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An Analysis of and Guide to Tamora Pierce's *Protector of the Small* Quartet as Compared to the
Established Young Adult Fantasy Canon

By

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Many people consider fantasy literature to be the ultimate form of escapism, a fiction genre that allows the reader not only to immerse themselves in someone else's story, but to become engaged with another world entirely. The fantasy genre is wide and varied, encompassing many subgenres, but as a rule, works in the genre must contain fantastical and/or magical elements. Fantasy fiction often takes place in a fictitious setting, with some exceptions. Despite being removed from reality in these ways, many elements of the real world make their way into fantasy novels. Although the events of said novels are fictitious, they can have a huge impact on the reader. This is particularly true of young adult readers, who, at a stage in their development where they are beginning to form opinions independent from those who raised them, may absorb some of the ideologies and values portrayed in their favorite fictional characters. However, some young adult readers may find themselves searching for fantasy stories that reflect their own ideals and find that the works considered the core of the young adult fantasy canon do not align with their own views. This makes particularly significant the fact that many of these works have issues such as intrinsic racism, sexism, ableism, and a lack of support systems and role models for the young protagonists. Some of these issues are products of their time, but that does not mean that these flaws should be dismissed or excused. When discussing or reflecting on the flaws in the staples of young adult fantasy, it can be useful to have an example of how these issues can be avoided or addressed in the genre.

Tamora Pierce serves as one example of avoiding or addressing some of the common flaws in young adult fantasy. Pierce has been an inspiration for budding fantasy writers for many years, including Holly Black (*The Spiderwick Chronicles*) and Kristin Cashore (*Graceling*), two authors whose fantasy works have gained a fair amount of attention among young adult readers. Cashore specifically cites Tamora Pierce's works as an inspiration during her work on *Graceling*

and its sequels, mentioning that Pierce's use of birth control in her works "was a big influence" (Cashore). However, despite serving as an inspiration and influence on these and other well-known authors, Tamora Pierce's works have remained obscure, often unknown even to experts. There has been little scholarship on Pierce's work, and what scholarship there is largely focuses on Pierce's earlier quartets, *The Song of the Lioness* and *The Immortals*, usually with an eye towards feminist readings and commentary. As a female-assigned person, my childhood would have been greatly benefitted from a reading of Pierce's works and their portrayal of female protagonists, discussions of consent and birth control, and support systems including both peers and adults. Part of the impetus of this project is to advocate for Tamora Pierce's works to be read more widely. While all of Pierce's works are worthy of attention, this guide is limited to a discussion of Pierce's *Protector of the Small* quartet, with a focus on elements present in the quartet that are absent or otherwise lacking in more well-known works of young adult fantasy. The guide is aimed primarily at youth services and school librarians, but I anticipate it will also be useful for parents, educators, and the readers themselves. Although *Protector of the Small* is a young adult series, it is my hope and expectation that this guide will also be useful for adults who are considering reading the series.

This thesis will examine *Protector of the Small* in comparison with several other texts, each of which are considered to form a part of the body of the young adult fantasy literary canon. The texts are as follows: C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, Lloyd Alexander's *The Chronicles of Prydain*, Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass*, and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. *Harry Potter* is emphasized in this guide as an important comparison point for several reasons – firstly, because the series' influence on young adults has been massive due to its popularity. Secondly, the *Harry Potter* series was first published between 1997 and 2007, which

makes it a direct contemporary of *Protector of the Small*, first published between 1999 and 2002. As an undeniable phenomenon of popular culture, *Harry Potter* is especially interesting as a comparison point for *Protector of the Small* because, despite being published within the same timeframe, *Harry Potter* gained far more popularity. Additionally, since *Harry Potter* is such a large part of popular culture in the United States and worldwide, it will provide a more accessible comparison point for those reading this guide who may not have read all the other works referenced.

Many readers may be unfamiliar with *Protector of the Small* due to its lack of popularity compared to many other current YA fantasy texts. Tamora Pierce's official website offers the following summary:

“Keladry of Mindelan has spent her whole life wanting nothing more than to follow in the footsteps of her hero, Alanna the Lioness. Finally old enough to enter training for knighthood, she soon discovers that being allowed to train even though she's A Girl doesn't make things easier.

