



## The Haunting of Charles Dickens

*Lewis Buzbee , Greg Ruth (Illustrations)*

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Meg Pickel's older brother, Orion, has disappeared. One night, she steals out to look for him, and makes two surprising discoveries: She stumbles upon a séance that she suspects involves Orion, and she meets the author Charles Dickens, also unable to sleep, and roaming the London streets. He is a customer of Meg's father, who owns a print shop, and a family friend. Mr. Dickens fears that the children of London aren't safe, and is trying to solve the mystery of so many disappearances. If he can, then perhaps he'll be able to write once again.

With stunning black-and-white illustrations by Greg Ruth, here is a literary mystery that celebrates the power of books, and brings to life one of the world's best-loved authors.

## **The Haunting of Charles Dickens Details**

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Author : Lewis Buzbee , Greg Ruth (Illustrations)

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## From Reader Review The Haunting of Charles Dickens for online ebook

### **Brian James says**

Sometimes there are stories that are in my mind that I want to read, but know not within what pages they lie. As soon as I began this book, I knew it was one of those stories I'd been searching for a long time.

This book is so wonderful on so many levels that it's hard to know where to begin praising it. But I'll start with what is always the make or break for me and that is character. The main character, twelve year old Meg, is one of those characters you don't want to leave off and keeps you reading. She's smart, courageous, and altogether real. I love when the child characters are real heros in middle grade novels.

The story moves at great pace, always leaving the reader wanting to push ahead. The central mystery is full of adventure that unravels perfectly. And the book never talks down to the reader.

I also think the themes of this book are incredibly relevant to our world. In many ways, I think our world has reverted to the industrial and corporate greed of Dickens time. Child labor is as much a problem today as it was in Victorian times. It's important for children today to be reminded of the cruelty that comes with this practice, especially when the very same practice is partially responsible for most of us to have cheap electronics and clothing.

There isn't anybody I wouldn't recommend this book to.

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### **Leah Ray says**

Excellent! The characterization of Dickens was deeply engaging. My only reservation is that I didn't care at all for the "clever" references and inside jokes, from a Mr. Micawber based on WC Fields's performance to the Beatles putting in an appearance. At least the Micawber character worked in the sense that this Dickens had met him before writing A Christmas Carol, so he could have been inspired by him. Other characters whom he meets for the first time in this novel are named after characters he had already written about in real life, so it makes no sense at all. I find these kind of "wink, wink" jokes distracting. They throw me out of the story, so I wish they weren't there. Noticed the same impulse, a bit less egregious, in some other historical kids' lit I've been reading. Other than that, I appreciated this book for its strong plot, its themes of child welfare and the creative experience, and its details about London at the time.

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### **Margaret says**

Meg Pickel's older brother Orion mysteriously disappeared months ago, much to the dismay of Meg's family, who run a print shop. When Meg sneaks out one night to look for Orion, she discovers a séance which might hold a clue, and there she encounters an old friend of the family, Charles Dickens. Dickens is concerned about the many disappearances of children from the streets of London, and he and Meg join together to find Orion and solve the mystery.

I wanted to love this, I really did. I adored Buzbee's memoir about bookstores, *The Yellow-Lighted Bookshop*, and was looking forward to his foray into young adult fiction. And in many ways, I did like it. Meg's an appealing character, brave and clever, and Buzbee's portrayal of Dickens is convincing. He has a good feel for the atmosphere of Victorian London and for Dickens' concern for social issues.

However, one thing just kept bouncing me out of the narrative: the constant references to Dickens' works and other cultural references. Since the story is set while Dickens was working on *Our Mutual Friend*, I could maybe accept the use of some of those characters' name: possibly Dickens could have met someone named Jenny Wren, for instance, and decided to reuse the name. But major characters named Mr. Micawber and Bill Sikes? Names unremarked by Meg or by Dickens himself? And worse than that, Meg and Dickens visit a street called Penny Lane, inhabited by a pretty nurse selling poppies and four young men cleaning a fire engine? It's all just too twee and clever for me.

I would probably try another YA by Buzbee, but I hope he'll tone down the self-consciously clever bits.

