



# The Phoenix Project

*D.M. Cain*

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## **The Phoenix Project** D.M. Cain

A thought provoking and compelling dystopian world that will change the way you view justice... A man fights for life-and redemption-in D. M. Cain's riveting new novel, The Phoenix Project. Britain has descended into chaos as violence and terrorist attacks seethe across this once-peaceful country. Outraged by the steady stream of lawlessness, citizens demand a harsher penal system, and the Phoenix Project is born.

In prisons across the country, inmates fight to the death in a weekly bloodbath while the nation cheers them on. Raven Kennedy, a prisoner who has never forgiven himself for his unspeakable crime, struggles against his own guilt and self-loathing. But even as the real war wages on within himself, Raven is forced to battle some of the prison's most ruthless killing machines.

Can he survive long enough to unravel the anger and regret that shackle him-and one day find the forgiveness he seeks?

## **The Phoenix Project Details**

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Author : D.M. Cain

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# From Reader Review The Phoenix Project for online ebook

## Jason Greensides says

### GENDER AND EMOTION IN A DYSTOPIAN NIGHTMARE

Raven, a man with a tortured past, is serving time in a prison where convicts must fight to the death for the entertainment of the free population. The dystopian world Cain creates is entirely convincing and downright scary: this world is not too far removed from the one we know and experience everyday. But religion and morality have partially broken down, allowing brutality to exist, rupturing the souls of all who fight for their survival and those who choose to watch and take pleasure from these televised displays of violence.

All characters in the novel - Raven, Kiri, Khan (whose fight scene with Raven has such a great twist in how we perceive his character, it blew me away), Millicent and Alexia are all well rounded, fully developed and sympathetic characters - even at their worst - and the story they find themselves in is emotional and compelling. The female characters are strong, it could be argued psychologically stronger than the male characters (Millicent and Kiri are both very determined) and there are even points where traditional gender roles seem to be reversed: female characters remain strong when Raven is weak, frequently female characters instigate sexual relations, and of course the biggest gender thematic idea - Raven's self-harm, which of course is traditionally thought of as a female attribute.

All characters must fight - whether male or female - and the fight scenes themselves are brutal and brilliantly described, and there's just the right amount of them too - too many fight scenes make my eyes glaze over. No problems here with that. Also, the fight scenes are emotionally charged and significant to the plot, so I cared about the outcome of all of them.

This wonderful book is an anti-hero's emotional journey towards redemption. I enjoyed it a lot and was frequently awed by Cain's descriptive powers, particularly of the characters' psychological and emotional states.

And then there's the end. The brilliant end. It's a courageous direction to take the novel in, but I'm glad Cain did it. I might even argue the book is worth it for the end alone.

A fantastic novel.

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## Rosemary says

The Phoenix Project - a review by Rosemary Kenny

The eponymous Project is a Planet Kill-like prison gladiator system of pitting fighters like Khan and sister Millicent against comparative novices like Raven and Alexia, the latter a young terrorist fighting against the tyranny of the Capital's elite. The resulting battles generate huge tv audiences and betting to match, to the delight of the Governor and his ilk.

Who is Kiri - and what role does she fulfil and for whom? What is different about Khan and Millicent? Where do the siblings live? Why does Millicent vow vengeance on Raven?

How did Raven become the new champion? How did Alexia help with this - and what punishment did she receive as a result? What happens between Raven and Gabriel? How does the Governor feel about Raven? How does Raven disappoint him? What is the Dark Room? How is Kiri saved from fighting?

This book by D. M Cain is a sure winner for all fans of Fight Club and Hunger Games, with its break neck action and engaging relationships between the complex and believable characters, as well as being a great start to the series. Grab your copy today and get reading!

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## **TheCosyDragon says**

This review has been crossposted from my blog at The Cosy Dragon . Please head there for more in-depth reviews by me, which appear on a timely schedule.

