



Heartseeker

Melinda Beatty

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A vibrant fantasy-adventure debut about a girl who can see lies.

You're a Fallow of the Orchard. You're as tough as a green apple in summer . . .

Only Fallow was just six harvests old when she realized that not everyone sees lies. For Only, seeing lies is as beautiful as looking through a kaleidoscope, but telling them is as painful as gnawing on cut glass. Only's family warns her to keep her cunning hidden, but secrets are seldom content to stay secret.

When word of Only's ability makes its way to the King, she's plucked from her home at the orchard and brought to the castle at Bellskeep. There she learns that the kingdom is plagued by traitors, and that her task is to help the King distinguish between friend and foe. But being able to see lies doesn't necessarily mean that others aren't able to disguise their dishonesty with cunnings of their own.

In the duplicitous, power-hungry court, the truth is Only's greatest weapon . . . and her greatest weakness.

Heartseeker Details

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Author : Melinda Beatty

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From Reader Review Heartseeker for online ebook

Annalise says

Heartseeker, with its eleven-year-old protagonist and sprawling fantasy world, is solidly a middle grade book. And normally, I don't read middle grade; the age appropriate villains, easily solved issues, and the overcompensation of authors attempting to make their protagonists sound like middle schoolers, turning them into naive idiots that even middle school me couldn't stand, tend to be major deterrents.

This sounds like a haughty generalization, but it's not. Many authors when writing middle grade are told to "dumb down" their characters, and to make their villains "less scary" in order to not alienate the parents from buying the books. The kids, if I remember anything about being a kid (arguably I still am) love a rich story but, ultimately, the decision is not up to them. It is up to whether or not the author chooses to take that risk. And I have to give credit where credit is due, Melinda Beatty takes that leap.

In Heartseeker, Beatty creates a kingdom in which the common folk live alongside the Ordish; a people that live on boats, much like Golden Compass's Gyptians. The Ordish are rumored to have small powers, called Cummings, that only add to the fear and disdain the people of the kingdom have for them. Inexplicably, the main character, Only Fallow, also has a gift. She can see lies, but cannot lie herself. When the King's horrible decree to steal away Ordish children in order to force the Ordish to pay taxes reaches her friends, Only accidentally reveals her power and is spirited away to the palace to become used in the political machinations of the royal family.

And there we have three things that really put this middle grade above others I have read.

1. The evil is real. It isn't simply a bad fairy that wants to rule the world, or a strangely incompetent Greek god. It's prejudice, and what it allows a government to get away with. This is a very important topic, historically and in today's world, and I like how it is incorporated into Heartseeker in a truthful, yet age appropriate way.
2. Only's power to see lies. There is so much potential in this gift. It is so unique. I can't wait to see how it develops in the sequels.
3. It's not condescending. Only is not stupid, and she's not a genius. She sees things the way they are; more so because of her gift. And while the world that she's in isn't outrageously gory and horrific, it isn't like my middle school's production of 101 Arabian Nights, where, surprise, no one actually got their head cut off because the grand vizier had been lying to the king the entire time. Hooray! No, it had grit, and realism because, guess what, so does the world. Why should books be any different?

If there was any critique I would give Heartseeker, it would be this: be more creative, more immersive. Only has such a unique gift, and the author has a whole world to play in. As I seem to be using a lot of Golden Compass similes today, I'll use some more (it's such an interesting book). One of the reasons fans love Golden Compass so much is that its world building is phenomenal. Everything is similar to our world, yet with a wholly unique twist that gives that book such a peculiar feel that sets it apart from so many others. In that book, the protagonist visits everyone from the scholars of London to the sentient bears of Svalbard, and each group has such a unique, vibrant culture that it is easy to see a whole world within the pages of that book. In addition, the people in Golden Compass were never truly alone, they were always accompanied by an animal representing part of their soul, which gave them a wholly unique mindset towards everything from

loneliness to relationships.

Heartseeker has that potential, but I don't think it's quite there yet. Only's ability to see and comprehend people's motives behind their lies could potentially evolve into a wholly unique character. Only's kingdom in which a diverse group of people live and small magical gifts hide just below the surface has so much world building potential. It just needs that extra push of imagination. I cannot wait to read the sequel and see that potential come to life.

For more reviews like this one, visit my blog [Who Needs Sleep?](#)

Bethany says

I originally wrote this review when I first read the book back in June but for some reason, GR is still listing Heartseeker as "to read" so...

