



Win the Rings

K.D. Van Brunt

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Jace has been the property of the U.S. Army since they found out about her when she was five, and now she has become one of its most valuable weapons. But Jace is not the only one of her kind. Gray is one too, but with the help of his sister, he has spent most of his sixteen years hiding from the Army.

Now, the Army has found out about Gray and they cannot allow him to roam free. Operating on the theory that it takes one to catch one, Jace is sent out with a special ops squad to hunt Gray down. But Jace is not the only one pursuing Gray, and the competition is after her too. What ensues is a desperate chase through city after city as duty and honor collide with love and sacrifice.

Win the Rings Details

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From Reader Review Win the Rings for online ebook

Lynn says

I would like to thank Net Galley, Evernight Publishing, and K.D. Van Brunt for an advanced copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Win the Rings by K.D. Van Brunt takes us into a world where the United States Government is hiding a special program of the U.S. Army from its citizens. Children are removed from their homes at five years of age, when testing for a deadly HSK disease shows a positive result.

Jace is a product of this program, being raised in the U.S. Army fighting her way through the ranks. She finally earns her graduation putting her in charge of a Special Ops team on the trail of a runner.

I enjoyed reading Win the Rings, and after reading the epilogue hope to see a sequel in the future. I highly recommend Win the Rings by K.D. Van Brunt to anyone who enjoys the science fiction, fantasy, and YA genre.

Scott Spotson says

Why is this book so fascinating? Let me list the ways.

1. Relentless, effective chapter by chapter trading between two main characters, Gray and Jace. They each take turns, one after the other. This book settles in this rhythm. You see how they will approach each other, how their very different lives and goals will collide. The only thing they have in common is that they're both shifters. But Gray is "free," while Jace is still part of the "establishment." It's like The Fugitive.
2. I loved Gray as a character. So hard to put down on paper, but the author nailed it. He was humble, thoughtful, determined, and easy-going. The fact he can't help but use his powers to save people along the way speaks volumes.
3. The shape shifting abilities are so much more interesting. Rather than just look like someone else, they can acquire the target's personality and memories. These memories are far more important than just acquiring the appearance, since the shifter knows how to escape, and has inside knowledge of the target's circumstances. This valuable intelligence enables the shifter to figure out the escape. For example, if you could fool your friends and family in letting you escape, or you know where the keys to the getaway car is, wouldn't that be so crucial in being on the run? I was thinking, over a lifetime, how many people's databases would be stored in just one shifter! Hundreds? Nonetheless, fascinating. Another special power was also the ability to acquire credit cards, keys, and uniforms, which again help with not only the getaways, but also living on nothing but stolen credit cards and cash.
4. There is excellent world-building. The dystopian headquarters of the shape shifters is grim, yet very different from anything I've read. Then, the nebulous network among shifters on the run, nation-wide.

This is so darn close to five stars, for me. But I was really, really, hoping that the ending would tie up all loose ends. Instead, it was another book that requires a sequel to continue the story. While I do enjoy series,

one of my rules is that each adventure or theme within a book in a series must start and end in that book, not resume with the same theme in the next book in the series. In other words, no pause in the adventure at the end of the book.

A few other comments, which aren't important but I'll put them in here. In this book, mention was made of a weapon against a shifter, called a spotter, which effectively stops them in their tracks. Yet, despite the overarching and grim interest in capturing Gray, a spotter was never used against him. Perhaps it would have been better for this weapon not to exist at all in this book.

Secondly, I think given the excellent story, a better cover could have served the sci-fi feel of the story. I'm a sucker for classic sci-fi covers.

This story reminds me a bit of Logan's Run.

Rose Glammoon says

I received a free copy of Win the Rings by K.D. Van Brunt in exchange for an honest review.

"Win the rings, Jace, and you win a ticket out of here."

When I first read the blurb of Win the Rings, I don't know why but I had this feeling that it would have a taste of dystopia, especially from the book cover. Nonetheless, I was drawn to this book & I'm wholeheartedly glad I was.

I cannot say how pleased I am that I got to read this book, I don't believe there is a way for me to put into words the brilliance of this book & the reason I believe this book had a certain amount of brilliance is because it was purely focused upon what the plot was about & didn't stray; & the fact that it was based upon the true type of shifters. Thank you K.D. Van Brunt!

