



Spirit

J.P. Hightman

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"It's something of a Romeo and Juliet story. There was a young couple in Salem, long ago . . . And the girl's mother, she hated the boy. When the witch-hunting began, mother, daughter, and suitor all ended up at the Blackthorne hanging."

Now, ages later, in the cold, dark heart of the Victorian era--an age of black clothes and black moods--one train is bound for Blackthorne, near Salem, where a winter carnival awaits. The cars are full of the promise of fireworks, sleigh rides, and skating. But for Tess and Tobias Goodraven, this train will take them to a place much darker than they imagined.

Even a seasoned pair of ghost hunters like Tess and Tobias didn't expect a witch like Old Mother Malgore--a witch who stalks the forests, silent as snowfall, hunting, hungering. When the train derails and the casualties climb, the Goodravens must bridge the gap between past and present tragedies if they have any chance of quieting the souls of the living, the dead, and the haunted.

In J. P. Hightman's richly woven story of ghosts and witchcraft, the simple is sinister, the dead stalk the living, and the only real weapon is love.

Spirit Details

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Author : J.P. Hightman

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From Reader Review Spirit for online ebook

Meredith says

Spirit is, hands down, the most disappointing book I have read in years. I LOVE Highman's "The Saint of Dragons" books. They were well written, original, and the plots were streamlined but still delightfully twisty.

Not so for this one. I wanted it to be fabulous. It had everything I love in a book: ghost hunting duo? check. sarcastic, witty dialogue? check. Suspense? Mystery? History? Horror? check. check. check. check.

(SPOILERS)

But after about page 50, the plot made no sense. It has holes you can drive a steam engine through. I'm still not sure who really died when. And I found the Goodravens, who I LOVED in the first third of the book, annoying and wussy in the last two thirds. The ending was a twist worthy of a Shyamalan movie, but it felt completely disconnected from everything else in the story. It's like he came up with a great beginning, a great ending, and BSed his way through the rest of it to string the two together. I enjoyed the book immensely until it became obvious in the last few chapters that everything was building up to a nonsensical resolution.

I mean, WHY, if the entire premise of the book is that Tess and Tobias are strong when they're together and weak when they're apart and the witch spent the entire book trying to keep them apart, do they just give up when the ghosts attack them?

And it's a shame, because his linguistic style is one of the most original and enjoyable that I've ever read. It is soooooooo hard to find young adult fiction -- especially in the horror/fantasy genre -- that is both well-written and assumes the reader is intelligent.

But I thought that "Twilight" made more sense than this. And I am NOT a fan of Twilight.

"The Saint of Dragons" is still one of my favorite books, but Spirit needed another dozen rewrites.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Rebecca Wells for TeensReadToo.com

Blackthorne has always been haunted. A tiny town in Massachusetts, it has been abandoned since the Salem witch trials, when a group of unfortunates fled there only to be hanged as witches.

Now, in the heart of the Victorian era, one train is bound for Blackthorne, where a winter carnival awaits in an attempt to breathe life into the old town. The cars are full of the promise of fireworks, sleigh rides, and skating, but Tess and Tobias Goodraven, two seasoned ghost hunters, expect something much darker.

Though they came in search of ghosts, even the Goodravens didn't expect a witch like Old Mother Malgore - a ghost full of malevolence, who stalks the forests, snuffing out any spark of life. When the train derails and casualties soar, the Goodravens must move between past and present tragedies to have any chance of killing

the witch, quieting the souls of the living, and setting to rest the ghosts.

SPIRIT uses the historical Salem witch trials as a jumping point, and leaps off into an eerie ghost story. The prose is lyrical and haunting, and the narration, led by Tess and Tobias, oscillates between richly romantic, unexpectedly terrifying, and acerbically humorous, all with a touch of darkness. As the story progresses, readers' expectations will be completely derailed as new revelations move the plot in altogether uncharted directions.

With an ending so unexpectedly chilling that I was actually frightened, SPIRIT is a masterfully done book that will haunt the reader long after its cover has been closed.

Tabby says

I did not like this book and that makes me sad because it sounded promising.

I very much disliked Tobias. He was a bully who only seemed to care about himself and manipulated his wife's insecurities to get what he wanted. Which was also weird because these are two seventeen year old kids. With money. Married. Living on their own.

