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A writer of whimsy and passion, Sandra McDonald has collected her most evocative short fiction to offer readers in *Diana Comet and Other Improbable Stories*. A beautiful adventuress from the ancient city of New Dalli sets off to reclaim her missing lover. What secrets does she hide beneath her silk skirts? A gay cowboy flees the Great War in search of true love and the elusive undead poet Whit Waltman, but at what cost? A talking statue sends an abused boy spinning through a great metropolis, dodging pirates and search for a home. On these quests, you will meet macho firefighters, tiny fairies, collapsible musicians, lady devils and vengeful sea witches. These are stories to stir the heart and imagination.

Diana Comet and Other Improbable Stories Details

Date : Published July 28th 2010 by Lethe Press (first published May 18th 2010)

ISBN : 9781590210949

Author : Sandra McDonald

Format : Paperback 283 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fantasy, Fiction, Glbt, Queer, Science Fiction, Lgbt, Anthologies

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From Reader Review Diana Comet and Other Improbable Stories for online ebook

Keira Edwards-Huolohan says

This collection held some really beautiful, magical stories. Many of them tied together in nice little ways. There were a lot of great queer characters which is the entire reason for my reading it.

Unfortunately, there was a lot of transphobia and queerphobia. One of the characters hated her body and referred to it in horrible ways. Others called her a man. Some other non-hetero characters exhibited a lot of internalised homophobia.

There was also a bit of sex worker-phobia, with use of 'sluts' and 'wh*res' as bad things to be/do. There was also a bit of incest.

I think I had high expectations.

Julia Capasso says

This collection of stories is unexpected and fun. The parallel world in which the stories takes place is like ours in many ways, which makes the dissimilarities all the more surprising and clever! These are tales of bravery, friendship, and the struggle (or not) of accepting one's true self or struggling for acceptance from others. Each story is cleverly interconnected and they are collectively quite an enjoyable armchair adventure!

Adam Lowe says

Diana Comet is a strange collection. I started reading a couple of the shorter stories out of sequence, and immediately put them down as unsatisfying. Then I re-read a review at EDGE and so resolved to sit down and read it properly. I read from cover to cover, and I wasn't at all disappointed.

The best stories in this collection are those describing the actions of Ms Diana Comet herself. A transgender spy posing as a woman of means (or a woman of means posing as a spy?), she drops her skirts at night and runs around as a slender young man, collecting evidence or saving the vulnerable. She's shown as far from perfect (often rather pompous and occasionally rude), but she's endearing in every way. Her strength and pride make her a wonderful character, and a wonderful example of a transgender character in modern fiction.

McDonald manages something whimsical but classical, literary yet fantastic, underscored with real human interactions and real emotional resonance. Those shorter stories I'd read out of context hadn't worked for me because of their subtlety--a subtlety that requires reading the stories around them to get the pay-off. Each story builds up more of McDonald's world (and you soon realise all the stories occur in the same world, albeit in different time periods), more of her characters (who are all linked, pretty much, by the end), adding to a deep and involving story about human nature and, most of all, the strength of the individual, the outsider, the other, and the love to be had between people of all kinds.

I want to read more about Ms Comet, her orphanage, and the world of Massasoit and New Dalli. I want to read more of Sandra McDonald and her shimmering, elegant prose. I also want to read more from her publisher, the striking Lethe Press, who I've also discovered have published Tanith Lee.

Yes, I recommend this book. Take a ride on a comet and see where Diana takes you.

Elisabeth says

Gender, sexuality, race, religion. A pretty loaded set of topics. Yet all are handled with deft humor and delight in this whimsical and fantastical collection. Some of the stories are difficult or sad; some make you laugh out loud; all are thoughtful and engaging, where people in a world not too unlike our own struggle with love and war and the demands of society.

Speculative fiction at its brief best.

Dayna Ingram says

Wow, I don't even really know how to begin to describe this collection of short stories to you. It is like nothing I have ever read, in the most refreshing way. Especially the Diana Comet stories; that character is AMAZING and should have movies made about her. I love that these are called "improbable" stories; very fitting. (Although, it should be noted that some of these stories would not work as stand-alones. I'm thinking specifically of the Greybeard stories.)

