

BOOK CLUB KIT















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I saw it all go down

New babe alert



REMINDER

2m ago

Spoiler Alert:
This kit contains explicit spoilers for the
ending of *The Rumor Game*.



REMINDER

4m ago

Content Warnings:
This book explores issues of bullying,
cyberbullying, sexual abuse, assault, weight
loss, body image, fatphobia, past self-harm,
underage drinking, and racism.



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AUTHOR INTERVIEW GROUP CHAT

What was the original inspiration for *The Rumor Game*? What made you set the book against the backdrop of Washington?

Sona Charaipotra

We wanted to play with the concept of power but also with how much these ideas—about bodies as commodities, manipulation, and what you can get away with—are fed to us from the top down, from the center of the known world, so to speak.

Dhonielle Clayton

I'm from the area and, growing up there, the private school system felt like a pressure cooker due to all the usual things—competition, uber-wealthy kids—but the backdrop of the politics added another layer. It electrified relationships and magnified mistakes.

You've written together in the past for the *Tiny Pretty Things* duology. Are there overlapping themes between that duology and this book?

Sona Charaipotra

Both are set in insular worlds where the power balance is lopsided, where the female body is a commodity, where rumors and secrets are the coin of the realm. Both offer multiple perspectives that tackle the specificity of the world and setting from different perspectives—racially, culturally, and in personality and approach. In both *Tiny Pretty Things* and *Rumor Game*, every character lives in shades of gray. No one is truly unscathed, and they all do damage. It's what they own up to (or deny) in the end that perhaps clarifies things.



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AUTHOR INTERVIEW GROUP CHAT

The story is told through prose, texts, social media comments, and more. How did you decide when to utilize each of these?

Sona Charaipotra

This world the three girls live in wouldn't make sense without social media. While writing, we frequently discussed how glad we were that we didn't have social media when we were teens. It's changed how teens live and where they live. So much of what they do is for an audience, and, to some extent, they can't turn it off. It follows every move, and it lives forever. We wanted to highlight that, and extenuate that tension, by putting that cold hard glare right on the page. We tried to do it in a way that propels the story forward, giving dribbles of information—or misinformation—as necessary, just as it would in the girls' lives.

With so many moving parts and multiple character POVs, what does the plotting look like for a book like this?

Sona Charaipotra

I've always been a plotter, an outliner, but for this, the process was even more intense. We were tracking plotlines, timelines, the actual rumor, and emotional arcs. It was a lot of moving pieces. I've found myself using the Plottr app a lot—it is a notecard app that lets you track different things in different color codes, like index cards taped on a wall but more intensive and detailed. You can see each element and you can zoom out and get the big picture. It's awesome.



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AUTHOR INTERVIEW GROUP CHAT

Did you have a favorite character POV to write in?
Which character was the most challenging to write?

Dhonielle Clayton

I love all of the characters because they're all messy in their own ways. I love writing characters who are deeply flawed and do the wrong thing due to their own traumas, experiences, and fears. Each character is both a joy and a challenge to write because each one of them has moments where they're hard to love and hard to understand and root for. I endeavor to write teens as they are, the ones that came in and out of my library and classroom, rather than idealized versions of them. They're messy, flawed, unlikable, unlovable at times, and fully human.

Sona Charaipotra

I focused heavily on Georgie. She's from a world and a community I know. A place where secrets have another layer of politics to them, where "family honor" is held in the behavior of daughters and wives, where you can do everything right and still end up a disgrace, so to speak. There are things I've seen in this community—hiding abuse, fat-shaming, cover-ups—that are astounding and frustrating. Often they remain hidden and are frequently taboo to discuss. Put all of that into a high school nestled in the thick of DC politics and the ember is sure to ignite. She was a hard character to write, but I know her. For me, Bryn was the most confounding—I felt far removed from her experience.



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AUTHOR INTERVIEW GROUP CHAT

What drew you to explore the challenges of figuring out who you are without allowing other people's perceptions to change you?

