



When Stars Die

Amber Forbes

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The City of Malva is rife with puritanical hatred for witches. It is said they embody the Seven Deadly sins of mankind. Amelia's only chance of saving her brother Nathaniel, a born witch, is to become a professed nun at Cathedral Reims. Enduring a series of trials including starvation, isolation, physical abuse and blood-sucking leaches, she will sacrifice all that she is to save him. Complicating all of this is the fact that Amelia can see what is lurking in the shadows. Shadowmen, seeking witches like Nathaniel to join their ranks. This group of Shadowmen begin planning. The results could be devastating. Oliver Cromwell, a dashing priest at Cathedral Reims, is the only one who can protect Amelia, her brother and save Malva. Yet, he may prove to be more dangerous than the shadows themselves.

When Stars Die Details

Date : Published November 11th 2015 by Lulu.com (first published October 1st 2013)

ISBN : 9781329621039

Author : Amber Forbes

Format : Paperback 150 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Fantasy, Romance, Paranormal, Magic

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From Reader Review When Stars Die for online ebook

Ky Grabowski says

Nuns, lust, witches?

What mixture. It reminds me of a teacher I had once who loved to throw random ingredients together in his food. Ironically, more often than not it all went well and turned out fantastic. Good food makes for a happy family.

The same for a book and a reader. I will not lie. I had my doubts but, reading it through I'm happy I made the time. Amber is a wonderful woman with an opinioned mind and tough heart. It shined in her writing, which was a delight to read.

The plot had me interested right away. I had tons of questions as I read, feeling Amber sneakily wrote in hints to the future of her book. Now that normally would make me less interested (mainly with TV to be honest) but not with *When Stars Die*. It made me want more to keep flipping the pages. I had this need to figure out what would happen next.

I liked getting to connect the dots and not be given all my Christmas gifts so soon. It allowed me to get a little more curious and excited when my questions were not answered. I had to sit back and trust in the author.

Amber gave this romance a neat spin with detail and dedication. While the cover is pretty in pink, the story danced with darkness.

Kristy Gillespie says

After she realizes that her younger brother is a witch, Amelia Gareth leads Nathaniel to a convent, far from their mother and father's sins. Amelia is convinced that if she prays fanatically to Deus, their God, and becomes a nun, then she'll be able to save her brother's soul. In order to become a nun at Cathedral Reims however, Amelia must undergo physical and mental anguish. Fortunately, she shares a bedroom with a lovely girl named Colette, and befriends an attractive priest named Oliver, who she gradually falls in love with. To make matters more complex, Shadowmen are roaming the halls of the convent, searching for witches. After Amelia discovers that she too is a witch, her quest for redemption diminishes. And she accepts the bitter fact that what she and Oliver share must come to an end and that saving her brother's soul is unlikely.

When Stars Die is beautifully written and Forbes' voice is original. The story reminds me of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* which is one of my favorite books.

Forbes' descriptions are lovely: "She is a dance piece in a music box..." (p. 12) – Amelia describing Colette

"People think children are so tender, but they're resilient. It is we older ones who are tender, already beaten down by life" (p.92) – Amelia comparing herself to Nathaniel

“Yet, even when stars die, they leave a lasting impact through their light, their diamond brilliance as they scatter their material to form new stars” (p. 133) – Amelia reflecting on her future and what if anything she’ll leave behind.

If you enjoy YA Paranormal Romance, I would highly recommend When Stars Die.

Amber Forbes says

I want to thank everyone who has read and rated this book so far. It is very much appreciated, and I am considering all criticism for the sequel, so expect something awesome!

Mariah Wilson says

This was a wonderful story from start to finish. The pace set by Forbes will keep you turning pages into the wee hours of the morning. Her characters are wonderfully flawed and completely compelling to read about. You can't help but falling in love with Amelia...and maybe Oliver...

A must read!

Harper Jewel says

I was given this book in exchange for my honest review. While I’m not usually a fan of books written in first person POV let alone present tense, I have to say, this one hooked me almost instantly. Amelia’s journey was filled with so many twists and turns it kept me on the edge of my seat the entire time. At times, I felt like cheering, others like screaming or reaching into the book and slapping one of the characters. When Stars Die is definitely a life lesson in the power obsession and greed can have over a person. A very gripping read, this one is definitely a great read!

