



The Unwanted

Jeffrey Ricker

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Jamie Thomas has enough trouble on his hands trying to get through junior year of high school without being pulverized by Billy Stratton, his bully and tormentor. But the mother he was always told was dead is actually alive—and she's an Amazon! Sixteen years after she left him on his father's doorstep, she's back... and needs Jamie's help. A curse has caused the ancient tribe of warrior women to give birth to nothing but boys, dooming them to extinction—until prophecy reveals that salvation lies with one of the offspring they abandoned. Putting his life on the line, Jamie must find the courage to confront the wrath of an angry god to save a society that rejected him.

The Unwanted Details

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Author : Jeffrey Ricker

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From Reader Review The Unwanted for online ebook

Timothy says

Jeffrey Ricker has written a fast-paced and imaginative tale about a boy who finds out he is the son of an Amazon...and if that isn't enough, he is at the center of a prophecy foretelling the downfall of the Amazon society!

Pleasant, likable characters and unexpected plot twists keep the book interesting, but my favorite aspects of the book are how ancient civilizations would adapt to modern technology and how the characters transition from our reality to the clandestine world of the Amazons and Greek gods.

This is now one of my favorite YA novels featuring LGBTQ characters.

Hilcia says

I read *The Unwanted* by Jeffrey Ricker in two sittings, the pacing and adventure are that good! The story begins in a mythology-based contemporary setting that surprisingly ends in the mythological world with a bang and a surprise.

The three main characters in this book were introduced in the short story "The Trouble with Billy," which first appeared in the *Speaking Out: LGBTQ Youth Stand Up* anthology. There, we met short, skinny Jamie, the only out gay kid in his high school as he was relentlessly bullied by Billy and defended by best friend Sarah. *The Unwanted* begins with Billy punching sixteen year-old Jamie on the nose at school, Sarah coming to the rescue, and Jamie going home with a bleeding nose without first asking for permission from school authorities. Poor Jamie is in for a surprise because when he gets there his mother is waiting. The mother that was supposed to be dead.

Jamie's parents have a lot of explaining to do -- one of them is the winged horse hanging out in his backyard! Once everything is explained, Billy and a bleeding nose are the least of Jamie's worries. It turns out that his mother is one of the mythological Amazons. As we know from Greek mythology, Amazons do not keep their male children and Jamie's mother left him to be raised by his father. Now there is big trouble brewing and the Amazons may be wiped out by an angry god. However, they have one chance, the Oracle's prophesy clearly says that a male child will save them. Jamie's mother believes that he may be that boy, and hopes he will go back with her to save her sisters and her home.

This is an adventure full of risks and danger! There is a romance, but there are also fantastic friendships, great magical moments, and dangerous battles filled with deadly villains. I enjoyed all of it. Jamie's personal situation captures the reader, but the slow-building danger and revelations really keep the reader going. I was surprised at how well the pacing works in this novel. It doesn't lag even when there's a lull in the action because there is that expectancy that something is about to happen.

As narrator, Jamie's voice is fantastic. Ricker hits the right young adult tone, so that Jamie comes off angsty, sarcastic, and humorous at the most unexpected of moments even as he deals with very serious situations. He's not a know-at-all or the big muscular hero who can do it all. As a matter of fact, he's small for his age, can't really fight, and doubts his abilities all the time. Young adults can relate to him as a character, including

when it comes to his handling of family and friends.

Family issues are definitely on the forefront for Jamie: his father's and his own confused feelings for an absentee mother. Additionally, Billy the bully also becomes a key character in this young adult fantasy/adventure. The development of Billy's character, the issue of trust and the growing relationship with Jamie carries to the end of the story.

I loved *The Unwanted*. I found it to be both fun and highly relevant with central and secondary characters that young adults can relate to, and will enjoy seeing on the page. Additionally, Ricker takes some overwhelming risks with characters and story at the end that I believe give this read a unique touch. Highly recommended!

Cryselle says

I stayed up way too late into the night to finish this book. I like YA for the need to stay on plot and out of the bedroom, and this story delivered. Jamie is given a hero's quest with a great ensemble cast to back him up, with the hint of romance.

