



Harpist in the Wind

Patricia A. McKillip

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In the midst of conflict and unrest the Prince of Hed solves the puzzle of his future when he learns to harp the wind, discovers who the shape changers are, and understands his own relationship to Deth, harpist of the wizard Ohm.

Harpist in the Wind Details

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Author : Patricia A. McKillip

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From Reader Review *Harpist in the Wind* for online ebook

sarah says

This review is for the trilogy, which I just finished!

As I read the books I kept wondering why the plot (prose? storytelling?) was so opaque. It was done beautifully so, but I definitely had a hard time tracking what was going on. So the book became an exercise in wondering what the purpose of the opacity was. It was very enjoyable, though. I thought that it would be a fairly standard young male hero goes on a quest story, but book two obviously upended that notion, which I appreciated. I wished that Raederle and Lyra had kissed.

Kat Hooper says

There are some fantasy epics that all literature professors, and most normal people, would consider essential reading for any well-educated person — J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Lewis Carroll, etc. So, yeah, I read those a long time ago. But beyond that, there's not much fantasy literature that's essential reading. So, for a long time, I didn't read any. In my drive to be educated, I stuck to the classics (which are classic because they're great literature, usually). But one day, maybe 15 years ago, Patricia McKillip's *RIDDLE-MASTER* fell into my hands. I can't remember exactly when, and I can't remember how. I can't even remember enough to... Read More: <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/revi...>

Kristina says

“The shape-changers melted out of the trees, flew after him. For a while he raced ahead of them in a blinding surge of speed toward the distant green mountain. But as the sun set, they began to catch up with him. They were of a nameless shape. Their wings gathered gold and red from the sunset; their eyes and talons were of flame” (132). *Harpist in the Wind* the last book in the Riddle-Master trilogy, is a satisfying conclusion. Patricia McKillip keeps readers in suspense until the very end of the book; Morgon struggles with riddles and how to master his power in order to end the war while you, the reader, growls in frustration.

The wizards, loosed from the Founder's power, are gathering in the ancient ruins of the wizards' school in Lungold. Raederle and Morgon travel there to meet with them and to help them fight against their old foe. Raederle, still fearful of the temptation of her shape-changer's heritage, refuses to shape change into other forms that would make their passage across the land safer and quicker. While the other two books prepared the characters for battle, in this book the battles begin. Morgon is fighting two enemies—Ghisteslwchlohm and the shape-changers. He as yet does not understand the nature of the battle nor does he understand why the High One has remained silent all this time. While he is still hiding from the shape-changers and trying to find their place in this power struggle, he is also wary of Yrth, a Lungold wizard who is accompanying he and Raederle on their desperate journey across the land.

I've read this book so many times you'd think I'd remember who is who and what the battle is ultimately about. I always forget though—probably because McKillip weaves the plot so expertly around riddles and myths and characters who are much more complicated than they seem—and almost *all* of the characters are

complicated and full of deep, dark mysteries. Because this is the last book, riddles are answered, the true nature of shape-changers are seen, and the power of the realm is finally settled. There is a certain sadness in this book, because endings are never as exciting and fresh as beginnings, but *Harpist in the Wind* is a dramatic conclusion to this wonderful trilogy.

If you prefer your fantasies to be less philosophical and poetic with the emphasis on magical deeds and swords, then you may want to skip this series. Stripped bare of its harping and star-bearing swords, it's the story of knowing yourself and trusting yourself; of love that endures despite betrayals and hardships. All three books are lovely and well-written and should be considered classics of the fantasy genre, or any genre. My editions all include a "People and Places" glossary at the back (very helpful) and a map drawn by the author of the (nameless) realm (also very helpful).

Amanda Kespohl says

I have a confession to make. I actually tried to read Patricia McKillip's Riddle-Master trilogy once before and failed. Despite the glorious things I had heard about the books, I got lost in a maze of odd names and confused about who was who, and I stopped reading about 20-some pages in due to an information overload. But I promised myself that I'd come back to it one day, because some of the things I'd been told about the books made them sound like a story that should not be missed.

To say that I'm really glad that I did is an understatement. Once I learned to focus on the important things and allow the story to tell me which details were important, things went much more smoothly. All the place names and people that were mentioned slid off my mind like beads of water while I fixated on the main character, Morgon of Hed, his funny, brawling family, and his high-tempered friend, Prince Rood of An. And of course, once I realized that there was a romance in this book, I was hooked. (I'm a sucker like that.)

