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Jonathan Strange And Mr Norrell



Synopsis

The international bestseller, reissued with a striking new illustrated cover. Part of The Bloomsbury Phantastic series - three books tracing the tradition of fantasy from Edgar Allan Poe to Neil Gaiman and Susanna Clarke. Susanna Clarke's novel is an epic tale of nineteenth-century England and the two magicians who emerge to change its history. In the year 1806, in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars, most people believe magic to have long since disappeared from England -- until the reclusive Mr Norrell reveals his powers and becomes a celebrity overnight. Another practising magician emerges: the young and daring Jonathan Strange. He becomes Norrell's pupil and the two join forces in the war against France. But Strange is increasingly drawn to the wildest, most perilous forms of magic and soon he risks sacrificing not only his partnership with Norrell, but everything else he holds dear.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I'm giving Jonathan Strange a 5 for the simple reason that I thoroughly enjoyed it all the way through, but I'd warn all readers to be more wary than usual of reviews (including this one). More than many books, this one I think will be a matter of true personal taste and experience will be your

only truly accurate guide. To begin with, *Strange* is often referred to as a "fantasy" novel, an "adult" Harry Potter (ignoring Potter's self-obvious claim to millions of "adult" readers). If you're expecting fantasy in the form of Harry Potter magic (though done by bigger people employing bigger words) or Lord of the Rings-like quests and elves, be advised neither is here. Fantastical might be a better genre-word here than "fantasy". There is certainly magic here, both human and faerie (very different forms), but when one of the major storylines is how magic has gradually disappeared from England and when one of the major characters has as his purpose the destruction (not Black Tower hordes of evil monsters destruction but economic, social, or legal destruction) of those who would become magician, as you might imagine there isn't a lot of magic going on, at least not for the first few hundred pages. Those looking for a lot of wand-waving or fireball-flinging would best look elsewhere. One of the signs of the book's maturity is that one can't really generalize too much about the magic in it. Magic is almost invisible in the beginning and near-constant toward the end. It is scholarly, bookish and tedious and also vigorous, physical and exciting. It is human and Faerie and a melding of the two. It is all-powerful (Spain complains about the rearrangement of several of their country's geographic landmarks) and ineffective (you can see visions in water but they seldom are helpful).

This book is hard to describe. In terms of genre, it is both fantasy and well-researched historical fiction, which makes it a rather rare bird. The writing style falls somewhere between Austen and Gaiman and Dickens. The plot is somewhat rambling and disjoint, forsaking the standard quest narratives; in some ways it is a fantastic history of England, in some ways a tale of rescue. If it is anything, it is the story of the relationship between the two title characters, but one of them is not even introduced for two hundred pages.. Unlike most of the better modern fantasy, this book is not a page-turner, and I mean that as a compliment; rather, it is a book to savor. Not that the plot isn't engaging - it is - but I frequently found myself comparing how many pages I'd read to how many I had left, deciding that I was burning through the book too quickly, and setting it down while I turned the passages I'd just read over in my head. As befits a character-driven fantasy, almost all the characters are likeable, or at least understandable; even when they take larger-than-life action, they do so for incredibly human reasons. There are also a number of historical-character cameos, all of them well-drawn and believable.. I do not agree with Mr. Gaiman's statement that this is "the finest English novel of the fantastic to appear in the past 70 years." Tolkien is better; his work has an epic grandeur that this book lacks, perhaps because Susanna Clarke so realistically and concretely evokes the precise historical era at which she aims : the imagination has a somewhat wider canvas

to paint on when reading Tolkien or similar high fantasy, with more blank space to be filled in by the reader.

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