



# So You Want to Be a Wizard

*Diane Duane*

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Something stopped Nita's hand as it ran along the bookshelf. She looked and found that one of the books had a loose thread at the top of its spine. It was one of those So You Want to Be a . . . books, a series on careers. So You Want to Be a Pilot, and a Scientist . . . a Writer. But this one said, So You Want to Be a Wizard.

I don't believe this, Nita thought. She shut the book and stood there holding it in her hand, confused, amazed, suspicious—and delighted. If it was a joke, it was a great one. If it wasn't . . . ?

## So You Want to Be a Wizard Details

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## From Reader Review So You Want to Be a Wizard for online ebook

Carol. says

Why yes, yes I do.

Based on the title, I expected something rather light and possibly silly. What I got was something more substantial, an old middle-grade book/YA book that suddenly had me recalling *A Wrinkle in Time* and *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*. Somehow I missed this one when I was younger, which is too bad. An enthusiastic review from a friend (thanks, Allie!) alerted me to this deficiency and I decided to rectify it.

**"She strolled between shelves, looking at titles, smiling as she met old friends--books she had read three times or five times or a dozen. Just a title, or an author's name, would be enough to summon up happy images. Strange creatures like phoenixes and psammeads, moving under smoking London daylight of a hundred years before... starships and new worlds and the limitless vistas of interstellar night..."**

Nita, short for Juanita, is regularly bullied and abused by neighborhood kids, finding herself almost helpless to prevent it. As she is running away, she darts into the library for safety and finds herself walking through the children's section, greeting books like old friends. One jumps out at her: *So You Want to Be a Wizard?* and she finds herself intrigued by what she reads. Perhaps it can help keep her safe from bullying? The wizard's book is divided into sections, and the read book follows those guidelines. 'Prologue,' 'Preliminary Exercises,' 'Research and Development,' etc. In short order, she meets another bullied kid, Kat, and starts working with him to retrieve a pen stolen from Nita in her latest attack. Events quickly escalate.

There's a lot to like here; a male and female lead that aren't involved in a romantic relationship, Kat's Latino heritage, parents that are supportive but mildly inept, astrophysics, mild fart humor, and kids saving the world. I thought the meta-themes of responsibility, compassion and choices well done. Added bonus for talking to trees and a (view spoiler). I loved the affection for libraries and books so evident in the first chapter. I thought the dialogue had an organic feel.

What isn't to like is that Duane seems to still have some period sexism going on, generally possibly explained by the fact that Kat discovers his book sooner, except that it still felt... off. There's also a lot of extraneous writing where a paragraph literally takes up a page and a half, particularly at the end battle. Plot development is a bit disjointed; I think even as a youth, it would have seemed odd to me to draw my sand in the line over an astronaut pen, but maybe not. The skill level of the two young wizards grows exponentially; they literally prepare for the big adventure by reading thirty chapters in one night. Because a lot of times Nita and Kat use Wizard Speech, the dialogue markers are in parenthesis, which may be confusing to less sophisticated readers.

On the balance, however, good completely outweighs the bad. I bet I would have loved it when I was younger, and I can absolutely see giving the sequel a try.

Three and a half stars, rounding up at the request of Young carol.

See also mark monday's review: <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

## Daniella says

*"Dear Artificer, I've blown my quanta and gone to the Good Place!"*

I'm so glad that I decided to re-read *So You Want to Be a Wizard* as part of my self-imposed book challenge for this year. I'd almost forgotten how much I love this book!

In fact, I love it so much that I almost *couldn't* read it again. At first, I would read a couple of pages and have to put the book down because I'd get all teary and junk. Not because it's sad (although it does have its moments), but because I would remember how much the story touched me the first time I read it. And it still does.

