

The Bookworm presents Shelf Awareness for Readers for Friday, June 26, 2020

From: The Bookworm Omaha (bookwormomaha@shelf-awareness.com)

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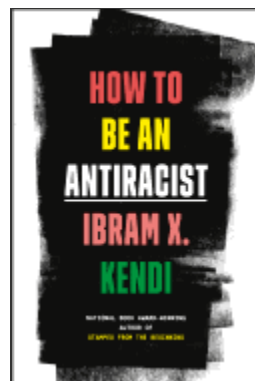


Friday, June 26, 2020

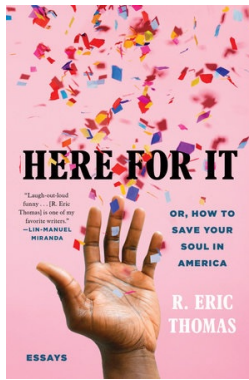
From the Shelf

A Literary Pride Parade

Pride celebrations look a little different this year; Covid-19 has resulted in the cancellation of most Pride parades, and the murder of George Floyd has led to protests across the world in the name of Black lives and racial equality. The push for equality for the LGBTQ+ community has been, and continues to be, intertwined with the push for racial equity (look at the activists who led the Stonewall uprising in 1969). So while you wait for your backorder of Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Anti-Racist* to arrive, why not consider marking both

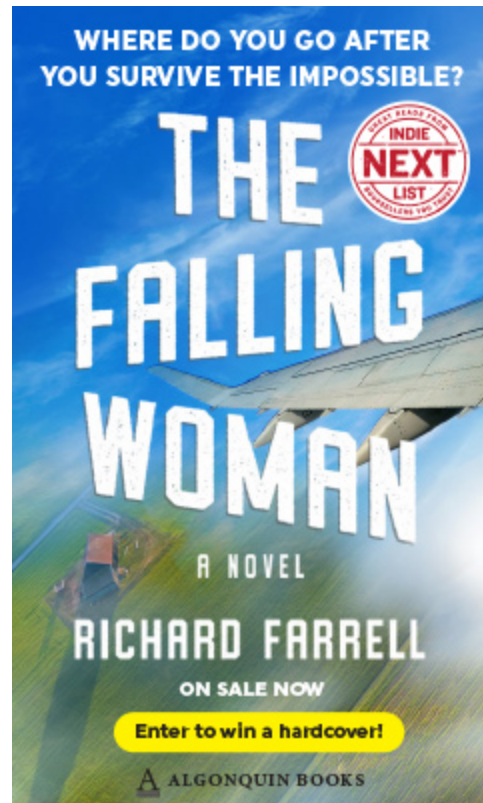


movements with a book by one of these Black LGBTQ+ authors?




R. Eric Thomas (the columnist behind the popular "Eric Reads the News" on Elle.com) uses his charming sense of humor in *Here for It: Or, How to Save Your Soul in America* (Ballantine, \$26), his first collection of

essays, to explore his life as a gay, Black, Christian man and what it means to be different--and to be one's truest self. If you need a good laugh and also want to examine the very real, very large issues facing our world today (racism, pride, religion, and mental health, to name a few), look no further than Thomas's excellent collection.

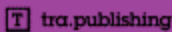


If fiction is more your



Celebrate Pride 2020 with *Heroes: A Tribute*.

Artist Doug Meyer pays homage to 49 creative pioneers who died of AIDS in the epidemic's early years. Meyer's innovative, sculptural portraits and the accompanying biographical text are a moving tribute.



for her younger sister, satisfying her mother, and exploring her sexuality; in *Patsy*, Dennis-Benn peels back the layers of motherhood in the story of a Jamaican immigrant living in New York--with her only daughter.

Books About Remaking the Future

Up next for me is Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* (Grand Central, \$16), which has been highly praised by many literary outlets (including this one). Our reviewer called it "riveting and peeling a variation on coming-of-age."

Rediscover Carlos Ruiz Zafón's *The Writer's Life* (Doubleday, \$14.99).

