Gone Alaska, by Dave Barrett rev. by Gabriel Tan

Adelaide Books

*Gone Alaska,* written by Dave Barrett and published by Adelaide Books, is a story about a man named Adam Porter who travels to Alaska to find a living. He meets several unique and interesting people, such as Philip Swanson, Adam’s ‘boss’ for the story. Throughout the course of the book, Adam gets roughhoused by almost everyone he meets, until he eventually snaps and realizes what needs to be done. I believe that this book has a good amount of personality, and that it will appeal to a wide audience of readers. I definitely recommend this book as a read.

The way the author describes all the environments and the people is astoundingly good. The author uses descriptive language in such a way that it makes the reader imagine exactly what the author is trying to go for. All the environments, people and their feelings become extremely vivid, especially when those feelings are related to the main character Adam. The description of Phillip Swanson perfectly encapsulates how the book describes the people and the environments:

“His face had that granite quality which indicated he could be anywhere from thirty to fifty years of age. His skin was weathered as wood on an old boat; his eyes like two blue marbles that have been sanded so all that’s left is a chalky pale blue core.” (29)

This short description tells us everything we need to know about the face of Phillip Swanson, assuming that the reader has seen all the items in question. The author uses multiple descriptions like this further on in the book, from whether he is describing the environments or the people. This makes the scenarios of the book easier to imagine, and helps the reader experience the world in greater detail through Adam’s eyes. The constant use of metaphors allows the reader to easily understand what the person in question looks like.

While we follow Adam’s story, we experience the unfairness of his treatment, from how he is often beat for missing one small step, or how he is ridiculed for being different. We feel happy when Adam succeeds and frustrated when as encounter goes wrong. By using descriptive language, all the emotions that Adam feels are transferred onto the reader.

The environmental message the book claims to have is second to the overall plot of the book, the message being that once humans have no more resources to fight over, Earth will heal itself. It manages to get across to the reader without drawing too much from the main story. It is, for the most part, integrated seamlessly into the story, save for a few times. One such time is the discourse between Adam and China Harry, the fishmonger.

“Both sides are fighting over what’s left in the barrel. When this resource is exhausted, we’ll be fighting over another as yet unnamed one! It’s the human condition. It’s how we are as a species” (Barrett, 118).

This quote takes away from the scene itself. While the message behind this quote is not bad, the issue is that it does not reflect the excellent storytelling that the author was doing earlier. It would have been more beneficial for the book if this was integrated in a way where China Harry’s philosophy was implied rather than told. I’m personally a big believe of ‘show, don’t tell.’

The premise of the story itself is nothing new; a man wants to go out into the world searching for riches and finds disappointment instead. While the premise isn’t anything to write home about, the plot of the story keeps me hooked all the way through. With constant changes in tone and many climax points throughout, the story has much more tension than a book about fishing in Alaska should, not that it’s a bad thing. The tension adds onto the story itself, making sure that the reader’s eyes are continuously glued to the paper. The changes that Adam goes through is a good example of the tension shown throughout the book.

“…’Because I said so!’ Swanson interrupted. ‘This is my boat. If you don’t like it… pick up your gear and go. Right now. Just pick it up and go. The day I start letting a puller tell me what to do---'

‘I ain’t telling you what to do!’ I interrupted, raising my voice at Swanson for the first time. ‘Just let me know why we can’t throw the bloody fish across instead of me risking my neck jumping!’

Both of us were surprised by my sudden outburst. There was an awkward silence for several seconds as we looked at and away from each other at the same time” (Barrett, 105).

This passage is the first time Adam snaps back at Swanson in the whole book, more than two-thirds of the way through the book. Adam was described early on as a very meek human, only really making light jokes and obeying everything that his captain, Swanson, said. He only retaliated in his mind. It shows character growth for Adam. At this point, Adam has realized that he has become for stronger than he previously thought (in the previous chapter, he knocked out a bouncer), building his character. The fact that both Swanson and Adam were surprised by Adam’s outburst signifies that Swanson never thought that a ‘greenhorn’ would ever talk back to him, and that Adam didn’t think he had it him to talk back to Swanson. The aggressiveness of Swanson’s actions and words along with the language the author uses makes us feel exactly how Adam feels at this very moment; irritated and bewildered.

*Gone Alaska* has a certain charm that I haven’t seen in a while. It has a common message, but the message is subtle (for the most part) and is second to the book as a whole. The message encourages us to think more about the effects of overfishing on both the environment as well as on humans. Overall, *Gone Alaska* is a good book and certainly worth a read. I hope to see even better works from the author in the future.