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Every afternoon Sean Benning picks up his son, Toby, on the marble steps that lead into the prestigious Bradley School. Everything at Bradley is accelerated—3rd graders read at the 6th grade level, they have labs and facilities to rival most universities, and the chess champions are the bullies. A single dad and struggling artist, Sean sticks out like a sore thumb amongst the power-soccer-mom cliques and ladies-who-lunch that congregate on the steps every afternoon. But at least Toby is thriving and getting the best education money can buy. Or is he?

When Sean starts getting pressure from the school to put Toby on medication for ADD, something smells fishy, and it isn't the caviar that was served at last week's PTA meeting. Toby's "issues" in school seem, to Sean, to be nothing more than normal behavior for an eight-year-old boy. But maybe Sean just isn't seeing things clearly, which has been harder and harder to do since Toby's new teacher, Jess, started at Bradley. And the school has Toby's best interests at heart, right? But what happens when the pressure to not just keep up, but to exceed, takes hold? When things take a tragic turn, Sean realizes that the price of this accelerated life is higher than he could have ever imagined.

Accelerated Details

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From Reader Review Accelerated for online ebook

Melissa Lee-Tammeus says

I am still not sure how I feel about this book. It makes me really want to do my homework on ADHD and ADD. And I question if this was a political and medical war cry disguised as fiction. How true are all the facts spouted in the book and could this really happen? Maybe and probably does already. It definitely makes one question the use of psychotic drugs in children and this ideal of pushing our kids to the limits of academic achievements. Not sure I really cared about the characters, but I couldn't help but wonder how it was all going to turn out. A little bit too much of a "wrap it up in a bow and call it a day" ending, but a good read none the less if you want to take a very biased viewpoint of a very big subject.

Christa says

This was just not a good book. I decided to give this a shot because the subject--over-medication of kids at swanky NYC private schools--seemed pretty interesting, but the story definitely didn't live up to it.

What went wrong? The whole thing just wasn't believable. The author seemed to have a hard time nailing down how an 8-year-old kid should act, making the kid seem more like a 5 year old in some spots but with the maturity of a high schooler in others. The grandparents were one-dimensionally atrocious. The teacher showed remarkably poor judgment in her relationship with Sean, who I just didn't care for at all. And all this isn't even counting the ADHD part...

I'd give this 1 and a half stars, mainly because I did finish it and it was a quick read.

Pete Danko says

Bronwen Hruska spins a great tale here that -- especially if you are a parent, and even more so if you are a parent of a boy -- will get you thinking long and hard about how hard to push your kids and what to expect from them. Ms. Hruska has a lot of fun skewering the Manhattanites who send their charges to exclusive schools -- and you'll have fun reading about them -- but not too much fun; it's all rather disturbing, with a larger social commentary emerging about a culture increasingly disconnected from what is real and what is important. Highly recommended.

Beverly says

the abuse of drugs at elementary prep schools, I had no idea this was a thing.

Beth Knight says

Warning: This review is full of spoilers. It also contains quotes of a sexual nature, so if that kind of things offends you don't read this review.

I thought I was going to like this book; I really WANTED to like this book. In reading the description, I found it contains elements that I like: it's about school, a snooty private school. My oldest son went to a private school from preschool-8th grade (only because at the time we lived in a place where the public school system stank) and I went to private school from 7th-12th grade (because my parents thought ALL public schools stank), so I'm familiar with the type of entitled, snotty, monied people who populate those places, and it's about ADD/ADHD and how our society over-medicates. So private school plus a controversial topic sounded perfect to me.

