



Out Of Play

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Gillian Campbell is out of patience.

Her husband is choosing his hobby over her. And the hobby in question? Live Action Role-Play, or 'larp'. Larp involves dressing up as a character (be it medieval knight, banshee or centaur) and participating in imaginary battles for entire weekends.

Gillian is not impressed. She seeks professional advice and is surprised when her therapist encourages her to try larp. *Who knows? It may make you smile. It may make you laugh. It may even improve your sex life. How terrible could it be?*

The advice seems super sketch to Gillian, but she decides to don a costume and give it a go. If larp doesn't work a marital miracle, Gillian will be able to walk away knowing she tried absolutely everything before giving up.

Will going on her own role-play adventure heal Gillian's marriage, or will the game shed light on everything that is wrong?

Out Of Play Details

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From Reader Review Out Of Play for online ebook

Sophie says

Netgalley copy in exchange for an honest review.

Gillian is really not happy with her life. Her husband is spending all his time playing a live action play game, and he's clearly neglected her and their marriage. She can't take it anymore. She tried everything, from including him in renovating their house to seeing a therapist...

Except taking part in the game itself.

Would that be enough to save their marriage?

I really loved that book. Gillian's voice is witty and sweet - it just feels right, and it's nice to read. She's relatable and very strong, which makes her a very loveable character. You can't help but rooting for her.

The story feels realistic as well - it's well researched on some parts - the addition of two points of view gives an insight on both parties: life is unfair.

You can't help but wanting to know, so you have to keep reading. And I read the whole book in one sitting, it's that quick and good.

It's a story about love, friendship, grieve, trust... And it was beautiful and I loved it!

★★★★

Maureen Moyes says

MoMo's Book Diary enjoyed Joy Norstrom's "Out of Play" and recommends as a great 4 star read.

This is a great book and all LARP-widows will love it!

Joy Norstrom has written a great book here and it was a joy to read.

The main characters, Gillian and Ralph, have hit a rocky patch in their marriage and Gillian is seeing a therapist who has some strange ideas but Gillian goes along with the plan – she is willing to try anything to save her marriage.

I have not read another book which looks at Life Action Role Play (LARP) despite it being very popular in today's world. There is a serious side to the book but there is also a good dose of humour meaning the book stays light and an easily entertaining read.

Sincere thanks to author, Joy Norstrom, and publisher, Crooked Cat Publishing, for opportunity to read this funny book via Netgalley prior to its release date.

Layla (Between the Lines) says

I received a free copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley. This in no way alters my opinion of the work.

I feel like I should preface this review by letting you know that I'm only a few years older than Gillian's goddaughter. Gillian's best friend, Jas, is essentially my mother's age. So I shouldn't have enjoyed this book, right? **Wrong.**

This book was a pleasant surprise. If I'm being honest, I usually avoid stories that revolve around marriage, separation, and the rebellious children that are the result of those two things. It was bad enough witnessing my own parents separate three times. I have no desire to remind myself of that awful decade. So for all intents and purposes, I should have ignored this book... but the Larp drew me in, and the Larp held me close.

I had already read two books yesterday, so I thought I would read a few chapters of **Out of Play** before bed and then finish the rest this morning. But I was wrong, *again*. I kept reading and reading until the next thing I knew, there were tears in my eyes, a stupid smile on my face, and the clock read far after midnight. So, yeah, you could say that I really enjoyed this book. I loved it.

The synopsis tells you what you need to know. Gillian seeks out a therapist with only one purpose, really: to have someone else reinforce her idea that Ralph is in the wrong, and that his Larping is ruining their marriage. Gill's tendency to "talk at" Ralph and his tendency to fall into silence really rubbed me the wrong way. It's clear that he gave up trying to argue with her a long time ago. He probably felt like he was walking on eggshells around her, like nothing he could say or do was right, and that made me really sad. They were both resigned from this relationship. When the therapist suggested that Gillian try out Larping, I was on board. Not just because we could get to read about it (which honestly was the best part) but also because it would get Gillian to actively participate in the marriage again, and hopefully result in Ralph doing the same. Things don't always go as planned, of course, but what needed to happen... happened.

