



# Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho

*Jon Katz*

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Jesse and Eric were geeks: suspicious of authority figures, proud of their status as outsiders, fervent in their belief in the positive power of technology. High school had been an unbearable experience and their small-town Idaho families had been torn apart by hard times. On the fringe of society, they had almost no social lives and little to look forward to. They spent every spare cent on their computers and every spare moment on-line. Nobody ever spoke of them, much less for them.

But then they met Jon Katz, a roving journalist who suggested that, in the age of geek impresario Bill Gates, Jesse and Eric had marketable skills that could get them out of Idaho and pave the way to a better life. So they bravely set out to conquer Chicago—geek style. Told with Katz's trademark charm and sparkle, **Geeks** is a humorous, moving tale of triumph over adversity and self-acceptance that delivers two irresistible heroes for the digital age and reveals the very human face of technology.

## **Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho Details**

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## From Reader Review Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho for online ebook

### Georgia Hessel says

The novel *Geeks* by Jon Katz depicting the lives of a young Jesse Dailey and his friend Eric presented not only the hopeful and promising story of two social outcasts but sheds light on what it's like to not be a "mainstream" young adult in a society that provides an easier path for those who follow the social norms laid out for them without breaking stride. Not more than four pages into the prologue, the book draws readers in to its primary concepts and bigger picture ideas. Jon Katz opens his case study by directly disclosing "if you find yourself on the outside looking in... watching TV on weekends while everyone else goes to parties... you don't have a lot of friends... the things you like aren't the same things most other people like" (Katz XVII) then you may be someone who feels they are on the outside, a geek. It immediately allows the reader to resonate with these statements and more, already feeling understood by the book itself. The book reaches out to emphasize it's understanding of how the reader feels, which in turn lets the reader be more open and willing to understand the book in return. Through this connection a more optimistic and connected outlook on the book is provided when the author introduced Jesse and Eric. Katz's use of this direct speaking to the reader, even though Jesse's life starting out at the beginning of the book doesn't directly apply to everyone, it still aligns the reader's mindset with his situation and life from Katz's attention getter at the beginning of the book.

Although the book chronologically sticks to the biography, it does a wonderful job of drawing conclusions that apply to a more general group of people. A highlighted concept is the feeling of detachment geeks feel at school and in their community. Furthermore it concludes the level of displacement felt by these students is a spectrum, and ranges from simply feeling left out, and being mindlessly uninvited from parties and group activities, to bullying, harassment, and physical violence. The author makes a point to cement the idea that "the lucky ones" only face minimum discrimination: being left out of conversations, not having many (if any) friends, and feeling like they're on the outside. He contrasts this idea with the other end of geek culture: name calling, getting shoved in the halls, essentially becoming a human punching bag both metaphorically and physically. Even though the basis of Katz's portrayal of the others getting off easy is correct on the surface, the deeper understanding shows otherwise. He immediately dismisses those who aren't put down by society to the extent Jesse and Eric were, stating other teens like them were lucky. Although the physical aspect of it is true and those who don't get punched or tripped in the halls are grateful for it, their mental state remains about the same to those who do. By merely being on the outside of the "mainstream" group and watching from the sidelines it can make someone strongly feel they don't fit in as much as those who get beat up. Katz does have the right to claim that overall those who were more polarized had it worse overall, but he was wrong in un-justifying those who went through similar but less intense forms of ostracization. Although Katz tends to single in on a very specific culture within geeks, computer geeks, he still provides a sense of hope and encouragement for the future for any reader. A moral that can easily be pulled from the story is that if a door closes a window may still be open, you just have to find it. By chronologically presenting Jesse's life, the reader can follow and assimilate with the ups and downs he faced as well, possibly similar to their own in pattern and structure. Therefore at the ending of the book, the reader is left feeling hopeful and excited for their own future, however cliché it may be. Geeks, taking place in the late 1990's still feels very modern, and fits in any time period after the uprising of technology and computers. Despite having a sense of timelessness, it was published in the year 2000 and Jesse's life continues on after. Feeling sickeningly inspired by the end of the book, I researched Jesse Dailey to see where he is today. As it turns out, Jesse was charged with at least two cases of sexual assault in 2013 against a 10 and 11 year old girl. After learning this, all of the previously created hope I had grasped dropped out of my hands and broke into hundreds of pieces. A person I had seen as a role model and someone to follow in the footsteps of, had become the scum of the Earth. This not only created my sense of previous false hope, but undermines the entire concept of the book. The book encompasses the idea that geeks are people too, their existence isn't in

