

## Lesbian sangoma's approach takes middle ground

**Title:** *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma*

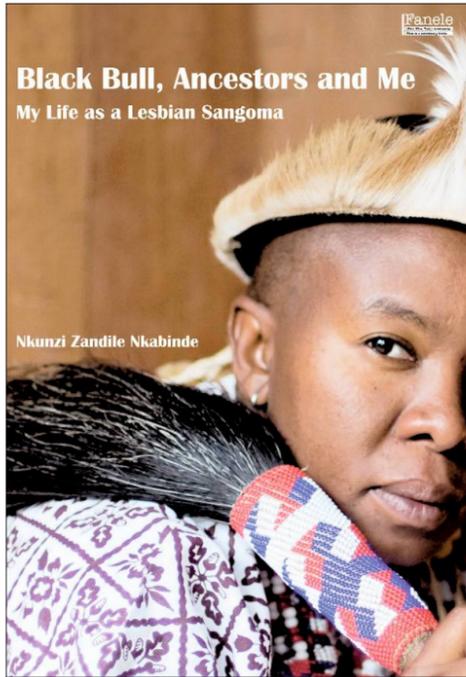
**Author:** Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde

**Publisher:** Fanele, an imprint of Jacana Media, 2008

**Price:** R135

**Reviewer:** Nerine Dorman

THE first thing that is immediately apparent when reading *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me*, is Nkunzi's overwhelming confidence in herself and her place in the world. She is not afraid of



breaking with her culture's established viewpoints and, in all that she does, she seeks to find the middle ground. This is expressed in her balancing the male and female aspects of her self, as well as drawing from established traditions with a vision of a dynamic future.

In many ways Nkunzi was fortunate, because she was raised by a mother who accepted Nkunzi for who she was, and defended her from those who would discriminate. Though she does not shy away from examining the painful aspects of life, her entire book comes across with a huge amount of positive attitude, which is so refreshing – especially when we consider the constant doom and gloom in the media. Mostly, Nkunzi concerns herself with doing what is right – this might not be the easiest path to follow, but she has clearly spent much time examining herself and others, and isn't afraid to say what's on her mind.

Central to Nkunzi's worldview is her firm belief in the powers of her ancestors, who have guided her on her path as a sangoma. If you, like me, are curious about how important this belief system is to others, Nkunzi offers a fantastic way for readers to experience a bit of a paradigm shift to establish greater understanding. It's not necessary to believe as she does, but I finished this book with a better idea of why some folks follow this path.

Of particular interest also is Nkunzi's research, which she relates here as she's spent much time travelling to interview other same-sex sangomas in South Africa, and has offered a fascinating glimpse into this other world. She speaks plainly and from the heart, toward greater understanding. I do believe her voice should be heard, especially in the light of so many brutal attacks against lesbians in South Africa's townships.

## Cyberpunk, outlaws and mysteries

ALEKSANDR VOINOV

WE'VE been busy at Riptide Publishing, and I'd like to introduce some of our recent releases. Personally, I love plotty, well-written and fast-paced stories that also tell a love story, so here are three of my current favourites:

**Falling Sky** by LA Witt combined two previously-published cyberpunk novellas. Liam, a bio-modified vampire assassin is sent to kill his ex-lover, corporate heir Daniel Harding. But it's a trap, and they have to make peace with each other, escape, and then take on Daniel's father and stop his dastardly designs. For fans of fast-paced action much in the same vein as *Burn Notice*, Witt tells this story of reunited lovers and corporate intrigue with panache and her trademark humour.

