

OLA BEST BETS 2024

GENRE  
BLEND  
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## **ABBOTT BY SALADIN AHMED AND SAMI KIVELÄ (ILLUSTRATOR)** **(FANTASY, HISTORICAL FICTION, HORROR)**

*Tone: Bleak, menacing, haunting*

*Writing Style: Compelling, strong sense of place, gritty*

*Illustration: Realistic, dark*

If you are a novice to reading graphic novels, Saladin Ahmed's 'Abbott' would be an excellent entry point to the genre. At 128 pages, 'Abbott' stands as a triumph of storytelling, seamlessly blending elements of noir mystery, supernatural intrigue, and social commentary. Set against the backdrop of 1970s Detroit, the narrative follows the tenacious investigative journalist, Elena Abbott, as she navigates a city rife with corruption, racism, and occult forces. Ahmed's masterful prose, coupled with Sami Kivelä's evocative artwork, immerses readers in a gritty, atmospheric world where the lines between reality and the supernatural

blur. As Abbott delves deeper into her investigations, confronting both human and otherworldly adversaries, the story unfolds with relentless tension and gripping suspense. Through Abbott's unwavering determination and resilience, Ahmed crafts a captivating tale that not only entertains but also resonates with themes of power, identity, and justice.

If you're craving another gripping thriller that delves into the depths of society's darker side, I recommend Devil's Highway by Benjamin Percy. Alternatively, if you're drawn to gritty fantasy comics featuring strong female protagonists, "Pretty Deadly" by Kelly Sue DeConnick might be just what you're looking for.

*Review by Madeleine*

## **FANGS BY SARAH ANDERSON** **(ROMANCE, HORROR)**

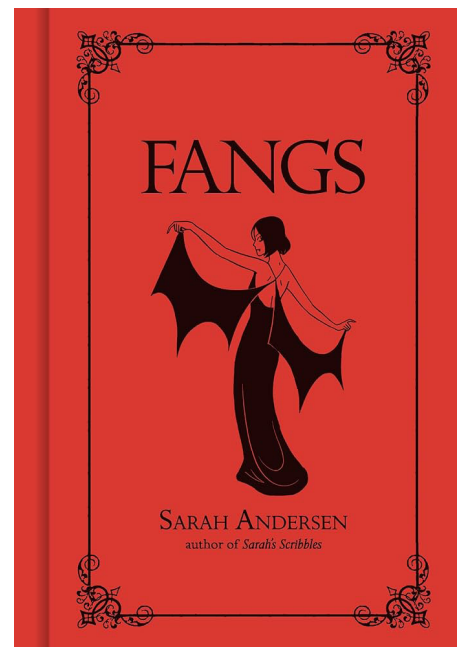
*Character: Likeable; Relatable*

*Tone: Darkly humorous; Offbeat; Feel-good; Romantic*

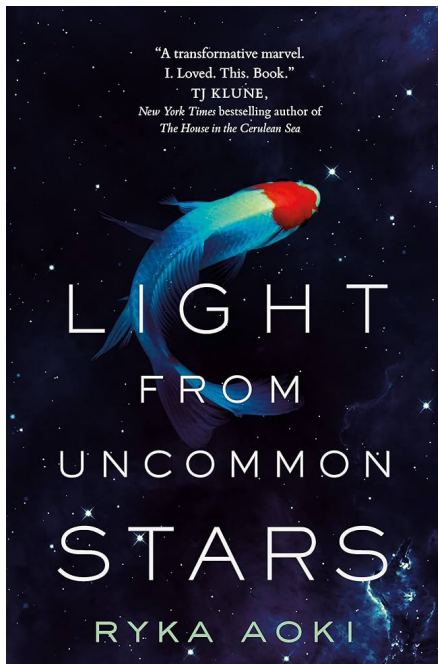
*Writing Style: Banter-filled*

*Illustration: Black-and-white; Delicate*

With a few panels per page and snappy dialogue, this humorous take on modern life and dating is sweet and relatable, even for those of us who aren't a 300 year old vampire falling for a cute werewolf. Moments between the characters are often quietly intimate rather than focusing on grand gestures, spun through their particular abilities and foibles as supernatural creatures of the night. Expect Addams Family levels of morbid jokes where you completely support the characters no matter how long their kill list is. Readalikes: The Montague Twins books by Nathan Page and My Roommate is a Vampire by Jenna Levine.



*Review by Michaela*



## **LIGHT FROM UNCOMMON STARS BY RYKA AOKI (SCIENCE FANTASY, SCIENCE FICTION)**

*Themes:* Chosen family  
*Character:* Transgender; LGBTQIA; Asian  
*Storyline:* Character-driven; Own voices  
*Tone:* Bittersweet; Hopeful; Moving  
*Writing Style:* Lush; Descriptive

Light from Uncommon Stars follows three main characters. Katrina, a trans teen girl running away from an abusive family, Shizuka, aka the “Queen of Hell,” a world renowned violin teacher and Lan, a refugee from another world, fleeing a multi-universe-spanning crisis. These three lives intertwine unexpectedly in this delightful story of magic, identity, curses, and hope. While the novel incorporates numerous fantastical elements, including demons, curses, and space aliens, it is a story about chosen family, ultimately grounded by strong female characters.

*Trigger warnings:* Abuse (domestic and parental), homophobia, transphobia, racism, rape, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, misgendering, gun violence, mentions of war

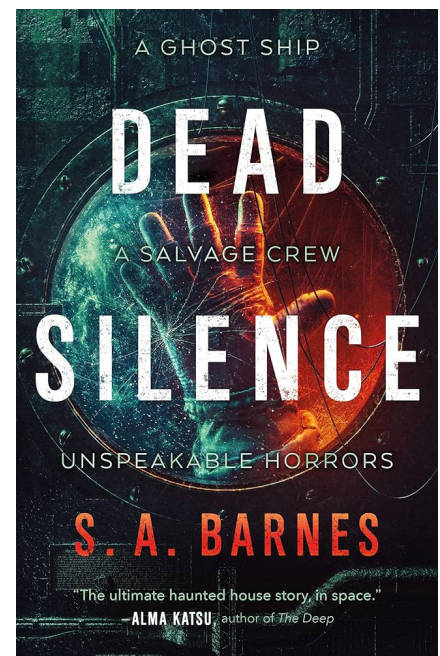
*Review by Angela*

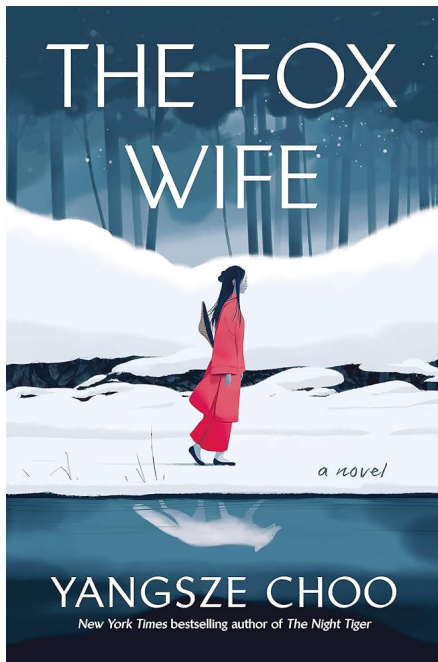
## **DEAD SILENCE BY S.A. BARNES (SCIENCE FICTION, PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER, HORROR)**

*Themes:* Don't go in there!  
*Storyline:* Plot-driven  
*Pace:* Fast-paced  
*Tone:* Atmospheric; Creepy; Menacing; Suspenseful  
*Writing Style:* Compelling

A small crew traveling home through deep space makes a hasty decision to salvage a famous luxury ship. Danger and mystery await them, once on board. What happened to the crew and passengers? Is there something still aboard? Crew leader Claire, dealing with her own PTSD, is having trouble understanding and reacting to what she finds. A tense blending of science fiction and horror, with elements of psychological thriller, and a sympathetic lead character. For fans of Ripley in Alien.

