SECLUDED RAINBOWS: 'FLAMER'

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"I know I'm not gay. Gay boys like other boys. I hate boys. They're mean, and scary, and they're always destroying something or saying something dumb or both. I hate that word. Gay. It makes me feel ... unsafe."

Homophobia is atrocious, sometimes deadly. People who are discriminated against because of their sexuality often confront internalized homophobia and other mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. Thankfully, literature like Mike Curato's "Flamer" can help them embrace their sexuality and defy any derogatory statements that are thrown at them.

Yet not everyone has access to those stories. When books and graphic novels like "Flamer" are veiled from the public, people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities have an even more difficult time accepting their identities

Welcome back to Secluded Rainbows, a biweekly column that publishes stories every other Tuesday. In each story, I discuss an LGBTQIA+ book that's currently being banned or challenged. In this issue, I'll discuss "Flamer," a graphic novel that was published on Sept. 1, 2020.

"Flamer" is one of the most challenged books in the United States. It was the most banned book in PEN America's Index of School Book Bans list in fall 2022. Furthermore, it was on the top 10 most challenged books list for three consecutive years; it was 10th in 2024, fifth in 2023 and fourth in 2022.

Besides lists, "Flamer" was banned in several states. In 2023, it was banned in Colorado, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah, Michigan, Texas and Florida.

The graphic novel is not safe from schools either. In the 2022-2023 academic year, it was threatened to be removed from the Eanes Westlake Innovative School District in Austin, Texas, for having derogatory language and mentions of bullying and suicide. In its final decision, the district kept the book, according to a report the district made.

"As early as elementary school, some of our students begin to question their sexual orientation," the district wrote. "LGBTQ+ students deserve to have access to books about their fears, struggles and inner turmoil about life, friendship, love and identity just like any heteronormative child."

"Flamer" was also challenged in an intendent school district in Katy, Texas, where a parent filed a criminal complaint saying the graphic novel is harmful for minors, according to the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. After a committee review, "Flamer" was removed from the district's middle school libraries.

Curato was both surprised and not about the challenging of his graphic novel, according to his interview with PEN America.

"It wasn't shocking to me that there is hate towards a book like this because I have experienced that my whole life, so I know it's out there," Curato said. "I think what was shocking to me is that people care more about banning the book than trying to protect children's physical lives in this day and age of mass shootings, for example."

"Flamer" follows the story of Aiden Navarro, a 14-year-old boy who spends the summer between middle school and high school at summer camp, where he forms friendships while confronting bullies. He eventually meets Elias, a boy he immediately falls in love with. As his feelings for him intensify, he embarks on a journey full of hardships, self-discovery and acceptance.



A page from Mike Curato's LGBTQIA+ YA graphic novel. The book was the most banned book in PEN America's Index of School Book Bans List in fall 2022.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @MIKE_CURATO ON INSTAGRAM

Throughout the graphic novel, Navarro frequently worries about his future. In middle school, he went to a Catholic school, where he was battered with bullying and homophobia. Beginning in ninth grade, Navarro will go to a public school. As the first day approaches, Navarro wonders about what it'll be like compared to the past.

"This fall may be a fresh start, but it feels more like a prison transfer to me," Navarro said on page 18.

"Flamer" is based on Curato's experiences, according to his website. Like Navarro, Curato endured bullying and homophobia as a child.

"It's happened so many times that I can't pinpoint when it started. It still hurts," Curato wrote.

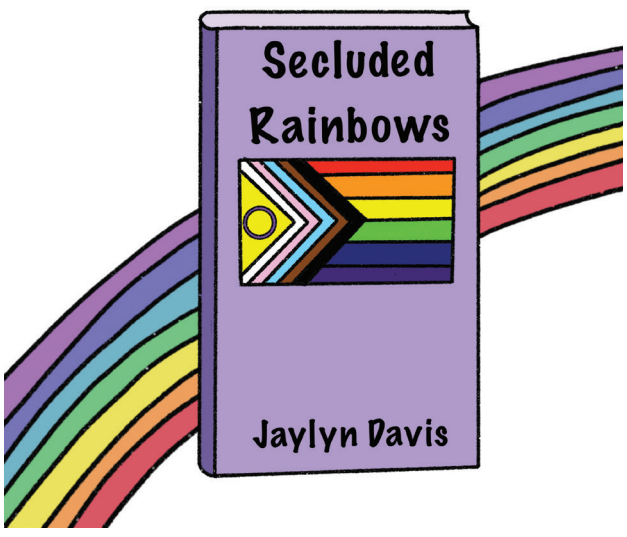
Curato wrote "Flamer" as revenge against the hardship he faced, according to his website. Curato said he wanted to write about what it's like to be gay and to say there's nothing wrong with being gay.

