

October 18, 2003

Dear Mr. Kelly,

The book I have chosen to do for my book report is called "I Capture the Castle" by Dodie Smith. I found the story very disappointing, for reasons which I will discuss later. This is how the plot progresses:

"I Capture the Castle" is about Cassandra Mortmain and her family, who have leased an old, ramshackle English castle in the 1903³⁰'s. When the castle comes to new management, the new owners (who are two brothers) visit their property. The Mortmain family happens to be down on their luck (they can claim barely any income). The Mortmain family live in a castle, owned by two brothers, Simon^{and} Neil. Cassandra's older sister Rose decides to win the adoration of, and marry the older brother, Simon. Just before the two get married, Rose realizes that she loves the younger brother Neil, and runs away with him to America. Meanwhile, Cassandra has fallen in love with Simon. However, he is still madly in love with Rose, so he and Cassandra can never be, or can they?

While this plot unfolds, the father of Cassandra and Rose is falling into the depths of despair. After writing a best-selling book called "Jacob Wrestling", he was sent to jail (for attacking his now-deceased first wife with a cake knife), and emerged a different person. He hadn't written a word since, until Cassandra and a friend lock him into one of the castle's towers. They tell him that they won't let him out until he has started writing again. When they do finally let him out, he has started writing a peculiar book filled with mind puzzles and problems. Things begin to look up in the Mortmain household, and

then the book ends.

Excellent
If "I Capture the Castle" were to have a sequel, I think it would be the kind of book where the first book's plot is repeated over again, but in reverse. For example, Rose would leave Neil and go back to Simon, and Cassandra would fall out of love with Simon. Mr. Mortmain would finish his book, make large sums of money with its sale, attack his new wife with a cake knife, get sent to jail, and refuse to write another word. Cassandra would get help to lock him in a tower, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. However, no one would notice this repetition and the 'new' novel would become a best seller.

Well stated.
The reason I chose this book was because I wanted a challenge, which unfortunately I didn't find. "I Capture the Castle" may be long, but I felt it had so little substance (in reading it) that it didn't take long to finish. I have read many books with half as many pages, though it took me twice as long to complete them. The first chapter was very interesting, but the book lost its sparkle halfway through the second chapter. The book just seemed to drag on and on.

"I Capture the Castle" falls under the historical fiction genre. When I was younger, I rarely read anything besides historical fiction, but now I enjoy modern or futuristic type novels. I still will occasionally read the odd historical fiction novel, but I don't enjoy them as much. That fact may have had effect on my overall opinion of the novel.

Dodie Smith's style of writing is old-fashioned, which may also have contributed to my attitude towards the story. The original book was published in 1948, which could be why the writing style is so foreign to me. Then again, the "Little House on the Prairie" series was written around the same time, and I enjoyed those books very much! I think that a different author may have made "I Capture the Castle" much more appetizing and interesting. It might have been a good idea to end the book in an unexpected place (when Cassandra is stranded at a restaurant with no money, for example), and then have a

sequel finishing the original book. That way, Dodie Smith would have generated more interest in the readers to buy a second book (therefore earning more money) as well as to find out what happens to the Mortmain family. The book falls short of becoming an epic tale.

"I Capture the Castle" made me think about how much easier it was to live in the 1930's in some aspects, and how much more convenient it is to live now in other aspects.

Excellent!
The Mortmains actually hadn't payed their rent for months when the novel first started, yet they were still living in the castle by the end of the book. I'm not positive if Dodie Smith omitted facts from the story, but there doesn't seem to be any taxes, bills, or other things inherent in running a household. The time frame in this story doesn't even have paved roads! The simple things (as we think of them now) are so often overlooked today - the characters in "I Capture the Castle" living without them but still managing (some-

what) well was a real eye-opener. Even a radio was considered a privilege to own!

Even though I disliked this book immensely, I felt it was important of me to read it for general knowledge and a look at a different time period. For example, I now know that a radio is called a 'wireless' in Britain. I also know not to go near another book by Dodie Smith!

Awesome! Enough said!

Level 4+

Sincerely,

KELSEY ROBERTS

Kelsey Roberts