



Unexpected Magic: Collected Stories

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Master storyteller Diana Wynne Jones presents a riveting collection of unpredictable tales, including:

- * A cat tells how the kindhearted wizard she owns is suddenly called upon to defeat a horrific Beast.
- * When Anne has mumps, her drawings come to life, and she must protect her home from them
- * Four children become involved in the intrigue surrounding an innocent prince, an evil count, and a brave outlaw.

These fifteen stories and one novella will enchant, startle, and surprise!

Unexpected Magic: Collected Stories Details

Date : Published February 7th 2006 by Greenwillow Books (first published 2002)

ISBN : 9780060555351

Author : Diana Wynne Jones

Format : Paperback 592 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Short Stories, Young Adult, Fiction

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From Reader Review Unexpected Magic: Collected Stories for online ebook

Chris says

The title is so apt in both senses, in that in DWJ's worlds anything can happen (and usually does) plus that for the reader the stories can (and do) provide the magic that may be missing in their own more prosaic world.

The stories are a little uneven, as they are aimed at different audiences (those who like whimsy, or cats, or were once in a bygone age bemused by word processors). The novella, *Everard's Ride*, for me was misplaced in this collection: first, its additional length made the paperback physically awkward to handle and, second, its setting and plot convolutions were a mismatch with the unidirectional flow of the other tales; it should really remain separately published as standing on its own merits.

That all said, my favourites were the novella and the autobiographical story which opened the collection.

Max says

I remember reading this book a lot as a kid, and as evidence of that I remember almost every single story the moment I began to read it. The one exception to that was *Everard's Ride*, which seems to have completely purged itself from my mind for some reason. Of course, as with any anthology, I loved some of these stories and thought others were pretty awful. But there were more I loved than I loathed, and some of them, having stuck with me since I was a kid, have gotten the chance to renew themselves in my memory and are likely to stick around till I next open up this collection.

Little Dot and What the Cat Told Me are probably my two favorites, as they both represent what I love most about Dianna Wynne Jones: cats and magic. Both are from the point of view of cats, viewpoints that are rendered quite well, and each cat heroically saves her wizard from various difficulties. Of course, as is the nature of cats, they are saving their wizards from problems they helped to create, or at least make worse. But each cat has a fair bit of magic of her own, and things come out to a nice conclusion in the end. I also love Nad and Dan and Quaffy and Enna Hittims, as they both play around with the magic of storytelling. The former is about an author of space operas who finds her new word processor does a lot more than just record her tales, while the latter sees a sick girl imagine a trio of fantasy heroines, only for them to get out of control and become a threat. I always enjoy reading authors playing around with the idea of storytelling, and these two stories have nice twists to them that have kept them lodged in the back of my mind forever. Plus I really wish the novels from Nad were real, cause I think I'd quite enjoy them.

Most of the other stories were generally fun, but I found a few to be rather disappointing. I read *The Master* in some other collection not too long ago and now, as then, I found it to be confusing, weird, and generally disappointing. It's a little less bad here as it isn't serving as the sole example of Jones's work and thus is less likely to turn off potential readers. I was a bit disappointed by *No-One*, which feels like a humorous riff on Bradbury's *There Will Come Soft Rains* that never quite landed the jokes properly. And *Dragon Reserve*, *Home Eight* had some interesting ideas but is hampered by somewhat unenjoyable characters and the feeling that there's a lot more story here we won't ever get.

