



## We Set the Dark on Fire

*Tehlor Kay Mejia*

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**We Set the Dark on Fire Tehlor Kay Mejia**

**In this daring and romantic fantasy debut perfect for fans of *The Handmaid's Tale* and Latinx authors Zoraida Córdova and Anna-Marie McLemore, society wife-in-training Dani has a great awakening after being recruited by rebel spies and falling for her biggest rival.**

At the Medio School for Girls, distinguished young women are trained for one of two roles in their polarized society. Depending on her specialization, a graduate will one day run a husband's household or raise his children. Both paths promise a life of comfort and luxury, far from the frequent political uprisings of the lower class.

Daniela Vargas is the school's top student, but her pedigree is a lie. She must keep the truth hidden or be sent back to the fringes of society.

And school couldn't prepare her for the difficult choices she must make after graduation, especially when she is asked to spy for a resistance group desperately fighting to bring equality to Medio.

Will Dani cling to the privilege her parents fought to win for her, or will she give up everything she's strived for in pursuit of a free Medio—and a chance at a forbidden love?

## We Set the Dark on Fire Details

Date : Published February 26th 2019 by Katherine Tegen Books

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Author : Tehlor Kay Mejia

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Genre : Young Adult, Fantasy, Lgbt

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# From Reader Review We Set the Dark on Fire for online ebook

## Elise (TheBookishActress) says

holy shit this looks awesome I'm here for the kickass latinx wlw

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## Emily May says

*ARC provided in exchange for honest review ?*

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## Madalyn (Novel Ink) says

I received this book for free in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

After following Tehlor Kay Mejia on social media for years and hearing some early buzz about her debut, I was highly anticipating this one. And, friends, let me tell you: it did not disappoint!

We Set the Dark on Fire is set in a world that feels uncomfortably close to our own. Medio is a world in which women are expected to conform to prescribed subservient roles, one where a whole nation of people is viewed as “illegal” and is constantly demonized by the oppressive government. I hesitate to use “dystopian” as a descriptor nowadays, because it holds so many seemingly negative connotations to a lot of readers. However, We Set the Dark on Fire is a dystopian novel in the vein of The Handmaid’s Tale and Red Clocks, as opposed to Divergent or The Hunger Games. The entire book feels like very pointed political commentary, and the subject matter was incredibly timely. Like, there’s literally a wall built by the Median government to keep out the “border-crossing illegals” who they blame for all of the country’s problems. Sound familiar?

Anyway, we follow Dani, who has just graduated from the esteemed Medio School for Girls, which prepares young women for one of two roles: Primera or Segunda. Basically, every rich, influential dude in Medio has two wives, a Primera and a Segunda, who are trained in different arenas of womanly duties \*vomit noises\*. At the beginning of We Set the Dark on Fire, Dani graduates at the top of her Primera class and is sold to the wealthiest, most influential family in the country... alongside her nemesis, Carmen, who is to be Mateo’s Segunda.

I was enthralled by the world of Medio from the first page. Mejia describes it so vividly, from the food, to the clothing, to the social customs. It’s heavily influenced by Mexican culture, which I loved. As such, almost every character in this book is Latinx, which I also loved. I mean, obviously, it has some flaws (see all of the misogynistic, heteronormative, classist, and xenophobic rhetoric spouted by the country’s elite), but it was fascinating to read about. The chapter headings are excerpts from the Medio School for Girls’ handbook, which I thought was a really clever way to acclimate readers to some of the more nuanced social

expectations in Medio. The whole concept of Primeras and Segundas was both fascinating and horrifying. It was such a structured system of oppression, but one that hid behind the facade of valuing women's vast talents and skills—AKA, the most insidious kind of oppression.

Dani herself was a really fun character to follow. She has a huge secret that I constantly feared was going to be discovered and, consequently, ruin her life. Throughout the book, she gets more and more involved with La Voz, the resistance movement in Medio, and I loved seeing her desire to stand up for what's right eventually eclipse her fear. I love that the resistance was painted as imperfect, but trying. Like I've mentioned, everything about Medio and its politics felt uncomfortably close to home.

Okay, let's get to my absolute favorite part of *We Set the Dark on Fire*: THE. ROMANCE. In such a bleak story, the romance was what gave me hope and made me want to keep reading. It's one of my favorite f/f romances I've read recently. It felt a little instalove-y at first, but I grew to really love and understand the quick bond between Carmen and Dani. There's something so vindicating about seeing two queer, Latinx ladies basically burn the entire system down. Also, I need their husband to die a painful death in the next book. What a jerk.

