DRAW THE LINE

LAURENT LINN

Emmy winning puppeteer Laurent Linn offers a debut about a closeted gay teen in love with comic books and drawing. It's sure to provide comfort and joy to some kids, whether they dig our hero Adrian's sexy superhero online comic (inspired by Renaissance art), his gaggle of supportive friends (including a sassy, full-figured and full of confidence female senior and a more despondent goth boy with an alcoholic, born again Mom), the new world he discovers at a gay center (including bingo nights overseen by drag queens), and the blissful fantasy of standing up to bullies, getting a boyfriend and having his parents politely urge him to come out to them, all in about a week. What's not to like? The book combines the usual self-aware teen angst with images of Adrian's artwork, a gambit done more effectively in "Winger" by Andrew Smith and elsewhere. In terms of plot and character development, it's so familiar and so rote that for those who've already read dozens of other books in the same vein, "Draw The Line" is oddly comforting. Gay teen novels are a dime a dozen now, not some shocking controversy they might have been even 20 years ago. Linn's book is wise enough to show the work that needs to be done (administrators still prefer to protect their star athletes; students still watch passively when others are picked on). But the "been there, read that" vibe it evokes for savvier readers shows how far we've come. When supportive parents and gay centers and out students dancing and kissing at a school event seem routine, surely something is going right. Linn might well inspire some teen who hasn't seen their life depicted on the page before. And some of the beats here feel fresh, from Adrian's passive superhero dubbed Graphite who has no interest in destroying but would rather create to the unabashadly sexy making-out sessions between Adrian and his boyfriend. So next time hopefully Linn will be inspired to move beyond a story with good intentions and let his freak flag fly just as proudly as his rainbow one. -- Michael Giltz