



# Sidekicked

*John David Anderson*

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Drew Bean might be a part of a secret organization for the training of superhero sidekicks, but that doesn't mean that life is all leaping tall buildings in single bounds.

Drew is possessed of super senses—his hearing, sight, taste, touch, and smell are the most powerful on the planet—making him literally the most sensitive kid in school. And then there's his best friend, Jenna—their friendship would be complicated enough if she weren't able to throw an eighteen-wheeler the length of a city block. Add in trying to keep his sidekick life a secret from everyone, including his parents, and the truth is clear: middle school is pretty much a drag regardless of whether you have superpowers.

But this is all before a supervillain long thought dead returns to the city of Justica and Drew's two identities threaten to crash head-on into each other. Drew has always found it pretty easy to separate right from wrong, good from evil. It's what a superhero does. But what happens when that line starts to disappear?

Fans of *The Extraordinary Adventures of Ordinary Boy* will love *Sidekicked*, John David Anderson's hilarious middle-grade superhero novel.

## Sidekicked Details

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Author : John David Anderson

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# From Reader Review Sidekicked for online ebook

## Erik This Kid Reviews Books says

Middle schooler, Andrew “Drew” Macon Bean couldn’t decide if it was good or bad to be a sidekick. His superpowers (super senses – extra good hearing, taste, touch, sight, and smell) make him super sensitive, so Drew thinks they are super lame. His Super, that he is a sidekick to (The Titan), is a super-drunk. Plus Drew is super-tired of keeping his super-secret identity super-secret. Drew thinks his Super is good for nothing, especially when The Titan doesn’t come to save him when Drew almost died. Instead Drew’s best friend’s Super rescues him. It all gets super worse when The Dealer (The Titan’s arch-nemesis who was thought to be dead) comes back and starts terrorizing the city and The Titan can’t be found. Supers are being kidnapped, and until the only Supers left in the city are The Fox and Mr. Masters (The Sidekick trainer) and the Sidekicks. Drew knows there is a mole in the few good-guys left, so Drew isn’t sure who is trustworthy. Drew has to call on the Super in him to try to save the day!

This book is AWESOME!!! I love superheroes! This was one of those books I couldn’t stop reading and I got in trouble for not listening to my parents because I couldn’t put it down (sorry mom and dad). The city that Mr. Anderson created for the story, Justicia, was an awesome setting and it was described very well. There was a bunch of action in this book and the plot was excellent! I was on the edge of my seat – 12 times (maybe more)! ;) Drew was a great character and I could totally understand how he feels. I love characters that have to challenge themselves to do something they think they can’t. I also think Drew was totally believable as an ordinary kid... with lame super powers. :)

\*\*NOTE - I got a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review

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## Bennett says

### **Warning: MAJOR spoilers! Do not read if you have not read this book!**

Super powers are the wish of many, but for Andrew, they are an reality, and they come with more than enough problems...

I loved this book! It must be a record: I read it in three days, and all three of those days were weekdays!

Very few authors do exactly what I want them to. I'm not saying this one did, but he was very close.

First of all, I was a little unclear on all of the H.E.R.O. members' powers. What was Jenna's power exactly? I thought she had super-strength when I first read the summary. But it never really said what her power was in the book. Second, that Eric guy. His power was doing karate. Okay then...Of all the powers, that's the stupidest. It's not even a superpower! It's just something he does. And also he's deaf. I have nothing against deaf people, but why did the author was throw that in?

The end was awesome. Some many identity switches, so many plot twists! I have to say, I expected that The Fox was somehow up to no good when she caught the two Jacks at once. But I never would have guessed that she was the Jack of Hearts who faked her death, and posed as her dead father while posing as a superhero! That's so far-fetched, no one would have guessed it! Also, I'm extremely claustrophobic. So getting encased in a block of cement is one of my greatest fears. It's also a totally satisfying and enjoyable

brutal death for the villain.

I did NOT suspect Jenna. When her identity was revealed, I couldn't believe it. Something must have been wrong! And at the end when she went to jail...that seemed a little overboard. She's only thirteen, and she's not even the villain! She just assisted the villain in a small way.

It seems like the book never has a happy ending. Instead of making up or becoming a superhero again, the Titan disappears and Andrew never sees him again. Jenna's in jail. Andrew is crushed. Then it ends. Maybe it's a good thing, because it leaves room for a sequel, and the author probably couldn't afford to make the book any longer (It's huge for a children's book! Almost 400 pages!)

It was a great book, and I desperately want it to have a sequel!

(P.S. If you go to the mobile version of Goodreads and go to this book's page, you'll see that the author's name has a bunch of spaces in it. OCD attack! Could a librarian fix that? I don't know if you're allowed to change an author's name, but...)

**Alternate rating:** A+

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### **Amanda Thompson says**

*You can support me by reading this review on my blog or watching my video review, featuring CAPTAIN LITERARY!*

Sidekicked has a serious Sky High vibe. I loved it.

