

“*Gay Club!* wears its activism with pride, and is packed with drama, plot twists and politics” – **Dean Atta** (author of *The Black Flamingo*)

“*Gay Club!* holds up a mirror to the experiences of being LGBTQ+; to the messiness, the humour, the hardships, and most of all, to the love and celebration” – **Adiba Jaigirdar** (author of *Hani and Ishu’s Guide to Fake Dating*)

“*Gay Club!* is bold, funny, brilliant, and bright... Green’s witty, insightful prose and pin sharp humour is a joy... This book reminds you that we are all allowed to have a love life, whatever our leanings. And that we are all allowed to love life, full stop. Everyone should read this book” – **Rebecca Root** (actor in *The Queen’s Gambit*, *The Danish Girl*)

“Funny, heartfelt, and angry in all the right ways, *Gay Club!* is a love letter to the messiness of our big gay family, and a manifesto for creating the change that the youngest members of that family need so badly today. A triumphant call to action” – **LC Rosen** (author of *Camp* and *Jack of Hearts (and other parts)*)

“One of the most hilarious, romantic writers in the game right now” – **Becky Albertalli** (author of *Love, Simon*)

“Quite possibly his best work yet. It left me crying with laughter late into the night because I literally could not put it down. Brilliantly controversial, so very witty, and full of enough queer joy to make any heart burst. Truly outstanding from start to finish – now I want to join the gay club too” – **Calum McSwiggan** (author of *Eat, Gay, Love*)

“Simon James Green has an impeccable ear for authentically funny dialogue. This book will make you laugh the way your best friend makes you laugh” – **Ciara Smyth** (author of *The Falling in Love Montage* and *Not My Problem*)

“As wonderful and inspiring as ever! Simon’s books are lifesaving for many and hilarious and riveting as well!” – **Matthew Todd** (author of *Straight Jacket*)

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“Once again, Simon James Green has knocked it out of the park. *Gay Club!* is Simon at his very very best. Hilarious and heart-warming with a gorgeous cast of characters and a beautiful message at its heart. I defy you to find a queerer book in 2022. Sign me up to *Gay Club* immediately. Shut up and take my money!” – **George Lester** (author of *Boy Queen*)

“*Gay Club!* is so smart and so funny, and full of characters who are also smart and funny. It’s everything I want from a book and from life. Everyone will love it! May I suggest you all join *Gay Club* with utmost urgency” – **Wibke Brueggemann** (author of *Love is for Losers*)

“*Gay Club!* cements Simon James Green’s position as the master of LGBTQ young adult fiction. No one today writes with such heart and lightness of touch – an author whose skill both intimidates and inspires his peers” – **William Hussey** (author of *The Outrage*)

“Sharp, witty, and strikingly thoughtful, *Gay Club!* is an absorbing celebration of identity and the power of community. Simon James Green has penned a timely love letter to young readers that’s guaranteed to change lives” – **Julian Winters** (author of *Running With Lions*)

“Set in a world full of drama, scandal and intrigue – a.k.a. high school – *Gay Club!* is a heartfelt, joyful tribute to messy LGBTQ+ friendships. Simon James Green had me rooting for Barney and his friends from the very first page” – **Phil Stamper** (author of *The Gravity of Us*)

“A fun and fabulous story which builds towards a powerful and important message for us all” – **Rob Gillett** (Queerly Radio and Queerly Books)

“Smart, sharp and blisteringly funny, *Gay Club!* is a celebration of the LGBTQ+ community, a clarion call for unity, and a truly sensational book” – **Matt Cain** (author of *The Secret Life of Albert Entwistle*)

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GAY CLUB!



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GAY CLUB!



SIMON JAMES GREEN

 **SCHOLASTIC**

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For everyone in our big, messy, LGBTQ+ family.
Out, in, really not sure – if your heart is in the right
place, this is for you. Welcome to Gay Club.

