

A YEAR AT BOOK CLUB



OTR Book Club is a group for 16-25 year olds to meet and discuss everything bookish!

This book club is run by Off the Record, a mental health and wellbeing charity for young people in Bristol, South Glos and North Somerset.

Thank you to Give a Book, the charity who provides us with free books every month. Without Give a Book, this group would not be possible.



Read on to see what we've read in a year at Book Club, and get a snippet of our thoughts and feelings on each book.

(The ratings for each book are a mean average of the ratings of members, and all the books with a low or average rating were in fact loved by at least one person!)

January



“The Lesbiana’s Guide to Catholic School”
by Sonora Reyes

Our rating:

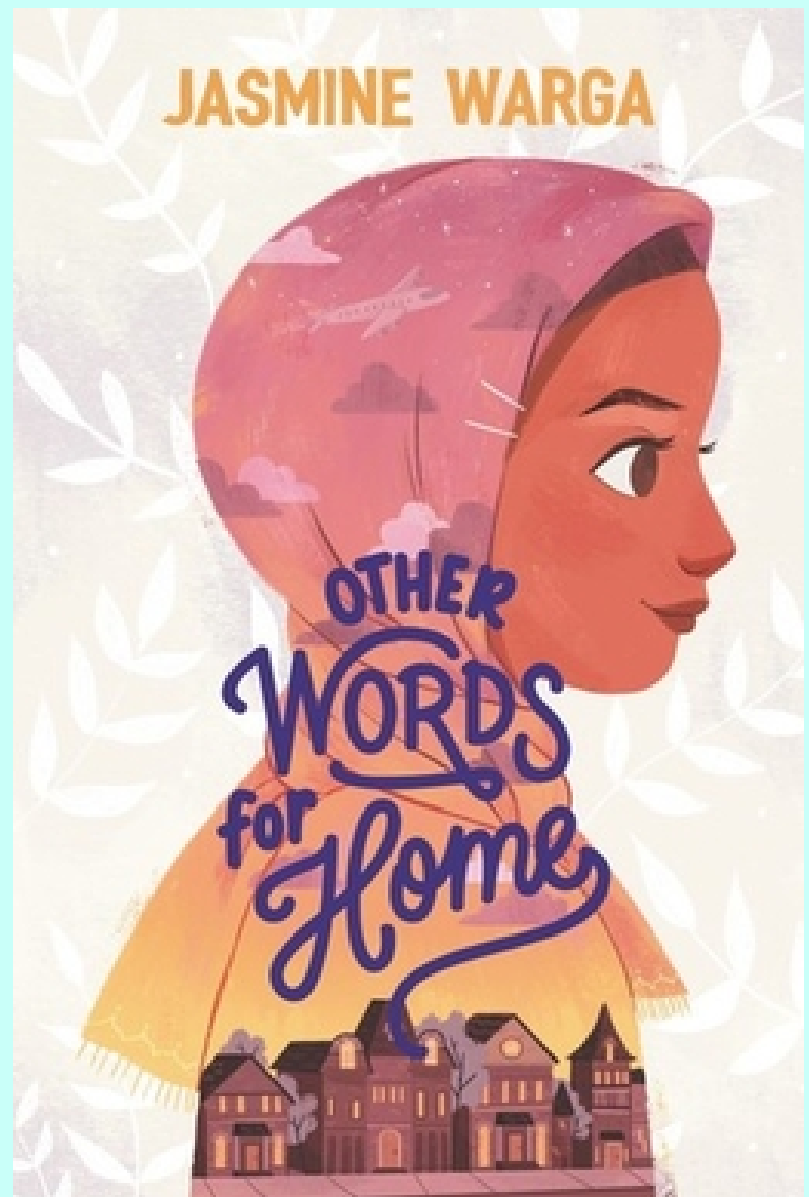


A fun, light read

It surprised me how much I enjoyed this one. The romantic relationship portrayed was healthy, culture was explored authentically with nuance and I appreciated how the characterisation and plot was done, which doesn't always happen with YA in my experience :-)

February

“Other Words for Home” by Jasmine Warga



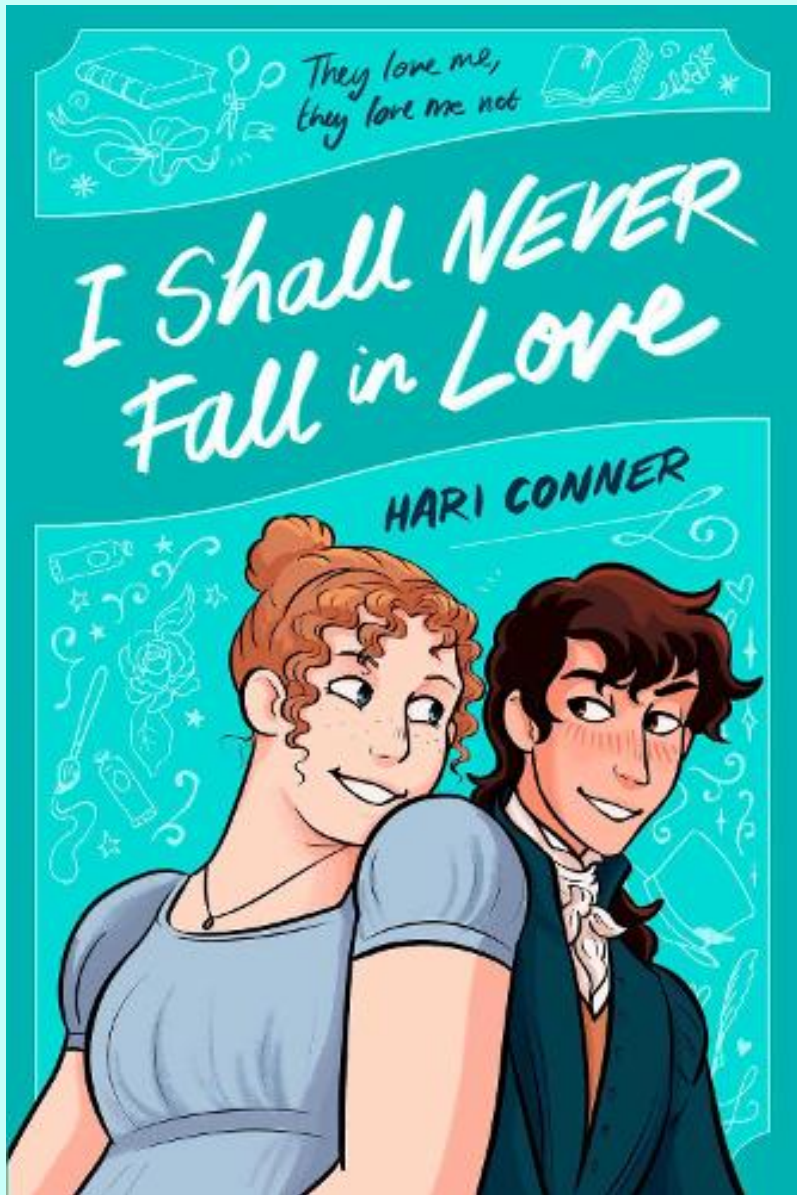
Our rating:



I loved to see the emotional journey of the main character

I was not a fan of the writing style

March



“I Shall Never Fall in Love” by Hari Conner

Our rating:

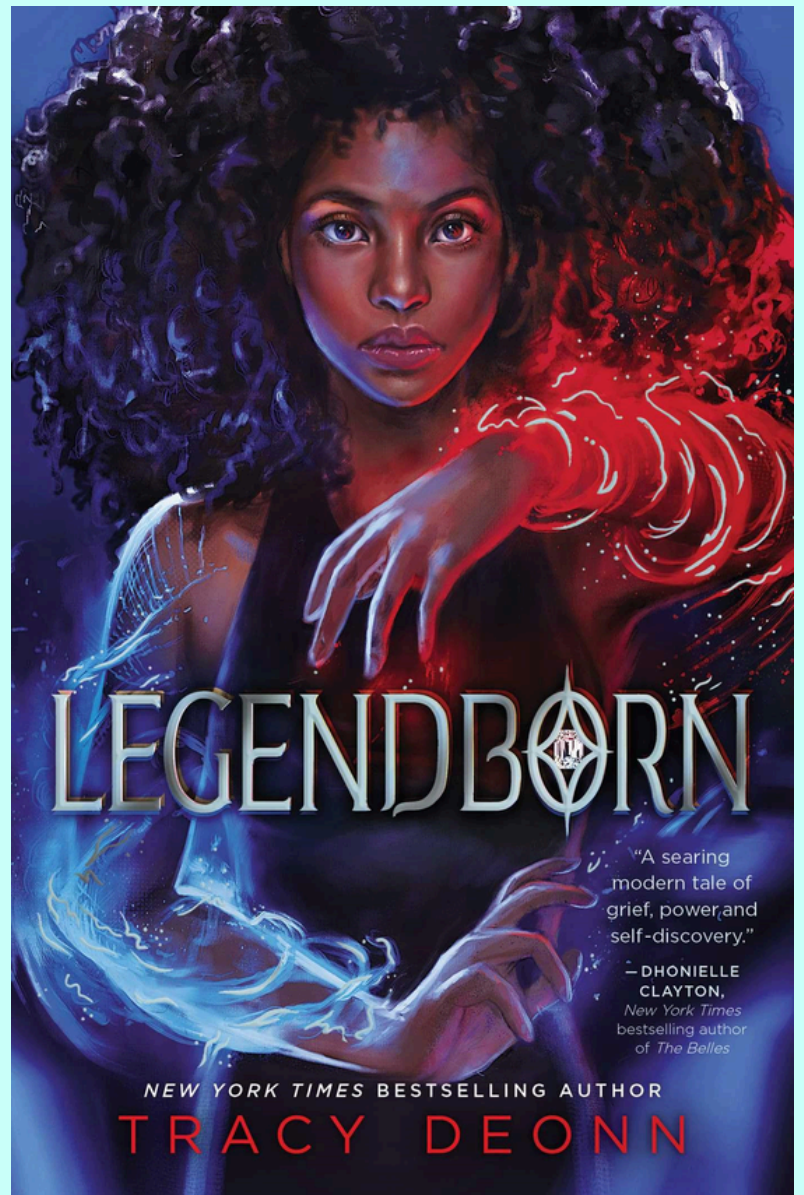


Very pretty art, loved the story

The fashion and textiles were historically plausible and that is all I could ask of a graphic novel

April

“Legendborn” by
Tracey Deonn



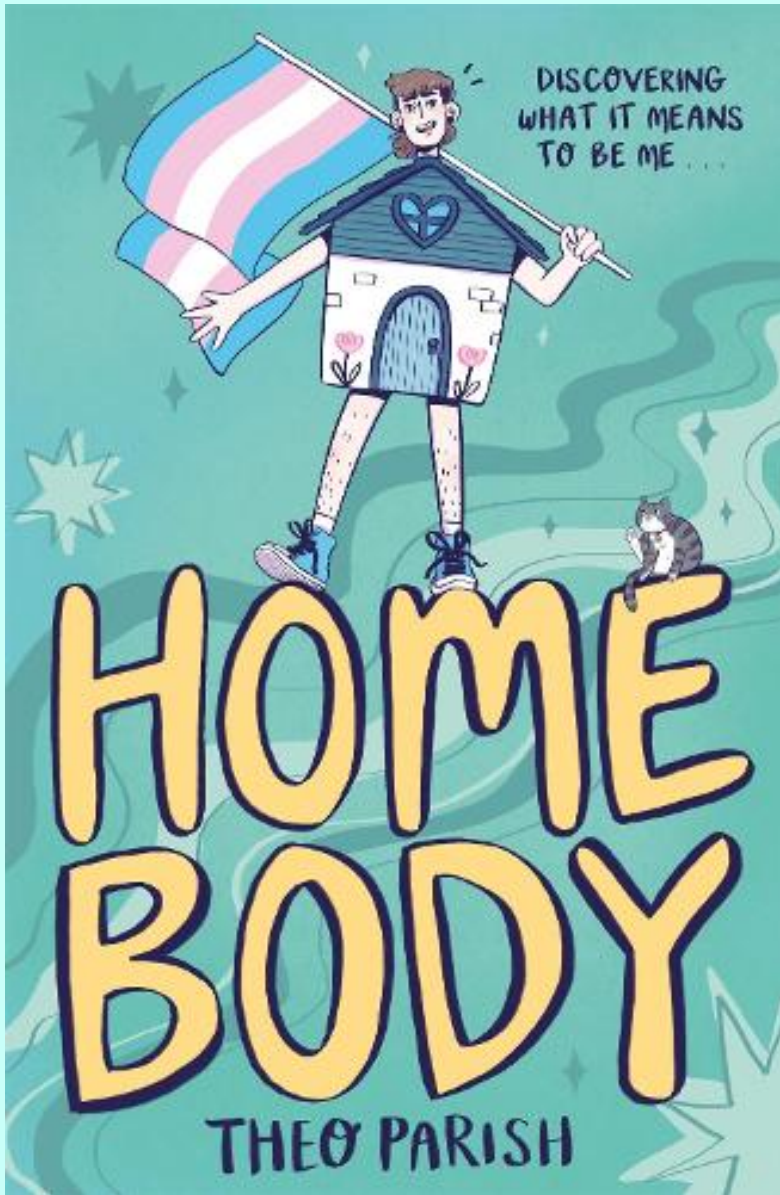
Our rating:



Really interesting, I would reread it
if I get the chance

It was slightly overshadowed for me by
Ninth House (which I read outside of book
club and had a similar premise)

