



Bingo's Run

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Meet Bingo, the greatest drug runner in the slums of Kibera, Nairobi, and maybe the world. A teenage grifter, often mistaken for a younger boy, he faithfully serves Wolf, the drug lord of Kibera. Bingo spends his days throwing rocks at Krazi Hari, the prophet of Kibera's garbage mound, "lipping" safari tourists of their cash, and hanging out with his best friend, Slo-George, a taciturn fellow whose girth is a mystery to Bingo in a place where there is never enough food. Bingo earns his keep by running "white" to a host of clients, including Thomas Hunsa, a reclusive artist whose paintings, rooted in African tradition, move him. But when Bingo witnesses a drug-related murder and Wolf sends him to an orphanage for "protection," Bingo's life changes and he learns that life itself is the "run."

Bingo's Run Details

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Author : James A. Levine

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From Reader Review Bingo's Run for online ebook

Julia says

I didn't really like this book much at the beginning. Bingo's life is centered among the most corrupt and vile people. Bingo is an orphan and a drug runner. BUT...as the story unfolded, I began to love the characters in this book - The African Picasso Hunsa, The Philosopher Krazi Hari, Slo-George, Colette Steele, Charity, and Bingo, of course! As lovable as these characters are, the villains are particularly loathsome. I found myself routing for Bingo and Colette as I raced through the African underworld in a twisty tale where the law of the land is hustle or be hustled. This story, both cruel and beautiful, is a heartwarming story of redemption. The characters are sure to stay with you.

Arlene Corbin says

One of the best books I have ever read. It is about the youth in Kenya and very interesting

Lucy Coe says

I really liked the beginning of this novel but it went somewhere totally unexpected and much less interesting. Bingo's ability to manipulate his circumstance is often impressive and actually endearing, despite it usually involving crime. Unfortunately, it turned in to some weird American-saviour piece. I enjoyed the writing and there were some lines in there that definitely stuck ("When you plow nothing you get nothing, but I still wanted to) and helped me feel an intimate understanding with the main character in a way most authors can easily fail to do. Getting through the entire book, though, became tiresome and unpleasant. Every aspect prior to Bingo's interaction with his American saviour is more interesting than what happens after, because it goes from being about this kid's life to something else. And reading the majority of this in one sitting really helped to underscore some odd shifts in behavior.

Dayna says

I almost chucked this after the 1st few chapters but am glad that I didn't. I enjoy picaresque novels, and the open-ended dénouement was perfect; it would have seemed too Disney if he had landed in the US. Some of the events seemed implausible or forced; seriously, any kid in that situation probably would not have made it to a double-digit age. The chapters seemed structured like screenplay scenes, so perhaps Bingo will end up in Hollywood.

Busy says

Definitely read the audiobook. The narrator is PERFECT, even putting a melody to songs heard on the radio. This was the kind of book that is served very well by being read out loud.

Plot wise this book gave me whiplash! But in a fun, unpredictable way that puts a smile on your face. Parts may feel a little half baked, a little red herring, but as it progresses you see that the story has more layers and moving parts than the giant trash pile. I thought it was a really good time. Wish the ending wasn't so vague though!

Belinda says

I really enjoyed the voice talent Peter Macoo that narrated this audiobook. Gives some insights to the struggles of poverty and how people find themselves in dire situations time and time again.

Anne says

"But I start each day as I left the last - just me, Bingo. I carry nothing of yesterday. The past weighs you down; too much past and you stop. I am Bingo. I am a runner; the greatest runner in Kibera, Nairobi, and probably the world."

"I thought how quiet it must be under the blanket of the tarmac. There, everything is silence. But life is not that simple. Show me one road where the tarmac is smooth and even. You cannot. We are driven over so much that every road is cracked. No one knows quiet peace."

"Time to Hunsa was like the color of a car before it explodes - not that important."

"'The other way,' she said, and pointed her hoof down Salome Road. 'You will hear tha music. Then jus' follow the noise of Satan screamin.'"

"'Mr. Mwolo, would you care to hear a story my mother used to tell me?"

'Na,' I said.

'Then I shall tell it to the lampshade,' she said."

"That was Charity's kiss, the sweetest bliss. She had kissed a person that lived under my skin. I was not sure that I knew that Bingo, but I wanted to know him better; I wanted her to kiss him more."

"It makes big problems when too many people can read."

"The reason people rush is that they know they are going to die. If people lived forever, they would walk everywhere and never hurry."

Amy says

In this humorous and poignant tale, a cheeky young narrator gives an eye-opening account of life in Nairobi's slums, as he survives by his wits as a drug runner while striving for something more.

Rachel says

It took me a little while to get into this, probably because it is told from the point of view of a 13 year drug runner in Nairobi, so quite a different perspective than I'm used to. In the end I was very glad I read it. Lots of twists and turns, descriptions of slums and orphanages, interlaced with folktales filled with hidden wisdom.

Josie says

Rapidly becoming a fan of James A. Levine! I read his first novel "The Blue Notebook" earlier in the year for this same challenge.

Bingo's run was very different, yet the same captivating spell was cast and this book had me hooked!

I found Bingo to be endearing and even though the book made no apologies for his crimes and you couldn't help but fall for this hustler in Nairobi slum life.

