



# The Earthsea Trilogy

*Ursula K. Le Guin*

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## **The Earthsea Trilogy** Ursula K. Le Guin

As long ago as forever and as far away as Selidor, there lived the dragonlord and Archmage, Sparrowhawk, the greatest of the great wizards - he who, when still a youth, met with the evil shadow-beast; he who later brought back the Ring of Erreth-Akbe from the Tombs of Atuan; and he who, as an old man, rode the mighty dragon Kalessin back from the land of the dead. And then, the legends say, Sparrowhawk entered his boat, *Lookfar*, turned his back on land, and without wind or sail or oar moved westward over the sea and out of sight.

**Wizard of Earthsea, The Tombs of Atuan, The Farthest Shore** - Ursula Le Guin's brilliant and magical trilogy.

Cover Illustration: Jonathan Field

## **The Earthsea Trilogy Details**

Date : Published 1979 by Penguin Books Limited (first published 1972)

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Author : Ursula K. Le Guin

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# From Reader Review The Earthsea Trilogy for online ebook

## Jan-Maat says

Ursula LeGuin's Earthsea Trilogy remains one of the more memorable books I read as a schoolboy. The claustrophobic atmosphere of *The Tombs of Atuan*, the dry, draining, feeling that pervades *The Farthest Shore*, the psychological sophistication of *A Wizard of Earthsea*.

The series as a whole strikes me as being a lot more philosophical than most children's books while at the same time they remain traditional Bildungsroman with their theme of growing into adult estate.

In contrast to much of the fantasy that I don't remember as well, there is not much here about swords, or bravery in combat, or the power of magic to destroy medium sized cities, rather the emphasis is on avoiding the need to do those things and on the principal characters coming to terms with themselves. It seems to me that there is some influence of Taoism and Jungian psychology in these stories, which would have been in line with the spirit of the times when they were written (view spoiler).

The setting is also unconventional, it is not a magical version of medieval or Arthurian Europe but rather is pervaded by the fresh salty sea breezes of its archipelago landscape and its theme of life and death as yin and yang still feels very right and proper even across all the years since I read it in childhood.

One of the remarkable things about it is the skin colour of the characters, here Le Guin as in other issues was working hard to create a future society that was rather cleverer and more sensible than it was at the time of writing, the road however is long and many of us walk far slower than she.

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## Milo says

Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy is one of my favorites. Her style is so unique and the underlying themes in her books are powerful. She has this way of saying a lot without saying much...if that makes any sense.

If you love wizardry this is the book for you. Ged is the name of the Archmage in this series and unlike Gandalf, who is presented as incorruptible, Ged must battle his own demons to gain redemption. The story is from Ged's point of view so he seems more human than the classical representation of the wizard seen from afar as a powerful figure cloaked in mystery. The second book changes the point of view from Ged to Tenar "The Eaten One". The story goes on to describe a tale of suffering, mercy, and the love that can be felt for strangers even in the darkest of places. This trilogy is so full of imagery and meaning that I would recommend it to anyone that loves a truly fine fantasy. I would also recommend you read the accompanying *Tales from Earthsea* and the final book in the series *The Other Wind*.

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## Stefan Yates says

Having previously read Ursula Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness*, I was a little leery of starting on the Earthsea Trilogy. I found Le Guin's style in *Left Hand of Darkness* to be very difficult to slog through for me

and, while her ideas and story were very well crafted, I did not enjoy my reading experience at all.

My experience with the Earthsea Trilogy couldn't have been more different from that of Left Hand of Darkness. Maybe because Earthsea is more intended for a younger audience, none of the writing seemed nearly as heavy and dense as Left Hand of Darkness. I once again did find the story and ideas to be well-crafted, however this time the language and style conveyed a magical quality to the story and I found all three volumes included within this omnibus to be unique and enjoyable in all aspects.

This was a fun trilogy to read and I will continue the series with the final volume and the short story collection that Le Guin has also written.

