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## **Queen Alice's Palaces by Juliette MacIver, illustrated by Sarah Davis**

**Publisher: HarperCollins**

**RRP \$18.99**

A light-hearted rhyming tale about a cheerful Queen with a beautiful palace that is gilded and grand. Her unfortunate neighbour, Sir Hugh, has a small, crumbling castle and desperately wants to upgrade his property.

Sir Hugh devises a cunning plot to trick Queen Alice into building a wonderful new home that he can take over. He encourages Alice to construct a palace of unique design that has never been seen before. A succession of disastrous follies takes shape; a thousand-room bamboo construction, a glacial ice creation, a cheese monstrosity ravaged by mice, and so on.

The various palaces are magnificent in appearance but they are architectural disasters doomed to last only a short time. Whereas Queen Alice's palace has stood by the sea on the edge of the sand for longer than anyone knew. The canny Queen realises her current abode is best of all because it has lasted so well and she is quite content to give up the construction business.

Thwarted, Sir Hugh stumbles home to his crumbling ruin. It is natural to want to better your lot in life if you live in substandard housing, but perhaps the message of the story is not to attempt to improve your situation through trickery.

Colourful, humorous illustrations by Sarah Davis make this an attractive picture book. Her sweet-faced Queen is appealing, while the dastardly Sir Hugh has a swirling moustache with grey, overcast skies highlighting his dark mood. The quirky castles are splendid with many details to make sharp-eyed young readers smile.

**Reviewed by children's book author, Jean Bennett**

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