



## The Other Wind

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When his late wife's shade reaches out to him in dreams, minor wizard Alder thinks his only problem is nightmares. Yet they trouble him enough that he consults Ged, the former Archmage. The king, Lebarren, has called Ged's wife Tenar and their daughter Tehanu to court to consult about new dragon raids on the western isles. Ged, or Sparrowhawk, has lost his magic, but his long-ago venture into the dark realms still marks him. After hearing Alder's story, he thinks the two phenomena may somehow be related. He advises Alder to go to Havnor and tell his story to the king.

What follows is a sojourn at the king's court, and two linked journeys to learn what is troubling the dragons and the dead. The two problems are indeed related. There are also political issues. The frightened Kargish princess sent as a potential royal bride exasperates everyone, but Lebarren dare not send her back without risking war with Hur-at-Hur, and the Kargish are barbarians who seem to have worked out a different arrangement with death.

Lebarren and Tehanu sail west to confront the dragons; Tehanu's status as a daughter of dragons enables her to speak to them. Alder and Tenar stay in the capital. When the party returns, the dragon-woman Irian is with them, in token of a temporary truce. The bigger task awaits. Someone needs to go to the walled hill where the restless dead are, and release their souls to bring balance back to the worlds of men and dragons.

Although *The Other Wind* fits a standard quest structure, it is stronger on symbol, metaphysics, and character exploration than on edge-of-the-seat action scenes. Almost all the characters from the previous five Earthsea books appear. It is a treat to see Ged and Tenar in later life, still powerful in some ways but longing for the quiet comforts of their cliffside home. Arren, the wide-eyed young prince of The Farthest Shore, has grown up to be a good and competent king. Alder most closely fits the role of the hero who learns about life on his quest; his small talent as a magical pot-mender foreshadows his part in the mending of the world. Ursula Le Guin's images--the grim walled land where dead souls cluster, and the glorious rush of dragons flying "on the other wind"--linger in the mind long afterwards. A fitting ending (if it is) to a renowned fantasy series.

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