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Shadow

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Editor's Choice:

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Media type:

Book

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The latest novel from Michael Morpurgo again concerns animals and war. **Shadow** has two inspirations: the work of sniffer dogs in detecting IEDs for the British army in Afghanistan and the plight of asylum seekers in Yarl's Wood detention centre. From these, he has made a story about an Afghan boy and his mother fleeing the Taliban; their friendship with a stray 'foreign' dog that they fortuitously return to the British army on their way out of Afghanistan; and their struggle for asylum in Britain. The novel displays all Morpurgo's trademark skills; the deceptively simple style in which every word, character and incident is made to count; a story which is both dramatic and thoughtful; and an authoritative and sympathetic voice whose commitment to fairness never wavers. All of this makes for a book which could be read by a good reader as young as nine years old and, possibly, might be read to a child even younger. However, the storyteller's voice is pervasive. Although much of the story is the boy Aman's, it is told through his friend Matt and Matt's grandfather, a technique which elides cultural differences; does not give Aman his own voice; and sees his experience both in Afghanistan and Yarl's Wood from the outside. The ending, in which Aman's and his mother's release are obtained in a matter of days through a newspaper article, public protest, and the intervention of a government minister, and which depends on Aman's role in aiding the British army in Afghanistan, provides a fitting nail-biting and emotional climax, but bears little resemblance to the painstaking, drawn-out and frustrating work of organisations aiding asylum seekers. A useful non-fiction supplement to the story for the same age group would be Anthony Robinson's 'Refugee Diaries' series [see **Meltem's Journey** reviewed in this issue]. For a way of treating much the same story from the inside (for slightly older children), try Libby Gleeson's **Mahtab's Story**.

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