



Attica

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Editorial Choice:

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Attics and their environs have an honourable history in children's books ? transformative or transitional places at a tangent to the adult world. The school attic is a place of banishment, then enchantment for Hodgson Burnett's Sara Crewe in *The Little Princess*, an attic study becomes the gateway to a parallel world in Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew*, while the roof leads above the attic are a place of refuge for a cross ?*Wouldbegood?* in E Nesbit's title, which inadvertently only leads him into more trouble.

Kilworth gleefully seizes on the imaginative possibilities in the attic world and exploits them for all he's worth. Three step-siblings, Jordy, Alex and Chloe, adjusting uneasily to their parents' relationship and a new house, go in search of a lost watch and are pitched into the extraordinary world of Attica. They discover not one discrete room, but a vast realm in which you can travel for days across the dusty rafters with roof beams appearing miles above your head. Attica has its own weather: electrical dust storms, the blistering South Draught of summer and the freezing North Draught of winter. It is full of natural and unnatural dangers and inhabited by Atticans of all descriptions, many of them hostile to humans. If you remain in Attica too long, it exerts its own spell and you risk metamorphosing into a board-comber, obsessively seeking to add one more object to your chosen collection ? or into a bortrekker, restlessly navigating the attic, becoming ever more hermitic and less human.

Much of the fun of this story resides in Kilworth's inspired transformation of Attic clutter ? Attican villagers whiz around on homemade cars powered by ancient sewing-machine parts, while grandfather clocks form a forest; the children are threatened by ?scissor-birds that blood your head? and animated musical instruments, voodoo-dolls and ink-imps. This is a hugely exuberant fantasy, with recognisably modern children negotiating a very modern dilemma ? the need to adapt to new family relationships, while forging a private identity. Attica provides Kilworth with a discreet platform for proselytising on children's need for adventure in an over-protected and circumscribed world. A crash-course in self-sufficiency, their perilous attic journey provides each of the siblings with a renewed sense of self and respect for the others' individuality.

Just as Kilworth has extended the imaginative attic landscape, he has reinvented the attic-story for the twenty-first century. Highly recommended. CH

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