THE DARK DAYS OF HAMBURGER HALPIN
By Josh Berk
Alfred A. Knopf / On sale February 9, 2010

"This witty tale of mainstreaming, misfits and murder glitters like the 'Future Diamonds' that coal-mine souvenirs promise to someday become."
Starred Review, Kirkus Reviews - December 15, 2009

“A genre-bending breakthrough that teens are going to love.”
Starred Review, School Library Journal - January 2010

Being a hefty, deaf newcomer almost makes Will Halpin the least popular guy at Coaler High. But when he befriends the only guy less popular than him, the dork-namic duo has the smarts and guts to figure out who knocked off the star quarterback. Will can’t hear what’s going on, but he’s a great observer. So, who did it? And why does that guy talk to his fingers? And will the beautiful girl ever notice him? (Okay, so Will’s interested in more than just murder . . .)

Those who prefer their heroes to be not-so-usual and with a side of wiseguy will gobble up this witty, geeks-rule debut.

THE DARK DAYS OF HAMBURGER HALPIN by Josh Berk
Alfred A. Knopf / On sale February 9, 2010
ISBN: 978-0-375-85699-0
Reading Level: Young Adult (ages 12 and up)
www.joshberkbooks.com
REVIEWS

School Library Journal, January 2010


Gr 8 Up–Will Halpin has ditched his former “deaf school” and is now trying to merge into the auditory-able mainstream at Carbon High in eastern Pennsylvania. As the new, overweight kid who has to sit off to the side during classes so he can try to read the lips of both his teachers and his classmates, Will–no slouch when it comes to reading human reactions–quickly downsizes his social expectations and retreats back into the soundless cocoon of his own skull. Luckily for readers, it’s darkly hilarious in there. That’s this debut novel’s most potent hook: the opportunity to spend some quality time inside the precociously perceptive and sardonically witty head of this ultimate outsider as he visually eavesdrops–and rips on–the sick subtleties of a typical high school’s social order. What teens wouldn’t want to have Will’s skills as he, notebook in hand, monitors the school bus mirror and pieces together what all the cool kids are talking about? Most, Will discovers, as he deftly dissects personalities and devilishly deconstructs high school culture, are slavishly focused on being invited to an exclusive party being thrown by popular jock Pat. But when Pat dies during a field trip to a defunct coal mine, under suspicious circumstances, the story morphs into an engaging mystery as Will reluctantly accepts the unsettlingly friendly overtures of a quirky classmate bent on enlisting him as a partner in some amateur sleuthing. A coming-of-age mash-up of satire, realistic fiction, mystery, and ill-fated teen romance, The Dark Days of Hamburger Halpin is a genre-bending breakthrough that teens are going to love.–Jeffrey Hastings, Highlander Way Middle School, Howell, MI

Booklist, December 2010

Will Halpin is the new kid at school. This is a tough situation even in the best of circumstances, but Will is also deaf, and his self-image isn’t great (he compares his body to a “sedentary manatee”). Having left a school for the deaf, Will survives at his first public school with a lot of lip-reading, texting, and the friendship of another social outcast, Devon Smiley. Together, the two students become a duo of misfit Hardy Boys who investigate the death of a classmate while on a field trip to the Happy Memory Coal Mine. The mystery is not the strong suit here; it’s the goofiness of these two unexpected heroes and their take on high school that carries the novel. The school bus, for instance, has “a directly rising slope of coolness from the front . . . to the back. . . . If you keep going, you’d fly out the back . . . and land in the cars belonging to the kids far too cool to ever set foot on a bus.” A humorous first novel from an author to watch.

— Cindy Dobrez

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