



Struts & Frets

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Told in a voice that's honest, urgent, and hilarious, *Struts & Frets* will resonate not only with teenage musicians but with anyone who ever sat up all night listening to a favorite album, wondering if they'd ever find their place in the world.

Music is in Sammy's blood. His grandfather was a jazz musician, and Sammy's indie rock band could be huge one day—if they don't self-destruct first. Winning the upcoming Battle of the Bands would justify all the band's compromises and reassure Sammy that his life's dream could become a reality. But practices are hard to schedule when Sammy's grandfather is sick and getting worse, his mother is too busy to help either of them, and his best friend may want to be his girlfriend. When everything in Sammy's life seems to be headed for major catastrophe, will his music be enough to keep him together?

Struts & Frets Details

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Author : Jon Skovron

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From Reader Review Struts & Frets for online ebook

Kate says

I received this book as an ARC from the publisher.

Sammy loves music. He loves it so much he's willing to be in a band with Joe, who scares the crap out of him. He loves it so much he can't see that his best friend, Jen5 (all the other Jennifer nicknames were taken), is in love with him. Music is his bond with his grandfather, who seems to be going a little crazy. Now Sammy's got a girlfriend, and his band, Tragedy of Wisdom, is going to enter a Battle of the Bands contest.

I fell in love with Sammy a little bit while reading this book. He's one of those kids who wears his heart on his sleeve and feels everything a little too much. He reminded me of Charlie from *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (who I also love). All the other characters felt like real people I might have met some time or another in my life, maybe back in high school in one of my art classes.

And, bonus, the book has a soundtrack! (a list, not an actual CD of music, but *Perks* also had a kind of soundtrack which I downloaded and love so hopefully this will be the same).

Heidi says

STRUTS & FRETTS has one of the hottest covers- and titles -around.

And what's inside is even better.

Honest, sweet, authentic boy voice.

Fully fleshed female characters.

Three dimensional grown-ups.

Surprises, drama and most importantly MUSIC!

I kept thinking while reading, "I can't wait to give this to my son when he's a teenager."

And my daughter.

One of the my favorite reads of 2009.

Enjoy the beat.

Lauren says

I don't know about you but I love it when books are inspiring in a way that makes you have the impulse to chase after your own dreams as soon as possible. If you haven't guess already, Struts & Frets was exactly that- and more!

If I were asked to quickly sum up Struts & Frets in a few words, a lot would come to mind. One being inspirational, obviously, along with moving and poignant. Since in all honesty that's just how Sammy's coming of age tale was.

Sammy is a character who has a lot on his plate. For one, his band, the one thing that means the most to him, is on the verge of splitting because of one pompous lead singer; his grandad is going literally crazy; and he may or may not have feelings for his long-time best friend Jen5, another struggling artist in her own right.

Sammy is boy that not only is unique but whose struggle to be who he wants often hit a chord in me that related to his desire and need to be someone who not only he liked but who others could appreciate as well. I also enjoyed seeing his relationships with other main characters be a big part of the novel. My favorite out of the bunch would be the one with his grandfather. Since it was so perfectly done and often made me think of that one adult among many in my life who always will support me and offer advice in the way that Sammy's grandad did with him. Because of this all, it was often heartbreaking to see Sammy dealing with the fact that this one major influence in his life was simply slipping away from him. Lastly, I liked how his relationship Jen5 showed how special yet frustrating young love can be.

While the plot of this was exciting and always tried to keep the novel moving, it often did not prove to be un-put-a-down-able, a fact that has overall brought my enjoyment of this novel down. Though I did enjoy the parts with the band and Sammy and his friends. I just feel that it could have been simply fantastic if upped up just a bit. Also, while I can see promise in Jon Skovron, one that may include in maybe, just maybe, becoming the next John Green, I felt that the writing was sometimes bland and his plot turns were, at times, predictable.

Though, in all, the fact of how inspiring this novel was, as well as the main characters, redeemed Struts & Frets, and leaves me to suggest this to all teen boys out there, as well as all you dreamers out there dreaming of something bigger and brighter; since this is the book for you!

Grade: B

Melody says

Oh, this was fun! The authorial voice was completely authentic- so much so that I found myself saying stern motherly things to the protagonist. Out loud.