The plot execution felt clumsy though the writing itself was good. The ending also wasn't my favorite.

Jenny says

The writing was of the quality of "it was a dark and stormy night." I admit it had a creepiness to it, and it is certainly gothic, but way over the top, like a slasher movie. Two teen orphans, Tess and Tobias, are husband and wife in Victorian America, and they are addicted to searching out the occult, because they are sensitive to the spirit world. Their latest mission is to go to Blackthorne, the town the real witch of Salem fled to to escape hanging and to feed on the ancient evil that even the Native Americans feared. The town has recently been rebuilt and the railroad is running through it, so a Winter Carnival has been planned to create enthusiasm for the project. Witch Malgore has other plans though, as she causes a train wreck and begins hunting down people one by one, with Tess and Tobias in the thick of things.

Angelina says

This book is not for people that get scared easily. A couple of parts even freaked me out. This book is about a curse that was put on a town close to Salem, MA during the Salem Witch Trials. I have no idea if this is based on something that really happened or not. Parts of this book were confusing and I felt like there were chunks left out of the story or not explained but the story line was likable. This is a must read for those who like scary stories or are interested in the Salem Witch Trials.

Marlowe says

Tess and Tobias Goodraven haven't been normal since being orphaned in a fire as children. Since then, they have sought to contact the 'Other Side.' When they heard that a notoriously haunted ghost town close to Salem was being re-opened to the public for a winter festival, they couldn't resist exploring the power of the three witches who never truly died. But what they find is far more dangerous than any hauntings they've encountered before.

The dust jacket of my edition says that Hightman is a screenwriter – and it shows. The novel is completely visual, as though no other sense mattered. There is little consideration for style and the timing of scares, which would work just fine in Hollywood but falls flat in print. Characters are one-dimensional. What little personality exists is told to the reader – their actions and speech rarely matching the image the narrator tries to impose. In the end, the twist was utterly predictable, made all the worse for Hightman's lack of trust in his readers as he repeats it, over and over again, in every conceivable way lest we should fail to catch his cleverness.

To say one positive thing about Spirit, the mechanics of the writing are all correct – making the book bearable if not enjoyable.

Jamie says

I read this book back when it was first published and hadn't picked it up in the years since. I hadn't remembered much of it, only that I really loved it. And thanks to some pretty horrible weather on the East Coast, I recently had the pleasure of reading it again. And truthfully I have to say that I loved this book even more the second time around.

While the writing itself can occasionally be a bit redundant and difficult to follow, (a mistake I blame on the editors and not the author) the story itself shines. I can't even say it what it is, but this story always draws me in. I personally don't find it all that scary, (as I'm probably desensitized from all the horror I read) but there's something lovely (if you can call it that) about this book, whether it be the simplicity or the fear factor.

It's a quick and easy read that you can probably finish in a day. And that is one of the things so wonderful about it. You're plunged into a vivid world and you meet some very interesting characters in a short amount of time. I cannot say enough how refreshing it is to read a novel that isn't Book 1 of a long, drawn out series/trilogy. The length of this book is perfect and the pacing is just right. It moves quick enough that the reader is still hooked, but not so fast that it prevents you from being able to really notice what's going on.

A few years later this book is still one of my favorites and I think it deserves much more recognition than it gets. Just don't let a few run-on sentences prevent you from reading something so engaging.

Courtney says

Tess and Tobias Goodraven are a wealthy, seventeen-year-old married couple living in Mass. during 1892. Both of them lost their parents in a theatre fire when they were young, which led them to become intrigued by the phantom world, and each other. Their morbid fascination with the occult helps Tobias stumble upon

an old legend about the 1662 Salem Witch Trials and the "First Accused," who was a real witch and purely evil. Unable to resist, Tobias convinces Tess to take a train to Blackthorne to see if the legend is true, and what they find is spirits who refuse to let go, and a witch bent on making sure there are no survivors.

The basic premise of this book was great. In fact, another reviewer sums it up when she says, "Excellent idea, terrible execution." First of all, this book is slotted for 6th-9th grades. The fact that the protagonists were married made the story unrelatable. I know why the author did it - it ties into the ending/climax - but it creates a disconnect from the first page. In addition, there is no plot development, just action. Every time someone would die, I would think "Who was that?" and I would read on because I really didn't care to go back 50 pages to figure it out.

