



Outwalkers

Books Reviewed:

[Outwalkers](#) [1]

Issue:

[228](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Nicholas Tucker](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Dystopia scenarios come in many fictional forms, but seldom as regionally based as here. In this tense story, a future England has been taken over by a wicked political cabal while over the border in Scotland ordinary decency still prevails. Brave orphan Jake, whose parents have been murdered because they knew too much, manages to break out from the sadistic boarding establishment which has become his new home. He then links up with a gang of strongly self supportive children intent on making it to the far North. Fiona Shaw describes their subsequent journey with relish, repeatedly making the point that face-recognition technology among other developments now makes it much easier for dictatorships to keep a tab on all and anyone. So the final escape by a gang of children plus dog, living rough and without friends, is little short of miraculous.

Shaw writes well, and there are some memorable passages, not least when the children try living underground in London for a while. There they explore disused tube stations while keeping a look out for other potentially dangerous occupants. But the author never quite explains why everything has gone so wrong. Why are the new state orphanages so very punitive, given that most of the other adults in this story still seem sane enough, apart from the dreaded ?Hubbers? manning the ever-present spying systems? And having the children finally bring down a tyrannous government in addition to making it over the border is surely taking several steps too far. Yet if the final version is both too long and too unlikely, there are still some excellent moments from a writer worth keeping a respectful eye on in the future.

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[1] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/outwalkers>

[2] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/228>

[3] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/nicholas-tucker>