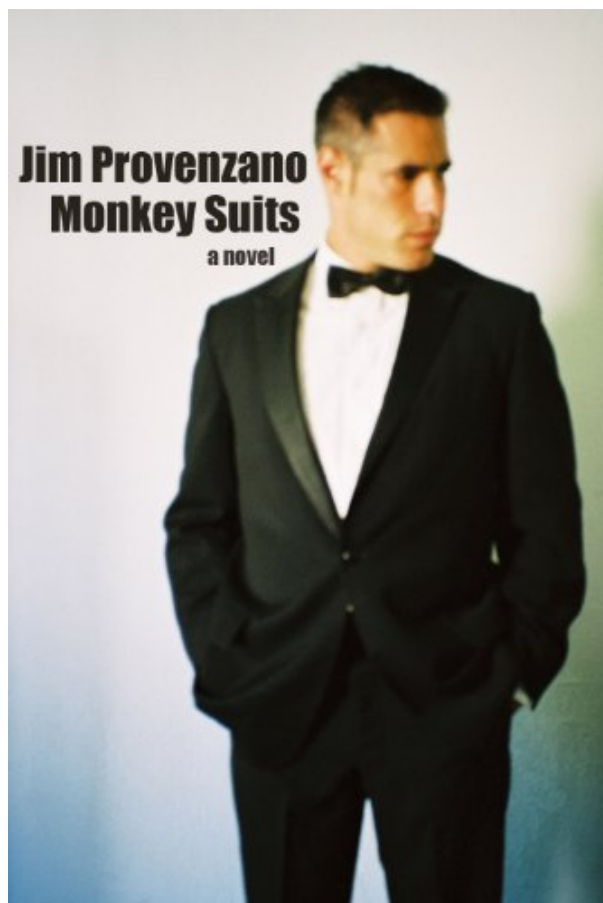
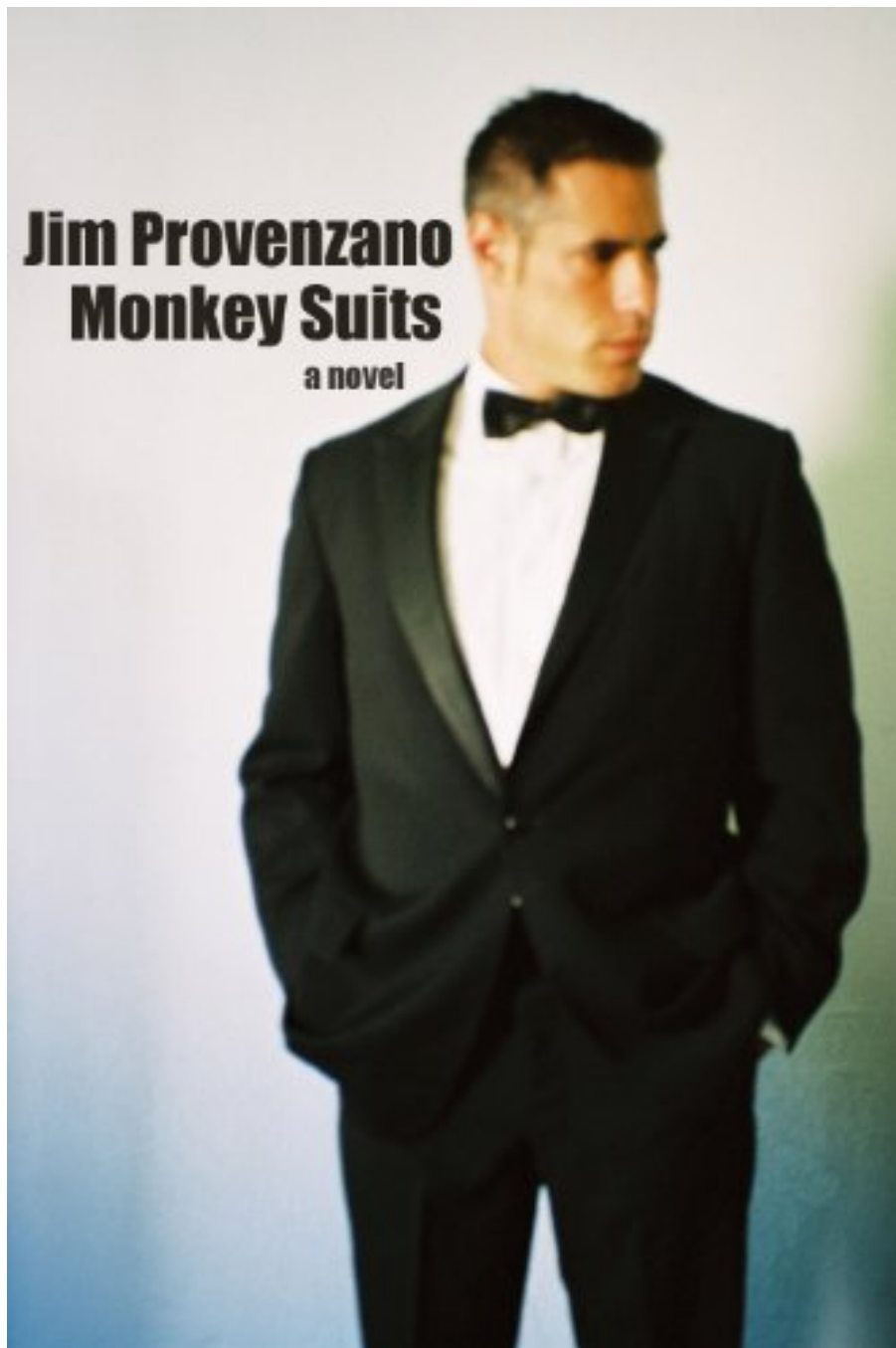


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If Provenzano wasn'thimself a waiter, he must have slept with some - his behind-the-scenesdetails are a hoot. The novel's realistic energy is further heightenedby the author's invocation of thinly veiled facts." - Richard LaBonte,Bookmarks

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"Jim Provenzano's brilliant new novel *Monkey Suits* captures perfectly the Reagan Age as it examines the lives of gay cater-waiters working the Metropolitan Museum's swank parties, while getting politicized by ACT-UP." - Author David Ehrenstein

"A thoroughly entertaining and well written story filled with well defined characters, clever plot twists and subtle humor. It's loaded with all the standards of a good story with the right type of characters and on-target situations, using light-handed irony and a sharp eye for dark humor around the edges.

