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Tomorrow's Guardian by Richard Denning

Eleven year old Tom Oakley thinks he's going mad when he seems to relive short periods of his life, and dreams about other people from different times. The reality is far stranger – he's a Walker, with the power to rescue those he dreamed about. Travelling to the battle of Isandlwana, the Great Fire of London, and a German U-Boat, guided by the mysterious Professor, Tom saves the lives of soldier Edward, servant Mary, and Able Seaman Charlie, who also have powers. There are others, however, with similar powers, who aren't as pleasant as Tom's new friends – and the four of them, allied with the Professor and his roguish helper Septimus, are pitched into a battle to save the worlds. That's intentionally plural – there are two parallel universes at stake here.

So, not lacking in ambition by any stretch of the imagination. The major success here – and it is a really major one – is that author Richard Denning, after a slightly slow first few chapters, keeps the action fast and furious for the other 400 or so pages of the book. Diving in and out of time, and in and out of the Twisted Reality (the other universe), there's never a dull moment as the inevitable confrontation with the evil Redfeld, villain of the piece, comes closer and closer.

The other thing that really impressed me about the book was the way the time travel was handled – this is a bugbear for me as I've read some dreadfully convoluted stories in the past concerning the subject. Denning sets things up well, never goes into too much detail on how everything works, and trust in his ability to keep the action flowing so well that the fine points aren't particularly important. Speaking of details, while the historical sequences are fairly short and they're set in times which I'm not particularly familiar with, they certainly all seem authentic.

I generally really like 'shades of grey' characterisation in fantasy, and tend to find completely good or evil characters rather boring. However, I'll make an exception here – while there are several characters who are definitely ambiguous, and whose motivations will keep you guessing right until the end, Tom and Edward stand out as really likable 'pure' heroes, particularly with a couple of speeches they make, while Redfeld is a splendidly evil antagonist.

In many ways, the story – young boy finds out he had mysterious powers he didn't know about and is plunged into a quest which has been going on for years – is reminiscent of the Dark Is Rising by Susan Cooper, still probably my favourite children's fantasy sequence twenty years after I originally read it. I'm not saying that I'll return to this one again as often as I've done that series – but I'll definitely reread it at least once in the future, and I'll recommend it to readers around Tom's age, many of whom I confidently expect to absolutely love it. I'm not sure whether older teens will like it quite so much, given the huge amount of great fantasy out there today and the lack of much character development, but I'd encourage them to at least try it.

I'm not sure whether author Richard Denning will continue writing about Tom, but I'd be extremely keen to read a follow-up – and I'm also planning on checking out the other books he's already got published, two historical novels.

Further Reading: For another enjoyable story of a young boy charged with saving the world, children could try [The Comet's Child by John Ward](#).



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