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Something is not right at Rookskill Castle, a rundown Scottish manor shrouded in mystery. The castle is a temporary boarding school for children escaping the Blitz, but soon it's clear there is something terribly wrong. There are clues hinting that a spy is in the house, and there are undeniable signs of a sinister magic. When the children in the castle's temporary boarding school begin disappearing one by one, it's a race against the clock for twelve-year-old Kat Bateson, her two younger siblings, and their new best friend.

The Charmed Children of Rookskill Castle Details

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From Reader Review The Charmed Children of Rookskill Castle for online ebook

Jessica says

Wow! This was really different! It was both a story about evacuees from London during the Blitz, and a story about black magic, and even had a bit of a steampunk element going on! There are witches and spies and ghostly visions! I was not expecting a lot of this book, nor could I guess the motives of most of the adults. It really kept me on my toes!

But I started to feel like, with so much going on, that there wasn't enough time to go in depth into various subplots, not to mention the characters. I was never sure how old any of the children were, and several of them veered wildly between acting like they were about 7 or 8 and then suddenly being teens or at least tweens. I got several of the children mixed up regularly, and also several of the adults, because there wasn't a clear description of them physically, and they seemed a bit interchangeable character-wise. There's also some thing that happens in this story that ceeeeeped me out, and continued to creep me out after it ended. I wouldn't give this book to a younger middle grade reader, because of this. It was very scary at the end, and that one thing was just too disturbing for me.

Allie says

When I was young I remember being fascinated by the thought of the mere possibility of getting scared while reading a book. I didn't think it was possible. (My Dad had told me that Dracula scared him so much he had to put it down for a few minutes. Dad!) There were no blood-suckers in this book, but it still delivered an eerie punch. Perfect amount of creepiness.

And the cover! How cool is the cover?!

AUDIOBOOK: The narrator did a good job -- easy to listen to.

UPDATE: I just listened to this again, this time with my kids. To be honest, I think I'd give it 4 stars now. (I'll keep it at 5 though, for the record.) ;-)

My 10 year old son's rating: 4.5 stars

My 16 year old son's rating: 3.5 stars

Angie says

Twelve year old Kat is being sent to Rookskill Castle to escape the Blitz in London. Along with her siblings and other children, they are to attend Lady Eleanor's school in the castle for the duration of the war. Rookskill Castle is a spooky, gothic castle in the Scottish Highlands and Lady Eleanor isn't what she seems. Kat was given her great aunt's chatelaine, a family heirloom, that is supposed to be magical. Kat doesn't believe in magic, but can't help being suspicious of some of the things going on at the castle. There are mysterious ghostly children no one seems to know. The adults all seem just a bit confused as to what is going on. Most disturbingly, the newly arrived children start disappearing one by one. Kat and Peter try to

investigate what is behind the mysterious clanking noises and who is using the hidden passageways. Is it a German spy? Or is it something much worse?

This was a pretty spooky middle grade read. It is very gothic with its crumbling castle, storm-swept highlands and mysterious passages. The story is interspersed with chapters about Lady Eleanor so the details of what is happening are not a surprise to the readers. You just have to wait for Kat to catch up with you. I liked the chatelaine as the instrument for the magic. It was unique. It did almost seem like there was a bit too much going on at times with Lady Eleanor and the German spy business. And the whole bit where Kat was able to decode the German codes was just too ridiculous. I think if the story would have stuck to the spooky Lady Eleanor storyline and left the whole spy business alone it would have been a bit better. However, it was spooky and hard to put down. I definitely wanted to see how Kat was going to defeat Lady Eleanor in the end.

Chelsey says

The back of this book is covered in lavish praise, which I find baffling because of how mediocre it is. It's not that it's a bad book, per se. Plenty of children will be modestly entertained by it. But it's so flat. Flat characters, draggily slow, a plot that is expressly given away at the beginning by letting the villain narrate her every move and motivation... More than one review mentions "twists and turns," of which there are literally zero. So strange.

Sara Saif says

How I came to read this book:

It's a funny story, I'm glad you asked. What happened was, I saw the cover and ...

The End.

The only thing that is charming about this book is that *soul-catching* (wink, wink) cover. I tried my best to enjoy the book but it was more than a little half-assed for me to appreciate it fully.

My issue with it is that it was vague in parts which were important and were potentially more intriguing. The concept of magic, first and foremost, with the chatelaines and clockwork devices and magisters and souls. It was restricted only to the plot and it wasn't explained as broadly as I would have liked.

