



## Full Tilt

*Neal Shusterman*

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## Full Tilt Neal Shusterman

Sixteen-year-old Blake and his younger brother, Quinn, are exact opposites. Blake is the responsible member of the family. He constantly has to keep an eye on the fearless Quinn, whose thrill-seeking sometimes goes too far. But the stakes get higher when Blake has to chase Quinn into a bizarre phantom carnival that traps its customers forever.

In order to escape, Blake must survive seven deadly rides by dawn, each of which represents a deep, personal fear -- from a carousel of stampeding animals to a hall of mirrors that changes people into their deformed reflections. Blake ultimately has to face up to a horrible secret from his own past to save himself and his brother -- that is, if the carnival doesn't claim their souls first!

## Full Tilt Details

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## From Reader Review Full Tilt for online ebook

### Evelina says

To Full Tilt ε?ναι ?να βιβλ?ο περιπ?τειας για παιδι? κι ?να ελαφρ? ψυχολογικ? θρ?λερ με πρωταγωνιστ? τον δεκαεξ?χρονο Blake.

Σε ?να λο?να παρκ με εφτ? παιχν?δια που θα τον φ?ρουν αντιμ?τωπο με τους φ?βους του θα βρεθε? ο Blake και μ?σα απ? αυτ? τα παιχν?δια,θα βρει ? θα χ?σει τον εαυτ? του.

Ο Blake ε?ναι απ? τους πολ? συμπαθητικο?ς χαρακτ?ρες,?ξυπνος και ψ?χραιμος,δεν αφ?νει καν?ναν π?σω του,προσπαθ?ντας ?τσι να επανορθ?σει για το ατ?χημα που συν?βη χρ?νια πριν και τον καταδι?κει. Οι αντιδρ?σεις του ε?ναι φυσιολογικ?ς κι ?τσι μπορο?με να ταυτιστο?με πιο ε?κολα μαζ? του,καθ?ς βλ?πουμε ?τι ακ?μα κι αφο? προσπ?θησε σκληρ? κι ?χει φτ?σει σχεδ?ν στο τ?λος,σκ?φτεται μ?πως πετ?ξει τους αγ?νες που ?δωσε για μια θ?ση δ?πλα στη σιγουρι?.

Η αλ?θεια ε?ναι ?τι π?ρα απ? την τελευτα?α δοκιμασ?α του,καμ?α ?λλη δε μου κ?ντρισε το ενδιαφ?ρον. Αυτ? που μου ?ρεσε,?μως, ?ταν η ιδια?τερη σχ?ση που υπ?ρχε ?δη μεταξ? των πρωταγωνιστ?v και ο τρ?πος που αναπτ?χθηκε.

Η νουβ?λα αυτ? του Neil Shusterman δεν ε?ναι πρωτ?τυπη,αλλ? σ?γουρα αποτελε? ?να ηχηρ? μ?νυμα για ?λους. Γιατ? ?λοι μας ?χουμε φ?βους,γιατ? ο φ?βος π?ντα θα υπ?ρχει,καταχωνιασμ?νος κ?που στο ε?ναι μαζ,αλλ? το κατ? π?σο θα με?νει αθ?ατος ? θα γιγαντωθε?,εξαρτ?ται απ? τον τρ?πο που εμε?ς συνηθ?σαμε να τον κοιτ?ζουμε. Και κ?θε συν?θεια ε?ναι δ?σκολο να σπ?ει,?χι ?μως τ?σο δ?σκολο ?σο το να ζεις καθημεριν? μαζ? της και να σου τρ?ει τα σωθικ?. Και ε?ναι αλ?θεια,πως ?σο μαθα?νεις να αντιμετωπ?ζεις και να αψηφ?ς το φ?βο σου,εσ? γ?νεσαι πιο δυνατ?ς κι εκε?νος ?λο και πιο αδ?ναμος.

