

# WAKER



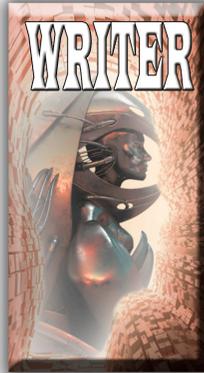
DAUGHTER OF TIME, BOOK 3



EREC STEBBINS



# DAUGHTER OF TIME



## A TIMELESS SCI-FI TRILOGY BY EREC STEBBINS

*From the future, a final plea. Out of the past, a last hope.*

**READER (Daughter of Time, Book 1):** A young girl, born to die in freakish disregard. A doomed world, enslaved to forces unseen. A final hope beyond imagining. Become a Reader, because in the end, the most unbelievable step in the adventure - *will be your own.*

*"Unique and altogether profound, reminiscent of Bradbury" -San Francisco Book Reviews*

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*From hatred, Love. From many, One.*

**WRITER (Daughter of Time, Book 2):** A love story and sci-fi epic about the beautiful and terrible destiny of profoundly star-crossed lovers with a galaxy's fate in their hands.

*"Stebbins's trilogy remains both fascinating and unpredictable. WRITER possesses all of the style, elegance, and tension that made READER gripping." -ForeWord Reviews*

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*Until all is lost, nothing is found.*

**MAKER (Daughter of Time, Book 3):** The final - or is it the first? - element of the trilogy. A story in which the One that was lost will be found. Where the thief will guide against chaos and time. Where all that was held dear will perish. And in that final and utter destruction - there will be a Creation.



# MAKER

*Daughter of Time*  
Book 3

Erec Stebbins

New York, NY, USA

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*for Ambra and not-Ambra*

It was one hell of a trip.



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*It is not only not right, it is not even wrong.*

—Wolfgang Pauli



# Prologue

*Time and Space... It is not nature which imposes them upon us, it is we who impose them upon nature because we find them convenient.*

—Henri Poincaré

I was called Waythrel of Xix.

In a time and space that no longer exist, in a cosmos that has been remade, in two books that have infiltrated and altered your minds, my character was part of a grand and terrible quest. One that failed utterly yet, in that failure, triumphed where it had never sought to succeed.

You knew me as an alien to your humanness, a monstrous form of heightened symmetry to your bilateral arrangement, with sixfold projections of limbs and visual organs and a cognitive cluster buried deep within our core. You followed our discovering of Ambra Dawn and her unique mastery of space and time, her cruel life and rise to power in the Dram Wars, and her eventual fusion with our artificial intelligence. There you witnessed the gestation of the proto-Orb as she defeated

the forces of the Anti and Dram aggregating around New Earth.

Reader, the recursive loops of space-time and causality have permeated the structure of your minds—not only the hormone- and blood-soaked lodged within your human endoskeleton, but also more deeply, into the mind that is the space-time field created by and creating your sentience, the soul that will live on after your flesh decays, to be lost in the emptiness of space or gathered in the Great Harvest.

Many of you prayed earnestly to save Old Earth, to funnel the latent Writer powers of your species across time, all that Ambra and we might amalgamate them, focus them, and undo a planetary massacre. Many of you instead scoffed, yet continued to read through the exhortations of the second novel as you were even asked to consider the Gathering of Souls.

Even so, here we lost many, for the story became increasingly strange by your standards—the characters' experiences remote from those a human animal might ever encounter. The voice was no longer that of your beloved heroine but instead that of her consort, as he spoke through the growing mind that projected his thought across the void and dictated the inspiration of the book's author.

Thus you have been primed.

Now all that is left is the final and most absurd step in the journey: to destroy all belief and memory and be born anew.

And so I am here to convey the true end, which is instead a beginning, to the impossible story of Ambra Dawn. I am here to reach across space and time, across divergent universes separating and uniting us, with fields and waves of thought to inspire this writer of your age. He will struggle one last time to transmit ideas that I myself do not comprehend, because conveying the

experience is beyond me. He will take from my own distorted thoughts only a sad caricature, and his primitive mind will then further blaspheme it through the terribly limited medium of your writing system. Thus ideas deeper than the most profound thoughts of the greatest minds of our galaxy will be painted in primitive languages at ridiculously low resolution with a small brush set of syntax and vocabulary, warped through your current incarnations of culture and prejudice, gutted of their essence and recast as grayed mockeries with all the colors washed away.

