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In Victorian London at the height of the industrial revolution, Horatio Lyle is a former Special Constable with a passion for science and invention. He's also an occasional, but reluctant, sleuth. The truth is that he'd rather be in his lab tinkering with dangerous chemicals and odd machinery than running around the cobbled streets of London trying to track down stolen goods. But when Her Majesty's Government calls, Horatio swaps his microscope for a magnifying glass, fills his pockets with things that explode and sallies forth to unravel a mystery of a singularly extraordinary nature.

Thrown together with a reformed (i.e. 'caught') pickpocket called Tess, and a rebellious (within reason) young gentleman called Thomas, Lyle and his faithful hound, Tate, find themselves pursuing an ancient Chinese plate, a conspiracy that reaches to the highest levels of polite society and a dangerous enemy who may not even be human. Solving the crime will be hard enough - surviving would be a bonus...

The Extraordinary and Unusual Adventures of Horatio Lyle Details

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From Reader Review The Extraordinary and Unusual Adventures of Horatio Lyle for online ebook

Dark Chocolate says

This book is rated "Young adult" but i can assure you that it is rich in words, characters and action which makes it enjoyable even for the older readers. It combines 19th century detective mystery with supernatural motives which grabs the attention of the reader since the very first chapter. I would gladly read the next book about Special Constable Horatio Lyle and his companions Thomas, Tess and Tate.

Phrynn says

Definitely my kind of book! Set in Victorian London with a main character who must be related in some way to Sherlock Holmes and a little bit of magic on the side to make things interesting.

The main characters are delightful. Horatio Lyle is a self designed scientist and part time sleuth. He is super smart and (nearly) always one step ahead of everyone else. Tess is a street urchin and thief who discovers that becoming Lyle's assistant means she gets a warm bed and three meals a day. Thomas is the son of a Lord who is tired of being cosseted and is looking for adventure.

I love the way the author sets a scene for example:

"1864, London. In the west the sun is setting. It is orange and yellow fire, the sky sooty grey and brown smudge. The sky is full of chimneys and asthmatic birds. The fog is rising off the river, all the way from Greenwich to Chiswick, crawling up past Westminster and hiding the ravens sitting on the walls of the Tower, who blink beadily, waiting for something interesting and edible to happen in their lives. The fog is grey-green, grey from the water suspended in it, green from the things floating in the water. In the west, the sun has set. "

You can easily guess that something is about to happen - probably involving murder:)

A delightful book from an excellent author, all the better because it is the first in a series so I have more to look forward to!

Jan says

Intriguing Sherlock Holmes-ish take.

Miriam says

This would make a good action film in the tradition of Indiana Jones or Lara Croft -- death-defying action scenes on roofs, elaborate machines, dramatic shots like the baddie's empty shoes smoking in a scorch mark after he's struck by lightning. It's got that filmic pacing, too, with the quips coming at just the right moment as if scripted. Although it is cleaner and has more jokes, the movie it reminds me most of is League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, because it has that same facade of Victorianism: the dark, dirty, wet streets of London, the fog, the long black coats -- but no authenticity. Many of the details are anachronistic, and more importantly so are the attitudes and speech. The characters introduce each other by first names, take the

Lord's name in vain, have little ingrained sense of class difference. Insofar as one can tell, that is, since we don't get much of what's going on in their heads. They're a bit stock and underdeveloped.

Aside from these criticisms and some plotting weaknesses, it was an entertaining read, imaginative and fast-paced. This was interesting to see in light of the slowness of her adult fiction, which is heavy on description and interior experience. But there are many passages where the sentences ring familiar and her fascination with the urban environment is consistent.

Hanna says

Overall, I liked reading this book. It has some small faults, though. The story itself is good, it's nice to read and quite exciting towards the end. When I read the last 50 or 60 pages, I could barely stop or put the book down. However, I think you can tell the author was very young when she wrote this novel. It could have done with less descriptions and also less similes and metaphors.

There was another thing I noticed that didn't really annoy me... but bug me a little. Horatio Lyle is supposed to be the main character. But then at some point I noticed I don't really know much about him. Not about his character at least. I knew about his appearance, his house, his dog, his mother. But what does he think and feel? It's not really in the story. And then there are other (great, I must say) supporting character whom I know a lot more about, like Tess (who is awesome) and Thomas (who's also awesome in his own way). So I don't know, not knowing much about the main character sort of surprised me.

