



# Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe

*Preston Norton*

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## Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe Preston Norton

Cliff Hubbard is a huge loser. Literally. His nickname at Happy Valley High School is Neanderthal because he's so enormous — 6'6" and 250 pounds to be exact. He has no one at school and life in his trailer park home has gone from bad to worse ever since his older brother's suicide.

There's no one Cliff hates more than the nauseatingly cool quarterback, Aaron Zimmerman. Then Aaron returns to school after a near-death experience with a bizarre claim: while he was unconscious he saw God, who gave him a list of things to do to make Happy Valley High suck less. And God said there's only one person who can help: Neanderthal.

To his own surprise, Cliff says he's in. As he and Aaron make their way through the List, which involves a vindictive English teacher, a mysterious computer hacker, a decidedly unchristian cult of Jesus Teens, the local drug dealers, and the meanest bully at HVHS — Cliff feels like he's part of something for the first time since losing his brother. But fixing a broken school isn't as simple as it seems, and just when Cliff thinks they've completed the List, he realizes their mission hits closer to home than he ever imagined.

## Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe Details

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Author : Preston Norton

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# From Reader Review Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe for online ebook

## Nat says

Warning: NOT suitable for my seventh-grade followers. But HOLY CANOLI. This book had everything I want in a young-adult-high-school-experience-address-all-of-the-angst novel. I don't think I've ever laughed so much reading a work of fiction, nor have I ever felt so much "YES. THAT." in reading about a *true* existential quandary from a teen perspective. A novel about hurt, and healing, and God, and "God?", and first love, and nerd debates cranked up to eleven... this book is so much YES.

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## Rebecca says

Cliff aka Neanderthal is just trying to make it through high school and grieving the loss of his brother, while a constant victim of bullying and parental abuse, drowned in toxic masculinity at every turn. That is until he winds up on a mission from god, bringing together an unlikely ragtag band in the process of trying to make the school a better place. Much like my recent read of *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, this tackles some really hard topics like suicide, abuse, coming out, drug addiction yet remains an incredibly hopeful and feel good story.

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## Carole (Carole's Random Life in Books) says

This review can also be found at [Carole's Random Life in Books](#).

My thoughts are somewhat mixed regarding this book. I really had no trouble reading it and did enjoy the story but it was missing that extra spark that it would have needed to make it great. It was a book that was pretty easy to set aside because I never felt completely invested in the story. There were a lot of issues address in this story and in some ways it felt like nothing went beyond the surface level. I did find the book entertaining and am glad that I decided to pick it up.

Cliff is huge which is one of the reasons that his classmates refer to him as Neanderthal. He leads a rather solitary life and is dealing with the loss of his brother not too long ago. Cliff and Aaron are not friends at the start of this book. Aaron is the popular quarterback so he has very little in common with Cliff . When Aaron has a near death experience, he partners with Cliff to fulfill a to-do list that he received from God. The list is very specific and everything on it is tied to their high school. If they can accomplish all of the tasks, the school will undoubtedly benefit from their efforts.

This book touches on so many issues. I actually think that it would have improved the story if fewer issues were dealt with but in greater detail. Cliff and Aaron are not only dealing with their list but they are also developing relationships including their own friendship. Some of the items on the list sound almost impossible and other will require some investigation before they can even begin.

I liked the characters but I never felt like I completely connected with them. The book is told from Cliff's point of view and I didn't feel like I got to know any of the other key players beyond the surface level. Even

during some parts of the book that were more emotional, I found that I was rather unmoved. I think I would have liked this book a lot more if I had been able to develop an emotional connection with any of the characters.

I did enjoy the story and thought that it had a lot of unique aspects. I do think that a lot of readers will enjoy this one a bit more than I did. I wouldn't hesitate to read more from Preston Norton in the future.

*I received a digital review copy of this book from Disney-Hyperion via NetGalley.*

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## **Larry H says**

"You know what the most dystopian idea in the world is to me?" I asked. "The idea that our feelings don't matter. We might as well be robots."