Andrew Bean, as his alter ego The Sensationalist, is a member of a secret sidekick training program through his school. With other sidekicks, he trains to hone his abilities and to learn every way a sidekick should help and not hinder his hero. It talks about the little things, too, the inconveniences that arise from having to take your mask with you everywhere in case of an emergency and wearing your suit under your clothes and hiding chemical weapons in your backpack. Drew gives you the lowdown on what it's really like to be a sidekick and it's enthralling.

But Drew isn't super strong or super athletic (or athletic at all, really). He can't walk through walls and he doesn't know eighteen different forms of karate. Drew has heightened senses -he can hear a whisper from the next room even in a crowd. He can see something far away and he smells everything. Everything.

I loved Drew, but even more than that, I loved that Drew's abilities aren't what you would normally think of as 'awesome'. I also love that Drew really has to work at his powers. If he's not careful, if he doesn't focus on something, he is quickly overwhelmed by everything he hears, sees, smells, and touches. This is something he deals with throughout the book and I thought it was a great opportunity to show that you really have to work for what you want.

Drew is a great character. The story is told from his perspective and some of his lines -my gosh. One of the things I love about superhero comics are the over-the-top narrations and descriptions and Anderson nailed it. **'Arms crisscrossed in a pretzel of triumph'**. Drew calls supers the **'great fuzzy comforter of justice that ordinary citizens of the world snuggle up with at night'**. He's funny and clever and sarcastic and he's so entertaining. He has his issues and his moments of self-pity but what really stuck out for me -aside from his

humor- is his determination. He grows through the book from a kid to a future super, and it wasn't all sherry and giggles. Another big key in Drew's development is not only his own growth, but how he learns to help others grow. A fantastic character.

This book deals with a lot of different issues. Between the fact that Drew's super won't get off his bar stool and the most notorious villain has returned to wage war on the city, Drew's trying to work up the courage to tell his best friend he likes her before fellow sidekick Gavin steals her away and he has to keep everything secret from his parents. Kids are going to find something to relate with Drew about.

On the whole, this middle grade fiction managed to catch the essence of the superhero genre and hold me captive. I had a hard time putting it down at night.

Sidekicked, Captain Literary approved!

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## **Becky says**

Who wants to guess which two of my pet topics I'm going to rant about with this book?

If you guessed morality and feminism, you guessed correctly! Yaaaaaaay!

[So many spoilers it's not even funny. Also some swears.]

Before I get going though, let me just say that it was a good book. Or it should have been, is maybe a better way to say it. The concept is cool, plot is good, the writing is good, characterization and blah blah, all good. I really enjoyed reading it, and it wasn't until I got to the last few chapters when it became really obvious that the little sexist quirks were based on much more solid sexist beliefs. It's a fun book that I would love to get behind, but there are some very serious problems happening here that make me very reluctant about supporting it. It's not NEARLY as bad as the School for Good and Evil. That book was more than just problematic, it was disgusting. The issues with this book are a bit more subtle, which make them potentially more dangerous.

So let's get going then.

In the main body of the book there were a couple of little things that caught my attention and worried me. For instance, Drew and Mike go to the mall, and Drew uses his super-hearing to eavesdrop on girls to know if Mike should go talk to them.

Let's rephrase this: Two males go to a crowded place and uses their superior power to carefully select an unknowing, weaker female to pursue. These boys are literally *hunting* girls. And it's all ridiculous of course, because Mike has never actually talked to any of them, and yet it normalizes an incredibly alarming view of women. These are middle school boys in this book, and presumably middle school boys who read this book, and not once is this view questioned.

In fact, it get's worse. Here's where I got really worried:

*"I should have known because the truth is, guys like me never get the girl. Other guys get the girl. Or maybe she goes off to boarding school. Or maybe she throws in her lot with a notorious villain bent on revenge and is forced to turn on her friends and see them swallowed up in a pit of quick-drying cement. Pick your ending, they're pretty much the same. And that's why I'm hanging here. Because of her."*

STAND BACK, LADIES, WE'VE GOT A NICE GUY HERE!

Let's do a quick recap here: your best friend falling in with a villain and killing you is EQUAL to another guy "getting" her. Six of one, half dozen of the other. If Gavin was going to date her anyway, it might as well be that she's actually evil, it amounts to the same.

And this goes on, this whole "I should have saved her, I should have seen it, I should have stopped her sooner," and nothing happens to suggest this isn't true. I'll tell you why he thinks this: because at one point in the book Jenna asks him if the ends justify the means (I'm paraphrasing). After a lot of floundering he basically says yes, if the ending turns out to be good, the means were probably okay. This conversation is why he's beating himself up. And this is where it bleeds over into a problem with morality, because it's partly left as an open ended question: was it worth it? And I love these kinds of things, I love it when the reader has to make a decision, but it's a problem here because even though that question keeps coming up, there is still this overwhelming sense that Drew dropped the ball where Jenna was concerned. That he could have and *should* have stopped her earlier in the game.

Let's do another rephrase: a male should have known the mind of a female and should have intervened. Her choices, her independent will, become meaningless. It was the responsibility of the male to fix her and he failed.

She made choices. She made very bad choices, but it was never about her betrayal and her mistakes. It was about his inability to save her, which was apparently what he should have done.

Then in the end, he kind of makes friends with "the other guy" because "he didn't get the girl either, so I guess we have something else in common."