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### **Alondra says**

The plot in this story is about a sister trying to find her kidnapped brother and how she goes through many adventures and as will discover and uncovers many things.

The grade that this book is best for is 10th grade and the reason why is because of its high vocabulary it consists of. As well because of the way they phrase their sentences the reader can easily get confused.

This book is from a sociological point of view because it points out many social concerns. The author was trying to point out many concerns that were and still are a concern to this day. The theme of this story was to be cautious with the people you surround yourself with. The way I know this is the theme of the book is because it points out how he started to talking to certain people and that made him poke around and that is how Orion got in all that mess. For one that is why he was kidnapped because he knew to much and that is why Meg had to go out in all those adventures to find her brother but in the process she discovered things that she simply couldn't walk away from and that's how she going out about all the kidnapping and where they went and what they were focus to put up with.

The part I enjoyed most was when they helped free the rest of the children and not just Orion because of the kind of people they are they could not just leave those kids just to suffer. The part I really dislike was when the cops were willing to walk away from the mess so they don't have to deal with when it was so obvious what was happening and also that they were about to walk away when nothing of what the criminals were saying made sense.

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### **Shane says**

Overall I liked this historical mystery set in 19th-century London. As the plot follows Meg while she searches for her missing older brother, things moved along at a decent pace. I think many of my 6th grade students might get bogged down in the narrative of this story--especially in how the descriptions at times go on and on while detailing the same thing for paragraphs, or how Dickens speaks in a roundabout way before the story continues on.

I'm not sure what the deal was with the supernatural aspect of this book because it seemed very unnecessary

to the plot as it only appeared toward the beginning and was barely referenced later. The haunting in the title of the book is misleading and does not have to do with a ghost but instead with Dickens being "haunted" by a problem.

I was also bothered about how character names from Dickens' books came up in the story as people that Meg and Dickens interacted with, but these didn't seem to trouble either of them even though the names had already been written in his books. I don't think my students would pick up on this, nor would they notice the other references, like the Lennon and McCartney factory.

These things aside, I did enjoy Meg's tour of London in her quest to return her missing brother to their family. I think the accent of the narrator on the audio book helped bring me into the story further.

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### **Jennifer Wardrip says**

Reviewed by Kira M for TeensReadToo.com

19th-century London is not a safe place for children, especially a girl like Meg Pickel. Boys and girls are going missing all over. Meg's family has been torn apart by the disappearance of her own brother, Orion, six months ago.

Now that her brother is gone, Meg is plagued with insomnia. While wandering the streets late one night, she runs into the family's friend, Charles Dickens, who is also suffering from lack of sleep. When an insomnia-ridden conversation leads them to a place where a group is having a séance, the two begin to believe that Orion was there, in the flesh.

Unable to let the strange circumstances go, the two try and solve the mystery of Orion's disappearance. Meg's father, however, isn't too thrilled with her being on the case, and danger is lurking around every corner. Can Meg solve the mystery of her missing brother, or will she wind up disappearing, as well?

A great historical mystery filled with adventure. The book seems to accurately portray the time period. The characters seem well-developed, and the plot is intriguing and does a good job of holding the reader's interest. Those who like mysteries, adventure, and a bit of paranormal activity will enjoy reading **THE HAUNTING OF CHARLES DICKENS**.

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### **Heidi says**

During most of this book, my biggest dilemma wasn't whether Charles Dickens would get over being haunted, or the missing boy found, but who this novel was written for.

I couldn't imagine kids really liking it. The main character, Meg Pickel, seems completely unreal, the sort of heroine who would be constructed by a middle-aged man. Charles Dickens comes across as a badly done parody of, well, Charles Dickens. The action is slow, with everybody constantly stopping to consume these elaborate meals in different parts of London, probably because the author wanted a chance to show off his research. And the author is constantly pulling back from an exciting bit of action in order to pompously editorialize about the customs of the time.

So was Louis Buzbee thinking that parents would love it as they read it to their children? He drops in many references that can only be familiar to adults. A number of the characters are named after Dickens's characters (which personally pulled me waaaaay out of the moment), and he throws in many more adult-centric details, such as the lost boys of Peter Pan (a book that hadn't been written in Dickens's time) and an encounter with four young singers on Abbey Lane based on the Beatles! But the prose and the characterization are so wooden and the reading level is so young I can't imagine adults getting into it either.

