



Failure to Communicate

Kaia Sønderby

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As one of the only remaining autistics in the universe, Xandri Corelel has faced a lot of hardship, and she's earned her place as the head of Xeno-Liaisons aboard the first contact ship Carpathia. But her skill at negotiating with alien species is about to be put to the ultimate test.

The Anmerilli, a notoriously reticent and xenophobic people, have invented a powerful weapon that will irrevocably change the face of space combat. Now the Starsystems Alliance has called in Xandri and the crew of the Carpathia to mediate. The Alliance won't risk the weapon falling into enemy hands, and if Xandri can't bring the Anmerilli into the fold, the consequences will be dire.

Amidst sabotage, assassination attempts, and rampant cronyism, Xandri struggles to convince the doubtful and ornery Anmerilli. Worse, she's beginning to suspect that not everyone on her side is really working to make the alliance a success. As tensions rise and tempers threaten to boil over, Xandri must focus all her energy into understanding the one species that has always been beyond her: her own.

Failure to Communicate Details

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Author : Kaia Sønderby

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From Reader Review Failure to Communicate for online ebook

Ceillie Simkiss says

clutches ebook to my chest

DAMN THIS WAS SOMEHOW EVEN BETTER THAN I EXPECTED???

[Read my full review](#)

Skye says

I read this within 3 days, on the tiny screen of my phone, and I could not care less because I've never enjoyed a book this much

The protagonist is a bisexual autistic woman. There's a strong focus on her inner life and thought process, and it's just so real. If you're autistic and have anxiety, here's finally a book that will make you feel understood, and have a truly relatable character.

For a large part the plot was intricate but lightweight until it got really intense toward the end. For the first half or so I thought I'd be recommending this as a light read but wow, as the book ended I was a sobbing mess.

Outwardly it looks like a science fiction book about aliens and diplomacy, but it carries clear social commentary as well.

I could not spot any ableism, racism or other *ism.

I really really really recommend reading this. Especially if you're autistic. And I guess also especially if you're not autistic. Or just in general.

It's also incredibly well written. The language is clear but artful.

Skye Kilaen says

Space diplomacy sci-fi novel with an #ownvoices autistic protagonist, and she's bi/pan? I almost didn't read it, only because I didn't want to be disappointed if it didn't click for me! Thank goodness I came to my senses. It's superbly well-plotted, every single character is distinctive and fascinating, and it manages to both resolve the main story and set up for the second book in a totally satisfying way.

Xandri Corelel, one of the few neurodivergent humans in the universe, has trained herself so well to read communication styles that she's now the head of a first contact team. Her ship gets summoned to an isolationist planet long past first contact, though, because they've gone and built a super-weapon that both Xandri's civilization and their genocidal space foes want. Result: political machinations, assassination attempts, and all kinds of backstabbing and general chaos - but then Xandri being super-smart and brave and telling people to sit down, shut the hell up, and LISTEN. Totally engrossing!

Read the first book in July and the second in September, loved them both, can't wait for a third installment.

Asher says

This was a really fun book to read. She, and her friends, were compelling and well developed characters. Xandri has a wonderful voice for a narrator. Failure to Communicate wasn't a fast paced story, but it was very well paced. It was refreshing to see autism/neurodivergence in an own voices treatment. We also got a well built world that didn't suffer from whitewashing or heteronormativity. I want more worlds and novels like this, and I look forward to reading what Sønderby produces in the future.

Sinead (Huntress of Diverse Books) says

Check out my book blog for more book reviews and other bookish posts!

I received a review copy of Failure to Communicate from the author. The blurb sounded quite fascinating even though I don't usually read sci-fi. I was intrigued in the idea of communicating with aliens.

It's #ownvoices for autistic representation.

—

The friendships that the various characters had with each other was beautiful. You could tell that Xandri was respected and trusted by a lot of the non-humans, which showed how much dedication she had in her job. The birdlike-aliens were especially awesome! I also loved Xandri's relationship with Carpathia. I'm hoping that the Carpathia, who is an AI, will play a bigger role in the sequel.

