



Eyes Like Sky and Coal and Moonlight

Cat Rambo , Michael Livingston (Editor) , Lawrence M. Schoen (Editor)

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Small Press newcomer, Paper Golem, debuts the first in a annual series of single author collections by brilliant new authors. EYES LIKE SKY AND COAL AND MOONLIGHT brings together twenty stories from the extraordinary talent of fantasy author Cat Rambo. Here are tales from seaport city of Tabat, both before and after the sorcerous wars that destroyed the Old Continent. Here are alchemical explanations for failed blind dates. Here you'll find a dryad, the last great elephant, and an uneasy blur of humanity. Cat Rambo doesn't simply amaze and delight, she restores wonder to her readers with every page. You won't simply believe that pigs can fly, you'll question why you ever doubted the premise at all.

Contents:

Eight Letters of Wonder • essay by Michael Livingston

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I'll Gnaw Your Bones, the Manticore Said

Heart in a Box

In the Lesser Southern Isles

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Rare Pears and Greengages

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The Dead Girl's Wedding March

Worm Within

Magnificent Pigs

Eyes Like Sky and Coal and Moonlight Details

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From Reader Review Eyes Like Sky and Coal and Moonlight for online ebook

Karen says

I like how Rambo does speculative fiction. Her span is great: there are tragic robots in here as well as enslaved centaurs and zombie girls. There's a beautiful, sad story about Jumbo the elephant (the real one, from Barnum & Bailey's circus) which I highly recommend: "Towering Monarch of His Race." There's a creepy, tragic tale of pioneers suffering through a deadly winter: "Events at Fort Plentitude," also highly recommended. There's humor and epic fantasy and fairy tales and pirates. It's all stuff you might also come across in Steven Millhauser or Kelly Link or George Saunders, but Rambo has her own distinct, highly readable take on it, and I gobbled this collection up in just a few days. Delicious.

Brightdreamer says

Despite a few dull clunkers, this is a decent collection of fantasy stories, with enough variance in theme and tone to keep from growing repetitive. There are some truly magical moments to be found in here.

Susan says

So, somebody gives you a box of candy, a type of candy you haven't had before. And, each piece is better than the last, each piece is your favorite. That is how I feel about this book of short stories. There was only one story that I didn't really care for, all the others were magical. But, the last story, Magnificent Pigs, that is the treasure. If you don't find yourself in tears at the end, well, I just don't know. If nothing else, find a copy of that story.

Chris says

Worth reading for the story with chickens alone. Not really a miss in this collection.

Jason says

I first discovered this book from Twitter. Kurt Busiek (who writes some of the best super hero tales in his series Astro City) tweeted out that it was available on Kindle for free. I'm a sucker for short stories, and if he liked it, there was a decent enough chance that I too would like it.

The author, Cat Rambo, doesn't sound familiar to me, even though her name is quite unusual. But the more I thought about it, the more it did sound familiar. It's possible that I've come across her name before but I don't quite remember where. (It's possible I met her at the SFWA event that I went to since she's the local president.)

Eyes Like Sky . . . is a collection of stories firmly in the fantasy genre. Some more than others. From the introduction, her words were described as poetry, and I can definitely see why they're described like that. Her ability to build a world that I could see, and in the constraints of a short story, reminded me quite a bit of Joe Lansdale or Harlan Ellison.

Now here's the hard part - I didn't LOVE this collection. Quite a few of the stories are set in a world that she created for a video game that never came to be. A few of those stories were enjoyable, but then there were quite a few that I didn't enjoy as much. I felt like I had no idea of the makeup of this world. I felt lost.

But there were four stories that I enjoyed - and two of them that I loved. Like LOVED.

Heart in a Box - a different take on the Little Mermaid myth/fairytale.

Eagle-haunted Lake Sammamish - Heartbreaking. Amazing. Tragic. This made the book for me. Cat Rambo now follows me on twitter because I said this to her.

Grandmother's Road Trip - my grandmother passed away a little over a year ago and I imagined that this could have been her. As noted in the notes, a semi-biographical tale.

Magnificent Pigs - this one took a twist that I wasn't expecting and turned an okay story into a great one.

This collection was firmly in the three star pile but those four tales above were enough to push it to five stars.

N. says

These are just real good, ok? Really enjoyed the variety, flavor, and character work in these stories. The story about the wizard and his familiar is particularly fun and lovely.

Lee Dunning says

I don't read a lot of short stories. For the most part I find them unsatisfying, many of the stories feeling like fragments of story ideas rather than fully fleshed tales. Peter S. Beagle is one of the few authors I've read who seems to be able to write both short and long pieces with equal skill. That brings me to Cat Rambo's work. This book was my first exposure to her writing, so I do not know anything about her longer pieces. I can however say that I was delighted with this short story collection. I picked it up because of a recommendation by another author, and frankly, because her name is so darn cool. What I found inside the book was a wide variety of stories ranging from full-blown fantasy to real-world with a hint of magic. PoV varied, and she handled all with equal aplomb. The level of imagination was impressive and even intimidating. I kept thinking, how the devil did she come up with that? The only story I found a bit of a letdown involved robots and an unreliable narrator. The truth of the story seemed obvious from about the third paragraph on. Aside from that, each tale left me hungry to read more. A couple even brought a few tears to my eyes.

