



Uncrashable Dakota

Andy Marino

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In 1862, Union army infantryman Samuel Dakota changed history when he spilled a bottle of pilfered moonshine in the Virginia dirt and stumbled upon the biochemical secret of flight. Not only did the Civil War come to a much quicker close, but Dakota Aeronautics was born.

Now, in Andy Marino's *Uncrashable Dakota*, it is 1912, and the titanic Dakota flagship embarks on its maiden flight. But shortly after the journey begins, the airship is hijacked. Fighting to save the ship, the young heir of the Dakota empire, Hollis, along with his brilliant friend Delia and his stepbrother, Rob, are plunged into the midst of a long-simmering family feud. Maybe Samuel's final secret wasn't just the tinkering of a madman after all. . . .

What sinister betrayals and strange discoveries await Hollis and his friends in the gilded corridors and opulent staterooms? Who can be trusted to keep the most magnificent airship the world has ever known from falling out of the sky?

Uncrashable Dakota Details

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Author : Andy Marino

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From Reader Review *Uncrashable Dakota* for online ebook

Daniel Shellenbarger says

Set in an alternate 1912 in which airships rule the skies thanks to bizarre beetles capable of generating insane amounts of lift after consuming a mixture of moonshine and sap, *Uncrashable Dakota* tells the story of the fateful maiden flight of the largest and most luxurious airship ever built, the *Wendell Dakota*. Young Hollis Dakota, barely 13 years old and heir to Dakota Aeronautics is having a hard enough time keeping his mother happy as he tries to play the part of corporate figurehead, but he's also dealing with his mixed feelings about his new step-brother (who is also his best friend) and step-father (who he can't really accept as a replacement for his father Wendell, dead in a tragic accident). Together with Delia, a bright young beetle-handler apprentice, Hollis and Rob find themselves in the middle of a vicious conspiracy to seize the airship and hold its passengers for ransom, with its roots in a long feud against the Dakota family.

Uncrashable Dakota is very much of a mixed bag. On the one hand, the chapters detailing the back-story of the invention of moonshine-sap-beetle-powered flight and the rise of Dakota Aeronautics are both inventive and extremely entertaining (particularly Hollis's grandfather's demonstration of his invention to President Lincoln). Likewise, there's nothing wrong with the main story, which is generally entertaining (if utterly predictable), and characters, who are likeable enough (if thinly drawn). However, this book feels half-written, and it gets worse the deeper you get into the story as if the author got tired of his story and wanted to finish it off as fast as possible. The later chapters in the book are filled with jump-cut scene-shifts and badly explained plot events forcing the reader to imply much of what the author is (supposedly) trying to relate. Moreover, the motivations and personalities of the characters are often painfully thin (particularly the bad guys, who are cartoonish at best). Frankly, if you want to read a YA book set on a luxury airship in an interesting alternate history world read Kenneth Oppel's *Airborn* (and sequels) instead. Andy Marino has some good ideas, but he just didn't take the time or the effort to flesh them out and what we're left with is a predictable paper-thin plot with a great back-story.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 3.5* of five

A pleasant read, occupying some hours I didn't want to spend doing something worthy but strenuous. I thought the basic premise was silly, beetles farting out some super-lifting gas, but then again who cares. This isn't meant to be *Deathless Prose*, this is a fun-to-read book that packs in some admirable sociopolitical sentiments. Also, crucially, the author's lifts from *A Night to Remember* are acknowledged. I recognized them, but he spiked my anger-powered nail gun by frankly stating he'd used the *Lord* book as source material. If you're gonna steal, steal from the best.

R.J. Murphy says

Thank you for the book Goodreads. This is an exciting adventure story set in an alternative history 1912. The Civil War was won thanks to the invention of an unusual air power and now a thriving industry has grown around this invention. In 1912 the largest (uncrashable) ship is off on its maiden voyage when it is hijacked.

