



[Home](#) > The Prince of Mist

The Prince of Mist

Books Reviewed:

[The Prince of Mist](#) [1]

Issue:

[183](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Robert Dunbar](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

A plot which sees a family move house and then discover that their new abode harbours secrets which have to be gradually unravelled has long been a popular one in children's fiction. Carlos Ruiz Zafón employs it once again in **The Prince of Mist**, in which 'an eccentric watchmaker and inventor of dazzling if completely impractical devices' of a father, Maximilian Carver, decides to take his wife and three children away from their city home and move to the coast. (The precise locations are never made totally clear, though it is perhaps fair to assume that the country concerned is Spain.) It is 1943 and much of the action of the novel takes place 'under the shadows of a war being fought so close and yet so far from that beach, a faceless war?' The occasional reminders of these far-off battles provide an interesting backcloth for the sequence of events, observed principally through the eyes of 13-year-old Max Carver. They are set in action as soon as the boy discovers that behind their new house is a decaying garden filled with stone statuary and protected by a metal fence topped with 'a six-pointed star within a circle'. The significance of this eerie domain will become clear once young Max is befriended by a local boy, Roland, who introduces him to the past history of the Carvers' new home and, in the process, involves both of them in a narrative which draws on various traditional myths and legends, including the Faust story and 'The Flying Dutchman'. Published originally to great acclaim in Spain in 1993 and here given an atmospheric and, where appropriate, lyrical translation by Lucia Graves, **The Prince of Mist** injects some quite chilling and supernatural elements 'and some more than chilling sinister characters' into a gripping and attractively paced adventure story, even if at times the details of the plotting are not totally convincing.

Running Order:

46

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Links:

[1] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-prince-of-mist>

[2] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/183>

[3] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/robert-dunbar>