



## The Dead Kid Detective Agency

*Evan Munday*

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Thirteen-year-old October Schwartz is new in town; she spends her free time in the Sticksville Cemetery and it isn't long before she befriends the ghosts of five dead teenagers, each from a different era of the past. They form the Dead Kid Detective Agency, a group committed to solving Sticksville's most mysterious mysteries.

## **The Dead Kid Detective Agency Details**

Date : Published September 1st 2011 by ECW Press

ISBN : 9781550229714

Author : Evan Munday

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fantasy, Paranormal, Childrens, Middle Grade, Young Adult, Fiction, Cultural, Canada, Horror, Humor

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## From Reader Review The Dead Kid Detective Agency for online ebook

### colleen the convivial curmudgeon says

2.5

This book had some nice things about it - it dealt with clinical depression and mental illness pretty well, and had some nifty Canadian history lessons. Actually, I just thought it was cool it was set in Canada, 'cause so few fantasy type books seems to be. Well, at least the ones I've read.

But I just never really connected with any of the characters much, and the mystery itself was pretty eh. It kinda seemed to be more about October and her weirdness and school and mean girls and stuff - all of which was handled fairly well, but none of which was all that great.

Also, it was bugging me that it kept changing from first-person narrative to third-person limited. About halfway through, or more, the third-person becomes sort of relevant in that we follow the dead kids instead of October, but for most of the book both the first-person and third-person parts solely follow October, so it just seemed pointless much of the time.

Also, the voices of the two narratives were very similar. Both sort of addressed the audience and tried to be witty in the same way - though the third-person narrative was more direct about it.

Then there were some chapters from the diary of Henri someone, and while it does become relevant to the story, it was kind of weirdly thrown in in random places. And it also stopped somewhere like midway through the story, instead of continuing through the end - though the end is where it would've fit more and I actually would've liked that bit to be fleshed out more.

All in all a sort of decent read, but nothing to write home about. I doubt I'll continue the series. Younger kids might like it - if they're not distracted by the author's attempt to use hip and cool vernacular that has probably long gone out of fashion by now. It sounded more like the way I talked in high school - almost 20 years ago - than how I hear my niece speak nowadays. :-\

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### Liliana says

Review also found here: <http://lili-lost-in-a-book.blogspot.c...>

Thanks to the publisher for the reviewing copy :)

October just moved to a new town with her clinically depressed father where she will be starting a new life at a new school. To make things worse, she's only 13 and she'll be entering high school already (yeah, she's that smart! She skipped a whole grade at her old school). Because she has an affinity for the color black and she likes to read in the cemetery, she's considered a "freak." High school kids can be such jerks! But I like October :) She's a pretty cool kid. Anyway, as she's starting to settle in, there is a murder that takes place...and it is someone October was starting to know and actually like (I don't want to give too much away ;)) Even though it seemed like a very tragic accident, October suspects that there was more to it. And thus the

Dead Kid Detective Agency was born! October and the ghosts of 5 dead kids around her age try to figure out who and why they committed the murder.

I was very aware that this book was aimed at kids around the middle school age when I requested to review it...but someone's gotta review it, right? lol. Anyway, I thought this book sounded very interesting; I do like a good ghost story, you know ;) And I am happy to say that it didn't disappoint!

I really liked the plot and the mystery behind it. Remember that murderer I was talking about? I sooo did not guess correctly who that was! In fact, I was so surprised when I found out who it was, that I had to read it twice! I really like books that prove my guesses wrong because in the end it's a surprise...and I love twisty ends wrapped in surprises!

Anyway, the plot was great, the twists were great, and the characters I also liked. They were all very diverse, especially the ghost kids who each came from a different era. And all the weird names the characters had was fun :)

In general, I absolutely loved the book! I especially liked the few drawings it had throughout the book. That was different and definitely something I enjoyed. The book was beyond funny! Like my cousin says, "total hilarity, man!" At some points it had me in total hysterics and my dad kept giving me this funny look, lol. But a book that can make me laugh like that is always a plus. I also liked how the narrator kept referring to us—the readers. That actually something I don't come across too often, but I enjoy it because it makes me feel like I'm somehow involved in the story too. There was one thing I didn't understand however: it kept changing POV—from 3rd person to 1st person and back to 3rd. I truthfully didn't notice it change POV until I was like halfway through the chapter, and it actually didn't bother me, but it's something that I noticed and don't really understand why that was happening.