S.E Dee says

WARNING: SLIGHT SPOILERS AHEAD

When Stars Die is a pretty gritty para/romance, something I don’t really touch. But don’t expect too much swooning. There’s darkness in this novel that I just don’t see in very many NA’s or YA’s at the moment, and for that, at least, it has my thumbs up.

However...

I really wanted to like this book but felt the characters and plot/pace really let it down.

Characters: I felt the MC, Amelia, and the other characters had a flatness to them, especially in regards to their dialogue, and this hampered my attachment to them. Cathedral Reims - where the opening of the story takes place - is where Amelia hopes to become professed in order to get her little brother, who is a witch, and perhaps herself, into paradise. The catch is that the trials involved are littered with varied forms of torture. My issue with this was that although Amelia showed many signs of indoctrination, she also displayed a strong level of common sense. Perhaps this was intended for inner conflict, but instead made for a frustrating read.

I'll say it again, I'm not keen on this kind of genre (romance), but there have been books (even ones I've disliked like "Fifty Shades") where the characters, regardless of how obnoxious, come to life. Here, I just couldn't feel that happening. The flat-ish dialogue and half expected type of speech they used quickly began to make them sound like cardboard cut-outs.

Having said that, Amelia's determination kept me holding on. There was strength in her that I really wanted to see blossom, but that was where I felt the plot tripped up.

Plot/Pace: I think there's a lot here, some very interesting concepts that, if more YA and NA had going on, I'd be more inclined to pick them up. The first few chapters really pulled me in; they were gritty and very striking. There was immediacy there. Unfortunately, this did not continue to hold my interest as once the shock factor died down, I was looking for a plot, and although I stopped reading (shortly after chapter 15) I had a feeling it was coming just around the corner...it was just taking so long to get there. At 50% in on my Kindle, for me, there was still no clear grounding in regards to plot. Or stakes, to be exact.

1. Amelia wants to become a nun but must suffer all forms of torture first.

She doubts the necessity of the suffering she and her friends must go through, allowing the reader to doubt if this is the only way to get into "paradise" or if it even exists. Because of this, this part of the plot stopped becoming interesting and the stakes no longer seemed real. (Though I think the sewing seeds of doubt was intended here.)

2. Amelia burns her best friend Collette with magic (?). However, other people in the convent either don't see this or refuse to accept it. Only Amelia is aware, meaning there are no consequences. (Although this implies Amelia is also a witch, without anyone taking note, there are no stakes except the possibility of one; "paradise", being thrown out, etc.)

3. She may be/is a witch and can see shadowmen. These shadowmen were not explained for a long time, neither was their intent. The men began to grate on me and I wasn't sure if they were good or bad. So these were unclear stakes. (I was actually starting to hope Amelia would show signs of madness as there was some real stakes there in terms of her being sent to the madhouse!)

4. She is later removed from the cathedral for failing a trial (not for being a witch). This should be a major stake, but considering the very questionable "paradise", for me, her leaving just felt like a relief. Here is where I hoped Amelia's determination and strength would have come into play, BUT

5. She then wants to go back to the cathedral....

6. Amelia is also in love with Oliver but is not allowed to express it physically - being a wannabe nun and all (nice!). Her love for Oliver is her own inner turmoil which was interesting, but in light of everything else, her pondering about whether to kiss him or not was a little distracting. There was tension there, and I felt it coming, but it would have been so much better, in my eyes, if it came soon after Collette was incinerated and

if he began to consider, then and there, that the girl he's "into" may just be a witch.

This seemed to be what 50% of the book was made up of. Great set ups but no real stakes.

The worst thing that happened was that Amelia burnt her best friend, but seeing as no one notices...

Now, I have a theory that...where I put the book down? S**t was about to get real. Having read some other reviews, there are implied situations that are going to happen to Amelia which sound very WTF?! There was also a hint, I think, of a possible relationship with the antagonist, as though he may be a good guy. Or maybe not?! With what I've read so far, I reckon there was a large possibility that I was in for some twists and turns, but having chugged through 50% already, I just couldn't go on. So I'm putting the book down for now, but one day, I may just pick up from where I left off and have more to say...until then, I can only say three stars.

