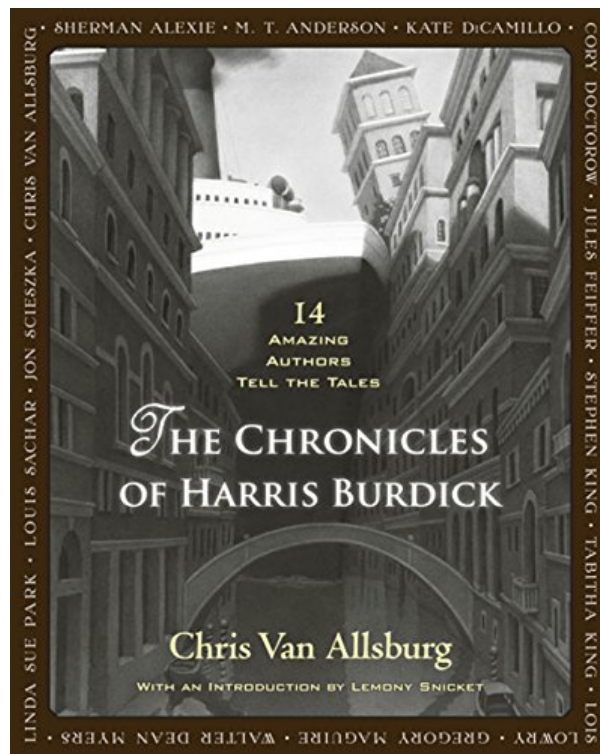
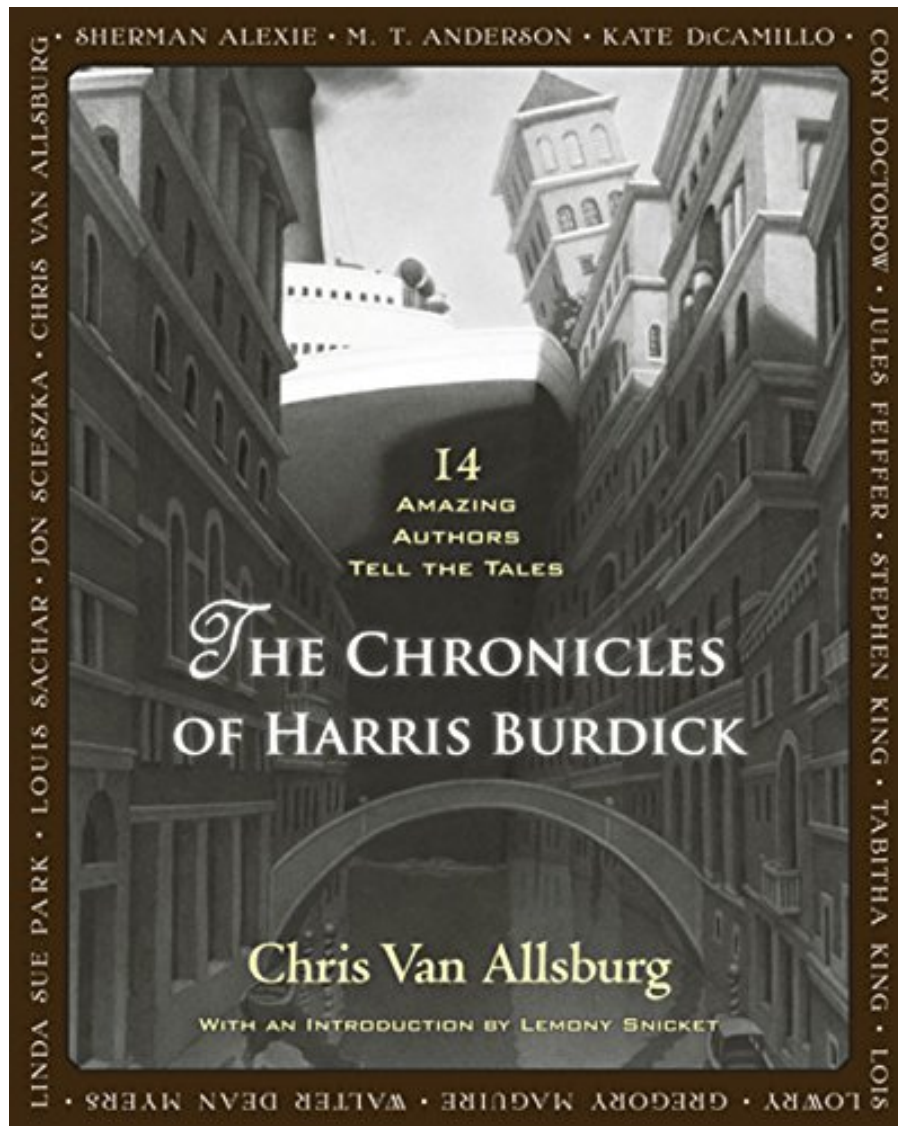


