



Cinnamon Toast and the End of the World

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Stephen Shulevitz remembers the end of the world. Two o'clock in the morning on a Saturday night in Riverside, Nova Scotia, when he realises he has fallen in love - with exactly the wrong person.

There are no volcanic eruptions. No floods or fires. Just Stephen, watching TV with his best friend, realising that life, as he knows it, will never be the same.

The smart move would be to run away - from Riverside, his overly dependent mother, his distant, pot-smoking father, and especially his feelings. But then Stephen begins to wonder: what would happen if he had the courage to face the end of the world head on?

Cinnamon Toast and the End of the World Details

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From Reader Review Cinnamon Toast and the End of the World for online ebook

Mel says

To begin with, the writing in this book is atrocious on almost every level. Most glaringly, the pacing is an absolute trainwreck. Periodically Cameron will decide to go back in time to review either Stephen's childhood or his first few months in college (why didn't we get to see this stuff chronologically?) and the way she would summarize all the events that happened there would make the whole section feel very pasted on, as if it were added after the fact. This effect is only exacerbated by the voice Cameron uses for Stephen, which sounds, at turns, like a middle aged man (all that "this was back in the summer of 1982" nonsense - what teenager talks like that?) and a particularly immature 12-year-old. Many times, when Stephen would make some kind of "joke" or reference I thought that I had missed a few pages because so many of his narrative asides come from completely out of nowhere.

This entire book feels unbalanced. Events that seem like they should have a huge aftershock (like Stephen's coming out at a high school party) end up barely rippling (given that this was set in the 1980's there should've been way, way more than a few nasty comments and a swirl as a result). So many things here seem like they weren't really thought through. Plotlines are picked up (Adam) and then abandoned (Adam) with barely more than a few sentences tying them up. And the sentence level is just as clumsy as the rest of the book. At best, the writing here is dull. At worst, it's cringe inducing. Not only does this read like a first novel, it reads like a first attempt at writing, period.

I honestly don't understand how this book was allowed out into the world, but I can definitively say that I wouldn't recommend it.

CaseyTheCanadianLesbrarian says

The title and cover of this YA novel are a bit deceiving; this is not the whimsical or light-hearted tale you might be expecting. What I really liked about this book was how vividly it brought (80s) rural Nova Scotia to life. Emotionally it was also very vivid, but quite tense and exhausting at times. Not surprisingly given the setting, Stephen's coming out narrative involves encountering a lot of homophobia. There are funny and sweet moments but overall it's a fairly heavy, although beautifully told story (with a happy ending).

Sometimes I wonder if we need these kinds of coming out books anymore. This is a very gay book in one sense of the word but certainly not in the other sense. I do think this will resonate for queer kids growing up in rural conservative places, even today, and it's a good window into coming out in a different era for today's queer teens too. But thank god we have many queer YA books that aren't like this these days.

[TW: scenes of homophobic violence / assault, sexual assault off screen, lots of excessive drinking, self harm]

Kathryn Mullin says

Very good, captures perfectly what it's like to be an outsider in high school.

Kim Trusty says

I'm feeling too many feelings, so I can't write anything - not even a sentence - about this book right now. Except to say that my heart aches but so does my face from smiling. So go read this.

Aretha says

This book is **amazing!!** . It captures so well the experiences of being "different" in a small town, and coming of age in a place that is both stifling and small minded, as well as community-oriented, and dismissed by the big city as "full of hicks". I couldn't put it down!

Penny McGill says

With a title like this I hoped for something lighter. The text on the back of the book promised "House parties - Pick-up trucks - Cherry-vanilla ice cream - Prom night - Unrequited Love" and all of those things were actually in the book, but not in the cheerful way I had hoped. It's a coming of age tale that is filled with misunderstandings and miscues but the voice of Stephen comes across loud and clear through Janet Cameron's writing.

It's not a light read but it is so worth reading. I'm sure any parent would benefit from remembering how much thinking is involved in the last few years of high school - thinking about the future, what friends think of you, which university you will attend (or not), and this book lays it all out for you, chapter by chapter until it reaches the end.

Elina says

I was able to read an advance of this book prior to its publication and I really enjoyed the read! Even though the character is in his last year of high school and lives a very rural life that is definitely unlike mine, I found him very relatable. Great book, I hope it does well!

Cynthia says

Actual rating: 4.5 stars

I can't believe how good this book is—and I can't believe it's this good and yet so few people have read it or even heard of it. It's keenly observed, achingly beautiful, shockingly real. I fell in love with every moment of reading it. It's a coming-of-age, coming out story, and—I don't consider this a spoiler, really, because it's important for me to know these things going in—there's homophobic violence. The gay guy gets beaten up.

But it doesn't feel trite in the slightest.

