



The Summer Prince

Alaya Dawn Johnson

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The lush city of Palmares Tres shimmers with tech and tradition, with screaming gossip casters and practiced politicians. In the midst of this vibrant metropolis, June Costa creates art that's sure to make her legendary. But her dreams of fame become something more when she meets Enki, the bold new Summer King. The whole city falls in love with him including June's best friend, Gil. But June sees more to Enki than amber eyes and a lethal samba. She sees a fellow artist.

Together, June and Enki will stage explosive, dramatic projects that Palmares Tres will never forget. They will add fuel to a growing rebellion against the governments strict limits on new tech. And June will fall deeply, unfortunately in love with Enki. Because like all Summer Kings before him, Enki is destined to die.

The Summer Prince Details

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Author : Alaya Dawn Johnson

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From Reader Review The Summer Prince for online ebook

Tamora Pierce says

This dystopian science fiction novel is like nothing you've read, I promise you. For one thing, the plot and the crises depend on art: music, painting, structures made of light, composition, and sound. Art in this book creates a voice for the voiceless, and teaches the rich youths who play with it that it is serious.

In the distant future, after plenty of disasters, the world is reduced to a handful of city-states and the wilderness between them where most people cannot live. In the Brazilian-like pyramid city of Palmares Três, the wealthy live on top and the workers live on the bottom. Beautiful artist June and her friend Gil fall in love with the Summer King, a gorgeous young man from the bottom tiers named Enki. One like him is chosen every five years and given the best of everything for a year. At the end of it, he chooses the next Queen of the city, and is sacrificed.

At first the three have fun, racing through the city and creating art and music. But Enki has an agenda, and he puts his art in service to it. June finds his message overwhelming, even as Gil falls in love with Enki. The older members of the wealthy part of society grow disturbed with Enki's hold on their children and his demands that high-tech implants, which can be applied simply for attractiveness, or for the cure of disease, be made available to the poor. In the end everyone may be too late to realize what June, Gil, and Enki can clearly see--that revolution is unfolding under everyone's noses.

I read this book in manuscript form, and it blew me away. I think it will do the same to you. Johnson's world-building, her female-dominated society for Palmares Três and the glimpses we get of the other city-states, left me hungry to see more of this new world. I found the characters fascinating, too, and very real. Here's a world that has been re-started, unlike the dystopias that are mostly ruins. A gripping, colorful, vivid read!

Elizabeth Drake says

This and other reviews can be found on [Reading Between Classes](#)

Cover Impressions: Pretty. Yay, no whitewashing. Natural hair on a woman of color!

The Gist: Summer king gets elected, summer king gets killed - still don't understand why. June is spoiled brat who causes trouble and calls it art.

Review:

WARNING: This will be ranty. If you don't like swearing, please move on to another review - this one is not for you.

This book broke me. And not in the "oh my god this is so good nothing will ever compare" kind of way. More in the "reading has become a huge disappointment and I will now spend my time watching reality tv instead" kind of way.

I hated every minute that I spent with this book and, now that I have finally quit, I don't even want to read anything else. I am that annoyed.

I hated this world. It was futuristic and fucked up and nothing made sense. To go along with the nothing making sense was the fact that the author chose not to explain anything. I made it 3/4 of the way through the book and I STILL have no idea why the hell they choose a summer king or why the hell they kill him some years and not others. And you know what? I don't fucking care. That is how little these characters affected me.

The kids were spoiled and entitled. June spent most of her time glorifying a father who committed suicide and blaming her mother for this, despite any evidence that she did anything to cause it. When she wasn't being a heinous daughter, she was ~~pulling pranks~~ making art for some weird ass contest to which no one ever explained the rules. Oh, and did I mention that any other free time she had was spent at lavish parties?

That was the gist of the plot, no danger, no immediate cause to work towards, just an episode of The Hills set against the backdrop of an alternative future.

Despite all these issues, I might have managed to get past it. However, then came the sex. I understand the desire to have sexual situations and language in a young adult novel, I really do. I do not, however, enjoy the way that this author chose to use sex in such a casual manner. June actually told us of how she and her best friend took care of their "virginity problem". We hear of the Summer King sleeping with anything and everything that moves and then, to take the literary cake, June strips off OUTSIDE, masturbates, is revealed to have had an audience to her little show and then acts as if it meant nothing. No. NO NO NO NO NO!

I can't even.

The fuck?

If I gave this book to one of my students, I would end up fired.

