



Sammy Keyes and the Night of Skulls

Wendelin Van Draanen

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"The most winning junior detective ever in teen lit. (Take that, Nancy Drew!)" —*Midwest Children's Book Review*

After being chased by a man wielding a shovel, scared silly by a mummy, and attacked by Heather Acosta, Sammy and her pals decide they've had their fill of monsters and head home to eat some candy. But along with bubble gum and chocolate bars, they discover something frightening in their trick-or-treating bags. Something that's definitely not sweet!

Before they know it, Sammy and her friends are following suspicious gravediggers, ghoulish embalmers, and shady undertakers. And somebody is following *them* . . .

The Sammy Keyes mysteries are fast-paced, funny, thoroughly modern, and true whodunits. Each mystery is exciting and dramatic, but it's the drama in Sammy's personal life that keeps readers coming back to see what happens next with her love interest Casey, her soap-star mother, and her mysterious father.

From the Hardcover edition.

Sammy Keyes and the Night of Skulls Details

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From Reader Review Sammy Keyes and the Night of Skulls for online ebook

K Grant says

Nothing in her life stays normal - not even Halloween. Sammy seems a bit more conflicted in this one, and it's a pretty confusing mystery too. Still Sammy faces life as a teen, with romance, drama, and true inner conflict, with perseverance and a good attitude.

Jasmine Hariri says

Sammy Keyes and The Night of Skulls by Wendelin Van Draanen is a very good book. First, Sammy and her squad go trick-or-treating and get chased by a man with a shovel when they trespass the graveyard. Then, Heather Acosta has to make their night even weirder by attacking them! When they get to Hudson's house they find out Billy had gotten two SKULLS in the sack that the beast chasing them had dropped. Then, they're suddenly following people who murder or whatever nonsense! What they don't know, is somebody is following them and they could be next. I recommend this to dare-devils and everyone else.

David says

This is one of the more interesting of the last few Sammy Keyes books. I've always thought she should do the right thing, and when she tries, she gets rebuffed. She does have some very thoughtful discussions with Sergeant Borsch, and continues to develop friendships.

Rage says

I remember being interested in this series when it was new and I was about Sammy's age. between then and now, I actually lived in Los Angeles... I often seem to enjoy a book just a bit more when it's set somewhere that I've been. I picked this up just for the Halloween theme, not because I'm trying to get back into the series. the book ended up being a discussion about mortality, with Sammy confronting (perhaps for the first time) her feelings about her own death, which I'm guessing many younger readers might relate to. also: how to live a good life so that, I guess, when you reach the end, you feel satisfied with who you were and what you accomplished. Sammy has to explore her sense of ethics, too, as she navigates complex relationships.

a lot of the book is dialogue. I am not familiar with all of the characters, so it took me a while to figure out what their roles are and the patterns in their interactions. there is some exposition, but overall I think this series would be best enjoyed in order. also, and this is a weird complaint, but it would have been nice to have even one example of a parent doing some legit parenting.

Liana says

Yes, Sammy Keyes is for kiddies, but I've been reading her mysteries since I was the proper age for them, and I'm not about to give up on ol' Sammy now!

This one was very good. Not quiiiiite up there with my favorites, but better than some. Just like "Sammy Keyes and the Cold, Hard Cash" involved lots of musings about money and its role in Sammy's life and in people's behavior, this book involved Sammy mulling over the theme of death and how bodies are treated after they die. It was all interesting because the inner workings of a funeral home were described but it wasn't too gross because it was for younger people. It was also timely because I just saw a creepy segment on "60 Minutes" about how the burial/cemetery industry is very unregulated and there are not the same kind of consumer protections that most businesses have.

I guess the only issue with this book is that, even though at the end of ALL the books, Sammy and her young friends pluckily hand some dangerous criminals their downfall, this one seemed a little more preposterous than most. Maybe it was because Sammy didn't somehow accidentally get mixed up in something, she repeatedly went looking for it of her own volition. Also, there wasn't a lot of tie-up after the crime, and there was an explanation but it was a little rushed and vague.