Chas says

I only read the first story and felt straight away this wasn't for me. I think mainly the style of the tale, very ethereal. Then in the notes I saw it was a tie-in to an on-line game which is a total turn off.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com:]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted here illegally.)

So before I even begin to say anything about genre veteran Cat Rambo's new book, *Eyes Like Sky and Coal and Moonlight*, let's first plainly acknowledge two facts about it that play into my particular biases as a critic: first, that it's a story collection, which as regular readers know I don't care that much for (I feel that short stories generally lack the gravitas and opportunity for development that come with full-length books); and second, the particular genre Rambo works in is fantasy, and I'm not much of a fantasy fan either (mostly because of the overwritten, contraction-free, ponderously purplish prose that inevitably always seems to come with such stories).

But I do have a standing promise here to at least give an overview of any book that a person takes the trouble to send me (with some exceptions, of course -- see CCLaP's submission policy for more); and so when it comes to this, I can at least say that *Moonlight* is easy on the eyes and not difficult at all to make one's way through, and even in fact contains a host of different kinds of fantasy writing -- overly serious Grand Mythology Tolkien-style stuff, light and humorous Pratchett-style work, even contemporary alt-reality New-Weird-type tales. But as far as doing a critical analysis of this work, I'm afraid this is one of those times when I'm simply going to have to recuse myself, in that I literally don't know enough about the short fantasy format to begin with to make a fair qualitative judgement about any particular piece of it. I will leave it up to bigger fantasy fans than myself to give you an actual opinion of this book (which of course I highly encourage you to do in the comments below), but I did at least want to make you aware of its existence, since Cat was nice enough to send me a copy in the first place.

Out of 10: **N/A**

Teresa Edgerton says

Often, I find short fiction unsatisfying because the characters and the plot seem undeveloped. That was not so with the stories in this collection. Almost every story finds its perfect length, and between them they showcase Rambo's capacity for invention -- some stories set in fantasy worlds, others in our own contemporary world where magic intrudes on the mundane -- as well as her insight into human nature. Her prose, which has been praised by others, is so beautifully clear that it is easy to overlook the poetry, with metaphors that evoke ordinary things in ways that are surprisingly eloquent.

There is a sadness to many of these stories, a darkness lurking around the edges, though there is hope, too, and transformation. Those that impressed me most were the title story, "Her Eyes Like Sky, And Coal, And Moonlight," "Magnificent Pigs," "The Towering Monarch of His Mighty Race, Whose Like the World Will

Never See Again," and "The Dead Girl's Wedding March." The last story in the collection, "Grandmother's Road Trip," is a story about the indignities of old age and the dilemmas of caring for an aging parent. Despite (or because) of the fantastical element, there is such a painful authenticity to this story, at times I found it difficult to keep reading. Implicit in the story is the knowledge that with the passing generations roles change.

Meran says

20 Short stories. Don't let the small size of this book fool you. At only 177 pages and 1/2" thick, it's misleading. There are 43 lines on each page and the print is small. Using those numbers, there are about 430 words per page. Yeah, some pages are blank. Still, it took longer and I got more enjoyment from it than much larger tomes!

There were also 9 5 star stories and ONE I HAD to give a 6 star review for. So, it's a winning read.

It's so nice to read COMPLETE short stories! So many times, one needs the background of a long series to comprehend the story just read. This author knows how to write them! Imaginative, fabulous, surprising, lovely, exquisite, rich, sweet, heart-breaking, fresh, innovative, full of wonder, strong women, and intelligent! I want more!

Intro is by Michael Livingston - Fun, upbeat promo of Cat and her writing, in which I agree with the writer, Livingston...

Her Eyes Like Sky, and Coal, and Moonlight - In a tavern, a tale is told of a woman warrior, strong and persistent and kind, and how the meeting of her marked the young girl in positive, strong way, even through the toughest times of her adult life. - 5 stars

The Accordion - A fun little love story, involving 3 chickens, their eggs, an accordion, and 25 other instruments, all beginning with a different letter of the alphabet. - 5 stars

I'll Gnaw Your Bones, the Manticore Said- (A Tabat Story) A manticore name BUPUS; that alone is funny! [I'LL GNAW YOUR BONES... love this! I need to say it. Often.] (A Tabat Story) LOVED this one, though I didn't understand the last paragraph. Will enjoy reading the rest when the author decides to write more. - 5 stars

Heart in a Box - Feminist story for sure! What women do for love of a man. Even to distraction. The story feels mean, authentic. - 5 stars

