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The Clockwork Three by Matthew J. Kirby

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Author: Kirby, Matthew J.
Title: The Clockwork Three
Year of Publication: 2010
Publisher: Scholastic Press
ISBN: 9780545203371
Number of pages: 386
Rating: Excellent
Reading/Interest Level: Intermediate; Young Adult
Keywords: Orphans; Friendship; Cooperativeness; Fantasy; Steampunk; 19th Century

Review:
An unusual friendship is born among three children. Giuseppe is an orphaned Italian boy gifted in music, but cursed with a malicious employer. Frederick is also orphaned, but blessed as an apprentice to a gifted clockmaker. Hannah, the only support for her family, was a maid at the Gilbert Hotel, but she recently became the assistant to the mysterious Madame Pomeroy. As their friendship progresses, the children find that by working together they can help solve each other’s personal problems amidst perilous adventures. In the end, Giuseppe is able to legally leave his employer and return to Italy, Frederick is able to become a journeyman and master clockmaker, and Hannah is able to completely support her family by becoming the overseer of all the maids at the hotel.

Kirby based the character of Giuseppe on actual events, but even with this basis in fact, readers need to be aware that this story is not historical fiction. The supernatural is a key theme in the book. An illustrated map of Kirby’s fictional city would have added to the novel because Kirby repeatedly addresses street names, building locations, and parks in the story. Some readers may find it hard to imagine the city’s layout and remember important locations without any visual reference. On the whole, Kirby mixes the best elements of Oliver Twist, The Invention of Hugo Cabret, and The Mysterious Benedict Society into creating his first novel.

Reviewer: Tessa McMillan

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