It was scary to imagine there could be a world where there are no imperfections, every human is born without an illness, a disability or a developmental disorder. This book discusses the ethics of that, and whether such a world is a utopia or a dystopia. It's a book that shows that these people who are viewed as imperfect, are not a problem for society. It is society that is a problem for them.

Xandri uses a slur for one of the alien races, and this is called out by another character. She still slips and uses it in her thoughts, thus showing that she grows as a character.

This is one of the first books I've come across with synesthesia representation. I felt like the concept was explained in a way that I could understand.

Halfway through the book, I suddenly had the realisation that the cover did not show two humans. The person on the left was an Anmerilli (you can see her tail in the shrubbery). I'm pretty sure it's Noaya, and I really like the scene that is being pictured. I loved this detail in the cover.

—

Failure to Communicate is a fun, welcoming sci-fi adventure that takes you on a ride through communication and miscommunication. A beautiful and intriguing read.

Chasia Lloyd says

Goodness, I only meant to read for 30 minutes but had to finish the whole book in one go. I cannot wait for the next one! FtC has a LOT of great things going for it - the sweet, autistic, bisexual, biracial MC Xandri pulls you into the story immediately. The side characters are all fabulously interesting - Diver was my fave, but I was also equally intrigued with Marco. The polyamorous relationships are amazing. The alien diplomacy politics and plot twist are RIVETING.

So much good stuff!!!

TWs: mentions of past abuse and sexual assault

RoAnna Sylver says

"I'd read Ancient Earth books, watched Ancient Earth vids, and more often than not, FTL travel was described in terms of colors. Shifting colors, prismatic colors, the colors of a rainbow or a nebula; but always colors, as if the state of the universe itself was not already beautiful enough without paint splashed on. But I—I watched the universe turn to cosmic fabric around us, the warp threads of silver and gold stars, the weft strands of eternal darkness, and I let out a small, joyous laugh at the sheer exquisiteness of it."

* * *

Sometimes theres no better words to read than 'Book 1.'

This is the first book in a series, and I am more grateful and joyful for this fact than I have been in a long time. (I'm also in love with TESTING PANDORA, the novella precursor, check my review of that out here! <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>)

This took me so long to write for two reasons:

1. Like Xandri, words escape me the more significant and intense a situation, feeling or concept is. The more I need to express it, the more difficult. This book is extremely important.
2. This book is so filled with amazing lines and moments and validations that choosing any to focus on - like my customary review-opening quote - was nearly impossible. Xandri's narration and voice and the acknowledgement of neurodiverse and autistic experience is incredible, the kind you only get from ownvoice writing. When we write our own stories, they ring so, so amazingly true.

They are beautiful. So I had to start with the beauty.

Synesthesia is something I have never read in another book so well-portrayed, so lush and vibrant and swirling and all-encompassing. The overwhelming, cataclysmic beauty of the universe, the awe, the sound and fury and color and movement in a voice, in stars, in motion, in breathing. My wonder is cerulean and my relief is violet swaying like reeds. My gratitude is tart orange-melon brush-whispering in a warm breeze.

Thank God, the glorious universe, and everything good in it - for this book that speaks my language. This is the first successful communication I've ever read, and a book that changed my life. There is nothing like being heard. There is nothing like not being alone.

And there is nothing more fun than lemony wicked-awesome aliens and intergalactic intrigue and starships that go really, REALLY fast. Or easy, natural, wonderful inclusion, growing bi polyamorous relationships with beautiful, wonderful people (who not only accept but adore Xandri for who she is), and adorable birds (and super-cool birdlike aliens!).

I just love this book so much. It deserves to be seen. It deserves to break out in a huge way.

I want it to explode across bestseller lists and public consciousness, and I want every sad, lonely, frightened person whose brain doesn't mesh with others or function the way we've been instructed... to read it. And take in the colors and people and "yes" waiting here. Yes, you belong. Yes, you are heard and understood.

Yes, it's going to be good.

Abi (The Knights Who Say Book) says

(4.5 stars) I shouldn't have waited so long to write this review, because there is SO MUCH to talk about in this book and I'm almost guaranteed to forget like five things.

