



## Variant

*Robison Wells*

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## Variant Robison Wells

Benson Fisher thought that a scholarship to Maxfield Academy would be the ticket out of his dead-end life.

He was wrong.

Now he's trapped in a school that's surrounded by a razor-wire fence. A school where video cameras monitor his every move. Where there are no adults. Where the kids have split into groups in order to survive.

Where breaking the rules equals death.

But when Benson stumbles upon the school's real secret, he realizes that playing by the rules could spell a fate worse than death, and that escape—his only real hope for survival—may be impossible.

## Variant Details

Date : Published October 4th 2011 by HarperTeen

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Author : Robison Wells

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## From Reader Review Variant for online ebook

### Cassi aka Snow White Haggard says

4ish stars (yes I'm a little wishy-washy on this point)

Variant is one of those books that's hard to review. (Yes I know I say that a lot!).

It's a book with a First Half. Then a Second Half. And I want to judge them separately. Because by the end I couldn't put the book down, almost finishing it in a loud chinese restaurant because I was that engaged. But as much as I enjoyed the second half, I can't ignore the first half of the book.

The first half I kinda wanted to smack the main character. Have you heard that famous Albert Einstein quote? "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." For me that's the first half of this book. Benson has only one thing on his mind. And it's something he SHOULD have on his mind. Only problem is that Benson has a bad case of the "doesn't stop and think."

*"No one talked about escape. I tried to bring up the subject once, but it died out fairly quickly."*

Benson my friend, I hate to tell you this but you did not bring it up once. I searched on my Kindle. The word escape appears 76 times. You might have been a wee bit obsessed.

BUT then comes the second half where everything changed. And I could not put the book down. The problem? I can't actually TELL you much about the second half without ruining the nicely done twist.

When we first meet Benson (which FYI had me thinking of Law & Order SVU every time they said his name) he's on his way to Maxfield Academy. He thinks a scholarship to an elite private school is his escape from the foster system. But Maxfield Academy is not what he thinks. It's not a wonderful opportunity, it's more like a prison than school. Instead he's trapped behind bullet proof glass and barbed wire fences, with no adults. The school is controlled by 3 different gangs and breaking a rule equals detention and detention equals death. It's not exactly the bright future Benson hopes for .

I feel like I should be able to sympathize with Benson. Maxfield Academy is horrible and it does suck. He's RIGHT about pretty much everything. But his approach is wrong. He is single-mindedly obsessed with escape. He's practically banging his head against the wall hoping to knock a stone loose. I spent the first half of the book wanting to shout at him. "QUIT RUNNING HEADLONG INTO DANGER! STOP AND THINK!!!!!" Benson is not much of a thinker, at least not at first.

But then about halfway through the book, just when Benson is finally calming down, falling for a girl and starting to get complacent, everything suddenly changes. Like BOOM I'm going to be a different book now. Like me better now? As a matter of fact yes I do like you better. You should have dyed your hair this color pages ago, does wonders for your pacing! Honestly the second half of this book made me question my opinion of the first. "Surely it can't be that annoying Cassi? Look how much you like it now!" So I suppose there's always the chance I was in a bad mood when I read the first half. I don't think so, but you never know.

Suddenly you can't trust anyone. Benson finally stops running in circles and starts thinking strategically. For me that's when the book gets good. When he stops banging his head against the proverbial wall and starts planning. Finally he's trying to figure out the big mystery of the school and tries to come up with a feasible escape plan (whereas his plan before was just jump the wall and hope not to die). This gives the reader the opportunity to follow his investigation and put the pieces of the puzzle together along with Benson.

Then ending is twisty, leaving the reader on a cliffhanger that made me say "HUH". I re-read the passage and I was still confused, but it was a good confusion (I was a Lost fan, clearly I have a thing for confusing cliffhangers). The ending left me curious enough that I want to read book 2.

This book has a Dystopian-vibe without actually being a Dystopia. It's a little bit sci-fi, a little bit thriller and a little bit something else that I can't place my finger on. But overall I liked it. The first portion may be a 3, but the last part is solidly 4+. In fictional math that equals a 4 star review for me.