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## **James says**

These are three beautifully written novels that make up a trilogy that is both highly influential in the modern fantasy trilogy and also highly unlike any trilogy out there.

The first book "A Wizard of Earthsea" follows the story of a young boy named Ged (he has a bunch of other names, but he's Ged) and his adventures as he discovers he is a wizard, goes off to a wizard academy to train, discovers he will be the most powerful wizard ever, and is inextricably linked to a diabolical evil that will one day plague the world of Earthsea (sound like anything?)

The second book, "The Tombs of Atuan," follows Ged into his middle ages as he journeys into the underground catacombs of Atuan to retrieve something of great importance. The tombs are guarded by a religious order of women (much like nuns), and one particular one is sent to investigate Ged's infiltration. What ensues is a realization of oneself and how we are not what we are taught to be, but what we have always been. The ingenuity of this novel is that all the action takes place in the pitch black catacombs. The reader sees what the characters see, which is nothing.

The last book, "The Farthest Shore," finds Ged in the dusk of his life and career as a wizard, leaving behind him the legacy of the greatest wizard that ever lived. He is on what seems his final voyage, and he and his young companion travel to the ends of Earthsea and the world of the dead.

These books, while in many ways as fantasy as fiction can get, are beautifully written and with even the smallest suspension of disbelief can be enjoyed by just about anyone. If you have read those Harry Potter books, you owe it to yourself and Ms Leguin to read this trilogy which, over thirty years after their first publication, are still responsible for so much of the fantastic literature that exists today. These are great little stories written by a fantasy/scifi writer who is arguably one of the best in the genres.

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## **Seth says**

dsfsdlkfjalsdkfj

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## Apatt says

This is the edition I bought as a wee lad, I only managed to finish *A Wizard of Earthsea* due to foolishness of the young. Recently I have finished reading all three books of the original trilogy so I thought I'd link this book to my review of the individual volumes:

### **A Wizard of Earthsea** - My review

In which we meet young goat herder Duny soon to be named Ged and nicknamed Sparrowhawk. This is the story of Ged attending a school of wizardry on Roke Island, a serious mistake he made through hubris and how he seeks to rectify it.

### **The Tombs of Atuan** - My review

In which we meet Tenar a young girl on the horrible island of Atuan where they worship the evil "Nameless Ones", how she meets Ged and ... (spoiler!)

### **The Farthest Shore** - My review

In which we meet young prince Arren who shows up on Roke Island to enlist Ged's help to stop an evil thing that is sucking every good thing out of Earthsea. Ged is now an old archmage.

The three volumes combined is shorter than one volume of most fantasy epics today. They are beautifully written and rightly revered as classics of the genre.

I have not read subsequent books *Tehanu*, *Tales from Earthsea* and *The Other Wind* though.

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## Elizabeth (Miss Eliza) says

\*Special Content only on my blog, *Strange and Random Happenstance* during *It's a Kind of Magic* (April 2017)

*A Wizard of Earthsea*

Date I read this book: December 2nd, 2016

★★★

On the island of Gont a young boy nicknamed Sparrowhawk is born with innate magical abilities. Motherless, his Aunt sees his potential and teaches him what she knows of magic and the words of power. When Kargish invaders threaten his small village of Ten Alders he is able to protect it by summoning a fog, concealing it from the enemy. The great mage Ogion who lives on the other side of Gont in Re Albi hears of the young boy's gift and journeys to Ten Alders to bestow the boy's true name Ged on him and offer him an apprenticeship. Ged is grateful for all that Ogion does for him but is impatient. In his impatience he releases a shadow from one of Ogion's spell-books and Ogion realizes that he is not the teacher for Ged and he sends him to the island of the wise, Roke, to attend the school for wizardry there. On Roke Ged's power is apparent to all, but he is headstrong and aloof, making enemies easily. One enemy is Jasper who Ged challenges to a duel. The duel will release a shadow creature into the world and almost destroy Ged. Taking months to recover he is a far changed man. He is more circumspect and willingly takes a humble posting in the Ninety Islands once he earns his staff. There he does much good but is still hunted by the shadow. He knows now that it will chase him to the ends of the earth, so perhaps it's time he started chasing it. The battle will go one

of two ways, but so it will be. As Ged sees it, this is his burden to bear.