Since his older brother died, Cliff Hubbard has been alone. He has no friends in high school, but he can't sneak through undetected, since he's 6'6" and weighs 250 pounds. He couldn't be any more noticeable; his classmates have bestowed upon him the nickname "Neanderthal." They ridicule him and mock his size, his appetite, his appearance, his loneliness.

But things are, perhaps, worse in his trailer-park home. His unemployed father, usually drunk, sits around and broods and takes out his frustration on Cliff, as he also used to do with Shane. Sometimes that frustration is expressed through verbal abuse, but more often than not it's manifested through physical violence. Cliff's mother, who works herself to the bone so they don't get evicted, sees what her husband has done to her sons, but she mostly keeps quiet, which angered both Shane and Cliff.

While there are a lot of people in school Cliff doesn't like, it's golden-boy quarterback Aaron Zimmerman he hates the most. Aaron coasts through life, driving his classic sports car, having every girl in school throw themselves at him, while he and his friends ridicule those they feel are beneath them. Even the teachers give Aaron a pass.

And then one day Aaron returns to school after being in a coma following an accident. He says he had a near-death experience, during which he spoke to God, who gave him a mission: make Happy Valley High School suck less. This mission has five components that will ensure success and God tells Aaron the one person that can help him is Neanderthal. As crazy as the whole thing sounds, Cliff eventually agrees to help Aaron, both because he wants to make school suck less perhaps more than anyone (except God), and for the first time, he has a friend, a purpose.

The mission isn't an easy one: they need to set the school's meanest bully on a different path, help a gang of drug dealers realize the error of their ways, help an angry English teacher recapture his passion for teaching, deal with the school's most vindictive club, the Jesus Teens, and stop a hacker who seems to know everything that is going on. Nearly everyone thinks they're crazy, but they're more than happy to sit back and watch them fail, because it's not easy to fix a school that's so badly broken.

The deeper Cliff wades into Aaron's mission (or is it God's?), the more he starts to come into himself, and the more he realizes how little he actually knew about his brother. And while fixing what is broken in school, as in the rest of his life, isn't easy, for the first time he realizes he is more than what people say about him.

*Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe* is a mash-up of a lot of elements prevalent in YA fiction these days, but Preston Norton puts his own twist on things. Cliff is such a memorable character—my heart just hurt for him at times, and I just wanted him to open up to people, because here's this smart, sensitive kid that everyone ridicules because of how he looks. There are a lot of supporting characters, some of whom are really fascinating, and some which don't rise above typical teen clichés.

There's a lot going on in this book, and at times I wish that Norton had concentrated the plot on one or two threads rather than multiple ones. I loved the way he pulled everything together, however, and I'll admit I was even surprised at one point with a twist he threw in. Some of the dialogue definitely rivals John Green's, but I think there's a lot more subtle (and not-so-subtle) sensitivity at play here, too. And, yeah, it choked me up, too. Damned book.

I've been reading a good amount of YA in recent years and I'm always blown away by the talent and the quality of writing that is out there. I wish not every book set in high school dealt with bullying (which seems to get crueler and crueler with every book) and teachers and administrators who let it go on unabated, if not encourage it. Believe me, I know bullying exists and the reality is, it *is* getting crueler, especially with the anonymity of the internet, but sometimes these books hit a little too close to home for me, even years and years after high school.

*Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe* really has a lot of charm and a lot of heart. Cliff is a special character I won't stop thinking about for a while, and I look forward to seeing what's next from Preston Norton.

NetGalley and Disney-Hyperion provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blog...>

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## **Brian says**

Clifford is a high school student who is used to being on the outs. At 6'6 and 250 lbs, he is a giant of a teen. He lives with his hard working mother and physically abusive father in a very small house. In school he is often ignored and picked on and has been given the nickname "Neanderthal." One day, a bully named Aaron who often picks on Cliff gets a head injury and thinks he has seen God. He has a list of tasks that he has to complete and decides to enlist Cliff to assist him. From there, we are taken on a journey that involves a major mystery as well as some great and fun characters that are introduced along the way. The book is very well written and is extremely gripping. I like the characterization of all of the characters included and the growth that each of them shows (or in some cases, doesn't show). The book has a lot of twists and turns that will keep the reader engaged. This is probably the best teen book I have read in a long while. This was reviewed from an ARC.

