



Youngblood

Matt Gallagher

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Jarhead meets Redeployment in a suspenseful and smart fiction debut that has been called "thrilling, tragic, and darkly funny" by National Book Award-winning author Phil Klay.

The US military is preparing to withdraw from Iraq, and newly-minted lieutenant Jack Porter struggles to accept how it's happening - through alliances with warlords who have Arab and American blood on their hands. Day after day, Jack tries to assert his leadership in the sweltering, dreary atmosphere of Ashuriyah. But his world is disrupted by the arrival of veteran Sergeant Daniel Chambers, whose aggressive style threatens to undermine the fragile peace that the troops have worked hard to establish.

As Iraq plunges back into chaos and bloodshed and Chambers's influence over the men grows stronger, Jack becomes obsessed with a strange, tragic tale of reckless love between a lost American soldier and Rana, a local sheikh's daughter. In search of the truth and buoyed by the knowledge that what he finds may implicate Sergeant Chambers, Jack seeks answers from the enigmatic Rana, and soon their fates become intertwined. Determined to secure a better future for Rana and a legitimate and lasting peace for her country, Jack will defy American command, putting his own future in grave peril.

Pulling readers into the captivating immediacy of a conflict that can shift from drudgery to devastation at any moment, *Youngblood* provides startling new dimension to both the moral complexity of war and its psychological toll.

Youngblood Details

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Author : Matt Gallagher

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From Reader Review *Youngblood* for online ebook

Snotchocheez says

4 stars

(I tried to get this review up in time for Veteran's Day; didn't quite make it, but I guess it's the thought that counts: Thanks so much to all the men and women who've selflessly served our country.)

I apologize to my friends who might be *done* with my recent war novel spate. While I can assure you that I despise war, I'm fascinated by accounts of war from those who have served, trying to explain the unexplainable: what goes on in soldiers' heads as they serve their country. I've read six fictional accounts now of the Iraq War, and I've been, quite honestly, amazed at the literary talent these former enlisted men have brought to the fore, sharing their stories in a truly compelling way. Though I've read so many of these novels the stories have started to blend together (for instance, Roy Scranton's *War Porn* and Matt Gallagher's *Youngblood* both feature an interpreter named Qasim who figures prominently in each story; both *Youngblood's* interpreter and Michael Pitre's *Fives and Twenty-Fives's* "terp" learned English from gangsta rap), yet each of these works are utterly memorable in their own way.

Youngblood sets itself apart with plenty of back stories, some pot-boiler, almost noir-ish detective intrigue, and some heart pounding inter-platoon conflict that would immediately translate well to the big screen. (And not in a hyper-real *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* kind of way, either; more in a gritty, plot-heavy *The Hurt Locker* sense.)

There's a lot going on here, but this centers on Lieutenant Jack Porter (a deeply moral commissioned officer who straddles the fence between his "Hotspur" infantry platoon, and the 'fobbits'--higher officers in a non-combat role that call the shots) and Staff Sergeant Chambers, a hot-headed lifer with several redeployment stints, who Lt. Porter believes will imperil the platoon with his "Shoot first, sort it out later" mentality. The platoon is nearing the end of its tour of duty; Porter's goal is to get the "Youngbloods" (those less-experienced infantry soldiers) home in one piece. Standing in the way of that is sectarian violence between the Sunnis and the Shi'a, that completely changes the complexion of the war from the initial invasion days. With the fobbits standing orders of paying "blood money" to certain insurrectionists, it's often impossible to discern who's an enemy combatant and who's an ordinary civilian. Each recon mission to "take out" a warlord becomes an exasperating, traumatic event from both an ill-defined, amorphous enemy and the hot-headed second-in-command SSgt. Chambers countermanding most of Lt Porter's direct orders.

As I mentioned, there's also mystery elements (one involving a former infantryman gone missing, rumored to have fallen in love with a Iraqi woman; another involving Lt. Porter investigating rumors of Chambers' alleged involvement in "kill teams" that purposely slay Iraqi civilians and flaunt the "rules of engagement") but these mystery elements, while mostly interesting, occasionally fall flat.

Still, this is a strong debut novel for Matt Gallagher, one peppered with snarky humor, and tempered with gut honesty that rings true throughout. This guy's really got a talent; I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see him win some big awards someday.