Fuck this. I'm out.

Teaching/Parental Notes:

Age: 16 and up

Gender: Female - I guess.

Sex: See review - this shit's fucked up.

Violence: Fist fighting. Knifeplay

Inappropriate Language: Whore, Shit, Ass, Bastards

Substance Use/Abuse: drug use

Domashita Romero says

One of my first real forays into YA fiction, and I found it right up my alley. It hits my buttons left and right. The setting and setup are the real juice of this story: a matriarchal city-state where succession of power involves the ritual murder of young men. GREAT, WHEN DO I MOVE THERE? The Earth in this book is centuries past a large amount of sweeping nuclear warfare and the resultant fallout, both politically and biologically, and I loved the glimpses of the history and what the world outside of this neo-Brazil might be. It also made me happy to read a book where the cast is all shades of brown and fluidity of sexuality is a norm. Ah, you think this is going to be your standard YA love triangle? No, here the protagonist's male best friend and the handsome summer king are the first to fall in love with each other, even though the relationships grow more complicated later.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book; I was close to finishing it on my subway commute and actually stood on the street to read the last few pages before going in to work. My only slight dissatisfaction is a quibble of personal preferences: I just don't like things written in first person present tense much. Fortunately, the story, setting, and characters could let me overcome this preference of mine.

Erin says

I have so many bones to pick with this book, but I'd do my best to start at the beginning. First off, why the Summer Prince as the title? Enki, the man June loves, is a Summer King or a Moon Prince (i'm not entirely sure what the difference is, since the author was never very clear), but he was definitely never a summer prince.

And that's where I get into my next issue. I have never had to guess so much about what was going on while reading. I had NO idea at times, and would just sort of assume things since I knew there was never going to be a definitive answer. The lack of description during action scenes and the random Portuguese words with no context clues....

deep breath. Okay. I'm going to try to be fair and at least state what i feel are definitive facts about this book. It is poetically, artistically written. It has beautiful imagery. Its action scenes are poorly written. Its plot meanders. The world-building lacks grounding in reality. It is **NOT** YA appropriate.

So let's start with the first few points, the reason I gave it anything more than one star. The writing is very pretty. It flowed well. Yet I think it's the first time I've encountered beautiful imagery that actually failed to create an image for me. We get a general sense of a glass pyramid above green vats, but that's about it. I can't figure out how June can see through the different levels into the pyramid when things like walls, flowers, grass, also exist. The author, caught up in the character's head, also seemed to have trouble clarifying anything for the reader that June was unclear about or that June already knew enough about that she never bothered to explain it. It was very frustrating.

The plot drove me crazy because I couldn't quite figure out what the point of it was, other than that we were all waiting for the summer king to die, and this was a sad thing. Yet it was hard to feel sad for him when he became super hedonistic and elf-centered (yet all this was supposedly because he loved too much). I got the feeling we were supposed to adore the main characters, but I couldn't connect with any of them, because their choices made no sense to me.

Which brings me to the next issue, the lack of realism. Everyone in this world seems to be pan-sexual, and have little feelings about it. You have sex early, often, and with whoever feels like having it with you. It's okay if someone you loves has sex with someone else you love. Jealousy? Ha, a thing of the past, apparently. And this is also where I really don't agree with this book being categorized as YA. Sure, the characters are the right age, but that's about it. I know I would never recommend my cousins or students read this--their parents would be horrified with me. And in all likelihood, they would get bored before they got to the sex scenes anyways, having given up on trying to understand the book.

It's a prettily-written book, and probably likeable if you can ignore that half the book doesn't really work. Unfortunately, I can't.

This digital copy of The Summer Prince was given to me by NetGalley & Scholastic Inc. in exchange for an honest review.

Tez says

[NOTE: I first published this at Speculative Chic.]

June lives in futuristic Brazil, where she creates amazing art - including installing lights under her skin. But her best work is a secret project she's collaborating on with Enki. They've known from the start that their time together is fleeting, so their deadline is tight. Like all Summer Kings before him, Enki is scheduled to be sacrificed.

The vivid lights and imagery should inspire some awesome fan-art by readers. Art, life, death, and the future combine in this memorable setting, as their society grapples with deciding how far they should take technology...and how much they should pare it back.

WARNINGS: (view spoiler)

Rose says

I don't normally do this for any book, but I'm going to remove my review and try to do a rewrite of it because my wording on my issues with this book was poor and I think I can do a better job of explicating what I found wrong with this novel. Not sure when I'll rewrite it yet.

