



Sawbones

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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This is an enjoyable tale, about which I have only one misgiving. Set in late eighteenth century London, its hero is Ezra, a surgeon's apprentice, who is caught up in an international intrigue involving an heir to the Ottoman Empire, several murders and a perilous friendship with the redoubtable Loveday, the red-haired magician's daughter. There's an awful lot happening. In the foreground there are resurrectionists, early surgical practices and Ezra's identity as a mixed race former slave. In the background, there are the customs of the Ottoman court, and Ezra's commitment to the ideals of the French Revolution and the writings of Tom Paine. And it all looks set to continue in a further book that will see Ezra, Loveday and the Ottoman prince in peril in Paris. The novel is in a vein of writing in which the past is an exotic setting for impossible adventures and it raises a question about what is acceptable in the way of historical anomalies. There are a number here and without some of them the adventure would have great difficulty even getting off the ground. The dialogue is necessarily modern, despite the occasional nod to a possible historic vernacular (the occasional use of the word 'cove', for instance) and Ezra and Loveday enjoy much greater freedom and self-confidence than is likely at this time for an apprentice and a newly orphaned girl. However, the anomaly that seems to put the veracity of the tale in danger for me, and I am not quite sure why, is a mere detail. The villain of the piece appears to be using a revolver about forty years before its invention. You can imagine in a Pullman novel that such a weapon would never pass without comment: it would, perhaps, be a prototype, acquired at great expense or through some criminal dealing. Here, neither the author nor the editor has noticed that it's out of place.

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