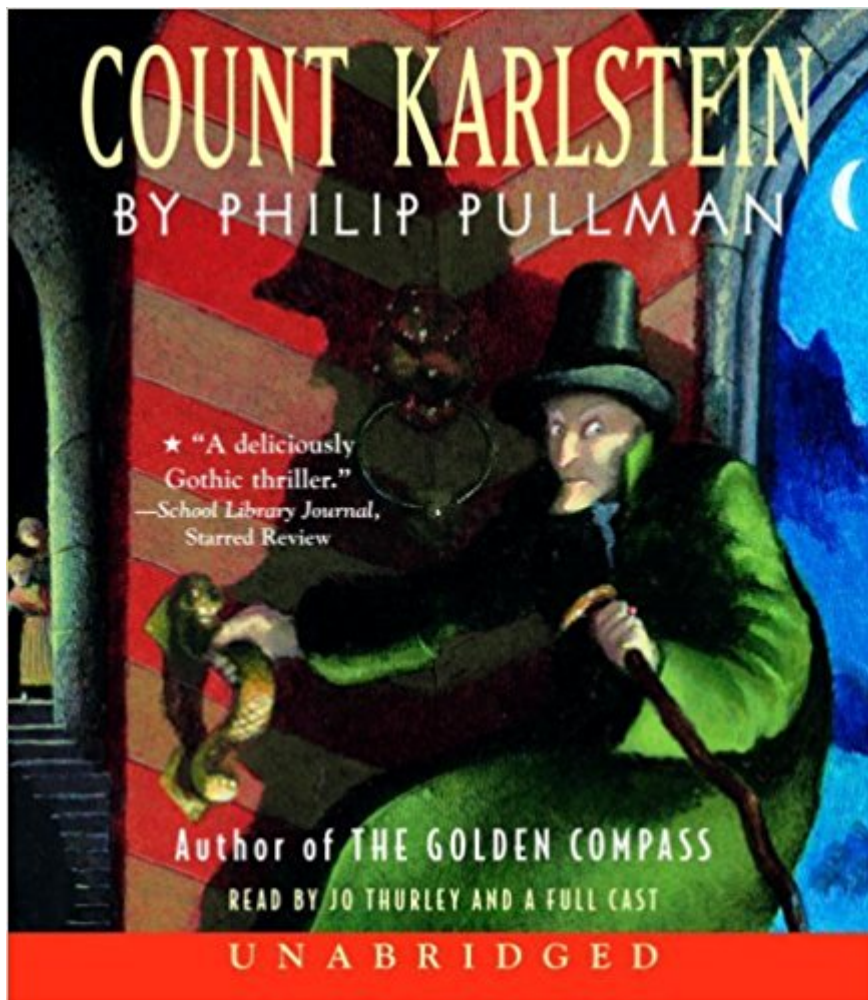


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Count Karlstein



Synopsis

Can you hear the distant howling of hounds and the thunder of ghostly hooves? It's All Souls' Eve and Zamiel the Demon Huntsman has come to claim his prey! He's headed straight for Castle Karlstein, where the evil count has hatched an evil plan; he'll sacrifice his two young nieces to save himself. Can Lucy and Charlotte outwit their uncle and his oily henchmen to escape their dreadful fate? From the award-winning author of *The Golden Compass* and *The Subtle Knife* comes a spooky, funny thriller just right for those middle-grade readers looking for horror--and humor. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

"I might have occupied my mind usefully with *Improving Thoughts*, but the only improvement I could imagine then was a pair of wings, to enable me to fly to freedom. And, of course, a Head for Heights. I cleaned the dust from the window and peered out hopefully, but there was nothing but a Horrid Precipice, with jagged crags several thousands of feet below." Such are the woes of young Charlotte, locked in a tower room of her uncle's gloomy Castle Karlstein in 19th-century Switzerland. Escaping this predicament seems the least of her worries: in a solemn blood pact, her evil uncle, Count Karlstein, has promised to sacrifice his two orphaned nieces, Lucy and Charlotte, to Zamiel the Demon Huntsman--on midnight of All Souls' Eve--in return for his current riches. First, however, the heartless Count and his "lip-licking, moist-handed, creeping, smarming" secretary, Herr Arturo

