



## Friend Is Not a Verb

*Daniel Ehrenhaft*

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You know things are bad when your dreams come with a washed-up '80s soundtrack

Henry "Hen" Birnbaum's sister, Sarah, missing for over a year, has come home unexpectedly, with no explanation at all. But he can't leave well enough alone; Hen needs to figure out why she disappeared, even if she won't tell him. It's not like he has anything better to do. His girlfriend just dumped him and kicked him out of their band. He can't play the bass worth crap anyway. His social life consists of night after night of VH1 marathons with his best friend and next-door neighbor, the neurotic Emma Wood.

Hen's sure the answers to Sarah's lost year lie with Gabriel Stern—Sarah's friend from college who also happens to be a twenty-two-year-old fugitive from the law and Hen's bass teacher . . . too bad he can't play bass worth crap either. A month into his quest, Hen has had countless consultations with Emma, watched approximately fifty-three reruns of *Behind the Music*, and made one new Facebook friend. Unfortunately, he's no closer to any revelations about his sister. The thing is, he's too distracted to notice it, but while Hen's been looking for all the answers, something mind-blowing happened: He got a life.

## **Friend Is Not a Verb Details**

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## From Reader Review Friend Is Not a Verb for online ebook

### **Liza Gilbert says**

I really wanted to like this book more than I did. Ehrenhaft created an interesting premise, but then followed it up with a very whiny protagonist. In fact, I enjoyed the side story of Hen's missing sister more than I did his own story.

The humor and New York City setting were fun and enjoyable, and the story is definitely edgier than the lame-o cover advertises. In fact, if I were Ehrenhaft, I'd be very ticked off about the cover.

I can see some teens enjoying this book, and then promptly forgetting about it. And, at times, the humorous-over-the-top-intelligent language requires some John Deere machinery to get through. It just might be too dense.

I would be interesting in seeing what Ehrenhaft does in the future, though. There was much to like in this book, but not enough to make it stick.

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### **Jessica says**

Let's start with the positives shall we? I always like to get off on a good foot. This book is pretty funny. Plain and simple there are parts in this book where I found myself laughing out loud, "Hen" or Henry, the main character, is witty and ridiculous at times. He tends to surround himself with other characters of the same magnitude, and watching them interact with one another can be pretty hilarious.

I also very much enjoyed the multiple pop culture references in the story, especially Henry's love for the 90's and all the nostalgia there within. Bands, television shows, it was all there in its truly cheesy 90's glory. Truthfully I began to get a little peeved near the end at how many times Facebook was mentioned, however I know this to be true to life. I can't count how many times I've been at a bar and heard that word thrown around. Yes, it's pop culture and yes it's here to stay. Daniel Ehrenhaft's mention of these items did help me form a connection with the characters as I read.

However this is where my love for the book ended. Although I found Henry to be funny at times, I mainly found him to be awkward and obnoxious. His incessant side notes to himself (set off like this) throughout the book were endearing at first, and then became extremely distracting. Henry's sole focus in this story was to be a rock star, and it seemed to me like it was a little forced. He knew he wasn't good at bass, and yet he continued to convince himself that that was what he needed to be happy. In Henry's mind, stardom = money = happiness and I just couldn't get behind that. Maybe it's just me, but I really thought he could have directed his confusion and family angst into something more worthwhile.

As for his sister Sarah and her story, the entire first half of the story had me wondering out loud when I was going to get to find anything out about her disappearance. There were no clues, no hints, her parents didn't even seem fazed when she showed up out of nowhere. I was also so frustrated at how uncaring she seemed and how distant. She was Henry's sister after all, doesn't that afford them some kind of confidence? As the book neared the end and I finally unraveled the mystery behind Sarah's disappearance, I began to wonder why it was all such a big deal. Why couldn't Henry's parents have shared that with him? It just seemed like

extremely poor parenting to me.

