



# Shotgun Gravy

*Chuck Wendig*

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## **Shotgun Gravy** Chuck Wendig

\* \* \* (Warning: Book features adult language and situations.) \* \* \*

“Sometimes she wakes up at night, smelling that gunpowder smell. Ears ringing. A whimpering there in the darkness. Doesn’t always hit her at night, either. Might be in the middle of the day. She should be smelling pizza, or garbage, or cat s\*\*t wafting from the house next door, but instead what she smells is that acrid tang of gunsmoke. All up in her nose. Clinging there like a tick...”

So begins the tale of Atlanta Burns, a young girl with a grim past lingering at the fringes of her droll and dreary high school existence. She’s content to remain there, too, or so she thinks: soon, however, she’s drawn in a battle against two separate groups of bullies – a trio of local troublemakers and a group of Neo-Nazi gay bashers – to save a pair of new and unexpected friends.

But actions have consequences, and by fighting back, Atlanta discovers she’s kicked over a log, thus revealing what hides squirming underneath.

It’s just her, her friends, and a .410 squirrel gun against a handful of bullies and a conspiracy whose worst aspects remain yet hidden.

Can she triumph?

Will her victory be paid in unseen sacrifices?

Or is fighting back just asking for a face full of bad news?

(This is novella #1, a complete tale in and of itself. But Atlanta’s story will continue in episode #2, BAIT DOG.)

“SHOTGUN GRAVY is like VERONICA MARS on Adderall. Atlanta Burns is a troubled teenage girl who’s scared, angry, and not taking s\*\*t from anybody. Chuck Wendig knocks this one out of the park as he so often does.” – Stephen Blackmoore, author of CITY OF THE LOST and DEAD THINGS

“Give Nancy Drew a shotgun and a kick-butt attitude and you get Atlanta Burns. Packed with action and fascinating characters, SHOTGUN GRAVY is a story that will captivate both teens and adults and have them clamoring for the next installment.” – Joelle Charbonneau, author of SKATING OVER THE LINE

## **Shotgun Gravy Details**

Date : Published by Terribleminds (first published October 12th 2011)

ISBN :

Author : Chuck Wendig

Format : Kindle Edition 109 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Fiction, Mystery, Crime, Thriller

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# From Reader Review Shotgun Gravy for online ebook

## Haralambi Markov says

A little too light on the prose, but when it mattered, Wendig delivered one punch after another. It's a merciless novella, which deeply resonated with me. Sure, the story is a hyper-presentation of ultra-violence [not the gore fest variety, but the violence that is motivated by hatred and inspired by cruelty]. It's a story about extremes, which delivers a very simple message, which I guess has no other way to be delivered than a classic hyperbolized war between good and evil, where no one really wins and everyone hurts.

I hope we get to see more of Atlanta Burns. Chuck Wendig, you did well.

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## Ben Babcock says

This story was very depressing. Like, bleak pits of despair depressing. Chuck Wendig takes all the good things in the world and beats them up for their lunch money, which he then spends on drugs and alcohol for underage victims of abuse. Sympathy is almost required for Atlanta Burns, but at the same time, it's difficult to like reading about her life. *Shotgun Gravy* is a perfect exercise for readers who like their *noire* extra black.

I'm not particularly fond of the clipped style of sentence structure Wendig uses. It would have been more tolerable had the book been in first person, but with a limited, third-person narrator, the style seems more artificial. I admit to being addicted to long, meandering sentences that belong more in Victorian novels than they do in contemporary works. Nevertheless, the staccato beats that pepper *Shotgun Gravy* tried my patience. Combined with the dark subject matter and dark tone in general, I spent much of the book wondering why I bothered to keep reading.

It's not that it's like a train wreck. I could have looked away.

It's not that there's something ultimately rewarding or redeeming about Atlanta's story. There isn't. She doesn't undergo any great epiphany as a result of helping victims of bullying. If anything, things get worse for her.

I don't really know why I kept reading. I just did. Then I went ahead and read *Bait Dog* too, and that wasn't exactly a bucket of laughs either.

If you like this sort of thing, there is no reason to avoid it. Wendig is skilled at character studies in self-loathing. (To be honest, though, I found the minor characters less than three-dimensional.) *Shotgun Gravy* is about Atlanta's slow road towards the on-ramp towards the service entrance for a detour near the road to recovery. As a result, it's a slow but tightly-packed narrative, and those who stick it out will be rewarded.

If you prefer puppy dogs and rainbows though, this is not the book for you.

(This is a rather brief review, but my review of *Bait Dog* is slightly more extensive.)

