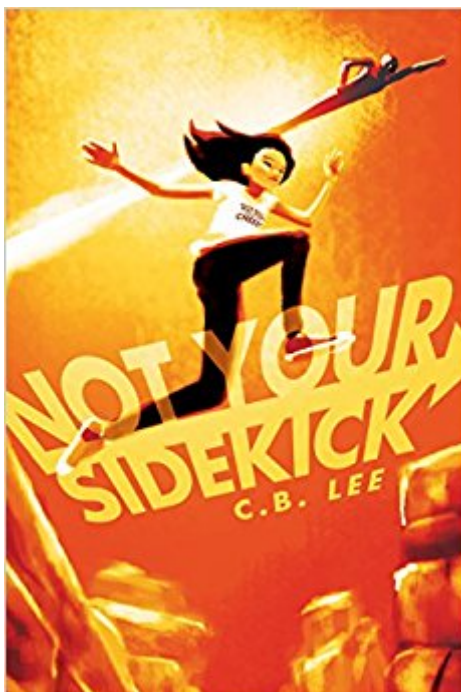


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# Not Your Sidekick



## Synopsis

Welcome to Andover... where superpowers are common, but internships are complicated. Just ask high school nobody, Jessica Tran. Despite her heroic lineage, Jess is resigned to a life without superpowers and is merely looking to beef-up her college applications when she stumbles upon the perfect (paid!) internship only it turns out to be for the town's most heinous supervillain. On the upside, she gets to work with her longtime secret crush, Abby, who Jess thinks may have a secret of her own. Then there's the budding attraction to her fellow intern, the mysterious 'M,' who never seems to be in the same place as Abby. But what starts as a fun way to spite her superhero parents takes a sudden and dangerous turn when she uncovers a plot larger than heroes and villains altogether.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 5-8 • Although her parents are the local superheroes, it looks like Jessica Tran is merely "normal." Taking an internship would be another normal thing for her, except it turns out she'll be working with her biggest crush as well as for her parents' nemesis. Can she work alongside Abby without making a total fool of herself? And what is the truth about heroes and villains in this superpowered world? This is a light romp of a middle grade adventure/romance, but the real strength is in its matter-of-fact representation of LGBTQ and first-generation American identities. While the meanings of these identities are explored, they are not the focus of the book and are simply part of the character- and world-building. Coming out has already happened, friendships based on immigrant identity are complicated, and there are many primary and secondary characters

who fall into these categories so that no single character has to stand for everyone. It's unfortunate that the use of the third person is so clunky throughout and that the twists are so obvious, but these are minor issues. VERDICT A good addition to any middle grade library concerned with LGBTQ and racial diversity representation across all genres. --L. Lee Butler, Hart Middle School, Washington, DC

Jess and Abby are delightful characters and superhero fans like this reviewer will especially enjoy Lee's take on how superpowers work. I'm ready for the sequel! --RT Book Reviews Lee (Seven Tears at High Tide) offers up a fast-paced, engaging tale set in a quasi-dystopian 22nd-century America where the line between hero and villain is often blurred. With a diverse cast of characters, both in terms of sexuality and ethnic background, and a wholly adorable romance for Jess, it's a lively exploration of morality in a superpowered age. --Publishers Weekly

Charming, straight-forward, and all around heartening. The moment I saw the cover upon its unveiling, I was interested. A story about an Asian young woman in a world of superheroes without a power of her own? The background of family, the difference and similarities between generations, disconnect in handling one's heritage and legacy - matched by the kind handling of bi and trans characters - left me feeling cheerful as I kept turning the pages. Some things felt a little too easy, but the qualities of living as a daughter of two backgrounds without much of the same footing was one of the strongest aspects of the book that rang true throughout. Aspects of the story are predictable, but it's evident that Lee is not trying to obscure certain facts too much - the question is not the mystery, but rather how these characters live with it and respond, and that was pleasant. Aspects of what's going on are a little too black and white in delivery, comical in a way that seems tongue-in-cheek but doesn't quite work for the tone of the scenes they're delivered in. But I really stress how much Jess's family struggles and identity come through as a routinely important fact - both Jess and Abby's families have a fascinating and human background. I would love to have read a book about Jess's parents in particular, but seeing them through her eyes, young and frustrated but willing to trust them, was wonderful. This book leaves a very optimistic feeling. The basic plot of a daughter of heroes interning for villains is something near and dear to my heart, but much of the humanity written into what remains of this world, and how it parallels with the world today made me even more glad it exists. It's cute and a little funny and very very sweet - Jess and Abby have a darling romance. I had hoped for a bit more of a rough edged journey than I was given with their relationship, but allowing them to be so open-hearted to one another is just as important in a world

