



# Numb

*Sean Ferrell*

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Early one morning, after a sandstorm had ripped through north Texas, I wandered into Mr. Tilly's circus. I wore a black suit and blood ran down my face. When some of the carnies came up to me, I said, "I'm numb." This became my name.

A man with no memory who feels no pain, Numb travels to New York City after a short stint with the circus, following the one and only clue he holds to his hidden history: a brittle, bloodstained business card. But once there, word of his condition rapidly spreads—sparked by the attention he attracts by letting people nail his hands to wooden bars for money—and he quickly finds himself hounded on all sides by those who would use his unique ability in their own pursuits of fame and fortune. It is a strange world indeed that Numb numbly stumbles through, surrounded by crowds of suck-ups and opportunists, as he confronts life's most basic and difficult question: *Who am I?*

Sean Ferrell's *Numb* is a wildly entertaining examination of identity, friendship, pain, and the cult of celebrity that heralds the arrival of a fresh and uniquely inventive literary voice.

## Numb Details

Date : Published August 3rd 2010 by HarperPerennial (first published July 18th 2010)

ISBN : 9780061946509

Author : Sean Ferrell

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Fiction

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# From Reader Review Numb for online ebook

## Colin Smith says

A man wanders into a circus with no memory of who he is or where he came from. All we know is that he is unable to feel pain. He is numb, and so that becomes his name. NUMB tells the story of this stranger as he goes from being one form of circus side show to another, traveling from the big top in Texas to the big city and media attention of New York. As his star ascends, the mystery of who he is and why he's numb hangs over him, waiting to be resolved.

NUMB is Sean Ferrell's debut novel. There are no high-speed chases, gripping edge-of-the-seat drama and such, but the air of mystery and intrigue carried me page to page and chapter to chapter. As I read, Numb's first-person narration betrayed a sense of numbness, indicating that whatever his mysterious "ability" was, it goes beyond a physical deadness. Something isn't right at a much deeper level. I don't think I'm giving too much away by saying that the story of Numb is the story of a search for answers on more than one level.

As I read, I kept thinking that Numb's voice was familiar. It dawned on me that he reminded me of Meursault from Albert Camus's *THE OUTSIDER* (*L'ÉTRANGER*). There's a matter-of-factness about the way he discusses things. It's perfect for Numb's character.

I found the way Ferrell describes scenes easy to visualize, which is important to me. I hate having to re-read sections because I can't "see" the setting in my mind's eye. He has some interesting characters, none of whom are either wholly good or totally evil. They all have different motives, with perhaps only two being anything close to what Numb might call a friend. This rings true given the world Numb inhabits and the circles in which he finds himself.

NUMB is very well written, but I would suggest it's not for everyone. Given Numb's ability and how he uses it to earn money (think hammer, nails, staple gun, and people willing to pay to have their curiosity satisfied), there are some scenes that might be too much for the squeamish. There are sex scenes, but they aren't extremely sexually explicit. The language is occasionally strong (f-words, s-words, and violations of the Third Commandment). Overall, I give it a PG15+---definitely older YA to Adult.

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## Andrew Smith says

A beaten and bleeding man who, it transpires, doesn't feel pain, staggers into the company of a group of circus performers. I don't know if such a condition exists but it struck me as a great basis on which to kick off an intriguing novel. Before long the man is part of the travelling circus and we follow him and his new friends as his life is transformed by his 'gift' and as his knowledge of his previous life starts to be unveiled.

In truth, the the execution doesn't quite match the idea. We do meet an interesting group of characters and the manner in which he is absorbed into this disparate group is interesting enough. Similarly, as the background mystery is gradually unravelled the story does change direction effectively, but the problem for me was that I never managed to get inside the head of the man who feels no pain - in fact, he felt a bit like the man with no feelings, period. Ok, that may be a bit harsh but it did spoil it a bit for me.

This is Ferrell's first book and it does showcase a new(ish) writer with fantastic imagination and great ideas.

His second book, *The Man in the Empty Suit*, really does demonstrate just how good he can be, and I absolutely loved this new take on a time travel theme. Ferrell is definitely a man to keep careful track of.

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### **J.C. says**

A lot stuffed in a small package. Don't let the page count fool you, this book will make you think - and feel - like you've read a substantial tome.

The story seems simple enough, an amnesiac who feels no pain searches for his identity, literally and spiritually. In a sense, it is the story of us all.

