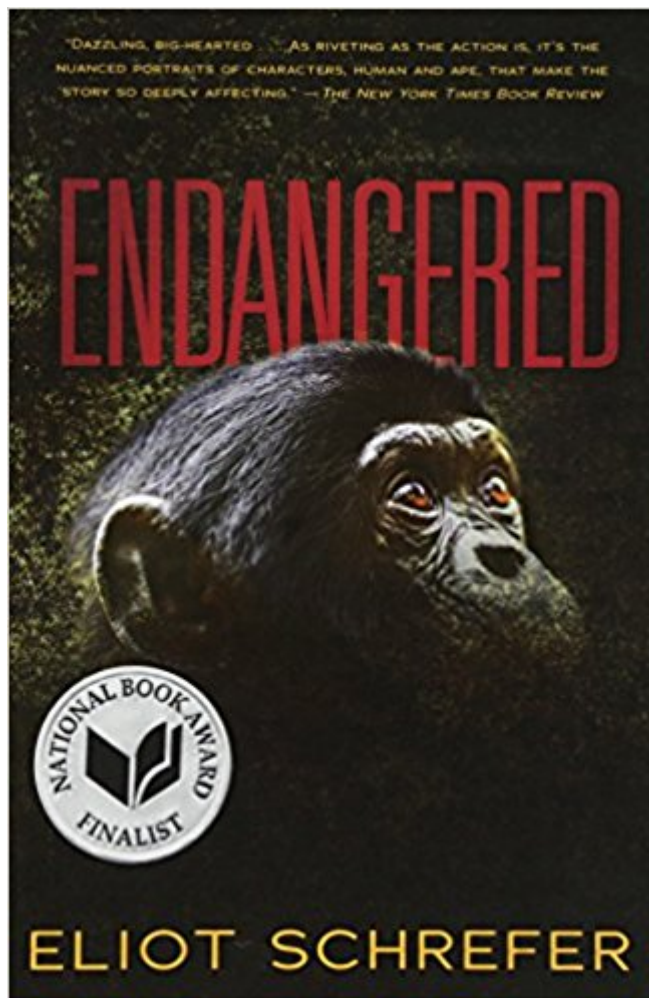




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Endangered



Synopsis

From National Book Award Finalist Eliot Schrefer comes the compelling tale of a girl who must save a group of bonobos -- and herself -- from a violent coup. Congo is a dangerous place, even for people who are trying to do good. When Sophie has to visit her mother at her sanctuary for bonobos, she's not thrilled to be there. Then Otto, an infant bonobo, comes into her life, and for the first time she feels responsible for another creature. But peace does not last long for Sophie and Otto. When an armed revolution breaks out in the country, the sanctuary is attacked, and the two of them must escape unprepared into the jungle. Caught in the crosshairs of a lethal conflict, they must struggle to keep safe, to eat, and to live. In *ENDANGERED*, Eliot Schrefer plunges us into a heart-stopping exploration of the things we do to survive, the sacrifices we make to help others, and the tangled geography that ties us all, human and animal, together.

Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Scholastic Paperbacks; Reprint edition (January 7, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0545165776

ISBN-13: 978-0545165778

Product Dimensions: 0.5 x 5.2 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 122 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #24,469 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #36 in *Books > Children's Books > Animals > Apes & Monkeys* #47 in *Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Being a Teen* #154 in *Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family*

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Gr 8 Up-Fourteen-year-old Sophie rescues Otto, a young chimp, while spending the summer at her mother's bonobo sanctuary in the Democratic Republic of Congo. When the president is assassinated and war breaks out, Sophie has a chance to return home to the United States but cannot bear to leave Otto. Their journey to safety takes them into the bonobo enclosure, but the real danger begins when they venture out and risk encountering rebel soldiers. Schrefer excels at

imbuing the bonobos with individual personalities and endearing quirks. The bond between Sophie and Otto is so expertly depicted that it almost seems like a parent/child relationship, and readers will readily relate to the anguish the girl feels as she debates leaving her pet behind. The novel tackles tough ethical dilemmas without offering easy answers and delves into racial politics (Sophie's mixed racial heritage influences how others treat her), giving the book a nuanced tone. Schreffer portrays painful scenes in unflinching detail, and his powerful use of language drives the story forward. However, Sophie often seems preternaturally skilled for a teenager who has spent limited time in the Congo. Several moments stretch plausibility, such as when she rescues Otto from a group of soldiers or when she becomes leader of the bonobo tribe. Additionally, because Sophie is recounting the story as an adult looking back, her voice is often far more mature and polished than most adolescent protagonists. Yet despite the flaws, this is a poignant and moving story. --Mahnaz Dar, School Library Journal