Overall this was a book that just irked me too much to really appreciate it. There were high points and low points, but sadly the things I disliked really weighed in strongly. More than once I had to resist simply giving up on reading this book, and that made me sad. It's not often that I find a book I have that much trouble reading. I think that this book has great potential, but that the quirkiness makes it a difficult read. Perhaps there are those out there who will think differently than me and if so, great!

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### **Kimberly Francisco says**

This was a fun, quick read. Nothing ground-breaking, and the multitude of pop culture references will date it very quickly. The wrap-up of the missing sister at the end was really odd...I didn't really buy it. But the suspense kept me reading, and the dialogue was mostly very good.

HOWEVER, the protagonists hate Journey and refer to the band as only being liked by their middle-aged parents and others like them. Seriously? EVERYONE likes Journey! Am I wrong? Don't teenagers still like Journey? Am I that old? I mean, they were before MY time (I'm 24) and there's always a time and a place for some Journey...everyone likes Journey!

OK that was a bit of a weird and not really relevant rant, but it needed to be said.

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### **Shelbie Butcher says**

The reason the author wrote "Friend is not a Verb" is because he wanted to describe a rock and roll, love relationship. The theme of this book is probably caring. The reason that the theme is caring is because after everything the Hen has went through in the end it is all about caring about the ones that you love. That is one of the main messages that this book send you.

The style that this book was written in was description. The reason it is considered a description is because it takes place during the 80's and 90's and it talks about experiencing all the things that most high school kids will experience in their life time. For example, someone's dad offered Hen a hit of Marijuana and Hen said no. Almost everyone is going to be offered something bad like that in their life time; it just comes down to who is going to stay strong and turn it down and who is going to give into peer pressure.

I thought this was a descent book. I am really not the kind of person who likes to read about rock and roll bands, but this book was pretty good. It never made me not want to read it; it just didn't grab my attention like other books have. I thought the book had some really boring spots in it. One part that I did like was when we found out the reason that Hen's sister was gone for a years and then came back. I would tell you more about it but that would just give it away. I would change the way the author had the relationships set up. I like to hear about juicy relationships and I thought this one was just boring. I will say that this book is nothing like I have ever read before. It has its good and bad parts, like most books do.

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## **Lela says**

(Elective reading)

Summary: Henry "Hen" Birnbaum has a sister, Sarah, who had disappeared and now is suddenly back home. Nobody in his family is telling him what happened, and he feels that he is neglected and treated unfairly. Oh, and his girlfriend broke up with him. And he got kicked out of his band. What's a boy to do? Luckily, he has his good friend Emma to keep him company. But he wants desperately to get to the bottom of his sister's disappearance and reappearance... so he'll go to Gabriel, Sarah's friend, for the answers.

Response: When I saw this title, I was immediately intrigued. The cover almost made me rethink it, but then I realized that I probably shouldn't judge a book by its cover. I was happily impressed with the wit and the humor that this author infuses into the narrative. While I usually am not too much of a fan of reading the semi-psychotic way that teenage boys' brains work, I found that I actually really liked this book. There were quite a few times that I found myself hating the cliches within it, but then the narrator mentioned it and tore it apart. I really enjoyed it.

When it comes to how I feel teens might like this, I definitely feel like it is a guy's book. I read pieces of this to my husband, and he was laughing hysterically. Apparently this author nails how a teenage boy feels about everything.

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## **Sara says**

Hen Birnbaum is an average high schooler who plays bass in his girlfriend's band and spends lots of time watching VH1 with his neighbor. But his family is not quite as it seems — his older sister, Sarah, has been missing for a year. Though his parents seem to know something about what's going on, they insist that Sarah needs to be the one to tell Hen. So when Sarah returns without a word of explanation and asks Hen to take bass lessons from her friend Gabriel, Hen is not sure how to handle things. And as the novel progresses, neither is the reader.

There are far too many things happening in this novel. Hen's relationship with Petra, who fronts the band first called PETRA and later called Dawson's Freak; Hen's friendship with the next door neighbor girl, Emma; Sarah's sudden appearance and subsequent re-disappearance; Sarah's attempt to keep in touch with Hen via Facebook during her second disappearance (hence the title of the novel); Hen's reading of Gabriel's manuscript which may or may not be autobiographical; Hen's relationship with his parents, who seem oddly strict with their son despite their daughter's sporadic absences. A confusing mishmash of potentially interesting storylines.

