



Strange Men in Pinstripe Suits & Other Curious Things

Cate Gardner

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Zombies, robots, and dragons, oh my! A collection of strange, surreal, and magical short fiction from Cate Gardner.

Strange Men in Pinstripe Suits & Other Curious Things Details

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Author : Cate Gardner

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From Reader Review Strange Men in Pinstripe Suits & Other Curious Things for online ebook

Philip says

There's something wrong with Cate Gardner. If you don't believe me, try reading Strange Men in Pinstripe Suits. Clearly, something in her imagination is connected backwards or upside down or inside out. Yes, that's it - something in her brain has been connected inside out so that all the bizarre, twisted thoughts normal people keep trapped inside their skulls come leaking out onto the page. It's the only explanation.

But that's a good thing.

The twenty four stories in this unsettling collection are some of the most deliciously skewed stories I've read in some time. In his introduction, Nathaniel Lambert likens Cate Gardner's writing to Lewis Carroll and that comparison is probably apt. You can never be quite sure what you'll find when you turn the page and almost every story seems to have its own brand of sinister undercurrent. Even the stories where the sinister is front and center have another layer of sinister underlying the first.

My favourite stories were Cold Coffee & Curious Things (a dark tale of a girl called Alice and the mysterious visitors that keep dropping by the hospital room she's trapped in), Parasol Dance with the Chalkstripe Man (a girl auditions for a high wire act in a circus) and The Moth Brigade (a robot firefighter and the last human firefighter team up to take on...well you'll have to read it).

I do recommend you read this book one story at a time. Read a tale, then let it skulk around in your subconscious for a while - see what it dislodges.

Strange Men in Pinstripe Suits is a very refreshing collection of weird fiction and I'm looking forward to trying Cate's latest book - Theatre of Curious Acts.

KV Taylor says

Let me say first that I consider Cate Gardner a friend. Disclaimer and all that.

But truly, this is a collection of short stories unlike any other I've seen, which is saying a lot. Cate's singular way with delicate worldbuilding, fragile characters, and powerful emotional punches makes for a most original set of fairy tales. Dark and disturbing like a fairy tale should be, but innovative. They have a way of inducing a kind of quiet longing, sometimes even vicarious regret, that's oddly addictive. They always carry you away to the strangest places. Yes, sometimes peopled with equally strange men in pinstripe suits.

Personal favorites, if I had to pick, would be:

- The short, painful "Burying Sam"--which is the first story of Cate's I ever read, a few years back, and rather than losing anything on re-read, seems to gain much.
- "The Moth Brigade"--which is particularly incredible for the ache it left me with. I think I might love Michael.
- "Empty Box Motel"--which nearly made me cry, but in the "god, that's gorgeous" way.

Jeremy Brooks says

This is a great collection of twisted little tales...Cate has an incredible, seemingly limitless imagination, and a talent for building the most bizarre, surreal worlds and drawing you into a day-in-the-life of the often broken inhabitants. The unique storytelling makes you want to go back and re-read right away, just to get the full "what the **** did I just read" effect. Imagine Tim Burton doing lime jello shots with Aesop, and Cate was there to transcribe the discussions. Good, mind-bending read.

Mary Rajotte says

I think many people get the wrong impression of horror. It's almost a dirty word in some cases, as it conjures up images of blood-soaked axes and mask-clad madmen.

Not that there's anything wrong with that. I'm a horror lover through and through, and I am obviously not averse to the use of a little grisly gore to get the blood pumping.

But these days, authors everywhere are experimenting when it comes to horror fiction, and Cate's book is a shining example of how one can add magic, surrealism, lyricism and beauty to the blood-soaked genre, and come away with something that is beautiful in its darkness.

Strange Men in Pinstripe Suits is like a perfect chocolate-box of dark fiction — delectable and indulgent, with hints of both sweetness and darkness.

With both shorter and longer pieces, as well as some prose mixed in for good measure, this sampling is meant to be enjoyed as you fancy.

Feel like indulging in a little fantastical fiction? Or maybe have a craving for something sinister or macabre?

There are stories for every palette here, and Cate's intoxicating way with words will leave you wanting more.

There is atmosphere in every tale, like in The Scratch of An Old Record, where the sound echoes "along the upstairs hallway" and the mood creeps yet still manages to entice.

Not only do I envy Cate's ability to weave these magical tales that entrance the reader so fully, she also masters the craft of creating titles that conjure up stark images that immediately draw one in.

From The Moth Brigade:

"Michael's metal wings folded back as he tried to fade into the backdrop of the underground train."

From Opheliac:

"Perched on a rusting shopping trolley, three fathoms below the surface, the man in the top hat and pinstripe suit wound a necklace made from teeth and bone around his knuckles."

