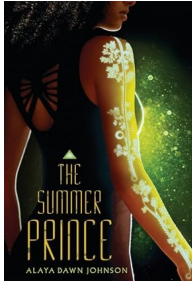




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



The Summer Prince
By Alaya Dawn Johnson
Discussed October 2013

Characters

June Costa - Aspiring artist and waka. Specializes in visual art, graffiti, and technology-enhanced performance art. Lives on Tier Eight of Palmares Três with her mother Valencia (former university president, current housewife) and her stepmother, who is...

Auntie Yaha - A rising star in the Palmares Três government, and the peacekeeper in June's raging feud with her mamãe. Former ambassador to the "flatling" city of Salvador. Other high-ranking Aunties include Auntie Isa (sub-queen), Auntie Maria (head of city security), Auntie Serena (municipal director), and Queen Renata Oreste (Auntie of Aunties).

Gil - June's best friend, and apparently quite a looker. Son of a well-established waka designer who provides June with all the normally forbidden tech toys an artist could want. Boyfriend/lover of...

Enki - The Summer Prince, a waka elected summer king during a moon year (midterm year) after competing with Octavio and Pasqual. Born and raised on the lowest level of Palmares Três (the verde). Simultaneously some kind of relationship with...

Ueda Toshio - Chief ambassador from the transhumanism-afflicted Tokyo 10. Typically addressed using the sama honorific, denoting his status as a highly respected guest.

Bebel - June's scholastic and artistic rival/frenemy; notorious perfectionist and candidate for the Queen's Award. Specializes in singing and music. Involved with Pasqual.

Lucia - Candidate for the Queen's Award and representative of the technophile faction of wakas. Specializes in nanotechnology and programming.

João Costa - June's father; music professor at June's mother's university. Voluntarily euthanized at age 149.

Ieyescu - Principal of June's school and apparently very old. Profoundly unimpressed by June's arrogance, ambition, and general intransigence.

Zanita and Tomas - Residents of Salvador whom June and Enki encounter while fleeing Palmares Três.

Discussion Questions

1. Did you finish the book? Have you read any of Johnson's earlier works?
2. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
3. *The Summer Prince* has been marketed as Young Adult. Did it fit your expectations of what a YA novel is? Did you feel its use of standard YA tropes (love triangle, countercultural teens fighting the Man, etc.) detracted from or added to the story?
4. The book also features sexually explicit material. Threesomes, exhibitionism, and sadism are present, characters are openly sexually active, and bisexuality is so ubiquitous that descriptors of sexual orientation are never used. How did you feel about the role and depiction of sex and sexuality in the book?
5. *The Summer Prince*'s teenage protagonists are emotionally unstable and not always rational. How did you feel about the characters? How did they (and your feelings about them) develop through the course of the book, if at all? What did you think about the relationships between the characters, both romantic and otherwise?
6. Sex and gender are a fundamental part of Johnson's worldbuilding. What did you think of the matriarchal Palmares Três—and of the implication at the end of the book that its system of government will be overturned? What did you think of the world's backstory, in which men are blamed for war? Are we meant to read it as literal truth, or as history seen through the unreliable filter of Palmarinian prejudices?
7. Johnson sprinkles Portuguese liberally throughout the book, and Brazilian culture in aspects both good (samba, Carnivale) and bad (corruption, social and racial inequality) play major roles in defining Palmarinian life. Did this picture of a far-future Brazil ring true to you? What do you think about the presence of Brazilian culture in the work?
8. One central conflict in *The Summer Prince* is the classic debate of technologists versus traditionalists. How do you feel about the way the book discusses this clash between nature and technology? *The Summer Prince* ultimately seems to come down against transhumanism ("You can't samba in a datastream.") Do you agree or disagree with its viewpoint?
9. How do you feel about the way Johnson portrayed the delicate interplay between the pervasive media, public opinion, and the Palmerinian government? Is it realistic? Idealistic?
10. Art and creativity are a constant presence in the work, from art as anonymous self-expression to art as political message to art as celebrity to art as competition. How did you feel about this theme? Is June really the "best artist in Palmares Três"? Was Enki truly an artist, or just an agent provocateur?
11. Enki and Gil's names reference the Epic of Gilgamesh, and the stepped pyramid design of Palmares Três is reminiscent of a Sumerian ziggurat. Did you spot any other mythological references in the book? Did they add to the story or detract from it?

Glossário

bem-querer: love, to love.

blocos: the street bands/groups of Carnivale in Pernambuco.

cachaça: a Brazilian white rum made from sugar cane.

candomblé: a Brazilian sect of the macumba cult (literally translated from Bantu as "magic"; in Brazil, typically refers to any kind of African ritual or "black magic/witchcraft").

capoeira: a distinctly Brazilian martial art that incorporates dance, acrobatics, and music and was developed by the residents of quilombos (escaped slave communities). Capoeira songs act out a particular narrative, simultaneously making the practice a repository for oral history.

catinga: foul smell, body odor.

coração: heart.

cuíca: friction drum, plays vital rhythmic role in samba music.

kiri: voluntary euthanasia, derived from Japanese (harakiri, "cutting the belly").

mushi: a category of animals that includes insects and larvae.

orixá: god, derived from their name in the Yoruba religious system (practiced in Western Africa, the Caribbean and South America).

Palmares: As of 2013, a city in the northeastern Brazilian district of Pernambuco, 73 km inland. The area was inaccessible to the colonizers of the 15th century, making it an ideal location for slaves who escaped from the coast. Their communities eventually formed a small empire known as Angola Janga ("Little Angola"). Its famous king, Zumbi, overthrew his uncle and waged a brutal war against the Portuguese from 1680 to 1694. He was captured and beheaded in 1695. Gender inequity in the captured slaves resulted in an overwhelmingly male society during its years as a quilombo. The few females who escaped or were captured by Palmarians reportedly had incredible influence over their communities, and had multiple husbands (polyandry).

querida: darling

saudade: has no literal English translation; "describes a deep emotional state of nostalgic or deeply melancholic longing for an absent something or someone that one loves. . . . Often carries a repressed knowledge that the object of longing will never return."

verde: literally "green" in Portuguese; refers to the lowest tier of the city, where the algae vats that provide Palmares Três with hydrogen are tended.

waka: youth (by Palmerian standards, all those under 30 years old), derived from Japanese (literally "Japanese poem", better known as "haiku").