



Echer, Diane

VAULTS OF POWER

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Echer's debut novel is a thriller about a mysterious manuscript and its global, historical reach.

Fans of summer thriller blockbusters should find plenty to like here. The main protagonist, Robyn Gabriel, is clearly established from the outset as a strong, capable and sexually liberated character. She's a treasure hunter, has a strong relationship with a childhood friend and current business partner and, though estranged from her family, she is willing to drop everything to go to her sister's aid when she's in trouble. One of the main antagonists, James McIntyre, is equally well drawn; Echer provides compelling details such as how the powerful VP at the Fed who is trying to acquire a manuscript whose secrets could topple nations also has to deal with a teenage daughter acting out. The story is complicated and can seem sluggish for the first 100 pages as Echer sets all the pieces in motion. But when things are actually moving, the author has a great feel for action and pacing and features some thrilling sequences in compelling locations from European crypts to a library at Yale. But

Echer is perhaps too ambitious, and the reader's threshold for coincidence—finding a caterpillar that only lives during certain seasons on a certain island, McIntyre's daughter's college connections—may be tested. Some elements of the final resolution seem to come together too neatly, and one character that pops up at the beginning of the story, disappears and then isn't heard from until the last couple of pages. Stylistically, Echer often strives for the language of the hardboiled detective genre. It often works, but there are stretches where pronouns are dropped to keep the action flowing where the style becomes distracting. But Echer has a great eye for detail; it's easy to visualize her characters and their settings, to see the action unfolding. And Echer is adept at choreographing action scenes. She clearly describes what the façade of a building looks like, works that into how a character approaches that building and even describes the smells that greet her characters once they are inside.

A promising, if flawed, debut for fans of action and intrigue.