



# Far Far Away

*Tom McNeal*

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It says quite a lot about Jeremy Johnson Johnson that the strangest thing about him isn't even the fact his mother and father both had the same last name. Jeremy once admitted he's able to hear voices, and the townspeople of Never Better have treated him like an outsider since. After his mother left, his father became a recluse, and it's been up to Jeremy to support the family. But it hasn't been up to Jeremy alone. The truth is, Jeremy can hear voices. Or, specifically, one voice: the voice of the ghost of Jacob Grimm, one half of the infamous writing duo, The Brothers Grimm.

Jacob watches over Jeremy, protecting him from an unknown dark evil whispered about in the space between this world and the next. But when the provocative local girl Ginger Boultinghouse takes an interest in Jeremy (and his unique abilities), a grim chain of events is put into motion. And as anyone familiar with the Grimm Brothers know, not all fairy tales have happy endings...

## Far Far Away Details

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Author : Tom McNeal

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# From Reader Review Far Far Away for online ebook

## V.C. Birlidis says

A wonderfully dark tale. A true brothers Grimm tale. The creepiness of this book hovered above until it struck with brilliant swiftness. I've been always one to believe that a true mark of a talented author is the ability to make the reader want the end, fear the end and sadden when you've reached the end. I truly loved it.

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## Neil (or bleed) says

*It did not matter how far you go, you always take yourself with you.*

Once upon a time, there was a young man who prefer reading a book entitled Far, Far Away at work than reading training manuals about network synchronization. And poof, he lived happily ever after. Lol.

Far, Far Away is a strange and fateful tale about Jeremy Johnson Johnson who can't see but can hear the ghost of Jacob Grimm, one of the Grimm brothers. Knowing this idea, I find the book more interesting. I was enthralled by the story and it had been doubled because of Jacob Grimm's engaging narration. Seriously. I can't put the book down. Maybe, I'm the kind of reader who likes an extraordinary character narrating a story, just like Death in The Book Thief.

Story wise, I like everything about this book, everything happened. But I do have favorite scenarios that include a game show about uncommon knowledge, Jeremy and Ginger moments and cakes and the idea of first tasting it and more. I thought it will be a typical story of longing, friendship, family problems, judgmental people, love and redeeming and proving oneself, etc. but it wasn't. What a surprise. The presence of Jacob Grimm should be an enough clue for me that the story will be fairy-tale-like. But guess what, I love that twist, that turn of events. I actually felt it but I had doubts. And in terms of Grimm's fairy tales, theirs do have gruesome scenarios and not-happily-ever-afters and probably you will perceived or encounter them here because I did but I'm not sure. I'm still thinking about it actually.

Indeed, another a not-so sensical review of mine hehe. I just swept away by this book that I can't think of a good adjectives from my limited collections of adjectives to describe how I really enjoyed and loved this one.

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## Danielle says

Gah, this was so, so good. A truly timeless quality to it - tons of suspense and creepiness, a sweet romance, great secondary characters, a real page-turner. Loved it. Let's just slap a Newbery Medal on one side, a Printz Medal on the other, and call it a day, shall we?

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## Janet says

Like nothing I've ever read before. This story is beautiful, haunting, horrifying, suspenseful, and clever. It's much darker than many so-called "kids" books, & I think most kids 11+ will be fine with that. I'll be recommending this to adult readers as well.

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## Ellen says

"This is the strange and fateful tale of a boy, a girl and a ghost." The ghost of Jacob Grimm, to be exact, whose job it is to protect the boy, Jeremy from *A Finder of Occasions*. The boy's ability to hear the ghost's voice is just another thing that keeps him from fitting in at school. That, plus the fact that his mother ran away with another man which caused his heartbroken father to take to his bed, where he spends his sad life. Ginger, the girl, is popular, vivacious, and daring. In short, she is everything Jeremy isn't. Yet something about Jeremy intrigues Ginger, or perhaps it was the Prince Cake they'd shared, renowned to make a person fall in love with the first person they see after taking a bite of it.

A seemingly harmless prank against the town's beloved local baker sets events in motion, and pulls Jeremy and Ginger into the heart of the town's darkest secrets and threatens their very lives.

