



Magnolia City

Duncan W. Alderson

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Houston in the 1920s is a city of established cotton kings and newly rich oil barons, where the elite live in beaux art mansions behind the gates of Courtlandt Place. Kirby Augustus Allen, grandson of the Allen brothers who founded Houston as a real estate deal, is grooming his daughter Hetty to marry Lamar Rusk, scion of the Splendora oil fortune. Instead, at the No-Tsu-Oh Carnival of 1928, beautiful, rebellious Hetty encounters a mysterious man from Montana dressed in the gear of a wildcatter--an outsider named Garret MacBride.

Hetty is torn between Lamar's lavish courtship and her instinctive connection to Garret. As Lamar's wife she would be guaranteed acceptance to the highest ranks of Houston society. Yet Garret, poor but powerfully ambitious, offers the adventure she craves, with rendezvous in illicit jazz clubs and reckless nights of passion. The men's intense rivalry extends to business, as rumors of a vast, untapped ocean of oil in East Texas spark a frenzy that can make fortunes--or shatter lives and dreams beyond repair.

A sweeping, sumptuous debut that evokes the turmoil and drama rippling through the history of the Lone Star State, *Magnolia City* is a story of love, greed, jealousy, and redemption, brought to life through the eyes of its unforgettable heroine.

Magnolia City Details

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From Reader Review Magnolia City for online ebook

Julia says

The book has such promise. It took me nearly two months to read this book and that right there says everything about it. The author most certainly did his research on the time period and his descriptions are wonderfully written. Because of that, however, the book tends to steer away from the storyline simply to describe a street or a dress. Description is very important but so is the story.

Kathy Jund says

Magnolia City is the work of debut author Duncan W. Alderson and sure to please with its descriptive words as fragrant as the flowers one envisions.

Travel through the lookingglass to Houston, Texas in the late 1920's, post war and amidst the oil boom that was sure to make almost anyone rich. We will follow the life of one Esther (Hetty) Allen a headstrong and outspoken woman with progressive thoughts destined to find the happiness (and riches) she deserves. Hetty, the oldest daughter of Kirby (Kirb) Allen, who himself is descended from the famous "Allen" brothers who discovered Houston and although bank President of Citizen's Bank of South Texas is regaled to living in the prestigious Warwick Hotel hoping to one day to find himself housed in a mansion at Courtland Place, home of the old cotton barons. Together, Kirb and his gorgeous but mysterious wife, Nella Ardra Allen feel they have a sure fire plan to gain the step up into high society they desire; the pawn in this scheme being their daughter, Hetty. Although Hetty has eyes for the heir of Splendora Oil, Lamar Rusk and can see her future living in the lap of luxury, a chance encounter with a handsome stranger at the annual gathering of high society, the famed No-tsu-Oh Carnival may change things. While the revelers crowd the ballroom in elaborate costumes, Garrett (Mac) MacBride in his wildcatters garb and fancy car sets off something in Hetty she is wont to ignore. The tale spun with passages of greed, treachery, heartbreak and prejudice all mixed together with the undercurrent of societal snobbery also contains the grit and determination to make it through. Secrets untold will unfold as Hetty makes her way. Magnolia City also contains the romance that wraps around you like a gossamer magenta sheet and holds you spellbound swinging from a hammock at sunset on the Gulf coast. The story written from Hetty's point of view contains such insight one needs to be reminded that our author is male. Sensual scenes draw the reader to read page after page while the enticing cover adds the final ribbon to the package that will prove irresistible.

Monica Henson says

Give. Me. A. Xanax.

In the beginning the story line was very interesting but quickly became a big hot mess.

There was just too many things going on for me to actually enjoy.

Between Mother daughter issues, sibling issues, the daddy issues, the love triangle, the boom to bust; back to boom; back to bust.... the clairvoyance thing, the husband thing....

Add all the above to Hetty's inability of figuring out who she is as she goes from... I am going to rebel against the establishment; no, I am going to become a civil rights activist before my time; no, I am equal hear

me roar; no, I am going to be a socialite; no, I am going to be a bootlegger; no, I really want to be a socialite; no, I am going to embrace my hidden heritage that has been denied me; no, I am going to be a oil tycoon; etc etc....

With soooo much going on, I just wanted it all to end.

Which is unfortunate. The book had really good bone structure but for all of this to happen in 300 pages and a few years... talk about Hetty suffering from ADHD.

It would be good to revisit as a book series or just completely different novellas... but rolling it all into one thing... ugh it was exhausting to read.

Also, just a quick history lesson, Mexicans working in the US were not called illegals... until the 1950s both US and Mexican citizens zigged-zagged across the boarder without issue and/or documentation necessary. Calling them illegals is completely out of place.

