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▶ Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award Reviews

ABNA Expert Reviewer

What is the strongest aspect of this excerpt?

Good plot development as we are introduced to two precocious kids likely to become set on figuring out mysteries. The reader is gradually brought into the world of the kids and their odd but apparently harmless parents. Good surrounds as well, with a ginormous castle overloaded with nooks and crannies and secret places.

What aspect needs the most work?

There is mention of Mom going in to town but it's clear the kids never leave the castle. This would tend to bother the average child a bit more than these two seem to appear. Perhaps a little history about their early years and their apparent acceptance of the enforced cloistering (nobody would believe for an instant that they would cheerfully go along with this forever) would make the lead-in to their eventual escape easier.

What is your overall opinion of this excerpt?

Pretty typical brother-sister behaviour here, well-written and thought out, but from the lead-in synopsis there seems to be way too much going on further along in this book. I'd like to know more about Mom and where she came from, hinted at so enigmatically. And while I understand that wizards don't really have to DO anything, this family seems to do a lot of nothing, at least early on. Everybody but Junior seems to spend most of their time reading - a commendable pastime, but one not conducive to life in general. Of course, things will heat up in no time, with all the fantastical creatures notated in the synopsis. It seems to me, however, that it is destined to go from zero to 600 with no time to catch up. It looks to get too busy to me.

ABNA Expert Reviewer

What is the strongest aspect of this excerpt?

The layout of the castle provides excellent imagery of its immense structure. The author deftly describes the rooms and layout giving the reader a clear view of the children's segregated area. Describing the parents was interesting, too. Both scientists but the mother lacking physical strength was an excellent suspense technique.

What aspect needs the most work?

I thought it was rather boring but this is young adult fiction and I am not an experienced critic of this genre. It moved slowly; after I learned the layout and the little games the children play, it was time for action. The introduction of the camera to view the Secret Door is good foreshadowing.

What is your overall opinion of this excerpt?

If the target audience is children who like science fiction and fairy tales, this could be an excellent introduction to an interesting book. The excerpt did not hold my interest but because of the subject matter, the writing was fluid and the descriptions of the castle and its surroundings evoked superb imagery.

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