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Dog Town

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Editor's Choice:

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Luize Pastore won the Latvian Literature prize for the Best Children's Book of 2013 with this book, which is also being made into an animated film. Imaginative Jacob goes to stay with his uncle in Maskatchka, a suburb of the city of Riga, where he discovers a pack of talking dogs and, with his cousin Mimi, helps them foil a plan to redevelop its streets of wooden houses into a skyscraper city. It's an interesting story and apparently has some local resonances that it might be useful for a non-Latvian reader to know about. If the talking dogs are a fantasy (I believe) then Maskatchka is very much a reality. A working class district which also housed much of Riga's Jewish community before the Second World War, it does indeed have distinctive wooden architecture. It is also a neglected part of Latvia's capital with a reputation for crime. So Pastore's transformation of it into a place of adventure for a child with an open mind and a big imagination, while acknowledging the district's material poverty, honours both of its present sense of community and its future possibilities. In this context, the story itself has big possibilities, which I didn't feel were realised. Partly, this may be the fault of the translation, which unfortunately, while making perfect sense, just reads throughout like a translation.

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