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Heavy Metal and You

Jeanne Gubler

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Reviewer: Jeanne Gubler
Reading Level: Young Adult
Rating: Significant shortcomings
Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;
Subject: Heavy metal (Music)--Juvenile fiction; Interpersonal relations--Juvenile fiction; High schools--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

The central themes of *Heavy Metal and You* are life, love, sex, friendship and how heavy metal music impacts a young man's self-perception. When Sam first hears heavy metal music he says, “... the sound came rushing out, washing over me with so much atmosphere and power that my preteen mind was blown away. ... I was enraptured by the musical darkness filling me, a noise that at the time seemed like the sounds of a war against all things good, the soundtrack to a temple being burned to the ground.” Heavy metal music became Sam’s life. He was never without it. It was full of rage and appealed to the dark side of him; it was frenzy and encouraged reckless abandon; through his life experiences and especially his anger, he identified with the lyrics, sounds, and emotions of heavy metal music.

As the story unfolds, boy meets girl. Sam finds himself attracted to a “preppy” girl--an oddity for a heavy metal man. Melissa tries to help him understand that he isn't his music. She sees the good side of him and is shocked when they attend a heavy metal concert: the concert smells like cigarettes, booze, sweat, blood, hair, cotton and leather, not to mention, she sees the mean, angry, violent side of Sam. He scares her.

She encourages him to stop drinking, smoking and doing drugs. He stops for her . . . for a while. But their problems are not over: she meets his friends and doesn't like them; he meets her friends, sees them as phonies, and tells them off.

The story continues to explore Sam's world: the intricacies that attend parties with friends (booze, drugs, and cigarettes), relationships with girls (undressing each other), and family relationships with parents and siblings. The author writes well: he powerfully draws the reader into sexual involvements and simulates the disgusting after effects of alcohol and drugs (vomiting, headaches, and utter abandon).

Sam proves to have some redeeming qualities. When invited to have sex with his girlfriend, he refuses. He likes her more than that. There is a sense that through his relationship with Melissa, he comes to know himself better. He comes to a peace within himself about smoking (he doesn't like it) and his incompatibility with this “preppy” girl. He sees the better side of himself through Melissa’s eyes.

At the end of the book, readers will discover a lonely young man who felt unloved, misunderstood, and judged by those around him. After being beaten up as a youth by other boys, he carried the pain of his helplessness and anger. He hated life, his teachers, felt heartbroken and hurt, was unrequited in love, loathed himself and saw himself as an adolescent misfit. These feelings drew him to heavy metal music. A girl helped him find a way out.

This story offers a window into a counter-culture lifestyle, but contains objectionable elements. The language is typical of counter-culture: the “F-word” is used a lot and God's name holds no value. Because Krovatin possesses a commanding ability to draw in the reader, readers will want to be careful in deciding whether the redeeming value of this book outweighs having to experience the language, sexual excursions and cultural aspects of heavy metal found in this book. These aspects of *Heavy Metal and You* make it a better recommendation for adults than young adults.