May



“Homebody” by
Theo Parish

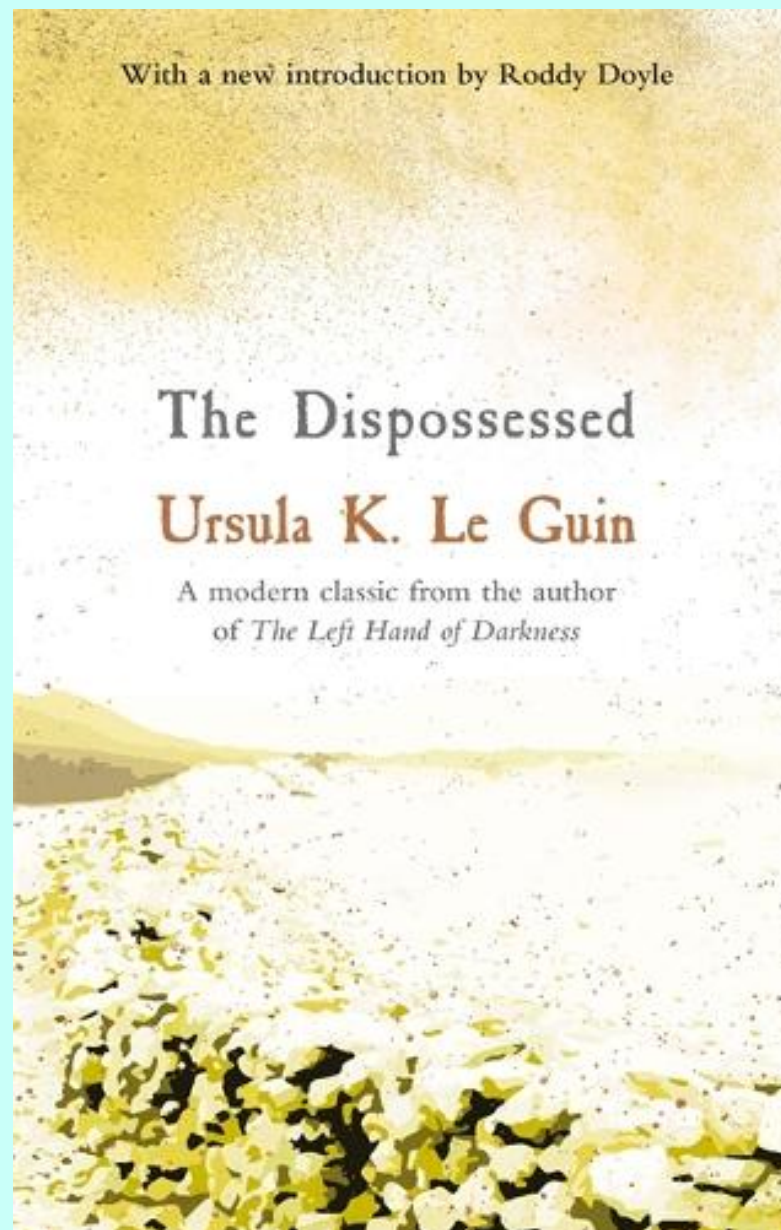
Our rating:



Loved the themes, I really related to it

June

“The Dispossessed”
by Ursula K Le Guin



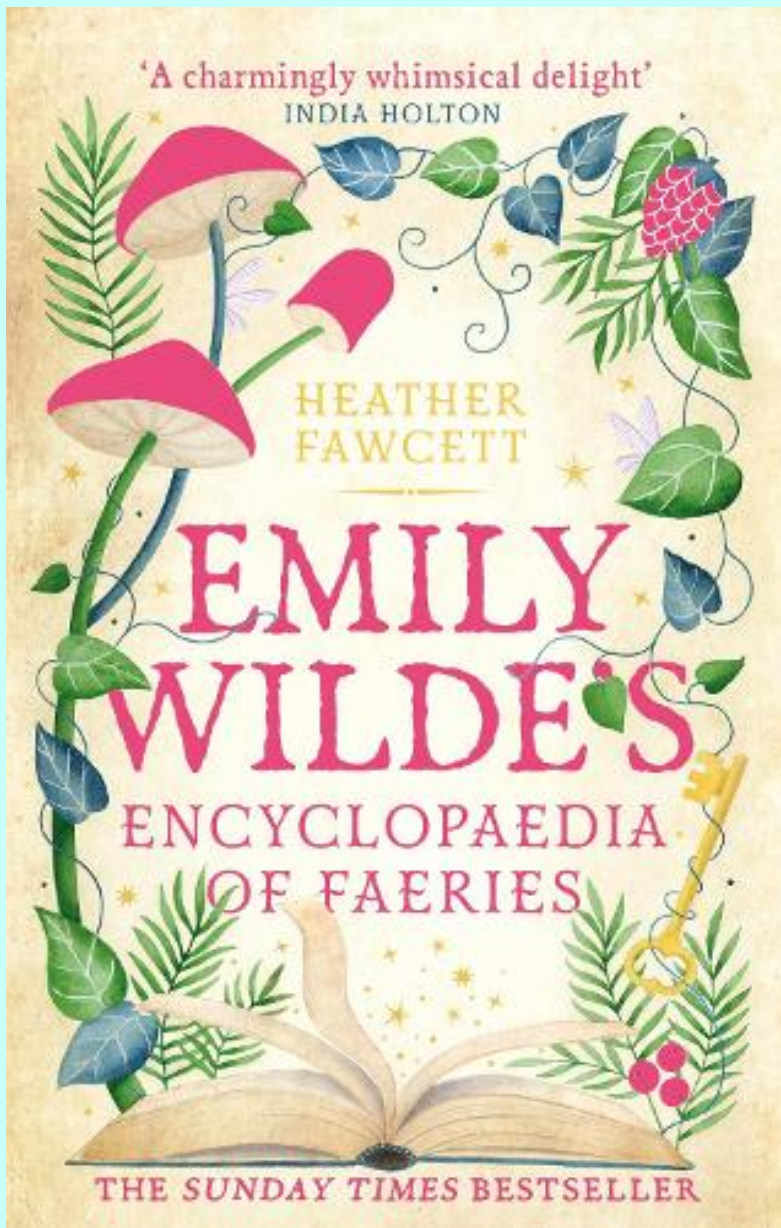
Our rating:



A really interesting work of feminism

I love anything and everything Le Guin writes, so I am profoundly biased

July



“Emily Wilde’s
Encyclopaedia of
Faeries” by
Heather Fawcett

Our rating:



Bad autism representation in my opinion (it wasn't actually said that the main character is autistic, but it's in the subtext)

I was surprised by how much I enjoyed this and how interesting the central relationship was