Alex Sanchez and L.C. Rosen's *Coming Out, Superpowers and Camp* (Doubleday, \$14.99) is a hilarious and poignant collection of essays.

KIDS BUZZ

See what authors are saying about their books! [Click here.](#)



Reviews



★ *All My Mother's Lovers* by Ilana Masad

On a series of emotional road trips, a young queer woman tries to understand her absent, disapproving mother after her sudden death.

[Read this review >>](#)



★ *The Groom Will Keep His Name: And Other Vows I've Made About Race, Resistance, and Romance* by Matt Ortile

A whip-smart essay collection explores the intersection of

race, sexuality and identity through the lens of one queer immigrant's personal history.

[Read this review >>](#)



★ [The Circus Rose](#)
by Betsy Cornwell

This imaginative and strange young adult fantasy is a queer reimagining of "Snow White and Rose Red" that takes place in a magical circus.

[Read this review >>](#)

Reviews by subject:

[Fiction](#) · [Romance](#) · [Biography & Memoir](#) · [Performing Arts](#) · [Children's & Young Adult](#)

What The Other Three Don't Know
SPENCER HYDE

"This novel is *The Breakfast Club* meets *127 Hours*. Recommended."
-School Library Journal

ENTER GIVEAWAY

Book Candy

Books About Remaking the Future

Just in time: author Peter F. Hamilton picked his ["top 10 books about remaking the future"](#) for the *Guardian*.

Martin Amis ["explains his method for writing great sentences."](#) (via *Open Culture*).

"A new archive digitizes [more than a century of Black American funeral programs.](#)" (via *Atlas Obscura*)

"[Five tips for raising a reader](#)" were offered by the New York Public Library.

"This [incredibly detailed Sino-Tibetan book](#) was printed more than 40 years before the Gutenberg Bible," *Colossal* reported.

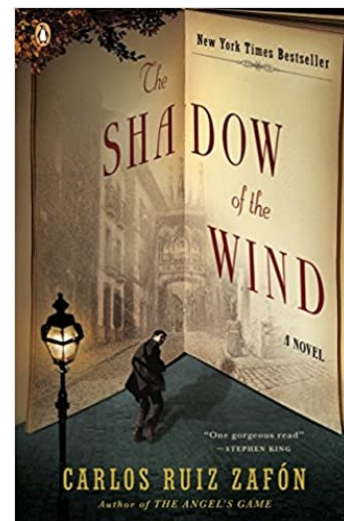
Artist Alexis Arnold "has created a fascinating project in which [she crystallizes books of all types and sizes](#) so that they appear to be solidifying and rearranging atoms." (via *Laughing Squid*)



Great Reads

Rediscover: Carlos Ruiz Zafón

Carlos Ruiz Zafón, whose novel *The Shadow of the Wind* "became one of the best-selling Spanish books of all time," died June 19, the *New York Times* reported. He was 55. Published in 2001, *The Shadow of the Wind* was translated into dozens of languages and has sold more than 15 million copies worldwide. Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* is the only Spanish novel that has sold more copies, according to his publisher, Planeta. Ruiz Zafón's debut novel, *The Prince of Mist* (1993), was written for a teenage audience and won him the first of many literary awards. *The Shadow of the Wind* was the first title in a four-part project called "The Cemetery of Forgotten Books," which also included *The Angel's Game* (2008), *The Prisoner of Heaven* (2011) and *The Labyrinth of Spirits* (2017).



Ruiz Zafón's literary agent, Antonia Kerrigan, recalled her first impressions of *The Shadow of the Wind*: "Carlos had been very successful with his young-adult books, and he had no real need to switch to an adult novel. But authors sometimes want to enlarge their vision of the world, and he clearly felt the time had come for him to do just that." Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez of Spain paid homage on Twitter to Ruiz Zafón, describing him as "one of the most read and admired Spanish authors worldwide," adding: "Thank you for letting us travel through your stories." *The Shadow of the Wind* was last published in 2005 by Penguin Books (\$18).