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## **Jeyda says**

Friend is Not a Verb

Jeyda B.

Realistic Fiction

Well, the book is split up in three parts (The two days leading up to the conclusion that becoming a rock star

would solve all my problems, The gig that didn't change everything, and The surprise twist that I probably should've seen coming). Within these three parts are chapters 1-18 with an epilogue and an e-mail that the main character, Hen , received.

In the first third of the book introduces the main character Henry Birnbaum (Hen). Hen was in a band called PETRA, he also had a girlfriend whose name was Petra and is the lead singer of the band. Right after one of their performances Petra dumped Hen as a bass player and as a boyfriend. So she left Hen standing outside of the lounge they were playing at in the pelting rain. The bouncer standing outside the lounge had a pin on that said 'Steal Your Parents Money'. Right after Hen leaves he goes to his best friends Emma's house. He always talks to her when he is about to lose it. Did I mention that Hen's sister Sarah and her friend Gabriel has mysteriously disappeared for a year? In addition to being dumped and kicked out of the band, Hen's sister just magically reappears back at their house after a year, but here's the kick neither Sarah or Hen's parents will tell him why she left. They keep saying "Oh she's a criminal." or "She was trying to keep you safe.". Well after Sarah came home Hen was quite angry with her and was determined to find out why she and Gabriel left. It seems like everyone knows why she left but won't tell Hen.

In the second part of the story Hen finds out that Gabriel was a bass player and thought it was a perfect way to find out reasons of why Gabriel and his sister left. Hen thought he would get his answers in the form of bass lessons. During his first lesson Hen found some manuscripts of Gabriels and took them to see what was in there. After reading at the manuscripts Petra eventually asked Hen if he wanted to be in the band again. After he said yes Hen found a flyer for an open mic night at the Bimbo Lounge. The band signed up for the mic night but it went terribly wrong, which led for the drummer, Bartholomew, to quit the band because of what Hen 'said' to the engineer of the mic night. Later that night Sarah added Hen on Facebook and within the second week Sarah disappeared for the second time. About a week and a half after she disappeared she updated her Facebook status which let Hen know that she was okay.

In the third and last part of the story Hen finds out why Gabriel and his sister left and the reason was because she stole \$2 million from Gabriels fathers account (which he deserved may I add). Turns out Sarah is the one who came with the 'Steal Your Parents Money' pin. Hen finally figured it out and thought that he should've seen it coming. Besides figuring out Gabriel and Sarah's secret, Hen also found out that Gabriel and Sarah were a couple and Hen and Emma became a couple themselves. After that lovey dove moment Sarah gave Gabriel's dad a \$3 million check so he didn't press charges, but the thing was is the Gabriel's father is so evil that Gabriel made a plan for a heist to steal his money again. The plan consisted of three phases. The plan was so detailed that it was a success, they has finally did it.

I think the book in all was pretty good. It kept my attention all the way through it, though some parts were hazy. The plot was good, though I don't know why they decided to steal some more of Gabriel's fathers money. The events all had consisted with one another. I feel like the author should've put more detail about why Sarah left rather than just saying she stole money from somebody. I also feel like Hen's ex-girlfriend, Petra was some what irrelevant, but aside from those things I really enjoyed the book.

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### **Nicole Houser says**

Meh. I'm not mad I read it, as it was finished in a day. However, the story was a little wacky and I wish some ends were tied up. (that's my fault, not the authors. sometimes cliff hangers bother me)

Solid 3/5

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## **Katie M. says**

Ugh.

This book was... well, I guess I'll just start with positives.

