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Justice of the Dagger

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Watson's pedigree as a writer of political novels for young adults is impeccable. In novels still in print, he has written about the Spanish Civil War, Angola and the Junta's Chile. The Indonesian occupation of East Timor is his latest subject; although, as Watson makes clear in an epilogue, **Justice of the Dagger** is by no means a documentary. Rather, it is an action thriller of operatic intensity, whose young heroes - Muyu, the son of an indigenous chief and Lyana, the beautiful, educated survivor of a massacre - suffer and endure in forest nights dark with greed and cruelty. Watson's characters would not be out of place in *Tosca* or *Fidelio*: Colonel Selim, the brutal womaniser, who meets poetic justice from Lyana's blade; Hans Mueller, the greenbooted pacifist ecologist, whose supposed corpse is displayed by the resistance as a tableau of repression to a visiting United Nations delegation; Benni, the child spy on a bicycle, who sells information both to the army and the freedom fighters; and finally, Lieutenant Gani, the son of a general, turned from his mission to assassinate Mueller to become Lyana's lover. Nearly all the violence - there is a lot of it, including the castration - happens off-stage: and, while Watson is determined that the reader should recognise the terror that is taking place, his main intention is to make political points through dramatic set pieces, like the fevered dream in which Hans confronts the world leaders with their complicity or inaction in the situation in East Timor. This is a powerful, intelligent book which uses its chosen genre both to grip and incite its teenage readership.

Running Order:

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