

[**Lockdown**](#) by Alexander Gordon Smith (book one in the near-future series, “Escape from Furnace” quintet)

In order to make an example of young delinquents after the previous year’s “Summer of Slaughter” fourteen-year-old thief Alex Sawyer is framed for killing his best friend, in a house robbery gone terribly wrong, by the same justice system that ultimately convicts him. Sentenced to the world’s most secure prison for young offenders, Furnace Penitentiary is buried one mile beneath the earth’s surface – a place where no one is safe. As Alex points out on the second page: “It’s where they send you to forget about you.”

Alex Sawyer knows he has two choices: find a way out, or resign himself to a death behind bars, in the darkness at the bottom of the world. Together with a bunch of inmates – some innocent kids who have been framed, others cold-blooded killers – Alex plans the prison break to end all prison breaks. But as he starts to uncover the

truth about Furnace’s deeper, darker purpose, Alex’s actions grow ever more dangerous, and he must risk everything to expose this nightmare that’s hidden from the eyes of the world.

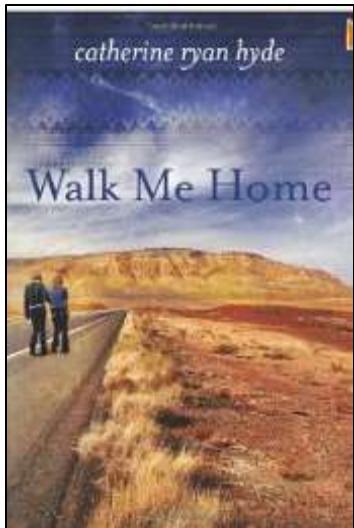
I really appreciated that although some of the scenes are visceral, like reading about how their food is this pink sludge made from whirring up rotting leftover animal parts, none of the scenes are gratuitous – each plays a necessary part in painting the true picture of horror that is Furnace. All three books are great, each one is fast-paced enough to keep me on the edge of my seat the entire time.

Cover image from Sno-Isle Libraries’ website.

**Beneath heaven is Hell... Beneath
Hell is Furnace!**

Novelist Readalikes for **Lockdown**

- ❖ [**Variant**](#) by Robison E. Wells: After years in foster homes, seventeen-year-old Benson Fisher applies to New Mexico’s Maxfield Academy in hopes of securing a brighter future, but instead he finds that the school is a prison and no one is what he or she seems
- ❖ [**The Forsaken**](#) by Lisa M. Stasse: After the formation of the United Northern Alliance--a merger of Canada, the United States, and Mexico into one nation--sixteen-year-old Alenna is sent to an desolate prison island for teenagers believed to be predisposed to violence
- ❖ [**The Twelve-Fingered Boy**](#) by John Horner Jacobs: Fifteen-year-old fast-talking Shreve is thriving in juvenile detention until he is assigned a strangely silent and vulnerable new cellmate, Jack, who just might have superpowers and who attracts the attention both of the cellblock bullies and sinister Mr. Quincrux



Walk Me Home by Catherine Ryan Hyde

After Carly and Jen's mom dies unexpectedly, the girls eager to escape the imminent threat of Child Services and foster care, decide to hitchhike across the desert from California to Arizona to hopefully be taken in by the closest thing to a father they ever had, Teddy, one of their mother's many short-term boyfriends...a guy who actually took care of them while their mother worked two jobs.

As they pass from small town to small town, 16-year old Carly and her 12-year old sister, Jen, note any items they take, like when they lifted two pairs of shoes from a thrift store, so that they can pay people back once they're settled in with Teddy. It's their "code of honesty" and their

way of not having to ask any adults for help, thus risking a call to social services. Despite their good intentions, however, they meet a bump in the road when, to stave off death from not having had anything to eat or drink in a few days, they're caught attempting to steal eggs from an elderly Native American woman, Delores. She makes a deal that she won't shoot them or call the cops if *they* promise to stay a week and work off the damage they've done to her chicken shed, plus the pain and suffering of knowing she was being robbed.