# THE CHRONICLES OF HARRIS BURDICK: FOURTEEN AMAZING AUTHORS TELL THE TALES / WITH AN INTRODUCTION



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"While the stories are distinct—by turns funny, sinister, and touching—they have much in common, sharing an arch tone, a curious metaphysicality, and some familiar folk-tale tropes, and the authors' commitment to the original conceit gives the volume additional cohesion."—Booklist

## About the Author

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An inspired collection of short stories by an all-star cast of best-selling storytellers based on the thought-provoking illustrations in Chris Van Allsburg's *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*.

For more than twenty-five years, the illustrations in the extraordinary *Mysteries of Harris Burdick* by Chris Van Allsburg have intrigued and entertained readers of all ages. Thousands of children have been inspired to weave their own stories to go with these enigmatic pictures. Now we've asked some of our very best storytellers to spin the tales. Enter *The Chronicles of Harris Burdick* to gather this incredible compendium of stories: mysterious, funny, creepy, poignant, these are tales you won't soon forget.

This inspired collection of short stories features many remarkable, best-selling authors in the worlds of both adult and children's literature: Sherman Alexie, M.T. Anderson, Kate DiCamillo, Cory Doctorow, Jules Feiffer, Stephen King, Tabitha King, Lois Lowry, Gregory Maguire, Walter Dean Myers, Linda Sue Park, Louis Sachar, Jon Scieszka, Lemony Snicket, and Chris Van Allsburg himself.

Van Allsburg's *Harris Burdick* illustrations have evoked such wonderment and imagination since *Harris Burdick*'s original publication in 1984; many have speculated or have woven their own stories to go with his images. More than ever, the illustrations send off their eerie call for text and continue to compel and pick at the reader's brain for a backstory—a threaded tale behind the image. In this book, we've collected some of the best storytellers to spin them.

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

92 of 100 people found the following review helpful.

A non-essential companion book to a classic

By Jennifer Mo

I came across Chris Van Allsburg's *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* as a young adult and fell in love. The surreal black and white illustrations and brief lines of evocative text hint at fantastic stories that are just out of reach. Part of the fun is, of course, thinking of your own stories. But I really think that most of the appeal is in not knowing the full story -- but being able to imagine that it is splendid.

Telling stories that live up to imaginary ones is a daunting task, and perhaps inevitably, *The Chronicles of Harris Burdick* falls short. It's not for want of talent: the line-up of 14 all-star authors includes Gregory Maguire, Kate DiCamillo, Lois Lowry, Stephen King, Louis Sachar, and Jon Scieszka. Lemony Snicket, still in his *Series of Unfortunate Events* persona, introduces the project and the stories. But simply by adding concrete details, beginnings, and ends, the authors lose some of that sense of wonder so evident in *Mysteries*.

