



The Most Dangerous Place on Earth

Lindsey Lee Johnson

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An unforgettable cast of characters is unleashed into a realm known for its cruelty - the American high school - in this captivating debut novel.

The wealthy enclaves north of San Francisco are not the paradise they appear to be, and nobody knows this better than the students of a local high school. Despite being raised with all the opportunities money can buy, these vulnerable kids are navigating a treacherous adolescence in which every action, every rumour, every feeling, is potentially postable, shareable, viral.

Abigail Cress is ticking off the boxes toward the Ivy League when she makes the first impulsive decision of her life: entering into an inappropriate relationship with a teacher. Dave Chu, who knows himself at heart to be a typical B student, takes desperate measures to live up to his parents' crushing expectations. Emma Fleed, a gifted dancer, balances rigorous rehearsals with wild weekends. Damon Flintov returns from a stint at rehab looking to prove that he's not an irredeemable screw-up. And Calista Broderick, once part of the popular crowd, chooses, for reasons of her own, to become a hippie outcast.

Into this complicated web, an idealistic young English teacher arrives from a poorer, scruffier part of California. Molly Nicoll strives to connect with her students - without understanding the middle school tragedy that played out online and has continued to reverberate in different ways for all of them.

Written with the rare talent capable of turning teenage drama into urgent, adult fiction, *The Most Dangerous Place on Earth* makes vivid a modern adolescence lived in the gleam of the virtual, but rich with sorrow, passion, and humanity.

The Most Dangerous Place on Earth Details

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Author : Lindsey Lee Johnson

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From Reader Review The Most Dangerous Place on Earth for online ebook

Esil says

The Most Dangerous Place on Earth is beautifully written, but it's awfully unsettling. Set in a wealthy town near San Francisco, the story focuses on a group of teenagers and one of their younger teachers. These are not nice kids, but to call them mean would be overly simplistic. The author does a superb job of getting in their heads, showing the rudderless movement of their thoughts, emotions and actions, and all the attendant nasty consequences. These are privileged teenagers, caught up in parental pressures and social pressures. It's painful to watch them, because they're so quick to hurt each other, to be careless with each other. It's painful to watch them because they don't have a clue about their place in the world or the effects of their actions, but the glimpse we get of their parents doesn't suggest that they'll grow knowing much more as adults. Although focused on teens, this is not YA literature. It's a book written for an adult audience. It's not a book for readers who prefer likeable characters or stories of redemption. It's painful all the way to the end. But what makes this book worthwhile is that Johnson's prose is incredibly strong, and at times stunning -- there's an almost unbearable but brilliantly written account of a teenage party. I'll happily read anything she writes in the future. Thank you to the publisher and Netgalley for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

Navidad Thelamour says

It's funny how novels are often published in waves—we'll see a flood of multi-cultural books, an influx of war novels or a deluge of high-school-centric reads at once, proving for those who don't believe it already that books come in trends much like shoes. *The Most Dangerous Place on Earth* instantly reminded me *Everything I Never Told You* (which I loved and rated highly) and of another new-release competitor and recent review, *Everything You Want Me to Be* see my review of it here, which will be published around the same time by a different publisher. But I'll resist squaring them off in a boxing-like match and stick to Lindsey Lee Johnson's debut novel.

If *The Most Dangerous Place on Earth* had anything going for it, it was bite. Set outside of San Francisco, it was a setting that was like every chic suburban town we've ever heard of—a town that reeks of wealth and privilege, kale smoothies and European SUVs. It is a place where teenagers wreck their BMWs and are utterly confused at the idea of poverty in Rwanda. In that way, Lindsey Lee Johnson used this setting as a springboard to explore the culture of privileged teens today and, at times, as the occasional trigger for insightful nuggets.

The format is a unique crossroad between short story collection and full-length novel, where Johnson takes turns telling the kids' stories in 3rd person vignettes meant to give us glimpses inside their minds. Each vignette-type chapter tells part of one larger story, of which they are all a part of, and is then tempered by a chapter from the POV of Molly Nicholls, the 23-year-old 1st-year teacher who has the self-altering experience of teaching them all in English. This device can, of course, be great for offering us depth and insight, but here proved to be bad for readers who want to intimately know each character.

Why, you may ask?

Because you only get each student's perspective for one chapter, never to hear from their voice or see their outlook again (hence the earlier comparison to a short story collection). At first I thought the novel would follow just the teacher into this dangerous habitat, or perhaps even the first student spotlighted in this book.

That we'd follow them and settle into seeing and learning the world around them through their eyes. But the multi-vignette approach turned the tables on my expectations—not, in itself, a bad thing. Yet, I ended up torn on my opinion to this narrative tool: I loved being inside of all of their heads, seeing what they saw and feeling what they felt (some more so than others), but the page count would've been better expanded so that the reader could really get to know each of the students better, because without that, it just skimmed the surface.

Likewise, the page count of this novel also proved to me something else: that too much of a good thing can, indeed, be bad. In that regard, I'm talking about Johnson's narrative prose.

Don't get me wrong: the descriptive prose of Lindsey Lee Johnson's debut novel is lovely. But there is so much of it within this relatively small page count that the novel feels consumed by it, and the action feels slow-coming after the first few chapters, so much so that I found myself skimming past long descriptions of bus rides and in-home décor to get to the good stuff. Truly, the endless pages of descriptive prose would've been better placed in a longer book, in a book that had the room for such descriptions. But with only this many pages in which to get this story across—more than enough room to do it well; we've all seen it done before—the descriptive prose was allowed to take over and edge out insight and layer peeling, leaving me feeling that something was missing.

