



The Wizard's Dilemma

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For use in schools and libraries only. When Nita's mother becomes sick with cancer, she feels her only option is to make a deal with the Lone Power, yet the outcome of doing so may be something too great for her to handle on her own in the long run. The fifth book in the Young Wizards Series.

The Wizard's Dilemma Details

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From Reader Review The Wizard's Dilemma for online ebook

Shelby says

The best part of this book: Mrs. Callahan's fight with the lone power. Seriously, it's like a whole star on it's own. I now love Nita's mom. She was barely in any of the others and then she comes along with *this* awesome little scene? How could you not love her?

The worst part of this book: The person I usually like a lot. Nita. She was just so...well, I guess you'll have to read the book to know, because I can't think of the right way to describe it.

Anna says

"The one thing you can't trade for your heart's desire is your heart." Bujold's quote seems apt here

Karina says

This isn't the first time I read it, but apparently I didn't review before. This one, it's a bit dark. The good triumphs in the end, more or less, but before the end Nita almost makes a mistake and makes a "deal with the devil" so to speak. As Tom or Carl asked her, "Are you doing this for her [mother] or for you?" Nita's mother was amazing. I think that while I did understand the moral dilemma the first time I've read it, this time I got more out of it and focused on the adult figures more...

Tria says

I will forever be glad I was warned of the subject matter of this particular book in the series in advance, in as spoiler-less a way as possible. It didn't ruin the book for me, and I don't think it made it hit less hard either.

The title of this book is truly fitting. When you struggle to find any way but destroying life to save other life, there's not always a clean and happy way out. It may take you places you'd never imagined going.

I went through a very similar situation - minus the wizardry, and I honestly don't know what my choice would have been either - when I was just two years older than Nita is here, and reading this, I cried buckets. Perhaps that was a given. But have tissues ready, just in case...

Henry says

Welp, this one took me a long time to finish. I'm still not quite sure how that happened. Part of it was that I started the book while I had far too many things on my plate and thus got distracted. But part of it was that at a certain point in The Wizard's Dilemma, I felt like I could see where all of the pieces were, where they needed to go, and had a pretty good idea of how they were going to get there... and I really wanted them to just be there already, instead of making me wait. I suspect that this is the price I pay for reading so much. Or

perhaps for being impatient.

It turns out that I was right about most of those various story beats, but seeing what Diane Duane did with them was far more satisfying than what I'd imagined. I probably should have seen that coming, given that I've read the earlier books in the series and know how good Duane is at her work. Once I finally got over my block and moved into the last parts of the book, I didn't want to put it down. And then, of course, the climax made me cry. Whatever the real reasons for my reading delays, I feel quite certain in saying that this was an excellent book, one worth reading, worth recommending, and one that leaves me wanting to read the next one in the series. Just like the previous books in the series. I probably could have seen that coming too.

So, why the heck did this book make me cry? Warning: there are some spoilers after this. They're pretty well flagged.

I suspect that anyone who does not entirely hate their parents, or even anyone who feels close to those who are edging towards or having a brush with death, will find this book powerful. Certainly the ending of it, at the very least. I'm not sure how much of the emotional content of this book comes from my own experience with coming to terms with death and dying, how much of it is simply me empathizing with the characters, and how much of it is inherent to the material. One way or another, I continue to be impressed by the regularity with which Duane is able to write accessibly emotional and intense material.

Ok, there're going to be some ***SPOILERS*** here, because I want to talk about the end of the book.

I'm pleased as punch about the line of argument / line of reasoning that Nita's mom takes when facing the Lone Power. Her statements of self-ownership, and calling the Lone Power out on its sense of entitlement with regards to her body, are like a breath of fresh air. This is exactly the kind of thing that I want kids to be reading and internalizing.

This is mostly unrelated, but it's especially refreshing to see these statements shown in such a positive light after having just watched John Wick the night before; that movie is a brilliant display of stunt and fight choreography and performance, something I love due to my own experience with same, but it is a terrible (i.e. it instills terror) view of the patriarchy in action. I doubt you'll have the same experience of watching John Wick and then finishing The Wizard's Dilemma, but their juxtaposition makes their differences all the more visible and highlighted the novel's excellence for me.

END OF SPOILERS

In conclusion? This is a damn fine book, and my troubling delays in reading it probably had more to do with me than with the novel. You'd be silly to pass it up without checking it out, though I basically feel that way about the whole Young Wizards series at this point. And, let's be honest, you might be thrown for a loop trying to start here without reading the rest of them, so don't even try. Start with So You Want To Be A Wizard. You can find my thoughts on it right here.

