



[Home](#) > Nowhere

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Books Reviewed:

[Nowhere](#) [1]

Issue:

[201](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Val Randall](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

This novel has an intriguing premise-one hundred teenagers from all over the country are locked away in a concrete cube of a prison in a dense, isolated forest. They have committed no crime but their punishment is designed to break their mind-set until they believe they have and so must repent. The story centres on Alyn, Jes, Ryan, Elsa and Julian and follows their attempts to escape before they, too, succumb to the brainwashing which has stripped the other inmates of their will to resist.

Tension is well-held as the reader knows no more than the inmates about the reason for their imprisonment. Robinson gradually introduces a dual narrative in which he slowly reveals that the political skulduggery which has created the prison is an attempt to allay public fears that society is on the verge of anarchy, offering the teenage prisoners as sacrifices to boost government popularity. Here, as elsewhere in the book, there are uncomfortable resonances with contemporary society.

The narrative explores both the physical and psychological tortures which the prisoners endure and offers convincing, boldly-drawn characters whose will to survive is particularly moving in the face of government manipulation and corruption and the readers' knowledge that they can never really triumph. There are those, like Julian, who have their own personal agenda but who learn to contribute to the group's attempts to escape.

The epilogue which ends the book is depressingly realistic - despite the turmoil caused by the five escapees there is a ruthless determination from the authorities to suppress that knowledge and repair the damage at any cost. The tiny seed of hope planted by the escape provides an intriguing sliver of optimism but the cynics among the book's readers may well feel that things were ever thus in terms of political corruption and unlikely to change. What is celebrated here is the resilience of the human spirit, against all the odds.

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