

Panic

Sharon M. Draper

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Reviews

- Kirkus Reviews (15 Feb. 2013.) “A troupe of high school dance students is rocked when one of their number disappears. The Crystal Pointe Dance Academy is a refuge for the group of students who take classes and participate in dance recitals. Each of them--Diamond, Layla, Mercedes and Justin, the only boy in the group--has a different reason to dance, but they all want to earn a role in the upcoming production of Peter Pan. When Diamond disappears during a routine trip to the mall, the close-knit group is thrown into emotional turmoil that mounts as the days go by. As it turns out, Diamond has been lured by a sexual predator dangling the promise of a movie audition and finds herself in a dire situation. While the four main characters alternate narration, this is really a two-sided story: Diamond's story of abduction and exploitation, and the everyday concerns her friends face back home. The other dancers face tough situations, from relationship conflicts to a parent returning home after a long incarceration. Diamond's story, though, with elements of suspense and sexual horror, is the more interesting of the two, and readers will find themselves impatient to get back to her ordeal, which is depicted frankly but with sensitivity. Threading through it all is the importance of the arts as a vehicle to get through tough times. By turns pulse-pounding and inspiring.”
- Booklist (1 Mar. 2013.): “After teenage Diamond makes a disastrously foolish mistake, she is abducted and finds herself in terrible danger. Will she survive? Will her life ever be the same? Told from multiple points of view, Panic is not only Diamond's story but also that of three of her friends, all of them students at the Crystal Pointe Dance Academy. Mercedes is Diamond's best friend, who, wracked by guilt, blames herself for her friend's abduction. Layla, given to bouts of self-loathing, is trapped in a physically abusive relationship with a boy whom she thinks she loves. And Justin, the only boy in the dance class, is secretly in love with Layla. Although much of her material will be familiar to YA readers, Draper does a good job of balancing and integrating her multiple plotlines. Especially good are the subtle parallels she draws between Diamond and Layla, both of whom are, in their respective ways, trapped and victims of the worst aspects of the Internet. Draper's many fans will welcome this latest addition to her growing body of work.”
- Shelf Awareness (12 Mar. 2013.): “Sharon Draper (Out of My Mind) takes us into the heart of a closely knit dance troupe that bands together when two of their members face a crisis. The author balances a suspenseful plot and the emotional growth of her characters with ease and grace. Four high school students in the troupe narrate: Justin, the lead male dancer; Layla, his crush, and the leading female dancer, who's dating Cadillac-driving Donovan; sophomore Diamond; and Diamond's best friend, Mercedes. Diamond and Mercedes make an afternoon run to the mall, but when the two separate, Diamond meets a handsome 40-something man in the food court who tells her he's holding auditions for a film. Draper never shows explicitly what goes on during Diamond's ensuing captivity, but readers discover what kind of film the man

had in mind. By alternating among the narrators, Draper allows readers to see the progress of the investigation, and gives us a break from the intensity of Diamond's situation. A chilling parallel emerges with the relationship between Layla and Donovan, whose abuse turns into revenge when he e-mails topless pictures of Layla that go viral on the Web. The author creates a counterpoint with examples of healthy relationships, such as Mercedes and Steven (who brings candy to the studio for his "favorite chocolate bunny"). Draper's tale leaves room for hope that Diamond and Layla can repair their lives, but with the understanding that they are forever changed. Her book may well prompt teens to be more circumspect about their own responsibility in the decisions they make."