And then, of course, there's that resonating feeling that all readers long to be left with. For some of us, it's "feels," for others "insight." In reading *The Most Dangerous Place on Earth*, it always seemed that Johnson was on the verge of something great, brushing up against really thoughtful writing set against a sharp and intuitive peep into this teenage realm. She was almost there, but it never quite made it. Long chapters stretch out before you only to end with no kick, no umph or truly thoughtful nugget to hold on to. In the end, each chapter was just that: a chapter, viewing the world through a high-schooler's eyes (albeit, entertaining ones) with enough of a changed personality to be detectable, just the smallest dab of irony as to be discernible, but not a lot more than that.

Lindsey Lee Johnson offered up a sharp glimpse at this culture, but then failed to really do much with it after that. With the short page count, coupled with the kaleidoscope of vignettes with brief connections and overlays with one another like criss-crossing tree branches in a breeze—I never really felt for any of these characters the way that I'd hoped. Maybe, with the better chapters, I felt that I understood them, if not knew them, because I'd just read a 30-40 page spread about them. But because I'd never see them again this intimately for the rest of the novel, I found that I didn't really care about them or feel invested in their outcomes as I could have. The plot this author offered was a 10, yet the execution fell short of expectations, leaving *The Most Dangerous Place on Earth* an above-average read that didn't quite push far enough to gain 4 stars. 3.5 stars. ***

*I received an advance-read copy of this book from the publisher, Random House, via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

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Julie says

The Most Dangerous Place on Earth by Lindsey Lee Johnson is a 2017 Random House publication.

Young Adult novels, as popular as they are, never caught on with me. However, this book, was compared to

Celeste Ng's novel, which was outstanding, so despite some minor reservations, I decided to give the book a try.

Middle school students living in a wealthy California enclave struggle with peer pressure, parental expectations, family hardships, and the consequences of their choices, caught in that agonizing limbo between childhood and adulthood, while an idealistic young teacher longs to forge a stronger bond with her students in hopes of making a greater impact on their lives, as a whole.

This novel is an eye-opening look at the lives of young people whose lives cross and intersect throughout pivotal points in their lives. The decisions they make are reckless, spur of the moment, and the fallout often takes a very heavy toll.

Each student gets a moment in the spotlight which examines their personal lives, inner struggles, and how this impacts their choices, friendships, and the path they decide to take in life. Their lives are filled with experimental drug and alcohol use, sexual encounters, bullying, social media and private messaging, while their home lives are not exactly warm and fuzzy.

What makes this tale different from other stories of teenage angst is that this particular group of people are not altogether likeable or easy to empathize with, what with their attitudes, privilege, carelessness, and seeming lack of conscience or awareness of the potential outcome of their words or actions.

In contrast, the young rookie teacher finds herself frustrated by the lack of enthusiasm from her students, her inability to inspire them, while constantly looking for a way to engage them. She also finds the teaching staff employs as many cliques as the student body does.

The writing style is unique as the story unfolds through a time span which covers the eighth grade through the senior year of high school and highlights the growth and setbacks the students endure before setting off on their own individual journey through adulthood.

This breakdown between grade levels sections the book off and allows the reader to follow this entitled group of kids via vignettes or short stories, while weaving them together within a common thread, which gave the book cohesiveness.

For me the agonizing line that teachers much draw in order to survive in this occupation was the most thought provoking area of the book. There is a very fine line teachers must walk and many of them gave up, or used their positions in disgusting ways, or become jaded and cynical. But, a line is drawn and while crossing it may result in making a huge and positive impact on a student, it can also backfire horribly.

This novel is a little off the beaten path for me, and I feel the comparisons to Ng's novel is a bit ambitious, this is still a gripping story, and gives the reader a better understanding of the world young people must cope with, while giving us a glance at the behind the scenes politics teachers encounter, as well. I found it to be a compelling read and I'm glad I decided to give it a chance.

3.5 rounded to 4

Larry H says

I'd probably give this 3.75 stars, so I rounded up to 4.

This was a tremendously intriguing book, but not what I expected based on its description. At some point would it be possible for the marketing departments of publishers to spend more time understanding what its books are *about*, instead of comparing them to any other popular title?

I digress.

In Mill Valley, California, there's an eighth-grade boy who always seems to be the target of abuse and ridicule from his fellow students. He's desperate to feel understood, to belong, to find a friend. But his one bold gesture goes very, very wrong, causing him more humiliation at the hands of his peers. And then one incident changes everything.

Several years later, many of these same students are in high school. They've mastered all of the cruelty, disdain, and casual nonchalance that children raised among privilege often possess. Yet even as their lives move forward, the incident is always in the back of their minds, affecting them in different ways—pushing them to achieve more, motivating them to care less, sending them on a self-destructive path.

When young teacher Molly Nicoll begins work in Mill Valley, she hasn't lost her idealism, her faith that she's going to connect with her students, break through their shells, and inspire them with a love of learning and a love of reading that she found as a student. But what she finds are overachievers and underachievers, drug addicts and students who wish they were anywhere but in school, and yet want to make their mark on their fellow students. Molly thinks her students need her, though, so she finds herself crossing lines to win their trust, their faith, perhaps even their friendship.

The students she tries to reach are unique in their own ways, but share many of the same characteristics. There's Dave, pushed by his parents to be the best, to make something of himself, to not settle for anything but perfection (it doesn't really matter if he wants the same things); Elisabeth, the beautiful and seemingly untouchable one who actually just wants someone to notice her for who she is; Emma, the talented dancer and self-destructive party girl; Nick, who uses his intelligence only when it suits his purposes; and Cally, who changed her name to Calista after eighth grade, and spends most of her days high and daydreaming with her friends.

