



The Alex Crow

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

[Matthew Martin](#) [3]

Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Andrew Smith's novel [Grasshopper Jungle](#) [4], a wildly original sci-fi adventure about sexually-confused teen boys fighting a plague of giant killer bugs, was one of my favourite books of last year. It was long-listed for the Carnegie Medal though sadly didn't make the shortlist.

Adolescent boys are also at the centre of **The Alex Crow**, which is equally wild, weird and profound. The central character is fifteen year old Ariel, whose story begins as he escapes death in his unnamed country's civil war, by hiding in a refrigerator. He describes his journey from refrigerator to the US, via a wretched refugee camp where he is abused by fellow inmates, to his adopted American brother Max, apologising all the while for burdening him with such dark life stories. The two become friends and allies at the more than slightly sinister Camp Merrie-Seymour for boys, a place teens are sent to detox from technology. The Camp is owned by the company that employs Max and Ariel's father as a genetic scientist, and his Alex division are involved in very strange activities indeed, including bringing extinct creatures back to life. Ariel suspects that he and Max too might be subjects of the division's experiments.

Other stories run in parallel: one involves the survivors of a nineteenth century expedition to the Arctic where, we discover, the de-extinction programme began; another describes a truly bizarre road-trip taken by Lenny, aka the 'melting man'. Lenny is an early creation of Max's dad, a biodrone now quite literally falling apart, and hallucinating wildly: Joseph Stalin is a constant presence urging him to commit crimes. All the stories combine as the book reaches its conclusion.

Technology is changing our world in ways we could never have predicted but, Smith seems to say, human nature remains obsessed with violence, and, despite our all-encompassing desire to reproduce, mankind is careering recklessly towards extinction. Original, entertaining and thought-provoking this is one of the best YA novels you will read this year.

Read our [Q&A interview with Andrew Smith](#) [5].

Links:

- [1] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-alex-crow>
- [2] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/211>
- [3] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/matthew-martin>
- [4] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/205/childrens-books/reviews/grasshopper-jungle>
- [5] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/211/childrens-books/articles/andrew-smith-qa-interview>