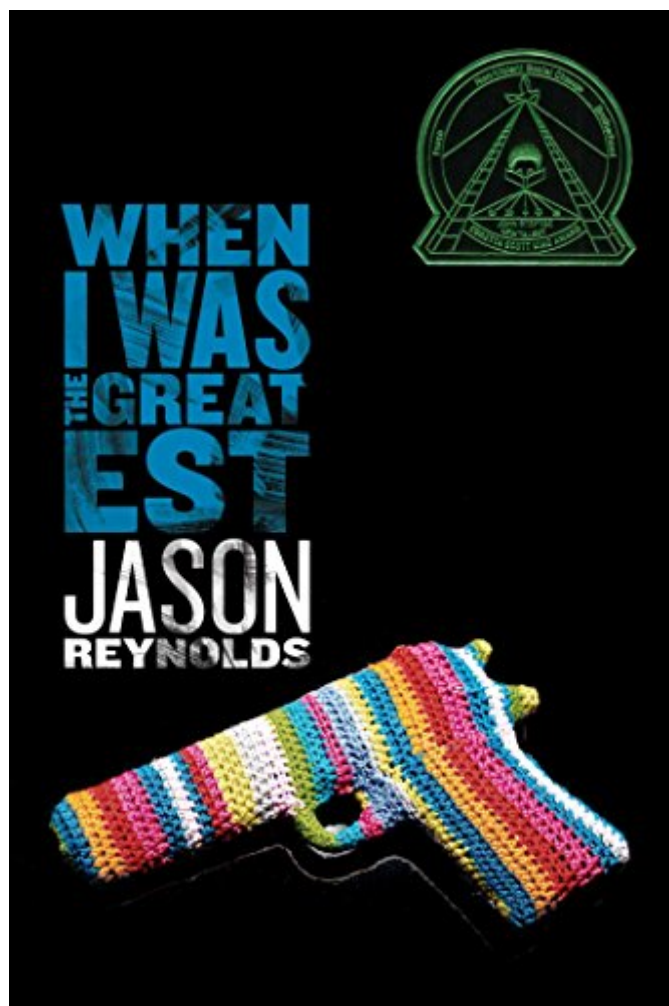


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# When I Was The Greatest



## Synopsis

In Bed Stuy, New York, a small misunderstanding can escalate into having a price on your head—even if you’re totally clean. This gritty, triumphant debut that calls “a funny and rewarding read” captures the heart and the hardship of life for an urban teen. A lot of the stuff that gives my neighborhood a bad name, I don’t really mess with. The guns and drugs and all that, not really my thing. Nah, not his thing. Ali’s got enough going on, between school and boxing and helping out at home. His best friend Noodles, though. Now there’s a dude looking for trouble—and, somehow, it’s always Ali around to pick up the pieces. But, hey, a guy’s gotta look out for his boys, right? Besides, it’s all small potatoes; it’s not like anyone’s getting hurt. And then there’s Needles. Needles is Noodles’s brother. He’s got a syndrome, and gets these ticks and blurts out the wildest, craziest things. It’s cool, though: everyone on their street knows he doesn’t mean anything by it. Yeah, it’s cool—until Ali and Noodles and Needles find themselves somewhere they never expected to be—somewhere they never should’ve been—where the people aren’t so friendly, and even less forgiving.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ali is a kid growing up in Bed-Stuy with his strong Mom, Doris, and his younger sister, Jazz. His dad, a small time hustler sells stolen stuff out of his car (which he is living in), and the brownstone next door has disintegrated into a no-hope building for junkies and prostitutes after the long time owners have sold up and moved South (which happened a lot in Bed-Stuy in the mid 2000s when housing prices boomed, and owners who had gone through the hardest of times (Bed-Stuy = Murder City in the 80s) suddenly had golden tickets and moved away in their old age.) In his terrific Young Adult novel, Jason Reynolds captures the feel of Bed-Stuy, both the energy and the despair, all from the view of young guys whose futures may or may not have been set in stone already. Ali is part of a loving, if complicated, family, whereas his best friend Noodles who lives next door in the junky house with his checked-out despairing mother and his brother Needles who suffers from Tourettes. Both Noodles and Needles futures look bleak, but Ali and his level headed, warm hearted take on life could perhaps be their saving grace. Following their day to day activities, in a real, non-judgmental way, Reynolds creates a vision of families surviving, and love thriving in the cracks. Ali is mentored by a local boxing coach, a Vietnam vet missing his legs, but is perhaps too kind to really fight, while Noodles is already spiraling into petty crime and an anti-social rut which can only end badly if he can't turn around. Together with Needles they get invited to an underground party, and their preparation for it and what happens there will change all of their lives. So why are these guys called Ali, Noodles, and Needles? Well, I'm not giving that away, but I do want to give you a whole, unexpected knitting subplot going on, and there is a scene where Noodles and Ali go to a knitting store over in Cobble Hill that had me rolling on the floor. Reynolds is interested in the race and class divisions that form the veins of NYC, and just as Ali is aware he is living in a world within other worlds, Reynolds shows us that, too, and in an entertaining, human way. It's a wonderful book, and everyone should read it, regardless of age.

Jason Reynolds has written a diverse book all teens will want to read. I found this title on [#weneeddiversebooks](#). This book is urban fiction (my students loved urban fiction!!!), involves a

black teen with Tourette Syndrome, the toughness of neighborhood and family but also the closeness of community. Ali is a teen who becomes friends with brothers, Noodles & Needles when they move into his neighborhood. They hang out on the steps of their Bed-Stuy block but these 2 brothers lives are so much more gritty than Ali's. Ali has a tough, loving mother who works 2 jobs, an 11 year old sister wise beyond her years, and a father who seems to be absent. Ali has scruples and looks forward to his days with Noodles and Needles even calling them The Three Musketeers. But as time goes on, Ali begins to struggle with the way Noodles treats his brother, Needles. It all explodes one night, causing Ali to question if he can be friends with Noodles ever again. The writing is unflinching but also extols family, friendship, loyalty and honesty. I loved everything about this book and am definitely diving right into Jason Reynolds next book, The Boy in the Black Suit. Highly recommended.

There are so many wonderful things I could say about this book, but I'm afraid this review would turn into a dissertation. So, I'll keep it as short as possible. "When I Was the Greatest" is a refreshing look at the life of a precocious kid from Brooklyn, Ali. The story details Ali's perspective on family and friendship. It is a colorful, edgy and insightful coming of age story. As a young adult novel, books like this are extremely necessary not only to minor communities but to our world as a whole. If storytelling is to communicate the complexities of the human experience then every human should have a voice, even young black men. Jason does an excellent job getting into the head of a teenage boy. Ali's wrestling and trying to grasp the depths of loyalty is something we can all relate to. Reading this book will make you laugh, cry and take a closer look into the hearts of our young people.

I bought the book after the author spoke to my class (I'm the teacher). The students were on the edges of their seats the whole time. I was so impressed that I bought 3 copies for my classroom at my own expense just to give my students a chance to read Jason's work. I also bought his other 2 books which look amazing too.

I enjoyed this book. Loved the characters, well written and kept my interest. I will definitely read more of Jason Reynolds's books.

Jason Reynolds is an author to watch! He opens up the literary world to a whole new audience. Fantastic read. Also great for younger readers!

The book definitely met my expectations. It was easy to relate to the story characters.

Loved it! Made me laugh & cry. Great read :) #iLoveJasonReynolds

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