Originally posted on Fistful of Wits.

Charissa says

Oof. This one is emotionally heavy.

Linda ~ chock full of hoot, just a little bit of nanny ~ says

[illness/hospitals (hide spoiler)]

Vicki (The Wolf's Den) says

Nita's having some problems.

First, she's started high school, and while she's still considered brainy, her subjects aren't coming as easily to her as they used to. She's starting to feel kinda inadequate next to Kit, who, though a year younger, is still breezing through everything.

Going along with that, she's not quite sure what to do about Kit. Their partnership is hitting some rough water, and she can't understand how he can insist on being so...wrong! It's affecting their friendship and their wizardry, and she's not quite sure which is worse.

Finally, there's her mom. She's sick. Real sick. Sick enough that the doctors aren't too hopeful. But Nita knows things doctors don't, and can do things they can't. Most of all, Nita knows exactly Who's fault this is.

Now it's personal.

But with so much doubt in herself, Kit being uncooperative, and her mom's life at stake, can Nita find a cure in time? Or might she have to make a deal with that One she's devoted her life to fighting?

I cried a LOT in this book. When Nita's mom first gets sick. When they first visit the hospital. When Dairine breaks down. When Nita breaks down. And more. Just the thought of losing my own mom...like that... I'm warning you, there is a lot of realistic emotional distress here, for realistic reasons, and if your family or friends have experienced anything similar, it might hit even harder.

I found this book a lot more engaging than the last. Nita and Kit are back in the forefront of things. In fact, Kit gets his own share of narration, like Dairine did in High Wizardry. Though Nita is still in charge of the main plot, having Kit's side of things helps not only soften the blow of Nita's despair but also provides more insight into our co-main character which we have been so sorely lacking before now.

It's been really easy for me to forget how young these characters really are. I think in book one Nita was 12 and Kit was 11; here, Nita is 14 and Kit is 13. This is the first time I found them acting their ages consistently throughout the book. Yes, they're both dealing with magical responsibilities and situations well above a 'normal' teenager, but their internal and personal struggles finally feel real. Not to say the other books lacked for it, but it definitely set this one apart in a good way.

As far as complexity goes, this installment has its fair share of advanced content. Nita's attempt to help her mom requires experience and practice in a field she hasn't yet acquired, so she's sent to train in 'practice universes', where the natural or physical laws aren't quite as solid as in our universe. Tom and Carl get into some technobabble when trying to explain these, but Nita manages to translate things well enough for the reader. It's complex, but engaging at the same time.

If you managed to make it through book 4, this one is definitely worth the struggle. It's longer, and you might have to take a couple breaks to dry your eyes (luckily, I had the audiobook going through the tears), but you're compelled through it, even from the first page where Nita and her mom are engaged in a

completely relatable conversation. If you care about the characters, which by this point it's practically impossible not to be, you'll read this book with a fervor.

Approximate Reading Time: 5.5 Hours

Victoria says

This book may take a little longer to get into than the previous installments, but once it does, it is the same roller-coaster ride as always.

For the first time since their Ordeal, Nita and Kit have had a major fight. Unsure of how to reconcile, they drift their separate ways for a while. And everything is just made ten times worse when Nita's family gets the news: her mother has brain cancer.

Nita's only hope seems to lie in a very difficult and technical type of wizardry that involves manipulating the "kernel" of a universe, its energy center. Only by rewiring her mother's inner "kernel" can Nita possibly save her.

While Kit tries to deal with a rapidly changing Ponch, who is developing weird powers, Nita attends a "training ground" for wizards working with "kernels." But when the Lone Power comes to her to make a deal to save her mother's life, Nita finds herself questioning everything she is as a human and a wizard. And only Kit may be able to intervene before it's too late.

Gripping, powerful, and heart-wrenching, this book tackles the big questions that haunt us all: What would you be willing to do to save the ones you love? What is it like to be losing a mother? How powerful is the love of a parent? And when everything around you is falling apart, who's going to hold you together?

Dixie Conley says

In this one, Nita's mother has cancer and Nita has a dilemma -- try to cure her mother and ultimately fail, or make a deal with the Lone Power, cure her mother and lose her wizardry forever.

Except it's not that simple. It never is. For one, everyone knows that if you make a deal with the devil, look out for the fine print. Or better yet, don't make any deals to begin with. Nita doesn't see any other way out.

