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The Savage

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Two years ago, I heard David Almond talk about a primitive quality of childhood, through which children have access to ancient powers of survival, imagination, healing, and perhaps redemption, which atrophy in adulthood. A difficult idea to express (and I may be doing him a disservice in how I've put it here) but one which I think most readers will recognise in his novels. His latest work is a distillation of this idea. Blue begins writing the story of the savage boy after his father dies. The savage lives off the land, cannot speak, and kills and eats anyone who sees him: 'He was savage. He was truly wild.' The misspelling of truly is intentional, for it is an older Blue who is telling us about the story he wrote when younger and showing it to us just as he wrote it. The story of the savage grows as Blue imagines him watching the bully Hopper, 'who made life horibel for nice kids, specially if they were weak or sad?'. Eventually, the savage and Blue cross into each other's worlds, the savage to wreak vengeance on Hopper, and Blue to restore his family in memory through the savage's preservation of them in cave paintings. A bare retelling cannot do justice to the power of the book. Like a folk mystery, with, as ever, subtle Northeast cadences, it will read aloud brilliantly. The McKean illustrations are remarkable. They are not really illustrations at all. Almost gouged on the page, washed in an eerie blue green light, full of excitement, menace and humour, they achieve the kind of imaginative synergy with Almond's/Blue's words that Blue has with the savage. I hope we see more of them in books for children and young people.

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