This was a great read and a book that defies easy categorization. On one level, it could be read as a cautionary tale, as many of the Grimm fairy tales were. But, as a YA novel, it doesn't allow for easy answers to one of the questions of the book about the nature of evil. It's an adventure, a love story and a coming of age story, with an ancient ghost with his own hopes and dreams and fears.

I loved this book and hope it catches on with YA readers. I'd be happy to read more about fairy tales and less about sparkly vampires.

Favorite passage: "When the king's son sees the portrait of the princess, his love for her is so great that if all the leaves on all the trees were tongues, they could not declare it."

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## Laura McNeal says

Even though I'm married to Tom and this makes me a tiny, tiny bit less credible, there are at least nine reasons why you're going to love this book as much as I do:

- 1) There's a character named Conk Crinklax.
- 2) It's narrated by a melancholy but not depressing ghost named Jacob Grimm.
- 3) The main character, Jeremy Johnson Johnson, is the only one who can hear Jacob Grimm, who speaks 10 languages, several of them dead.
- 4) Cake is involved.
- 5) Not just cake, but a very elaborate Swedish type called *Prinsesstårta*.
- 6) The *Prinsesstårta* is made by a Swedish baker named Sten Blix, and "over the years, certain villagers—Jeremy's mother, for example—had grown to believe that whatever living thing was looked upon during the first bite of *Prinsesstårta* would steal one's heart."
- 7) Jeremy accidentally sneezes when the disturbingly bold and pretty Ginger Boultinghouse is eating her first bite of cake, which causes her to open her eyes and look--well, you know where she looks.

- 8) The whole story, like all Tom McNeal stories, is funny, literate, moving, and original.  
9) There's a very disturbing villain in this book. Disturbing villains=suspense.

I could give you a tenth reason and a fifteenth and a thirty-ninth because I read the manuscript many, many times over the five years it took to write, and I never stopped loving Jeremy and Jacob and the whole wistful, life-saving, dangerous idea of going FAR FAR AWAY.

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## **Navessa says**

I'm not sure if I couldn't get into this book because I'm not its target audience or if it was really as confusing as I think it was. It must have been as confusing as I think it was because I'm obviously still too confused to figure out if it was really that confusing. Does that make sense? Or do I sound like I'm messed up? I feel like I'm messed up after reading this but I've had not a drop to drink nor imbibed in any legal or illegal "medications". Granted, my fiancé could have spiked my coffee...

\*glances nervously at oblivious fiancé who stands by the sink humming an Imagine Dragons song while staring out the window\*

Then again, probably not...er, hopefully not.

So really, that leaves the question "What the hell did I just try to read?"

This story is told through the first 'person' perspective of the few hundred year old ghost of Jacob Grimm and his narrative is filled with the sort of musings and observations a person from his time might make. The thing is that because of this, the writing seemed pretty lofty for a book intended for a younger audience. I consider myself an avid reader and even I stumbled across some words that I had either rarely seen or had never seen. Was this done with the intention of trying to improve the vocabulary of middle schoolers? I'm not being facetious, I'm genuinely curious. I remember at that age I read to try and get away from schoolwork. I wanted a book that would distract me, not one that required the assistance of a thesaurus. If the latest generation of young teen readers is anything like I was I'm not quite sure if the targeted age group will really gobble this one up.

Paired with this writing were some downright cartoony characters. They sported names like Jeremy Johnson Johnson, Conk Crinklaw, Sheriff Pittswort and Harold Johnson...think about that last one for a second. Are the numerous silly names and one dimensional support characters supposed to counteract the heavy writing? If anything such contradictions and stereotypes only served to add to my confusion. I started questioning if this was even a children's book when I came across the gay jokes and references to sex within the first few pages.

Then we have the story itself, it centers on Jeremy Johnson Johnson. He's an outcast because when he was younger he admitted to hearing voices. His home life is pretty much a nightmare. When he was younger his mother skipped town with some random Canadian dude, leaving he and his father alone. Then his father disappeared too. Oh, he's still there, he's just not anything resembling an actual parent. He's a shut-in and a recluse that's managed to convince himself that his wife left him because of a pastry's magic...yeah...

