



The Ridge

Carmen-Shea Hepburn

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Set in Amanzimtoti, South Africa, the story follows Wayne du Preez as he starts his matric. Completing his final year of high school won't be his only problem, however, when a boy from his childhood makes a surprise reappearance in small town Toti, throwing Wayne's picket-fence dreams with girlfriend Jess into a tailspin and forcing him to deal with a part of himself he's been denying ever since he shared his first kiss with Kyle way back when.

The Ridge Details

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Download and Read Free Online The Ridge Carmen-Shea Hepburn

From Reader Review The Ridge for online ebook

abi says

I absolutely adored this book! What a wonderful, enthralling debut that captures teen angst and the weight and confusion of romantic inclinations and identity.

Amanzimtoti: The Ridge follows Wayne du Preez, as he starts his last year of high school with his best friend Travis and his girlfriend Jess, and is confronted by the sudden and unexpected reappearance of his childhood best friend, which leaves him with him exploring an unhealthy inner turmoil of feelings.

Once I got a few chapters into this book, I found it incredibly hard to put down. I was completely sucked in by Wayne's internal conflict vs. Kyle's persistence of a relationship of any form vs. Jessica's unwavering dedication and kindness. I honestly loved every single character and the relationships and dynamic built between all of them.

I loved that this book used South African slang. This, coupled with the luscious descriptions of the landscape, made me truly picture the surroundings and the lives that these teens led. I also really appreciated that there was a glossary of these terms at the back of the book, so even if you had no knowledge of South African slang, you could still understand what these characters were saying, and be further immersed in the authenticity that Carmen-Shea Hepburn was trying to create. The use of this slang also added to the character of these teenagers, and helped greatly in truly believing that there were actually teenagers, and added to the honesty and realism of all of them.

One of the most important parts of the books was of course the budding, and oftentimes fraught, relationship between Wayne & Kyle. I loved the slow burn of the relationship, and the longing and meaningful glances between them, however I equally couldn't wait for them to get together. It is a hard task to create a love triangle and have readers care about both relationships involved (in this case, Wayne-Jessica and Wayne-Kyle) however I believe Carmen-Shea Hepburn has mostly achieved this (I'm still rooting more for Wayne & Kyle but Jessica is so incredibly sweet that I want the best for her too). It is also a testament to how good of a writer Hepburn is, that she was able to make me understand both Wayne's and Kyle's viewpoints. Both of them have experienced homophobia due to the nature of their relationship, but still this doesn't want to fully stop them.

Yes, Wayne blames Kyle for the kisses.

Yes, that definitely isn't nice of him.

But yes, I can completely understand it. This is a boy who is incredibly scared of allowing himself to have feelings for Kyle. It could jeopardise everything for him, and from the glimpses we've seen of his family, they'd make his life absolutely miserable if they thought anything was going on. He's trying to protect himself and those around him, but that doesn't mean he doesn't want Kyle. The struggle that Wayne has between his heart and his head is nice to see, and it's going to be interesting to see this further explored in the second book. Again, the fact I feel for Wayne, who's just trying to protect people, and for Kyle, who knows what he wants (and knows that Wayne wants it too) and is unwilling to settle for anything else, is an indicator of how excellently Hepburn has built this universe with these characters in this setting.

Kyle, to me, never seemed like a bad guy, even though it was obvious that he was actively pursuing Wayne. I did feel bad for Jessica, but I also felt as though the relationship between Wayne and Kyle was unstoppable. Even though we did see Wayne blame Kyle for the kisses, and act like he was just reacting to anything Kyle did, and though he was almost an unwilling participant, he did invite these things. Again, Wayne wants Kyle

but is just afraid of what it could mean, and it is wonderful to see this intense struggle of wants explored.

I do love that Wayne is essentially what people may class as a jock, but he's also incredibly sensitive, finds it hard to make friends, and has deep secrets – he's absolutely not a two-dimensional character.

In fact, none of the characters in this book are two-dimensional, especially Travis and his conflict between loyalty to his sister and loyalty to his best friend, and how he struggles to handle this later on in the book. Even the side characters that we see, such as members of the rugby team, and the popular girls, are all shown to be different to the main characters. Even though this book very much centers on four people, there is a definite change in dialogue and personality of every single character, even when there is minimal dialogue for side characters compared to Wayne, Jessica, Travis, and Kyle.