"READING
ALWAYS THE QUEEN:
THE DENISE LASALLE STORY
IS LIKE EATING CANDY."

Southern Soul RnB



The Writer's Life

Alex Sanchez and L.C. Rosen: Coming Out, Superpowers and Camp

L.C. Rosen, aka Lev Rosen, writes books for people of all ages, most recently [Depth](#), [Jack of Hearts](#) (and other parts) and [Camp](#), available now from Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. Rosen lives in New York City with his husband and a very small cat.

Alex Sanchez has published eight novels, including an American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults [Rainbow Boys](#); the Lambda Award-winning [So Hard to Say](#); and the reimagined DC [Aqualad](#) origin story graphic novel, [You Brought Me the Ocean](#) (reviewed below). An immigrant from Mexico, Sanchez received his master's in guidance and counseling and worked for many years as a youth and family counselor. Now, when not writing, he tours the country talking with teens, librarians and educators about books, diversity and acceptance. Sanchez lives in Penfield, N.Y..

Here, Sanchez and Rosen discuss coming out, Rock Hudson and writing sex-positive works for teens.



L.C. Rosen

L.C. Rosen: Hi Alex! It's so wonderful to talk to you. I recently finished *You Brought Me the Ocean*, an origin/coming-out story for DC's Jake Hyde, aka Aqualad. I feel like the idea of "coming out" as a hero has been a metaphor queer people have seen forever in comics, so I really loved the way you took both coming out as powered and coming out as queer and twisted those together to create reflections of each other. Did you want the two kinds of coming out to bounce off each other?

Alex Sanchez: When DC asked me to pitch an initial idea, they specifically asked for a story that included queer teen sexuality. So it made sense from the get-go to have the twin

story lines of coming out as gay and as super-powered bounce off each other. The fun in the writing was to see how those two plot/character arcs could intersect and resonate with each other.

I loved *Camp* and I'll ask the question that I'm sure you'll get asked a lot....



Alex Sanchez

[Read more >>](#)



From Author **Kathleen Varn:**

Get your Beach Read ON!

Grab Copies of *Gardenia Duty* and
Ameera Unveiled TODAY!

www.KatVarn.com



Ameera Unveiled
ISBN: 9781642377545

AND

Gardenia Duty
ISBN: 9781642370485



Book Reviews

Fiction

★ *All My Mother's Lovers*
by Ilana Masad



[MORE INFO](#)

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All My Mother's Lovers, Ilana Masad's debut novel, is an empathetic portrait of a difficult mother-daughter relationship intercut with grief, road trips and queer romance. The novel begins with 27-year-old Maggie Krause returning home after her mother's sudden death. Maggie's grief is complicated by long-held resentments: her mother's frequent absences and her seeming refusal to accept Maggie's queerness fractured their relationship. Maggie finds an excuse to escape the unbearable grief--and long, painful shiva--filling her childhood home when she discovers a series of letters her mother has left behind, addressed to men Maggie has never heard of. In one of a series of arguably selfish choices--Maggie is young, figuring herself out, and no saint--she decides to leave her grieving father and brother and deliver the letters in person, initiating a series of road trips to find out who these men are and what they meant to her mother.

All My Mother's Lovers is about rediscovering Maggie's mother, a contradictory, surprising woman who Maggie, as children often do, has inadvertently rendered into a two-dimensional figure. In a way, it resembles a coming-of-age novel, inasmuch as learning to forgive and accept your parents--and the insecurities they've handed down--is a critical part of growing up. Maggie is a strong-willed young woman who throws herself into risky situations and says what's on her mind. Whether she wants to admit it or not, a lot of that comes from her mother. *All My Mother's Lovers* is a raw, emotional book about acceptance and the kind of complicated, messy love that sometimes takes years to comprehend. --[Hank Stephenson](#), manuscript reader, the *Sun* magazine

Discover: On a series of emotional road trips, a young queer woman tries to understand her absent, disapproving mother after her sudden death.