the way of others, and it's just a different way of life; the path less taken. By humanizing this path and these people, Katz tries to provide a better home for geeks within it. What Jesse did only 13 years later breaks that entire line, and undoes everything Katz tried to do with his book. It creates a real slap in the face for the reader, as well as the author whose entire piece was ben broken. This illuminates another concept needed to be better known to people in the public eye, they represent a group, whoever that group may be, and their actions have consequences for everyone within that group. Jesse created yet another hit and negative finger to point towards the geek community since his case study was used to represent such a large group of people. Jon Katz's interpretation of Jesse Dailey's transition from a teenager to young adult provides plenty of inspiration and promise for the future of high school students as well as other adult readers. But within the work it provides a deeper understanding of how geeks are different than others and what separates the different cultures. Through Jesse's actions he breaks the foundation of understanding and acceptance the world had begun to have towards geeks. He brought an entire society of people back to square one, and although today it has less effect on the world, it drastically impacted the way the book is perceived. As a wise man once said, "pedophiles, they're ruining it for everybody".

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### **Dillon Procter says**

Geeks a book written by Jon Katz. I journalist who meets two introverted boys name Jesse and Eric. Jesse is a troubled teen who had some run-ins with the police and had joined a local gang. Yet, he is "tech wiz" and is, as Jon Katz describes him, a master with his computer. Eric is a very introverted teen who only talks to Jesse and Katz. He always is considered a "tech wiz." These two worked at a small shop, coding repairing, and programming computers. They never realized that jobs all over the country needed people like Jesse and Eric. So, they decide to leave there small town in Idaho and go to Chicago. Honestly, the beginning of the book was the best part (which isn't saying a lot). The middle of the book is basically the troubles of the move and finding a job. I will admit Jon Katz has written this book with amazing humor and detail. Its just the plot is boring. The end (which I will not spoil) is particularly interesting and made for awareness. I'll stop there. This book would be enjoyed by people who had a computer in 2001. You can relate how the internet was 16 years ago compared to now. Not many people 15 years ago were technology wizards compared to today where there are repair shops everywhere. This book has an interesting perspective on triumph and rising to the occasion. Geek style.

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### **Patrick Zerrudo says**

When it comes to Geeks by Jon Katz, the main focus of the story is how people like Jesse Daily and Eric Twilegar who are considered as outsiders who do not conform can triumph over adversity. Jesse's attempts to conform and be someone he was not lead him into a dangerous drug-filled gang life. Once the Geek Club was invented, Jesse realized who he was, what he liked, and what he needed to focus on. Personally, the book's theme of triumph aligns very well with my own views of the world. People who change the world are not exceptional among the crowd, but separate from it.

Geeks is a personal favorite book of mine due to how much I can relate to both Jesse and Eric, and it is clear that Jon Katz knows how to put people in others' shoes. The way that Katz can make me feel like I am living in the cave of Jesse and Eric, and even makes me want to encourage Eric to keep pursuing a job despite his constant failure. Katz achieves this immersion with very thorough syntax in every scene. People get the sense of how down on their luck Jesse and Eric are with quotes like, "He was clinging to his optimism despite neckwear inexperience and coffee stains". This was a quote relating to Jesse's appearance, but it describes both boys' situation perfectly and subtly. They both maintain a positive outlook for each other, despite their intense work ethic, portrayed by the coffee, and their amateur and unexperienced lifestyle,

exemplified by the neckwear inexperience. It is the tiny, subtle elements within the text that detail every scene, and it definitely helps that Jon Katz experienced this first hand. My main and only gripe would be how cliché the story turned out to be. I understand that Katz could not bend what truly happened to make the book more entertaining, but because of that, it came out as a typical underdog story. Apart from this, Geeks still remains a very motivational novel that teaches its readers about self-confidence and perseverance in a society where everything and everyone is betting against outcasts.

