



Take the Lead

Alexis Daria

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The first book in a sizzling duology about dancers who find love from #OwnVoice's Alexis Daria.

Gina Morales wants to win. It's her fifth season on The Dance Off, a top-rated network TV celebrity dance competition, and she's never even made it to the finals. When she meets her latest partner, she sees her chance. He's handsome, rippling with muscles, and he stars on the popular Alaskan wilderness reality show Living Wild. With his sexy physique and name recognition, she thinks he's her ticket to the finals—until she realizes they're being set up.

Stone Nielson hates Los Angeles, he hates reality TV, and he hates that fact that he had to join the cast of the The Dance Off because of family obligations. He can't wait to get back to Alaska, but he also can't deny his growing attraction to his bubbly Puerto Rican dance partner. Neither of them are looking for romantic entanglements, and Stone can't risk revealing his secrets, but as they heat up the dance floor, it's only a matter of time until he feels an overwhelming urge to take the lead.

When the tabloids catch on to their developing romance, the spotlight threatens to ruin not just their relationship, but their careers and their shot at the trophy. Gina and Stone will have to decide if their priorities lie with fame, fortune, or the chance at a future together.

Take the Lead Details

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From Reader Review Take the Lead for online ebook

???s ~~X~~amante de los spoilers~~X~~ says

Hace tanto que no me emocionaba con un libro, ME ENCANTÓ.

Y bueno che, la vida del lector es así, leerse 10 libros pedorros para que con toda la furia te enamores de 2.

Y TENEMOS UN GANADOR!!!!!!

*Cuando lo empecé, pensé "seguro que él héroe va a ser re forro con la prota porque es una chica de ciudad". ME EQUIVOQUE.

*"No me va a gustar que sea narrado por él porque odio cuando hacen eso" (siento que le quitan misterio a la historia cuando ellos son los narradores). ME EQUIVOQUE.

He wanted to be someone she felt comfortable with, someone she could reveal her thoughts and feelings to

Basta chicos, esto es too much para mi o sea, yo AMO a los héroes BETA y acá Stone se lleva el premio al héroe beta del año.

He was so respectful of her. He knew he was big and burly, and since their first meeting, he'd done everything in his power not to frighten her again.

Dios mío, Stone es un mountain man que sabe que es un tipo grandote que puede dar miedo pero tiene una personalidad re dulce y es super atento a los sentimientos de los demás. Habla de sus sentimientos, es sensible, amable, paciente, respetuoso.

I'M IN LOVE.

Es tan perfecto que da asco. En el buen sentido, of course.

* Por otro lado tenemos a una protagonista Latina que se queja del estereotipo de Latina promiscua (la Latina bomba sexual). Una mina muy career oriented (se dice así?), enfocada en su carrera, y encima segura de sí misma y de su sexualidad.

QUERÉS MÁS!!!!!!???

PAREN TODO. LEAN ESTE LIBRO.

Este libro es TODO lo que está bien en los contemporary romance, nada de juzgar a otras mujeres, de machitos violentos, no señor.

Mi única crítica es que se arma un drama al final que medio al pedo pero por lo menos sirve para que nos demos cuenta que Stone no es perfecto. (Lo sé!, pueden creerlo???) . Si bien Stone se mando una cagada sirve para que su personaje sea más realista.

En fin, estoy enamorada de este libro. Que Dios la re bendiga a la autora por regalarnos esta historia maravillosa.

Pd: Aguanten los latinos carajo!!!! Al fin una buena representación !!!

Reyes says

A NA with old-ish characters and story development, an actual plot and hot scenes that do not make you cringe?? Maybe this book feels better than it actually is after the horror that was 2017 NA-speaking, but I enjoyed this a lot! It still was a bit cheesy towards the end and had many of the things I've come to exasperatedly enjoy in a NA (too big, never been in love before, blah blah) but all in all it is very recommendable, and I've already added book 2 to my wishlist :)
Maybe I should start watching Strictly... ?

Joce (squibblesreads) says

Here's the link to my video review!