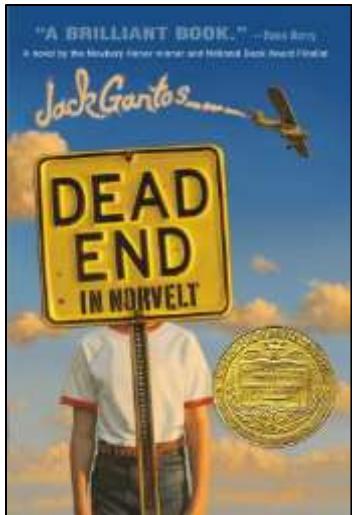
Delores' policeman friend, Alvin, comes by and promises them he'll try to find Teddy, "their stepfather", (as they describe him) if they promise to stay put. Jen, who's already enamored of the desert homestead Delores has (there are horses to ride, after all!) confesses a secret she's been keeping and then tells her sister she just wants to stay put because she's tired of walking. Still hoping to track down Teddy and get him to take them in, Carly soldiers on alone. Her solo travel west is a great insight into her mental and physical toughness.

This is a great story about how similar and how different sisters can be at the same time. Carly and Jen have different ideas of what home is and who might be the best person to take care of them. How will they resolve their differences? Will Carly ever find the truth about the secret Jen revealed? Is Jen's confessed secret even real, or was it only imagined?

This was one book I wished I'd had the time to read in one sitting...when I wasn't reading it, I was wondering what was going to happen next! *Cover image from amazon.com*

Readalikes for **Walk Me Home**:

- ❖ **Finding Somewhere** by Joseph Monninger: Sixteen-year-old Hattie and eighteen-year-old Delores set off on a road trip that takes unexpected turns as they discover the healing power of friendship and confront what each of them is fleeing from.
- ❖ **Defining Dulcie** by Paul Acampora: When sixteen-year-old Dulcie's father dies, her mother makes a decision to move them to California, where Dulcie makes an equally radical decision to steal her dad's old truck and head back home.



Dead End in Norvelt by Jack Gantos

Another book I didn't want to put down just because it was so hilarious. This semi-autobiographical and exaggerated novel (at least I hope it's exaggerated), melds the entirely true with the wildly fictional and had me laughing out loud, especially because the protagonist is the same age in 1962 as my older brother was, so I could imagine him doing some of these same things. I also grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania that was pretty much a little town in the midst of an agricultural area, like Arlington is.

Dead End in Norvelt is a novel about an incredible two months for upcoming teen Jack Gantos, whose plans for summer vacation are shot down when he is "grounded for life" by his feuding parents (Jack's dad is a World War II veteran who wants to leave Norvelt for somewhere with

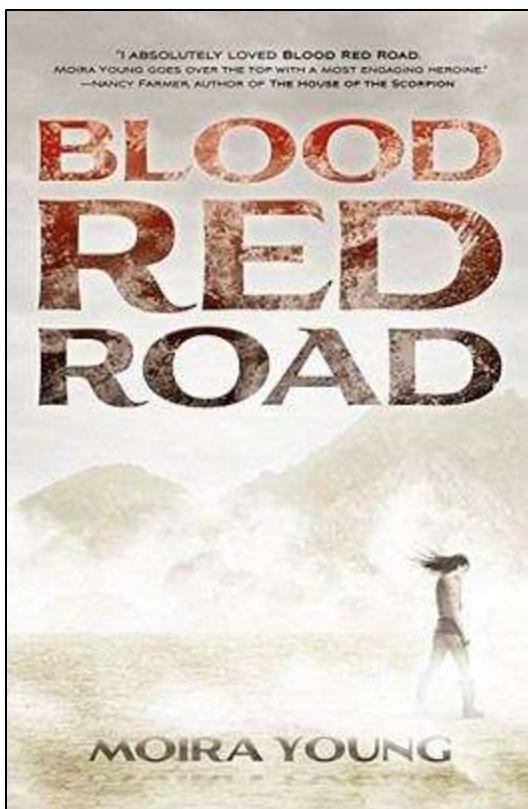
better opportunities, and in the meantime is preparing to fight the Russian Commies whom he believes are poised to attack the United States. Mrs. Gantos is on the other end of the political spectrum.)

