



The House of the Four Winds

Mercedes Lackey , James Mallory

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The tiny nation of Swansgaard is a lovely place with abundant natural resources, including the royal family, which has been blessed with twelve daughters and a son. As this boisterous baker's dozen approaches adulthood, the king and queen lovingly tell their daughters, "You must make your own fortune, for we cannot enrich you without impoverishing our people or leaving our lands defenceless, and that we will not do."

Happily, the princesses of Swansgaard are eager to meet this challenge, for they yearn for adventures both near and far from home.

Clarice, an expert swordswoman, is the first to depart. Disguising herself as Clarence, she signs on for a voyage to the New World. The captain is vile and blackhearted, and the crew soon mutinies. Clarice becomes first mate - and finds her heart captured by the new captain, Dominick, who is, to his own surprise, increasingly attracted to Clarence.

Now outlaws, Dominick and his crew turn to piracy - though their hearts are not entirely in it. They soon run afoul of the Pirate Council, who orders them to retrieve the Heart of Light. All who have searched for this great treasure have vanished, with neither ships nor crews ever seen again and no sign of their fates ever discovered.

But none before have carried with them the sorceress Shamal, who stakes a claim of her own on Dominick's heart.

The House of the Four Winds Details

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Author : Mercedes Lackey , James Mallory

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From Reader Review The House of the Four Winds for online ebook

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.com/2014/07/23/b...>

It's been a while since I've read a satisfying maritime fantasy. "I wish you luck, love, and adventure," says a character to the protagonist in the beginning of this novel, and incidentally that's exactly what we get. Starring a princess masquerading as a young man, along with pirates, magic, a secret map and untold treasures, perhaps the "adventure" part is what we get the most of all in this story that takes place mostly on the high seas.

Princess Clarice is the daughter of the Duke of Swansgaarde, the eldest of twelve girls (I know...YIKES!) and one boy. While the arrival of a son and heir apparent was a much celebrated event, this left the family with a dilemma – they cannot possibly secure the futures of Clarice and her eleven sisters, as that many royal dowries would surely bankrupt the already small and modest Duchy. The girls, therefore, were raised from an early age to be able and independent, preparing for the day they would be expected to make their way into the world and find their own fortunes.

Sometimes, I get the feeling that a book really wants you to get into the action right away. These books tend not to weave the world's history into the story and instead the authors push everything you need to know right up front. Readers of House of the Four Winds might find its prologue and the first couple of chapters to be exposition-heavy, outlining the Duchy of Swansgaarde's circumstances and thus also explaining Clarice's fighting prowess and motivations for traveling on her own to see the world. Granted, it's not the most subtle way relaying the information, but it's efficient and fast, and looking back, the introduction gave the book an almost fairy tale-like "Once upon a time..." quality, which was actually quite nice.

Then we get to the meat of the story, an action-adventure tale with a bit of romance thrown in. As the first princess to seek her fortune, Clarice has decided to play to her strengths as a sword fighter, and intends to hone her skills in the New World across the ocean. Disguising herself as a young nobleman named Clarence Swann, she is charmed by the charismatic and handsome navigator Dominick Moryet and books passage on his ship the Asesino, sailing under Captain Samuel Sprunt who is said to be extraordinarily lucky. There might have been more to Sprunt's "luck", however, as the unfortunate crew come to discover when tensions mount and an uprising becomes inevitable.

If your fancies run towards the nautical, then you'll be in for a treat. Your journey will start with the down-and-dirty details of everyday ship living, as well as meeting the various crew members and officers, all of this seen through Clarice/Clarence's eyes so it is all very natural and relevant to the young princess' learning. The authors make it a fascinating experience and the story only gets better as the events unfold, leading to a mutiny and the discovery of a hidden island controlled by pirates and an evil enchantress. Pirates, of course, are always a fan favorite. The plot is also kept fun and lighthearted with the protagonist's efforts to keep her disguise a secret, even as she begins to fall for the winsome Dominick. Mistrust between the factions aboard the ship keep the story interesting, not to mention the possibility of the crew of Asesino turning privateer themselves.

