



A Secret of Birds & Bone

Books Reviewed:

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Editor's Choice:

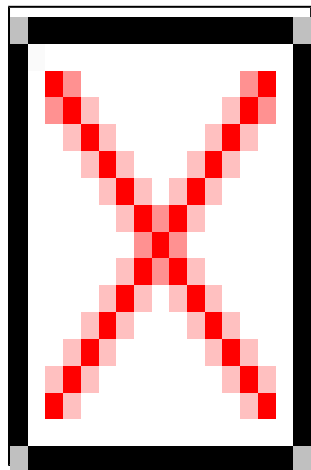
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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4



Sofia lives with her mother who is a famous bone-binder, and little brother, Ermin just outside Sienna. She can see the towers from the olive grove that is her haven with their pet crow, Corvith. Returning from a day spent in the olive tree branches she overhears a conversation between her mother and a strange, masked visitor with a sinister magpie companion. After this meeting, her mother's mood changes ? and then she disappears. How can Sofia unravel the mystery, especially when she and her brother find themselves behind the barred gates of the city orphanage?

Kiran Millwood Hargrave has established a reputation for creating imaginative novels for a KS2 audience ? or younger teens. This is no exception. Here she transports the reader to an Italy of the past; a time when the city states are ruled by an elite aristocracy. Sienna is no exception, governed by a much loved beautiful Duchess who is never seen. For plague is another reality ? the Duchess is in mourning. However, all is not as it seems. The tense atmosphere, the heat, the excitement of the re-established Palio are all excellently created by the author. Then there is the physical presence of the city ? the sewers, the towers, the olive groves ? the reader walks with Sofia as she moves through this world. Meshing seamlessly with this historical setting is the magic ? the role of the bone-binder (marvellous creations made from bone animal and human), the magpies, the magic spring- the reader is spellbound. The characters invite belief. Sofia and Ermin are both real and distinct; the adults though inevitably more shadowy are nevertheless presented as complex

rather than one-dimensional. Young readers are presented with some of the dilemmas life ? and more importantly ? love can present. Harwood?s attractive contemporary prose is enhanced throughout by the page designs of Helen Crawford White, whose lovely cover design demands attention.

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