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### murphy 🌸 (daydreamofalife) says

4 / 5

a bit shorter than my usual read, but it managed to find a really great fast pace and stay really entertaining. bumped up a star bc i'm always a slut for creepy carnivals :)

full review for this and all the other books i've got waiting for reviews to come next month (hopefully irl stuff will be less hectic then)

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### Kristalia says

Final rating: 4/5 stars

## **I love Neal Shusterman.**

Especially after reading Bruiser, Unwind and UnWholly (i really need to find time to read his other books-especially skinjacker :D). I love that his works are always deep and quite psychological. Full Tilt didn't disappoint.

~\*~

This is a story about trauma, despair, guilt and much more. It's a ride through the fears of all people who get stuck in that carnival.

Like i said, **it is quite psychological, because characters are faced with their worst fears, and they don't know how to beat them.**

That carnival is a definition of creepy as well.

Although the characters were the best part of the book, i found that **story had it's flaws**. Till the end it remained a **mystery** about Carnival and Cassandra, the one behind the scenes. I was too obsessed with characters and story to not notice the background one. The rides were quite interesting. The way it connected was kind of unusual, and with each ride, they were becoming far more scary.

And don't expect a love story, because this book definitely isn't one.

*“They say you never know who's the real hero and who's the real coward until you're looking death in the face. I've always been afraid of plenty of things, but fear isn't what makes you a coward. It's how depraved your heart becomes when fear gets pumped through it.”*

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### **CHARACTERS :**

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**So we have two brothers, Blake and Quinn who are not in best type of relationship; and we have a couple, Maggie and Russ.**

◆ **Blake :**

The narrator of this story is Blake, and while whole book was from his POV, i liked everything about it. Blake will always think then react before he does something, unlike other three in the story. I found that he is quite interesting and likeable character with own depth.

◆ **Quinn :**

Quinn on the other hand is quite reckless, doesn't care if he will live or die the next day-he lives his life to the fullest. Being that type, he doesn't understand why Blake is always retreating, why Blake doesn't take chances at doing what he wants. He considers Blake a coward, and Blake himself thinks the same. But none

of them were actually being honest to each other.

◆ *Maggie and Riss* :

As for Maggie and Riss, they thought their love was true, but...

### **OVERALL :**

Very very interesting, beautifully written and a fast page turner. Do not expect this book to actually be 100% explained - some things are better off with being a mystery. (Although i wish it could have been longer =\_=)

*This review can be found on my blog: infinity-of-time.blogspot.com also known as...*

## Calibrarian says

Full Tilt is about a boy named Blake who is headed in the right direction. Seems like everyone in his life is off-track including his 'living-for-the-thrill' brother and his boyfriend hopping mother. But not him, Blake's going to college, has his life mapped out and is basically someone you can depend on. He seems perfect really. The only problem is he's hiding a dark secret...nothing evil or haunting, but its a secret he keeps from everyone. He holds the guilt of being the lone survivor of a horrific bus accident. He holds the memory of seeing his teachers face on the bus as it teetered and toppled over the side of a bridge. He holds the guilt of believing he could have done something to save the others.

If he can just keep careful control, then life wont throw anymore curve balls at him.

His plan goes awry when he gets talked into going to an amusement park with his friends...they love the roller coasters especially his wild edged little brother Quinn--but he doesn't. He's white-knuckling it and back on the bus ...and this time he's going over.

After hating life on one ride, he can't be convinced to go on another, not matter how hard his friends try and convince him. Even when a mysterious chick, that looks like she could teach him a few things, hands him a personal invitation to a private amusement park, he's too spooked to go. He tosses the invite on his dresser when he gets home and crashes.

But it turns out his little brother isn't afraid and is dying to go. In the middle of the night, Blake wakes to the screams of his mother. She's bent over the comatose body of Quinn...Blake looks down at his brother...but when he looks into his eyes, he sees Ferris wheels spinning. His brother is trapped and only Blake can get him out.

What follows is the worst night of Blake's life...he makes a deal with a devil and has to survive the park and ride seven rides before dawn to save his brother. The problem is, every ride is tailored to your worst fears

and every ride can kill you.

It doesn't help to know that no-one has survived and the price of admission is your soul.

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### **Ylenia says**

I finally finished this. After one month I managed to finish 200 pages of pure *nothing*. I didn't have any expectations but it was a pointless read.

