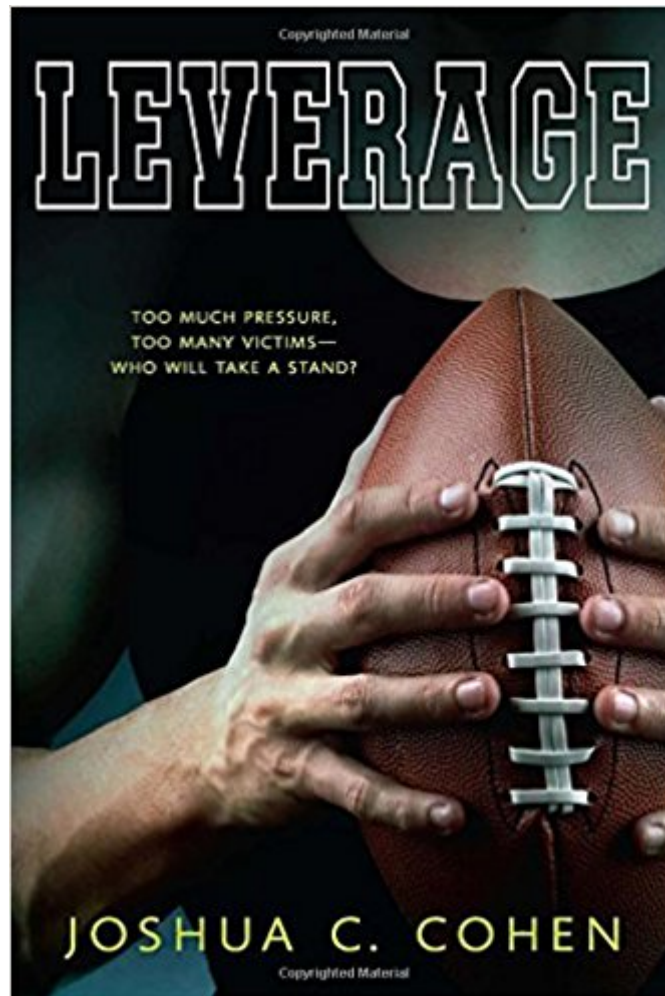




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# Leverage



## Synopsis

A timely book about bullies, their victims, and a high school football team where winning is the only thing that matters. This intense sports novel will strike a chord with those who followed the tragic football stories that broke in 2011. In this heart-pounding debut, Joshua C. Cohen conveys the pressures and politics of being a high school athlete in a way that is both insightful and compelling. At Oregrove High, there's an extraordinary price for victory, paid both on and off the football field, and it claims its victims without mercy. When the unthinkable happens, an unlikely friendship is at the heart of an increasingly violent, steroid-infused power struggle. This is a book that will stay with readers long after they turn the last page.

## Book Information

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[Family Issues > Drugs & Alcohol Abuse](#) #135 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Bullying](#)

## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** Sports novels don't hit much harder than this. Sophomore Danny may be a rising star on the gymnastics team, but that figures little in his daily life, where his small size makes him a target for the school's ruling class—the hormone-pumped, college-scouted stars of the football team. A minor grudge escalates until horrific revenge is taken upon one of Danny's teammates. Coming to the rescue, however, is Kurt, a behemoth new fullback whose scarred face and stuttering speech hint at a past that puts him at odds with his teammates. Told from the well-drawn alternating perspectives of Danny and Kurt, this is not a book about steroids; they exist, and they exacerbate the strife, but even Kurt admits that they have some short-term benefits. Rather, this is a novel about being trapped inside a web of expectations, where

one's family, community, team, and future rest on the assumed perpetuation of the established social order. Sports fans will love Cohen's style: direct, goal oriented, and filled with sensory detail. Characters and subplots are overly abundant yet add a deepness rarely found in comparable books. Drugs, rape, language, and violence make this book serious business, but those with experience will tell you that sports is serious business, too. Grades 10-12. --Daniel Kraus  
--This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Joshua C. Cohen is a former collegiate gymnast who now lives with his wife in New York City.

