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Carole McDonnell

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Wind Follower Details

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From Reader Review *Wind Follower* for online ebook

Satima says

This review first appeared in the now-defunct webzine, The Specusphere, in October 2009.

Wind Follower is Carole McDonnell's first novel, but prior to publishing this book, she was already established as a reviewer and essayist. She has also written poetry and devotional pieces, mainly for Christian journals. Her Christian faith has also informed her speculative fiction work, and this is very apparent in *Wind Follower*.

The story is an adventure-romance, set in a richly imagined world. Boy (Loic) meets girl (Satha), boy loses girl, boy goes to ends of earth to find girl, and finds his own true purpose en route. The setting is a kind of alternate Africa, or perhaps it stands for any country ripe for colonialism. McDonnell has analogously incorporated all the earth's races into her continent, representing them by the very dark Thesen; the lighter coloured Ibeni, the slant-eyed, yet sometimes red-headed Doreni and threatening all of them, the invading Angleni.

The Juno imprint is noted for its strong female lead characters, and Satha, the heroine of *Wind Follower*, carries the role well. She has to deal with more perils than Pauline, more trials than Job: in fact at one point she is so obviously an avatar of Hagar, Abraham's concubine, that we are looking for someone to play the role of Isaac. But although the book has a curiously Old Testament feel to it, the parallels are not distinct: McDonnell's references gently investigate possibilities and move on, as we follow the journeys of Loic and Satha through alternating first person chapters.

McDonnell is a fine writer, and *Wind Follower* leads us to expect even better things from her in the future. The story is burdened, however, by a certain falling down between two stools – or actually in the middle of a circle of stools. We have a classic epic journey, involving a romance and a coming-of-age story; an equally classic captivity scenario, in which the enslaved person survives through her own fortitude and resilience, and a rather self-consciously overlaid effort to show that faith conquers all. At the end, we learn that the Tribes never succeeded in uniting against the Angleni and remained the underdogs, yet they rejoice that the Angleni brought their own true religion, encapsulated in the Lost Book, back to them.

And here's the problem. What readership is *Wind Follower* aimed at? Many Christians, black and white, are likely to balk at a theology that is very like that of Christianity, yet does not follow it nearly closely enough for the tastes of fundamentalists. On the other hand, many fantasy readers of whatever ancestry will reject the book's overtly Christian allegory, and some black readers who are not Christians may be dismayed at the oblique suggestion, normally propagated only by the conquerors, that as long as invasion brings True Religion it is acceptable. Yet still other readers, not all of them Christian, will feel uncomfortable at the idea of spreading a what is supposed to be a religion of peace through invasion and, the conquered people having accepted that religion's tenets, ignoring them in order to rebel against the invaders. Like the Old Testament, *Wind Follower* abounds in mixed messages, and this is why it falls in the middle of those hypothetical stools.

Yet there is probably a niche market for books like this one, and it is, I would venture, among Christians who are not fundamentalists and who are willing to consider that perhaps parables can be spoken in the language of fantasy as well as that of religion. A tall order, perhaps, but I hope McDonnell finds this readership. An author who can produce a work such as *Wind Follower* deserves to have an extensive circulation.

McDonnell can be found on Facebook and at <http://www.darkparables.blogspot.com>. Her work will not be easy to find in Australia: however, *Wind Follower* can be found for sale at online shops.

Monica *can't read fast enough*** says**

I'm very happy to say that the beautiful cover that attracted me to this one didn't lead me astray. This was a really good fantasy story with plenty of conflict of human nature, politics, and self discovery. Satha and Loic are characters that I enjoyed seeing come together despite their differences. I think this is one that I may read again. I almost feel as though I read it too quickly. But the ending-well, it wasn't exactly what I expected and it left me a little thrown.

Sumayyah says

Students and followers of the Abrahamic traditions will find this story, in turns, familiar, disturbing, historical, and prophetic.

Begins as a simple love story between Loic and his chosen bride, Satha, but quickly turns into a theological and racial discussion. 4 tribes fight, make peace, and enslave each other, with 1 tribe believing that they have been called to rule over all. The tribal spirits sow war and confusion amongst the people while The Creator tries, almost in vain, to be heard by a lonely few.