Jessica K says

I received a copy for an honest review.

What I enjoyed about this book was its originality and creating a new world. It seemed to be set back a few hundred years, but it is a different world that has witches and instead of worshipping God or Jesus it's Deus, a figure we never learn about except that he doesn't forgive. There were parts of the book that flowed nicely. I really enjoyed a couple of chapters, and details especially that Colette smells like clover. One of the most important and interesting themes that I think a lot of women can relate to is choosing a guy over a girl friend and I felt like the author did a great job with this. This was a real interesting theme that the book explores with. When reading Amelia's thoughts and actions, it crazy but understandable at that age to think that despite how much she appreciates Colette's strength as a friend and a person, she still chooses a guy over a loyal friend. When she is about to leave the Cathedral, she is eighteen but it felt like she is acting like a thirteen to fifteen year old. I think that after enduring torture to be a nun, she'd appreciate Colette more and trust her but Amelia's jealousy and insecurity gets in the way. I thought the ending was good. The ending was foreshadowed a little bit, and one that I thought was natural that Amelia would die and become a Shadow person.

But on the other hand, there were a lot of frustrations for me as a reader. The first chapter was difficult to get through. I was expected to understand the allusions of Sash and Asch and hardships that a character I haven't gotten to know is going through without fully understanding how she got to the Cathedral Reims and that she is special because she can see these Shadowmen. It was too much too fast. I was confused for most of the book how the Cathedral Reims operate and had a hard time being sympathetic to her situation that she chose for herself.

It was difficult to care about Amelia in the beginning and even toward the end. It was hard to understand her wants and desires and it wasn't clear. She likes Oliver, not even a tenth of the way through the book, which is something I would of wanted to see build up. This was something I didn't think should of been rushed. I had thought that these feelings would develop over time more, but then I forgot that the book takes place years after they've known each other and interacted during those years. We just assume that she knows Oliver likes her but nothing can happen. Yet at the same time, it is frustrating that as a reader, I can know her thoughts but that she just doesn't say she likes him. This is one of the those books that I thought would

benefit from flashbacks of their experiences, of how she got to the Cathedral, more of her first interactions with him, and Colette.

Another hole and flat character is Lily. I thought she'd get tied back into the story again, especially as someone who "she was like an older sister to Nathaniel and I, whenever she could be." What was the whenever she could be? It was never explained and it felt like there was no point to even mention Lily. If Amelia's trademark and drive for the story is to save her brother, and have that much devotion for family, how could she say Lily was like a sister? She never mentioned a thought or memory of Lily again during the whole trails when she was in need of comfort or the rest of the story as someone who was like a sister? I thought a bond with a sibling was the most important thing to Amelia?

I was confused about Amelia's mother and wanting more of an explanation. Her deadly sin was the opium addiction but we didn't get to learn about her complex character at all, it was just told for us that she was complex. It felt like it was just to explain why Nathaniel and Amelia are witches when there could of been a lot more with that. And what about her and Nathaniel being close? What would they do besides buy toys together? Or does he just think he had a close relationship with her? This wasn't explained clearly. We didn't get a lot of her character and I felt bummed out about that. If the mother and her father were easy enough to walk away from and their children could live apart from them for three years, there must of been more to their characters that was mentioned. I just didn't buy that it was all because of Nathaniel being a witch or a home life that was vaguely wealthy or neglectful.

Some of the wording was unnecessary that I could figure out for myself like: "When we come upon it, Sash is leaving with a smile. He doesn't make eye contact with me, yet that smile indicates Sash discovered something." As a reader, I can make the connection! Because why else would Sash smile? The first chapter and second indicates he isn't to be trusted so him smiling is bad. It slowed the flow of the book and it wasn't necessary to spell it out for the readers. If anything, it slowed my reading and comprehension a lot and this happened frequently.

At the end, the father is not heard of, but it is a possibility that he is alive. yet in the ending section for the sequel, I wasn't sure if he was murdered by the Shadow version of Amelia in her next life or not.