As a kid I of course had heard of Ursula K. Le Guin, not so much because of her Earthsea books, but because of her Catwings series. They were released through Scholastic in the late eighties and seriously, it's about flying cats, there's no way I wouldn't have fallen for these books. They were basically marketed just for me, as evidenced when I laboriously filled out the Scholastic order forms to return to school. But as for delving into Earthsea? It's been something I've always meant to do for years but just never got around to. When the Sci-Fi channel adapted the first two books into a major television event I finally bought myself a copy of *A Wizard of Earthsea*. And like most books I buy, it just sat on my shelf all alone, until it was joined by the omnibus edition I bought from the Science Fiction Book Club containing the first three books, it was then eventually joined by *The Lathe of Heaven* for book club, but still the languishing continued. As I have mentioned before a joy of book club, with my group of friends all having similar tastes though vastly different opinions I've been getting around to a lot of these long neglected books. *Ender's Game*, *Middlesex*, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *Misfortune*, *Catch-22*, *The Shadow of the Wind*, *American Psycho*, *The Family Fang*, *The Magicians*, and finally, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, these are ALL books that have been sitting on my shelves for years unread until book club. And once I started *A Wizard of Earthsea*, it was the work of a moment until I knew I had to read the whole cycle as soon as I could.

What amazed me so much about this book is that you can see how Le Guin's writing influenced everyone from Terry Pratchett to Patrick Rothfuss. This book was written in 1968 and feels like the origin of all origin stories for modern science fiction and fantasy with the young boy's journey into manhood. This prototype is Ged! He can be seen in everyone from Keladry to Harry Potter to Kvothe to Kell. While many of you might be objecting and saying what about Tolkien? What about Lewis? What about White? What about her only choosing "K" protagonists? Yes, you do have a point, but they are the authors that broke the mold, they helped create this fledgling new genre and it was Le Guin who struck this new mold. She built on what they had created and made a blueprint for all the authors that came after. Yes, after accepting this you might start to shake your fist at her that she's the one who brought about the callow youth who needs a good smack down, a trope that sometimes can be too much, but at least here, well, Ged sure does get smacked down. But what happens to us readers who experience this smack down of Ged is that in his growing up we begin to like him. The truth is kids can be bastards. There's a reason none of us had the best of childhoods with bullying and regimented schooling, but we outgrew that. Perhaps that's why we hate Ged so much in the beginning? He reminds us too much of the untested swagger we all possessed about our beliefs. He is perhaps painfully relatable, and that's why he has become a trope. Because we get it. We get the journey because we've been through it ourselves.

Though it's the success of the magic system that for me makes this book not only so readable by so relatable. Let's look to Harry Potter. I adore Harry Potter but the magic isn't exactly logical. I mean, they just magic food together? Why? And yes, I was just rewatching *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them* so this is obviously the first example to pop into my head. I mean, can you make bad food as a wizard? I seriously want to know. They can mend that which is broken, they can kill with the swish and flick of a wrist, but what are the consequences? Where is the balance? Here magic is balanced. As Ogion shows, it is sometimes easier to just let the rain fall on your head than to magic the weather away. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, hence dark magic summoning a dark force. Magic is never just used for it's own ends, it's used only when needed for the betterment of life, for helping to control goats, or making a ship sail true, or maintaining the balance of the universe. Everything is about equilibrium. Nothing should be attempted without knowing the full consequences of those actions. If you think about this the way magic is approached should be the way we approach all things in life. The whole do unto others but with a magical backlash. *A Wizard of Earthsea* through magic shows us how to properly live with the world around us, and that is indeed magic.

