

# Head Games

by Casey Lever

Reviewed by Fran Knight - Literacy Consultant, S.A.

*'Casey Lever has written a very readable story of the relationships between different groups in a school. Each person in the group brings their own hang ups, secrets and problems from home, revealing little to their peers, but the game brings these out, forcing the group to have some say about their friends' behaviours. It is their friendship which encourages them to make changes in their lives. Steven speaks more openly to his father, Connor tries to stop his involvement with his brother, Tala attempts to work out his feelings, Jude makes an attempt to open up- tempering her churlish exterior and Avery reveals she is not what they all thought. The unexpected friendship between this group of five disparate people is enticing and will easily absorb younger secondary readers.'*

## Description

When Steven sees a note handed to Avery, the girl he loves passionately, he strives to read it, spying out something about a game. Desperate to be involved with her in any way he can, he asks about the game, plunging himself and his closest friend, Samoan Tala, into a minefield of secrets, half truths and desperation.

Truth and dare seems innocuous enough on the surface, but Tala sees that this can be too revealing, too confronting, and may lead them in unexpected directions. He tries to stop Steven from joining the group, consisting of Avery, her current boyfriend from the wrong side of town, Connor, and his recalcitrant half sister, Jude, but joins himself to protect Steven. The first night of the game sees Avery humiliating Steven by speaking truthfully to the question of how she feels about him. The stage is set.

One night, while at Avery's house, Avery spikes Tala's drink and unused to alcohol, he quickly becomes drunk, saying too much, smashing furniture after falling, and then collapsing into a deep sleep. Connor leaves, devastated by Avery's revelation that she is only using him, and Steven, impulsively heads after him. He feels some sympathy with this surly, looming year 11 boy and so the two spend a while talking, learning things about the other that they did not know before.

Connor admits that he was using the game to find out how Avery really feels about him, and now that he knows, the game is over. But Steven wants more. He knows the power base has changed. Avery and Connor no longer control the game, so he and Tala talk everyone into going on. This is a mistake.

Tala is cornered into revealing that he thinks he is gay, and devastated by his own admission, runs out on the group. Connor, pressed again by Avery, reveals that he pushes drugs for his brother, under considerable duress. Steven tries to reason with him, encouraging him to see a way out, and later in a more open frankness with his father, reveals that Connor is behaving criminally. Late one night, Jude rings Steven, asking for help.