For me, it was difficult to have a weak main character or someone who wants to give up life and die. I felt like most of the book was filled with how much Amelia wants to not feel pain or other things anymore, but it was suffering that she caused herself. This was upsetting to me. As a reader, I want to feel her pain and I know she isn't a perfect heroine because that's what makes her unique, but at the same time, she felt like a downer. Isn't there another town outside of Malva and the Cathedral? Why couldn't she just go explore the world and take her brother with her? If she's willing to leave her father before why not again? She said a few times during the book that she has no family but Nathaniel, yet her dad is willing to have a relationship. It is Amelia who keeps screwing it up. Unfortunately, it was Oliver not her dad who made her want to take in Malva I think. And that's natural for a teenager, but for someone who values family, she really turns her back on the ones she has: Father, Colette, and Nathaniel in a way by making his life choices for him as a parent when it wasn't her place. Especially if the books as set in a similar time period (even in another world) I felt like the language and customs were similar: proper, polite, big country house, servants, etc. But then Amelia doesn't follow all the rules: sex before marriage, running away, drinking. Yet I felt like these were rebellious or heroic acts. I felt like she picked and chose her actions and it wasn't consistent with what should of been done and she gets away with it: Nathaniel doesn't get mad at her like he should of, her father doesn't do anything about her running away.

A theme I had a hard time dealing with was her devotion to her brother. To not tell her brother or explain to him or even get his permission to kidnap him and take him to a cathedral to live and become priests and nuns is insane. Most siblings would not do that for one another, and for that to be the only reason why she went to the cathedral, my belief wasn't completely suspended. I think it would of made more sense for her to have other reasons such as an unhappy homelike where a specific traumatic incident happened, or to be with Oliver, maybe a crush she had since thirteen before the Cathedral. Just something like that. At sixteen, I think it is nearly impossible to make a decision, and a selfless one like that. All her other decisions are not selfless, even when she believes she'll be saved by Deus, it is all selfish.

Deus = Jesus? I was a little confused. I felt like it had a religious connotation to it. I'm not religious and to believe someone thinks they are damned because of sin (even in a newly constructed world with witches) was unbelievable to me. Deus was never fully explained during the book. Was he like a God? Or a person? In the ending section, there was mention that he had a child so he was a person. Amelia's actions and fate determined by a judgmental god or powerful person was frustrating to me.

The end writes off Colette in one sentence about how she died in one of the battles. The battles were confusing and seemed isolated when reading the book, but then somehow most of the city was in battle and there were people and witches murdered. It was confusing again.

It was unexpected that Oliver would die and Amelia would kill him. I didn't expect Amelia to die by the priest. I thought that she would of been killed by Oliver and we'd atleast get to see how his character played out in the next book as with Amelia. Same with Colette. I was expecting a reunion. But instead, I felt like we never got to know Colette the entire book but now she is completely gone and that was disappointing.

All in all, I think that the sequel could have the potential to be even better than the first book. I think that the world needs to be explained, and I hope the next book will do that.

Kimber Wheaton says

I received this book from the author in exchange for an honest review

When Stars Die is an eerie story, at least as dark as it's title. The plot is quite original and definitely intriguing. I imagine this world with a hazy fog around all the time, perhaps a direct result of the heaviness I felt while reading. While this is not what I normally like to read, I couldn't help but be drawn into the world created by Amber Skye Forbes.

Amelia decides that the only way to save her brother's soul is to become a nun, enduring the rigorous trials all nuns must face. She is a strong protagonist, not one to back down from what she wants. My heart ached for Amelia throughout the entire novel. The poor girl just couldn't seem to get a break. Amelia is very dedicated to those she loves, and will do anything in her power to help them.

The story begins with Amelia and her best friend, Colette, preparing to undergo the trials to become nuns. The opening chapters are so dark, creating an almost horror-like atmosphere. I kept expecting one of the nuns to declare their allegiance to Satan. The descriptions are vivid, drawing the reader into each chilling scene. There were times when I was so drawn in, I forgot everything around me (quite the feat in a noisy dentist's waiting room). While the pacing started out a bit slow, it picked up about halfway through, making the novel difficult to put down.