There's one thing I want to talk about though that is a little controversial, and that's the color question. My first real image of Ged was the marketing for the miniseries starring Shawn Ashmore, a whiter white boy you could not get. So imagine my surprise when I realized that everyone in Earthsea is dark skinned. So yes, the miniseries was whitewashed. And the thing is, I just don't get why. Maybe I was just raised right, believing everyone is equal no matter what gender, skin color, or sexual orientation. Therefore changing this makes no sense to me. Especially when this miniseries was made so recently. I applaud this book for making a strong fantasy series outside the trope of the skinny white boy who will pull some magical feat and become king therefore subverting the genre. In fact, I think I would have read this series earlier had I know that it was so progressive. On many levels. But I'm also writing this from a place of privilege. Seriously think about how you picture the characters of a book when you read it. If you're white your just going to assume they are like you because they usually are written as such. But if you're colored, it's rare that you're actually going to see an accurate depiction of those who people your life. Therefore I think this book needs to be talked about more. Look what it did and when it did it. Seriously, admire it.

If this book has a flaw, moving beyond the color question, because that's the reader forcing the issue, also going past Ged being so callow because over the course of the book he does move beyond that, it's that the ending is rather abrupt. We've grown up with Ged, on Gont, on Roke, when he took a lowly possession but did real good, when he negotiated with a dragon and chose the people he cared for over his own chance of survival, so many adventures, and yet the ending is bam, done. For the hundreds of pages leading up to him confronting the shadow and giving it a name we journey the width and breadth of Earthsea, we are on his little boat Lookfar, we have travelled to the very end of the world, and then he just stands there, gives the nameless a name, and bam, over. And yes, I'm sorry for repeatedly saying bam, but the ending is just so abrupt that it felt like a door was slammed in my face. I kept re-reading that section thinking to myself that that couldn't be all. Ged couldn't just solve all that plagued him in an instant. The resolution is too fast to be satisfying, and perhaps that is why I so quickly picked up *The Tombs of Atuan*. I thought that this story had to go on somehow. But it didn't. That was the end. And while it was the ending that was always in sight, could we perhaps have admired the view before being thrown overboard?

#### *The Tombs of Atuan*

Date I read this book: December 4th, 2016

★★★★★

Tenar doesn't remember her life before. A life filled with love and apple trees. She has even forgotten her name. She is the One Priestess of the Tombs reborn in the service of The Nameless Ones. She is now Arha, "the eaten one." Her life of abnegation began at six. Lonely and cold and devoid of friends her days are filled with worship and dark rituals to The Nameless Ones, who dwell beneath the hall of the throne in the place of the tombs. Each day is much the same, passing in routine and ritual in windowless rooms. When she is fifteen, a year after crossing into womanhood and coming into her full powers, she is finally permitted into the undertomb. What should be a wonderful experience, entering her true domain of the tombs and the labyrinth that follows becomes one of her worst memories as she was brought there to punish prisoners of the Godking. Prisoners she leaves to starve to death.

This memory is like ashes in her mouth and she withdraws from the world above of petty conflicts and power struggles seeking comfort in the tombs and in the labyrinth beyond. It is there that her endless days of monotony suddenly change. For it is there she sees a Wizard! She knows instantly what he is and that he is there to steal from her, seeking the long-lost half of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe. The magical ring which, once whole, will bring peace to all of Earthsea. But for now he has brought light into the darkness, her darkness, and she traps him behind the iron door at the start of the labyrinth. Yes, the Ring is in the labyrinth but only Arha can navigate it. So the labyrinth shall be the wizard's tomb, if Arha decides to let him die. She is oddly

fascinated with this man. She has lived all her life in seclusion with females all with only one point of view. Here is an outsider who has a different viewpoint and who might just open her eyes. But has Tenar lived in the dark for too long?

