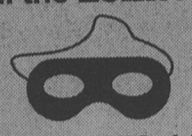




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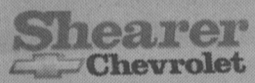
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a e BOOKS

Before Brokeback Mountain: The Male/Male Erotica Explosion

BY CYNTHIA POTTS

James Justin is an architect with a passion for old buildings. He's also in the mood for a little rough and tumble adventure, so he stops by a bar on the tough side of town. Soon, he catches the eye of a tall, handsome cowboy. An intimate encounter in the alley next door follows.

Sound familiar? This could be a setup from any of a dozen gay novels. Increasingly, however, gay male erotic novels are being written by, to, and for women of every sexual orientation.

James Justin is from Laura Baumbach's *A Bit of Rough*. Available in e-book format from Torquere Press and in print from Sybaritic Press, the title has rocketed to the top of genre best-seller lists. *A Bit of Rough* also placed fourth in the Predator and Editor's poll for favorite romance. It's small wonder. With a great blend of characterization and erotic action, so vividly written, one is left wondering if Baumbach was a very lucky fly-on-the-wall observer.

Careful attention is paid to the dynamics of same-sex dating, with the nuances of courtship captured with pinpoint accuracy. Characters are fully realized and utterly believable, and the reader finds oneself instantly engaged. One needs to know what is going to happen to James and the mysterious cowboy - in bed and out. It's a compelling read, and can stand proudly on the shelf next to any gay romance novel.

The gay marketplace seems largely unaware of the growing nontraditional m/m erotica marketplace.

Business, like nature, abhors a vacuum. Long-time publishers like Alyson and Cleis have been putting out volumes of erotica for years, catering to the gay and lesbian marketplace. Yet the new fans of gay erotica are looking for something different.

Some find what they're looking for in fan fiction. Fan communities abound online, where participants write and read fiction using the characters from popular television shows, movies, and books. Much of this fiction is erotic. Homosexual erotica is known as "slash."

"Fandom is a gateway 'drug' for erotica and romance reading and writing - not only for m/m," explains Emily Veinglory, author of several popular erotica novels, including *Eclipse of the Heart*. "It helps modern people get over the stereotypes associated with both genres as 'trash' fiction only for the undereducated or perverted."

"M/M stories have been big in fan fiction for over 30 years starting with the first Spock/Kirk naughty story!" Baumbach agrees. "There is a huge following for it out there."

Still others are getting their reading materials from overseas. Manga - Japanese graphic novels - are becoming increasingly popular. There are several types of manga, including yaoi. Yaoi are also known as "boy's love" novels, featuring impossibly beautiful men in romantic situations. Targeted at teenage girls, yaoi titles range from the sickly sweet to the mind-bendingly raunchy.

For fans of text-based erotica, the internet offers up a bonanza of selections. Relatively new companies such as Chippewa, Loose ID, Phaze, Venus Press, Sybaritic and Torquere Press have stepped up to provide m/m erotic novels of every stripe. From cowboys to shapeshifters, there's a little something for everyone. The low cost and relative ease of e-publishing has removed many of the barriers authors traditionally faced while bringing their work to market, and a thriving marketing niche has emerged. Sales numbers have been strong enough, in fact, so that some companies are starting to offer their novels in print.

"The www is how I discovered my fetish did not make me a freak," Veinglory said. Fan fiction groups are quick to point out the importance of a community that centers around their shared interest. It seems as if free and open

communication is proving that we're not all so different after all.

Will the increased visibility of gay male sexuality lead to increased social acceptance and tolerance? Some m/m authors think so, although they're cognizant of the amount of progress that needs to be made.

"I still think we have a way to go," said Leigh Ellwood, author of *Jack of Hearts* and *The Healing*. "Some theaters still won't show *Brokeback Mountain*, you can only find gay/lesbian themed shows on cable and pay TV rather than network television, and even in the romance industry it is difficult to get a m/m romance reviewed everywhere. I've had my m/m books returned based solely on that. Perhaps, though, if *Brokeback* gains legitimacy at the Oscars we might see a turn in the trend. I would love to see one of my m/m books reviewed in *Romantic Times* one day!" ▼

➔ Cynthia Potts, of Plattsburgh, NY, has been known to write a little m/m fiction herself, when she's not busy with feature articles for the *Plattsburgh Press Republican*, *Vermont Woman*, and of course, *OITM*. Find out more at www.cbpotts.net

A Scarecrow's Bible

BY JOE SWINYER

Content temporarily aside, this brief 201-page first novel presents the two main characters in a unique style. Gary and Zachary give their take on the story in the first person and in parallel text. The typescript clearly identifies the speakers, both of whom are present in most chapters. Peripheral inhabitants of the novel move in and out, transported by Gary and Zachary.

The text moves quickly and easily. The content mirrors, to some extent, *Brokeback Mountain*. The setting is rural, homophobes are violent, and Gary and Zachary deal with their sexual identities.

The mirroring is not total, however. Zachary is much younger and has acknowledged his gayness. Gary is somewhat older and has had gay experiences with little emotional conflict. He is waiting for a critical life experience, his wife's departure, to allow him to move on in the gay world. Zachary is already there.

Other themes include heavy reliance on drugs and alcohol by both main characters. This is not recreational use, but for these men, it is survival use. Until their short-lived partnering, both require substances to endure each day. Their lives are stressed and needy. Readers see homophobia expressed, strong and active, in the story.

But the characters also demonstrate unexpected strength: Gary adds an "s" to the "queer" word spray-painted on their home. His former wife demands the epithet painted over. Gary refuses.

The story resolution is not happy or pretty. It is realistic, and unfortunately possible, even in 2006. ▼

Suspect Thoughts Press, 2006. Available online from Borders

➔ Joe Swinyer lives in Cadyville, NY, near Plattsburgh, with his cat Tabby, also known as Mr. T. While retired, Swinyer works part-time for New York State's Documentary Heritage Program. He also volunteers for *OITM* and the RU12? Queer Community Center where he facilitates the Coming Out Support Group.