It is up to the owner's teenaged son and his stepbrother to save the day. I even like the cover. My only complaint is that the author interrupts the story every thirty pages or so to add a chapter on the History of Flight – slowly telling how flight was discovered and how it won the war back in the 1860's. I don't care for the practice of jumping back and forth between two stories. I would rather read the history first and then read the whole uninterrupted story of the Titanic like ship.

Online Eccentric Librarian says

More reviews (and no fluff) on the blog <http://surrealtalvi.wordpress.com/>

Uncrashable Dakota was a very surprising read. What started as a simple adventure very reminiscent of Scott Westerfeld's Leviathan Trilogy soon turned into something completely different by the middle of the book.

The premise of the plot is simple: Samuel Dakota chances upon a way to create lift through beetles and moonshine/tree sap. He uses this knowledge to end the civil war early and create an empire. His young grandson, tween Hollis Dakota, is now helping his mother launch the flagship of his missing grandfather's company: the Wendell Dakota (named after his deceased father). On board with his stepfather and stepbrother Rob, what should have been a routine maiden voyage goes horribly wrong. Samuel Dakota had secrets and they are coming due.

The author cleverly interwove brief episodes in the time of Samuel Dakota (1862 Civil War) that slowly unlocked the keys to explain all that is happening in Hollis Dakota's present (1912 Edwardian) situation aboard the Wendell Dakota. This allowed the story to unfold at a great pace without the need for a lot of expository.

Also clever were the world building and characters. Without needed too much explanation, we're given a slowly developing glimpse of several of the characters and their pasts - helping to define them over the course of the story. I also really liked the various gadgets, toys, machinery, etc. - they are explained but not overly so, creating a great sense of wonder.

Near the end, the book really became something else completely - owing quite a nod to "A Night to Remember". The story is not coincidentally set in 1912 with a ship deemed 'uncrashable'. It does get a bit dark and very serious - quite a bit more than I would have expected for a YA. But that is also to its credit that the tone throughout the book is mature and doesn't pander to a young audience. There are several social statements being made as well on several themes pertinent to the Civil War Era, Edwardian Era, and today.

In all, I found this to be a well constructed book with a very good plot, interesting characters, and a surprising depth. 4 out of 5 stars due to the plot becoming a bit sidetracked with the literal "Night to Remember" sequence.

Received as an ARC from the publisher.

Fiction_TheNewReality says

You can see more of this review on my blog (fictionthenewreality.blogspot.com)

Synopsis: It's the new golden age of sky travel, and Hollis Dakota is lucky enough to be the heir to the largest air travel company in the sky, Dakota Aeronautics. Aboard the legendary new Dakota airship, deemed "uncrashable" by all, Hollis is about to encounter something his privileged life has never seen before. When the airship is hijacked by none other than his own stepfather, as revenge for an old family feud, Hollis teams up with old and new friends to stop Jefferson Castor from taking over the ship and proving that the Uncrashable Dakota, is in fact, devastatingly crashable.

Review: First, a HUGE thank you to Andy Marino and MacMillan Kids for sending me this ARC copy of Uncrashable Dakota! If you're like me, and you're dying for a nice and clean YA book that stands out from others, then you should definitely read this book. Lately all I've been reading is dystopia and it got to the point of being repetitive and boring. When I picked up Uncrashable Dakota, I was instantly sucked into this new and exciting world where BEETLES were combined with moonshine to make the world's greatest invention of airship traveling. I loved the originality and creativity behind the setting and theme of this novel. It's very easy to tell that the entire concept behind Uncrashable Dakota was well thought out and planned.

There were so many amazing elements to this story! First we have the use of the Civil War in Hollis's family history, travel by way of airship, the "invention" of a new communication device, and much more. "...try to remember that you're on an airship that's scientifically uncrashable." That sounds a little familiar, doesn't it? I'm guessing the Titanic played a huge part of the plot, especially towards the end. I liked this idea of a steampunk, airship version of the Titanic. Sometimes readers won't like books that are written off another idea, but Uncrashable Dakota wasn't so insanely similar to the Titanic that it would ruin the story completely. Not at all.