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## **OutlawPoet says**

Ever read one of those books where you're only halfway through, but you already want to tell everyone you know to read it? But you can't at that exact moment in time because you've got tears pouring down your face

and you can't find the Kleenex and everyone will want to know if you're okay?

This is that book.

It's honest, irreverent, sweet, funny, incredibly sad, and still hopeful.

Some of the characters curse a mile a minute. Some do drugs. You have homophobia, intolerance, and even parental abuse. Yet, it's such a beautiful story.

Neanderthal (Cliff) and Aaron are just about the most awesome duo in YA lit. Two guys who you would think would never, ever be friends – who end up changing the lives of those around them. I loved the motley crew of kids who join their cause. And I simply loved how everything ended up.

This is an absolute five star read. I want more.

\*ARC Provided via Net Galley

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### **Stacee says**

This book was pitched to me and I loved the synopsis and cover, but somehow it got buried. When I finally found it and got around to reading it, I was angry that I had waited so long.

I love love loved Cliff. He's so weary and tired of dealing with all of the bs life has dealt him. And yet, he hasn't given up. He's hopeful. His inner monologue is absolutely hysterical and had me actually laughing out loud. There are a core group of other characters who are fantastic, but this story is all about Cliff.

Plot wise, I didn't know what to expect. I was drawn in from the beginning and was captivated in reading Cliff, Aaron, and their band of merry men and women figured out how to create change.

Overall, this book was heartbreaking and hopeful and relatable af. I could have easily read 100 more pages.

\*\*Huge thanks to Hyperion for providing the arc free of charge\*\*

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### **Paula M. of Her Book Thoughts! says**

**EVERY BIT OF PERFECT!!!!** Full review will be posted. Expect nothing but praise.

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### **Mrs. Europaea says**

I really wanted to like this, I wanted to like it so much that I forced myself to finish this even though by page 60 I was beyond ready to call it quits BUT I kept thinking that Norton would surprise me at some point making my determination worth it. I was wrong.

What is there to say? Aside from Cliff's size, he had no interesting qualities which is disappointing

considering he is the main character. His relationship with Aaron was completely absurd, even if you attempted to suspend all rationale it still didn't feel genuine much like his relationship with Tegan. The dialogue was cringe-worthy, there was a complete lack of imagery.

I did appreciate bringing up the issues of LGBTQI students in small towns but I felt like it was handled poorly. I don't think Norton did a good job changing the perception at all for any students so it felt kind of pointless to even bring up the subject in the first place.

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## **Irena says**

Warning: This novel contains strong language and touches the topic of suicide.

Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe is the one novel I feel like I had on my kindle app for the longest time. I got it unsolicited from the publisher (which I'm very thankful for) way before it was published, and then at first I saved it so I could read it closer to it's releasing day, but then life got in a way, I hit that blogging and reviewing slump, and this book was one of the victims of the mental state I was in.

As Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe was on many bloggers lists of favorite books of 2018, I decided it was the time for me to read this book myself, and now when I finished it, I only feel sorry I didn't get this book a chance sooner, because it was amazing!

The story follows Cliff who is known at school as Neanderthal because of his height. He got into fight with a popular boy at school, Aaron Zimmerman, and he is on his mission to get revenge.

However, after nearly death experience Aaron comes back to school claiming that God spoke to him, and gave him the list to make their high school a better place, and Cliff is the chosen one to help him complete the list.

From there we watch a new friendship being born and follow our main characters on their adventure to discover life.

First of all, this book is really funny. It talks about serious topics like poverty and suicide, but it still has that intelligent humour that never came over board. I really appreciate it for that.

Second, the way serious topics and problems were talked about made me appreciate this novel even more, because it touches important things, but never loses that light tone.

I think that I've read that this novel is perfect for fans of John Green and I agree, but also I have to stress out that there is something unique that Preston Norton gave to this story, something that is entirely his.

I know, in my reviews, I usually say that I want to read author's other books, but this time I'll say I know I will read Norton's next novel, because there is no way I'm going to let myself miss it. I will probably read it as soon as it comes out!