What I finally concluded is that what Buzbee and his editors had in mind was some sort of Dickens homage on a junior level, complete with authorial asides, humorous characters, sketches of London life, and a social message. But while Dickens has the mighty genius to pull this off, Buzbee really doesn't. My CDs malfunctioned at the very end, and it says something that I may or may not take the book out of the library to read the conclusion.

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### **Natalie says**

Meg's older brother, Orion, has been missing for the past six months. There's been no sign he's still alive but Meg keeps hoping. One night she sees a strange light from an abandoned house not far away. She decides to investigate and stumbles upon a faked seance and Charles Dickens, also spying. Then Meg thinks one of the boys in the room could be Orion. Thus begins Meg and Mr. Dickens' search for the missing Orion. They stumble upon clues, get chased, dress in disguise, and use Mr. Dickens' pull to get out of legal trouble. And what they find will change how England treats children.

A somewhat engrossing tale. There are hints to Dickens work throughout, and although Meg's family is part of the search for the missing brother, Meg takes center stage. Child labor is the biggest social issue here as it was to Dickens.

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### **Courtney Johnston says**

I love the idea of this book. Dickens (big right now - good advance picking, Buzbee) is famed for his midnight walks round London - solitary walking was an immense part of his creative practice.

Buzbee takes these lost hours, and inserts into them a solid mystery story. Twelve-year-old Meg Pickel's older brother Orion has been missing for six months. She slips into the London streets one midnight, and happens upon Dickens, also out searching - searching for his next story.

Dickens happens to be a friend of the Pickel family; he buys his paper from their printing shop. And as he waits for inspiration to strike him, he joins with Meg in the hunt for Orion.

The book is a pastiche, and a reasonably successful one: it brims with Dickensian language and outrage at the unfair treatment of London's poor and lost children. Buzbee sprinkles the book heavily with references to Dickens' books; the fossilised wedding cake and scuttling spiders of 'Great Expectations', an Old Curiosity Shop, the appearance of characters named Mr Micawber, Jenny Wren and Miss Podsnap, and probably many more than I don't catch, not being very familiar with the books myself.

The evocation of Victorian London is rather fantastic, and I imagine will appeal a lot to younger readers' imaginations:

It is a truth universally acknowledged that within the hub-bub of any grand city, a pair of friends might find a quiet bubble within which to cocoon themselves from all the commotion. It is not that the walkers create, by force of concentration, such a bubble of silence to inhabit; the commotion itself creates such bubbles. Stand by a rushing brook or near the crashing ocean, and you will see bubbles. It was in one such bubble of silence that Meg and Mr Dickens found themselves. All the way from Cheapside down Queen's Street, until they reached the docks and the Thames, Meg and Mr Dickens were able to speak, as if in private, while the river of London flowed noisily around them.

The book has some sizable flaws though. The unneeded reference at the start of the paragraph above is a wee example - they start off being amusing as a 'knowing' reader, but become tiresome: a young reader is likely to not derive anything from them (I can see they're all about the joy of reading, but others have done this much better: see [Rebecca Stead here](#)). There's an odd, unexplained supernatural appearance at the start of the story which goes unused; there's a rather pointless set-piece in which Meg and Mr Dickens, exploring Penny Lane, happen upon four young men cleaning a fireman who break into song. And there's a couple of overt grrl-power moments dropped clunkety-clunk-clunk into the narrative:

It is generally accepted of reality that there are fields of endeavour suited to the male sex and fields of endeavour suited to the female sex. It is also assumed, generally, that what men will do women ought not to do. . .

Perhaps there will come a time - can we strain our minds to imagine a future one hundred, even two hundred years hence - in which women and men will compete for the same positions of skill and adventure. But that time is not now. Now, today, 1862, in the year of our good Queen's Silver Jubilee, we assume that women will tend to the home, while men will shoulder other duties.

All this I will forgive though for a transcendently appealing passage about operating a printing press, redolent with archaic jargon, thumping sounds, sticky ink, deft movements, and the joy of mastery. 'The Haunting of Charles Dickens' is a love letter to reading and the making of books - if at times the emotion is a little cringingly expressed, then, well - who can blame the guy?