Everard's Ride, as I said, seems to have disappeared from my memory, to the extent that I was surprised to find this book contained a novella in addition to the dozen or so short stories. As with a lot of Jones's writing, I found it took me a little while to get into the story, but once I did, I got through it pretty quickly. It's not her greatest, but it's sort of a fun secondary world (or something - the other version of the land that the Victorian characters visit is never explained and doesn't seem to be that much more magical than ours) fantasy. The world our heroes visit is a medieval fantasy one that has knights and princes, and its currently embroiled in a war over succession caused by the murder of the previous ruler. The four kids from our Earth play an important role, but it's nice that a lot of what happens still comes down to the actions of natives. I liked the idea that the realm will end if any Outsiders are killed, though I wish the reason for that had been explained. I also liked how the kids are from the Victorian era and thus brought in things like more modern ideas of government and a gun. In general this was a pretty fun story, which I'd probably rate around a three on its own. It isn't up with her best, but there are some neat ideas here and the action is pretty good. I am left wishing there was a sequel since I think this story could be taken in interesting directions from here.

Really, if there's one downside to rereading this book, it's that I've been reminded of just how much I love Dianna Wynne Jones's writing, and now I really want to reread all of her books I have read and finally read all the ones I haven't. Which would be a fun project, but I'm not sure I'm up to it right now given all the other things I also desperately want to read. While there are a few stories here I thought weren't that good, I still feel this is a great representative sample of Jones's works and well worth reading whether you're a fan or just somebody who's always wanted to give her a try.

Morgan says

I kept forgetting that all of these stories were by the same author. I have always loved Howl's Moving Castle, and as an adult I was so happy to find that Jones had written more books and stories.

Sarah says

This was a fairly fun anthology. Not the author's best work, but not her worst either.

Highlights:

- Nad and Dan and Quaffy gets a mention because it's about a writer who . . . well, I can't explain it without giving away the story, but it was quite amusing. Not my favorite in the book, but it was fun.
- The Master is a thoroughly strange story, and rather creepy to boot, but interesting to read and try to puzzle out what's going on. I have certain suspicions about what happened after the story's end . . . I'm not sure whether or not to be glad there's no sequel.
- The Girl Who Loved the Sun is also interesting, and rather reminded me of a folktale. It was a bit sad-bittersweet, more like.
- No One is sci-fi, not fantasy, concerning a robot and a mechanized house (a la Ray Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains"). It was not quite like anything I'd read before, though I suppose that could be because I haven't read much sci-fi.
- Little Dot was splendid. But I might be biased, since it had a great many cats in it and I'm rather fond of cats.
- Everard's Ride is a novella, and probably my favorite selection in the book. Another world within our own, a bit of a mystery, and a fair number of twists (only about half of which I guessed before they happened).

And it didn't have a perfectly neat-and-tidy ending, which surprised me a bit- a lot of Mrs. Jones's stories do. (It actually boosted this book's rating by a star, all by itself.)

Lowlights:

-I'm not going to mention any specific stories in here, but I've noticed that quite a few of her short stories (in this and other books) follow a certain formula of "Beastly adult(s) introduced. Beastly adult(s) are steadily more and more beastly. Other adults are unable or unwilling to do anything about it. Child(ren) (likely precocious) must put up with beastly adult(s). Eventually, circumstances or the children themselves conspire with magic to humiliate or otherwise get rid of the beastly adult(s)." It's . . . not my favorite sort of story, let's put it that way.

Overall, though, this is a pretty fun collection. Worth a read if you're a Jones fan.

Robyn says

It's my preference for short story collections not to give star ratings to each story, but to mark whether I felt positively or negatively toward them when I finished each.

1. The Girl Jones +
2. Nad and Dan adn Quaffy + (fun)
3. The Plague of Peacocks + ? (love when people get what's deserved)
4. The Master +
5. Enna Hittims +
6. The Girl Who Loved the Sun +
7. The Fluffy Pink Toadstool + ?
8. Auntie Bea's Day Out +
9. Carruthers - (main character was a brat from the first moment)
10. What the Cat Told Me +/- (not worked out well)
11. The Green Stone +/-
12. The Fat Wizard +
13. No One +
14. Dragon Reserve, Home Eight +
15. Little Dot + (read this in another anthology a few days ago)
16. Everard's Ride + (the novella in this collection)

As every story in this collection had been previously published elsewhere, I think this particular publication of them is best for those who already know DWJ's work and are fans of her. The type of story changes so much from one to the next, the age of the intended audience is so different from one to the next, and it starts with a story that is probably only really interesting to those of us who are interested in DWJ as a person, that for this to be an introduction to her would probably be somewhat disastrous. I quite enjoyed it, however.

