



Big Man

Matthew J. Metzger

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Max Farrier wanted to follow in the family footsteps and join the Navy once, but he's better off focusing on just surviving his last year of school and going to work in Aunt Donna's shop once it's over.

After an incident at school puts Max in the hospital, Aunt Donna's had enough. She signs him up for private lessons at a Muay Thai gym. Boxing—she says—will change everything.

But it's not boxing that starts to poke holes in Max's stupor—it's his sparring partner. Cian is fifty percent mouth, fifty percent attitude, and isn't afraid to go toe-to-toe with a bully in the street. Cian takes what he wants, and doesn't let anyone stand in his way—not even himself.

Big Man Details

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From Reader Review Big Man for online ebook

meep says

Honestly this was a do not finish (dnf) for me. As a plus size girl i can relate with the bullying although it never got physical thankfully but i just could not connect with the main characters. I really tried but got maybe 3 chaoters in. overall it was a very good book. Maybe it being a british book the slang threw me off? i really wanted to like it. The idea was really great and it was very well written. Still going to give it 3 stars.

Kaje Harper says

Matthew Metzger always creates characters I care about, who feel plausible and real. This story, about a significantly overweight teen boy whose life is changed when his mom's fiancée sends him to learn Muay Thai boxing, is no exception. Max has been seriously bullied, verbally and physically, by the boys at his school. His "Aunt Donna" hopes that learning some self defense may change both his attitude and his risk, but it's meeting Cian - a mouthy, confident, trans guy - that really changes things for Max.

I loved Cian, who is unapologetic, unwilling to ever back down, and whose ability to see the person inside Max's hesitant and drastically out of shape persona isn't hampered by preconceptions. At times Cian pushes everyone, including himself, too hard, but he has courage and integrity and a sense of humor.

Max's issues with his weight, his long-deceased father and recently lost grandfather, are poignant. There's a clear dichotomy among reviewers in how they feel about Max's self-loathing and depression and how his weight plays into that, (including among reviewers who are themselves overweight.) Some find it real and poignant and plausible. Others feel like the obsession Max has with his size and how it impacts all the other parts of his life amounts to fat-shaming.

This issue is not personal to me, but I believed in Max, and his reactions and concerns felt valid. It didn't feel generalized beyond what is a realistic situation for a very overweight kid facing the cauldron of social pressures and judgment that is high school. The book does not require him to become slim, in order to become happy, although working at the gym does help his physical health improve. For me, that was a believable progression. For some, Max's starting point may feel uncomfortable or stereotypical or presented too strongly, so be aware. I applaud having a book where weight issues play a role, acknowledging that I don't think there is ever going to be a way to write that and make everybody happy with the portrayal.

I appreciated how Max's self-perceived orientation has to change from "straight" when he starts to be attracted to Cian, and how he deals with that. I also loved how Cian's ambivalence about his own body, its sources of pleasure, and its appeal to Max, played out. I really appreciate the way Metzger gives us trans characters at different points on their coming of age journey and lets the reader understand where they are coming from, even here through Max's POV. And I liked having a bisexual mom as just part of the secondary cast.

I did have a couple of issues with the plot of the book - most notably the idea that physically fighting back is the best way to deal with bullying, especially serious, physical bullying. There is no doubt that many, many teens have faced abuse that was ignored, condoned, or unable to be prevented by the adults who should have stepped in. But the message of fighting back and the idea that bullies are likely to be cowards is a risky one

to endorse. Max's understanding of his own strengths was important but how that was deployed was a problem for me.

I also had a few quibbles with the supposedly-positive adults in the story, although perhaps it's good to have fallible adults in adding realism. (view spoiler)

Over all, not my favorite Metzger, but one I was pulled into as usual, and enjoyed, and that had some moments of real poignancy, and real triumph.