with so few kind romances for girls. And this was very, very kind. If anything, I wish that this book had been longer to allow scenes and delivery to be drawn out - I found pacing to go far quicker than I wanted it to at times. The dialogue works well for the ages of the characters, but I think they shine most when given opportunities to interact in scenes of tension. There was plenty of interaction outside of action, as teens do, but more building on the part of who they are when under stress, together, was something I found myself wanting. That said, the scenes that do allow that are genuinely favorites - action is simple but clear and leaves a strong sense for what's happening. I'm very glad for this book's existence, and I look forward to the next. I hadn't realized it would be part of a series, but I'm only more glad to have the chance to get to know Bells more - Lee set up all the characters around Jess in a way that made them feel full of life as well, and Bells grew strong in my heart. I am a little biased because I well up emotionally at every trans character who is treated so well, but Goodness Gracious, his presence was a healing salve to my too often broken heart.

Seriously I feel like this book was tailor made for me. Asian American bisexual protagonist with issues in post-apocalyptic America because her family is super heroes and she doesn't really see herself as measuring up? And also super doofy and clueless about girls in high school and what's flirting and what's not? Ignoring the obvious because she's insecure? It's like my autobiography from ten years ago. But seriously this book has everything, queer characters, a trans best friend, super diversity, discourse on governmental involvement and privacy laws and the war in the Middle East and...just....god everything is a metaphor and I Love it. Please read this book!

This is just a fun read cover to cover, not afraid to play with goofy superhero tropes and smart enough to use world building to set itself apart from most cape'n'cowl fare, with a strong and sweet central romance. Not Your Sidekick is the kind of LGBT fiction I'm always looking for, but rarely find. It's entertaining, sincere genre fare with a bisexual protagonist and a central romance between two girls (yes! awesome!! hooray!!!! I'll take five!!!!!!). It also ekes just the right amount of conflict out of Jess's sexuality and crush on Abby, enough to make it feel /real/ but not enough to bog things down with angst or tragedy. Jess faces issues like not being sure where the line between flirting and friendliness is, uncertainty due to not knowing whether her crush is interested in girls at all, and not always fitting in with the other LGBT kids at school, all real situations that I and people I know have dealt with which are refreshing to see depicted in fiction. I also really enjoy how the world building accounts for a world with superheroes. Without spoiling anything, Not Your Sidekick takes a smart approach to justifying why its world populated by clashing superheroes and villains works the way it

does. It also has a fun, tongue-in-cheek approach to handling secret identity hijinks and other superhero tropes; some things are telegraphed a bit too strongly, too early on, I think, but knowing more than Jess does about the other characters' lives does add another layer to it.

I went on a thrilling adventure with Jess Tran and her eclectic set of friends in C.B. Lee's YA novel, *Not Your Sidekick*. Jess is a character I identified with the seeming epitome of average, which is how most of us feel about ourselves. Sandwiched between two exceptional siblings, she desperately wants to prove that she is special, but every time she tries, she further demonstrates how ordinary she is. Or is she? It takes an adventure that starts at a prestigious, but somehow also quirky internship (yet another effort to distinguish herself) where Jess puts her best foot forward through hard work and finally begins to discover her strengths. In addition to finding a place where she fits and even shines, Jess takes a risk and opens her heart to a co-worker. Jess must ultimately question everything she has been taught to believe in since childhood. She takes the necessary leap of faith and lands in a pot of hot water where comic book battles come to life. *Not Your Sidekick* is an exciting adventure, but it's also a teenage girl's personal quest to find her path and her truth and her worth. I highly recommend *Not Your Sidekick* to readers who are looking for diversity in YA futuristic fiction. A great read!

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