Marin says

As a Brazilian young-woman, I found this book offensive on its bastardization of Brazilian culture, which is blatantly abused to make this empty fictional world seem "exotic."

Whereas I can acknowledge the author's multiple attempts at inclusiveness with PoC and bisexual characters,

the problematic use of Brazilian culture under the "gentle savage" rule of thumb made me cringe. Regardless of the fact the story is set in a dystopian future, implying that the part of Brazilian culture that survived is only the "exotic" one is just... typical lack of understanding of actual Brazilian culture (which also often extends to a bastardization of Latino culture as a whole, lbr).

Bottom line is, painting Yoruba as savage religion capable of evolving into condoning human sacrifice and the basis of a society that glorifies sex/bodies isn't ~*edgy*~, it's not knowing anything about Brazilian society and still abusing those offensive misconceptions to justify bad world-building.

(And, lbr, to sell books.)

Brittney says

Once my eyes grazed over the first words that composed the first line of the book I was sucked in. I could not look away from such a beautiful story that painted people of color brilliantly. I absolutely love the protagonist because of her imperfections, her liberated personality and her relationships. She is unpredictable, and realistic (to me at least, and her place in her World makes sense.) The story from her eyes was worth listening too. Her voice was so brilliantly constructed that I finished the book after a few hours. Her troubled relationship with her mother reflects exactly the troubled relationship I go through with my own mother. Her open and assured sexuality is such a wonderful and different touch.

In fact the different relationships throughout the book were brilliant, and it proved that love looks beyond cultural prejudices like race and gender. I believed and appreciated every single relationship. I loved how they were each carefully described and depicted. Love truly sees no bounds, and the foolish rules and moors of our society should not compromise our thoughts of a new, beautiful one. I felt June's love for Enki through her words and her actions. I have never loved a male character as much as I love Enki. The dialogue that spills from between his lips was almost always brilliant, confident and poetic. His character squeezed my heart tightly. Often I could identify the pain June felt for loving him. I don't think I've experienced a love as great as hers, but I believe that her love was very real, and I too hope to find someone who has me feeling so confused and content. This book possess a lot of themes with death being one of the greater ones. For once instead of fearing it, I accepted it and attempted to understand it.

I understand how people can get confused at some points, but this is not a book to skim. Take your time, it's beautiful really. Soak in all the words. Feel the story with your own nerves, because once you do, it's like a great high.

I am so pleased that I was graced with the opportunity to read this book. I truly thought it was beautiful, and I hope that as a aspiring writer I could create something just as great. It is now one of my favorite books. It was so good that I took the time to write a review, and I am a very lazy, lazy, lazy person, but it was worth my time.

Anyways, there's always a song.

Eden says

The Summer Prince tore my heart out. I mean that as viscerally as possible without being actually literal.

It all starts with the worldbuilding. This is genuine sci-fi at its best, a whole new world fully realized from the tiers of the pyramid city to the verde and its catanga to Tokyo 10 and its immortal datastreams. Palmares Trés is a real city in these pages, and it makes everything about the book so much truer.

The themes in this book!: technology is at once deadly and beautiful, art struggles with ambition, death questions meaning. Sexuality is dealt with openly (LGBTQ relationships are normal and our protagonist masturbates in one scene), and the matriarchy is thought-provoking and thorough:

"It's okay to cry," he says.

"Gil, you know I hate it when you sound like an agony auntie."

He laughs. "Am I wrong?"

"It's fine for you to cry. You're a beautiful boy."

"So girls don't cry? June, I never knew you were so conventional." (p.83)

(I do think that all the themes make for a denser read than the traditional YA audience is used to. But I'm just adding this note here after skimming all the negative reviews for *The Summer Prince* and getting sad. :())

June, oh, she's not immediately relatable, not your insta-friend. She isn't because she's finding herself, figuring out what's important and what's right. And with the stakes so high, you sympathize with her. Don't we all, in the end, want to make something beautiful? Have something beautiful?

