

Cotler, Steve. *Cheesie Mack Is Not a Genius or Anything*. Illus. Adam McCauley. New York: Random House, 2011. Print.

The protagonist of this story is Ronald “Cheesie” Mack, an energetic boy who, at ten years and ten months of age, has just finished Grade 5. In his own words, his story is about “a mysterious old coin, an evil sister...a dead sister...runaway rodents, a super-best friend, a fifth-grade graduation disaster, some really unusual words (including a few that I made up), and The Haunted Toad”. The plot is equal parts mystery novel, elementary school pranks, and sibling rivalry, with a running commentary on friendship woven through the book.

The strength of this novel is the first-person narration, which stays lively from Chapter 0 (“This Story is Over!”) to the very last page (“This is not a Chapter. Visit CheesieMack.com if...”). Cheesie Mack is a self-aware narrator who makes frequent asides to the reader, in order to provide foreshadowing, define words, explain character motives, and encourage readers to visit his website. Readers who enjoy plot-driven books may find Cheesie’s interludes annoying, since they act as frequent distractions from a plot that seems meandering at times. The book weaves multiple plot threads together, but takes its time doing so. Readers may feel as though the author will never return to earlier plot threads to resolve them (although he does successfully tie these pieces together at the end).

However, young readers who appreciate a light-hearted character-driven story will definitely enjoy this book. Readers of a similar age will be able to relate to Cheesie’s sentiments towards his best friend and to his ongoing battles with his sister. His comical interjections and mock dialogue with his readers ensure that the book remains playful and engaging, even when the plot may not be. For those who don’t want the story to end, there is always the CheesieMack.com website.

Recommended: 3 out of 4 stars

Reviewer: Dale Storie