



Ambitious

Monica McKayhan

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There's only one thing tougher than getting in to Premiere High: Staying in...

At Premiere School of the Performing Arts, nicknamed Premiere High, talent is a must and competition is fierce. But the payoff is worth it. Some of the biggest stars in music, movies and dance are on the alumni list. New student Marisol Garcia dreams of taking her place among them one day. And being chosen to take part in a local dance contest where a film role is the prize could possibly be her first step into the spotlight.

Almost as big a challenge: getting Drew Bishop to see her as more than a friend. But Drew is preoccupied with his own dilemma of either playing basketball, which could be a free ticket to college, or pursuing the stage where he really comes alive. But every dream comes with a price. And as Marisol becomes consumed with winning, the once straight-A student risks losing everything. Starting with her parents' approval, her friends and her place at Premiere High...

Ambitious Details

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Author : Monica McKayhan

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From Reader Review Ambitious for online ebook

Rabiah says

Originally Posted at: <http://iliveforreading.blogspot.com/2012/08/ambitious.html>

This took me a while to get to, as the reading pile has expanded hugely, but surprisingly, it's not a very long read. It only took me around a day to complete it. I liked the story line and the characters well enough, but it was a book that didn't really WOW me. Unlike most books about the fine arts, this didn't really show the difficulty and struggles of dance, acting and music. Sure, they touched upon some points, but nothing too much that was like in *Virtuosity* or *Various Positions*.

The characters were well thought out and of course, very unique. The story is told from two perspectives of the main characters, Mari and Drew. Mari was the more dominant main character, as by how the story is mainly about her.

I found Mari a 'neutral' character. Like, I didn't find her extremely exciting nor made me feel like throwing a brick at her head. She could have been a little more interesting, but I generally had no problem with her. Drew is the other main character and Mari's love interest. I didn't like him at all, I'm sorry to say. He's too much of a womanizer, to put it frankly. He kept checking out other girls, using them for homework etc. and then keeps thinking about Mari. Really ticked me off.

The supporting characters I did love though. Jasmine and Preston were probably the most interesting people in this book, along with Nico (Mari's brother), yet he only appeared in little bits of the book.

Preston I LOVED. I wish he'd have been the love interest instead of Drew. He's sweet, really funny and doesn't use girls the way Drew does. Jasmine actually had character. She faced a struggle, helping at home, had parents with low income jobs. THIS, people, is substance that is needed for a book. Can't help it- we readers are leopards, hunting down the more interesting characters.

Overall, this book is great if you want a short story to read about the "lighter" side to the life of a student (or two) and their problems in the fine arts.

Clementine says

Marisol Garcia dreams of becoming a famous dancer. Her ticket to stardom is entry into the Premiere School of the Performing Arts, aka Premiere High. She gets in and pretty soon is also entered into a local dance contest which boasts a film role as a prize. As Marisol struggles to balance school, dance, and family, she also struggles to figure out why Drew Bishop is so reluctant to be more than her friend. Drew's got his own problems, though: he's a star basketball player who also loves to act. Both teens have obstacles to face in their quest to pursue their dreams, but they also have to learn to stay true to themselves.

Here's the problem with Monica McKayhan's new series of novels aimed at reluctant and struggling readers: she's taken a good premise and has laid the groundwork for a series that could be both interesting and helpful for teens struggling with reading, but it's not very well executed. While the concept of a performing arts high school is certain to appeal to a specific demographic of teens (this book is clearly aimed at fans of the *Step Up* movies, as well as the remake of *FAME*), it's not very well-researched and therefore doesn't present a very accurate picture of what it is to go to a performing arts school. Of course, this is just the tip of the

iceberg, because there's a lot that doesn't quite work in *Ambitious*.

But first, let's focus on the positives. McKayhan has presented a group of teens representing multiple races and ethnicities and coming from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. It's refreshing, to say the least, to have a group of teens who don't come from wealthy backgrounds and a life of privilege. This is going to work well with teens who are sick of reading about spoiled rich white kids living on the Upper East Side.

McKayhan also does a nice job of presenting layered, complex female friendships. This is, perhaps, the strongest plot point in the novel. Marisol must struggle to manage her friendships: the new ones she makes at Premiere, and her old ones from her neighborhood. There's several good moments as the girls grapple with where they fit in each others' lives as they move apart and discover new interests.

However, the novel is also frequently too didactic, covering issues ranging from gang life to smoking to bad grades with a kind of heavy-handed tone that most teens are going to see right through. These passages are often awkward and clunky, taking the reader out of the narrative. Stilted dialogue runs throughout the book, but it is in the passages trying to teach a lesson or relay a message that it is the most noticeable.

