



The Traitor Game

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Michael Thompson, a clever and imaginative teenager, has been so cruelly bullied at his comprehensive that his mother has secured him a place at a fee-paying independent school, St Anselm's. Hoping to ease his transfer, she contrives for him to meet a fellow-student, Francis Harris, before term starts. Michael's refuge from his former misery has been the creation of a secret imaginary world called Evgard, complete with its own geography, literature, medieval culture and tribal conflicts. When Francis stumbles on Michael's hidden archive, Michael fears yet more ridicule. Instead Francis becomes an enthusiastic fellow-creator of the Evgard world, and their friendship prospers until Michael finds evidence, as he thinks, that Francis has betrayed their secret. Mortified and vengeful, Michael then betrays Francis, lying viciously about him to malevolent pupils at St Anselm's, which has its own quota of bullies. The brutal consequences of Michael's action are reflected in a parallel narrative set in Evgard. A question asked tongue-in-cheek by Michael in the real world has resonance in both narratives: 'if you are torn equally between worlds, who will you owe allegiance to?' This is a double story of loyalty and betrayal.

The book carries a health warning: 'Contains strong language and some scenes not suitable for younger readers?'. The warning is justified, and affects the story. The incessant 'strong language?', much of it in Michael's confused and troubled thoughts, raises the psychological temperature of the real-life narrative to unconvincing levels, and in both plots there are graphic scenes of physical violence. The fantasy-narrative in Evgard is more successful than the novel's depiction of real life, but this is still an overheated book. But it perceptively reveals betrayal as inseparable from self-betrayal, and shows to powerful effect the ugly and corrosive damage caused by bullying.

Running Order:

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