The supporting cast: Bebel and the relationship she and June have is something absolutely fabulous. Here, ladies and gentlemen, is the mean, catty girl trope turned on its head. Gil. Oh, Gil. Sometimes, like June, I hate Enki for hurting him, for loving him, because Gil is such a force of nature it seems wrong. Gil and June have the type of friendship that's so wonderful it endears them both to you at the same time:

Gil stroked my hair and I felt warm and happy as a lizard in the sun. (p.60)

Gil dances like the old days, like he wants to tempt his own death. (p.225)

And Enki. I still don't know if I like this boy or not. Can you love someone who loves the whole world? But at the same time, he knows what's right and what's wrong; and he doesn't love everything the same way. Not the way he loves June. I cling to that as his saving grace.

THE ENDING. The last scene. You think *Delirium* broke your heart? There's nothing like letting your hopes breathe one last breath before plummeting into starless darkness.

When you're finished the last sentence, go back to the beginning and read the first page again.

The lights are out in Palmares Trés.

Why did they go out?

Because I told them to.

*The lights are out in Palmares Trés.
Why are you alone?
Because I left you.*

*The lights are out in Palmares Trés.
How do I know?
Because I am dead.*

Excuse me I have something in my eye. Just a dust speck. Or a branch.

Alyssa says

In order to fully give my thoughts on this book, I am going to have to write about major plot points, so a warning... spoilers are ahead!

I was really interested in reading this book. I have read two of Johnson's previous works and found her to be a young writer who has never blown my socks off, but shows some promise—"Racing the Dark" was truly an interesting book, and "Moonshine" which was okay but didn't stand out from the crowd – and I was interested in seeing how she used the theme of the sacrificial king/ sacrificial agricultural god/ dying-reviving god. Sadly, I was pretty disappointed in the result.

I will say that part of my dislike of the book is something that will probably not be an issue for others. I just finished my MFA in visual arts, and the main character of "The Summer Prince" is an artist, and the first 180 pages or so focus heavily on June, the main character, making art. This wouldn't be so bad, except while Johnson seems like she admires art, she obviously knows very little about it and has never done it. In one scene June masturbates thinking about her work. I don't have any issues with a female teenager masturbating in a book, but the idea of an artist masturbating thinking about their work? It's just ludicrous. Thinking of my work includes things like, "I need to stretch paper tomorrow," "I need to get the charcoal out of the carpet, hopefully I don't have to get a steam cleaner again," "How much transparency did I put in that color?" "This lithography stone better not scratch because I really don't want to spend another two hours graining it," etc. etc. Artwork is work, and thinking about it isn't sexy.

Another issue with the art: June is seventeen years old, and most seventeen year olds are still trying to work out basic things like proportions and are working at trying to develop skills in one or two areas, and they may be starting to find "their style." They really are not making amazing, life changing, art. The amazing art pieces June is supposed to be making were not impressive either. Her stencils sounded like want-to-be-Banksy (of which there are already thousands of in today's work), her light tree was okay but Johnson was terribly fuzzy on how they worked and were installed (a gel let her embed lights *into* her skin and she was fine right after it?) and with the island piece all I could think of were videos of houses on the internet whose Christmas lights were synchronized to hard-rock. All the works made are propaganda, and Johnson misidentifies propaganda as High Art. Propaganda is not "High Art." In fact, it is one of the most shallow forms of art out there. Propaganda is meant to make people feel a specific thing, it doesn't leave room for interpretation and it doesn't expand a viewer's mind.

Johnson also does exactly what my professors told me never to do when describing my work to people—tell them how they feel about the work. With these projects Johnson would tell the reader how amazing/wild/intense, etc. they were, and give sentences describing how everyone in the city runs to the window amazed at June's art! Unfortunately, I'd rather be amazed at Johnson's interesting ideas than be told how amazing they are. Telling the reader without convincing them is an overall issue that I have with this

book and will be talked again later.

I'm sure Johnson would roll her eyes at overly dramatic or idealized portrayals of writers, and I feel the same about visual art in her work. These are things that are an issue for me, but may not be for others.

The book has a lot of issues outside of how visual art is portrayed, however. The book started off very slowly for me. I didn't get any sort of excitement about the book until about page 180. In a book that is 280 pages long, that is too little too late (not to mention that around page 230 it lost my interest again). There was even a time when after reading the book, I chose to pick up something else for a while, and I normally don't do that.

Part of what made the book hard to get into was that June was terribly annoying. June is perhaps a more realistic teenager than is often portrayed in novels, but those qualities that made her a realistic teenager— self-centeredness, self-grandizing, inability to see other points of view, etc— also make her a rather annoying character to have to follow for 289 pages. I don't have to love a main character to like a book, but having one who is as off-putting as June doesn't endear me to the work.

