



## **Spirit Level**

*Sarah N. Harvey*

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Harriet is a donor-conceived, an only child. She has never considered her family unusual.

But things change when her longtime boyfriend chooses New York over their relationship, and her best friend leaves her for Paris. Level-headed Harry can't keep it together.

Maybe it's time to do something other than cry into her pillow and wallow in smoothies. Maybe it's time to think about the bigger picture. Maybe it's time to find some half-siblings and redefine her idea of family.

## **Spirit Level Details**

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Author : Sarah N. Harvey

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# From Reader Review Spirit Level for online ebook

## Jenna Degowski says

I really enjoyed reading this book. It was a wonderful story of family as unconventional as they come. Touching on subjects of runaways, same sex families, transgender and donor children looking for a place to belong. My only issue is though the author is not from the US it was based in Seattle and she included several phrases through out the book that US reader would not say or may be confused by if they are not familiar with other forms of English speech. Overall, it keep my interested and was quite satisfied with the ending. Which was open for a potential sequel.

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## Dani St-Onge (Literary Lion) says

<http://literary-lion.tumblr.com/>

Disclaimer: A copy of this novel was received from LibraryThing Early Reviewers in exchange for an honest review.

Harry is depressed after losing her best friend slash boyfriend Byron. Trying to fill her life up she begins a search for her half-siblings. She finds two sisters and three brothers. One of her sisters, Meredith, is searching for their donor and Harry isn't certain she's comfortable with that. She is definitely comfortable with Meredith's cute best friend though, something Meredith doesn't seem please about.

This book is full of diverse cast, most notably Alex who's a transgender man. Diverse books are important, and this one definitely knows it's subject matter. It has intelligent writing about homelessness, sex work, transgendered people and depression. It showcases several non-traditional families as being functional and examines the relationships between sperm donor and offspring. How half-siblings might relate to each other, the problem is it's focusing on a few too many things. This book is a hodgepodge of representation, plotlines, characters and relationships.

I felt like the synopsis of this book robbed me of the chance to read it. The official gives away over half the plot of the novel. Things that should be huge and exciting reveals for readers, such as Meredith's lies and Alex being trans, are right in the back blurb. These are not issues that incite the story but rather the actual climax. After that the book sort of just stops.

The book begins slows, but then picks up pace too fast for it's own good. There are so many things happening that it feels like the book isn't certain where it's headed. There's a good story about Alex and Harry being together and how Meredith factors in. There's a good story about finding their donor. There's a good story about the homeless girls Harry's mum works with. None of the stories manage to be solid. Some characters vanish for entire chapters until they're needed. In particular Harry has a best friend she doesn't mention or think about until near the end of the book.

It's important for books to have multiple levels, but this one couldn't seem to decide on a plotline to follow. It darted between several stories and left none of them with the development it deserved.

The main plot suffers the most for it's underdevelopment. There are characters the author clearly wants

readers to sympathize with, but the ending makes it nearly impossible to. Alex looks weak and Meredith is left looking like a monster. Spirit Level tosses out some “doesn’t everyone deserve a second chance” line and hopes that readers will just accept it instead of actually showing us that the characters are worth a second chance.

There’s no real resolution. One of the plots is very suddenly brought to a (sort of) satisfying end and the other three or so are left unfinished and it doesn’t feel intentional. It feels like a book cut off in the middle. It’s a shame, because the book was enjoyable and fast paced, but the ending leaves me feeling hollow. There is no satisfaction in the way the book ends. There are too many loose ends for it to feel finished.

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### **Angela says**

I received an advanced copy of this book from Librarything early reviewers. While I found the beginning to be a little weak, it did not take me long to be thoroughly enthralled with the book. I love that the book is about personal identity, family dynamics, and gender identity. While the story of gender identity is a secondary story line I found it to be the most captivating. It touches on many of the challenges that face youth when living transgender without being too serious or depressing. I have to admit though, I am one that enjoys a story that wraps everything up at the end and this one did not really do that. Overall, it was a very enjoyable YA read. Sarah N. Harvey

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### **Nick says**

This is a solid Orca book with a relatively-sophisticated and somewhat original story, socio-cultural sensitivity, and a strong female character, surrounded by other strong female characters. It has positive vibes that don't wear out the reader too much, and some quality teenage self and family discovery.

As with most Orcas, it is a bit transparent, formulaic, and trying too hard -- in this case resulting in some notable plot weakening and hodge-podgery. A cut above the standard Orca though.

### **3.4 Stars**

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### **Kate Puleo Unger says**

I didn't know what to expect with this book. I honestly don't even remember getting it at BEA. It was kind of refreshing to read a book having no expectations. Harry (Harriet) is a donor-conceived child. Her single mother decided she wanted a baby, so she used an anonymous sperm donor to get pregnant. Now she's 16-years old (I think) and alone for the summer. Her best friend is abroad, and she just broke up with her boyfriend who moved from Seattle to NYC with his father. Harry decides it's time to find her half siblings using the Donor Sibling Registry.

Harry ends up finding two sisters who also live in Seattle. Lucy is 14-years old and half Asian. Her moms used the same donor to conceive her and her half brother, who's away at college in Oregon. Meredith is 18, and she's run away from Montana to come find her father (as she calls their donor). She's brought along her

best friend, Alex. Lucy is sweet and SUPER peppy. Meredith is sullen and angry and a little unstable.

This book was rather short, but I enjoyed the very different story. Harry, Lucy, and Meredith had some serious drama, just like any sisters. All of the adults in this book were very realistic and really added to the story. I especially loved Harry's "grandmother."

