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The Great Trouble: A Mystery of London, the Blue Death, and a Boy Called Eel

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Book Review

Title: The Great Trouble: A Mystery of London, the Blue Death, and a Boy Called Eel

Author: Deborah Hopkinson

Reviewer: Tessa McMillan

Publisher: Alfred A. Knopf

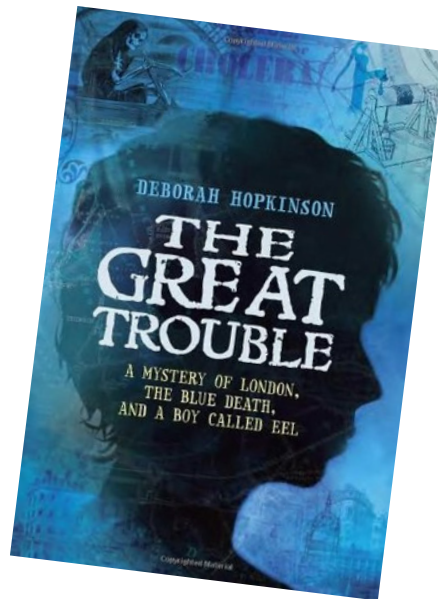
Publication Year: 2013

ISBN: 9780375848186

Number of Pages: 249

Interest Level: Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding



Review

Eel's life has improved since he escaped his abusive stepfather and stopped mudlarking. Eel now has food, shelter, and steady work all supplied by the owners of the Broad Street pub. However, his stability is taken away when a jealous coworker charges Eel with theft. When Eel is about to ask a neighboring tailor to prove his innocence, Eel finds that the tailor and most of his family are dying from a new outbreak of the Blue Death. With nowhere to go, Eel takes what jobs he can to secretly care for his younger brother. Dr. John Snow, who employed Eel in the past, hires Eel in proving that the Blue Death epidemic was spread by tainted water, not noxious air as most believe. Right when Eel uncovers proof of Dr. Snow's theory, Eel is kidnapped by his stepfather and tortured to reveal the location of his younger brother. Eel doesn't give in and escapes with the help of a past mudlarking friend. Running from his stepfather's quarters, Eel makes it in time to testify before a court that Dr. Snow's theory is true.

Hopkinson's book is a beautifully written story within the vein of Charles Dickens. Like Dickens, Hopkinson saw a need to write a novel not only revealing the destitution of London's orphans, but also spotlighting an important historical figure few know about today: Dr. John Snow. Dr. Snow was not blinded by superstitions in treating the sick. He had to push past many boundaries to reveal the truth of how disease was spread. Eel is a similar thinker. Eel pushes past all that fate dealt him to find a happy, stable place even when the world was telling him he would never amount to anything more than a mudlark. But once Dr. Snow and Eel worked together, the two were unstoppable, even in the face of death. At the end of the book, Hopkinson highlights the true characters and places of her story. She even includes the map Snow created in recording the spread of the Blue Death. An enlightening historical-fiction read for ages 12 and up.