My only issue with this book involves certain aspects of the writing, especially when we are reading about significant events that I feel should hold more weight and suspense. In my opinion, these scenes weren't very well executed. Deaths of important characters were glossed over unceremoniously. Fight scenes were cut-and-dried without much sense of urgency. And of course, the prime example was the critical and inevitable moment when Clarice's identity is revealed to Dominick, and the result was a fizzle at best. There was no

outrage and no shock of betrayal, and even if Dominick were the most understanding person in the world, I would not have expected his response to be “OMG I LOVE YOU TOO!” Things tied up just a little bit too neatly. Considering how Clarice kept the truth of her identity from the whole crew for pretty much the whole book, with everyone believing she was a man this whole time, I would have expected a more realistic reaction.

These tiny quibbles aside, *The House of the Four Winds* is a fine tale of swashbuckling adventure. The story is to be taken lightly and enjoyed at face value, and the book is the boisterous seafaring romp it was meant to be. As another bonus, it wraps up nicely with satisfying ending. This conclusion along with the series name of *One Dozen Daughters* leads me to wonder if future books will focus on Clarice’s sisters’ individual journeys instead, rather than continue with Clarice herself. If that turns out to be the case, then there’s no telling the places this series can go; the possibilities are exciting and endless. Either way, I’m looking forward to seeing more.

Koeur says

<http://koeur.wordpress.com/2014/06/09...>

Publisher: Tor

Publishing Date: August 2014

ISBN: 9780765335654

Genre: Fantasy

Rating: 2.5/5

Publisher Description: The rulers of tiny, impoverished Swansgaard have twelve daughters and one son. While the prince’s future is assured, his twelve sisters must find their own fortunes. Disguising herself as Clarence, a sailor, Princess Clarice intends to work her way to the New World. When the crew rebels, Clarice/Clarence, an expert with rapier and dagger, sides with the handsome navigator, Dominick, and kills the cruel captain.

Review: Cover art is lame. Looks like the DVD cover of a bad porno...”Butt Pirates of Borneo” or “Shiver Me Timber”.

So “princess” Clarice (disguised as a man named Clarence) sets out to find her way in the world and make a living. What is weird to me, is that she cannot be a princess if she is the daughter of a Duke. She would be addressed as “Lady” were she single and then it resides in peerage depending on who she marries (Countess etc.). She eventually books passage on a suspect ship with evil officers, excepting a few. It is a short step to mutiny and the privateers life. Based on Clarice’s past, we can all assume that she is fairly pretty. It is stretching the imagination that a woman can dress up as a man, and be taken seriously as one without makeup. A corset and raspy voice would never fool anyone for long, especially in the absence of an adams apple and heavier brow. Never mind mastering a mans movements.

Princess hottie pants is eventually unmasked, and Sir Hotness Dominick loves her back, they trounce the evil witch and find treasure. The best part about this novel were the bit players and character actors in supportive roles. The main characters were kind of dull in a dimwitted way.

The mild/major detractors in this novel was the overuse of phrasing...yes phrasing where at the end of each sentence in a particular diatribe the author uses, for example, "said wryly/dryly" or "said moodily", "said grimly", "said mildly", "thought waspishly", "said quellingly" or "said repressively". I am not even sure that 'quellingly' is a normative contraction of 'quelling'. This conjunctive crap to expedite scenes can really wear on you if you let it. This author(s) must have trained at the Simon R. Green school of literature. It's too bad really, as the novel lost a rating star because of it. There was a lot of word overuse as well. For instance murmured, growled and scowled, our old friends, were back in earnest. The author must be a star trek fan as Dr. Chapman considered changing his name to Leonard DeForrest, post mutiny, in order to hide from the law. There was also a ship's mate named Geordie. Coincidence? I think not. Clarice at one point puts her hand on her saber, ready to fight. Only she uses a rapier. Sometimes it is the small details that make a difference.

Despite some writing fall downs, the plot was good and married well with the story line. The characters were interesting and the scene descriptions were vivid and well done. This was a light hearted read, not to be taken seriously. If that doesn't bother you, you can have fun with this novel and get lost for awhile.

Sarah says

28/9 - YAY!! I'm the first person I know to read this. That doesn't happen very often, usually I'm way behind the trend, reading the most popular book of the year five years after the fact. *Shrugs* There are a lot of books out there, sometimes it's hard to keep up with what's popular when it's popular.