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## Casondra says

Like a blast of pellet in the face, *SHOTGUN GRAVY* explodes right from the get go and you want to follow around Atlanta Burns as if she's the Bonnie to your Clyde. This book is a 4-star thriller on my virtual shelf.

This novella has been out for a long time (since 2011, to be exact), and I've read it twice now – my first foray into the ebook world. So, I blame that for making me take so dang long (my slow reading pace aside), as my reading time normally involves a hard-copy book. I'm not a luddite, I just prefer it the old-fashioned way. Regardless, once I did read *SHOTGUN GRAVY*, I sped through it; turning pages faster than Ms. Burns shotgun of justice.

There's something darkly satisfying in this story – your inner dorky teen exalts the protagonist for doing the things you sometimes wish you could have done when you were a teen. If you've somehow forgotten your teen years, read this so you understand that it's hard to tell a teenager “It Gets Better” when they are in the midst of a bad bully culture. If you're the parent of a teen, reading this may well help you understand well why your kid is so frustrated with the hierarchy of high school culture and the ignorant parents that allow it to endure.

Don't be scared that *SHOTGUN GRAVY* is all doom and gloom, though. Wendig has a great way with words (if you don't follow his blog *TerribleMinds* this might be news to you), so there's humor and a true-to-reality glimmer of hope. I would say that teachers of teens, parents of teens, as well as every teen and adult around should read this book.

Without giving it away, the ending leaves you not only wanting more, but knowing that blasting back at bullies is just as hard as taking it. You decide if Atlanta and her cohorts pick the right path. Regardless, this is a YA as YA books should be – dealing with real issues and not sugar-coating it or downplaying just how bad it can be to be an outcast in the realm of teenage-hood.

As I said, the ending leaves you wanting more. Not to leave you dissatisfied, Wendig followed up with *Bait Dog*, a full-length novel for the return of Atlanta Burns. I'm warming up my Nook now. He made reading on the e-reader enjoyable, so I'm betting Wendig's Burns in *Bait Dog* will do it again. You would be wise to do the same.

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Reviewer's Note: I don't write a review unless I've read the book at least twice. I may give some stars to a once-read book, but an in-depth review means I've read it at least twice.

I use the system of 1 to 5 stars. Here's how that plays out in my scale:

Five Stars: this is a work that will grace my bibliophile shelves, for which I will likely read other books by the author, and for which I'll read again, and will likely become part of my “comfort reads.” These are books that have wrecked, changed, inspired, or otherwise rewarded me doubly for spending time with them.

Four Stars: means I'll likely read it again, as well as recommend it to others.

Three Stars: is a book I'd recommend people read.

Two Stars: means that I found pleasure in reading it to the end, but I likely wouldn't recommend it to someone else – and I likely list what that reason is.

One Star: are typically books I can't finish. But, they get one star because every reader is an individual. What I can't finish, you may love. Also, the author put the story out there and that is brave and incredible and I give them props for that. Typically I will denote why I believe I can't finish the story.

<http://www.casondrabrewster.com/?p=1980>

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### **Kathy (Kindle-aholic) says**

Atlanta Burns, the main character in *Shotgun Gravy*, is dealing with some serious, violent bullies. There is an undercurrent of hate through her town that is having monstrous results. The characters are teens, but is this a YA? I'm vacillating. And this doesn't mean I don't think teens should read it - I read adult books when I was a teen, so that's neither here nor there. It's just would I group this with YA or not? I think I'm leaning towards not, however, it does deal with a real issues that teens face: bullying. Let's face it, bullying isn't confined to high school. How many of us have encountered the bully who's still at it, this time in the corporate jungle versus the jungle gym.

Of course this story deals with bullying in a holy crap kind of way.

Atlanta has just returned to school after a stint at a special school/psych hospital due to events concerning her, a shotgun, and her stepfather. Her mother lives in the garage and seems afraid to say anything to her. Right away, she sees a boy being bullied and steps in. Atlanta has a strong sense of justice. She doesn't really trust that anyone with authority will fix the problem.

I'm not saying more about it because events unfold, secrets are outed, and I don't want to tell you the story. There were many times I was very scared for the characters. I really didn't know where this would go, how far, who would be left.

The story's also not over.

There is lots of swearing, violence, but this story does draw you in. I'll read the next one. Actually, after the teaser at the end of *Gravy*, I HAVE to read the next one.

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### **Kevin Veale says**

Yesterday, we got ourselves a christmas e-reader. Also yesterday, I sent an email to Chuck Wendig asking if I could get .epub versions of some ebook PDFs of his that I'd already bought, since PDFs weren't playing nicely with the ereader - although I had known that was likely.