Overall, *We Set the Dark on Fire* kept me on the edge of my seat the entire time I read it. It was missing that special \*something\* to bump my rating up to a full five stars, but rest assured that it did not disappoint in the slightest. This was a very strong series opener, and I am anxiously awaiting book two in this duology! If you need more queer Latinx rep, as well as some excellent social commentary, in your life, you have to pick this one up.

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### **Rachel Strolle says**

IMMEDIATE FAVE  
IMMEDIATE FAVE  
WOW WOW WOW WOW WOW WOW WOW  
HOLY F

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### **Tatiana says**

Nothing about the blurb sounds interesting or new, but 4 starred reviews? Can't resist...

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### **destiny ??? [howling libraries] says**

- 1) I'm always going to be here for fantastic queer women of color
- 2) Tehlor Kay Mejia's story in *All Out* was so phenomenal that I feel an empty space in my soul begging for more of her writing

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## **Melissa (Ever So Mela) says**

I'm a simple person...

I see a Latina main character, I press TBR

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## **Dahlia says**

\*is no longer speaking to Tehlor\*

Now that we have that out of the way, this is an unsettlingly prescient read for the state of politics in 2018-19 - like, it's literally about wall-crossing "illegals" and has a bunch of characters you'll want to rip apart with your bare hands and thank God there is some kissing in there.

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## **- ?? DANY ??- (danyreads) says**

. : ?? — 5 ★

READ THIS REVIEW ON MY BLOG!!!

<https://bit.ly/2SxlsQY>

**ARC provided from the publisher via Edelweiss+ in exchange for an honest review (thank you Katherine Tegen Books and HarperCollins!!)**

OOF, if it isn't one of the most exciting, original, well written and gorgeously set up books I've read. it's a YA The Handmaid's Tale AND ALSO The Handmaiden all at once: a dark, forbidden sapphic romance with intensely vivid world building?? count me in!! and as if that wasn't enough to pique your interest—it ALSO introduces a cast entirely made up of latinx characters!! (and I gotta say, I get it now. it's pretty exciting to find a book that features a character with the same name as you!! I've never come across another Daniela, even if her nickname is Dani with an "i" and not Dany with a "y", it's still Daniela and it's still something that caught me by surprise and immediately warmed me up to the book).

aside from the main character and I having the same name, though—We Set the Dark on Fire is absolutely captivating in its own right and deserves every piece of buzz you've heard about it. it's beautifully written and gorgeously built. I read it in almost a single sitting and the entire time I was absolutely immersed in every single word. every character and chapter felt unique to anything I've ever read before, and the relationship between Dani and Carmen CONSUMED every single one of my thoughts for hours after I'd finished reading. everything about this book was beautiful, and the fact that it's ALSO Tehlor Kay Mejia's debut just makes it even better. We Set the Dark on Fire is truly a triumph!!

I don't want to go into a lot of detail because I'm afraid if I get myself going I will literally never stop talking about this book. all I want to say is that this isn't a book that you should allow to pass by, and I know it's only February but I'm willing to bet it's one of the best books I'll read this year. I'm still reeling from it, to be honest. thanks again to Edelweiss+, Katherine Tegen Books and HarperCollins for providing a free copy!!

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## Lea (drumsofautumn) says

### ♦ Video Review ♦

We all know Dystopian has had its big hype and it seems like it's not coming back anytime soon. But with WE SET THE DARK ON FIRE, Tehlor Kay Mejia managed to write a truly engaging, very timely Dystopian Fantasy that feels different from what we've seen before.

*“'Women, I'll never understand them.' With only his Primera and Segunda present, there was no one in the room to laugh at his joke. While he was busy congratulating himself on it, Carmen shot Dani a look over her napkin. It almost looked... inspirational.”*

I thought the Dystopian world building was super interesting. **A good Dystopian has a concept that is really horrific, while at the same time realistic**, and the author pulled this off so well. Not one second while reading this, did I doubt that this is an actual way a society could develop into and that made it all the more well done.

I definitely wish we had seen a little bit more of the school that the girls get trained at. I think it would've been even better for the world building to include that as well and also to show more of the relationship between the main character and her love interest and develop feelings a little earlier.

And while the main character talks about her growing up outside the wall, **I wish we had seen some flashbacks** or just generally more of the world outside the wall to really understand what was going on there, to see the differences of the in- and outside and to understand what the rebellion was actually fighting for/against.

