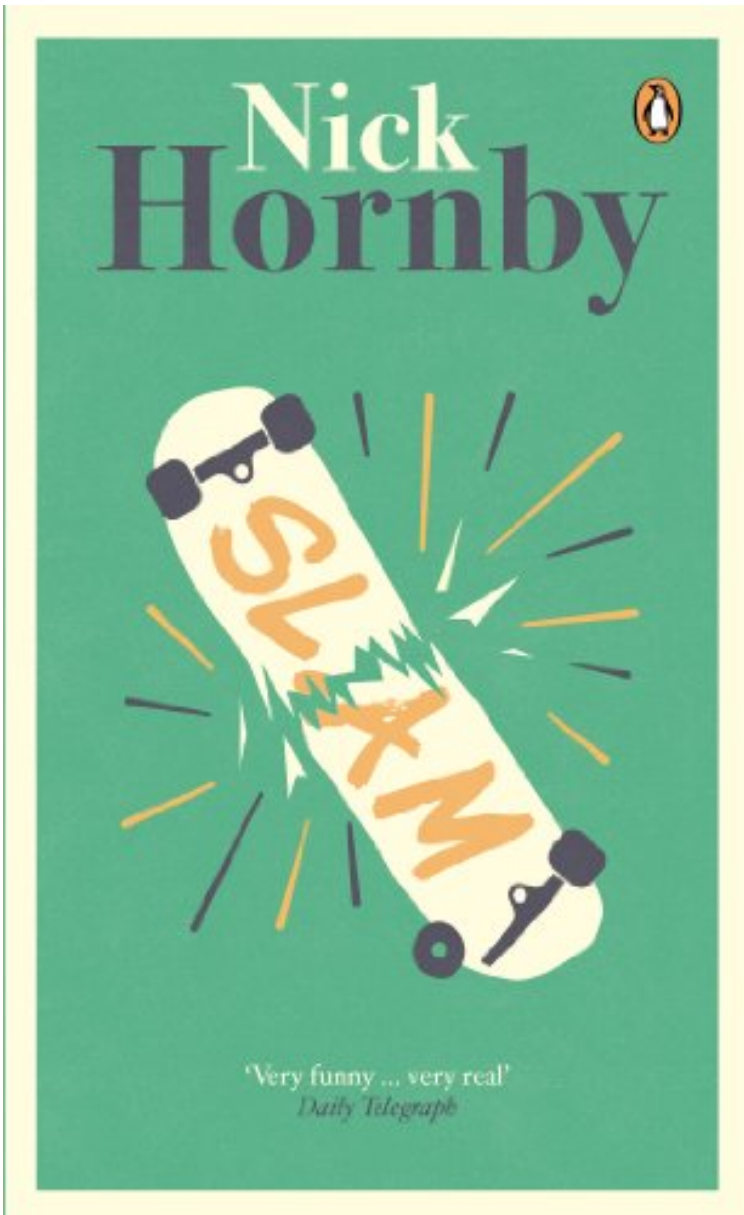


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Slam



Par Nick Hornby
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur"There was this time when everything seemed to have come together. And so obviously it was time to go and screw it all up.'Sam is sixteen and a skater. Just so there are no terrible misunderstandings: skating = skateboarding. There's no ice. Life is ticking along nicely for Sam: his mum's got rid of her rubbish boyfriend, he's thinking about college and he's met someone. Alicia.Then a little accident happens. One with big consequences for someone just finding his way in life. Sam can't run (let alone skate) away from this one. He's a boy facing a man's problems and the question is - has he got what it takes to confront them?ExtraitSo things were ticking along quite nicely. In fact, Id say that good stuff had