So even though Benson is a little obnoxious at the beginning of the book, bear with him because he gets smarter. There's an interesting mystery, a creepy school and life or death stakes. The book is clearly meant to be part of a series (trilogy is my guess) because you don't get all the answers in this book. Assuming that the new and improved Benson plans to make an appearance in the next book I want to continue this series. And the cliffhanger better be worth it! Not just a shark with a random dharma logo!

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### **Annette says**

One of the lucky people who got to read a pre-press copy.

Now that it's out, my 16YO son devoured it.

This is easily my favorite YA book of 2011. Edge-of-your seat action, twists, turns, moments where my jaw dropped and I yelled things like, "NO WAY!" and, "That DIDN'T just happen!" (But, of course, it did.)

I'd recommend it for anyone 12ish and up, but especially for boys. No content issues, just a great read.

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### **Erin Bowman says**

I've heard this book described as a "Lord of the Flies" set at boarding school. Um, yeah. That sounds awesome. And it is. From the second Benson sets foot within the grounds of Maxfield Academy – which happens within the first several pages, mind you – things are intense. Examples: there are no teachers, students have split into gangs, cameras watch everything, everywhere, and no one ever leaves the campus. This book is fast paced and near impossible to put down. Benson is not a perfect person, but he has a good heart. He tries to do the right thing in the upside-down world into which he is thrown. He is on a constant lookout for answers and while that narrow vision sometimes had me pulling at my hair, he is a fabulous reluctant hero.

And then of course, there's the twists. This book is FULL of them. Every time I thought I'd figured something out, Wells threw another curve ball at me. And the ending. Oh boy, the ending. I can't say much else without spoiling things. Just get your hands on this.

Originally reviewed here

NOTE: This review is based on an ARC

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### **Sara says**

I don't know what to think of this book. Throughout the entire book I was reminded of the Maze Runner by James Dashner, except I loved that series! This book was just strange to me. I found the believability aspect of it to be extremely lacking. I just didn't believe these kids would conform to a school like this rather than trying to get out. I didn't believe the circumstances they were given and when we found out the big secret, I didn't even believe the explanation we were given. None of it made sense. I don't want to give spoilers so I can't go into too much detail, I just didn't get it. Maybe it was because I kept thinking of the Maze Runner... but the scenario in those books by Mr. Dashner WERE believable... those kids in the glade were always looking for an out, they never just accepted their circumstances without questioning everything. The kids at Maxfield Academy were just mindless and boring after the kids in the glade.

As I stated, maybe it was wrong of me to compare the books, but it was hard not to. The situations were a lot alike to me. I may read the next book to see what happens, but I'm glad I didn't buy this book.

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## Margot says

I can't think of a single reason why I shouldn't give this a five-star rating. I loved everything about it.

First of all, *Variant* is one original little book. Yeah, everyone says the same about all the books they read, but I definitely found *Variant* refreshing and unique. And I really enjoyed Benson's voice.

*Variant* hooked me right in since the very beginning—I couldn't put it down. I found it original, thrilling, compelling, and so easy to read. Interesting from the first page to the very last one, where it left us with a cliffhanger.

There were parts where my heart was pounding in anticipation, and I was pretty much biting my nails—I couldn't read fast enough—because just when I thought he—and I—had something figured out, surprising little twists happened.

It was nice to read a good YA book that had an unpredictable plot for a change. I wanted something different and this absolutely delivered. I cannot wait for the sequel.

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## Joe says

*Variant* is the perfect name for this book, because it is, itself, a variation of...

### *Lord of the Flies*

In Golding's classic, which has its fair share of detractors, children and teenagers are thrust into a truly upsetting situation that supplies a chilling context for Golding to explore mob mentality, primal urges, and the tightrope walk of animal instinct and human compassion.

Wells attempts to expand this theme by putting teenagers in a boarding school with no teachers and a sloppily constructed social order that is meted out via three groups: The Society, Havoc, and V's (the titular Variants, which was enough to make my eyes roll so far back into my skull that I could see my brainstem). Each group falls so neatly into stereotypes that it makes *Divergent's* world-building look like poetry.

Anyway, the groups have a truce that has existed among them to maintain order in an adult-free school. The reason behind the truce is such an obvious plot device that it's pointless for me to explore its lack of depth

here. Just know that it exists and it is beyond stupid.