As you probably guessed, Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe impressed me, and if I read it last year, it would probably on my list of favorites too, but there is a big chance it shows up on my 2019 favorite lists.

If you like ya contemporary and coming of age stories, trust me, you do not want to miss this one!

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## Entrada Book Review says

Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe is just as unconventional as the name.

The book follows all around self-proclaimed loser Cliff Hubbard through a montage of terrible experiences to set up the tragic backstory and get the reader ready for the revelation.

Aaron Zimmerman has seen God in a near death experience and has transformed from all out \*\*\*hole into wanting to fix Happy Valley High School with THE LIST.

The plot is interesting but with so much drug use, sex, and the F-word proclaimed multiple times on every page, this possible feel-good story gets lost in the weeds.

The spoiler at the end can be seen a long way coming.

However, there are just so many funny, stupid and corny lines in the book that you just have to finish.

All your base are belong to us!

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## Jes Reads says

“There are three rules to high school irrevocably inscribed within the interstellar fabric of the universe. Rule number one: it’s all bullshit. Now before you go thinking I’m some angsty little teenage shit, you should know that I’m not little. In fact, I’m a behemoth. Sixteen years old and somehow miraculously shattering the 250-pound barrier. Holy crap, you say. Get the hell out of town, you say. You think that’s nuts? Let me rephrase it for you: I’m a quarter of a thousand pounds.”

Welcome back everyone! I hope you all had an amazing Christmas and a happy New Year! I have to say I have been wanting to write this review since the day I finished this book, because I need everyone to read it. Is it weird to know your favorite book of 2018 only 6 days into the new year?

Neanderthal is a Young Adult book written by Preston Norton, published by Hyperion. It is available May 22nd, 2018 and I am not joking when I say this: don’t walk, RUN to your local bookstore (or even Amazon if you’re into that) and grab this book!

Let me start out by saying that high school settings aren’t my favorite. But did that keep me from loving this book? Absolutely not! Clifford Hubbard may be my most favorite main character ever. Mostly because I love self deprecating humor, and also because he’s just so dang funny.

“That was me, Clifford Hubbard- the Grand Canyon-assed, Twinkie-and-small-children-eating, jetliner-breather. Known more commonly by the Happy Valley High School population as Neanderthal.”



This book centers around Clifford simply trying to get through high school while simultaneously rebelling against everything following the suicide of his older brother, and best friend. There's fights at school, fights at home. Nothing seems worth while in Clifford's life, but one day the student he hates more than anyone comes to him with a task he claims is sent by God. A task that involves making the high school setting Clifford has hated for so long, that Aaron Zimmerman has been benefiting from, better. Is it a message from God or just another joke on poor, dumb, Neanderthal?

"This might have been a big deal if I gave a shit about anything. But I didn't. Not one single shit. If it was possible for me to give negative shits, I'd distribute those like a six-year-old flower girl at a wedding. Negative shits! Negative shits for everyone!"

I don't have to say this again, but I'm going to: I LOVED THIS BOOK. I enjoyed all the characters. I thought they were well thought out. I went into this book thinking it was going to be a fluffy young adult book about high school and came out with so much more than that.

I loved how deep this book got. How much representation there was without it being forced. We have the hacker, the fat kid, the hard chick, the nerds, the jocks, the bully. All the major players in what ended up being the most moving book I've read in a long while.

"Some of us are barely swimming, some of us are drowning, and there are some of us still who are being tossed in waves and dashed upon the rocks. And often we feel that we won't survive. Maybe that ocean is school, and we're struggling to get decent grades, or to fit in, or maybe we're just trying to survive the hurtful words and actions of people who don't understand their own cruelty."

If you guys are interested in finding any more information on this title you can visit Preston's goodreads here (Goodreads )Also here is a direct link if you'd like to purchase the book when it comes out as well!(Amazon)

Thank you to Netgalley for sending me this ARC for review.

