



Pukawiss The Outcast

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When family complications take Joshua away from his fundamentalist Christian mother and leave him with his grandfather, he finds himself immersed in a mysterious and magical world. Joshua's grandfather is a Wisconsin Ojibwe Indian who, along with an array of quirky characters, runs a recreated sixteenth-century village for the tourists who visit the reservation. Joshua's mother kept him from his Ojibwe heritage, so living on the reservation is liberating for him. The more he learns about Ojibwe traditions, the more he feels at home.

One Ojibwe legend in particular captivates him. Pukawiss was a powerful manitou known for introducing dance to his people, and his nontraditional lifestyle inspires Joshua to embrace both his burgeoning sexuality and his status as an outcast. Ultimately, Joshua summons the courage necessary to reject his strict upbringing and to accept the mysterious path set before him.

Pukawiss The Outcast Details

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From Reader Review Pukawiss The Outcast for online ebook

Michael Bowler says

Loved this book! It is wonderful. I had read a previous novel by this author and looked forward to this one with great anticipation. I was not disappointed. His story is heartfelt and emotional, stocked with endearingly likeable characters, and a terrific setting. Main character Joshua is fourteen and gay, half Ojibwe Indian and half white. His Indian father could best be described as uninvolved in his life, until he up and leaves one night. Joshua's mother is a wrong-headed fundamentalist Christian who obviously has no idea who Jesus Christ is given the hate and vitriol she spews, especially about gay people. When Joshua's dad takes off, his mother decides she needs to "find herself" and dumps the confused boy unannounced at his Indian grandfather's doorstep. Alas, Joshua's mother is the least defined character in this story and honestly appears not to love her son at all. She comes across as wishing she never had children, without any explanation as to why she's so harsh and uncaring toward a good boy any parent should be happy to have. Even the most extreme religious people usually at least love their own kids, so why doesn't she? She doesn't even know that he's gay. In any case, she's not in the story much and serves as the villain of the piece, so maybe that's just as well. However, she really makes the reader identify with Joshua right off the bat as a boy in need of love and nurturing. Despite his initial anger at being dumped on the rez with a grandfather he barely remembers, this quiet spot nestled within the woods of Northern Wisconsin is where Joshua's life as a human being finally begins.

His grandfather, Gentle Eagle, is an elder on the Ojibwe reservation, while also running a recreated 16th century Ojibwe village as a summer tourist attraction and a way to keep the old ways alive for the present day Indians living there. At first, Joshua feels out of place, but his grandfather's gregarious and somewhat precocious sixteen-year-old assistant, Mokwa, takes him under his wing, quickly adapting the newcomer to life on the rez. As someone who has always had a fascination with Native American culture, I loved learning about Ojibwa history and tradition right along with Joshua. When Joshua decided to master the art of Fancy Dancing like the great manitou Pukawiss, who according to legend, created the dance, I was right there with him. Powwow Fancy Dancing is magical and if you've never witnessed it first hand, I strongly recommend attending a powwow some day. You'll be dazzled.

In addition to the dancing, Joshua develops strong feelings for Mokwa, exacerbated by the older boy's shameless flirting with him. Is Mokwa a Two-Spirit, as Joshua learns gay people are called, and could he be as attracted to Joshua as the younger boy is to him? Or is Joshua merely seeing in the other boy what he wants to see?

Joshua's struggles to accept his sexual orientation, however, take a back seat to his acceptance of his Native heritage, a heritage denied to him his entire life by a mother who thinks all that Indian stuff is devil worship. Gentle Eagle lives up to his name. He's patient and loving toward Joshua, something the boy has never known before. Through him and Mokwa, Joshua finds that his heritage is in his blood, and hidden in the mysterious dreams he has almost nightly. But there are still issues for him to conquer. What do the dream images signify? What is that strange word Mokwa and his grandfather have uttered on more than one occasion, but refuse to explain? What does it mean to have courage and be brave? Will he ever feel comfortable enough to tell Mokwa and his grandfather the truth about his nature since he's never trusted anyone before? And will he ever have a true Indian name like the other Ojibwe? These are some of the strands that the author weaves seamlessly together into a wonderful, magical tale.

Joshua is a terrific teen protagonist, and all the teens portrayed are likeable and believable. Mokwa is a little undefined because he often sounds much older than he is and there's no indication of his educational level. Even when speaking with his fellow teens, as opposed to adults, he tends to use higher-level vocabulary. It distracted me occasionally, but did not detract from the story. All told, these teens act and think like real teens, unlike the kids I see in many a bestselling YA book these days.

