

**Title:** *The New David Espinoza*  
**Author:** Fred Aceves  
**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**Reviewer Name and Grade:** Oliver W., 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Date Reviewed:** August 16, 2021

David Espinoza, who is the skinniest boy at Culler High School, is finishing up his sophomore year of high school when he is slapped in the face in the locker room after gym class. David is a fun and kind person, who tries to hang out with his younger sister Gaby and keep her company. David is taking off his PE uniform on the last day of school when he is slapped on the left side of his face by a boy named Ricky, and he falls to the ground. David brushes off this attack, thinking that nobody saw it happen and that it's just another bully. But later when he goes to the end-of-the-year party with his girlfriend Karina, many people are watching a video of the attack and laughing at how skinny and weak he is, and David escapes from the party. When the video of the slap goes viral and gets millions of views, David decides to start going to the gym over the summer to gain muscle and make his new body "unrecognizable." David starts to go to Iron Life Gym, whose owner Alpha got fourth place at the World Muscleman Championship this year and clearly uses steroids.

One week after he starts going to the gym, David becomes discouraged when he sees that he isn't making obvious progress. David decides that he wants to use steroids for only twelve weeks to give himself a "boost" before school begins. He asks Alpha to hook him up with steroids, known as gear, which Alpha eventually agrees to. Once David starts using gear, he sees himself making amazing progress in his workouts, but the people around him start to become suspicious about his quick gains. David's obsession with his body starts to consume all his time, and he no longer has time to play with Gaby or hang out with friends. As the side effects of steroids, including having a short temper and constantly looking at his body, start to affect David, his Dad becomes sure that David is using steroids and decides to search his room when he is not home. When he finds David's steroids in a coat pocket and confronts David, David attacks his dad and slams him against a wall, and runs away from home. David moves in with Alpha. One day when he goes to see a movie with Karina, she tells him that she thinks he is using steroids and talks about how she misses the "old" David. David unintentionally raises his voice to a shout during an argument outside the movie theater, and Karina runs away.

When David returns to Culler High in the fall, he notices a lot of people talking about him. Many people start talking about how David must be using steroids to achieve his transformation, and when Ricky asks him for a dollar, he can't control his rage and attacks Ricky. Ricky easily knocks David out and after that, David switches to Franklin Adult School, hoping to leave his old life behind. David keeps pushing everyone who cares about him away until a tragic incident happens that changes everything.

*Did the plot keep you interested?*

The plot mostly kept me interested. David narrates the story, so we could read about what was going on inside his head. However, it took a little too long for the plot to really start developing, and I started to lose interest before the action started.

*Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?*

The pace of the book was ok. I think the author covered too much of David just going about his daily life for too long at the start of the book, but the pace was pretty good once the effects of steroids on David became more obvious to the people around him.

*What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?*

I think this book is appropriate for people in grades 7 and up. There is occasional profanity, and the author doesn't hold back when exploring David's thoughts, which can sometimes be considered inappropriate.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

I would really recommend this book to everyone, because I think the topic of muscle dysmorphia is rarely discussed and is important for people to read about.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?*

I think it would be helpful for teens reading this book to know that steroid use is heavily discussed in this book, and there are scenes of David injecting steroids.

My rating - 3 stars: *It was okay; I had hoped for better.* While this book's message was really important and the author's intent was very clear, I wasn't a fan of the writing style for much of this book. The sentence structure was very choppy, and everything was told to us directly. The ending didn't show much growth in David, and it felt like the author was trying to end the story as quickly as possible. I found it very difficult to connect with David, and I felt that the supporting characters didn't have much depth, and the whole story was quite predictable. However, the topic of muscle dysmorphia is rarely discussed in books, and the author really showed what David was thinking without any filter, so I think this book is important for people to read.

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Yujay A., 10<sup>th</sup> Grade**

**Date Reviewed: October 16, 2021**

David Espinoza is a junior living in a Florida town with a loving dad, sister, and girlfriend. However, David is very skinny and is bullied for being underweight and weak. On the last day of his junior year, David is in the locker room after gym class when he is slapped by a bully. David does not think much of the incident and continues to enjoy his last day. Later on, David goes to an end-of-the year party that has many popular kids. There, David finds all the popular kids watching and laughing at the video the bully took of David getting slapped. David leaves the party in horror and overnight, the video blows up, getting millions of views. David vows to change his lifestyle and get a new, muscular physique over the summer, and gains inspiration from actor Van Nelson, who got big muscles between movies. After doing research, David starts a strict diet and joins a gym called Iron Life. At the gym, he meets the owner and professional bodybuilder Alpha, who finished fourth in the World Muscleman Championship. Alpha is kind to David and shows him around the gym. David follows his strict diet and goes to the gym for one week, but is very disappointed when he sees no results. David asks the other guys at the gym and explains that he was following Van Nelson's routine, when they tell him that most actors and bodybuilders use steroids to gain fast results. David decides to go on a 12 week steroid cycle before school begins to get the results he wants fast. David persuades Alpha to give him steroids because Alpha was once a skinny bullied kid like David. David starts to use steroids and starts to progress very quickly. However, the people close to him start to become suspicious and are upset with David because he spends all his time obsessing about his body.

The side effects of steroids include increased aggression, and David's family, friends, and girlfriend start to notice. David's dad finds David's steroids, and David gets angry when his dad tells him to quit. David slams his Dad into the wall and hurts his dad's back. David moves in with Alpha to further focus on his body and to get away from his dad and sister. One day, David goes on a date with his girlfriend, where she tells him that she misses the old him and that she knows he is using steroids. David is angered and becomes aggressive, causing his girlfriend to run away. David returns to his high school in the fall, expecting to become popular and scare the bullies. However, everyone begins to suspect that David uses steroids and makes fun of David. David gets into a fight with a bully, but gets easily knocked out, and moves to another school. David's life is in shambles due to his steroid use until a tragic accident happens which changes his life.

*Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?*

Yes, the plot kept me interested as there were many plot twists and some action at the end.

*Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?*

The pace at the beginning of the book is a little too slow as there is not much action and the plot develops slowly. After the beginning where David begins to use the steroids the pace becomes better.

*What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?*

This book is probably appropriate for grade levels 7 and up, as there is strong language and some violence.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

I would recommend this book to everybody as the book raises awareness about steroid use and muscle dysmorphia.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?*

The book is told from the point of view of David and depicts steroid usage.

I would rate *The New David Espinoza*: 4 stars - I enjoyed this book and found it worthwhile reading, as it was a very informative and fun novel to read. However, there were points in the book that were very slow and the ending was too short. I think this book is very important as it raises awareness about the use of steroids in the bodybuilding and acting industries and muscle dysmorphia. Overall, I enjoyed this novel and think that this book is important for everyone to read.