From The Forest Of Discarded Hearts:

“On a Tuesday morning in October, Ruby Ash discovered it is possible to disappear overnight; that all it takes is someone willing to wish you away”

Whether Cate is telling the tale of a curmudgeonly writer and the man in the white jacket who could be the answer to his lost nightmares (*Insomniac Ink*), the story of Sally Stevens and the magic parasol that allows her to fly as high as the heavens (*Parasol Dance With The Chalkstripe Man*), or the Grim Reaper Man and his below-world (*Other Side of Nowhere*), each tale feels like a curious adventure into the daydreams of fairies, ghosts and other night-dwelling creatures.

If you are looking for a book that will treat you to an otherworldly adventure without ever leaving your room, *Strange Men in Pinstripe Suits* offers readers a sneak peek into wondrous worlds where, underneath the darkness, the unusual and the strange are illuminated.

Jan says

This was the first book I won via the Goodreads First Reads Giveaway, and I'm glad it's a book I really liked. (Nothing more annoying than receiving a gift you end up disliking - it always seems like such a missed opportunity).

When it arrived I did a little dance and immediately started reading. And stopped after the first one paragraph story to take a deep breath. Short as *Dandelion Fluff* might be, it sets the tone of Cate Gardner's collection perfectly. I was bewildered and wondered what it was I just read. I read it again and still didn't quite understand what it was all about. So I decided to read the next story, *The Graveyard of Dead Vehicles* and found myself equally bewildered, but also enthralled.

This is a collection filled with weirdness, strangeness and mysterious things. Often I had to reread a story, because I was sure I missed a little detail that would make me understand what just had happened. And I always found something new, but it more often than not added to the bewilderment.

But I think that's actually one of the themes that runs through this collection. Almost all characters are somewhat out of place. There's a great line in *Trench Foot* that sums it all up:

“Sometimes Amelia forgot she was living with people who existed on the wrong side of reality.”

It's like you step through a different looking glass for every story, and the end result is this marvelous experience of alternate realities that are often slightly creepy and surreal, but also leave a definite sense of wonderment.

After a couple of stories I started to wonder about overlapping storylines and developed some conspiracy theories - I'm still 50% sure the recurring Men in Pinstripe Suits are some sort of secret organization ALA Men in Black, only not for aliens, but for the weird.

Or maybe for the lonely. A lot of Gardner's characters are dropped in a situation out of their comfort zone or understanding, and have to face it by themselves, often with sad or gloomy results. Most heartbreakingly was the girl who tried to get her heart back in *The Forest of Discarded Hearts*, or the girl missing time in *Cold Coffee Cups & Curious Things*.

This isn't a collection you can rush through - there's so much going on in so few words, and your mind needs time to process the surrealism. Ideally you let each story simmer, with a cup of tea and a comfort blanket, and find yourself grabbing the book again the next day, for another taste.

I'm not sure what to compare this collection of Gardners style with, because it's a combination of so many things. So instead of failing at comparing, or trying to explain further what it's all about, I'll just urge you to try it out.

If you're wary of trying out a new author, quite a lot of her stories can be found online, or in various magazines, of which you can find a list on Gardners website

Highly recommended to short story fans, lovers of the surreal and weird people.

Annette M Guerriero Nishimoto says

Today's review is on Strange Men in Pinstripe Suits by: Cate Gardner

I was sent a friendly challenge by a friend of mine to read this book and review it "if you dare".

So, M.B. here goes.

I would have to say that this was one, if not THE strangest collection of stories that I have yet to come upon. After reading just the first; Dandelion Fluff, I knew that I had no idea what I had gotten myself into by accepting my friends challenge. First off, as I usually read novels, it was a bit difficult for me to stay motivated to keep reading. Just as I was getting into the story it seemed to end. This however is no reflection on the writer. In fact the writing is fantastic. Each story has a "creature, feature"; (a tv series popular in the 70's), feel to it. That said, many of those shows gave me the creeps, not to mention nightmares.

I would have to agree with Nathaniel Lambert; the author of the introduction, likens this collection to a sort of "Wonderland fable" in which Alice was shoved "face-first through the looking glass", and then had to describe what she saw. However, I would like to add that I think everyone else in Wonderland, as well as perhaps Alice, may have been on Crack!

At the very least I have learned two things. One: I need to watch a happy Disney movie tonight before I go to bed. Two: Question book recommendation from M.B.

I give it 5 out of 5 stars just for creeping me out so much.

