



Upright Women Wanted

by Sarah Gailey, Fiction, originally published 2020

Available electronically at
Clarkston Independence District Library (CIDL)

- OverDrive/Libby in Audiobook
Read by Romy Nordlinger, 3 hours and 52 minutes
- Hoopla in Audiobook

Also available in Audio book on CD and in print in our library, 167
printed pages

Reviewed by Cherie P. Bowers, Librarian, MILS

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Esther needed to get away from the town where she grew up. So, she climbed aboard an outbound wagon and told a lie. That's where she traded one kind of trouble for another.

In Sarah Gailey's Science Fiction & Fantasy novel, we learn about a different breed of Librarians in the re-imagined American southwest. Under the leadership of the no-nonsense Head Librarian, Bet, and her mate Leda, this band of women travel by wagon and on horseback to remote outposts to deliver Approved Materials along their route.

Esther is a young woman who's paid a heavy personal price for violating the social norms of her community under the watchful eye of her father, the Superintendent of the Lower Southwest Territory. By falling in with the Librarians, she learns the rhythms and routines of their ways. She comes to understand learning how to take a punch to the face is just as important as using her sewing skills to mend broken book bindings.

Among their group is Cy, an Apprentice Librarian whose pronouns are they and them on the trail and she and her in towns. Esther is warned to keep those distinctions clear. To get it wrong is a matter of life and death.

At 167 printed pages, the action of Gailey's novel moves quickly. There's a minimum of scene description. The writing is clear without much time spent on the backstory of each character. There's a hint of government military involvement on foreign soil through the mandatory showing of "Why we fight" movie reels in the local theaters. But, the main focus is firmly on the activities of the Librarians.

It's a tale of unexpected twists and turns with shifting loyalties. Who are these Librarians? At the end, readers experience a different novel than they started. It's also an interesting demonstration of how a gender fluid character is described using their pronouns of choice depending on the setting. This can be a little confusing at first. But, as the reader gets to know more about Cy, this becomes easier to follow.

Esther learns quickly her presence in the group is both a help and a burden. The Librarians face multiple challenges as they pick up and drop off their packages. Esther needs to decide in seconds who she is – for her own safety as well as that of the Librarian community.

Even though I've never read anything quite like this novel before, this western has a hopeful ending with Librarians riding off into the sunset.

Other books about misbehaving librarians owned by CIDL

The Invisible library (Fiction) by Genevieve Cogman, 2016, Book 1 in the Invisible Library Series, available in Overdrive/Libby in Ebook and in print in our library, 341 pages

Deal with the devil (Fiction) by Kit Rocha, 2020, Book 1 in the Mercenary Librarians Series, available in print in our library, 336 pages

The Bad-Ass librarians of Timbuktu: and their race to save the world's most precious manuscripts (Non-Fiction) by Joshua Hammer, 2016, available in Hoopla and Overdrive/Libby both in Audiobook (8 hours or 9 hours and 2 minutes) and in print in our library, 278 pages

Other books by Sarah Gailey owned by CIDL

River of teeth (Fiction) 2017, Book 1 in the River of Teeth Series, available through Hoopla in Audiobook (4 hours and 1 minute) and in print in our library under the title *American Hippo*, 298 pages

Taste of marrow (Fiction) 2017, Book 2 in the River of Teeth Series, available through Hoopla in Audiobook (4 hours and 15 minutes) and in print in our library under the title *American Hippo*, 298 pages

Magic for liars (Fiction) 2019, available through Overdrive/Libby and Hoopla both in Audiobook (9 hours and 8 minutes) and in print in our library, 336 pages