Porcelain says

Action packed storyline and a quick read. I especially enjoyed the descriptions of the period fashion.

However, I found the random and frequent sex and wild adventures to be humorous, when I think that may not have been the author's intention. It was very obvious that it was written by a man, as I think the female narrator's idea of romance and seduction was way off base.

Maria V. Snyder says

Lovely, wonderfully well written! I will fess up that Duncan is a friend - I attended a couple of his writing classes back in...well, it was a while ago. He's a great teacher and writer and he's been working on this historical fiction for the last 10 years! And you can tell, the research is unbelievably detailed - I thought I was back in the late 1920s Houston during the oil rush and depression. but it's not all facts and details, the story about Hetty and her family is so well done - I read this 400 page book in a matter of days.

If you're a historical fiction fan, this is a must read for you! It'll be out in April 2014 and I hope to have a Q&A with Duncan on my blog and do a give away at the end of March.

He sent me the book to get a cover blurb and this is what I wrote: "Masterfully written, this story of oil, love, and family will grab you by the heart and not let you go."

Kristina says

I really enjoyed this book! Magnolia City was nothing like I thought it would be and I was wonderfully surprised. Set in 1920's Texas south -Houston-, it was great to go on the journey with Hetty and Garrett. From eloping to bootlegging liquor (prohibition time) to oil rigging it is quite and adventure! Hetty trying to navigate on her love interests and seeing the highs and lows of money (Great Depression) coming in and out of your life, these experiences give her the strength to keep going and help her family pursue a better one. It didn't end the way I wanted but this book seemed more real than most. Love historical fiction and haven't

read many books on the 1920's with the start of oil rigging. Very fascinating!

Erin says

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot...>

I was ecstatic when I finished Duncan W. Alderson's *Magnolia City*, euphoric even. I'd come, I'd read, and though it was an uphill battle from the beginning, I had conquered. This smug sense of triumph set the tone for my review, imbuing my commentary with a sarcasm Alderson's work didn't necessarily deserve, something I realized while proofing my work. Don't misunderstand, I am still delighted at being done with this book. I'm simply acknowledging that quiet reflection afforded an appreciation for the story that was not evidenced until I'd said goodbye to Hetty Allen, Lamar Rusk and Garret MacBride.

From a historical perspective, *Magnolia City* is a masterpiece. Layers of minute detail provide an astounding backdrop, effectively transporting readers to a bygone age. Alderson's subtle manipulation of fact is delicately refined and so seamless that one hardly realizes where truth meets fiction.

Alderson's prose adds another dimension to the narrative. The glittering opulence of Bayou Bend, the fiery burn of mescal, the unmistakable scent of oil fresh from the earth. His evocative and lyrical descriptions produce a piercingly vivid portrait, one that wholly immerses his audience in Hetty's experiences and complex affairs.

The problem I have with this piece, is its length. Alderson's themes are introduced early on, but they so vague and scattered that pinpointing their nature and connecting one to the next is a practical impossibility. I'm not exaggerating, I spent most of the narrative frustrated at what I identified as lack of direction, fighting the urge to scream at what seemed a mishmash of unrelated concepts. I often felt lost in the immense scope of the narrative and though I was ultimately impressed with Alderson's thesis, I can't help feeling the novel is about two hundred pages longer than it needs to be.

Would I recommend the book? I don't know. I suppose it would depend on the reader. *Magnolia City* is by no means an easy read and might not be the best choice for those seeking immediate satisfaction, but it is a dramatic and emotionally poignant story that shouldn't be undervalued.

Janis says

Duncan W. Alderson provides a good dose of Houston history in the 1920s and early 1930s through Hetty MacBride and her dashing husband who deal with greedy and corrupt oil barons, a society that is set in Victorian principles, and debt born from business opportunities gone awry. Hetty is a tough female who faces any obstacle with determination.

I purchased the book because it was by a local Lancaster County, PA author who would be present later in the week to sign the book at a local book store. I never did meet him, but the story took me on a journey through a part of history that was unfamiliar, the oil barons of Texas. It is definitely historical fiction with a nice love story, but it also touches on several other issues. Hetty discovers what has happened to *Magnolia City* as a result of the search for more places to dig for oil. It reminded me of the controversies surrounding fracking of today and the feared effects on the environment. Through her mother's desire to be socially

accepted into the world of the nouveau riche, Hetty witnesses the loss of family values. Whether or not she is simply being rebellious to Victorian standards imposed by a small segment of Houston society or whether she is becoming socially conscious of the plight of the poor, Hetty emerges as a strong female character. I am not so sure if her encounter with Mexican American bootlegger's is realistic but her adventures are a good read.

