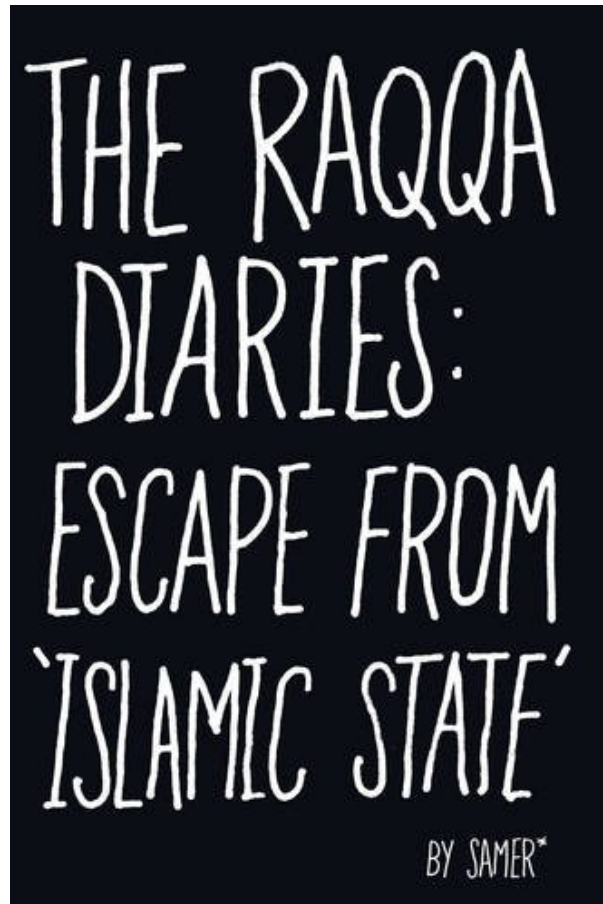
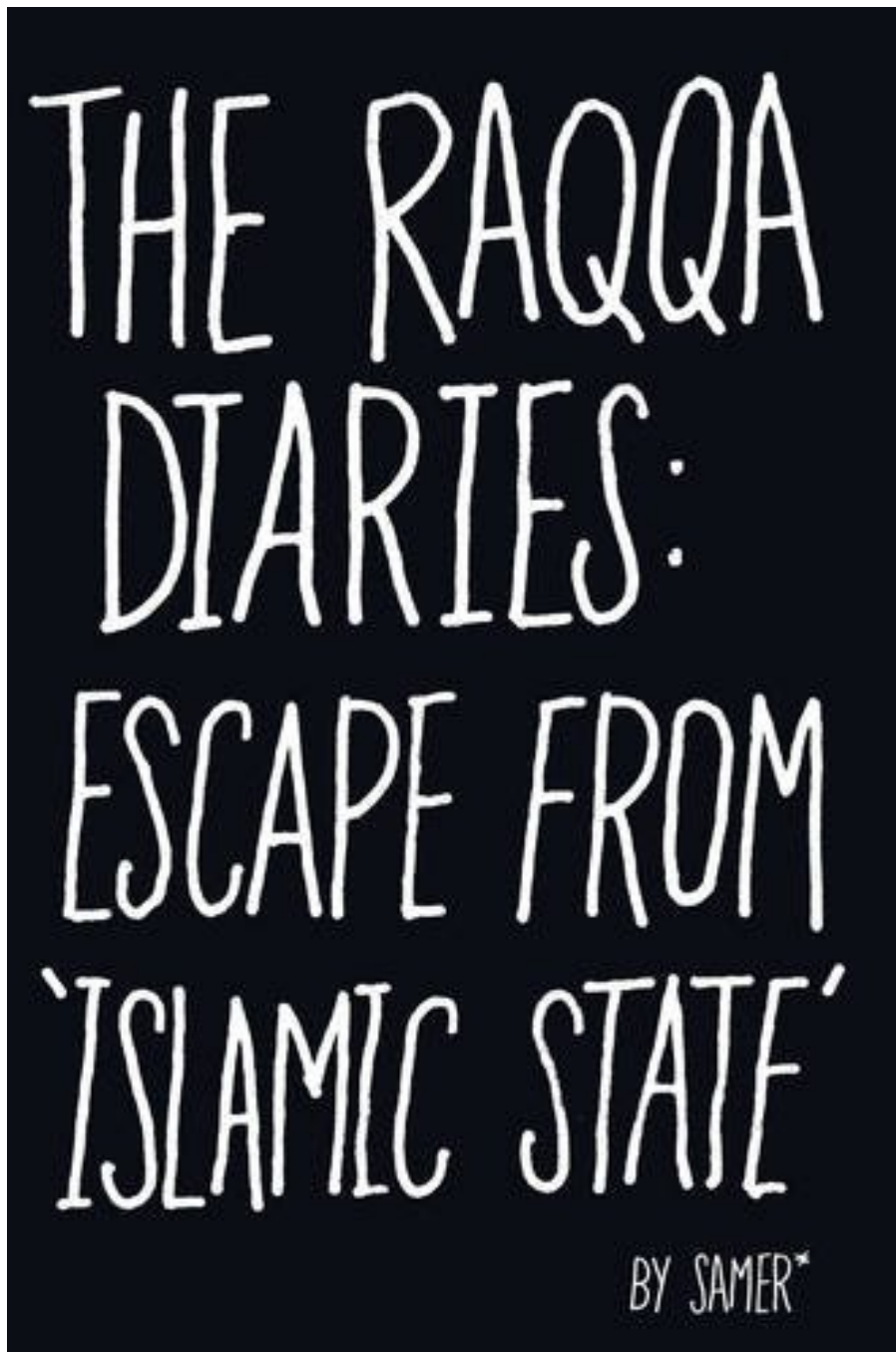


