



Wither

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By age sixteen, Rhine Ellery has four years left to live. She can thank modern science for this genetic time bomb. A botched effort to create a perfect race has left all males with a lifespan of 25 years, and females with a lifespan of 20 years. Geneticists are seeking a miracle antidote to restore the human race, desperate orphans crowd the population, crime and poverty have skyrocketed, and young girls are being kidnapped and sold as polygamous brides to bear more children.

When Rhine is kidnapped and sold as a bride, she vows to do all she can to escape. Her husband, Linden, is hopelessly in love with her, and Rhine can't bring herself to hate him as much as she'd like to. He opens her to a magical world of wealth and illusion she never thought existed, and it almost makes it possible to ignore the clock ticking away her short life. But Rhine quickly learns that not everything in her new husband's strange world is what it seems. Her father-in-law, an eccentric doctor bent on finding the antidote, is hoarding corpses in the basement. Her fellow sister wives are to be trusted one day and feared the next, and Rhine is desperate to communicate to her twin brother that she is safe and alive. Will Rhine be able to escape--before her time runs out?

Together with one of Linden's servants, Gabriel, Rhine attempts to escape just before her seventeenth birthday. But in a world that continues to spiral into anarchy, is there any hope for freedom?

Wither Details

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From Reader Review Wither for online ebook

Emily May says

Surprisingly, the worst thing for me about Wither was the boredom I experienced trying to finish it. I had previously been warned that the dystopia made little sense and didn't contain a particularly relevant message to society - unless you count trying to scare the hell out of teenage girls who may have otherwise carelessly become pregnant! But again, I'm not sure what point (if any) Lauren DeStefano was trying to make. Though that wasn't the biggest problem.

Divergent had no political or social relevance but it was still wildly entertaining for me and I was addicted to finding out what would happen in such a ridiculous and far-fetched dystopian setting. Wither was terribly dull. I expected shock tactics and obscene cruelty that would have me sat, pulse-racing, wondering what would happen to our protagonist and if she would ever get free of the marriage she was forced into.

Well, I'm sorry, but like Matched it simply wasn't dramatic enough, it wasn't that *bad*. I know it must be awful to be forced into a marriage with someone you have no feelings for... but Linden was kind to Rhine, she wasn't raped or treated badly, she was well-fed and had access to a large and pretty house. If this was reality then I would have felt sorry for Rhine, but fiction needs more drama to it. I wanted to be scared for her, sad for her, I wanted the novel to make me feel something... and it never did.

Plus, even though I said it wasn't the main issue, the fact that what this dystopia is all based on is not explained, well, that's quite bad. So, basically, curing diseases like cancer in one generation suddenly means that all their children and their children's children (and so on) now die young. Females at twenty and males at twenty-five. Huh, why? It could have been very interesting... if it had been explained. Though I'm rather certain that thus far Lauren DeStefano hasn't a clue as to why it happened, she doesn't appear to have worked out the whys and hows of her world-building.

Also, small but annoying, if you're going to have that romance story subplot - and it seems everyone is - then at least create chemistry and sell it to me, because I'm not convinced. I finished the book with no cares as to whether Rhine and Gabriel had a successful relationship, the only thing in his favour throughout is that he's the better option to Linden and that's hardly difficult.

I do understand how some people thought the writing was pretty, there were parts where I paused and re-read a sentence because it sounded nice. But it wasn't enough to hold up the entire novel, and especially not when I have recent reads like Lips Touch: Three Times, Daughter of Smoke and Bone and The Piper's Son to compare it to.

I don't understand the hype when it comes to Wither, as I usually do with other popular books that didn't do it for me. If you want to read a fantastic dystopia about what happens when a woman's control of her choices and her womb are taken away, then pick up The Handmaid's Tale.

Alana Kelly says

I had a lot of issues with this book from the start. For one, dystopia works because it reflects the scary possibility of horrible things to come. Even if the reader doesn't believe their world could ever turn into the author's vision, there is still a believability that all good dystopians have. Do I think I will ever live to see something like *1984* come to fruition? Of course not. But as a reader I can understand how it could happen. How fear and want for safety can convince people into giving away something sacred: their freedom. In a post 9/11 world this isn't hard for anyone to understand. Dystopia is one of the genres where world building **really matters**. If an author does a shoddy job then it's hard to connect with the characters because the reader can't accept them as real (in the fictional sense) because the reader can't accept the world they live in as real. And *Wither* never meets this simple expectation.

Obviously readers are required to have some "suspension of disbelief." It's kind of hard to get into a fantasy book if the reader keeps thinking "magic isn't real." The problem with *Wither* is while the reader is ready to buy into its premise, DeStefano finds ways to slap that suspension in the face. In the book, DeStefano actually writes "the polar ice caps were vaporized long ago by warfare." Um *what?*! Even if we ignore all the things a claim like this requires, like actual information or some details, it's kind of hard to take this serious when the story takes place in Manhattan and Florida. Do you have any idea how high the seas would rise? I don't know either, but it's a lot. Enough that Florida would not be around to become some polygamist playground. Even if I'm supposed to believe all the water from the polar caps became vapor and went *somewhere* so the coasts weren't damaged, the rising temperature of the oceans would still make the water expand. And it would be hell of a lot hotter. I just can't accept this statement at face value. To make matters worse, DeStefano also writes "a third world war demolished all but North America, the continent with the most advanced technology and the damage was so catastrophic that all that remains of the rest of the world is ocean and uninhabitable islands so tiny that they can't even be seen from space." Sweet Jesus. This makes no sense at all. For one, North America is the continent with the most advanced technology? I think not. Also, destroying the continents so only tiny islands exist? Sorry, I don't buy it. Even though the reader is given reason to believe this isn't true, I don't understand how anyone in DeStefano's world would buy into this. If she had said the land was inhabitable, then okay. But totally destroyed while Florida still exists? No way.

Even if you ignore all the science stuff and try to focus just on the story itself, there's still a lot of problems with DeStefano's overall premise. The only thing more unbelievable than vaporized polar caps and yacht parties on Florida's coast is the idea that everyone on the North American continent would have had access to the genetic engineering that made the generation of people whose children die young. There's no way. There are people dying right now because they don't have access to medicine that costs *cents*. Even if we buy into this idea, DeStefano never gives the reader a compelling reason for why these young people are so obsessed with keeping the population from dying out. There's no sense of a strong sate power that conditions its citizens to be baby making factories so I just can't see why people care so much. I also don't understand why girls are kidnapped. Throughout the story the reader is often told America has a huge orphan problem. This makes sense since people die so young, but it would also stand to reason that there would always be a steady supply of willing and eager wives who want to get out of poverty. So why the kidnapping? DeStefano also doesn't explain why girls who are so valuable they have to be kidnapped would be killed if they weren't chosen by the buyer. It just doesn't make sense. Plus, the original generation is still alive. Why have women lost all power in society?

I know I've rambled on for a while here, but I want to highlight that this book has no explanations for any of these questions. I've seen this book called *The Handmaids Tale* for YA, but there is simply none of the social or political explanations as with that story. Why are young people sold into slavery? Why do women have no

political autonomy? Who maintains this system? Why do men live five years longer than women (especially when women outlive men)? This story would work so much better if only one sex died young. That alone would answer a lot of the questions people are left wondering and explain why women have to be kidnapped. As it is, this story just doesn't make sense.

One more thing, the characters are boring and completely unbelievable. If there had been superb characterizations then maybe I could excuse the major problems I had with the story. We all have books we love that aren't very good. But that's not the case here. All of the characters are too one dimensional. The villain is too villainous. Linden, the husband, is too ignorant. Apparently all kidnappers have to do is draw some pictures and they can start to win over their captives. Is the reader really supposed to feel sympathetic towards a man who refuses to learn anything about the world? Is the reader really supposed to quietly accept Rhine's softening towards him? If Linden is so nice then why didn't Rhine just tell him the truth? Rhine is also too bland. There's nothing special about her and yet we're forced with her narration. It also felt like DeStefano was trying to titillate readers with the sexual aspect of young teens in polygamous marriages while also keeping Rhine free from it. And while I'm glad I didn't have to read a rape scene, the lack of Rhine having to face the ugly side of her marriage felt unbelievable to me. Rhine shows more anger towards a teenage girl, who is just as much a victim, than Linden. It's ridiculous.

The cover is the best thing about this book. Maybe the next two books will get better, but these watered down YA dystopias are driving me crazy. The themes are handled with kid gloves and nothing feels believable.

Kat Kennedy says

After a great deal of reflection, I can't shake off the fondness I had for this novel. For me it had a deep, rich, intoxicating quality that I don't often read in Young Adult novels and has become an increasing rarity for me.

