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Robert J. Wiersema

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Following his bestselling debut, *Before I Wake*, Robert J. Wiersema returns with this exquisitely plotted blend of supernatural thriller and domestic drama.

For novelist Christopher Knox, getting up early every morning to write isn't bringing him the sense of fulfillment it once did. It's been ten years since his first novel was published, to some acclaim, and he's hit a wall in trying to write his next. His marriage to Jacqui isn't doing much better, and it's been months since he's slept anywhere but his office above the detached garage.

The part of Chris's life that *is* going well, and brings him easy joy, is his relationship with his eleven-year-old son, David. While Chris may not make it to all of his son's ball games, their nightly ritual of reading together at bedtime not only helps David overcome his struggles with reading, but is a calm within the storm for them both, when their days are so full of challenges. And what better way for a novelist to connect with his child than through their mutual love of books, and a bedtime story routine as unwavering as Chris's love for his son.

When Chris comes across a book by one of his favourite childhood authors in a local used bookstore, he knows it will be the perfect gift for David's birthday.

To the Four Directions is not one Chris has read before, but he knows that Lazarus Took's adventurous, magical stories of young heroes and other realms would be just the thing for David, as they were for him. David is less than thrilled to receive a book he's never heard of before, however – he'd been hoping for *The Lord of the Rings* – and Jacqui is quick to see it as yet another sign of Chris's detachment from David's life.

But once they start reading the novel together, David is completely enthralled, to the extent that he truly cannot put the book down. The story, of a young peasant boy who is plucked from his home by castle guards and sent on a quest for a mysterious Sunstone, makes David feel like he is right there, in the action. Even after his parents have to take the book away from him, he can't help but sneak it back to his room. As David is reading alone that night, he suffers an inexplicable seizure and falls into a state of unconsciousness. Doctors perform a barrage of tests, but cannot determine what's wrong. And as David's seizure recurs every night, his father learns that only one thing will calm it: being read to from his strange new book.

True to his nature, as someone with an inherent belief in the power of words, Chris becomes convinced that the secret of David's collapse lies within the pages of *To the Four Directions*. After failed attempts to find out more about Lazarus Took from his estate, Chris traverses the continent in search of the truth. Meanwhile, David wakes up within the story he has been reading – as the boy he has been reading about – and finds himself facing perils unimaginable, in a world that he soon realizes was created to capture the hearts and souls of children like him. Because he's not alone as he takes over the hunt for the Sunstone, but accompanied by those boys who have come before him. And as the quests of father and son lead them toward a fateful collision of worlds, David realizes that while he's not the first to fall victim to the book's horrific spell, perhaps he can prove himself strong enough to be the last.

Bedtime Story Details

Date : Published November 2nd 2010 by Random House Canada

ISBN : 9780679313755

Author : Robert J. Wiersema

Format : Hardcover 496 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Cultural, Canada

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From Reader Review Bedtime Story for online ebook

Jenn says

Well written but not my cup of tea. I don't like a lot of fantasy novels and this would fall into that category. I thought it would revolve more around the odd seizures that the son was having. The ending was a little hard to follow, switching back and forth from the present to the past. Somewhat convoluted trying to follow it.

Melissa says

I flew through this book, but not because I loved it. It has elements of some favourite books and elements that I didn't enjoy. The long lost book by a beloved author reminded me of *The Shadow of the Wind*, the idea of literally escaping into a book was reminiscent of *The Neverending Story*. Both books top my all-time favourites list, and both books did a better job of tackling these elements. I didn't enjoy the story sections as much as the main plot itself, so I found myself skimming those so that I could get back to the main story (sorry, Rob, but I think you're better at contemporary than fantasy!). The magic elements of the book were reminiscent of *The Night Film*, which was a book that I really struggled with. So, readers who enjoyed the three books I've listed may really like this one, but it fell flat for me. Still looking for my next *Before I Wake* reading experience ??

Andrew says

Gonna go out on a limb here: Robert J. Wiersema has a thing for broken families—maybe not even broken, but in the process of slowly, agonizingly falling apart. That, and childhood trauma of the sort that would likely scar one for life.

The narrative in *Bedtime Story* is charmingly simple, but layered with an almost unsettling amount of emotional honesty (as much honesty as one can convey through layers of magical realism). A writer whose second book is years overdue, struggles to connect to his wife and son. On his son's birthday, Chris, the protagonist, gives him a fantasy book by an author he loved as a child. While reading the book, his son, David, suffers a dramatic seizure and becomes trapped within the narrative, fighting to resolve the story. What follows is, in essence, two interwoven narratives striving towards a unified climax.

