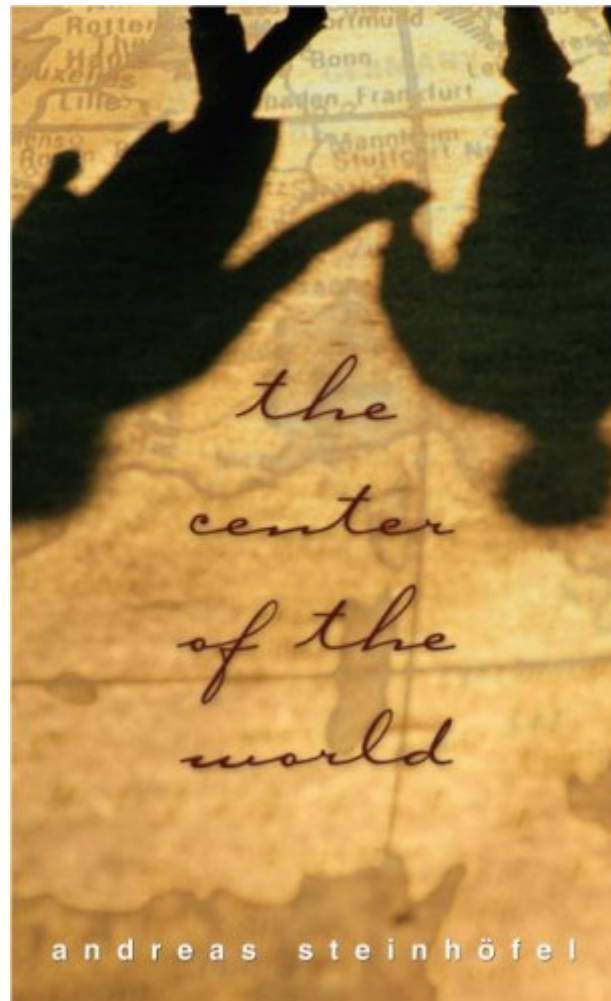




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The Center Of The World



Synopsis

Seventeen-year-old Phil has felt like an outsider as long as he can remember. All Phil has ever known about his father is that he was Number Three on his mother's long list of third in a series of affairs that have set Phil's family even further apart from the critical townspeople across the river. As for his own sexuality, Phil doesn't care what the neighbors will think; he's just waiting for the right guy to come along. But Phil can't remain a bystander forever. Not when he's surrounded by his mother, Glass, who lives by her own rules and urges Phil to be equally strong; his sister, Dianne, who is abrupt and willful, with secrets to share; his uncle Gable, a restless mariner, defined by his scars; his best friend, Kat, who is generous but possessive. And finally, there is distant Nicholas, with whom Phil falls overwhelmingly in love—until he faces the ultimate betrayal and must finally find his worth . . . and place in the world. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

characters were accurate and believable. However, not much to the plot. I got bogged down with the

message.

Somewhat tedious.

I liked this book a great deal and if I'd been part of its target audience - it's aimed at young adult readers and I'm depressingly far from that demographic - I'm pretty sure I would have loved it, and given it five stars and raved about it to everyone. It's a story about love and secrets, trust and betrayal, a story with as narrator a seventeen-year old boy who is gay and refreshingly free of guilt, although not of desire. It's an odd, but successful mixture of gothic romance, coming of age story and, in its way, celebration of the world. A hymn to what the world offers. At one point, the library in the house that provides the core setting for the novel is referred to as the center of the world, and this partly explains the title - books and letters play a significant part in the novel - but if the library is the world it's also true that the world is a book or collection of books, and Phil's gradual reading of the world, as it is and as it might be, as the novel develops - perhaps not always as smoothly as it might, but always with heart and nerve - is a joy to witness.