been happening pretty solidly for about six months. For example: Mum got rid of Steve, her rubbish boyfriend. For example: Mrs. Gillett, my Art and Design teacher, took me to one side after a lesson and asked whether I thought of doing art at college. For example: I learned two new skating tricks, suddenly, after weeks of making an idiot of myself in public. (I'm guessing that not all of you are skaters, so I should say something straightaway, just so there are no terrible misunderstandings. Skating = skateboarding. We never say skateboarding, usually, so this is the only time I'll use the word in this whole story. And if you keep thinking of me messing around on ice, then it's your own stupid fault.) All that, and I met Alicia too. I was going to say that maybe you should know something about me before I go off on one about my mum and Alicia and all that. If you knew something about me, you might actually care about some of those things. But then, looking at what I just wrote, you know quite a lot already, or at least you could have guessed a lot of it. You could have guessed that my mum and dad don't live together, for a start, unless you thought that my dad was the sort of person who wouldn't mind his wife having boyfriends. Well, he's not. You could have guessed that I skate, and you could have guessed that my best subject at school was Art and Design, unless you thought I might be the sort of person who's always being taken to one side and told to apply for college by all the teachers in every subject. You know, and the teachers actually fight over me. No, Sam! Forget art! Do physics! Forget physics! It would be a tragedy for the human race if you gave up French! And then they all start punching each other. Yeah, well. That sort of thing really, really doesn't happen to me. I can promise you, I have never, ever caused a fight between teachers. And you don't need to be Sherlock Holmes or whatever to work out that Alicia was a girl who meant something to me. I'm glad there are things you don't know and can't guess, weird things, things that have only ever happened to me in the whole history of the world, as far as I know. If you were able to guess it all from that first little paragraph, I'd start to worry that I wasn't an incredibly complicated and interesting person, ha ha. This was a couple of years ago, this time when things were ticking along OK, when I was fifteen, nearly sixteen. And I don't want to sound pathetic, and I really don't want you to feel sorry for me, but this feeling that my life was OK was new to me. I'd never had the feeling before, and I haven't really had it since. I don't mean to say that I'd been unhappy. It was more that there had always been something wrong before, somewhere something to worry about. (And, as you'll see, there's been a fair bit to worry about since, but we'll get to that.) For instance, my parents were getting divorced, and they were fighting. Or they'd finished getting divorced, but they were still fighting anyway, because they carried on fighting long after they got divorced. Or maths wasn't going very well. I hate maths. Or I wanted to go out with someone who didn't want to go out with me. . . . All of this had just sort of cleared up, suddenly, without me noticing, really, the way the weather does sometimes. And that summer, there seemed to be more money around. My mum was working, and my dad wasn't as angry with her, which meant he was giving us what he ought to have been giving us all the time. So, you know. That helped. If I'm going to tell this story properly, without trying to hide anything, then there's something I should own up to, because it's important. Here's the thing. I know it sounds stupid, and I'm not this sort of person usually, honest. I mean, I don't believe in, you know, ghosts or reincarnation or any weird stuff at all. But this, it was just something that started happening, and . . . Anyway. I'll just say it, and you can think what you want. I talk to Tony Hawk, and Tony Hawk talks back. Some of you, probably the same people who thought I spend my time twirling around on ice skates, won't have heard of Tony Hawk. Well, I'll tell you, but I have to say that you should know already. Not knowing Tony Hawk is like not knowing Robbie Williams, or maybe even Tony Blair. It's worse than that, if you think about it. Because there are loads of politicians, and loads of singers, hundreds of TV programs. George Bush is probably even more famous than Tony Blair, and Britney Spears or Kylie are as famous as Robbie Williams. But there's only one skater, really, and his name is Tony Hawk. Well, there's not only one. But he's definitely the Big One. He's the J. K. Rowling of skaters, the Big Mac, the iPod, the Xbox. The only excuse I'll accept for not knowing TH is that you're not interested in skating. When I got into skating, my mum bought me a Tony Hawk poster off the Internet. It's the coolest present we've ever had, and it wasn't even the most expensive. And it went straight up onto my bedroom wall, and I just got into the habit of telling it things. At first, I only told Tony about skating. I'd talk about the problems I was having, or the tricks I'd pulled off. I pretty much ran to my room to tell him about the first rock-n-roll I managed, because I knew it would mean much more to a picture of Tony Hawk than it would to a real-life Mum. I'm not dissing my mum, but she hasn't got a clue, really. So when I told her about things like that, she'd try to look all enthusiastic, but there was nothing really going on in her eyes. She was all, Oh, that's great. But if I'd asked her what a rock'n'roll was, she wouldn't have been able to tell me. So what was the point? Tony knew, though. Maybe that was why my mum bought me the poster, so that I'd have somebody else to talk to. The