At every turn, Kel is forced to prove herself, not only to her teachers, but to her fellow pages and squires. Her relentless sense of justice and her inability to turn away from someone in need makes as many enemies as allies. With the return of dangerous magical creatures from the Realms of the Gods, and the looming threat of war, the Protector of the Small has a hard road ahead” (“Protector of the Small”).

The series spans four volumes which follow Kel's journey of development: *First Test*, *Page*, *Squire*, and *Lady Knight*. Kel's story is in dialogue with that of Alanna – the heroine of *The Song of the Lioness*, Pierce's first series set in Tortall. Unlike Alanna, Kel does not disguise her sex to

train as a knight, nor do the gods intervene on her behalf or grant her magical powers (May 67). Kel is an undeniably ordinary girl, extraordinary only in her relentless resolve to protect those who cannot protect themselves. For young readers, she provides a realistic protagonist who, despite exhibiting and engaging in traditionally masculine interests, still retains and is proud of her femininity, something that has been lacking in young adult fantasy up to this point.

In addition to a series' protagonist, another important element of any novel is the antagonists. Conflict, big or small, is at the center of narrative dramas, and the antagonist is often representative of that conflict in some way, particularly in YA literature. *Protector of the Small* is unique as a YA series. Unlike *Harry Potter* or *The Chronicles of Prydain*, it has no overarching villain. There are, however, three major antagonistic figures across the *Protector of the Small* quartet.

The first of these antagonistic figures is Joren of Stone Mountain, who, at the beginning of the series, is Kel's senior as a page. Joren dislikes Kel from the beginning due to her sex. As Kel is only the second woman to be able to train as a knight (and the first to do so without pretending to be a male) Joren hopes to force her to give up on her dreams, coordinating efforts to bully her. In the later books, this dislike turns out to be cruel and dangerous. At the end of her time as a page, Kel is forced to skip the mandatory examinations to become a squire to rescue her kidnapped maid, Lalasa. This incident turns out all right, but in the third book, *Squire*, Kel and her mentor, Lord Raoul, are summoned to the royal capital to attend the trial relating to Lalasa's kidnapping. There they find out that it was Joren who hired the kidnappers; despite previous assertions that he had changed, he clearly still wants to sabotage Kel (*Squire* 144).

Joren is easy to compare with one of the antagonists in *Harry Potter*, Draco Malfoy. Both serve as peer antagonists to the protagonist, and both, as readers eventually learn, have been

influenced by their family's narrow-minded views to become bullies. In order to become knights of Tortall, all squires must endure an Ordeal, which, in short, involves being locked in a chamber that contains a magical Immortal entity, which will test them overnight. At the end of Joren's Ordeal, the Chamber opens on his corpse, and his father, overcome with grief, attempts to attack Kel (*Squire* 269-271). From Joren's father's ranting – he calls Kel, among other things, a “Jumped-up merchant slut” – it is easy to see where Joren's sexist views and attitudes towards women came from (*Squire* 271). Similarly to Joren, Draco's behavior – in this case towards Muggles, people not part of the wizarding world, and wizards who descend from regular people – comes from his parents. Draco's mother and father, Lucius and Narcissa, were on Voldemort's side in the previous generation's war, but came back to the side of good wizards quickly after he disappeared, claiming they had been bewitched (*Sorcerer's Stone* 110). Lucius and Narcissa still retain the attitudes of the Death Eaters and rejoin Voldemort after he returns in the series' fourth book. Draco joins them, but has a generally bad time of it, as Voldemort forces him to perform various tasks, some of which, such as killing Albus Dumbledore, he fails at. In the final book, Draco is asked to identify Harry and his friends but says only that he “can't be sure,” avoiding looking at Harry and seeming to be actively nervous and reluctant (*Deathly Hallows* 458). Later, he insists his friends not kill Harry (*Deathly Hallows* 630). In the end, Draco's mother, Narcissa, is actually the one who has the biggest redemption, as she chooses to lie to Voldemort and pronounce Harry dead so she can enter Hogwarts to search for Draco, who is alive in the castle (*Deathly Hallows* 726). This saves the Malfoy family from being imprisoned, and years later, Harry sees Draco sending his own son off to Hogwarts, although they keep their distance from each other (*Deathly Hallows* 755-756). Although Joren, unlike Draco, loses his life for his bigoted behavior, it is worth mentioning that one of his friends, Vinson, survives his Ordeal and

is required by the Chamber to confess to beating and raping a commoner (*Squire* 259). It is assumed that the Chamber sees an opportunity for Vinson to redeem himself and allows him to live, although he is arrested and not much is heard about him afterward.

