



[Home](#) > Slam

Slam

Books Reviewed:

[Slam](#) [1]

Issue:

[168](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Writers and publishers with young adults in mind have a liking for clichés; of situation (catastrophic parties), of character (Cinderella girl with no prince in prospect), of language (?And I was like, you know ? whatever?). Nick Hornby avoids them all. A story of a 16-year-old skateboarder whose girlfriend gets pregnant and has the baby, and how the three of them get on, might not promise enough to keep a reader turning its 304 pages. No drugs, no rock concerts ? just some parental rows, some class snobbery, a couple of days when the plot takes an excursion to Hastings.

What makes it all work so well is the character and voice of Sam, the narrator. It?s all happening inside and over his head, out of his control, confusing and alarming. His first instinct when faced with a problem is to run like hell. His skateboarding mates are no help, school?s uphill as it is, and fairly irrelevant when fatherhood is on your mind. But Sam learns to muddle through with a weary, likeable resilience. He loves his mum and she loves him, so that?s one fixed point; trouble is, she?s only 32 and pretty enough for his mate to fancy her. His other anchor is Tony Hawk, the supreme (real life) skateboarder and author of **Hawk ? Occupation: Skateboarder**. Sam knows this book better than believers know their bibles. When in doubt, he consults his bedroom poster of TH and applies the text to where it hurts.

So Sam stumbles amiably through his dilemmas. Life?s full of rough edges, his future options shrinking day by day. A couple of times, TH miraculously ?whizzes? Sam into his confusing future as a young father (a literary sleight-of-hand which Hornby just about gets away with). Bit by bit, crisis by crisis, Sam discovers that he?s not too bad at a few things, including loving his son, from changing his nappies onwards. The dialogue is consistently funny and much of the story is carried by conversations, many of them taut with social embarrassment. Sam doesn?t always know he?s being funny, but when he does it?s very hard to resist his diffident self-mockery. This one is a different, and more trustworthy, slice of YA angst.

Running Order:

17

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[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/168>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/geoff-fox>