



What Goes Unseen: & Other Tales From Afar

Sean Minster

Rosie Minster, Illustrator

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In its absorbing passion for the weird and weirded out, What Goes Unseen is an entertaining short story collection.

The seven stories of Sean Minster's *What Goes Unseen* are inspired by philosophical speculations, folklore, and tall tales. Within them, far-fetched situations and elusive characters prove to be able embellishments.

From a murderer who couldn't know the ramifications of her crime, but who learns them at her victim's graveside, to a mythical beast, the origins of the boogeyman, and a man who inherits a curse, the book's provocative scenarios cohere because of their dense writing styles and their characters' straight-faced determination.

In the standout "The Great Hodag Hunt," a band of kids want to trap the exotic creature, but find that Russian circus fugitives got there first. The story's forest setting builds anticipation while the tone is humorous, even when danger arises. It's as much a nostalgic nod to a time when children could play outdoors with minimal fear as it is an exercise in hyperbole.

Fantastical elements abound. In "What Goes Unseen," Charlie overhears a yarn in a tavern that leads him to acquire the power to peer inside other people's souls. After a slow-burning setup, focus turns toward a local huckster. Characters' dialects are heavy and archetypal, while Charlie's cruel experiment, which involves murdering a man to see how that death impacted the man's widow, is repellent. There's psychological terror implied in the loss of moral boundaries, but it's abstract. Meanwhile, "The Lost Coast," which is inspired by Native American history but is delivered with humility, is about environmentalism and a conquered people's resolve. It echoes real histories and is a departure from the book's more improbable situations. The collection widens in consequence when considering such themes.

Each story is followed by an author's note. Within these notes, background references, such as a note that the song "Long Black Veil" led to a story of the same name, are useful for the context they provide and help to connect tales to popular sources. However, some of their explanations, including an assertion that the children in "The Great Hodag Hunt" might have invented the story's Russians, destroy the entries' ambiguity.

Color thumbnail illustrations from Rosie Minster adorn the first pages of each story, comprised of landscapes and suggestive facets. A bonus excerpt from a novel-in-progress rounds out the book, reinforcing its focus on wilderness adventures.

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KAREN RIGBY (December 20, 2019)

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