



The Bookish Magazine | September 2020

MELANIN INK

A THOUGHT

Lovecraft Country vs. Antebellum

REPRESENTATION MATTERS IN EVERY PHASE OF CREATION.

LOVECRAFT COUNTRY, the HBO show based on the novel of the same name by Matt Ruff, has been a regular trending topic on Twitter and seemed to arrive at the perfect time as the United States is forced to contend with its dark history. It follows a young man, Atticus, as he travels the land in search of a family member and encounters monsters of men almost as frightening as the literal monsters stalking the shadows. The show is (at the time of writing) being hailed for the way it weaves America's history of oppression into a tale of monsters, magic, and murder.

However, on the other side of the spectrum is the film ANTEBELLUM. Though not directly based on the novel KINDRED by Octavia E. Butler, the parallels between the two are undeniable. In KINDRED, a young Black woman and writer is transported through time to the plantation where her ancestors were held and must survive. ANTEBELLUM's plot is identical. Yet, the film has been panned as "exploitative" and "shallow" for the depictions of violence in the antebellum south. So, why are these two programs garnering such disparate reactions? The problem might be tied to who is behind the camera.

Contrary to what one might suspect, the author of LOVECRAFT COUNTRY is a white man. While our experiences are different, he took care to be honest about the oppression that has plagued the United States. Yet, the showrunner and many writers of the series are Black. While, once again on the other side of the spectrum, ANTEBELLUM was written by and directed by two white men.

The common complaint for the latter is the level of violence — the voyeurism of it all — the lack of care taken. Most glaring of all is the refusal of those in power to acknowledge the work of Octavia E. Butler. Just like the enslaved Africans whose stories they seek to exploit, they have erased her all together. The care required to tell such stories, a care Octavia E. Butler exercised in her writing, is gone.

That seems to be the crux of it: when Black stories are told, who is best suited to do them justice?

While we want more Black stories, we crave the quality, respect, and representation behind the camera which can ensure it. Our stories, no matter how fantastical, are worthy of representative control and development. If corners are cut and the reins of power are handed over to those ill-equipped to do the tales justice, there will be more cases of ANTEBELLUM on the horizon.

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INTERVIEW

Who is LaKase Cousino?



LAKASE COUSINO

[Website](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)

LaKase Cousino is an author who has been a storyteller all of her life. Growing up, she was rarely ever still unless there was a story to be told, and often convinced her parents to read books multiple times before bed.

Now, she writes stories with the confidence of knowing there is a place for Black characters in magic, who have adventures, who live in the thrill of discovery, without being relegated to being someone else's sidekick. She infuses her works with her own unique mixtures of myth and truth to land somewhere in between that provides her readers with illumination.

Her novel, *ACROSS THE BROKEN TIDE*, was acquired by *Written in Melanin Publishing* in February of 2020. A historical fantasy set in Cordoba, Spain, it follows the dual stories of a young woman expanding her world while realizing her true power, and a young man who is working to be a better man and bring home the girl he loves. Her novel is set to debut during the fall of 2021.

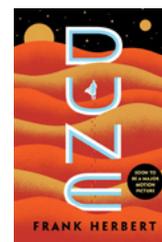
TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR BOOK? WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION?

My book *ACROSS THE BROKEN TIDE* is a historical fantasy set in the 10th century. It follows the intertwined stories of Dima and Azad, childhood friends who are ripped apart by circumstance. Dima discovers the long-hidden magical powers she possesses and must decide who she will become. Likewise, Azad is forced to face his own uncertain future while also fighting to find Dima and bring her home.

I was fortunate enough to take a course in college on the period of Muslim rule in Spain, when people from all over the world lived and worked in a relatively open society. It was called *La Convencencia*, due to the peace they managed to strike. I was captivated. Later in life, I learned about a woman referred to as "The Ivory Bangle Lady", called that for the riches she was found buried with. She lived in England in the 4th century. She had immigrated from Africa and was wealthy enough to be of status. For a long time I had been shown one version of the world, where only certain people went on adventures, yet that wasn't the case. Learning these things breathed life into my writing and set me on the path to write *ACROSS THE BROKEN TIDE*.

BOOKS THAT SHAPED

THE WRITER





INTERVIEW



Who is LaKase Cousino?

WHAT WAS THE MOST INTERESTING PART OF YOUR RESEARCH?

When I first had the idea to write in this era, to make a woman the protagonist, I was worried it would be too unbelievable that a woman could be like what I imagined Dima to be in the era. I was amazed to “discover” how many opportunities there were for women to become educated and hold positions of power in Cordoba. Namely, Lubna of Cordoba became the main scribe to the Caliph (king) and was well respected. This was a woman who was previously enslaved, but showed so much potential she was elevated. In Orkney, which is another community we get to explore in the book, women were also making moves and bringing down entire houses with their cunning. Stories like that kept popping up all over in the course of my research. I couldn’t include each amazing woman, but I hope their stories are reflected in Dima.