Jace as a protagonist was a hardcore & determined girl, despite her acceptance of situation & temperamental attitude she wanted what she had lost when she was five years old - her freedom. She had good points such as being intelligent & well calculated of her surroundings but she also had soft points such as caring about unsuspecting characters within the book that gave her the essence of being real. She was the true essence of what the U.S. Army would do someone like her & she was a straightforward as well as strong lead.

Gray as a protagonist was a true-hearted & down-to-earth boy, despite his unfortunate situation & true-world experiences he wanted a life for his sister Nia instead of being selfish like others might have been. He had good points such as being kind & caring even when it leads to trouble but he also had weaker points of being portrayed as innocent whereas he was merely naive & at times filled with dumbstruck bravery but his good points by far outweigh his weaker points which nearly evened everything. He was despite everything the true essence of rundown kid with nearly no purpose in life.

Nia as a supporting character { In Gray's POV } was endearing as much a sister as a friend. She was exactly the undeveloped adult as I believe she was meant to be, she played an important role into shaping her brother as a mother would with just the right amount of wisdom to do what's right. Her presence was perhaps second-important to the Protagonists as the story spun mostly because of her.

Max as a supporting character { In Jace's POV } was obviously laced with hints of being a love interest. He was someone I'm actually craving more of since his presence wasn't as strong as I believe should have been, his faint love-hate relationship with Jace was an entertainment. His knowledge of just how much buttons to push to get the right reaction was an appeal yet his lack of development was a slight disappointment as he could have been quite important to his Protagonist but perhaps more will be seen later on...?

The General had an aura of being as much an Army man as he did of being an antagonist & never mind Marvin (view spoiler). Leon felt undeveloped as well but his important scene servings was good enough.

P.S. I loved the back-story as to where the name for the title **Win the Rings** came from, it's not often where books feature the actual title within & that was wonderful, thank you.

Win the Rings was a strictly-focused-on-the-plot book, well enough written once gotten into the rhythm, very well researched, honest guidance of plot with down-to-earth reality { In Gray's POV } & pressurized U.S. Army structure with all the right provisions { In Jace's POV }, all-together an intelligent book to read.

Overall Review ::: Two Separate Yet Interlaced Stories, Hard-Researched Facts, Strict Plot without Deviation, Fairly Well-Made Characters, Emotion-Provoking, Very Worthy of Series Continuation.

Absolute Recommendation to All!

Sizzling Hot Books says

Original review can be found on Sizzling Hot YA Books

Honestly, I didn't know what to expect when I started Win the Rings, because this is not my typical go-to genre. Granted I love a hardcore, tough heroine and all. In turn, that's what gave me the motivation to really dive into this story line, see what made her this way. And boy, am I so glad I stepped outside of my comfort zone with this one.

First off, there's Jace--a teenage girl who has been the part of the United States Army for a very long time. You see, Jace has special abilities where when she touches someone, she's able to become them--shift into them in a way but still have their own thoughts at the same time. All individuals who are this way need to be brought to one place, somewhere secretive that's run by the army, where they are supposed to be training and maintaining their abilities safely. Jace isn't necessarily like the others though, in the sense that she's tough...to put it mildly. Heck, Jace can beat up anyone and everyone put in her way. And she does...a lot. In turn, she's chosen to graduate the program early. But before she's granted the freedom to leave, she must go on a hunt for rogues who never took the test to see if they had these abilities.

Or really one rogue in particular. And his name is Gray.

Gray's been on the run with his older sister since he was a little kid. But his time is fast running short with the army on his trail. Regardless of his attempts at trying out a normal life, Gray knows he's different, and also knows his sister has risked a normal life to take care of him. But what's a guy to do when he has absolutely no idea of the fate that's waiting for him in the end?

Character wise, I felt a little more attached to Gray. Knowing his background, seeing him in everyday

situations, I felt he was a little bit more developed. I truly enjoyed his protectiveness towards his sister. Even not knowing his fate fully, he did everything he could to protect her, as she did him. It's not often in YA books that you get to see a great brother and sister relationship like this, but I was super excited to explore just that in Win the Rings with this pair.

Jace. Loved her. I did. I just wanted more from her in a way. More emotion, less hardcore. Not that I didn't like her hardcore, it's just that I wanted to see her feel a little more. I'm really hoping that's the case in the next book, because I really did enjoy her character, but maybe seeing a softer side to her will help me love her even more.