Sammy lives for music, but he's also a regular teenage kid with insecurities, blind spots, family issues and in short, a normal life. I love reading about kids with normal lives, kids who are not Representing A Disorder. Samuel is hilarious to read about from an adult perspective, too- this book works on more than one level, and hits on all cylinders.

This is a lovely coming-of-age book with a satisfyingly complex cast of characters, believable dialogue, and a solid plot.

My favorite part is the dialogue about sex between Sammy and his loving but occasionally clueless mom. I can't resist sharing a bit of it:

"But the stuff she said didn't exactly make me feel any more ready, especially conversations that went something like this:

MOM: You know, Sam, when you do decide to start having sex, which shouldn't be anytime soon because you're much too young--

ME: Oh, God, Mom. Can't we just watch the movie?

MOM: No, I just want to clarify that the scene you have just witnessed has very little to do with a realistic and healthy sexual union.

ME: I get it. It's just a movie. I don't plan on hunting down killer cyborgs, either. Now, can we--"

And it goes on, and just gets funnier, from there.

Carla says

It seems quite fitting to for my first review of 2010 to be of the last YA book I read in 2009. To put it lightly, I friggin loved this book, I even named my brand spanking new laptop "Macbook Sammy". I've only ever read one YA music book, which was so funny and unique, I went into reading this book quite guarded, I never expected to like it nearly as much as I did. Jon Skovron has this way with words that seems so real and raw, the openness of the writing style is heart breakingly beautiful, yet very humorous at the same time.

Sammy Bojar is going to be a musician, he has everything he needs to make his dream come true; he can write songs, play the guitar and a band. But Sammy is still struggling to find his place in this so called band as well as in life. Throughout the story, he struggles with uncooperative band mates, his friends and worst of all his family, all while trying to get ready for Battle of the Bands, where his future as a musician may be determined. Music is at the heart of the story and man, Sammy has some cracking taste in music. I may have a crush on him or his music preferences, I haven't quite decided yet, the jury's still out.

Skovron shows in this beautiful story how much your passion for something can influence your life. Through Sammy he shows that even if you choose not to take the easiest path in life, as long as your doing something you love, you will be happy. I loved following Sammy's journey through learning that maybe being a musician is something his family may not want for him, or watching him struggle with his feelings towards Jen5, his best friend.

The main story was the music, peppered with little song lyrics and song references by Sammy, I felt immediately drawn to him as a character, because he just felt too real. Plus it helps that the guy was so funny, I laughed until my sides hurt. He acted like any boy would, but it felt more lifelike because a male had written the character, not a female, and it really benefit's a story when you know what your character will be feeling and how they would be acting, because you know, you've been there in one way or another.

I loved how his grandfather was wound into the storyline, because it didn't distract from the story, more like helped carry it to the end. I loved how Sammy got his passion and musical abilities from his musician grandfather. This was pivotal to the story, because it draws you in, holding you in an emotional vice. Plus, it helped that the story was such an easy one to follow, nothing too far fetched happened, it as just a true representation of a teenage boy struggling to find his way in the world. And, yes, this book so rocked the male protagonist. I can't wait to see what Skovron has up his sleeve for his next book. Loved it.

Heather says

If you love music this book would be great to read. I thought it was really cute.

I thought it was funny, because of the timing of reading it now- Jen5 so reminds me of Crystal Bowersocks

from this seasons American Idol. It must be the dreadlocks.

I also thought back to the rock band my high school had. I could only imagine the drama swirling around their lives I didn't know about. I wonder what happened to them or how many high school bands make it big...hummmm.

Kathryn says

Can't Stop This Music

I freaking loved this book. Any book that can make Jane's Addiction and Shakespeare come together to create a beautiful story has my full support. And it didn't hurt that the writing style has a rawness and openness about it that nearly broke my heart and kept me laughing all at once.

Sammy Bojar is going to be the next big thing--or will be after the current next big thing gets out of his way. All he has to do is figure out how to keep his indie/punk/emo band together, turn his best friend into his girlfriend and watch his grandfather slip into dementia. Luckily band front-man Joe seems to be keeping it together, Jen5 knows just how to deal with a new emo-rocker boyfriend and Gramps still has plenty of musical lessons to teach. Sammy's candle might just have a chance to burn long and bright before it is put out.

And that's just scratching the surface. This book proves that fame and music and life isn't always pretty nor as satisfying as Hollywood would have you believe. It's messy and complicated and heartbreaking, yet it's also full of tomorrows and potential.