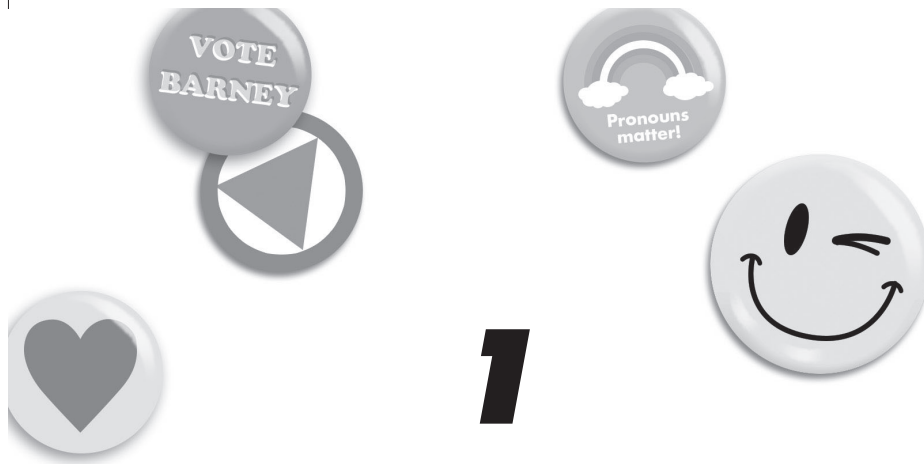


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I'm walking towards my destiny and I'm on top of the world. There's a definite bounce in my step as I stride down the corridor. It's *not* a sashay (dear god, I wish I could sashay, but I tried it in secret once and I looked like I needed urgent attention from the orthopaedic trauma team), and it's not a *strut* (that would be way too arrogant), but it's *confident*. The sort of confident that only top-of-the-food-chain sporty guys can get away with without attracting comments, because why would a boy like me be happy and self-assured? Why would a "massive gay dork" (big thanks to Nico Murphy for that generous quote; I'll be sure to use it on my CV) be feeling just a little bit good about himself?

I surreptitiously check (for the fifth time) that the flies of my chinos are done up, that my light blue Oxford shirt (unbuttoned at the collar, so as to be smart but not formal) is tucked in, and clutch my leather (OK, *faux* leather, *you*

wouldn't know!) folder tightly, like it contains sensitive government business. I mean, it kind of does, I guess. Along with the agenda for today's meeting, I've got the blueprints I've been working on since the middle of last term: the strategy for how I'm going to turn the LGBTQ+ Society around, when, in approximately twenty-five minutes, I'm elected president. That isn't meant to sound arrogant. I usually have zero confidence that things will go in my favour. But I've studied the club, I've seen what it needs, and I've done the work to impress. It's like playing chess: you plan forward in order to win.

Of course, you can't always account for the other players' moves, no matter how much you play out the options, and this one was a surprise: former president "Big Mandy" (an ironic name, since she is actually relatively small, both in stature and in ambition for the club) immediately resigned the minute she got her uni offers in ("*Don't need to waste my time doing extracurricular now – woo-hoo!*"), and now it's only the four of us left in the whole club. Bronte is running for president too, because she runs for everything (lacrosse captain, drama club artistic director, debate team leader: you know, fully keen but somehow still cool). That leaves George and Maya, but they are my best mates, so they'll vote for me. Also, Maya used to date Bronte and can't even look at her since they split up, a couple of weeks ago. Since then, George and I have spent a lot of time sitting with Maya, eating tubs of Ben and Jerry's

and slagging off Bronte's cruelty and heartlessness, so, you know, we're all pretty invested in her demise.

In any case, it's me the club needs, because I'm actually going to turn things around. The LGBTQ+ Society has four members. In a school of a thousand. Where there are definitely more LGBTQ+ kids, some of them out, a few of them dating, but none of them wanting to join the club because it's seen as "tragic".

But I've never seen it like that.

It was midway through year ten when I first walked through the door of Room 120. There was an A4 sign Bluetacked to the door – the club's motto:

**You don't have
to come out
to come in**

I'd done low-level surveillance on the club for quite a few weeks. It's important to scope out the state of play before making your move. I would stroll past the door multiple times during Thursday lunch, waiting at the end of the corridor, pretending to be rearranging the contents of my rucksack, while checking to see which students were going in. *Were they like me? Was I one of them?* The gay guys I'd seen presenting TV shows were loud, and camp, and ostentatiously dressed . . . but I was quiet, and nervous, and disastrously dressed. I'd seen gay teenagers in movies . . . but

they were American, and beautiful, seemed to be in their twenties, and liked boys in the most poetic and eloquent of ways. I was a British fourteen-year-old, traumatized by random boners on a daily basis, who whacked off to high-school wrestling videos on Instagram. Was I gay? Or just a hormone-addled mess?

Maybe I was both.

I didn't know anyone like me.

. . . Until I walked through the door of Room 120, with the prepared excuse that I was looking for "Bake Club" if I got cold feet, which was stupid because Room 120 is a history classroom, not home economics, but I clearly wasn't thinking straight. Didn't matter, I didn't need any excuses, because that afternoon I finally found my people. George and Maya were both in year ten too, but I'd never spoken to them before. I knew from my surveillance that they came to the club, but I think I'd convinced myself *so hard* that I was the only one that I was still kind of surprised to see them there – like, maybe they were just confused, and were only accidentally attending, mistaking it for D & D club, or something. No sooner had I walked in on that first day than they were both straight over.

"Finally!" Maya grinned.

"Were you expecting me?" I replied.

"We saw you spying," George said.

That was it. We've been best friends ever since. Bronte was in my year too (I *was* expecting to see her: she's been

out – very visible and taking no one’s shit – since year eight), Mandy was in year eleven (when she could be bothered: she was constantly in trouble for her low attendance), and presiding over us all was sixth former Ed Lester, who was fantastically handsome, super-smart, and dating a lad called Xander from Branscombe Boys – a private school about twenty minutes away. With their “European mini-breaks” and tales of wild LGBT parties, Ed was my idol – a shining beacon of what life might one day be like. So, sure, Mandy and Bronte were frustrating and irritating, respectively, and Ed was untouchable and basically from another planet compared to me, but they were still somehow part of my tribe, and they faced a lot of the same stuff as me and Maya and George. On some weird, deep level, we fought and bitched about each other (and in the case of me and Ed, some of us hero-worshipped each other), but we all got each other, too.

