



# Hellebore & Rue: Tales of Queer Women and Magic

*JoSelle Vanderhooft (Editor) , Catherine Lundoff*

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The essence of fantasy is magic and the folklore of women has often dwelt on the innumerable powers they possess. Magic that heals, magic that destroys, magic that saves their community. All these elements and more can be found in the queer women of Hellebore & Rue. These lesbians shape their worlds, their wants and needs, and, most important, their destinies. Here are stories of a greenmage reuniting with her former partner on one last mission in Connie Wilkin's "The Windskimmer"; a shaman calling on the power of the Medicine Buddha to fight demons in Jean Marie Ward's "Personal Demons"; and even an aging school nurse discovering a dark secret about her heritage in Steve Berman's "D is for Delicious." A dozen stories by a dozen talented authors, including Juliet Kemp, Lisa Morton, Ruth Sorrell, C. B. Calsing and other names that promise the reader many wonders.

## Hellebore & Rue: Tales of Queer Women and Magic Details

Date : Published May 5th 2011 by Lethe Press (first published February 1st 2011)

ISBN : 9781590213773

Author : JoSelle Vanderhooft (Editor) , Catherine Lundoff

Format : Paperback 238 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Short Stories, Lgbt, Fiction, Anthologies, Glbt, Lesbian

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# **From Reader Review Hellebore & Rue: Tales of Queer Women and Magic for online ebook**

## **Shomeret says**

Three stars is a good rating for an anthology. Anthologies are always mixed bags. I particularly liked "Personal Demons" by Jean Marie Ward about the Tantrika who calls on the Medicine Buddha because of its ironic ending. I also liked the premise of "A State of Panic" by Rachel Green, but I wanted more than a short story dealing with this concept. Other stories didn't grab me or turned out to be fragments.

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## **Donna says**

So after the Canadian Postal strike I FINALLY received this book through the giveaways yesterday. Wanna know how much I loved it? I stayed up ALL night and finished it! I mean, I got maybe an hour of sleep before coming in to work this morning. I'm really happy that I entered for this giveaway, as it's not usually a book that would interest me (I'm not that big into short stories, they're not long enough for me) but there was something about the title that just drew me in. I think it was karma or something. This is definitely a book that I will be recommending to my friends. Once I have a bit more time (and am a little less sleep deprived) I will add a review going into further details about this awesome book.

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## **Sacchi Green says**

The writing in this book was outstanding, without even taking into consideration my own story here (written by my alter-ego Connie Wilkins) at all. In fact, when I was co-editing Heiresses of Russ 2012: the Year's Best Lesbian Speculative Fiction for Lethe Press, I seriously considered many of these stories for inclusion, and ended up choosing Lisa Nohealani Morton's "And Out of the Strong Came Forth Sweetness."

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## **Jarla Tangh says**

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Drollerie Press  
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Naturally, whenever I read a work of fiction, I am longing to be transported. I want to love what's going on and to love whomever it's happening to. Editors know this and the best of them patiently sift through hours of preternatural wordage in order to yield a suitable harvest. I bow to the wisdom of Joselle Vanderhooft and Catherine Lundoff.

Twelve tales of women loving women and their magic brought me the required ensorcellment. Milleus ranged from a slightly altered here-and-now to a fantastical futureverse. Certain stories reverberated with the burr of a fast-moving dragon's scales, obscured their happy endings as in gazing into a cloudy crystal ball,

and plunged the reader into another character's existence in the literary equivalent of bi-location. Several stories in particular act as threshold guardians with their shared archetype of a troubled stranger bringing challenge to an established magic-worker and two intimate companions relying upon one another to battle malefic forces.

Standout stories for myself included: *And Out of the Strong Came Forth Sweetness* by Lisa Nohealani Morton where a good deed yields an unexpected and unforgettable sacrifice; *Trouble Arrived* by C. B. Calsing brings us down to the swamp where a card dealer faces off with the cheated man who once taught her all the tricks she knew; *Personal Demons* by Jean Marie Ward caught me totally off guard with a tale of what happens when a serious practitioner gives proof of the reality beyond the flesh; Connie Wilkins shared *The Windskimmer* where two seasoned conjurers of Sky and Green magic combine their arts to avert tragedy.

Special mention must be made of Rachel Green's multiple viewpoint tale, *A State of Panic*, where arcane detective work eventually leads a female police sergeant to a deadly ancient diety.

