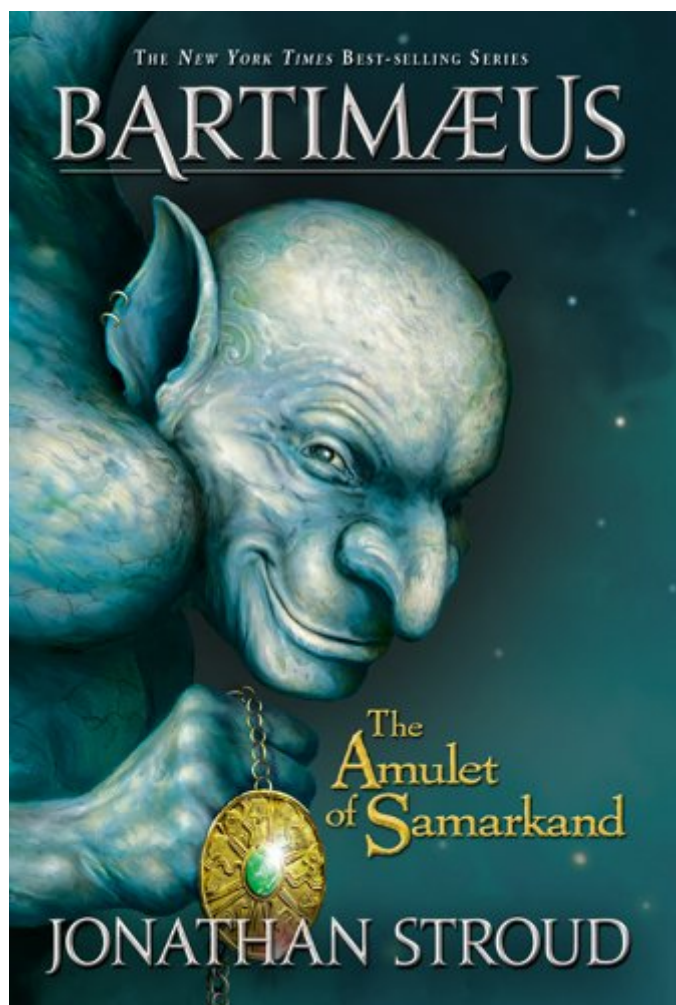


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The Amulet Of Samarkand: A Bartimaeus Novel, Book 1



Synopsis

Nathaniel is a magician's apprentice, taking his first lessons in the arts of magic. But when a devious hot-shot wizard named Simon Lovelace ruthlessly humiliates Nathaniel in front of his elders, Nathaniel decides to kick up his education a few notches and show Lovelace who's boss. With revenge on his mind, he summons the powerful djinni, Bartimaeus. But summoning Bartimaeus and controlling him are two different things entirely, and when Nathaniel sends the djinni out to steal Lovelace's greatest treasure, the Amulet of Samarkand, he finds himself caught up in a whirlwind of magical espionage, murder, and rebellion. Includes a preview chapter from *The Golem's Eye*, the second book in the series!

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Customer Reviews

This is the story of Nathaniel, a young and ambitious magician in training, whose master is mediocre at best and loathes Nathaniel. Because Nathaniel is impatient and too smart for his own good, he decides to take his training further, without his master's knowledge, and summons Bartimaeus, a djinni from the "Other Place" and that's when the trouble starts. This is Harry Potter meets Aahz (for

those of you familiar with the M.Y.T.H series by Robert Asprin and well, Harry Potter). It sounds like a déjà vu, been-there-read-that kind of story but Stroud came up with a well crafted work that brings a bit of novelty to the genre. Bartimaeus (or Barty, as I like to call him) is absolutely hilarious. His chapters are written in the first person and he is not sparing with his opinions. He's been around for 5000 years and he's pretty full of himself. My only complaint is the author's excessive use of footnotes in the Barty chapters. Although most of them are hilarious and worth reading, I feel a lot of them could have easily been incorporated in the text itself, instead of having the reader going back and forth to read them. Especially since I read it on Kindle and it took me a while to get the hang of reading the footnotes and coming back to the text afterwards. But my own dorkiness is hardly the author's fault. So now, as is always the risk when reading the first book of a series (that I got as a freebie on), I find myself hooked and in a bit of Barty humor withdrawal syndrome. Guess I'm going to have to shell out the 7\$ to get the second book, which I will do gladly :)

I had read a third of this book about a year ago and for some reason I had left it there. I guess it hadn't clicked or I wasn't receptive of its style. However, I got the reading itch a week ago and decided to browse my bookshelves, effectively re-discovering it. In just one night, I read half the book, finishing it a couple of days later. It is definitely a recommendable book that I was a little surprised belonged to the young adult fiction category. The main character is a young magic apprentice that has a penchant for getting himself in troubles much more perilous than what would be normal for his age. The second main character is the djinni he summons, a sarcastic, ancient "demon" that is the primary source of humor in the book, especially with his condescending footnotes explaining all kinds of magical stuff to the reader with a very biased tone. So if you are in the mood for a quick read of light fantasy, ignore the hideous cover of this book and delve in its rich storytelling.

