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Michael Morpurgo

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A stunning new classic from master storyteller Michael Morpurgo for readers of 9+, in the vein of PRIVATE PEACEFUL and THE BUTTERFLY LION

This is a landmark new novel from the nation's favourite storyteller, set in the unique landscape of the Camargue in the South of France during WW2. There, a young autistic boy lives on his parents' farm among the salt flats, and the flamingos that live there. There are lots of things he doesn't understand: but he does know how to heal animals. He loves routine, and music too: and every week he goes to market with his mother, to ride his special horse on the town carousel.

But then the Germans come, with their guns, and take the town. A soldier shoots a flamingo from the sky, and it falls to earth terribly injured. And even worse is to come: the carousel is damaged, the horses broken. For this vulnerable boy, everything is falling apart.

Only there's a kind sergeant among the Germans – a man with a young boy of his own at home, a man who trained as a carpenter. Between them, perhaps boy and man can mend what has been broken – and maybe even the whole town...

Flamingo Boy Details

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Author : Michael Morpurgo

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From Reader Review Flamingo Boy for online ebook

Ken says

The story starts with young Vincent explaining why he wanted to travel to the South of France, on he's journey he is taken ill and elderly pair Kezia and Renzo who help nurse him back to full health.

Each night Kezia recounts a tale of what life was like growing up during the Second World War. Herself being a Roma gypsy girl and Renzo autism.

Morpurgo's delicate handling of Renzo's disability is the heart of the book.

My only criticism of the book itself is that it's a story in a story, this nullified any sense of threat.

All the scenes with Vincent did seem slightly pointless and dragged the story down for me.

Thought I can appreciate this is to make this book more accessible for younger readers.

James says

'Flamingo Boy' (2018) is the latest novel from Michael Morpurgo and to some extent appears ostensibly to be exploring similar themes and territory as well as being set against a similar backdrop to many of his previous novels – a fairly typical WWII setting here along with Morpurgo's seemingly ever present horses. Having said that, 'Flamingo Boy' is certainly not a re-tread of Morpurgo's other novels and the familiar-ish setting is by no means to the detriment of this new story.

'Flamingo Boy' is located overwhelmingly in Northern France, more specifically the Camargue, and tells the story of how Vincent, our storyteller within a story, finds himself there – how he meets the eponymous 'Flamingo Boy' and the story which Vincent is told whilst there.

Much of the book is about differentness or otherness – about acceptance, rejection, understanding or lack thereof and is inspired at least in part by Morpurgo's own autistic grandson. 'Flamingo Boy' is essentially about embracing and understanding otherness, whether it be a disability such as autism or ethnic differences – in this case Roma or Romani. Morpurgo also alludes here to the complex, selective, transient and sometimes fickle nature of racism and bigotry. A recurring theme of Morpurgo's is present here also – the very human face of war and the simple assertion that there are 'good' people on both sides in a war; people who can be trusted despite being ostensibly the 'enemy'.

As with many of Michael Morpurgo's novels, this is an affecting, compelling and engaging story – simply and movingly told. Morpurgo is at heart a storyteller – as such, there is nothing here that feels extraneous and the momentum is successfully maintained throughout.

Whilst not quite Morpurgo at his finest (War Horse, Kensuke's Kingdom, Alone on a Wide, Wide Sea et al) 'Flamingo Boy' is nevertheless a very strong story told with customary workmanlike efficiency and skill through the prolific pen of former 'Children's Laureate' Michael Morpurgo.

Christine Dolan says

Another lovely story from the wonderful author of Warhorse. It is about a boy who is different, and the little Roma girl who befriends him. I enjoyed the beguiling setting of the French Camargue, and although it is set during World War Two, it has a heartwarming, happy ending. The book focuses on hope, which is much needed during these dark times.

Rebecca says

This was the first new Michael Morpurgo book which I've read in years and it didn't disappoint.

I loved the book's setting of the Camargue, and the story's bursting at the seams with atmosphere - from the ever-present flamingos, horses and bulls to the relentless mistral, to the charming tune of 'Sur le Pont d'Avignon.'