**BROS BEFORE HOS MOTHERFUCKER!!**

Then there's Nikki, who keeps a string of boyfriends, sometimes having two at a time.

Drew is all like:

By all means, let's market this to young boys and expect them to grow up to respect a woman's privacy, person, and choices.

And it makes me really sad, because otherwise it was really good. It had this beautiful paragraph about the firefighters and paramedics as heroes. And it could have been an amazing insight into loneliness and rejection, not only the romantic kind, but also by parental figures. And it really wasn't. I wish I could recommend it, but I can't.

Sigh.

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## colleen the convivial curmudgeon says

2.5

This book had a slow start, and a whiny protagonist. He spends most of the book lamenting that he doesn't have a cooler/more active power, like super strength or super speed, and, instead, has super senses - like sight, hearing, etc.

I can't blame just him, though, because even the head of the department of sidekicks (or whatever) also seems to sort of undervalue his powers. I mean, he does work on improving and expanding them, but no one really seems to know how to use them to the fullest - i.e. as one freaking kickass spy!

There are several times throughout the book where they're trying to figure out where people are, and I'm like, "Why do they never think to use this kid like a sniffer dog?"

Also, I understand that he's also learned how to turn off his sense, because they'd be overwhelming otherwise, by the number of times he's snuck up on and whatnot is pretty effing ridiculous all things considered.

But it's not just his powers that's the problem. There's also the fact that his Super has bailed on being a Super, and they're kinda using this kid as a last ditch effort to get him to sober and Super up again.

He also has an "antagonistic" relationship with another sidekick - whose main "failing" seems to be that he's strong and handsome and that his female friend seems to be into him. (i.e. a major case of "I hate you because I want to be you" syndrome.)

And, of course, his jealousy and anger also gets directed at said female friend, because he wants to be more than friends but she doesn't, or isn't sure if she does, and of course those chicks have to pick the jocks, right?

\*sighs\*

So, anyway -

That aside, the story did pick up by the end and it was entertaining enough. I even considered bumping it up to three at one point.

But then we find out the 'cause of his Super's depression and withdrawal, and it's the most cliché thing ever. (view spoiler)

Lastly, the story tries to introduce some moral shades of grey, and whether the ends ever justifies the means, and all that good stuff - but, unfortunately, the ends are so selfish and shortsighted and the means so not ok,

that you have to wonder how someone who seems to be a relatively decent and intelligent person could really fall for the claptrap.

Teenagers, right?

Except no.

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The writing itself, once it gets going, isn't bad, and the story's ok if you aren't annoyed by... all the things that annoyed me.

Anyway - it was more serious, and darker, than I expected going in. I was expecting something pretty light and silly. But it also seems like it wanted to be a sort of deconstruction, but ends up being all too familiar in most ways.

I'm sort of ambivalent about continuing the series. I won't say never, but I'm not exactly keen on it, either.

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### **Lynn says**

Sidekicked is about a boy named Andrew Bean with a few special abilities, living in a world where "Supers" with superpowers are the norm. We learn pretty early on in the book that those with superpowers have many of the same problems as the rest of us in addition to ones that are unique only to them. Andrew Bean tells the story from his perspective, so we see how he deals with the world of middle school as well as the world of "Supers." The story was well written with lots of insight into both worlds.

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### **JeanBookNerd says**

Super Hero stories have always captured everyone's imagination. From the very first day it was told and to the latest telling, it's the type of story that lets us dream the impossible. John David Anderson's Sidekicked is a super hero story that is wildly fun and uniquely twisted at the same time. Andrew Bean's powers is that he has ultra-high senses. His sense of touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing are super enhanced. He is also a member of his middle school's group of students with powers, rightfully called H.E.R.O. Headed by Mr. Masters, he teaches these kids about how to manage their gifts and pairs them up with Supers as guidance/mentors. Along with his best friend, Jenna, the two try to maintain their lives with dual identities. But when a supervillain that is thought to be dead returns to cause havoc on Justicia, Andrew must use his lessons to distinguish the rights and wrongs. Supers begin to disappear and Andrew realizes the cause of all this mayhem may be closer to him than he thinks.

Super hero books are popular by nature as it stretches the imagination of readers. Andrew is the type of character that many readers can relate to. Although he has powers and is part of an elite group, his powers are far less than anyone's but it doesn't stop him from making bold moves and heroic choices. Each character, no matter how colorful or complicated they were, Anderson surely knew how to fully present them



and provide them with life and attitude.

Super hero stories at the middle grade level tend to be cartoonish with silly plots to entertain an audience who may not necessarily care much for back stories. However, the deeper I got into this book, I realize the depth Anderson has provided in writing such an incredible super hero story. I enjoyed the two worlds that Andrew was seeing. One being a kid in middle school and experiencing all of the antics and realities of this period of a thirteen-year-old's life. The other was just as interesting as he was living a double life with his gifted abilities.

Andrew and the other sidekicks to the Supers form an outstanding display of interaction. The author allows them to create their own real voice and real personalities that they did not seem like cartoonish characters. This approach provided a level of drama and seriousness that would otherwise be missing if gone a different route. Sidekicked is a wonderfully written story that will appeal to many fantasy and sci-fiction fans. However, I see it being enjoyed by a broader audience that would normally pass on this genre.

