

Emma's fury overwhelms everything: she cuts herself off from email, friends, and family, and distrusts the motives of everyone at her new school. Her only companions are an old gardener who teaches her how to make tea and a strange American girl. On top of it all, Emma's hormones are sent into overdrive by an extraordinarily handsome, extremely rich local boy named Mustapha, who is, unfortunately, engaged to an equally upper-class (and jealous) girl.

The first half of the book sets all this up, while the second half tears it down. Emma's American friend is sent away, Mustapha and Emma kiss, and it is revealed that his fiancée works teaching slum kids, proving she is more than the spoiled rich girl she at first appears to be. The complex relationships are resolved in a dramatic night of rioting and danger.

An Infidel in Paradise is a very well-written evocation of both a tormented teen and the exotic setting she finds herself in, but Emma's anger is a little too conveniently overwhelming, and paradoxically vanishes a bit too easily. However, teen readers will relate to Emma's struggles and learn much from this excellent portrayal of culture clash. – John Wilson, whose latest novel is *Stolen* (Orca Book Publishers).

Homeland

Cory Doctorow; \$19.99 cloth 978-0-76544-369-8, 400 pp., 5¼ x 8½, Tor/Raincoast, Feb. (ages 13-18) Reviewed from finished book

It's not easy being a hero. In Cory Doctorow's bestselling 2008 novel, *Little Brother*, readers followed the story of Marcus Yallow and his friends who, after being detained and questioned by the Department of Homeland Security following an horrific terrorist attack on San Francisco, fought back using the government's own technological tools against it. Yallow became something of a folk hero, both with his techno-cohorts (who knew him as M1k3y) and the world at large. His work was a triumph for civil liberties, and freedom itself. A few years later, though, the triumph feels a little hollow.

Homeland picks up Marcus's story on a decidedly down note. Like so many others, his parents are slipping toward bankruptcy, and Marcus's anti-government activities have made it impossible for his father to get the security clearance he needs for well-paying consulting jobs. Marcus himself is struggling with student loans and a virtually non-existent job market.

That's when Masha, Marcus's foil from

Little Brother, re-enters the picture, pressing on to the once-and-future hacker a huge file of Wikileaks-style information that documents corruption at the highest levels of government, and urging him to release it should anything happen to her. When Masha is taken by seemingly hostile forces, Marcus once again finds himself going up against the government.

Despite the YA classification, adult readers will find themselves captivated by the story – though in a different way than their younger counterparts. This is, in many ways, a grown-up book: the youthful idealism of *Little Brother* has been ground down by the world. *Homeland* depicts characters on the cusp of adulthood, with all its compromises and reality checks. – Robert J. Wiersema, author of *Bedtime Story* (Vintage Canada).

Still at War

Jean Booker; \$6.99 paper 978-1-44311-383-0, 160 pp., 5¼ x 7½, Scholastic Canada, Feb. (ages 9-12) Reviewed from finished book

The protagonist of Jean Booker's new novel is a girl named Ellen who lives in a small town in England shortly after the end of the Second World War. Though the conflict is over, life is still not easy: rationing continues, few have indoor plumbing, veterans are returning with physical and emotional wounds, and it's the coldest winter in living memory. In addition, Ellen's town is still hosting German POWs, who are working odd jobs while waiting for passage home.

Some townspeople focus their anger and frustration on the POWs, especially because many locals, including Ellen's parents, are out of work. Ellen, however, is anxious for a different reason: she let a young German soldier escape during the war and now lives in fear that he will resurface and force her to admit that she helped him.

The book contains only a few tantalizing details about how Ellen met the POW, because that story is told in Booker's 2011 novel, *Keeping Secrets*. While this sequel is a good story in its own right, reading its predecessor will help readers better understand Ellen's situation.

What is wonderful about *Still at War* is that, despite major historical events, Ellen is mostly concerned with typical preteen anxieties. She's embarrassed by her mother's outspokenness, worries about how to pay for a new party outfit, and is desperate when she thinks she's lost her best friend after they argue about a boy. Her voice is authentic,

and readers in the target age range will likely identify with her.

The strong English dialect (words like “nowt,” “bangers and mash,” “jumper,” etc.) may cause problems for less advanced readers and interrupt the flow of the story. That aside, this book should appeal to young readers who are struggling to figure out who they are, while reinforcing the truism that no matter how much the world changes, teen angst stays the same. – Megan Moore Burns, an editor in Toronto.

Danny, Who Fell in a Hole

Cary Fagan; Milan Pavlovic, illus.; \$14.95 cloth 978-1-55498-311-7, 120 pp., 5 x 7½, Groundwood Books, April (ages 8-12) Reviewed from advance reading copy

In celebrated author Cary Fagan's latest middle-grade novel, young Danny is presented with a dire and confusing situation: his father announces he is moving to New York City to become an opera singer, and his mother proclaims she is moving to Banff to bake cheesecakes. They are not getting a divorce or even separating; they are simply going to live apart for a year or two to pursue their individual dreams.

Suddenly, Danny faces the prospect of shuttling between two different places, and to top it all off, his parents have given away his dog, Thwack, in anticipation of the family's dispersal. Not surprisingly, a very upset Danny runs away. He runs out of his house, across town, and into a construction site, where he falls into a really big hole.

In classic Fagan fashion, the author turns a potentially tragic situation on its head with a good dose of humour and whimsy. Danny proves to be quite resourceful, surviving on the contents of his backpack (he was running away, after all), and handling his predicament rather well. But Danny is quickly overshadowed by another inhabitant of the hole: a talking mole (named Mole) who is funny, chatty, and a talented poet and dancer. Danny may be the book's main character, but Mole steals the story.

Fagan uses a gentle touch to explore several weighty issues – identity, being “different,” accepting change, bravery, friendship, and family – all while delivering comedy and adventure. The themes and execution might not appeal to older, more advanced readers, but kids at the younger end of the target age, as well as fans of Fagan's previous work, will find much to like about this book. – Jennifer Foden Wilson, a writer and editor in Toronto.