For those who appreciate a touch of wicked absurdity, do partake of *D is for Delicious* by Steve Berman; I want to follow Kelly Harmon's heroines of *Sky Lit Bargains* in a longer work if not a sequel; *Gloam and Quinn Smythwood* educated me as to the ills that attend corpse lights and life-stealing things that walk the earth; *Witches Have Cats* by Juliet Kemp answers the question: is a familiar that is not a feline just as familiar? *RRain Prior* takes a rogue elemental and a wandering songstress and pits them against one another in *Bridges and Lullabies*

*RRain Prior*; *Thin Spun* by Sunny Moraine gives an interplanetary exile a new appreciation for her adoptive homeworld and an end to her longing for a lover; and in *Counter Balance* by Ruth Sorrell a grandmother, a granddaughter, and the granddaughter's lover make a stand against a goddess.

Note: This copy of *Hellebore and Rue* was an electronic copy acquired from an editor upon the reviewer's request. Her *Tangh-i-ness* usually reviews on a for-the-love basis. No lucre has been involved.

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## April says

(Originally posted @ CSI:Librarian)

It took me awhile though to get through this book because I'm not really much of a short story reader. Happily, I found this anthology to be wonderful, different, and full of women dealing with magical forces without being solely defined by their sexual orientation. For the most part, the collection flowed from one tale to the next in a really great way too.

The stories that that really stood out to me were "Personal Demons" by Jean Marie Ward, "The Windskimmer" by Connie Wilkins, "Sky Lit Bargains" by Kelly A. Harmon, "D is for Delicious" by Steve Berman, "And Out of the Strong Came Forth Sweetness" by Lisa Nohealani Morton, "Bridges and Lullabies" by Rrain Prior, and "Thin Spun" by Sunny Moraine.

In some respects, I felt like the other stories needed a bit more pack to the punch. This isn't to say that the

characters weren't strong or cool throughout the anthology though so much as it is a result of my personal reading preferences. However, the writing, uniqueness, and creativity were solid throughout. I was always engaged and pleasantly surprised by the way the tales developed. I never felt that any of the stories was a waste of time or not worth including either, which is always a sign of a strong collection.

In conclusion, very, very good. If you like well-crafted short fiction and want something refreshingly new in terms of Fantasy, pick up this anthology.

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### **Simone says**

I enjoyed most of the short stories contained within this book, some more than others, but with the range of styles presented in this work I do not find that surprising. It is definitely an enjoyable read with a set of different but connected stories that flow well from one into another. I will probably read at least some of the short stories again one day.

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### **Warren Rochelle says**

Hellebore—black hellebore (the most appropriate for a witch's garden)—according to some sources, was used in the flying ointment. Other uses include the healing of mental and emotional illness and in exorcisms, and to increase intelligence, for protection, and for invisibility. It is a baneful herb, and should never be eaten and is highly toxic. "Wear gloves when handling it."

Leaves of rue relieve headaches and when worn around the neck, aids in recuperating from illness and acts as a ward against future ill health. Fresh rue, sniffed, clears the head in matters of love and can help you think better. Toss some in your bath to break all hexes and curses. Rub fresh leaves on your floorboards and ill spells will be sent back; hang rue at the door for protection.

And combined together, as in the collection, *Hellebore & Rue: Tales of Queer Women and Magic*, edited by Joselle Vanderhooft and Catherine Lundoff, (Lethe Press, 2011) some powerful magic is made by powerful women, powerful witches, and yet, quite human, with all the contradictions and ambiguities that means. Magic can heal and protect; it can destroy and harm, and is both feared and desired, and so can and is human love and human desire. In these stories, these queer women who make and use magic must also navigate the complications and mysteries of the human heart, and as result, this is a collection will appeal the reader of fantasy and the reader who appreciates excellent stories of human relationships.

In this collection, the reader will find such tales as:

"Personal Demons," Jean Marie Ward:

Tantric sorcery, an exorcism, a young girl possessed by a powerful demon—yes, this could exacerbate the already rising tension between the sorceress, or tantrika, and her psychologist partner who outed her as a user of magic in *Psychology Today*. Can love survive dark power and its use, its link to sex?

"The Windskimmer," Connie Wilkins:

One last flight, one last mission, against the enemy for a greenmage, reuniting with her former partner—what will Menka find, will she be up to the task brought to her by Aviel? And what about their hearts?

