

Book of the Week

Where angels tread:

Diaspora of the Discombobulated is lively, thought-provoking and spiked with humorous wordplay.

By David Steinberg For the Albuquerque Journal

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“*Diaspora of the Discombobulated*” is the title of a new book from the imagination of award-winning Placitas author Mary E. Carter.

The title will probably dispatch you to a dictionary to look up diaspora with a lower case “d,” which means a scattering of people, and to Diaspora with an upper case “d,” which refers to the scattering of the Jewish people.

Discombobulated? Well, it’s a cute tongue twister of a word that means confused.

The title notwithstanding, the major theme of the book is guardian angels. A question is printed across the top of the book cover — “Do you believe in Guardian Angels?”

Look, there’s one standing in front of the character, a human, named Chava in her studio with “wings trembling.” What’s an angel without wings? But trembling!

Chava gestures for the guardian angel to have a seat on the sofa, and describes her thusly: “She is magnificent in her disarray, with a curious and somewhat tattered splendor.”

Get this: The angel is wearing a name tag identifying her as Hannah-Naomi and her company’s name as Gig Guardian Angels LLC. Obviously, this segment is set in the present-day United States. Chapters mostly alternate between the points of view of Chava (perhaps joined with the author’s voice) and with the Guardian Angel Hannah-Naomi, who informs the reader that she’s been around since before recorded time.

The author said in an interview — just as Hannah-Naomi tells the “Creation Director” in the book — that “from Anglicanism to Zoroastrianism, every major and many minor religions have explored guardian Angelship. Whether believers or not, great minds of all sorts have addressed guardian angelic qualities, attributes, even negative aspects.”

Carter has been researching guardian angels for two years and said she has made a point to look up every source she could find on them. The back of the book has a full page of “selected references.”

There are several quite surprising digressions in the book.

One is when Hannah-Naomi wants to shed her heavenly role as a guardian angel and become a human. She has fallen in love — in lust? — with a male named Gershom Holder, one of her human charges.

To achieve that unusual transformation, she must get prior approval from the creation director. Is Hannah-Naomi going to be branded a fallen angel? Will Hannah-Naomi be allowed to return to guardian angel status if she is displeased with or if she has misjudged Gershom’s reciprocal behavior?

An unexpected digression is the sudden detour to the canine world with the introduction of a dog, a golden Labrador retriever named Golda or Goldie. The lab lives with a cat in a studio of an artist — spelled ar-dist — and speaks intelligently to readers that guardian angels are capable of protecting animals as much as dogs, in particular, comfort and protect humans. Goldie has been doing her job.

A third digression moves from a discussion on whether the phrase “words can’t kill” is in error and that maybe words can kill or hurt or embarrass, etc. That segues to an exploration of Al Chet, Hebrew for the confession of sins on Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of repentance for words spoken and actions taken that have caused pain in the previous year.

Carter’s book is self-identified as a novel. That seems to apply to some of the chapters or sections of chapters. But the book meshes or shifts back and forth between fiction and nonfiction realms.

There are segments that contain references to Chava’s life at the same time they seem to resemble the author’s recollections of stages of her own life — adolescence, college days, years working in the advertising business.

The book’s tone is lively, thought-provoking, conversational and spiked with humorous wordplay. Which characters in the book might the “discombobulated” be? Readers have choices.