What was the magister's end game? Just the euphoria of seeing his creations brought to life? Was that really it? And the rooks. Like, why rooks specifically? The lady's scheme to bring more children to her through this academy of hers was another thing that didn't sit well with me. I think I understand why Kat's father sent her and her siblings, but all those other kids? If escaping war was the reason the parents were sending them there than why were there so few of them? It should have sent the kids there in droves if it was *that* appealing. I don't know, this bit was too convenient.

There was an odd magic = science and science = magic theme here which wasn't coherent.

And since the real 'mystery' ceased to be just that pretty early on in the book the rest just seemed to drag on

to its predictable end.

I do appreciate the uniqueness of the story and its appeal. If this is ever made into a film I'm sure it'll scare me shitless but as a book, eh, it didn't have quite the effect it was meant to have.

IT IS YOUR BANE,
THIS CHATELAINE.
BY FLESH AND BONE,
BY ROCK AND STONE,
I'LL CHARM A CHILD
TO CALL MY OWN.

Leona Carstairs says

real rating: 3.5 stars

omg, surprise surprise, this was way better than I anticipated! it was a delightful MG story, and a really original one to boot. SERIOUSLY THIS WAS A REALLY GOOD BOOK. also, I feel like this would make a really fun movie, if handled correctly, and I would totally go see one if it came out.

I pretty much liked everything about this book, I can't really think of any aspects that annoyed me. I liked the characters, the writing was really good and so was the story. the ending was a cliffhanger and i'm confused...is this a standalone or not? will there be another? (I would definitely read a sequel if one came out)

Hannah Greendale says

[Click here](#) to watch a video review of this book on my channel, *From Beginning to Bookend*.

It is 1940.

Kat and her siblings are sent to Rookskill Castle to escape the London Blitz.

Rookskill Castle is a labyrinthine structure housing several children and many secrets. When children start disappearing one by one, Kat is forced to unearth Rookskill's hidden truths before she and all of the other children disappear forever.

The Charmed Children of Rookskill Castle has enormous potential. The cover is enticing, the title is alluring, and the premise implies a merging of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry with the Pevensies children from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but the book fails to impress with every turn of the page.

The writing isn't necessarily bad; in fact, the descriptions of the castle are enchanting:

The castle loomed out of the fog at the end of the winding lane, after what seemed an age. Kat sat up

straight, and Peter let out a low whistle.

It was much bigger than the picture had made it seem, a real castle with many turrets rising up through the gloom bit by bit, and it did look the sort of place that would house ghosts.

It's the number of awkward plot devices employed that makes this book an unsatisfying read.

To begin with, the meaning of a scene is often explicitly explained for the reader, even when the meaning is already implied:

"Did I ever tell you about my dog, Dodger?"

"That you left behind in America?"

He nodded. "I knew I had to leave him. So I stopped playing with him, stopped walking him. [...] I just . . . gave up. I let him go, gave him to another family, long before we left for England."

"I'm so sorry."

"There was no use trying to keep him. That's the way I feel right now. Kind of . . . helpless. Like I want to give up." Peter rubbed his eyes, his back to her. "I wish . . . Well, no use is it? I don't even know why I told you that."

The room filled with the sound of the crackling fire.

"We can't give up," Kat said, her voice quiet. "That's why you told me about Dodger."

Several scenes include the children embarking on a mini-adventure with a particular goal in mind. These adventures crop up as though someone is telling the story off the cuff and saying, "And then . . . And then . . . And then." On every adventure the children face an unexpected hurdle, which distracts from their original goal. These hurdles are too conveniently overcome and, once bypassed, the children seem to forget what they set out to do in the first place. They head back home and make no further mention of their unfinished adventure. Occasionally, the means by which the children overcome these hurdles feel ill-suited to a middle grade novel, such as twelve-year-old Kat fending off a pack of wolves by quoting Plato.

'As' sentences - a point of personal annoyance - are used to absolute excess:

As they wove through the garden now they passed the small pond where Kat had seen the girl. The pond was dry. A little tickle ran up Kat's arm as she thought of the girl's invisible fishes.

As they entered the allée, they turned back to look at the castle.

Even the structure of the book is cumbersome. Because the book sometimes shifts to the perspective of other characters, the story becomes repetitive with the same incident described from multiple points of view.

Time shifts forward and backward throughout the book between 1746 and 1940. It's not always clear when time has shifted at the start of a chapter, making for a sometimes disorienting read.