Jeremy and his dad live above the bookstore that Jeremy's grandfather left him. It's a two-book bookstore that carries two books. Volume 1 and Volume 2 of the self published autobiography of said grandfather. It's

going out of business...shocking.

Jeremy draws the attention of Ginger Boultinghouse, an outgoing girl from his school who takes a sudden interest in him and draws him into the schemes of her and her two closest girlfriends, joins them on one of their pranks and has the misfortune of being the one caught.

...AND that's about as far as I got. For whatever reason I just didn't feel invested in the characters or the plot line. For me this book was like a strange amalgamation of a children's story, a fable, a YA and a history lesson. In the end this just wasn't for me. But hey, I'm not the target audience so what do I know?

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### **Ionia says**

Far Far Away is a book that I am finding difficult to review without raving over certain portions and accidentally throwing out a spoiler. I will proceed with caution.

If you have ever read a book that makes you wonder why it took someone so long to produce this kind of genius, then you will be able to grasp how I felt about this story. While the tales of the Brother's Grimm have become rather popular in recent days, this is the first book I have found that did them justice.

If you are searching for a warm, fuzzy read where everyone is happy and the conflicts are few, go somewhere else. If you are looking for a book that is delightfully twisted, has absolutely wonderful and unforgettable characters and an unusual plot that will keep you reading even when you are determined to go to bed, read this.

The main character in this story is not perfect. He has issues that the others around him cannot begin to grasp, but he is also charming, at times hilarious and a character that you grow to love more and more as the pages turn.

I won't give away what happens, but I will tell you that the ending of this book is not at all what I would have expected and it was fantastic! If you are a fan of Tom McNeal or even if you aren't yet, you must read this book!

This review is based on a digital ARC from the publisher via Netgalley.

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### **Anna (Curiosity comes before Kay) says**

Jeremy Johnson Johnson lives in the small town of Never Better. But things have definitely been better for him, with only his agoraphobic Dad left to take care of him and a Mom that ran off years ago. Oh, and there's also the fact that he can hear ghosts. Jeremy's constant companion is Jacob Grimm, one of the famous Brothers Grimm, who didn't pass on when he died. Instead he's spent all the time since then looking for his brother Wilhelm. But there is evil lurking in the town of Never Better, the kind only thought to exist in fairy

tales. With the help of Ginger, the girl Jeremy likes, and Jacob Grimm, can Jeremy find a way to defeat evil, win the money to save his family's bookstore and their house - all while staying alive?

As a bit of a slow starter, I wasn't really all that invested in things at first. I felt like it took forever for anything to actually happen. But when it did, it was definitely an interesting ride! I do like the narrator being Jacob Grimm. It gave the story an interesting, somewhat outside perspective from Jeremy, Ginger and the other main characters of the novel. That said, when a story isn't being told in a first person perspective of the main character (for whom you're supposed to be feeling everything and getting attached to) or in third-person omniscient (which allows you to get the emotions in many characters heads, with an overall deeper view) it can cause a serious disconnect from the outcome of what will happen to the characters in the end. And unfortunately I felt that to a pretty large extent while reading this book. One of the things that saved it for me was probably that I kept hearing Jim Dale's voice in my head when Grimm was narrating. The whole quirky, small town with secrets thing drew a Pushing Daisies comparison - in a really awesome way!

Jeremy to me was the basic, run of the mill, everyman or the stock orphan character. I did like the fact that he could talk to ghosts and further into the novel I did feel like I got to know him better. But I still feel like he was a pretty bland character in general. Ginger was more interesting, because she made her own fun, pulling pranks and overall running amuck through the town. She reminded me more of a normal teen than Jeremy but she was still fairly clichéd as a character type. I would say just for lack of character depth or development that this book belongs as a middle grade novel. But the main plot and the identity of the evil person in Never Better alone make this far too dark to be middle grade. It definitely falls into YA territory when it comes to that! All I will say is that while the MCs are starving to death in a hidden room of the person's house, I was still getting over their identity. Looking back there was foreshadowing, but I kind of passed right over it. That twist is what made this that much more like a Brothers Grimm fairy tale.

