



Cart and Cwidder

Diana Wynne Jones

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Cart and Cwidder is the first in the best-selling Dalemark Quartet of books and tells the story of Moril and his brother and sister who are travelling musicians journeying through Dalemark, until one day they pick up a mysterious passenger. Somehow Moril's family and the stranger are becoming bound together in terror, flight, and music.

Cart and Cwidder Details

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Author : Diana Wynne Jones

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From Reader Review Cart and Cwidder for online ebook

Nigel says

A family of musicians traveling on the somewhat oppressive and repressed south of Dalemark perform in towns and villages, passing messages and news as they go. An unwelcome passenger creates tensions and problems, and when tragedy strikes, everything seems to fall apart. Wynne Jones expertly crafts an other-world fantasy around family and music and a fight for freedom.

Nikki says

I've heard vague things about the Dalemark Quartet for a long time (...as with so many things I read, I suppose), and today seemed the perfect time to start, while I was procrastinating from my dissertation. It doesn't feel quite like any other Diana Wynne Jones book I can think of: there's something rather serious about it, ultimately, where often her books seem to be rather frivolous. Perhaps it's the oppressive setting of the South, where there are few basic freedoms, perhaps it's the fact that the magic -- when it comes -- is a little bit awful. (view spoiler)

It's an interesting world, really, and something about it feels more three dimensional than some of Diana Wynne Jones' others. At the same time, it's surprising to see a work of hers with so many trappings of conventional fantasy -- though it does remain uniquely her own work as well. It's just closer to what you'd expect from the fantasy genre at large than from Diana Wynne Jones.

Claire says

Decided to start a reread of the series - Cart and Cwidder is a weird one for me because it's the first book in the series, and it's the beginning of so many characters (and not just Moril and Kialan. Like, I forgot the number of people who show up in this who become important later, like Keril, obviously everything with Hadd and Henda for the next book, and Hestefan). But it's also one of the very few DWJ books where the world-building outweighs the plot. The world-building itself feels effortless like it always does (there's something so matter-of-fact with how DWJ introduces you to a new universe), but here it feels like it took precedence over the plot. Because the plot is so thin and the end is really rushed and it reads like she had other priorities.

But I loved getting back into this world. I just love these characters and how they interact and everything about Moril and where he is at the start of the book vs. the end vs. who he'll become. Also, I have a LOT of thoughts about Keril in this one. (view spoiler)

Jen! says

Review can also be found on combustiblereviews.com

This is a really interesting plot with great characters and written well too WHICH IS WHY I'M SO DISAPPOINTED!!

This is nowhere near long enough. I feel as if the Author couldn't be bothered to delve further and fill out all the brilliant plot points. Everything's covered, but in a very shallow way.

The plot headed in a great direction and I was enjoying it despite the pace. I found some things happening were too blunt, but, considering Diana Wynne Jones, is one of my favourite Authors I assumed there was a reason. And there was, but it still happened too quick and, despite explaining why, it was never addressed.

Nothing quite became of the plot. I had a lot of expectations and build up, but it ended way too soon. The book, at 180-odd pages, is way too short.

This may be an enjoyable read for a younger person dipping their imaginations into fantasy for the first time because, as I said, it is well written. I just wanted MORE. It's like only having one crisp, (potato chip whatever you call them), out of the bag. Yummy, but not fulfilling. NO, I WANT TO EAT THE ENTIRE BAG!! D:<

I will be reading the next book, (in this four book series), and we'll see if it's worth continuing the series.

To sum up, Good plot, Good characters, Way too short leaving you disappointed.

Was it worth the read? No

Would I re-read? No

Would I read this Author again? Yes

Katie says

Good. I like the Derkholm novels better.

Harold Ogle says

Another fun book with a completely different take on magic from Diana Wynne Jones, Cart and Cwidder tells about a family of singers who use their unique status as entertainers to cross back and forth between two nations/regions which are in a cold war and otherwise have no traffic with each other. Like many of Jones' stories, this is also a coming-of-age story, in that the main protagonist, Moril, is eleven years old, and he comes to realize both his passion and his identity over the course of the story. The cwidder of the title is a large stringed instrument that is never really described in much detail (I pictured a cross between a guitarrón and a lute); the family band plays harmonies with bass and treble cwidders for many of their songs.