But that's my only issue. The Sammy Keyes series is entertaining, gripping, and VERY well-written. If you know any middle-school aged kids, especially girls who don't fit the stereotype of "girlie," this is definitely a series they should be reading.

B says

I'm not as enchanted with this series as I used to be. The plot was interesting although a bit convoluted and quite creepy, but I'm just kind of tiring of certain things..the constant fighting and baiting between Sammy and Heather, etc.

Chloe says

I've been reading this series since I was 11, and I still love it just as much now as I did 6 years ago. Sammy is such a fun character to return to every year, she has such a unique and funny voice. This being the 14th book in the series now, we've seen her grow a LOT from Hotel Thief.

Some developments in the book which I very much enjoyed: the extreme cuteness of Sammy and Casey, Sammy's pondering of why Heather hates her, the relationship Sammy has with Sergeant Borsch, the hinted at Marisa/Billy, and how YOUNG they all seem now. I realize that I still have friends that are Casey's age, and I can barely imagine them doing all of the things that Sammy and Casey do (not like that. But sneaking into graveyards and walking around by themselves at night, etc. etc.).

Another thing I love about this series is the random knowledge that Van Draanen crams into her books. For example, how many kids do you think know about eminent domain? Everyone that read SKAT Dead Giveaway does. The different death customs and how many holidays there are around November 1st were fascinating.

So though I am almost positive I will be done with college by the time Sammy is done with 8th grade, I'm still very excited to come back to Santa Martina and see what shenanigans Sammy has gotten herself into

this time.

Lydia says

I am almost positive I have read this before...And the second time through was just as captivating and enjoyable as the first time through.

Melissa McShane says

It still amazes me that a series written for the juvenile/young adult audience appeals so much to me, and I don't think it's because I'm a juvenile reader. Sammy continues to grow in intelligence and maturity, and the world of this series continues to expand as new characters enter and old ones return. This volume deals with death and how different cultures deal with it, from those of the United States to Mexico and to earlier Native American cultures (the title comes from an unusual and little-known tradition of one of these). The book manages to explore death rites and perspectives from religious and secular traditions without saying that one is the "true" answer, and I think it's a good book for young people who might not yet have a handle on what they feel about death.

With this book, the series has come full circle through the holidays and started over. My kids are convinced the holiday themes will still be a pattern; I'm still getting used to the fact that the series didn't end when Sammy finished seventh grade, so I'm happy for whatever comes next. Surprisingly, I'm also happy to know that the series will end after the 18th book, because I can't see it maintaining its charm with Sammy in high school. It's sad to see the end in sight, but that's better than being blindsided by it.

(Isn't it wonderful when you get a new book and have to wrestle two children to have a shot at it? It's thanks to the persistence of my youngest that we have it at all.)

Brett says

I know I've said it in every review of books in this series so far, but I just can't say it often enough: Sammy Keyes (along with Michael D. Beil's Red Blazer Girls) is my all-time favorite mystery-solving protagonist. Nancy Drew wishes she could be like tough, smart Sammy when she grows up. But she'll just never be as cool.

Sammy is looking forward to a better Halloween than last year: she's dressing up, going trick-or-treating with her great group of friends old & new (& her more-than-friend, Casey) & has only one requirement for the night: no dead bodies this time. But the gang's shortcut through an old graveyard on their way to a haunted house turns out to be more than just a quick thrill: a kid is being chased by what appears to be a vampire, & his dropped bag turns out to contain a couple of really realistic-looking human skulls. Of course, in spite of having to deal with the hatred of not only Casey's sister Heather but his mom, too, while trying to help bff Marissa through her ill-fated crush on a sleazeball, Sammy can't leave these mysterious occurrences alone, & soon she's on the case, along with the reluctant help of her friends - including Officer Borsch.