Many reviews make a deal of the problems associated with the implausible premise. If you think that's going to bother you then you're best to steer clear of this one. As for me, unbelievable characters or plot holes will ruin my reading experience but I've never necessarily been deterred by an implausible story vehicles so long as it gave me a good ride (TWSS). As with *Unwind*, I prefer to see the value of the idea fulfilled than to wonder over how likely, or unlikely it is.

However, *Unwind*'s premise was always very clearly tied to its themes and intentions which didn't always feel as such with *Withered*. I found it difficult to determine what the main themes of *Withered* actually were. The value of freedom glimpsed from a gilded cage? The systematic oppression of women when society is placed under stress? The insidious nature of Stockholm syndrome?

Despite the ambiguity of the above, *Wither* is very readable, complete with unsettling atmosphere, interesting, relatable characters and a compelling plot. I wonder at the characterization of Linden, though, and it worries me. *Raise The Red Lantern* depicted this setting best, for me, by not even showing the husband on screen.

It strained credibility that he could be so naïve, so blind to the world around him and, at times, felt weak to not portray him as a more realistic character. Realistically, he would have been a character who purchased three girls from slave traders and, with full knowledge and forethought, forced them to marry him.

Perhaps that is the crux of the issue. Despite Rhine's seeming pragmatism, there was a romanticizing, idealic undertone that couldn't be ignored. Where the bad people are irredeemably bad and the good are great and we all know which side of that line they're on. Whether black or white. Still, I can't complain really. I thought every character was reasonably complex and interesting – even if I would have preferred to read this story with a different type of Linden, just to see a more bold stance by the author.

I think DeStefano's strong stylistic abilities and natural story telling flare saved this for me. Parts of me wanted it to be a grittier, rawer read, but the other half wasn't sure my blood pressure would take it.

So if you're looking for an interesting, thought-provoking YA Dystopian, give this a try!

Deanna says

It's great having a teenage daughter who loves to read as much as I do. We can share books, we have lots to talk about, we can make recommendations for each other and more!

When she reads something she REALLY likes she wants me to read it. However, this usually means she would like me to stop what I'm reading and read whichever book she's just read. Now usually this is fine because I read fairly fast. But lately I'm finding it's usually a SERIES that she's just read. So then I'm signing on for two or three books! Honestly though she's not that bossy, she just really wants to share what she loves with me and I love that.

Now enough of my personal stuff. On to my review!

I have found that I do enjoy a good young adult book and have really enjoyed some of the dystopian reads. So far this one is pretty good.

WITHER is the first book in The Chemical Garden Trilogy.

It is set in a future where scientists engineered genetically perfect children. It was thought that this would ensure the future of the human race. The first generation is almost immortal. However, something went wrong and although subsequent children were born extremely healthy, there was now a virus causing them to die very young. Females are dying at age 20 and males at age 25. Geneticists are working to find a miracle antidote. However, crime and poverty has escalated and girls are being kidnapped for brothels or polygamous marriages to breed children.

It starts off with a terrifying and disturbing scene. Young women are being snatched off the streets and forced into the back of a van. Some of the girls are killed, and others sold for polygamous marriage. The main character sixteen-year-old Rhine, is sold to a wealthy man. Along with two other young women, she will be married to Linden Ashby and bear his children.

Rhine and her sister wives are locked away in a mansion. Although they have every luxury they will always be property, owned by their husband and Housemaster Vaughn, Linden's manipulative and terrifying father. Rhine tries to play the part of dutiful wife but all the while is planning her escape for freedom and to find her

twin brother.

Although I enjoyed this book and read it in two or three sittings there were a few things that bothered me. I was rather disturbed by the child bride aspect. The fact that the youngest sister wife was only thirteen bothered me. I can't even imagine a world where it is the norm for children of that age to bear children of their own. Although, to be honest I can't imagine a world where everyone dies so young either.

I found it strange that the science could be so exact. That the women and men were dying at exactly ages 20 and 25. But I found I was soon caught up in the story and wasn't so focused on the science of it but more the human aspect. I thought many of the characters were well developed but at times some of the relationships between them fell flat. However, I really liked Rhine and her relationships with her sister wives, as well as the relationship with her personal servant Deidra.

The idea behind the book was great and I was really intrigued by this new world. I do wish that there was more information about the world itself and the virus that was killing everyone. At times things were left hanging with many unanswered questions. Maybe I will get some of my answers in the second book of the trilogy.

In spite of all of this I still enjoyed the book and will continue the series as I must know what happens. Will Rhine escape and find her twin brother? I hope to find out in the next book "Fever".

Gina Denny says

EDIT: This was not in my original review, and while I did say it on my blog, twitter and several other bookish communities, I think it ought to go here as well: Lauren DeStefano is actually a very talented writer. She has the enviable ability to create beautiful sentences, and to turn those beautiful sentences into evocative and atmospheric paragraphs, even pages. Simply put: *she has a way with words*. I look forward to the day she writes something else, NOT related to this book, very much. I am anxious to see what she has to offer when her talent isn't being marred by a really, really bad story. END OF EDIT

Sex 3/5: It was never graphic, but there was a lot of semi-discreet discussions about different positions making it more likely to conceive a baby, and mention of brothels. It's all matter-of-fact and not sexy at all, but since the main character was kidnapped to be a baby-maker, sex is a pretty omnipresent topic.

Violence 3/5: A few anecdotes mention violence in passing: a car bomb, a girl waiting to stab her husband, nuclear warfare. The whole tone of the book is pretty bleak and gruesome, and the "virus" that magically attacks everybody on their birthday causes them to cough up blood and die quickly.

Language 0/5: Nothing.

Substance Abuses 2/5: Everybody drinks, there's no legal drinking age because everybody is a "child." The sixteen year old protagonist (who never has a birthday in a year?) gets falling down drunk at least twice. Her twenty year old husband (again, no birthday?) does the same.

Tatiana says

As seen on The Readventurer

Oh boy, do I have problems with this new crop of YA dystopian/post-apocalyptic lit! I am starting to think that the authors who attempt to explore this genre have no understanding of what it takes to write such books. Just making up some new horrible way people are treated in a future society and adding in some angsty love triangle isn't enough!

I don't want to sound too lectur-y, but these new, young writers probably do not realize that to create a dystopian/post-apocalyptic society that is believable, they need to: 1) understand how our current world works; 2) be able to identify cultural, political, economical trends that can possibly affect humanity in a major way in future; 3) realize that when they set their eyes on extrapolating a certain trend, they need to have their characters react to it in a logical (in terms of human psychology) way.

Let's take *Wither*. About 70 year prior to the beginning of the story, humanity got itself into a huge bind. Playing with genetic engineering, scientists created a new, improved type of people, cured of disease, with longer lives, etc. Only the offsprings of these new people have some side effects - females now die at the age of 20 and males - of 25 (this number thing is weird, but ok, I am not going to linger on it). What happens now is that young girls are kidnapped and sold into polygamous marriage to procreate. The main character of this novel, 16-year old Rhine, is now one of 4 wives and is scared for her future...

You know what my problem is, right here? The notion that barely out of teen years young men would be so preoccupied with procreation. Why would they care to make babies? They will be dead in a couple of years! Why would anyone in this world care to have children or place a value on them if they never see them grow, if they never were raised by their own parents?

Such a strong pro-procreation scheme requires a lot of conditioning IMO, some structure that makes young people accept the idea they need to waste their precious years on being pregnant and producing children. You need some older people to think-up and maintain the procreation cycle, because mostly older people care about this sort of thing. Throw a couple of dozen of teens on an island, tell them they only have four years to live and see how many will think about the next generation. There are some "first generation" people around in this novel, who can live their lives until old age, but I never found them very influential in this world DeStefano created. More often than not they are domestics, and not evil masterminds.

Then the whole structure of this world is just unbelievable. Why do these people want to give birth to children when there is nobody to take care of them and so many of them run wild? Why do they kill young girls if they are so valuable as wombs? Who actually makes these young people work if they know they are about to die? What motivates them to go to work? None of these questions were answered convincingly to me.

The entire dystopian/post-apocalyptic premise is faulty in my mind. My rant here only pertains to a fraction of issues I have with it. There are great reviews, like this one that explore holes in the world building in terms of economics, politics, etc.

You might think I am too nit-picky, question everything, but I just read Paolo Bacigalupi's short story "The People of Sand and Slag" in which people eat sand, regrow their limbs and embellish their bones with blades and I totally bought it! When written right, any, even the most outrageous premise, can make you believe in

it.

I am sure there will be some people taken by *Wither*. They will like being shocked/disgusted/titillated by the scenes of polygamy, the main character's constant fear of being raped and impregnated, 13-year old girl having sex with her much older husband (and liking it), mentions of Kama Sutra, etc. I personally found some aspects of this novel distasteful.