This world of violence is only a small step from our own. Religion has been blamed for terrorism and driven underground, and prisons are bursting at the seams. The only solution is to reduce the number of prisoners and getting them to kill each other for spot is a logical solution. Charged with a deadly crime, Raven punishes himself again and again with no hope of salvation.

This novel opens with a bloody fight scene that positions the reader to empathise with Raven while at the same time wondering why he has killed before. Although the blow by blow of the fight is written slightly awkwardly, the feeling behind it is strong enough to seep through the action and encourage the reader to keep going!

This is a bloodier, more brutal criminal punishment than that explored in Day 7 and Cell 7. I rather like this novel more because it is more detailed and meaty, with a protagonist who has sinned, but is ready to redeem himself eventually.

Ah yes. Raven is a tortured, depressed prison inmate who nevertheless cannot stop fighting for his life. His despondency seeps through the pages and his self-harm (extreme trigger warning) is painful to observe. I felt myself wondering what choices I would have made, and whether I would be as strong as Raven.

This novel comes with an optional epilogue, as the ending within the novel is quite abrupt. I liked being given the option to read it or not, because I can't decide how I feel about it. I like there to be a concrete ending, even if it is not a happy one. Go purchase this book for yourself, and then decide whether you too want to read the epilogue.

I read this novel a long time ago, and remember that I loved it so much that I gave it 5 stars. Then I neglected to review it, and let it just sit there on the review pile for a year (or more!). So this review is actually written based on my re-read, and it was worth the time.

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## **Cynthia Morgan says**

After reading the book's cover description, I was already intrigued to learn more, not only about the history of this futuristic society where brutality has become the norm, much as it had been in Roman times, but also by the main character, Raven. It did not take long to connect with his tortured soul as he was beautifully and

lovingly developed; his pain and the trials he faces to survive, outwardly and inwardly, are poignant and marvelously developed in a story that delves far beyond the gladiator theme I originally envisioned.

Aptly named, *The Phoenix Project* tells a stirring, vivid tale of a self-destructive soul who eventually discovers Hope and Renewal through the inspirations and insights provided by those he meets on his journey. Entertaining, yet thoroughly provocative, Raven's story captured my imagination and, very quickly, my heart.

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## **Lorraine says**

An original, entertaining, thought-provoking and, at times, an uncomfortable read. The story line was well thought out, refreshingly unique and well worth reading.

I followed Ravens journey in the present as he dealt with life in prison and the brutality of the Phoenix Project, and learnt, through a series of flashbacks, how he ended up there. His remorse, self-loathing and guilt, but also his survival instinct are graphically brought to life by D.M. Cain.

The world Raven inhabits is brought to life by the authors detailed and descriptive writing.

I was gifted an eCopy of the book by the author.

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## **Phillip Stephens says**

### **Prison fight club tale fails to land knock out blow**

If *The Phoenix Project* feels familiar to readers, they need only search for "Arnold" on Netflix. The premise reads like the logline to *The Running Man* and a half-dozen similar movies and books. A corrupt police state forces the protagonist, Raven, to fight in televised prison games.

In her favor, Cain's visualization of the premise, as well as her characters, shows more depth than the Schwarzenegger movie (or the Sthratham version of *Death Race*). The prisoner Raven earned his sentence for murdering his lover, and Cain lays out the events of the novel to force him to confront his culpability. Cain develops *The Phoenix Project* at two levels. The action depicts a political system drawing Raven into the fight game, even as he resists. At a psychological level Raven begins his sentence with a death wish, unconsolable in his grief over murdering his lover, but not willing to face the character defects in both of them that drove him to kill her.

Conspiracy thriller fans will love Cain's premise, it ranks two on the right wing theorists favorite fantasy list, just behind ISIS plots. A neo-socialist world government overthrew the Vatican and forced the people to reject all trappings of faith. The government and media use the Phoenix Project as a trial experiment to keep the masses entertained in order to distract them from their real problems.