Judith says

This is probably a really good book to start with if you don't know DWJ yet. It's a collection of (magical) short stories and one novella (Everard's Ride), which was also my absolute favourite piece out of the book.

It's a very dense story, not quite a fairytale, rather a sort of medieval tale, really gorgeous. What I love most about DWJ's stories is that magic, in all of her writing, is an everyday thing - it's part of life, usually not mentioned as something special. She makes it seem natural and you begin to feel that everyone has a little magic after all.

Lydia says

I really don't think it is fair to give a blanket rating to a collection of **very** different stories, so I'm going to break it down a bit more, keeping in mind that this book is shelved in the Juvenile section of my library, so I will be commenting on age appropriateness or not in each story's review.

The Girl Jones feels very much like a biographical story, not sure how much of it is or isn't true, but it's rather funny, and as someone who avidly avoided babysitting as a teen, I can totally relate to this story. Taken in the light of a silly, biographical tale, I didn't really find anything wrong with it that the author doesn't mention as being a mistake herself. **Three stars**, fine for young adult / teen and up.

Nad and Dan Adn Quaffy this is a short story for adults, other than the nudity and the innuendo, there isn't much else to the story except a clever play on phonical sounds and words. Overall plot could have been interesting if it had wandered a bit farther out of adult fantasy. **One star**, inappropriate for teens, not much better for adults.

The Plague of Peacocks is a sad cautionary tale and rather anti-religious. As far as language and such go, it is okay for teens, though a good discussion on the real motives of the Platts wouldn't go amiss. **Two stars**, older teens and up.

The Master is, quite frankly, mostly just creepy. Feels very like a fever dream from the narration and the weird stuff going on and from the poor resolution. Mildly disturbing content, off-stage animal violence against people, slight innuendo, alcohol use; **two stars**, adult only.

Enna Hittims is another good warning tale in how we treat the people around us, and letting your imagination run rampant. Violence, peril situations and some language, I would say only appropriate for older teens, though I think the pre-teens are more likely to actually "enjoy" the story. **Two stars**.

The Girl Who Loved the Sun I actually liked, it's a good story about running after the wrong things and the hurt it does to ourselves and others, particularly when you are chasing a lie. Painful situations and a sadder ending, **three stars**, young adult / teen and up.

The Fluffy Pink Toadstool is a good warning on being consumed by fads and is fairly anti-hippy (or hippy poser if you prefer). The aspect of the story that I didn't like, was how overall the family didn't respect one another, which in the end the mom learned a lesson, but the others didn't. They dealt with it by ignoring her and being rather hurtful of her feelings. **Two stars**, young adult / teen and up.

Auntie Bea's Day Out is rather the same overall feel as the last story and *Enna Hittims*, though rather more clever and humorous. The story does end well for the heroes, but they don't really solve the problem. **Three stars**, young adult / teen and up.

Carruthers, taking into account this was written in the 70's (women's lib issues) it is a bit easier to see where she is coming from, but the main heroine and her father behave horribly to each other, and because of this

cause problems for the other two sisters and her mother. Again, mutual respect would have gone a long way to solve their problems, but hitting is not the way to fix things. Peril situations, family fighting; **two stars**, older teen and up.

What the Cat told Me is actually a very clever tale of magic and intrigue and thwarting evil told from the perspective of a wandering cat that is perched on the reader's knee. Somewhat dark in tone, though it has a happy ending and slightly sensual (as when "the boy" sees a beautiful girl the cat doesn't understand until she figures "he wants kittens"), may also be some language but I don't remember for sure; **three and a half stars** (can I do that? Well, it is in my review so I don't see why not and it earned that half!), young adult / teen and up.