Instead of *Wither* I would recommend *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Children of Men* which deal with similar themes, but in a more responsible and sophisticated way.

Krystle says

I've never read such science fail in a book, *ever*. You know, the first thing before you write your book is to do a lot of research on the area/subject you're writing on and to make sure that all the rules and conventions of the world you set up are logical and plausible. This is given a lot more leeway if the story is set in an alternate world (ie: fantasy) but since this is not and based after a post-apocalyptic/dystopian reality of our own world, everything falls apart.

First of all, if the icecaps melted, the world would be in some serious shit. The sea levels would rise dramatically (I don't know the exact measurements because I hate math but I know it's a lot) so Florida and large parts of New York would not still exist! They would be underwater! Second of all, the icecaps make up a large percentage of the Earth's albedo (ratio of radiation reflected back out to space that comes in) and with one of the major sources of reflection gone you can bet that's going to have an effect on things. Maybe not so much as temperature is concerned (although this is quite possible) but I'm positive there will be higher instances of skin cancer and what not from the radiation.

Next, the disease fail. I have never heard of an age-specific disease/virus/whatever that wipes out people so thoroughly. Sure there are hereditary and other diseases that arise from mutations or accident in the DNA code in which they say people who have it are predisposed to die by a certain age but there is a gradual and obvious increase of someone's ill health before it happens. And it's not even absolute, because there are such things as miracles, or cures that enable the person to live longer or be entirely cured of it. I don't see how the disease in this book works, where a person who is healthy for practically all of their life and as soon as they turn twenty become deathly sick. It just doesn't happen that way.

What is this disease supposed to be exactly? All I got is them coughing up blood and stuff. What is it, some hyper version of tuberculosis? It's never really explained and that drives me crazy. I like things to be specific you know.

I have no idea how they got everyone in the world to be genetically modified to be perfect. That's like... impossible. There would be major opposition to that and that sounds majorly expensive. But whatever.

If, you know, the population is in danger of dying out why would men and women be interested in getting married and having kids? Copious amounts of sex I could understand because, well, you're gonna die anyway so what the heck, right? And why are they killing off the unwanted "ugly" ones if everyone's dying off? Isn't it a pretty critical time where you can't afford to be picky? WHAT?

Okay... enough of the world building shizz, what about the plot and characters? Man, when your whole book

takes place in a HOUSE for the entire duration of the novel and all it revolves around is bitching about how shitty your life is and how you're so getting out is very, very boring. Like the only action comes from teenage drama between the girls, her random, pathetic attempts to escape, and her going out to these parties. Not a lot of riveting stuff there.

I know some people might love the darker aspects of the novel (polygamy, teenage pregnancy, etc) but I could really care less. I have no sympathy the guy who is nothing more than a spineless puppet who doesn't have the balls to sleep with Rhine because she reminds him of his true love that died and would rather screw the thirteen-year-old who's more than willing.

Rhine is so irritating sometimes at how she whines about how sucky her life is in her position when the other wife (the young one) has to put up with being pregnant while she gets to lay back and angst more. And she gets to have the luxury of leaving the house, eating all kinds of fancy foods, and even being pampered with candies! What the heck is she complaining about? Bah!

The concept of this novel is so very good, it's very striking and bleak, but it just fails under even light inspection. The major props for this story would probably be the quality of the writing. Some of it is very beautiful and poignant while other times it meanders and tries too hard to be significant.

I thought the relationships between the girls were done moderately well because I actually felt a twinge of sympathy/sadness when one of the character's died. It's very clear how much they cared for each other and even though they might not get along all the time, it shows that they're willing to fight things together.

The romance. Blah. I wasn't a fan of it. Especially with a very lukewarm and tepid male as the love interest. At least he wasn't offensive, which I guess is a big plus? I hope this doesn't turn into some love triangle with her husband and the guy she falls in love with. That would be... a very boring and tension lacking page filler.

Whoever did the cover and layout for this book is a GENIUS. It is gorgeous. Plus the sometimes good writing make this a not so terrible disappointment but, really, if only the world building wasn't so much of an epic fail. I've heard it's very *The Handmaiden's Tale*, so I should get on reading that. If you aren't one of those who pay attention that much to a book's world building and focus mainly on the characters you might enjoy this a lot more than I did. Oh and if you just love dystopian novels. You'd prolly lap this right up.

Edit: Oh! I forgot to mention the whole, America is the only place left because we have all the technology in the world. WHAT? That is so... egotistical. Oh, yeah, America is the only one that survived and the other didn't. I hope the author is gonna do some major backtracking and do a "PSYCHE! I was joking with you!" and it's only because they teach/believe that America is the only country left standing.

And America with the best technology? Are you serious? You know where we get most of our fancy gadgets and things from? ASIA. That's right. Best place in the world my ass.

tonya. says

For such a 'scandalous' concept and for all its attempts at drama and intrigue, I found *Wither* to be incredibly boring.

I never really felt connected to Rhine, or became invested in her story--or anyone's, for that matter. For all DeStefano's attempts to make Linden a sympathetic character and, I assume, set him up as the eventual third point in the love triangle, I was completely creeped out by him. Sorry, maybe he didn't know everything his mad scientist daddy was up to, but he was still super cool having three wives and knocking up a thirteen year old.

Ew.

There's no redeeming that. If I was supposed to let it go because his behavior is normal for that society, then I don't feel there was enough setup to warrant my acceptance. Not only that, but he went from grieving over the death of the love of his life, to 'falling in love' with Rhine--who happens to look a lot like the former Mrs--in 0.2 seconds. Not creepy at all.

On the other side of the spectrum, Gabriel was basically a non-entity. He was a cardboard cutout character, two dimensional at best. I never felt any chemistry or was given any foundation for the supposed connection he and Rhine had.

Added to that the evil genius Housemaster Vaughn who's pretty much killing everyone everywhere to find the cure to stop people from dying? Idk. It was just a mess. From about 30% on, *Wither* is just chapter after chapter of repetition, the only difference Rhine's gradual softening toward Linden...you know, the guy who was cool with his dad buying random girls--sight unseen, mind you--to be his wives/sperm vessels? But he sketches super pretty houses and sometimes takes her to parties and dances with her SO HE'S FINE, GUYS. DON'T EVEN WORRY ABOUT IT. HE MIGHT EVEN BE A LITTLE HOT WITH HIS PALE CHEST AND HIS TEARS AND HIS DELIBERATE OBLIVIOUSNESS TO HIS RATHER OBVIOUSLY EVIL FATHER.

TEAM LINDEN!

I found this incredibly creepy, from top to bottom. And not only creepy, but boring.

I don't normally write such harsh reviews, but this fell flat for me in every single aspect.

Vinaya says

My grandmother was twelve when she got married. Fourteen when she gave birth to her first child. By the time she was thirty, she had given birth to seven children.

I'm telling you this to give you a little perspective on where I'm coming from. A culture where child brides are not so far in the past that we can't see their faces. A social order where things we can't imagine today were not only accepted, but natural. Indian mythology is filled with stories of polygamy — a king with three wives, a queen with five husbands. These are the stories I grew up with, ingrained seamlessly into my culture. This may be why some of the things that disturb people about *Wither* don't seem quite as unnatural and unbelievable to me.

Ideally, I should give *Wither* four stars. The world building pretty much sucks, to be honest. There is a token acknowledgement of a debilitating virus, one that kills all the young women at the age of twenty, and young men at the age of twenty four. I'm always unconvinced by age-determined viruses, especially when they are

so specific. Can you think of one, just one disease we have right now that would attack a person at a specific age? With no variables? I can't either, and that is the first point at which the world building falls short.

The second is the complete lack of detail that goes into building this dystopian society. There are very many, many descriptions of the dresses and the house and the holograms, but none whatsoever of the real world outside the privileged set that Rhine is introduced to. When you're building an alternate universe, you have envision every aspect of it. If only a section of North America is left unsubmerged (which is pretty unconvincing in and of itself) then would an industrialized society such as the one described in *Wither* still work? Where are the crops grown? Where are the raw materials processed? In the absence of most of the world's population, where are they finding the labour for even the bare necessities, let alone house constructions and clothing manufacture and soap opera production? If all the children in this world are dying young, where are they finding the time and guidance to learn skilled trades that would keep all of the technology functioning? Where is the religion? If there's one thing that comes to the fore at the edge of the world's destruction, it's religion. Too many questions that are left conveniently unanswered.

But I am willing to forgive the flaws in the world building (as I did in *A Long, Long Sleep*) because of the sheer beauty of the writing. If there's one thing that can suck me in and hold me captive, it's beautiful prose. And Lauren De Stefano's prose is world class. What really caught me about this book was the human element. It just happens with some characters, you know? They're not just interesting, they're almost **real**. And with *Wither*, that didn't happen with just one character, but almost all of them! I found myself connecting, really connecting, on a level deeper than words, with all of the wounded, desperate people in this story.

