



An Interview with Author Lucas Rocha

Lucas Rocha was working at the Brazilian Center for Health Studies copyediting articles when a theme caught his attention: the misconceptions and prejudices of HIV and HIV-positive people in the 21st century. That led to his debut novel, *Where We Go from Here*, featuring three gay friends.

The idea for this book came to you when you stumbled upon an article about how Brazilian people perceive HIV and HIV-positive people. Tell us more.

Thinking of ways to change [the misconceptions], I started to develop these three characters that guide the novel, showing the ways in which they deal with HIV from different perspectives: a character that's been recently diagnosed with HIV, an HIV-positive character that has been living with his diagnosis for three years, and an HIV-negative character who develops a romantic relationship with one of the others. What I intended was to show that the stories of HIV and HIV-positive people don't have to be the Sad Story anymore, that they can thrive and, more than surviving, that they can be able to live full, happy, and messy lives.

Did you encounter challenges while writing this book?

The research was my main concern. When dealing with a subject that can be sensitive to a lot of people, such as HIV, I had to be extra careful to deliver the proper information and to not spread misconceptions, improper terminology, and/or false truths. I went to treatment centers and talked a lot with infectologists and patients to understand the different points of view they had of the virus and of how it can affect one's life. I also had to do a lot of rewriting: after my agent read the book, after my sensitive and beta readers read it, alongside my Brazilian editor, and then my translator and my US editor.

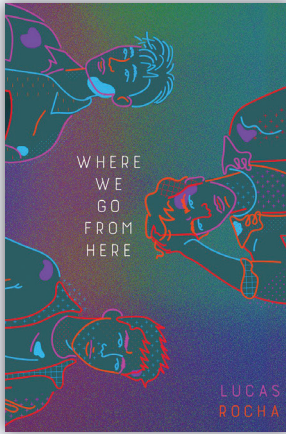
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Tell us about the response so far.

This book was released in Brazil in 2018, and, since then, what brings me the most happiness is readers' responses to it. We are currently living under a very conservative government in my country, but to see that I had overall positive feedback about the book, the characters, and the way in which the theme is developed leaves me filled with joy. The LGBTQIA+ community of readers in Brazil is amazing! And I hope *Where We Go from Here* can speak to the US readers just as much. Being a debut novelist in my own country, I never imagined that my first-ever published book could leave Brazil and reach other countries in such a short amount of time!

What else would you like readers to know?

Debating in the US as a Brazilian writer (and in translation!) was beyond my expectations, but it's happening in the best way possible, under a publishing house and a team that really believes in this book. This is a very important story to me, and not only because it's my debut, but because it can shed some light on our own misconceptions and prejudices about HIV and HIV-positive people. I know that I learned a lot about the virus and the stigma that people still suffer in present day during my research, so this novel is an attempt to stop looking at HIV as just the virus and to start really seeing the people who live with it.



Where We Go from Here

Lucas Rocha • Push • 2020 • IL YA

When Victor finds himself getting tested for HIV for the first time, he can't help but question his entire relationship with Henrique, the guy he has-had-been dating. See, Henrique didn't disclose his positive HIV status to Victor until after they had sex, and even though Henrique insisted on using every possible precaution, Victor is livid. That's when Victor meets Ian, a guy who's also getting tested for HIV. But Ian's test comes back positive, and his world is about to change forever. Though Victor is loath to think about Henrique, he offers to put the two of them in touch, hoping that perhaps Henrique can help Ian navigate his new life.

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