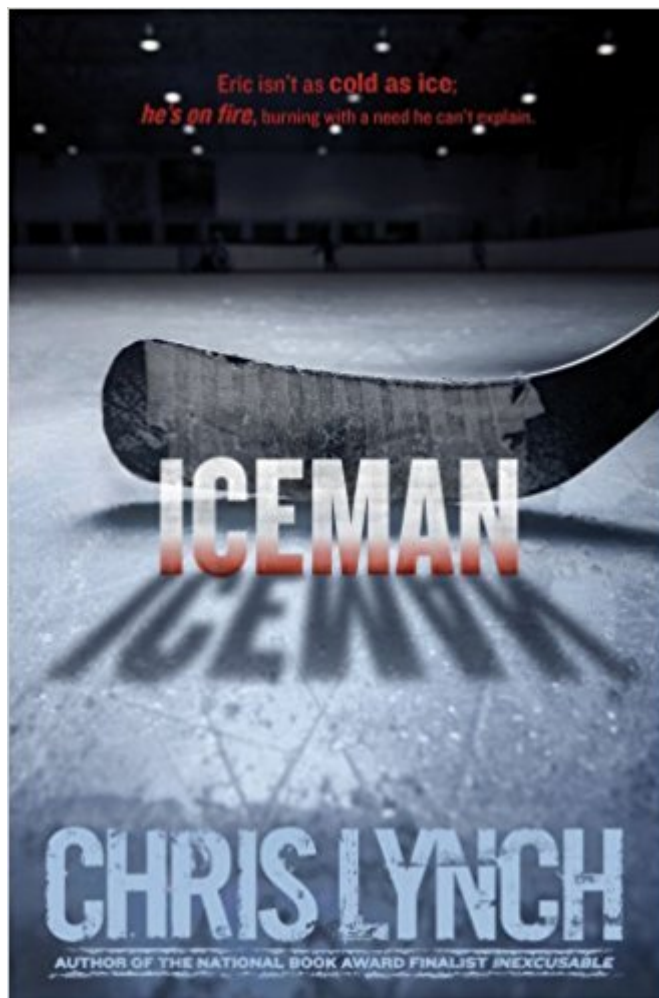


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Iceman



Synopsis

Is Eric as cold as the ice he skates on? A fiery tour de force from the author of >, a National Book Award finalist. The other guys on Eric's hockey team call him the Iceman, because he's a heartless player, cold as ice. Only Eric knows the truth—he's not cold, he's on fire, burning with a need he just can't explain. Least of all to his family—not to his dad, whose only joy in life is watching Eric smash other hockey players to a pulp. Or his mom, who starts every conversation with, "Your problem is..." Or even his brother, Duane, once a star athlete, now a star slacker. Can Eric find a way to make them understand how he feels—before the fire inside consumes him completely?

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Age Range: 12 and up

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Customer Reviews

Chris Lynch is the Printz Honor Award-winning author of several highly acclaimed young adult novels, including Printz Honor Book *Freewill*, *Iceman*, *Gypsy Davy*, and *Shadow Boxer*—all ALA Best Books for Young Adults—as well as *Killing Time in Crystal City*, *Little Blue Lies*, *Pieces*, *Kill Switch*, *Angry Young Man*, and *Inexcusable*, which was a National Book Award finalist and the recipient of six starred reviews. He holds an MA from the writing program at Emerson College. He teaches in the Creative Writing MFA program at Lesley University. He lives in

Boston and in Scotland.

PLAYING WITH FIRE This is why I'm confused. I'm a hockey player. I'm a very good hockey player, not a great hockey player. My brother Duane was a great hockey player when he played, but he gave it up. "If I know one thing in this world, then this is the thing I know," he told me the day he bestowed his old equipment on me. "The minute you start thinking about the meaning of sports, you're useless as an athlete." But that's not why I'm confused. I don't question why I'm a hockey player, I just am one. It's my style that's the issue. I play hard. Rock-sock-em, you might say. Yet I always lead my team in scoring. Not because I've worked to develop my shot or my puck-handling skills, but because I either intimidate guys into giving the puck up to me or I ram the guy with the puck right into the net. It works. Coach is always using me for an example in practice. "The guy with the fire in the belly," he calls me. "If you all played with half the fire this guy has, we'd win the damn Stanley Cup." But then he'll turn around and tell them, "He's cold as ice, this boy. And that's what you need to do the job. He'd skate right over his own mother, slice her to bits, to get that puck." And he meant it as a good thing. Somehow, he was right both ways. I'm known to other players as the Iceman, because I'm heartless. But they couldn't really know about the burning inside. Could I be both, fire and ice? Sure, depending on the day. Opening day this season, in my grubby little league, I was on fire. I don't play anything, don't really do anything, in the summer, so I was kind of itchy when the season started. I came out like a pinball, hitting everything in sight. I play defense, but right off the opening face-off I took a run at the center, leaving him flat like a bull's-eye in the face-off circle. The puck dribbled off to his left winger, who I chased, caught, and body slammed. As I sat on that guy, the defenseman came rushing by and scooped up the puck. Whoosh, he blew by the lame center and lame right winger on my team. Swoosh, he blew by our lame right defensemen. But by the time he reached the right circle in front of our lame goalie, I was right on his ear. He heard me. "I know, because when I come up behind a guy, I use a heavy, pounding stride that cuts the ice so hard you can hear it in the stands. As I hoped, he tilted a glance just slightly over his shoulder in my direction and hesitated before winding up, and he was mine. His skates left the ice momentarily as I drove him with a football-like tackle, past the net and into the boards with a crash of sticks and pads and skates. Almost knocked myself out in the process. I dragged myself wheezing and hunching to the bench. Less than a full minute into the season, and I