Personally, probably the only downside of this book is that for me, too much time was dedicated to Wayne's internalised homophobia and self-harm and anxiety issues. I understand that this is incredibly important, and I loved that it was in the book, but I believe we saw one too many instances of it, and as a reader it made me slightly uncomfortable. I did not count the number of instances this happened in the book, however it starts in one of the first few chapters, when Wayne sees Kyle again for the first time in eight years, and near the very end of the book too, and is a major theme throughout. Intentional self-harm (plus a case of accidental self-harm) happens a lot, and is the most important coping mechanism in this book for Wayne. When you consider that this book is full of angst, you can imagine that he will turn to this a lot, however I do still think that the amount of times we did this happen was a little too much, and some of the cases could have gone unspoken but implied. This would have still achieved the exact same message, but again, it is incredibly important to see these issues discussed and described, especially in the case of teenage boys.

Another minor point that I didn't really enjoy was when Kyle insinuated that Wayne (view spoiler) I'm glad that Wayne came to the conclusion that Kyle was wrong, but it still seemed like a weird almost sub-plot to me.

The ending frustrated me beyond belief, but only because I wanted to know what happened next. The abrupt ending offered me no satisfaction, but knowing that there is a second book coming, that is going to hopefully further explore the relationship between Wayne and Kyle, is comforting.

Overall, this book left me feeling ecstatic in places, angry in others, and incredibly dejected too. This book is slightly rife with angst, so of course there are going to be down moments, but there is also light and comedy in it too.

I am truly excited to read the second book and how this story develops, and I couldn't recommend this book highly enough. Please, if you enjoy LGBTQ+ romance, meaningful teen drama, or simply want to immerse yourself in a different culture, read this book!

Sophia says

“He didn’t think he’d ever felt this terrified. This exposed and vulnerable.”

When I received an ARC from the author I was beyond excited to start reading, because the plot summary on

Goodreads just grabbed me. **I needed to read this.** And read it I did...in one sitting. My emotions for this book are hard to put into words, because it swept me up in a way I wasn't expecting.

Whenever I read YA contemporaries, I know I'll either get the cute boy meets girl scenario or the more serious coming of age story; throw in some humor here and there. And I love those stories! They are refreshing! But THIS blew me away entirely, because Carmen-Shea Hepburn has provided us with **a story that we don't see enough in YA literature!**

Amanzimtoti: The Ridge is a book that everybody should read. I've seen many movies addressing **LGBT issues**, but this was my first experience reading a work of fiction surrounding this topic. Hepburn's debut novel is a **coming of age story that addresses the conflict of accepting one's true self**. It conveys a message about both emotional and physical pain and the power it can have over you. There's a very **serious tone**. The book also deals with racism, self harm and domestic abuse, so it could be triggering for some. Nevertheless, it is **a reflection of real situations**.

The center of the story is Wayne du Preez, a 17 year old boy living in South Africa, who must come to terms with his past and now his present. When the boy he shared a kiss with at age 9 comes back to town, Wayne questions everything about himself. He isn't "like that". He isn't like Kyle...or is he? Much of what happens in the novel happens in Wayne's head. **We see things through his eyes.** We feel his pain, perceive his inner turmoil and are fully aware of his denial. In fact, the word "gay" only comes up two or three times! It isn't a word that Wayne wants to think, hear or say out loud. His upbringing and culture has led him to believe that homosexuality is a sin, so every justification for his denial is based on that indoctrination.

I felt for Wayne. His struggle made me want to reach out and just say "it's ok" with all the sincerity in the world. As the reader and knowing exactly what was going on in his mind, I myself struggled with the inability to do anything. This is what happens when I get overly attached to fictional characters. However, it also occurred to me that Wayne's inner turmoil isn't fiction, because it's relatable.

Everyone is afraid. But not everyone has a support system to tell them it's ok to be themselves, to love themselves and that they are loved no matter what. I have so much love for Jessica, Travis and Wayne's friendship trio. There is so much trust between them despite Wayne's withholding of information. They accept his silence. I also loved Ms. Vector for this reason. She provides him with the unspoken support and kindness he doesn't get from his family.