Overall, this book rambles in a lot of places, then has scary scene after scary scene. The legend is alluded to, but the reader never gets the real story of the murdered lovers or how Widow Malgore (the evil witch) became evil. I would have LOVED to read flashbacks of their lives so that the ending was more powerful.

Shallow writing, at best.

Sensei says

[When Jurey tried to warn them about Blackthorne, Tobias was so dismissive. He also didn't seem to really believe anything else anyone on the train had to say about Blackthorne. This type of attitude is reminiscent of the typical teenager attitude- "Don't tell me. I already know everything...What do you know...you're

theghostwriter says

ok, i'm going to dork out for just a moment here and say that this was a really, really, really FREAKING AWESOME gothic ghost/witch story. i mean it was fantastically written and not hokey AT ALL for its genre, and trust me, paranormal fiction can get undeniably cheesy. the characters were likable, the story was scary as hell and the ending was SO! GOOD!! and unpredictable. well, i kind of predicted it but still... i was sad when i finished it. trust me, get this book and read it on a rainy, dark night. booOOoooOOOoo!!

Jaime says

This was a very difficult book for me to get through, in fact, I was unable to finish the book. It lost my interest about half way through and I was easily distracted from the book. It started off strangely and I wasn't really "feeling" the characters. : (

Allie Brown says

This is a spooky book that 6-9th graders would enjoy. Tess and Tobias Goodraven are orphans who found eachother after a tragic fire took the lives of both their parents. They are 17 and married. They also enjoy ghost hunting in their freetime! However, this trip is nothing they planned for... In search of the witches that

escaped from the Salem witch trials, Tess and Tobias are on a train to Blackthorne MA in the 1800's. On the train they encounter a mix-match of characters all out for the same adventure. When the train derails in the middle of nowhere in the middle of winter, things go from bad to worse! There is a creature in the woods hunting the surviving passengers and killing them one-by-one. Tess and Tobias are separated as Tobias and a group of able men go on for help and leave Tess and the rest to tend to the wounded. As both struggle to survive they feel their grip with reality slipping away.....the ending is shocking!

Key Characters:

Tess and Tobias Goodraven= 17 year old man and wife and they both love to play the cello as relaxation. Also both hold a sort of 6th sense in relation to ghosts....they can sense them, communicate and interact with the dead

Key Issues: survival, love, devotion, hate, evil, retaliation, revenge, quest for peace, bonds of marriage

Stephanie says

Decent plot, horrible execution.

Ashley says

I thought that the premise of this book sounded interesting and I still do but poor execution spoiled the overall arc and dragged the story down.

I thought this plot to be better suited for older characters and it was hard to think of this married couple as mere kids, which I assume the author knew since he felt the need to remind us every few chapters that Tess & Tobias were young and different. I found the characters to be annoying and unlikable. Tess was weak as well as spineless with Tobias being an overbearing brute. They were ill-suited as a couple and didn't seem to be in love or even like each other.

The writing was ok, word usage decent yet the plot was hollow and hard to follow at times due to the story jumping and bad pacing, as well as details that were confusing and unclear.

I have no problem with that "twist" at the end but there needed to be a better setup for it. I thought I was reading a book about witchcraft not a book about a train wreck.

No wonder my niece was getting rid of this book.

Kim says

I guess the only thing that I can say about this book is how horribly disappointed I was with the ending. Everybody's dead(which comes as some surprise to me, since everyone was alive up until they realized they were dead all of a sudden). That was half-baked and bad enough, but at the very end, to have Tobias and Tess have their bodies stolen by the two ghosts at the end, what a groaner! I understand that the author wanted to have some resolution to the story, and couldn't think of anything else that would have been plausible as an ending. Having the two main characters roll over and just hand their bodies over left a bad taste in my mouth and made me throw the book down in disgust. Not like at any part it was a masterpiece to start with, but just saying.

Complete and utter confusion the whole way through, with the abstract descriptions. Especially everyone that's left being alive one minute, only to find out they're dead and gone the next.

I wouldn't have minded so much if Mother Malgore *had* got them after all, at least that would have been better than the cruddy real ending. Sigh, two days wasted.
