ForeWord Reviews

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

So Punk Rock: And Other Ways to Disappoint Your Mother
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Determined to improve his social life and attract the girl of his dreams, Ari Abramson launches "Operation Make Me Cooler" by starting a punk rock band with himself as lead guitarist-even though hes only been playing since camp. His best friend, Jonas, agrees to learn bass, and together, the boys recruit Yossi Gluck, a social dead zone, as drummer, because he is the only person Ari knows who owns a drum set. When Yossi turns out to be a two-for-one deal, because his parents think his sister Reena should "branch out" socially, the Tribe is born.

The Tribe has to be kept a secret from Aris SAT-obsessed parents. Its first gig, one song at a bar mitzvah, is rewarded with instant fame and a cell phone ringtone that ricochets through Gittleman High. As the band prepares for its second gig by learning two new songs, Ari pretends to practice SAT essay-writing to appease his parents curiosity. He is actually drawing in his song-writing notebook, creating the comics that punctuate this first-person narrative and explain Judaism while also mocking the insular community of Jewish day school life. For example, one frame shows Yossi explaining his fascination with the minutiae of Jewish law by saying, "Studying the Mishnaic law helps us understand our own system of ethics as well as the laws-written and unwritten-that we live by." Although many readers may not know what Mishnaic law is, they will quickly understand that Ari is both embarrassed by and drawn to his religion.

As with many books about high school life, this one involves a quest for self-enlightenment that goes beyond anything Nirvana wrote about. In Aris case, being able to trust his own opinions and having the courage to stand by them is key, even when that means contradicting his friends or confronting his parents after a catastrophic night with the band. When Yossi, who turns out to be the bands moral meter, tells Ari that “you have no idea who you are,” Ari realizes that self-knowledge cannot be crystallized unless one tests it by communicating it to others. This may not mean that Ari and his parents “reach some sort of mind-meeting, peace-making thing,” but it is definitely, as Jonas would say, “kosher.”

This is the authors sixth YA novel; *Emily Goldberg Learns to Salsa*, won the New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age award.

Elizabeth Breau