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Invisible in a Bright Light

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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It begins with a mystery; more properly several mysteries. We might not expect to know who the man in the emerald green suit is; nor why he is sat in a barnacle encrusted throne in an undersea cave surrounded by dangling corpses. Such things will become clear; as will the precise nature of the task he is setting the girl before him. But the girl, who is she? She has lost her memory. She doesn't even know if she is Marie or Celeste. Only gradually does Sally Gardner reveal exactly what is going on in this tale. It is once more a tribute to the great Dane, the best known coiner of such tales; and it draws its inspiration from relatively recent myths of disappearing ships and sailors (run the girl's two possible names together). Most of the story takes place on dry land, in the Royal Opera House in a European port city in the late nineteenth century. Theatre is something that Gardner knows much about and she peoples this story with the facts of everyday theatrical life, the glamorous and the unglamorous, and the figures of its fiction: a prima donna soprano; a long suffering director; and overlooked bit players, including the prima donna's abused daughter, who may yet become a star. But surely even this is not the world as we know it, for here a chandelier can explode and pepper our whoever heroine with shards and she not only survives but is given an extraordinary gift by the apparent catastrophe. It is a story rich in allusion, maybe even to that most wonderful of films of theatre life, **Les Enfants Du Paradis**. There are name games and plot puzzles for the attentive and quick witted reader; and this gradually and compellingly unfolded tale is also rich in Andersen-like colours of light and dark: where the kind and generous, however humble, and the selfish and cruel, however exalted, get their just deserts.

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