Poor Jack's nose spews bad blood at every little shock he gets – bad news since he's in for plenty of excitement coming his way once his mom, as part of his punishment, loans him out to help a fiesty old neighbor with a most unusual chore—typewriting obituaries filled with stories about the people who founded his utopian town and also driving this neighbor around town (his mother didn't know this was part of the deal, remember, he's not yet sixteen!). As one obituary leads to another and the death toll of the founders rises, Jack begins to wonder if there's a curse on Norvelt and knows that he needs to get to the bottom of the mystery or he might end up needing an obituary written about him! And what's the deal with the Hell's Angels that are driving through town?

While the age-group is supposed to be middle-school, I thought this felt more like a book for older teens (and adults who might remember this time period). *Cover image from Sno-Isle Libraries' website.*

Novelist Readalikes for **Dead End in Norvelt**:

- ❖ **The Amazing Adventures of John Smith, Jr., aka Houdini** by Peter Johnson: Thirteen-year-old John "Houdini" Smith tries to write a book about what is happening in his life, from his parents' worries about money and his brother in Iraq, to his new understandings of people while he and his friends rake lawns in their East Side Providence, Rhode Island, neighborhood.
- ❖ **The Teacher's Funeral : A Comedy in Three Parts** by Richard Peck: In rural Indiana in 1904, fifteen-year-old Russell's dreams of quitting school and joining a wheat threshing crew are disrupted when his older sister takes over the teaching at his one-room schoolhouse after mean, old Myrt Arbuckle "hauls off and dies."
- ❖ **The Chicken Dance** by Jacques Couvillon: When eleven-year-old Don Schmidt wins a chicken-judging contest in his small town of Horse Island, Louisiana and goes from outcast to instant celebrity, even his neglectful mother occasionally takes notice of him and eventually he discovers some shocking family secrets



Blood Red Road by Moira Young (book one of the Dustlands trilogy)

If you loved Hunger Games and Ship Breaker, you'll love this book, too. "To escape, she'll have to fight...to survive, she will have to lead."

I think of it as Mad Maxx meets Katniss .

In a distant future in a landscape desolated by "The Wreckers", Saba has spent her life in Silverlake, a dried-up wastelands that had been saved by previous civilization known only as "The Wreckers". When four cloaked horsemen kill her father and kidnap her twin brother Lugh, eighteen-year-old Saba and her nine-year-old sister Emmi end up trailing them across bleak Sandsea.

Saba thinks she's having great luck in meeting a kind elderly couple in the middle of the wasteland. They offer her food, water, and shelter in their "boat on wheels". That thought quickly changes, however, when they drug her, chain her up, and deliver her to brutal Hopetown where they sell her as a cage-fighter, thanks

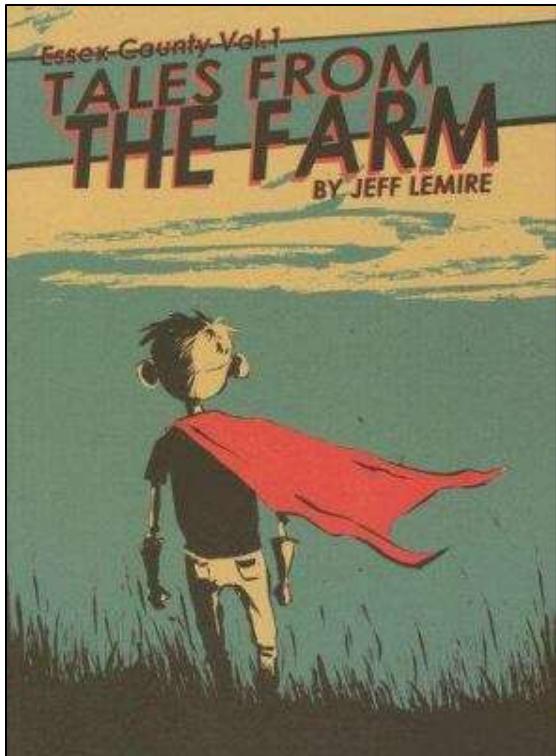
to Saba's apparent natural ability for fighting. Given the new name "The Angel of Death" she is teamed with another fighter – and new friend – the handsome daredevil name Jack. He, along with a gang of women revolutionaries called the Free Hawks, helps Saba escape and accompany her to the hidden fortress of Freedom Fields, where rumor has it her brother is being held as the King's next sacrifice for midsummer. Will Saba find this hidden fortress in time? Will she be able to save Lugh from being killed?

