



Riddle-Master

Patricia A. McKillip

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Riddle-Master

Patricia A. McKillip

Riddle-Master Patricia A. McKillip

For over twenty years, **Patricia A. McKillip** has captured the hearts and imaginations of thousands of readers. And although her renowned **Riddle-Master** trilogy--**The Riddle-Master of Hed, Heir of Sea and Fire**, and **Harpist in the Wind**--has been long out of print, it is considered her most enduring and beloved work. Now it is collected in one volume for the first time--the epic journeys of a young prince in a strange land, where wizards have long since vanished...but where magic is waiting to be reborn.

Riddle-Master Details

Date : Published March 1999 by Ace (first published 1976)

ISBN : 9780441005963

Author : Patricia A. McKillip

Format : Paperback 578 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Young Adult, High Fantasy, Science Fiction Fantasy

 [Download Riddle-Master ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Riddle-Master ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Riddle-Master Patricia A. McKillip

From Reader Review Riddle-Master for online ebook

Jessica says

I grabbed a copy of this book to read on a plane to Ireland. The plane landed when I had finished all but one chapter, and I ran to the baggage claim to sit down and finish it.

The story was compelling, the writing was exquisite, and McKillip manages the nearly impossible -- in writing about emotions and experiences that are impossible to put into words, she suggests them so well that the reader is able to feel them. It made me choke up in a number of places, even cry in a few, and there are images burned into my mind that I will never forget. A comparison to Tolkien is probably useless -- McKillip and Tolkien share little except an obvious love of myth and language, and stunning vision and originality.

However, in reading other reviews, where reviewers indicate that they found the book confusing, or "weren't able to get into it," it did occur to me that this is not a book for everyone. The language and images are rarely concrete -- they are fleeting impressions, suggested rather than described. The story and writing overall are dreamlike -- you can understand them instinctually, but if you try to analyze or think about them too much, they fade like a dream does upon waking. For people who like their descriptions concrete, or who prefer events to be clearly explained, or who want explanations that are stated directly rather than implied, it would probably make for very frustrating reading.

The best advice I can give to a would-be reader who is not familiar with McKillip's writing style is to not think about it too much while you're reading it -- just experience it. If, after finishing the first book of the trilogy, you're not enthralled, put it down. If you aren't put off by the dreamlike nature of the book, however, you will find it one of the most astonishing and revelatory reading experiences you will ever have.

Kaitlin says

I picked this one up as part of my reading project for this year. I'm really trying to read more books written by ladies pre-2000 in SFF. This definitely fit the bill, but unfortunately it didn't grip me anywhere near as much as I had hoped for...

This includes the third and final book in the trilogy which follows Morgon, Prince of Hed, and Raederle, his lady love (I've reviewed the first two individually from this one). In this volume we see both of them come together after much adventuring about, and we get some explanation (after a whole lot more mystery) about just WHO the High One is and what's been going on with the magic and myth of this world.

I have to say I was frustrated by this volume as although I think it wraps things up well enough I felt like this really reverted back to many of the problems I had with book #1. I didn't feel like I really got into the story, I felt detached from the characters again, and the people I did like were once more shunted to the background...

In the end I gave this on 2*s overall because it's not a bad book, but it was just an okay read for me. I felt like there was a lot of convenient/predictable stuff happening with the plot, and I also wish it had been a bit more emotional rather than long-winded. I would give the series as a whole a 2.5*s because of the second one

being a marked improvement on book #1 and yet this one let it back down again for me.

Erfan says

As with other books I will slowly add here, this is one I think the world of, particularly this one and for its love story which moved me to the depths but I will mislead by that comment - the love between two people I refer to is not romantic in the conventional sense. There is one of those, done and done well, with a wonderful female character who is strong and practical in her own right. I should not even have to say that, should I?!

But this other relationship takes the whole trilogy to relate, and is done with a light touch that moves exquisitely, even a sentence is sometimes all that is said, a look, a gesture, a posture.