If your looking for romance in this book, then you've got to know that there is very little. A sad down point for me, but not a deal breaker at all. You do get to see Gray struggle with trying to maintain a relationship with a girl, but it's short lived. Buuuut, if your looking for a non-stop adventure that never ceases, then Win the Rings is exactly the story for you. Two young people, living through a life with the weight of the world on their shoulders, trying to find out who they are, all while channeling their abilities, is the story you'll find here. Something fresh, something truly different then than the normal YA book, Win the Rings is definitely one you don't want to miss out on. Great story line, an amazing hero, and a tough heroine? Really, that's what this story is. I loved it. A lot. And will be impatiently waiting to see what's to come in Jace and Gray's world now that...well, I'm not going to spill the secrets here, but trust me you'll want to read Win the Rings to find out the secrets and mysteries alone.

roxi Net says

I was kind of surprised at how much I liked this book! I went into it without any expectations and it was pretty well-written and easy to follow for a sci-fi book!

Jace, a 16 year old girl had been taken by the government at age 5 for her abilities to morph into any person by just touch. During her time at the CRACKD government facility, she becomes a hardened warrior determined to escape by any means possible - even if it means capturing other shifters and putting them through the same horrors she went through.

Gray, a 16 year old boy has been on the run from the government since age 5, with his 27 year old sister Nia. Living off the grid as best as possible, his life has always been about hiding and running although he's not sure exactly what he's running from. While trying to help people (to ease his mind about stealing), the government/Jace track him down and the fight of his life begins.

Told by both Jace and Gray, it's a fast-paced book with fully developed characters that I really liked and can't wait to read more about.

Matt Ely says

Original review posted at JC's Book Haven

"It's simple. If things go bad, Nia over me. Promise?"

The Good

Where to start? I love the characters, so we'll start with them. The writer lets us get to know them just enough so we can like them and form opinions about them, but not get smothered in their life story. He also does a really good job of balancing enough characters to fill multiple scenes in multiple locations without drowning you in names that you just don't care about. Not once did I find myself having to back track to try and remember who someone was and how they related to the story line. Which is important to me when you have so many named faces. I thought he did an outstanding job in this aspect of the book.

I love how their power works. Not only do they take the form of who they shift into but they get thoughts and memories and can even pull items that are in their pockets through the contact into their own pockets.

I do want to touch on two characters in particular, Jace and Grey. Jace, because she just may be one of my favorite female bada*** of all time. I love how she doesn't look for trouble, and in her own way she even tries to give those who mess with her a way out. But when they push, or are too dumb to see the gesture for what it is, she goes full on. Cobra Kai and shows no mercy. Then with Grey, you have this kid whose grown up on the run with his older sister. They've survived by stealing from dishonest people. Kind of the Edward Cullen 'only eat serial killers and rapists' motto. And it works for them, but Grey still tends to make mistakes as he is only sixteen. The thing I like about Grey is he comes off as the crafty, sarcastic look-out-for-the-little-guy type even if it means he gets hurt in the process. The possibility of Jace and Grey teaming up, her the fighter and him the sneaking street-smart mouthpiece, with equal billing intrigues me to no end.

I loved the pace of the story as I was able to pick it up and read right through to the end in two sittings. Would have been one, but work got in the way. I never found myself hoping he would just get on with it. It's not cover to cover action, but at the same time, it had the potential to have a fight break out at any given moment which I enjoyed. He did have a few surprises for me with some of the characters. One in particular he got me to like and root for where before I thought I didn't care for them at all. Yeah I didn't see that one coming. While he has the obvious good and bad guys, he did a phenomenal job mixing in the hidden mole or moles leaving you wondering who will betray who. Plus, I'm wondering what other abilities will show up since we've seen more than shape-shifting already.

The Bad

My gripe is how easy Jace understood relationship issues. I get she leads the girls and had for a long time, but she didn't really like them and did distance herself from them. Most of them seem to dislike her. So with her growing up in the army's care since she was 5 years old and never having been in a relationship or seemingly having an interest in one, she handled their problems like an old pro. Small gripe and something she may have picked up from the old leader before she graduated, but it still read off to me just a bit.

The Romance

Well in book one, it's more about the love than the romance. While there are a few short relationships, the only one that stands out is the brother/sister relationship of Grey and Nia. So as I said, not really romance but love does effect a good portion of the choices made in the book. I really like the way he handled it as well. The way Nia treats Grey feels so natural it's as if the writer just observed a brother and sister in this situation, but I'll assume he doesn't know anyone on the run from the law, and if he did that they didn't invite him along to observe them just for his book. Let me just end this part by saying the brother and sister bond is something I look forward to the most in the next book.