Character issues are an overall problem in this book. I felt almost no connection with any of the characters in the work because they often felt too vague to get an idea of, June is an artist, Enki loves everything and wants to die, Gil is good-looking and a good dancer, Gil's mother is a good seamstress, June's mother isn't happy, the Queen and the Aunties are manipulative. So many of them feel like first-draft sketches of characters that need to have more revision to fill out into more than one-dimensional figures. I don't need to be told anything about them, but I need more meat than I was given. (The characters will sometimes suddenly change too, as for no apparent reason June goes from hating to liking her Auntie Yaha). The secondary characters were the ones that I did find the most interesting (and often sympathetic) in the book, but being secondary, none of them are around much, including Gil who really should be a main character, but gets reduced to being pulled out and then quickly forgotten about.

The relationships between the characters are mostly problematic too. In "Summer Prince," Johnson's relationship strength is in family relationships. I felt the most convinced with the dynamics between June, her mother, her step-mother, and her dead father. These rung the most true to me. On the other hand, I wasn't convinced at all by the romantic relationships. Johnson has created, to some degree, an actual triangle rather than a spokes, however, this triangle is terribly flimsy. The reader is told that Enki loves Gil, but nothing in his actions show it, as he'd often run off to spend time with June and by the end seemed to care more about her than Gil, leaving me skeptical on how true any of the relationships were.

The end of the book was a problem for me too. While I give Johnson props for actually killing Enki, the end was all too convenient for June. A cloth with a technology that has never been mentioned before in the book suddenly appears to make June Queen (all throughout the book I was dreading the idea that June would become Queen— and of course she does), and June finds a record that will make her able to stop the killing of all the future Kings. I'd take Chekov's gun over a deus-ex-machina any day, and so having all these things seem to come suddenly out of the blue seems far too opportune for June.

The writing itself was somewhat of an issue for me too. Like with the writing about art, Johnson told me a lot of things throughout the work, but never made me feel them. Her action scenes are also somewhat sketchy (an issue I've run into in some of her other work too), and the reader could make a drinking game out of the words "love" and "art" but they'd be dead before they got to the end.

There are other issues that I could write about with this book, but I think that is enough. Overall, I was unconvinced by the book, and felt like it needed a lot more filling out.

Lightreads says

This sounds overbaked, and it kinda is, but you've gotta go with it. Brazil, centuries after the apocalypse, a young man is elected summer king. He will reign for a year, rockstar and figurehead, and then he will select the new queen as he dies. Our teenage girl heroine achieves various pitches of quivering emotion about all of this.

Okay, the thing is, this is actually a really good book. Our heroine fancies herself an artist – excuse me, Artist – and the book is about her struggle with her political protest art, and what it means and what it doesn't, and how real she's willing to make it. And the book is wry but kind about her youth and her, um. Well. Put it this way: if this girl had access to Tumblr, she'd max out the posting limit every day reblogging pictures of graffiti with hundreds of tags explaining her FEELS. She has a lot of growing up to do, and the book rides that well.

It also has this crisp way of de-centering itself, either by replacing the cardboard star-crossed teenage romance I was expecting with a functional bit of queer polyamory (no really). Or by letting the heroine talk our ear off about her city's class structure for a hundred pages before hugely complicating the entire thing by explicating the racial politics she doesn't understand. The whole book is just that little bit slippery, that extra turn of complexity ready to unfold.

And yet. As much as I liked this in theory . . . as much as it plays with traditional growing up narratives in a story about one kid who will never get the chance to grow up . . . It's still very, very young. This book takes Art so seriously, it ensured in several instances that I couldn't take it seriously at all. These characters use their bodies as canvas, their talents, and, in at least two cases, their deaths. And even as the book is pushing at that, it's also so fucking invested in *gestures* the myth of the protest artist in this particularly . . . Tumblr way. Like it can't really commit to complicating the narratives when it's just so overcome by the romance of it all, OMG. So . . . young.

Still. This has lovely moments. And complexity to spare. And a lot of you will really like it.

Nafiza says

This book goes places that not many other YA novels have gone before. It is complex, emotionally rich and exquisitely detailed. It is not perfect but that will be discussed a bit later. For the meantime, let's just savour the fact that this book exists.

