



## Under the Stars

*Geoff Laughton*

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## **Under the Stars** Geoff Laughton

Ethan Tanner is an out and proud, fastidious, and fashionable sixteen-year-old vegetarian who likes theater and musicals. This year, it's his sister's turn to pick the vacation destination, so he ends up on a dude ranch he knows he is going to hate. What with the dirt, animals, and germs, he can't possibly be happy.

Jason McCoy is the closeted sixteen-year-old son of the ranch owners and is trying to find his place in a world that doesn't seem to fit him. He takes an interest in Ethan, shows him around, and gets him to ride a horse. When he invites Ethan camping, Ethan thinks Jason must be joking. But Ethan takes a risk, and the two boys bond under the stars.

After that, Ethan and Jason are inseparable. Their friendship grows into something deeper as they begin to figure out what they want from life. But Ethan's home is in Chicago, and the distance might be more than the two teenagers—and their blossoming relationship—can withstand.

## **Under the Stars Details**

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Author : Geoff Laughton

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## From Reader Review Under the Stars for online ebook

### Natalija says

This has to be my favorite Geoff Laughton book so far. I really liked the setting, the characters, and how sweet the romance was. On a side note, what's the story with Rick? If you ask me, it could have been left out completely.

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### Serena Yates says

In a wonderful variation on “City Kid meets Country Boy”, this story is about sixteen-year-old Ethan from Chicago who is “forced” to go on a family vacation on a dude ranch. He is out and proud, likes to dress well, and cannot imagine having to live in a primitive cabin and “do stuff outside” for two weeks. Jason is the dude ranch owners’ son, also sixteen, and loves the countryside, never expecting to live anywhere else. And voilà, the stage is set for conflict, a very reluctant friendship, and the slow blossoming of something more between two young men who couldn’t be more different. Needless to say, I was really looking forward to find out Geoff Laughton’s plans for these two.

Ethan has never hidden who he is, well not beyond a couple of unsuccessful attempts when he was very young. He came out when he was fourteen, and has extremely supportive parents. He is a bit of a fashion addict, likes his creature comforts, and I don’t think he knows what to do with himself without some sort of electricity-based toy at his disposal. Life without WiFi is his idea of a nightmare. When Ethan first arrives on the dude ranch he expects life to be pretty bad for the next two weeks, but when he meets Jason, a boy his age, all of that slowly begins to change.

Jason has no idea what it is like to be out. He knows he is gay, but his parents are pretty homophobic (his father more openly than his mother), and anyway, he doesn’t believe he’ll ever live anywhere else than on the ranch. He is upset about the fact he is being used as cheap labor, while his slightly older cousin is being paid for his efforts since “he has to save up for college”. When Jason begins to get to know Ethan, his view on life, and who he might be when he grows up, slowly begins to change.

This is a charming story in a spectacular setting, a burning romance between two young men on the threshold of becoming men, and so much longing and sweetness between them as they fight seemingly impossible odds that I came close to tears several times. If you like young adult romances that are just as intense as some more adult versions, if you want to know some of what it’s like for two young gay men to figure out who they are and what they want from life and each other, and if you’re looking for a sweet read with a lot of angst and some very loving moments, then you will probably enjoy this novel. I totally adored it and can only hope there will be a sequel to see what life is like for Ethan and Jason at college.

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### Emilia Barnes says

Ugh, okay, so this is an ok premise executed by someone who is not a naturally talented writer. For a while I thought it might have been written by a kid, but actually the author profile says that Geoff Laughton is a husband and father, so it's the talent thing. Laughton is not a writer. He makes very basic stylistic mistakes, like for example not varying sentence lengths.

When you write, you want to write long, complex sentences, next to shorter, to the point ones. Like so.

Here's what you don't want. Short-ass sentences. All the time. For a whole paragraph. Like so.

This is super basic stuff, but it makes *such* a difference when reading. Similarly, when you write, you want to do something called setting the scene, which means giving a brief feel of where the reader is to place the characters, what the characters look like, what they act like, anything to give you a *feel* for the situation. Laughton just launches right in, people come and go, you don't know what anybody looks like, the ranch I have to imagine all by myself, which isn't cool for someone who's never been to a ranch like that. Instead he will give you point by point description of who does what, even if it doesn't matter one jot and doesn't progress the plot at all.

