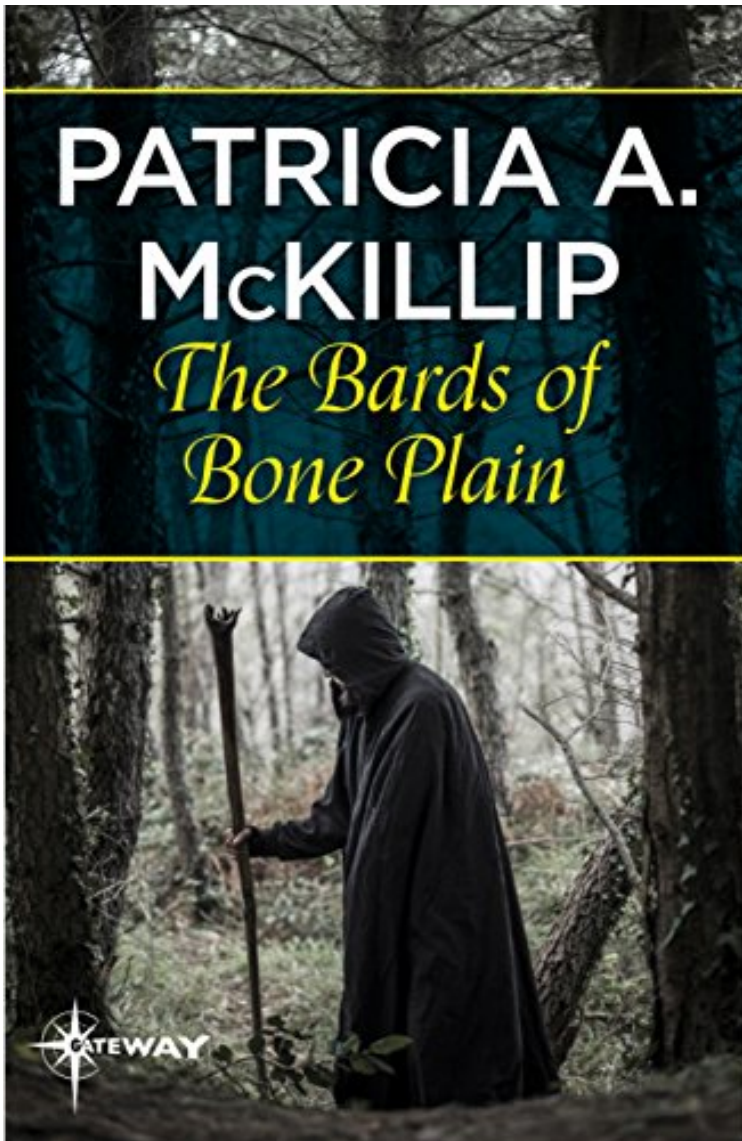


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The Bards of Bone Plain (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurEager to graduate from the school on the hill, Phelan Cle chose Bone Plain, oft immortalised by poets and debated by scholars, for his final paper because he thought it would be an easy topic. It was commonly accepted - even at a school steeped in bardic tradition - that Bone Plain, with its three trials, three terrors and three treasures, was nothing more than a legend, a metaphor. But as his research leads him to the life of Nairn, the Wandering Bard, the Unforgiven, Phelan starts to wonder if there are any easy answers...ExtraitDeclan smiled. "I offered to come. I wanted to hear what strange music has grown along the edge of the world."They studied him curiously, all suspicion gone. "Another wanderer," one decided. "Like Nairn." "Nairn."They gestured toward the young harper. "He can play anything; he's been everywhere around the Marches. He's heard it all."The golden eyes, glinting like coins, studied Nairn. Nairn,

meeting the unblinking, dispassionate gaze, felt oddly as though his world had shifted sideways, overlapped itself to give him an unexpected vision of something he didn't know existed. The feeling echoed oddly in his memories. Astonished, he recognized it: the other time he had wanted something with all his bones and didn't know what it was. Declan smiled. Wordless, Nairn tipped his harp in greeting. The older bard came over to him, sat on the bench beside him. "Play," Declan urged. "Some song from the sea." Nairn shook his head slightly, found his voice. "You first. They're all tired of listening to me by now, and so am I. Play us something from your world." The men rumbled their agreement. Declan inclined his head and opened his harp case. The harp came out dancing with light. Uncut jewels inset deeply into the face of the harp glowed like mermaid's tears, green, blue, red, amber in the firelight. The men shifted, murmuring with wonder, then were dead still as the harper played a slow, rich, elegant ballad the like of which Nairn had never heard. It left a sudden, piercing ache in his heart, that there might be a vast sea-kingdom of music he did not know and might never hear. The wanderer who had enchanted the pigs with his voice and had calloused his feet hard as door slats had glimpsed the castle in the distance, with its proud towers and the bright pennants flying over them. Such lovely, complex music was no doubt common as air within those walls. And there he stood on the outside, with no right to enter and no idea how to charm his way in. With a bladder-pipe? The ballad ended. The men sat silently, staring at the harper. "Sad," one breathed finally, of the princess who had fled her life on her own bare feet to meet her true love in secret, only to find him dead in their trysting bower with her husband's wedding ring lying in the hollow of his throat. Another spoke, after another silence. "Reminds me of a ballad my wife sings. Only it's a sea-maid, not a princess, and her husband is sea-born as well, but her own true love is a mortal man, drowned by a wave and found in the sand with a black pearl on his throat." Nairn saw a familiar kindling in Declan's eye. "Please," the bard said. "Sing it for me." "Ah, no," the man protested, trying to shift