*Review by Elizabeth (Sarah also loved it!)*





## **FOX WIFE BY YANGSZE CHOO (HISTORICAL FICTION, MAGICAL REALISM)**

*Character:Complex; Asian; Sympathetic*  
*Storyline:Intricately plotted; Plot-driven;*  
*Pace:Leisurely paced*  
*Tone:Atmospheric; Suspenseful*  
*Writing Style:Compelling; Lush*

This captivating novel set in 1908 Manchuria centers around two mysteries. Bao, a private detective, has been hired to find the identity of a woman found dead in a restaurant alley. Some superstitious locals he talks to suspect that a fox spirit is to blame. Bao was raised on tales of foxes and is intrigued enough to accept the case. Elsewhere, Snow, a shapeshifting fox, is searching for the man responsible for the death of her daughter. During her search, she is reunited with old acquaintances, also foxes, who threaten to wreak havoc on her quiet life.

Told in alternating points of view, the audiobook is read excellently by the author and really captures the charming voices of the main characters. The complexity of the many characters against a backdrop of revolution makes it a perfect read for fans of *Gentleman of Moscow* by Amor Towles. For those looking for more stories inspired by Chinese folklore, try *The Girl with Ghost Eyes* by M.H. Boronson.

*Review by Kat*

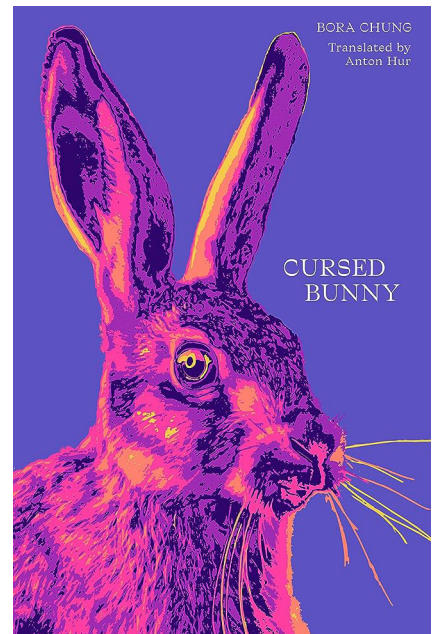
## **CURSED BUNNY BY BORA CHUNG; TRANSLATED BY ANTON HUR (LITERARY FICTION, MAGICAL REALISM, HORROR, SCIENCE FICTION)**

*Writing style:lyrical, engrossing*  
*Pace: fast-paced*  
*Tone:Sobering; Disturbing, atmospheric, haunting*

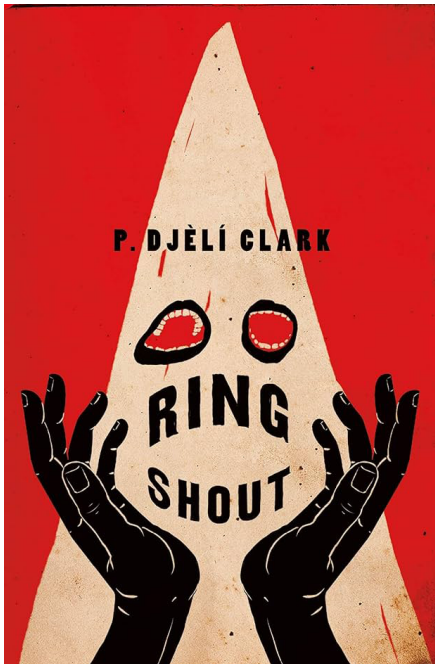
*Cursed Bunny* by Bora Chung is a mesmerizing collection of short stories that pushes the boundaries of genre, earning its place on the International Booker Longlist 2022. Chung's writing seemingly blends elements of magical realism, horror, and science fiction to create a haunting reflection of contemporary society's follies and injustices. In addition to the author's haunting prose and darkly humorous plots, what makes *Cursed Bunny* such a satisfying – albeit disorienting at times - read is its ability to unsettle and provoke thought. Chung effortlessly weaves together the mundane and the extraordinary, inviting readers to reconsider the world around them through a fresh and often unsettling perspective.

Fans of creepy, thought provoking short stories that challenge conventions will enjoy *Her body and Other Parties* by Carmen Maria Machado and *Nineteen Claws and a Black Bird* by Agustina Bazterrica.

*Review by Madeleine*







## **RING SHOUT / P. DJÈLÍ CLARK (HORROR, FANTASY, HISTORICAL FICTION)**

*Themes: cosmic horror, facing facism*  
*Character: strong female*  
*Storyline: Own voices*  
*Tone: Gruesome; Creepy; Suspenseful*  
*Writing Style: Compelling*

Ring Shout is a riveting blend of historical fantasy and horror that captivates readers from start to finish. Set in an alternate 1922 Georgia, the novel follows Maryse Boudreaux, a sword-wielding monster hunter battling Ku Kluxes – demonic entities born of hate and racism. As Maryse and her fellow resistance fighters embark on a perilous quest to thwart a sinister plot, they confront both supernatural threats and the pervasive racism of the Jim Crow South. There is so much to love about this book. From the witty banters to the pulse-pounding action

scenes, to the colourfully drawn characters and rich historical details, the propulsive prose will take readers on an immersive journey into a vividly realized fantasy world.

For readers who appreciate a unique blend of historical fiction and supernatural horror, I recommend Matt Ruff's Lovecraft Country or Victor LaValle's The Ballad of Black Tom.

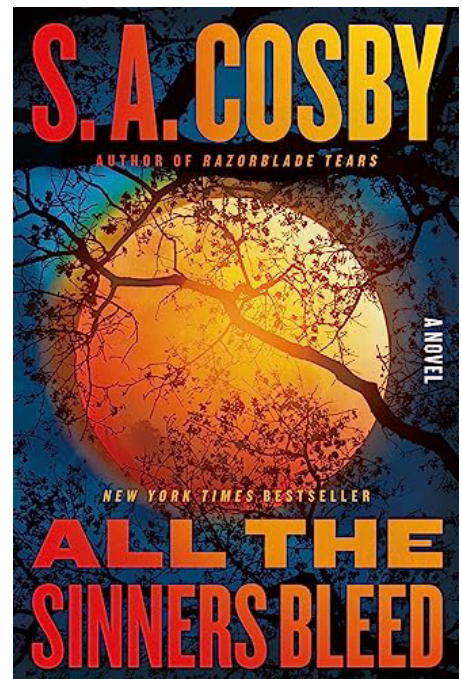
*Review by Madeleine (Michaela and Sarah also loved it!)*

