



## A Boy's Guide to Outer Space

**Peter Selgin**

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The malaise of a small New England town in the 1960s is given an undercurrent of the infinite in Peter Selgin's inspired novel *A Boy's Guide to Outer Space*.

Half is a junior high school student with a mentally ill stepbrother, a hat store–owning stepfather, and an alcoholic mother. His perspectives are bounded by Hattertown, Connecticut, a hat industry town with only one active factory left. Prone to curiosity and longing for a career as an astronaut, Half is guided by the specter of his father's voice commanding him to follow his fears. As a result, he begins to reconsider his place in society, pull away from his crew of friends, and reassess the limitations of his prospects. To boot, Half is drawn in by a mysterious denizen with a sordid past, dubbed the Man in Blue, who lives in a bucolic cottage on the outskirts of town. With his stepbrother in tow, and with the blossoming of a complicated relationship with the strange resident of the cottage, Half faces existential quandaries and adolescent snares that bring his place in his community and beyond into blurred focus.

Its prose equal parts humorous, poignant, and observational, this is a sharp-toned story about small-town upbringings. Half is as rambunctious as he is confused and as inquisitive as he is somewhat damaged. His wish to explore the cosmos seems blunted until the realization that despite the facade of his predicaments, Half's explorations and epiphanies make him but one articulation of the courageous voyager he pines to become.

In the comforting, truth-filled bildungsroman *A Boy's Guide to Outer Space*, a boy is more than where he is from. Outer space may be just outside his door, if he looks with the right eyes.

RYAN PRADO (November / December 2024)

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