



# These Dark Wings

*John Owen Theobald*

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## **These Dark Wings** John Owen Theobald

After her mother is killed in the Blitz and her father in the North Sea, 12-year-old Anna Cooper is sent to live with an uncle she has never met - the Ravenmaster at the Tower of London.

Amid the Tower's old secrets and hidden ghosts, the ravens begin to disappear and Anna must brave the war-torn city to find them.

With Nazi forces massing on the other side of the Channel, the fate of Britain might be at stake, for an ancient legend foretells that Britain will fall if the ravens ever leave the Tower.

## **These Dark Wings Details**

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# From Reader Review These Dark Wings for online ebook

## Lindsey says

Three stars only because it's written about such an important piece of history. But it was pretty redundant, as I'm sure times were back then.

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## Maureen says

I bought this book a few days ago at the Tower of London after meeting the Ravenmaster. It was very slow moving, which was disappointing. I had planned to read it to my 8th grade students, but it just doesn't flow well. I loved the interview with the Ravenmaster at the end however.

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## Elaine Aldred says

When her mother dies in an air raid in the Blitz, twelve-year-old Anna, must go to live with her uncle at the Tower of London. He is the Ravenmaster, and as Anna begins to help him to look after the ravens she becomes to feel more responsible for them. So when the ravens begin to disappear, Anna sets out to discover what has happened, but must brave war-torn London to do so.

This is an excellent sourcebook for creative writing, because it is very readable as well as being packed with information about the Tower of London and the City in the Second World War. John Owen Theobald has managed to fuse fiction with reality in a way that covers not only the main events, but also everyday issues, such as lack of food and clothing due to rationing, looting, evacuations and the type of mind-set children had to adopt while being subjected to extensive bombing. Yet there is no sense of an information dump, just a steady unfolding of a very interesting story.

This was a time where the population of the United Kingdom felt that they could be invaded at any moment. The author captures this tension really well, particularly as the first-person viewpoint adds a sense of immediacy to the story.

The writing style and thoughtful construction, with plenty of good dialogue and frequent breaks within chapters make this a highly approachable story to children, even those as young as nine. The clear language also lends itself to being read out in a storytelling session.

While reading the book we found ourselves constantly looking up subjects that came up, because we became interested in knowing more. We were surprised to find that the events that took place in and around Tower of London in the Second World War were as remarkable as those in the book, so we look forward to reading the next in the series.

These Dark Wings courtesy of Head of Zeus via NetGalley

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## K.S. Marsden says

In the middle of war-torn 1940's London, Anna loses her mother in a bombing, and has to go live in the Tower of London with an uncle she has never met. War has altered the meaning of safety and friendship, and

Anna must learn who to trust.

I really enjoyed this story. It reminded me somewhat of *The Book Thief*, with the subject matter and style of writing.

It is written for a young audience, but it is equally easy to get swept along as an adult.

You get to see London during the blitz, through the eyes of a twelve-year-old girl, being suddenly wrenched from everything she knew, and having to live in a cold, creepy Tower. Her uncle is practically a stranger; and she is the easy target as an outsider at school.

Anna wants to think the best of everyone, with a certain naive charm; but she is being told that her only friend is an incurable liar; Churchill demands that they all look out for spies and Nazi-sympathisers; and Anna knows that her uncle is hiding something about her own mother.

*These Dark Wings* keeps you guessing throughout, whether it is all the over-imagination of a stressed girl that has lost everything, and lives in fear of a German invasion; or is there a sinister truth to it all?

I liked how Anna progresses, and her relationship with the ravens of the Tower.

To begin with, she sees them as scary beasts that she can't tell apart, but has to help her uncle (the Ravenmaster) look after. Eventually she starts to call herself a Ravenmaster, as though the title gives her a purpose in this mad world.

They have a saying that if the ravens leave, England will fall. Anna never truly admits believing this, but it gives her a way to feel like she's doing *something* in the fight against Hitler.

The story is genuinely very sweet throughout, and I was impressed with how strongly it finished. The final twist is definitely worth it!

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## **Dawn says**

I received a copy of this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

This is going to be a tough review to write... mostly because I sailed through it in less than 48 hours (despite being in the middle of 4 other books!).

So, it probably goes without saying that this is an easy read. It's probably aimed at a much younger audience (I'd say between 10 and 14), but that's not to say the writing or story is childish.

The writing is deeply comfortable and easy to connect with.

