

The Amulet of Samarkand

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Reviewed by: Rishi Chillara, 14 years old

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A djinn named Bartimaeus gets summoned one day to do a task. It is simple, just go to a mean wizard's house and steal one of his special amulets. Easy enough, Bartimaeus has done multiple robberies from magical people in his past (mostly due to his magician's commands), so he takes this opportunity right away. But, when he steals the amulet successfully, and Nathaniel reveals why, they are thrust into a conspiracy full of danger and action, not knowing what adversaries come next. Now, will Bartimaeus and his master Nathaniel take up the mantle of heroism and save everyone from the evil powers of the Amulet of Samarkand? Or will they leave the UK (and possibly the world) enslaved to the Amulet? This action-packed, darkly funny book details the grand adventures of these two unlikely companions, and how they came to be.

This adventurous novel is very funny (in a morbid, dark way), and is a great tale of redemption too! The book is bound to please anyone who likes these simple fantasy tales, in this first of a trilogy. There is Bartimaeus, a funny, wise-cracking demon—sorry, djinni—helps his master Nathaniel. Nathaniel is a 12-year-old boy with lots of character development in the story, something that I really liked. He grows from a curious, orphaned child with magical properties, to a smart person with strong emotions and bonds. They were both great characters and I loved their adventures. I also like how the book sequences and splits its story. Throughout the book, Bartimaeus speaks in first person in some parts, and in others, Nathaniel's third person chapters pop-up. At first, they are Nathaniel's backstory, until it catches up and all ties together. This book taking place in modern-day London is bound to be a book that fans of fantasy novels like Harry Potter will enjoy! The humor is great, while not taking away from the subject matter, a concept this book masters. The book is serious at times, yet is also very pleasing.

However, no book is without bad. This book has very good storytelling, that is, until the finale of the novel. The finale contains a large battle between the main characters and villain. This battle is ultimately satisfying, yet overall felt very dry. The battle's pacing is significantly ponderous, with weight being generated by the long sentences of dialogue uttered by each character. Also, the monster that the villain Simon Lovelace crafts seems like a device made just to provide the characters with plot conveniences. The monster is perceived to be very foolish, and then opens a situation where the characters suddenly having access to plot conveniences ultimately slowing down the final battle. Finally, concerning Bartimaeus' friends. These demons were put in the most possibly for the sake of moving the story forward. They have barely any backstory whatsoever, and instead just appear or disappear whenever the book needs them to. I would recommend this book to the age range of young adults (12 years old and up), probably due to the impact of violence, some language, and complex themes that younger viewers may need discretion to understand. Overall, the book is still a fine specimen, a book that any fantasy fan will love (I found myself really liking it!) and it convinced me to get the 2nd book in the trilogy (or sequence as Bartimaeus would like you to call it) very soon! I cannot wait what adventure happens next to these two unlikely companions and heroes!

Recommended Titles:

The Harry Potter Saga by J. K. Rowling

Spellhacker by M.K. England

Eragon by Christopher Paolini