Amy says

I have to admit, I read the original blurb for this book and it intrigued me. Then I found out there was some controversy surrounding the MC's voice and the amount of self-hatred he felt because of his weight, and this book intrigued me even more. I'm so glad I gave it a chance. Matthew Metzger is a "new to me" author and I quite enjoyed his writing, but I don't really get the controversy. I found nothing offensive at all.

Yes, Max Farrier is fat. He's teased. He's called "Fatso Ferrier". He faces relentless bullying at school. He's been kicked in the head and pissed on. He has switched schools several times, but the bullying always seems to follow him.

Is he angry? Yes.

Does he hate being fat? Yes.

Does he hate that he doesn't stand up to the bullies? Yes.

Does he feel like a failure? Yes.

Is he full of self-loathing because of all this? Of course.

Is this an accurate portrayal of a 15-year-old boy facing these issues? Absolutely!

The author doesn't sugar coat it. Max's life is not sunshine and roses. It's hard. It's painful. But it does get better. Max's soon-to-be stepmom signs him up for Muay Thai boxing, hoping he'll gain some self-confidence and learn how to stand up for himself.

Max's journey to self-acceptance is long, but he finds strength with his sparring partner Cian. Their story is beautiful and brave. And so inspiring. I loved them!!

Trio says

This was a beautifully written story. Only the second book I've read by Matthew J. Metzger the other one, Sex in C Major, was incredible as well and I highly recommend it.

The story of a horribly bullied 16 year old, Max is suffering from depression and body image issues. While he reluctantly accepts the support of his family and a new friend, in the end he's able to change his life and establish some goals and a future he can look forward to. Watching Max develop some self esteem over the course of this story was a journey in itself, and one well worth taking. Metzger paces the story well to make this young man's evolution truly believable.

I recommend *Big Man* as an extremely well written, poignant, and very unique YA story. While very different from *Sex in C Major* I get Metzger's style and I'm definitely a fan.

this title was provided by NetGalley for the purpose of my review

Samantha says

Hey so...

Here's the thing. If you judge the book based on a blurb and a small excerpt, that's cool. But you aren't getting even half the story.

This is about learning to love yourself, no matter your size or shape. It's an own voices journey. It's been read by a fat sensitivity reader. It's hard and it's messy and it's a 15yo struggling with the hell that is trying to love himself and his body.

This book is me. This book is several of my friends. This book is valid.

But again, if you want to tell me, an actual fat person, that I am wrong for feeling this book represents me, go right ahead.

My journey to loving myself was just as hard and difficult. If I had this book when I was younger, I may have realized earlier on that I didn't have to hate myself for my curves. That my shape didn't make me who I was. I get to do that. So yeah, this book is important to me.

Just remember all the people you invalidate in invalidating this book (a few sentences of it) for not fitting your perspective.

If you don't want to read it, that's fine. But don't invalidate people in the process.

Edit:

I want to clarify that I had nothing to do with editing or the publishing of this book. I've barely had contact with the author, either. A few words, but nothing more.

I am deeply sorry to anyone who felt I was trying to invalidate their hurt, as that was never my intent. I have no problem with the idea of increasing warnings or even editing the blurb. I reacted to words like "trash" that made me feel like my voice was trash for having gone through self-hatred. Please know that I believe your hurt is valid, too, and I was only trying to say that all sides are valid. Mine included. I still believe that, but I am sorry to anyone hurt if it came across otherwise.

Sara says

5 Hearts

I am warning you now, this is going to be a ramble of epic redhead proportions. This book was so much

more than I thought I was getting and I am head over heels in love with Max, Cian and Matthew Metzger for giving me their story.

From the blurb, one could assume this book would be nothing but the self-hate of an overweight boy who is bullied and made happy by losing weight and that would be dead wrong. This book is so much more than that because while all of that; the self-hate, bullying and happiness is found in the book, it only scratches the surface of a truly profound read of finding yourself and loving yourself enough to love another person.

There will always be people who want to stomp on you. They don't care if you have the right to go about your life how you like; they don't care if you've ever done anything to them—they just find it funny. There will always be those people. And the best way of warding them off is letting them know you're not a victim, that picking on you is going to end very badly for them."