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## **Experiment BL626 says**

Superhero fictions tend to fall into two camps: campy and meta. This Middle Grade fiction fell into camp meta, and it fell flat on its bottom with a splat. Ouch.

### **+ the main character**

I struggled to like the main character because Drew was quite nettlesome. I was aware that because he was only 13 years old I should cut him some slack, and I did. I cut him lots of slack, despite the jabbing fact that the people in charge thought he was mature enough to handle and keep chemical weapons and to go out on the street and fight bad guys. What was I saying, again? Oh yes, I cut Drew lots of slack. Still and all, by the middle of the book, I had to wave the white flag. He had shown not an inch of character growth. Not a fucking inch.

Drew was one of those brats who lives a good life but thinks they don't. What we had in first person narration was complaints about how unhelpful his superpower was, how his superhero partner sucked, how much he disliked Gavin, and how much he liked Jenna and wished she would reciprocate and stop spending time with Gavin. Rinse and repeat. I understood his complaints for the most part were meant to be humorous in a sardonic manner but none of it amused me.

I felt bad for Gavin for how Drew treated him, and I was already feeling bad for Gavin for being typecast as a slow witted jock. Drew's fellow sidekick did nothing to him to earn his enmity except for being everything Drew wanted to be: tall, handsome, muscular, popular, and having a superpower that is "combat compliant." Drew's jealousy was a pain in the neck. I hated how none of the characters called Drew out for the crap.

What was worse was that accompanying his jealousy with Gavin was his possessiveness with Jenna. She was his best friend yet Drew treated her more as a go-to emotional comfort blanket than as a friend. She was there for him many times but the few times when she needed him he doesn't deliver. To my horror, Drew worked that "Nice Guy" attitude where if a guy is a nice to a girl for a certain period of time she must reward his niceness by being his girlfriend. No. Just no. 13 years old and already his feet were on the road to dick-hood.

In addition to Drew sucking as a decent person, he also sucked as a sidekick. His super senses could be extremely useful in crime-fighting, investigation and espionage for example, if only he would realize it and quit shallowly seeing superhero-ing as all about the epic battles. He never really did much to my exasperation. I struggled to understand why Drew continued to stay in H.E.R.O. when many times it seemed like his heart wasn't in it. Now, to be fair, I also blamed the program and Mr. Masters, the person in charge, for not doing right by him. Ugh, so much incompetence.

Anyway, I had difficulty believing how Drew managed to survive with so few injuries when things could have easily taken a turn for the tragic. He had incredible luck let me tell you. Now, Drew did make smart decisions, but they were very few and far between, and that's why I took issue. The kid was very smart, but just like his superpower, he never made full use of his brain as often as he should have. He had so much potential but displayed very little of it.

#### **+ the plot**

For most of the book, Drew was a passive participant, which made for a dull read. Not that Drew didn't do anything, it was just that he could have done more, and he could have done it with a lot less whining. The plot didn't hit the ground running till halfway through, and even then it wasn't running fast. Action scenes were scant and fleeting. I could forgive all these things if the book brought any worthwhile commentary about the superhero theme. It brought shit.

Well, things weren't all bad. The best part of the book were the twists towards the end. They completely surprised me. Unfortunately, they also put in a crimp in the portrayal of strong female characters, and the book was already dripping in machoism. It was depressing that even the good things came with some problems of their own.

Rubbing salt into the wound was the lackluster ending. I think I saw half of an inch of character growth from Drew at the end. Talk about pitiful. The other characters were equally disappointing as well, especially Titan. When the story revealed what happened in the past that put him into depression, it turned out to be something stupid and cliché. Oh, boo hoo cry me a fucking river. I wanted to bitchslap the dude... and maybe also tie him to a rocket and launch it to the sun. Man, what a group of shitty characters.

#### **In Conclusion**

I rate *Sidekicked* 2-stars for it was okay. The book was engaging but it failed to meaningfully explore the superhero theme and, more importantly, it failed to entertain me. If you plan on picking it up, I recommend borrowing over buying. Or better yet, try *The Cloak Society*, a better Middle Grade superhero fiction.

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#### **Shanshad Whelan says**

I grew up on stories of superheroes. I think a lot of kids did, and still do. The comics, the animated cartoons that brought them to life, the movies and fans. I'm a huge fan of this world of extraordinary powers, fast-paced action and drama and serial storylines. I still love reading about superheroes. Most of these super-powered denizens of contemporary science fiction and fantasy inhabit the world of graphic novels, comic books, and spin off media books. There is, however, another subset of super hero fiction stories out there. Rather than basing their narratives on familiar comic book heroes and villains and the worlds from their

franchises, these writers create their own unique heroes and back stories in order to explore the tropes, themes and issues of superheroes through narrative form. I've read a good deal of this fiction, and while there are some gems in the bunch, a good portion of it falls flat. Either it tries too hard to be literary and loses sight of the nature and immediacy of the superhero story, or the fiction fails to translate the graphic novel action and event into a full fledged, fleshed out novel. It's rare to find a story that manages the trick of capturing the tone, action and vision of these heroes while providing a deeper context and exploration of these heroes at the same time.

