



The Dead I Know

Scot Gardner

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Aaron Rowe walks in his sleep and haunted by dreams he can't explain and memories he can't recover. Death doesn't scare him—his new job with a funeral director may even be his salvation. But if he doesn't discover the truth about his hidden past soon, he may fall asleep one night and never wake up. In this dark and witty psychological drama about survival, Aaron finds that making peace with the dead may be easier than coming to terms with the living.

The Dead I Know Details

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From Reader Review The Dead I Know for online ebook

Evie says

Powerful, haunting, and absolutely unforgettable, *The Dead I Know* is not Scot Gardner's first novel, or even the first one to win him recognition, but it's the first one of his books published in Canada, and one that you simply can't afford to miss. It's a tour-de-force examination of the always difficult subject of death, grief and coping with the loss of a loved one. Above all, though, it's a heart-wrenching insight into one boy's tragic life and a deeply affecting, thought-provoking and unsettling look at his psyche.

Aaron Rowe lives with his grandma, Mam, in a caravan park. He just got hired for a three-month trial as a funeral director at JKB Funerals, and is working hard, doing everything in his power to prove to his boss that he's the right man for the job. The dead don't affect him much, as he doesn't feel much in general. He's numb and withdrawn, and he doesn't speak a whole lot. He keeps to himself. There's a lot on Aaron's mind these days. His grandma isn't acting normal, her mental state getting worse with every passing day. On top of that, Aaron is a somnambulist and his sleepwalking has been getting way out of hand. Mentally exhausted, confused, and scared, Aaron has to find a way to get his life back under control, before someone (possibly himself) gets hurt.

At only 200 pages long *The Dead I Know* is a fairly quick read, but also one that will grip you from the first to final page. I honestly don't think you will be able to put this book down. I know I couldn't. I'm not big on reading back blurbs, they're usually more of a spoiler than a teaser, so I try my best to avoid them. I'd rather take my chances with a book and go into reading it blindfolded. When I sat down with this novel I had no expectations what-so-ever, besides a vague idea that this might be one of those light and amusing paranormal reads (based on the cover). Boy, was I wrong! From the opening lines this book delivers nothing but an exquisite literary performance and beautifully crafted, disquieting plot line. It reads more like an adult contemporary novel than your typical YA (it's as far from light and fluffy as it gets), and it prays on the most basic human fears: of death, mental illness, and being absolutely and utterly alone. This book affected me on a very personal level, as my own grand-grandma died from dementia, and I know exactly what it means to take care of a person suffering from mental disease, how physically demanding and emotionally draining it is, and just how extremely powerless and terrified it makes you feel. Scot Gardner did a phenomenal job conveying all these emotions and realities of a dementia-affected household, he brought tears to my eyes and left me speechless. When I turned the last page I didn't put the book down and simply moved on with my every-day life, I sat there hugging it close to my heart, thinking about both the storyline and my own past.

I was deeply impressed with the author's ability to tackle the subject of death, grief, mental sickness, and growing up without parents with such exceptional honesty, sensitivity and thoughtfulness. This story feels very intimate, it's full of small moments and situations that have a strong emotional impact on the reader. The narrative voice is all-too real and convincing, to the degree that you almost feel embarrassed. Like you're reading someone else's diary or spying on a stranger through a keyhole. I also loved the construction of the plot - you never fully understand what's going on until the very end of the book. There are clues and pieces of information scattered throughout the story, then there are also Aaron's feverish dreams and blackouts, but it's all very vague and mysterious. I liked that. The tension and the heavy, dark atmosphere, combined with the concise, well thought-out plot line, made this book a deliciously readable treat.

I can't recommend this book enough! It's not a long read and I really hope you'll find time to squeeze it in your reading schedules, it's definitely a must-read!

Kirsty Murray says

Brilliant. This book is beautifully written, fantastically structured and utterly compelling. I couldn't put it down. Scot Gardner's writing just keeps getting better and better.

A recent spate of YA novels with intensely unpleasant teenage male protagonists had made me almost wary of picking up yet another novel about a seventeen year old male but Gardner's protagonist Aaron Rowe is a compassionate, honourable, complex and deeply endearing character.