"He makes his points cleanly in the context of the story itself, with a wit that equals Maupin at his best, using the figure of the Cater Waiter as his Everyman." - Author Keith Morrisette

"From the secret lives of married gay men to the secret lives of cater waiters, it seems like everyone has something to hide. That's especially true in Jim Provenzano's exciting second novel, *Monkey Suits*.

A nostalgic mix of sex and melodrama, Provenzano crafts a late-80s AIDS story with paint-by-numbers plotting. Still, it's to Provenzano's credit that "*Monkey Suits*" is such a fun read, jammed with in-jokes, intrigue and involving characters. It's those details and finishing touches that make the book a sultry page turner. - Torso Magazine

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Most helpful customer reviews

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

The Waiter World

By Foster Corbin

The problem with this novel is that of many second novels; it is not as good as the amazing *PINS*, Mr. Provenzano's first novel. While the author wrote about the world of high school wrestling teams in *PINS*, here he writes about the waiter world (thus the name *MONKEY SUITS* since those who carry food to our tables usually are clad in those uncomfortable suits with cummerbunds). It's certainly not a bad novel and is an easy read. It just doesn't have the passion, at least for me, that his first one did. Set in Manhattan in the late 1980's-- The elder Bush is elected president during the course of events-- the novel follows the lives of several gay "cater" waiters and one mostly straight one, Ritchie, who-- whether intentional or not on the part

of the author-- comes across as one of his most endearing characters. There are other characters to care about as well: Kevin, for one, who is active in ACT-UP when he isn't waiting tables. But many of the other people aren't very sympathetic. They work for the people, high society types, who treat them badly even while raising money for AIDS. They do not lift a finger to help themselves-- unless you count the occasional passive aggressive spitting in someone's food. And the use of feminine pronouns to refer to men is way past overdone. Additionally, the scene at the AIDS benefit at the Metropolitan Museum degenerates into slapstick. I thoroughly expected a food fight. Finally, at two different places in the novel the author inserts a page of quotations at the end of chapters (pages 108 and 165) that just seem to float. I have no idea what that's all about.

MONKEY SUITS is far better than a lot of contemporary "gay" novels and certainly covers an area not usually written about. It's probably unfair to expect this novel to be as fantastic a story as PINS. Mr. Provenzano obviously is capable of writing very fine stories and most likely will do it again. I'll read them cheerfully.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Men in Black

By Jason D.

What was it like to be an out gay man in New York City just as the AIDS activist group ACT UP became popular? And what's it like to serve dinner to the wealthy who ignored the AIDS crisis while struggling with your own growing anger?

This is what author Provenzano explores in an ensemble novel about a group of waiters, some of whom ignore the crisis, others who work within the echelons of upscale servants before abandoning that world.

While not as impassioned, deeply symbolic and poetic as his first novel, 'Pins,' he does weave amusing metaphors of Egyptian culture (and Anubis/dogs as well), portraying Manhattan as a slave culture of sorts. The handsome, gay men in the book have their lives intermingling.

Chapters shift mostly from one guy to another, with a few asides for a sarcastic yet humane portrayal of a socialite who means well, but becomes the subject of a bumbled protest because of her homophobic husband. While the depiction of a Marianne Williamson-type "faith healer" doesn't work as a parody (the quoted "God Did Not Create AIDS, therefore AIDS Does not Exist" was actually one of her obtuse mantras), it seems to be a critique in contrast to the eventual activist stance of the main character, Lee.

With its rich detail, based on obvious experience in both worlds, Provenzano's narration takes on a dishy character all its own, extolling the excess. Urban and urbane, the humor is sometimes sidetracked by too-brief touching moments; the waiters stopping to hear a mourning co-worker play at a piano, one character's coming out as HIV-positive under a Central Park snowfall. Yet it captures an era now lost, and makes one wonder who among these tuxedoed men may have survived.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Tuxedo Junction

By A Customer

I wasn't expecting anything like PINS, the author's first, and it wasn't.

But once again, a whole subculture is thoroughly explored, this time in 80s New York among a sort of hive of worker bees; cater waiters, mostly gay. His details are expansive and dishy, like a sort of gossip columnist who went to these parties.

The interaction between the characters, while sometimes pithy, develops into hurt, anger, fear of AIDS, or denial of it, and passion. Some of the sex scenes (in unusual places!) are hilarious.

Instead of forcing an activist agenda, he shows how some people become swept up in it, to their own benefit (Lee and Cal), deal with it in their own quiet way (Ed), or race through it (Brian). The difference between these guys made it feel like the ensemble style of "Queer As Folk," but the setting's more like "Bonfire of the Vanities."

The whole story is framed around what these guys do in, and out of, their tuxedos. The plot doesn't really jump at you, but escalates. The clever blend of fact and fiction edges close to a few celebrity outings (!!), but it's really about the transformation of some otherwise invisible servants in Manhattan.

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