



The Witch Boy

Molly Ostertag

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In thirteen-year-old Aster's family, all the girls are raised to be witches, while boys grow up to be shapeshifters. Anyone who dares cross those lines is exiled. Unfortunately for Aster, he still hasn't shifted . . . and he's still fascinated by witchery, no matter how forbidden it might be.

When a mysterious danger threatens the other boys, Aster knows he can help -- as a witch. It will take the encouragement of a new friend, the non-magical and non-conforming Charlie, to convince Aster to try practicing his skills. And it will require even more courage to save his family . . . and be truly himself.

The Witch Boy Details

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From Reader Review The Witch Boy for online ebook

Calista says

Oh sweet Billy Elliot! How could I not love this book about witches, breaking gender stereotypes and magic? Pure Pleasure to read. Such a great read. In this world, women are witches and do magic while men are shapeshifters and they protect. Aster is a lovely boy who keeps trying to overhear the secret women's teaching. He is drawn to it and not to the shapeshifting side. He keeps being pushed to connect with shapeshifting and he tries and tries and he can't.

I started reading this and I could not put this down. I was so pulled into the story. I love Molly's work and I will keep my eye on her and her work. She is a fantastic storyteller. I love her story and I love her art. She had good characters and a well driven plot.

What a joy to read. It's also a fast read. I can't wait to read the next volume. I think it comes out next year. This was a pleasure to read.

Erica says

This book has killed me and I am dead, typing out reviews from beyond the grave because I know how to live the best afterlife.

Originally, this piqued my interest because of the title and cover. Witches? Yes, please. Boy witches? Interesting! Cute kid + monster shadow? I'm in!

And if you like reading on the surface, that's exactly what this story is about - witches and shapeshifters, fitting in (or not), family, friendship, and terrible monsters.

If you're more of a Find the Symbolism/Read Deeper/ALL THE ALLEGORIES! person, then you'll find a whole lot more going on including gender roles, societal expectations, diversity and acceptance, as well as witches and shapeshifters, fitting in (or not), family, friendship, and the making of terrible monsters and how that can be avoided.

Here's what charmed me (I'm so clever with my words):

1) The illustrations. They're adorable, colorful, well-rendered and, oddly, reminded me a lot of Noelle Stevenson's* work, even though everything is less pointy and not as thin-lined. It's got a similar feeeeeel, though.

(ok, that looks more like Calvin and Hobbes but trust me, there's a Noelle Stevenson vibe running throughout, too)

2) There is one gender norm pushed in this book (and it's pushed so it can be shattered) and all the others are nearly erased. The protagonist, Aster, has a girl-typical name and when compared to his cousins, looks effeminate. But he's a boy and that only matters because he's supposed to be a shapeshifter. Boys are shapeshifters, girls are witches. Those are the only roles to which genders must conform in this story. Otherwise, everyone is who they are. Aster's mother, Holly, is the ultimate earth mother type, primal femininity, nurturing, running around barefoot in her country dress. She looks like some Irish goddess. Aster's aunt Iris, though, looks like she came from a punk rock band and is all emotion and reaction. Other

than Aster's dad, a thoughtful, family-oriented, slender-but-strong brown man, we don't get to see as much of the male counterparts and what we do see seems typically masculine, mostly, all except Aster. The other boys tease him because he sucks at doing what they do, shapeshifter stuff, athletic stuff, physical stuff, not because of his name or his looks or anything else.

Aster meets Charlie, a super sporty black girl WITH THICK ANKLES!** who didn't even know magic really existed until she saw Aster doing witchery in her neighborhood. She knows who she is, what she wants, and where she's going. She is the epitome of being herself without caring what anyone else thinks about her. She's also somewhat reckless, as evidenced by her broken leg. It's only natural these two would fit together so well.

3) Aster and Charlie's friendship is perfect. There are no romantic under or overtones, they are so wonderfully comfortable with each other, they obviously love and admire one another a lot and they intentionally work together instead of doing that "I have to do this alone" nonsense. It's beautiful and I wish friendships like this were represented more often.

4) There's one message that gets driven home, pointy end first. The rest of them are just there, lying around for the reader to pick up either intentionally or subconsciously. The cast is racially, genderly, sexually, aged-ly, all the other -ly's diverse. And it's unquestioned. Except for the storyline about defying gender norms, everything else is just accepted. What a great message to plant in the mind of the younguns: you're not like everyone else? That's fine. They're not like everyone else? Also fine. Find your commonalities and make friends among people with whom you connect while respecting everyone else even if you don't personally like them. And this simple message is there to witness but it's not preached, not at all. I loved that.