A ton of fun but also important and layered. First of all, I used to dance and it was such a huge part of my life and I felt like that was portrayed well. I also am a sucker for dance-based reality TV so this book was basically made for me. I loved how it talked about being a Latina woman in the entertainment industry (Gina is a Puerto Rican woman, as well as Natasha who book #2, Dance with Me, is written about), and how she feels typecast and pigeonholed into roles that were clearly tokenized as the fiery woman with a short temper always in a red dress with red lipstick and a short dress. Gina and Stone's romance was also slow burn, and hate-to-love, but it wasn't overdone or superficial. Stone also was in a tricky situation financially which was woven in nicely. We also have some producer or director drama which was juicy and kept me turning pages. I'd definitely recommend this one!

Mirjana **DTR - Down to Read says**

*****4 Stars*****

Loved this debut!

Puerto Rican professional dancer + Mountain man reality star + dance competition = One happy reader!! ♥
♥

"You light me up. You helped me remember who I was before, and see clearly who I am now

and who I want to be."

Gina and Stone were fantastic together. Both dealing with unwanted expectations and trying to break free from the molds the public put them in, they find comfort and so much more with each other.

Gina has dreams. She wants to dance, sing, and act. Her mother gave up a potential career as a singer for a man who eventually walked away from her and his family, and Gina refuses to let history repeat itself. Being a pro dancer on the Dance-Off is fun, rewarding, and a great stepping stone in her career, but she refuses to let herself be pigeon-holed as nothing more than the sassy and sexy Latina. She's more than that and having the producers try and push an "are they or aren't they?" angle is something Gina refuses to go along with. Her career is the most important thing to her, and she won't compromise that for anything...or anyone.

Stone is known as the strong and quiet one on his family's reality show. His family has built their public persona on being wilderness survivalists and all that entails, but privately, things aren't as they seem. Stone has become frustrated and tired of living a double life. Going on the Dance-Off will help his family with some of their financial issues, but he wasn't expecting to get paired with someone like Gina. Someone so full of life, fun, and energy. Someone who hurdles his carefully constructed walls easily. Someone who brings out the side of Stone he hasn't been since before his family's reality show.

"You make things...easier."

"What do you mean?"

"It's easier to talk with you. Easier to think. Easier to...feel."

The way Alexis Daria wove this story was terrific. I was equally invested in Gina's and Stone's individual growth, their journey as a couple, and their ups and downs as competitors on the dance show.

The instant attraction that Gina and Stone felt evolved wonderfully into so much more. Their connection was believable and the stolen quiet moments they were able to share were both heartwarming and sexy as hell.

The pacing was a little uneven at times (zooming through scenes that I think should have been expanded to add depth or giving too much time to scenes that didn't really add anything), but even with that, it didn't pull me out of the story.

And can I just say the dancing was awesome! I'm a fan of dance movies and watch Dancing with the Stars every season, and everything in this book hit the notes that I love. Alexis Daria showed so many different aspects of dance...how personal it could be, the commitment involved, and how it can lead you to discover sides of yourself you try to hide or didn't even know existed.

She'd danced the tango countless times, with countless partners. It had never, never been like this.

This was foreplay. He was showing her his intensity, what he was capable of, and what he'd do to her - for her, with her - if she let him.

This is a debut book by a debut author that I highly recommend.

I can't wait to see what's in store for Natasha (Gina's best friend and fellow competitor) and Dimitri (a judge on the show).

But more importantly, I can't wait to see what more is to come from Alexis Daria. With one book, she's got a fan in me!

*****ARC courtesy of publisher, via Netgalley, in exchange for an honest review*****

Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says

Instagram || Twitter || Facebook || Amazon || Pinterest

This is one of those books that has received a lot of **advanced praise** - Sarah MacLean called it one of the best romance novels of 2017 - and yet, there's hardly any reviews for it on Goodreads. *What the heck, my readers? What the heck?*

WHY HAVE NONE OF MY FRIENDS READ THIS YET??

TAKE THE LEAD is a good book for many reasons. It's set on a *Dancing with the Stars*-type reality TV show. Gina is a Puerto Rican dancer who has dreamed of and prepared for "making it" her whole life. When she's paired with the wilderness survivalist star from another reality TV show, she's skeptical - until she meets Stone, and finds that beneath that strong and silent lumbersexual exterior is a good-hearted man who is determined to see this dance competition to the bitter end.