Tom O'Connell says

I was drawn to 'The Dead I Know' because of its thematic similarities to Six Feet Under. Also, it was a required class read. 'The Dead I Know' details the ins and outs of a working funeral home. But the procedural stuff [about funeral homes] was really just superficial padding, an intriguing backdrop to frame a strong, intimate narrative. It's not like this stuff wasn't interesting, though, and I do admit that it acted as a springboard on more than one occasion (laying the book's major themes out in an organic fashion).

There wasn't much about 'The Dead I Know' that hasn't been done before; the trick was in approaching it in an original way. Well, Scot Gardner must moonlight as a magician (*cringe*) because this was a poignant, affecting, *intelligent* story — a real emotional tour de force.

When funeral director, John Barton, takes in young down-'n-outter, Aaron, as his apprentice, the reader is invited to witness a gradual, endearing transformation; in the Bartons we come to see the true spectrum of human compassion. The Barton family are wholesome in a way that feels almost antiquated. Fortunately, they aren't complete saints (almost!); they're three dimensional people with the kind of steadfast values we all aspire to (though, more often than not, fall short trying).

The way they embrace this disadvantaged stranger genuinely moved me. It wasn't hokey or overplayed; it was inspiring. Even the prickly, precocious youngster, Skye, reveals an endearing softer side in time. Reading about this family — and this is going to sound a little strange — made me nostalgic for my childhood. It reminded me of when it was easy to believe in the inherent good in people. I'm telling you — I don't know what's in the water over at the Barton household, but I want a thermos full of it.

So, if Aaron's relationship with the Bartons represents his future — a bright, enticing opportunity and a beacon of hope — then his relationship with his mother represents everything that is shackling him to his past. His mother, y'see, is slowly losing her mind. For Aaron, keeping her out of harm's way becomes a full-time occupation. The pair lead an embarrassing existence in a dingy caravan park, but Aaron doesn't mind. His loyalty to his mother (including the many ways in which he defends her honour) is immensely becoming; the reader can feel his desperation as she begins to slip away. Aaron knows deep down that his mother needs more help than he can give; he knows that she has become too unfit to care even for herself. But still he struggles at length with making the drastic change he knows he needs to.

Aaron's inertia could frustrate an impatient reader. Fortunately, I understood and empathised with him, so I didn't find it an issue. I think all readers would agree that he is generally a strong and likeable protagonist. Despite his initial resistance, it is clear that he is a good person with drive and depth.

Gardner writes Aaron as an observant introvert. What this does is it allows Aaron to believably defy the limits of his own perspective. He says insightful things because it's in his character, and when he falls short, he understands the greater part of his own folly (which in turn makes him forgivable).

The only irksome thing he – and the wider narrative as a whole – did was succumb to occasional melodrama. All the unspecified shit with the other caravan park tenants, for instance, was over the top (particularly the resolution of this story thread) and soured an otherwise plausible premise.

Aaron's sleepwalking disorder grated on me in a similar way; it was a cheap, gimmicky device that impeded on the plot rather than enhanced it. Aaron's aforementioned turn to melodrama coincides with a severe bout of sleep deprivation so, in a sense, it has context, but it still wasn't enjoyable to read. The Holden Caulfield-esque suppression of painful memories were a slight copout to me. I consider it an overused, ho-hum narrative thread.

So, these things are what brought it down a star. They didn't stop me from thoroughly enjoying the ride, but they prevented it from taking off to that indefinable 'other level'. In all honesty, the book's shortcomings only stand out like this because everything else is so polished and thoughtful.

Gardner's a writer of considerable talent. He effortlessly feeds complex ideas to us in a readily accessible way. I have no qualms recommending this to YA fans, or lovers of character dramas in general.

Shirley Marr says

I got off to a bad start with Scot Gardner's writing by reading *Happy As Larry* first, when I should have started off by reading this novel instead! I love the cover of *The Dead I Know* and I love the dark premise of a teen boy undertaking an apprenticeship as a Funeral Director. We meet Aaron as he is being interviewed, accepted by his new boss John Barton and beginning his transformation with a haircut and new clothing - and I took to the quiet, tall and dark, sparsely worded boy straight away.