THE RAQQA DIARIES



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Review

"The fact that Samer was able, and indeed brave enough, to communicate with the outside world is an inspirational victory over bullies and oppressors. In the context of Islamic State's brutality Samer's quiet voice becomes a roar, a roar of defiance. His remarkably balanced account of terrible things and terrible times is the sound of civilisation. A clarion call to all of us that we should not give up. Somewhere there is a voice in the wreckage." -- Michael Palin

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From the Back Cover

An incredibly brave account of life inside one of the most isolated and fear ridden cities in the world. The Raqqa Diaries began as a series of short broadcasts on BBC Radio 4's Today Program. Now one of the most isolated and fear ridden cities on earth, no-one is allowed to speak to western journalists or leave Raqqa, without ISIS's permission. Those caught breaking the rules face death by beheading. Despite this, the BBC's Mike Thomson, with the help of the BBC Arabic Service, found a young man who is willing to risk his life to tell the world what is happening in his city. Part of a small anti-ISIS activist group, the diaries were written, encrypted, and sent to a third country before being translated. The diarist's father is killed and mother badly injured during an air strike; he is sentenced to 40 lashes for speaking out against a beheading; he sees a woman stoned to death. They show how every aspect of life is impacted?from the spiraling costs of food to dictating the acceptable length of a person's pants. At one point, the sale of televisions is banned. As Samer says, "it seems it's not enough to stop us talking to the outside world, now we can't even look at it." Having seen friends and relatives butchered, his community's life shattered, and the local economy ruined by these hate-fuelled extremists, Samer believes he's fighting back by telling the world what is happening to his beloved city. Raw, direct, and profoundly affecting, *The Raqqa Diaries* is an important book by a brave young man, which allows unprecedented access to the brutal conditions that many Syrians are living under.

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Samer is 24 years old. Having escaped from Raqqa he is living in a refugee camp in northern Syria.

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- Original language: English
- Dimensions: 8.11" h x .79" w x 5.47" l,
- Binding: Hardcover

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About the Author

Samer is 24 years old. Having escaped from Raqqa he is living in a refugee camp in northern Syria.