The story is complex and saturated with emotion. It is the emotion that throbs behind every sentence that really gives this book its character. The plot unfolds beautifully, and Rhine is the perfect central character, smart and tough, but also so very vulnerable. When she is first stolen and sold as a bride to a House Governor, she is full of anger and pain. She is determined to hate her husband, the cause of so much misery and death. Her only goal is escape, her beacon the freedom to live her short life and die in a place and a life of her choosing. This ambition shapes her actions throughout the book, but it doesn't make her a single dimensional character. She begins to develop feelings for one of the servants sold into captivity; she forms a bond with her sister-wives; she even slowly begins to understand and care for her husband, so hapless and oblivious.

And Linden. Linden just broke my heart. I've read some reviews that talk about his lack of spine, but to me, Linden was never a weak character. He's one of the most powerful ones in the story, in fact. In the beginning, I was inclined to hate him, much as Rhine did. But DeStefano pulled the rug out from under my feet. He's such a mixture of affection and dependency and naïveté. He is as much a victim of circumstance and manipulation as any of the sister-wives, a fact that only slowly becomes obvious to the reader and to Rhine. Here's what I admired about DeStefano's writing: she made me like Linden *before* she revealed his ignorance about the death and destruction surrounding the world around him. I felt almost schizophrenic towards the end of the book, with one half of my mind urging Rhine towards choice and freedom, and the other half urging her to stay, just for Linden.

Rhine's bond with her sister-wives is also a huge plus point for this book. From initial distance and distrust, she slowly begins to form a bond with them, to truly become their sister. Even with Rose, the first wife who dies before her marriage, she manages to form a sympathetic relationship. She cares deeply about Jenna, the withdrawn, tortured recluse and Cecily, the child trembling on the brink of adulthood and too blind to see what she's missing. The subtle loss of Cecily's childhood and her ignorance of its value was especially chilling and beautifully drawn.

I like the fact that DeStefano realistically portrays Rhine's conflict between staying and going. Even as she acknowledges the lure of freedom, Rhine worries about her newfound family, and is seduced by the idea of living out her life in the comfort and solicitude of Linden's home.

Every character tugged a separate heartstring, from the little domestic Dierdre, to Gabriel, so very much in love and so very helpless to do anything about it. I'm glad the romance took a backseat in this story, without ever quite going away. It wasn't all desperate declarations of love and affirmations of undying passion. Instead it was one thread to add to all the other threads tangling together in Rhine's complicated life.

And over all of it was the shining theme of freedom, never really pushed in my face, but woven throughout the story. Every time Rhine is in danger of getting too complacent, she remembers what *real* freedom is, no matter how uncomfortable and painful achieving it may be. Rhine is a character I will remember for a long time, strong and courageous and pragmatic and dreamy and smart and vulnerable and so very *real*.

I'm not sure I would classify this book as YA. Lauren DeStefano's prose is solid and stately, complex and layered, with ideas and emotions that require a certain level of experience and maturity to resonate with a reader. But personally, this is a book that has found a place in my heart, and also taught me that dissing a book before trying it for myself is a Very Bad Idea.

Disclosure: An ARC of this book was provided to me by the publishers for review purposes. No external considerations affected this review.

Meredith Holley says

This book makes so little sense that it was almost painful to read. Admittedly, I finished Blood Red Road about two seconds before I picked this one up, and it has the same basic premise, but is one of the best books I've ever read. They are both post-apocalyptic and about twins cruelly separated, trying to find each other. I wasn't going to mention the twin thing because of karen's unreasonable prejudice, but I'm kind of okay with people being prejudiced against this book because it sucks. Not even just with the unfair comparison to Blood Red Road. It kind of sucks on its own, too.

So, you've got this pretty complicated post-apocalyptic society here, where they've solved cancer, but now all the girls die at age 20 and all the boys die at age 25. (None of this is really a spoiler because it's all background that you learn fairly quickly and that has no real connection, as far as I can tell, to the actual story.) Also, somewhere along the history, somebody destroyed all of the continents except North America. I'm no scientist – I'm not even a fan of science – but even I could tell you that none of that makes sense. I don't really want to hear arguments from the peanut gallery about how technically you could destroy all of the continents and not throw the earth off its axis or some shit like that. It just seems weird to me, and the author did not convince me otherwise. And I know there are hints that the continents are not actually destroyed, but what I'm telling you is that this is a serious issue to me, and I would have appreciated it if Lauren DeStefano had spent less time describing bubble baths and party dresses and more time telling me whether in the future there will be continents.

I guess that's my main problem. The post-apocalyptic garbage was extraneous to the story, which, surprisingly enough, was basically about polygamy and babies. (I know, I can't get away from the polygamy topic.) This story could have been set in the present day and it would have made *more sense*.

That reminds me of another of my many beefs with this book. It is *so annoying* to me when something is set in an alternate reality, and then a character is like, for example, “What you’re saying reminds me of ‘Halloween,’ which I have obviously never experienced myself, but I know about for some random reason.” Dumb. Stilted.

I was on the Kendwa beach, on the north coast of Zanzibar, when I hand-wrote most of this review in my travel journal, and I made a note here that I was a little drunk. But seriously, I had been reading this book off and on for the whole week and hating it all the way. It is a wolf in sheep’s clothing. It’s a book about pregnancy, polygamy, and bath salts, disguised as a post-apocalyptic adventure. Here are a couple of ways that it could have been re-written to make more sense:

1. Lose the post-apoc business and make it a story about contemporary polygamy and child brides. However, whether the story featured me or a man, this would require that the polygamist actually be culpable in acquiring the brides (or grooms), rather than just being a lovable idiot, but I’m in favor of that anyway because the lovable idiot thing totally offends me.
2. Focus on the post-apoc business, but drop the polygamy nonsense. It makes zero sense that a society dying like flies would be collecting brides for the rich and shooting the rejects. But a society dying in its twenties could be interesting with an entirely different story.

I could continue. This book is ridiculous. The bad guys are unconvincing; the good guys are morons; the twin thing was irrelevant to the entire story. I know it’s setting up for sequels, but even the idea of a sequel, considering the way the book ends, makes me crazy. Other than being a really helpful guide for me in my future concubinage endeavors, this book is pretty useless. If, however, you want to read a book about a bunch of idiots eating candies that turn their tongues colors, then giving birth and being judgmental about lactation techniques, this is the story for you.

(A friend gave me this as an ARC to read while I was in Zanzibar. Thank you, friend!!!)

Wendy Darling says

The concept of a society in which girls are forced into polygamous marriages may not be everyone's idea of a good time, but I like art that pushes boundaries or attempts to explore unusual subjects in a meaningful way. Besides, the cover is gorgeous! And on the set decoration front, *Wither* is a novel that seductively beckons the reader with alluring images and positively drips with atmosphere. Languid young women wander around a mansion in lacy gowns waiting to be impregnated by their joint husband, due to drastically shortened life spans that force them into polygamous marriages. It's pretty much the love child of Ally Condie's *Matched* and the television show *Big Love*, as styled by *Vogue*.

While many of the scenarios and language are certainly quite beautiful, however, sometimes I wasn't sure whether I should laugh at the repeated images of our heroine lounging on a satin bedspread eating candy, all while she's supposedly upset over the situation she's in. There's a strange lack of internal dialogue and emotional distance that make it difficult to empathize with Rhine, and very few scenes that come close to evoking the horror that lies beneath the beautiful exterior of the pampered world in which she lives.

This whole concept just seems like a weird one for YA literature, too. In order for the icky factors of child

brides (one of them is only 13), kidnappings, forced marriages, fixation on impregnation, murder, medical experimentations, and so on to be successful, they needed to be overridden by solid world-building, strong characters, and emotional depth. Unfortunately, the whys and wherefores of how society has disintegrated into this is never really explained, and as a result most of set-up for this world seems fairly ludicrous. The questions that were raised in my mind were also never really answered, nor the characters adequately developed. There are surface attempts to create relationships between Rhine and Linden and between the sister wives, but none of them seemed very real or compelling to me--and Rhine's interest in Gabriel seems due to proximity more than anything else. How can people live this closely together for so long and know next to nothing about one another? But is there really anything under the surface at all? After spending 358 pages with Rhine, I still don't feel as though I really know who she is or why people are drawn to her, except that they're supposed to be. It also strains credulity that a healthy young man would (view spoiler)

Overall, this novel just needed more tension, more anguish, more depth, and more feeling. By the time Rhine finally takes some action, I was fairly impatient with how long it had taken the story took to get there, as well as annoyed by how little information was revealed. I'm also disappointed in the missed opportunity to explore the unusual dynamic of a polygamous relationship, which was one of the weakest aspects of the book. I'm curious to see where the story goes, however, so I'll probably pick up the next installment in the series. But I'm crossing my fingers that the beauty of the language and imagery will also be matched by more intricate plotting and more genuine emotion.