(And with that, I'm plum "war-red out", I think I've read enough war stories to last a lifetime. I need some *much* more tranquil reading material, and perhaps a Xanax or three.)

Steven Z. says

Like all wars before it, the war in Iraq has spawned its own literature. In Vietnam the war produced the likes of Philip Caputo and Tim O'Brien. Today as our current conflict has morphed into the war against ISIS, writers like Matt Gallagher have come on the scene with novels like *YOUNGBLOOD*, which takes the reader inside a platoon in the town of Ashuriyah, outside of Baghdad, when the optimism spawned by the "surge" gave way to skepticism about the war, and as we know the rise of ISIS and the American withdrawal in 2011. When stationed in Iraq, Gallagher began writing in his own blog from inside the war that attracted a large following. Military authorities eventually shut down Gallagher's blog, but his new novel has allowed him to express many of the feelings and emotions of his characters, many of which, I am certain, are composites of the men he served with.

The narrator of *YOUNGBLOOD* is Lieutenant Jack Porter, and through his voice Gallagher expresses the view that "so little of Iraq had anything to do with guns, bombs, or jihads." The novel portrays a war that encompasses the locals and their lives, as they try and cope with a form of hell that has destroyed their way of life. It comes across as a confusing and angry conflict which continues to this day with little understanding on the part of the people who are responsible for the mess that Iraq has become, as many of them are now calling for the United States to dispatch even more troops to the region. The American mission after years in Iraq had evolved into, "clear, hold, and build, a motto that was extremely difficult to implement successfully.

Porter faces a number of obstacles as a platoon commander. First, he had to deal with bribery and the overall corruption that existed. American military payments were made to numerous groups including sheiks, both Sunni and Sh'ia, and militia leaders in order to combat al-Qaeda, and other groups to obtain their loyalty. Further payments went to Iraqi families that were victims of collateral damage, even more money flowed to projects to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure, but it seemed that little was being built. Porter's second problem was Sergeant Daniel Chambers, a military lifer who had already served tours earlier in the war. Chambers had been foisted on Porter by his superiors and his demeanor and discipline became a threat to Porter's command which undermined his relationship with his men.

Once Gallagher introduces his main characters we learn that Chambers may have been involved in the killing of two unarmed Iraqi citizens who were mistaken for jihadis the military was looking for. Porter wants to prove that Chambers had violated the rules of engagement and begins to investigate the shooting in the hopes of getting rid of the ornery sergeant. A second major plot line is Porter's relationship with Rana, a local sheik's daughter. Rana, who was involved with an American soldier who converted to Islam, and wants to marry her, is killed. It is left for Porter to pick up the pieces. As the novel evolves, Gallagher integrates past events as a means of trying to understand the present. His relationship with his brother Will, a West Point graduate who served in Iraq, and his girlfriend Marissa, who seemed to have drawn away from him, play on Porter's mind throughout.

The reader acquires a strong sense of what it is like to be a soldier in Iraq. The fear of death, having the Stryker vehicle you are riding on set off an IED. The friendships that result in sick jokes, games and other amusements that fill the void of limited down time. The exhaustion of carrying 60 pounds of body armor and weapons during patrols or having to maintain a sharp focus for long periods as they try and survive. Gallagher writes with verve and humor as he tries to convey Porter's experiences, who is fully aware that no one will understand him, not his brother Will or his girlfriend Marissa back in the United States. Porter must live with his memories as he faces the reality of war each day, a war where he exhibits empathy for the Iraqi

people he comes in contact with, and the men he commands. The end result is that Gallagher portrays the horror and inequities of war, and how it has eroded the fabric and foundation of Iraqi society. After one puts the book down one wonders what will be the final chapter for Iraq as a nation, as it continues to struggle with sectarianism, a corrupt political system, the constant threat of violence, and the legacy of the American invasion.

