



The Jungle

Pooja Puri

Ink Road (Sep 1, 2018)

Softcover \$12.99 (224pp)

978-1-78530-088-2

In Calais, France, there is a horrifying encampment known as The Jungle that teems with people who've who fled wars and violence. Faced with overcrowding, police brutality, and political ennui, their dreams slowly fester. Residents swing between apathy and frantic attempts to escape—anything to alleviate the unrelenting wait. There are only three real ways out: the help of a lone pro-bono lawyer, the nefarious human traffickers known as the Ghost Men, and death. Faced with these options, Mico turns to stealing.

Pooja Puri's young adult novel, *The Jungle*, follows Mico's exploits. He's a Kenyan teenager sent by his family to seek a better life in England after civil unrest destroys their poultry farm. Out of money and unable to cross the channel, Mico shares a tent and forges a fragile peace in The Jungle. He repairs stolen bikes for a camp gang when he's not queuing for basic needs or avoiding the Ghost Men's ire. But all of that changes when Leila arrives.

Mico and Leila are the novel's heart, and their connection shows that strong bonds aren't reserved for romances. Leila is bold where Mico is hesitant, assertive where he's observational. Their reluctant relationship is magnetic, subverting cultural and gendered expectations as they repel and spin each other around. Accomplices and scamps, they're a delight in the midst of dire heartbreak.

A vivid depiction of the lengths that people will go to in order to survive, *The Jungle* is impressive, appalling, and entertaining, bringing to life the realities of people like Mico and Leila. It is the perfect introduction to a heavy topic.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (November/December 2018)

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