ENJOY THIS EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK!



“This is,” Dima gasped between steps as she ran beside Azad, “the very last time I will listen to you!”

Azad let out a wild laugh in his rumbling baritone with such force that it echoed through the glistening hallway. She might have throttled him if not for the fear and exhaustion coursing through every muscle in her body.

“No it isn’t, Dima!” He shouted over the sound of their feet slamming beneath them. “You love getting into trouble with me!”

Dima’s bare toes were aching from their sprinting, and she knew she would be in for a long night of sore feet. She prayed they would be the only sore parts of her body. They would just have to make it to al-Hakam before the guards. The pair rounded another turn in the hallway, where they finally saw the exit. The arched entryway was illuminated by the light of the rising morning sun, the palm trees just beyond the steps were swaying in the warm breeze, and the birds chirped lovely tunes from branch to branch. The rest of the world, Dima noticed, moved on without little care for their certain doom.

WHAT WRITING ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

Trust your gut. Don’t try to write what you think will sell, or what you think the gatekeepers are looking for. Don’t run from your interests, because that’s what will set you apart from the pack.

SUBMITTING TO MELANIN INK

Melanin Ink is a bookish magazine designed to promote, celebrate, and support Black authors and creators. To that end, we are open to submissions for those looking to be included in upcoming issues. Submissions do not guarantee publication and we reserve the right to choose what is added into each issue of Melanin Ink.

We currently accept submissions for:

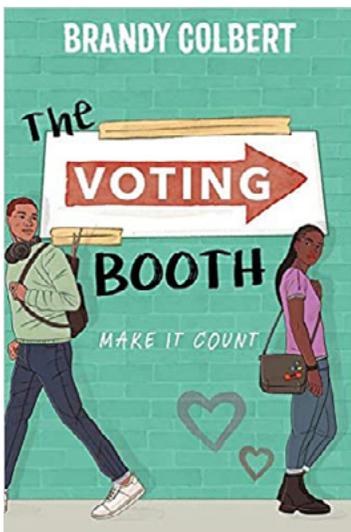
- Interview requests,
- Book releases and announcements,
- News regarding upcoming conferences, conventions, and networking opportunities,
- Artwork and bookish fanart by Black creators,
- Book reviews from Black reviewers reviewing Black books.

To submit, email Chelsea and LaKase at MelaninInk@WrittenInMelanin.com with what you’re submitting for in the subject line.

BOOKS

Melanin Awareness Books

Melanin Awareness Books are books that we of *Melanin Library*, *Melanin Ink*, and *Written in Melanin Publishing* have found and thought we should share. These books are written by Black authors, feature Black and Brown main characters, and may not have the largest audiences. We haven't always personally read these books, but we want to ease some of the burden of finding them and let everyone know *they are out there*.



THE VOTING BOOTH BY BRANDY COLBERT

Marva Sheridan was born ready for this day. She's always been driven to make a difference in the world, and what better way than to vote in her first election?

Duke Crenshaw is so done with this election. He just wants to get voting over with so he can prepare for his band's first paying gig tonight.

Only problem? Duke can't vote.

When Marva sees Duke turned away from their polling place, she takes it upon herself to make sure his vote is counted. She hasn't spent months doorbelling and registering voters just to see someone denied their right.

And that's how their whirlwind day begins, rushing from precinct to precinct, cutting school, waiting in endless lines, turned away time and again, trying to do one simple thing: vote. They may have started out as strangers, but as Duke and Marva team up to beat a rigged system (and find Marva's missing cat), it's clear that there's more to their connection than a shared mission for democracy.

Romantic and triumphant, *The Voting Booth* is proof that you can't sit around waiting for the world to change... but some things are just meant to be.

BEWARE THE COSMOS BY E. G. SEVENS

Tales from the multiverse to satisfy your insatiable hunger for the strange and the weird.

The very thing you've been looking for. Cyberpunk, dragons and super heroes with no chill. Witness the Great Winter Mage in all his glory. Listen into the thoughts of Wanderlust. Beat down crime lords with Lady Death Punch.

From robot uprisings to time traveling adventures. Explore universes of epic magic and others of war and chaos. Over thirty stories of science fiction and fantasy full of heroes, villains and those in between. With a special guest appearance from a reality hopping, samurai vampire.

