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The Middler

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Dystopian stories for younger readers often try to offer some hope in their final pages despite all the various horrors and set-backs that might have happened to main characters before. But Kirsty Appelbaum in her first novel does this by contriving a last minute rescue so unconvincing that even Enid Blyton may have hesitated before going down a similar path.

Otherwise well-written, the story revolves around eleven-year-old Maggie, the middle of three children, hence the book's title. This is not a bad position to hold, given that all the oldest children in her village are sent away to fight in what's known as the 'Quiet War' once they are fourteen. They never return, and the idea that all the parents concerned continue to go along with this absurd situation year after year is another unlikelihood difficult to swallow. Maggie then meets Una, a girl her age and one of a band of wanderers banned from the village and generally demonised as major undesirables by the sinister village mayor. But Maggie overcomes her prejudices and forms a close relationship with Una before disaster strikes.

Set in rural surroundings reminiscent of the countryside around Winchester where the author grew up, there are some good moments here conveyed in an effectively punchy prose style. When she finds a plot equal to her ambitions, Applebaum could well be a writer to watch.

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