

BATTLE ROYALE

Lord of the Flies with guns and gore



• NOW • £8.50 • VIZ •
• US IMPORT • ADULT •
• KOUSHUN TAKAMI •

BEFORE THE MOVIE, the sequel and the manga, came the controversial book, Koushun Takami's *Battle Royale*. Originally published in Japan in 1999, an English translation followed in 2003.

The novel is set in a dystopian future where Japan is part of an isolationist police state known as the Republic of Great East Asia, controlled by a mysterious figure known as the Great Dictator. Rock music and religion are banned and, each year, teenagers are forced to fight each other to the death in the Program – more commonly known to fans of the film as *Battle Royale*.

Enter the Third Year Class B of Shiroiwa Junior High School, who are looking forward to a study trip, unaware they are the next unlucky winners of the Program's lottery. After being gassed, the unfortunate class find themselves on a small island in the sea of Japan with exploding collars around their necks.

Given packs containing weapons, food and water, the class are informed that they have three days to kill each other off. The last person left alive will be the winner and receive a pension and the Great Dictator's autograph. If no-one dies in 24 hours, the collars will explode. If they try to escape, the collars will explode. If they stay put and the area becomes a Forbidden Zone, the collars will explode. Faced with no alternative, the slaughter begins.

If you've seen the movie then all the characters will be familiar, although the great thing about the book is it is possible to learn more about each of the students, from the reason why Kazuo Kiriyama is a sociopath and the dark secrets of Mitsuko Souma's twisted childhood. We even get to see into the delusions of would-be Warrior Princess Mizuho Inada.

Presented in the third-person and in present tense, Takami has provided a God's eye view of the proceedings and each person gets their 15 minutes of fame, along with a grisly death. But – as in the movie adaptation – Shuya Nanahara, Noriko Nakagawa, Shogo Kawada and Kazuo Kiriyama remain the main protagonists.

Fictional factual information, such as the definition of the Program and excerpts from speeches by the Great Dictator, gives *Battle Royale* more of a sci-fi feel, and fans should note that the controversial manga was based on this novel.

A UK release of the novel was planned for July, but has since been cancelled, however, the Viz translation is widely available and well worth a read.

LESLEY SMITH



NEO 新
GOLD AWARD

The live action *Battle Royale* film was released in the UK by Tartan Films

