



Johnny Come Home

Jake Arnott

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It is London and the year 1972. A charismatic anarchist called O'Connell dies of an overdose, leaving his artist boyfriend, Pearson, and fellow activist Nina in shock. It also leaves a spare room in their squat. So Pearson moves in Sweet Thing, a streetwise yet vulnerable young rent boy he initially picks up but then tries to help. Pearson isn't the only one who's interested though - glam rock star Johnny Chrome is on the brink of a breakdown and is convinced that Sweet Thing is the only one who can bring him back. As Sweet Thing gets drawn further into Johnny Chrome's dangerous orbit, Pearson and Nina discover that O'Connell was not all he seemed. In this tautly paced, highly evocative novel Jake Arnott once again combines brilliant storytelling with a flawless portrait of a changing era, when the optimism of the 60s was giving way to the anger and bombs of the early 70s.

Johnny Come Home Details

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From Reader Review Johnny Come Home for online ebook

Richbern says

3.5 stars.

As the idealism of the 60s turns into the despair of the 70s, three lost souls search for meaning in their lives. The author is an acute observer of detail, and delivers an incisive view of England's downward spiral in the early 70s. His writing is remarkably unadorned, with the directness giving it a greater power. And while there were some definite flaws in the plotting, overall it was a worthwhile read.

Laura says

This reads like an arch parody of those New English Library paperbacks of the 1970s (think 'Skinhead'), and perhaps that's what it's supposed to be. Unfortunately, Jake Arnott is no Richard Allen. The writing is desperately poor, spattered with cliché and the kind of pasted-on research that no decent historical novelist would ever flaunt: 'Glam rock, they were calling it. It had started about the time that the Angry Brigade had bombed the Biba boutique in May 1971.' The characterisations are risible (a teenage rent boy called Sweet Thing...Velvet Goldmine eat your glittery heart out), the reconstructions of 'alternative' political thought laughably naïve. Arnott is hopeless at female characters, but his 'Women's Libbers' here are even less convincing than the singers and molls who populate his crime fiction. The representation of female orgasm...oh dear. As for the versions of Jonathan King ('Tony Rocco', would you believe?) and Tam Paton ('Kenny Morton') on display at the Teenscene Club in Chapter 26, words fail me.

Is this a first novel that lived in Arnott's bottom drawer until his rather better effort, *The Long Firm*, had won him a measure of fame and literary respect, and allowed him to clear his clutter? Or is it the 'difficult fourth novel', a rusty and holed bucket dropped into an ever-drier imaginative well? No wonder he changed historical tack with the much better 'The Devil's Paintbrush'. The only good thing about 'Johnny Come Home' is that I bought it for £1.50 in Oxfam, and was thus able to make a donation to a good cause. I then passed it to Age UK, so if you buy it, you'll have done a good deed too. Don't be too charitable towards the book though. I had to listen to 'Hear Come The Warm Jets' for hours until I felt better.

Alex says

Brilliant. Set over one week in the English summer of 1972 (about six weeks before I was born), this novel which is ostensibly a "crime" novel, examines deeper issues of radical politics, gender, terrorism, political commitment, mental illness, homosexuality, drug abuse, lesbianism, betrayal, fame, and of course glam rock.

Tosh says

At last! The first 70's glam rock novel. And by the wonderful London observer and stickler to details - Jake Arnott. Like Arnott's great London 60's crime novel "The Long Firm," "Johnny Come Home" takes an intense look into the music scene of London's glitter era. Johnny, is sort of based on Gary Glitter - but I don't think it is actually him, just image wise. But the narrative deals with a gay couple involved in radical politics

as well as a woman who is in that world as well as getting involved with a glam-struck rent boy, who is basically supported by the Gary Glitter character.

The novel is pulpy, but it is also a great snapshot of London culture and Arnott has a great feel for that time and the Capital's damaged citizens. Essential rock n' roll read.

Agnese says

A book about human fragility and the need of authenticity. A fresh look at the 70s that tries to capture the ideals that stirred that period and the previous decade, starting to break with the current mentality and conventions and opening the way in good and bad to a new age. Beautiful prose whose rhythm reflects the fluid unfolding of the events and sustains the currents of thoughts and feelings of the protagonists.

