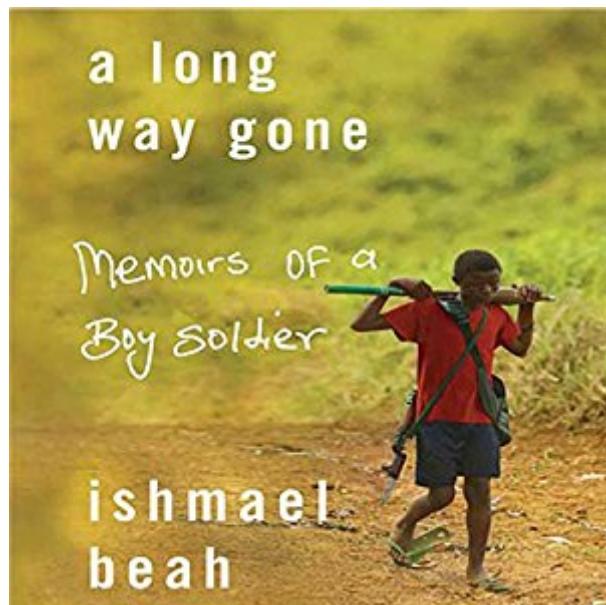


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A Long Way Gone: Memoirs Of A Boy Soldier



Synopsis

This is how wars are fought now by children, hopped up on drugs, and wielding AK-47s. In the more than 50 violent conflicts going on worldwide, it is estimated that there are some 300,000 child soldiers. Ishmael Beah used to be one of them. How does one become a killer? How does one stop? Child soldiers have been profiled by journalists, and novelists have struggled to imagine their lives. But it is rare to find a first-person account from someone who endured this hell and survived. In *A Long Way Gone*, Beah, now 26 years old, tells a riveting story in his own words: how, at the age of 12, he fled attacking rebels and wandered a land rendered unrecognizable by violence. By 13, he'd been picked up by the government army, and Beah, at heart a gentle boy, found that he was capable of truly terrible acts. This is a rare and mesmerizing account, told with real literary force and heartbreakingly honest.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

While I did find this book painful to read, I am very glad I stayed with it. Ishmael tells his story in casual language, almost as if he were sitting next to you, sharing his experiences over (many cups of) tea. He relays his life to us chronologically, beginning in his home village. He and some friends took a several day trip to a neighboring village to show off their hip-hop skills at a talent show. Little did they know, that little trip probably saved their lives. For while they were away, the rebel army attacked their home village. From there, we follow Ishmael and his friends as they try to find their families (all had had to flee the village, literally running for their lives) struggling to meet the barest of necessities. It is a long, dangerous road they walk, and they suffer countless difficulties as they try

to find somewhere safe to stay. A tunnel with no light. You really feel the desperation, the loneliness and despair that descended upon this poor little boy. Much of the book is about this time of wandering, going hungry, being ill-met by other villages who suspect these young, homeless friends of being a wandering squad of rebel child-soldiers. They are met with suspicion at best, hostility at worst. It is actually understandable when Ishmael is manipulated into fighting with the government army. He is finally in a village that feels safe, he is eating, there are soldiers protecting the village, that is until the rebels surround the village, leaving no path for escape. All males (even 6 or 8 year olds) must fight for their lives, or die. It begins as such, fighting for the "good side," the ones who did not kill his family, and fighting to defend himself.

You might not be able to read this book if you didn't know it had a hopeful ending. The violence is unstaged, described in a matter-of-fact way that gives it a haunting quality; wounds bleed, women scream, babies are burned in their cribs, grown men are shot after being tortured. And it is violence perpetrated in many cases by boys, young teenagers who in their own culture are usually not considered old enough to date or wise enough to make tough decisions. Ishmael Beah was born in Sierra Leone and grew up in a time of relative stability, before open rebellion began. One day he and his close buddies went to a nearby town to enter a music contest. They'd been listening to rap, imitating the poetic lyrics and the dance moves. They had a couple of home-recorded cassette tapes. While they were away, rebels swept into their home village, killing many inhabitants and forcing the rest to flee. Everyone disappeared from Ishmael's home in a few short hours, and he was never again to see most members of his close family. With no preparation, he was cut off from the life he had known and forced, with his companions, to begin a long period of constant flight, near-starvation and terror. The boys knew that their time was limited. The rebels were recruiting boys to fight, raping the young girls and enslaving the elders. They were stealing all usable items and all food, burning the villages as they left. The army was likewise recruiting boys, after men were slain by rebel forces. Boys so young as to be barely able to carry a weapon were given AK-47s and told to avenge their family's deaths. They were drugged with marijuana and cocaine until their minds were as ragged as their clothes, and sent out to kill. After living from day to harrowing day, Ishmael was forced to join the army.

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