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Abarat

Elizabeth Meyers

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Barker, Clive. *Abarat*. Illustrated by Clive Barker. Joanna Cotler Books/HarperCollins, 2002. ISBN 0060280921. \$24.99. 388 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fantasy fiction; Adventure stories;

Subject: Space and time--Juvenile fiction; Good and evil--Juvenile fiction; Teenage girls--Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

Whether she's with her dysfunctional family or in class with her depressingly prosaic schoolteacher, Candy has always felt that she doesn't quite fit in the incredibly dull Chickentown, Minnesota. Then, in a single afternoon, Candy is suddenly whisked off to a strange place known as the Abarat, an archipelago where each island stands at a particular hour of the day. This is a place where everyone seems to have a hidden agenda, and the battle between good and evil is frighteningly real. The Abarat is overwhelmingly different, and strangest of all, Candy feels like she actually belongs here.

Barker does a superb job of blending text and illustration, although the fantastic and abstract tone of the paintings does, at times, keep the book itself from feeling quite real. In addition, some readers may feel frustration with Candy as she blunders through various experiences, or accepts wildly weird occurrences quite calmly, while the rest of us would break out screaming. However, there is evidence that her acceptance of the Abarat is essential to the series as a whole, and will be explained in full later on. In short, Abarat is strange, and should be read with that strangeness in mind. Once readers get past that, they'll find that it contains an engaging storyline, and that the characters, though at times grossly different, are disturbingly similar to themselves.