I'm a sucker for "showmance" storylines. I think it's the modern-day equivalent of the arranged marriage plots in fantasy and historical romance, which I also love. I think it harkens back to an earlier view of love, based on shared experiences and friendship, where sex comes later. TAKE THE LEAD is definitely romance of a slow-burn variety, even though both characters have instant attraction for one another. Gina doesn't want to get involved, though, and even though *that's what they all say*, her reasons are totally reasonable and serve as commentary on the sexist lens through which female celebrities are viewed, as well as the stereotypes of Latin American women in media.

But there was something I liked even better than the romance and the Latinx rep - and *that was the freaking reality TV setting*. It felt very realistic. I loved seeing the characters in the goldfish bowl, and how they dealt with that stress. I loved the descriptions of the dance costumes and the dances. I actually set the book aside -

well, OK, I closed my eReader application - and went to YouTube to look up the *paso doble* dance after it was described in this book and **holy so-you-think-you-can-dance, Batman!** I don't have a graceful bone in my body, but after finishing this book I had half a mind to sign up for dance lessons at one of the local studios.

So you're probably asking yourself, "If it's so great, why only four stars, Nenia?" There's a Big Misunderstanding plot that creates some additional drama in the last act. It wasn't badly done, but I felt like it was unnecessary and made Gina look like an irrational person. And while I get that we're all irrational people who sometimes behave like jerks, it was still annoying. Also, the beginning was a bit slow, and it took me a while to warm up to the characters, and fall in love with them. (Although I did - by the end of the novel, I was totally ready to smoosh their faces and be all, NOW KISS!)

TAKE THE LEAD is one of the few romances of this year that actually lived up to the hype. It has great characters, awesome chemistry, a creative and fun setting, and an awesome cover. I'm super psyched for the sequel, which stars Gina's biffle, Natasha. **Just sent that shiz to me by priority mail, ASAP. Kthxbai.** But seriously, if you're a fan of authors like Alyssa Cole and Courtney Milan, you will *love* this book!

Thanks to Netgalley/the publisher for the review copy!

4 stars!

Maria Rose says

2018 RITA Award winner for Best First Book!

If you're a fan of Dancing with the Stars or other reality TV show dance competitions you are definitely going to want to pick up Take the Lead, a lively, energetic and sexy contemporary romance by debut author Alexis Daria. And if you've never watched one of these competitions before, after reading this story you'll likely want to add it to your viewing schedule. The plot is fresh and original, giving the reader almost a voyeuristic behind the scenes look at what makes or breaks the dancers on the stage. Along the way it details the romance between a professional Puerto Rican dancer needing to make the finals or be cut from the show and her partner, an Alaskan lumberjack who'd rather be anywhere than on the stage.

Gina Morales is ready to take her fifth season on Take the Lead by storm and hopes she'll be paired with someone who will be both capable and popular enough to make it to the finals. Her producer has made it clear that if she doesn't make the final three, she'll likely be out of a contract for next year. All signs point to success when her partner turns out to be Stone Nielson, one of the stars of his family's reality TV show, Living Wild, set in Alaska. Tall, handsome and fit, Stone has the qualities every female dancer on the show wishes for in a partner. With a little luck and a lot of hard work, they could be the couple to beat.

Stone hates Los Angeles. He misses his old life in Juneau where he lived and worked quite happily before

being coerced into participating in a show with an adoring audience who don't realize that much of the circumstances of their day-to-day existence of the contestants are fake. The medical bills from his mother's hip operation are the only thing that convinced him to join the dance competition. What makes the whole thing bearable is his partner, Gina.

Gina's producer Donna thinks that Gina and Stone would make the perfect 'showmance' for the season, something Gina absolutely opposes. The last thing she needs is get slotted into a stereotypical 'hot Latino dancer' role that will make it that much harder for people to take her seriously. She has aspirations of getting into acting when her dancing days are over and an 'affair' on a TV show is not going to help her career. But she and Stone do have some serious chemistry, and the more time they spend together, the deeper their connection becomes. As their relationship heats up both on and off the stage, can a happy ending for them on the show mean one in real life too?