I thought the friendship between Lorenzo and Kezia was extremely touching and I loved how they almost instantly seemed to understand one another. My favourite scene was one in which Lorenzo showed off his own personal 'Camelot' and made Kezia his Guinevere. I also thought it was interesting that we got a Nazi character who was actually sympathetic and didn't necessarily believe in the system he was working for.

As always I have a couple of minor gripes. For example, the story bookends in the perspective of a young man called Vincent and to me, his parts felt a bit superfluous. I think the story would have been just as good if not stronger if told exclusively from Kezia's perspective. Also I thought that Lorenzo got away with antagonising the Nazi soldiers a few too many times. I know it's a children's book and you can't reflect all of life's grim realities but...I don't know, it didn't quite sit right with me.

On the whole however, the book was beautifully written, it was a charming story with likable characters. In my opinion, it would also make a wonderful film or televised drama.

Julia says

Flamingo Boy by Michael Morpurgo is a delightful historical children's novel that can be enjoyed by all ages. I am a granny and really enjoyed it.

Michael Morpurgo weaves a wonderful tale beginning in 1982, he then transports the reader back to the occupied south of France during World War II. The reader gets caught up in the war as the peaceful countryside is taken over by the Nazis.

There is the theme of trust. Not all Nazis were evil. They all wore uniforms but underneath some were men and not monsters. "In this uniform, I am Caporal Willi Brenner. Under this uniform, I am Herr Willi Brenner, husband, father and Lehrer."

The novel revolves around two children in the 1940's. One has special needs. It sounded like autism to me. He finds trusting hard but his instincts are key. If he likes you, you receive "an open-hearted smile, a smile of complete trust."

Children (and adults) with special needs may have an affinity with animals. The reader sees an animal whisperer who has patience, love and care. "He puts his hands on them, breathes on them and they get better."

There is a carousel in the story. This can be seen as a motif for French lives. "What looks broken can always be mended." Lives disrupted by the Nazis would one day be restored.

In spite of occupation, there is a calmness to the story. I think this is due to the tranquil setting and the personalities that radiate love. In the midst of war, there is an "oasis of peace."

When all seems hopeless, there is still prayer. "I kept praying... more in hope than in faith." The day that hope dies is the day that all will seem lost. We must keep hope alive.

I really loved Flamingo Boy. It is a story of love, of friendship, of hope in the midst of adversity and of a beautiful bond with animals. There is a wonderful gentle soul who is not sullied by the world and it is beautiful to witness.

An absolute joy to read.

I received this book for free. A favourable review was not required and all views expressed are my own.

Sue says

As always with Michael Morpurgo you are in safe hands, and that is something I really admire about his novels: difficult subjects are approached with care and consideration; information is delivered in such a way as not to disturb or upset a young reader too much, which is why we have chosen this book to be part of our school's book award shortlist.

This book deals with various subjects: autism, persecution of the Roma Gypsies and Jews during WWII, Nazi occupation and Vichy France, collaborators and the Maquis, and was inspired by his own autistic grandson. What I particularly like is the humanity he gives to 'Capo', a Nazi corporal, who to all intents and purposes, if the stereotype is followed, should be portrayed as an evil sadist, rounding up all undesirables and sending them off to camps or extermination for the good of the Reich. But in fact this role is given to the collaborator factions, the French Milice, whereas Morpurgo reminds us that there were Nazi soldiers such as Willi Brenner ('Capo') with humanity, a man who has lost his own son through the war, been injured and traumatised on the Eastern Front, and just wants the war to end and for children to be safe.

You can always rely on Morpurgo for his consummate storytelling, painting believable characters and realistic landscapes whilst delivering information about a subject or period in history.

Kelly Furniss says

This story is so stereotypical of the kind this author creates and the fact he still does it is why I choose to still read them myself even now my Son is older.

In modern day France our protagonist meets a lady and her autistic friend who go on to tell him the tales of how life was for them when the County was War torn, what happened when the German soldiers came to town and how the carousel and flamingo's on the land helped them rebuild their lives.

