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Jepp, Who Defied the Stars

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

2

I have been reading historical fiction for children and young people for over 40 years and cannot remember a story about dwarves at court before. This is an intriguing story, based on historical fact and concerning itself with the very nature of our lives, that is are our fates foretold in the stars, or a product of our parents, or do we make ourselves what we are?

Jepp, at thirteen leaves his mother's inn to go to the court of the Spanish Infanta, ruler of the Spanish Netherlands. Jepp finds himself living at court in accommodation suitable for his height and arriving at the Infanta's table beneath a pie crust. There is rivalry amongst the court dwarves, and he is drawn to Lia, who is friendly with Robert, a rather large but normal sized man. Lia is raped by Pim and becomes pregnant and Jepp becomes involved in a plot to rescue her and let her baby be born free. But Lia dies in childbirth and Jepp is caught, beaten and then taken to Uraniborg, home of the Danish astronomer, Tycho Brahe. Tycho makes Jepp live with his pet moose and feeds him morsels while he sits under the table, but when he discovers that Jepp speaks Latin he allows him into the library to learn with his team who are mapping the stars. Jepp falls in love with Tycho's daughter who is not a dwarf, but before they can marry he sets out to search for his real father and see his mother again.

This is told in rather dry and flat prose, but gradually the reader is drawn into Jepp's life. He thought to be at court would be wonderful but the cruelty of this existence is spelt out from his first entry underneath the pie crust. The dwarves are prisoners, playthings of the Infanta and Pim is sadistic and unpleasant. Jepp's desire to search for his father arrives quite late in the plot and therefore does not ring quite true, but the sadness of his return to his mother's inn to discover that she had been dead sometime, is poignant and emotional. The details of the mapping of the stars and the weight given to astrology at that time is clearly told, as is Magdalene's belief that human beings make their own luck, sometimes despite what the stars may foretell, and who our parents are.

The audience for this book is difficult to determine. Readers will need to persevere to get into the story and become involved in Jepp's rather sad and difficult life.

Links:

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/jepp-who-defied-the-stars>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/197>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/janet-fisher>