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Ways to See a Ghost

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Reviewer:

[Caroline Sanderson](#) [3]

Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Gray is the son of geeky UFO-hunting conspiracy theorist. Isis is the daughter of a fake medium. The two are thrown together after their parents meet at the scene of an unexplained death and start dating. But unlike her flakey mother, Isis really can see ghosts. Her powers are mostly an annoyance, particularly when she is in the Victorian building at school, where her 'otherworldness' makes her the butt of jokes. Until the day when a terrifying 'being' manifests itself, and puts everyone Isis cares about in grave danger, the dead as well as the living. Will her psychic powers be enough to see off this immortal peril, and can the non-seeing Gray be of any help?

Now I know I'm an easily-spooked, wussy adult, but the jacket design had me expecting a slightly creepy book for younger readers. So I wasn't at all prepared for what is a really rather nasty story, with evil and unquiet spirits and Dementor-like devourers of souls lurking in our ordinary midst. This second novel by the author of the inaugural **Times/Chicken House Award** in 2009 is always eerie and mostly engrossing, and hints at some interesting themes, from the spotting of cranks and charlatans, and the brainwashing of children by technology, to the anatomy of grief, and the question of whether psychic powers are a gift or a defect. The relationship between Isis and her little sister Angel, established in a memorable opening scene is a touching one, despite the fact that I didn't always feel Angel's voice, or her behaviour rang quite true.

And ultimately, the unearthly, shape-shifting being at the heart of the story remains a bit of a phantom menace. Paranormally, or even normally speaking, it's a bit hard to work out exactly what is going on. The counterpoint telling between Gray and Isis alternates between the 1st and 3rd person, and this also made the narrative slightly disjointed for me. I felt this novel had the power to transmute into a fascinating exploration into the nature of spirits and the evidence - if any - for their existence, but this shift up a psychic gear never quite happens. I suppose I would have liked less ghost-busting, and more ghost-probing.

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