Skovron doesn't belittle adolescent feelings of love and fear and compassion, nor does he skirt over issues like sex or make a big deal out of things like homosexuality and drinking. The story focuses on the music and stays true to character development. The teens in this novel are down to earth and struggle with the same issues of insecurity and hope that all real-life teens deal with every day.

While the story arc is a little rough and the adult characters are a little cliché, this is an amazing debut novel. I am honored to have it stand next to my other YA music books like Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist, Heavy Metal and You and Notes from the Midnight Driver. I look forward to seeing what other stories Skovron has in store for us.

Christianne says

I hope this will be a hit with guy readers. I found it to be funny, touching, and honest. A strong male character who loves a strong female character and has great friends and goals and a great mom. Plus a cool soundtrack of alternative music. What more could you ask for? The title is genius too.

Zahra says

3.5 stars

I thought this was a Middle Grade book because after seeing that cover, how could I not? But it's YA.

I love books with music wound into it, it gets me into so many new genres and this was no exception.

A simple, honest book on young bands. Thoroughly readable. Only the fact that I kept waiting for the type of MG crackpot schemes lessened my enjoyment.

kari says

I've had this book on my TBR for a bit and I should have read it sooner. Terrific. Fabulous. A wonderful and complete story with an authentic sounding voice.

Sam wants to be a musician. No, more than that, he has to be one, he can't imagine his life without music. I liked the chapter titles that were song titles or lyrics. They tied in well with the story and made sense as Sam is always thinking music, either listening, hearing it in his head or writing it.

The other characters are also well drawn. Jen5 is different than the usual most popular perfect cheerleader and I liked her a lot. Her toughness and vulnerability were a nice balance.

Sam's friends added a lot to the story and Skovron creates wonderful people without any stereotypes. Not easily done.

The writing made me laugh out loud at times, get teary-eyed at times, wince sometimes(in a good way, not because the writing was wince-worthy - example: Sam's mother is trying to talk to him about sex, not explain the birds and the bees, but actual how to), and say awww a time or two.

I should add that it does have teenagers talking the way teenagers talk, swearing when they feel the need, etc. It adds to the realistic tone of the voices, but if you are offended by swearing, well, you were warned.

I'm not going to describe the story at all because you'll want to experience it for yourself with no spoilers. Excellently done. There isn't anything about this story I'd have changed. A keeper.

Hallie says

3.5 stars.

Lot of wonderful things in this sad, funny and happy book, but I didn't feel whole-heartedly crazy about it. Sammy was a great character, and his intermittent real immaturity combined with his strengths and kindness were quite winning. Maybe it was the way sometimes things were played for laughs, and got them, but in the process lost some of the subtlety of characterization that bounced me out. The main example of this, which I have other concerns about too, was when Sammy and his very newly-become gf (no real spoiler, but I'll avoid the name anyway) "decided" to have sex for the first time (both of their first times, as well as together). There was the requisite funny scene of Sammy having to face the wall of condom options in the drug-store, but all it did was make me even more convinced that he was too immature and unready for this than I had been before. And the before version was pretty convinced of it anyway.

There was a slight feeling I got of ticky-boxness about this relationship too - almost as if the author was so determined to make the gf be the one who initiates things every time *and it's cool* that everything felt too rushed.

Final concern was the way Sammy's mother, who's a therapist *maybe* in need of more therapy herself, given her utterly crappy childhood, handled her father, who was suffering from dementia. I do not have to be told

that it's harder to be rational and decisive about making hard calls when it's your own family, believe me. Still, it just didn't feel right. (view spoiler)

I liked Jen5, as we were supposed to, but her mother was so unspeakably awful, and her father so apparently incapable of doing anything to make up for the mother, that it seemed a bit unlikely she'd have been quite as emotionally together as she was. Sammy's other friends were great most of the time, but unevenly so. If as good a kid as Sammy seriously has close male friends who keep telling him how his mother is so hot, a MILF, and did I say hot? -- I think I despair just a little bit.

Thebookbutterfly says

"He would talk about how important all music was. How it took us--not just the people who played it but the people who heard it--to a place above the normal boring world."

What I've realized with the world is that you cannot talk about music, good music, without being pretentious which 1) I don't really care. I love music so much that I just don't let it bother me anymore. And 2) There is something wrong about that because you should be able to talk about your opinions on everything from the punk movement to how The Kinks affected heavy metal without being viciously and verbally attacked.