Up until I'd started this book, I'd been reading and enjoying Mary Doria Russell's The Sparrow, but once I started this, I couldn't stand to read The Sparrow any more until I'd finished Jones' book. Her writing is just so much better that it makes Russell's writing seem clumsy and awkward. I really need to be more careful

about picking up Jones books when I'm reading something else.

Althea Ann says

Originally published in 1975. I really wish I had read this short novel as a kid. I still enjoyed reading it now, but I think it would have been one of my favorite books if I had read it at a younger age.

Although a YA novel, with a fun and fast-moving, adventurous tone, this book doesn't shy away from 'heavier' emotional issues and political situations.

The feudal land of Dalemark is divided, and the South is extremely politically repressive. But people depend on traveling minstrels for not only entertainment but news and mail delivery – so entertainers have a more free rein than most. Moril has spent his whole life traveling and performing with his family from a horse-drawn cart, singing and playing the cwidder across the land.

But when his father is murdered by a group of richly-dressed men, his mother immediately chooses to return to the stable, well-to-do suitor that she left for a musician years before. Moril and his brother and sister, driven both by suspicions that their mother's new beau had something to do with the murder, and a lack of enthusiasm for a bourgeois lifestyle, take the cart and strike out on their own, agreeing to take the young man who had been their family's passenger to his destination in the North.

More trouble awaits than they had bargained on however, as secrets regarding an underground political movement are revealed, and the children realize that their life was not all the happy-go-lucky glamour that it seemed. Soon they're well in over their heads – which makes it convenient that Moril's inherited cwidder, reputed to have belonged to the legendary bard Osfameron, may have more-than-simply-musical powers.

Shawn Thrasher says

What makes Diana Wynne Jones so great? She doesn't have to spell out every last thing. She plants clue and connections throughout her plots, or often what characters are thinking or saying or feeling, that allows the reader to infer important aspects of the plot, or the setting, or the character's motivations. To be completely blunt, and rather snobbish, she's not a writer for dumb readers. That makes her book that most wonderful and glorious of things, immanently re-readable. Every time you re-read a Jones book, you get something new (and perhaps strange) out of it. And the feeling that you are very smart, although never quite as smart as Diana Wynne Jones.

Andree says

[Obviously the person turns out to be the Prince of the

Arielle Walker says

I've been trying to read this quartet since I was gifted the books over a decade ago. I still don't know why I never managed - especially after finally picking up this first book yesterday and realising that it is fantastic

and not at all difficult.

It's strangely sombre for a children's book, the world is a harsh place and the journey that the main characters go on is challenging in a way that quests rarely seem to be these days. The consequences are as harsh as the world they belong to, and death - though shocking - is an easily accepted thing. Maybe this is why I struggled to read it as a child?

Moril is a wonderful lead character, and the music theme is explored differently than I've seen before - though of course this is Diana Wynne Jones and so I would expect no less!

~Geektastic~ says

Re-read.

This is the first installment in Diana Wynne Jones' epic Dalemark Quartet. I first read this series when I was 13 or 14 (which is the intended age group), and I remember being so swept up in these books, they remained in my "favorites of all-time" for many years afterward and began my lifelong love of epic, multi-volume fantasy. Of course, revisiting something you LOVED when you were in middle school is always a gamble. So, the real question is: did it hold up?

Yes!

And no.

Cart and Cwidder is the story of Moril Clennensson and his family of travelling Singers. Moril is an eleven-year-old musician and daydreamer who lives on the road and performs with his family all over the politically divided land of Dalemark. When the family takes on an arrogant young passenger named Kialan, a chain of events begins that will change not only Moril's life, but will affect the entire land of Dalemark.

I wanted to leave my description as vague as possible, as it is the progression of discovery that makes it so much fun. But I do want to look at the elements I still love. Moril is a fantastic character, seemingly ordinary and likeable, but obviously designed for bigger things. For those of us that spent most of our teenage years in a fog of daydreams, he's the embodiment of the dreamy but secretly astute creatures we may have believed (or hoped) ourselves to be. Moril *sees* things, but people rarely realize it, and the look of vague inattention on his face fools those around him into constantly underestimating his abilities. He's an average boy stuck in a not-so-average situation, and he proves himself to be up to the task, but not without some sadness and regret.

