Time Bomb

Nigel Hinton
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Oaths in blood, bombs, mystery, family strife, discrimination, boyhood bonds—individually they each create an interesting theme for a middle-grade novel. Mix them all together and the end result is *Time Bomb*. Set in post-war Britain during the summer of 1949, the novel chronicles the experiences of Andy and his three friends, Eddie, Manny, and Bob.

The opening lines foreshadow the seriousness that will follow the sweet picture of the last days before summer for these four eleven-year-old boys. “I’ve never told this story to anyone,” says Andy, “because when I was twelve I swore an oath in blood that I would never tell it. But the friends I swore it with are dead now, so it’s time to break that oath and tell the truth.” The first chapter then relates the tale of Andy’s memory of that last day of school before summer break. The art project, the crush on his teacher, his happy memories all then overshadowed by his friend Eddie being disciplined unfairly.

School gets out and the boys spend their days playing in an abandoned bombed-out building. The site holds a feeling of intrigue and ghosts. Among the many discoveries the boys find there is an unexploded bomb. It becomes almost an idol to worship, creating excitement, fear, and a strange sense of empowerment.

Loyalty and friendship between the boys is tested when the character “Cap” enters the story. Andy and Eddie are enthralled with his stories about politics and war, while Manny and Bob doubt his honesty and are the brunt of his racist rants. “You can always tell a Jew: big fat gobs going jabber, jabber, jabber. Hitler knew how to shut you up though didn’t he?” The boys then discover that Cap is part of the construction team planning to tear down the bomb site and build over it. They wrestle with the decision to tell Cap about the unexploded bomb. The decision they make has a deep effect on all of them.

The author was born in 1941 during an air raid, and he played in bomb sites while growing up in London. He has written sixteen novels, including *Buddy*, *Ship of Ghosts*, and *Beaver Towers.*

Time Bomb is loaded with subplots, including Andy’s internal struggle over telling his mother about his father’s infidelity, Bob’s stuttering, Manny’s political and religious struggles, and Eddie’s anger and need for revenge. Some content in this novel may be too dark for younger middle-graders. Readers who desire a story that will come full circle with a happy ending will be disappointed. The many layers of this novel, the excitement, the mystery, and boyhood bonds will especially appeal to older male middle grade readers.

TROY-MICHELLE REINHARDT (October 5, 2006)

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