

Nukunu College

Z. D. Boxall

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In the young adult drama of Nukunu College, relationships are tested, lines are crossed, and nothing is off-limits.

In Z. D. Boxall's juicy tale of love and war, *Nukunu College*, a girl who just wants to avoid drama is followed by it.

In her last year of school, Alice changes venues, entering Nukunu College to focus on her grades and hoping to get into university. But things aren't as they seem at Nukunu. A shady character plagues the school; rival groups within it, the Uncannys and the Steels, work to manipulate Alice and her friends to start an all-out war. Alice and her friends are the only ones who can stop it in time to graduate, while Dukes, a neutral character, works to remind everyone that religious love is what's important.

The narrator is an unknown observer who offers a dry, unbiased account of events and recaps character dialogue, if in a choppy and awkward-sounding way. The narrator's explanations maintain an even flow but often include distracting interjections and commentary, as well as changes in tense, and the result sounds unnatural. This odd narration draws attention away from the action.

The scandalous drama unfolds in a logical, chronological fashion, if the teen fighting is taken to extremes, including schemes to bring couples together and interrogations. Paintballs are lobbed at innocent victims and people are taken to a jail within the school. Between the bursts of drama, unanswered questions make it hard to stay focused. Everything is relayed by the narrator rather than shown, and it becomes hard to relate.

The cast of characters is wide. Some make an appearance once, never to return again. Why characters act and respond in the way they do is unclear. Alice, who is supposed to be avoiding drama, inserts herself into the war between the factions without clear motivations. Love stories are present but underdeveloped. It is unclear why the silent adults have allowed groups of teenagers to run the school.

An explanation of why the war starts and who is responsible relates back to the relatives of the Uncannys and the Steels and is tied up clearly. The ending focuses on love and acceptance and brings the ridiculous actions and drama together into a moral theme. Characters find common ground despite their differences. This is mostly satisfying—and at least it brings everyone together in time for formal. Where Alice is headed remains a mystery.

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REBECCA MONTERUSSO (October 19, 2018)

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