Anyway, as I had no **trusted** friends' reviews I just had to go with the fact that I loved the cover and that the blurb reminded me of a favourite romance from the 90s - *Seduced* by Virginia Henley - which was **loosely** inspired by Shakespeare's Twelfth Night (separated twins and the girl pretends to be the boy leading to a case of mistaken identity for an unwary man). There are no twins in *The House of the Four Winds* (although you might imagine the mother of those one dozen daughters and one boy would wish there had been), but there is a case of mistaken identity due to Clarice (main character and oldest of the 'one dozen daughters') deciding that the best way to achieve her dreams of adventure is to dress as a man. So far I'm really enjoying this, it might not be high literature but at least it's lots of fun, which is more than I can say for the last few books I've read. I can't wait to keep reading. To be continued...

Later - This is an interesting combination of 1800s-ish rules, laws, manners, propriety, fashion, and technology mixed with magic that is commonplace, if not expensive, all set on what appears to be an alternate Earth. Swansgaard is a tiny nation located **somewhere** between Poland and Turkey in the continent of Eurys. So we have some of what is familiar to us mixed in with the alternativeness that makes up this different reality the book is set in. To be continued...

Later - The blurb on the inside flap says that after the crew mutinies and resorts to piracy Clarice becomes Dominick's first mate. This is completely untrue, and illogical, Kayin is made first mate after Dominick is elected captain by the crew. The likelihood of Clarice/Clarence, a landlubber who had never even seen the sea before signing on as a passenger, being made first mate is laughable and the story would have become laughable if that was what had happened. With a complete novice as first mate it would be likely that in the event of any kind of sea-going disaster the ship would capsize or descend into another mutiny, with even

more severe results than the first one. Whoever wrote that blurb needs to familiarise themselves with the story a bit more, the wrongness of that statement is embarrassing. To be continued...

Later - Okay, so now she's been made first mate and the fact that she knows nothing about ships or sailing has been discussed and dismissed as not important. She will just have to **pretend** to be an experienced first mate because she carries the talisman/medallion/map thingy (not sure why Dominick can't carry it and Kayin can't carry on being a perfectly good first mate, but anyway) and therefore must have an important enough position on board the ship to make her ownership of the medallion plausible. She talks a good game, but I hope she's a fast learner as she won't be able to talk herself out of every situation she comes across that requires the knowledge of a first mate. To be continued...

30/9 - I really enjoyed this!! A rip-roaring adventure, with a couple of annoying (but not fatal) holes. Shamal tells Clarice and Dominick that she needs someone of royal blood, a virgin, and someone who can sail the ship in order to get to The Heart of Light. Once this is out in the open, and Dominick and Clarice have admitted their feelings to each other I don't understand why they don't do the most obvious thing and foil Shamal's plan by having sex. No more virgin, no more need for the ship, and since Dominick would no longer be under Shamal's spell (broken by true love) he and the rest of the crew would be able to fight back. There's no reason to think Gregare wouldn't have done whatever it was that he did (the reason for his whole transformation thing wasn't clear to me) in my proposed situation, just as he did in the book. I definitely wouldn't call this a romance (and I'm surprised it's the second most popular shelf), while Clarence and Dominick become very good friends and Dominick comes to rely on Clarence, there is no evidence of any deeper feelings on either part until very near the end, and even then one kiss a romance does not make. I do wish it had been a bit longer. Three quarters of the book was the lead up to the big finale, but the big finale could have been much bigger and more exciting if a few more pages had been devoted to it. I will definitely be reading the next book in the series, and at this early stage I'm excited at the thought that there will be 12 more books in the series.

Lisa says

Review Posted from TenaciousReader: <http://www.tenaciousreader.com/2014/0...>

The House of Four Winds has the air of a fairy tale. A fairy tale that features pirates, nonetheless. It's an interesting setup; the royal family of a struggling land has a dozen daughters. They are each tasked with learning a trade seeing as how their family can't support them all. The eldest daughter, Clarice, takes up the sword as her trade and on her eighteenth birthday sets out to gain experience, and more importantly sets out in search of adventure!

