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Set against a vibrant South Bronx neighborhood and the queer youth culture of Manhattan's piers, *Chulito* is a coming-out, coming-of-age love story of a sexy, tough, hip hop-loving, young Latino man and the colorful characters in his vibrant neighborhood. Chulito, which means "cutie," is one of the boys, and everyone in his neighborhood has seen him grow up—the owner of the local bodega, the Lees from the Chinese restaurant, his buddies from the corner, and all of his neighbors and friends, including Carlos, who was Chulito's best friend until they hit puberty and people started calling Carlos a *pato* . . . a faggot.

Chulito rejects Carlos, buries his feelings for him, and becomes best friends with Kamikaze, a local drug dealer. When Carlos comes home from his first year away at college and they share a secret kiss, Chulito's worlds collide as his ideas of being a man, being macho, and being in love are challenged. Vivid, sexy, funny, heartbreak, and fearless, this brilliant work is destined to become a queer classic.

Chulito Details

Date : Published May 1st 2010 by Alyson Books

ISBN : 9781593501723

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Format : Paperback 280 pages

Genre : Romance, M M Romance, Young Adult, Lgbt, Gbt, Queer, Fiction, Contemporary

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From Reader Review Chulito for online ebook

Kaje Harper says

This is in many ways an amazing book, with characters who are not your typical M/M romance guys. I'm not qualified to judge their authenticity, but they and their setting rang completely true to me. The MC, Chulito, seems older than his supposed age, but as the song says, "you grow up quick when you grow up poor." He is a fascinating and conflicted guy, trying to reconcile the code of the streets on which he lives, and the anti-gay opinions of his group of friends, with his growing awareness that he is falling in love with another boy. You get a few scenes from POV's other than Chulito's later in the narrative, and although it jarred me out of the story a little the first time it happened, I actually liked the small tastes of other characters' viewpoints. One hectic action scene was a bit truncated in both emotion and description of the action, but overall this book was well written and engrossing. I was sorry to have it end. I would be delighted to read a sequel.

The big problem I had with this story was the explicitness of the sex, especially in the first sex scene, which was M/M/F. I have no prejudice against any menage combination; I love 'em all when they are written in a way that is appropriate to the story. In this case the actual MMF trio was vital to the plot, to Chulito's relationship with Kamikaze, the drug dealer he works for and is like a protégé to, and to his own realization that he is far more interested in the other man than the woman in the bed. But the explicitness to my mind was a poor choice. First because in this scene Chulito was only 15. Although not entirely erotic, it was still TMI for me to be comfortable with when one of the actors is under age. Secondly because I really, REALLY want to be able to recommend this book to YA readers and I can't. This is 18+ material. And it is a shame.

This is a book that should be able to be in libraries and schools. There are young guys out there navigating the macho culture, and other people who know and care about them, for whom this book would be a great read. If the author put out a revised YA version (which in my mind would lose nothing of importance to the story) I would recommend this book to everyone with wholehearted enthusiasm. As it stands, this is a great, unusual, and ultimately sweet read for adults only.

karlakolumna says

DNF at 70%. Sorry. Just couldn't get into it and I really tried considering that I was already bored out of my mind at like 10%. But some reviewers stated that this book just kept getting better and better...

Well, I certainly get where people are coming from when saying that this story felt real and managed to capture the Bronx and thug life quite well. While everything I know about ghetto, Bronx and gang life comes out of the Hollywood machinerie -and thus, I can't claim that the author *actually* did a realistic job here - I gotta admit that it, at least, felt real (to me).

But oh my god. I really couldn't connect to any of the characters, couldn't *feel those "niggas"* (this is a quote, the n-word appears quite frequently in this lovely book) at all. And while I'm quite aware that lots of people talk and act all "*gangsta*" and "*yo, whassup nigga?*" I can't relate to that at all and can't help but roll my eyes at wannabe macho behaviour like that.

Hiphop, rap, machos, gangstas... This just isn't my world.

This book wasn't my world.

Fangtasia says

This feels like a play, West Side Story, Hair, or Rent. The characters are iconic. When I first saw this book being read by a friend, I was wary of it. The setting and ethnicity of the story can easily be made into a farce by someone who hasn't experienced it. And that hurts, because I've been there and it's no joke. There's also the usual murder of our native language, Spanish, when words and phrases just yank me out of the story by how horribly mangled they are.

