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Books of Interest



Posted: Jun 1, 2007 10:09

BE MORE CHILL

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By: Ned Vizzini
Hyperbion Books, 2004 New York
ISBN-0786809965

[Buy from Amazon.com](#)

Reviewed by Janyce Lastman, LL.B.

CAUTION: *This novel is definitely **NOT recommended for preteens, nor suitable for those easily shocked or offended** by language or typical teen behaviors. It contains strong language, sexual content and descriptions of recreational alcohol/substances that often reflect today's teen culture. However, the author ends by rather elegantly delivering a clear moral message about the self-empowerment of making good choices, without coming across as artificial or preachy.*

Jeremy, a decidedly non-cool high school junior who narrates this innovative novel, is obsessed with buying a coveted "squip" off the black market. To raise the cash, he must first steal, then sell off his favorite aunt's prized Beanie Baby collection. For the uninitiated, a squip is a futuristic, pill-size super-computer that, when swallowed, implants itself into its owner's brain and becomes a sort of uber-life-coach. Jeremy's squip goes to work immediately on his most glaring deficits, becoming a high-tech social skills coach and tutor rolled into one. The squip's voice instructs Jeremy in wonderfully pedantic detail, and it is precisely this real time "voice" that teens with NLD will initially connect to so well. The squip tells Jeremy exactly how a teenage boy "should" talk, walk, swear, dress to impress girls, party like there's no tomorrow, and paradoxically, how to charm his teachers, be seen as an ideal student, ace his assignments and fly through his SATs while he's at it.

True to its warranty, the squip is a very good instructor and Jeremy, a highly motivated pupil, is rapidly transformed. Though the squip's voice is always "on" inside his head, Jeremy's rapid learning curve means he relies on it less as he begins to generalize his newfound teen skills. Socially clued in and now looking the part, he quickly leaves his nerdy loyal best friend in the dust for his new best buds. He seeks out the coolest, "baddest" dudes and the hottest girls always

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ready for action. Even better, he's pulling off great grades by studying faster and smarter than he ever thought possible, while working the classroom atmosphere to his advantage.

So life should be beautiful... or is it? Unfortunately, the only thing lacking in this version of the squip prototype, and thus lacking in Jeremy by association, is a sense of social responsibility and moral conscience (apparently this is an option planned for future versions of the squip not yet on the market).

Author Ned Vizzini was still in his teens himself when he began writing teen fiction. He is gifted-NLD and has struggled with mental health issues. Another of his books, *It's Kind of a Funny Story*, is a semi-autobiographical account of battling clinical anxiety and depression plus an OCD-related Eating Disorder, and concurrent psychiatric hospitalizations. In ***Be More Chill*** as in all his books, Vizzini's cleverly understated writing style allows his hero to make the requisite right choices and learn the necessary life lessons - all before the reader really catches on. The shift from a tantalizing read to a pro-social model is subtle yet sudden. Teen readers, especially those with NLD, have no time to back away, but instead are carried along toward the desirable conclusion almost despite themselves.

Visit www.nedvizzini.com for more on this and other novels, which are also suited to older teen readers with NLD. And for more information on the squip, Google it.

NOTE: In the *Extended Insights* section, the author of this book review has an overview article about teens struggling with NLD.

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