



Promises, Promises

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Promises, Promises: A Romp with Plenty of Dykes, a Unicorn, an Ogre, an Oracle, a Quest, a Princess, and True Love with a Happily Ever After

Sandy Blunt, witch, has big dreams but C-average magic skills. Her only noteworthy talent is for paying extravagant compliments to women. Trouble is, when she uses that gift, she unwittingly foretells the future for a pretty princess. The punishment for prophesying about one of royal blood is death. With the help of ill-assorted companions, including a self-professed princess in disguise with a wild imagination, a self-absorbed member of the royal guard, and the not-so-average girl next door, Sandy has a year and a day to travel to far-flung places--encountering such dangerous creatures as a dragon who writes awful poetry, slovely elves, and boarding house landladies--to collect the weird and magical items needed to turn her prophecies into promises and so evade the executioner.

Promises, Promises Details

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From Reader Review Promises, Promises for online ebook

Flowerscat says

A light and entertaining read. Many laugh-aloud moments. Perfect for when you need a break from everyday life.

Elaine Burnes says

First a disclaimer: I happen to be a moderator on the forum run by L-J Baker, lesbianfiction.org, so my objectivity could well be questioned.

Anyway, the subtitle pretty much says it, and you can probably guess this book is not meant to be taken seriously. I am not well versed in fantasy (Chainmail bikinis? Apparently.) and science fiction. Those who are, will likely get even more enjoyment out of this than I did. I think of this as a lesbian mashup of Monty Python (think Holy Grail) and Harry Potter. As straight-C witch, Sandy Blunt, embarks on a quest of, if not epic proportions at least humorous ones, she and her gang skewer just about every trope and cliché of the genres, with plenty of winks to the reader. Baker has something for writers as well. Some might wonder why a character is named Bob, but if you write, you know why and wonder if Baker will deliver the line. Find out for yourself. I did have a bit of trouble getting into the story and really attaching to the characters, partly because of my lack of experience with fantasy, partly because there's a lot of dialogue without a lot of action in the beginning—lots of talk about how boring real adventuring is. It takes a long time to get to the first item on Sandy's list, but then things take off nicely. There's a quotably funny line every few paragraphs. I laughed out loud at the trademarks. (Not sure why I found those so funny.) What I appreciated the most is that the story actually gets better as it goes along—the humor withstands and, while you know where this is headed (see subtitle), there's still plenty of interest in how she gets there. The writing is crisp and genuinely funny.

I do have a couple of gripes, but they have nothing to do with the writing or the story. First, the font. Perfectly normal except for a curly ligature between some letters, most notably s and t, which bothered me the most because is such a common combination. I found myself counting them instead of focusing on the story. I also wanted to read them with some sort of lisp. Second, the cover. While the drawing is cute, it seemed better suited for a graphic novel. And why is one character depicted with blue eyes and blond hair when he has black eyes and green hair? Both were distractions that pulled me out of the story. Baker is a good writer. Publishers should let her words speak for themselves. But hey, I'll take a good book packaged poorly over the reverse any day!

So, read this. You'll have a blast.

Roth says

4.5 stars. A thoroughly enjoyable irreverent take on sword and sorcery fantasy. This book was fun and hilarious and chock full of gay ladies and I had such a great time reading it.

Sandy says

I started reading this a while back and it was so smarmy, cutesy humorous that I stopped at page 5. It was really annoying. I ran out of things to read on my Kindle so I started it again and this time I did finish it. Either I was in a better mood this time or it's better if you can make it past page 5. It's kind of like Princess Bride meets Lord of the Rings, only the hobbits are lesbian feminists. It's fine if you're looking for a silly beach read but it was a little too self-aware at times.

Myopicscientist says

Although I was initially lukewarm, this book really grew on me and by the end I was not only entertained but genuinely emotionally invested in Sandy finally getting her act together and kissing Ruth. A fun, self-aware send-up of sword-and-sorcery tropes.

David says

This book has many references to popular culture.