Michele Wen says

I absolutely loved this book. It was always a cliff hanger and I never wanted to put the book down. Personally, I love every book of the series. Every book has it's own amazing story that I cant ever seem to get enough of. 5 stars is not enough for this book. In this book, Sammy Keyes, the main character, gets her and her friends into a bunch of trouble again. They go trick or treating and decide to go through the graveyard for a shortcut. But her and her friends run into some trouble on their way out of the graveyard. Later on, they find out about missing people and one of the them happens to be Sammy's friend. Sammy starts to investigate it with her friends and they get themselves in so much danger without realizing it. I wont ruin the ending for anybody, but it's such an awesome book. I definitely recommend this book and every book in the series :)

Pooja Dimba says

I used to really love this book series. I used to think that it was the best book ever written in the whole entire world.

I guess I don't think that anymore.

The first problem I had with this book was the constant mention of death. It was just creepy and weird. The mystery in this book was also really unrealistic. I've never heard of a group of teenagers who stop murderers. Also, unlike Sammy's grandma, I know my grandma would freak out and tell me I shouldn't go anywhere near a graveyard again, instead of having a lovely picnic there like in the book. I found a lot of characters really annoying. I used to find Casey really sweet and cool, but now I just find him cheesy and stupid. To be honest, I think Casey has always been that way. I also found Marissa to be a bit shallow. One minute she's head over heels for Danny, but as soon as she finds out that Billy likes her, she automatically stops liking Danny. Even though Dot was not at all really in this book, I found her to be the most realistic. And as for the conflict between Heather and Sammy, it's getting old. Their problems just seem really juvenile and unrealistic.

Overall, this book was entertaining, but I guess I'm not a huge fan anymore.

Yuseyz says

This latest Sammy Keyes mystery is a great one for any mystery fan. It has suspense, life threatening situations, and (As you can see from the title) a couple of skulls. In her latest adventure, Sammy spends a lot of time in the graveyard with her friends, and a little to much times with the dead. She discovers people that are put in tombs... before they are dead. She strains her relationship with Casey after turning over his old friend. Heather fights to remain Queen at school while Casey tries to keep a relationship with Sammy. They have to find a place to meet without being caught and still have fun. They do.... in the graveyard. The only people that can catch them there are the dead.... and a few unwelcome guests - who bring more dead.

Melissa says

I'm never disappointed when I read a Sammy Keyes novel! She is certainly one of the best teen detectives out there, and I have to admit I like her a lot more than Nancy Drew. She's relatable, funny, witty, spunky, and definitely fearless. Not to mention that her little romance with Casey Acosta is one of the cutest young-adult book romances ever. Her friends are great, especially the humorous Billy Pratt and her loyal friends Marissa and Holly. And I love how easily Sammy handles teen drama with Heather Acosta and the world of adult crime at the same time. There's always a deeper lesson to learn in each installment, too, which I admire.

It's Halloween, and Sammy and her friends cut through a graveyard at night. At first, it's just a little harmless fun, when a man surprises them by leaving them his sack - which they later discover is filled with skulls. Of course, this isn't even the main plot, this is only the beginning. The skulls lead Sammy to discover the Day of the Dead, and the Mexican tradition of celebrating their deceased loved ones. But while they investigate the skulls, Sammy, Casey, and Billy stumble upon a few new discoveries that lead to a greater ring of crime and deception. Sammy puts on her thinking cap and beings unraveling mystery after mystery, all while juggling her love life, girl drama, and questions about death.

I really liked how Officer Borsch has become sort of a father figure in Sammy's life, and that he genuinely cares for her. I love Hudson - he's the coolest old guy ever. And Grams is as sweet and funny as usual. It's always funny how Sammy names her unknown suspects - Vampire, Shovel Man, and El Zarape. It was also interesting to see Sammy's point of view on death, dying, burial, and how she felt about it. It was great to see her go from being wary about graveyards and death to embracing life and being more comfortable with it.

I love Sammy Keyes.

Rebecca McNutt says

I hadn't read any books in the *Sammy Keyes* series before this one, but I'm glad I did, because this story was surprisingly gripping and intriguing for middle grad fiction.
