

Flight of the Raven *by* Stephanie S. Tolan



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Reviews of the *Flight of the Raven* *by* Stephanie S. Tolan

Qwne

Flight of the Raven, by Stephanie S. Tolan, is about Elijah Raymond, a 7 year old boy who has escaped from a mental institution he doesn't belong in and run in the the Adirondack Wilderness. While in the mountains, he is captured by the Free Mountain Militia, a terrorist organization led by Charles Landis. Elijah does not believe in the Militia's idea that deaths are necessary losses in their anti-government war. Landis's wife and daughter, Cassie and Amber Landis, however, believe in the militia, and Amber tries to convince Elijah that the death and destruction is all for good. Meanwhile, Elijah struggles with whether or not to fight back at Landis's son Kenny, who is very unkind to him. When he convinces himself that the militia's fighting evil with evil is wrong, he decides that fighting Kenny back with evil is wrong too. When Charles Landis fails in launching a biowar with mutated smallpox that would kill half the human population, and instead kills only himself, Amber and Cassie come to realize how evil the Militia's actions are and run away into the wilderness with Elijah. Kenny tries to recapture them but Elijah thwarts his pursuit.

Flight of the Raven is 300 pages of adventure, excitement, and suspense, but it is also a deep look into the minds of evil people, exploring how they can come to be so evil, and still believe that they are right. It also studies the evil and corruption in the government and the media, and how we have to be careful what and who we believe. Questions like, should we fight evil with evil, or with kindness and love, and how much evil is too much to take?, are all questions that this book explores. It is very engaging, thought-provoking, but still fun, and is a must read for any child.

LeXXuS

Arrived wrapped like, and I mean this literally, new! Great virtually unknown author of wonderful fiction!

Darksinger

Product is well made and arrived quickly from shipper.

Mot

This book is a sequel to *Welcome to the Ark*, which I really enjoyed because of the sensitive portrayal of extremely gifted children. As a sequel, this book follows Elijah, who recently escaped from the mental hospital in which he was being held and is picked up in the forest by a group of terrorists who are bent on disrupting and eventually destroying the repressive government of the United States.

Elijah, who is for a long time mute and who is usually outside of the happenings in the compound, eventually makes friends with Amber, the daughter of the head of the group. Amber is uneasy about certain aspects of the goals of the group, but she can't articulate the reasons for her growing sense that something is wrong.

Both of the major characters have to eventually face the realities of the world with regard to their personal commitments to each other and to the mission of the group, when Amber is the target of an attempted assault and the terrorism of the group goes further than they can fathom.

The eeriness of this tale comes from the "bombing of the towers" and the attempt to infect the whole world with small pox.

As with *Welcome to the Ark*, though, the ending of this story goes just a bit too far into fantasy for my taste. Most of each of the books is realistic and so possible that you would almost think that the characters are real. But then, at the very end, the books get mystical and veer off into fantasy. Yes, there may be powers that these kids have that can't be explained by modern science, but that almost seems like a cop out, given the very real world problems they are confronting.

Still, I am eager for the next in the series.

Zadora

In "Welcome to the Ark", Elijah was the least developed of the four characters. Miranda was the easiest to empathize with, the clear center of the novel. Doug was clearly hurt, but he expressed it. Taryn had her poems and her deep connections with everyone and everything to show her feelings of loss. Elijah, a superbly intelligent boy diagnosed as autistic, was the string tying them together, but his characterization itself wasn't much thicker than one. He was the raven, both the protector and the protected, and the silent child who grew a voice in his head, on the computer, and eventually quietly out loud.

