

The Phantom Files: Houdini's Curse

William B. Wolfe

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Alex April can see and hear ghosts, and they know to come to him with their problems. His best friend, Bones, is fascinated by the supernatural and is a regular at paranormal conventions, but doesn't have Alex's gifts. Together, they team up to help the spirit of escape artist Harry Houdini complete some unfinished business in William B. Wolfe's *The Phantom Files: Houdini's Curse*.

A fun and fast mystery for middle grade readers, the book begins with Alex and Bones trying to find out why Bones's dead sister is still present in her old room, unable to cross to the other side. Just as Alex starts to work on that case, he and Bones receive an invitation to a magic show—one that only Alex can see, because Houdini is reaching out for help with lifting a curse that a medium placed on him when he was alive.

The friends travel to a convention to see if that medium's descendant might be able to lift the curse. While they try to save both Houdini and Bones's sister from their states of limbo, they also contend with a demon who has his own plans for them. Soon, Alex and Bones are trying to save themselves as well as the others.

The Phantom Files: Houdini's Curse combines magical realism with an adventure story in an intelligent way. Its themes of teamwork and redemption may be familiar, but the bond between Alex and Bones is compelling, and the balance struck between their individual interests and abilities drives the book's madcap plot in the perfect way.

JEFF FLEISCHER (September / October 2019)

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