The story starts simply, but builds into something much more than I expected.

It's atmospheric, absorbing, and brilliant!

This is the sort of book my teacher used to read to my class in the last year of primary school - and she was very picky about her choice of book!

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## **Roxanne says**

Thank you to Netgalley for a couple of this eArc for review..

Anna is sent to live in the tower with her uncle after her mother dies during a bombing! Once there Anna begins to learn the old tales, that as long as there are ravens in the tower England will stand, but should they all be gone, then the country will fall. Soon after she arrives, the Ravens starting disappearing or dying, and Anna can't quite figure out what is going on. Will she be able to say Grip and find Mabel or will London fall in 1940 because the ravens have all gone.

I will say I am tad disappointed, I think I was expecting a fantasy, and that wasn't what it is. More historical fiction, now that being said I did enjoy the book. It was interesting to see what was going on in 1940, when England was not doing so well in the war.

To realize that many people thought England would be invaded, and that they were poised to lose everything. It's heartbreaking and fascinating, plus the real mystery would be Anna's parents, and who her father really is and what actually happened to her mother. One of which was sort of answered while leaving you with a massive cliffhanger. The other not so much.

I am interested to see exactly where this story is going and what the deeper storyline will be. I won't say that I am giving up hope that there will be some magical aspects with the ravens down the line.

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### **Jacquie (Rattle the Stars) says**

I really enjoyed reading this book! The Second World War is a topic that has been widely covered in historical fiction. If you can think of it then it probably has been written about. What really drew me to These Dark Wings was the setting, the Tower of London during the Blitz. Throw in a myth about the Tower's ravens and a few mysteries and I can just say this book was non-stop. Putting it down was seriously difficult.

The story is about a young girl named Anna. She had just lost both her parents to the war with Germany and was sent off to live with her estranged uncle, the Ravenmaster, at the Tower of London. The story is told from her POV which I thought was great because as you really get to know the character well. She's isolated, lonely and afraid. My heart just ached for her. The progress Anna makes from the beginning to the end of the novel made me love her even more. She messes up, makes mistakes, but is resourceful and resilient. A wonderful heroine that you can totally get behind!

The book was extremely well written – it was moody, tense and full of emotion. The Tower of London, a damp and gloomy place known for its history of torture and executions, acted as a perfect backdrop to the story. The Blitz (the German bombing of Britain) caused intense fear and destruction. The British boarded up their windows, lived off of rations and when the sirens sounded they retreated to makeshift shelters or underground tube stations. It created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion and having Anna's story take place at the Tower only amplified these feelings. It was always hard to tell whether a threat was real or just the imagination of a stressed 12 year old.

Sometimes with books based on historical events the authors do A LOT of information dumping. This can be a real drag and often takes away from the story. I love history but can understand how it can be a bit much. These Dark Wings thankfully doesn't do this. The details were inserted organically and it actually made me want to learn more about the Tower. Now that to me is the sign of a well written piece of historical fiction!

The author's writing style reminded me of The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas and The Book Thief, both books I also really liked. I believe the book is aimed at a middle grade audience, which makes it flow really well. It's

a quick read (I finished it 2 days and I'm a slow reader), but don't let the "middle grade" label fool you. I really believe that all ages would enjoy it, especially if you are a fan of historical fiction or the two books mentioned above.

The ending left me wanting more and more! Thankfully for me, the sequel *What the Raven Brings* will be released in March 2017.

Originally posted on Rattle the Stars.

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### **Alex (not a dude) Baugh says**

It's October 1940 and Anna Cooper's journalist mother has just been killed when a bomb hit the bus she was riding on. Now, Anna, 12, whose father drowned when she was 5, is sent to live with her Uncle Henry, a man she has never met. Uncle Henry is a Warder at the Tower of London, called "Ravenmaster" by its residents because it is his job to take care of the Tower's ravens. England has just begun the fight of its life against Hitler's Luftwaffe and according to legend, there must always be six ravens at the Tower of London. If any of the ravens fly away or get lost, the monarchy will fall and Britain with it.

Uncle Henry begins teaching Anna how to take care of the ravens, a job she doesn't much care for at first, but then, living in a freezing cold chamber in the Bloody Chamber isn't exactly where Anna wants to be either. But even as Anna begins plotting her escape from the Tower, so she can get on a ship to Canada where her best friend Flo was evacuated to, and stay with her for the duration, the first raven disappears.

