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Juvenile Fiction

The Lobster War
Ethan Howland
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Setting lobster traps in the cold Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Maine has a fearful but gripping appeal to sixteen-year-old Dain Harrington. “I know it was strange, wanting to be a lobsterman and all, but the truth is I was scared of the water.” The teen is determined to overcome his fear in order to keep alive the memory of his father and the good times they had together with his brother as they went out in their boat.

Dain is smart, and his mother would like him to get a college education. Dain’s older brother, Eddie, is a high school dropout who is hanging out with troublemakers, including a sinister fellow named Roger Gribbin.

Dain explains why Roger is frightening to meet. It’s his “blue unblinking eyes. It was those eyes that scared me the most—not his tattoos or his muscles or the way he leaned too close to you when he talked. It was his eyes. They absorbed everything, even the light, and they gave nothing back. In some parts of the world people believe that cameras can take a person’s soul. Well, when Roger Gribbin stared at you hard, you had to wonder if your own soul was entirely safe.”

Dain is not safe. The lobster war is on: Roger and a helper have been cutting Dain’s traps and stealing his lobsters. Dain takes his boat out one night to watch for the thief, and discovers that the helper is Eddie. In a climax with almost Biblical overtones, Dain angrily confronts his brother. Soon thereafter, Eddie and Roger founder at sea during a storm. Dain must confront his fear of the water and his rage toward those who have wronged him as he attempts a brave rescue.

The author lives in Maine, where he works as a reporter. In this first novel, he uses his experiences as a journalist and a New Englander to provide accurate details of the lobster trade and the coastal landscape. The brothers' relationship is salty, drifting, and painful, even through their reconciliation.

Ultimately, The Lobster War is about the internal wars of right decision-making. It is about cutting traps and cutting ties—sources of struggle for many young adults.

Linda Salisbury