This is how you will receive the terrible and beautiful story of our Ambra. Do not expect coherence. You will have none. Do not look for consistency. There will be mostly nonsensical paradox. And yet, those paradoxes and absurdities that you read will be far closer to the truth of this universe than anything in your science or religion. And yet every word a lie.

Know also that this is a story of symmetry and symmetries broken, the chronological invariance of the laws of physics shattered by the arrow of time. The perfect balance of particles and their inverse properties wrecked to produce our fractured cosmos nearly swept clean of one aspect of matter, and thus witness to the genocide of the mental superstructure it would have engendered. This is a story centered within an endless fractalled universe that builds and builds, and also devolves and devolves, from and into entities of smaller and larger structure without reference point, without center, into a bottomless abyss of reductive constituents and launched asymptotically toward an infinitely realized synthesis.

This is a story of symmetry repaired and the utter annihilatory creation that is its offspring. In such a tale, there cannot possibly be only an Ambra Dawn. It is required that there be an anti-Ambra, an antithesis, a

force in essence, development, and complexity that mirrors yet is not its symmetry mate.

She is of course the clone who took me on Dram—a fabrication of the Anti who escaped their myopic control and launched herself on a quest neither she nor I understood at the time. It was a journey that, in the end, would bring a primordial pair full circle, like a proton and antiproton hurled about in opposite directions through the magnetic bowels of a synchrotron to collide, transforming the fundamental structure of matter and energy—indeed, of our universe itself.

And so I step back into the memories of an existence that now never was, to the moment in an unmade eon when you lost me in the second book, when I crouched within a bubble of space-time under the wild and furious assault of a thousand clones of the Daughter bent on our destruction. It was to be my last true moment with Ambra Dawn, the human creature I cherished above all others.

# Part 1

*I speak of gods and other mad taboos  
that scar my soul with two-edged, healing wounds.  
Who dares cast down these gleaming gains construed  
while marching to our frenzied, empty tunes?  
The sand that is your soul will never birth  
one flower in this unrelenting drought.  
Your brushstrokes paint no truth and have no worth.  
In vain you look for meaning through your doubt.  
I am a fool, untamed, consumed with pride  
and often speak too much on that I love,  
for I, insane, once cursed our fall and died  
while clasping to my heart a blinded dove.  
Whatever sight I have of what is true,  
it neither lives with me nor dies with you.*

—Mazandarani, *Sonnets from the Desert*



# 1

*Even at those astounding energies, the asymmetry between matter and antimatter is extremely small. For every billion antiparticles that were created, there were a billion and one particles. To put it another way, you're essentially a rounding error from around  $10^{-35}$  seconds after the Big Bang. Doesn't make you feel very important, does it? Of course that's just as much a bummer for the antipeople, too.*

—Dave Goldberg

I held Ambra's hands tightly.

There was little point in my meditation. With barely the strength of an average human Reader, I had nothing to offer Ambra to resist the siege that descended upon us. In the realm of space and time, I felt myself to be a particle of dust in the sandstorm, dwarfed and blown haphazardly by the churning wrath of wind raging around us.

Yet I did offer something of great value to Ambra. I sensed it in her fear and concern for all of us on this mission who relied so completely on her powers. Already we had witnessed the horrific deaths of the MECHcore soldiers David Kim and Erica Fox. And now each of us in this besieged space-time bubble of Ambra's creation was splattered with the lifeblood of Warrant

Officer Aisha Williams—ripped apart by the powers of only a single clone of the multitude now assailing us.

As the sea of orange hair swirled around our transparent vessel, as the hateful assault from the minds of the clones struck blow after blow against our weakening resistance, Ambra reached across and into me, like a child gripping the hand of a parent, and grounded herself in the love that we shared. It was this connection that allowed her to hope, to believe that she would devise some escape from this trap. It was this center of affection for her within me that prevented the storm of antipathy screaming around us from driving her to despair.

