

Book Title: Gone

Michael Grant

Reviewed by: Yukun Zhang, Age 18

Star Teen Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

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Gone is a phenomenal novel written by Michael Grant. It involves a part sci-fi, part reality story where everyone over the age of 14 vanishes mysteriously on a fine, normal day. Some of the remaining kids found themselves bestowed with supernatural powers and animals around them mutated into totally new species. A spherical barrier made of a new, indestructible material and 20 miles in diameter enveloped the kids in their little world. There was an epic power-struggle to determine who should rule this little world, and a mysterious monster called Darkness was out loose, causing kids to disappear like the rest of the other adults once they reached their 14th birthday.

To me, *Gone* is one of the best books that I have read in my life. Unlike most other books that start off with a slow-paced introduction which sets the stage for future events, *Gone* jumps right into the crux of the story: the mass disappearance of adults. This sets the story off in a fast pace and leaves the reader with a myriad of questions like “what caused the sudden disappearance?”, “will more disappear?”, “how will a society run only by kids function?” These questions grab the attention of readers and compel readers to read further into the book for answers. Such a strategy was so effectively utilized that I was glued on to this book for hours at a time.

Another aspect that makes *Gone* stand out from the other novels is that certain events in the story are told from more than one perspective. Writing a story in this fashion has a major drawback: chronological confusion. However, Grant was able to seamlessly integrate the various perspectives into an intricate, yet comprehensive storyline. For example, the readers could see the moment when all the adults disappeared through the eyes of Sam, the main character in the story who was in town, and through Lana, a girl travelling with her grandfather miles away in the mountains. These two characters took on separate adventures until their paths crossed halfway into the book. Writing a book from multiple perspectives allows the Grant to create a storyline more complete and comprehensive than most other books. It allows the reader to be fully immersed in the storyline, thus further adding to the addictiveness of this book.

A major theme in the novel is power. Grant’s portrayal of power in the novel greatly fascinates me because it is a perfect representation of how power functions in society. We all hear about the saying “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. Caine, the arch-villain in the story, possessed more supernatural power than anyone else. He showed the first sign of corruption when he took that power for granted and forced the other kids to obey him. Then he led the town of kids under a system of dictatorship. This use of absolute power corrupted him further and he captured other kids with supernatural power and imprisoned them in a “concentration camp” in fear that he might get overthrown. It’s disturbing to see how a little bit of extra power comes a long way to corrupt Caine, but the truth is that the same mechanism drove Hitler and Saddam into creating world horrors. On a lighter note, power is also shown as a force that can unite individuals. Near the end of the book, Sam’s power allowed him to stand out and unite the kids in a combined effort to defeat Caine.

Gone was an exceptionally well-written book, but even still there were a few areas that need to be addressed. After reading the entire book, my initial question about how the strange world was created was still unanswered. Grant did talk about Little Pete allegedly teleporting all the adults away, but that still doesn't explain the barrier and the special abilities. Also, the story ended too abruptly. One moment Caine was adamantly refusing to comply with Sam's demand of leaving the town, and then in the next moment he was walking out of town with his group of villains. To me, this overly brief conclusion is an eyesore in this otherwise impressively written novel.

I would recommend this phenomenal novel to everyone above the age of 12. *Gone* was a totally amazing book and I had so much to write about it. I have a feeling that it might be the next "Harry Potter" or "The Lord of the Rings" some day.

Book Title: Secrets of Kiteboarding

Book Author: John Holzhall

Reviewed by: Yukun Zhang, Age 18

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Secrets of Kiteboarding is a non-fictional book by Holzhall that teaches beginners how to kiteboard. It starts off with the basics, and slowly builds off them to explain the technical aspects of it. The correct techniques for handling a kiteboard and the safety precautions involved with kiteboarding are emphasized in this book.

I find this book particularly informative and educational. Although Holzhall is an expert at kiteboarding, his book is dedicated to educating the beginners and novices. The pictures in his book further help the author deliver his ideas across to the reader. Since safety is of major concern in his book, we can safely use this book to learn how to kiteboard.

I would recommend this book to anyone aged 10 and above, especially to those interested in beach sports.