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Death and the Arrow

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Reading this historical detective adventure reminded me of some big names, Chandler, Garfield and Pullman among them. Perhaps Priestley isn't in that class yet, but there's time. It's a clever, exciting tale, with surely drawn characters and a sense of style and atmosphere which are ably supported by Priestley's own illustrations and decorations. In 18th-century London, young Tom Marlowe, thirsting for adventure and travel, is caught up in a series of murders, whose victims are marked by their possession of a calling card depicting a skeleton holding an arrow. Tom and his redoubtable friend, Dr Harker, investigate. They make a journey through the criminal underworld, face a struggle to the death on the dome of St Paul's (a touch of Hitchcock?), and visit Newgate Prison, to discover the origin of the mystery lies on the other side of the world. The plot twists and turns satisfyingly. There are vertiginous chases across London rooftops. Some colourful historical detail is splashed in. There's even a consideration of the gap between law and justice that Tom's distant transatlantic cousin, Philip, would have no difficulty recognising. None of this is beyond a good reader of 9 or 10. I suspect it might read aloud well as a serial, and it's a lot more interesting than many written to order historical fictions.

Running Order:

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