First of all, I bought this book because it was on sale for 99 cents and I'd heard good things about it, so even though I wasn't really interested in the blurb it seemed like a good deal. And obviously, I ended up LOVING it. So let that be a lesson to you all. (I'm not sure what that lesson is — take advantage of ebook sales? Don't judge a book by its blurb? Rely on the reviews of people you trust? — but TAKE IT.)

Starting the book, I found it very readable. Despite it not being my favorite kind of space book and not being YA, which is what I prefer to read, it was just really easy to pick up with the story whenever I had time, as opposed to thinking I could spend the time checking tumblr or goodreads instead.

Another thing I realized I liked early on is Xandri as a character. She's up against a lot that's not her fault, so it's so easy to sympathize with her. And she's such a genuinely nice person. As comes up a lot, she often has trouble finding the "polite" or "socially acceptable" response, but she's always thinking about being *kind*, which is completely different and so nice to read. I love main characters who own being selfish or a villain, and I've got plenty in my favorite YA books, but Xandri being the opposite of that is such a nice break. She's the person who sees and understands the outsiders because she is an outsider.

(Also, she makes friends with the ship's AI because she's just that nice, and I LOVE the Carpathia. Guys! It's friends with the other ships!)

Plus, Xandri always trying to see things from other people's perspectives, even if she doesn't like them, is what makes her a great negotiator and is such an important part of the plot. There is a certain point I won't spoil when I was on the verge of tears and I just!

I've never read a character who has a job like Xandri's (observing new alien species until she understands how to communicate with them) either, so that was interesting. Of course, for most of the book she has to put

these skills into being a political negotiator, which is a hell of a frustrating job. It's *supposed* to be slow and frustrating, but I think that part carried over a little too well to the reader. When this part got slow it got harder for me to want to pick up the book in my free time, so that's why I decided to not give it a full five stars.

But the entire book wasn't slow! There were also a handful of very intense action scenes, and it was... *wow*. Because the rest of the book tends to be a calmer, low-simmering tension the outright fights slap you in the face and it's awesome.

I don't have a good transition from that to sexuality, but that's where we're going next. I don't think any labels are used explicitly in this book, but Xandri has two love interests, a man and the woman, and it's not a love triangle — the possibility that they could all be together is completely there. And I 100% ship it.

Polyamory is mentioned casually as a thing that's not out of the ordinary in the future, and it also seems like all sexualities are completely accepted. So, a very accepting future in that way! Given that there's so much about non-human people in the book I would have loved to see more about how other species have different conceptions of gender, which kinda only comes up once, but there are *so many* things going on in this book. I'm not mad gender wasn't a focus.

Probably the reason it was so nice to have a non-homophobic setting is because in another respect, the book does not show us an accepting future. It's a future in which humans have used science to eliminate neurodivergence, and autistic people like Xandri are both rare and discriminated against. The book is not pulling punches here. Xandri was abused as a child, her parents tried to *make* her neurotypical, and she's still dealing with that trauma. She encounters plenty of people who make assumptions about her because of what they've (wrongly) read, assume she can't do her job and treat her like a child, and situations in which other people make no allowances for the fact that it's harder for her than it is for them. As I understand it, basically like modern times.

Of course, it's still a book in which Xandri is the hero, and she has carved out a place and accommodations for herself despite everyone who would keep her out. Also, this book is proof that actually exploring accommodations for neurodivergence and disabilities in fantasy/scifi settings is 10000% more interesting than magical/scifi cures. So every author who has ever done that, take some goddamn notes.

As I was saying. Commentary on the treatment of autistic and other neurodivergent people in our society? Yes. Also in this book: Gun Control And Why The F Don't We Have It Yet, Society Creates Its Own Villains By Abusing Them In The First Place, Killing Animals For Sport Is Barbaric, and Governments Move Slowly Even When The Answer Is Obvious. Also probably a dozen other things I'm forgetting.

I'll leave you with a quote.

"There's a lot of cruelty in the universe. I prefer not to be a part of it if I can help it."

Maraia says

This was amazing! I highly recommended it. We need more diverse sci-fi like this. The characters are the

best part about this book, and I can't wait to read more about them.