As a piece of art, I can say I enjoyed this book for its humor and relatability. Although it isn't going to make me roll on the floor laughing, Geeks has an amount of understated humorous moments, which stem from how the reader can relate to the boys. Most laughs came from envisioning myself as one of the characters, and making the same decisions they would, which made me realize how socially awkward I must be. As a story, I was not entertained. I have seen rags to riches kind of underdog story too many times to be entertained by it any further as I find the most entertaining moments in any story are surprises or twists. Even with this, I can appreciate its motivational nature, and only left it feeling like I should take over the world. Overall, Jon Katz conveyed his messages of self-confidence and triumph very effectively through his ability to make both Jesse and Eric extremely relatable and human. Katz took a persona of an outsider investigating Jesse and Eric, which is the perfect way to approach their story. Both boys were seen as the outsiders of any group, and through how Katz speaks the narrative, it's as if we are the outsiders looking into their lives through a lens.

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### **Chris Hardie says**

This book is unlike many others in the sense that it is real with real events, and it follows two guys on their journey to escape their small town in Idaho. Not only does the book describe the journey that these two people embark on to try and make their lives better, but it also delves deep into the world of geek culture. It explores what the definition of the word geek is, and how that describes a large group of people that are very creative and capable but are just separated from the rest of the world. The passages that Jon mentions in the story draw a parallel to all the things that happen in the lives of the two main characters. The story explores the personality traits and thought processes of the "geeks" that are building the modern world.

I think that this book takes a very interesting take on the entire geek culture that was developing during the early 2000s and is now a fully functioning community that can be accessed around the world. Following the two main characters to a new city and then getting them into college so that they could succeed while simultaneously learning about all of the geek trends that happened back then makes for a very interesting book. Although I did find it boring at times because the two boys' storyline was a bit boring, but other than that I would recommend reading if you are interested in technology of the early 2000s.

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### **Aqil Merchant says**

Where did the term "geek" get its present-day meaning from? It's not a question that people often think about, but you could make the case that it originated from around two decades ago as the tech industry was flourishing. Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho dives extremely head-on into this time period just when Mr. Katz first meets the two most carbon-copied geeks you could ever find: Caldwell, Idaho's very own Jesse Dailey and Eric Twilegar. Just when life could not get any worse for these alienated outcasts hopeless in their search for change, Mr. Katz comes into the picture and motivates the two to make a name for themselves. But....is it enough to spark a change? Prepare yourself for a roller coaster that Jesse and Eric experience being hit by dozens of twists and turns. It is a journey few experience in their lifetime, and it is all centered around the perception of identity: Are Jesse and Eric just geeks? Or, are they much more?

Now, you might be asking: is this book for me? If you are an individual likely to identify yourself as an outcast, reading this is a great opportunity to relate yourself to other so-called "outcasts." Through this book, you are able to identify similarities and further compare yourself to the main characters. Even though this book is centered around this idea of being an outcast, I would still not limit my recommendations to only so-called "geeks." Individuals who are quite confident in their identities can still largely benefit from this book. If this is you, reading this book is a beneficial experience that will help you understand the steps needed to be someone's Mr. Katz and motivation in life. All in all, if you want a book that teaches you about real-world challenges and why to look in the present rather than in the past, this is the book to read.

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### **Patrick says**

Focusing on the lifestyle of "typical geeks," *Geeks: How Two Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho* tells the true story of two teenage boys living in an unchanging, unpromising town of Idaho. Not being part of the crowd, Jesse and Eric spent any time they had outside of school taking part in the activities that most kids their age didn't find interesting; 'geekdom' filled their lives via e-mails, modems, and motherboards. This was enough of a future for them at first, but it wouldn't be long until the two "geeks" would experience their lifestyle bringing them to new heights, rescuing them from Idaho, and transporting them to Chicago where they were, in fact, part of the crowd. "Geekdom" no longer meant seclusion or isolation; it meant opportunity and acceptance. Teachers' text collections will benefit in having Katz's *Geeks*, for reluctant readers may find appreciation in this exploration of "geekdom."

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### **Tabitha Nagy says**

This story starts in Caldwell, a small town in Idaho. It follows the lives of two recently graduated teenagers who live on their computers. They work for minimal pay, and discover almost everything they know on their own. Belonging to a Geek Club in high school, which was run by their favorite teacher, Mr. Brown, they discovered who they were, but felt trapped. It was as if their small town was a jail cell and the rest of the world was out there, but they had no way of getting to it. Jon Katz, the author of this book, discovers them through an email sent to him by one of the boys, Jesse Dailey, regarding his view on the geek ascension. Katz decides to throw his judgement to the wind, and go visit them in Idaho. He takes them on a thrilling ride by so willingly helping them move to Chicago to get a fresh start in a new world. Their story is a bumpy one, which covers struggling to fit in with the rest of society and overcoming challenging obstacles, such as money and work. They know that it will not be easy, and will likely never be easy, but they finally feel like they are free. Free from labels, from judgement and criticisms, they feel like they are on the way to a new and better life. You will see how these two boys take their differences and make a difference by accepting themselves for who they are, and making an impact on all people who feel just like they do; like geeks.