Conclusion

Money well spent. I would recommend this book in a heartbeat to anyone that enjoys the paranormal/fantasy

genre. I'm really looking forward to the next book in this series and seeing how the characters develop. Win the Rings has become an instant favorite of mine. It's worth reading over and over again. Until part 2 is out, I'll just chill on this cliffhanger he left us on. Don't worry there's plenty of room for you to join me.

Liz says

Win the Rings is a young adult dystopian novel, narrated in first person from the perspectives of two sixteen year old shifters, Jace and Gray.

Shifters have the ability to 'acquire' non-shifters through touch. Once acquired, shifters take on the physical form, memories, emotion and knowledge of the person they acquired, without losing their own sense of self. Taken by CRACD (Classified Resources Academy Delta, colloquially referred to as 'Cracked', a secret branch of the U.S. Army that trains young shifters) at five years of age, Jace is introduced to the reader as a powerful shifter who is both feared and bullied by her fellow cadets.

Gray has been on the run with his non-shifter sister, Nia, since he was five years old. He manages to scrape by, by acquiring white-colour criminals and stealing their money. After one of his victims files a police report after realising her bank account has been emptied, Cracked sends Jace to track Gray down.

The alternating chapter narrations makes Win the Rings, for the most part, a fast-paced, enjoyable read. As I was reading a Gray chapter I wondered how the events would effect the following Jace chapter, and vice versa. There was a great contrast of worlds, with the grim regimented military stronghold of Cracked that Jace inhabits add odds with the open-world inhabited by Gray and Nia, where each location presents high risk opportunities for loss or gain.

Jace's chapters were, at times, frustrating to follow. The reader is often told about relationships and events, rather than shown. I got a sense that this was because there was so much back story about Jace, her relationship with others at Cracked, and the politics and history of Cracked, to cram in. For instance, Jace tells the reader: Once, years ago, I was friends with Max. We survived together at Cracked, but he stopped being a friend a long time ago, as our mutual feelings slipped from friendship to indifference to smouldering hatred. I wanted to see their history, to have a scene played out that showed their friendship dissolving, or, failing that, to see their smouldering hatred played out in a scene, rather than have Max leering in the background.

Information, such as the HSK test and the abilities of a shifter, is delivered in bits and pieces in different chapters, which may have been done in such a way as to create suspense, but I found it jarring, as, thinking I had missed information, I found myself going back and re-reading chapters.

Probably the most frustrating aspect of Jace's chapters were references to her vanity. In one scene she expresses disappointment because she feels she is too skinny and flat-chested. In another scene she muses: somewhere in the back of my brain maybe I want to be beautiful, but beauty doesn't survive well here. At one point she reflects: I'm not sure why I bother with make-up; it's not like any of the guys around this place would want to have anything to do with me. While her low self-esteem and preoccupation with her image contrasts with other characters' perception of her as a hardened bully, and would make her relatable to many female readers, I wondered whether other insecurities would have provided greater depth to her character and better matched her environment and circumstance, given she inhabits a place where cadets disappear or are killed. Would body image issues have still applied if Jace was re-written as a male character?

I felt that I learned more about Gray than I did Jace, because there was less back-story, which meant more time was devoted to following Gray and his sister as they tried to evade capture. The strength of Gray's chapters is that the reader is taken along for the ride, and learns about character relationships as Gray does,

rather than being told retrospectively. Gray was an exciting character to follow, with the bulk of his chapters being action packed. The pacing is pretty solid, as is the suspense, as Nia and Gray go from place to place, trying to survive while carving out something that resembles a normal life. It was fun to follow Gray as he acquired the white-colour criminals. There was an underlying suspense with everything Gray and Nia did, whether adventurous or mundane, as I wondered if or when they'd be tracked down.

Overall, I enjoyed reading Win the Rings and read it quite quickly. I wanted to see (not be told) more about Cracked, but I am hopeful this will be explored further in the sequel. I was captivated by the premise of the book, of Jace being 'the property of the U.S. Army ... (who has become) one of its most valuable weapons'. I don't think this premise was fully realised in Win the Rings but I am hopeful this will be fully developed in the sequel.

I received a complimentary copy of this book from the author, K.D. Van Brunt, in exchange for an honest review on Goodreads.