The writing is clean and borders deceptively on being simple - which balances the sometimes-hard-to-take scenes (which trace the day-to-day activities of a funeral parlour) perfectly. If the writing had been harsher, more sombre or had tried to be too over-quirky, it would have tipped the balance over, so Scot Gardner strikes a good balance there. I loved learning about the trade and it is executed in a very tasteful and respectful nature so one can see the love and the care behind the job of a funeral director, as opposed to the gore and guts. As we witness Aaron and John drive around to collect and prepare the Dearly Departed, there is a beautiful luminosity to these scenes which shine with life as opposed to death.

I also adore each and every character - Aaron himself, his boss John Barton and especially John Barton's daughter, the little firecracker Skye, who provides the perfect a-question-a-second foil against Aaron's almost voiceless one.

Overall, a very interesting slice of life story. What doesn't work as well for me is the dramatic arc, involving Aaron's flashbacks and the mystery behind his nightmares and sleepwalking. I found it too diffused and when the pieces finally came together, the impact didn't reverberate enough into the present to justify it being touted as the "Big Mystery". I would have been happy with Aaron as the morose Emo Boy without need for the Big Back story. I don't know... maybe because it had too many shades of "Dexter" in it, which I am way too familiar with, it just didn't have that punch for me.

If this book was a funeral service, I think I expected to be moved more and to be openly weeping, but all I did was stand back, feel a bit shaken and think "well, thanks for the good times" and that was it. On both occasions Gardner has disappointed me with the overall flatness of his plot execution with throwaway climaxes that don't do anything for me.

The aggravating thing is that I know he is not short on talent, and he does do *something* for me (ahem, that would be his characterisation), so whatever he puts out next, I will be reading it and I will quietly stalk him.

Moonlight Gleam says

What would you do if you had recurring, bone-chilling nightmares that you couldn't explain? Or memories of your past that are hidden deep within your subconscious and that you couldn't recover? Your sleepwalking is spiraling out of control. Then there's your drug-addicted neighbor that threatens to harm you, and a grandmother that is beginning to lose all her senses. What would you do? These are the questions that Aaron Rowe must answer, however, he must do it all on his own. His past is a blur and nothing seems to make any sense except for one thing, death...

Although *The Dead I Know* is a short and easy read, there is a great amount of depth that lies underneath the surface of the story. There is mystery surrounding Aaron's past and present at the beginning of the novel, but as the story progresses and the character's background unravels, readers will desperately crave for more.

My favorite element of *The Dead I Know* is the author's writing style. Scot Gardner keeps everything simple and very engaging throughout the novel. The plot was compelling, and had my full attention right from the very first page. The characters were relatable and I also appreciated that they all played an important role in Aaron's story including the secondary characters that appeared in very few scenes. I also enjoyed Aaron's back-story as well as his recurring nightmares that would give me goose bumps. As the story progressed, I sympathized with Aaron. There was so much that he had to deal with and he had to handle it all on his own.

Scot Gardner should be commended for taking such a dark subject and creating a brilliant read. The author keeps his readers in suspense and only reveals the answers near the end.

The Dead I Know is an emotional and heavy read that I would highly recommend to those who enjoy Young Adult Fiction with a large dose of dark humor.

Must Read! Highly Recommended!

Tasha says

Aaron has just gotten a job at a funeral home with a man who is happy to give him all sorts of opportunities like a new suit, help with getting a driver's license, and even invites him to eat meals with his family. But Aaron has too much to hide to trust his new boss. Mam is slipping deeper and deeper into dementia, often forgetting who Aaron is. The two of them live together in a camper where their neighbors are violent. Aaron also has a recurring nightmare that happens every time he falls asleep, so he tries not to sleep. When he

inevitably does, he sleepwalks. As Aaron finds stability in his job with death, his tenuous control of his life starts to fall apart. The question is when Aaron will be able to face the truth of his past and whether it will be before it destroys him entirely.