I was looking for a more serious book. I realize this is a work of fiction but I wasn't expecting "fluff." This book ended up being too "chick-lit" for my taste. To begin with, I didn't like the gratuitous sex. I'm not anywhere near a prude but the sex in this book was cliché. The main character in the book, Sean Benning, was recently dumped by his wife, who flipped out one day and left home, leaving their 8 year old son in Sean's care. Within the first few pages of the book we see him having sex with another parent in the bathroom of someone's home during a school fund raiser. She, of course, is married, which is supposed to add to the "hotness" of the scene. "She yanked on his belt buckle and a laser-like flash blinded him. When he got his vision back, he realized that the gumball-size rock on her finger was reflecting the overhead lights into rainbow beams. Kind of like a superhero ring. He'd never seen Cheryl's husband and now he was forced to wonder how big the guy was and if he could throw a punch. Then he remembered she was married to a famous neurosurgeon who traveled around the world saving lives. A guy like that would never risk messing up his hands." (Oh yeah, there's a lot of name dropping in the book, including Bill Clinton at a dinner party given by an uber rich man who happens to be a graduate of the school Sean's son attends). Anyway, the sex scene continues with Cheryl on the bathroom sink (so original) and Sean thinking about how touching Cheryl's breast implants (because of course she has them) is like playing with water balloons. Sexy!!!

Next we find out that Sean's son Toby is having some trouble in school (in other words, he's not 3 grades ahead like every other child at the school) so he's sent to a psychiatrist for evaluation. Toby is diagnosed with ADHD and medication is given. Sean isn't happy with this but caves in, despite his better judgment, and gives Toby the medication. In the meantime, Toby's best friend is found by Sean and Toby's teacher (Jess), lying in the stairwell, unconscious, at the school. He's rushed to the hospital and dies a few days later, apparently of a peanut allergy that no one knew he had. In the meantime, Sean scores with Toby's teacher, who just happens to be engaged to a man she's having problems with. And here's part of one of those sex scenes:"He was blurry with desire and the overload of sensation and almost fell over when Jess's body began to shake. He tried to spread his legs wider for a better foundation, even though his ankles were still shackled by his boxers. The shaking set off a reaction in him that involved his entire body seizing up and releasing. Without warning, his legs went wobbly and staying upright became much harder. And though his problem-solving skills were impaired, he managed to anchor himself against the closet doors to keep from falling over." It's OK, you can laugh. I did. Again we get to experience more cliché sex scenes. The teacher goes back to her fiance and then leaves him again because of course there has to be a ridiculous "I love him. I don't love him" romance in a book where an 8 year old has died. And this, of course, leads to another medical emergency: Toby has collapsed during gym class and is taken to the hospital where Sean learns Toby may die if he doesn't come out of the coma he's in within 48 hours. Melodrama!! Predictably, Toby pulls out of the coma and is fine. Sean starts thinking that the school may be falsifying documents in order to place the majority of students on medication. He and the Toby's teacher launch an investigation. And what do they find upon breaking into the nurse's office at school? 100s of bottles of medication, one for almost every child at school. And what are they? They're all for ADD/ADHD. What a surprise!!! Oh, and of course Toby's friend didn't die from a peanut allergy, he died of an overdose of ADD medication. Surprised??? Not. And of course, the parents of said child went along with the school's coverup of claiming their child died due to a peanut allergy. Why wouldn't they?

Naturally, it's a conspiracy that almost every teacher, the school psychologist, the headmaster and the nurse is in on. After further melodrama, including having Sean's art showing (he works for a rag celebrity gossip magazine but is an artist on the side) cancelled due to the influence of the school's all-powerful headmaster,

the book ends on a happy note of Sean, Toby and Jess all moving away together and living happily ever after. Oh, I forgot to mention that somewhere in all this mess, Toby's mother came back home to care for Toby after he was released from the hospital. And after much resistance on the part of Sean (haha), he ends up having sex with his wife. But...in the middle of the sex, he decides that the sex with her is too "same old, same old" and he wants no part of it. Does it get any better than this?