None of that happened here. Mr. Rice-Gonzalez lived it, just like I did. He belonged to that "nabe", there's just no way to fake it.

Several important topics are addressed in this book, all layered into the narrative and perfectly handled. It's a romance, yes, Chulito and Carlos had me rooting for their HEA from page 1. But it's also a testament to the people who make up the neighborhoods, the influences - local and imported - that help shape their lives and future.

Carmen, the hard-working mother, with a son who dropped out of high school, looking the other way but knowing he's working with the local drug dealer. All because she'd rather not be alone, and she knows he will leave if she pushes him. There's no daddy around to "impose the law."

Brick, the ex-drug dealer/model, who paid dearly to get out and is still trying to learn to live a life worthy of the daughter he loves with all his heart.

Martha, the no-nonsense "liberated" woman, going to college, trying to make a future for herself. But also standing by her friends and trying to help them overcome the obstacles they and their environment have imposed.

Julio, the gay, older man who owns the travel agency. He and Puti, the washed-up, drug-addicted local drag queen end up showing the whole block what it truly means to be a man. By saying "enough", by fighting for your rights, but not taking any shit.

Carlos, having the guts to come out and live out. To leave the neighborhood and go to college. To dream of more and go out to get it. To believe in Chulito and give him the chance to be himself and reach for their HEA.

Finally, Chulito, the gangsta, with the clothes and the bling and the Tims, bopping along to the tune played by everyone's expectations. Until he realized what true love is, how it feels, and that it's worth losing what you know to gamble on earning something unknown but infinitely better.

This is a book that should be read in every schoolroom in the US, but particularly in all the cities with a high concentration of latinos. Because no matter where we settle, our ghettos tend to be the same.

Read it, feel it, hear the drums, they beat in our blood...

Edina Rose says

OMG! This for all the Chulito and Carlos out there!!!

Incredibly realistic story about two teenagers from the Bronx, the little gangsta (Chulito) and the smart one who got to university (Carlos).

What can I say, this book made me think of the TV show The Wire. Just like The Wire, it feels authentic, real. Things are said without flourish, without embellishment. The author just puts thing out there for us to see, in a simple and powerful prose.

This is, apparently, how it was and maybe still is, to be a teenage gay boy in love in the Bronx. With happy ending.

I loved this book.

Trisha Harrington says

[The issue I had with the book was the manage scene mmf at the beginning. That is really not for me. Added to that I think it was kind of unrealistic to the rest of the b

Lucy says

DNF page 60

One star for mentioning my favorite foods....mofongo, pernil, arroz con gandules.....the rest sucked.

Jeff Erno says

This shit is dope.

Wow, what an amazing read. Chulito is a sweet-faced, thugged-out sixteen year old Latino, living in the Bronx. He's dropped out of school and works for his friend Kamikazee selling drugs. Chulito's best friend Carlos shocks the neighborhood when he comes out as gay, and Chulito is torn. He wants to be loyal to his friend, but he has to protect his reputation. To complicate matters, Chulito is struggling with his own sexual orientation, and though he tries to deny his attraction to Carlos, he can't seem to stop himself from

falling...and he falls hard.

In the beginning, Carlos is willing to keep things on the down low. But as their relationship progresses, Carlos becomes impatient. He's hurt by the way Chulito pushes him away, denies their relationship, every time anyone from the neighborhood is close enough to see them together.

This story was incredibly authentic, written in street vernacular and laced with hip-hop culture. The dialect, setting, interpersonal relationships, and atmosphere of the barrio all rang true, and the book had me flying through the pages, utterly engrossed.

Not only was the plot exciting, but the emotional depth of the story was absolutely phenomenal.

Indescribable, actually. I laughed throughout and sometimes cried. I especially loved the big climactic fight scene, when Chulito finally came out and stood tall and proud for who he was. Although emotionally told, it was also funny in parts. For example, one of the secondary gay characters, Lee, was intent upon going out in the street to help his friends fight, but his father locked the doors of their restaurant. So Lee tried crawling through the takeout window and got his head stuck. Believe me, the way the author told it was hilarious.