Warnings include rape, violence, and child death.

Carole McDonnell says

This is my book. I wrote it.

Lisa Nevin says

Created a wonderful new world - new customs, language, fabulous, but not all that fond of the ending.

Dorkthropology says

While the world-building was interesting, and the core story had great ideas, the blatant Christian allegory didn't capture my interest and felt preachy many times.

But I will never get over how badass that cover is.

Caprice Hokstad says

Wind Follower is a ethnic fantasy/folk tale by Carole McDonnell. Much of it "feels" historical, but it's not quite historical and not quite alternate history either. The "spirits" or demons of her world have real power and use it in ways we're not accustomed to in our reality. By the way, her setting is meticulously detailed and superbly executed. Carole did her homework and built a rich world full of a diverse customs and a complex culture. Her setting information is seamlessly woven with the well-paced plot, so it doesn't become a boring travelogue. Plus, there's a handy glossary at the back of the book! My only objection was that I didn't discover this lovely gem until I finished reading the story. I wish it had been at the FRONT of the book or that there had been a note in the front alerting me to its existence.

The chapters are presented as first-person accounts alternating between the two protagonists, Satha and Loic. Satha has very dark skin, which is considered less desirable than Loic's lighter brown. This is ironic, since the even paler Angleni people are the enemy! Anyway, when the story opens, Satha is past the "normal" age for marriage and has pretty much resigned herself to life as a single woman. But after just one meeting, Loic, the son of an important chieftain, becomes utterly enamored and "pulls out all the stops" to get to marry her. The parents even lie about a childhood betrothal in order to push the wedding date closer. But like so many in our culture today, they are impatient and don't wait until after the wedding.

There is some sex in this book. Some of the description was a bit more information than I felt necessary, but it was still well-handled. Frankly, I was more horrified that Satha sliced off a woman's nose in front of a whole host of people than I was that she secretly jumped the gun in "couching" with her fiancé. Yes, the women of her tribe are expected to know how to handle a dagger and the woman who lost her nose at Satha's hand deserved far worse. I just wanted Loic's father to handle his "Third Wife" rather than have Satha become so violent. Admittedly, that is my personal and cultural bias. Readers who like female warriors (e.g. Xena) would probably applaud this aspect of Satha's character.

McDonnell's characters are all very realistically drawn. A little too realistic for my taste. I like my fantasy a little more on the heroic side--not perfect, but a bit more virtuous. Even after Loic has a "Damascus Road" type of experience with the Creator, he still does not obey the Creator's direct command not to kill the man who raped his wife. The Creator tells Loic to leave the vengeance to Him. But Loic doesn't listen. And it's not a "moment of passion" kill either. It is totally premeditated, planned, and considered. Loic doesn't pray for help in resisting his desire for revenge. He acts like he has no choice but to give in to his rage. This made me question whether he really took his conversion seriously. Directly after this disobedience, things go downhill for Loic and his people. It seemed to be a cause-and-effect situation to me, but the author asserts (on a blog outside of the book) that she did not intend it to be. In any case, the ending was too depressing for my taste. I read for entertainment and tragedy has never been my cup of tea. However, that does not negate its validity as a literary form. McDonnell follows in the revered footsteps of Shakespeare.

If you like "kick-butt" female characters and realism in your fiction, then Wind Follower is a thought-provoking and skillfully crafted tale that's right up your alley.

Parker Cole says

This was the first book I'd read by Carole McDonnell. I loved the cover of the book and admittedly that's what drew me to the book. However, the cover is only one aspect of wonderful detail and it gets more beautiful as you pore through the pages. I was particularly drawn to the rich detail of the book. The tribal nature of the narrative is a uniqueness to the book. It's as if you're sitting at the feet of the queen and king of the tribe as they relate their story.

More than once I forgot I was reading. I could feel the emotions of the characters so well. Loic was rash, Satha stoic and it makes for a wonderful contrast. The interpretation of the story is left up for grabs but I chose to see it as a parallel of our world and that the gospel was taken to another world so that all could come under the knowledge. Loic and Satha went through so much.

