

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

ELEVEN

Rogers, Tom

Alto Nido Press, LLC (200 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

A young boy's birthday falls on Sept. 11, 2001, in Rogers' riveting debut middle-grade novel.

There are two things that Alex Douglas loves more than anything else: dogs and airplanes. He's convinced that his 11th birthday will be the best ever because his parents have promised to get him a dog—if he proves he's responsible enough by getting better grades. But the day before his birthday, he realizes that he didn't hold up his end of the bargain. Worse, he has an awful fight about it with his father, ending it with three regrettable words: "I hate you." Alex's birthday seems back on track the next morning after he has a pancake breakfast. But then school bully Jordan smashes his cupcakes on the bus, and later, school lets out early without explanation before Alex's birthday celebration. He must take care of his little sister until their mother, a nurse, gets home, but it gives him a chance to track down a stray dog, with whom he connects immediately. Then he finally hears the news that terrorists have crashed planes into the World Trade Center. All Alex can think about is his dad, who drives the PATH commuter train to the twin towers, and what he can do to bring him home safely. Rogers displays deft insight into the 11-year-old mind, and by alternating chapters among Alex, an older man named Mac and a mysterious "Man in the White Shirt" at the World Trade Center, he makes Alex's legitimate worries, and the story as a whole, much more intense. Young readers will easily sympathize with Alex as they're drawn into the terror of an event that, most likely, happened before they were born. As a result, the book may help them understand that tragedy's personal side. Overall, it's perfect for young readers who enjoy survival or disaster novels or for classrooms hoping to explore this event in recent history.

A touching, terrifying book about family, growing up and an event that shook the United States.

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