Sona Charaipotra

The hope is that you can be strong enough to not have outside perceptions shape who you are. In reality, that's hard to do—especially for a teenager. Georgie certainly doesn't pull it off. So much of what she thinks she wants is driven by what she sees in others. For a long time, what she does and goes along with is informed by that. It's only when she experiences that second trauma, and it tears open an old wound, that she decides she needs to figure out who she actually is and what she actually wants. That takes a lot of strength of character, but the trauma is a lot. I think a character like Georgie will be living with it and unraveling it for years.

What do you think readers can do to make their experiences on social media safer for themselves and their mental health?

Dhonielle Clayton

I have learned a lot of lessons about social media over the years. I haven't always used it successfully, but one of my favorite writers and mentors told me: Social media and the internet aren't real or a substitute for your real life. Once I committed that mantra to memory, I achieved a better relationship with each platform. There's a wide world out there off of your phone and computer. Remember to log off.



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AUTHOR INTERVIEW GROUP CHAT

Sona Charaipotra

I'm still learning to do this myself. It's easier said than done, but sometimes disconnecting is the answer. Taking breaks from social media and the world online—literally unplugging, unfollowing—can help a lot. It doesn't have to be forever, but even a day or a week of social media fasting can make a profound difference.

For adults, what advice do you have as they try to help teens navigate these experiences?

Dhonielle Clayton

As you try to help your teen navigate these experiences, a first place to start is to remember to validate their feelings. Social media might not feel like that big of a deal to you, but for this next generation, it's part of their core identity. Dismissing it or telling them to ignore it doesn't help them learn to navigate or cope.

Sona Charaipotra

If what your teen is going through is beyond the scope of your abilities—and let's face it, it likely is—there is no shame in reaching out to well-trained professionals who can help. In fact, it may be critical. We've provided a list of resources in the back of the book, and there are such resources available online like RAINN, the Trevor Project, and there's Sakhi and Maitri for South Asian women and girls in trouble.



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AUTHOR INTERVIEW GROUP CHAT

For teen readers, what advice do you have if they find themselves in a situation where they're being bullied either in real life or on social media?

Dhonielle Clayton

I would like to remind teen readers that social media and the internet are not the real world. Even though it might feel like everyone is there and everyone is looking, when the devices go off and you log off, you don't have to sign back on if you don't want to. If you're being bullied in real life or on social media, please tell someone and ask for help. There's nothing weak or wrong with reaching out to a trusted friend, family member, teacher, counselor, or therapist to help you navigate all of your emotions and feelings.

Sona Charaipotra

I would hope that teens have someone in their lives that they can turn to and seek out actual help. That kind of intervention at an early stage would have done so much to prevent some of the damage in *The Rumor Game*. Dr. Divya is one such resource in the book, and she's perhaps my favorite character because she offers a lot of clarity and useful information, and she reminds Georgie that she's not alone and it's not her fault.

Thanks for chatting!



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< DISCUSSION GUIDE



1. Which was your favorite character POV to read? Which did you connect the most to?
2. Reflecting back on the book, what early clues were in place to show that Bryn was orchestrating all of the rumors?
3. What were your first impressions of Bryn, Georgie, and Cora? How did those impressions change (or stay the same) by the end of the novel?
4. Through these characters the authors explore the intersection of race and gender and how that impacts the way they're treated by others in the book. How do you see these intersections shaping each character's experiences?
5. The novel ends with the characters spread out as they attempt to move on from what happened. Were you satisfied with the ending? How do you think the events of the book will shape each character's future?
6. If you could read one POV chapter from Baez, Chance, Jase, or Riley, which would you want to read and why? How do you think a chapter from these characters would have impacted the novel?
7. Georgie's therapist tells her, "Nobody can make you feel anything you don't want to feel." Do you think this is true?





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< DISCUSSION GUIDE



8. Discuss the way friendship is portrayed in the novel. Are there any genuine friendships in the book? How do you think the built-in support of friends would have changed the story?
9. For teen readers, what aspect of the book most resonated with you? Did the story make you reconsider the way you use or engage with social media?
10. For adult readers, in what ways do you think the adults in the novel failed the teen characters? How do you think they could've done a better job when it came to understanding what the teen characters were experiencing?

