



Borderline

Mishell Baker

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A cynical, paraplegic screenwriter with borderline personality disorder gets recruited to join a secret organization that oversees relations between Hollywood and Fairyland in the first book of a new urban fantasy series from debut author Mishell Baker.

Millie is a bit of a mess: she's cynical, disabled, and self-destructive. And she has borderline personality disorder. So she's a little confused as to why she's been recruited for a top-secret agency that oversees deals between Hollywood icons and fairy muses. Even though this hidden, fantasy Hollywood isn't exactly wheelchair-accessible, Millie is determined to ace her first assignment and not let her mental illness get the best of her. But when her first routine mission takes an unexpected and dangerous turn, Millie finds herself hip-deep in some of the scariest situations Fairyland has on offer—and she may not make it out in one piece...

Borderline Details

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Author : Mishell Baker

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From Reader Review Borderline for online ebook

Tatiana says

3.5 stars

A solid urban fantasy novel. The fae lore is not entirely new here, but the characters are. MC is a double amputee with a border personality disorder, for instance. Movie-centric Hollywood setting is not bad either.

I would have liked it even more if there was more fodder to ship somebody. Basically, the story needed some romance in it, not just a few hints at a possibility of a romance. But this is how *I* like my UF. I am shallow like that.

K.J. Charles says

Okay, this was an astonishing example of how diversity revolutionises genre. The story here is pretty standard urban fantasy: young woman introduced to magical world, meets ragtag gang of misfits, solves crime. It's perfectly good urban fantasy, well written and niftily handled, just nothing to set the world on fire. What makes this an astounding read is that the protagonist/narrator has borderline personality disorder, and this is not window dressing or treated lightly. It informs every aspect of the plot, her motivation, her behaviour, reactions of others. This wouldn't be anything like the same story with a neurotypical narrator. (I stress this point because there are so many tiresome people who like to bleat about diversity being "shoehorned" into books, as if different perspectives and experiences didn't lead to completely different output, or as if you can slot in white cis able men to any plot without making a difference.)

As it happens the narrator is also a double amputee after a failed suicide attempt. That isn't gratuitous, and the consideration or lack thereof for her physical difficulties and pain is an ongoing thread, but it's not plot crucial; the ways her disability intersects with the plot could have been handled by other means if need be. (That's not a criticism, rather the opposite: as with all diverse rep, we need more disability rep in books that isn't plot related, because people aren't always plot hooks.) Whereas her BPD informs *everything**, for good or ill, mostly ill, and becomes a hugely compelling aspect.

I can't comment on the accuracy of the depiction, or on how Borderliners might feel about reading this. I will say that, if you have/had an untreated Borderliner in your life, you may find the narrator's behaviour hits home at points; I had to put the book down a few times because it brought back some very raw feelings. BPD is depicted with enormous clearheadedness here in my (entirely uninformed) opinion: we come to empathise with Millie, and desperately wish her success, but the book doesn't make excuses or seek to minimise the consequences of her words and deeds on others.

Startlingly good and I really want a sequel.

Philip says

4.5ish stars.

This is a 400-page book that feels short. I honestly could have read 100 more pages and not complained. I

was that into this. The setting, plot, sequence of events are pretty straightforward and not particularly deep. But I couldn't put it down.

The Hollywood aspect of the story is glitzy and fun. The connections to real-world stars and savants and the alternate reality sources of their inspiration through fey Echoes is pretty awesome.

"So we can get inspiration from fey and vice versa. Anybody who's anybody has an Echo."

"All of them? You're saying Martin Scorsese hangs out with fairies?"

"Yup. Not all fey are sunshine and rainbows."

"Kubrick, Eastwood, Coppola?"

"Kubrick's before my time, but probably. Eastwood and Coppola, yeah."

"Spielberg?"

"He doesn't need one; he's a wizard."

Let's talk about the characters. They elevate this story so far beyond what it would otherwise have been. Our non-heroine, Millie, as well as an incredible supporting cast, are such awful, cringe-worthy, despicable people and I could not get enough of them. In a lot of ways, this book reminds me of *The Magicians* which is one of my favorites. You kind of hate everyone at some point and love them at others. Baker doesn't hold any punches by trying to make these people likable or relatable or excuse them in any way. By so doing, if anything, she's created characters that are relatable just by their nature of being human (except the ones who aren't human, I guess.)

