



Voices in the Mist

J. S. Ralph

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Curious elflike characters and a strange threat to their home heighten the mystery of this rich fantasy realm.

A twelve-year-old British girl learns she has been specially chosen to be welcomed into the world of tiny beings who live hidden in the forest below her grandparents' home, and she must assist when an unknown evil threatens them all in J. S. Ralph's fanciful first novel, *Voices in the Mist*.

Narrator Suzy tells her story in one long flashback, starting when she first met the "paxtey" known as Scratch, coming out of hibernation from his chrysalis in her grandparents' attic. "I'm not an elf or a fairy or a pixie. I am a small person like a pixie, and I have wings like a fairy, but that is where the likenesses end."

Ralph has created a delightfully rich realm in which the paxteys reside, from the newborn babies arriving at the end of rainbows like pots of gold, to the swiftness of their flight and sensitive hearing, to their overall kindness to the world around them. But when Suzy and the paxteys hear the terrible voices in the mist accompanied by the near destruction of their home, they are forced to unearth the cause.

The characters and story line are somewhat reminiscent of those in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, and even the Harry Potter series. For example, Suzy is able to fly along with her new friends because a small summer house in the backyard doubles as her transport.

Because the author is British, the human characters speak in colloquialisms, such as when Suzy says, "Last night I was excited, but tonight I really have the collywobblers." It doesn't distract from the story; in fact, it adds to the ambiance. The pacing of the story works out just right. The humans and paxteys have enough time to meet and connect before bad things start happening on a much larger level.

Characters are sufficiently drawn: Nan and Grandad are always available and helpful, although, as Suzy notes, "Funny how in every emergency we always put the kettle on for tea." Her childhood friend, Julie, wants to know the secret Suzy is keeping from her, and Chamali, the wise old paxtey storyteller, disappears, adding another piece to the puzzle.

Detracting from the delightful story Ralph weaves are the occasional punctuation and grammatical errors. Learning a little more of Suzy's backstory would have been nice too. School children and fans of the fantasy genre will enjoy this highly original take on a young girl's special friendship with creatures not of the human world.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (May 8, 2014)

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