The emphasis on the lives of itinerant musicians in this first volume gives us an early glimpse at the beautifully constructed world of Dalemark. It is a land divided; there hasn't been a king on the throne in over 200 years, and the earls that rule the various territories have created a fierce division between North and South that promotes prejudice and keeps the people separate and easy to manipulate. The South is known for being efficient and aristocratic, but also harsh and authoritarian. To the North, people have more freedom, but life is a bit more hardscrabble in the cold and less productive climate. (Yes, I do realize that there are definite American Civil War divisions going on here. Agricultural, repressive south vs. progressive, industrial north is a very old story from many Western nations at this point. But it works.)

This being a fantasy series and not simply a work of pre-industrial historical fiction, there is magic and

wonder aplenty, but it is done in such a way as to not overwhelm the character-driven nature of the story. Moril inherits a very old and mysterious musical instrument from his father, known as a cwidder which, to the best of my knowledge, resembles a large lute. This cwidder is *ahem* *instrumental* to the series, both in this volume and later on. When Moril unlocks its magical potential near the end of this adventure, the real story is just beginning.

As the first entry in a four-part series, *Cart and Cwidder* does a very good job of setting up the overarching structure of the whole. It gives us an overview of the land, and insight into the nature of the North-South division. Moril is a living, breathing manifestation of the opposing sides; his father is from the North, while his mother was once a Southern aristocrat. The religious belief structure that comes into greater play in later installments is mostly absent, but it isn't necessary and is probably better off without it. Jones does an excellent job of creating a solid foundation to build on later, not overwhelming the reader right out of the gate, but prompting a desire to learn more as the story progresses.

Now, in what ways does this not hold up to my original perceptions? In this volume, there actually isn't much that let me down. As I mentioned, this introduction does a very good job of slowly building a world in which the reader becomes more and more involved. I suppose my only argument against it, and would keep it from receiving a full five stars if this were my first time reading it, is Jones' inclination to rush understanding in some instances. There is a tendency to have characters discover things in a rush, which requires a suspension of disbelief I was much better at when I was a teenager. It's not entirely unconvincing; the story couldn't survive if it was, but it can be a little less satisfying than it could be. However, I still love it and to explain, I'm going to lift a phrase from a fellow Goodreader that really captures the essence of my continuing appreciation: "I'm sorta fond of my fond memories of fondness."* Yeah, that could mean I'm in love with the *ideal* of my initial reading. But I don't think, in this case, that it does. My fond memories and my current enjoyment came together quite nicely to create a lovely, nostalgic experience that doesn't overshadow the story's ultimate worth.

Ultimately, I'm leaving the 5 star rating. As a first time read at the age of 27, it may be more in the 4 range, but if you average my initial response and my current one, it really does still merit 5.

(Oh, and my only other complaint: the horrible, childish covers on the British Oxford paperback editions. The library copies I read had lovely covers; these are a travesty.)

Old (yay!):

New (boo!):

*Thanks to Paquita Maria Sanchez and this review <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...> for providing such an astute distillation of my experience.

Becky Schneider says

Man, was this ever dark and tense. I really liked it, though, and expect to enjoy the rest of the series! I enjoyed reading a DWJ novel with a slightly different worldbuilding style than her usual - vaguely like the

Ingary books, but not quite.

I liked how the storytelling and musical aesthetic was very Celtic, specifically Welsh (the "branches" of the Adon's tale was a fun allusion to the branches of the Mabinogi.)

Allie says

DWJ is one of my favourite authors. Surprisingly, this is the first book of hers I've seen available on audiobook. While it was good, it wasn't great. (Guess she was saving her greatness for the Chrestomanci series.)

Interesting tidbit for you

On the audiobook the narrator says Diane Wynne Jones!

