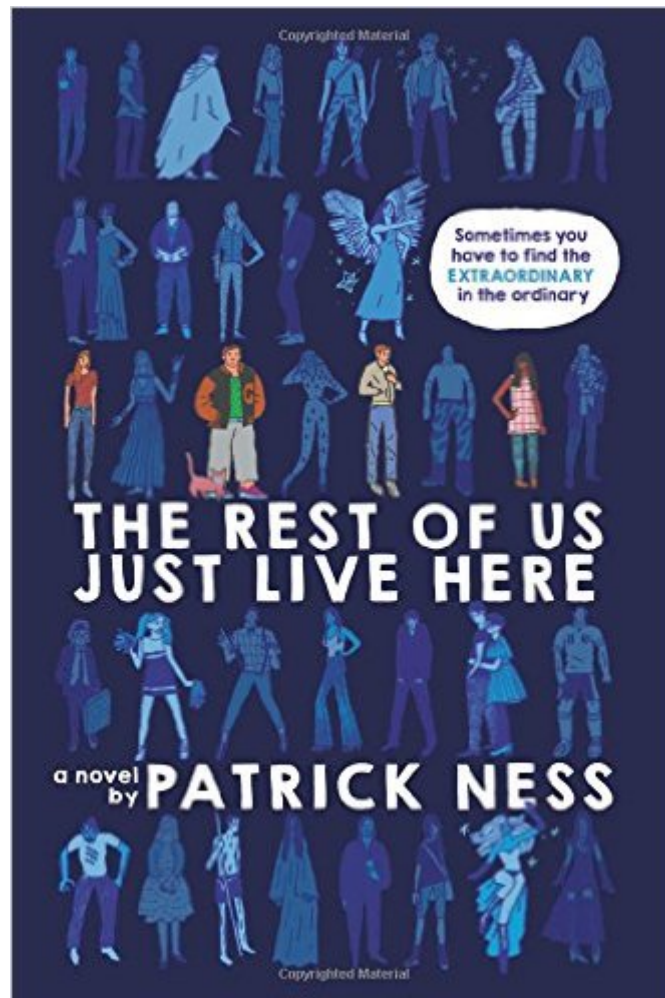


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The Rest Of Us Just Live Here



Synopsis

ALA Best Fiction for Young Adults * Cooperative Children's Book Center CCBC Choice * Michael Printz Award shortlist * Six starred reviews * Kirkus Best Book of the Year * VOYA Perfect Ten * NYPL Top Ten Best Books of the Year for Teens * Chicago Public Library Best Teen Books of the Year * Publishers Marketplace Buzz Books * ABC Best Books for Children * Bank Street Best Books List

A new YA novel from novelist Patrick Ness, author of the Carnegie Medal- and Kate Greenaway Medal-winning *A Monster Calls* and the critically acclaimed *Chaos Walking* trilogy, *The Rest of Us Just Live Here* is a bold and irreverent novel that powerfully reminds us that there are many different types of remarkable. What if you aren't the Chosen One? The one who's supposed to fight the zombies, or the soul-eating ghosts, or whatever the heck this new thing is, with the blue lights and the death? What if you're like Mikey? Who just wants to graduate and go to prom and maybe finally work up the courage to ask Henna out before someone goes and blows up the high school. Again. Because sometimes there are problems bigger than this week's end of the world, and sometimes you just have to find the extraordinary in your ordinary life. Even if your best friend is worshipped by mountain lions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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This is a bifurcated review. My son (who loves fantasy novels, Brandon Sanderson, big epics, and

funny YA novels) was bored by this novel. The approach, focusing on the normal kids on the sidelines of the superhero fight, lost him. The style lost him. The slow start lost him (Dad, the 5 characters they throw at you in the first pages were all limp). Me, who has read tons of YA fiction over the years, to help find him good books to read, liked this quite a bit. The main characters -- Mikey, etc -- face real problems with their personalities, the liminal edge of leaving high school, all with superhero stuff as a backdrop. There were some quite witty moments. Maybe too meta for an actual young adult reader?