**Here are three questions suggested by
Dhonielle Clayton and Sona Charaipotra:**

11. The three main characters in the book have very different relationships with their parents—especially their mothers. How do these family dynamics inform the way they approach their world?
12. Is there a true villain (or perhaps multiple villains) in the story? Which character(s) do you see as a villain and why?
13. How can social media lead to misinformation? Are there ways to spot false information online?





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BOOKMARKS

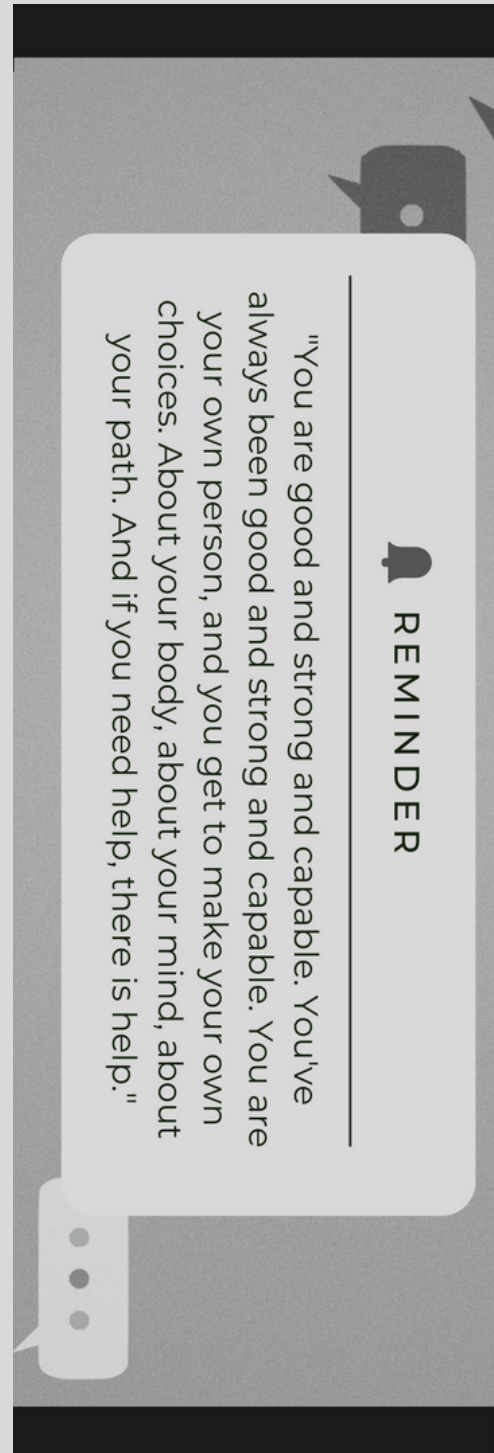
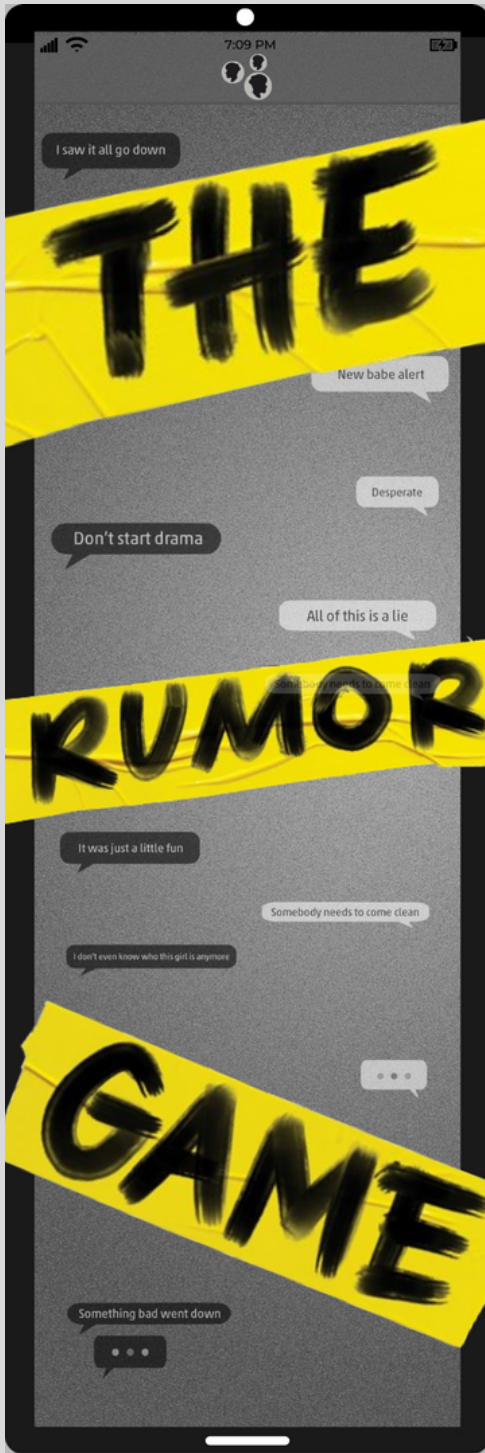