This was an outstanding debut that left me excited to read more! Protagonist Only's talent for seeing lies, much like a form of synesthesia, is both a blessing and a curse. Probably more the latter, as the few adults in her life who understand what she can do have known all along. She tries to keep it hidden but sometimes, the truth has a way of making itself known.

The book functions on many levels and will be enjoyed by readers of different age bands. While lower middle grade readers will enjoy the fantasy aspect and will likely be outraged at the social strata, older readers will grasp the nuances and read & enjoy on a whole different level. (Since I originally wrote my review, I've had the chance to both add the book to my library shelves, and share it with my own kids. I have had way different deep conversations about the story with my elementary students and my personal high schoolers.)

Thoroughly enjoyable, from the appealing cover art right through to the hook at the end. It's been very popular in my K-6 library. We can't wait to find out what happens next!

Cathy says

This is an exciting fantasy novel that centers around a young country girl, Only Fallow, with a surprising ability—she can see lies. They appear as colored clouds around the teller. Her gift has a drawback though, she can't speak an untruth without suffering. She wisely keeps her ability a secret, only confiding in her Non—the matriarch of her closeknit family. But circumstances reveal her gift and she's swept into the political intrigue of a kingdom in turmoil. Her gift can sort truth from lies, but can it help her navigate in a court full of intrigue, mixed loyalties, and physical danger?

Only is an appealing heroine who feels very real. Her relationships with her brothers and family are warm and multi-dimensioned. Her magical gift is a great mix of positive and negative. Imagine being unable to lie when you can see others "shading" the truth all around you.

The supporting characters are interesting and I'm impressed with how the author has painted these characters so that almost none of them are all black or all white. Even after rereading parts of the last third of the book,

I am still not sure who is telling the whole truth and who the REAL enemies are. I'm really looking forward to the next book and spending more time in Only's world.

Rebecca says

Loved it all. I'm only mad we have to wait until next year for resolution of Only's tale.

I could have read in a sitting or two, but I made myself put it down a few times because I didn't want it to be over so soon.

Jeremy Garber says

A marvelous, entertaining, and important read. [Full disclaimer: the author was one of my best friends in undergrad, but the book stands by itself!] Only Fallow is a stubborn farmer's daughter with an inexplicable gift: she can see when other people lie by the colors bursting around their head, but when she tries to lie herself, it causes her literal pain. Only learns to know the Ordish, migrant farm workers that come by boat to pick her father's apples that go to make the king's scrump. When two of the Ordish are captured for sale to the king himself, the investigation leads to the discovery of Only's gift - and the king's command for her to appear at court.

Beatty writes effortlessly and readably - you can hear each character's voice in your head, from the homespun dialects of the farmers to the oily smooth enunciation of court intrigue. The reader enters immediately into her inventive world, not having to struggle with overly complex made-up names and geographies, because she introduces them naturally and subtly. The personalities are unique and amusing, and because we learn to love them, the stakes are high. Younger readers will love Only and the Ordish, and older readers will appreciate the unfortunate relevance of a political elite that preys upon the Other to maintain their economic and political status quo. My only regret is that I can't immediately turn to the next one - I need to know what happens next!

Amanda says

Wow! It took me just a bit to get into this because the world-building was so complete that I felt like I was visiting a country that I SHOULD already know, that I had been to before and had forgotten from my childhood, that I kept stopping to rack my brains, and try to figure it out, but no! This was so different and amazing and original! Yeah!

Once I settled down into the story, I didn't want to leave it, so when the ending came, I turned the pages looking for MORE, but there wasn't any. Be warned. You WILL want more; it leaves you hanging. Beatty, please give us a sequel soon! The characters are compelling and complex and flawed; they don't always do what you would want them to do or what you think they should do, which makes this book more interesting. The world is full of places where I would love to visit, and places I would love to visit if I had a troop of armed guards with me (haha). The plot does leave you hanging, as I mentioned, and it isn't clear whom the "bad guys" are necessarily! I can't tell if the MC has made a wise choice at the end. Yikes.

Heads-up if this is a thing: a minor character is gay and is bringing up her niece as her ward and heir. Just throwing it out there in case this is an issue. Cases of violence, death, lying, thieving, and back-stabbing (hey, part of this takes place at the royal court, so what did you expect?). On the flip side: extreme loyalty (!), love, self-sacrifice, dedication, patriotism, and family values.

