The Rest of Us Just Live Here

Patrick Ness

About the Book

Patrick Ness’s bold and irreverent novel powerfully asks what if you weren’t the Chosen One? The one who’s supposed to fight the zombies or the soul-eating ghosts, or whatever this new thing is, with the blue lights and the death? What if you were like Mikey? Who just wants to graduate and go to prom and maybe finally work up the courage to ask Henna out before someone goes and blows up the high school. Again. Because sometimes there are problems bigger than this week’s end of the world and sometimes you just have to find the extraordinary in your ordinary life. Even if your best friend might just be the God of mountain lions.

About the Author

Patrick Ness is the award-winning and bestselling author of the Chaos Walking trilogy, A Monster Calls and More Than This. John Green has described him as “an insanely beautiful writer”. He has won every major prize in children’s fiction, including the Carnegie Medal twice.

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Discuss

1. In many novels where extraordinary things happen and young people are forced to act, the adults don’t seem to believe in or see the extraordinary happening in front of them. Is this just a device to enable young characters to take centre stage in the story? Or is it a reflection of real life, and if so, why do you think adults behave like this?

2. When do you think this story is set? Mikey’s area has already been visited by the undead, soul-eating ghosts, vampires and cancer. Do you think that Patrick Ness is also gently poking fun at a number of popular Young Adult novels that deal with these ‘apocalypses’? In what way is this book different from and similar to those? What do you think being a ‘chosen one’ means in this story compared to other YA novels?

3. What do you feel about the way each chapter begins? The matter-of-fact statements about the indie kids’ stories are dashed off in an almost bullet-pointed way, despite the dramatic events they describe. The main thrust of the chapter then describes the everyday lives of Mikey and his friends. How does this juxtaposition of styles impact on the reader? Why do you think Patrick Ness has done this?

4. This is Mikey’s first prom and his last chance to impress the girl he thinks he’s in love with. Do you think that Mikey and his friends have been desensitized by what happened to indie kids in the past to the extent that worrying about their prom dates is more important than blue lights and dying? Is this just teenage self-obsession or is it something else? Who out of Mikey and his friends or the indie kids do you think is finding high school the hardest?
5. When Henna is talking about her parents, she says, “I think it’s why my mom and dad go on all these mission trips. Try to beat some of the darkness out of the world with their bare hands” (p.39). Mikey says of his, “Out here, people either grow organic turnips or vast fields of marijuana. My parents do daffodils” (p.21). What do you think they are saying about their parents and the community in which they live?

6. Jared is “big, he’s friendly and there’s the whole cat deal”. What did you originally think about Jared as a character? He and Mikey have a very close relationship built on friendship and a deep trust, but Mikey’s mother doesn’t like him. Is this just because of his father and their political competition? The choice that Jared makes at the end of the book has huge implications for his own life and yet he makes that choice to help Mikey. Why do you think Jared makes that choice?

7. “He doesn’t see us – the indie kids never really see us, not even when we are sitting next to them in class” (p.16). “The rest of us just have to live here hovering around the edges, left out of it all, for the most part” (p.24). Do these statements which Mikey makes as a “non chosen one” reflect the divisions within schools, communities and society? Is this the reality for many young people today? How might things be changed to make it different?

8. Do you think it is true that not everyone has to be the “chosen one”? Or is everyone “chosen” to make their “ordinary” lives “extraordinary” in some way?

9. When Mikey and Mel are talking about her anorexia, she tells him, “I want to live, I want to live long enough so I can really live” (p.203). What do you think she means by this, and do you think this desire is enough to help her keep her anorexia demons at bay?

10. Each of the central characters keeps secrets from the others. Jared tells Mikey that the reason he kept his secret is “to do with what something becomes once you tell it” (p.316). Do you think this is true for the other secrets people keep, or are there other reasons?

11. The friendships and family relationships between Mikey, Jared, Henna, Mel and Meredith are very strong and very important to each of them. Is this story a “rite of passage” for these characters as they try to come to terms with their fears of what might be waiting for them beyond school? What do you think will happen to them in their later lives?

12. The parents of Mikey and his friends all think they know what is best for their children, but at the same time, they themselves are flawed and dealing with addictions and compulsions. What impact does each family dynamic have on the young people? At the end of the book have the adults learned anything and in what way have the young people changed in terms of their relationships with their parents?

13. Which is your favourite character in the book and why? What does this character contribute to the development of the story?

14. What did you think about the ending of the book? What do you feel it is saying to you as the reader?