The only thing that confused me at first was how absent all the parents were. (view spoiler) But then I realized that Wayne's distant relationship with his family explains why there is such little interaction. He feels unwanted, unworthy and disconnected.

Lastly, as frustrating as the ending was (aaah a cliffhanger), it followed a turning point that was defining of how the sequel could play out. (view spoiler)**People are only as alone as they want to be.**

I recommend Amanzimtoti: The Ridge to everyone. It made me think and reflect. What Carmen-Shea has created is truly wonderful and I hope that you readers enjoy it as much as I did. This story will stay with me for a long time.

{Afterthought: **need.sequel.now.**}

Tex Reader says

3.0 of 5 stars – Good Gay YA At Start, But No Development.

[Thanks to the author for a free copy via Goodreads' YA LGBT group in exchange for an honest review]

I love various gay genres, including YA romance, and this was an enjoyable enough read; yet it still left me wanting more (so it was not a standalone).

Carmen-Shea Hepburn's style was straightforward, easy-to-read and descriptive of the setting, which I enjoyed travelling to via her book. For example, there were nice descriptions of all the experiences at the beach, which I myself love; and this made me feel I was there. As did the Africaan feel and terms, which were nicely aided by a glossary. I also appreciated some of the more serious, psychological tone.

The story was told in the third-person POV of Wayne, and Hepburn did a fairly good job of depicting what teenagers say, think and feel. Wayne's (view spoiler) was uncomfortable but done well to be consistent with the context (view spoiler). I appreciated the mixed race diversity in the characters, and thought the neighboring brother and sister, Travis and Wayne's girlfriend Jessica, were well drawn and seemed to be true to how teenagers interact.

There were, however, two main aspects that bothered me – the angst and the ending. The plot and tension drew me in at the start, and I was impressed with how well Hepburn had written Wayne's angst over Kyle's return – it was typically dramatic, but not yet over the top, based on a bit of real emotions. With more of the same, at halfway I thought, okay, let's get beyond this and see something develop. At three-fourths in, I was losing patience, tired of hearing about it, and waiting for Wayne to "snap out of it." Finally, the end disappointed and let me down because the main issues were still in the same place as at the start – the angst didn't have to be fully resolved, but there was no development, maturity or even understanding by Wayne. Just as my explanation here of my angst over the angst is drawn out, so was Wayne's.

So by the end, I knew more about it, but that didn't make up for being drawn in for the whole book only to be left hanging without even a nibble of satisfaction. I am often okay with loose ends, but not this one. I understood there were psychological issues and those can be tough to manage, but I felt there should have been some progress without having to wait for book 2. I even wondered if it was drawn out just to make two books.

So this started off well, but gradually didn't end up so much so.

Carmen-Shea Hepburn says

Amanzimtoti is a story that has been with me for what feels like half a lifetime, dogging my dreams and waking hours for years before I finally decided to put pen to paper and tell the story of a young man struggling to accept a sexual orientation he's spent his entire life believing was wrong.

It's always nerve-wracking to share something that is so deeply personal, and means so very much to you as an author, with the rest of the world; opening yourself to critique and judgement from a sea of faceless strangers. But I can honestly say, as terrifyingly exposing as it's been, it's also been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life!

After a tumultuous year spent living and travelling around four separate countries, I'm finally shelving book one and excitedly preparing to share book two with you all.

So if you haven't already, but intend to read the next book in the series, please add Inyoni Rocks to your goodreads shelves!

For series information, more specific novel release dates, free copies, extras and the occasional goodie, please check out my website: carmenshea.co.uk and consider subscribing to my Newsletter.

Thank you to everyone who's made this journey worth it, and to everyone who will continue to make this whole experience worthwhile.

--Carmen-Shea

PS. 'Ask the Author' has now been enabled for anyone who has questions about this story/series.

Jennifer Oliveira says

review of a received advanced copy

Wayne is about to start his matric year, which I think is equivalent to the senior year or last year of highschool, alongside his girlfriend Jessica and her twin brother, his best friend, Travis. On the first day of school a new boy arrives in town, Kyle aka his childhood friend and the boy who had kissed him all those years ago. Of course, this arrival is bound to interfere with what he had planned for his last year before everything changes.

