
Diana Wynne Jones

Year of the Griffin

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Q: How did you start writing fantasy?

A: I started writing fantasy, rather to my surprise, when my children were old enough to start reading books for themselves. What they preferred was fantasy, but there wasn't much in those days that was any good. When they had read Kipling, Lewis, the Oz books, and Joan Aikin, they looked round for more, and my eldest son said wistfully that what he really liked was books that made him laugh. There were even fewer of those. So I tried it myself. But as soon as I had got started, I realized that what I was writing were the kind of books that I was never allowed as a child. I had almost no books as a child. In fact, I started actually writing out of sheer book-starvation when I was twelve, but I didn't know about fantasy in those days. What I wrote then were adventure stories, all very bad. But there was in my mind a picture of the ideal book, which was magical and exciting, and humorous too. I have been trying to write that book ever since.

Q: Where do your ideas come from?

A: My ideas come from all sorts of sources. One book started with my favorite road, chalky white and winding over blue distance; another with a tune that ought to have had words and didn't. My dog gave me the idea for *Dogsbody*. Some of them just started from the characters in them, who were hanging around in my head demanding a book that fitted them, and still others from a tiny word or phrase, like "Hope is an anchor" or "Let's get weaving." One at least began because I was so fed up with the way other writers handled a subject; and the very latest began because Susan, my editor at Greenwillow, wanted more, more, more about griffins. There have also been the odd few books which have sprung almost fully formed into my head, and I have not the faintest notion what gave me the idea for those.

Q: Your books have a great deal of crossover appeal. Do you write for any specific audience?

A: I don't write for anyone particularly. I find if I have a specific person in mind, it makes me too self-conscious to write — and the same goes for a larger audience. I prefer just to concentrate on the story, which is, after all, the main thing. But when I first started writing, it was when my husband was valiantly trying to read books aloud at bedtime to our children. Three sentences in, he fell asleep, was woken by shrieks of indignation, and fell asleep again because the stories bored him so. I vowed then that I would write books that had some interest in them for adults too.

Q: *Year of the Griffin* is a sequel to *Dark Lord of Derkholm*. Did you know there would be a second book when you wrote the first? Will there be more?

A: I did not know there would be a sequel to *Dark Lord of Derkholm*. *Year of the Griffin* happened because I just had surgery and was wondering if I would ever have the energy to write again, when Susan Hirschman phoned and demanded more about griffins. I can't promise another, although I can see there ought to be a story in there about Wizard Derk's winged children. The way I write, continuations always take me by surprise.

Q: What authors have influenced you? And how do you feel when you are cited as an influence on other writers?

A: What authors have influenced me? The very few fantasy writers I came across as a child: Kipling, Elizabeth Goudge, P.L. Travers. These were augmented by books in tiny print filched from my parents' shelves: *Malory's Morte D'Arthur* and one called *Epics and Romances of the Middle Ages*, together with a lot of fairy stories (the Brothers Grimm in a learned edition and other queer collections) and a book of stories from *The Arabian Nights*. I did not meet the usual books people read until my children were of an age to need them. It was like discovering treasure.

If I am cited as an influence on others, I am always very surprised and pleased — and just a bit exasperated, thinking, *Why can't they think of things themselves, the way I had to?*

Q: If you weren't a writer, what would you be?

A: If I were not a writer, I would be a very miserable person.