Jak says

Sometimes people only have one book in them, and sadly that appears to be the case with Jake Arnott. "The Long Firm" was excellent but it's been steadily downhill since then.

Johnny Come Home is sent on the Glam era of the 70's and three main characters a young male prostitute (Sweet Thing), a feminist lesbian (Nina) and a gay art student (Pearson). The story also includes an aging pop star (Johnny Chrome) trying to recapture his former glory by re-launching himself as a glam rock star and a copper (Walker) engaged in countering the counter culture movement.

Of these, only Walker really came across as anyway interesting or vaguely believable. In particular Pearson's sudden change as a character seemed way out of left field.

The plot itself was pretty tattered and not in anyway engrossing.

I'm not particularly moralistic about sex in books but the sex in this seems gratuitous and served no real purpose. I get the feeling that Arnott's publishers noticed he declined in sales since the Long Firm and told him to 'spice things up a bit'. But Arnott overplayed the hand and made it uncomfortable reading.

All in all a poor book I wouldn't recommend.

Jayne Charles says

This felt like a slice cut out from the middle of a longer story. I found myself wondering more about what went before it and what would come after, than engaging with the plot we were presented with. That said, it was - like all the author's other works - a well written story with a strong sense of its time and place. In this case, it was the hippie/glam rock scene of early 1970s London, but these weren't just pot-smoking open-toed sandal wearing hippies, these hippies were quite angry.

There were interesting insights into the mundane workaday stuff that goes into creating the persona of a pop

star, and quite a lot of exploration of different sexual orientations, much of it centring on rent boy 'Sweet Thing' ("Car for Mr Thing" brilliant, brilliant).

I found the whole thing considerably more straightforward and conventional in format than his other work, but perhaps a consequence of that was you don't hit quite as many literary highs along the way.

David Lowther says

I found this a difficult read. I've read three previous novels by Jake Arnott, the best of which by some distance, was *The Long Firm*.

As with that novel, and *He Kills Coppers*, the author takes a real story and turns the events into fiction.

His target in *Johnny Comes Home*, is the sex, drugs and rock n'roll era of the seventies and he does a mighty good job of painting a grim picture of that depresssing decade. He does, however, treat the characters with a good deal of sympathy and left me thinking that the wretched characters are more victims of the times in which they lived rather than any shortcomings of their own.

As always, Arnott's dialogue and characterisation are convincing but my overall feeling was thank god for a decade gone by. No nostalgia trip this time.

David Lowther. Author of *The Blue Pencil* (www.thebluepencil.co.uk)

randy says

This is a book wholly concerned with release. And naturally, the characters are all at odds with how to exactly achieve that in damn near every avenue of their lives. This is a compelling portrait of six people flailing about trying to make sense of the urgency of the early 70s, which has woken up to a type of nihilism that seemed repressed by the naivety and utopian dreams of the 60s.

Every action that takes place within can only be seen through the prism of the suicide that takes place on the second page. Even though all the characters do not have direct dealings with O'Connell, the deceased, their every thought and movement seem to seep out of the storm his death brings, they all have to navigate through the debris field of a life exploded well before its expiration date. Arnott captures O'Connell's life amazingly effectively though only memory and the single act of his taking his own life. It is the other characters, the ones that actually breathe, that while mostly actualized, seem to exist in a stasis of looking for any kind of release that makes up this novel.

From prior reviews, I was expecting some graphic sex as the living beings floundered around seeking a release into purpose. Alas, where there is indeed sex throughout the novel, it is far from graphic, unless, I guess, you think gay sex is graphic by nature.

Amazingly, Nina, the only fleshed out female character, does indeed seem to finally fall into herself through sex, only she instantly sublimates her pleasure for a cause, a cause she does not even wholly support.

Needless to say, the releases everyone is looking for, and that all find - at least momentarily, are explosive and shatters lives. The happy endings in falling into their release are not to be found here.

Arnott chronicles this age far too well for his years, for something he witnessed only through the eyes of a school boy. I was unfamiliar with him before, but he is now on my radar for the future. Though, I would be far more interested in a less tragic novel, but as he makes succinctly clear, this was a tragic time and those who lived there could do nothing less than inherit the tragedy.

Rue Baldry says

Absorbing & compelling. Graphic descriptions of gay, lesbian and het sex. Glam rock, rentboys, the Angry Brigade, Gay and Women's Lib, London, squatting, art and fragments of Bowie's lyrics hidden like Easter eggs in the paragraphs.