was so exhausted I couldn't speak. "Sometimes I think maybe you should just leave your stick on the bench when you go out there," Coach said, laughing, as he passed me the Gatorade squeeze bottle. That was pretty much how that first game went. I knew that I should have been pacing myself, but it was like I had no control over it. I'd sit on the bench, get my wind back, then go out like a maniac for sixty seconds, destroying everything out there until I could barely crawl back to the bench. Somehow in all that I managed to steamroll a goal in, by slashing at the goalie's hands so much in a pileup that I swear I heard him mutter, "Screw this," as he pulled his hands back. We won 1-0, mostly because by halfway through the second period nobody on their team was too hot for holding the puck, and because I was being too disruptive for my own team to get any flow going when I was on the ice. When I wasn't on the ice? Let's say my team wasn't very deep, which is why I had to concentrate on staying on the ice longer, not burning out. Game 2 was a whole different thing. Pacing was never a problem. It came only three days after that first crazy game, but I felt so different, it was like I was a different player inside the same #4 uniform. I was cool, cold even, as I thumped up and down the ice, doing my job, stopping everybody who came my way, clearing the puck out of the defensive zone, even managing to whistle a few drives on net from the point. But I felt nothing. I knocked some guys down with good clean checks. Some guys knocked me down. But we all went on our way. When the second period came, I had no recollection of the first and had to look up at the scoreboard to find out that we were down 2-0. The only time I felt a little bit of something was when I had to go with Dice. Darren Dice, a big mother of a guy who had been dogging me since my earliest peewee games, was stalking me for the first of our many annual brawls, but I hadn't even noticed him. Not much of a talent, Dice, but always with a mean stupid grin that scares people into making mistakes for him. And he could knock out a bronze statue if you let him catch you. I was a little lazy, carrying the puck up ice early in the third period. Dice must have been in his sneaky crouch, hunting me down from all the way across the ice, because I never even saw him before he blasted me from the side. It was a perfect shoulder check that sent me headfirst into the Plexiglas by my own bench. Nice hit, I thought, and that was it—that's how dead zone I was. Until I got up and found him right in my face, both gloves off and stretching his fingers out. With the grin. For the first time, though, I was looking almost straight into his eyes, and I filled nearly the same amount of space as him. In past years, boy had I taken some spankings from him. The key, with Dice, with big guys, with tough guys, is to keep them off balance. I dropped my gloves and quickly grabbed the neck of his shirt. Using a stiff-arm technique, I jerked him first left, then right, then straight down as if I was going to ram his face on my

knee. I got him so that he didn't know where he was going with each tug. But I knew. When I moved him to one side with my right hand crack! my left fist was there to meet his face. When I moved him to the other side, or down, or pushed him straight back, one-two-three-four-five, my left hand was like a baseball bouncing off his cheekbone, his forehead, squishing into his nose. I dissected him, hitting him exactly where and when I wanted to. All the while he had to keep scrambling just to keep his skates under him. The feeling of power, of total control, made me want to do it more, and hit him again, which I did and did. Finally I knocked him off his feet, not so much with the punches he was one tough mother but with the constant shaking and pulling him every which way. He never even got to throw a punch. I rolled on top of him, and when the refs pulled me off, old Dice looked a little stunned. Stunned, but still smiling as much as ever, as he had through the whole fight. I did my time in the penalty box, and by the time I got out, there was only a minute left in the game. That's what happens to guys who fight in the third period, they're basically out of it. But I didn't mind. I stayed on the ice that entire final minute and didn't contribute much. I even allowed some weenie, weasly little winger to slip past me and score a goal, making the final 4-0. But after he finished celebrating, on his next trip down ice, I wrecked him. He was flying by me, trying to do the same thing again, only this time I wasn't asleep at the wheel. I let him think he was past when, at the last instant, I threw myself sideways. I caught him perfectly in the solar plexus with my shoulder, making him suck for air so hard it sounded like a little scream. I followed through on my check, like you're supposed to, bouncing him off the boards. His stick flew into our bench. His helmet rolled fifty feet away. When the buzzer sounded to end the game, he lay on his side curled up like a cooked shrimp. That was my job. I was doing my job. Half the crowd whooped my father being the whoopiest but the other half booed me. It was a home game, and they booed me. They didn't understand that even though the game was over, we still had to play these guys two more times this season, and this guy had to remember me. All they knew was that he was smaller than me. I didn't like doing it. But I didn't not like it, either. That's basically how the whole season went. I'd blow hot and cold all year, from game to game. Some days I wanted to take everybody's head off and win games all by myself. Other games I just wasn't there. Thing is, I think on the outside it all looked the same to people, the way I played. I was always the Iceman, and I was the only one who knew the difference, so maybe it didn't really matter. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This was purchased for a reluctant reader who enjoys hockey. The student enjoyed the book.

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