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### **Lindsay says**

I wrote a massive long review about how I hated this book, but it didn't save. Pretty much it's about two whiny 19 year old boys from Idaho (like myself) who hate it here and a the author gives the idea to move out

of state because there are jobs for geeks all over. So he helps them move to Chicago and helps them get jobs and even helps one of them get into college. First off, Idaho isn't as bad as they make it out to be. Second, if they hated it here so much, then they should've just made sure they had great grades in high school and went to a college out of state like a lot of my classmates did. And is the author going to go out and play daddy to all the other teens who feel misunderstood in high school. Maybe if they hadn't spent all their time online or acting out, they might have gotten the courage to try new things and make some new friends and feel like the fit in a bit better. But nope, they were geeks (as they called themselves) and did nothing but play online and become hermits. I have no sympathy for these guys. If you don't like how your life is, do something about it, because not everyone is going to be lucky enough to get a news reporter to help them with the hard stuff in life.

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### **Ryan Seeber says**

The story takes place in a small, rural town in Idaho with two geeks named Jesse and Erik living their normal lives. They are the stereotypical geeks, by having a love of computers and video games, but they are proud of being outsiders and go as far as to create a geek club for themselves. Their lives were bland and unexciting until a young reporter, and whom the story is told through, named Jon Katz wants to document their lives as geeks and outsiders. He offers an opportunity for them to get them out of Idaho and into the industrial city of Chicago. They risk everything to go there as if they fail to succeed to get a job and pay for rent or get kicked to the streets and lose everything.

What I like about the book is how this gives the geeks of the late 90's to the early 2000's a chance to be in the spotlight and show their journey throughout Chicago. What I dislike about it is the how you can be confused easily about who is talking because they are not exactly clear about it. I would give this story a 3 star rating because of the encouraging story about bravery, self motivation, and friendship between Jesse and Erik's trip to Chicago and after. The story is brought down by the mediocre ending and the confusing character dialogue. I would recommend this book to people interested about how geeks acted and were treated in the 90's and early 2000's.

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### **Veronica Zaleha says**

I read this book not long after it was published in 2000, but I think this is an important time to revisit it again. Katz describes the witch-hunt fall-out after Columbine directed toward students who qualified as different and/or who didn't fit in, and focuses on two teens in my home state of Idaho who don't fit in at their small town high school.

At this moment in history when we are finally seeing people rise up and proclaim enough, when we are finally seeing people demand our representatives care more about our children's lives than NRA money, (these people, by the way, mostly being young adult students!) I think Katz's thoughtful book is an important reminder.

I've seen some backlash to the student walk out promoting "walk up", and I've heard and read that student's need to "be nice", as a way to prevent school violence. I do believe there is a fine line between teaching our children empathy and compassion and engaging in victim blaming. Katz book reminds us not to scapegoat. Let us not put the responsibility on the victims here. Let us instead focus on easy availability of assault rifles, lack of funding for mental health, and schools not being given the resources to keep small classes and adequately address the many needs of our student populations.

I read Geeks with fellow teachers at the faculty book club I hosted in my high school library. We concurred that every teacher should read it. I'd like to recommend it to teachers and concerned citizens again!

## Darcy says

Couldn't hack it--the New York journalist author was continuously down on Idaho like it was the most backwoods hick place in the world and that he thought every intelligent life form would never be able to live here. He also thought geeks were the only intelligent life form on earth. I hate that narrow kind of thinking with snap judgements made and held as beliefs. Too bad. I would have liked to enjoy it for the local interest.

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## Trent Mikesell says

I had to read this as part of a training I am doing, but I really enjoyed it. I'm a half-geek, and could relate to some of the feelings in the novel. As a teacher, though, it really had an impact on me. It made me think about how I treat my students especially those who may socially be on the fringes. We have endorsements, trainings and classes about how to deal with many types of "at-risk" students. However, I have not participated in many at all (nor am I aware of many) that discuss how to deal with students who are socially at-risk. These students need our help, and I think many teachers need training on how to work with them.