In "Flight of the Raven", much of Elijah's characterization suffers from being in the focus rather than the background. His character is interesting when based on interactions, but in this book, he's one of three things: the hunted, the hunter, or the symbol. He and Kenny play a game of cat-and-mouse that seems out of character for Elijah- especially for an Elijah who certainly remembers how to "tame" the violence, as he expressed. He might not have been sure if it would work, but none of the kids in WttA with the possible exception of Doug would have refused to try after the events in the book. Elijah, especially, tended to think before acting. His desire to "get back" at Kenny is normal, but his constant hesitations due to his own size seem to contradict the history in WttA, with Taryn calling birds and all four causing Timmy to break his own foot. The ending of this book makes no sense in the context of WttA, which provided so many ways around violence before he used violence as the means to an admittedly non-violent end. The way he used violence was also mind-boggling; his transformation wasn't precipitated by any hard facts, but he was willing to try that over something tried and true. It rang false for the mind of such a logical character. Elijah and the raven have always been intertwined, but in this book it becomes much more heavy-handed. In WttA, it was his symbol, and it was in the dreams. As Taryn had said, "the raven still flies". In this book, everyone accepts the bird as a sign, Cassie sees it as an omen, and Kenny hunts ravens to make his point to Elijah. Ravens save Elijah. The book leaves Elijah seeming almost Taryn-like, but his views against peace (saving himself and Cassie and Amber over the lives of others) are decidedly not.

Speaking of Amber, her "Ark-ness" isn't in any way explained. Both Amber and Kenny are intelligent, but Amber shows no sign of Ark. The only signs we're given are heavy-handed, at least compared to the subtlety in WttA. In WttA there were glimmers between Miranda and Taryn or Miranda and Doug, before they communicated about their shared dreams, before Taryn "told" her how the tree felt. Here, Elijah feels connection from almost the beginning. He heals Amber before he knows her. An argument could be made that he opened up after the Ark experience, but the same could be made that upon leaving them he immediately went back to his old ways (getting "inside" the marble, Tondishi, avoidance, etc.) as soon as he left. Amber, however, has never been open to Arkness before. Ark kids were anti-violence, anti-world; she reveled in it and took her father's words at face value.

The near-assault of Amber, while compelling, seemed harsh in a book aimed at children. I don't know if the youngest readers would understand how close it seemed to a rape, and the older readers will probably wonder why it wasn't more of a focal point. Amber was okay with murder when she felt her assaulter would be properly punished, but that isn't a solution. WttA succeeded because the solutions, although not feasible in a literal sense, make sense in symbolic terms. A child could become friends with others who are different and improve the world, albeit not by psychically bonding. Accepting a bombing isn't an answer. The bioweapons seemed both heavy-handed and scarily prescient. I wish there had been more of a hint of something wrong with Landis, besides Elijah's "bad feeling" about him. It made a possibly good plot weakened. In addition, Elijah left Mack and Kenny in charge as the lesser of evils, and it's disconcerting to think of a "good guy" seeing things that way. No, 140 million people won't die, but they aren't solving problems except with bombs whose death tolls "don't matter". As I was IMing a friend about the book, I kept finding things that rang eerily in the aftermath of even worse New York terrorism. The smallpox issues, which hit me both because of the recent news issues and because of the Cross-X high school debate topic on it, were exceptionally, frighteningly, and flawlessly accurate as far as my research has gone, but the concepts of the "solution" seemed to again go against Elijah and what he chose. He empathized with Amber over dead rabbits and dead parents, much like he did previously when he chose vegetarianism. I suppose the reader could assume that he chose to "turn off" part of the Ark part of his mind the way Doug and Miranda did, but he clearly used it with Amber throughout the novel. It makes sense for Elijah to develop his mind more, away from the stabilizing and repressing atmospheres the other three were in, but it doesn't seem logical for him to develop in this way.

Overall, despite these criticisms, I enjoyed the book. I liked references to the Ark, and the story kept within the context of the ending of WttA. Elijah is still a compelling character, although less so. But unlike WttA, this won't be a book I'll be rereading often. It provides some closure for Elijah, but didn't fit in with what I wanted to believe about all of the characters. It had all of the ingredients for a wonderful book, but they didn't mix together for a really good read.

Iseared

THIS BOOK WAS GREAT.TOLAN PULLS YOU IN WITH EXCITING PHRASES, AND AN EXTREMELY SUSPENSEFULL PLOT. I WOULD RECOMEND THIS BOOK TO ANYONE ABOVE THE AGE OF 10.

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