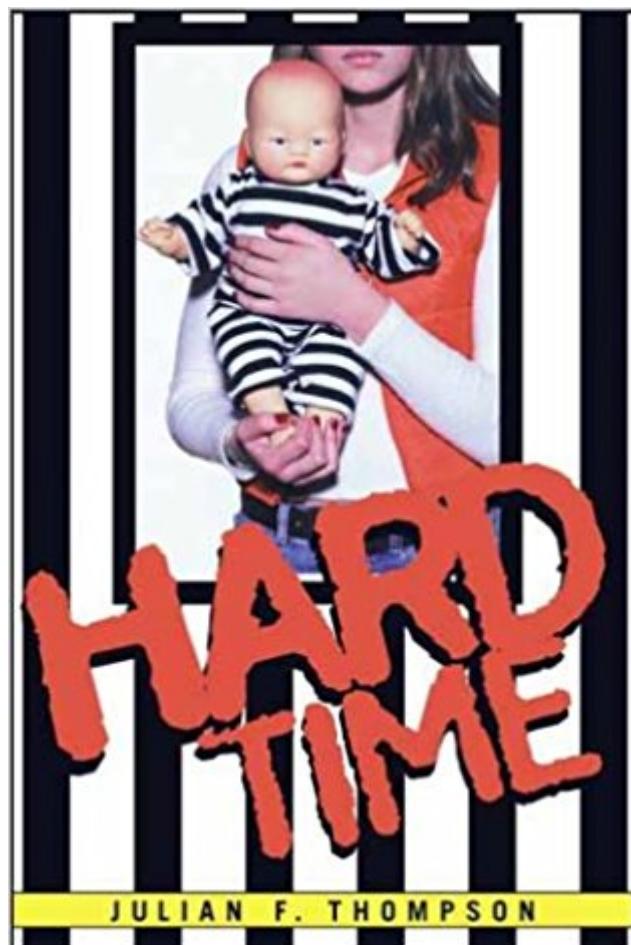


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# Hard Time



## **Synopsis**

"When we're born, we're sentenced to, like, life. And some of us -- I'd be a prime example -- are made to do hard time." So says Annie Ireland, sentenced to a life of trying to live up to her parents' never-ending expectations. For a long time the only person she can count on for unconditional support is her best friend, Arby, known to the horror and delight of many as "The Roach Boy." And then Pantagruel Primo, Esquire, comes into Annie's life and just like that, she has another friend, this one ageless and with special powers -- and not looking like himself (at all), at first. Suddenly, as a result of a story she writes for English class, Annie and her friends find themselves sentenced to five days in the county jail and then to an indefinite stay at the Back to Basics Center, a wilderness school for "problem" kids. After a series of comic misadventures they manage to escape its bizarre, unpleasant clutches, and Annie comes to realize she's unique and strong and lovable, and that it doesn't matter what some other people think. Delightfully ridiculous (but also timely), part fantasy and part real life, Hard Time is a humorous, sophisticated tale about one girl's struggle to be who she is rather than the person some adults keep wanting her to become.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Grade 8 Up-In this broadly satirical fantasy, a leprechaun named P.P. (Pantagruel Primo, Esquire) coincidentally inhabits the body of a baby doll that Annie Ireland carries around for her ninth-grade Life Skills class. P.P.'s identity is revealed when he announces to Annie that her house is burning down, a dire event that leads her self-absorbed parents to park their daughter with her aunt and

uncle while they escape to a fat farm in Arizona. Thompson's style is sophisticated and irreverent. The vocabulary, choice of names, literary allusions, and plays on words all contribute to his lampoon of acronyms, censorship, greedy adults, standardized tests, sweepstakes, camp counselors, life in jail, and more. When a story that Annie writes for her English class is published in the school's literary magazine, it draws the eye of a D.A. who has her arrested, tried, and sentenced to five days in jail for advocating school violence. This is just the first in a bizarre string of punishments imposed upon Annie and her friend Arby, who is also jailed when he protests her conviction. From there, they are sent to a militaristic boarding school. The most extreme punishment imposed on the friends is solitary confinement in the ACLU (Auto-Cathartic Learning Unit) by Dr. Smithers of the BBC and his stun-gun-wielding wife, Dolores, both classic caricatures. Rescued in the end by their magical ally, P.P., Annie and Arby are happily returned to their families, a remarkably mellow ending to a comic novel that is truly over the top. Susan W. Hunter, Riverside Middle School, Springfield, VT  
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Gr. 7-11. Annie feels sentenced to a life of high parental expectations and criticism. She has one friend in whom she can confide: Arby the Roach Boy. Then the doll she was given to look after for a child-care awareness class comes to life. Magically trapped inside the baby's form is a cursed leprechaun named Pantagruel Primo, Esquire. Primo encourages Annie to express her frustrations, and when Annie writes an inflammatory story for English class, at Primo's instigation, all three characters wind up doing "hard time" at the Back to Basics Center, a disciplinary wilderness school. As usual, Thompson has written an edgy, funny novel, this one irreverently alluding to our current fear of high-school violence. Annie and Arby are both victims of their own good intentions and of adults too self-absorbed to listen. Thompson typically pushes the envelope, sometimes bordering on the absurd, but this real-life fantasy will resonate with teens who, like the characters, are struggling to reconcile parental and school restrictions with the rest of their lives. Frances Bradburn  
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Ordered this for my library at school. Several students recommended it as a high interest read. Haven't read it myself yet.

As a school project, Annie receives a baby doll that she must take care of. To her utter surprise, she finds out that it talks, and is really a wizard trapped in the form of a plastic doll. When she is sent to jail, and later to a special camp for 'troubled children,' (because she wrote a story for her school

newspaper) the doll accompanies her there, and on all the rest of her adventures. Although the writing was OK, in my opinion this was not a good book at all. The plot was unrealistic and completely unbelievable, and the characters very shallow. The author has tried to mix fantasy and fiction and failed.

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