Carol says

I didn't notice at first that a man wrote this. I think he writes very well in a woman's voice, not all men can do that. *Magnolia City* by Duncan W. Alderson. The book cover looks like a historical romance to me. I love historical fiction and not so much romance so I was a little leery at the beginning. I was worried that there may be too much romance for me. The main character, Esther Arden Allen, aka Hetty, did remind me a little of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. She was flirty and eager to have new experiences. She did seem a bit more intelligent to me than Scarlett O'Hara.

Hetty was living the high social life of Houston in the late 1920s and was really enjoying the new freedoms for women in her social class. She had to decide between the suitor from a very rich family that her parents had picked out and one that she discovered. That one, Garrett McBride, was not rich but had a fire inside of him to succeed. Also, there were family secrets kept from her, even one connected to her birth.

Since that I now live in Texas, I really enjoyed learning about Houston and the social classes at that time period, about the culture that goes with wildcatters and the financiers. Also about the condition of the hospitals care for the blacks back then. The book reminded me a little of *Giant* too, especially when it got into oil and the events and culture around it. I did enjoy more than I thought I did. The sex scenes were just a tad too graphic for me but once I got past that I loved this book. I enjoyed it enough to want to read more of the author's books. I think I understand more about Texas now!

The characters were developed and the story is rich with historical details. I highly recommend *Magnolia City*.

I received this book as a win from FirstReads but that in no way influenced my thoughts or feelings in my review.

Adriane says

At first I didn't want to give this book 5 stars. At times the story frustrated me.. The changes in plot and setting are quick and without apology, it actually reads more like a series, and here's why: we start out in 1920s Houston where a young socialite must choose between a well off man from a rich family, and a mysterious man from Montana who's intent on making money in the oil business. Then we're taken to a story about the bootlegging business, then the oil wells of East Texas. San Antonio plays a role as the one place our protagonist, Hetty, feels most comfortable. Also, Hetty's transformation from spoiled party girl to a woman capable of taking care of her family and herself reminds me of *Scarlet O'Hara*.

Being a native Houstonian, I was excited to hear the different street names and places mentioned in this

book. St Joseph hospital is still here, and Bayou Bend. I have a whole new appreciation for my city after reading this.

Steven says

From the moment you discover Hetty Allen on the novel's first page, Alderson sucks you in. Her voice is immediately clear; and with a keen ear for dialogue, the author manages to make his reader feel like a fly on the hot Houston walls. (My favorite touch is small, but just the way Alderson writes the word "Mama" lets us know exactly where we are.) Alderson knows his leading lady well and he writes from her point of view with skill and ease. Hard to believe that this is Duncan W. Alderson's first published novel with a voice as strong as his.

Magnolia City is a wonderful, engaging and fast-paced read. I've never been to Houston, Texas, but Alderson paints the city so beautifully that I'm eager to discover its magic.

And then there's Garret - the most alluring, seductive and just plain sexy leading man to come out of a novel in a long time.

There's a lot to love in Magnolia City and it's the perfect book to sit outside with on a warm spring day. I can't recommend it enough.

Sarah says

Did not like it. I can't believe I even finished it. I thought there was way too much meandering away from the story as well as too many trite phrases and cheesy descriptions. Would not recommend it. And has ANYONE noticed that the title is magnolia city but on the cover are gardenias?? Ugh. That was the beginning of the end for me.

Teresa Mahlandt says

Finished this novel last night at midnight. My first thought was Bravo. I loved this book. Good read, fast read. The protagonist, dear Hetty was a brilliant mesh of human emotions, conflicts, and endurance. Congratulations Duncan. Must read!

Jess says

I received this book through GoodReads "First Reads" as a courtesy in exchange for my honest review of this book.

Duncan Alderson takes the reader to 1920s Houston as seen through the eyes of debutante Hetty Allen. Hetty envisions herself to be the bright young thing that a modern woman of a new flapper generation should be.

This vision puts her at odds with her parents who have invested themselves towards arranging a suitable marriage between Hetty and Lamar, heir to Splendora oil fortune. Hetty The world is changing after the war and men are out to make their fortunes in the Texas oil fields. Hetty meets Garrett MacBride, son of a Montana senator, who plans on making his fortune in Texas. Hetty is charmed by MacBride and must choose between the path her parents' have chosen for her or make her own trail in life with Garrett. Hetty comes to terms with a secret her mother has been hiding. That secret begins to define her and her choices in life.