Lorilin says

I really enjoy reading stories (fictional or not) told from the perspective of soldiers. I've read a bunch of them, so I have many to compare this one to. I have to say, *Young Blood* is one of the strongest books of its kind that I've read in a long while. The plot is engaging—even surprising at several points—and the characters are believable and well-developed. I found myself drawn to lieutenant Jack Porter immediately. I like that he isn't all brawn and bravado. Porter is competent, but also unsure of himself in his new leadership role. He is thoughtful and cautious, and he makes mistakes. Far from being some one-dimensional He-Man, he actually has some depth.

My favorite thing about this book, though, is that it didn't go anywhere I expected it to. A lot of the book focuses on Porter's tense relationship with Sergeant Daniel Chambers, and, honestly, I thought I knew exactly what was going to happen between them. But I was way off. The end of the book, in actuality, is much more nuanced and subtle than I expected. The events that unfold are complex, and, through them, author Gallagher acknowledges that war is not a black and white experience—not for soldiers or leaders, not for the occupied or the occupiers. It's all just...complicated.

At any rate, this was a great read. Good story. Interesting characters. Solid all around.

Check out more of my reviews at www.BugBugBooks.com!

Saleh MoonWalker says

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Aurora Dimitre says

~This book was won from a Goodreads Giveaway~

I know 100% that this book was a case of, "It's not you, It's me."

Objectively speaking, the characters are interesting, the writing is good and fast-paced and I assume engaging, there's a mystery plot that would probably be interesting and completely immersive to others, but I just didn't care about the setting or the plot or anything that was going on. I could recognize that this book wasn't bad, but personally, I didn't enjoy it one bit. There's a reason I rated it three stars instead of one or two, which is what I normally rate books that I skim-read like I skim-read the last two hundred pages of this

one, and that's because *it's not a bad book*. It's just one that didn't personally interest me.

Jennifer says

I really got bogged down in the middle of this book. The narrative struck me as directionless and random - waiting - until the plot suddenly picked up in the last 75 pages of the novel. Was this intentional? Was it supposed to be symbolic of the pointless U.S. presence in Iraq after the war was "over"? If this effect was purposeful, then it was brilliant. The problem was that it didn't *feel* purposeful, it just felt like the book needed some heavy-handed editing.

The writing was only "ok" for me as well - I was not particularly inspired by it as other reviewers seem to have been.

Paul Pessolano says

"Young Blood" by Matt Gallagher, published by Atria Books.

Category – Fiction/Literature

Jack Porter is a lieutenant serving in Iraq. He is serving during the American withdrawal from the country. He is fighting to assert himself to his platoon and finds that his attempts are being undermined by his sergeant. He is also in conflict with the war lords that he has to deal with, and to make matters worse he becomes involved with a sheik's daughter. It seems that there was a love affair between her and an American soldier. This soldier has no desire to return to the United States and seems to be embracing the Iraqi way of life. Jack finds out that this soldier has died and that the sheik's daughter is in need of his help. Jack goes against military protocol and helps her while he attempts to find peace in this war torn country.

I am sure there is a story here but for the life of me I could not find it. The writing is haphazard and the characters are not fully defined. It is impossible to find empathy for any of the characters, let alone the story. It was also impossible to have any feelings towards the Iraqi situation or the quagmire of American involvement.

Glen says

A book of love and war. Just phenomenal. And beautiful.

"Youngblood" is going to win awards, as did "Redeployment" and "Yellow Birds," but this is bigger than those books in terms of story and scope and arguably better if those are things you enjoy in a book. The language is as strong but less "showoff-y" than those other two books. Less about the author's writing and more about the story.

Ashuriyah is still with me, the story of LT Jack, the daughter of the sheik Rana, the story of the hard sergeant Chambers, the mukhtar ... it is haunting and painful and powerful. All of it. Just like all of war. It touches on

empire, and love, and loss, and lost idealism and trying to do a good thing in a world of awful choices. I finished "Youngblood" two days ago and still feel it within me, especially the epilogue.

The only other book about modern war that belongs in this class is "Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk," and that's more about America at war than war itself. This is probably the best American war fiction since the Vietnam novels. And I do not say that lightly as a Vietnam veteran myself and an avid reader since long before even that.

"The Red Badge of Courage." "Sun Also Rises." "The Naked and Dead." "Catch 22." "A Rumor of War." "The Things They Carried." And now "Youngblood." Yes, it is that good.