Characters, motives, rich contexts, imagination, high romance (not the sexual kind), high drama, and multiple, colourful, likeable individuals shown in depth as well as a strong plot woven in complex layers, are all strengths of this work. But aside from all of that, the style and language is simply poetic, simple and lyric, vivid with stark images and feelings powerfully told with few words. If I was limited to one word alone, I would say atmospheric.

Charles says

Stuff I Read - Riddle-Master: The Complete Trilogy by Patricia A. McKillip Review

I will admit to being a bit at a loss of what to say about this series. On the one hand, I liked a lot about it, and liked the way it meandered about and came at a couple question in interesting ways. On the other hand, this book was a bit dense in places and I didn't really feel that it helped the narrative to circle back and back to certain things, and there were parts where I just wanted to know what was happening and it was a little vague. It's a good trilogy, but there were some lingering problems that I just couldn't get into so much.

The trilogy is structured well, though, with the first book following Morgon of Hed as he and the High One's Harpist, Deth, travel through the various realms and discover riddle after riddle. They are bound for the High One, and the world building is interesting and well done, with the various lands having different laws about how they work. It's a standard set-up for fantasy, a reluctant hero and all that. The second book, with Raederle as the main character, was really where the book started to take off, because it complicated the villains and made Raederle a real character with her own motivations and strengths. She and Morgon are a great pair of characters, though I might have wanted a bit more to really believe their relationship.

Still, everything worked all right. The most frustrating part came with the third book where things dealing with the Earth-Masters were brought up. Because, in my opinion, things flew off the rails a little bit there. I was following along nicely to that point, but when it came to the High One's mastering the land-law and limiting the Earth-Masters, I was just sort of pursing my lips a lot trying to figure it out. It doesn't help that the writing style is not always the most straight-forward, and while the setting was great, the characters solid, and the reveals and twists quite good, I couldn't help but feel a little let down by the ending.

Not that I'm sure what else could have happened, but it wasn't satisfying to have Morgon solve things the way he did. The children of the Earth-Masters that he had spoken to said they were waiting for a man of peace. And Morgon was supposed to be that man. But he couldn't find a truly peaceful solution. Peaceful

enough, maybe, but it felt to me like sweeping it under the rug, hoping that the problem would die before anyone had to deal with it. It just didn't sit right. I really liked the ending with him and Raederle, but it wasn't enough to bump it higher than a 7.5/10 for me.

Madeline says

1. These three novels were really formative for me - I read them, I think, when I was ten (I got this collection for my eleventh birthday, and I'd already read them all at least once).
2. There's a betrayal at the end of the first novel that ruined me for all other fictional betrayals. Caesar? Ned Stark? #KanyeShrug. Probably real life betrayals, too. Whatever happens to me in the future, it won't be as bad as what happened to ten-year-old me at the end of *The Riddle-Master of Hed* (well, maybe the job market).
3. When you first meet Morgon, he's hungover. Then he has a fight with his family [about his secret life]! Ah, family happiness. Then he leaves them, and there his troubles begin. (No, no, really they started way back, but no one knows this yet.) McKillip owes some things to Tolkien, of course she does, and maybe the strongest overlap is the overlap of the Shire and Hed:

"I'm not even sure the farmers of Hed believe anything exists beyond Hed, and the High One. Of all the six kingdoms, Hed is the only one the wizards never sought service in - there wasn't anything for them to do. The wizard Talies visited it once and said it was uninhabitable: it was without history, without poetry, and utterly without interest. The peace of Hed is passed like the land-rule, from ruler to ruler; it is bound into the earth of Hed, and it is the High One's business, not mine, to break that peace."

"But -" Lyra said stubbornly.

"If I ever carried a weapon into Hed and told the people of Hed to arm themselves, they would look at me as though I were a stranger - and that is what I would be: a stranger in my own land, the weapon like a disease that would wither all the living roots of Hed."