When Benson arrives at the school, the social order begins to crumble. Why? Because Benson is a renegade. He doesn't play by the rules.

Sound familiar?

### ***Lost***

J.J. Abrams' television series was compelling, fun, and slightly scary for the first season. Then as the story dragged, it became pretty apparent that the writers had painted themselves into a corner. To this day, I still haven't watched the last four seasons because I just stopped caring. From what I understand, the whole series became convoluted and culminated in a thoroughly unsatisfying series finale.

Wells follows a similar trajectory. The first hundred pages of *Variant* are filled with an endless parade of fascinating questions: Why is Benson at Maxfield Academy? Why are some of these kids acting so brainwashed? What's the meaning of the paintball wars? What's with the constant surveillance? Who is the Iceman?

(Iceman - lolz!)

As the book barrels along, though, these questions become less interesting and more frustrating. This is largely due to the fact that Benson is *constantly* asking himself these same questions, voicing the readers' curiosity with the incessant insistence of a curious 3 year-old. The more Benson wondered about his fate (which, to reiterate, is literally every chapter), the less I cared about what happened to him. By the time the "shocking" violence takes place (followed quickly by a plot twist that is hilariously awful), I had checked out entirely.

### ***Nearly every YA "dystopian" trope ever hewn and re-hewn and re-re-hewn ad infinitum***

Seriously, YA authors. STFU.

Teens forming factions! Teens showing atypical agency and bucking the system! Teens facing an uncertain and cruel future!

This book *barely* qualifies as a "dystopia", yet it is clearly marketed as such. Its science fiction factor is at, like, .1%, and it seems to exist only because the wave of dystopian literature continues to be at an indefinite zenith.

I am *so* over this trend. After *The Hunger Games* (which I still love, but fully blame for the virtual tsunami of shit that has been on its heels), every editor in the world should have rejected the endless dystopia book pitches instead of accepting such blatant mediocrity.

I get it: publishing is a business and it's impossible not to see dollar signs. In fact, Wells was allegedly working on his Master's degree in finance while writing this book, which makes its existence seem even more... *calculated*. Buh-dum-CHING!

As a teen librarian, I know how much appeal there is to a book like *Variant*, and I will recommend the hell out of it to kids who will love its "twists", reserving, as I always do, my personal opinion and head-banging (view spoiler) to the comfort of my own home.

## Elana says

VARIANT is the kind of book you race through, unable to stop even though you're eyes are tired and it's late at night. Wells has created a compelling closed society, with characters that live and breathe on the page.

Not really a dystopian, but with the chills and twists of a boarding school that creates a dystopian-esque atmosphere.

One of the best reads of 2011 for me.

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## Sasha says

This is the story of Benson Fisher and how he settles into his new life at Maxfield Academy, where there are no teachers, no grades, and only 4 rules. The school is split into three different "gangs" and these gangs have come to an agreement that will keep them at peace..most of the time. And then Benson comes across the school's real secret..so, what will he do with this information and what will the consequences of his actions be?

This book was a thriller right from the beginning. Within the first 15 pages or so, I was already asking myself TONS of questions about the school - about the kids - about EVERYTHING. I found myself just as scared/angry as Benson was about the whole situation. I think that's one of the things that made this book so good for me - I really, truly connected with the characters. I felt like I was actually there, right along side Benson.

Variant was such a unique take on the idea of a Dystopian society and the ending left me begging for more. (I literally tweeted at Mr. Wells asking him if he had already written the second book.) I don't know where this series is heading, but this guessing-game is very refreshing for me.

Every so often, a book comes along that I would recommend for anyone and everyone. This is one of those books. I can't think of anyone who wouldn't like this thrilling, action-packed story - including teenage boys, who are very hard to pick out a book for.

You'll especially like this book if you enjoyed The Maze Runner by James Dashner.

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## Lucy says

So my dog does this cute thing sometimes where he chases down a toy or ball with such intensity that he sometimes crashes into walls and furniture. After he does this he looks up at me with an expression on his face that I'd like to catch on camera without deliberately letting him get a concussion. It's a cross between 'where the fuck did that come from' and 'how did I get here again' because you see he's forgotten he was chasing a ball in the surprise of his encounter.