The Most Dangerous Place on Earth takes an unflinching look at the culture of privilege that many wealthy students grow up in, and how this privilege actually puts them at a disadvantage unless they're willing to take control of their own lives. Most of these students are unsympathetic, flawed characters, although you understand how they got that way. This is a book that leaves you wondering how true-to-life these behaviors are, and how many students really act this way—and how many teachers get caught up in the need to be part of their students' lives.

Lindsey Lee Johnson is a really talented storyteller. There's nothing particularly shocking, plot-wise, but you get engrossed in the story, even as you may feel at least a bit disgusted. This book reminded me of a bunch of other similar books, but in good ways. All I know is, if high school is really like this now, I'm glad I'm far away from it!!

NetGalley and Random House Publishing Group provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo...>

Deanna says

My reviews can also be seen at: <https://deesradreadsandreviews.wordpress.com/>

The book begins in the eighth grade at Valley Middle School. A beautiful school in Mill Valley which was recently declared the Fourth Best Small Town in America.

Thirteen year old Cally Broderick is impatient and restless for her life to begin. Her teachers keep telling her that she just needs to apply herself, but she's more interested in her best friend, Abigail and Ryan Harbinger, the boy she has a crush on. When she opens her locker one day and a note falls out, she assumes it's from Ryan. But it's not, it's a very long note from Tristan Bloch. Tristan is one of those kids that stands out for all the wrong reasons. Cally did NOT want a love letter from Tristan Bloch. She's embarrassed by it. Tristan bares his heart to her. It's all just too much for Cally and she doesn't know what to do.

I was so anxious as I read this. I just felt like it wasn't going to end well.

Teenagers. Crushes are the norm. However, when you have a teenage girl who cares very much about how others perceive her and add a boy who many consider strange and who has a crush on her? Add some mean girls and boys AND social media.....deadly combination.

The book is broken into parts. Eighth Grade, Junior Year and Senior Year. We follow the same group of students through these years and we see how things that happened in the Eighth grade follow them, shape them and affect all of their lives in many different ways. These are all privileged students.

Nick is popular. He doesn't want anyone to know how smart he really is. He's also a criminal.

Cally/Calista is completely changed by things that happened in the eighth grade.

Dave is smart, but he has to work hard at it. He is constantly striving to meet his parents high standards. He feels that nothing about him has changed since grade 8 other than his shoe and shirt size. I really felt like Dave was more compassionate than the others.

Emma is a dancer who is self-medicating to deal with the stress of eating, sleeping and breathing dance 24/7

Ryan - The pretty boy. The bad boy who gets away with everything. I had such a hard time with this character. He seemed to have zero redeeming qualities. I felt bad in a way as this is a teenage boy but one that I wanted to throttle with my bare hands.

Elizabeth is beautiful, quiet....and lonely. So beautiful that the girls are jealous and the boys too intimidated to approach her.

Abigail is a mean girl who is looking for love in all the wrong places.

Damon is another "bad boy" but he doesn't get away with things like Ryan does.

Molly Nicoll is the new English teacher In the groups junior year at Valley High. She's replacing a teacher who just ups and leaves in the middle of the school year (I can't imagine why). She's happy to be teaching at Valley High. Twenty-three and finally on her own. She cares about her students and truly wants to help them

achieve any goals they may have.

Thirty-two year old Doug Ellison teaches Government in the class next to Miss Nicholl. He's very involved with his students and has many roles at Valley High including helping with SAT Prep and Yearbook.

I can see that a lot of what happens in this book taking place in High Schools.....bullying, sex, drugs, alcohol, peer pressure, cheating, suicide, social media. However, sometimes it just felt a bit over the top. Or maybe not. It may be that it felt like it was ALL happening at this one school. Almost like the worst of the worst. As I read I was asking myself.....is it really this bad? I was hard pressed to find redeeming qualities of many of the students.

Things have changed so much. Nowadays, kids use their phones to answer questions. Wikipedia, Yahoo Answers and Google their main source of information. But I'm not sure I should be so judgemental. Because in actuality when there is something I don't know, the first thing I want to do is pick up my phone and ask "Siri".

I asked my daughter what she thought the title "The Most Dangerous Place on Earth" meant. She guessed jail first but her second guess was high school. Social media is often at the center of so many of our conversations. Most of these apps are terrible for not only impulsive teenagers but many adults as well.

All in all I thought that the author did a good job in showing what is happening in our schools with our teens. Though somewhat exaggerated, with many unlikable characters, it does show how much more aware we really need to be. Especially in this age of technology and social media.

I think this is a very good debut novel. Interesting and thought- provoking. I will happily read more from Lindsey Lee Johnson.

Thank you NetGalley, Random House, and Lindsey Lee Johnson for providing me with an advanced readers copy of this book.

Brenda - Traveling Sister says

I listened to the audio version of The Most Dangerous Place on Earth. I was left speechless for a few minutes after listening to this one and then a flow of thoughts and feelings came rushing in and I had to grab my notebook and pen right away to gather my thoughts on this one. I went into it mostly curious to see if it would seem like something my sons could have experienced in high school. I started listening and my filters quickly kicked in to filter out the profanity, however I soon realized that I would need to listen to get the whole feel of the characters. I almost quit listening but my curiosity won out and I continued. I am so glad I did.