Brilliant. This winner of the 2012 Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year for Older Readers is an amazing read. Gardner creates a tense mystery yes, one that keeps the pages turning. At the same time though, the book is immensely poignant as a young man learns to trust others, figures out that sometimes people just do good for others for no other reason, and starts to trust himself too. It is a story of a person realizing that they are good at something, seeing a future where there was none, and finally being able to see their past clearly, dealing with the things they buried long ago.

Aaron is an incredible hero at least in part because he is so very human. From his lack of speech to the depth of his thoughts, he is trapped in his own head much of the time. As he works with the death around him, handling dead bodies, attending funerals, and putting together caskets, he finds that the dead are not the problem. It is the emotions of the living that are too difficult for him to handle, and that includes his own. The secondary characters are equally well drawn, with no one as a caricature, even the police officers.

A beautiful book, one that is tragic and hopeful all at once, that combines death and life into one amazing read. Appropriate for ages 14-17.

Dodie says

First of all, the cover pictured here is MUCH better than the one on the ARC, which shows a well-dressed young man relaxing on a coffin top holding a single red flower - which almost implies a romance within, which there isn't...

This is a dark and humorous story about a young man, disturbed by incidents from his past, ignoring the problems of his present - sleepwalking, insomnia, nightmares, and strange turn in his life from being taken care of by Mam to taking care of her as she slides into dementia. He ends up taking a job at the local funeral home under the watchful eye of John Barton, the funeral home director, his wife, and feisty daughter Skye.

Demons are everywhere and for Aaron, and it is only through taking care of the dead that he is able to push his own fears away. Living a somewhat sordid "caravan" park (known in the US as a trailer park) with Mam is no picnic, but it is the only life he knows. Aaron has been with her since he was very small, but is starting to realize that this is not a safe place for him, or Mam, to be. Especially since he is a somnabulist (sleepwalker) who finds himself waking up on the beach, in front of a cafe, and in another person's trailer...

Very good writing and well-developed characters; the handful of Australian expressions are easily interpreted, and the description of the work done in funeral homes is as fascinating as it is bizarre.

JennRenee says

I didn't quite know what to expect out of this read when I started. The ARC ended up attainable and decided to give it a shot. This is one of those books that I liked, I enjoyed, but it didn't wow me. It wasn't what I expected but I am not sure what I expected so that didn't bother me, I went in pretty clueless. It was a good

story. I have just a few issues with the book but overall it was a good read.

Aaron lives with his mam, an elderly woman who is dealing with some issues. Issues that are of the dementia kind or something similar. Aaron has to take care of her and gets a job at a funeral parlor. He meets the director, his boss, John and John's family. He goes on death pick ups and he helps prepare the dead for viewing and the funeral. This is not easy for him, he struggles through it but it still seems easier than his home life. At this funeral parlor, with John and his family, and with death, Aaron unravels his past and finds a way to live with his present.

'So like I said, this book did not wow me but it was a good read. From the description I knew there would be a bit of mystery with Aaron's life and it would begin to unravel. I don't think I expected what I found but it was still a good thing to explore. There are two parts for this book, one is Aaron's past. It is a mystery to the readers and the book is driven on finding out what is in Aaron's past, what is his relationship to Mam, and why is so distant and closed off. The other is part is Aaron's life he lives. The dreams he has, his sleepwalking, and why again he is so distant and closed off. So that is what makes up this book.

The beginning was a bit slow but it still held my attention. This book is short, very short and still I felt it took a while before it seemed to get anywhere. Once everything started to unravel, the story picked up and it was a much quicker read.

Aaron was a very interesting character, I liked him but I didn't love him, I connected to him in a way I felt bad for him and wanted him to find peace and deal with his issues, but I never seemed to get close to him. He was really closed off so it was hard. As the story progressed, I was able to connect more. I was able to understand as his past came to life.

The funeral director, John was a great character, I did love him and his family. He was patient, caring, multi layered, and very loveable. He was a very important part of this story and tied it all together.

The story was good, the issues hard to deal with but real and I was happy to see them explored enough to see them and know they existed. I think the book could have been a bit longer and deeper, the issues addressed deserved a bit more time to understand and the story could have benefited from more depth. What was there was good but I think it could have been great.