The sad thing is, this book might have been good if the focus was on ADD/ADHD. There could have been a good story here if there wasn't the crappy sex, the weird name-dropping and all the crazy melodrama. I do think there's schools and teachers who, when confronted with children who learn differently or who can't sit still for hours on end, like to use convenient labels and refer those students for testing in the hope that those kids will be medicated and then become the robots they want to have in class. Yes, there are kids who truly have ADD/ADHD and medication is beneficial for them, but I also believe that there are children being misdiagnosed and medicated for no reason other than they don't fit the mold that ineffective teachers want them to fit into. If the book would have focused on those issues and had been written in a more serious manner, I think the book would have been good instead of being the cliched melodramatic piece of fluff I found it to be.

Joni Daniels says

Children as resume: this book explores the pressure on parents from internal needs, social pressure, school, medical and psychological professional opinion/advice/influence and the potential consequences when things don't go according to plan. While I'll admit to finding Dad Sean's behavior wanting (he has no strong inner voice, seems baffled that he has grown up to be a father, husband, employee, has sex without thinking much about the consequences beyond the actual act) I also get that this is the story where he figures things out for himself. While the book has a clear point of view about medication for ADHD/ADD, it also provides interesting data to think about. The ending was never in question for the main characters, but it was still worth the read.

Lauradownsify says

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a highly impairing condition, associated with impulsivity, increased risk of substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, and increased risk of physical injury, just to name a few. By propagating the myth that this diagnosis is given to children who just have a harder time paying attention, this author is undercutting the validity of a condition which has a broad negative impact on the lives of those it affects. This author has no idea what she's talking about, and should not be writing about ADHD without having read the vast body of empirical psychological research which has been conducted on this disorder. Having read her opinion piece in the New York Times, it sounds like her son was misdiagnosed with ADHD. However, as a parent, she did have the option to seek a second opinion, or attempt to use behavioral strategies to improve his behavior. Ultimately, medication is the decision of the parent. Not the decision of teachers, not the decision of doctors, it is solely the decision of the parent. Books like this contribute to the increasing amount of stigma directed towards those individuals with a valid diagnosis of ADHD.

Kristin Strong says

Interesting premise. Main character well-enough drawn. But VERY poorly edited. Limited vocabulary -- people "whine" too much. Misspellings galore: for example, a song does not have a baseline; it has a BASS LINE. A large group of beings is not a hoard; it is a HORDE. Inconsistencies in narrative: When the main character is upset on the phone, he opens the conversation by "screaming"; later on he is just "almost shouting" at her. It's irritating. And I'm SICK of books where characters meet, screw around, and turn out to be the loves of each other's lives. That's irritating too. And it's cheap. Somebody needs to edit this junk and make it less disrespectful of the reader. This one could have been much better.

Alyssa says

Despite being released in tasteful hardcover, this is the same kind of trashy thriller as *The Select*, with an evil private school instead of an evil med school. It actually reads as a pretty good parody of that type of book, which I can only hope was the author's intent.

Debra Martin says

How far would you go to help your child get ahead at school? This is the question being put to Sean Benning. His son Toby is in third grade at the prestigious Bradley School. The outrageous tuition is being paid his wife's parents. When the wife takes off, Sean is left to pick up the pieces and take care of everything to do with Toby's education. When the school starts pressuring Sean to put Toby on ADHD medication, he balks at the idea, but reluctantly he gives in. He mistakenly believes that the school has only Toby's best interests at heart. When a near-tragedy strikes, Sean uncovers a more sinister reason why so many of Toby's classmates and for that matter, most of the students at Bradley, are on ADD/ADHD medication.

This book is timely especially in light of the rapid rise in ADD/ADHD diagnosis' being made for today's grade school kids. Why are there so many more kids being diagnosed with this condition and is a subjective impression by a health care professional really enough evidence to accurately diagnosis this? I found the beginning of the book a bit slow, but there is no doubt that Sean has only the best interests of his son at heart. The difficulty of being a single parent will ring true for a great many readers. This story highlights many of those difficulties especially making life-changing decisions. I did find the whole "in crowd" social parties a bit over the top with Bruce Springsteen and former President Bill Clinton making appearances. I don't think they were needed to highlight the differences between the wealthy elite and Sean's humble circumstances. Readers who struggle with their own family issues of ADD/ADHD will certainly find ACCELERATED an enlightening read. Recommended.