Dutton, \$27 hardcover, 336p., 9781524745974

The Tree and the Vine

by Dola de Jong, trans. by Kristen Gehrman



[MORE INFO](#)

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Originally published in 1954, Dola de Jong's *The Tree and the Vine* was a groundbreaking portrayal of lesbian lives in Holland just before the outbreak of World War II. Bea, a shy office worker and the narrator of this story, keeps to herself and considers social activity a chore, until she meets Erica. Within weeks, they become roommates, and Bea is increasingly fascinated by her heedless new friend: Erica, a journalist, keeps strange hours and doesn't seem to sleep. Her moods vacillate. Over many months, the pair becomes close, and Bea is simultaneously obsessed and resistant to her own feelings, telling herself that independence is paramount.

As the threat of a German invasion grows, Erica gets involved with several female lovers, often in abusive relationships, while Bea plays the loyal friend always there to bail her out of trouble. On the brink of war, realizing that Erica is half Jewish and engaged in risky behaviors, Bea takes a half-step toward recognizing what they share. "She never spoke those few words again.... We've accepted it, each in our own way."

The tone of *The Tree and the Vine* is often elegiac; what is most important almost always goes unsaid. In a thoughtful translator's note, Gehrman mentions linguistic peculiarities of de Jong's original: Anglicisms and words and expressions from the French, for example, which Gehrman has worked to maintain, and her delicate

handling of Dutch idiom. She argues that *The Tree and the Vine* is not just a lesbian novel but "reflective of a broader female experience." By turns emotional and restrained, this powerful story indeed offers valuable perspective on the human experience. --[Julia Kastner](#), librarian and blogger at [pagesofjulia](#)

Discover: This sensitive novel illuminates women who love women in pre-World War II Holland.

Transit Books, \$15.95 paperback, 150p., 9781945492341

Fiebre Tropical by Juli Delgado Lopera



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The potent sights, sounds, smells and textures of Miami don't begin to compare with the vibrant, witty interior of a Colombian immigrant teen discovering herself in Juli Delgado Lopera's dazzling first novel, *Fiebre Tropical*.

Francisca is an unhappy 15-year-old when her single mother, Myriam, transplants the family (which includes younger sister Lucía and grandmother Alba) to Florida from Bogotá. While living in a rundown townhouse, they're swept into the evangelical currents of Iglesia Cristiana Jesucristo Redentor, along with Tía Milagros, Myriam's sister, already deeply invested in the church's social pageantry. Frustrated by the move, Francisca resists this unfamiliar brand of religion, so fixated on eternal life. Meanwhile, she watches her sister embrace it thoroughly, mother descend into depression and grandmother sink into alcohol. Nothing gives Francisca joy except for the bubbly feelings she begins having for the pastor's daughter, Carmen.

A nuanced tragicomedy, *Fiebre Tropical* is an outstanding work of fiction by a transdisciplinary artist who has already earned several awards for previous work, including a Lambda Literary Award for the anthology *¡Cuéntamelo! Oral Histories by LGBT Latino Immigrants*. Delgado Lopera seamlessly slips between English and Spanish throughout the novel, so monolingualists may want to have a translation app handy for full comprehension. But context more often than not brings absolute clarity in this fabulous coming-of-age story, whose rejoinders like, "I wondered what exactly Mami revealed about our house to the Pastora that made her think we all wanted to spend our afterlives together," impeccably balance humor and pathos. --[Dave Wheeler](#), associate editor, *Shelf Awareness*

Discover: A Colombian teen with a sharp sense of humor develops a crush on the pastor's daughter while managing the discomforts of living with an unhappy family in a new city.

Amethyst Editions/Feminist Press, \$17.95 paperback, 240p., 9781936932757

The Knockout Queen
by Ruffi Thorpe



MORE INFO

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In novels that are centered on a close friendship, it's often depicted as an overwhelmingly positive force. In *The Knockout Queen*, Ruffi Thorpe presents a friendship that is equal parts life raft and anvil, and she shows that loyalty can be much less interesting than volatility.

