

Cogheart

Peter Bunzl

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In Peter Bunzl's enthralling middle grade adventure, *Cogheart*, Lily Hartman's inventor father is missing, and she sets off to solve the mystery of his disappearance.

The story moves quickly, its complex plot never missing a step. It starts with Professor Hartman's zeppelin getting attacked. Malkin, a mechanical fox, takes the only escape pod to find Lily and deliver a letter, but he is shot in the process.

A clockmaker's apprentice, Robert, finds and repairs Malkin, who then convinces him to retrieve Lily. The family housekeeper has trapped her and conspired with the villains, who are searching for one of the professor's inventions, a perpetual motion machine. Lily flees with Robert, taking a locked box which may contain the device, hoping for clues to finding her father.

The lead characters are appealing. Robert does not want to be a clockmaker, loves zeppelins, and is afraid of heights. Lily is beloved to her adventuring father, but is stuck in a private boarding school. Both long for more than they have; when they join together, their worlds open up. Their friends and family are kind and supportive, while the book's villains are creepy, even grotesque.

The book's world building blends the familiar geography of Great Britain into a fantastic imaginary society that runs on steampunk technology. Its descriptions create a striking sense of place and capture the emotional climate, too. The night in which Lily and Robert are forced to flee Robert's home is described as "Dark as the Devil's mouth ... the wind was sharp as vinegar."

The story concludes with a clever twist that still leaves much to explore. *Cogheart* is delightful and inventive—a captivating adventure for middle-grade readers.

CATHERINE THURESON (January/February 2019)

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