

Gabriel's Storm

Diego Hojraj

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Gabriel's Storm is a thoughtful coming-of-age story deftly set around a captivating crime plot.

In Diego Hojraj's *Gabriel's Storm*, a deadly revenge plot leads to deeper struggles for a gang of outsider teens.

It's 1983, outside of New York City. The summer after they graduate from high school, Gabriel and his three best friends, Achilles, Jared, and Johnny, hatch a murder plan. But a hurricane, first love, family trouble, and illness put the plan at risk. That summer changes the course of the rest of their lives.

The narrator is omniscient, casting a wide lens on what the murder means in the lives of all involved. The boys' voices come across distinctly through candid dialogue and intimate details about their lives. The gritty lives of the characters, in a wrong-side-of-the-tracks setting, lends a toughness to the tone.

Conversations are not polite; characters speak their minds. Some dialogue is funny, befitting eighteen-year-old humor, and keeps the mood light during drama and intrigue. The characters come across so clearly that the murder plot isn't the focus as much as their coming of age in the midst of it.

Women characters include Gabriel's mom, an orphan who grew up on a kibbutz, and his girlfriend, who has mysterious scars on her back. They are equally well developed and take part in building the story. They argue with panache, countering men who don't take them seriously with witty retorts and defiance. They are studious and hardworking, and they jump off the page with their charisma and depth.

The writing is expansive and forward moving. Transcribed radio news briefs set the story's action in the context of world events and draw attention to the equal seriousness of the boys' actions. The story moves between 1983, the 1970s, and 2008, jumping back and forth in time to reinforce the changes in the characters and build suspense. The climactic event takes up a tiny fraction of the novel and is told in an unemotional tone. The more important parts of the plot come before and after it, showing how the characters' lives are affected by the carrying out of their plan.

Action drives the novel, but ideas fuel it. A disagreement between Achilles and Gabriel about whether "the point" is to "make it to the next day" or "to be remembered" is a central theme that echoes as characters decide how to proceed with the plan. Big ideas are also embedded in the family stories: Gabriel's Israeli roots and the Greek origins of Achilles's name hint at religion, fate, and honor without overshadowing the boys themselves.

The novel wraps up quietly, like the still after a summer storm, and is satisfying. *Gabriel's Storm* is a thoughtful coming-of-age story deftly set around a captivating crime plot.

MARI CARLSON (August 19, 2019)

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