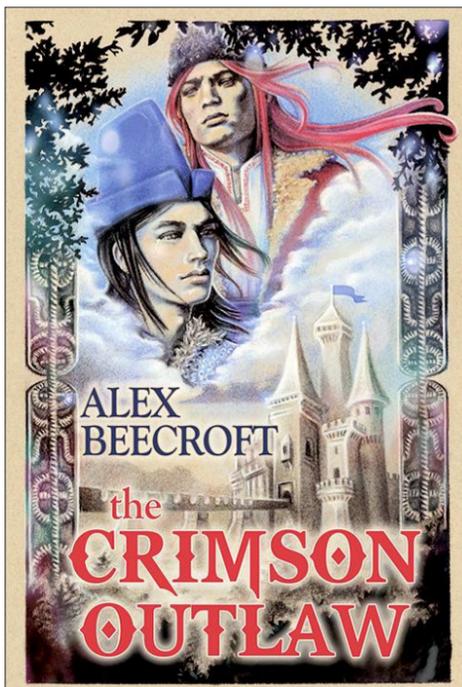
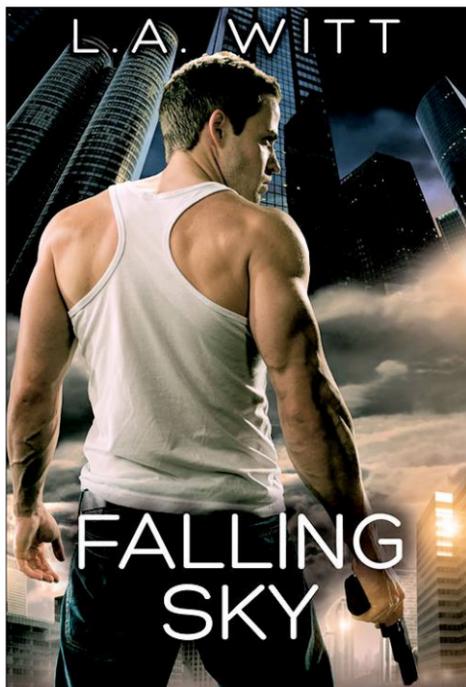
**The Crimson Outlaw** is the newest release from masterful historical storyteller Alex Beecroft. It tells the story of Vali, son of a boyar, who is taken hostage by Mihai, the fearsome Crimson Outlaw, a disgraced knight who has an axe to grind with Vali's tyrannical father. Vali is

surprisingly happy to be captured and debauched, and their initial attraction soon deepens into love. They will have to fight to free themselves and their people from the boyar's oppression, to win a better world for all. Beecroft's took me back to 1720s Transylvania (no vampires!), and her stylish and atmospheric writing is a delight.

Bestseller author SE Jakes has launched the *Hell or High Water* series, and the first installment, **To Catch a Ghost**, is out now. Prophet – former Seal, former CIA – has worked as Extreme Escapes for years, comfortable in his role as a lethal shadow, helping those the government can't – or won't – ave. Quite against his will, he is teamed up with Tom Boudreaux – failed FBI agent, failed sheriff, full-time believer in bad luck. This is a cracking action series with scorching chemistry between the main leads. I can't wait for the second book, *Long Time Gone*.

*Aleksandr Voinov is senior editor and co-owner of Riptide Publishing, an independent GLBTI press.*

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FAMILY: Roxi and Susan with Finn.

## One couple's unconventional journey towards motherhood

**Title:** *Making Finn*

**Author:** Susan Newham-Blake

**Publisher:** Penguin Books (South Africa), 2013

**Reviewer:** Nerine Dorman

**Price:** R170

WHAT becomes abundantly clear after you reach the last page of *Making Finn* is that GLBTI couples are in the process of rewriting the rules for what we consider as family. Susan always knew she wanted children, but by the time she had committed herself to her life partner, Roxi, she knew the road to parenthood wouldn't be simple.

Already in her mid-thirties, Susan worried that she might have issues with her fertility, and set on getting pregnant with her own child, they began looking for a suitable sperm donor. Of course it all sounds a lot simpler than in practice. Susan and Roxi were not sold on the local options – they could either have a friend donate his "goods" or use a completely anonymous donor.

But both these methods came with psychological repercussions, as opposed some of the benefits offered by the US-based sperm banks which would allow Susan and Roxi's children to discover more about who fathered them.

What follows is Susan's account of the months leading up to the birth of her son, Finn, and all the highs and lows of preparing for parenthood. Susan faces her somewhat daunting task of importing "the goods", but it's not only that. How does one pick a father for one's child based on written reports?

Susan asks herself

many hard questions, yet her honesty is refreshing – she definitely lays her soul bare; her quest is not all plain sailing, but the outcome of Susan and Roxi's journey most definitely serves as inspiration for other GLBTI couples who're considering this step in their lives. Yes, admittedly, there would have been easier ways to conceive a child, but Susan and Roxi explored their motivations for following the route they did. My only gripe was that I felt I'd have liked to hear more about their experiences post-birth, and the events leading up to Roxi eventually having her own son. What I must thank the ladies for is allowing readers to share their unconventional journey.

SUSAN NEWHAM-BLAKE

## Making Finn

One couple's unconventional journey to motherhood