Clarice's goal is to travel far and wide, earning a name for herself with duels so she might come back and teach others the sword as a renowned swordmaster. To best achieve this and have the greatest opportunity of success, she decides it would she should travel as a man. So, she sets out as "Clarence" and eventually finds herself aboard a ship, with high hopes and an excited anticipation of adventures to come.

For whatever reason, I love stories where a female character is living under the guise of a man for one reason or another. I also love the prospect of them being skilled in an area such the sword. So, I thought this one might be a good fit. And for a while it was. I enjoyed Clarice's character and how she interacted with her shipmates. I even enjoyed her relationship with Dominick, that is also her love interest. At least up until a point.

Now, I want to make a disclaimer. I don't often read books that are tagged romance. This one was. But every

once in a while, I like to read something a bit different. Sometimes I look for something more fun, less dark, so I'll request a book out of my normal reading range. This was one of those.

The problem for me was that it had what I could consider to be a Disney style romance. It's that quite sudden, consuming love that leads characters to say and do things that just make me roll my eyes. Actually, I shouldn't say 'consuming', because unlike some books, the focus was not lost because of romance. So I applaud it for that. I also knew going into this it was a romance, so I can't decide how to judge it. This is not my normal sub-genre and I know I am quite finicky about romance in my books. So, just because I had a negative reaction to this part, may very well have no bearing on what other readers will think of it. And to be completely fair here, I said early this has the feeling of a fairy tale story, and the ending and the romance were both very true to that form. I think for the type of story it was, it did quite well.

I enjoyed the story, but the resolution came rather sudden and easy for me, personally. Much like the romance aspect of it. It is a lighter read, perhaps that should not be a big deal, as the book was written to be a swashbuckling fun adventure. And it was, but I think I would have enjoyed it more if that part of it was either a slower build, or if the romance were left out completely. But hey, it's a fairy tale romance, it's meant to be a fairy tale romance, so you probably shouldn't take that criticism from me to mean much. I can't fault a book for being something it is supposed to be. The rest of the story I really did enjoy. So, if you are one that enjoys books with fairy tale romances like this, then it is definitely worth checking out.

Cecelia says

The first time I had a look at the cover of Mercedes Lackey and James Mallory's *The House of the Four Winds*, I thought it wasn't my sort of book. I mean, I read seafaring and swashbuckling tales with relish in my younger years, but it's not my usual cup of tea these days. Then the kind folks at Tor sent over a note about its release, and I always try to give my email an honest read before answering it, so I did more than skim the description. Lo and behold, this was a fantasy (I should have known – Lackey and all!), with a cross-dressing princess of a heroine, and the blurb promised ROMANCE. Well, who was I to say no to that?! It sounded like good fun.

Clarice is the oldest of an enormous brood of daughters (and one son) born to the ruler of a tiny principality in the mountains. Her parents can't afford dowries for their daughters without beggaring their kingdom, so each daughter is expected to go off and seek her fortune. Clarice is determined to ply her trade as a swordsmaster, but she must earn a reputation first, and that requires travel. Disguising herself as "Clarence Swann," she takes passage on a merchant vessel bound for the New World, and quickly becomes fast friends with the ship's navigator, Dominick. When sinister events and adventures threaten her life, Clarice/Clarence must use all of her resources (and rely on her heart) to come through the storm.

The first thing you should know about *The House of the Four Winds* is that my first judgment after a 5-second perusal of the cover art did not fail me. It's 90% about life on a boat filled with men, plus some violence. The other 10% of the book is split between Clarice's (somewhat boring) backstory and a magical mystery at the very end of the book. The second thing you should know is that this book didn't do anything for me. I generally like Mercedes Lackey's books (see: *Elemental Masters* series), but I didn't like another co-written book of hers, so perhaps that is to blame. The third thing? The official summary contains ALL OF THE SPOILERS. *le sigh*

Shall I catalog my disappointments? The sooner I do, the sooner I can dwell on this book's good points (and ideal readers). Number one: lack of female characters. Clarice's female-heavy family notwithstanding (and they really are off-stage, as she leaves them immediately), the female characters present in the story are:

Clarice, a virtuous white woman who is determined to look, think and act like a man at all times, and Shamal, a non-white seductive evil sorceress. Commentary: depressingly obvious. Number two: believability. Clarice's sex is NEVER discovered on a ship, over weeks worth of time. She is also an incredibly wise (but naïve in all the ways that count!) eighteen year old with no faults to speak of. Excuse me while I laugh my head off over here in the corner.

