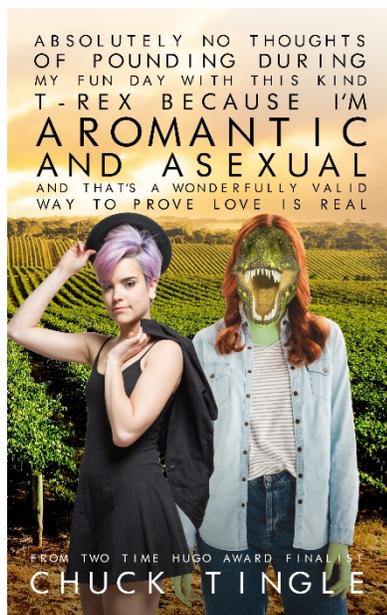




I Interview Chuck Tingle's *Absolutely No Thoughts Of Pounding During My Fun Day With This Kind T-Rex Because I'm Aromantic And Asexual And That's A Wonderfully Valid Way Of Proving Love Is Real*

Review by Ulysses Constance Bougie

Chuck Tingle. *Absolutely No Thoughts Of Pounding During My Fun Day With This Kind T-Rex Because I'm Aromantic And Asexual And That's A Wonderfully Valid Way Of Proving Love Is Real*. Self-published, 2021. <https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/57099171-absolutely-no-thoughts-of-pounding-during-my-fun-day-with-this-kind-t-re>.



The above image depicts the cover of the reviewed book. The title is at the top; the bottom reads: "From two-time Hugo Award finalist Chuck Tingle." It depicts a white young adult in a black dress and hat standing beside a red-haired humanoid with a T-Rex's head, dressed in jeans and a button-up shirt. They stand in front of a field of crops.

I live by myself, but tonight I'm sitting down on my cat-scratched living room futon for a platonic interview/date with Chuck Tingle's lengthily-titled *Absolutely No Thoughts Of Pounding During My Fun Day With This Kind T-Rex Because I'm Aromantic And Asexual And That's A Wonderfully Valid Way Of Proving Love Is Real*. Self-published as an ebook on Valentine's Day in 2021, Tingle's text tells the brief story of an aromantic asexual protagonist who looks for (and eventually finds) a lost dog with the help of a newly befriended tyrannosaurus rex.

What follows is an edited meta-interview with Tingle's story itself, one that plays (like Tingle's work) with the non-/fictionality of author, audience, and text. Is Tingle's story, I ask, innovative in both genre and aromantic representation despite containing eight uses of the verb *blurt* in its short 13 pages?

Bougie: Is it alright if I just set you on my lap while I record this?

Absolutely: Absolutely.

B: I remember you coming out on Valentine's Day this year—the week before, Tingle posted a tweet asking for messages from aromantic fans to include in his next book. Or... whatever you call what he makes.?



A: I think you mean *Tingler*—“[a] story so blissfully erotic that it cannot be experienced without eliciting a sharp tingle down the spine.” (Goodreads, n.d.).

B: I figured he would just put a bunch of the messages in an appendix at the end of the book. But you were only my second Tingle, so I didn't really get his meta shtick then. This is someone whose other work featuring a-spec characters includes *Not Pounded In The Butt By My Book "Not Pounded In The Butt By Anything And That's Okay" And That's Okay*, though (Tingle 2018). So I guess that's just his thing.

I think I bought you a few months after seeing those tweets because I was feeling depressed, and you were very short. Kind of like, “Fuck it, it's something to add to my list of books I've read this year.”

A: Fair.

B: 29 down, 40 to go.

A: Nice.

B: I'm trying to figure you out, anyway. You're a weird mix of badly-written, fanfic-y writing and... surrealism? Like, at first, you're just a story about Michelle, a probably-human being who's watching a friend's dog and needs to go looking for him after he runs away. Then, as she's looking for him, a red-headed T-Rex pulls up in a car and asks if she needs any help. And some of the other characters they end up meeting are a unicorn who manages a winery and a triceratops who works the counter of a chocolate shop. I guess everyone else is human? You never said.

A: I like the idea of keeping readers guessing there. It's really taking advantage of the medium, I think—you can get really minimalist in a text like this in a way that more visual art forms can't, in a way that evades not only aesthetics and assumptions of gender but of species, as well.

B: Would you call yourself minimalist or nuanced given how didactic you are in some scenes? Like the part where Lara (the T-Rex) defends Michelle after the two of them are assumed to be romantic partners, saying, “There are all kinds of love, and ways to love. Love doesn't have to be sexual, and love doesn't have to be romantic. Love doesn't need to be strictly between a couple, or more people, or less people” (Tingle 2021, 7).

A: It's not subtle, perhaps, but that's the struggle with representing aromanticism in creative work, isn't it? Unless you use terms as explicit as *aromantic*, audiences often won't recognize your inclusion of the things those terms signify. Maybe I'm rebelling by not making an effort to be subtle. Consider how Adrienne Rich argues for the necessity of taking “the step of questioning [compulsory] heterosexuality as a ‘preference’ or ‘choice’ for women,” doing “the intellectual and emotional work that follows” despite the difficulty of doing so (1980, 648). It's not quiet; it's a definitive move from one space into another.



B: She follows that line, I think, by positing that the rewards of doing so might include “a freeing-up of thinking, the exploring of new paths, the shattering of another great silence, new clarity in personal relationships” (Rich 1980, 648).

A: What if so-called “bad” fiction can shatter that silence more easily than other work by being more explicit about such ideas?

B: Maybe the non-/human friendship that develops between Michelle and Lara is an example of one of those new paths that Rich references, or of a new mode of relating that centers neither the romantic or the human??

A: That’s certainly one way to see it. Zine creators yingchen and yingtong write in their *aromantic manifesto*, after all, that “aromanticism is a principled commitment to finding radically nonviolent ways of relating to others” (2018, 12).

B: So Tingle was kind of just like, fuck it—fuck whatever “good” writing is; I’m just going to literally share these messages from aromantic Twitter by making them characters who show up in person at the end of the story (at the end of you?) to say stuff like “Love is love, and that includes non-romantic love!” (Tingle 2021, 12).

A: Chuck did that, yes. To himself, as well.

B: I was confused, at first, when Michelle and Lara found the lost dog chilling with this dude in a Tae Kwon Do kit and a bag on his head. But then he announced himself as “world’s greatest author Chuck Tingle,” author of this story, so I figured it was him (Tingle 2021, 11).

A: It was, yes.

B: He takes a very literal approach to inclusion.

A: Touché.

B: Is there anything else you’d like to share before we finish up for the evening?

A: Only that it’s been lovely, absolutely lovely.

B: You are, really, the ideal date.

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ULYSSES CONSTANCE BOUGIE (he/they) is a creative writer, visual artist, and academic bitch with bachelor's and master's degrees in English from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and the University of Missouri, respectively. He is currently a graduate instructor with focuses in asexual and aromantic studies, composition studies, and multimodal + neuro/queer rhetorics at Illinois State University. They recently published a chapbook of old poems entitled my [god\(s\)?](#). Find him on Twitter as @5tephendeadalu5 or via their website, cpbwrites.wordpress.com.