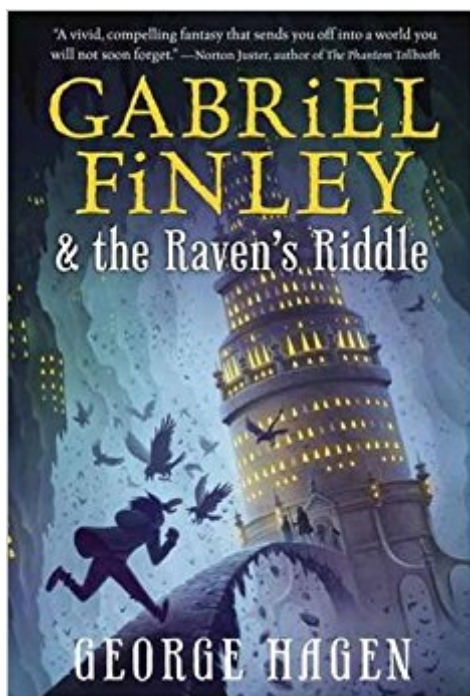


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Gabriel Finley And The Raven's Riddle



Synopsis

“A first-rate fantasy for middle-grade readers,” declares Booklist in a starred review, comparing Gabriel Finley to Harry Potter, Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials series, and The Mysterious Benedict Society. A tangle of ingenious riddles, a malevolent necklace called a torc, and flocks of menacing birds: these are just some of the obstacles that stand between Gabriel and his father, Adam Finley, who has vanished from their Brooklyn brownstone. When Gabriel rescues an orphaned baby raven named Paladin, he discovers a family secret: Finleys can bond with ravens in extraordinary ways. Along with Paladin and three valiant friends, Gabriel sets out to bring his father home. They soon discover that Adam is being held captive by the evil demon Corax—half man, half raven, and Adam’s very own disgraced brother—in a foreboding netherworld of birds called Aviopolis. With help from his army of ghoulish minions, the valravens, Corax is plotting to take over the land above, and now only Gabriel stands in his way. “A vivid, compelling fantasy that sends you off to a world you will not soon forget.” —Norton Juster, author of The Phantom Tollbooth “A great read for fantasy lovers who have worn out their copies of Harry Potter.” —School Library Journal, Starred “Brimful of antic energy and inventive flair, like the best middle-grade fantasies; readers, like baby birds, will devour it and clamor for future installments.” —Kirkus Reviews

From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

Customer Reviews

Gr 5—Gabriel Finley loves riddles. His father taught him one every day; every day, that is, until he disappeared. For three years Gabriel's father has been missing and his father's somewhat dotty but loving sister is taking care of Gabriel. Ravens also love riddles. They use riddles to distinguish themselves from valravens—evil birds who never laugh, who eat human flesh, and who turned humankind away from friendship with ravens. On Gabriel's 12th birthday, his aunt gives him his father's diary and he discovers that his father was an amicus, someone who could merge with a raven and fly through the sky. He also discovers that his father's older brother, Corax, was also an amicus who turned evil and disappeared. Soon after, Gabriel rescues a baby raven and discovers that he, too, is an amicus. The raven, Paladin, tells Gabriel that they must find an object called a torc, which can grant any wish, before Gabriel's Uncle Corax does. The titular character, along with Paladin; Septimus, a former inmate who knows his father; and three school friends, sets out to rescue of his father and, in essence, save the world. Hagen has crafted a tale that contains riddles, magic, courage, loyalty, and compassion in a way that is sure to engage readers. Gabriel inhabits a dark world where friendship is the guiding light and differences are respected and valued. This is a great read for fantasy lovers who have worn out their copies of "Harry Potter." The ending suggests that more is to come, and more will be welcome.—Kathy Kirchoefer, Henderson County Public Library, NC --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

—“A first-rate fantasy for middle-grade readers. Like Harry Potter,... Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials series,... and Trenton Lee Stewart's Mysterious Benedict Society books.—Booklist, Starred“A great read for fantasy lovers who have worn out their copies of Harry Potter.—School Library Journal, Starred"...brimful of antic energy and inventive flair, like the best middle-grade fantasies; readers, like baby birds, will devour it and clamor for future installments." —Kirkus Reviews—“Adult author Hagen (The Laments) makes his children's debut with a fantasy adventure touched with whimsy, satire, and the quirky love of urban fauna that characterizes New Yorkers.—Publishers Weekly, Starred—“Both startling and moving—a vivid, compelling fantasy that sends you off to a world you will not soon forget.—Norton Juster, author of The Phantom Tollbooth

I wanted to love this book - Ravens and Riddles! Marvellous! I bought it having read and enjoyed p.1 online, and started with high hopes. Despite an iffy premise (see below), which I managed to lay aside, I found the first few chapters compelling. Here, we alternate between the story of Paladin the baby raven, who will turn out to be the hero Gabriel's Amicus (aka familiar), and main character Gabriel. Over all, Paladin was my favorite character: I cared about him and his survival. But as Gabriel's story took over, Paladin got lost behind other characters who were far less interesting or endearing, with whom I felt little connection besides quirky Abby (whose quirks however are mostly characterized by her wearing ill-matching clothes, rather than having greater significance). From there, it went downhill. The parallels with certain Potter tricks became a little too obvious; for me, in two main respects: 1. a writing desk that walks and talks, and shows moving pictures wherein Gabriel can see the past (sound familiar?); and 2.