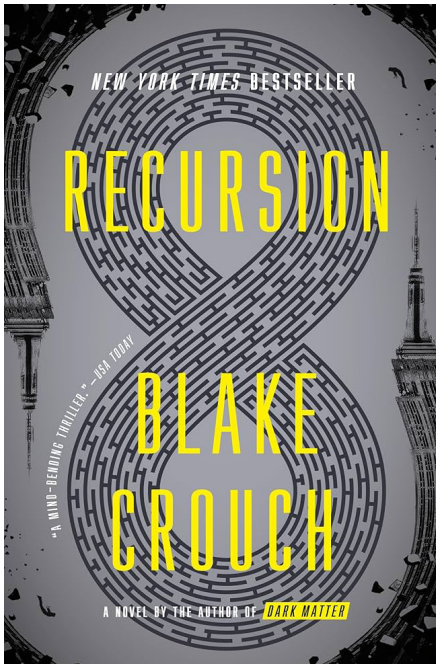
## **ALL THE SINNERS BLEED BY S.A. COSBY (NOIR, MYSTERY, THRILLER, SOUTHERN GOTHIC)**

*Character: Black; Complex*  
*Storyline: Intricately plotted*  
*Pace: Fast-paced*  
*Tone: Atmospheric; Haunting; Suspenseful; Violent*  
*Writing Style: Compelling; Richly detailed*

In this haunting southern gothic mystery, Titus Crown, the first Black sheriff of Charon County VA., is investigating a shooting at the local high school that leaves both a beloved teacher and the killer dead. He uncovers evidence that the two men participated in the gruesome ritualistic killing of 7 black children, with help from a mysterious third person. With tensions rising and the bodies stacking up, Titus and his deputies race to find the killer. This fast paced and intricately plotted thriller is perfect for readers looking for a mystery with emotional depth.

*Review by Sarah*





## RECURSION BY BLAKE CROUCH (SCIENCE FICTION, SUSPENSE, THRILLER)

Themes: Altered memories; Fixing history; Time and again

Storyline: Intricately plotted

Pace: Fast-paced

Tone: Suspenseful; Thought-provoking

Writing Style: Compelling

Recursion explores what happens when a brilliant female scientist invents a powerful technology that allows people not just to reactivate their most visceral memories but to reinvent them entirely. For some, it offers the chance to rewrite their entire lives while others are driven mad by memories of a life they never lived. Memories and experiences make us who we are. This novel explores manipulating past memories to change the future, a memory time travel of sorts. Recursion is relentlessly thrilling, unpredictable, and mind-blowing. I am not a SciFi reader, but was hooked from the start.

Trigger warnings: Child death, Death, Murder, Suicide (mentioned), Violence  
Review by Angela (Sarah, Elizabeth, and Kat also loved it!)

## EIGHT BEARS: MYTHIC PAST AND IMPERILED FUTURE BY GLORIA DICKIE (NATURAL HISTORY, MYTHOLOGY, ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM)

Storyline: Issue-oriented

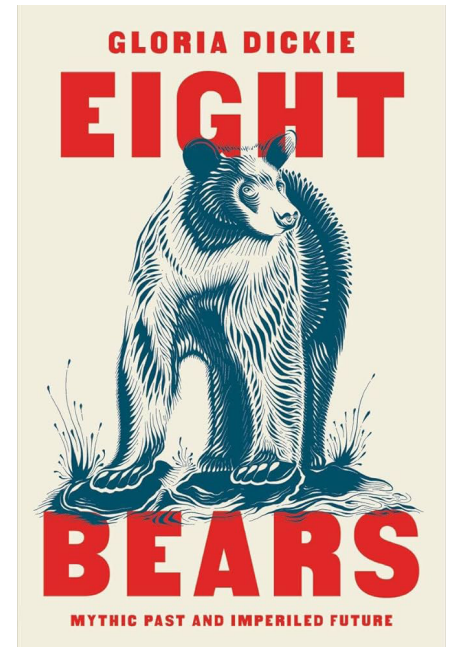
Tone: Thought-provoking

Writing Style: Compelling; Accessible, Richly detailed; Well-researched

Gloria Dickie masterfully blends natural history, mythology, and environmental journalism into a captivating narrative in *Eight Bears: Mythic Past and Imperiled Future*. Through meticulous research and engaging storytelling, Dickie explores the intricate relationship between humans and bears across cultures and throughout history, offering readers a fascinating glimpse into the cultural significance of these majestic creatures. Drawing on her knowledge as an environmental journalist and firsthand interactions with conservationists, Dickie delves deep into the complex issues facing bear populations today, highlighting the urgent need for conservation action. Written with empathy and urgency, *Eight Bears* is a compelling and thought-provoking read that not only educates readers about the plight of bears but also inspires a deeper appreciation for the beauty and complexity of the natural world.

If you're drawn to descriptive and thought-provoking nature writing that emphasizes modern conservation efforts, I suggest checking out *Of Time and Turtles* by Sy Montgomery. For those who enjoy a meticulously researched yet accessible nonfiction exploration of the consequences of human negligence on the environment, I recommend *Wasteland* by Oliver Franklin-Wallis.

Review by Madeleine





## WITCHBLOOD: THE HOUNDS OF LOVE BY MATTHEW ERMAN (HORROR, FANTASY, WESTERN)



*Genre: Comics and graphic novels; Horror comics; Fantasy comics; Dark fantasy*  
*Themes: Weird Westerns*  
*Storyline: Action-packed; World-building*  
*Pace: Fast-paced*  
*Tone: Funny; Suspenseful*  
*Writing Style: Witty; Well-crafted dialogue; Compelling*  
*Illustration: Colorful; Cartoonish*

In this supernatural western, a rebel witch who has left her coven, faces off with a group of vampires hunting for witch blood. Yonna is an immortal witch traveling across America with her pet crow Bhu. Her life changes when she encounters The Hounds of Love, a vampire biker gang, who are killing witches in an attempt to find the source of all magic; if they find it, it will mean the end of the world. This supernatural western is full of snappy dialogue and a built in soundtrack - with speech bubbles directing readers to play specific songs. Vibrant art and quick pacing makes this an addictive read.

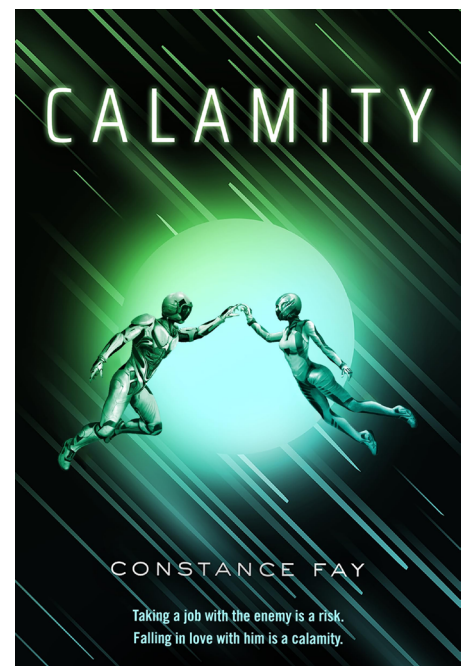
*Review by Sarah*

## CALAMITY BY CONSTANCE FAY (SCIENCE FICTION, ROMANCE)

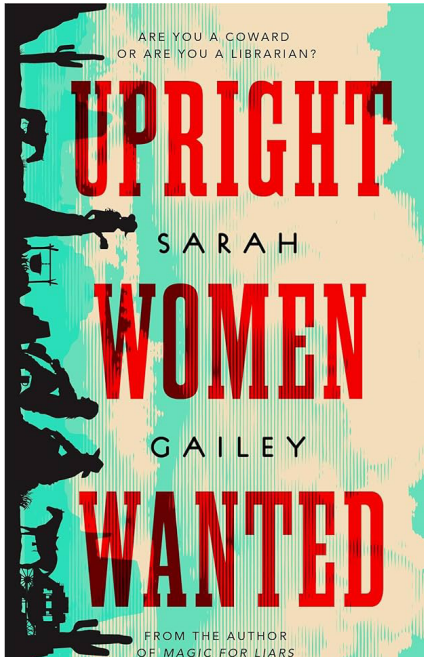
*Themes: Chosen family; Enemies to lovers*  
*Character: Likeable*  
*Storyline: World-building; Action-packed*  
*Pace: Fast-paced*  
*Tone: Suspenseful; Heartwarming; Steamy*  
*Writing Style: Compelling; Witty*

If you are a sci-fi reader who feels left behind by the romantasy trend, look no further than Calamity by Constance Fay. Mix the world building of Red Rising with the found family relationships of Firefly and add in a smart-talking heroine with romance's favourite hero, the stern yet incredibly capable grump, and you have Calamity.