We meet our first person POV character after he's just gotten punched in the nose by the guy who's made his life difficult for years. There's a reason for that, but it serves as a great introduction to Jamie, Billy, and best friend Sarah. The introduction of a mutual foe and a mutual secret get Billy and Jamie to stop pummeling one another long enough to work on the bigger problem, and to pave the way for a gentler interaction. The transformation takes most of the book, and isn't rushed or forced.

Finding out a "dead" parent is not only alive, but effectively immortal, with some amazing skills and some spectacular flaws, totally reorganizes Jamie's world view. He's been yearning to get out of his home town, and now he's going farther into stranger realms than he ever imagined.

Greek mythology weaves into modern day: Amazons set their perimeters with video surveillance and defend it with swords and bows. Gods and goddesses leave Olympus to meddle, bringing signs and portents into a shopping mall. Some of our worst fears about high school principals and spooky school basements are confirmed. The Oracle speaks truth, but it doesn't always make sense because she's stoned out of her mind and always has the munchies. The author does us the very great favor of not trying to reconcile the Greek pantheon with the current dominant religion. [Love you for that, Mr. Ricker.]

The parents in this story are unusually strongly written: while they are divided on the goals and how to achieve them, no one is a cardboard cutout, nor are their reactions kneejerk, even when crashing into the kinds of problems on which marriages founder. Everyone has some kind of journey to make, even if it's in the far background. This was particularly well done and took nothing away from the main story, but added depth.

Another incredible strength of this book is that gender wars are inherent in the idea of Amazons, who leave the men behind, until they need the men to save them. Except—it's not played out like that, nor in any Us vs Them way. It's very much "We are stronger together, and one person needs to be the spearhead." So much of m/m vilifies women or ignores them, but the handling here empowers everyone. It's organic, never preachy,

and the message slides right by as “the way things ought to be” but so seldom are.

The idea of Billy has been done, but Billy as a character is much stronger than that: he's an integral part of the action, which is front and center, and anything personal between Jamie and Billy they only examine when there's the leisure to do it.

The ending—perfect, and figure on a large handful of tissues. Older readers will probably cry for more reasons than the intended YA readers, but it's wonderful and cathartic for everyone. Athena warns that the victory will exact a price, but the coin is not so obvious. I'm sniffing all over again right now.

This story deserves a place on the shelf next to all those books about teens fighting a dystopian world. The Unwanted is a lot more hopeful.

Copy received from publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Don Bradshaw says

This was a well written adventure story they played heavily on the mythological. The three main characters, Jamie, Billy and Sarah were well developed average teens dealing with the pressures of growing up. The story starts moving when Jamie's mother comes on the scene. Jamie has to cope with meeting this woman he believed to be dead and learning that she is an amazon. Billy's step-mother is also an amazon. The story boils down to a battle of good vs. evil in the amazon's mythical city. The oracle has foretold that the future of the amazons depends solely on Jamie but that a death will occur. The transformations that takes place in Jamie, Billy and Sarah are amazing. The story is not a romance per se though Jamie and Billy have a young love. The story is about personal growth and life decisions that change everything. The story is an easy read with good underlying message. Mr. Ricker us a new author to me but one that I will keep an eye on. This adventure story is easy to get caught up in and well worth the time.

Pixie Mmgoodbookreviews says

5 Hearts

Review written for MM Good Book Reviews

Jamie has enough on his plate with Billy, the jock, bullying him at every turn, but now he has to deal with the mother he thought was dead turning up claiming she needs his help. Jamie isn't sure what to believe... that his father has lied to him for sixteen years, that his mother really is an Amazon, that a prophecy says he will save his mother's people or that there really is a winged horse eating the grass in the back yard!!! With strange things happening at school Jamie, along with Billy, and his best friend Sarah band together to face the wrath of a God.

Oh my, this is an incredible story that follows a young adult who discovers the truth of his parentage and discovers he will be the saviour of an ancient race. Jamie is a wonderful sixteen year old boy who is being harassed and bullied at school; his bully is Billy a boy in his year who ends up being an important part of Jamie's life. Discovering the truth about his mother leads to many more discoveries that has Jamie and Billy

becoming close, and they begin an adventure that is fraught with danger.

