

The Redshirt

Corey Sobel

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Corey Sobel's magnificent debut novel, *The Redshirt*, exposes the hypermasculinity of collegiate football as a freshman starts at a Division One school.

Miles is younger and smaller than the rest of his teammates at King College. He's also grappling with his identity: he's gay, but has never acted on his desires for fear of being shunned by his teammates. His roommate, Reshawn, is a physical prodigy at the sport he loathes. He'd rather be deep in his literature classes, but with his family depending on his scholarship and stipends to get by, he has to continue to play football.

Miles's and Reshawn's freshman year is shared from Miles's perspective. Miles reveals that, until summer football camp, he had never been alone in a room with a Black person. The rest of the cast, including sweet and brawny football players, the team bullies, and introspective party animals met off of the field, are approached in terms of their relationships to Miles, too.

Miles takes the standard classes that the athletic department recommends his first semester, but in the spring, he joins Reshawn in literature classes, where they read Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, seeing themselves in classic books that help to guide them through their identity struggles. Both come to realize that the other has what he wants: either the scholarship, the place on the team, or the acceptance of his true self.

Literary and beautiful lines transport readers to the boys' Southern college, where the football team is no good and no one cares. *The Redshirt* is a gorgeous novel in which two young men learn who they truly are, with and without the drama of college football.

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