



My Brother's Keeper

Books Reviewed:

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

My Brother's Keeper is the latest of a series of publications by Bloomsbury (in partnership with the National Archives) to commemorate the centenary of World War I. Few topics capture the imaginations of young people as much as The Great War, and young fans of history will find this story of the young British soldier, Alfie, engaging as well as informative.

Like Scholastic's **My Story** series, this short novel is a combination of detailed, factual information and an original story and this makes for an authentic, convincing tone. Though the book is marketed for younger readers (9+), its authors do not shy away from the appalling and gruesome nature of war. The putrid conditions of the trenches, the stench of corpses and latrines, are described in detail and without sentiment, as readers are invited to consider the true nature of life in Flanders' fields.

The combat scenes are exciting and fast-paced but are balanced with sensitive passages that emphasise the closeness felt between brothers in arms. Alfie and his loyal companions are heavily shelled and sent on daring and deadly midnight raids into enemy trenches, before an inevitable climax - the Big Push.

At the end of the story, the reader is left questioning the decision-making ability and motives of the generals in charge, who are characterised, typically, by 'Mad Jack', who appears to care little for the lives of his men. When informed that many of his men were dying, he responds: 'that is what they're for?.'

The book's title refers to a more sympathetic officer's desire to stay in the war in order to care for his men, even though he is opposed to the fighting. This sentiment is attributed to Siegfried Sassoon in an historical note at the end of the book that adds further factual context to the story.

Tom and Tony Bradman have succeeded in telling a story that will educate young readers about the Great War. However, more impressively, they have described a genuinely exciting journey through the eyes of an endearing character with whom readers will sympathise throughout.

For readers who crave still further information from the period, The National Archives have also published an

accompanying non-fiction series, **World War I Unclassified**, by Nick Hunter.

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