



## City of Orphans

By Avi

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**Plot twists, big accusations, and plenty of shifty, crooked characters fill the pages of this harrowing adventure from Newbery Medalist Avi.**

The streets of 1893 New York are crowded and filthy. For thirteen-year-old newsboy Maks Geless, they are also dangerous. Bruno, leader of the awful Plug Ugly Gang, has set his sights on Maks and orders his boys to track him down. Suddenly Maks finds himself on the run, doing all he can to evade the gang, with only his new friend Willa by his side. And that's just the start of Mak's troubles. His sister, Emma, has been arrested and imprisoned for stealing a watch from the glamorous new Waldorf Hotel. Maks knows she didn't do it—but will he be able to prove it in time?

This is a riveting, quickly paced adventure set against a backdrop alive with the sights and sounds of tenement New York.

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### Editorial Review

Review

CITY OF ORPHANS

Written by Avi and Illustrated by Greg Ruth

(Atheneum; ISBN: 9781416971023; September 2011; Fall Catalog page 51)

"An immigrant family tries to survive crime, poverty and corruption in 1893 New York City. Earning enough money to cover the rent and basic needs in this year of economic panic is an endless struggle for every member of the family. Every penny counts, even the eight cents daily profit 13-year-old Maks earns by selling newspapers. Maks also must cope with violent attacks by a street gang and its vicious leader, who in turn is being manipulated by someone even more powerful. Now Maks' sister has been wrongly arrested for stealing a watch at her job in the glamorous Waldorf Hotel and is in the notorious Tombs prison awaiting trial. How will they prove her innocence? Maks finds help and friendship from Willa, a homeless street urchin, and Bartleby Donck, an eccentric lawyer. Avi's vivid recreation of the sights and sounds of that time and place is spot on, masterfully weaving accurate historical details with Maks' experiences as he encounters the city of sunshine and shadow. An omniscient narrator speaks directly to readers, establishing an immediacy that allows them to feel the characters' fears and worries and hopes. Heroic deeds, narrow escapes, dastardly villains, amazing coincidences and a family rich in love and hope are all part of an intricate and endlessly entertaining adventure. Terrific!"

-- Kirkus July 15, 2011 \*STAR

City of Orphans

Avi, illus. by Greg Ruth. S&S/Atheneum/Jackson, \$16.99 (368p) ISBN 978-1-4169-7102-3

Thirteen-year-old Maks Geless, the oldest son of Danish immigrants, makes eight cents a day hawking *The World* on Manhattan street corners in 1893. Newbery Medalist Avi tells his story in a vibrant, unsophisticated, present-tense voice (a typical chapter begins, "Okay, now it's the next day--Tuesday"), and it's a hard life. Maks's sister Agnes has TB, the shoe factory where Agnes and Mr. Geless work is suspending operations, and the grocer and landlord want their accounts paid. Then Maks's oldest sister, Emma, is accused of stealing from a guest at the Waldorf Hotel, where she is a maid. Amid this strife, the good-hearted Gelesses take in Willa, a homeless girl who saved Maks from a street gang. Maks and Willa must prove Emma's innocence, with the help of an odd, possibly dying detective (he's coughing up blood, too). The contrasts among Maks's family's squalid tenement existence; Emma's incarceration in the Tombs, the city's infamous prison; and the splendor of the Waldorf bring a stark portrait of 19th-century society to a terrifically exciting read, with Ruth's fine pencil portraits adding to the overall appeal. Ages 10-14. (Sept.)

--"Publishers Weekly", August 22, 2011, \*STAR

"Narrating in the present tense, Avi attempts a colloquial, first-person "Lemme tell you how it was" style not

normally found in books for middle graders. The opening, which describes Maks so vividly you feel that he's standing right in front of you, strikes the kind of friendly note bound to draw in the average reader. 'Now, this Maks, he's regular height for a 13-year-old, ruddy-faced, shaggy brown hair, always wearing a cloth cap, canvas jacket and trousers, plus decent boots.' In short, he's a 'newsie'...honest-to-goodness historical mysteries are hard to find, and Avi doles out his clues carefully, allowing children the chance to feel smart if they put two and two together."

