

Daring Damsel Defies Death

Historical action thriller a winner

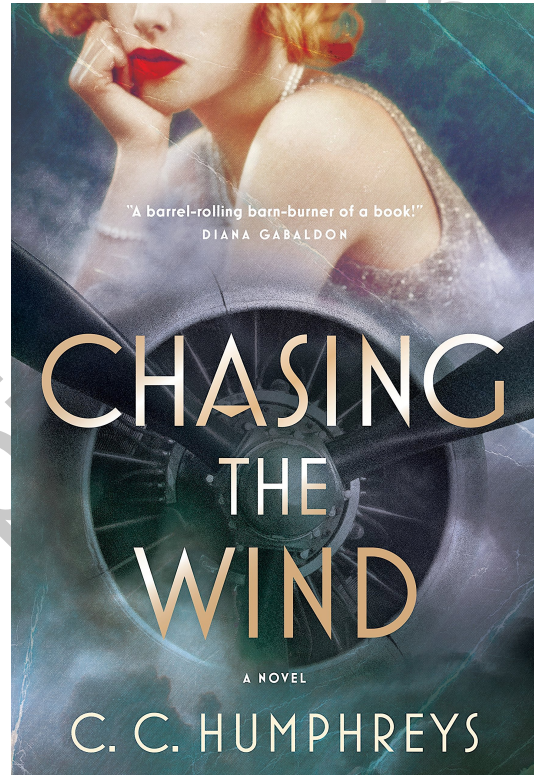
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Full disclosure: I'm not a huge fan of action thrillers. Often the characters are unconvincing, larger-than-life cardboard cutouts that can do no wrong and who somehow contrive to escape from circumstances that would spell the end for lesser mortals.

That said, I was utterly charmed by Roxy Loewen, the feisty, indefatigable, but fallible heroine of Canadian-born C. C. Humphreys' latest novel, *Chasing the Wind*. Roxy is an aviatrix in the America of the late 1920s and 30s, friends with Amelia Earhart no less, and will, before the tale has ended, make at least a nodding acquaintance with such notable figures of the day as Hermann Göring, in a bid to prevent him from holding onto a previously unknown yet priceless painting—not because of any political views, but because she needs the painting, or rather the wealth that it represents, to extricate herself from crippling family debts and secure her independence.

She's aided in her quest by fellow pilot Jocco Zomack, who couldn't be more different. Jocco is an idealist, with sympathies for communist causes and the rebels fighting a civil war in Spain. It's an uneasy alliance, and one that will come back to



haunt the intrepid Roxy before the tale has ended. Together they face a truly sinister adversary named Sidney Munroe. He's responsible at least indirectly for Roxy's father's death, and he wants the painting, together with all of Roxy's family inheritance. Did I mention that he's also friends (if that's the word for it), with Herr Göring? Not an easy man to like, then.

Deftly combining elements of the politics of the day, art history, and the cataclysmic end of the Hindenburg,

Humphries weaves an action-packed tale of a headstrong young aviatrix who has witnessed her father's death, and who is in a fight to the finish of her own with his killer.

The writing is absolutely first-rate. Consider this passage, when Roxy has taken a plane (not her own) to avoid the police and the clutches of Sidney Munroe, and injured, makes her escape:

Roxy reached the low ceiling, burst through and kept climbing. The world went dark for a while. The buzz of good whisky had dwindled to a residue of pain. But it was all she had left of her father so she clung to it. All she had left of her mother was the rabbit's foot on the chain around her

neck. Thinking of one, clutching the other, she cried now, because she could; because she was alone and not even God could see her in these clouds. Great shuddering sobs came, snot and teardrops freezing on her face. Up and up she went, with her sorrow, until it got hard to breathe and she thought she'd never make the summit. Then, in a heartbeat, grey nothing turned to brilliant sunshine, Levelling, she rode the cloud tops north.

Combining escapist fun in a well-told action thriller that has than a nod to history, *Chasing the Clouds* begs for a film treatment that will do it justice.

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Jim Napier is a professional crime-fiction reviewer based in Canada. Since 2005 his book reviews and author interviews have been featured in several Canadian newspapers and on multiple websites. His crime novel *Legacy* was published in April of 2017, and the next in the series, *Ridley's War*, is scheduled for release in the Fall of 2018. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com