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## **Lauren Stoolfire says**

### **I received an ARC from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.**

Cliff is a 6'6" and 250 pound loser, in fact his nickname at school is Neanderthal. He has no one in his corner and everything has gone bad to worse since his older brother's suicide last year. Cliff can't stand the star quarterback, Aaron. When Aaron returns to school after a near-death experience, he says that he saw God when he was out of it. The real kicker is that God gave Aaron a to-do list to make Happy Valley High suck less - and that he needs to help Neanderthal. No one is more surprised than Cliff himself when he agrees to help Aaron with the list which features everything from a vindictive English teacher, a mysterious computer hacker, a decidedly unchristian cult of Jesus Teens, the local drug dealers, and the meanest bully at the school. For the first time since he lost his brother, Cliff feels like he's part of something bigger than himself. Fixing a screwed up school isn't as easy as it looks and as soon as Cliff think they've completed the list, he realizes their mission hits much closer to home than he expected.

I'm so glad I found *Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe* by Preston Norton. YA Contemporary isn't usually my go-to genre choice, but this new novel is a compelling must-read. Cliff is now one of my favorite leading guys in YA. He's been dealt a crappy hand in life and he's so fed up by everything, but he hasn't given in and has hope for the future. After all with Aaron, he begins to try to put make seemingly small changes in order to enact bigger, positive change at their school and in their own lives. Another one of my favorite things about Cliff is his sense of humor. I mean, sometimes his inner monologue is laugh out loud funny - if crude at times. The author does a brilliant job of developing his cast of characters from the main characters and the supporting characters, but Cliff himself is for me the most compelling. I felt an entire spectrum of emotions for him from misty-eyed sadness, red-hot anger, to uplifting hope.

Overall, *Neanderthal Opens the Door to the Universe* is an absolute must for fans of brutally honest, yet ultimately hopeful, funny, and relatable YA Contemporary with a well-written cast. If you're interested in the work and writing style of John Green and Andrew Smith, you may enjoy Preston Norton's style. I will definitely have to check into Norton's other releases and his future projects.

Thanks again, NetGalley!

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## **Dianne says**

Labels, the bane of high school existence. Cliff knows, because he is called Neanderthal, for his size, his demeanor and because he isn't that popular jock, he is just a kid trying to get by, trying to overcome the sadness of his brother's suicide. It was easy for him to hate Aaron Zimmerman, handsome, athletic, rich and popular, as well as brutally unkind to Cliff, that is until Aaron has a near-death experience where he saw God and God had a mission for him. That mission would involve Cliff and the start of an unlikely friendship that would change both of their worlds.

It started with a list and became a quest to make things better in high school, but it became more, it took on a life of its own and would begin a healing process in the lives of so many that suffered in silence. Through their often humorous journey, Cliff would begin to heal, grow and find that life is what you make it, one step at a time and each step makes one's heart just a little lighter, even when life deals some crushing blows, one can survive and learn.

Preston Norton has nailed a winner with **NEANDERTHAL OPENS THE DOOR TO THE UNIVERSE!** Not only is it filled with endearing characters, it is filled with heart, heartache and the joy of learning to feel good again! Laugh with the characters, cry with them and witness what happens when one learns to look outside of their private sphere and embrace the world, flaws and all! These teens are truly alive! Their story is a little over the top, but it fits perfectly into that awkward stage of life. Mr. Norton has created a tale about a slice of two boys' lives and how they learned to look beyond the believable and create their own version of community, as they watched it struggle to grow and thrive.

Pure entertainment, pure reading joy!

I received a complimentary ARC edition from Disney-Hyperion. This is my honest review.

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For Reviews & More: <http://tometender.blogspot.com>

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## **Sarah says**

4.5/5 stars. Okay so I'm not going to lie: for the first 1/3 of this book I genuinely thought it would be about a 3 or 3.5 star read. But oh, I now stand corrected. *Neanderthal* is easily the funniest book I have read in a very long time. And even though this is a laugh-out-loud type of book, it handles extremely important and sensitive topics so beautifully and you can't help but admire how it tackles those topics in a way that conveys how serious they are but also keeps the story from getting too dark. This was such a good book and is quite easily a new favorite for me.

Also, can we take a minute to appreciate the casual AVPM reference that Julian makes? I just loved it so much.

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