So you can perhaps imagine my ambivalence picking up *Sidekicked*. I'm always interested by middle grade super hero fiction, as there is only a scant handful of it outside the realm of graphic novels. But I feared it would disappoint this super hero fan. Despite my concerns, I began reading. When I put the book down, I knew that it was one of the best darn super hero novels I've read. Hands down. John David Anderson decants the essence of superhero myth and legend . . . and melds it with the realities of middle school life from the perspective of a thirteen-year-old protagonist. He sets his story in a world that believes in Supers . . . but also has math tests, school lunches, and awkward relationships. What is key in my mind, however is that he does this without making the entire thing a comedy. It's fairly easy to make heroes so outrageous and larger than life that the whole thing becomes a tongue in cheek, over the top satire. But to have those wildly powerful Supers and create a dramatic and serious story about them that brings them down to earth just a bit while still allowing them to be Supers? That's a heck of an accomplishment.

It's Tuesday. Andrew Bean is suspended over a swimming pool full of acid. For a normal kid this might be a bit unusual, but for Andrew (aka *The Sensationalist*) it's just a one of the hazards of being a sidekick in training. When he's not attending middle school, doing homework and studying for tests, he's the *Sensationalist*, the kid with super senses who is training to fight crime. Of course, having extremely sharp senses of hearing, smell, sight, touch and taste isn't quite the same as being able to benchpress a car like his best friend Jenna. Or fly. Or phase through solid objects. Still, Andrew embraces being a part of H.E.R.O.—the secret organization that trains sidekicks and pairs them with full fledged Supers as mentors. He only wishes his Super would show up. Being targeted by dangerous villains, having his Super MIA and trying to determine what really are the boundaries of good and evil is a lot for one extremely sensitive kid. But when an old nemesis returns to Justicia for revenge and Supers start go missing, things can a Super-less sidekick figure out what's going on . . . and maybe save the day?

Andrew, our protagonist and first person narrator by turns thoughtful and funny, sweet and inspiring and incredibly likable. Despite his extraordinary adventures and secrets, Drew feels like an ordinary kid, navigating a lot of very realistic middle school issues. It's just that in the middle of them is this whole super-hero thing added to the mix, and our protagonists' approach to his side-kick status is very much in keeping with who he is. Unlike his startling friend, Jenna who transforms herself from a slightly nerdy girl in school into the dangerous and elegant *Silver Lynx*, Drew is no master of battle and poise. He's still struggling to use his super senses rather than simply suffer from them. Despite this, he doesn't shy away from the dangers of being a sidekick, and it's obvious he cares about the people in his life, and shoulders an awful lot of responsibility . Readers won't doubt that this is one sidekick who has the heart of a hero, even if he's got a lot to learn. He's also fun and funny to read, injecting wry observations and notes on the every present sensory input he deals with day in and day out. For all that he has a lot on his plate, readers won't find Drew to be a complainer he's a decent story narrator that brings depth to the overall story arc. In this case, the first person POV is a true strength of this book. Without Andrew's "voice" it wouldn't have been nearly as accessible and enjoyable to read.

The other sidekicks and Supers in this book stand out vividly—the author allows them to be unique enough that they do not fall into stereotypes. At the same time, readers can suspend their disbelief and accept that

these are Supers, with powers and abilities similar to those they've seen in movies and comics. The author never turns these individuals into caricatures and so manages to maintain a level of drama and serious tension in his book that could otherwise be lost.

When it comes to the story itself readers will have to suspend their disbelief a bit. This is an alternate reality where super powered beings are part of the regular landscape. There are villains around with dangerous powers and high profile crimes. There are new broadcasts covering astonishing heroic rescues. And while the author provides some unique characters, he's also faithfully pursuing a super hero storyline. Expect action, adventure, betrayal, doubt, and beyond all else a big wrap up finale. It wouldn't really be much of a Super hero story without those elements. It's the execution of the story elements and what's going on inside Andrew's mind that deepen the story and make so much more. There are some powerful and poignant scenes, particularly between Drew and his would-be mentor (and what kid doesn't know what it's like to have an adult in their lives who has let them down?). Occasionally, we're reminded that this is a dangerous 'reality' that these sidekicks inhabit. People die, or sometimes get badly injured. And that can have a profound effect upon them. For a middle school reader who has absorbed the mythos and the excitement of heroes, this book isn't going to dull the passion, but it might provide some sobering thoughts and questions that the reader can take away.

Oh, and did I mention the writing? I've got to mention the writing. John David Anderson succeeds in creating a distinctive and realistic voice for his first person POV narrator. He makes the flow of story and structure of the chapters look effortless, which can only mean a heck of a lot of good writing on his part. The tone is light, but not comedic — readers will likely find it easy to get drawn into the main character's story and cheer him on. The pacing is, to my mind, skillfully handled, I never felt the plot bogged down in detail, nor that the action overwhelmed everything else. The story moves quickly and I suspect even reluctant readers may dive into this book without too much hesitation. None of the superhero fiction I've read to date has managed to combine this kind of written ability with a story line that does it justice the way Sidekicked has.