Oh! And any book that mentions Greek mythology gets another super special plus just for doing so (if you don't know, I am a huge fan of Greek mythology): "October's plan sprung out fully-formed, like the goddess Athena from Zeus's head. Check out your Greek myths, kids. Those stories are messed up to the extreme." Ha! I love that! And its sooo true! :D

I recommend this book for kids around the middle school age. My brother is actually in 8th grade and I recommended this book to him as I was reading it. However, I think anyone can read it, not just kids. Especially if you don't mind the lack of romance...which I don't.

This book is of course worthy of 5 stars. And this is a 19-year-old girl saying...I can't wait for book 2! :D

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### **Lakis Fourouklas says**

I think that Neil Gaiman's fans will love this for one reason or another. To begin with a lot of the action takes place in a graveyard, then the main character somehow reminds us of Coraline and Bod and, finally, every now and then the narration becomes dark, without lacking though a sense of humor.

This is the story of October Schwartz, a thirteen year old girl that moves with her manic-depressive father to the town of Stickville where the latter is hired as a science teacher.

October is a lonely girl, with a healthy imagination, and pretty sad since her mother passed away ten years before. She's growing up very much alone since her father seems to be enclosed in a world all of his own, and her only joy comes from reading books. She really loves reading a lot, her favorite author is Stephen

King, but she also likes to write. She's currently, and for quite some time actually, working on her first novel titled *Two Knives, One Thousand Demons*, even though her muse seems to have abandoned her lately.

The place she likes the most in the new city is the cemetery, which is conveniently situated very close to her home. She often goes there at night to think, to reminiscence and to read. And all is well, until there comes a time when she sees a transparent figure sliding away into the darkness; and then another. As she's soon to find out every night the cemetery becomes the playground for the ghosts of five dead children. It's exactly with these kids, her dead friends, that she'll found The Dead Kid Detective Agency.

The first case that they'll hire themselves to investigate is that of the murder of the French teacher, October's favorite teacher. The six of them, along with her best (living) friends, Yumi and Stacey, will start on a journey into a world of mystery, full of obstacles and colored with agony, which will make their friendship even stronger, but that will also bring out the best of each and every one of them. October, that lonely soul, will all of a sudden find herself in the epicenter of the attention not only of the people around her, but also of somebody else, who doesn't seem to have her best interests in mind. Each new day will bring with it a surprise, now and then pleasant, most of the times not, and every night will pave the way to new unrest. And, sooner or later, she'll also come to realize that everything happens for a reason, and that her unwilling arrival at that place served a purpose after all; to create a new beginning for her life.

The landscape where the events of this story take place is bleak, but not scary. The author talks in a superb way about death and the traces it leaves behind in its passing, about loneliness, about the imagination, which is sometimes the only thing that can keep us going, but he also takes a good look into the fragile but complicated souls of his young heroes; especially his heroine's. October seems to be brave but nevertheless frightened, strong but with lots of weaknesses, determined but willing to take a step back when the circumstances demand it of her. She's a girl of this modern age, though she seems to remind us every now and then of a heroine from times past.

This is a well-crafted adventure, with a big heart, which can bring much reading joy to young and adult readers alike.

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## **RaygunGothic says**

"Did Nancy Drew ever have to cope with a disapproving and clinically depressed father?"

There is some nifty Canadian history in here as well as vocabulary which sounds weird to the American ear (e.g., washroom, pop machine). Sticksburg Central, The school in this book is dominated by almost all male, mustachioed teachers even though 60% of secondary teachers in Canada are women ([statcan.gc.ca](http://statcan.gc.ca)). Probably because the author is a man?

