The Midnight Zoo

Synopsis

When the Germans attack their Romany encampment during World War II, Andrej and his younger brother, Tomas, flee through a ravaged countryside under cover of darkness, guarding a secret bundle. Their journey leads to a bombed-out town, where the boys discover a hidden wonder: a zoo filled with creatures in need of hope. Like Andrej and Tomas, the animals ;â • ; wolf and eagle, monkey and bear, lioness and seal, kangaroo and llama, chamois and boar ;â • ; have stories to share and a mission to reclaim their lives. Master storyteller Sonya Hartnett has crafted a magical and moving fable about war and redemption . . . and what it means to be free.

Book Information

Audio CD

Publisher: Bolinda Audio; Unabridged edition (September 13, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1742377408

ISBN-13: 978-1742377407

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 0.6 x 5.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (13 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #2,070,790 in Books (See Top 100 in Books)   #316 inÂ Books > Books on CD > Children's Fiction > Animals   #689 inÂ Books > Books on CD > Children's Fiction > Fantasy   #1090 inÂ Books > Books on CD > Children's Fiction > General

Customer Reviews

(Although I tried not to give away too much of the book, there are possible spoilers.)I chose to read The Midnight Zoo by Sonyia Harnett and illustrated by Andrea Offerman because of my interest in the history of the time period. Despite my interest in the time period, this book is very far removed from what I normally read. However, it was a very interesting story, a quick read, and once I started reading it I could not stop.The Midnight Zoo is about a set of Gypsy siblings that are lost in Europe during World War II. The siblings are Andrej, 12, Tomas, 9, and then Wilma who is still a small baby. The siblings were told by their mother to run away because of danger at their camp. So the two boys took their sister and ran as far as they could. They come upon a bombed out town that has a very small zoo in it. All of the animals in the zoo have been left in their cages and the people of the village are no longer there to care for them. After another instance of airplanes bombing the town the animals begin to talk to the boys and share their stories. The boys return the favor. However, the

boys realize that they also need to leave and Tomas does not want to leave the animals behind. The rest is for the reader to find out.Andrej and Tomas are very dynamic and round characters. At the beginning of the story, they were frightened boys who were concerned about the survival of themselves and their sister. However, as they get to know the animals they begin to realize that they were not the only ones affected by this war and they were not the only ones left to fend for themselves. The antagonist in this story is the leader of the invading army.

Fiction set during the Second World War often takes a turn for the depressing, though not without good reason most of the time. It simply was not a pleasant period for the world at large, and the effects of the war touched lives everywhere. Parents and educators are advised to be careful choosing WWII literature for their children, for while they deserve to learn more about this era of history, some of them could be deeply disturbed by some of the horrible things that were done during that time."The Midnight Zoo" is a slightly different take on this era of history, giving a light fantasy element to an otherwise bleak era of history. And while some readers might find a "historical fantasy" jarring, I found it helped this book, and could help children and adults alike better understand what happened and how it effected even the humblest of lives.This book centers on three gypsy children -- twelve-year-old Andrej, nine-year-old Tomas, and baby Wilma -- who managed to escape an attack that wiped out their Romany encampment. After weeks of roaming and living on their own, they take shelter in an abandoned zoo near a bombed-out village. To their surprise, the animal inhabitants of this zoo talk, and have their own stories to share about the war and their captivity. As the night wears on the boys tell their story, and many of the animals have a chance to share their stories, as well as how the humans' war has shaken their lives despite them having no part in it. And ultimately, both the children and the animals share a faint but fervent hope for rescue.While a short read, this book is beautifully written, with vivid yet dreamlike descriptions that bring to mind Peter S. Beagle or Ray Bradbury.

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