



The Fearless Travelers' Guide to Wicked Places

Pete Begler

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Something strange is happening in the coastal town of Mist Falls. A purple, skull-shaped cloud appeared overhead a week ago, and now several mothers have disappeared, including twelve-year-old Nell Perkins's mother, Rose. Nell and her little brothers, George and Speedy, turn to Duke Badger, a shopkeeper/steampunk hero with a leather trench coat and weaponized umbrella, for help. Freyja Skoll and her coven of Dark Daughters have turned Rose into a bird and trapped her in a cage. With Badger as their chaperone, the Perkins children must undertake a dangerous journey to the Wicked Places, a land of nightmares, to find a Dreamer who can change their mother back. But will Rose remember her children after a transformation that wipes her memory?

The Fearless Travelers' Guide to Wicked Places, the first novel from movie and television writer Pete Begler, is a triumph of world building that combines familiar fantasy elements in surprising ways. It has magic spells and talking animals—including a sea-turtle boatman and a haughty cat that was once a queen—but also evil clowns and animate skeletons. Begler doesn't shy away from some pretty dark, scary territory, as when Nell sees a bloody shoe falls out of the sky. He successfully balances the cozy anthropomorphism of a Narnia-type land with the borderline horror of Neil Gaiman or Stephen King. The vividness of this imaginary world would undoubtedly lend itself well to a big-screen adaptation.

At its heart, this is the story of a gutsy family outfoxing everything that's thrown at it. Yet it's also about finding the hero inside each one of us. Nell develops into a fearless traveler over the course of her adventures; while readers might not encounter witches and octopus-wolf hybrids, they'll emulate her courage as they face the everyday perils of growing up.

REBECCA FOSTER (Children's 2017)

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