The ending does leave something to be desired but even the ending makes sense. It's because rarely is life a fairy tale and even with individual happiness and success, the overall picture can be bleak. But then, the story for -us and for the people in the book - is not over yet.

Cheryl says

Although it is not entirely to her liking, grief-stricken Satha, a dark-skinned woman from a poor Theseni clan weds young Loic, the wealthy Doreni son of the king's First Captain. Loic, graced with ability to see into the hearts and minds of others, begins to help Satha overcome her sorrows. Despite coming from different tribes, they begin to forge a life together. But when Satha's own compassion is used against her and a treacherous enemy contrives to dishonor her in Loic's absence, Loic's love turns to anger and disgust. Embittered, Loic must still avenge his honor and Satha's and he sets out on a journey that brings despair as well as spiritual discovery. Battling him are the Arkhai, the spirits of the land who know his quest will lead him toward the God whom they have usurped. After his departure, Satha is kidnapped, sold into slavery and learns, first hand, how cruel the pioneering Angleni tribe can be. Both face great hardship, danger and anguish apart, but with the Creator's aid there remains hope they will be reunited and heal the love the world has torn asunder.

I have to admit I have been wanting to check out this book for a while, so when I won it from J. Kaye's book blog I was excited. So when I read this book I was a little disappointed and still a little confused about what really took place during the story. Now it could have been partially due to the fact that I was reading it at work so when I got a break or lunch I would read it and could only get into about 15 to 30 minutes at a time to dedicate to this book. Now don't get me wrong as this could be a good book and maybe when I get the chance I will try reading it again.

Brownbetty says

I chose this book from the library on the basis of I liked the cover: a heuristic which has certainly resulted in many books being read that might not have been otherwise. I like that she's naked, but the impression given isn't one of powerlessness, or sexification.

First off, this book is essentially an examination of the effects of colonialism, and how colonialism also promoted the spread of Christianity-- written by a Black, Christian woman. I was completely unaware of

this. Once again, my horizons have been broadened by the book-cover method!

As a story, I think the book works, but I'm not really able to evaluate it purely as a story, because I spent so much time boggling at the theological underpinnings.

"Wind Follower," Ganti said, "if you think the Angleni Good Book is truly the Lost Book, what will you do? [...] And yet, that such a lying and cruel people should have such a loving and near god."

Kaynu pointed to a boat floating toward the river. "Perhaps it is because their god is so near, so giving, and so forgiving that the Angleni are so selfish. Like spoiled children who know their parents love them, they know all things are theirs. They take without asking."

I mean, it would never have occurred to me that white peoples' entitlement complex comes *literally* from being god's chosen people. I'm trying to be open-minded to this interpretation, but my mind sort of shrinks from it.

Okay, so, putting that aside for a moment, I think the book did suffer somewhat, on a theological level, from trying to tie too many strands together. The story is that of Satha, a poor girl, and her rich but sickly husband, Loic. Satha, when kidnapped, becomes involved in a story where she is clearly cast as Hagar, to her captors' Abraham and Sarah.

Loic, while wandering the wilderness, seems to wander into and out of the role of John the Baptist, Elija, um, Naomi, (I'm not reading too much into this, I swear: when someone says "Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, and your god, my God," to him, I think I'm justified in making that connection,) Jesus, (he goes around putting peoples' *ears back on!*) and probably more I've lost track of. (I could make a somewhat sketchier case for St. Peter, too.) The result is a rather mixed metaphor.

Minke says

I really liked this story, I couldn't put the book down. I don't usually read books with religious themes but because I didn't really catch on until the end but the story was really well written and I love the character descriptions and world building.

Derek says

I was interested in this book as an exploration of gender and ethnicity. McDonnell creates an intriguing tribal culture as a backdrop for these issues. The rather blatant Christian metaphors were a bit abrasive for my tastes.

