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Circus of Thieves and the Raffle of Doom

Books Reviewed:

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Issue:

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Reviewer:

[Lucy Staines](#) [3]

~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Armitage Shanks, circus ringmaster, can't help but think of himself as a genius: as the Austen of audacity, the Beethoven of break-ins, the Columbus of crime, the Darwin of Deviousness, the Einstein of expropriation, the Freud of fiendishness, the Galileo of gall, the Homer of house-breaking, the Isambard Kingdom Brunel of ingeniously kitted burglaries, the Jobs of jobs ?etc ? you get the picture! Unfortunately for him, he is about to run up against a pair of pesky kids, Hannah and Billy, and a clever dog. We know that never ends well for fictional villains and the adventure that follows is delightfully fast-moving and wacky, full of bizarre characters and situations.

This is a funny, clever and very entertaining book targeted squarely at fans of **Mr. Gum**. In fact, you rather wonder if the author hadn't sat down with the **Mr. Gum** oeuvre and thought, 'I'd like to have a go at that!'. No wonder the publisher commissioned David Tazzyman to do the illustrations. It's like **Mr. Gum** in that for all its crazy anarchy, it's very cleverly structured, with many of the best gags depending on an understanding if not of literary forms, at least of how books work. There's a delight in words and language that's very rewarding, and I loved the army of footnotes.

Armitage Shank might match Mr. Gum for wickedness, but he's nowhere near as dirty. In fact, there's a lot less of the yuk factor here and much more of a traditional story with beginning, middle and end (not to mention carefully sign posted flashbacks). There's a proper tension to the plot too ? we want to know how Armitage is getting away with it, and we want to see Billy reunited with his dad. I like the friendship between Billy and Hannah too ? again, for all the madness, that feels very true and rather touching.

This a book that both adults and children will relish and that they will enjoy sharing with each other. It's fun and playful and the cast of animal characters are great too. William Sutcliffe's very different novel [The Wall](#) [4] is shortlisted for the 2014 Carnegie Medal.

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