I received this book from the publisher in exchange for a fair and honest review. My disclosure policy can be found here: <http://twoendsofthepen.blogspot.com/p...>

Laura says

The best thing about this book is the author's name. Okay, maybe it's not that bad but it certainly could have

been better. The sex is gratuitous, and unbelievable, the plot is so thin that it's see-through, and the ending is pat and trite. In addition, Hruska throws around a lot of factoids about ADHD and the drugs used to treat it as if she has researched it. Unfortunately she does not include sources for her information thus raising questions about their validity. This is just irresponsible. The defense "but it's just a novel" is not good enough if the author is going to throw around statistics as if she is authority. As a journalist Hruska should know better.

The novel starts with a suddenly single dad raising his son in NYC. Sean, the dad, is so incompetent that he can't even remember to buy food, but, lucky for him, Grandpa and Grandma are footing the bill for Toby, the son, to go to the best school in the city. The first scene is at a parent party where Sean ends up in a steamy, bathroom sex session. Soon Sean is also banging his son's new teacher while questioning the diagnosis of ADHD that his son has received. Is the ADHD drug causing deaths? Is his son's school covering up deaths and illnesses with stories of peanut allergies? Is there a big conspiracy to keep boys medicated? Will our dad win the day? Um, yes to all of the above. Is this a spoiler? I think not because I had it all figured out well before the end of this book. This could have been a good story but somehow it just fell flat.

Orland Outland says

Very much the work of a "Lifetime movie" scriptwriter...the "big crisis" occurs exactly 2/3 of the way through. The research is almost literally cut and pasted in, in the form of article titles, etc. The "reveal" of the private school's dark secret is preposterous, as is the ridiculously happy ending in absolutely every way for absolutely every major "good" character, and the bad end for all the "bad" ones that it boggles description. The relationship between the mentally ill mother and the main character/dad is "dramatic" in that it would make okay dialogue in a bad movie but not much more than that. It's written by a scriptwriter who would be counting on actors to make up the difference in impact that's missing on the page but this is a novel so that's not going to work. The characters she tries to make larger than life, like the Ted Turner-esque billionaire, come off as the most cardboard and phony, while Bill Clinton's cameo oddly enough seems more realistic - she must have met him and pretty much transcribed the encounter. Veto.

Randy Briggs says

This novel started out as a satire of Upper East Side schools, the students, and their parents. Then about halfway in, it turns into a child-drugging conspiracy. Having worked in schools, I found this premise totally believable. In my schools, there are large numbers of children on ADD meds, and each classroom has at least four personal monitors to assist these children. I enjoyed BOTH parts of the book. The second half was a tense, gripping tale about unraveling a conspiracy. As I said before, highly probable and believable.

Juliet says

I feel so lucky I got to read this book in galley way before all the press about it started--it's fun watching everybody else start discovering something you already know is pretty great.

The story is definitely entertaining and page-turning, but aside from the fact that this book is a great read, the eye-opening factor is very high. The reality of prescription drug usage against the backdrop of an education

system that overburdens students, teachers, administrators and parents is something that hasn't gotten enough mainstream attention and which has complicated--and irreparably damaged certain segments of--a generation of future leaders. I think this book is a great tool for opening up this important conversation with a friendly fictional framework.

Jeff says

I was looking through the goodreads reviews of Hruska's beautifully written first book and realized that some readers don't see it as a novel (which it is), but rather as the author's Op-Ed on ADHD (which it is not). I can't imagine what I would conclude about Stephen King if I decided his protagonists were reflections of his personal philosophy, as opposed to the fruit of his creativity and hard work.

I loved Accelerated. It's a novel about a father doing battle against a New York private school, which sounds innocuous, perhaps even boring to some. But not only is the story compelling, the way it is constructed--as a fast-paced mystery/thriller/love story (with great sex)--makes putting it down extraordinarily difficult. Hruska is off to a great start, and I can't wait to read what's next.
