

Thursday, June 20, 2019

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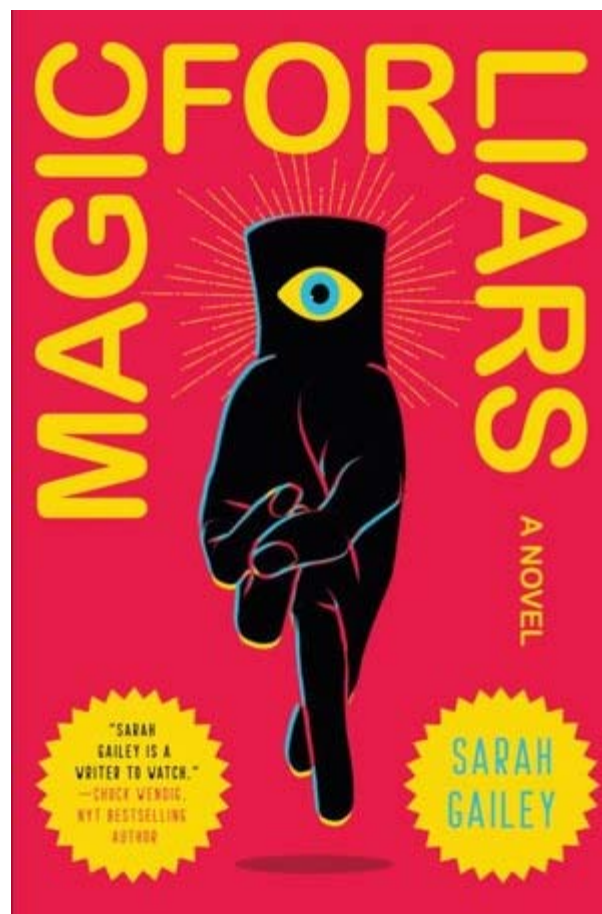
FICTION

Murder at the Magic School

In ‘*Magic For Liars*,’ a Private Eye Who’s Not a Dick

June 20, 2019 Michael Giltz

Sarah Gailey is far from the first author to cross-pollinate fantasy with the hardboiled detective genre, as Harry Dresden fans would surely point out. But in her new novel, *Magic For Liars*, she tosses in a “school for magicians” setting and a female P.I., and suddenly she’s casting a unique spell. Philip Marlowe threw down drinks, but he rarely broke down in tears.



Ivy Gamble, Gailey’s protagonist, is a mess. She spends her days chasing after adulterers and other sordid characters. If a spouse isn’t furious over their cheating partner, they’re swearing at Gamble because she’s telling them their partner *isn’t* cheating on them. The work is easy but dirty and Gamble knows she should strive for more.

And suddenly “more” shows up in the guise of a new client. Marion Torres is the headmaster of Osthorpe Academy of Young Mages. One of her teachers was murdered. Yes, the official investigators ruled it an accident but Torres knows it was murder and wants Gamble to investigate.

Gamble’s sister is magical and teaches at the school. But the two haven’t spoken in years, since their mother died of cancer. Gamble hates herself for resenting her sister and the opportunities magic opened for her. How can a “normal” person investigate a school filled with teachers and students who can manipulate, confuse, bedazzle and trick in a thousand different ways she’d never know?



Sarah Gailey Author Photo ©Allan Amato 2019

Well, Gamble is about to find out. Even for a private investigator of the noir sort, Gamble has all sorts of issues: resentment over her sister, an inferiority complex for not being magic, alcoholism (naturally), and no love life or even friends (ditto). This one case could solve it all...or make things much worse.

If you've read Raymond Chandler, you'll plop for much worse. But Chandler rarely talked about periods or birth control. Those matter-of-fact details are just some of the positives in Gailey's book. It has a few interesting men on tap, from a disgruntled teen boy certain he's the Chosen One to a lascivious teacher named Toff and a rather nicer

teacher named Rahul.

But it's the women who intrigue, from Gamble's sister Tabitha to the frighteningly persuasive mean girl Alexandria (don't call her Alex) to the intriguing assistant to the principal Mrs. Webb, who seems more capable and intimidating than everyone else combined. Toss in a plot that involves abortion, and you've got a world that feels more up-to-date than Lev Grossman's *The Magicians*, which began and ended with the idea that it would be funny if the kids in *Harry Potter* swore and wanted to have sex.

Gailey allows a glimmer of hope, yet holds fast to the cynical aura of true noir with conviction. That's admirable and makes up for a plot contrivance or two at the finale. Perhaps the only surprise is that Gailey didn't subtitle *Magic For Liars* "An Ivy Gamble Mystery" or "A Mystery For Mages" or some other clue that this is the launch of a series. But we figured that one out on our own.

(Tor Books; June 4, 2019)

Tags: Harry Potter, Lev Grossman, Magic For Liars, Sarah Gailey, The Magicians

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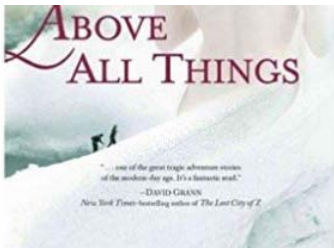
Michael Giltz

Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in New York City covering all areas of entertainment,



politics, sports and more. He has written extensively for the New York Post, New York Daily News, New York Magazine, The Advocate, Out, Huffington Post, Premiere Magazine, Entertainment Weekly, BookFilter, USA Today and the Los Angeles Times. He co-hosts the long-running podcast Showbiz Sandbox.

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