Wayne lives in Amanzimtoti, a coastal town in South Africa, and the first things that made me really interested and curious when I started reading this book were the differences in vocabulary, the slang. The book comes with a glossary at the end, but obviously if you're reading this on a Kindle device that isn't so practical, so right at the start the author included a link to her website where there's also a glossary. I became so interested I actually went on youtube to hear some South African youtubers speak so I could better imagine the characters' accents. It might throw you off at first, but bear with it, this new slang is going to grow on you quickly.

Now, even though the blurb might suggest it, this is not a high school drama and this is definitely not a romantic comedy. This is a very complex, heavy, deep, hit-you-across-the-face-with-a-baguette-several-times kind of book. The writing is very descriptive, and most of what it describes is the inside of Wayne's head, which is not a good or happy place to be from the moment he sees Kyle is back in town, because Kyle means trouble, because Kyle means having to think about what happened, and kissing other boys is not something that is accepted by his family or by himself.

This is a very psychological book and so it deals with psychological problems, even though they aren't specified. So, for the readers out there that are going through things, here are some of the trigger warnings I remember: panic attacks, self harm, homophobic slur, mentions of violence and alcohol... I will add to this list if I remember other trigger warnings, I know how important these might be for some of you.

Anyway. I really, really enjoyed this book. The overall vibe it gives you is of sadness, and there aren't many

good moments to balance out the sad ones, but I'm not about to take any stars away because of that since this story could only be told this way, it's not a happy story but it's a brilliant story that I totally recommend. It's also not a finished story and I cannot wait (I really can't it makes me so frustrated I really just want to read more and more of this) to read the next book in these series.

In the e-mail the author sent me with the copy of the book she said she wasn't expecting anyone else to love this story as much as she does, and that's normal, our stories are like our babies and we treasure them and feel very attached to them, but a while I might not love this story as much as the author does, I really, really enjoyed it.

Andreja says

The kiss was harder than he was used to, the angle stranger as he tilted his head upwards under the guidance of Kyle's palm, the brush of his stubble a delicious friction against Wayne's bottom lip as he pressed in again and again, unable to get enough of the taste of his mouth.

This book is going to be hard to review, because it deals with the inner workings of a really messed up boy and his inability to face the hard truth he's been avoiding for almost 10 years. I did not expect for this book to be so heavy, for the lack of a better word. When you read the summary you don't expect it and at the beginning I admit I thought he was whiny and immensely overreacting and then you slowly start to realise he is having horrible panic attacks and is dealing with some major anxiety. This book is also trigger heavy, because Wayne is dealing with his problems the only way he thinks is possible, denial and self-harm. His family is horrible beyond fucking reasoning. His only pillar of hope are his best friend and his best friend's sister who also happens to be his girlfriend.

Kyle is more of a tricky character. He probably means well for pushing Wayne out of his comfort zone and out of denial, but he is severely underestimating the gigantic claustrophobic closet where Wayne has been hiding for a while now.

I was also an idiot and I stupidly believed that I will get some resolve by the end of the first book. I really hope the next book comes out as soon as possible.

Nelou Keramati says

***I received a free ARC of this novel in exchange for an honest review.

What an incredibly brave debut! Carmen Shea Hepburn has taken on a subject matter most authors shy away from. This novel in a very rich exploration of the human psyche. It is not a fast-pace, action-packed kind of story. It is contemplative, inquisitive, dark, and brutally honest. It is the story of a young man named Wayne who finds himself thrown into a wild tailspin upon the sudden return of his former best friend, Kyle. A friend he lost. A friend whose return he prayed for. A friend who influenced him to such an extreme extent that his return eight years later made Wayne's perfectly-structured life completely unravel.

I must admit that I had no idea what genre of book I was reading upon picking up this little gem, so I was lulled in by a false sense of security with a serene opening scene, and was pleasantly surprised when a veil of darkness was cast. The author expertly portrays the suffocating grip of self-hate, and the emotional roller-coaster of denial. She casts a giant spotlight on the effects of prejudice on a young child, and how ignorance and violence can rob someone of their true identity.

I found myself exceptionally fond of Kyle as he tried to break down Wayne's walls. Although I appreciated Wayne's twin best-friends, Jessica and Travis, I felt that the hold Kyle had on Wayne was far more powerful than the twins' support system because it was blunt and honest. His words weren't sugar-coated, and he wasn't enabling Kyle's behavior by being too soft with him. I would personally love for the second novel to be told exclusively from Kyle's perspective. To see the other side of things. To enter the psyche of someone exposed to the same circumstances, but who chose not to be molded by it.

