



The Homeward Bounders

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If he finds the right world, Jamie can get Home again.

When Jamie stumbled upon the powerful Them playing Their mysterious games, They threw him out to the Boundaries of the worlds. Since then, he's been yanked from world to world, doomed to wonder in hope of one day finding his way back to his own city.

Bit by bit, though, Jamie realizes there are rules They have to play by. He forms an alliance with two other lost Homeward Bounders—bitter, powerful Helen and demon-hunter Joris—and takes a desperate chance, hoping that the three wanderers can find a way back to their home worlds at last.

Once he becomes a pawn in a game played by a powerful group he calls Them, 12-year-old Jamie is repeatedly catapulted through space and time.

The Homeward Bounders Details

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From Reader Review The Homeward Bounders for online ebook

martha says

[September 2005 review.] The more DWJ I read the more I can pick out what themes she likes to use, similarities between different stories, so at the very beginning this book reminded me of her Hexwood, but it ended up being very different. I really liked this one -- reviews on Amazon point out that this is one of her more somber, darker books and I think it's one of her best that I've read so far. The premise is that every world is a game played by Them, and if you discover this you get sentenced to wander between worlds. There are some great cameos from various mythological characters, including The Flying Dutchman and The Wandering Jew, and the narrator is nicely charismatic.

Alex Ankarr says

Reading this book may hurt you. It's that beautiful, and that sad. But it's worth it.

?Ruth? says

I don't really know what rating to give this book, I guess 3.5 would be about right. It's a very imaginative story, which doesn't quite explain itself. I found myself re-reading paragraphs quite often to try and make sense of what was happening. For a children's book I think it's somewhat complex but on the other hand, maybe a child would just accept the concepts without trying to understand them! It's well written with interesting characters and despite a rather repetitive theme, it manages to stay interesting.

Melissa McShane says

In her twelfth published novel, Diana Wynne Jones again does something new; *The Homeward Bounders* has a little bit of *Dogsbody*, a little bit of *Power of Three*, but mostly it's just itself. Young Jamie goes poking around where he shouldn't and is found by *Them*, mysterious cloaked creatures who appear to be playing an enormous strategy game with the world--and they deal with Jamie's intrusion by making him a Homeward Bounder. Now Jamie is forced to travel between worlds, pulled by an insistent demand he can't predict, with the promise that if he can find his way Home he'll be allowed to stay. As he travels for months and years without aging, Jamie visits hundreds of worlds with hundreds of societies, some pleasant, some hostile, never allowed to stay long enough to make a home, holding on to just the tiniest hope that he will return Home someday.

While the varying societies Jamie visits are fascinating (DWJ was endlessly creative when it came to making new worlds) this book is very much about people and how they treat each other. Jamie's experiences make him cynical, naturally, and when he finally acquires some companions, he's unable at first to trust them or see them as anything but burdens. Helen Haras-uquara has her own issues, and Joris the demon hunter can't seem to stop talking about his "owner," the great demon hunter Konstam. That the three of them can become friends at all is due to DWJ's understanding of how people work. Their relationships are prickly, slow-

growing things, but they do grow in ways dictated by who each of them are.

As a role-playing gamer, I love the way that wargaming comes into the story. Adam, an enemy turned friend (something we'll see again in other DWJ books, particularly Archer's Goon) provides the key to defeating *Them* through his and his father's enormous wargame terrain. While the other characters have supernatural abilities that let them fight their unseen enemy, Adam and his sister provide support in other ways, particularly through knowledge.

The revelation of how *They* are playing their game and what it will take for Jamie and the others to defeat them is complicated, typical for a DWJ novel. There's never anything simple about her solutions, and in this case understanding it requires a way of thinking about the world that reminds me of the ending of *Fire and Hemlock*--if one thing must be true, then another can't be. Jamie's solution to the problem hinges both on his ignorance (knowing who Prometheus is would have ruined everything) and his profound understanding of the puzzle. He sacrifices everything to keep *Them* from returning to power, and the final sentence of the novel makes me cry every time I read it.