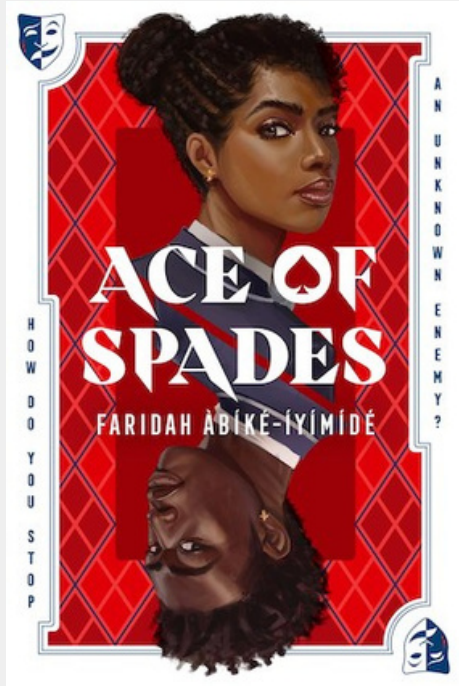


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BOOKMARKS



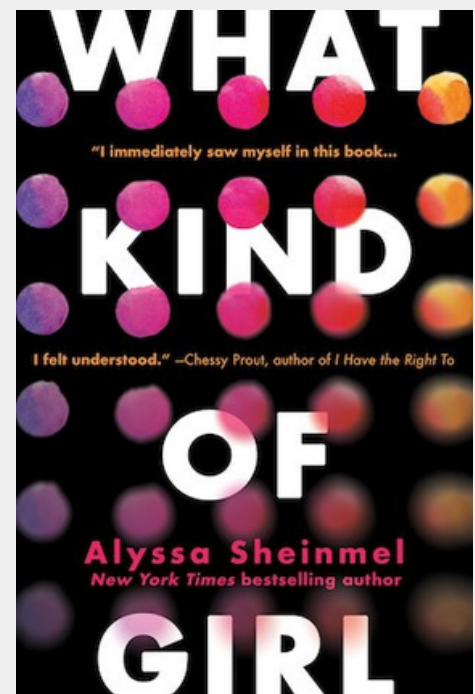


Ace of Spades by Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé

Were you fascinated by the prep school aspects of *The Rumor Game*? This is your next read. Niveus Private Academy is the setting for this YA thriller where an anonymous texter known as Aces is sharing students' secrets with their classmates. Head girl Chiamaka and musician Devon team up to take Aces down.

What Kind of Girl by Alyssa B. Sheinmel

Gossip and half-truths divide student opinion in *The Rumor Game*, with girls facing harsher judgment and higher standards than their male counterparts. The heroine at the center of *What Kind of Girl* faces similar scrutiny when she reveals that her boyfriend's been abusing her. While some rally around her, others side with her boyfriend.