What a fun read! The dance show/reality TV element is so well handled that it wouldn't surprise me to find out the author has been staking out reality dance competitions backstage, because the drama, personal relationships and week by week eliminations had me flipping the pages eagerly to see what would happen. As the author is herself Puerto Rican, she adds an authenticity to Gina's character that comes across in her mannerisms and expressions (as well as her cooking!). Gina's enthusiasm for dance is equal to her skill, and she's able to teach Stone both the physical steps and the emotional expression required to achieve their goal every week of impressing the judges and getting the viewing audience to vote for them. Her skills are not limited to dance though. She choreographs scenes, chooses appropriate costumes, and knows the 'business' side of the competition – the need to be 'on' for the camera at all times. If this is wearing for her at times, it's only in the quiet down times off camera with Stone that she is able to let some of that go.

Stone is the strong, silent type. Or at least, that's his character on his family's show. He has to remember to hide anything about himself and his family that doesn't fit with how they are portrayed on TV, especially if cameras are around. Being with Gina is eye-opening for him, not just because he realizes he can dance, but because he's forgotten what it's like to have fun, to be in the moment and enjoy life. She brings out the side of his personality that's been hidden away and he likes this side of himself. In private, they can step outside of their TV personalities and be themselves.

While the attraction between them leads to on-stage chemistry that they can shrug off on camera as being a result of the hours they spend together and their strong friendship, off stage they eventually hit the sheets in some steamy love scenes. Keeping their feelings for each other private becomes increasingly difficult. While Stone would have no problem coming out into the open, Gina believes the resulting publicity would do more harm than good for her in the long run. In the end her decisions will affect them both.

Besides watching Gina and Stone grow closer, it's equally fun to follow them in the competition. The other couples are well described, and as some of the dancers have been with Gina on the show for a few years, they feature prominently as secondary characters. I'm not going to give away whether or not they make it to the end, but suffice it to say Gina and Stone get more out of the competition than they ever expected. If you are looking for a fun, flirty, exciting romance, you should add this one to your to-read list.

This review also appears at All About Romance: <https://allaboutromance.com/book-revi...>

A copy of this story was provided by the publisher via NetGalley for review.

Rebekah Weatherspoon says

A wonderful debut. I worked in reality TV for a long time and Daria nailed the ins and outs of working on a show like Dancing With The Stars. Looking forward to the next installment.

Nicola says

In the UK we call it Strictly Come Dancing, across the pond it's Dancing With the Stars, but whatever name it goes by, if there's glitter, sequins, fleckerls, foxtrots and fake tan involved **I. AM. THERE.** So a romance centralising around all this?

No stranger to reality TV, gorgeous 6'7 bearded Alaskan wilderness star, Stone Nielson is more at home chopping wood than shimmying his hips. But when he's partnered with LA based pro dancer, Gina Morales on *The Dance Off*, it's not long before she coaxes out the moves hiding beneath the muscle and the man-bun.

I loved Stone. Quiet, contemplative and brooding, he's a gentle giant and I enjoyed seeing how his confidence grew as the competition progressed. Gina was a fabulous female lead and her bright and vivacious personality complimented Stone's perfectly. And whilst both refuse to be cornered into a *showmance* to boost their popularity and show ratings, their attraction to one another is undeniable.

"The intensive nature of the training and filming schedule forced an intimacy that was unlike anything in the real world."

Naturally it's only a matter of time before Stone and Gina's tango becomes that of a horizontal variety and trust me, all the build-up and tension towards it is seriously worth it. But what really struck me were the real and poignant nods to Gina's personal plight and her battle against stereotype with her being Puerto Rican and a performing artist, which played an important and valuable part to the story.

"The worst would be playing into the 'sexy Latina' stereotype, setting a bad example for my nieces, and losing out on future jobs because they think I'm unprofessional."

Fun and sexy with the right balance of fight and conflict, *Take the Lead* wasn't flawless—at times the pacing felt a little rushed with regards to the live shows—but it is a strong, satisfying series opener and debut from Alexis Daria: I'm looking forward to reading more from her and seeing what treats lie in store when pro dancer, Natasha and show judge, Dimitri get up close and personal in *Dance with Me*.

Copy received courtesy of St. Martin's Press via NetGalley.

*Stock Images

Lucia says

I had mixed feelings about this book.