A coming of age story set in a remote mountain range in Germany; Steinhofel weaves the elegant tale of a seventeen-year-old boy named Phil. Although the novel does deal with Phil's sexuality, it primarily illustrates his tumultuous relationship with his unconventional mother, Glass, and reclusive twin sister, Dianne. From the birth of Phil and Dianne by their teenage mother in the prologue of the story, the family occupies a large estate, called Visible, on the outskirts of a socially repressive and ultra-conservative town. The town not only discriminates against Glass because of her promiscuous nature, but they transfer their criticisms to her two children. Therefore, throughout Phil's childhood, he feels ostracized despite his mother's advice to ignore the harshness of the "Little People," or the people who inhabit the town. Phil does discover refuge in the form of a young and vivacious girl named Kat, who becomes his one and only ally. However, despite Phil's seeming acceptance of his sexuality, he does not believe that his family or his friends would approve of his relationship with a charming and attractive runner, named Nicholas, who becomes his first boyfriend. The novel is written in a first-person narrative with intermittent flashbacks that describe the roots of Phil's personality. Steinhofel's greatest accomplishment is that he portrays homosexual relationships as the equivalent of heterosexual relationships. By demonstrating that the journey toward self-discovery of a young gay man is the same as that of a young straight man, Steinhofel shows that discriminatory views on homosexuality are completely unfounded. In addition to vividly depicting

Visible's breathtaking surroundings, his crisp and graceful prose provides insight into Phil's complex thoughts and emotions. Satisfying the reader with Phil's self-discovery, Steinhofel does an excellent job of balancing the scales between satisfaction and misery, having and wanting. By the end of the novel, one aches with a confused combination of happiness and grief. Steinhofel and his novel deserve every word of praise!

Reviewed by Flamingnet reviewer for Flamingnet Book Reviews[...]Preteen, teen, and young adult book reviews and recommendations

This 480 pages long story is labeled as a novel for teenagers, but adults like me (43 years old) can also highly enjoy it. The only teenage thing about this book is the setting in which the protagonist, youngster Phil, lives: school, home and falling in love for the first time. What is the real item of this book? That's kind of hard to explain. I could call it a coming-of-age drama, yet it goes deeper. Phil has a hard time connecting to kids his age. Not mainly because he is gay, but due to his sensitiveness and intelligence. He can see right through bourgeoisie and rejects those 'little people' (his mothers' words) but still he needs human warmth. How to get it? His mother is a selfish men-chasing woman, and his sister is a very closed and very dark character. Phil's best friend is a smart and direct girl, but can he trust her? The same counts for his love-interest, a selfcentered athlete. Maybe that's what the story is about, a search for trust. Why is it so difficult to find? Is it Phil's issue or is he surrounded by the 'wrong' people?

The Center of the World by Andreas Steinhofel is by far one of my favorite books. I hate to see it labeled into one category because while the main character, Phil, is coming into his own identity, the book encompasses so many different themes that I hesitate to label it at all. Written so seamlessly and clearly (credit to the translator) and with vivid, interesting, and developed characters it's more than easy to get lost in this 400+ page novel. The scenes are unforgettable and there are no loose ends when the story wraps itself up. The nearest thing I can compare this to is "Lost in Translation" because of its raw emotion and fluidity when almost nothing seems to happen, but in that nothingness lies inherent meaning. I'd advise everyone to pick this up. My only complaint is that the prologue is not nearly as well-written (credit to the translator) or interesting as the rest, though I suggest reading it (the prologue) for the heck of it. This is not, however, a book for children as this book does contain sex (not graphic) and violence.

The Center of the World was one of the best books I have ever read. It opens your mind to new things and lets you see experiences some people go through in their life. I know that is a fictional

book, but I can't help but think that there is some truth to it. If you have an open mind and love reading coming of age novels this would be the book for you. Its very though provoking, sometimes absurd, and wonderful all at the same time. You can't help but turn page after page.

I would explain the plot, but I think that's been covered very well. Suffice to say, I've read thousands of books and this one reigns as my absolute definitive favorite.

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