This is a story about learned helplessness, friendship, love, lust, fear, belief, and hope. It is a story about the human condition that does not insist on being seen through a particular filter, and I believe everyone will relate to it on a personal level. Some may empathize with the characters, be outraged at the cruelty and injustice, feel frustrated over the protagonist's predicament, or be inclined to judge. But everyone will feel the gravity of the issue at hand, and likely to ask: does our identity belong to us, or to others?

Wonderful debut!

Sandra (LadyGrey Reads) says

2016 Book Awards

(more information about these awards on my blog)

I received a free copy of this book from author Carmen-Shea Hepburn in exchange for an honest review.

Oh.
My.
God.

This book. *This book!* Gods, it f*cked me up.

I wasn't sure what to expect from this book, but I liked the brief summary I got and I was like "yeah, cool, this will be a good book to read after work, just relaxing, an easy read". Boy, was I wrong - and in a good way!

This book follows Wayne, who lives in Amanzimtoti in South Africa with his family. He has a girlfriend, a best friend (who happens to be the twin of the girlfriend), loves to surf, does not enjoy school... sounds like your average feel-good novel, right? And the first chapter or two might make you think that it is. Then all hell breaks lose as Kyle, Wayne's childhood friend, suddenly comes back into his life - and with this arrival, the hell that was his childhood comes back to the surface. **Warning!** If you get triggered by self-harm, homophobia or family abuse, this is not a good book for you. Because there's a lot of it.

The characters feel real, the situations they're in feel real, and I found that I could not just speed read through this book because after every second chapter or so I just had to stop and process what had just happened. And that's what makes it such a good novel; it makes you think. It makes you reflect, it makes you want to go smack something, or cry, or hug someone. Absolutely mind-blowing and superbly awesome.

Bárbara says

-I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review-

The actual rating is 4.3 stars, because I'm an annoying kind of special snowflake and I tend to use the full spectrum, instead of getting to limit myself to the wholes and the .5's. Bear with me.

This book was simply spectacular. Make no mistake, it's not spectacular because it's all sunshine, lollipops and rainbows. It actually wasn't, really. What it was, it's heartbreaking. It was brutal. It was raw and honest and emotional, also more realistic than it should be acceptable for a book to be (who am I kidding? I love it when books are like this).

One of the strongest points of the story (besides the brilliant way in which our author explored Wayne's- our sweet, tormented, innocent main character- mind, which was flawlessly constructed), in my humble opinion, was that the writing is so beautiful that no matter how low the blows, no matter how utterly heart-wrenching the story gets, YOU. SIMPLY. CAN'T. STOP. READING. You're sucked right in from the first sentence and there's no way out but through.

It's THAT kind of story.

Another highlight for me was the way the author writes the dynamics between the characters: I loved the bond between Wayne and the twins, and also how he interacts with Mrs. Vector (and Kyle's Ouma, too: that woman is a gem). I liked how it seemed to stress the fact that, even though SOME adults (namely the parents) were crappy, it's not so much as a rule. This is not a YA-useless-adults kind of novel, and I have SO MUCH RESPECT for that, even if it is a minor detail.

I can honestly be here writing forever and I couldn't exactly give this book all the praise it deserves.

In the email which had the copy attached, the author says she doesn't expect anyone to love the story as much as she does; and I agree, because I understand that you can't really expect anyone else to understand your journey and to value your work when they didn't really have the full experience you did. But I guess that us, as readers, can offer a different kind of love; a love born from recognition and gratitude: recognition because, obviously, we know that writers don't work "for" us, that we are just privileged enough that they decide to share a bit of them with us. And of course, for that, we should feel grateful; because the life of a reader would be nothing without that utter generosity.

To wrap this up and stop boring whomever dared reading this blabber I can't seem to be able to cut, this book was amazing. If I didn't settle on an official, 5-star rating, maybe it was because there were some minor things I wasn't totally sold on: namely, I wasn't entirely "comfortable" with the way Wayne and Jessica's relationship was written sometimes; I felt there were a lot of on-page kisses that I could have gone without. I liked Wayne's dynamics with the twins in general, but I feel there could have been a different approach to that side. Nothing major, though. On the other hand, to avoid ending this in a down note, I was deeply grateful for the way the relationship of Wayne and his father/brother was handled on-page. I feel it would have been much harder to put up with the whole situation if it had been addressed directly rather than through Wayne's words. It was very tastefully done.

