

## Second Chance

**David Booker**

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It's 1970, and eleven-year-old Jack Bucher just can't win. All he really cares about in life is baseball, and his family's upcoming move to Mexico is going to mess up his plans. To make matters worse, his best friend is killed in a car accident that also temporarily leaves Jack in a coma. His sister is a bully, his father is abusive, and his mother is a doormat.

Into Jack's troubled life comes a voice in his head—a philosopher named Zeph who promises to lead him to greatness. Zeph takes Jack on time-travel trips that illustrate the lessons the philosopher is attempting to impart to Jack.

The move to Mexico makes life worse for Jack. The air is foul, the local residents resent the rich Americans, and Jack is horribly bullied at his private school. It takes a violent fight with some schoolmates and some soul-searching to help Jack realize what he can accomplish.

David Booker's *Second Chance* is about possibilities and potentials. One area the author explores is the possible benefits of living in another country as a young person, learning another language and experiencing another culture. By the end of the book, Jack sees the good in his family's move to Mexico.

The setting in Mexico City is well presented. Booker captures the city's choking pollution and the vibrant scents of its open-air markets, creating a stifling atmosphere for Jack's dysfunctional family. "There was a booth filled with fresh iced-down whole fresh fish ... Flies were swarming everywhere. He figured that was the source of Mary's awful smell ... the whole city stank like boiling sewage on a hot summer day."

Unfortunately, this book falls short of its potential in several places. For example, when Jack's mother shows him his own obituary, which was mistakenly printed after his car accident, she points out that he has not accomplished much in his life. Jack's young age makes this point seem a bit far-fetched.

Other than Jack, whose character does evolve, the other characters in the book are not well developed. Mary, Jack's sister, is the typical overweight bullying sister. Will, Jack's father, is verbally abusive toward members of his family in the name of creating a better life for them than he had as a child. Zeph, the voice in Jack's head, is primarily a device used to motivate Jack and force him to take risks that he wouldn't normally take. Zeph's main purpose seems to be to serve as Jack's moral guide.

Another area of concern is the book's intended audience. The main character is eleven years old, but the length of *Second Chance* and the author's writing style place the book at the upper end of the age range for young-adult readers. For example, Booker writes, "Another seed of hatred began to blossom in his heart at his father for causing his mother's tears and the forced changes to his own life." While it may appeal to readers who are intrigued by philosophy, the book may not find a broad young adult audience.

LYNN EVARTS (March 22, 2013)

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