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The Battle for Gullywith

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Ten-year-old Oliver McKenzie Brown is about to move home to a country house named Gullywith. Before he moves house, stones begin unaccountably appearing in his pockets. When his family reaches Gullywith, there follows a chapter of accidents such as a collapsing roof and a flooded cellar. It transpires the house used to belong to the Stone King. He wants it back.

The novel is a fantasy quest narrative. Oliver forms an alliance to persuade the Stone King to relinquish his claim, a team including the mysterious KK, her brothers Zed and Zylo, and Nonny Dreever, an adult who mentors the children and commands an army of tortoises.

The first 60 pages progress very slowly as Oliver (along with the reader) acquires enough knowledge to work out what must be done. Thereafter the structure takes shape, the pace quickens and the texture of the book becomes rich and satisfying. The children ? particularly KK and Oliver himself ? are often depicted as older than the age reported for them or assumed from the narrative.

Oliver learns much of what he needs from books ? books which magically appear and disappear, and from which chapters suddenly vanish. This episode may remind young readers that books do have a value in the electronic age, and give a new twist to the phrase ?mobile library?.

One brilliant episode makes me wonder what this book might have been. The children visit a Midwinter Revel, encountering magical snowfields in mid-summer. At this point the narrative takes fire. Why couldn't more of the book reach this exciting standard?

Running Order:

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