



The Fire of Ares

Books Reviewed:

[The Fire of Ares](#) [1]

Issue:

[170](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

2

The blurb on the back of my proof copy of Michael Ford's first children's novel prompts us to 'think Young Bond in a short leather skirt; think Caroline Lawrence meets **Gladiator!**' Neither of these odd visions fits the bill, although a transvestite 007 is probably in some writer's notebook somewhere. This is a boys' adventure set in Sparta, which concentrates on the brutal training that young men underwent to become warriors. There is a threadbare plot draped around these bare bones. Lysander is a Helot (slave) who wears a mysterious jewelled pendant that turns out to confer on him a heritage that's exalted even for a Spartan. In training, he is bullied both by the tutor and one of the other boys, to the point of nearly being thrown down a well and really being used as a target for javelin practice. Eventually and inevitably, he wins a trial of strength, skill and endurance against his main tormentor. The training regime has a dreadful fascination but there is little else in the novel that's interesting. The characterisation is thin; the mystery of the stolen pendant fails to grip; there is only a faint impression of Sparta as a functioning society (although plenty of incidental historical detail); and the ending, in which a slave uprising ends without bloodshed 'You have vanquished the Spartans today without shedding blood. This day will live on in their minds as the day the Helots spared them' is surely without precedent in ancient, and probably modern, history. A sequel follows later this year.

Running Order:

40

Source URL (retrieved on Oct '21): <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/170/childrens-books/reviews/the-fire-of-ares>

Links:

[1] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-fire-of-ares>

[2] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/170>

[3] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/clive-barnes>