The relationship Carlos and Chulito shared was so beautiful, and the portrayal was picture perfect. Contrary to what some other Good Reads readers have written, the story did not contain overly explicit sex. In fact, there are only two intimate scenes in the book. One occurred in flashback, Chulito's first experience, and it was with his friend Kamikazee and a hooker they'd hired. Sort of his coming of age. The second was a beautiful love scene with Chulito and Carlos.

The story has a fantastic message and is incredibly well written. By way of criticism, I'd have to say that it annoyed me a bit that halfway through the story, the author began to shift point of view within scenes. There were also quite a few typos, like "care" instead of "car" and "loose" instead of "lose".

Overall, I loved the story and highly recommend it. It's going on my recommended reading list on my website.

TeeTee says

Excellent! This is the Bronx I grew up in. I know it may seem that in this hood... they were always at the brink of violence and maybe it seems like a tragic horrible place to grow up. It wasn't for me and I completely understand why Chulito and Carlos have this love-hate relationship with the neighborhood. It's home but you wanna get out, it's smells good and it stinks, your family and childhood friends are there but so are you enemies and the knuckleheads. I think setting this love story with this hood as the background is daring and probably a lot closer to reality then most people think about. I loved it! The love between the two characters is honest, gritty, real and simple.

On a personal note:

I went to the Poe Cottage elementary schools and walked by the park and cottage every day for 10 years. I live out of state now but.....Da Bronx 4evas!

Lauraadriana says

Chulito is a hoodrat. Born and raised in the South Bronx. A beautiful 16 year old boy who grew up in the streets of his neighborhood and lives by the rules of that small world.

Carlos, was Chulito's best friend while they were boys, and later when they got a little older Chulito realized that he maybe felt more than just friendly towards Carlos.

But Carlos is an outsider now. He has left the Hood, and gone to Long Island for college. He is also openly gay. Those two things put Chulito and Carlos in two worlds so distant they might as well be in different planets.

Chulito's life revolves around hanging out on the corner with the Fellas, running drugs for his best friend Kamikaze, the local TOP DOG, and being the hardest thug he can be. He dropped out of high school, and all his ambitions pretty much lie within whatever is confined to his block and the people in it.

The only thing that Chulito can't do is not be friends with Carlos, he misses him. Wants to reconnect with his boy, so he makes a move to get in touch with Carlos, and ends up being surprised by his friend coming back to the Hood for the whole summer.

This book was SET SO PERFECTLY. The author captured the sub-culture so well, and not just of the ghetto in NYC, but of the Latin communities, especially Neuyoricans and Dominican Yorks. It's such an insular world. Comes from immigrant generations that preferred staying up there in Washington Heights, Harlem or The Bronx where everyone spoke their language, ate their foods, listened to their music, knew their history, their culture, and most importantly UNDERSTOOD why it was preferable to come to the United States to the ghetto than remain in a homeland that had nothing to offer. Even if the memory of that homeland is something so large and painful that it's present in everything they do.

He captured, The Hood and its cycles of poverty, and outdated views on gender roles, who men and women should be or act like. These attitudes can entrap many kids, wanting MORE or wanting DIFFERENT, whether it is ambition to move elsewhere, being open about your sexuality, daring to demand respect as a woman, or show vulnerabilities as a man, cannot only make you an outcast it can make you a target. But he also showed the love and support that exists in those neighborhoods, strong loyalty and such a deep understanding of each other.

We understood all the contradictions of that world. Who Chulito was, and his yearning for something more than the Hood, but also his loyalty to the neighborhood that has been his whole world. Carlos' need to leave it, but also feeling pulled back by those he loves that are still there. The women in the neighborhood and how they cope with hard lives, the lack of aspirations and ambitions and posturing of the men. The trials that those who dare to be different have to endure. All SPOT ON.

I know that for some readers Chulito and Carlos will be strange characters, they seem so much more mature than their age. It is strange it's true, but kids like Chulito and Carlos grow up fast and hard. It is rough living with no daddies, hustling to make a living, mothers that care but have to work hard to provide for their kids. There are too many harsh realities everywhere in places like Chulito's world.

