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Alex, the dog and the unopenable door

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This gently anarchic and thought-provoking book packs a powerful punch weighted with farce, adventure, wit - and a hefty slice of magic realism. The whimsical cover sets the scene perfectly for what lies within its pages. Alex, the son of a famous explorer and the owner of a very large jumper, is sent to Cloisters Boarding school at the same time as its unprepossessing and reluctant Headmaster, Matthew. Both are in thrall to their fathers - Matthew uncomfortably, Alex loyally. Alex's father is devoted to dogs and determined to discover what lies beyond The Cusp, at the centre of The Forbidden Land, neglecting his home, wife and son to do so.

The book leads the reader down the paths which Alex must follow - both physically and emotionally - in order to enter The Forbidden Land and unlock the door which leads to its centre. He collects a number of unlikely allies along the way - his Headmaster, his friend Martha - who plays French horn and has ill-fitting false teeth - and Arnould, the French-speaking dog. He also gains a deadly arch-enemy - Davidus Kyte, the new Head of Expeditions to The Forbidden Land and his father's rival in the quest for the centre.

The plot rattles along heartily, taking the reader with it at every turn - but the story is not simply devoted to action, however eccentric and exciting. It chronicles the danger of obsession, of living always for the next opportunity to fulfil the dream, of alienation from family and friends.

The shocking ending of the book hauls Alex back from the brink of making the same mistake as his father and he realises that it is the real world and the people in it which matter, not elusive dreams and challenges which lure you on only to destroy you in the end. A salutary lesson for us all and a must-read for a bright and responsive reader-child or adult!

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