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# A Nicer Way to Die

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

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Book

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A party of boys on a school trip abroad suffers an horrific accident. The survivors, in a claustrophobic adventure, discover evil and violence within themselves. And there the similarities with *Lord of the Flies* end.

16-year-old James and his step-brother Henry believe they are the only ones left alive after a coach crash in France. They stumble into a deserted chateau, but far from finding refuge there, James's energies are drained in fearful avoidance of Henry, who he believes plans to attack and even murder him. Through flashback chapters, the reasons for their mutual loathing emerge. James is an eloquent, if not entirely plausible narrator (and then, beyond an essence, a transcendent nothingness?). But then, these boys have advanced literary experiences for GCSE students: they've read *The Waste Land* and are studying *Hamlet*.

There are a couple of schoolboy fantasies here to stretch or maybe titillate a reader's belief: an English teacher who invites James up to her flat and tremulously pours out her sexual problems before guiding his hand to her breast; the transfixing horror of watching his mother make love to a man he finds repulsive? yes, it's the *Hamlet* problem. In fact, it is while acting the 'O my offence is rank' scene with Henry/Claudius in front of the class that James draws a kitchen knife on his step-brother. James is a Stephen King fan, and maybe readers sharing his enthusiasm will be riveted by Henry's taunting, menacing pursuit of his victim around the gloomy house. For me, the hunt seemed overlong, possibly because I found it difficult to be sufficiently engaged with these unfortunate, damaged boys. GF

Running Order:

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