



The Occasional Diamond Thief

J.A. McLachlan

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On his deathbed, Kia's father discloses a secret to her alone: a magnificent diamond he has been hiding for years. Fearing he stole it, she too keeps it secret. She learns it comes from the distant colonized planet of Malem, where her father caught the illness that eventually killed him. Now she is even more convinced he stole it, as it is illegal for any off-worlder to possess a Malemese diamond.

When 16-yr-old Kia is training to be a translator, she is co-opted by a series of events into travelling as a translator to Malem. Using her skill in languages and another skill she picked up after her father's death, the skill of picking locks - she unravels the secret of the mysterious gem and learns what she must do to set things right: return the diamond to its original owner. But how will she find out who that is when no one can know that she, an off-worlder, has a Malemese diamond?

"Tense, thrilling, edge-of-the-seat reading--I tore through this! Kia and Agatha are a fascinating pair, Kia so practical, down-to-earth, and wilful; Agatha so mystical and driven. More, please!"

~ Tamora Pierce

"J. A. McLachlan is a terrific writer -- wry and witty, with a keen eye for detail. I've been following her work with interest and delight since 2003. In a world where young-adult fiction is booming, *The Occasional Diamond Thief* propels McLachlan to the front of the pack." ~ Robert J. Sawyer

The Occasional Diamond Thief Details

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From Reader Review The Occasional Diamond Thief for online ebook

Marsy Billinger says

Well done – I couldn't put it down, the story kept moving forward and was intriguing. I definitely think both adults and young adults will enjoy the story.
I like the humour.
I like the subtle lessons on religion.

Madison Ross says

The book was very interesting. Especially the parts when Kia is held captive, and is in jail. I think if you're into science fiction and fantasy, you would really like this book.

Jennifer Chow says

What a wonderful book! There are two strong female characters in this novel, which I appreciated. I really enjoyed the friendship between Kia and Agatha. The gem of this story is the relationship between the girls.

McLachlan also explores and brings to life new worlds and cultures. She adds in very unique descriptions about the different planets. Additionally, there's a strong tug of mystery in the novel. What really happened with Kia's father? A fast-paced plot kept me reading page after page.

Marsha says

A fun, quick read. The story has a dash of space travel, a funny/serious sidekick, and a reluctant thief trying to find her way. Kia is such a great character; a perfect balance of kid and adult. Agatha is by far my favorite character in the book even if she is the sidekick. Her influence on Kia is wonderful and I look forward to more adventures from these two!

Michael Mardel says

The occasional diamond thief by McLachlan gives the reader a glimpse into a future world where one can reach other planets. The main protagonist, Kia, is given a hidden diamond by her father on his deathbed. She hides it from her estranged family but steals other jewellery to pay for her translator fees. Her character blows hot and cold about this. One day she is caught by a Select, Agatha, and not long after an Adept accuses both of them and banishes them to Malem. Kia can speak the language because her father used to trade there and she has to teach Agatha. Malem is a dark, dank planet and Kia wants to return to her warm

home planet. There's also a plague which has killed off many, including the Queen's child, and is threatening another child. Twice Kia is thrown in prison and Agatha helps her to escape once. Through it all Kia has her father's diamond secreted in the hem of a cloak. Will she find the owner of this diamond and will she make her way home?

Sheryl Loeffler says

At age 16, Akhié Ugiagbe, who prefers to be called Kia, is already a master of languages.

She's been sent to the planet Malem to act as translator for Select Agatha, a kind of lie-detecting priest in a truth-seeking religious order known as the Order of Universal Benevolence.

The Order recommends Kia for the mission when she's caught stealing a diamond bracelet. She's in no position to refuse.

But Kia has other secrets. Her father, delirious in death from a recurring virus that he'd caught in Malem in the days when it had decimated the planet, had led her to a secret of his own—a Malemese diamond, unlawful possession of which meant death in Malem. She carries it with her to Malem and sews it into her hem. And her need to sell a ring abandoned in a washroom for translation school tuition had led her to an unscrupulous dealer who'd schooled her instead in breaking and entering. She carries the illegal tools of that trade with her to Malem, too.

Malem is backwards, harsh, and afraid. There are few creature comforts. Amputations and beheadings are frequent and public. And fear of the virus—even though it's no longer the threat that it was in Kia's father's day—still informs public policy and daily life on the planet, a planet that Kia and Select Agatha help to save, facing disease and death, treachery and violence, imprisonment and improbable escape with extraordinary bravery.

But that's all I'm going to tell you.

