

**Ghosting Home, by Julia Jones, pub Golden Duck £7.99**

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This is the third, concluding volume of Julia Jones's Strong Winds trilogy, and in many ways the most satisfying – which is not to denigrate the impact of the preceding books. This one completes the architecture of the series, and develops and expands the themes implicit, or slowly revealed, in *The Salt-Stained Book* and *A Ravelled Flag*.

Although Jones explicitly takes her inspiration from Arthur Ransome (and packs her tales with both clear and sly references), her themes have never aped the escapism of *Swallows and Amazons*. Her characters are children in a real and complex world, with a focus which develops through the series, from personal and domestic to the wider world – this time embracing China.

Sailing and sea-traffic in general remain at the heart of the narrative, and there is a huge amount of well-researched technical accuracy embedded effortlessly in the action. The North Sea passage of *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*, here started by a pier-head jump without a pier, effectively (and in a single chapter) consigns the voyage of the *Goblin* to the realms of myth, as *Strong Winds* copes with Traffic Separation Schemes, fights off an attacker with flares, and is tracked by a helicopter, which eventually delivers an adult male relative by winch.

The narrative as ever magically combines pacy action with a real sensitivity towards the needs, emotions and anxieties of her cast of early-teens. It's deep, rich, dramatic and comic sometimes almost simultaneously, and the trilogy as a whole amounts to a classic in the making.

In fact – and I can hardly say this without feelings of disloyalty – but Julia Jones's grasp of what matters in storytelling, and how to use it is so strong that she's in danger of leaving her mentor Ransome drifting in her wake.