There are so many things in this book that, even as an adult, I can relate to: from Nita's isolation and finding solace in books to the desire to become, to be and to *do* something more, something beyond imagining, being so strong that even danger and death seem worth the risk. I cannot even begin to count how many times, or how intensely, I've wished throughout my life for something to come along and turn my world upside down, set me off on some crazy ass adventure and make everything new and exciting. And reading about an introverted, socially awkward, oft-misunderstood geek who stumbles across a mysterious book and suddenly finds herself immersed in a world (or two) of wizardry and wonder (and some terror and heartache) allows me to live my fantasy vicariously through a younger, fictional, sort-of alter ego.

Another thing I absolutely adore about this book--and the Young Wizards series in general--is that Diane Duane never assumes that the readers (her target audience being kids roughly, I'd say, 10-14) won't "get it" just because they're young. She doesn't dumb anything down, doesn't shy away from using or making up big words, and she doesn't water down her prose into that succinct but ineloquent simplicity sometimes found in young adult novels. Yet she's managed to weave a tale that is not only beautiful and sometimes lyrical in its elegance (I truly loved how she described the trees talking in *leafrustle* and *fireflicker*), but also accessible.

Duane also deserves kudos for creating one of *the* most original characters ever. I mean, in what other book are you going to find a freaking *white hole* as a central character? And, oh, how I adore Fred.

*"You people are so fragile. A little gamma radiation will ruin your whole day, it seems."*

Who can *not* love a wise-cracking and often endearingly clueless space phenomenon who has a bad habit of spontaneously emitting cosmic rays? Not I, my friends, not I.

Did I mention that I adore this book? I do. And if you're looking for a fast-paced, action-packed, strangely reaffirming adventure to sink your teeth into, or if you're trying to find something to fill the gaping wound...er...void left after *Harry Potter and the Book That Tore My Heart to Pieces*, *Covered Them in Petrol*, *Set Them on Fire and Danced a Merry Jig All Over the Bloody Ashes*, *Goddamn You, Joann* (otherwise known as *Deathly Hallows*), I highly recommend SYWBW and the rest of the Young Wizards series.

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## Nikki says

I've been told to try these so often that I more or less assumed the recommendation would be apt, and got a bundle of the whole series in one of Diane Duane's website sales. Unfortunately, something about this doesn't work for me — I guess it feels too random and immature? Stuff like 'Fred', the 'white hole', who is the opposite of a black hole, and some of the logic of how magic worked just... I didn't feel hooked by it.

Once I got to the white hole burping up whole cars, I was more or less done; I just skimmed the rest.

I do actually like parts of the set-up: the idea of the book that starts the main character's journey is pretty neat, for example, and I didn't read the characters as just default white kids from the start — even if Kit Rodriguez's name wasn't a probable giveaway. I think maybe if I'd first read it when I was younger, and had that flexibility of imagination, I wouldn't have questioned it so much and could have enjoyed it now if I was rereading it. Unfortunately, I come to this as a 27 year old about to get married, and so I just can't engage with it on that level.

Not something I would recommend to someone my own age, but I might very well pass it to a kid young enough to feel the magic of waiting for your Hogwarts letter, or scanning the library shelves for books about what you can be when you grow up and finding a mysterious book which at first might seem like a joke, but turns out all too real...

Originally posted here.

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### **Sesana says**

Reading this book, I wished I could time travel. I would hand this book to my younger self, when I was Nita's age. Because much as I liked this book as an adult, I know that if I'd first read this in middle school, I would have loved it.

It is a good book, a very good book. I take nothing away from Duane, because I think she hit every mark nearly perfectly. And I did enjoy reading it, even if I'm not hooked. Her system of magic is interesting, basically talking the world into doing what you want it to do. It sounds simple and intuitive, but deep enough to take years, or a lifetime, to truly master. And yet, I know that everything I liked about this book I would have loved if I'd read it at age twelve, and much that I was apathetic towards I would have liked. Some books should just hit you at the right time of your life, or miss their chance to really take hold.

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### **Bill Khaemba says**

*“Reading one book is like eating one potato chip.”*

This was honestly one of the best middle-grade fantasy books, I have ever read :) It was whimsical, magical and so fun :)  
MORE OF THE REVIEW HERE

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### **Mrelia says**

When the young readers in my acquaintance complain that there aren't more Harry Potter books to read, I like to suggest this series.