With that said, I was a little offended when some of the people portrayed in the book said that teachers "didn't care if they lived or died" and ignored them if they were being bullied. Almost all of the teachers I know are very caring individuals. In fact, I would say that about most of the human beings that I know. We are overworked and may not notice things, but I don't know of many teachers who deliberately ignore students. I care about all of my students and I want them all to have happy and successful lives and I'm doing the best I know how to make sure that happens when they are in my sphere of influence. I'm getting so tired of hearing people talk about "teacher failure."

Sorry for the rant...don't let it turn you off from the book. It was great!

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## Matthew He says

"Geeks, How Two Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho" by Jon Katz is a very inspiring biography about how two people changed their lives through the the use of the internet and making their lives very much revolve around it. The book also shows that people like geeks can change their life to something better after school since the world needs geeks to keep business going. the biography starts off with the writer Jon Katz meeting two people named Jesse and Eric in a town in Idaho. Katz is interested because he wanted to write about geek lives. Both Jesse and Eric identified themselves as geeks, and loved to fiddle around with computer. Near the beginning, it is shown that Jesse and Eric don't really want to stick around and are depressed with their lives. It goes into a background of high school where it's shown geeks are tortured and aren't popular in a school environment. But soon fast forwarding to a time where Katz has been with them a while, he talks about how geeks are needed everywhere now, in a time where technology is rising. Because of this, Katz also proclaims a suggestion that they could move out of Idaho to Chicago and get better lives. Fast forward a bit where there are conflicts of Eric and Jesse having to pay for stuff, and them getting jobs and going to college. Places like the university of Chicago were places Eric and Jesse wanted to go, and it shows that through perseverance and Jesse background of being a geek, he got in. Throughout The Whole story, Jesse and Eric immensely improved their lives because of their geekiness. I do agree mostly about how geeks can change their lives for the better if their in a bad spot, and Katz probably put that into account when

he gave them inspiration throughout the story. The main theme this book introduced is that people that are geeks like Jesse and Eric are shaping the world through the rise of technology. It's show that they are now needed. Through logical reasoning, this can easily be seen. It probably even still applies today somewhat even after 15 years. It's interest and theme have lasted this long through multiple proofs in the biography, and with that, I think I can conclude the books claims are effective. In conclusion this books shows a reasonable claim with effective evidence and is a good read that is understandable.

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### **Awallens says**

This book is about two computer geeks who make their way from rural Idaho to Chicago for work and for a better life. It also blends the author's opinions— often unflattering and frankly annoying of Idaho and nongeeks— and also the social problems geeks often have. I wanted to like this book more, I really did. Having said that, I didn't for a number of reasons. I didn't like how the author portrayed Idaho. Surely he could have found one or two nice things to say about the inhabitants, because the negativity really got old fast. Also, I feel he really abandoned Eric in favor of the more successful Jessie. Overall the book was OK, and made you think, but I wasn't to thrilled with the human aspect of it.

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### **Alma Merchant says**

Mr. Katz, the author of Geeks, wanted to re-define the term "geek" as the word was known as the stereotype of computing, but Mr. Katz wanted to show/represent geeks as a culture. However, to prove his understanding, Mr. Katz needed to find his own pair of geeks to document their life. Mr. Katz had stumbled upon Jesse and Eric, who have been geeks their whole life. Jesse and Eric worked at dead-end, low paying jobs as they were forced to make a living for themselves. However, Mr. Katz knew that Jesse and Eric could have been doing bigger and better things in life as geeks were an universal need. Once Jesse and Eric realized that they could be in a better position, they knew it was time for a change, so they flew to Chicago to start their new journey. When starting their new journey, Jesse and Eric wanted to transform the term "geek", but their outcome did not end up like they had hoped.

In addition, Geeks is not a traditional written story as it never had a plot. This is because I feel that Mr. Katz put a lot of his input which took away from the main purpose of the book. However, Geeks did change my perspective of the term "geek" as I realized that not every environment is made for a certain person. Therefore, being different does not always have to be negative as being different can be a positive aspect in life, too. Overall, I would recommend this book as even though the author took away from the essence of the book, it showed me that even one person can make a difference in your life no matter how big or small the change can be.

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