MW says

One of the many things I had enjoyed about this book of short stories, was that each tale was different. Cate Gardner tried her hand at many genres, ranging from fantasy to science fiction. Of all the tales, I had particularly liked "The Moth Brigade", "Empty Box Hotel" and "The Graveyard of Dead Vehicles." Each had an eerie, unstable quality to it that I had always craved for when looking for new books to read: something unique and not moulded to a cookie cutter standard of what fiction should be. I look forward to her future work.

Gef says

I won a copy of the erotic horror anthology, *Cthulhurotica*, from Cate Gardner back in March, along with which, she sent me a copy of her own short story collection, *Strange Men in Pinstripe Suits*. Well, as curious as I was to see what *Cthulhurotica* had to offer, I was even more curious to finally dive into a heaping pile of Cate's short fiction, as I've enjoyed the stories of hers that I've found across the internet with various online magazines.

If you're unfamiliar with her work, I guess you could say she specializes in the weird, because many of her stories are told in such a way as if you're seeing them through a funhouse mirror. "Fantasy" is a broad brush that might not do her work justice, so I'll stick with "weird."

There's over twenty stories in this collection, of varying lengths and styles. After a nice introduction from Nathaniel Lambert, the book kicks off with a one page story called "Dandelion Fluff" that works well to set the tone for the rest of the book.

A few of the standout stories for me were "The Forest of Discarded Hearts", "The Sulphurous Clouds of Lucifer Matches", "Frog and the Mail Order Bride", "The Moth Brigade", and "Trench Foot". Some stories have been published before, like "Trench Foot", which I first read online at Fantasy Magazine, while others are brand new, appearing for the first time in this collection's pages. If I had to pick a favorite, I'd likely go with "The Moth Brigade" for its blend of science-fiction and fantasy--and I'm a sucker for a good robot story.

So many of the stories have a whimsical feel to them, they border on the surreal. And what stories don't start off with a feeling of falling down the proverbial rabbit hole, carry the sensation of having already face-planted into Wonderland with a resounding thwap. Cate's stories are invariably fun to read and I look forward to when she starts cranking out the longer works, as well.

Kawana says

The stories in this book are like a succession of grotesque dreams of the very best sort, the sort where you wake up and wonder if they might not be untrue and perhaps await somewhere in some twist of the day; they haunt long after being read.

They are stories whose each peculiar flavour is not only worth savouring, but to which I feel that tearing through them would be a disservice to both their twisted brilliance and to oneself.

Miss Gardner's style is one of a kind, of a weird, fantastic, grotesque, surreal, brilliant kind, and if that description sounds at all intriguing you would render yourself a great boon to read anything she's written.

Josephine Bird says

I really enjoyed this book. The stories are varied and interesting. I'd definitely read more from this author.

Craig Hallam says

A wonderful collection of the oddest stories you will ever read. Gardner renders her prose with a dream-like quality that has you hooked from start to finish. If you miss it, you're missing out.

Mike says

'Parasol Dance with a Chalkstripe Man', 'The Scratch of an Old Record' and 'Empty Box Motel' were my fave stories in this wonderful collection of uniquely whimsical horror stories.

DeAnna Knippling says

Cate Gardner's collection of short stories makes me incredibly jealous, so jealous, in fact, that I had to put the book down and walk away several times. It's as though a modern-day woman had picked up where Lewis Carroll left off, and was writing for the grown women that Carroll's little girls would have eventually become. Which is to say, she writes nonsense, the very best kind.

Freda Mans-Labianca says

For a collection of short stories, this has to be one of the best I've read!

There were so many different stories, werewolves, zombies, and even stranger still. This book was captivating from beginning to end.

The difference in stories didn't bother me at all. Each one had a start, middle and end, so it all fell together nicely.

In the end my lasting impression is: groovy!

4.5/5

E. says

The landscape here is strange and if you see a man in a pinstriped suit along the side of the broken road, you are advised not to stop. Keep your windows drawn shut and if you're walking, run.

Still, you may be inclined to slow. I know how these things go. You will want to collect the postcards from this strange world. You will pause outside the tents, peer inside. In most cases, you will allow yourself to be drawn deeper, to see the young girls in their candy-colored dresses, to stroke your fingers over the fluff of a dandelion, to hear the possible rumbling of a scarecrow's stomach. You will want to know why the men in the pinstriped suits do what they do, and how the frog came to meet his bride. You will bring a paper bird home as a souvenir.

This land may be called Wonderland or Nowhere, but whatever the name, Gardner maps it with careful, melancholy strokes. Where the map wanders is where it grows most distinct; "above us there is no sky," and yet we don't seem to care, transported to moments where we don't need a sky.

Strange Men in Pinstripe Suits collects twenty-four stories from Gardner (ten of them exclusive to this volume), each one a strange and wonderful discovery. Gardner knows her way around this world and effortlessly gives readers a behind the scenes tour.