This book put that expression on my face a lot. Sometimes being surprised and a little confused can make for an amazing book if the technique is right... the technique was not spot on here. The surprises felt really

random. I feel like telling everyone where the book got weird, but it's a pretty big spoiler and you never get much more information about it beyond that one fact.

The writing was simplistic. It kind of reminded me of the first two Percy Jackson books, which are more on the middle school end of the YA swimming pool. It's all functional, but it's not a style that allows you to feel fully emerged in the main character or even the story. There's always a slight sense of detachment that kept me from really connecting to or sympathizing with the main character's plights.

Benson Fisher, the main character, was also exceedingly difficult to like. He does a lot of stupid shit without thinking it through. He takes big gambles with the school's social order and structure without fully thinking about what will happen even though he has all the necessary information to realize he could be making a big mistake. As a reader I certainly knew he was fucking up everyone's lives. Let's see, the last time people did what he was doing... there were gang wars that resulted in student on student murder several times over, but he goes for it, tells no one, and then takes a nap after instead of bracing himself for the fall out. Smart. See, YA Paranormal Romance heroines aren't the only unlikeable fools out there.

The end of the book pissed me off. There is no ending. This series seems to be one of those series where the books aren't individual stories building into a whole. I say seems because this is only book one, but this book ended abruptly without closing any major story archs. The author opens more for the next book, but he misses a big step in reader satisfaction by leaving almost every major plot open from this book.

I'd recommend this to really young adults. 11-14 or maybe 15, boys in particular might like it more. It's got a fair bit of action, a male lead, and they tend to be more forgiving of simplistic writing. I don't think adult YA fans will find anything here for themselves.

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## **Heather says**

Okay, October 4th is finally here--official release date of VARIANT.

This book is a definite must-read for 2011. It's being promoted as dystopian, but it could easily take place in our day. Benson is a foster kid, moved from place to place for as long as he remembers. So when he gets a "scholarship" to Maxfield Academy, he jumps at the chance, thinking he can finally get out of the rut he's lived in for so long.

When he arrives at Maxfield, he immediately starts noticing strange and bizarre things. First of all, there are no adults. Second of all, no one can leave.

In this rollercoaster of a plot, readers will soon discover that nothing is as it seems at Maxfield, and when rules are broken, detention is the least of Benson's concerns.

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## **karen says**

if anyone popped into my RA group looking for a book that was "not well-written, consistent, or plausible," i could hand them this book with full confidence.

and i feel bad for saying that, i do. this book means well, you can tell. the author dedicated it to his best friend erin. that's cute, right? but about thirty pages in, i started getting concerned that this was another YA book actually written by a teen author. i am not going to have another *truancy* experience, thank you very much. but no, not a teen, just the brother of dan wells, who i still have yet to read, but seems like a really nice guy.

so this is why i feel bad for hating on this book, because the brother of the author has always been nice when he has come in. that makes perfect sense, right? also, i write my least convincing book reports when i am ill. but these are the cards we were dealt today.

so, seventeen-year-old benson fisher applies for a boarding-school scholarship program in order to get out of the foster-care system cycle he has been swirling around inside for years. he gets it - yayyy - and flies off to new mexico to settle into his new school and meet his new classmates. but oh no! where are the teachers? where are the adult cafeteria and maintenance workers? why are all the children shouting? so, basically - this is a school in which all the duties of the school are performed by the students themselves. please hold your questions until the end. so there are three groups, groups that have formed out of necessity, after some unpleasantness in the past, when the students had been just fending for themselves. and by unpleasantness, i mean many many deaths. this being YA fiction, the groups have suitably goofy names: the society- who play by the rules, havoc - who wear thuglife pendants and like to fight, and the variants - who would like to escape, but are very pragmatic and would like a color-coded escape plan first, please. for safety's sake. (which group do you think benson aligns himself with? i give you a hint and point you towards the title of the book) so, each of these groups perform certain functions in the school, based on agreed-upon and bidden-for contracts. havoc is in charge of food and groundskeeping, society handles admin, nursing, teaching, variants clean up the trash, but all are ruled by a tv screen that depicts an adult face giving out daily punishments, after reviewing the tapes culled from the numerous video cameras and microphones all around the school. and if you get detention, you never come back.... shhhh - questions at the end, please! the lessons are arbitrary lectures on aesthetics or field surveying, and they play a lot of paintball, and points are accrued all around so they can buy clothing and other gear, but never.... their freeeeedom. so it is shades of *ender's game*, shades of *lord of the flies*, shades of any other of the recent batch of YA dystopia where kids form little white gangs and adhere to bizarre group standards in order to show that they are independently minded freethinkers - hey! hands down! and there are ample excuses as to why the kids were chosen, why they can't just call for help or use the internet, or escape over the wall, why they don't just... stop.