For starters, I loved all of the pop culture that was put into this book. There was mention of seventies, present, and so much about the nineties that I appreciated (I really think I should have been 16 in the nineties instead of now.. or the mid-late sixties.. but back to the topic!) I have a tendency to get really excited when things that I know or like are thrown into a book, and that's probably where most of the appeal was for me. I also like how metaphorical and ironic it was. I mean, it could have been a lot better, but it was fairly amusing.

The things I did not like were how big of a fail the plot was for one. I mean, you were KIND OF kept guessing though out the book, but it wasn't really made so that you actually cared to figure it out. Aside from that, the reason for Hen(main character)'s sister and friends running off and doing what they did is just... asinine. I was expecting something bigger, more meaningful, and it really wasn't.

I also hated the section of the book in which Hen was obsessing about becoming a rock star. He could not have possibly become a more annoying character in those moments, and it was probably for that reason alone that it took me so long to read such a short book.

The last probably I have kind of contradicts the reason I like it. The 90s pop culture. I mean, I get it, but I know people who wouldn't get it, or even have any idea what on Earth the characters were talking about. In a world where talk show hosts Mention Avril Lavigne and have to question whether or not teens still know who SHE is, it's hard to believe anyone will know or remember Dawson's Creek, or the Bloodhound Gang.

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## **Lena ? ? says**

I just could not get into this book. I tried, I really did, but after 100 some-odd-pages, I just had to call a quits.

The protag, Hen, got on my nerves. I don't know why exactly. Maybe it was the excessive whining and rambling about his rock star dreams. Or the attempt at emotions which didn't register to me as realistic. Or maybe it was the(random statements) (placed in parentheses) (which can be very distracting to the story/plot).

All and all, this just wasn't the book for me. Now, keep in mind, I didn't finish it. Maybe the story picks up and gets better towards the end. But, quite frankly, there are so many great reads out there right now, I didn't want to waste my time.

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## **Jennifer says**

This review was originally posted on my review blog : <http://fallingoffthehself.blogspot.com>

Henry "Hen" Birnbaum has been going through a lot this year, and it hasn't all affected him for the better. When his sister Sarah first ran away a year ago, it really tore him up. All he knew was that she did something she wasn't supposed to do, and was now a fugitive of the law. His own parents won't even give him the rundown on what his sister has done, although they know perfectly well what it was. Needless to say, Hen is

tired of being considered a child, he's 16-years old now, and has the right to know some things.

The night his sister decides to return to the family, Hen's life gets worse. His girlfriend, and the leader of their band PETRA, breaks up with him in the middle of the rain, and then continues to boot him from his position as the band's bass player. It's okay though, because he never really could play the bass very well anyway. When he arrives home and finds a note from his parents claiming they've gone to pick up his sister Sarah, Hen can't believe it. He can't decide whether he's truly happy to see his sister, or still infuriated with her for leaving without even saying good-bye.

Things between him and Sarah are weird now, especially since she still won't tell him what's going on. When her friend and fellow fugitive, Gabriel Stern, offers to give him bass lessons, Hen decides to take them in hopes that Gabe will slip up and tell him what is going on. Instead it seems Gabe is more worried about Hen admitting to feelings towards his best friend, Emily Wood, that he's not even sure are really there. Emily has always been next door, and she knows just about everything about him, but can there be more to their relationship than Hen thinks?

I really liked Hen's character from the very first page. He may have been a little depressing at times, but he was extremely quick-witted and had the tendency to make me giggle. I could understand why Hen was angry at his sister Sarah for leaving, and then returning without giving him an inkling toward her reasons. On the other hand, I think he could have been a little more happy to see her, especially if he missed her as much as he claimed.

There was a lot of characters in this book, and believe it or not, despite how short it is you learn a lot about each and everyone of them. My favorite character was probably Emily, even though there were a few times that I wanted to wring her neck because of the things she was doing. She was all around good-hearted, and despite some of the things she did, they were always for the benefit of others.

My least favorite character was Petra, the ex-girlfriend. She wasn't really that bad actually, but it seemed that if you weren't cool, she wanted nothing from you. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree though, if you ask me, because her father wasn't really any better. Both characters are nice to those around them, but in the limelight of things you feel like you're just not up to their standards the more you read about them.