My only problem with Uncrashable Dakota was that it was a little bit confusing to keep up with; only because the writing didn't fit in with this older middle-grade/young adult style. Andy Marino is definitely an amazing writer, and I would love to see him write more for the older young adults, which would make for an amazing book. I really do have to commend Andy for such a lyrical, bold way of writing. It's been a while since I've read a book with such great use of vocabulary and sentence structure.

Conclusion: Today marks the launch day of Uncrashable Dakota; which also means that it hit the shelves today! (see what I did there? "launch" as in, BOAT launch? haha) Anyone looking for an original and humorous read for a lighter and cleaner mood should definitely read Uncrashable Dakota.

C.O. Bonham says

The year is 1912 and Hollis Dakota and his family are not only the owners of, but also passengers on the maiden voyage of the world's first uncrashable luxury airliner.

Sounds familiar? Not quite steampunk Titanic but the similarities only serve to give the story more of an historical feel.

The action keeps you reading and the plot is creative. I am too scared of giving to spoilers to say too much more about it but if you enjoyed books like *Airborne* and *Leviathan* then add this one to your list.

Whitley Birks says

See more reviews at my blog.

Not necessarily a bad book, but overall pretty bland. Most of the lasting impressions I got from this book were of things it didn't contain, because it felt like the story was too big for its britches. Instead of coming away from this thing with thoughts about what happened, I was left thinking about all the things the book should have included but failed to.

As a concept, this book worked pretty well. I liked the airship, and magic-science in this book toed that line of ridiculous-yet-workable almost perfectly. The "science" in this book is so far out of left field that you just have to roll with it, but it doesn't suspend my disbelief too far because it (almost) never intrudes on real science. Magic beetles make the ship fly? That's fine, as long as everything else works the way it's supposed to. And it does. I really enjoyed the descriptions of the ship, the way they manage their "scientific discover," and all the clever little details that spring from it.

But that's about where the charm ended. The writing was solid, but invisible, which is really only a boon if there's powerful characters to fill in the void. These characters were...thoroughly forgettable. Not quite bad, but just sort of there. The story was predictable, and as things went on, bits of the technical side fell apart. There were a few too many times that people got written into a corner, and then we'd cut to a different character and find out that the other situation was fixed off-page, with no explanation, everyone just showed up and carried on.

The book tried to be bigger, though. It tried to have a message. However, the focus of the story wasn't right for it. Most of the book took place before the "crash" part, which means we got to see almost nothing of the boys trying to deal with the chaos of a crashing ship. They tried to play off like the two pages of them doing stuff was meaningful, but it was far too short. A few chapters tried to be able classism, but we spent so little time with the steerage passengers that I never really had a chance to feel for them. (And even Hollis was like "gurl, I'll feel bad for you later, hijackers now" then moved on.) There was so much hasty set up and so little payoff that the whole mess just felt hollow. It had the potential to be epic and it folded instead.

Angie says

Uncrashable Dakota is an alternate history/steampunk middle grade adventure novel. During the Civil War, Samuel Dakota discovered the power of flight. Seems a certain kind of beetle really likes whiskey soaked sap. You feed it to them and they can fly. Put the beetles in a ship and the ship flies. This discovery ended the Civil War years early, started the flight industry in the 1860s and allowed Lincoln to live to be an old man. Fast forward to 1912 and Dakota Aeronautics is getting ready to launch its biggest ship ever, the Dakota. On board is the elite of society as well as the general public. The Dakota family, consisting of Hollis and his mom and her new husband and his son Rob, are ready to set sail with the ship. During the voyage the ship is hijacked and Hollis, Rob and their friend Delia have to save the day.