And Morgon, who realizes pretty quickly he's stepped into something bigger than he thought, tries to get back there every change he gets. *The Riddle-Master of Hed* (be honest: that is an awesome title) takes Morgon through the six kingdoms - this will be important later, I won't tell you how because one of the joys of these books is seeing how something that seems like a lovely bit of detail becomes terribly important later on - and in each kingdom he's confronted with something, and each time he tries to opt out. But he never does, because you can't opt out of heroic quests. But also because he's curious. "Beware the unanswered riddle," we're told, and it's a lesson Morgon has internalized. In fact, he's internalized it so well that he keeps trying to run away from the answer. But that only lasts so long, as it quickly becomes apparent that the entire world, really, is conspiring to make avoidance impossible: "If they kill you in Hed, they'll still be there, and so will Eliard. And we'll be alive, asking questions, without you to answer them," Lyra, the warrior princess points out.

4. I mean, obviously, there are ways in which my feelings and opinions about this series are not to be trusted. I read it at an early, impressionable age - my judgment was definitely clouded forever in some ways. But I really love the women in these books. The second book, *Heir of Sea and Fire* is Raderle's journey, the answer to *The Riddle-Master of Hed*, and although she retreats significantly in the third book, she stills gets her own development - it's, actually, importantly, a development that mirrors and echoes Morgon's.

"What in Hel's name do you think I'm doing in this College?" She let her hands fall and wondered if, behind the armor of his solitude, she had at last got his attention. "I would be that for you, if I could," she cried. "I would be mute, beautiful, changeless as the earth of An for you. I would be your memory, without age, always innocent, always waiting in the King's white house at Anuin - I would do that for you and for no other man in the realm. But it would be a lie, and I will do anything but lie to you - I swear that."

Raederle's journey is one of action. She's not passive, even at the beginning, but she is slightly ornamental ("the second most beautiful woman in the Three Portions of An," "the great treasure of the Three Portions") and she lashes out against that - "I've never done anything in my life," she says, long after that's stopped being true.

5. People make a big deal about McKillip's prose, which is understandable, because it's magnificent and slightly tricky. You do have to read every word in a way you don't often have to in prose, because she elides description and action, so something that starts out as setting the tone might turn out to be an important plot development. And McKillip is efficient, economical. *The Riddle-Master of Hed* is only 187 pages; books 2 and 3 are likewise slim. I particularly love the first lines of the first two books: "Morgon of Hed met the High One's harpist one autumn day when the trade-ships docked at Tol for the season's exchange of goods." and "In spring, three things came invariably to the house of the King of An: the year's first shipment of Herun wine, the lords of the Three Portions for the spring council, and an argument." But I think they understate the humor. Again, understandable - the humor is itself rather understated. It's there, though - and it serves an important counterpoint to the solemnity of everything else. Har, the wolf king, is particularly good for this - he gets some of the best lines, and I always hear him as Peter O'Toole (there is something cinematic about these books, but then, the majority of the decisive action takes place inside people's minds - so there is something much more vital that is quite anti-cinematic). The unruly royal families of Hed and An are also a source of humor, and of love, and of hope, and of fire.

6. Oh, and the other similarity with Tolkien that speaks strongly to me, though I think McKillip commits to it more, is the desire for peace.

Danny says

While McKillip's prosaic writing is masterful, it also makes the book very difficult to read. I found myself screaming, "just get on with it!". While the most interesting characters were never fully developed, the title character was overdeveloped and unlikeable. I grew weary of the constant whining over his destiny, remorse for things he did, or expostulating on everything from life mysteries to romantic endeavors. She wanted to create a Tolkien-like world, but ended up with only the dismal shadows of the most obscure parts of Middle Earth. It's like a beautiful abstract painting ... that gives you a headache.

Olivier Delaye says

Good Fantasy, if somewhat a little predictable. The writing however is pure poetry. McKillip's mastery of the English language is downright breathtaking!

