



How to Lead a Life of Crime

Kirsten Miller

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A meth dealer. A prostitute. A serial killer.

Anywhere else, they'd be vermin. At the Mandel Academy, they're called prodigies. The most exclusive school in New York City has been training young criminals for over a century. Only the most ruthless students are allowed to graduate. The rest disappear.

Flick, a teenage pickpocket, has risen to the top of his class. But then Mandel recruits a fierce new competitor who also happens to be Flick's old flame. They've been told only one of them will make it out of the Mandel Academy. Will they find a way to save each other—or will the school destroy them both?

How to Lead a Life of Crime Details

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From Reader Review How to Lead a Life of Crime for online ebook

Faye, la Patata says

What takes more guts? To fight for your own life at any cost - or prove that you're willing to lose it?

A fair bit of warning: this book is **NOT** for the faint-of-heart. It contains and talks about a lot of stuff, both sensitive and controversial, that will highly likely bother and rattle your squeamish and soft-hearted side. Organized crimes, underground syndicates, briberies, rape, prostitution, suicide, serial killings, secret laboratory stuff that will make you look away in disgust... yup, you name it, and the list goes on and on and on. I don't even think this book is suitable for those below 15, but if you're tough and open-minded, then I reckon you can handle it.

How to Lead a Life of Crime is easily one of the most violent, gritty Young Adult books out there. The stuff I previously stated alone is a testament to that; however, despite such a claim, it's also one of the most refreshing and heart-warming I've ever read. It touches upon differing themes: friendship, love, family, and revenge; it pushes you into a variety of emotions you can barely control. You'll get angry. You'll get frustrated. You'll probably root for the main character regardless whether he's doing the right thing or not. And you'll also get sad. Very, very sad. It's a whirlwind of feelings, but I assure you - in the end, it'll be worth it. So, hang in there!

There are so many things to love in this book, but the factor that I appreciated the most was the main character and the way his personality, his narration and everything about him were written. We're introduced to Flick, a seventeen year old guy scavenging the streets and trying to survive as a thief. He has a troubled and dark past thanks to his super rich and powerful but also brutal and abusive father, who has beaten him left and right while growing up. Flick believes that in order to get back at this dad, he needs to get stronger first, and thus takes it to the streets. One day, however, another powerful man invites him to this prestigious, well-known Academy, only to find out that it's a school that makes and breeds criminals.

Flick's voice grips you from the very first page and doesn't let you go. He's amazingly intellectual, cynical, witty, calculating, and masculine, making him such a refreshing person to read. I haven't had this much fun reading a male character narrate for a long time. It's pretty obvious that Flick has a lot of conflicted feelings inside him; he's angry, sad, and frustrated all at the same time, but even with all these feelings bottled up, he keeps up a cool and tough façade, seeing things in a wary and cynical eye. He doesn't hesitate to throw a sarcastic comment every now and then, and when he's trying to be funny, he's really funny. His flaws, reactions, and gestures are very realistic and genuine, making him such a likeable and authentic character.

Sometimes you'll find yourself questioning his actions. But whether or not he's doing the right and good thing, you'll root for him, anyway. He'll make his struggles your struggles, too. Maybe this is why he became such an effective individual. I couldn't help but be in his shoes all the way thanks to the convincing narration Miller has written.

Aside from this, **I loved how scary social issues were presented here.** Now, I don't think that such an Academy does exist, but organized crimes, syndicates, briberies, murder, suicide, rape... all of these are real in the real world. They *do* happen out there, somewhere, making this book, for me, scarier than a

zombie/vampire novel. Many times the thought of such activities made me want to back away and hurl, but I eventually held my ground, especially since I saw how the characters, in the end, wanted to fight against it. I appreciated the fact that this book made these concerns more accessible to the intended audience, making it not just simply a background, but also a relevant matter that should be given more thought and attention.

Also, **this book is like a "you and me against the world"** kinda thing. The plot is extremely engaging and compelling. **IT IS NOT BORING**. It's like, once you think things are going to cool down, another event happens that will blow your mind away, another twist you just didn't expect coming appears. It will punch you in the gut, kick you in the chin, crack your ribs wide open. It's THAT gripping. There is a lot of shock factor given the fact the plot is not without the controversial stuff that were mentioned earlier, so be wary and cautious, but if you're fine with it, be prepared for a fun ride.

My only problem is the censorship of swears. I don't understand the need to censor it when in fact the book talks about a lot of scarier stuff that are more sensitive than "fuck". We're talking about murder and suicide. If teens can take it, why not that single "f" word, especially since it's common to the ears nowadays? :/

All in all, *How to Lead a Life of Crime* finds a spot in my 2013 favorites. The voice, the plot, the overall writing is pitch-perfect, crystal clear, and extremely pleasurable to read. I would love to read it again and again in the future :)

What would it be like to exist in a world without suffering? To have no needs, only desires? To be surrounded by so much beauty that you forget how ugly life is for everyone else? Who wouldn't want that? Who wouldn't be willing to fight for it? What the alumni did to get there - lie, cheat, steal, kill - I'm sure they'd all say it was worth it. And I bet they sleep soundly because they know that their nameless, faceless victims would have done the same thing.

