

Review by: Charlie Jackson

Multi-platform Game Reviewer - Cataclysm Games

Title: Ram I Am - Book 2 of the Ram series

by Jonathan Womack

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"With great power comes great responsibility, and that's especially true when you're able to sense desperate calls for help and travel across the globe in the time it takes to picture your destination. **Ram**, a superhero born of Jack Ramsey's out of body experiences, is capable of these things and so much more, and feels compelled to use them for good. **Ram I Am**, the sequel to Ram's origin story, **A Cry for a Hero**, takes place a year later, meaning that Jack is now much more experienced with Ram's powers. He helps spirits cross over, he saves people in need, he patrols the planet and he fights pirates on September 11th.

Yep, that's right, **Ram I Am** takes place on September 11th. Ram is patrolling, using his "psychic-sonar" to detect any potential terrorists that would love to terrorize the country on the anniversary of the terrible terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. He picks up a signal, but it's not terrorists, it's a swordsman trying to take on three pirates while protecting a woman! Ram

watches as the swordsman is murdered, then enters his body, yanks the sword from the would-be corpse and defeats the pirates (without killing anyone, as Ram pledged not to kill anyone a year prior), then leaves the body behind to return to his lab.

This isn't the first year that Jack has felt compelled to travel into the past to rescue someone, and Dr. Keef points out that it happened on the same day and time last year. He's worried Jack may not know everything he needs to know about his abilities as Ram, and boy does it come at the worst time! It turns out there really is a threat to America, but it's far worse than anyone could have guessed. On the bright side there's already a plan to stop it, but unfortunately for Jack, Dr. Keef, and Vonya Sarjenko (Jack's significant other and badass gal in her own right), the plan includes a preemptive strike involving scientists with superpowers commandeering the Keef Institute by force if necessary.

From the moment I cracked open ***Ram I Am***, I was hooked. It isn't often that superheroes in present day get called to fight pirates with a sword in the British Isles, and immediately after Ram returns to the Institute, where there are numerous nonstop plots. Is Jack safe as Ram? He has to put himself into a state of near-death using his mantra - "be dead..." - to exit his body as Ram, and it certainly wouldn't be far-fetched for him to be hurt or even killed if something went wrong with the process. And even that's only when Jack can find a safe

place to keep his body since he's defenseless in that state with his spirit hundreds or even thousands of miles away. Then there are the sudden, mysterious visitors to the Keef Institute, the amazing work that Dr. Keef is doing with drawing power from the earth like ancient civilizations did, a threat from the Middle East that could destroy the entire USA, and a potential preemptive strike that could take out the entire Middle East instead. With such high stakes, what can Ram, the brilliant Dr. Keef, and the kickass Vonya Sarjenko do to stop it, and how can anyone even try to choose what's best in less than 24 hours with so much going on? And it all happens on Jack's 30th birthday no less!

As action-packed as ***Ram I Am*** is from beginning to end, the book is also chock-full of themes. Out of body experiences (OBEs) are a big part of both books in the series thus far, and they're a big part of the author's life as well. In fact, several things in the Ram books are linked to author Jonathan Womack. Jack and Jonathan were both born on September 11th, and both have experienced major OBEs. The book also utilizes the theme of American/Middle Eastern relations, from the book taking place on the anniversary of the World Trade Center attack to the twists and turns of the plots by both sides to eradicate each other in the name of peace and retribution. Ram has a spirit guide, his teacher, who helps him with his spiritual growth. Perhaps due to this or due to the nature of being a disembodied spirit, Ram and Jack sometimes feel like night and day: Jack is dealing with a slew of issues immediately around him

for the greater good of those he loves, but Ram sees things on a much larger scale and feels more at peace about it all, even in moments of great strife where the fate of the world hangs in the balance. In fact, not only does Ram save people like a typical superhero would, he also helps spirits cross over when they're clinging to this earthly life or are scared or confused by what happened. This balance between Jack being right up in the action as a very mortal man facing off against supervillains and paranormal foes juxtaposed with Ram, who's essentially the spirit version of Superman (hence his nicknames, "Phantom of Steel" and "Man of Mist") who is able to literally see the entire planet at a glance from space, is terrific. It's also quite funny at times, such as seeing Jack talk about how badly he'd love to kick a certain jerk's ass, then promising he won't since he knows it's not right.

In addition to numerous themes, Jonathan also gives us a look at each of the characters. While I loved *A Cry for a Hero*, it had been years since I read it and I honestly forgot pretty much everything about it. *Ram I Am* does a great job of defining the main characters - Jack, Vonya, and Dr. Keef - again. I also liked that women are far from helpless, weak, or unintelligent in the book, and that this is a "clean" novel without detailed intimate scenes. The good guys aren't the only ones with insight in the book; Jonathan shows us the point of view of the villains as well. Every good story needs a good villain, and it's always nice when even the bad guys are doing what they do because they feel like it's

the right thing. That doesn't mean I agree with all of them; one villain was much more monstrous, literally and metaphorically, than the others, but the other two were deep characters with their own levels of inner conflict as well.

But what makes ***Ram I Am*** such a terrific book is the author's writing style. It's fun but tense, and I loved that I always felt like I was right there in the middle of it like a silent fourth character. The pop culture references were all excellent as well, like Nuke (the lead tech guy) getting his nickname from his real name sounding close to Duke Nukem or how Agent Robert Frazier looked like Michael Chiklis, grew up in the same suburb, and "Chiklis went to Hollywood to play the part of a hero; Frazier went to the nation's capital to live it." In a very dangerous situation Jonathan writes that a character "felt like Captain Kirk beaming a red-shirted guard to an unknown planet", which is something my gal and I joke about with characters on a regular basis ourselves. He also sometimes compares Ram to Superman; my favorite nickname for Ram is "Phantom of Steel" and it's used during a fight scene that felt like a duel straight out of the movie ***Man of Steel***. Even the descriptions are humorous at times, like a scene where he compares a room lit with ultraviolet light to "hippie den hues". And the book includes a slew of "in the time it takes to..." lines that fit the situation, such as "in the time it takes to sketch a villain" regarding the speed of a villain's actions, or "in the time it takes to don a cape" for Ram doing something heroic. Like the pop culture references, these are scattered throughout and never felt

heavy-handed, they were just a little icing on the cake for this lifelong fantasy/superhero/sci-fi lover.

Overall, Ram I Am is a terrific book. It has a bunch of action, tension, humor, varying themes, solid writing, and villains that are as relatable as the heroes. I never felt that "ugh I hate this character" feeling, and if I were to re-read it there aren't any scenes I'd want to skip over. The pop culture references are terrific but not such deep cuts that people will be confused, and I can (and do!) recommend it to anyone in their mid-to-late teens and up since there's no graphic sex or violence."

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