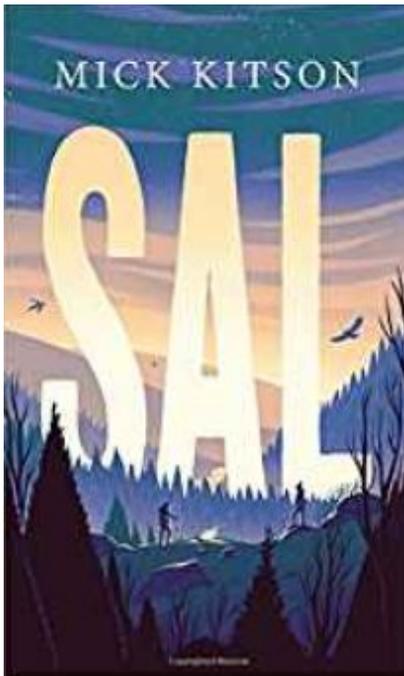


LoveReading Reader reviews of **SAL**

By Mick Kitson

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.



Lindsey Whittle

Brilliant! Read it in one go, couldn't put it down. Will stay with me for a long time. Surviving life, not just how to live in a forest.

You've read the synopsis, so something about this story has already grabbed you; maybe the combination of YouTube and the SAS Handbook of Survival with a teenager going off-grid with her little sister! How's that going to work out? This wasn't the book I expected, but it will stay with me for a long time.

It's so believably written, it's as though Sal is talking directly to just you. The story covers alcoholism, poverty and the fear of police and social workers, and how a child assumes grown-up responsibilities when the grown-ups won't. Sal is unusual, and the story seems to hint that she may be somewhere along the autism spectrum, in having intelligence allied with dispassion and a need for facts and figures, masked by dyslexia. The close sisterly relationship is shown in its squabbling, irritating but fiercely protective normalcy.

The story is not only about Sal and Peppa, but is also that of Ingrid, a fellow forest-dweller, who survived a feral childhood in Russian-occupied post-War Berlin, eventual defection from East Germany to the UK, love and betrayal, and finally disengagement. Ingrid's involvement brings the story to a believable conclusion.

I would recommend this book to both adults and young adults; and it's a good one for discussion – what did you feel, what do you think happens next?

Catherine Bryce

A brilliant story which is sure to give many readers many happy hours of reading

This is an excellent debut book by Mick Kitson. It's beautifully written and tells a lovely compelling story.

From living with an alcoholic mother and her mother's various boyfriends, Sal is being abused by her mother's boyfriend Robert, while protecting her younger sister Peppa and reaches a decision to leave.

After having planned to go on the run for over nine months, Sal fatally stabs Robert and the two sisters go on the run. The story describes their survival of living in the woods of Scotland, of meeting Ingrid, who also has a personal story to tell and like the sisters has been living in the woods for some time. She passes on her experiences to the girls, who are trying to hide from the authorities and helps them get in touch with their mother. The ending is superb and realistic

The author has written a brilliant story of life written as told by Sal herself, and is certainly one book that should be on reading lists

Sarah Webb

Wow, this is quite a story, and so well told. Sal is smart, wise and clever. She is also very loyal. And aged just 13, she is very protective to her younger sister, Peppa.

*At the centre of Sal's story is the theme of abuse – despite this, **it's an uplifting story, full of love and kindness and hope.** Two of those the sisters encounter on their journey are also filled with wisdom and warmth. To say more about the plot would be to give too much away and to spoil the book. Suffice to say that sometimes the tension in the story was almost unbearable, but I had to keep reading. And when I had to put it down for a while, I kept thinking about Sal and Peppa and how they were doing: always a sign of a book that's really captured my imagination. This is a debut novel by Mick Kitson and on the basis of this book, I can't wait to read more.*

Alfred Nobile

It is a book filled with well drawn characters, who leap off the page fully formed and into to your mind with their stories to tell. And what fascinating stories they are.

This was a stunning book. Hard to realise it was a debut novel, and such a beautiful debut it was.

The writing is of such a high quality in a book laced with humour and at times tragedy.

The novel opens with sisters Sal and Peppa on the run.

Through her diligent research and careful planning Sal is convinced she and her sister can survive in the Galloway Forest.

Told through Sal's eyes it is a story of two sisters; and two very different sisters they are. Sal is a worrier and planner, whilst Peppa sails through life on the seat of her pants.

Their characters leap off the page fully formed and drag you into their lives and adventures.

You find yourself rooting for Sal, even though what she has done is fundamentally wrong. As said previously it is a book filled with well drawn characters, who leap off the page fully formed and into to your mind with their stories to tell. And what fascinating stories they are.

