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# The Space We're In

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~~Not on Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Max is aged five and has autism. His brother Frank is aged ten and is the narrator of Balen's story. He has no such impairment. The mother of the two boys is the one who best understands Max's needs. The loving father is also present.

Early in the narrative Frank fails to show his brother the respect and understanding that Max needs. However we should not think of Frank as acting out of ignorance. He knows his language and behaviour are unacceptable: he is acting from anger, frustration and impotence.

At this point a disaster overtakes the family. Balen's novel now explores the question of how the different members of the family cope in the aftermath of the disaster. Special attention is paid to the question of how Max's needs are met in the new family circumstances. Many novels featuring characters with disabilities portray special schools in a negative light, the needs of the pupils largely unmet. Balen in contrast depicts Max's school in a positive manner. Frank's account reveals how the school enables Max to develop at his own pace and in ways that he finds appropriate. One notable feature as the story unfolds is a brilliant example of intertextuality with Maurice Sendak's **Where the Wild Things Are**, which any reader familiar with Sendak will enjoy.

Laura Carlin's monochrome illustrations combine artistic skill with a childlike element that complements the text.

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