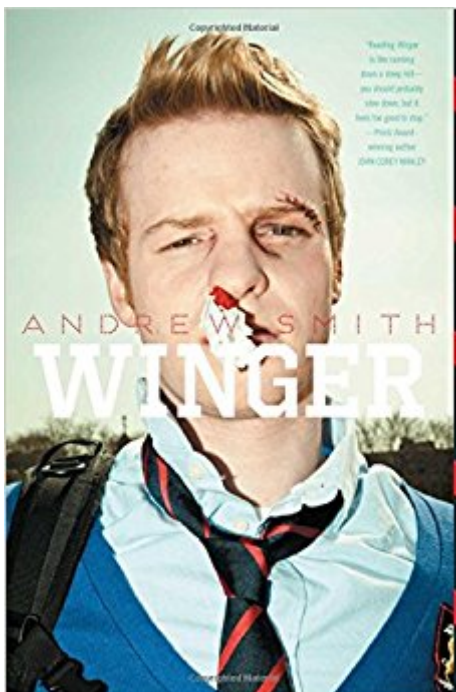


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Winger



Synopsis

A teen at boarding school grapples with life, love, and rugby in this unforgettable novel that is “alternately hilarious and painful, awkward and enlightening” (Publishers Weekly, starred review). Ryan Dean West is a fourteen-year-old junior at a boarding school for rich kids. He’s living in Opportunity Hall, the dorm for troublemakers, and rooming with the biggest bully on the rugby team. And he’s madly in love with his best friend Annie, who thinks of him as a little boy. Ryan Dean manages to survive life’s complications with the help of his sense of humor, rugby buddies, and his penchant for doodling comics. But when the unthinkable happens, he has to figure out how to hold on to what’s important, even when it feels like everything has fallen apart. Filled with hand-drawn infographics and illustrations and told in a pitch-perfect voice, this realistic depiction of a teen’s experience strikes an exceptional balance of hilarious and heartbreaking.

Book Information

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Paperback: 464 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 161 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #76,004 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > LGBT Issues #94 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Gay & Lesbian #129 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Boys & Men

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up • Ryan Dean West is the smartest student in the junior class at Pine Mountain boarding school, a starter on the rugby team, and two years younger than the rest of his classmates. He is also hopelessly in love with his best friend, Annie, who sees him as just a little kid. When Ryan Dean moves into Opportunity Hall, the dorm for misbehaving students (owing to an

illegal cell phone encounter the previous year), he finds himself at odds with his roommate, the meanest member of their rugby team. Mark Boyett does a wonderful job narrating, especially Ryan Dean's voice, which reveals his wild imagination, full-blown adolescent hormones, and self-deprecating humor. Other characters' voices are equally believable. Friend Seanny is rendered with a deadpan monotone, while Screaming Ned, an old man the boys offer a ride to, is cantankerous, confused, and done with a high-pitched, scratchy cackle. Ryan Dean's cartoons, doodles, and charts, which add such charm to the print version, are described so that the listener doesn't miss anything. The resulting audiobook is laugh-out-loud-funny at times and heartbreakingly serious at others. This is a terrific recording of an unforgettable book. —Julie Paladino, East Chapel Hill High School, Chapel Hill, NC --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Starred Review After he opened a vein in YA lit with *The Marbury Lens* (2010) and then went completely nutso in *Passenger* (2012), about the only thing that Smith could do to surprise would be a hornball boarding-school romantic romp. Surprise! Well, sort of. At 14, Ryan Dean West is a couple years younger (and scrawnier) than the rest of the juniors at Pine Mountain. He is a plucky kid despite a tendency to punctuate his every thought with "I am such a loser" who stars in the rugby team due to his speed and tenacity. The rail ties of his single-track mind, though, are his exploits (or lack thereof) with the opposite sex, particularly his best friend Annie, who thinks he is "adorable." In short, Ryan Dean is a slightly pervy but likable teen. He rates the hotness of every female in sight but also drops surprising bombs of personal depth on a friend, his homosexuality, the poisonous rivalries that can ruin friendships, and his own highly unstable mix of insecurity and evolving self-confidence. Much of the story seems preoccupied with the base-level joys and torments of being a teenager, content to float along with occasional bursts of levity from some nonessential but fun minicomics by Bosma. But at its heart, it is more in line with *Dead Poets Society*, and by the end this deceptively lightweight novel packs an unexpectedly ferocious punch. Grades 9-12. --Ian Chipman --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Right now I'm having a difficult time figuring out what I want to say about *Winger* because Andrew Smith left me heartbroken and hopeful at the same time. I can say that Ryan Dean West is now one of my favorite characters and *Winger* is now one of my favorite books. I absolutely love finding books with guy appeal. *Winger* falls into this category perfectly. Ryan Dean's voice struck true from the first to the last page. He's a