I recommend *When Stars Die* to those 17+ that enjoy a dark paranormal story. The only reason I don't include younger readers in the recommendation is the graphic violence (both physical and psychological) and brief sexual situations. This novel will leave the reader thinking about both life and the after.

Léatitia Brière says

From my blog (<http://mybookshelfisyours.over-blog.com/>)

Picture this: End of 19th century Europe, a world as religious as ever, full of sinners looking for redemption at any cost, but most of all scared by the idea of being surrounded by evil, impure and dangerous beings: witches. *When Stars Die* is the story of Amelia Gareth, an 18-year-old girl who wants more than anything to become a nun. In order to do that, she has to go through physically and psychologically challenging trials to be professed. It is one of the rules at Cathedral Reims. Accompanied by her 8-year-old brother Nathaniel, Amelia took refuge in the strict, cold and harsh convent life. And for good reasons: her parents committed irrevocable sins, which made her brother a witch. For him, she accepts this life, she wants redemption and a chance for her brother and herself to go to heaven when they die. To help her overcome her difficulties and fears, she can count on her best friend, Colette, who has proven to be the best of sisters, in every sense of the word, for the past three years. Amelia can also rely on the reassuring and singularly different presence of Oliver Cromwell, a priest who represents the best and the worst of temptations... But the young girl has more than her fears and doubts to deal with. There is much more at stake than her life at the convent. Lately, shadowy figures have been following and watching her. She keeps it a secret, only Colette knows. What Amelia doesn't know is that she is not the only one who sees them and who is in danger. Soon, everything changes for Amelia. Truths and secrets she knew nothing about will explode... One question remains: who can save them?

Characters:

Amelia is the kind of heroine you don't expect. She's a wallflower, quiet and reserved. She could be your best friend, just like she could be your scapegoat. I'm not saying that she doesn't have a strong character, that would be a lie, but she only uses it when necessary. If I had to describe Amelia in a few words, I would say she's loyal, determined, protective, scared and blinded. Of course there are others words to define Amelia. But I think you have to remember that Amelia live in a world that she never really wanted. Even though the Cathedral and Malva have become her life now, she made choices without thinking about what she wanted to do with her life. She quickly got used to her new life, gladly forgetting about her past. Everything she is and everything she wants to become is a result of her love for her brother Nathaniel. He is also extremely endearing and brave. His relationship with his sister is vital to him, even though he never wanted to leave his parents and join the harsh religious life. His sister's choice is not his, and he paid the price as much as she did. Even though he questions this choice, he fully trusts his sister. His intelligence, his maturity and the fact that he's a witch make his an incredible child.

Then there's Colette. She is, in my opinion, one of the most interesting secondary characters I've ever encountered. She is a rock for Amelia, she's strong and loyal. Her role in the story takes unexpected proportions if you don't pick up on the clues left by the author throughout the text. I have to warn you, Colette and Amelia will have more in common than their desire to become nuns.

Now, my crush: Oliver "Olly" Cromwell. When you finish reading *When Stars Die* (and I know you will read it!), you may have trouble understanding what I'm about to say, but I have to say it anyway. I have rarely loved a male character so much in a novel as I have in *When Stars Die*! He's incredible! Not only

because he is attractive, tender, funny and extremely captivating, but also because he made me feel a lot of things. And not necessarily in a good way... Because he's complex and his role in the book is never clearly defined. He will not leave you indifferent. You won't be able to trust yourself around him, just like Amelia can't herself, I imagine...

I could also talk about the Mother Superior, Aurelia or Theosodore, or about those little shadows, Asch and Sasch, but I think it would be better if you discovered them by yourself.

What I found incredible:

There are many reasons why this novel deserved five stars. The first thing I found amazing was the writing, which I would describe as almost magical. I was blown away by the use of the first person narration and the present tense, by the many descriptions: the scenery, the feelings and the scenes, always depicted with well-chosen words. Even though I'm French, I had no trouble imagining the characters and their actions. But what I loved the most was the beauty with which the emotions were described. It is told with old words but it is timeless. Unforgettable. It is a dark and really deep writing. Really unique and beautiful.