First of all: this book should have at least 400 pages. Not 200.

It doesn't make any sense since the plot is all condensed and the pace was weird and there was no time for character development or anything like that.

Second thing: this wasn't scary. The rides weren't scary. *Nothing was scary or creepy or whatever.* I just felt awkward through the entire book because I wasn't getting the point of it.

I really couldn't care less about this book, I'm sorry to say this since it has so many good reviews but apparently it's just me.

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### **Cassandra {semi-hiatus} says**

***"They say you never know who's the real hero and who's the real coward until you're looking death in the face. I've always been afraid of plenty of things, but fear isn't what makes you a coward. It's how depraved your heart becomes when fear gets pumped through it."***

As usual, Neal Shusterman novels don't just entertain you with their creative worlds or realistic characters. They also make you question some aspect of your life or your world. This one handles fear and the ways it can change people. For such a tiny novel (it's only 201 pages), it packs quite the emotional punch.

In *Full Tilt*, the main character, Blake, goes to a mysterious amusement park in the middle of the night to rescue his younger brother, Quinn, who is essentially trouble personified. However, this isn't any ordinary amusement park; this park creates rides based on your biggest fears. In order to get out, you have to ride six of the rides before dawn. It was just as creepy and fantastic as it sounds.

Also; the spirit of the park's name was Cassandra. Finally; a novel with my name in it. Plus, I was a badass spirit who fed off of fear. Can it get any cooler than that? I'm pleased.

Besides the action packed plot, and fascinating concept, I also really enjoyed the relationship development between Blake and Quinn. So many YA fantasy novels make the main focus a romance, and as always, I can appreciate that this one was a platonic relationship and not some dreary love triangle or even just a cliché romance. I loved that about it.

To avoid any spoilers, I'm going to conclude this review with this is a perfect read for anyone looking for a

adventurous tale with paranormal/fantasy elements, or even just a fan of any of Neal Shusterman's other works. Fantastic YA stand alone that will raise all kinds of questions about who your friends and family truly are, and most importantly, who you are.

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### **Aaron says**

Full tilt, an adventure filled, rollercoaster ride of a book. Packed with twist turns ups and down loops and thrills, kept me reading the book. I rarely read books but from the title catching my eye and its extreme background of colors, it's really an awesome book. The book had me on the edge every time I picked it up, not wanting to put it down. It's filled with the excitement and themes to keep me wanting to know what's going to happen next. I happen to like the book so much that I had put my self in side, the ride of what I read.

Full tilt is about 16 year old, name Blake, who is at the begging a chump or self conscious. He's very smart and is on his way to college. He has a brother who lives life on the edge not caring about the rules. He brings along to friends Maggie and Russ who are boy friend and girl friend and is a wired couple. Well they are at six flags and Blake is scared of big type rides. And he finally gets on a ride which changes his fate. After he gets off, he is called by a game personal to play for free. And in his luck he wins. Without asking she gives him a bear which hold an invitation to the ride of his life.

His brother is found on the ground laying in a coma and the smart Blake realizes what's going on. He checks the bear that hold the invitation and finds it gone, and that's where his adventure begins. A must read book very interesting and will catch your mind in the great adventure it holds.

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### **Adel says**

Mind = blown.

Okay, so maybe I'm a little biased because of my obsession with Neal Shusterman, but this book is amazing! I read this book during a reading slump ... in one sitting. So you know it had to have been good. The one thing that I kept thinking about during the whole book was "This book would make a great video game!" And it would. It could be almost like Dante's Inferno, only not with the whole Deadly Sins thing, but with the seven rides.

I found there wasn't much character development, but I think it worked well with this book. It didn't distract you from the edge-of-your-seat / in-your-face kind of action.

Marry me, Neal?

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### **Rose says**

Where the heck was I when this book was published? Nonetheless, excited to finally read it. :)

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## Angela says

The plot had the potential to be interesting and spooky. However, the delivery of the “horrifying” parts of the rides fell flat, leaving me unsatisfied, disappointed, tired, and bored. Only finished it for book club.