The 14 stories are perfectly readable, if a little uneven. My favorites include Jon Scieszka's *Under the Rug*, which reads like his fractured fairy tale picture books: terse, a little macabre, and quite funny. I also enjoyed Jules Feiffer's *Uninvited Guests*, with its deranged main character and existential twist, although I can't imagine that younger readers would get much out of this one. Chris Van Allsburg's own contribution, *Oscar and Alphonse*, strikes the perfect balance between whimsy and bittersweetness.

Some of the stories are a bit peculiar. Sherman Alexie is a hugely talented writer who spins a memorable tale in *A Strange Day in July*, but it doesn't match the sunny innocence of the illustration it accompanies. Lois Lowry's *The Seven Chairs* struck me as having an odd sexual undertone, and Steven King's *The House on Maple Street*, with which the collection ends, is actually distasteful. The other stories range from mildly entertaining to disappointingly mundane. A few feel a little forced.

The stories are all over the place in terms of tone and setting -- creepy, sweet, snide, heart-warming, grotesque -- and I don't think they're all appropriate for young readers. *The Chronicles of Harris Burdick* is

an interesting collection of stories, but it is essentially a companion book to a much more powerful and lasting work.

23 of 27 people found the following review helpful.

The Chronicles of Harris Burdick

By Chapati

Almost 30 years ago, Chris Van Allsburg (of Jumanji fame) came out with a book entitled The Chronicles of Harris Burdick. It was a collection of 14 drawings, each with a tantalizing title and an intriguing caption. And that's all- no stories attached. There was an interesting back story told about these stories, about a mysterious man named Harris Burdick who dropped the pictures off, promised more of them and the accompanying stories, and then disappeared, never to be seen again. And now, fourteen brilliant authors have collaborated to each create a story around the pictures, using their titles and the given captions as additional inspiration.

The contributing authors are all-stars: Sherman Alexie, Kate DiCamillo, Stephen King, Lois Lowry, Gregory Maguire and more. The introduction (quite witty) is by Lemony Snicket. Chris Van Allsburg contributes a story, too. And the inspiration for the stories? Excellent. The pictures are beautifully evocative, and when you combine them with the titles and the captions, it's fabulous fun to think of all the stories that might accompany them, what the characters are doing and what happens at that exact moment.

That, perhaps, is why this collection falls a little flat. Some of the stories, like Chris Van Allsburg's own, Kate DiCamillo's and Louis Sachar's, are lovely. Some have that enticingly creepy overtone that Chris Van Allsburg is so good at- especially Sherman Alexie's. Some just are... well, not nearly as interesting as the stories that I imagined were waiting to be told. And it's hard, really, to see a picture, read the caption and then center your imagination around a title, and then be disappointed in the story that is actually presented to you. In this way, the collection will never really be brilliant to anyone who reads it because each story has to stand up to your own vivid imagination, and if your imagination- however vague the story in your head may be- trumps the author's, then you are just left with a feeling of disappointment.

When I think about it more deeply, I almost find it a shame that these pictures now have concrete stories associated with them. I love the romance of a vanished author whose work has been lost, the world left with only these fourteen clues as to his promise and potential to take us on trips to faraway, fantastical destinations. Setting these pictures to words, even the words of some of our greatest authors, limits the magic they can create and forces our own imaginations into boxes not of our own making. So I'd say to get the original version of this book, that gives you just the illustrations and the captions and the titles, and let your imagination create its own vivid stories and characters and possibilities around them, rather than letting these authors lead you down their imagined paths.

26 of 31 people found the following review helpful.