October attempts to solve the murder of her favorite teacher by employing a group of ghosts she accidentally raised when reading from a book she's writing (title: *Two Knives, 1000 Demons*). Working with ghosts has certain advantages: "Ain't breakin' and enterin' if you just walk through the walls."

One odd choice is the unseen narrator, who sometimes asserts various personal commentary on events without introducing themselves.

Another odd choice is the time period. I can't tell when this story is set because of mentions of leg warmers, Ghost Busters, The Cure, Nine Inch Nails, Morrissey, etc.

October is 13 years old, but in ninth grade.

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### **Beka says**

Though the concept was interesting enough, this whole book felt like slogging through mud. It took much longer than it should have to read just because there was so much verbage to wade through. Also, though the author tried making the protagonist an underdog to root for (emphasizing multiple times that she's misunderstood, slightly overweight, a 13 year old starting high school, missing mother, depressed father, etc.), what he really created was a rebellious teenager who lies to everyone who loves her, mistreats all her friends, and disobeys her father with near disastrous consequences. I will NOT be reading any of the sequels.

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### **Richard (Bound & Determined...) says**

Ok, so lets just say that I was wrong about this book. I apologize to the Dead Kids. I misjudged the book by it's first 80 pages.

I had a hard time getting into it. The first 80 or so pages were hard. Very dull. Day in the life of a 12-then-13yo genius Goth girl kinda dull. The story is told from a narrator's and from October's points of view. Hard to follow? Yes. Interesting writing style? Yes. Clever writing & funny? Yes. Easy to follow? No. You get the picture.

October (who's name has to be the best character name of 2011) is new at school, shy, self-conscious, and only 13...as a freshman in high school. Anyone hear the Doogie Howser theme? Yeah, but it's not like that. She's not some uber-freak smart kid, she's just ahead based on the curriculum from her last school. Anyway, she's a loner, has a couple friends, spends time in a graveyard. Yeah, and that's about all that happened until Chapter 6. But keep reading, trust me. I did. Things get SO much better.

The mysterious death of her favorite teacher leads October, with the help of the BEST part of the entire book: THE DEAD KIDS (!!!), on a search for the who's, what's, when's, where's, why's, and how's. It's a comedy of errors, mixed in with some Canadian history lessons, and a lot of Nancy Drew-esq sleuth work. As a 30-something I was entertained. As a tween, with my ever-present discerning taste in literature, I would have been entertained as well.

Now, I can't honestly post a review without some criticism. And there is actually very little to criticize. The Dead Kid Detective Agency is long—at just over 300 pages, the story did get a little winded, and a few (or a few thousand) words could/should have been removed. Though intriguing, there was too much mess between critical plot-relevant elements of the novel. It was like the never-ending story. I'm sure you caught that THE BEST PART OF THE BOOK ARE THE DEAD KIDS, but there's not enough of them in the book. It's "October this" or "October that." The Dead Kids felt like an after thought, just a clever name for a book.

I get the distinct impression that this is the first in a series of books. If this is so, I will check out the next in the series.

4 Stars: Investigate this one, the answers are worth the footwork.

Many Adventures,

Richard

\*This pre-release was provided to me by the publishers through netGalley\*

For more of my reviews, please visit my blog

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## **Maja (The Nocturnal Library) says**

I hadn't read a children's book in a few years, probaby since my last children's literature exam. That's why I wanted to like this so badly. Unfortunately, there wasn't much to like.

October Schwartz is a 13-year-old girl, and because she skipped a year in her old school, she's younger than all her classmates. On October's third birthday, her mother packed two suitcases and left, never to be heard from again. October and her clinically depressed father, who can't hold on to a job for very long, moved to a new town. There, entirely by accident, October raised the spirits of five children buried in the local cemetery. A very unlikely friendship formed between October and the ghosts, and together they decided to try solving the murder of October's French teacher, Mr. O'Shea.

This book has many, many flaws. Evan Munday is an illustrator - every chapter of The Dead Kid Detective Agency has at least one of his (great) illustrations. Unfortunately, that also means that writing is not his most developed talent. He made some mistakes he never should have made – things any experienced author would see from a mile away.

