



Envy

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

[Val Randall](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Katelyn Berkley was found dead in the bath by her mother Sandra, with nothing but an espresso maker in the water to keep her company. This dramatic and cleverly constructed opening to Gregg Olsen's **Envy** leads the reader down a series of engrossing false trails until the truth behind her apparent suicide is revealed at the very end of the book.

In his first book for young adults, Olsen has crammed his pages with a huge variety of diversions and stereotypes to keep the reader guessing-psycho twins Hayley and Taylor, high-school queen and arch-manipulator Starla, besotted teenage boy Teagan, inadequate mother Mindee-to say nothing of a serial killer, a child-molestor and the obligatory ultra-reliable boyfriend who has the uncanny ability to solve problems others have been unable to penetrate.

The effect of this high-octane cast of characters is to propel the story along at a furious pace, with one cliff-hanger following another and new narrative threads developing as the old ones die away. However, the intensity of this forward propulsion implodes and plausibility is threatened as one suspect after another takes centre stage, is accepted by the reader and then dismissed as a red herring by the author. Olsen has tried a little too hard here-if he had pared down his ingredients and established some of his large cast of characters more roundly **Envy** would have been an undeniably gripping thriller, well suited to the teenage audience which it aims to target.

Olsen has a keen ear for dialogue-though, at times, the American teenage vernacular is somewhat bewildering-and his portrayal of female friendship is engaging and sharply humorous. He captures well the preoccupations and pitfalls of high school life-the cliques, the loyalties, the cruelties. This is the first in the **Empty Coffin** series and a taster for the second book appears on the last two pages, rather coyly called the 'Sneak Peek.' I feel sure this series will find a following amongst older teenage girls who like their fiction fast-moving and well-seasoned with drama and intrigue.

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