

## ★ **A Different Kind of Brave**

**Lee Wind**

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In Lee Wind's exciting novel *A Different Kind of Brave*, two gay teenagers who emulate James Bond fall in love and crisscross the Americas to shut down a harsh conversion therapy institution.

Sixteen-year-old Nico escapes Dr. Hergenreder's Institute in California, vowing to free the sixty-nine other queer teenagers still imprisoned there—"lumps of clay" whom Dr. H intends to remold into straight Christians. Meanwhile, privileged Sam, who has had his heart broken by Kevin, confronts his parents about their infidelities before they leave Manhattan for a yachting trip. They send Sam on a vacation to a Mexican resort; there, Nico, under an alias, leads adventure sports. The new couple, on the run from Dr. H, plans a daring raid on the Institute.

Chapters alternate between Nico's and Sam's points of view, with different fonts indicating the switch. The typeface gives further clues: italics for Nico's flashbacks to life at the Institute and before, and cursive handwriting for Sam's "One Good Thing" gratitude journal entries assigned by his therapist. Sam and Nico meet at the halfway point, making love the fulcrum. And Sam is embedded in a fun group of queer friends that includes nonbinary Ari and gender-nonconforming Frida.

The action atmosphere, built on surveillance, identity theft, flashy vehicles, and up-to-date technology including drones and vlogging, is authentic. However, old-fashioned ingenuity is prized too, as when Nico jams door locks with a mixture of baking soda and glue. In this way, the book both pays homage to and updates the James Bond-style spy story. It contrasts toxic masculinity with what Sam calls "magical penis swagger"—the sort of confidence embodied by Bond, his hero.

*A Different Kind of Brave* is a gem for young adults: not just a high-octane thriller but also a queer romance full of heart and sensuality.

REBECCA FOSTER (March / April 2024)

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