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Jackaby



Synopsis

“Sherlock Holmes crossed with Buffy the Vampire Slayer.” -Chicago Tribune
Newly arrived in New Fiddleham, New England, 1892, and in need of a job, Abigail Rook meets R. F. Jackaby, an investigator of the unexplained with a keen eye for the extraordinary—including the ability to see supernatural beings. Abigail has a gift for noticing ordinary but important details, which makes her perfect for the position of Jackaby’s assistant. On her first day, Abigail finds herself in the midst of a thrilling case: A serial killer is on the loose. The police are convinced it’s an ordinary villain, but Jackaby is certain the foul deeds are the work of the kind of creature whose very existence the local authorities—with the exception of a handsome young detective named Charlie Cane—seem adamant to deny.
“The rich world of this debut demands sequels.” -Kirkus Reviews, starred review
“We honestly couldn’t put it down.” -Nerdist.com
“Toss together an alternate 19th-century New England city, a strong tradition of Sherlockian pastiche, and one seriously ugly hat, and this lighthearted and assured debut emerges, all action and quirk.” -Publishers Weekly
* A Top Ten Fall ’14 Kids’ Indie Next Pick * A 2014 Kirkus Reviews Best Book for Young Adults * A 2015 Yalsa Top Ten Best Fiction for Young Adults Title * A 2015 Pacific Northwest Book Award Winner * A 2015–2016 Georgia Peach Award Nominee * A Junior Library Guild Selection

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Historical

Customer Reviews

“With tension as taut as a high wire, this series blends laugh-out-loud humor and ghastly horror with supernatural skill. You don’t have to read the first book to enjoy this one, but we highly recommend it because reading the series is straight-up fun. Perfect for fans of Harry Potter, Grimm and Sherlock Holmes.” —Justine Magazine
“Ritter’s debut skillfully blends science with the supernatural and balances whimsy with violence. The smartly paced plot wraps up neatly, but the rich world of this debut demands sequels.” —Kirkus Reviews, starred review
“Toss together an alternate 19th-century New England city, a strong tradition of Sherlockian pastiche, and one seriously ugly hat, and this lighthearted and assured debut emerges, all action and quirk.” —Publishers Weekly

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The minute I first heard about this book I was intrigued. I’m not sure why I have a fascination with historical mysteries, maybe it ties back to my first reading of Sherlock Holmes, in any case I knew I wanted to read this series. The addition of the supernatural added a touch of creepiness to the already strong air of mystery that the story holds. Abigail makes for a great narrator with her ability to observe the ‘ordinary’ as Jackaby says. She gives the reader a look at her new employer that makes Jackaby as much of a mystery as the murder they are trying to solve. His unusual ability to see the supernatural allows him to notice things that nobody else does, but at the same time he misses the ordinary, which makes Abigail such a great assistant for him. Add in Jenny Cavanaugh, the ghost who inhabits Jackaby’s current residence and her mysterious death and the frog that

stinks up the whole house, and throw in a former assistant turned duck and you've got a thoroughly entertaining story that really doesn't read like anything else. It does have a taste of Sherlock Holmes to it combined with Stroud's Lockwood & Co. focus on ghosts and ghouls. There is a tiny bit of bad language and a moderate amount of violence (someone was brutally murdered after all, several someone's actually). I found Jackaby a fascinating case study in the art of the historical fantasy mystery (is there such a genre? If not there should be).

I wasn't totally sure what JACKABY was all about but I was excited to start it! I actually hadn't known that it involved paranormal elements so that was an interesting surprise when I started reading! (Yes, yes, I know that's what the whole series is about and it's plain as day in the book descriptions but you know me and going in totally blind.) I actually thought JACKABY was straight historical fiction, like a YA Sherlock Holmes. I was also interested to find out that Jackaby himself wasn't a young adult, and I thought that was great to have an adult character as a main part of the book since so many YA books skip around older figures and stick with the teens. It brought an interesting dynamic and mix and also allowed Abigail to get involved in so many things that she may not normally have had access to. That's always my thing with YA mysteries • a big question that always has to be addressed is why a teen wouldn't go to an adult with a murder-mystery case and in JACKABY, Abigail is working for paranormal detective R.F. Jackaby. I also figured that there would be a romance between Jackaby (this was before I knew how much older he was) and Abigail and I'm really glad that there wasn't! It was nice to see the romance built with Abigail and more of a secondary character and that it was a side plot and not a main focus of the book. The quirky mysteries still took the spotlight and there wasn't any mixing of work and romance. I actually didn't really care for the romance, though. I thought it wasn't very developed in the first book, which it didn't have to be developed right away, but for some reason it felt fast and forced for me. JACKABY wasn't a perfect book but it was really enjoyable! Things kind of piled on with the paranormal but it was fun and not overwhelming as some books tend to feel when dealing with so many different para-creatures.

Sherlock Holmes pastiches often delight me, sometimes infuriate me when done badly, but always underscore my sense that Holmes is the most iconic character in the mystery canon. With R. F. Jackaby, Ritter has given a nice twist to Holmes. Jackaby indeed sees what others do not, but it's

not an attention to detail that is his gift, it's that he, quite literally sees what others cannot see. He sees otherworldly creatures invisible to the rest of us. He is as well versed in supernatural phenomena as Holmes is in cigarette ash. In fact, mundane detail often escapes him, which is why, when Amanda Rook applies for the position of his assistant, he hires her, grudgingly acknowledging that she notices things he doesn't bother with. Yes, okay it's a little strained in that respect. I can't imagine being a detective and being sloppy about any sort of detail, but I guess if you're tuned in to an invisible, supernatural world, you can let some humdrum stuff slide. That's what the police are for. I enjoyed the story enough that I immediately bought the second volume, which is probably the best recommendation I can give. It's well written, fast-paced, funny, and there's a genuine mystery or two rattling around in there. One I guessed at pretty quickly, one I was dead wrong about. I'm glad about the latter, it's really what keeps me reading a mystery. If they're too obvious, I lose interest. Jackaby himself is more personable than Holmes, and the other characters are well drawn enough to engage my interest. If some of the portrayals, most notably Abigail, are a touch anachronistic, I'm willing to overlook that because I like them and the way they fit into the story. If you enjoy a good fantasy mystery, then give Jackaby a shot.

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