Kel's second major antagonist in the early stages of the series is Lord Wyldon of Cavall, the pages' training master and a staunch conservative who does not approve of having girls become knights. He is the one who requires Kel to be on probation her first year as a page (*First Test* 4), and throughout her time as a page, he repeatedly tests her, challenging her to do things he would not ask of the boys. However, he grows throughout the series, giving Kel jousting advice (*Squire* 248). Most important to his growth is a pivotal scene in *Squire* just after Joren's death and Vinson's arrest, when Kel learns that Wyldon is resigning his post as training master. Explaining why he feels he needs to resign, Wyldon says that "it may be that the best thing said of my tenure was that you were my student. Should that be the case, I *am* the wrong man for this post. I did all I could to get rid of you. Your probation was wrong. You know that, I know it. I was harder on you than any lad" (*Squire* 275-276). This marks a turn in Wyldon's behavior towards Kel. In the final book, *Lady Knight*, he entrusts Kel with immense responsibilities, saying she is "the only one I can trust to do this job properly" due to the care for common people Kel has exhibited throughout the series (*Lady Knight* 71). Wyldon grows from an antagonist who wants to stop Kel from achieving her goals to a supportive figure who wants to see her achieve her full potential as a commander.

The third antagonist, Blayce, who comes into play only at the end of *Squire*, much more reflects the traditional YA fantasy antagonist – pure evil to the core. Similar to characters like Voldemort from *Harry Potter*, the White Witch of Narnia and Arawn, Prydain's Lord of Death, there is little nuance to Blayce. A necromancer who claims: "I must work with what [talents] I

have” (*Lady Knight* 386), Blayce becomes Kel’s ultimate enemy. Implied to be a pedophile (*Lady Knight* 355-356; 362), Blayce has children kidnapped and brought to him to be murdered so he can bind their souls to killing devices, which are then used against Kel’s nation in battle. Unlike many other traditional fantasy antagonists, however, there is nothing enchanting or bewitching about him. As Kel notes, he is a “Nothing Man,” unremarkable in everything except his evil deeds.

What we learn from Pierce’s antagonists can be seen both on a case-by-case basis and also when considering the antagonists as a whole. When examining Joren (and along with him, Vinson), Wyldon, and Blayce together, we learn about the range of challenging, flawed, and even evil people in the real world. Pierce teaches accountability in the case of Joren and Vinson, showing that cruelty has an impact not only on the person who inflicts it, but also on their victims. Bringing Blayce into consideration, Pierce shows how unremarkable evil can sometimes be, how pointless and disappointing. Through the eventual consequences of Blayce, Vinson, and Joren’s actions, Pierce also reassures children that cruelty will be punished. Through Wyldon, she teaches a different lesson: that adults can change, acknowledge their mistakes, and become better people in the same way that children can. These same adults can also become supportive figures in time. Pierce’s antagonists serve not only as narrative obstacles for Kel, but as individuals with varying levels of complexity, motivation, and lessons for children to learn.

Turning from antagonists to sympathetic characters: an interesting quirk of young adult and children’s literature is the trend towards dead or merely absent parents. The reasons for this phenomenon are largely unknown, although it seems most plausible “that writers wished to free the children from the constraints of parental domination” (Taylor). This certainly sets child protagonists free to establish their own identities independent of their parents, but this does not

mean that the children will have no supportive adult in their lives to serve as mentor, protector, and even as surrogate parent. These adults, however, may not always be supportive from the start – they may even be hostile towards the protagonist and try to obstruct their growth. Transitioning from antagonists to supportive adults, one would have to think about *Harry Potter*'s Sirius Black, who, when he first appears in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, is framed as a criminal and a danger to Harry and his friends. Although Sirius' innocence in regard to the murders of Harry's parents is eventually proven, and he is portrayed as a kind, if incredibly traumatized man, he is not without his flaws. He can be very prone to anger, particularly when it comes to talk about his family or his past (*Order of the Phoenix* 114), which makes sense as he – like most of the adults in Harry's life – clearly suffers from untreated post-traumatic stress disorder. It is also implied, though not directly stated, that Sirius struggles with alcoholism in addition to depression during *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, as he spends the majority of the book confined to his family home (*Order of the Phoenix* 80).