August

“The In-Between
Bookstore” by
Edward Underhill

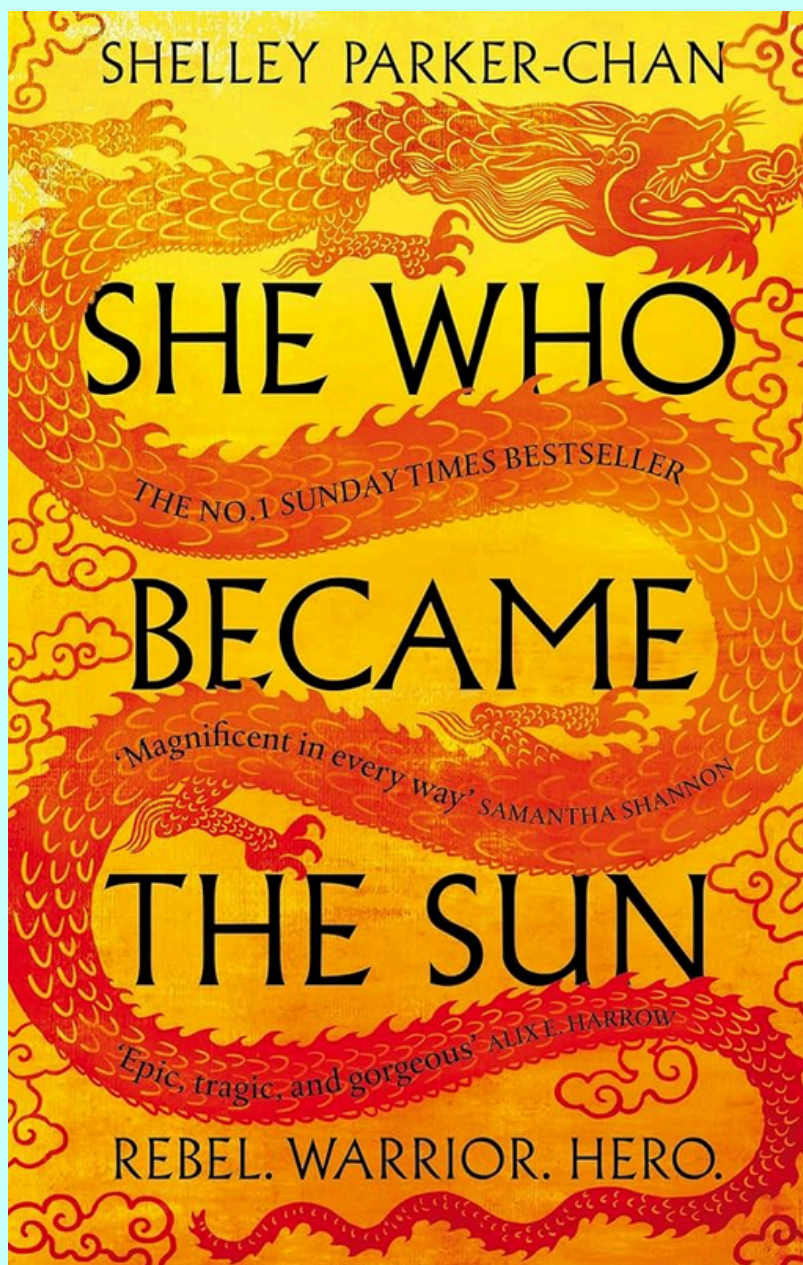


Our rating:



I find the main character unikeable

September



“She Who Became the Sun” by Shelley Parker-Chan

Our rating:



Amazing, possibly the best thing I read all year. Ouyang and Zhu are both great protagonists and foils to each other. The themes around fate and inevitability were explored in a very natural and compelling way.

Fascinating story with lots of threads interwoven

October



“Only This Beautiful Moment” by Abdi Nazemian

Our rating:



A really exciting premise that was somewhat let down by its execution

October

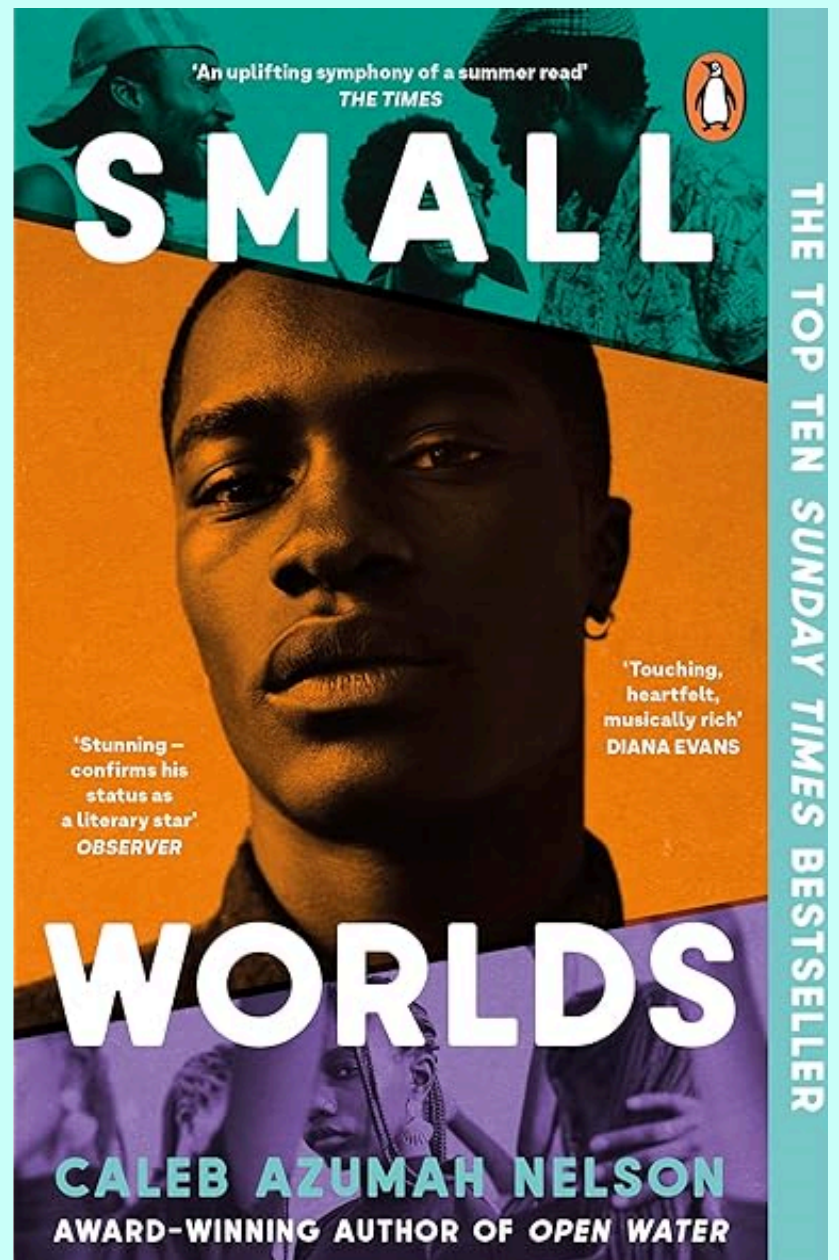
I really enjoyed 'Only This Beautiful Moment' - it honoured the profound love, grief and care passed on through generations so beautifully, and each perspective was presented with such nuance and warmth. I resonated a lot with the sometimes fraught and also gorgeous connection between culture and queerness especially within immigrant families, and loved the portrayal of queer mentorship.

One of my favourite quotes is when Zip talks to Bobby about passing on the torch of intergenerational care: 'if you want to thank me, take care of the next generation when you're my age. [...] Help young people who are made to feel invisible feel the opposite. Make them feel seen.'

