



The Children of the Lost

Books Reviewed:

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[Ruth Taylor](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This is the second book in Whitley's trilogy set in an alternate quasi-mediaeval world. The first book, [The Midnight Charter](#) [4] (reviewed in **BfK** No. 179), introduced us to the city of Agora, where everything can be bought and sold, each relationship needs a contract, and human characteristics such as emotion and despair are bottled and can be taken like a drug. In this harsh social climate, young Mark has risen to the heights as a public seer, while Lily has set up an almshouse for the poor and destitute. However, political machinations lead to their joint banishment to the outside world of forest, marshland and streams. This is the starting-point for the second volume, which follows Mark and Lily to a peasant-village, dominated by faith and harmony ? the opposite, apparently, to Agora. Yet the implicit imposition of unquestioning conformity, tied to everyday toil and religious observance, soon leads Mark and Lily to recognise the need to be themselves. Surrounding the village is the forest, the home of the Nightmare, which works through dreams to unlock ?every secret urge, every dark desire?, and ?turn them loose?. The two young people must learn to ?ride the Nightmare? when they leave the village, and Lily embarks on a pilgrim's progress to find her father and, through him, the truth.

The narrative of Lily and Mark's adventures moves forward at a brisk pace, with exciting set-pieces and a vivid sense of place. Every third chapter is set in Agora, largely continuing the political story of the first volume. These interpolations tend to disrupt the main story, but their importance becomes evident as the two strands come together before the end of this volume. Many readers will appreciate the consideration given in the text to issues such as conformity and individuality, although some may be confused by the various Orders and Brethren that appear. However, all should value the acute characterisations and the tense moments of gothic drama. It should be noted that some of these passages, especially those that deal with the infiltration of dreams, could be disturbing for particularly impressionable children. Generally, **The Children of the Lost** represents a sophisticated expression of moral issues through the fantasy mode. The second novel ends at a crucial point for both the central characters, leaving the overall effectiveness of the trilogy to become fully apparent once the complete story arc has been published.

Running Order:

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