Overall, I enjoyed reading this book. I liked what McNeal tried to do with the concept and I feel like he succeeded pretty well. I can even get past the detached narration, because it makes sense when you think of Jacob Grimm being the ultimate storyteller who is detached himself. At least until the very end, when he realizes what Jeremy means to him personally and his own journey. Recommended for younger teens, late middle school or early high school aged. Or anyone who just likes twisted fairy tales for that matter!

**VERDICT:** 3.5/5 Stars

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**\*\*No money or favors were exchanged for this review. This book is now available in stores, online, or maybe even at your local library.\*\*?**

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**Nick says**

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*What follows is the strange and fateful tale of a boy, a girl, and a ghost.*

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#### **4 SOLID STARS!**

You can find the full review and more about this book on my blog!

***Beautiful awesome smoky book cover.** Everything fits, the color, the font, the figures such as the smoky ghost. Great job on the cover, it is perfectly done!*

***Far Far Away** is a strange fantasy novel, filled with a lot of unusual things. Personally when I heard that the narrator is Jacob Grimm, this book took my attention right away. I am a huge fan of The Grimm Brothers and I like to read everything about them. So yeah, I read this one too. I have read books that include the brothers, and I must say, this one is one of the best.*

*It's a story about a boy, Jeremy Johnson Johnson, who can hear the ghost of Jacob Grimm. In the other hand the beautiful Ginger takes a bite of a cake, which is enchanted with a spell, that causes you to fall in love with the first person on whom you cast your eyes after taking a bite. And guess who Ginger saw first? Jeremy. Now everything changes in Jeremy's life, he does things he never imagined doing, and somehow his routine changes. He first enjoys this new life, but what will happen when this will bring him more trouble than joy?*

*This book is really complicated to read. And I think that's nice, because I love books with complicated words, it makes me think more and it's more fun to read, but I don't think people for people under 13 or 12 would be such a fun read, because they wouldn't understand. And the plot is also complicated as well.*

*I recommend this book to every reader out there, if you like challenging books with fantasy and tales, this is the one for you!*

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#### **Larry H says**

I'd rate this 4.5, maybe even 4.75 stars.

"It doesn't matter how young you are or how old you get or how brittle your bones are or how leaky your gray cells, you are still going to flat like a happy ending."

If you're a believer in happy endings, in fairy tales, enchanted spells, ghosts that have a purpose, and evil forests, then Tom McNeal's wonderfully magical *Far Far Away* is a book for you. But if you can't get your head around any of these concepts, this is probably not a book you'll enjoy.

In a land called (of all things) *Never Better*, Jeremy Johnson Johnson (that's his real name; it's not a typo) is a smart, sensitive boy who keeps to himself. You see, Jeremy hears voices—or, more accurately, one



voice—the voice of Jacob Grimm, one half of the famed fairy tale-writing Brothers Grimm. For reasons neither of them can quite understand, Jacob is tasked with protecting Jeremy from the evils that lurk in this world.

But neither Jacob nor Jeremy consider beautiful, mischievous, and athletic Ginger Boultinghouse a threat, not even after she takes a bite of a cake so delicious it's supposedly enchanted with a spell, that causes you to fall in love with the first person on whom you cast your eyes after taking a bite. Naturally, Ginger sees Jeremy first, and finds herself inexplicably enchanted, even though she doesn't believe in such magic. And while Jacob isn't happy that Ginger's attentions are keeping Jeremy from his studies, or that she is somehow convincing him to sneak around late at night and play pranks on residents of their town, Jeremy enjoys the attention—until it brings him more trouble than he bargained for.

And that's just the start of Jeremy's problems. Because in addition to his fellow townspeople suddenly shunning him, there's a small problem of his father owing so much money on their small house that they're about to lose it to the bank. Plus his father hasn't left the house in years. Despite constant attention from a sheriff's deputy determined to find Jeremy and Ginger causing trouble, the kindly baker, Sten Blix, befriends the duo when no one else will.