Alcoholism is also portrayed in *Protector of the Small*, as well as in the larger Tortall world, but in a much different way. Lord Raoul, Kel's knightmaster, once struggled with alcoholism (*Squire* 61), and notably does not drink alcohol throughout Kel's story. After Joren's death, he comments that he needs a drink, and when Kel offers to get him one, he asks for juice or water, commenting that “[Liquor] turns me into someone I don't like” (*Squire* 272).

Throughout the latter two books in the quartet, Raoul supports and trains Kel, taking her as his squire because of her skills as a leader under pressure, and also because of her knowledge about the Yamani Islands, a country whose princess is slated to marry the Crown Prince of Tortall (*Squire* 14). As well as teaching Kel combat techniques, Raoul also gives her practical experience in other fields, from tactics to supply calculations. In one notable scene, he explains

to Kel that good commanders, like heroes, are very rare, and that her natural ability to command is part of why he is teaching her things like supply calculations for large groups (*Squire* 112-114). Pierce's portrayal of Raoul is important for young readers for several reasons. Firstly, it models not only that substance abuse struggles can be overcome but that such issues in the lives of adults can be dealt with without placing responsibility or stress on the children they care for. Pierce also shows that practical skills are important to learn as well as "fun" skills like combat techniques, as Kel later applies the skills Raoul taught her when she becomes responsible for a refugee camp.

Kel is not the only YA fantasy protagonist to learn practical, perhaps more boring skills alongside how to fight. In *The Chronicles of Prydain*, the protagonist, Taran, spends a part of the fourth book, *Taran Wanderer*, traveling and learning trades and skills from sympathetic adults he happens on. The smith, Hevydd, teaches him to forge a sword. From a woman named Dwyvach, he learns weaving, from a man, Annlaw, pottery. Along with their craft, the artisans also teach Taran valuable life lessons. It takes Taran many attempts to make a usable sword, but when he comments that he is lucky it did not take him a dozen tries, Hevydd says it was "More labor than luck!" that brought about the successful sword (*Taran Wanderer* 181). From Dwyvach, he learns that only patience and continuing to work can make weaving seem like a light task (*Taran Wanderer* 186). From Annlaw, he learns the most painful but most important lesson – that no matter how much one might desire to have a gift, sometimes all that hope is in vain. Even so, Annlaw points out, there is no waste in trying to learn (*Taran Wanderer* 198).

Kel learns hard lessons of her own, not only from Raoul, but from other adults in her life. Early on in her squire days, Kel witnesses several executions, and becomes upset at the festival-like atmosphere surrounding the ending of lives. Afterwards, clearly understanding that Kel is

upset, Commander Buri of the Queen's Riders – a battle troupe that accepts both women and men – pulls Kel aside, saying “We do what we must. We don't enjoy it,” (*Squire* 94). When Kel asks if she will ever get used to it, Buri replies “Never. There'd be something wrong with you if you did. Death, even for someone just plain bad, solves nothing” (*Squire* 94). Although, apart from Buri, Kel does not get to interact with other women as often as she would like – the knightmaster she had hoped to have, Alanna, is barred from interacting with her – when she does get to interact with other women, she forms bonds and learns lessons from them as well, as we will see. These interactions with other women, although not always frequent, show that female mentors and role models are important even for girls who may take a more “masculine” approach to life, as we will continue to see in the next section.

To return to the question of biological parents, we should touch on the role of parents – and biological family members in general – in *Protector of the Small* as well as in our comparison texts. Keeping in mind that parents are, as a rule, absent – for example, the Pevensies' parents are always conveniently away for the events of their adventures in Narnia, whether it be that their father is at war, their mother at home in London or both parents are off on a trip to America or, in the case of Harry and Taran, dead– it can be difficult to discuss the role of parents in young adult fantasy. The voids left by these dead or absent parents are usually filled by sympathetic adults, as we have previously discussed. However, this need not mean that parents have no role in the protagonists' stories.