I want the other queer kids in the school to find their people, too, with us. I’ve seen the way some students roll their eyes whenever anything LGBT is mentioned – like they’re sick of us. “That’s so gay” is still a phrase that rings around almost every classroom, even though the teachers are meant to challenge homophobic language. And sure, a straight couple getting with each other in school would cause a *ripple* (everyone loves a bit of goss), but two boys, or two girls, would be an *earthquake*. So, sorry, *Mandy*, pinning some rainbow flags on our club noticeboard and raising

money to give out pin badges during Pride (which is all the club has really achieved in the last year, other than everyone sitting around eating Haribo) won't change anything. We need to unite and fight. Campaign. Be visible.

I think we can make things better.

We at least have to try.

And I have a *plan*. (Of course I do. I always have).

I feel a hand squeeze my shoulder.

"You've got this, Barney!" George says, striding up behind me. He gives me a little wink. George is pure sophistication and class. Tall (well, taller than me) and slim, his dark brown hair is styled in a side-parting and smart quiff. As sixth formers, we're meant to dress "business casual" – a definition that is interpreted very loosely by many, but taken to the next level by George, who today is sporting an impeccably tailored dark-blue suit with waistcoat, starched white shirt, hand-crafted brown brogues, and a burgundy bow tie. A cane would complete his dapper, man-about-town look. I might get him one for his seventeenth. "You've got this," he repeats.

"You think? No, yes, *I have*. Haven't I?"

"There's no one who'd be better." He sweeps his hands in front of him as we walk along. "Barney Brown – *President, LGBTQ+ Society*."

"It's got a ring to it," I agree.

"You'll need business cards."

"Oh my god, stop."

Then I suddenly *do* stop and turn to him. “OK, but what if—”

“Barney.”

“No, hear me out!” I glance up and down the corridor to check the coast is clear, and lower my voice anyway. “What if Maya buckles at the last moment? Like, I know she *said* she’ll vote for me, but she was with Bronte for a few months. . . *They did things*. Things that might . . . inexorably forge a bond of loyalty with another person!”

George frowns. “What part of Maya throwing darts at a picture of Bronte when we were last round at yours and screaming a list of obscenities, before burning the photo while chanting some kind of curse she found online, makes you think there’s a special bond between them?”

“People do and say things when they’re hurt – they don’t always mean them.” I sigh. “When my folks split up, Mum told Dad he doesn’t know how to satisfy a woman, and that’s in direct contradiction to some of the stuff I’ve had to hear through the bedroom wall over the years.”

“Well, that’s a gross thing that neither of us wanted to think about.”

“Sorry,” I mutter.

George puts his hands on both my shoulders. “You’ll get one hundred per cent of the Black lesbian vote – Maya will come through. And you’ve got one hundred per cent of the white trans guy vote.” He grins at me. “And assuming you also vote for yourself. . .”

“The white, gay boy vote.”

“*Right*, that’s seventy-five per cent of the total queer vote, which makes you president of the LGBTQ+ Society, so let’s just go and do this.”

“You’re right.”

George shrugs. “Always.”

We walk on, round the corner, and find Maya hovering outside the door of Room 120. She’s done her hair in two puffs, with big hoop earrings, and, if I’m not mistaken, a bit of smokey eye. She’s also wearing yellow dungarees and Converse with rainbow laces. It’s a bold mix that straddles a line between playful and . . . children’s party entertainer.

“Bronte’s in there already, so thought I’d wait for you,” Maya says, as we approach.

Her whole energy is “on edge”. This is partly Maya’s standard energy – she identifies as a “disaster lesbian”, and while I’m not sure that’s an official identity on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, I do get what she means, since I feel like a disaster gay most of the time. It’s a feeling of not quite fitting it, not quite getting it right, *them* never liking you back, general awkwardness, almost total messiness, and low-to-mid-level anxiety about . . . well, most things.

“You look nice,” I tell her. I more or less mean it, but the time to question people’s sartorial choices isn’t right before you want them to cast a vote for you.

“It’s not for Bronte’s benefit.” She gives me eye contact for too long. “OK, it is,” she relents. “But this is me saying,

‘I’m fine, I’m over you, I’m happy enough to wear yellow dungarees and I’ve got some earrings in and a bit of eye make-up because I’m free and single and you and me are over and I’ve moved on—”

“Maya, *breathe*,” George tells her.

She takes a breath, then exhales. “I hate her goddamn guts.”

“So I can count on your vote?” I ask.

Maya’s eyes widen. “Omigod, *yes!* Like you even need to ask, Barney! I’m not going to vote for *her*.”

George smiles, a satisfied look on his face, and gestures to the door. “After you, then, *Mr President*.”