I felt like all the humor was on the first 50 pages or so. It was a very promising start, but after that, it was neither funny nor cute. It would also seem that the author wasn't able to decide between 1st person and 3rd person narrative, so he used both: the first three chapters are in third person, the fourth goes to first person without any reason that I can see, then back to third person it is. These changes continue throughout the book. It's a disaster - I don't understand how or why it happened.

\*\*\*\*\*WARNING!!!\*\*\*\*\*Sociolinguistics lecture ahead\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*Feel free to go read something else\*\*\*\*\*

Trying to write dialogues in the language of your intended audience is a pretty big risk. I'm obviously not a native English speaker, but I can identify all the traps hidden in the use of such language, and Evan Munday fell into every single one of them. Firstly, when a non-member of a certain group uses the group's language, it's rarely correct to begin with. The only people who can judge the correctness of a certain variety are those who created it to satisfy their own social needs. Seeing as the excessive use of the word 'like' certainly isn't the only rule that applies here, Evan Munday made the wrong decision. It should have been clear to him that such a variety of language, created to satisfy the needs of one closed group and/or generation, is far more complex than it seems at first glance. Secondly, it's a variety that evolves with incredible speed: even if, by some miracle, it is acceptable today, it certainly won't be tomorrow.

Here's an example:

*"Mr. O'Shea was, like, the only good teacher at this school, Stacey. And he coached curling, which is, like, illegal if you're clinically depressed. It's too risky," I said definitively. "He just wasn't."*

*"Maybe he had, like, a totally different identity outside of school: a clumsy, heartbroken failed saxophonist," theorized Stacey. "You never know."*

I didn't have trouble finishing this because the story itself is not at all bad, but the writing is pretty disastrous. The ending left things open for a sequel – let's just hope it will be better next time.

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## **Emily says**

This book was good. The beginning was boring because it just talks about her school. At the part where the teacher dies it gets better because October is trying to find out who did it and why. I kept reading because I was curious to find out. I liked the characters too. My favourite was Stacey because he would stand up for October when Ashley was mean to her. This book was great and I could not put it down!

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## **K says**

### **Nitpicky Reviews- The Dead Kid Detective Agency**

I picked this up from the library on a whim since I like mysteries and it sounded interesting enough. And well... that is about the only reason I had for picking it up. Which is a shame because the mystery was one of my bigger issues with the book. But I'm getting ahead of myself, obligatory summary thing is always first and foremost!

#### **Obligatory Summary-ish Thing:**

We have the wannabe-author, occasionally plucky, goth protagonist, October Schwartz. Her father, the depressed chemistry teacher still mourning his runaway wife. Together they move to Sticksburg and get tangled up with mean girls, a zombie tramp and boy with a girl's name, an overly nice, horror-loving, French teacher, and the death (or rather murder) of said French teacher. Oh and minor detail, the ghosts of dead kids like to put on plays in the cemetery behind October's house.

With all that I thought it had potential, and the first chapter geared me up for some humourous narration to boot. And then I got to the next chapter and suddenly 'October said' was replaced with 'I said' and I (this 'I' being me) was suddenly confused. Now I love some good POV swaps, when it is done right. But I have never read a book that jumps between third and first person, especially not while focusing on the same character/events. Now I think I know why. While neither was terrible, the narrator (which slowly ran out of humour steam) was still superior and made me wish the author had stuck to that. While October's voice was not terrible, it was fairly similar to the narrator with most of the over-the-top-ness stripped out. Not helping matters was that it went on to alternate between these two for the rest of the book. Also, pop culture references are all well and good but if you could keep them to a minimum in my book, that would be much appreciated.

#### **Strike number one, the POV switches.**

I was willing to overlook the ever so slightly jarring third person-first person jumps if the story was worth it. Like the narration, it started out promising. We get October, a few tidbits about a missing mother, see creepy-yet-comforting-to-October cemetery front and central, and a whacky school. And then we get more of the foremost and latter and none of the middle. I was interested in reading about a murder mystery, not so much October dealing with highschool, friends who aren't really friends, and mean girls. But that is actually

the majority of the book (save for a few bumbling ghost interludes). I have a special place in my heart for school dramas, it sits right beside boiled spinach and Shakespeare essay (alright, so it isn't that bad. I mean it's still above sappy love triangles. I can add that as a pro for this book, almost zero romance).