The chapters switch off between Marisol's narration and Drew's, and while it's clear that McKayhan is trying to hook both male and female readers alike, the voices aren't distinctive enough for it to really work. Added to this is a smorgasbord of exposition and uneven pacing. The whole book comes off as awkward and half-baked.

That being said, I recognize that it is a series which aims to appeal to a particular demographic. There aren't a ton of options for teens interested in urban fiction, especially if they're reading below grade level. This is a novel that might work for those teens interested in the performing arts.

Ambitious by Monica McKayhan. Kimani: 2011. Electronic galley accepted for review via Netgalley.

Bookworm1858 says

New students Marisol and Drew negotiate the ambitious waters at Premiere School, following their respective artistic passions of dance and acting, making new friends, navigating academics, and flirting with each other. I loved the concept for this as I'm a sucker for "Step Up," "Center Stage," and other dance movies. But I was not very impressed with the book as a whole finding it lacking in plot and characters.

Marisol is a decent character. Her dream is to dance and she pursues that dream by auditioning for the prestigious Premiere School, even though her family and neighbors didn't think she could get in. She does and keeps pushing herself in dance to audition for a dance contest that could launch her into the big time. But she's also caught between new friends and old friends. This all sounds like a lot of drama and conflict but it's not really. Mari easily gets in to the school, despite little formal dance training and easily secures a place in the contest without much training or practice. The friendship drama was a little bit more drawn out but in the end they reconciled pretty easily. Still she was miles better than Drew.

Drew started out okay. He was a star basketball player trying to be like his dad when he decides that he wants to try acting. After a few chapters, he is more fully drawn as an arrogant player who expects everything to be given to him. He's constantly assessing the bodies of the girls around him and using them; he's greedy, cocky, and selfish; and I just disliked him so much. He had little depth, being a pretty rich kid

who never really struggles despite the attempts to portray him as struggling. He easily wins the lead in the school play despite being a sophomore with little acting experience. And college scouts are still interested in him for basketball. His biggest trouble is his shyness with Mari, the one tiny area where he has to work a bit but even there he displaces her date, pleasing rather than outraging her.

One other thing I noticed was the presence of various brand names that set the book firmly in this time (Justin Bieber is huge for the girls-I do not get that boy's appeal). They seemed to dominate the story: from food to clothes to singers. I noticed them so much more than in any other story I've read recently and I didn't really like that.

Overall: Flat characters with little depth and easy plot turns.

Elizabeth B says

This was a really, really hard book to read. From the very first the short, clipped sentences began to annoy. I think they are meant to be the random way in which a teen thinks but it was so stilted and unforgiving that I almost considered not continuing. The dialogue was very hit or miss as well. There seemed to be no flow to it and none of the characters ever gained their own distinctive voice through the novel. The repetitive "Premiere High" was almost too much to bear...any time the school was mentioned it was always with the full name. It seems like just a little thing but it became so annoying after reading it hundreds of times. Mari, the main character, is a puzzle to me. We are explained how exclusive "Premier High" is but then told she just started taking dance classes the previous spring. The book does change viewpoints among the characters but the story never stalls for this switch overs and continues to move forward at its slow pace. It really is a step by step book in that you are walked through each moment of the day (order pizza, discuss toppings, order soda, describe soda) which can get exhausting.

I do think this book may have its place with the pre-teen set. I assume it's aimed at high school due to its content but the grammar, language and choppy sentences will make it more appealing to a younger audience. Fans of "Secret Hollywood Life", for example, may enjoy this. Otherwise, I'm honestly at a loss to identify the targeted audience.

ARC Galley Proof

Melanie Goodman says

Mari (short for Marisol) achieves her dream of getting into the dance program at Premiere High School, a special school for performing arts, but quickly discovers that she won't be able to rest on her laurels. It will take a lot of hard work to stay at Premiere, and even more work to win a dance competition that would land her a role in a movie. Still, all of that is nothing compared to how hard she'll have to fight to win over her parents' and old friends' support as she pursues her passion.

Mari is not the only one struggling at Premiere. At her orientation to the school, she bumps into Drew, a hot guy who she hopes will become a friend, or maybe even more. However, Drew is having a hard time of his own. In order to attend Premiere and develop his acting skills, he had to give up on basketball, a sport that could have earned him a spot in a top notch college. His old friends and his father are less than enthusiastic

about his decision, and Drew has to decide what he really wants to do with his life.

