



# Dawn of Fear

*Susan Cooper*

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## **Dawn of Fear** Susan Cooper

Derek and his friends, living outside of London during World War II, find plenty of opportunities to explore bomb craters, collect shrapnel, and identify the fighter planes that fly overhead. When a bomb hits close to school, causing classes to be canceled, the boys are overjoyed: They can spend the day building their secret camp.

But when their work on the camp is sabotaged, a tough neighboring gang is to blame. A violent clash with the rival gang—followed by a long night of bombing close at hand—change forever Derek's feelings about the war.

## **Dawn of Fear Details**

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Author : Susan Cooper

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# From Reader Review Dawn of Fear for online ebook

## Jess says

Rather different from usual war stories, Dawn of Fear presents us with a very civilian, almost humdrum take on World War II. Three boys, Derek, Peter and Geoffrey, go to school, build fortresses and fight with rival gangs against a backdrop of near-daily air raids and bombings. I thought the boys' childishness and emotions were very realistic, though as another reviewer has commented, the opportunity to inject more depth into the story comes too little, too late in this book.

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## James Lark says

Not as sensational as 'The Machine Gunners', less ostentatiously sophisticated than 'Fireweed', but of all the blitz stories I read as a child, this is the one that stuck with me most. It doesn't seem to have made it onto the popular lists of great WW2 children's literature, and unable to remember the title I hadn't tracked it down until stumbling across it in a library a couple of weeks ago. What an experience to find on every page images and events that have remained with me with incredible clarity after 28 years - though it's hardly surprising, given the simple effectiveness of the writing.

Perhaps it hasn't sustained a wider readership because, unlike other children's books with a WW2 setting, it doesn't have much of a 'hook' - there's no extraordinary inciting event, no unique selling point, it simply portrays the lives of three boys living through the blitz. Even that isn't sensationalised - they have grown up with bombs, so the nightly raids are merely a backdrop to their preoccupations of building a den, and their rivalry with the kids from a different street.

The clever trick Susan Cooper pulls is to show dawning adulthood creeping into these activities: awareness of conflict and violence doesn't come from Nazi bombs, it comes from their own squabbles, though the connection eventually becomes clear in the most gut-wrenching way.

It isn't showy, it isn't glamorous, but it's a sophisticated piece of writing, and in spite of the straightforward style, Cooper captures something immensely poignant about the way boys on the cusp of adolescence interact.

Worthy of a far wider audience (is it even in print any more?!).

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## Deborah O'Carroll says

DNF (did not finish)

I started reading this AGES ago--I was pretty young at the time--but I couldn't get into it and it was dark and depressing. It's a fictionalized semi-autobiography of the author's experiences as a child during the bombing of London in WWII, so, obviously horrific, the more so because it's largely true. For those interested in such things they might find it interesting. But it doesn't seem like it's for children, to me anyway, and... I don't know, it just wasn't for me I guess. I glanced at the end and it looked pretty sad so I decided not to finish.

Not rating it since I didn't read the whole thing.

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### **Sara says**

This book takes a bit to get up to speed but ultimately it does a good job of dealing with a very difficult topic. The book is about young boys during World War 2. Originally they are fascinated by the war but over the course of the book they learn to feel differently. It's a pretty gut-wrenching read as an adult but I couldn't say how it would go over with a younger crowd.

It's not my favorite Susan Cooper book but it was quite good.

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### **Catherine says**

As with other older treatments of childhood in World War II (such as *Carrie's War*), this book focuses on the day to day perspective of the children themselves and doesn't load onto the children insights and political views that they would very probably not have had. Nor does it set out to teach readers about rationing etc. It is just a story set in a particular time and place which is why it is so powerful. The three boys in this novel are highly convincing, including the ambivalent relationship of Derek and Geoffrey. Their daily comings and goings and excitement about the barrage balloons and days off school feel real, as does the occasional awareness of the danger of the war. The climax of the novel is stark and offers the reader no comfort or resolution. Overall, this could be a very effective way of opening up the life of a child during the war to a KS2 class though the lack of action might hinder access for some, particularly in the age of Alex Rider et al., and the writing and sentence construction could be a challenge to some. A teacher would need to be aware of the sudden ending. The book is not long and could work as a class book to support study of life in Britain during WW2.

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### **Hillary says**

I found this book to be very unappealing. First it was dry and didn't have anything that hooked me right away. Second, there was some awfulness that just seemed to grow and grow without much resolution. And yes, I do understand that most WWII books touch on terrible things, there always seems to be some light thrown in as well (at least for kids' books) but this was just lacking. Pure darkness with no redemption or explanation for its place in the story. I would not recommend.

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### **Sam Pope says**

I read this as part of research for an essay I am planning for my MA on representation of war in children's literature (particularly WW1 and WW2) as a possible contrast book against Robert Westall's work. There are elements in this that are similar to Westall's *The Machine Gunners* - mainly how children often create their own sense of war during times of conflict. In both books, children gather into groups and plan their own kind of Home Guard. In both, there is tragedy that affects the children directly, who are consistently and constantly bombed. However, while Westall's work has been criticized for being overly violent, there is a

sense of optimism at the end that isn't there in Dawn of Fear (I won't say any more for fear of spoiling it!). While Dawn of Fear is aimed at younger readers than The Machine Gunners, what unravels is potentially more distressing so I would take care when reading this with children younger than 10.

