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Frances Leventhal's brother Daniel has committed suicide at the exclusive Pettengill School. But there is more to his death than meets the eye...

Black Mirror Details

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From Reader Review Black Mirror for online ebook

Ryan says

I like Werlin's characters and her stories. There is a coming-of-age-ness to this book. Frances was basically abandoned by both parents - her mother left to join a Buddhist monastery and her father is plainly depressed - and as the book opens, she is coping with the death of her brother. He was, she says, her best friend. Her only friend. She is different - not all Asian, not all Jewish, not all anything. Just in between and being in between is tough, lonely. But sometimes the alone is good. I liked her description of discovering art, about Frances love of creating art. It fills in the lonely so its just alone.

The book is also a bit of a mystery - something is going on (it says so on the book jacket so this isn't a spoiler) in Frances' world. Only a part of it is external though. Mostly, she is growing up, and that can be a big mystery on its own.

Kanae says

I tried it but I gave up on it, because it didn't pull me in like books usually do.

Mirrani says

I had a very difficult time putting down Black Mirror, not necessarily because I was held at the edge of my seat with suspense, but because the characters were so real that I simply could not let them go. Reading this book I felt as if I was listening to a friend tell the story of some intense drama that happened to them in the past week and the emotion behind the characters pulled me even deeper into the story.

The main character, Francis, tells the events as they happen, in the first person. It is her story, told in such a way that you can almost feel as if you picked up someone's diary, opened to a random page and began learning about their life from that moment on. As is the case with everyone, things have happened in her past, before the book begins, however we are not bombarded with the details. We learn about them in mentions here and there; her Japanese mother left them to join a Buddhist monastery, her father moved the family to live with their Jewish grandmother, she grew up, her brother died. It is in this part of her life what we find her, feeling out of place as a part of a mixed family, going to a private school on a special scholarship. As a reader I became drawn to this self-proclaimed outcast, feeling her pain, her worries and experiencing her life /with/ her in these moments of confusion and sadness. She was close to her brother before they grew up, then he drifted away from her and now, with his death, she finds herself all alone with only her own art to comfort her.

As a mystery, the story moves you from one direction to the other. Is there a crime? Who is the guilty party in certain events? What has happened to some of the people she has seen in her time at the school? Some of these questions are answered as you might have expected, others might throw one surprise after another at you before you come to the book's conclusion. And, as is true of picking up anyone's diary and learning about their life by only reading part of it, there are events that occur in the book that you will not discover the outcome of. I found that most refreshing since, after all, doesn't our life continue after the end of a major

event? Do we not have our own questions to answer after we go to bed in the evening? Life continues and this book is a perfect reflection of the life of a person that you might have simply met at random, making discoveries that will forever change them.

Redd Becker says

As an Edgar Award winner Werlin has the skill to create characters who carry readers into the story. Then she uses the mystery as a vehicle for readers to learn about Frances' world. A great combination.

In essence Black Mirror is a coming-of-age mystery. Frances' brother kills himself and she is left to decipher why. In the process she uncovers secrets about a charity at her school and learns that even those she thought she knew best have secrets.

Written in first person we get inside of Frances' head along with her many misinterpretation of people and events. Characters are developed through Frances' eyes, but Frances is wrong more often than not. She's hard on herself, can't look in the mirror and doesn't trust people enough to make friends, but that doesn't stop her from crushing on an older guy. She finally partners with a mentally impaired janitor and tries to reach out to a teacher for help, but who can she trust when the evidence mounts. A surprise ending leaves Frances with her biggest challenge yet, forgiveness.

Sandy says

Frances had issues with coping. She couldn't cope with herself, with others and then when her brother dies she couldn't cope that either. Instead of hiding which was her normal coping mechanism she does the opposite and slowly starts to break out of her shell. Hard as that is, she learns a little about herself and the world around her. When her brother dies unexpectantly of a drug overdose she blames herself and later on she realizes she didn't really know her brother as well as she thought she did. Living secluded, she begins to realize the things she has been missing out on and thinks about whether she should open up her life to other things. There is this mystery about Frances, she's dark and I almost feel sorry for her boxed-in life. Her fear of being exposed to life makes you really think. Anyways, as she begins to open up and tries to come to terms of her brother's death she pushes she own boundaries and when others start to push her back into the safety of her box, she starts to get upset. Just when she decides to change her view on life, others are not willing to accept the new Frances. Why is that? Why can't her brother's old girlfriend be more accepting of her? Can't they all see she is trying to more outgoing and be more like her brother, Daniel?

I had troubles getting started with this book, it just did not grab my attention. It wasn't until Frances' issues started to surfaced did I start to enjoy the book. The way Daniel's thoughts and saying kept creeping into Frances' head told a lot about how much Daniel meant to Frances. When Frances started to put the pieces together, I didn't know if she still had some issues going on that needed to be addressed so the ending was quite a surprise to me.

