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# The Call

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~~Not a Choice~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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The basic plot of this novel is certainly familiar. There's a boarding school which is training its teenage students for combat anticipating a time when they will find themselves naked and alone hunted through an unfamiliar landscape. But if the Hunger Games template is obvious, Peadar O'Guilin offers a compelling Celtic variation. The book is set in a future dystopian Ireland. The fairy folk, the Sidhe, were dispossessed of the island by humankind in the long distant past and banished to a parallel Grey Land. Not at all like those fairies photographed at the bottom of Edwardian gardens, they are re-asserting their claim to their former homeland in a brutally effective manner by slaughtering the young Irish one by one.

At some time in their adolescence, each person will be 'called' into the Grey Land to be hunted, tortured and killed, leaving behind only a pile of their clothes. They will return alive only if they can survive the hunt for more than a day in the Grey Land, which is three minutes in the human world. Very few do and even the dead are often returned hideously mutilated just to appal and terrify the living. The novel is structured around the friendships and rivalries in the school's Year 5, focused on two young people whose survival is the most precarious: Nessa, whose legs have been twisted by polio; and Anto who is a pacifist by conviction. At intervals, school life is interrupted as a student is 'called' and we see how each hunt plays out.

The situation is well developed. There's plenty of interest in the characters' school relationships, which, given the teenagers' likely fate, are, for good or ill, that much more intense. The Grey Land, its beautiful sadistic rulers and the misshapen creatures who do their bidding are all vividly realised. Each hunt runs its own dreadful course. And a sardonic, hard-edged narrative voice adds to the impression of young people living in the shadow of death. However, the frantic climax comes on rather suddenly and this reader, at least, would like to have discovered more about the Sidhe than just their ingenious cruelty. That might be remedied in the future, for the battle that closes the book leaves the war between human and Sidhe unresolved. There could well be more to come.

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