



Furnace: Lockdown

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

[Robert Dunbar](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Prison diaries, whether of the factual or fictional variety, rarely constitute the most cheerful reading and it must be said immediately that Alexander Gordon Smith's novel does not greatly add to the gaiety of the young adult literary experience. Although not set in a specific time or place, the inference to be drawn seems to be that we are in a Britain not too far away where, following what is designated a 'Summer of Slaughter', draconian measures have been adopted for dealing with young offenders. One of these measures has been the establishment of the scarifying institution known as the Furnace Penitentiary, an underground prison where brutality, sadism and indeed killing flourish among inmates and wardens alike. It is to here, on a trumped up murder charge, that 14-year-old Alex Sawyer is admitted and given a life sentence. The book, written as his first person narrative, is taken up with a seemingly endless catalogue of the degradation to which he is subjected, much of it, especially the violence, of a frankly stomach-turning variety; much of it is also characterised by a prose style which does not hesitate to indulge in the colourful image: 'My head was drumming some sort of ancient tribal dance, my throat felt like I'd swallowed a cheese grater and my eyes were watering as if I was wearing ancient contact lenses soaked in vinegar.' The boy's occasional memories of his upbringing and of his pre-prison experiences, together with his reflections on those sharing his incarceration, add some measure of psychological depth to what is otherwise a rather depressing tale. Will any escape be possible for Alex and friends? Two further volumes are expected.

Running Order:

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