I was happy with the read, I just saw more potential. The writing was good, the characters were good, the story was good. I think more depth and exploration would have made it great to awesome.

Sue says

The Dead I Know is a gripping, emotional rollercoaster of a book. The story centres around Aaron Rowe, who has left school to train as a funeral director with John Barton, owner and operator of JKB Funerals. Aaron lives with his Mam in a caravan. Mam is not mentally sound and it makes Aaron's life very difficult, especially because he loves her so much. Their relationship is a complicated one and, without slipping in a spoiler, not what I expected.

Aaron sleepwalks, having nightmares that seem like memories, and often wakes up in strange places. The novel focusses on a period of about a month in Aaron's life, where the nightmares are becoming real and he is struggling to cope. He slowly builds a relationship with Skye, John's younger daughter, and the

brother/sister relationship they have offers him a safe haven - indeed the whole Barton family accepts him for who he is, without judgement, and they become his rock in a swirling maelstrom.

This is a novel about change, about growing up and about acceptance - both of oneself and by others.

I found the characters in this novel real and believable, which unnerved me a little. I am not accustomed to feeling as attached to a central character as I was to Aaron. His story is utterly compelling. Gardner never wastes words, but paints raw and visceral pictures with his language.

This is an intense reading experience, but well worth the effort because it is ultimately a story of hope.

Cheryl says

I was expecting this book to be somewhat like Warm Bodies by Isaac Marion. Not in the way that I thought this book would be a love story or a zombie book but in the way that I thought it would be dark like Warm Bodies in exploring death but also in a twisted like hearted way. I got none of this from the fourteen chapters that I read. That is all I could make myself read. I was hoping it would get better as the story went along and Aaron got more familiar with his job. Yet I found it boring and disjointed. The way that it jumped from Aaron having his dreams to real life. Also it felt like big chunks of the story was missing when it would go from the dream like state to the present. Such a bummer.

Michele Harrod says

Wow, I really enjoyed this book, what a fabulous new voice, with a unique and surprising tale. It was hard to remind myself that this was intended as a Teen Novel. Despite the lead character being one, I never felt that I wasn't reading a serious adult novel. As someone who herself applied to work as a coronary assistant at the age of 16 and was turned away due to my age, I was fascinated with Aaron's ability to face the dead, and his feelings around them. This book was quite different to what I had expected, with characters that I truly cared about. I did take a while to 'place' the age of the undertaker and his wife (she seemed so homely and kind), I felt the need to see her in my mind as late 50's - which was unlikely, as the daughter was younger, and thought Aaron's Mam looked older than her grandmother - so I had to 'adjust' my mental picture, when I came to that line. However, that would be the only problem I had with the story.

I was deeply moved by the undertaker, John, taking what to all outward appearances would have been a troubled, and probably troublesome boy under his wing, and offering him trust and the opportunity to shine in his own quiet way.

On being called to the scene of a motor cycle accident to 'pick up' a body spread rather far and wide - here are Aaron's thoughts as they finally secure their client in the back of the hearse, for transport back to their offices

"I became aware, as John closed the door, that although we'd been conducting the same search, the policemen and I had been looking for different things, and for different reasons. They were hunting mortal remains to finish a job, I was hunting the still countenance of someone's son, perhaps their brother, maybe even their father, to bring him a final grace. By giving him grace, I found some of my own. The police protected the living, ambulance offers protected the injured and we protected the dead. All as it should be."

This book is a real gem, and I look forward to more from this author.

Skye says

This review is also posted on my blog, In The Good Books.

I had no idea what to think of *The Dead I Know* before -- or even as -- I started. All I knew is that it was a recent Aussie release, and that was good enough for me. Though, by the end, I was pleasantly surprised.

There's a lot of mystery shrouding Aaron in the beginning. He's stoic, and initially doesn't give much away through either his dialogue or first-person narration. We understand him better once we get a look at his home life, and sympathise with him more. While it's heart-wrenching to see his life begin to fall apart, it's also inspiring to watch how he grows and develops from this.

The writing style was simple and engaging. It easily evoked Aaron's voice and helped the reader to become invested in his well-being.

