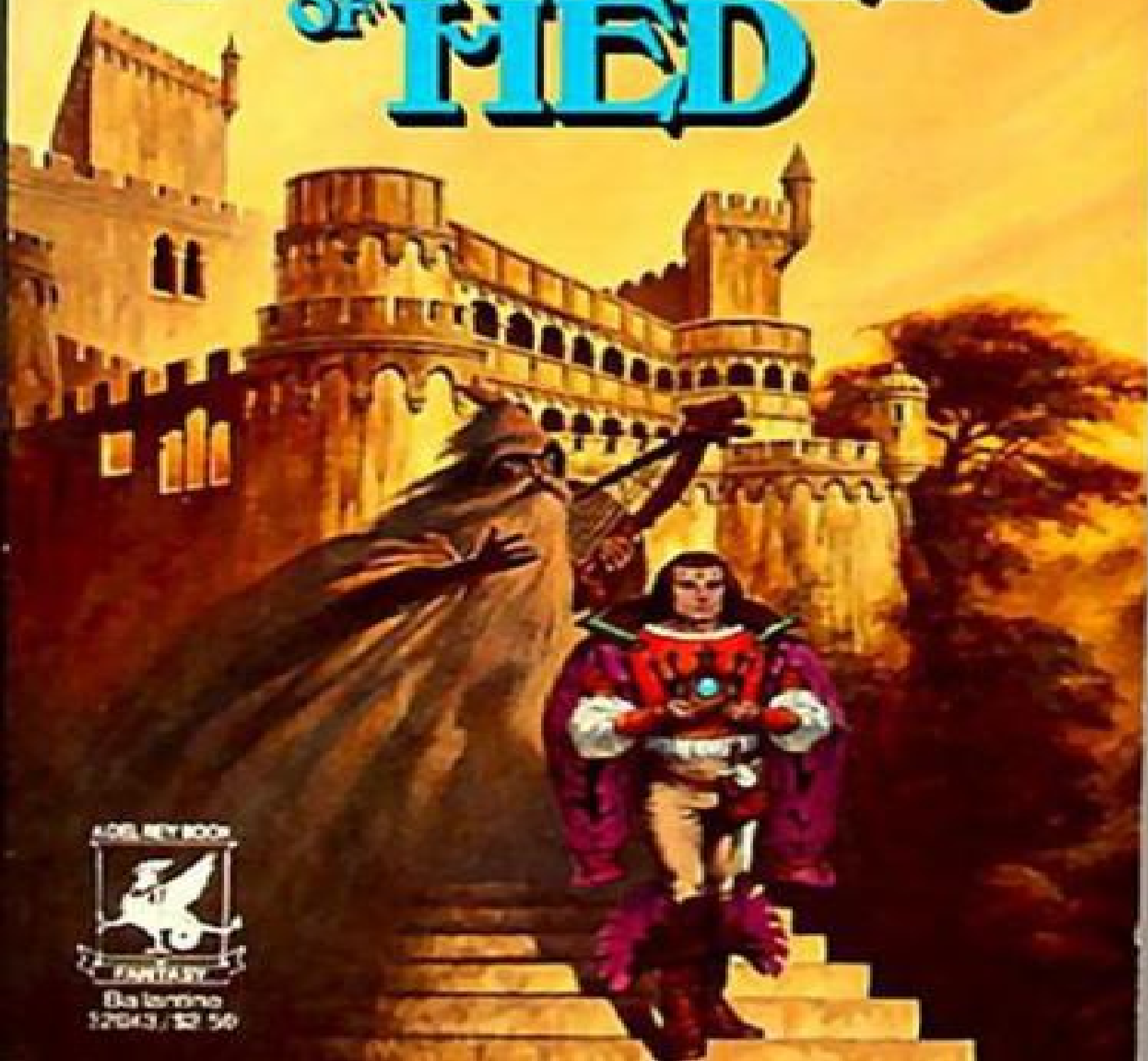


A dazzling new fantasy by the author of *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld*

**PATRICIA A. MCKILLIP**

# THE RIDDLE MASTER OF MED



# **The Riddlemaster of Hed**

**Patricia A. McKillip**

**Fantasy Masterworks Volume 19**

eGod

# Table of Contents

## [Book 1 - The Riddlemaster of Hed](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[People and Places](#)

## [Book 2 - Heir of Sea and Fire](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[People and Places](#)

[Book 3 - Harpist in the Wind](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[People and Places](#)

[About the Author](#)

# **The Riddlemaster of Hed**

For Carol

the first eleven chapters

# 1

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. A small boy caught sight of the round-hulled ships with their billowing sails striped red and blue and green, picking their way among the tiny fishing boats in the distance, and ran up the coast from Tol to Akren, the house of Morgon, Prince of Hed. There he disrupted an argument, gave his message, and sat down at the long, nearly deserted tables to forage whatever was left of breakfast. The Prince of Hed, who was recovering slowly from the effects of loading two carts of beer for trading the evening before, ran a reddened eye over the tables and shouted for his sister.

