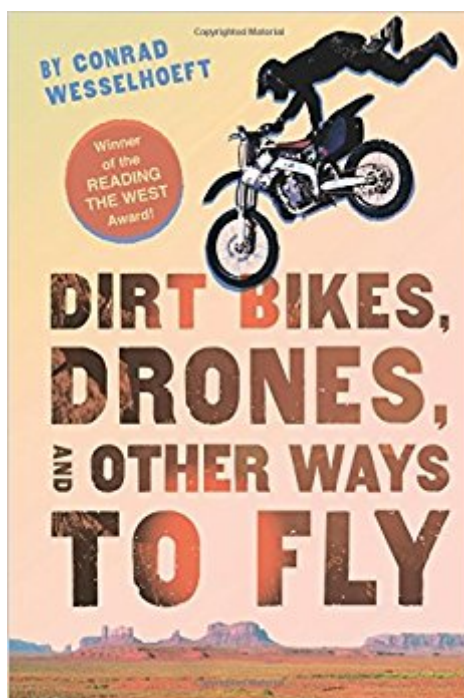


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# Dirt Bikes, Drones, And Other Ways To Fly



## 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

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up • Arlo Santiago, 17, is a lover of all things extreme, from racing his dirt bike through the New Mexican landscape to competing for the highest score on the video game Drone Pilot. However, it may all be just a cover for dealing with the darkness in his life: his mother’s death was all-too sudden, his father drinks too much, and his sister is slowly deteriorating from Huntington’s disease. In a plot point that borders a bit on the unbelievable, Arlo’s life takes a sudden turn when he is recruited by the United States Air Force to fly a real military drone in an effort to catch the leader of a terrorist group hiding in the mountains of Pakistan. On top of that, his talent for dirt bike racing fuels various dangerous stunts throughout the novel. This sophomore effort from

Wesselhoeft feels like a combination of poetry and adrenaline, with sometimes mixed, unfocused results. Fortunately, Arlo is a lyrical wordsmith, and at times, readers can feel transported right into his struggle to deal with his emotions. Other times, however, there's so much action that teens will have to hold on desperately for the ride. Still, it makes for a moving story about loss, love, and learning to let go. Give this to fans of similarly amped-up fiction by Chris Lynch and Carl Deuker. — Kimberly Castle-Alberts, Hudson Library & Historical Society, OH --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Readers will worry, laugh and ultimately soar along with Arlo as he finds his way. Nuanced supporting characters and a vivid New Mexico landscape ground Arlo's dilemma, creating a superbly well-balanced narrative.” — Kirkus, starred review  
“A moving story about loss, love, and learning to let go.” — School Library Journal  
“Wesselhoeft's mesmerizing descriptions of Arlo's New Mexico home...and giddy exhilaration when he's riding his Yamaha bike...will keep readers in the thrill of the moment.” — Publishers Weekly  
“Features both a supporting cast lit up with larger-than-life characters and a protagonist who loves flying recklessly close to the edge but makes right choices in the clutch.” — Booklist

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book; I am from the area where the majority of the story takes place and the author has definitely captured the essence of the "Land of Enchantment." The characters and the landscape have a strong connection, and even though the characters are mostly young adults they were relatable and interesting. (I think I would have really enjoyed reading this when I was in high school as well.) The drone action and the motorcycle parts makes the story exciting and relevant and make you want to see what happens next. My favorite part is the layered nature of the book; the subtle moral underpinnings of the character's motivations are what drive the book, and ultimately make it a heartfelt, conquering, and enjoyable read. I would recommend this book specifically to young adults, anyone who has ever lived in the southwest, and anyone who needs the inspiration to take the bull by the horns and not merely survive this life, but thrive.

Wonderful characters and stunning prose! This book is by turns warm, chilling, funny, and heart breaking. The writing, the hard, real choices faced by Arlo, and the perfectly painted setting of northeastern New Mexico are all perfect. A really great read!

Great novel for boys about video games, air force, sky-diving, thrill seeking behavior and family.

Yes thank you, will be a Christmas gift for a 12 yr old

Beautiful story, beautifully written.

My 12 year old loves this book

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.

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.

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