



The Islands of Chaldea

Books Reviewed:

[The Islands of Chaldea](#) [1]

Issue:

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Reviewer:

[Ferelith Hordon](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

A gap was left in the world of children's books with the death of Diana Wynne Jones. It is exciting to discover there is one more title from her imagination. Written during her final illness, it has been skilfully completed by her sister, Ursula, to provide a seamless narrative.

Aileen is destined to become a Wise Woman following in the footsteps of her aunt. Except she fails her Initiation. She will never have magic. However, when Aunt Beck is summoned by the King and given the task of rescuing the king's son, Aileen goes too. It seems an impossible mission for there is a magical barrier separating Logra from the Islands of Chaldea. As Aileen and her Aunt travel the islands with a motley band including an invisible cat, a green parrot and a spoilt prince. How can they hope to succeed when faced by powerful magicians? Maybe Aunt Beck is not the only Wise Woman in the group.

This is not a Chrestomanci novel nor is it set in the real world. Rather we find ourselves in a world that owes much to Celtic traditions and stories; an imaginary set of islands that nevertheless seem very recognisable. Mistaken belief and growing up are recurring themes in the books by Diana Wynne Jones. This is no exception. Aileen believes she is no good, but when faced with a real test discovers that she does have the ability to change things; to take control. As she is blind to her own powers, so Aileen is blind to the qualities of others. Throughout the narrative, mistaken - or rather hidden - identity is a joke shared between author and reader, for the clues are all there. Humour is a central ingredient. While the story may have the trappings of a traditional quest, any pretensions are quickly pricked; a great Guardian with the name Plug-Ugly?

This is not a pompous novel. It is a story that carries the reader along, full of interesting characters, moments of jeopardy and also of comedy. As always with this author, her imagination is almost too much, but the structure of the plot - a quest journey - provides a framework that leads to a satisfying end. The whole is delivered in the conversational style that draws the reader in and is familiar from other titles. Aimed at confident readers KS2 and up, this is a delight.

Links:

[1] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-islands-of-chaldea>

[2] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/205>

[3] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/ferelith-hordon>