All of this fell flat mostly because the main aspect of the story is the rebellion group but sadly I found myself **not caring too much about the rebellion**, especially in the beginning. Because we don't have that much background knowledge, I found it hard to care and to understand why Dani would give up her safety she and her parents have fought for so hard.

In Dystopians I like to see a normal life happen for a bit before the rebellion aspect comes into play, which is also something that I was missing from this novel. While Dani obviously knows how corrupt the system she's living in is, I still would've loved to see her just live in it for a little while, **kind of being oblivious to the fact that she actually has the power to change things**. She was kinda pushed and pressured into caring and I think it would've been nicer if she developed that more for herself.

One of my biggest gripes with the story was the character development of the love interest, Carmen. Her change of heart came basically out of nowhere, which made it very hard for me to get invested in the romance at first. While we find out her reasons as to why she first disliked Dani and was mean to her, the development just happened to quickly. To me there wasn't much chemistry and **the feelings came out of nowhere**. This was such wasted potential because once the characters actually talked about their feelings for each other and were romantically involved, I thought it was beautifully done. The romance in itself was wonderful and I was super invested, it's just that I didn't enjoy the path towards it at all.

*“You're a hundred shades of a girl. You hold those shadows and bring them to life when you need them, and they're flawless. Look how far you've risen, how many people you've fooled.”*

As you can tell from the above paragraph, this features a f/f romance. This also has a really great female masturbation scene that I appreciate a lot in YA! And all of the characters in this world are Latinx!

Overall, this was a really entertaining read, that had a good balance between the cruel Dystopian world and still being an enjoyable to read novel. This is a **Dystopian novel that deserves a chance in today's publishing world** and could very much bring this genre back.

♦ Booktube Channel ♦ Twitter ♦ Instagram ♦

*Thanks to Edelweiss for providing me with an early review copy!*

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### **JenacideByBibliophile says**

Disclaimer: This book was sent to me by the publisher, Harper Collins, via Edelweiss+ for an honest review.

Opinion:

I cannot tell you guys how excited I was to receive an ARC copy of this book from Edelweiss+!

SO excited.

So, when I started actually reading, I realized...maybe, this isn't exactly what I imagined it to be. But naturally, I kept reading...

And reading...

And...reading...

\*Sigh\*

This was ALMOST my first DNF book of 2019.

Daniela's family sacrificed everything they had to give her a better life. In a world where men are the hierarchy and are sold two wives to prosper and be happy, there is a school for girls where such women are educated and molded. As a Primera, Daniela is made into a wife that is both strong and intelligent. One that is cunning and to be used as the right-hand for her future husband. It is a life of calculated sentences, practiced facial expressions, and complete modesty and structure. But when Daniela is forced into making a deal with a member of a dangerous rebel group, in order to hide the past that could get her killed, she begins to question the life that she has spent so many years striving for. Should she do what is expected of her and stand with a man that is both cruel and devious, or should she fight for her people to hopefully make a difference?

It took me almost 2 weeks to finish *We Set the Dark on Fire*, which is practically UNHEARD OF for me! What I was HOPING was going to be a creative and fresh YA story about the oppression of women in a world of men salivating on excessive power, was a dreary story that barely held my attention and one that

resembled other books a little too closely. This is The Handmaid's Tale set in the Latin Community, and resembles current events that can either be closely similar or completely off-base, depending on your stance and view of the world.

I wanted this book to be innovative and a new outlook on themes/issues that have/can/are happening in the world.

But it didn't quite feel like that.

For me, this book didn't touch on any feelings and issues that I didn't already see or think about. It seems like SO much of this book was a parallel version of The Handmaid's Tale, which is so spectacular and gut-wrenching, that I can't imagine ANYONE wanting or even ATTEMPTING to try and replicate it. But that is what this story feels like to me, a less heart-shattering YA version of a story that is and was so incredibly impactful.

As soon as I started reading, I found I had a difficult time getting into the story and sticking with it. My mind was wandering, my eyelids were getting heavy, and it took a good few chapters for the story to make me want to keep reading. The turning point for me was when Dani leaves the Medio School for Girls, and begins her new life as a married Primera. Though I was hoping more of this story was going to be held at the school, because that is what the description lead me to believe and that, after all, is what grabbed my interest. But that aside, the story finally starts to "become something" when Dani is moved into her new home and given her wifely duties.