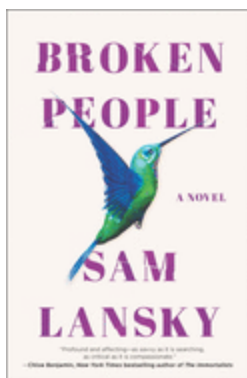
The Knockout Queen's narrator, Michael Hesketh, has been living with his erratically employed aunt in Southern California's affluent North Shore since he was 11, but he doesn't meet Bunny Lampert, his next-door neighbor, until they're both in 10th grade. Bunny doesn't care that Michael is gay, and he commiserates with her about being a 6'3" giantess by the end of their junior year. They bond over having alcoholic fathers and absent mothers, and fearing that no one will ever find them beautiful.

The Knockout Queen is an unexpectedly gorgeous suburban gothic about what, if anything, we owe our nearest and dearest. Thorpe, who has also written the novels *The Girls from Corona del Mar* and *Dear Fang, with Love*, spends the first quarter of *The Knockout Queen* doing prep work, fruitfully gambling that her loose-limbed but assiduous characterizations will hold readers' interest until she springs her plot, which entails a series of distressing events that take place during Michael and Bunny's senior year. As Michael puts it, "Overnight, Bunny had gone from being the princess of North Shore, happy, popular, a varsity athlete, and daughter of one of the most influential men in town" to being, well, something else entirely. --[Nell Beram](#), author and freelance writer

Discover: This outstanding novel of friendship, starring two teenagers who bond over their outsider status, has no time for the quaint notion of unconditional love.

Knopf, \$26.95 hardcover, 288p., 9780525656784

Broken People
by Sam Lansky



MORE INFO

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Can a tortured soul rewrite his history and free himself from the shackles that have bound him to a life of shame?

Sam is a 28-year-old gay man in Los Angeles, the author of a memoir about drug addiction and several years sober. Despite these accomplishments, Sam lives in a prison of his own mind--an imposter yoked by self-obsession, dissatisfaction with his body and paralyzed by the belief that he is undeserving of true happiness. He doesn't want to die, but rather "coast into a static condition of un-being.... Certainly," Sam fantasizes, "that had to be better than sustained consciousness." When he overhears someone at a party say, "He fixes everything that's wrong with you in three days," Sam figures he has little to lose.

The "he" in question is Jacob, a practitioner of "transdimensional intercession," who uses ayahuasca as the vehicle for transformation. Accompanied by Jacob's chanting and drumming, Sam drinks hallucinogenic tea and embarks on three days of intense self-reflection. The memories that occupy him show flashes of elusive happiness, but more often he's debilitated by shame of his body and the unattainable demands that drove away the men he was close to, especially his true love, Charles. Incapacitated, will Sam find the strength to challenge the stories he's told himself and achieve the happiness that has eluded him?

Lansky's memoir, *The Gilded Razor*, chronicled his battle with addiction, and he successfully transitions to auto-fiction with *Broken People*. He disarms readers with incisive observations and sharp humor to counter the constant drumbeat of negative thoughts, and provides hope for those consumed by destructive self-importance. -
[Frank Brasile](#), librarian

Discover: With wit and insight, a tormented writer seeks to liberate himself from his demons through an ayahuasca ceremony.

Hanover Square Press, \$27.99 hardcover, 304p., 9781335013934

Romance

Something to Talk About
by Meryl Wilsner



MORE INFO

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A shared laugh on the red carpet is all it takes to ignite rumors in Meryl Wilsner's charming romance debut, *Something to Talk About*. Chinese American screenwriter and former starlet Jo has a great working relationship with her much younger Jewish assistant, Emma, but is it more than that? The media, fed by tips from an on-set leak, surely seem to think so.

As they try to keep a professional distance while working in close proximity, the rumors have Jo and Emma seeing each other differently--a situation that becomes ever more awkward as their relationship evolves: "The rumors would have kicked right back up if people saw them like this, looking like lesbian aunts cheering on their siblings' kids. Emma was even wearing *plaid*."

