

Convincing novels



Rayne & Delilah's Midnite Matinee

Written by Jeff Zentner
Andersen Press £7.99 ISBN: 978-1783447992

A brilliant book for teenagers that foregrounds female friendship in an authentic, positive way, while also making space for a romantic storyline. Josie and Delia are best friends both making big decisions about their futures. Josie needs to decide whether or not to leave her town (and best friend) in order to pursue an opportunity in television – her lifelong dream. Delia has engaged a private investigator to track down her dad but once he's found what should she do next? The two present a late-night horror film show on Public Access television. Delia can't imagine continuing without Josie. Josie is torn between letting down her friend and taking the next step towards her goal. Told in alternating chapters from each girl's point of view, Jeff Zentner has managed to raise the stakes for both characters and introduce tension and romance for Josie without the girls ever betraying each other or prioritising a boyfriend over a best friend. Great dialogue means that the story skips along and even when serious topics are explored, the pace and tone never let up. Highly recommended.

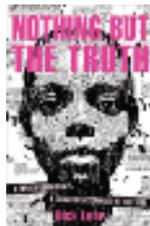
Annalise Taylor

Nothing But The Truth

Written by Dick Lehr
Walker Books £7.99 ISBN: 978-1406379846

In the late 1980s a young girl is murdered; an innocent victim of gang related gun fire. The alleged murderer is caught and imprisoned for life. For the next twelve years, Romero Taylor's daughter, Trell, just one-year-old when he was sentenced, visits him every week with her mother. Romero and his family have always protested his innocence, but to no avail. A new inquisitive lawyer agrees to look at his case, and a journalist from the Boston Globe also agrees to investigate the events surrounding Romero's conviction. However, it appears others are determined to keep these events secret. This is a thrilling book, made all the more compelling knowing it is based on a true story, and written by the investigating reporter. It is obvious that the book has been written by a journalist; the descriptions of characters and events are clear and detailed, but also to the point. Trell is well drawn; intelligent, brave and determined; a really positive role model for young girls. This is an insightful look at the US justice system and how the pressure for justice to be seen to be done, may actually obstruct real justice being delivered.

Jane Hall



The Closest Thing to Flying

Written by Gill Lewis
OUP £6.99 ISBN: 978-0192749482

At first glance, this is a well-explored theme: troubled young girl, Semira, finds an old, hidden diary that illuminates her own experience. But this story takes a new angle with a theme that is bang up to date.

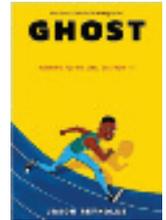
Semira is a refugee from Eritrea. She and her mother live in fear, trapped by the coercive control of the smuggler who brought them to safety and is now exploiting them. The diarist, Henrietta, is writing a hundred years before but also lives under the shadow of coercive control – in her comfortable middle-class home. Henrietta's story comforts Semira and encourages her to take a step towards her own freedom. The dawn of the women's rights movement and the terrors of human trafficking have been well researched and are sensitively portrayed. The

insights into the historical and current oppression of girls and women are naturally integrated into the story without sounding teachy or preachy.

Yvonne Coppard

Ghost

Written by Jason Reynolds Illustrated by Selom Sunu
Knights Of £6.99 ISBN: 978-1999642525



Castle 'Ghost' Cranshaw discovered his gift for running when he and his mum had to flee for their lives. At school, he has a short fuse and is constantly in trouble. The coach of a local running team recognises his natural talent and offers Ghost the chance to be part of an elite running team – if he can change his behaviour and attitude. There are many themes here – undiagnosed, repressed trauma; the yawning gap between motivation and ability in making a change and, most importantly, the importance of having someone stick by you, no matter what. Ghost is a vulnerable, troubled lad and his desperation to belong creates connection with the reader and gives an edge of suspense as Ghost makes one bad choice after another. This is the first in a four-part series, each centred on one member of the running team. It is the best kind of series: you will not be disadvantaged by reading just one, but investment in all the main characters is worthwhile.