“Witches Have Cats,” Juliet Kemp:

And this one has a dog, and doesn't know she is a witch. But when Laura Verrall's ex develops a sudden case of the boils and a woman at a coffee shop knows this, and offers to help her with her newly-manifesting powers, Laura's life—and that of her dog, Jasper, suddenly get complicated. Then, her friend, Alicia, calls from a party. She wants to go home, but she can't find the door—literally, and the corridors go “round and round in circles,” and she's trapped—can Laura help? And people at the party recognize Laura's power—Laura is for some changes.

“D is for Demons,” Steve Berman:

Ms. Grackle is another unsuspecting witch, a retiring school nurse, who learns not only that she is a witch, and there is power waiting for her to use, but that a dietary change can help—think Hansel and Gretel.

“State of Panic,” Rachel Green:

A London police officer, who has transferred to Laverstone, far from the city, Sergeant Anna Wilde confronts more than a little prejudice against women, and finds her magical skills come in handy—even as she has to keep them hidden: they burned her grandmother. Then a murder case turns out to involve Pan and Summer, that Other Place ....

These and other stories—a dozen altogether—with other authors, such as C.B. Calsing, Ruth Sorrell, Lisa Nohlealani Morton, Quinn Smythwood, Kelly Harmon, Rain Prior, and Sunny Moraine, do indeed, as the back cover suggests, “promise the reader many wonders,” and this collection keeps that promise.

Catherine Lundoff and Joselle Vanderhooft have worked the powerful magic of story and word and wonder, dark and light, myth and magic, in this collection of tales of queer women, queer magic. You don't have to wear gloves, but a little rue by the door and some leaves scattered on the floor wouldn't hurt as you venture out and into this magical collection. Guaranteed to sharpen those mental process, both seen and unseen—and as for matters of love, well ... some fresh rue wouldn't hurt.

Highly recommended.

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## **Nikki says**

Hellebore & Rue is an anthology of "tales of queer women and magic", both of which is delivers. There's a lot of fascinating other worlds in this collection, and not one that I was totally turned off or bored by -- there were some I liked better than others, of course: Personal Demons had a very solid punch at the end, and The Windskimmer totally intrigued me. I could have wanted more from some of them, whole novels written in those worlds, but that's obviously not a criticism.

The collection is generally pretty strong, although there a couple of careless errors left in -- I think twice there was a subject/verb disagreement that just jarred. But for the most part, they're well edited and well picked to be a nice spread of different stories.

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## **Jenny says**

I won this in a first reads goodreads giveaway. First of all I would like to say, thank you for giving me a chance to win this book because this book was in a genre of books that I have never read before. The first thing I noticed was the cover, the woman's hair on the cover has a bunch of flowers all over it, it really made the whole cover pop out.

By the way this book is more like of a bunch of short stories put together in one book. I am on the first short story right now and its called "Counterbalance" the story so far is good enough to keep me interested.

My favorite story would be the second one!

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## Mim says

(The rating is probably more like... 3.5 stars? The fact that we have no half star option is an endless source of woe for me, but alas.)

I love short stories. I love queer ladies. I love magical nonsense. I think you can see where this is going? The second I stumbled upon this book I decided that oh yes, it was definitely something I wanted to read, aaaaaand promptly *didn't* read it for like two years - a serious mistake, which I only got around to rectifying now. Which is a shame, because this is a fun little collection. I didn't super enjoy *all* the stories in this anthology, but I liked most of them and loved a few, which is a really solid accomplishment considering it's a bunch of stories from different authors. Also, the cover is really really pretty, which is what made me get it in paperback instead of just getting the ebook version. So if you're into stories about magical lesbians, I'd recommend it, basically. Although, if you're looking for like super explicit queerness, you may be a bit disappointed? A lot of the stories just have offhand mentions of past relationships with ladies/have the relationship mostly as background. I didn't bother me at all (I quite liked it, actually - it felt like stories about queer people instead of Stories About Being Queer), but it may not be what you were expecting. Breakdown of the stories and more of my thoughts in general below, if you want to know more - I'm not doing the spoiler thing (like, I'm not even summarising them - they're short stories, what's the point) so you should be safe, but if you'd rather not have any info at all before you read, maybe skip that bit.

**1. Counterbalance:** This was actually probably my least favourite story, and it gave me the impression that I'd like the book a lot less than I did in the end, so I really wish it wasn't the first one, eek. Short stories - especially genre stories - are tricky because you often you'll need to show an entire world with its magic and rules and technology and whatever, but obviously you don't have the space to really go into it. So you need to give us a glimpse that feels rich and interesting and like there *is* a lot there, we just don't have time for it all right now - and this is, I think, where this story fell flat for me. It felt... wide but shallow, and sort of generic. The only bit that somewhat caught my attention was the villainess (which, to be entirely fair, may or may not have been because my mental image of her was Natalie Dormer), but even with her I got the same sense that we weren't seeing more because there *wasn't* any more, rather than because there just wasn't the space for it.

