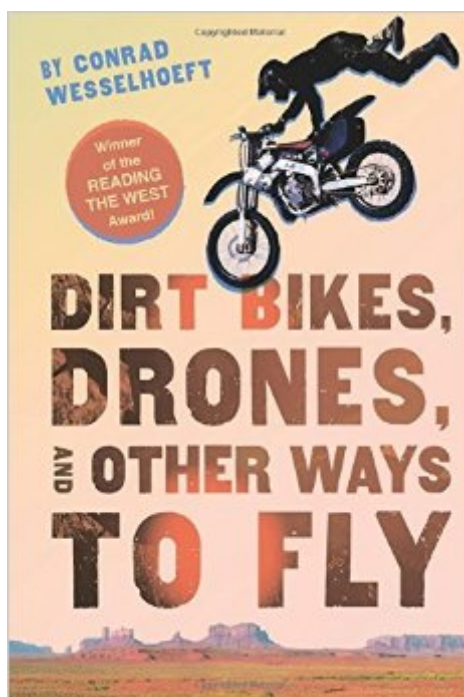


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Dirt Bikes, Drones, And Other Ways To Fly



Synopsis

Seventeen-year-old Arlo Santiago lives for the "Drone Zone" that free, joyful, anti-gravity feeling. He achieves the Zone with risky motorcycle stunts on New Mexico roads, or while playing his favorite video game, Drone Pilot. His gaming skills are so off-the-charts, he's recruited by the U.S. Air Force to remotely operate real-life drones in Pakistan. How can he refuse the paycheck when his little sister's health is at stake? This pull-no-punches novel soars, with poetic style, focus on friends and family, philosophical life-and-death musings, and vividly drawn setting of a land at the intersection of mesa dust and tractor rust.

Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars See all reviews (47 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #908,808 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #13 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > United States > 21st Century #226 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Middle East #233 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Violence

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

In *Dirt Bikes, Drones, and Other Ways to Fly* this author has taken what is actually a very time worn premise and used it as the basis for a story that is surprisingly original and very exciting. We've all read stories and seen movies about the young teen video game master who gets recruited by the government/abducted by aliens/kidnapped by terrorists because he is just so good at video games he can totally change the world. Arlo Santiago is that good at Drone Pilot, which turns out to be a video game that uses the same technology as the government. When White Sands comes calling, Arlo is drawn into the hunt for terrorists and must examine his own feelings about war and what he wants to do with his life. If that was all there was to this story, then I would certainly not be giving

this book five stars. Fortunately, there's a lot more to this novel that will speak to young readers with a voice that is unerringly authentic, action that is top notch, and a heart as big as the sky. Arlo is an adrenaline junkie. When he's not playing Drone Pilot, speeding off to White Sands to work with the military, or performing daring motorcycle jumps, this kid is sky diving. Yep, there's a little bit of everything in this book. Amidst all this action and adventure, Arlo is also dealing with the death of his mother, a father who seems determined to drown his sorrows in a bottle, and a sister with a degenerative, ultimately fatal disease. Add in a new girl who steals his heart, and you get a novel packed with emotion. This novel offers up some truly perceptive and poignant observations on family, love and grief. These characters are so complete and complex that they will steal your heart, spark your imagination and leave you wondering what you would do in their situations. I thoroughly enjoyed this author's portrayal of rural New Mexico. He really captured the spirit of the country without bogging down the narrative. The reader is left with a real sense of the beauty present in this land, so much so that the setting seems to become another character in the story. *Dirt Bikes, Drones, and Other Ways to Fly* is a wonderfully written, thoroughly entertaining novel that will appeal to young readers ages 13 and up. I enjoyed Arlo's introspection, intelligence, and daring. His is a strong voice that will resonate with readers young and old.

Fly with Arlo Santiago on his dirt bike and as he pilots drones over Northwest Pakistan. That's right, dirt bikes and drones in the same breath, just as the title says. But that's only part of this great yarn. At its heart lies Arlo's shattered family that must pull together after his mother's death and his father's newspaper goes under, all set in picturesque New Mexico mesa country. *DIRT BIKES* is really about the boy's many talents and his big heart, both fueled by generous amounts of testosterone. The characters are just one step the other side of ordinary: the pacing unstoppable. Best part of the book, however, is the author's use of language, pared down to razor-sharp essentials, perfectly reflecting the hero's state of mind. A thrilling read!

Arlo's life on the surface sounds like fun - he rides trick bikes and is the top player in the world at Drone Pilot. But under that he has to deal with his dad crawling into the bottle, his sister's Huntington's problems and they are all grieving the death of their mother. And now he's being hired by the government to fly drones over Pakistan. In some ways I get the parallels to *Ender's Game* but I think this book is perhaps a little deeper, a little closer to home.

I really have mixed feelings about this book. Some parts I really, really liked. When Arlo is on his

bike, Wesselhoeft makes you feel every bump, crunch and exhilarating emotion. When the author paints the New Mexico landscape you are right there on the mesa or in the canyon. The characters and relationships in this book are well developed and complex. All good things. Two, maybe three, hang ups. 1. This book should really be classified as a YA, not a children's book. The publisher recommends this book for 12 years and up. I would say that 9th grade would be more appropriate. The language is rough at times and the subject matter is pretty heavy. The main character is 17 years old and he acts and talks like an older teenager/almost man. I believe the story would be most meaningful to a high school student. 2. You are supposed to believe that the US Government secretly recruits this 17 year old and use him for an extremely important mission when: a. he gets absolutely no training b. when he makes it clear he is a pacifist (so they try to bribe him) c. use him when he could be mentally unstable and under the influence (of prescribed medicine) d. and the military believes he is the only one capable of flying the drone well enough to take the target out. This part of the plot so bothered me that I put down the book several times because I just couldn't get over this unrealistic portrayal. 3. This is not really a knock, just an observation. It seems like the author spoke both his political and faith beliefs through one character in particular, a high school english teacher. At times it seemed a little heavy handed. The bottom line: the book is about a young man wrestling with who he is as a man and how that is going to play out in his life.

Imagine a literary, realistic, contemporary version of Ender's Game. If this isn't on a bunch of award lists next year, I'll be shocked.

I loved it! The characters are likable, believable, interesting. The dialog is sharp and engaging. The New Mexico setting comes through in living color. And the story just flows " moves effortlessly forward at just the right pace. You know you're in the hands of a first-rate storyteller. This book is fun, it's poignant, it's tragic. And it gets you right inside the head of a teenage boy - with all the excitement, adrenaline, and tender feelings that involves. A terrific read.

Bought it yesterday and couldn't put it down. Real characters and a very riveting plot. Just what I was looking for.

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