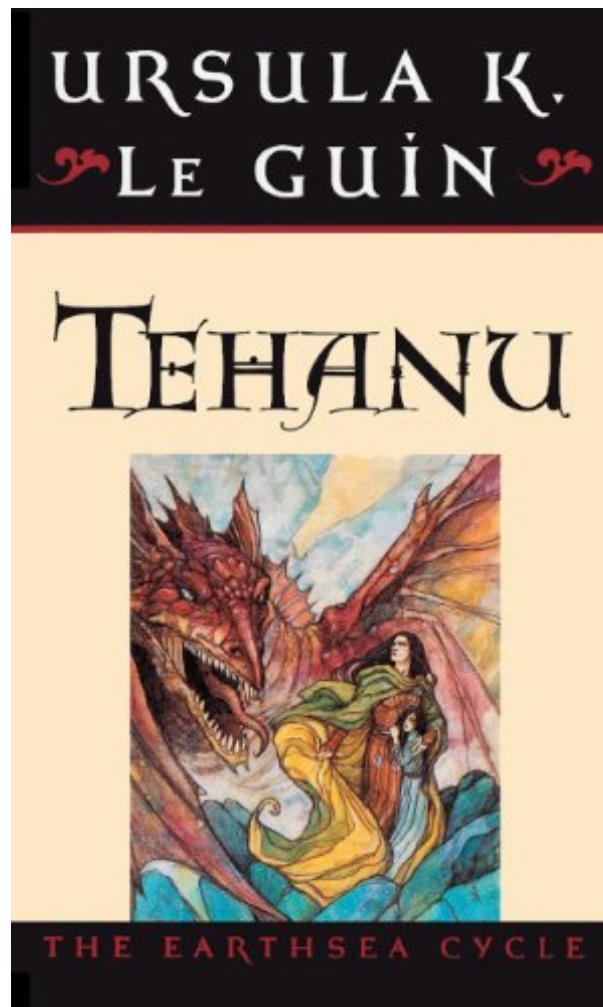


**TEHANU (THE EARTHSEA CYCLE, BOOK 4)
BY URSULA K. LE GUIN**



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Amazon.com Review

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From School Library Journal

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FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES ONLY. When Sparrowhawk, the Archmage of Earthsea, returns from the dark land stripped of his magic powers, he finds refuge with the aging widow Tenar and a crippled girl child who carries an unknown destiny.

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- Published on: 2001-10-01
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Amazon.com Review

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Most helpful customer reviews

86 of 95 people found the following review helpful.

Either excellent (5) or horrible (1), and that's the problem

By Carmen

This story is so hard to rate, because it is excellent - the writing is so much more personal and deep than in the previous books in the trilogy. If you are looking at the technical parts of the story, Tehanu is much better than the beginning stories, and you will go back to the first trilogy, read it and wonder why she couldn't have made the style more like it. It is an good starting point for people who are not accustomed to fantasy, or who like reality to have a place in a fairy tale.

The problem that everyone has with this book, in my opinion, is how harsh it is, how human the characters. We who loved the first book will be shocked and dismayed at how frail and... and real our heroes have become. Ged without magic, and utterly without power really hurts to read about. Reading these characters, after having loved who they were, is like having your dreams shattered. The magic is torn brutally out of the fairy tale, and what we have left isn't pleasant. I kept reading the story only because I was certain Le Guin wouldn't let what was once a beloved story for adults and children alike become such a hard, ugly story about life and pain and hope. She just couldn't, but she did. Reading a fantasy in which your heroes are broken and humbled is almost as frightening as watching your parents cry, or seeing what was once a beloved place be torn down to make something like a freeway, black and ugly and full of smog. I kept wishing for the dream that was clear and innocent and beautiful in the first books to come back, but it never did. And though some people might laugh at me for being so childish, I think that the reason we all loved the first books was that it was so much a story that included our fairy tale champions, the characters that we could love both as children and adults, that we could share with our kids. And it gave us these characters without giving the story a predictable, black-and-white cut-and-dry plot. Our heroes made mistakes, and were sometimes foolish and stubborn, which made them all the more treasured and endearing. Tehanu is hard and painful and too real to be connected with the first books. The reason, to me at least, for reading fantasy is not to see life, which is frequently harsh and oppressive and can be cruel with its promises, but to see hope and beauty and dignity which is all too rare in our world. There are enough stories of grief and suffering out there as it is, in stories and out of them.

