



Drag Teen

Jeffery Self

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A fantastic, fabulous, funny YA debut from Jeffery Self, one of the gay icons of the YouTube generation, that follows one high school student on a drag race to his future.

Debut YA author Jeffery Self takes us on a road trip with an insecure high school senior who has one goal: to be the first in his family to leave Clearwater, Florida, and go to college. The problem is, he has zero means of paying for school -- until his friends convince him to compete in a drag teen competition for a college scholarship.

Drag Teen Details

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From Reader Review Drag Teen for online ebook

Paulo Ratz says

Uma história bem gostosinha e divertida com uma perspectiva que eu nunca tinha lido. Tinha muito lugar pra crescer, mas acho que caiu em muitas obviedades e em alguns momentos pareceu um pouco infanto juvenil. Uma pena, mas como disse no canal, quem quiser uma historinha rápida e gostosinha, vale a pena.

Renata says

This is probably like a 3-star book but I'm awarding a bonus star because I like to feel pandered to, and I know my Drag Race-loving teens will also enjoy feeling pandered to by this.

It's a little cut-and-dried--the setback/solution formula of the roadtrip, the realizations that everyone has their insecurities and yet everyone is beautiful in their own way...but it's got some pretty good jokes and some A+ drag teen names.

Solid pick for teens looking for fun queer fiction where nobody dies!

Online Eccentric Librarian says

More reviews (and no fluff) on the blog <http://surrealtalvi.wordpress.com/>

Although I enjoyed Drag Teen, I admit to feeling somewhat ambivalent about the story and characters. The themes that emerged were: dealing with weight issues and hiding who you really are (whether through a drag persona, not being true to oneself, or radically remaking yourself to be different than who you were in the past). It all felt so shallow - especially considering how many really good LBGT books came out last year (Simon vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda, Better Happy Than Not, etc.). It was missing an edge, a spark, an angle, or even a good romance. I'd categorize it more as a pleasant fairy tale where 3 teens can pop into a car, tell their parents they are going to the neighboring city, but instead drive from Tampa to NYC and only encounter a flat tire and some stolen drag costumes as difficulties. It's lovely and enjoyable, a sweet little Hershey's kiss of a book.

Story: JT lives a somewhat insulated life - his mother spends all day on QVC, his father is absent even when home, and most of the kids at school pretty much ignore him since (he believes) he's too overweight to be popular. But JT has the hottest guy in school as his boyfriend and a great best friend Heather who is also dealing with self image issues and weight. JT wants to go to the university with boyfriend Seth but his family is too poor to send him; Seth hits on a contest in NYC with a prize large enough to pay for JT's education. But JT had a bad experience already when he dressed up in drag and sang "Part of Your World" at the school talent show. Will he have enough courage to drive across the US in order to compete? Or will his self doubts bury him once and for all?

I'd like to say the story is about an amazing road trip; but honestly, the story is about JT finding the four requirements in order to win the contest: Glamor, Artistry, Heart, and Soul. He conveniently finds each of

those along the way and by the time he arrives in NYC, he's had professional makeup tips, a full wardrobe of the best wigs and drag costumes ever, two very supportive friends, and even hundreds of dollars extra. It read almost like the the fairy godmother of gay teens had tapped her wand and bestowed everything JT needed, along with the support from hot boyfriend and best buddy girl to propel him to self confidence and drag queenship. It felt more Wizard of Oz than journey of discovery.

There were several off-notes that were more likely to be from an adult looking back on being a teen than not-too-bright JT would notice. In those, I heard actor/author Jeffery Self's autobiography more. Lines such as observing that once college is done, no one ever takes a test again, so what's the point of testing in high school as well as musings about what life must have been like for a gay man in the 1970s felt far too introspective to a kid spending all his time moping about his weight, how he doesn't deserve his great boyfriend, and how his family is too distracted by a petty life to give him support

At times, I kept wishing for a POV in the story. Either an adult quipping about the teen years, some kind of conflict other than annoyances or moping self doubt, more insight into the drag world, or something interesting. But Drag Teen is a straightforward slice of life with a lot of self doubt from JT and Heather thrown in. As well, when someone is given nearly everything he needs throughout the story (without having to do much for it himself other than just existing or chancing upon it), it's nearly impossible to make the journey of self growth meaningful. JT shows up, things are thrown at him (money, wigs, outfits, places to stay, companionship), he moves on. Side characters Seth (the boyfriend) and Heather (best bud girl) are pretty much 2-dimensional characters, so lightly sketched that they are only serving to make JT seem even more self absorbed. It's a shame - they really could have used more rounding out and each characters' moment of clarity was briefly discussed then completely forgotten.

