



## The Cabinet of Earths

*Anne Nesbet*

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*The Cabinet of Earths*, Anne Nesbet's debut novel for tweens, blends fantasy, science, and horror into an irresistible story in the vein of the classic His Dark Materials series.

Twelve-year-old Maya is miserable when she has to move from California to Paris. Not speaking French at a school full of snobby French girls is bad enough, but Maya believes there is something sinister going on in her new city. A purple-eyed man follows Maya and her younger brother, James. Statues seem to have Maya's face. And an eerie cabinet filled with mysterious colored bottles calls to her.

When James becomes the target of dark forces, Maya decides she must answer the call of the Cabinet of Earths, despite the danger.

## The Cabinet of Earths Details

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Author : Anne Nesbet

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## From Reader Review The Cabinet of Earths for online ebook

### Ariel says

I love fantasies and I read so many of them that it's always surprising and exciting to find a really original vision like this one. For one thing the magic is French and it's set in Paris, which is a refreshing change from the English magic trope. For another, the "earths" themselves and how they work represent such a interesting reworking of a classic theme. Then there are the themes of the delicious anbar and the colorless cousins. AND the book is beautifully, whimsically, even deliciously written. Just wonderful! I read this in the waiting room while my poor husband was having arm surgery and it was like having a friend in the room to entertain me and keep me company.

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### D.J. Butler says

I really wanted to like this book, and it has some cool stuff in -- a family cursed to betray each other, a cabinet that stores the mortality of chosen people, rendering them immortal, and a keep of great secrets who has rebelled. For those virtues, and to reward a first time author generally, three stars.

But I can't give it more than that, because the book is kind of boring and really slow.

First of all, stuff happening is not a plot. A plot is a character who has a problem, and takes action to solve that problem. You can't have your protagonist make a meaningful resolution to solve her problem for the first time on page 150 of a 250 page book -- everything before that moment is just set up, and that's three times too much set up. Boring.

Second, telling a tale about people in Paris can make a story a setting-driven tale for grownups. See, e.g., the first sequence of The Da Vinci Code, which is full of details of the Louvre and Paris. But Paris is not a magical land for kids, so lingering on its details, in a kids' book, is boring.

Third, when you're telling a story, you need stakes. The stakes are what is at risk in the plan of action of your main character. So having a sick mother is a fairly good stakes, but only if your protagonist actually is driven by her mother's sickness to formulate a plan and take action. Otherwise, a sick mother in a story is boring.

The net result: for over half this book, the protagonist just wanders from scene to scene, taking French lessons, baking cookies, and going to dances, as the backstory slowly reveals itself. That doesn't make the book terrible, but it really undercuts some great ideas by freighting them down with slow, boring story.

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### Akoss says

Maya is a regular girl who got thrown inside a complex relationship between magic and science. I mean it when I wrote "thrown" because that's what I saw. She had to figure things out for herself while dealing with family issues as well.

So the story starts with Maya and her family moving into their new apartment in Paris from their old life in

the US. She immediately started noticing odd things that no one else seemed to see. Soon she discovers an underground society that preys on children because of their life force basically. The one thing that made those children alive, radiant and happy. Everything that also describes Maya's own brother. The society believes that magic and science on their own are nothing but combined together could do magnificent things. Which is mostly true but also extremely wrong and dangerous.

In an attempt to save her brother, Maya goes to great length, including embracing some magic she didn't fully understand yet.

Although I found the premise compelling, and the setting (Paris) awesome, I didn't fully enjoy the story. Something was missing and I still can't put my finger on it. I feel like most of the time Maya reacted to events instead of taking charge. I also didn't like that she was mostly on her own fixing things. She had a sidekick but he was more of a part time sidekick and remained skeptical to the magic to the end.

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### **April says**

The Cabinet Of Earths, Anne Nesbet's debut middle grade novel examines larger ideas. What would you sacrifice to live forever? What would you give for your sick mom to get better? These are the questions Maya Davidson, 12 year old protagonist of The Cabinet Of Earths grapples with.