Sandra says

I have to say this book was really amazing...how could one character be so similar to me growing up? I'm

half japanese, suffered ridicule as a teen for how I looked, my build was umm...very voluptuous, I wore big slouchy clothes to hide my body, I avoided the mirror, would sometimes have outbursts in school, and had and still have painful cycles...I too retreated into my art class and often the library...I was very much a loner in my own right...I did have friends...but no one I would consider close to me...I had a few girls who were especially crule to me...I also had a crush on a guy older(6yrs) than me. I couldn't help but feel a kinship to Frances and understood her pain. I didn't lose a brother...but my brother did have lukemia and I understand the sense of not knowing or feeling like I'm not in control of the situation. There were so many similarities to my life and Frances I really do get it. I'm grateful to a friend to suggested I read this.

Lauren says

I would not recommend the book "Black Mirror" by Nancy Werlin to anyone. I would give the book "Black Mirror" a 1 out of 5 stars. Throughout the book, the author keeps it unexciting with no action or specific plot. The only information that explains what the book is supposed to be based on is the last ten pages. Nancy Werlin writes; "Bubbe, my father's mother, was of course a Leventhal only by marriage. Her statement felt to me like the curse of an evil fairy."(page 3) "I had a couple of morning classes, but with a twinge of guilt I stayed in bed through most of the first one. I figured I could probably still take advantage of the depressed, in-mourning-for-brother loop-hole." (page 120) "And maybe I really am just an inch away from insanity. I might be. I don't know. Do you want to be the one who shoves me there? Do you want that on your tiny conscience?" (page 133) I knew within the first six pages, that I was not going to like this book. When I first picked it up and read the back, it made it sound suspenseful, action packed, and mysterious. When really, it was very boring. For instance, the first quote is what pretty much started the constant repeat of the whole book. The second quote goes along with this. The entire book is this girl Frances who goes to this boarding school everyday, complains about her entire body about how she can't look at herself so she puts black sheets over mirrors, and her recently dead brother and his drugs. Who finds the same events over and over again interesting? The last example is just the same as the one before. Why does Frances have to be such a wallflower, and depressed and winy? I don't understand why people would want to read about an ugly depressed girl with no point in life. It's depressing in itself. "Black Mirror", by Nancy Werlin, which I give 1 star, is a book I definitely would not recommend.

Anjali says

Black Mirror narrates the story of a sixteen-year-old girl Frances Leventhal whose brother committed suicide. Somehow she feels responsible, feeling she shouldn't have been wrapped up in her own self-hate and misery and realised that her brother was hurting. This is the second of Nancy Werlin's novels I have read, the first being The Killer's Cousin which was enjoyable. This novel was edging on slightly too boring and quite disappointing compared to The Killer's cousin, the character of Frances, though suffers body image issues is not as relatable and I found myself disliking her. There was and wasn't action. Some parts of the novel are okay because you want to know the truth about Frances' brother's death, but other parts were plain boring, telling a cliché story about how everyone hates her, how she is just miserable, unsociable, unloved and friendless. After a while you feel you cannot sympathise with her, but that is just me. Though I disliked the characters there were some sort-of exciting parts like when Frances is threatened by Daniel (her brother's), ex-girlfriend Saskia but that's about it.

Diane says

Frances doesn't seem to know her brother, Daniel, anymore. They have grown apart ... especially since Saskia Sweeney entered Daniel's life along with the charity organization they both work for, *Unity Service*. Frances has never wanted to be a part of this school activity even though Unity Service supplied her scholarship.. But when Daniel dies of a drug overdose and suspected suicide, she starts to feel guilty and ashamed. Why would her brother do this? As she gets more deeply involved with these people, including James (the grad student drug dealer), she starts to think there's something going on that may have lead to Daniel's murder.

Carmen Yeung says

Frances is an unique girl to me, because she would do anything for her own brother, Daniel. Even though she is really self centered, she still manage to try to join the unity because of Daniel. In the beginning, Daniel was known as being murdered. Frances would blame everyone about it, but she never knew that Daniel was killed beacuse of her. Daniel tried to protect Frances and was murdered by his own girlfriend Saskia. Daniel was finding out facts about Saskia about Patrick. Saskia had to find out crimes about Patrick. Saskia told Frances that she had to kill Daniel in order to get Patrick under arrested. Frances thought Daniel was not murdered and committed suicide, but she also believed that he would ever do that, because Daniel is so outgoing and would help anyone if they need help at the shelters. From the beginning of the book, in the forest James helped Frances. Frances started to tell him everything as a normal friend will do. James stayed with Frances throughout the days and they started out to like each other. Frances did learn to let go and move on, she forgived Saskia, because she understand how much Saskia hated Patrick and she also moved on to a new love. I think this novel is not the best, but it was quiet interesting, in the beginning of the year i mentioned that i like mystery novels. I found myself attracted to the fact that i am helping out to solve the mystery by reading along. I thought Frances was a bit smart for trying to figure out what happened to Daniel, because if she never thought about finding out the truth, she probably never met James and become more talkactive. She would still be "trapped" in her little world of everything is other people's fault. Nothing is her fault. But truth is scary, she faced it and understand it. I think she is very smart and she actually understand things better than others. If i was her, i would be scared and just move on with the fact that Daniel had died. This book turned out better than just the blurb i read from the back.