fourteen-year-old boy and he talks, thinks, and acts like one. Believe me, I've taught freshmen boys for the past six years. There's bathroom humor and humor from things that probably aren't supposed to be funny, but Ryan Dean's reactions and thoughts make this a laugh out loud book. For the first 400 pages I was constantly laughing and smiling. Andrew Smith's writing in this book made me think of Geoff Herbach's writing in Stupid Fast. Both stories are funny, include sports, and will get guys reading, but they also delve into a deeper story. When I read that this is heartbreaking, I kept waiting for something heartbreaking to happen and wondering what it would be. I was both prepared and unprepared for the moment. I'm not going to go into too much detail because I don't want to take away from that experience for you when you read Winger. I read the page and sighed because I expected something like that to happen. I turned the page, let the moment and scene hit me, and then I cried. Not long after I finished reading this I still had to keep taking deep breaths. I wasn't sobbing or anything, but I had to let myself digest what I read. I spent so much time loving this book and getting to know the characters that this moment felt like a punch in the face. And I mean that in the best possible way. I have mixed feelings about where this scene is placed, but I understand the reasoning for it. When you read it, which I hope you will, we should discuss it. Now, on to the whole John Green thing. I can already see the comparisons to John Green's writing and one of his books in particular. I get it. BUT, Winger is not that book and Andrew Smith is not John Green. I love John Green and all, but I don't think I've ever read one of his books and thought, "Yeah, my kids are just like (insert character name)." I've read his books and thought of students who would like reading them, but I've never been able to picture one of my students as a character. The characters in Winger are REAL. I pictured a number of former students and others when I was reading this. I'm confident that my students will appreciate this when they read it. The copy of Winger I read belongs to my local library, but you can be sure that I plan on buying at least two copies of this book for my classroom library. It's that kind of book. Andrew Smith has written something special. Similar Reads: Stupid Fast by Geoff Herbach, Leverage by Joshua C. Cohen

I used some grant money to purchase a class set of this book for my high school students to read, and it was one of the biggest hits of my teaching career. Yeah, the kids liked any excuse to read profanity, but, more important than that, the story grabbed them. Ryan Dean may be brilliant, but

he's also a 14-year-old, which means he does dumb stuff, usually in pursuit of love with Annie, the best friend he dearly wishes loved him romantically. He also does dumb stuff just to see if he can, and one of those stunts winds him up in his boarding school's dorm for troubled kids. Also there is Joey, a popular athlete. That Joey is also gay is almost a non-starter, but Andrew Smith knows his audience. He knows that while teenagers like to front as if they are open-minded, anything different scares them. The story will grab you from its first pages, just as the characters will grab your heart. I do recommend that you have a box of tissues nearby because you will cry. Some of my toughest boys admitted to "watery eyes" as they read this book. I love how Andrew Smith writes about and for teens. And I love Ryan Dean.