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### **Natalie Ayala says**

Meg's brother Orion suddenly goes missing. After six months of not being able to sleep due to her unanswered questions about Orion, she finally sets out to find answers when Mr. Charles Dickens secretly visits her father's print shop. This book would be best suitable for audiences between the ages of 11-15 or students that are in sixth to tenth grade. I recommend "The haunting of Charles Dickens" to this age group of students because it does not include mature language and it is easy to follow and understand what the characters talk about. The main characters in the book also seem like they are between eleven and fifteen

years old as well. This book may be valuable from an educational standpoint because Meg and Mr. Dickens connect details to figure out what to do and what pieces to put together in order to understand Orion's disappearance as well as what led up to it. An example, of putting pieces together was when Meg was able to conclude that a woman was using two identities to hide the fact that she is involved at the Satis House. Meg was sure she had seen Orion and that woman after he went missing there. Through this I think the author was trying to accomplish a sense of developing plans and or solutions on your own through clues. I think the theme is persistence. The thing I enjoyed most about the book was the mystery and suspense aspect. This was what really made me like the book because I wanted to keep reading to follow Meg and Mr. Dickens getting to Orion especially since the possible clues they found along the way were just so surprising. My favorite clue happened to be Charlie. There was not anything that I disliked about this book.

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### **Elizabeth Varadan says**

Take an unexplained disappearance. Bring in a ghost who points the way. Add Charles Dickens, who knows London's troubled neighborhoods only too well. Stir in a plucky, thirteen-year-old girl who will let nothing stop her from tailing a dangerous kidnapping gang, and you have the grand, new middle-grade mystery by Lewis Buzbee, *The Haunting of Charles Dickens*.

Meg Pickel's older brother, Orion, disappeared six months ago. Her family is still numb with shock. Each night, when everyone is asleep, Meg goes up to the roof-garden to brood. One night, a green glow from the skylight of the Satis House catches her attention and launches Meg on her own personal search for Orion. Part mystery, part ghost story, this intriguing tale leads a reader through twists and turns that parallel the dark streets and hidden alleys of Dickens's London.

The Great Man, Dickens, is a regular customer at the Pickel family's printing shop as well as being a close family friend. Orion's disappearance affects him deeply. He and Meg team up as sleuths, accompanied by the family dog, Mulberry. They find clues on walls and dusty floors. Colorful characters offer them leads. Soon it is clear that Orion has been "press-ganged", kidnapped into slave labor. Now it is up to Meg and Dickens to save Orion. But not just Orion: A ghost Meg and Dickens met earlier in the Satis House becomes the metaphor for all the ghosts of London's forgotten children.

This is a fine adventure story with engaging characters, a complex plot, and writing that is rich and vivid. An added pleasure for Dickens lovers is the way Buzbee at times dips into the style of times and addresses the reader directly. And, in the same vein, names of characters give clues to their natures: Micawber; Mr. Hardlywaite; Jenny Wren; Mrs. Podsnap (married now to Mr. Bogle.) Scenes unfold that could be from a Dickens novel. Consider:

"....Out of the dark recess of a far corner, a shadow seemed to be swirling, and swirling, seemed to coalesce into a figure, the figure of a man dressed in the colors of a shadow. He was as thin as a lamp-post, with a long beard as thin as a smaller lamp-post. And he was staring right at Meg. Un-remarked by all, the man moved towards her, as if floating rather than walking. He did not take his eyes off her, nor did his lips stop moving...."

*The Haunting of Charles Dickens* will be in bookstores in October, 2010 (next month) – a must read for anyone who enjoys a good mystery, enjoys the writings of Charles Dickens, or enjoys any novel set in

Victorian London. A triple treat for those who enjoy all three. The atmospheric black and white illustrations by Greg Ruth are a perfect choice for this ethereal tale.

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### **Alan says**

ATOS Book Level: 6.0

Interest Level: Middle Grades Plus (MG+ 6 and up)

AR Points: 13.0

Word Count: 79887

I've only finished the first chapter but I'm hesitant to read much more. The prose doesn't flow well for me, I know it's just for background info and to set up their connection to Dickens, but the style of the writing comes across as flat.