I also like that while it reminded us to honour our ancestry and those who came before and will come after us, 'the light shines only now'. We have to grasp each precious moment and live it in the present.

November

“Small Worlds” by
Caleb Azumah Nelson



Our rating:

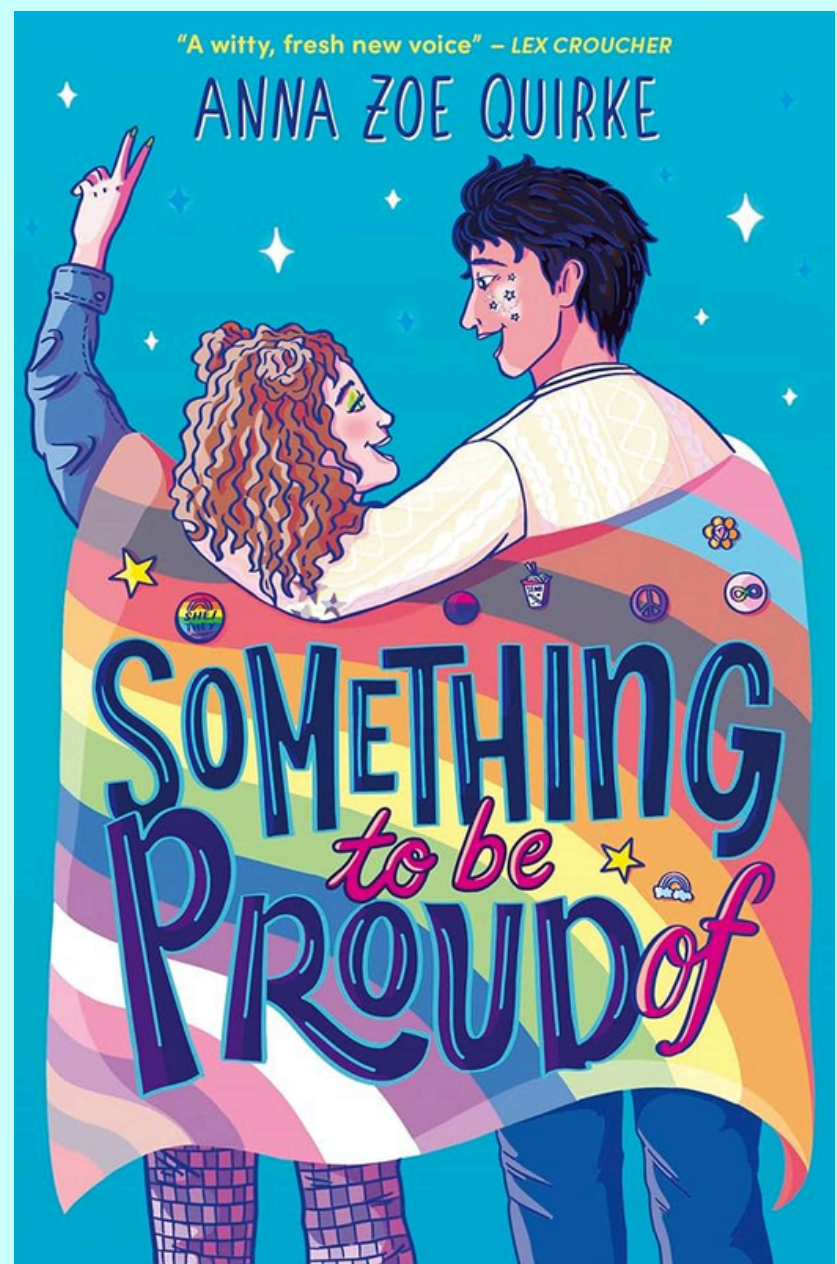


The writing style matches up well with how my thoughts work, I feel sucked in

An eye-opening snapshot of black culture, specifically young people who are children of immigrants in London

December

“Something to be Proud of” by Anna Zoe Quirke

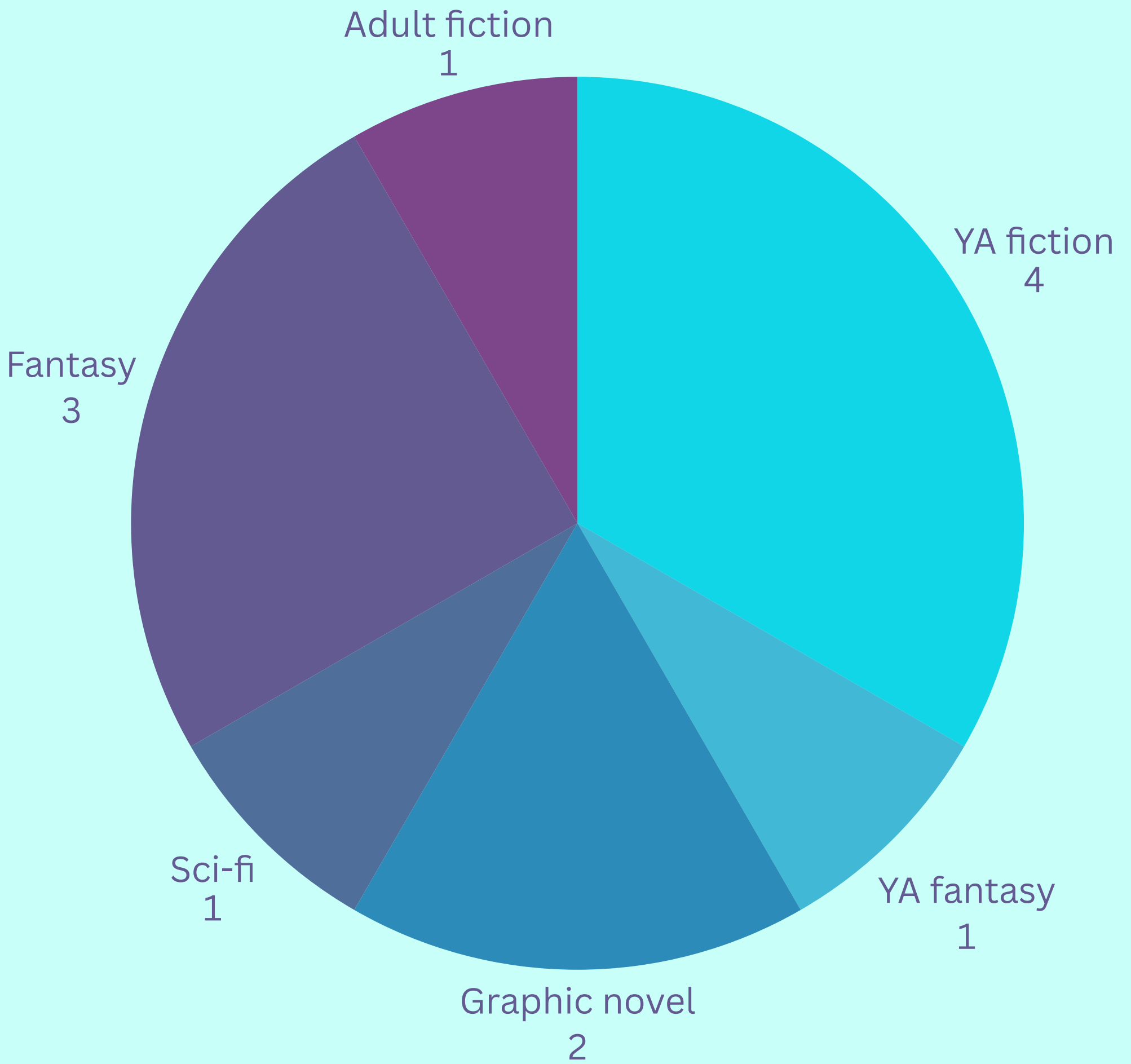


Our rating:



Really funny, enjoyed the banter between the group, shocked to read [spoiler!] was gay and really happy [spoiler!] got together in the end

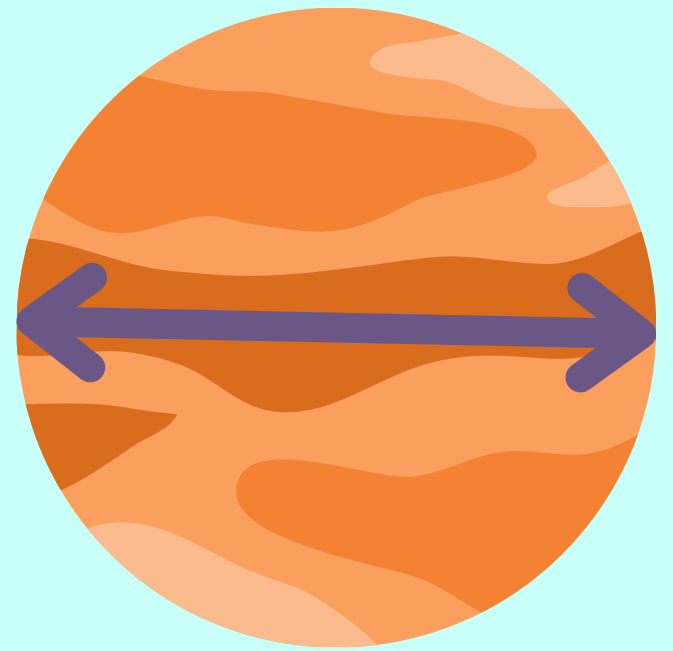
Genres



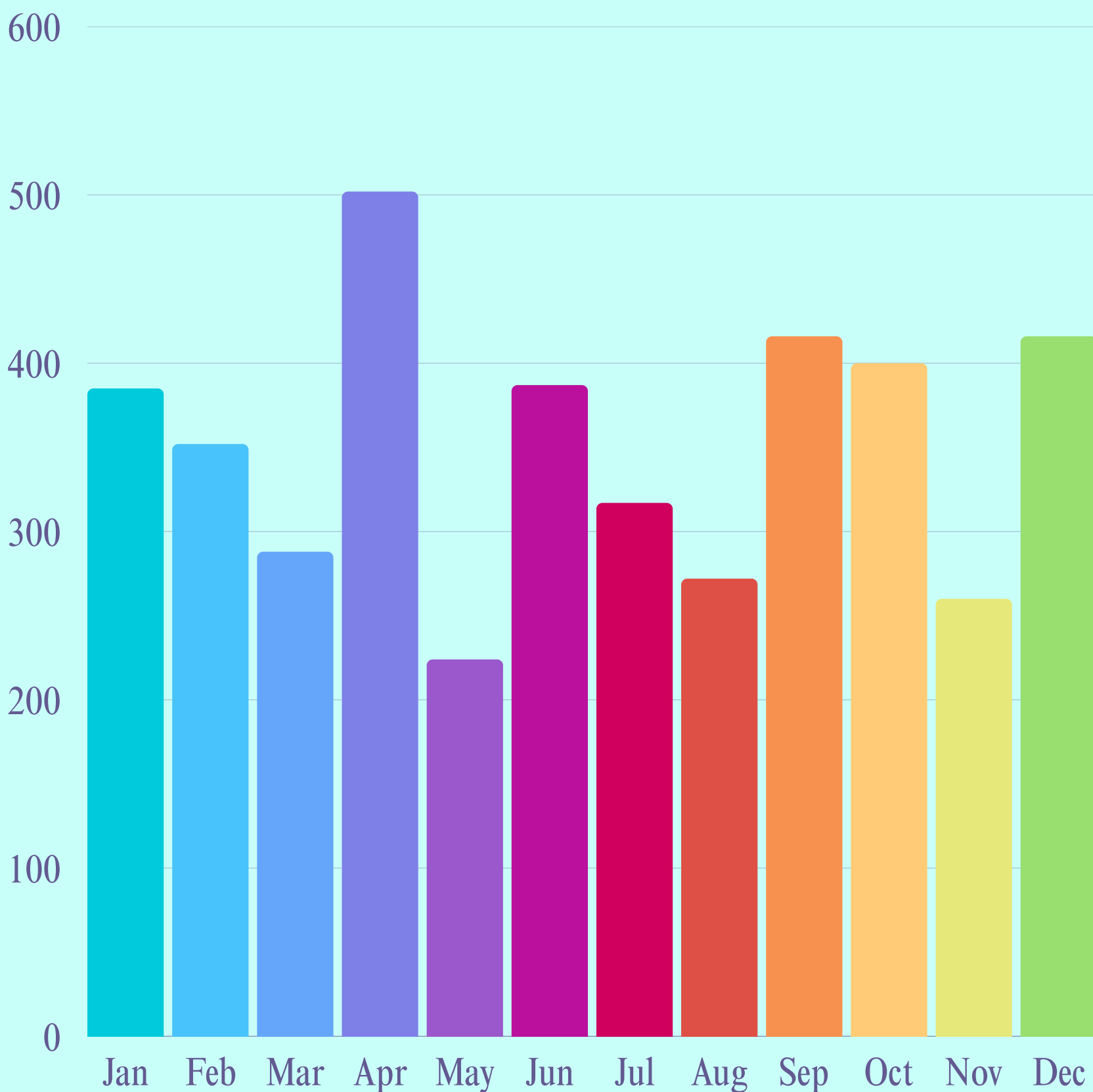
Total pages read this year:

4,219

That's the diameter of Mars in miles!