The Green Stone is a great play on the epic fantasy story, don't want to ruin the twist, but it is hilarious! Probably my biggest quibble is the fact that it ends in the middle of the action! Some scantily clad characters, and an off screen zombie attack, but still a solid **three stars**, appropriate for young adult / teen and up.

The Fat Wizard is classic DWJ battle of the magics, with un-intended consequences. Pretty funny, some women's lib stuff, though generally the fault of the town jerk, slightly strange and perilous situations just barely avoided, **three stars**, young adult / teen and up.

No One is a rarer DWJ sci-fi, from the point of view of a robot who has to learn how to work with humans who don't explain very well and take a lot for granted, and machines who are doing their best to thwart it from petty jealousies. All while outmaneuvering kidnappers! It's quite fun, though there is some peril and some un-answered questions (view spoiler), overall, solid story; **four stars** young adult / teen and up.

Dragon Reserve, Home Eight, another DWJ classic in multiple universes, though this one tends to blend magic and science more than is usual. An interesting, ironical tale, that also ends rather in the middle of things, though change for the better is definitely in the air. (This story really reminds me of something else, but I can't place it! Maybe I'm just remembering it from a different collection.) Anyway, quite good, but doesn't feel as whole or as clever as I know DWJ can do, **three stars** older teen (darker contents) and up.

Little Dot, easily my favorite of the short stories, another "cat story" though this one is simply told from the perspective of the cat as the tale is happening. Strange things are happening on the moors, but fortunately for Henry, he is acquiring cats at a fast pace who just so happen to have the skills he needs to help him solve the riddle of the countryside. Little Dot and the other cats are the real stars here, as "their humans" are generally just along for the ride! Another very fun story, though Henry's sudden and short-lived live-in girlfriend is a definite negative, the rest of the story is quite clean with some violence, though that is generally off screen or only bluntly described (view spoiler). **Four stars**, older teen and up.

Now for the real piece de resistance, *Everard's Ride*, which is my favorite story in the book (yes, I know I said *Little Dot* was my favorite short story, but *Everard's Ride* is technically a novella, not a short story! :)). As it takes up a good third of the book, it's a bit harder to summarize in a couple sentences. Picture a mix of the good bits of *Brigadoon*, *Downton Abbey* and *Lorna Doone*, generally focused on four teenagers from two different families (one upper class, one farmers) thrown into a turmoil world that appears at certain times along a road into a bay. This other place has many similarities to the world the teens come from, such as language and some customs, but an entirely different monarchy and ruling class who are currently in a bad state as The Prince (main ruler, no King or Queen) has been murdered and his nephew, second to the throne after his son, is accused. Enter Alex, Cecelia, Harry and Susannah who must unravel the mystery, all while figuring out who to trust, what is the deal with Outsiders and how to explain themselves when they get home? A great historical/fantasy world, I wish DWJ would have spent more time here rather than on *The*

Chronicles of Dalemark series (that wasn't nearly as interesting, and it got four books!). Ah-well! Swords and boxing style violence, there is some death though it happens off screen (after all, they are trying to figure out a murder mystery), otherwise clean, no language / sensuality issues. **Five stars**, young adult /teen and up.

(Did anyone else notice how not one of these stories was really juvenile section of the library material? Just because it is Diana Wynne Jones, do *not* assume it is a kids book!)

Sarah Laing says

I never read any Diana Wynne Jones until AFTER she died - shame on me - but I don't think I'd heard of her either. She takes credit for inspiring J K Rowling. She has an extraordinary imagination - her stories veer off in all sorts of random, magical, captivating directions. Now I'm starting Neil Gaiman's 'The Graveyard Book' - a present to my 8-year-old from his aunt - which has a DWJ endorsement on the cover.