In the Lesser Southern Isles - (A Tabat Story) A kidnapped lesser girl child surprises everyone, herself included, by a trip to the Southern Isles. I want to know more! - 5 stars

Up the Chimney - So funny! A one-page story, succinct, complete Fairylands vary. Who knew? - 5 stars

The Silent Familiar- With this tale, the author makes you love the characters, gives you joy, then rips your

heart out through your tears, shamelessly. - 6 stars

Events at Port Plentitude - (A Tabat Story) Hunger in the harsh winter at a settlement, which is beset by creatures that kill with pleasure. They say that freezing to death is almost pleasant. It seems they want the babies. Not fully explained for a short story; needs more storyline. - 4 stars

Dew Drop Coffee Lounge - I could see this entire story as being absolutely true. It makes me feel like there really is a plan to how things happen. - 4 stars

Narrative of a Beast's Life (A Tabat Story) From a Centaur's POV, I thought at first "how unusual!" But this tale seems almost verbatim of many American African slaves' tales that I could not, in good conscious, give it a high rating, Not at all original. Sad. I'm trying to remember the name of the slave this tale parallels to the end, but I can't recall. The genre is called "slave narratives." Though I agree entirely with the story, as who connote, I wish it had been done in a different format. - 1 star

Eagle Haunted Lake Sammamish - A sad tale of good intentions probably gone wrong. Maybe. - 3 stars

Sugar - (A Tabat Story) [Supposed to be a pirate tale, but I wouldn't have known if not told by the author.] A love story, with Death already present, and the new love already engaged. - 3 stars

A Key Decides Its Destiny -(A Tabat Story) Excellent story of an apprentice learning to be a wizard, despite the odds. - 5 stars

The Towering Monarch of His Mighty Race - Not a flattering view of PT Barnum, but then I'm not sure one could admire the man. Almost from Jumbo's POV, the reader will definitely fall in love with him! The author breaks my heart once again. Jumbo was still a sensation when I was a kid, a legend by then. - 5 stars

In Order to Conserve - What if, instead of conserving gas or water, it was less tangible things like color, or music, or the Arts, we were losing? What would the world be without those? - 3 stars

Rare Pears and Greengages - A very sad, inevitable fate for a bastard baby and its unfortunate mother. Fairies figure heavily in this tale and they aren't the Disney kind either. - 4 stars

A Twine of Flame - (A Tabat Story) A woman carries a plague of flame, claiming lives of many in order to save her sister(s) from a sorcerer. Is the price too great? - 3 stars

The Dead Girl's Wedding March - (A Tabat Story) Will LOVE take down a city that has stood, unchanged, for over 5000 yrs? - 3 stars

Worm Within - A machine with a metal illness as if it were human. In fact, it thinks it IS a human. Interesting. - 4 stars

Magnificent Pigs - And again, the author breaks my heart. A 10 yr old girl, a litter of pigs, a budding tattoo artist older brother, no parents around. Build THAT into a heart-breaking story! - 5 stars

Heidi Vlach says

Like any short story collection, some offerings are stronger than others. I found a few of the stories too bleak, so focused on their uniquely awful situations that they didn't manage much development or meaning. But overall, the collection is an interesting read covering several different flavours of fantasy.

I found a lot of the stories really charming. A wide variety of fantasy beings populate the stories, with many takes on how they would interact with humans. "I'll Gnaw Your Bones, the Manticore Said" was my favourite for its touching take on which creatures are worthy of being considered people. The well-imagined details of each fantasy scenario match well with the literary style used throughout -- because, hey, if you're going to use a showy turn of phrase, why not use it to paint another world in bold strokes? I picked at this collection whenever I had just a few minutes to read, and it filled the gaps nicely.

Kira says

Apparently it is impossible for me to finish short story collections. Rambo definitely has some great ideas, although sometimes her execution leaves something to be desired. "I'll Gnaw Your Bones, the Manticore Said," "Events at Fort Plenitude" and "Sugar" were my favorites.

Lynette Aspey says

Cat Rambo's writing is evocative and detailed, complex and illuminated. This may not be everyone's cup of tea because each story requires investment (concentrate or you'll lose the nuance!) but I have a fondness for the surreal and the daring, and this collection delivers.

José Vázquez says

DISCLAIMER: Sorry for poor English, not my native language.

A solid fantasy anthology, covering all flavors from magic realism in the South American style to the more Tolkien-esque, but always with a very distinctive touch. Interesting and well written stories, all of them. The main problem is (like in many others one author anthologies) that they tend to become repetitive in tone and not be as brilliant as when you read one by one along other authors in monthly publications (bear in mind that most of them were originally printed in magazines or other anthologies). Cat Rambo is definitely an author to follow in the near future, and I am looking forward to read new short stories, or even longer fiction if she publish more. I would rate it more as 3.5/5 than 3, in fact.