*Review by Jessica*



## UPRIGHT WOMEN WANTED BY SARAH GAILEY (HISTORICAL FICTION, SCIENCE FICTION)



*Genre: Science fiction; Modern Westerns; Dystopian fiction; Adult books for young adults*  
*Character: Authentic; LGBTQIA*  
*Storyline: Own voices*  
*Writing Style: Lyrical*

In a near-future world, Esther runs away from home, traumatized by seeing her lover hanged for reading 'unapproved materials' and fearing the arranged marriage that her father has promised. She becomes a stowaway on a wagon of Librarians, unaware that these seemingly upright citizens are actually rebels distributing contraband. Full of unique characters with great LGBTQIA+ representation, Upright Women Wanted is a gorgeously written novella with action scenes that pack a punch. If you're looking for another queer feminist western, try Outlawed by Anna North. The television series Wynonna Earp may also fit the bill.

*Review by Kat (Sarah also loved it!)*

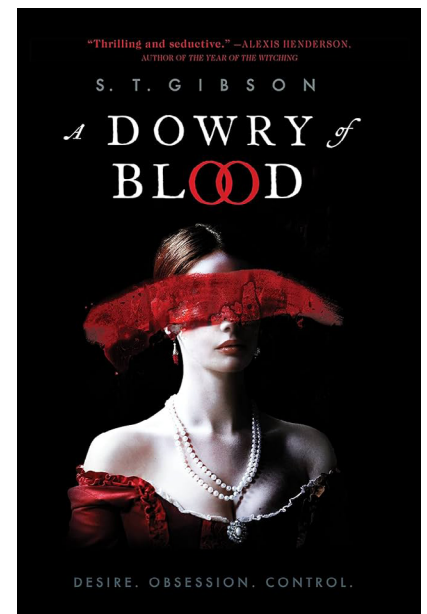
## A DOWRY OF BLOOD BY S. T. GIBSON (ROMANCE, FICTION, PARANORMAL)

*Themes: Toxic relationships*  
*Character: LGBTQIA*  
*Storyline: Character-driven; Intricately plotted*  
*Pace: Fast-paced*  
*Tone: Atmospheric; Steamy; Suspenseful*  
*Writing Style: Compelling; Lyrical*

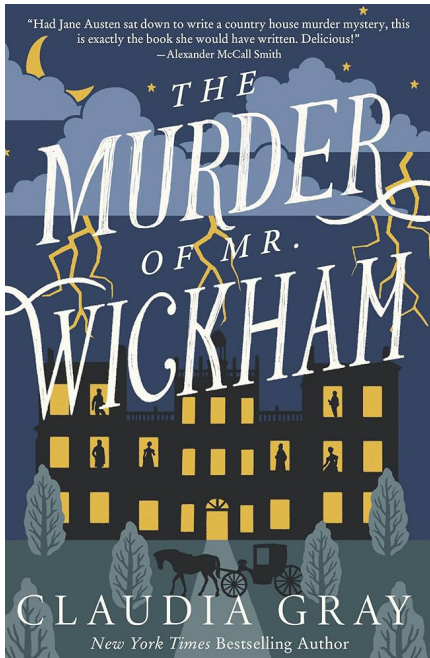
A Dowry of Blood retells the classic Dracula story through the eyes of his young bride, Constanza. Written in an open letter format from Constanza to Dracula, A Dowry of Blood chronicles the entirety of their life together. From the turning of her into a vampire to the conclusion of their relationship. Transformed from a peasant girl into Dracula's bride, Constanza is initially mesmerized by the dark King, but when Dracula draws a cunning aristocrat and a starving artist into his web of passion and deceit, Constanza realizes that her beloved is capable of terrible things.

Trigger warnings: emotional, verbal, and physical intimate partner abuse  
gaslighting, War, famine, and plague, blood and gore, consensual sexual content

*Review by Angela*







## THE MURDER OF MR. WICKHAM BY CLAUDIA GRAY (HISTORICAL FICTION, MYSTERY)

*Themes:*The butler did it!; Locked room mysteries  
*Character:*Well-developed; Authentic; Neurodivergent; Autistic  
*Writing Style:*Engaging

Emma and Mr. Knightly are having a house party, and many of our favourite Jane Austen characters are in attendance. When an uninvited guest is murdered, it's up to our young hero and heroine, children of Austen's famous couples, to solve the case. This historical murder mystery with literary flavour delivers for fans of the Regency period as well as stories with amateur detectives solving locked room mysteries. If you're a little bloodthirsty, like me, you might want more murders. Happily, there's a sequel. *Readalikes:* Death Comes to Pemberley by P.D. James, The Vanished Bride by Bella Ellis, and A Most Agreeable Murder by Julia Seales.

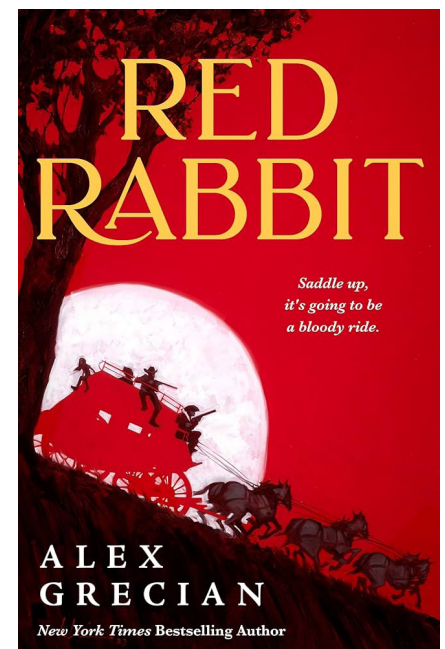
*Review by Michaela*

## RED RABBIT BY ALEX GRECIAN (HORROR, WESTERN)

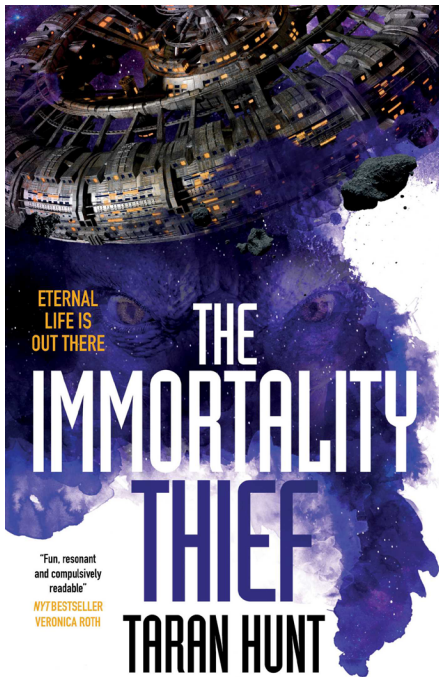
*Themes:*Weird Westerns  
*Storyline:*Intricately plotted  
*Tone:*Atmospheric; Suspenseful

Alex Grecian combines horror with western to create a terrifying tale set in the post-Civil War American West. An eclectic group of people, including two wayward cowboys, a widow, a witch hunter and his apprentice, and the ghost of the widow's dead husband set out to kill Sadie Grace, a witch who has been accused of terrorizing the citizens of her town. Stalking them is a demonic entity who can assume many forms. This is an ambitious novel - each character has their own motivation for setting out on the journey, and there are multiple storylines, but by the end of the novel, Grecian manages to tie everything together. This book is perfect for readers looking for a spin on the classic Western.