This book will take the reader from the elaborate halls of Houston society to the grime and muck of the Texas oil fields. Alderson researched the time period and addresses issues of race-both African American and Mexican prejudices of the time, the rise of the Jazz movement, the impact that oil rushes have on areas, Prohibition, the Mexican community living near Texas, and the Freudian movement in psychoanalytical theory. I found myself going back and forth between liking this book and disliking this book- but I always found myself drawn into the story to see how it turns out. At times I found Alderson's descriptions and prose dramatic and over the top. He made efforts to write through the eyes of a female protagonist which at times fell flat. I appreciated his research and learned about oil drilling, Texas history, and influences the Mexican community had at the time in Texas. My main disappointment was in the ending. I would have liked more plot resolutions between Hetty and her family. Overall, it was a nice read and I would recommend it to others.

Phaedra221 says

A number of historical figures mentioned or included in the book and Alderson did a good job of developing his main character, but with a number of others, who were central to the novel, seemed to be given short shrift. I do have to say, however, that I had not heard of Ima Hogg before and know if I had had that name, I would have had it legally changed as soon as I was allowed to do so.

P.J. Lazos says

Magnolia City, Duncan Alderson's first novel reads like Gossip Girl for the South. Experience the glory days of Houston in the 1920's, the days that gave the city its oomph, its architecture, and its arrogant charm, when oil barons ruled the roost, flapper fashion was on top, and alcohol was underground, but available if you knew where to get it. Glamour was every girl's best friend and Esther "Hetty" Allen, a descendant of Houston's founding fathers, had a steamer trunk full of it. On a fast track to marry the city's most eligible bachelor, Lamar Rusk, heir to the Splendora oil fortune, Hetty had a spot at all the best tables and on everyone's guest list, living in extreme comfort, the life of the super rich.

Hetty may have been born with a silver spoon in her mouth — her father was part of Houston's founding fathers, himself oil cognoscenti — but there were an oil rig's worth of secrets that needed to remain underground for her to stay there. How much family history, both fortune and genetics, could influence family fate was an open question that Hetty felt compelled to answer. Then there was Lamar. Hetty was the hands down favorite to marry him, but she'd have to bump her younger, social-climbing sister out of the way first. Yet, our gal Hetty was a little more complicated than that, and if a woman in the 1920's can find a way to live life on the edge then Hetty's the woman to do it.

For the history of Houston and the wildcatting days of big oil, Magnolia City is as good as any textbook, but as a story to spark your heart, Magnolia City is even better. Magnolia City is a feast for both the head and the heart. So pull up a chair and have a look. Flasks welcome.

Jowanda says

switching to audio book it is available on Hoopla

Dan Oko says

This novel is a bit overwritten, but offers some neat historic detail of Houston, which is where the author grew up. It's kind of Gatsby-meets-Giant, a story that focusses on love, class and race in the face of Texas' original oil boom.

Marcia says

I'm generous with giving this a 4 star review. I chose to read this because it is set in Houston Texas and I've recently relocated there. The novel was quite informative of the life and times of Houstonians and eastern Texas during the late 1920's to early 1930's. I found myself looking up the cities on google maps to orient myself with the travels of the heroine. I was really amazed at how the author wove in the historical facts of the area and people into the story. I must warn you that there is a little bit of some sexual content and frankly, it wasn't necessary. When I looked at the author again I just had to roll my eyes because of course, it is a "he". Why do male authors always find it necessary to write in sexual scenes? I was intrigued by the Mexican/American love/hate relationships. I felt disappointed in the ending. I felt they had just given up. I also didn't like the fact that she felt she had to do the apologizing....(another male author trait). I understand women were subservient during that era but the heroine always thought for herself and independence and the ending left me feeling like she took a GIANT step backwards.

Melinda says

Hetty Allen privileged in Houston's upper crust, forced to choose between two men, a choice that will change both the course of her life and the lives of her entire family. She quickly learns the consequences of her actions, transforming her from a spirited, fun-loving girl into an independent and calculating woman.

Alderson certainly delved in the history of Houston during the 1920's, the vast history of this city was well done, fascinating and educational.

Magnolia City is an ambitious piece of work, almost too much. Alderson needs to minimize all the events occurring in such a short period of time, this would add merit and plausibility to the narrative. As it is, it feels forced and quantity takes over quality. With sound editing this story has endless potential.

The array of characters evolve as the story progresses, surprising given the amount and pace of the narrative.

An interesting story especially with the depth of Houston's history explored and obviously well researched. Fine tuning, tempering of romantic scenes leading to a promising novel. I appreciate Alderson's enthusiastic effort, detailed for a debut, impressively researched. I'd explore future endeavors from this author, his research cannot go unnoticed.