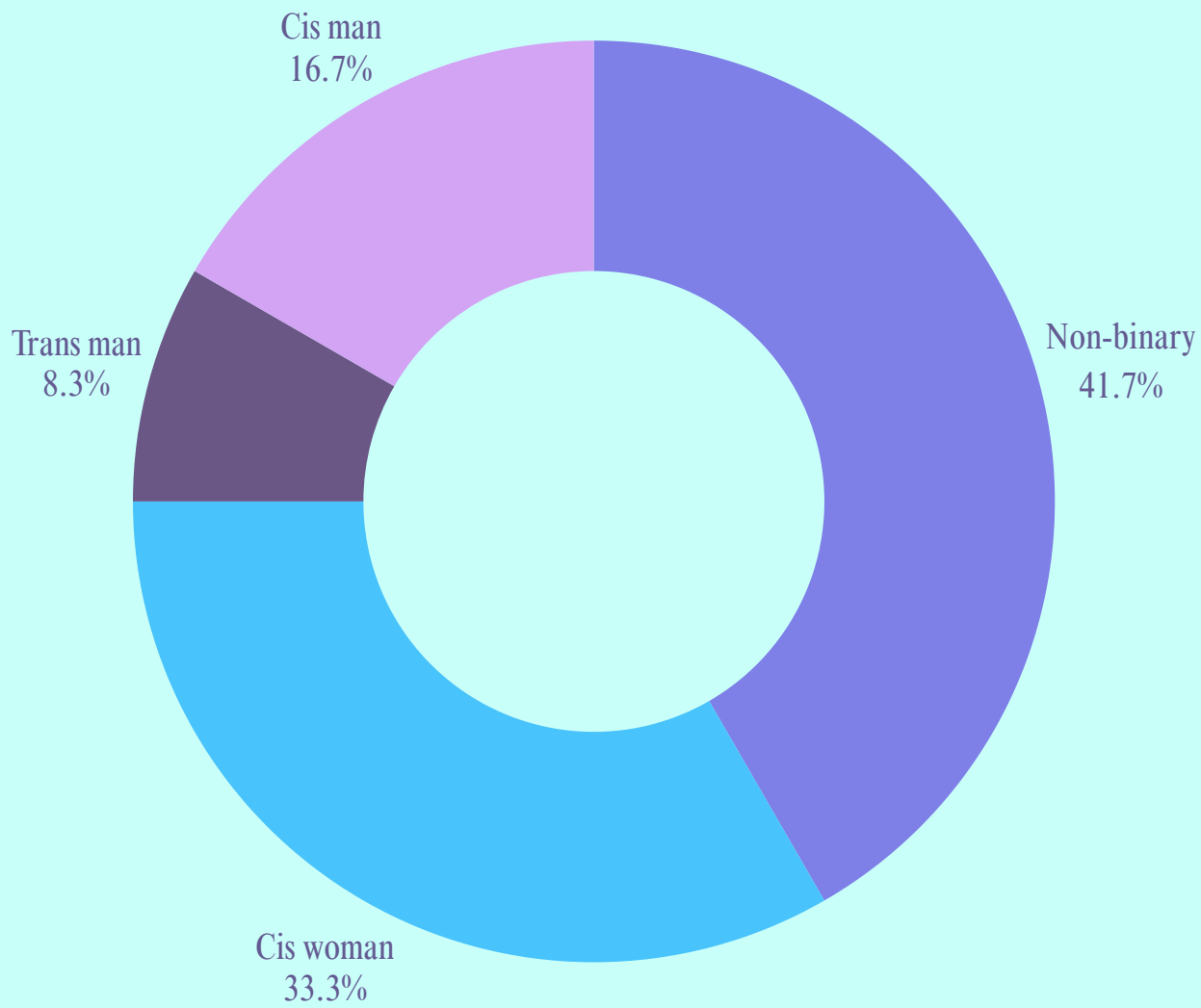


Pages read each month:

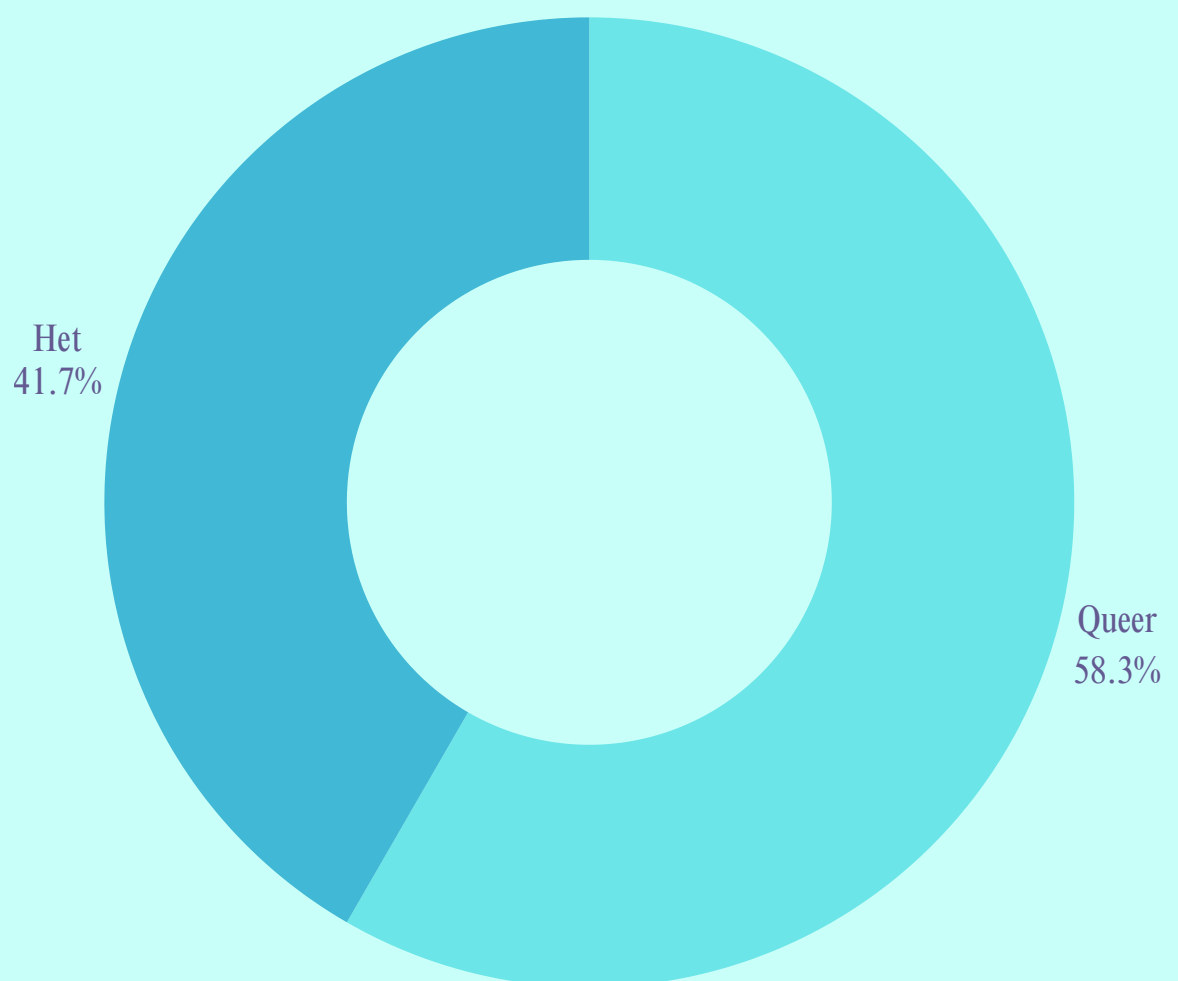


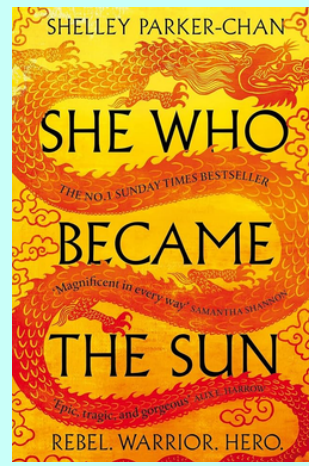
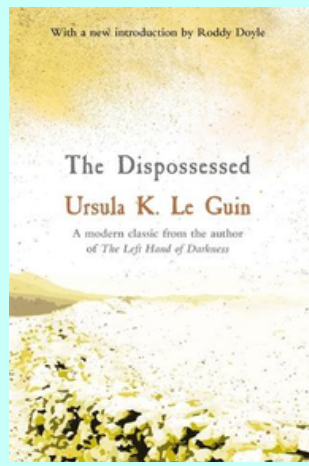
Author Stats