Alexa says

Read on my blog.

LGBTQAI+: Xandri, the protagonist is bisexual and polyamorous, and there is also at least one sapphic side character/potential LI.

Sex on page: No

I have seen several people recommend this book on Twitter as an amazing indie book with an #ownvoices autistic protagonist, and I was not disappointed. *Failure to Communicate* was absolutely amazing and I can't wait to read the sequel (not to mention the beautiful covers for both books).

Xandri was a detailed, three-dimensional protagonist who was easy to get attached to. I loved reading about the way she perceived patterns, people and the world, and I also loved the ways in which she was unique – for example, that nobody else thought to make friends with the ship's AI. I also loved the many, many different alien species that were hard to keep track of at first, but once I got used to it I appreciated the thought and worldbuilding that went into making many unique species.

One of my favourite tropes in sci-fi on spaceships is the crew as family, and that really shone through here. While they had their disagreements and tension, Xandri's crew held together, and they were especially ride-or-die for her. I loved the way most of them kept her needs in mind and helped her cope without making her feel like a burden, and how they (especially Diver) went out of their way to defend her.

This book also had mention of polyamorous communities, as well as a budding polyamorous relationship between central characters, although it didn't become official in this book. Still, I absolutely loved the dynamic between the three of them and I'm eager to see more.

Failure to Communicate also had themes that went much deeper than fluff between crew members. The blurb starts with naming Xandri as one of the only remaining autistics in the universe, and pretty early on the book explains the way people now engineer their children before birth to get rid of any irregularities or neurodivergency. In a way, autistic and mentally ill people were wiped out – not by killing them outright, but by not letting them be born at all. While the crew knows Xandri and supports her, there is much ableism from strangers and the society in general – some of it unintended. Since there are only a few autistic people are left, all most people have to go on are inaccurate, generalised texts that show them as cold and without emotions. The level of ableism in this society was often sickening, especially towards the end (and yes, I was disappointed by Christa reverting to ableist comments even at 96% in the ebook).

The book also addresses gun violence and gun control, not only through the Anmerilli but also by directly referencing 21st century "Ancient Earth", which was surprising but not unwelcome to see.

While these parts may have been difficult to read, I loved the way the book handled and addressed the deeper issues while also keeping them balanced with funny or heartwarming scenes.

Note: I do want to explain why I didn't rate this book 5 stars, so I'd like to talk a little about my conflicted feelings towards the ending. Since this part is full of spoilers, I left it to the end.

(view spoiler)

My rating: ?????/5.

Avery Delany says

For anyone who loves The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet, Mass Effect, or otherwise diverse A.F sci fiction - this is the book for you! I absolutely love this book to pieces and have found a new series, and author, to devour my soul.

The thing that had really drawn me into Failure to Communicate was the idea of a science-fiction book which had a female, autistic main character who is also **HEAD OF XENO-LIAISONS**.

Firstly, anyone who knows me knows that I LOVE books with **super diverse alien species** in it and FtC does not disappoint on that front. We're introduced to a lot of different types of alien species, bodies, languages, and cultures within the space of just this one book and all of them felt authentically rich. So, of course, I was going to love something that had diverse aliens **and** that had human-alien relations in it!

Secondly, I have never read a character as relatable to me as Xandri, nor as well written, and that is **so important**. It's really hard to explain just how well written Xandri was as a character or how amazing the autistic representation so you should all just go and read FtC immediately so you can see what I mean. At all times Xandri is an incredibly complex character with complex needs, desires and quirks. I *loved* how much we got to know Xandri as a character and also got experience through her. From sensory overloads, meltdowns, painful eye contact, the need for reassuring textures and tastes, difficulties with communication... that's just skimming over the surface. Possibly one of the greatest things that I appreciated about Xandri's character, and FtC more widely, is that Xandri is the head of Xeno-Liaisons. She not only had a job which is all about communication, something which Xandri constantly pokes fun at as this is something that "autistic people are unable to do", but she is at THE TOP OF HER PROFESSION. I can't even explain how amazing that made me feel. FtC also deals extensively with other people's reactions to Xandri's autism including judgemental colleagues, overt discrimination and prejudice, and also love, support and encouragement from her team.

