

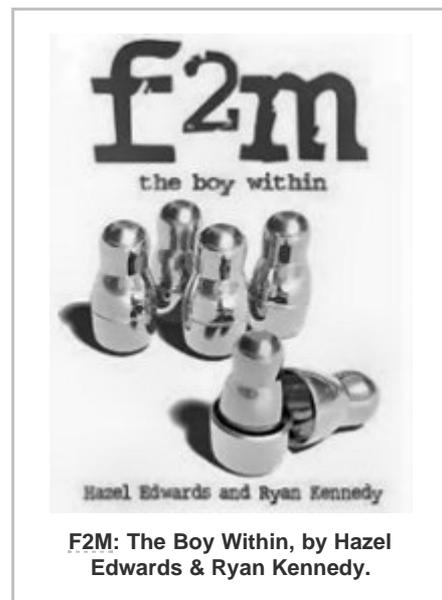
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## Book Review: F2M: the Boy Within

### A Valuable Addition to Teen Literature

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Reviewed by Katherine Cummings



#### F2M: The Boy Within

by Hazel Edwards & Ryan Kennedy  
Published by Ford Street Publishing  
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*Finn soon charmed me into feeling for his distress as his coming-out to his friends is seen as a betrayal of feminism ...*

**S**erendipitously, as we pursue our emphasis on the needs of the young transgendered, we have been lucky enough to receive a review copy of a new teen novel which deals with the progress of a female-to-male teenager coping with growing self-awareness and the pressure to come-out to his friends and family.

Hazel Edwards is a well-known author, and she has collaborated brilliantly with a transgendered friend of many years, Ryan Kennedy, who lives in New Zealand. Ryan transitioned F.T.M. at the age of twenty-seven and his insights as an F.T.M., a musician and an environmentalist strengthen the character of the protagonist, Finn.

We are made aware of Finn's need to be male very early in the book, where he is searching for information on the Internet in order to satisfy his inner knowledge that he is not Skye, as he was christened, and not female. He won my heart with the statement on page 2 that "F.T.M. stands for female-to-male. It's a subset of transgender, which is different to

transsexual, but only to some people."

The book starts with the teen rite of passage, passing the driver's licence test. He is soon blogging his friends with the good news that he is "now licensed to hoon" at which point he nearly lost my approval again.

But despite being a brand of teenager of which I am (happily) ignorant, the kind which is against everything and glories in piercings, ragged clothes and strange make-up (strange, who says it's strange? get a grip, Kate, just because you're old ...) Finn soon charmed me into feeling for his distress as his coming-out to his friends is seen as a betrayal of feminism, and his formerly all-girl punk band, the Chronic Cramps, find his new songs, celebrating his F.T.M. status, confronting.

Luckily for Finn, he is eighteen, and many of the problems which confront transgender people who have not achieved the age of majority do not apply. Finn is able to make medical appointments for himself, without parental intervention, and through the Internet is able to make contact with F.T.M. forums who provide suitable first contacts in the medical profession. There is a puzzling flashback statement which suggests that in whatever country Finn is growing up in, thirteen is the age at which people become adult but I will let that pass.

There are complications in Finn's relationships with his immediate family as his mother pushes him to be more feminine and a mysterious great-uncle Al emerges from photo albums and gradually is limned ever more firmly as a forerunner to Finn in the family F.T.M. stakes.

All in all, Finn's progress from Female to Male is steady and relatively unfraught (would it were always so) and her family eventually support her in practical ways (providing funding) as well as emotional (big brother supportively offering to 'do up' Finn's ancient vehicle).

I have only one cavil from what is otherwise an entertaining and informative book for teenagers, whether they are themselves transgendered or simply questioning. My cavil lies in not knowing where Finn and his family live. At the outset I thought it might be Australia or New Zealand, but then it was suggested that if Finn was prepared to wait he could have his surgery paid for by the State, which sounded like Britain. Certainly it is not the United States.

It doesn't really matter. Hazel and Ryan have not set out to write a manual on 'How to ...' but have included some valuable information and even more valuable attitudes. Finn and his best friend, the fiercely activist feminist lesbian Marla are easy to like and demonstrate strength, honesty and dedication to a goal, all admirable qualities in young people striving to be themselves in the face of ignorance and prejudice.

Like Julie Peters' *Luna*, Edwards and Kennedy's book will help many gender questioning young people to recognise and pursue the

possibility that they can be themselves and emerge into the light from the shadows of prejudice and confusion which have messed with their sense of self for most of their lives.

*F.2.M.: The Boy Within* is a valuable addition to teen literature and should be in every school and public library.

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