Nightmare at the Book Fair by Dan Gutman

Readers (Including Reluctant Ones) Will Enjoy The Genius Concept Of These Rapid-Fire Stories

Trip Dinkleman hates to read. Hates, hates, hates it. All he wants to do is play lacrosse. So when the president of the PTA asks Trip to help her out on his way to tryouts, he is not happy. He is even more not happy when a stack of books tumbles onto his head and knocks him out cold. And he is even more not happy when he wakes up and has absolutely no idea where he is. Now all he wants to do is get home. But after encountering a haunted house, aliens, talking animals, and much, much more, he realizes getting home might be just a little bit harder to do than he thought.

Personal Review: Nightmare at the Book Fair by Dan Gutman
Trip Dinkleman is looking forward to going out for lacrosse. On his way to tryouts, he gets waylaid at the media center. Trip notices a big sign on the wall that reads "THIS WAY TO THE BOOK FAIR!" There is nothing in the world less interesting to him than a book fair because he doesn't like to
read. Reading is just plain boring. While he's thinking about how much he detests reading, Mrs. Pontoon, the PTA president, asks him to help move book boxes. She says it will only be for a few minutes.

As Trip maneuvers an extremely heavy crate of books, it keels over and lands on his head. And when he opens his eyes, he finds that he is a character in the middle of a horror story called "Sugar Shock." He's invited into a haunted house by a girl who swears it's the scariest haunted house he'll ever enter. Of course, Trip is a little bit disoriented by finding himself at a boardwalk instead of the school's media center, but he decides not to worry about it and just go with the flow. However, the haunted house is beyond creepy. He screams out loud when he sees a cat with a dog's face. Then he's tempted by a funnel cake displayed in the haunted house's kitchen. There's nothing Trip loves more than a good funnel cake. He can't resist taking a big bite...and then finds out about the secret ingredient (yech!) just when a fellow named Professor Psycho is about to get the best of him...

Trip finds himself starring in a sports fiction story called "The Game on the Line." Can he save the day for his team, playing in the Super Bowl? But that's just the first of many questions for our hero as he enters story after story in genres covering adventure, science fiction (aliens try to save the world!), humor (slapstick silliness complete with tons of "boy" jokes), mystery, reference (definitions with a hidden message), historical fiction (in which Trip finds himself on the Apollo 11), easy reader (a poem that inspired the author to apologize to Dr. Seuss), animal fiction, fantasy, and a gender-bending girls' fiction story. Trip's adventures end with a final wink and a nod to THE WIZARD OF OZ.

The tongue-in-cheek fantasy "The Quest for the Gold-Plated Knick-Knack" is an especially appealing rib-tickler. It opens with the description "ice formed on the dell like the sound of invisible feet bathing delicately in the shaded depths and ancient whispers of twilight's soft darkness," continuing on in that manner until concluding, "But it doesn't matter, because none of that crap makes any sense." Next, Trip meets the judicious and mystical mentor named Hockaloogie, who explains that his purpose in the plot is to show up randomly, speak in Old English and not give away important information...just because.

Readers (including reluctant ones) will enjoy the genius concept of these rapid-fire stories, covering such a wide spectrum of genres. The stories themselves are filled with adventure and humor, and move at a rapid pace. Although Trip himself could be a little more fleshed out, the tales are way too fun to resist. And there's certainly something for everyone in the inspired NIGHTMARE AT THE BOOK FAIR.

--- Reviewed by Terry Miller Shannon

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