

# Books for people like me

## ALEKSANDR VOINOV

ONE trend in overall publishing gives me a great deal of hope: the rise of LGBTQ popular fiction, especially romance. Romance is the biggest of all fiction genres, but most of it is heterosexual – regardless of the fact that gay love stories have been written for hundreds or thousands of years. Big publishing houses care mostly about the bottom line, so they have a natural tendency to publish what the greatest number of readers will buy. Simple economics: with only maybe 5 to 10% of people being LGBTQ, of course they would aim at the heterosexual reader, leaving “niche” books to “niche” publishers serving “niche” readers, who can pick up the tiny profits that are left over.

LGBTQ publishing is a vibrant field of small independent publishers, usually without big offices and huge staff. In the past, they often struggled to break even, but they served their readers admirably in tough circumstances. The industry is rife with stories about

passionate owners remortgaging their houses to finance a print run of a book they believed in. Many of these focused on worthy books of literary merits and biographies of LGBTQ people who would otherwise have ended up silenced.

That said, what I was missing most were books with LGBTQ characters who were not necessarily all about being LGBTQ. I wanted to read about trans\* people falling in love, gay fantasy warriors going on epic quests, lesbian starfleet pilots exploring the universe, bisexual paranormal investigators facing ghosts and vampires. I wanted historical characters living in times and societies when and where being LGBTQ was very different and held unique challenges—or even opportunities.

In short, I wanted LGBTQ characters who did all the things that their cool hetero/cis peers did in literature, and I could barely find any. Of course, the biggest of all the popular genres is romance, but there are sci-fi romances and fantasy romances and historical

romances, so romance as a genre really encompasses all other genres and has a lot of crossover. I wanted to see myself represented in the literature I loved reading, and I was tired of the mainstream where the LGBTQ character, if present at all, was there as a token, as somebody played for laughs, as the villain, or as the victim who gets murdered. I wanted equality, firmly believing that whatever a hetero/cis character can do, an LGBTQ character can do, too. And why not?

When I tried this about 12 years ago in Germany, my literary agents and several acquiring editors told me the mainstream wasn't ready for it, and would I please write about straight ladies, because “that sells”. I left, pretty much writer's-blocked and unable to do it. I didn't want to be “straight-washed”.

Then everything changed. E-publishing took off and gave rise to the boom of genres dismissed as too “niche” by the Big Guns and “too low-brow” for some of the LGBTQ literary houses.

Meanwhile, LGBTQ rights have been making enormous strides in many countries around the globe, and LGBTQ rights (such as marriage) are much higher on the political agenda than they have ever been. We see gay marriages being celebrated, lesbian kisses on TV, trans\* people charting their journeys in mass media that no longer makes them look like freaks. The tide has truly turned—suddenly, we are not so “niche” anymore.

In this spirit, I co-founded a publishing house, Riptide Publishing. We publish lots of romance (and a fair bit of erotica), and we want to entertain

with well-written fiction starring LGBTQ characters, so we span all genres, including mainstream contemporaries, fantasy, horror, sci-fi and, yes, literary fiction. If it's a great story with a great voice, it can find a place with us. We're now publishing the exact same books I'd have loved to read ten years ago and that I still love reading – books for readers who want more diversity in fiction that still tell stories about LGBTQ characters being amazing and finding their happy endings. I feel we deserve no less.

See [www.riptidepublishing.com](http://www.riptidepublishing.com) or follow on Twitter @RiptideBooks.



## What's new and exciting from Riptide Publishing

CHOOSING favourites among our releases feels bit like choosing between your children, but the editors at Riptide Publishing ([www.riptidepublishing.com](http://www.riptidepublishing.com)) are proud to present these new and upcoming releases:

**Glitterland.** Alexis Hall's debut is out of the gate with a roar. USA Today bestselling author Ruthie Knox calls it “Honest, intense, and swoonily romantic ... a sparkling debut.”

Library Journal agrees and gives it a starred review, saying: “By turns laugh-out-loud funny and tragically sad, Hall's novel draws readers into

this wonderful glitter-ball of a world. Highly recommended.”

New York Times bestselling author Suzanne Brockmann says: “I love this book. Deeply. Eternally. My favourite romance of the year.”

And New York Times best-selling author Laura Kinsale calls Alexis Hall “simply the best writer I've come across in years.” Needless to say, we at Riptide agree.

**Scorpion.** Aleksandr Voinov opens his dark and gritty fantasy saga *Memory of Scorpions* with a tale of redemption, coming of age, and adventure as

Kendras, surviving member of a mercenary unit, battles conspiracy and intrigues to find and free the enigmatic leader of their brotherhood.

Mrs Condit & Friends Read Books calls it: “[A]bsolutely stunning ... [V]oinov has written a sweeping saga that takes you from the gritty slums of the cities to the glittering palaces of kings and queens ... [R]ecommend[ed] to everyone.”

**Apple Polisher.** The first novel in Heidi Belleau's *Rear Entrance Video* series about a group of college-age characters who end up running a porn

store, *Apple Polisher* is by turns funny and heartfelt as her characters battle real life, coming out, and prejudice and still manage to fall in love along the way.

With a “Recommended” from Library Journal and advance praise pouring in, this series is not to be missed!

**Catch a Ghost.** Bestseller and fan favourite SE Jakes opens her highly anticipated *Hell or High Water* series with a bang. Prophet, former Navy SEAL and CIA spook, is forced to team up with Tom Boudreaux, failed FBI agent, to take down killers in the dangerous world of underground cage matches.