For Lyra Belacqua of *The Golden Compass*, parents are a particularly complicated puzzle, even in this genre of the dead and absent. Although brought up to believe her father perished in an airship accident, she learns that her father is actually alive, and that his true identity is that of her guardian and ‘uncle,’ the fierce and mysterious Lord Asriel (Pullman 121).

Worse still for Lyra is the revelation of her mother's identity. Almost in the same moment that she learns of her father's identity, she realizes that her mother is none other than Mrs. Coulter, a proud and malevolent woman who took Lyra from her childhood home at Jordan College. Throughout the story, Lyra has to fight against her parents – to flee and escape from Mrs. Coulter repeatedly, and to confront Lord Asriel as he, too, betrays her by sacrificing her childhood friend, Roger, to open a pathway to another world (Pullman). For Lyra, parents are a cause of suffering and loss, rather than people who care for and protect her.

On the other end of the spectrum is Harry Potter, whose mother's unconditional love saved his life as an infant and protects him from Voldemort years later (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* 299). Although his parents are dead, they serve as a source of love and comfort for him throughout the series, albeit usually indirectly. But in the final book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry uses the broken Resurrection Stone to fetch his parents, along with Sirius Black and Remus Lupin, who, he notes, are in reality there to fetch him, as he is about to die (*Deathly Hallows* 698). His parents, "less substantial than living bodies, but much more than ghosts," praise him, telling him how brave he has been and how proud they are of him (*Deathly Hallows* 699). On his journey through the forest, his parents and mentors stay with him, until the moment of his final confrontation with Voldemort. Just as his mother's love saved his life as a child, Harry's parents give him strength and courage at the end of the series. But the fact remains that, for the entirety of Harry's journey, they are dead. They and the parents of many other YA fantasy protagonists do not raise their children, form bonds with them, and support them through the challenges of growing up in the way that real, good parents do.

In *Protector of the Small*, the matter of the protagonist's parents is much different than it is for most of the protagonists we see in classic young adult fantasy. Kel's parents are perfectly

alive and well, but since she spends the majority of the series away from home, first in training and then as a knight of the realm, she rarely sees them. However, we see throughout the series that Kel's parents love her and support her decisions, despite being often absent from her story. Both Kel's father, Piers, and mother, Ilane, support her decision to study as a page, although they know that it will not be easy for her and that she may be sent home after only a year (*First Test* 17). Interestingly, we see early on that it is Ilane, not Piers, who is the more skilled warrior of the two parents. As a young girl, Kel spent considerable time in the Yamani Islands, where her parents worked as diplomats between the Yamani people and their home country of Tortall. In a flashback-sequence dream, the ten-year-old Kel remembers a time when the Yamani palace was attacked by pirates. At that time, it was Ilane who defended her child against the invaders using her skills with the glaive, a weapon unique to the Yamani people (*First Test* 20-22). It is this memory, among other things, that inspires Keladry to become a knight.

Ilane's influence on her daughter is not just limited to being an example of a woman warrior. She openly talks with Kel about other, more mundane parts of life as a cisgender woman – and Kel does not hesitate to go to her mother with concerns related to things like puberty. In *Page*, Kel spends time with her parents at their house in Tortall's capital city of Corus, and confides in her mother that she feels upset that she has gotten her period and started developing breasts as an eleven-year-old. Ilane, who experienced puberty later on in adolescence than Kel, sympathizes with her daughter. She also imparts Kel with some advice: “Remember—you may be able to do so, but no one can force you to have babies” (*Page* 121).

