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For every supermodel, there are thousands of women who have heard "Why don't you just eat less?" far too often. Except as comic relief or the unattractive single BFF, those women's stories are never told. Crossed Genres Publications presents Fat Girl in a Strange Land, an anthology of fourteen stories of fat women protagonists traveling distant and undiscovered realms. From Guatemala, where a woman dreams of becoming La Gorda, the first female luchador, before discovering a greater calling in "La Gorda and the City of Silver"; to the big city in the US, where superhero Flux refuses to don spandex in order to join her new team in "Nemesis"; to the remote planet Sidquiel in "Survivor," where student Wen survives a crash landing, only to face death from the rising sun. Fat Girl in a Strange Land takes its characters - and its readers - places they've never been. TABLE OF CONTENTS: Sabrina Vourvoulias - "La Gorda and the City of Silver" Lauren C. Teffeau - "The Tradeoff" AJ Fitzwater - "Cartography, and the Death of Shoes" Josh Roseman - "Survivor" Brian Jungwiwattanaporn - "The Right Stuffed" Katharine Elmer - "Tangwystl the Unwanted" Bonnie Ferrante - "Flesh of My Flesh" Rick Silva - "How Do You Want To Die?" Nicole Prestin - "Nemesis" Anna Dickinson - "Davy" Jennifer Brozek - "Sharks & Seals" Barbara Krasnoff - "Marilee and the SOB" Anna Caro - "Blueprints" Pete "Patch" Alberti - "Lift" Cover art by Lili Ibrahim

Fat Girl in a Strange Land Details

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From Reader Review Fat Girl in a Strange Land for online ebook

Tiakall says

I read this one quite a while back, and I still remember how the first story about La Gorda made me feel. This anthology is worth it for that story alone. Not only does the story focus on a marginalized group (a fat woman), it also highlights a lesser-known culture by thrusting the reader into the world of luchadores. Best of all, it was a story about a woman who is fat, but whose struggle is not defined by her fatness--it's just a part of who she is. If the whole anthology had been like this, I would've slammed a five-star down on this so hard, the referee would've had to disqualify me.

Mind, the other stories are good, but none of them, for me, met the level of La Gorda. One thing I was disappointed in was that in most of the stories, the fat is presented as an obstacle or a source of conflict--often, something that has to be overcome instead of something that just is. Issue stories for marginalized groups certainly have their place, but as someone who's been a fat woman, I really would've liked more stories that had characters that "just happened to be fat". Normalizing fat characters and showing them as fully realized people instead of people with an issue was something I had hoped for in this anthology, and in that regard, I was disappointed.

This anthology has actually gone out of print, so it's only available if you can find a used copy on Amazon. I really hope the author of the La Gorda story re-releases it, because man, that story really needs to be available to the world again.

SantosGray says

"Fat girl in a strange land" - sounds like me at the gym. But seriously, looking forward to this one.

Dawn Albright says

I had this for a long time without reading it because I wasn't expecting much. But I was pleasantly surprised when I finally picked it up. All of the stories are readable and interesting, and there is a good variety. Sometimes narrowly themed anthologies get boring by the end because there isn't enough variety in the stories, but there was a great range in settings and styles. I was surprised at how often being overweight was worked into the speculative element -- the protagonist's weight was plot critical in nearly every story. For example, in one story overweight women did long range space travel because they survived suspended animation better.

I have a lot of this publisher's books because I keep sponsoring their kickstarters even though I haven't read any of the books I bought before. I'll have to read the others now.

Sean Silva says

I was pleasantly surprised by this anthology. Admittedly, the title grabbed my attention. I grow tired of stories with the same heroes and heroines used over and over again, and I've yearned for something different. Even though this anthology was uneven (as most collections tend to be) I still enjoyed it, skipping over only two stories. Those being "The Right Stuffed" and "Blueprints" because I didn't care for the pacing or the plots. Overall, most of the stories were well written and there were several personal favorites worth mentioning. "La Gorda and the City of Silver", about a woman living in a luchador wrestling family, and becomes one to fight off an evil that threatens the city. "Tangwystl the Unwanted", the story of a girl locked away in a tower until her caretaker passes and she journeys to find the family that abandoned her. "Davy", the tale of a woman who rescues her baby from creatures in a painting, and "Lift" the heartwarming story of a teenage girl who works to create her own spacecraft when her classmates say she's too big to travel in theirs. At times, the fact that the female characters were supposed to be bigger women has little effect on the stories as a whole, and I would've liked to see that idea as more of a driving force for the plots. Still I found this anthology to be enjoyable and refreshing, if a tad bit too short and slightly muddled.