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## Will M. says

What happens when you are suddenly pulled away from the real world, and plunged into a carnival where your soul can be claimed? Blake needs to decide between his own safety, or his brother's. Every decision counts, as the carnival awaits for his defeat.

Most YA horror are formulaic, and this novel proved no different. A guy has to save someone in a world full of his fears. I honestly didn't care about his fears and the not-so-scary carnival rides, but the characters, or at least some of them, were really well developed. Blake and Quinn are brothers who don't get along all the time because of their differences, but they're brothers nonetheless. I liked how the author worked on their relationship as brothers and ended up making me feel a sense of connection between one of the two.

If you're looking for a YA novel with a very good plot, then steer away from this. On the other hand, if you're looking for one with very good character development and decent writing, then this is the novel for you. Speaking of the writing, all I can say is that I can't really complain much on it. This was obviously aimed for younger audiences, so that means that the author had to dumb things down a little. A lot of things shouldn't have been emphasized on but the author expounded on those.

A few months ago I used to grab a YA book with a ready feeling of hatred toward it. I'm turning 20, so I'm more of an adult than a teenager. I don't like things dumbed down because it makes the plot shallow. Recently I learned not to expect much on any book, especially YA ones. They're not naturally bad, but one's perception plays a huge role in the overall enjoyment. I could've easily hated this for being too YA, but I didn't, and I won't. It had a decent plot so I honestly won't hate on it just because it didn't give me much of a scare. I'm sure that younger readers would've been terrified with the premise alone, more so with the plot. All I can say is that keep an open mind when it comes to novels that aren't intended for your age, but don't get me wrong though because I know a lot of adults who love to read middle grade and YA. It differs from person to person, but keeping an open mind will surely help, in my case.

What made me aware of the existence of this novel would be Buzzfeed. I'm subscribed to their few-times-a-week emails of books that you should read, and this was #1 in their **23 Underrated Books Every Horror Fan Needs To Read ASAP** so the book was added to my TBR instantly because the premise was great. A few days later, I was strolling around the bookstore and suddenly saw this book, so I bought it in an instant. I even read it right away because I couldn't choose what book to read next. Conclusion would be, don't trust Buzzfeed, or at least lower down your expectations.

3/5 stars. Cheap thrill but a good comfy read. A great pick if you're in a reading slump. I'm excited to read more of Shusterman's work in the future.

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## **Megan says**

*Full Tilt* is an interesting book. At first glance it looks like a typical Goosebumps-style young adult novel about teenagers being sucked into a paranormal amusement park. Fortunately (although that could be cool), this book goes beyond that to explore its characters, or at least its protagonist, in more depth.

Blake is a sort of bland, generic overachiever with some secrets in his past when the book opens. Using the plotline of an amusement park run by a mysterious, otherworldly figure, Shusterman follows Blake through growth and a new understanding of himself and his strange, not-quite-there brother.

I thought this book felt a bit flat, particularly compared to Shusterman's other works, but I did enjoy it. The character of Blake's brother, Quinn, especially rang true for me since I knew several teenage boys very similar to him. At times the action was either too toned down and rattled off too quickly or dense and difficult to follow, but the book read quickly and I enjoyed it.

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## **Rollie says**

Unwind was supposed to be the book I'm reading first from Neal Shusterman, but when I saw this in our bookstore here in my place, I immediately grabbed this undoubtedly since I was told before by a reader that Shusterman is such an amazing author. So who do you think can resist of searching for his books after hearing such a word?

Blake fears something and he fears to admit that it's the rides he fears to get in. Some are meant to be survivors, some are not. And some are meant to be a single survivor out of tens, twenties or thirties unfortunately die in an accident. Being the only one survivor of the bus accident when he was a child, it gives him creeps no matter how old he's now.

Since before, Blake has been Quinn's—his brother-- butt-savior. Quinn travels to places he sometimes doesn't know why. One month to go, Blake is going off to college and it obviously mean that he's leaving Quinn to live with their mom and her new boyfriend. One night Quinn's gone, left their house but physically in coma, only to find out that his soul is in an amusement park. Would Blake continue to save his younger brother even if it means, riding seven rides before dawn in full tilt?