I usually start the campaign with a few questions to get them interested.

"What if kid wizards couldn't tell their families about their powers?"

"What if they had to risk their lives in secret to keep the world safe?"

I find the pre-teen and teen characters in this series to be much more engaging and realistic than the self-centered, clueless and common sense-lacking characters found in much juvenile fiction.

I also felt that the way Ms. Duane portrays courage, friendship, trust and sacrifice in these books teaches a positive lesson to the young readers in an entertaining (and almost subliminal) way.

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

GODDAMMIT DIANE DUANE STOP PUNCHING ME IN THE HEART!

It's a children's book, they said.

It's like Harry Potter but in America, they said.

You'll have a good time, they said.

THEY ALL LIED! I'M NOT CRYING YOU'RE CRYING!

There was a time when this book was about a girl, Nita, getting bullied at school and having her pen stolen - and this was the happy fun times. This book becomes so much more when she hides in a library and finds a book about wizardry. A book that materialized there just for her to discover. She soon finds another young wizard, Kit, who is also being bullied because of his accent and his brown skin. They befriend each other and start learning magic together, and then horrible and wonderful things start to happen.

First, this is NOT Harry Potter. I don't know if JK Rowlings read this series before writing her own, but there are some elements that are similar in both. Aside from the obvious (magic) there is a one-who-must-not-be-named, dragons, time travel, and two protagonists who just don't fit in and they're in school together. But that's where the similarities end. The magic here is rooted in the principles of science, the wizards are charged with slowing the destruction of the universe (all of them), and Nita and Kit have to deal with all this while going to school, dealing with bullies and hiding this from their families. Oh, and there's a white hole named Fred, and that's the least absurd thing that happens in this book. There are Advisories, older wizards who are past their "freelancing" years and now advise younger wizards while going about ordinary lives. Potential wizards can choose for themselves if they want to take on the mantle of wizard - and they can put it aside again if they no longer feel up to the task.

Duane borrows from fantasy, horror, science fiction and mythology to create her world. There are a couple of hiccups along the way, but for the most part the world-building is amazing here, and the prose is breathtaking. Nita and Kit (and Fred) are fully developed characters and get to go on their own personal journeys. They're friends and equals, despite being a year apart (Nita's older), different genders and different races. None of that stuff matters to them. What matters is that they have each other's backs, they encourage each other, and they both have strengths they can utilize as they fight the Destroyer - who eats stars out of spite. I was fully immersed as the action started to pick up, and then I didn't want to put it down, even when Duane punched a hole in my chest, tore out my heart and proceeded to squeeze it before my eyes.

This is such a cool and amazing world Duane has created here in just one book. I don't know how I missed this series growing up, but I'm glad I'm reading it now. There is a lot of nuance here I'm sure I would've

missed as a kid, and it would be hard to fully appreciate this world without picking up on that stuff. Also, the nightmare fuel. So much nightmare fuel. God, what are the other nine going to bring? I am not ready.

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### **Emily says**

I read this series countless times when I was a teenager, but this was always my least favorite of the lot - almost too creepy for me. I was never excited to roam around in this particular world the way I was excited to return to *High Wizardry* or *A Wizard Abroad* (though that last one may have something to do with the love interest .... sue me).

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### **mark monday says**

So you want to stop being bullied, you just want some time to yourself, to read, to do what you want to do, to even make a friend maybe? You find a book and it tells you how. Your book will take you places. Dealing with bullies after reading this book becomes such a small thing. Being the person you want to be and doing the things you want to do is so much more important!

So you want to learn how to do wizardly things, talk to trees and suchlike, make things happen, meet new beings, maybe find that lost pen? Your book will show you how. It will turn magic into science and you will summon not a demon but a star; your new friend will have his own familiar too, not a beast but a car. A star and a car. They will take you far!

