



Moonlocket

Peter Bunzl

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Peril and Victorian steampunk meld in Peter Bunzl's winsome middle grade novel, *Moonlocket*. Lily, her mechanical fox Malkin, and their friend, Robert, return for a personal mission that highlights London's old-world mystique.

Jack Door is an escape artist who broke out of prison to reclaim a royal blood diamond he'd stolen years earlier. Robert—still grieving his father's death—is looking for his mother, Selena, who abandoned him for reasons he's yet to discover. When Robert learns that Jack and Selena are bound by a shared history, the race to find her intensifies.

The book builds on melodrama, presenting Jack as a canny opponent whose tricks and perfect timing build suspense. His brushes with Robert, Lily, and their friends range from classic villainy (dramatized when he drops his calling card, the Jack of Diamonds) to outright cruelty. Warped by ego, Jack's thieving nature pits him against the other characters and their goodness. The resultant clever chase lets the children test their limits.

From London's streets to its sewers, Bunzl crafts a storied environment laced with the nineteenth century's curious artifacts, such as automatons, and objects of pure invention, including the title's moonlocket. That the blood diamond dovetails with Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee is a fun, intelligent bonus.

In a less prominent side story, tension between humans, mechanicals, and hybrids—who are part-human and part-mechanical—raises questions on belonging. Lily, whose clockwork Cogheart is introduced in the first volume, struggles to prove that she's just as capable as anyone. Her loyalty in helping Robert is touching.

Drawing on wondrous details and strongly motivated characters, *Moonlocket* is a caper with heart.

KAREN RIGBY (July/August 2019)

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