The Project selects prisoners to fight each other to the death. Once they enter the games, prisoners who survive five years earn their release. No one, of course, survives five years. Two fighters, however, Khan and his sister, reach superstar status with a string of undefeated records. Like the character Jonathan from the movie *Rollerball*, they have special quarters, their own TV shows, and a rock band.

Raven wants to die in the fights, but his instinct for survival always kicks in and he finds a way to win.

Alexia, a Christian who wants to stop the games, nurses him back to health. Sooner or later he knows he will face Khan, and if he wins, it will mean the Project, and prison will retaliate against Alexia.

Cain develops fully-realized believable characters, and she manages the pacing well. Fight purists might find something to nitpick in the fight scenes but they flow well and read realistic to the average reader. It's a good read for the casual reader.

However, *The Phoenix Project* will disappoint readers who read the book for the action line. She only attempts to resolve the Raven's psychological crisis. I won't spoil the book for you, except to say readers can learn how *The Phoenix Project* plays out by following a link to the deleted original ending online, which is only a few paragraphs long. For some reason, whether a rush to press or weariness with the material, she failed to resolve the action with the characterization. Hence, the three stars.

As to the psychological drama, Cain dwells far too often and far too long on Raven's compulsive guilt. As a narrative device it's one thing, but after a point even the most dense reader gets it. Raven's guilt drives him to cut himself, and seek to undermine himself in the ring, flashbacks will drive the narrative just as well. Or does guilt drive him, as the implied author insists?

I had the misfortune (at least in this case) of working with a professor who was a student of BJ Paris at Michigan State. (I went to grad school at Michigan State but my specialty kept me away from Paris' classroom.) Paris, whose work introduced me to the term "implied author," focused on a field of literary interpretation that he called Hornian psychology. He believed that most authors misunderstood the psychological motivations of their characters, and based his interpretations on Horney's work.

Truthfully, I haven't given a thought to Paris since I left grad school. Until I read *The Phoenix Project*. In this case, I suspect he was right. Seraphia, Raven's wife, was a calculating shrew who manipulated Raven's emotions to keep him on the hook until she no longer needed him. Raven, by the same means, was equally controlling—using every trick in the book to keep her in his sphere of influence and under his watchful eye. Raven's deep-rooted anger masked his need to control and once he killed Seraphia, he mistook his anger for guilt. His death wish and self-hatred reflected his anger that he lost control—that Seraphia drove him to the point that his only remaining means to control her was murder. For that he could never forgive himself, and Cain needed *The Phoenix Project* to work it out.

Personally, I believe the book's worth reading just to see how the drama, melodrama and psychodrama plays out. It may not go on your shelf of all time favorites. Still, it's a better book than *The Running Man* was a movie and Carol and I keep that in our iTunes library to watch every two or three years.

*Rating system:*

5 = *Delicious dialogue, crisp prose, clever characters & compelling plot*

4 = *Great read, won't want to stop*

3 = *Worth buying*

2 = *I will tell you what audience will like this, but other readers will want to look elsewhere*

1 = *If I review a book this bad I felt seriously compelled to warn you*

*Phillip T. Stephens is the author of Cigaretts, Guns & Beer, Raising Hell and the new release Seeing Jesus.*

*You can follow him @stephens\_pt.*

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## **Bill Ward says**

This book was a surprise and must be applauded for the originality of the hero and dystopian view of the future. It is a near future, which made it seem all the more plausible and at the same time worrying. I didn't immediately connect with Raven, who should probably be referred to as the main character rather than the hero, as this is a deeply troubled man who has committed a terrible crime and finds himself in a new type of prison, where you have to fight other inmates to stay alive.

Raven is punishing himself for his crime and doesn't believe he deserves to live but a couple of female

inmates do see something good in him and show him there is something to live for.

The characters are very well described and the author explores many topical issues such as religion, reality television and our democratic freedoms.

