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The Tinderbox

Cassandra Fugal

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Andersen, Hans Christian. *The Tinderbox*. Illustrated by Bagram Ibatouline. Candlewick Press, 2007. ISBN 9780763620783. \$17.99. 40 p.

Reviewer: Cassandra Fugal

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fairy tales;

Subject: Soldiers--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

On his way home from war, a common soldier meets a hideous witch who begs help from him and promises much wealth in return. He lowers himself into a hollow tree to retrieve a tinderbox for the witch. There he meets three unusual dogs, each of whom guard great treasure. After filling his pockets with as many coins as he can and getting the tinderbox, the soldier fights with the witch and slays her. He then continues on to the city, where he begins a life of decadence. In the city, he learns of the beautiful princess. The princess, because of a prophecy that she will marry a common soldier, is kept locked up by her father. Using the tinderbox to summon the dogs from the hollow tree, the soldier has the princess brought to him at night and falls in love.

Mitchell's retelling of Hans Christian Andersen's classic tale is reliable, but it is Ibatouline's masterful illustrations that make this book enchanting. Page after page the illustrations are meticulously rendered line drawings washed in muted colors and detailed with cross hatching. The three dogs are especially skillfully illustrated. The artist makes the dogs look terrible and frightening with their large, strange eyes, while simultaneously making them lovable, and endowing them with common dog characteristics such as loyalty and affection towards their master. This skill makes it hard for the viewer to truly fear the dogs. Through the use of mixture (muted earth tones with subtly brighter reds, pinks, and yellows) Ibatouline delicately draws the viewer's attention to where he wants without detracting from the illustration as a whole. The overall result is illustrations that will delight time after time.