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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Superficially, this is a mundane domestic story. Its narrator is Josh, just into secondary school and possessed with an exceptional memory for facts and by a fascination with lions and other members of the cat family. Its plot, however, centres on the seemingly inexplicable behaviour of his younger brother Jamie who suddenly retreats into silence but is revealed to be mentally possessed in a more sinister way by one particular lion.

In reality, this is a novel about sibling jealousies. Josh and Jamie are learning to cope with their parents' separation, acquisition of new partners and the birth (to their mother and her new boyfriend) of a baby sister and the arrival (in their father's new home) of a moody half-brother.

To regard it simply as a book that may usefully be pushed into the hands of any 10- to 13-year-old who is experiencing similar domestic disruption is to diminish its worth. Yes, it could well be extremely helpful to such readers ? and, since such situations are by no means rare, it would justify its place in most libraries on these terms.

But, more importantly, despite its parochial scale, it is a genuine ?page-turner?, a novel rooted in the realities of home and school life in north-west London and one with utterly convincing characterisation. Both dads may be white van men but they are more than ciphers: they have their own unexpected interests in wild life and cooking.

The style is crisp; devoid of any floweriness and punctuated by convincing ?extracts? from Josh's special lion-centred scrapbook and by other illustrations by Ian P. Benfold Haywood. Add to this the book's striking gold foil dust jacket, then holding and reading it becomes a strangely and pleasingly tactile experience.

Running Order:

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