But as soon as I started to gain interest, I found myself bored and skimming pages again.

In this story, that author uses a writing style where she has Dani reflect on her childhood or what it was like over the border. I love flashbacks and moments from the present that will spark a memory for the character, but how it was done here just wasn't executed well. At times, It feels like the author has put too much emphasis on making the story detailed and creatively written. Usually I am a HUGE advocate for a poetic way of words that describes everything so vividly, but the exuberance of reflections and descriptions kept losing my interest. There was TOO MUCH of this and it took away from the story and made me lose focus countless times.

Regarding the characters, everything felt rather predictable. Carmen became the chosen Segunda in Dani's marriage, which the reader will have easily saw coming. Mateo was the typical villain with zero heart or even a glimmer of kindness in him, which I found to be slightly unbelievable. It made his character one-dimensional and simplistic, rather than a villain with layers and a backstory that molded him to be such a ruthless and cold soul. Carmen started out as a character that could have really stolen the show with her charm and charisma, but she was really put on the side and only made a love interest and the second wife of Mateo.

But where I really lost interest in this story, was the bizarre way the author introduces the romance of this book.

It was, to be simply put, sudden and uncomfortable. It didn't flow smoothly, it came out of such an unimportant conversation and encounter and was suddenly just...there. WHAT?! Where were the hints that this could be a relationship? The buildup?? The moments of fluttery nervousness and thoughts from our main

character that this COULD be something she wants?! It just made ZERO sense, and felt ridiculous. This could have been a beautifully woven romance that was gentle and made strong by their shared bond. But instead, it came across feeling like some fleeting little fling with no substance.

At this point, I just kept reading to get it over with.

This isn't to say that the book is horrible, that it has no direction, and that the writing is impossible to get through. Because it isn't any of those things. It just didn't hold my interest and attention, and I couldn't connect with the characters or what they were really FEELING in these serious and scary situations.

I just wanted more substance for this story.

I wanted to feel the anger, agony, anguish and sadness for these characters! I wanted to be excited for rebellion, understand every aspect of what they were fighting for, and be yanked into the story with no yearning to come out.

Unfortunately, *We Set the Dark on Fire* just wasn't what I expected and what I was looking for.

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### **mahana says**

#### **full review on my blog**

**Representation:** Latina main characters and an f/f romance. According to the publisher, these are both ownvoices.

*ARC kindly provided by Katherine Tegen Books in exchange for an honest review.*

This was such a refreshing and original read that takes on so many prevalent issues in today's society. I hate comparing books, but if you like diverse reads with queer characters of colour that have the same vibe as *The Handmaid's Tale* (except Young Adult), then you'll love this. Even if you don't like it, pick it up for the amazing ownvoices diversity in a fantasy/dystopian setting.

Since the plot is unique and complex, I'll put it simply: young girls are trained at the Medio School for Girls to become ~~emotionless, conservative (glorified) maids~~ Primeras or ~~aesthetically pleasing, scandalous child-bearers~~ Segundas and are ~~sold~~ married off to rich men. Except, based on the mythology of the world, a girl from each side is married to one man. The main character, Dani, is a Primera from the lower class and will be married off to the chief military strategist's son alongside her first friend at the school (and now "enemy"), Carmen.

Obviously, I can't go into a lot of detail because this doesn't come out until 2019 but I can definitely say this is something you shouldn't miss. The world is terrifying, yet so relevant. The world-building and writing are both absolutely stunning. The characters are all complex and well-developed. The f/f romance is adorable (though it needed more development in the beginning). My only complaint was the lack of action throughout

the novel where the explanations of the corrupt government were explained to us rather than shown.

P.S. Don't read an ARC of this because there's an intense cliffhanger and you'll have to wait two years for the sequel. You're welcome.

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### **Melanie says**

*ARC provided by the publisher via Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review.*

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### **Scarlett ♦ Underrated Lit Warrior says**

If we're not all free, none of us are free.

I'm looking forward to writing down my thoughts on the amazingness that is WSTDOF, but for now let me just say that. Ending. was. WILD. I seriously cannot wait for the next book and read what becomes of Dani, Carmen, Sota, & Alex...

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### **megs\_bookrack says**

IT HAS ARRIVED!!!

It's gorgeous and I am so starting this tonight.

Do I have 1,436,102 review copies I am suppose to be reading?

YES.

But this is one of my most anticipated books of the year and I am NOT putting it off!

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