Ariana says

Originally posted on: The Quirky Book Nerd

I received a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review

Heartseeker is one of those novels that makes me even more glad that I am given the opportunity to read and review books, especially those for younger audiences. Reading has always been such an important part of my life ever since I was a kid, and it is something that has led me to find my other biggest passion of writing. I get such joy out of encouraging people of any age to read, and discovering a middle grade gem like this that I can so highly recommend is always wonderful. This novel reminds me of the fantasy stories I adored when I was younger, that piqued my imagination and creativity and solidified my love of reading. It is a beautiful tale full of love, magic, and strength that will captivate readers of any age.

In this novel, we follow a young girl named Only Fallow, who has the ability to see lies. When people lie, she sees them ringed in a whole variety of colors, each connected to the type of lie and intentions of the person. However, this power comes with the curse of not being able to tell a lie without experiencing physical pain. As magic, or “cunning”, is not accepted among her people, she is forced to keep these things a secret—but sometimes secrets have a life of their own.

When Only’s powers are discovered by the King, he takes her from her home to live and work in his castle at Bellskeep. The King’s intentions are to have her assist him in determining deceit among those of his kingdom, as there are many traitors about. But this plan is not foolproof, as the potential cunning of others is not taken into account. Now, Only must navigate her new circumstances, where her greatest power can also be her greatest weakness.

This is such a unique and interesting story that I found myself immediately swept up into. The idea of seeing lies as colors—as well as the meanings given to each one—is not only an inventive way to portray this power, it is also truly and utterly magical. Readers are given the chance to fall into a vibrant world and an epic adventure that captures and carries the imagination into new realms. As a whole, this narrative is something that I believe will spark the creativity of all of its readers—I know it definitely did that for me.

Beatty has crafted every component of this novel beautifully. Her writing is incredibly easy to get caught up in, and fluidly carries the reader over the pages. The style in which she writes is very distinctive and fitting for the setting—this adds further dimension to the novel as a whole. The world is carefully constructed and vividly described. It unfolds and builds up around you as you fall into Only’s life. Beatty’s writing breathes life into her narrative and fully immerses the reader in every aspect of the story.

Only is an incredibly strong heroine. She is brave, intelligent, and extremely loyal—a very admirable female lead. Beatty does a great job of filling out her character, taking the time to really build her a three-dimensional personality. I had a quick and easy time connecting with her and coming to love her. The characterization as a whole is very solid, as Beatty fills this work with a cast of memorable characters. My

particular favorites were Non, Jon, and Gareth. The relationships between everyone in this novel are very well-portrayed, and everyone plays a massive role in driving the narrative.

I thoroughly enjoyed getting lost in this heartwarming and exciting adventure, and was very reluctant to leave. The escapades of these characters continue to replay in my mind, and will surely stay with me for a long time. It is a story that I can see being universally accessible among readers of all ages. Heartseeker is a charming and wholesome read that I would highly encourage younger readers to pick up, and that I would recommend to everyone in general.

Kari says

Review based on an advance copy provided by the publisher

This entrancing new fantasy adventure was the story I didn't know I needed (but now I can't get enough of) and is my most anticipated book of the year.

Debut author, Beatty, hooks readers from the very first sentence: Lies are beautiful.

This is storytelling at its finest with nods to 17th century England but a vivid world all its own, a courageous yet unexpected heroine, and a page-turning plot that leaves you wanting more.

A story of intrigue, sacrifice, and resilience, Heartseeker will delight fans of Cornelia Funke, Marie Rutkoski and Shannon Hale, and is the perfect follow up for readers who loved The Girl Who Drank the Moon by Kelly Barnhill.

I can't wait for the second installment!Heartseeker

Kate Feldman says

Really enjoyed this read! I loved the world building and the characters, and I loved that the book is about courage and truth. Can't wait to read the next one!

Rosanna says

Lucky to get an advance copy on this one. There's a sequel in the works, and if it was out I would have ordered on Kindle immediately and kept right on reading. That's how good a book this is.

Loved this. The clever premise – a young heroine who can see lies – is beautifully crafted. The heroine Only is not “spunky” she is strong, making her way and finding connections she needs for the test she will face.

Perhaps fiction allows us to see the creative beauty of imagination, the way that Only sees lies as colors. I could see it sparkling off of this book.

David says

[SPOILER FREE - Other reviews give plot outlines]

I read very widely and bought the Kindle Edition after a personal recommendation.

I confess that I really didn't know what to expect as this is a novel for children and young adults, apparently, and I haven't dipped my feet in those waters since I read The Hobbit when I was on the cusp of becoming a young adult myself (Harry Potter excepted, naturally). I shouldn't have been concerned as I was hooked within a few short pages and, at the very least, Heartseeker proves again what JK Rowling showed us: That when in the hands of an excellent writer, a well crafted tale remains a well crafted tale regardless of the target audience.

