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The Bombs that Brought Us Together

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

The bombs come in the first chapter of Brian Conaghan's fine novel, raining down on the residents of Little Town, while our hero 14 year old Charlie Law, squashed up with his mother and father, hides under a duvet, their only protection. It's a vivid scene, tense, frightening, but also, as described by Charlie, funny too. It sets the tone for the whole book.

Charlie has always lived in Little Town which has become a grim place to be. The government - the Regime - enforce strict rules, which make any form of association, or having fun it would seem, illegal. Charlie knows all the rules and follows them to the letter to avoid getting into trouble with the Rascals, a kind of secret illegal police. The Rascals, or people like them, control the lucrative black market too: most things - money, jobs, food, medicine - are pretty hard to come by in Little Town, unless you're prepared to deal with criminals. Things are different next door in Old Country. They have buckets of money, hospitals, a proper army, but it's just as repressive and particularly dangerous for anyone who speaks out against the government. The inhabitants of Little Town knew that at some point Old Country would attack.

Charlie's life changes when he meets Pav, who has come from Old Country with his parents as refugees. The family are not welcomed in Little Town and Charlie witnesses two frightening attacks on them, first by Rascals late one night, then at school where Pav is badly beaten up by the school bullies. He and Pav quickly become friends however, forming a kind of relaxed, jokey friendship that feels utterly real. Pav has a lot less regard for laws than Charlie, but then the bombs come, swiftly followed by invading forces from Old Country, and everything changes anyway. Almost before he knows it, Charlie is in debt to the terrifying Big Man, and ordered to repay it in a truly terrible way.

While it has echoes of other dystopian novels, **1984** for example, or **Maggot Moon**, and explores what it might be like to live under war, invasion or oppression - sadly there are children all over the world who would understand Charlie's situation perfectly - nonetheless this is a book we haven't read before. Charlie is an extraordinary central character, his outlook, his adolescent hopes and aspirations, and his relationship with Pav hold the book together and despite the bleakness of setting and events, give it a sense of real hope and sometimes even joy.

Links:

[1] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-bombs-that-brought-us-together>

[2] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/218>

[3] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/matthew-martin>