



[Home](#) > How I Live Now

How I Live Now

Books Reviewed:

[How I Live Now](#) [1]

Issue:

[149](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Val Randall](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This remarkable book, justly shortlisted for the Guardian fiction prize, tells Daisy's story - a laconic and cynical 15-year-old New Yorker who is summarily dispatched to her eccentric Aunt and cousins in the depths of rural England at the behest of her loathed step-mother. She has retreated into anorexia - as a weapon against her father and his new wife and as a means of keeping control of what is happening to her. All semblance of control on any level vanishes when her Aunt is called to Oslo to try to prevent the disintegration of world peace and Daisy begins a sexual relationship with her 14-year-old cousin Edmond. This attachment is so strong that they are able to communicate in an almost telepathic way - this is both their salvation and their downfall when war breaks out. At first the disruption merely isolates and cements the idyll but when their home is requisitioned by the armed forces they are all separated and can only try to survive and find each other again. Edmond is unable to ignore the thoughts of those in distress and this brings about his breakdown, through which he can only think of returning to the family home to find Daisy. Daisy and her cousin Piper endure much horror and privation but their arrival at the family home - two days before Edmond's - is shattered by Daisy's father's immediate recall of her to New York. The book ends with enormous poignancy when, six years on, Daisy is eventually able to return and try to effect some restoration of the broken Edmond and the ashes of their relationship. The narrative so moves the reader because it is always filtered through Daisy's thoughts and observations, leaving clues to be picked up which then vividly colour events and interpretations in an uncluttered yet often harrowing way. The final section of the book sees the only use of direct speech, thus powerfully delineating past and present and leaving readers to draw their own conclusions about the future.

Running Order:

7

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[1] <http://wvjxyve.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/how-i-live-now>

[2] <http://wvjxyve.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/149>

[3] <http://wvjxyve.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/val-randall>