Number three (and this may well be my biggest disappointment): what love story?! I was promised a magical romp heavy on romance! It's all very much ship life, and officer/crew hierarchy, what-are-we-going-to-do-about-the-pirates?! until the last second. And then the "romance" is lightly sprinkled on at the very end. UNSATISFACTORY. Also, only one swordfight worth mentioning. Travesty, I tell you!

Finally, the worldbuilding was spotty. The magical system isn't given any depth or character, the main characters (except the villain) don't do any magic themselves, and the whole thing feels like a big cliché. It would be one thing if there was a bit of humor to lighten the tone of the story and turn it into a romp (I suppose I wouldn't mind weak worldbuilding so much then), but there's not. Instead, there's death, tragedy, uncertainty, and a lot of loose ends.

So, who WOULD enjoy this book, and/or what were its good points? I'd say anyone who picked it up for the cover won't be disappointed. There's a lot of sailing and pirating involved. Clarice's introduction to the nuances of shipboard life brought Avi's *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* and Jean Lee Latham's *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch* to mind. I also think fans of *The Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise will find much of the familiar in this tale. What I mean is, it's clichéd, and it wasn't for me, but I can see how it would be fun reading if you want a sea adventure and don't mind a fantasy without much magic. It is also a good candidate for a YA crossover title, as the romance is quite clean and the heroine has just turned eighteen.

All in all? The book's cross-dressing heroine and promise of romance did not fulfill my expectations, but the story will likely please others.

Recommended for: anyone who has been searching for *The Pirates of the Caribbean* in book form.

Holly says

The blurb and cover gave me high hopes but in the end I was really disappointed. This book just wasn't enough for me. Not exciting enough, not romantic enough, and not adventurous enough. I had to force myself to finish it and it never really improved. There were bits and pieces of interesting storyline like the secret pirate island but even that proved to be a bit dull. And it is well written I just didn't find the content very captivating.

Allison says

This is turning out to be the summer of pirates and girls disguised as boys for me, and *The House of Four Winds* has plenty of both! (Well, really only one girl.) I felt like this one finally combined all the elements of sea-faring adventure and disguise that I was hoping for in those other books. There's an unspoiled princess who is not above taking care of herself, and knows how to fight and how to read situations. There are real pirates, mutinous crews, ghost ships and treasures, curses and magic. There's even a touch of romance - very light and mild, but also sweet. All-in-all it was a satisfying adventure and I'm looking forward to reading more in the series.

I did find the very beginning of the book a bit confusing and slow because of the world-dumping, though. There was too much information for my poor brain to process - so many names of places, kingdoms, important people, references to history, etc., that I just didn't need to know about. All I needed to know is that this is a world very similar to our own geographically, back in the days of maritime trade and exploration.

The names are different, but the picture that I was finally able to put together includes a London-type city, a Europe-style continent full of small kingdoms, faraway tropical islands, and lots of ocean in between. But really, the ocean is all that matters because it's not until the ship sets sail that the real story begins. I loved it from that point on. Luckily there are only a couple chapters to set the stage before the voyage begins, so it didn't drag on for too long.

Since the series is called *One Dozen Daughters*, I'm guessing the next book will focus on one of the sister's adventures instead of continuing with these characters. It might have nothing to do with seeking a fortune at sea, but whatever the fortune is, I'm looking forward to reading about it.

***Received free arc for review.*

Anne says

This looks like it's going to be a series of books, each based on one of the twelve princesses of Swansgaard. This is Clarice's story...

Like the blurb explains, the kingdom is tiny, and her parents can't afford to marry off all of their daughters (with a nice dowry). But because they have progressive/loving/supportive/cool parents, each of the princesses has been trained in the profession of their choice.

Clarice (the eldest daughter) chose to train with a sword.

On her eighteenth birthday, she takes off to find adventure and make her way in the world as a famous swordswoman.