Science fiction, young adult fiction—*The Occasional Diamond Thief* fits these categories. But it also transcends them—it's an adventure, a fairy tale, a might-have-been love story, a mystery, a parable.

J. A. McLachlan is a remarkable creator of worlds, a remarkable creator of character, a master of suspense. In short, a remarkable storyteller.

You don't have to be a young adult to love this book.

Sheryl Loeffler
Writer, *A Land in the Storytelling Sea*

Robert says

You can also find my review of The Occasional Diamond Thief on my science fiction and fantasy book blog.

The \ Occasional / Diamond Thief is a YA adventure scifi novel.

Our heroine, Kia Ugiagbe, is the 15-year-old daughter of a fairly unsuccessful trader. Her father has been sickly as long as she can remember, suffering episodes of fever and weakness ever since he'd travelled to a faraway frontier planet, Malemese. He never talked about what happened there, but it has left its mark on him.

On his deathbed, Kia is the only one he can talk to any more, because she's the only one to have learnt the Malemese language. Malemese is the language he falls into when suffering fever hallucinations. In his final moments, he reveals a secret he has kept all those years: hidden at the back of a drawer, there is a little bag containing a huge diamond which could only have come from Malemese. Her father, she realises, must have stolen it.

Soon after his death, Kia gains independence from her abusive mother (and her aloof siblings) by means of stealing jewellery and using the proceeds to fund a place at a school for translators. However, her brief career in thieving is just the start of her adventures...

Fast paced, fun, and tense, The Occasional Diamond Thief is a brilliantly absorbing novel. Kia is easy to root for: she's hard-working, not brilliant at everything she does (especially her people skills are a subject she struggles with), but dedicated to her work. At times, she reminded me of Pat Rothfuss's Kvothe: all her skills are hard-earned, but unlike Kvothe, she isn't magically gifted at everything. She has a sense of humour and just the right amount of cheek: enough to put a twinkle in the reader's eye, not so much that she becomes annoying. She stumbles into her adventures, and though some are forced upon her, the story never loses the main thread of Kia's desire to understand more about her father, and the man he was before the sickness that would ultimately destroy him.

It's not a flawless novel - the mother is a bit too simplistically drawn as a character, and some of the scene changes are disorienting - but it's one of the best YA novels I've read. Better by far than Hunger Games, and on a par with Ian McDonald's Planesrunner series.

Highly recommended!

Melanie says

The Occasional Diamond Thief is a fabulous adventure, but it also offers thoughts and feels for readers of all ages.

In The Occasional Diamond Thief, McLachlan's protagonist, Kia, learns the truth about herself by learning the truth about others.

Kia is the youngest of three children. Her father, a space ship's captain and merchant, returns from a trip to another planet with the illness that eventually kills him. He is secretive and haunted, but Kia wants his love and approval.

She believes her facility with languages will accomplish this and so learns the difficult Malemese. Unfortunately, hearing the language worsens her father's condition.

Kia is also at odds with her mother, who is strictly religious and seems to resent Kia's connection to her husband through the language of Malem. In an attempt to protect both spouse and child, Kia's mother forbids the speaking of Malemese in the house.

When her father dies, Kia is with him, and he commands to her an incredible diamond. Determined to solve the mystery of the gem, but escape her mother's oppressive grief, Kia applies to become a translator. Independence is a challenge, and Kia must turn to thievery to support her life as a student.

She gets caught, and as a consequence is sent to Malem as a language teacher for the Select who assisted her in the theft. Once there, Kia must solve the mystery of the diamond, risking her life and that of the Select, uncovering a conspiracy that has its roots in the highest levels of Malemese society.

Kia believes her mother harsh, but learns that she was only trying to protect the ones she loved. Kia believes her father is a thief, but learns that it was his compassion that placed the diamond in his custody. Kia believes the Select and her order, the O.U.B. are attempting to manipulate her, but discovers that they are only trying to make it possible for Kia to right old wrongs. Kia believes the Malemese people to be cold and barbaric, but experiences their capacity to love first hand and fights to free them from a fearful legacy.

McLachlan has created a simple, but compelling universe that doesn't strain credibility and serves as the perfect backdrop for Kia's journey. She even weaves in a sweet love interest that proves to have his own secrets. Woven into the overall plot are mystery and thriller elements that will keep readers turning pages.

McLachlan's novel is reminiscent of Madeline L'engle and Ursula K. LeGuin's young adult fiction.

My highest recommendation.