Sal and Peppa's. Ingrid, an old woman who befriends them, has her own fascinating story to tell. Even Maw in Sal's recollections and later on in the book has a story.

A brilliant, fascinating book which is well worth investing in. I don't think you will be disappointed. Thanks to Mick, Cannongate and Lovereading.co.uk for the ARC. Worthy 4 stars.

Bertyboy123.wordpress.com

Val Rowe

An absolute little treasure of a novel - quirky, unique and beautifully narrated. I hope that this will be the first of many novels from Mick Kitson.

Sal is determined to protect her younger sister, Peppa, from the abuse that she herself suffers from her mother's partner. With Maw and Roberts' lives being destroyed through drugs and alcohol, it takes Sal a year to systematically make the necessary plans for her and Peppa to escape. Using her self-taught survival skills, Sal and Peppa begin a new life, finding support from their new friend, Ingrid. Will the police discover where they are and will they ever see Maw again?

As soon as I read the first page, I just knew that I would love this book! Narrated by Sal, the reader cannot fail to engage with the plight of the two sisters, the process that they go to survive and their distinctive and appealing characters.

Kitson is a superb storyteller, gently feeding us enough information to keep us drawn in and offering us extra details to enable us to really get under the skin of the characters. I especially enjoyed Ingrid's storytelling and the quite natural way in which the location and the ways of surviving outdoors, were described.

For me, Kitson uses just the right balance between description and narrative and I had a very clear visual image of the setting and characters.

This is the most memorable novel that I have read in a long time and shall be recommending it to my friends.

Louise Woods

Wow, what an amazing little book. It grabbed me from the first page and kept me hooked right up to the last word, I got completely lost in Sal's story. *The detail and descriptive narrative had me right there in the trees with them, smelling the pine, and willing them to survive.*

When you first read how Sal has looked after her sister, kept her safe from a drunk mother and an even worse character, her mothers 'boyfriend' you can't help but feel drawn to her. She is outwardly tough and practical, at times scarily detached, yet the naivety with which she plans and carries out their escape makes you want to reach out and hug her. She believes wholeheartedly she can keep her sister safe, and her skills are impressive, but you can't help wonder how long they can last on their own.

As the story builds you are rooting for them, I want them to live their lives in peace out in the wilds, but you know in reality life is never that easy.

Nicola Lowes

An honest story about an intelligent and capable 13 year old, Sal, who takes the appalling conditions she is living under and tries to make them better in a radical way.

Sal doesn't show much emotion but you are always on her side. The experiences she has been through in her short life have obviously affected her but not in the way you would expect. She is made of true grit and fiercely loyal to and protective of those who show her love. She plans out the survival skills required for escaping her situation to living in the wild.

The descriptions of rural Scotland make you feel like you are there. They camp out in the way of Swallows and Amazons. Quite an antidote to today's digital world.

The other characters in the book are likeable, even the hapless Maw. They form a band to help each other. Peppa is full of life and provides a good balance to Sal. They meet Ingrid who provides an interesting new branch to the story.

They become careless about being seen at times and you do wonder why they weren't discovered then. Yet this doesn't detract from the wholesome world that they create.

I would definitely recommend this.

[@NJLowes](#)

Adrienne Kinsella

A sad, harrowing tale of survival that's also memorable and wonderfully compelling. Sal has been like a substitute mother to her sister Pippa and will do anything to protect her.

The story, told by Sal, gradually unfolds and we learn about the neglect she has suffered all her thirteen year old life. Her mother is an alcoholic and her boyfriend regularly abuses Sal and threatens to start on her sister Pippa, who is nearly ten. That forces Sal into making an awful decision, which required a year of planning and building up a store of useful items, because it's all about survival and keeping her sister safe. Sal is a tough kid, a product of her upbringing, but she is clever and her devotion to Pippa is touching. The two end up being on the run. They hide out in the wilds of Scotland and Sal displays

impressive wilderness survival skills. It was a great idea to introduce the colourful Ingrid at this point, who has her own awful tale of survival to tell. She probably showed the girls the most affection they had ever known. The book was peppered with lighter-hearted moments too and it was interesting the contrast between the two sisters. Sal was the worrier while Pippa was the spontaneous one, she also had this soft, caring side though and you found yourself rooting for her and hoping she would get the chance in life she so deserved. Overall a compelling read that I would definitely recommend.

A sad, harrowing tale of survival that's also memorable and wonderfully compelling. Sal has been like a substitute mother to her sister Pippa and will do anything to protect her.