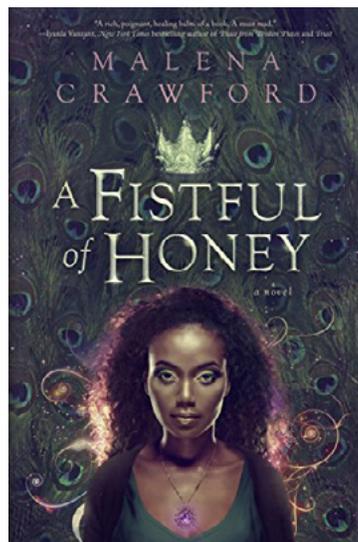




BOOKS



Melanin Awareness Books



A FISTFUL OF HONEY BY MALENA CRAWFORD

Money. Love. Family. When it all falls away and she's left with nothing, one unlikely woman must save herself so that she can save humanity.

When Alena Ford is exiled from the whitewashed Upper East Side paradise she hid behind and forced to face both the racial injustice—and her painful past—that she pretended to forget, chaos ensues. A desperate move to a gritty section of Brooklyn sets off an adventure she never imagined.

She befriends her eccentric new neighbor Gloria, and the woman's stunning amethyst necklace and Black Madonna painting draw her into a world of ancient secrets, dark forces, and powerful magic. Alena is descended from an ancient order called The Bridgers, chosen to save humanity from the origin of evil, the Shetani. To succeed, Alena must first battle the demons of her past; if she loses, the fate of the world is at stake.

If Alena hopes to survive a final showdown between good and evil, she will need to awaken gifts bestowed to her lifetimes ago and heed the wisdom of the Beings of Light—but first she must make it through her initiation alive.

UPCOMING BUDDY READ!

For the month of October, LaKase and I will be reading **THE YEAR OF THE WITCHING** by Alexis Henderson. If you want to join in on the discussion with us, grab a copy of the book and read along with us! The discussion will be hosted on the [*Written in Melanin YouTube channel*](#) and we'll be giving away a copy of the book during one of our [*Melanin Chats*](#), so stay tuned for that!

THE YEAR OF THE WITCHING BY ALEXIS HENDERSON

In the lands of Bethel, where the Prophet's word is law, Immanuelle Moore's very existence is blasphemy. Her mother's union with an outsider of a different race cast her once-proud family into disgrace, so Immanuelle does her best to worship the Father, follow Holy Protocol, and lead a life of submission, devotion, and absolute conformity, like all the other women in the settlement.

But a mishap lures her into the forbidden Darkwood surrounding Bethel, where the first prophet once chased and killed four powerful witches. Their spirits are still lurking there, and they bestow a gift on Immanuelle: the journal of her dead mother, who Immanuelle is shocked to learn once sought sanctuary in the wood.

Fascinated by the secrets in the diary, Immanuelle finds herself struggling to understand how her mother could have consorted with the witches. But when she begins to learn grim truths about the Church and its history, she realizes the true threat to Bethel is its own darkness. And she starts to understand that if Bethel is to change, it must begin with her.

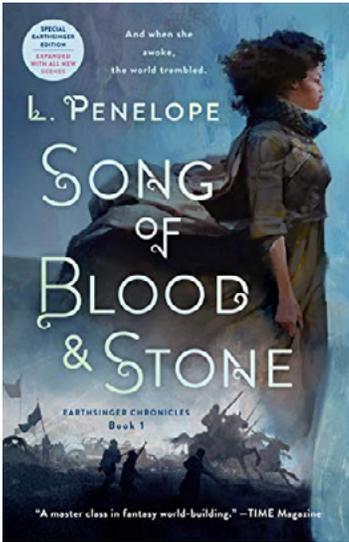




BOOKS



Bookish things.



MELANIN LIBRARY APPROVED BOOK

Melanin Library Approved books are books that are read and enjoyed by two or more trusted members of the Written in Melanin Network. The title is only given when the approval is unanimous. The books that receive this title are ones that we of *Melanin Library*, *Melanin Ink*, and *Written in Melanin Publishing* as a whole recommend to you without hesitation. We hope you enjoy them.

SONG OF BLOOD AND STONE by L. Penelope follows the story of Jasmina and Jack. Jasmina has the power of earthsong — she can tap into the connection of living things and channel that into power. Jack is a spy with a well-kept secret he must bring back to the capital — the magical barrier protecting them all from the True Father, a merciless dictator in Lagrimar, is about to fall. Left without any other choice, Jasmina is pulled into Jack's efforts to save Elsira, but Jack has more than one secret he's keeping from her.

This is the first book in the **EARTHSINGER CHRONICLES** and it's full of magic, hope, last ditch efforts, rich history and lore, mystery, betrayals, romance, and more. If you're looking for a new adult fantasy series with multiple books that will have you invested in the lives of fictional characters, then get into this book and series.

OTHER WORKS FROM L. PENELOPE



CURRENTLY READING WITH CHELSEA & LAKASE

SLAY BY BRITNEY MORRIS



BITTER ROOT BY DAVID WALKER & CHUCK BROWN

