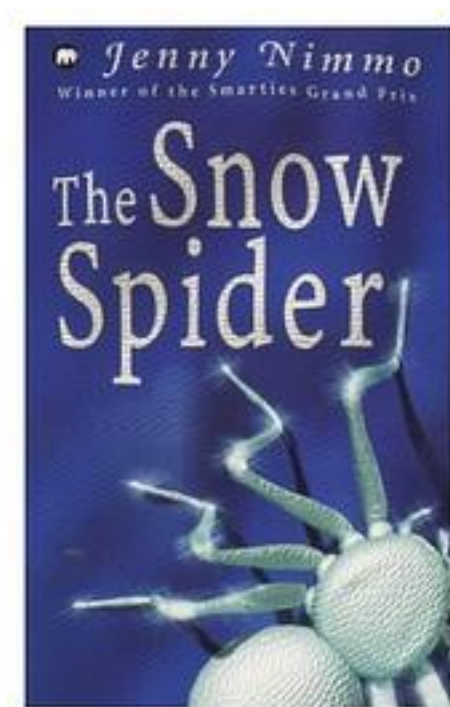


The Snow Spider



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The five gifts Gwyn's grandmother, Nain, gives him on his tenth birthday fulfill her hope of awakening his inherited magical powers. Gwyn's farmer parents are impatient with Nain's "superstitions"; but when Gwyn's first gift, a brooch, is torn away by the wind and replaced by a supernaturally lovely silver spider (Arianwen), he realizes that his talents are unusual. Arianwen's delicate web reveals an evanescent re-creation of Gwyn's sister, Bethan, mysteriously lost on the mountain on his birthday four years before. The vision vanishes; but soon an orphan, Eirlys, appears in the community; her resemblance to Bethan helps resolve Gwyn's parents' continuing bitterness and grief at Bethan's loss - even though, after a horrendous storm Gwyn inadvertently invokes

through the fifth gift, Eirlys (who Gwyn now understands to be his lost sister) returns to an apparently happy afterlife. Nimmo, who lives in Wales, uses its fabled landscape and weather to good effect. Less convincing is the integration of magical powers into the life of an otherwise ordinary boy who, unfortunately, never rises above grandmother Nain's warning - that the gifts should not be misused - to the awe, dignity, and moral order implied in such books as Susan Cooper's. With its imaginative overlay and exploration of family dynamics, this would make a satisfying TV drama (an area where Nimmo has experience); as fiction, it lacks subtlety and logical links. Yet the tale is smoothly written and entertaining; and that entrancing spider suggests that Nimmo's next book will be of interest.

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