And here I am now, writing a review of *Shotgun Gravy*. This says two core things: firstly, Chuck Wendig is

a kindly prince among men, and that once I picked up *Shotgun Gravy* I didn't put it down.

*Shotgun Gravy* is the first in a series of novellas featuring one Atlanta Burns. Bad things have come into her life in the past, and she and the bad things both were left altered by the encounter. In *Shotgun Gravy*, she finds herself dealing with that delightful frisson of petty-and-stupid-yet-potentially-murderous bullying that can define teenage years and which adults spend so much time and energy convincing themselves doesn't exist.

I did not enjoy highschool.

I believe it is safe to say that this is an understatement.

Normally, when I say, "I did horrible things to survive. They will haunt me forever," I say it with appropriate verbal exaggeration because Comedy.

It's still a true statement: I am not proud of who I was back then, but there is no shame attached to the idea. These things happen, and it wasn't a choice so much as a response to a situation I couldn't change. And trapped animals don't feel shame.

But enough about me. The core of my point is that I remember how it felt to be trapped. The feel of anger that you'd felt for long enough that you stopped recognising it as anger anymore, so it was just part of your personal energy. Just another tool for dealing with the world.

I'm guessing Chuck Wendig knows too.

It suffuses *Shotgun Gravy* and makes it real for me. The interesting part is that it doesn't *upset* me, and I think that's because Atlanta Burns, as a protagonist, feels real too. She has agency. She isn't necessarily *wise*, but I consider that much of what would be filed as 'wisdom' gets framed by people who are able to move past questions of What Will I Do To Survive Today, And Who Will I Be By Tomorrow?

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix is the last book I read in the Potter series. Dolores Umbridge as a character tap-danced all over buttons that I do not mess with in leisure time, but it takes two to tango: Harry was made helpless. We were supposed to understand him as helpless.

As a survival instinct, I can't do that. You can fight, no matter how hopeless or helpless because at that point it's not just about getting out okay, it's about sinking your metaphorical teeth into someone's cheek on the way down so as to preserve some semblance of selfhood for yourself.

Atlanta Burns is not Harry Potter, and this fact is a great relief to me.

Comparisons have been made between *Shotgun Gravy* and *Veronica Mars*, and I can see why: they're both dark and complicated tales framed around strong female protagonists and the caged rage of basic highschool injustice. *Shotgun Gravy* is the darker of the two, and bleak things are moving and shifting if anyone turns a torchlight into the shadows.

*Shotgun Gravy* is more of a YA story than *Veronica Mars*, and I don't mean because it's 'easier to get into,' or 'less challenging.' It has the feel of background rage burned down to seething embers, the kind that belongs to stories aimed at kids who don't need to be challenged by the injustice and anger of day to day life since they're stuck living it *now*.

This would make a good, if emotionally harrowing, double-feature with *Unwind* despite being a completely different genre and kind of story, because they share that hot core of emotion.

I enjoyed it, put the ereader down, and came here to write a review. It's that kind of story. I'm looking forward to seeing what happens next.

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### **Josh says**

With a reputation forged by a forgetful past, the protagonist of 'Shotgun Gravy' oozes sentiments of Sophie Littlefield's female vigilante, Stella Hardesty. Atlanta Burns, a YA cult hero in the making accounts for her troubles and those of the class underdog by drawing upon basic human survival instinct – and a can of bear mace.

Underpinning the story is a broader conceptual look at the ramifications of bullying and those who stand against it. While Atlanta's plight doesn't always produce a happily-ever-after, the humorous and sometimes dark ride is as thought provoking as it is entertaining. Wendig has done a great job at creating a rich and insightful character with an interesting supporting cast and sinister back-story.

To be delivered in episodic form with a continuity link, the future instalments (based on the preview at the end of 'Shotgun Gravy') promise to be just as good. I look forward to future instalments. 4 stars.

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### **Dave Versace says**

Short and sharp - 'Shotgun Gravy' is about bullies and the sometime terrible consequences of standing up to them. Atlanta Burns is a hard-bitten abuse survivor who decides to stand up for her friends. It goes pretty badly.

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### **J.D. says**

Atlanta Burns is an angry young woman who has, in her own words, "been through some bad shit." The exact nature of that particular metaphorical excrement isn't immediately spelled out, but the aftermath has left her an outcast, feared and shunned even by her former friends. When she takes on a particularly psychotic set of school bullies, she stumbles into some local secrets that foretell more bad times ahead in future installments of this series.

