

Reviews



***Please Don't Kill the Freshman* by Zoe Trope**
New York:
HarperTempest,
2003. 295 p. ISBN 0-06-052936-9

Zoe Trope's memoir of her first two years of high school isn't much different from other teenage girls' diaries. But since it's an actual book that's been edited, it's like reading all the best, most creative, entries in a teenager's diary. It's life without the boring parts. Some of the interesting moments in Zoe Trope's life are universal ones that all teens can relate to, while others rarely happen to anyone, and are even less rarely represented in literature for teens. Trope is comfortable with her sexuality (much more comfortable with it than the adults around her are), but even she doesn't know how to react when, as she phrases it, "My girlfriend turned into my boyfriend and didn't even ask my permission." It's hard enough to be queer in high school, and now that her significant other is a transsexual, what impact it will have upon *her*?

PDKTF was originally published as a shorter chapbook, and in this version, Trope shares her

"As of today, I exist. I am immortal. I have an ISBN. This is eternity."

~ from *PDKTF*

excitement and trepidation about having a book published. "As of today, I exist. I am immortal. I have an ISBN.

This is eternity." Her cryptic stream-of-consciousness style can be incoherent, pretentious, and profane, but Trope is unflinchingly honest, even when her honesty reveals her immaturity. She wishes people who are depressed would get over it, complains "nobody wants to kiss the fat girl" although she's kissed many people, and hates "bitterly intelligent females fussing over their grades" although she is one. Trope is often immature and self-absorbed, but all teens are at times. She expresses her feelings in a way that will make readers feel they are not alone, that someone understands.

***Lily* by Christina Gunn**
Lockeport, NS: Roseway
Publishing, 1998. 191 p. ISBN:
1-896496-06-7



Imagine if Robin Hood had a sister, who was separated from her family in childhood by a tragic accident. Imagine if this long-lost sister also grew up to be a talented archer, a fierce fighter, and a champion for the poor. This is what sixteen-year-old Christina Gunn imagined, and for the most part, she does a good job of bringing her ideas to life in *Lily*, her unique take on the Robin Hood legend. Gunn's descriptions are vivid and her action scenes are exciting.

The only serious flaw is her characterization, or lack thereof. Although the book is called *Lily*, the reader never gains much understanding of this title character. The first two-thirds of the novel are from the viewpoints of secondary characters, such as Will Scarlet, or Lily's friend Peter. It is difficult to relate to the supposed main character when much of the story is not told from her point of view. Lily is a unique and complex girl who at first finds Robin annoying — she is quiet and unobtrusive when helping the downtrodden, so why does he have to make such a fuss about

doing the same thing? (The encounter when she and Robin discover they are brother and sister takes place “offstage,” which is really a shame, as it has so much potential for dramatic and comic effect.)

Although Lily is not depicted as perfect, she always seems larger than life and never quite human. And be warned: this is not a story with a happy ending, though it may be a fitting one, considering the characters' situations and personalities.



“ ‘Can you help me?’
These are the four little
words that Jaime's best
friend Melissa uses to her
sum up Jaime's role in
their relationship.”
~ Review of *Doormat* from
Teenreads.com

***Doormat* by
Kelly McWilliams
New York: Delacorte Press,
2004. 144 p. ISBN: 038573168X**

Jamie's best friend Melissa has always been the pretty, popular one, and Jamie has always been the doormat for Melissa to walk all over. When Melissa thinks she's pregnant, she tells Jamie, but she won't tell Jamie who the father is, or what she

*“Having been unpopular in high school is not just cause for book publications.”
~ Fran Lebowitz*

plans to do about her pregnancy. Melissa’s problems are getting too big for Jamie to handle, especially if she wants to have a life of her own.

Melissa is never depicted as anything other than a spoiled brat, and it’s hard to understand why Jamie would put up with a friend who’s always putting her down. The other supporting characters have more depth, though. Zak becomes part of the “pregnancy club” with Melissa and Jamie after an accidentally overheard conversation and later becomes Jamie’s first boyfriend. Jamie’s easy-to-talk-to Aunt Sarah is an executive who paints her nails bright colours and takes Jamie to the juice bar. Jamie’s mom seems like Aunt Sarah’s polar opposite, until she and Jamie tentatively begin to rebuild their relationship — but in a realistic way, not like sit-com characters.

The characters are believable, the plot is fast-paced, and fifteen-year-old McWilliams writes with a deft touch and memorable turns of phrase, but this slim novel isn’t perfect. The book’s climactic events are unsatisfying, because instead of

showing the action, Jamie shifts to telling about events after they happen. This makes it hard to understand what’s going on at the novel’s climax, and one wonders why McWilliams didn’t describe this part of the story with the same detail and straightforwardness as the rest. *Doormat* is a promising debut by a talented writer, only marred by its murky ending.



Teen Angst?...Naaah: A Quasi-autobiography.
By Ned Vizzini
New York: Dell Laurel-Leaf, 2000. 279 p. ISBN: 0-440-23767-X

Ned Vizzini and his friend Ike once formed a “band” called Wormwhole, consisting of Ike on guitar, Ned on drumsticks (they didn’t have actual drums), no one on bass, and no singer. Their entire repertoire was made up of two instrumental songs they wrote, one called “Lumber” and the other called “Pants in the Mail.” And Vizzini isn’t afraid to admit it. In this collection of essays, published when he was nineteen, he writes about

standardized tests, Nintendo, smoking pot for the first time, Magic: The Gathering, summer jobs, the senior prom, and going to Hooter's with his family, all in a flippant, breezy tone.

The twenty-nine short essays, studded with footnotes *à la* Dave Barry, are arranged in chronological order, providing an episodic account of the author's junior high and high school years. If you're looking for deep thoughts in this book, you won't find any. If you're interested in the light-hearted yet accurate observations of a gifted, nerdy, and weird teenager growing up in the late '90s, then you won't be disappointed. Vizzini isn't afraid to laugh at himself, and the highlights of his high school years will make readers laugh, too.



***How My Private, Personal Journal Became a Bestseller* by Julia DeVillers. New York: Dutton, 2004. 212 p. ISBN: 0-525-47283-5**

This novel wasn't written by a teenager, but its main character is a fourteen-year-old published author. After popular, nasty Sawyer Sullivan

insults her yet again, Jamie writes a journal entry about a fictional "superheroine", IS, who battles Sawyer-inspired villain Myrna and her evil clique of Populors (including the Gossipor and the Ostracizor) with "positivity rays". She accidentally gives this story to her English teacher, instead of her homework. Jamie is mortified, but her teacher, who is friends with a literary agent in Manhattan, loves it. The agent also loves it, and sells it to a publisher. Readers will have to suspend disbelief about the incredible haste with which the book is published — Jamie spends a week extending her story to novel-length, and her editor leaves the manuscript mostly untouched, since it "rings so true" in Jamie's own words. The publishers make it a rush book and it is published within a few weeks. If the novel's greatest weakness is its lack of realism surrounding the publication process of Jamie's book, its greatest strength is the realistic way Jamie reacts to her sudden fame. She has made a lot of money, but her parents won't let her spend any of it. The hottest guy in school is

paying attention to her, but she's pretty sure it's only because she's famous. And Sawyer Sullivan is being as nasty as ever. When some girls at school, inspired by IS, stand up to Sawyer, Jamie decides that girls like Sawyer don't always win; sometimes they just *think* that they do, and the rest of us know better. Maybe Jamie can't make Sawyer change, but she can change herself.

