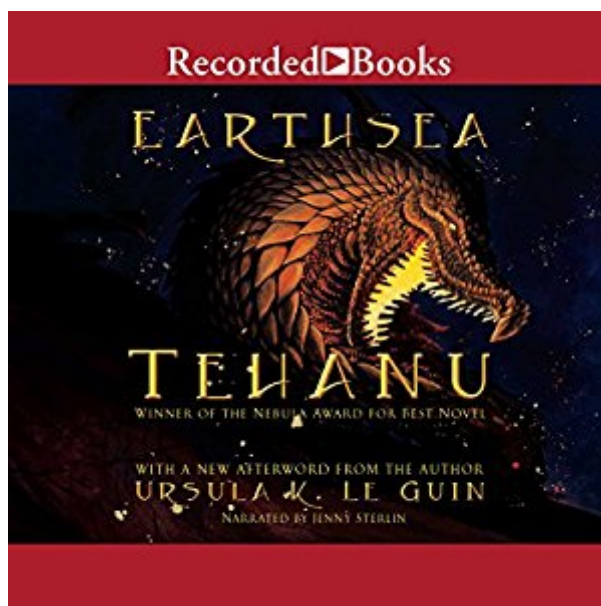


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Tehanu: The Earthsea Cycle, Book Four



Synopsis

Years before, they had escaped together from the sinister Tombs of Atuan - she an isolated young priestess, he a powerful wizard. Now she is a farmer's widow, having chosen for herself the simple pleasures of an ordinary life. And he is a broken old man, mourning the powers lost to him not by choice. A lifetime ago they helped each other at a time of darkness and danger. Now they must join forces again to help another - the physically and emotionally scarred child whose own destiny remains to be revealed.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The fourth volume in Ursula LeGuin's famous Earth Sea series, following the life and magical destiny of a dark and tormented character who comes into her own at the end. It deals with themes already presented in earlier volumes: cruelty, disability, vengeance, use and misuse of power, and the healing force of love. A profound return to the world she created with Wizard of Earth Sea, Tombs of Atuan, and the Farthest Shore. It also leaves open the world of Earth Sea for future exploration.

Probably 3.5 stars. I always appreciate LeGuin for her characters, plots, and insights into humanity. In this book, she explores the idea of what happens after you are no longer the center of attention. Is a person only what they accomplish? What about all of the common people? This book is a followup to the Farthest Shore, but it is slightly unclear how long afterwards. The center of the book is Tenar (from The Tombs of Atuan) and Ged from the earlier trilogy. Both are now older and in

some ways worn out--especially Ged. I won't go into any spoilers, but it was a little slow for me. I enjoyed the conversations and the characters, especially Tenar and Therru--her adopted daughter. My complaint is that it has a nice slow pace, until 84% into the book it appears that the author decided to quickly wrap it up. Lots happens in the last few pages that aren't well explained nor do they seem consistent with the characters. For example (mild spoiler) up until this point Therru has not been able to speak much. All of a sudden she is a primary narrator. There are various prophecies and hints about things which don't get explained and they are left unresolved at the end. I felt that it should have been about twice as long or there should have been an immediate sequel. The "official" next book (Tales of Earthsea) does not resolve any of these either. In the end, I felt let down that there was so much more that could have been explored and explained.

"Tehanu" steps back from the series' focus on epic journeys and instead focuses on Tenar and her place in the world. I like the exploration of identity and autonomy. Ged has lost his magic, so he has to shape a new identity for himself, and Tenar's life is changing. There is the idea of a person being shaped by the events around them and playing a role rather than being their own person. Tenar says, "I chose to mold myself like clay... I made myself a vessel. I know the shape. But not the clay. Life danced me. I know the dances. But I don't know who the dancer is." She is saying that even when she was given choices, she was only choosing a role for herself and that she didn't know who she was as a person. I like that discussion because it eloquently lays out a question that many people have: who am I? Where does the individual begin and the social conditioning end? I disagree with the overall answer, though, because I don't think that there is a transcendent self separate from the person immanent in the world. As Chuck Palahniuk said, "Nothing of me is original. I am the combined effort of everyone I've ever known." In Tenar's analogy, the clay gains its meaning only as a vessel; the dancer is defined by the dances. The question shouldn't be trying to figure out who the dancer "really is" (as if there were some meaningful answer to that question) but rather to figure out the right dances to do. We shouldn't ponder on the nature of clay; we should make things with it. The book has a focus on social structures. I remember reading some second-wave feminist writings by Catherine MacKinnon where she describes women as superior for reasons relating to their connection to the earth and bearing children and having periods and breastfeeding (if I recall correctly). Le Guin reflects, in her afterword, about a conversation. One character, Moss, says, "Who knows where a woman begins or ends?... I have roots... I go back into the dark!... Who'll ask the dark its name?" and the protagonist, Tenar, responds, "I will... I lived long enough in the dark." Moss' statement seems very much like MacKinnon's writing, and Tenar's

response, very much in the theme of her explorations in the book, is an expression of dissatisfaction with the simple mysticism of second wave feminism. She feels as though other peoples' explorations of identity aren't helping her own search, and a reflection of the power structures and systemic injustices that she has experienced are more relevant to her than discussions of intrinsic identity.

I have just finished reading this book and have read all of the other previous (aside from Tales of earthsea). I enjoyed it for the most part. Compared to the others it actually kept a decent pace. It basically picks up from the tombs of atuan (which was my least favorite because it was the least captivating until the end). I enjoyed seeing the mature side of tehanu and i think this book shows more the magic of love. I like how Ged was not incorporated to the story until the right time and moment (though you want him to show up sooner) but it shows the magic of Tehanu and the choices she does make. As usual her endings are so short. I didnt think it was too feminist or womanly. It just lacked the main Earthsea character Ged than readers would be used to. But i think it was good for LeGuin to show us a more witch side to the wizarding world of Earthsea. I wouldnt recommend this to be the first book to start on (maybe i would do Tales from Earthsea first then the rest in order).Tales from EarthseaA Wizard of EarthseaThe Tombs of AtuanThe Farthest ShoreTehanuThe Other Wind

I loved the first three books of the Earthsea trilogy when I read them as a child. I encountered Tehanu for the first time when I re-read the series as an adult. Tehanu is a marked departure from the previous three books: years after writing the first three books, Le Guin, now an established author, revisits her beloved characters and addresses complex questions and themes that she couldn't tackle when she wrote the original series. The main theme is an exploration of power - not on a grand scale, but the power we have over our own lives and decisions, the overt power of men vs the subtle powers of women in a traditional society, etc. The book explores gender roles, aging, parenthood, violence and abuse in a very tender and sensitive way. Young children may find it less exciting than the first three, but for adults and kids who are mature enough to appreciate it, It's a much richer, deeper book than its predecessors, with much wisdom in it.

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