Dinnu Reads Books says

For me the story has the vibe of William Ritter's "Jackaby" which I loved immensely. I rather enjoyed this book too. A few spots in the plot where explaining further could have been nice (for me some objects and people were appearing a bit randomly) but all in all not a bad story :)

Rachel McMillan says

So i have read this a million times;but I read it again. One of my all time favourite desert-island books

read this and the rest of the series :-)

Marianne says

The Extraordinary and Unusual Adventures of Horatio Lyle is the first book in the Horatio Lyle series by British author, Catherine Webb. The scene is London, 1864. Horatio Lyle, son of Harry and Milly Lyle, is an enthusiastic inventor and occasional sleuth. Shortly after he catches young pick-pocket and thief, Teresa Hatch leaving the scene of her latest break-in (his house), he is called to the Palace by Lord Lincoln to temporarily resume his position as Special Constable. He is needed to investigate the theft from the Bank of

England of, among other valuables, the Fuyun Plate, a Tibetan artefact made by a powerful race of angel-demons. He decides to take Tess along with him, as well as, of course, his faithful and very useful hound, Tate. At the Bank they encounter Master Thomas Edward Elwick, heir to the Third Baron of Elwick; Thomas is keen to be useful in the investigation, and this team of four soon find themselves involved in all sorts of escapades as they try to solve the robbery and find the Fuyun Plate before it falls into the wrong hands. While the details of the character backgrounds are sparse, their dialogue, their resourcefulness and their sense of adventure will certainly appeal to young readers, as will the myriad of inventions (dynamos, flash bombs, tasers, chemical explosives) and the non-stop action (abseiling down buildings, zip-lining, rooftop chases, sliding down bannisters, fights with evil beings wielding crossbows). Webb has fun with character names (Tate and Lyle, Inspector Vellum, Miss Mercy Chaste, the vicar's daughter, Mr Dew) in this fight between inventive, scientific Londoners and a decidedly malevolent army of a quite different sort of greenie. Young fans will look forward to the second book in the series, *The Obsidian Dagger*. A fun read.

Gram says

I'm not much use at science, so most of the stuff about magnets and electricity went completely over my head. BUT, the action was almost non-stop and dashed exciting and the story was great fun to read. I can imagine Benedict Cumberbatch playing the hero, Horatio Lyle, but what happened to Miss Chaste at the end?!?!? I do hope she's alright.

Katherine Hetzel says

Loved the interplay between the characters, particularly the well written dialogue.

Story is good, though the end scenes felt a little too drawn out. Liked the mash of sci-fi (almost steam punk) with a touch of fey...

Definitely an author I'll be reading more of.

Hesione says

I love funny historical fantasy fiction. This one is like Jackaby, but packs more of a funny punch. Science!

Hannah says

The Extraordinary and Unusual Adventures of Horatio Lyle started off well, and offered a fun and intriguing combination of a vividly painted Victorian London setting, murder and mystery, and supernatural elements. Lyle was an interesting character, and the insane situations that he finds himself in is amusing.

Where it failed was the execution of the final confrontation when everything came to a head; the action scenes were often confusing, and the ending was abrupt and rather anticlimating considering the build-up. The characters of Tess and Thomas, technically so integral to the plot, are severely underdeveloped,

particularly in the case of Thomas. We're left with a barest sketch of their personalities which lacks depth. The character of Tess had so much more promise, but was unfortunately reduced to the stereotype of the clever young thief. Thomas was nothing more than a plot device to bridge the gap between Lyle and the upper-class society which he needed to infiltrate in order to discover what the Tseiqin were up to.

As a huge fan of steampunk, I absolutely loved the elements of Victorian London, but personally did not enjoy the supernatural elements. There was very little lore for the Tseiqin, and I think I would have preferred it if the mystery and murders weren't explained away using "evil creatures intent upon destroying mankind." It's a little too cliché.

Despite the criticisms, though, I liked it enough for its setting and tone to pick up the next book in the series. Younger readers might enjoy it more.

Tyas says

Victorian London has always been appealing to me, not exactly because it's dark and gloomy, but because it was one of the most interesting period in the history of science. And it is from this setting our hero, Horatio Lyle, emerges. He's a special constable, or you can say a detective. What's more, he's a science enthusiast, and the second generation of a family that has made some fortune by building machines. In his first adventure, Horatio meets Tess, a young pickpocket, and Thomas Elwick, a young aristocrat interested in science. They - along with Horatio's dog, Tate - have to face a beautiful but dangerous race emerging from the forests of Tibet, swearing to destroy the technology and machines that human builds.

A very promising first book, with lively and interesting characters.

Favourite quote:

'repressed vestal virgin'.

That just makes me laugh.

The following is a review in Indonesian that I wrote a couple of years ago in another site:

Catherine Webb, penulis buku ini, tahun ini [2006] baru berusia 19 tahun. Meski demikian, jangan anggap dia remeh. Novel debutnya dirilis saat ia baru berusia 14 tahun, dan meski usianya masih muda-belia, kemampuannya menulis dan kelincahannya berbahasa patut dipuji. Tak salah jika ada yang menganggapnya dapat menjadi penerus Philip Pullman suatu hari nanti.

