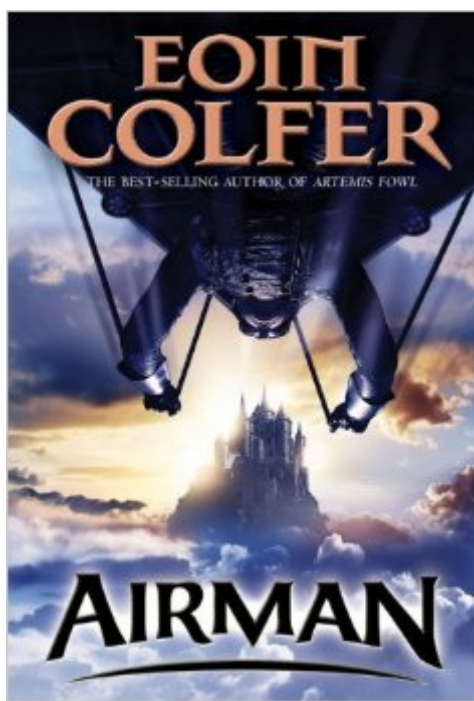


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Airman



Synopsis

Conor Broekhart was born to fly. It is the 1890s, and Conor and his family live on the sovereign Saltee Islands, off the Irish coast. Conor spends his days studying the science of flight with his tutor and exploring the castle with the king's daughter, Princess Isabella. But the boy's idyllic life changes forever the day he discovers a deadly conspiracy against the king. When Conor intervenes, he is branded a traitor and thrown into jail on the prison island of Little Saltee. There, he has to fight for his life, as he and the other prisoners are forced to mine for diamonds in inhumane conditions. There is only one way to escape Little Saltee, and that is to fly. So Conor passes the solitary months by scratching drawings of flying machines into the prison walls. The months turn into years, but eventually the day comes when Conor must find the courage to trust his revolutionary designs and take to the skies.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 800 (What's this?)

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Disney-Hyperion; Reprint edition (May 5, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1423107519

ISBN-13: 978-1423107514

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 1.1 x 7.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars See all reviews (112 customer reviews)

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& Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Self-Esteem & Self-Respect

Age Range: 10 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 - 9

Customer Reviews

I love the Artemis Fowl (Artemis Fowl, Book 1) series and Half Moon Investigations by Eoin Colfer, so I was exciting to pick up this book and delve into a story of adventure in the great blue yonder. What I didn't expect was how enraptured I would become by this book, especially after reading the first chapter that made me roll my eyes with its campiness. Conor Broekhart was born to

fly, or more accurately, he was born flying. From his legendary birth in a hot air balloon to his heroic feat saving the princess from a deadly fire by turning a flag into a parachute, Conor has always looked to the skies for inspiration. But when his tutor and king are both killed in a plot to take over the government, Conor spends the next two years in prison, thinking his father has turned his back on him and his beloved princess blames him for her father's death. After nearly losing himself in the inhumane conditions of the prison mines, Conor finds escape drawing designs for flying machines on his cell walls. His plans finally take flight *ex machina* in the form of a balloon that carries him to safety. He must then decide if he will turn his back on those who abandoned him or stand against the evils that threaten the freedom of his nation. It was like reading *The Count of Monte Cristo* (Penguin Classics), *The Princess Bride*: S Morgenstern's Classic Tale of True Love and High Adventure and an H.G. Wells novel all in one. It had all of the elements of a great adventure novel in a very contemporary writing style. It made me laugh, it broke my heart, and it left me wanting more. I absolutely adore this book and hope that Colfer continues to write adventure novels. This book is for a slightly older audience than Colfer's usual readers because of its complex themes and sometimes violent overtones, but it is still an appropriate book for advanced middle grade readers, high school students or adventurers of any age.

This was one of those books I saw sitting on my boss's bookshelf that made me think, "Maybe I should read that." Yet it wasn't until multiple people told me in person and repeatedly how good it was that I caved. And it really is good, gentle reader. It puts the buckle in swashbuckling. The play in swordplay. The terror in terrific. It's a good old-fashioned tale of thwarted romance, betrayal, great heroism, murder, diamonds, villains, kings, Americans, thugs, and a boy with the unusual inclination to fly. The thing to know about Conor Broekhart, before all the nastiness occurred, was that he was born in the sky. A hot air balloon, if you wanted me to be more precise. A falling, soon-to-be-crushed, death trap of a balloon, to be even closer to the mark. Of course Conor didn't die, and as a result his family returned to their home on the Saltee Islands (just off the coast of Ireland) with a new baby to introduce to the King. Conor's father was the king's right hand man, and because they were so close the boy grew up running around the castle with his best friend, the princess. But that was before the king was murdered. Before Conor was thrown into jail on the Little Saltee island (think Alcatraz, but with less charm). Before the boy discovered how to survive in his new, harsh, surroundings and find a way out of his predicament. And now the princess and his family are in mortal peril, unless Conor can truly crack the riddle of how to construct a machine that will fly. Is it fantasy? No more than any historical novel where the hero indulges in science. Is it