And that is why, when the clone came, when it broke through everything around us, even through Ambra's power, ignoring its brethren and their efforts and grabbing my arm, when the strange creature took me by means mysterious and unexpected, Ambra's mind broke. It broke like a ship tearing away from anchor as the frothing sea threw it wildly into the maw of an angry ocean. As the world about me dissolved and I momentarily lost consciousness, I felt for an instant a wild hurt and loss from Ambra, a telepathic cry rippling outward in time and space from that goddess growth in her artificial skull. I heard the cry echo inconsolably through the corridors of time.

But for me, it was truly only an instant. One moment I was in the bubble that had carried us across the galaxy—that crew of soldiers on a mission to halt the Dram expansion—and suddenly, I was not. Instead, I awoke above the planetary surface of the Dram home world, a reckless acceleration propelling me away from it into the blackness of space.

I was not alone. Flying through the emptiness alongside me was a child. Her hair, what of it remained, was exactly Ambra's rusty orange, the hand that

grasped the dark purple of my upper arm a bright white turned dull red in the light of the swollen sun. As during the recent journey with Ambra, this clone and I were contained in some type of warped space-time enclosure that sealed us from the void outside. I could not move my extremities—invisible chords bound them. But my eyestalks were free, and I surveyed the girl and my environment.

Below me, Dram receded quickly, the swirling desert dunes blurring to an orange-red planetary disk. In front of us, I sensed the growing presence of the Orb. The clone was racing directly toward it. Part of me was shocked to realize this; I believed at the time that only Ambra had the power to use the Orbs, so I wondered what this crazed creature could be thinking. But another part of me was also afraid. Somehow I intuited the awful possibility: this clone was going to be able to pass through the entity, to what destination and to what end, I could not begin to guess.

“She’s following,” said the thing beside me.

The words were calm, almost lilting, and yet cold. It was the first time it had spoken. I still reduced the creature to a genderless object, an “it,” unable to see the clone as anything more than a warped product of the enemies who sought to destroy us. But my education was soon to begin.

“She’s very upset. I told him that she would be. I wonder if he will be strong enough for what is to come.”

*Told whom what? What is to come?* I thought.

“Yes, I think he will be,” the clone continued. “They made him too perfect and didn’t see what such love would bring. And so there is no stopping the crystallization.”

The creature was speaking in riddles, but I was too caught up in the impossibility of all that was happening to formulate rational responses.

At least I could observe. I examined the clone closely. From my knowledge of humans, I would have placed her age at around eight to ten years old, prepubescent; the developmental program to create the reproductive, adult form of the species was only beginning to activate. But I knew that nothing was to be taken for granted with the clones. From what we had learned on Dram, every aspect of their genesis and development had been altered, artificially enhanced, and accelerated, so that this young child before me could very well be half the age I expected, yet at the same stage of development.

The cybernetic enhancements were particularly extensive in this creature, far more intricate and integrated with the organism than anything I had seen even in the most advanced technology on Dram. Where—and better yet, *when*—it had been made was very much a question. At the least, I knew it had to be in the far future.

All the underlying foundation of Ambra Dawn was there. In addition to the hair and skin, the clone possessed the green irises that produced such striking contrasts in the human visual organs and thus were likely strongly selected for in sexual competition in their evolutionary past. The body form was of an expected variant on the genetic blueprint, very likely similar to the eight-year-old version of the progenitor I had just been torn away from: the bones were long and delicate, the shoulders somewhat broad as compared to the average for the female genotype, the hips still narrow prior to the adolescent widening.

The wires and intubations in the skull were fantastic, a labyrinth of insertions and protrusions that connected different regions of the brain to the machinery of the

embedded artificial intelligence. The modifications were so extensive that they left the clone with only a sparse covering of the rich hair that characterized this genetic background. Of course, the center of the structure and design were on the tumor inevitably present in the middle of the enlarged skull, the organ that had made this stock so central to the struggle of our galaxy.

Etched across her forehead and face were a set of geometrical lines like dark circuits underneath the skin. The patterns were too angular to be veins or other vessels. I had never seen anything like it in humans before, not even in the other clones we had encountered. I surmised it was associated with the AI and cybernetic technology her makers had embedded within her.