Jessica says

I chose this book for one reason ... on the back cover, there was a review which read: "Patricia McKillip has done something extraordinary, to write a trilogy comparable to Tolkien." I was sold. Obviously as a writer myself, who is an heir to that honor-ridden, legacy-laced, return-of-the-king obsessed writing culture, I needed to know what a book looked like that COULD be compared to Tolkien ... if for no other reason. What I found floored me.

Patricia McKillip is a masterful writer - not so prosey as Tolkien, nor as long-winded, but quite as skillful in weaving a tale which invoked the wonderful traveling/loyalty themes of the Lord of the Rings. However, the major differing point for McKillip's novel is that she (unlike many of the Fantasy novelists of her time) explores the concept of a FEMALE heroine - in fact, an entire book of the trilogy is dedicated to the growth and cultivation of Raederle's "inheritance," as it were.

I would definitely suggest this book, primarily as either brainfood immediately prior to or following the reading of the Lord of the Rings trilogy - a little lighter, a bit easier to "digest," it calms the mind and forces it to walk those strange paths... though, unlike Tolkien, you occasionally feel as though you are walking that path hand-in-hand with another.

Chris says

Explicitly inspired by — but no slavish imitation of — *The Lord of the Rings*, Patricia McKillip's trilogy is an epic fantasy that stands on its own merits rather than in comparison with Tolkien's work. Yes, it starts with a very domestic scene before exploring from one end of a continent to the other, and, indeed, the main protagonist is reluctant to embark on his quest, but in reality the whole feel and mood of McKillip's narrative is far removed from Tolkien's, not least because it gives almost equal prominence to a female protagonist. On top of this, the author was only in her late twenties when she began her very mature epic when compared to Tolkien, who was in his sixties when the final volume of LOTR appeared.

The first part begins portentously enough:

"Morgon of Hed met the High One's harpist one autumn day when the trade-ships docked at Tol for the season's exchange of goods."

In one sentence we are introduced to many of the main themes that run through the trilogy. Morgon, Prince of the small island principality of Hed, the High One who has (or rather had) suzerainty over all the lands, the subtle undercurrent of music (the author is apparently an accomplished pianist), the passing of seasons and the routines of social intercourse that will be so rudely disrupted. The young ruler, who had studied and attained high honours in the arcane discipline of riddling, will find not just his heritage challenged as he is plunged into dangers that will threaten the lives of countless peoples. Will he have the strength of will to overcome those dangers, and what part will Raederle of An have to play in the upheavals to come?

The core precept of much fantasy — and what can potentially put off readers allergic to the genre — is the idea of predestination, of prophecies that have to be fulfilled by the end of the tale. The Prince of Hed rails against this — "I'm not going to follow the path of some fate dreamed up for me thousands of years ago, like a sheep going to be fleeced," he declares early on — but of course he won't be able to fend off the inevitable;

fantasy owes much to mythology and religion where fate holds such strong sway and where balance must be struck between sacrifice and redemption. So Morgon fights against destiny, because it's what's expected and because narrative feeds on tension, but we know he will at last accept his allotted role.

The gnostic titles of the three parts tell you all you need to know: *The Riddle-Master of Hed* is about Morgon, *Heir of Sea and Fire* describes the part Raederle has to play, while *Harpist in the Wind* hints at the final resolution to all conundrums, involving both music and the elements. The trilogy structure also emphasises the tripartite nature of this world's riddling: the question, the answer and the meaning or 'stricture' to be drawn from the form. Thus it is that we initially have queries about what exactly is going on, we then start to have solutions in the second part, and by the end of the third we're given some insight into what it all means.

Clues to the destinies of this world reside in (you've guessed) three objects — a crown, a harp and a sword — which presumably represent the stability of land-rule, the pervasiveness of a traditional culture and the responsibility that comes from power. All these trios are closely bound up with the three stars which Morgon wears like a mark of Cain on his forehead, not a brand or tattoo but perhaps a birthmark of some sort. What do they all mean? What it all amounts to is that Morgon is the reluctant culture hero who has to restore all the realms from the wasteland that they turning into, what with dead spirits wandering at will, powerful shapeshifters who ambush the Prince, and a High One whose rule has been usurped.