Jacob is a helpful and trusted companion to Jeremy (although not always a welcome one). Yet as devoted as he is to protecting his charge, Jacob is helpless as an unexpected evil in the form of the dreaded Finder of Occasions takes control of Jeremy and Ginger. It is the toughest challenge the duo—and the ghost—have ever faced. Will the duo be able to outsmart their nemesis? Can a ghost who can only be heard by Jeremy actually help save him?

Far Far Away is a creative, magical, wonderful book. It's a little bit of an anachronism, in that it feels as if it is set in a place far away and a time long ago, yet there are cars and answering machines and credit cards, and Ginger in particular acts more like a modern teenager than anything else. It was a little hard to get into at first, but once I did, I quickly devoured the rest of the story. I found Ginger's manner of speaking a little grating at times, but I really loved everything else about this book.

Predictable? Sure. But that's the beauty of fairy tales: you know where the story will probably end up, but the journey is tremendously worthwhile. And the journey to Far Far Away is definitely worthwhile.

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## **Jeremy says**

So even as a young adult I don't think I would have been into this book at all. As an adult who's about to go into teaching, this book has some redeeming qualities. For one, it's easy to read. The words and story are not difficult to follow at all. But there are a number of difficult words that could be used in a vocabulary test. Also, there are characters students could relate to or understand, such as Jeremy, Ginger, Frank, and Conk. Far Far Away does a good job blending reality with fairy tales and shows how sometimes the two aren't so different. That could be a lesson or activity of some kind: have students identify fairy tale tropes McNeal uses. Another good thing about this book is the red herring McNeal employs: Deputy McRaven. Some characters that you think are one dimensional have some interesting qualities: the sheriff, for example, is your typical bumbling cop, but he does have a soft side.

As a reader though, this book has some issues that I may have noticed (or missed) if I was reading this at a younger age. For one, the plot seems meandering: the game show could be completely removed from the

story and still not affect the plot. Also, there seem to be a lot of unanswered questions: why is the baker the “Finder of Occasions?” I thought he was going to have some deeper, evil power, or the Finder was going to be some disembodied spirit that just inhabited bad people and made them worse. And what about the Prince Cakes? Were they made with people? And what about the plate of Prince Cakes the baker leaves at the end? He made them but didn’t kill the kids? I thought the two were related. I was hoping his last batch was rotten or something, made people sick, I don’t care, but just did something! Maybe the point was that reality and fairy tales aren’t necessarily a 1:1 pairing, but that overarching trends in reality could be read as fairy tales, depending on the language you use.

This book was two different stories: the first story was the “weird/shy kid who has to enjoy his last summer in town and/or raise money to save his house.” Why are so many stories about people raising money for something? Then the last quarter of the book takes a dark turn where they get kidnapped, and only through THE POWER OF SONG are they saved. Huh?

I think McNeal was trying to capitalize on the resurgence in popularity of fairy tales: Shrek, Tangled, Once Upon a Time, etc. What we get is this weird hybrid between the aforementioned tropes, Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, and “Hansel and Gretel.”

I would have advanced sixth graders and maybe seventh graders read this novel, but I wouldn’t go above that. I just think older students would be too turned off by the sheer simplicity of the writing.

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## **Dianne says**

What if you could hear ghosts? What if the ghost you could hear was Jacob Grimm, of the Brothers Grimm fame? Young Jeremy Johnson Johnson,( yes really, that’s his name), is known as slightly odd in his small village of Never Better, where gossip is the local pastime and opinions are often rushed and wrong. Jeremy hasn’t had an easy life, one thing after another has tripped him up, but his heart is huge and in the right place! Jacob Grimm becomes his inner voice, his teacher, his friend and is determined to help keep Jeremy safe. You see, Jacob cannot cross over until he solves the mystery of what is preventing him, he has several regrets in life, but, he doesn’t know how to atone and earn the right to pass on from this world. Maybe Jeremy is his key to a peaceful eternity?

Ginger has latched on to Jeremy, her wild and daring ideas sometimes get Jeremy in trouble, but she is one of his biggest supporters in a town that shuns anyone different. Between Ginger and Jacob, Jeremy has a chance to see himself in a brighter light, learns to step outside of his comfort zone and to be happy with who he is.