Sifting through all these observations, I finally summoned the calm to speak. "She will stop you from escaping. Without the help of your clone army, she is more powerful than you."

The creature laughed. It was an unusual sound that differed significantly from the response I had grown accustomed to in humans. I began to suspect that this clone possessed a very different mentality than Ambra herself.

"She's not more powerful. Not in this form. Not without her spirit army!" The clone glanced behind her. "What a cry she made for you, Xix. There was terrible pain."

The words struck me like a blow, the memory of it replaying in my mind, Ambra's terrible suffering ripping through me once again. I tried to focus.

"Look at the Orb," I said with difficulty, staring at the tumultuous frothing on its surface. "Already it has turned against you."

"Not against me, Xixian. All her powers will not help her now."

The calm certainty in its voice disturbed me, but I still believed that Ambra was shutting the Orb to our travel. The clone did not hesitate, however, or slow our velocity. The colossal surface of the Time Sphere grew before us, an ocean of confusing features bubbling and churning in anger as we approached. Again I looked behind—we would reach the Orb before Ambra could catch us. Whatever the effect of being shut out of the Orb would be, I would discover it within seconds. I steeled myself for a possible end and stared forward with as much courage as I could.

But we were not impeded. In a disorienting blast of vertigo, we entered the thing, and the bottom seemed to fall out of the universe. We tore through multiple dimensions of nested wormholes. My entire experience from my previous travels with Ambra was only a faint warning of the possible depth and complexity of the internal structure of the Orb. As I fought to stay in control of my mind in this terrible vortex of radiance, I surmised that we must have been traveling great distances, likely both in space and in time, distances unlike any I had breached before. But I had no idea in what direction or to which destination the clone was taking me.

I could no longer sense Ambra. Whatever had happened at the Orb, she had not stopped it or been able to follow, and now she and what remained of our mission were locked away from me across some enormous separation. It was, as I have said, the last time I would ever see her, at least in her original form. Wherever I was going and for whatever reason, I was now utterly alone.

Alone but for a familiar yet strange pair of green eyes staring back at me in a tumultuous ocean of darkness and light.

## 2

*We seldom stop to think that we are still creatures of the sea, able to leave it only because, from birth to death, we wear the water-filled space suits of our skins.*

—Arthur C. Clarke

**G***reen eyes in the darkness.*

I stared up at a night sky churning with stars in patterns that I could not recognize. A soft breeze trickled over me, the sounds of insects or other alien creatures punctuating the soft whisper of the wind. My eyestalks darted about, appraising the planet surface, the heavens, and the figure of the clone sitting beside me.

The eyestalks gazing upward soon abandoned their efforts. It was desperation from the start to hope that I might be able to determine where we were from the stars, but it was impossible not to try. Nothing was familiar. Wherever and whenever I was, the constellations resembled nothing my mind could map, even considering multiple viewpoints within the galaxy. It was quite possible that I was not even in our galaxy.

Since both of us were alive on this world without environmental suits, I could conclude that the planet was human-Xix compatible. The humidity—something

we desert-spawned Xix are always sensitive to—was low, almost an arid climate, but not nearly as dry as Xix or the New Earth desert from which we had begun our disastrous mission. I breathed in deeply through my skin sacs. The oxygen levels were likely a little higher than optimal, but not so high as to represent a significant concern.

Finally, I turned my attention to the human cyborg in front of me. The child sat with its legs pulled up, nearly obscuring the head, the green eyes that haunted me in the Orb traversal peeking over the kneecaps. It wore clothing of a fabric unknown to me with an unusual style combining elements of robes and skirts. The material was homogeneously colored a light beige. The clone's arms were wrapped around its legs, keeping them together as the child rocked slowly back and forth. I detected a faint sound, rhythmic pitch changes and repeating patterns. I think it was humming.

I sat up and stared across at the creature. "Where have you taken me?" I asked. The child continued to rock and hum, seeming to ignore my question. I continued, "I know it is far. I know we are not in the galaxy I have known, either in physical space or in time." Still no response. "You have torn me from your progenitor in the middle of an assault of other clones. But I contributed little to their defense. You have dragged me through the Orb to this world alone with you for nothing."