? Shannon ? says

I would have given it 5 stars if it didn't have a word that I absolutely despise in it. Otherwise good book, quick read, nice flowing storyline. Read it yourself to find out more. It's 1 am here and I'm too tired to write an actual review. My apologies!

C.G. Drews says

Oh. My. Gosh. I can't give this book enough stars!! I'm totally shellshocked. This review will be a buzz of incoherent warbles about how much I ADORE this book. You have been warned.

Where do I start?! The writing was AWESOME. The characters were AWESOME. And the story was. so. freaking. AWESOME. I'm just...AHHHH. The feels. The complexities. Can I rate it higher than 5 stars? Please?

I'll start with the writing and the plot. Both were epic. I'm always over-the-moon when I find a book I love with really, really good writing. My only negativity is the amount of tense swapping. Sometimes I really

didn't think it fit. Other than that, it was beautiful. The prose swung from page the page. The balance of action to backstory to narrative to dialogue was perfect. If I had to quote a book for exceptional writing style and voice, this would be it. As for the plot? The twists kept me on my toes. It was complex, but not confusing. THIS BOOK NEEDS TO BE A MOVIE.

Characters. I want to hug all the characters! (Only, they'd...well, kill me. But still.) They are SO well written. It's narrated by Flick (that's not his name, though. I know his name, but you won't until the end...Ha ha to you!). Flick is a complicated fellow. He's been abused and mistreated by his father, and he's witnessed enough horror to kill a person. He's fueled on hate and revenge, but doesn't want to be because he refuses to be like his father. I was just gobsmacked at how well he was written. At times I thought his character would slack off, especially when Joi was on the scene. But he my favourite character (though I simultaneously loved and wanted to bash him).

The other characters? Just WOW. Everyone from the villains to the people who barely get a name were all detailed with minuet precision. They were real people. Of course, then there's Joi. She's a do-good person, living in the slums and trying to help out people. Well, that's what she lets YOU think. You can't describe Joi. Flick tries, but all he gets is she smells like "jasmine and cocoa butter" and that's really perfect. Although, my only question is: how did she stills smell like jasmine and cocoa butter when she was living in the academy and obviously had no access to nice smelling body lotions? Come on. Reality strikes every single paragraph of his story EXCEPT for that bit.

And then there's Peter Pan. Jude. Juuuuuude (wails quietly). I can't help but love that kid, even though he was dead the entire book. He saved Flick. On multiple levels. I loved how he was Peter Pan and how he was simultaneously Flicks savior, life, and breaking point – and also mental breakdown. Every scene with Jude was powerful.

Basically, the entire book was awesome. I would rave about it all day. Sure it's violent and gritty and sad and desperate and horrible. But the title kind of indicates that, right? My gosh. All I can think is: if every book was as powerful as this one, I'd get nothing done because I'd just read my whole life.

Steph Sinclair says

Actual rating: 4.5 stars, but what the hell? I'm rounding this baby up.

This is the first novel that I've read from this author and I have to say that I am very impressed. I don't usually seek out crime, mystery or thriller/suspense novels, but I'm really glad I had an opportunity to read this one. There aren't many books where I can say I have almost nothing to complain about. And even though I've finished the book weeks ago, I still have nothing but high praises for it. Simply put, *How to Lead a Life of Crime* had fantastic writing, realistic characters and old fashion, damn good plotting.

When I first read the blurb for this book, I'll admit to having pretty low expectations. I thought it would take on more of a humor angle, though I'm not exactly sure why I initially thought it would. The blurb took on a lot of serious topics that I thought, "Surely, this must be from a comic standpoint?" And I'd be wrong. But what I didn't expect was for Miller to take on a few major social issues and make them relevant to the teenage audience. And guys, she did this so well! First off, the main character is a guy and get this. HE SOUNDS LIKE A GUY. Not once did I feel like he was hiding ovaries from me. This made me rejoice because his authenticity, flaws, struggles, passions all felt so much more realistic to me. Flick is a character with very real problems. He's a homeless pickpocket who was raised by an abusive, rich father. On the outside, it looked as though he had everything, but his entire life fell apart when both his mother and brother

died. Flick blames his father and swears to one day make him pay. What happens afterwards is a plot so tightly woven, it made my head spin.

But back to the social issues: The backdrop of the story is about Mandel Academy. To average, everyday folk, the school is praised as one of the best schools a youngster can attend. All graduates attend the best colleges and get the highest paying jobs. It's a highly coveted school and secures futures for kids that may have otherwise not been allotted such a luxury. Or so that's the image painted. What Mandel Academy really hides is its shady ways of criminal activity. The school essentially molds these kids into a bunch of crazies that can be controlled and set into positions of power all over the world. The scary thing is... I could totally see this as a realistic possibility. Miller carefully planted the perfect "what if..." seed by way of her excellent world building. It's easy to expect a certain level of world building for fantasy novels, but it's equally important for contemporary since it's set in a setting that is relevant to you. I really think it was done perfectly here.