The characters in this story are all brilliantly written, from the teenagers to the parents and from the power-hungry adults to the standoffish Gods who try to help, we are treated to an incredible cast. The storyline has everything you could want, it's a blend of contemporary and fantasy with young love and filled with confusion, danger, power-hunger schemes and forgiveness. The writing is wonderful and flows smoothly, never lagging always leading us to the next scene perfectly. The story itself keeps you gripped as you wonder what will come next and it is never quite what you expect.

I have to say that I loved this story; watching as Jamie came out of his shell, the friendship/romance that develops between Jamie and Billy, the discoveries and plans, the grabbing hold of life and accepting the fate. After the final battle I was both sad but hopeful and then I came to the end, and I have never before come across an ending that is both heart-breaking and heart-warming before... I wanted to both cry and grin as I read the final pages; it truly was a bittersweet ending.

I recommend this to those who love young adult stories, fantasy blended with contemporary, a blossoming young love, forgiving the past, accepting the future and a bittersweet ending that will have tears in your eyes even as you smile.

Mark says

I loved *The Unwanted* by Jeffrey Ricker. Not only was I treated to an imaginative, well-written story, but I was spared the chore of cleverly sidestepping my true opinion had I not enjoyed, seeing that Jeff is a personal friend. But there's a lot to enjoy here. It took a lot of talent to make the story of a scrawny gay teenager whose assumed-dead mother shows up to inform him that he's the savior of the entire tribe of Amazon women. Let's see John Grisham pull that one off.

He makes the story work by creating endearing characters we can relate to even when their circumstances stretch beyond our grasp. We believe the story because his characters struggle, just as we would, to accept what is happening. Front and center is Jamie, the aforementioned gay teenager, who questions why he's running into a dark, scary room instead of running to safety--just like normal people. At first he doesn't believe he has what it takes to complete his mission, but unlike normal people, he finds an inner strength that enables him to face each challenge with bravery, even if it's a little on the shaky side.

There's nothing shaky about this novel. Thank goodness.

Rachelle says

I went into this story expecting something short and adventurous, and for the most part, that's what I got.

But, at times there was so much more than that.

The Unwanted deals with Greek mythology. And we all know how much I love me some Greek mythology, right? Well, now we do. I've also been loving LGBT literature lately, so getting my hands on a review copy of this was totally wicked. LGBT is something that needs to be in YA a lot more than it currently is. Sure there are contemporary stories about LGBT teens "finding themselves," but there's hardly any stories where the focus of the book isn't on the character realizing their sexuality. This one is, though. Instead of leading a seriously angsty plotline, Jamie's story manages to create a fun thrill ride.

Jamie was a great character to read about. He was a nice kid who had a good relationship with his father and his best friend, Sarah. Jamie didn't have to be all kick a\$\$ like some other stories portray their characters. And sure, Katniss types are cool to read as well, but I like it when a character has more in common with myself. Don't get me wrong, Jamie does acquire some skills in the book, I just like how he's a humble boy in the beginning who has to go out of his comfort zone in order to become a semi-good fighter.

The parental aspect of this story was phenomenal! So many times in YA you see characters who barely ever talk to their parents, or they have no parents. It's nice to have a few teenagers who actually have a loving and caring relationship with their mom and/or dad. The parents were even major characters in the story! That's definitely something that doesn't happen very often.

The action in the story was quick and fun. There weren't a whole lot of epic fights, but I was fine with that. Ricker managed to get the fighting scenes down without having pages of text on how, "his sword stabbed left, then he parried, blah blah."

Billy was Jamie's love interest and at first I was kind of skeptical. I don't really like it when the bully suddenly changes their ways and then love magically manifests itself. Love didn't ever magically manifest itself, but you get my drift. Jamie falls in love with his tormentor. Thankfully, the reason behind the tormenting is explained later on in the story. About halfway through the book was when Billy started to grow on me. And by the end, I was in love. Of course it never would have worked out, but a girl can try.

I have to say, that ending. I almost cried! It was so sad and terrible, but beautiful all at the same time. Way to end a book, Ricker!

While the mythology was fun to read about, there were some minor issues. There was nothing that could distract from the entertainment of the story, but they were still there. Also, there were a couple of pieces of information that I feel could have been expanded on, like the principal and the high school girls, but again, not a big deal.