So far, this is better than the last book of the same author I've read. But amazingly these two books have originals concepts. However, this book has gotten my taste more than the other one. I'm very much lucky to notice this book in our bookstore.

I admit that I'm really impressed of this book. The book has what it takes to be a real YA fantasy nowadays. This book has a non-stop full tilt of adventure. Every chapter gives different kinds of excitement and thrills. As if in just reading this book, you have ridden the rides by yourself already. It was an unimaginable thrill of less than twenty-four hours of adventure.

The relationship of Blake and Quinn is normal as any other siblings do with each other—saving the butt of the younger ones, the arguments and even the teasing with each other. However, this book has, in one way or another, added more odd habits and spice to every character to have stronger personalities. The only problem

I found out in this book is Shusterman gives no justice at the ending of this book. The story as if hangs in midair, as if halted instantly while in a rush speed of motion. This book needs an additional page or chapter. Nevertheless, this is really great book that I couldn't put down.

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### **Connor says**

[3.5 Stars] I really liked the messages as I always do with Neal Shusterman books. I think he addresses some of them better in some of his other books though like self image and confronting your past, and I think it was too short to fully pull me into the story and make me feel for the characters. I liked Blake, but he'd forget about his friends and brother a lot which I found weird since his brother is the whole reason he's there in the first place. Overall I'm still happy I read it and I think people can definitely pull some important themes away from this. I'd recommend it if you haven't read a lot of his other stuff or if you're a die hard Shusterman fan like myself.

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### **Rachel (TheShadesofOrange) says**

#### **3.0 Stars**

This was a fast-paced action packed YA horror novel. I didn't love it as much as I hoped, but it had an interesting premise.

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### **Brigid ☆ Cool Ninja Sharpshooter ☆ says**

YAAAAAAY! CARNIVALS ARE FUN!

**Except when they're trying to steal your soul.**

Neal, Neal, Neal. How I love you. Yes, in the creepiest way possible. As in, I want to stalk you to get your autograph.

Seriously, though. This is the ... 9th book by Shusterman that I've read, I believe. None of his books have disappointed me. They're all amazing. If you haven't read any of his books, I suggest you read Unwind, Bruiser, and the Skinjacker Trilogy (Everlost, Everwild, and Everfound) above all. But even though I didn't love Full Tilt as much as those books, I still think it's worthy of the 5-star rating.

Here's the story:

Teenage brothers Blake and Quinn are polar opposites. Blake is the more responsible one, the one who gets good grades and is about to go off to Columbia University. Quinn is the risk-taker, the kid with a million piercings in his face, the one who is always putting himself in danger. One night, the pair of brothers and their friends Russ and Maggie go to a carnival, where Blake meets Cassandra—a beautiful and mysterious

girl who hands him an index card with a strange symbol on it. Later that night, Quinn is found comatose in his bedroom. Blake, Russ, and Maggie soon figure out that Quinn's soul is being held captive in a phantom carnival. And the only way to get out is to get through seven rides. Easy, right? Well, except for that these are no normal rides ... they turn your deepest fears against you and will do anything to make you give up. And if you give up, you stay forever. Blake must endure the seven rides in order to save his brother, and ultimately he must come to terms with a traumatic accident he's been struggling with for years.

What I thought:

Despite my undying love for Neal Shusterman, I stayed away from this book for a long time. I am not a fan of horror, and I thought this sounded like the typical scary movie plot. And yes, the idea of a creepy carnival is still clichéd. But this is no slasher-movie type story. As far as I recall, there weren't even any scary clowns in it (thank God)! Don't get me wrong, this book still has quite the creepy edge to it. But it's scarier on a more psychological level than I expected. (And why I feared a Shusterman book would not be deep, I don't know. I'm a fool.)

Anyway, this book is no gore fest or anything. Blake's fears are more complicated than scary clowns. Most haunting of all is the "survivor guilt" he's been dealing with, ever since he survived a bus crash in which everyone else was killed.