The book opens with a violent encounter between Max Farrier and the boys who bully him. It's violent and made me sick to my stomach with what they do to Max that ends him in the hospital. We know, as the story is told from Max's POV, that this happens regardless of the school he goes to, that he can't out run what people see and do to him but Max is lucky he has a carrying Aunt Donna who knows he deserves better. Now I admit I didn't like Aunt Donna when she first came on the page. I am not a fan of violence in anyway and her theory of Max learning martial arts to protect himself was all fine and dandy but my original introduction to her didn't sit well. That is until she told Max about being attacked for being a lesbian and then it made sense. She doesn't want Max to be violent, she wants Max to learn a skill to yes be able to protect himself but also to build his confidence enough to stand up for himself. So after that and through the rest of the book, I adored Aunt Donna and what she has done for Max and his mom. Oh yeah, Aunt Donna isn't really his aunt, she is the fiancé of his mother, the Aunt title just fit when they became a family and it's stuck.

I was excited that Max would be learning Muay Thai. I love the sport – via my crush on Gina Carano – and have always wanted to take it up at the local gym in my town but I have always been afraid to walk in looking like an idiot who has zero coordination. You see, there is a lot of Max in this book that spoke to me. I'll just get this out there now, I was that fat girl in school. The one everyone made fun of, pushed around, never picked for a team until I was the only choice left, the one picked on ruthlessly by the girls in the locker room when I pulled my too small shirts over my knees to stretch them out so they didn't cling to my stomach rolls. The girl that was called Thunder Thighs and told my ass was so big it could be sat on like a shelf by the boy I once had a crush on. The girl whose mother would give her a piece of Big Red gum before she left for school in the morning, telling her that if she chewed that all day maybe she wouldn't eat and could lose weight. The girl whose nickname in her family was "Fatty" and was put on a coffee diet in Kindergarten by one of her sisters because I was too fat and embarrassed her when she had to watch me. There are so many instances I can think of as a young girl and into adulthood and while I may have lost weight, I am still that fat girl. The weight loss didn't take away the identity of that girl who was told for so long she was unattractive, unwanted and unlovable because her knees were fat. That doesn't go away and yeah, it causes issues in my life even at almost 41 years of age but the self-hate talk, I try to tame it. Try being the operative word but it doesn't always work. So Max, I get him being the fat kid in school but Max has an advantage, people who love him and want nothing more for him to be happy...no matter his size.

It seemed too easy. Too Simple. Was a new boyfriend and a hobby all it took to be someone other than Fatso Farrier?

So back to Aunt Donna. Donna signs Max up for private lessons at the gym to learn Muay Thai and Max must stick it out for 16 weeks or Aunt Donna won't let him be her apprentice. On that first day, Max meets his partner Cian, who he believes at first sight to be a girl. Cian opens feelings within Max that he believes are beyond his grasp. But he still likes the sight of Cian and being partnered even though that first workout kicks his ass. I know what those workouts feel like. I have recently joined a gym which focuses on endurance events so I know that feeling of DOMs when it sets in and how you feel like dying so I was so damn proud of Max getting up and going again and again. Sure, he has the lure of Cian to pull him in and I adored so, so, so much that when Max is set straight about Cian, when Cian tells him he is a boy, Max decides he totally okay with still fancying Cian because well he's Cian.

Cian. Wow. What an amazing boy to meet and read. Cian is this strong character that challenges Max every step of the way. He makes Max see what is in front of him even if that means looking down to see his ankles, because Cian is supportive and in his own way, on a journey of self-acceptance just like Max. With Max, it's about his weight and being able to stand up to the boys that bully him and Cian, he's a bit more complicated and I fell hard for him with his "layout" struggle and how it all makes him feel.

"If I can't be brave with you, I might never be."