Almost half way through and I find myself stopping to read reviews about the book to see if I should continue on. I did finally get caught up in the story when Dickens and Meg are running around Cheapside, but when they end up back at the print shop, talking to the family and deciding what to do...

The reviews talk about the historical accuracy of the book and Dickens looking for inspiration for his next book, but how many middle schooler readers are going to get caught up in this book? readers of Charles Dickens perhaps but if they're good enough readers to enjoy Dickens then they're good enough readers to realize that this book does not stand up to Dickens own prose and story telling.

I still plan on plowing through the book but it may take awhile, hopefully it will change my mind.

This book does have it's moments but they are few and far between. Much like a Dickens novel it has a strong theme against poverty, greed and child enslavement. As well as a the theme of the power of words to both conceal or enlighten.

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### **A.J. says**

Meg's brother Orion is missing. On a midnight rooftop escapade she runs into Charles Dickens, a family friend and fellow insomniac. They witness a fake seance, which leads them to believe that Orion may be prisoner somewhere and it is up to them to find and free him. With the help of the rest of Meg's family and a sundry cast of worthy Victorian characatures, they set out on a quest to bring him home.

Quite a good book for what it is. I sense that it's well-suited to the upper-middle-grade/youngish-young-adult set (thought having always been super ahead of my age in reading level I don't necessarily have the best perspective of what that actually is). But it's well written, has a strong female protagonist, and a great family dynamic that I really enjoyed. It's true to the period without being graphic or inappropriate, and it conjures up the world and style of Dickens himself nicely for kids/teens who may not be quite ready to bite off the Great Man himself.

My quibble with the book comes from the way it conjures up Dickens; I constantly felt like it was trying so hard to be clever that it undercut the very things that it was doing so well. My two main issues were:  
(view spoiler)

Those two mini-rants aside, I did enjoy the book, and I would gladly recommend it as a gateway to Dickens/Victorian literature for younger readers.

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### **Hazel West says**

**Thoughts on the Overall Book:** This was one of those books that when I started it, I wasn't sure if I was going to like it or not. It's starts out slow, and I was worried that the mystery of Meg's brother's disappearance would turn out not to be all that interesting. However, about a third of the way in, the book takes a really interesting turn, that immediately made me sit up and speed through the rest. It was one that I really didn't know what the book was going to be about when I started it, but ended up being really good.

**Cover--Yea or Nay:** I really like the cover. I was excited to see the book was illustrated by Greg Ruth (I loved his work in the "Secret Journey's of Jack London" series) and he's probably one of my favorite illustrators at the moment. There's just something about his style I really like.

**Characters:** Like the story, I wasn't exactly sure what I felt about Meg at first. I liked how she was worried about her brother disappearing, and that she was willing to do whatever she had to do to get him back, even if the rest of her family had given up hope, but she almost came across as a little bit naive, and almost borderline bratty on occasion. However, as the story progressed, she just became a strong and very smart heroine, and I have to take it into account that she's only about 12 or so too, so she is still young. I really liked Orion right off though, even though most of what the reader knows about him is just from Meg's memories and flashbacks. I also loved the inclusion of Charles Dickens. I always love it when famous authors are incorporated into novels, and I have read several novels featuring Dickens. Sadly, I have yet to actually read his books, but Charles as himself has already endeared me to him.

**The Romance:** None!

**Writing Style:** I liked the writing style, it was classic and fit the time period, and I do believe was a bit reminiscent of Dickens's. The only thing that bothered me about it was that there was an "unknown narrator" who spoke in various places and those were in present tense whereas the rest of the story was in past. It wasn't totally jarring, but it stopped me for a few seconds when I came to one of those places. I really liked how the author portrayed the darker side of London at this time period too, and how children were treated, which was horrible at the best of times. Since this is a kids' book, there was nothing mentioned in any detail, but you still got an insight of the horror of the workhouses and how cruel they treated the poor orphans there and how they press-ganged any children they could find. You get the idea of the horror and to me, it's almost worse than having it put all in front of you.