Even though this book is all about the Larp, it also talks about love, grief, and loss. Despite the accompanying tears, I did finish this book with a smile on my face. This is a testament to Norstrom's writing. It was witty and entertaining, and I found myself chuckling at all the same things Gillian laughed at. It was written very well. I honestly wish the book were longer.

All I can say is, sign me up! I'm looking forward to reading more from Joy Norstrom.

Cheri says

I received an ARC of this book from Net Galley in exchange for an honest review

The premise of this book seemed interesting to me. Although nobody in my family is a LARPer (that I know of!) I am surrounded by the type of guys who would possibly do that. My oldest goes to conventions and often does cosplay when he goes. So I kind of get it.

Although I really enjoyed the writing style and the story pulled me in, this was a slow starter for me. I can't pinpoint the reason though. Of course the beginning is all set-up which is needed, but that's nothing new. There's a possibility that it's because I wasn't a huge fan of the heroine, Gillian. As the reader, I could totally see where she was going wrong and got frustrated that she wasn't able to open her own eyes. Don't misunderstand, I didn't dislike her. I just wasn't all in with her yet. As much as she frustrated me, I've known real people who have reacted the same way when knee deep in marital ennui.

By halfway through I was all in and had even thought I may give this book more than the 3 stars I was initially thinking it deserved. I still wasn't thrilled with Gill's way of dealing with her issues, but somewhere along the way I decided to have her back.

All along I just loved the relationship Gillian had with her best friend, Jas, and her goddaughter, Jas' daughter Arianna. It was real and rough and loving and dirty and deep. They were her support system when she didn't even realize they were the ones lifting her.

Where this book transformed for me was when Gillian's truths started coming out. Now, most readers will figure out at least the basics of what caused the problems in Gill and Ralph's marriage. It's the execution of the reveal; the heart-wrenching eye-opening that Gillian has to go through to truly heal. These are the things that suddenly catapulted this book to damn near perfect in my eyes. I cannot even describe the feelings that went through me while reading the last few chapters. After the light humor through the beginning, things got super real. Having some of these scenes play out in middle of a LARP event kept them from totally burying me in emotions since there was still that element of oddness.

Joy Norstrom has a bright future in writing ahead of her.

Jacqueline Aubin says

I found protagonist Gillian to be one of those rare individuals who is witty, slightly neurotic, loyal, and intelligent. She is a woman who finds herself at a pivotal point in her life and in her marriage, and in dealing with it all she manages to put herself in more than a few amusingly awkward situations. When husband Ralph becomes fixated on his LARP hobby Gillian handles this new challenge in her relationship in an unexpected and hilarious manner that had me shaking my head and admiring her simultaneously.

Everyone needs a friend like Gillian, and her best girl friend Jas, is fortunate in this regard. The easy friendship between Gillian and Jas is among my favorite parts of the story; the delightful way these two women are sounding boards for one another, and their unfiltered insight and candor with each other is realistic and enviable.

With so many books focused on finding Mr. Right followed by a wedding, I love how this book focused on the period afterward (post wedding), the true-to-life marriage part of the relationship. Gillian and Ralph's marriage has had its share of problems and as a reader I kept rooting for them to figure things out.

I highly recommend reading *Out of Play*; it is a funny-yet-serious-un-romance. I consumed this book. It tugged at my heartstrings and made me laugh (especially the yoga scene). The dialogue was relatable and the characters were authentic.

The author, Joy Norstrom, has a unique voice, writing style, and unconventional approach to storytelling that

cleverly balances genuine life problems with humorous scenarios. I look forward to reading more from this debut author.

Karlita | Tale Out Loud says

Life was changing. Changing in ways we hadn't expected. Changing in ways we weren't quite ready for.

