

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

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★ **Manu!**

By Kelly Fernández. Illus. by the author

Oct. 2021. 192p. Scholastic/Graphix, \$24.99 (9781338264197); paper, \$12.99 (9781338264180); e-book, \$7.99 (9781338264388). Gr. 3–6. 741.5

Fernández's debut graphic novel is all about embracing the parts of yourself that are mysterious and magical, as it traces the story of Manu (short for Manuela) in a setting inspired by the Dominican Republic. She is taken in by a religious order of sisters who run a school for little girls with magical powers, or witchlings. The order's practice focuses on using their powers for good and for serving others, but Manu is always getting into mischief and showing off. Manu is different from the other kids, even down to the kind of bird she's able to transfigure into, which complicates her social life. One thing leads to another, and a curse causes her to seek help from a demon, which brings out the parts of Manu that she would much rather hide. Fernández's cartoon artwork in saturated tones and with lush, vibrant backgrounds dense with plants makes for a charming, light-hearted atmosphere, within which she affectionately depicts the rich variety of love people can have for one another, such as the love of a parent, foster parent, or best friend. It's a lovely portrayal of religious mysticism, in which witchcraft and Catholicism are interdependent, that emphasize how people can use their abilities, regardless of where they came from, for good.

— *Kristina Pino*