Forget the part about the amnesia; memory or not, searching for ourselves, understanding who we are, defining our place in life and amongst society is a timeless and ageless theme.

Ferrell gives it a new face and twist in this intriguing story meant to leave you wondering about what really matters: in terms of who we are and how we live our lives -- how important is it really to know where we came from or who we might be?

Doesn't it matter more to simply be in the moment so we can see, and enjoy, what is right in front of us every moment of every day?

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### **Derek Gentry says**

I can always tell that I'm really engaged with a book when I start neglecting mundane obligations like sleep and personal hygiene in order to squeeze in more reading time. Sean Ferrell's *Numb* had this effect on me, and this despite the fact that I'm a teensy bit squeamish about blood, and significantly more squeamish about people driving nails through their hands, an activity that constitutes "just another day at the freak show" for *Numb*'s sensory-challenged, amnesiac title character.

With its darkly funny mixture of the beautiful and the repellent, *Numb* is a book that makes you laugh even as you squirm, and keeps you riveted even when you'd rather look away. But as startling as it might be when *Numb* accidentally nail-guns himself to a tent pole, our visceral discomfort with his condition is quickly overtaken by our uneasiness about the world's reaction to him and the series of unsavory characters who enter his life looking to use him for their own ends.

We learn early on that *Numb*'s inability to feel pain might be psychosomatic, and for me, that's what really makes him interesting. Are his amnesia and his insensitivity somehow dependent on each other? Is he a superhero, a martyr, or maybe just a guy willing to destroy himself to impress a girl? And why, despite his painlessness, does he still seem so vulnerable? Fans of Chuck Palahniuk—and anyone else who doesn't mind a little blood on the carpet—should definitely give *Numb* a look.

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### **Roseanne says**

Sean Farrell's prose is clean and precise, with cutting wit and flawless absurdity. I loved how effortlessly he

moved between pondering the inner tension and struggles of Numb's identity to describing the trouble he finds himself in. I wanted to feel more compelled by a passionate narrator, so I can't say I particularly sympathized with Numb, but he raises important, big life questions with deft perception. Well thought out and well written--would love to see what Ferrell could do with a passionate, Mal-type protagonist where the author could really let loose.

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### **Brian says**

This book had a strange pacing for me as a reader. Much of the text read really fast, and felt like engrossing reading with a bizarre story that followed the life and times of an interesting character. I liked the story as a whole, and enjoyed it touching cavalierly onto moral issues and letting the reader figure out how they felt about each action. The book focused on the lonely life of someone who has an interesting and fascinating gift that lands them in the public eye out of happenstance more often than other folks. Numb must learn how to survive among a group of image crazed media junkies and hangers on who waiver between seeming helpful and hurtful to his quest to find his own history and understand himself better. The open-ended way that the story leaves the reader is a fitting end to a fun, off-kilter book that I would suggest to anyone interested in reading a longer version of a short story.

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### **Trisha Leigh says**

I finished NUMB, by Sean Ferrell, over the weekend. I had no trouble getting into the descriptive, yet accessible prose. The writing is wonderfully layered; I'm still rummaging through the lingering thoughts and concerns in this novel left in the back of my mind. The story follows a man called Numb who knows nothing about his past – or why he can't feel any pain.

As he wanders through his days amassing scars on his body and soul, Numb let's other people control his life and decisions. He floats along, figuring when he finally discovers his past then he'll be able to grab hold of his future.

Along the way he attains a certain amount of notoriety, none of which he desires but that he doesn't avoid either. Sean Ferrell has a real knack for making Numb, the unapologetic narrator of the novel, likable even when he shouldn't be. He paints the insecurities and hopes of these desperate characters in a way that makes me ache for them, root for them.

It's a beautiful story that takes on an issue we all struggle with – that maybe it doesn't matter who we were. We can only take control of who we are and who we want to be.

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### **Neil Shurley says**

I flew through this book. Ferrell's an assured writer and his voice is strong, interesting and funny. I loved the mystical yet down to earth feel of the book and the strange journey of the narrator. It put me in mind of the work of Paul Auster, another author I love.

In Numb, Ferrell creates a sort of avatar of and commentary on contemporary culture. Numb, the character, begins life fully grown, aware of and knowledgeable about everything except his own past. He starts his life in obscurity, grows a following, and, by the power of others more than any steps he takes himself, gets dragged up the ladder of success. He ends up in the spotlight, both figuratively and literally, as Ferrell casts his glare at the absurdity of celebrity.

