

The Castle

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The Castle is an ambitious supernatural mystery about Devon, a boy plagued by cancer and events that take place somewhere between reality and various dimensions of his consciousness. Just what's real is an enigma for the reader to determine. The "castle" in the book title refers to the chess piece more often called the "rook." "Castle" is also a force that threatens to transport Devon to another place and time; a place which has a "real" castle.

The story opens with Devon (narrating in first-person) discussing the day he was born, his parents and grandparents, and the onset of his cancer. During the operations on his eyes, and the subsequent blackouts, Devon meets James White, an old man who reminds him of his beloved grandfather, and who also gives Devon a chess set. Devon's grandfather is also named James and also gives Devon a chess set. When Devon is in the realm where the castle exists, he meets up with Joseph, a boy who was also being treated for cancer in the hospital with Devon. The story continues with many crossovers and coincidences between dream-like states and reality, between what could be glimpses into the future or journeys to the past. Devon explains, "All these things were like a dream to me, but they always say there is a narrow line between dream and reality."

Although the author spins a wild tale that makes the reader wonder about various states of consciousness, life and death, and other dimensions in time, there are quite a few moments of distraction caused by inconsistencies, awkward writing, and numerous typos. For example, several chapters after Devon has had an operation on his right eye, he requires an operation on his other eye. Olfet unnecessarily repeats this information: "The sight in my left eye was getting worse and worse. It was my right eye before; now it was my left one." Another example of overstatement occurs when Olfet talks about a room getting very dark: "The room was getting absolutely dark, so dark that he had to touch his surroundings to be able to find the light stick."

There are also numerous bothersome sentences and word choices. Examples include: "I could tell it was good and bad timing at the same time. Good, because it was Christmas and everybody was happy, and bad because of my health condition," and "Devon had no cancer anymore but the power of love of his grandpa did not leave him alone." Moreover, the change in point of view from first person to third person is jarring and causes the book to read like an unfinished manuscript.

Omid Olfet is also the author of *In The Dark*, another mystery targeted at young adults. He teaches chess in Plano, TX. With some polishing, this tale for young adults shows promise.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (April 28, 2011)

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