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Heroes of the Valley

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Halli is an unlikely hero. His legs are too short, and his wit, too sharp. He loves to hear stories about Svien, the founder of his house. Secretly, he aspires to live a hero’s life. When he witnesses the leader of a rival house murder his uncle, he sets out on a quest for revenge. With the help of his friend, an intelligent and fiery girl named Aud, he discovers the truth about himself and the legends.

One of the strengths of the book is character development. Like Nathaniels in Stroud's popular series *Bartimaeus* (Miramax, 2004-2005), Halli is a character whose only redeeming quality, at first, is his wit. There are a number of funny scenes where Halli persecutes those who try to bully him. Unfortunately he acts thoughtlessly, and each of his actions has negative repercussions on his family. As the book progresses, Halli becomes wiser and less self-centered. Another strength is the book’s plot development and pacing. Stroud mixes humor and serious moments to keep the reader engaged. The ending has an unexpected and electrifying twist. The only element that slows down the plot is the legends of Svien that begin each chapter. They play a role in the story, but are a little tedious after the first few chapters. Despite this shortcoming, tweens and teens who liked *Bartimaeus* will enjoy this new offering.