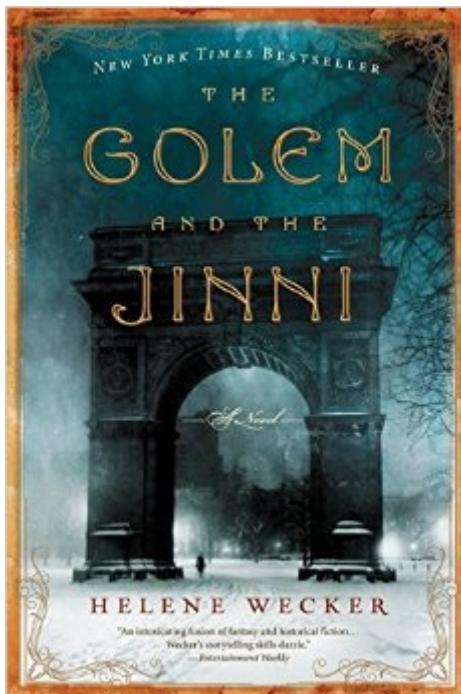


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The Golem And The Jinni: A Novel (P.S.)



Synopsis

In The Golem and the Jinni, a chance meeting between mythical beings takes readers on a dazzling journey through cultures in turn-of-the-century New York. Chava is a golem, a creature made of clay, brought to life to by a disgraced rabbi who dabbles in dark Kabbalistic magic and dies at sea on the voyage from Poland. Chava is unmoored and adrift as the ship arrives in New York harbor in 1899. Ahmad is a jinni, a being of fire born in the ancient Syrian desert, trapped in an old copper flask, and released in New York City, though still not entirely free. Ahmad and Chava become unlikely friends and soul mates with a mystical connection. Marvelous and compulsively readable, Helene Wecker's debut novel The Golem and the Jinni weaves strands of Yiddish and Middle Eastern literature, historical fiction and magical fable, into a wondrously inventive and unforgettable tale.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There is a certain satisfaction in coming to the end of a long novel, but as the pages dwindled on Helene Wecker's The Golem and the Jinni, all I felt was grief that this magical story had to end. After 500 pages, I wanted it to go on and on. And if you stop reading this review right now, that's all you really need to know. You will be shocked to hear that the novel is, in fact, about a golem and a jinni. For those who are unaware, a golem is a figure of Jewish myth, an automaton made of earth or clay, brought to life to do the bidding of another. A jinni (or genie) is a figure of Arab myth, a magical creature of fire. So, before we even get into plot details, look at that fascinating set-up!

Jewish/Arab. Earth/fire. Just hearing the premise, I anticipated some sort of culture clash to be central to the tale. And while the story does primarily unfold amongst the Jewish and Syrian immigrant populations of late 19th century New York, it is not a parable of Mid-East conflict. This was merely the first of many instances when Ms. Wecker defied expectations and convention, keeping me guessing in what direction her tale would evolve again and again. Talk about defying convention--the titular golem is a woman, and self-aware. She was originally created (with a laundry list of attributes that included intelligence, curiosity, and propriety) to be a rich merchant's wife. He, alas, died en route to America, shortly after bringing her to life. She arrived at Ellis Island without a master or a plan. The jinni, on the other hand, WAS freed from a thousand-year mprisonment in a flask--but don't expect him to start granting wishes any time soon. This is the story of two creatures in turn of the century New York who are both Old Worldly and otherworldly. Separately, they must find their way in circumstances that neither is prepared for, all the while concealing their essential natures. As the golem says to the jinni, "We're our natures, you and I." Because, yes, eventually their paths do cross and it's the start of a most unexpected friendship. Can I tell you? This wonderful, literary fantasy left me wanting to slap the next writer who sits down in front of a keyboard and starts typing about a vampire. Ms. Wecker has created a story unlike anything I've ever seen. Her central characters, while not human, share a deep humanity (for better or worse) and are beautifully drawn. Other characters, which at first seem peripheral to the tale, prove to be central, as Wecker's story expands encompassing a larger community. And at all times the relationships depicted between men, women, creatures, adults, children, friends, lovers, and enemies were complex, unpredictable, and captivating. The novel's prose is as rich as the period setting is evocative. And while I really haven't gone into any detail, please know that the plotting is both elegant and assured. Of course, there IS culture clash in this novel, and conflict galore. But in every instance that her tale could be ordinary, Ms. Wecker makes it extraordinary. The lush cultures, heritage, and history depicted so beautifully are merely the jumping off point for a dazzlingly inventive fantasy. Where did this writer come from, and how is it possible that this accomplished work is her debut? It is sure to be one of the literary highlights of the year!

4/1/13 I don't usually comment on a book while I'm reading it. Often, I read them so quickly, there's no time or inclination. Sometimes, some books have lousy endings and that completely colors my rating of the book (Feed, I'm looking at you.) So far I've read just less than a fifth of the book. I love this book. I love the picture of the Lower East Side and Little Syria in 1899. I know from golems, but Chava is unique. I know jinni, djinni and ifrit, but not as well and nothing like Ahmad. 4/3/13 The

ending of the book is completely satisfying, just like the rest of the book. Wecker left the door ajar that there could be a follow-up with these characters if the book is as wildly successful as I hope and believe the book could/ will be. I enjoyed all the time that it took for the characters to meet, because it let me spend more time with the characters getting to know them as individuals. Chava is convinced she is a monster. I disagree; she is a good woman. Ahmad looks human, but he doesn't think that way, nor does he make the effort that Chava does to blend in. It made me happy to spend so much time on the Lower East Side and Little Syria. The first place I thought I knew from fiction and movies, but I didn't know about the dancing palaces there. Little Syria is an insular place. I liked how the center of it seemed to be Maryam's cafÃ©. I wonder if there is something magical about Maryam's ability to calm and soothe the patrons of her cafÃ©? Ahmad works as a tinsmith and makes a spectacular topical map of Syria in the lobby of an apartment house. I would dearly love to see this, because the way Wecker described it sounds like it must be real. I consider myself very, very fortunate to have had the opportunity to have read such a magical book. I believe you will also count yourself fortunate to have read it, if you give yourself the chance. *Thank you Vine Program* for providing me a copy in return for an honest review.

I find it hard to categorize this wonderful first novel by Helene Wecker. It's part fantasy and part historical fiction, but at the same time it has a fairy tale-like quality about it. It's a story of two fish out of water, two mythical beings, drawn into real life turn-of-the-century New York city. One is the earthen-made Golem, from Jewish lore; the other a Jinni, born in the deepest deserts of Northern Africa. Wecker exposes each story in parallel, bouncing back and forth between their respective histories and present; exploring their childlike naivete as they're exposed to more and more of modern life in a massive city. Each has their own 'sponsor', the Golem is discovered by an aging retired rabbi, the Jinni by an introverted metalworker. Wecker does a terrific job teasing out each personality while revealing the cultural center that resides at each of their existences. Wecker's narrative is very adult, but often reads like a childhood fable in structure. This book should appeal to any fan of literate historical fiction, but doesn't mind a bit of the fantastical. There are no medieval dragons and wizards, but more of a delightful bit of cultural magic.

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