Stars Wars

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

Bewitched

The Narnia Chronicles

The Lord of the Rings

The Princess Bride

Snow White

Wizard of Oz

Three Little Pigs

Hansel and Gretel

Chronicles of Thomas Covenant

The Walrus and the Carpenter

m. moon says

I dropped it about halfway through; I was struggling to get invested and I think it's cuz I pretty much only like this particular style of writing and humour in campy movies! I just find it difficult to connect with this humour without visuals, unfortunately, though it certainly SOUNDED like something that would be up my alley - it just wasn't quite grounded enough for my novel tastes. :(

(If someone were to ever make a campy silly ridiculous movie adaptation, though, I would add it to my Netflix queue right away.)

Shira Glassman says

If there were a Mel Brooks movie that parodied classic sword and sorcery high fantasy tropes — Lord of the Rings, Dungeons and Dragons, and the Northern European fairy-tale canon — with three lesbian leads, I expect a lot of people would add it to their Netflix queue before I get to the end of this sentence. That's basically what you'll find in *Promises, Promises* by L-J Baker. As someone on Twitter put it, "she messes with metatextual analysis like she's humping the fourth wall." References to Star Wars, Douglas Adams, and other fandoms join humorous anachronism and modern-day feminist, lesbian, and gender politics.

HOWEVER! This book is not just a bunch of gags strung together. There's a plot that, while overall predictable in that comforting way that fairy tales bring, went in a lot of creative directions that were entertaining to watch unfold, and lots of different personalities of interesting female characters whose friendship and interaction I enjoyed. Basically, they wind up having to go on a quest to recover a number of improbable magic items—a dragon scale, a talking pearl earring, etc.—and in many cases the retrieval process went in a direction so original it would have stood on its own as a story played straight. (...not that kind of straight!)

My favorite character was Drusilla, irrationally optimistic, heroic in the face of everything and fighting her enemies with a paring knife. Her skin color was never mentioned in the book but the cover shows her as Black.

The three lesbian leads pal around with a straight sendup of the warrior woman trope. She was beginning to remind me of Rivka, my own take on the straight warrior woman cliché until I realized the author had made this one a radfem. So, every once in a while she said something that made me nervous, but all of the book's lesbians had a different approach and that suited me just fine. There's also a male ogre who turns out to be progressive in many ways including feminist, and I liked that, too.

This is a book that gives you double f/f-happy-endings plus a healthy dose of reassurance that *physical* attraction between women is normal (I need this, because it isn't modeled enough in fiction.)

A sample of some of the fourth-wall mooning:

"Don't forget how we managed to buy asparagus, marrows, pumpkins, cherries, and apples ripe all at the same time," Bob said.

"I wasn't actually going to draw attention to that," Sandy said. "Because I don't want whatever is causing it to get embarrassed and stop."

and a gag that made me hoot out loud, warning for tasteless, when a barmaid is miffed they didn't have anything to tip her with: "Even Tom the leper leaves me a little something!"

There's also a wizard who's so and so "the Off-White." Yeah, it's that kind of book. But it's also a place where four women get to go on a quest, and three of them like ladies, and there's friendship as well as f/f. And honestly, I *did* find poetry in all the pretty language Sandy spouts off when she gets going about how gorgeous someone is. I guess I'm just a sucker for that stuff.

BTW, if you find the word 'dyke' triggering, read cautiously, but this is a totally lesbian positive book so it's up to you whether or not that's worth it. No pressure!

Clémence says

Such a good time

Cynthia says

Delightful!

Well written and imagined. Loved the playful irony, and humorous twists on various well known fictional fairy tales and fantasy stories.

Heather Henkel says

Absolutely wonderful!!!! A really great fun read!

Serenity says

I loved this book on every level.

Catherine says

Wrote a blurb for this a few weeks back - rollicking and hilarious send-up of fantasy genre conventions.