The second element I found incredible was the story in itself. I know I have already said that I love this novel, but the story is so unique, I have to talk about it! The synopsis intrigued me and I wasn't disappointed. If you're looking for something new and surprising, you won't be disappointed when reading *When Stars Die*. There are so many twists and so much suspense. And what an ending! I can't talk about it but let me tell you it was an amazing and astonishing slap in the face! I've already felt that way after reading a particularly remarkable novel but this one...

The downside:

My downside isn't necessarily one, but I have to admit that some scenes and twists didn't surprise me as much as they should have. Maybe it's because I'm an attentive reader, I don't know. I could really relate to the main character and unlike her, I could see the bigger picture in the situation. So it makes sense to guess some things sometimes. Don't worry though, it doesn't make the reading boring or less interesting, on the contrary. As I've said before on my blog, I love to be an active participant in my reading. And it didn't keep me from loving this novel and from being blown away by the ending.

Well, I hope my review convinced you to start the *When Stars Die* trilogy. I can't wait to read the next one! If only for Amber Skye Forbes's talent!

This first book is available on Amazon, and make sure to check out the author's blog, where you'll find advice for budding writers.

Thank you and enjoy your reading!

Lady says

This book was dark and twisted... definitely not for the faint of heart. I really enjoyed it but I would not recommend it to anyone who cannot handle extreme violence. I can honestly say I have never read anything like it.

This book was definitely one of a kind. The horror and suspense were palpable throughout this surreal tale of twisted love and vengeance. In many ways it was pure dark fantasy as the world in which it was set in no way resembles our own. There were so many twists and turns to the plot I never knew what was going to

happen next. The main character is easy to identify with most of the time and truly tragic. I can not wait to read the next installment!

I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys dark fantasy or horror novels. To classify this as a romance is very odd. I just do not see it. The romance is a major plot point but not the genre for this book. I think people who read paranormal thrillers would also enjoy this.

***This book is suitable for adult readers

Lipsy says

I have been following Amber Skye Forbes' blog for a short while but I hadn't read much about the actual plot of her forthcoming debut When Stars Die. What I did know is that Amber's all into ballet and stuff, the title sounds magical and the cover is pretty so when the opportunity came up to get an advanced copy to review I was thrilled and as soon as I started reading I knew instantly that this book was absolutely nothing like I was expecting.

From the very beginning it's clear that this isn't going to be a happy, soppy love story. Amber created a dark, mysterious and ominous atmosphere right from the get-go and I was entranced. Amelia is at Cathedral Reims -such a great name- where she is undergoing trials to prove that she deserves to be, and can handle the life of a nun. Straight away I was glued, the main leaders or teachers (whatever you'd like to call them) Mother Aureilia and Theosodore came across as incredibly sinister and cold, and the trials themselves were a lot nastier and darker than I would have first imagined.

And then, as you'd imagine, the plot thickens!

I loved the idea of the Shadowmen prowling around Cathedral Reims looking for witches and when Colette bursts into flames I had surprised cat face for at least 5 seconds. We soon come to realise that this world is nothing like ours.

People are born witches as a punishment to parents who have sinned, so basically there's a whole lot of witches! And when witches die they become Shadowmen, and the whole thing is driven by the evil, manipulative God Deus. Now, I'm not religious but I am fascinated by it and I thought the ideas and themes here were really interesting. I can honestly say that I've never read anything quite like this, which is something you don't get to say very often.

That being said, there were a lot of things that hindered my enjoyment as the book went on. When Stars Die is set in the 1800s but it's written in a modern style. I'm not usually a stickler for things like that but I frequently found words and phrases that I couldn't help but go 'surely that wouldn't have been said in the 1800s?' It distracted me a little.

I also felt the dialogue let it down slightly as it didn't seem very natural to me and I wished I liked Amelia more as a protagonist. She didn't really do anything wrong but I felt I couldn't warm to her because other than being there to save her brother's soul I wasn't convinced by any of the motivations for her actions. I never really got to know her as a person.

