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Fighting Ruben Wolfe

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

First published in Australia in 2000, this story concerns Ruben and Cameron, teenage brothers who become embroiled in the world of underground boxing clubs in order to earn money for their struggling working-class family. They begin by sharing a pair of gloves as they spar in the back yard, then Ruben is discovered by a talent-spotter after pulping a schoolmate who has insulted his dissolute sister. This brings them into the sleazy glamour of a world of committed gladiatorial violence, Ruben as an invincible but agonized champion, Cameron, our narrator, as the plucky loser who collects tips for taking his thrashings manfully. Both brothers earn money rapidly, but in a way that would horrify their parents.

The title is Ruben's fighting name, but also a play on his battles with his brother, the world and himself. The prose style resembles the brothers' boxing: lots of staccato, jab-like sentences with longer, more graceful flourishes of vivid description and reflection. Each chapter ends with a murmured conversation between the brothers in the darkness of the shared bedroom, suggesting concerned, ring-side chats between rounds. The book provides a traditionally punchy view of anguished masculinities ? the fighters' older brother and their father also have struggles of their own ? but poignant complexities are brought out in the way in which the boys both embrace and resist the expression of their most humane instincts in violence.

Running Order:

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