"We are not dirty. And we are not sinners for being gay," Curato said.

Despite the oppression, "Flamer" received 13 awards. A few are the Lambda Literary Award and the Massachusetts Book Award. The book also appeared in many bestsellers lists, such as New York Public Library Best Books of the Year, the Cooperative Children's Book Center Reading List, the Horn Book Fanfare List and the American Library Association Rainbow Reading List.

The graphic novel has been heavily praised. Kirkus Reviews said for some people, "it will be the defining book of their adolescence." Meanwhile, Shelf Awareness said "Flamer" "acknowledges the weight of hatred, yet inspired the courage to live." Booklist said it's "visual storytelling at its finest," and the School Library Journal said "Flamer" is "an essential book that shows readers that they are never alone in their struggles."

In a world where homophobia, transphobia and discrimination are traumatizing the LGBTQIA+ community, stories like "Flamer" help people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations stand up for themselves and embrace their identities.



LOGO BY LILLIAN LAFEMINA, ARTIST EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

AFTER 'IN ENDLESS AGONY & AWE,' DAINE SHOULD BE ON YOUR RADAR

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Daine released a new album titled "In Endless Agony & Awe" on Friday, Nov. 6.

Daine Lauren Wright who goes by Daine, is an Australian hyperpop artist. They released their debut single at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. After releasing three extended plays, this is their debut album. They are coming of an appearance on the track "It's You" on Ninajirachi's 2025 record. This is where I discovered Daine, and the singles for this album put this album on my radar. How does "In Endless Agony & Awe" fit in the zeitgeist of hyperpop? Let's dig in.

The album opens with "Silly Little Animal / Go!" Immediately, the glitchy synths that protrude the entire record are on display. It's dreamy and cute with a good bite in the instrumental. Daine pens a great chorus to start the record that becomes a theme.

The sound of this album is sweet with glitchy elements. Much of the tracks have very pretty instrumentals that pair well with Daine's voice. That sugariness is contrasted on a few tracks where the glitched production is amped up.

One of those tracks is "White Collar." The track opens with a muddy synth; they add dueling guitars that create a disorienting melody. It gives the same feeling of walking through a spinning tunnel in a fun house. Daine's vocal delivery on the chorus is almost goofy and adds to the track so well.

"Product of Profit" is a great track with another stellar chorus. Daine's choice of words with "I'm not really a person; I'm a product of profit" are very introspective. They look at turning themself into a marketable image and how it affects their everyday interactions. The screamo background vocals show off some of their inspiration. The prettiness of the whole album remains with the xylophone on the track.

Tracks "Wishing Well" and "God Figure" keep the good vibes rolling, with some laid back acoustic guitar lines and solid melodies. The only gripe is that they blend together a bit too much.

Some booming percussion begins "PQC," a huge highlight on the album that switches from the laid-back base of the previous tracks. This track is loud and in-your-face, with an anthemic chorus.

"I Used to Kill" has some groovy drums. There's a feature from aldn on the post chorus. Then the chorus has an emo-inspired vocal performance from Daine.

"Love Love" is a great electro-pop song, with a simple chorus that works well. The track is about a past friendship that ended, and Daine is looking back at it fondly. It's very bright and bubbly, just a textbook modern pop song that could be a blueprint for good writing.

"(I Want You In) Dakota" is a sweet song about longing. Geography references are a welcome idea.

"Supervillian" and "Spider-man" are fine ways to wrap the album up — not very memorable, but not bad. If bland is the worst the album gets, then "In Endless Agony & Awe" makes for a solid record.

"In Endless Agony & Awe" is a good showing from Daine. At just 38 minutes long it doesn't overstay its welcome and provides some good tracks. This album doesn't reinvent the wheel but provides a pleasant listening experience. At 23-years-old, Daine has a very bright future.

Rating: 3.5/5



The cover for Daine's debut album, "In Endless Awe and Agony." The album was released on November 6, 2026.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @D4INE ON INSTAGRAM