Not that there is a plot, because basically there isn't. Nothing happens.

This book is not a realistic or even plausible development of the initial, in my opinion interesting, premise. I liked the premise: an out-and-proud(ish) city kid goes to a farm and meets closeted cowboy kid. That opens a number of interesting possibilities to an author, right? You could populate the ranch with interesting characters who create obstacles for the kids etc. Here, not so much. Jason, the apparently closeted kid, makes a move on Ethan. Yeah, because closeted kids are generally known to do that. Then they camp out together, no problem, and can fool around in the tent, again, no problem. Yeah, Jason's parents don't approve, and there's some guy named Rick for some reason, but it doesn't actually stop anything from happening or affect the plot in any way.

Ethan is a walking gay stereotype, and I found him irritating. I get it, he is out, he is super gay, he loves Broadway musicals and has to express himself by dancing and dressing "nicely". Okay. That's fine. But then what? I can't but compare this guy to the character Travis in *Almost Like Being in Love*: also a flamboyant theatre-loving kind of gay guy, but that's just part of his personality (as is the mild OCD thing, which he also has in common with Ethan). But while Ethan is basically defined by these quirks, Travis has a whole world of personality that is peculiarly his own. But this goes with the writing talent. Laughton is just not a subtle writer. If he can't give a kid fabulousness, he basically loses any sense of character development at all. For example, look at Jason. He has no personality, no discernible characteristic, nothing to distinguish him from anybody. What motivates him? What does he feel? I haven't the least clue. Add to this Laughton's need to punctuate his story with Ethan's uber-mature speeches about being gay and being who you are and I don't know whether to yawn or to gag.

Finally, Ethan and Jason don't behave or speak like teenage boys. When they goof around together they behave like they're five, and it really feels like the author is forcing some sort of situation in which the characters laugh together, even though you, the reader, won't laugh. When they make out and are intimate, on the other hand, they behave like they're thirty five and after two divorces. It's like the author forgot what it's like to be a teenager. You know, when you are alone with your crush and you realise that he's into you too and that such a thing as kissing exists? Here, Jason and Ethan kiss when they first go camping, and then they stop to eat cookies and then they go to sleep in a tiny tent, without even kissing again! Lol, yeah right! None of their interactions read as though they were natural. It all felt forced and paced by an adult's hand, and not in a subtle way.

So, at 60% through the story, I lost interest. It's just not a good story, and it is not executed well.

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**K says**

4.5 stars rounded up

This is the second young adult novel by Andrew Grey's alter ego, Geoff Laughton, that I've read and while I enjoy his adult books, I think the YA books are actually better - certainly less formulaic.

16 year old Ethan isn't pleased to be having to spend his family holiday on a Dude Ranch in Wyoming, but it's his sister's choice and he gets no say. Determined to be miserable and not join in he finds himself coaxed into joining in with the activities by Jason, another sixteen year old. Ethan has been out since he was 14 and whilst not flamboyant isn't going into the closet for the holiday, Jason on the other hand is closeted and, as far as I can make out, Ethan is the first openly gay teenager he's met. The pair slowly fall for each other, even knowing their time is limited.

The story doesn't end at the end of the holiday, but they remain in contact through e-mail, text and skype. Eventually when the end of the story comes, it finds them both starting out a new phase of their lives and relationship as college students. I liked the fact this is very firmly a HFN and not a HEA.

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### **Chris Jeffreys says**

Under the Stars is the newest young people's novel (Harmony Press) by Geoff Loughton a/k/a Andrew Grey. It is a story of a family who decides to visit a dude ranch for their summer vacation. The family's angst ridden son, Ethan, doesn't want to go to a dude ranch because he prefers Broadway/New York/theater to anything that involves dirt and horses. He is a bit of a hypochondriac. But, of course, in this rather simple story, the son goes to the dude ranch with his family, finds another closeted teen, Jason, (the son of the dude ranch owners) and has insta love.