Snivelwurst, will have to catch Lucy, too--and it is no small task with the headstrong, 14-year-old Hildi Kelmar; her 18-year-old, handsome-in-a-scowling-sort-of-way brother, Peter; and the intrepid English teacher Miss Augusta Davenport on the girls' side. As Miss Davenport herself points out, "an English gentlewoman can rise above any circumstances, given intelligence and a loaded pistol." The events in this delightful gothic farce unfold quickly in a variety of narrative voices, artfully building in suspense to a powerful, terrifying, deeply satisfying stand-off between the Count and the Demon Huntsman of Impenetrable Darkness himself. Subplots and loose ends are gracefully, happily, justly tied up in the light of day, finally allowing readers to exhale. British novelist Philip Pullman, masterful storyteller and creator of the bestselling adventures *The Golden Compass* and *The Subtle Knife*, mesmerizes us again with his playful, suspenseful thriller *Count Karlstein*, released in the United States 16 years after its appearance in the United Kingdom. Readers young and old will revel in every angle, twist, and turn of this breathlessly paced, very funny page-turner. (Ages 11 and older) --Karin Snelson --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Originally published in Britain in 1982, Pullman's light-hearted debut effort appears in the U.S. for the first time. A welcome diversion for fans impatiently awaiting the final installation of the trilogy begun with *The Golden Compass*, this novel--though lacking the more serious underpinnings of the author's later books--showcases the boisterous narrative style that fans will recognize as an established element of Pullman's repertoire. Set in a Swiss village in 1816, the story revolves around wicked Count Karlstein, his two wards--the English orphans Lucy and Charlotte--and the nasty bargain Karlstein has struck with Zamiel, the Demon Huntsman, a supernatural being who annually haunts the local woods on All Souls' Eve. Pullman adds further zest to the mix with the appearance of characters like the orphans' former schoolteacher, the indomitable Augusta Davenport ("I was able to console myself with the reflection that an English gentlewoman can rise above any circumstances, given intelligence and a loaded pistol"), and the actor and sometime swindler known as Doctor Cadavarezzi (aka Signor Brilliantini), a mountebank as charming as he is sly. Briskly narrated in a variety of voices, including those of Lucy (influenced by such contemporary gothic novels as *The Mysteries of Udolpho*) and the bumbling, hilariously self-important police sergeant Snitsch, the plot undergoes a series of twists and turns too complicated--not to mention delightfully improbable--to delineate here. In an exuberant conclusion worthy of the best of comic operas, the orphans find a true protector, the evil Count is served his just deserts and the formidable Miss Davenport is reunited with her long-lost love. Dashing, sparkling and wildly over-the-top fun.

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Such a great book! Reading it with my 10-year-old daughter. Philip Pullman was actually my middle school English teacher, and so I saw the very first ever performance of Count Karlstein, as a middle school play. To those who have concerns about its suitability for young children, I say "pshaw!" - it's fun and exciting (and maybe a little scary in places), but that's what good books SHOULD be! As some others have pointed out, because the second half of the book is done on a chapter-by-chapter basis with different narrators, it really helps to read it to younger kids, especially if you can do different voices for the different characters. At least that's what my daughter says - she certainly COULD read the book herself, but she prefers it when I read it to her...

We enjoyed this story on a five hour car ride - three kids under 14 and one adult. We thoroughly enjoyed it! Count Karlstein is a classic fairytale with hints of Faust, Hansel and Gretel (The Brothers Grimm), and Charles Dickens. The story has a lively combination of characters both straight and comic. The audio version is clear and well portrayed with a cast of 8 actors. Count Karlstein is a villain who is the sole remaining relative of a pair of orphan girls. These girls, though young, are thoughtful and resourceful. But some evil plan is underfoot. How do the maid, her impetuous brother, the lawyer, the magician, the constable, the English teacher, the silly lovers, and the demon work to thwart each others efforts? Read or listen on!

A nicely told tale

"Count Karlstein" is one of the funniest books I've read. Based on the legend of the Wild Hunt and the Demon Huntsman, it is full of outlandish characters and one hilarious, improbable event after another. It's written for children, but grown-ups who enjoy humorous fantasy, especially those who are fans of Diana Wynne Jones, should make sure they don't miss out on this one.