*Review by Sarah*



## THE IMMORTALITY THIEF BY TARAN HUNT (SCIENCE FICTION, HORROR, HUMOUR)



*Themes:* Race against time  
*Character:* Snarky; Complex  
*Storyline:* Action-packed; Intricately plotted; Nonlinear  
*Pace:* Fast-paced  
*Tone:* Menacing; Bittersweet; Offbeat  
*Writing Style:* Compelling

Wisecracking convict Sean is the perfect candidate for a space mission requiring a linguist. He accepts the hurried mission to retrieve data from an ancient spaceship, in exchange for his freedom. Many monsters await on board the abandoned ship, some of them are possibly friendly. With empathy, quick thinking and lots of quips, Sean moves indirectly towards his goal, in this fast-paced story. This one's for you, if you enjoy some humour with your space opera.

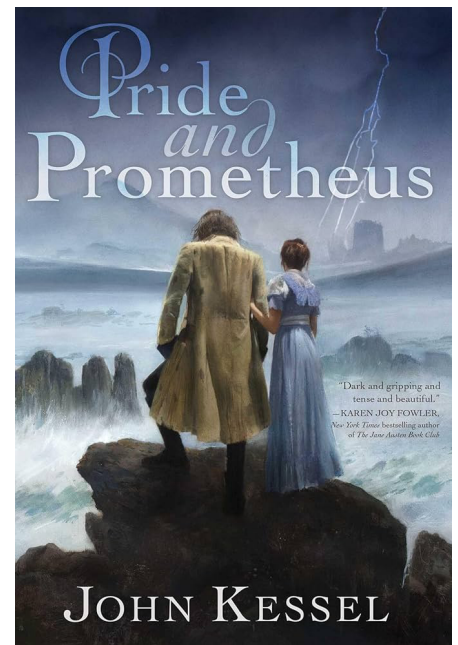
*Review by Elizabeth*

## PRIDE AND PROMETHEUS BY JOHN KESSEL (HISTORICAL FICTION, HORROR)

*Themes:* Monster mashups  
*Character:* Flawed; Brooding  
*Storyline:* Intricately plotted  
*Tone:* Moody

It makes perfect sense that Victor Frankenstein would eventually meet up with Kitty and Mary Bennet, given the inter-connecting social circles of the early 1800's. And where the tormented Victor goes, can his Creature be far behind? In this genreblend, studious Mary meets an interesting man, with many secrets. This story leans most heavily on the horror side of the blend, but fans of Mary Bennet will enjoy seeing her development into a more mature and kinder woman than we knew in *Pride and Prejudice*. If you enjoy this concept, you might also like another genre-blending story from the world of Jane Austen. The *Jane Austen Project* by Kathleen A. Flynn (2017) features Jane herself, as the object of a time travel experiment.

*Review by Elizabeth*





## THE SPARE MAN BY MARY ROBINETTE KOVAL (SCIENCE FICTION, COSY MYSTERY)

*Character:* Snarky; Physically disabled; Using mobility or assistive device

*Storyline:* Intricately plotted; World-building

*Writing Style:* Banter-filled; Witty

Space adventures but make it feel like Gatsby. Our heroine, a brilliant inventor, is travelling incognito for her honeymoon on a luxury space liner headed for Mars. She's enjoying the anonymity with her handsome husband, her small service dog, and plenty of martinis, until a murder happens on the ship and her husband is accused. She must put her keen mind to the case to exonerate her husband and find the murderer among them. A retro aesthetic in sci-fi brings out a whole new texture in the genre; combined with a plotty little mystery, it softens the entry for those who don't think they like sci-fi.

*Readalikes:* Station Eternity by Mur Lafferty and The Mimicking of Known Successes by Malka Older

*Review by Michaela*

## LONE WOMEN BY VICTOR LAVALLE (WESTERN, HORROR)

*Themes:* Weird Westerns

*Character:* Black; Strong female

*Storyline:* Character-driven; Intricately plotted; Own voices

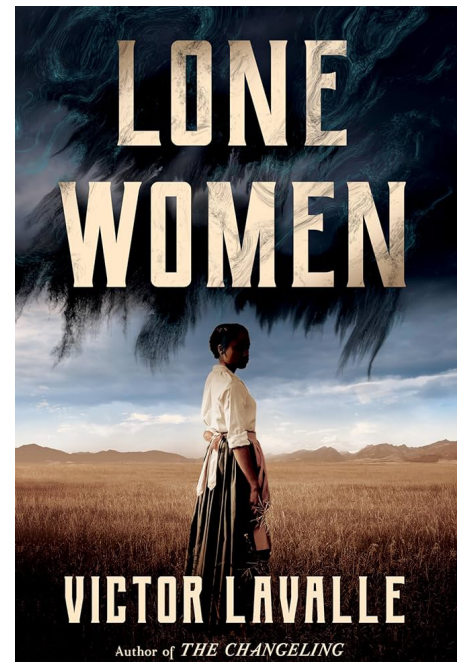
*Pace:* Fast-paced

*Tone:* Atmospheric; Creepy; Moody; Suspenseful

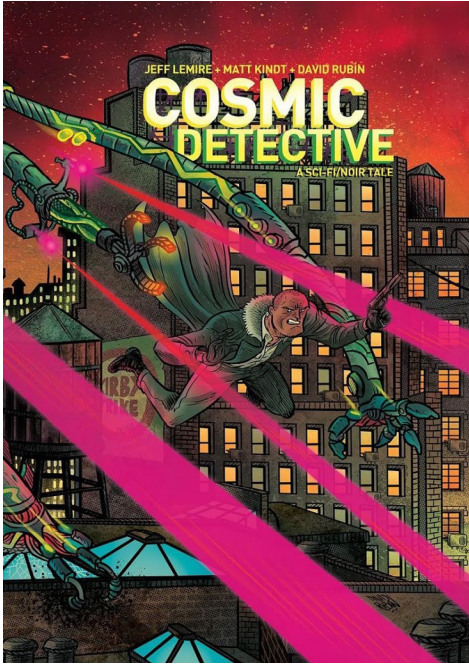
*Writing Style:* Compelling

Seeking isolation and a chance to start over on her own, Mrs. Henry moves from California to northern Montana to homestead. She hopes to keep her family secrets to herself there, and prevent further death. Although there are not many neighbours in her new home, they all have secrets, too. This is a fun take on the traditional Western, with women at the centre of the story.