### **Strike two, too much school, too little murderous murders and (interesting) detective ghosts.**

All things considered though, the school drama wasn't appalling and I was willing to wade through it in order to sink my teeth into a good mystery. There was just one problem, what mystery? Alright so the obviously-so-nice French teacher gets crushed by his car in the school auto shop. October is sad. Police say accident, some teachers say suicide. October instantly changes her mind to murder. Great. There isn't a real reason why except for the 'he would never kill himself' (which I assume is why the Police said it was an accident). Okay, so there is 'how did he get in without a key?'. Perfect, why don't you find some more evidence now? No? Just going to get mad at teachers, let mean girls verbally abuse you, and occasionally order around some ghosts to 'snoop' for you? Fine.

*--Brief interlude from mystery complaints--*

October's 'friends' aren't really friendly. So she has two in real life who are pretty nice, but she isn't really nice to them. Then there are the ghost kids, who she does nothing but order around for the few minutes a night she spends with them. I honestly have no idea why they keep helping her out after all she does is complain about the murder and try bribing them with board games. They aren't overly nice to her either. Somehow they are all super-duper-bestie-friendies at the end though. Go figure.

*--End of brief interlude from mystery complaints--*

So then we get to the 'investigation'. Which basically consists of October going to school and randomly picking new 'suspects' while the dead kids bust up houses at night for 'proof'.

*--Brief interlude number two--*

So the dead kids. I have to assume they were part comic relief, part making up for October's lack of investigation. There was the annoying, insulting one, the one who agreed to help for no reason every time, the one who fought with most of the others, and then the two who didn't do overly much except get lost and stare at one of the other ghosts. Their 'investigating' consisted of trashing houses, occasionally pulling a poltergeist stunt, and joyriding. There were also loose rules about when they could go out and what they could or could not do. Over all, they weren't my favourite and considering they are an integral part of the story that's not a good thing.

*--end of brief interlude number two--*

There isn't much besides that. We get a diary, possible alternate identity of murder victim, and a slew of teachers who may be connected to that identity (view spoiler) but not too much besides that and the mystery kinda just sits there, going nowhere save for a few bursts of 'information' (which is quickly solved/proven to not apply). Then it all fall into place at the very end and the day is saved.

### **Strike THREE, the 'mystery'**

All in all, nothing terrible, just not my idea of a mystery novel to sit down and chow through in a pleasant afternoon. If you like slightly whacky, modern day teen drama with some supernatural elements, a murder 'mystery', and plenty of classic horror book and film references thrown in then you will probably enjoy The Dead Kid Detective Agency more than I did. Though it sounds like I'm slagging the book it had some interesting ideas, they just didn't fall into place for me. But I read it through to the end and quite enjoyed the start (before I realised how the rest of the book would be). Hovering between 2 and 3 stars, I'll settle on a low

2.37ish. Not for me, but maybe somebody else.

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### **Sarah says**

#boutofbooks

I will give this a 3.5 because it's a first effort, but at the same time, it really did seem like a first effort.

I liked the links to Canada and Canadian history; we don't see that enough, but there were too many clues and red herrings - it was kind of like October's book.

I also wasn't sure about the intrusive narrator. I think I would have preferred one point of view.

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### **Dania says**

Oh this book kept me laughing throughout! I love the relationship between October Schwartz and the 5 dead kids as follows- Cyril Clark, Morna MacIsaac, Tabetha Scott, Kirby LaFlamme and Derek Running Water. Although it was strange that a living girl is solving mysteries with ghost kids, it actually was a win-win situation!

I love how October was constantly alert on the possible killers of Mr. O'Shea, not becoming like the cliche protagonist in mystery novels who seem to believe the suspect is the person where ALL the evidence leads to, a.k.a the most evil person. PHEW!