THE VERY BEST thing about this book are Chulito and Carlos. What a JOY is was to watch them fall in love. To see Chulito discover a whole world outside of the Bronx. I just loved them. They were so open,

so hopeful and brave to be who they were, despite a more than hostile environment.

There were too many things I loved about this book, it's worth reading if only to get a glimpse at a slice of American life that people rarely get to read about, especially from the perspective of young gay men.

Chulito and Carlos were TRAILBLAZERS, I wish that every boy like them could find a way to love and be loved openly like they did.

RECOMMEND. RECOMMEND. RECOMMEND. RECOMMEND. RECOMMEND.
RECOMMEND. RECOMMEND. RECOMMEND.

Lenore says

Well, I won't say I found this story beautiful, but I will definitely say there's beauty in it.

Sixteen-year-old Chulito, for starters. He's a cutie. On the first page of the book he's described as *a Latino, hip hop version of Michelangelo's David*.

Then the neighbourhood. Hunts Point, in the Bronx. The botegas. The Chinese/Korean restaurants. The auto glass guys. The corner where Chulito hangs out with the fellas. It was very well done and for me it was the best part in the story. I read in some other review that the hood and the fellas brought the TV show "The Wire" in mind, and it's true. I, too, thought of that show more than once, especially the first season, while reading *Chulito*. The teenage boys with the necessary and at times funny nicknames, high school dropouts, aspiring to make a "career" in drug trafficking, hooking up with local girls but avoiding getting serious with them, adept at fathering children but inept at taking care of them.

Then the secondary characters. Without them this story would have been nothing special. They were described so vividly, so aptly, they felt authentic, like real people. The most notable ones for me were Kamikaze and Brick. The current and the ex-criminal. Two characters with both good and evil in them, with as many vices as virtues, as many merits as flaws, with layers and layers of qualities, positive and negative, that made you want to both laugh and cry, slap them across the face and hug them tight, be friends with them and hate them at the same time.

Other characters I liked were Julio, the old gay travel agent, Puti, the neighbourhood transvestite, the mothers, Carmen and Maria.

I also enjoyed Chulito's dreams, one earlier and one later in the story, expressing the teenager's wishes and fears, the question of his sexuality, the dread of the realisation that he was different. I especially enjoyed the dream about macho having been outlawed, the macho-meter device the authorities used to screen men and Chulito's fear that he wouldn't pass it.

Then the fight scene. Chulito standing up for his choice. Puti, for once abandoning her position at her window, limping outside and using a high-heeled shoe as a weapon. Julio brandishing his gun and exclaiming "enough" to everyone and no one in particular.

But. Yes, there's a but. More than one buts, really.

The dynamic between the major characters, Chulito and Carlos. Their emotions for each other, how and why they started, how and why they bloomed, didn't come across as powerfully as I expected.

Chulito, unable to overcome his dread of being labelled as gay, kept blowing Carlos off, treating him worse and worse. However, despite his shitty behaviour, despite being the younger and less smart one, despite his fears, he came across as the stronger of the two, the one calling the shots.

Carlos, although openly gay in a neighbourhood full of prejudices, discrimination and bigotry, although much more mature than his actual age, although probably smarter than any other seventeen-year-old in Hunts Point, and despite his determination not to let Chulito drag him back in the closet, came across as weak, insubstantial, plain, insipid. He lost the game the moment I started wondering what Chulito found in him (and it was pretty early in the story).

Now, the relationship between Chulito and Kamikaze? A whole different ball of wax. What Carlos and his interaction with Chulito lacked, Kamikaze and his own interaction with Chulito had in spades. Chulito and Kamikaze had hammered out a relationship of such intensity, intimacy, trust and love, whatever Chulito had built (or was building) with Carlos paled in comparison. Even their single common sexual experience felt hot times infinity compared to Chulito's encounters with Carlos. It was Kamikaze's wiry pube Chulito made sure stayed under his tongue for safekeeping, not Carlos'.

Then there were also the issues I had with the narrative. I'm not sure if it was omniscient or third (and single) person POV. Or both. Or neither. Eighty per cent of the time it felt like single person. It was through Chulito's eyes the story was told. Then, for no apparent reason, a couple of scenes with Carlos' POV appeared. And the strange thing was that they didn't offer anything extremely different, or new, or substantial.

