



Cope Field

T. L. Simpson

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In T. L. Simpson's absorbing novel *Cope Field*, a student's fast track to the big leagues changes when a community service project and a new friend give him the courage to ask hard questions.

Craw, an ace pitcher whose teammates respect him, has the potential to earn a college scholarship or a spot in the draft. He is also the son of a former Major League pitcher. His father has local influence because of his career but also has a violent streak.

After hitting his father in the head with a baseball bat during a fight, Craw is sentenced to community service. His father gets the judge to assign work fixing up an old baseball field, set to be named for the elder. A second student, Hannah, draws the same assignment. Hannah and Craw begin an uneasy friendship that grows into a touching bond.

For all his success on the baseball field, Craw's home life is a constant challenge. He has questions around why his mother left her sons with their mercurial father. His father spoils his sons and has fun with them, but his hair-trigger temper and deeper well of issues undermine their relationships. Hannah draws Craw out, getting him to think about the life he wants instead of the one his father wants for him. As Craw comes to understand that there is a risk to speaking out, his and Hannah's family challenges intertwine in unpredictable ways. Those challenges take the coming-of-age story into more powerful territory with real consequences for its characters.

Cope Field is a commanding novel in which a troubled student learns difficult truths about his family and chooses a new path forward.

JEFF FLEISCHER (March / April 2025)

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