Filled with interesting characters and situations, it's a journey I highly recommend.

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### **Patty Blount says**

I couldn't wait to return home from vacation so I could get my hands on NUMB. I'd pre-ordered it weeks ago but it hadn't arrived in time to pack. I read it in a single sitting the morning after I got home. If you follow Sean Ferrell on Twitter or read his blog, you probably think this guy can write. Heh. Wait until you read the book.

The aptly named lead character wanders into a circus one day, unable to remember who he is or feel any pain and soon becomes the major draw. Numb feels nothing, but Sean's mastery of language ensures we see and feel every scar Numb collects. The story is well-told, the imagery detailed without being intrusive. Numb, as it turns out, not only feels no physical pain, he has problems feeling emotions, too. The story is less about solving the mystery of his past and more about accepting who he is now - freak? Aberration? Loner?

I cried at the end when Numb decides who he wants to be. I think Sean's hit it out of the park with this novel and highly recommend it.

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### **Jonas Samuelle says**

I was intrigued to find that the title character's condition goes much deeper than the synopsis implies. The author never says it outright, but Numb's emotions seem to have been stilted as well, always drifting somewhere in the vague midland of feeling.

He (Numb) wanders through the story in a reflective lethargy, letting the whims and desires of others dictate his actions. Ferrel does a good job of making the reader wonder how much our individual identity depends on our ability to feel pain.

The craft and cleverness of this debut makes me wish I couldn't feel jealousy.

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### **Kristin says**

I was touched by Numb. Initially, I was drawn to its subject: pain and after reading it, I was reminded me of the fact that to feel pain is to be human; that it's what we all have in common. The book follows a character named Numb. Named that way because he turns up at a circus with no memories of who he is or where he came from and without the ability to feel pain. In Numb's efforts to find an identity without pain, which is what the book asserts is necessary to the process, Numb doesn't seem to have the ability to worry about the people (who can feel pain) that he leaves in his wake. The novel is at its best in the passages with Ferrell's

ruminations on pain. I wish he had stayed there throughout the novel and had forgone delving into fame's place in the human experience, but ultimately for a person who's spent a life healing wounds of the past, it was nice to be reminded that I'm human after all.

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### **Erica says**

Numb is the story of a man who arrives at a circus with no memory of who he is and no ability to feel pain. he becomes famous because of it, all while struggling to discover who he really is (and not just in the sense of where he came from, but what kind of person he wants to be.)

I was expecting this one to have a compelling plot, but I wasn't expecting the writing to be as beautiful as it often was. Not necessarily my usual thing (though Numb does, in a way, come of age), but I definitely liked it. A quick read, too--finished in less than two days.

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### **Tara says**

Numb is a man who feels no pain and doesn't remember where he came from or anything about his past. His only link to his personal history is a bloody business card he finds in his pocket. After performing with a circus and befriending fellow performer, Mal, the two travel to New York together. Numb's journey to understanding himself is full of people who appear to want to help but just might have other motives for befriending him. Will Numb be able to make sense of the intentions of the people he encounters?

Wonderfully written...brilliant! Numb is a captivating novel! Readers will fall in love with Numb from the start and root for him until the end. Numb is a character that won't easily be forgotten.

\*I received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads\*

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### **Jeremy Brooks says**

Numb had a very narrow narrative focus; not at all a bad thing, that gave Ferrell the canvas needed to tell Numb's and Mal's stories in some level of detail. It's far from an action book; the tension comes from how Numb feels about his disorder, how he relates to people, how they relate to him, if he can overcome his emotional numbness, since it seems he's stuck with his physical one. There didn't seem to be much anticipation around Numb learning his identity, which kind of sapped the tension out of that arc a bit. Overall a good book, though. Ferrell writes in the style that I tend toward myself (stories driven by broken characters, minimal action), so I guess he gets an extra point for that.

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### **Elizabeth A. says**

When a bloodied stranger with no memory of who he is or how he got there wanders into Mr. Tilly's Circus in south Texas, the only thing the battered and confused man can think to tell the curious workers who surround him is, "I'm numb." Though he means it literally, that proclamation also comes to be his name.

Numb's ability to absorb physical punishment without feeling the resulting pain makes for a highly successful circus act, one that finds him pounding nails through his hands and feet, making creative use of a staple gun, and acting as a human dart board for members of the crowd.