In addition, the almost complete lack of past perfect tense confused me more times than I could count, having me wondering if what I was reading was happening in the present or the past and, eventually, taking me out of the story.

Lastly, finishing the book I had the strong impression that the author all but abandoned his story in the last twenty per cent or so. That was where the story deflated instead of taking off.

I expected much more to happen in the neighbourhood after the fight scene. And I expected the relationship between Chulito and Carlos to feel fortified not compromised, with one of them, Carlos, leaving, going back to college, to a life familiar and an environment he knew how to handle, and the other, Chulito, staying back, alone, altered, redefined, to a life he didn't have the time to adapt to, having to learn how to work a legit job, to be someone else, and probably fight a war of survival no one, not even Kamikaze, seemed to know how would evolve.

Even though the story ended on a hopeful tone, I felt like Chulito hadn't realized what was coming, and like what was coming wasn't a walk in the park.

So, this book didn't speak to me on the profound level it did to other people. And it wasn't because of the Latino/Ghetto theme. If anything, that was a plus. Mostly, it was the imbalance of the flat, shallow characterization where it mattered most and the three-dimensional, full-blown characters where it didn't.

This story could have survived without such a realistic Brick, perhaps even without such an amazing Kamikaze. But, unfortunately, it didn't survive without a mind-blowing Carlos.

But at least it had Brick and it had Kamikaze and, most of all, it had Chulito, the sun around which everyone

else in the book revolved. This was Chulito's story and as such I can say it was worth the time I spent reading it and writing this review.

Charles Rice-Gonzalez says

This is my book, so of course, I love it!

Val Kovalin says

Some initial thoughts: Finished March 4.

- (1) I'm really liking this kid Chulito. His name for his penis (Papito!), his epic sex dream -- it's all very funny, endearing, and realistic.
- (2) ~~I can see kind of a love triangle developing. I'm really curious about Kamikaze, if he's even aware of what he's doing. Not getting as much of sense of Carlos yet, but enough. He's still in the distance.~~ I found Kaz very creepy because of his drug dealing and his refusal to provide for his infant son. Also, it seemed to me that he manipulated Chulito emotionally and even sexually throughout the book.

However (view spoiler)

- (3) the sense of Puerto Rican New York City is awesome -- vivid, three dimensional, vibrant. I love a strong setting.

As of March 4: This book just kept getting better and better. I'll admit that I prefer reading gay romance to gay fiction because I want the happy ending, and sometimes I'm wary to try something that doesn't look like an obvious romance because it could have a tragic ending -- to make a point about homophobia, and to get more respect from the critics.

Fortunately, that did not happen here. Our two very appealing heroes get their happy ending. The ending was awesome with (view spoiler)

Also, I'm one of those readers who gets impatient with dream sequences, and I think the two we get in this book are the only ones I've ever liked in all my reading. The epic sex dream! The Macho Meter dream! Too funny.

Best of all was the unabashed romanticism between Carlos and Chulito, which was especially striking coming from Chulito with his badass attitude and expressions. These two boys were meant to be together. Very highly recommended!

Jerry says

What an incredible story! Everything felt so real. The locale, food, clothes, talk, people, music and the love story. This is really the kind of love story I want to read. I read so many MM books that are pretty much fairy tales in that the lives of the MC's are so easy and Chulito and Carlos have to live with the grit and grime of real life. This covered all of life, the pain, the joy, the mundane, the fear...it was a slice of real life. There were a few scenes that were kind of shocking to a CA white gay boy yet everything felt perfect for the plot and pace of the book. Not much sex and it really didn't need it. What was there worked perfectly for the story. Reaching into my MM side, I do wish for a sequel or maybe just a peek into their lives 10 years from now?

This would make a great West Side Story musical or movie.

Brilliant book!

Larry Benjamin says

Chulito lingers in memory like a lover's first kiss on the lips in the moonlight.

