



# PINS

*Jim Provenzano*

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## **PINS** Jim Provenzano

PINS tells the story of bigotry in athletics, and one very short boy who stands up to it.

Set in Little Falls, New Jersey in 1993, PINS weaves the classic story of a Catholic saint into a compelling modern life -and near-death- account of Joey Nicci, a fifteen-year-old Italian-American wrestler.

After befriending Donald "Dink" Kohrs, Joey and his new posse get involved in pranks and partying that eventually get out of control, resulting in the death of a maligned fellow teammate.

The ensuing legal battle and media frenzy alter Joey's life and his self- perception as a gay teenager while shattering his fragile love for fellow teammate Dink. Like his patron saint, his battle against his own teammates forces him to suffer for his beliefs. His survival becomes a literary miracle.

A compelling story of a loving yet confused family, coaches and teachers struggling with multiple issues of violence and homophobia amid the clan-like world of teenage athletes, PINS brings together elements now frighteningly common in the media; bullying jocks, assaults on weaker students, faculty and families unwittingly allowing such behavior

## **PINS Details**

Date : Published October 1st 1999 by Myrmidude Press

ISBN : 9780967238203

Author : Jim Provenzano

Format : Paperback 288 pages

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# From Reader Review PINS for online ebook

## Grw says

This is a very decent book that could have been great but for one - not that minor - flaw.

The plot is good, managing as it does to span numerous genres from coming-of-age, to sports, to coming out, to Americana, to bullying, and many other things that are touched on during the course of the book.

The story itself can be split into three parts, which says something about the pacing. There's the build up to a life changing event during which everything seems to be fine, the actual event itself, and the aftermath. Interestingly, it is the middle of those that is by far the briefest, which although realistic as it covers the least amount of time, is unusual.

For the most part the characters are nicely drawn, fully rounded people but with one exception, and that is the lead himself who is rather difficult to understand or even feel sorry for. This is probably down to the narration, which despite being all about Joey/Joe/Joseph can't seem to make up its mind just how to refer to him and does beg the question as to why the book wasn't written in the first person, using Joe/Joey/Joseph's own voice?

However, despite that flaw, the book is well worth a read, and thankfully the wrestling aspect isn't dealt with in too much detail so it doesn't matter if you don't know that much about it at the High School level.

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## Tony says

Disturbing but excellent.

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## Mike Adams says

"The boy's buzz cut swirled out like a tiny universe whose only limits were two stubby ears."

With that evocative first sentence, PINS takes us into the teenage life of a young New Jersey boy, the pressures and privileges of being a jock, and a gritty almost palpable immersion into the cult of wrestling.

While outwardly another "coming of age" story, PINS not only tells of homophobia, violence, repressed lust and complex family interactions. It also describes the sport of wrestling with an accuracy on a par with "Wrestling Sturbridge" and the works of John Irving. But the voice/writing style gives it a teen authenticity, or at least with a Jersey syntax.

But it's not just about sports, or being gay. The layers of symbolism: Catholic imagery, the repeated horse references, even the school color choice of orange and black ("It's always Halloween") mark this as an exceptional novel.

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## **Keith says**

I enjoyed this book and read most of it sitting on a clothing optional beach in the 'gay' section-very appropriate setting. I have to say I wasn't truly and fully captivated by any of these characters as I was in other books written by Jim. But what did keep me interested and turning each page was the story line of Joe the gay closeted catholic school boy who moves to a new town and continues his schooling at a public school. This brought many memories both good and horrible, rising back within me. I was Joe in high school, a gay closeted catholic school boy who transferred to a public high school and who joined the track team to fit in. But the difference was I didn't fit in at all and thought my parents had no idea of my secret but Mother's and Grandmother always know.

I guess the plot that threw me for a loop was and got derailed for me for awhile was the killing of Anthony. I wanted to know a little more about Anthony, his backstory and his association with Joe as certain issues were transpiring.

But all in all it was a good beach read and the soft porn wrestling fantasy element was a 5 star for me.

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## **Micha Meinderts says**

I have mixed feelings about this. It was a nice read, it felt really realistic and the atmosphere gave me a content feeling, it that makes any sense. Yet technically it wasn't a good book, with a badly paced storyline, too many errors still left and a subdued, almost emotionless main character, despite his outbursts of aggression and sadness.

