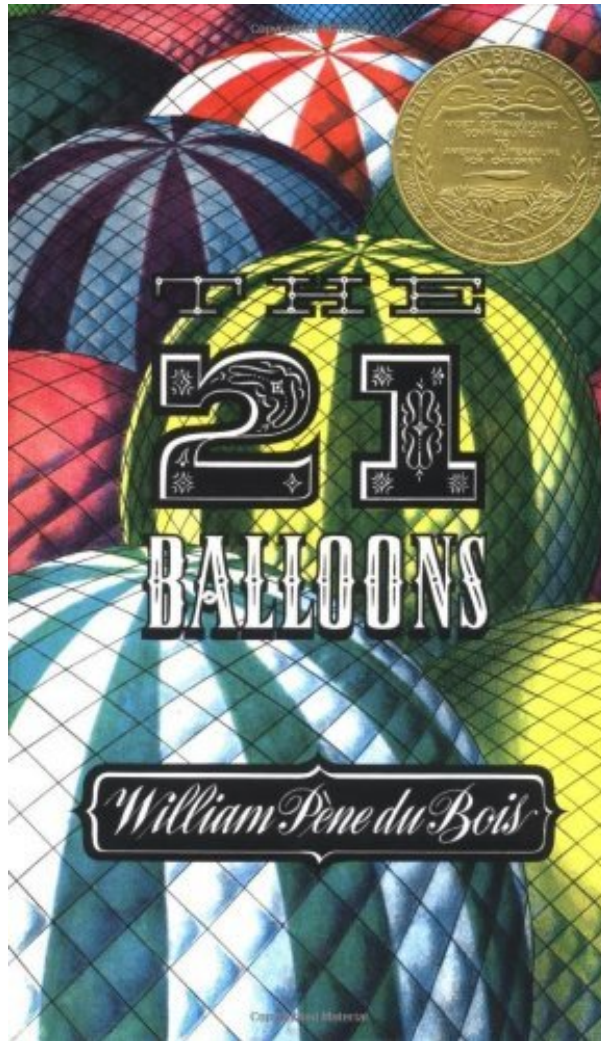
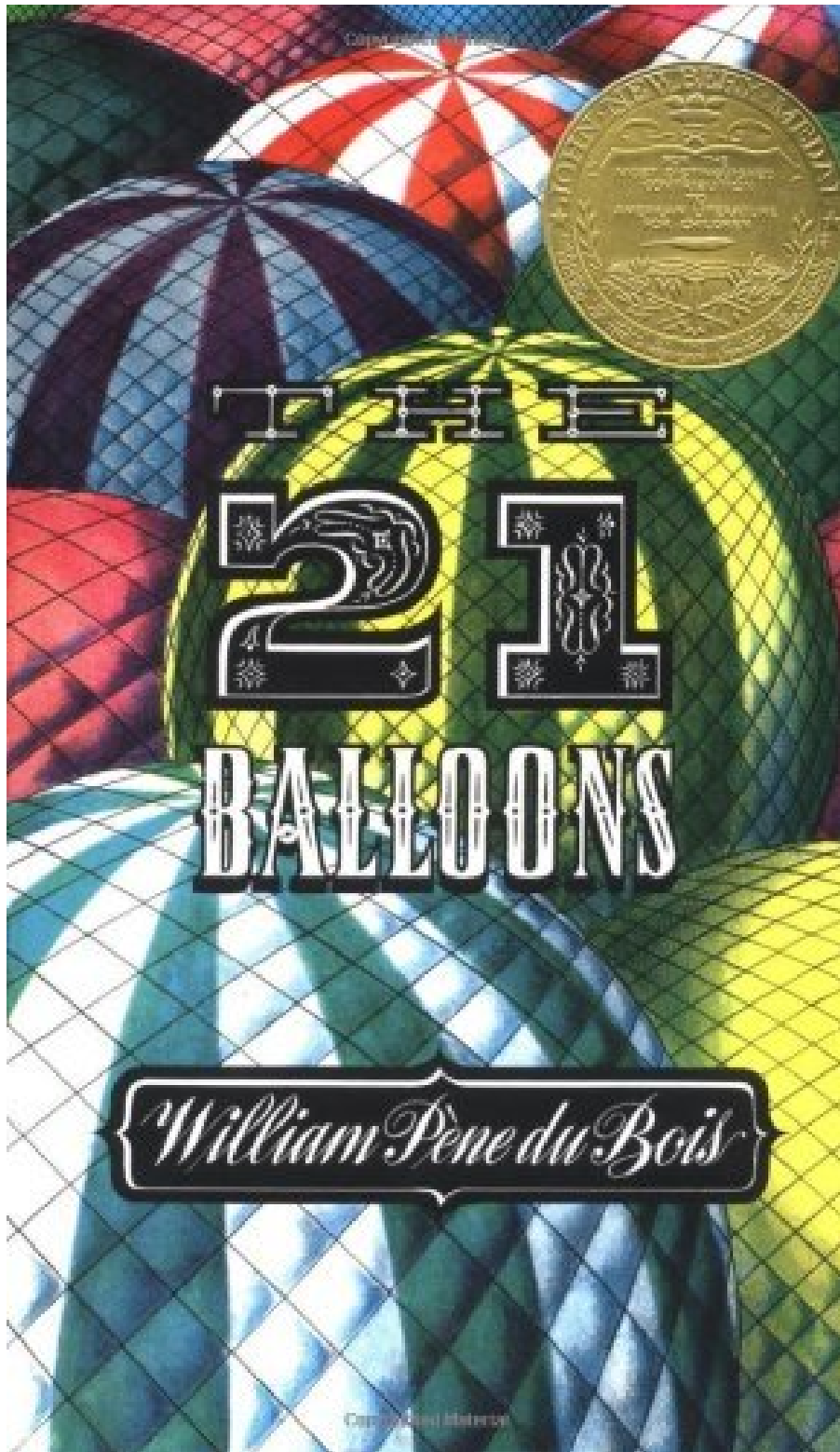