to safety behind his friends. "I couldn't. Not for you." "I'll sing with you," Nairn suggested promptly. "I know it." You see? their faces told Declan as Nairn began. He knows everything. They were all singing it toward the end, all the villagers with their voices rough as brine-soaked wool, trying to imitate the older bard's deep, tuned, resonant voice. Declan listened silently, harp on his knee, hands resting upon it. He was hardly moving. Maybe it was his breathing that kept the harp moving imperceptibly, the jewels glittering with firelight, then darkening, then gleaming again, catching at Nairn's eyes as he played. For the first time in his life he saw some use for what he only knew as words in poetry: gold, jewels, treasure. He was born poor; he took his music for free; it cost no more than air or water. But there were other songs, he realized, other music, maybe even other instruments secreted away where only those who possessed gold, wore jewels, were permitted to go. The jewels, fair blue as sky, green as river moss, fire red, teased him, lured his eyes when he ignored them. He met Declan's eyes once, above the jewels; they told him nothing more than mist. He had stolen things in his life, but only to keep on living: eggs out of a coop, a cloak left on a bush to dry, a pair of sandals when his feet grew bigger than his shoes. Things he needed. Never anything like this. Never anything he wanted, mindlessly, with all his heart: these jewels, useless, brilliant, indolent creatures, doing no one any good, just flaunting their wealth and beauty on the face of a harp whose supple, tender voice would not change so much as a tremor if the jewels vanished. He heard Declan's voice then, softly pitched to reach him beneath the singing. "Take them. If you can." He met the bard's eyes again, found them again wide, unblinking, oddly metallic, the pupils more like coins than human eyes. Like the jewels burning on his harp, they lured, teased, challenged. Nairn dropped his eyes, pitched every note, sang every word of longing and passion in the ballad to all the music he had never heard, might never hear, the treasure-hoard of it, hidden away like forbidden love behind windowless walls, within indomitable towers. He scarcely noticed when the ballad came to an end; he heard only the longing and loss in his heart. His fingers stilled. He heard an ember keen, a twig snap. No one spoke, except the fire, the wind, the sea. Then, as he stirred finally, he heard an odd ping against the flagstones, and then another, as though, beneath his feet, some very ancient instrument were turning itself. Another. He looked down, found the jewels had melted like tears down the harp face, slid to his feet. He stared at Declan, whose eyes held a pleased, human smile. The men at the tables were beginning to shift a bone, draw a breath. "They go where they are summoned," the bard said. "Take them. They came to you." Presentation de l'diteur Eager to graduate from the school on the hill, Phelan Cle chose Bone Plain, oft immortalised by poets and debated by scholars, for his final paper because he thought it would be an easy topic. It was commonly accepted - even at a school steeped in bardic tradition - that Bone Plain, with its three trials, three terrors and three treasures, was nothing more than a legend, a metaphor. 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