



Marvel and a Wonder

Joe Meno

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Marvel and a Wonder is a darkly mesmerizing epic and literary page-turner set at the end of the twentieth century. In summer 1995, Jim Falls, a Korean War vet, struggles to raise his sixteen-year-old grandson, Quentin, on a farm in southern Indiana. In July, they receive a mysterious gift--a beautiful quarter horse--which upends the balance of their difficult lives. The horse's appearance catches the attention of a pair of troubled, meth-dealing brothers and, after a violent altercation, the horse is stolen and sold. Grandfather and grandson must travel the landscape of the bleak heartland to reclaim the animal and to confront the ruthless party that has taken possession of it. Along the way, both will be forced to face the misperceptions and tragedies of their past.

Evoking the writing of William Faulkner and Denis Johnson, this brilliant, deeply moving work explores the harrowing, often beautiful marvels of a nation challenged by its own beliefs. Ambitious, expansive, and laden with suspense, *Marvel and a Wonder* presents an unforgettable pair of protagonists at the beginning of one America and the end of another.

Marvel and a Wonder Details

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Author : Joe Meno

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From Reader Review *Marvel and a Wonder* for online ebook

Robert Intriago says

An interesting and dark story but to compare it to Faulkner or Cormack McCarthy is a little too far for me. When I first started the book I thought maybe a little bit like “The Reivers” by Faulkner, but soon desisted. Do not get me wrong I did enjoy this book. In a small town in Indiana that is slowly dying because the factories, restaurants, and farms are disappearing, young men and women without jobs turn to drugs and crimes.

The book is not for the faint of heart as it can be very violent at times. The characters are vivid and the writing is workman like but not exceptional. I had some complaints about the book, which lowered my rating. The ending tends to drag a little bit and at times redundant and there seems to be a persistent depiction of southerners as gun totting, racists, drug idle and brainless religious fanatics. A little bit of a generalization.

Areli Joy says

Marvel and a Wonder is a story about a grandfather and a grandson who are somehow distant from each other. Until a horse (a racing horse to be exact) came into their lives and changed everything. They became closer to each other. Their once boring lives became adventurous in some ways, and they really had one hell of an adventure in the climax! That part, the adventure part, I liked the most. I just feel not contented with its ending. It just ended like ENDED like I can't even explain!!! I want to know what happens next after that last paragraph. :(

It took me 7 days to finish this book. I know... I read it so slow-paced. To be honest, I found it hard to read, I found it hard to finish. Don't get me wrong, though. I like the story. I like the theme and the moral of the story. It's just that it's not my cup of tea. I also kind of did not like its structure and the way it was written (maybe?). I also think that it does not connect to the reader.

However, I would still recommend this book to those who like general fiction, a straight-story novel, and to those who love witty novels.

Laura says

This is one of those split rating books where I was loving it . . . and then I wasn't. Maybe four stars for the writing and the majority of the book, and two for the ending. I was a bit surprised at the Cormac McCarthy-esque nature of this book, as the only other *Meno* I had previously read was the hipster-angst *Office Girl*. The story is a little bit softer around the edges than McCarthy but, in the end, equally violent and bleak. Beautifully written and compelling, but the ending left me feeling pretty desolate, so I can't really say I loved it. Yes, there's some hope, but overall the message is fairly dark. There's definitely a first half/second half to this book, with some characters and the majority of the violence being introduced fairly late in the story. I also thought there was a bit of a mixed message to Rick's character. *Meno* gives him hints of remorse and a touch of introspection, but they didn't help me to see any depth in him and just kind of mucked up his

menacing, fumbling incapability. At times I wanted to hug the book because I wished the best for Jim, Quentin and the horse, but by the end I was ready to be done.

Tina says

Thanks to Akashic Books for granting me access to a digital review copy in Edelweiss.

I am in the minority of readers who did not enjoy this book very much.

The main story is great. Jim Falls is an aging farmer with precarious health who is struggling financially. He is also a grieving widower and father to a drug addicted screw-up daughter who has just dumped her emotionally damaged teenage son, Quentin, in his care. Not an original premise, but very well written.

The second half of the book is filled with gratuitous violence committed by desperate sad sacks and psychotics, reminiscent of some of Cormac McCarthy's books. I know that horse racing is a notoriously corrupt business, but I was put off by this aspect of the book. I resorted to skimming through the unsavory parts so I could get back to Jim and Quentin's story.

Marjorie says

This book is a marvel and a wonder indeed! I truly enjoyed the heart-wrenching emotional journey it took me on. This beautiful story filled my heart with wonder until it was overflowing. It's a magical, compelling and utterly unique book.

