

University and College Admissions

From *Wickedpedia*, the feared encyclopedia

University admissions or **college admissions** is the process through which students gain admission to universities and colleges. Requirements vary from country to country.

But one thing is common to the process around the world: Competition among prospective enrollees is fierce. Today, applicants are justified in resorting to unconventional measures to set themselves apart from the rest of the pack.

Even murder.

CHAPTER 1

There are tools among us.

This was clear to Cole Redeker as his bus farted its way through a November slush to the entrance of Springfield High School.

Spotting the new BMW in the student parking lot was what cinched it. The driver and his passenger bounced out in sync, their Axe Dark Temptation body spray unfurling around them like fallout. If Josh Truffle and Scott Dare weren't honing their soccer skills, they were popping their collars or buying braided belts. Cole had frittered away his junior high years on the fringe of this duo of mom-anointed "nice boys," manning the mid-field and dabbling in the preppier arts, a fact that his friend and personal provocateur, Gavin, would never let him forget.

Back then Cole's mom had signed him up for the summer league in the dual hope that he'd spend less time in the kitchen experimenting with piecrust recipes and instead expand his social circle beyond Gavin, who, at thirteen, had already begun to exhibit certain qualities guidance counselors deemed indicative of the "slacker." Chief among them: playing bass in a terrible jam band. Nothing raises the hackles of the PTA crowd higher than a Grateful Dead cover.

Gavin was honored by her disapproval, and upped the ante every chance he got, purposely leaving hacky sacks at Cole's house for her to find.

“Thanks, Mrs. R!” he said when she offered one up, asking if it was his. “I was wondering where I’d left that. Can’t seem to focus these days. Do I smell brownies?”

The friendship had blossomed and Cole’s parents learned to tolerate Gavin, if barely, because even the boy’s best efforts at corruption could not corrupt their son. Cole still scored straight As, still headlined the debate team, still sat first-chair sax, still trained seeing-eye dogs, still turned water into wine. . . .

“If preparing to get into college was a profession, you’d be CEO.”

“It *is* a profession,” was Cole’s doleful response. His parents had assembled a war council to shepherd him into an Ivy League institution of their choosing: an SAT tutor, a private admissions counselor, and a doctoral candidate hired to edit his college essays. “By the time I get accepted they won’t have any money left to pay tuition.” Which had a great deal to do with the reason he rode a bus to school instead of cruising up in his own BMW, or perhaps more realistically, a Kia.

A tasteful, nondescript Kia that would get the job done and never, ever draw attention to his connections and wealth, which wasn’t a problem, anyway, because he lacked both.

But not for long, he daydreamed. And with good reason. Cole Redeker did not have his own credit card, but he did have goals to spare and the tools to achieve them: brains and patience. Expertly wielded, they would win him acceptance to a top-tier school and a four-year vacation from his parents while he laid the groundwork for his real post-grad plans: a gourmet empire to dwarf any of those charlatans featured on the so-called Food Network. Forget about a BMW. He’d have a Ferrari, a Lamborghini, and an Alfa Romeo — the more vowels the

better. The more vowels, the more attention he might attract from a certain ex-girlfriend (“Correction: *only* ex-girlfriend,” he could hear Gavin say). But stepping off the bus that cold Monday morning, forced to take an undignified leap over a puddle of sludge, he was confronted with the BMW — its flawless German engineering, moonroof, and leather interior. Suddenly Cole felt that his strategy of focusing on his future was doing his present a grave injustice.

What kind of parents go out and buy their son a brand-new BMW with winter looming, except maybe to rub it in the faces of people whose parents can’t?

Tools, that’s who.

Gavin’s two favorite phrases:

1. “It’ll be fun. I promise!”
2. “Told you so.”

Cole was fond of neither. The first was usually what Gavin trotted out to tempt Cole into aiding in some mischievous, vaguely criminal act. The second was how Gavin invariably greeted him the day after Cole declined to take part. Often Gavin displayed proof that the so-called fun was had. Examples included: a neck brace, shaved eyebrows, or the dental impression of an alpaca on his butt. Sometimes, however, Gavin’s wordplay surprised Cole. Sometimes he switched it up.

“So Josh turned out to be a total Neanderthal? Told you so.”

This was not one of those times.

They were on their way to Mr. Drick’s honors history, a rare shared class and Gavin’s sole academic interest.

“You should’ve seen it coming,” said Gavin. “Remember how you used to be ‘friends’? Look at how that turned out. Look at your miserable excuse for a life now.”

“I’m aware, thanks,” Cole said sharply. He needed no reminder of the humiliation he suffered at Josh’s hands. He wore it like a noose.

“Just making sure,” said Gavin. “Sometimes it’s hard to tell if you’re only moping or if that’s the new you.”

Cole was too distracted to respond. Ambling down the hall ahead of them was Josh, his arm slung over the shoulders of his girlfriend, Winnie. They lingered outside Mr. Drick’s room to punish unwitting bystanders with a drooly kiss. Gavin told him to look away. “Why torture yourself?”

“I’m not tortured,” Cole answered stiffly. “It doesn’t bother me.”

Cole had many talents. Lying was not among them.

“How evolved of you,” Gavin drawled. “Because bearing witness to those two excavate their esophagi between classes bothers me into a boil. And I’m not even her ex-boyfriend. Josh didn’t steal her from me. He stole her from you.”

That day, history class passed in a tide of dates and facts, none of which sank in for Cole. His mind was on his personal history, which happened to be seated two desks up and one row over.