okay - now time for questions.

okay, so i just wrote out a string of like 20 questions, but ended up deleting them all because they would probably be too spoilery, for those of you who are interested in reading this, despite my warnings. because it still looks like a book i *should* like. greg brought it to me at work, saying just that, "this looks like a book you would read." and i did read it. and it was bad. and i am glad i borrowed it rather than buying it, because i was about to buy it, actually. but now i can bring it back. and maybe the person who reads it next will love it, and i would be pleased to hear it. i just hate it when i dislike a book that looks like it means well. it tried, right? especially when it went nuts there at the end and decided to try something "new," and everyone went "whaaaaa??" and then laffed. baffling. truly baffling.

but i will allow this one question - why are YA novels always structured this way, where characters huddle together in like-minded groups instead of utilizing the strengths of all participants? does no one see how this limits the resources? it is a structure that only works if the book is well-written enough to overcome its own inherent silliness. *divergent* was, i thought, fantastic, even though it had a lot of its own foolishness to overcome. this one tripped over its own foolishness, and then stumbled down a hill, caught on fire, and then just smoldered there. in a not-very-sexy way.

now i am going back to bed. i wouldn't say this book *gave* me this surely-fatal illness, but i'm also not ruling

it out.

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### **Neil (or bleed) says**

Variant is like The Maze Runner. (And it's kinda awkward that James Dashner blurbed this book.) I mean both has the same set-up where teens are trapped in a secluded, unknown place and don't know any idea why they are there. But both are still different in many aspects, anyway. I still like Maze Runner (just the first book, not its sequels, EW!) more than this book .

In my honest opinion, there weren't much happened in the book until Benson, the main character, discovered something he didn't expect. The good thing was Variant is engrossingly readable and the mystery will drive you insane or just curious to know what's the mystery behind this fucking academy.

Like I said, there weren't much happened but I seriously love the paintball scenes (heh). I don't know exactly why but I enjoyed reading those. And the rest is history. Blech. Because, really, nothing happened. Ugh.

In terms of characters, they are mostly one dimensional. I can't connect with them and don't really care about them. The back stories of some characters are trying-hard and felt like as fillers. But, I thought it was fine since the mystery and anticipation compensate for it. Which is the main reason I still gave it 3 stars.

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### **Robison Wells says**

That's a completely unbiased rating.

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### **LuAnn says**

Review originally posted in January 2011:

I have the honor of being in Rob Well's writer's group, so I got to read the final manuscript before even the ARC was ready. This is one of the best books I've read in the last year. The main character, Benson was someone I could relate to--maybe because I teach school and he reminded me of several of my students--and the plot was compelling. I couldn't read it fast enough--yet the themes and final questions continue to haunt me--and now I'm begging to see the next book in the series, eight months before this one even comes out. Variant is already available for pre-order on Amazon, so jump over and put your copy on reserve today so you don't forget. This book will be a Whitney nominee for sure, and I'm certain the national buzz will also go crazy.

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### **Pip says**

1.5 out of 5 stars.

## NEGATIVE REVIEW IS A COMIN WURRR WURRR WARNING

Characters: FULL of stereotypes / Main protagonist: perhaps one of my least favourite fictional characters in recent years. Completely idiotic and impulsive, so MIND-NUMBINGLY IRRITATING yet totally bland. I'm glad you've completely overcome your trauma because you've fallen in love this week! Well done.

