



The Unheralded King of Preston Plains Middle

Jedah Mayberry

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Red City Review Annual Book Awards Grand Prize

From irascible patriarch Alonzo Grandpa Tuke Tooker on down, the Hopkins family altruistic Dottie, dissatisfied Chester, and their sons Langston and Trajan are no typical residents of the Thames River Valley town of Preston, Connecticut. This is perhaps most true of Langston, a boy whose peers declare him to be the King of Preston Plains Middle School: a vibrant young man dedicated to his dream of competing in Olympic-level Tae Kwon Do, as well as to his growing passion for his beautiful classmate Angelica Chu. Yet when a terrible accident brings Langston's Olympic dreams to an abrupt close, Trajan Hopkins, the family's youngest son, must learn to cope alone with the coming trials of adult life: his slowly changing relationship with self-destructing childhood friends, his initiation into the world of women at the hands of a former teacher, and his growing awareness of the risky world outside his family's circle within the shadow of a Haitian drug lord's operation and the often-threatening local police who watch over it. Jedah Mayberry's *The Unheralded King of Preston Plains Middle* marks the debut of a striking new voice in American fiction: intelligent, richly cadenced, slyly funny, and deeply thoughtful about what it means to be a son, a father, and a man.

The Unheralded King of Preston Plains Middle Details

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Author : Jedah Mayberry

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From Reader Review The Unheralded King of Preston Plains Middle for online ebook

Michelle Rosado says

Loved reading about the town where I grew up and also was married in. This was a solid read and I enjoyed it.

Simon says

Recommended by one of the online review sites this is a really a really wonderful coming of age novel that is rich in detail and has an authentic feel. I would love to read more from this author. His prose are a genuine pleasure and though they do tend to get lost in the detail at times I think create a very distinctive literary voice.

Annastew1144hotmail.com says

I would describe The unheralded King Of Preston Plains Middle in three ways. First very well written, two a coming of age novel that reflects the realities of life and three thought provoking. If this Jedah Mayberry's first novel I cant wait to see what his second one will be.

OOSA says

Am I My Brother's keeper?

When Trajan Hopkins loses his brother in a freak accident, the family is pressed to find the answers to what happened and why. Instead of leaning on each other, each person goes into their own shell without reaching for the comfort of each other. His mother, Dottie, stays locked in her room for days at a time. His father, Chester, who left the family years earlier for another woman, stops by for random visits. Trajan struggles to grow up in the shadow of a brother that he never really understood.

Meanwhile, Trajan is coming of age with no one to really talk to about his growing pains except for his grandfather and delinquent friends. He finds comfort in unexpected places, which only leaves him more confused and wondering what his place is in the world.

I applaud Mayberry's efforts to write a coming-of-age novel about a young man's passage into manhood. However, the story is weighed down with too many descriptive narratives that prove to be unnecessary to the plot. For example, there is a lot of detail given to explain the family lineage of one of Trajan's friends. This information was not needed for the reader to understand the plot. Many of the characters received this type of detailed background information that weighed the story down. This could be a good novel if it were edited to remove these extraneous passages.

Reviewed by: Flashette

Matthew Hiley says

Jedah Mayberry has a raw, unique voice. I enjoyed the originality he offers in the way his characters develop throughout this powerful story. I look forward to his future offerings.

Byron Edgington says

Here we have a growing up tale of two brothers whose lives take very different paths. When one dies, the other loses sight of who he is, becoming defined through the book by what his dead brother might have been. 'Langston' is the older brother of 'Trajan.' Langston is also Trajan's idol, "...my whole world," the younger Hopkins boy says at one point. The older boy also seems to be the title character, though that designation could be given to other roles in the book, as we shall see.

Langston, who as the author states "...entered the world fists balled" receives a debilitating head injury in a fight with school rival named Albert, the brother of Langston's love interest, Angelica. After the fight and the head injury, Langston is left with a seizure disorder. He struggles to find his way, loses Angelica, cannot find a life purpose and lands in police custody. When he dies of a seizure under the stress of being arrested—on spurious charges it must be said—younger brother Trajan is bereft.

So is Langston's mother Dottie, father Chester and grandfather Tuke. But it is Trajan who must now define himself without the role model he once had. Trajan's father, Chester, leaves the family, mother Dottie retires to her bedroom, becoming a recluse and Trajan is left, at a young age, to strike out on his own.

Trajan maneuvers through school activities, a responsible work assignment, casual female friendships and sports. He falls in with a woman who idolized Langston, and who was a one time teacher to both Hopkins boys. Mrs. Quigley and Trajan become lovers, and the clandestine relationship ushers Trajan into adulthood in more ways than one.

returning home from the Quigley house through a snowstorm, Trajan stumbles upon a murder scene, in which a man is dead and a woman survives. The crime is the work of Luscious, a local drug kingpin. For inadvertently covering the criminal's tracks in the snow, Luscious delivers Trajan home. The encounter sets up the climax of the book.

