

Book Review: Ticker by Lisa Mantchev

by Krista Johnson

After suffering much loss in past years, Penny Farthing and her family find themselves reeling from yet another blow: a family friend is on trial for murder, murder he claims he committed for Penny and the clockwork heart that saved her life. Penny's world quickly starts falling apart when the family's factory is bombed and her parents go missing. With her brother Nic and their close friends Violet and Sebastian, Penny and her failing ticker race to save her family before her clockwork heart finally runs out of time.

As a new entry in the steampunk genre, *Ticker* paints a fascinating world where mechanical butterflies are hot collectables, portraits of the dead are popular photography, and Augmented humans are all the rage-in more ways than one. Mantchev mixes petticoats and top hats with re-imagined technologies to take her readers on an exciting adventure full of elements that are suspiciously familiar and, at times, bone-chilling. Even more interesting is how heroine Penny retains her image as a proper 19th century lady while facing danger head on with guns and Pixii blazing.

Penny Farthing is not a particularly complicated character. Mantchev avoids much deep character development in favor of Penny's smart-mouthed and daring personality. She's both unafraid of death and terrified of it. Quick to put herself in danger, Penny still fears the malfunction of her ticker despite the many other perilous situations she willingly walks into. Supported by a cast of characters that are interesting in their own right, Penny doesn't have to be complex. In fact, her simplicity works well because the adventure through her world is so captivating.

Everything begins to unravel at the worst time for Penny. The mechanics keeping her blood pumping are slowly deteriorating to no one's surprise; after all, the clockwork heart installed years ago wasn't meant to work forever. The knowledge that any action could finally stop her heart for good both scares her and makes her more determined to sacrifice herself for those she loves. Living with the fact that her days are numbered is what makes Penny a fierce heroine who won't be stopped by anyone, from her overprotective brother to the commander of the security forces. When she comes face to face with the man that is her adversary and her savior, she doesn't back down from her principles which helps solidify the plot. Although the results of her quest are not shocking, her determination and daring keep the novel fresh and entertaining.

Some of the words Mantchev uses can be confusing, though I am not sure if this is due to being unfamiliar with the steampunk genre. On the other hand, much of the language is enticing and adds to the beauty of the novel. The dialogue and descriptions contribute to the full realization of this 19th century world. Even the relationships between male and female characters are proper and in line with the average reader's knowledge of the time period.

Lisa Mantchev's *Ticker* is well worth the read for readers of all ages and genre interests. The novel easily gets 4 out of 5 stars and has something for everyone: adventure, romance, humor, suspense. Readers looking for a fun, fast paced adventure should give this book a look.