Also related to structure, one of the book's weakest features is the choice to introduce the villain so early in the story, along with an explanation of how the villain operates. It then comes as no surprise when children slowly disappear throughout the book. The main protagonist may not understand what's happening or why, but the reader already does, so there's no intrigue, no mystery, and no motivation to keep reading.

Two of the book's subplots resolve themselves with the snap of a finger. Again, these instances are far too convenient. The resolution to these subplots simply fall in the protagonist's lap, so there's no sense of payoff or accomplishment because she didn't have to earn anything or work for a solution.

The book's most offensive folly has to do with one of the biggest 'reveal' moments in the story, which is totally reliant on one of the children not knowing the first name of *their own father*. This would be understandable if the child didn't know their father, but that's not the case in this novel. The child has a very close relationship with their father. It's quite possible the father's name was replaced with a code name (after all, the book does take place during World War II), but whether or not the name is a code is never clarified.

With a dank castle, a magical mystery, and rumors of ghosts, *The Charmed Children of Rookskill Castle* has all the right ingredients for a fantastic Gothic fairy tale, but too many writing blunders result in a clunky, disappointing book.

Donalyn says

Wonderful audio production of a fabulous book!

Richard Corbett says

This is an exciting, haunting, beautifully told historical fiction that has elements of fantasy and magic. The heroine Kate believes that there has to be a logical explanation for everything, but she is up against Lady Eleanor who is in a way a tragic figure, almost a Lady Macbeth, who come from a tragic past and hungers for power and revenge. The Lady runs a boarding school in a castle in England that Katherine is sent to along with her younger brother & sister, there she meets and become friends with an American boy named Peter. This is all set in World War II with a wonderful cast of characters and an extremely powerful ending. I could not put this book down and I was left in it's spell for a long time after.

Liz Carr says

"The Charmed Children of Rookskill Castle" was not as predictable as I thought it was going to be. I like that in a book.

❀?RoryReads?❀ says

It's rare for me to give a one star review because I feel bad when I do. But this book, THIS book..... The author thanks her editors (plural) for all their help, and I'm baffled, because clearly, they were no help at all. In historical fiction, even that written for children, it's important for the characters to be true to the times in which they lived. These children are not. Kat's brother swears! When he is introduced to his father's colleague he calls the man a "ruddy American". Ruddy is a euphemism for bloody, which in 1940, the year this book takes place, was a swear word. These are well brought up middle class children; in 1940, he would have gotten a smack for saying that to an adult. Kat refers to other children as "kids". This was slang and not in common usage before the 1960s, and certainly not by an English child. Add to that the incorrect terms for common items, such as using "sweater" instead of "jumper" and you have a story that is not British and not of it's time.

This had an interesting premise, and a great setting but the execution was hampered by a lack of research and poor editing. It would have benefited from being a good 50 pages shorter as well. I think the reason this one annoys me so much is because there is so much potential here and it's wasted.

Jennifer Bertman says

Three children are sent to a new academy in a Scottish castle to avoid the bombings in London during WWII. The castle is odd and unsettling right from the start, and things only get more mysterious and downright creepy as the story progresses. Kat, the main character, struggles with determining whether there is a magical or supernatural reason for everything going wrong, or whether there is a rational explanation, like a spy being harbored in the castle. I often found myself looking up from the book, relieved to see I was not trapped in a moody Scottish castle, and I whipped through this story eagerly to find out how everything was going to work out. Fantastic read. (This would be an interesting book to read in tandem with *The War That Saved My Life*, as they both deal with children being sent from London to avoid the bombings in WWII, but the narratives and tone are very different from each other.)

Brittany Fielding says

This book was very suspenseful and creepy. It has that tone that you don't know what to expect. I wanted to keep reading because I wanted to know what would happen next. I thought the first chapter was creepy and then after that chapter, it got slow, but then it got better. I really liked it. I don't normally read creepy books, but this book was really good. I liked how the author keep the ending slightly open for a sequel. Neato!

I think I would recommend this book to those that like suspenseful books.

Warning: There are some graphic scary parts and there is some mention of abuse in this book.

Laura says

Creepy (perhaps a bit *too* creepy for younger readers) and a little more about why the children were sent away (American readers won't know about the Blitz and child evacuations). Beyond that, what happens to the children - all of them - at Rookskill, and how they react is a great blend of realism (rebelling against an older sibling) and fantasy (Lady Eleanor's plans for them).

ARC provided by publisher.

Christie Angleton says

A perfect spooky read for these quiet, foggy mornings of early autumn.