'The Extraordinary and Unusual Adventures of Horatio Lyle' adalah sebuah cerita detektif Zaman Victoria yang cukup unik. Kisahnya berlangsung tahun 1864, hanya beberapa tahun setelah Charles Darwin merilis bukunya yang sangat berpengaruh, 'The Origin of Species'. Inggris di Zaman Victoria memang menelurkan banyak pemikir dan saintis yang cemerlang serta sangat memengaruhi dunia. Sebuah dunia baru sedang bergerak; dunia yang didorong oleh teknologi dan dibahakankari oleh sains. Tidak heran jika tokoh utama novel ini, Horatio Lyle, juga seorang saintis. Namun selain itu, Horatio Lyle juga menjabat sebagai seorang special constable – polisi yang hanya dipanggil untuk menangani kasus-kasus khusus.

Penokohan Horatio Lyle sebagai seorang saintis mungkin sudah sering Anda dengar. Skeptis, senang menghabiskan waktu di laboratorium sambil mengutak-atik ini-itu (rumahnya seperti benteng kecil yang sulit ditembus pencuri), tidak percaya Tuhan, gagap dalam hubungan dengan lawan jenis. (Horatio

menggunakan frasa ‘repressed vestal virgin’ untuk mendeskripsikan dirinya sendiri.) Namun Webb cukup berhasil mewujudkan Lyle menjadi seorang karakter yang menarik, terutama berkat interaksinya dengan berbagai karakter yang ada dalam novel ini, terutama Tess. Tess adalah seorang gadis remaja yang awalnya hendak merampok rumah Lyle, namun keburu tertangkap oleh salah satu dari sekian banyak jebakan yang dipasang Lyle. Usahnya memfitnah Lyle sebagai pemerkosa gagal, dan Lyle malah berhasil memerasnya untuk mau bekerja sebagai asistennya.

Lyle—dan secara otomatis Tess, serta anjing Lyle, Tate—diminta Lord Lincoln, salah seorang bangsawan tinggi Inggris, mengungkap misteri pencurian simpanan harta berharga kerajaan. Hal yang sepertinya sepele dan dapat diungkapkan dengan mudah oleh Lyle itu ternyata membimbingnya pada petualangan yang misterius dan mistis, meskipun Lyle dan pemikiran skeptisnya berulang-ulang meyakinkan bahwa tidak ada yang namanya sihir dan lain sebagainya.

Pada akhirnya, Lyle memang tidak begitu salah. Segala misteri dalam novel ini disangkutpautkan dengan apik dengan teori-teori listrik, terutama Faraday (salah satu saintis terkemuka di masa itu). Namun lawannya, para Tseiqin, jelas sulit untuk diterangkan dengan sains yang begitu dipegang teguh oleh Lyle. Para Tseiqin adalah makhluk-makhluk indah dalam kepercayaan Tibet, yang muncul dari hutan-hutan dan begitu anti pada besi dan mesin. Mereka hendak memusnahkan ‘peradaban besi’ dan mengembalikan kemurnian dunia. Wujud manusia para Tseiqin tampan dan cantik, dengan mata hijau yang begitu indah. ‘Kecantikan’ mereka ini bahkan sedikit menambahkan bumbu-bumbu homoerotisisme dalam novel tersebut.

Plot ceritanya memang linear dan tidak berlapis, namun asyik untuk diikuti, terutama berkat kelancaran Webb bertutur dan pilihan kata-katanya yang mengena. Meski saya mendeteksi kalau Webb sedikit terpeleset—ataukah memang disengaja?—ketika ia menggunakan kata ‘genetically’. Kata itu belum ada di Zaman Victoria.

Oya, ada cameo usil dalam novel ini: Thomas Hardy. Ketika bertemu dengan Tess di salah satu klub, Hardy menanyakan nama gadis itu, yang dengan polos dijawab dengan ‘Tess’. Namun ketika ditanyai asalnya, Tess sembarangan berbohong, ‘Darbyville’.

Namun, setelah segala misteri terungkap sekali pun, novel ini masih membuat saya berpikir. Kala cerita ini berlangsung, tidaklah sulit untuk menempatkan diri kita sebagai pendukung Lyle, yang mencoba menyelamatkan peradaban dan teknologi. Saat itu, teknologi adalah penyelamat manusia—setidaknya, sesuatu yang diharapkan dapat membuat kehidupan manusia menjadi lebih baik. Akan tetapi, kini, ketika dunia terancam kerusakan dan kehancuran, mungkin lebih mudah bagi kita untuk beralih ke sisi para Tseiqin, dan mempertanyakan apakah harga yang kita bayar demi kemajuan teknologi kita sebanding dengan kerusakan alam yang menggila saat ini.

Rachel England-Brassy says

This was likeable, but it really is written by a teen for a teen. That said it was enormous fun. However, I would rather recommend writers such as Ben Aaronovitch and Andrew Cartmel, who are the masters of this style, for adults.

Molly Teleman says

Mycket sympatisk bok med en stil och stämning som får mig att associera till både Sherlock Holmes och Dr Who. Lättsam, välskriven och ett riktigt äventyr för tonåringar och vuxna i ett viktorianskt London med mkt vetenskap och övernaturligheter.