The Most Dangerous Place on Earth is an achingly sad, shocking and emotional story. It's a story of a high school among privileged students of Mill Valley, California who have the freedom and the ability to access anything they want but not what they really need.

The story starts off with a tragedy in grade 8, that grabbed my attention right away and then cleverly jumps ahead to grade 11. We then follow along with the students that were involved as they struggle with their guilt, sorrow, the pressures from their parents to succeed, pressure from their peers, finding who they are, who they want to be and dealing with their situations. The story is told in alternating perspectives of the students and one teacher allowing us to see them as individuals and then also seeing them as part of a group.

The Most Dangerous Place on Earth is a cleverly written book with a lot talent from Johnson who has given us a vivid view of the dangers in the teenage world.

“To her friends who are flawed, but yes living.”

“She knew there was only this and whatever moment would come after, Is going on and trying, like everyone to live in this beautiful world.”

<http://www.twogirlslostinacouleereadi...>

Debbie says

Pshew! Glad I don't have to deal with the stuff the parents in this book had to deal with! Few books have made me feel so grateful—grateful that my kids were the hell out of high school before social media became the main game in town. Sure, some of the social scene in the sky is good (we all need to know that Brittany is eating sautéed Brussel sprouts in sunny Timbuktu, for example), but there's an evil side for sure. And this book makes you look at this side up close.

Yes, this book made me mull over things well after I turned the last page. It's the danger of digital that's the big mull. Social media is this giant force that can mess with heads, especially the underdeveloped brains of teens. We've got cyberbullying, the race to be the first online to report some drama, the joy in gossiping in cyberspace. All three of these things happen in this book, with disastrous consequences.

Another thing this book made me think about is how each teen leads a secret life, one where their parents basically don't exist. The teens' real life is their peers, end of story. Parents can't compete. It makes you realize how little influence you have over your kids once they hit middle school, how they are no longer under your parent spell. The teens usually work around the loving or absent parents and are in their own little worlds. This is sobering to people who pride themselves on being good parents and good communicators.

I really liked this book. It's told from multiple perspectives of a bunch of rich teens and one sort-of-lost teacher. The author made each kid interesting, no matter how shallow or immature they may appear to the world. I found I was less interested in the chapters about the teacher, which was a pain because there were definitely more chapters about her. She was well drawn but boring. We get a really good look at each character—very rich and insightful.

The story starts at eighth grade and ends at senior year. Sometimes I thought of the book as a set of interrelated stories. Each chapter is a plaintiff solo, and as each section of the orchestra adds its part, the song created is cohesive and memorable.

The writing is clean, though now and then there's a tiny bit too much description for me. There's some online chat, and I liked this change-up in the narrative. Also, these cyber-conversations added a realness to the story and upped the suspense, as I fretted about what the upcoming train wreck would look like.

I have to laugh because there were all these big tragedies happening (with people experiencing much drama and disaster), yet the one scene that made me twitch, cringe, sweat, and fret was a party scene (!), where a house, not a person, was being destroyed. The teens had a huge party in a pristine house while the parents were gone. Really, I'm not Martha Stewart-like nor am I a neat freak, but the damage that was continually being done to this home was just more than I could take. And it went on FOREVER! I took every house affront personally; I felt like it was my house getting ruined. Ouch! Oh no, that didn't just happen! Close

your eyes!! Run! WTF??

I thought I had O.D.ed on student angst and tragedy, but this book grabbed me immediately and made me sit up straight. For those who read this book and have teenagers in the house, I applaud you. And I totally understand if you have to run to the doc's for some Xanax.

One silly comment on the book title: The book says the most dangerous place on earth is high school. But to me the most dangerous place is cyberspace. Question: Is cyberspace on Earth??? Where is cyberspace anyway? I always picture it Up There, but hell, maybe it's Down There. Or in the middle, at about our height. Or parallel. But wherever it is, it's technically not on the earth, right? Just saying....

Thanks to NetGalley for the advance copy.

Liz says

3.5 Stars First off, this book makes me exceedingly glad that I went to school before cell phones, emails, facebook, 24/7 bullying and shaming. The Most Dangerous Place on Earth is aptly named. Mill Valley HS is a land mined filled place, where one wrong step makes you a target. The kids are uniformly rich and white with parents that can buy their way out of trouble but don't always really care what the kids are up to. But that doesn't protect them from their peers or teachers.

With each chapter focusing on a different teen or teacher, they are not uniformly engrossing. At times, I felt Johnson had a list and was checking each quality off the list. Nick was one of the ones who truly drew me in. One of the few non-privileged, he lives with his single mom and has discovered a host of ways to make money off the other students. When Tristan dies, he writes an honest essay, only to get in trouble for his honesty. Miss Nichols is the one constant, the teacher Johnson returns to time and again. She provides the "adult" perspective on the kids, although at 23, she's barely an adult. And poor soul, she truly is caught between the students and the experienced teachers. I found myself cringing at some of the things she did, she was just so naive.

This book didn't draw me in the way Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You* did, with which it's been compared, but that book was truly exceptional. This story is well written but comes across as more YA. Where Johnson excels is in capturing the lack of understanding about consequences. Time after time, these kids have no concept about how what they are doing can affect their future.

My thanks to netgalley and Random House for an advance copy of this book.

Jenna says

Another (this one fictional) exploration of teen-to-teen-inflicted, parent/teacher-inflicted, and social media-inflicted unnecessary suffering in an otherwise privileged, very wealthy, and apparently mostly white California high school. If speedy-readability were a primary consideration in awarding a book a high rating (and I know it can be), then this book would have surely earned a 4 rather than the 3 stars on which I finally settled. I can't say I "enjoyed" this book exactly, for reasons that should be apparent given the subject matter,

but I was quite engaged and tore through it pretty rapidly, particularly the first three-quarters.

