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Everyone Dies Famous in a Small Town

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Reviewer:

[Nicholas Tucker](#) [3]

Editor's Choice:

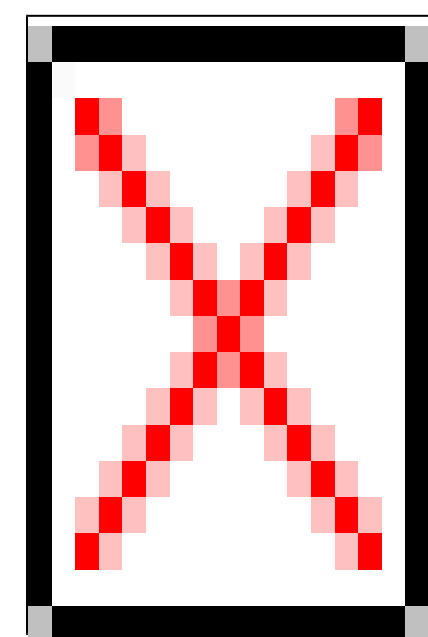
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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5



This, the publishers write on the back cover, is a novel like no other. They are right. While young adult fiction has grown increasingly tough over the years, it still usually ends up holding out at least some moments of hope for its readers. But not in this novel, written by an American author living in the same area described in her story. Nine interlinked stories, each one introducing new characters along the way, are set in and around the Wyoming and Alaskan countryside at its bleakest. Bored teenagers, marooned in small communities, have to cope variously with a paedophile priest, a child abductor, terrifying forest fires, wandering bears and mountain lions and dangerously low temperatures during long winters. Their parents are often in full retreat from any sort of commitment or responsibility. In a summer camp, infants risk fatal accidents on an hourly basis. Friendships flicker but often die. Any occasional sense of contentment or general optimism remains largely absent.

What stops all of this from going well over the top is the quality of its writing. Each word counts, and there are no repetitions. There is also some black humour in its teenager banter, although this often hurts too. Tracing characters

from one story to the next takes time and attention, almost certainly meaning that this novel has to be read at least twice before all the connections become clear. But a map on the front cover, showing the neighbouring terrains and which characters live where helps out. And re-reading is also a pleasure. Despite its darkness, this book is a triumph of storytelling. The only indication that it is written principally for teenage rather than for adult readers is the fact that all its main characters are young. In every other way it is a story for all ages.

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