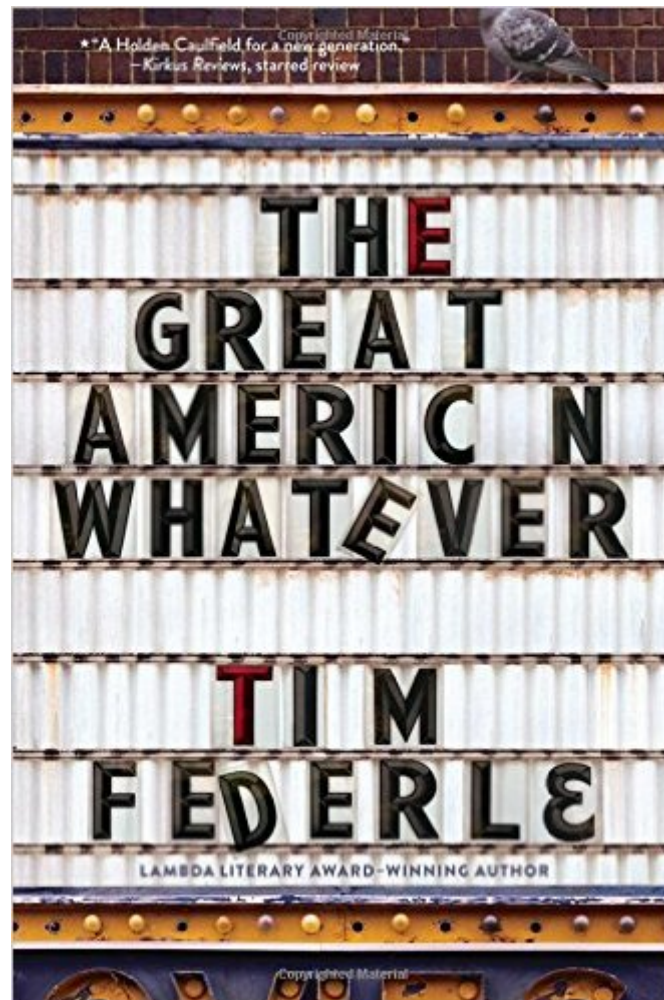


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# The Great American Whatever



## Synopsis

From the award-winning author of *Five, Six, Seven, Nate!* and *Better Nate Than Ever* comes a new Holden Caulfield for a new generation • (Kirkus Reviews, starred review). Quinn Roberts is a sixteen-year-old smart aleck and Hollywood hopeful whose only worry used to be writing convincing dialogue for the movies he made with his sister Annabeth. Of course, that was all before "before" Quinn stopped going to school, before his mom started sleeping on the sofa and before the car accident that changed everything. Enter: Geoff, Quinn's best friend who insists it's his time that Quinn came out "at least from hibernation. One haircut later, Geoff drags Quinn to his first college party, where instead of nursing his pain, he meets a guy "okay, a hot guy" and falls, hard. What follows is an upside-down week in which Quinn begins imagining his future as a screenplay that might actually have a happily-ever-after ending "if, that is, he can finally step back into the starring role of his own life story.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Great American Whatever was a book of contradictions for me. By far, this had the most authentic dialogue and perspective I've read in a very long time. But with that authenticity came characters I didn't like or even want to follow after awhile. And that was frustrating - because the book is extremely well written and very subtle where it needs to be. Author Federle builds the world and the characters one achingly poignant moment at a time so that by the end of the book, we finally have the full story and a meaningful catharsis. But by then, I admittedly started skimming, especially over the 'faux screenplay' thought scenes. Story: 16 year old Quinn has lost his beloved

sister and his father - one to a car accident and one to abandonment. His mother eats herself into oblivion and Quinn has withdrawn to his bedroom permanently. When best friend Geoff comes over to drag Quinn out of his stupor, he'll begin to realize what he really lost, what is truly important, and a reason to look forward to the future. What we have is a story of a boy coming out of his shell - one that he has built around himself in the form of a love of Hollywood movies. It becomes his obsession until he distorts his world around it - losing sight of his friends and sister in the process. With the death of his older sister, who was the director to his screenwriter, he doesn't know how to continue and so withdraws. Admittedly, I found the 'faux screenplay' scenes of Quinn re-imagining moments of his life very uninteresting. They should be showing his snarky view on life but it all seemed so pointless - similar to listening to an old man tell fanciful fish tales from when he was young.

One of the latest YA novels to tell the tempestuous and angsty but ultimately affirming tale of adolescent coming out, Tim Federle's *The Great American Whatever* problematizes the romantic notion of 21st-century queer affirmation by complicating the protagonist's sexual identity development with grief over the death of his older sister and managing his own control issues. Quinn Roberts - sometimes called "Win" (a clear signifier of his eventual triumph) by his late sister and his new paramour - aspires to be a successful Hollywood screenwriter. After his childhood crush and former babysitter shared with him the formula for successfully crafting an epic heroic adventure (which nearly replicates Joseph Campbell's monomyth paradigm), Quinn collaborated with his sister Annabeth on a number of quirky independent films. He also casts himself as the hero of his own life and imagines life itself as a screenplay that he has the power to control. The people with whom he interacts are "scene partners." He doesn't engage in conversation; he speaks scripted dialogue. He even renders parts of his first-person narrative as movie scenes complete with dialogue, set descriptions, and stage directions. As he struggles to cope with his sister's untimely death (for which he at least partially blames himself), he also tries to help his mother come to terms with the loss (his father abandoned them long ago) as he discovers the limits of just how well he knows his best friend. And he's falling in love for the first time. Federle depicts these events with all of the sweet innocence and snide frustration that so deftly characterize adolescence.

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