*Review by Elizabeth (Michaela and Sarah also loved it!)*







## **COSMIC DETECTIVE BY JEFF LEMIRE, MATT KINDT AND DAVID RUBIN (SCIENCE FICTION, MYSTERY)**

*Themes: Unnamed narrator*  
*Storyline: World-building*  
*Tone: Suspenseful*  
*Writing Style: Compelling*  
*Illustration: Dark*

In this noir sci-fi detective story, a detective is contacted by a shadow organization. A god has been murdered and he is unwillingly called in to investigate. The vibrant illustrations will keep you turning the pages even as you're sometimes struggling to figure out what's going on, just like the protagonist. This original graphic novel will have you guessing until the end, and the unique illustrations will have you lingering over some of the spreads long after you've finished the book.

*Review by Kat*

## **THAT TIME I GOT DRUNK AND SAVED A DEMON BY KIMBERLY LEMMING (FANTASY, ROMANCE, ADVENTURE)**

*Storyline: Plot-driven*  
*Pace: Fast-paced*  
*Tone: Funny; Racy humor; Explicit*  
*Writing Style: Well-crafted dialogue; Banter-filled*

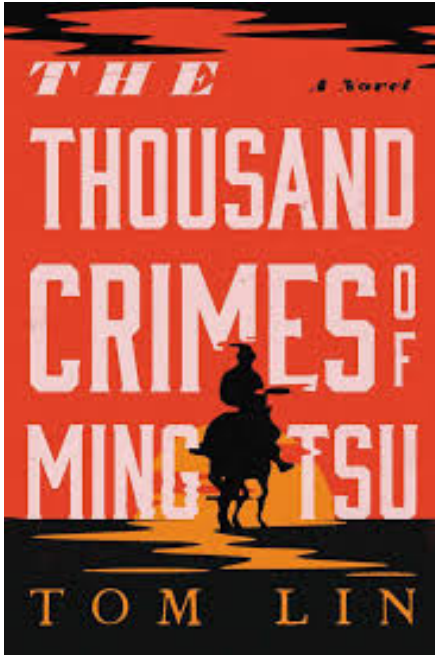
If you are looking for a fantasy romance that is hilarious, sexy, and full of adventure, then look no further than Kimberly Lemming's *That Time I Got Drunk and Saved a Demon*. Cinnamon wants nothing more than to spend her days working on her cinnamon farm and spend her nights with her best friend. After a night of partying, Cinnamon accidentally saves Fallon, a demon who is on a quest to kill a witch who is enslaving his people. Fallon convinces Cinnamon to join him and the two set off on their adventure.

*Review by Sarah*





## THE THOUSAND CRIMES OF MING TSU BY TOM LIN (WESTERN, MAGICAL REALISM, LITERARY FICTION)



*Themes: Vengeance is mine*  
*Character: Asian*  
*Storyline: Own voices; Intricately plotted; Plot-driven*  
*Pace: Fast-paced*  
*Tone: Atmospheric; Dramatic; Violent*  
*Writing Style: Richly detailed; Compelling*

All the hallmarks of a classic revenge Western with a hardened, sharp-shooting protagonist, facing down foul enemies in dangerous environments, made fresh with a Chinese American protagonist and a thread of magical realism in the form of a circus troupe with unlikely abilities. Literary Westerns like Lin's crack open a genre perceived as conservative on social issues and low on diverse characters and themes to tell sweeping stories in a familiar, if hostile and grisly, terrain.

Readlikes: *The Which Way Tree* by Elizabeth Crook and *How Much of These Hills is Gold* by C Pam Zhang.

*Review by Michaela*

## THE VERY SECRET SOCIETY OF IRREGULAR WITCHES BY SANGU MANDANNA (ROMANCE, FANTASY)

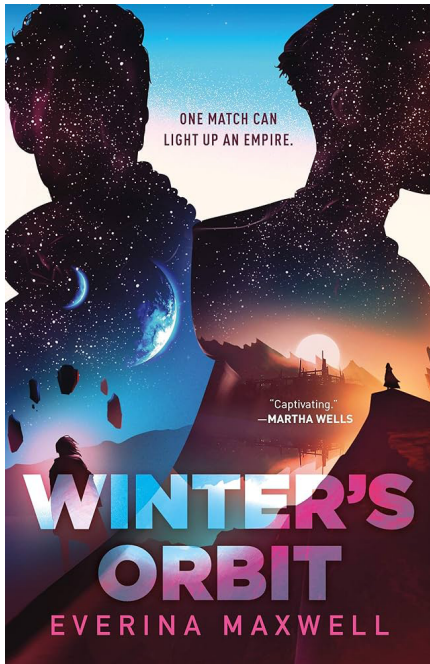
*Character: Asian*  
*Pace: Fast-paced*  
*Tone: Heartwarming; Romantic*  
*Writing Style: Engaging*

Mika Moon pretends to be a witch online but, in reality, isn't pretending. Noticed for her genuine abilities, she is invited to tutor a group of young witches in secret in their household of nonwitch adults at Nowhere House. Cosy, romantic, and heartwarming with themes of found family and self-acceptance alongside a romance you root for with a handsome librarian love interest. Mandanna builds a sense of magic that feels appropriately enchanting and picturesque. The witchy elements blend seamlessly with the real world as we know it, with the end result that the book feels nearer to reality for contemporary romance readers than other big romantasy titles.

Readalikes: *The House in the Cerulean Sea* by T.J. Klune and *The Dead Romantics* by Ashley Poston.

*Review by Michaela*





## **WINTER'S ORBIT BY EVERINA MAXWELL (SCIENCE FICTION, ROMANCE)**

*Themes: Court intrigue*

*Character: LGBTQIA*

*Storyline: World-building; Intricately plotted*

*Pace: Intensifying*

*Tone: Suspenseful; Romantic*

*Writing Style: Compelling*

This debut novel has some of our favourite romance tropes – arranged marriage, opposites attract, and friends to lovers – but also space! It takes place in a complicated interplanetary political system that adds so much to the story, by adding political intrigue, espionage, and a unique approach to gender expression. Fans of romance will appreciate the great chemistry of Prince Kiem and Count Jainan while sci-fi readers will love the amazing world building. Needless to say, if you enjoy both genres you're in for a real treat. *Winter's Orbit* is perfect for fans of *Red, White, and Royal Blue* and C. J. Cherryh's political sci-fi.

*Review by Kat*

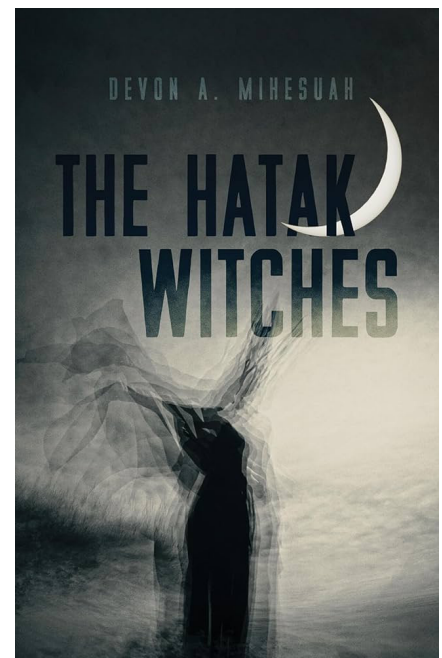
## **THE HATAK WITCHES BY DEVON A. MIHESUAH (HORROR, MYSTERY)**

*Storyline: Own voices*

*Tone: Suspenseful*

In modern day Oklahoma, a security guard at a museum is gruesomely murdered and unidentified human remains from the collection are stolen. Detective Monique Blue Hawk initially believes that a human killer is responsible but as the investigation progresses, she realizes that a family of shape-shifting witches may be responsible. This gripping mystery blends together a police procedural with Choctaw legends to create a truly terrifying tale.