At the beginning, I kept thinking that I need more than just physical attraction for romance to work for me. I even contemplated DNFing this book.

But later on, story took the right turn and I could do nothing else but sit back and enjoy the sizzling chemistry between main duo. I didn't even mind (that much) occasional clichés and cheesiness that accompanied the story.

Moreover, I found setting very interesting. I am not a fan of real Dance with the Stars show, yet I had fun reading about it and all other backstage stuff.

Take the Lead is perfect leisure read for laid-back friday evening!

JenReadsRomance says

Listen. Take the Lead by Alexis Daria is perfect. PER.FECT. I loved this book. I want to take this book out behind the high school and make out with it. This book was goddamn good that after I finished reading it, I spent the rest of the day watching Strictly Ballroom, the Step Up movies, and Magic Mike. This book made me want to sign up for dance lessons----and I am a white girl with NO rhythm! I clap on the wrong beat and my husband jokes I need a walking helmet! I'd sooner give up romance and only read Jonathan Franzen novels before I'd take dance lessons! I just wrote a paragraph with like 18 exclamation points, and I hate exclamation points! I have been reduced to a quivering pile of happiness at the perfection of this book. I mean, I guess you could stick around for the particulars, but if you haven't one-clicked yet, I really can't help you.

The characters in this book are both trapped in a web of their own making, beholden to their lives as reality TV stars. Gina Morales is a professional dancer on a Dancing With the Stars-type show. This season, her partner is Stone Nielson. He and his family are stars of their own reality show about being survivalists in Alaska. He's farmed out from the family show to the dance show to try and win enough money to pay for his Mother's medical bills. Gina is determined to win this season, knowing it could catapult her career to the next level.

Gina and Stone have all the chemistry, but their beliefs about who they are and how to be in the world couldn't be more different. Some of it on the surface: he loves Alaska and she's a city girl; he's quiet and taciturn while she's bright and chatty. On a deeper level, each character is fully developed, with a set of fears and foibles that make them afraid of making a future together.

I loved Gina. She's strong, hard-working, and knows exactly what she wants. She's also savvy about the ways in which the whole system is working against her. Early in her career, she had a boyfriend who used her to get ahead and then dumped her. She's determined not to let anyone else have a chance at ruining her career. When they first meet, Gina is instantaneously wary of Stone, sensing her producer is setting them up for a "showmance." While other dancers might enjoy being at the center of a showmance, Gina negotiated a contract that expressly outlaws being cast in that light. Even though she can't resist him and their romance is real, she explains when they need to keep it secret, "Do you have any idea how much my agent fought them on the showmance angle when I was hired? A lot. And because I'm Puerto Rican, I've been fighting against

the ‘sexy and promiscuous’ Latin stereotype my entire career, something that’s hard enough when you’re a dancer....You don’t get to make this about you.” Gina breaks her own rules when she gets involved with Stone, and she is convinced that if others know about their romance, it will hurt her career. There is no part of her worry that seems contrived or hysterical, by the way. It just feels real. She’s a woman of color, and she knows damn well she can’t make any mistakes. But is Stone a mistake?

What Gina doesn’t realize is that Stone has been lying for his family for years. Their reality TV show is contrived, and his whole life is managed, scripted, and filmed. Stone doesn’t ever have the chance to be himself, because his reality TV contract forbids him from sharing anything that would ruin the illusion of his family’s life in the Alaskan wilderness. Stone loves his family, but he cannot wait for his contract to be over so he can return to a regular life. Stone is impressed that Gina lives by her principles while he is living a lie. This means it is especially painful, hurtful even, to keep his feelings about Gina a secret. He thinks, “Everyone wanted him to be silent--his family about their pasts, and Gina about their relationship. The silent protector, keeping secrets and putting aside his own needs. Well he was sick of being the quiet and reserved one.” Stone’s inner turmoil is just as real and grounded as Gina’s, and neither of them can figure out how to move forward together.

It’s this conflict and character building that makes *Take the Lead* a 5 star romance for me. I cared for both of them, wanting both of them to get what they need and to end up together. It truly takes compromise and work from both of them to find that HEA. Part of the reason I called this book perfect is Alexis Daria’s flawless portrayal of their emotional and physical intimacy. Every steaming glance builds the heat, every kiss feels earned, and the sex simultaneously builds intimacy and reveals their vulnerabilities. I desperately wanted them to end up together but had no idea how it would happen.