Over the course of a year, the two women navigate their age gap and power imbalance, a sexual harassment incident with another character and the hazards of figuring all of this out in the public eye. Wilsner takes care with both the power dynamics between Emma and Jo and the sexual harassment subplot, but makes sure to add enough banter and behind-the-scenes Hollywood tidbits to keep the narrative from feeling too heavy.

Something to Talk About is primarily a slow-burning romance, and Wilsner keeps readers invested through strong characterization, a cast of endearing secondary characters and a healthy dose of humor. Readers looking for two smart, ambitious and big-hearted women will find a lot to talk about in this sapphic story. --[Suzanne Krohn](#), editor, *Love in Panels*

Discover: Told with humor and grounded in the realities of being a queer woman in Hollywood, this is the perfect slow-burn, low-heat lesbian romance for readers looking for a soft, sweet escape.

Berkley, \$16 paperback, 336p., 9780593102527

Biography & Memoir



The Groom Will Keep His Name: And Other Vows I've Made About Race, Resistance, and Romance
by Matt Ortile

In "Barong Tagalog," the first of 10 essays, Matt Ortile sets the tone for what is to follow in the sharp and insightful *The Groom Will Keep His Name*. Ortile uses his experience as a "young queer and brown immigrant" as a



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lens through which to view the world. He picks apart the lasting legacy of colonization and assimilation, the role of the "model minority" and what it means to be persecuted because of your differences. "For me," he writes, "part of decolonizing has been to hold myself more accountable, to think more critically about my actions and experiences as a gay Filipino immigrant; my writing is part of that project."

The Groom Will Keep His Name is an invitation to join Ortile in that critical thinking. What can we infer about belonging if a gay man uses the social networking app Grindr to hook up with men, based not on their appearance but their apartments? What does a scholarship student owe his alma mater, and vice versa? What does it mean to be a citizen of two countries, when neither seems particularly welcoming? Ortile never asks his readers to answer these questions directly, nor does he answer them for anyone but himself. Instead, he weaves together a series of personal stories and reflections--some funny, some sad, some scandalous, some touching. Readers interested in topics of race, identity and relationships (and how the three are inherently related) will enjoy every essay in Ortile's polished collection. Those reading with a critical mind will perhaps find themselves thinking differently about their own experiences, and how they relate to the larger world. -- [Kerry McHugh](#), blogger at [Entomology of a Bookworm](#)

Discover: A whip-smart essay collection explores the intersection of race, sexuality and identity through the lens of one queer immigrant's personal history.

Bold Type Books, \$16.99 paperback, 336p., 9781541762794

Fairest: A Memoir by Meredith Talusan



MORE INFO

For Meredith Talusan, transformation looks like this: "Sun Child," "Harvard Man," "Lady Wedgwood." In the nimbly titled *Fairest*, award-winning journalist Talusan shares an unflinching exploration of identity. "Mirrors were not just mirrors to me," she writes in her prologue, "but bridges made of light to fantastic destinations, where I could be different than myself and lead a better life."

Born in the Philippines, Talusan had blonde hair and blue eyes that marked her as an "*anak araw*, a sun child." Assigned male at birth, her albinism made her "fair and beautiful," pampered by her grandmother, who was her primary support. At 14, her estranged parents and younger brother posed as a family unit for immigration approval to

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California. In becoming American, "I perceived myself to be a white person of European descent when I looked in the mirror." Despite impossible obstacles, she arrived at Harvard, joining the class of 1997: "Maybe this was the place where I could erase everything about me that didn't add up or make sense, the place where I could finally belong."

