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Inexcusable

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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When Keir seriously injures his opponent in a crucial tackle in a football game and acquires the nickname 'Killer?', he is worried; but not to the extent of questioning himself or those who congratulate him. After all, he was only doing what was expected of him, it seems to have earned him a place at a prestigious college, and it's turned him from an outsider to one of the in-crowd. From then on, as he enters into the period of semi-licensed mayhem that surrounds the end of high school, it is downhill to a tragic drink and drug induced rape of the girl who has become his closest friend.

This story, which was one of four finalists in the U.S. National Book Awards for Young People's Literature last year, is disturbing in many ways. It's Keir's own account of events, told in flashback as some kind of explanation. He is convinced that he is a good guy at heart, and every irresponsible and brutal act is reinterpreted or excused in this light. This would be disturbing enough if Keir was malicious, but actually he is vulnerable and weak; and his self-justification is doubly disturbing for all of us who have sometimes failed to recognise the real nature of our actions. Most disturbing, however, is the moral vacuum in Keir's life and, it appears, in the life of all the men who are his family and friends.

The novel is an indictment of the kind of adolescent behaviour that seems to be indulged, or even expected, as part of a rite of passage to manhood (and not just in the States); and, by implication, it is a condemnation of adult society's failure both to set boundaries or to seek to understand young people's needs. The novel reads like a perverse Pilgrim's Progress, and I sense the moral indignation that drives it. I have seen it described in one review as a tragi-comedy. I found nothing at all to laugh at. CB

Running Order:

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