Paul says

Many science fiction stories are about tall, square-jawed adventurers boldly exploring the galaxy. The women in such stories are the female equivalent of tall and square-jawed. This anthology looks at a very under-served part of the population - fat women.

A woman in Guatemala dreams of becoming the first female luchador, until she discovers a greater calling that is much closer to home. A midwestern soccer mom, nicknamed Flux, refuses to wear the new spandex outfit given to her by her superhero colleagues. A team is being sent to a far-away planet that is in the middle of being terraformed. They will be working practically non-stop for months, so they need every bit of bodily fuel that they can get. That is why they were instructed to put on a lot of weight before they leave.

Most of Earth's population has emigrated to a new planet, Terra Nova, because Earth is dying. Among those who are left is a teacher at a special school for fat kids. Also fat, she makes the long trip to Terra Nova, but is detained and sent back to Earth. Mary Beth's friends have their own spaceship, for quick jaunts to Mars or the Moon. She is asked to get out of the spaceship, because she is too heavy. With help from a local junkyard, she attempts to build her own spaceship. It is not a short or cheap process. Does she succeed?

This is a pretty good group of stories from a marginalized point of view. Some of the stories were better than others, but this book is still worth reading.

Erin (PT) says

I rated this a 3 largely for the two really good stories in the anthology. Overall, though, Fat Girl In a Strange Land is an incredibly disappointing book. Both because it's largely not what it sets out to be, in terms of positively featuring fat women and because many of the stories just aren't very good.

This interview, where they say:

Crossed Genres has always been a publisher that supports underrepresented groups. Fat women have always been hidden in literature and film, or represented as examples of what not to be. We wanted to show some of the ways in which fat women are ostracized, and shoehorned

into stereotypes, and display some of the mental and emotional consequences of those stereotypes. We also wanted to prove that fat women can be proud of who they are, and are deserving of their own stories.

With that as their stated mission, the biggest problem I have with this anthology is that its protagonists are mostly not heroes, their characters often feeding into the worst stereotypes about fat women; ugly, sad, unwanted loser-loners with no self-esteem or self-worth. Comparing the majority of the anthology's stories with the editor's statement: "*We also wanted to prove that fat women can be proud of who they are, and are deserving of their own stories,*" I don't know whether to feel more dismayed that they felt these stories represent fat women feeling proud of who they are or that they feel these are the kinds of stories that fat women deserve.

Breakdowns by story:

(view spoiler)

Beth Cato says

Despite enjoying Crossed Genres's past anthologies and having some of my own stories in their magazine, I admit that I had reservations about this anthology. I've been overweight or obese much of my adult life and it's a sensitive subject for me. On one hand, I thought, "Wow, how great to have stories with plus size women

in charge!" and on the other I cringed, worried about that fat issue being an overbearing part of the stories and the characters' personalities.

That said, I was pleasantly surprised at the work. It's as strong as Crossed Genres past anthologies. Each story is unique and handles the weight issue in a different way. Sometimes it felt a tad forced, but overall the work was excellent, readable, and at times, an inspiration. The first story, "La Gorda and the City of Silver" by Sabrina Vourvoulias, set the mood well by establishing a girl as a luchador turned superhero. Other favorites included "The Tradeoff" by Laren C. Teffeau, which uses body fat as a practical survival method for space-farers on a mission, and "Lift" by Pete Alberti, where a girl's determination to make her own spaceship put a big smile on my face.

On a negative note, my version of the ebook for some reason had the story titles and authors obscured at the front of each story. I'm not sure if this was purposeful hobbling for LibraryThing Early Reviewer copies or an issue with reading it on the iBook app, but it meant I had to scroll all the way to the table of contents to see the names of each story.

I highly recommend this book if you're looking for speculative stories about strong, resourceful women.

Tyrannosaurus regina says

While it evened out to a middling-good rating in the end, the truth is that I really liked some of the stories and really disliked some of the others. I came to the anthology believing that it would be fat-positive, which in retrospect I guess I was never promised, and in some cases it definitely wasn't. I was taken aback by the fat-shaming and fat-hatred in some of the stories, and the unexamined stereotypes that formed the foundations of some of the plots. But then, a couple of the stories were *really, really* lovely. I certainly don't regret reading it, but be aware of what you're getting into.

Miranda says

I think I can echo a lot of the previous reviews in that some of these stories were not as fat-positive as I might have liked, and a few were actively fat-shaming. I had hoped to read a book about big girls having adventures where their bigness, while a part of who they were, was not what their stories or their self-images revolved around. Some of the stories gave that to me, some didn't *quite* make it, and a few missed the mark entirely and plunged straight into fat-hating. (The Tradeoff being the worst offender of the latter; it was also my least favorite story because I'm not a fan of stories where guys who won't take no for an answer get the girl they've been sexually harassing. That was seriously skeevy.)