The humming suddenly stopped. "Not alone."

"Not alone?" My eyestalks swiveled around anxiously.

"Not for nothing." The intubated, tattooed head cocked to one side, the green eyes staring fixedly at me. "I didn't take you to weaken her in the battle. It's not *then* that you have to worry about her, but at the *beginning*."

I sensed the tendrils of the creature's thought dancing around my awareness. "You are probing my mind."

The head darted to a strange angle, forty-five degrees and peering from behind its right knee. "Your thoughts leak everywhere. You Xix are leaky-brains."

Suddenly, the child stood up. It was a rapid motion, catching me completely by surprise. It stopped to stand above me, long, ragged clumps of red hair dangling haphazardly and nearly obscuring its face.

"If not to harm her, why?" I managed.

The clone sighed and stared up into the pageantry of the stars above, the density of lights very high and unusual to human or Xixian eyes. I noticed that there was a milky-white sphere the size of a marble embedded in her skull just slightly above the forehead. It seemed to glow weakly from the starlight shining through it. "There is so much to understand. He didn't understand either when I told him. But *I* don't really understand. It's a *problem*."

I pulled myself upright, uncomfortable to be prone and beneath this unpredictable creature. "Who is *he*?"

"Her consort. The soldier. The one with the hole in his mind."

I nearly caught my breath. *It knows?*

The clone shook its head. "Worry, worry, worry, worry, you Xix. Stop! I haven't told them about your trick. It's a very clever one. I liked it a lot. But it already happened before I was born, and there is no stopping it. Not like that. *They* wouldn't listen about that at all." The clone gestured in front of us dismissively. "That's why you're here. That's why I had to take you. Because there is no stopping any of it—but we have to find a way. Not to stop. *No stopping. Unmake. She* told me. *Showed* me. All of them did."

“Look...” I paused, not knowing what to call this thing, but feeling a primal need to address it personally. All my instincts sought to engage with my captor to better understand it. But it was challenging enough simply remaining calm in the presence of this engineered assassin. Trying to converse with it, knowing that at any moment it could kill me or use me against Ambra, made the effort nearly impossible.

“Call me Kloan,” it interrupted, “since you can’t get that out of your mind.”

“Clone?” I repeated, or thought I did.

“No. K-L-O-A-N. Like ‘Joan’ but copied genetic materials with tubes and wires and all this!” She gestured wildly with her hands toward her head. “I don’t really have a name. Not here. It’s just numbers.”

“Kloan.” Her green eyes darted toward me and then away. It was a strange name to suggest, but it was surprisingly comforting to have a personal name for the thing. “Okay, Kloan, what I wanted to say—”

“And I’m not here to kill you. Where would I be then?”

I had no answer to that, hardly understanding the question—certainly not its context. My mind raced through the dialogue, parsing each phrase. “You negate killing me, yet leave open the possibility that you are going to use me against Ambra.”

Kloan smiled. “Depends on what you mean by *against*.”

“You speak in conclusions without providing me any of the background data!”

She nodded, a satisfied look on her face. “That’s *why* you’re here. *Data*. The first data to enter the gate.” Again she nodded and then turned her back on me, walking down a steep slope. “Let’s get started.”

“Started with what? Where are you going?”

Kloan continued walking without turning back. Her next words were nearly lost in the insect sounds and the wind that carried them down the landscape. “To where it all began for me. To watch the beginning flow around us and mature and twist through time and space to come back to be us. Then we will be ready for the next step.”

The intense starlight cast sharp shadows on the rocks. The figure of the child was gone, swallowed in the darkness and slope of the hill we stood on. Raising my gaze in the direction of her last words, I saw far below a dim glow. Artificial. Originating from the ground, the light partially polluted the brilliance of the stars near the horizon.

*Waythrel, come on!*

Her voice rang impatiently in my mind. My eyestalks curled up on themselves. What else was there for me to do?

I followed her.