There are books that you struggle with initially but eventually pay off in such spectacular fashion that all that you went through was worth it. *The Tombs of Atuan* is just such a book. Reading the Earthsea series consecutively like I did *The Tombs of Atuan* is a drastic shift from *A Wizard of Earthsea*. It's far more formal with a dense backstory about Godkings and Nameless Ones and religion. Not to mention that Arha is hard to initially relate to. She's very standoffish. But you just have to get under her skin, get past all her training that stripped her personality away and watch as she struggles to become someone she can like. As many have pointed out, this is basically the companion story to Ged's journey to becoming a Wizard in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, what with shifting from a male to a female protagonist. But I think it's so much more. Yes, you could say it's because I'm a girl so that I could relate more, but I felt like Le Guin took Tenar on a greater journey than she did with Ged. Yes Ged traveled and ran from his mistake, but Tenar was there day after day facing her mistake and working out who she was. It was a far more satisfying journey. Sometimes it's about inner change more than anything that makes a story work.

What also helped was that while Ged was important, he was put on the back burner. He wasn't the focus at all just a conduit for Tenar's change. What I find fascinating with this decision of Le Guin's is that she takes a character that we know well after reading *A Wizard of Earthsea* and makes him mysterious again. Yes, some time has elapsed and he has aged, but he's still Sparrowhawk. Seeing him through Tenar's eyes makes you feel like you're seeing him for the first time all over again. While I do love series where I can follow the entire journey of the characters I love from beginning to end, this time lapse that Le Guin utilizes makes this second book so fresh that I actually heart it way more than the first volume. You could guess what Ged was up to down in the labyrinth and all his plans, but in the end, everything that happened to him hinged on what Tenar did. Seeing her fascinated with and then eventually coming to trust Ged makes you, as a reader, more fascinated with Ged than you ever have before. It's interesting that in stepping back you see more clearly. Personally, I didn't want this story to end. They could have stayed in that maze forever just talking.

Yet it wasn't just the change in perspective that made *The Tombs of Atuan* so compulsively readable, it was that the location changed and with it the style. Earthsea is basically a generic fantasy land that is predominately water. Yes, it's kind of an unfair generalization, because each island is so unique, but as a whole it's built from the blueprints of other fantasy stories. Here the basis is less fantasy and more adventure. More H. Rider Haggard and Elizabeth Peters. Dusty old cultures whose bloodthirsty customs are a danger to the more enlightened times we are now in. Once I realized and embraced this I came to adore this book. I think this was where I had problems initially connecting. This book is SO different from its predecessor that it's kind of a culture shock. But what makes it amazing is all the ways it's different from *A Wizard of Earthsea*. I felt like I was reading some of my favorite Egyptian stories about gods and temples and a plucky heroine. Add to that an underground maze that is so awesome and has so many connotations from all different mythologies and made me think of everything from *Labyrinth* to *Jim Henson's The Storyteller* and this book appealed to both the child and the adult in me. I only wish I had read it sooner.

Though the reveal of the connection between Ged's and Tenar's stories is what just blew me away. I have to fully admit that I was reading these books while sick so I might have been a bit slow on the uptake, but when I realized who exactly were Tenar's Gods I was in awe. Yet again did Le Guin make the known mysterious. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* Ged is fighting an Unnamed force. Victory is achieved by naming it. Tenar is in service to The Nameless Ones. In other words, literally, another way of saying Unnamed. Please do not mock my inability to connect them immediately, as I said, I was sick, but also I think the way the story is written it's made to ingeniously hide something in plain sight. None of Tenar's beliefs seem evil or dangerous



at first, so why would her Gods be dangerous? It's only as she grows and learns that it becomes obvious that her Gods might not be kind ones. To then learn they are the world destroying evil that Ged faced? Epic reveal. Plus, it's rather an indictment on religion. To learn that you are serving the forces of darkness? That could quite mess with your mind.