Morgon cannot do it on his own. He has to rely on others who are bound up with the rule of their own lands, and particularly he must depend on Raederle whom he has seemingly won by successfully answering a riddle. Here's where McKillop differs significantly from Tolkien in that females are well to the fore: as well as wielding real power, with that power they prove to be more proactive. Raederle in fact proves to be a significant ally to aid Morgon in his impossible task.

If you are one of those who, like me, come all over faint with the plethora of invented names epic fantasy specialises in, fear not: a glossary of people and places is included. To orientate yourself there is of course a map, though Kathy McKillop's four-decades-old original is rather tricky to read in paperback format without a magnifying glass. Imagine Middle-Earth turned clockwise 180 degrees, Hed near where the Grey Havens lie and Erlenstar Mountain in the equivalent position of Mount Doom. Or perhaps it's a reverse image of the West Coast, Hed around Oregon (where McKillop lives) and Erlenstar Mountain standing in for Mount Rainier. Or perhaps neither of these. What's clear is McKillop's debt to Welsh traditions in her choice of names and motifs, so maybe the world of the Riddle-Master is a sort of mirror image of this ancient Celtic land.

The Riddle-Master trilogy is eminently readable, with moments of prose poetry, suspense, twists and turns in the plotting and, of course, strong characterisation for the principal characters. The sense of natural magic, especially that linked to the land and living creatures, is strongly evoked, and while the secrets that Morgon is seeking are strongly hinted at it may be that the reader may not realise them till the actual denouement. If you like mysteries to go with your magic and questions to go with the quests then this may be just the thing for you.

<http://wp.me/s2oNj1-riddles>

Sara says

Beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. I started reading this book and found myself a little bored or seeing ways I thought it could have written it better. But then suddenly, I found myself swept up by the mastery of the simplicity and I was in love with the world and the characters and the plots. The beauty is in the simplicity. The sparseness that still somehow captivates you. What this book does that so many modern books fail to do is that it gives you almost everything. It gives you enough and then leaves you to make your own decisions and think for yourself on some of the moral and fate issues and twists it leaves dangling. It's one of those books that when you read the end you feel as if you expected it and didn't expect it at the same time and within that dichotomy is a sense of peace and loss because it ends so well but then you know that you can never unread it and reread it.

First series I've ever read in which the sequel and last in the trilogy become even better than the first.

Hayley says

The trilogy gets more stars than the main character has on his face.

I was generous, even though it has its flaws. Here is why:

The way McKillip's "magic" system works is so utterly unique that I dare not compare it to anything. Magic is the innate qualities of a thing. You understand the thing completely and you are magically connected to it, able to be it or to use it against others. People are fooled by illusions that are simply the augmentation of a thing's natural qualities, which the trickster understands very well. It's a literalized version of the idea that you must see through someone's eyes and understand their thoughts and feelings to have power over them. It works well.

But that is not my favorite aspect of the trilogy. Perhaps more importantly, the characters are splendid. They are unpredictable and well rounded. Despite a plot that conforms to a few fantasy stereotypes (but also breaks with some of them), the characters are all puzzles. True to her theme, McKillip makes us wait until the end just to know the real identities of some of them--which they often didn't know themselves. Naming anything, to her, is power.

Her writing verges on poetry. I'm not just saying it's beautiful--though it often is--I'm saying that it's indirect. Meanings creep up on you (and on the characters). This is a beautiful tactic that, to me, brands something as very McKillip. However, I think she occasionally takes it too far. I sometimes had to read something twice and ask myself, "What the hell just happened?" She makes it quite clear for the reader by the end, and at points throughout the book. But mostly she treads a fine line between ambiguity for poetic purposes and...plain ambiguity. This may throw readers, especially those who haven't read her work before.

