

The Wind Singer (The Wind on Fire, Book 1)

By William Nicholson

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Kestrel Hath's schoolroom rebellion against the stifling caste system of Aramanth leads to explosive consequences for her and her family: they are relegated to the city's lowest caste and are ostracized. With nothing left to lose, Kestrel and her twin brother, Bowman, do the unthinkable: they leave the city walls. Their only hope of rescuing the rest of their family is to find the key to the wind singer. Armed with bravery, wits, and determination, Kestrel, Bowman, and a tagalong classmate set off to find the key. Along the way they meet allies and foes, but in order to succeed in their quest, they must face the most sinister force of all: the evil spirit-lord, the Morah.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
In the city of Aramanth, the mantra is, "Better today than yesterday. Better tomorrow than today." Harder work means the citizens of Aramanth can keep moving forward to improved life stations--from Gray tenements and Orange apartments, upwards to glorious mansions of White. Only some families, like the Haths, believe more in ideas and dreams than in endless toil and ratings. When Kestrel Hath decides she is through with the Aramanth work ethic, she is joined in her small rebellion by her twin brother Bowman and their friend Mumpo. Together, they set the orderly city on its ear by escaping Aramanth's walls for an adventure that takes them from city sewers to desert sandstorms. Guided by an archaic map, they know that if they can find the voice of the Wind Singer, an ancient and mysterious instrument that stands in the center of Aramanth, they can save their people from their dreamless existence. But the voice is guarded by the dreaded Morah and its legion of perfect killing machines, the Zars. Are three ragtag kids any match for an army of darkness?

Like Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass*, *The Wind Singer* is a rich, multilayered fantasy that can be read on many levels. With this first volume of a planned trilogy, British author William Nicholson deftly illustrates such fundamental values as tolerance and the importance of individuality, without sacrificing a bit of the novel's breathless adventure. Watch out, J.K. Rowling! If the rest of The Wind on Fire trilogy is as amazing as this debut, Nicholson's books may be the next hot English export. (Ages 10 and older) --*Jennifer Hubert*

From Publishers Weekly
Nicholson's (Shadowlands) highly imaginative debut YA novel, the first in a planned trilogy, starts out tantalizingly but eventually neglects its internal logic. In the dystopian city of Aramanth, family ratings determine position, housing and privileges within the society's color-coded caste system. As the novel opens, the Hath family brings two-year-old Pinpin for her first day of "testing"Awith comically disastrous results. Shortly after, Kestrel, the Haths' strong-headed and brave daughter, stages a rebellion in a riotously depicted scene at school and eventually ends up climbing the wind singer (a giant archaic structure whose history is nearly forgotten) to hurl curses at the town. Events escalate, and soon Kestrel, her twin brother (who has supernatural abilities to empathize with others) and a learning-disabled classmate, Mumpo, find themselves on a quest to retrieve the wind singer's voice; according to legend, it will restore harmony to Aramanth. Nicholson is at his best when he adheres to Kestrel's point of view; occasional shifts in perspective may temporarily break readers from the author's spell. Highly original characters, such as the loving "Mudpeople" who inhabit a world under the city's grid-like streets, and "old children" whose touch zaps the life from normal humans, exert a powerful fascination. However, there are inconsistencies (Why, when Mumpo turns into one of the "old children," is he exempt from the laws that govern them?) and unexplored elements (e.g., Kestrel's mother's ancestry and gifts as a prophetess). Perhaps these curiosities will be explained in subsequent installments, but they come across here as loose ends. Final artwork not seen by PW. Ages 10-14. (Aug.)
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From School Library Journal
Grade 5-8-A prominent producer/director/ scriptwriter ventures into epic-or at least epic length-fantasy with this tale of three children out to save the regimented residents of their walled city. Over generations since the small silver "voice" of a mysterious aeolian pipe organ known as the wind singer was meekly surrendered to the Morah, a menacing spirit-lord, Aramanth has become enslaved by a relentless ethic of academic self-

improvement, enforced by color-coded social strata and regular, supervised, written examinations. When the misfit Hath family draws the eye, and ire, of the Chief Examiner, twins Kestrel and Bowman set out to reclaim the wind singer's voice, accompanied by a despised, simpleminded classmate. After an episodic series of encounters-including hordes of giant eagles and wolves, and finally with the Zar, an army of murderous zombies that marches at the Morah's behest-the three do give the wind singer back its ethereal voice, whereupon the pursuing Zar all die and the citizens of Aramanth spontaneously throw off their oppressive urge to excel. Nicholson throws a satiric light onto his various societies, gives his young protagonists intriguing capabilities, and concocts genuinely bone-chilling supernatural menaces. However, rescue (usually of a contrived sort) is always so conveniently close at hand that the children never fall into convincing peril, and subplots seem to exist for the sole purpose of giving their parents something to do. Still, despite being the first of a projected trilogy, the story stands alone, and fans of such barbed journey tales as Tanith Lee's Wolf Tower (Dutton, 2000) will enjoy the social commentary.
John Peters, New York Public Library
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kelly Watson:

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