

Galadria: Peter Huddleston and the Rites of Passage

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Socially isolated, beleaguered Peter Huddleston seems doomed to be the victim of nasty neighbors, his disconnected dad, and his step-mother's devotion to beige décor and bland cuisine. However, Peter's idyllic summer of cheese sandwiches, tree-climbing, and comic books vanishes when "Aunt Celeste," his stepmother's best friend, insults the deceased mother he barely remembers. Peter loses his temper and hurls his trusty boomerang at her "frilly desk...cleanly beheading an entire vase of dull, lifeless flowers." Unrepentantly declaring to his father, "If I had wanted to hit her on the head, I wouldn't have missed," he makes matters worse the very next day by throwing the boomerang right at a busybody neighbor! It doesn't hit her, of course, because he is already a champion boomerang thrower, but the incident gets him banished from home for the summer.

Deposited at Aunt Gillian's by his uncommunicative father, Peter is astounded to discover that his mother's mysterious sister presides over a palatial estate, complete with vast grounds, three thousand rooms, and a bevy of comically devoted servants. However, when Aunt Gillian reveals that Hillside Manor is merely the earthly manifestation of Galadria, a magical realm that she rules and hopes one day to pass to him, he concludes, quite sensibly, that she is "stark raving mad!" The truth becomes all too clear, however, when Peter's succession to the throne is contested by Knor, a vitriolic pretender from the House of Shadowray.

Peter's days quickly become a crash course in all things Galadrian, arduous training sessions complemented by hours of boomerang practice. His tutors are an idiosyncratic bunch: Monty, the royal butler who cossets him and brings him delicious multi-course meals; Mrs. Cornhen, a stern cultural guide; and Ms. Homebody, whose irrepressible liveliness reminds readers of just how ridiculous adults can be. Rune, a white tiger, becomes his protector. Even the Twickeypoos, Peter's eccentric secret grandparents, give him magical gifts that ensure his survival.

One of the delights of this book is that the adult characters focus completely on Peter, who blooms as every neglected child dreams of doing. He revels in their antics, benefits from their attention, and blossoms as much as the Discoed Daisies, Rockaway Roses, and Tangoed Tulips do when they hear Earth music. All is not a bed of daffodils, however, and Peter must overcome hidden dangers that lurk in magical hiding places, waiting to waylay him before he can complete the Rites of Passage. Readers will wait impatiently for the second installment in Peter's saga, *Peter Huddleston and the Mists of the Three Lakes*.

ELIZABETH BREAU (June 21, 2011)

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