

Street racer Bronze is killed in an accident, leaving behind his found family. Arctic knows the truth, but he'll have to conquer his demons to save the street racing syndicate before anyone else becomes a victim.

Green: The Pitstop Articles - Book 1

By B. M. Valdez

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THE PITSTOP ARTICLES #1

All that Glitters isn't gold.

GREEN

B. M. VALDEZ

Also by B. M. Valdez

Relapse

Countenance of a Hero

Faceless

Daisukidayo, Honey-Senpai!

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Chapter One
Stefanie Souther
Lonephalt, Tenth County
Seven Months Ago

The nursery was decorated in white, with elegant accents of silver and light blue. It didn't feel surgical at all. In fact, Stefanie felt quite warm when she was in there. Racers from all over Tenth County and even other parts of the state gifted Bronze, ranked Number Three, with boxes to help out. It wasn't as though Bronze couldn't afford to support Stefanie and their child.

Stefanie didn't care for any of the gifts. She had met very few of Bronze's crew and knew nothing about racers outside the county, though Bronze spent a lot of his time in Locksley County. She left most of the gifts boxed up and tucked away in the attic space above their squat home in the Lonephalt suburbs. While Stefanie, already six and a half months pregnant, was shifting things around up there, she had come across a box labeled ES. She knew she had seen it once before, when they had moved in, and knew that it had to be particularly close to Bronze to have his legal initials on it.

She had promptly carried it down from the attic and to the kitchen. Digging through revealed a collection of worn-out stuffed animals, a knitted blanket, and t-shirts too small for a Yorkie Terrier. Among the box's contents, she found an old wooden carving of a dog. Two of its legs and its tail were broken off, so that if it was set up, it would awkwardly wobble front to back. It had the whimsy of a child's toy, and

Stefanie at once wanted their child to play with it in the same way she imagined Bronze had.

So she took the wooden dog into the white, blue, and silver nursery. It was getting harder to walk and climbing up and down the attic ladder hadn't helped her back pain any, but Stefanie persisted.

She swung in a slow circle around the nursery, eyes lighting up at the crib, rocking chair, and changing table. When she tried to take her life eight years ago, having a child of her own had been the farthest thing from her mind. Now it was all she wanted. To live a peaceful life with Bronze and their child.

Stefanie set the wooden dog figure up on a clear spot on one of the shelves, shifting the small pile of mother-to-be books over for it to lean on. As she stepped back, the mobile phone in the pocket of her robe started ringing.

Expecting to see Bronze's name and mobile across the screen, she was surprised when, instead, it was Fuel, the only one of Bronze's racers to be in direct contact with her.

"Hello?" she answered. The racer usually didn't speak to her. And had only been given her mobile in case of an emergency.

"Stefanie, it's Bronze," Fuel said. Static distorted his voice, possibly from wind whipping by. "Taboo made him a challenge he couldn't refuse."

Stefanie wasn't immediately concerned, but the desperation in Fuel's tone caused her to sit down in the rocking chair. "Is that a Heart-to-Heart?" she asked. That was the only way she could conceive that Bronze couldn't refuse the challenge. "With the Starvale czar? Where?"

Fuel gulped before responding. "Yes," he said. "At Suicide Road."

"Bronze wouldn't race there," Stefanie said. "He hates it."

“Stef, you need to come down here,” Fuel said. “Right now. He might realize how stupid it is to rise to this silly challenge if he hears it from you.”

“Okay,” Stefanie said. “I’ll be right down.”

#

Soon after, Stefanie pulled her red two-door convertible Makush Rhaigo down Ferdinand Street, the narrow side street that connected to the Street of Saint Apollos. Aside from driving straight up the one-way street known as Suicide Road, the intersecting street right before the infamous ninety-degree turn was the best, and safest, way to get there. Stefanie had to stop the car just before the traffic signal. A crowd had already gathered.

She jumped out of the car, holding her belly, and pushed her way through the mob. The traffic light hanging above Ferdinand was green, which meant the Saint Apollos light was red. Engines roared in the night as Stefanie stepped off the sidewalk below the traffic light.