The mystery of Hen's missing sister hovered over this entire plot, while it wasn't always front and center. Hen almost always had it on his mind, despite the fact that he tried his hardest to just leave it alone. The funny thing is, the answer to the mystery was in front of both Hen's, and the readers face the whole time, you just didn't know it. I was completely surprised when I found out Sarah's story at the end of this book, and actually slapped my knee because I was too silly to figure it out earlier on.

All around this was a great book. You learn a lot about Hen, and his friends. Despite the lack of appearance from his sister, Sarah, she is one of the main focus points of this novel. Even though you get to watch Hen grow as a teenager, and learn more about himself and those around him, you still find yourself wondering what his sister could have done to get herself into so much trouble. I'll more than likely be reading more books by Daniel Ehrenhaft in the future, because I loved his writing. I even liked that it was narrated from Hen's point of view. I'm usually not into books narrated by male characters, but his one was written perfectly, and it made me feel like I really knew Hen, sometimes better than he knew himself.

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## **Adele says**

I am a shallow being. I freely admit to be as such as I purchased this book based on the title, cover art and the fact that it was authored by a man. Turns out that my puerile ways resulted in a great read told from a teen male perspective and a new (much needed) male YA author in my arsenal - not a bad day's work.

There are so many things to like about Ehrenhaft's exploration of a teen romance gone kaput, a friendship strained and a sister at a distance. Introspective, sensitive and quirky - the reader is taken on a journey where the character gradually shifts in his consciousness which affect his choices in turn. The voice of the character is so relatable and authentic that it is frighteningly easy to share his mind. He's sullen, oblivious, quick witted and slovenly - sometimes all in the same passage. The author really captured the contemporary teen male voice without playing to cliches or this female's perception of what a guy sounds like.

While many readers might gravitate to the romantic or friendship aspects of the novel, I found myself captured by the brother-sister dynamic presented. As an older sister the push and pull of Sarah and Hen's relationship really rang true to me. Boys aren't as outward in their feelings as their female counterparts and this is shown to great affect with the impact Sarah's disappearance (and return) have upon Hen. To the outside world he doesn't care - but that's anything but the truth. This segues nicely into Hen's bass playing and Gabe's impact on his musicality and growth as a son, brother and friend. It's quiet and beautifully realised.

Teen girls are crazy and it was quite amusing to see them at work from the laid back perspective of our protagonist. Whether it was the selfish manoeuvrings of Petra, Emily's personality 180 or Sarah's deliberate quash on enlightening Hen with any information whatsoever it is fun to see what rolled off his back and how much truly resonated. It is here that I had some concerns, at times the depiction of some of the secondary characters was a little light but never falling into caricature territory. The central problem of Sarah's disappearance is handled well in retrospect but when reading it felt a little anti-climatic. There is also a subplot involving dogs that felt extraneous but I could also argue that most things you do during the summer are immaterial.

The voice is fun...even when mocking Journey and the pudgy kid from Dawson's Creek (oh no you didn't mock my Pacey). It moves quickly with Hen envisioning his life retold as part of the now defunct MTV Behind the Scenes. Ehrenhaft smoothly navigates the many intermingling subplots and Hen's growing awareness with humour, perceptiveness and some catchy dialogue.

A contemporary tale about a guy, his bass, the girl next door, his self-absorbed ex and his MIA sister that has its hand on its heart, crotch and funny bone.

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## **Brandi says**

Everything changed after Hen's sister Sarah disappeared a year ago. No one knows where or why she went, but there are speculations everywhere that she is in some kind of trouble. Since his sister vanished, Hen has fallen in love (he thinks), played the bass guitar in his girlfriend, Petra's, band (subpar, at best), and managed ridiculously paranoid parents (he's not going to run away, you know). Now everything is slowly crumbling to Hen's feet. Petra dumped him and kicked him out of the band leaving his social life an empty void except for his best friend Emma and the addictive VH1 Behind the Music marathons. Right when Hen is getting

settled in his new, slightly boring life, he comes home to an empty house with only a note stating that Sarah had returned. His parents refuse to acknowledge the fact that Sarah had been missing for a year and life continues on as it had before she left. The worst part is no one will tell Hen where she was or why she was gone, but he's positive that his parents know everything.

