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I Am Thunder

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

No half measures ? this is an important as well as an immensely assured first novel. It revolves around bright but shy Muzna Saleem, the sixteen-year-old only child of Pakistani parents now settled in Britain. She battles at home with an over-ambitious father, who wants her to become a doctor whereas Muzna can only think about her writing. At her new school she adores her inspirational English teacher but has issues with her developing facial hair, thankfully brought under control after a visit to her local doctor. There is also Arif, a fabulously good-looking boy in her class she worships from afar until almost unbelievably it begins to seem that he might be interested in her too.

But what could seem up to this point yet another perceptive coming of age story takes off in its second half in a quite different direction when poor Muzna gets dangerously over-involved in what turns out to be a manipulative terrorist cell intent on bombing London. Tamely following Arif into what she thinks is merely an intensification of her own not very strong Muslim beliefs she ends up unable to withstand further and further demands putting her own family and other people in real danger. What happens after that is a sharp lesson in never allowing emotions to blind better moral judgment.

The author, a maths teacher in a London secondary school, draws brilliantly on his day to day knowledge of pupils like Muzna along with many others. But what could have been an overwhelmingly gloomy, soul-searching novel is enlivened throughout with witty dialogue, not least from Muzna herself. We are told that the very talented Muhammad Khan is to go on a creative writing course next year. On this evidence, he hardly needs to.

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