The last few points of why FtC is also amazing include:

- F. YEAH worldbuilding from Sonderby
- Racially diverse human characters
- Beautiful, validating and loving bisexual & polyamorous relationship which absolutely floored my little heart
- Phenomenal writing from Sonderby. Everything about this book is exquisitely written
- Demonstrates the importance of #ownvoice books

It's no secret how much I am in love with The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet and A Closed and Common Orbit by Becky Chambers and it fills my heart with such joy that the Wayfarer series has really taken off in terms of popularity. But I want nothing more than Failure to Communicate to take off in the same way because it really, really, really deserves your love too. This book is so validating, so beautiful, so diverse and so important that it needs to be celebrated more!

I am also SCREAMING because the second installment Tone of Voice literally just came out yesterday, AND there is a prequel to FtC AS WELL Testing Pandora which I am going to be reading it ASAP and you should too!

Check out my blog for more reviews!

Claudie Arseneault says

Friends, allow me to flail with pure love.

This book does everything right. It managed to get completely past my natural editor tendencies to take a novel apart and get hung up on the bits that could work better. Probably because I'm not sure there ARE much of them.

The characters in this are absolutely wonderful. ALL OF THEM. Xandri is so relatable in so many ways--her determination, her kindness, her honest reactions (both internal and external). She has so many layers of complexity and awesomeness, and all of it just naturally -fits- together into a seamless, amazing character. And although none of them narrate, you get exactly the same sense of relief and depth from the rest of the crew *including* the aliens and their culture (which is often where I find First Contact fails me).

Xandri is also autistic, and I want to touch on that as an allistic person, but please ABSOLUTELY read RoAnna Sylver's review for the autistic perspective. All I want to add is that this has been wonderful--it is one thing to hear and read about what it's like to be autistic, and to sort of experience it within the frame of a character, her reactions, her thoughts, etc. They say ownvoices books can be windows for outsiders, and this window is gorgeous as heck.

I jumped into this without having truly read the blurb (I jumped into it because of how much RoAnna loved it, basically), and when the elements of an alien diplomacy intrigue spread before me, I got pretty excited. I'm a sucker for political plotlines, and this one was a great and relentless ride. The overall pacing of this book felt pretty flawless, the intense scene buffered with nice and fun moments that just kept adding to the universe and characters. The sweet polyam develops over the course of the novel, building itself in a totally natural way (Xandri is bisexual, I think I haven't mentioned yet).

I also greatly appreciate the wide variety of fauna and flora you get to see in this, and how Xandri's love for alien species reflects is for both sapient and non-sapient ones, in addition to subtly showing up in her way of describing things.

This book is a gem. I laughed and cried and read late into the night, and it will stay with me for a long time. Please read and love it too <3

Michele says

Another one I had on my "to read" shelf for way too long. I truly loved this book. Some books I read (well a lot of them), I can multi task at the same time. I can walk around with my iPad doing various boring, yet required tasks like house cleaning, laundry, work (shush don't tell my employer), driving (i'm kidding. Just

seeing if you are paying attention). But this book required my full 100% attention. I needed to sit still w/no distractions, while I read. That is not to say it was a heavy, cumbersome read. No, quite the opposite. The world building, the story, and wondrous characters just had me so riveted.

The main character, Xandri...there are not enough lovey dovey adjectives in the English language to attach to her. Brilliant, kind, funny, brave, compassionate...I mean, I can just go on and on. I just want to hug her, although I don't think she would want that, so I would telepathically hug her. The most awesome thing though, Xandri is the best person for the job(Head of Xeno-Liaisons). Not despite her autistic "quirks" but because of them.

The writing, OMG, is just top notch. I mean, I got weepy over the ships computer saying goodbye to Xandri. Sheesh.

Highly recommend for anyone into sci-fi, fantasy, or post apocalyptic.

4.5 stars

lov2laf says

I really enjoyed this and I'm looking forward to devouring the rest of the series.