Alex Ankarr says

Loved this so much. Bear in mind if you're addicted to HEA and HFN, this may not be the book for you. The world is heaven and hell combined - well, Milton says so, and I find it credible - and Diana expects you to be a grown-up and take your lumps, be strong enough to deal with the truth.

If you've got enough backbone for it, this book is exhilarating.

Lark says

DWJ's short stories are varied in tone, but the themes are familiar from her longer works. Etta Hittims shows the downside of having a Sophie-like mind, while also echoing Hexwood. My favourite story is The Fat Wizard, which I would have loved to see extended to booklength. Mind you, it has elements of Enchanted Glass, so maybe it WAS. Other stories, including the Plague of Peacocks and The Fluffy Pink Toadstool, remind me of Joan Aiken's stories about Mark and Harriet. That's all good, since I like those stories too.

Luann says

If you don't want to read this entire book, start at the end with "Everard's Ride" and then work your way backwards through the stories. When you get to stories you don't like, stop, because they only diminish in quality the closer you get to the beginning of the book. I think some of the stories - even ones I didn't really like - could be worked into pretty good full-length novels. But here in their short story form, they just don't do much for me. Besides the novella "Everard's Ride," which I really liked, my favorite short stories were

"Dragon Reserve, Home Eight," "Little Dot," and maybe as a distant third, "What the Cat Told Me." Based just on the short stories, I would give this a solid two stars, but "Everard's Ride" brings it up to three stars for me.

Althea Ann says

A good collection of Diana Wynne Jones' short fiction. They're not all her best work, but there's some excellent stories here. Recommended for her fans.

The Girl Jones

A most excellent way to get out of babysitting, forever. Hilarious. Not fantasy, though.

Nad and Dan and Quaffy

Eh, I didn't care for this one. Too self-referential, and kind of annoying. A female writer, at her word processor, makes contact with an alternate universe.

The Plague of Peacocks

A peaceful village is invaded by new neighbors. Their passive aggressive, do-gooder ways get worse and worse... until their just desserts are delivered, in the village's own special way.

The Master

A vet takes a late-night call, and is led into a mysterious wood to tend to wolves. It's framed as a dream... but in a far less-annoying way than most "it was a dream" stories.

Enna Hittims

A child is sick with mumps. To amuse herself, she pretends that her bed is a dramatic landscape... but when the tiny adventurers of her imagination come to life, things get out of hand... (Doesn't most everyone get vaccinated for mumps these days? I'll look at it as being a period piece...)

The Girl Who Loved the Sun

A story with a mythological feel, about a girl who becomes a tree, believing the sun will love her.

The Fluffy Pink Toadstool

Ha! Hippies might get a bit grumpy about this one, but it's pretty funny. The mom of a family goes on a DIY craze, and foraging for food goes just a bit wrong.

Auntie Bea's Day Out

An annoying aunt doesn't pay attention to warning signs at the seashore – and gets far more than she bargained for, on a whirlwind 'tour' of all different sorts of 'islands.'

Carruthers

Due to an aural misunderstanding, a young girl thinks that a walking stick will magically beat her annoying father. The stick talks to her, and moves, but seems unwilling to do any beating. People think she's pretty weird for bringing a cane everywhere, and talking to it. But in the end, she's vindicated... in a rather unexpected way.

What the Cat Told Me

An evil wizard uses boys for nefarious purposes, but, with the help of a cat, one may finally escape... told from the point of view of the cat, which one may either find cute, or mildly annoying.

The Green Stone

A funny take-off on the quest story. All the heroes, sidekicks, and what have you are assembled at the inn yard, and a bard is there to report on their deeds. But the quest unexpectedly get aborted... in, of course, an unexpected way.

The Fat Wizard

A small-town story of magic gone wrong... or possibly, unexpectedly right. ("losing weight" doesn't necessarily mean you'll be "in shape...")

No One

An amusing sci-fi story about a very poorly programmed household robot.