As the story unfolds, we learn that Morgon is the Prince of Hed, a tiny, inconsequential farming kingdom where very little happens of note. That is, until Morgon decides to challenge a ghost in the land of An to a riddle match. When his sister finds the crown he won under his bed, Morgon discovers that he's stirred up a hornet's nest by quietly winning a contest so many men have died trying their hand at. He also discovers that the crown was not the only prize for besting the ghost: King Mathom of An also promised his daughter, Princess Raederle, to whoever beat the ghost's riddle game. Raederle is the sister of Morgon's friend, Rood. Morgon has known and admired Raederle for some time, and he's quite smitten with her. With visions of a beautiful, amber-eyed redhead dancing in his mind, he sets out from Hed with the intention of coming forward with the crown and seeking Raederle's hand.

As much as Morgon would have been perfectly content to take his princess back to Hed and return to farming, making beer, and bickering with his siblings, the universe has other plans for him. No sooner does he leave his little island than do strange enemies come out of the woodwork, endangering not only Morgon, but those he loves best. In fighting and fleeing his foes, Morgon finds himself faced with a host of riddles even he can't answer that all seem to revolve around the mark of the three stars that has been on his face since birth. Those stars seem to mark him for a destiny that is larger than life, one set in place thousands of years before he was born. He must either give in to it or perish, even if embracing his destiny means giving up all of the things he holds most dear.

The journey Morgon undertakes makes this Patricia McKillip's most traditional fantasy novel yet, as it has

the quest structure and some of the familiar high fantasy archetypes. However, what elevates it and makes it extraordinary is her rich, imaginative world, filled with golden horned vesta bounding through the snows, land-rulers who are bonded to their lands such that they share an empathy with the earth itself, and odd, beautiful magic, where even the gentlest harping may hold great power. Once I started traveling with Morgon into these other lands, I couldn't have put the book down if I'd tried. Each new place held such marvels that I couldn't wait to see where he went to next or who he would meet. There is no doubting after you read this book that Patricia McKillip's imagination is a national treasure.

The characters are another strong draw. Morgon, himself, is a sympathetic and flawed hero. He is not entirely willing to be sucked into the role of a legendary hero, but when duty calls, he has enough honor to step up. He's a kind, gentle man and a good brother, and relies on wit and intuition rather than pure brawn. And it also speaks well of him that he respects his lady love. Even though he has won the right to marry her by winning the riddle match, it is never Morgon's intention to show up and claim her like lottery winnings. No, Morgon's first through is to ask her if she would be willing to marry him, and then and only then will he take her back to Hed.

Raederle, herself, is absent from the first book, but takes on a very nontraditional role in the second book. And that's the other thing that is so spectacular about these books. This fair princess is not sitting somewhere knitting booties for her future offspring while the hero does all the work. Raederle is an active heroine in the story herself, a fiery, spirited, independent, strong-willed woman who knows what she wants and goes after it. After all, Morgon is not the only one with a destiny here!

I could go on about how beautifully McKillip handles Raederle's interactions with Morgon, keeping a legendary tone to the story, but also with a thread of realism and relatability, but I don't want to get too spoilery. Suffice it to say that this is not your typical fantasy story, though it's every bit as lovely and magical as you would hope it to be.

Even without Morgon and Raederle earning gold stars for awesomeness, there's a whole host of supporting characters who shine in these books. Deth, the High One's harpist, is an intriguing riddle of a man who kept me on my toes throughout the books. King Har of Osterland, Danan Isig, Astrin Ymrir, the Morgol, and Mathom of An also earned my respect and devotion in their time on the pages. I loved every one of them like they were old friends and anytime any of them had cause to grieve, I wanted to wade into the story and hug them.

And did I mention how beautifully McKillip writes? You've heard me wax on about this before, if you've read some of my other reviews of her books. Still, it cannot be said enough: this woman has a poet's soul and a novelist's mind. Her words glitter and glint on the page, filling your mind with gorgeous, dream-like images. When describing a character's impatience, we are told that she feels that "even the dead of An, their bones plaited with grass roots, must be drumming their fingers in their graves." This book is filled with gorgeous passages that make me want to hang up my keyboard and stop pretending like I can share the name "writer" with someone like McKillip.