One thing is for sure: her writer's voice has a immense authority. She crafts a story with surprises and interesting turns without it feeling arbitrary. It's a feeling of, "Things really are this way. This is really how it would happen." I'm going to do what I hate to see reviewers do, and compare her briefly to Tolkien for this reason. They are both masters of their created worlds. McKillip is her own High One.

SPOILERS

I'm biased too, by my love-love-LOVE of her High One's character, be it Deth or Yrth or finally, his real form. I might not say he's my favorite fantasy character of all time (thinking of LOTR's Aragorn or Coldfire's

Hunter), but he's up at the top. He is so sad and so wonderful (and a musician to boot--always makes me identify with a character more). When he died I just stared at the page for a little while, uncomprehending (or wishing to be).

Christian says

I bought and read this book on the recommendation of several family members who had read the original books when they were first published (and when they were much younger readers).

Compared with the other fantasy novels that I've read, this is among my least favorite for the following reasons:

Lack of background on the world

Lack of depth to the characters

Lack of conflict and plot

Poor dialog & formatting

The story was mildly interesting, but has been done several times before and at this point isn't anything new.

First, the formatting of this book was poor and may be the result of the three original novels being combined into a single edition. There were several times when the character came out of a dream sequence, but you didn't realize it until a paragraph or two later. Likewise, there were other times when the setting changed or time passed and there wasn't any indication of this. Most authors put a blank line between paragraphs to indicate either of these occasions, but that's only used a couple times throughout the book. Additionally, the dialog formatting is poor and can be confusing when there are several characters in a room having a conversation. Most of the time, there are several lines of dialog without attributing them to their speaker. Since the characters are all flat and don't have any variation in dialect and don't have any catchphrases, I found myself just reading through it and not caring who said what as long as I got to the next paragraph.

Besides the formatting, the lack of introduction to the world and characters was also a point of frustration for me. There is no background to what a "riddle" is or how they are important in the world. For the series to be called "Riddle-Master" there should have been more setup and explanation as to how the riddles of the world worked, and why they were important. It didn't even seem like there was a high regard for those that studied riddle-mastery. They didn't walk around the land with an elevated status, or any extra honor compared to other characters. It seems more like the riddles were simply "questions" that needed to be answered, and often you can substitute the word "question" for "riddle" and the text will make more sense and reads more smoothly. One of the examples of the text where this stuck out most was pg. 387, "From the greyness an owl woke and sang a riddle." Owls are frequently known for making the sound "who, who," which as far as I know is at best a question and certainly not a riddle. There's also nothing really mentioned about the importance of a character's "name" either. There's a little background as to the wizards and some of the other characters in the books, but it doesn't really explain why the continental land-rulers (aka Mathom, the Morgol, Har and Danan Isig) are almost immortal (having lived centuries), while Morgan's parents didn't seem to be centuries old and certainly weren't immortal.

I was able to fight through the poor formatting and lack of background detail in hopes that the story and characters would be good. I was let down. The overwhelming majority of the books are taken up with characters traveling. There's not much conflict and almost zero fighting. I think that for these two reasons, the target audience for the series is much younger (perhaps the under 12 crowd). Unlike other books, there isn't a rush you get from characters narrowly avoiding the enemy or barely defeating their foe. The characters just plod along on their path as it appears before them. It's more like one of those "lazy river" rides at a theme park than an actual roller coaster. After the second book, I only read the third one because I had it, and I had hope that it might be better than the first two. Since it's the final book, there's actually a bit of conflict towards the end, but nothing worth the build up of 500+ pages. The aftermath at the end is also rushed, as though McKillip had a deadline to make and just wrapped everything up as best she could. I would bother discussing this poor finish more, but the lack of interesting characters didn't really make me want to know what Tristan, Eliard, Danan Isig, Har, Mathom and the Morgol ended up doing.