Although as Millie explains BPD and its effects, she kind of sounds like she's quoting a WebMD article, her actions seem to transcend the symptoms checklist and paint a legitimate portrait of someone living with the disorder. This isn't the sanitized, PC version of mental unwellness, this is real and I love it.

Can't wait to go deeper into this world.

(view spoiler)

Jessica ❁ ⇨ Silverbow ⇨ ❁ Rabid Reads-no-more says

Reviewed by: Rabid Reads

4.5 stars

I've been book funky . . . for like . . . WEEKS. I've binge-watched: **Gotham** , **The Flash** , and the first three seasons of **Suits** . I've decimated my **Secret Garden** coloring book.

And on the day I read **BORDERLINE** by Mishell Baker, I tried to read four different books. **FOUR**. This is the only one that stuck.

Millicent (Millie) Roper is a most unlikely urban fantasy heroine.

She has two prosthetic legs. And I'm not talking futuristic bionic limbs that give her superhero-like speed or strength. NOPE. Just the usual kind. Not that I'm saying people with prostheses can't be heroes, it's just not the standard in fiction.

She lost her legs when she landed feet first from a seven story jump, and, YES, I do mean jump--it was a suicide attempt.

A suicide attempt that took place after a failed romance with one of her professors . . . Millie also has BPD (Borderline Personality Disorder).

Basically . . . she's a HOT MESS.

She's also one of the most compelling characters I've read in recent memory.

When we meet Millie, she's languishing in some kind of a rehabilitation/recovery facility. With shrinks. She's been there for six months, and while it seems like her stay hasn't done her much good, as the story progresses, we see that it really, *really* has.

She's learned terms that help her identify her behaviors. She's learned coping mechanisms. And *we* learn more about her disease than I ever thought was possible without falling asleep.

But as it turns out, people "marked by unstable moods, behavior, and relationships," . . . NOT boring. Especially when they get recruited by a government-funded agency to liaise between the humans and the fey . . . Recruited with a bunch of other crazies . . . Who all live in the same house.

So that's awesome.

Also awesome is Baker's writing. I have so many highlights, so many ridiculously good examples of Baker's awesome that it almost physically hurts not to be able to use them all. SO. After careful consideration, I limited it to three:

"I'm Gloria," she said.

"I, uh." My brain felt like a bumper-to-bumper traffic jam.

"You've never met a little person before." She giggled, in that cute way Southern women do instead of punching you in the teeth.

I know that giggle. I may have even used it a few times myself.

Then there's Millie's painful honesty. Like when she discovers Caryl has separated her more volatile emotions into a familiar:

*I had a sudden desperate urge to talk to Dr. Davis. This woman, her former patient no less, had torn her mind in half. Her Emotion Mind was perched on my shoulder while her Reason Mind drove the car and told me it didn't matter. **It was fascinating and horrible, and I was deeply, sickeningly envious.***

rubs fist over heart

But where Baker really excelled was in her throwaway descriptions:

Union Station is the sort of place that looks like it ought to have ghosts. And it does, if you count the dead-eyed people shuffling through the cavernous main terminal or perched in uncomfortable chairs, watching rows of demonic red numbers.

That shit is EVERYWHERE.

BORDERLINE by Mishell Baker is that rare something new, something different, something GOOD that we're all silently hoping for every time we pick up a new book. Baker puts her own unique spin on the fey, while maintaining their basic integrity. Her writing is bloody fantastic. Her characters are real, and I straight-up love Millie--she is deeply flawed, possesses an honesty that is alternately painful and hilarious, and manically likable. Any fan of urban fantasy should check this one out. Highly recommended.

Veronique says

4.5

"From across the room, I'll admit death looks like a real babe. But I've been close enough to see what's under her makeup, and no thanks. Really."

A few people whose opinion I value recommended this urban fantasy. So pleased I listened :O)

Baker first of all offers us a protagonist with a difference. Millie is truly fascinating and the main compelling element of the book. Having a character who is not only a double amputee but also suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder (and other various effects from her suicide attempt) is refreshing and captivating. To say that she is flawed is beyond the point. Millie both attracts and repels, and the author succeeds in giving her a voice that reflects all of this, with a good dose of snark. The rest of the cast is drawn from the same psychological strokes. Again, pretty interesting choice.

