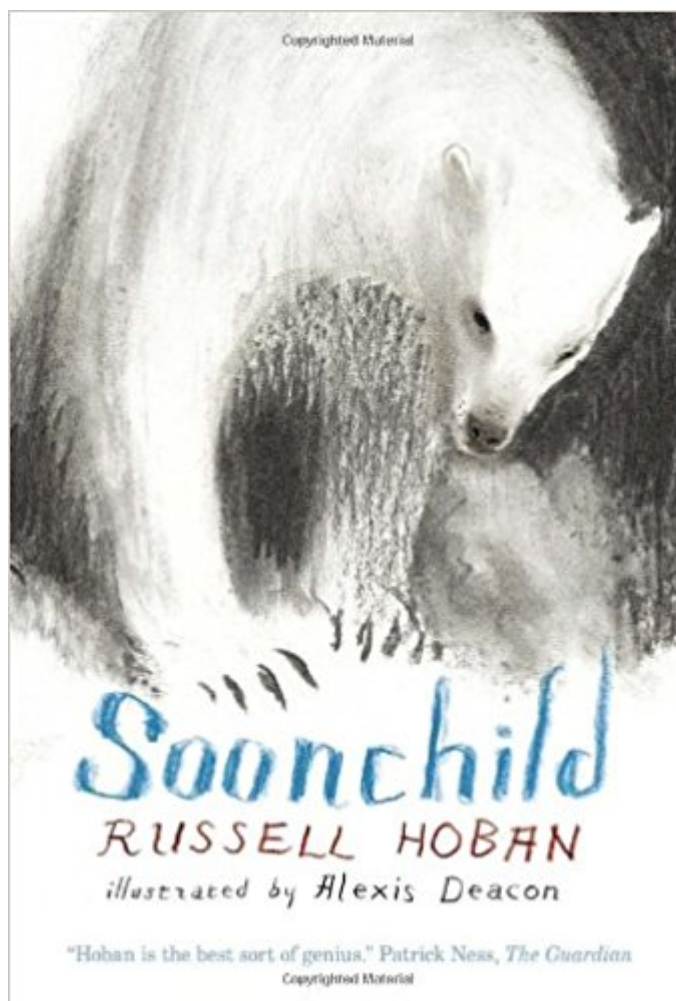


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# Soonchild



## Synopsis

Two internationally acclaimed artists create a groundbreaking, genre-defying adventure to transcend time, place, and identity. In the cold north where the white wind blows lives Sixteen-Face John, a shaman. His wife is expecting their first child – a "soonchild." But Soonchild won't come out! So John sets out to find the World Songs that inspire all soonchildren to leave the womb. Along the way, he must shift shape and size, converse with animals and ancestors, and face demons and death. But he also pursues an elusive golden-eyed presence that hints at a connection with his past. This breathtaking novel, as exciting as it is spooky, is a lyrical tribute to the forces of nature, magic, and family.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up-In the far north, Sixteen-Face John and his wife, No Problem, cannot convince their daughter, Soonchild, to be born. The spirits have left, and she cannot hear the World Songs of nature. Although John is a shaman, he wastes his time drinking Coca-Cola, watching TV, and reading magazines with centerfolds. No Problem and her friends scrape hides to earn money for videos. To coax Soonchild forth, retrieve the songs, and save the world, John concocts a Big-Dream Brew. In his dream travels, he encounters various animals and spirits that help or hinder his quest. After overcoming fear, dying several times, and spending thousands of years in the spirit world, he retrieves the songs and returns. Soonchild emerges as Here and Now. When she grows up, she

forms a band and writes songs that incorporate phrases from John's journey, turning a monumental quest into lyrics that generate celebrity and wealth. Hoban's intent is unclear. Is he paying homage to tales of Native peoples by incorporating characters such as Raven or making fun of them by giving people names such as *Where Is It?*, *Take It Easy*, and *Way to Go?* John's shaman Granny plays poker with her spirit friends and demands vodka and cigars before helping him. Deacon's charcoal-and-pencil drawings, particularly of animals such as the ice bear, walrus, and killer whale, are impressive. Some of the illustrated sequences advance the narrative more effectively than Hoban's words. The book may appeal to adults who enjoy Hoban's novels and will give literary scholars fodder for comparative studies with his other works. Consider as needed for academic libraries.-Kathy Piehl, Minnesota State University, Mankato <sup>Â</sup> (c) Copyright 2011. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

