

## Order of the Poison Oak, The

*By Brent Hartinger*

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**Summer camp is different from high school. Something about spending the night.**

**Things happen.**

Geography Club's Russel Middlebrook is back, and he and his friends are off to work as counselors at a summer camp. Brent Hartinger's third novel is the story of Indian legends, skinny-dipping in moonlit coves, and passionate summer romance. It's also the story of Russel's latest club, the Order of the Poison Oak, a secret society dedicated to helping its members see life's hidden beauty and accept its sometimes painful sting.

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## **Order of the Poison Oak, The By Brent Hartinger Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #2017581 in Books
- Brand: HarperTeen
- Published on: 2005-03-15
- Released on: 2005-03-15
- Original language: English
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## Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 8 Up—Sixteen-year-old Russel Middlebrook hopes to escape his identity as the token gay guy at school by spending the summer as a counselor in a camp for burn victims. At first he finds that controlling eight hyperactive, 10-year-old hellions is grueling, but once he charms them with a retelling of a fable based on Native American legend in which a multicolored crow is burnt black by fire, he has no trouble taming them. And with their cooperation and enthusiasm, he creates the Order of the Poison Oak, a special club dedicated to outcasts of all types. With its titillating cover, high dramatics, and steamy romance triangles, Hartinger's novel will definitely score big with teens hankering for a sequel to *Geography Club* (HarperCollins, 2003). But even with improved characterizations and fast pacing, it's not enough to cloak the author's less-than-subtle attempt at equating burn-scar victims with victims of homophobic bigotry and prejudice.

Unfortunately, this well-intended yet domineering metaphor smothers many of the novel's better elements, and ultimately will render more groans than shouts of triumph from its readers.—*Hillias J. Martin, New York Public Library*

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 7-10. In this sequel to *Geography Club* (2003), 16-year-old Russel, now openly gay and tired of being the freak at school, tries to escape as a counselor in a rural summer camp with his two best friends. The camp kids are 10-year-old burn survivors, scarred and disfigured, and Russel identifies with them. They also have fun together, once he stops seeing them as "all nervous and noble." But Russel fights with his friends, especially after discovering that he and bisexual Min are attracted to the same gorgeous counselor guy—who tries to have unprotected sex with each of them. There's too much metaphor and message, including the stories Russel tells the kids about raging fires, hidden beauty, and developing toughness. What readers will like best is the honest, tender, funny, first-person narrative that brings close what it's like to have a crush and hate a friend. In one unforgettable scene, some teenagers call the scarred kids freaks, and to his lasting shame, Russel says nothing. *Hazel Rochman*

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Review

"... a nice change from more angst-ridden stories of young gay relationships." -- *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

"Honest, tender, funny, first-person narrative." -- *ALA Booklist*

"This is a funny, touching novel ... a book that stays with you long after you've finished it...." -- *Midwest Book Review*

"...Hartinger's novel will definitely score big with teens hankering for a sequel to *Geography Club*..." -- *School Library Journal*

A touching and realistic portrait of gay teens.... Hilarious. Teens--gay and straight--will connect -- *Kirkus Reviews, January 15, 2005*

Beautiful and emotional... The love scenes are tasteful but definitely hot... Discover this beauty of a book. Immediately. -- *TeenReads.com, March 2005*

Beautifully written, authentic sounding, and smart...I was sniffing and my eyes were moist...moved to tears. -  
- *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 20, 2005

Superb. 5Q (highest rating) -- VOYA

Technically a young adult book, Hartinger's storytelling gifts make it a worthy read for anyone. --  
*Sacramento News & Review*, May 12, 2005

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Travis Ralls:**

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#### **Scott Anderson:**

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