



Starcross

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

How excellent to be offered yet more Stirring Tales of British Vim upon the Seas of Space and Time penned by Mr Philip Reeve and decorated by Mr David Wyatt. Youthful devotees of their earlier **Larklight** will not be disappointed by the further exploits of Art Mumby, his irritating but endearingly prim sister Myrtle, and her erstwhile piratical beau, Jack Havock. In fact, they'll be transported. For once again, we are whirling along in the aether ships and steam trains of space in a Victorian parallel universe. The volume is a physical delight in itself, for the ingenuity and pleasure of its creators - including the three lovely editrices to whom due acknowledgement is paid - are infectious. Readers open the front cover to find endpapers crowded with illustrated sepia advertisements for everything from 'The Rain & Co. Phlogiston-Powered Mangle & Wringer' to 'The Nereid, Remarkable New Design for Ladies that Bathe'. And those advertisements deserve a second look when they reappear as the reader finishes the book, for most of them have played their parts in the tortuous adventures charted in the novel. There are secrets and surprises everywhere - even the obligatory front matter page carries a footnote: 'For the reader's safety, this volume has been baked in a Snagsby and Co. Patent Book Oven, and is certified free from Unearthly Animalculae, Harmful Spores and the dreaded Sequel Bloat.'

The trick Messrs Reeve and Wyatt so deftly carry off is that it matters not a jot whether their young readers are conscious of the multitude of references to Victorian times; for, more importantly, these serve to create a texture, an entrancing otherness which is nevertheless anchored in Britain's Imperial past and prejudices. In such a world, it is no surprise to encounter the mysterious Moobs which can settle on one's head in the form of one of Titfer's Top-Notch Toppers and take over one's mind; or to be confronted by the daring French agent Miss Delphine Beauregard, masquerading as an invalid in a wheelchair pushed by the formidable Mrs Grinder. In this universe, readers learn not to be amazed that Mrs Grinder's impressive stature is accounted for by the fact that she is made up of numerous little soldiers of the Legion D'Outre Espace, standing on each other's shoulders. So a reader of **Starcross** is caught up in a web of story and illustration, delightedly snared by the rollicking plot (and is there anyone better than Mr Reeve when it comes to plotting?). At the end of it all, tucked away among the 'charming reviews' of **Larklight** and the authorial portraits of the Two Gentlemen of Devonshire ('Who are these ragged figures lurching out of the fog that swirls eternally across this dreadful Moor?') there is more good news from Art Mumby, our principal narrator: 'Coming Soon, **Moth Storm** - in which I relate my latest and most Exceptionally Perilous experiences'. Capital Stuff!

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