I wouldn't classify this as a paranormal romance, as it was a pretty bad romance but the setting and Amber's

descriptions of the world she has created here were really what made this book for me. That and the genius idea to use first person - present tense really made it stand out. **It was a unique read and the Epilogue has certainly intrigued me enough to look forward to the sequel.**

Sorin Suciu says

Amber's writing is dark, marked by suffering and a deep understanding of what makes us tick, not to mention tock. Her devastating first-person narrative and present tense combo makes it hard not to be drawn into the story.

While "When Stars Die" is categorized under Romance, there is so much more to it than that. Indeed, I would even argue that romance is not even the main dish, but rather the subtle spice that takes the whole plate up a notch.

The story is set in a late 19th century Europe, somewhere close to Denmark but not anywhere you would find on a real map. Without giving away too many spoilers, I would like to concentrate on Deus, the sadistic god and true villain in this universe. He keeps the society into an eternal check, giving them very few reasons to love him. It should come as no surprise then to the amateur theologian, that the more he hurts them, the more people love him. Amelia, the main character, and one of Deus' unfortunate victims, is the best example of this masochistic devotion taken to the extreme.

In tackling sensitive topics such as religion, abuse, rape and the inquisition, Amber dances on hot coals to a dangerous tune, but she does it with incredible style and pinpoint precision.

Sarah says

(Source: I won a digital eARC of this book. Thanks to author Amber Forbes.)

18-year-old Amelia lives in a world where witches are born of their parent's sins – if the parent has committed one of the seven deadly sins, then their child will be born a witch, and once discovered will be killed.

Amelia ran away with her 5-year-old brother Nat 3 years ago to the Convent where they now live, in the belief that becoming servants of God would absolve them of the taint they were born with. But when Amelia watches her best friend Collette spontaneously combust, and only she can see the flames, she and her brother are sent away from the Convent and back to their parent's house. Amelia is escorted home by Oliver – a trainee priest who has feelings for her, and they struggle with their feelings for one another.

Amelia soon learns that the strange shadows that she sees are called 'Shadowmen', and may have something to do with Collette's death, and also want something from herself and her brother.

What are the 'Shadowmen'? Why are they after Amelia and her brother? And how long can Amelia keep herself and her brother hidden and safe from those who would burn them as witches?

This was an enjoyable story with plenty of tension and excitement.

Amelia was a strong character who would do anything for the people she loved. She sacrificed a lot to be able to keep her brother safe, and it was obvious that she had feelings for Oliver. She did seem to change as the story went on, but she tried hard to hold on to her morals for most of the story!

I liked the storyline in this, and I liked the tension that was woven into the story. It wasn't easy to guess what would happen next, and I just had to keep reading to find out what would happen to Amelia next! I did get a little confused at points over the 'shadowmen' stuff, but this didn't really spoil the story, and I had to laugh when Amelia was told that Collette's spontaneous combustion was caused by an epileptic seizure!

This book read a bit like a historical fiction novel, but also had the paranormal element of witches and 'shadowmen' and stuff which was done well. It reminded me a little bit of 'Witchstruck' by Victoria Lamb, so if you liked that you will like this.

The romance in the story was nice, and I thought that Amelia and Oliver were pretty sweet together, even though there were hidden secrets waiting to be revealed. There were a couple of tasteful 'love' scenes, although there were also some non-consensual scenes too, but these weren't in-depth.

The ending was a little unexpected, and pretty brutal, and Amelia did seem greatly changed by what happened. I did lose interest a little bit towards the end, as I kept getting confused as to what was going on, but all was eventually revealed. The very end was then pretty unexpected, and the epilogue was a little strange, and Amelia seemed to have totally changed in all possible ways which was a shame as she was such a good character throughout the rest of the book.

It will certainly be interesting to see what happens in the next book!

Overall; an enjoyable historical/fantasy novel, with plenty of excitement.

7.5 out of 10.

Denise says

What do you do when you are raised your whole life thinking that witches were born out of parents committing one of the Seven Deadly Sins? When Amelia suspects that her little brother might be a witch she takes her brother and runs away to the Cathedral Reims so that she can become a nun and hopefully through her atonement to their god "Deus" she can help heal her brother.