We follow Raven on his journey and I enjoyed the ending.

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### **Maggie Thom says**

Its a well written book that pulls you into a gritty reality of not only the mob mentality of kill or be killed but the despair of being the next name called. This was a different story but a really good one. The characters are interesting - you really felt like you got to know them, which was good and bad as you're not sure who to get attached to. Raven's remorse is almost more dangerous though than having to fight for his life. It has a very dark pull to it that will keep you reading, needing to know where it's going, what is going to happen in this place that is a disposal system. I truly felt the horror that the inmates were living. And I can't tell you why but I loved the ending. 4.5\*

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### **Cassandra MADEUP BookBlog says**

This is a brilliant example of a worryingly plausible dystopian future, with engaging and interesting characters, a powerful story and consideration of some topics that many shy away from.

In this Dystopian future, those who commit crimes are forced to fight in "To The Death" situations, in fight cages, as entertainment for the general population. Although the premise of fighting for survival has been done a few times, I found the way that this Author approached the topic was individual, especially when considering the Characters.

The main Character has done committed an awful crime, and struggles with self worth as a result. He doesn't feel that he deserves to survive the fights, and so each fight he is forced to go through, he attempts to "Throw the Fight". Yet each time he tries, his survival instinct kicks in and he ends up winning.

There are many situations within this, the story considering current time and looking back on Ravens past. Raven self harms by cutting himself, and this is handled such that we can start to understand his turmoil, the inner struggles he faces daily. It's very powerful, very emotive, and I think helps the reader to start to understand that harsh reality of how Mental Health can effect a person, and how all encompassing this can be.

There is a wide mixture of Characters in the story, each very different to the last, and each has an understandable (if not always likeable) role to play. A couple of the Characters try to help Raven, try to convince him of his self worth, and the situations this results in are very emotive.

The ending was very well done, beautiful I would even say. There was a note from the Author on an extra chapter being available, and I will admit to not having even looked. I feel like this story ended in the perfect place, and although a part of me would love a sequel, a bigger part of me adored the ending and feels like any more would detract from the raw emotion of it.

Overall, this was a very well told and engrossing read, certainly one that many will enjoy! And has been set

as my Book Clubs February readalong following my read of it.

I look forwards to getting stuck into more by this Author, and YOU should too!

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### **K.S. Marsden says**

The forgiving world we know has crumbled in the aftermath of terrorist threats. In a bid to appear strong enough to make the tough decisions, and to make the public think that something is actively being done, the government create the Phoenix Project. A brutal new way for prisoners to live, being forced to fight and die in pits for entertainment.

Once an anti-Phoenix campaigner, Raven winds up in Salverford prison, and becomes entangled in a much bigger game.

This was brilliant! Although it is a dystopian, it focusses more on the psychological aspect of existing within the prison system. Knowing that at any time, you could step into the ring to die. Or worse, to have to kill a fellow inmate with your bare hands.

There are some, like the prison champion Khan, who thrive under the spotlight and attention. He is Britain's number 1 gladiator.

Most others just hope to stay alive. They might enjoy a few successes and a brief fame outside the walls of the prison; but ultimately they will die.

This follows Raven, who is deep in depression and self-loathing. His motivation to win his fights is shaped as a sort of self-punishment, that he is not allowed to die until he has paid off the debt that he is carrying with him. But I do wonder if he is partly telling himself that, to make it ok that he has a survival instinct that kicks in every time he enters the arena.

The perception of the Phoenix Project, and the public championing one fighter or another... those that catch their admiration are adored, worshipped, become celebrities etc. There is one point where, during an interview Millicent (the ultimate bitch and wild animal with no control in the arena) says that she is an idol to young girls - encouragement that they should grow up to be all that they can be.

As the lines between the punishment of the penal system and the demands of entertainment blur, it is often overlooked, or consciously dismissed that all these people are criminals. That is why they are here in the first place!

