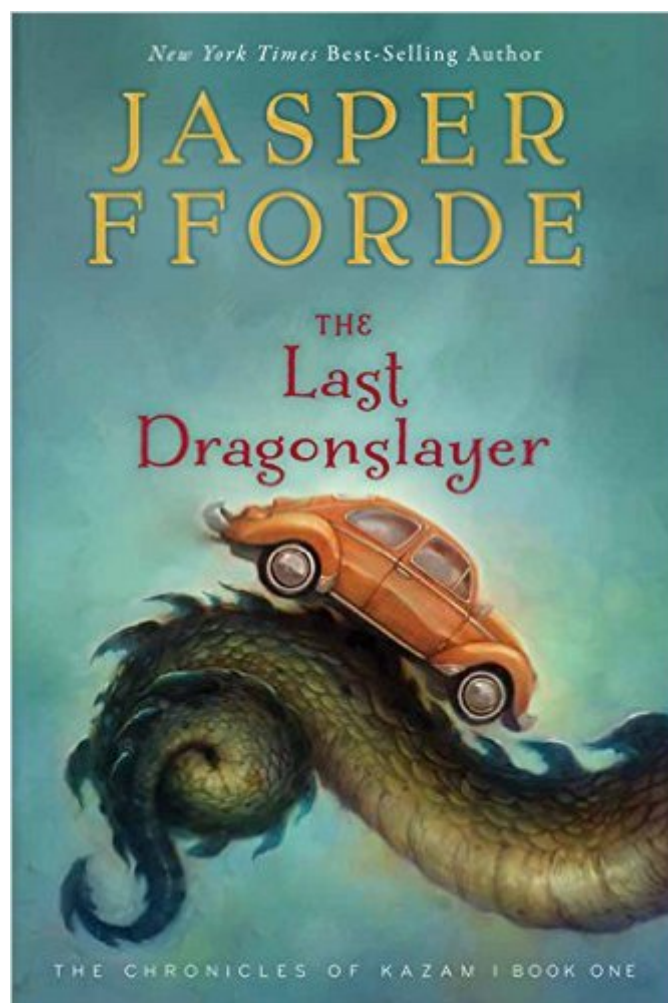


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The Last Dragonslayer: The Chronicles Of Kazam, Book 1



Synopsis

In the good old days, magic was indispensable. But now magic is fading: Drain cleaner is cheaper than a spell, and magic carpets are used for pizza delivery. Fifteen-year-old Jennifer Strange runs Kazam, an employment agency for magicians—but it's hard to stay in business when magic is drying up. And then the visions start, predicting the death of the world's last dragon at the hands of an unnamed Dragonslayer. If the visions are true, everything will change for Kazam—and for Jennifer.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Fforde is one of those authors that I found quite by accident while looking another one up and then couldn't help but keep reading. His Thursday Next series (which has a sequel due out this year!) is a delightfully entertaining mystery quasi-fantasy that's full of clever puns and satirical renditions of our own world. The Last Dragonslayer is no different, just it's a young adult fantasy series. While I had no idea this was coming out I'm glad that I came across it because it was pure entertainment to read.

The book has a very British feel to it, which it should since British author + British environment, which includes the humor. There's a little slapstick (Gordon von Gordon taking care of some of the reporters was a good laugh), some irony (what happened to the Great Zambini...) and dry humor (The Blessed Sisterhood of the Lobster?). As the kid who grew up on the BBC more often than Nickelodeon it made me all warm inside. Much of the world is built upon being like ours, but slanted a ways. The UnUnited Kingdoms? I'm guessing because of the magical influence, and the Dragons,

things developed differently. The Dragons, after the Dragonpact some 400 years earlier, were each given a fairly large chunk of land, some of which sat in the middle of Kingdoms. Some things, like the Consolidated Useful Stuff business seems to be a direct jab at mega-corporations like Wal-Mart (aka The Evil Empire in my household). Jennifer, indeed all the characters, don't act like you'd expect. There are several twists and clever plays on how the smallest idea can become a firmly entrenched belief. Or how prophecy will always find ways to make itself come true (though maybe not for the reason you expect). The last dragon, Maltcassion, reminds me of a grumpy old man with the mischievousness of a five year old. He certainly doesn't act like a maneater. He was probably my favorite, next to the Quarkbeast honestly. In short if you're a fan of Terry Pratchett you will likely enjoy this book honestly. It's just this side of ridiculous with some weighty moral concepts strewn about to keep it from being utterly ridiculous.

Before I start, I'll point out this is a children's book, and I've regarded it, and starred it as such. I think it would be a great read for children around the ages of 10 and 12. The Last Dragonslayer is the tale of 'foundling' (orphan) Jennifer Strange, and a re-imagined 'Ununited Kingdoms', a UK much similar to one we know, but divided into feuding kingdoms; a place where magic exists, but is dying. Jennifer works at one of the last two remaining wizard agencies: talent agencies representing wizards. It's a bizarre place, filled with hilarious characters, unpredictable magic, and a Transient Moose. The world, the characters--the creatures--are characterised by Fforde's typical brand of charming absurdism, and The Last Dragonslayer is genuinely one of the best children's novels I've encountered in a long time. Imagine you're a 10 year old, and Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett (both of whom I'm forever comparing with Fforde) write about a UK where dragons and magic still exist, adults are even weirder than they already are, and you can have a pet that's one part velociraptor, one part kitchen blender, one tenth golden lab, and eats tin cans for breakfast. Wow. Fforde tells a magical story of corrupt government, corporate (and individual) greed, lobsters, personal sacrifice, values, and it's one where the good guy wins--but at a cost. The story is intelligent, yet never condescending. There's a very strong moral message in the book, but it's not at the cost of a marvellous story. I often find Jasper Fforde's writing quite dense (not a criticism--just an observation), so it was very interesting reading this, as, while his trademark humour is still there, his writing is much changed for a younger audience. The Last Dragonslayer deserves to be up there with Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone and Artemis Fowl--and should appeal to fans of both.

The Last Dragonslayer, is another amazing 'trip.' Somehow Fforde is able to mingle the ordinary

with the extraordinary, and he's a wiz at it. This book is no different than his others. My first experience with Fforde was *The Fourth Bear: A Nursery Crime*. In that book nothing in our nursery rhyme memories is sacred. We meet Detective Jack Spratt and Sergeant Mary Mary. Then there's *The Big Over Easy: A Nursery Crime*. Who pushed Humpty Dumpty anyway!?! I digress. I was supposed to review *The Last Dragonslayer*. In the Ununited Kingdom, Jennifer Strange, an orphan from the Blessed Sisterhood of the Lobster (yes, that's where she's from), has been put in charge of Kazam. Kazam is an employment agency for magicians. Seems really bazaar, but wait there's more! It gets more bazaar. Pizzas are delivered on magic carpets. There's Tiger Prawn, Jennifer's assistant, there's the Transient Moose, who just sort of shows up wherever he likes. Then there's the Quarkbeast, and the dragon Maltcassion, of course, and there are many others. Don't for a minute think that all Fforde's silliness, satire and puns are for naught. Not in the least. There are a number of moral issues embedded in the story. Some messages relate to big business, others point directly to environmental issues. We also see a lesson about getting along with each other (an age old problem). You'll recognize your own world, but it will be slanted and twisted while the message somehow shines through. All and all, this is another wonderful story woven by the phantasmagorical mind of Jasper Fforde. Don't miss it, just for the fun of it.

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