And then there is the setting and plot. I loved how Baker mixed the crazy world of Hollywood with the fey, how these 'cultures' interact and what rules they have to obey.

Have I forgotten to say that it is also a 'whodunnit'? Yep, and I do like my mysteries :O)

Robyn says

I don't have enough time to write a solid review, but this book is one of those extremely fun ones that grabs you by the jugular and never lets go. Anchored by an incredible protagonist, the fairly ordinary urban fantasy story takes flight. (How's that for mixing metaphors?)

Sunil says

So a queer double-amputee with borderline personality disorder walks into an urban fantasy novel about Hollywood and fairies...

Borderline, Mishell Baker's debut novel, begins with an awesome first line: "It was midmorning on a Monday when magic walked into my life wearing a beige Ann Taylor suit and sensible flats." It perfectly sets the tone for a neo-noirish urban fantasy narrated with endearing flair. We first meet Millicent Roper in a psychiatric center, recovering from a suicide attempt that cost her her legs. A woman recruits her for the mysterious Arcadia Project, ostensibly because of her filmmaking background and her borderline personality disorder. Soon she's trying to find a missing person alongside similarly mentally ill colleagues all caught up in the fey underbelly of Hollywood.

How much do I love *Borderline*? Let me count the ways. Let's start at the top level, the premise that posits a connection between Hollywood and the fey, injecting a magical element into the history of filmmaking. Urban fantasy is full of fairies, but I love how very specific this take on them is, the idea that they would be so drawn to films, *our* fantasies, though they're not the only things that tie them to our world. Baker carefully reveals the details of this worldbuilding as we learn how it all works along with Millie, piece by piece, so that it feels organic; moreover, often the way a particular element is revealed doubles as a plot point.

Let's talk racial diversity, because although Millie is white, most everyone else in the book is not, which is reflective of, you know, the actual racial diversity of Los Angeles. Yes, there is an appearance by a Latina housekeeper, but she is not the only Latina in the book *and* she doesn't speak in broken English. Baker is so savvy that she makes Millie herself a bit dodgy at times, which allows POC to continually call her out if she fucks up. No one in the book is a stereotype, and by the end of the book, they all have a surprising amount of depth to them. They have histories, traumas, specific reactions to Millie.

And Millie, hoo boy. As a person who is able of body and mind, I can make no real judgment on how accurate Baker's portrayal of physical and mental disabilities are, but the details about Millie's use of prostheses and wheelchair seemed well researched to me, and Baker shares a diagnosis with her protagonist, which makes this an important #ownvoices book. The book is called *Borderline*, so clearly Millie's BPD figures heavily, and she constantly lets the reader in on why she is reacting to things in way a neurotypical person would not. It helps that she's self-aware about it, as it allows us to see her struggle and empathize, but this is *not* a book about how terrible it is to have BPD. She manages it, it's part of who she is, and she still gets the job done. (Same with the fact that she's missing a couple legs.) It's so rare to see a positive portrayal of a disabled character, especially a protagonist, and of course there's so much more to her than her disabilities. As is pretty standard in urban fantasy narrators, she's snarky, but the wry humor only comes out occasionally; she's not a joke machine. Hell, sometimes she's an actual asshole. The book deals with some heavy issues, but there's enough lightness to balance it out that it feels true to life.

And what about the writing itself? Unlike the writing in this review, nearly every word, every sentence, every paragraph in *Borderline* is perfect. I don't mean it's gorgeously written, I mean it's *expertly* written, with a sense of what words matter and when, everything flowing smoothly, with metaphors that come from Millie's filmmaking eye and cutting lines that reveal deep human truths. And it doesn't just flow on a micro level: this book fucking *moves*, and I don't mean it's a fast-paced thriller, I mean that it continually pushes forward, with diabolical chapter cliffhangers, with plot twist after plot twist that peel apart our perceptions of who people are (fitting for this noir-tinged environment). I was not bored for one fucking second.