This was a pretty hefty book with a lot going on. Not only do we have the hijacking story, but there is also a lot of backstory for when Samuel Dakota invented flight. I thought it was pretty inventive to have beetles be the mode of flight, especially ones who like to eat whiskey sap. There was definitely a Titanic vibe to this story (giant ship, best of its kind, supposedly unsinkable/uncrashable, disaster). I do wish the book would have been just a tad shorter or better edited. I think a lot of the story of the kids running around the ship could have been condensed. That being said I also wish the ending would have been expanded a bit. You have 300 pages of the hijacking and just a couple pages of the crash and its aftermath. I also thought the story of Rob and his father kind of went off the rails a bit and its ending was just about the worst thing in the book. I think the book had potential and it was an enjoyable read, but the ending was too rushed with too many loose ends for my tastes.

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley.

Kathy Martin says

Thirteen-year-old Hollis Dakota is the heir to Dakota Aeronautics and a passenger on the company's greatest invention - the Wendell Dakota. After his father's accidental death, his mother remarried Jefferson Castor. Castor's son Rob is Hollis' best friend and is well-known for leading him into mischief. Both boys are friends with Delia who is an apprentice beetle keeper on the ship.

This is alternate history. History changes when Hollis' grandfather Samuel discovers a variety of beetle that becomes lighter than air when fed on a mixture of tree sap and moonshine. His discovery leads to the invention of flying machines which support the Northern side of the Civil War and end the war long before it ended in our timeline.

This story begins fifty years later. Samuel has disappeared into the sky. Dakota Aeronautics has grown into a massive company. When the Wendell Dakota is hijacked by Jefferson Castor to get revenge on the Dakota family because Samuel accidentally killed his grandfather, Hollis, Delia and assorted friends from steerage need to find a way to defeat the hijackers and save the passengers. Rob is torn between his friendship with Hollis and his love for his father.

The story was filled with interesting detail about the design of the massive airship and the science of using beetles to power flight. Delia - a genius inventor - also invents a number of useful gadgets including a taser and wireless radio which aid the kids as they try to save the ship.

The story was an exciting adventure story but not an easy story to read. The text was complex. Not only were there several flashbacks but the story was told from a variety of points of view. Able middle grade readers and high school readers will enjoy this adventurous tale.

Tina says

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Mini review! Kind of. As mini as a Christina review will ever get.

First off, let me say that I haven't read many steampunk novels. That was part of the allure for me, but I cannot tell you how this book ranks within its genre or in comparison to others like the Leviathan series by Scott Westerfeld. There are some reviews which already have, if you're interested in them.

As some of those reviews mentioned, this book has a definite middle-grade / younger reaches of YA steampunk Titanic in the sky vibe going for it. To call anything uncrashable, unbreakable, etc. is to invite trouble. The difference between this novel and the Titanic bit is that Uncrashable Dakota focuses much less on romance (none here!) and much more on swashbuckling adventure for our young main characters.

This book is very inventive. You know what gives these characters the power of human flight? Beetles. And some mixture of moonshine and sap. It's not a secret - beetles are the logo of Dakota Aeronautics and as such, they're featured as headers at the beginning of every chapter. You get to explore this aspect, and how that factors into the ship as well as the ship dynamics, other inventions/steampunk gadgetery, beetle cults, class tension, family legacy, and the effects of flight on the civil war. The book alternates between chapters on the history of Dakota Aeronautics and the present realization of how the company is faring. One thing I would say I wished for was a map of the ship; instead of the beetle headers, why not give us a map to picture how everything was laid out? The cover is kind of there, and the details are there, but I'm not a visual reader nor do I know what the name of each thing is in relation to the picture on the cover.