The author has written a multi-layered love story between a grumpy grandfather, the grandson who bewilders him and an astonishing horse. The hope that this horse brings into their lives begins to form a connection between them. That new-found hope is in peril when the horse, which is both financially and emotionally valuable, is stolen from them. Their pursuit after the thieves will have you on the edge of your seat. But the suspenseful chase isn't the heart of this book. The heart of this book lies in the beauty that unfolds within its pages, the glimpses into the lives and pasts of this man and boy. This author has the mind and soul of a poet. I felt so connected with the main characters and could empathize with them completely and cared about their plight. And of course there's the amazing horse, who will find a place in your heart and will never leave.

This is a literary creation by a gifted author. It's the first book I've read by this author. He's been compared to William Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy, but I'd like to add another comparison: John Steinbach. A book that is well-deserving of the many awards that I have no doubt will be coming its way. Highly recommended to those who enjoy literary achievements.

I won this book through LibraryThing with the understanding that I would give an honest review in return.

Billie Hinton says

Good read, with many beautifully-written passages. I would give it 3.5 if I could. Why it's not a 4: a horse figures largely in this novel. Some of the horse behaviors and other descriptions of things to do with the horse were not well-researched. As a horsewoman, that pulled me out of the story numerous times throughout. This horse does assume somewhat magical proportions in the novel but if this extended to basic behaviors and facts it was not set up in a way that made it clear. A few editing glitches and imo a structural weakness in introducing what became one of the main characters were also aspects that pulled me out of the book. Still - a good read, though not imo comparable to Cormac McCarthy.

Shawn Mooney says

Jim is a 70-something widower, an Indiana farmer on the verge of bankruptcy. He lives with his daughter, although she's always strung out on drugs, and rarely actually at home, and 16-year-old half-black grandson, Quentin. A man of few words, Jim feels virtually incapable of connecting with his chubby, glue-sniffing grandson, who only seems to be interested in the weird reptiles he keeps as pets.

Into this bleak family scene comes a gorgeous racehorse, dropped off at Jim's one day out of the blue, and nobody knows who has given it to him. But it is his, or theirs. And what a difference a horse makes! Grandfather and grandson come alive, their hardscrabble existence goes technicolor.

I'm not a horse person, but Joe Meno made me love this horse as much as the characters in the novel loved it. The many many passages which describe the horse in motion are stunning.

But all is not well in 1990s America, not even in rural Indiana: some ne'er-do-wells in the neighborhood have designs on this horse, and the family's brief joy is shattered. The second half of the novel is quite violent and incredibly suspenseful as grandfather and grandson set out to regain what was--yes, improbably, but also rightfully--theirs. Along the way on this almost madcap, incredibly dangerous road trip, Jim and Quentin struggle to find the words for what the missing horse means to them, what they mean to each other.

Because it's such a struggle for them, what few inarticulations they do force out pack a real wallop. All the while, I was sitting on the edge of my seat through most of the second half. I don't usually like books that threaten to turn violent with every turn of the page, but neither the suspense nor the violent parts felt gratuitous.

What a wonderful book, by an author I knew nothing about until I noticed this book reviewed in the New York Times. I think Meno is capable of a masterpiece. I wouldn't go so far as to call this one a masterpiece, but it was an incredible read! The author has a very cinematic writing style; it's structured very much like a movie, one that I would enjoy watching with my eyes shut half the time.

Angela M says

It's 1995 and financial hard times have hit the people of this Indiana community including Jim Falls , a veteran of the Korean War , who is trying to make do on his farm . But this is about much more than the making do . It's about family crisis and the heartbreak caused by an addicted daughter and mother and about

the hope that can spring when a grandfather and grandson bond after realizing that they have each other.

Quentin , 16 years old , biracial, doesn't know his father and his drug addicted mother abandons him leaving him with his grandfather . The story is in some ways a coming of age story as Quentin learns some harsh life lessons. It's also about Jim coming to terms with his past and learning a few things about himself. I love the way their relationship grows. Their journey to find the love they have to give each other and fill the voids of loneliness they each carry , is a difficult one .

A race horse is willed to Jim by mistake and it is instrumental in bringing Jim and Quentin together . When the horse is stolen, their journey to follow the thieves to find the horse becomes dark, dangerous and gritty as their paths cross with drug dealers and thieves and some unscrupulous to say the least characters.

I was drawn to the writing from the beginning - so much in the simplistic yet full descriptions and I found the narrative technique to be quite interesting. Flashes to the past and then back to present blended one paragraph after another . Oddly enough these felt seamless but later on - alternating paragraphs of the grandfather and the boy and the criminals they were pursuing took a little getting used to but somehow it worked knowing what each of them were doing at the same time .