Winnie. Concert-choir soloist, all-county tennis player, animal-shelter volunteer.

Winnie. Whose long auburn hair draped across her back in thick vines and hadn’t been cut since last year, when Cole suggested she continue to let it grow. “Think of the points you’ll score with admissions officers when you finally donate it to Locks of Love,” he’d advised.

Winnie. Known once as Cole's first kiss, now as his chief competition for valedictorian and forevermore as his faithless, backstabbing ex-girlfriend.

Winnie. Or, as Gavin dubbed her in the post-breakup era, Whinny. Cole tried to get across that homonym humor worked only written, not spoken, but it didn't matter to Gavin. "It only needs to be funny to me," he explained.

It wasn't funny to Cole. Nothing about Winnie was funny. Not since the eve of the SATs, when the school's underground newspaper broke the story that she'd dumped him — before she'd actually dumped him. At the time, he'd dismissed it as preposterous and e-mailed the reporter his demand for a retraction. The response he got from the mysterious gossip columnist WaldaWinchell@SHSmuckraker.com read:

I stand by my story. And I stand by you. You
deserve better. Chin up, Cole. WW

Cole wrote it off. "Psychological warfare," he told Gavin. "Whoever started this rumor wants to knock me off my game before the SATs. It's a joke." He wasn't laughing when Winnie cut him loose at the exam site, then scurried right over to Josh, who awaited her with open arms and No. 2s.

Winnie. The source of the dark circles under his eyes and the cause of his dangerous flirtation with an A-minus average.

That flirtation had become a full-blown affair. As class drew to a close, Mr. Drick returned their graded essays, along with a helping of dandruff. Cole's essay was branded with a big red *B*. Cole was aghast. To him, *B* stood for "Better up your game or it's Ball State for you, bub."

“You’re slipping, bro,” Gavin hooted after class. “Keep this up and Whinny will grab the top spot right out from under you.”

“I’d like to see her try,” Cole snapped, stifling the dread that she was nipping at his heels. “She’d have to tear herself away from Josh long enough to study first.”

“You do nothing but study. And cook. How’s that working out for you?”

“And how did your essay fare?” Cole said, trying to change the subject. “Did Drick find your musings on Benedict Arnold as penetrating as you do?”

“Dunno,” he breezed. “I picked up someone else’s essay instead. Guess who got an A-plus?” He spotted Josh exiting the classroom, looking around, and he proceeded to read aloud: “‘A comparison between American and international serial killers reveals several notable differences.’ I wonder what those are. Do you think he’s about to tell us?” Alerted, Josh made a beeline for the twosome. Winnie followed, leashed to her boyfriend. Gavin continued his dramatic reading.

“‘Perhaps most striking is that when selecting victims, Americans tend to adhere to far more rigid criteria than their worldwide counterparts. An American serial killer knows his victim; an international serial killer *discovers* his victim.’ What kind of messed-up mind writes about serial killers for history? Oh, hi, Josh.”

“What are you doing with my essay?” Josh demanded to know.

“Just admiring the prose. Mr. Drick thinks it’s top-quality work. Care to let us in on your secret?”

Josh snatched his paper. “Keep your hands off my stuff.” He looked at Cole looking at Winnie. “That goes for you, too.” Cole watched them go.

“Getting in Josh’s face like that is just asking for trouble,” said Cole. “I don’t know why you bother.”

“Because someone needs to, and you lack the cojones for the job. Otherwise, watch his cheating wreck the curve for the rest of us.”

Cole looked at Gavin askance. “Cheating?”

“Do you really think that essay sprang from his brain? Josh couldn’t string two sentences together with barbed wire.”

It was the widely held suspicion among SHS students that the administration instructed Josh’s teachers to go easy on him. Without his talented feet, the soccer program would be in tatters. Cole didn’t doubt that the faculty goosed the curve in his favor, but they’d never abide out-and-out cheating.

“Winnie probably helped him,” Cole offered.

“Maybe,” Gavin said, slowing by a water fountain. He lowered his voice as a litter of freshmen passed. Safety in numbers. “Or maybe she’s cheating, too.”

If Cole had been wearing a glove — and living in Victorian England — he’d have slapped Gavin with it and demanded satisfaction. “Winnie does not cheat!”

“Except on you, you mean?”

Cole felt his ribs constrict. “Since when do you care about the curve, anyway? I thought you didn’t even want to go to college. Don’t you want to take over your dad’s mail route or something?”

Gavin kicked a loose pen down the hall. “Mail is going the way of network television and the polar ice caps. What I want is to see justice done. Josh and Winnie committed a crime against you. They turned you into a joke. All you’ve done since

then is wallow. And your cooking hasn't been the same. Last week's cupcakes were seriously subpar."

"You had three."

"Barely! It was all I could do to lick the crusted frosting off the wrappers."

They turned a corner. Josh and Winnie had stopped at a table where tickets to the winter formal were on sale. Cole stared. He and Winnie had ironed out their plans for the party just days before she'd broken up with him. She told him what color dress she was getting. What color corsage to buy. What kind of tux he should rent. He'd smiled and taken notes, just happy to be there.

Now his plans were Josh's.

"You're doing it right now!" Gavin griped.

"Doing what?"

"Brooding." Cole felt his face flush. "Either get over it and move on or don't get over it and get back at them."

The thought had a certain appeal. But he doubted he had the stomach for revenge. "What would I even do?"

Gavin gleamed. "I'm sure we'll come up with something. And it'll be fun. *I promise.*"