Okay, now I'm done, I promise. Bottomline: I adored this story. I know this is not acceptable (ask Patrick

Rothfuss or George R. R. Martin about it) but I just wish we could get news soon about the next book because I SERIOUSLY need to read what's next in store for our poor, sweet boys. I loved this. I want more.

enqi ??? [joon's] says

DISCLAIMER: I received this book on a free read-to-review basis from the author, Carmen-Shea Hepburn. Many thanks to her for giving me the opportunity to read and review her book. This does not in any way affect my review, opinion(s) or final rating.

This book left me a little uneasy.

It's dark, but not dark enough to be truly unsettling. It's raw, but not raw enough to be emotional. I want to applaud Carmen-Shea Hepburn for venturing out of the lines of conventionality and bravely telling a rather unusual, yet beautiful story.

Amanzimtoti: The Ridge tells the story of a South African boy trying to find his identity in a place where homosexuality is viewed as disgusting and wrong. Because of this, he struggles with who he is, and desperately tries to excuse his sexuality and his feelings, even going so far as to avoid hearing the word "gay". It broke my heart to read this book, because I now have a glimpse of what it feels like to deny your own sexuality to yourself your whole life, and what some people are facing simply because they're not heterosexual. I felt for Wayne whenever he had a panic attack or became depressed, and also whenever he displayed his obsessive-compulsive habit of digging his nails into his skin. And I was appalled at the self-harm he inflicted on himself, and the treatment from his family because they thought he was "wrong", and the way he punished himself in the hopes that he "wouldn't be like that". (He couldn't even bring himself to think the words "gay", or "homosexual".)

I wavered between giving this 3 stars or 4 stars. This book felt a little repetitive after a while because of similar descriptions used a lot. I can't count how many times I saw the word "ferrous" or the phrase "(long) line of heat" (that's a legitimate phrase? seriously?). Also, Carmen-Shea Hepburn beats around the bush plenty with her descriptions, or repeats the same thing she said in an earlier sentence but with different words. It was basically just a thousand ways of saying Wayne was attracted to Kyle and felt guilty for it. This started to feel like infodump at times and made me balk for a while until I got used to it. I felt like she could try not to constantly "tell" us about Wayne's feelings for Kyle and try to "show" it to readers instead, letting them infer this conclusion from occurring events.

Guess what saved this book? *The twins*. I loved them to bits. Jessica was so sweet and Travis so loyal. I think without them I'd have given the book 3 stars. But they're a huge plus and such lovely, beautifully written side characters, so I added an extra star.

But I'm writing this review while still in the afterglow of finishing this book, so in time I may bring my review down to 3 stars. We'll see.

This was a good solid book though. If I had had to pay for my copy, I wouldn't say it was a waste of money. It opens the reader's eyes to some societal issues, and the inevitable crisscross of religion and traditional beliefs with LGBT.

Brown Eyed Girl ~Suzanne~ says

3.75 stars

The story spent a lot of time in Wayne's head. It's definitely angsty but I thought it went a bit overboard. I have children the age that Wayne and Kyle were when they first kissed. That seems awfully young. My boys don't have any inclination to kiss anyone, they are still children. I would've believed it more if Wayne was closer to 11 or 12.

I felt bad for Kyle. He got blamed for the first kiss and the the next two! Plus I'm super confused over Wayne's feelings for Jessica. I was a bit nauseous at how much they kissed too! It was too sweet, especially for someone questioning his sexuality.

The parents were non-existent. So many stories I've read have horrible parents that beat their children! So badly that Wayne should've went to the hospital? And what's with his mom doing nothing! When Wayne does something to himself by accident how could he hide that?

I hope the next book centers more on Kyle and Wayne. Travis and Jessica are great friends but I would like more Kyle.

Di says

I received a free copy of this ebook in exchange for an honest review.

Review also available on my Blog: Book Reviews by Di

Firstly some trigger warnings: **Self harm** and **references to child abuse**. Generally I would say this book is for mature audiences only - there is quite a lot of strong language, some violence and also casual use of alcohol and drugs.

