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Leviathan

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Editor's Choice:

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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It is 1914, and Europe is on the verge of the First World War. But while the countries concerned remain the same, the conflict this time is between two factions straight out of science fiction. On the one hand there are the Darwinists, who have used their master's discovery of DNA to fabricate sometimes huge animal eco-systems that can function as air-ships, messengers with human speech or fighting forces of many varieties. These are opposed by the Clankers, who have put their faith in ever more ingenious machines, some of them enormous structures that can walk or fly while dropping bombs or firing cannons to deadly effect. In between there is 15-year-old Alek, the son of the assassinated Austrian Archduke and now hunted by both sides. There is also Deryn, a supremely gifted girl pilot of around the same age pretending to be a boy.

Most of this novel is made up of two parallel stories before Alek and Deryn finally get together and manage to evade their many enemies. For most of the time Westerfeld writes well, and as his many fans will attest he has indeed extraordinary powers of imagination. But even so fatigue eventually sets in. Deryn's oft-repeated insult 'bum-rag' soon becomes very tedious, and there is too much hearty shoulder clapping, particularly at the end of chapters. More seriously the author trivialises scenes of mass death on the battlefield. Deryn's efforts with her machine-gun 'spewing death in all directions' should surely not to be taken so lightly, but neither she nor Alek ever show much concern over other people's fate while treating their own as if it was all part of a good if dangerous game even when they are most threatened. Splendidly illustrated in swirling black and white by Keith Thompson, particularly effective in bringing some of the Darwinists' weirdest new species to light, there is a lot to entertain here, with two more instalments still to come. But good as it largely is, it could also have been so much better.

Running Order:

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