Read the rest of my review [here](#)

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### **Snail in Danger (Sid) Nicolaides says**

Okay. I have now re-read this. It holds up pretty well. It is more like a 3.5. It is maybe not the most original thing thematically (Immortality Immorality being fairly well-covered ground), but it is still imaginative and entertaining.

Maya is a kickass big sister, and Valko is an awesome sidekick. Cousin Louise, oh my god, Cousin Louise. I like her more every time I re-read this. Maya's parents are somewhat oblivious, as parents in these sorts of stories often are, but Cousin Louise and (to a lesser extent) Cousin Henri-Pierre make up for it. (Henri-Pierre may not be a cousin exactly, I can't remember and I don't feel like drawing up a genealogical chart just now.)

This book has a lot of things I like. Magic! Science! Paris, in all its nefarious historical glory! Including a real house with salamanders around the door, and an onomastic hat tip to the house's designer. Visiting the Louvre and seeing this painting. Being in a strange place, and having to get along in a strange language, and moving around so much you feel like you don't belong anywhere, and start forgetting how to speak your native language. (I also enjoyed the mention of the John Muir house, though it wasn't very relevant to the story.)

Sometimes it's funny how your fiction reading and your non-fiction reading dovetail unexpectedly. I had been doing a ton of reading about occupied Paris during World War II, and the fear and the worry and the trying to survive worked very well with this, especially since World War II matters to this story.

This could make a great movie, with the right screenwriter and director. I hope someone picks it up. I usually mean that in a somewhat derogatory way but here I mean it in a positive sense. So many scenes would be visually great, not just awesome action/things blowing up scenes, which is how I usually mean it.

There are times when Maya and Valko seem a little *too* wise and self-aware. The (view spoiler) at the end was maybe a little too convenient ... but I liked this books. If you are an adult who likes middle grade books, give it a try.

Also, note that a sequel is forthcoming: Box of Gargoyles.

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### **Pam ?Because Someone Must Be a Thorn? Tee says**

I really dislike the current 'cartoonish' bookcover. It makes "The Cabinet of Earths" look like fluffy juvenile market stuff, which it's not.

I say this because Nesbet's story is nuanced, with subtle tensions and issues. It isn't a variation of Goose Bumps, or even an adventure like the Percy Jackson series. This is a sorta-creepy Steampunk-ish mystery book for people who like well written stories!

:::POSSIBLY SOME SPOILERS:::

Backstory begins the book. We are introduced to the Cabinet itself and the Lavilettes and Fourcroys, the families at the heart of this book. And right from the beginning there is betrayal and death, and for us, the reader, the tantalizing mystery of what 'the earths' are.

From the WWII era, we are whisked into a steampunkish present where an American family has moved to Paris. The father, a scientist, has been offered a position with a Society which he believes has scientific focus like his own. But which, in fact, is a front for a foundation with it's feet in promoting magics that lead to long, long life.

This long life, and the vigor which can also be purchased, becomes of interest to our 13 year-old heroine, Maya, because her mother has been fighting cancer. And so the idea that Maya can save her beloved mother is very attractive. The question is, what is the price?

:::END Possibly Spoilers:::

I really liked this book. It's a stand-alone (okay, I'm hoping for a series) and it is so well written. One of those books where the narrative 'holds together' beautifully.

I found the characters well drawn and interesting. The tension was palpable and the mystery unfolded in logical steps.

If you liked "Cabinet of Wonders" by Marie Rutkoski or "The Kneebone Boy" by Ellen Potter, check this one out.

