

## The Cardorian Complex

**J. Taylor Baker**

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*Aura readings are at the center of this thoughtful young adult character study.*

In J. Taylor Baker's contemplative young adult novel, *The Cardorian Complex*, a shy high school student is introduced to esoteric philosophies.

As his senior year draws to a close, Jeremiah worries that his difficulties making and maintaining friendships will carry through to college, if not plague him for the rest of his life. He's working with his school counselor, Tom, to address these issues. Tom introduces Jeremiah to an aura-detecting device and offers to introduce him to a community of aura-studying recluses nearby. At Tom's recommendation, Jeremiah and a fellow student decide to spend the summer with the Auralites. There, a mystery regarding Tom's past arises that has repercussions for Jeremiah's future.

The narrative begins as a character-driven drama centered on Jeremiah. When he, Tom, and the other student, Alicia, end up with the Auralites, the story takes a sharp turn into a mystery, after which Jeremiah's time is spent listening to characters' backstories and recollections. The time he spends with each of the Auralites adds little to the larger arc; those accounts read more like short stories aimed at teaching the aura-centric philosophy than anything else. There's no immediacy here.

Characterization is reliant on the revelations of the aura-detecting device, which highlight character changes by revealing a color and a number. Auras are presented as malleable and constantly in flux but are somehow still treated as accurate tools for understanding individual personalities. Beyond them, the characters are flat. They are shown changing, but none of the growth feels organic; it is merely a pronounced impetus for moving the plot forward. Early satisfaction around watching Jeremiah learn and grow is lost.

The dialogue expands upon information in a way that maintains the slow, steady pacing. Quirks in the characters' speech, from Tom's subtle interrogations to various townspeople's reliance on allusions, reward careful attention. Scenes are constructed with attention to detail. Infographics expand on potentially complex concepts.

The novel's unique elements include its close-knit town of arcane scholars and its aura-manifesting technologies. These factors spark interest but don't contribute to satisfying conclusions. One figure is mostly missing from the story despite being a huge component to the mystery; her absence is intriguing at first, but by the climax, it seems to be an element that does not pay off.

Thoughtful and character-focused, *The Cardorian Complex* mixes diverse elements into its young adult mystery.

JOHN M. MURRAY (April 30, 2019)

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