Deborah O'Carroll says

Reread August 2018

Read January 2014

Polina says

this was comforting in a way that a lot of 90s/early 2000s mg books are. i love that it felt very small scale and intimate despite the larger scale issues that came into play, and how human the characters were (a favorite moment was when the older kids fa tried to stay up late to keep watch and then promptly fell asleep the next day and the younger kids just kind of rolled their eyes) and the different skills they brought to the table, and the way it felt so traditional and simple while having all kinds of fun trope subversions and surprises and depths. i did think there was a bit too much info dumping and spelling things out for the reader but i still loved it and diana wynne jones is brilliant.

Kate Forsyth says

Diana Wynne Jones is one of my favourite writers from my childhood and Cart & Cwidder is one of my favourite of her books, and so it was the one I chose to re-read for DWJ-month in the blogosphere – a global celebration of her books and writing. This is the story of a family of musical travellers in a world divided between North and South, and has DWJ's trademark mix of the ordinary and the magical. A truly delightful children's fantasy.

Margaret says

After hearing about the genius of Diana Wynne Jones more times than I can count, I have finally joined the ranks of her admirers. Jones truly knows her craft. I found many similarities between her writing and the writing of Megan Whalen Turner. Namely, amazing plot twists, nuanced characters, and a finished project worth reading over and over. I'm glad this is a series of four, because I am far from being done with her incredible universe.

Update 1/16:

Still good. Still good.

Wealhtheow says

I love Ms. Jones with all of my heart, and that is why it pains me to admit that I didn't really enjoy these stories. There was no connection between the stories (although the first two novels are set during the same period, they concern two completely different cultures and geographic areas--the difference between *A Horse and His Boy* and *Prince Caspian* for instance), so there's really no point at having them all part of the same "quartet." Moreover, the stories just didn't grab me. I don't know why not, but these are probably her least-enjoyable works.

Melissa McShane says

This was one of the first books I read by Diana Wynne Jones, back in the days when I would read and love a book and then lack the good sense to look up other books by the same author. I must have stumbled over three or four of her books this way before "discovering" DWJ; what a surprise to me, later, to pick up one of her books and find it oddly familiar.

Diana Wynne Jones's sixth book is her first fantasy set in a world other than our own, and is also more serious than the previous ones. The Dales are a country divided north and south; the North is a land of freedom, and the South is dominated by oppressive lords who tax the people heavily and ferret out rebellion wherever it sprouts. Moril's family are traveling performers and some of the few allowed to cross between the countries, carrying messages between towns and entertaining with song and story. When Moril's father Clennen takes a young passenger named Kialan, their lives take a different turn, and Moril discovers the truth about the old cwidder his father plays and that he's told Moril will be his someday.

Family is at the heart of this story, and family is one of the things DWJ does best. It's a truism in young adult literature that the first thing an author has to do is kill off the parents so the children have to depend on themselves. I think the first part of that statement is what gets remembered, when the second part is what's actually true: YA literature requires that children learn to solve problems because adults are not reliable, for many reasons. In *Cart and Cwidder* the parents are present, but not reliable, because they have their own lives; Clennen is absorbed in performances, and their mother Lenina (sorry, I keep having *Brave New World* flashbacks with that name) is cool, efficient, but distant. It's true that Moril and his siblings Brid and Dagner end up on their own (view spoiler), but that's about halfway through the book. And even then, that

"abandonment" is because both parents have lives of their own--and this makes the point even more powerfully than if the book had simply started with three orphans making their way in the cold, cruel, heartless world.

Cart and Cwidder marks a satisfying change in DWJ's approach to fantasy fiction. I recommend reading the entire series in the order listed, even though *The Spellcoats* comes first chronologically.

Ryan Mishap says

A re-post, now that Jones has died (March 26, 2011). Thank you, Diana, for all these wonderful stories.

If you haven't read Diana, starting here would not lead you wrong.

In a series of baronies controlled by tyrannical leaders, a group of traveling musicians drift from town to town doing plays, puppets, and songs. The son of the group, who, like the rest of the family, misses his father, is about to be set on a journey that will challenge the power of the rulers, intersect with the lives of other important adolescents--one who joins a revolutionary group to topple the baron he lives under and has his own father issues--, and re-connect with the spiritual past of the land.

Intriguing, a complete world filled with great characters and a wonderful look at our own world and ideas through fantasy. the way all the best fantasy books do.

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