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Karen Memory



Synopsis

"You ain't gonna like what I have to tell you, but I'm gonna tell you anyway. See, my name is Karen Memery, like memory only spelt with an e, and I'm one of the girls what works in the HÃ´tel Mon Cherie on Amity Street. HÃ´tel has a little hat over the o like that. It's French, so Beatrice tells me." Set in the late 19th centuryâwhen the city we now call Seattle Underground was the whole town (and still on the surface), when airships plied the trade routes, would-be gold miners were heading to the gold fields of Alaska, and steam-powered mechanicals stalked the waterfront, Karen is a young woman on her own, is making the best of her orphaned state by working in Madame Damnable's high-quality bordello. Through Karen's eyes we get to know the other girls in the houseâa resourceful groupâand the poor and the powerful of the town. Trouble erupts one night when a badly injured girl arrives at their door, beggin sanctuary, followed by the man who holds her indenture, and who has a machine that can take over anyone's mind and control their actions. And as if that wasn't bad enough, the next night brings a body dumped in their rubbish heapâa streetwalker who has been brutally murdered. Bear brings alive this Jack-the-Ripper yarn of the old west with a light touch in Karen's own memorable voice, and a mesmerizing evocation of classic steam-powered science. At the Publisher's request, this title is being sold without Digital Rights Management Software (DRM) applied.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It took me more than a month to finish the book. Not that I didn't like it, I did. Really. But it lacks my kind of optimistic humor and the book sometimes is too hard to read. I mean, how much bad things can happen to those nice women?! Apart from my regular "too much complications" objection, I find the book "quite a fascinating read. It is a Wild West Steampunk story about "seamstresses" (a euphemism the main character uses for prostitutes) after all. Karen makes a unique and delightful narrator. But not just her. Elizabeth Bear has a talent for creating unforgettable, vivid and varied cast of side characters. I liked so many of them, with Miss Francine being my absolute favorite. I was happy with deep cultural and feminist issues the author touched in the story. Which said - the plot is imaginative and feels fresh and full of life, served up as a rich blend of mystery, suspense, action and romance.

I enjoyed this book immensely, despite a couple of things that could turn some readers off. The biggest for me is that the book is written in Karen's first person voice, which is uneducated and frontiersy. For example, syntax like "I wish I would of knowed he were heeled afore I stopped him" can be a little draining after 300 or so pages, non-stop. ('heeled' means carrying a gun - you're welcome). But on the whole, it helped form Karen's point of view, and helped me climb inside her head, so on balance, a win. One thing that's very minor, but at the same time inexcusable, is that the main character's name is spelled wrong on the cover. In literally the second sentence of the book, she explains that her name is spelled "Memery", and it's Memery throughout (except for a typo about 3/4 through). Not gonna lie, I can't bear to read a book filled with typos and shoddy editing, and to encounter one so obvious on sentence #2 almost made me stop reading. I wondered if it was a joke, but I don't think so. Glad I stuck with it though, as there were very few errors of this type. The characters weren't especially well fleshed out. Some of the secondary characters felt interchangeable, but there was plenty of action, and overall I'll be looking for more by this author.

Karen Memory can be classified as sci-fi fantasy, steampunk, western, mystery, or historical fiction. It is all of those. It is especially the tale of an extremely capable young woman who can be tender,

nurturing and kick ass as the situation demands. Karen is one of the most memorable (figure the pun) heroines you will ever meet. She does not need a man to save her. The really great part of the story is the men do not need to be saved either. Both male and female characters are well developed and balanced. If a character is weak it is the personality of the character, not the gender that makes them so. Karen Memory is a prostitute at H&A's tel Mon Cherie, one of the better bordellos in what is to become Seattle. She works for Madame Damnable. Karen describes Madame as, "She's got to be fifty-nine, and she's still got a balcony you could do Shakespeare from." The descriptions of people are wonderful. They are three dimensional with actions fitting with their characters. The range of characters is broad also. Besides Karen's coworkers there are villains, inventors, and a broad range of nationalities as well as ethnicities. Karen tells her own story. Her voice is clear. Her backstory slips in where she feels it is relevant to what is happening. It does help explain her motivations and how she comes to working as a prostitute. The steampunk aspect of the story is very subtle. It is woven into the story and not distracting at all. Karen's sexuality is seamlessly written into the story. Her attraction to women is not explained or commented on. It just is as it should be only a part of who she is. The narration by Jennifer Grace is perfect. Karen's voice is strong as she recounts the events that take place in the story. She admits her mistakes, admits her fears, and allows her anger to show. She felt very real to me, like someone I would want to call friend. The other voices are equally well done by Ms. Grace. The women's voices are identifiable by pitch, accent or tone as are the men's voices. It really is a great job narrating. I enjoyed Karen Memory and was sad to see the book end. I know it will be one that I will revisit again and again.

Story (Plot) 5
Performance 5
Production Quality 5
Attention Holding 5

I originally received Karen Memory from Audiobook Jukebox in exchange for a fair review but enjoyed it so much I purchased Kindle and Audible versions.

So, here's the thing. I'm in love with a book. Which is not the same thing as loving a book, although that's also true. Or falling for a character, which is also, sadly, true. I cannot remember the last time I was so taken with a novel. The description seemed to be, well, too much. Western, steampunk, alternative history - ok. But Karen Memory is like a voice that you cannot get enough of. You know the one - it could be a baritone southern accent, enhanced by a diet of cigarettes and whiskey, or it could be a British accent, or a woman who's breathlessly musical. This is literally how it is with Karen Memory- the narrative voice is just so lovely, so engaging. The character development is simply amazing, so much so that I think that I can actually get a whiff of how different characters

actually smell. Immersive? Absolutely. I'll be very sad when it's done, I will.

I really liked this book. I am a sucker for books with narrators that have such unique and interesting voices. I loved Karen's voice with her southern-esque accent and her mannerisms. Her voices gives the book an extra oomph and made me feel as if I was living in the old west. The book doesn't shy away from showing the attitudes and beliefs people had back then, but the main characters themselves are more "modern". The book also isn't shy on showing more fantastical elements like creatures from American folktales, steampunk robots, and mad scientist. Overall, this was a fun read.

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