Gillian Campbell, married for fifteen years, felt her life was just like a passing day—an everyday routine which includes a heated discussion with her husband about his ridiculous hobby of "**live-action role playing or larping**". With their current roommate-like situation rather than intimate lovers who almost never been like a married couple, Gillian decided to see a therapist to help her save her marriage tainted by past memories and pain, suppressed but never forgotten.

Ralph Campbell always thought that Gillian never supported him especially on anything that has something to do with his weird hobby. He felt rejected. The only thing Gillian has done whenever there was a chance of interaction between them was to complain on how embarrassing and childish his own version of enjoyment was.

When Gillian's therapist suggested that she should be open on trying something what Ralph's love to do, she decided to at least be interested until she gave in and joined a weekend of larping as an NPC (*non-player character*) volunteer, only because she wanted to prove Ralph how unreasonable his priorities were.

There she realized that it wasn't bad after all. But a lot of unspoken emotions surfaced without warning. Could this be the way for them to finally get connected again and get the splinter out of their relationship or would it just endlessly outsized the gap between them?

The issues on both characters were real even if most of the story was set in the fantasy world of larping. I understand why Gillian and Ralph found something to do with their own lives separately. They wanted to fill the void missing in their relationship—the connection that was once there and the visibility of spark that's pouring out excessively before everything happened.

I was rooting for Gillian because I knew that she just wanted Ralph's attention and to spend a quality time with him. But as I dive in to the story, I was able to know Ralph better. He used larping as his only way of dealing the **REAL** problem—an escape, an alternate reality or parallel universe that stroked more appealing than the constant nagging of his wife or the awkward silences they usually have.

It felt like they didn't even know each other. **Gillian's trust was sparse. Ralph was becoming more distant.**

I love how the writing quality was **simple yet gave a credible and impressive structure to the story** with an **on point plot, genuine characters** and an underlying topic about friendship and parenting.

Joy Norstrom was not afraid to stress out how **marriage could be imperfect**—a strong, positive message about the real battle you face because in any kind of relationship, it's always going to be a two way process where you have to exercise patience, trust and understanding. **She was able to point the flaws without romanticizing the truth.**

Out of Play is **unpretentious, convincing and honest**. A story which tells you that life is not always going to be great. Sometimes it gets unhappy, frustrating, vexatious but you have to hope against all odds and preserve an unbreakable bond of *'for richer and for poorer, till death do as part'*.

Open, communicative, and trusting marriages don't just happen. They take hard work.

*****Thank you to Joy Norstrom for providing me a copy of this book in exchange for a fair and honest review!**

Links to buy:

Amazon | Barnes & Noble | Google Play

About the Author:

Joy Norstrom is a Canadian coffee-a-holic. She lives in Calgary, Alberta and enjoys hiking with her family, wine with friends and reading late into the wee hours when she should be sleeping.

She is also a mother and a social worker. When she's not parenting, championing inclusion, or getting lost in a good read, she can generally be found in conversation. A people-person by nature, she looks forward to meeting with book clubs both in person and online.

Website | Facebook | Twitter | Instagram

Carrie says

Gillian Campbell has come to the point that she has no idea how to save her marriage and decides to start seeing a therapist. The problem to Gillian is that her husband would rather focus on his new hobby, LARPing or live action roll play, than have anything to do with her these days no matter how many times she tries to talk to him.

Gillian's therapist asks her to try not complaining of her husband's hobby but perhaps she ought to give it a shot herself, maybe just maybe Gillian may find this fun or at least understand her husband better. Renting her own costume and volunteering for the weekend Gillian sets off on her own role-play adventure in hopes of saving her marriage.

Out of Play was one of those reads that pleasantly surprised me more and more as I read through the pages. The idea of the live action role play seemed to be an interesting setting to focus a story around and I was glad to be right in that regard. The setting led to some rather humorous moments as Gillian dove into this world she didn't understand.