All in all, this was a good book. I seriously enjoyed it and I think there are other people out there who would too. It's cute, fun and witty, why not give it a try?

4/5 stars

*Note: I received a copy of this book to review from the publisher. This in no way altered my opinion/review.

Jess says

The Unwanted is a wonderful book. Jeffrey Ricker develops characters and draws you into a connection with them with far more skill than many better-known authors. Normally, a book that includes characters out of mythology wouldn't be likely to grab my attention. However, I am very happy that this one did.

The characters are smart, funny and believable. We come to care about them, and I found myself getting pulled deeper into the story. While the ending was a bit of a surprise, I must say that the entire book, from beginning to end, was very well done and well worth the time.

Kezia says

I don't read YA novels. My teenage children keep pushing them on me, and I keep trying to stir up an interest in them, but they just fall flat for me. When I was their age, I read the Dragonriders of Pern, the Dune saga, the Chronicles of Amber, and the like. I still love those stories, and they're hard to live up to, I'll admit. So when I realized that the book I'd agreed to read and review was a YA urban fantasy, it took me a while to summon the will to read it.

To think of those wasted weeks I spent procrastinating, when I could have been enjoying one of the best books I've read so far this year. Although, really, how was I to know that the story of a 16 year old boy who discovers that his dead mother is in fact a very lively Amazon warrior princess, and that he is foretold by prophecy to be the savior of the people who never wanted him in the first place would be anything but pretentious, tedious, and dull? It shouldn't work, but it does.

In his second novel, Jeffrey Ricker gives us a wonderful modern fable (in the sense of incorporating elements of myth and legend, rather than a moral tale with animal characters) that has all the snide sarcasm and blushing fumbles toward first love that one would expect from a nerdy teenage boy. Jamie is absolutely authentic, and as unlikely an epic hero as one could find. But when the goddess Athena herself tells him he's destined for greatness, what's a boy to do?

The characters are vibrant and engaging, the plot entirely believable within a fantasy universe, and the pacing struck a good balance between narrative and action. If this is the beginning of Ricker's career, I'm looking forward to his growth as a writer.

While I would not call this a romance, there is a romantic element to the story. For those among you who care about such things, be aware that the main character, Jamie, is gay, and the romance is between him and another boy. I mention this because there is no hint in the blurb that the hero is gay. It shouldn't matter, but I'd hate to see bad reviews put out there simply because someone was caught with their prejudice showing and feels cheated out of eight dollars. We are shown some sweet kisses, and there is the suggestion that more happens behind closed doors, but there is no graphic sex in this book.

I received a copy for reviewing purposes, and I'm grateful that I was lured out of my genre for this.

Jess Faraday says

Though written with a snappy, sarcastic, witty voice, there's a lot of hidden depth to this story. A lot of convention-breaking--and I love that in a book. For a bully and his victim, the resolution comes from understanding, not revenge. A war requires unforeseen sacrifices. Sometimes one's best isn't enough--and sometimes "good enough" is the best you can do. I don't mean to be cryptic, but I don't want to reveal any spoilers. The ending is shocking and unexpected--and yet, it was a powerful choice that sets this apart as a powerful story. Excellent and highly recommended.

Indie Reviews says

My Review Rating: 4.5 Stars

The Unwanted, Jeffrey Ricker's second novel, is an extremely well written, action-packed gay young adult fantasy set against the backdrop of the ancient Greek mythological world. In it, the author unfolds the story of Jamie Thomas a sixteen-year-old high school junior whose life is turned upside down by the return of a mother he thought was dead, and who is now seeking his help to save her tribe – The Amazons. Mixing action, danger and romance, Mr. Ricker chronicles Jamie's more personal journey of coming to terms with the relationships in his life to write a page-turning young adult adventure story that has depth and underlying meaning, and one that I could not put down.

The complete review of *The Unwanted* by Jeffrey Ricker is available at Indie Reviews.

On the occasion of the release of *The Unwanted* Mr. Ricker was kind enough to participate in an author Q & A, which is also available at Indie Reviews.