Adults who have never read and loved the first books might like this story. They might see it as a superb example of life, exhausting and petty and cruel at times, being brought into a field of books which normally contains simple, predictable, happy endings of good over bad. And it does, but in my opinion the fairy tale and innocence and fantasy were better left standing, not brought down and dragged in the dust and mire.

180 of 227 people found the following review helpful.

Sacrificing the magic of Earthsea

By Barry C. Chow

This book is a betrayal of all that came before. It should never have been written.

The first three were works of wonder, touching on universal themes: sublime, compelling, cogent and inspiring. They asked large questions and arrived at honest answers, but they did so gently and gracefully.

The quiet unhurried voice is one that this author has honed to perfection. Her world of Earthsea ranks among the very classics, alongside Middle Earth, Narnia and Avalon.

Here, everything that made Earthsea so inspiring and evocative is sacrificed to make a point. Le Guin has decided that the fourth book of the series shall be a polemic - an undisguised and prolonged treatise directed at female empowerment and decrying child abuse. Are these worthy moral pursuits? Of course they are. Do they belong in the world of Earthsea? Not even remotely.

This book was one of the most excruciating and disappointing reads I have ever undertaken. It's not the writing or the skill - the author's proficiency remains unparalleled - but the desecration of what was magnificent. The skill with which this work is written actually adds to the anguish; we remember what this skill was harnessed to build and cannot help but contrast it to what it is now being used to destroy.

Reading this book, one is struck by how fragile a fantasy world like Earthsea really is. Earthsea works because, like all myth, it is founded in a successful illusion. When an author creates such a world, she makes a pact with the reader: "Accept this illusion, and we will journey to a place more vital than any you have known." If the author ever forgets this promise, if she ever turns from the myth to the commonplace, the illusion collapses and the world disintegrates.

In this novel, Earthsea suffers precisely such a fate. The mysterious is rendered mundane, fantasy is replaced with reality, imagination is sacrificed to treatise, and the philosophical is surrendered to the prosaic. In the process, Earthsea is reduced to plain old earth. Our imagination is arrested in mid flight and we land with a shattering thump.

The third book of the series was a magnificent work. The hero must save Earthsea from the death of its magic. He succeeds, but at great personal cost. In this book, the magic of Earthsea truly dies, but the death comes at the hands of its author and for reasons that are unworthy. This is one of the few books that actively destroys what has gone before. This destruction is so complete that I wish I had never read it and that the memory of Earthsea had been preserved for me unstained.

20 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

Feminism 101

By Assaf Tal

This is the 4th and last book in the Earthsea quartet.

After using up all his power to heal the tear in the fabric of reality, Ged returns to Gont, his first home, to learn and cope with life without magic. Alongside Ged's story, we are told the story of Tenar whom he rescued from the Tombs of Atuan in the 2nd book.

Unlike the first three books, this book has almost no plot. This is in fact not a bad thing. It means Tenar is more of a "character's novel", which is fine, with the two main characters being Ged and Tenar. The book slowly unfolds and reveals their lives and their relationship.

In my opinion Le-Guin botched up an opportunity at a really great novel here - there aren't many character-based works of fantasy out there. This is a rare book. The theme of losing one's power and learning to cope with it is also powerful and capable of moving, if used correctly. However, Le-Guin has turned Tenar into a feminist manifesto. I'm all for feminism, but it has been shown in countless cases that art recruited to prove a point is at most average art. This is exactly the case with this book - in her attempt to show the value of women, Le Guin forgot about her characters and the whole coherency of the book. I think the only reason this book has survived so far is because it has the earlier 3 books to carry its weight.

I felt I had to write these things down, although I don't think these comments will deter any earthsea fan from purchasing this book, and, after all, aren't we all Earthsea fans here, having reached the 4th book at all?

See all 254 customer reviews...

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