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Dancing in the Dark

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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A young teenage boy, James, dies in a cycling accident; his parents and his younger sister, Jessie, are left to deal with the aftermath. While 'coping with loss' has served as theme for numerous children's and young adult novels, it is given considerable freshness here in one significant respect: six months after his funeral James returns from the dead, as a ghost, to haunt his sister and to continue to bicker with her as much as he had done when alive. This continuation of their 'often very entertaining' sibling rivalry is played out against a background of various other problems confronting Jessie, principally those concerning her life at school. Gangs of some rather unpleasant youths 'male and female' seem determined to ostracise her, there is some nasty bullying and, most important detail of all, the (Irish) National Schools' Dance Championship finals are coming up, in which Jessie, tap dancer extraordinaire, will, unexpectedly, have a heroine's role to play. And then there is Alan, a newly arrived boy at her school, whose presence will, eventually, bring some solace. Prendergast's first person prose is linguistically simple but emotionally powerful, his insights into the many facets of family grieving are perceptive and sympathetic and there are some nicely observed social nuances in his Irish school setting. This is Prendergast's first full-length novel and represents an impressive achievement.

Running Order:

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