Drag Teen is a very light and breezy read, easily finished in a couple of hours. Although I was looking for more from the book, I do appreciate that it is refreshing the only conflict of being gay in this book is that other guys hit on JT's boyfriend and it makes him jealous. It is, therefore, perhaps a book very much of its time - when being gay is less problematic than being overweight. Reviewed from an advance reader copy provided by the publisher.

Frank Phillips says

Listened to the audio book and would recommend it over reading, if possible. A very cute, fun ride of a book. I loved it and if you're looking for some light, fun reading I couldn't recommend it more!!

Amy says

I love this book. Parts of it felt a little clichéd, or cheesy, but it was amazing. As a fairly recently out queer woman, the book really captured what it was like to feel like an outsider, even in what is supposed to be your community. Definitely a book I'd recommend reading.

Kylie Kaemke says

When I started Drag Teen I had just finished up Kissing In America by Margot Rabb, so I was on a road-

trip-to-win-a-scholarship kick; which is okay with me! I'm always down for a good road trip story, and while Drag Teen is less road trip and more and more self discovery Jeffery Self still delivered everything I was expecting to find in this book.

It's a great friendship story, as well as a relationship story. The MC had a lot of self-pity in the beginning, and that got a little redundant, but as the story progressed he got better... or I stopped caring, either way it didn't negatively impact the story enough for me to dislike him. I didn't love the super fluffy everything-is-rainbows ending, but it was still a decent ending to a great story. It was also an ending, that even though I personally didn't love, that the story deserved.

It was a very quick and fun read. There was an important message within the words, and I am all about books that make people feel 'normal'. I know lots of teens will pull something really special out of this book and be able to apply it to their daily lives, and that's really important! I gave Drag Teen 4 stars, and I know some teens out there are going to love it and give it all the stars!

Bravo to Jeffery Self on his debut YA, and thank you to Scholastic for reaching out to me and providing me with an arc!

Noura says

This book was a hot mess and I LOVED it. The beginning was a bit rough and I was about to stop because I was over the characters after chapter one but I continued because a) drag queens b) no, really drag queens c) did I mention drag queens?

Anyway, after the first few chapters it started to pick up and then the hot the mess that is this book really started. I loved the variety and ridiculousness of these characters. I loved all the drag references. I loved the road trip. I loved all the fabulousness it contained.

And the reason I gave it a 3 star rating was because of the start and the transitions of the story weren't as smooth as they ought to be. Yes, I loved the characters later but there was more of them than is actually necessary for the progress of this story.

I would still recommend it though especially if you, like myself, love drag queens.

Mariah Roze says

3.5 so I am rounding it up to a 4. I really wish Goodreads would make half ratings!

I picked up this book because I am a teacher, so I try to read as much YA as possible. However, I am just like a student because I picked up this book because I thought the cover looked really cool.

The main character was an insecure high school senior who had one goal: to be the first in his family to leave Clearwater, Florida, and go to college. The book starts off with him having trouble trying to find a way to pay for college. His boyfriend and best friend convenience him to go on a road trip to New York City where he would compete in a Drag Teen competition for a scholarship.

This book was very entertaining but extremely unrealistic. First off, they lie to their parents about going to NYC and tell them they are going to a different part of Florida. Then they have multiple mishaps that turn out great! They have a flat tire, but no spare, so a random celebrity picks them up and lets them sleep at her house. She also happens to have great costumes for the main character to wear in the competition and gives him the confidence to sing in front of the judges. Also, she gives them hundreds of dollars and helps them get a new tire. After this all happened they apparently are ahead of schedule so they take a detour to Maryland, so the boyfriend can see his old hometown.

Like I said, the book was very entertaining but extremely unrealistic.

Carey Gibbons says

Even though I love drag and am an avid fan of Drag Race, I know that as a 37 year old cis lady, I am not this book's target audience. That being said, I found it fluffy and sweet and would not hesitate to recommend it to others. Party!

