

The Antidote

Susan McCormick

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The Antidote is an informative adventure story in which a boy faces a moral quandary after learning about his incredible inherited gift.

In Susan McCormick's thrilling novel *The Antidote*, a boy descended from a line of doctors prepares to battle the physical embodiment of disease.

Alex Revelstoke is a precocious twelve-year-old with too much medical knowledge. When his classmate chokes in the lunchroom, Alex has a vision: the boy's skin and organs disappear, leaving only his throat visible. Alex realizes that he can pinpoint what ails others—in this case, a hot dog chunk lodged in the throat. Alex is so introduced to his family gift: the ability to look at a human body and determine the exact illness, disease, or obstruction undermining it. His family has spent generations using their gift to help others. They're also locked in a war with ILL, an ancient entity that created all diseases. As the last of his family line with the gift, Alex must confront ILL once and for all.

ILL is fascinating. His origins are exposed via flashbacks; his true nature is murky, and the threat he poses is sinister. Because his family hid information from him, believing that the gift would not pass on to him, Alex is ill-prepared to deal with ILL, though. He relies on a support system consisting of a classmate, a stray dog, and his grandfather. Alex's grandfather is a tragic hero in his own right: his wife died under mysterious circumstances, after he refused to use a powerful artifact to save her. His family shunned him for letting her die.

The book moves at an uneven pace. Long sections are devoted to unimportant events and scenes, like those that cover daily life at Alex's school. It is more involving when Alex discovers his power and learns about his family's history, and when it commits itself to flashbacks from ILL's past. The buildup to the confrontation between Alex and ILL is slow; both make their plans with care, though ILL's activity is under explored.

The Revelstoke family gift is fleshed out via ample, didactic medical information. Alex uses his family expertise to explain what diseases are, what their effects on the human body might be, and how to treat them, and walks a fine line in doing so. The informative concluding chapter expands on relevant topics for those left curious.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (March 15, 2021)

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