

Cirque du Slay

Rob Osler

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A gentle introduction to trans issues, Rob Osler's humorous cozy mystery novel *Cirque du Slay* is the follow-up to *Devil's Chew Toy* in the Hayden & Friends series.

Hayden, a middle school teacher and gay dating blogger, and Hollister, a lesbian and a furniture designer who's Hayden's best friend, accept an invitation to a flashy circus fundraiser for a nonprofit organization run by their frenemy, Sarah Lee. Soon after the curtain comes down, Sarah Lee is discovered wielding bloody scissors over the body of the circus's artistic director; she can't remember what happened. To clear Sarah Lee's name, Hayden and Hollister pose as journalists and interview an array of suspects, including a cowgirl sharpshooter and a troupe of sexy Romanian acrobats with the amusing name *Adrenalin!*

The standout among the colorful characters is self-deprecating Hayden, who labels himself a "pocket gay" because of his diminutive size. Excerpts from his dating blog are included. Also noteworthy is the trans defense attorney for Sarah Lee who turns out to be Hayden's doppelgänger.

From the atmospheric beginning onward, the prose is sharp and punchy. The connection between mild-mannered white guy Hayden and Hollister, a powerful, decade-older Black woman, isn't clarified for series neophytes, though, so their motivations for proving the innocence of a woman they don't like are at first unclear. Still, the book sprints toward a climax that's slapstick gold, with the circus setting giving Hayden a chance to reveal his hidden prowess.

An upscale adult circus is visited by friends' hijinks—and a murder—in *Cirque du Slay*, an entertaining series mystery novel.

PAULA MARTINAC (March / April 2024)

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