



# Sketchtasy

*Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore*

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## **Sketchtasy** Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore

*Sketchtasy* takes place in that late-night moment when everything comes together, and everything falls apart—it's an urgent, glittering, devastating novel about the perils of queer world-making in the mid-'90s.

This is Boston in 1995, a city defined by a rabid fear of difference. Alexa, an incisive twenty-one-year-old queen, faces everyday brutality with determined nonchalance. Rejecting middle-class pretensions, she negotiates past and present traumas with a scathing critique of the world. Drawn to the ecstasy of drugged-out escapades, Alexa searches for nourishment in a gay culture bonded by clubs and conformity, willful apathy, and the specter of AIDS. Is there any hope for communal care?

*Sketchtasy* brings 1990s gay culture startlingly back to life, as Alexa and her friends grapple with the impact of growing up at a time when desire and death are intertwined. With an intoxicating voice and unruly cadence, this is a shattering, incandescent novel that conjures the pain and pageantry of struggling to imagine a future.

"Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore won a Lambda Literary Award in 2014 for her compelling memoir *The End of San Francisco*. It was a deserved achievement in a tenacious career already filled with vibrant and challenging work. And she one-ups herself with the dazzling new novel *Sketchtasy*. Immersed in the '90s queer culture of Boston, Alexa is a mess. She's a queen in crisis, desperate for relief from the sinister traumas of her past and the ominous threats of her present. She's searching for hope, even as she becomes mired in an unforgiving cycle of addiction. *Sketchtasy* is a breakneck spree through a cultural moment, scratching off the patina of nostalgia to show how urgently relevant it still is. If you've heard her read, you know Sycamore's voice is one in a zillion. She's at her very best here." —*Shelf Awareness*

"Every sentence in *Sketchtasy* is a living thing, fierce and funny and a little bit dangerous—a voice made of coke dust and club lights, cut with crackling insight. I was completely addicted to the story of Alexa's search for connection, set in the gritty Boston nightclub scene in the '90s. Nobody writes like Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore—most writers wouldn't dare try." —Julie Buntin, author of *Marlena*

"Reading this was like a night of stealing other people's drinks, or a much-needed slap to the face, or a little of both. Bold, glittering, wise, fun, the novel as found poem alive in the mouth of this truth-telling queen, making her way through a wasteland of other people's lies (and a few of her own), and looking for something near paradise. Follow her and live." —Alexander Chee, author of *The Queen of the Night*

"If *Sketchtasy* doesn't become a classic, we are doomed. Mattilda has such complete command of craft here that she is able to evoke experience, rather than simply describe it. Whether or not we identify with her characters, she lets us into their hearts and perceptions through sheer talent, raw honesty, and the sophisticated ability to handle word order, duration, pacing, and soul. The form of this novel is determined organically from the emotions at their core. A lesson in how to write, how to remember, how to grapple with history." —Sarah Schulman, author of *Conflict Is Not Abuse*

"*Sketchtasy* is a vivid masterpiece that rivals the likes of *Last Exit to Brooklyn* by Hubert Selby Jr. It's dangerous, hilarious, scary and transcendently beautiful. Sycamore's prose is so searing, you might want to read it with sunglasses." —Jake Shears, musician, actor, and author of *Boys Keep Swinging*

## Sketchtasy Details

Date :

ISBN :

Author : Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore

Format :

Genre : Fiction, Glbt, Queer, Lgbt, Novels, Gay



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# From Reader Review Skethtasy for online ebook

## **Sarah Schulman says**

So well written it is exciting to read.

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## **YYJE says**

I found this book almost hard to read — I remember those days, and I remember those people. A very real portrayal of the way some people lived and died.

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## **Kalen says**

I don't even know how to begin talking about this book so I'll let Julie Buntin do it for me:

"Every sentence in Skethtasy is a living thing, fierce and funny and a little bit dangerous—a voice made of coke dust and club lights, cut with crackling insight. I was completely addicted to the story of Alexa's search for connection, set in the gritty Boston nightclub scene in the 90s. Nobody writes like Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore—most writers wouldn't dare try." —Julie Buntin, author of Marlena

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## **Katrina Ayala says**

Skethtasy held so much promise yet fell incredibly short of my hopes for an LGBTQ book. It's pride month and as a flaming dyke (not a butch – look it up) I am reading every gay and lesbian book I can get my queer little hands on.

Skethtasy reads like what I can only imagine is a heavy drug haze. As someone whose never touched a hard drug, its hard to immerse myself in a story surrounded by drugs. Especially when the main character is perpetually snorting coke, ingesting K, and combating it with Xanax and alcohol.

The book moves so fast, with dialogue imbedded within the narrative it's difficult to follow along. The characters are introduced at rapid speeds with gender pronouns switching so constantly its near impossible to keep up.

