



The Boundless

Kenneth Oppel

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The Boundless train is on its maiden voyage across the country. When first-class passenger Will Everett gets the key to a train car containing priceless treasures, he becomes the target of sinister figures from his past. To survive, Will joins a travelling circus, helped by ringmaster leader Mr. Dorian, and Maren, a girl his age and an expert escape artist.

The Boundless Details

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From Reader Review The Boundless for online ebook

Joshua Whiting says

This review was posted on granitemedia.org: <http://www.granitemedia.org/2014/11/t...>

A cross-continental Canadian steampunk circus train con job adventure, plus sasquatch to boot.

Through a classic rags-to-riches turn of events our young man Will Everett finds himself traveling first class on The Boundless, the largest steam engine train ever built, for its maiden transcontinental voyage. However, when Will witnesses a murder and becomes a target himself, he must literally join the circus on-board the immense train in order to save himself, his friend the mysterious escape artist Maren, his father the railroad magnate and head engineer, and possibly the entire train.

Like many Americans, I know perilously little about Canadian history and geography. The Boundless is an unapologetically Canadian book, and it's all the better for it, but it is also a book that plays fast and loose with reality. Sasquatches and other mythical creatures are accounted as real, so being an ignorant American it is hard to know just where the historical realities end and the fantasies begin. Poking around on the Internet after finishing this book I was almost surprised to find that William Cornelius Van Horne was in fact a real railroad president who actually did manage the colossal construction of a transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railroad. But was his body actually interred in an electrified railcar tomb filled with treasure? Did the mighty Boundless engine actually exist and pull 900-plus cars in one cross-country trip? Who knows? Who cares? This is just a fun adventure and its historical Canadian setting only makes it all the more fantastic for American readers, while giving Canadian readers a great national children's novel to get behind.

Content note: this book portrays violence, some minor swearing of the damn and hell variety from the bad guys, brandy-clinking and cigar-smoking Robber Barrons with impeccable facial hair, a creepy animatronic severed hand, scenes of sustained tightrope walking, and more.

A few possible read-alikes: The Lost Kingdom by Matthew J. Kirby, The P.K. Pinkerton Western Mysteries by Caroline Lawrence, and The Mark of the Dragonfly by Jaleigh Johnson, anything by Jules Verne.

Mandy says

Actually more like 3.5 stars.

I found this entertaining, particularly as I got towards the end, but I'm not the target audience for this book and I think it showed. If I'd read this as a child I think I would have loved it though.

Our main protagonist is Will Everett, whose father works on the railroads and, following an accident three years earlier in which he saved his boss's life, has been promoted through the ranks to rise to the top of the company.

The Boundless is the longest train ever built, and it is on its maiden voyage. Will is accompanying his father on this trip, along with a circus troop, and the funeral car carrying the body of Cornelius Van Horne, aforementioned boss.

Will finds himself caught up in all sorts of adventures, and I think that any middle-grader would really enjoy this.

The story moves along at a cracking pace, and Will himself is an extremely likeable main character. He is well fleshed out and easy to identify with. The other characters in the book are also quite well drawn.

A long time ago, when I was a lot younger, I loved books like this, and as I was reading this, it did spark

some fond memories for me.

I did enjoy the writing too, and I will be reading more from this author I think, as a few people have told me this book is not necessarily his best.

Richard Denney says

1 STAR!

I really, really wanted to enjoy this book. It had trains, which I love, it took place in an alternate Victorian era, and it was an adventure. But alas I could not get past two very big things, the first it being so incredibly boring and slow. It took at least 200 pages to get going and it takes place on a train which you'd think would go by even quicker, but no. There's also a hint of romance in this which I wasn't for, you all know how I feel about MG books with romance in them. I don't like it. This could've been a favorite of mine, and that cover!! it's gorgeous but it just didn't work out for me. NOW! let's get to the second and most important to me, the usage of Blackface/Brownface as a disguise. I won't spoil it too much but Blackface/Brownface is used on the main character in this book and how the author didn't see that that was a gigantic no-no is beyond me. And what bothers me even more is that other reviews on Goodreads haven't mentioned this.