I appreciated that this book seemed like a passion-fueled project to me: I somehow got the sense the author really cared about her material. I guess you could say the book certainly benefits from an energy or momentum that may reflect the author's investment and maybe also fueled my speedy-reading of it. I noticed the author has teaching experience, and whether or not this is related, she's an astute observer of how teens can talk, look, and act. Capturing how they think may be a bit trickier, but hey, who the hell knows how teens think?! One can only venture a best guess!

There were several character portrayals (3 students and 1 teacher) that I found pretty compelling and fairly complex given the very limited time allotted to each (more on that later): Callista, whose boho-rebellion serves to mask and numb her confusion and pain; self-effacing Elisabeth, whose beauty serves as a magnet for judgment and negative attention; Dave, a self-doubting young man trying to develop strength, integrity, independence, and a sense of self under contradictory pressure from parents, teachers, and fellow students alike; and the idealistic Miss (Molly) Nicholls, a very young, naive, inexperienced but well-intentioned new teacher who truly cares for her students' wellbeing, but struggles to determine appropriate boundaries and gain the comfort and confidence to act in her students' best interest as mentor rather than peer. Another student character, the socially awkward Tristan, is also worth mentioning; initially we see him through the eyes of his peers who victimize and bully him, but the author uses an interesting method (I'm not sure whether I bought it, but I appreciate it) to try to show how he is more complex, surprising, mature, and aware than his fellow students would be able to discern or value.

All this probably sounds pretty good, but a couple factors lowered the book's GPA in my view. This is one of those books that skips chapter-by-chapter from one character's perspective to another. This is a storytelling technique I often enjoy, but (as other reviews mention) the problem here is that there are a lot of "main" characters - the handful I mentioned in the last paragraph only represents a few of them - and so there are a whole lot of perspectives to cover in this pretty skinny book. This means that each individual character's coverage is spread really thin, which sets the author up for the pretty steep challenge - a fitting challenge for a book about adolescence! - of "so much development to do, so little time!" As a result, some of the characters are a little less fleshed out or a little more flat, which means we can find ourselves reading about people we may not yet fully care about, or who border on stereotypes. Two examples for me here were party girl Emma and bad boy "Flint," both of whom the author made a very noble effort to set up as more complex and sympathetic characters by providing some backstory and development, but I just hadn't quite arrived "there" yet in the page count allotted.

At worst, this page count barrier could produce characters who seemed unreal or unbelievable. One notable example for me was Bieberesque athlete and chick magnet Ryan, whose character goes in a pretty extreme 11th-inning direction that, while certainly possible, seemingly careened out of nowhere, and thus came off as unnecessarily melodramatic. I guess I believe high school and growing up are hard enough already without having to resort to such pole-vaulting plotwise. The author could have portrayed Ryan's self-discovery in a more straightforward way and it would still have been plenty meaningful and impactful.

And speaking of stereotypes: Pretty much every single teacher and parent except for Miss Nicholls is absolutely horrible? Really?? And also - yes, pretty much all the stuff you'd expect to happen in a high school-set tragedy DOES happen. Name the top two bad things that could happen as a result of a wild teen party with drinking? Yeah, probably at least one of those things you named happens. Top two things that could go wrong in a school with an unethical teacher? Yeah, most likely at least one of those things happens. Top two tragic consequences as a result of social media misuse and abuse? Yep, betcha at least one of those things happens.

So if you can get past these little lapses in subtlety - when things get a little too "Spark-notey" or "Afterschool Special" - go ahead and give this book a read if you find the subject matter compelling or

important and tend to find these kinds of high school books in your virtual TBR backpack. Probably you will not regret it, as I ultimately didn't. And ultimately, the reason I'm holding out for 3 stars rather than awarding the author an "A for effort" is because I can see this author is capable of even greater things, and worthy of the kind of tough love we sometimes need from our best teachers.

Iris P says

The Most Dangerous Place on Earth

★★★★ 4 Stars

I received a free advance e-copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review, thank you!

I have always thought of high school as a microcosm that mirrors the dynamics of society at large and serves as a training ground for young people to practice how to become independent adults and hopefully, responsible citizens.

To an extent, *The Most Dangerous Place On Earth* includes the predictable cast of characters you expect to encounter in any high school narrative. So you will find the jocks, the nerdy crowd, the bullies, the popular girls, the idealistic young teacher, the cynical more hardened teachers, the inept bureaucrats, all struggling to find out where they fit in the social ladder of this environment.

To Johnson's credit, she dares to go well beyond stereotypes and dig much deeper into the behavior and motivations of these characters, as a result she reveal to us the complex social maze that is a high school in America today.

So you are now entering Mill Valley, a wealthy California town located in the affluent Marin County. The place is not only economically prosperous but it blessed by nature as well with **"... green mountains and gold hillsides, but also redwood forests, canyon waterfalls the Pacific Ocean and the San Francisco Bay."**

Considering where the story takes place the title of the novel might sound counterintuitive: the kids of Mill Valley don't have allowances, they have bank accounts; when due to of an emergency a couple of girls entered a Walmart store, **"they giggled in fascination and horror at this newly discovered yet essentially unknowable corner of the universe"** . In other words, so far they have lived extremely pampered, overindulged lives.

The irony of being born into privilege is how challenging it is to be exceptional when so many around you already are. So the pressure for these kids is inescapable and it's amplified by the expectations their parents have put on them: be the best dancer, write an outstanding essay, excel at math, get that perfect SAT score.