The background characters -- namely the Barton family -- were realistically developed and fleshed out. John's almost fatherly role in Aaron's life created a hopeful dynamic, and Skye's relationship with him was in equal parts adorable and touching (Something about her character was really likeable... it was probably her name). Aaron began to feel like a part of their family; a second family contrasting the state of his real one.

The mysterious element to the story -- what Aaron's sleepwalking, almost- crazy mother, and strange recurring dreams all meant -- was well done, with suspense building until the mystery is finally unravelled. It isn't hard to piece it together yourself first, but it's worth sticking around to see Aaron's emotional reaction to it and how he bounces back.

Overall, an short and enjoyable read that I'd recommend to fans of darker YA.

I give *The Dead I Know* a 4 out of 5.

Melissa Chung says

I don't know how I feel about this book so I'm giving it a 3.5 stars. I really felt for Aaron. I really liked Skye. But the book was kind of slow moving.

Aaron Rowe is a sleepwalker. He also has recurring nightmares that cause his sleepwalking. He lives in a trailer park with Mam and he is a funeral director in training. That is a lot to go on.

We meet Aaron at the funeral home. He is timid and shy and aims to please. He really wants to be there. John Barton is the funeral director, Aaron's boss. His wife and daughter Skye make up the house hold. Oh yeah and there is Moggy the cat.

Aaron is a sad soul in this book. He has to deal with this nightmare which isn't really a dream but a

suppressed memory. He also has to deal with Mam who is slowly losing her mind to dementia. It is a long time coming, but Aaron finally gets over the hurdle of not trusting people and gives in to the pain of his past and spills his guts figuratively to Skye and then to John.

Like I said. It was hard to rate this book. I really liked it but it had some issues. If you like dark contemporary definitely check out this book.

Jess - The Tales Compendium says

The Dead I Know begins with a lot of mystery surrounding our main character Aaron. He has shown up for his first day working at a funeral parlour looking worse for wear and with an antisocial attitude. We don't know a lot about him except that he's a bit of a loner, lives in a caravan park with Mam, who we assume to be his mother, and that she has some kind of mental illness. Because of Mam's apparent illness, Aaron has to play the role of the parent the majority of the time and since it is just him and Mam, there is a lot sitting on his young shoulders. On top of this, he's having trouble with his violent and drug-addicted neighbour and he has recently started sleepwalking and having disturbing nightmares. It is evident he is troubled but the question is, what traumatic memories are hidden away in his subconscious?

"If Mam were an alcoholic, her mental state would be easy to explain. If she'd taken drugs or had an accident, her luck-of-the-draw world would make more sense. Sometimes she was lucid and practical; other times she was a stormy two-year-old. There was no rhyme or flow, just what she was served. Yet, for all her shifting states, she never woke with a stranger's broken hairbrush in her hand."

Aaron needs mindless, repetitive tasks to stay focused and keep himself calm, meaning being an assistant at a funeral home is perfect for him. He doesn't have a problem with death. That doesn't however make him a morbid, angry teenager wanting to kill everyone.... he just understands it. I know that the fact the book is set in a funeral home might deter some people from picking it up, but please don't let it stop you. There are a couple of moments when you might get a tad squeamish but it's really not the focus of the book. It's about Aaron and whether or not he can put his past behind him and find peace of mind.

"The police protected the living, ambulance officers protected the injured and we protected the dead. All as it should be."

The Barton's, who own the funeral parlour, are such lovely people and I thought that John Barton was the perfect person to help Aaron during this particularly difficult time. John takes him under his wing, subtly providing him with a support network without Aaron really realising it. Throughout the story, Aaron's past slowly comes to light, expertly drawn from him by John's precocious 12-year-old daughter Skye (who I started off really disliking but quickly found the value of her personality). What we come to realise is that Aaron is a broken boy struggling with not only the horror of his past (which is so tragically sad!), but also the pain, pressure and denial that comes with having a loved one suffering from dementia (something I am all too familiar with).