The full text of this review may be found in [The Midnight Garden](#).

Donna says

I'm not a chick that falls easily into hype but sometimes it can be hard to avoid, like with this book. It seems like EVERYONE absolutely LOVES this book. I have not come across one blogger saying anything to the contrary. Of course I could be missing a few but those that I do wander across, love. I had to wade into Goodreads reviews to find black sheep like myself that found serious fundamental issues with this story on multiple levels. Did I buy into the hype initially? To an extent. Books get pimped all the time but it's not all that often that they're swayed so heavily like *Wither* was. So when I went to read it, my expectations were slightly higher than normal. Unfortunately the book didn't even come close to meeting them. And of course I then started to freak out a little and that's when I started looking for the less than stellar reviews. Did anyone else feel like I did about *Wither*? Yes. They're the minority but yes. As some asstastic random commenters on Goodreads would have it, anyone with a dissenting opinion against the overwhelming majority should just shut the hell up and keep their opinions to themselves or suffer the wrath. Silly. Does that sound like me?

See, with dystopian fiction, you can't just insert random catastrophic, shock value events for people to live around without having a thorough understanding of how our society works today and how this current society would potentially break down under such apocalyptic situations. So when I see a statement in the ilk of 'the ice caps were vaporized long ago by warfare' with zero environmental nor humanistic repercussions for such an event, my suspension of disbelief gets punched in the face. It can only take so many hits before it just gives up. DeStefano punched my disbelief in the face. A lot.

If the elements in a dystopian world don't make sense, I just can't take the rest of the plot seriously because everything ends up disjointed. Let's take those ice caps (which is a near quote from the book, by the way). They were vaporized by warfare. Breaking that down, we would have to have weaponry that ran so hot it

could vaporize Antarctica. Which holds a steady -35 degrees Celsius. Okay. Hot weapons. But if they're cataclysmic enough to do that, what about the rest of the planet? Would it not get completely annihilated? People, we'd turn into Mercury if there were weapons that could do that. Since weapons of mass destruction have not moved beyond the nuclear warhead in the 65 years it's been in existence, and this story is only set about 70 years in the future, it's relatively logical to assume that they haven't moved much beyond that. And since nukes now are capable of ass raping humanity, what this premise is saying that they've created something beyond that that have been used but people still exist. No, sorry. You can't just pick and choose which elements to remove without considering the greater repercussions of that action. And this isn't even considering the environmental impact of releasing millions of square miles of ice as vapor into the atmosphere. Guys, we'd have beach-front property in Kansas if that happened. We'd have floods of Arc proportions that would have even Noah going 'fuck this shit.'

Do you see what I mean? Since we have Rhine going from Manhattan to Florida, from that tiny statement alone my suspension of disbelief has a black eye, a bloody nose and is missing a tooth. Factor in a nonsensical virus that no one can explain yet everyone's looking for a cure to (how you can fight something you know nothing about is beyond me and how no one knows how it works after 50 years is absurd), women dying before men (when, scientifically, women outlast men, and again, this virus seems to function for no other reason than shock value), how the society has de-evolved to a Victorian polygamists' compound (despite coming from a feminist culture where women should be smart enough to hold their crotch regions hostage and switch control since, you know, they're the ones with the power to control the fate of procreation in their . . . nether regions), the whole of the planet has destroyed itself in viral chaos except for North American (which, upon first mention, had me going 'are you fucking kidding me?' either the author is shitting on the rest of the planet for being feral idiots that couldn't survive the virus or she's shitting on Americans for being dumb enough to believe that we're the only ones superior enough to survive this, either way it's bad), girls getting slaughtered for not being bride material (in a society where a womb is like gold, makes total sense O_o) and the kick to the nuts the author gives sensical dystopian fiction, my suspension of disbelief was pureed in a blender and drunk for breakfast.

The world failed hard. Nothing made sense and everything seemed to exist to serve the plot. DeStefano pushed aside what should have been valuable research for shock value and pretty dresses.

And then there were inconsistencies in the plot, like Rhine's desperation to leave. Yet when she's presented with perfectly valid windows of opportunity, she passes on them for one stupid reason or another. With her earthly clock winding down, you'd think time would be valuable. Waste none, right? So instead of taking the opportunity to, literally, walk away, Rhine tried to make mad dashes in the most horrible, inconvenient ways. Why? I have no idea other than to make the plot more interesting.

Linden's an idiot pedophile whose ignorance is made to actually be appealing. He doesn't know what his dad is doing. His father keeps him in the dark. Maybe he isn't so bad after all. No. He's no more ignorant of what's going on in his own damn house than the Germans were of the camps they were living next to. Sorry, guy, but you don't live in the middle of a shit pile and not smell the stink. It really bothered me how his whole situation attempted to make Rhine's blooming Stockholm syndrome justifiable and even okay. No! She was kidnapped! Her "sister wives" are being raped! This is not okay! But of course Rhine gets a free pass. In a house where Vaughn is salivating to produce loinfuit, Rhine doesn't have to get down with her pedo-husband for . . . reasons . . . I guess. She just weasels her way out of it. Or someone didn't want to write a rape scene from behind the eyes of the MC. Either or.

Any antagonist in this story is implied and insinuated but never shown. Yeah, we see Vaughn with a body in a gurney but anything outside of that window is pure conjecture. We hear gunshots but the door's closed

before anything could actually be proven. The fear is spread by rumors and wild imaginations. As far as we know, there is no threat. But people's wagging jaws and out-of-context scenes keep the fear alive. We have no idea what really happens outside of Rhine's eyes. She doesn't even know what happens outside of her eyes. She just guesses.

The words on paper were good enough to get me from beginning to end. I was definitely compelled to read through to the end and find out what happened to Rhine, despite the fact that I found her to be a whiny brat without the brain she kept saying she had in Manhattan. I liked the oldest sister wife whose name escapes me right now. I found her the most dynamic, the most compelling character. But the world is written so lazily and the situations so nonsensical that I just couldn't get into it. I couldn't push the niggling back far enough to enjoy it. Sorry, but I'm science-minded and I don't like it when people fuck over science for the sake of dances and bubble baths and candies. If I can't believe the world in which these characters live, how I even begin to believe them?

In all honesty, I'd bet money on the cure for this virus being in Rhine's multi-colored eyes. It's mentioned too hard and fast in this book not to carry weight further on down the line. You don't show a gun in the first act and not have it go off in the third, you know? So I would not be surprised if Rhine lives beyond her scheduled 20 years because of some genetic mutation caused by those multi-colored eyes. Or the twin thing factors into it, or both. They both survive because they split off from the same egg, thus each carrying the same mutation to both embryos and saving both children, only one's dominant and one's recessive. The twin thing is pretty dominant in the story too, and it was mentioned that Rhine and her brother were the first non-deformed twins her parents had. But I might be thinking way too far ahead of myself here because this is all branched off of scientific accuracy, which this book spits in the face of.

When it comes down to it, remove the characters from the story and set them in ether and you have a love triangle coupled with kidnapping. It's not a "normal" love triangle where the contenders are evenly matched. One is made pretty obvious over the other here and the other two chicks are there basically for shock value. They're not competition (I guess) but they don't really serve a purpose other than to serve Rhine's plot.

Chances are you'll get sucked into it but personally, you have to turn your suspension of disbelief way up to get through it. Like I said, I was compelled to read through to the end and I liked the ending. The story could rightly end there (although we know it doesn't), it was nice and cleanly finished in a happy ending sort of way. It was nice. But the rip-my-hair out parts far exceeded anything good I found in *Wither*. There are far better, and far more believable, dystopians available out there that couple not only a strong (and less quick-worthy) romance but a well-built, believable world to set it in.

Steph Sinclair says

I sort of went back and forth on the rating for this book. I couldn't decide to give it 3 or 4 stars. In the end I decided on 4 because this book did keep me up till around 2am. So, for a book to do that to me when I know full well I have to wake up super early with my kids, it pretty much earned those 4 stars.

Let me start by saying I didn't expect to like this book as much as I did. In fact, I was kind of ignoring it as it sat on my shelf collecting dust. I wasn't sure how I felt about the whole polygamy with young girls. I can't imagine sharing my husband. Honestly, I think I would feel like 3rd wheel.

However, I really came to appreciate the relationship between Rhine and her sister wives. They looked out for one another. And even though Rhine wants to escape, she worries about leaving them behind. I absolutely LOVED the premise for this book.