But once getting passed the situation in the book that has brought the main character to try such an unique event I was wondering just where this story would lead. Would Gillian turn into one of those over reacting females that can be somewhat of a turn off? Just when I began to question things the author flips the story into one that is quite emotional catching me again off guard so color me quite impressed with combining so much into a somewhat short little story that truly had me feeling for these characters.

Overall, quite enjoyed this emotional little tale from the beginning humor to the ending that may require

some tissues. Great story with a unique setting.

I received an advance copy from the publisher via NetGalley.

For more reviews please visit <https://carriesbookreviews.wordpress....>

booksofallkinds says

OUT OF PLAY by Joy Norstrom is a funny, often poignant, look at marriage and what can happen when the spark of romance seems to have died and been replaced with boredom and resentment.

Gillian is fed up with her husband Ralph. Feeling like they are room-mates rather than partners, Gillian is determined to figure out a way to fix Ralph - after all, it is his fault that he disappears most weekends LARPing with his friends (that is Live Action Role Playing for those who are unsure). So spending more time doing yoga, meeting up with her best friend Jas who has her own issues, and seeing a therapist, will surely provide her with the answers. But when the therapist suggests that Gillian should make more of an effort and join her husband on the weekends and become a part of his hobby too, Gillian is definitely unsure. But surely it is worth a shot, right?

With plenty of hilarious escapades, misunderstandings, and tender moments, OUT OF PLAY by Joy Norstrom is a story about real life and realistic problems, with characters that are flawed and more likeable for it. While I did find the pace slow at times, it didn't stop me from enjoying this story and all that it had to offer. I really enjoyed the LARPing element as it was fresh and different, but I have to admit I did not know too much about this type of hobby before reading this book.

OUT OF PLAY by Joy Norstrom is an enjoyable tale about marriage and the messiness of life and would appeal to all contemporary fiction fans alike.

*I voluntarily reviewed this book from the author

Grass monster says

I was drawn to this beautiful bright cover at first, the blurb sounded interesting but didnt quiet fit with the cover. I wanted to read this as I had never heard of Live Action Role Play (LARP) Nor did I know anything about it. I have to admit for me it was a slow start, but hey I have given it 5 stars so it must get better right?. Trust me it does and I didnt want it to end, neither did I feel ready saying goodbye to Gillian, who I felt had become my best friend.

Meet Gillian Campbell, a huge Yoga fan after needing time and space away from her husband Ralph's obsession with LARPing. Ralph prefers to run around a forest with his friends banishing a foam sword and living in a make believe world rather than spending time with her. Gillian meets with a Therapist and wants to try and change her husband and their marriage. The Therapist suggests she go along as an 'out of play' helper to see what this LARPing is all about and maybe open Gillian up to new possibilites rather than rejecting her husbands hobby.

As we go on this hilarious journey with Gillian, I could not put the book down. I had so much fun with her hiding behind bushes, cooking for players, trying to spy on her husband, meeting new people and being put

in some awkward positions. I found myself Laughing out loud on more than one occasion. We had some surprises in store and I thoroughly enjoyed this story. Gillian had a great supporting cast, best friend, Jas, and her goddaughter, Jas' daughter Arianna. The story had a great little mix of people. Joy Norstrom, certainly did her homework and I can imagine had so much fun researching and writing this.

Gail Atkins says

A married couple's marriage is suffering due to a lack of communication. Both having different interests which leads to them leading almost separate lives.

Gillian goes to see a therapist who suggests that the couple need to start being a couple again.

How could they do this when Ralph spends every weekend LARPing (Yes I had to look this up!), wasting money on equipment?

Gillian confides with her best friend Jas, about her plan but Jason isn't convinced it will work.

Can this couple mend their relationship before its too late?

Catherine Franssens says

Out of Play is brilliantly crafted and deceiving in its simplicity. The light, accessible writing style lures us into initially trivializing Gillian's martial issues... the same way she trivializes her husband's hobby. We think "if only she were a more open, loving person... Ralph, albeit passive aggressive, seems like a pretty good guy... so what's the problem?" But as the book unfolds, we learn that LARP is serious to those that partake in it; that beneath the surface the issues between Ralph and Gillian are real and pervasive; and that this book has serious depth. The readers' journey with the book mirrors that of the characters and their marriage – a testament to the true craftsmanship of Joy Norstrom's writing.