In the end, as the pieces of the story came together, I could clearly see what McKillip had been building to from the beginning. Even the small patches where I doubted, thinking she was meandering a bit, snapped into focus as crucial moments that shaped the ending. In other books by this author, I've had to spend time mulling the rightness of the ending, wondering if the plot points truly lined up in the direction she had chosen. Usually, I come around to appreciate it, though I sometimes find myself wishing that things had played out a little differently here and there. This time, I didn't even have to think about it. I felt the rightness in the story, even though parts of it broke my heart.

Ultimately, these books will resonate in my memory as some of the best I've ever read. So, to put it mildly, I'd recommend them. To put it less mildly, why are you still sitting here reading this review? Quick, order your copy now! And then come back and tell me how much you loved it! :)

Beth says

A riddle is a tale so familiar you no longer see it; it's simply there, like the air you breathe, the ancient names of Kings echoing in the corners of your house, the sunlight in the corner of your eye; until one day you look at it and something shapeless, voiceless in you opens a third eye and sees it as you have never seen it before. Then you are left with the knowledge of the nameless question in you, and the tale that is no longer meaningless but the one thing in the world that has meaning any more. (Heir of Sea and Fire)

I cannot review the books in this series individually because they've come to form one achingly beautiful tapestry for me, one epic story broken up into three parts. In a way, I can't review them at all because every detail I'd want to comment on constitutes a spoiler. I will say instead that it's been a long time since I've read a series this brilliant and brave, this grand in scale, this heartwarming and heartbreakingly sad. This is an epic and simultaneously intimate story, one that is so perfect it makes me catch my breath in awe.

The story takes turns I could never have foreseen and yet I *should* have foreseen them because they are so organic to the story that the book never could have progressed any other way. The language is poetry breathing through prose, elegant and lyrical, and it manages to capture the things that seemingly cannot be put into words.

The grandeur of this series, the emotional intimacy, the thematic perfection, is something relatively matchless, I think, in the field of classic high fantasy. I cannot understand why this series is out of print. I can only say that if you find the books anywhere, grab them. They're worth it.

Jim says

I was a bit disappointed with this book. A bit too much mysticism & I wanted to kick some of the main characters a few times. My wife liked it a lot, better than the other two. It certainly, FINALLY, answers the myriad of questions that have been raised & comes to a resounding conclusion, but it wasn't blood thirsty enough & idolizes the idea of 'doing no harm'.

Let me explain. It's not blood thirsty enough because our hero has put up with a lot & this is a sword & sorcery book. The hero feels too guilty at every death. Come on! He's been chased, had friends & family threatened & people tortured & murdered. Grow a pair & take a few heads with satisfaction, dude! But no, he has to whine about it. Ugh. It's one reason I generally prefer this sort of fantasy written by a guy. Women writers too often don't get behind the idea of vengeance, although when they do, they can be too mean. I think it's the way we're wired.

The idyllic idea of doing no harm by being an herbivore that vegetates in the snow, basically retreats into Limbo, doesn't do much for me, although it is certainly more humane & better in the long run. Still, this along with some similar devices stretched the story out & made me impatient.

It's possible that I was just frustrated a bit because this book couldn't top the first two & I really wanted it to. Both of them were new & fantastic in many ways & this one didn't have any really unique kick to it, but I'd built my expectations too high. Oh well, it's a must-read & you can make up your own mind. If you read the first two, you HAVE to read this one.

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

This is the third and final part of the *Riddle-Master Trilogy*, and you should definitely read the two earlier books first, this is definitely no standalone, you should really think of it as one novel in three parts. The first book, *The Riddle-Master of Hed* belongs to the title character, Morgon of Hed, Riddle-master and Farmer-Prince who finds the most challenging riddle of all is his own identity and destiny. The next book is the story of Raederlie, Morgon's love who in *Heir of Sea and Fire* goes in search of him and finds out much about her own identity and powers.

Now in *Harpist of the Wind* they're together trying to find out what has happened to the "High One" the "sustainer of the land-law of the realm" that ties the rulers to an awareness of their lands. Despite the multiplying of mysteries in the books, by the end of this one they're all tied up neatly--and with a fairly unpredictable but logical twist. I'd also say that McKillip develops her world deftly--like most high fantasy it definitely has a medieval European feel, but it feels it's own place. Even minor characters are well-drawn, and the style is smooth and the narrative flows well.

