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# Refugee Boy

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

14-year-old Alem, the product of an Ethiopian father and Eritrean mother, who is under constant threat from both sides of the warring factions at home, is brought to England by his father who abandons him tactically, knowing that he will be taken under the wings of 'compassionate people who understand why people have to seek refuge from war.' Inevitably the plot is interwoven with the various stages of his application for political asylum and, whilst awaiting the outcome, his placement with foster parents and his entry into the school system. British officialdom, the Refugee Council and Alem's white foster parents behave with impeccable civility, professionalism and warm-heartedness respectively and Zephaniah does well to weave an engaging human story with an exciting climax into otherwise routine bureaucratic procedures. There is a tendency for the author to spell out matters which perhaps could be best left to emerge subtly from the text as when Alem is described by his headmaster as '...one of the most conscientious, hard-working, intelligent people that I have ever met, and I've met a lot of people, young and old.' And too often one senses in the narrative that the characters are the mouthpieces for the author's own views (however progressive and appealing) as when Alem, making a speech at the same demonstration, displays a command of English and a maturity beyond his 14 years. Such excesses (which could have been avoided by more rigorous editing) are, however, more than offset by the book's positive message of racial and religious tolerance, peaceful living, the delights and benefits of multi-culturalism, and above all, its compassion for the plight of refugees, increasingly a burning issue in Britain and globally. This book may be flawed, but it tackles an important topic with humanity and sheds light on a topic too long shrouded in darkness.

Running Order:

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