As a "Harvard man," Talusan explored sexuality, inspired by one of her first classes, "Topics in Gay Male Representation." While she eschewed lasting love as an undergraduate, she fell into a committed relationship with an MIT professor--nearly Prince Charming with his British title and inherited wealth--and considered life as "Lady Wedgwood." Her eventual transition to Meredith, "released after a lifetime of hibernation," will be what leaves her "finally satisfied with staying put." Confronting race, colonization, gender and sexuality, Talusan's fierce quest for acceptance becomes an evolving odyssey navigating contemporary queer identity. --Terry Hong, [Smithsonian BookDragon](#)

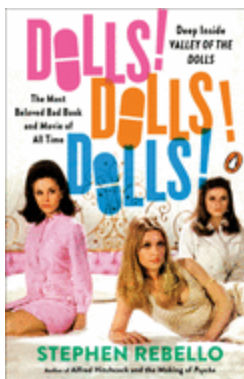
Discover: Meredith Talusan, assigned male at birth, documents her peripatetic journey from a Filipino boy with albinism to an award-winning journalist with a Harvard degree.

Viking, \$27 hardcover, 320p., 9780525561309

Performing Arts

Dolls! Dolls! Dolls! Deep Inside Valley of the Dolls, the Most Beloved Bad Book and Movie of All Time

by Stephen Rebello



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Stephen Rebello (*Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of "Psycho"* and *Bad Movies We Love*) is the perfect author to chronicle how Jacqueline Susann's 1966 novel *Valley of the Dolls* and the 1967 film adaptation overcame universally negative reviews to become one of the top-selling novels of all time and a beloved celluloid camp classic. Rebello succinctly sketches Susann's hardships and triumphs. Prior to writing *Valley*, she had a son with severe autism, and she received a cancer diagnosis resulting in a radical mastectomy. Thanks to relentless and imaginative self-promotion, *Valley* stayed on the *New York Times* bestseller list more than a year and, at its peak, sold 100,000 copies a day. Rebello explains how Susann's "mink-and-mascara-lined kitsch milestone" tapped an audience who didn't normally read books.



When 20th Century Fox bought the movie rights, it hired a top director, two award-winning screenwriters and several Oscar-winning actors. How the movie went so terribly wrong fills the majority of the book with deliciously juicy firsthand observations. It was, according to Rebello, "a production riddled with infighting, feuding, tension, tragedies, missteps, and double dealing." Judy Garland was hired and fired after 10 days of shooting yielded only 90 seconds of usable footage. Patty Duke later quipped, "I realized another month into the filming that Judy was the one who got off easy." Like the novel, the film was critically drubbed but a massive hit. Against all logic (and Susann's lawsuit), the studio began working on a sequel.

Delectable gossip and exhaustive research combine to make *Dolls! Dolls! Dolls!* delight and sparkle! --[Kevin Howell](#), independent reviewer and marketing consultant

Discover: Rebello uncovers a treasure trove of delicious gossip, fights and lawsuits as he charts Jacqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls*' transition from bestselling book to camp classic movie.

Penguin Books, \$17 paperback, 352p., 9780143133506

Children's & Young Adult

★ *The Circus Rose*
by Betsy Cornwell



[MORE INFO](#)

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Magic and gender are explored in Betsy Cornwell's ambitious *The Circus Rose*, a reimagining of "Snow White and Rose Red" set against the vibrant backdrop of a circus.

In Esting City, Ivory and Rosie are twins--with different fathers. Raised in the Circus Rose, a traveling show, the sisters, along with their mysterious bear companion, are inseparable. Their mother is the bearded lady and ringmistress; their friends are contortionists, dancing boys and other performers. The twins are part of the act, too: Rosie swings up high on the trapeze while Ivory is the stagehand. "She shines, and the world basks in her light," Ivory reflects, "I stick to the shadows." But changes are happening in Esting City and the circus is in danger. The Brethren, religious fundamentalists led by the unscrupulous Brother Carey, are gaining social power and condemn anything that strays from the "light." The Circus Rose is deemed sinful. Ivory, Rosie and Bear must face the evil priest to save the circus and their found family.

The Circus Rose features dual points of view, Rosie's passages in dreamy verse and Ivory's in grounded prose. Cornwell's evocative storytelling begs to be reread and, though the twins are of different races and Cornwell's construction of race could have been stronger, she still assiduously interrogates outdated social constructs. Ivory's love interest, Tam, the show's Fey magician, is described as "being neither male nor female, like all Fey," while Ivory and Rosie's discoveries of self are heightened by accepting and celebrating what makes them "othered." Readers might find the plot's time jumps jarring, but they will cheer for the tender love stories and Rosie's belief that "the human heart/ is a resilient beast." --[Zoraida Córdova](#), freelance book reviewer

Discover: This imaginative and strange young adult fantasy is a queer reimagining of "Snow White and Rose Red" that takes place in a magical circus.