Dragon Reserve, Home Eight

A familiar-feeling but very enjoyable story... on a colony world, those with psychic powers are kept in swift and brutal check. So it's not surprising that some families would try to hide their children's abilities. The end of the story makes too much effort to backpedal from the nastiness the story has brought up, but I still liked it.

Little Dot

Another story from a cat's point of view. But I liked this one. I'm not sure why Bast would be a Caribbean lady, not an Egyptian woman, but it's fine. A bunch of cats must drive off their rescuer's new girlfriend before she takes them to the pound... but she is more nefarious than even they could have guessed.

Everard's Ride

This is not a short story; it's a whole novel. Not even a novella. It's around 230 pages long. Why it wasn't published as its own book, I do not know. It's an early work by Wynne-Jones, originally written in 1966. It's a very nice romantic fantasy... If one travels to a small island in the proper way, a medieval-ish 'pocket' world is discovered ... Although rumors abound of ghosts, it's very real, and there may be more there for some of the characters than there is 'here.'

Margaret says

This volume brings together fifteen stories (all but three of which I'd read before) and a novella, "Everard's Ride". Spanning genres from science fiction to fantasy and even a touch of horror (in "The Master"), all of the stories show off Jones' wit and wild imagination, qualities which make her one of the best young adult fantasy writers of today (perhaps one of the best fantasy writers of today, period). I was disappointed, though, that so many of the stories had been in previous collections - surely there were more to choose from?

Among the stories, the standouts are: "Enna Hittims", in which a girl who has the mumps draws stories about a fictional hero, who becomes frighteningly real; "Dragon Reserve, Home Eight", set on a world in which dragons are real and telepathy is illegal; "The Girl Who Loved the Sun", the myth-like tale of a girl who longs to become a tree; "Nad and Dan and Quaffy", a witty story of a typo-prone science fiction writer whose

computer suddenly starts talking to her; and "What the Cat Told Me" and "Little Dot", both tales of magic narrated by cats.

Since I already own and had read most of the stories, I was most looking forward to reading "Everard's Ride" and wasn't disappointed. Alex and Cecilia live in Victorian England, the children of a wealthy farmer; there is a mysterious island near their home, said to be the site of a ghostly kingdom called Falleyfell. When an enigmatic stranger comes to the farmhouse one night, Alex and Cecilia begin an adventure which leads them into Falleyfell and the dangerous intrigues of its court. Not as inventive as Jones' best novels, "Everard's Ride" is still fast-paced and thrilling, with glints of humor and vivid characters.

Nikki says

A lovely collection of short stories -- one or two I'd read before, I think, but the rest were new to me since I'm somewhat new to Jones' writing: I never read her work as a child. Some of the stories are fantastical, one or two more sci-fi, and one of them autobiographical (and also collected in *Reflections* with Jones' other non-fiction). In many ways, they're very typical of Diana Wynne Jones' work -- though I found them somehow more complete and satisfying than some of her other books, despite how short they are.

My favourite story was 'Everard's Ride' by far, though. I fell totally in love with Robert and was so glad about the ending.

Neil Anderson says

At when readers pick up this book, they will be intruded and mystified about the magical stories in this book. If you can expect the unexpected, you will like this *Unexpected Magic* by Diana Wynne Jones. This book contains multiple stories which all have original plots. In each of them something magical seems to happen. I love how the book easily captured my childlike wonder with enchanting scenarios. This is especially true in the story called Enna Hittims where a little girl named Anne Mittins gets the mumps and she created the imaginary character of Enna Hittims so she isn't bored. However the character comes to life and starts going on quests all around her house. Anne has to choose but to stop Enna from destroying everything. During this story I found myself questioning what was real and what was part of Anne's imagination. This story actually made me think and was a nice change of pace from the average hero's journey book's I usually read. If you want something that might make you think and is something different, then this book is perfect for you.