There are underlying messages in the historical story and we analyse friendships and how different people can pull together in the face of adversity.

Although aged at a young audience this tale is one of those that will warm the heart of readers any age.

A special book I would recommend.

My thanks go to the author, publisher and Netgalley for providing this arc in return for a honest review.

Laura says

Set against the backdrop of WWII, Michael Morpurgo weaves a tale of trust, commitment, acceptance and love. A truly lovely story that warms the heart of all ages.

Beginning in 1982, 18 year-old Vincent sets off to the south of France to visit the beach Van Gogh painted in the picture that's hung in his bedroom. Whilst there, events lead him to meet Kezia and Renzo, a man who has autism; and Vincent hears, through Kezia's retelling, how they dealt with and overcame Nazi occupation in their idyllic town.

In the generations since both World Wars, it has become commonplace to assume that all German soldiers were evil. However, with the character of Willi Brenner ("Capo"), Morpurgo reminds us that this was not the case - that these were normal, everyday men who were simply ordered to do a job.

Renzo's disability is beautifully conveyed through the love his family, and Kezia's family, have for him. Their ability and commitment to go into his world, rather than forcing him to adhere to social norms (particularly in the 1940's), is very special to read. I hope that this will transcend into today's world and change some people's perception of children like Renzo. They are special and they do have a voice, if you're willing to listen.

I really loved this book and I can't wait to read it to my own class of children.

Thank you to Netgalley and Harper Collins, Children's Books UK for this advanced copy.

Rachel says

I received this novel from Net Galley and Harper Collins UK in return for an honest review.

This is the story of an 18 year old boy called Vincent, who travels to Southern France in the footsteps of his namesake Vincent van Gogh to visit the site where Van Gogh painted one of his favourite pictures. While he is in the South of France he meets an elderly man and woman, Kezia and Lorenzo, who take him into their home when he falls in. Kezia tells Vincent the story of their childhood, how they became to live together, and how Lorenzo became the Flamingo Boy.

So although this novel begins in the 21st century and is narrated by Vincent, the majority of this novel takes place during WWII. This is quite a common setting for Morpurgo, my favourite novels from him are all set during WWI or WWII, and this novel doesn't disappoint. Morpurgo writes such clear and calm descriptions of WWII in this novel, he manages to get across the sheer depravity of the actions carried out, and the strength and humanity displayed by many who fought against the Nazis. Morpurgo does this in a concise way which makes it simple to understand for younger children, yet still detailed enough to create a story, and fuel the plotline, and with enough clarity that none of the gravitas of what happened is lost.

As per usual, Morpurgo's storytelling is masterful. His ability to make stories personal, to give tragedies and huge historic events a human face and to give insight into the individual tales that make up the event is a skill that Morpurgo does better than most. He writes such beautifully powerful and moving novels that are predominantly aimed at children, but appeal just as strongly to adults.

Morpurgo always writes wonderful characters, and this novel is no different. Lorenzo, the Flamingo Boy is my particular favourite in this novel. He is described as having Autism in the blurb, and he sees the world in a slightly different way to the way everyone else does. He is so carefully and sensitively written by

Morpurgo, and he is genuinely a lovely character. I really liked the relationship between Lorenzo and Kezia, it definitely added to my enjoyment of the novel, and was an integral part of the plot in general. This is probably one of the less emotionally draining Morpurgo novels that I have read. I am used to crying a great deal when I read any of Morpurgo's novels, and I was preparing myself mentally and physically for tears, but this novel wasn't quite there for me. Perhaps because this novel ends with a lovely happy ending, but whatever the reason, I just felt there was a bit of emotion and sadness missing from this novel. Overall I really enjoyed this novel. I love Michael Morpurgo's novels, and although this one isn't quite up there with War Horse and Private Peaceful for me, it is still an excellent Morpurgo novel, and I would recommend it to children and adults alike.