The life of becoming a nun is a hard road. When she and her friend are enclosed in a cell for another "trial" of sorts, she sees her friend burst into flames. Fearing that she had done this Amelia seeks to do even better. But when the Mother Superior sends her and her brother back home, the real trials begin.

Learning that she is too is witch and many more are as well, she sets out trying to bring change. Can she do it? What forces are at play to keep any change from happening?

Nick says

First of all, let me get this out of the way: this book's epilogue seriously annoyed me. It cheapened several of the novel's earlier events and turned Amelia - a great protagonist up to then - into a total hypocrite. It didn't

completely come out of the blue, to be fair, but still: it was an extremely sour note for the book to end on, and one which I dearly wish the book had not done so.

The problem with the above, at least for me, is that this book is set to be the first of a trilogy. This book also happens to be very good on the whole. It comes complete with an excellent and vivid writing style, a well-developed and relatable protagonist (epilogue notwithstanding), some novel world-building, and plenty of twists and turns where plot is concerned. That means that I most definitely will be buying the next book in this series, which in turn means that at some point I'm going to have to accept that bloody epilogue as canon. I just...ARRRRRGH!

Moving on.

When Stars Die is the story of Amelia Gareth, a teenage girl who ran away from home in order to become a nun and thus redeem her brother in the eyes of her world's god. Amelia's brother, Nathaniel, can produce the magical fire that signifies him as a witch; such people are said to be born from their parents' sin and so are shunned as monsters by society. Amelia's only wish in life is to join the Professed Order and pray fervently to Deus within the walls of Cathedral Reims, in the hopes that both she and her brother will be accepted into Paradise upon their deaths.

Amelia struggles to pass the trials necessary to become a nun: not only are the trials themselves brutal in nature, but Amelia is constantly sighting mysterious shadow-creatures that nobody else seems to see. Fortunately, Amelia is aided in her journey by two people: Colette, her best friend with whom she shares a room, and Oliver, a kindly young priest who joined the Order for reasons similar to Amelia. Oliver and Amelia share an attraction entirely inappropriate for their chosen paths in life, but are unwilling to abandon it altogether. Seeing as this is a paranormal romance, you can probably guess where this is going.

That being said, there's no guarantee that this guess will be correct. In fact it probably won't be: When Stars Die is full of twists and revelations, and I guarantee that it won't end the way you expect it too. I was repeatedly taken by surprise, and really felt compelled to keep turning the page to find out how it would all finish up. The reveal of the villain's identity was an especial high point in this regard: it's foreshadowed well and seems obvious in retrospect, but I doubt that many people will work it out ahead of time.

Amelia herself is an excellent lead, being flawed in several ways without losing any of the reader's sympathy. She is joined by a rich cast of supporting characters, though some are better than others. Oliver is a wonderfully complex individual, with far more to him than initially meets the eye. Nathaniel was also a highlight, with his relationship with Amelia portrayed very well indeed. Other characters felt a little underused, however, with Colette in particular coming to mind.

While we're on the subject of characters: the villain here is actually quite sympathetic, at least if you squint at things the right way. They're undoubtedly monstrous, yes, but you can just about imagine how circumstances could have made them what they are. This made the final showdown a lot more compelling than it otherwise would have been.

Despite the above, my one big criticism of this book is its ending. Though the climax itself is excellent, the lead-in felt a tad rushed in places. The penultimate chapter ends with what could have been a fine conclusion, only for that epilogue to be tacked on afterwards. In addition to what I said at the start, I should also point that the epilogue differs significantly in tone from the rest of the book, making it feel very out of place. This could well have been what the author was going for, but...well, I can't say I found it particularly satisfying. I would honestly have preferred the book to end one chapter earlier; until the sequel arrives, I'm

just going to pretend that this was indeed the case.

When Stars Die is a riveting and well-plotted adventure that will appeal to both paranormal romance readers and fans of paranormal and/or fantasy in general. Anyone looking for a Twilight rehash will be disappointed, mind. I really came to feel for Amelia by the end, and I look forward to seeing where the rest of the trilogy takes her. Perhaps after the next book, this one's ending will be easier to accept. Watch this space.