Clarion, \$17.99 hardcover, 288p., ages 12-up, 9781328639509

You Brought Me the Ocean by Alex Sanchez, illus. by Julie Maroh



Alex Sanchez (*Rainbow Boys*) and Julie Maroh (*Blue Is the Warmest Color*) team up for a gorgeously rendered graphic novel that reimagines the origin story of DC's Aqualad. Part coming-out romance, part superpower discovery tale, this exploration of identity portrays loved ones lending each other incredible strength.

High school senior Jake Hyde dreams of the ocean but lives in the New Mexico desert. His mother has forbidden him to go near water since his father drowned. Overprotective to a fault, she wishes Jake would abandon plans to study oceanography and apply in-state with his best friend, Maria Mendez. Secretly, Maria hopes that if Jake stays, they'll date. No one knows that Jake is gay and crushing on swim team captain Kenny Liu. On a long hike, Jake musters his courage and comes out to Kenny, confiding in him about everything--even his strange skin markings that glow in water. When a flash flood threatens to drown them both, Jake saves the day. But how?

You Brought Me the Ocean masterfully conveys the conflicting emotions behind coming out and self-discovery. By pairing Jake's readiness to pursue a romantic relationship with a boy with the manifestation of his hydrokinesis, Sanchez delivers the vital message that there is more to every member of the LGBTQIAP+ community than their sexual identity. Limiting their art palette to oceanic and earth tones, Maroh adds multiple

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layers to Sanchez's story: by strategically washing out the desert environment, they let the reader experience Jake's worldview; pops of blues and greens draw the eye to the details Jake values. Depicting the hard-won confidence of a newly out gay teen superhero, *You Brought Me the Ocean* adds fresh voices from the LGBTQIAP+ community to the DC Universe. --[Samantha Zaboski](#), freelance editor and reviewer

Discover: Coming out, romance and superpowers mix in this YA reimaging of the origin story of DC's Aqualad.

DC Comics, \$16.99 paperback, 208p., ages 12-up, 9781401290818

The Falling in Love Montage by Ciara Smyth



MORE INFO

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Ciara Smyth triumphs in *The Falling in Love Montage*, which features 17-year-old Saoirse Clarke, who orchestrates an experiment to live out her own romantic-comedy fantasy amid a real world of uncertainty and heartbreak.

When Saoirse falls for cute, single Ruby, she decides she needs "a way of protecting myself from getting my heart splattered again." Saoirse insists that their newfound relationship resemble a classic romantic comedy montage, with only the fun parts and absolutely no serious conversations, sappiness or "we-ing, as in *we love this, we are cat people, we are going to live happily ever after.*" But accompanying the Ferris wheel rides and flirty banter are Saoirse's deep personal secrets. She describes her life "like emotional dodgeball and I kept getting hit."

Juxtaposed with Ruby, who is transparent about her own family struggles, Saoirse's pain is deep as she refuses to acknowledge her own demons out of fear her vulnerability will expose itself. Instead, she lashes out with quick wit and biting remarks.

Smyth's story focuses on a lesbian teenage relationship in which queerness is not a major plot point. Saoirse even notes, "Sometimes I forget that I'm a lesbian. As in I forget that it's statistically unusual and that some people have strong feelings about it." The result? A true-to-life protagonist secure in her marginalized sexual identity yet acutely aware of how her gay relationships may be negatively perceived by strangers. While Smyth deftly depicts the painful toll trauma can have on a child, she brings levity and balance to the narrative with hilarious rapid-fire exchanges and hijinks as the girls complete their rom-com bucket list. --[Kieran Slattery](#), freelance reviewer, teacher, and co-creator, Gender Inclusive Classrooms

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