Closest to Stefanie, a lime green Monoway was squeezed into the narrow lane of the Street of Saint Apollos. On the other side of the Monoway was Bronze’s silver Poratha.

“Bronze!” she shouted, but despite the high concrete walls around them, her voice did not carry far over the din.

“Stefanie,” Fuel’s voice responded. The middle-aged man approached her from the right. “They’ll start on the green light.” He grabbed her by the arm and navigated through the spectating racers to circle around the back of the cars. “It’s been red for a while, but this light is infamous for its stale reds.”

"I know," Stefanie said. "I know." She closed her eyes and allowed Fuel's gentle touch to guide her across the street.

As they passed behind the Poratha towards the opposite sidewalk, the light dropped to green. Both cars shot forward and went under the traffic light as it turned yellow.

"Bronze!" Stefanie shouted again. She hoped he didn't lose control of the car in the takeoff. That Bronze would be safe.

Stefanie could not judge how fast the two drivers were going as they entered the ninety-degree turn, but it looked like Bronze had the Poratha under control. Then the Monoway kicked sideways. Plastic and metal crunched together as it slammed the smaller Poratha sideways.

Bronze's car careened into the concrete wall. The metal body collapsed into shrapnel. The green Monoway kept going.

Metal crackled through the silent air. Dark liquid spilled out of the Poratha. Then chaos. Racers jostled past Stefanie. Desperate to go to Bronze's aid. They shouted at once. Voices blending together incoherently.

Fuel ushered Stefanie towards his car. He tipped his mouth towards her ear, his breath warm as he said, "We'll meet him at the hospital."

Stefanie had no choice but to climb into the passenger seat of his car and to buckle up. A siren was already peeling through the air by the time Fuel closed his own door and started driving up the side street. Sharp pain twisted Stefanie's stomach, but she bit her bottom lip against it. Tears were welling in the corners of her eyes.

This wasn't happening. The crash wasn't real. Bronze was alright.

They made it to the hospital a full half hour before the ambulance showed up. Stefanie insisted on staying outside

to wait for it. She ran to the back doors of the vehicle as it parked in the emergency bay, tripping over herself and landing on her knees on the way. Her vision was blurred by tears as ER doctors rushed out the doors.

“Step back, miss,” one said, but Stefanie threw herself across the stretcher as it emerged with Bronze. His eyes were closed, and the blankets were bloody. The paramedics were bloody. Everything was bloody. One was in the middle of performing CPR.

“Come on,” a nurse said gently as she removed Stefanie. “Give them some room.”

The stretcher rolled into the hospital and Stefanie cried out, the sound ripping a hole through the night air. She had already lost her mother and her father. She couldn’t lose Bronze too.

A painful spasm dropped her to the pavement. Stefanie had the briefest notion that she must’ve landed in a puddle because she was suddenly wet from the waist down.

“She’s in labor,” one of the nurses called. “Her water just broke.”

The words barely registered as Stefanie was assisted into a wheelchair and wheeled through the doors after Bronze. A machine made a *derr* sound as they passed and she heard someone say, “Clear.”

“Bronze,” she croaked. “I have to see him.”

“Not until this baby is born,” the nurse told her.

The contractions were far too close together for the nurses to take her far. They set her up in a bed in the emergency room. They stripped her clothes and put her in a gown. She felt defenseless.

But then the baby was born.

Dead.

And Bronze died too.

Stefanie’s world collapsed.

Chapter Two

Mercedes, Number One

Roanoke City, Strike County

“Beautiful day to be tearing up the streets.” Charm’s voice crackled through the car speakers.

“Quit admiring the scenery and get your ass ready for this race,” Splinter’s voice replied.

Mercedes lifted the large puffy headphones to his left ear as he spun the dial on the police scanner with his right hand. The leather seat of his Myndryt was pushed all the way back from the steering wheel. His long legs were crossed at the knee as he leaned back. His car sat on the roof of the tallest parking garage in Roanoke City. He had only to turn his head to peer over the side of the two-foot-tall cement guard rail.

