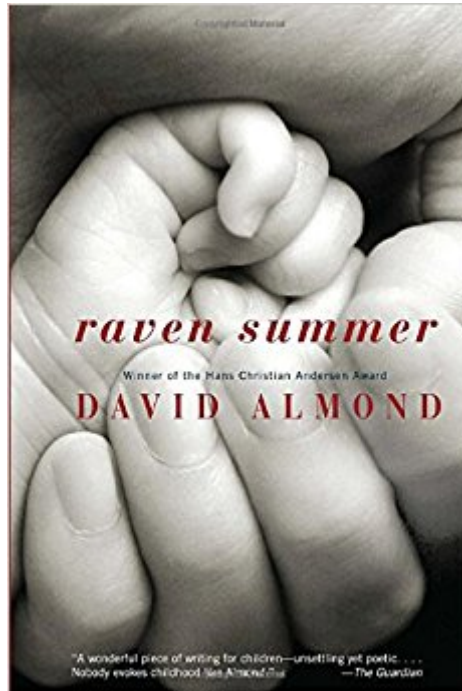




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Raven Summer



Synopsis

Liam and his friend Max are playing in their neighborhood when the call of a bird leads them out into a field beyond their town. There, they find a baby lying alone atop a pile of stones—•with this note pinned to her clothing: PLEASE LOOK AFTER HER RITE. THIS IS A CHILDE OF GOD.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

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Social Skills & School Life > Boys & Men

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Grade 7—•Liam lives with his father, a famous writer, and his mother, a photographer, on Britain's Northumbrian coast. One day out wandering with his friend Max, Liam is led by a raven to a baby left with a note and some money. When Liam and his parents visit the infant's foster family, Liam connects immediately with two of the foster children, Crystal, a wild-child girl, and Oliver, a refugee from Liberia. Liam's mother falls in love with the baby, and she comes to live with his family. When Crystal and Oliver run away to Liam's secret hideaway, Oliver reveals his true identity, and Liam is forced to explore the darkest parts of his own soul as he realizes the evil he is capable of doing. *Raven Summer* is set in the recent past against the backdrop of the war in Iraq. It explores how children everywhere are physically and psychologically scarred by violence and brutality that they cannot escape and can be led to do horrible things. Almond's story is a passionate plea for peace, and the putting away of weapons of war. While the question of the book's audience is a valid one, and while there are perhaps a few places where the children seem

impossibly wise, and are even perhaps acting as mouthpieces for the author, this book is exquisitely crafted and will make any reader stop and think about the consequences of violence. —Tim Wadham, St. Louis County Library, MO Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review, Booklist, September 15, 2009: "The kindness in every chapter is heartbreaking too. A haunting story, perfect for group discussion." Starred Review, Publishers Weekly, November 9, 2009: "Almond tackles complex questions about humanity from multiple points of view; flashes of wisdom—sometimes painful, sometimes uplifting—arrive at unexpected moments." Starred Review, Kirkus Reviews, October 15, 2009: "[A] hypnotic, sensuous foray into the nature of war, truth, art and the savagery of humanity." From the Hardcover edition.

David Almond has a reputation for crafting oddly beautiful, thought-provoking books that remain with readers long after the final pages. His newest work holds this same power. Full of images both alluring and deeply disturbing, *RAVEN SUMMER* is the kind of atmospheric novel that will haunt readers' thoughts. Liam is all too aware that he is on the cusp of great changes as he spends one last summer of childhood with his friends and family on England's Northumbrian coast. This bleak but beautiful landscape that surrounds him offers plenty of fodder for the imagination; historic artifacts and ancient structures play roles in daily lives, even in the 21st century. Liam and his friends still love to while away their days hiking and playing football, spending long summer evenings playing games similar to hide and seek. But Liam finds that the focus of his friends --- and, at times, he himself --- has turned in different directions, both toward the increasingly attractive prospect of the opposite sex and, in a darker turn, toward violence. Liam's thoughts often turn toward violent topics; planes bound for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan roar overhead regularly, and several soldiers from his area have died or been kidnapped in wars overseas. His own mother, an artist, has obtained a fair measure of success, in part by photographing abstract images of the wounds on Liam's body in the wake of fights with his friends. These fights grow increasingly menacing as Liam tries and fails to distance himself from his childhood friend, Gordon Nattrass. Nattrass also fancies himself an artist, and his video installation --- which focuses on disturbing reenactments of hangings and beheadings --- inspires Liam and his parents to consider the fine line between art and sensationalism. Liam's father is a famous novelist who spends most of his time upstairs in his study,

