



**When the Angels Left the Old Country by Sacha Lamb**

Arthur A. Levine, Levine Querido, 2022

ISBN: 9781646141760

Age Range: 12-18

Grade Range: Gr. 9 and up

**BOOK SYNOPSIS**

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**For fans of “Good Omens”—a queer immigrant fairytale about individual purpose, the fluid nature of identity, and the power of love to change and endure.**

Uriel the angel and Little Ash (short for Ashmedai) are the only two supernatural creatures in their shtetl (which is so tiny, it doesn't have a name other than Shtetl). The angel and the demon have been studying together for centuries, but pogroms and the search for a new life have drawn all the young people from their village to America. When one of those young emigrants goes missing, Uriel and Little Ash set off to find her.

Along the way the angel and demon encounter humans in need of their help, including Rose Cohen, whose best friend (and the love of her life) has abandoned her to marry a man, and Malke Shulman, whose father died mysteriously on his way to America. But there are obstacles ahead of them as difficult as what they've left behind. Medical exams (and demons) at Ellis Island. Corrupt officials, cruel mob bosses, murderers, poverty. The streets are far from paved with gold.

**REVIEWS AND PRAISE**

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★ “Powerfully moving. Broad in scope, the strong queer relationships at its core provide an unfaltering anchor.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred)

★ “Immersive...Propulsive. A mashup of historical fiction and magical realism, this will find a satisfied audience in fans of both.”

—*BCCB* (starred)

★ “Extraordinary....Absorbing. A sublime novel about the fantastical, freeing nature of love.”

—*Foreword Reviews* (starred)

★ “Gorgeous, fascinating, and fun. Deftly tackles questions of identity, good and evil, obligation, and the many forms love can take.”

—***Kirkus* (starred)**

★ “Terrific. Richly imagined and plotted, this inspired book has the timeless feeling of Jewish folklore.”

—***Booklist* (starred)**

★ “Expansive queer tale that marries historical fiction with inventive world-building. Witty, cerebral storytelling.”

—***Horn Book* (starred)**

★ “A must-buy for any collection, Lamb’s historical fiction novel brings soft queer joy to a compelling tale of immigrants and unions and Jewish folklore.”

—***School Library Journal* (starred)**

“Liars, lovers, grifters, a good angel and a wicked one—all held together with the bright red thread of unexpected romance, enduring friendship and America’s history. You don’t have to be Jewish to love Sacha Lamb—you only have to read.”

—***New York Times* Bestseller Amy Bloom**

“I LOVE THIS BOOK SO MUCH!!!! I read it in two days and then I spent the next two weeks thinking about it. Literally forgot to take my lunch break at work because I was busy thinking about it. This book is SO fun and funny and beautiful. Inherently, inextricably deeply queer-and-Jewish in a way that makes my brain buzz. I am obsessed.”

—**Piera Varela, Porter Square Books**

“I love this book more than I can say (but I’ll try!) I was delighted by the wry narrative voice of this book from the first paragraph. The author perfectly captures the voice of a Jewish folk tale within an impeccably researched early 20th century setting that includes Yiddish, striking factory workers, and revolutionary coffee houses. It gave me so many feelings about identity, love, and their obligations to the world, themselves, and each other. This story will forever have a place in my heart and in my canon of favorite books. I can’t wait to have it on my shelves!”

—**Marianne Wald, East City Bookshop**

“A beautiful story of an angel and demon set on helping an emigrant from their shtetl, and the fierce girl that joins them on the way... A must read for all ages—one filled to the brim with heart.”

—**Mo Huffman, Changing Hands Bookstore**

01/25/2024

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## AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

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- Stonewall Book Award Winner
- Sydney Taylor Award Winner
- Michael L. Printz Honor Book
- National Jewish Book Award Finalist
- Audiofile Earphones Award Winner
- Best of the Year:
  - NPR
  - New York Public Library
  - *Kirkus*

## MEDIA AND RESOURCES

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Boston Globe, Seeing the Past in All Its Dimensions in *When Angels Left the Old Country*:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/12/08/arts/seeing-past-all-its-dimensions-when-angels-left-old-country/>

Electric Literature, 8 Queer Historical Fiction Books Set Around the World: <https://electricliterature.com/8-queer-historical-fiction-books-set-around-the-world/>

Jewish Book Council A Conversation between Sacha Lamb and Aden Polydoros:

<https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/pb-daily/pasts-that-are-as-diverse-as-the-present-a-conversation-between-sacha-lamb-and-aden>

Junior Library Guild Q&A with Sacha Lamb: <https://www.juniorlibraryguild.com/blog/post/q-and-a-with-sacha-lamb>

Kveller, 16 LGBTQ+ Jewish Books for All Ages: <https://www.kveller.com/16-lgbtq-jewish-books-for-kids-of-all-ages/>

Geeks Out Interview with Author Sacha Lamb: <https://www.geeksout.org/2023/03/03/interview-with-author-sacha-lamb/>

Sacha Lamb '20MS/MA Embraces Queerness and Jewish Folklore in Debut Novel:

<https://www.simmons.edu/news/sacha-lamb-20msma-embraces-queerness-and-jewish-folklore-in-debut-novel>

Strange Horizons *When the Angels Left the Old Country* review: <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/when-the-angels-left-the-old-country-by-sacha-lamb/>

A Jewish Q&A with Author Sacha Lamb: <https://jessicarussakhoffman.com/blogandwriting/the-dark-humor-of-jewish-literature-and-folklore-is-a-really-important-element-of-the-book-a-jewish-qampa-with-author-sacha-lamb-when-the-angels-left-the-old-country>

## RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES

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IBPA, Book Banning Impacts IBPA Member Publishers, and How You Can Help This Banned Books Week:

<https://www.ibpa-online.org/news/652639/Book-Banning-Impacts-IBPA-Member-Publishers-and-How-You-Can-Help-This-Banned-Books-Week.html>

The Book of Life, Let Freedom Read! Banned Books Week 2023: <https://jewishbooks.blogspot.com/2023/09/let-freedom-read-banned-books-week-2023.html>

Publishers Weekly, Authors Raise \$100K for Levine Querido: <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/93268-authors-raise-100k-for-levine-querido.html>

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## **AUTHOR STATEMENT (OPTIONAL)**

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There is a vocal minority of people in the United States who approach children’s literature with the aim of insulating children from difficult subject matter. Books have been challenged, sometimes even for subject matter they simply don’t contain, but mostly for dealing with topics like race, gender and sexuality, and the realities of bigotry. I believe that these challenges come from a place of not trusting young readers. Young people encounter in real life every issue that has been challenged in fiction. They are aware of politics even when they are not personally affected by them. When young readers are allowed the freedom to explore, fiction helps them work through the problems they deal with every day, and helps them find answers to the questions they may not know how to ask. For a young reader who is marginalized, fiction offers companionship and reassurance. For a young reader whose friends are marginalized, fiction offers understanding. And for the presumptively innocent young white reader I think book challengers are imagining—a reader I’m not sure even exists—fiction offers a path for working through unconscious biases and building empathy. When children encounter difficult topics through literature, they are able to process them at their own pace, step away when they need to, and foster healthy emotional responses.

As an author writing for teens who need the stories I myself needed when I was younger, I feel personal hurt at having my book challenged. But I also worry for children whose access to information and to the safe space of fiction is being limited. Trusting young people to know their own minds and limits and allowing them to read widely and deeply will not harm them, it will strengthen them. Fostering curiosity and openness in young readers is for the good of all of us.--  
Sacha Lamb

## **\*A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

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A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book’s intended use.

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