Plot: Oh. OH. Don't even get me started. I don't think I've ever come across such a great idea completely and utterly destroyed with ridiculous, pointless complications and sub-plots. I think the phrase 'this is so dumb' sprung to mind approximately 80,000 times while reading this.

Predictable. So silly. No. Just no.

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### **Steph says**

Wtf was that ending.

How am I supposed to go the whole weekend without getting the second book? Wtf ending was that? I think I'm hyperventilating...breathe....breathe.

### PLOT

An orphan boy named Benson applies for Maxfield Academy thinking it's a normal boarding school. It's not. There are no adults. Kids have to create groups to survive. No one can leave. The school is surrounded by a wall and a gate and whoever dares to cross, they never come back. Bad behavior means detention. And no one comes back from detention. When Benson figures out the real story of this school, he'll do anything to get out.

### MY REVIEW

Oh. My. Gracious. Why did the book have to end the way it did?

When I first started the book, I thought it was just going to be one of those books that you read to past time and get rid of, but towards the middle...I loved it.

One bad thing was that the characters were really flat. They didn't really have any dialogue or actions that made them distinct (besides Isaiah). They didn't have that much personality.

Also, sometimes it would be a little hard to keep track of the characters since there were so many of them.

Originally, I was going to give this book 2 stars, but that ending really surprised me. Everything that I didn't expect happened. And in the middle of the book, it took a turn that I didn't expect at all!

The book was pretty good besides the flat characters. Can't wait to get the second book!

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## **Krista Jensen says**

I was fortunate to have read this book before final edits and I still can't wait to get it in my hands and read it again as a finished product. The characters, the twists, the mind-blowing premise of this YA thrill ride has left me needing the next book. Benson is the perfect reluctant hero, and I really hope he figures this thing out. Mr. Wells, get on that.

Oh, and the cover? I'm not ordering it for my Kindle. I want to SEE it up close in all its shimmery beauty. I can't wait until its release. This one is going to be fun to watch.

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## **Sue says**

Simple words: BLOODY BRILLIANT!!!

I've read so much of YA, and from the first page, everything is so predictable, you have an idea of the direction and what will happen at the end. Even the Dystopian novels, the main problem is X and you obviously know that the MC will survive.

But THIS. I could not for one second predict where this would go and I'm excellent at predicting what's next.

The writing served its purpose, I didn't have to skim over anything. You know how in novels sometimes the prose is striking and beautiful and the descriptions so vivid? And there's a bunch of symbols that give deep meaning and yada yada yada. There's none of that in this.

Because really, if you're the narrator writing and it's in first person, do you really go on and describe the sky's purple hues and the symbolism of a bird over your head? And then you map out the skies as say how thick the clouds are so it must be raining and you go all philosophical? Yeah, screw that. Be real and tell it like it is, not overly-descriptive, not too sparse, just a need-to-know basis and the narrative is genuine in following the character's train of thought.

The action was good, the pace was fast and most of the time you really just had to wonder what will happen next. I honestly couldn't put the book down even with a gun to my head. I just had to know what to know what will happen.

The characters are definitely interesting and our MC isn't overly superficially brilliant. He isn't someone who comes into the school and manages to overcome everything with ease like a supergod character and is armed with some ridiculously helpful skill. Benson is not one of those characters when in a hard situation amazingly shows his awesomeness with skills like super combat, gun expertise and survival skills even though the character is only a teen. A lot of what he learned is from TV, which is genuine given all the CSI watching these days. He's not one of those brilliant charismatic characters who manages to unite and bring everyone on his side either.

I also applaud the book in no plot holes that I've picked up on. I hate it when scenarios are implausible. Like that one main character doesn't get caught even though the streets are patrolled, yeah right. For once the MC actually keeps up with what's going on like a real reader. You know how sometimes in books the villain or something is so glaringly obvious and yet the character is still dumb when readers have already figured it out halfway and the characters haven't? None of that here. I love how he instantly picks up on every nuance, how we have a character who is smart enough to ask questions instead of mulling over it and only having that one moment where he pieces everything together. It's a step-by-step process, not some eureka moment. It's just

so refreshing to have a character who is intelligent and who realises things fast enough so there can be real action and events in the novel and move things along.