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After 14-year-old Sophie leaves her home in Florida, where she lives with her father, to visit her mother's bonobo sanctuary in Congo, she rescues a young bonobo from its captor. Sophie names her new friend Otto and the two bond, but after civil war breaks out, Sophie and the young ape must flee from the sanctuary and attempt to survive in the jungle against overwhelming odds. With cruel revolutionaries everywhere, Sophie's life is constantly in danger. The story veers perhaps into improbability when Sophie, unwilling to abandon Otto, rejects two offers to leave the country. Still, Schreffer creates a vividly realized setting and a harrowing portrait of the chaos of a country at war. Best, though, is Schreffer's portrayal of the extraordinary bond between Sophie and Otto, and the close, awe-inspiring look at bonobos in general. Nature-loving teens will be captivated. Grades 8-12. --Michael Cart --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Schreffer has crafted a story that is both eye-opening and touching. A story that seems historical but is very much contemporary. Through the eyes of one young girl, the reader gets a glimpse into the deep-seeded challenges of a conflict-riddled third-world country. Sophie has come to stay at her mother's wild animal preserve in the heart of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Being biracial complicates things a bit (Congolese mother, white American father) as she's seen as foreign both in America and in the Congo, but she's learned to deal with that. What she doesn't expect to happen on this visit is falling in love with an injured baby bonobo that she can't help but buy from a local

bush-meat trader. This spontaneous act sets off a series of events that leaves Sophie feeling guilty and conflicted. And things take a turn for the worse when just after her mother sets off to release some bonobos into the wild, the Congo once again erupts into devastating violence. As Sophie struggles to keep herself and her bonobo, Otto, alive, she's forced to face the consequences of her own actions as well as the horrible results of war. Despite the devastation that Sophie sees both inside and outside of the bonobo sanctuary, Sophie remains determined to survive, but at what cost. Is it possible to survive a war without being corrupted by it? Several close calls (including a near rape) leave Sophie desperately hoping to find her mother in all the chaos. The book does contain numerous references to violence including burned villages, dead bodies, and vague references to rape. I found the relationship between Sophie and Otto to be very compelling as I read quickly to find out what would happen to them. Schreier has created a remarkable story of survival and hope in a world gone to pieces.

Endangered is a marvelous book for teens, but it is a book adults should read as well. It deals with the plight of endangered bonobos, but not in a didactic way. Rather, the reader experiences along with Sophie, the young protagonist, the perilous political situation in the Congo and is led to see through Sophie's eyes all the complexities that make saving the bonobos difficult. In her attachment to Otto, the bonobo infant she rescues and assumes responsibility for, we see why saving the bonobos is so important. Her harrowing trek through the jungle with Otto and the constant threats they endure make the book impossible to put down. The perils Sophie and Otto face reveal in microcosm the precarious state in which the people of the Congo exist.

Endangered is a riveting, realistic survival, adventure, coming-of-age story. The nail-biting suspense is smoothly fused with historical information on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and beautiful descriptions of the geography. I really appreciated that author, Eliot Schreier, did not idealize the efforts to save endangered species or simplify the complex problems in wartorn, poverty ridden Democratic Republic of the Congo. As protagonist Sophie quickly learns, nothing ever has a simple solution or a simple cause. Like many 14 year olds, Sophie would rather spend her summer hanging out with her friends than her mother. She resents being forced to leave Miami to go live in the jungle of the Congo where her mother runs a sanctuary for bonobos. A sincere, but foolish, mistake on her first day in the Congo results in Sophie becoming a surrogate mother to a baby bonobo. Sophie did not plan on spending her summer babysitting, and little Otto requires almost 24 hour care. When a violent revolution erupts and the violence finds its way to the sanctuary, Sophie

refuses to abandon Otto and evacuate. Soon, Sophie is all alone surrounded by ruthless soldiers. She is determined to save herself and Otto. Sophie must use the bonobos as her teachers for jungle survival and her instincts to keep them all alive. Her chances of finding anyone to help them or a place safe from the violence are grim, but Sophie knows without her the bonobos are doomed. Sophie's commitment is admirable, but very close to suicidal. Luckily, she has Otto, and the other bonobos, as her protectors.

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