Which leads to the message of *The Tombs of Atuan*, the very heart of it's maze. This book is all about guilt and redemption. Tenar, in sentencing those prisoners to death set herself on a path. A path she didn't like. The way she takes care of and treats Ged, keeping her prisoner alive and eventually freeing him breaks her chains. She is able to redeem herself through doing an act of kindness, by doing good. While she didn't know that the forces she served were malign, she was able to search her own conscience and realized that what she did didn't make her feel good. Think of the power this book would have on a young reader. If you are trapped in a bad situation there is always hope. There is always a chance to make tomorrow better. I know it might be trite, but it's so true that reading opens your mind. Reading makes you more empathetic, more able to feel and understand and just get it. That's why I never trust people who say they don't like reading. They are shutting themselves off from feeling from becoming the best human being they can be. Read this book and I dare you not to be moved to be better to do better to question everything and to find the right path for yourself.

*The Farthest Shore*

Date I read this book: December 10th, 2016

★★

OK, so there's not room to post my full review here, so it will be here on April 14th, 2017.

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## **Saskia (Smitie) says**

Aangezien dit drie boeken zijn in 1, maak ik per boek een mini review:

Machten van Aardzee: Heerlijke ouderwetse fantasie. Ik heb erg genoten van de avonturen van Ged, al was hij soms wat filosofisch. De magie en het mysterie van de schaduw zijn erg interessant. Ik miste wel een kaartje van het Aardzee gebied, ik vind het fijn om me soms even te oriënteren waar in de fantasiewereld we zitten.

De Tomben van Atuan: Weer een fantasierijk verhaal met in het centrum de mysterieuze tomben van Atuan. Deze keer is Tenar het hoofdpersonage, al komt Ged ook weer in het verhaal terug. De mysterie en duisternis van de tombe en het labyrint geven een beklemmende sfeer. Ik had graag meer achtergrond gehad, al vind ik het al knap dat Le Guin geen 500 pagina's nodig heeft om een goed verhaal te vertellen (in tegenstelling tot veel andere fantasy series).

Koning van Aardzee: Het meest deprimerende verhaal van de drie. Ged is weer terug en heeft het geschopt tot Archimagus. Nu moet hij het avontuur aan met de jonge prins Arren aan zijn zijde om het mysterieuze verdwijnen van magie bij tovenaars te achterhalen. Voor mij was dit het minste boek. Heel veel deprimerende dialogen tussen de personages en de sfeer in veel locaties is grimmig. Het einde werd wel beter met een grotere rol voor de draken (mijn favoriete fantasy wezens).

Het was al met al een leuke leeservaring van een klassieke fantasy serie.

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## Pixie Dust says

This trilogy comprises the first three novels set in the Earthsea world. My second time reading it in 9 years, I found that it still held up well.

The narration often takes on a matter of fact tone, almost taking for granted as perfectly natural all the magic and customs of the land, and the novels read like Icelandic sagas in the way the stories are told like old myths and legends. Despite the brevity of the novels, Le Guin manages to convey the sense that there is a vast amount of history in the world of Earthsea, and it is populated by diverse peoples of which we can only barely get to know. Le Guin builds her world using much lore that is familiar in the tradition of the fantasy genre, e.g. the power that is in names, the danger of taking on another shape. There is in fact not much that is new in her Earthsea magic. These stories also have no surprising twists and turns of plot that are almost compulsory elements in modern fantasy novels. Yet, the reader is carried along by the tales in the most accepting way, for the power of the books is in the narration.

The third person narrator is clearly also of this imaginary world, seeped in the Earthsea culture. He tells the stories of Earthsea with some nostalgia, blending his own interpretation with what is apparently historically known about that period of time. At times, the matter of fact tone tricks the reader into forming no incredulity about the events in the story, and at other times, the narrator lulls the reader into full belief with his hypnotic prose that oftentimes stuns with its lyrical quality: "Arren turned back to the dark. He went back. He lifted Ged up as best he could, and struggled forward with him until he could not go any further. Here all things ceased to be: thirst, and pain, and the dark, and the sun's light, and the sound of the breaking sea."