In Riverside, Nova Scotia, Stephen Shulevitz realises he has fallen in love with his best friend, Mark. They're sitting in the basement watching TV together, and there's a moment when he imagines himself kissing Mark—and that's the moment when the world ends. But as the book goes on, you find out that Stephen has had lots of moments like this before. He's known for years that there was something different about himself, and as for Mark—well. Stephen has been best friends with Mark for eight years. And now, they're nearing the end of high school. In a few months, Stephen will be out of here. It turns out a lot can happen in a few months.

What sets this book apart? The prose. The prose is so warm and so heartfelt and every sentence gives me that feeling they talked about in the History Boys: "it's as if a hand has come out and taken yours". It's like I'm holding Stephen Shulevitz' hand the whole way through this book. Stephen is so vividly drawn, I'm going to keep his character in my heart for a long time to come.

To me, this is the gay guy counterpart of *THE MISEDUCATION OF CAMERON POST*. If you loved *MISEDUCATION*, you'll probably love this too, and vice versa. *CINNAMON TOAST* and *MISEDUCATION* are both about growing up gay in a small rural town in the 1980s. And just like *MISEDUCATION*, *CINNAMON TOAST* really gets it. It just nails the experience of being a queer teenager, the isolation, the fear, the falling in love with your straight best friend whom you desperately hope against all odds might reciprocate your feelings, despite the giant flashing signs saying NO. *CINNAMON TOAST* contains the same sort of slow, unbearably poignant unravelling as *MISEDUCATION*. The yearnings of adolescence, the confusion and anger and despair, distilled. The inexorable march into adulthood and the increasing clarity of perspective that comes with that. And perhaps the promise of something better, finally.

I loved the ending. In fact I would give anything to read a whole other book about Stephen at college. The author has deliberately left the ending a bit open, but it's still definitely a hopeful one.

One thing I didn't appreciate was how at one point, Stephen keeps grabbing random girls and touching them without their permission at a party. I wasn't sure what the point of it was, and it was presented in such an offhand way that it disturbed me. Being a gay guy doesn't entitle you to women's bodies. This is something that frustrates me particularly because I do see it happen a fair bit in real life. If this were any other book that part would probably have annoyed me so much I wouldn't think the book deserved more than three stars, but I just love the rest of this book way too much. So I'm knocking half a star off for that. Otherwise this is undoubtedly a five-star book.

Jodi R. says

I ADORED this book. I loved the story, but also loved Janet Cameron's use of language. Beautiful. Love, love, LOVE this book!

Meghan says

This is a beautifully written book. Like life, it's full of as much pain as laughter. A truly incredible first book

and a story that speaks volumes about the complexity of growing up gay in a small town. Not only to be enjoyed by the LGBT community - we can all relate to being an extreme outsider at some stage in our lives. Read it; you won't regret it.

Caroline says

A coming of age story told from the point of view of Stephen a teenage boy struggling to accept his sexuality and his love for his best friend Mark. Amazing characterisation, razor sharp and very witty. A stunning debut.

Zoe Carney says

I expected to really like this book - the premise was interesting, and the blurb made it sound like something I would connect with (young person coming to terms with his sexuality in a small town).

Sadly, the execution left me a bit cold. Sure, it was an interesting story, but it felt a little bit like 'story by numbers', like something a student would produce in a writing class having closely studied all the elements of how a story should work. And the characters, while potentially intriguing, never came off the page for me. Maybe it was the first person narrative, but I never felt like I had a clear handle on who the protagonist was other than 'gay kid with daddy issues', and as a result I didn't really care what happened to him. The supporting characters were similarly two dimensional - the bully with the good heart, the hippy-dippy mom, the edgy out of town... none of them felt *real*, which is, ultimately, why this book didn't work for me.

That's not to say there aren't some good elements to it; I wouldn't have read past the first chapter had that not been the case. The author did a good job of having the various supporting characters react differently to Stephen's coming out - not all bad, not all positive. And the fear of AIDS being front and centre for some of the characters felt era-appropriate (it's set in the early 80s), and a lot of the negative reactions stem from ignorance rather than actual hatred, which again felt accurate.

But in the end, the habit of telling rather than showing that the author has bugged me, and while I would hesitate to call this a bad book, it's not one that I would recommend.

Sheena Lambert says

If you've ever been a teenager, you will enjoy this. I missed Stephan when he was gone.... great book about growing up. Not for the very faint-hearted, but a great story, really well written.

Leigha Craig says

Despite planning my weekend to allow for a slow, careful reading of this book I ended up plowing through it at warp speed. However, my headlong rush through the pages often came to a screeching halt so I could pause to admire a certain scene, sentence, phrase, or even a particularly well-chosen word. Then, I would

begin flip, flip, flipflipping the pages all over again. This rough pace was entirely my fault but Cinnamon Toast and the End of the World was well worth it and I'm already looking forward to a second smoother and far more leisurely read.