I would recommend this book to everyone who likes books like Princeless #1, Lumberjanes, Nimona, hell even Rat Queens #1 if you're looking for something aimed at a younger audience, and for readers who love Raina Telgemeier and/or Faith Erin Hicks.

*soooo...I'm reading the acknowledgements and at the end, Molly thanks her partner, Noelle, for making their house a home or something. Now, aside from my sister's, I don't see the name Noelle that often so the first one that came to mind, because she was already in my mind due to the aforementioned illustration style, I wondered...could Molly be talking about Noelle Stevenson? I mean, they'd know each other from being in the same industry, and all. I stalked them this morning and guess what? They're a couple! Which is kinda great because, in retrospect, I'd totally ship them even though I give no shits about people's relationships. These two are too perfect and adorable to not be together and they're melting my heart. I wonder if they need an aunt. I only have two nieces and two nephews, there's plenty of room for two more.

**Thick ankles is something that is never talked about. Like, never! But it's such a worry for so many kids, mostly girls but also boys, especially athletic kids. You never ever see imagery of thick ankles on anyone who isn't pregnant, in which case it's shown as a symptom of pregnancy and is used to evoke sympathy or empathy, or fat, in which case it's shown as a symptom of being overweight and just think about how nice those legs would be if they didn't look like tree trunks, or old, in which case it's shown as a symptom of agedness when your body gives out and you can't be pretty anymore because you are ancient. But not everyone has thin ankles and some people, especially people who run and kick and use their legs a lot, have strong, hearty, not-thin ankles! It's not a terrible thing at all, it's not shameful, it's not a symptom of anything. It's a body part and unless you've got gout, you should not be worried about the size of your ankles so thank you, Molly, for bringing this up because more kids need to know that ankles aren't supposed to come in one size only.

Tatiana says

I had wanted to read this after seeing so much excitement. To me, this book is about gender essentialism and the way it harms the people you're trying to force it on.

I liked the art, and was glad to see lots of brown skinned (though I think they're black people) in the book.

It's a MG graphic novel, which I didn't know going in. So if you're into that demographic, check this out.

Lola says

This works very well as a standalone. I don't feel as if there are unanswered questions or elements missing. Still, I wish to read more books about Aster and his magical community.

The characters are strong. They all play a certain role in the story. It's when you can't imagine a book without its different characters that you realize they've left an impression on you and are worthy of being in the story.

Aster is so relatable. In his world, women are witches who manipulate magic and men are shape shifters who turn into a certain animal and protect the community. But Aster can't shape shift, and anyway, he doesn't want to. It's not him. Witchery calls to him instead.

His situation is similar to many other people's situations, even in our contemporary society without magic. These feelings of wanting to be whoever we are but fearing ostracism are universal. It wasn't hard for me to connect with Astrid, and I believe it won't be hard for other readers either.

The illustrations are SPLENDID. My advance copy only had a few pages in color, but I'm sure the final book will be MAGNIFICENT. Very interesting story and formidable diverse characters. Too bad I have to say goodbye to them so soon.

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Davey says

(The bookstore where I work received an ARC of this today from Scholastic and, as it was a particularly slow day, I read it all in one go while standing behind the cash register.)

I loved it. I loved the world right away--in fact, I wished it were longer (or perhaps the beginning of a series) just because the magic was so interesting. I really dug the artwork, too, of course. It felt very organic. But also magical. And I liked the character designs.

But mostly it was just such a compelling metaphor for being "Other," gender-wise. It really hit me in a soft spot in a way that, to be honest, not a lot of middle-grade books do. It captured so well and in such a short space the yearning for something that society says you aren't supposed to have--it captured equally well the putrescence of the soul that can grow when you're denied your true self.

Raeleen Lemay says

This was fantastic! Magic + diverse characters + beautiful art = my kind of graphic novel

Bogi Takács says

This was nice, the kind of gender representation that might even fly with right-wing parents just because it's mostly super-not-declaredly but-still-quite-clearly trans. (I live in Kansas. These books are needed.) Probably not going to review it at length for now, because I have a lot of other things to review, but it might go into my SFF comics highlights of 2017 (I'm still working on that one).

