



The Curse of Jacob Tracy

Holly Messinger

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St. Louis in 1880 is full of ghosts—mangled soldiers, tortured slaves, the innocent victims of war—and Jacob Tracy can see them all. Ever since Antietam, when he lay delirious among the dead and dying, Trace has been haunted by the country's restless spirits. The curse cost him his family, his calling to the church, and damn near his sanity.

He stays out of ghost-populated cities as much as possible these days, guiding wagon trains West with his pragmatic and skeptical partner, Boz. Then, just before the spring rush, Trace gets a letter from the wealthy and reclusive Sabine Fairweather. Sickly, sharp tongued, and far too clever for her own good, Miss Fairweather needs a worthy man to retrieve a dead friend's legacy from a nearby town—or so she says. When the errand proves far more sinister than advertised, Miss Fairweather admits to knowing about Trace's curse and suggests she might be able to help him—in exchange for a few more odd jobs. Trace has no interest in being her pet psychic, but he's been searching 18 years for a way to curb his unruly curse, and Miss Fairweather's knowledge of the spirit world is too tempting to ignore. As she steers him into one macabre situation after another, his powers flourish, and Trace begins to realize some good might be done with this curse of his. But Miss Fairweather is harboring some dark secrets of her own, and her meddling has brought Trace to the attention of something much older and more dangerous than any ghost.

Rich in historical detail and emotional depth, *The Curse of Jacob Tracy* is a fast-paced and inventive debut, an intriguing introduction to a bold new hero.

The Curse of Jacob Tracy Details

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From Reader Review The Curse of Jacob Tracy for online ebook

Robert Dunn says

The proverbial book that makes you want more. Kind of a weird west fantasy with shifters, ghosts, and walking the shadow lands. The wonderful cover made me look and the story had me early with character more than plot. I like these people and want them to succeed, I want the evil stopped, and most of all I want more. Thankfully I'm pretty sure there will be more. This is the perfect start to a series.

Lisa Mandina says

I have to thank one of my fellow teachers for passing this ARC on to me a month or so ago. The author is a friend of one of our art teachers, and I'm actually going to get to meet her when she comes to talk to the students at our school in December. When the art teacher first told me about the book, I went and looked it up on Goodreads, and was immediately intrigued. The story sounded really good. And I loved that part of it was going to be set in Missouri, even if it is on the other side of the state from where I live. I've really started enjoying historical fiction these days I guess. And while this is fantasy, it is definitely a bit of a scary story as well. And can I say that I could totally see this book as a really great TV series or movie? The characters were really well done. The historical time period was very detailed and seemed just like what you would imagine. One of the characters in the last section of the book, named Remy, was a Cajun man, and as I read his dialogue, I totally heard the accent and voice in my head. I look forward to reading more by this author, especially since I think this definitely left off for a sequel. There is more that I need to know!

You can read the full review at [Lisa Loves Literature](#)

Rana says

Good enough to know I want to keep reading, love the relationships between the sidekick and the woman. Forgive me, as it's been several days since I finished this. I don't remember names but do remember that I enjoyed the heck out of it.

Cheryl says

A great supernatural fantasy Western. Lots of action and well-developed characters. Very entertaining and highly recommended.

Veronica says

This book is what you'd get if you mashed up the movies *Constantine* and *The Exorcist* but set it in the American west circa 1880. I guess that makes it a paranormal western? I'm not quite sure but I found it to be

a pretty entertaining story, featuring a 38 year old former-seminary-student-turned-cowboy/ranch hand - Jacob Tracy (aka Trace) and his best friend, a former slave, John Bosley (aka Boz). Since narrowly cheating death after being wounded in the Civil War, Trace has found himself saddled with the ability to see and commune with the spiritual realm. He has spent years trying to suppress his abilities but when he's hired by the mysterious Sabine Fairweather things come to a head pretty quickly.