15VanGeesbergenH says

I couldn't put this book down and I highly recommend this. Their struggles seemed to come to life through Micheal morpurgos writing. I love Micheal morpurgo books and this one definitely delivered

Vee ?Under Mountain Books? says

Michael Morpurgo truly is an incredible writer, he can find stories in places in history that have been done a thousand times and make them feel completely new and different. When I saw that he had a book releasing this year I hit request immediately, sure that a story about a young autistic boy who lives on a farm during occupied France would be incredible.

It takes a lot for me to be mad at a book but yeah, I'm pretty mad at this book. Whoever wrote the blurb likely didn't read the book. The story is told by Vincent, when he is older. He tells of when he was young and travelled to France after nearly being smacked on the skull by a painting, where he met Kazia and Lorenzo. Then, Kazia tells him of when she was young and the story we hear in the blurb, about the flamingos and the carousel and what happened when the Germans came to town.

"Lorenzo loved everything to be the same, even goodbyes. Goodbyes, hellos, sausages and songs, he loved what he knew, never wanted anything to be different. The trouble is that things do change, whether we like it or not. And for Lorenzo any change was always difficult. It still is sometimes."

To tell a story with so many layers like that is a truly bizarre choice and honestly, I'd have cut Vincent out entirely. It should have just been told from Kazia's point of view, especially as by having the older versions of her and Lorenzo meant that there was no suspense or fear for them when the Germans came to their town. I spent the majority of the book worried about a carousel at most.

The idea of the story is fantastic, we need more diverse characters and choosing a gypsy girl and an autistic boy as our central characters was such a great idea, especially as they're in an environment we don't often see in books, with views we almost never read about. Unfortunately this felt like he had an idea but couldn't really be bothered to spend the time to perfect it, so just sent out the first draft.

Nancy says

Vintage Morpugo! Loved every chapter, every character, and after all the trials and tribulations of wartime France, a happy ending. A splendid binge-read. OK, I'm somewhat older than the "9-plus" age groups it is intended for, but I'll read anything Morpugo writes. His "Private Peaceful" helped me to understand my late uncle's condition of shell-shock (these days called PTSD). Each re-read of that book brings me to tears.

Aruna Kumar Gadepalli says

I wonder at times with war in the background (theme) how could one write so many stories. Each story different and interesting. I wait for his books. Waiting always gives its results. This book is no exception. Easy, quick read about friendship, war and enemy. The relationship between humans, animals.

Paula Sealey says

It seems that every Michael Morpugo book I read has the ability to turn me into a blubbing wreck at some point in the story. 'Flamingo Boy' was no exception and the tears were bouncing off my cheeks at the end! I know his books are targeted at a young audience, but honestly, the tales are so touching that they demand to be read by everyone.

In the South of France during the Second World War, young Romany girl Kezia meets Lorenzo. Lorenzo is unlike anyone Kezia has met before. He lives on his parents farm, caring for injured animals and the local flamingos with his special healing magic. He loves nothing more than to ride on Kezia's parents carousel; enjoying the music and movement. When a storm rages and the carousel is damaged, everyone is devastated, including an invading German soldier. While war rages on, and with the help of the German captain, the two families work together to survive and restore the carousel to its former glory.

I loved every character in this book, but Lorenzo was a joy to read! So wonderfully described, he really came alive and I envisaged him flapping his arms around the marshes in joy; honking like a flamingo. How Kezia comes to retell her story to young Vincent was a lovely touch, and the ending just couldn't have been any better. One for young and old and a huge 5 stars from me!

*I received a copy of the book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Aditi says

"Close friends are truly life's treasures. Sometimes they know us better than we know ourselves. With gentle honesty, they are there to guide and support us, to share our laughter and our tears. Their presence reminds us that we are never really alone."

----Vincent van Gogh

Michael Morpurgo, a bestselling English writer, has penned a delightful children's historical fiction called, *Flamingo Boy* that revolves around a young teenage boy, who after finding the real artists behind the painting in his room, journeys to the north of France, where he stumbles upon a family of an old woman and a strange old man living in a farm, and gradually the old lady narrates the story of that strange old man, who was once known as the *Flamingo Boy*, a story that involves the German invasion, the playful song of a carousel, friendship, laughter, even grief, a boy with healing powers and lots and lots of flamingos.

