



Downsiders

By Neal Shusterman

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Beneath the sewer grates and manholes of the city lies a strange and secret world called the Downside.

Every Downsider knows that it's forbidden to go Topside, and most fear a collision of the two worlds. But fourteen-year-old Talon is curious about what goes on above ground, and one day he ventures out in search of medicine for his ailing sister. There he meets Lindsay, who is as curious about Talon's world as he is about hers. When Lindsay visits the Downside for the first time, she marvels at the spirit of the Downsiders, and the way they create works of art from topside "trash," like old subway tokens and forgotten earrings. As awed as she is by the Downside, however, she also questions its origins, and when she finds out that this fantastic world is not all it appears to be, she is determined to tell Talon the truth. Then a construction accident threatens to crush Talon's world, and his loyalty is put to the test. Can the truth save the Downside, or will it destroy an entire civilization? Neal Shusterman takes readers on an amazing journey into a place that's only a few steps away, yet beyond their wildest dreams.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Meticulous 14-year-old Lindsay isn't exactly thrilled about moving to the chaos that she believes is New York City. Her flighty "career college student" mom, now divorced, has dumped her on her city engineer dad, "a man who lived his life twenty minutes behind schedule and in a perpetual state of apology." Lindsay is certain that nothing better awaits her than prep school boredom and constant battles with her evil stepbrother Todd. But she is wrong. Quite by accident, Lindsay discovers an unusual boy named Talon who resides in a secret city beneath New York--a kind of underground Oz called the Downside. Talon and Lindsey are fascinated by the differences in their dual worlds and soon grow equally fascinated with each other. But when Lindsay's dad's construction project hits a snag that reveals the Downside, it is not only the blooming relationship that hangs in the balance, but the entire future of the Downside as well.

Downsiders is both funny and compelling. But while Lindsay and Talon's observations of their distinct environments is humorous (Talon compares Lindsay's French braid to a "gator's tail" and, despite Talon's explanation that "time is of low importance," Lindsay still thinks it's strange that Talon wears his watch around his ankle), Neal Shusterman also uses their relationship to illustrate how much a particular culture both shapes our identity and affects how we view people from backgrounds other than our own. This call to look beneath the surface is cleverly and subtly woven through an original story with broad appeal. (Ages 10 to 16) --*Jennifer Hubert*

From Publishers Weekly

History and urban folklore are wittily combined in Shusterman's (*The Eyes of Kid Midas*) well-wrought fantasy, centering on an alternative society that thrives undisturbed in the subterranean recesses of New York City. Despite stringently enforced rules against mixing with "Topsiders," 14-year-old Talon sneaks aboveground into an Upper East Side townhouse. There he meets Lindsay, also 14, whose self-absorbed, divorced mom has left her with her equally inattentive dad "for all eternity." The friendless girl quickly forms a bond with the pale, otherworldly boy, and when he finds her again, she eagerly goes with him to tour his underground universe. However, Lindsay's presence, as well as some historical information she unearths, are as threatening to the Downsiders as the excavations for her father's West Side aqueduct project. Amidst the thrills and insider humor (Downsiders eat throgsneck soup and have hunted sewer alligators to extinction), Shusterman offers a crisply written coming-of-age story with a message worth pondering: "Better that the truth be like the moonAa bright sphere only showing half of its face at a time, leaving the rest to be uncovered fragment by fragment, in its own proper time." Ages 10-up. (June)
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From School Library Journal

Grade 8 Up-The Downsiders live in a subterranean world far beneath New York City. Taboos forbid them from going Topside, but the two worlds collide when Talon, a Downside teen, ventures up looking for medicine for his critically ill sister. There, he meets Lindsay, a Topside girl who intrigues him so much that he breaks a cardinal rule and takes her into the tunnels, showing her an amazing place filled with cast-off items-dryer lint, subway tokens, soda-can tabs-that have become useful, even beautiful. Her visit sets in motion a dangerous chain of events. Talon's friend betrays him to the authorities and Talon is sentenced to death (by being flushed through a sewer pipe). The story takes a fascinating twist when Lindsay discovers that Downside was founded about 100 years ago by Alfred Ely Beach, a 19th-century inventor and scientist. Facts about this historical figure and about the old New York subway system are blended with the fantasy until it is difficult to tell where truth stops and fiction begins. Unfortunately, there is no afterword to explain

the connections and readers might miss the fun. There is also a good deal of sophisticated social satire, as Topside is seen through naive underworld eyes. Sometimes the plot lapses too far into the absurd and there are a few weak spots. The often mock-serious tone of the narrative may be lost on some readers. Overall, though, this is an exciting and entertaining story that will please fans of adventure, science fiction, and fantasy.

Bruce Anne Shook, Mendenhall Middle School, Greensboro, NC

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joshua Arwood:

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