Gabriel's clutch of plucky friends (though he has one more gal pal than HP). But where Rowling manages the interplay between her characters so brilliantly, and all have depth and development, none of these, including the hero, really change from start to finish. One character who does change is minor player Aunt Trudy, who starts out being the mean cow from hell, but at the end, out of the blue, is inexplicably jollying around the kitchen. Back to that initial premise, which explains how the evil valravens came into existence. (It's on p. 3, so hardly a spoiler). It goes something like this: Ravens have always been paired with beloved humans, and one day, one faithful raven loses his "master" in battle. In his sorrow, this raven is somehow tempted by a mysterious phantom-like bird to attain immortality by eating his master's flesh, thereby breaking the raven/man bond and - ta-da - valravens are born. There's no explanation as to what's in it for evil phantom bird to have valravens exist, but far more pertinent, why, when the raven was mourning his master, would he at that moment crave immortality?

"I'm so heartbroken, I want to live forever." So these were 2 major motivations that could have been interesting and added depth, but were totally missing. Over all: story line okay, and probably works for middle grade readers, as might the riddle aspect (which I still love the idea of). But for me, the more I read, the harder it became to go back to it. The writing, having started out well, deteriorated, and too much shifting POV took my focus. Had the characters compelled, I could have overlooked the writing more; had the writing compelled, I could have overlooked the lack of characterization more. But as well as a good story line, I want insight into, and from, the characters and their motivations (yes, even in middle grade!) and this just didn't deliver. 3 stars because

of the bits I did like (raven lore, Paladin), and to give benefit of my adult doubt, because the book is probably better for kids than for me.

This book seems to really speak to kids, especially boys. This is typical of the notes I've seen: "[My son] read the book and really enjoyed it. It's rare that he ever has anything positive to say about a book so it must be really good." So, to the adult reviewers here who acknowledge that the book wasn't really targeted for their age group but wanted to review it anyway, let me just suggest this: give it to a kid between the ages of 7 and 12 and see what he or she says. My guess is that he or she will love it. (Disclosure: I am a biased but honest reviewer -- I've seen the dozens of notes from kids and they're amazing.)

I love this book, fascinating characters and a great inventive story. I love riddles!

A few moments of imagination and a nice message about the power of believing in others can't save this predictable, contrived storyline. Characters' choices are almost always serve as set-up for future dilemmas rather than authentic choices that grow from character development. The little character development that there is, seems only to serve the restrictions of the predictable plot. Motivation rarely, if ever, feels natural or even logical in many places. (i.e. Oh, I better bring my violin to the underground villain's lair. . .you know. . .just in case. . .?!!?!?) I usually love a kids book with plenty of puzzles or riddles. It's kind of like a two for one. You get the adventure/mystery of the entire plot with a lot of little entertaining mini-puzzles along the way. Still, the riddles in this book were just too much. I mean, it was a neat idea, but really? Telling a riddle is the ONLY way to identify a valraven? Not so, we're told plenty of times about how different they look, and many times they even have yellow glowing eyes that set them apart. The major problem with this book though, was buy-in. I just couldn't accept the premise. Now, I've accepted way crazier premises than this one, but if you're going to set up a crazy premise, you HAVE to have solid characters for me to hold on to. These characters were nothing, forgettable, flat. I didn't care about them, and they weren't interesting. None of the characters seemed to behave in a way that made sense. I still don't understand what Gabriel's aunt was supposed to be all about? I mean, she gives him this book and just sends him off into certain danger. HE'S TWELVE! What the heck? And Trudy and her daughter? Why are they even in this book? trope trope trope . . . Give this book to a kid who is either obsessed with riddles or ravens/birds, but otherwise. . . not worth it. for parents who want to know: there is some violence/gore. . . birds pecking out eyes, eating the flesh of humans, etc

Funny, intriguing and irresistible! Can't wait for the sequel.

QUALITY READ FOR PRE-TEENS.

A good coming of age story. My children enjoy it and I think it is age appropriate.

Another book I bought as a gift for my granddaughter. It is hard to review when it is a gift. This book was highly rated, but I don't know if I ever got her reaction. She reads so many books.

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