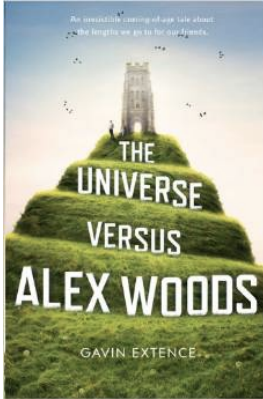


***The Universe Versus Alex Woods* by Gavin Extence
Redhook (June 25, 2013)**



Quirky only begins to describe this incredibly touching tale of an epileptic British misfit science geek who befriends an aging American Vietnam War vet. As the book begins, Alex is a teenage boy, arrested and being questioned by the authorities. What happened? How did he get here? Who is this kid? Do we even like him? Debut novelist Gavin Extence dangles these questions before us, then cleverly leads us backwards in order to answer them. The story (and therefore our journey) starts years before, when young Alex was randomly, life-alteringly struck in the head by a meteorite, rendering him both a scientific celebrity and a school yard outcast. Kurt Vonnegut's influence is obvious within specific plot points, and is also noticeable in Extence's writing, where he strikes a balance of describing tragic events with comedic style, wrapping his seriousness within subtle absurdity. Specifically, his attention to bullying is distinct, yet unsanctimonious. By the time we're back in the interrogation room,

our questions about Alex have been well answered, but a bigger question demands our attention: How far would you go for a friend? --[Robin A. Rothman](#)