Like all Shusterman's characters, all the characters in this book are fascinating. Blake, Quinn, Russ, and Maggie are an interesting set of protagonists, all with different motives and fears that make them believable characters. Cassandra, the evil spirit who runs the carnival, is delightfully creepy in her obsession to keep all the souls trapped in her world.

*Side note: If you've read/seen Coraline, she kind of reminded me of the Other Mother ... \*shudders\**

This is more than just a horror story. It's about trauma. It's about guilt. It's about obsession. It throws characters into a desperate situation, where they'll do anything to get out. That's the type of story I love! Plus, it's told with Shusterman's great writing, realistic characters, and over-all pure brilliance.

This is a really well-crafted book that kept me on the edge of my seat. So, like, read it dudes.

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## Luke says

WOW! This was my first time reading Neal Shusterman, and I was not disappointed!

The main plot revolves around a kid named Blake, who is going off to college at an Ivy League school. When he goes out with his friends, he meets an irresistible girl named Cassandra, who promises great thrills at her theme park. Strangely enough, one of Blake's friends says that the park appears to never be in the same location twice. He finds when he enters the park that he must ride seven rides that represent his greatest fears (in several hours, no less) in order to escape the park alive. Will he pull through?

Definitely one of my favorite books! A must read!

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## **Neil (or bleed) says**

*"To be completely helpless in the face of life-- powerless to do a single thing-- that's what I'd always feared more than anything."*

### **3.5**

Neal Shusterman is my favorite author and I promised myself I will read all his books (even his earlier novels) as long as I can find a copy. *Fult Tilt* is one of his earlier novels and my 12th book of him.

The time I started the book and it was in an amusement park and this is a suspense-thriller of sort, I thought this will be something like *Final Destination*, but it wasn't. Anyway, it's okay since after finishing the novel I was satisfied on what this book made me feel.

Basically, this is a bizarre, life-or-death story of Blake and his struggles to face his fears and deepest, horrible secrets in a carnival. Yep, a twisted carnival owned by a bewitched, peculiar girl named Cassandra. The thing is, Blake and his friends should do 7 rides before dawn or they will be stucked and be part of the carnival forever.

Blake is an interesting character. He is not fearless, but he can do things he need to do out of fear. The thing is, there is something about him why Cassandra chose him to give an invitation to her carnival. And that's for you to find out.

*Full Tilt* is a well-paced, page-turner book that creeped me out, psychologically. This book made me feel the feeling of guilt, desperation and brotherly love. It showed that fears are there to hinder you but there is always a way out out of these fears. A compelling story of breath-taking adventure in a bizarre world of your own thoughts and fears designed to succumb you forever.

Nonetheless, Cassandra's character hasn't been delved into but I thought sometimes, something needs to remain as a mystery.

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## **Josiah says**

I think a legitimate argument can be made that *Full Tilt* is the point where Neal Shusterman really began "putting it all together" as an author, melding the fascinating metaphysical nature of some of his earlier material (*The Eyes of Kid Midas*, for example) with the powerful emotional impact of his first novel, *The Shadow Club*, to create a ride like nothing else before in the history of young-adult literature. Once Neal Shusterman really found his groove, he became awesome on a whole new level, quickly catapulting ahead of most of the rest of the pack to become one of the finest writers of his generation. In *Full Tilt*, we see the beginning of that transformation from very good to legendary, the start of a journey that would produce several of the greatest books I've ever read: *Unwind*, *Everwild*, *Everfound*, *Bruiser*... It's hard to find anything, anywhere, that rises to the astounding heights of artistic achievement reached by these books, because Neal Shusterman has elevated the art of writing to heights met only rarely, if ever, in the history of the English language. *That* is what I'm talking about when I say that Neal Shusterman has changed the face

of literature. His books are masterpieces of innovative human thought and the sides of our shared experiences that it may never have even occurred to us to take a closer look at, and if *Full Tilt* was the party to celebrate the arrival of this new, even more brilliant Neal Shusterman, then all I can say is that I'm privileged to have been invited.

