



Bitter Chocolate

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Here Sally Grindley turns her attention to children in troubled West Africa. Two phases of Pascal's short life are gradually revealed: his present hand to mouth existence as a worker on a cocoa plantation, little more than a slave; and his past as a victim of civil war in which his family has been lost, probably killed, and he has been kidnapped to serve as a child soldier. The real experience of children like Pascal would make disturbing reading even for adults, and Grindley has been careful to keep this story within the understanding and emotional capacity of a nine- or ten-year-old unacquainted with such cruelty, which means that the worst aspects of Pascal's experience are left to the reader's imagination. This literary anaesthesia sometimes makes the story less credible and, paradoxically, more documentary than fiction, but avoids treating Pascal's suffering either as adventure or as serial atrocity. Pascal and his friends are not just victims but children with their own hopes and fears, who can act on their own behalf, as they do to escape the plantation at the close of the book, but whose fate ultimately is not in their own hands. There is some clumsiness in the book ? the plantation overseers are given ungrammatical speech to highlight their brutality ? but generally it is a well constructed, well informed and sensitive attempt to convey the lives of children in crisis so that other children will understand and empathise.

Running Order:

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