### 3

*Know that for the mind there are certain objects of perception which are within the scope of its nature and capacity; on the other hand, there are, amongst things which actually exist, certain objects which the mind can in no way and by no means grasp: the gates of perception are closed against it. Further, there are things of which the mind understands one part, but remains ignorant of the other; and when man is able to comprehend certain things, it does not follow that he must be able to comprehend everything.*

—Maimonides

I raced to catch up to the child, my steps uncertain, the dusty ground surprisingly slippery under my feet. Descending the steep slope of this elevation, I stumbled and tripped, my four arms only poorly grasping the rocks and alien vegetation, seeming to lack any friction to form a proper grip. After nearly falling several times, I began to suspect that there was something strange going on, that I had been drugged or that there was a phenomenon on this world that interfered with my basic movements.

*It's a field around you.*

Her thoughts danced again through my mind.

*It's skintight, coating your surfaces, insulating you from everything around us.*

Listening to her voice and trying to understand what she was saying, I nearly crashed into her as I rounded a large boulder. The ground was strewn with shattered rocks and their remains, products from avalanches tumbling down from the jagged hills behind us.

"Why is there a field? What kind of field?" I asked.

Kloan was staring ahead at the source of the light. A city or military installation of some sort rose from the the dry lands. Organized groups of shadows marched throughout the installation. It seemed like a very busy place.

"I don't know what kind of field. She—*they* make it for your protection."

"Protection from what?"

Kloan pointed toward the city. "Come. It's almost light. That's when it all begins. We'll go see me there, and then you'll see what happens."

She began to walk toward the complex but I reached out quickly and grabbed her shoulder, turning her back to face me. "Wait! This is another clone production facility, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Where you were made?" She simply nodded. "And one in the far future and someplace very far away. We can't just walk right into that place—you saw what happened the last time!"

"There is no danger," she said.

"Maybe not for you! But *I* can't. You said you didn't want to have me die. They'll kill any Xix who shows up for sure!"

"They won't see us. We both have skin suits. *Dark ones*. Their eyes can't see. Ears can't hear. Not even the Readers will perceive."

"You saw through Ambra's bubble! You came inside it, even."

Kloan shook her head. "Hers was simple. Weak. Primitive."

"And yours around us now is none of those things?"

"I told you, they're not *mine*," she said sighing. "Now, come on."

The child pulled me forward, and I relented. If it had wished to kill me, it could have done so before—and easily. I was helpless here, and I desperately needed to learn more to find any hope of escape. If there was any such hope, that is.

A bright light erupted from the darkness in front of us, a flash that blinded my eyes, leaving blurred afterimages. A fireball climbed into the air and darkened, the smoke from the explosion already beginning to snuff out the brilliance. The ground shook suddenly, and the rending sound of supersonic compressed air blasted over us, even at this distance.

"Too late," she said, squinting from the dust blown forward. "It's already started. Why did we come to this time point? They'll already be moving on the structure and surrounding me."

"Surrounding you?" I looked around us, seeing no evidence of anything besides the landscape.

"Not here! There!" she shouted impatiently, gesturing with her hand. "The tunnel must be there, but we can't get to it before it closes. But we'll go through it soon!"

"Kloan," I said unsteadily, "you're not making sense. What tunnel? Where is it, and why do we need to go through it?"

"It's the only way to escape! At least without so many deaths. The masters will bring all the children against us—I couldn't just slaughter them. I didn't want to. She

knew that so she helped. But it will happen too soon, and we can't be there when we go through!"

The child seemed to be insane and speaking nonsense. I didn't know what to say to help make sense of this situation. With a growing unease, I began to conclude that my questions weren't going to help clarify anything.

Kloan continued, breathlessly. "We can go around, find the path. *Yes*. Catch up maybe before we leave and then you can see before we leave as well."

As I stood there, stunned, she began to sprint back up the mountainside. I reviewed my status. I had just been plucked from one time and place, torn from all those I loved and removed from the desperate fight for the soul of our galaxy, dropped into this strange place of confusion with a being who spouted nonsense, only to turn from one mad rush to another, none of the reasons for anything explained.

She was nearly out of sight, and I would soon be alone. I had to follow her again. It was absurd, but she was all I had to connect me with the past and my home. This child-thing was both my captor and hope for deliverance. Yet for all I could tell, she was utterly mad.

Again I ran after her.