



## Picking Up the Ghost

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When a letter informs fourteen-year-old Cinque Williams of the passing of the father he never met, he is faced with an incomplete past and an uncertain future. A curse meant for his father condemns Cinque to a slow death even as it opens his eyes to the strange otherworld around him.

## **Picking Up the Ghost Details**

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Author : Tone Milazzo

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# From Reader Review Picking Up the Ghost for online ebook

## Justin says

I enjoyed PICKING UP THE GHOST more than I thought I would. The story of Cinque, a young urban kid, trying to find who he is and where he comes from in a dying city starts off rather slow, and for the first fifty or so pages I struggled to keep reading. But, once Cinque's life is shaken by a traumatic event and he learns of the reality of voodoo, the story picks up steam and starts to ramble forward on more interesting wheels. By the time it was over I was thoroughly enjoying Cinque's story and wanted to know where it was headed next. Great job, Mr. Milazzo.

Two issues I had with the formatting (I read it on Kindle):

There text wasn't fully justified on the right.

There are frequent British spellings of words such as "colour," but the character isn't British, and it doesn't take place there, nor did I buy it from Amazon UK.

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## Tone says

I liked it.

But I'm not the kind to give myself 5 stars.

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## Barbara Gordon says

I picked up (sorry) this book because of the striking and unusual cover art, reminiscent of graffiti and perfectly suited to the setting. I bought it because of the unusual setting (a decaying Southern city) and protagonist, a young Black boy (I get so tired of default-setting protagonists).

What I liked about Picking Up the Ghost: most of it. The book design is very attractive, with the same distinctive art continued throughout. The way magic was entwined into a derelict post-industrial landscape instead of a pseudo-medieval fantasyland. The very unpleasant and threatening ghosts, and the way Cinque simply falls into an otherworld that seems to run just a half-block over from the world we know. I was reminded of Tim Powers and of Stephen King's Talisman (only without King's weakness for the Magical Negro), and of course of Nalo Hopkinson.

Other stuff: It's clear that this is a debut novel. The prose, especially in the first chapters, is sometimes awkward. The plot rambles and stalls a few times, and the story was slowed, I felt, by the new writer's tendency to include All the Cool Stuff. (Of course, I don't know how much Cool Stuff Milazzo might have cut before publication!)

Although I'd guess this to be more a 'boy book', being about the quest for the father, the female characters weren't bitches or doormats, but seemed to have their own lives rather than existing only in relation to Cinque. So overall I'd call this a strong debut.

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## Ben Babcock says

I wasn't sure I would like *Picking Up the Ghost* before I started it. The back cover copy bills it as a coming-of-age story about a kid from an impoverished background learning more about himself and his absent father through magic and encounters with ghosts. None of that pushes my personal urban fantasy buttons. But I gave it a try, and it just goes to show why reading widely and keeping an open mind can be rewarding. Tone Milazzo presently surprises with a story that is both endearing and somewhat original in its emphasis and expression. It's not a book about beating a bad guy or saving the world. It's about learning who you are and having confidence in yourself rather than relying on others.

Cinque seizes an opportunity to find out more about his father when he receives a letter informing him of his father's death. He hitches a ride from St Jude's into Chicago (this in and of itself is ill-advised) to claim his father's effects. As a fourteen-year-old black kid from a very poor city, part of him is hoping for money, and lots of it. Instead he gets an unopened letter from his mother and a book about the Black Arts. Coupled with strange dreams and seeing ghosts, this leads Cinque down a very dark rabbit hole indeed.

A spirit steals Cinque's heart. As he tries to discover what to do about it, he meets an African guru by dreamwalking, a mysterious woman named Iru who oversees important moments of change, and a cynical ghost named Willy T. Cinque continually trusts and listens to these characters and others, and this proves to be a bad idea. For this is the primary lesson of *Picking Up the Ghost*: don't trust people until they earn it. By far the majority of the bad mojo that visits Cinque is a result of him blindly following the lead of another character, simply because they are explaining something to him. Cinque takes their explanations on faith rather than being critical, and this gets him into progressively hotter and hotter water.

Eventually Cinque realizes his problem and starts fighting back. And this is where *Picking Up the Ghost* starts to shine: Cinque is a very empowered young adult protagonist. Though he makes a few shady deals with some spirits, on the whole his redemption is of his own making. He takes matters into his own hands, and instead of looking for an instruction book to help him get of trouble, he writes his own. The climax truly is a thrilling turning point, where Cinque begins to stand up against the threats that have, until that point, thoroughly trounced him.