Author Tom McNeal’s characters were odd, quirky, imperfect, and often hilarious. He allows Jacob to narrate the story in his own way, after all, he probably has more writing experience, being around two hundred years old! Jeremy’s world felt both modern and “old-fashioned,” sometimes I would forget that this is a modern day tale, and expected to hear the clip clop of horses pulling carts! Written for Young Adults, there is something for everyone with its many unfolding mysteries and subplots! This is an enchanting and warm read about a young boy and his ghost that will pull at your heart!

An ARC edition of **Far Far Away** was provided by NetGalley and Random House Children's Books in exchange for my honest review.

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Age Recommendation: Young Adults, over 12

My Rating: 5 stars

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## Brooklyn says

"What follows is the strange and fateful tale of a boy, a girl, and a ghost."

These are the words that captured my attention from the first paragraph (well, i guess more like sentence), but before i go into further detail, lets summarize:

this story is set in the point of view of the ghost Jacob Grimm, who, though his name is pronounced yaw-kub, i never got out of the habit of calling him jacob. though i have to admit, calling him yaw-kub had a glimmer of charm to it. it definitely made me love him more! so, our jacob is watching over a boy named jeremy johnson johnson, a very special boy. jeremy can hear jacob talking, as he can hear other ghosts. (this definitely appealed to my paranormal side) everything isnt sunshine and daisies though. so theres this dude: this Finder of Occasions guy. and im sitting here thinking, finder of occasions. nifty name for a bad guy. this story just gets better and better. then i learn that this finder of occasions identity is-hello-unknown and that hes out to get poor jeremy. & our plot has arisen. thank you god for a writer as talented as mcneal. these have been my prayers to bed as of late.

of course, like all of my summaries, i tend to drift off... i cant stick to one thought, especially when ive read a book as fantastic as far far away. seriously. its unfortunate that this is not a series, because i woulda paid some serious cha ching for the next installment, had it been a real thing. lets move on. gotta keep focused.

things i absolutely adored about this book:

1. everything.
2. the names. i mean, come on. sten blix. jeremy johnson johnson. ginger bouldinghouse. burpo bowen. the towns name? never better? what the crap. how amazingly amazing. i thought, man, this dude is taking some serious risks. and then i thought, HOLY HECK THIS IS AMAZING.
3. the dialogue. how much more realistic and absolutely adorably awesome can you get than the things ginger says?
4. the characterization. all of mcneals characters were not just characters. they were real people. i loved them like they were sitting next to me, or rather, that i was in the same situations as them, and honestly? i was loving every minute of it. EVERY. SINGLE. MINUTE. :D
5. all of the stories and fairy tales. we constantly had a retelling of some kind of fairy tale and i loved how it was interlaced with jeremys own kind of fairy tale. it was one big kasplosion of fairy tale awesomeness.
6. the emotion. dear god, the emotion in this book. i laughed whenever ginger opened her mouth, swear on

my life. i trembled anxiously while jeremy was in the game show, and i nearly screamed when he continued on and on with each question. you almost had me there mcneal. i almost gave up trying to read the book, the emotion had me in tatters. i sobbed my dang face off at the ending. literally. cried. so. hard. i even cried after the game show.

7. the entire freaking plot. how genius. how... just... i dont even know. please. someone explain to me how a human being could have came up with something so wildly perfect? never could i have dreamt up a book such as this. never.

8. jacob grimm. he was a personal favorite. he bout tore me to pieces with how desparing and yet happy he was. he truly cared for jeremy, like he were his own child. the fact that we knew this almost the instant we heard jacob going "the studies, jeremy, the studies" and they didnt know it as much as we did was all the more perfect.

9. the ending. way to tie up the loose ends. a lot of authors tend to forget about things, or overlook them, or simply ignore them. bravo mcneal, because you sure threw in a real tear jerkin ending there. you had to know it was coming, and yet you cried your way through it (or at least i did, i dont know about any other readers or future readers) and asked for a cookie to cheer you up when you finished. (again, thats what i do. i dont know about you other crying pansies out there)

10. the fact that this book exists. god. please. write another one. please. i am mcneals new number 1 fan.

and because i cant not talk about it... THE FINDER OF OCCASIONS! ITS...