In Hoban's final work, rough-edged characters who speak in prose-poetry hurtle through an Arctic world in which humans, animals, and underworld spirits share a dizzying variety of magical powers... Hoban fearlessly tackles the big questions: the distinction between the real and the unreal, the nature of courage, and the debt humans owe the dead and the unborn. Deacon's charcoal drawings render Hoban's mix of horror and slapstick note for note. Hoban's fans will revel in this last tale of his, and they'll mourn when it's done. <sup>Â</sup> Publishers Weekly (starred review) It <sup>Â</sup> sort of a legend and sort of contemporary, it <sup>Â</sup> both playful and challenging, and it <sup>Â</sup> equally profound and offhandedly glib. And among its numerous, unexpected joys is perhaps the simplest and best summation of life yet: "It <sup>Â</sup> one good-bye after another until you reach the Big Hello at the end when That <sup>Â</sup> All She Wrote." . . . Deacon <sup>Â</sup> contributions to the story begin as a few pieces of spot art scattered about the periphery, which then become more integrated and even include pages-long sequences that carry just as much weight and wit as the narrative. Together, they weave a funny and wise tale that will echo with readers for a long time. <sup>Â</sup> Booklist (starred review) These illustrations, combined with the author <sup>Â</sup> lyrical language, engage the reader in a magical, thought-provoking expedition. <sup>Â</sup> NY Journal of Books

I've bought several copies to give away and find myself rereading it every few months (and looking at the wonderful pictures). As a children's book - though it's not only a children's book - it could be as transforming as *The Hobbit* is to some kids; *The Hobbit* is about [an imagined version of] the Anglo-Nordic north and *Soonchild* is about the more intimate and earthy (and icy) Inuit north, but

both books have a quirky balance of the comic and the dead serious, and a moral force that sneaks up on you. If you've ever tried and not managed to read Levinas, this is Levinas for kids - the obligation you can't decline, the task you have to solve and accomplish because "you're the only one there is." Hoban's ear is absolutely true - the story is no moral lesson, it's a demonstration of why we do things we don't know how to do, or even think we're worthy to do. "I have no excuses," says the shaman, "I am not a good man but I am trying to do a good thing." Stunning.p.s. Pay no attention to the review from School Library Journal; Hoban isn't "making fun of" the Inuit with the names he gives John's ancestors, he gets something about their culture - its matter-of-factness, its ingenuity and persistence in a severe climate - that the nervous p.c. sensibility misses in its haste to detect bad intentions.

Russell Hoban's mysterious characters continue to be raucous and edgy. In this fable of a man in search of an answer, I was reminded of how much I have loved the personalities and exposed emotions of his writing since Riddley Walker introduced me to his world.In fairness, he may just be my favorite author, so my perception may be skewed. I found this short tale appealingly odd, with that literary truth that forces you to read, think, and read again, without feeling oppressed, but rather just curious to know.I hope this encourages new readers to explore other works, and I think Hoban's fans will appreciate the struggle and ultimate triumph of the story.

I LOVE this book and have given it as a gift to many people. I myself have read it many times and each time it gives me something new.Highly recommend it.

A book that suits adults as well as young readers, written in the language of metaphors: this gorgeously and singularly illustrated volume captures the effects of fear on the creative process and interrogates the way we use masks to hide as well as to express truths. Sui generis, just like the writer.

Beautiful, amazing. Filled with the darkness and the light of the North. Halfway through, I bought another copy for a special Christmas gift.

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Soonchild

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