**Problems/What bothered me:** The only thing that really bothered me was the fact that I really saw no reason for the inclusion of the ghost boy "Dick Wittington". You see him once in the first few chapters, but he never re-appears, nor did I see any ah-ha correlation to him in any other aspect of the story. I kind of got how he represented "eternal childhood" but I still didn't really see how that all tied in. I think the story would have been just as good without his inclusion.

**Conclusion:** 4 stars. I ended up really enjoying this book, and it ended on a good note with a happy ending, but also had a tad of bittersweetness as well. I liked seeing Meg grow up in the story from how we originally see her--a dreamer who thinks of the world like a novel--to who she becomes by the end of the story--a bit more world weary, and finally able to realize that not everything can be fixed, at least not right away, and

that there really is no conclusion to life like in a novel.

Recommended Audience: Fans of Charles Dickens would enjoy this as a quick read. It's also a kind of easy read for Victorian mystery lovers. Girl or boy read, ages 12 and up.

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### **Hallie says**

This was - confusing. Also rather confused, I think. There was a lot going on - as, of course, is the case with the typical Dickens novel - but sometimes one element seemed to interfere with another, and by the end, I wasn't sure quite *what* kind of story Buzbee had set out to write. One thing is pretty certain though, and that's that people who can't stand Dickens will be very unlikely to enjoy this book. A compliment in a way, because as a straight Dickens pastiche, it's quite successful.

Meg Pickel is the 12-year-old daughter of a London printer, with a younger brother and an older one who disappeared six months ago. Her father, understandably distraught by the loss of his wife some years ago, and now the loss of his oldest child, has rather given up on anything except keeping the remaining children safe. But Meg has never given up on finding Orion, and out investigating a strange light from an abandoned house nearby one night, encounters Charles Dickens, a (fake) séance, a real spirit and - only glimpsed from the rooftop - her brother. Dickens has finished *Great Expectations* and has lost inspiration for his next book. He's also in hiding from the world, pretending to be in France. He and Meg set out to find and save Orion, despite Meg's father's worries.

Problem number one is that *Great Expectations* is absolutely finished, already in print (as a novel, even), and yet Meg and Dickens talk about the strangeness of the abandoned house's name - 'Satis House'. On returning to it and going in, they see the ruins of the wedding cake, complete with spiders and all. But *Great Expectations* is **written**. How can Buzbee have missed the obvious fact that it makes no sense for Dickens to see the scene that gives him inspiration for his writing about his NEXT novel and his PREVIOUS novel at the same time? I've been worrying this one over ever since encountering the Satis House name, and am no closer to understanding what went wrong here than when I first heard it. (Audiobook, so it was quite a while ago!)

I've no problem with Dickens getting the idea that sparks *Our Mutual Friend* when he and Meg are going around London looking for Orion, as that is the novel after *Great Expectations*, and of course Dickens did get inspiration from things he saw and read about. But there are names from many of the books he'd already written by the time of Buzbee's book, including *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* and scenes heavily reminiscent of other books. Doesn't make any sense.

The low point though, for me, was when Meg asked Dickens not to read from *Little Dorrit* at one of his readings, and he asked her what she really thought of the book. She said that Dorrit isn't her favourite character, because she isn't her own hero. (Words to that effect, anyway, as it's hard to quote from audiobook.) He thinks about it and then says she's right, and if he had known her before writing *Little Dorrit* it would have been a better book. This may be unintentionally so, but it's ridiculously arrogant to claim that one's own character would have taught Dickens to be a better writer! Also - I'm sorry, but Meg wasn't a favourite of mine. Definitely brave and determined to rescue her brother, which was admirable, but also a bit of a spoiled madam, and seriously manipulative at times.

Aside from that, it seemed to me that the fact that both Meg and Dickens had actually seen a real spirit/ghost and talked to him, even, should have made a bit more of a difference to them and the story! It did encourage them both to keep trying even harder to save the real children being abused and exploited in London - the living dead, as Meg comes to call them - but nothing else.

Finally, in the pettiest of quibbles, I seriously doubted that a 12 year old girl in London in the 1860s would have been guzzling quite so much strong coffee. There were quite a few other little details that seemed wrong, but overall the feel of Dickensian London was really good.

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