I honestly really loved The Dead I Know. It was suspenseful, heart-breaking, touching and hopeful. I read the whole thing in one sitting, I was just so desperate to know what had happened to Aaron and that he would be ok. I really came to care for him as a character and was able to identify with him in reference to his struggles with Mam. Recommended for ages 15+

And if that's not enough, it comes recommended by John Marsden, "*I have never read a book more gripping, nor more triumphantly alive*"

Marj says

"What is life without a memory? Is it death? Sometimes memory was death - slow and painful, eating away at your insides, reeking of decay. Losing your memory would save you from that; wipe your slate clean. But the good would be swept aside with the bad. All the fine things to build a life on would be lost, leaving you just one thing - that moment. No dreams and no history. The ultimate expression of living in the now." p. 147 -148

Not since Evelyn Waugh's 'The Loved One' have I read a book set in a funeral parlour. They're rare; books for teenagers with that setting even more so. Just as rare is such a gem of a book about boys coping with feelings of grief, loss and abuse.

Our introduction to the setting is upfront from the very first line of this novel, however it takes some time to realise that the title is enigmatic: 'The dead I know'. Our apprentice undertaker, Aaron, begins his job and one by one we meet the funeral parlour's clients - those who have died and those who mourn them. But the reader develops a greater interest in the undertakers themselves and their families. Through dealing with the dead, the lives of the living unfold, particularly the past histories of Aaron and his boss John Barton. Slowly, we learn about the dead we DON'T know.

Scot Gardner has woven a delicate and touching story of grief and loss. Though not for the faint-hearted, the incidents of violence in the story only serve to highlight the empathy and care of the well-drawn adult characters who enable Aaron to gain some acceptance of his terrible past. Excellent read for mid-teenagers, particularly boys. 4 1/2 stars.

Giselle (Book Nerd Canada) says

A finished copy was provided by the publisher for review.

I didn't know what to expect from this one. I actually thought it was about a medium (someone who speaks to the dead), but I was wrong. The description is very simple yet it shows there's something more than what is on the surface. Aaron being a funeral director in training is correct. What I didn't expect was the truth that finally came out in the end.

Aaron's nightmares are vivid and scary..Violent and morbid. I couldn't understand what it was. Here is this teenage boy trying to live, trying to make sense of his own life. Surviving in a trailer park with his sick grandmother is no way to live. I commend him for seeking out a job. It's different than most books, since his true horror isn't revealed until later on and then all the pieces are unraveled and then you get that "Ahah!" moment where it all fits together.

The writing is simple and doesn't exaggerate. The main character is heavily flawed and in doing so, many other characters reach out to help him, particularly his boss John and his own family. Skye is a wonderful character who brought a little life back into Aaron. Their relationship was sweet and you can't help but smile

at Skye's questions and observations especially when she nicknames him "Robot."

lucky little cat says

keywords: damaged YA hero, trailer park, Australia, sleepwalking, kindhearted funeral director with loud drawers, dementia, you can go it alone but you shouldn't, another wise-beyond-her-years twelve-year-old, multiple ER trips, elderly much-loved cat

Steven R. McEvoy says

Five years ago when I read a book I always had a pencil in my hand and made notes and grabbed quotes as I read. As I have been reading more and more electronically, now when I do read a physical book I find I just have lost that habit. But this book was so compelling that I stopped on a number of occasions to write down quotes to share with others. This is the first of Scot Gardner's books to be released in Canada. It was an amazing read. I literally read it in less than 24 hours and could not stop talking about it and think about it for days afterwards. It is an incredible read.

