



Concentr8

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Set in contemporary London, this novel imagines a time when disruptive pupils are routinely fed a calming drug called Concentr8. Any resemblance between this and Ritalin, today's actual calming drug of choice, is entirely deliberate. Each chapter starts with extracts from recent authoritative articles or books detailing the alarming rise in prescriptions for Ritalin among the young, particularly in America but also over here.

The story starts just after the government, for reasons that are never made clear, decides no longer to support mass dosages of Concentr8 to pupils selected by their head-teachers as prime candidates for chemical calming down. The result is a riot where shops are looted and buildings vandalised. But a gang of five teenagers has other ideas, kidnapping a local government officer and taking him to their urban hide-away. They treat him pitilessly, with Blaze, their leader, particularly heartless. The rest of the novel continues to be told as if by the different characters concerned as things hot up and the young kidnapers find themselves besieged by the police.

Told entirely in the first person, the various accounts provided by the disaffected youths in this story of their miserable childhoods are convincing enough but there is too much of them. These gang members are also so weak and nasty it is hard to feel sorry for them or their sad backgrounds. Sutcliffe tends to be equally unforgiving where other characters are concerned. The London Mayor, more like Boris Johnson than Boris himself, comes over as a buffoon rather than wily politician, and the police and journalists involved in the story are also sold short through their own utterances. With no character inspiring any respect readers' sympathies could become dangerously stretched. But the whole enterprise is saved by its entirely legitimate concern about ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) both as a diagnosis and in the way it is currently treated. That is why this is an important as well as an exciting story, despite its occasional excesses.

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