With the reemergence of Sarah comes the paranoid artist, Gabriel Stern. Gabriel was apparently with Sarah while she was gone and is now trying to become a part of Hen's life as well. When Gabriel offers to teach Hen how to play the bass better, Hen agrees with the hopes that Gabriel will shed some light on the last year of Sarah's life. On top of some sneaking around Gabriel's apartment, Hen finds a few new activities to keep him busy. Hen gets a part-time job walking dogs for some very wealthy women. He is also invited to join back up with Petra and her band for a very important gig. Can Hen juggle everything after having a boring, uneventful life?

A down-to-earth story, *Friend is not a Verb* mirrors the real lives of teenagers fairly accurately. Hen is a likeable character with the habit of narrating his life like an announcer for a biographical TV show. One of the only negative thoughts I have about this book refers to the cover. A boy and a girl holding hands is not a good representation for this book and I fear it will turn guys away. Don't believe the cover! Pick it up today!

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### **Sara says**

3.5 stars. Henry ("Hen") has dreams of becoming a big rock star, narrating his own life with the kind of melodramatic voice found in old episodes of "Behind the Music". His sister disappeared a year ago and no one knows why, but she suddenly reappears without explanation; his parents seem to know more than they're letting on but want the sister to tell Hen on her own terms. In the meantime, all anyone will say is that she's kind of a fugitive until certain things get sorted out. In the meantime, Hen re-joins the band his ex-girlfriend kicked him out of, begins taking bass lessons from his sister's friend (who also won't tell Hen why they disappeared together), and tries to deal with oddness between himself and his best friend.

I loved the narration in this book. Hen's voice shone through and he was very funny and likable. I could have done without the occasional italicized narrations (ones in which he imagined how "Behind the Music" would describe the moment) but overall, his observations about life were great. He made a lot of nice observations, such as the difference between "friending" someone online and actually *being* a friend to someone. I also liked his comments about how witty someone could be in writing yet the same wittiness in person just made them seem like they were trying too hard. Everyone can relate to these observations, which was a big reason why Hen was so likable.

The missing sister plot intrigued me, and I had no idea where it was going. I kept reading on because I wanted to know why she'd disappeared, and it frustrated me (much like it frustrated Hen) that no one would explain anything yet he was expected to just deal with it. The author did a nice job of weaving details together in the end, making the entire story quite cohesive. I would have liked the ending to have been a little less sudden, but the story itself was good.

As a whole, this novel seemed to lack *something* - perhaps a deeper exploration of the brother/sister/family dynamic, perhaps a more developed subplot, or perhaps even a bigger main plot. There were so many little things I liked in this book - the characters themselves, the way reality didn't align with fantasy, the mystery behind what happened to Hen's sister and why she'd shown up again - but everything seemed only briefly

touched upon, the story moved on, and then it all wrapped up quickly. The book was entertaining overall; I just wish there had been a little more to it.

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### **Say says**

i always had the thing for geeky and nerdy guys, guys who is not worth another glance once you passed by them. but when you get to talk to them, you will ask yourself "you make so much sense." i thought henry "hen" (yes. like a rooster....har har!) was one of those guys. he being a music guru (well, more of the 80's and 90's) was cool but as the story goes i just couldnt like the guy. i dont know maybe it's just me but eventhough he has a wide expertise in music, i liked his friend emma more. or should i say i liked gabriel more eventhough he has a small part in this book. the only reason i continued reading this one was i wanted to know what is sarah's secret (hen's sister) and what is the real reason she left and return after a year. and of course there's the music thingy going on in this story. that's just it. the story was ok. it was a short read (thank god!) so i just wasted a whole day with this book. i would be more frustrated if it were longer and i had to finish it and then not like it at the end.

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