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An enduring classic for all ages!

By ProperGander News (Dr. Emil Shuffhausen)

I first read this story nearly 30 years ago, when I was not quite yet a teenager; I've read it many times since. It never fails to delight, fascinate, amuse, and enthrall me. It is by turns hilarious and innovative, combining science, fantasy, whimsy, and adventure in an intoxicating magma that explodes in an eruption of high drama. OK...perhaps that last sentence was over the top, but when you're trying to describe a fantasy tale about the explosion of the Krakatoa volcano, you can get burned by using too many cute metaphors and adjectives. Look...let's keep it simple. This book rocks. It rolls. It even shakes and rattles. The story is funny, the scenes are well-choreographed, the premise is captivating, and the narrative is told in a splendidly droll manner. So, if you are 10 years old, or 20, or an old geezer like me who still likes a good kick in the head every now and then, buy this book and read it. It's got balloons, diamonds, sharks, a volcano, exotic foods, fantastical houses, and stuff that will blow your mind. Now...please tell me you liked this review!

64 of 65 people found the following review helpful.

The richer a fellow is, the better I like him

By E. R. Bird

Kids obsess over the darndest things. Scooters. Small electronic pets. Plastic accoutrements that somehow incorporate the word "jelly" into their titles. And while I am an ancient 26 years of age with only dim recollections of my idyllic midwestern youth, I think I can say with perfect certainty that there is one subject that very very few kids obsess over. Ballooning. When was the last time your child begged you for a lifetime subscription to (actual publications) "Ballooning Magazine" or "Aerostat Hot Air Balloon Magazine"? This isn't to say that when the local carnival comes to town, some kids wouldn't leap at the chance of hopping into one of those balloon rides that go up and down. But will they seriously seek out literature that feeds this all-consuming hunger for all things dirigible? William Pene du Bois apparently thought so. And so, with his 1948 Newbery Award winning, "The Twenty-One Balloons", Pene du Bois gives us a tale that is part Jules Verne part H.G. Wells with just a touch of Rube Goldberg for spice. And while I doubt that many children today will pore over the intricate technical aspects of this otherwise fun ride, they will at least be intrigued by its tale of a man, his dream, and his encounter with a truly original society.

