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The Far West (Frontier Magic Book 3)



Synopsis

From #1 New York Times bestselling author Patricia C. Wrede, the fantastic conclusion to her tale of magic on the western frontier. Eff is an unlucky thirteenth child...but also the seventh daughter in her family. Her twin brother, Lan, is a powerful double seventh son. Her life at the edge of the Great Barrier Spell is different from anyone else's that she knows. When the government forms an expedition to map the Far West, Eff has the opportunity to travel farther than anyone in the world. With Lan, William, Professor Torgeson, Wash, and Professor Ochiba, Eff finds that nothing on the wild frontier is as they expected. There are strange findings in their research, a long prairie winter spent in too-close quarters, and more new species, magical and otherwise, dangerous and benign, than they ever expected to find. And then spring comes, and the explorers realize how tenuous life near the Great Barrier Spell may be if they don't find a way to stop a magical flood in a hurry. Eff's unique way of viewing magic has saved the settlers time and again, but this time all of Columbia is at stake if she should fail.

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Customer Reviews

"The Far West" is the third entry in Patricia Wrede's 'Frontier Magic' trilogy of an alternate colonial America, where there is magic aplenty on the frontier just west of the Mammoth (Mississippi) River. There are also large mammals that in our 'real' time-line died out at the end of the Pleistocene 10,000 years ago, e.g. Woolly Mammoths and Sabertooth Tigers. These critters compete with the human settlers for their crops and sometimes their lives, but they also have to contend with magical animals. There's one particularly nasty entity called a 'steam dragon' that could eat a horse and rider for breakfast and then polish off a farmer's dairy herd for lunch. In "Thirteenth Child," the first book in this series, we watched Eff Rothmer, the unluckiest of thirteen children, the thirteenth child of a Professor of Magic grow from age five to eighteen and slowly come to grips with her own magical talent. Her twin brother, Lan is the fourteenth child and also the seventh son of a seventh son. Everyone expects great magic from Lan, and he is sent off to one of the great Eastern colleges of magic to further his talent. In "Across the Great Barrier" when a classroom spell goes horribly wrong, Eff rescues her brother and they return to Mill City on Columbia's Western frontier. Book 2 ends with the discovery of yet another magical monstrosity that the magical twins must pit themselves against. Book 3 gets off to a slow start, spending much print on character building and relationships. If nothing else, readers can guess right away from the cover illustration that Eff is going to be a member of the expedition that travels into the unknown Far West, all the way to the Rocky Mountains. When the magical twins finally set off with the band of explorers, scientists, and Army specialists, we are very well acquainted with all of the major characters. One of the most interesting aspects of "The Far West" is the meticulous detail of how the expedition is set up and operates on the trail. The explorers must stop and hole up for the winter, drying meat, collecting fodder for the horses (and a mammoth!), and building strong barricades against the aggressive wildlife. There are also pressing magical mysteries to solve and new, very dangerous critters to battle. No wonder the Lewis and Clark Expedition in this alternate America vanished into the unknown! "The Far West" is a satisfying read in spite of its slow start, and left me hoping that Patricia Wrede might continue this intriguing series. After all, we've only gotten as far as the Rockies, and there is an impending magical Armageddon that has been delayed but not resolved.

I loved this series, from #1 through #3, and I think it kept getting better. "The Far West" takes us on an ambitious expedition into unknown territory... and also has Eff, our narrator, really coming into

her strengths. Eff is a twin. She's also the 13th child of her parents- seen by some as inherently unlucky/evil- and the twin of a 7th son of a 7th son, traditionally extremely powerful in magic. In #1 she got over that, mostly... and in 2 and 3 she's figuring out her own strengths, which enable her to do things that no one else can handle. Part of this is that she is independently-minded, and learned early to take things people tell her with a certain amount of salt. It is also true that while her brother is quite powerful- he is also lacking in common sense and responsibility; for many years she provided these for him, because he was the star and she was probably a curse- or so many in her extended family said. I can see readers not warming up to her, though I found her wonderful. She tends to the laconic; is not exuberantly emotive; and is very practical and responsible. I liked these. And I liked that as she grew and came into her own, she started being increasingly able to resist the pressures- subtle and obvious- that others tried to impose; this is an excellent lesson for most people, especially girls. The story arc did end here. I rather hope Wrede re-visits the "Frontier Magic" world at some point, though, because I'd love to read more set in it. It's one of the most original alternative worlds that I've read recently. Very recommended- but do start with #1!

I have enjoyed all of the Frontier Magic books, but this one may well be my favorite. The characters develop nicely, building on what has happened in previous books and moving forward to their individual destinies, and we have the introduction of some new and interesting ones. The different types of magic are very well portrayed, as well as Eff's own exploration of her abilities and special viewpoint. Eff also has to make some very serious choices about her future. Lan, William, Wash, Professors Torgeson and Ochiba are very much present and facing serious decisions and situations. New crisis and new creatures abound. And the conclusion wraps up very neatly, settling some old questions while creating new possibilities. While the book nicely wraps up things for the various characters, there is definitely room for more exploration beyond the "Far West".

This is an absolutely fantastic book. It does not fit neatly into any category, so do not go into it with expectations. Patricia Wrede is a greatly talented writer and storyteller, which this book highlights. Characterization and interaction are the basis of the book, and they are excellent.

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