While the novel has serious structural chops, it never loses its light, human touch. The subject matter is treated with both sensitivity and a sense of humor, and the story holds the reader's interest throughout. The characters are superbly real, complex, and flawed human beings – they could be the people next door, our friends, us. So much so that there are no protagonists or antagonists – just a bunch of real people trying to relate to each other as best they can. Which is exactly what Gillian finds out about LARP.

Aside from Gillian and Ralph, there is also Jaspreet, Gillian's over-reacting best friend. Jas is the perfect foil and in many ways decoy to Gillian's dismissiveness. Gillian sweeps her true feelings under the carpet, while Jas comes to unreasonable conclusions. Gillian backs away from conflict, while Jas seems to come out guns blazing. The interplay of the two characters propels the plot forward, all the while clouding our judgement of the true story until it is ready to emerge.

I'm giving Out of Play a five-star rating, because it has accomplished what so few novels in this genre have – remain light and entertaining without sacrificing quality either in the writing or structure of the story.

Susan Hampson says

After being married for 15 years the spark between Gillian and her husband Ralph has diminished to the point of the only couple of things they really have in common is living in the same house and not really liking each other very much. Gillian is irritable and hates the fact that Ralph escapes once a month for a whole weekend away Larping (Live Action Role Play). Now I hadn't a clue what this was but it comes down to role play over different eras, where battles are reconstructed. It isn't that Gillian wants Ralph to particularly do anything with her that one weekend each month, but she certainly doesn't want him to have time out and fun either. In fact to say it really frustrates her and winds her up would be a gross under statement and she lets him know that.

Something has to be done so Gillian takes herself off to see a Therapist. It was more she needed someone to say 'fair play, you gave it your all and it didn't work so leave him' but what she got was 'try Larping yourself, you may even like it'. So Gillian didn't get her 'Get of the this marriage free card', she had to give it one more resentful go so she could leave with a clear conscience.

I really liked poor Ralph from the start because boy did he have something to put up with but it isn't always what we say that means the most but what we don't that speaks volumes. This couple has one heck of a lot of work to be done, if they are going to survive.

This really is a book that I jumped to conclusions and made judgements on far too soon, definitely a lesson to be learnt, as it developed into a multi layered story that really took my breath. There were plenty of laughable incidents but blimey does Joy Norstrom know how to knock you off your feet. There are some of the most tense and tender bear your soul moments in this story that I have read.

I find it hard to believe that this is Joy Norstrom's debut novel, this is a beautifully written story that I felt humble to read. It makes you realise just how much you take for granted. I really hope there is more to come from Joy Norstrom very soon.

Christy says

This book is a realistic portrayal of marriage and what can happen if you and your partner retreat into yourself and not into each other. I correctly guessed the tragedy that spent years driving this couple apart. The book is a lesson on how NOT to deal with an unpreventable tragedy; after reading it I feel like I will long remember the lessons. I found the characters realistic (in all their flaws), but still relatable and ultimately, likable. I definitely recommend reading this powerful but relatively quick read.

Joy Norstrom says

Hello everyone! This is my debut novel, coming out October 27th. I'm excited to share it with you, and I'm hoping you may be able to help get the word out by adding it to your to-read list. Thanks for your help!

Esther says

Thanks to the author for providing me with a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Joy Norstrom, a debut author, will be on my list to keep in mind when looking for a good book. This first

book contains well thought through characters, real life problems and a lot of feelings. I think a big audience will like this book and you should give it a try if you like raw, emotional books that contain the hard parts of life.

A longer review can be found at [Bite Into books](#)

A great debut. What you see is what you get, Joy is not making life better than it is. Raw, pure, full of emotion and very real characters. I hope more is to come from Joy Norstrom!
