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Set in Zimbabwe in the 1980s, just after the war for independence, a young English boy, Jacklin, is torn between his black friends at school and his sympathy for the colonial whites after witnessing the compulsory land seizures by Robert Mugabe's government.

But with an imminent visit by Robert Mugabe to the school, Jacklin realizes that Ivan, his white supremacist schoolmate, plans to assassinate the black leader. The novel leaves us with the moral dilemma — in hindsight, should Jacklin have killed Ivan or let Ivan kill Robert Mugabe?

"If I stood you in front of a man, pressed a gun into your palm and told you to squeeze the trigger, would you do it?"

"No, Sir, No way!"

"What if I then told you we'd gone back in time and his name was Adolf Hitler? Would you do it then?"

A compelling, thought-provoking novel about race, bullying and the need to belong, set in Africa.

Out of Shadows Details

Date : Published January 28th 2010 by Andersen

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Author : Jason Wallace

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Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, Cultural, Africa, Fiction, War

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From Reader Review Out of Shadows for online ebook

Mike says

Genre: Young Adult

Awards:

Rating: 5/5

Summary:

The novel is set in post revolutionary Zimbabwe. The narrator and protagonist, Robert Jacklin is a white British boy that relocated to Zimbabwe with his parents. Robert's father came to Zimbabwe for a career in civil service. As a boy Robert is sent to Haven, a previously "all-white" boarding school. In order to please his father Robert befriends a young black student named Nelson. The school still has a very low proportion of black pupils despite Mugabe's attempts at integration. As a result, the few black students who attend Haven are frequently subject to abuse by the native white population. Eventually fearing harassment from the white students, Robert distances himself from Nelson.

Robert falls in with a white boy named Ivan, who takes Robert under his wing. Ivan is a furious and intemperate young man who perceives himself as a victim of racial integration. Ivan longs for his home, as it existed before the war. Ivan is subject to abuse at home and worries about his future being in the hands of the new government. Although Mugabe aims to promote equality white farmers fear that the government will take their land despite promises otherwise. This fear fuels Ivan's fathers and consequently Ivan's passionate rage. Later Ivan encounters and is inspired by a man of action, the glorious Mr. Van Hout. As Ivan becomes closer to Mr. van Hout Robert must finally pick a side in the ensuing fight.

Evaluation: Overall the book was a good choice for a teen audience however it presented the reader with details that may not have been appropriate. That being said the book would be a good choice for an individual to read however it would not be suitable for a public institution to distribute to students.

Description of ending: Open: Although the main character has moved on the place he left behind has only plunged further into violence and turmoil. The character and the reader are left with many "what if" questions that are not answered. Many of the questions brought up in the story have still not been answered today and will not be answered with the current state of the government.

Suggestions:

This book was an excellent book that other authors could benefit from reading.

Pages I would read aloud:

Page 4 Particularly the part where Robert's father praises Mugabe and calls him a hero.

Page 149 This page exemplifies the corruption and distortion perfectly.

Page 250 This page exemplifies Robert's inner turmoil.

Cordelia Archer says

It was a brilliant book which highlighted the hatred that each race had towards the other after Zimbabwe gained independence. Very vivid descriptions but quite distressing to read in so much detail.

Adeeb says

Words cannot describe how amazing this book was. At least my words can't.

Ahhh...

Everyone READ this!

It is written beatifully! It will haunt you. The story is very sad, but even more realistic.

I read this in one sitting. That's how good it was. Took me a few hours to finish reading this.

Colin says

Woah. This book was *intense*. Lots to think about. Painful, honest, compelling. The main character's arc was riveting, and as a reader I appreciated the way his own insecurities and weaknesses were intertwined with the brutal and fear-fuelled racist antagonists, his "friends." A starkly political and complicated story about the history of colonialism is a rarity in YA lit. Recommended.

Elizabeth says

Surprisingly good:

This has been sitting on my Kindle for ages and for some reason I kept putting off reading it. Somewhere I had it in my mind it was a book written for young people and so was reluctant to read it. So I got towards the end of my Kindle on holiday and started this and I was pleasantly surprised. Gripping story and interesting points of view - easy to see how the protagonist got sucked in.