“I don’t need to pay attention to get in front of you,” Charm said.

Mercedes reached forward and thumbed the mic mute button on the steering wheel to unmute his audio feed. “Scanner’s quiet,” he said.

“Awesome,” Splinter replied. “We ready to get this thing going?”

“Only you would be dumb enough to challenge Charm,” Mercedes said. “But yeah, I’m ready. What about you, Mister Czar?”

“Tch,” Charm said. “I’ve crushed this guy in my sleep.”

“Because your dreams are the only place you can beat me, old man,” Splinter said.

“Go challenge the czar of your own city,” Charm said. “Oh, right, you can’t beat him either.”

Mercedes drummed his fingers on the paneling of the car door. “I recognize this to be an official challenge by Splinter for the title of Czar for the town of Peace Harbor, Strike County,” he said, tone projecting more boredom than he intended. It was pointless. Charm was too good for him. “Do you accept this fairly spoken challenge as current Czar, Charm?”

“Let’s just get this over with,” Charm said. “I’d like to get down to the Kegasaurus while I’m in the city.”

Mercedes looked over the edge of the garage at the state capital’s busiest street. It had five lanes—two going in either direction and a left turn lane with a protected arrow where Oregon Avenue intersected South Street. The light had just changed to red, and cars were piling up. A purple wide-bodied, two-door muscle car Monoway Medeor sat in the left turn lane, heading north. A much smaller coupe blue Erdoth Cemra was next to it, in the middle lane heading south.

“When the light turns green, the race begins,” Mercedes said. He leaned toward the screen console in the middle of the dashboard. It was black, so he tapped it twice. White letters like tread marks flashed across the screen, spelling “Psypher,” before a map of Roanoke appeared. “Then I’ll forward the track to your units. A Czar Challenge never uses the same route, to keep things fair for a first timer like you, Splinter.”

“Roger,” the two racers chimed at once.

Mercedes glanced back at the street below. The South Street intersection with Oregon was notorious for stale red lights. It was the perfect starting line. As he watched, the Oregon light bounced to yellow then red. A few heartbeats

later, the South Street light and the left turning green arrow jumped on.

Engines roaring, the two racers rocketed forward, the Medeor careening out of the turn lane to duck between the Cemra and a car in the oncoming traffic lane. Mercedes glanced to the screen long enough to hit the send button on the map. Drivers below honked their horns when they realized that another of the infamous Raymond street races was underway.

It wasn't long before Mercedes could no longer see the two racers. The triangles on his screen indicated that they were still neck and neck. Maybe Splinter was better than he gave him credit for. And he despised Splinter bad enough to give the man no credit in anything. Regardless, Mercedes would still be more comfortable if his adoptive father, Charm, held onto the czar title.

"There's gonna be a new czar at this year's winter events," Splinter said. His purple triangle nudged just ahead of Charm's blue one.

The winter events, Mercedes thought. This would be the first time the events would take place without Bronze since Mercedes became a racer.

"Oh?" Charm said. "Are you planning on making a challenge against another city's czar before then?"

Splinter's snort dispelled the regret that was beginning to settle like a storm cloud around Mercedes' lungs. He didn't have time for that now.

The police scanner was starting to get some action, but only a vague notion of where the two cars sped to. This was a Czar Challenge, so it wasn't going to be easy for either of them.

"Caller reports that they were last seen heading south on South Street beyond the intersection of Oregon Ave," the dispatcher's voice said near to Mercedes' left ear.

He thumbed the mute button on his steering wheel, turning his car mic off. "Not for long," he said, taking a pay-as-you-go burner phone out of his glove box. Poor Splinter didn't know what he was in for. This was his first time challenging one of Mercedes' city czars. Some would call it an unfair advantage that the incumbent had, but Mercedes needed his czars to be able to multitask and follow directions.