One minor quibble. The book contains a prologue in third person POV where readers are introduced to a high drama action scene with Captain Marvelous. This is the Captain's only appearance—he's there only to introduce readers to the Titan and set the stage for our sidekicks in the future. It isn't so much that any of the prologue is bad, but rather that I found it completely unnecessary since most of what happens in the Prologue is never again mentioned in the story. I don't think Captain Marvelous comes up at all—so why start the story off with him? It's also slightly jarring to switch from third person POV to first person POV in the first chapter.

I think this story will appeal to fantasy/sf readers, but will also be accessible to a larger audience that may not be as familiar with genre fiction, but is likely to have some knowledge of superheroes. Those who've enjoyed *Powerless* by Matthew Cody and *The Cloak Society* by Jeremy Kraatz should give this a try!

Original published on my blog, Views From the Tesseract: <http://shanshad1.wordpress.com/2013/0...>

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### **Barb Middleton says**

This novel pays homage to conventions of superhero fiction novels, as well as pokes fun at the genre. I am a newbie when it comes to reading comic books or graphic novels, but I have seen oodles of movies over the years and I did hear Stan Lee speak this summer, learning a bit more about common comic book tropes. Stan

Lee created: The Fantastic Four, Captain America, Spider-man, Thor, Iron Man, to name a few. Lee was one of the creators that influenced a new type of superhero in the mid-twentieth century that had weaknesses as well as strengths. His characters were not always handsome or affable and had moments of depression. Women characters sometimes played the most prominent role. Spider-man was a teenager with pimples who was a worrywart. Other characteristics of the comic superheroes were that they were adults with sidekicks that teenagers were meant to identify with; hence, Batman's sidekick was Robin or The Human Torch's sidekick was Toro. The sidekick was supposed to appeal to the adolescent, although I've never met a kid that wanted to be Robin and the author plays on this notion with his main character, Andrew (Drew) Bean, and others of the H.E.R.O team that hate being novices or sidekicks to the adult superheroes. What's fun about this book is that Drew has a self-deprecating, sarcastic inner monologue that pokes holes at common superhero conventions and themes, such as alienation from society, but it also embraces familiar tropes found in well-known comic book characters. Author, John David Anderson, puts his own spin on the familiar in this genre, creating thirteen-year-old Drew who is dealing with alienation and loneliness but tied to middle school issues such as dating girls, feeling inept, disillusionment, divided loyalties, and having no authority. While the plot had enough complexity and twists, it is the character development that held my interest most.

Drew is in middle school and a part of a school environmental club, H.E.R.O, that conceals a secret facility below the first floor classrooms that operates as a training ground for kids with superpowers. The members of the team have cool physical powers. One can turn into granite. Another can produce electricity. A third can walk through walls. Another has super strength and acrobatic skills. Drew? Well, he has hypersensitive senses that can hear or smell scents from miles away. When he finds himself dangling over an acid pool, he mocks the superhero conventions and his less than spectacular superpower: "I can't believe I left my utility belt at school. Again. Not that I could reach anything on it. It's just a comfort thing. Like forgetting your watch or not putting on underwear. Without my utility belt, I am basically harmless. With it, I am at least somewhat potentially threatening." Once in a while the inner gab goes on too long, but for the most part it shows his growth as a character. As the action moves forward, he learns how his superpowers are invaluable to the team in different ways whether picking locks, sniffing out danger, or following the scent of a person.

All of the members of H.E.R.O. are sidekicks and connected with a mentor that trains and teaches them until they are ready to go off on their own to be a superhero. Drew's hero is the famous Titan that put away the villainous Dealer and henchmen. For some mysterious reason, the Titan refuses to mentor Drew and spends most of his days drinking at bars. When Drew is almost killed, he confronts Titan only to be told to "save himself." He learns to deal with his insecurities and isolation with the help of his friend, Jenna. She too struggles with the same issues although the first person narrative limits the reader from getting inside her head. The two have a discussion about good and bad decisions and how they boil down to choices and consequences. The debate shows how the two are ambivalent about the morality of killing a person and what defines loyalty. When the Dealer comes back from the dead and reenlists the help of his previous henchmen the city becomes terrorized. The Dealer hunts down the superheroes who first put him in jail and as the sidekicks mentors start to disappear they decide it is time to take action on their own.

Drew says that the hardest part of being a super is "keeping the secret." This isolates the superhero making them feel alienated from others. Middle school is a time when students are becoming more self-conscious, develop a stronger sense of what is right and wrong, learn to be more independent, and need to belong to a social group. Drew and the other sidekicks have to lie to family members and friends so no one knows when they've been involved in a battle involving villains and superheroes. They are unsung heroes and the seduction of fame and wanting to be special is very real for some of them. Just like Clark Kent was the nerdy, inept reporter by day, Drew is an inept middle schooler. Marvel Comics created teenage superheroes that felt ambivalent toward society and alienated from it. The sidekicks are alienated from other middle schoolers unable to tell them or their parents about their powers.

