

[Kill All Enemies](#) by [Melvin Burgess](#)

Reviewed by [work experience](#) school students [Yasmin Redfearn](#), [Kathrine Payne](#)

and

[Hannah Mason](#)

July 2011

Yasmin's view of the novel:



Kathrine's view of the novel:



Kill All Enemies by Melvin Burgess is a gritty novel based around the stories of three young people, Billie, Rob and Chris, and their care worker, Hannah. There's Billie, the 'hardest girl in school', who regularly gets into fights and has a severe aggression problem. Then there's Rob, a big, hard bully who's been kicked out of two schools for fighting. Chris, the third teenager, comes from a middle class background and, unlike the other two, attends a private school. However, he hasn't done a single piece of homework in four years, and point blank refuses to do his work when not in school. Each teenager struggles with their own individual problems, which aren't immediately apparent.

Despite their seemingly 'hard' or 'troublesome' appearances, we soon learn that these kids each have their own reasons for being that way. Rob, the huge, angry teen, is regularly beaten up by his abusive step-father and is without any friends at school. His mother, too, is often beaten up by Philip, and one day she leaves him and his brother, making Rob vow that he'll look after them both. Chris also has a reason for his 'disruptive' behaviour, but one that isn't revealed until later on in the book, so I won't spoil it.

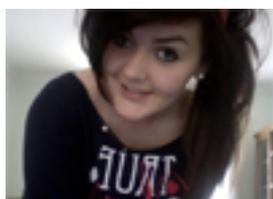
It is Billie, though, that we feel the most empathy for. Billie, apparently the 'toughest' girl around, has been forced for years to care for her two younger siblings whilst her alcoholic mother neglected them. Now, Billie's mother refuses to have her in the home, and Billie – who has developed anger and violence problems – has been passed from carer to carer, lasting at most a few weeks at each. When she attempts to visit her family, and join their unit once again, she is rejected – not only by her mother, who it seems is still drinking herself to death – but by the sister to whom, for so many years, she was a mother to, and who has now taken Billie's role as mother of the household. From that point onwards, the reader can only sit back and watch as Billie's life spirals further and further out of control, with the knowledge that only she can stop the downward spiral that, to the misunderstanding adults, seems inevitable.

The three young people meet when they are all excluded, for different reasons, from their individual schools and sent to the Pupil Referral Unit, *The Brant*. Melvin Burgess visited many different PRUs in the North West before writing the book, and this has clearly helped when describing *The Brant*. The three teenagers are all assigned the same care worker, Hannah, and at key points Burgess allows us to see the goings on through her perspective. Their stories gradually become more and more intertwined, although at the start it's unclear how the three characters could possibly become connected. After a few chapters, I realised that to each character, the other ones are nothing more than background people, unimportant and irrelevant to their current situations. This soon changes, as Melvin slowly introduces each character to the others, and they become more and more important to each other.

A relatively slow beginning moves on to an interesting, and then absorbing middle section, as we realise the growing danger that Billie poses to herself. One of the most riveting chapters in the book takes place when Billie is hiding at Cookie's - her 20-something boyfriend - grubby flat, after having ran away from her foster parents. Cookie's friends come round for a party whilst he is out, and the situation quickly spins out of Billie's control. The climax is gripping and terrifying, and both the reader and Billie are shocked to discover something terrible, that neither were aware of, has in fact happened before.

Without spoiling the end of the novel, I can say that although Burgess shows us throughout the harsh reality of life for kids in foster care, or with abusive or neglecting parents, we also see that there is a happy ending for each of the characters. I really enjoyed this book, as my interest grew and grew whilst reading it, and I found myself enthralled with 'watching' the lives – however disastrous – of Billie, Rob and Chris unfold. It's alerted me to the intelligent, descriptive writing of Melvin's, and the skilful way he can intertwine stories and characters.

Hannah's view of the novel:



Melvin Burgess is a well known children's fiction novelist and known as one of the best writers of contemporary children's literature, publishing his first book *The Cry Of The Wolf* in 1990, and now twenty one years later and with around twenty published novels, he has a new one on the way called **Kill All Enemies**. This will be released on 01 September 2011 and there will be a book launch and audience interview with him at Blackwell University Bookshop on Tuesday 06 September.

After just reading *Kill All Enemies*, this captivating tale of three troubled school students, with hard home lives and their own problems to face, this book is gripping and draws the reader in from the very first page.

Melvin's unique way of writing, use of teenage vocabulary and slang, extends the idea that these characters are real and by having the book from four different perspectives keeps the

book really exciting. Melvin Burgess ends up joining all the characters together in such a clever way, giving the book a feel of a completely new personality. Melvin Burgess' style of writing about true and relatable characters has increased the readers love for his writing.

Kill All Enemies has taught me personally that 'naughty' students may not always be to blame; the girl falling asleep at the back of the classroom may have been up all night caring for her little brother and sister. This book teaches us not to judge a book by its cover and to always respect that people have challenges in their private home lives.

This book is by far, one of the best I have read in a long time, every page is exciting where something new is happening, and the idea of three main characters all being linked together and how we can see that an action by one character can affect another character in such a huge way.

I feel this book is an amazing read for adults and children and will really pull on heart strings, make you laugh, make you smile, make you cry. But most definitely it makes you fall in love with these amazingly heroic characters who, even with their life struggles, are still able to look after and protect the ones they truly love, and don't lose their love for them along their troublesome road to a happier life.

Note: Click on this [interview with Melvin Burgess](#) link to read Yasmin, Kathrine and Hannah's take on what Melvin's like. Details of an *In conversation* discussion with Melvin Burgess at Blackwell University Bookshop on Tuesday 06 September are available by clicking on this [Kill All Enemies](#) link.