I'd recommend this book to a parent who's going to read to their child, or has a young reader and is looking for an okay story that doesn't feature any violence or things that might be unsuitable for younger ones. Children will be able to muscle through the poor formatting and lack of background information and will probably find the story entertaining. I feel like this book was like when you watch a children's show as an adult and say, "how on earth can kids find this interesting?"

Bronwyn says

So this is yer basic three-part magical-feudalism farmboy-leaves-home-and-finds-a-sword-and-a-destiny Tolkien-clone kind of a thing, with flat characters in a sometimes incoherent world but also a strong prose style and enough specific interest to earn it a place on the shelf with its samey siblings, and a richness that's hard to identify. It's pretty good.

What makes it *fascinating* is that it was written by a woman in the early-to-mid nineteen seventies. It predates Brooks and (by decades) Eddings and Goodkind and Jordan and Martin, and there are signs all over it of influence on all of them, and on the next generation, too, especially Patrick Rothfuss (and, in a happier genealogy, NK Jemison). So I enjoyed it most as a pretty gratifying experience of filling in a missing link of the fantasy canon.

Most of the areas where it suffers are a symptom of its major virtue, which is having kept itself short, but even in brief space it's surprising that the principal characters are so vague, and that in spite of compelling premises and worldbuilding there's not much emotional drive. But I love its care for knowledge, the way it invests in the structure of the quest as fundamentally an epistemological one, a need to know, seeking as the solving of riddles or, more simply, asking and sometimes answering of questions. Institutions of knowledge, generations of scholarship, teaching and learning—these are books that know what seeking really is. It loses track of this in some ways as the books proceed, but always riddlery is the engine that gradually reveals the mystery of sovereignty in this world, an ecological learning that is another of my favorite things about it.

And in the middle book, the only part dominated by a female protagonist and her mainly female companions, I found Raederle's responses to patriarchy refreshing: it's clear she lives in a world where women's lives are limited by patriarchal prerogatives, but instead of trite meta-commentary on the fact of it, or not-like-other-girls haughtiness, what we get a weirdly satisfying passivity in her acceptance of the fact that men and male argument will be an obstacle to her at every stage and the steady company of her continuous stubborn persistence in taking her own path. In other words, it's a set of responses to patriarchy written by a woman.

Anyway, recommended for people who wish they could get back the hours of their adolescence they devoted to the Wheel of Time.

Chieze says

When I picked up this book, the only fantasy I had read for a long time were of the large, serial variety (Robert Jordan, George R. R. Martin). I gotta say, this was quite the breath of fresh air.

The characters are all likable, the plot and pacing were perfect, and even though this is only one book (it's a trilogy, but the size of it is about the size of one volume of A Song of Ice and Fire, so I think of it as one book), the world is very immersive. The sense of urgency as the hero of the story races to save his life builds to near tangibility. McKillip has an almost lyrical quality to her work that reminds me of the songs found in Lord of the Rings.

Also, one of the things that I look for in a fantasy book is an interesting system of (or at least an interesting take on) magic. This book has that. Most of the magic throughout is inherently tied to the feudalistic system of land-rule that governs the world in this book. It's a really cool idea and handled throughout the story very well. When the reader finds out near the end of the novel what all of it has to do with the protagonist (I honestly forgot his name) and it all comes together, it's one of the coolest moments in a fantasy novel.

Katie says

Common McKillip themes exemplified by this trilogy:

- 1) There is nothing which cannot be faced, endured, known, understood.
 - 2) Art conquers all misfortunes.
 - 3) The mind is the most powerful weapon.
 - 4) He who plays God had better be prepared to be God, especially when God turns up and wants his housekeys back.
 - 5) Mess with teenage girls and the shit will be on.
 - 6) Stand by your man. Even if it means turning pirate to hunt the dead bastard down.
-

Bookwraiths says

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths Reviews

A long time ago in a decade far, far away . . .

I was a teenager! Not only that, I was a fairly arrogant one, who believed that he knew everything, had seen everything worth seeing, done everything worth doing, and had read every fantasy series that mattered.