The violence and language would probably scare off the average YA publisher. That's why I'm so glad that the e-book revolution allows stuff like this to find a readership, because this is a really good book. It's very realistic in its portrayal of the relentless tension and dread that's familiar to anyone who's ever been bullied, that sense that you can't get away, no one will help, and there's no way out, save suicide or violence. I doubt school authorities would condone the way Atlanta takes matters (and her trusty .410 scatter-gun) into her own hands, but it makes for a compelling revenge fantasy.

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## **sj says**

Originally posted here as part of the 30 Day Book Challenge.

### **A Book So Emotionally Draining, I Had To Set It Aside**

I've made no secret of the fact that Chuck Wendig's Miriam Black books are some of my favourites that I've read so far this year, and have encouraged several people to pick them up (most of them have liked them too, yay!) so I kind of knew what to expect going in. If you visit this book on goodreads, you'll see the following in the blurb:

(Warning: title features mature themes, profanity, and violence.)

It's probably a good thing that it mentions that up front because this book COULD BE trigger as fuck to some people. Atlanta Burns, our protagonist, has been through far too much in her short 17 years of life.

The answers to just what she's had to deal with are doled out slowly throughout, but you know early on that whatever it was wasn't pretty.

...and even though she's been a victim herself, she'll be damned if she'll sit by and just watch it happen to other people.

Even though it's short (it is only a novella), those few pages pack a brass knuckle punch straight to your gut. I can't even count the number of times I was UGLY CRYING during the few hours it took me to read it.

Unfortunately, many of us have been in the situations described here.

Unfortunately, so many of us wish we'd had an Atlanta to stand up and take vengeance on our bullies/molesters/rapists/abusers, but we didn't. So we sat quietly and took it. Telling ourselves it would get better eventually - and sometimes it does, but sometimes it doesn't.

I got up no less than three times while reading, tears streaming down my face, pacing, wringing my hands, telling myself that there was just NO WAY I could continue reading.

But I did.

And I'm so glad.

For realsies, guys. If you can make it through it, *Shotgun Gravy* is totally worth it. It's only 99¢ and it's so completely worth your time and the DOLLAR you will spend on the ebook.

Just be prepared for it to rip your emotions a new one.

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**Lucas J.W. Johnson says**

I have to admit, I wasn't really sure I believed him when Chuck Wendig said *Shotgun Gravy* was YA noir. But by golly, he pulled it off. Not only that, but he pulled it off extremely well.

*Shotgun Gravy* is about takes-no-bullshit Atlanta Burns (what a name) who, dealing with her own problems and psychological issues, takes it upon herself to help out some others who are being not just bullied but absed, and finds herself face to switchblade with a group of neo-Nazi scum.

But it's not just the story of a kickass teenage girl kicking ass with a shotgun -- though it's that, too. *Shotgun Gravy* is an extremely poignant look at bullying, racism, and homophobia; like most good YA, it's an examination of what it feels like to be a teenager. And it's full of fantastic characters I want to be real, and line after line of hilarious or brilliant writing that really hits at the core of things.

"What it's really like [to be gay] is, moments of unbridled delight punctuated by long stretches of misery, uncertainty, and oppression."

She shrugs. "Same as any teenager, then."

"Say that if you want. And maybe it is. Maybe we all have our own bullshit to deal with. But I can tell you that it sure ain't easy, sister."

I wanted to take a big green marker to the book and write "Yes. This." beside lines on every page. But that would have ruined my iPad.

Chuck Wendig is brilliant and funny and poignant. Atlanta Burns cuts to the core even as it is pure noir action entertainment. I can't wait for #2.

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## Krycek says

I have to admit that I was not prepared for how dark the story was going to be. I knew it was going to be gritty, but it caught me by surprise! That fact alone, though, is not why this story had me turning (e)page after (e)page. What struck me was the sensitivity with which the topics of abuse, bullying and racism were treated. Certainly, this is not a fuzzy-hugs book. It is brutal and scary, but that is the world in which these teens live and the alienation that both Atlanta and the supporting characters felt were vividly portrayed and certainly the product of an author who knows what he is doing.

Just FYI, it is written in present tense which always throws me for a loop at first, but one quickly adjusts.

Four stars because I'm saving the fifth for the coming titles in the series. I have a feeling that things are going to get even better as the author becomes more comfortable with writing the character in future titles.

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## Ambrosia says

Mix equal parts John Hughes flick and *Hobo With A Shotgun*. Add a dash each of *Preacher*, *Heathers*, and *Deliverance*; blend well. Garnish with a few of Wendig's signature creative profanities, and serve.