Well, on the one hand, I loved this book. On the other...it was pretty dark. I have a hard time reading books where I can count on all the characters to treat one another badly, time after time. I know that a lot of books are full of people who are more principled and generous than almost anyone is in reality. The Amulet of Samarkand is the exact opposite of that: everyone is always selfish, amoral, opportunistic, nasty. No good deed goes unpunished. Anyone who won't threaten you to your face is just waiting to stab you in the back. But it was so well done. The main character, Nathaniel, is particularly interesting. You can't help but feel for the poor kid - given away as a child by a family who apparently didn't much regret his loss, he's placed as an apprentice with a master who'd rather

not have a child in the house. The master, Arthur Underwood, is petty and small minded. He is a mediocre magician, but an excellent bureaucrat. That is to say: he is sycophantic to those more powerful than him, and he is tyrannical to those less powerful than him. Poor Nathaniel sits at the bottom of the totem pole and so he is Arthur Underwood's favorite whipping boy. Nathaniel is smart, diligent, desperate for affection - and it's hard to see his talent unrewarded, his thirsty heart dry. In some books young children deprived of affection, family, friends, and playtime grow up to have a heart of gold and keen sympathy for others who suffer. I have to admit that Nathaniel is the more realistic character - he's angry, greedy, and untrusting. As much as he hates his master, he mimics Underwood's bad attitude, treating commoners (non-magicians) with contempt and cultivating a sense of extreme self-importance. Sometimes I liked Nathaniel, sometimes I hated him. He's not a good kid, to be perfectly honest - but he's better than he could be, and I learned to admire him for it. While magic rules this world, humans do not really possess it. Rather, they summon and enslave demons who wield magical power. The book is narrated both by Nathaniel and by the djinni he commands, Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus is fantastic, a constant delight in a very grim book. He's funny, full of quips and cynical insight, a real showman, worldly and knowledgeable. As many reviewers have mentioned, his footnotes are a delight to read. The second one in the book, added to a scene where Bartimaeus is contemplating Nathaniel during a summons, reads, "I couldn't do anything while I was in the circle, of course. But later I'd be able to find out who he was, look for weaknesses of character, things in his past I could exploit. They've all got them. You've all got them, I should say." It would be easy to get bogged down in how horrible it is that all the demons in the book are the unwilling slaves of unworthy magicians. The only thing I can say in the magicians' favor is that the demons aren't any nicer to one another than the humans are to them. Organized into a strict hierarchy, a djinni like Bartimaeus is always ready to put a less-powerful imp in its place, and eager to avoid a higher-ranking afrit who will casually and painfully exert his dominance over Bartimaeus. Comforting, right? The plot is full of crazy twists and turns. The mystery isn't who the villain is (this is clear from the beginning) but how twelve-year-old Nathaniel is going to win the day against such a devious and powerful magician. Even Bartimaeus, clever and cocky as he is, isn't sure it can be done.

This is an excellent young adult fantasy novel! There is constant tension, great characters (Bartimaeus is awesome!), and extremely clever plot twists. I've read the book *Sabriel* and *Eragon*, and I thought this one was a lot better, primarily because the writing is at a much higher level and it avoids all the clichés common with fantasy novels. There is a lot more "pepper" to this book than

other fantasy novels, with a lot of surprising plot twists and character lines. The main character's (Nathaniel's) principal ally fights, taunts, and generally him. It's pretty funny, but it can be serious and tense as well.

Read this series as a kid back in high school. Loved them then love them still now as an adult.

This is easily one of the best young adult fantasy books I have ever read. I have often complained about the 5 star book rating system and how it muddles reviews forcing us to give books 5 stars that were really 4.5. Well, no problem here. Giving The Amulet of Samarkand 5 stars is under-rating it. The only caution I must give is that the reference to "demons"™ throughout the book which, I think, might make some of a certain religious bent cringe.

Love, love this author and his unique and clever writing style. Can't wait to finish this whole series!!! I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys Dianna Wynne Jones work.

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