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First Test (Protector Of The Small #1)



Synopsis

Tamora Pierce returns to the land of Tortall with a heroine who refuses to quit in this first book in the #1 New York Times bestselling Protector of the Small series. Ten years after knighthood training was opened to both males and females, no girl has been brave enough to try. But knighthood is Keladry's one true desire, and so she steps forward to put herself to the test. Up against the traditional hazing of pages and a grueling schedule, Kel faces one roadblock that seems insurmountable: Lord Wyldon, the training master of pages and squires. He is absolutely against girls becoming knights. So while he is forced to train her, Wyldon puts her on a probationary trial period that no male page has ever had to endure. Further set apart from her fellow trainees, Kel's path to knighthood is now that much harder. But she is determined to try, and she's making friends in the most unlikely places. One thing is for sure, Kel is not a girl to underestimate. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

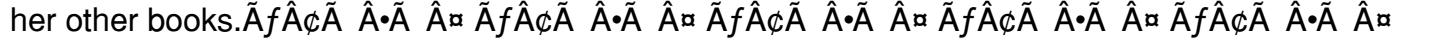
Grade 5-8-Ten years after the proclamation that girls are eligible for a page's training at the court of King Jonathan of Tortall, 10-year-old Keladry applies and is accepted, but on probation, a condition never forced on male applicants. Resolutely accepting the challenge, the hostility of the royal training master, and harassment by fellow pages, Kel makes her way through this difficult year.

Trained from early childhood by stoic Yamani warriors, she is capable of hiding her feelings, fearless in a fight, and willing to work hard to develop the necessary physical capacity. Her sympathy and support for the underdog and her sense of chivalry earn her the admiration of a group of fellow pages. She also befriends the sparrows that live outside her window and wins over a difficult horse. Kel performs well in her first real battle and is grudgingly allowed to stay for another year of training. The medieval/magical world of Tortall has been the setting for eight of the author's titles; in First Test, the first of a new series, this fantasy world is clear and well developed, allowing the book to stand on its own. Characters who may be familiar to readers of the previous titles are reintroduced successfully or remain on the sidelines. The scrappy Kel is an appealing and believable girl whose struggles to integrate a formerly all-male world are both familiar and freshly told. This is smooth storytelling and a satisfying read. Kathleen Isaacs, Edmund Burke School, Washington, DC Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Pierce begins a new sequence of books set in her imaginary kingdom of Tortall with a new heroine, 10-year-old Keladry, who must fight her way through her first year of knight training as a page. Despite Alanna's success years before (recounted in The Lioness Quartet), both the knight trainer, Lord Wyldon, and Kel's fellow pages oppose a girl being introduced into the program, so Kel uses her wits and courage to overcome the many obstacles set for her in her probationary year. Pierce takes small liberties with her medieval setting (Kel has a privy and eats with cutlery) but does a fine job making Kel's perceptions of the concrete details come to life. Part school story, complete with bullies; part fantasy with powerful evil creatures such as the disgusting Spidren; and part animal story as Kel makes friends with a flock of sparrows and bonds with her balky gelding Peachblossom, this is a splendidly rousing feast. Susan Dove Lempke --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

I have to admit that I didn't immediately fall in love with this series of Tammy's for some reason, but on every re-read I just end up more head-over-heels with both Kel and her story to the point where I'm really not sure why it didn't click with me the first time; all I know is that now I absolutely adore it and by now I've read it almost as many times as I have the Immortals despite that earlier quartet's head-start. The writing prowess demonstrated has leaped ahead compared to Tammy's by-no-means-paltry talents displayed in the first two Tortall series, part of which must doubtless be attributed to the fact that she's got so much more room in these books to let the story read since the

page-count-limits of YA fiction were greatly loosened by this time--and I could kiss J.K.Rowling's feet every day for that result alone, because the Protector of the Small quartet is glorious! The book manages to be both action-packed and thoughtful both in terms of its plot(s) and its heroine; Kel never backs down from a fight but she also insists on thinking things through. She's a wonderful student and a wonderful mentor at the same time, and watching her grow into herself is as fascinating as the burgeoning war, royal marriage, and social upheavals that serve as the foundation of the plot. And then there's the societal aspects, both in terms of Tortall (how has the world changed because Alanna is a knight? what other social changes have Thayet and Jon attempted since taking the crown? what happens when the culture and citizens of the Japan-like Yamani Islands meet the Western European-style kingdom of Tortall?) and our own world. Unfortunately many of the problems that Kel faces as the first known female page in centuries are all-too-realistic and common in our "more modern" world as well, and neither Tammy nor Kel hesitate to address how wrong these things are, whether they impact Kel directly or through her friends. This series tackles weighty issues like sexism, bullying, classism, poverty, crime, and the injustice of law head-on, all while never once sacrificing the suspense and delight of the story itself. I could not possibly love these books more and I truly believe that they ought to be required reading for every girl coming of age--and for every boy, genderqueer kid, and grown-up for that matter! It's never too late to learn, as some of those who initially balk at Kel discover, and the lessons of this quartet are as important as the story itself is engrossing. I'd give it six stars if I could.