The events leading up to that climax are a little confusing. Cinque goes through this whole trial in which he must discard his identity and become no one, nameless, in order to escape the antagonist. Before he can turn the tables, he must reclaim his identity. This is a powerful sequence, but Milazzo doesn't invest it with the greatest clarity. I wish there had been more detail to explain exactly what was happening. This is one of the reasons I'm leery of books in this vein—they use some of the trappings of magical realism that I like the least, namely a taste for surreal descriptions that I have trouble reconciling with reality. Cinque isn't really Cinque any more, but everyone tells him he is Cinque. He had a hook in his skull, but presumably there was no mark, no blood—so it was a magic hook of some kind. It's all just very vague and dreamy and magicky (as opposed to magical).

Some of the other plot points could also have been integrated more organically. Without delving too deeply into the spoiler bag, the whole thing about Cinque being the seventh son of a seventh son comes out of nowhere. The antagonist lets it slip during a particularly nasty confrontation between the two of them, but aside from furnishing him with slightly more motivation for his relentless attack against Cinque, it doesn't seem to have much bearing.

This are rough edges around an otherwise very enjoyable book. *Picking Up the Ghost* is a novel of confrontation and transformation. I've shelved it as young adult, because it would definitely appeal to young adults—but it is a very adult young-adult novel; it is dark, not in an explicit way but in a profound one. Cinque learns tough lessons and becomes stronger for it. In the end, his relationship with Eshu—the being claiming to be a god that helps Cinque in return for some favours—is never fully resolved, so there is a strong hint of a potential sequel. But with the main plot wrapped up, this is a thoroughly satisfying novel that can stand alone.

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### **Angela(demonsangel) Fitzgerald says**

I think it was a strong and promising debut for Milazzo. I found the book slow in the beginning but it does pick up.

Cinque is a 14 year old boy who is unclear of his origins and himself. He is on a path of self discovery. When he gets the letter he can't help but journey in hopes of making sure he has a future.

Cinque's journey takes him to the otherworldly. When he starts seeing ghost and spirits is when the story picks up. Of course, Milazzo introduced magic and that made it a good read as well. I think if magic hadn't been added the book may not have become a book.

Cinque comes to question others motives and taking it in face value he realizes he can do what must be done himself. I think that was a great way to introduce that everyone ends up doing but its better when you learn these things early on. When Milazzo introduces this to the story it makes it have meaning.

Overall it was a good read but it does have a few things I didn't like or questioned. I was taken back with the whole voodoo mumbo jumbo. I also didn't like that there weren't any main characters or any strong characters to connect with. I must say that this isn't a book that I would have ever bought only because its not my usual choice of the type of books I read. But, even though it was enjoyable so I give it 4 stars.

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### **Bri Beck says**

I will say that at first I was a little hesitant at reading the entire book seeing as the beginning threw me off..... But once I read past the first three chapters or so I instantly became hooked. This book is full of twist and turns and was humorous as well. I will say that this book is worth the read. I also love love love how this book has many factors which make you think. This book is different but in such a good way!!!!

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### **Wendy says**

This story surpassed any expectations I had and surprised me at every turn. A good mix of raw & mystic experiences wrapped in a boy's self-realization as he quests to find his identity by trying to piece together intimidating pieces of his unknown father's past. Plus, there were some very bad-ass supernatural characters, demons and creatures!

I deeply identified with Cinque's desire to understand himself and his impulsive assumptions that his own mystery could be solved by understanding the father he never knew. This was very well written and engaging. I am glad that I got to know this good kid and his family and watch him grow so authentically. It's emotional, nostalgic, mystic and wicked!

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### **Brad says**

Starts slow, but an interesting read. The profanity will keep the book out of many young person's reading lists, which is probably unfortunate. I got into the characters; I want a sequel to find out what happens with Cinque and Imani.

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### **Tracy Murray says**

I have to start by saying that I enjoyed the book. I enjoyed the characters and most of the story. However...(sorry) it was difficult to get through. It took me a very long time to get through this relatively short book. I found myself wanted to skip ahead to the next part. I also kept feeling like I was missing out on something secret. Maybe inside symbolism that wasn't meant for me but meant something to the author.

I wanted more interaction between the people and less in the other world. Great potential to be either a story about finding your own way, or your own way out, but didn't quite hit it.