-- "The New York Times Book Review"

"Like the intricate inner workings of a fine gold watch from a bygone era, Avi crafts a not-to-be-missed mystery/thriller yarn featuring a colorful cast of mugs and swells and set amidst the opulence and the poverty of nineteenth century Manhattan."

Richie's Picks <http://richiespicks.com>

City of Orphans.

Avi (Author), Ruth, Greg (Illustrator)

Sep 2011. 368 p. Simon & Schuster/Richard Jackson, hardcover, \$16.99. (9781416971023).

Dickensian street action comes to New York's Lower East Side in this gripping story, set in 1893, of newsboy Maks, 13, who feels "hungry twenty-five hours a day." After rescuing a filthy, homeless girl, Willa, Maks takes her to the crowded tenement he shares with his struggling Danish immigrant family. Pursued by Bruno, the leader of the Plug Ugly street gang, Maks is desperate to save his sister, Emma, who was imprisoned after being falsely accused of stealing a watch from the Waldorf Hotel, where she worked as a cleaner. Just as compelling as the fast-moving plot's twists and turns is the story's social realism, brought home by the contrasts between the overcrowded, unsanitary slums ("No water, gas, electricity") and the luxurious Waldorf. Then there are the unspeakable conditions in prison, where, even as a prisoner, Emma must pay for food. Avi writes in an immediate, third-person, present-tense voice, mostly from Maks' colloquial viewpoint ("He's full of heartache, but no one is seeing it"), with occasional switches to Willa and to the desperate young gangster leader. Threading together the drama are tense mysteries: Is Willa really an orphan? Who stole the watch? Pair this riveting historical novel with Linda Granfield's *97 Orchard Street, New York: Stories of Immigrant Life* (2001), a nonfiction account of Lower East Side tenements.

--"Booklist", August 1, 2011, \*STAR

#### About the Author

Avi is the author of more than seventy books for children and young adults, including the 2003 Newbery medal winner *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*. He has won two Newbery Honors and many other awards for his fiction. He lives with his family in Denver, Colorado. Visit him at [Avi-Writer.com](http://Avi-Writer.com).

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#### 1

Amazing things happen.

Look at someone on the street and you might never see that person again—*ever*. Then you bump into a stranger and your whole life changes—*forever*. See what I'm saying? It's all 'bout them words: "luck," "chance," "coincidence," "accident," "quirk," "miracle," plus a lot of words I'm guessing I don't even know.

But the thing is, I got a story that could use *all* them words. 'Bout a kid by the name of Maks Geless. That's Maks, with a *k*. M-a-k-s.

Now, this Maks, he's regular height for a thirteen-year-old, ruddy-faced, shaggy brown hair, always wearing a cloth cap, canvas jacket, and trousers, plus decent boots. He's a newsboy—what they call a "newsie." So he's holding up a copy of the New York City newspaper *The World*, and he's shouting, "Extra! Extra! Read all 'bout it! 'Murder at the Waldorf. Terrible Struggle with a Crazy Man! Two Men Killed!' Read it in *The World!* The world's greatest newspaper. Just two cents!"

Now, not everything gets into the papers, right? But see, the only one who knows what really happened up at the Waldorf is . . . Maks.

You're thinking, how could this kid—this newsie—know?

I'll tell you.

This story starts on Monday, October 9, 1893. That's five days *before* the day of that headline you just heard. It's early evening, the night getting nippy. Electric streetlamps just starting to glow. In other words, the long workday is winking.

Not for Maks. He's still on his regular corner, Hester Street and the Bowery. Been peddling *The World* for *five* hours and has sold thirty-nine papers. Sell one more and he'll have bailed his whole bundle. Do that and he'll have eighty cents in his pocket.

Now listen hard, 'cause this is important.

In 1893 newsies buy their papers and *then* sell 'em. So next day's bundle is gonna cost Maks seventy-two cents. *Then* he sells 'em for two cents each. Means, for his five hours' work, he'll earn a whole eight cents. Not much, you say? Hey, these days, six cents buys you a can of pork and beans, enough eats for a day, which is more than some people gets.

