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Stranger (The Change Book 1)



Synopsis

Many generations ago, a mysterious cataclysm struck the world. Governments collapsed and people scattered, to rebuild where they could. A mutation, "the Change," arose, granting some people unique powers. Though the area once called Los Angeles retains its cultural diversity, its technological marvels have faded into legend. "Las Anclas" now resembles a Wild West frontier town | where the Sheriff possesses superhuman strength, the doctor can warp time to heal his patients, and the distant ruins of an ancient city bristle with deadly crystalline trees that take their jewel-like colors from the clothes of the people they killed. Teenage prospector Ross Juarez's best find ever – an ancient book he doesn't know how to read – nearly costs him his life when a bounty hunter is set on him to kill him and steal the book. Ross barely makes it to Las Anclas, bringing with him a precious artifact, a power no one has ever had before, and a whole lot of trouble.

Book Information

File Size: 1779 KB

Print Length: 433 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 067001480X

Publisher: Viking Books for Young Readers (November 13, 2014)

Publication Date: November 13, 2014

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00INIYEA8

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #472,704 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #58

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Teen & Young Adult > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Alternative Family #71 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Alternative Family #333 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Teen & Young Adult > LGBT > Fiction

Customer Reviews

Stranger is a beautifully written, exciting and moving story written by Rachel Manija Brown and Sherwood Smith. Think of it as a wild and wonderful cross between the Wild West and YA teen dystopia. There's been a cataclysm on Earth, and a weird mutation called the Change changes wildlife and grants some people incredible superpowers, such as speeding time, telekinesis, and superhuman strength. Those who have powers are known as the Changed. The technological progress of our world has been lost, and Las Ancas (formerly Los Angeles) has become a Wild West frontier town. Teenage prospector Ross Juarez is being hunted by a bounty hunter for possessing a valuable artifact -an ancient book. Ross arrives at Las Ancas fatigued and injured by dangerous crystalline trees, and is taken in by sweet Mia and her adorable father Dr Lee. The kind and tough Sheriff Crow also looks out for Ross, as he starts to build new friendships and gain confidence. However, there are characters prejudiced against the Changed people. And they have deep reservations against Ross staying...I loved this novel. The prose is beautiful, and the worldbuilding is amazing. There's a sense of optimism, wonder and beauty that is so rare in YA. What I enjoyed is the sense of history and how the world has evolved since the Change. It felt like I was reading a snapshot of the future and a classical adventure western. The environment and people are vividly described. There are mouth-watering descriptions of food, and I enjoyed reading about the experimental cuisine cooked by Dr Lee. I think anyone who is a foodie will appreciate the amazing food descriptions. I liked how Ross's PTSD was handled in a sensitive and non preachy way. And I was happy to see him form his own community/circle of friends for the first time. I liked seeing various characters build their confidence, make their own family and find their own inner strength. There are straight and LGBT characters, multiple relationships and characters from different cultural backgrounds. All of these characters are well drawn and memorable, especially Ross, Yuki, Mia and Jenny. Each character has their own hopes, dreams, passions and strengths. And it is so refreshing to see men and women characters in dynamic roles that are not stereotyped by gender. I will definitely be picking up book 2 when it comes out.

I was blown away by how much I enjoyed this book, and how much it subverted the paradigms it is a part of. I bought it because the great faith I have in Sherwood Smith to be surprising and insightful in her depiction of teenagers. I kept reading it because it was relentlessly enjoyable -- fast-paced, humane, thrilling, and tender. It would be easy to write this off as another HungerMazeRunnerDystopiana. It's not. It is about the difficulty of being a part of a community, and heroing that involves educating kids and recycling and research librarianship and amazing interdependence. When I say a book is humane, I don't mean that it is free of cruelty (this one is not)

or is prone to philosophical wanking (not so much); I mean that it is full of characters and situations that I recognize -- no one is an untouchable superhero, the stakes are not galactic, the fate of the world is not in the balance. I like all sorts of books, but I appreciate the unique courage it takes to write one that is not about starting a civil war, but rather a new business. There are lots of other things that delighted me -- the sense of economics, the multicultural community (and their FOOD), the way characters didn't instantly overcome trauma, or all handle it the same way. The clothes, the worldbuilding, and the characters -- everything said that this was a book that had been thoughtfully constructed, but I didn't think of that until after I'd finished reading it in a day. There's a love triangle. It's very sweet, and I give it two thumbs up, and yes, you can still let kids read this book. The overall level of sexiness is very low. Overall, I would heartily recommend this book to anyone, and in fact, I'm nominating it for a Hugo. It is exactly what I want to see more of in the world. Read if: You'd like to read about the post-post apocalypse, and how humanity has rebuilt. You're interested in the culture that does and does not get perpetuated. Skip if: You can't handle teenagers dying in combat. It's not super gory, but there is a pitched battle. Also read: Circus of Brass and Bone, for a community of mutants. A Stranger to Command, for sheer awesomeness. Flora's Dare for another satisfying retort to the love triangle.

Postapocalyptic YA "in a world transformed by natural disaster and the appearance of strange mutations that change humans, plants, and animals physically and psychically, a stranger comes to town. And kind of gets nailed to a tree, or at least has a tree try to grow out of his blood. The singing trees that eat people are pretty interesting and I'd like to know more about them. Tensions between apparently unaltered humans and altered ones are a significant part of the plot, but it's at its core about growing up, figuring out who you are in a world that mostly doesn't care and also wants to kill you, and falling in love. Lots of ethnic and sexual diversity; one real Mean Girl complicates the protagonists' lives within the town, but to her credit when the town faces an outside threat she works with everyone else instead of being dumb about it.

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