



# Never Fall Down

Books Reviewed:

[Never Fall Down](#) [1]

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Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

0

This account of the life of Arn Chorn-Pond in the killing fields of Cambodia takes its readers into the darkest regions of human experience. It is not particularly graphic, given what is described, although the book's cover has an understandable warning to would-be readers about the disturbing nature of the content. This is a story of unrelenting brutality and of desperate survival, partly by cunning, partly by luck, and often by acquiescence and enforced collaboration in atrocity. Written as a novel, it is essentially a witness statement, unremitting in its honesty about the capacity of people to inflict the worst cruelties on each other and about the suffering of victims and what they will do to survive. It is the testimony of a remarkable survivor, taken into the countryside by the Khymer Rouge as a child and whose hard-won skill as a musician enabled him to cheat death, who has dedicated his life since to the cause of children caught up in war and the resurrection of traditional Cambodian arts and culture. While his story is a record of cruelty and degradation that is hard to read, his subsequent life and his belief in forgiveness and the common humanity of oppressor and victim is a testimony to how our best instincts can triumph over our worst. I find it impossible to judge this book as a novel, although Patricia McCormick and not Arn Chorn-Pond is its author and she has shaped the story so that it is within young people's understanding. McCormick has approached her subject as biographer, journalist and ghost-writer, supplementing Arn's own memories with those of other survivors and telling it in a version of Arn's own English voice. That the story rings true is a measure of her success. Somehow, to give it a star rating, seems to me a disrespect to her subject and to all those to whose fate he so effectively bears witness.

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