I mean, think about it. Politicians regularly are considered to be bought out by corporations or seemingly operating with someone else's interests in mind. Would it be so much of a stretch to think there could be a bigger organization at work here to keep the little people down? Influencing who gets voted into office? Approving and denying certain products and services? Am I starting to sound like a conspiracy theorist? Wait. Don't answer that last one. The point is: It was all believable. Maybe not as I'm trying to explain it, but as I read further and further, I started to think, "Wow. This could totally happen."

What I also loved were the side characters and how big of a role they played in the entirety of the novel. Miller had a running theme of "No one is worthless" and that certainly applied to how she herself chose to use all her characters. Like Flick, I had written off Joi as just the girl he left behind. I knew from the blurb she would make a reappearance. But I did not expect her to make a come back and kick so much ass in the process. The girl was viciously badass. I thought I loved Flick and how well he had the Academy figured out, but then Joi came along and stole the spotlight. It really gave Flick some well-needed vulnerability because for a while he started to feel as unstoppable as June and Day from *Legend*. (In fact, I'd highly recommend *How to Lead a Life of Crime* to Marie Lu fans.)

And then there is the villain. Like, whoa. I can't really go into so much detail because of spoilers, but it was very three-dimensional. Even in the end, the villain always seemed to be one step ahead of everyone. I can't say I didn't see it coming because it's slowly revealed to the reader as the novel goes on, but you never realize the extent of the crazy until the final chapters. Flick faces so many "demons" in this book that there were times I was unsure if he could do it. I was genuinely worried for his life and felt so invested that he'd be okay. Dare I say I was on the edge of my seat? The anticipation was built just right thanks to the perfect pacing and action packed quality.

If there is one and only complaint I have, it's that whenever the f-bomb is dropped it's cut out of the book and instead appears like "f---". I don't know if that is just the ARC I was reading or if the finished copy was the same way, but it did bother me a bit. But that is a relatively small negative in comparison to everything else this book does right.

The writing was excellent, the dialogue was smart and witty, the plot was air tight and the characters carefully planned. It's the novels that you aren't expecting that completely surprise you. *How to Lead a Life of Crime* is one of them. If it's not on your to-read list now, it should be.

Side note: Weirdly enough, the finished copy was *compromised*. Though it is unknown, someone altered passages and added typos. It's alluded that the book has enemies, which adds another level of creepiness given the book's premise. You can find out more about that here.

**Unsolicited ARC was provided by the publisher for an honest review.*

More reviews and other fantastical things at Cuddlebuggery Book Blog.

Suzanne says

If I could only use one word to describe this reading experience, this book: “interminable.” If I could add a couple of others, I might throw in some like “flat,” “overstated,” “uneven,” “illogical,” and even a descriptive phrase like “poor narrative integrity.” If someone challenged me to find some positive things to say about the book, I could manage that: some nice conspiracy theory aspects about the unscrupulous 1% manipulating and capitalizing on the populace as if we are an entirely different species and bringing attention to the many ways that the powers that be prey upon their “underlings.” I could also mention that I liked the character Joi when we meet her early on in the novel as a Wendy figure looking after orphans, strays, and runaways on the lower East side of NYC. Sadly, she only reappears after a long absence at page 273. Seriously, I had to dredge through almost 300 pages before the quoted excerpt on the back of the book, about her being brought to the Mandel Academy--a bizarre school where you rise to the top of the criminally trained teenagers or you die--comes to pass.

I didn't ever really come to care about or much admire Flick, the protagonist, who didn't even seem to exhibit consistent aspects of character. And even Joi's backstory as a child of a Bosnian war criminal who came to the U.S. with a refugee camp aid worker at 14 but then ran away, didn't feel true or rational—I just liked her better. None of the teenagers really sounded or acted much like teenagers, even if I adjust my expectations for the saved from societal disposal types that make up most of the students at Mandel.

If I hadn't been considering this as an award nominee, I would have given up much earlier. I found it a chore, rather than a joy, to read. Clearly, based on the book's rating on GoodReads and even among my own committee, I am in the minority here, but I stand by my assessment. It appears one student at my school has checked it out. I will hunt him down and find out whether he liked it, finished it. It's always better to have the real live YA perspective before committee deliberations, particularly if a book just irked me, and teens have no problem with it.

Basic premise, just because I've said almost nothing about it: Flick is on the streets making his living through petty theft when he is invited to attend his father's alma mater to decide a wager between his monster of a father, responsible for the death of his beloved brother, and the strange headmaster of the school. If he attends, Flick is promised evidence that will convict dear old Dad, so he is willing to put up with all the insanity at the school, where becoming the ultimate predator is the only way to graduate and survive; but preying on your classmates and humanity is a high price to pay for wealth and power. The headmaster believes many people have the potential to become predators is a genetic switch is flipped through trial by fire. He is willing to do anything to prove his theory.

