

Bug

Giacomo Sartori

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A lonely boy befriends a charming but dangerous robot in Giacomo Sartori's science fiction novel *Bug*.

After a horrible car accident leaves his mother in a coma, a disabled boy is left to fend for himself among relatives and teachers who make little effort to understand him. His only friend is BUG, a prankish AI created by his older brother. Even as BUG's attempts to help cause as many problems as they solve, the boy cannot bring himself to abandon the only friend he's ever had.

The narrator's world is, in many ways, a grim one. He lives in a refurbished chicken coop with his genius brother, his aloof father, and his grandmother's ashes. He does not receive proper accommodations at school, where the ableist principal wants him out. The few certainties of his life fall away piece by piece, with BUG the only remaining constant. BUG's friendship, however, is a double-edged sword. Despite an incredible capacity to learn and a genuine desire to improve the boy's life, BUG possesses a childlike logic that prevents him from understanding the full consequences of his actions.

The prose is lively, intense, and full of perceptive similes. The boy's voice is unique and memorable as he records his daily adventures at school and at home. The extent to which the creative young narrator can be believed is a matter of interpretation, but the truth is not the point. Whether real or imagined or both, the boy's adventures show him to be resilient, vulnerable, caring, and inquisitive—but above all else, he is a neglected child who wants his mother back.

Bug is a fanciful science fiction novel about how a child's optimism, imagination, and self-belief help him cope with hard times.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (March / April 2021)

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