Reading Charles Rice-Gonzalez's Chulito was a very personal experience for me. It's set in the Bronx, where I also grew up: Hunts Point, Longwood Avenue, Parkchester—almost forgotten yet familiar. I could close my eyes and see the people and smell the odor peculiar to that part of the Bronx. Adlai Stevenson High School, was my high school and my eyes grew wide when he mentioned the University of Pennsylvania, which I also attended.

The familiarity of the setting was an unexpected surprise. I picked up this book because it fell outside the traditional white homo-normative narrative of popular gay fiction. Rice-Gonzalez gives voice to the previously voiceless?the inner city Hispanic, the drug underlord, the gay gangsta?and what a voice it is, solid and true.

The truth in his voice, the authenticity of his characters made me fall in love with this book. I, too, had a Chulito in my life. Reading about this Chulito, his struggle with his love for Carlos, his sexuality and his place in the 'hood brought back memories and a pain I'd thought long forgotten. Every word, every scene rang true and I found myself nodding throughout. This book made me wish we'd both been stronger but gave me hope the current generation is.

As they fall deeper in love, Carlos and Chulito must decide whether to leave the world they know or stay within their world and change it from inside. The most powerful message is in the simple fact that whether they stay or leave, they have changed the 'hood simply because they themselves have changed.

Seeing the book's unlikely hero, the older gay Julio, change through Chulito's eyes from an object of derision or worse an invisible person into someone determined, wise and strong was extremely gratifying. It is Julio who explains to the struggling Chulito: "...until the world changes, we have to fight for our love." And fight they do. Just as it was the effeminate, the drag queens that launched Stonewall, here too it is the neighborhood queens who rise up and fight back when they've had enough. The powerless become powerful, the victims become warriors and a high-heeled shoe becomes a weapon of retribution; two queens show a neighborhood what it means to be a man.

This book is a must read for anyone struggling, or who has struggled, or who knows someone who is struggling to accept him/herself. Chulito's struggle is our struggle. When Chulito comes out, he discovers he must come out over and over again—to the guys on the corner, to his mother, to Carlos, to himself each morning. His coming out rings true; there is no magic bullet, no one time that he comes out and it's over. He must fight every day for his love.

I was pulling for Carlos and Chulito from the beginning, even when it looked like they weren't strong enough to make it. My Chulito and I didn't get our happily ever after but Chulito and Carlos do; that makes me infinitely happy.

Chulito is a wonderful, well-crafted book and Charles Rice-Gonzalez is a writer to watch. I expect great books from him.

Sheziss says

Irregular, irrelevant, irrational. Ridiculous, tedious, pretentious... I can carry on like this but I won't.

There were several Spanish words. And I will tell you a secret: I wasn't thrilled about this.

Now let's come back to the crux of the matter: if I have to sum the story up in a few words I would say this is a nonsense. There were moments I was interested in the story and in Chulito. Those scenes usually were the life of Hispanic people in one of the troubled suburbs in New York. But that didn't last long because suddenly a secondary character's life was told and I was just not interested in that. Even more, I wasn't aware they were talking about said person until the narrator had already told half their lives, and as fast as it has started it ends in the same fashion and the plot goes on with Chulito. I never grasped the utility of doing this. It gave me the impression of an unbalanced story, with no harmony at sight. Is the narrator's goal to confuse the reader? Because he achieved it.

Secondly, this is a contemporary book but this may well be sci-fi nonetheless. To be honest, the mood of the book never struck me as a futuristic one but it surely felt as one. Because Chulito not only travels through time but he beams up whenever he wants, too. One minute Chulito is in his neighborhood and the next one he is with Carlos getting into an empty building on the other side of the city (because New York is that small, guys).

Also, I could not really understand his social dynamics. He works for a gangster and that is cool, but his mother doesn't want him to behave badly so he doesn't say a thing because he loves her. I know, peer pressure and all of that, but I could never feel close to Chulito. I believe he is a superficial prick with no personality to stand for himself and for what he wants. Carlos has by far more character than him and that's why I didn't like him, either, because he is clever enough to realize Chulito has never deserved him and that he should invest his time in someone more worthwhile. Generally speaking, I didn't like the MCs.

Furthermore, there is a disgusting image I can't get rid of even after all this time since I finished the book. I will never forgive the author for this.

All in all, I can't recommend it.