Finally, I think the best books are always having a larger conversation about society and the world. Yes, this book needs a Spotify playlist and a YouTube channel of dance clips. But it’s also as damning an indictment of reality TV as the scripted Lifetime show *Unreal*. On Twitter, author Cecelia London recommended another novel that takes on reality TV called *The Last One* by Alexandra Oliva, saying “She really nails the bullshit involved in the way the media is presented to us, and how it creates doubt in our minds.” *Take the Lead* is doing something similar, but oh so personal. Gina and Stone are caught in the web of expectations of family and society, but I couldn’t read it without wondering about the webs keeping me in place, or the webs I am inadvertently weaving for others.

Cross-posted at The Book Queen's blog: <http://www.tbqsbookpalace.com/2017/09...>

I got this book from NetGalley.

?lleskelle - teamSøren? ?I like big b00ks? says

So here's the thing. I don't like Dancing With The Stars.
I really don't care for it. At. All.
And yet I picked this book.
And furthermore... I'M LOVING IT.

I picked it up because that hooker, Geri from Dirty Girl Romance Book Blog was reading book 2 ('Dance With Me' releases December 12th - <http://amzn.to/2BGn2nC>) and completely sold me on the idea of a romance between DWTS co-stars.

I mean, although not a fan of the show, I always wondered about dancers acting so in tune and showing off scorching chemistry on the dancefloor... Was this only for show, or could there be more? Yeah, I must admit the romance reader in me fantasized about the idea of the dancer and the celebrity falling for each other. I'm sure it must have happened in the show, I'm not following at all so I can't say for sure but this sounds like a good premise for romance, right?

Anyway, I'm loving this slow build friends to lovers and can't wait for the next book in the series. It goes without saying that if you do enjoy Dancing With The Stars and you're looking for a feel good and sexy romance this book is for you!

More reviews and book talk at :

You can find me here too 

Skye Kilaen says

Of all the romance novels I've read, this one best qualifies for the title "beach read," and I don't mean that in a bad way. It's a passionate romance between two contestants on a dance competition reality show. Stone Nielsen is an improbably tall (see note below) star of an Alaskan outdoorsy reality show. Gina Morales a Puerto Rican professional dancer who will be his partner and dance teacher for his guest stint on The Dance Off.

If you're looking for something lightweight and entertaining, this is a good pick, and Puerto Rican author Alexis Daria is one to watch going forward. There aren't any surprises here, and the characterization can be a little thin (why did Stone give up his whole life for his family's show?), but I had fun reading the book. Gina and Stone have serious chemistry, and their dance lessons and performances were vivid and enjoyable. Gina's conflicts over avoiding the "sexy Latina" stereotype were real, and I loved watching her succeed professionally in ways that were deeply meaningful to her.

(NOTE: Stone is 6'7", holy crow! Gina is 5'6". The author makes a point early on about how it can be tough to choreograph for such a height difference, then seems to ignore Stone's height for the rest of the book. Every time a new character walks into the room with Stone, they should be like DAMN YOU'RE TALL! And the couple shouldn't be able to accidentally kiss so easily with all of their feet on the ground. Her head comes up to his shoulder!)

Liv (Stories For Coffee) says

I really enjoyed reading this novel because I love dance competitions, so this book really won me over. I also enjoyed the Puerto Rican culture that's woven into the story since Gina is a Puerto Rican main character whose ethnicity and culture is very important to her. Her drive to break stereotypes placed on Latinas was like a breath of fresh air to me because I related so hard to her character and everything she stood for which was hard work, perseverance, and dedication.

Stone was also an adorable character to get to know along the way, as well. His gruff demeanor contrasted perfectly with Gina's personality. Their dynamic was so unique because their relationship blossomed on screen for this reality show, so it was interesting to see how they were pushed together by their producers and their own desire to be together. I loved how healthy and cute their relationship was and I rooted for them

to not only win the competition but to win over each other's hearts at the end of the novel.