*Review by Sarah*



## THE SUMMER HIKARU DIED VOL 1. BY MOKUMOKUREN (HORROR, FRIENDSHIP, COMING OF AGE)



*Character: Complex*  
*Storyline: Intricately plotted*  
*Tone: Strong sense of place; Haunting*  
*Writing Style: Compelling*

A wonderful example of melding the classic friendship/coming of age story in realistic fiction with the horror premise of body snatching. Yoshiki knows his best friend Hikaru is gone, but whatever came down from the mountain with his face still has his memories and mannerisms, so it is easy to behave like nothing has changed. There are horror moments in this book such as monsters in the woods and truth tellers dismissed as unreliable, but the heart of the story is a meditation on grief, love and the moral dilemma of being a bystander. This will be a good entry point into horror for realistic fiction fans.

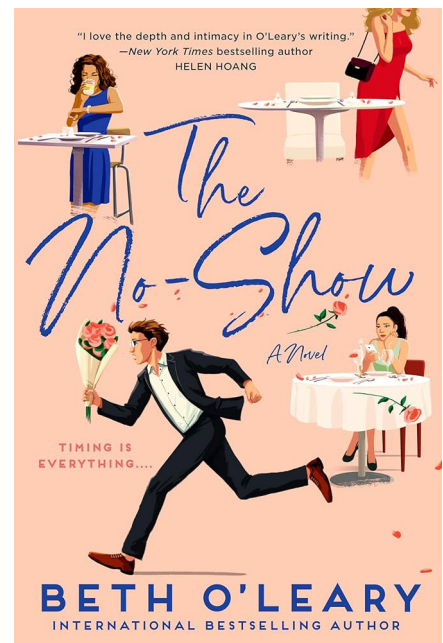
*Review by Jessica*

## THE NO-SHOW BY BETH O'LEARY (RELATIONSHIP FICTION, CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE)

*Character: Well-developed*  
*Storyline: Intricately plotted*  
*Tone: Heartwarming*  
*Writing Style: Engaging*

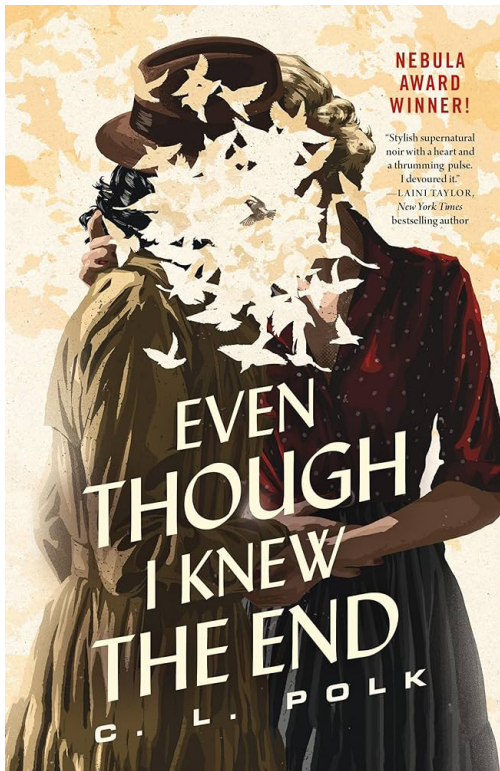
The No-Show seems like a contemporary romance with a unique premise: three women are stood up by the same man on Valentine's Day, and in alternating points of view, the story follows the characters as each woman forgives him. But the fundamental rule of the romance genre is a happily ever after or a happy for now ending, which seems at complete odds with the premise. We won't spoil the ending, but this is a title that balances between the romance genre and relationship fiction, so it's a good one for people who want a love story but aren't ready to embrace the traditional relationship arc of the romance genre.

*Review by Jessica*





## **EVEN THOUGH I KNEW THE END BY C.L. POLK (FANTASY, HISTORICAL FICTION)**



*Themes:* Ancient enigmas  
*Character:* Complex; LGBTQIA  
*Storyline:* Character-driven; World-building  
*Tone:* Moody; Atmospheric; Violent  
*Writing Style:* Gritty; Stylistically complex; Richly detailed; Compelling

Even Though I Knew The End at first feels familiar - a 1940s noir style detective story set in Chicago, speakeasies included - but you soon realize you've stumbled into something special, where the hard boiled detective is actually a warlock and the serial killer they're after is no ordinary murderer. The complexity of the worldbuilding and the characters, especially the central couple, feel like they belong in a much longer book than this 140 page novella, and you might even wish it was longer despite being wrapped up in a perfect bittersweet bow. Even Though I Knew The End is perfect for fans of the Hellblazer comics. In the mood for another great historical queer novel? Try Last Night at the Telegraph Club by Malinda Lo.

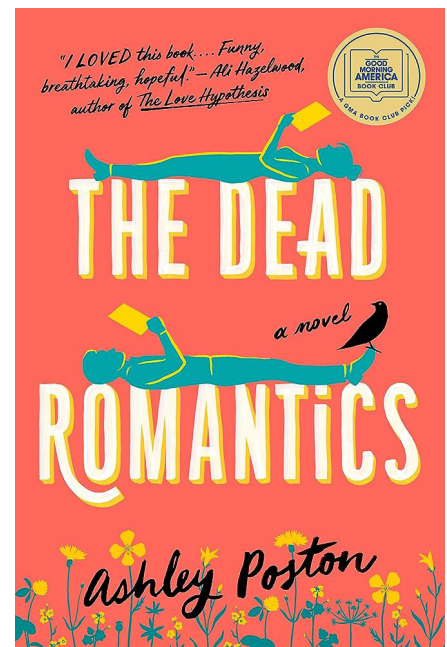
*Review by Kat (Michaela also loved it!)*

## **THE DEAD ROMANTICS BY ASHLEY POSTON (CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE, MAGICAL REALISM)**

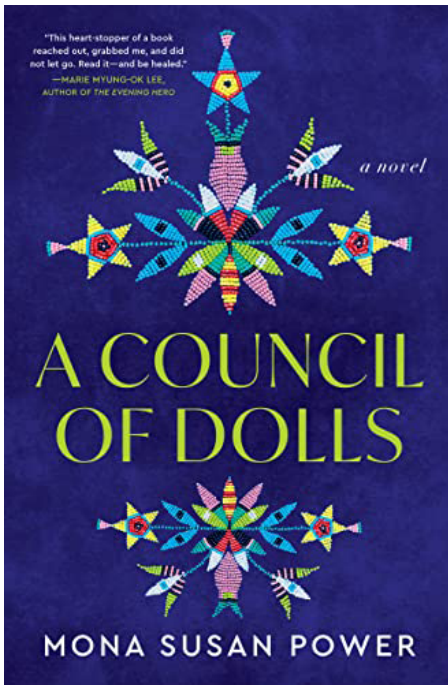
*Themes:* Home again  
*Storyline:* Intricately Plotted  
*Tone:* Funny, Heartwarming, Offbeat  
*Writing Style:* Well-crafted dialogue, engaging

The Dead Romantics starts with Florence Day's handsome new editor, Benji, denying her an extension, and then it takes a turn: she gets a call that her father has died, and needs to return to her family home (which is also the family-run funeral home). Once there, she faces the ghosts of her past, both figurative and literal when Benji's ghost unexpectedly shows up. While firmly at home in the romance genre, this book will also appeal to people who like magical realism and explorations of family relationships and loss.