Mandel, the headmaster, is by turns Hannibal Lector mad scientist and James Bond chatty villain. It never quite makes the level of working spoof or satire. I didn't find the wolves, androids, or ghosts at the Academy to be fleshed out to much remember who is who; and the character of Gwendolyn just makes no sense at all for too many reasons to list here.

Apologies to friends or colleagues who really dug the book, but I remember intensely disliking her other book called *The Eternal Ones*, too, so I am thinking she's just not my author. I can't imagine this book being popular with my students, but tastes and opinions are meant to be varied, right? I will update if I find I am just crotchety and too hard to please!

Jessica says

This book reminded me so much of Divergent, mostly in the sense of "I can barely stand to read this, but I know so many people who will think this is The Best Book Ever." For my professional review I will write about the potential mass appeal, but for Good Reads, you get my complaints.

- 1) The use of the word "f--" seriously, as in they couldn't print the word but couldn't come up with a suitable replacement. The weirdest form of censorship. What The Fuck? If you won't print the word, don't have your characters say it.
- 2) Boring characters with inconsistent motivations.
- 3) Unremarkable relationships.
- 4) Violence for the sake of plot. Deaths because the protagonist needs a reason to be angry. But we don't really care about the victims.
- 5) No underlying sense of morality. In fact the author seemed to enjoy describing sadism. And while our hero is fighting against the psychopaths, he doesn't seem any better than them.
- 6) Lack of realism removed any value this book may have had.
- 7) So derivative. When Flick calls the school for criminals a "Hogwarts for Hoodlums" it tells you everything about the structure of the story. Wacky classes, unusual teachers, inter school competitions.

Ugh!

Sarah says

4.5, but what the heck.

I never set out to be a thief. I suppose I once had something grander in mind. But when you live on the streets, you find that your career options are limited. You can be one of the kids who disappear with the strangers who cruise through every night. You can sell the stuff that helps those kids forget what they've seen. Or you can be a thief. If those choices don't suit you, you can always be dead.

How to lead a life of crime depicts the hard life on the streets of New York and a boarding school that appears to be a safe haven but is much more than that.

The plot slowly grows darker and I was surprised by its complexity.

None of them (the kids) are old enough to watch R-rated movies, but most have seen things in their own lives that would never make it past any censor.

It's a thriller with heart-stopping pacing. There wasn't a single boring moment in this book, and the action and plot twists had me at the edge of my seat.

Flick is our main character. If you liked Cassel from White Cat, you'll love this guy!

He's a phenomenal actor, manipulator and survivor. Flick may pretend to be an asshole but is deep down so caring and brave. He would do anything for the people he loves. Not to mention he's hilarious and always quick with his sarcastic replies. He rises to the top of his class at Mandel Academy, and it's because he's so confident and quick to catch on.

I usually have trouble connecting with male POV, but no such problem here.

The characters, oh the characters.. We have a wonderful cast of secondary characters. There are about 50 students at Mandel Academy, roughly 15 of them are more focused on and Miller somehow manages to flesh

them all out. I kid you not, EVERY single character is important. The character descriptions and extra background at the back shows how much thought was put into them,

In case you're wondering about my new shelf called Peter Pan syndrome - no I'm not referring to people who don't want to grow up, it's because this book is about lost kids who have to fight on their own, like in the story.

Kids who do not know better. The first chapters we are introduced to a group of children who live on the street.

That's why the contrast is so effective; we go from poverty and helplessness to a glamorous yet harsh world of elegant, discreet crime.

It reads like a great action movie, but with better characters and a less rushed plot. It is an adventure through and through.

There's murder, lies, tests and hardcore training. It's one of my favorites of the year. I loved it. You should read it, if you're not convinced by now.

P.S I originally wrote a much longer and more detailed review for this but accidentally deleted it and 10 other half-finished reviews off my phone. LOVELY. I'm upset because it was one of my favorite ones I've written.

Wendy Darling says

I liked the first part of this book when Flick was still living on the streets, but once he entered the Academy, I was much less engaged by the story, and in fact had to push myself to finish it. I just didn't really care that much about the prison-like alpha dog dynamics, nor about the majority of the characters and relationships.

I did like the male POV and Flick's sense of humor, and of course Peter Pan references are ones I'm going to be fond of! But while the plot has certain points that are intellectually stimulating, the story never really excited me or surprised me that much--and definitely did not come close to reaching me on a deeper level. Could be that I've read too many thrillers, though, as most people seem to be excited over this one. In my case, it's a like, but not love situation. Oh, well.

Rachel Kramer says

Hogwarts for Hustlers meets the Hunger Games (sort of).

To the outside world, the Mandel Academy is an upstanding, prestigious school producing many of New York's elite. Bankers, lawyers, and even politicians have emerged from this renowned (but mysterious) academy in Manhattan. Bottom line, anybody who's anybody graduates from the Mandel Academy. Or, they don't graduate at all.

That's right. A school where failing just may be the death of you.

Flick, our hero, knows everything has a price. And, as Mandel's most recent initiate (and first volunteer), he's quickly learning the bargain he's made may not worth it.