One of my pet peeves in YA lit is kids who talk and act like adults, especially middle school kids, and I see that constantly in books that feature young characters. I'm currently reading two bestselling series that do this to the point that I want to pull my hair out in frustration. As a high school teacher for twenty-five years who still works with teens on a daily basis, they do not talk in one-liners all the time like stand-up comics, nor do they sit around and rationally discuss a serious personal issue or situation. I happily put both those other books aside to read Pukawiss, and felt sad when I finished because the journey was so charming and the characters so real that I hated to see it end. Mr. Hawke knows teen voices, and he knows that emotions rule teens, not reason and hokey-jokey dialogue. Many props go to the author for keeping his teen characters real, while giving each of them a distinctive voice. From Jenny's sunny disposition, to Little Deer's sarcasm, to Mokwa's love for life, even to the stormy Black Crow's seeming anger over everything, they all sprang to life and engaged me with their humanity.

And Joshua is one of my favorite teen characters ever! He's a good boy with a good heart in search of himself and his place in the world, and the author renders him with poignant realism and heartfelt abandon. I love this kid. It makes me sad because his only experience with Christians is his hateful and venom-spewing mother and others of her ilk, and as a result he's come to disdain Christianity. Sadly, this happens all too often when kids live with or interact with so-called Christians who may have their favorite interpretation of the Bible memorized, but wouldn't know Jesus if he walked up and tapped them on the shoulder. They'd think he was some homeless guy and tell him to get lost.

Like the Ojibwe religious tradition Joshua discovers, Christianity as taught to us by Christ is beautiful. It's about loving and nurturing people (all people, including gays) and bringing those people together, rather than driving them apart.

Joshua is so real in my mind that I have hopes he'll one day meet genuine Christians who live the faith as modeled by Christ so he'll know what it's really all about. I know, it's crazy hoping life gets better for a fictional character, right? But hey, that's what great writing does for us. It makes characters live and breathe. It gives them life. And if the author is successful, those characters become part of us and live within us forever. Joshua is just that kind of character. I love him. I want to adopt him. And I'll never forget him. I suspect you won't, either.

Jason Bradley says

This was an amazing tale with the added bonus of learning about native American culture.

Jay Clark says

This the one book every gay youth should read, as well as every questioning youth and every teen in a GSA club. Young readers will fall in love the story of Joshua, his dreams and his struggles in life. But it is just as powerful, sweet, gut-wrenching and yet hopeful a novel as any reader of M/M fiction could hope for. I highly recommend it to everyone who has not yet read it. It will make you laugh, tear up and just be glad you read it.

Sala Bim says

3.5 stars

Eladio says

The part of the blurb that made me curious was the mention of everyday life on the Ojibwe reservation while helping to run a recreated 16th century village as a tourist attraction. What a great idea! And this book delivers. Joshua and his friends think and talk like real adolescents with real enthusiasm and short attention spans and insecurity and innocence.

There is a touch of the supernatural in Joshua's dreams, but since receiving messages from dreams is an everyday way of life for the Ojibwe, this part of the plot blended well with the realism overall. The book beautifully portrays Joshua's fascination with his Ojibwe heritage (especially when he learns of the exalted "two spirit" status that gay people have within the tribe), and his worries that he might not be accepted as a real Indian.

The book starts a little slow, but gets compelling as soon as Joshua's dilemma with his disintegrating family becomes clear. I wish Joshua's mother had not been such a two-dimensional villain. Same with the pastor. I wish Joshua's missing father, who was full-blood Ojibwe, had been a bigger part of the story because his influence might have been important.

Readers should know that this is NOT a gay romance book. Harmony Ink Press is an imprint of Dreamspinner Press, and it publishes LGBT young adult fiction, which can include romance, but that is not what you get with this book. Joshua has a crush on another boy that transforms harmlessly into friendship. Joshua's gay sexual orientation seems mostly unimportant and advances the plot only by giving him one less reason to like his mother, and one more reason to want to be Ojibwe.

The real story is not Joshua's coming of age as a gay youth, but his awakening to his Ojibwe heritage, which he immerses himself into while helping his wise and compassionate grandfather with the recreated village, picking up the Ojibwe language, attending powwows, and learning to do the intricate Fancy Dance in traditional regalia.

All this is a lot of fun to read and felt very authentic and informative of Ojibwe culture. Joshua is a very likable character, and this book should please both adult and teen readers who like non-romantic coming of age stories. (Free review copy was received from the publisher via Hearts on Fire Reviews in exchange for an honest review. Review was written for Hearts on Fire Reviews.)