There's more boy girl trouble in this one as Nita's mother rephrases one of Robert Heinlein's timeless adages -- in an argument, should you discover that you are right, apologize at once. Nita doesn't get it; it is counterintuitive after all, but it's the only thing that works. There's also a bit about fiddling with a universe's core reality and making universes.

A decent read, but I'm not sure whether this book should be for adults, as its ultimate message is, "We all die in the end".

Kathleen Dixon says

Diane Duane writes the most elegant and beautiful wizardry, with Kit and Nita using the Speech and the elements to arrange their spells in an artistically creative way. Using the Speech they can understand all living creatures, even the rocks and the water. With their motivation being to harm nothing and to assist life whenever possible, they travel the universe on quests. They fight the Lone One (Evil Incarnate) and they liaise with alien wizards. And then there are the problems of growing up (Nita is now 14, Kit is 13), and family dynamics. And Nita's mother is suddenly rushed to hospital.

This series is terrific. I love Duane's writing, and she melds the beautiful with the mundane. Brilliant!

Kailey (BooksforMKs) says

Yet another book in this series that broke my heart! Such beautiful writing!

Nita gets the terrible news that her mother is dying of cancer. In between hospital visits, Nita searches for a dangerous and elusive wizardry that will cure her mother, but the price may be more than she can pay. She and her wizarding work partner, Kit, have suffered a misunderstanding that keeps them apart. Determined to find a cure on her own, Nita falls prey to the evil Lone One, not realizing that Kit might have stumbled on the answer to all their problems, if only they can reconcile in time!

As in all the other books, I adore the camaraderie and complete trust between Kit and Nita. Their friendship is so special, and seeing it fall apart in this book was heartbreaking. But even through their argument, I loved seeing these characters grow and change, and their friendship ultimately grows and changes along with them. All friendships have some rocky spots, a few bumps in the road, and I was so happy to see how both these characters overcome the obstacles in their way, and it makes them better people, and makes their friendship stronger!

The magic system, as always, is beautifully complex, and yet simple to understand. I appreciate how the magic spells and wizardly doings fit in perfectly with the world, and with the spiritual powers of the books as well. The weird magical extras change in every book, and all the strange alien side characters that come in are so imaginative and different. The whole world-building is seamless and delightful!

This book deals with Death, and so the spiritual undertones, which are present in all the books of the series, are really brought to the forefront in this book, even going so far as to quote several Scripture verses. The age-old battle between light and dark, between good and evil, is a major theme in all the books, but in this one it becomes much more personal to the characters, as they face the darkness inside themselves. All the books have very definite Christian and spiritual themes, and I loved seeing that even more clearly in this book!

Nita has to make a decision about what she is willing to do to save her mother's life, and of course, there is the temptation to do evil in order to accomplish a "good." Do the ends really justify the means? Are you really doing it with purely unselfish motives, to benefit someone else? Or are you doing it for yourself, because YOU are afraid to lose someone?

All these questions are dealt with in a graceful and accessible way that was a pleasure to read. Not at all preachy! And of course, seeing Nita going through this terrible difficulty, brought my own thoughts into alignment with these questions and made me contemplate some things as well. I love a book that makes you think, but also tells an engaging story!

There are many deep and emotional themes in these books, but it's also balanced with many light-hearted and

even silly moments of fun! The different plots lines all converge perfectly at exactly the right times and in the right ways. Brilliant writing!

Robyn says

Montana Library 2Go

Changed rules in the middle of a series, shallow everywhere, horrible Kindle transcription, all combine to spoil what could have been a touching and meaningful installment in the Young Wizards books.

Apparently Duane decided that the rules she had created for this world were not satisfactory to her, because she's changed the way the wizardry works. It was annoying enough before that she was insisting on pretending that wizardry was 'definitely not magic' but also not science, being more complicated than magic and beyond science because science couldn't possibly understand and all the et ceteras. I've seen others complain about this, so I know I'm not the only one, it's really just a way of turning her back on two literary genres at the same time, which comes across as very conceited. Sorry, Duane, you're not better than either fantasy or sci-fi, and since this was written before specific was in common vogue (though of course not before the term was coined), you don't get to swim around in that. Regardless of what you want to call it, you really can't do 4 books that cover about a year and a half of the characters' lives with them using their wizardry in specifically defined ways and then start book 5 with them in the habit of using it differently. Suddenly the spells that were always simply verbal before can be held in the hand, tucked into a pocket, and handed (or thrown) to each other? Funny, the exact same spells in previous books were phrases that Kit would think through almost to completion, so that he just had to speak a last word to complete them. They weren't physical things. Kit wasn't carrying around little snippets of spell that he'd cut off of other spells. If a spell was drawn or written down it was done so by using concrete objects such as paper or dirt, not mysticism. Now, though, because it was necessary for the denouement, rules for wizardry have changed. (This might be mildly acceptable, though still a cheat, if Kit and Nita had acknowledged the change. If they'd had a quick conversation at the beginning about how hard it was to get into the habit of doing wizardry in different ways as they advanced or something.)