So you want to discover new worlds? How about Hell? Or a twisted version of our world full of horror and hopelessness which may as well be hell. It may not be the adventure you wanted but it is an adventure nonetheless. You and your friend will have to figure things out, and very quickly - it's a good thing you both are smart. You will learn important lessons on this adventure, like sometimes people you love will die. And that's a hard lesson to learn!

So you saw this on kindle unlimited for the remarkable price of free and you thought, hey that's on my list, why not? You also thought that this would be pretty okay, you haven't heard much about it but then there's this surprisingly real slice of life and this surprising bit of diversity (in the 80s!) and then that other bit of diversity (a gay couple? maybe? in an 80s book for kids!) and the surprisingly science-y way of using magic and the surprisingly bleak and hallucinogenic adventure that comes from searching for a lost pen (of all things!) and the surprising lack of adults or aslans to the rescue (but lots of trees and statues!) and then, surprise surprise, you've realized you just started a whole new series that promises a whole lot of pleasure!

So you want to read a kid's book that starts off like any good kid's book but slowly becomes something more resonant than you expected, darker and more tragic and yet still light and life-affirming? I suggest you read this book!

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### **Rachel (Kalanadi) says**

My third reread: loved it.

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## **Bonnie says**

The magic and wizardry content in this book was just too strange. It's totally possible to write about things that are different from what we experience in this world, but to write them in a way that you understand what's going on. In this book, though she uses analogies that don't help make things any clearer. When I stopped reading, for example, the 2 young wizards are creating a thing to plug a hole in a thing to keep out a grey cloud that they somehow know wants to eat them (clearly I couldn't tell what was going on). The analogy she used to explain what the situation was like, paraphrased: "It was like a cement rose unfolding, or like being at a party where everyone wants to tell you their life story." I just was stumped by how those analogies work together, and also by how that was supposed to explain the situation.

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## **Lolly's Library says**

I must've been too busy reading Diana Wynne Jones and Madeleine L'Engle, because I'd never heard of this series growing up. It was only in the past couple of years that it came to my attention. I have to say, I'm not all that impressed. Part of the problem is the fact that the book feels dated. Usually when that happens, the story is able to carry me along so that I don't notice things like Dictaphones and typewriters (non-self-correcting ones, at that). Not with this book. I blame most of that on the "magic" used in the story; it seemed more like physics or calculus to me. I'm sorry, but when I want to read about physics, I'll read Stephen Hawking. I don't want to stumble through it in a childrens' book. It's not the fact that magic is equated with science that gave me pause, it's the manner in which the author narrated its use. The analogies and descriptions she gave of its workings had me scratching my head, rereading paragraph after paragraph, and always with the same result: "Huh? What the hell is she talking about?" The only way I got through it was to gloss over such descriptions: "Okay, they did something and now they're in a parallel world... Oh, look, cars that act like animals!" I'll also repeat what several have said before concerning the sexist attitude represented in the story; Nita seemed to require an awful lot of aid from her fellow (male, of course) wizard, Kit. She spent most of her time deferring to him, aiding his spells, looking to him for answers. Puh-lease. Not to mention the dumb-ass concept of younger wizards having more power (what?). What a lame plot device to explain the two kids' prowess with their wizardly powers.

There are a few other nitpicky points of dislike which I won't go into detail here. The only bit that really was intriguing and quite original was the character of Fred, the white hole thingy (yes, that's a technical term). His was the most well-rounded and charismatic character in the book, with the Lotus not far behind in terms of likeability. It's pretty sad when one feels a stronger connection to non-human characters than to the human ones about which the story (supposedly) revolves.

I will be fair and give the next book a go. Perhaps the series gets better as the characters develop. If I'm wrong, however, I'll happily forgo the rest of the series and return to the books of Diana Wynne Jones and Madeleine L'Engle, forgetting I ever heard of Diane Duane. 2.5 stars.

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## **Kewpie says**

This is sort of an American, dark and urban version of Harry Potter. While browsing shelves at the library, Nita discovers a book with the title "So You Want to Be a Wizard" She takes it as a joke, but it turns out to be the real deal. The spells work and she actually is learning to be a wizard.