Elyse says

I am not the typical reader of "war books," and in fact was unsure about this one at first. But my husband is a bookseller and brought home Youngblood and said I needed to read it. I'm glad he did. This is a very fine novel, and for all the blood and violence in it, it is more about people, and what people will do during war in order to survive. It is about the American soldiers, the Iraqi people, the Iraqi terrorists, and about we Americans at home watching the war unfold from afar. It also helped explain to me how ISIS came about.

Youngblood follows the exploits of Lieutenant Jack Porter, who is bored and disillusioned during the end of the Iraq occupation. Around the same time he begins to hear stories about a legendary soldier named "The Shaba" and a beautiful sheikh's daughter named Rana, a violent Staff Sergeant named Chambers comes back to the Iraqi village. The war returns shortly thereafter, and we get a sort of entirety of the long Iraq war compressed into a short time, in one village, with one group of soldiers trying to end it all.

This is very story driven, especially for a "literary" book, and I prefer it that way. Very little navel gazing, and it's a "fast" 400 pages. I would encourage any readers interested in current affairs to read this. It reminded me of Joseph Conrad's books but from an American perspective rather than English.

Jon says

Matt Gallagher is a former U.S. Army captain and veteran of the Iraq War. He first gained attention for writing a military blog, Kaboom: A Soldier's War Journal, that became very popular before it was finally shut down by his commanding officers. This novel is his fiction debut and it's non-clichéd, subtle, and very well written.

As the novel opens, the main character, Jack Porter, is a newly promoted lieutenant in Ashuriyah, Iraq during the waning days of the Iraq war. The U.S. military is preparing to withdrawal soon, but sectarian violence has spiked locally and Porter and his men are attempting to bring it under control. Into this volatile situation, Porter gets a new platoon sergeant, Chambers, a hard-bitten veteran who might have committed war crimes during his previous tour of duty in Ashuriyah and might be committing them still. Soon a power struggle develops between Porter and Chambers:

"What happens at night? On your patrols. Soldiers been talking about that, too. Like, where would you guys be right now if you didn't have to be here?"

He squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head, “Combat is a hard place for hard decisions. For hard men,” he said, opening his eyes again. My question had disappointed him. “Leave the moralizing for the bystanders. You want to be one of us – be the type of officer soldiers will follow – you need to kill that part of you. Easy solutions don’t exist. Not here in Indian country. You should know that by now.”

One of the book’s strengths is its subtlety and complexity. As the novel opened, I fully expected the book to be a modern version of the movie, *Platoon*, but Gallagher has more on his mind than a simple story of Good versus Evil. The palette that he uses consists of shades of grey instead of black and white. While Chambers is openly contemptuous of the military’s counterinsurgency policy and is, at times, menacing, he is also intelligent, an extremely capable soldier, and genuinely concerned for the welfare of the men in his platoon. He is a flawed, but fully realized human being instead of just a caricature.

A secondary plot involves Porter trying to discover what happened to a Rios, soldier who served with Chambers during his last tour in Ashuriyah. Rios went missing and Porter thinks discovering what happened to him might be a way to get rid of Chambers once and for all. This plot plays out like a mystery as Porter investigates and questions people who knew Rios. Like *Roshomon*, Porter often gets contradictory versions of the events as he tries to piece together what happened. Again, I thought I knew where Gallagher was going with this plot, but he ended up surprising me. However, in all honesty, this side plot that ends up echoing *Romeo and Juliet*, doesn’t fully work and is probably the weakest aspect of the novel.

Gallagher’s characterizations are strong and his descriptive passages convey a sense of what Iraq was like for a foot soldier: the sounds, the smells, and the boredom interspersed by moments of abject terror. It isn’t an uplifting book. The world Porter finds himself in is one of moral ambiguity where monthly cash payments are made to Iraqi “friends” and “allies” who have the blood of American soldiers on their hands. A moral ambiguity that corrupts the best intentions of the soldiers and of Porter himself.