I wish I had read this before *The Long Firm*, because then I wouldn't have been distracted by noticing similar shapes to the relationships and similarities in characters, but if anything I think I enjoyed this one more.

It would have been five stars, but the ending was weak and the POVs shifted inconsistently without warning. Totally engaged by the characters, plot and setting, though.

Biba, the rise of the IRA, Blake, a women's commune, Bolan, Top of the Pops, gelignite, re-rewriting the bible, dope, mandies, speed, heroin...

Diane Louis says

This was a very disappointing read from what I thought, upon reading the first of his books that I had tried, was a very promising author. *The Long Firm* was an outstanding read, and Jake Arnott was all set to be one of my favourites. The next book by him that I read was a total disappointment, and this was no better - a ridiculous premise and flat, one-dimensional characters. If you read anything by Jake Arnott, make it *The Long Firm*. I wouldn't bother with any of the others.

Alex Bleach says

A really solid read. Disappointing ending, but the characterisation carries the books shortcomings.

Larry-bob Roberts says

Jack Arnott writes historical fiction, but not of the frilly lace 18th century variety. He writes about recent historical eras of the 20th century.

The setting for the book is the early 70s in England and he combines two different subcultures - glam rock and the Angry Brigade, a Weather Underground-like group of bombers. Like another of his books, *The Long*

Firm (which is set a decade earlier in the milieu of British gangsters) the focal characters are queer. There's a burned-out artist who has recently lost his lover to an overdose, a bi-dyke alienated by separatist politics, and a glam rent boy who has a would-be glam rock star as a client.

James Lark says

This is almost like discovering a novelisation of all of David Bowie's early 70s albums rolled into one. It's The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars that gets an actual name check, and the campy glam and optimism of that album gives the book its sparkle - but the politics, particularly the dark glimpses of the 70s yet to come, call to mind the Orwellian nightmare of Diamond Dogs.

Not that the explicit nods to Bowie get in the way of this novel's own sense of purpose and drive; what they do provide is a sense of real authenticity, that this is a story about the people who inspired and were inspired by those albums, who lived and breathed the hopes, fears, politics and philosophies they ran alongside. Each of the characters in this book is a sort of cypher - representing corporations, consumerism, dying hippy freedom, the spirit of the new age and so on - so it's entirely appropriate that their words and actions occasionally collide giddily with the pop culture of the age (and indeed that pop culture is one of the narrative strands).

But they are also fully formed characters in their own right, who without exception Arnott manages to imbue with empathy and complexity. I found myself thoroughly drawn into their world, living their highs and lows with them, as they hurtle towards an uncertain and exciting climax.

It's a stylish, eloquent and actually rather sweet natured book, a snapshot of a moment in time that manages to be both symbolic and considerably more than that. A very easy read and a very rewarding one - highly recommended.

ManOhMan says

Reviewed by Jamie: If the cover and the blurb alone doesn't get your salivating over this book, then the quote from glam rock icon David Bowie should - "Whenever he's got a new book out I drop everything."

Arnott writes with fluid grace, a lot of drama, and bittersweet imagination.

This is not a romance story by any means, this is gritty and real. But in the midst of potentially dangerous situations, romance blossoms where it's least expected.

After his boyfriend's suicide, Pearson, a quiet social activist in London, is disheartened and lonely. He finds a streetwise rent boy, nicknamed Sweet Thing, and takes him home.

Except nothing goes according to plan for Pearson. Sweet Thing is already busy being at the beckoned call of an aging rock star, Johnny Chrome, to be bothered with Pearson. Then the double whammy of Sweet Thing starting a relationship with Pearson's female -and supposedly- lesbian housemate, Nina, really knocks him.

This sets Pearson off on a revenge plot, while Nina and Sweet Thing try to define themselves as man and

woman, gay or straight or both....or possibly just human.

'Johnny Come Home' is a whirlwind, a real emotional twister.

I would warn that, if you're used to happy endings, you may get an unwelcome surprise by the somewhat abrupt ending of this book. When the ending came for me, I was left breathing deeply, and wishing it could have gone on for another book!

Love it or not, this is not a story to miss in your reading library.

A?

<http://manohmanreviews.blogspot.com/2...>