While this story was written in a pace that was a bit too fast for me to fully enjoy the characters and their growing relationships, I still enjoyed this story overall for its diversity, well-written dance scenes, and quirkiness that comes along with reality shows. If you love anything to do with dance, a steamy forbidden romance, and a strong-willed female lead, you'll love Take the Lead.

Anne Boleyn's Ghost says

Take the Lead won the RITA award for "Best First Book", and it is easy to see why. It was a **wickedly fun and entertaining** read.

For the most part, I hate reality TV. I have a lot of reasons why I hate reality TV, but this is a book review and not a rant about reality TV. Considering the subject matter - **a romance between Gina, a Puerto Rican dancer on a reality TV dancing competition, and her partner Stone, who stars on an Alaskan wilderness reality TV show** - you can imagine my reluctance. But Daria doesn't shy away from exploring the behind-the-scenes manipulation and exploitation and addresses the reality TV world with both snark and sensitivity.

In a place where real often isn't real at all, the connection between the leads shone true and bright.

Gina has a big smile, a big heart, and big dreams. Her ambitions and vulnerabilities were relatable, and Stone, a gentle giant who shies away from the spotlight, proved himself to be a worthy partner both on and off the floor. They supported each other from the beginning, and it was apparent that they will continue to foster and encourage one another's dreams. **Their relationship is a sweet slow burn that explodes into a hot, hot, HOT flame.**

I believe that conflict is necessary in a romance novel. That said, I didn't care for how the conflict unfolded here. It relied on Stone and Gina behaving in uncharacteristic and unflattering ways. And while the story mostly kept me engaged, it felt slightly uneven at times. There was a bit of cheese, and a few clichés.

But for a first novel, these are things that I could and did overlook. I appreciated the **diverse cast of characters**, and I hope that we get more stories for them and soon!

***Take the Lead* is absolutely deserving of the acclaim that it has received.** Read it, friends.

Read for SBTB July - September 2018 Quarterly Challenge: A book where the author's first or last name begins with A.

Xan West says

A copy was provided by the publisher through Netgalley in exchange for an honest review

I loved this! It was completely gripping; I stayed up way too late last night because I could not put it down.

I loved these characters so much, fell hard for them both, and particularly for Gina. I was rooting for them all the way, as a couple, as dance partners. I wanted them to get a happy ending. The obstacles and conflict felt so right, they unfolded in a beautiful way.

The heroine is Puerto Rican, and I really appreciated how deeply culturally specific so many aspects of the story were, and really felt for Gina in her fight to push back against sexualized stereotypes of Latinas. The way that was woven into the conflict in the story was brilliant, and had me really invested in her arc.

As a New Yorker, I also really enjoyed how much this book (and Gina) were enamored of NYC, even though so much of it happened in other places. It was lovely to read the NYC set scenes, they were swoony and full of details and just made me really happy. The Central Park scene totally had my heart.

I liked the way the book showed the depth of Stone's discomfort with being sexually objectified and in particular, sexually harassed by one of the other contestants. These things are often excused and made light of when men are being targeted, and I liked that this story didn't do that, that we were shown how very uncomfortable he was with it.

I absolutely adored the dancing in the story. Loved how central it was, how much it was described, it just made me so happy to read that. I got to really sink into the details of the dancing, and the arc of the competition. I also got a kick out of the reality tv aspects of the story, how much it played with the manipulation of reality tv, how that brought them together and how it created obstacles for the romance. So much drama! So much push-pull and forced proximity and intensity and internal and external conflict!

I loved the chemistry between Gina and Stone, it was so hot, and had this lovely thread of tenderness in it too. This translated into the sex scenes, that brought so much heat, and also a lot of heart. Stone was a wonderful match for her; I really got why she fell for him. And I loved how much he adores her and admires her and gets invested in her success.

The resolution of one of the central romantic conflicts caught me a bit by surprise, but after I sat with it for a minute, really worked for me. The other resolutions of the major arcs were extremely satisfying, and one of them around Gina's career, really got me in the feels. This felt like such an intricately woven story, and I loved the way it wrapped up.

A masterful job of pacing and characterization, this romance was a joy to read, and is an incredible debut. I can't wait to read book 2!

Trigger Warnings: (view spoiler)