Melinda Beatty, make no mistake, is an excellent writer. Characters are well-drawn and believable and the world-building is both thorough and utterly compelling. Beatty's dialogue, rustic and home-spun for the most part, includes excellent turns of phrase and no little humour.

Often while I'm reading a fantasy, something on the page will suddenly strike me as simply too farfetched for me to continue to trustingly hold the author's hand. I lose belief in both the author and the story. Similarly, in the case of historical fiction, if I come across a grating anachronism then I am suddenly snapped out of the world that the author has replicated. Reading Heartseeker was immersive. Nothing jarred, nothing seemed out of place, nothing felt "wrong". I was happy to be along for the entire ride.

Speaking of which, this is the first in a series and if the second is half as good as the first then I'll be along for the entire duration.

A rare (from me) Five Stars.

Teresa Edmunds says

Beatty has a good idea here: a girl with the rare gift of finding truth and reading people's emotions is sent on an adventure to save the kingdom. Though the main character, Only Fallow, can see lies, she does not know whom to trust. Neither does the reader. Beatty does a great job of humanizing the characters by showing both their faults and good intentions, so the reader has to really think about where to place their loyalties. The main problem with the book is not the story, but the writing style. The tale takes place in an older time, so Beatty uses an older form of language and dialect. The fifth grader that asked to review the book, brought it back to me a few days later because it was hard for her to understand the words and phrases. She only made it through 2 chapters. Once I started reading it, I saw the reason for her struggle. It was tedious for me to get through the first several chapters because of the writing style. Older readers should be able to catch onto the unusual language after three or four chapters, but younger readers probably won't bother. And seeing that the target audience is mid-grade, not upper grade, this is indeed a valid concern. Which is a shame because the story idea is interesting and clever.

Charlie Smith says

Full Disclosure: I know Melinda Beatty because she is a bookseller at my glorious local indie, The Curious Iguana. We have never spent time together outside that context: book lover who sells (and writes) books and book lover who buys (and writes about) books. And, to be clear, I bought my copy of Heartseeker. Gladly. I will likely buy a few more for relatives and friends.

I've been lamenting of late the lack of books with electric plotting, memorable characters, and artful prose, the kind of books that grab hold of you, pull you into their universe, and stay with you for more than five minutes after you've finished them.

Problem solved.

Melinda Beatty's debut (DEBUT!) novel, Heartseeker, checks all of those boxes and more.

Only Fallow, six years old, lives in small, simple Presston, youngest of three in a family whose father's cider is favored by King Alphonse, bringing jealous attention to Only and her brothers, Ether and Jon. Feeling like an outcast, Only is drawn to Lark and Rowan, two children of the Ordish, the traveling folk rumored to have gifts of cunning and magic, who help Only's father each season with the harvest and are much looked down upon, distrusted, and discriminated against by the subjects of King Alphonse, whose agents have been kidnapping Ordish children, using them as slaves until their relatives can raise the ransom for their return. Only feels especially akin to the Ordish when she discovers, with the help of her grandmother, Non, that she has a cunning of her own: she can see lies. Too, her gift comes with a price: if she herself lies, she is stricken by great pain, a seizure-like blacking out. Non advises Only to keep her gift hidden, but through twisted-misadventure, rumor of Only's abilities reach the King, who believes such an ability to discover liars will help him save his kingdom which is in disarray. But truth being told and liars being revealed are the last things some in the kingdom want to happen, and they attempt to stop Only from taking her place at court in the enormous city of Bellskeep, a role she has only agreed to in order to save her family.

I am rat-rotten at synopses, but that's a rough-ish outline of 336 pages chockful of adventure, plot, surprises, and fascinations. Melinda Beatty clearly has a cunning, herself. She has built a world utterly unique and wonderfully believable. Her introduction of its specific vocabulary, traditions, belief systems, and social structures is seamlessly, skillfully done by using context and dialogue. There is no pedantic, dull-as-dirt back-story-ing to interrupt the action, the world is made and the characters come to life through the telling of the story.

And what a story! Only Fallow is a likeable, trustworthy narrator and you want to go with her, warn her, stop her, help her, urge her on, hug her, protect her. Her Ordish pals, Lark and Rowan are also attention-grabbing and vitally alive, worthy of their own tales. The there's the court intrigue. And the love story Only's brother Jon is one half of (I don't want to give any more away than I already have). And grandmother, Non, I can't wait to spend more time with her.