This book takes you on a journey of these two young adults and doesn't hold back when dealing with their issues. Max doesn't set out to lose weight by going to the gym but it's a byproduct of his hard work and dedication. His story is not saying goodbye to being "Fatso Farrier", but owning the name and turning into something he uses for himself and lets it breathe a new life. Words can hurt, they can leave terrible damage when used as weapons but when we take those words and take ownership of them, they become ours and names like Fatso Farrier become an empowerment and not contempt. Really, this isn't about Max losing weight so much as about Max becoming an athlete and building the confidence to trust his instinct. That instinct is important with Cian and with the boys that bully him but when it comes to Cian...

Gah! These two were adorable and I loved the way they came together. All the teasing while going through their private workouts together and the friendship they begin before the romance comes into play. For two young adults these two had excellent communication and that made a huge difference. It was amazing that Max could ask Cian questions about being transgender and Cian was open to it, even if he had his limits on Max staring. The exploration of sexuality between Max and Cian was stunningly gorgeous and so respectful and yet, so on point for a couple beginning a relationship. Yup, even at this age it was perfect and they really brought out the best in their partner.

He could feel Cian. Not the girl, not the boy, not the passage between the two. Just Cian. He wanted to feel that everywhere, all of the time.

I have written so much already and haven't even said anything about Max and his desire to join the Navy and be an officer like his late father and the Farrier men before him. Max lost his father when he was three and the male figure in his life was his grandpa who has passed now as well. I felt for Max because once again we have something in common. Where Max used to build models with his grandpa and hasn't since he died, I used to read and discuss Stephen King books with my late father and haven't touch a single one in the 20+ years since he's been gone. Max has so much more to deal with than just his weight but just like anyone, we are so much more than what is seen on the outside.

This book! Wow. I cried at least a dozen times with moments that were so profound, there was no other way to react. I cheered for Max with every step that takes him closer to being the Big Man he can be and yeah,

that title, it has a meaning that is at least threefold to the story and not just about what Max weighs. I loved the stories of his father and how Cian calls him Big Man... sigh.

That epilogue made me grin like a fool and made me have a minute or ten with my Nook to hug it out.

Again, this book was so much more than I thought I would be getting and just know, Max and Cian stunning, brave, strong and so fucking adorable.

This was so good.

So good.

Xan West says

Edited 12/11/18 to add: Here is a review that discusses the fat representation in the book at length, and describes much of what I took issue with in the excerpt I read, in terms of the language of the book and the way the text itself was written in a way that was full of hate for fat people. It also gives detailed content warnings for the book.

My original review is here:

It is clear from the blurb and the excerpt posted on the publishers website that this book is full of really intense hatred of fat people. Not just from the other characters, but the intense amount of self hatred the fat MC has, and especially the way the story is told. This book is very obviously steeped in fat oppression, and definitely not something I would read.

Excerpt is here if you want to subject yourself to it. I don't recommend it:

<https://ninstarpress.com/product/big...>

Added 3/23:

It seems that the blurb has been edited. The original first sentence has been cut. ("Max Farrier is too fat to function.") I cannot see other substantive changes. The blurb is still full of fat hatred. Cutting that sentence didn't fix the issue. This edit makes me wonder if folks have the tools they would need to unpack fat oppression in a text. Did they think this sentence was the whole problem? Yes it was awful and ableist and full of fat hatred. But it definitely wasn't the whole problem.

Update 3/25:

- a more intensive rewrite of the blurb has been done, removing all references to the MC's fatness
- TWs were added on Netgalley and on the publisher's website (that don't reference the MC's fatness, and vaguely name internalized self hatred and bullying)
- as far as I know, the excerpt on the publisher's site hasn't been edited

Copy and paste of warnings on Netgalley: "This book contains off-page teenage sexual behaviour, scenes of

humiliation related to teenage bullying, depictions of homophobia/transphobia, and internalized hatred. Tags: LGBT, contemporary, YA, coming-of-age, bisexual, trans, high school, sports/martial arts, depression/grieving, #ownvoices"

I haven't heard of any changes to the text of the book. With an imminent release it seems unlikely.