How do they hang on to young love after the summer vacation is over? Well, Ethan decides to tutor Jason on the Internet so they can both get good grades and go away to college together. Well, it starts to work, and Jason's grades increase -- he then joins the science club and he gets to travel to Ethan's home city of Chicago (where the two boys rekindle their love as though they were never separated).

As in all young adult novels, two years passes in two pages, and the boys are accepted into the same colleges. Jason comes out to his parents (since he received a near complete scholarship for school). The father becomes indifferent to Jason, but that is not explored.

In the end, the two boys meet in their shared college dorm and fall into a romantic embrace. A little too much saccharin for me.

That's really all that there is to this book. Best described as a cute piece of fluff. Three stars from me.

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### **Abbi Fricke says**

I liked it a lot but it was a very slow read for me.

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## Amy says

3.5 - not a bad story, although 12-year old Jessica was treated more like a three year old and Rick's part in the story sort of fell away by the end of the book and we never find out the motivation behind his actions.

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## Arch Bala says

I don't know what's with Andrew Grey when he's writing as Geoff Laughton because his books under the latter are just so good or perhaps it's the YA genre where he's really hitting the jackpot for me. This one's another awesome read which I thoroughly enjoyed while mooning like a girl in my bed. I'm sure glad that Ethan was there to encourage Jason to accept himself and finally come out of the closet (and be a brave little boy.) I loved that their relationship didn't falter before going to college since they basically live from different states. I love the setting of the story as well where these guys met and just the whole feel-good vibe of the story esp the ending. Awwwww... young love it is.

**Rating: 5 out of 5 stars**

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## T.M. Smith says

Sixteen year old Ethan Tanner is out, proud and flamboyant. He loves fashion and musicals, so when his family decides to spend their summer vacation on a ranch, he is less than enthusiastic about the trip. But there is something about the peace, quiet and beauty at the ranch that even a skeptic like Ethan can appreciate. The totally cute ranch hand is a huge plus as well.

Jason McCoy is everything that Ethan is not. A down home, real life, cowboy. While Ethan prefers Dolce, Gabbana and Broadway musicals... Jason is all wranglers, ropers and Stetsons. Jason shows Ethan how to relax, enjoy the great outdoors and ride a horse. And Ethan stirs up feelings in Jason that he'd just as soon keep to himself. Jason doesn't think his parents, especially his demanding father, would accept him being gay.

Ethan and Jason spend their time together talking and getting to know each other under the stars. But when vacation is over, Ethan and his family will return to their life in Chicago, while Jason is forced to return to his life in the closet. Unless the combined perseverance of two teenagers that fell in love under those stars can find a way to stay in contact over the next two years, until they are old enough to make their own decisions.

I really enjoyed the way the author used the characters differences in personalities, twisting them and making them complimentary to each other. Ethan is outgoing, out and proud, yet he still struggles with acceptance from his peers. He just can't justify pretending to be something or someone else though, regardless of what people think, say or do. Jason is the muscle in the relationship and he could probably run the ranch right by himself, blindfolded and with one hand tied behind his back. But he has led a sort of sheltered life. He longs for his father's attention, to be something more to the man than just free labor on the ranch. He has never felt more wanted or loved than he does with Ethan, and it's the determination that they both have to be together again that will see them through.

While this is a young adult title, the maturity of the storyline and scenarios make it intriguing enough to hold

the attention of readers of all ages, with the author holding true to the age appropriate content. The scenery was so vivid that I felt like I was lying on a blanket on the ranch staring up at the stars. I hope there is a sequel to this story, that I can follow Ethan and Jason on this journey that they've started.

\* I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review through <http://mmgoodbookreviews.wordpress.com> \*

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### **Riina Y.T. says**

Aw aw aw! What a wonderful story about young, first love. Sweet, sweet, sweet!

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### **Tina says**

DNF at 20%. No rating.

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### **Becky Condit says**

I love the stories written by Andrew Grey's alter ego and character from his Farm series, Geoff Laughton for Geoff's son. Under the Stars is a sweet teen-aged love story about opposites attracting.

Ethan is the treasured gay son of a family who obviously have money and each summer they allow their children to take turns choosing the vacation of their choice. This summer Ethan's sister has decided the family needs to spend two weeks at a working ranch, which is absolutely an anathema to the fashionable, fastidious Ethan. He brings enough games, movies, and electronic entertainment to allow him to hole up in his room for the duration. That's fine until he meets the son of the ranch owners, Jason.

