



A Cathedral of Myth and Bone

Kat Howard

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In these sixteen exquisite stories Kat Howard deftly weaves in and out of the countries of myth and hagiography to write the lives of women untold and unexplored.

A woman being written into her boyfriend's fiction is at first flattered to be his muse, but then finds her real life literally consumed and overtaken by his. A desperate young woman makes a prayer to the Saint of Sidewalks, but the miracle she receives isn't what she expected. A painter spies a naked man, crouched by the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, transform into a beautiful white bird and decides to paint him, and becomes involved in his curse. Jeanne, a duelist and a sacred blade for God and Her holy saints, finds that the price of truth is always blood. And in the novella "Once, Future" Howard reimagines the Arthurian romance on a modern college campus as a story that is told, and told again, until the ending is right.

A Cathedral of Myth and Bone Details

Date : Published January 8th 2019 by Saga Press

ISBN : 9781481492157

Author : Kat Howard

Format : Hardcover 368 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fantasy, Science Fiction, Mythology, Fiction, Adult, Anthologies



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From Reader Review A Cathedral of Myth and Bone for online ebook

Michelle says

Pub date: Oct 2018

Wow! I am not usually a short story person, but this was chockablock full of wonderful and terrifying woman-centric magic and modern mythology. Most of the stories I loved (especially "Once, Future"), just one I thought was just ok, but all haunted me and left me wanting more. With Ms Howard's fabulous writing, I would recommend this book for everyone.

Rani says

The novella "Once, Future" where the story of King Arthur plays out on a college campus is probably my favorite piece in this collection.

On the while, I found the collection to be a bit of a mixed bag. I think in general I probably like Kat Howard's longer works more than her short stories. I found her novels "Roses and Rot" and "An Unkindness of Magicians" (published elsewhere -- not in this collection) to be quite engaging. But I liked some of the short stories and found "All Our Past Places" and "Saints' Tide" to be standouts.

DeeDee says

(Thank you to Edelweiss and Saga Press for providing this DRC in exchange for an honest review)

One of my new favorite books, and certainly my favorite short story collection to date! I would recommend this to literally everyone, but especially those that understand that fairy tales, legends, and myths deserve to be told not just for their magic, but for what they reveal in our individual realities.

Here are my ratings for the individual stories (*** marks my favorite ones, yes there are four, you can't make me choose)...

A Life in Fictions - 5 stars

Saint of the Sidewalks - 4.5 stars

Maiden, Hunter, Beast - 4 stars

***Once, Future - 5 stars

There were too many wonderful quotes from this story to narrow them down to one:

“Of course the writer is manipulating things, making sure the underlying pattern of the story is recognizable. But I also think this particular story has a pattern that likes to be fit. It is almost like self-replicating DNA. The story makes it easy for the writer. That’s why there are so many retellings.”

“Maybe that’s the nature of tragedy. That you don’t notice. Or you see the signs gathering around you, and still you think: not us.”

And finally:

“There weren’t any women sitting [at the Round Table], not even Guinevere. And even if we ignore the sexism, it wasn’t a parliament. The Round Table wasn’t a congress or his advisory board. Arthur made the law. He may have sat with them, but he wasn’t equal.’ Nora tipped back in her chair, then dropped it to the ground with a thud. ‘Which, honestly, makes the whole Guinevere thing worse. He could have saved her, commuted the sentence, shipped her off to a convent, whatever. Instead he’s all fake-noble, “The law ties my hands. Sadly, I must burn the unfaithful whore.” He’s no better than Henry the Eighth—I mean, if Guinevere’s dead, Arthur can marry again and fix his lack of a legitimate heir problem. The whole thing is bullshit wrapped up in the name of being a nice guy.’

‘The reason we mourn isn’t about Arthur, it’s about Camelot. Camelot was about the idea that you look for miracles,’ I said. ‘That Christmas didn’t start until a wonder had walked into the hall, that when the kingdom faltered, instead of going to war, they went on a holy quest.’

‘So religion fixes everything? Not likely,’ Nora said.

‘Not religion. Myth. The numinous. Magic. The idea that there was something more, something better, and that the solution to the problem was to find that.’”

Translatio Corpis - 4.5 stars

Dreaming Like A Ghost - 5 stars

Murdered Sleep - 5 stars

The Sleeping Bone - 3.5 stars

***Those Are Pearls - 5 stars

“This is what it means to break your own curse. It means knowing what the curse is. Not how it manifests, not why it fell upon you and not upon some other, not what people say it means, that such a curse has chosen you. It means seeing it truly, recognizing the truth at its red and bloody heart.

And so it means knowing your own red and bloody heart as well.”

***All Our Past Places - 5 stars

“Cartography, the making of maps, is based on the idea that we can model reality. When it comes to a map, the reality being modeled is usually some kind of physical location.