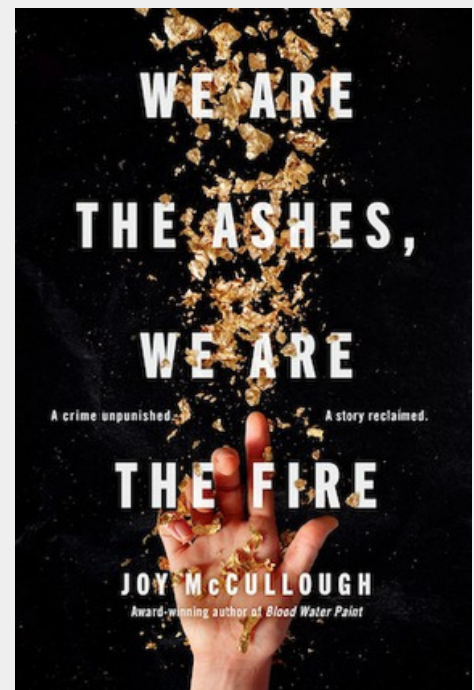
How We Fall Apart by Katie Zhao

Social media is weaponized after a murder in this YA novel. Nancy and three other students at her prep school are labeled as suspects by an anonymous source known as The Proctor. Together they have to race against the clock to uncover his identity and keep their own secrets safe.

We Are the Ashes, We Are the Fire by

Joy McCullough

Readers who were touched by Georgie's journey in *The Rumor Game* should pick up Joy McCullough's latest. Em Morales goes viral after a judge takes a lenient stance against her sister's rapist. Struggling to heal in the face of injustice, she finds solace in the story of Marguerite de Bressieux, a French noblewoman known for avenging rape survivors.





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< CREATING OPEN COMMUNICATION



Adult Guide

It's helpful to not wait until the first sign of trouble to sit your teen down for a conversation. Set aside a time when you're both free and focus on creating a comfortable and safe space. Share favorite foods, quietly play music, and gently remind them that you're always available to talk.

Having a regular time set aside to talk about your teen's life is an easy way to incorporate open communication into your schedules. Remember that asking someone to be vulnerable can often require being vulnerable yourself, so don't shy away from sharing honest emotions.

While it may be tempting to believe that you can solve any problems that arise together, don't be afraid of reaching out to a family therapist to help navigate difficult conversations. Aim to make these decisions together, whenever possible, with your teen.

If your teen is experiencing bullying, look at the resources on StopBullying.gov to determine the best steps forward. Talk with your teen openly and, if possible, work together to come up with a plan you're both comfortable with.





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< CREATING OPEN COMMUNICATION



Teen Guide

Between school, work, activities, and more, it can be difficult to find regular time to sit down with the adult in your life and catch up. Still, it's helpful for everyone involved if there's a regular conversation scheduled where you can talk about what's going on in your lives.

This type of schedule gives the adult in your life more insight into how you're thinking and feeling about everyday things, which enables them to better help when larger issues occur. You'll avoid the situation that Georgie, Cora, and Bryn found themselves in when their parents learned about the rumors after everything spiraled out of control.

All three characters have times when their parents don't seem to hear them. If you find yourself in this situation, consider asking if an objective third party (such as a therapist) can join you to help ensure that everyone is heard.

If you find that your parent or guardian isn't someone you're comfortable discussing certain topics with, consider the other adults in your life. A teacher, school guidance counsel, coach, or school psychologist are all good options when you need help. On the next page, you'll find links to professional organizations that you can reach out to.





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RESOURCES



Some of the themes in this book might affect readers in a very real way. Below we've rounded up resources for those who want to seek support. All of these resources are free, available 24/7, and offer options for both speaking online or on the phone.

RAINN

(Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)

rainn.org

800-656-4673

SAMHSA

(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

samhsa.gov

800-662-4357

The National Alliance on Mental Illness

nami.org

800-950-6264

Mental Health America

mentalhealthamerica.net

703-684-7722

For resources specifically about dealing with bullying visit
StopBullying.gov

The creators of this kit are supplying the websites here for your informational purposes. These organizations are not affiliated with the kit creators, book publisher, or any parent or affiliated companies and they make no representations concerning the information provided.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dhonielle Clayton is the *New York Times* best-selling author of the Belles series, *The Mirror: Shattered Midnight*, and the coauthor of *Blackout* and the Tiny Pretty Things duology, now a Netflix original series. She hails from the Washington, DC, suburbs on the Maryland side. She taught secondary school for several years, and is a former elementary and middle school librarian. She is COO of We Need Diverse Books, and president of Cake Creative, an IP story kitchen dedicated to diverse representation. She's an avid traveler and always on the hunt for magic and mischief. Up next: *The Marvellers*, her middle grade fantasy debut.