It's a good read. Not a great read. I read this trilogy because it was recommended on the "Seven-League Shelf" of the "cream" of fantasy. I don't think it rates as among the best in the genre I've read. I wouldn't place this with others on the list such as *The Gormengheist Trilogy*, *Lord of the Rings*, *The Once and Future King*, Carroll's *Alice* books. I don't consider it extraordinary in style, nor did it move me to tears or laughter nor did I find it gasp-worthy. But entertaining? Yes, certainly. And some have told me that McKillip's best book isn't this trilogy but *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld*. I'd certainly be interested in trying that someday after reading these.

Kathleen says

I listened to the series opener (*The Riddle-Master of Hed*) and *Harpist in the Wind* (this book), skipping book 2 because it sounded like filler and many reviews stated that the story became more gripping in book 3. I found that to be true, also. I cried towards the end. I was able to predict some of what happened, but McKillip didn't employ all the normal tropes (only some of them). The plot and mythos is not terribly complex, but as a listener I had to pay attention and replay several scenes.

Riddles (questions about history and destiny) occur throughout the series, and those unanswered questions bedeviled me. But they were FINALLY and FULLY addressed as the story reached a resounding conclusion.

McKillip writes quite well, but WHY do authors feel the need to protect bloodthirsty, vicious, inhuman psychos?? Baby killers? Why didn't Morgon kill the villains???? Now they will probably just escape and kill millions. Again.

The audio narration by Simon Prebble was not bad, but nor did it enhance the story. I could barely hear a

difference between voices for the wizard Ohm and Deth, for example.

As with many fantasies, invented names for characters and places are hard to differentiate and remember via audio (An, Aum, Ohm, El, Iff, Nun, Tel, Tor, Hed, Har, Rood, Rork, Ymris, Yrth, etc) so I referred to a VERY helpful website: <https://wizzley.com/riddle-master/>

Ian Mathers says

I think when I was younger I found the way the end of this one played out just a little deflationary, but now I think it's really amazing. I keep going back to the line from the previous book, "they were promised a man of peace", and what it's revealed to mean, in terms of who said it, who "they" were, who made the promise, and who it's said to. I apologize if these reviews have become just impossibly cryptic, but 1. I don't want to spoil any part of these really wonderful books for anyone 2. I actually love this series too much to really write coherently about it? This is an ending that is fully worth all the time I put into the first book as a magic- and mystery-loving teenager. These books really are, as the initial subtitle puts it, about "the end of an era". By the end the world of the High One is profoundly changed, and so are all the characters we've been reading about. Fittingly enough for a writer of her calibre and sensibility, McKillip doesn't half-ass that the way so many fantasy series do; she's no doubt aware of how human it is for all of us to want more stories with these people and/or in this place, but this is the story. Sometimes things end, and it doesn't make them less wonderful.

Jeffrey says

A magical series, one of the best fantasy series that I have read. This third volume is a great read. I have re-read these three books many times and I think they hold up remarkably well. This concluding volume is especially good end because it answers all of the riddles.

Timeless fantasy from a master

Onefinemess says

There's a lot to recommend about this book - and a lot to get nit picky about, if you have a hunger for nits. Maybe with salt.

The world has both the classic sense of ...whimsy (?) (that word kind of demands italics, doesn't it?) that you just don't see in fantasy anymore (or at least I haven't seen in years) paired with a sense of eternal foreboding (those pesky bad guys...always locked up, never killed) and some of the weird evasiveness that you see in modern works like the Malazan stuff - sometimes shit just happens and we don't or can't know why.

It reminds me most of something like Lloyd Alexander's High King series - or at least of my memory of that series..I haven't read it in twenty years. There's an inexperienced country boy stumbling into destiny and power and all that. CHECK.

There's also what seems like a strong female character - she even had the whole second book mostly to

herself who doesn't let the MC push her around (although he keeps trying...which is, I guess, true to nature...), and has her own hoary, ancient powers and Shit To Deal With (although we don't get much of that in this book, since it's from Morgon's perspective again).

