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You Can Run: Gay, Glam, and Gritty Travels in South America

by Kareem Tabsch
EDGE Contributor
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EMAIL PRINT SHARE BUZZ UP!

In A Four Letter Word the newly released film about the trails and tribulations of gay love in the city,

hunky Luke gets offended when a cocky bar patron labels him a 'gay cliché'. Barraging through a world of fleeting one-night stands, late-night drinking, all-night partying and an off the wall sex drive moviegoers immediately recognize that despite his objection to the moniker, it does indeed fit. At first glance, actor Jesse Archer would seem to be the embodiment of the character he plays (Archer incidentally co-wrote the script). He is lean, charming and flirty but unlike the fictional Luke, Jesse is an intellect who can get down and dirty not only in the bedroom, but in the muddy lands of the South American jungle as he tells in the recently published **You Can Run: Gay, Glam, and Gritty Travels in South America**, a memoir chronicling his adventures traveling through Latin America.

Commencing in the Summer of 1999 (which is the title of the first chapter) in Archer's native Portland, Oregon; the hub of the west Coast indie music scene and site of yet another disastrous job for the recently 'out' Jesse. Though being the son of unaccepting former Evangelical missionaries is surely no walk in the park for any flagrantly proud homosexual, by the time he was in his mid-twenties Jesse had already had his plate full of 'experiences', moving to Los Angeles to study theater at USC, living in Capetown, trekking throughout Europe, Greece, and spending a year in Paris. Yet afraid to fall into the rut of 'dependable income' jobs and the banality of being...gasp...a suburban gay, Jesse decided to embark on a self-led backpacking tour of South America and brings along on-again, off-again boyfriend Zane with him.

From the first few pages of You Can Run, two things are evident: One, Jesse Archer is a terribly talented writer whose witty and charming style makes reading his work an infectiously joyful experience; and two, Jesse and Zane in the third world are as good an idea as Judy popping barbiturates and scotch before an encore, (file both under bad combination that happened anyways). Zane is at once Jesse's great love and greatest frustration, a first class swimmer and gym bunny that Archer describes as a "beautiful blond with a competitive streak," a characterization that fits Archer as well (though more of the honey-brown variety.) Perhaps the reason that they are so 'made up to break-up' is that they are so much alike. From their arrival in Chile to their ultimate departure from the continent nearly two years later, You Can Run is more than just an account of the on-the-road experiences through our Spanish speaking neighbors to the south, it's a voyage into the complex and convoluted world of two friends and lovers. What becomes intensely clear though as you delve through the 36 chapters, is that despite pushing each other away, Zane and Jesse are inexplicably linked together, albeit if only by a shared history of co-dependence.

With not even an understanding of basic Spanish, Archer decidedly wants to avoid the tourist groups and opts for the no-frills options in everything from food, lodging, transportation and excursions with few exceptions and meeting along the way a varied and unforgettable cast of characters. Patricia, the Pink Lady whose turned her shack and her life into varying shades of the bright color; Vu, a bitter under-sexed Vietnamese American who bought affection with an endless supply of drugs; Milena, the Argentine Jewish teenager who wants to learn the lyrics to every rap song; to Santusa, the Bolivian sium-hoteller whose fang engaged lips only move when she's trying to sell a tour package.

Itineraries are things that don't exist in Archer's vocabulary, and his voyages progress when his intuition tells him it is time to move on, even when it means away from Zane for a while. Times and chance seems to be on Archer's side, as he lands in Rio de Janeiro in time for carnival (and a tryst with a sexy brasileiro), stumbles upon a gay pride parade outside Evita's Argentine palace where the protesters out number the queers, and able to catch the circus in Bolivia and see their star attraction, the Wolfman of Borneo.

For a substantial portion of his trip Archer settles into Buenos Aires, finding work as a waiter at a country club to teaching Argentine brats a few words of English. The truth is that Archer isn't a very good teacher at all, that is until he meets his dream pupils: a class of over the hill queens whom Jesse is able to teach important vocabulary terms like



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'pearl necklace' and 'horse cock.'

Undoubtedly the greatest treasure of all his travels is encountered in the birthplace of the Tango and his name is Walter. Walter is a 25-year-old fashionista (read as label queen), a child of some privilege and a talented artist with no ambition. Walter also becomes Jesse's saving grace, an endless source of genuine love and affection. With some prodding, Jesse drags him along for the ride and the snooty-but-sweet Walter agrees to leave the comforts of his family's home in upper-middle class Belgrano just to be with Jesse. Snot stained hotel walls and four-day long hikes prove that love is indeed patient.

Jesse Archer shares candid accounts of being an American abroad striving to be a traveler not a tourist. From buying cocaine from inside a Bolivian Prison, to finding anal sensation aides in the produce isle to his ultimate return to the states, landing in South Beach amidst Winter Party, Archer narrates not only his experiences but also his thoughts.

Included in the 244 pages, published by Haworth Press and edited by Michael Luongo, are original illustrations by Walter Laruccia (Jesse's 'amor argentino') and a map pin-pointing the places Jesse visited.

You Can Run: Gay, Glam, and Gritty Travels in South America is a literary tour-de-force from a man who is undoubtedly going to become one of the most important voices in GBLT America, that is if he stays put long enough to get known.

by Jesse Archer

You Can Run: Gay, Glam, and Gritty Travels in South America, retail price \$12.95 paperback (ISBN: 978-1-56023-654-2) or \$39.95 hard bound. (ISBN: 978-1-56023-709-9). For more information visit the authors website www.jesseonthebrink.com

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