As it is for many teenagers, their lives exists on parallel platforms: on and offline. Peer-pressure is not a new

social phenomenon but no doubt its digital iteration is much darker and troublesome than it was for previous generations. The very troubling events that occurred in the first chapter of the novel highlight the perils of this new brave digital world we are living in.

Because of the multiple perspectives and its complex character development it would be difficult, perhaps pointless to summarize the plot of this novel. But the storyline revolves around a traumatic event that takes place during 8th grade. For the kids involved on this episode, the tragic consequences will follow them all the way through the end of high school and one can imagine, perhaps the rest of their lives.

While reading this story, I frequently thought about an issue I personally struggle with as a parent, which is this: where you draw the line between motivating your kids to develop their full potential and acknowledging their limitations? Will they live happier lives by allowing them to find out the answer for themselves? This is probably one of those questions that have not right or wrong answers but instead, required that we as parents continually revised and adjust our approach.

So my take on *The Most Dangerous Place on Earth* is that, besides being a profound, well done character study, this is also a serious novel that carries a poignant message for parents, educators and any adult interested in the future of a generation growing up in this risky interconnected world. Not an easy read but an important one.

Elyse says

Update: This book is a \$1.99 Kindle special. Read the blurb and reviews— some readers didn't like it — but MANY did...

It takes place in one of the most wealthiest places in Northern California. These families have money - the kids are privileged.

They have a very different type of pressure than kids who come from poverty.

It's worth \$1.99 - and worthy of a trial run read in my opinion. Great discussion book!

I requested to read this book the 'second' I learned about it 5 months ago. It will be released Jan. 2017.

Mill Valley, located in Marin County, with lovely Mount Tamalpais State Park, and Muir Woods, is considered one of the most affluent Zip Codes in the Bay Area. The racial make up is 88.8% White. 1.1 % are Hispanic or Latino.

Before I review the fiction story, "The Most Dangerous Place On Earth", which Lindsey Lee Johnson wrote - - much of it taking place at Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley, Calif. focusing specifically on eight students -a few teachers and parents...

I thought I'd share a little history about the REAL HIGH SCHOOL ---

"Tamalpais High School".....often abbreviated - and called TAM HIGH --(same in Lindsey's fiction novel too):

.....Founded in 1907

.....1990: Following The death of a history teacher from AIDS, The principal announced that students have persuaded the administration to allow the school nurse to distribute free condoms. Tam High would have been the first high school in California to dispense prophylactics without parent approval.

.....2004-2005 Tam High what is the subject of local controversy during the school year when several anti-gay crimes, targeting a 17-year-old female student wrestler, receive coverage in local newspapers. After police investigation a student confess to

the hoax.

.....2006 former president of the associated student body, committed suicide. Later that year another student committed suicide.

.....2006 A physical education teacher and tennis coach, was arrested and charged with sexual battery against a former member and the boys tennis team.

..... inappropriate, miss behavior, my parents at a basketball game, led to police being called in and the first 'code-of- conduct' contracts for parents of athletes.

.....Tam High is a California distinguished Public School ranked in the top 5% of American high schools since 2005.

Back to "The Most Dangerous Place on Earth".

I read this book in one sitting. The first chapter begins in Jr. High - 8th grade....

which is gut shattering. It's also feels real...making it all the more horrific - leaving a lifetime scar. Really really sad... wishing that 'one' mistake was never made.... which changed many lives forever.

This story moves on --- to HIGH SCHOOL....it's less about Bullying....but we follow the kids from Jr. High into High School at TAM HIGH.

How much did their 8th grade destructive behavior contribute to their behavior in High School? Or did it? Or is something else going on? We follow these kids into their future.

It's clear these kids are wealthy. Many drive Lexus Sedans, shop at Norstroms, and Saks, with their parents open ended credit card. Many of the kids know 'the game'.... As long as their grades are high.... their parents are satisfied and will will indulge them in anything they want.

For many of these kids -the high achievers--they know they only need to produce high SAT scores and high grades....to have EVERYTHING else they want. Morals and integrity are non- issues with parents as long as the results come in at the top 1% --Top Ivy League College is the parents game. The rest...is Cowboys and Indians.

As for the under achievers- they get a different kind of pressure. And by under achiever .. I'm speaking 'above average' is not good enough. However... 'cheating' is ok...(just don't get caught is the message). Love comes with conditions for these kids.

It was hard to pull yourself away from reading this book in the same way it's hard to 'not' look at the car accident you're driving pass.

There 'are' stereotypes with several of the characters and clichés-- and parts of the storytelling feels a little forced ----

I'm not sure if kids are really saying F*^ K You to teachers and administrators as easily as they did in this story...plus there are a 'few' individual stories for specific

characters which felt like a stretch,

but much 'was' (sadly) realistic. Casual sex, drugs, alcohol, friendships gone wrong, emotional issues, pressure to succeed academically and athletically,

School hierarchy, snootiness, entitled kids, a naïve teacher, wrong choices, and the roll of social media in every students lives.

I happen to have my own memories driving up Mount Tamalpais towards Stinson Beach many times.

But....did author Lindsay Lee Johnson 'really' have to ruin it for me with this visual between a student and a teacher?kidding...she can't take away my own great experiences of the lovely area... but this is a little sick:

"He picked her up behind the Dumpsters [NOTE DUMPSTERS --a little symbolic?] at Starbucks and drove her up Mount Tamalpais toward Stinson Beach or Bolinas Ridge. They parked on the desolate edges of Cliffs or in groves of eucalyptus that shuddered in the fog. They touched hands, and talked. They talked forever. He opened her with questions, eased his way in. Until one day she made the move. So for the rest of their relationship they would be able to say that she'd started it".

