# POZ Awards 2022 / Best in Literature

Read about the nominees, then scroll down to vote for your favorite!

October 1, 2022

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VOTING IS CLOSED

Welcome to the 7th Annual POZ Awards, spotlighting the best representatives of HIV in media and culture.

The POZ editorial staff selects the nominees, but POZ readers choose the winners.

Eligible nominees were active or were presented, published or produced between October 1, 2021, and September 30, 2022.

BEST IN LITERATURE

This Time for Me by Alexandra Billings

Award-winning transgender actress and history-making LGBTQ activist, Alexandra Billings has had an amazing journey. Her remarkable book chronicles her path from her childhood in the 1960s, when her very existence was illegal, to her self-discovery and transition as well as her stints as a sex worker, her acting career highs and lows, her HIV diagnosis and more. The book also shines a light on the evolution of queer liberation amid the devastation of the AIDS epidemic in the ’80s and early ’90s, the sometimes painful and frightening challenges of simply existing as trans and the deceptions she had to engage in to keep herself safe. It’s an inspiring book that gives us great insight into what it took for Billings to pull herself up by the straps of her Mary Janes to become a successful television and Broadway performer and proud trans woman living out loud.

It Was Vulgar and It Was Beautiful: How AIDS Activists Used Art to Fight a Pandemic by Jack Lowery

In the early days of the epidemic, while AIDS was annihilating gay men, IV drug users and minority populations, the government did very little to combat it. President Reagan refused to even mention the word AIDS. It was up to those in the vulnerable communities themselves to rise up and demand action. Out of the activist group ACT UP was born Gran Fury, an artist collective aimed at battling government and corporate apathy regarding AIDS and those suffering through and dying of the illness. Writer Jack Lowery tells the moving story of this collective and how its passion and creativity, as seen in powerful 1980s and 1990s works—including the iconic

Silence=Death and Kissing Doesn't Kill poster—still resonate today. Gran Fury's work not only raised public awareness about AIDS but also put pressure on politicians to do something to fight the virus that was decimating whole communities. It's a heroic story about anger, grief, love and solidarity at a time when the only hope in the face of AIDS came from the people most affected by it.

My Government Means to Kill Me by Rasheed Newson

Hailed as one of the most anticipated books of 2022 by The New York Times, this debut novel from the television writer Rasheed Newson (The Chi, Narcos and Bel-Air) is a fierce coming-of-age story about a queer, young Black man in 1980s New York City. Earl "Trey" Singleton III travels to the city from Indianapolis at age 17, ready to shed his parents' expectations and create a life for himself. What follows is a political and personal awakening, through volunteering at an AIDS hospice, joining ACT UP and meeting people who forever change his life. This lively piece of historical fiction is filled with joy, anger, angst, sex, humor and energy and features cameos by famous names and events. Newson is brilliant at weaving together historic places with his compelling fiction, creating a fast-paced and remarkable read.

Never Silent: ACT UP and My Life in Activism by Peter Staley

Peter Staley is an HIV hero. No, more than that: an icon. A legendary member of ACT UP in the early revolutionary days of the AIDS crisis, Staley opens up about his own diagnosis in the days when it was considered a death sentence, fear, anger, fierce activism and what happened afterward. Including a foreword by Anderson Cooper, this memoir is a powerful, enlightening document about the HIV movement from a man who was at the forefront. Staley frankly exposes his own demons, including bouts with addiction and depression, revealing a vulnerability and frailty that we don't often get to see from our heroes.

The Viral Underclass: The Human Toll When Inequality and Disease Collide by Steven W. Thrasher

Groundbreaking LGBTQ scholar, social critic and journalist Steven W. Thrasher, PhD, has spent his career studying HIV criminalization and how the virus has been policed in marginalized communities. This vital and potent book explores how viruses can expose the vast inequalities in our society, something we witnessed all too recently during the COVID-19 pandemic. Friends, activists and teachers shared their heartbreaking stories of navigating the coronavirus, HIV and other viruses with Thrasher, uncovering the devastating effects of privilege. The Viral Underclass is a powerful book that helps us to understand more fully the differences that determine who receives care when society is facing the deadly effects of a mysterious virus.

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