You're probably thinking, eight pennies—that ain't hardly worth working all them hours. But this is 1893. These are hard times. Factories closing. Workers laid off. Not many jobs. Housing not easy to find. Fact, people are calling these days the "Great Panic of 1893." And the thing is, Maks's family's rent is due *this*

week. Fifteen bucks! For them, that's huge.

All I'm saying is, Maks's family needs him to earn his share, which is—you guessed it—eight cents a day.

Now, most days when Maks finishes selling his papers, he likes staying in the neighborhood to see how his newsie pals have done. Don't forget, this is New York City. The Lower East Side. Something always happening.

This night all Maks wants to do is to get home and eat. No surprise; he's hungry twenty-five hours a day, eight days a week. And last time he ate was breakfast—a roll and a bowl of coffee-milk.

So Maks holds up his last newspaper and gives it his best bark: "Extra! Extra! Read all 'bout it! 'Joe Gorker, Political Boss, Accused of Stealing Millions from City! Trial Date Set! Others Arrested!' Read it in *The World!* World's greatest newspaper. Just two cents! Only two cents!"

Sure, sometimes crying headlines, Maks gets to head doodling that someday *he'll* be in the paper for doing something great, like maybe making a flying machine. So *The World* would pop *his* picture on its first page, like this here mug Joe Gorker. Then Maks reminds himself that his job is selling the news, not being it. Besides, *The World* is always laying down lines 'bout Joe Gorker, screaming that the guy is a grifter-grafter so crooked that he could pass for a pretzel.

Anyway, Maks's shout works 'cause next moment, a fancy gent—top hat, handlebar mustache, starched white collar, what some people call a "swell stiff"—wags a finger at him.

Maks runs over.

The guy shows a nickel. "Got change, kid?"

"Sorry, sir. No, sir."

I know: Maks may be my hero, but he ain't no saint. Like I told you, for him, pennies are big. Needs all he can get.

"Fine," says the swell. "Keep the change."

"Thank you, sir!" Maks says as he slings his last sheet to this guy.

The guy walks off, reading the headlines.

Maks, telling himself his day is done, pops the nickel into his pocket. Except no sooner does he do that than who does he see?

He sees Bruno.

This Bruno is one serious nasty fella. Taller than Maks by a head, his face is sprinkled with peach fuzz, greasy red hair flopping over his eyes, one of which is squinty, and on his head he's got a tipped-back brown derby, which makes his ears stick out like cute cauliflowers.

But the thing is, Bruno may be only seventeen years old, but he's head of the Plug Ugly Gang. Lately, Bruno

and his gang have been slamming *World* newsies, beating 'em up, stealing their money, burning their papers.

So Maks knows if Bruno is giving him the eye, things gonna be bad. And it's not just 'bout being robbed. If Maks loses his money, he ain't gonna be able to buy papers for next day. No papers, no *more* money *and* the family rent don't get paid. In other words, no choice. Maks has to get home with his money.

Trouble is, his home is a three-room tenement flat over to Birmingham Street, near the East River. That's fifteen big blocks away, which, right now, feels as far as the North Pole.

In other words, if Maks wants to keep his money, he's gonna have to either outrun that Plug Ugly or fight him.

Don't know 'bout you, but Maks would rather run.

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Enrique Myers:**

What do you think about book? It is just for students since they're still students or this for all people in the world, the actual best subject for that? Only you can be answered for that question above. Every person has distinct personality and hobby for each and every other. Don't to be pushed someone or something that they don't need do that. You must know how great and also important the book *City of Orphans*. All type of book would you see on many methods. You can look for the internet solutions or other social media.

#### **David Carson:**

Many people spending their moment by playing outside together with friends, fun activity together with family or just watching TV all day long. You can have new activity to shell out your whole day by studying a book. Ugh, you think reading a book can definitely hard because you have to use the book everywhere? It alright you can have the e-book, getting everywhere you want in your Cell phone. Like *City of Orphans* which is getting the e-book version. So , try out this book? Let's see.

#### **Muriel Carpenter:**

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