Shortly after, Anna notices Warder Oakes, a man who gives her the creeps, secretly meeting a man at Traitors' Gate, an area usually filled with water, but dry at the moment. Could he be meeting a German spy? Is it possible Oakes is planning to kill Churchill when he comes to visit the Tower? Anna becomes more desperate to escape to Canada than ever.

But when her first attempt is unsuccessful, she realizes she needs an accomplice, someone who really knows their way around and she meets just the person she needs at the Tower school. Like Anna, Timothy Squire is not well liked by their schoolmates, but they are a perfect match for each other. And Timothy can and does get her out of the Tower for excursions, but when Anna discovers why he leaves so often, she isn't sure about being friends anymore.

As the nightly bombing by the Luftwaffe continues and increases, more ravens begin to disappear and Anna determines to stay and to solve the mystery of what is happening to the birds. But is it a sinister plot to destroy Britain's morale and make it easier for the Germans to invade Britain and is that why Hitler's Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess is at the Tower?

I can honestly say that I didn't know what to expect when I requested *These Dark Wings* from NetGalley. I knew it was a WWII story, but didn't really read the blurb describing it. I thought the dark wings referred to in the title were the wings of the Luftwaffe, so I was actually somewhat pleasantly surprised when I realized the setting was the Tower of London. The Tower is one of my favorite places to visit in London, and thanks to a British father, I already knew about the legend of the ravens, begun in the time of Charles II.

But for readers who don't know about the legend, and for whom the Tower may not be familiar, not to worry. There is a map and anything you need to know is explained within the story, so that young (or old) readers

learn about things right along with Anna, a perfect protagonist for this tale. She is a bit naive, and a desperately lonely character, always hungry and cold due to rationing, not unusual circumstances during the Blitz. And Timothy Squire is the perfect foil for her. Both characters are so realistically portrayed, though Uncle Henry, a few of the Tower's other resident's, with the exception of Oakes, remain less than fully realized, but for me, that didn't matter much. On the other hand, through Anna's observations, the different personalities of the ravens does successfully come through.

The novel is written chronically, beginning on Friday, 4 October 1940 and ending on Monday, 1 September 1941, with a real cliffhanger. The plot, the mysterious disappearance of the ravens, does get a little bogged down in all the information needed to set the stage for the novel, for instance, the layout of the Tower, the bombing of the docks and surrounding area, rationing, etc, but I assume that will not be so necessary in the next two books.

I very much enjoyed These Dark Wings and will probably read the next two installments of Anna's Tower of London adventures, assuming the author keeps her there or at least connected to it. After all, the Tower of London, with its bloody history, is such a wonderfully dark and grim location for a wartime story.

Do read These Dark Wings if you are looking for something different in the area of WWII middle grade novels.

This book is recommended for readers age 9+

This book was an EARC received from NetGalley

This review was originally posted on The Children's War

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### **Adrienne says**

Full disclosure: I would not have even known this book existed if it wasn't written by the brother of a coworker, and I was determined to give it more of a chance because of that connection.

Set during WWII, the main character, 12 year old Anna, is sent to live with her uncle in the Tower of London after her mother is killed. Her uncle is the Ravenmaster, responsible for the care of six birds who are gifted with a mythological importance to England's future. The story jumps from Anna's complaints about her daily life (food, school, boys, raven care duties) and thoughts of escape, to a quest to root out a spy, find a missing raven, air raids and other war casualties, and her eventual coming to terms with life in the Tower.

I had a very hard time getting into this book, which really only became interesting about 50 pages from the end. The introduction of Hess and Anna's final exclamation concerning him (won't give away the spoiler) made NO sense until I realized this is meant to be a trilogy.

A decent foray into the mind of a 12/13 year old girl, but I had higher hopes based on the novel's setting.

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### **Tracey says**

I'm just not sure about this one. I think I'm kind of getting used to teenaged (or thereabouts) main characters

that I just don't like much – and I don't like that, either. When her mother is killed by German bombing, Anna Cooper, 12, goes to live with her uncle in the Tower of London, where he serves as Ravenmaster – maintaining the legend that if the ravens leave the Tower, England will fall. It's something that seems more critical now than ever, given that the city is suffering under the Blitz, and any small blow to morale would be magnified.