The Summer Prince is a post-apocalyptic novel set in what used to be Brazil. Patriarchy has been replaced by matriarchy and a king is sacrificed every year. There are Aunties who are a bit like senators or MPs, a Queen and a sub-Queen. There is a sun king who gets to choose a new queen and a Summer King who is always young and his duty is not to choose a new queen but to reaffirm the ruling power of the current one. But no matter sun or summer, Kings always die in the world this novel is set in.

This novel engages in themes of art and artistry, politics of power, love, technology, social hierarchy, sexuality, humanity, death and trying to find common ground with parents. These are a lot for a book that is only 304 pages. First, let's talk about the main character, June. She's interesting. I know, that is not always a positive thing but this time, I really do mean it. She's like a comet, burning hot, hot and hotter; passionate about the things she believes in and the people she loves. As passionate in her anger and hatred as she is about love. Her mother and her mother's wife who is one of the "Aunties" present interesting venues for

conflict. Her best friend Gil and her rival turned friend Bebel are also intriguing characters who add to the narrative. For such an important character, Gil doesn't have much page time and I wonder about that. I think he should have been more present given his role.

It is the Summer King, Enki, however, who is the true sun of this book. All characters and events orbit around him, helplessly attracted by his looks, his personality and his magnetism. Homosexuality is not even mentioned in this book – it's such an ingrained part of the culture that talking about it and making it distinct is not even necessary. Teenage sex is present in this novel as is masturbation and there is no prurience attached to the scenes. The characters in this novel exist very physically; moving, dancing, making love, creating art. So them physically expressing their love will trouble no one except those who like to get offended. And there are many of them out there. Hur.

As I said however, the book is not perfect. The novel is not clear about the direction in which it wants to go. There is talk about a revolution but the government doesn't get enough coverage and I am not wholly persuaded that the so-called revolution is necessary. This is partly due to me reading *The Hunger Games* and seeing far crueler leaders than the Queen and partly due to the fact that not enough information is given to delineate the social hierarchy. It is present but not as explicitly as I would have liked it to be. The resolution is a bit too neat and I'm bummed that the author didn't show what would have been the most powerful scene in the book. I understand why she didn't but I would have liked to see it.

Alaya Dawn Johnson's books are always different. Well written, yes, but they always challenge the reader to think harder, open her mind, cast a wider net in order to encompass the entire narrative. The world of *The Summer Prince* is so rich and the characters are so complex and layered that I could have easily spent a thousand or more pages with them in that world. However, Johnson manages to tell a powerful story about the inevitability of greed where power is concerned, of the danger of love and the intricacies of art in just a bit over three hundred. Definitely recommend if you want something different, something more. I know that this book will not appeal to those who consume the standard YA fare. As I have said once and again, this is bold and different. There are the elements of a YA novel present, the skeleton of it but the book is almost feral. I can see it appealing a lot more to adults than teenagers and I think the publishers should consider the crossover appeal and market it accordingly. Either ways, I do urge you to read this. You may not like it but it is different and augurs a different path, an alternative path, for YA writers to consider and take.

Lara says

And now for this one, which has always seemed somewhat...divisive. But all the people I know in real life who have read it really liked it too, so there! I've actually been meaning to reread it pretty much since right after I finished it the first time!

So, yes, I still think this book is so, so good!

There are a few other complaints that I've seen about it that I think are a little ridiculous, but whatever, to each their own, right?

Hmmm...

Maybe there's something wrong with me, because so many people seem to *not* like this one? I loved it though, I really did. I actually don't even totally know what to say about it because I feel like I'm still kind of processing, you know?

Maybe I'll just start with some of the things that I've seen people complain about.

1) June is a spoiled rich kid brat: True. But she does grow up some over the course of the story, and her brattiness and anger with her mother always felt realistic to me. I still liked her, and I liked that she had some very real flaws.

2) The sex: Blah, blah, blah. Eyes rolling.

3) The world-building is frustrating and/or underdeveloped: I didn't feel that way. I found the descriptions really immersive and appreciated not having every single little thing explained to me.

4) The title: Seriously? I mean, it totally makes sense. Check out page 171.

5) The plot meanders: Sure, okay. I'll give you that one, but honestly? That didn't bother me one bit. I think I actually kind of have a thing for books that meander a bit. Hi, Robertson Davies!

Anyway. I either liked the things most people are complaining about or else those things just didn't subtract even one little bit from my enjoyment of the story. I got completely sucked in in a way that I haven't in a long time, and it made me sad that I couldn't just read it all day long and had to do things like work and sleep and drive my car instead (boo).