Katie says

I expected to like this book because I have the pleasure of knowing the author, and it's always fun to read the writing of one's friends. What I didn't expect, however, was a conclusion that left me breathless. Overall the novel read, for me at least (and this is high praise), like a greatest hits of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, with the best of high-school angst, myth-come-to-life, adventure, and an adept balance between character cheek and sincerity. That all would have been enough for me to give the novel five stars. But the conclusion ties it all together with such creativity, beauty, and subtlety that I'd happily devote a separate review (and five more stars!) just to the last chapter. I don't want to give anything away though, so go read it!

Nathan Sims says

I've been waiting for this book to come out for some time now. Despite my forty some years, I still love YA fantasy and haven't seen that many quality LGBT YA fantasies come out that captured my attention. I've liked Jeffrey Ricker's short fiction for a while now and was excited to see what he would do with the genre, so when Bold Strokes Books made this available on Net Galley for early review, I gobbled it up, and I wasn't disappointed.

Jamie is a short, physically-underdeveloped teenager who happens to be the sole out gay kid at his high school (in the role of Jamie I kept envisioning Josh Hutcherson from his Cirque du Freak days – for his height, just his height; nothing else, I swear). After a particularly rotten day at school, he comes home to find that his mother, who he thought was dead, is actually alive. And an Amazon. Having been dumped on his father's doorstep sixteen years earlier, he now learns that he may be the only one who can save the Amazon race.

Sounds like the son of Diana Prince and Steve Trevor gets his own spinoff comic book, right? It's not. It's way cooler than that. And besides, Jamie's mom doesn't even own an invisible jet. She owns an invisible winged horse.

Ricker created a fun, action-packed, thoughtful novel that kept me page-turning all the way to the poignant ending. He invested his characters with such warmth and charm that watching them work through their personal struggles was engrossing. He also didn't gloss over the difficult consequences for the choices they made.

Considering the subject matter, I expected the book to be grander in scope than it was (what with the Amazons, gods, prophecies, oracles, and the like), but Ricker somehow kept the action on a low simmer for most of the book, and focused instead on the story unfolding between Jamie, his parents, his best friend, and a school bully, so that when he did go all epic on us toward the end it had a much larger impact. That isn't to say that the book is slow. On the contrary, it moves quickly and Ricker sucks you in with Jamie's narrative and wicked sense of humor. There was just a quiet intensity beneath the surface that he cleverly held on to as long as possible until it boiled over.

One of the things that I was particularly taken with was Ricker's ability to maintain a light mood despite all the turmoil that Jamie experienced. His personal struggles with the lies his father had told about his mother's absence and the bullying he received at school for being gay ran the risk of turning the story maudlin. But Ricker didn't fall into those easy traps. Despite Jamie's struggles, he kept the mood light while still giving sufficient gravitas to Jamie's personal journey.

One of the other major selling points for me was the parental/adult characters in the book. Normally, in YA fiction they tend to take a backseat to the teenagers and are there either as the villain or to throw roadblocks in the way of the action or provide sage advice at just the right moment (in those "mwa-mwa mwa-mwa" Peanuts' voices). Not these folks. They got down and dirty and were as invested in the action as Jamie and his friends. Ricker also cleverly rounded out the cast with enough supporting roles so that you weren't sure who to trust until the big reveals later in the book.

Jeffrey Ricker's *The Unwanted* is a real winner. If you pick it up, you're lucky. It's a YA novel that deserves all the attention it garners.

Jeanne 'Divinae' says

This is the first time I have read a story by this author. I had signed up for the GR giveaway and was the lucky winner. I am always a bit skittish when I read a book by a new author(at least to me). But I ended really like this story. There were a few things that I was confused about(I'll get to them later) but it didn't take away from the plot. The plot was very good and the story flowed well.

We have Jamie, an everyday normal type of guy. Ever since he had come out, he acquired a bully in the name of Billy. At least at the beginning, he is a bully. At first I wasn't team Billy, but he really grew on me throughout the story. Then we meet Jamie's mother, who is very NOT dead, as Jamie was lead to believe. But she isn't your normal mother, she is an Amazon and has a winged horse. Something weird is going down and it all leads back to Jamie and his friends. Along with Sarah, Billy they have to figure out what the mystery. For some reason the Amazons are only have males and they are facing extinction if they can't figure out how to break the curse...