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look away if you dislike spoilers though i already added a warning!

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STEN BLIX! WHAT? NO! WHY? HE WAS THE ONLY ONE ON THEIR SIDE AND HE WAS A SUICIDAL PSYCHO? WHHAAATTT? WHAT? WHAT? no. gosh. i kind of knew it was him, and yet, i kept trying to convince myself it wasnt. like, one of the notes i wrote as i read this was "hit me while i was reading. maybe hes the hero and hes there to save them, not to doom them." that was literally not a page

before he drugged the snot out of them, stuck them in the back of his truck, drove around sadistically with them in the back of your truck and talked to jeremys parents, WITH THE CHILDREN IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK, and then proceeded to take them to your secret lair under the not so innocent bakery, lock them up with frank bailey, who, it was painstakingly obvious at least to me, that he was NOT at some super awesome cooking school, and starve them and poison them. WTH. no. get out of here you psycho santa claus. this just proves it: dont trust swedish people.

i kid, i kid. but come on! jolly old sten blix, the guy who makes the princesstartas, which, i was completely convinced was made out of chopped up little children and that was the source of the green smoke, had kidnapped some kids just for putting pop rocks in his cereal and trapped them in his freaky hotel/dungeon basement, starved them and then fed them rat poisoning. then jumped into a fire. this is one occasion where i will not say "YOU DESERVE TO DIE, GO MAIM YOURSELF." instead, i will say, you sir, deserve to be sent to jail where you will experience first hand what you put ginger frank and jeremy through minus the starving/poisoning/creepy night noises bit.

okay. moving on. ive ranted enough.

the romance was good. and by good i mean barely there at all, and no that was not sarcastic. i mean good as in, for once we have a story that survived on its own two feet with barely a lick of any romance at all that 90% of the authors today rely on to keep their books afloat. thank you mcneal for a genuine experience.

now, excuse me while i go cry over my life once again because, a) i cannot speak to ghosts and b) even if i could speak to ghosts, mine probably wouldnt be some super cool one like jacob grimm because he ALREADY MOVED ON.

gosh. i need to quit. im getting to worked up about this. way to worked up. as it happens, i started this book way long ago, had to quit in order to finish some other books, then came back to this one, was once again entranced, and finished it in a single night.

congrats mcneal. what a terrific page turner. you have earned my respect and i love this book from my toes to the tips of my ears. you should most definitely be proud of this achievement. and now, i take my leave. good day, and a+ to you.

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## **Malia says**

4.5 stars

Wonderful! This was such a treat, and such a change from my regular fare of murder and mayhem (literary style, of course). The story combines contemporary YA with a generous splash of magic and history, and the blend is a winner.

Jeremy Johnson Johnson can hear ghosts. That his how he comes into contact with the spirit of Jacob Grimm, one of the German Grimm brothers who collected fairy tales. I grew up in Germany and was read these tales all the time, so there was something quite nostalgic about this part of the story. The German phrases McNeal used were always correct and appropriate,too, which often is not the case when an author

uses foreign phrases.

Jeremy is a kind and thoughtful teenager, who has been dealt a tough hand. His mother is gone, his father has been unemployed for half his life, and to make matters worse, the threat of eviction has become very real. Added to his troubles, comes the dubious fact that young people and children have been going missing in the small town in recent years. Fortunately, Jeremy has Jacob and his sage advice and his new friend, Ginger, to rely on. All the same, trouble manages to catch up with them, and the story turns quite dark, though I was happy with the ending.

The only tiny issue I had was that I had guessed who the villain was rather early on, and there was one mystery that, at least as far as I can see, was never resolved.

Nonetheless, this was a wonderful, very atmospheric and memorable book, and I cannot wait to explore what else McNeal has written!

Definitely for fans of Gaiman, Hilari Bell, Johnathan Stroud...

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## **Jessica says**

This book is not something I'd normally be interested in reading, but *To Be Sung Underwater* was one of my favorite books of 2011. I had no idea that McNeal had another life as a children's author.