Brian says

JT has aspirations of leaving his small town in Florida and become a drag superstar. His parents barely notice him and his best friend Heather has her own problems with her weight. And his boyfriend Seth is perfect...too perfect and surely he will realize that he can do much much better than JT. But regardless, Seth inspires JT to travel on a road trip with himself and Heather to New York so that JT can enter a drag competition that will allow him to get a scholarship. Along the way, they encounter a cast of interesting characters. This book was a cute and quick read. It wasn't anything particularly deep or memorable, but it was fun to read nonetheless.

K. says

Trigger warnings: homophobia, fatphobia.

3.5 stars.

So here's the thing: I'm trash for RuPaul's Drag Race. Obviously I was going to read this book. And I sped through it in one sitting. It was fun, it was cute, it was enjoyable. But at the same time, it was very very simple. There's an easy solution for every challenge that JT comes across. There's no real depth to any of the characters. Everything is a little too quick, a little too surface level. But sometimes, that's exactly what you want.

Will I remember anything about this in like a week's time? Probably not. Did I enjoy the hell out of it when I was reading it? Absolutely.

Nurhayati Ramlan says

That scene with JT and his parents outside of the Drag Teen pageant had my eyes all teary up. I love this, a lot! Cheers to the journey of discovering and loving yourself. <3

shady boots | #WatchPOSE says

Let me tell you a story.

Once upon a time, there was a little gay kid who loved to sneak into his mother's bedroom to slather on her ruby lipstick; who loved to slip his feet into his older sister's strappy high heels—that he could barely walk in, but gave him such a rush when he wore them; who would take T-shirts and wrap their necklines around his head so he could fling them around like wigs, and wrap towels around his body like they were red carpet couture. He would prance around his room then, as if he were on a runway of his own making.

The kid didn't know why he felt so liberated when he did all these things, so much more confident than he would be if he were just wearing regular "boy" clothes, like everyone around him expected him to. He didn't understand why "drag queens" in his home country of Indonesia were practically social pariahs; the only times he'd see them would be when they're walking the streets from car to car, begging for spare change. He didn't understand why his family told him to fear them, to condemn them, to see them as abnormal. He didn't understand why he wasn't allowed to wear skirts or wigs or heels or makeup, and why he had to stifle those urges because he was supposed to be "macho".

Fortunately, his family's corrupted thoughts and closed-minded views never burrowed into his own mind, and as he grew older he discovered a little show called *RuPaul's Drag Race* that further opened his eyes. Then the sequined door burst open fully and out came *Paris is Burning*, *To Wong Foo*, *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* and *Kinky Boots* and suddenly the kid was immersed in something that he had a passion for, that gave him endless amounts of joy and laughter and self-empowerment.

He learned the different styles of drag, from pageant to campy to comedy to club kid and many more unique ones. He learned that drag could be considered a career, an art form, a perfectly-manicured middle finger to societal gender norms, but above all, a vehicle for self-expression. A way to fully unlock that inner confidence in yourself that may need an extra push.

That kid, of course.... was Nikki Blonsky from the movie *Hairspray*.

I'm just kidding, it was me.

I may be a little over-dramatic when I say this, but I feel like this is the book I've been waiting to read my entire life. Just from that story alone, I'm sure you could understand why this book had such a big impact on me. There was so much riding on this; I hyped this book up in my mind, all the while worrying it wouldn't measure up, that it would disappoint me. But as you can tell from that rating, I am just so relieved at how all of my expectations were met.

This book, very much like drag itself, made me *happy*. And I realize that a huge reason why that is is

because it hits so close to home for me, so of course there's no way for me to review this book in an unbiased way. Perhaps many of you who read this book that don't have a personal connection to drag won't really be as attached to it as I became. Or on the opposite side of that, perhaps those of you who are actually more *experienced* in the world of drag than I am—maybe you do drag professionally yourself—probably notice the little inaccurate, unrealistic details in this book that I missed. I don't claim to have an extensive knowledge on drag, since my living in Indonesia prevents me from actually being able to do it—at least in public—but I really appreciated not only the representation within this book, but also the overall message.

Self-confidence. Like I said, that is one of the most important and valuable things drag can do for a person, especially someone who struggles with crippling self-esteem issues, much like myself and the main character of this book, JT. We're both chubby guys who are often down on ourselves, don't see our self worth, and it's tough. More so because we're gay guys, and there's this high expectancy within the community that gays have to always look their best and physical attraction is *very* important among us. Getting in drag, for a lot of us, helps us unleash that fierce creature that we keep caged within us in our daily lives. And beyond that, it's just really fun to say "fuck you" to the concept of gender norms.

