



Empress of the World

By Sara Ryan

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Nicola Lancaster is spending her summer at the Siegel Institute, a hothouse of smart, intense teenagers. She soon falls in with Katrina (Manic Computer Chick), Isaac (Nice-Guy-Despite-Himself), Kevin (Inarticulate Composer) . . . and Battle, a beautiful blond dancer. The two become friends--and then, startlingly, more than friends. What do you do when you think you're attracted to guys, and then you meet a girl who steals your heart? A trailblazing debut, reissued with an introduction by acclaimed author David Levithan, and copious back matter, including three graphic novel stories by Sara Ryan (and artists Steve Leiber, Dylan Meconis, and Natalie Nourigat) about the characters.

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Empress of the World By Sara Ryan Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

While the characters in this first novel are not fully developed and the dialogue often feels clunky, Ryan nonetheless surpasses many of the trappings of stereotypical gay teen representations. At a summer school program for the gifted, anthropology student Nicola, or "Nic," pens everything in her "field notes," from over-scripted exchanges with her dimensionless new friends, like outspoken redhead Katrina and spacey music student Kevin ("It's like we're in a chat room and he's got a really slow connection") to painfully detailed descriptions of their clothes. Nic's driving need to label everything wears at her fledgling relationship with Southern belle Battle (tension comes to a head on their "two-week anniversary"). Ryan is to be applauded for taking this story beyond an identity struggle; at story's end, Nic is unsure if she is a lesbian or bisexual, but she comes to accept her feelings without having to label herself, and learns to tolerate outsiders' judgments. Mostly she grapples with the ordinary drama and traumas of teen romance. Ryan also does not shy away from describing the physical relationship between Nic and Battle (though nothing beyond kissing is made explicit). Her story unfolds slowly and, ultimately ends up feeling unpolished, but many teens will be drawn to the subject matter, and Nic herself is an appealing heroine. Ages 12-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 9 Up-Written with understanding, humor, and heart, this first novel explores a teen love relationship bounded by time, inexperience, and an enclosed community setting. Nicola goes away to a summer program for gifted students, expecting to explore her interest in archaeology while also continuing her artwork. On the very first day, she is attracted to another girl, but she refuses to be labeled as a lesbian because she thinks she's also attracted to boys. And that is the rub with which Nic is faced in this realistically flowing plot: she thinks and analyzes everything she feels, everything others say to her, things left unsaid. This, rather than the gender orientation of her first serious relationship-which does unfold, collapse, and then bloom again before summer's end-is what she learns about herself. Ryan places Nic not only in a romantic relationship with a girl who herself is willing to explore sexuality with a girl and a boy in the same summer-school period, but also in credible friendships with an evidently straight girl and a couple of straight boys. The strength of this novel lies in this interweaving of types of partnerings: the ones driven by desire, those driven by respect for emotional understanding, and others that teens undertake for reasons-frustratingly for Nic-that simply can't be analyzed. These characters seem to breathe in their realism, and the setting of a secluded campus, inhabited by brainy teens for a couple of months, is evoked in sensual detail.

Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley Public Library, CA

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 9-12. Fifteen-year-old Nicola is spending the summer at an institute for gifted youth, where she's studying archaeology. To her surprise, she falls in love with another girl, Battle, a lovely dancer with long hair, and Battle with her. Nic's intense feelings for Battle cause a break-up that sends Battle off with a guy, but unlike many stories of young love, this has a happy ending. Interestingly, Ryan writes this just like most teen romances; as far as the events go, Battle could easily have been a boy. A few muttered "dykes" is the extent of reaction from the other students, and though Nic, who has liked boys in the past, wonders about her sexuality, this seems to be a side issue; the main one is how Battle feels about her. There are subplots about parents and archaeology, but as in real life, the girls are submerged in the relationship. The dialogue may be

a bit like *Dawson's Creek's* at times, but first-novelist Ryan has a good handle on her characters and on her story, which is romantic without being explicit and feels very much like today. *Ilene Cooper*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jeffrey Brown:

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