



## Runner

*By Robert Newton*

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### **Runner** By Robert Newton

Charlie's father is dead, and although his mother insists he stay in school, Charlie has no patience for the classroom. All he wants is to make money, to give his mother and baby brother a better life. So when he catches the eye of Squizzy Taylor, a notorious mobster, and is offered a job as Squizzy's courier, it doesn't take Charlie long to accept—even if he has to go against his own mother's wishes.

At first, the job's a thrill—running with messages, illegal liquor, whatever Squizzy orders. It fills Charlie with power. But then come the not-so-savory parts of the job. Collecting Squizzy's debts. Dodging Squizzy's enemies. The very real dangers of the streets. And at some point Charlie has to ask himself—how long before running for a better life means cutting his life short?

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### Editorial Review

#### From School Library Journal

Grade 5–8—Charlie Feehan, 16, stuffs the holes in his boots with newspaper and runs through the streets of Melbourne, in 1919, to escape the cold and sadness in his mother's tiny flat since his father died. When the city's most notorious gangster, Squizzy Taylor, offers the teen a paying job as a runner, he secretly quits school and takes to the streets, delivering illegal liquor and collecting money for his boss. Vowing to surprise his mother with money to ease her burden, Charlie ignores obvious dangers. Teamed up with "Nostrils," he cowardly runs away from a gang one night, leaving the boy behind to be brutally beaten. Shaken, Charlie quits the illegal running and listens to his neighbor Mr. Redmond, who offers to train him to run for a purse in the Bellarat footraces. Betting his ill-gotten gains on himself, Charlie wins and uses the money to help Nostrils, who is now on crutches. Rich dialogue in Australian dialect creates a colorful picture of the historical urban setting, suspenseful plot, and warm characterizations. Minor figures are as well developed as the protagonist, and readers will enjoy Nostrils and his football-obsessed father, Charlie's budding romance with the baker's daughter, and the flamboyant Squizzy and his motherly girlfriend. Add this one to adventure collections or bibliographies about Prohibition.—*Vicki Reutter, Cazenovia High School, NY*

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#### From [Booklist](#)

In 1919, in the working-class slums of Richmond, Australia, 15-year-old Charlie and his mother shiver through their first winter since Charlie's father died. Looking for warmth and an outlet for his grief, Charlie sets off on nighttime runs that attract the attention of a local gangster. Soon, Charlie is running booze and collecting debts for the local Mob. After the gang warfare heats up and his best friend is severely wounded, Charlie uses his athletic talents to pursue a more honorable path. Charlie's nostalgic voice occasionally veers into cliche—"The sleazy streets seduced me, and, like a moth to the flame, I gladly surrendered"—and the colorful cast includes the stereotypical characters of a gangster film. Still, the witty wise-guy patter and the thrilling running scenes deftly balance the grim survival of poverty, and readers will be easily drawn into the old-fashioned, heart-tugging tale of a boy overcoming extraordinary odds. A glossary of Australian slang and a note explaining historical references are appended. *Gillian Engberg*

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#### About the Author

Robert Newton has published several other young adult novels in Australia. He is a full-time firefighter, and lives in Melbourne with his wife and two daughters.

### Users Review

#### From reader reviews:

#### Louis Vasquez:

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