

S.T.A.G.S. by MA Bennett (2017)

S.T.A.G.S is a clever, deadly thriller which explores school social hierarchies, blood sports and bullying. But it's a lot more than that...

Have you ever read a book that seemed to burrow deep into your soul, spotting your good points but also revealing your weaknesses? Weaknesses you'd never really identified until now? That is what S.T.A.G.S. is about. It plays on the desire to fit in at school, to be a part of THAT popular group, THAT clique we all secretly admire but seems superior to us - more educated, more glamorous, more wealthy. It makes us question what lengths we would go to, just to fit in. Would we act differently in order to be liked? Would we turn a blind eye when that clique behaved badly? Would we accept anything, even murder?

The title S.T.A.G.S. is an acronym for the privileged, wealthy boarding school, St Aidan the Great, where all the characters board. Yet its other meaning becomes apparent when the protagonist and social exile, Greer MacDonald, receives an invitation to attend a Half-term weekend at the country manor house of wealthy and popular student, Henry de Warlencourt. A weekend of "huntin' shootin' fishin'" takes on a new meaning - Is Greer and the other "lucky" chosen students the predators or the prey?

S.T.A.G.S has a fast paced plot, which kept me guessing until the end. Even the final page revealed surprises I couldn't have guessed. It twists and turns unrelentingly. More importantly, it makes the reader question their beliefs: Are the cliché really superior to the rest of us, or should we champion the outsider against all the odds?

This gripping novel is not to be missed - 10 out of 10. Ideally enjoyed by students 11 and above.