“Still, though – I’d decided that I wanted to leave Iraq having done one good thing. One good thing free of complication and ambiguity, one good thing that proved I wasn’t the type of man who used drop weapons or destroyed mosques or couldn’t remember his dead soldiers faces”

All in all, a strong and moving story that lead me to buy Gallagher’s non-fiction book about Iraq, *Kaboom: Embracing the Suck in a Savage Little War*

Chaitra says

An Iraq war novel, set in Iraq, that I really liked. Which hasn't happened since *Yellow Birds*. I like war novels, World War II is my favorite historical fiction period. But this war, I somehow haven't felt anything for the novels about it. To be fair, I'm reluctant to even pick them up.

But *Youngblood*, while not fun, is fairly quick. It has a clear objective to begin with, a great narrator who is young and cocky and vulnerable and unsure, an epic romance that doesn't involve said narrator even though he gets caught up with it, and some tension filled moments. And then it leaves a few major threads hanging, but in a good way.

I got caught up in the language, the situations, and the characters, who felt real.

Book Riot Community says

Make room on that list of amazing fiction about the Iraq War for *Youngblood*, a complex story of love, war, and morality. As the U.S. prepares to withdraw from Iraq, a lieutenant struggles with its implications and must also contend with the arrival of a sergeant whose aggressive nature threatens to undermine the lieutenant's attempts to keep the peace. As fighting breaks out, Jack becomes obsessed with the tragic love story between an American soldier and a local girl. This is first-rate storytelling, and should be mentioned in the same breath as *The Yellow Birds* and *Redeployment*.

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Beverly says

My thoughts:

A raw gritty and skillfully written novel that captures the complex harsh realities of the counterinsurgency tactics employed in Iraq. The sharply drawn characters illustrate the fragile and ever-changing reality of allies, partners, and adversaries and just what is the truth at a moment. I was captivated by the life-and-death experiences that needed to be made on a moment's notice – do you follow the textbook technique, rely on the more experienced soldiers in the unit, and/or just go with your instinct at the moment. While the physical scars show the tragedy of the violence, this book delves more into the psychological scars as history, economics, and humanity plague the participants in this war. Besides dealing with the current military orders, there is an intriguing murder/romance mystery clamoring to be solved. As I am not familiar with the military terms/common slang used in the Iraqi War, I would have liked a glossary included so could easily get the definition/nuances of what was being said. A richly rewarding storyline that is a nail-biting read from the first page to the last. I recommend this book to anyone interested in American foreign policy and wants a better understanding what a modern war is all about.

“There was a ritual to donning armor, deliberate and purposeful, like the warriors of old dressing for battle, but taking it off always seemed an exercise in frenzy....I'd shed sixty pounds of gear in ten or so seconds. Once I bent over and loosened the laces of my boots, I felt human again.”

“Then I thought about how I wasn't really the person I presented to the soldiers, either. There were parts I hid. Parts I exaggerated.”

“Yesterday was the result of a half-assed strategy set by old men in suits do don't have a f**** clue. They hear ‘counterinsurgency’ and thinks it's War Lite – a smarter cleaner way. But it's not. War is always dirty. War is always about force.”

“...certain I'd just found another place to the puzzle that was Iraq, but bemused as to where to place it.”

Lynn says

A dirty, gritty novel about the dirty, gritty war in Iraq, told by recently commissioned Lieutenant Jack Porter. Jack is trying so hard to be a leader, but it seems that veteran Sergeant Chambers thinks his own way is the best way. But this is more than a contest of wills. It's the story of men trying to do their jobs and trying to survive so they can go back home. It's the story of men who don't know whom to trust or which story is the truth or when the info is good or when it's bad. In a land of vicious heat where they don't speak the language, life is full of twists and turns and whom do you believe???

A fearsome look at how the war affects those who are fighting it, and those who have come home.

Megalion says

I've never served but one thing that often comes to mind, it's not easy to lead a group. What about leading one in a life and death situation?

I really enjoyed this book because Jack Porter has just made lieutenant. He knows his men. But the squad has just taken in new people. He's also been assigned a career soldier.

He has to make it all work despite the power struggles from the career guy, and resistance by the new guys in becoming part of the unit in spirit. He knows a lot but he also knows enough to know that he doesn't know stuff and that the training he received didn't cover a lot of the tough and very real decisions he has to make.

Seeing things unfold from his perspective makes for a good read. I can't vouch for how accurate it is to real life but seems like it represents it well.

Recommended.
