

One final point; this is intended to be a children's book, as is clear from its "semi-developed psychological" characters, which are not quite Tolkien's "types". Yet I think it should be very enjoyable to adults in a similar way to Alan Garner's "Weirdstone of Brisingamen" and "Moon of Gomrath". I am sure there are many aspects of it children would not understand, for instance there are distinct sexual undertones to it, but would I, at the age of, say 13 (I assume this is the age group it's aimed at) have noticed them?

Perhaps in this review I have dwelt too long upon the undevelopedness of the characters which inevitably springs from its being written for children - I hope this does not deter you from reading it. It is certainly a very happy relief from the turgid Moorcock I've been wading through recently.

THE TOMBS OF ATUAN by Ursula Le Guin.

published by Gollancz. £1.25.

Reviewed by Jessica Kemball-Cook (Luthien Tinuviel)

One of the most important fantasy publications this year, 'The Tombs of Atuan' is a sequel to 'The Wizard of Earthsea', which was the best children's fantasy since Alan Garner's books, and even more original. The first book told how Sparrowhawk learned how to master his magic powers at a school for wizards, but could not control his human weakness, and in that tale we travelled over the whole archipelago of the Fantasy world of Earthsea, a world of hundreds of little islands.

As 'The Wizard of Earthsea' is a book about the balance of external and internal forces, so is this one, but in contrast 'The Tombs of Atuan' is more inward looking in its handling of one of Le Guin's basic motifs, the conflict of Light and Dark. This conflict has its battle ground in Middle-earth as well - I shall remind you, from many possible quotations of Haldir's words in Lorien; "Whereas light perceives the very heart of darkness, its own secret has not been discovered, not yet." In the "Tombs" there is far more concentration on the self-imprisonment of the main character, the girl, Tenar, which is mirrored by the claustrophobic horror of the Tombs of which she is the guardian.

At the age of six, Tenar is taken from her family, and doomed to be chief priestess of the dark tombs and the terrifying labyrinth beneath, and to serve the nameless gods. This part is very reminiscent of Lovecraft's weird city and his Old Ones, and almost as frightening. Tenar's life is narrow, caged, and everything is prescribed by ancient ritual until she meets Ged-Sparrowhawk, The Wizard of Earthsea. Readers of the earlier book will remember the two old people Ged found stranded on an island, and the half-circle of the broken ring they gave him. This was one half of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe, which holds a mighty Rune of Rower, and to make use of the Rune, Ged seeks the other half of the Ring in the Tombs. Tenar finds him wandering and, by right should doom him to death for desecrating the shrine of the gods. Ged makes her see she has a choice.

The master touch of Le Guin is ever-present: descriptions of weird riter and sacred dancing; the intolerance of the other priestesses; the dark oppressive labyrinth which Tenar learns to follow by touch alone. There's a message too - about the weight of freedom: "It is not easy, it is not a gift given, but a choice made, and the choice may be a hard one. The road goes upward towards the light; but the laden traveller may never reach the end of it."

The final volume in the Earthsea trilogy "The Farthest Shore" has now been published by Gollancz at £1.60. In it Ged travels to the Land of the dead, and we hear more about Le Guin's dragons dancing on the goldenwind....