Anna doesn't like her uncle. She doesn't like the Tower. She doesn't like the ravens. She doesn't like the other kids who live with their Beefeater fathers in the Tower, and she doesn't like their fathers (or mothers), either. She never expresses much if any grief over her mother's death, nor worry over her father, who is apparently serving in the North Sea. She does her utmost to make the lives of everyone around her miserable.

Part of the reason for this is obvious – it's also part of why kids don't want to be kids, I think: they are told nothing. She overhears little bits and snatches of things, but when she tries to find out more about just about anything – from why her uncle and mother never saw each other, to what the deal is with the mysterious man she sees lurking about. She begins to suspect that one of the guards is either a spy or a traitor, and I began to very much hope he was neither because I did not want her to be correct.

Another aspect of the story that irritated me was the author's adherence to the he-punched-you-in-the-arm-because-he-likes-you, dipping-pigtails-into-inkwells school of young love. One of the boys sharing the compound is mildly monstrous to her, to a degree that when she went out of the Tower with him I worried for her safety, figuring he'd either do something terrible or abandon her. Yet, pardon what I suppose is a spoiler, by the end when they're separated she finds herself pining for him. It's not exactly a classic love story.

When the revelation comes of who the mysterious stranger is, I might have given up if the book wasn't already almost over. It's based on truth – but the manner of the revelation annoyed me deeply. Overall, not a book I connected with.

The usual disclaimer: I received this book via Netgalley for review.

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## **Nataly Trofimova says**

*Thank you NetGalley and Head of Zeus for providing an ARC in exchange for an honest review.*

### **WARNING!!**

My dear fellow readers DON'T be discouraged by my review!

If you want to read it – do it!

There is a separate public for every book.

Usually I try to avoid reading books about World War II. The Book Thief was the last straw - after that book I swore to read nothing about that period of our history. But as you know oaths can be broken.

I'm not sure if I can write a very informative review for the book without any spoilers. Note one thing – summary misleads you into thinking that it will be one sort of a story, when in truth it is absolutely different. These Dark Wings was an easy reading – I took me just one day to finish it. But something was not right. I don't know if it was Anna or those ravens and the legend about them and Tower.



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## **Sophie Narey (Bookreview- aholic) says**

Published: 11/02/2016

Author: John Owen Theobald

I received this book for free through GoodReads FirstReads competitions.

I thought that this book was incredibly well written, it captured my attention and refused to let it go, it was a very hard book to put down I just wanted to keep reading it. This book features the character Anna Cooper who is 12 years old when her mother is killed in the Blitz and her father is killed in the North Sea. Although it is aimed at a younger audience it is just as enjoyable for older readers.

The characters that feature in this novel are all very well described and add a great deal of depth too the novel. In this novel you get to see London during the Blitz through the eyes of a twelve year old girl and how she manages to cope with everything she knew being ripped away and the London she loved turning into the war zone. You really feel for Anna when she has to go live in the cold tower where her uncle lives, who is a stranger too her.

If you read The Book Thief and enjoyed it then you will love this novel! The story is very sweet, touching and doesn't let go of your attention. It is a very strong and powerful book which has an incredible ending.

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## **Emily says**

I received this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

This book was okay. The writing was good; I just wasn't crazy about the story. I feel like I may have missed the point of it. There were a lot of different aspects to this story, and I'm not sure what the author's intention was.

The beginning moved so quickly with almost no background, and then dragged for the rest of the book. I felt like it was missing background details even when it was moving slowly.

There just wasn't enough going on to maintain my interest. I'm not sure if that was because it's directed toward children, or if I couldn't connect with the story.

A lot of the characters had hidden agendas, but it wasn't really made fully clear what they were or why - just that they were hidden.

I wish that this book would have had a little more action and had more background information. I probably won't try the second one.

Thank you to NetGalley and the publisher for the opportunity to read this book in exchange for an honest review.

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**Sarah Knadler says**

I wanted so badly to like this book. The premise was good: 12 year old girl is orphaned during WWII and sent to live with her uncle at the Tower of London, the famous prison where Anne Boleyn was taken and executed. I was very disappointed, however, when there was no clear plot. There was very minimal conflict between the characters and it was just really rather stale. I didn't feel like the story was going anywhere and I wanted so badly for it to pick up, but it just never did.

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**Danielle N says**

These Dark Wings had, and then it lost it. It is obviously the author can write. What was not so clear for me was exactly where this story decided to head. I felt that even though this was part of a trilogy, it began to just sit.. stale. There was no real character depth and no final conclusion for me. I just needed more.

[Full review here.](#)

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