The American saviour turn in the story almost spoiled things, but all in all I really enjoyed this book.

Lisa Cook says

Finally the last of the Alex Winners. Phew!

This book was all over the freaking place. I loved the beginning and then had so many moments of, "wait, what?!" that I found it hard to finish this novel. *Bingo's Run* tells the story of a teenaged drug runner in Nairobi. With a terrible past, and frankly, a terrible present, he does what he can to survive and swears excessively in the process. Then there's a drugged-out master artist? Then there's a murder? Then there's an orphanage? Then there's a white woman who wants to adopt Bingo? Then there's a hotel maid? Ugh. I got tired of keeping track of the "And then's." This book had a lot of potential at the start, but it was trying to do too much and ended up a failure because of that. Great voice, but that was not enough to keep the story going.

Heidi says

Deeply troubling and heartbreaking, but worth seeing it through.

Martin Hamilton says

An unexpectedly enjoyable book with a thoroughly original main character.

Briane Pagel says

I am a sucker for stories about, or set in, Africa. I don't think I've ever read a bad one -- from *Into the Out Of* by Alan Dean Foster to *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver to many, many more, if a story is set in Africa it's going to make my list to read.

Bingo's Run is the latest Africa story, and it did not disappoint. I stumbled across *Bingo's Run* while I was browsing around for a new (audio)book after finishing *The Golem* and *The Jinni*, having never heard of the book or the author before. From the first line ("I am Bingo Mwolo. I am the greatest runner in Kibera, Nairobi, and probably the world") I was hooked.

Bingo's Run follows Bingo as he moves from being a drug runner to potentially an art dealer worth millions to almost dying: At the outset, Bingo introduces us to his life as a slum kid in Nairobi. His days begin with him and Slow George, his possibly-retarded friend, stealing some food from the market, then throwing rocks at a crazy bum at the dump before Bingo goes to his boss, Wolf, a relatively-higher-up in a drug trade. Bingo's job is to run drugs to various buyers around Kibera and Nairobi, and he is, as he says, the best at it.

The story gets into motion when Bingo sees Wolf murder another dealer, and Bingo absconds with a briefcase holding \$200,000. He ends up at an orphanage run by a crooked priest, and then, rather suddenly, adopted by a rich art dealer from the US.

To say more would spoil the rest of the story, which is full of twists and turns, double-crosses, arguments, sneaky maids, mysterious characters, corruption, and African legends. It's phenomenal. The story itself is gripping, but the atmosphere the author, James Levine, creates moves the story above 'really good' into great. Through Bingo's eyes we see the slums of Kibera and the fancy hotels frequented by tourists, the insanity of artists in Nairobi, the grim reality of African jails and orphanages, and through Bingo's thoughts we get the confusion of a young boy trying to make sense of a world that's already chaotic and just gets more bewildering.

Bingo's own memories are parceled out through the story, along with what I took to be an African legend about the dawn of the human race, and his life is sad: he recalls spending time with his grandfather before the "gang boys" killed most of the village and forced his mom to flee -- and his memory of what then happened to his mom and how he feels about her is devastating. His friendship with Slow George is a wonder, and when the two get in an argument midway through the story I felt genuine anguish over it.

The ending to the story is, somehow, *Gatsby*-esque, and that's all I'll say about it: It evokes the ending of *The Great Gatsby* while being nothing like it at all, if that's possible.

)One thing that I find amazing is that the author was able to craft Bingo's life with what appears to be spot-on accuracy, from the language to the details of the city buses to everything, really; I'd assumed the author must be from Kenya or live there or something, but when I went to look up James Levine, I found out he's an English doctor who's now a professor of medicine at the Mayo Clinic. It seems his experience with Kenya comes from working with impoverished children, and PBS says he's also a "slam poetry champion." (He also wrote a book about how bad sitting is for you, I saw, which means he would likely take a dim view of what is pretty much my only form of exercise.) Plus he invented the treadmill desk. Levine himself seems about as interesting as his books: he used to drive around Cleveland at 2 a.m. and talk to drug dealers about diabetes.)

But back to *Bingo's Run*. Here's how gripping the end of the story was. Every night, I take Mr F for his

nightly ride to calm him down enough to go to sleep. The usual route takes 26 minutes; a slight hitch can turn it into a 32 minute ride. But after the first 32 minutes, the story was so close to the end and getting so great that I looped us around another 1 1/2 times so we could hear the end and find out what happened without waiting until tonight.

Bingo's Run is one of those rare stories that I think everyone should read, even if you wouldn't ordinarily go for this kind of book. It's full of incredible, memorable characters, and has at least five scenes that you'll never forget. I may just buy the hard copy of it to have around.

Amy says

A good read for when you're feeling cynical. Everyone is a hustler in this story of Nairobi slum life. The police chief, the orphanage priest, the art gallery owner, maybe even the hotel cleaner. Certainly Bingo himself.

I'm not usually a fan of child narrators, but I fell for Bingo and his 13 commandments and the bits and pieces of fable-like stories that he remembered his grandfather telling him.

The best part of the book has to do with a contract that Bingo has a very unusual, street-side type of lawyer draft for him. The ups and downs of this contract are good fun, especially as a break from law school tales of contracts.