Joshua C. Cohen is an author to watch! *Leverage* is an edgy, emotional, gripping debut. It will appeal to those who enjoy sports, but it's about more than sports. It's about loyalty, courage, and standing up for what's right, even when the odds are against you. Kelly at Stacked has been telling me to read this for months, but I can't say why I put it off for so long. I'm actually mad at myself for waiting so long to read *Leverage*. When I told my students about the Y.A. Cybils finalists, one of my Y.A. Lit students asked if he could read it for his project (sports in Y.A.). He reported back to me as he was reading it, and eventually another student in class went to our library to get himself a copy. Once my student finished *Leverage*, he came into class telling me all about it and preparing me for some of the events/scenes in the novel. After this interaction with him, I started it right away. Just like my student, I came into school and kept up our conversation, this time sharing my thoughts about the story. This kind of interaction/relationship with my students is why I love sharing books with them. I'm happy one of my older students read *Leverage* first because it's a mature read. I knew something bad was going to happen as the prank war escalated, but even after my student's warning, I never expected it to get as bad as it did. Without spoiling the novel, one scene in particular is horrific and haunting. I had a feeling something like that might happen, but I hoped it wouldn't. It's a graphic scene, so if you're working with younger students, you might want to read *Leverage* first before you hand it to one of them. Or at the very least, let these readers know that it's a mature and sometimes graphic novel. While I was heartbroken after this event, I understand why Cohen included it. It really sets up the characterization of Danny and Kurt. I really enjoy novels that switch points of view, because it allows for more understanding of the events in the story. Kurt and Danny are written so well, that I couldn't choose which character I preferred more. Both characters are flawed and motivated by their emotions. Kurt

has a past no person would wish on another, and Danny is searching for praise and perfection. Kurt's goal is to leave his past behind, so he's working out constantly in hopes for a football scholarship. Football also allows him to release his anger and frustration. His helmet helps him speak without a stutter, which makes him feel more powerful and in control. He can also hide his scars, both physical and emotional. Danny's mother died, so now it's just him and his dad. His dad doesn't seem to take Danny's sport seriously, he sees gymnastics as a hobby.

Danny's hoping to become captain one day and receive a scholarship, but he also wants his dad's approval and recognition. Danny and Kurt may play different sports and be vastly different physically, but both have similar aspirations. It's not really until the heartbreaking scene that these two characters come together and work towards justice. It's this scene that really shows how flawed Danny and Kurt are, but even while I was yearning for them to do something, I understood their hesitation. Joshua C. Cohen not only created complex characters, he has written a novel that makes the reader question what he/she would do if placed in Danny or Kurt's position. Once you think about this from the character's perspective, it's difficult to judge them for their actions and/or inaction. *Leverage* isn't a novel for the faint of heart, because like Kelly told me, it will devastate you. And while much of the novel is dismal, I knew there would be some hope towards the end. Although the ending itself, I'm not so sure about. Parts of it didn't feel very believable to me, but that might depend on the reader. If you decide to read *Leverage*, be prepared for an intense reading experience and an emotional connection to the characters. *Leverage* is a story about bullying to the extreme, and it's one that I highly recommend.

The characters and their behaviors are dead on accurate. The depiction of high school is realistic and brutal at times. It is heart-breaking and thought-provoking. I couldn't put it down, even as tears rolled down my face. I feel every counselor, educator, parent, and high school student should read *Leverage*. It will break your heart even as it opens your eyes.

Very Satisfied...

One very violent scene. This was disturbing to several of my students. They did not finish the book. Ending seems a bit unrealistic for the violence that was portrayed.

If you enjoy books about sports, then you may very well enjoy this book. If you DON'T particularly enjoy "sports books," you also will enjoy this edgy book. Despite the cover and cover description, sports in this book is more of a setting for human drama than the main thrust of the story. *Leverage* is a book about bullying and the fallout. It's about how people handle it when bad things - really bad things - happen. It's about friendship and loyalty too. In our social media age, bullying these days often takes the form of cyber-bullying. But in *Leverage*, bullying is the old-fashioned kind. "I'm big, you're small, therefore I can do to you what I want. And because I'm seen as popular (i.e. powerful), I'll get away with it." The story is told from two different perspectives - Danny and Kurt. Danny is a sophomore, small and a gymnast. Kurt is a large, hulking football player. He's not stupid, though his stutter makes him appear so. Danny and Kurt form a strange duo and an unlikely pair. *Leverage* is a tautly woven tale about making choices, about finding courage, and about the consequences of our actions. Cohen creates wonderful tension in the book. You know from the first couple of chapters that something bad is going to happen. You don't know what and you don't know when. But you know it's coming. The "bad thing" that happens comes at about the 40% mark. And as a reader, I felt the tension - actually began to sweat - as the "bad thing" began to unfold. Author Cohen did a great job of "showing" just the right amount. The big scene isn't for those who cannot abide any form of sexual violence (fair warning). As someone who avoids contemporary realism (I love Ellen Hopkins' writing but find her books too harsh to read), I was able to read *Leverage*. The author didn't resort to sensationalizing the scene to emotionally manipulate the reader. The remainder of the book explores the aftermath of the horrible thing that happens. The main characters, the ones involved - even the town itself - is explored. Joshua Cohen is a bright star of a writer, giving us a wonderful first book that makes us want more from him.

AMAZING!!!! This is definitely one of my favorite books just amazing how the author wrote it two perspectives but still make it connect. Five stars is not enough imo.

It has been a long time since I last became this wrapped up in a novel. There is a depth to this book that pulled me in. I loved the main characters, especially Kurt. There were times when I yelled at the characters and times when I wished I could comfort them. They felt so real. Great, great read.

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