"But, Morgon," said Harl Stone, one of his farmers, who had a shock of hair grey as a grindstone and a body like a sack of grain. "What about the white bull from An you said you wanted? The wine can wait—"

"What," Morgon said, "about the grain still in Wyndon Amory's storage barn in east Hed? Someone has to bring it to Tol for the traders. Why doesn't anything ever get done around here?"

"We loaded the beer," his brother Eliard, clear-eyed and malicious reminded him.

"Thank you. Where is Tristan? Tristan!"

"What!" Tristan of Hed said irritably behind him, holding the ends of her dark, unfinished braids in her fists.

"Get the wine now and the bull next spring," Cannon Master, who had grown up with Morgon, suggested briskly. "We're sadly low on Herun wine; we've barely enough to make it through winter."

Eliard broke in, gazing at Tristan. "I wish I had nothing better to do than sit around all morning braiding my hair and washing my face in buttermilk."

“At least I wash. You smell like beer. You all do. And who tracked mud all over the floor?”

They looked down at their feet. A year ago Tristan had been a thin, brown reed of a girl, prone to walking field walls barefoot and whistling through her front teeth. Now she spent much of her time scowling at her face in mirrors and at anyone in range beyond them. She transferred her scowl from Eliard to Morgon.

“What were you bellowing at me for?”

The Prince of Hed closed his eyes. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to bellow. I simply want you to clear the tables, lay the cloths, reset them, fill pitchers of milk and wine, have them fix platters of meat, cheese, fruit and vegetables in the kitchen, braid your hair, put your shoes on and get the mud off the floor. The traders are coming.”

“Oh, Morgon ... ” Tristan wailed. Morgon turned to Eliard.

“And you ride to east Hed and tell Wyndon to get his grain to Tol.”

“Oh, Morgon. That’s a day’s ride!”

“I know. So go.”

They stood unmoving, their faces flushed, while Morgon’s farmers looked on in unabashed amusement. They were not alike, the three children of Athol of Hed and Spring Oakland. Tristan, with her flighty black hair and small, triangular face, favored their mother. Eliard, two years younger than Morgon, had Athol’s broad shoulders and big bones, and his fair, feathery hair. Morgon, with his hair and eyes the color of light beer, bore the stamp of their grandmother, whom the old men remembered as a slender, proud woman from south Hed: Lathe Wold’s daughter. She had had a trick of looking at people the way Morgon was gazing at Eliard, remotely, like a fox glancing up from a pile of chicken feathers. Eliard puffed his cheeks like a bellows and sighed.

“If I had a horse from An, I could be there and back again by supper.”

“I’ll go,” said Cannon Master. There was a touch of color on his face.

“I’ll go,” Eliard said.

“No. I want ... I haven’t seen Arin Amory for a while. I’ll go.” He glanced at Morgon.

“I don’t care,” Morgon said. “Just don’t forget why you’re going. Eliard, you help with the loading at Tol. Grim, I’ll need you with me to barter—the last time I did it alone, I nearly traded three plow horses for a harp with no strings.”

“If you get a harp,” Eliard interrupted, “I want a horse from An.”

“And I have to have some cloth from Herun,” Tristan said. “Morgon, I have to have it. Orange cloth. Also I need thin needles and a pair of shoes from Isig, and some silver buttons, and—“

“What,” Morgon demanded, “do you think grows in our fields?”

“I know what grows in our fields. I also know what I’ve been sweeping around under your bed for six months. I think you should either wear it or sell it. The dust is so thick on it you can’t even see the colors of the jewels.”

There was silence, brief and unexpected, in the hall. Tristan stood with her arms folded, the ends of her braids coming undone. Her chin was raised challengingly, but there was a hint of uncertainty in her eyes as she faced Morgon. Eliard’s mouth was open. He closed it with a click of teeth.

“What jewels?”

“It’s a crown,” Tristan said. “I saw one in a picture in a book of Morgon’s. Kings wear them.”

“I know what a crown is.” He looked at Morgon, awed. “What on earth did you trade for that? Half of Hed?”

“I never knew you wanted a crown,” Cannon Master said wonderingly. “Your father never had one. Your grandfather never had one. Your—“

“Cannon,” Morgon said. He raised his hands, dropped the heels of them over his eyes. The blood was high in his face. “Kern had one.”

“Who?”

“Kern of Hed. He would be our great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather. No. One more great. It was made of silver, with a green jewel in it shaped like a cabbage. He traded it one day for twenty barrels of Herun wine, thereby instigating—“

“Don’t change the subject,” Eliard said sharply. “Where did you get it? Did you trade for it? Or did you ... ” He stopped. Morgon lifted his hands from his eyes.

“Did I what?”

“Nothing. Stop looking at me like that. You’re trying to change the subject again. You traded for it, or you stole it, or you murdered someone for it—“

“Now, then—“ Grim Oakland, Morgon’s portly overseer, said placatingly.

“Or you just found it laying in the corncrib one day, like a dead rat. Which?”

“I did not murder anyone!” Morgon shouted. The clink of pots from the kitchen stopped abruptly. He lowered his voice, went on tartly, “What are you accusing me of?”

“I didn’t—“

“I did not harm anyone to get that crown; I did not trade anything that doesn’t belong to me for it; I did not steal it—“

“I wasn’t—“