Wow. Just...wow. This book is freaking brilliant. I mean it. I think this is top 5 for this year, if not all time, and is most definitely the most heartbreaking this year if not all time. So one of the best things Winger has got going for it is it's male pov written by a male. This ship is real, y'all (unlike Ryan Dean, I try not to swear, even in my writing)! I mean, Ryan Dean is just such a....boy. A teenage boy at that. I had no trouble believing all the ridiculous things he thinks, says, and does throughout the novel. Peeing in a gatorade bottle rather than going to the bathroom? Check. Being pervy with every single female character (by "every single" I mean all of them, not single as in relationship status because...well, RDW has some homewrecker moments) in the book, particularly in his thoughts? Check. Ryan Dean is really astute and a remarkably good narrator, but he's also straight-up dumb sometimes, but that's okay because it fits so well with reality as well as the world of the book. See, when Ryan Dean is acting like a hormonal idiot, Andrew used his other characters to take up the slack. There's Joey Cosentino: the Voice of Reason. I don't care that Joey is gay, I am totally in love with him. Joey's job is to point out every time Ryan Dean is being stupid, but he always has RD's back, on the rugby field and off, and I have nothing but respect for him. He's a Nice Guy, but he's not above getting dirty to defend himself or calling someone out when they need to be put in place. There's Annie: the Best Friend and Love Interest. It's way cool seeing Annie face reality when it comes to her relationship with Ryan Dean. I, being a girl who at one time was sixteen, innately know what's going on in Annie's head so it's way cool understanding her thoughts while actually reading from Ryan Dean's mind. Love it. There's Chas: the Hostile Roommate & Teammate/Romantic Competition. Chas's purpose really confused me during much of the novel, but his presence actually puts Ryan Dean into the role of bad guy at one point, which forces the reader and Ryan Dean to actively acknowledge his fault. Also, Chas is instrumental to the resolution of Ryan Dean's story. There's Seanie (the Comic Relief, insofar as sometimes Ryan Dean has to be

serious for a second and not be funny himself) and JP (the Other Romanic Competition). These guys...well, I didn't care a whole whole lot for them because Seanie is just an oddball and JP is a douche, but again, we see Ryan Dean in a different light because of them. Ryan Dean makes a lot of mistakes, and Seanie and JP are kind of the collateral damage.

There's Megan: Love Interest/Temptation. While Annie is the attainable-but-unattainable best friend/crush, Megan is the unattainable-but-attainable (yes, there's a difference) hot girl that Ryan Dean wants because she's hot, but shouldn't want because she's otherwise taken. Yet, while Annie is spending her time wrestling with her feelings for Ryan Dean, Megan decisively chooses to spend some quality time with Ryan Dean pressed up against the water fountain, if you know what I mean. Megan helps Ryan Dean transform into the Wild Boy of Bainbridge Island.

There's Casey: the Bully. Grade A douchenozzle. Spends all his time picking on everybody else. His presence gives Ryan Dean the opportunity to be both the victim and the hero.

There's the staff: Mr. Farrow (Perpetually Absent Authority Figure), Ms. Singer (Perpetually Present Stick-Up-Her-Butt [possibly a broomstick] Female Authority Figure Who Might Be a Witch Constantly Cursing Ryan Dean), Mr. Wellins (Pervy Teacher Who Reads Sex Into Everything), Coach M (Authority Figure Who Actually Means Something to the Students), and Nurse Hickey (Hot Nurse With Suggestive Name). These characters aren't hugely present, but each one has a unique relationship with Ryan Dean so I figured I'd include them. There are others as well, like guys on the rugby and football teams, Isabel, Annie's parents, etc, but not too intricately included in the story. I did just kind of reduced all these characters to a small label-able characteristic or two, but trust me when I say they're important.

So the characters are all great. The story, at least at first, was a bit slow for me, but it picks up. I thought Winger was supposed to be just a funny novel. And it really is a hilarious look at Ryan Dean trying to fit in at his school, trying to navigate the waters of romance, trying to not die either on the rugby field (by an opponent OR teammate because it was touch-and-go sometimes), trying not to be cursed by Ms. Singer. Winger reads like a journal with Ryan Dean frequently breaking the fourth wall to talk to the reader, rating things on his ridiculous scales like my rating above, and drawing awesome cartoons. Seriously, the drawings add an awesome artistic element. I really hope this trend gets a kickstart because I love it. So I'm reading Winger, expecting it to continue the funny when WHAM! Out of absolutely nowhere, Andrew Smith decided to punch a hole through my heart. It took me a couple of weeks to read Winger, but one night I decided to just finish it in one sitting. It was about 1 AM so when this crazy unimaginable, unexpected, heart-wrenching event occurred, I couldn't take it anymore. Oh, sure, I finished Winger at about 1:30, and then for at least an additional 20 minutes I sobbed like my 3-year old niece when someone tells her no. So...thanks for that, Andrew Smith, you

cruel genius you!

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Winger

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