science fiction? Only if you consider the notion of one man discovering the use of propellers on his own fantastical. Is it steampunk? No. Stop being silly. No this is, odd as it may sound, fiction with spice. That's not really a category, so I don't know if you can call it anything but original. Frances Hardinge's *Fly by Night* suffered similar categorical problems. Her book seemed like a fantasy, but like this book it was merely an alternate history. Still, if lumping this puppy in with 500+ page fantasy tomes is the only way to get kids to read it, so be it. I've no objections on my end. For all its 416 pages, the book feels very tight. Colfer keeps a firm hand on the reins of his plot, never indulging too far in one direction or another. The result is a story that flies by with hardly a gasp for breath. This isn't to say that the author doesn't indulge in a small aside once in a while. He does, but they're always very quick and funny. For example, when the castle tower is on fire and King Nicholas must escape from his royal bathroom the text reads, "There was a window, of course. Nicholas was a great believer in the benefits of good ventilation. He was a devotee of meditation, too; but this was hardly the time for it." There are also copious details that give the book just enough heft to keep it from feeling too frivolous. They tend to be little things. The scrape of the bolt on prison doors is described as "Top C", with the side note, "Social diarists record that survivors of Little Saltee often suffered from insomnia unless their bedchamber doors were fitted with rusted bolts." There are references to Napoleon's stay at Little Saltee (apparently he fared poorly). I liked the little mites that eat away the disease and filth from new prisoners. And Conor's method of writing down his schematics is probably the closest this book comes to science fiction, without ever really treading fully down that path. Kids looking for excitement will find it from page one onward. And yet, for all its death-defying escapades, Colfer is very careful to cover his bases. He doesn't get sloppy on the details. By the end of the book the reasons why Conor wasn't killed at the same time as Nicholas and why the princess is left living are explained perfectly without so much as a glint of a gap in sight. Kids will enjoy the book because the characters are great and the story is fun. Adults will enjoy it because it won't require extraordinary suspensions of disbelief. Plus the fact that this is a stand-alone novel that does not lend itself naturally to sequels or a series is like a palate cleanser in this sequel-addled age with live in. Colfer shows himself to be a skillful writer by his interesting choices. Under normal circumstances, when the hero in a story has a plan and doesn't let the reader in on it, usually that plan goes off without a hitch. It doesn't look as if Colfer understood that concept, though, and the book is stronger for it. He also must have never heard the rule that the more often the hero is knocked unconscious, the worse the book is. Conor gets his own fair share of blows to the head, but the author always plays fair and never uses that as an excuse to fudge details or bridge insurmountable distances. Well played. I also had great respect for Colfer when he

saw to it that his hero never became a murderer. Our heroes in movies and books like killing henchmen. The idea that an action packed storyline requires that your protagonist have blood on his hands is a complex issue, too easily skirted around. Colfer isn't afraid to face the problem head-on, though, making it perfectly clear that the "kill or be killed" mode of thought only means that under the right circumstances it is the people without the proper intelligence or imagination who are the ones who descend into becoming killers. And on a personal note, I was happy to see that the Yanks in this book come off looking pretty good. Good King Nicholas, the forward thinking monarch on the Saltee throne, is an American. Linus Wynter, the kind blind prisoner who helps Conor survive prison, is also an American. We haven't looked this good on paper since Lee Scoresby first showed his face in *The Golden Compass*. Some people say the book is *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Others argue that it feels more like *The Man in the Iron Mask*. With such esteemed comparisons, it shouldn't hurt matters any to also note that it also happens to be consistently interesting, smart, exciting, and fun. The finest book Eoin Colfer has ever written, and hopefully the start of more stories like this to come. Everyone should read it.

As a reader of many young adult novels, I was never able to get into the author's *Artemis Fowl* series although I know they are popular. However, I have to give high praise, two thumbs up and five stars to this fabulous and unique adventure story for boys and men of all ages. This a wonderful coming-of-age story of a young man with a scientific mind and a dream of being the first man to fly. Trained in science, fencing, martial arts, and raised with a high education, our young hero Conn, while saving his princess damsel from death, soon is betrayed and framed for murder and sent to prison where there he plots escape and spends years inventing his future dream machine. Great characters of good and bad, high action and adventure, a little romance, and lots of cool flying. This is truly outstanding and a pleasant change of pace from the author's other styles of writing.

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