Susan Wallace

A beautifully told, gripping story, of a young girl's escape, with her little sister, from a horrific home situation and how they survive in the wilds of Scotland.

SAL is the story of a young girl who runs away, with her younger sister, to live in the woods of a remote area of Scotland, in order to get away from a horrific home situation. She has learned her survival skills from YouTube and managed to buy survival equipment from Amazon using stolen credit cards. She does what she does with the best of intentions. She is a great character, totally believable and likeable, and who's love for her little sister has driven her to take extreme measures to ensure that they both can survive. It is a beautifully told story, with great descriptions of the awe- inspiring Scottish landscape, and mesmerising descriptions of how they get food and shelter in an inhospitable and remote area. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and would recommend it.

Victoria Emerson

Just read it!

SAL by Mick Kitson is a beautifully raw story of two sisters trying to get through a terrible event in their life by running away and surviving in the Scottish Highlands.

I liked Sal's character and thought that she had been very well written. Also the

addition of Ingrid made the story much more rounded and interesting.

It blew me away.

Suzanne James

Sal is a beautifully written tale - funny, sad & inspiring, you can't help but be drawn to the brave girl who risks everything for her sister.

Sal is a great little story of sisterly love. It is a story of survival - a young girl, driven to a terrible act, goes to incredible lengths to protect her younger sister, learning to survive in the wilderness of the Highlands so that the two girls can stay together. The dysfunctional background she has escaped from becomes clearer as the story unfolds and you realise what an amazingly strong character Sal is. The long, rambling sentences perfectly capture the tone of a child trying to process the situation she finds herself in. You immediately feel that you are seeing everything through Sal's eyes and experience her fears, hopes and frustrations. It's not only the two sisters that are very well-written and lovable, the beautifully evoked Scottish scenery transports you to their safe haven. You almost wish their adventure wouldn't end.

Alison Layland

A heartwarming, captivating coming-of-age story about various facets of survival.

I found this a captivating coming-of-age novel. Sal is a wonderful character, strong and humorous. Her defiant escape from a difficult life and fierce love for her lively little sister – the equally lovable Peppa – are beautifully portrayed in a forthright, distinctive first-person voice. Sal's reasons for leaving her family home are difficult, but matter-of-factly presented in a way that evokes sympathy and understanding. The survival aspects of the story and immersion in the beautiful Scottish landscapes are atmospheric and fascinating, and I was rooting for the girls every inch of the way. I also loved Ingrid, the former doctor they meet who leads a similar off-grid life of survival and escape; her backstory and present circumstances are every bit as moving as those of the girls. A heartwarming story about various facets of survival.

Cathy Small

A beautiful story of Sal's protection of her younger sister written from her own viewpoint.

Sal is a clever girl in a terrible home situation. Her mother is an alcoholic and her mother's boyfriend is abusing Sal and has been since she was 10. Her younger sister is 10 soon and she will not allow her sister Peppa to be abused. She watches, steals, buys online & reads to ensure that she knows all the survival tricks to run and stay alive & safe. We see the journey and Sal's life story from her own viewpoint including her bravery in protecting her mother whilst saving her sister. A heartwarming story showing true bravery and love.

Peter

A book of survival in every sense of the word

One may be forgiven for thinking this would be better suited under the heading of non fiction survival guide. However, this book is a clever combination of fact and fiction. The hero (or heroine) is also a victim. A good read

Kate Thacker

*I found at first, i wondered how someone at 13 would get skills to survive. But then in a world where Bear Grylls is, I quickly learnt to go with it. This was largely due to the lovely writing and enchanting journey the book took me on, and **i was very quickly captivated by this read and the power it showed** of a sisters love and to protect her sister how far she would go. **brilliant.***

Catherine Jenkins

An excellent companion to have on the road to self-discovery and survival, with a feisty heroine who deserves to earn her place in the annals of literary explorers.

If I went off into the wilderness to survive, I'd take this book with me. It is indispensable in the insights it gives to going off-grid in today's hyperconnected world, and taught me so much about loyalty and love. I know that it will stay

with me for a long time!

[@CathLynneJ](#)

Sabine Little

*While the narrative of "wild living" is not new, and has led to some of the most beautiful literature there is. Mick Kitson has definitely added to the genre, Sal and her sister Peppa are sympathetically drawn characters, two girls living wild in the Scottish countryside, after Sal's decision to remove them from their family situation. This is by no means a sentimental book, and there is some difficult content there, but the beautiful writing, which slowly reveals more about the girls' lives, against the backdrop of the stark beauty of their surroundings, has led to **an intelligent, beautiful, and sometimes harrowing book, which will stay with me for a long time.***