The stories I enjoyed the most were La Gorda and the City of Silver, Tangwystl the Unwanted, How Do You Want to Die?, and Nemesis. I *loved* the premises of Blueprints and Marilee and the S.O.B., but I think they would have worked better as slightly longer stories, if not full novels. (If they were full novels I would buy them in a heartbeat!)

The writing on all of the stories was pretty strong; the execution of the premises were what could be hit-or-miss. The Tradeoff was the only one I actively disliked (the rest fall into "love," "like," or "meh" categories), and even then I can admire the author's writing ability, if not her choice to perpetuate harmful social

constructs.

Overall, a very enjoyable read, and I'm really glad I picked it up!

Irfon-kim says

As with all collections of short stories, this one is variable. There were a few stories that I really enjoyed, which is why I couldn't quite give it one star. However, when it "missed", at least for me, it missed by a lot.

I bought this as part of an ebook bundle at WisCon (a feminist SF/F convention). Because of the context, the normal wariness I might have had was dulled, and I expected a great set of stories about fat women being awesome, probably in space (the cover features a spacesuited woman).

Unfortunately, what I got instead was mostly depressing stories about people hating their fatness, achieving things (when they did achieve things) despite being fat instead of just while being fat, and a whole heap of stereotypes about fat people. I started getting the vibe that none or few of the authors were actually fat women, and instead this is what you'd get if you asked a bunch of people to posit what it's like to be a fat person. Virtually every character in the book is friendless, single, lonely, despised by everyone around them, deeply unhappy, and eats to compensate for it.

And that's just the ones that are just disappointing as opposed to those that are actively offensive. Such as the story about two fat women being hired to perform covert operations in virtual reality because in the VR world they're to infiltrate, key assets are (for whatever reason) always modelled as copious amounts of decadent food, and the military special ops agents, being health nuts, wouldn't be able to force themselves to eat and eat enough, even in a simulation, whereas the military figures these women will be all-star eaters. And, of course, they are -- their first mission involves one of them fending off a virtual snake while the other eats an entire cake. Of course, the defender eventually decides that her gun isn't effective enough and just eats the snake. And so on.

There's another story, even earlier on, that's entirely about a person who has to gain weight for a specific mission that occurs on a very cold planet and about how much they hate being fat. It ends not with them coming to terms with it, but with them finally getting through the mission and being intensely relieved to be losing the weight again, while pitying whoever gets assigned to the duty next for having to go through the ordeal.

So... yeah. Overall I was not pleased with this collection at all, despite a few gems. I've still got a few other collections from the same publisher to check out. I'm hoping they'll be better.

Julia Dvorin says

I picked up this anthology because I'm someone who is greatly interested in speculative stories about/from historically marginalized perspectives. Plus, as a woman who has been solidly (see what I did there?) on the "fat" side of the weight spectrum her entire adult life, I was intrigued by the title and concept of this collection, described as "an anthology of fourteen stories of fat women protagonists traveling distant and undiscovered realms." Would the experiences and attitude of these fat heroines mirror any of my own, and

make the characters and situations extra relatable to me as a reader? And how would the speculative elements fit in? Would fatness itself perhaps be used as magic, or impact technology? I was especially curious to see whether weight and body image issues would be the central subject of each story, or whether the plus-size of any given protagonist would be normalized as just another physical descriptor.

On the one hand, I feel like it's critically important to encourage more stories that speak specifically to the experience of being a fat woman, whether that is related to the speculative element or not, because the more we have access to each others' specific experiences, the more we can relate to each other (and the more we can relate to each other, the less likely we are to cause each other harm. Theoretically.) On the other hand, I also agree with the argument that one of the goals of creating a rainbow of fictional protagonists of diverse shapes, ages, colors and backgrounds is to equalize all experiences, so that a size 20 heroine isn't remarkable unless her size is specifically relevant to the story. How would this anthology approach this, ahem, weighty debate over specificity vs. normalization?