The premise for Skethtasy could have been great, and maybe it is for someone who can relate. Dr. Suess is that you? Anyhow, I'm going to chalk it up to a lack of understanding on my part. Except that I have read books like the Crank series by Ellen Hopkins and absolutely loved every minute of it. So maybe it's the writing style, maybe it's the subject. If you're looking for a fast paced, ever moving, rollercoaster queer book – you may like this one.

I was offered a copy from edelweiss in exchange for my honest review.

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## Andrea says

Glowing review to come! I loved this book!

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## Josephine Quealy says

Oh, Alexa, you made me love you and you broke my heart.

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## Christopher says

This is my first (but definitely not last) book by this author. I was absolutely blown away by how much I enjoyed this novel. Set in 1995 and using first person stream-of-conscious writing style I was thrown into a whirling spinning drug laden world. I must be in the target demographic, because I could grasp every mid 90's references. The writing is fluid so I felt as if I were coasting through each 'trip', revelation, and self discovery seamlessly. I felt a total connection with the primary character and found many similarities with in my own 90's gay experience.

Definitely Queer Literature at it's finest. Highly recommend this novel to anyone who remembers or would like to get a sample of what life was like in big city gay life in the 90's.

I received a copy of this novel free of charge in exchange for my honest review.

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## Julie Ehlers says

Early in my publishing career I read a short story by Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore. If I recall, it was only a few pages long, but I never, ever forgot it. The voice! I never forgot it. I noticed over the years that Sycamore was publishing books, but my (long-subconscious) fear of no author living up to my first experience with them kicked in, and I never got around to any of them. Until now! When I won a copy of *Sketchtasy* in a Shelf Awareness giveaway, I was psyched! And when I read a few pages and realized the voice was similar to what I remembered, I was even more psyched.

*Sketchtasy* is a novel about Alexa, a young queer person living in Boston who's estranged from her parents, and her friends who are mainly in the same boat. Beyond that, it's a little difficult to describe. It takes place in the 1990s, so AIDS is a factor; there's a lot of drug-taking and some turning of tricks, and friendships form and lives come together, and then things fall apart and have to be rebuilt, over and over again. Alexa's voice is humorous and casual, even gossipy at times, certainly drug-addled (which is part of the point) but there's also a lot that's sad and poignant about this book, and a lot that's emotionally astute.

This novel isn't necessarily for everyone. At times, the level of TMI approached *The Pisces*. But, you know, *The Pisces* was about a woman (view spoiler), and *Sketchtasy* is about things that actually happen in our actual world. Honestly, I get so bored sometimes of reading about privileged white people and their stupid

problems. The whole time I was reading *Sketchtasy* I was acutely aware that for some people, back in the 1990s and even up to the present day, this book isn't fiction. It's a representation of a life that I have no experience with, but I was very grateful to get a glimpse of it. It's one of those books that you live along with the characters; once I was done it took a few days for me to shake it.

I was going to give this 4 stars, but the level of emotion I'm feeling as I'm writing this makes me want to bump it up. This is a wholly original work from a wholly original mind, and I'm very glad I had this opportunity to read it.

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### **Sassafras Lowrey says**

i love being lucky enough to get to read queer fiction before it releases! eep! i feel bad that people have to wait for October for this book - Mattilda is such a queer literary treasure <3

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### **Abby says**

This is the second queer novel I've read this year set in the 1990s & it's been fun to revisit that time and place again through these talented authors. Sycamore has such an incredible voice and her characters glitter on the page. I was completely sucked into the world of Alexa and her friends -- the drugs, the tricks, the late-night club scenes. Totally captivating and frequently heartbreaking. Highly recommended for fans of Michelle Tea and Andrea Lawlor.

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### **Vera says**

Won a copy of this. Started a couple times before, but lost interest. So tried again. Guess just not to my liking, but found book a little boring.

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### **Karen Mahtin says**

TW for this book: drugs, incest, rape, theft, AIDS illness and deaths, and hot gay sex.

At first I was pretty annoyed at all the descriptions of different highs, but Mattilda's descriptions are so beautiful. The drug use is an important theme as it affects every aspect of her life. After a while I realized that the prominence of the descriptions reminded me of Kerouac or Kesey or someone else I read 20 years ago.

I'm from Boston and was an active member of the (sober part of the) queer youth scene during the time in which this novel takes place - I even recognized a character as a now-dead member of that community. It was fun to follow Mattilda to clubs that I've heard of (and in some cases, been to), and to places like Dollar a Pound and other parts of Cambridge and Boston that were so important to me in my high school and college years. There is a beautiful section that I guess I'd describe as a stream of consciousness narrative that combines a lot of stories that Alexa hears at AA... it's all so familiar and foreign at the same time. A lovely

book, but if you find any of the issues in the trigger warning disturbing, just avoid reading it (at bedtime).

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