

A dystopian story about a strong young woman in a changing world

The Towers of Beirut

PAUL VERREPT

Fifteen-year-old Nabila has had enough of the monotonous life in her village. Egged on by the spirit in her head – her djinn – she travels to Beirut as a stowaway in her uncle's taxi. The djinn is not a demon, but he challenges her and also helps her through the toughest of times. As a street child, Nabila tries to survive in the city. Zahirah, a refugee, becomes her best friend and her first big love.

Nabila and Zahirah experience moments of happiness, but in Beirut too catastrophe is brewing. Fences appear and form barriers, ground is shifting, buildings vanish and weapons appear on the scene. The towers rise up from the ground: immense buildings that cast long, deep black shadows over the city – a metaphor for the invisible powers that compete with one another. They turn Beirut into a battlefield.

A richly layered coming-of-age story with glorious images that stay with you

PLUIZUIT

Verrept sketches the hopelessness of life on the street in a city torn by both war and the widening gap between rich and poor. The greyish images with powerful charcoal lines and sombre colouring accentuate the dark threats to the city: the windowless towers are massive, the rows of polluting cars endless. Man is absent, except in the pictures before and after the actual story, with the black shape of a girl in the wind.

Alienating yet relatable****

DE STANDAARD



AUTHOR



Paul Verrept (b. 1963) is an author and illustrator. He writes his gently philosophical stories about life, love and death with candour and an eye for vivid detail. Verrept's characters have a certain innocence: they gaze at the world with wide-open eyes. They are vulnerable, but also resilient. No matter how badly life bruises them, they always stand back up again. Verrept sketches them with a great deal of compassion. *Photo © Marleen Nelen*

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