My favorite story is "The Instrument." Chilling, absurd, humorous, brilliant.

Runner-up is "Kingdom Coming" (wickedly inventive), followed closely by "Diana Comet and the Disappearing Lover," which frankly deserves more than a short story can give it.

I'm also quite fond of "The Goddess and Lieutenant Teague," because the only thing really "fantastical" about it is that all of the Army dudes were women. Felt like a nice commentary ("This is weird. Wait, why IS this weird? This should not be weird." You know?).

One thing I did not care for were the end notes. While occasionally humorous, I didn't really understand their contribution to the stories and they just felt superfluous.

Overall, this is a refreshingly different collection of stories that I recommend to anyone interested in the improbable.

Miss says

well that was an unexpected pleasure! i wish i could remember whose recommendation prompted me to stick this on the to read list, they have good taste

diana comet and other improbable stories is a short story collection that is best read in order. you get a range of characters -- a lovestruck cowboy! a seawitch! a talking statue! walt whitman! firefighters!* -- as well as

the recurring figure of ms. diana comet herself, a transgender spy, philanthropist, and generally adventurous woman. it pulls off the same trick catherynne valente's *the orphan tales* does which is gradually reveal how all these stories are inter-related so that each lends additional resonance to the following one. i liked the device of author's notes at the end -- less disruptive than footnotes but the same flavour of fun. i may borrow it for my next short story attempt

4 stars

*i suspect sandra macdonald has a thing for firefighters and i am entertained by it

Steph Bennion says

I really enjoyed this collection of tales, which all have LGBT themes and take place in a well-imagined fantasy version of own world. I liked best the stories featuring the eponymous Diana Comet (no spoilers as to her secret). Well worth reading if you're tired of straight white males grabbing all the action.

Stephen Poltz says

This is a very interesting and entertaining collection of stories that run the gamut of the LGBTQ experience. The stories are literary, yet have fantastical elements to them. And there's an obsession with firefighters. What really struck me about these stories was that I was able to get into most of them very easily. Sometimes with short fiction, it takes the whole story to get into it, but I found that the stories grabbed me right from the start and most of the characters instantly likeable or relatable. Some of the stories are standalone and some of them are related. They all take place in the same universe, mostly around a city called Massasoit. They take place in different times, but in the end story, all the stories more or less come together. My favorite of the stories were the Diana Comet stories, of which there were three where she was a main character. But almost all them were fun and inventive. This book won the Lambda Literary Award for Sci Fi/Fantasy/Horror in 2011.

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<https://itstartedwiththehugos.blogspot...>

Hilcia says

I've read one book by Sandra McDonald, *The Outback Stars* a military science fiction fantasy. I loved her writing and eye for detail, and her ability to create fantasy and human characters. In *Diana Comet and Other Improbable Stories*, Sandra McDonald uses all those talents to their full extent. The result is a collection of unique, reality-based fantasy stories that are just plain gorgeous.

There are fourteen short stories in this collection, some are obviously related and some seemingly stand on their own, however all of them share the same fictional setting. Although the characters in this collection are varied and unique in each story, the most prominent and the one who binds this collection, is Diana Comet. The intrepid Diana is a gorgeous transgendered character who is fearless in her love and beliefs.

McDonald begins with a Prologue that sets the whimsical tone to this collection, and continues with the story of Graybeard and the Sea, a sentient wooden figurehead who longs for what he can't have, and where he first meets his young friend Cubby, a story that seems light and fantastical. As the book progresses, the subject matter in the stories gain depth with each telling and by the time *Women of the Lace* is read, the realization sets in that all the stories have been neatly and cleverly tied up by the writer.