The story is divided into four or five parts and, if this were a television show, each part would be an individual episode with Trace's instruction by Sabine in the spiritual arts forming the connecting links. To my mind, however, there is little actual spiritual instruction going on. I never warmed to Sabine. She withholds information and then blames others for not asking specific questions, all the while expecting Trace to be at her beck and call. I liked her about as much as Boz, which is to say not much. The best part of the book was the love, loyalty, and friendship between Trace and Boz. I would happily read more adventures of the two of them traveling across the American western frontier, battling paranormal monsters as they go. But with the way this ended, coupled with the fact that Sabine is on the cover of the next book with Trace, makes me think this is going to be the Trace and Sabine show moving forward. And I'm just a lot less interested in reading that.

Chris Bauer says

"The Curse of Jacob Tracy" is a weird Western unlike any I've ever read before. Messinger does an exemplary job of creating a completely unique and original world, populates it with conflicted and complex characters and sets the blender to max. The result is a highly entertaining novel. I was in particular impressed by the overall narrative structure. While it is a novel, the format uses a nifty sort of "serialization" framing device such that each chapter almost reads like a self-contained short story, bound to prior episodes with common threads and themes. I liked the format a lot.

The more I reflect upon the novel, the more nuances and choices I can see in retrospect which impress me even further.

The narrative is top notch and dead-on accurate for the times. Character interactions are authentic, at times detrimental to the characters themselves, but very genuine. The plot is wide, but narrows to a largely satisfying conclusion.

Imagine the love child of Larry McMurtry, Cormac McCarthy and top urban fantasy writer of your choice and you've got the idea. Great read.

Maggie Walsh says

I've been mulling over several aspects of this book as I was reading it and in the 24 hours since I finished. First, I have come to the conclusion that Jacob Tracy fits Greg Rucka's idea of a detective that he outlined in an essay that appeared his Stumptown comic.

Jacob Tracy lives at boundaries: not only between the natural and supernatural worlds, but also different layers of society and city vs untamed lands. At the beginning of the book, he is more comfortable in the wilds because there he can find peace from the spirits that are more prevalent in populated areas. But

circumstances require him to not only be in the city but also to use his curse to resolve whatever challenges he faces.

He also has a strong moral compass. It was shaped both by his Catholic beliefs but also his experiences during and after the war.

One aspect of this is his sense of equality. The most obvious example is his friendship with Boz, a former slave. There are at least a few instances where he makes it very clear to others that Boz is not their inferior and is worthy of their respect.

Another aspect is his desire to seek out justice for those who have been wrongly accused, injured, or killed. Unfortunately, it often puts him and Boz in harm's way.

I also thought a lot about how Trace and Boz's relationship evolves through the book. They have been friends for five years, but Trace still hasn't fully revealed or explained his abilities to Boz. Trace feels he has an excellent reason not to, but it does put a strain on their relationship. Although the book did not end the way I wished in this regard, I hold out hope that their friendship is strong enough to survive.

The last concept I've been thinking about is genres. True, this is historical fiction set at the turn of the 19th into the 20th century. But I've been debating with myself on whether it could also be classified as horror. This is a bit ironic for me because I usually tell people "I don't do horror". Given the inclusion of Spiritualism and occult elements, I think there is a good case that it belongs in the horror genre. But I'm not sure what "flavor" of horror it is. My conclusion at this point is that it's American Gothic in many respects.

And for all of the reasons above, I very much enjoyed this book. I loved all the characters and can't wait to find out more about them, particularly Sabine Fairweather and how she is connected to the Russian Mesmerist.

♥ Sandi ♡ says

I enjoyed this book, however it is not my normal cup of tea. This is a novel debut for this author - a new author for me. Her writing style is good, she has a good mastery of words, and among the twists and turns in this book ended up with a pretty solid plot. I will definitely read her in the future.

This book had just a bit too much of a shape shifter and werewolf theme to it. The historical fiction part was very good - and kept me reading - but the unexpected fantasy portion was not what I had expected.

A drifting cowboy, with a side kick, who was overwhelmed with the curse of hearing and occasionally seeing the dead. A beautiful woman enters the picture and tries to help him eliminate, or at least begin to manage his curse. She has an ulterior motive. He needs her, he resents her. He loves her, he hates her. The protagonist is one that you want to follow, get to know, like, and relate to, wanting to see where his future lays.

Not the ending that I wanted or expected, and although a full story in itself, I can see where this could easily be the first book of a series, if the author chose.

Meagan says

I'm not sure where I land on this book. There were a lot of things I liked about it, and a lot of things that didn't exactly work for me.