I looked at the room I sat in, covered with Aoife’s maps. Maps that modeled no reality, except the one she wanted them to have, the river Lethe as red thread connecting the pieces. Maps to places she imagined into

being. Maps to the places we once were.

A pile of maps, purgatory burnt through, erased from existence. You could go anywhere, so long as you had the right map.

That was what I needed, if I was going to bring Aoife home again.”

Saints' Tide - 5 stars

***Painted Birds and Shivered Bones - 5 stars

“Even after Eorann had told Sweeney that she could not save him, it took him some time to realize that he would need to be the saving of himself. More time still, an infinity of church bells, of molting feathers, to understand that saving himself did not necessarily include lifting the curse.”

Returned - 4.5 stars

The Calendar of Saints - 4.5 stars

The Green Knight's Wife - 4 stars

Breaking the Frame - 4.5 stars

Sami says

A haunting and gorgeous collection of short stories threaded together with the quiet opulence of a stained glass window. Howard's beautiful prose brings together fragile bones, feathered pages, and heartsick saints. It's worth mentioning that Once, Future is my favorite King Arthur story since The Once and Future King—it's that unbelievably good.

AliceAnn says

While I didn't love all of these stories, the ones I did love were fantastic. The writing is lyrical, and although the stories are mainly based on mythology, they're quite unique in their delivery.

H says

Some of the short stories in this book are fantastic. The novella update of the King Arthur story was lovely and dreamy. As sometimes happen in short story collections, the strongest stories were clustered in the front, and then some of the later stories seem almost unfinished. But they are all worth reading! For adults or older

teens.

Bryan Miller says

What a brutal, unsettling, and poignantly mythic collection of stories. Personal faves include "Translatio Corporis" as well as "Dreaming Like a Ghost" and "Returned". So damn good. If you're a fan of Neil Gaiman or Aimee Bender—and always imagined what some mix between the two might look like—this collection is for you.

Liz says

Short Review

Short story collections are always hard to review because the quality of stories differs. I gave this four stars because I loved "Once, Future" and "Breaking the Frame." All the other stories are good. They're well written, but felt like they jumped around a lot. Sometimes they worked for me, other times not so much. However, I do like Kat Howard as a writer. I think her later work speaks for herself, and a lot of these stories are earlier work of hers (the collection spans seven plus years of her work, so it doesn't help with the variation). Anyway, a lot of great female characters and a lot of myth. Honestly, the female "Neil Gaiman" much like V.E Schwab.

vgl3 says

A number of these stories were excellent, and I enjoyed the themes of location (the cathedrals of the title crop up regularly), myth, feminism and the thin line between reality and fantasy. Unfortunately, the story I enjoyed the least was the longest (by far), dominating the book and therefore my enjoyment of it. It felt rushed and superficially explored, and without it, I would have rated the collection higher. Still a very solid read, and one I would recommend.

Marzie says

This fascinating and varied collection of short stories (and in one case a series of vignettes that form a novelette) by Kat Howard is actually the first time I've read a good bit of this author's work. Many of these tales are memorable re-envisionings of stories from literature or history, such as Arthurian legends (what's in a name?) or a modern Joan of Arc (looking for miracles in an urban setting, with the aid of Chanel Vamp and the back of a Stoli box). While I felt varying levels of engagement, some like "Maiden, Hunter, Beast" took my breath away, and others like "Murdered Sleep" haunted my thoughts, while "The Green Knight's Wife" had me shivering.

This anthology has certainly whetted my appetite for reading more of Howard's fiction!

I received a Digital Review Copy of this book from Saga Press via Edelweiss, in exchange for an honest review.

Hillary Smith says

I am completely and totally in awe of this new collection of short stories. These tales are as dark and beautiful as the myths and fables they are based on, but somehow they seem impossibly richer. Howard has breathed new life and modernity into everything from Greek mythology to the tales of Camelot. Impeccably executed and perfect for fans of fairy tales, myths and magic!

Mike Chen says

Kat Howard has constantly shown that she can ground fantastical elements in contemporary storytelling. This, along with wonderful prose and sharp characterization, is why her novels ROSES AND ROT and AN UNKINDNESS OF MAGICIANS work so well -- they blend those elements together without ever collapsing under the weight of either side. A CATHEDRAL OF MYTH AND BONE is a collection of stories -- myth retellings, essentially -- that follow suit. Most of these were previously published, but the biggest star here is Once, Future, a novella length (about 115 pages) story that not only brings the Arthur myth into the modern age, it also turns it on its side and weaves a jumping mythological timeline into the tale. It's clever and funny and intense and meta -- but meta in an "oh that's cool" way, not a "look at me" way. Though that only takes up about 1/3 of the entire book, the novella is worth the price of admission; the fact that the rest of the stories are great is a wonderful bonus.