This calendar year, I've read all three of Wiersema's books: *Bedtime Story*, *Before I Wake*, and the novella *The World More Full of Weeping*. To clear the obvious from the table, I loved all three. He's an incredibly creative, intelligent, and most importantly, reserved writer. Wiersema has a gift for giving a scene exactly the amount of severity it needs, never giving in to the ever-alluring pull of melodrama. He's able to sell us narratives of magical realism, to convince us that the fables he spins are as possible as anything in our world by anchoring them to characters that break, that lie to one another, that hurt and betray one another, but still love each other and never, ever fall into the territory of the black-and-white archetypes whose villainous or saint-like behaviour can seemingly never be forgiven or related to.

Bedtime Story gives us a trio of characters in the protagonist Chris, his estranged wife Jacqui, and their son David that are an absolute joy to spend an entire novel with. Though in some ways Chris and Jacqui can feel

like modest iterations of the husband and wife at the heart of *Before I Wake*, they are fully formed and three-dimensional in the sense that their language and actions never feel alien or hyper-realized, as so much lesser fiction would attempt to convey in an effort to increase the drama of a given scene or moment.

Though the structure of *Bedtime Story* is not terribly unique—many books have used the interwoven narrative approach to varying degrees of success—its payoff is worth the journey, as the manner in which the two worlds come together, both in terms of narrative as well as the visual avalanche of universes bleeding together, is truly climactic. As the individual parts become more entwined and less segregated into individual chapters, Wiersema aptly brings several lingering—but never extraneous—threads to a head that feels entirely earned.

In fact, if I were to lob any criticism onto *Bedtime Story*, it would simply be that it feels, in some ways, too similar to *Before I Wake*, especially in the realms of theme and characterization. That's not to say that what is accomplished isn't impressive—as it clearly is—but I was left with less of a feeling of genuine exploration into a new world, and more as if I were traversing a slightly less biblical and more Tolkien-esque iteration on a previous blueprint. Part of this feeling might be rooted in the fact that I have read all of Wiersema's works in such short order, but that doesn't change the fact that the similarities are there, and they are obvious to a fan of his work. And if I had to choose, the characters and narrative in *Before I Wake* are still the most captivating of his creations.

Wiersema is a gifted novelist, and I would be remiss if I didn't mention other authors I happen to love who also tackle similar character archetypes again and again (Murakami, Auster, King), but for his next work, I would love to see him step away from the broken family/childhood trauma themes and to really challenge himself on startlingly new terrain.

Bree Phoenix says

"Turning to the first chapter, I couldn't help myself: with the first sentence it was like I was eleven years old again, reading in the apple tree or the hayloft at my grandparents' place in Henderson." Parents will always see their children as their little boy or their little girl. It is a fact that neither you nor I can escape. Our parents until they die will view us as the little people they've birthed and raised. So when I was browsing the shelves of the library and happened to stumble upon a novel called *Bedtime Story* it caught my interest. When I started to read the synopsis I was hooked, no doubt about it. Not only was this novel going to remind me about my parents and their unrelenting love of reading to their children, but I love novels with two separate plots written in one book, it's like a bonus: two stories in one. So of course I jumped at the opportunity to read *Bedtime Story* and I must say Mr Wiersema would have made my father proud.

Christopher Knox began his writing career with a bang. He had a hit novel, a popular column, and the ambition to be the best writer in his generation. 10 years later he finds himself living above the garage of his home, estranged from his wife and still trying to write his second novel. The only thing that keeps him sane is his daily routines, one of which involves reading his young son a bedtime story every night. When David's 11th birthday rolls around, Christopher presents him with a novel written by one of his favourite authors from his childhood called *To the Four Directions*. At first the novel was discarded by David but soon he becomes so enthralled in the novel he cannot distract himself away from it until one day David has a massive seizure and falls into a catatonic state. At first devastated Christopher tries to make sense of the seizures that usually fall around the time he would read a bedtime story to David. When Christopher falls into his story routine at the hospital David's seizures rapidly decrease yet he still remains catatonic. Christopher realizes

that the novel is somehow connected to David's inability to snap out of his coma and sets on a mission to find out what is happening to his son, all the while he is unaware that his son is trapped within the pages of the novel, trying desperately to stay alive, and find his way back to consciousness.