Author Gender



Author Sexuality





2025 OTR Book Club Reading Wrap-up



Books read: 12

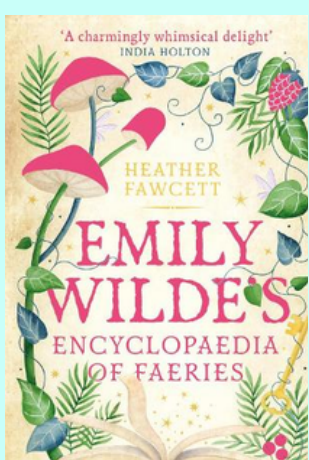
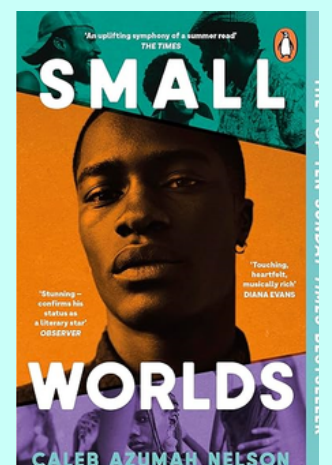
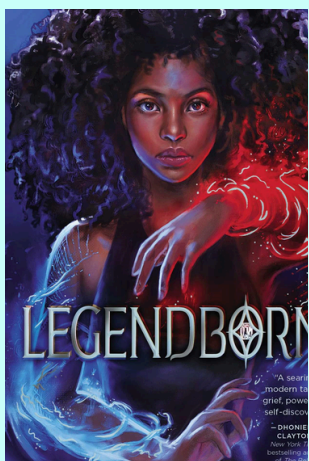
Pages read: 4,219

Genres explored: 6

Average length: 352 pages

Average rating: 3.5 stars

Highest rated: Home Body
and Something to be Proud of
Lowest rated: Small Worlds



WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO JOIN BOOK CLUB FOR THE FIRST TIME?

BY PERSEUS

I first joined this OTR Book Club almost 3-years ago now, in May 2023. When I joined, there was a week left before the Book Club meeting, fortunately an online one, and the book was 'Open Water' by Caleb Azumah Nelson. I managed to get a copy 5-days, at most, before the session, & because it was my first time attending, (as well as my first time being part of any Book Club), I was really anxious that I had to read the entire book otherwise I would make a really bad first impression. So, over a period of about 5-days, whilst attending College 4-days a week, & having my 35-hour exam coming up the following week, I read this book for my first ever Book Club session at every single spare second I could grab (most of which were 2-4am when I gave up on my flawed attempts of sleeping, like any normal human would... 😊)

When the Book Club session came around, I was literally 30-pages from the end - however, I didn't want to be late attending, so I joined the call & tried (& failed) to continue reading those 30-pages whilst also paying attention to the session.

Whilst books are my absolute everything, (literally - I take pride in my vast collection, & volunteer twice a week at an Oxfam bookshop where I get to repaid books, sometimes as old as from the 1600s!), I am not exactly skilled in the human-ing aspect of life. For the beginning of my education, I was spending more time either kicked out of classes for being 'badly behaved' or just 'being a nuisance', & from the age of 7, I was homeschooled by my Mom until I turned 16. Therefore, I wasn't exactly spending a lot of time around humans, other than my Mom & 2 older brothers.

So, when I joined this OTR Book Club, I was absolutely terrified that I would do something wrong, say the wrong thing, like I always seemed to, offend or upset the other people, or, worst of all, get kicked out or banned

I have wanted to be part of a Book Club for as long as I could remember - for the few years that I attended school, I very quickly realized that I wasn't like other people, & that they very quickly decided I wasn't welcome around them. Therefore, I spent most of my time in the library, either reading or writing my own stories. Books helped me feel calm, they gave me time to process the events of the day, helped me take time to calm down if someone had hurt or humiliated me, & most of all, they didn't make me feel like I was a complete & total screw up.

Unfortunately, in both schools attended, they seemed to actively ensure that all books in the school libraries were 100% free from any form of ‘negative influences’ – in other words, there was absolutely zero books with positive representation of characters who struggled to listen, or individuals who struggled with Anxiety, nothing to represent any form of Neurodiversity, no characters who were in any way, shape or form associated with the LGBTQ+ society, etc.

When I started being homeschooled by my Mom, she made sure to keep supporting my love of books – seeing as I live in North Somerset, it is a bit more difficult to access things like libraries unless you can drive yourself around (& now that I can, fortunately, I more or less live at my library! :D), but I was very, very lucky that we have the Mobile Library visiting the road I lived on where I grew up.

So every other Thursday, between my classes with my Mom, she would walk with me to the end of our road, I’d bring my rucksack (to carry all the Library Books in, ofc!), & Mom would bring my Library card. We would pick out some new books for the next 2-weeks, return all the books I borrowed when I last visited the Mobile Library 2-weeks before, then return home to do some reading before starting school classes again.

This Mobile Library was freedom to me. It was where I first read about characters who weren't 'normal'. I remember turning to my Mom when I first came across a book where a character kept misbehaving, but didn't want to cause harm, and I said to her: "I didn't know there were books about people like me. I thought only good people got to be in books." And from that moment, my Mom made it her mission to help me access books which truly represented our beautiful, diverse world

Now, when I joined OTR Book Club, I assumed that, going back into the 'real world' for the first time in over 10-years, I would be going back to a 'no badly behaving people allowed' world. However, I went into this group, early in my social transition, to a group who also were Neurodiverse, whether that was individuals who had literally just been diagnosed as Autistic, like I had at the age of 16, or who were diagnosed very young. I was around other people who had such a diverse variety of family situations, gender identities & sexualities, races, religions, & more. I went into a world where I wasn't just 'normal', but welcomed to be me. Book Club was a safety. And for the last 3-years, it has been one of my absolutely favorite moments of each month, attending these sessions, whether that is online or in-person, with such amazing, caring, interesting people to share these diverse books with!

2025 Book Club Vibes

Fun Friendly

A safe space

Enjoyable

Interesting



What will Book Club bring
in 2026? Join us to find out :)