



Strong Like You

T. L. Simpson

North Star Editions (Mar 12, 2024)

Softcover \$14.99 (224pp)

978-1-63583-094-1

In T. L. Simpson's moving coming-of-age novel *Strong Like You*, a high school student in Arkansas struggles to understand what happened to his missing father.

When the book begins, Walker's father is already gone without explanation, the house where he lives with his mother is falling apart, and he needs to meet with the school guidance counselor weekly after punching a football teammate on the first day of school. Still, many of Walker's best moments come on the football field, where, along with his cousin and closest friend, he excels as a linebacker. His team is putting together its best season in years. As the novel continues, Walker sets out to discover the reason for his father's disappearance, tracking down the elder's unsavory associates in an attempt to bring him home.

The book is narrated as if Walker is describing its events to his father. He has a lot to navigate, including his feelings for a new girl at school, his rivalry with the team's quarterback, and his coach and his mother becoming friendly. On the advice of his counselor, he chronicles his thoughts in a journal; the book includes key entries alongside Walker's narration. The absence of his father and his attempts to be like him find their way into all aspects of Walker's life and create myriad complications in his relationships. Even once he learns where his father is and why, the answers create more problems to solve.

Strong Like You is an engaging novel in which a high school football star is forced to confront his ideas of manhood and forge better ones.

JEFF FLEISCHER (March / April 2024)

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