Karla says

Spoilers Below**

I was lucky enough to be sent a copy of Win the Rings by K.D. Van Brunt! And when I say lucky, I mean VERY lucky. I loved this book! I found myself totally engaged throughout the entire book. There were twists and turns I did not see coming, along with ideas that were very innovative. The text is written from two points of view, which always makes for a great teaching moments. Each of the characters has a background story uniting them to the same place, but yet vastly different. I would highly recommend this book to my friends as well as my students.

Win the Rings is a story revolving around special abilities and government secrets. Upon entering kindergarten children are given a test claiming to determine if they have a fatal disease. In reality the test determines if the children are able to, what they call, "shift". If a child is determined to be a shifter they are taken in as government property. They are then raised to be weapons for the United States army. The children are taught to master their shifting, fighting, and other tactical skills. The goal being that the children eventually are used as spies, assassins, spotters (see the text), and other highly skilled positions. However, none of this will ever be by choice of the children. Upon entering the government facility they are implanted with kill-switches attached to their brain stems. If they attempt to escape or are deemed unworthy of continuing training, the kill switch is engaged and the child is never seen or heard from again.

The book begins by introducing sixteen year old Jace Moray. Pretty much the toughest girl in existence. Jace is the top fighter of the females, along with being a master shifter. Jace has but one goal: get out of the government facility that has enslaved her all these years (A.K.A. Classified Resources-Academy Delta). Jace is finally given an opportunity to go out on assignment and she couldn't be happier as she hasn't left Cracked since she was five. The mission is to find a rogue shifter, what they refer to as a runner. A runner is a person who for some reason was not tested and caught at 5 years old. The Cracked General has offered Jace a deal; for every completed mission she will earn a ring. After three rings she will be out of Cracked and deployed.

The other point of view is from Grayson Price. Gray is a runner, a rogue shifter. His sister, Nia, somehow knew about his shifting abilities, took him, and they have been on the run for 11 years. Gray struggles with the very essence of his being. Gray is forced to shift and steal in order for Nia and him to survive. It is an awful existence, but it is better than the alternative: Cracked. Gray also has one more special ability, he is able to telepathically speak to his sister. Gray's one goal is for Nia, and hopefully himself, to live a normal life. While running from location to location Gray always finds himself in situations where he feels compelled to help others. This is Gray's true nature, kindness, but it is also his downfall.

Gray and Jace's path ends up crossing on her first mission. Jace and the army believe that Gray is involved in a runner plan to shift to government officials. Unfortunately, Gray and Nia just happen to be in the same place at the same time. From this point on the story takes twists and turns you won't see coming.

The story weaves around themes of loyalty, friendship, identity, family, right and wrong, and more. Another group is introduced and ends up putting into question: Who are the good guys and who are the bad guys? How can a shifter live a normal life? Are humans ever going to stop enslaving each other?

As I previously stated, I would recommend this book to anyone! I can't wait for the next book to come out! Again, thank you K.D. Van Brunt for this EXCELLENT piece of young adult fiction!

Elisha says

I received a copy of this book from the author, K.D. Van Brunt, in exchange for an honest review.

Wow. Wow wow wow. This book is going straight to the top of my 'highly recommend list', as well as my 'favourite female characters' list and my 'I absolutely cannot wait for more list'. I'm kind of shocked about just how good this book was, to be honest. I've been racking my brains all day to think of a single criticism I could give about it and I can't think of one. The storyline was unique, fast-paced and very engaging. I was left shocked and sad plenty of times and I laughed out loud a few times too. The overall ensemble of characters was excellent and I feel like there's so much more to come from them. The writing was good and the world building was good. I'm not a huge fan of books written in split POVs in general, but it worked extremely well in here. All of the essentials that make an excellent book were there.

I think what I liked the most about this book was the realism. A lot of novels that centre around magical abilities such as shape-shifting or that focus on kids being trained to fight and kill seem to be based either in a fantastical setting or a dystopian/futuristic setting. This was set in present day America. The characters were riding on buses, finding evidence on YouTube and having shoot-outs in WalMart and I really appreciated that. It was very different to anything I've read before. I also liked the secrecy of Cracked and how determined they were to keep shifters a secret from the wider society. And most of all, I loved the flawed characters.

