ForeWord Reviews

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Punkzilla
Adam Rapp
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Jamie, called Punkzilla because of his affection for punk rock, is weeks away from his fifteenth birthday when he embarks on another journey-the first was his clandestine escape from Buckner Military Academy to Portland, Oregon. This second trip is also a secret, a secret he shares with his dying brother Peter (P), a playwright living in Memphis.

Along the way, Jamie decides to write letters to his brother, without any regard to conventions, about his past and the people he meets while traveling by Greyhound. He has decided to be honest with P, and himself, about who he is and how he makes it from day to day. To begin, he tells P that he did meth the night before, he has spent the last few months "jumping joggers in Forest Park" to make a living, and he believes the marijuana he smoked during his formative years in Cincinnati stunted his growth and damaged his hormones (Jamie does not have pubic hair, and he is often mistaken for a girl). Relieved to have someone to confide in, he writes, "Its weird I don't feel so ashamed about confessing this stuff to you, P. Does that make me a sociopath?"

The author is an expert at using stream-of-consciousness and stark, realistic language smothered in hopelessness. Toward the end of his journey, Jamie writes, "I got to Memphis six days ago. You are dead and I cant believe how shitty this world is." Yet humorous quips are never too far away: "You're from Portland and you've never seen a guy like me [a transsexual] before? Where'd you live in the planetarium?" Rapp, a playwright and musician, has written several notable books for young adults, including *33 Snowfish* and *Under the Wolf, Under the Dog*. In 2006, *Red Light Winter* earned him a Pulitzer Prize finalist citation for drama, and most of his young adult novels have been on "Best Books for Young Adults" lists.

The graphic language, raw desperation, and sexual experiences discussed in the letters might disturb some readers. There are other letters, arranged out of sequence, written to Jamie from his family and friends that help explain why Jamie makes some of the decisions he makes, but it is the letters *he* writes that really reveal the grim reality of where he is in life and just how far he might have to go to survive.

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