Amanzimtoti: The Ridge is a coming-of-age novel centred around Wayne Du Preez who, at the beginning of the book, is about to embark on his final year of high school. The book goes through approximately six months of his life when a boy from his childhood reappears - a boy he with whom he shared his first kiss. This boy has returned to Toti and has brought his childhood memories and his fears with him.

I liked and enjoyed this book and thought it was a very brave and promising debut novel. I truly look forward to reading more from Carmen-Shea Hepburn

As an expat living in Southern Africa next door to South Africa where this book is set, I appreciated the 'local' references and slang but I did find that there was a *lot* of it interspersed throughout the narrative. For an aspiring International book, I would have preferred to have seen the slang more limited to the dialogue.

The actual plot was good and the characterisation was fantastic. I felt a strong connection to Wayne and to his two best friends, Travis and Jessica. I did feel that Wayne's first kiss and the incident that most of this

book is actually centred around happened when he was extremely young (a sexual experience at age 9?) and as thus I found it a little hard to wrap my head around. However beyond this, the characters are complex and believable and one cannot help but be drawn into their world.

While the writing itself was good and easy to read and immerse myself into I did find the detail at times to be too tedious. For example at a braai they were having we are divulged with the fact that Jessica served Wayne up with steak, boerewors *and* chicken. None of this was actually important except maybe for the fact that Jessica actually got the food.

There was also some confusion for me about the time period in which this novel takes place. It is definitely a contemporary setting with all the main characters having cell phones (before they have graduated from high school) so this to me puts the books at least post 2000, however there was also mention of a Hi-Fi at a party with tapes and cds scattered around it. By the late 90s and 2000s it was definitely all cds, even more so for the young adult generations like those we are reading about, and 2001 saw the launch of the iPod which revolutionised the way we listen to music on a global scale. A small and forgivable incongruity, but nevertheless one that stood out for me while reading.

For most of the reasons above I felt like the story only really hits its stride from about 40% into the book, where most of the excess padding is removed and every chapter actually becomes significant, which is why I can only rate this one at 3 stars. The rest of the book however was quite gripping and as I said, I truly look forward to reading more from this author.

Keihi says

*I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Let me be perfectly clear - I did not know what to expect when I opened this book. And it might seem like a hard book to like, because it's not a feel-good reading, but it's heavy, feel-a-lot kind of a story. (Which was, for some reason, unexpected).

I got hooked from the first pages - both because I simply love books with glossaries in them (where else would I get the opportunity to learn some Afrikaans slang?), and because I really enjoyed the writing, which was descriptive and insightful and really good.

And then the trouble rolls in, and the feels kick you right in the face.

Wayne is an incredibly messed up kid, and understandably so. He is horrifically abused by his family - not only for his sexual orientation (doesn't it just set your teeth on edge just thinking, that someone would be enough of a disgusting scum to beat up a 9-year-old kid for kissing a boy? Like, how much of a bastard do you need to be?), but for anything and everything he is that is not up to his father's standard of perfect manhood.

And that, in turn, brings a load of issues with it - self-harm, denial, substance abuse, and, seeing as the whole book is told in Wayne's POV you get real up close and personal with it. This is not a fun place to be.

I want to make a side note here: that cliffhanger was cruel. Also, it's a good thing this is the first book of the series, because a lot of things need to be addressed yet - i.e., the abuse that the twins face, the reason Kyle

suddenly thinks it's okay to try and force Wayne into a situation that nearly got him killed the first time, considering the fact that his circumstances have not changed in any way, etc. Also, I hope that bisexuality is going to be seen as an option here, because either bisexuality or demisexuality seems to be the case here, and Wayne is perceived (by himself and others) as either straight and confused/taken advantage of or gay, and it makes me sad.

And back to track - I really enjoyed the way the reveals were done. You're shown that there's more to this mostly unwelcome return of a childhood friend in careful stages, you kind of start to guess what happened (even if you didn't read the blurb), and then the reveal still swipes the ground from under you with the delivery.

So, to summarize my ranting: this is a very well written debut novel about a very heavy topic, it explores some really dark themes in a (sometimes painfully) honest and relatable way, and I'm really looking forward to the second book.