Lately I've been seeing a discussion going around on Twitter about authors who write historical fiction disregarding diversity because of the time period they write in and I think it's a load of bull. It's historical FICTION for a reason, you can do whatever you want with it. So using the time periods as an excuse needs to stop. And I feel like that is the argument that would be used in this book's case. But as I said above, this takes place in an alternate Victorian era, again ALTERNATE so this is the author's own creation of the Victorian era we are reading and maybe the usage of Blackface/Brownface was unintentional, but still, it doesn't mean it isn't WRONG.

All in all I'd say to pass on this. Something I would recommend better than this is The Invention of Hugo Cabret by Brian Selznick. Now that is a Historical Fiction Middle-Grade book done right with lots of adventure and an amazing young protagonist. - Richard

Alisha Marie says

God, I'm such a sucker for a book with a beautiful cover. And my God, the cover of The Boundless is stunning. I really wish that the story was at least half as beautiful or stunning as the cover is. I wish that I would've found The Boundless even slightly interesting. But alas, it was not meant to be.

Here's my issue with The Boundless...it was boring. I'm talking coma-inducing boring. The beginning was meh, so I thought "Let me give it at least until the middle. I'm sure it'll pick up by then". But it didn't. And once I reached the end, I thought "good riddance". The Boundless is pretty much bland characters doing bland things that are masquerading as adventurous...only it wasn't. Not even a little bit.

Another thing that annoyed me about The Boundless was Will's characterization. This is someone who is about 17. Yet his actions and his thoughts are those of a little kid, not an almost adult. It seems as though the author dumbed him down to justify an older teenager being a protagonist of what is essentially a children's novel instead of just having it be YA.

So, overall, I found The Boundless to be blah. I just wasn't the least bit intrigued and literally had to force

myself to finish it. Now that I have, I'm breathing a sigh of relief. I say, skip it.

R.J. says

I feel kind of guilty for not loving this book more, because there is really nothing technically wrong with it -- at least not that jumped out at me while I was reading it. But for some reason I just didn't love the characters or the story enough to get excited. Pity, because there are a lot of great ideas here -- but for whatever reason, I was just not the right reader for this particular story.

That wouldn't keep me from recommending this book to others who might find it more to their interest, though. Opper is a solid writer with some clever ideas and plenty of action in his stories, and I think readers who are looking primarily for those qualities should really enjoy it.

Jesse (JesseTheReader) says

Here's a video with my thoughts on The Boundless: <http://youtu.be/6nuH818MRkE>

Maureen says

3.5/5 stars

BOOKTUBEATHON BOOK #5 DONE BLESS UP.

I enjoyed this a lot! It was more exciting than I thought it would be. I loved the story, but the characters didn't have a lot of growth, or at least growth that made sense. It was mostly all about the plot, which in this case was good, so not a total loss! I loved the descriptions of the cars on the boundless because that seriously sounds like a train I want to be on. Overall enjoyable though not incredible!

Lee Födi says

I was privileged to attend a Kenneth Opper launch of this book and hear a lot about the genesis of this idea. He's taken an interesting approach with this book. By mythologizing Canadian history, he takes us on a journey across Canada, from Halifax to Victoria, via a Titanic-inspired train that is populated with famous personalities such as Sam Steele and creatures such as a Sasquatch. Personally, I enjoyed the use of present tense, which really serves to ground the reader in the moment (an interesting tactic for a book that takes place in the past).

The hardcover edition has a nice bonus at the back . . . a ticket for The Boundless, and another one for the Zirkus Dante.

Penny McGill says

A truly great book that kept me up - reading - all in just one evening. An evening that flew by and very little laundry was folded and put away. This isn't the first Kenneth Oppel book that I've read (or read aloud to my kids) that made me think it would make a fantastic movie. We loved it. I'm always on the edge of my seat when I read that he'll publish something new but I almost felt like I'd won the lottery when I saw the blog post where he mentioned all of the research for this book. It's like a gift to parents when a popular author ties his suspenseful story telling to things that actually happened in our country's history (I know that some parts were fictional; but not the sasquatches, right?) I couldn't stop talking about this book when I had finished it but my kids just grabbed it right up when they saw the name on the front cover and stopped listening to my enthusiasms.