I think that October solving the mysteries of the dead kids will be interesting. Excited for the next books!

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### **Heidi says**

Three Stars: An entertaining mystery for middle grade readers.

It is the first day of high school for the plucky, precocious, semi goth girl, October. Today she is starting at her new school in Sticksburg and she is especially nervous because she is only thirteen, a year younger than her peers. She hopes that no one will learn her actual age. Anxiously, she shoulders her backpack and meanders past the old cemetery adjacent to her house. While others may be a little jittery living next door to the graveyard, October is intrigued by the crumbling headstones and tranquil atmosphere. Alas, school calls; head down she ducks through the congested halls hoping to go unnoticed and somehow endure the day. No such luck; sandwiched beside her locker is the resident queen bee, Ashley and her swarm of drones. Ms. Popular sneers her direction and immediately dubs her "zombie tramp". So much for coasting through her debut at Sticksburg. October withstands the day and she even makes a couple of friends. She might just survive after all. The days begin to pass by and afternoons are soon spent scribbling away on her horror novel in the graveyard. Then her favorite teacher Mr. O'Shea is killed in an untimely accident, crushed by the lift in the auto shop. October has a nagging suspicion that his death was no accident. Somehow she manages to accidentally summon five ghosts and The Dead Kid Detective Agency is born. The question is was her teacher murdered and if so by whom? Can the dead kids and October solve the crime?

### What I Liked:

- \*The tone of this book will appeal to the middle grade readers. It is slightly sarcastic and witty. An abundance of funny aside commentary will surely generate some snickers.
- \*There are plenty of humorous illustrations dotted throughout the pages. It has definitely been awhile since I read a book with pictures. Leading me to wonder, why aren't more adult books illustrated? I like the visual depictions of the scenes.
- \*The characterization in this book is fun. October is adventurous, resourceful, a bit of an underdog and she has a quick wit. The five ghosts are all from unique time periods and ethnic backgrounds. It was fun watching them navigate in our time and experience them trying to learn the ropes of modern day technology.
- \*I enjoyed the depiction of some of her teachers, as we know educators are varied and often eccentric. Mr. Santuzzi was especially funny with his bad clothes, suspicious hair ( was it a toupee or not?) and military style of teaching. Meeting her teachers certainly gave me flashbacks to my own school days.
- \*The plot keeps you guessing. I honestly spent most of the book trying to figure out the mystery. The story will lead you to one suspect, only to steer you on a detour to another. There are some twists and surprises along the way. A lively, little mystery.

### And The Not So Much:

- \*I struggled with this book being labeled as a middle grade novel. While some parts would appeal to the younger crowd they were many aspects that led me to believe that this was more suited for a more mature reader. For instance the book is set in high school, which of course presents many issues that are pertinent for that age group. It would be better if October was in junior high, more relatable for the target reader. One plot revolves around a terror cell in Quebec that operated during the late 1960's; that in my opinion is subject matter that is a little over the head of younger readers. There was a scene that involved some teenage drinking and smoking, again material for an older reader or preferably not at all.
- \*This book starts out with a first person narration, October's view point but the author couldn't seem to make up his mind, he switches to third person narrative and then it is back and forth, which is distracting. Then there were these diary entries from a frenchman in the late 1960's. The first time one popped up I was definitely confused. After awhile it made sense as to why they were written into the plot but I do not feel that it integrated smoothly into the story. Personally, I was a somewhat bored with the journal pages.
- \*The story presented several intriguing story lines, such as the mystery surrounding the disappearance of October's mother when she was three. The early introduction of the missing mother indicated that it would be a story line followed to the end. Instead it is left hanging at the end of the novel for completion in a future book. If the author was not going to finish the story line then why bring it up in the beginning? He also introduces each of the dead kids and discusses the strange circumstances surrounding their deaths. Not one of the ghosts knew the specifics of their demise. It is hinted that this will be answered in future novels but I wanted at least some answers in this book.

The Dead Kid Detective Agency is a witty introduction into a series for middle grade readers. While the book does have a few problems it is still an enjoyable read. However, I think it is best suited for older middle grade readers. It is quirky and funny and October and the dead kids are likeable characters. It will be fun to see where the series goes from here.