Mr. Mayberry has told quite a story here, a tale that barely masks itself as autobiography, it appears, but in a fictional way. This reader found not one typo, and the work is syntactically excellent and well edited. The writing is quite beautiful. For example: discussing the loss of Langston, Angelica was, "...losing him in a trillion tiny pieces, grains of him sliding past her with magnificent force." Instead of birds and bees, Trajan learns about, "...butterflies and ladybugs." Raucous music on a dance floor is like "...that of cats being pushed from high places." A jock that Angelica clings to is, according to Trajan, "...a muscle on skates." However, the story contains so many subplots and peripheral themes it is almost unwieldy.

Indeed, that's one of its only shortcomings. It's a good tale, all in all, but the numerous trajectories and character detours subtract from an otherwise fine story. Is it necessary to include the Sessions family history? All the native American background? The Took family's extensive history for that matter? Also, considering the subject matter, the emotional level seems a bit temperate. We don't see Dottie's grief when her older son dies, we only hear of it. We don't feel the tension when Trajan and Mrs. Quigley are nearly discovered in their tryst. We sense the conflict when Luscious and EZ confront each other at the end, when Trajan is in jeopardy as well, but we don't see it, don't smell it, or feel it.

In the end, it is Trajan, the young man who survives the loss of his big brother, the depredations of a drug lord and the absence of a mother or father figure in a hostile world who is the true Unheralded King of Preston Plains Middle.

Byron Edgington, author of *The Sky Behind Me: A Memoir of Flying & Life*

Heather says

A friend of mine recommended this book to me because it's from an author who grew up in Southeastern Connecticut where I live. I like reading local authors and books that take place in this area.

When I first began to read the book, I wasn't entirely sure what the book was going to be about. After I read 98% of the book, I still wasn't sure what the book was about. The last 2% gave me something to grasp onto, but it just wasn't enough to give an accurate succinct summary of the book.

Being from Southeastern CT, I thought the rivalries and feelings between the different ethnicities could have been played out more. It seemed watered down.

The book was a lot of book for little gain. I think it would stand better as a collection of short stories that happen to all relate to each other. If I had read all the different story lines over time as short stories, I think I would have enjoyed it more. Maybe a stronger theme would better emerge.

One local error: Connecticut College is NOT a community college like Three Rivers is. Rather it's a very respectable four year college that costs an arm and a leg. Perhaps the author meant UCONN Avery Point? Or was thinking of Mitchell College, although I think that is primarily a four year college, too.

Overall, the writing was very nice. I enjoyed the descriptions. I think the storytelling was better suited for short fiction stories, but enjoyable. It was the merging of all of the stories that I didn't enjoy. Nor did I like the different sections of the chapters.

I think other readers would probably enjoy this book more than I. I suspect others would rate it higher.

Marie says

As I am familiar with the area of Preston and Norwich, it was a hoot to read a story based in this area. I did trip up in the beginning when I found myself picturing the true location instead of the story location. I loved the storytelling of Trajan and his family. Jedah Mayberry sets the storytelling of Trajan's growing up as if he was sitting around the campfire and talking about a friend. As he tells the story he fills in the background and past; this could be confusing if you were trying to read it like a novel with chapters to separate past and present. I cannot wait to attend this year's CT Authors Trail and meet him in person at the Preston Public Library.

Michael Noll says

When I was a boy, my grandmother used to tell stories about our family. The stories never proceeded in a straight line. She'd stop and say, "Well, you know So-and-so was related to So-and-so" and then tell some crazy story about a person I'd never heard of but who was distantly related to me. After years of these stories, I gained a deep sense of the interwoven threads of the tapestry that was my family history. The child or cousin or grandkid of So-and-so would inevitably pop up in another story. What I learned was there are no truly independent souls. We are all the products of the people who came before us, and to truly understand

ourselves, we must first understand the progression of lives, the stories, and places that led to our first feeble cries. And we must recognize that we, too, will become part of the family history, one story among many.

It's a rare novel that captures the entire tapestry of a family history. The Unheralded King of Preston Plains Middle is one of those books. Though the story is about a young boy's entry into manhood in the midst of tragedy, it is also about the men and women whose lives intertwined in order to allow his story to exist. Jedah Mayberry has written a novel that will sit among the likes of *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones, *Sula* by Toni Morrison, and *The Farming of Bones* by Edwidge Danticat. In other words, *The Unheralded King of Preston Plains* is a marvelous and ambitious first novel, and Jedah Mayberry is a writer to keep your eyes on.
