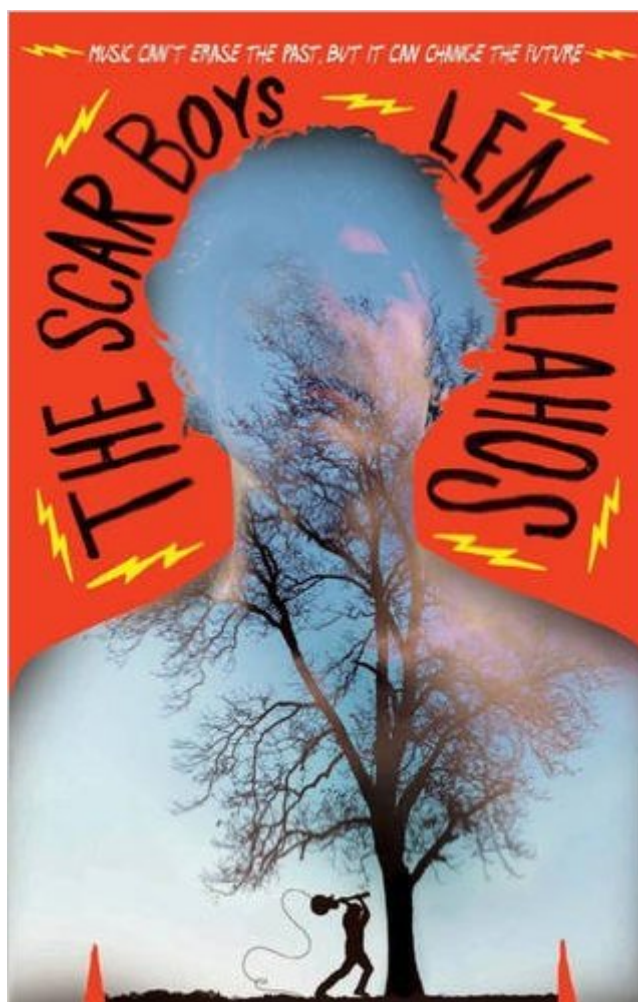


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# The Scar Boys



## Synopsis

Playing in a punk rock band brings peace to a bullied teen in Len Vlahos's debut novel. A severely burned teenager. A guitar. Punk rock. The chords of a rock 'n' roll road trip in a coming-of-age novel that is a must-read story about finding your place in the world...even if you carry scars inside and out. In attempting to describe himself in his college application essay--help us to become acquainted with you beyond your courses, grades, and test scores--Harbinger (Harry) Jones goes way beyond the 250-word limit and gives a full account of his life. The first defining moment: the day the neighborhood goons tied him to a tree during a lightning storm when he was 8 years old, and the tree was struck and caught fire. Harry was badly burned and has had to live with the physical and emotional scars, reactions from strangers, bullying, and loneliness that instantly became his everyday reality. The second defining moment: the day in 8th grade when the handsome, charismatic Johnny rescued him from the bullies and then made the startling suggestion that they start a band together. Harry discovered that playing music transported him out of his nightmare of a world, and he finally had something that compelled people to look beyond his physical appearance. Harry's description of his life in his essay is both humorous and heart-wrenching. He had a steeper road to climb than the average kid, but he ends up learning something about personal power, friendship, first love, and how to fit in the world. While he's looking back at the moments that have shaped his life, most of this story takes place while Harry is in high school and the summer after he graduates. Also available in hardcover (ISBN 978-1-60684-439-7) and electronic book format (ISBN 978-1-60684-440-3)