rarely engaging with his family's life. That is, until Liam and his friend Max follow a raven to where a small baby girl has been left alongside a note and a jar full of cash. The story inspires Liam's father's imagination and captivates the media as well. When the family later visits the baby's foster family, Liam finds himself drawn to two other foster kids, whose future directions seem somehow fated to be tied up in his own. Both these children come from legacies of violence, which is part of their fascination for Liam. But when all the strands of his story converge in a tense encounter, how will Liam himself react? *RAVEN SUMMER* is a novel that will raise as many timeless questions for the reader as they do for Liam himself. What are the origins of evil? Do humans start off as innocents, or are we evil by nature? What are the connections among beauty, truth and art? Is there ever any value in creating or considering images of violence and war? Throughout, Liam's reflective approach to his life and his elegiac contemplation of his own rapidly vanishing childhood will draw in mature readers and inspire them to their own thoughtful considerations. --- Reviewed by Norah Piehl

David Almond's *RAVEN SUMMER* is dark (like a raven) and deals with the age-old (try Biblically-old) question of the demon seed. As Adam and Eve learned the hard way, sinning is easier than you think. And then they raised Cain, who really emphasized the point. Humans -- even children -- possess the ability to do good and the ability to commit evil... unspeakable evil, in fact. To prove his point, Almond takes an everyday British lad of the Highlands (Liam), adds a nasty neighbor boy who likes to torture animals and bully friends (Nattrass), and injects a Liberian refugee whose parents were murdered and who was trained by the murderers to be a murderer himself (Oliver). Somehow he brings this strange brew together near a place where British soldiers just happen to be playing war games. This sets up the *deus ex machina*, ending it all quite neatly. The style is severely clipped with enough short sentences to bring Hemingway to mind. Realism is ignored at times, too, so be prepared for possible eye rollers. A "thinking lad's book," *RAVEN SUMMER* does not have a particularly gripping plot, so if that is your bread and butter, prepare for a salad. Might make for good discussion material, especially in light of boy soldiers used in Africa and the exploited use of children in both fascist and Communist regimes of the past.

One discovery, one event, can change your life forever. For Liam, it was following a raven, which would ultimately lead him into one of the darkest summers he would ever experience. With the raven came the discovery of a little baby, abandoned with just a note labeling her as "a childe of God," and a jar of money. Liam and his friend, Max, take turns carrying the baby on the way back to Liam's

house, knowing that this lovely-smelling baby will need milk, clothes, a family. Without an appearance of the baby's parents, she is quickly taken to a foster family, where Liam meets Crystal and Oliver. RAVEN SUMMER continues with the introduction and Liam's encounters with characters that have had dark experiences or are experiencing dark thoughts. There is the foster child, Oliver, a refugee from Liberia, who fled after his parents were murdered and before he could do any harm to others. His dark past and what he was dangerously taught still haunts him, as his scar is a blatant reminder of what his life was like before experiencing a "safer" world. Then there is Gordon Nattrass, a friend of Liam's whose mind turns to the dark as he enjoys the actions of beheading, torturing, and bullying animals - and some humans. Liam himself can't help but think of violent images of war, as all around him are wars between countries and even somewhat between his friends. RAVEN SUMMER is a dark, compelling, and intriguing novel with complex and sometimes even frightening thoughts. It strongly expresses the evil and violence that encompass the world through the minds and eyes of all ages. The novel concludes by connecting the lives of the younger cast of characters with a climatic ending, including a game turned awry. This is a novel that one must experience firsthand in order to truly understand what a classic it will be one day. Reviewed by: Randstostipher "tallnankyrn" Nguyen

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