When admitting that, I realize how immensely naive and prideful it all sounds – especially that last bit. However, at the time, I felt my observation about fantasy were completely justified. I mean, I had read J.R.R.

Tolkien's books (all of them at the time), swung swords with Howard's Conan and Kull, devoured Stephen R. Donaldson's Thomas Covenant stories, inhaled McCaffrey's Pern, went through the wardrobe with C.S. Lewis, fought for and against chaos with more than a few of Moorcock's eternal champions, drifted through the shadows of Amber with Zelazny, and . . . I'll stop already. You get the idea I'm sure.

Anyway, I was pretty well read in the fantasy genre for a teenager of my time . . . I thought. Then I picked up *The Riddle-Master* trilogy by Patricia A. McKillip. I can't remember exactly when, or how it came into my hands. I do know the covers weren't really my cup of tea at the time nor did the description promise testosterone-driven adventure. But for some reason, I read it anyway.

The story was simple enough. Many generations in the past, the wizards had vanished from the world; all the remaining magical knowledge hidden in riddles. The Prince of Hed, Morgon, had a talent for riddles and had decided to try to win a crown from the dead Lord of Aum.

However, Morgon had awoken something sibilant by his riddling. Ancient evils were stirring. They stalked the land after him. His friends began to disappear; some even replaced with what had to be shape changers. And so, Morgon was forced to flee his simple kingdom, journeying the land to uncover the secrets to reach the High One who ruled from mysterious Erlenstar Mountain.

Naturally, our prince did not go alone. His main companion on this quest was Deth, the High One's Harper. And as the two stumble blindly from one terrifying encounter to another, Morgon begins to see that only by solving the riddle of the three stars upon his forehead can he uncover his own destiny!

I know, I know it sounds like a standard fantasy stories from the time period. And I suppose it is . . . to a certain extent. But McKillip writes it all with such elegant prose that it still remains fresh in my memory; the wonderful imagery, the powerful themes, and the subtle plot lines still alive within me. Even now, I recall the ending of book one and the beginning of book two as if I had just read them yesterday; the powerful emotions of both scenes etched into my memory more so than many recent novels that I have read.

No, *Riddle-Master* might not be a novel read often anymore, but it is one that should be. With the series, McKillip brought an elegance and beauty to the fantasy genre that I personally had not experienced to that time. And, while certain parts of the story have left me, the feelings that it invoked never have – nor, I hope, ever will.

Ben says

I can't recommend this book.

Much is made of the dreamlike quality of McKillip's prose, but I found that this detracted from what could have otherwise been a memorable and different fantasy setting. A large number of intriguing plot points are introduced and then never referred to again, swept away in the preoccupation with the characterless protagonist. As the reader you never gain any appreciation of his (or anyone's) motivation, as the plot moves from one travelogue to another. Here are a few of those plot points:

We get no real reason to believe in the relationships between characters, as their backgrounds are so sketchily drawn. Why exactly is Morgon in love with Raederle (and vice versa)? Where does the great bond of loyalty between Morgon and Deth spring from? What's a Morgol (or a land-ruler for that matter), and why should we care? Why does Riddlery seem to matter so much that there's a College for it? Why do some land-rulers live for centuries? Does everyone in this world develop remarkable, un-earned, ill-defined magical powers eventually, or just the main characters?

I struggled to finish this trilogy. The revelation at the end of book one was spoiled by being written in black and white in a major character's entry in the (Fantasy Masterwork edition)Glossary. Book two travelled the same path as book one with a different (albeit more interesting) set of characters. By book three, so much of the backstory had been forgotten that it was difficult to care what became of the characters. Deaths are perfunctory and without any impact; the climactic battle for the realm is over within a few pages; the shape-changers are never given any character or menace beyond being unkillable.

I struggle to see why these books are accorded such high praise. They seem to be an exercise in diaphanous prose and wasted potential. I fear I've missed the point somewhere. Sorry Patricia.