*Review by Jessica*







## **A COUNCIL OF DOLLS BY MONA SUSAN POWER (LITERARY FICTION, MAGICAL REALISM)**

*Themes: Child narrator*

*Character: Indigenous*

*Storyline: Own voices; Character-driven*

*Tone: Heartwrenching; Atmospheric; Moving; Haunting*

*Writing Style: Descriptive; Richly detailed*

A Council of Dolls tells the story of three generations of Dakhóta and Lakhóta women from most recent to least, and back again. At different points in their lives each girl possesses a doll that can read their hearts, communicate with their souls, and possibly save them at their worst moments. Told in first person narrative, often through the eyes of the dolls, A Council of Dolls is a story of survival. Power highlights the struggles of generational trauma through her knowledge of Indigenous history. Painfully exploring the long lasting impacts of Indian residential schools, this novel was a challenging but extremely

engaging read.

Trigger warnings: alcohol abuse, child death (by sickness and by violence), child abuse (physical emotional, and verbal), residential schools, anti-Native American racism.

*Review by Angela*

## **NEUROCOMIC BY DR. HANA ROS AND DR. MATTEO FARINELLA (SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, FICTION/NON-FICTION)**

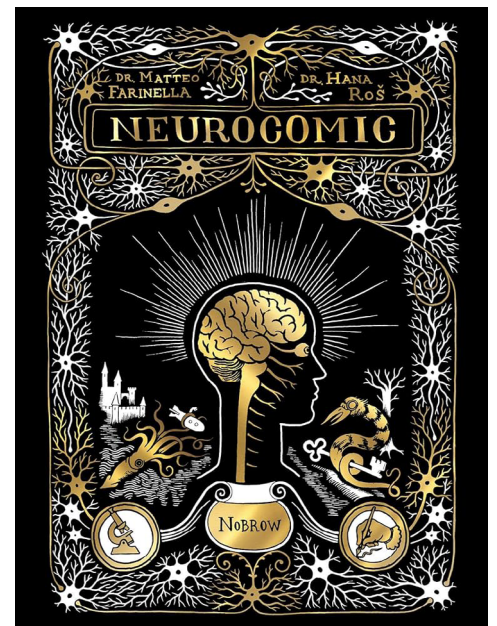
*Tone: Offbeat*

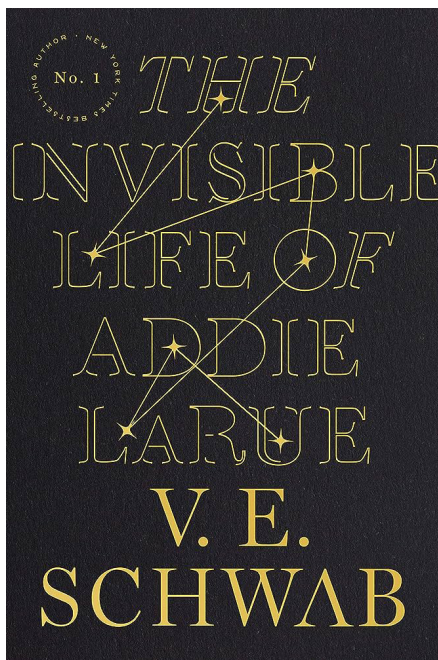
*Writing Style: Richly detailed; Accessible*

*Illustration: Black-and-white; Inventive*

Neurocomic is a wonderful introduction to the elaborate workings of the brain in a Graphic Novel format. Chronicling the journey of a man who finds himself lost in a brain, Neurocomic explains the complexities of neuroscience. The book follows a man's travels as he encounters friends, foes, and even pioneering neuroscientists who teach him about their momentous and often Nobel Prize-winning contributions to the dynamic field of neuroscience. A great introduction to neuroscience and psychology, providing basic details without really being overwhelming or overly simplistic.

*Review by Angela*





## THE INVISIBLE LIFE OF ADDIE LARUE BY V. E. SCHWAB (FANTASY, HISTORICAL FICTION)

*Themes: Be careful what you wish for*  
*Character: Strong female, Bisexual, LGBTQIA*  
*Storyline: Sweeping*  
*Tone: Suspenseful, Haunting*  
*Writing Style: Engaging*

In France in the 1700s, a young woman named Addie LaRue makes a deal with a devil and is granted immortality but with the curse that she will be forgotten by everyone she meets. Triumphant but alone, Addie embarks on a solitary life leaving invisible fingerprints on art and history until, one day, she enters a bookstore and the man behind the counter remembers her name. Historical fiction fans will relate to Addie's quest to experience everything, romance fans will yearn with her as she longs to find connection, and fantasy fans will applaud as she matches wits with a cunning and clever adversary.

*Review by Jessica*

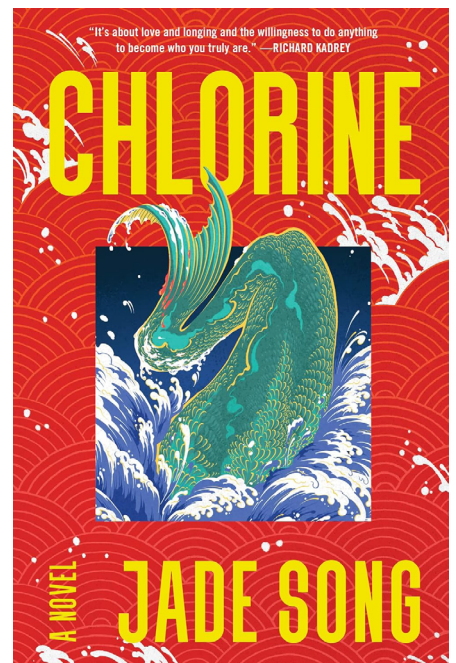
## CHLORINE BY JADE SONG (BODY HORROR, SCIENCE FICTION, ROMANCE)

*Character: Asian, brooding, introspective*  
*Storyline: Own voices, character-driven, open-ended*  
*Tone: Disturbing; Haunting*  
*Writing Style: Lyrical; Stylistically complex; Compelling*

Blurring lines between reality and the fantastical, Chlorine is a gripping narrative that will leave you on the edge of your seat. It's an immersive reading experience that challenges norms, blending fantasy, horror and literary fiction to deliver a story that will resonate long after the final page. Ren Yu's a competitive teenage swimmer whose world revolves around the pool, where her dreams of success, love, and acceptance are tightly bound. Underneath the glory and accolades, Ren yearns for self-acceptance and for a life beyond societal expectations. As Ren grapples with societal pressures - only finding solace in the stories of creatures of the deep - she decides to confront her desires and embrace her true self, even if it means blood-shedding.

Fans of Literary fiction seeking thought-provoking and visceral narratives featuring women challenging societal norms, intertwined with elements of magical realism, should check out *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang or *Earthshaker* by Dolores Reyes.

*Review by Madeleine*



*For this list of genreblended reads, we've used genres and appeals taken from Novelist to map our selections.*