### Favorite Quotations:

“The air was crisp and a bit cold for early September, like a Granny Smith apple left in the freezer by accident.”

“The boy looked like he’d been slapped across the face with a glove full of nickels.”

“Her mouth hung open like an expectant mailbox.”

“My high school social status, to this point on life support, was now officially dead.”

“I thought I had honed my skills at sneaking out of the house to, like ninja level.”

“Do boring people need therapy.”

For my reviews visit my blog: <http://rainydayramblings.typepad.com/>

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## **Hylary Locsin says**

Originally posted on my blog: <http://libraryladyhylary.blogspot.com> ! Check it out for more reviews!

After her father gets a new job teaching high school biology, thirteen-year-old October Schwartz is forced to move to the small Canadian town of Sticksburg to a house situated right next to a graveyard. A fan of horror novels and black eyeliner, October is actually kind of excited about the cemetery, but is not so thrilled to be starting at Sticksburg Central High School. Having skipped a grade, she is a full year younger than the rest of the ninth grade class, and, to make matters worse, she will be facing the daily battle of running into her dad at school. Things at Sticksburg Central are not as bad as October was expecting, however. She quickly makes friends with fellow outcasts Yumi and Stacey (a boy with an unfortunate girl’s name), and, at Yumi’s request, joins the curling team that is coached by Mr. O’Shea, her kind French teacher who is genuinely interested in October’s aspirations to be a horror novelist. October’s almost normal life takes an abrupt detour, however, when Mr. O’Shea is killed in a mysterious accident in the school’s auto-shop. Saddened by his death and the memories it brings back of her own mother’s disappearance when she was three, October is grieving one night in the cemetery when she suddenly encounters the ghosts of five “dead kids” close to her age. Although she is understandably unsettled by her new friends, October realizes that their ability to move through walls and travel unseen might be the key to finding out what really happened to Mr. O’Shea.

Veteran cartoonist Evan Munday’s quirky sense of humor leaks off the pages of his debut novel *The Dead Kid Detective Agency*, making for an enjoyable mystery and promising start to a new series for tweens. Since the author is Canadian and the book is set in Canada, American readers will have to get used to some of Munday’s references/vocabulary that differ slightly from what they’re used to. Once this is accomplished, however, young adults are sure to enjoy this witty story, full of pop-culture both past and present, comedy, a likable cast of characters, and even some of Munday’s cartoon art. October, the thirteen-year-old leading lady, will resonate with readers who have ever had to be the “new kid” at school or who have felt outcast by their more socially resilient peers. The addition of her ghost detective posse proves to be very entertaining, providing many opportunities for paranormal shenanigans, something that will undoubtedly keep the series entertaining as the following installments are published. Although many of the pop-culture references are likely to soar over the heads of younger readers (i.e. REO Speedwagon, The Wicker Man and Meatloaf), Munday’s inclusion of a “glossary” at the end of the novel makes the story more apropos for the tween audience. Overall, *The Dead Kid Detective Agency* is an easily enjoyable, entertaining and downright funny story that many young readers are sure to love. A preview of the second installment in the series can be found in the final pages of the book, although the expected publication date or title of this novel have not been announced.

I have to admit that when I first started reading this novel I had trouble getting used to Evan Munday's writing style. Not many authors joke quite as much as he does in telling the story, so it was somewhat new territory for me. Once I became more accustomed to it, however, I ended up really enjoying this book! Munday's pop-culture references were spot on for me, making me laugh at the nostalgic feelings they conjured up. That being said, I do think that this aspect of the novel will be lost on many readers since I am personally considerably older than the tween audience the story targets. The other side of the coin, however, is that readers might be sparked with an interest in learning more about what they've read, making *The Dead Kid Detective Agency* valuable in motivating tweens to research history and pop-culture. I also thought the "who-dun-it" mystery was very well-done, and I'm looking forward to uncovering the truth about the dead kids in the upcoming novels. I would highly recommend this title to tween readers who want something with a bit of edge and a lot of laughs.

