

Top 10 castles in fiction

From classic scary gothic settings to warm and dreamy refuges, fiction is full of castles.

“There are many things you can do with a good castle. Hide in it. Feast in it. Break into it. Break out of it. Plot in it. Live your whole life in it. Fiction is full of castles: on hillsides, in forests, in towns, on clifftops. Castles dreaming in the distance, or castles looming over your head. Castles made of stone, of wood, of ice; with passageways tunnelling deep into the ground, or spiralling high with turrets and stairways. Castles safe and warm, or frightening and oppressive; busy and functional, or lonely and ruined. They’re everywhere, and they are hard to resist

1. **The Castle of the Forest Sauvage**, from [The Sword in the Stone](#) by TH White

TH White’s castle is solid and warm, a paradise for children to grow up in. His version of medieval England, where ruddy-faced barons are fatherly landlords to a contented peasantry, is a myth – his description of an idyllic Christmas in the castle finishes: “Even the weather behaved itself”. But it’s a lovely fantasy, of freedom and security combined. As the year turns and the Wart learns his lessons from Merlin, Sir Ector’s castle is the safe home at the end of all his adventures, until he leaves for London, and the sword which waits in the stone.

2. **Masyaf**, from [Knight Crusader](#) by Ronald Welch

Lots of castles here. There’s Blanche Garde, nicely illustrating the contrast between the civilised comfort achieved in Syria and the more primitive standards of the Franks from the west. There’s Krak, stuffed full of grim-browed Hospitallers staring moodily at each other. But Masyaf is the most memorable castle: perched high at the top of a gorge in Syria, it was supposedly the fortress home of the Hashishiyun, or Assassins. Those unusually wide, airy windows, looking over the abyss below . . . We shiver with horror when someone throws himself out on the casual word of the Old Man of the Mountains (though of course, barely a muscle moves in Philip D’Aubigny’s manly cheek). Ronald Welch can usually be counted on for a good castle or two, with a gruff but kindly wizened Welsh retainer in every one.

3. **The Moving Castle**, from [Howl's Moving Castle](#) by Diana Wynne Jones

“You’ve no right to walk into people’s castles and take their guitars,” Sophie says (an excellent life rule). The Moving Castle is extraordinary and bracingly complicated. It exists in four different places at once. So from inside, a single door opens either into the royal city of Kingsbury, or into a little coastal village called Porthaven, or onto the hills outside the small town of Market Chipping, where the castle roams around frightening people. All of these are in the made-up but recognisable world of Ingary. The door also opens into a mysterious country called Wales. The castle’s movement is powered by the Fire Demon who lives in the hearth and eats logs and bacon rinds, under the control of the wicked but delightful wizard Howl. Diana Wynne Jones’s characters are flawed and likeable. Our heroine Sophie Hatter is shy and ferocious, stomping around Howl’s castle getting things wrong and telling people off, and her relationship with Howl is bliss. Curse that grey-and-scarlet suit – we’re all a little bit in love with him by the end.

4. **Schloss Adler**, from [Where Eagles Dare](#) by Alistair MacLean

“The lights of the Schloss Adler, the castle of the eagle, seemed impossibly remote, as unattainable as the mountains of the moon.” The windows are high, the snow lies deep, and the clouds scud across the wild sky. The plot is as twisted and slippery as an ice-coated cable car wire. No wonder the Germans seem easily confused. The agents race around the castle’s corridors and galleries, double- and triple-crossing each other and exchanging flippant comments at every turn. Then they manage to wreck the castle completely on their way out, leaving the mighty and impenetrable Schloss Adler a towering mass of flames on the side of the mountain. “Were any of your boys carrying matches?” asks the pilot of the British plane flying in to pick up the remains of the team.

5. **The Château D’If**, from [The Count of Monte Cristo](#) by Alexandre Dumas

“The sea is the graveyard of the Château d’If.” It’s all so deliciously unfair. Poor seaman Edmond Dantès gets captured and locked up in the island fortress of the Château d’If, as part of a vicious plot, just before he marries his sweetheart Mercédès. The Château is merciless and omnipotent, its

power reaching out over the dark plain of the sea, and its damp walls seeming to weep with the tears of its prisoners. Edmond escapes, of course, but only after 14 years. He turns up in Paris some time later, mysterious, handsome and complicated, with some great horses and a fabulous title, and above all, absolutely loaded with cash. Extremely satisfying.

6. The Peel Tower, from [Cue for Treason](#) by Geoffrey Trease

The peel towers were built in the north of England as defensive structures during the wars against the Scots. By Elizabeth I's reign, this one is empty and decaying, a "lonely tower" perfect for treacherous plotting. Geoffrey Trease wrote this book at the start of world war two, when the "hungry war" that he quotes from Shakespeare must have felt very real. Historical writing can date easily, telling us more about the time when it was written than the time it describes. But Peter and Kit, bickering as they stalk the peel tower and race up and down England, jump off the page as freshly as if they were written yesterday.

7. Fortis Castle, from [Crusade](#) by Elizabeth Laird

Elizabeth Laird's crusade story follows the stories of two adolescent boys, one Muslim and one Christian. Adam, from England, grows up under the shadow of great grey Fortis Castle, which "rears like a mailed fist" over the land. This castle is a city, filled with workshops and kitchens, dog kennels and smithies, with people pouring in and out on their daily business. In the story it throws people from opposite ends of the social scale together, even while reinforcing the hierarchy. A gritty, oppressive, convincing castle.

8. Sleeping Beauty's Castle, from Thorn Rose by Errol le Cain

The castles of fairy tales could make up their own list, and Sleeping Beauty's castle is one of the most interesting, fraught with symbolism. In Errol le Cain's beautiful and slightly sinister pictures, malevolent little creatures watch over the banisters as Thorn Rose climbs the stairs to the furthest turret. (Another of my favourite pictures was always the one of the earlier princes hanging in the branches of the forest, caught by the thorns. Lovely.)

9. Castle Dracula, from [Dracula](#) by Bram Stoker

“A vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky.” For your classic scary gothic castle. If the locals start crossing themselves, moaning, and hanging around in groups to mutter about Satan and stuff in their own language, for pity’s sake don’t leave the coach to go off to Castle Dracula. It’s not going to be nice down there.

10. **Green Knowe**, from [The Children of Green Knowe](#) by Lucy M Boston

Green Knowe emerges first from the darkness by the light of a lantern, reflected in the floodwater that surrounds it. Inside, it is full of mirrors, candlelight, carved wood panelling – and, yes, ghosts: the Children of the title. This castle is warm and lived-in, dreamy and atmospheric, full of half-seen secrets and whispered laughter, a gentle refuge for all its children.