Now, from what I understand, that plan mainly consisted of her winning some duels, making a name for herself, and getting some students.

In order to do that, she decides to travel to this world's version of the Americas.

Of course, she ends up on a ship with an evil captain, and (after bad things happen) the crew does the mutiny thing.

As a landlubber, I had no idea this was such a big deal. Apparently, though, you're not supposed to do that sort of thing on the High Seas...for any reason.

I learned something new!

Clarence/Clarice has become close friends with the ship's navigator, and (naturally) she develops feelings for him, but can't seem to find the right time to let him know she's a girl. The romance is important to the plot, but it takes a backseat to the action and adventure stuff.

It's a nice touch, and since there's no hanky-panky going on between these two, they have to actually become *real friends*. Bonus!

Meanwhile, since this is a world with magic, they also run into some supernatural piratey stuff. They have to fight off curses, charms, and a witchy woman who seems to have some powerful hocus focus on her side.

Is it great?

No.

I've enjoyed some of Lackey's stories in the past, but this one didn't **WOW** me enough to make me want to come back and re-visit this world.

But I didn't hate it, either. It was just sort of...*meh*?

It was entertaining, and there was nothing glaringly wrong with the book, so if you're looking for a light adventure story, then this might be for you.

I was given a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Althea Ann says

Just recently, I was bemoaning the lack of good, fun pirate books. And then, entirely by coincidence, in one week I read two! (The other being Kage Baker's excellent 'Or Else My Lady Keeps the Key.')

This is a more YA-oriented adventure, but I found it to be rollicking good fun. Clarice is a princess of a small duchy. Her parents have recently produced a male heir, so they've encouraged their twelve daughters to go out and seek their fortunes. This book follows the eldest (I suspect more daughters' tales are forthcoming.) Clarice's ambition is to become a tutor of swordplay - but first she wants to travel the world and build up her reputation. For safety, she disguises herself as a man and goes by 'Clarence.' [Although, with the lack of detail provided about the difficulties of maintaining such a disguise, the masquerade could well have been eliminated.] But when she tries to book passage aboard a ship, all the more reputable ones are full up. She's leery of the captain of the 'Asesino' - but the ship's handsome navigator sways her better judgement, and soon she's at sea...

Mutiny, piracy, and sorcery - along with a bit of romance - are in Clarice's future...

I am quite certain that many of those who are expert at the sailing of ships and familiar with the facts of life at sea, will likely find quite a number of quibbles with this narrative. However, while 'Two Years before The Mast' it's not, I quite enjoyed the book. I'd recommend it for fans of L.A. Meyer's Jacky Faber series.

Much appreciation to NetGalley for the advance copy of the book! As always, my opinion is unaffected by the source...

Lia (a paper pigeon) says

me before reading this book:

me while reading this book:

me after reading this book:

(yes, I do love pirates)

Tabitha says

THE HOUSE OF THE FOUR WINDS is the kind of fantasy book you read if you want an adventure that is quick and fulfilling but not especially deep. The characters are very straight forward, and it's obvious who the villains are as well as the direction the story will take but in a way that was part of its charm. It is exactly the kind of book I want to read in a day in between heavier books that demand more concentration. I loved that this one didn't ask much from me and reminded me of the fun I had the first time I watched Pirates of the Caribbean.

When Clarice turns 18 she must leave her life as the eldest princess of Swansgarde and go out into the wider world to seek her fortune. This is because she has 11 sisters and when their youngest sibling was born a boy the line of succession was set on him. As her kingdom is so small they can not afford to supply dowries for any of the girls. This is an excellent way to set up a fun adventuring series starring each of the princesses of Swansgarde. I'm already excited for the second book to release featuring the next sister.

There do be something crooked afoot

Clarice wants to make a name for herself in swordsmanship so she books passage to the new world of New Hesperia in hopes of gaining practical experience. But the ship she travels on, the Aesisino, is in for trouble with a tyrant captain, lots of flogging and starvation rations. I loved the details that were included of how the ships crew function. There do be pirates of course, yarr, and we get them in more ways than one. We also get a handsome young ships officer Dominick, and the girl in disguise trope, which I personally always enjoy. There is magic, mystery, mutiny and light romance. And let me not forget sea serpents! What is adventure in the high seas without a sea serpent. Recommended for readers that enjoy maritime fantasy.