"Catch ya later, Charm," Splinter sneered. Mercedes saw the purple triangle barrel ahead of the blue triangle as they made the next turn.

"You'll wish you weren't out front when they set up a roadblock," Mercedes said to himself.

On the burner phone, he dialed 0-1-1, the state of Raymond's emergency line that directed callers straight to the special police units who handled street racing crimes.

"Street racing hotline," a woman answered. "What is your street racing emergency?"

"I have two known suspects racing down Washington Avenue going towards Elmer Street North," Mercedes said.

"Please stay on the line," the woman said. "I'm sending officers."

"A pleasure," Mercedes said.

The woman bumped him onto hold a moment before her voice crackled into his left ear. "Strike County 0-1-1, page for Roanoke City SR Task Force," she said. "We have reports of two known suspects heading towards Elmer Street North."

"Feel the pressure, Splinter," Charm said as he whipped in front of Splinter as they turned onto Elmer.

"Sir?" the voice of the 0-1-1 operator said in Mercedes' right ear.

"It's a purple Medeor and a blue Cemra," Mercedes told her. "They just turned onto Elmer."

“You’re the Reporter,” the woman said before he was put on hold again for her to speak through the scanner.

It was a moniker that Mercedes was devilishly pleased to bear. The Reporter. Dispatch thought he was a member of the press when he made these calls anonymously. He never gave them wrong information, leading them to believe he had a news helicopter following the scene. Mercedes didn’t view the act as being a snitch. It was more of a safeguard for himself to make sure an incompetent racer didn’t bear the title czar, reporting directly to him and therefore closer to him than was comfortable.

“Five oh, five oh!” Splinter shouted as two flashing red and blue triangles appeared on the map from the Washington Avenue turn.

Mercedes didn’t know how Stunt got the Psypher network to display cops like that, but he was grateful for it.

He muted the phone and unmuted the car. “Dropping off is a defeat,” Mercedes said. “Keep going.”

“Sir?” the woman said.

Mercedes switched the mutes.

“We have two units on Elmer Street,” she said.

“They will be heading west on Fossil Street and then south on Guess Boulevard after that,” Mercedes said.

The phone went back to hold.

“I need all units around the intersection of Fossil and Guess to prepare a barricade,” the woman’s voice said in his left ear.

“Mercedes, what’s on the scanner?” Splinter asked.

Mercedes switched the mutes again. “They’re on Elmer but you should be fine as you proceed around the next few turns,” he said.

“Hmph,” Charm’s voice said.

“Mister Reporter?” the woman said in his right ear.

"I'm stepping out," Mercedes told the racers as a line of flashing blue and red triangles appeared at the intersection of Fossil and Guess. He jabbed the mute button on the car before pulling the door open and stepping out. He thumbed the phone's mute button. "Yeah, I'm here," he breathed, pulling out a pack of cigarettes.

He pulled one out with his teeth and lit the end, taking a long drag before puffing smoke towards the afternoon sky.

"I'd set up another barricade where Guess crosses the railroad tracks at Broadway," Mercedes said. "And Main Street will be hit after that."

"Yes sir," the woman said.

The dispatcher never questioned how the Reporter could see the future of the race.

"I want air coverage."

Mercedes stiffened at the sound of the voice coming loudly through the puffy speakers sitting on the driver's seat of the open car door.

"Officer Curse wants a bird's eye view?" Mercedes asked as he puffed his cigarette. "It won't help."

"I want that Reporter found," Corey Curse's voice continued.

"Sir?" the woman said.

"E-excuse me," Mercedes said and hung up the burner phone.

"If he's up there, bring him down and bring him in," Corey said.

Mercedes stared at the cell phone for a moment before hurtling it off the parking garage roof. He didn't wait long enough to see or hear it smash in the street below. This hadn't happened before, but he knew one thing. If the task force had copters out, they were bound to spot his distinctive red-striped black Sevance Myndryt sportscar on the roof. He had to move. Hopefully the tips he provided to 0-1-1 were

enough to derail the Czar Challenge because he certainly wasn't calling back.