Ilane's openness to talking about puberty and sexuality with Kel allows her daughter to come to her with questions during her years as a squire as well. As a fourteen-year-old squire, Kel starts to feel interest in romantic relationships, something that her knight-master, Raoul,

cautions her about when he realizes that she and a fellow squire, Cleon, are interested in each other (*Squire* 218). Although Raoul offers to explain “issues of the body—sex, pregnancy, and so on,” Kel opts to discuss things with her mother, something which Raoul is more than happy to accept (*Squire* 219). Ilane’s advice is both hopeful – as she notes, Kel has more freedom than most young noblewomen because she has chosen knighthood rather than being married off as a lady – and practical. Ilane criticizes the nobility’s traditions when it comes to sex and marriage, stating that “[common people] know that a woman’s body belongs to herself and the Goddess” (*Squire* 220). Although Kel is – and remains, unlike some of Pierce’s other heroines – convinced that she does not want to have sex with anyone, Ilane still advises her to get an anti-pregnancy charm, a magical form of birth control, in case she changes her mind (*Squire* 222). Such a responsible discussion of sex and birth control is rare to find even in reality, let alone in fiction. Kel’s mother, along with other adults in her life, trust and encourage her to make her own decisions when it comes to her body, which is a true rarity among the many other young adult fantasy books where parents are scarcely present at all.

Kel’s interactions with her parents truly underscore the value of Pierce’s work. Although they are not always present in the narrative, Ilane and Piers support their daughter in whatever ways they can. In a genre where supportive parents are often absent or dead, and where their absence is often felt keenly by the young protagonists, readers who gravitate towards fantasy may not find many examples of good parents in literature. This adds to the value of Kel’s parents, particularly her mother, as people that she feels safe coming to in times of crisis. This normalizes supportive, open, non-judgmental communication between parents and children even when it comes to topics like puberty and sex, providing children with a benchmark for their own

parents and giving them an excellent example to follow in the event that they, too, one day have children.

There is one group of people more important than mentors, teachers, and even parents to the young adult mind: peers. Although young adult protagonists can often find themselves isolated from helpful adults, most have at least one, if not several friends around their own age to assist in their quest. Inversely, these young people often also have rivals or outright enemies in their peer group.

In *Harry Potter*, it can sometimes be difficult to identify which peers are friends and which are enemies, if one leaves aside the assertions in the narrative that Ron and Hermione are Harry's and each other's friends and looks only at their interactions. From the beginning of the series, Harry, Ron, and Hermione have a somewhat turbulent friendship. An intelligent, yet overeager student, Hermione tries to overcompensate for her non-wizarding background, often ending up in conflict with Ron. Although Ron comes from a wizarding family, he has spent his life being compared to his older brothers, and this has led to him having jealous tendencies toward more "gifted" or extraordinary individuals. This leads to tension between Ron and Hermione, especially in the first book of the series, when they are not yet friends. In Charms class, Ron fails to pronounce a spell correctly, while Hermione manages it easily after snapping at him about the pronunciation, putting him in a bad mood. At the end of the class, Ron mentions to Harry that "It's no wonder no one can stand [Hermione]. She's a nightmare, honestly," causing Hermione to burst into tears and run away to hide in the girls' bathroom (*Sorcerer's Stone* 171-172). However, Ron accompanies Harry to warn Hermione about a troll that has broken into the dungeons of Hogwarts later the same day, and the boys are able to rescue her. Hermione takes the blame for the incident – startling Ron so much he drops his wand – and

afterwards, the three are fast friends (*Sorcerer's Stone* 177-179), though not without their share of arguments.

In *Protector of the Small*, although Kel is somewhat isolated among her peers at first due to her status as a girl, she is, like Harry, not without one fast friend from the beginning. When, upon the new pages' arrival at the castle to be trained, Lord Wyldon calls for someone to take Kel under their wing and show her the ways of a page, a self-described "rash and peculiar" boy, Nealan of Queenscove, volunteers (*First Test* 33). Although Nealan is fifteen – five years older than Kel is at this stage – the two quickly become friends, despite initial misgivings on Kel's part. Although at first they remain isolated, with Kel as the only girl among their peer group and Nealan as by far the oldest, in time Kel gains a large group of friends, in no small part due to her inability to sit idly by while some of the older pages abuse the boys in her own year by taking their hazing traditions too far (*First Test* 143). Kel often leaves the study group to patrol the halls for older boys bullying the younger ones, and Nealan, after catching on to it, confronts her, stating: "I'm your friend and what you're doing worries me sick!" (*First Test* 148). The other boys in their study group join in on the conversation, with some advocating for Kel to let their peers' behavior go as a natural part of the hazing tradition. As her older friends argue that things have always been this way and should be allowed to continue, Kel argues her own position: "this custom leads to worse things. Cleon sends me for papers, but someone else traps a first-year in a corner and keeps making him do stupid tasks. He'll maybe hit the first-year [...] and that is dead wrong" (*First Test* 150). After Kel brings up that if they don't protect the small and weak now, how can they start doing that as knights, Nealan admits that "the best lesson I've ever had on chivalry came from [Kel]" (*First Test* 151) and joins her efforts to stop the hazing. As the days go by, more of their friends join their patrols – with one notable exception, the crown prince of

