

## Dragging Mason County

**Curtis Campbell**

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In Curtis Campbell's stunning, funny novel *Dragging Mason County*, queer teenagers put on a spectacular show—the Drag Extravaganza—in their small town.

In rural Mason County, Peter and his best friend Alan—two of the few gay teenagers in town—are used to judgement and misunderstandings from others. But when Peter is mixed up in a confrontation with another queer schoolmate, the altercation is filmed and uploaded online. Going viral makes Peter look heartless and cruel.

In order to salvage his reputation and prove his worth as a “good” gay, Peter agrees to produce the town’s first drag show. It’s a showcase of loud drag personalities through which Peter learns how to reckon with his own emotions. He also makes new drag queen friends and handles the conservative town’s backlash.

Set in a quirky and alluring place, the story features a vibrant mix of small-town conservatism with fantastical drag performances. It also goes deep in addressing subjects like internalized homophobia and tension within queer social groups. There are interesting perspectives on both community emotions and allyship.

The imperfect heroes of this tale are endearing and prone to witty banter. Peter shies away from anything gaudy, preferring to be “dragnostic.” He has quick comebacks despite his awkward demeanor. Though he stumbles, his search for self-acceptance is just as satisfying as his part in the final Drag Extravaganza. And his relationship with Alan is a pure connection: even when the two argue over boys or butt heads over the details of the drag show, they are pillars of stability for each other.

Showcasing a friendship that withstands hardship and disagreements, *Dragging Mason County* is a comedic novel in which queer teenagers butt against small minds, but still put on a heartwarming, showstopping display of self-discovery.

ALLISON JANICKI (September / October 2023)

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