

How should I handle a book that has a dark theme?

Q: I'm a new author who published a young adult book that has received one award nomination, a few endorsement quotes, and some good and bad reviews. The story is set in the Balkans and may have disturbed some reviewers because of its dark moments, but I think these are part of the book's strength. How would you suggest handling future books of this type to get a better response?

I think getting endorsement quotes in advance, as you've done, is good for a book that has dark or complex themes. These can come from authors and could also, in a book that addresses current affairs, come from journalists. In the future, you may also want to ask the publisher to include an author's letter with the books they send out to the consumer media explaining what inspired the story. This would not be appropriate for review journals, like *School Library Journal* and *Booklist*, but might be helpful with others. You could also furnish the latest current statistics or news articles on the foreign country or information on a current event for a book with a contemporary setting. If the book is set in the past, you may want to provide an historical overview. These can help provide a context for your story.

Beyond that, it's important to keep in mind that a controversial book is likely to generate mixed reviews, especially when its for children. But, if a book is good, it can provide young readers with important information. Hopefully, you'll continue to find publishers willing to take the risk. 11:12/99