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# Mud City

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Following *The Breadwinner* and *Parvana's Journey*, this is the third book in Deborah Ellis's exploration of refugee life in Afghanistan at the time of the Taliban. Shauzia and her dog, Jasper, have fled their country to shelter in a refugee camp just over the border in Pakistan. In this story they leave the relative security of the camp to pursue Shauzia's dream of a better future in faraway France, a country she knows only from the creased and faded photo of a lavender field she carries with her everywhere. In the nearest border town, disguised as a boy, she finds a bitter present of hand-to-mouth odd-jobs, begging and scavenging. Eventually, she finds herself back at the camp. In the meantime, she has discovered that, despite her determination and cunning, there is little that she can do alone to improve conditions for herself and the other children like her. When she returns of the camp, she seizes the opportunity to put her talents to use for the greater good. At the same time, the reader is introduced to the desperate conditions of refugee life and to the various responses of the members of the host nation: the shopkeepers who give Shauzia casual work; the corruption of the local police, who steal her money; and the shadowy figures who come in the night and whose sinister designs are not spelt out. Ellis pitches her story for pre-teens and, while she does not spare her readers the daily degradations of the life of the poor, she merely hints at the more terrible aspects of exploitation and cruelty to which such children may fall prey. She does not allow Shauzia herself to become degraded, disillusioned or bitter, and readers will warm to this wilful, cunning but essentially good-hearted girl. Typically, she outstays her welcome with a well-meaning expatriate American family, by opening their home to the poor off the streets and by storing quantities of decaying food under her bed, because she may need it later. Ellis provides a glossary and an author's note which provides the historical background and gives readers the opportunity to play their own part in making the future a little easier for children like Shauzia.

Running Order:

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