Most helpful customer reviews

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

A bit let down

By Nathalie Martin

I purchased the kindle version of this book. Honestly I was a bit let down. The book is vague in some parts, incomplete in others: he tells of trying to find a doctor for his sister but doesn't complete the story. He leaves us with a bleeding sister. He gets lashed but say anything about it felt or how he treated himself. Too brief and "factual".

Elsewhere, historical context seems added later. While this is a diary there is almost no dialogue. The parts about getting organised with other people felt too textbook that I'm wondering how much was added later by the editor.

Overall the book doesn't bring many new elements: the beheadings etc were all reported in the media. I wanted more details like it how was perceived because Samer is a first person narrator whereas the book feels more "reported" or written at a later time.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Hard to read, unbearable to write, unimaginable to live through

By Lady Fancifull

This is one of those books that any reader must wish had never needed to be written. 'Samer' is the pseudonym of a young man, living in Raqqa, who was part of a resistance group within Syria, struggling to survive under the harshness of the Assad regime, and then struggling to survive after Daesh captured the city. The small group he belonged to were endeavouring to let people in the outside world know what their terrifying existence had become.

In Raqqa controlled by Daesh, communicating with the western media is punishable by beheading. And of course, Western journalists are not allowed into the city. Those who are determined that the outside world should be aware of what their lives are like are in permanent danger of discovery, permanent danger of death, and also place their families in danger. It is a vicious choice to have to make, bearing witness seems the only possibility of any kind of less bleak future. The activist group Samer belonged to had made contact with the BBC. Samer's resistance was to keep a journal of events (something, of course, punishable by death)

The journal was published after his escape from Raqqa – his present whereabouts are in a refugee camp in

northern Syria.

I received this as a digital review copy

Samer tells the bleakness of his country's present story simply. Too much of what happens is unbearable to linger on, and, living amid horror I suspect that allowing full realisation in would make surviving impossible. There is only so much pain which can be borne. Here is the experience of one who should have been an ordinary young man, one who loves his country, his family, his friends, his religion, one with ordinary hopes for an ordinary future. Exceptional events, orchestrated by terrible people, have forced ordinary people into making heartbreaking choices - for Samer, telling this story meant a certain death, and leaving his country, his family, his friends, was the hard choice. Resistance is the act of bearing witness.

Line drawings by Scott Coello are similarly spare. Samer's diary is translated by Nader Ibrahim. Excerpts were originally broadcast on Radio 4.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Hell on Earth

By A. E. Thomas

“The Raqqa Diaries: Escape from Islamic State” by a young man with the alias of Samer, is a heart-wrenching account of his life in Raqqa before and after it was taken over by Daesh. He also describes how he escaped from the city and made his way to a refugee camp in northern Syria.

As he said, life was not easy before the war began. The Assad regime had been in place for 40 years or more and many people hoped to see the end of it. However, the rebels were unable to hold Raqqa, which was then overrun by Daesh. Life under the so-called Islamic State was horrific. Samer saw so many dreadful sights – executions, some carried out by children; women being stoned to death; men arrested for wearing their trousers too short.

Under this regime, the people of Raqqa became poorer and more despairing by the day. Many feared for their lives. Men, especially, were suspected of being revolutionaries and there was the daily expectation of being picked up and executed.

I was interested to read that Samer decided to escape from the city that he loves at the insistence of his mother. She was terrified that he would die at the hands of Daesh. Maybe this is the answer to the question that I have heard raised as to why there are so many young men who are fleeing from Syria; their families wish them to survive rather than face the daily prospect of execution.

This is a book that one can read quickly, but it should be read. Lives were risked so that we could have a glimpse of life inside Raqqa. I think we owe it to Samer and all involved in this.

Thank you to NetGalley for the opportunity to read this harrowing, but important, book.

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