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Bridge to the Stars, A

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

First published in Swedish some 15 years ago and now available in Laurie Thompson's English translation, Mankell's atmospheric coming-of-age novel is the story of 11-year-old Joel Gustafson and the close, loving bond between him and his father Samuel. The delineation of this relationship, played out against a poetically evoked 1950s Scandinavian landscape of dark forests, isolated towns and long winter nights, sees the boy attempting to make sense of a world which, in so many respects, is a puzzling place. His principal bewilderment arises from the fact that his mother, Samuel's wife, abandoned him as a baby: consequently, his gradual exposure to the mysteries of the adult world comes mainly via his father and the inhabitants of the small town whose streets he haunts nightly. As we read at one point early on, 'not knowing why, and not being able to do anything about it' is his initial response. As events evolve, he (and his father) come to some measure of acceptance of the past and its losses, being able to contemplate a future where happier dreams might just have some chance of coming true. Impressive in its narrative restraint and its avoidance of the melodramatic and sentimental, this novel, with its unusual setting and cast of characters, acts as a worthy addition to our fictional depictions of the pre-teenage years. RD

Running Order:

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