Monica McKayhan's *Ambitious* may be a great book for struggling readers, but it was not the right book for me. It came across as a dumbed down version of *Fame* combined with *Save the Last Dance*. The writing felt oversimplified and fragmented, which was not helped by the multiple narrative perspectives, and things were often spelled out a little too much. For a short book, *Ambitious* packed in a lot of plot lines, taking a basic look at several story elements without really fleshing any of them out completely. The book has some interesting things to say about performing, identity, race, gangs, and other topics, but I would have liked to see it explore just a couple things in a lot more depth. *Ambitious* is the first in a new series of *Premiere High* novels; unfortunately, I can't say I see myself picking up any of the others.

Emily says

Girl gets accepted to a massively competitive performing arts high school and soon proves herself one of the best dancers in the school...and gets the hottest and most talented guy in her class.

Wait...that's not how it works, is it?

In *Ambitious*, it definitely works that way. Marisol is accepted both to *Premiere High School of Performing Arts* AND the top dance class in the school despite any formal dance training. A free class the previous summer seems to be Marisol's only actual dance instruction. People can be naturally talented, but from the first page, *Ambitious* flirts with snapping my suspension of disbelief.

Her love interest, Drew, also is far better than seems reasonable. With echoes of *High School Musical* dancing and singing through the head, Drew's not only a standout basketball star who's approached by a Georgetown scout in his sophomore year (after he's stopped playing ball in order to attend *Premiere*), but he's also apparently an amazingly talented actor who lands the starring role of Walter Lee Younger in the school production of *A Raisin in the Sun*. This is despite any acting experience beyond a Christmas pageant in sixth grade and an Easter play at his grandmother's church.

Marisol and Drew alternate point-of-view chapters as they experience the first months of attending *Premiere High*. They both have to handle family issues – Marisol's little brother is being pressured to join a gang and Drew's dad doesn't like his son giving up basketball. Marisol also has difficulties combining her neighbourhood friends with the girls and guys she meets at school in Manhattan.

Marisol is a likeable enough character as she deals with leaving her close-knit Brooklyn neighbourhood and expanding her horizons into Manhattan – and hopefully future stardom. But while the character is sweet, she never seems to have to actually struggle to achieve anything. She competes in a *Dance America!* Contest – referred in the book as the most competitive dance competition in the country, but Marisol breezes through to the finals in California while seeming to only train for the competition at lunch. Her old best friend is jealous over Mari's new school friends, but the issue is smoothed over when said old friend gets sick of the girl she befriended to replace Marisol and tries to make amends. She worries about boys, but they compete with each other to ask her to the formal dance. Without much adversity to define her character, the likable qualities seem mostly one-note and the character lacks needed complexity.

I wasn't nearly as fond of Drew even on a superficial level. His chapters failed to provide a level of character development expected from a main character, and they mostly detail his name brand possessions and trips to

see Knicks' games or golf outings. I kept expecting some quality of self-reflection from him, especially given his interest in acting, but I was disappointed. The only scene where his character seemed like a human and a teenage boy instead of the author's conception of the ideal teenage boy was when his grandmother visited and talked with him about acting and girls. But even then, I was glaring at the page, annoyed that his grandmother is portrayed almost as maid – she comes by every week or so to clean Drew and his father's apartment, do their laundry, and cook for them. I wanted to shake the boy and ask if he really was sitting there letting his elderly grandma scrub his toilet.

I had high hopes for Ambitious. I've such a soft spot for stories a) about boarding schools/exclusive schools and b) about theatre or dance, and this one seemed to hit all those points. The synopsis and promise of a future series set at a Manhattan performing arts high school sounded like it could be really interesting and full of the backstabbing drama that only really shows up in the arts. But until the characters actually have to work to succeed in such a high pressure environment, I'll be passing on any future Premiere books.

Paula Phillips says

As a fan of all those Dancing Flicks, the ones where they audition and then they don't get in and then along the way something happens and they are given a second shot and make it . I love them from Step Up trilogy to Centre Stage Duo to Make it Happen and Burlesque. Ambitious read a bit between Britannia High, Step Up and Fame. In Ambitious we meet Mari aka Marisol, her passion since she could remember was dancing her Mexican-American butt off , she lives for it and when she's offered the chance to audition for Premiere High - a School of Music, Arts, Dance - her dream school - she jumps at it but of course, theres a few things she has to do first. The first is to persuade her parents to let her audition. However, as we all know dreams can come with a price tag attached and though it may not be monetary it can make you lose and risk everything that you have ever dreamed off. For Mari, the pricetag is new hottie Drew and the goal of getting him to see her more than just a casual friend, this won't be an easy task as Drew as his eyes set on his goals of playing Basketball and winning a scholarship which would be his free ride to College or as we say in New Zealand -University. When Mari starts to obsess over winning Drew , we read as everything else starts to take second best in her life and soon she is so consumed about Drew that she doesn't realise everything else is being pushed further and further away.