Trisha Harrington says

sigh Now I have to wait for the sequel. Hopefully it won't take too long.

My review of Pukawiss The Outcast!

Don Bradshaw says

A wonderful coming of age story about a 14 year old boy, Joshua, who finally found his roots while living with his Native American grandfather on the reservation. I was amazed by the changes in Joshua once his shrewish, bible thumping mother dumped him off with Quiet Eagle. It's not that the boy ran wild but he was guided by a gentle love and given reasonable responsibilities. I was touched by the way that Quiet Eagle and Mokwa integrated Joshua into reservation life as if he'd always lived there. Josh is captivated by the story of Pukawiss who was an outcast himself and takes to the tribal dancing to work through his varied problems like his attraction to Mokwa. If you're looking for sex, there isn't any in this story. What you will find is an emotional and touching look into a young boy's discovery that he's a pretty awesome person with a long way to go. The ending felt wide open for a sequel which I personally would grab up. I highly recommend this feel good story.

Ptdog says

Good story. Well told. I wish Jay would publish more often.

Vivian says

Joshua is abandoned at his grandfather's house after his mother and father have a falling out. Having not seen each other for nearly a decade, they are unknown to each other. The anger Joshua was feeling about his being pawned off is soon shifted as he comes to embrace the freedom to explore himself and life without his mother's poisonous rhetoric.

Half-Ojibwe, Joshua learns about his Native American self. He's got a friend to help--Mokwa. As a teenager he questions things about himself, he starts to learn, and find self-acceptance with the guidance of his grandfather and friends. There are parts of Joshua that his mother will never accept and things he has to face.

The beginning was a little stilted to me. The introduction to Joshua felt forced, but soon it moved smoothly and I was caught in the story, finishing it in a single sitting. There are people in your life who will take things away from your self and those who embrace all the pieces of you and strengthen them, and once you learn to see those who do which it becomes much easier to see what love truly is. Joshua learns this.

The ending is filled with promises to be fulfilled as Joshua steps up and lives his life.

~Copy provided by Netgalley~

John Inman says

I'm kind of busy these days and I don't have a lot of reading time available, so it is really a rarity for me to get so wrapped up in a book that I finish it in one day. That's what happened with this one though. From the very first page I was hooked. Absolutely hooked. Every single scene in PUKAWISSL THE OUTCAST is written with such clarity and such devotion to story, that I actually found myself a little breathless at how

well it was written. And being a writer myself, I have to admit I was a little jealous too -- jealous at the author's skill in laying out his story with a minimum of fuss, and still maintaining the story's heart and depth and passion and innocence. Jay Jordan Hawke is a wonderful writer and PUKAWISS THE OUTCAST is a fabulous read. Way to go Harmony Ink, for snatching this story up. It's a winner. And, oh my God, I love that cover!

Kate says

I really wanted to like this book, but there are a couple reasons why I cannot.

First, I didn't like the writing style. It reminded me of my own writing, which is bad. Too many describing words, not enough description, if that makes sense...character never just "said" anything, they "teased" or "agreed" or "admonished". Some of the sentence structure just didn't sound right to me: "Gentle Eagle looked at him oddly, revealing he understood that Joshua likely had stereotypes about Native American food." "The loons cautiously eyed the two intruders. They finally took off after having had enough of the unwelcome and rambunctious humans." I know that some other reviewers really like the writing style, it's just not for me.

I'm always happy to see more books about Native kids, but there's so much out there that is stereotypical and disrespectful. As someone who is not Native, I try to do some research to make sure that what I'm reading is respectful and accurate. The first warning sign I found is that the author is not Native. Not that a non-Native person could never write truthfully about Native characters, it's just something I feel is important to look at.

I recommend reading this review, from a website that specifically evaluates Native representations in children's books. She pointed out many things that I wouldn't have known, not being very well-versed in Ojibwe culture. She did point out one thing that bothered me, that one of the characters said he always thought that Pukawiss (a spirit from the Ojibwe culture) was gay, because he ignored pretty ladies and wore bright colours. Is that all it takes?

There's so little young adult/children's literature out there representing minorities, and even less that is intersectional. I so wanted this book about a gay Native boy to be a good representation of both gay and Native people, but it missed the mark.

