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The Secret History of Tom Trueheart

Cassandra Fugal

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Beck, Ian. *The Secret History of Tom Trueheart*. Greenwillow, 2007. ISBN 9780061152115.
\$16.99. 341 p.

Reviewer: Cassandra Fugal

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Significant shortcomings

Genre: Fairy tale;

Subject: Storytelling--Juvenile fiction; Fairy tales--Juvenile fiction; Brothers--Juvenile fiction;
Books--Reviews;

Enter the Land of Stories where all fairy tales take place. In this land, the Story Bureau starts a story, sets the stage, and then assigns an authorized adventurer (from one of the adventurer families) to play the role of the hero to complete the story. The adventurer then tells the story of his adventure to the Bureau so it can be published. Tom is the youngest brother of the adventuring Trueheart family. His six older brothers are everything a fairy tale hero should be: tall with broad shoulders and gleaming blonde hair, brave, and all are named Jack (or a variation thereof). As Tom's twelfth birthday approaches and he comes of age to become an apprentice adventurer, he fears that he is not cut out to be a fairy tale hero. Unlike his brothers, Tom is small with brown curly hair, and not brave. When all six of his brothers disappear midway through their stories, the Story Bureau sends Tom to find them and to help complete their stories so everyone can live happily ever after.

Beck playfully makes fun of fairy tale conventions in this story. By cleverly naming all six brothers with a variation of Jack, he pokes fun at the fairy tale heroes who seem interchangeable from one story to the next. Unfortunately, Beck's cleverness does not compensate for the irritating voice of the narrator or the flatness of all his characters. The reader, like Tom, will be disappointed with his adventure: Tom is disappointed that the villain got away, and the reader is disappointed that the promised adventure never begins. While fairy tales may also contain flat characters and be lackluster in the adventure department, they are grounded in a world that is easily understood. The world of the Land of Stories is so poorly developed that the reader cannot engage in the story. The inability to engage in the story makes it difficult to understand why the disappearance of a few adventurers is so frightening.