I enjoyed this book! It's dark, gritty, and mysterious. Plus, I loved both Flick's sarcasm and his strength. There were a ton of twists—some mind-blowing, and some not so much. A fast paced story, with a creative plot, and a three dimensional MC. I certainly recommend you put this on your to-read list.

Maipon says

The book was a page-turner, but I can't help but feel frustrated with all the lost potential of the story.

What didn't work for me

- I felt like the book simplified some really big issues: corrupt politicians, greedy businessmen, dishonest lawyers, drug lords and human traffickers are everywhere, but the book's ending leaves the reader with a false feeling of a happy ending, as if destroying the school and its alumni would actually change any of those things. I get that the story had a message of altruism and that we can all fight the system if we choose to, that there's always a third choice. But I'm not really convinced by a story that brings up such complex issues and then never even attempts to say anything substantial about them. I guess one of the only times this happened was when one of the students, Felix, was assigned his major, and he was shocked to learn that after finally managing to escape sex work he would have to become a pimp – and sell other people's bodies instead of his own, while knowing just how horrible it is. When I read the scene, I was almost in tears just like Felix. And then the whole thing was barely mentioned ever again and I was really disappointed, because insights like this would have given the book's message a lot more substance.

- There were way too many characters who were nothing but a name attached to a few characteristics. The amount of characters wouldn't have been a problem, if the more central characters (aside from Flick and maybe Joi) wouldn't have been left unexplored. I wanted to know more about characters like Ella, Felix, Aubrey and Lucas, but the focus shifted constantly away from them. Instead, we get to read about Gwendolyn and the other "wolves", who are not really given proper personalities or any interesting qualities despite all the paragraphs dedicated to them. And sorry to say this, but Flick alone wasn't really the kind of character that can make a book great without the support of other characters. Of course he wasn't really alone: his friendship with Lucas was one of my favourite parts of the book, and I thought his relationship with Joi was interesting as well. Still, in the end it felt like a lot of potential was wasted with the way the characters and Flick's relationship to them was handled.

- The book was full of violence and gruesome deaths, but their impacts weren't really brought up or dealt with in depth. It feels a bit weird that in a YA book it's possible to have graphic details of killing a person, but never really discuss how it really affects those doing the deed, or those who might have to witness it. I know it was mentioned how the people in the school had to either be psychopaths or become sociopaths in order to get to the top, but it would have been more interesting if the book tried to go a bit deeper into the psychology behind those personality disorders. Now it almost feels like they were used more as a fantasy element than anything else... The theory about a psychopathy/sociopathy gene was so ridiculous I had a hard time suspending my disbelief when Flick, who was supposed to be super smart and educated, was all "okay, sounds legit".

- Also, can we talk about how there can be murders left and right, but any sort of sexual content is shoved so tightly between the lines it's almost impossible to detect? But I guess that's what you get with YA books...

What I liked

- The way Flick handled his past and spoke to his dead little brother Jude really helped to shape him as a character. I liked how the events in the past were revealed bit by bit over time, because it was still hard for

Flick to admit what had happened. It also established him as a sort-of-unreliable narrator and made me not take everything he says at face value.

- Joi was amazing and flawless and if you think otherwise, you probably have issues and need to go. (view spoiler)

- Lucas and Flick's little friendship was one of the things I really enjoyed. It was so subtle but still had an impact on them both. (view spoiler)

Other things

- I was a bit surprised by the amount of gay references and jokes. I'm not sure if it was because Flick could have been flexible like that, or if he just felt so ~secure~ in his heterosexuality that he didn't get upset by being called a faggot or men hitting on him. Idk.

- All the literary and movie references in the beginning were funny and interesting, but for some reason they were dropped almost completely (except for Peter Pan of course). I loved the "Are you testing if I'm a Replicant or a homosexual" one.

- I still don't really get what the videos Flick, Ella, Ivan and others were shown during the assessment were about.

Tiff at Mostly YA Lit says

Flick is a boy who lives on the streets. And he's...a force to be reckoned with. He's a thief who tries to help people occasionally – he still takes money, but from the first moment you meet him, you see that he's got a bit of a hero complex. He's layered, he's emotionally damaged, and he's living on the streets because he's had some MAJOR family drama. You really want to give him a hug right away.

Luckily, Flick's girlfriend Joi (pronounced Joey) is there to give the hugs. She's sweet, compassionate, and totally take-no-prisoners. She takes in street urchins and tries to help them, which Flick doesn't approve of, but he still totally loves her. Joi is incredibly well drawn - even though we don't hear that much about her, we know why Flick loves her. Unfortunately, Flick is terrified of hurting her and hurting himself, so he's planning to leave her any moment.

The perfect moment comes up when Flick is tapped by a guy named Lucian Mandel to attend a special school for street kids. The school basically teaches people to be white-collar criminals – and it's kinda crazy. Flick is not interested, but Mandel has some information that Flick really, desperately wants in order to fulfill what Flick feels is his duty in life. In order to get that information, Flick agrees to be a student at Mandel Academy. In doing so, he discovers the seedy underbelly of New York's corporate criminals, and whether he can stomach everything that Mandel Academy is in order to pursue his duty.

