



The Printer's Devil

Books Reviewed:

[The Printer's Devil](#) [1]

Issue:

[150](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

This debut novel offers a labyrinthine mystery as tortuous and as dangerous as the streets of its setting in old London Town. We're among thieves and murderers, Bow Street runners and sinister lascars, the denizens of roistering taverns and dimly lit opium dens. Here, Mog Winter is at home -- at the outset of the novel he's a 12-year-old printer's devil apprenticed to the bad-tempered Mr Cramplock. He lives by his wits from day to day, his dog Lash his only trustworthy companion. This London feels genuinely dangerous, largely unrelieved by comedy, though Mog's newfound acquaintance, the dwarf Mr Spintwice, has an attractively Dickensian eccentricity and warmth about him; and the level of coincidence which lies behind the friendship Mog makes with the violently abused Nick would be familiar to readers of nineteenth-century novels and penny dreadfuls. Control of plot is crucial in a thriller and we are well-served here. Each adventure leaves the inquisitive Mog -- and us -- increasingly curious to unravel just one more mysterious knot. The author might have benefited from a keener editorial eye to eliminate the occasional looseness such as the use of 'tatty' three times in as many pages. Idioms like 'hang about' or a comic reference to the 'All-England Cleaver-Throwing Championship' jar precisely because the Underworld is otherwise absorbingly created. Every now and then you might wonder how a 12-year-old printer's devil could make quite such an articulate and perceptive narrator; and it surely won't do to leave some intriguing threads untied on the pretext that this is how stories and life sometimes turn out -- that's a bit of a cheat! There are twists and turns through the alleyways and bustling quaysides, with threatening and violent ruffians at every corner -- and behind those villains lurk more powerful criminals, playing for high stakes. Mog's anxiety and excitement will surely infect young readers -- and though thriller fans will foresee some of the revelations well before Mog gets there, there are a couple of surprises for readers which cannot be divulged here. The hardback, incidentally, is a physical pleasure to handle with an enticingly atmospheric dustjacket. Paul Bajoria is a name to note with pleasureable anticipation.

Running Order:

11

Source URL (retrieved on Dec '20): <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/150/childrens-books/reviews/the-printers-devil>

Links:

[1] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-printers-devil>

[2] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/150>

[3] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/geoff-fox>