Olga Godim says

I received this Kindle ARC through NetGalley.

This novel promised much more than it delivered. A girl masquerading as a boy, a princess playing a common swordsman, seafaring adventures and pirates, sorcery and deadly beasts, plus a dash of romance – it should've been a fascinating book. Sadly, it wasn't.

Princess Clarice is the oldest daughter of the Duke of Swansgaard, a tiny idyllic principality somewhere in the mountains of an imaginary world. Clarice's home isn't even on most maps, and her father can't provide royal dowries for his numerous daughters. So as soon as Clarice turns eighteen, she sets out to seek her fortune. Trained with a sword, she decides to be a swordsman. And to ease her travels abroad, she pretends to be a man, Mr. Clarence Swan. This is all a back story and explained in details in the first couple of chapters.

Then Clarice buys a passage on a ship heading to the New World, and the story really starts. There is a dashing young navigator and an evil captain and a conflict brewing, but even then the plot crawls slowly. Too many info dumps weigh down the narrative, and tons of trifling minutiae hinder the action's progress. I yawned in boredom and would've abandoned the book at that point, if it wasn't a NetGalley ARC and I didn't promise to write a review. So I ploughed on. Mercifully, half-way into the book, mutiny explodes on board the ship, and the story finally picks up speed.

The second half reads better than the first. It's faster and much more interesting. The back story is already out of the way, so the authors can concentrate on what is happening here and now, on the pages. The plotline of the second half of the novel reminded me of the old Sindbad movies. The same trappings: a sinister sorceress, a malevolent spell, the heroes sailing through storms and icebergs and sea monsters, and a treasure in the end as their just reward. It wasn't original but it wasn't too bad either.

The protagonist, Clarice/Clarence was a nice cross-dressing touch, a potential source of excitement, tension, and humor. Alas, none of that materialized. For one, nobody suspected her femininity until about 80% into the book. I can't believe it, not after she spent weeks on board the ship, in close proximity to the rest of the crew, all male. Were they all blind? Of course, she wore a special corset to flatten her breasts, but surely

there are other clues.

Other than masquerading as a man, the protagonist was rather blah, a sweet, well-bred girl falling in love with a sweet man who thought her a guy and considered her a friend. And she seemed okay with both notions until very late into the story.

Another point of contention for me was that she was supposed to be a swordsman extraordinaire. There was lots of blathering about swords and fencing but only one short sword fight in the entire book. So many chances for other fights, for demonstrating her skills were wasted. They could've enhanced the story.

Besides, Clarice never practiced to maintain her skills, not once throughout the book. She just chatted with people, sulked in her cabin, and promenaded on deck with her beau.

The other characters were even less defined than Clarice. Most of them were flat and interchangeable.

Altogether, this book was disappointing.

The only thing I really liked about it was its cover and the font of the title. Esthetically, it was pleasing to the eye, probably the most beautiful pirate cover I've ever seen, if a little too sweet.

Cait • A Page with a View says

Ughhh 3 star reviews are the hardest to write because I DID like the story... it was fine. Everything was *fine*. But that's it. It's nothing memorable or even exciting enough to talk very much about in a review.

I thought the description sounded like a princess version of Lila Bard on a pirate adventure, but everything was so very bland that there was almost no adventure. The entire IDEA was fun! I should have loved what was happening in the story... but I had to work really hard to stay interested enough to keep reading. And look at that -- I've already forgotten most of it.

Katie Montgomery says

Things Katie enjoys in a novel, as correlated with Lackey et al's new novel The House of the Four Winds:

☒ Period-appropriate prose

☐ Talking cats

☒ Strong, sassy heroines who have no trouble kicking it with the boys

☒ Believable, likable characters

☐ Pandas

☒ Swashbuckling

☐ Dragons

☒ People wearing awesome hats

☐ Perfectly executed genre mashups

- ☒_X_ Fairytale flavors that induce minimal eyerolling
 - ☐___ Spaceships and/or lasers
 - ☒_X_ Princes/princesses who have their shit together
 - ☒_X_ Romance that keeps it classy
 - ☒_X_ Sword fighting
 - ☐___ Dimension-jumping
 - ☐___ Character that could be played by Maggie Smith in the BBC dramatization
 - ☒_X_ Satisfying endings
-