The art of the short story

By E. R. Bird

Chris Van Allsburg has always been the Rod Serling of the children's literary world. Of that there can be no question. With no other author, not Gorey, not Snicket, not even R.L. Stine himself, will kids encounter that eerie feeling that can only be best associated with classic Twilight Zone episodes. All his picture books (even nonfiction ones like Queen of the Falls) suggest to the reader that ours is a world not far removed from the ones featured in his books. Maybe coloring books really do have lives of their own before children get to them. Perhaps strangers with amnesia really do have a special relationship with the seasons. And that board game you find one day? Fuggetaboutit. Of all his books, mind, the one that really touched this eerie quality best was The Mysteries of Harris Burdick. I can think of no other picture book that has covered such ground. Back in 1984, Burdick dared to simply imply stories rather than tell them. Its mysterious pictures, each with

a single line beneath, hinted at whole worlds. Now fourteen writers for children have been tapped to interpret these stories themselves, to varying degrees of success. Whether you love all the stories, some of the stories, or just a few of the stories, this is one of the better short story collections for kids out there. Its success, however, hinges entirely on its authors' ability to understand Van Allsburg and his tone.

Fourteen authors. Thirteen stories. One introduction by Lemony Snicket. Each author takes an image from Chris Van Allsburg's *The Mysteries of Harries Burdick* and writes a short story about that image. The results are as varied as can be. Jon Scieszka seemingly channels Roald Dahl with his satisfyingly short "Under the Rug". Stephen King, in contrast, presents the longest story with "The House on Maple Street", though it is no less satisfying. Kids reading this book will find droll writing from Linda Sue Park, a Truman Show-esque tale of caution from M.T. Anderson, and a true epic fantasy from Cory Doctorow. By the end some authors have successfully plugged into the Van Allsburg mindset while others have struggled, but while the stories might be touch and go, they are never, ever dull.

Short story collections for kids can be such a mixed bag, particularly when different authors write them. You'd actually find a lot more consistency in a collection by a single author (like *Strange Happenings* by Avi, say) than one with fourteen different people. In the case of this particular book, I found myself judging the stories on two entirely different levels. First, there were the tales themselves. Were they adequately interesting? Well-written? Something a kid would be compelled to read? Second, how closely did the authors actually look at the images they were supposed to interpret? In short story writing there can be no "wrong" storytelling, yet I often felt far more compelled to give credit to the writers that knew how to use a picture as inspiration rather than as a mere starting point.

Let us consider the quality of the tales, first and foremost. Some writers wrote tales that were whole and complete stories. Stephen King's consideration of a space-bound house, say, or Jules Feiffer's tale of an elderly children's author. Other authors sort of took their tales and used them to tell the beginning of a story. Cory Doctorow's fascinating look at alternate realities did that, as did Sherman Alexie's tale (which, along with M.T. Anderson's, ambles the closest to Van Allsburg's own penchant for the dark and mysterious). But those authors that wrote what felt like the first chapter in a book actually became the most interesting of the lot. They hearken back to the original *Harris Burdick* and its role in classrooms around the country. For years creative writing teachers have used the picture book and its illustrations to inspire kids to continue the tales. So stories like Doctorow's or Alexie's sort of end up doing the same thing. A kid could read their tales and be inspired to continue along the same lines.

That said, some of the stories just didn't do it for me storywise. Tabitha King who, to the best of my knowledge, has never written for children before, is a strange inclusion in this collection. Her story "Archie Smith, Boy Wonder" promises much with its title and image. Sadly, it doesn't deliver (making me suspect that hers is the first story in the collection for a reason). And interestingly, looking back at the book I found myself forgetting Van Allsburg's own story (a fact I find relatively ironic). It's perfectly nice, but I couldn't conjure you up the details if you asked.

Then there was how well and author interpreted their picture. There was a great deal of variation in this. Some authors were shockingly faithful. Gregory Maguire's tale "Missing in Venice" really does manage to come up with a reason why an ocean liner might be traversing the too small canals of that great city. "The Third-Floor Bedroom" by Kate DiCamillo starts out by sounding like it might go in a different direction, then justifies everything by its story's end. Other authors were vaguely faithful. Lois Lowry's "The Seven Chairs" uses the line that accompanies its image ("The fifth one ended up in France") though not with the scene that we see of a nun floating high above two priests. That's okay. It's cheating a little, but it isn't too bad. Then there are the authors who clearly just glanced at the image and quote and didn't feel the need to