This is a futuristic sci-fi book that is unique in a number of ways. Xandri, the lead character of the book and the one point of view we're given in the read, has Autism. She's one of the few neurodivergents known in the universe since "undesirable" genes were removed through genetic engineering and she only happens to exist because of a short-lived natural birth fad.

Though figuring out human behavior is Xandri's ongoing challenge, one of her talents is observing the behaviors of new species and what makes them tick, allowing herself to ingratiate herself to new worlds and pass information on to others to improve interspecies relations. In our everyday reality, it's akin to Temple Grandin's observations of cattle and the knowledge she passed onto the agricultural industry that revolutionized their care.

The story kicks off with a charged action scene but the majority of the read is actually Xandri and her team on a high-stakes diplomatic mission with a xenophobic species that has the biggest weapon of mass destruction yet encountered. Though most of the read is not exactly action-oriented it's still highly entertaining and never dull. In a lot of ways it's more of a political/military tale with interesting parallels to the government gridlock and debates we see in the current day.

The sci-fi aspects are really vivid and consumable as are the number of unique species the author created. And, the most interesting elements of the read lie with Xandri's interactions with other characters; friend, foe, and everyone in-between. The cast is large but the author did a great job of portraying nuanced characters, subtle attributes, and humor. The dialogue was also excellent and fun. And, I have to give kudos because the plot could've been clunky with all of the numerous complex topics it presented but instead they were done in an engrossing, streamlined way.

In my opinion, Xandri herself is a really endearing, strong, admirable, and lovable character so I loved being

in her head and seeing the story from her perspective.

I usually read books that fall into the lesfic category but my interest in this book was due to the fact that the lead character has Autism as does the author. My sons are on the Autism spectrum so that aspect piques my interest and gave me more comfort about Xandri's representation.

So, I was pleasantly surprised to find that Xandri is actually a bisexual character with two love interests, one male and one female. There is clear interest displayed from all three characters, and I really adored each of them. However this is not a romance, either. It's more subtext with potential romance to come.

In addition to the Autism representation, the book has a ton of ethnic diversity which is refreshing to see. The only downside I saw was that a female leader of Islamic faith uses incorrect terms for exasperation/exclamation (which was pointed out to me by my bubble bursting Muslim Arabic speaking partner when I got excited about seeing the character ~ note to author, if you want a sensitivity reader there, my partner would be happy to help).

The book wraps up its storyline while spring boarding into the next so I'm eager to get to the second book.

So overall, this was a really unique, fun, and enjoyable story. Well done. 4.4 stars

C.G. Drews says

Oh there was so much to love about this book!! It was really complex and had incredible world building and the CHARACTERS WERE THE BEST. I am hugely craving the next book too...like that ending??!! How dare it leave me like this. I have questions and concerns and aghhhhhh. (Apparently there's a novella so I will go dig for that soon and devour it.)

So full confession: I don't really do super well with sci-fi. So I admit a lot of the politics and long discussions were lost on me. This is more a *me* thing though? Mostly the book reminded me of *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* (which is super good too!) and I was in love with all the more "domestic" scenes and the characters' bantering and Xandri just existing because she's amazing.

Also YES, this features a protagonist with autism. I loved the rep so so much and, as an autistic too, it absolutely resonated with me. I know it's #ownvoices and it just makes me cry happy tears to have #actuallyautistic authors giving the real angle on what it's like to be on the spectrum. (Especially for girls because we're woefully underrepresented.) Also the way it affected the plot + was explained + just was woven into Xandri's everyday life was REALISTIC AND REFRESHING.

LIST OF THINGS I SHALL SAY:

- I loved the diversity! Not only of like human vs other sapient species, but also with skin colour and neurodiversity (of different types too) and sexuality!
- like heck Y E S to scifi that's diverse
- I loved Xandri so much
- The ending *hurt my fragile soul* and I just aghihg (view spoiler)
- I loved Diver! And Kiri!!
- I loved how so many of the crew respected Xandri and still really cared about her needs
- The world building was incredibly complex and I'm in awe

Seriously if you like sci-fi and you want to see GOOD rep of autism?! Eat this book. Or, you know, read it. However you like to absorb books go for it I am not here to judge.