As people who follow my reviews will know, my favourite types of characters are badass ladies, mentally unstable heroes, antagonists that I love to hate and characters with realistic and flawed. The characters in this book tick more than one box. Jace was the epitome of a badass lady. She was strong and determined and practically unbeatable. I loved the way she defended the other girls at Cracked and I also loved that adult characters in the book were actually surprised to see a sixteen year old girl in the army. As much as I loved her though, she did have her flaws. She had some anger management issues and could be a bit of a bitch sometimes, but I still absolutely loved her as a character. Equally, Gray was both heroic and slightly idiotic.

He did some great deeds in the book and saved lives, but most of these decisions cost him his own freedom and safety. That was interesting to me. Normally, everything a hero does is depicted as perfect but that wasn't the case with Gray. I loved his narration too and also his relationship with Nia, who was also an excellent character. As well as having great lead characters, there were also some really intriguing side characters. I loved too many of them to mention, but the ones who I was most interested in by the end of the book were Max and Rachel. I'm really, really excited to see more of them. And finally, I know that I try not to use the 's' word in serious reviews, but I seriously ship two characters already. However, as I don't see much hope for them as of yet, I'll keep quiet about them for now.

Overall, an amazing starter to a series. I'm still racking my brains for any major concerns I had with it and I'm still finding nothing. This book ticked almost every one of my boxes and I am so thankful to K.D. Van Brunt for sending me a copy of this to review. I'm indescribably excited for the next one (I have so many questions from this book that need answering later on) and I would highly recommend this to anyone who likes action, sci-fi, good characters, fast-paced, excitement and basically good books in general. Please check this book out if you haven't already. You won't regret it.

Larissa says

First of all, I'd like to thank the author, KD Vanbrunt, for sending me my review copy in exchange for an honest review. *Win the Rings* is a gripping Science Fiction Thriller sure to enthrall readers of all ages, but is perfect for the Young Adult range. It was a page-turning opener to what I am sure will be a gripping series.

Win the Rings is told through the alternating POV's of Gray Price and Jace Moray. I thought these two perspectives each added a really interesting element to the novel, seeing what each side knew, and what remained a mystery to both parties. In some ways Gray and Jace are so different, but they have more in common than they realized. I also really loved how action-packed the story was! There was not much twiddling of thumbs going on, there was constant moving, each thing piling on top of the next. I thought Vanbrunt did a really good job setting up this novel as a first book in a series. There was great world-building - setting up a world very similar to ours, but with some very drastic differences - as well as a great story arc while setting up for the main conflict of the series. I also really appreciated that she ended at a place where the book felt complete, yet left me wanting more. She did not rely on some giant cliff-hanger to get me to read the sequel, she wrote a compelling story that left me coming back for seconds.

One thing that bugged me a bit was Jace's lack of character development. She is tough, one of the government's best fighters, but wants out, and that is about all that we get to know of her. Perhaps her reluctance to kill Gray was progress, but at the same time it seemed like it could have been in her character all along. I'm betting and hoping that Jace will go through more of a transformation in the following books. I think I got a hint of that towards the end, but I would have liked to see more.

If you are looking for a thrilling next read in the science fiction and or YA genres, I would highly recommend *Win the Rings*. It was a great premise, an exciting plot, and the beginning of an action-packed new series to burn the midnight oil for!

Rachel W says

WARNING: SPOILERS!

I love shaper-shifters! I'm not as keen on werewolves, they always seemed a bit too hairy for my tastes, but shaper-shifters are a personal favorite of mine. By now, I've read so bloody many of them that you'd think that they'd start to become repetitive, but I am still astounded when I find an original book like 'Win the Rings' that it makes my day. So not only is it a secret government conspiracy, there are supernatural fugitives, secret international paranormal mafia organizations, an underground 'sanctuary' for government fugitives and of course more criminals, evil plots and a mystery guy named Scorpio. So far, that's pretty freaking good. There is nearly non-stop action, shootouts; car chases manhunts, larceny and everything. Imagine taking one of those super fast paced, full of wonderful explosions cop/SWAT/CIA/whatever action movies, like, I don't know, Red or Die Hard, then add all the uber cool stuff paranormal from a show like Alphas (which was great while it lasted) and the whole shape shifting thing from the Terminator, but then recast all the main characters as teenagers. It's a dream come true.