Pam T~  
mom/#kidlit blogger

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### **Ms. Yingling says**

Maya and her family, including five-year-old brother James, move to Paris. Her mother has cancer and has always wanted to go, so when her father gets a fellowship from the Society of Philosophical Chemistry to study there, Maya can hardly complain. Shortly upon arrival, strange things start to occur-- odd relatives show up, Maya's face appears on a statue, a packet of pictures appears. Maya and James spend a lot of time with their colorless cousin Louise, who is helping with their French, and the very strange Henri de Fourcroy who tells them a little about their strange family history. The Cabinet of Earths turns out to be a way to make people immortal-- their "earths" are bottled and kept in the cabinet, and they are fed "anbar", the essence of lively children, to keep them happy and vibrant. Once Maya finds out about this, and finds that she is the keeper of this cabinet, she is torn-- she can keep her mother alive, but must then be a part of this evil process that could strip the liveliness from her brother.

**Strengths:** My readers are trending away from medieval fantasy, and I know just the student to whom I would hand this. Even though the cover and the title on this one set me into defensive "I don't want to read anymore fantasy!" mode, I was drawn into the story very quickly.

**Weaknesses:** Maya's life in school was touched on much too briefly-- I think I would have left it out. Even the friend she makes there doesn't add much. The father's position was also rather vague, although the family needed a reason to be in France. This writer show a lot of promise, but I have a feeling that her next book will be much better. Don't mean to damn with faint praise, this one was oddly compelling and yet bothered me at the same time.

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### **melissa1lbr says**

**My Thoughts:** I thought this one had a fun and kind of unique, quirky plot. It was a bit aggravating to begin with - I kind of despise the whole discover strange things a tiny, confusing piece at a time plot. Anyway, it felt different than many of the middle grade fantasies I've read. That being said, I was not very intrigued and found it hard to keep reading. No particular reason I can pinpoint, just wasn't that thrilled. Guess there's no reason for me to pick up the sequels.

Full review at [One Librarian's Book Reviews](#).

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### **Jenn says**

Enchanting! I really liked this book! Don't let the cover fool you, it's fun for adults to read too! I was very impressed with the author. Looking forward to reading the next book in the series! :)

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### **Diana Renn says**

I was thoroughly enchanted by the story of Maya Davidson and her family. When the story opens, the Davidsons have just moved to Paris, to take advantage of a fellowship Maya's dad has been offered by the

intriguingly mysterious "Society of Philosophical Chemistry." But as the story unfolds, we learn something deeper seems to have summoned the Davidson family there, including complicated ancestral ties, a tangled history of bad luck and betrayals, and a beautiful, magical cabinet. This story has plenty of imaginative wizardry and whimsy: a strange camera that measures children's charisma, a hidden stash of oddly shimmering photographs, a nearly invisible long-lost cousin, and bottles that contain grains of people's mortality and stop time (with dire consequences). There are plenty of realistic details to ground the story as well, including Maya's concern about her mother's health (she is in remission from cancer), Maya's homesickness, and a refreshingly normal dose of jealousy toward her charming and extroverted little brother, James. Anne Nesbet is a very gifted writer and I can't wait for her next book (A Box of Gargoyles come out in 2013).

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### **Laura says**

What a fun, interesting twist on the idea of immortality and the marriage between magic and science. Maya is the bookish, normal daughter in the Davidson family; her mother is recovering from cancer, her father is a scientist and her younger brother, James, is one of those naturally charming, gregarious kids everyone loves. The family moves to Paris for a year while her father works with the Society of Philosophical Chemistry, and she's thrown into a school where she must speak French and is an outsider - although she does make one friend, a Bulgarian named Valko, who lived in America for four years and speaks English.

Maya spends time with her cousin, Louise, a very faint, forgettable, grey woman who as a child survived a church collapse in Italy and through Louise meets another cousin, Henri-Pierre, who lives a very secluded life making opera sets and watching over a rather odd looking cabinet. There's another cousin, another Henri, who is young and dashing and yet somehow a little creepy. The three Fourcroys are descended from the original Fourcroy, a scientist, and his wife, a Lavirotte, a witch. Maya appears to take after the Lavirotte side, which will have consequences for her family...

There are touches of Lewis' *Magician's Nephew*, *Tuck Everlasting* and more modern "weird things happen to ordinary people" books, but the blend is new and fresh.