**2. Trouble Arrived:** Thankfully, I liked this story much better than the first. The plot/magic system didn't particularly grab me, but the story had a lovely mood and style to it (which is often enough to carry a short story, if done right), and I quite liked the two main characters. I found it weirdly emotionally satisfying as well, which is not bad for something that's less than 20 pages long, so kudos there.

**3. Personal Demons:** Ahhh, I don't know about this one? The magical bits I found quite interesting and not a

type of magic that usually pops up in fantasy stories, but the ending was really odd with this one. It felt very abrupt and really separate from the rest of the story mood-wise (which when you're talking about a short story gives you some serious mood whiplash) and I'm not really sure what it was saying? I mean, I got what actually happened (my narrative comprehension skills are fine!), but I just didn't quite get what the point of it was, I guess. An odd one.

**4. The Windskimmer:** After the first three stories I more or less liked most of them, so yay! This one is possibly one of my favourites, as it sort of had a lot of stuff I really like in short stories, and most everything I wanted to see in these. It felt like an episode from a larger story, but not in a way that leaves you unsatisfied about how this one ended. The magic system was really lovely and interesting (I'm a sucker for an interesting magic system, so sue me), and more than that I really liked the characters - they felt full and fleshed out even though we only got to spend a little time with them.

**5. Sky Lit Bargains:** Another reviewer on here said that they liked the story, but really wanted to read the story implied by its ending, and I really agree with that so I'm quoting it. Not that the story itself isn't fun - it's a quick read (I can hear the 'duh' you're sending my way) and flows well. Also, the heroine of this one is a sort of warrior lady, while her girlfriend (future girlfriend?) is the witchy one, which I thought was a fun way to switch it up.

**6. Gloam:** Probably another favourite? Probably. I think this one had the most interesting/engaging plot out of all the stories, which is impressive as hell - hats off to the author. It actually felt tense for a bit there, even though realistically you know the plot is getting resolved within the next fifteen pages and everything is probably going to be super fine at the end. There was also a really great little episode which did the thing where it's implied that the universe of the story is lovely and sprawling and a bit spooky, but only let you in on it a tiny bit, which I thought was really effective. Really enjoyed this one!

**7. Witches Have Cats:** I'm not going to lie to you, this was probably my favourite story overall. It's super cute and almost unexpectedly funny. The main character felt real in a way a lot of young people in books for some reason don't, and you really get a sense of her personality, even though the story isn't among the longest in the collection. And there's a really great side character! I think a character that can really grab you with like approximately thirty lines total is a good character. The plot wasn't extremely tense and mysterious, but there *was* one, and one which felt like the introduction to a bigger plot. Which, don't get me wrong - this story didn't feel unsatisfying. It didn't feel cut off or like it *needed* more to be interesting. It felt like the first of many episodes in a story; I super enjoyed reading it on its own, but if there were more, you bet I'd read the hell out of those too. And that's something I really love with short stories! As usual, I'm pretty crap about talking about the things I like the best, so let's stop it here. In short: I really liked it.

**8. D is for Delicious:** Oh boy. This is likely the oddest story in the collection. I'm still not sure if I liked it. I think I did? Maybe? It's the only story where the protagonist turns out to be a witch of the evil kind, but it's very much a bizarre little story, both in content and in style. I wouldn't say horror, necessarily, but - pretty macabre, in a sort of overblow pop art rainbowish way. I don't know, guys. It's one of the shortest stories included, if I recall correctly, so if you don't like it you're not losing a lot of time.

**9. And Out of the Strong Came Forth Sweetness:** Another one I liked a lot! This was one of the only stories to incorporate sort of futuristic/sci-fi elements, and I thought it did it really well. The worldbuilding was right on point for a short story, I thought (just enough detail to feel full and interesting, not so much as to overwhelm you), and the way magic seems to function in it was really quirky and lovely. The plot was mostly centered around these two ladies meeting and falling in love, which actually doesn't happen in most of these stories, so it was a fun read in that respect. Oh, and I really liked the style and ~mood~ of this one! I think

this is one of the stories I'd love to see as a novel.