talking back started soon after Id read his book HawkOccupation: Skateboarder. I sort of knew what he sounded like then, and some of the things hed say. To be honest, I sort of knew all of the things hed say when he talked to me, because they came out of his book. Id read it forty or fifty times when we started talking, and Ive read it a few more times since. In my opinion its the best book ever written, and not just if youre a skater. Everyone should read it, because even if you dont like skating, theres something in there that could teach you something. Tony Hawk has been up, and down, and gone through things, just like any politician or musician or soap star. Anyway, because Id read it forty or fifty times, I could remember pretty much all of it off by heart. So for example, when I told him about the rock-n-rolls, he said, They arent too hard. But theyre a foundation for learning balance and control of your board on a ramp. Well done, man! The Well done, man! part was actual conversation, if you see what I mean. That was new. I made that up. But the rest, those were words hed used before, more or less. OK, not more or less. Exactly. I wished in a way that I didnt know the book so well, because then I could have left out the bit where he says, They arent too hard. I didnt need to hear that when Id spent like six months trying to get them right. I wished hed just said, you know, Hey! Theyre a foundation for learning balance and control of your board! But leaving out They arent too hard wouldnt have been honest. When you think of Tony Hawk talking about rock-n-rolls, you hear him say, They arent too hard. I do, anyway. Thats just how it is. You cant rewrite history, or leave bits of it out just because it suits you. After a while, I started talking to Tony Hawk about other things about school, Mum, Alicia, whatever, and I found that he had something to say about those things too. His words still came from his book, but the book is about his life, not just skating, so not everything he says is about sacktaps and shove-its. For example, if I told him about how Id lost my temper with Mum for no reason, hed say, I was ridiculous. I cant believe my parents didnt duct-tape me up, stuff a sock in my mouth and throw me in a corner. And when I told him about some big fight at school, he said, I didnt get into any trouble, because I was happy with Cindy. Cindy was his girlfriend of the time. Not everything Tony Hawk said was that helpful, to tell you the truth, but it wasnt his fault. If there was nothing in the book that was exactly right, then I had to make some of the sentences fit as best I could. And the amazing thing was that once you made them fit, then they always made sense, if you thought about what he said hard enough. From now on, by the way, Tony Hawk is TH, which is what I call him. Most people call him The Birdman, what with him being a Hawk and everything, but that sounds a bit American to me. And also, people round my way are like sheep and they think that Thierry Henry is the only sportsman whose initials are TH. Well, hes not, and I like winding them up. The letters TH feel like my personal secret code. Why Im mentioning my TH conversations here, though, is because I remember telling him that things were ticking along nicely. It was sunny, and Id spent most of the day down at Grind City, which as you may or may not know is a skate park a short bus ride from my house. I mean, you probably wouldnt know that its a short bus ride from my house, because you dont know where I live, but you might have heard of the skate park, if youre cool, or if you know somebody whos cool. Anyway, Alicia and I went to the cinema that evening, and it was maybe the third or fourth time wed been out, and I was really, really into her. And when I came in, Mum was watching a DVD with her friend Paula, and she seemed happy to me, although maybe that was in my imagination. Maybe I was the happy one, because she was watching a DVD with Paula and not with Steve the rubbish boyfriend. How was the film? Mum asked me. Yeah, good, I said. Did you watch any of it? said Paula, and I just went to my room, because I didnt want that sort of conversation with her. And I sat down on the bed, and I looked at TH, and I said, Things really arent so bad. And he said, Life is good. We moved into a new, larger house on a lagoon, close to the beach and, more importantly, with a gate. Like I said, not everything that TH comes up with is exactly right. Its not his fault. Its just that his book isnt long enough. I wish it were a million pages long, a) because then I probably wouldnt have finished it yet and b) because then hed have something to tell me about everything. And I told him about the day at Grind City, and the tricks Id been working on, and then I told him about stuff I dont normally bother with in my talks with TH. I told him a little bit about Alicia, and about what was going on with Mum, and how Paula was sitting where Steve used to sit. He didnt have so much to say about that, but for some reason I got the impression that he was interested. Does this sound mad to you? It probably does, but I dont care, really. Who doesnt talk to someone in their heads? Who doesnt talk to God, or a pet, or someone they love who has died, or maybe just to themselves? TH . . . he wasnt me. But he was who I wanted to be, so that makes him the best version of myself, and that cant be a bad thing, to have the best version of yourself standing there on a bedroom wall and watching you. It makes you feel as though you mustnt let yourself down. Anyway, all Im saying is that there was this timemaybe it was a day, maybe a few days, I cant remember nowwhen everything seemed to

have come together. And so obviously it was time to go and screw it all up. AudiofileNarrator Nicholas Hoult is best known as Marcus in the film version of author Nick Hornbys ABOUT A BOY. Now he narrates Hornbys latest novel while still a teenager himself--not surprisingly, he nails the tone of a Londoner whose life goes unexpectedly off the rails. Sam is obsessed with skateboarding and Tony Hawk, the worlds greatest skater. Life is going well--his teachers are recommending art college, and he has a beautiful girlfriend. In skating, a slam is a hard fall; in Sams life, the slam is unexpected fatherhood. Sam becomes a father at 16--the same age his mother had him. Hoult makes Sam an entirely believable teenager--his dialogue is slouchy, like a teenagers, and his light tone maintains Hornbys humor. A.B. 2008 Audies Finalist
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