There really is something a bit magical about his writing. The sentences all seem to knit together in your mind and make the scenes come alive on an internal movie screen. We had a lot of fun talking about train that the novel is named after; would it actually be possible to have a steam engine that was several kilometres long? Would people choose to travel on it the same way they did in this book? Would Will Evrett's father really have risen so quickly in the railway organization? Some of the technical discussions we had about the train related to the way Oppel described the flying ships in the Airborn or the libraries of the mansion in Such Wicked Intent... and then we also started thinking about the trains that Katniss and Peeta travel on. We did agree it was a book for middle-grade kids and not an easy sell to teens, however some super fans will love reading it anyway. No risk here. Sasquatches and a windigo! Come on, it's Canadiana at it's very best.

This book has given us so much to talk about at home and I know families will love it. It is high on my list for gift giving (shhhh) but I will also pass it out to patrons at the library, much as I have with other fantastic books Kenneth Oppel has written. This guy always has a 100% success rate for me at work. Any patron or parent that takes home an Oppel book comes back happy and I know they'll feel the same way about this book. It's one of his best and I am so grateful (even though I woke up very tired the morning after I read it - too little sleep).

Alissa says

This is not a book I would have picked up on my own (it was given to me to review). So I was pleasantly surprised at how much I liked it once I got into it. For this reason, five stars!

Gilbert says

A train. A murder. Not very original... But, not so fast. What Kenneth Oppel does in that context with this story is very original. Only he'd think to add a raucously circus made of creative characters, headed by the mysterious Mr Dorian; an element of eerie with the muskeg; somehow incorporate sasquatches; and make the setting so unique and vibrant aboard the nine-hundred-eighty-seven car long imagined train. I would love for this to be made into a movie. (Of course I would want to be Will, though, and in several more years, maybe Mr Dorian... ;)

My gripe is that the ending was rushed and almost bland, especially contrasted with such a build-up. The characters seem to say what they're supposed to say, and do what they're supposed to do, to wrap up the story. And that's when you can sort of remember that the story is being told by someone; you wake up from

the "fictional dream" that the writer/professor John Gardner talks about; the author intrudes on the story.
(view spoiler)

This is the first book I've read from Kenneth Oppel since several years ago (I read Silverwing, Sunwing, and Firewing)... and I enjoyed it. Despite my agitations, I love Mr Oppel's writing, the way he makes characters come alive, and mostly, I love his imagination.

Cyan The Clockwork Fangirl says

This book was hecka dope!! My friend recommended it for book club and I'm so glad she did!! This book has action that's perfectly paced throughout the book. The events of the first chapter really just grab you and take you along for the ride! I DEFINITELY recommend reading this book!! You certainly won't regret it!!

Renee says

This review is based on an ARC. I found "The Boundless" entertaining, but not as gripping as Oppel's other books. The narration style took me a while to settle into, though I was never completely comfortable with his voice; it seemed choppy. I liked that the book was set in Canada and tried to portray light and dark parts of Canada's history (i.e. the last spike ceremony, CNR, treatment of aboriginal peoples, colonials and whites). The antagonists seemed a bit one-dimensional: they were thugs looking for gold they thought was owed to them. Maybe I've been reading "A Song of Ice and Fire" too much, but I expected the Brogan character to have more depth. Overall, a good story with the twists you expect from Oppel, but not the same punch.

John Cho says

The Boundless by Kenneth Oppel

I highly recommend this book to those who love thrillers and want a book that keeps you on the edge of your seat. This book is full of mystery, wonder, and packed with action. A touch of fantasy here, a touch of history there, and tons of action and suspense will intrigue and make anyone want to read this book. The Boundless is not your typical book about good versus evil, it shows the other side of stories and that maybe good can be bad and that bad can be good. Will Everett is a curious adventurous boy, desiring excitement and adventure aboard the Boundless, the longest train known to man. Everything goes smoothly on the ride until Will wanders off at one of the stops, then everything takes a turn for the worst. He eventually finds himself between a rock and a hard place, debating on what he thinks right and wrong. And when a murderer is after him fueled by greed and rage, he must pick a side. The consequence is his life, or even worse, the lives of everyone he knows and loves on the train. From fights on top of a train alongside a circus to discovering sasquatches within the Rockies, this book is sure to keep you turning pages for hours.

Val says

This book is too amazing to write about. Highly recommended!!