Will she realise what's happened before it's too late or has her obsession with Drew destroyed her one goal ?Find out what can happen when Love and Lust takes over. It is interesting this though as I found with my studies , it's quite difficult having a guy around as your'e studies, work etc tends to get pushed to the backburner lol.

Jennifer Ellison says

Full review posted here: [http://www.almostgrownup.net/2011/08/...](http://www.almostgrownup.net/2011/08/)

I really liked the premise of this book. I'm a sucker for the movies that this book pretty much emulates.

Marisol and Drew are both likable characters (though Drew suffers a major case of HORMONES and seems to like every girl he meets).I liked that the two of them are classic teenagers: yes, they have some attraction to the other, but it doesn't blind them to their own lives or to other members of the opposite sex. The

conflicts that Marisol and Drew face with their chosen paths are good ones, but they're a bit glossed over at some points.

A lot of the competition scenes were fun to picture as well.

What I didn't like: There were a lot of times in this book that I thought it could have been developed more, but it seemed like the writer took the easy way out. Mari's best friend Luz shows up to make the final 5 in the Dance America contest as a "Wild Card" contestant, when she didn't even make the cut to the final ten. That was just entirely unrealistic to me. I also wish that Drew and Mari's problems (Drew with the possibility of a scholarship and Mari with her grades) had been explored more. They were dismissed much too easily for their situations.

I also would have enjoyed seeing their relationship explored a bit more. There is one almost-kiss before the ending occurs and the sexual tension between them there is good, but it's the only time I see them together in a more romantic light.

The book was also bogged down by symptoms of Telling-Not-Showing Syndrome and Repetition-itis. I often found a phrase used twice or more on a single page. And I felt discredited as a reader for being told some things that I easily could have just inferred.

So, do I rec it? If you're into theatre or enjoy movies like Step Up, Dirty Dancing, Save the Last Dance, or High School Musical, you may like this book. Basically, movies that are about teens that overcome some obstacles to perform the way they love. I found myself drawing parallels to those kinds of movies throughout the book. However, I probably won't read the next "Premiere High" novel. I didn't find this one to be much my taste.

Isamlq says

Ambitious did nothing for me on any level. The characters lacked a depth to have me caring about the outcome of their story. My reading experience went along the lines of 'Yeah? So what?'

As said, the characters lacked a depth to them. Mari has her dancing. She's been admitted to a prestigious Arts school. There's nothing really that she has to beat... there's no big drama in her life except that is to win a big dance competition. 'And so what?,' I asked. I really didn't care about her.

Maybe the love interest is a different matter because Drew's a player both on and off court, who'd dropped both to be in the same school to train to act. And you know what? I still felt nothing for him either. OK... I may have felt something a bit stronger... just nothing good given his tendency towards being a pig. What he is, is a player. Even at the beginning when they barely knew each other, he'd shown himself concerned only with girls and how others saw him, there's also the fact that he expected others to be impressed with who his father was! Maybe I should like him more for being imperfect in this way but I just couldn't bring myself to do that.

My disconnection to story might have been exacerbated by the way they spoke and thought... or the way the overall story was told (and I'm not talking about the shifting POV's.) I felt the writing to be too easy, predictable. Each character always had something to say, had a way of responding that seemed contrived and fake to me. It seemed they said something or behaved in a certain manner because it's what was expected.

Perhaps 'easy' isn't the right word. Neat? Yeah, everything was way too neat, as in 'this goes in that slot and that one in this slot.' Everything had a place, position and sequence.

1.5/5

Thanks NETGALLEY

Ellen Sara says

This book dealt brought up a lot of teen issues. It talks about body image, gangs, smoking etc. It also has the POV of our heroine Mari and her possible love interest Drew. They each have decided to enroll in an artistic school. The book talks about what they gain but also give up by choosing that school. I can see how this will make a great series. There are plenty of characters for each book to focus on. I'm not from New York so I enjoyed reading about the city. I really liked how protective Mari's parents were with her. I think younger teens will enjoy this book.