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## Customer Reviews

How can you convince someone to accept you in 250 words or less? You can't. So Harbinger decides to tell his story. In Len Vlahos' breakout novel, he gives Harbinger a voice, even though he isn't the kind of you man to stand up and shout... or at least he wasn't, until now. With a name like Harbinger, and a history behind that name that would make you sob, Harry was bound to live a unique life. But how unique? He was almost struck by lightning. He wished he was struck by lightning. He was a methadone addict. This all happened before he was 10 years old. When a group of bullies tied him to a tree, they didn't expect or care about the lightning storm that shot a bolt directly at the same tree where he was tied. He wasn't struck by lightning, but the bolt sheared off the top of the tree in a fiery ball of flames and dropped it on an incapacitated Harry. This leads to months of hospitals, reconstructive surgeries that didn't make him look normal again, and a lifetime of hiding his face from disgusted looks. But he never gave up the kids who tied him to the tree. He was scared to death of those kids. But they were probably more scared of him than he was of them. Harry's life is eventful and uneventful all in one. He doesn't do anything. He isn't a stellar student. His situation is a burden on his parents' lives and marriage. He doesn't even have any friends. Until Johnny moves to his town and his school. Johnny is like an uncontrollable force that changes everything in his wake, including Harry. When Harry is rejected by a girl, Johnny says, "Let's start a band." While it seemed out of place and not entirely comforting, a band was exactly what Harry needed. Harry needed to stop being a tool. He needed to stop being a doormat. And most of all, he needed to stop feeling sorry for himself. A band wasn't a panacea, but it certainly did change Harry's life in ways he never thought possible. I personally don't read as much realistic YA as I do fantasy or science fiction, but when I do, I am usually quite impressed because I pick those titles carefully. This story was an absolute shock. It was this mix of shockingly horrible situations, endearing moments, and flawed relationships. I am not quite sure how to classify this story, but I know I loved it. Harbinger is the kind of guy who just lets life happen to him. From the lightning strike to the band, he doesn't fight for or against anything. He just goes through the motions. Johnny changes that, but not all for the good. Sure, Johnny befriended a kid most adults were even too freaked out to talk to, but Johnny liked the fact that Harry was damaged. Next to Harry, Johnny was even more impressive. From his smooth, suave talk with parents to the animal magnetism everyone was drawn to, Johnny appeared to be the model young man, but his relationship with Harry was complicated and not altogether positive. I loved and hated Johnny interchangeably, and it was a

difficult pair of emotions to resolve. Without Johnny, however, Harry would never have become the young man who wrote this college essay (the premise for the story). He never would have lived those moments, thought those thoughts, or even stepped foot outside his door. And even as he lives this strange and legendary few years with Johnny and the band, he doesn't think he is responsible for any of it. He lives his life assuming the bad things that happen to him were all his fault and the good things were thanks to some other force in his life. It was heartbreaking to witness, but Vlahos made it into a story you can't put down. Harry's short life so far is one we thank god we don't have to live through and thank Vlahos for giving it to us to bear witness. Pretty amazing! I would give this to any student- male or female. I don't think there is a "type" of reader who would enjoy this story because I believe it will transform any reader. Excellent story, transformative characters, and enough spunk and humor to keep you going. A+ in my book!

So many YA books are written with a female protagonist and appeal to girls. I am always looking for books that appeal to middle/high school aged boys because my young son is a huge reader and so many boys lose interest in high school when there are so few books for them. The Scar Boys is a keeper for my list. The victim of a childhood bullying prank that left him severely disfigured, this is a coming of age book that was both heartbreaking and uplifting. The book itself is the protagonist - Harry's- college application essay and tells of the big moments in his life...his childhood and injuries, finding that first real friend, forming a punk rock band, and girls. Recommended for high school and above due to unsettling violence toward a young child, frequent and heavy language, a few instances of underage drinking and pot, and some mild sexual situations.

You have to love any book that uses the word horripilating. I am always on the lookout for books my son will enjoy (he's 14). I ordered this coming of age book for him, and he said he "really, really liked it." Then he brought it in to his English teacher (honors English) and suggested it for class reading. That hasn't happened yet, but I decided to read it myself, and I enjoyed it. In fact I zipped through it in a day. The author has a nice restrained touch. He's funny, empathic, deft, and definitely not predictable.

Read this book, now. If it's currently on your wish list, move it to the top, and if it's not, then it really should be. Several times while reading, I had to remind myself that it was fiction and not a biography. The descriptions of situations and Harry's emotional responses seemed so real and appropriate for a teenage boy. Harry has led an unusual life and when completing his application for

university, he find that the tiny space available to add supplementary information about himself, is too small. Instead of the allotted 250 words, he starts writing the story of his life, spanning some 200 plus pages. Through his words, we learn of the tragic accident which left him physically scarred and which impacted him long after ward. Why do I recommend this book. For the most part, we all live safe predictable lives. We feel sorry for ourselves when something bad happens to us. Bad might be failing a test we didn't study for, missing out on a sale price on a desired piece of clothing, or sprouting a pimple the day before school photos. This story will help put your views back in perspective. From a parents point of view, it serves as a reminder to value your children for who they are, not who we want them to be or who they might have grown up to be if only some malady or mishap hadn't happened.

I absolutely loved this poignant yet hilarious story about a badly scarred boy as he endures the normal travails of teenage-hood over and above dealing with his disfigurement. I strongly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys voicey male POV stories with self-deprecating humour and a lot of musical references. The musical angle of this book made it even more awesome!

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