

We Set the Dark on Fire

Tehlor Kay Mejia

Reviewed by: Rina Guo, 17

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Society is distinctly divided by the rich and poor. The political and noble leaders hold all the power, and the poorer towns near the border, are plagued by poverty and gang violence. Daniela Vargas left her family to study and live at the Medio School for Girls, an education institution, dedicated to educating daughters of wealthy families to become proper wives for their husbands. But Daniela actually has a big secret. Although she grew up near the border, her parents used forged identification documents to get her into the Medio School for Girls and to give her a shot at a more well-off and safer life from her poor and dangerous hometown. With this in mind, Daniela works hard and becomes the top student of her class, destined to certainly be married off to a son of a wealthy and powerful political leader in the land. But despite this, when Daniela first meets her elite husband, son of a national military leader, he speaks down on her and refuses to consider her as nothing more than a servant to his needs. As the son succeeding the top military position of the country, Daniela's husband is also extremely tense and adamant to destroy the impoverished rebels of the country, many of whom are Daniela's own suffering people from her hometown. Out of nowhere, Daniela's life takes a turn when the national rebels blackmail her into becoming a spy on her husband for them. But in her work, Daniela accidentally uncovers a dark truth about the capital's intentions for its poorer districts on the border and now Daniela can't help but feel a sense of conflict over whether she should save her people or herself.

This novel is for readers 13-18. There is some misogyny, violence, and nudity, but nothing is overly suggestive or offensive.

This was a great novel. The plot twists and character transformations were unpredictable and thrilling. Something unique about the novel is that the love interest shifts to a female-to-female romance, which was new and interesting. Not only does the novel have some representation for LGBT community, but I love that the novel delves into representation for the Latinx community as well. This is nothing like I've ever read before. After finishing this novel, I realize that there's so many unanswered questions up in the air. I feel as if I've only gotten a small taste of just the beginning of the story, and it has me longing for more.

Sometimes the plot events seemed coincidental and weakly developed, like the protest rebellions. I wish we had much more insight about the political rebels and their secret organizations, but I guess that must have been intentionally excluded, so we could uncover more information about them in later books. This novel has quite a special cliffhanger at the end, and I kind of wish, the whole shock of it all could have been built up with greater momentum and over time, in order to bring more climax to the special moment.

Overall, I greatly enjoyed this book and I would recommend it to readers of who enjoy the genre of dystopia and the topic of social class struggle.

Recommended Titles:

We Unleash the Merciless Storm by Tehlor Kay Mejia

Wither by Lauren DeStefano

The Love Interest by Cale Dietrich

Crier's War by Nina Varela

The Henna Wars by Adiba Jaigirdar