Yet it's only when he finds himself thrust into a wrestling match with a lion that Numb finally realizes his future is going nowhere, in large part because he doesn't know his past. And so, along with best friend and fellow circus performer Mal, Numb heads to New York City in search of his identity.

Once in New York Numb's life changes dramatically, as what had previously made him a freak and outcast in the circus garners him popularity and fame in the big city. Be it doing television commercials, magazine cover photo shoots, or even appearing on Letterman, Numb's problems appear to be over. And that's when author Ferrell pulls a brilliant slight of hand, taking what initially appeared to be on the surface a straightforward "Hey, look at the freak!" story and downshifting into a much more serious gear.

Through his interactions with those he meets in NYC (his agent, who may or may not have Numb's best interests at heart; an ambitious, and slightly psychotic, model he meets on a photo shoot; the beautiful – and blind – artist who appears to be the only one to "see" him for who he truly is) Numb comes to understand the necessity of pain; its role as the counterpoint to pleasure. Despite all his apparent success, Numb realizes he's stuck in a limbo world of sorts, wondering if he'll ever really be able to feel joy if he doesn't know what it is to experience pain.

Numb is a clever, offbeat tale of a man searching – both literally and spiritually – for the answer to the ultimate question: who am I? I'll leave it to you to discover whether Sean Ferrell allows Numb to figure out the answer to that age-old question, but I will tell you that Ferrell sure as hell has served up a book that makes you think about how we define ourselves. Is it by what's inside, or by what is reflected back to us by others? And when an author has the chops to both entertain readers as well as make them think, that's beautiful thing.

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## **Mav Skye says**

Sean Ferrell grabs you by the collar and forces you to feel the physical, psychological, and emotional pain that Numb is unable or unwilling to feel. He jars you with the bizarre, distracts you with pretty women, and while you're looking the other way, pounds nails into your heart. Unlike Numb, you feel each swing of the hammer. It's like Palahniuk meets Steinbeck in a lion cage. They sit, have coffee, and play chicken with a pairing knife. You are wondering who is going to lose a finger and if the other will sew it back on. The read is refreshing and real, and I can honestly say I can't wait for his next book.

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## **David Hebblethwaite says**

The titular character of Sean Ferrell's *Numb* by is unable to feel pain, or to remember who he was before he stumbled, bleeding, into a circus, of which he soon became the star attraction. We join Numb as he is gearing up for his greatest stunt yet – facing off against a lion. Things don't work out as they should, though, when the lion collapses at the key moment. As a result, Numb leaves the circus, along with his colleague Mal, and heads to New York, in search of his fortune, his identity, or... well, maybe even he doesn't really know.



One's natural expectation with a story like this is that it will focus on uncovering the protagonist's past, but Ferrell's novel isn't like that. The man Numb is now is of greater interest to the tale than the man he used to be; when occasional clues do appear (never adding up to anything like a solution, though), they feel almost like an intrusion – which, in a sense, they are, because Numb's greatest interest is establishing an identity for himself in the present.

Identity is perhaps the central issue of *Numb* the novel, as that subject impinges on each of the main characters in some way. Numb himself has to deal with becoming public property to an extent; his feats of endurance make him famous, land him appearances on TV; he becomes the star of innumerable internet videos, about which he learns only by accident, if at all – in short, Numb's identity multiplies until there are people out there who've never met him, who have a more solid conception of who he is than he does himself. Numb's situation seems to me summed up best by a passage in which he reflects on the experience of staying at length in a hotel (funded by his agent) – surrounded by luxury, everything he could want at hand, but none of it belonging to him.

Mal also has to deal with the effects of Numb's fame, though in his case the issue is that he has fallen on hard times whilst Numb's stock has risen; Mal takes desperate measures in an attempt to claw back his sense of self. Elsewhere, we have Emilia, a model with whom Numb embarks on something of a 'relationship', and whose identity appears mutable – she gains gratification from Numb's inability to feel pain in New York, yet, when Numb meets her later in Los Angeles (where she has moved), Emilia is a much softer, more relaxed character. Then there is Hiko, the blind artist with whom Numb falls in something which is not quite love; she captures the essence of her subjects in her works, but keeps a second, private set of portraits, which sum up her own image of those people – she creates multiple identities of others.

By novel's end, Numb is on his way to discovering who he is, or at least to becoming comfortable with whatever answer to that question he may choose – and we as readers have experienced an interesting and very entertaining examination of what 'identity' can mean.