So what we have now is a book blurb that gives no heads up about a central aspect of the book, & warnings on NetGalley and the publishers site that leave out all info about fat hatred in the book.

I am worried now about readers (esp fat teens) being taken by surprise, unless they read the excerpt. & how many people do that?

This response to folks talking about fat hatred in a blurb and excerpt--wiping all mention of fatness from the blurb--what is the goal of that?

Libby says

Loved this book. I did read it in December but I finished in less than two days (pretty normal for me with a Matthew Metzger book). I'm really confused by all the "fat hatred" comments here. I'm a fat person, have been since I was a teenager and at no time do I remember being offended by the writing. And since Matthew is my fav. writer I know I'd be very aware if that happened. I do hope everyone will keep an open mind. Matthew characters are always so beautifully real and therefore not perfect, as in the case of a teenager who hates themselves for being fat (pretty normal unfortunately).

DF says

There are a lot of things to be said, as the book deals with very sensitive topics.
I am going to focus on the things I liked about it.

I am not going to say it's a story about self-discovery, because to me, this is every single character, it's just presented in different ways.

It's a very YA book, and the good thing is characters act age-wise. Their reactions, the way they express themselves. The questions they ask.

I liked the way the parents' figures were presented and the sub-message how important their support in a growing teenager's life is.

Not an actual spoiler, and it's not necessarily referring to this story, but it made me think of something. There is bullying as a plot line here, and I'd love to see a story where the so-called "bullies'" point of view, or reasoning is presented.

Anyway, it's a good coming of age story and I am sure anyone can find something worth thinking of while reading Big Man.

Copy kindly provided by NetGalley in exchange for an honest review

Cassandra {semi-hiatus} says

Thank you to NetGalley and the publisher for the free copy in exchange for an honest review!

"But Fatso Farrier hadn't put in his opinions form. Fatso Farrier hadn't graded yesterday. Fatso Farrier didn't have a reference from his boxing instructor for the Navy. Max had."

Disclaimer: this quote sounds offensive out of context, but actually is one of the most moving and heartwrenching moments in the book. So you should read it so you can understand it. :)

Let me start this review with six words I mean with all the feeling in my dark heart:

Max and Cian have my heart.

Honest to God: I went into this hesitant to the point of resentment due to the mixed reviews. I thought it was going to be insensitive and kind of obnoxious.

The only obnoxious thing about this book was how precious the romance was and how profound the character development was. It was just *that good*.

Spoilerless things to love about this book: the sweet yet badass Max Farrier that will always be my "big man." The sassy and strong love of my life Cian. The beautiful British setting. (Can you tell I'm American?)

So go read this. Do yourself a favor and enjoy this glorious creation and all its originality. You won't regret it.

abi says

this book could've been a 3.5, maybe even 4 star book if it wasn't such a fatphobic, transphobic mess.

the word fat or some variation of it (i.e. fatso) is used 142 times. in a 210 page book. so essentially one mention on almost every page. the readers are left with the impression that max, the 15 year old protagonist of the book, is bullied because of his weight. sure, that's some of it, but his own self-loathing surrounding his weight has unknowingly for him made him a target, and he's just ended up accepting it.

after another incident where he ends up in the hospital, his parents (but mostly his stepmum-to-be donna) sign him up for private muay thai sessions to gain confidence and face his bullies. if he loses some weight too then great but it's more about facing the bullies. not that max initially seems to understand this, and his apathy towards how he perceives himself definitely makes this book hard to read.

once he joins the gym however, the story really starts. there he meets cian, who far away looks like a boy, but no they're a girl because they look like one, but no they're a boy. max just can't wrap his head around cian being trans to begin with which is just....not what i want to read. then there's some really strange language/dialogue where cian is all 'i have the plumbing of a girl/if you got me naked i'd look like a girl'

which again is....insensitive to say the least. i just would have expected his identity to have been handled a little differently, especially by a trans author.

it starts being a little less offensive about half way through in regards to max being a lil less fatphobic/transphobic, but don't worry because there are other characters who'll be able to deliver on everything that max isn't anymore.

i think a book can still include elements of bullying and its effects without using language that is frankly quite gross. yes, the book ends in a good place, but i don't particularly want to read about how a trans guy is going to be raped so they'll be a girl again y'know?