As a backdrop for *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*, a *Big Bad* plots to destroy the world. A group of high school kids are the *Chosen Ones* who will attempt to thwart said *Big Bad*. This novel isn't their story. Instead, *The Rest of Us Just Live Here* focuses on a different group of high school seniors. They're anxious about saying goodbye to life as they know it and unsure of their futures. Of course, all that will be moot if their high school is destroyed before they graduate. In a world reminiscent of the *Buffiverse*, where supernatural occurrences are likely blamed on gas main explosions, the *Unchosen* are uniquely aware of the weirdness going on around them. They're conscious that it's some other group that must face the impending doom. And yet they have their own problems which are only complicated by the zombie deer and possessed denizens of their small town. *The Rest of Us Just Live Here* is uniquely structured. Each chapter (Chapter the Nth) starts with an introductory synopsis (in which) of the overarching supernatural storyline that is the background to the proper narrative. *Indie Kids* (the moniker of the chosen ones) are introduced and dispatched as the evil plan comes to a head. This information is relayed in matter of fact sentences absent all flair, just the bare bones facts. Then the story proper unfolds concerning the protagonists who live in the shadow of these other events. The novel's real focus is the relationships of these students as they struggle with their personal demons in light of their impending graduation. And so, despite the apocalyptic trappings which foster some genuine tension and suspense, the novel succeeds or fails largely on the development of its central cast of characters. The narrator, Mike, appears to suffer from extreme obsessive compulsive disorder. He also has a crush on one of his friends, Henna, and he feels he only has a few weeks to let her know how he feels. Henna recently ended a relationship but seems preoccupied with a new boy, Nathan which is when she's not sending very mixed signals to Mike. Jared is Mike's best friend. He's been secretive lately and Mike doesn't know what he's been up

to. Oh, he's also part god (which seems to strain the premise as is acknowledged late in the novel). And then there's the new kid, Nathan. Might he be linked somehow to the new round of supernatural phenomena plaguing the town or is the timing of his arrival just a coincidence? The characters are sympathetic and annoying by turns. Mike's OCD is really well represented. His challenging home life is understandable as is his unrequited love. Unfortunately, he really wallows in self-pity particularly as the story progresses. He's prone to unreasonable jealousy and behaves quite unkindly as a result. Henna is learning to embrace her freedom but at what cost to others? Does prioritizing self necessarily translate into being selfish and inconsiderate? Additionally, there's a secret underpinning much of the narrative drama that makes absolutely no sense. When the reveal occurs, it casts doubt over quite a bit of the behavior that preceded it and makes the experience feel arbitrary and meaningless. So much of the novel boils down to romantic relationships (or, perhaps more accurately, hook ups). Even if one acknowledges that's what constitutes and motivates a lot of high school life, it felt sadly superficial and hollow. The Rest of Us Just Live Here is a quick read and, as stated, it does generate some suspense. There's also a touch of humor. There are moments when the characters are entirely relatable and sympathetic. Unfortunately, they could also be insufferable and confusing. It's disheartening when a key portion of the relationship drama is discovered to be contrived and the resolution unconvincing. By the novel's conclusion I felt generally apathetic.

Please don't read unless you don't mind spoilers. Terry Pratchett once dedicated a Discworld book to the guys in movies whose job it is to run in, attack the hero one by one, and eventually die. "The Rest of Us Just Live Here," promises to do something similar by focusing on a group of teens who aren't the focus of the supernatural forces swirling around their small town - but it doesn't quite manage it. (For one thing, one of the teens has super-powers, so that kind of negates the whole idea that these are "ordinary" teens.) This is a book where each of the characters has an Afterschool Special Issue with a capital "I" and they must band together in the last weeks before high school graduation in order to figure out why the indie kids at their school keep dying, and there are weird blue lights, zombie deer and explosions, among other things. Actually, they don't have to save the world, but in order to stay alive, it would help if they could figure out the mystery before they all split up and go off to college. The roll call is as follows: 1. one recovering anorexic with self-esteem issues, due to neglectful/abusive/alcoholic parents, and who also literally died in a car accident but came back to life 2. one teen with obsessive-compulsive disorder, whose sister is the recovering

anorexic, so too, must deal with aforementioned parents, one of whom needs (but won't go to) rehab, and the other who is a full-blown narcissistic politician (if that's not redundant)3. one teen whose older brother died tragically and whose parents want to drag her into a war zone in the Republic of Africa to do missionary work.4. one teen with a dead sibling, who doesn't appear to have any kind of guardians and who hangs around moodily at the edges of everythingoh and, don't forget (drumroll, please)5. one gay teen who is dealing with conservative small town homophobia, has the power to talk to mountain lions and magically heal many of his friends' injuries because he is part God. He also doesn't have a mother, but this appears to be the least of his problems.It's not that I don't think all of these are worthy topics to be explored in young adult literature, it's just that cramming all of them in one book that isn't the length of a Wally Lamb novel is overdoing it, in my opinion. None of the main characters appears to have hobbies, passions (apart from each other), aspirations, or career plans except for the vague "go to college," which makes them bland apart from their Issues. The narrator is also not the most likeable - often acting much younger than his chronological age, though the author does a good job of depicting OCD. I think in my memory this book will be "the one with the zombie deer and the teens with all the problems." But that's just my opinion.

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