

books

Locally Grown

Northwest authors address pop culture, teen angst

The Everlasting

by Jamie S. Rich; Oni Press, 2006; \$19.95 softcover

A bittersweet story of the inescapable pain of coming, in one's post-adolescent 20s, to a mature understanding of life, love and romance, *The Everlasting*, Portland author Jamie S. Rich's sophomore novel, expands upon and deepens the themes—pop culture and unrequited love—of his debut, 2000's *Cut My Hair*.

The Everlasting's protagonist, Portland resident Lance Scott, is a middle child living a pop-saturated life in the shadows of his much more accomplished siblings, a famed musician and an acclaimed novelist. A freelance Web designer, Lance is a Jan Brady among prodigies. Over the novel's course, he meets three young women who, at maddeningly unpredictable intervals, bemuse, befuddle and betray him.

True to Northwest urban cosmopolitanism, Rich includes a parallel queer subplot: Lance's roommate, Roger, has his own snarled love issues with a closeted rock star. The novel's main focus is on Lance, but Rich is adept at showing both the differences and similarities of the search for love in these young men's lives. If anything, Roger is the better-adjusted one and is eventually revealed to be better able to learn from

romantic defeat, but whether the two characters' different mindsets are a function of sexual orientation is entirely up to the reader's interpretation; Rich presents his characters warts and all, endearing one moment and exasperating the next, very much like the people we know (and are) in life.

Equal in astuteness to Rich's observations of Lance's and Roger's fraught romances are his snapshots of the anxieties, agonies, rivalries and

hard-won pleasures—as well as the specter of burned-out misanthropy—of life in Portland's artist-musician hipster milieu. The risk of overdosing on one's obsessive, private dreams—fueled as they are by the endless flow of pop culture in which we all take part, consciously or not—is a problem addressed head-on by Rich as Lance struggles to reconcile his romanticism with his real-life relationships. The question Rich provokes us into asking ourselves is: Is it brave or crazy to expect our lives to attain the exquisiteness of a love song on the radio or a Bogart/Bacall moment on the silver screen? Is pop culture our best salve? Our most dangerous poison? In *The Everlasting*, it's both.

—Christopher McQuain

Split Screen: Attack of the Soul-Sucking Brain Zombies! and Bride of the Soul-Sucking Brain Zombies

by Brent Hartinger; HarperTeen, 2007; \$16.99 hardcover

It's two books in one! Combining a clever packaging concept and an absurdly challenging title, *Split Screen* takes big chances right out of the gate. Fortunately, it's good enough to transcend the gimmickry and provide a refreshingly cheerful but nuanced take on gay young adult fiction.

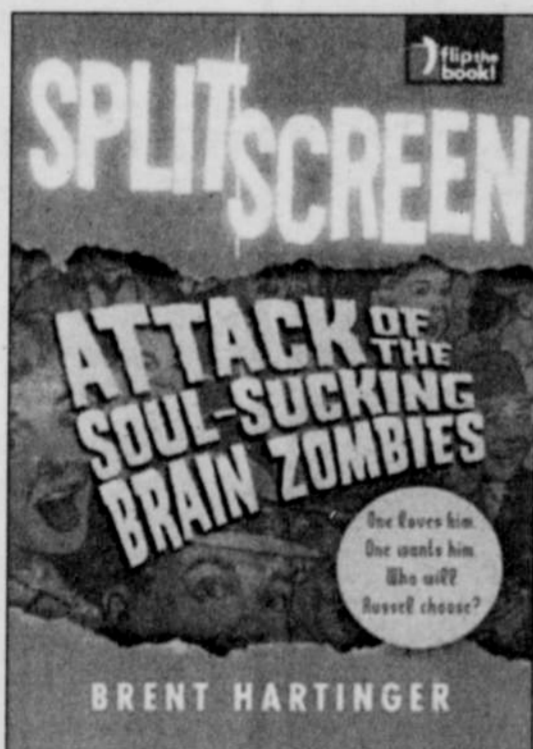
It's not a horror novel, or really even a novel about being involved in the making of a movie. Instead, the paired novels depict two teenage characters dealing with the realities of being out and falling in love and the uncertainty of their own points of view in the face of pressure from peers and family, all while acting as extras in the baffling, low-budget zombie flick named in the title.

Rashomon-like, we get to see the story of those tumultuous few weeks from both viewpoints. Russel, the hero of *Attack*, finds himself caught between his new, long-distance boyfriend and the good-looking, popular jock Kevin, who dumped Russel the year before and suddenly expresses new interest in him—and in coming out himself. Meanwhile, Russel's parents don't take his coming out well at all. Min, *Bride's* narrator and Russel's best friend, falls for an intriguing girl on the set of the horror movie, but this new girl isn't out to family or friends, and Min wavers between self-righteous indignation and undeniable attraction.

Author Brent Hartinger of Tacoma, Wash., does a more skillful job on Russel's story than on Min's. He doesn't seem to know how to get into the head of a teenage, female, bisexual, Chinese brainbox, and she comes across as much more of a plot device and attitude than a complete character. Still, there is a much clearer picture of her from Russel's perspective, including her typical teenage self-involvement, and Min's love dilemma is arguably more realistic.

No matter who's speaking, the characters and dilemmas are genuinely involving, and there's no such thing as an easy answer. *Split Screen* is both fun and thought-provoking, the kind of novel that school libraries should celebrate, rather than slap onto banned-book lists.

—Jemiah Jefferson



eatingout eatingout eatingout eatingout

brunch
spun right
CRUSH

SUNDAY BRUNCH 9AM-3PM
DJs 10AM-2PM
HAPPY HOUR grub 3PM-7PM



feel good music
for feel good people
every sunday >>>>> 1400 se morrison

MR. MOTO
RICE BOX



MENTION
THIS AD FOR
10% OFF!

healthy asian food

503-221-3045 DINE IN OR OUT
413 NW 21st Ave. • Portland, OR 97209
(BETWEEN FLANDERS & GLISAN)

HAVEN
3551 SE Division St. 503-236-6890

FEATURING

Beer, wine, art,
comedy, live music

VISIT
www.havencoffee
for our events calendar

ristorante
fratelli
an
italian
kitchen

regional italian dinners
Open 7 nights

Sunday-Thursday 5:00-9:00pm 1230 nw hoyt | portland
Friday-Saturday 5:00-10:00pm 503-241-8800
www.fratellicucina.com

GAY SKATE!

MONDAY, MARCH 19TH 7-9 PM

\$5 + donation of food or sundry items • Oaks Park Roller Rink



M

Le Bistro Montage

301 S.E. Morrison • 503.234.1324
montageportland.com

Open Seven Days a Week
Dinner: Sun-Thur. 6p.m.-2a.m. Fri. & Sat. 6p.m.-4a.m.
Lunch Mon-Fri. 11:30-2

Bar now open around the corner!