As far as characters go, I didn't really like Jace all that much. To be frank, she was a cruel, heartless bitch and I hated her for it. The only time I felt she showed any real compassion and that she felt like a halfway decent person was when she convinced Will not to give up. That was kind of sweet in a horrible it's-going-to-traumatize-him-for-the-rest-of-his-life kind of way. Unfortunately (for me), she definitely needed to be that way for the story to make sense, and she fit her role admirably. Still, I hated her guts. On the other hand, I loved Gray. He was a thief, smart and a bit manipulative, but he had a conscience. He was compassionate and was willing to die to let his sister escape. So sweet!

The only down side? Such a cliffhanger! So many unanswered questions! I know we will be getting the answers to those burning questions in books two or further down the line, depending on how many there will be, but still, it kills! What is the science behind shifting? Is it science, or magic? (I say science, but who knows) what about the telepathy? Nia isn't a shifter, so that rules out it being a shifter only thing, and now Jace too? I really want to know more about the testing, how does the eye scanner administered to the kindergarteners work, especially if they are in their base form? What are the alleged symptoms of the mysterious fabricated disease? The shifters only are born mainly in the US. Why? And if so, how do they keep the other countries from knowing? The cover story would be know in other places, and questions would be asked of why this mysterious illness only appeared in the States, so how does that work out? What about Nia and Gray's family life before? I know Gray was so young, but Nia was nearly 15! She would have had memories, I'm curious. Also, how would their mother know about Cracked? Was she in the government? Was she a shifter, maybe and escaped government chic like Rachel, or a runner or just a normal lady? Who is the mole? Who are the 'others' after Gray and why? How did Rachel escape anyway? What will happen to Gray now? Will he make it though cracked or what? And Jace, will she fall in love with Gray? (Though it might be a bit cheesy and I can't see it happening, it could happen). So many questions!

There is only one thing that I really want to complain about, and it has nothing to do with the story itself. That's right, the cover. It was very misleading, I personally think it doesn't well represent the story, it looks more like something to do with a desert more than an action sci-fi, but whatever.

Big thank you to the author K.D Van Brunt, not only for writing 'Win the Rings' but for the free copy! You are awesome!

Fangs for the Fantasy says

Shapeshifters can turn into perfect copies of people – any person – with just one touch. And that doesn't just mean appearance, that means their memories and skills as well. One touch and they can become them any time. After one shapeshifter nearly bankrupt a city, the US military quickly intervened under a secret executive order and all shapeshifters are found and imprisoned – raised, trained and by the army in brutal surroundings. Evading them is a crime, free shapeshifters are hunted.

Jace has been in the army prison since she was 5 years old. It was hard, it was brutal – and she is both of those things. She also wants to be free... which means earning her freedom

Gray ran, he's spent his whole life on the run, but he's finally been noticed and hunted. Gray's freedom may be the price of Jace finally escaping.

This world is an interesting wrong, bringing in shapeshifting as a power and mixing it with elements of mind reading to make a truly original and rather frightening story. Beings who can read the minds and memories of those they have turned into – the threat they represent is incredible which in turn leads to them being brutally oppressed and denied anything resembling rights as human beings – this widescale kidnapping and holding of them works and remains realistic in the story simply because they never forget how much of a threat they are – we are constantly reminded in subtle ways just how dangerous a shapeshifter is.

I think the world building also works because there's a limit on anything else out there. Gray and his sister have a form of telepathy that suggests maybe there is more out there, but the author has resisted the temptation to crowd the story. We have one supernatural, we have the world adjusted to control and use this supernatural. This is their stories – we don't need other psychics, weremoose, and-whatever-monster-we're-calling-fae-this-week.

This tight focus works to keep the story moving – and makes it a very good first book. We get the characters introduced, motivated and developed in excellent but not long winded detail. Everything is focused on them and their journey so you really get to know these people without distraction. The world isn't overly complicated nor is the story confused or twisted – it's pretty focused. The military controls all shapeshifters (to stop them running amok in uncontrolled ways and to use them to run amok the way they want to) in, basically, a prison. Jace can earn her freedom by serving her masters – and that service means bringing in shapeshifters who have managed to dodge the system; like Gray.

