ForeWord Reviews
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YOUNG ADULT FICTION

On the Run: The Phenomenon Trilogy Book 2
Chris Raabe
Lunker Productions
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Three Stars (out of Five)

How many ways can a road trip go wrong? *On the Run*, the second novel in The Phenomenon Trilogy, by Chris Raabe, is appropriately named. When four supernaturally gifted teens hit the road in a desperate attempt to avoid capture by the government, they encounter flat tires, empty gas tanks, kamikaze deer, state troopers, and frazzled nerves.

Each of the teens has problems as well as powers. Ray, who can withstand extreme temperatures, is orphaned and thinks that Christian's attachment to his family makes him weak, not strong. "You still think there's hope," Ray tells Christian. "If you want to survive as a Phenomenon Child, you need to get that particular kind of hope out of your system." For Alexis, who has been in and out of foster homes since she was young, family is not a problem; it is her acute hearing that causes her both physical and emotional discomfort. Samantha misses her family as much as Christian misses his, but she knows that letting down her guard means letting herself get captured for her ability to read people's emotions. Despite their different backgrounds, the kids form a new sort of family when Mr. Banner adopts them—but is he a benevolent father figure, or an undercover government agent?

Raabe weaves themes of Christian faith, uncertainty, self-reliance, and betrayal together in this well-paced novel as he leads the teens from one chase to the next. However, some parts are questionable, such as when the agents, who are supposed to capture the kids alive, start shooting at them instead. It is also tough to imagine where the teens are getting the money to pay for the gas and snacks on their extended road trip, since they don't seem to have jobs or parents who give them an allowance. Furthermore, young Alexis and Ray are "practically married," since the "Phenomenon Children way was sort of an arranged marriage situation." To be fair, Christian's not sure if he's "ready for that kind of commitment at fourteen or fifteen," but this arrangement seems to be more of a convenient way to introduce sex into the novel.

That said, the author's intimate knowledge of the farms and back roads of Iowa lends authenticity to the never-ending road trip. Raabe balances the teens' criminal deeds with their

good hearts—when they're done with their stolen car, they make arrangements to get it returned, and they also call for an ambulance for the agents who flipped over while chasing them around a dangerous curve. Just like in real life, the teens are faced with situations that don't have ideal outcomes, so they must rely on each other and their personal faiths to guide their difficult decisions.

It would have been nice to see the teens' powers in action a little more, since Alexis's sensitive ears are the only tools they use to gather information. Perhaps the final book in the trilogy will showcase these powers rather than just mention them. Still, this is a quick read with adventures and life lessons that any teenager can identify with, whether they have super powers or not. Young adults who enjoy road trips and taking control of their own lives will enjoy this story.

Emily Asad