Yvonne Coppard

The Disconnect



Written by Keren David
Barrington Stoke £7.99 ISBN: 978-1781128558

Challenged to put aside their mobile phones and disconnect, Esther and her friends are tempted by the £1000 prize money. However, six weeks seems like a life time, particularly when Esther's father, sister and baby nephew live on the other side of the world. The prize money would enable her to visit them, but how will she manage outside the bubble of social media? A very astute and thought provoking look at social media and the impact it has, *The Disconnect* is an engaging read. Whilst highlighting the negatives of having technology at your fingertips - bullying, obsessive usage, FOMO (fear of missing out) and the anxiety this can cause, the book also notes the positives it brings - Skyping loved ones who are miles away, maps to ease navigation, etc. The story also acknowledges that adults can be as caught up in the virtual world as their children, disconnecting from them when perhaps they are needed most. The real strength of this story, however, is in the characters and their relationships. Esther learns much about herself - and others - during her disconnect, making interesting reading. The conclusion offers a sense of balance - a healthier use of social media rather than a complete ban.

Sue Wilsher

Special Forces Cadets 1: Siege

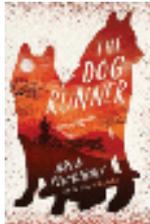
Written by Chris Ryan
Hot Key £6.99 ISBN: 978-1471417253



Right from the opening sentence, this grips. Max Johnson, AKA 'Orphan Boy' is part of a climbing group ascending Helvellyn via Striding Edge. His strength, skill and endurance are tested to levels he could never have envisaged after being captured and mysteriously

whisked off in a Chinook helicopter. Chris Ryan writes with precision and conviction and his selection and training descriptions are obviously built around his own personal Special Forces knowledge and experience. The last six recruits must be whittled down to five and someone is out to test Max mentally and physically to the absolute limits. Who rigged the paracord? Who is R.E.J.? And why is Hector so determined that Max will be going home? Then there's a 'situation' which interrupts schedule and at any moment anyone or everyone's life could be extinguished. Utterly terrifying and totally captivating, this is a credible Chris Ryan classic.

Gill Roberts



The Dog Runner

Written by Bren MacDibble
Old Barn Books £6.99 ISBN: 978-1910646489

Set in a dystopian Australia where a virus has destroyed the world's grain, thus making food scarce, Ella and Emery are alone in a city that is becoming more dangerous each day. Their father has gone to find Ella's mother and they realise that they can't wait for him but

have to move up-country to find Emery's mum, living on a farm with her Afghan father. Ellen and Emery harness their dogs to a cart and set off across the barren land. This is a story about a journey, fraught with danger, and about survival in difficult circumstances. People resort to violence to get food so towns and settlements have to be avoided and it is difficult to know who to trust, particularly as the dogs would make a good meal. Ellen and Emery have to keep from starving themselves so resort to eating snakes and insects, and when Emery becomes injured, Ella has to take over. A tense, gripping story of endurance and persistence with strong female protagonists, though not for the squeamish. Recommended for younger teen readers, there is some violence (people being shot, animals killed and eaten) but it is in context.

Barbara Band

A Story About Cancer (With a Happy Ending)

Written by India Desjardins Illustrated by Marianne Ferrer
Translated by Solange Ouellet
Frances Lincoln £9.99 ISBN: 978-1786032188

The author was asked to write a cancer story with a happy ending instead of the usual sad ones. She has certainly achieved this as it is brimming with hope and love. Told in the first person by a girl with cancer struggling with over protective parents (naturally), her own morbid thoughts, the loss of a good friend and falling in love for the first time is each conveyed with sensitivity. The superb illustrations aptly characterize the mood of the story from the bleak hospital corridor colour scheme to the evocative images of waiting for results. Although I knew the ending the tension was palpable and beautifully written.