Definitely not a mix for everyone, but if you've got a hankering to see some vigilante justice done and appreciate better-than-average character development, this is great guilty-pleasure fun. I was pleased to read

in the author's notes that this was the planned beginning of a four-novella series. I'm even more pleased to see that it appears that novella #2, *Bait Dog*, has become a full-length novel. For all the wish-fulfillment themes of this story, Atlanta, her friends, and her particular corner of Pennsylvucky feel real enough to support a good long yarn.

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### **Ms. Nikki says**

Why do you hate me?

Why do you try to put me down every chance you get?

Do you see something in me you'll never be?

Why do you talk about the color of my skin?

Repeating America's past sins.

Why do you like to hold me down?

Pretending to be your dad knocking your mom around.

Why do you drink all alone?

Drowning out sorrows you're too weak to own.

Why do you yell, scream, hate?

Erasing my future, changing my fate.

I don't hate you.

I feel sorrow for you, I do.

For what you do to me.

Will be done unto you.

It may not be tomorrow.

It might not be for years.

Hell will come for you

and I won't shed one tear.

by Nikki

At the heart, this story is about violence and the lengths Atlanta went to to stop something bad from happening to her. From then on other teens look to her for guidance. It's funny how one person can think a book unrealistic and another can think it's the fictionalized story of their life. A worthy serial read~

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### **Jessica says**

Chuck Wendig is a new author to me. He has a book coming out soon *Blackbirds* that sounds so amazing and who's cover totally makes my toes curl. I've never read his books so when the chance to try his novella *Shotgun Gravy* free on amazon presented itself I jumped at the chance like a junkie on a needle.

*Shotgun Gravy* was free on amazon for a short time and I am so glad I got to try this great little read to get a taste of what Chuck has to offer and boy does he write some kick ass fiction. It's still free as I write this for those with amazon prime.

Shotgun Gravy is really very simple - a girl with issues and her shotgun go up against some bullies to help out a couple friends.

That simple premise is fanfreakingtastic. Atlanta Burns is the protagonist that you cheer for. She's human, vulnerable and yet ballsy in a way most people just wish they were.

Her flaws are part of why you love her and her snark and wit just make you smile. I loved the writing and will be reading more of Chucks work for sure. I know this because I have pre-ordered Blackbirds shhhhh but also covet like crazy Chucks other book Double Dead.

All in all Chuck Wendig is an author I think I'll be blogging about often and one I think everyone who enjoys kick ass characters and story would like. Shotgun Gravy is a great way to get a taste for his work and what a hunger it has created in me.

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## **Tony says**

I'm a big fan of Mr Wendig. I get my ra-ra skirt and pom-poms out whenever I hear he has something new for me to read. Sorry about giving you that image.

Although this short story has a different feel to Mr Wendig's previously published works I would recognize this as one of his works instantly. There is a definite voice that permeates his work. There is one line that I remember being used in one of his blog posts and it still made me chuckle. Some jokes just work.

Unusually I'm going to talk about the epilogue before I mention the plot. The epilogue sets the bounds for this series of stories. Readers willing (please but this as I for one want to read the second one) there will be four short stories that whilst self-contained will form an over-arching story arc. Quick, dirty and easy to read. Right up my alley then. Also discussed is whether this book is YA (Young Adult). It deals with teen issues, has main characters that are teens and would probably appeal to teens. Sounds like a perfect fit? If you haven't read his work before you may be surprised by the profanity Mr Wendig imparts to his work. Teens swear right? Not in front of us if they are smart, but swear they most certainly do. For that reason alone I can't see this book reaching the top of the YA charts or being recommended by teachers across the land.

The main protagonist is called Atlanta Burns, that alone should be a clue that her world is not exactly a happy place. Atlanta has had to deal with some pretty screwed up stuff and her eventual escape from her bad situation left her as mentally damaged and scarred as the physical wounds she left on her mum's boyfriend. Three months in therapy outside of school and her history has turned her into a pariah. Her old friends avoid eye contact and nobody else has any interest in being anywhere near her.

Knowing what it is like to be bullied in the worst way possible Atlanta can't help saving one of the geeks from her school from a beating. Shane is thankful and along with his friend Chris want to pay Atlanta to help prevent the bullying and abuse they are receiving from two sets of thugs. Atlanta comes up with a cunning and brilliant plan (milord) to deal with both sets of bullies at once. Unfortunately this does not exactly go to plan and things get even worse. The inevitable showdown with the shady force behind a big part of the violence is quite scary because it could quite easily be true. There are some truly unpleasant people out there and they are depicted rather well here.

I like the way that Atlanta asks herself at several points whether she is being racist, this certainly meshes with my memories of being an over-analytical teen. I could relate to Atlanta's actions if not thankfully her experiences.

This is a cracking little read with plenty of potential for successive stories. I will certainly be buying the next one.

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