Tortall, Roald. Although Roald clearly wants to join them, he is unable to due to his position, and his peers respect that, allowing him to refrain from taking part without pressuring him to join in (*First Test* 154).

Throughout the series, Kel's friends continue to support her. In the final book, *Lady Knight*, Kel makes the decision to go against her superiors' wishes and cross the border with Scanra, the country against which Tortall is at war, in order to rescue a group of captured refugees she has spent the better part of the book caring for. She knows that she is committing treason by defying her orders, and does not care if she loses her knighthood or is executed because of her decision. Astonishingly, after they realize she's gone, Kel's friends – including Neal and many among her initial study group peers – set out to fetch her back to Tortall (*Lady Knight* 263-266). However, once they reach Kel – who is accompanied by a substantial group of soldiers she formed relationships with as a squire – they unanimously decide to accompany her on her rescue mission, despite Kel's pleas for them to return home (*Lady Knight* 283). With their help, Kel is able to rescue the kidnapped refugees and bring them home to Tortall, something she could never have done alone.

Kel's friends do not talk about her behind her back or snipe at each other, as Ron and Hermione continue to do throughout the *Harry Potter* series. Rather, they are loyal young people with strong moral codes that have been influenced for the better by their friendship with Kel. Kel is able to rely on her friends to have her back, even when she wants to do things all on her own. Although she sometimes has to face her battles alone, there is always a reason for her friends' absence, and when they can, they come to her aid as quickly as they can, just as they do in *Lady Knight*. Not only does this show children what a loyal and strong friend group looks like, it also provides them a goal to strive for when it comes to how to support their own friends. In half a

page, Kel's friends realize why she has chosen to try to go alone to rescue the refugees, and thereafter, immediately rally and make a plan to go after her and support her (*Lady Knight* 264-266). A strong contrast to this is how, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, for seventy pages – during which time Harry *dies* – Ron and Hermione know neither where he is, nor that he is in the process of sacrificing himself.

Sometimes set apart from peers, sometimes utilized as a part of that same subset, are siblings. Some children may think of their siblings as their best friends; others may fear or even hate their siblings for a variety of reasons. An interesting example of sibling dynamics can be seen in Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, which features the four Pevensie siblings as its protagonists, particularly the youngest sister, Lucy. With the four siblings and their relationships as a focal point of the novel, there is much to analyze. After Lucy's first adventure into Narnia, where time does not flow as it does in our world, she comes back out of the wardrobe not realizing that no time has passed in our world while she was away. When she attempts to show her siblings where she was, the path to Narnia does not open, leading her siblings to think she is lying. Her siblings' disbelief makes Lucy "very unhappy. The two older ones did this without meaning to do it, but Edmund could be very spiteful, and on this occasion he was spiteful" (Lewis 26). Now, after some time, Edmund, who is the next youngest sibling, finds his own way into Narnia, and after having his own adventure, meets up with Lucy and admits she was right. However, when faced with their older siblings' questions, Edmund denies the existence of Narnia, upsetting Lucy again. The oldest brother, Peter, becomes angry with him, saying that "what good do you think you'll do by jeering and nagging at her one day and encouraging her the next?" (Lewis 46). Still, though, Peter believes Lucy is lying, until the day that all four siblings find themselves in Narnia together. At that point, struck with the reality of

the world within the wardrobe, Peter “turned at once to Lucy. ‘I apologize for not believing you,’ he said. ‘I’m sorry. Will you shake hands?’”. Lucy, of course, makes up with him, and the matter is solved (Lewis 55), since now that they know Lucy is telling the truth, Peter is genuinely sorry for his behavior.