really pair their stories to the images. I'm torn on the Walter Dean Myers story "Mr. Linden's Library" since the storyline feels very Van Allsburg, even while it has little to do with the accompanying picture of a woman asleep in front of a vine-spewing book. Louis Sachar, however, may have paid the least amount of attention to his image. In his picture a captain signals a boat with a boy by his side. Look closely at the picture, however, and you'll see that the captain has a firm grip on the boy's upper arm, so as to keep him from escaping. Sachar latched on to the boy and captain idea in "Captain Tory" but the drama of the scene has completely escaped him. Ah well.

I told someone I know about this book recently and they responded with sadness. "Oh, what a pity. The whole point of *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* was that kids could make the stories out to be whatever they wanted." True, I suppose, but I don't see this book as being anything but a natural extension of the original. There's nothing to say that teachers can't continue to use the first book for assignments, then show the kids this book as a follow-up. And who knows? Maybe the kids will read these stories on their own, think to themselves "I can do better than that!", and be inspired to write their own versions as well. Hey, stranger things have happened. Above and beyond all of that, however, this is just a really good collection of stories for kids. Eerie and wonderful. Strange and unpredictable. You may not love every story in here, but the ones you do care for will burn strong and bright in your memory, long after the weaker ones have faded. If I were to recommend to you one short story collection to kids published in the last ten years, this would be the one I'd hand over.

For ages 9-12.

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# **THE CHRONICLES OF HARRIS BURDICK: FOURTEEN AMAZING AUTHORS TELL THE TALES / WITH AN INTRODUCTION PDF**

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Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, November 2011: Sublimely curious, strangely serious, terrifyingly hilarious--the 14 new short stories by authors Stephen King, Lois Lowry, Walter Dean Myers and other bestselling storytellers in Chris Van Allsburg's *The Chronicles of Harris Burdick* are a perfect match for the unexplained drawings that inspired them: the beloved, eerie black and white images, accompanied only by a title and caption, in *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, originally published by Allsburg in 1984. What could have been a basic writing exercise in the hands of these professionals unfolds as thoughtful, intriguing tales only masters could tell. With an introduction by Lemony Snicket, the stories close the loop on the mysterious drawings, but if they aren't up to readers' satisfaction, it can merely serve as another reason to gaze upon Allsburg's layered pictures once again, 27 years later. --Alexandra Foster

Review

"Engaging, with strokes of brilliance"—Kirkus

"This star-studded exercise in creative writing tests the wits of favorite authors and shows readers how even the big shots hone their craft."—Publishers Weekly, starred review

"The stories embrace a range of styles and subjects, but, like their enigmatic and mysterious inspirations, each touches on the strange, the odd, and the fantastic."—The Horn Book Magazine

"While the stories are distinct—by turns funny, sinister, and touching—they have much in common, sharing an arch tone, a curious metaphysicality, and some familiar folk-tale tropes, and the authors' commitment to the original conceit gives the volume additional cohesion."—Booklist

About the Author

Chris Van Allsburg is the winner of two Caldecott Medals, for *Jumanji* and *The Polar Express*, as well as the

recipient of a Caldecott Honor Book for *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*. The author and illustrator of numerous picture books for children, he has also been awarded the Regina Medal for lifetime achievement in children's literature. In 1982, *Jumanji* won the National Book Award and in 1996, it was made into a popular feature film. Chris Van Allsburg was formerly an instructor at the Rhode Island School of Design. He lives in Rhode Island with his wife and two children.

Sherman Alexie is the author of several novels and collections of short fiction including the National Book Award Winner *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) and *War Dances*, winner of the 2010 PEN / Faulkner Award for Fiction. Alexie lives with his wife and two sons in Seattle, and has published 14 books of poetry and short stories about life on a contemporary Indian reservation, and Indian-white relationships.