Even Raven, the hero in our story. He is in prison for a very good reason. Which begs the question, does he actually deserve freedom and forgiveness?

I found the end of this book a little unusual. I'm not sure whether I dislike it, or found it refreshing, the verdict is still out. Not to give anything too spoilerish away, but I was surprised by Raven's role (or lack thereof) in bringing down Salverford. There's a part near the end where an important discovery is wedged in, and then there's a bit of a blur over time, as though the author was in a rush to tie things up.

Overall, a really good psychological and moral drama.

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### **Stewart Bint says**



## A Never-To-Be-Forgotten Masterpiece

In my humble opinion The Phoenix Project is a masterpiece in every sense of the word.

It succeeds in an extremely difficult task of being both thought-provoking and entertaining at the same time – while also being uncomfortable but essential reading.

DM Cain has created a terrifying scenario set in the not too distant future where terrorists and other violent prisoners are pitted against each other in a fight to the death – televised for the world to see.

Terrifying on two counts; one, for the prisoners incarcerated in the brutal world of Salverford prison, and two, terrifying for us readers because this way of legally disposing of violent prisoners is brought alive and believable by DM Cain's skilful writing.

While some of the detailed description of the fights is particularly brutal, showing the inmates' inhumanity to fellow prisoners, this is a vital aspect for what follows as we join Raven Kennedy on his horrifying journey.

The various fighters' deliberate and prolonged cruelty within the ring is more than matched by Raven's cruelty to himself as he struggles to come to terms with the terrible crime that landed him in Salverford.

And that is the book's strength. DM Cain pulls no punches as she introduces us to Raven's self-harming attitude, and we see why he is desperate to stay alive so he can suffer more and more until he is satisfied he has atoned for his crime. But will he ever reach self-forgiveness?

The heart of this once-read-never-to-be-forgotten story is Raven's own guilt and self-loathing, which comes alive with clarity and believability.

Although he committed a monstrous crime, I still sympathised for every injury he sustains in the ring, and every pain he causes himself through self-harming. Here is a guy we want to come through! The actual tale of what led up to his crime runs parallel with his life in Salverford, and indeed both timelines reach their shattering climaxes at the same point in the book.

The descriptive scenes take us into the very heart of Salverford – I could see every nook and cranny, feeling as if I were locked in that cell with him – and the extensive, wonderfully written, dialogue between leading players gives us a unique and changing insight into their characters, what drives them and motivates them.

When I first started reading this book I described it as fastening a collar around my neck and dragging me along, relentlessly, behind it – I couldn't stop even if I wanted to. That applied right through to the end. The Phoenix Project will remain in my memory for a very, very long time to come.

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## Domoni says

I would like to thank the author for allowing me to read this book in exchange for an honest and unbiased review.

A dystopian future that could be. The world has been plagued by terrorism in the name of religions. As religions are blamed they then become more brutal. The British government decides to deal with violent offenders by creating the Phoenix Project. Inmates will be sent to prisons where they will be matched in battles to the death. After a years trial the government votes to continue with the project even including public displays of the battles. Heroes are created from the brutality for the public to worship. Is it everything that it claims to be. And is forcing people to murder others ok, even if those people may have been murders.

Raven is the central character to this story. He is haunted by his crime that landed him in Salverford prison. A place he had been against. He protested the Phoenix Project and abhors the idea. After committing a horrible crime that haunts him, he is sent to serve his penance. He tortures himself mentally and physically out of guilt for what he has done, but fights his battles unwilling to die. He claims if he dies his punishment

will be over and he doesn't deserve that, though that could be what he needs to tell himself to survive.

