Mister Monday

Book 1 of The Keys to the Kingdom

by

Garth Nix
Ages 7 +

Synopsis:

Arthur Penhaligon, is an ordinary boy as so many boys are. He is just starting the seventh grade in a new school, in a new town that his adoptive parents and siblings have recently moved to. His father, Bob, is a successful musician whose band tours allows the large family to live in relative comfort, and his mother Emily, is one of the foremost doctors and researchers of rare diseases. Besides having lost his parents at a young age, Arthur's life is completely normal and relatively free of worry. He has a severe case of asthma, that keeps him from participating in normal early teenage activities, like sports, and when the book starts he is nervous about starting a new school, but beyond these things, he does not have an real concerns.

Unfortunately one of the first people that Arthur meets at his new school is a P.E. teacher that does not accept hi explanation of having asthma as a reason not to participate in gym class that day. Not wanting to cause problems, and hoping for the best, Arthur tries to keep up with the class, but very quickly succumbs to the worst asthma attack he has ever had. It is in this state between life and death that Arthur gets his first encounter with a Denizen of the House, Mister Monday and his Steward Sneezer.

Though Arthur does not understand what they are talking about, Mister Monday, is one of seven Trustees, who were left in charge of the House by the Architect. The House is possibly the foundation for the entire universe, or The Trustees, each named for a day of the week, were supposed to selflessly keep the House running and recording the events of the Universe and all its worlds, but who in actuality broke The Architect's Will into Seven pieces and scattered them across the stars in order to allow each to seize power for themselves within their own dominion.

In the prologue of the book, the first part of the Will manages to break out of where it has been imprisoned for 10,000 years, and goes in search of one of the Rightful Heirs of the Architect.

Arthur is not chosen because he is particularity brave, or strong, or has any special quality about him, he is chosen because he is supposed to die on the day of his asthma attack, and the Will is trying to trick Mister Monday into believing that is he hands over the Keys of the Kingdom to Arthur for just one split second, he will have fulfilled his role as Trustee, and then as soon as Arthur dies, he can take them back.

Nobody expects Arthur to live, and thus begins the seven book adventure of Arthur through the House and across the universe.

Review and Analysis:

First of all, you should know, Garth Nix is one of my all time favorite authors. In my opinion, he can do very little wrong.

So why the mediocre, just passing score?

What Nix does best in my opinion is have original twists on classic motifs. You know when you pick up one of his books that you are going to enter a world you've never been to before, but this also means that he has to figure it all out as he goes, and this is definitely the first book of a series. A lot of fun and original ideas are presented, like the entire universe being watched and logged by the
insanely bureaucratic inhabitants, the Denizens, of the sprawling and mysterious "House". Nix also
plays with the age old fairy tale of the Pied Piper, explaining where the children that he took from all
those villages ended up. But so much information is being presented to the reader, in such a short book,
that you cannot help but feel a little rushed through the story, and I would say this one is much less
satisfying than the ones to follow.

The series as a whole is an excellent coming of age story, with Arthur, though dealing with
potentially more life threatening situations than the average pre-teen boy, is trying to find his place in
the world.

The trope of the stress of beginning a new school, is almost needless. Arthur faces the exact same
situation on a more massive scale when he enters the House for the first time, i.e. being thrown into a
strange environment and trying to fit in, that the beginning of the book reads as a little cliched. And Nix
is too clever of an author to need to rely on those.

A few of Nix's signature touches that I would like to mention:

The Crazy Mad-Cap Bureaucracy-
This is government gone wrong in an extreme way. Everyone in this world has a job and they do it
with a single mindedness that leaves the reader grinning. It doesn't matter if the ink needs to be refilled
or not, if its Monday at 2 pm that ink WILL be refilled. All the Denizens of the house are single minded
about their jobs, unless of course, its tea time.

The Piper's Children-
Thankfully you, as the reader, get to hang out and get to know this group of characters pretty
well throughout the books. The main one, Suzy Turquoise Blue is one of the first people Arthur meets
on entering the House and her relentless good cheer are a fine counter point to Arthur's teenage
moroseness and sometimes attitude. The Piper's Children are just that, the children that have been
captured over the ages by the legendary Pied Piper. He led them to the House where, though not
original residents, and not Denizens created by the Architect, they were given jobs and places in that
society.

Nithlings-
The so-called, beginner boss battles, that Arthur has to face when he first enters the House.
They are creatures made of Nothing and/or Chaos. They single minded gravitate towards anything that
was ever Created with the intention of consuming it. While in their early stages in this first book, the
Nithlings become as interesting as the Piper's Children in their own way later on.

I actually just re-read this one, And even though there was almost a 14 year gap between my first
read ( I was 14) and my re-read (I'm 27 now) I feel that the story held up remarkably well for a young
adult novel, and I also think I enjoyed it more the second time as a discerning and literary adult. I've re-
read some favorites from my childhood and teenage years, that had nowhere near the same level of
enjoyment so many years later, but Nix always seems to hold against the test of time.
Also recommend: Sabriel, Gath Nix, The Seventh Tower Series, Garth Nix

Vocabulary Words:
1. Sentinel
2. Denizen
3. Postern
4. Environ
5. Quarantine
Activities
1. Tea-
   Tea Tasting:
   All of the inhabitants of the house love to drink tea, and will often use tea to trade or will attempt to
divert shipments of tea for their own enjoyment. A fun activity to do with young readers of this series
would be to have a tea tasting. Brew several different types of tea, Ceylon, Earl Grey, Green, Jasmine,
etc. and try them in different ways, with milk, sugar, honey, lemon etc. Have students write down
impressions of each type of tea in a notebook, using as many sensory words as possible.

History of Tea:
The Denizens of the House are watching ALL of the worlds of the universe, and yet they have a
particular love for Earth's tea culture. This is a great teaching opportunity to look at the culture of tea