



The following titles have been reviewed in the November 2011 issue of
The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books:

Starmer, Aaron *The Only Ones*. Delacorte, 2011 [336p] Library ed. ISBN 978-0-385-90839-9 \$20.99 Trade ed. ISBN 978-0-385-74043-2 \$17.99 E-book ed. ISBN 978-0-375-89919-5 \$17.99
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 5-7

In this curious mix of gritty apocalyptic story and whimsical, creative time-travel fable, a boy named Martin must face the way one person's actions, however well intentioned, can literally change the world.

Martin is one of a small number of children still struggling to accept the fact that they have been left behind after nearly all of humanity has disappeared. The few remaining kids all find themselves drawn to one town, Xibalba, where they figure out who they are without parental and family influence, think about ways they can get all the people back (and what could have happened to them), and struggle with notions of authority, power, and intelligence in situations that would have, in their old worlds, been handled by grownups. The balance between cautionary tale about the dangers of messing with the fabric of time and end-of-the-world survival story is sometimes an awkward one, but Starmer offers a group of kids so peculiar and vulnerable that they work in either scenario. They are useful props (with a wide mix of skills) to explain and resolve how the world got so empty, and their scrambling to live another day will lead readers to identify with their plights. The fact that there can be no true happy ending is tempered by many smaller successes and a well-integrated acknowledgment that priorities and notions of happiness adapt to make even minor victories worth savoring.

While this grim tale is not for everyone, thoughtful middle-schoolers who don't mind ambiguity and loss mixed into their futuristic adventures will find this a contemplative, engaging read. AS