Synopsis:

A stunning new classic from master storyteller Michael Morpurgo for readers of 9+, in the vein of PRIVATE PEACEFUL and THE BUTTERFLY LION

This is a landmark new novel from the nation's favourite storyteller, set in the unique landscape of the Camargue in the South of France during WW2. There, a young autistic boy lives on his parents' farm among the salt flats, and the flamingos that live there. There are lots of things he doesn't understand: but he does know how to heal animals. He loves routine, and music too: and every week he goes to market with his mother, to ride his special horse on the town carousel.

But then the Germans come, with their guns, and take the town. A soldier shoots a flamingo from the sky, and it falls to earth terribly injured. And even worse is to come: the carousel is damaged, the horses broken. For this vulnerable boy, everything is falling apart.

Only there's a kind sergeant among the Germans – a man with a young boy of his own at home, a man who trained as a carpenter. Between them, perhaps boy and man can mend what has been broken – and maybe even the whole town.

One fine summer in England, Vincent found out about the artists and his story behind the boat painting hanging in his room, and that leads him to embark on a voyage to the north of France in a small sleepy sea side town called, Camargue where the artist, Vince Van Gogh, found his inspiration behind the boat painting. But on his way, Vincent, the young teenage protagonist of this story, stumbles upon a kind pair of couple living by the farm, when the old strange man rescues Vincent from a wild storm and takes him back to his home, where he was taken care of by a lovely old lady. That old lady later opens up her heart and narrates the story of the old strange man, who was once known as the "Flamingo Boy" and how German invasion disrupted the peace and snatched away happiness from their lives, and how that strange boy could heal the ailing animals on the farm and how he used to talk to the flamingos and so much more about their lost and happy past, that is the very foundation of their strong bond of friendship through love and war.

A spectacular historical children's fiction that narrates the story of pure, innocent friendship and its significance. The author has vividly captivated the essence of a long, forgotten past of German invasion and how it affected lives through his story. Not only that, the author has delightfully portrayed the eccentric character of an autistic child and the way he perceived the world around him in his unique way. This is a story within a story, where the author has explored the world in a sensitive, loving and honest manner to let his users reflect upon a bygone era and the importance of accepting and welcoming autistic children in the society.

The author's writing style is coherent, laced with enough emotions and suspense to keep the readers curious and intrigued and so the protagonist. The narrative is painted with enough realism and is easy to comprehend

with, as the dialogues are kept simple yet evocative enough to make the readers feel deeply for the cast of the characters. The pacing is really fast, as the style of the story-telling by the second protagonist is done in an engaging manner. The backdrop of the small sea side town in the North of France comes alive right before the eyes of the readers through this tale, as the author has portrayed the background in a striking way, complete with tiny details so that his readers can visualize the town pretty vividly.

The characters in this book are extremely well developed that reflects their genuine demeanor through the tale. The main character Vincent is just an onlooker or rather say an observer of the main story line. Hence his character isn't explored in depths to give a strong personality in the eyes of the readers. Vincent is more like us, the readers. But the next two protagonists as well as the supporting cast of diverse characters are sketched in an impeccable way and those which reflect the pains of the war. But the best character would be the "Flamingo Boy" whose autism is not only penned in a sensitive and realistic manner, but with so much heart, charm and encouraging manner that will make the readers fall for this young, enthusiastic boy all at once.

In a nutshell, the story is not just a war story about two diverse families caught in the wrong side of it, but it is also about the people who are actually causing this war, and in center of it stands that amazing "Flamingo Boy" who screams "Fly, Flam Fly" to the flock of pink flamingos.

Verdict: *This compelling, poignant and charming story is a must read for any and every age group of readers.*

Courtesy: *Thanks to the publishers from Harper Collins India, for giving me an opportunity to read and review this book.*