The short answer was, in both ways. In some stories, like the beautiful "La Gorda and the City of Silver" by Sabrina Vourvoulias, where a woman who wants to become a luchadora uses her size, strength and courage to also become a folk hero and savior of women and children, the cleverly-written-through-journal-entries sci-fi story "Blueprints" by Anna Caro, where the heroine is part of a group of people who cannot leave a dying Earth for a new planet because of the weight restrictions for FTL travel, or the heart-warming "Lift" by Pete "Patch" Alberti, where the heroine who is rejected from the "popular" kids' spaceship because of her weight builds her own spaceship with the help of an elder fat mentor, the heroine's size was central to the story and the story wouldn't have been the same without it. In others, like the fairy-tale retelling "Tangstwyl the Unwanted" by Katharine Elmer, or "Davy", a tale of conquering literal manifestations of post-partum depression by Anna Dickinson, or "How Do You Want To Die?", a chunk of sword-and-sorcery tinged desert adventure by Rick Silva, the heroine's size seemed like inconsequential flavor to the story, just one more piece of character description. I appreciated that the anthology editors were likely trying to present both kinds of stories, but I found myself enjoying more the ones that specifically revolved around the heroine's size and her issues related thereto—probably because it still seemed like a refreshing rarity to experience a story from that specific point of view.

Like many anthologies, I found the stories here somewhat uneven from a writing point of view—some were certainly better than others in both concept and execution (though some of that may be personal taste, and of course your mileage may vary). Some, like "How Do You Want To Die", "Sharks and Seals" by Jennifer Brozek and "Marilee and the S.O.B." by Barbara Krasnoff, felt like excerpts from a longer work or derived from an already existing/Previously developed story world rather than stories complete in themselves, which I found vaguely frustrating. Some stories, like "Nemesis" by Nicole Prestin where a "size 14 soccer mom" superhero refuses to wear a spandex uniform and has to deal with mocking by her teammates and the public, touched my experience directly and felt true and relatable even when they were not necessarily perfect pieces of literature. Some stories, like "The Right Stuffed" by Brian Jungwiattanaporn about fat women recruited by the military as counterintelligence agents in the digital Void because they'll be less squicked at "eating" data, felt more clumsy or stereotypical in their attempt at imagining what it might be like to live in a fat body and what issues a fat character might have.

Overall, though, most of the stories were fat positive, the collection kept me interested all the way through and some of the stories were truly lovely. I'd say this is a collection definitely worth checking out and supporting.

A Heroines of Fantasy review

Jennifer Osterman says

I really enjoyed this selection of short stories. The subjects varied in style from sci-fi to fantasy as might be expected from the title's homage. Many of the stories stayed with me after reading, which to me is always a sign that I enjoyed the book. The protagonists in each story were larger-sized women, which in some cases was completely irrelevant to the story, and in some cases details about the character's weight seemed to be added in to the story simply so the story could be included in this collection. However, the stories themselves were very engaging. I devoured this book in an afternoon. The writing was very even in this collection, which I always like - some collections of short stories have definite high- and low-quality entries.

I received an electronic copy of this book from LibraryThing Early Reviewers.

Sabrina says

My story is in this anthology, so I can hardly be impartial, but I think it's a pretty strong collection of stories.

AJ Fitzwater and Brian Jungwiattanaporn deliver stylistically ambitious pieces; Rick Silva and Jennifer Brozek offer up what seem tantalizing segments of longer stories; Barbara Krasnoff's is a quintessential urban fantasy, Katharine Elmer's is a quintessential fairy tale and yet both are fresh and uniquely memorable. Teffeu, Roseman, Ferrante, Caro and Alberti all do Sci Fi with imagination and assurance. Caro's was the story that resonated the most with me -- the world created is very complete and emotionally complex and I love its bittersweet wisdom. Dickinson's piece is dark and textured and stays with you long after you're done reading it. In some ways Prestin's story is closest to mine in spirit, given that they're both about "superheroes," but Prestin's is a much cheekier and more sophisticated superhero -- which makes her fun to read.

Jessica Strider says

This is a short story collection dealing with two things: overweight women and fantastical locations. Aside from those criteria, the collection is quite diverse. The stories are a mix of fantasy and science fiction, in some the women are comfortable with their weight, in others they aren't. The stories that take place on earth are situated all over (Guatemala, Australia, New York City), and though most of the authors are American, there are several from other countries as well. The quality of stories is quite high, and in all cases the women are sympathetic protagonists. Ultimately this collection showcases a great variety of plus sized women.

***** "La Gorda and the City of Silver" by Sabrina Vourvoulias - La Gorda, The Fat One, was born into a wrestling family but told she could never enter the ring. She makes the Guatamalan streets of City of Silver her ring, wearing a mask and making the streets safe for women and girls until a masked menace comes.

This is a touching story of wanting to be more than you are, and more than society allows you to be. It's about heroes and sacrifice. It's not really a science fiction story (as no one has superpowers), but it is a well written story.