This one's actually a title for teens, and I found it quite charming. It reminded me so much of *Pushing Daisies* that I even heard Jim Dale's voice as I was reading it.

Jeremy Johnson Johnson is an outcast in his small town of Never Better. His two surnames honor the fact that his parents were both named Johnson - though they weren't related. His mother took off when he was young and his father hasn't left the house since. He runs the Two-Book Bookstore, which only stock the two volumes of his grandfather's autobiography and doesn't actually make any money. As if that weren't weird enough, he's the only one who can hear the voice of a ghost. That ghost is Jacob Grimm, who's not able to move on to the afterlife until he's fulfilled his duties on Earth. Evidently, for reasons unknown, his duties involve protecting Jeremy from enigmatic danger.

Tell me that doesn't sound like a Bryan Fuller pilot.

This isn't a flawless book. Sometimes, the fact that Jacob Grimm is a narrator who can sneak off and see what other people are up to feels a bit like a device and I never fully understood the origins, if you will, of the sinister part of the storyline. Overall, though, I was so lost in the quirkiness that I wasn't overly bothered by a few problems in the execution. I think anyone who gets excited by offbeat themes and a little suspension of disbelief will enjoy this book.

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## **Melissa says**

Intrusive narrator + adult main character + slow action = a book adults think kids will like. Bleh.

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## **Monica Edinger says**

This is a very unique read, sort of spooky, definitely creepy as it goes on. With one notable exception, the characters are-not-quite Grimm characters, but nearly. The book is filled with Grimm tropes and you think the author is going to take you in somewhat predictable fairy-tale directions and he doesn't. McNeal really knows how to make food sound really scrumptious and also various characters twinkly and fun until...they are not. It probably would have given me nightmares as a kid. That is, I was the sort of kid who always freaked out around clowns and there is a character in this book that reinforces just why they freaked me out. Can't say more without spoilage.

Highly original.

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## **Brenda Kahn says**

Wow! I totally missed this and thankfully my IT guy stumbled upon the audio and raved about it. I was riveted and scared throughout the entire book. The ghost of Jacob Grimm, the fairy tale parallels, this is a story that will stick with for a long time. I am glad that I read it with my ears as the narrator was excellent with his accents and inflections.

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## **Kat Heckenbach says**

I was actually a little skeptical of this book. I have to be honest--the cover turned me off. I don't normally mention covers in reviews unless they are exceptional or really bad. This one was sort of a non-cover to me. Just nothing. Boring. Made me almost pass the book by.

But. I. Am. So. Glad. I. Didn't.

First of all the concept is cool. A boy hearing the voice of the ghost of Jacob Grimm! I was, however, afraid it would end up hokey or...I don't know. I just really doubted it was going to be pulled off brilliantly, but I should not have feared. The author handled it perfectly. You really tasted the voice of the ghost of Mr. Grimm, and yet Jeremy held center stage at the same time. I felt so connected to both of them as characters, and I just don't know how the author did it.

I. Am. Impressed.

The plot itself was clever. Certain things were maybe predictable, but only in the how-a-fairy-tale-should-be kind of way. And the whole cast of characters were just exactly what they should be. I loved Ginger. I was suspicious of her at first, but she quickly showed that she was a true friend for Jeremy and I was glad. I thought she was spunky and fun, and deeper than the others gave her credit for. Maybe deeper than she gave herself credit for.

The story, of course, uses the Grimm fairy tales as a plot device. It's not just a show of author knowledge, though, as some of these types of books can be. Everything is tied so intricately together. The telling of stories, the use of their meanings within the book's story, and the fact that ultimately this is a fairy tale itself. Layers. I love layers!

I have to mention this--it is NOT a middle grade novel. I'm not sure why I keep seeing reviewers refer to it as such, but it's very dark during the second half and deals with things that are not generally found in middle grade novels. Also, Jeremy and Ginger are 15. I really don't get why it's been categorized as middle grade. Not that this should be reserved for older teens, but don't give it to your nine-year-old. I'd recommend at least 12, which makes this young adult level.

Anyway--highly recommended!

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My YA fantasy series:

book 1

book 2

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