The Urban Book Source says

Carole McDonnell's 2007 novel, *Wind Follower*, entered into my life on two ironic premises: 1) I never thought I'd have the patience to read Christian fiction, 2) I hadn't imagined a book of this sort would revive and reinvigorate my latent pessimism that the barren tree would ever again produce sweet fruit. Just when I'd

reached the point of surrendering PNR to a lost cause, a point of no redemption, that I no longer believed that the ole great literary plane would ever fly again, I discovered Carole McDonnell's brilliant novel, read it...and then I exhaled.

I will not give the story away but I will note that Wind Follower is perhaps the most eloquently written book I've read this year. McDonnell's prose is polished and sophisticated, her command of language is breathtaking, and the story is beautifully imaginative. Loic and Satha are the main characters of this very biblical tale. Loic falls in love with Satha and wants her for his bride. Although there are differences between them both believe in the power of the Wind God. The two endure great challenges of love and romance in the face of faith, tragedy and revenge. In the end, Loic and Satha learn much about themselves and what they mean to each other.

I personally appreciated McDonnell's strong moral message of love (which transcends culture, class, and race – Loic is light skinned and Satha is dark skinned), which focused on hope, community and redemption. Wind Follower is also a dynamic compilation of various cultures, clans, traditions, beliefs, and characters pulling and stretching the reader's imagination while pushing us along into the labyrinth of McDonnell's meticulously crafted fiction.

Wind Follower is a fine read and will ultimately become a classic. Carole McDonnell is a brilliant writer with a bright literary future ahead of her. I fully recommend this book, and I anticipate McDonnell's next novel!

What did you like about the book?

Carole McDonnell is a great writer. I love her historical imagination.

What did you dislike about the book?

Nothing to dislike, McDonnell introduced me to a new genre.

Inda says

I picked up Wind Follower from the bookstore the last time I was able to go on a book binge. The beautiful cover art is just a taste of the awesome storytelling McDonnell offers here. With her protagonist Satha, she offers a type of heroine we don't often get in fantasy: a dark-skinned, fat Black woman fully aware of her how others see her and experiencing vulnerabilities because of those perceptions.

Due to customs, Satha must marry a wealthy heir, Loic, she does not know and doubts has true feelings for her. However, Loic, who is also the protagonist of the story, falls for her at first sight and despite being younger than her, asks his father to arrange the marriage. They buck custom and enter a full marriage after one week even though they were supposed to wait a year.

Of course, not all is well in the household and enemies conspire to end the happiness Satha and Loic build with each other. However, this is not simply a love story. McDonnell draws from many experiences including the slave trade to build a rich world of gods, demons and humans to tell the story of Satha and Loic.

McDonnell has the flair of Sofia Samatar when it comes to creating a world that draws on traditions and customs from POC and gives the story a very non-Western feel. She also has the talents of N.K. Jemisin when it comes to world building. I wish I had found this in 2007 when it was released but with the surge of Black women writers in fantasy and scifi, hopefully this one is rediscovered.

Jessica says

I enjoyed this book so much. The writing is outstanding. It pulls you through the narrative, but is never tired or derivative. I very much liked the main characters, particularly Satha, the heroine. The story does not pull its punches, and there were points when I found the narrative too painful to read and put it aside. This is a tribute to its power; I became fond of the central characters, Loic and Satha, who face some harsh tests in their quest.

The imaginary world, with its four tribes and languages, is imagined in vivid detail. I was apprehensive about the strong Christian theme that animates the book, but for me it formed an organic part of the narrative. Though there were occasions when I was not always in agreement with the book's themes, they never detracted from my enjoyment. The characters, heroes and villains, were complex and believable. The trickiest part for me was the paradox that the Angleni, the colonial invaders, were the ones who brought the truth with them. But the book does not shy away from the paradox; the Angleni themselves are not a good thing.

But the story never becomes a simplistic allegory. The African world of the fantasy is striking and original and avoids the over-used tropes of some traditional fantasy. I rather wish it had gone on longer. I would have liked to read more! I would recommend this book to any fans of fantasy, but also to those who would hesitate to read books bearing the fantasy label. The strength of the prose and the characterisation alone should make it more widely read. Hoping to read the author's next book, 'The Constant Tower'.
(I wish I could give it 4.5 stars!)(review also posted on Amazon).