Aaron Rowe is a young man who has had trouble fitting in at school. He is now beginning an apprenticeship to work as a funeral director. On one of his first days there is a motorcycle accident and he finds the head some distance from the body and he reflects to himself: "I became aware, as John closed the door, that although we'd been conducting the same search, the policemen and I had been looking for different things and for different reasons. They were hunting for mortal remains to finish a job. I was hunting the still countenance of someone's son, perhaps their brother, maybe even their father, to bring him a final grace. By giving him grace, I found some of my own. The police protected the living, ambulance officers protected the injured and we protected the dead. All as it should be." He likes his new work and seems to have a natural knack for it. But Aaron is suffering from nightmares and sleep walking and both are getting progressively worse. As they are getting worse, so is his mother; she is slipping into dementia and Aaron does not want to lose her and her presence in his life. He thinks to himself: "With that fragment of conversation, I knew the scales had tipped. Mam had gone and probably wouldn't find her way back. Perhaps she'd gone home? She'd done her work. She'd schooled me in life the way an institution never could. She'd made me think long and hard about everything and anything, answered every question I'd ever asked and many that I hadn't. She'd fed me, washed me and clothed me until I could do it for myself. Until I could do it for her. She'd grown old and now she was growing young again, all innocence and hugs. It seemed to have happened so fast, but if I stopped to think about it there had been years of incremental decline, faithfully denied by us both until - paf, like a blown globe - she'd finally let go. Until that moment, when I'd let go too." Again, later in the book, he reflects on the turmoil in his life and nightmares and the peace of his new work. "The smell of air-freshener flowers had become linked in my mind to the cool stillness of death, and death was my new best friend - someone I'd only just met but felt I'd known forever." And so begins the tale of Aaron.

The characters in this story are amazing - Aaron, his new boss John, and John's very precocious daughter Skye. Between their interactions with the living and the dead it makes for a wonderful tale.

In the last 5 years I have read 800 books and this is the number 2 fiction book in that time. (The first being I Hunt Killers by Barry Lyga.) It was so good that I bought and read the only ebook available in North America by Scot Gardner the day after I finished this book. On a side note, I lent this book to my mother- in-

law after reading it. She works in the funeral industry and she could not put it down and also read it in one day. I cannot think of higher recommendations than the two of us, so different but both unable to stop reading. So pick it up and give it a try. *The Dead I Know* just might surprise you in more ways than one.

Read the review and with links to other reviews of books by the authors on my blog Book Reviews and More. And also an author profile and interview with Scot Gardner.

Larissa says

Aaron Rowe has just started his first day at his new job as a funeral director. He is grateful for the job in more ways than one, primarily because it gets him out of going to school but the bonus is he'll get payed. There are some obvious draw backs to the position, though it is not the dead bodies as one would expect, it is the living that are left behind and their grief that has stirred something in Aaron.

It has been years since Aaron has had trouble sleeping, but now the nightmares have returned. But just as bad as the dreams is the sleepwalking. So now it's not only the dark disturbing images that fill his sleeping mind that frighten him, it's the fear that he could wake anywhere, at the beach, outside a cafe, at the lookout. But scarier is the possibilities of what Aaron has done in his sleeping state.

The Dead I Know is about a tough yet vulnerable boy who is struggling with his hidden past and his current circumstances. Although a book about death the meaning behind its pages is life. A story that speaks to all those who have been left behind to pick up the pieces in the wake of a death of a loved one. Aaron's tale is an urban mystery that is shaded in tragedy, death, dreams and crustless sandwiches.

Nic says

Favourite Quote: *There was the unknown, the dark, the cold and the emptiness to contend with out there, but those concepts are all relative. Cold compared to what? A dead hand? Dark compared to what? Unblinking eyes? At times the ocean seemed full beside my emptiness. At times it was the one knowable thing in my world.*

The Dead I Know is a story that comes together like pieces of a puzzle. It is dark, mysterious and refreshingly different read.

This story is so different from what I expected but in a good way. I wasn't expecting it to be such a gritty and emotional read. There are many scene in this book that made want to hug Aaron, the main character, and say it is going to be okay. This story shows how hard life can be sometimes especially when you are trying to do it on your own. But that being said they were also some very funny moments and overall it was had somewhat of a hopeful feel.

Another thing I enjoyed about this book is I never knew what to expect. It is a story that constantly surprised me. I was completely stunned about Aaron's past. It just unravelled wonderfully.

However, I did struggle with the style of writing at the beginning. It probably took me about 30 or so pages to get use it. Also there was also a few squeamish scenes.

My favourite thing about this story is the unique bunch of characters especially Aaron. He is a multi-layered character and it doesn't take long to become emotional invested in him. And the secondary characters Mr Barton and Skye were very entertaining.

Overall, The Dead I Know is a fast paced and compulsive read. I recommend for this fans of contemps who like them a little gritty and raw and also to male readers.

Thanks to Allen & Unwin for providing me with a copy