All he had to do was drive down a level to get out of view of the copters. Then he could watch the end of the race in safety. Mercedes took a final drag on his cigarette before throwing it over the edge of the roof after the phone. He grabbed up the headset for the scanner and dropped into the driver seat of the Myndryt, pulling the door closed behind himself. The console screen was overrun with flashing red and blue triangles. Mercedes started the car and kicked it into first gear. He slung the earphones onto his neck and cranked the volume up.

"We have three birds heading towards the downtown region," a male voice was saying. "They'll start the search at South Street and Oregon Avenue."

"Be quick about it," Corey replied. "I will not lose him this time."

"I don't see you getting out of the station and off your lazy ass to help us," a new voice spoke, chopper blades thwamping in the background.

Mercedes jerked the Myndryt forward and sped down the parking garage ramp. He navigated to the middle level, the fourth story. Only once he was securely parked in the dark between a white Erdoth Kolish, an electric-powered hatchback, and a gold Monoway Relevo Curion minivan did he check the map for any sign of his racers. A pack of flashing red and blue lights separated the blue and purple triangles, both of which were still following the route. Charm was in the lead, of course.

He clicked the mute button on the steering wheel. "Are you still up for the challenge, Splinter?" Mercedes asked.

"You know, I see that there's about thirty cruisers between me and him," Splinter said. "Even if I can get through them, I guess it might be hard to catch Charm."

“Challenge diffused,” Mercedes said. “I’ll catch you both at the Kegasaurus.”

About the Author

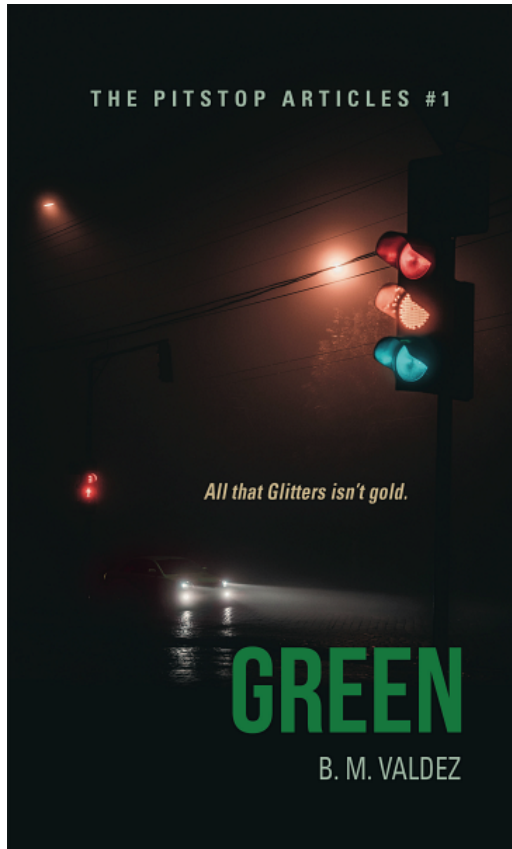
B. M. Valdez has been writing since they were a child in elementary school. Though they write a broad range of genres, including everything from dark fantasy to science fiction and even contemporary romance, Valdez considers themselves an author of queer stories above all else. Valdez is passionate about the LGBTQIA+ community, and their work always features a diverse cast of characters representing this community. *Relapse* is their first published novel.

Valdez believes that identity is ever evolving and is still on a journey of becoming more true to themselves. They hope that the community can continue to celebrate authentic selves.

When they aren't writing, Valdez enjoys spending time with their sibling playing video games, watching movies, or just generally having a good time. They can often be found covered in pet hair from their two dogs and two cats. They live in the Washington D. C. region of the east coast, though will always remember growing up on the Oregon Coast.

Without readers, B. M. Valdez would not have the opportunity to continue sharing their stories! They would love to connect with readers and can be found on the various sites below.

- bmvaldez.com
- B. M. Valdez on [Goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com/showauthor?author_id=14444444)
- B. M. Valdez on vocal.media
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