Sue says

Synopsis:

After Frances' brother Daniel committed suicide, Frances decides to honor his legacy by joining the charity organization, Unity Services, which Daniel worked with. Her act is largely born out of guilt for his death, because Frances felt that she was too wrapped up in her own depression and self-hate to notice that her brother was hurting. As Frances tries to integrate herself in with the other members of Unity Services, Daniel's girlfriend Saskia starts a campaign to make Frances' life at school unbearable in an attempt to force her to quit volunteering at Unity Services. At the same time Frances starts to notice that something isn't quite right with the organization at Unity Services and begins to suspect that the charity organization is a front for an elaborate drug ring.

Review:

Werlin's narrator (Frances) is extremely easy for teenagers and pre-teens alike to identify with. Her self-image and vacillating self-confidence makes her an ideal candidate for YA readers who need to know that their feelings are universal. That being said, I found the book to be an interesting read and enjoyed the vivid description Werlin uses to bring her world to life. Unfortunately, Werlin's narrator reinforces the image of the perpetual teenage girl who is consistently unhappy with herself.

Yolanda says

I just finished this book and was not all that impressed. The begining and some what of the middle dragged on for me. I feel as though, that the reason for this was to try to make the ending a little more interesting then it actually was. I did like the mysteriousness of this story, although i don't really like mystery at all. I would recommend this book if you like drugs, murdre and mystery, but if you like books that get to the point and don't drag on, I would look beyond this one and keep looking.

Keely Tubbs of Salt (keelskilo) says

This book is not exactly fabulous.

I'd *like* to leave the book at that, but I find that I can't. The need is too strong: I MUST review it.

My first problem with it? Frances herself. I found that I could NOT relate to her or her view of teenagers at all. I go to a very public school, and although drugs are a very obvious issue here, I don't think they are as hugely spread through the teenage community as the author suggests. I also am a light skinned, blue eyed 17-year-old. I'm tall, but extremely "small" compared to one of Frances' "problems" *cough cough* , if you get my meaning. And I don't do drugs.

Frances, to me, was sort of stupid. Some of the problems in the book were quite obvious and they went RIGHT over her head. She was annoying, took drugs even though that's what killed her brother, and her character kept morphing. I thought at first that art was very important to her.

But the whole "art" thing faded into the background.

I'm also not sure if the FBI would be that interested in this one school's drug problem. I'm not saying that they for sure WOULDN'T be, but...The book tends to stretch your suspension of disbelief, or whatever that's called. You know what I mean.

I guess if I could relate to Frances at all, I might have a different opinion of the book. But I don't. So I can't. And that's that.

AK says

1* for Andy. Another star for the author because (at least,) I could finish the book.

I'm disappointed with Black Mirror. I think it could be much better than this. The mysteries could be

unfolded in more impactful ways. I was all excited during the climax but then, I went "...only that? Seriously?"

Judy says

Frances, the main character, is a scholarship student at Pettengill, a boarding school. The book begins with her brother's death, and how she is dealing with her grief. She attempts to join the club that her brother was passionately involved in at Pettengill - Unity, and starts to discover the sinister secrets behind this club.

I thought this was a suspenseful and enjoyable read. Much of the book is built on perceptions. There is Frances' perception of herself: "...you are not going to be a dainty Japanese woman", combined with her 'Asian' eyes set in a non-Asian face. There is her idolization of her brother Daniel. There is her distrust and jealousy of Daniel's girlfriend, Saskia. Frances is kept in the dark throughout the book involving the roles of the various students and teachers that she has personal relationships with.

The under-current of anger and self-loathing that Frances exhibits surprised me at times, creating a complex character who I thought would be difficult to relate to, but was actually all too real.

Some of the elements of the book were predictable, but others caught me off-guard (in a good way). I enjoyed her developing friendship with Andy, winced at what happens with her crush, but I think through the experience, she became a stronger person. Although the ending was anti-climatic in a way (do not expect any jam-packed action scenes or suspenseful watch-your-step thriller-esque moments), yet the final revelation was still satisfying. It made me consider that what appears acceptable, what is on the surface of "doing good" - how much of it is for others and how much of it is for ourselves? And how far are you willing to go to stop something bad from happening? Is it worth it to perform a bad deed to stop future bad deeds from happening?