Lee Al-Atraqchi says

I really enjoyed this book. The blatant racism described in it is very eye-opening. I recommend this book.

Jo says

3.5 stars.

“I nodded subserviently while inside I was chewing over his words: tipped the balance of power. It seemed a strange expression to me because it gave me an image of a seesaw, and when one end was up the other was always down. It was never actually balanced.”

Initial Final Page Thoughts.

What... wait.. was that...? No.. it couldn't be. Could that be an epilogue that didn't make me superfluously angry?! I believe it was. Gosh.

And also... sadness.

High Points.

Let's hear it for the boys. History. Unflinching. Raw. Nelson. Snakes in the grass. Honesty. Brothers. Thought-provoking. Difficult questions. The writing.

Low Points.

Oh won't somebody think of the ~~children~~ parents? Seriously... I know in YA Land parents are normally dead/divorced/ awol for unexplained reason and I've come to accept that. But this was ridiculous. These boys were just running around like the lost boys at the end!

And speaking of the ending, it was.. um.. *interesting* but a little unconvincing and about as subtle as a ton of bricks.

Also, I wish we had spent more time in 1985. It was nice to see Robert starting off in the boarding school but I think it went on for a bit too long and, I know Mr Wallace had to set the scene because some people (like moi) may not know about this era at all, but I would like to have had more time looking at Robert when he was older because I think his character really started to develop and, of course, break my heart and make me scowl and sigh in exasperation and write 'ROBERT NOOOO! Come on!' and 'Robert don't do that. Why are you doing that?!' and 'PLEASE JUST STOP EVERYTHING THAT YOU'RE DOING' in my little notebook.

Hero....ish.

Alright Robert. I would call you Bobby or Jacko because that's what your... *friends* call you. But, to be honest, I don't know if I want to be your friend because it seems you're not a very good one. I won't go into the details because I know it's a sore subject and it just makes me upset to think about it because I thought we were going to be close and then you ruined it all (oh and also spoilers).

But you know what you did or what you *didn't* do.

So we'll leave it at that.

The journey that the reader goes on with Robert is fascinating and often difficult to read. It was hard to see Robert, the nervous and shy boy in the first chapter, be seduced by Ivan's manipulative ideas and turn his back on everything he knew was right because he was afraid to stand out and have Ivan's bullying turn on him. (There is a moment where Robert says that he "hid by joining in" because it was easier to go along with Ivan's "games" than it was to call him out.)

Even though I didn't necessarily like him, I felt like I knew him. And even though I didn't agree with the choices he made, I understood why he made them. Robert was a fascinating character and it was impossible not to sympathise with him, in spite of everything. I thought it was really effective seeing the events occur from his perspective as it introduced a lot of the thought-provoking questions that made this book so compelling.

But yes... Robert was definitely an interesting character and I'm still not 100% sure I had him completely figured out. One minute I wanted to hug him and tell him all was forgiven. And then the next minute I wanted to throttle him or at least frown until he understood that I was angry with him.

This book will stay with me for a long time and definitely made me think.

That's right... think.

looks suspiciously at the book

I'm missing out a whole lot of these headings because I really don't want to ruin anything for those interested in reading it.

~~Theme Tune.~~

Not so much a theme tune but more a *topical* tune.

Gimme a sec.

Topical Tune.

And also an excuse to use this song in one of my reviews.

Cal Me Al by Paul Simon (Zimbabwe Concert)

I have so much love for this man and this song and this video is just fantastic.

~~Sadness Scale.~~

10/10.

It's weird to give this book such a high rating because it didn't make me cry so much as it made me uneasy and on edge and I honestly don't think making his audience sad was Mr Wallace's intention and he didn't make me... wait... ok, I'm gonna change things around before I give myself a nosebleed.

Gimme a sec.

Distress Scale.

10/10. OK, that's better.

As I was saying, this book had me on edge. About everything. And it distressed me. I finished this book yesterday and I'm still thinking about certain scenes and fretting about them.

