

You Brought Me the Ocean: An Aqualad Graphic Novel

Alex Sanchez

Julie Maroh, Illustrator

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In *You Brought Me the Ocean*, Lambda-award winner Alex Sanchez's fast-moving graphic novel, strange scars line Jake's arms, and no one except his mother knows they react in water, not even his best friend Maria. But the scars are only one of Jake's secrets.

Maria hides her secret crush on Jake; Jake hides his secret crush on Kenny, one of the few openly gay students at their high school. Jake also applies to the University of Miami in secret, hoping to study oceanography despite his father's death by drowning many years prior. When all of these secrets come to a head, Jake is left figuring out whom he can trust.

Jake's burgeoning superpowers are engaged without ignoring his identity as a teenager struggling with school, friendship, and love. Clever, detailed illustrations use a muted color palette and the play of shadows, keeping focus on the emotive facial expressions of the well-wrought cast, which is made up of people of color. Each has motivations aplenty to push them through succeeding volumes.

As the story progresses, parents and friends misunderstand each other, though their misunderstandings would be easy to lay to rest with communication. Though Jake and his friends live in the desert, water still comes to town, bringing with it a flood of potential powers and problems, only some of which Jake is able to solve in this volume. Still, the book pulls together the lives and struggles of its teenagers well, weaving them into a greater story involving the DC superhero universe while also paying attention to the emotional realities of young adulthood—a feat that is something of a superpower in itself.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (May / June 2020)

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