Sometimes I wanted to throw up while reading. BEETLES. BEETLES. I am the person who closed her eyes during the Mummy because BEETLES. I had no idea that this book involved them -- I'd only seen the cover and the synopsis when I requested it. (And okay, I just looked at the cover more closely, and there are beetles on the beams. Clearly I'm a fail.) There are some pretty disgusting things in here related to beetles that make me want to scrap out my mouth and pretend I never read about them. Very inventive and also cinematic but *shudders.*

This book has the feel of the fourth Harry Potter book in terms of friend/character dynamics. Hollis's friend Delia felt like a Hermione to me - very smart and driven, and the one who unites the group. She's more of a scientist type than Hermione and has a harsher background that rounds out some of the themes in the novel. Neither Hollis nor Rob really remind me of Harry or Ron in terms of personality, but their character relationship did. It was fun to get to experience the adventure first hand the changing dynamics of their sibling-esque relationship as Hollis uncovers more about his family legacy. The other characters didn't get as much attention as these three did, and Delia's definitely my favorite of the bunch.

Although it seems more suited for the younger crowd, this book also deals with some heavy issues like privilege, taking responsibility for the past, and detaching yourself from war and other people - losing touch with your humanity in different ways and the ways that class tension is exposed across interactions between the crew and the Dakotas and the dynamics of the ship. These themes will make this book a more satisfying read for the younger crowd it's targeting. The reason I'd recommend to a younger crowd is because it was sometimes frustrating to read. It makes sense that these young, naive characters would not realize what was happening at the time, but as a reader I figured things out long before they did and any time that happens it's frustrating. At the same time, I think that problem would be lessened in younger readers who will love the adventurous and inventive aspects of this novel.

If you're interested in sampling Mr. Marino's work, read *The Oregon Trail Diary of Willa Porter* or an excerpt from *Uncrashable Dakota*.

Mandi Barber says

One Sentence Review: Uncrashable Dakota is a quirky adventure with wonderful characters somewhat let down by its own ending.

Recommended for: Fans of steampunk and alternate history looking for a light read.

I wanted to love this book. I really did. The characters were charming and fun, and often had me laughing out loud. The pacing was spot-on, with plenty of intrigue and a few good twists. I really liked the way Hollis' story intertwined with his grandfathers in the interlude chapters. Plus, airships. (I mean, come on.) By page 268, I was sure this was going to be a new favorite.

Sadly, I felt the climax didn't live up to the rest of the book. I don't want to get into spoilers here, because it really is a good book, so I'll just say the climax had two threads: the emotional climax surrounding Hollis' relationship with his friend/step-brother Rob and the action climax involving the conspiracy plaguing the Wendell Dakota. I was incredibly invested in the emotional climax, to the point that the action climax felt like an unwelcome interruption.

Most of the last 40 pages were lacking in emotional depth, and the resolution was somewhat unsatisfying given when I thought the author was headed with Rob and Hollis' argument and reconciliation.

I won't say the ending ruined the book, because I did still enjoy it, and the first 5/6ths of the book were so good only a truly awful ending could have soured my opinion. Nevertheless, I was left wishing for something just a bit more satisfying.

Caden Schneider says

Title: Uncrashable Dakota

The uncrashable Dakota written by Andy Marino was a dull book at first look. I choose to read this because I like fiction and history. I thought it was about the inventing of a flying boat basically. Also it looked like an old time book. I also thought it would just be about inventing.

I like the twists they have in the book. Also the major differences in the characters. I don't like the amount of missing pieces. Such as why hollis's mom was taken. Also are there cults on the ship and who took his mom. I think the only interesting character is Delia. The plot is confusing because what does H.C mean by his notes. The writing style is a bit slow but some what interesting at points.

I loved the plot twists. I can not believe that Jefferson castor hijacked the ship. I also can not believe that Samuel killed Hizake. He keeps adding twists to make you feel shocked. Also the meeting of Sam and Hollis was really surprising. Although some of the elements that made the beginning good are missing at this point it is quite interesting.

The book was okay I feel they struggled at the end. The character details were strong. The ending was weak. A weakness was the beginning and filling in gaps. I would recommend this too fantasy fans. Also to historical fans and action fans. Overall this was a good book.

Donna says

Adventure story with a historical fiction feel to it. Hollis, his mother, step-father, and friend/step brother are off on the maiden voyage of airship Dakota. As the remaining members of the Dakota Aeronautics Empire, it is up to them to keep the passengers happy. Trouble starts when Hollis realizes that the ship is being hijacked and it is all based on a long standing family feud. Can Hollis save the ship? Will his friend Delia be able to keep the ship in the sky? Will Rob and Hollis come out of this as friends or enemies?