Borderline is fun and complex, with layered characters who give you unexpected feelings, with a well-crafted mystery about a cleverly devised world. It's full of the kinds of people you don't normally see in novels, and they get to be the good guys, though they're flawed good guys. Even the bad guys, menacing as they may be, have their virtues. This book does so much right it's unfair. It deserves a far better review than I have given it, so pretend that's what you read.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

My decision not to finish this Nebula Award nominated book has more to do with me and my reading preferences than the book itself. I actually really liked it in the first 50 pages. The writing is fine, and Mishell Baker has interesting characters and memorable settings (that house!)... but as soon as it got to the first mention of *fey* it was like my brain shut down. I try to like urban fantasy but just have a hard time connecting to it. I really like it in TV form but not books, so sue me. So if you are a fan of urban fantasy I can recommend this book to you wholeheartedly, while maintaining that it is just not for me.

Gergana says

It's one of those books that I truly appreciate on a technical level, but fail to connect to on an emotional level. I can write a whole essay about the complexity of the characters, the originality of the plot, the beautiful description and detailed world-building and I definitely recommend *Borderline* to anyone who is looking for something unique! However, despite its countless strengths, I kept finding myself looking at the number of minutes I still had left of the audiobook (the narrator was pretty awesome by the way). I'm still curious enough to check the sequel one day.

Lindsay says

A fairly ordinary urban fantasy plot and setting made stellar by a brilliant protagonist and a fascinating cast.

This is basically *Men in Black* with Fey and magic instead of aliens, which sounds cool but it's been done before. What takes it into brilliance territory is Millicent Roper, a sufferer of *Borderline Personality Disorder* who is recovering from an extremely serious suicide attempt that's left her a double amputee, physically scarred and with some brain damage on top of her existing BPD. Very much not your typical uber-competent UF protagonist, but perfect for a position with the Arcadia Project.

The Arcadia Project is the *Men in Black* organization. It's staffed primarily with people with significant mental health issues who live in group housing (so they can be warded against hostile fey). I'm not sure I quite buy that, but it makes for some really interesting household/workplace dynamics. Milli's first case looks to be trivial, but it turns out to be anything but, and she turns her formidable intelligence and creativity to getting to the bottom of the situation.

The fey, the missing persons, the magic, the portals and the bad guys, all of this is pretty standard urban fantasy material and it's done well here. Great world-building, action-packed plot, interesting bad guys with a diabolical scheme. All good. And nothing to do with why I'm giving this five stars.

No, why it deserves five stars is that it's really opened my eyes to a whole lot of issues regarding the treatment and competency of the mentally ill (and to a lesser extent, disability). One thing I remarked on early in the book is how the people that Milli lives and works with give almost no consideration of her issues. When walking they don't wait for her (she's a double amputee with a below-the-knee prosthetic on one leg and an above-the-knee prosthetic on the other). The share house she's in doesn't allow any form of drugs (most leg amputees deal with significant stump pain when they use a prosthetic). An assault by her early on, that has some provocation, nearly gets her kicked out. And for a lot of the book I have no idea if these people are being assholes or actually being pretty wonderful.

Another thing about this is the nature of this employment for people with these issues. There are several reasons why people with mental health issues are perfect for this job. One of the reasons that you realize fairly early on: they're *expendable*. Another is that jobs with this group may be just about the best jobs people like this can get, so the Arcadia Project has enormous power over these employees and can enforce some pretty strict rules. I'm really not sure if I'm ok with any of that, but it probably extrapolates well to all sorts of employment situations that exploit people like this.

It's all really eye-opening, but there's positive messages here too. Milli's strengths, her near obsessive drive (actually potentially part of her BPD), her creativity (again, common with BPD) and her acknowledgement of her condition and the various coping strategies she utilizes, all of these end up allowing her to save the day. And I think that's something really positive to read about when people like this are often demonized.

Loved it. You should read it.

Lata says

4.5 stars. I loved this fast-paced story of Millie Roper and how she gets involved with the Arcadia Project. Millie, with her borderline personality disorder and her missing legs thanks to a suicide attempt off a building, is often her own worst enemy, saying and doing things that push others away and leave herself bereft of support.

The Arcadia project and all the hints of the other world are fascinating, and I found the author's use of mental illness in the characters made for a fractious but interesting mix of characters. I found myself caring a lot about them, and look forward to more Millie.