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### **Jim says**

this was a kick in the head.

one week in the life of a half dozen 10-12 year olds near London during ww2. not a nice story. made me thankful for not living during wartimes that affect me personally. this goes in depth about what "normal" life was like in Britian then. breakfast, play, radio programmes are natural part of the story.

the ending could have gone many ways, fortunately it didn't, it went true to the story.

just read the bio of Susan Cooper on goodreads. i assumed she wrote the book as an outsider, an american having well researched contemporary English life. she grew up in Britian, first woman to edit the Oxford university paper, wrote for Ian Fleming before coming to US and owning the Newbery medal for several years and marrying Hume Cronyn.

now i need to find out if she wrote an autobiography.

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### **Kirsten says**

I thought I should read some of Cooper's other books, besides The Dark is Rising series. This was really good. It mostly just goes along, tra la, slice-of-wartime-life, and then the ending really got me. So well done.

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### **Mathew says**

It has been a long time since I picked up a Susan Cooper book, the last being Over Sea, Under Stone. I thought Dawn of Fear was a wonderful story, partly autobiographical, in which Cooper follows the story of three friends who live under the constant threat of Nazi invasion. The story is set within the streets, homes and wilderness around the town within which they live and follows the boys' exploits as they go about creating their own shelter to protect themselves from the bombing.

What struck me was how insightful Cooper's writing and observations of childhood were. I caught myself thinking that the way the boys acted, the reasons why and the thoughts that Derek, the main character, has seemed 'right'. These are considerations that I had not reflected upon before reading this Signs of Childness in Children's Books but which have gone on to make my reading for more astute.

Told in chapters set as days rather than numbers, Cooper's tale is much cleverer than it first appears. Throughout, the idea of war is one of great emotional disconnect to Derek and his friends, it is only in a powerful moment that the reality of the event strikes home.

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## **Joy says**

I found this book interesting for a few chapters and the middle boring with a touching ending.

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## **Duane says**

Young Derek is trying to grow up during the bombing of London. He learns lessons about sacrifice and fear in a world we can't control. Overall, I was disappointed in this book. I never fell in love with the characters because they just never revealed themselves to me. The author tries to throw in some deepness at the end of the book, but it's too little too late. An extra thing, the artwork on the cover does not happen in the book, which I found interesting since I found the book to be a let down when it came to substance.

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## **P.D.R. Lindsay says**

Susan Cooper always writes well. This is one of her deceptively simple books. On the face of it the story is an uncomplicated children's story, but it is, as the title suggests, about learning what fear really is. For Derek and his friends, Peter and Geoffrey, think the war is, as Derek's father said of their attitude: 'Just a great game.' They continue to build their den, go to school, fight off the neighbouring street's children who destroy their den, and wonder, for there are undercurrents they sense the grown ups know about. Even the nightly air raids are adventures, not seriously scary.

Over the nine busy days of the story Derek changes from the boy who thinks war is exciting, who collects shrapnel and enjoys watching the dog fights, to one who understands war as destruction and death.

Susan Cooper's skills turn this difficult subject into one any child can understand. It is also a book which would give a youngster an understanding of what it was like during WWII, seen through the eyes of Derek, someone their age and a likeable character. Whilst I've made the novel sound like a history text, which it could be used for, in fact it is a cracking good read, as are all Susan Cooper's books.

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## **Cynthia Egbert says**

I promised myself that I would read some more books about WWII from the English citizen's perspective after I returned from my trip to the UK. This is the first in the line up of books that I have chosen. It is a young adult book but it is well written (as most youth literature is these days) and it is painful to read and yet beautiful. Susan Cooper has never yet disappointed me and I would recommend this book just as I have all of her others. But read it too, don't just give it to your children. It is one that should be discussed a wee bit.

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## **Nick says**

I read Susan Cooper's fantasy series, The Dark is Rising sequence, as a teenager, but don't remember if I ever read Dawn of Fear. At any rate, for some reason I kept this very slim volume when the Dark is Rising novels went to the charity shop. Having read it (again) now, I rather regret giving away the other books.

Dawn of Fear is the story of three fairly ordinary schoolboys who happen to be growing up at a very extraordinary time. Cooper draws on her own experiences of the 1939-1945 war and is very good at capturing the way it has distorted these children's sense of normality - air raids are tinged with excitement rather than fear, older teenagers going off to fight are hero-worshipped, games and fantasies revolve around weapons, ambushes and secret camps. Yet as the War draws closer to them, the children start to see terrifying glimpses of real, adult emotions: fear, grief and anger.

The plot hinges on one particularly powerful shock, one that changes the direction of the story. Cooper delivers this with substantial force, deliberately breaking the boundaries of what readers expect from a story about children, aimed at children. Reading as an adult, I expect it is more harrowing because we realise the full impact it has on the characters, the way it brutally and irretrievably marks the end of their innocence.

My edition was marketed as being for readers of ten and above, but Dawn of Fear is considerably darker and bleaker than most fiction intended for this age group. It is also rather brilliant. Not only is it a powerful evocation of the War from a child's eye view, keeping the experience alive for future generations lucky enough to experience nothing even remotely similar; it also tells a timeless story of lost innocence and the darkness that even children carry in their hearts.

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