Gavin and Drew are both interested in Jenna. Drew is insecure with his skinny arms and looks compared to the buff Gavin. The two don't get along as a result. When Drew talks to police about a break-in at his home the officer asks if anyone has a grudge against Drew. He thinks of the villains trying to kill the sidekicks and Gavin who can secrete lava rock, but got injured by some "goon's beam-blasting eyeball." When Drew finally responds to the policeman he says that people don't care about him one way or the other to which the officer humorously responds, "Right. Looks like not much has changed since I was in middle school." When circumstances push Gavin and Drew together and Gavin saves his life, the two learn to work as a team and swallow their differences. Much of this story has to do with friendships, as well as the disillusionment of being a superhero.

In an exciting conclusion, Drew finds his potential as a hero and becomes more confident in his abilities. I did have some questions about the plot such as not being sure why the mayor was a target and how the bee villain fit in to the overall scheme. Some spots are slow and I the prologue confused me (I was thinking the narrator was pretending with a friend), but it comes together and takes off by the end. The world building is solid and the super human powers explained well. Superheroes oftentimes have their hearts broken and Drew does a few times and he is not the only character that struggles with disillusionment. Titan is disenchanted with the superhero gig while Jenna questions the morality of it. Rocket and Mr. Master's want to protect the sidekicks like a parent from getting hurt. Loads of humor and action layered with themes make this worth your while. Another good superhero book is "Steelheart" by Brandon Sanderson. Grab your mask and settle into your favorite reading spot with Drew, a.k.a. "The Sensationalist."

Interesting article on comics in EBSCO database:

Trushell, J. M. (2004). American Dreams of Mutants: The X-Men—"Pulp" Fiction, Science Fiction, and Superheroes. *Journal Of Popular Culture*, 38(1), 149-168.

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### **Abby Johnson says**

Funny and action-packed, this is a good bet for kids who enjoy all things superhero.

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### **Kailey (BooksforMKs) says**

I adored this book from start to finish! It surprised me, made me laugh, tugged at my heartstrings, and made me think about the meaning of good and evil. Brilliant writing, a delightful story, and a compelling and likable main character! I love it!

The story is told from Drew's perspective, who is a teen sidekick-in-training with a super that has abandoned the superhero community. As Drew tries to convince his super to come back and fight against evil, the other sidekicks are having difficulties as well, especially once an old archenemy returns and begins kidnapping supers. The best thing about it is that Drew's superpower is his supersenses; super-hearing, super-smell, and super-sight.

I loved Drew's character, because I always love the underdog. I immediately connected with him, his angst and self-doubt, his unexpected courage and clear-thinking, his loyalty and tenacity. The plot forces him to really think about the superhero world and what it means to be super, but he also has the funniest one liners

and silly situations he gets into. He discovers and changes and learns and takes risks with his heart and throws himself headlong into danger! I adore this character so much!

All the supporting characters have their own voices too. Each character is well-developed and unique within just a few chapters. And Drew's relationship with each of them, whether friendly or otherwise, is wonderfully explored and fleshed out through the rest of the book. We never know who to trust, and it's evident that someone has betrayed the supers, but I never guessed who it was. That plot twist completely surprised me!

One of my favorite things is that one of the sidekicks is deaf, and that does not stop him from kicking butt and being completely awesome! His deafness is never treated as a disability, and there's some hilarious deaf humor in the book. (Someone shouts, "Everybody shut up!", and the deaf hero sits on his hands. haha!) This reminds me strongly of the way Toph's blindness was presented in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, never as a disability, but as a strength for that character. Beautifully done!

Drew and Jenna... ah, what can I say? Blossoming teen romance or devastating friendship-gone-wrong? I still can't decide. Those two are so brilliant together though. Jenna is such a complex character, and seeing Drew trying to figure her out just brings the tension mounting through the whole story. Absolutely incredible writing!

There's a perfect balance between serious material and humor, fighting action and personal drama. Most of all, the story is just plain entertaining! The writing has wry humor, dry humor, puns, and slapstick humor and every kind of humor in between. Even in the most tense moments, I just laughed and chuckled and rolled my eyes at everything!

The theme is definitely that good and evil are not black and white. Moral dilemmas get complicated sometimes. There are gray areas, but you have to be careful that those gray areas don't lead you into complete darkness.

I cannot think of a single thing that I didn't like about this book. So I must give it 5 stars!

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## **Joshua says**

Perhaps I expected too much from this book. I've read a lot of good texts in the superhero genre. In fact, some of the best texts I've read, best movies I've watched, and so forth are in that genre. I also read *Sidekicked's* sequel/companion novel, *Minion* (which has nothing to do with the cute little yellow things from *Despicable Me*, much to my dismay), which was highly original and interesting, beforehand. That was a good book. I'll review that one someday. It would be inaccurate to say that *Sidekicked* is a bad book, but despite potential to be otherwise, it's thoroughly unoriginal and was a chore to read.

The biggest problem with *Sidekicked* is the nature of its plot, which could have been an interesting deconstruction of the superhero genre. While Anderson does occasionally explore interesting ideas, he almost seems afraid to delve too deeply into the world he's created. This is mostly a straightforward tale of good versus evil. The main characters are sidekicks to famous superheroes, while still navigating the perils of middle school. (And take it from me: There are few things more perilous than middle school.) A sinister plot is created and is duly thwarted in the end.