Angela Randall says

This was a lovely little escape from reality. I hate giving spoilers, so I won't go into details. Just pick it up and have a read.

Diana Wynne Jones has a real talent for inventing worlds and telling a story. I do also love how she's basically timed how long it takes a young reader to get bored and will jump in with something intriguing to keep them going. If you're looking to be a writer, you could do worse than to study this master.

Lyn says

Not that I cannot or will not review a young adult fantasy, but more likely I am just not attuned to realizing and articulating what is best with this novel.

The author is certainly very talented, the story is well crafted and blends more mature elements into a fine adventure story that many young readers will very probably enjoy, but ... I just could not get into it, much more of a YA book than what I was expecting.

Felicity says

Diana Wynne Jones was a wildly uneven writer. Even her worst stuff is better than many writers' best stuff. This book is one of her best - for the first 2/3 of it - and then it completely disintegrates. It feels as if she suddenly realized that it was shaping up to be a really long book and she was about to hit a major deadline like, the next day, so she threw in a ton of deus ex machina and bam, finished it. This is a damn shame because if it only had just kept going the way it started it would be one of the greatest YA fantasy books of the late 20th century. As it is, it's just . . well. . . the first 2/3 are well worth reading but after that, yeah, not

so much.

Emily Collins says

You all know how much I love Diana Wynne Jones.

I discovered this book only a few weeks ago, when I picked it up from an HPB.

I did not like this book.

Now, don't get me wrong - it was fascinating. I read it in maybe three days. I couldn't put it down. I needed to know what happened next. NEEDED TO.

BUT YOU GUYS I CRIED SO HARD BECAUSE OF THIS BOOK.

AND I KNEW I WAS GOING TO CRY.

ALL THE WAY THROUGH THE BOOK I COULD SEE IT COMING, STRAIGHT FROM PAGE ONE.

BUT IT HAPPENED. AND I DID.

I MIGHT BE CRYING AGAIN RIGHT NOW.

I cannot handle the emotions this book gives me. CANNOT HANDLE. It's too much for me. Especially to read right before finals.

I didn't see as much of the Diana style reading through this as I normally do. The world jumping, definitely (Konstam jumps worlds like a goat, anyone else notice that?), but it was so much DARKER in this book than I was expecting. Amazingly dark. I don't understand it, it was just like you could feel *Them* seeping out through the pages. Horrible. Terrifying.

Mely says

I am terrible at remembering exact lines, even for poetry or songs, where you'd think the rhythm or sound would help. I regard all the characters in Tam Lin who can quote poetry-- or even the characters in *Buffy* who can quote movies -- word-perfect with suspicion and envy. I get the scansion right but one of the words wrong or the sense right but not the phrase and worst of it is, I know it's wrong -- I just can't remember what the right version is.

I've always remembered the last line of this right. Always.

Mathew says

This is one of the most complex yet richly rewarding reads that I have come across. It was like reading all of Pullman's *Dark Materials* in one book (sort of). The subject matter and idea was complex but the plot and characters were so engaging. Unlike *Charmed Life*, I thought this was a challenging read both in concept and an writing but it was infinitely all the better for it. Based on the idea that all worlds are controlled by gamers who played with our lives, one young boy, Jamie, having discovered 'Them' is cast off from the game and doomed to wonder the different worlds in which they play as a Bounder.

It is for Jamie to discover the rules which govern the game in which he once was a part of in order to find and fight for his way home and yet to finds more to himself and his choices in his life which make for a far richer and rewarding read. Simply excellent.

Brandy Painter says

Originally posted here at Random Musings of a Bibliophile.

I am still making my way through Diana Wynne Jones's backlist. I probably wouldn't have read *The Homeward Bounders* for a long time to come as it's currently out of print in the the US (except as an e-book) if it weren't for a conversation on Twitter I had with Sage Blackwood in which she said she heard some consider it to be a metaphor for life as a military kid. My interest level rose exponentially and she was kind enough to send me an old used library copy to read. (Much thanks for that.)