What I liked:

*I don't see a lot of horror written in a western setting. I liked seeing old St. Louis and frontier Wyoming and the changing landscape after the railways were built. The world in this book is one where wagon trains were still heading west, even as some settlers were taking trains to their destinations and buying supplies on arrival. The modern world was bumping up against the old way of doing things, and it offered a big variety of story options as well as being a rich source of conflict.

*The types of scary in the plot were an enjoyable mix for me, and right up my alley. I got a nice blend of vague menace and blood spray. I like that a good deal of effort was put toward building up atmosphere and threat, heightening the tension for me, the reader. I *also* like that we got a good release of that tension through attacking monsters, malicious ghosts, and real physical peril. This is an essential part of horror for me. It's hard to keep being scared if nothing bad or dangerous actually ever happens.

Some things that were potentially problematic:

*There was a decent amount of diversity in this book, which, to be perfectly clear, is not the problematic part. I liked that the hero's best friend and partner was a black man. I like that the story mines the traditions of Chinese culture for the monsters and ghosts that haunt the railroads, where Chinese immigrants worked and died in huge numbers. I like that the United States in this book was filled with people from England, Germany, Mexico, China, etc. My understanding of history is that this is an accurate portrayal, and I like that it was present here. My problem is that I was so often uncomfortable with the racial slurs, especially toward Boz. I'm not calling it a negative, because I think it's representative of what would have actually happened during this time. But I can't entirely get past it, and I'm not sure why. Is it because I wish no one ever used slurs like this? Probably. Is it because this book was written by a woman who, as far as I can tell, is white? Maybe. I felt like I was in a strange gray area, where it wasn't unrealistic for these words to be flung around, but I still wasn't sure if it was ok or necessary to have them there. I'm still not sure. It made me uncomfortable, but I think it should. I also don't think I'm entirely qualified to judge whether it was necessary and useful, or just gratuitous. So I'm sticking with "It bothered me" instead of "It was a problem."

*Sometimes I felt like the story was a little haphazard. I read another review that used the word "episodic," which could also work. Each part of the book read like its own complete short story. It starred all of the same characters, and the general direction of the story was the same, so it's possible to view them as linked stories, or a serial novel. My problem was that I sometimes didn't feel the intention behind the switch in scenery or events. It often felt more like the author wanted to write a scene with monsters attacking a train, and less like a scene where monsters attack a train was getting us to the conclusion. Did I like reading the train scene? Yeah I did. Super action-packed and fun. But the stuff I got out of that scene that related to the final conclusion didn't always feel vital. Not a deal-breaker, but I would have been much more enthusiastic if I had felt a strong hand guiding the story through the whole thing.

All told, I enjoyed this. It isn't a can't-miss title, but if you enjoy western-set horror, I won't try to dissuade you either.

Kristina says

For a relatively short book (just over 300 pages), *The Curse of Jacob Tracy* by Holly Messinger is full of action, ghosts, demons, and other supernatural baddies. I thoroughly enjoyed it (damn it), so I guess I'm sucked into following the series.

Jacob Tracy is a sort of cowboy/jack-of-all-trades kind of guy. He was training to be a priest, but left the seminary to join the Confederate War. When he was wounded in Antietam, he began seeing spirits. Even though it's been eighteen years and Tracy has tried to avoid encouraging his supernatural powers, spirits are everywhere and they speak to him. With his long-time partner, Boz, Tracy is hired by a wealthy English spinster, Miss Fairweather of St. Louis, to retrieve property left to her by a friend. This seemingly simple task proves to be much more dangerous and brings Tracy into close contact with the spirit world he's been trying to ignore. Despite Boz's worries, Tracy continues to accept jobs from Miss Fairweather, a woman who knows about his gifts and may want to use them for her own ends.

My library has this classified as "sci-fi/fantasy," which is ridiculous as it is neither. There are no aliens and no space ships. There are also no dragons, hobbits or wizards. I would consider it Western/cowboy fiction crossed with paranormal mystery. I guess that's too specific to classify. Whatever you call it, it's a fun read. The action is pretty much non-stop, but the book also takes time to develop the characters of Jacob Tracy, Miss Fairweather and Boz. Tracy and Boz have a long friendship and the events in the book take a toll on the trust they have in one another. Miss Fairweather is much more mysterious, and you know less about her, but you get the feeling she can be trusted. More or less.