DeStefano explains the reason for this dystopian society is because of childhood vaccines received by the 1st generation. Now before I continue, I think it's important for me to touch on a few points about childhood vaccines so you can see where I'm coming from. Wait-- let me grab my soap box.

In the US our babies are given so many vaccines within the first year of life. Sometimes as many as 5 or 6 different vaccines in just ONE visit. That is a lot of medicine to pump in a baby, whose immune system is not even considered mature until around age 6. However, the CDC and FDA tells us these drugs are completely safe. Rarely will the pediatrician go over the side effects with you (which can range from a low-grade fever to brain swelling or seizures). Hell, most won't even ASK you if it's ok to give the shots. The nurse just walks in to administer the meds and you, the dutiful parent, don't question it. After all, why should you? The government says they are safe and anyway they have been rigorously tested. They wouldn't give it to our precious newborns if it wasn't safe.

And my question to you would be: What testing? There are no long-term studies to show what effects these vaccines have on our bodies long-term. They literally don't exist. Why? Because they are too new. Half of the vaccines they give out today wasn't even around when I was a kid. And I'm only 23! So if you really think about it, we and our offspring are the study. Experiments, if you will. One thing is for sure, we aren't passing on natural immunity anymore, because we don't have it. So, who knows. Maybe we are destroying our bodies and we don't even know it.

While that sinks in, I'll move on to the rest of the review.

Can you only imagine living till age 20 (female) or 25 (male)? Can you imagine a world of human trafficking girls as young as 13 to become child brides and mothers, only to have their babies experimented on, desperately searching for a cure? Sounds horrifying, right? That is the world 16 year-old Rhine lives in. She is kidnapped by the gatherers and sold off to Governor Linden Ashby along with Jenna (18) and Cecily (13).

The Characters:

I loved Rhine. I truly felt her pain throughout the book and understood the overwhelming urge to escape her luxury prison and return to her twin brother Rowen. However, she doesn't expect to develop a true sister relationship with her sister wives.

I wasn't sure how I felt about Linden in the beginning. He seemed like a weak character to me. I just couldn't understand why he never apologized to the girls about taking them from their homes. Then I realized he did not know. In reality, his father, Housemaster Vaughn kept him a prisoner as much as he did the girls. This allowed me to actually have sympathy for him. I found myself secretly wanting Rhine to tell him his father's dark secrets. I felt a bit sad when she would lie to him because he truly did care for her. But can I really blame her? No, I suppose not.

Jenna and Cicely viewed life at the mansion drastically different from Rhine. Jenna looks at it as living her final two years in style before the virus takes her life. As a result, she is a little reckless with her actions because she feels she has nothing to lose. Cicely, on the other hand, envisions it as a privilege to live in the

mansion where she can be waited on. For most of the novel she is oblivious to the severity of their situation.

Housemaster Vaughn is the villain. I'd liken him to that of a mad scientist. It seems he is willing to risk any and everyone to find the cure. He truly disturbed me with his methods and sinister plans.

I really liked Gabriel, but unfortunately I still don't feel I know him that well. I'll be interested to see him develop further in the next book.

Even though Rhine's brother, Rowen, doesn't formally make an appearance I feel like I still got a good idea of him as a character. Something tells me we may see him in the next book.

I loved DeStefano's writing style. It pulled me in quickly and I found myself irritated whenever I had to put the book down. Lol. The ending, IMO, was a little rushed, but I am still really looking forward to the next book.

More reviews and more at Cuddlebuggery Book Blog.

karen says

so this is *the handmaid's tale* for kids. with some new details for the modern set. premise: world is basically over. only north america survives, but barely - like one step better than *the road*. due to genetic manipulation and subsequent oopses, there are considerably lower life expectancies: girls live to be twenty, boys to twenty-five. then - coughing, blood, expiration.

so, to keep the population going, and to provide new babies to experiment with, many young girls are kidnapped and sold into marriages where they are treated like goddesses, frankly, except they can't leave and they are expected to fulfill all those wifely duties with the highest bidder.

see, here is my problem. if the world was shitty enough that you had to live in the basement with only your twin brother for company, nailing shut the door to prevent thieves and murderers from breaking in and holding knives to your throats, and afraid to go outside unprotected because marauders would kidnap you and maybe sell you into prostitution, only one day you *do* get captured (this is all in the first couple of pages, so don't start putting your hands over your ears and going "lalalalalala") and they plop you in a mansion to be one of three brides to a wealthy man with a pool and a library and a bevvvy of stylists who make dresses just for you and cooks who bring you whatever you want at any time. i mean - what's the big deal?? if you are going to die in four years anyway, why *not* live like this?? tolerate some fumbled caresses (that are all too easy to deter, anyway) and sit around reading and drinking hot cocoa until you cough yourself to death?

do i just not value my liberty??

is it because i technically have no siblings so i don't understand the family-pull??

am i just too soft and domesticated?

i could totally be a kept woman if the alternative was freezing and starving to death. i mean - you die when you are twenty in a world with very little left. what, are you going to have a career?? not likely.

me, i will be eating the chocolate covered strawberries on the trampoline, thank you very much. does this reflect poorly on my character?

and i didn't dislike the book, but i just couldn't relate to the character. the whole time, i'm like - come on, girl, it isn't that bad... but i will totally read the next two books in this trilogy, especially if ariel isn't mad at me for not loving it as much as she did.

i definitely think this book will be popular with the teens, but with more ambitious and less comfort-loving girls than me...

going to curl up now with netflix and pomegranate iced tea.

come to my blog!

Brittany says

how does linden still have a father if men die at 25?

Jillian -always aspiring- says

If this book were to be judged by its cover and package alone, it would be very gush-worthy -- but, alas, books are not meant to be judged by their covers but by the stories waiting inside.

What's my verdict? Well. . .this book left me feeling very conflicted. I just don't know what to think.

Now, I was really worried to start this book. You know that reality show, *Sister Wives*? As much as I believe in 'to each his own,' I just am not down with polygamy, and that little family (one husband with four wives) gives me the heebie-jeebies. It's unnatural to me since I believe in monogamy. If a man can barely handle one woman sometimes, how does he expect to handle two or more? (The same is true for women too. Yes, I'm looking at you, Zoey Redbird! Females should not be having their own harems either!) Thus, with my being so stalwartly against polygamy, how could I read a book with that as one of its prime focuses?

Wither is set in one such twisted, insane, dying little world where polygamy is now seen as a way to ensure the survival of the next generation. Men die at age twenty-five, women at age twenty, and the only ones living longer are of the 'first generation' who passed on the genetic mutation/anomaly in the first place due to genetic engineering. (Yes, I know: the science aspect of all this is very vague. . .but I just summed it up to, "Okay, this story needed a background and a foundation, so I guess this is it." Sometimes you just have to go with the flow on these things.)

With that being said. . .this book didn't strike me as dystopian. I don't know why. Yes, it has survival at its roots (much like favorite YA dystopians of mine such as *The Hunger Games* and *Unwind*) and quite a disturbing premise, but it didn't have as much depth as I would have liked. The heroine, Rhine, had a detached way of perceiving things -- but, then again, all the characters had a hopeless feel to them. They're living in a dying world. But one must wonder: aren't there better ways for the precious time you have left to be spent than living in an isolated mansion and playing house in a polygamous family?

Rhine, one of three girls kidnapped and brought to become a wife to a wealthy young man, lives a lie all the while trying to come up with an escape plan that won't end up landing her back in the house and under even

more scrutinizing eyes. The other two wives, Cecily and Jenna, couldn't be more different: Cecily is a naive, selfish thirteen-year-old who views her new marriage with joy and expectation while Jenna is an eighteen-year-old exotic beauty with secrets behind her eyes. Almost a year passes within the novel, and the girls become family ('sister wives') to one another even despite their differences. They are pretty birds in a gilded cage, true, but they each seem to rise above their circumstances in their own ways.

The love interests. . .weren't the main focus for me. I found it exasperating to read every scene with Linden, the husband, since I wanted to go into the novel and shake his shoulders, shouting, "How can you act normal with this?! Are you defective in the brain?!" (It also didn't help that he reminded me PAINFULLY of Linton, a character I couldn't stand, from *Wuthering Heights*. Then again, Cecily reminded me irritatingly of Cathy, also from said novel, so I have this to say: Cecily and Linden deserve each other. They shouldn't torture anyone else with their selfishness, weakness, and/or obliviousness.) The other love interest, Gabriel, didn't have enough of a presence for me -- not helped by the fact that he was almost nonexistent in the last half of the novel -- so thus I'm still pretty 'meh' about him. The relationship among the sister wives actually moved me more than any of the 'romance.'

