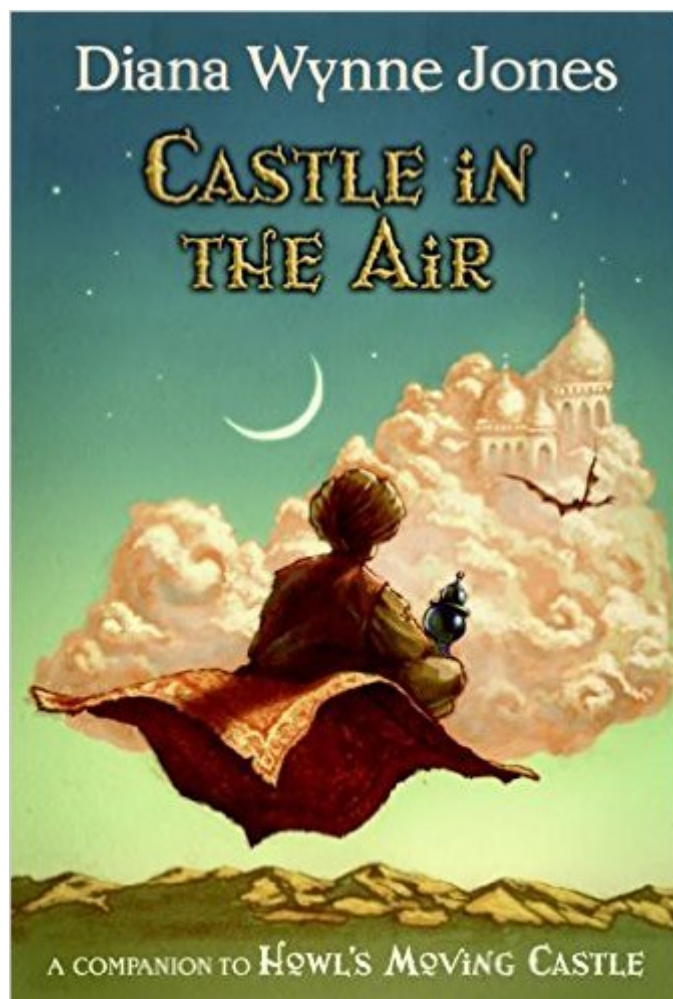


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Castle In The Air



Synopsis

Young merchant Abdullah leads a humble life. Or he did until a stranger sold him a threadbare "and disagreeable" magic carpet. Now Abdullah is caught in the middle of his grand daydreams. Waking one night in a luxurious garden, he meets and falls instantly in love with the beautiful and clever Flower-in-the-Night. But a wicked djinn sweeps the princess away right before Abdullah's eyes, leaving the young man no choice but to follow. This is no ordinary quest, however, for Flower-in-the-Night isn't all the djinn has stolen. Abdullah will have the so-called help of the cantankerous carpet, a cranky genie in a bottle, a dishonest soldier, and a very opinionated black cat. Will this motley crew be able to find the djinn's mysterious dwelling and rescue a castle full of princesses?

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 890 (What's this?)

Paperback: 400 pages

Publisher: Greenwillow Books; Reprint edition (April 22, 2008)

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ISBN-10: 0061478776

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Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.8 x 7.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars See all reviews (206 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #22,563 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #69 in Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy > Humorous #1085 in Books > Children's Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy & Magic #1447 in Books > Children's Books > Action & Adventure

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 - 7

Customer Reviews

Having a favorite obscure British children's fantasy author is a bit like having a favorite obscure British band. At first, they're your own private secret. The kind of thing you try to get all your friends into. You get all their best work. You belong to their fan club. And you wonder why no else has ever been as intelligent as you are in finding them. Then, one day out of the blue, they hit it big. At first you're elated. FINALLY, the world has come around to your point of view. You feel utterly vindicated. This feeling lasts for about three days, then comes crashing down around your ankles as

you come to realize that now everybody and their mother wants a piece of YOUR discovery. Such was the case with me and Diana Wynne Jones. I was perfectly content to keep a large Diana Wynne Jones section in the children's library where I work. I'd recommend her to any child who was suffering from Harry Potter withdrawal. Then "Howl's Moving Castle" was made into a film and everything changed. Now she's the hottest item since sliced bread and everyone wants a piece of her. I wouldn't be surprised if "Archer's Goon" gets turned into a mini-series and "Dogsbody" ends up animated on Saturday morning cartoons. Until that happens, however, I'll continue to read and recommend her works. "Castle In the Air" is actually the sequel to "Howl's Moving Castle", and is in many ways more readable than its predecessor. There's nothing quite as delightful as discovering a new book by your favorite author. Even if everyone else in the world thinks that author's cool too. Abdullah leads an unremarkable life. He's one of many carpet dealers in the city of Zanzib and he does what he does rather well.

One of Diana Wynne-Jones' less impressive works, "Castle in the Air" is nevertheless a funny and entertaining read, full of memorable characters and tight plotting. A little too tight in places, but never quite becoming irritating. Mediocre Diana Wynne-Jones is still exceptional. Abdullah is a dreamy young carpet merchant with a slew of nosy, overbearing relatives and a prophecy made at his birth; they see him as wasting his life, which is quite humble to say the least. But his fortunes change when he is sold a magic carpet by a mysterious stranger. The carpet takes him as he sleeps to a secluded garden, where a naive, beautiful young woman called Flower-in-the-Night is.

Unsurprisingly, Abdullah and Flower-in-the-Night fall deeply in love. Unfortunately, her rich father wants to marry her off to a prince. Abdullah tries to elope with Flower-in-the-Night, only to see her carried off by a hideous djinn. He ends up on the run from her father with a mercenary soldier, the flattery-hungry carpet, a malicious genie who makes every wish go wrong somehow, and a mother cat and her kitten. Soon they end up enmeshed in a bizarre tangle involving wizards, djinns, demons, genies, dogs smelling of squid, and a slew of princesses with minds of their own. Though this is a sequel to "Howl's Moving Castle," the characters from that book take over half the book to show up. Instead, we are treated to Wynne-Jones' entertainingly skewed version of the "Arabian Nights," with the hapless and sweet-spoken Abdullah slogging to the castle. Jones manages to affectionately poke the Middle-Eastern setting and its various customs, while spinning the story outward to encompass "Howl's Moving Castle" as well.

This book is advertised as a sequel to "Howl's Moving Castle" and it took quite a long while for me

to understand why -- Howl, Sophie, Calcifer, and the crew were not mentioned for much of the book! However, this book has a charm all its own and should be enjoyable for anyone who liked "Howl's Moving Castle." The writing style is similar, certain parts of the setting are familiar (especially at the end), and it's a light, quick read (even for adults, although every bit of it is suitable for young readers, as well -- no adult language or situations to worry about). Please note that our main character, Abdullah, is given to rather flowery language; excessive flattery is part of his essential nature. Surprisingly often, this language is effective at achieving Abdullah's goals. I also like the subtext there, that Abdullah doesn't really mean even half of what he says, but is willing to say it if he thinks it will get the job done. There *are* some stereotypes/tropes at work here, and they bear mentioning. They're quite overused at this point in time, although this book was originally written more than 20 years ago. Our story starts in a bazaar with a carpet merchant named Abdullah, in a country where men can have multiple wives and there are things like djinn and magic carpets. Abdullah's story bears something of a resemblance to Aladdin's story (the Disney version, which is the only version I'm really familiar with), although Abdullah's genie isn't as friendly -- he's fallen in love with a princess (called "Flower-in-the-Night") who's totally inaccessible as a marriage partner based on Abdullah's social station.

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