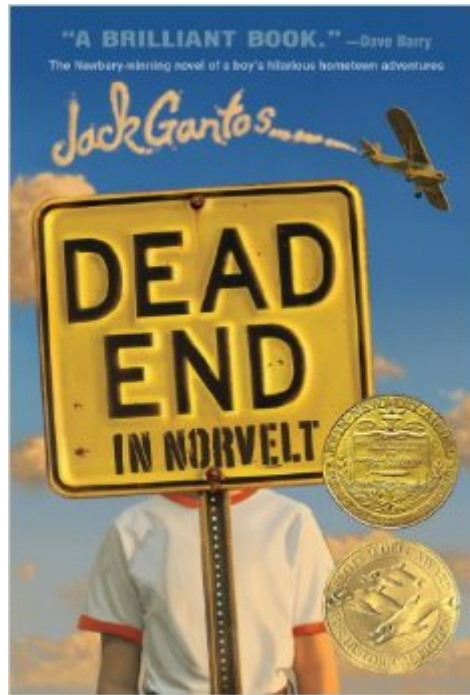


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Dead End In Norvelt (Norvelt Series)



Synopsis

Dead End in Norvelt is the winner of the 2012 Newbery Medal for the year's best contribution to children's literature and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction! Melding the entirely true and the wildly fictional, Dead End in Norvelt is a novel about an incredible two months for a kid named Jack Gantos, whose plans for vacation excitement are shot down when he is "grounded for life" by his feuding parents, and whose nose spews bad blood at every little shock he gets. But plenty of excitement (and shocks) are coming Jack's way once his mom loans him out to help a feisty old neighbor with a most unusual chore—typewriting obituaries filled with stories about the people who founded his utopian town. As one obituary leads to another, Jack is launched on a strange adventure involving molten wax, Eleanor Roosevelt, twisted promises, a homemade airplane, Girl Scout cookies, a man on a trike, a dancing plague, voices from the past, Hells Angels . . . and possibly murder. Endlessly surprising, this sly, sharp-edged narrative is the author at his very best, making readers laugh out loud at the most unexpected things in a dead-funny depiction of growing up in a slightly off-kilter place where the past is present, the present is confusing, and the future is completely up in the air.

Book Information

Series: Norvelt Series (Book 1)

Paperback: 384 pages

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Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (214 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #10,758 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in [Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > United States > 20th Century](#) #16 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > New Experiences](#) #31 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Humorous](#)

Customer Reviews

In the summer of 1962, 12-year-old Jack Gantos is "grounded for life" by his parents. Jack accidentally fired a live bullet from his dad's Japanese sniper's rifle, and got in the middle of a dispute between his parents and disobeyed his mother's orders not to cut down her corn crop. To

get out of the house, he agrees to help out his elderly neighbor, Miss Volker, with a special project. Miss Volker is a former chief nurse and now the medical examiner of the town of Norvelt, a New Deal community established in 1934 to give hardworking people a helping hand. Norvelt is named after former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. At the time of her appointment, Miss Volker promised Mrs. Roosevelt that she would keep health records on the original 250 families. As the original residents continue to move out or die off, Miss Volker composes their final health reports --- but in this case it's their obituaries. Because her crippling arthritis has rendered her unable to write or type, Jack has been "volunteered" to help out by writing out and typing the obituaries and delivering them to the editor of the Norvelt News. For Miss Volker and many of the residents, the obituaries are more than records of deaths; they are historical narratives of the deceased lives and how they impacted the town of Norvelt. Norvelt is populated with colorful characters. There's Bunny Huffer, Jack's best friend, who is the daughter of the town's undertaker. Unlike Jack, Bunny isn't squeamish being around dead bodies, and she likes to play pranks. Mr. Edwin Spizz is the town busybody who rides around on an adult tricycle, spying on neighbors and reporting them to the community council. Mr. Spizz also has had his eye on Miss Volker since 1912, but she has no use for him.

I brought *Dead End in Norvelt* home the day it won the Newberry, and could barely contain my excitement as I presented it to my 12 year old son, saying "This book won the Newberry Award today, doesn't it look good? I thought you might like to read it!" He gave me one withering glance before saying "Not really...everyone knows Newberry winners are boring." Ouch. So being the book nerd that I am, I read it myself. Initially, I was inclined to agree with my son's snap judgement assessment. It took me quite a while to warm up to young Jack Gantos and his strange little town of Norvelt. Things get off to a pretty slow start as we meet Jack, his family, and a collection of truly odd characters. Those readers who are able to hang in there through the slow parts will most likely come to appreciate Gantos's unique brand of homespun humor, and will be rewarded with a story that takes enough unexpected twists and turns to keep you turning pages long past your bedtime. Young Jack Gantos is having the world's worst summer. After being grounded for getting in the middle of a fight between his parents, he's destined to spend a summer confined to his room reading history, and helping his dad dig a bomb shelter. It's 1962 and Norvelt is a Roosevelt town filled with aging townspeople, most notably Miss Volker, the official town medical examiner. It's her job to write the obituaries, and since she suffers from arthritis, it's Jack's job to help her. These two make quite the team and their interactions provide a lot of the humor in the book. Add in Jack's dad

who is constantly talking about the communist threat, and Jack's mom who believes in communal living and the barter system, and you can see the potential for quite a story.

What makes Jack Gantos tick? It's a question that haunts every book he writes, from the simplest Rotten Ralph to his own YA autobiography *Hole in My Life*. It's a talent to write compelling characters, but what if the most compelling character of them all is the author himself? With each Gantos tome I find myself coming back to this question: Why is Jack Gantos the way he is? To be fair, I suspect the man is asking himself the same question at the same time. How else to explain the Jack Henry books like *Jack Adrift* that cull from the author's life? Or the aforementioned autobiography? Or the fact that *Dead End in Norvelt*, his latest outing, stars a kid named "Jack Gantos" who lives in a town Jack lived in for a time and experiences many of the things Jack experienced. We're dealing with a book that melds memoir and fiction by turns, managing to drop little tidbits of information that appear to be the seeds of everything from *Joey Pigza* to *The Love Curse of the Rumbaugh*s. Folks, it's a weird book. No question about that. It may also be one of the finest he's produced in years.

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