

Paulsen, Gary. *Liar, Liar: The Theory, Practice, and Destructive Properties of Deception*. New York: Wendy Lamb Books, 2011. Print.

Kevin Spencer, the fourteen year-old protagonist of Gary Paulsen's latest novel, is a consummate and unashamed liar. He considers lying to be second nature, "a way of life"; even going so far to proclaim that it is his duty to lie for the greater good because it makes things easier for everyone. In his words, the secret to successful lying is that "people only listen for what they want to hear, so I only tell them that." Possessing this particular skill also means he's never been caught in a lie.

This novel chronicles a week in Kevin's life, the week in which his lying gets out of control and his life goes from "zero to crap". He lies to his classmate about a medical illness to get out of working on an assignment, lies to his teachers so he can get skip class and spend more time trying to impress a girl, and lies to his parents to get his siblings in trouble. Along the way, he explains the rules behind "good" lying as he rationalizes and justifies his actions, until finally he is forced to face the fact that his lying has consequences.

*Liar, Liar* is full of Paulsen touchstones, including a bright, self-aware teenage protagonist, a cast of quirky supporting characters, and witty and fast-paced dialogue. Ultimately, the novel is stronger on character development and dialogue than on plot. Although the story moves along briskly enough to keep most readers interested, it is not as satisfying or cohesive as those in Paulsen's other novels. The series of events that precipitate Kevin's eventual realization about the negative effects of his lying are less dramatic than expected, resulting in a rather understated story overall. Similarly, the romantic interest that drove many of his lies was also left resolved (likely to be continued in the next novel in the series).

Nevertheless, anyone who is a fan of Paulsen's later novels such as *Lawn Boy* will still find *Liar Liar* to be an enjoyable read. Even if it's not always clear where Kevin is going with his consistent lying, his inner monologue keeps the journey entertaining.

Recommended: 3 out of 4 stars

Reviewer: Dale Storie