



Noble Conflict

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Kasper is thrilled to have been accepted into the elite peacekeeping force, the Guardians. It is all he has ever wanted; after all his mother was one, and died doing her duty. The enemy are the Crusaders, rebels who through their Insurgents, commit dreadful acts of terrorism with no respect for life. The Guardians themselves do not kill; their weapons are stun guns. However, a series of attacks followed by a chance encounter with Rhea, an Insurgent, make Kasper aware of anomalies in the story he has been told. He embarks on a journey to find out what is going on, and makes some very uncomfortable discoveries.

Malorie Blackman's latest novel for young adults will have her readers turning the pages well after lights out. Plenty of dialogue, contemporary vocabulary, a specialist military force, a detective story involving computers - and two very likeable protagonists, all ingredients to ensure a very satisfied audience.

Blackman is adept at locking into the world of the modern teenager. Here she sets her novel in a dystopian future, a world that will be recognisable to those familiar with films such as **Starship Troopers** (even if they are unaware of the book that inspired it), while the language and action looks to movies such as **Die Hard**. However, as always Blackman has a purpose. As with her previous novels which have covered such issues a racism, teenage parenthood and organ donation, here she looks at questions of state control, the truths we are given to believe, attitudes toward others, violence and torture. These are hard hitting issues and Blackman is characteristically direct in her presentation - the description of what is done to captured Insurgents is not for the squeamish. She never, however, loses sight of her young audience. She is able to enter the world of the tightly controlled team, where obedience to orders is paramount and opinions often extreme. In this case it is military, but readers, especially boys, will be able to see parallels in school or sport. Kasper as the main protagonist has all the qualities of the young hero while Rhea and Mac are girls with attitude, the former a ninja style Insurgent, the latter an IT whizz - and a book reader. The conflict between the two groups, The Alliance, so humanitarian in its stance, and the Crusaders, is presented uncompromisingly - so the reveal is all the more effective. However, there is little room for ambiguity and it is only with the character of Voss, leader of the elite Guardians and Mac's father, that there is any hint of complexity. Young readers who are aware of current affairs will easily make connections with the world today, for others Blackman introduces these ideas in a way that encourages thought without making difficult stylistic demands.

Malorie Blackman is an author with a high profile, now enhanced by her recent appointment as Children's Laureate; expectations will be high. **Noble Conflict** does not disappoint. It will satisfy those who have read her other books and will ensure new fans. The themes could lead to recommendations to read **Here lies Arthur**, **Out of Shadows** and on to **1984** and **The Handmaid's Tale**.

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