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## **Elisabeth Black says**

I reviewed this book on my blog, here: <http://elisabethblack-writer.blogspot...>

A snippet:

Ferrell's elegant and beautiful prose ensnared me from the start. Beyond the author's voice, though, there's a stillness within the narrator, a unique receptivity that counter-balances the exuberance of his adventures. And adventures there are. Numb is a serious book, but it's an exciting one too.

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## **Joemmama says**

He blew into the failing circus on a Texas dust storm, bleeding and battered...he said "I'm numb". That became his name, since he did not remember who he really was, or where he came from.

Numb worked around the circus and ended up as a freak who felt no pain, nailing his hands and feet to boards. He made friends with Mal, a fire eater, and they ended up leaving the circus and going to New York together. Numb had found a bloody business card in the pocket of his suit, and was sure he would find out

who he was.

Numb and Mal made money, nailing Numb's hands and feet to the bar and floor of the sleazy place, betting that he would not feel it.

Numb quickly tired of the game and went out on his own. Finding an agent, who hired PI's to check on leads into Numb's identity, he went mainstream.

Getting into a snobby crowd, Numb seemed out of his element. He moved in with a blind artist, and he became her muse. When Mal comes back into his life, Numb sees things in a different light.

The story of Numb and Mal is both sad and sometimes funny as hell. Offbeat and well written, this book was terrific!

I received this book from Erica at Harper Perennial for review. Thanks so much!

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## **Benoit Lelièvre says**

Praise the Gods of Social Media (and Janet Reid), I have bought Numb. Honestly, since I've begun this whole blogging thing, I've been swimming in a lake of paranormal, romance, vampires and werewolves writers. When I heard about Sean Ferrell through his agent's blog, I was curious. His approach to fiction writing seemed similar to mine. My writer-sense didn't disappoint me, because Numb is one hell of a book.

Numb is the story of...Numb, some guy that walks into a freak show circus in Texas, covered in blood and wearing a black suit. He doesn't remember who he is and can't feel any pain. The circus owner sees the opportunity of a quick buck with him and includes him into the show. One day, things go overboard and Numb gets locked in a cage with the Caesar, the circus' lion. His friend Mal saves his life and drags him out of the cage and together they leave the circus to start their own roaming freak show. Numb's career goes upwards though as he hits New York and lands a contract with an agent, Michael who turns him into a celebrity. Numb gets introduced to the jet set, blind artist Hiko and model Emilia, who find a way to make his life complicated despite the newly found celebrity. Meanwhile, Mal struggles, but the bond he has with Numb proves to be stronger than his new entourage though.

The chapters of Numb draw a series of portrait of Numb's life who are loosely connected, but beautiful on their own. Most of them would make a good standalone story, which gives the novel a depth and an aesthetic that most first time novelist don't even come close to. What I liked best about Numb was Ferrell's reflexion on identity versus celebrity. All that Numb has about himself is the perception of other people, which makes him identify himself to his scars, which is the only thing people seem to give him attention for. That also causes these beautiful moment of lonely hollowness, where he's trying to "numb down" an nameless feeling (I.E. In Hiko's appartment when he turns all lights down or in the hotel where he keeps ordering stuff for no apparent reason). This is where Numb is most appealing, in its graceful impending doom. The numbness is only physical, despite the main character denying his anxiety (consciously or not).

What I liked a little less is the theoretical stance of the novel. Numb is a voice (an commanding one), but as a character, he comes off a bit more like a theoretical example than a live character to whom the reader attach. I can understand Sean Ferrell wanted (and achieved) that ethereal feeling, but there is a cost to this. I'm not even sure other characters call Numb by his name during the novel. He's mostly nameless and could have

been called "loss of identity" or "existential dread" and the novel wouldn't have been affected. He doesn't seem very interested in his past and his life and seems happy to surf on the wave of his own hype. It's not that critical, but it strips the novel of a great power it could have had and traps it in this intellectual cast.

For a first novel, Numb burns rubber. It's a spectacular kick-start to Sean Ferrell's novelist career. It's not the most accessible novel and it's going to frustrate a lot of reader that aren't used to play mind games of authors, but it gets the job done. Sean Ferrell isn't dead or famous yet and it's with great pleasure that I hop into his bandwagon.

(Taken from my blog: [www.deadendfollies.com](http://www.deadendfollies.com))

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