Jackie Cowgill says

I had a difficult time deciding between 3 and 4 stars. I chose 4 because ultimately the great stories in this anthology outweighed the not so good. And none of the stories were bad, but I just didn't understand some of them because they were so unique and out there. Also, a few were good stories, but the subject matter wasn't interesting to me. For example, the main novella was about Camelot, which I have never been very interested in.

I really loved the prose and magical imagery in these short stories and I think they will stick with me for a long time. My absolute favorites were Translatio Corporis, All of our past places, and painted birds and shivered bones.

Jazmine says

3.5 stars

My favorite stories were probably A Life in Fictions, Saints' Tide, and The Saint of the Sidewalk.

Marija (Inside My Library Mind) says

More reviews up on my blog Inside My Library Mind

“The story knows the way of its telling.”

As a Whole...

All of these stories revolve around myths and legends and thus have a common theme of storytelling interwoven throughout all of them. Every story is set in our world, but not quite. It's our world but deconstructed and mixed with symbols and aspects of different stories.

There's also a common theme of a story being retold through time – always being the same, but also always changing and evolving and I loved that. All of these stories have women in the center and all of them involve women losing and reclaiming agency in some form or the other. And this is sort of a linear trend – the first couple of stories women lose themselves and their narrative, and as the collection progresses forward, we see them reclaiming their place. It's incredibly clever and incredibly well done. I was in awe with some of the stuff that Kat Howard managed to pull in these stories and I was so impressed by her craft and the way she constructs these narratives.

On top of all that there's also a sense of grandeur and urgency in these stories. They feel epic and otherworldly, but also really well grounded in our world and they have meaning that surpasses the stories themselves. I just cannot praise the subtlety of the storytelling in *A Cathedral of Myth and Bones*. Moreover, there isn't a single “bad” story in here. None of them felt like fillers. Sure, I did like some less and some more, but there wasn't a single one I did not like, which is saying a lot.

Some Highlights

A Life in Fictions – 5 stars

A girl keeps getting written into stories by her ex-boyfriend – but she lives in them and starts losing herself and her real life for the stories.

It's scary and also captivating at the same time. Loved this one and it's a great opener for the collection because it really sets the tone and highlights the central themes of the collection.

The Saint of the Sidewalks – 4.5 stars

A girl, desperate for help, prays to the saint of the sidewalks, only to be made into a saint herself.

A really intriguing concept that manages to explore being put to a really high standard, having power you did not want and not knowing how to really use it. It's such a great and clever story.

Once, Future – 5 stars

A retelling of the King Arthur legend, where students take on the roles of people from the myth, only for real life to start mirroring the story and vice versa.

This is my absolute favorite story in the collection and I think the main one that inspires and grounds all others. It's unbelievably smart and unique, and goes above and beyond the myth itself and manages to deconstruct it in really clever ways. It's a fantastic exploration of human nature, the way we experience

stories and how they manage to track and follow us through time. And I would easily read a whole book based on this story.

Those are Pearls – 4.5 stars

A story which is based on the fact that everyone carries their own curse and what happens when those curses are broken.

This one is gorgeously written and is so clever in dissecting what a curse can mean for someone and also tackles gender norms in a really interesting way. Really enjoyed this one.

Returned – 4.5 stars

A woman gets unwillingly brought back to life by her lover, and her memories of how she died are hazy. Again, a super smart story that puts women and violence in the center and gives said woman her agency back. I really adored this one and I love that this is a running theme of the collection.

The Calendar of Saints – 5 stars

A story that revolves around a sword-for-hire that settles disputes between people with her sword in duels. I think this would make a great full length novel, and it's my second favorite story in the collection. It does some really interesting things with saints and sainthood again, but also tackles subjects of science and religion and it's beyond amazing. Truly.

Breaking the Frame – 5 stars

A woman becomes a model for a photographer in his fairy tale shoots, only to start changing the stories. Again a really interesting way to handle women reclaiming agency and the way we can change the existing narratives. It's a fantastic end to a fantastic collection.

Quotes

And just because I cannot highlight how brilliant this is, here are some quotes:

“That was how saints were made. Some piece of strangeness happened, and it hooked itself in the heart of someone who saw it and called it a miracle.”

“Sleep is dying, and has been for a long time now, through uncounted ticks of clocks and the flickers of thousands of too-brief candles. Sleep is dying, a slow exsanguination of dreams, a storm-tossed suffocation of nightmares. Sleep is dying and she is not alone in her throes.”

“We don’t talk about how the curses happen. We grow up knowing that certain curses run in families, that boys get cursed into monstrosity and girls into sleep, and we leave it at that.”

To Sum Up

I cannot recommend this more. It speaks volumes that I loved so many stories in this one and that I haven't

shut up about this collection. Please get it as soon as it hits shelves in January. You won't regret it!
