

## **When I was the Greatest**

**Jason Reynolds**

**Reviewed by: Anika 16**

**Star Teen Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity**

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Allen Brooks lives in Bed Stuy, a tough and poor neighborhood up in New York. He's better known as Ali, a nickname his sister gave him for his boxing skills. Life's always been a struggle, with his mother working 24/7 and his dad out of the picture. Things get better though when Ali befriends two teens who move into the bad apartment next door. Ali's sister calls them Needles and Noodles and they've become instant friends of Ali. Needles has Torres Syndrome that makes him say crazy things, and his brother is hard on him because of his embarrassing condition. Noodles on the hand is a troublemaker who relies on Ali to clean up his messes. Their friendship keeps them together, but things escalate to the point where their friendship might fall apart. As Ali goes through his story, he will find out that there was a time where he truly was the greatest.

I enjoyed the characters despite them being a bit cliché. Ali is a very relatable person and he made me feel like I was with him during his whole story. The book has a very important message about loyalty and caring for others. Being able to care for one another keeps everyone together, even if they are total strangers. Learning more about Torres Syndrome was interesting as well. I had never heard of the condition until I read this book. The syndrome interferes with Needles's daily life, but he manages it in his own way. It doesn't make him any less than someone else. And I thought that was great way to bring awareness to the syndrome.

Despite this, there are a few things I disliked in the book. Ali's telling of the story fumbled a bit at times, not necessarily making much sense. His storytelling also progressed very slowly and made way for what I believe was an unsatisfactory ending. Jason Reynolds had so much he could have done at the end to make a meaningful impact on the reader, but it didn't turn out as I wished it did. Some violence, bad language, alcohol, intimacy are present within some parts of the story, which is why I recommend it to anyone 12 years or older. This book would make a great gift for fans of Muhammad Ali!

### **Recommended Titles:**

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas

They Both Die at the End by Adam Silvera

The Serpent King by Jeff Zentner

All American Boy by Jason Reynolds