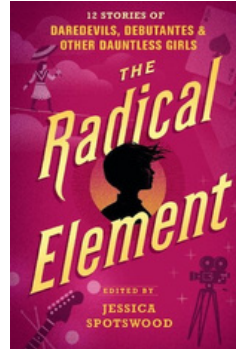
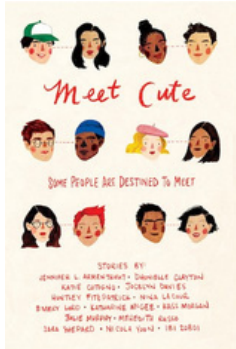
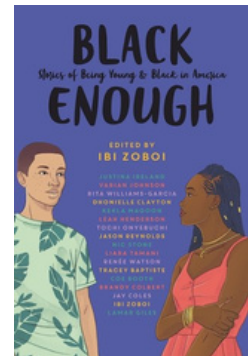
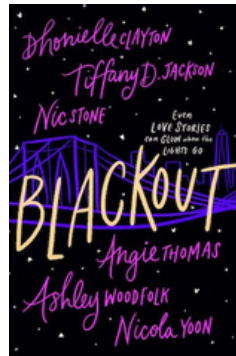


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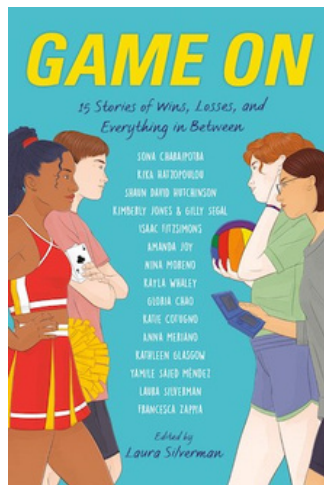
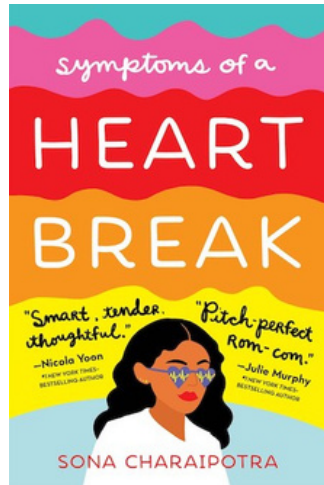




ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sona Charaipotra is the author of *Symptoms of a Heartbreak* and *How Maya Got Fierce*, and coauthor of the *Tiny Pretty Things* duology, now a Netflix original series. She earned her master's in screenwriting from NYU and an MFA in creative writing from the New School. A working journalist, Sona has held editorial roles at *People*, *Teen People*, ABCNews.com, MSN, and, most recently, the Barnes & Noble Teen Blog (RIP), and contributed to publications from the *New York Times* to TeenVogue. She is a former We Need Diverse Books board member, and co-founder of Cake Literary, a boutique book packager focused on high-concept diverse titles. Find her on the web talking about books, Bollywood movies, and chai.



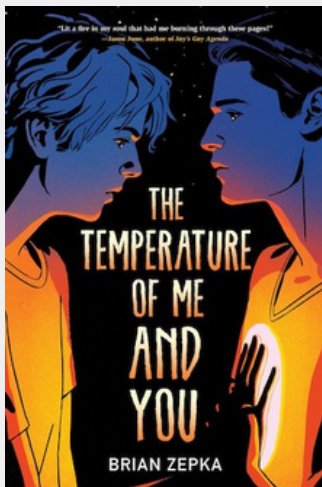
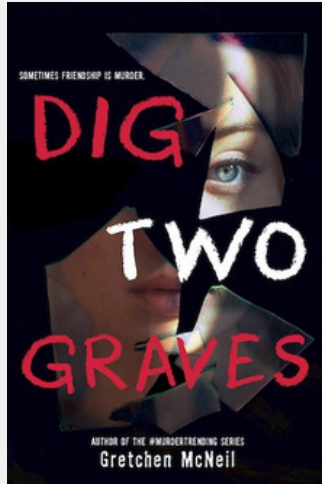


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MORE FROM DISNEY-HYPERION





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