Ellie says

From bisexual-books.tumblr.com

Promises, Promises: A Romp with Plenty of Dykes, a Unicorn, an Ogre, an Oracle, a Quest, a Princess, and True Love with a Happily Ever After is just fun. Sandy Blunt makes improbable promises to a princess, and telling the fortunes of princesses is illegal, so she has a year and a day to make them all come true or be she and her friends will be beheaded.

As a parody of fantasy/adventure quest stories, the characters subvert common fantasy tropes. Sandy is a wizard, but she's not very good at it. Tyrone is a palace guard, but he's a terrible fighter and more concerned with keeping his armor rust-free. The Amazon Anax'athelia ("The gratuitous apostrophe is a bitch, I know.

But I don't get any work without it. My real name is Mavis Green.") spouts feminist platitudes, and the big scary ogre is a horticulturalist who is more likely to tear you limb from limb for treading on his *Heliotropium arborescens* than to eat you. The unicorn is the size of a small goat. Other characters have stories that are so far-fetched that they appear to be lying – Sandy thinks Drusilla is delusional because she claims to be a disposed princess of a far-off land who must fend off assassins at every turn, but of course she is telling the truth. Prolix the Off-White will interpret any language or prophesy, "Approximation to Authenticity Guaranteed," but of course he is completely accurate (except that he thinks Drusilla's name is Marjory).

Little asides to the audience break the fourth wall and pay tongue-in-cheek lip-service to the tropes of fantasy. After they go under the ocean, without their horses and unicorn, Sandy warns Ruth, "Shh. I don't think we're supposed to mention them," and assures her that they will just be waiting for them when they reach shore. In real life, they would much more likely be commandeered by sailors, stolen by thieves, or otherwise wander off. Off-handed details reference classic fantasy and science fiction stories. A little girl chasing her dog in the perfect land of the unicorns recalls *The Wizard of Oz*, and their ship's captain picks up a translating fish "from some hitchhiker".

This is not a world with compulsory heterosexuality, so if you're looking for that kind of social "realism" in your fantasy, you can forget it. I actually enjoyed having characters who didn't have to constantly justify their same-sex attractions, or repress themselves for the sake of the throne or family honor. The story is touted as a lesbian fantasy, and the two main characters identify as lesbians, but several of the side characters behave bisexually throughout the book, although the word is never used. Their palace guard, the fussy and meticulously clean Tyrone, talks about saving himself for the "right woman," and is very disappointed to miss the opportunity to sleep with the Queen Under the Waves (his comrades don't let him, because he has to preserve his virginity so he can wrangle the unicorn), but he later runs off with an elf man for the gift of some shiny mithril-like chainmail. Likewise, Princess Maybelle talks at length about wanting to marry the perfect man, but has no problem dropping that fantasy when Drusilla meets all of her expectations of perfection. Finally, the Queen under the Waves is more than pleased to sleep with any of our adventures, preferably all of them.

For the last 100 pages, I really hoped that Ruth, one of the adventurers, would have a grand reveal as a bisexual. Ruth's sexuality is a big unknown for most of the story, at one point she is even described as "having a question mark over her head." It becomes clear pretty quickly that she has a huge crush on Sandy, and much of the plot revolves around Sandy, "The Great Obtuse Mage" coming to realize her own feelings for Ruth. For most of the novel, the group is described as having two lesbians – Sandy and Drusilla. It would have been perfect if this description turned out to be true all along, just like all the improbable oracles in the story, but Ruth finally comes out as a lesbian. Still, the representation in the minor characters was a nice touch, and on the whole it was a fun book.

Susan says

I got 38% of the way through the audiobook and... I think the narrator is taking away from the story with her very blah performance. The story isn't amazing but I think it would be a lot more interesting to read rather than listen to the disinterested narrator. It sort of matches Sandy's personality but it's just bad. There isn't enough distinction between the voices, nor is there consistency at times. She also was either using no pop filter or a really bad one because it is filled with the noises of saliva!!! There has to be some other noise going on while I listen or those sounds stand out too much and I shudder.

I think the book is amusing enough to warrant another try without the narrator bringing it down. I don't

recommend the audio version.