McDonald's unique characters are as diverse as their stories. There are statues that come to life, terrifying sea witches, bewitched music boxes and aliens, rooting this collection firmly on fantasy. And then there are the highly effective human characters that populate these stories and give them that touch of passion and reality: Landers, the gay cowboy hiding his nature from society in *Diana Comet* and the Lovesick Cowboy, Lieutenant Teague and her Sergeant Liss fighting attraction in the middle of a war in *The Goddess* and Lieutenant Teague, Cubby and Rev. Sawberry Chicken's interactions in *The Land of Massasoit*, the general's fear in *The Instrument*, Jaleesha family's struggle between conforming and having the courage to fight the status quo in *Kingdom Coming*, and Diana dealing with grief, changes and taboos in *Diana Comet & the Collapsible Orchestra*.

Diana Comet and Other Improbable Stories felt different and unique and I re-read it once before writing this review. I loved this book and there's no doubt in my mind that this was essentially due to Sandra McDonald's writing and execution. She reels the reader in with the light fantasy and then goes deep, while using a light touch as she addresses contemporary issues through fantasy. Some characters and stories make more of an impact than others, but undoubtedly as a whole, this collection is a winner.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I would never have heard of Sandra McDonald if one of my GoodReads friends hadn't recommended this volume to me, and I'm so glad I requested it from a library in another state through interlibrary loan (just to demonstrate how very off my radar it was).

It is true that many of the characters are GLBTQ, and it is true that there are some fantastical elements in these stories, but I think those two things pale in light of other important facts - the characters are written in such a way that I felt very warmly towards them, even after only knowing some of them a short time, and was always happy when they returned in another story. There is an underlying current of fireman obsession, something to certainly look out for. And I have never so seriously contemplated the feelings and cravings of inanimate objects....

Definitely worth it to track these down.

Nic says

Beautifully written. I think my esteem for this book benefitted from the fact that I read it while suffering from a cold, just in that having a stuffy head makes me slow down and pay close attention when reading, which helps me really enjoy good writing.

I like how the story is set in places that are like, but not quite, real-world locations. It even includes similarly whimsical takes on some historical figures - all hail poet Whit Waltman!

(It is a little embarrassing to me just how long it took me to realize that the locations were based on real-world places, though. Geography is not really a thing that I do.)

Craig says

This is a charming collection of "braided" SF/F stories that feature a recurrent theme. The character of Graybeard--an abandoned carnival figure--floats through the stories, as does the titular Diana Comet, an elegant, near supernatural character that serves as a kind of Mary Poppins figure who happens to be a preoperative transgendered male to female. The range of these tales is immense--from tall tales, to military SF, to alternative history to folk tales. LGBT issues flavor, but don't overwhelm the stories. And the author does a wonderful job of portraying characters of color. There's also warmth in her characters--they step off the page. "Diana Comet" is classic storytelling in the vein of Washington Irving and Ray Bradbury.

Megan says

You know that feeling when suddenly you hear a song someone you loved used to sing to you as a baby? A song you'd completely forgotten you even knew until you heard it again? That's how I felt when I read this book. Whatever crazy-crack Sandra McDonald's smoking, I'm smoking it, too. Her book of --I can only think of them as fairytales-- resonates with me in a way that a very tiny precious handful of books do. She writes about such loneliness and yearning, but in such a beautiful, ridiculous, charming way. If you could plant books in the ground, and from them would grow trees, this book would grow a tree that was hung with little golden apples, the dense, sweet kind with a rough skin and crisp flesh, and even when it was covered in apples --which you could eat and eat and eat, by the way, and never run out-- it would also be covered in blossoms, all pink and white and full of honeybees. That's the kind of book it is. Everyone should read it. I don't care if you read it and hate it. Read it all the same. Some things are just good for the soul.

erforscherin says

I had very high hopes for this story collection, but none of it ever quite materialized. McDonald is a very lyrical writer, but let's be blunt: she can't plot her way out of a paper bag, and (especially towards the end) her characters feel very cookie-cutter after a while. She gets a few bonus points in my book for a brave effort in trying to fly LGBT-friendly messages, and the occasional inspired turn of phrase, but the plot and characters are so lackluster that even a 2.5 feels like it might be pushing it. Very unfortunate.

David says

One of the most enjoyable books i have read in years (and i read a lot). The footnotes (actually I guess they are endnotes) were a particular pleasure, which is not normally what makes a work of fiction stand out -- but this is a very unusual collection of stories!