Ingrid Fox



How High the Moon

Written by Karyn Parsons
Puffin £6.99 ISBN: 978-0241346891

Segregation, the difference between living in the north and the south of America, injustice and personal doubt about where you fit in, Karyn Parsons handles in an almost innocent and gentle way. We meet all of the events in this book through the eyes and the feelings

of eleven-year-old Ella. Her realisation that she is a 'Zebra' of both black and white parentage adds to her struggle to face a world where her father is unknown and she knows little about her own mother. The strength, warmth and humanity of Ella's grandparents create a real contrast to the bigger events threatening them. *To Kill a Mockingbird* immediately sprang to mind as I read this book. Weaving the real story of the execution of fourteen-year-old George Stinney Jr into this tale, by making him a school friend and first love of Ella's cousin, brought the issues of the Jim Crow

South sharply into focus. A book that is a wonderful experience to read and an equally wonderful debut.

Sue Bussey



No Fixed Address

Written by Susin Nielsen
Andersen Press £12.99 ISBN: 978-1783447213

Circumstances have led Felix and his mother to be living in a van. Their transitory life has begun to improve as Felix has enrolled in high school and been reunited with his best friend Dylan. However, along with keeping clean, having acceptable clothes and navigating a friendship

with an annoying girl, Felix needs to keep his home a secret from everyone. The first-person narration shows us his emotional journey and the dilemmas that he faces. His life is practically and emotionally difficult, but he is surrounded by warm, helpful characters that stop the story from becoming hopeless or bleak at any point. The opportunity to win money on his favourite game show gives Felix a sense of agency and builds the pace and tension of the story. Events also serve to remind Felix and the reader that despite her 'slumps' of depression, his mother is doing her best, as are his friends when they intervene to get him the help that he can no longer see that he needs. Nielsen skilfully depicts the complexities of family life as Felix comes to accept that as much as he loves his mum, he is not responsible for her.

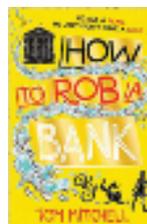
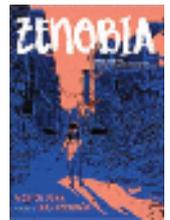
Annalise Taylor

Zenobia

Written by Morten Dürr Illustrated by Lars Horneman
Seven Stories £12.99 ISBN: 978-1609808730

This deeply affecting graphic novel tells the story of a Syrian child refugee. The comic format makes a difficult subject accessible for younger readers. The story opens wordlessly, with an image of a dangerously overcrowded boat, minute against a vast ocean and filled with people fleeing war. In the midst sits Amina, a young girl, alone, eyes wide with fear. As the story unfolds, the reader glimpses Amina's life through her thoughts and memories. These are conveyed with sensitivity, respect and honesty using understated images, restrained colours and very few words. This potent combination brings immense impact and magnifies both the ordinariness and the terrible extraordinariness of Amina's experiences. Her memories of home, of being a happy, young girl playing hide-and-seek, are beautifully depicted and easy to relate to. But there are difficult memories too - of war, loss and having to flee. And memories of stories her mother told her of Zenobia, a courageous Persian queen; stories encouraging her to stay strong and resilient. Humane, compassionate and challenging; this is an exceptional, thought-provoking book about the impact of war on ordinary people.

Anne Walker



How to Rob a Bank

Written by Tom Mitchell
HarperCollins £6.99 ISBN: 978-0008276508

If you're planning to rob a bank, fifteen-year-old Dylan advises you to start with your motivation. Whether your reasons are the same as his, guilt for accidentally burning down a girl's house, Dylan will show you how not to do it. His plans for a semi-high-tech robbery go awry when

instead of casing the target bank he ends up with a Saturday job there, making coffee for the manager. While becoming a career criminal is probably out of the question for Dylan, he might have a future as a comedian. His funny, charming and chatty narrative voice keeps this heist story light-hearted and a lot of fun, despite his genuine desire to steal the money to help someone else (mostly). Mitchell doesn't allow moralising to get in the way of a great story, but quietly in the background Dylan knows it's wrong. He does the right thing in the end, but first he has to break back into a bank to put things right.

Benjamin Scott