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Rash



Synopsis

Consumption of alcohol: Illegal. Football and other "violent" sports: Illegal. Ownership of guns, chain saws, and/or large dogs: Illegal. Body piercings, tattoos: Illegal. It's late in the twenty-first century, and the United Safer States of America (USSA) has become a nation obsessed with safety. For Bo Marsten, a teenager who grew up in the USSA, it's all good. He knows the harsh laws were created to protect the people. But when Bo's temper flares out of control and he's sentenced to three years of manual labor, he's not so down with the law anymore. Bo's forced to live and work in a factory in the Canadian tundra. The warden running the place is totally out of his mind, and cares little for his inmates' safety. Bo will have to decide what's worse: a society that locks people up for road rage, or a prison where the wrong move could make you polar bear food.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Rash by Pete Hautman is a wry look at a possible 2070s United States, now called the USSA (United Safer States of America? United Socialist States of America?). In this dystopian society, Americans (as well as people in most other countries) have traded freedom and independence for safety. It's no longer legal to play football, or to run without wearing extensive padding a helmet. Alcohol, cigarettes, temper tantrums, hunting, large dogs - all illegal. Three quarters of people over the age of ten are on the drug Levulor, which slows their reflexes, and helps them to keep their tempers in check. Levulor apparently doesn't work all that well, though, because twenty-four percent

of adults are in prison. The government uses prison labor to do the jobs that other people don't want to do, like cleaning septic systems, working on roads, and making frozen food products. People are carted off for all sorts of minor infractions (including "self-mutilation", which can include weighing too much), because their labor is needed in the work camps. *Rash* is the story of sixteen-year-old Bo, who lives with his ineffectual mother and his nostalgic Gramps, while his father and older brother are off in prison. Sandbagged by a rival, Bo is unfairly blamed for a mysterious rash that spreads through his school. Pushed to the breaking point, he lashes out against his rival, and is sentenced to three years of labor in a prison camp up in the (former) Canadian tundra. The workers in this camp spend 18 hours a day, seven days a week, making pizzas. The camp actually reminded me a lot of the youth offender camp in "Holes", but set in a much colder climate. Taken out of the protective cushion of society, Bo encounters things he's never seen before. Deliberate violence and cruelty. Football.

Picture, if you will, life in the year 2076. You are living in The United Safer States of America and things such as obesity, verbal abuse, and dangerous activities are against the law. The legal driving age is twenty-six. Even sports such as football are illegal. Sports that are allowed are hindered due to all the safety gear the participants are required to wear. This is the world that sixteen-year-old Bo Marsten inhabits. Bo has inherited a bit of a temper from his father who has been in prison since 2073 for road rage. He has been in trouble at school many times for "failing to control his antisocial impulses," but when he is falsely accused of causing a rash that spreads throughout the school, his anger gets the best of him and he assaults a classmate. This action lands him in a work camp in the middle of the Canadian tundra that is surrounded by hungry polar bears. The work camp Bo is sent to is a factory that makes pizzas. He becomes a member of a four man team with the responsibility of using the pepperoni gun. Each pull of the trigger on the pepperoni gun delivers twenty-six pepperoni on each pizza. When the team works in sync, life isn't so bad. There is only one group that causes Bo problems while he is there, the Goldshirts. The Goldshirts are an elite group at the pizza factory that have special privileges like a variety of food, when the others only have defective pizzas to eat for every meal, every day. The Goldshirts main job is to play football for the warden. All new editions to the work camp eventually have a tryout in front of the warden. This entails running and catching a pass. If you catch it, you become a Goldshirt and are placed on the team.

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