

Title: *The Way Back*
Author: Gavriel Savit
Genre: Young Adult, Historical Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Michaila P., 11th Grade

Date Reviewed: April 2, 2022

The Way Back takes place in Russia sometime after Napoleon's conquest into the land. It is different from actual history however, because of the magic. This world is based on Jewish-eastern European folklore, and centers around a world filled with demons. There are two protagonists, Yehuda Leib and Bluma. They both live in Tupik, and a Rabbi's youngest granddaughter is getting married and everyone is invited. Yehua Leib is a fatherless, poor young boy, who is sent away as a drunk, powerful man wants him to send to the Tsar's growing army to avoid going himself. He runs away from Tupik, but is quickly caught by the man. It turns out this man is his father, and after finally meets his father, he is violently taken away from him as Yehuda Leib accidentally murders him. He meets the Angel of Death and attempts to convince him to let his father live, but is unsuccessful, with Death handing his soul to a crow. Bluma is the daughter of a baker and encounters death for the first time when the angel of death comes to collect her grandmother who lives in the attic. However, Death leaves their spoon behind, which is essential to taking souls to the afterlife. Soon, both children are whacked away to Far Country, the land of the demons. Bluma meets Lilith and her sisterhood of six grey cats and loses her face to the spoon in order to remain undetected by the rest of the demons. Yehuda Leib is bought by Lord Mammon, who is in possession of his fathers soul. After the demons failed attempt to crash the Rabbi's granddaughter's wedding and steal his soul and convince his granddaughter to join the sisterhood, the two meet up. Yehuda Leib and Bluma team up to conquer Death itself, all well avoiding getting eaten by demons and a powerful demon generals interest.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

The plot did not leave me unstressed in reading more. It was confusing and I didn't understand what was going on most of the time, and when I did, I didn't know why it was happening. Overall, I can't even judge the plot because I have no idea what even happened.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of this book was two fast. Nothing was developed well and the plot just jumped around without giving the reader any reason to care about it. The plot never slows down and gives you a minute to breathe, or even connect plot points as things happen completely randomly and without explanation.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This book is good for all ages, however it will confusing for kids younger than 13

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

This book would be a good read for anyone interested in Jewish folklore or Eastern European stories. It can be read by ages 13 and up, although it might be hard to read for those on the younger side

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

This book is based around traditional Jewish-folklore, specifically Eastern European. It is not fantasy, but actually historical fiction, despite the demons and magic in the world. It takes place sometime after Napoleon and probably in the early 20th century.

2 stars: I did not like this book but somebody else might.

I disliked this book. It was very confusing, and the writing was sloppy. The characters did have some motivation, but not enough to justify their actions throughout the novel. The world was confusing and I suppose if you are more familiar with eastern European Jewish folklore, it might make sense, but as someone who is not, it was confusing and nonsensical at times. The characters were bland and overall, I found this to be a dissatisfying read.