It's a gripping story , tense at times , violent at times but very much worth knowing this grandfather and grandson.

Thanks to Akashic Books and Edelweiss for the advance copy .

Matthew Allard says

I love Joe Meno. But I much prefer his more surreal, absurdist fiction than his "serious" books. *Marvel and a Wonder* is one of his serious books. There's no color or flavor here. He's always well-written but this one is lacking any excitement. Nearly halfway through and the horse hasn't even been stolen yet (which seemed to be the main plot line from the book jacket). I love a character study but I'm having a hard time feeling invested in this. Bummer.

Kevin Krein says

i've never read any cormac mccarthy but i am lead to believe that this book is supposed to be similar in tone and style. it unfolds SO SLOWLY and so deliberately that it takes a long time to get into, and even then, i wasn't 100% committed to it. however, i will commend joe meno's ability to write within a different style in practically every book he's put out. but they always have echoes of another writer to them- *The Great Perhaps* was similar to john franzen, *Hairstyles of The Damned* was similar to stephen chbosky. nothing i guess can be as innovative as *The Boy Detective Fails* or as odd and sparse as *Office Girl*.

Marvel and A Wonder is a weird book, inexplicably set in the mid 1990s (OJ references throughout) and throughout all of it, i just felt kind of bad for all the unsavory characters, making sad, poor decisions with their lives.

Mark says

Blood Orange Mint Julep

juice of 1 blood orange (plus half a lemon depending on preferred tartness)
2 tbsp sugar
2 oz. bourbon or whiskey
mint
bitters
ice

Add sugar and bitters to a highball glass. Add mint, and macerate with sugar until fragrant. Add remaining ingredients in this order: ice, bourbon, juice, more ice. Stir well until sugar is all dissolved.

Josh says

(2.5) I received this via Akashic books by giveaway for an honest review.

To be **honest** this is not the kind of book I gravitate to. I'm not a fan of horse racing or even horses in general, so the subject matter was definitely not my thing, but I've heard praise about Joe Meno, so I thought I'd give it a try.

At first glance, you can tell *Marvel and a Wonder* has been cared for in a great way. The packaging reminds you of all the Europa Editions books, the artwork is sleek and somewhat minimal and definitely eye-catching. As I opened the book and started reading, through the first page or so, I get a general feeling that 'yeah, this guy can write.', but as I trudged on, I just didn't connect with any of the characters or the story itself. I didn't *feel* much about the hi's and low's of Grandfather Jim and Quentin, what they went through or where they were going.

As I said above, Meno can write and that's why I'm bumping it up to 3 stars.

Nathan says

The latest from Mr. Meno is ultimately a let-down having loved so many of his previous works. I like the pulpish style of *Marvel and Wonder*, but have a hard time connecting with the characters, and feel parts of the plot disjointed, unbelievable, and not contributing much to the whole. Maybe this would have been better as a short story. The past few Meno publications have fallen flat, so here's hoping he can recapture the magic of his earlier books.

Melissa says

I received an advanced review copy from Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review.

Another novel that reminds me greatly of Cormac McCarthy and now Ron Rash (after just finishing **Above the Waterfall**). **Marvel and a Wonder** follows Jim Falls and his grandson, Quintin, as they work the farm day-to-day in contemporary Indiana. Quintin's mother is a junkie that is rarely home so Jim is raising him on his own. Unexpectedly, Jim is bequeathed a beautiful white racehorse from an unknown donor. Things seem fairly calm right up until the horse is stolen one night, Jim is shot by one of the kidnappers (two brothers, one of which is a PTSD victim from fighting in the Gulf) and Quintin and Jim head off after them.

There is a lot to dig into in this novel. It's gritty, comedic at times and there's plenty of intensity as well.

Rasmus Skovdal says

I really wanted to like this – or, rather, I really wanted it to be good. Which is of course unfair, but hey, that's how it goes.

And I guess it is good – or at least, pretty good. A sparse story about an old man and a young man chasing a stolen horse, the actual plot doesn't really matter that much. This feels like an attempt at setting a mood, and hitting a tone, and sometimes it works. There's a an amazing stretch, a little more than halfway through the book, where everything clicks. It's tense and alive. But then there's the rest of the book. Which is, you know, pretty good.

The characters are all flawed, and some of them feel like real people. But most of them feel like ideas, or secondary characters from that one movie you watched that one time. In some cases, the flimsy nature of a character works; the hints of a past, the idiosyncrasies feel just right. But when it doesn't, you're just left with some guy, or some girl, you don't really care about, with some back story that doesn't really matter, and who doesn't add enough colour to a world that needs just a splash of it.