Thank you Nino for recommending it :)

Source of the book: Lawrence Public Library

Skye Kilaen says

Fairly straightforward but heartfelt tale about the toxicity of rigid gender roles, with lovely art because Molly Knox Ostertag is amazing. It's the story of Aster, a boy growing up in a society where women do magic and men shapeshift, and that's that. Except it isn't, because Aster does magic and doesn't shapeshift. What I particularly appreciated: (a) Aster's confidence-building friendship with a girl outside his community who also doesn't follow gender norms, (b) The diversity of skin color among the magical community, and (c) the magic system, because I would love to talk to a tree with a cool-looking symbol and have it give me an apple. The resolution with Aster's parents was bittersweet but realistic given that they're fundamentally good people but severely blinded by their culture. Hopefully every library in the entire country has this on the shelves, it's both entertaining and sorely needed.

mo says

4 to 4.5 stars. A gentle but exciting exploration of gender stereotypes and belonging, all wrapped up in the trappings of magic, shapeshifters, and burgeoning friendship. Lovely art is the icing on the cake.

Misty says

This was sweet and beautifully drawn, and it may hit the sweet spot for a lot of young readers, but it left something to be desired. Everything felt a little shallow and not fully fleshed out, and there's no real "twist" -- even though I think one was *slightly* intended -- as it couldn't be more obvious what's going on. And it has a nice message, which it presents without the least bit of subtlety.

I think its strengths are in the relationships, which I wish had been explored even more. As a longer book or

part of an ongoing series, slowed down to really build those relationships and interactions, this could have been really lovely.

As it was, it was sweet and quick, and not something I regret giving the time to -- but underwhelming, all the same.

Korrina (OwlCrate) says

Such a cute little graphic novel that challenges gender constructs in a unique way. Plus it's just a fun spooky magical story! My only complaint was that I wish it was a bit longer and more fleshed out. But I really enjoyed reading it.

Sara says

A delightful coming of age tale about the son of magic users who's grown up in a world where women do magic and men shape shift. Neither must ever meddle in the other's affairs but of course our hero, Aster knows its his destiny to be a witch like his mother and sister. When the boys in his family begin to disappear its clear that something dark and powerful is preying upon them and Aster, with the help of his new human friend Charlie, is the only one who can save them.

This was wonderful. Molly Knox Ostertag is the genius behind my favorite web comic "Strong Female Protagonist" which if you haven't read...just go read it its wonderful and the illustrator behind Sharon Shinn's first graphic novel Shattered Warrior which I had mixed feelings about story wise but certainly not art wise.

Ostertag has written a wise and very sweet allegorical fable about not being afraid to be what and who you truly are even when everyone in your life is saying its impossible. She's also created a really neat mythology for her characters and I finished this story absolutely wanting to learn more about this world. There's something really warm in the way she draws, everything feels very inviting and cozy in the big ramshackle house Aster lives in with his huge extended family and she loves dressing her characters in bright colors with lots of layers and baubles. There's just a tad of dreaminess to things too. Her villains are definitely frightening but they have an old world fairy tale quality to them that made me think of Arthurian legends and stories like St. George and the Dragon.

This was a thrilling debut for a truly talented young woman who I very much look forward to following for what I hope will be a long and very successful career!

Vitor Martins says

(Esse sou eu lendo quadrinhos para tentar bater a meta de leitura de 2017 hehe)

The Witch Boy é uma história mágica sobre uma família de mulheres bruxas e homens metamorfos. Aster é um menino que quer aprender bruxaria mas ninguém na família quer ensiná-lo porque ele não deveria ser tão interessado em "coisas de menina". O roteiro é bem simples e tudo acontece dentro do esperado mas é muito bonito ver o arco de desenvolvimento do Asper. A mensagem de "seja quem você quer ser" que a história passa é colocada de maneira muito responsável e pode ser aplicada pra muitas áreas da vida. Falando sobre

técnica, as ilustrações são maravilhosas, cenários incríveis e cores muito lindas! O traço da Molly Ostertag é do tipo que me inspira muito e essa história me deixou morrendo de vontade de escrever um quadrinho em um futuro próximo.

Jackson Bird says

This was everything I've ever wanted in a story. Big magical family living in a giant house in the woods. Kids who don't conform to gender roles. Realistic, loveable characters. Tons of diversity. I'm so happy there's a second installment coming, but how will I wait until October??

Adam Silvera says

I've been wanting to read this MG graphic novel since I saw the book deal announcement and I'm so happy I got to read it on my flight today. The basic premise is that a boy wants to learn spells and other magic but witchery is reserved for girls and boys are expected to become shapeshifting demon hunters. I was OBSESSED with witches as a kid/teen (still am as an adult) and this would've really spoken to me. Overall, THE WITCH BOY is a super fast and super charming read. So excited to discover there's going to be a sequel. I hope librarians/educators pick this graphic novel and get it into their hands of those who don't fit gender norms and those who need to learn how to celebrate's someone differences.