I know that *Fifty Shades* has forever ruined the term "inner goddess" for all of us, but this book actually brought it up a few times. If we can just pretend Anastasia Steele never existed, I feel like that is very much the essence of drag, to reveal the inner goddess in ourselves that helps us in developing self-love. Why do you think RuPaul always says "If you can't love yourself, how in the hell are you gonna love somebody else?" at the end of every *Drag Race* episode?

I realize this review is a mess cause I've barely talked about the book itself, but hey, this is just my legit emotional reaction to it. As far as the actual book goes, I really connected with JT because I saw a lot of myself in him. I also related to Heather due to her struggles with weight, and how she often felt like the third wheel. I loved JT's boyfriend, Seth, who is an absolute sweetheart who's always eager to help and wants to see JT be more confident. Some people may get a kind of "Manic Pixie Dream Guy" vibe from Seth, but I just thought he's a really good person with his own set of flaws, and I'd kill to have a Seth in my own life.

Another thing about Seth I loved was that he was actually the one who encouraged JT to pursue drag. Why this was important was because there's such a stigma with dating drag queens in the gay community. You have no idea how often the phrase "He's so hot, too bad he does drag" or something similar is uttered. For some reason, there's this idea that doing drag somehow makes you less desirable to other gay men. There are a lot of exceptions to this, of course, and Seth is a great example of that exception. There should be more guys like him, who love someone drag and all. Shows like *Drag Race* have definitely helped in getting rid of this stigma.

But yeah, I really dug all three of them and connected with them on their little road trip. The first half of this book gave me such *Priscilla* and *To Wong Foo* vibes with the whole road trip thing and meeting colorful characters along the way. It's definitely very different, since technically only JT is the one doing drag whereas those two movies consist of three drag queens going on a road trip, but it gave me that same vibe nonetheless and I think that's what the author was going for. The second half of the book was the New York part, and I had some little gripes about a few of the characters there being a little too stereotypical, like Pip (the hippie) and Tash (the mean girl), but they didn't really bother me that much.

And yes, I realize that looking back, the structure of this book is like a stereotypical feel-good movie, complete with convenient scenarios (view spoiler) but it just worked, in my opinion. It was paced very nicely, and I hope someday it DOES get picked up as a movie. I definitely would love to see some of the *Drag Race* girls having roles in it, too. Bianca Del Rio would make for an amazing Lady Rooster.

I'm just so happy. I'm happy that this book exists and I'm happy that it's actually *good*. I'm happy that this book captured a big part of what drag is all about; unlocking the ability to love yourself, even if it takes a fifty pound wig and a fully beat face to do it.

To the author, Jeffery Self, if you're miraculously reading this review at this very moment, I just want to say thank you. Thank you for introducing the magical world of drag into YA fiction, because it sorely needed it. I wish I could go back in time and give this book to my younger self, because I know *he* sorely needed it, too.

Izzy says

RuPaul's Drag Race literally gives me life. I binge-watched the first six seasons on Netflix in literally three weeks almost two years ago, and it became one of my favorite realities. I've had the pleasure of going on lots of amazing performances by my favorite queens this past year. So am I excited about this? HELL YEAH!!!! Please let it be as awesome as it sounds!

jv poore says

Remember the first time you released your inner-most self? Knowing you, to your very core; adoring and admiring that person so much it had to be celebrated---the joyful, buoyant feeling had to be released, good vibes to everyone. Imagine being in that moment when a hate-filled, bitter person brings contempt so tangible that the light is smothered; the joy stolen. Because most of us have experienced that, it is almost intuitive to empathize with JT's predicament.

His parents do not support his desire to attend college after high school. They appear offended by his plan, as if his ambition is as an affront to the lives they lead. Rather than seeing and hearing their son, they seem to have created a persona of an ungrateful, arrogant brat that is easy to dismiss. But JT has Seth, and Seth has a plan.

A Drag Teen pageant is being held for high school seniors needing financial aid for college; the prize—a full scholarship. The idea of being a Drag Teen doesn't bothers JT, the terror doing it again, with the same results is paralyzing. With the support of his boyfriend, their best friend Heather and an assortment of souls along the way, JT tackles the terror.

I was amused, delighted and entirely invested in this story. The combination of blue-collar parents, an over-the-top, former country music sensation, teen-agers and Drag Queens is quirky in the best possible ways and works wonderfully for JT's journey to New York City and self discovery.

This review was written for Buried Under Books by jv poore.