**** "The Tradeoff" by Lauren C. Teffeu - Commander Clarinda Hilliard is on a mission to begin the

terraforming process on Caldwell, an ice planet. In order to work long hours in the cold, her and the other members of her team must bulk up. She's left very uncomfortable in her new body.

The examination of a woman who's become fat, if on purpose, is interesting. Many women are uncomfortable with their bodies, so it's a story with realistic underpinnings and an interesting look at food rationing in the future.

*** "Cartography, and the Death of Shoes" by A. J. Fitzwater - A city woman whose size belies how much walking she does and how many shoes she goes through, tries to find the cobbler shop she remembers as a child where she got a perfect, lasting pair of shoes.

The author puts a fun spin on an old trope though I wasn't a fan of the rather unusual second person singular the story was written in.

**** "Survivor" by Josh Roseman - Overweight Wen Irons is the only survivor when her graduation party shuttle crash lands on Sidqiel. She's told by a Sergeant on the nearest space station that she must walk 35 kilometers to an old research substation on the planet before sunrise 7 hours away or she will be killed by the radiation.

A great story about persevering under pressure, both physical and mental.

**** "The Right Stuffed" by Brian Jungwiattanaporn - Two large women are hired for what they're told will be secretarial positions, but turn out to be something else.

This story deals with a digital world and utilizes its protagonists in an interesting way.

***** "Tangwystl the Unwanted" by Katherine Elmer - It begins with a princess stuck in a tower, but if you think this is a retelling of Repunzel, think again. Elmer combines several fairy tale motifs to create a new story, about a young woman fed daily fairy cakes with no room to exercise.

This is a fun story that has the dependence on 3s so prevalent in fairy tales. Tanny's a great character who never learned that being large is a problem and so merely considers it objectively as her situation changes.

**** "Flesh Of My Flesh" by Bonnie Ferrante - Alina's not thrilled to learn her fiancee is en route to the distant alien planet where she provides translation He's controlling and she's learned to love her new home.

Creepy story and quite short.

*** "How Do You Want To Die?" by Rick Silva - A group of captured soldiers escape the desert city of Ahman and run into a sand storm. Their leader, Donna Stone, contemplates how she'd like to die.

This is an atmospheric story. The author packs a lot of character detail into Donna, considering the setting and length.

***** "Nemesis" by Nicole Prestin - When Flux, a size 14 soccor mom who can manipulate molecules (think Kitty Pride of the X-Men), joins Liberty Force, she's dismayed by the attitude of one of her teammates and the press about her size. She quickly proves that intelligence and skill are what make a superhero.

This is the only story in the collection to have typos. Most notably, the team is called Liberty Force five

times and Omega Force three. That aside, it's a brilliant story, the type that makes you want to cheer for the heroine who's completely comfortable with who she is and won't take grief from anyone or change herself to meet others' standards.

***** "Davy" by Anna Dickinson - The unnamed narrator of the story suffers from post-partem depression and excessive weight gain. In an attempt to help his despondent wife, her husband buys a painting. All is not well when the wife starts seeing grey, elf like figures emerge from it.

Another creepy story with antecedents in old folk and fairytales.

*** "Sharks & Seals" by Jennifer Brozek - Corelli, a member of the First Circle of the Order of the Sacred Eye, is asked to a meeting with the leader of the Children of Anu.

This story felt like a prologue or first chapter to a novel. While it was self-contained, as I reader I was left wanting more.

*** "Marilee and the S.O.B" by Barbara Kransoff - Marilee's hobby when depressed is to follow interesting looking people and see where she ends up. Her latest target is an overly good looking boy on the subway.

An interesting premise, with a classical ending.

**** "Blueprints" by Anna Caro - The unnamed narrator of this dying earth story wants desperately to travel to Terra Nova, a beautiful, unpoluted planet. But people above a certain weight are denied transport on the grounds of health.

An interesting look at getting what you wish for versus knowing what you want.

***** "Lift" by Pete Alberti - Teenaged Mary Beth determines to build her own spaceship after friends tell her she's too fat to ride in theirs.

A great story about hard work and effort paying off in the end. And that some friends aren't worth keeping.

Ultimately I was happy with this collection. I would have liked more stories where the protagonists were not bullied/teased about their weight or where they were content with their weight despite outside criticism. However, the collection does pack a lot of realistic emotions into its stories, exploring a number of different personalities and situations.

Want some great stories with a character set that's usually ignored (as far as being the protagonist is concerned)? Then pick this collection up.

S.T. Rucker says

[As I read, I wondered if any of the writers were actually fat or fat activists, because some of the stories at times sounded like thin people ghostwriting stereotypical imitations of