But music (bear with me) is a soul, a pulse, a heartbeat. And I will always love it for being that way. Music is expression and life.

Sammy is this really cool, really musical, slightly emo teenager and you absolutely cannot read this book with falling in love with him for that fact. Watching him struggle with his feelings for his longtime best friend Jen5 (who is a really cool, really artistic girl with a tough attitude that I also adore) is just...exactly what I love in a romance-y contemporary novel. Sweet and authentic.

The band was quite funny as all bands should be. I loved reading their interactions with one another because they're the kind of geeky that I love. When Sammy said that his friend Alexander was "like a walking They Might Be Giants song" I fell in love all over again, with this entire story and it's vivid characters.

The writing was powerful and charming and genuine and raw--all at the same time. Jon Skovron has a true talent with words, the story flowed along so smoothly that it almost went by too fast, leaving me both nostalgic and satisfied at the same time when the book ended.

The Columbus, Ohio indie underground scene was just plain awesome. No other words for that.

When Sammy said how the Pixies were his favorite band...

Ok. I'm finished. I will just end up gushing the rest of this review.

Please go read this if you haven't yet :)

Jamie says

Imagine picking a book up with no expectations and suddenly realizing it's set in your own past. That's the

feeling I got from reading this Young adult debut by Jon Skovron. Set in my hometown of Columbus, OH, it namedrops places (Blue Danube/a re-named Bernie's) and real life bands and songs (Monster Zero, Charles Cicirella's WHITE JEEP, which I spent HOURS AND HOURS trying to find online last night, even though I know I at one point in time had some kind of recording of it.) Now, imagine that even with all that, you have a good story, well told, humorous, real, sad and fulfilling. Hooray for this book, and everyone in Columbus should totally read it.

K says

Sometimes when I start a book, I can see the plot and outcome right away and end up going through the motions of reading. To feel all-knowing, maybe? While this book wasn't a wild twist from what I'd foretold in the beginning, it did have personality I wasn't expecting and told a story with heart that wasn't totally transparent.

Sammy is a guitarist in a band. He writes all the music and lyrics, but wants no part of being a front man. Instead he damns his band mates to Joe. Dude is scary. Sam's longtime friends Rick and TJ are the rhythm section and the three of them can usually be found hanging out with easygoing Alexander and artsy Jen5, a nice mix of personalities without stereotypes. There's a Battle of the Bands coming up and Sammy sees it making Big Things happen for them, if he could just will it into fruition.

Hallelujah for a recognizable music scene. Instead of just being the something-they-do filler, it was fleshed out with all too familiar venues and vibe, crowds, and music buff references. Skovron included a playlist of all the songs mentioned (and these weren't mentioned in passing, Sam had a little to say about each). I have no idea how relevant these songs are today but I was diggin' it.

Also praiseworthy is Sammy's family. His mom is realistically present; her sex talks are frank and mortifying, her nightly interest in his homework is annoying, and Sammy *asks permission*—all without the trite 'my mom is sooo unreasonable' angsting. Plus, he hangs out with his Gramps. I love grampses. Along with an honest voice, it all made Sammy pretty loveable.

I was pleasantly surprised. A quick, fun read.

elissa says

Exactly the right book for me right now, and I read it quickly. Emotional, but not too much. A very likeable main character (plus great secondary characters--the grandfather, the mom, the girlfriend, friends), and lots of pondering about music and sex. This has the best description of sex, for a teenager who's also a musician, that I've ever heard, and this book is one that's inspired me to add quotes in to goodreads, which I haven't done in awhile. There's not much of a plot, but that's not the focus and it doesn't matter. My main quibble was that I didn't believe that the main character was in high school for the first quarter or so of the book, but as I kept going, Skovron convinced me that he's just a very thoughtful young man. Another recent example where a gay character is a friend of the main character, and it's not really an issue at all. Well done first novel, for boys, musicians, and (as the book jacket says) anyone who's "ever sat up all night listening to a favorite album, wondering if you'd ever find your place in the world". I haven't heard about this anywhere else but at Cap Choices meetings, so I'm thrilled that we got this on to the Capitol Choices list in January! I'll definitely be watching for Skovron's next book, and I love that he's a local author. More like 4 1/2 stars.