Jason talks Ethan into a trail ride which leads to talking and discovery that maybe Ethan doesn't need to bathe in antibiotic gel or shun everything that is new to him. Jason is also gay but closeted and fearful of his parents finding out the truth of who he is. Jason is attracted not only to Ethan but to what appears to Jason to be an exotic life in the city of Chicago.

The boys realize they are going to have to part at the end of the two weeks and are therefore reluctant to declare their budding love to one another. How they work out to carry their friendship and romantic relationship forward after parting is sweet and the HFN ending leaves the reader hoping this "first boyfriend" will eventually be much more to both Ethan and Jason. Very sweet, very real emotionally, and highly recommended. Geoff Laughton's characters have once again touched my heart.

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### **Love Bytes Reviews says**

4 star review by Marieke

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Ethan starts out as a spoiled brat that has a bit of a princess attitude. But slowly, during the whole story, he evolves into a very likable young man. It starts with horseback riding. Ethan finds out he actually likes it, even though the first time is not a success. He learns that getting dirty doesn't have to be a bad thing.

Jason is a bit of a mystery in the beginning. First you think he might be gay too, but then he says some things that make you wonder. His reactions are confusing, sometimes he seems to be kind of bigoted, but other times...he seems desperate and lonely.

The two boys start with an awkward friendship, circling around each other because they both have no idea what to do about the mutual attraction. But soon enough, their love grows. Jason's parents try to keep them apart, but of course the boys find a way.

This story started out so amazing, the characters so well fleshed out, and the situation so perfectly described. I loved the whole farm scenery and the development between the boys is amazing. But, halfway through the story, the writing style changes. It's no longer detailed and slow paced, but it skips big chunks of time.

It also skates over emotions and situations as if the author was in a hurry to get to the end. The actual ending is very sweet, with a happy ending to melt your heart, but again, very hasty.

This could've easily have been a five plus star review, but it just didn't get there. The second half took away too much detail and therefore emotion. So all in all a good book, but it could've been nearly perfect.

A copy of this book was provided in exchange for an honest review. Please visit [www.lovebytesreviews.com](http://www.lovebytesreviews.com) to see this and many more reviews, author interviews, guestposts and giveaways!

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## **Joyfully Jay says**

*A Joyfully Jay review.*

### **5 stars**

Ethan is a deep philosophical young man, having gained his knowledge from the school of hard knocks. He has an incredibly supportive family, but that does not change the fact that people are cruel and his bravery at coming out at age 14 has taught him much. Then we have Jason, who is living a lie, a necessary lie, which was truly sad, yet common regardless of whether the teen is a rancher's son or a city dweller. We hear stories of the bigotry experienced by LGBT teens by unsupportive family members and Jason's family situation may not be the worst case scenario, it is far from the best.

Laughton truly knows how to put himself in the minds of his characters. As an adult, I would never have thought of the quote "Parents are weird. Just when you think you have them trained, they start to think for themselves." This is just one of the things that lent authenticity to the story and the characters and made me feel that he captured the teenage mindset perfectly.

If there is one thing Laughton does well, it is the creation of the world in which the characters interact. I could picture the Rocking H ranch clear as day. The writing was exactly as I would have expected, smooth and satisfying and I have always found his stories to really explore the emotions of the characters and we can't help but feel for the boys as they navigate their fledgling relationship.

**Read Jason's review in its entirety here.**

## wesley says

The writing is just okay. I did not fall head over heels for it, but I did not also dislike it. There were some things that the author could have worked on like the redundancies (Ethan's fears as an example) or how the story just went in circles instead of moving forward while going on and on about the same conflict/issues. Although, what I really liked though was how mature his characters are. I thought that the flamboyant and dramatic Ethan was very levelheaded and smart. He did not come across as clingy or whiny to me. Jason, although closeted and insecure, was full of heart and kindness. Their alone time are the moments I'd give the author a pat in the back for giving two sixteen-year-old boys great voices. Those conversations could surely help teens out there who are still struggling to find their own identity in this world.

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