I won't lie: the polygamous lifestyle these characters eventually developed/adopted did make me cringe a few times. It's very off-putting to read about child brides and the expectations thrust upon them. I just couldn't wrap my head around how all three girls eventually seemed to adapt. Perhaps polygamy, especially the unwilling kind, is a bit like Stockholm Syndrome? Some of the eventual scenes between Rhine and Linden actually reminded me of the relationship between Ty and Gemma of *Stolen*. (Trust me, though: Linden has *nothing* on Ty, off-kilter Australian kidnapper that he is.) The similarity helped me to stomach the moments that otherwise might have made me gag or fling the book across the room.

Questionable concept and characters aside -- the book *is* well-written and engaging. DeStefano gave me prose that I had expected but not received from *Matched*. She is an author to watch for, and I will definitely pick up future books from her. She has a way of winding words and emotions together in a way that isn't cheesy or melodramatic. The story is believable and digestible because of the emotions involved and threaded into the character of Rhine. Needless to say, I was very impressed with the writing.

Was I in love with this book? No. Will I read the sequels? Definitely. The best advice I can give if you're faced with this book is this: go with your gut feeling. Can you get past the intimidating notion of polygamy to get to the heart of the story? Can you take it all in and not judge until the very end? Can you try to place yourself in the heroine's shoes and wonder what you might do in such a daunting situation? If you answered yes to any of these questions. . .then I recommend this book to you and hope you come away with many thoughts to ponder after reading it.

Kogiopsis says

Let me start by saying that I know numerous people who liked or loved this book, and that I see why someone would and I mean no disrespect to your opinions. You have, in general, written very eloquent, expressive reviews describing why you liked it and I have read and enjoyed those reviews. I'm not here to step on anyone's toes.

Except maybe Lauren DeStefano's, because I didn't like this book.

Wither fans, I might be mean after this point. You've been warned.

The basic concept of this book is bullshit. Science 'perfected children' and freed the world of disease, but when their perfect generation had kids, the kids all died when they reached a certain age. It's so freaking precise it's ridiculous. Something flips a switch in women at age 20, and in men at age 25, and they die before they reach their next birthday.

Aw fuck, who told you you could throw science out the window?

Disease is not that precise. Period. Someone who is perfectly healthy for nineteen years doesn't suddenly start dying when they turn twenty. Believe it or not, nature doesn't give a shit about your birthday. If it had been a wasting disease that meant pretty much no one lived past their 25th birthday because they were *withering* away for their entire lives, I might have bought it. Maybe. But as is it's totally ridiculous and serves no purpose except to a) provide an excuse for everyone to be young and b) make them all angsty.

And that's just the beginning of the science fails in this book. My theory is that DeStefano has a horrible swell-up-and-die allergic reaction to research, because she doesn't seem to have done any. Which results in...

...a world where the polar ice caps have been melted and yet the action takes place in FLORIDA. You know what the highest point in Florida is? It's called Britton Hill, and it's 345 feet tall. If both polar ice caps melted, USGS estimates that sea levels would rise 215 feet. That means only 130 feet of Britton Hill would be exposed above the water. Florida's average elevation, by the way, is 100 feet above sea level, which means that in Rhine's world it should be *115 feet below the water*. Manhattan, where Rhine lived before she was kidnapped, and L.A., from which some fabric is once ordered, wouldn't be any better off.

...a war in the history of this world that "demolished all but North America, the continent with the most advanced technology. The damage was so catastrophic that all that remains of the rest of the world is ocean and uninhabitable islands so tiny that they can't even be seen from space."

I'm not sure what kind of weapons DeStefano thinks can demolish entire CONTINENTS into tiny islands, first of all, but if she's alluding to nukes I can promise you that we, the loud and proud U.S. of A., would be first on some other nuclear powers' shit lists. Which means that North America wouldn't be left unscathed. And Manhattan certainly wouldn't have survived - because really, if you were an enemy power wanting to hurt the States, you'd hit D.C., New York, and Los Angeles before almost anything else.

Also, the idea of a war that could destroy the **Himalayas** is ridiculous.

And if everyone's dying before they turn thirty, there's no way they're still running a space program, so how would they know if the islands are visible from space or not?

This strikes me as a stunning cop-out. There's no need for the other continents to be destroyed, except maybe saving DeStefano from having to involve them in her plot. Frankly, if the ice caps melted the world would be fucked up enough without a war. Between ice caps, catastrophic war, and messed up genetic experiences, this world is bizarre beyond readability.

...characters who are supposedly smart, or who know about things, and yet think Christopher Columbus circumnavigated the world in the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria. If anyone ever, ever, ever tells you this, hit them. It was MAGELLAN whose expedition first circumnavigated the globe; he had five ships and a two second Google search will give you the names of all of them, none of which sound remotely like Columbus's little fleet. But hell, that doesn't even take reasearch. Anyone who went through American high school should know that Columbus didn't sail around the world!

...a society that has holograms everywhere, ubiquitously, but still uses a card catalog in its library. I don't think I need to explain this. It's just preposterous.

...a Florida in which it snows. Heavily. A lot. I lived in South Carolina for about four years and do you know how much it snowed? ONCE. Also, if the ice caps melted, your average temperature should be higher, not lower. Big fucking duh.

...hurricanes that only start hitting the coast in October. Hurricane season starts in June! And also, if Africa is shattered, what makes you think you'll have hurricanes at all? They do require continents to form, you know; they don't just pop up out of nowhere.

So that's the science for you. Fucking stupid. Now, let's talk about non-scientific logic fails.

1. Though girls are supposedly ever so valuable as wombs, those who aren't bought by the wealthy are killed.
2. Christmas has somehow, for reasons never explained, become the solstice celebration. Look, if the world is screwed up, people are going to turn *towards* religion, not away from it.
3. Rhine's idea of a disguise is putting in contacts. As if her eyes are her only distinguishing feature. This girl ain't the sharpest knife in the drawer.
4. Linden, despite having lost someone very important to him before, supposedly can't understand Rhine and Cecily's grief when someone they cared for died. Uuuuum what?

And then there's the character of Rhine. She was, for lack of a better word, a tool. When she hears servants badmouthing someone who treated them like shit, she thinks that "none of these people, laughing at her expense, would understand anyway." She has no respect for her fellow sister wives, and it takes her far too long to recognize that Jenna isn't a weakling who's trying to ignore the world. (Jenna, the one character in the book who I really liked, is far better to Rhine than Rhine deserves.) Oh, and there's the time when Rhine, knowing Gabriel is going to come up with a logical reason why her plan is idiotic, kisses him to shut him up. I'm not kidding; here, have a quote: "I know, I just know, that he's going to use logic against me, and that will never do if I want to get out of this place at all before I die, so I kiss him."

There are other things, of course. Cecily was a little brat for the entire book, and frankly she disgusted me - maybe that's just me being a prude, but there you go. Linden had moments when he might have been interesting, but he was way too oblivious and some of his actions seemed irrational. Also, while sometimes he was a nice guy, he occasionally just made decisions for his wives without even thinking about their sides of it.

My reaction to this book may be a result of the fact that after twelve years of public education I'm completely sick of immaturity. My tolerance level right now is miniscule. And because none of these characters are allowed to grow up, they act immaturely all the goddamn time.

But while that's probably a factor, it's not the only reason I disliked this book. It's supposedly science fiction, which means there should be more SCIENCE IN IT. And while it may not actually be dystopia, since it doesn't spring out of anything in the modern world, it doesn't fit in post-apocalyptic fiction either because the apocalypse is given only a passing mention and doesn't affect the world in the way it logically should.

Wither got its second star for the ending, because it was actually quite beautiful. Not good enough for me to read a sequel, but I left the book feeling a bit more positive than I expected.

Morgan F says

I knew something about this book before I cracked open the pages, even though I was reading an ARC. That's the kind of buzz this book has been getting. Honestly, I would have read this book for the cover alone. God, that is some gorgeous cover art. And I was prepared to hate this book. I thought it was going to be a book with a pretty cover, titillating premise (OMGzzz polygamy!), but with no substance. Overall, Wither exceed my expectations.

Let's start out with the bad things.