Nikki says

This review can also be found at my blog, *There were books involved...*

This book was *fun*. I'm a huge fan of nautical, pirate-y adventures, and in that aspect, *The House of the Four Winds* definitely delivers. It's fast-paced, and chocked full of everything a pirate adventure needs - storms, swordfights, sea monsters... If you're looking for a book with a seriously awesome "swashbuckling"/sailing-the-high-seas atmosphere, you can't go wrong with *Four Winds* .

However, for me, *Four Winds* fell short in... well, sort of, everything else...? =S I would still recommend it if you're in the mood for a lighthearted nautical adventure, but maybe *also* when you're in the mood to not dissect a book too closely, either...

The Characters

The main characters - Clarice and Dominick - were pretty good. Clarice is the most well-developed, being the narrator, and I liked her a lot. She's **smart, fierce, and not afraid to fight for what she wants**. That being said, **she didn't really have much depth to her**, either. What you see is what you get, really - at least, for the reader. It's a different story for everyone else, who thinks Princess Clarice of Swansgaard is really *Clarence Swann*. ;) **Dominick is... sweet? a really good guy?** I liked him, but again, other than details of his history, **he's pretty much what he appears to be**. A stand-up Englishman (or, this series' version of English, I guess). He's got a bit of a tragic backstory, takes most things in stride, and loves sailing. **Nothing terribly earth-shattering, but enjoyable**.

The Romance

As for the romance... well, I was decidedly underwhelmed. **The blurb says that the authors "bring romance to the fore" in this book, but I didn't feel it**. I can't say too much about Clarice and Dominick without giving away *when* Dominick finds out about Clarice (spoilers!). But disregarding the 'when', I never felt real chemistry between the two, either before, from Clarice, *or* after Dominick finds out, from either of them. Clarice tells us that she's falling for him, but once things transition into the "it's more than friendship"

stage for her, I had a hard time believing it. And once Dominick finds out she's a girl, it's sort of an immediate "okay obviously we're in love now", which felt odd. That said, **their friendship, pre-Dominick-finding-out, is wonderful**. I really, *really* liked their... bromance? :P They made an awesome team, and **it was nice to see two characters just have an easy friendship for once** (minus Clarice's eventual Feelings).

The Plot

The plot was okay - though I do feel a bit misled by the synopsis, which says that Dominick leads his crew in search of treasure in the House of the Four Winds (the secret pirate haven). **Their motivation in going to the House of the Four Winds is decidedly not treasure**. Basically - the crew mutinies and kills their horrible captain, they have to sail Somewhere in order to actually survive, and they're lucky to make it to the House of the Four Winds. After that, they run into the sorceress Shamal, who decides that she needs Dominick for Reasons, and she drags him and Clarice/Clarence and their crew on a Quest. (At that point there's spoilers, so I'll stop.) Anyway, this was definitely a case of, "Where's the driving plot behind all this stuff? Is it really just the character arcs? Because these characters aren't strong enough for this." Basically I just felt like, **after the mutiny, everything just happened to the characters**, as obstacles for the sake of some excitement.

In conclusion...

There are a few other issues I had with the believability and convenience of certain events (disregarding that this this a fantasy), but I don't want to get into that too much here. Despite its flaws, this book is *fun*! **It had all the scaffolding to make for a fun pirate story, but you can't wiggle the supports too much, otherwise it starts to fall apart**. (Please forgive the building metaphor, construction is not my thing! :P)

Also, I'm not sure why this book isn't being marketed as YA, because **it definitely felt appropriate for a YA audience**, and might actually be a bit too... I don't know, *tame*(?) for Mallory's and Lackey's usual adult audience? I don't think there's anything in it that would prohibit it from being sold in the YA section, maybe as 14+. This might be another reason I was a little underwhelmed with this 'adult' title - there wasn't any grittiness to it. It really was like the synopsis says, a "**swashbuckling**", "**charming**", "**lighthearted fantasy romp**", and that's pretty much it.

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There were books involved...