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### **Cyberiasha says**

Picking up the Ghost was a pleasant surprise. I will admit that I found it hard to get into at the beginning. It starts out slow as it depicts the barren almost destitute town of St. Jude, however, Cinque holds the story together and his path of self discovery is one for the ages. Cinque is a young man unclear of his origins and unclear of himself. His town is one that has seen good times but similar to many other factory towns saw its own demise with the closure of the nearby plant. This town is the backdrop for a number of magical occurrences that bring Cinque closer to understanding what many adults are searching for, his own truth. Picking up the Ghost does have a couple of lulls but if you plow through those and read it with an open mind the intended message is clear, knowledge is power but only when used with a measure of discernment and tempering. Out of five stars I am giving it the full five. Its rare that I am surprised by a book and when I am, I prefer to take note of it. This is a thought provoking read that you are sure to enjoy. Happy reading.

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### **Frank says**

I'll refrain from gushing over Tone's book (being biased as I am), and just say this: It's a strong debut; a well-done hero's journey with some excellent twists and turns; and very gutsy in his choice of protagonist and subject matter. And he accomplishes it all without leaving me feeling uncomfortable. I really enjoyed the approach to magic, it felt grounded, real and visceral; not at all like the silly faux-Latin spells and wands of certain other child sorcerers.

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## **Tahlia Newland says**

Picking up the Ghost is an unusual and fascinating story about the search for identity and inner strength cleverly written in a way that is entertaining and accessible for teens.

Living in St. Jude, a 110-year-old dying city on the edge of the Mississippi, is tough. But when a letter informs fourteen-year-old Cinque Williams of the passing of the father he never met, he is faced with an incomplete past and an uncertain future. A curse meant for his father condemns Cinque to a slow death even as it opens his eyes to the strange otherworld around him. With help from the ghost Willy T, an enigmatic White Woman named Iku, an African Loa, and a devious shape-shifter, Cinque gathers the tools to confront the ghost of his dead father. But he will learn that sometimes too much knowledge can be dangerous—and the people he trusts most are those poised to betray him.

Fifteen-year-old Cinque gets a letter telling him that his father, who he has never met, has died. This begins his search to find out who his father was. When he starts to see ghosts, spirits and magical constructs, the search changes to another level. I can't go into this too much without giving away the story, but I can say that there was an amazing array of strange and wonderful creatures, eg the octopus-like one with many yabbering mouths on the end of the tentacles and the variety of fibs (the result of his father's lies). One of these spectres becomes dangerous and threatens Cinque's potential for happiness, basically trying to make him take on the sins of his father - a great concept.

Cinque and the other characters are believable and realistic. In trying to handle these dangerous spirits and fibs, he runs into some people who say they can help, and they do to a certain extent. But at what cost? Over the period of the book, Cinque comes to question others' motives, rather than taking them on face value as he does in the beginning, and he ends up relying on himself rather than outside help. This is a clear analogy for the inner journey everyone must go through at some point in order to know themselves – the challenge of adolescence. As such, it is not just a great story, but also a deeply meaningful book.

I did have a little difficulty do to the cultural difference between me as an Australian and what was very much a black American context, primarily what I figured was voodoo speak. I don't know if it's being released in Australia or not, but if so, or even for a white audience, a word at the beginning that explains the magical context would be helpful.

I recommend it for anyone who likes something different, and anyone interested in the above themes. I think it would be particularly excellent for teenage boys, especially those with a Black American background. It's a well written book and I give it 4 stars.

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## **Indy Quillen says**

Before reading this book I noticed some readers had mentioned the book got off to a slow start, so I admit that's what I was expecting. But, that wasn't my experience. I believe it's because I was immediately taken in

by the main character, Cinque. The author did a good job of portraying the fourteen year-old boy, but it was the writing that made me want to keep reading from the first page. I have to say, I would've read this book and enjoyed it even without the paranormal aspects, because Milazzo made me care about Cinque from the first page. But the author cleverly used the magic to create many life lessons and teaching experiences - a nice bonus that supported the coming of age story.

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### **Victoria says**

This is a good first book.

I had a bit of trouble getting into the book at first. I had a little trouble relating to Cinque. But by chapter 3 I was hooked. It's an interesting spin on magick, voodoo, juju, and hoodoo. I liked the boy's exploration of it. The sense of place was very strong in this book. This book has a lot going for it. I'm eager to see what Milazzo comes up with next!

I received this book as a first reads winner.

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### **Elaine Smith says**

I agree with another reviewer that this is a strong debut, with a lot of magic--all kinds of magic! that somehow feels grounded. I love the bits of wisdom that the hero, Cinque, picks up from various ghosts. One tells him, "I won't do this thing for you because it's the doing that's important...I am offering to make you stronger, strong enough to solve your own problems." And another says, "But the most important magic ain't magic at all, it's how you present yourself...Confidence...." And as Cinque goes on his journey and encounters truisms like these, he grows in confidence. Well written with a lot of humor. Enjoyable read.

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