I've been dithering to and fro writing this review and I'm still not 100% sure that what I'm saying is going to make sense.

I don't really want to go into the parts that I found most distressing because, obviously, they are more effective when you don't know they are coming. Wallace doesn't keep any of his characters safe, something tragic happens to pretty much every single one of them, but it never feels forced or as if Wallace has sat at his desk and thought 'Damn, that character is in danger of having a happy ending. Quick think of something hideous to happen to them.'

And the fact that these issues were never milked or dwelled on for too long made them all the more upsetting. The conclusion of one of the events that I'm *still* thinking about was given approximately three lines... yet it still chilled me to the bone.

Recommended For.

People who are looking for a compelling historical YA novel that deals with difficult subjects in an honest and insightful manner.

You can find this review and other exciting things on my blog [here](#).

Edward Sullivan says

Superb debut novel centered in an elite private boys school that begins in the early 1980s when Rhodesia has become Zimbabwe and Robert Mugabe has taken power as Prime Minister. A riveting story that explores deeply and thoughtfully a host of compelling themes and subjects: colonialism, racism, guilt, bullying, inequality, justice, revenge, and much more. A richly layered, gripping story!

Debbie says

I really enjoy fiction that also provides a history lesson, which this one does. The characters are really well drawn - I had moments of sympathy even with the most despicable of them!

Rll595ag_thomasjakovlic says

What do you do when your father is an idealistic ex civil servant from Britain who has relocated to Africa, and you enter Zimbabwe's social upheaval between white Rhodesian Afrikaans and native Zimbabwean's who want to assert their independence and new found power? This is the situation that Robert our teenage protagonist is thrown into in Jason Wallace's "Out of Shadows". The context is set early as Robert's father a British civil servant exclaims that to his son that colonial Britain should rightfully return the control of the country to native Zimbabwe's African population. The father has repatriated himself to the new Zimbabwe, and just placed his 13 year old son to an all male boarding school. The year is 1983. Britain has relinquished power to Zimbabwean military. Mugabe is the new leader, but no one at the time realizes that he will be a violently merciless to his own citizens and the former Rhodesian farmer overlords. Meanwhile, Robert is torn between making new friends and keeping his cultural allegiances to the white Afrikaan peers, while he tries to understand the nationalist desires and new found pride of his young native cohorts.

What makes Jason Wallace's book so authentic is not only that he describes the wild native beauty of the African savannah with such breathtaking detail, or that he understands the inner workings of a boarding school, Wallace attended a Zimbabwean's boarding school as a youth, instead it his intimate understanding of the power struggle and violence in the aftermath of the Zimbabwean's struggle for independence that is so apparent to the reader. Wallace doesn't pull any punches in describing how the Rhodesian farmer school boys are just looking to reassert their lost dominance in the social order. They will recruit any new white student to their cause, and Robert is on their list. Jason Wallace shows that 13 year old teenagers are not immune to the peer pressure nor nearly mentally resilient enough to overcome the social maelstrom of intimidation and violence that is not only consuming the minds and actions of the farmer boys. Robert inexorably gets sucked into the ethical vacuum of rationalized brutality, and we seem him gang beating his black brothers with Ivan and his thugs. This is not an easy book to read, or digest as to why Robert at least can't resist his cultural affinities to see the evil nature of his behaviors. Fortunately our protagonist eventually has a tug of at his conscience. Is it after a white teacher is raped, or after several innocent native Afrikaans many who early in the book befriended him are viciously abused. Either way, we see how Robert father's comments about who are the truly rightful owners of Zimbabwe and how his actions are causing havoc and pain comes to climax. Robert has an epiphany, and the novel then quickly accelerates to a new suspenseful climax. When a teacher poses the question "if you had a gun to Mugabe's head, comparing him to Hitler, would you pull the trigger.", Robert goes from villain to heroic champion, and the transformation of his spirit will pull all participants, good and bad, into a climatic ending with national ramifications to Zimbabwean's future.