It's not a complex or twisted story (though there are elements of one to come in future books). But it's clear lines let us focus on the characters, let them explore this (again, not overly complicated) world and establish everything perfectly

And this is ideal because I love the protagonist, Jace and Gray. Starting with Jace: ok, I would expect someone raised in a government facility to be rather more brainwashed than she was, but that's clearly not been the way she was raised and there's some quasi explanation for it. The main reason I like her is that she has all of the usual excuse we have for a complete asshole of a character – the tragic past, being completely friendless, being relentlessly bullied and constantly having to fight for her place – yet she isn't that asshole. She's hard. She's harsh. She's unforgiving and uncompromising. She has a control streak 10 miles wide But

she's fair within her own rules, she's willing to fight for other people as much as for herself. She has a strong sense of duty even if she doesn't like or isn't particularly nice to the people she feels dutiful towards (or if they don't like her either). She has a short temper, but it doesn't reach the comical levels we see so often in the genre with protagonists lashing out like berserkers at the slightest thing. And she's selfish – or, rather, she's focused on her own goal. She wants to get out, she wants to escape the prison she has lived in all her life – and if that means she has to work for an organisation she loathes and even hurt someone else in the process – well, needs much. In fact, she's not selfish – but she isn't a martyr. And that doesn't make her a bad person – she does what she has to within the limits of her terrible situation

Read More

Karla says

Loved this book.

loved the characters, the storyline, the world building, everything about this book.

I generally know from the first chapter if im going to like a book or not. This book ticked all my boxes. Intrigue, suspense, action and curveballs

There wasn't a love story sub plot in this book however I think there is a strong love/hate relationship with Max, so something may develop with him in book 2. Then there is Gray, he already thinks she is hot. But I wouldn't be surprised if Leon made a move.

The main female lead is strong. Jace kicks ass. The supernatural power of shifting is well described and made believable. Telepathy connection is interesting and I'm sure we will learn more about that in book 2 as jace tries to find out how to kill the kill switch.

The epilogue gives me high expectations for book 2.

Overall I loved this book. 5 stars....

Melanie says

4.5*s

review posted here...

<http://bookpassionforlife.blogspot.co...>

Win the Rings was a really great read and a promising start to a new series.

Here we have a world where people can become 'shifters', now these aren't your normal shifters that change into animals and such.... These people can acquire your appearance, your memories, your clothes, your life..... with the touch of a hand. Ever since the US Army found out about this ability among the populace it devised a test in which all five year old children are given the test to discover whether or not they are

shifters, if they are - they become property of the US Army and live their lives in a prison-esque training camp where they will become weapons for their country, if they survive. Others choose to run and are taken by family members before the test is administered, living a life off the grid but always running. That is how we meet both of our leads in this story. Jace has been in the 'care' of the US Army since her testing at five years old, she's been trained and moulded into a hardened young 16 year old, capable of defending herself against anything and anyone. She is the perfect weapon and few will challenge her but with that status comes hatred from her peers and a loneliness that no one should bear. She focuses on being the best that she can be so that one day, she will be set free.

Grey is a 'runner' and along with his sister Nia, has been on the run since he was five having escaped just before the testing. Life on the run isn't great and he is forced to use his 'shifting' abilities to survive and they've been surviving for 11 years until all of a sudden, he's on everyone's radar and they're coming for him with all barrels blazing forcing him and Nia into a run/hide/chase scenario. Jace is soon on the case as she is promoted and given more freedom, her General is trusting her with this new position and has made her a promise that if she can win three rings by doing these missions successfully, that he will deploy her to active duty and therefore freeing her of her current confines. Nothing will stop her from this goal and that of her ultimate goal too.

I really enjoyed this book and to be honest, it's not something I would have necessarily have read. The characters are easily relatable and I empathised with both of our lead characters. I enjoyed both of their alternating points of view and thought it brought a very balanced aspect to the story because on one hand we get what it was like for Jace who was institutionalised at 5 yrs old and made into a weapon, trained in combat, given others lives to use in such training and made to live in a hostile environment with her peers, fighting for survival on a daily basis, not to mention the lack of love & such emotions a child would need – basically they are moulded as a type of super soldier. Then we have Grey who shows us what happens when you fight back, when you flee the testing because your family knows what will happen if you fail and living a life where you're constantly looking over your shoulder and having to resort to doing the wrong thing in order to survive. Both aren't free, both are trapped, both just want to live their lives in peace.

The storyline was very fast paced, just the way I like them! We have the shifting ability which could bring endless possibilities to a story, we have a secret Army facility that trains children with abilities and we see an opposing force to this facility and it all revolves around Grey because everyone wants a piece of him. As I mentioned, it is a run/hide/chase scenario, filled with action and I find these great for keeping me on my toes and interested in the story because you never know what's going to happen next. I thought this was great opener to the series, it is brimming with potential and I can't wait to find out what happens next.