With many similarities to the Titanic story, this book will appeal to those who are interested in flight, adventure stories, and alternate history stories.

Ashley Choo says

Twist after twist after twist. I freaking loved this book. It took me a while to get into it, but the characters are incredibly complex. I especially loved the female characters in this fantastical story. Delia, the brilliant, brave scientist and inventor was by far my favorite character. I also loved that Lucy Dakota wasn't a damsel in distress, once she was released from her bonds, she immediately took control and managed to save a good portion of the passengers. And don't even get me started on Maggie, I want to know everything about her. What did she do to get into the industrial school? What antics did she get up to with Delia? And what does she do with Chester on the airship? I was pleasantly surprised that Hollis acts his age. He's impulsive, and reckless, and he also has no idea what to do, and relies on Delia and Rob to help him. And while he's on a mission to save his mother, he still thinks of ways to impress Delia.

Faye, la Patata says

The publisher is going to hate me for this... but yeah.

One of the reasons why I didn't write a review right after I read this book was because I didn't really have anything to say, aside from the fact that it was forgettable. I thought I just needed a wee bit more time before officially submitting my insight, despite the dangers of forgetting it even more with the passing of time. But, hey, I live the dangerous life, so bring it on, yeah? #MedyoBadGirl

So here I am, almost more than a month has passed, and instead of providing criticism or praise, I am typing filler to at least give it a fair amount of character count (like I said, I live the dangerous life...). **I search near and wide, even going as far as the deepest pits of my mind for anything... ANYTHING at all... but I still cannot scrounge up anything to say about this book.** Aside, of course, from the fact that it was forgettable. But way back in University, I mainly survived by cramming (Cram Culture FTW), as when I am pinched for time is when my creative juices start to really come out and overflow, so let's just pretend I am in that situation (I am really typing filler here... #MedyoBadGirl).

So... let's just say this book is kind of Titanic-ish, but instead of a boat in water, it's a huge vessel soaring in the sky, an innovative technology made possible due to a certain kind of beetle that can somehow make stuff fly. There has been a hijacking, and the protagonists are set to find out who masterminded it and to stop it before... you know... things end up horribly wrong.

Sigh... this was really forgettable. Even that summary is mediocre by my standards. But, I digress.

Anyway, if I find something unforgettable, it usually means I couldn't connect to the story or the characters, and I think that's what happened here. **The narration, I felt, didn't leave much room for me to personally sympathize with their plight, although I'll blame the fact the chapters were kind of all over the place.** There were three protagonists and it would often jump from one character to the other, with some dedicated to a backstory that happened back in time during the war, which we will later learn has a significant role in the hijacking. To be honest, I am not fond of this kind of writing as I would rather be emotionally invested in one or two characters, instead of having a broader view of many of them (as per the saying "Quality over quantity"). It didn't help that it also felt kind of monotonous, with little to no internal narration (at least from what I remember, because otherwise, I wouldn't have been bored to death).

I thought the plot was kind of confusing, too. When I was reading it, I remember scratching my heads at certain moments that seemed to come out of nowhere... like they were totally random. I definitely feel this would have worked better if it was targeted for teenagers or adults, as children protagonists handling a serious hijacking seems a bit unrealistic and doesn't leave room for a lot of drama and internal conflict.

Would I recommend this book? Although I didn't hate it, I obviously did not like it either, and it wasn't emotionally fulfilling enough for me to remember all the details even right after I finished it. While I wouldn't be running down the street cursing its name and warning people to get away from it, I also certainly wouldn't be busy urging people to get it, either. I wouldn't recommend something I didn't enjoy, lest alone even remember half of it, to my friends and family. ./ Hopefully, my next read of this author's works would be better.

Final Verdict: (?) 2.5