The shifts in point of view between novels are well chosen. The first book, *Wizard of Earthsea*, is told from Ged's perspective. This works well as we see how Ged grows and meets the challenges of attaining his wizardry. However, once Ged is at the height of his powers, telling the story from his point of view would make his powers seem like exaggeration. So, it worked really well when in *The Tombs of Atuan*, the POV shifts to Tenar, the young priestess of Atuan. Through her eyes, the reader can share in the awe she feels when she comes to the realisation of how powerful Ged is. Similarly, in the third book, *The Furthest Shore*, we see the story through the eyes of the young prince Arren who accompanies Ged in the search for the source of evil. Because these characters do not know the extent of Ged's powers, the reader too is kept in suspense.

(view spoiler)

Will definitely go on to read more in the Earthsea series.

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## Bucko says

Unlike the *Lord of the Rings*, which is three volumes of one book, this consists of three books which are each quite distinct entities to themselves. (I was just too lazy to find all three books and review them separately.) They go together because they share a common protagonist, the erstwhile goatherd known as Sparrowhawk, whose true name is Ged.

The first book, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, deals with Ged as boy and young man, struggling to come to grips with his power. The second book, *The Tombs of Atuan*, finds Ged some years later on a search to reclaim stolen treasure in a hostile land, where he encounters a young priestess, Arha. Arha must help him or hinder him, but not even she knows which path she will choose. The last book, *The Farthest Shore*, follows Ged on his most dangerous quest of all, with only the young prince Arren to help him, the fate of the world resting in the balance.

Ged is one of my favorite characters, from any book, ever. I read these for the first time maybe when I was 12 or 13, and I still read them every so often now. I think the brilliance in these stories is that they have come to mean much different things to me now than they did when I was a teenager or even in my early twenties. *A Wizard of Earthsea* was my favorite when I was younger, but now I prefer *The Tombs of Atuan*. I mentioned something along these lines to my dad some while back, and he told me *his* favorite was *The Farthest Shore*. When I asked him why, he told me I'd understand when I was fifty.

Other than those who are adamantly opposed to the fantasy genre, I can't imagine anyone not enjoying these stories. The books are short, the stories well crafted and the prose is wonderful. Most definitely in my Top 5, and right up any teenager or young adult's alley.

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### **Lynnae Leigh says**

Context seemed to be so interesting, and I've heard so much about Le Guin. But I ended up getting bored so fast. And I hated the fact that magic was for boys only. So few women, too.

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### **El says**

The first of the trilogy, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, introduces readers to Ged (aka Sparrowhawk) and follows him to wizard school where he learns all of the words and spells that make him one of the most powerful wizards in all of Earthsea. In *The Tombs of Atuan*, then second book, Tenar is taken from her family as The Chosen One to be the guardian of the tombs of Atuan. In her time there she meets Ged (now middle-aged) who is searching the tombs for a specific treasure. The third, *The Farthest Shore*, follows Ged as an older man as he and young prince Arren have many adventures before encountering Orm Embar, the biggest, baddest of all the world's dragons.

I tried really hard to really dig these books. I kept picking them up after putting them down, but really there was very little story that I was interested in. The second book was likely the most fun to read, but even with that inclusion there was so little character development in any of the books to keep me on the edge of my seat. I wanted a reason to care about Ged in any of these books, and every once in a while there would be a page or a paragraph that would make a little light go on inside my head; almost immediately, however, the next sentence was back to LeGuin's bland style and I found myself sighing all over again. I know people who adore these books, I once had a professor who raved about LeGuin's writing (I would love to hold a debate with him now), and LeGuin seems to be well-beloved, so clearly I am in the minority on this view. My third eye did not open in the process of reading these books, which is a shame because I think Ms. LeGuin and I would probably have a good time together if we had a chance to talk.

Again, interesting people do not always make interesting writers.

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## **Bodhidasa says**

I re-read this masterpiece trilogy on a recent Buddhist retreat in New Zealand. It became something of a spiritual road-map for my inner journey. Each book seemed to address, in mythic proportions, the struggles I was having with being an heir to my actions or with feeling bound by dusty habits. Admittedly, there were less dragons in New Zealand, despite what Peter Jackson might lead you to believe.