We also get a view of other inmates, Khan and his sister Millicent, two brutal fighters who have been the prisons undefeated victors for years. We learn soon on that they were not technically prisoners but had volunteered for the program and been paid and given perks to add to the element of entertainment. Though both love the battle and the adoration. Alexia, the Roman Catholic girl who also tried to volunteer in an effort to blow the prison up and then was caught and sentenced to be a prisoner despite being a minor. Various other faces and names that pass through the battles and stories. Some I could get a feel for and sympathize with and some I hated. The author added enough depth to the story to keep me entertained through to the end.

This story time hops through Raven's life. From before his incarceration to present day. It was somewhat easy to follow the time hops and kept Ravens motivation a mystery for quite awhile. This story was very interesting to me because it was a future that could make sense. Based on society today and our reaction to religious extremists and violent criminals as well as the deep seeded racism in much of humanity, it would not surprise me to hear that a world of extremes like this could evolve. The authors writing was easy to read and the story passed quickly. Though the ending did surprise me. I enjoyed this book.

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### **Lynne Murray says**

The Phoenix Project evokes the darkness of a not-too-distant future in which televised broadcasts of prisoner fights to the death double as mass entertainment and a veiled threat to keep protesters in line. We meet the hero, Raven just as he is about step into the arena where he will kill or be killed. This not his first such fight nor will it be his last. That would seem to be the deepest depths to which a man could sink. But Raven finds that the psychological torment and guilt overpower the physical pain when his success in the death arena turns him into a cultural icon.

D.M. Cain's dystopian vision has some similarities with *The Hunger Games*, with its televised deadly competition of teenagers turned into media stars by killing one another on broadcast television--all to distract the population from rebelling against the totalitarian government. There are also parallels with other dystopian works such as George Orwell's *1984* and Terry Gilliam film *Brazil*. But the D.M. Cain's work reminded me most of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksander Solzhenitsyn. Particularly because of something that author wrote in a foreword to his factual rendition of enslavement, brutality and meaningless death, *The Gulag Archipelago*. He described the lies people embrace when they confront this kind of evil and try to persuade themselves, "'It would not be the same here; here such things are impossible.' Alas, all the evil of the twentieth century is possible everywhere on earth."

Raven's soul searching and fight toward redemption reminds me of another poignant Solzhenitsyn quote, "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

The Phoenix Project makes us question just how far the slippery slope humanity can fall when reality television markets personal suffering and the prison industry turns human lives into commodities.

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## **Nicholas Adams says**

The Phoenix Project is a brilliant story of tragedy and redemption. D.M. Cain will take you into a world that has ceased to value human life. The characters are easy to relate to, and you never know who will survive to the end or perish along the way.

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## **David says**

The Phoenix Project is so amazingly written and has characters that are so well formed its impossible not to feel you know them all personally. After reading the book description I thought this book would be just about the brutal life in jail and constant fighting. The kind of story that while entertaining isn't especially deep. While there is plenty of scenes where Raven and other inmates are required to fight to the death, the book is so much more than that. I was so wrong to think it would have such a narrow narrative.

The book is very, very thought provoking in the areas of life, death and religion and i found myself questioning my own beliefs about these topics. This is a story of the journey of Raven (our main character). His personal journey, the ups and many downs he endures in his life. The consequences of his actions and the affect it has on him and how he learns from all that he has experienced.

D.M. Cain has done a fantastic job capturing the real emotions in the lives of these characters. I felt the sadness and emotional torture of the characters, I could completely feel for them and understand why they acted the way they did. I found some of the people in the book despicable and easy to hate, just to find I didn't know them as well as I thought and later found them redeemable and not the monsters I saw them as. D.M. Cain has a fantastic way of presenting the prisoners in a way that leads you to judge them, only to later reveal more of their back story causing you to do a 180 and re-think your assumption.

The more I read the more I found myself wrapped up in the story, I needed to know what made Raven tick, what had happened to get him where he was both physically and emotionally. At the point where I learned his history I felt for him and understood why he was the way he was. I am so glad I read this book and very impressed with D.M Cain's debut novel, I will be keeping my eye out for her next book and have become a real fan of her work.

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