This is not a book for middle school students. The brutal violence, and derogatory and vicious thoughts of a whole range of characters makes this a hard read with mature themes and ambiguous actions. "Out of Shadows" is a novel that talks in frank terms about what happens when a nation still has its white overlords wanting retribution for their losses of land, power, and prestige to their former social underlings. Jason

Wallace's book would be a perfect novel for World History high school students who want an intimate look at how African independence is often a bloody and muddled journey. Wallace's ending me a bit unrealistic, but it appeals to young adult readers who want both a villainous and heroic character. Robert fits that bill in every way. The language, actions, and real life drama between these two cultures level of the boarding school is gripping literature. Parallels and differences between disenfranchised Rhodesian farmers and the Southern plantation whites of the Reconstructed South in the 1870's would provide Social Studies teachers with ample material for discussion and student research. As a literary example of ambiguity of character, and the idea of choices Robert makes and why, Jason Wallace's "Out of Shadows" gives educators many themes to explore: racism, peer pressure, politics, and corrupting influence power has on individuals.

Edward Sanchez says

A great book for about a young man's experiences at the end of all white rule in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). It's a great book to help anyone remember the importance of standing up for others and themselves.

Redd Becker says

A devastating story that pulled at the depths of my compassion. Wallace explored the human ability to survive against the odds and the ways we devise to cope. When pushed far enough humans are capable of doing things we wouldn't imagine. Wallace brings this all out in the painful story of youths placed in an impossible, but plausible environment. I could taste the depression. There seemed no relief.

The time was during the political shift of power from white supremacy to a black president following the 1980's war in Zimbabwe. The country's culture didn't change fast enough and the effects of the war devastated the psyche of a boarding school there. Alliances built between young men, naturally and due to the war, had consequences no one should be required to confront.

It's a story of the dark side of humanity. I hurt for protagonist and antagonist. It depicts a painful, but educational experience of the effects of racism on both sides of the divide and down the middle. It reminds us we are acting in compliance by not acting at all. I hated knowing, but was compelled to read. It left me informed, introspective and sad.

I only gave it four stars, because I couldn't stand to feel the pain rereading it and five stars is my indicator of what I may reread.

Emma says

I found myself constantly reminded of a *The Book Thief* when reading this novel. They are both historical fiction, featuring a child in a new, alien setting. The narrator in both books repeatedly warns us that events are soon to take a sharp turn for the worse. Unfortunately the *Book Thief* is a much better novel, and is much less blatant in its foreshadowing, and is more nuanced in its characterisations.

Out of Shadows follows Robert Jacklin, an English boy who has moved to Zimbabwe following the war in the 1980s. At school, he falls in with the wrong crowd, becomes friends with white supremacist Ivan, and

becomes an increasingly unwilling participant in the violent bullying that seems commonplace at this school.

The book did well in characterising Ivan. Although his actions are detestable, he is a very believable product of growing up in a country at war. The reader is almost led to sympathise with him in places, particularly in scenes where we see his farm get ravaged by the ex farm workers.

On the other hand, the "good guy" characters like Nelson and the black teachers at the school almost seem too angelic. A more nuanced portrayal of them would have ultimately served the book better. As it stands, they are simply two dimensional victims.

I was surprised to learn this book was meant for children given its very dark themes. Overall, it was a superb debut novel.

Ellen says

Painful reading at first but becomes addictively un-put-downable. Set in Zimbabwe at the start of Mugabe's rule this is the story of a young English white boy sent to a boarding school. Deals with issues of bullying and race, hatred and revenge. And the big question of "if I put a gun in your hand and told you the man in front of you was Adolf Hilter, would you shoot him?". Would be a great book for a book club read as raises loads of issues. Fantastic story, although painfully thought-provoking.

Linley says

This is a haunting, historical novel set around the time Robert Mugabe rose to power in Zimbabwe. The reader would do well to have a little bit of history of the sad and seemingly endless decline of this once beautiful and bounteous country. The breath-taking part of this book is the slow realisation Robert Jacklin, our narrator, has of himself and how much he wants to belong. But can he pay the price.?

A truly superb coming-of-age novel and would be well-worth considering for an NCEA response. I am even leaving in the pencilled notes as, for once, I think they add to the story. Recommended for Y11-13.
