



Printz Honor Speech
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I am going to start this speech by reading a bit from a book. It's not one of mine. It's by Diana Wynne Jones, one of my favorite authors. *A Tale of Time City*. All you need to know is that it is about a girl named Vivien who is kidnapped to the future by underage time-travelers. And, as I read to you, I would like for you to imagine ten-year-old me reading it.

Jonathan said. "What do you want if I can get it to work?"
"Forty-two Century butter-pie," Sam said, as if it was obvious.

Jonathan went to a thing on the wall facing Vivian which she supposed must be a musical instrument. The thing began to chuff and grunt and to shake a little, at which Jonathan kicked it fiercely lower down.

"Well, it's done the butter-pies," he said, peering inside and handing a pot with a stick poking out of it to Vivien.

Wonderful tastes filled her mouth, everything buttery and creamy she had ever tasted, with just a hint of toffee, and twenty other even better tastes she had never met before, all of it icy cold. ... at that moment, she bit through into the middle of the butter-pie. And it was hot. Runny, syrupy hot.

"It's *goluptuous* when you get to the warm part, isn't it?" Sam said, watching her with keen attention. "You want to let it trickle into the cold." Vivian did so and found Sam's advice was excellent. The two parts mixed were even better than the cold part alone.

They sound amazing, don't they? Ten-year-old Maggie thought they sounded amazing.

They aren't real. Yeah. Diana Wynne Jones made up 42 Century Butter Pies. Completely. They don't exist anywhere in this world.

So I'll get back to the butter pies. I just want you to hold their existence, or lack thereof, in your mind for a bit.

I have two writing partners, and when we're not critiquing each others' manuscripts, we talk a lot about what makes a book great. What makes a book stick with you. And even though we all enjoy a lot of the same sorts of novels, it should surprise no one here that our individual qualifications for what makes a book great are wildly different.

When I look at my bookshelf at home, my standard for greatness is pretty consistent. I want a book that has another world inside it. Style and character and plot are important, of course, but a book that has all of those and doesn't take me somewhere else, that doesn't make me feel like I've really been someplace when I close the covers . . . it might be good, but I won't hug it to my chest for the rest of my life and it won't be the story that I never get tired of hearing.

In my life as a reader, I've found so many books to hug to my chest, novels about world: *The Island of Blue Dolphins*, with its lonesome, warm solitude; *Peace Like a River* and its frosted Minnesota fields; *The Dark is Rising* series, pocked with ancient black lakes and shadowed by mystical Welsh mountains, and, most recently, *Lucy Christopher's Stolen*, with its persuasive but deadly Australian outback.

Now, I knew when I started writing *The Scorpio Races* that I wanted it to be that holy grail of books. A book about a world.

Of course, it's one thing to know what you want as a reader, and it's quite another thing to write about it. Because a fictional world is a tricky thing, it turns out. It's not just about setting a book in a fantastical place. Because a book can be a world book even if it's set in your own back yard. One of my favorite books growing up, *My Side of the Mountain*, is set in rural upstate New York, a place not very different from rural Virginia where I grew up. And still, it was a world book. How? And again, on the other side of the coin, I've read books set in fantastical locales that never transported me from my living room couch.

So what is this thing, world? What makes us believe in a place? That's the question I was determined to answer while writing *The Scorpio Races*. It takes place on a cold, rocky, remote island called *Thisby*, edged by cliffs and wracked by storms. I knew there were real places like this, and so I decided to build my world the same way I build my characters: by stealing from reality. I used to be a professional portrait artist, and I think of building my characters the same way I paint a portrait. I start with a real person and then I study their mannerisms until I can paint a portrait that doesn't just capture a likeness — it captures their soul.

That's what I wanted. The SOUL of the place. I flew to California and France and the UK, looking for my cliffs, looking for Thisby. And I found it. Amazingly, I found it. I could see it all around me. But the problem was still there. How to get it on paper.

And the answer is this: 42 Century Butter-Pies. That's right. Those imaginary pies that tormented me as a ten year old are also the solution to making a world. Because instead of baldly presenting a culture to me, Diana Wynne Jones showed me the symptoms of the culture. It wasn't just the sights and the sounds. It was the taste in my mouth and the feeling on my skin and the sense that no matter where I turned my head in this book, I'd experience something new about the world. It was, as they say, the little things.

So that's what I did. I filled *The Scorpio Races* with as many of the little things as I could remember from my trips, and when I thought I was missing a little thing, I went looking for it. In the end, I feel like Thisby is a big place made of tiny, true sensations.

So I've almost forgiven her for the butter-pies. Almost. They taught me a lesson, after all. But that didn't stop me from writing my own imaginary food into *The Scorpio Races* — the butter-drenched November Cakes only available on Thisby.

And I have to admit, it pleases me just a little to think that there might be another ten-year-old girl out there now, who picks up my novel, and falls into the world of Thisby far enough to make her want to create one of her own when she comes back home.

Thank you, to the Printz committee, for recognizing my book. Thank you loving this place that feels real to me.