Chesca says

“He tried to tell himself he didn’t care. ”

Actual rating: 4.5 stars

A copy was kindly provided by the author in exchange for an honest review.

I NEED THE NEXT BOOK NOW!!

The Ridge blew me away. It is such a wonderful debut that has a pure heart in its center. Very lovely and fresh, but also overwhelming, it gave me the feeling of being taken by huge crashing waves and sinking deeper in the waters.

This is the kind of story wherein you want to get inside it to help the protagonist because it's just beautifully frustrating! I WANT TO KICK EVERY OTHER CHARACTER IN THE FACE FOR MAKING LIFE SO MISERABLE FOR WAYNE!!

Wayne's situation is so suffocating, and he is damaged by it. He has a controlling father and older brother who would hit him whenever he doesn't act like how they want him to be. His mom doesn't even know how to support him. We don't even need that woman in the story, in my opinion. I wish she starts getting functional in the next book.

Anyway, because of what he's been through when he was younger, Wayne started to live his life in fear. He also always thinks that, by being true to himself, he is sinning or making mistakes. He sees himself negatively.

Jessica and Travis are Wayne's closest friends. They both treat him as family and they care so much about Wayne. Jessica is a very patient girlfriend, because if I were her, I might have started questioning my boyfriend. I think she's the kind of girl any guy could ask for. Travis is a great friend too. He would never leave Wayne. The twins understand Wayne very much. The two of them make him stand his ground and

stick to his plans when Kyle came back to Toti. They are really great characters and they affect Wayne too much because he doesn't want to hurt them. They are his anchor to what he believes is right. Kyle is a very interesting character. I love him and how he carries himself. I am very excited for how the author would further develop his character, and I wish to see more of him.

The story is slow but I get it. It is due to Wayne's confusion about his life. It's so hard to be caught up in that state wherein you always feel wrong about yourself and what you do. It's emotionally and mentally tiring.

The writing is really good for a debut. What caught my interest more is the Afrikaans vocabulary in it that readers could learn and explore. Included at the back of the book is a glossary of slang.

The only problem I had with the writing is the lack of commas in some sentences. For example: "*Could barely walk he was shaking so hard.*" It could be better if it was written as "Could barely walk, he was shaking so hard" or "He was shaking so hard that he could barely walk." Additional subordinating or coordinating conjunctions would work too, if not the right punctuation marks.

I can't wait for the sequel! I hope that, by the end of this series, Wayne would be brave enough to see things in a different light and change things for himself. I am very excited for Wayne and what he would do.

Do I recommend this? Absolutely! Please do give it a try. It's so worth it.

Teresa says

Title: Amanzimtoti: The Ridge

Author: Carmen-Shea Hepburn

Publisher: Carmen-Shea Hepburn

ISBN: B01CBBGS1U

Buy Link: <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B01C...>

Reviewer: Teresa Fallen Angel

Blurb:

I received a free ARC of this novel in exchange for an honest review.

Amanzimtoti 1

Set in Amanzimtoti, South Africa, the story follows Wayne du Preez as he starts his matric. Completing his final year of high school won't be his only problem, however, when a boy from his childhood makes a surprise reappearance in small town Toti, throwing Wayne's picket-fence dreams with girlfriend Jess into a tailspin and forcing him to deal with a part of himself he's been denying ever since he shared his first kiss with Kyle way back when.

Summary:

The may be the first book in the series, but the emotional drama drew me into the character's lives allowing me to see the world through their eyes, both good and bad. At first glance, Wayne had everything a young adult, but looks can be deceiving. From one action at the age of nine he endured physical and verbal abuse from his family all in the name of love. They thought that beating him would keep him from ever kissing another boy. In a way it did do that, but the emotional and psychological damage was apparent to anyone who looked for it. His family never cared enough beyond making sure he never acted beyond what they considered "normal". That left Wayne isolated until a family moved in with twins who kept after him until

they became best friends. Even after Jessica, one on the twins, became his girlfriend he still had periods of emotional distress because he had to keep his past hidden as his family monitored his every movement. This wonderful story is set in South Africa allowing the reader a glimpse of a world many have never seen. Things spiral out of control when Kyle, the boy he kissed, returns reopening wounds that never truly healed. This story has just begun and I for one will be impatiently waiting for Inyoni Rock, the next book in the Amanzimtoti series!