Kaje Harper says

I liked this book a lot. I enjoyed the narrator's young, lonely, and plausibly distractable/uncertain nature. I liked that it didn't dive into either sex or romance at this age of protagonist, but was more about self-realization and growing up. There was a bit of skimming over of the problems of reservation life and romanticizing of Native traditions but it was interesting, warm and positive, and not too implausible in this context.

I really loved Joshua's relationship with his grandfather, the way he finally was both accepted and teased, valued and yet asked to contribute. What every kid needs. The other young protagonists were also not cardboard, and had some interesting facets to them. Mokwa in particular was great, and I liked Jenny. On the other hand, Joshua's mom was very one-dimensional, but she's not on page much.

The language was one of the things that took it down from 5 stars to 4 for me - having teenager Mokwa say "You are a refreshingly curious student" instead of "It's cool you're interested in this stuff" ... or the tight third 14-year-old POV voice "he began to salivate" instead of "his mouth began to water" gave it just an edge of distance IMO. It wasn't out of place with the "tales and legends" aspect where the old stories are done in more formal language, but it made me just a fraction less engaged in the characters' heads.

I really didn't like the (view spoiler)

The end is a bit cliffhanger. Not completely- this section of Joshua's life has come to an end, and he faces new challenges. But it leaves a feeling of apprehension, not the satisfied sigh I prefer at the end of a self-contained story. It worked on me, in that I immediately bought and read (and did enjoy - 4 stars) the second book in the series.

Russell Sanders says

As a gay man and as a writer, I find myself constantly asking, "What if? What if a gay boy grew up in a Muslim society? In Uganda? In a ghetto dominated by gangs? What if?" But I have neither the first-hand knowledge nor the research abilities to answer, in novel form, this question. Jay Jordan Hawke, however, has that, and he has quite satisfactorily answered the question, "What if a young boy is gay and is an Ojibwe Indian?" Joshua's journey to acceptance of his Ojibwe heritage is one that is enjoyable, and the wealth of Ojibwe culture presented is fascinating. I would have liked a bit more character development in two of the characters: Black Crow, whose transformation seems to be a bit too easy and quick, and Joshua's mother, who, although she is supposedly a devout Baptist, seems to be a shrew who is almost profane, especially in her language usage. But the character of Gentle Eagle, the grandfather, is beautiful. Hawke has captured his personality so well that his mellifluous voice almost sings. Joshua learns and grows in this tale. The fact that he is gay is not fully explored, but then again, perhaps that's the best kind of presentation of the subject, what all gay men and women are hoping for: that we simply are, and being so is no big deal. One curious thing-- the novel is set in the Bill Clinton Presidential era, and though this setting is mentioned in only one scene, I found myself wondering about its significance.

Jason says

This was such a great young adult novel. I've been searching for something like this for a while. Unique, atmospherically beautiful, instant character connection and a welcome break from the typical young adult narratives; I found it to be quite a refreshing read.

The story begins with a boy of fourteen, Joshua, who's father abandons him and his mother. He is gay and has remained in the closet because of the bigoted religious views of his mother. As a result of his father's abandonment, Joshua is sent to live with his grandfather on an Indian reservation while his mother tries to come to terms with the situation. As the story progresses he makes friends and searches for his identity, particularly as it relates to his Ojibwe heritage.

A great narrative to be sure, but even the best stories can't stand on their own without great characters. This title certainly had that as well. Joshua's best friend Mokwa, stole my heart with his own. And if he were not

fictional, I could imagine sitting for hours talking to Gentle Eagle. Joshua couldn't have asked for a better guardian.

However, my favorite aspect of this book was the setting of the story. The "Wiigwaas Village" transported me. Being an avid outdoorsman myself, it was nice to see a story in which nature was the backdrop, instead of the drab walls of a high school or typical boring suburb.

Each chapter was a joy to read, the definition of a "page-turner". I did have a couple of quibbles, but nothing major. The timing of certain situations just didn't seem quite right. And vocabulary choices could have been a bit more inventive. Also, I would like to have seen at least a little bit of love shown from his mother. Even bigoted parents still have, to some degree, affection for their own children right? That said, I loved this novel and I'm looking forward to the sequel. A great book for gay teens, GSA libraries or if you're just looking for something a bit different.

***Favorite quote:**

"He had always felt like he was alone in the universe. His mother and father, his culture, his religion, they all rejected him. But now, Joshua realized, that simply wasn't true. An entirely different culture, one he was a part of, one he was getting to know for the first time, embraced him, elevated him, revered him, and most importantly, had a place for him."

Michael Thompson says

A great YA novel. Looking forward to jumping into the next book in the series, A Scout Is Brave.