Derek Newman-Stille says

J. A. McLachlan explores the power of suppression and recovery on an interplanetary scale, a community scale, and on a personal scale for Kia and the people around her. Kia's linguistic gift is related to the issues of communication that shape the interactions between people in McLachlan's world, the separations and miscommunications that have meant that planets and people have viewed each other with suspicion and distrust. In Kia's desire to understand language and its cultural connections, she becomes a figure who collapses distances and allows people to communicate.

Unlike many intergalactic, interplanetary tales, McLachlan's story is a highly personal one, shaped fundamentally by character and the character's exploration of selfhood and interaction on a microcosmic level which has implications for the macrocosmic level. Sometimes even small interactions between people are enough to shape and change universe-spanning political issues.

Communication means that secrets lose their powers, things lost are returned, and healing happens through the barred gateways opened by the desire to talk and share.

To read a longer version of this review, visit my website at <http://speculatingcanada.ca/2015/06/1...>

Cassandra says

Not a thief

I really enjoyed reading occasional diamond thief. The story was different than most sci-fi stories of war. It had a purpose and goal to achieve that made it move. A really good book and characters.

Joy Weese Moll says

Kia's adventure begins with the discovery of a rare diamond discovered in her father's possession on his deathbed. Her language skills take her to a far-flung world in the company of Agatha, a wise and spiritual woman who needs Kia's translations and her practical mindset. The secret of the diamond, however, risks the mission and their lives.

More thoughts on my blog: [The Occasional Diamond Thief](#)

Jennifer Gisselle says

Amazing characters and intricate storyline made this a YA novel a page-turner!

Sherry Ramsey says

This was one of those books that, once I started it, I found it difficult to put down. The main character is intriguing as she finds her path between right and wrong, driven by the events of her past, her relationship with her family, and the secret behind it all. Along with that, though, it's a great science fiction adventure tale told across fully believable worlds and civilizations. A great read for YA or adult lovers of character-driven science fiction.

Edwin Downward says

A rollicking adventure that kept me guessing until the very end.

Meri Greenleaf says

When I first started reading this book, I was figuring that I wasn't going to like it much. Not because of the description, but because it's written in first person present tense. I tend to avoid first person books in general because I have a hard time connecting to those characters. Not many writers can pull it off and have a

character who doesn't come off as perfect or self-centered or just plain annoying, and adding present tense into the mix? It has the potential to be a disaster.

Well, I was wrong. Incredibly wrong. McLachlan pulls off this writing style with grace and skill and I immediately found myself entranced by the story. Kia is a well-rounded and developed character. Yes, she has moments where she acts a little "know it all", but it was entirely accurate for the character: she's sixteen. Kia acts like a teenager, but more than that, she acts like a real person. Another thing I notice in first person books is that the non-main characters tend to not get a lot of development. McLachlan avoided this, too! This story had a few secondary and tertiary type characters who aren't around long enough to get the depth of the main character, but they didn't feel flat. The other main character, Agatha, was just as developed as the POV character. I loved how she didn't fit quite in with the other Selects (priest/esses, essentially) and that even though her personality clashed with Kia's, they were able to work together in a way that was believable and interesting.

I was so afraid when the author introduced not one, but two fairly jerk-ish boy characters that this book was going to turn into one of *those* YA books where the female protagonist inevitably falls for the obnoxious male character who never seems to have any redeeming qualities. Well, I wasn't disappointed there, either! Two thumbs up for McLachlan and how she approached the character in the "love interest" role.

And the world building! I love a book with lots of world building and this one had that! Not one but three cultures were mentioned with a fair amount of depth and I found myself itching to know more about the planets and cultures. The information about the cultures was never dropped in obtrusively and blended well into the narrative. I loved that the plot went beyond the personal experiences of the main character to involve the politics of the different planets. I'm not even a huge fan of sci-fi (I prefer fantasy) and I loved this. Then again, it wasn't an excessive amount of science fiction. What was there peppered the culture Kia comes from with detail to pull you into the world. Later in the book she was on a planet with very little technology, so it read more like something modern than futuristic. Even the beginning of the book, though, is the kind of sci-fi I like: enough to give you some bearing as to the character's surroundings and the technology, but not so heavy that you're bogged down with techno-babble. Writing out this review, I'm realizing that McLachlan truly does have a good balance of everything in this book.

As an aside, I got a kick out of the bit at the end written by Kia. "Occasional" indeed.

This was a book I didn't want to put down. It had everything I could want in a book: developed characters, thought-out world building, enough action to keep things interesting without hurting the dialogue and character development... Five stars and two thumbs up from me, along with a "would recommend" and "will read the rest of the series". (Please tell me there will be more books!)