Le Guin's thoughtful, reflective almost poetic prose engaged me on every level. The story is simple, the ideas complex and the issues rich in allegory. Ged - the protagonist- is a humble, damaged man who, besides being a phenomenally powerful mage, is an astonishingly grounded human figure: like us, he struggles with fear, pride, loyalty, friendship and the fragility of life.

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## **Deb Miller schultz says**

One of the first fantasy series I read. Love going to another world.

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## **Tristan says**

This was a lovely classic of fantasy to find myself reading. This volume contains *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Tombs of Atuan*, and *The Farthest Shore*--the first three novels Le Guin set in Earthsea and the story of the great wizard Ged. I found it a bit slow at times, although always beautiful and always interesting and Le Guin's magic possesses a smooth self-awareness of its own philosophy that makes it especially interesting as a reader to encounter. This is a magic preoccupied with balance and with goodness and with a powerful acceptance of our own frailty, humanity, and mortality, while still rejoicing in the wonderful power of human agency--we are the ones who can do evil, and so the ones who can truly do good.

Due to its slowness and Le Guin propensity for not explaining (there are huge swathes of story that get skipped over and underpinnings of magic that are never quite made sense of), I almost gave this three stars, but I did like it. The elegance and mystery of *The Tombs of Atuan* was my favorite of the three, although the ending of *The Farthest Shore* was absolutely perfect and really brought me back after stumbling through some of the final book of the volume. I think that the novels don't quite blend their character-driven and philosophy-driven core with their adventure-fantasy trappings, although the fantasy is necessary for the philosophy to come through effectively and with such naturalness.

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## **Phil Scadden says**

favorite children fiction

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## **?????? ????? says**

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## **Maksym Vlasov says**

Read it many times. It's been one of my favourite since the childhood.

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## **Karlo says**

Never really followed Le Guin's fantasy works previously, having just joined the SFBC, I picked up this omnibus edition. The writing was wonderful; there was a sense that each word was picked with care; not too much detail, not too little, just enough to evoke the tale she wanted to tell. In the current world of 800+ page books (I'm looking at you, Mr Erikson), I appreciate economy.

Story-wise; it's a slight twist on a familiar trope; the Magician's rise to Mastery from obscurity to SavingTheWorld (TM). It's done with a sincerity that is refreshing now (and one assumes back when it was published).

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## **Stephen Smith says**

This book could be a case study in how not to write a fantasy novel. Start with poorly-drawn characters the reader will feel indifferent about. Add a world that isn't very interesting. Complete it by having the characters do next to nothing of significance. Then, when the climactic battle comes the reader has nothing invested in the outcome.

In this novel, Ursula LeGuin has succeeded in making dragons and wizards seem tedious and boring, which is no small feat.

I'll try to reiterate the plot, but I may fall asleep in the middle. In the first book of the trilogy, a kid named Sparrowhawk finds that he's skilled in magic and little else. He ends up in school for wizards. On a dare he tries to contact a dead person. When he does, he encounters a spirit that he alternately avoids and pursues through the rest of the book. In the end, he apparently wins, but it's not clear why or how.

In the second book, a girl is handpicked to be a priestess. She believes she is the reincarnation of the prior priestess, is kind of a bitch, and never gets to really do anything. She explores her domain and runs into Sparrowhawk, who's apparently looking for half a piece of jewelry. She keeps him a prisoner, then becomes his ally, then they escape and put the two pieces of the jewelry together, and all is right with the world.

In the final book, Sparrowhawk is now the head of the wizard school, and a prince comes to tell him all that's going wrong with the world - apparently there is less magic, and people don't seem to care about anything.

Small surprise, as there isn't much to care about. So the wizard and the prince go on a trip across the world, at which point they are told by a dragon to go somewhere else, which they do, then they go to the underworld among the walking dead and manage somehow to close the passage between the world and the underworld and again all is right with the world. Yawn.

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