Clearly this book is not for everyone. But guess who it *is* for--ME!

Rachel Brown says

I am in love with the cover. I wish it showed her face, though. I'm tired of all the headless women covers. But it's gorgeous, and, thankfully, not whitewashed.

usagi ?? says

This book is no less than stunning in nearly every way - a luscious, almost decadent read of a future city in a pyramid, with almost something for everyone, including magical realism, cyberpunk and sci-fi, a crazy mix of South American/Cuban-Afro and Japanese cultures. This is a tale of death and kings, of queens and machines, of youth and love, of war and peace. "The Summer Prince" is definitely one of my favorite books of 2013 so far because of its delicate yet bold storytelling, and because of Johnson's brave portrayal of a future society where who you love doesn't matter, unless it's the Summer King - doomed to die each year so that the Queendom may continue.

This is a pretty spicy read (no pun intended, considering where it takes place) for YA - I'd almost say it moves closer to mature YA than anything else, because of some of the themes it introduces. There's the idea that pansexuality is decriminalized (our MC has two moms, for crying out loud), that polyamory happens (I

won't spoil any further on that point), and that a society can only flourish if a woman is in charge, and executes a man each year as her Summer King. I can safely say that this may make it to some banned book lists, but you know what? That would just put the exclamation point in terms of how awesome this book is, how bold it is. It introduces some very provocative ideas that may not even get introduced in adult lit, and my hat goes off to Johnson for being brave enough to try to write all of these things for YA, period.

Let's start with the world. The only issue I had with the worldbuilding was that I was a little bit fuzzy on how Palmares Tres was built (where everything was), and the calendar structure (normal years vs moon years vs sun years, and how the Summer King sacrifices all fit into that. The rest of the world in terms of imagery was gorgeous, and there were no real issues with that for me. The backstory was great, though it was a bit late, and felt a little infodumpy, but otherwise really good. While I could pick a serious bone when it came to the Palmares Tres-adopted idea of "kiri" (as in harakiri, Japanese ritualistic male/samurai suicide), I'm not going to, not really, because everything else is just so good in this book. I'll just say that it fits with this futuristic city, but she got the origins in terms how each gender committed ritual honor suicide a bit wrong. Harakiri/Seppuku (depending on how you read the kanji) was reserved for male samurai, and as the kanji suggests, it's self-disembowelment, not cutting one's own throat - though you did offer it to your servant overseeing your suicide so that they could decapitate you after death. Women would commit ritual honor suicide by drowning themselves after their husbands, or also engaging in harakiri, though the former was a far more "clean" way to go.

That being said, I love how Johnson went ahead and combined all of these different cultures together to make Palmares Tres, and you can see all of those elements of those different cultures throughout the book in very strong, pronounced ways. In that way, the worldbuilding was bold, and I loved it.

The characters. Unforgettable. I think even I fell in love with Enki. They're all very layered, the entire main cast - including the most minor characters. This is where Johnson shines the most - with her characters. June, Gil, and Enki are absolutely amazing, and the messy sort-of-love triangle (which was totally forgivable because it brought the whole GLBT thing into the mix, and that was awesome) and the question of 'friends or lovers?' was present the entire time, and even June herself isn't sure for most of the book, nor is Gil, nor is Enki. June is a great fiery, feisty protagonist, and it was a real joy to watch her grow throughout the book.

The theme of this book is perhaps the most important of all - the transience of youth and life, represented by the role of the Summer King. He dies so the rest of the world within Palmares Tres can continue to flourish. In a world where you can now live over three hundred years with body modifications, it seems that everyone forgets that humans can actually die. Everyone but those in Palmares Tres, who the world views as barbaric and backward. I thought this was an excellent touch, especially when we see Ueda explain it all to Enki and June with the whole system of the Aunties, the Queen, and the Summer King.

What did need work aside from the aforementioned parts of the worldbuilding - transitions. Many of these transitions were pretty cloudy and ambiguous, and while I love that in a book and can see it used as a style, here it was just obvious that it needed a bit more editing. Then again, I got an early ARC of things, so I'm hoping by the time the final copy is out on shelves, all of that will have been solved.

Otherwise, final verdict? Definitely a breathtaking debut that can't be missed, you simply must give "The Summer Prince" a try. "The Summer Prince" is out now from Scholastic in North America, so be sure to check it out when you get the chance!

(posted to goodreads, shelfari, and birthofanewwitch.wordpress.com)
