



The Bears' Famous Invasion of Sicily

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Editorial Choice:

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BfK Rating:

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It is difficult to determine the audience for this English translation of a classic of Italian children's literature, first published in 1945 and written and illustrated by Dino Buzzati, novelist, journalist, painter and well-known figure of twentieth century Italian literature. It may appeal more to adult readers and students of children's literature, although the beautiful production, fable-like story and old-fashioned but intriguing and detailed illustrations may hook confident child readers in once they get used to the complicated language and discursive style.

The book reads like a folk tale and tells the story of the bears of Sicily who, starving after a harsh winter, descend from the mountains in search of food. They proceed to invade the valley below, defeating the army of the Grand Duke of Sicily and ruling over the land. There is a plot thread involving the kidnap and rescue of the King of the Bears' son as well as many complicated and intertwined adventures with battles, intrigue, treachery and encounters with magical characters and monsters. Ultimately this book becomes an allegory on the corruption of power, as the bears begin to lose their true nature, and it deals with themes of war, politics, love, honour, courage, betrayal, vanity and self-knowledge in a philosophical way. The text is broken up by poems, asides, footnotes and a mix of black and white line drawings and detailed full colour illustrations.

This book could be read as a fantasy story, if a rather rambling, disjointed one, or a political allegory, or a mixture of both. It is fitting that the book ends with a Reader's Companion written by Lemony Snicket as the witty knowingness and digressions of the author's narrative voice closely resemble the tone of Lemony Snicket's stories. This Reader's Companion is very clever, humorous and helpful, with a summary of each chapter, and a list of interesting questions and activities, and may well act as the best way into this novel for young readers. This intriguing work is best described as a literary curiosity; there is plenty to treasure and discover here but it will probably be of limited appeal to a young audience.

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