**10. Bridges and Lullabies:** This one just didn't grab me at all. I don't know why, as there's really nothing I can point to as being "wrong with it", and I didn't find it a pain to go through or anything, but it just... didn't work for me, I guess. I feel kind of shitty for not having more to say about it, because as I said, nothing I can super critique, just - meh. Not for me, I guess.

**11. Thin Spun:** The only other story to do the scifi thing - it has different planets and worlds and spaceships and all that good stuff. It sort of bombards you with a lot of weird new terms and names and stuff like that at one point, which feels a bit whoaaaa cowboy slow down there, but I did enjoy it quite a lot - mostly due to the characters, I think, who all felt separate and fun and substantial (I mean, *all* - there's three of them, but still). The world you're sort of bombarded with sounds pretty intriguing as well, and this is another story that sort of suggested quite a few other stories - all of which I'd be interested in reading.

**12. A State of Panic:** Not necessarily a favourite, but another story I enjoyed quite a lot. It mixes classically pagan magic with what you'd imagine magic would evolve into in the 21st century, which I thought was an interesting and refreshing take. The main character was really likeable and relatable (well, for me), but not in that dull Every(wo)man way, and she really made the story, in my opinion. Also, a note: there's a scene of attempted sexual assault in this one. It's not very detailed and brief, since it's stopped before it goes far, but if that kind of stuff upsets you, maybe look out?

That's all! Also eek I don't usually do reviews here, so sorry if this is something of a rambling mess, but there weren't all that many reviews for this one so I wanted to contribute. :) If you decide to check it out, hope you enjoy it! (Oh, also, my apologies if I fucked up the html anywhere. It's one in the morning. I should really be asleep.)

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## Catherine says

Our new anthology! Due out in early 2011.

The authors did a terrific job - we're very pleased with the results and think you will be too.

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## Juushika says

Twelve short stories about queer women and magic, a refreshing and engaging premise that fosters lovely atmospheres, like the 1980s urban fantasy vibe of Sorrell's "Counterbalance" or the magic-touched science fictional world of Moraine's "Thin Spin." The plots and sometimes the voices are less memorable but generally competent; only about three stories made me want to read more by the author, but only one (Berman's "D is for Delicious") is outright bad--so, an adequate collection. But given the premise, I wish there were more on-page queer relationships--there's a wealth of recent breakups, some meet-cutes, but it's not quite the representation I hoped for. I admire this more in concept than execution, and wouldn't go out of my way to recommend it, but it's fine.

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## **C.M. says**

This entertaining collection of stories centers on sorceresses, be they the fantasy sort of our childhood, full-on Wiccan or something entirely new. Over the centuries, lesbians and witches have been associated as one in the same, often leading to the accused's demise. And I think *Hellebore & Rue* subtly explores what makes that association so threatening.

In H&R the magic is sometimes organic and mundane and other times powerful and heroic instead of stereotypically evil. (Well, except for that delicious children story. Berman's witches are wonderfully wicked.) The stories vary in era and locale, another nice touch. My favorites were based my own predilections rather than just the quality of writing. All are worth the price of admission.

For example, I love-love-loved how the secondary character (a sort of handmaiden/love interest) in "Sky Lit Bargains" is the power behind the story's sword-wielding alpha female, forging her beloved's armor with protective magic. Their bravery together yields victory. I really liked that aspect in many of the couplings in this anthology. But this story in particular made me search online with hope that it was excerpted from some awesome novel. Sadly, no. Or at least none that I could find. So I just "went there" in my head and thought about the characters for a while. Which, one could say, is the sign of really good short fiction. Another example was "Thin Spun," a story crossing time and space, which takes a bit to unpack but is highly rewarding.

Plenty of the offerings in this book could be developed into novels because they just make you "go there." Definitely recommend it.

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## **Amy says**

I recieved this book through the goodreads giveaway program.

This was a great selection of short stories about "queer" women who possess supernatural abilities of some kind. I really enjoyed all the short stories in this collection. I enjoy short stories with unusual endings and these did not disappoint. A nice weekend read.

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## **Pogue says**

I love reading short stories if just to find a new author to read. While this book is short stories about lesbians in the paranormal. Their sexuality was not in the for front of the stories. The relationships were "normal" what I mean by that is that they are there but not shoved in the face, and that is what I think they should be like.

Each story was well written and fit very well into the book. There was not one story that I liked over the others, and there was not one that I did not like. If there is another copulation of stories by they authors in the same book I would read that one.