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### **Vikki VanSickle says**

Mystery is always a popular choice among young readers, and as Kevin Sylvester as proved with his successful *Neil Flambé* series, mystery with a bit of humour and some spot illustrations is even better. Evan Munday's new series is a great step up for older *Flambé* fans. His text is full of pop culture references, some more obscure than others, but comes with a handy reference guide in the back. Not knowing the references won't frustrate or deter readers from the story. A successful graphic artist, Munday also proves himself to be a worthy wordsmith on his first foray into children's literature.

October Schwartz is new to the aptly named Sticksville, located somewhere in Southern Ontario. She is motherless, likes to wear black, and is deep in the writerly throes of a book entitled *Two Knives, One Hundred Thousand Demons*, which she toils over in class or in the cemetery beside her house. It is this book that brings about the appearance of five dead kids, representing various historical eras (an aspiring loyalist shipbuilder, a depression era quintuplet, an underground railroad escapee, a Scottish immigrant from the early 1900s, and a Native activist). Their deaths are mysterious, but the reader is led to believe that they will one day be explained. I am always on the look out for a good supporting cast, and I especially took to October's living friends- an unassuming, mild mannered boy named Stacey and the indomitable Yumi Takeshi. This trio of lovable outcasts have some great dialogue and their camaraderie feels authentic.

Canadian history is a much moaned about topic among students, who find it too dull, too diplomatic, and lacking in drama. Frieda Wishinksy's *Canadian Flyer* series (for wee ones), Eric Wilson's *Tom and Liz* *Austen* mysteries (a much adored series from my childhood that is perhaps in need of a cover makeover), and Scholastic's uber successful *Dear Canada* and it's brother series, *I Am Canada*, have gone to great lengths to improve the impressions young Canadians have about their country's history. Munday's new series is a welcome black sheep to this literary family, touching on various historical periods with tongue placed firmly in cheek.

Fun, fresh and punchy, *The Dead Kid Detective Agency* adds life and a good dose of humour to Canadian history.

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### **Barbara McVeigh says**

*The Dead Kid Detective Agency* is the quirky story of a Goth girl named October. She has just moved to Sticksville, Ontario because her clinically depressed teacher-dad had a nervous breakdown at the last school

he taught at. He finds a new job in Sticksville and moves himself and his daughter there. October's mom mysteriously disappeared 10 years ago on her 3rd birthday.

For some reason, October is allowed to begin high school one year too soon. On her first day, she meets her two new best friends: an Asian Goth girl named Yumi, and Stacey, a boy with a girl's name. There is also a clique of mean girls who focus their bullying efforts on October.

I do like the book a lot when it makes a true observation about life as a high school student. For example, when October goes to the cafeteria, she encounters "a scene of unadulterated horror: organized fun...overseen by the benevolent dictators of the student council."

The story reveals other quirky details: an Orthodox Jewish Klezmer punk band has a concert nearby and FLQ victims teach at her school. In her spare time, October writes a horror novel. While reading her work out loud, she accidentally raises five kid ghosts in the cemetery bordering her backyard.

Get the picture?

I've tagged this book as Young Adult, but there's so much 80s & 90s retro love that I think this book is more for adults who miss *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

This novel has a lot of potential, but it doesn't quite fly. It's the first in the series, so perhaps Evan Munday will be able to resolve my beefs in later editions. My biggest beef is that there is no real development in the relationships between October and the ghosts in the story. She isn't nice to them and just uses them. Also, there doesn't seem to be a point in having five ghosts; one or two would do to help October solve the mystery of her French teacher's death. The only thing the ghosts contribute to October's quest is their ability to walk through walls and to become invisible. And they do this more than once.

The resolution of the mystery itself is almost accidental: Vital clues are carelessly revealed by implausibly inept adults. As well, the story is told both in the first and the third person for no obvious reason.

The concept of *The Dead Kid Detective Agency* is clever, and even though I do miss *Buffy*, the opening book of this series lacks the wit and originality of a Joss Whedon universe.

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