*Full Tilt* truly sets a new standard for itself, defying comparison to any other book or writing style. If you think you've got a hold on what's happening, then think again, because you never know for sure what's really up when it's a Neal Shusterman book you're reading. The crazy energy of the story zaps out in a hundred directions at once, all of them capable of throwing your mind for a loop. What might surprise readers who are new to Neal Shusterman, though, are the philosophical brick walls that seem to crop up out of nowhere as one reads, appearing so fast that it's easy to run smack into them if you're not watching. No matter how far out the story becomes, or what crazy worlds of paranormal weirdness swallow the characters, everything they encounter circles back to truths that we all can understand about real life, whether or not we're able to articulate them as convincingly as Neal Shusterman. This is, in my opinion, the greatest strength of *Full Tilt*, and serves to rein in all the wild action so that it never completely detaches from our comprehension. We're able to identify with the characters because their realistic struggles, not the outside dangers from a world of paranormal death, tether our lives closely together. Ultimately, the hellish carnival and deadly traps in it that have been set for Blake, Quinn and his friends are not the focal point of the story, but rather the key to unlocking our minds and letting us see a part of ourselves that we've never known, because fear and moments of pure shock tend to open us up in a way that doesn't normally occur. In our fear, and in theirs, we see the darkness of humanity, but also the light that emanates from the decision to remain true to one's ideals and not degenerate into the shadowy depths of depravity when the going gets rough and personal character is stretched to the breaking point. This, more than anything else, is *Full Tilt* at its very best.

"To be completely helpless in the face of life?powerless to do a single thing?that's what I'd always feared more than anything. It was like I'd been keeping all the edges of my life neat and clean, pretending the neatness was all that mattered, pretending life could somehow be controlled."

?*Full Tilt*, PP. 108-109

"The rides are different for everyone. I'm convinced of that now. I mean, sure, there are some we ride together. Either we find ourselves drawn to some common experience, or maybe we're pulled in by the people we care about. Our friends, our families can drag us onto coasters and Tilt-A-Whirls that are really meant for them. But in the end, no matter whose rides we find ourselves on, the experience is all our own."

?*Full Tilt*, P. 93

Sixteen-year-old Blake and his thirteen-year-old brother, Quinn, are opposite in almost every obvious way. It doesn't take more than the first few pages of *Full Tilt* to see that this is the case, as the two of them, along with Blake's friend Russ and Russ's girlfriend, Maggie, go adventuring at a theme park near their home. The rides at the park are screwy, loud and have more than a slight off-the-wall feel to them, perfect for three teenagers raring to attack an amusement park that's not going to be just like every other entertainment venue they've experienced. The *Kamikaze* seems to be the wildest ride that the park has to offer, but Blake isn't hot on the idea of doing battle with the huge roller coaster. He has an aversion to rolling, spinning, screaming machinery that hurtles through thin air at high speeds, understandable when one finds out that there's a much darker secret than fear of roller coasters tugging at the fabric of his mind. Blake may have no desire to "Die on the *Kamikaze*", but his friends wouldn't miss it, so he reluctantly joins the group standing in line.

But what if Blake knew that the *Kamikaze* he sees isn't the only one? What if he knew that the greatest threat

he could face on this night would be far more deadly than the squeamish sensation of a few stomach plunges and sharp turns on the twisting metal track of the super coaster? There's another dimension to Blake's world, commanded by an entity with far more on its mind than showing Blake a good time at an amusement park. Blake's demons are all lined up neatly, made all the easier to exploit for his natural ability to shuffle them to the back of the deck when they creep up a little too close to the front. To save himself, Blake will have to finally do battle with these demons that have scared him from the outer limits of his consciousness since he was a very young kid, and he'll have to do it in a timely fashion if he's to have any hope of saving Quinn, too. Sometimes our darkest demons can take hostages even of the people around us, people who didn't deserve to get caught up in the tangled mess of our psyche but do, anyway, for no other reason than that they care enough to be in proximity to us. But our worst demons have to be defeated by no one but ourselves. If we're to finally destroy them?not just beat them down, but utterly destroy them?then we'll have to figure out how to do it on our own, even if we have all the support and love in the world at our backs.