If not for *Minion*, actually, I'd probably have rated this a good three stars. It has some very positive things to recommend it. An intriguing mystery, for one. I didn't guess the big plot twist until it was revealed towards the end, which is rare for me. Good characters, for one. The various sidekicks, with the notable exception of the main character, were relatable and interesting. But while there were many good things about this novel, it really felt like a by the numbers tale. There was nothing much to make it stand out.

The story also suffers from the fact that its main character is a whiny, annoying, sanctimonious, jealous poor example of humanity. Now, granted, quite a few people I knew in middle school could be described as such, including myself to a limited degree. But I don't think that the main character got a chance to grow over the course of the novel. He ends the same individual he started with, a thoroughly unlikable one. Reading the novel through his eyes was simply torturous. I'm glad I'm not rereading this one anytime soon.

*Sidekicked* represents John David Anderson's halfhearted effort to create a unique superhero story. It was mostly a failure, and probably should be avoided. (I'd have avoided it myself had I not been stuck on a plane for 10 hours. You'd be amazed how desperate you can get to distract yourself.) If you want to read a gripping superhero story, try reading comics like *Runaways* or *Watchmen*. Or even the sequel to this novel. But not this novel. Please don't. You'll probably regret it.

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### **Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says**

*Sidekicked* had me at superheroes. I can't get enough of them, at least so far, and the superhero books I've read thus far have yet to seriously let me down. *Sidekicked* is a great read, full of action and humor, like all the best superhero stories. Full of twists, turns, and middle school awkwardness, *Sidekicked* is a delightful addition to superhero fiction.

Like most superhero stories, *Sidekicked* takes place in a fictional city, the home to the most famous of all superheroes, Justicia. In Justicia, seeing superheroes saving the day is commonplace, much like in Kurt Busiek's *Astro City*. Cops and EMTs wait for superheroes to arrive on the scene of any crime involving a villain, because they're both outclassed and used to the aid of the heroes. These heroes are actually possessed of powers, not just rich kids with toys, though they are mostly wealthy since being a superhero is a costly venture - secret lairs aren't free, you know.

Andrew Bean's middle school has a secret program, one that allows him to skip gym: the Highview Environmental Revitalization Organization (They keep the trash off the streets!). Also known as H.E.R.O. Drew is one of only six kids in this special club, all of them special and all in training to one day be superheroes. Each one gets paired up as a sidekick to a hero, who can teach them the tricks of the trade, unless they refuse to meet with you like Drew's does.

Drew's alias is *The Sensationalist*, because he has super senses. All of his senses are greatly enhanced, except for touch, which is a blessing. Though these powers are fairly useful, he feels out of place with even the rest of the sidekicks, who have super strength or speed or can walk through objects. Drew wants either to be normal or to be truly exceptional, but feels trapped in the middle, not powerful enough to be a Super but too strange and nerdy to fit in with the rest of his classmates.

Drew falls into classic outsider territory. Told in first person narration, the commentary throughout the novel is hilarious. He just made me smile, like when he was working out what his catchphrase might be and said this: "I'm the sensationalist, and I at least smell better than you!" Maybe I have a future as a deodorant



pitchman.' The rest of the cast is well-developed too, and it's a nice ensemble of quirky characters. I love that Jenna is the most powerful of the sidekicks and that a female Super is the strongest hero currently in action. There's a real emphasis on the strength in everyone and looking past the surface.

What most impressed me with Sidekicked though was actually the plot. Anderson keeps everything fast-paced, full of attacks by villains, some of which were pretty intense. At a hundred pages in, I had this awesome theory about the twists that were coming...and I was wrong. A lot of novels targeted to younger readers really telegraph the twists, but Anderson didn't do that. Everything came together really nicely, and he surprised me with each one, even though I was watching for them. Now, I'm not saying I'm the best at anticipating twists, but I suspect the intended audience will be shocked when they reach the big reveal. I really appreciate when middle grade fiction isn't dumbed down.

Anyone who enjoys superhero stories will most definitely want to read Sidekicked. Though a middle grade novel, John David Anderson's Sidekicked is a story that will please children, teens and adults alike with its clever humor, vibrant cast, and action-packed plot.

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### **Vincent Chen says**

This book had a clear understanding of what happens throughout the story. This novel to me would be considered to be more of a children's book than a teen or adult book. But the story has a good plot to it because the author includes lots of action, adventure, and a little bit of comedy in it. Some teenagers would maybe like to read this book but not all of them. The author describes the characters appearance, the setting, what happens, etc. really well because he adds good detail so it helps the reader understand the story easily. Also, when the author is writing a story about superheroes, he doesn't write the story in just a few pages just like other kids books, he writes it as a decently sized book because of all the detail he adds. For example, in a kids book, the author would just write down exactly what's happening and not include any detail because it confuses the kid and not make them understand the book. One of the paragraphs in the story show, "I listen for the heavy thus ==d of Officer Jenson's heels on the sidewalk. Our lone security guard has a slow, bowlegged gait and wears heavy boot-easy to identify."

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