The world building. I am not the first person to point out how much this sucked. Dystopia's are so successful and interesting, because they set up the possibility of *maybe*. In a good dystopia, we are able to see some aspects of our society magnified and twisted in a way that terrifies us and makes us question the world we live in. There really is no basis for polygamy or child brides that is present in our society. I'm not going to say that it doesn't happen, because we've all seen the Lifetime specials and newsreports. But one reason why polygamy and child brides are so interesting is because, in Western Society, they are considered obsolete and taboo. I feel like the premise was just designed to intrigue readers, and if the story, with the prose and the characters, were under different circumstances, this book would have garnered five stars from me

Don't get me started on the science of this book. It is nothing but pseudo-science, and curious and careful readers will get pissed off at the impossibility of it all. Supposedly, this book takes seventy years in the future (or sixty, or something like that). Scientists have issued a "cure" for cancer to all individuals (Which is highly unlikely. Some people refuse the flu vaccine, what basis do they have to receive a barely test cure?), but with disastrous results. The first generation grew up fine and hardy, but their children, and their grandchildren, are dying off after adolescents, girls at twenty, boys at 25 from some mysterious infection. There is absolutely no basis in science for a disease that kills off people so suddenly, or so without a cause. Even for the most fatal of hereditary diseases, the victims are usually given decades of wiggle room. It just doesn't make sense, especially that women die younger than men. Statistically-speaking, men die from more diseases than women do, and generally have a lower life expectancy. Clearly everything is a plot device, which does not make for good world building.

Also supposedly, the whole world except for the smallest bit of North America has been killed off in some cataclysmic war, in the process melting all the ice caps and sinking all the continents. Yet, North America appears to be functioning just fine, albeit with better technology than nowadays.....I really hope people understand how IMPOSSIBLE this is. Common sense demands it. For the sake of DeStefano's intelligence, I really hope this turns out to be a rouse. Kind of like how Linden is shielded from the world outside of his estate, I hope Rhine has been shielded from the rest of the world entirely.

And one more random nitpicky comment.....why would the snatchers (is that what they are called? I forget...) wear uniforms? Wouldn't it make more sense for them to wear street clothing? That is like a serial killer walking around with a bloody knife and a t-shirt that says "I KILL YOUR CHILDREN".

Now onto the good things. Obviously, from my rating, the good things win out. If the good things weren't as good, I would have absolutely detested this book.

The prose.....oh, it was lovely. Beautiful, and delicate, it grabbed me from the first page. I was expecting some serviceable, generic words-on-a-page, but instead there was just pleasantness. DeStefano has a way of making the most desperate situations hopeful, and Rhine's emotions bled off the page. I strongly recommend

listening to wistful instrumental music while reading this book. It's reaaaaaally nice.

I cared for all the characters, even the ones I was initially supposed to hate. DeStefano made me feel for the characters before I even realized what she was doing. The oblivious, charming Linden, the overeager, selfish Cecily, and the exotic, melancholy Jenna.....the only character I really didn't care about was Gabriel, the love interest for Rhine. He wasn't really established enough yet, something I am looking forward to in future books. He wasn't a bad character, and Rhine and he were at least friends initially, and not the "*I shall die without you*"-type couples that so often populate today's YA novels.

I expected to feel nothing for this book, but instead I felt my heart breaking and my lips smiling.

Yes, the book has *copious* faults, but please try to look past them. For me, the writing and character building triumph over the sucktastic world building. Wither is a prime example of a fine young talent trying too hard to make her book marketable.

Alas, I am eagerly waiting for the next book.

Arlene says

This is going to be one of my rare exceptions where I'm giving a generous star rating to a book that had me simultaneously cringe, confused and connected all at the same time.

My mixed feelings for **Wither** apparently correspond with the wide range of reactions I've seen for this novel. But either way, I'll admit now that I'm moving on to the sequel, not because I was offered to read the ARC... well not solely, but I'm really interested to see how this story unfolds and hopefully comes together.

In **Wither** we meet sixteen year old Rhine on the day she is kidnapped along with several other girls around her age by a groups of Gathers, whose sole purpose is to collect girls to marry them off into polygamist relationships to hopefully give the human race a chance at survival. See they think their actions are noble because they live in a time and place where cancer treatment had a rebounding effect on the next generation. Girls die off at the age of 20 and guys at the age of 25, so these girls are taken from their homes to live as sister wives and procreate to keep the remaining population from dying out. Rhine refuses to accept her situation and from the day she enters Linden's compound, she looks for a way to escape and find her twin brother. With the help of Gabriel a house servant, Rhine survives one day at a time and searches for that one opportunity to escape this dangerous world of lies and abuse.

First off, I have to point out that I felt the world building is extremely flawed. What sort of world catastrophe demolishes all of the countries while simultaneously leaving the US virtually unscathed? That seems too random and unlikely that I had a hard time envisioning a setting where only the US exists and all other countries are wiped off the face of the earth.

Also, the science behind the story is extremely weak as I can't for the life of me figure out the biological explanation for girls dying at the exact age of 20 and guys at the age of 25. It all feels so random and too exact when all you hear of medical explanations is that "everybody responds differently" and "not everyone is the same." Why that age? What happens to the body at those ages that triggers such a response? Is it an autoimmune deficiency? A virus? Also, if the cause of this unexplained anomaly stems back to the fact that it resulted from a cancer treatment, why was it given to absolutely everyone? Couldn't they limit the treatment

and test the results? Not everyone develops cancer and sadly not everyone has access to medical treatment, so how did this happen?

As far as the Gathers who kidnap the girls, I don't understand why they come in gray suits to announce themselves rather than using some other stealthy method of operation. Not that I want to give them any ideas, but really? And then they kidnap a group of let's say 6 to 7 girls with the intent of forcing them into polygamist relationships for the sole purpose of experimenting on them and forcing them to have babies, so explain to me why they kidnap a bunch of them and kill off half before they even arrive to the compound? Believe me, I don't wish that on anyone, but why do they collect so many and kill off half of the girls at the onset? Doesn't this contradict with their initial purpose of trying to keep the population from dying off?

In terms of the time setting, it feels futuristic ... say maybe 75 to 100 years in the future. It was rather ambiguous or I must have missed it, but that seems like such a short amount of time in the not too distant future to have our legal and government system go to shit where it allows for underage marriages, illegal drinking, polygamy, child slavery, disregard for the age of consent, flaunting of kidnapping where the girls are televised on television. What the hell??? What crazy world is this?

So why my generous rating? Wow, this is going to be tough to explain! But here goes... there was something elegant about parts of this book. Not glaringly so, but sort of subtle. There were relationships among the characters, such as the sister wives and creepily enough between Linden and Rhine that felt genuine and pure. You'll have to read the book to understand, but trust me I came undone at some of the stuff that was presented, but that didn't stop me from realizing the underlying beauty that was there when you peel away the many layers of this book. That's my peace...

Anywho, I'm really interested to see how this story unfolds, if anything to see if Lauren DeStefano is able to tighten up the loose ends and provide some sort of explanation for aspect of her world building.

Overall, there are some cringe-worthy scenes, but when it's presented in such a creepy yet captivating way, I have to admit I'm shamelessly intrigued.

Michelle, the Bookshelf Stalker Queen of the Undead says

On the first few pages of *Wither*, the author revealed to me, kidnapping.

On the next few pages of *Wither*, the author revealed to me, kidnapping and sleeping gas.

Further, in the pages of *Wither*, the author revealed to me, kidnapping, sleeping gas, and indentured servitude.

Deeper into the pages of *Wither*, the author revealed to me, kidnapping, sleeping gas, indentured servitude, and Polygamy.

Not even reaching ¼ of the way through the pages of *Wither*, the author revealed to me, kidnapping, sleeping gas, indentured servitude, Polygamy, and rape.

Somewhere in the pages of *Wither*, the author revealed to me, kidnapping, sleeping gas, indentured servitude, polygamy, rape, and terminal genetic disorders.

I cannot believe I was still reading this book, when the author revealed to me, kidnapping, sleeping gas, indentured servitude, polygamy, rape, terminal genetic disorders, and pregnancy.

Yes, the list of social issues came to me like the “12 Days of Christmas” song. Morbid? Yes. Twisted? Yes. Nevertheless, I did not write this book full of social issues. So don’t shoot the reviewer!

Don’t fret! The book handled the social issues with extreme care and effortlessly wove the issues into the newly created dystopian world that was explained in its entirety. NOT!

I’ve watched someone I love die from Huntington’s disease, a terminal neurodegenerative genetic disorder. To see that issue, and other very serious issues handled so lightheartedly that the issues were practically glossed over, was disheartening.

I swear it was like the author had a central idea “girl wants to escape back to her brother and needs the help of her new love interest to complete her plan” and worked around that idea by throwing everything AND the kitchen sink into the book.

I am in no way a prude (look at my other books to see that I can, and will read everything- shocking, terrifying, gory, sexually explicit- you name it, I’ll read it) but the irresponsible way this book was presented to the reader stopped me from continuing.

The characters did not help the story at all (ok, there really is no story, this is a YA romance wannabe). The characters were so flat and boring that I did not care one bit what happened to them.

If I sound annoyed. I am. This book is going to be a huge success and IMHO it should not be. There are so many wonderful YA books out there that do not have the right publicity and that’s sad.

1.5 stars out of 5. Why not 1 star? Because it brought out my emotions and I guess that is worth a half of a star!