There were some other unexpected topics involved in the plot that I won't mention because I don't want to spoil anything, but I am unsure what to think about how one thing was handled. It was a rather optimistic outcome, but I appreciated the juxtaposition to another book I read recently. Did I just annoy the heck out of you with that ambiguity? Sorry! Not sorry. You'll have to read the book.

<http://www.momsradius.com/2016/08/boo...>

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### **Melody says**

I kept thinking about how glad I was that there's some fiction around donor-conceived kids. I would have loved to hand this to my own DC son. Of course he would have rolled his eyes and not read it, but still. I'm glad this book exists.

Relatable and sweet, Spirit Level tackles some big questions in a refreshingly matter-of-fact way. Recommended.

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### **Stephenee says**

\* I received a copy of this book through the Goodreads First Reads Giveaway Program. \*

I was really excited to win a copy of this book - the blurb sounded interesting and the cover of the book actually grabbed my attention and made me ask why? I enjoyed the story, the characters and the plot...what I didn't love about this book was the end - there was no mention of another book coming after this one, however, this one left the reader with a ton of questions that were never answered... The book just seemed to end abruptly, with no resolution to anything. I was completely unsatisfied and not at all happy. I wish that the author spent more time on the end and less on the things that really didn't need to happen (the Byron side story that seemed to get forgotten for one).

I would def. read another book by this author, because I did enjoy her writing style and the depth in which she gives her characters, however, I would hope that she would get a bit better with the endings. Not a bad book, just a bad ending.

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### **Maureen Kesterson-Yates says**

This book really sucked me in. Harvey captured the mixed feelings of being donor conceived, forming relationships with new family, and traversing teenage love life.

My favorite part is that everything is normalized. Harry is donor conceived and only has a mom, Lucy is a ball of energy with two moms and Alex is a trans man. All of those plot points are addressed, but never

labeled as “bad”. Yes Harry is hesitant to start a relationship with Alex, but that has more to do with Meredith than it does with Alex being trans. There were a few iffy points where Harry calls Alex’s situation “the trans thing”. However I’d like to hope that’s just her processing through everything that’s happening in her life.

All in all, this is one of the best representations of being donor conceived and I couldn’t be happier to read it!

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### **Monica says**

I really enjoyed this book. I found it to be a very fast read and one that kept my interest. Spirit Level is the story about a girl named Harriet.

Harriet is the product of a sperm donor. She learns in this book that she has siblings. There is Lucy, Meredith, James, Adam and Ben.

The characters are wonderfully developed and engaging. The different personalities of the siblings make for some great entertainment.

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### **Raye of the Dead says**

One thing I liked about this book was the fact that it was diverse. That was awesome. But I didn’t really like the main character, Harry. I thought she was kind of judgmental.

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### **Crim says**

I'm tempted to rate it the full 5 stars because damn, way to handle things. Really.

I've seen review on various YA books with trans characters complain about:

- \* the cis, straight character taking time to process and/or wondering what it means for their sexuality
- \* the cis, straight character thinking about the sexual side of a potential relationship in anything less than "totally fine with all of it/you!" ways
- \* non-Straight-Up-Evil characters using terms that aren't the most fully positive/inclusive/tumblr flavor of the day.

This book does all of those. And it is awesome. It's realistic. It's normal. One of my favorite moments in the book is Harry reading up on it (as one does) and, once she has more information, reacting to the specifics: without ever misgendering Alex, she does wonder about the sex, because she realizes he would not have been in the position to take hormone blockers, start transitioning while at home, or pay for much since then. An adult body in early transition not corresponding to one's gender is the reality of trans people. What is the point of expecting books to ignore it in favor of a cozy, feel-good (for the predominantly cis readers, duh) non-reaction?

Anyway, unexpectedly great book.

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## **Wendy says**

An ARC was provided from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

I found Spirit Level to be a very enjoyable and interesting read about what happens when children who have sperm donors for fathers become interested in learning more about their genetic families. The different scenarios are varied and very true-to-life; a single mother by choice, a lesbian couple, a couple who couldn't have children... And, as to be expected, the children are completely different, with different takes on genetic family vs. the family they've grown up in, complicated again in one case by rejecting the family of origin and creating one's own family (sort of the theory that, since the issue for one character is one of being transgender and rejection by the character's parents, the family you create is closer than the one you were born into). One half-sibling's determination to find the donor leads to some complications and doubt on the part of the main character's behalf, as she's not sure whether or not she really wants to meet the donor. I enjoyed the way that Harry and Lucy's families became involved with each other. I liked the characters and found them compelling, even Meredith and all of her issues. It was easy to identify with Harry's frustration at Alex doing everything that Meredith wanted, however, as well. Life is definitely not a clean and easy thing to deal with. I haven't ready any books on families where donors were used, and the children connect, and I think this one is really well done. I would definitely recommend it.

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## **River says**

When I saw that this book was about a girl (Harriet, known as Harry) who was donor conceived, and gets in contact with her two of her donor sisters, I knew I had to read it.

I was not expecting such a diverse set of characters, so that was a pleasant and welcome surprise. Harry lives quite a sheltered life, very different from the way her mother (a Single Mother by Choice) grew up, and because of this, Harry has some growing up to do. Her journey begins while she is depressed over her best friend turned boyfriend moving away from Seattle to New York. This ends up being a great example of how big changes can lead to a lot of personal growth.

It's through Harry's donor siblings, and her new possible love interest that she really gets the chance to open her eyes and perhaps learn a little compassion. This happens rather slowly, and at times I wondered if maybe Harry was being a little unfair. But I cared for her, and found the book entirely engaging, and very contemporary. I would recommend it to any teen.

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## **Jennifer Baysinger says**

A must-read, book for those who have been lost and for those who have found.

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