"He was her first. They did it in a cramped backseat of us hatchback or took a picnic blanket from the trunk and lay down in the cars grassy shadow".

I'm giving this book 5 stars - not because I think it's flawed - a couple of times I felt a character was portrayed as a caricature --- however -- It's a very readable book - worthy of our discussions ---between parents, teachers, administrators, communities and teens... (wealthy or not).

Who 'is' raising our children today? It's clear that School and social media is a big influence on our kids. How do we even measure the percentage of influence between the home and schools? I've no idea!

5 Stars fora worthy book to read --not perfect--and no big surprises --but it opens questions for more discussions.

What I 'do' love about Lindsey's writing was her ability to keep me engrossed and captivated.

Marie says

This is a horrific story of a group of seemingly heartless children following them from 8th grade through senior year. They live in Mill Valley, a wealthy city within Marin County. They are entitled, spoiled, and largely ignored by their parents. Through the use of social media they are also extremely dangerous. Each chapter is told from the perspective of a student or teacher. Even the teachers in this book are awful. They are trying to relive their high school years by relating and engaging with the children inappropriately. This is a book that disgusted and enraged me, but also scared me to death (as a mother). This books warns of the horrors of social media, how it betrays friendships, how people can be heartless and ruthless on social media with no regard to feelings and outcomes. It warns how children and adults can make very big mistakes online, how a small mistake in real life can be amplified by social media to social and emotional ruin.

This group of children in particular is savage. Social standing is everything. Relationships lack depth. Anyone can stab you in the back if it might earn you higher social standing. With all that these kids were going through and experiencing, they each seemed to be islands, lacking close friendships or supportive families. They did not share personal details of their lives with their friends, they did not confide in their friends. Their friends were there solely for the purpose of social standing. The children appear lost, unhappy, and in some cases were trying to become someone else rather than discover who they really were.

At it's core this book is about bullying and I felt it was a cry that we as a society should be doing more to prevent it, to address it once it happens, and acknowledge that it will likely happen again. There are so many students that participated in the bullying and the bulk of it was done online where people can hide behind screens and become more heartless. How do we as a society, as communities, as school address the online lives of our children? How much freedom and independence do we give them versus close monitoring? What kind of limits should be imposed?

Towards the end of the novel, Molly is made to shut down her Facebook account by the school administration because of her over-involvement online with her students. "At least for a while, she'd reside in the land of the actual, where she might discover who her real friends were. Where she might discover herself."

As hard as this was to read, I think there is an excellent message to this book. It asks a lot of questions and hopefully will get people thinking. The character development was excellent and I enjoyed reading and getting inside the heads of various different students and teachers. I thought it was an interesting twist that Ryan gets taken advantage of through social media at the end, however, it did seem a little far-fetched and

out of character for him. My first inclination was to give this 3 stars, however I'm bumping it up to 4 because it brings up a lot of great discussion points. This would make for an excellent book club read.

Thank you to netgalley and to Random House Publishing Group for an ARC of this novel in exchange for an honest review!

For discussion questions, please see: <http://www.book-chatter.com/?p=951>.

Bill Kupersmith says

Personally I'd not class this as a YA (tho' highly recommend it for younger readers) because an OA like me can not only enjoy it but bring a maturity & historical perspective. Back in the 1970s a delightful work of satirical fiction first appeared in Northern California as a series in a local newspaper, which was collected under the title *The Serial: A Year in the Life of Marin County*. The author was Cyra McFadden, who was later to publish a memoir of her own chaotic upbringing by nomadic & somewhat alcoholic parents. Her characters are on the cusp of middle-age, who still think like teenagers themselves even tho' they are already parents of teenaged children—who might be "living with some turkey in a yurt." McFadden's characters may belong to "the Radical Unitarian Church" & subscribe to every New Age practice & belief: EST, Rolfing, T-groups, the Eslan Institute. I found myself reflecting back on *The Serial* as I read *The Most Dangerous Place on Earth*, set @ Marin High School, because the characters in *The Serial* would have been the grandparents of these students. Tho' these young people enjoy every material luxury—their parents bribe them to get high grades with BMWs & unmaxable credit cards—they inhabit the moral & spiritual equivalent of a toxic waste site. The spirituality in *The Serial* was utterly bogus, but @ least there was a spiritual dimension in the characters lives. These students, their teachers, & their parents believe in nothing @ all except getting them into an elite college.

Despite their nihilistic world, some try to behave decently. Molly Nicoll is a new English teacher from lower middle-class Fresno who wants to help her students develop. Calista Broderick is one of Molly's best students, carrying a load of guilt because when in the 8th grade she took part in online bullying a class geek into jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge, riding the entire distance on his bicycle. Calista ends up befriending a group of slackers who seem to be only characters with any authenticity. Abigail Cress is seduced by another teacher, Doug Ellison. When rumors reach her parents, he covers & she covers for him, telling him: "I wanted you to know . . . I could have told them, & I didn't, & I still could. If you ever try to talk to me again." That was for me the most chilling and revealing moment in the book. All the guilty teacher had to do to redeem his stature as an honorable man would have been to reply to Abigail: "Tell your parents & the principal the whole truth. Your respect & my honor are worth infinitely more than my marriage & my miserable career. I loved every moment we were together, & I shall never regret our relationship." I am not @ all sure that I'd have the courage to do that myself, but I know the right choice wouldn't take long -- speak three sentences.