- Publishers Weekly (25 Mar. 2013.): "A tumultuous week in the lives of students at the Crystal Pointe Dance Academy is told through a variety of viewpoints. Justin, the academy's principal male dancer, must continually defend himself against homophobic taunts while he pines for Layla, whose low self-esteem keeps her locked in an abusive relationship. Zizi is an airhead, and Mercedes lives under the thumb of her oppressively rigid mother. Then there is Diamond, who goes to the mall for dance tights and leaves with a handsome older man who has promised her a film audition. As readers will likely predict, the film Thane is making will not be rated G. Diamond is drugged, tied to a bed, and raped repeatedly in the presence of some burly cameramen, who post the film online and rake in money. Diamond's chapters are brutal but, perhaps mercifully, they are few and far between; the story sidetracks frequently to other characters' less urgent dramas. Draper writes about the lives of teenagers with authority and believable dialogue, but the juxtaposition of banal moments with Diamond's nightmare makes the sexual violence feel uncomfortably trivialized."
- Bulletin of Center for Child Books (1 May 2013.): "Diamond and her friends love dancing at Crystal Pointe Dance Academy. They all still dream of fame in the larger world, however, so when Diamond meets a man who claims to have a daughter her age and connections to some big stars that he's casting for a movie, she abandons common sense and goes with him to an "audition," which turns out to be an internet porn operation. He keeps Diamond locked up and drugged for six days while her family and friends fear for her. Her drugged state allows for the multiple rapes she endures to be only hinted at and affords her a mechanism of oblivion when she eventually escapes that makes the aftermath less traumatizing. Meanwhile Layla, another girl at the studio, is struggling with her own abusive situation as her boyfriend, Donovan, gets more and more aggressive, and her public humiliation enables her to be sympathetic to Diamond's exposure. Draper employs her signature format here of focalizing through an ensemble cast of African-American teens coping with the multiple facets of their own lives while being involved in a single larger issue. Each character is given a distinct set of family circumstances and personality traits to ensure multiple access points for reader identification, and their choices, while not always wise or comfortable, certainly have credibility. What's particularly interesting here is where she takes the aftermath of her protagonists' traumas: there's no blaming or moralizing, just a sympathetic acknowledgment of the need to move forward from bad circumstances, a supportive point that will ring truer to readers than more didactic approaches. The emotional ranges of the characters

are likewise readily recognizable for teens: Draper doesn't go too deep or rely on metaphor or complex psychology to establish motivation, and this straightforward treatment, along with the pacing and subject matter, will make this attractive even for older teens who enjoy drama but don't necessarily see themselves as enthusiastic readers."

- School Library Journal (1 May 2013.): "Draper has created a nurturing setting for her characters in the Crystal Pointe Dance Academy where students have been dancing and working together for years. Miss Ginger, their instructor, provides support and challenge in endeavors like the spring showcase or the upcoming production of Peter Pan. Diamond, 15, is swept off her feet by a stranger's promise of an audition for a movie when he finds her alone at the mall. Her BFF, Mercedes, gets a cryptic text before they are to meet at the food court to go to the academy for a performance. Through drugs and restraints, villainous Thane and his henchmen cameramen, as well as other paying participants, abuse Diamond as the unwilling star in Internet pornography for days. Meanwhile, with only intermittent plot coverage of Diamond's ordeal, the dance academy and school hold vigils and worry about their classmate. Most chapters actually deal with Layla: she doesn't acknowledge fellow dancer Justin's crush because she is more concerned about boyfriend, Donny, who gets dangerous and abuses her when he feels jealous or insecure. Layla suffers from some bad judgment, a mostly absentee mother, and the challenge of her father being released after six years in prison. This realistic novel takes on too many characters and plotlines, and the scattershot approach may leave readers less engaged and invested. Dance enthusiasts should enjoy the depictions of costumes, jitters, daunting roles, and therapeutic workouts. However, multiple issues-bullying, kidnapping, sexual enslavement by a predator-pedophile, abusive teen relationships, and sexting-result in hot-button overload."

Awards

ALA 2014 Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Readers <https://bit.ly/43MuGcR>

References

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Response to challenges

This is a book that address multiple “hot-button” issues such as kidnapping, bullying, sexual enslavement, and abusive teen relationships. Possibly an overload of issues, this novel does, however, keep the topics realistic and shows teens’ dealing with their problems in constructive, healthy manners.