The main problem here is that the book is so surface and so shallow. Part of the issue is that I come to the series years later, so I know the books continue, and therefore there was no moment that it was plausible that Nita might give up her wizardry or that she might die. Even if the series didn't continue, however, I would never have believed in that possibility for a moment. It just doesn't fit Nita's personality or Duane's writing. That we are at book 5 and Duane decided to acknowledge that all previous books were resolved through somebody else essentially throwing themselves under the bus on Nita's behalf, but didn't choose to change anything? That just reinforces the shallow feeling of the book. I had the additional issue that I had accidentally seen the plot synopsis for book 6, which stated that (view spoiler), so I went through this book knowing what the final result would be one way or another.

The plot synopsis for this book specifically discusses Nita's mom's illness, and the book's copyright page includes it, but we don't get there until halfway through the book. The first 200 pages are taken up with other things, which are clearly meant to lay groundwork for why Nita makes the choices she makes, but just take too long. There's a lot of treading water, which again simply strengthens the surface skimming. Worse, everything was pointless. Kit's entire subplot was not just lazy writing (it really is a cheat to have Kit stumble across something that in all the millennia of life on this planet no wizard has ever been able to do, be aware of, know anything about, just so that he's out of Nita's hair both to reinforce the problems they're having and to give her a chance to make more bad decisions), it was apparently built to give him access to this thing that...did not much in the end. Nita's decisions and choices and mistakes all led up...not much in the end.

In the first book it was nice to have a female protagonist who had powers specific to her and strengths that others didn't have and a leadership role. But Nita has never been a good heroine. It is always about her, yes, she is the center of each book in ways that Kit is not. But they triumph only because someone else is willing to sacrifice their life or throw in their power or see what needs doing and do it or lend wizardry to her or whatever else. Nita has never, in 5 books, solved a problem or been strong enough to triumph over adversity or made the right choice on her own, or anything. Creatures from other universes die so that she may live. Sharks die so that she may live. Relatives throw their being into newly created AI so that it can use power to fight. Individuals holding the spirit of heroes of the past find it within themselves to take the step necessary and emerge victorious. And Nita watches. It's actually the worst kind of damsel in distress because it disguises itself as girl power.

Just like every other book in the series, the transcription into a Kindle book is horrible. There are multiple errors on every page. The lower-case letter r next to a comma is usually an n, commas are missing entirely, quotation marks appear or disappear in no relation to whether someone's speaking, italics for thoughts stop and start in the wrong places, on and on. Examples: Page 10 "not bad..not bad at ally, the tree said modestly...need anything from met?...this was the core of wizardry, for hen hearing it all going..." Page 172 "where the hard comers on things aren't so hard...Someone higher Hp foresaw the need..." It's highly frustrating to read.

I continue to read the series because I'm getting them through the library and so they're free and I need reading material. I enjoyed book one, suffered through later books in hopes the series would go back to the level of the first book, but at this point I'm just putting up with them while I wait for books I have on hold to come through. I cannot recommend the series like I did with book one.

As a side note, I'm sure plenty of people were really choked up by the end of the book. Duane did some lazy writing there which was designed to tug at the reader and give them a lump in the throat. Was not successful for me, but I'm sure plenty of people gave high rating because of it and eagerly anticipated the sixth book as a result.

Scurra says

A very clever entry in the series, this deals with the issue of parental loss in a genuinely unexpected way. And it also finally confronts head-on the "elephant in the room" of all modern world fantasy: that if you have superpowers/magic, why can't you solve everything?

And the ending is wonderful. I didn't find it as affecting as that of #8, but probably that's because I haven't personally experienced that sort of loss (as compared to the situation in #8.) But I would certainly put this book on the reading list of a teen who had - it's mature and unflinching and yet very positive at the same time.

Rachel says

Exceptional entry into this series. I won't say much, as pretty much everything would be a spoiler- but this contains some of Duane's best writing that I've encountered so far, and it handles extraordinarily difficult and painful topics with a lot of grace. I appreciate this book tremendously.