The foreshadowing is thicker than Portland drivers in the sun this time around. If you haven't figured out who the High One is by now, McKillip is going to beat you over the head with it so much you'll wonder how Morgon can be so dumb about it. Although, technically he almost realizes it a couple of times then forces himself not to realize it?

Dumb. Sorry, there's no way around that.

The magic system is both interesting and lawless. Like, it's one of those where shit can just happen unpredictably (to the reader anyway)...I guess more of the classics were like that, but I'm spoiled on Jordan, Sanderson and even Butcher and their fairly ordered magic systems that work enhance the experience instead of just deux-ex-fucking all the time. This series has a ton of "why did the magic do that?" moments where you just have to roll with it. Might not bother some people, but it bothers me a little.

THREE AND A HALF STARS

Solid 70s/80s fantasy.

Jenny says

This is the perfect end to the series. I feel satisfied with the answers to the riddles, and the ending is beautiful, especially Chapter 15, the second to last chapter of the novel. McKillip maintains the mystery throughout most of the novel but provides answers before the reader goes crazy with not knowing. Even after the riddles are pretty much all resolved, the book comes to a nice closing, not too drawn out or anticlimactic. As a series, I fully enjoyed Riddle-Master. I went on a journey with Morgon, trying like he does to answer the riddles of his destiny and of the past, present, and future of the High One's realm. The story is complex, but even when I felt most confused while reading, I was still enthralled by McKillip's prose and by the characters. Morgon's transformation from the Prince of Hed into the Star-Bearer is well done. It's subtle and realistic but striking by the end of the series. Deth is a great character, and I loved meeting the other wizards in this book. There could be an entire series just about them: Nun the pigherder, Aloil the poet, Talies the historian, Ghisteslwchlohm the Founder, Yrth the harpist...

I recommend this series to fantasy lovers. The books aren't long, but the stories are complex, so you might take your time with them, but they're well worth it. I plan to reread them one day now that I have the answers. It will be interesting to go back and see how everything really fits together. I'm curious now about what other riddles McKillip has woven into stories.

Jennifer Freitag says

Patricia McKillip is pretty nearly as good as Rosemary Sutcliff in wringing my heart. This was a fantastic conclusion to her Riddle-Master trilogy, cutting deeply, bitter-sweet, full of beautiful prose and a powerful plot. My library would be sorely lacking without this trilogy.

?Ruth? says

This is a series of books that plunges you straight in at the deep end. During the first few chapters of book one, I felt almost like I had missed reading an introduction or a prologue somewhere.... but with the help of a map and the glossary of characters at the end of the book, everything soon started to slot into place. However, this is not a simple tale – the basic concept is unusual, woven into a story which includes sorcerers, shape-shifters, spirit-wraiths and immortals.

My most lasting impression is of the author's prose, which is so poetic I found myself reading paragraphs over again just to savour the beauty of her descriptive passages – one of my favourite lines:

“The clouds, softly shaped by the wind, rested on the silence.”

Michaela says

i don't know why but for some reason i got into parts 1 and 2 more than this final part of the trilogy. can't put my finger on it ... too much? too complex? just not the right time / mood?

beautifully written as always, of course, and the world created by mckillip is a marvel.

Katie says

So I do like the story this told, but I think I'm sticking with the feeling that the writing just was a bit lost on me.

I did, however, have to stay up until I finished this last night, which says something!

Luke Burrage says

Good end to a good series.

Full review on my podcast, SFB RP episode #374.

Isaac Clarke says

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expects. The motivations behind the final reveal and what all the characters are fighting about are basically left to the idea that power corrupts. It's vague, but at least the writing was nice.

There are moments of real emotion in the book. Raederle's character is continually the touchstone for any strength this series has found. I have read many reviews that claim that this is that reader's all time favorite series. My only conclusion is that they have connected with these characters in their brief moments of genuine insight. Each of them, especially Deth the harpist, have the potential to be major fantasy characters, but at the end of the day, plot helps flesh characters out, and these books were lacking in it. Florid prose does not a series make.

The Riddle-Master Trilogy had many good ideas and characters – even though their fullness didn't quite pan out. There was enough here that I would be willing to try more from this author. If you read this series, you may not be disappointed, but there's also plenty of other fantasy out there you should hit first.

5.5 out of 10 stars

Red Eagle's Legacy