During the story, Jamie is informed that someone close to him will betray him. I honestly was a bit surprised when we found out who it was. I had thought it was (view spoiler). The ending battle really didn't take that long, and I thought it would spoil the storyline, but it didn't for me. It was just long enough to make it not rushed (in my opinion).

The end of the story made me cry. I had an inkling something bad was going to happen, but it still made me cry at the end. I was thinking about what was told him him; there was an outcome where it was bad but had a positive outcome....just remember that as you read.

The ending..(view spoiler)

Okay, so here is where I am a bit confused. It is about the Amazons, and might be seen as a kind of SPOILER!!!

So the prophecy was about the extinction/end of the Amazons. Where they immortal or just had a very very long life span. Jamie's mother, along with the other Amazons where very 'old'. Did they only have one child throughout their lifetime or are there siblings?? Did the Amazon's offspring have the same lifespan? Or, did they just procreate so if one of them was killed off, there was another 'Amazon' to replace them? Additionally, at the end (view spoiler).

Overall, I really enjoyed the flow of the story and liked it a lot.

Nathan Burgoine says

Jeffrey Ricker is like my "writing big brother." My first publication was in the same book as his second, and we've often been in the same anthologies. When I find one of his stories in a collection, I can't help but smile, and I know I'm in for something as different as it is good. He's chilled me to the bone with a horror story from Night Shadows: Queer Horror. He's left me sniffly with a bittersweet romance in Foolish Hearts: New Gay Fiction. He made me laugh out loud more than once with his novel, Detours, about a young man facing a road trip with his kinda-sorta ex and his mother's ghost (yes, you read that right). He's gotten smutty on Mars, even, in Riding the Rails: Locomotive Lust and Carnal Cabooses. Put simply, he always surprises me, and it's always a pleasant surprise.

One of the other incredibly awesome things about being with the same publisher is that I get to take an early peek at titles before they officially release, and when I saw his second novel - The Unwanted, a YA novel - on the list, I nabbed it and told myself I'd read a chapter or two a night before bed.

I lasted four days, and it only took that long because I had to go to work a couple of times.

I gobbled the last three-quarters of this book today, and I'm still leaning back and reeling a bit from what was yet another surprise from Jeffrey Ricker.

The set-up for this book is a solid one that made me grin from ear-to-ear: Jamie, the skinny, short, and only out gay kid in his high school, is having a craptacular day. His bully tormentor landed a solid blow, and he took off from school without permission to nurse the mashed nose and wounded pride at home. Unfortunately, waiting for him at home is his mother, which would be normal for most kids but Jamie's mother is dead.

She's not dead, it turns out. She's just an amazon. As in the mythological sense. As a boy-child, he was of course dropped off with his dad to raise, she explains, but it turns out there's this big problem and it might just be that Jamie is the only one who can fix it, and save all of amazon-kind.

Suddenly, a mashed nose doesn't seem like such a big deal.

While the tale has a real sense of fun to it, and there's more than a few great humor moments and Jamie's internal monolog is completely spot-on in the tone of a young teen, there's real depth to this story. The ties of family, friendship, and love are never as simple as they seem, and unlike many teen and YA books, there are some consequences to danger and violence in this book that I really appreciated, even as they served to jack up the tension to the point where I was curling over my e-reader and praying that everyone was going to make it out alive.

Jamie is such a strong character, and one so easy to identify with. Out and suffering the consequences, his only real goals seem to be escape and survival, and the last thing he needs is this sudden arrival of mythical issues. Worse, the more tangled things get, the more he realizes there's a very real weight on his shoulders as potentially the only one who might stand a chance to make everything all right. This "chosen one" character concept isn't new, but in Jamie, it's given a refresh. He's not perfectly capable, but he's not useless - that's a fine line to walk as well as Ricker does.

It should come as no shock that I adored this. When you put down a book and it's still echoing in your head and you're still feeling the impact hours later, you know the author has done their job well. YA just gained a fantastic new book with *The Unwanted*, and I can't wait to watch the readers discover it.

(Oh, and I should mention that the characters in this book appear in a short story, "The Trouble with Billy," in *Speaking Out: LGBTQ Youth Stand Up*. You don't need to have read it prior to reading this novel, but you know how I feel about short fiction.)