Justine says

Borderline is an amazing book in every way. While the story is fairly straightforward, Mishell Baker has made it something special in the telling.

Borderline is filled with deeply flawed characters, but Baker lets them be who they are without any apologies and the story is that much richer for it. Her writing is fresh and visual and feels intensely personal throughout. This book is going on my favourites shelf for 2016; it is a clear standout.

Baker has established herself as a talent to watch and I will definitely be picking up any other book she writes.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2016/07/08/...>

I'm so glad I finally got the chance to read *Borderline*. I admit I haven't been trying out a lot of new urban fantasy lately, since after a while so many of the common themes start to run together until I can't keep the different stories straight in my head anymore. *Borderline*, though, is special. Very special. It's completely invigorating and just what I needed to rekindle my excitement for the genre.

The story, which I originally thought would be darker and grimmer in tone due to what I read in the publisher description, actually turned out to be a lot of fun. The book stars Millie Roper, a young woman with borderline personality disorder who is in recovery for a failed suicide attempt a year before. The incident caused her to lose her legs and her promising filmmaking career, but just as Millie has decided to resign herself to her new reality, a strange woman called Caryl Vallo shows up in her room at the psychiatric center, claiming to represent a group called the Arcadia Project.

And what is the Arcadia Project? Now that's where things get interesting. Imagine something like *Men in Black*, but replace the aliens with faeries. Arcadia is the name given to the "other" realm, where the Fey and other mythical creatures reside. They frequently come visiting in our mundane world, and some even make it their home. It's the mission of certain secret branches of the government working with the Arcadia Project to track these Fey visitors and make sure they don't stir up too much trouble on this side of reality. What that also means is when the Fey break the rules or go off radar, agents have to be sent in to investigate. That's where the Arcadia Project comes in, and now Caryl is asking Millie to be their newest recruit.

Wow, where do I start? First of all, Millie is an incredible protagonist. Yes, she's a complex, fully-realized character. And no, she's not always likeable. Her borderline personality disorder sometimes makes her emotions volatile, and her behavior unpredictable. But paradoxically, I also found her very genuine despite her moods and thoughts constantly swinging in different directions. I find that unreliable narrators are commonly used in stories about characters with mental illness or behavioral disorders, but Millie also somehow breaks that mold, coming across to me as an exceptional and very different kind of protagonist. She can't help what she feels in the moment, but she will always tell you straight. She has her dark and low moments, but when she's not experiencing symptoms she can also be a very humorous, energetic and upbeat person. I loved her unique voice and wouldn't have wanted anyone else at the helm of this wonderful story.

Speaking of story, on the whole *Borderline* features a rather conventional urban fantasy plot, but the joy of it is in the details. The book takes place in Hollywood, amidst sprawling film studio lots and glitzy celebrities. Millie herself was a former film student and an indie director before her suicide attempt. Both the character's background and the setting are woven tightly into the story, so we also get to have some quirky twists involving the movie making industry. For example, almost every successful filmmaker and actor or actress in the past century has had some connections to Arcadia. Central to the plot is the really cool concept of Echoes. The idea suggests that every creative genius in our world will have a muse, or Echo, in Arcadia. And when they meet, it's like the faerie-touched version of finding your soulmate—you just know. Once a person and their Fey Echo are joined, their talents can reach their full potential, unleashing even more creativity into their work and furthering their success. It's a lovely idea, and I find it works especially well in this world Mishell Baker created.

I really don't have many complaints. Perhaps the only thing that tripped me up is the way the author sometimes portrayed Millie's BPD. I used to work in the therapy and rehabilitation field, and spent a great

deal of time working with clients with mental illness, personality and behavioral disorders, as well as acquired brain injury. Millie's "checklist" style of discussing her BPD at times felt exactly the way I'd described—often it felt like she was reading out of a copy of the DSM and ticking off all the major points like "Borderlines do this because" or "I am like that because" it's what the info on the disorder says she should feel or do. It hasn't really been like that in my experience; every individual is different and rarely does the full gamut of symptoms come neatly described and packaged together like that with any one person. It didn't greatly affect my overall enjoyment of the novel though, and I appreciate the fact that Baker is trying to shine a light on mental health issues and the personal struggles of people who live with them.

I really wish I had read *Borderline* sooner, as it was such an extraordinary, refreshing novel. It's exactly what I want in an urban fantasy: entertaining, original, and even meaningful. The fantastic cast simply further highlighted this read for me, from protagonist Millie Roper to my personal favorite character Caryl Vallo. Everything about this book was a delight, and I highly recommend it.

Bradley says

This was an unexpectedly good Urban Fantasy novel with Fae and a differently-damaged protagonist that sets it apart from most by dealing with mental illness.

What? Mental illness? What kind? BORDERLINE Personality Disorder. :) Just think unstable and you've pretty much got it. It makes for hell on all her personal relationships, her professional relationships, and to make things worse, her suicide attempt took her legs from her.

Woah. She's got problems. It should make for some rather interesting reading in any normal circumstances, I'm sure, but it looks like she's just been selected for an untraditional work-therapy program... with Fae. :) It helps that this UF ties creative abilities with the Fae and we're in LA. I mean, everyone's fairly close to the borderline anyway and I'm sure no one would blink an eyelash when they were told that Hollywood is run by the Unselee Court. (OR some variation.) :)

The rest of the novel picks her up as an investigator which is pretty boilerplate but I didn't care in the slightest because of all the interesting twists and turns. Is it primarily a character-driven novel? Absolutely. Is it fresh? Absolutely. Did it renew my faith in UF? Absolutely. :)

The fact that the author took on a topic that is difficult and disturbing and wasn't afraid to let me actively dislike the main character while simultaneously making me search and find things to love about her is definitely a big bonus. :)

Bravo!

Carol. says

One of my friends once called me 'The Anti-Drama.' It was one of those moments of startling clarity, when one thinks, 'wow; that could be the truest thing I've heard.' I've found myself shying away from people that seem to enjoy confrontations, outbursts, reversals, confessions, and living life on a roller-coaster of emotion.

All of this is to explain that it isn't Mishell Baker's book as much as it is her protagonist, Millie, of the borderline personality disorder and recent suicide attempt, that prevented me from enjoying *Borderline*.

Well, maybe the writing has something to do with it. Baker drops us into Millie's world without background, almost exactly like meeting a new person in real life. We don't know her childhood, although there's clues dropped that her mother was absent and her father abusive/distant. We learn she was a prodigy in the film world, with a shot at winning Sundance, but have very little of the in between. These hints come about as she talks with other people, or as she thinks about her coping skills. The advantage to this is avoiding awkward explanatory backstory; however, it does little to mitigate the perception of impulsive, selfish behavior. Millie's own habit of stating 'borderlines do this...' and 'of course, mood swings are borderline...' etc. contributed to the outsider effect.

Equally difficult was her inability to demonstrate compassion or softness with others. She seemed to value other people in terms of usefulness or in response to sudden affection (characteristic of borderline, of course, not just your average 20 year old who recently left an isolated environment). She has little empathy for their own struggles, even after learning everyone at the house that serious issues. For me, it was a barrier to connecting Millie as she continually sabotaged her moments of possible connection and success. On the plus side, there were a couple of moments where she was able to coach herself through ('borderline,' of course) situations (because who else over-reacts?). It ended up not really being enough to connect with her, or actually care particularly when she was so quick to abandon the group (again, 'borderline,' not an impulsive young person). It was a little like watching a mouse run a maze. Would she navigate it? Did I care?

The setting was a split-world fairyland/real world set-up, centered in Los Angeles, California, movieland. Baker's spin on the two worlds is that many people have an emotional fae twin on the other side, and allowing the human and fae to meet would allow the human to express new heights of artistry. The plotting focused equally on Millie's development in this new world and a missing Fae. There's a lot of sarcastic/dry humor, mostly from Millie, so it can be amusing.

My last mental association is unfortunate, because I never really cared for Madonna. I'm sure younger readers won't have this problem.

I read this with somewhat high expectations, after GR buzz, knowing it won a World Fantasy Award and a Nebula Award nomination (shocking), and a very enthusiastic podcast where someone called it the 'best urban fantasy I've ever read.'

I'd like to introduce him to *A Madness of Angels* and Kate Griffin.