The author has a great way of creating a new and believable language...English, but not quite. (Which makes sense since there is no schooling anymore.) You will eventually get into the flow of it, so don't worry if the dialogue on the first few pages feels a little off-kilter.

Cover image from Sno-Isle Libraries' website.

Novelist Readalikes for **Blood Red Road**:

- ❖ **Divergent** by Veronica Roth: In a future Chicago, sixteen-year-old Beatrice Prior must choose among five predetermined factions to define her identity for the rest of her life, a decision made more difficult when she discovers that she is an anomaly who does not fit into any one group, and that the society she lives in is not perfect after all.
- ❖ **The Knife of Never Letting Go** by Patrick Ness: Everyone can hear everyone else's thoughts in an overwhelming, *never-ending* stream of Noise. Just a month away from the birthday that will make him a man, Todd and his dog, Manchee, whose thoughts Todd can hear, too, whether he wants to or not, stumble upon an area of complete silence. They find that in a town where privacy is impossible, something terrible has been hidden
- ❖ **Max** by James Patterson: When millions of fish start dying off the coast of Hawaii and something is destroying hundreds of ships, the government enlists the Flock--a band of genetically modified children who can fly--to help get to the bottom of the disaster before it is too late



[**Tales from the Farm**](#) by Jeff Lemire (Essex County trilogy, vol. 1).

A magnificent, albeit moody, graphic novel.

Lester, a 10-year-old boy, is orphaned after his mother succumbs to cancer and goes to live with his uncle on a farm in Ontario. Things aren't easy for them, as Lester dons a cape and mask every day, transforming himself into what he loves most: a comic-book superhero, and spends a lot of his time reading comic books. Uncle Kenny is a childless man who has lots of trouble connecting with children and doesn't approve of Lester's escape into his private comic book world.

The only friend Lester has in his new habitat is Jim Lebeauf, a former Toronto Maple Leafs NHL'er who, because of a career-ending injury, now works at the local gas station/minimart and who, to the chagrin of Uncle Kenny, shares Lester's enthusiasm for comic books and make-believe.

As the two grow closer, Lester's relationship with Uncle Kenny gets even rockier. Will they ever connect? What is the secret that Jim is keeping? What's the secret that Uncle Kenny is keeping?

The story is told in flashbacks and while much of it is related through Lemire's black-and-white pictures rather than the text, I would strongly recommend this book because the drawings are incredible. Before this book, graphic novels had never been a preferred book format. Now, however, I am always on the lookout for the next graphic novel that will tell me a great story.

The entire story unrolls throughout all three books. Vol. 2 is "Ghost Stories" and Vol. 3 is "The Country Nurse". *Cover image from Sno-Isle Libraries' website.*

Readalike for **Tales from the Farm**:

- ❖ [**Sweet Tooth series**](#) by Jeff Lemire: A cross between Bambi and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, *SWEET TOOTH* tells the story of Gus, a rare new breed of human/animal hybrid children, has been raised in isolation following an inexplicable pandemic that struck a decade earlier. Now, with the death of his father he's left to fend for himself . . . until he meets a hulking drifter named Jepperd who promises to help him. Jepperd and Gus set out on a post-apocalyptic journey into the devastated American landscape to find 'The Preserve' a refuge for hybrids.