Sibling troubles, however, do not end with the Pevensies’ entrance into Narnia together. Edmund, corrupted by the White Witch, the story’s antagonist, leaves the group and joins her, although it is noted that “You mustn’t think that even now Edmund was quite so bad that he actually wanted his brother and sisters to be turned into stone” (Lewis 89). Interestingly, it is noted that not only does Edmund partially want to get back at Peter for being angry at him earlier, but Peter himself takes responsibility for Edmund’s betrayal, saying that “I was angry with him and I think that helped him to go wrong” (Lewis 128). In the end, luckily, Edmund is rescued, having realized his error, and after he apologizes, the four siblings are all friends again. Together, they spend many happy years as kings and queens in Narnia, and, after returning to their own world and finding themselves children again, they go back to Narnia together a second time. Edmund and Lucy return to Narnia a third time, along with their cousin Eustace, and it seems that the siblings’ relationship suffers no real damage from Edmund’s betrayal.

Although Kel’s siblings play a very small role in *Protector of the Small*, their interactions with Kel are still comparable to those of the Pevensies. Throughout the quartet, Kel’s fear of heights is a major obstacle that she has to work on conquering. This fear was brought about by Kel’s older brother, Conal, teasingly holding her over the edge of a tower balcony as a child (*First Test* 8-9). Although Conal’s actions were joking, they have real consequences for Kel, and these are reflected in the story, unlike with Edmund’s betrayal, where the siblings make up and are not shown to struggle with fear or bitterness afterwards. Kel also has a very positive

relationship with her other older brother, Anders, who worries about her and offers advice as she prepares to go to page training. Anders warns his sister about the hazing rituals and encourages her to stand up for herself so that the older pages will leave her alone (*First Test* 18). Years later, when Kel is a squire, Anders approaches her to ask if she will talk to his oldest son, Lachran, about page training, which is upcoming for Kel's young nephew. Kel is happy to oblige, remembering how Anders advised her when she was starting out as a page (*Squire* 304). With her sisters, Kel has a more complicated relationship – as the youngest and not so traditionally ladylike, Kel is not very close to her older sisters, Adie and Orië. When she is assigned to wait on a table of nobles including her sisters at a palace festival, the sisters are at first alarmed to see Kel, as they feel her presence may disrupt Adie's prospects with a young nobleman whose mother is also in attendance (*Page* 76). However, when one of the company at their table disrespects Kel, Adie and Orië give her “a look that promised trouble,” which almost makes Kel feel sorry for the disrespectful girl, who will be a victim of her sisters' inventive revenge. Having been dismissed from the table, Kel makes sure to tell Adie she hopes her prospective suitor is worth it, to which she replies he is (*Page* 78). Small though these interactions may be, they show the complexities of sibling relationships, as well as the real consequences that siblings' choices can have on each other. This is a much more realistic portrayal of sibling relationships than that of many other YA fantasy works, where siblings may constantly bicker or suddenly get over their differences at a moment's notice. For children who have siblings, this shows that their nuanced and sometimes difficult relationships with their siblings are normal, and, similarly, shows that children may have a different relationship with each of their siblings, as Kel does with hers.

There are many more qualities of the *Protector of the Small* series that could be drawn out, and an equal number of comparisons to classic YA fantasy works that could be made. However, from this short guide, we can learn a few things about what qualities readers might appreciate in the series. First, there is a full range of interesting antagonists, some of whom are presented as villains and villains alone, and some who receive incredible redemption arcs and become supportive adults. Although Kel faces a lot of opposition from people around her, she also always has someone to support her, whether it be in the form of supportive mentors like Raoul and Buri, peers like Neal, or her biological family. Readers who are looking for a world that portrays not only the bad but also the good in adults and peers will likely enjoy *Protector of the Small*, and may even find the series to be a calming escape from aspects of their own lives that are not supportive or welcoming.

It should also not be lost on the reader of this guide that *Protector of the Small*, like the majority of Pierce's work, focuses on a female lead character who, while she displays some traditionally masculine traits, is still proud of her femininity. This representation is important and influential for young women, so even if readers do not like all the aspects discussed in this guide, they might still enjoy this or another of Pierce's works.

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