Heartseeker, labeled Middle Grade, is also wildly enjoyable for adults. Enjoyable as in: remember that feeling you had as a child when you discovered *Harriet The Spy*, or *Little Women*, or *Portnoy's Complaint* (I was a very precocious child)? Heartseeker draws you in with that same entirely other yet also totally familiar world, as in, it's clearly outside your day-to-day reality, but the emotions and behaviors are on-point, from the heart, as if the author had culled her story from inside your head and dreams.

Melinda Beatty has that cunning of gifted authors who can fabricate riveting, riotously readable tales that elucidate real-life emotions and experiences.

I eagerly await volumes 2 and 3. And, in fact, anything else Melinda Beatty writes. I suspect she will be too busy soon inventing other worlds to sell me any more books, but that's okay, she'll be selling lots and lots of books in a new and exciting way by sharing her work with the world.

Mary Beth Phelps says

I met Melinda Beatty on Twitter several years ago and have followed her on various social media platforms ever since. After seeing her tirelessly support authors, books and reading, it is incredibly exciting to finally get to read her own debut novel, *Heartseeker*. I grew attached to and invested in Only, her Non, Lark, Maura, Bethan, Gareth, and their families and friends from the get-go. They live in a totally original fairytale world with its own set of rules and traditions, and have a manner of expression all their own. Beatty is excellent at thoroughly creating a natural atmosphere and setting the stage for both dialogue and action. I wasn't always a fan of the story's pacing, but I did always feel engaged with the characters and did not consider putting the book down a single time.

I am really hopeful that a sequel is forthcoming because I'll definitely read it. As a sidenote, I'd love to see Beatty venture into adult fiction as well. I love the themes explored (and explored well) in *Heartseeker* and think that Beatty's narrative style and sense of social and political issues would translate particularly well into stories with more mature themes. Only's story often reminded me (in the best possible way) of a YA companion novel to *The Wild Girl* and *Bitter Greens* by Kate Forsyth.

I highly recommend *Heartseeker* to readers of any age who enjoy thoughtful fairytales, unique magic, strong heroines, and compassionate heroes.

Sheila Welch says

Don't expect HEARTSEEKER to follow the well worn, traditional path of fantasies for children. No dragon flits between turbulent clouds, no child is whisked away on an enchanted train, and no wizard waves a magic wand. The setting and characters exist in a sort of in-between time and place, which feels like ancient Britain – but not quite – and the elements of fantasy remind me of the magic or magical realism found in many of the classic books by E. Nesbit.

In HEARTSEEKER, the first person narrator tells her tale with such clear-eyed candor, readers might be convinced it's the truth. For, after all, Only Fallow is physically unable to tell a lie. As a small child, the few times she attempts to stray from an honest account, she develops a dull pain in her head. And as she matures, her involuntary reaction worsens; she becomes violently ill to the point of passing out. No chance of her being an unreliable narrator!

Now, Only has lived past eleven harvest seasons, and, taking to heart her grandmother's advice, she's managed to keep the other side of her "cunning" hidden from everyone, including the rest of her family. Her loving parents and two older brothers don't realize that lies are revealed to her in the form of shapes and colors that surround the liar. But is her cunning a welcomed gift or a dreaded curse?

She's puzzled by the complexity of the world around her: At "sanctuary," Rector Wither prays to Mother All and warns his flock of the dangers of "unnaturalness;" neighbors resent her father's success as a farmer who grows apples in his orchard to make Scrump, a drink fit for the King; people call the Ordish, who move with the seasons, "river rats" and "wet collars;" townsfolk grumble about her father hiring Ordish to help at harvest time; the King whom Only has been taught to respect is stealing children; and Only has no true friends since she can see the lies on so many lips.

This year, after the arrival of the boats, Only actually meets and befriends two Ordish children and shortly afterwards is witness to their being kidnapped. Her cunning warns her of the danger in time for her to escape but also arouses the suspicions of the child-stealer. Soon the King sends his inquisitor to confirm the reports of a girl who can be of great value to a King who needs to weed out the liars among those who surround him.

Suddenly, Only is elevated to a position she's never considered. Ripped from her home and family, she's facing danger and intrigue way beyond anything she could have imagined when she was only Only Fallow. Is she capable of the task she's been assigned, or will her cunning fail her if she's challenged by stronger magical abilities?

This story sparkles with clever language, a swiftly moving, action packed plot, and thought-provoking concepts. Middle-grade and middle-school students who read Beatty's debut novel will be thrilled when the sequel is published, so they can follow Only's adventures. As Only might say, "Mother All! Ain't that the truth!"