This book, like all of Jones's books, has had many covers. I'm using the latest UK cover because I really like these covers for her books.

The Homeward Bounders unfolds slowly. For the first part of the novel Jamie is all alone simply telling his story about how he came to be a Homeward Bounder and the way the worlds work. As he tells his tale little things about Them (the players) are revealed, and what is revealed is rather chilling. They have no regard for lives. They are ruthless in pursuit of the game they are playing. The game they are playing is us and our lives. And the lives of countless other beings in countless other worlds. We are all pieces on a giant board game helped along by computers and players (the identity of who is a brilliant reveal). Who hasn't wondered about that at some point in their life? This is the sheer genius of Diana Wynne Jones, taking the things everyone ponders and expanding on them and turning them into a brilliant story. Jamie is thrust out of his world after discovering the game. A "discard", he is forced to wander the worlds in search of home. He is alone for a great deal of his search and that loneliness comes off the page and affects the reader. Finally Jamie is able to find some companions. Helen is special in her world, but has been exiled because she also discovered too much. Joris is a demon hunter apprentice, a slave with so much devotion he was dragged into life as a Homeard Bounder by a demon he refused to let go. These three are misfits and they form a strong if somewhat squabble team. A team that doubles when they are able to convince some actual non-Bounders of what is going on. But of course, this can't last forever. They are not going to allow them to remain together without a fight. I really enjoyed Jamie as a character all alone, a wander traveling the worlds. And I loved his interactions with the family he cobbles together from the people he meets. Helen and Adam are particularly fun to watch him with.

The Homeward Bounders is tragic, far more so than a lot of Jones's books are. It is a sort of tragic that is full of purpose though. The trials are not for nothing and the people suffering them learn to adjust, though it leaves scars and yearnings they will never shake. Yes, I can see why some people have likened it to life as a military brat. There were some sentences that made me cry because, yes, they do describe the feelings you have, the feeling that home is a place out there somewhere if you could only just find it, but deep down you know you never will because you missed that chance. That your life is out of your control. That you form attachments only to have them ripped away from you so why bother forming them at all anymore. There is something utterly profound in the conclusion of the book that relates as well. The lack of choice the Bounders have about how long they stay in one place (but they do know approximately how long it will be) and their lack of choice in where they end up next speaks to it as well. Whether Jones did this intentionally or not, I can't help but wish I had this book growing up.

The Homeward Bounders is not a book everyone is going to like, but it is perfect for me. I think it is one of Jones's best actually. It doesn't have the charm and quirk of *Chrestomanci*, *Howl*, or *Derkholm*, but it still has

a sly and ironic humor that keeps it from being too tragic. And in the end it really is a beautiful story that is brilliantly crafted.

Jessica says

Haven't read this one in years either, but thinking tonight about how much I love Diana Wynne Jones and remember this being another one of my favorites (not as good as *Fire & Hemlock*, though). This Diana Wynne Jones woman is a frikkin' GENIUS. IMO these are the greatest kids' books EVER WRITTEN. This one starts out when this kid who lives in some sort of strange time and place that never actually existed stumbles upon a group of *Them* (*Them* being hooded, sinister gamers who are possibly among the most haunting figures in kid lit due to horrific combination of general creepiness and very disturbing model of cruel and indifferent gods). *They* catch the kid spying on *Them* while they're playing, and as punishment cast him out into a collection of alternate worlds, which it turns out are all these alternate realities manipulated by *Them*, as *Their* form of amusing game. Because the kid discovered the players behind the curtain, he is forced to become a Homeward Bounder, doomed to scramble around between the worlds, trying to find his way back to his own home. As the story goes on, you start to get the feeling this might be trickier than originally thought, as the kid begins to encounter other Homeward Bounders, including the Flying Dutchman and the Wandering Jew, who have been at this homeward bounding for quite some time.....