This is a well-written paranormal gunslinger of a novel. There's a sly sense of humor to it (particularly some of the spirits) and I enjoyed seeing how Boz and Tracy would survive one adventure after another. There is a delightful assortment of spirits, demons and unnatural creatures in this novel, even one kind I hadn't heard of before. If you enjoy Westerns and ghosts, this may be the book for you.

Whitney says

I've learned in the past year that I really like weird westerns. So I was thrilled to see this in my local library. I was even more thrilled once I started reading it. This is a great book with well fleshed out characters and a super intriguing plot. I love the friendship between Trace and Boz. At least in my experience, it's not often you see two men care so much for each other, especially in a western setting. I was also very intrigued by the mysterious draw of Fairweather. I guess Trace and I have that in common.

The themes of religion, shame, and repression made this book significantly deeper and more thought provoking than any paranormal book I've read in a very long time. It's really resonated with me in that way.

And now I will anxiously await the release of book 2.

Jaclyn says

Originally reviewed at The Book Adventures.

The Curse of Jacob Tracy is the first in a new series, featuring a former seminary student/soldier.

Death constantly lives in the shadow of Jacob Tracy. After surviving the Civil War, Trace discovered that he could see ghosts; this was not a gift that he wanted and each time he tells someone about this gift they die. So, when Miss Sabine Fairweather asks for his assistance and claims to be able to help Trace with his gift, Trace is understandably wary.

Trace has lived for years repressing his ability to see and speak with ghosts. Trace has always believed that his gift was a curse and does his best to ignore it. After starting to do the odd jobs for Miss Fairweather, Trace finds his powers increasing and changing all the while Miss Fairweather tempts him with her knowledge. However, Trace refuses to succumb to the temptation that Miss Fairweather presents, instead running off only to discover that he has been targeted by another man with powers, Merek. It seems that the mysterious and secretive Miss Fairweather is Trace's only chance for answers, and she needs him just as much as he needs her.

The Curse of Jacob Tracy is a difficult book to review because while I liked parts of the book, I wasn't crazy about pacing. For me, *Jacob Tracy* came across as episodic rather than a continuous, flowing plot; this was a style that did not work for me. In addition, I found *Jacob Tracy* to be plot-heavy and I was left wanting to know more about the characters of the book. This is a book that is most likely to appeal to readers who enjoy detailed descriptions and more emphasis on actions of characters rather than the psychology of the characters themselves.

What I did like about *Jacob Tracy* was the combination of the Western genre with fantasy elements. In many ways *Jacob Tracy* is what I think of as a Western. There's trouble with the law, long rides on horseback, and working on a farm. The twist is that the author seamlessly combines those known elements with the unknown. In this world there are ghosts, there are vampires, and there are werewolves, and Trace is at the centre of that world with his strong abilities. This paranormal world is something that Trace is discovering for the first time, and with that readers are treated to a great introduction in the existence of fantastic beings into a seemingly mundane setting. The contrast between the normal and the paranormal was set up perfectly and acted as a mirror of Trace's own inner conflict about which world he wanted to be part of.

So, while I have conflicted feelings about *The Curse of Jacob Tracy*, I did appreciate it for as a genre-bending read. Readers are introduced to a tentative hero reluctant to take on a larger role, the woman pushing him to accept said larger role, and the big bad that wants to take Trace's powers for his own. *The Curse of Jacob Tracy* is a solid first installment that sets the stage for book two, *Curious Weather* (out in March 2017).

Richard says

This one is very close to five stars for sheer enjoyment. It's fun, well-written, and clever.

The episodic structure makes for some repetitious moments, and a couple of character reveals in the last

episode seemed inadequately foreshadowed, or just confusing. The biggest problem is that Jacob's last adventure (in this volume, at least) just isn't his best one.

Still, a new author added to my must-read list.

Renita D'Silva says

Beautifully written and original.

Angela Castille says

This novel reminded me of a show I loved as a kid, "The Wild, Wild West", if it had included ghosts. I enjoyed the pacing and the way the sections were set up to be episodic.