ARC provided by publisher.

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### **Chris says**

From the initial premise I was intrigued by The Cabinet of Earths. It felt freshly different than a lot of the other children's and young adult lit coming out these days. The premise is fun and interesting...Maya is a 13 year-old girl who moves with her family to Paris when her father is asked to take a new job. She feels isolated, awkward and nervous. Her mother has cancer and although she tries to put on a good face, Maya is very worried about her mother. Maya's younger brother James is magnetically amiable and quickly fits into their new life. This makes Maya feel all the more isolated and gives us a good jumping off point for a somewhat standard coming-of-age tale.

Instead of following a traditional mundane path, the story takes all sorts of twists and turns. Maya catches glimpses of strange things happening around her. She slowly begins to piece things together and realizes that the world around her isn't what it appears to be.

The initial chapter of the book introduces the magical device from which the book derives its title. The "Cabinet of Earths" is quite literally a cabinet full of Earth. It has a shimmery glass front and is filled with jars and jars of Earth. The initial chapter borders on the gruesome side as we learn just what that Earth is all about...it hearkens back to the ancient adage "dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return." In a strange melding of magic and science, certain people have discovered how to remove the "Earth" from a person and thus grant them immortality. The Cabinet is the holder of these Earths.

As Maya stumbles on more and more aspects of the mystery we find more and more disturbing revelations. The author does a fabulous job of weaving together a very intricate story. There are times when things felt a bit muddled and I hoped for a little more clarity, but at the same time I felt like my own confusion mirrored Maya's unsettling situation and so came across as a sort of metafictional element.

The book is often slow paced which is both a boon and a detriment. Because of the twists and turns in the plot, it's helpful to have the pace slow enough to give you a chance to try and unravel the knots. At the same time, the slow pace can border on boring at times when you want to speed along and try to figure out what happens next. It's a tricky balancing act. For me it worked most of the time. Once you get a hold on the plot line, it is very compelling and interesting and made me want to rush on. The interweaving of the Cabinet, Maya's family and the family controlling the Cabinet were very fun and interesting.

I especially loved the characters and the setting. I felt that both were well handled and a lot of fun. I've never been to Paris and I have no idea how accurate this book does at representing the roads and buildings (though the acknowledgements did point out some research). Personally I found the Parisian setting very vivid and fun such that even though I didn't have a good point of reference for the places indicated, I quickly felt accustomed to the location.

The characters were especially fun. Maya is a well rounded and interesting character full of nervous curiosity and a growing sense of self amid the hesitation and self-doubt of growing up. Her brother James was a little more one-dimensional as far as characters go but his personality and mannerisms made him a lot of fun. Maya's friend Valko was intriguing and mysterious and while I thought he was well done, I kind of wanted a little more from him. I really loved her "invisible" Cousin Louise...not so much for her characteristics (which were invisibly average) but for the way aspects of the plot pivoted on her existence. All of the plot threads that wound around Louise were fascinating to me.

As should be apparent, I really enjoyed this book. I have three small hesitations about giving this a hearty recommendation to everyone. The first two I mentioned above: 1) The plot is a little complex and twisted and easy to get lost at times. 2) The pacing of the story is a bit slow and (when combined with the twisting plot) could be off-putting. Both of those hurdles could be easily overcome and I look forward to reading Nesbet's next book to see her style improve and become even more engaging. She has great creativity and style that with a little tuning could likely become a "can't put it down" sort of book.

My third bit of hesitation in giving this a full recommendation is that the book gets a little gruesome at times. The cartoony cover art will make it appealing to younger crowds. It is set as a "middle-grader" book and that's probably appropriate...but sensitive readers may squirm at some of the imagery (we're talking about taking the Earth from people to make them immortal). There are some historical segments that deal with the witchcraft around creating the Cabinet. While these scenes could be something kids might see in a "Scooby Doo" style cartoon sometime, it's a testament to Nesbet's writing that they actually come off as quite vivid and just a bit scary...certainly more so than Scooby Doo. As such, I'd be a little wary about which kids I recommend read this book. I'm sure my 12 year old would be fine and my 10 year old would probably be alright too. But I certainly wouldn't recommend it to anyone younger (they'd probably get lost in the plot

anyway...but that would be after they read the first chapter, which is quite creepy).