Confession: I didn't expect to like this as much as I did. I couldn't remember the synopsis when I first started reading, so when I started, I wasn't sure if the protagonist was a boy or a girl. It didn't even matter. I was immediately drawn in to the rich, dark atmosphere of Flick's New York: a dark, dank place full of petty thieves and people looking out for themselves.

Sadly, the above is pretty much all I can tell you about the plot and characters without spoiling anything. Seriously, you do NOT want me to say anything else. This book is chock-full of twists, and every time I thought I knew what was going to happen, Miller would throw another thing at me. She also revealed things

way earlier than I expected her to, keeping me guessing at every turn. I honestly did not know how this one was going to end, or even where the next chapter was going to lead me.

Read the rest of this review at [Mostly YA Lit](#)

Katy says

3.5 stars - I have mixed feelings about this book, but I'm bumping it up because I like the unique concept. I really struggled with the first half, but the second half was actually pretty good. A much improvement from the Eternal One series.

First of all, I love the concept. It was dark and sinister and had the perfect mood to go with it. No, I can't say the book was very realistic, and a lot of the crimes and background information were a little too over the top. But I think it fits because we're talking about the worst of the worst here, and the concept does make you question just how much is deeper than just meets the eye.

Having said that, I really struggle with the first half. Not only was it long, but it FELT long. One, Flick was interesting enough, but I found it hard to like him. Sure, he's been through a lot, but he was just one cocky bastard. And two, I just felt like it took way too long for anything to happen. Sure, Flick had his little missions, and he was admitted to the academy and proceeded to conquer, but I found myself thinking, "Who cares?" I just couldn't get myself to, and I'm not sure if it was because I knew Flick's heart wasn't into it, or if I was just bored.

And many have mentioned this, but yes, the censoring of "f--" was really annoying. At first, I thought it was just Flick's way of saying the word like the way a lot of people say "eff." But then I realized it really was censoring. Why use it at all. And the book itself was dark and scary (not in a frightening way but in a mentally chilling sort of way), and it was littered with crime and murder, so why censor it in the first place. It's not exactly a rated G book.

But halfway through the book, the new class enters the scene, and that's when it starts becoming interesting. First of all, there are people to put Flick in his place, and even though he is thrown in a funk, it was much more interesting to read than the stoic weapon he was supposed to be. I still wasn't crazy about Flick and his annoyingly inconsistent character development, but there were enough interesting characters - both heroes and villains.

Along the way, you learn what Mandel really wants, a lot of conspiring and some backstabbing, as well as a few twists - some were predictable, but there were a few surprises. Miller really took the time to plan this intricate web of how everything falls into play.

There were some things I still wasn't clear about like [\(view spoiler\)](#)

So overall, it was a pretty interesting story. I just wish it wasn't so long or that it didn't feel so long. I could have used some more excitement in the first half or maybe even less of the story from that half overall. But in the end, it was a pretty cool book.

Maja (The Nocturnal Library) says

First, a quick note: How to Lead a Life of Crime is among the most violent young adult novels I've ever read. If you enjoyed I Hunt Killers, for example, you're likely to enjoy this too, but if the thought of YA books that contain murder, corporate crime, illegal drug trials, teenage prostitution, implied rape and even a severed head bothers you, then this is not a book for you.

Flick's is one of the clearest voices I've come across in YA. He grabs your attention right from the first page and he never lets go. He is instantly likeable, despite being a small-time thief. Flick cares about two things in life: avenging his younger brother (which entails destroying their father, the murderer) and Joi, a girl he met on the streets. Because he loves Joi, he considers her his great weakness and knows he'll have to abandon her as soon as he's strong enough to confront his father. Flick is not your typical street kid; his family is obscenely rich, but Flick sees surviving on the streets as a way to toughen up enough to face the man who abused him all his life.

I never set out to be a thief. I suppose I once had something grander in mind. But when you live on the streets, you find out that your career options are limited. You can be one of the kids who disappear with the strangers who cruise through every night. You can sell the stuff that helps those kids forget what they've seen. Or you can be a thief. If those choices don't suit you, you can always be dead.

Once Flick agrees to go to Mandel Academy, hoping to find evidence against his father, he realizes it's nothing like he expected. The school is full of kids with colorful pasts and nowhere else to go. Some of them are hackers, some skilled thieves, some are drug dealers and prostitutes and some are even serial killers. Most of them aren't poor misunderstood individuals, no matter what we'd like to believe. They are cruel, they're vicious and they'd do anything to survive. Mandel Academy breeds psychopaths and sociopaths and prepares them to be world leaders.

In the second part of How to Lead a Life of Crime, Miller strayed into more implausible territory, and the further she took things, the less enthusiastic I became. The plot suddenly became too big, far too over the top and while it was still bloody and wildly interesting, it paled in comparison to the realistic grittiness of the first half. Some of Flick's outrageous confidence was also lost somewhere along the line, which meant that he wasn't nearly as funny (or as endearing) as he was at the beginning.