But the most painful episode for me as a former teacher was when Molly was called to the principal's office for taking too much interest in the welfare of her students. She's told: "There have been some questions raised by certain members of the staff, questions about your pattern of behavior. It seems the tone that has been set in your classroom, I mean as far as student learning objectives are concerned, has not been especially productive." That jargon-laced reprimand is bad enough, but it continues: "These are not your kids. These are your students. Last year they were someone else's, next year they'll be gone. You can't be their mother. You certainly aren't their friend. You are the person who gives them grades. And if you go on caring for them in this way you won't survive." Molly takes the lesson in professional standards to heart. When later when Caly asks for her comments on a very moving confessional essay about her part in having

helped drive that student to jumping off the bridge, Molly treats it impersonally as a work of fiction & confines her comments entirely to matters of organization & style. I term what happened to her "professional deformation" & unfortunately it is the norm for "educators."

The Most Dangerous Place on Earth fails to be a complete artistic success. Dividing the story among too many characters made it difficult for me to care enough about any particular one of them, so I never felt I'd really got to know how she would feel. Except for the boy who committed suicide early in the book, none of the boys captured my sympathies at all. It should have bothered me that the outstanding athlete ends up a male prostitute in Los Angeles, but it didn't. And the boy who hired a ringer to take his SAT exam was equally fatuous. (BTW, the ringer's formula for an outstanding essay wouldn't work in real life—examiners really can identify the distinctive features of anonymous essays.) But my strongest reason for recommending this book is what it tells us about American education. Why would parents be content to send their children to schools that teach them to believe in nothing except worldly success and be concerned only that they get accepted by elite universities, bribing them with expensive cars, clothes & accessories to get high grades & score well on entrance exams. Why not instead spend the money to send them to good secondary schools that would provide a moral & spiritual formation, & then let them attend a much less expensive & prestigious public college? It seems counter-intuitive.

I am most grateful to PenguinRandomHouse & NetGalley for a gratis ARC.

Ellie says

The Most Dangerous Place on Earth, according to author Lindsey Lee Johnson, is an American school, specifically, middle school and high school, even (or especially) in a wealthy community in Northern California. Unsupervised teenagers with money and today's ever-present technology is apparently a lethal combination.

The first story feels authentic and is heart-breaking and its repercussions follow the characters throughout the rest of this collection of linked stories. Each story is a vignette of a different student (and one teacher) depicting their struggles to survive this difficult age and place.

There is no safety for these children, not at school or at home. Parents are, as is usually the case in this type of story, absent, preoccupied, or hostile. Even when present and well-meaning, however, they are unable to reach their desperate children, to understand or to help them.

The writing is excellent and the stories so vivid I could see them easily in my mind. The outcomes, however, were highly predictable. These stories held no surprises, although they did make me grateful for being out of school (although I am a teacher and the featured teacher's experience rang somewhat true although highly stereotyped).

As a Young Adult novel, this is a highly readable and relatable work. It does, however, lack complexity and depth, that I especially missed given the high quality of the writing.

My thanks to NetGalley, Lindsey Lee Johnson, and Random House Publishing for an ARC of this novel in exchange for an honest review.

Cheri says

! NOW AVAILABLE !

3.75 -4 stars....

“The Most Dangerous Place on Earth” begins in 8th grade, when some are little more than larger children. Others are already envisioning, yearning for, life away from the caring, but prying, eyes of parents and teachers who want to insert themselves in your life, your thoughts, your future. Like everywhere, there’s a boy who isn’t like the others. He doesn’t dress, think, or behave like the others. Some openly mock him; others just laugh at him behind his back, make jokes at his expense. And, as sometimes happens in such stories, some boys like some girls. Sometimes they even tell them their feelings. Sometimes this backfires.

The area is affluent, not Trump money but House Beautiful comfortable, comfortably elegant. Kids own new, expensive cars so their parents don’t have to haul them about. There’s a price for this freedom, these “luxuries” that seem more like necessities to these kids. Who can really blame them for wanting everything when they’ve never been denied anything? Who can blame the parents when both are so busy working jobs with grueling commutes and long days? All the parents want is for their children to be positive proof of what great parents they are, those 4.0’s, high SATs, the acceptance letters from the best colleges. The unspoken “we will always love you and be proud of you”...IF you make us look good.

Then there are the teachers. Good teachers are so necessary to students in this age group. There’s one fresh out of college, heart wide-open to these students, all of the students new to her. She can’t wait to get to know them. And then there’s another teacher who has been teaching there a while. He can’t wait to get to know some of them better, either.

The world isn’t like it was when most of us went to High School. Immediate access to information has changed everything. That party you went to and had a little too much to drink and made choices you’d rather not ever think about again? Those days are over. Bad decisions don’t just live in your mind, anymore.

This story felt a bit manipulative to me, the characters feel more like they are composites of stereotypes. I might excuse some of that, but I think the message would have been felt and heard more clearly without the clichéd characters and the manipulation. I know all of these things do happen, but it feels like someone spent an inordinate amount of time looking for the worst things ever captured online, facebook, cyber-bullying, etc., the embarrassing photographs that live on and on... and took the stories and crammed them into one small group of characters.

Despite some negatives, this was a quick, mostly engaging read. The writing is proficient, the story interesting.

For those that count these things: a LOT of profanity

For those that count these things: No animals were injured, but people were.

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Many thanks for the ARC provided by Random House Publishing Group – Random House, NetGalley and author Lindsey Lee Johnson