"No mirrors in the real world had the ability to reach inside you the way these did. You could tell yourself that the mirrors were simply telling lies, but you'd be wrong. They took tiny truths, swelling them out of proportion?and the fact that there was a kernel of truth in what they reflected made the effect devastating."

?*Full Tilt*, P. 97

"I guess we all can't help peeking at our own imperfections, just like we can't help scratching a scab that keeps itching. When those imperfections are pasted across your face like that, exaggerated and magnified, it's hard to find all those good thoughts you have about yourself. If you believe those distorted reflections too deeply, you'll never get out of the maze."

?*Full Tilt*, P. 97

These are just a few of the brilliant paragraphs that make *Full Tilt* what it is, a spine-tingling and soul-searching examination of ourselves that lays bare our most personal thoughts to the realization that others have felt the same things, even if they're really good at hiding it. As far as that first quote above taken from page 97 goes, it's a perfect description of the way that we often see ourselves in actual mirrors as well as the "mirrors" of the people around us, *and* of what it means to tell a story that really affects people. A book like *Unwind*, for example, has a really "out there" premise, but what brings the terror home to us so that it's unforgettable is the kernel of truth that gives the story its impetus. It's all about taking "tiny truths" and "swelling them out of proportion"; then, "the fact that there was a kernel of truth in what they reflected made the effect devastating." It's as if Neal Shusterman has laid out for us the essential elements of the entire storytelling process here, giving us the basic blueprint for writing a story that has the potential to be as powerful and timeless as *Unwind*, or any of his other luminescent works of genius.

If I were to pick a focal point for *Full Tilt*, it would have to be the horrifying expedition through the hall of mirrors, from which I took the two quotes on page 97. It is here, I think, that Blake begins to get a handle on what his descent into the bowels of fear really means, that it's about a whole lot more than just trying to survive seven souped-up carnival rides until dawn. There's no way that he's going to make it out of all seven rides alive unless he has the courage to confront his own dark side, and the hall of mirrors shows him the worst parts of himself as no other ride could ever do. Blake sees that there's no good in just dismissing the darkness inside of oneself, pretending that it doesn't exist as it rears its head to bite. One *can* realize that it's a distortion of the truth to say that the darkness is all there is, though, or even the most important part, and steel oneself against believing the distorted reflections for what they claim to be. Believe what others say about you and you'll never find your way out of the maze, because they can never know you as well as you know yourself. Holding onto the real image of who you are, good mixed with bad as you know it to actually

be, prevents the distortions from ever becoming reality. This, ultimately, is what Blake must do to survive the night, and he discovers it, ironically, in the hall of mirrors, the place designed more than any other to distort the truth and give incorrect perspective.

"I hadn't lived a real life?I'd had just a *model* of a life. Everything I did, everything I *thought*, was suspended safely by strings, too high up for anyone to damage. Zero contact, zero risk. Now those strings had been cut and I was going to die, never having had a chance to live without them."

?*Full Tilt*, P. 115

"They say you never know who's the real hero and who's the real coward until you're looking death in the face. I've always been afraid of plenty of things, but fear isn't what makes you a coward. It's how depraved your heart becomes when fear gets pumped through it."

?*Full Tilt*, P. 125

There's so much to be said about *Full Tilt* that the Goodreads limit of twenty thousand characters would never be enough to hold it all if I were to unpack every worthy bit of fascinating discourse to look at more closely in this review. In fact, that has been the case for more than one Neal Shusterman book I've read, though I think that I've actually made more of an attempt at examining and discussing the worthy thoughts that act as scaffolding for *Full Tilt* than I have for most of the author's novels. In the end, this is a book that actually has to be *read* for one to come across all of its many revelations, so many personal epiphanies waiting to be discovered that it's hard to think back on exactly how one felt about these matters before reading *Full Tilt*. So come let the master Storyman lead you, if you're daring enough to give over control of the ride to him for a little while. This book can be a real life-changer, and undoubtedly will leave an indelible impression upon whomever reads it. There's no doubt that I would give the complete three-star rating to *Full Tilt*.

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## GRB says

I had some doubts about this book.

How wrong I was.

This book changed my life. That's all there is to it. I'll never forget it. Ever. The end.

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