It turns out that this is the way wizards are trained. Their textbooks seek out those with the talent. Nita soon finds another wizard named Kit and they go on a really twisted and somewhat scary adventure to a very dark and creepy world.

While on the surface, you might think it sounds a lot like Harry Potter, but it isn't. The book has a totally different tone and many people who like HP books don't like this one. I liked it though. It's a totally different "world" with totally different magic and it feels more like a comic book than anything else.

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### **Tamora Pierce says**

The perfect fantasy novel--there you are in the library, and you pick up one particular book . . . I love Kit and Nita as they struggle with being sloppy and working around their parents as young wizards!

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### **Adam says**

I started reading this book for the first time when I was grade 8 and I couldn't really get into it. I've finally figured out why.

I'm reading it again because it was in my house and I needed something to read, and the dialogue feels forced and VERY dated. It's almost a condescending mockery of how kids talk. The ideas in it are really interesting, but they're described by thirteen year-olds who talk like little kids, instead of adults, so the magic is being sucked out of... well... the magic.

And then just to completely throw the reader, the other characters all talk like incredibly wise people, and 'Fred's' language seems pretty advanced. There are passages where Nita describes Entropy, which (at least at my school) wasn't tackled until the 11th grade, but she's supposed to be 13...

My initial impression is that the novel can't decide what age demographic it wants to aim at, and it's all over the place.

Oh and Carl and Tom don't seem like just room mates. Just sayin'.

\*\*\*\*\*

Nov 22nd 2009

This book hits a huge wall around page 200 and becomes slow.

Like, really, really, really, slow.

It's like a snail and a jar of marmalade reproduced and then that offspring mated with a sloth/really-boring-Sunday-school-lecture hybrid.

I'm not even sure how Duane pulled that off because there is so much action in the second half that it could have filled up three novels worth of climaxes.

There were a couple of moments where I had to go back and reread passages, because the characters suddenly had an intense knowledge of magic for no reason (Well... the reason was that they read about 30 chapters virtually overnight and somehow memorized it all). It really took me out of the experience.

Also, younger wizards are stronger than older wizards? uhh... that's one of the dumbest concepts I've ever heard of.

Here's why:

1. That would mean that as time progresses the wizard would get weaker, which is not only ridiculous, but makes no sense. The more you practice something, the better you get. How could you possibly be good at something you've never done before, and then not improve through practice? How frustrating would that be?!
2. It's a cheap plot device. *"Why are Nita and Kit able to do all this stuff, but the other wizards can't?"*  
*"'cause they're younger, thasswhy!"*
3. It means that as the book series progresses (...yuck...), the stories would, theoretically, get more boring because the magic is less complex.

The majority of the second half of the book feels like Nita whining for Kit to save her, and he does. The world they fall into is supposed to be filled with nightmarish creatures and scare Nita and Kit (and presumably anyone who accidentally winds up there), but I've felt more chills walking in downtown Montréal at night. Perytons, which were supposed to be horrifying creatures of blah blah blah, were bland and anything but menacing.

Nita is virtually useless, except to calm down Fred, who's almost as useless, though occasionally he'll fart and scare the bad guys. At least Fred's good for a laugh!

Nita freaks out one moment, then immediately pulls herself together enough to comfort Fred... umm.. what?

Fred is the ONLY redeeming character in this book, and even that statement is a stretch.

If you really want to experience magic, check out Harry Potter or the Bartimaeus trilogy.

And saying "This book is older than Harry Potter!" is a BS argument because a lack of Potter influence doesn't excuse *SYWTBAW* from being this crappy. It could have set precedent so we'd compare Harry Potter to *SYWTBAW*. Instead it's the other way around.

Seriously Nita, Kit, you did all that to get a pen back?!

PS: Redeeming features:

- Rant-ability
- Different Magic system (though poorly described)
- Fred
- LOL unintended but ever present Misogynism, perfect if you have to do a project on "sexist themes in Children's literature" or something of the like.