If there was one thing Professor William Waterman Sherman was tired of, it was teaching mathematics to little children. For years and years he'd done it and finally, once retired, he was given a chance to fulfill a lifelong dream. Sherman would outfit himself a fabulous balloon. It would be the second largest ever commissioned and would carry a small wicker house, in which Sherman would be able to sail in perfect peace and comfort. Containing a great deal of food, the hope on his part was to be able to sail around the

world for at least a year without having to come into contact with another human being. On August 15, 1883 he sets out above the Pacific in a single balloon to live in the sky. On September 8, 1883 he is picked up by a passing American freighter in the Atlantic while, "clinging to the debris of twenty deflated balloons". How is this possible? Where did the balloons come from? How did he travel around the world so quickly? And what stories has he to tell? "The Twenty-One Balloons" is Sherman's wild, impossible, and truly original tale of his time spent on the island of Krakatoa, mere days before it exploded sky high. And what he found there will astound.

Pene du Bois begins this book with a rather touching caveat. He points out that just prior to publication his publishers couldn't help but notice similarities between this story and F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story, "The Diamond As Big As the Ritz". Pene du Bois admits that some of the similar details are a bit striking, but that he really hadn't heard of Fitzgerald's version before. A quick perusal of the two stories is enough to convince me that Pene du Bois is certainly telling the truth. Though in both tales we view rich opulent societies that own a mountain filled with diamonds and use their wealth to maintain both secrecy and a higher standard of life, Fitzgerald's story is obviously a slyly clever critique of his contemporaries while Pene du Bois concocts a delightful confection of various "what ifs". Kids reading "The Twenty-One Balloons" will instantly wish to find themselves on Krakatoa (pre-volcanic eruption, of course) and to eat at a different restaurant establishment every night.

The best word for this particular book is "innovative". When Sherman crash lands, nude, on Krakatoa, he meets its European inhabitants. Because they are so incredibly rich (all due to Krakatoa's diamond core) they spend their days inventing wild games and conveniences while indulging in delightful foods and expansions of the mind. Pene du Bois's original illustrations bring Krakatoa brilliantly to life while also explaining the technical aspects of everything from balloon merry-go-rounds to beds that change their own sheets. Though I sincerely doubt that any publisher has gone so far as to print this book without the original pictures, make absolutely certain that your book has them if you're going to purchase it. In some ways they brought to mind the delightful scribbles of Ronni Solbert in the equally amusing children's book, "The Pushcart War".

Many kids find themselves saddled with the assignment of choosing and reading one Newbery Award winning book for school. And a child could do far worse than choose the charming, "The Twenty-One Balloons". I like to think that the book is as much fun to read as it was for William Pene du Bois to write. Brilliantly conceived and full of lovely little ideas, this is one award winner that's certain to remain much loved for years and years to come. A pip.

36 of 39 people found the following review helpful.

Can't Go Wrong with a Book Like This

By Timothy Haugh

I have just about every Newbery Award winning book on my bookshelf and I've read most of them. But not all. In particular, many of the ones written before 1950 or so still need my attention. So, periodically, I try to pick up one I haven't read and give it a go. Having just finished reading Simon Winchester's Krakatoa, where he gives such a glowing report of this book, I pulled it down from the shelf.

This is a fun book. It tells the story of a retired math teacher, William Waterman Sherman, who builds a balloon to help him get away from it all by spending a year floating through the skies. Instead, he quickly finds himself downed on the island of Krakatoa where he finds a secret colony of people living quite comfortably. He joins them. Unfortunately, in a couple days, Krakatoa erupts, destroying the island almost completely. Fortunately, the colony had prepared for the chance of eruption and everyone is saved.

Published in 1947, this book is filled with a little interesting science and a lot of fantasy. If it has a weakness, it is that this book feels a little more dated than some of the other older Newbery winners. It doesn't feel dated because of its content, however, just its prose style. Its a little formal and relates a post-Victorian view

of the world which many young people probably will not understand very well.

Still, I enjoyed this story and the drawings by Mr. DuBois very much. When it comes right down to it, you can hardly go wrong with a Newbery winner. Still one of the best signs of excellence in the world of fiction-for children or no.

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