I'm desperately waiting for the sequel.

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## Cory says

More reviews @ <http://antidrugreads.blogspot.com>

If I were to just call Variant unpredictable, that would be an undoubtable understatement. By the end of the book, my mind was completely blown. The places I assumed or expected this story to go throughout my reading, proved to be wrong every single time.

"Trust no one" is the perfect tag line for Robison Wells's creation. Benson, the protagonist, thinks he just got a scholarship to an upper class prep school, but boy is he wrong. What he gets in reality, is a one way ticket to a prison. This prison isn't much different from a regular prep school though- Students, dorms, and classes. The differences are that there are no adults, walls and locked doors prohibit escape, and calls home are replaced with death threats. All the kids are being treated like lab rats. Some of the students go along with what is happening, while others like Benson aren't as compliant. This is where the story takes off. Numerous situations at the "school" cause Benson to plot an intricate escape and trust no one.

Benson's first person narration is quite refreshing. The YA genre is dominated by female narrators, so I jumped at the chance to read Variant. Benson is an extremely determined fellow. Fear and rationality always seem to take back seat whenever his mind is set, no matter the danger. I found it to be a respectable trait, especially since it made for a suspenseful story!

Robison Wells did a phenomenal job with creating a unique story in a popular genre. His dystopian world is controlled, and has the potential of going in multiple different directions. I'm having a hard time writing this review, because I don't want to risk spoiling anything. Everyone deserves to be as shocked as I was after reading all the rattling scenarios.

I know Variant doesn't come out till the first of October, but I just had to read and post my review of it. I am not one who can handle anticipation well. Variant kept me guessing till the very end, and then left me dangling off a cliff. Now to the best of my ability, I will wait anxiously for the second book in the series.  
\*eyes twitching\*

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## Reynje says

Well, the joke is on me apparently.

As I was racing towards the end of Variant it became very clear that the number of pages I had left to read were not going to be adequate to address the plethora of unanswered questions I had. My rising mental chorus of "*But what about...? But why...? How....?*" smacked straight into a four word brick wall: **End of Book One.**

I really thought this was a standalone book. Ha ha.

Variant is a fast-paced, fairly gripping read that slaps you with quite a doozy of a cliffhanger on the last page. It's told through the first-person perspective of seventeen-year old Benson Fisher, who applies for and receives a scholarship to Maxfield Academy, thinking this will be a relief from a life spent in a series of foster homes. Of course, all is not what it seems.

There are no adults at Maxfield, just intense video camera monitoring and four rules: no "violent" fights, no sex, no refusing punishment and no trying to escape. Breaking the rules results in detention, and no one returns from detention.

Sometime prior to Benson's arrival, the students of Maxfield had been getting their Lord of the Flies on in an all out intra-school war (really, what is it with me and books about kids beating the heck out of each other?). A tenuous truce between the three "gangs" (Havoc, Society and Variant) has brought a kind of precarious order to life in the Academy. So what exactly is going on? Is this a prison? Are they unwitting lab rats in a cage? And who is behind the sinister rules and punishments of Maxfield?

It's a chilling premise and the for the most part, I think, well done. Wells' keeps a tight rein on the tension and it builds rapidly, making this a fast-paced read. There's definitely an unsettling atmosphere of paranoia about the whole claustrophobic set up, especially through Benson's eyes as the newcomer. Comparing his viewpoint with that of the students who accept their strange lives with a type of "*it's this or die*" resignation, is quite effective. The power play – both psychological and outright physical - between the different factions of students is disturbing and keeps the story compelling.

As a heavily plot driven story, the characterisation and development of relationships felt a bit thinner than what I usually enjoy. The primary focus here is on Benson attempting to figure out what's going on and plotting escape, although he does form some tentative bonds with some students.

The writing is brisk and quite business-like, which suits the pace and the urgency of Benson's situation. (After all, this is not really a story to linger over, but one that almost forces you to race through). The sharp twists throughout, and particularly towards the end, are neatly orchestrated and pack enough shock value to consistently hold attention.

And the ending? Well, all I'll say is that Variant raises more questions than it answers.

And beware if you're not a fan of severe cliffhangers :)

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