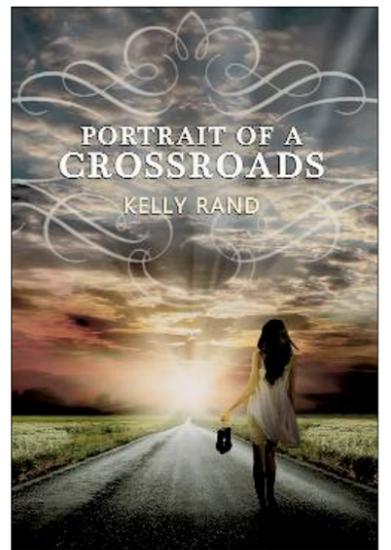
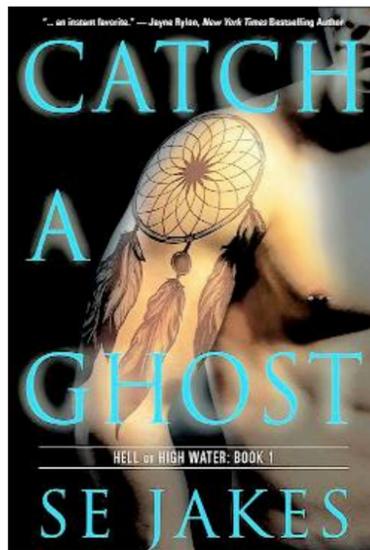
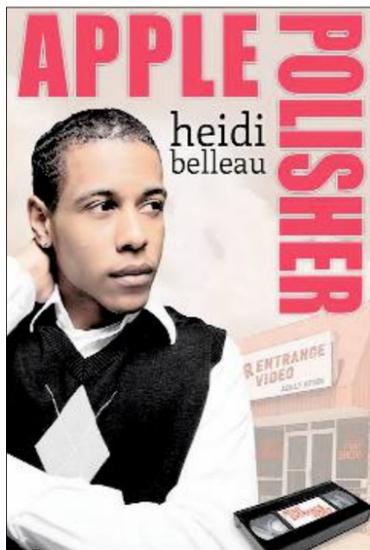
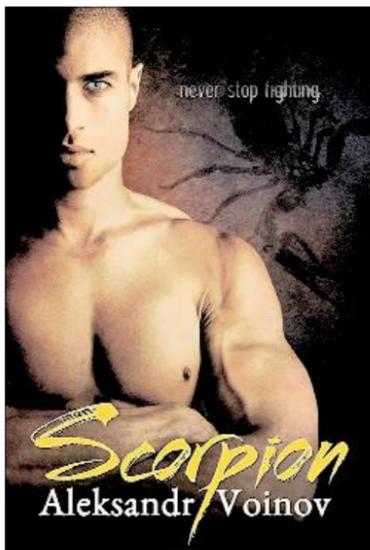
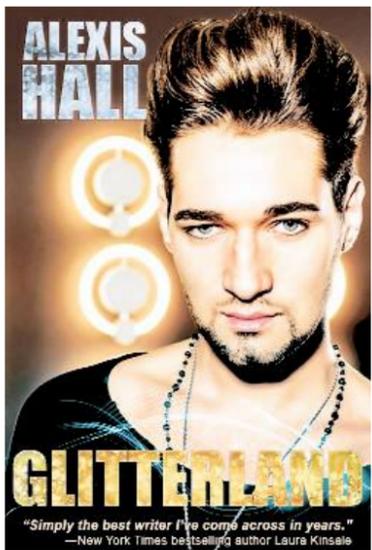
When they find themselves caught

in the crossfire, these two loners must trust each other and work together to escape their ghosts ... or pay the price. New York Times bestselling author Jayne Rylon calls it “An instant favourite,” and we think you'll agree.

**Portrait of a Crossroads.** Kelly Rand's gorgeous literary lesbian story charts the coming-of-age of Annette, whose world-weary neighbour Sadie, a portrait artist, awakens emotions and new possibilities in her.

Seen through the eyes of love, old familiar crossroads seem so fresh and promising.

BiblioJunkies said: “[A]n excellent coming of age story ... [T]he perfect amount of steamy and sexy ... I highly recommend it ...”



## Fondue Fridays lead to melting moments at Eikendal

EIKENDAL Vineyards situated at the foot of the Helderberg Mountain, is adding Fondue Fridays added to its myriad attractions.

Over the past three decades the cheese fondue has been an integral part of this Swiss-owned winery and, after a short absence, it is now back by popular demand.

Every Friday evening until the end of August, enthusiasts can ease into the weekend, where Gruyère and Emmenthal meet estate wines, when the resident restaurant lifts the lid on its version of the traditional Swiss cheese fondue, served with an array of

dipping delights for two. In addition, chef Mark Radnay adds sweet satisfaction with a royal chocolate tiramisu fondue festooned with fresh fruit, Spanish doughnuts and éclairs to start your weekend on a decadent high.

The Fondue Fridays' bill of fare also offers hearty curries ranging from a traditional Bo-Kaap curry and a Cambodian peanut curry of grilled beef to a Vietnamese Hang-lay pork curry.

For reservations, call Eikendal Restaurant on 021 855 5033 or email [restaurant@eikendal.co.za](mailto:restaurant@eikendal.co.za).

See [www.eikendal.com](http://www.eikendal.com) for additional information.

