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# Challenger Deep

Carlie Smith

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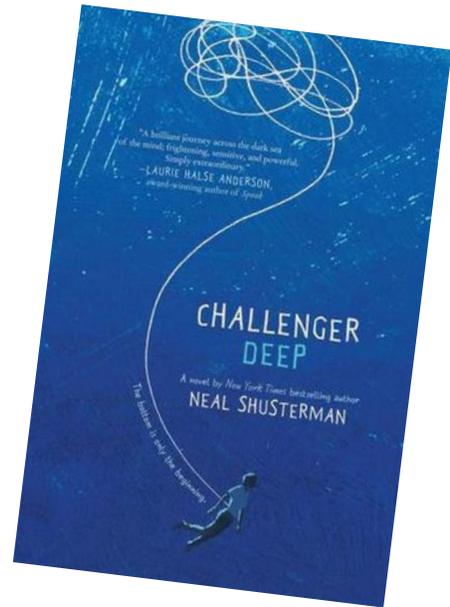
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# Book Review

**Title:** Challenger Deep  
**Author:** Neal Shusterman  
**Illustrator:** Brendan Shusterman  
**Reviewer:** Carlie Smith  
**Publisher:** Harper Teen  
**Publication Year:** 2016  
**ISBN:** 9780061134142  
**Number of Pages:** 308  
**Interest Level:** Young Adult  
**Rating:** Outstanding



## Review

Cayden Bosch is a boy who lives two lives: one aboard a pirate ship sailing for the deepest part of the Marianas Trench and the other as a normal high school student succumbing to schizophrenia. His paranoia, anxiety, and delusions eventually cause his parents to take him to a mental hospital. There he contends with his psychiatrist, the medications, and other patients. Cayden eventually makes friends with Callie and Hal and they help him in his self-discovery. His time in the hospital is the main storyline; however chapters detailing his delusions aboard the ship are shuffled in. delusions are described in alternating chapters. This metaphorical journey helps him to process his condition but also separates him from the real world. When Hal stops taking his medication and attempts to commit suicide, Cayden also sinks into despair. He symbolically dives into the trench when he also stops taking his medication and has a major breakdown. Cayden emerges from the depths after finding hope and realizing the importance of his medication. After nine weeks in the hospital he is released with a sense of optimism knowing that he even though he may sink into the depths again, "it's not going to happen today."

*Challenger Deep* is a riveting way to address one of literature's most timeless themes: Man vs. Self. But Cayden isn't a man; he's a frightened 15 year old boy, and the part of himself he fights is bent on utter self-destruction. Neal Shusterman describes Cayden's battle with schizophrenia with a degree of intimacy, respect, and tenderness that come from his experience watching his own teenage son struggle with mental illness. His authority on the matter and the skill of his writing give the book a sense of strong authenticity. Even more remarkable is the gradual way in which Shusterman reveals the meaning of Cayden's delusions. This process of discovery is engaging and rewarding. The climax of both narratives – Cayden's descent into *Challenger Deep* and his mental breakdown – is a poignant reminder of why we read fiction. This book offers hope to those struggling with mental illness and a pathway for their friends and family to develop keener understanding and empathy.

\*Contains mild language and attempted suicide