Ricardo says

I received a copy of this book from NetGalley.

This book is AMAZING. I didn't give it 5 stars because I reserve those for the books I consider almost works of art but in my mind, this book deserves 4 1/2 stars. Max and Cian are an incredible couple of main characters and all the supporting characters are extremely well-developed too. This is not one of those LGBT stories where the characters fall in love in 10 pages, have sex in the next 10 pages, spend 200 pages going back and forth over some stupid contrived miscommunication, and then everything resolves itself in the last 10 pages. This is a REAL book, one that I would hope every teen, both gay and straight, has a chance to read. Having been a "fatso" myself, I could identify so well with the main character and if you think that the author exaggerated, let me assure you he didn't, all those thoughts actually do cross a fat person's mind. I definitely recommend this book

Leah says

This book tries to be a story about a bullied fat kid learning to defend himself and love himself, with the help of his family and some new friends. But what it actually succeeds in portraying is visceral fat hatred, unnecessarily graphic violence towards a fat person, and a trans acceptance narrative through the point of view of a cis person.

Read the full review on my blog.

Laina SpareTime says

I don't have time for fat hate books from thin authors tbh

Chris, the Dalek King says

I just moved recently and don't have internet yet, so I'm currently occupying a Peet's Coffee so as to post this review...which I'm having to write on my Kindle. Which is my way of asking you to be forgiving of the

spelling in this. I'll try to catch the mistakes, but autocorrect can be a real bitch sometimes.

My feelings coming out of this book are a bit mixed to be honest. The writing aspect, the storytelling and characterizations, were spot on as always. Metzger has always been, at least in my experience, a very talented storyteller. I've yet to pick up a book by him and not be instantly drawn into the tale. The same is true here in *Big Man*.

However there was also a part of me instinctively pulling back for almost the entire story. For me my weight has always been more of an issue for me, self-image-wise, than being trans has. Probably because I've always been fat, and only realized I was trans less than a decade ago. And I was perhaps lucky enough to come into the realization of being trans at a point in my life where I never felt ashamed of it. The same can't be said of my weight.

I wish I could say that what Max is thinking in regards to how he sees himself — and how he sees other people seeing him — is completely unreal. Except it is all too familiar. And that level of self-loathing is hard to read for me. I empathize a bit too much with it.

And yeah, I must admit that had an author I didn't know/like written Max like this I would be *ranty as fuck* about how yet again the only fat characters allowed to exist in stories are the lazy slobs who shovel food into their mouths while complaining about having to walk more than ten feet in any direction. Which I'm not exactly *happy* about, here, but I at least trusted Metzger enough to not dnf after the first chapter. Which I'm glad about now. Because I ended up mostly liking where he went with it. It wasn't pleasant to read a majority of the time, but for all my issues with this part of the story, I was glad to have some payoff for it in the end.

I just can't see myself revisiting this book again, for all that I think it is a decent story — unlike a vast majority of Metzger's backcatalog which are read at least once or twice a year (with a few exceptions).

On the non-Max front, I do want to add that Cian — the other MC — was kinda awesome. One of my favorite parts of Metzger's trans-MCs are how strong they are usually portrayed. They are not without flaws or weaknesses, but they don't come off feeling like they are begging the world to cover them in cotton, or treat them like little children. It is something I always appreciate.

I sadly cannot completely recommend this story, for all that I ended up liking it. But I don't want to say to avoid it either. The best I can say is that if you read the first couple chapters you should get a good feel for the tone of the story. And if you can stick it out, I will say that it is worth it.

3.5 stars

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