## COSMODROME

***Eleni Katsama***

The Cosmodrome is the space centre of the former Soviet Union, now situated in Kazakhstan; the exploration of new worlds began right there. In this book of the same title, a similar exploration is attempted: learning about worlds other than our own is an opportunity to get new insights about our own.

Twenty-three teenagers in twenty-three different countries (Iraq, England, Australia, Somalia, Russia, France, China, New York, Kazakhstan, El Salvador, India, Colombia, Greece, Rumania, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Taiwan, Iran, former Yugoslavia, New Zealand, Japan, USA) tell us their stories and share the reasons why they can’t drift off easily to sleep at night.

**Akim**

A teenage soldier in Iraq, Akim forms an unexpected friendship with a snake he meets in the desert. When the snake attacks him, it is for reasons no one could ever imagine.

**The World According to Danny**

Clara lives in London; she’s overweight and pimply – unforgivable traits, according to Danny. So he makes her life a living hell, till he and his posse trap Clara into a deserted schoolroom...

**The Salt Route**

A caravan begins its amazing and dangerous journey to the ancient salt mines ofTaudenni. The young hero of the story crosses the Sahara desert for the first time, bidding farewell to his childhood.

**Pirates of Somalia**

Matthew’s dream to sail round the world comes true with the help of his stepfather. Together they set out from Australia on a voyage full of surprises. But off the Somalia coast,they are attacked by pirates. What will happen when Matthew meets Abdullah, a young Somali pirate?

**Nikolai**

Nikolai is about to be accepted as member of a neo-Nazigang in Moscow. But when he becomes witness to attempted murder during his initiation rite, the world as he knew it collapses around him and the masks fall off.

**Championship**

After an unusual treasure hunt in the streets of Paris and a football championship in the *banlieus*, Chassou, Aqui and Louis will realize it is not easy to be an immigrant among people who are not.

**Riyo and Masuji**

Riyo wants to be a wizard. She and her siblings Masuji, Li, and Shin are growing up near an electronics scrapyard in Guyu, China. When Li falls ill, Riyo will try to heal him with her magic tricks.

**Shy Boy**

Mr. Mo N. Ster lives alone in a flat in an apartment block in New York City. A boy in a flat across the road is watching his every move. Their loneliness will bring them together.

**Verik On The Moon**

A young shepherd living near the Cosmodrome, ex-Soviet space centre on the steppes of Kazakhstan, loses Verik, his cunning sheep, on the very day cosmonaut tourist Charles Simonyi returns from his holidays in space. The boy walks all the way to the Cosmodrome through the steppe to find Verik and meet the space tourist.

**Rosita Rules**

For the young people in Sonsonato, El Salvador, life is tough; gangs, arms, violence and death are parts of their everyday reality.

**Bollywood, Bujami and I**

A poor young boy in India is the spitting image of famous Bollywood star RahatmaBujami. He uses this similarity to make a few extra rupees doing impersonations of the star, and to win the heart of beautiful Etira.

**Isaza**

Recruited by FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), young Isaza is transported into the Colombian jungle and forced to commit a number of crimes. Seven years later he escapes, having lost his left eye, his youth and part of his soul.

**Skeleton Man**

Nikos lives in Athens. Unable to bear the stifling and hypocritical atmosphere of family and school, he plants a makeshift bomb in a schoolroom and disappears, leaving behind only an angry letter for his father. But who is his greatest enemy? Could it be the Skeleton Man?

**Goldfish**

As she prepares to leave Bucharest forever, Christina meets a boy who introduces himself as Goldfish. She follows him and to her astonishment discovers an underground world of children growing up in the sewers of the city.

**Netball National**

In Colombo, Sri Lanka, a new team makes its appearance. But although it is called the Netball National, the players cannot play – all they do is kick pebbles around during practice. How are they going to face their opponents?

**Not Me**

To prove his devotion to the RUF (Revolutionary United Front), a young boy in Sierra Leone is forced to shoot his own mother. As he points his gun at her, he is trying to read her thoughts.

**Made in Taiwan**

Jimmy and Lou, from Taiwan, make small plastic toys destined for the western market. Lou paints a tiny key on one toy, which will have unimaginable effects in the life of Assad, a boy living in Iran.

**The Zoo**

During the Belgrade bombing in the 1990s, David and his brother steal the keys to the zoo and free the animals. Hungry and hurt, the animals will try to find shelter in a nearby wood. But perhaps there is no sanctuary for them any more.

**Curtains and trumpets**

At Gizborne, New Zealand, the easternmost promontory in the world, Talem and Billy watch the first sunrise in the world every morning.

The stories in the Cosmodrome are based on true events; they refer to real people in real-life situations. Through the eyes of their peers all over the world, teenage readers will have an insight into totally different ways of life and different worlds, and eventually an insight into their own interior worlds.

This is an unusual book: contemporary, vibrant, poetic. Written from the point of view of the young protagonists and inspired by true stories, the characters strike a delicate balance between violence and sensitivity, despair and a sense of humour, life and death, injustice, poverty and optimism.

**Eleni Katsama** was born in Athens in 1973. She studied journalism and acting and has written for newspapers and magazines. Her first novel was awarded first prize by the GreekSociety of Children’s and Young Adults’ Writers and Illustrators. In 2007 she was awarded 3rdprize for her short story “Lysander’s Tale” by the International Olympic Truce Centre.

# KEY WORDS

World, future, optimism, teenagers of the world, social gap, civilization and cultures, war, friendship, bullying, harsh living conditions, cultural differences and conflict, coming of age, piracy, nationalism, racism, xenophobia, ecology, loneliness, gangs, guns, poverty, teenage rebellion (anarchy, terrorism, revenge, anger, lack of communication), abandoned children, migration / immigration, civil war, violence, children soldiers, child slavery, bombings.

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