M. T. Anderson is the author of *The Game of Sunken Places*, *Burger Wuss*, *Thirsty*, and *Feed*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award, a Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor Book and the winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Young Adult Fiction. Anderson also received the Printz Honor and the National Book Award for *Octavian Nothing*. He lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

Kate DiCamillo is the author of *The Magician's Elephant*, a New York Times bestseller; *The Tale of Despereaux*, which was awarded the Newbery Medal; *Because of Winn-Dixie*, a Newbery Honor book; and six books starring Mercy Watson, including the Theodor Seuss Geisel Honor Book *Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride*. She lives in Minneapolis.

Cory Doctorow ([craphound.com](http://craphound.com)) is a science fiction author, activist, journalist and blogger -- the co-editor of *Boing Boing* ([boingboing.net](http://boingboing.net)) and the author of the bestselling Tor Teens/HarperCollins UK novel *Little Brother*. He is the former European director of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and co-founded the UK Open Rights Group. Born in Toronto, Canada, he now lives in London.

Jules Feiffer's artistic sensibility permeates a wide range of creative work, from his Pulitzer-winning comic strip in the *Village Voice*, to his Obie Award-winning play *Little Murders*, to his Oscar-winning anti-military short subject animation, *Munro*, to his beloved illustrations for *The Phantom Tollbooth*. Feiffer's cartoons have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Playboy*, and *The Nation*, and he has recently reinvented himself as a children's book author. His first book, *The Man in the Ceiling*, was selected by *Publisher's Weekly* and the New York Public Library as one of the year's best children's books.

Stephen King has since published over 40 books and has become one of the world's most successful writers. Stephen lives in Maine and Florida with his wife, novelist Tabitha King. They are regular contributors to a number of charities including many libraries and have been honored locally for their philanthropic activities.

Tabitha King has published eight novels (the eighth in 2006 with Michael McDowell as co-author), all of



which were released in hardcover and paperback by Macmillan and New American Library. She has also published two works of non-fiction, one of which was published in paperback by Dendrite.

Lois Lowry is the author of more than thirty books for children. She has received countless honors, among them the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award, the California Young Reader's Medal, and the Mark Twain Award. She received Newbery Medals for two of her novels, *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*. Her first novel, *A Summer to Die*, was awarded the International Reading Association's Children's Book Award.

Gregory Maguire is the author of five novels for adults, including the best seller *Wicked*, and more than a dozen novels for children. Mr. Maguire has been the recipient of several awards and fellowships. He lives in Massachusetts.

Walter Dean Myers is the critically acclaimed New York Times bestselling author of more than 80 books for children and young adults. His award-winning body of work include *Sunrise Over Fallujah*, *Fallen Angels*, *Monster*, *Somewhere in the Darkness*, *SLAM!*, *Jazz* and *Harlem*. Mr. Myers has received two Newbery Honors and five Coretta Scott King Awards. In addition, he is the winner of the first Michael L. Printz Award. Mr. Myers lives in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Linda Sue Park is the author of Newbery Medal title *A Single Shard* as well as numerous other novels, picture books, and poetry. She lives in Rochester, NY, with her family.

Newbery Award-winning author Louis Sachar is the creator of the entertaining *Marvin Redpost* books as well as the much-loved *There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom*, winner of 17 child-voted state awards. His book *Holes*, winner of the 1999 Newbery Medal, the National Book Award, and the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, is also an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, an ALA Quick Pick, an ALA Notable Book, and was made into a major motion picture.

Jon Scieszka was appointed the first National Ambassador for Young People's Literature in January 2008. He is the author of several bestselling children's titles, including *The Stinky Cheese Man*, which won a Caldecott Honor medal, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* and the *Time Warp Trio*, a chapter book series. Scieszka is the founder of *Guys Read*, a nonprofit literacy organization.

Lemony Snicket is the author of several unpleasant stories, including those in the bestselling *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and *The Lump of Coal*.

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