This is one of the funniest books I've read in ages. It's based on the legend of the Wild Hunt and the Demon Huntsman. The story involves plenty of outlandish characters and hilarious incidents. The high point is the shooting match near the end where one very improbable coincidence after another is revealed. Grown-ups, don't miss out on this one. It's not just for children.

I am a huge fan of Philip Pullman's work, yes most notably his His Dark Materials trilogy, but his whole YA fiction in general surpasses most Author's attempts. He has a knack for coming up with brilliantly told, well structured and complex plots, filled with more twists and turns than you can shake your fist at. Now apparently, unbeknown to me, Count Karlstein (first published in 1982) was Pullman's very first children's and Young Adult novel. I was extremely eager to read it, as you can probably imagine. Count Karlstein tells the story of Hildi, a maidservant to the Count. The story is set in a little Swiss village and right from the off, we are told of this awful sinister plot to sacrifice his nieces, Charlotte and Lucy. And so sets off an important string of events as Hildi helps the girls escape and go into hiding, for on All Souls Eve, the demon huntsman himself, will show his wrath and feed upon anyone he crosses. The story itself is told in three parts. The first and third parts are told in Hildi's perspective, whereas part two is told from multiple characters' points of view. This is an interesting way to do things and actually it works quite well, because we can get to see alternate views about the goings on. You can see why originally, Count Karlstein was actually a play, first devised when Pullman was an English teacher. Of course, every character in the story has their own story arc, not just about Count Karlstein's plan. For example, Hildi's exiled brother, Peter is on the run from the law and he's in hiding at the Jolly Huntsman, their mother's inn. Peter dreams of winning the shooting contest, where he will be declared a free man and no longer have to worry about the police catching up with him. There's a whole supernatural element to this story, with a demon huntsman and all and though perhaps the story is a little unoriginal, it has a completely new telling; fresh and very easy to follow. It gives this gothic tale a fantasy element and it is done so subtly that it works very well indeed. But perhaps what also is intriguing is the inclusion of Doctor Cadaverezzi and his Cabinet of Wonders. He is a travelling magician of sorts, performing shows for the locals. There just seems to be a whole variety of characters to take a liking too. Characterisation plays a huge part in this story. Miss Charlotte and Miss Lucy are obviously upper-class children, acutely educated and speak above their young years. Max, Doctor Cadaverezzi's assistant, is perhaps more common and being an orphan means he had to grown up quite quickly and find work. Miss Davenport adds a touch of feminism into the story and reinforces certain values of what is expected such as morals and standards. But no matter who the characters are, Pullman writes with such wit and humour that it is an absorbing read. And it is this humour that will attract the children. He creates stupid and slapstick policeman that fall foul of the situation and usually find themselves as the victims of some rather funny pranks. The whole book reads like a yarn or fairytale and this is why when read aloud, the world of magic really comes alive. Although I did love this book, there were certain parts I felt let the book down. The first of which is that I felt the book had so much

potential and actually could have been a little longer, giving some story arcs some more action. Doctor Cadaverezzi and his Cabinet of Wonders are introduced as if they are important to the plot, and although there is a twist here, much, much more could have been done. It felt restricted at times, as if Pullman ran out of ideas. His demon huntsman, who is mentioned throughout, only gets minimal inclusion and a more action-orientated ending could have turned this into a great modern fairytale. And perhaps more surprisingly I found myself shocked at one piece of language. The violence is actually quite toned down here, often coming across more slapstick than actually sinister and Pullman actually creates more of a thriller through tension and situation rather than the actual fights. But late in to the book, as Count Karlstein, he uses the word "slut" when describing Hildi. This was extremely inappropriate, especially when this book is marketed towards older children. On the whole though, despite some misgivings, I felt Count Karlstein was a gripping tale, lots of psychological tension used to great effect and a whole cast of characters that are appealing and well voiced. When read aloud, Count Karlstein really does come alive and it's a book that will hold many age groups. It is a slightly gothic tale that mixes both tricks and paranormal beliefs, with more traditional behaviour and traditions. I thoroughly enjoyed this and I hope you do too.

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