It mostly felt like watching a movie through a frosted window or something. But it was a good movie with an important and positive message. A peek into a world I didn't know (I knew next to nothing about wrestling), with a character that was about my age so some things were rather familiar.

Provenzano's style left a bit to be desired, his fragmented way of stringing words together made me feel uneasy, like I was missing something, and his choice of words wasn't always the best either, but its realism was very pleasant.

The "awright" started getting on my nerves fairly quickly though. I think there was too much of the accent in the dialogue for it to be an easy read.

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## **Jim says**

“What starts off as yet another coming-of-age tale of gay youth in suburbia takes a dramatic turn and careens into a full-fledged miracle of writing.” – NY Blade News

“Fully captures the reader ... a descriptive writer of the Ernest Hemingway model; terse, stripped down, and

to the point.” – Lambda Book Report

“Provenzano has a swift and flexible style that cuts against sentiment and reveals, in moments of grace, something like true feeling. He’s also funny. He has an ear for teenage banter, and he’s tartly lyrical about Jersey towns, Italian families and homemade mix tapes with titles like GRAPPLE and AURGH. Most urgent, he shows how gay bashing is still an outlet for kids who grew up in the so-called gay ‘90s.” – The Advocate

“The author brings evident personal knowledge and a crisp, uncluttered prose style to this coming-out saga.”  
– East Bay Express

“A brilliant piece of fiction... The plot is very complex with many layers, each well-developed and passionately expressed. No sensitive reader will make it to the end without giggling, anxiety, joy and tears.”  
– Gay People’s Chronicle

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## **Marty says**

poignant, funny; realistic and endearing characters

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## **John Crowe-Lockerman says**

I started this novel just hours before Hurricane Michael hit. I got so involved in it that for two days without power, I read by flashlight. This novel completely engrossed me! It brought back a lot of memories! What the characters in this novel go through reminded me so much of what I went through when I was their age. I could so sympathise with all of their struggles. It was exciting to be front, center, and involved in the whole entire Scholastic Wrestling genre. I say "genre" because until I read this book I never knew there was such an art to Scholastic Wrestling. The amount of training and discipline that go into it was mind blowing to me! The author did a magnificent job blending the drama of the novel with the excitement of Scholastic Wrestling prowess. All while incorporating first loves, self discoveries, pack mentality, heartbreak, bullying, and also the endurance of the human spirit, mind, and body.

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## **Garnet says**

I haven't read a novel in years. I chose this book because I like the idea of high school MM romances and this was centered around the world of wrestling, something I am unfamiliar with. I found the writing to be hard to follow, the characters themselves somewhat unobtainable, and the story a little boring. The introduction of a tragedy halfway through the book sets the stage for teen angst, unrequited love and parental

realization about their golden boy. I couldn't wait for it all to end. Back to my non-fiction.

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## **Sean says**

One of those good ones; I read this a few years ago when I was going through a phase of having to find great books with young gay characters, that wasn't too light, or too dark. Since it's been awhile, I'll let this blurb suffice:

"A heartfelt and touching story, unwaveringly authentic and compelling. His characters wrestle with each other, vividly, and also with larger issues of sexuality, faith and family." Michael Lowenthal, *The Same Embrace*

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## **James says**

I read this novel for a couple of reasons: The author was an acquaintance of mine when living in San Francisco back in the 90's. He was writing this book at the time. As an avid wrestler in high school and college, I was interested in reading Mr. Provenzano's take on the wrestling life and how it was juxtaposed against coming to terms with one's sexuality. Mr. Provenzano was also a wrestler, so I enjoyed talking with him about our similar experiences.

"PINS" was a great read for me. The characters, their mannerisms, and their struggles (sexually, athletically, and emotionally) resonated with me on many levels. I grew quite attached to some of the main characters. Mr. Provenzano did a great job of fleshing the characters out with authenticity and realism.

At some points, it felt like there was a deeper symbolism with some of the passages that Mr. Provenzano wrote. I missed some of the symbolism and references. I thoroughly enjoyed the book and the direction of the story - particularly the elements of wrestling: making weight, the fraternity of the wrestling team, training, peer pressure, locker room bullshit, weigh-ins, the psychological aspect of winning, mental toughness, sizing up your opponent, coaches, family dynamics, school spirit, etc.

I recommend this book for anyone interesting in wrestling, high school sports, coming of age, and family/friend relationships.

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