Okay, so DIANA WYNNE JONES IS A GODDAMN GENIUS, AND I THINK SHE WRITES THE BEST ENDINGS EVER AND I DON'T CARE WHAT ANYONE SAYS.

It is not just about how she blends traditional legends and mythology with her own crazy made-up ideas and recurring worlds/characters (I was probably 14 before I realized Guy Fawkes Day was not Jones's own invention -- whoopsie!). It is also about her ability to write this chaotic, artistic, meaningful literature for children. At the end of this book (I'm spoiling here! So lookout!), the characters suddenly confront the significance of the anchors that *They* use throughout the book as a sort of symbol. This is a really important point in the plot, because it's only then that the protagonist has the revelation that "hope is an anchor" -- that is, that hope and faith in the future is a prison, a deceptive trap being used to enslave the Homeward Bounders and to keep in place the nefarious system of worlds *They've* established.

Isn't that SO COOL??? Okay, maybe I wouldn't consider that such a profound message if I found it in a grownup book I'd be reading today, but for kids' fantasy fiction, that is some pretty heady stuff, am I right?! Hope *is* an anchor! It keeps you in chains! The way to become liberated is to abandon all your hopes and optimistic expectations, as only then you can really be free!!! That is just such a terrific message for kids to learn early on, especially in such a very lovely and entertaining format.

GOD I love this writer. I wish I could meet her someday, but I don't really know what I would say. I've got to go back and read these all again, but they're all at my mom's in California, and if my lovely out-of-print/first-edition hardcovers got lost in the mail, I'd have a terrible nervous breakdown for sure and never recover.

Serena W. Sorrell says

This is, to date, my favorite standalone DWJ. Yes, there were a few dragging parts, but I felt at the end they were necessary for Jamie's story.

And any book that makes me cry is a good book. That ending had me in awe.

As always DWJ makes a world, or worlds, that are so utterly fantastic you have no choice but to believe they're real. Every bit of it flowed perfectly to the next.

Tam G says

Solid 3.5 stars.

This is one of those books that kind of defies expectation. Diana Wynne Jones is a lovely writer, and she understands dialogue and how not to over-explain things. This one started with a sheer sense of wonder. Not because the main character has a sense of wonder. He was very pragmatic and plain. The plain explanations, how obviously the main character doesn't understand the things he sees, ignites a sense of curiosity. It feels real.

The middle is kind of up and down. There are times you think 'oh, this is going to be one of those children's books where they meet myths and stories?' Then something completely different happens. It feels random. Random is good in some respects (surprise, wonder, curiosity) and bad in others (does the author have control over the story? is it balanced?). In the end I found the randomness added to the story. I enjoyed not being able to guess what would happen next.

The ending explanation felt a bit rushed and silly, but the ending felt satisfying which is one of the harder things to do in a book. Leaving people with that little sigh or laugh of contentment.

Elizabeth Boatman says

Diana Wynne Jones is one of my favorite writers. I go to her when I need a jolt of something entirely different and unexpected. This has all the usual Jones elements: parallel worlds, girls with magical gifts, mythic beings, and the play on words and logic. As with *Fire and Hemlock* you may have to read the ending twice to figure out exactly how it all played out.

The protagonist, Jamie Hamilton, is a compelling character. He's a twelve-year-old boy from a lower class family. He's not interested in school nor does he want to take over the family grocery business. Both bore him silly. He likes football and exploring around the city. This sense of wanderlust comes in handy when he intrudes on "them", those other reality beings who are playing games with the lives of Jamie and others on his world. They are not pleased by this disruption and "discard" him to walk the Bounds. The book is about his journey and the people he meets while trying to get Home.

It's a quick read but not a casual read. Jones has filled the story with ideas about war and slaves and otherness (whether from a deformity or created by class difference). Not all plans are successful and not all successes are happy. Upon reflection though, it seems that this is the way it should be.