I admit I didn't always like the book's main character and narrator, Stephen, but let me be clear: Stephen, his family, friends, and his life are well written and wonderfully imperfect. I have read books where a character's flaws are obviously out of place, something the author threw in as an afterthought to make their character more relatable. Not so in this case. Stephen's humanity is part of him from start to finish and it is gloriously messy. He is intelligent and insightful but also sometimes frustratingly limited. He is wry, sly, and often laugh-out-loud funny but other times he reflects back on the world the things that hurt him most: thoughtlessness, cruelty, and anger.

This book made me gasp and wince as often as I laughed.

I had read the reviews so I was prepared to like this book. I was prepared to like it a whole lot. Did those reviews prepare me for the range of emotions this book made me feel? Did they prepare me for the rush I got as I read it or the loss I felt when I was done? For how it made me want to go out and buy a copy for everyone out there who hasn't yet read it? I can't say that they did but that doesn't matter. What does matter is that this is an incredibly well-written book and I highly recommend it to everyone out there whether this is a genre you usually read or not.

I can count on one hand how many books I've read that have inspired me to this degree and I count myself lucky to have one more to add to that very short list. This book has the potential to change how many people think about people within the LGBT community because it pushes the reader past dated stereotypes to see Stephen as he struggles to come to terms with his sexual orientation in a town where different isn't always safe, let alone good.

Brian Finnegan says

At the beginning of Cinnamon Toast and The End of the World, Stephen Shulevitz's world as he knows it comes to an end. He's reached the sudden realisation that he's in love with his best buddy, Mark, and that he desperately wants to kiss him.

This is a 'coming out' novel. You know from the opening scene that Stephen will have to overcome a series of emotional obstacles before eventually coming to terms with his sexuality; that towards the end he's going to tell Mark that he fancies him, for better or worse; and that there's going to be some deep issues with Stephen's parents that he's going to have to sort out along the way. There'll probably be a story arc featuring Stephen's close female friend too. As with any romance novel, where the two paramours are introduced in the opening chapter and you know that on the very last page they will get together, the table is set for a three-course meal you've consumed several versions of before.

The desire to keep reading a novel in such a well-trodden genre is founded in questions about how the journey will unfold, and the mark of success is whether it keeps the reader questioning.

Luckily Cameron knows how to keep the questions popping up. She's a talented writer, and the journey she takes us on is always pleasurable, sometimes moving, and has a lyrical literary style that separates it from the masses of 'coming out' fiction that litter the queer cannon. It also dares, at times, to jumble up the equation

and come up with different answers, as in a later reunion scene between Stephen and his absent, drop-out Dad, Stanley, in which a lesser novelist would have given her readers warm, fuzzy emotional resolution. Before any conclusion is reached, Stanley says: “I think this conversation has run its course.” Stephen, instead of getting his father to say he loves him, is left in confusion, and Cameron resists any urge to move Stanley centre stage again for the tying up of loose ends.

The tale is set in 1987, mostly in the small Canadian town of Riverside, where boredom rather than outright prejudice drives the violent motivations of its teenage population. Cameron clearly loves the eighties. The book is filled with playful cultural references to the era. When Stephen contemplates suicide, he does so through the filter of watching an umpteenth Friday The 13th sequel. At the inevitably excruciating prom, he dances with rebellious abandonment to Aha’s The Sun Always Shines on TV.

He may be surrounded by stalwarts of the genre – the best girlfriend (Lana) who secretly fancies him, the ambivalent but unavailable love interest, the school bullies – but its in her depiction of supporting characters, like Lana’s immigrant father, Mr. Kovalenko (“a look on his face like he’d been chewing old sardines”), and Stephen’s fleeting, sexually gluttonous girlfriend, Tina Thompson, with her “muscular tongue”, that Cameron really lights up. Stephen himself is a sharply drawn protagonist, his teenage view of the world suitably cynical, but underlined with almost poetic, acute observation.

Towards the end the inevitable happens, and as Stephen’s orientation becomes known to his peers, he becomes more and more vulnerable. Cameron isn’t afraid to shift the lighthearted tone of the first half of the novel into much darker territory, and during the penultimate, chaotic scene between Stephen and Mark, you begin to think this might not turn out the way all ‘coming out’ novels turn out, after all.

You’ll have to read the book to find out if it does, but in the meantime I’m taking bets that Cameron’s second novel will leave the ‘coming out’ genre behind. She’s simply a writer, a good one, who likes to tell a cracking story. That this story is about a gay boy finding himself is incidental.