If there's one thing in this book I object to, it's the censorship of swear words spoken by the characters, and somehow I don't think it was the author's choice. I am firmly against using asterisks or anything similar in their place. That's not to say that I advocate excessive profanity in YA, but there are times when it's expected. In this book, all the teens come straight from the streets. They are ex drug dealers, thieves and prostitutes. They *will* use swear words on occasion or they wouldn't be very realistic, would they? What are we protecting our teens from, exactly? And can we really write something they haven't already seen? If we replace every F-bomb with f--, what message are we sending, especially in this context? That severed heads are fine, but fuck isn't?! I think that's ridiculous and maybe a little bit sad.

I'd have preferred it if this book remained as realistic and unsettling as it was in those first one hundred pages, but even with the turn it took later on, it was a read I won't easily forget.

Chelsea ♥Peril Please♥ says

"What takes more guts? To fight for your own life at any cost-or prove that you're willing to lose it?"

Well, well, well....I am so beyond happy. <<< Eew that sentence, but it's so true! Months ago, I read a series that I absolutely cherished, adored, obsessed over-I Hunt Killers. It took me a long time to get over my Jazz boy, and anyone that didn't grasp my level of obsession over him would have to have been blind or wholly disinterested. But what do you do when you can't make extra books appear out of thin air when your favorite series of the year ends? **You find similar books.**

I don't care about Ghosts or girls anymore. I don't give a damn about proof. This monster is just waiting for a chance to kill it's creator. One way or another, I'll get out. And then I'm going to destroy him.

But, as it was, when I started this, I couldn't stop thinking of my wonderful Jazzy boy. So, this was put on hold until I could get my head out of that world and I could focus on this one. My long winded story ends here, I promise-This weekend I couldn't get into my book, so I scoured my e-library and saw this beauty. It suited my mood, it reminded me of a favorite, had an addicting and compelling story, and it had an amazing male lead that had me rooting for him from beginning to end. I wasn't sure how I'd feel about this book...but, in the end, it was a thrilling page turner that kept me on the edge of my seat.

I would sacrifice almost anything to stay here with her. And that's exactly why I have to leave. She will keep me from becoming what I need to be. And if she tries to save me, I will end up destroying her.

And that's the best part-It wasn't extremely fast-paced, it wasn't action on each and every page, and it wasn't what you'd expect. But, with all that being said, it was **so much better** . It was **chilling, intense, underhanded, and brutal in it's subtlety**. I didn't need non-stop action, nor did I need millions of things to happen at once. This story was so **manipulative and gripping** that I never once was thinking about anything but what was happening in front of my face-that is so rare for me. I am always thinking to the next chapter, the next page, the next problem, but because this was so intense I was so worried for our main character that I only cared what was happening to him in the here and now.

I thought this time, I was willing to do anything. Now Mandel will know that it's all just an act. Because there's one thing that I will not do. Not even to save the world from a monster. I won't let Joi die.

I don't know what I was expecting when I went into this, but I never expected for it to have The Testing vibes mixed with an I Hunt Killers theme I so immensely craved. And, even more than that, **it was sad**. Our poor boy, who had lived an inexplicably sad and undeserved life, was hurting-and rightfully so. More than once **my heart ached for him** and was torn to shreds as he imagined his little brother right beside him, even though he never truly could be again.

I'm not a lost boy, and I'm too old for a Wendy. But I want to remember her once before I let her go. All I get is a faint whiff of jasmine before my dream's interrupted. And then the last person I'll love is gone for good.

I choked on tears, wished for a better life than what he got, and hoped for him to make it out of Mandel Academy alive....but that's hard to accomplish when you set out to make enemies.

Second period just started, and I already have five enemies, a pretty blond stalker, and zero friends. It's a record, even for me.

Flick (No, that's not his real name) is a thief, a boy so good at pick-pocketing on the streets that **all it takes is a flick of his wrist** and he has your license, your money, your life in his hands-clever, eh?? His humor is exactly what I love in these books. Thrown into a world he'd have never wanted after losing his mother and almost identical brother, the only two happy things in his life, and being beaten for the most minuscule things (I mean it-like, being beaten to a bloody pulp) by his father, Flick is what you could *probably* call a 'tortured' male lead.

When I was younger, I'd make Jude stand beside me in front of my mother's closet mirror. We looked so much alike. I couldn't see what the difference was-I couldn't understand how my father could love one of us and loathe the other.

So, when he is offered a chance to go to Mandel Academy in exchange for information that will help him take down his father, the reason for all the bad things in his life, he accepts....but at a price-**he must leave Joi**, his last happy thing, behind without a word or notice.

Suddenly I see the problem with Jude's brilliant advice. Be who you want to be, he said. Well, the person I'd like to be would save (view spoiler). But that would be dangerous. I could die trying-and there's only one of me to sacrifice.