Overall this was a very fun read. There were a few slow patches but the plot was compelling enough to not only help me push through but make me want to read even faster. The characters and settings were vibrant and alive. The plot felt fresh and new and was just a lot of fun.

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4 out of 5 stars

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### **Roslyn says**

You know how occasionally it happens that you're only into the second or third sentence of a novel by a new author and you know, immediately, that you're in the hands of an assured, distinctive voice? (Sorry about the mixed metaphor!) Well, that's what happened to me with *A Cabinet of Earths*.

Maya's father lands a job in Paris and the whole family go to live there for a year. Paris itself is a character in the novel: it's portrayed beautifully through both detail and impressionistically. Throughout, the writing is delicious, lyrical, multilayered.

The novel does have some weaknesses. Why does Maya's father, after the first part of the novel, just fade into the background? It seems especially odd because the 'company' that employs him consists of major players in the novel; we never find out how the events affect him or his job. Related to this, I was also a little disappointed in the use of the old 'parents can't handle the truth when it's real magic' trope here, because the parents do seem initially so open and interesting, and because I personally find this particular trope a rather boring one.

Additionally, it didn't quite feel plausible to me that it would take Maya so long to twig to what was really going on; most readers will be way ahead of her in figuring it out. This means that the zany unpredictableness the novel opens with gradually fades somewhat as the writer flings out obvious clues that are not picked up by the protagonists.

So why the 5 rating? It's that distinctive, confident, voice, the lyrical writing, the vivid characters and the ideas that sing. They'll do it for me every time.

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### **katayoun Masoodi says**

a most enjoyable read.

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### **Brandy Painter says**

Originally posted at Random Musings of a Bibliophile.

The Cabinet of Earths by Anne Nesbet is one of those books that begs to be read. Just look at the cover. It is

one of those fantasies that surprises in how grounded in reality it is. There are no journeys to other magical places to fight evil. There is plenty of evil to fight right here.

This book is mostly a book about fear. Fear of change, fear of the unknown, fear of letting go of the comfortable. It's themes are perfect for a middle grade novel and Maya's character displays them well. She is a character easy to relate to as she is completely average in every way. Maya longs for her mother to be permanently well, to go back home to where things are familiar, to not have to be such a good sport all the time. The temptations she faces to stray for what is right are realistic without dulling the fast actin of the story. It is love for her brother that propels her actions in the end and as I always love a good sibling story this made be particularly happy. (On a personal note the dynamic between Maya and James reminded me much of the dynamic between my own children so I was particularly concerned for their outcome. My son has the same sort of effect on people as James, and I've seen in my daughter's trying to reconcile always being in her younger brother's shadow the feelings Maya displays in the book. But she loves him ferociously and would go to any lengths to defend him. And he thinks there is no greater person on the planet.) I was quite happy to see how well Maya and James's relationship demonstrated how complicated and devoted sibling relationships can be merely by showing their interactions.

I really enjoyed how the author was dealing with some complex concepts of trust and betrayal, mortality and immortality, inner beauty and outer beauty, science and magic and managed to make it all work on exactly the right level for this story. She never condescends and she only gives as many details as needed to tell the story in this book.

My only one small complaint was that I feel like I still didn't know Valko well by the end of the book. He is Maya's best friend (possibly more?) but their relationship isn't nearly fleshed out as well as the sibling relationship. That may be corrected in the sequel, *Box of Gargoyles*, due out in 2013.

I was actually quite surprised to discover there would be a sequel as this reads as a stand alone story. Surprised, but very happy indeed.

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