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In the early nineties, the name **James St. James** became synonymous with clubbing, drug use and bizarre fashion excess. His lurid account of his friend **Michael Alig**'s murder of fellow club kid

Angel Melendez several years later, in the bestselling book *Disco Bloodbath*, made him a celebrity in the literary world. It wasn't until 2003, when the book was made into the movie *Party Monster*, starring **Macauley Culkin** and **Seth Green**, that St. James became something of a household name worldwide.

Now, some eight years after *Disco Bloodbath* was first published, St. James has finally penned his second book, but it may not be what you're expecting. Like the ever-changing chameleon that he is, James St. James is set to turn the literary world on its ear again, with an unconventional novel for the teen set, entitled *Freak Show*. Yes, you heard correctly. James St. James has written a children's book. "Who knew I could be the gay Judy Bloom?" he says, tongue embedded deeply in cheek. "It never dawned on me. That's one of those things where life is an adventure. My first book was in True Crime. Now, this one will be in Teens. I thought I'd do a gardening book next, just to keep the mix going."

To call *Freak Show* a teen novel, however, would be a disservice to both the genre and the author himself. Much like *Disco Bloodbath*, *Freak Show* combines St. James flamboyant and chatty style with the earmarks of the genre, then gives it a gentle, humorous twist all his own. The result is an engrossing read with unexpected emotional gut-punches artfully blended with the outrageous, laugh-out-loud exploits of the books hero, **Billy Bloom**.

In the book, Billy is the misfit interloper, a burgeoning 17-year-old drag queen sent to live with his industrialist father in the deep South. Once there, he is enrolled at the exclusive **Eisenhower Academy**, a buttoned-down bastion of moral indignation and contempt for anything different, filled with hateful debutantes and bullying jocks. Neither the students, nor the teachers, appreciate Billy's particular style and within minutes of being introduced into their midst, he is targeted as the school's new whipping boy.

To say that Billy never has a chance is an understatement. How he handles each mounting humiliation and degradation, with humor and unparalleled pluck, is the true heart of the story. Not surprisingly, St. James admits that Billy is based very loosely upon himself. "Well, it's sort of me," he says. "That really was my first day of high school, when I walked in and thought I was **Rosalind Russell** and everyone was just shocked and I essentially ruined my high school career in those first few seconds. So, that's where I wanted to start the book."

His reasons for doing so, however, are as generous as the author himself. "I felt that it had always been a part of my life that had never been resolved. I'm not as strong as Billy and I didn't do the same things that Billy did, so it was sort of a way of me saying this is how it should be done. This is how to overcome these things. I get a lot letters from teenagers and I wanted to give them a character to show them that, even though bullying does happen, they can overcome it with grace and dignity and forgiveness and that type of thing. So, that's where all that came from. It really did come from my childhood and how I wished that I had handled it."

The (Re)Evolution Of **Freak Show** Chronicler **James St. James**

by David Salcido



Still, the question lingers; why follow up *Disco Bloodbath*, an **Edgar Award**-winner in the True Crime genre, with what will essentially be marketed as a children's book? "Well," he explains, "after *Party Monster* came out on DVD, I started getting a lot of letters from teenagers who had read *Disco Bloodbath* and seen the movie. They had decided that Michael Alig was their idol, or I was someone to look up to, and I thought that was kind of horrifying, because I wrote *Disco Bloodbath* for all the catty queens in New York and it never dawned on me that teenagers would be reading it.

"They were walking away with the view that doing drugs was fabulous and the murder was fabulous and getting sort of all the wrong ideas from it. So, this was my chance to write something for children and sort of right that wrong. I wanted to give them an **Auntie Mame** character. I wanted to give gay teenagers a fabulous role model that didn't think drugs were fabulous. It was sort of a way of delving into the spirit of *Disco Bloodbath* and that 'everything goes' mentality and the beauty of transformation and being yourself and being true to yourself, but without all the drugs and murder."

What is interesting about St. James writing, and *Freak Show* in particular, is that, just as teenagers found themselves drawn to *Disco Bloodbath*, there is plenty within the pages of *Freak Show* to appeal to adults. Think **J.K. Rowling's** crossover appeal, but with a much gayer sensibility, and you'll be on the right track. The hard part, however, still lies ahead. "I'm a little worried, because it is going to be in the children's section of **Borders**, or the teen section," he says. "I'm hoping it gets found by people. I know that I have a fanbase that isn't all teenagers. So, I don't know. We'll have to see. I'm hoping that I can trumpet it loud enough that it gets noticed by everybody. I think it definitely has cross-over appeal. And who knows," he adds with a self-deprecating laugh, "it could be the pivotal point that starts the revolution that changes the world!"

One thing he is definitely looking forward to, when all is said and done, is the inevitable firestorm that is sure to follow the publication of his book. A 17-year-old drag queen infiltrating a nerve center of Republican conservatism and religious fanaticism certainly won't go unnoticed by the moral watchdogs of the far Right. Bring it on, says St. James. "I keep telling my publicist to send it to **Pat Robertson**. Lets get people talking. It's part of being an artist. You have to fight for what it is you believe in. I'm ready for that fight. I've been fighting it my whole life." And if that doesn't work, there's always ***Gardening With Billy Bloom***.