Others have likened this to Cormac McCarthy novels, but it's more McCarthy as filtered through the movie version of *No Country for Old Men*. And, if you're looking for that kind of vibe, that movie might be a slightly quicker way of getting it, depending on how fast you can read 330 pages.

I found it interesting as a look at a past America (1990s), in which men long for their past America, but leaving the reader with every indication that the America they long for was just as fucked as their present, and that whatever problems they have might just be new variations on old classics. There are ideas here that work, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with a book about nothing, in terms of “story”. It's just that, in this case, mood and ideas only get you so far, and few of the themes and metaphors explored ever really amount to much.

But like I said, it's pretty good. Which I guess is 2 or 3 stars. Let's go with 3, for those moments that do work.

Stephen says

Reads like Cormac McCarthy ala *No Country for Old Men* with roles reversed--the heroes chase the bad guys. Same austere writing style. Thematically dark like McCarthy's books. Also like McCarthy's books, most of the characters in *Marvel* are lost souls, emotionally wrecked, addicted and/or violent, following seedy paths they may not survive. Only the grandfather and grandson are noble.

The set-up is simple: An old man and his grandson are gifted a wondrous horse. It's stolen. The man and boy give chase. Very little good happens and A LOT of bad. *Marvel* is a violent read. Not my normal kind of book--I am not a McCarthy fan--but I did find it compelling. Meno is a terrific writer. *Marvel* is intricately plotted with an almost biblical old testament feel. It moves at a relentless pace once the chase begins. I found it hard to put down.

I was disappointed by the ending, the final confrontation not as epic as I imagined, nor as satisfying in its conclusion. I hoped for a better outcome for the old man and grandson, and retribution for the evil Rick West, but true to its McCarthy vibe, good does not necessarily triumph nor evil perish.

On my buy, borrow or skip scale: A definite buy if you're a McCarthy fan, a borrow if not but are open to a thrilling, violent read.

Nick says

cant believe i'm saying this, but i like Meno's earlier twee books much better.

Denise Cote says

The story of a grandfather, grandson and a beautiful race horse that changes their life.

Tobin says

One of the best Cormac McCarthy books written by someone other than Cormac McCarthy I've ever read.

Oriana says

I have read a *lot* of Joe Meno books. Some of them I loved. Some I loved so much it made me a little dizzy. For some I was able to achieve a balanced joy. Some frothed me up. Others let me down.

So you can see that I am already quite invested in and dedicated to this fella. That's why this was my reaction when I heard this book was on its way:

NEW! JOE! MENO!!!!

I actually stalked the publisher on Twitter and begged them to send me a copy because I was so so so excited. But bad news, guys: I really didn't like this at all.

Here, I think, is the problem: The first Menos I read were *Boy Detective* and *Demons* and *Office Girl*, his twee hipster fables that are drenched in melancholy yet glimmering with quirk. I love them. I love them *so much*. I know what this says about me. I am okay with that.

But the rest of his oeuvre isn't like that. (Well, *Great Perhaps* kind of is, and although that one didn't physically destroy me, I think in retrospect that it is probably his best book.) The *rest* rest of his oeuvre is far heavier on the bleak than the blissful, thrashing around in dirt and despair rather than laughter and light. And so given that, *Marvel and a Wonder* is its own sort of apotheosis, the natural next step in Meno's other trajectory, one that leads down down down into sorrow and poverty and hardness and meanness and brutality.

I do not love that. I did not love this. I know what this says about me. I am okay with that.

For those following along at home, this is a book about an aged Midwestern farmer, his meth-addled daughter who is booted out of the story early on, and his mixed-up, diffuse, pubescent grandson. It's also (see the cover) about a horse: a huge perfect beautiful stark-white racing horse, who achieves mythic status nearly the first time we lay our readerly eyes on her regal physique.

Here are some other things this book is about: rural poverty, calculated brutality, catastrophic thievery, very bad judgment, necessary and unnecessary violence, the limits of male stoicism, fucked-up war veterans, broken-down desperate idiots, and the inability to find even a little bit of happiness in this grim, hardscrabble life. And I guess also about family values and coming of age and learning what matters to you and just how far you'll go to get it.

Those are a lot of things, and this book covers a lot of ground. But all the ground is all scorched and the air is all bleak and everyone is basically a monster and I just hated hated *hated* the journey.

Lots of people compared this to Cormac McCarthy, which just cements my determination to never read that guy. I'm going back to the twee hipster lit boys (and girls) asap.

To bookend with gifs, here is how I felt while actually reading this book:
