



# Hitchers

*Will McIntosh*

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## Hitchers Will McIntosh

Two years ago, on the same day but miles apart, Finn Darby lost two of the most important people in his life: his wife Lorena, struck by lightning on the banks of the Chattahoochee River, and his abusive, alcoholic grandfather, Tom Darby, creator of the long-running newspaper comic strip *Toy Shop*. Against his grandfather's dying wish, Finn has resurrected *Toy Shop*, adding new characters, and the strip is more popular than ever, bringing in fan letters, merchandising deals, and talk of TV specials. Finn has even started dating again.

When a terrorist attack decimates Atlanta, killing half a million souls, Finn begins blurting things in a strange voice beyond his control. The voice says things only his grandfather could know. Countless other residents of Atlanta are suffering a similar bizarre affliction. Is it mass hysteria, or have the dead returned to possess the living? Finn soon realizes he has a hitcher within his skin... his grandfather. And Grandpa isn't terribly happy about the changes Finn has been making to *Toy Shop*. Together with a pair of possessed friends, an aging rock star, and a waitress, Finn races against time to find a way to send the dead back to Deadland... or die trying!

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## Hitchers Details

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## From Reader Review Hitchers for online ebook

### Shoshana G says

After a plague of anthrax hits Atlanta, people begin being possessed by the dead. It was thoughtful, and I really enjoyed the interpersonal relationships. Despite being obviously science-fictional, it also felt real.

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### Stefan says

Will McIntosh's debut *Soft Apocalypse*, which I reviewed here, was a brilliant novel about normal people trying to survive while society gradually collapses around them. It was easily one of my favorite novels of 2011. His catalog of strong short stories includes "Bridesicles," which won the Hugo and was a Nebula finalist. It's one of those rare stories where emotion and technology merge to form a perfect little SF universe. I can't be the only reader who was eagerly awaiting this very exciting author's second novel.

Well, it's finally here, and it's called *Hitchers*. People who are familiar with Will McIntosh's debut will immediately notice that this is a completely different animal: a contemporary supernatural/horror novel rather than dystopian science fiction. Keep an open mind, because different as it is, it's definitely worth your time.

Read the full review at my site [Far Beyond Reality!](#)

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### Bibliotropic says

I could rate this novel highly solely due to the fact that McIntosh referenced steampunk rock band Abney Park (who, by the way, do some seriously awesome music, and if you haven't listened to them before then you're missing out), but that would involve ignoring all the other talent that McIntosh presented as the plot of *Hitchers* developed.

The premise for the novel is a fairly simple one. The souls of the dead have come back, are possessing people, and now these people have to figure out how to either stop it or live with it. McIntosh layers on the intrigue by adding time constraints (the spirits are taking control more and more, sometimes to the point where the original personality is being driven out entirely), and some very interesting character interactions and conflicts, and when it all adds up you get a book that compells you to keep turning pages just to see what happens next.

The story brings up the interesting question of the ethics of body-sharing, and the conflicts that can arise from it. Finn, the main character, lost his wife in a boating accident, and during the possession incident, the spirit comes back in the body of the woman who Finn realizes he's getting a crush on. Meanwhile, Finn is possessed by the spirit of his angry drunken grandfather, who is annoyed that Finn went against his final wishes. This is a story built upon layers, all of them wonderfully and finely detailed so that you truly feel as though you're reading about real people instead of merely characters in a book.

This is the kind of book that can appeal not only to those who tend to enjoy speculative fiction but also those whose tastes run a bit more to the mainstream. It was an excellent introduction to McIntosh's writing, and I can't wait to see what else he's done, or what he will do, because after this I think he's got me hooked as a fan for a long time to come. Highly recommended!

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### **Ellie says**

Following an anthrax attack that kills hundreds of thousands, Finn starts to feel a bit strange. He hopes he isn't falling ill but become more concerned when he starts blurting out sentences at random. What's even stranger is that he's saying things that sound like his Grandpa, who died the same day as his wife, two years' earlier. Is this a side-effect of the anthrax? Is he going crazy? Or could it just possibly be his Grandpa communicating from beyond the grave? And if so, does that mean he can find his wife?

Hitchers and I got off on the wrong foot. In this world of ebooks, it's even more important to make an impact with the first chapter, as many people will just download a free sample before deciding whether to part with their hard earned cash. In this instance, I would have walked away. Finn's wife is introduced, a confrontational woman, yet she falls to pieces in the face of a storm and some long grass that she thinks might contain snakes. She is abruptly killed off and to be fair, this isn't something I was disappointed with. Whilst not a fully formed character, I didn't like her much. The main problem was they were paddling down river in a metal canoe when the storm started. Thinking metal containers are pretty safe things to be in around lightning, I asked around for other opinions and the general consensus is that the canoe would have acted as a Faraday cage. Yet still, she died from a lightning strike that hit ground on the opposite side of the river.

So maybe that put me in a mood to enjoy the book less. Whilst the idea was good, I found it all a bit bland. Two years later, Finn goes on a date and reveals he isn't over the death of his wife however as a first person narrator, the grief should have been felt through his words. The only reason I knew he was grieving was because the reader is told outright. Finn has other friends die and he just seems to get on with it.

It's a quick read although some scenes are a bit too rushed and are left unconnected to the following plot. If someone tries to kill you, wouldn't it stay with you a few days? The anthrax attack also appeared to be over in record time, with only a lack of Snickers bars in the shops to show for it. Other times Finn would just come to a conclusion that happened to be right but without much leading up to it. Altogether it read like a first draft instead of a novel in the final stages of publication.

McIntosh's vision of the afterlife shows potential but I think it is forsaken for the conflict between Finn and his Grandpa. Grandpa feels a little too much like a caricature of a cantankerous old drunk and there is no leeway for any kind of compassion towards him. It's all very black and white.

Will McIntosh is not a new writer however his critical acclaim has mostly been for shorter works of fiction. Hitchers sort of has a feeling of small episodes strung together into a novel. There are some parts that gave me pause for thought and I would certainly be tempted to read some of his short stories.

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### **Violet Laflamme says**

I don't know what to say about this book. I gave it three stars but only because the end came back so strongly from such a weak beginning and middle. The writing and story could have been a lot more believable and engaging. It's telling that I spent a lot of time while reading this book thinking about the bad review I would give it on Goodreads.

However. The author manages to throw curveballs at the right time to bring everything together in a way that may not be \*satisfying\* due to low investment, but is still interesting and even exciting. This book is a weird ghost story that is told from the POV of yet another young heterosexual male writer who finds an interesting woman at a low point in his life that then becomes one of the main characters. The tropes are a real bore, but the take on the ghost story thing was a new one on me.

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### **Hollowspine says**

Another wonderful story from Will McIntosh. Seriously, if you like sci-fi or if you don't but want to try it out, or if you did but got tired of all the stereotypical characters, done to death (haha) plots and overused phrases rife in the genre, start reading anything by McIntosh. Everything I've read by him is top notch and genre defying. Great original stories, wonderful empathy-inducing characters, and all of it very well written.

So, *Hitchers* is the story of Finn (I just finished *100 Sideways Miles* which also stars a guy named Finn weirdly) who has had some bad times in his life, but at least he has his best friend Annie. Oh, wait, with the Anthrax attack that has hit Atlanta, he may not even have her anymore.

Finn's life has been a series of tragic losses, when he was a kid, his twin sister died. As an adult he lost his wife. Both times he felt that he was responsible. Now the attack on Atlanta has taken care of the few friends he had left.

Half a million people are dead, but some of them aren't staying that way. Something else is happening. Finn is being possessed by the spirit of his grandfather. It could be because he revived his grandfather's comic strip, *Toy Shop*, against his dying wish and now grandpa's taking it back, along with Finn's body, pushing him out into the Deadlands. A place no one wants to be.

Soon it seems many other survivors of the anthrax attack are coming forward with similar 'symptoms.' The city-wide possession brings out cohesion in some, but violent opposition in others. And of course, the government is slow to respond. Finn and two new friends, a has been rocker possessed by his former band mate, and the waitress at a local diner who is also possessed (it's complicated), try to figure out a way to rid themselves of their 'Hitchers.' But, those spirits who've returned have their own business and call themselves 'The Returned.'

The story takes this concept of ghosts returning from the dead and weaves a very complex and emotional web of characters, history and hope. It gave me a lot to think about. In fact I hated Grandpa so much at times I literally shook my fist at the sky. I wondered, what if someone returned, inhabiting your body, and you both wanted to stay together? Would that be possible? It also reminded me of the teen series *Hybrid Chronicles* *What's Left of Me* where everyone is automatically born with two distinct personalities (souls) inside one body. I have to say, everything that I found lacking and underdeveloped in that series was really done well here. But, that said, if you liked this and don't mind reading teen fiction, try it out.

This is McIntosh's second novel. Pretty amazing. I kind of wish he'd write another with this setting, but I

don't think he's one to re-visit worlds he's written about, or at least it doesn't seem like it so far, he seems far too busy making up a completely new original and awesome worlds in each book!

Small spoiler that I need to get out: (view spoiler)

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### **lucky little cat says**

Inventive ghost-story / apocalypse hybrid keeps you guessing about what will happen next. I read this a couple of years ago, and I've been surprised at how some of the more poetic images have stayed with me.

Like the best ghost stories, it's emotionally resonant.

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### **Jennifer Petkus says**

When six hundred thousand people suddenly die, it has to leave a mark, at least what Obi Wan would call a disturbance in the force, and in Will McIntosh's *Hitchers*, that disturbance widens the crack between the living and the dead, allowing the dead to use the living as macabre time shares.

In *Hitchers*, home-grown whackos release anthrax in Atlanta, resulting in the direct death of hundreds of thousands and the incidental drowning death of Finn Darby, a cartoonist who has taken over his dead grandfather's newspaper comic strip and who two years earlier suffered the death of his wife, killed in a lightning strike before his eyes. Luckily Darby is resuscitated after drowning, but he's accidentally picked up his grandfather's vengeful spirit and is slowly being possessed by the old man. Grandpa resents the success the newly invigorated comic strip has seen since his grandson took over, against the old man's dying wishes.

The story starts as a steady drip, drip of eerie until the spigot opens wide into a full-on nightmare when throughout the stricken city others begin speaking in a dead person's voice. But Darby's "case" is far more advanced, probably because of his ten minutes in the land of dead while his rescuers tried to bring him back to life. He's already experienced the progression from the spooky frog-like voice of the dead to the claiming of his body.

Fortunately the dead can at first only claim the living for a short time and Darby is contacted by others who are also unwilling hosts of the dead, including an aging rock star and a waitress who has a connection with Darby from the time of his wife's death.

What's really enjoyable about *Hitchers* is the nice juxtaposition of something so sadly believable — a terrorist attack — and the utterly fantastic — the dead possessing the living. The main characters suffering from their afflictions are also admirable for their logical, almost scientific approach in investigating the parameters of their nightmare, coupled with a lot of eye rolling metaphysics. And it's all based in the present world of the first black president, Homeland Security, religious extremists who see the dead as Satan's Army and lots of references to National Public Radio. It's also very believable that the dead should want to experience life again, from going to nightclubs to posting on facebook.

It's also nice to see Darby go from a man, almost friendless after the death of his wife and actually left

friendless after the anthrax deaths, to a man who has found fast friends and who has conquered some of the demons that have haunted him his whole life.

I also really appreciated the conclusion, which seems very logical given the parameters of the world McIntosh has created. I feared the book would go the way of a British SF television series — in other words slit your wrists bleak, but I think you'll appreciate the groundwork the author had laid to support the conclusion.

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### **Jessica says**

In general I really liked this book - really inventive and new premise, and a well-executed and enjoyable read. I'm not sure this one will stick with me as much as the author's first book did (Soft Apocalypse), but it might. There's something about the way he depicts casual murder by armed thugs that's really haunting, which doesn't sound like I'm saying something nice but I do mean it that way.

HOWEVER, as a 20-year+ Atlanta resident, the inaccuracies regarding the locale drove me NUTS. "Route 285"?!? Really???? Nobody here would ever call it that - locals refer to the highways by their numbers alone. 285, 75, 85, or the Connector. Or the Perimeter, for 285. (Although in this book that's actually at one point a real military perimeter, so I could see where that could get confusing.) Also, The Buckhead Diner is the name of a restaurant, not a generic term, so the entire thing should be capitalized. And the 30-year old narrator could not possibly have gone to the Cypress Street Pint & Plate as a kid with his grandfather, since the place has only been around since 2008. None of this would have been noticeable to a non-resident, I'm sure. But my advice to any aspiring authors would be that if you're not writing about the city where you live and your characters are natives, have someone from that city read it. I'm happy to volunteer as an Atlanta locale editor.

Oh, and at one point one character is talking of places she's visited and says "And Nashville. I saw Graceland." You don't have to be a Tennessee native to know that's wrong.

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### **Tim Hicks says**

OK, 3.5 stars.

This book didn't get off to a good start. On page 1, the author has the protagonist propelling a canoe with an oar. To canoeists, this is about the same as telling a sailor to pull the rope that lifts the white thing up the tall pole. In the same chapter, a very important plot point is based on the canoe being made of steel. There. Are. No. Steel. Canoes. Aluminum would have been fine.

But from there we have the setup for our plot, which unfolds slowly, not quite too slowly but close. The "what if" issues appear one at a time, increasing in complexity in way that we can easily accept as the way the protagonist is learning it.

A little blip as we see that two years after his wife's death our hero still has her car as well as his own. I guess they don't pay outrageous insurance rates in that state. But then it's the same state where a man can bully his way into buying a Maserati without any paperwork (and the huge briefcase the cash must have been in was

never mentioned). But I quibble.

When we meet the aging rock star "Mick Mercury" I stop and ask myself, "Surely he's breaking the fourth wall here?" Surely the author struggled to come up with a name, failed, shrugged, winked at the reader and went with this. Ask yourself this: would "Freddie Jagger" have been any sillier? I expected to read later that the president was Barack Romney.

But we move on. I was a bit disturbed that (view spoiler) turned out to be (view spoiler) but McIntosh has established that what's going on is NOT random so I'm OK with it.

And the complications develop, in an interesting and adequately plausible way. No, really, despite my complaints.

I didn't care for our hero's melodramatic ocean solution, and in a first-person novel it's hard to think that he's not going to get through it. But I accept that it did set up the closing scenes, in which the whole thing is resolved very well indeed.

Rob Sawyer has tackled this sort of "what if" in several of his novels, and they too have overcome some little WTFs in the execution.

I'll read another McIntosh.

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## Lexyvs says

Looking back now, I can't believe that I had no idea who Will McIntosh was before I started reading *Hitchers*. Once I got into the book, and realized how great it was, I started poking around on the interwebs to find out more about him.

*Hitchers* is only McIntosh's second novel, but he's written and published a ton of stories both in magazines and anthologies. He also won a Hugo award for his story "Bridesicle" — pretty awesome, right? I recommend popping by his website where you can get a taste for his writing with an excerpt from his first novel, *Soft Apocalypse*, which he's posted for your reading pleasure.

And now, onto *Hitchers*. The book takes place in present day Atlanta after a terrorist attack that claimed over half a million lives. Now, you're probably thinking, what could be worse than that? Well, I'll tell you ...

What if when that many people die in one place at one time a rift opens and, as the souls of the dying are moving from one realm to another, some long dead folks are able to get back to the world of the living? Impossible? Tell that to Finn Darby, our reluctant hero. After some uncontrollable outbursts, Finn begins to suspect that he's sharing his body with his dead and very angry grandfather. Partnered with an aging rock star and a waitress, Finn has to figure out how to get rid of the hitchers before they take over completely. *Hitchers* is a great story, with a really interesting premise. As I was reading, I became very emotionally attached to the characters. I was desperate to find out if they would win the battle with their respective hitchers, and then I found myself wondering for whom I was really rooting.

You see, the novel that McIntosh has crafted isn't as simple as good vs evil. I mean, sure, some of the hitchers were jerks. They were terrible people in life, and when they came back they were no more endearing than before they died. But others were just people. People who died and when the opportunity arose, they decided that they wanted another shot at living. Can you really blame them for seizing the opportunity when it presented itself?

If you're a fan of speculative fiction, I definitely recommend giving *Hitchers* a read. I enjoyed it so much that his previous novel, *Soft Apocalypse*, is definitely going to be added to my ever growing to read list.

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### **Lauren Smith says**

Finn Darby's wife and grandfather died on the same day. While Finn misses his beloved Lorena, he doesn't really miss his grandfather Tom – a tight-fisted, alcoholic, racist, abusive old bastard. Tom Darby created Toy Shop, a long-running newspaper comic strip, and refused to ever let Finn – an aspiring cartoonist – have anything to do with it.

But Finn went against his grandfather's dying demand, resurrected the strip, updating it for a modern audience, creating new characters and selling merchandising rights. It's more successful than ever. Most of the money goes to his Finn's long-suffering grandmother but Finn has become fairly wealthy too.

Then, after a terrorist attack kills half a million people in Atlanta, Finn starts blurting out things in a strange, disturbing voice that he can't control. Eventually he realises that his grandfather is speaking through him, and that the terrorist attack has somehow allowed the dead to return by inhabiting the bodies of the living. At first they can only blurt random words and phrases, but it's not long before the hitchers' influence begins to grow. Finn's grandfather wants Toy Shop back, but it's not all bad. Finn quickly realises that he can contact his dead wife, and he finds her in the body of a waitress named Summer.

Together with Summer and an ageing British rocker named Mick Mercury (a combination of Mick Jagger and Freddie Mercury, I assume), Finn tries to understand the hitchers and the afterlife they come from. It looks like they're here to stay, but can they be allowed to?

*Hitchers* is a quick, light read, but even if that's what you're looking for, you might not appreciate it in this book, especially if the ideas in the plot are what intrigued you. On the one hand, the story incorporates a lot of serious ideas and situations, but it's mostly handled in a superficial and sometimes amateurish way that wastes the premise. Also, it features Toy Shop cartoons that all suck.

Let's take the existence of hitchers, to start with. They're all people who either really, really didn't want to be dead or have unfinished business. Finn's grandfather was vicious, Lorena incredibly vivacious, and Mick's hitcher has... actual unfinished business. It's pretty boring, but the ghosts' existence is more important to the plot than their reasons for hanging around, so fine. What bugged me more was that everything the characters need to understand about the ghosts and the afterlife come from one book. Summer is a hippy who just so happens to have this book – a tome by an Indian mystic named J. Krishnapuma. And Krishnapuma is spot-on about everything. It's so very lucky for everyone in the kind of plot device that should be reserved for children's adventure stories.

The situations that the hitchers create are much more serious though, and McIntosh plays around with some

interesting and disturbing ideas. The ghosts are basically always present in the bodies they inhabit. It's like looking out silently through someone's eyes. After a while, instead of just blurting out a few words, they take full possession of the body. Neither the ghost nor its host can control when the ghost speaks, when it takes over the body, or for how long. During possession, the body's owner becomes the viewer.

The issues of privacy and control are the most obvious ones here, and Finn's situation is particularly scary because his grandfather is a thoroughly hateful bastard. Finn's relationship with Lorena raises a different set of disturbing problems.

Of course, Finn can only speak to Lorena through someone else's body. A body that Lorena is involuntarily hijacking. Finn and Summer become friends, so Summer is at least understanding and co-operative when it comes to giving Finn a chance to spend time with his wife, but this quickly becomes far more complicated. For example, when Lorena takes over Summer's body, they kiss and touch in physically intimate ways that Summer hasn't consented to but experiences because she's still inside her body. Then, Finn finds himself increasingly attracted to Summer, which Lorena picks up on because she's watching all the time.

It's a weird love triangle with two bodies and three people (four, counting Finn's grandfather, although he doesn't care about the romance), but it's one of the issues that I think was handled too lightly. Yes, the characters agonise over it, but it feels a bit superficial. At the end, the whole thing is dealt with in a way that I found far too easy and dismissive.

The plot as a whole suffers from a similar problem. For a story featuring a terrorist attack that kills half a million people, uncontrolled possession of the living by the dead, some very bleak depictions of the afterlife, and personal struggles to deal with grief, *Hitchers* is just too relaxed and simplistic even when it's supposed to be serious.

The Krishnapuma book that explains everything the main characters need to know about the hitchers and the afterlife is one example of this. Finn's grandfather is another – technically Finn got rich by stealing his work, but Tom is such a vile person that you could never muddy the moral waters by taking his side. McIntosh also avoids the most interesting complexities of hitcher possession. There's only one glimpse of a cross-gender hitcher. Except for Tom enjoying having Finn's young, healthy body, there's nothing about the experience of having a body notably different from your original one (male/female, child/adult, able/disabled, black/white, etc.). And although Finn, Mick and Summer are always listening to news reports about the hitchers, there's no mention of anyone seeking out their loved ones as Finn has. This is the best thing about the hitchers, but also the most morally conflictual because of the way it affects relationships. Why then, is this most interesting of plot points restricted to Finn, Lorena and Summer?

In terms of the broader social effects of the terrorist attack and the hitchers, there's one scene that stands out for me as the book's failure to deal with difficult problems. After a night out, Finn and Summer are attacked and nearly murdered by religious fanatics who believe that people with hitchers are evil. Afterwards, this problem disappears from the plot, and Finn, Mick and Summer carry on as usual, as if there weren't psychos trying to murder them in the streets.

At the end, the main plot is resolved far too quickly and conveniently, giving the impression that the author had just gotten tired of the whole thing. And honestly, it doesn't feel like a story that's worth your time. So much weight has been lifted from it that you feel like you're getting something lesser than it should be. Easy reads are great, but not when it feels like an easy way out.

For more reviews, check out my blog [Violin in a Void](#)

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### **Elizabeth says**

Did anyone else notice the inconsistencies with the dates? In 2008, Finn is in his late 20s. So in 2010 he'd be about 30. He talks about taking photos on his cell phone when he was in high school, but they wouldn't have camera phones when he was in high school.

There's also a part in the story where Finn's mom received a cell phone call when Finn was 12 - which would be around 1992 and very unlikely that she would own a cell phone.

At one point Finn says he and his twin sister are 12 when an accident happened and later says they were 11. He says many times that the accident was 19 years ago, but later says it was 16 years ago.

Lastly, Summer is supposed to be about 28. She has a 4 year old daughter and says she had to drop out of high school to raise her daughter. Last I checked 24 year-olds (her approximate age when she had her daughter) are already out of high school.

Not a big deal when it comes to the actual story, but I just thought it was odd that the writer wouldn't consider this.

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### **Sean Whatshisface says**

This was really well-done! I was a little unsure at first, worried we were going to deal with some fridged ladies -- which, I mean they technically were, but I can forgive it in light of everything else. Good, complex characters with an excellent storyline. The way the author describes people's reactions to the events taking place is just so realistic, it was so easy to get swept up in this one. I'm awful at writing good reviews, but I can honestly say I'm going to be buying this one for my own bookshelves, it's just so good.

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### **Justin says**

[http://staffersmusings.blogspot.com/2...](http://staffersmusings.blogspot.com/2011/09/hitchers.html)

**Hitchers** is my first exposure to Hugo award winner Will McIntosh. Somehow I missed his debut novel, **Soft Apocalypse**, last year. I'm terrible about keeping up on short fiction, but his 2009 Hugo Award winning short story, *Bridesicles*, was just recently optioned for a feature film. He's also signed a book deal with Orbit to write a novel based on it. Clearly, I've been missing out and **Hitchers** confirms it.

A tight novel, **Hitchers** is a fast paced horror story built on the premise of the dead coming back to life. When an act of terrorism unleashes anthrax on Atlanta, killing hundreds of thousands, cartoonist Finn Darby begins blurting things in a strange voice beyond his control. Countless other residents of Atlanta are suffering a similar bizarre affliction. Either all of Atlanta is suffering a psychological break or the dead have returned to possess the living.

Called hitchers, the voices aren't particularly happy and Finn has it worse than most. His voice sounds like

his grandfather -- Tom Darby, creator of the long-running newspaper comic strip *Toy Shop*. And Grandpa isn't terribly happy about the changes Finn has been making to the strip. Naturally, the quest is to get rid of the hitchers and get life back to normal. The mechanism accomplishing this functions like a mystery thriller as Finn and his friends discover the how and why behind the supernatural event.

While McIntosh is executing a simple plot, with more than few contrivances, the strength of the novel is in the emotional and philosophical content. Often communicated through clever interior art in the form of the *Toy Shop* comic strip, **Hitchers** discusses the ties that bind people together, and the only thing guarantees to sever them -- death. For Finn, these ties relate to both his grandfather and his dead wife, but also to the rest of his family who are harried, even from the grave, by the Santini like figure of Tom Darby. It all works in McIntosh's capable hands, resonating on every level.

As I read, I was reminded of the television show *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*. It was a show about making a sketch comedy show (*Saturday Night Live* look-a-like), but they never actually showed the comedy sketches. It deflated the product. **Hitchers** shows the product (*Toy Shop*) and it makes the whole story pop. Finn and Tom Darby are cartoonists whose conflict stems (at least superficially) from their difference of opinion on the artistic direction of a comic strip. Finn, in particular, is portrayed with such familiarity that I imagine McIntosh has sat at an easel to ink a few frames himself. All in all, the strips are a small part of the overall product, but I can't overstate their importance to the novel's veracity.

I did mention some contrivances earlier in the review, and for some they may detract from the story. Tom Darby is borderline unbelievable in his unabashed selfishness. Finn, and his buddies, always seem to find the people they need to find in convenient fashion. The conclusion to the hitcher problem is one that's as old as the first ghost story. In the moment, I didn't find any of these to be disruptive to my enjoyment of the novel, and McIntosh's skill as a story teller never ceased to stand out.

Based on what I've read about **Soft Apocalypse** I'm not sure that its proponents will immediately feel the same about **Hitchers**. The speculation is grounded in the supernatural realm, painting a disturbing view of the afterlife that will give readers something to muse about long about after the final page. He suspends reality more than extrapolating it to a logical conclusion, which seems to me a very different kind of novel. Nevertheless, it demonstrates tremendous range, and given the subjects of his new two-book deal with Orbit, I expect McIntosh to continue to push those boundaries.

Long story short -- if Will McIntosh were a blog, I'd be making sweet love to his RSS feed. Wait... that didn't come out right.

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## Kacey says

This was a weird, quirky book. That's honestly the best way I can describe it. It has an interesting premise and some of the concepts it introduces are pretty interesting as well. The comic strip art was nice to look at and honestly, I kind of wish there was more of it. Overall it wasn't anything great, but there were some bits I really enjoyed.

I think the biggest flaw of this book would have to be the character development. We're told a lot of things, but it's really hard to gauge who these characters are. Finn's grandfather, for example, felt too much like an overused archetype. Of course the bias of Finn's perspective does weaken the character already, but even so

it didn't really feel like he was a fully realized person. The same could be said about pretty much all the characters, actually. None of them feel like they're fleshed out and it was hard to care about any of them.

It feels like the author had the concept fully realized, but not the people. Because the concept was done in a pretty unique way. The Deadland was an eerie place whenever Finn went there. In a way, I think this might've worked better as a comic book. The concept would lend itself to some really good visuals.

It isn't fair for me to be critical of what I wanted this book to be rather than what it was. I was honestly hoping for some psychological horror, or maybe just more of a struggle of identity and life versus death. What I got wasn't bad, it was just weird. Sometimes funny, mostly lacking in depth. It did bring up one great thought on if art should go on after an artist has died, but other than that, it was pretty mediocre.

I'm not sorry I read it, but I do feel like more could be done with this.

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### **Michelle says**

It is a capable and lovely science fiction story that is about letting go. There's really good plotting and it all weaves together conveniently. The characters aren't well rounded, but they're okay.

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### **Jeff Raymond says**

When a terrorist attack hits Atlanta, killing over 500k people, something strange starts happening to a man who has continued his grandfather's daily comic. Specifically, he's channeling the voice of his dead grandfather. And this is also happening to other people in Atlanta as well. And the voices? They're trying to take over these people.

The premise sounds a lot more ominous than the book is, which is more of a fun conceptual story about possession and the afterlife. I grabbed it because of the plotline, and I came to enjoy it more because of how well it was put together on a whole.

A pretty different book, one I really enjoyed but don't have a ton to say about.

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### **July says**

#### **Liked:**

- \* The premise is very unique and very well-executed. Everything is explained in a natural, non-infodumpy (yes, that's a word) way.
- \* There is a major twist at the end that I was not expecting. The plot is engaging and unexpected.
- \* The best of genre fiction uses something strange and new to hold a magnifying lens to our humanity. This book certainly does that. It put me through a whole range of emotions, and I am honestly sitting here and thinking of what I would do in the same situation.

#### **Liked Less:**

- \* Though the plot had decent momentum and unexpected twists, things did sometimes drag a teensy bit.

\* Although he was the main character, Finn was the person I felt that I knew least about. The supporting characters stand out more to me. I think that's an accurate reflection of his character because he is the kind of person who is happy to stay in the background most of the time. Still, I would have liked to feel more connected to him.

Overall, an excellent read for lovers of speculative fiction.

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### **Janice says**

I apparently got this book in a Humble Story Bundle or something. We went off for a couple of days and our cabin didn't have internet. I found this on my Kindle, so I read it.

A giant anthrax attack has killed a horrifying number of people in Atlanta. In its aftermath, people are finding that the dead appear to be speaking through them. Sometimes that's kinda nice, as when you get to talk again to the spirit of your dead-too-young wife. Sometimes, as when your sonuvabitch grandpa who always bad-mouthed you and kinda hated you starts possessing YOU, and actually wants to take you over.

It's a bit about grief, and moving on, learning to deal with the past and its hidden secrets. It's a decent, quick read.

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