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The Scar Boys

Emma Patton

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Harry Jones is a freak. As a result of an unfortunate bullying incident from childhood, Harry is severely burned and disfigured, which makes it difficult to find friends or practice self-acceptance. But then, in eighth grade, he meets Johnny. Johnny defends Harry from bullies, accepts Harry’s scars, and acts as Harry’s voice when he feels like he doesn’t have one. So, when Johnny suggests that they start a band, Harry is ecstatic. As their friendship develops through high school along with their musical abilities, the potential success of the band keeps Harry motivated and hopeful. But soon, Harry and Johnny are at the end of high school and must grapple with the reality that sometimes, good things can’t last forever.Facing the possible end of the band causes Harry to realize that Johnny might not be that great of a friend after all. But when he thinks of a future without Johnny and without being a guitarist for the Scar Boys, he wonders whether there will still be anything worthwhile about him after it’s all gone.

The Scar Boys has many positive elements. The characters and the relationships between those characters are complex and original. The adult author does an excellent job of writing teenage characters in a relatable and realistic way, without imposing any unnecessary cliches on them. Also, the narrative carries an overall tone of angst and desperation that is extremely appropriate for teenagers nearing the end of their high school experience and facing the end of an era. However, the narrative arc is rather confusing. The exposition and set-up of the story seem to take far too long, with the actual main events of the plot occurring late in the book and without much significance, so that by the time the book was actually finished, the story still seems to be building to something. Also, though the conflicts between characters are complex, the resolutions to those conflicts are simplistic and seem forced. Ultimately, the book had a very strong beginning but failed to maintain that power through to the events of the end.

*Contains severe language, moderate sexual content, mild drug abuse, and mild violence.