I. The Beginning: Did It Hook Me? To be honest, yes and no. I mentioned this in previous posts, but I am very new to high fantasy YA. I honestly thought I wouldn't ever read it, but it is now one of my favorite genres. This is hilarious to me since my mother loves high fantasy and I used to tease her for reading them; my have the tables turned! I think I would have understood this book better had I read the previous ones. I didn't even know there was a whole "world" to this series. I was curious about Alanna the Lioness and was upset when we didn't learn more about her; after going to Goodreads, I now see that there's a series dedicated to her alone. And I will be reading it, along with her other books. 
II. The Characters: Could I Related to Them? Absolutely. Kel. She is ten years old, but she is wise beyond her years. Her focus is on the task at hand, she stands up for what she believes in and has a special kind of resilience. She would've been too perfect had her fear of heights not been introduced. She was a girl I could root for, the one who ran out the front door instead of up the stairs if she was being chased. I just love her! Crown. Crown is Kel's bird friend

who can't talk or express ideas, but I loved her so much! I liked how she stood by Kel, defended her and helped her in any way she could. I have the nagging suspicion someone in the palace can change into an animal, hence giving a reason for Crown's intelligence, but the jury is still out on that one.

The Plot: Was It Well Paced? Absolutely. This book was very easy read and didn't have any lagging points. I will say that the action sometimes seems misplaced in the book, though. For instance, the fight with the Spidrens is at the end of the book, but it would've help more worth had it been in the beginning. Kel is trying to prove her way in a male-dominated field; that fight would've been a perfect way to do so. Some parts of the books seemed slightly rushed, but this didn't happen often. I can honestly say some of the plot twists snuck up on me! I thought I had this whole book figured out, and then BAM something happened! I liked this, since books typically are extremely predictable.

World Building: Did I "Get" It? I don't want to say no, but I think reading the previous books will help with this. It's clear the setting of this book is in the past, but when you think of the mutations in the animals, I started thinking maybe this book is set in a post-apocalyptic future. I still don't understand the role of the trainees and their journey, but I'm learning over time. Their seem to be universal truths when it comes to fantasy, so this may just take time. I didn't have a firm grasp of where events took place or when. This book flows very well, but there really isn't a line of demarcation between "scenes".

The Ending: Did It Make Sense? Absolutely, but it could've been stronger. I loved seeing Kel triumph after so much hardwork, but it would've meant more if the writer had played up the drama. So much could've been thrown into the mix, but it wasn't. Maybe that's why I love this book; it's anything but typical.

Overall, I truly enjoyed this book. It has many positives and only a few negatives. I would highly recommend this book even to those who aren't into fantasy; it's just that good. There were a few plot holes I'm hoping will be tackled in the next book, but there was nothing terribly amiss. I recommend this book!

I have read all of Tamora Pierce's novels and I would highly recommend any of them to everyone I know! I have read each and everyone at least once a year since my first reading at age 12. Pierce's weaves a tale of glorious action and adventure for her heroines throughout every novel.

Kelandry is ten, a young girl who is dedicated to one goal: becoming a knight and doing that job with honor. When she applies, she is accepted but with reservations--she will be on probation. She accepts anyway, and begins her training in the face of open hostility from many of the school's attendees. This novel chronicles her first year: her challenges, both physical and mental, her strategies for existing as the only female in the page wing, and her resistance to the academy's head who is open about his feeling that women should not be Knights! This is a fine novel, certainly written for young adults, but loved by both my wife and myself--neither of whom could be considered "young." Read it and enjoy! And then give it to all the young teens you know!

Tamora Pierce is definitely my favorite author and the Protector of the Small is my favorite quartet. Alanna even mentions it in the book - the reason that Kel draws such admiration from her fans (and readers) is that she seems more real to people than the Legendary Champion. She's very down to earth and no nonsense, and struggles with being the first girl to openly strive for knighthood. She deals with everyday discrimination, excels despite setbacks, and stays true to her values. Kel is a strong role model for girls and her story is also a great story to read.

I bought this for a friend's daughter, I read these books growing up and I attribute like 90% of my feelings on ethics to its influence.

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