The Secret Railway

Books Reviewed:
The Secret Railway [1]

Issue:
220 [2]

Reviewer:
Anne Faundez [3]

New Talent: off
Editors Choice: off

Media type:
Book
BfK Rating:
3

Ella and Leo Leggit have just moved home with their parents to a former railway house at the edge of a forest. Exhorted to go off outdoors and explore, they discover a dilapidated workshop, covered in cobwebs and filled with dust and old railway paraphernalia. There amongst the junk is what appears to be a magnifying glass with a silver handle and ornate decoration. The moment Ella picks it up, it starts to fizz with excitement, leading the children to a padlocked door?beyond which lies a parallel universe, dislocated in time, where Bartholomew Buckle and his magic steam locomotive await. The train sets off with them on board, its destination the enchanted Kingdom of Izzambard under the spell of a wicked queen, and hurls them into an adventure of good and evil, magic and wrongs to be put right.

The Narnia-like opening moves the story into a fantasy world peopled by fearful mechanical birds, a talking vacuum-cleaner and coal-shovelling squirrels. The story constantly widens its focus, introducing new characters while maintaining its vigorous pace, but its madcap effervescence at times overwhelms the plot. The bond between brother and sister, in particular Leo?s regard for his younger sister, is heart-warming and helps to anchor the story, providing a realistic backdrop to the surreal events. Large and frenetic illustrations perfectly capture the story?s mood. A sequel to this story will be published shortly.

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Links:
[1] http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-secret-railway-0