I'll be quick-Joi is who makes him strive to be better, what keeps him from flipping his switch and turning into a monster. She helps anyone and everyone, never turning down even the most lost of souls, and she is a ray of sunshine in his-and many other children's-bleak world. But don't be mistaken-Joi can be a badass, too. But I don't want to spoil that for you ;).

Maybe he's not going to give me the choice to trade my life for hers. Maybe he's found another way to force me to watch the girl I love be destroyed.

All in all, I never expected much from this story. I didn't know where it was going or when the blurb would come into play-but I was never bored. And the minute the blurb *does* kick in? Wow. The things Flick has to do, the intense, multi-layered cast of CRAZY characters he has to encounter and go through....Wow. Keep your eye on a certain...yeah, never mind. Just watch out, 'K? **It's never safe. Never trust anyone. And don't do anything you can't live with.** This chilling cast of characters will make your head spin.....and I still am thinking about it, even a day after finishing.

This is how it feels to lose your last hope. To stop treading water. To unplug life support.

For more of my reviews, please visit:

Mihir says

Full review originally at Fantasy Book Critic

Overall rating =2 & 1/2 stars

OVERVIEW/ANALYSIS: If you read the blurb to this book by Kirsten Miller, it becomes very hard not to be interested in it. The book beckoned me with oh-so-intriguing premise and so I got my hands on a copy and started reading immediately.

The story begins with a sly and street-smart teenager who is slumming in the seedier parts of New York City trying to toughen himself for a Herculean task that he has to accomplish. He goes by the moniker of Flick and is desperate to emulate his father to turn in to a hardened diamond. He hangs out with a girl named Joi who is a Mary Poppins figure and helps the meek among the runaways. He however leaves her when he gets an opportunity to join the Mandel academy for the gifted; this school is like the Hogwarts for people with nefarious talents with a major Hunger Games-like enforcement. He tries to gauge what the school principal's angle is, in allowing him to join the academy and why he should strive to graduate. Flick is also wary as his brother Jude who appears to him as Peter Pan doesn't want him to join but Flick decides to follow the path of moral ambivalence. This step thus allows him to do whatever is necessary to become crude and violent enough to do what he plans.

The next step amidst his plan is to find out the truth about Mandel academy, its alumnae and the path that leads to his final reckoning with his patriarch. Flick however doesn't know the many pitfalls in passing out of Mandel academy and the many sacrifices he will have to give to steel his resolve. There are many surprises in store for the protagonist and the reader and is the final culmination of the tale that resolves all the mysteries that sprout within.

The best part of the story for me was the plot setting and the blurb, as the reader is introduced to this exciting and dark [YA level] story that showcases a world wherein the nefarious are being trained for the next level. As a reader, this is a tremendously cool setup and full points to the author for coming up with it. The next plus point for the story is its fast pace that constantly sweeps the plot threads in a forward manner and make it exciting all the way to the final twists of the tale. Lastly the author has to be lauded for making this into a standalone story and not dragging it out over several volumes. Amid the era of series, this standalone story makes it a good investment of time for any new or old readers.

Now these were the points that I liked about the story unfortunately my overall experience wasn't an entirely fun one because of the following factors that depreciated the read. One of the main reasons that I didn't like about this story was the uneven characterization. Beginning with our main protagonist Flick who is shown to be struggling in the first third then suddenly becomes this uber-cool fantastic student that crushes everyone and is great at everything and then in last third again does a turn-around to become a semi-confused persona. Then there's Joi who surprisingly turns out to be the best at everything and is the Mary Sue for this story. Following on with this trend there are the antagonists Gwendolyn who's supposed to be this ultimate badass but comes across as unhinged and weak. The main villain is also a mastermind who gets fooled ridiculously at crucial turns. This was especially disappointing as the villains became caricature-ish and thus the predictability of the story become apparent to the most novice readers.

This is one of the aspects of the YA storyline that I don't understand exactly. The cool concept which isn't properly explored perhaps considering the YA nature of the book This was the most frustrating part about this story that while it seemed that the author had this fantastic idea/plot but the execution faltered majorly for the story to fall into the category of "could have been awesome but..." stories. Perhaps I'm not so familiar with YA stories and how they are executed but in this book I was more than waiting to be surprised. However the ending came and my expectations took a downward turn. The climax while not so surprising becomes a bit comical in regards to the solution about the Mandel Academy?

The author does try her best to come up with a twist of sorts in regards to Flick's revenge plotline and however the overall predictability of the climax makes it a moot point of sorts. In this regard, my opinion of the book is a subjective one and it will be up to the readers to see how they find the story. I think this could have been a fantastic piece but ultimately went sideways for me. Lastly one good thing about the story is that it ends on a poignant note of sorts and perhaps the author can also explore the characters in a future book for those who did enjoy this story and want to know more about the characters and world.

CONCLUSION: A fantastic idea that intrigued me however the book didn't hold up to the impressive

happenings as promised in the blurb. How to Lead A Life Of Crime is a book that will finds its fans and detractors, sadly I find myself leaning towards the latter camp and couldn't really enjoy the story as it was written.