I absolutely adored this novel, I couldn't put it down. I was David; trapped within the words of Wiersema (I didn't get a seizure thankfully). This novel, right from the very first sentence, captures your whole attention and sends the reader on an adventure of mystery, action and suspense. It also shows the true love a parent can have for their child. Where David's mother tries desperately to come to terms with the fact that her son may never get out of his catatonic state, his father tries desperately to find a solution using theory, magic and psychics. There is a story in here that will appeal to both children and adults. There's David's narration of his quest to find the healing stone that will appeal to a young adult reader while Christopher's quest to find a cure for his son will surely capture the attention of the adult reader. And, while these days with television and the internet, it sure is nice to read a novel that advocates the joys and pleasures of reading, especially among young males. I honestly hope that our generation and the generations to come will fall in love with reading again, especially boys. There is so much joy to be had being captured for a few hours by a book. Anyway I do hope you all will get a chance to read this one. It really is worth a look.

Laura says

I thought this was a fun interesting book and I recommend it.

Shannon says

Was slow getting into it but once I got through the first 100 pages I really got into the story. Was an entertaining read. Kept you guessing til the end.

Laura Buechler says

I devoured this book in less than 48 hours, and it is a BIG book. It was that compelling. There are two parallel stories being told: the story of writer Christopher and his young son David, and the narrative of the book they are reading together. Several chapters in, David suffers a seizure and becomes comatose. The narrative of the story, however, continues on, and it soon becomes clear that David has been transported into the world of the book through some nefarious plot. Christopher discovers this and desperately tries to save his son, while David struggles to stay alive in an unfamiliar world. The two narratives are beautifully woven together, and Wiersema's instincts for timing and conflict are simply impeccable. Highly recommend this book!

Angela Randall says

Interest Prompted by this Boing Boing article.

Kerry Vaughan says

I love this book, as soon as I started reading it I was right back to bedtime my brother and I sitting one on either side of my dad as he read us The Hobbit. This book brought back so many memories from that time and then whisked me away on a whole new adventure. The twists and turns kept me on the edge of my seat, the quests and battles hungry for more and the mystery woven intricately in kept me reading well after I knew I should have been asleep. Thank you Robert Wiersema for reminding me why I love to read, and now I feel like going and giving my dad a big hug for giving me the gift and love of reading.

Kiley says

How can a book about a child lost in a catatonic state be a fun read? (A) When you somehow know from the start he will emerge, (B) when there's fascinating double, sometimes triple or quadruple, narrative threading going on, (C) when you get to oscillate between YA fiction and adult domestic drama in one book, and (D) when you're almost laughing, in a lovely, on-board way, at the sheer audacity of the author in daring to write such a convoluted, ambitious, thrilling, almost childlike-in-its-throwing off-of-conventional-shackles book.

Were there problems with Bedtime Story? Yes. But problems I think Wiersema knew about himself—some genre tropes, some crazy leaps of logic to keep the plot/narrative system moving, and some cloying, cliched language. There were times when I was a bit, "Are you serious? You expect me (the reader) to sit down and swallow that?" But then I sat down and swallowed that because overall, the book is such fun and I so admired Wiersema for writing it the way he did. Amazing imagination. Super-fun read.

Amanda Kramers says

As I was reading this book I found myself staying up until 4:30 in the morning reading it. I am shocked about the way it ended it seemed like there should be a sequel

P?€c??i?* ~SLiTsRead says

Pretty good. Reminds me of Neverending Story.

Theresa says

All I can say is some books just don't work for me. Initially I enjoyed the book and the book within a book concept. However I found the fantasy book within to be poorly written (most likely deliberately so as the author was trying to recreate a pulp-type genre) and couldn't get past this. About 150 pages in, I realized I just didn't care to read the rest and just read the last chapter to satisfy my curiosity.

Corey says

Wiersema has always had a hint of the magical in his stories up until now, but *Bedtime Story* pushes him into epic new territory. A story about a boy trapped in a fantasy novel and the father seeking clues to free him, it treads a fine line between realism and the fantastic that would trip up lesser novelists. Weirsema keeps his story straight and his style clear, capturing the feel of Tolkien-like epics on one hand while delivering an affecting portrait of grief and loss on the other. Pair this one up with Lev Grossman's *The Magicians*.

Read the full review at *Shelf Monkey*

Christina Difilippantonio-jolley says

Very interesting and different concept. I loved the omniscient writing style and the main character of Chris. I couldn't put the book down while reading, but looking back on it, the ending was rushed. Still a good read. If you like the *NeverEnding Story*, you will love this.
