



The Hob's Bargain

Patricia Briggs

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Beauty and The Beast

Hated and feared, magic was banished from the land. But now, freed from the spells of the wicked bloodimages, magic—both good and evil—returns. And Aren of Fallbrook feels her own power of sight strengthen and grow...

Overcome by visions of mayhem and murder, Aren vows to save her village from the ruthless raiders who have descended upon it—and killed her family. With the return of wildlings to the hills and forests, she strikes a bargain with the Hob, a magical, human-like creature imbued with the power of the mountains. But the Hob is the last of his kind. And he will exact a heavy price to defend the village—a price Aren herself must pay...

The Hob's Bargain Details

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Author : Patricia Briggs

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From Reader Review The Hob's Bargain for online ebook

KatieV says

I really enjoyed this early Briggs outing. Her talent for fully fleshed-out characters is really starting to shine.

The book begins on the last day of normal life for newly married farmer's wife Aren and her medieval/fantasy world village. In the first chapter she loses her entire family and the world as everyone knows it is gone.

Aren had 'the sight', mostly feelings of dread accompanied by small visions that could only make sense in hindsight. It was a useless, torturous, and secret curse. Magic had long ago been bound, limiting the powers of those who possess it and banishing all of the Fae creatures to a deep sleep. People had stopped worshiping the old gods and now prayed to 'The One God' who was of the 'do not suffer a witch to live' variety.

On the same day that a group of murdering, outlaw raiders terrorize the village, the magic is suddenly unbound. Aren's visions are no longer so vague or secret and the Fae creatures return.

The Hob is one of the Fae, newly awakened from sleep. Unlike most, he does not hate mankind and, as the last of his kind, he needs a wife. He makes a bargain with the village to marry Aren within a year if they agree he has helped them survive in this new and dangerous world.

I was very drawn in, but admit I'm spoiled by Briggs series that allow us to more deeply explore themes and relationships. There was a lot to explore in this little standalone - fear, loneliness, prejudice, forgiveness, the nature of evil, and several other gems. We also get a sweet developing romance between Aren and the Hob. There were some things that I felt needed expanding upon and I'd have loved to have seen this dealt with over several books rather than just the one. It was probably a reflection of Briggs place in her career. She likely didn't have the leverage to convince a publisher this needed to be anything more than a standalone.

Grace says

It's a credit to Briggs that I was on my library's website and, on impulse, thought, "Eh, whatever. Let's order The Hob's Bargain." If your booklist is anywhere near as large as mine, books might have the tendency to... disappear in the other large amount of books. A lot. I wasn't looking at any of Briggs books at the time. I wasn't looking at paranormal books, that I can remember. But I remembered the title of the book, the author, and I remembered Caefawn's tail.

Isn't that so weird? I just remember liking it and I felt like reading fantasy so... here I am!

If you read a lot, you might notice that rereading a book a year or two later either finds you wondering why you loved such a shoddy book, or how you missed the subtle nuances and cleverness of the book in question book. This was one of those books for me. I did enjoy rereading it, but I noticed some things in it that I didn't before.

The plot/story arc/pacing of this story sometimes stumbled over itself. It focused on the raiders a good percent of the time. Only I felt like the bloodmage scene was supposed to - and could've - been more climactic if the bloodmage was worked in more before that point. There were hints of it throughout the book of course, and you could almost feel Nahag looming, but the way Briggs set it up... One would've feared the bandits more. The one thing I kept expecting to happen only happened once and then it was quickly left behind: the spirits/faen/elementals attacking. There were several places where this story could've gone and I think Briggs finally decided towards the end to make it be the bloodmages. So it definitely seemed rushed at points. A compact book, for sure, and I wish it was longer and she delved into it more. The world she created here was beautiful and amazing and I wish that I could've seen more of it, learned more about Hob mountain and what happened to the hobs and the king and the bloodmages and everything. Her focus was all over the place, just barely scraping by in a way.

The characters could've been fleshed out more, Aren especially. While I did get emotions from her, and felt fear and weariness when she did, considering how it started off, I feel like an event such as that doesn't let anyone bounce back that easy. Come on, raiders killed her family. I know she was in shock, and saw their deaths beforehand with her sight, but no one gets over deaths of family members (and, hello, her husband!) that easily! I did like Aren as a character, though. I honestly think Briggs could've explored more aspects and emotional turmoil for Aren's character, but for a small, compact read, Aren worked.

Caefawn... Boy, do I wish we saw more of his side of the story. And more details to how he was a servant to the mountain. The hob was my favorite character in all of this. He pretty much became my favorite when he knelt and said, "Your tree branch, my lady." I was done from there. However, my main issue with Aren and Caefawn is that, while they meshed, I felt like their love bloomed far too quickly. What was it Aren thought? Something like "And, looking at him, I realized I loved him." I wish I were kidding. I was like, "Whoa, when did this happen?" And when the bloodmage had done his part and Caefawn thought she was dying, and she looked at him and realized he loved her I went, "What? She saw that in his eyes?" Neither of them really... enunciated it clearly enough for my comfort. He called her "love" and "my sweet" but, well, Caefawn, in the right mood, can be a flirt. I wanted them together. I did. But their relationship is rocky at best (come on, she's the "sacrifice" in the bargain! surely that's an issue for others and not just me!) and even with a fluffy ending I still feel like Briggs could make a second book on the trials and tribulations of this pair.

And my final issue with this book: the hob. Which sounds odd, doesn't it? Caefawn. I loved him, I did. He came across complex, even without much effort on Briggs's part to flesh him out. I wished I could've seen more of his story. But for now, let's go over this. He had fangs. Pointed ears that flick, sometimes against his head (think like what a horse or cat does). He has claws. Grayish/brownish skin. And a tail. He's another race all together. Now, ironically, Briggs sums it up perfectly for me here from the book itself:

"... One year from today we will meet again. If you all agree I have helped the village survive, you will present me with a woman of childbearing years to wife. Think long and hard, gentlemen, before you agree. Death might seem worse, but mating with a creature outside of your race is no light thing."

There you go. Another creature. Mating. This isn't Beauty and the Beast. Aren is not a beauty. Her looks come across average from the brief insights we had of her. Which is fine, but that makes it more clear that this is not a Beauty and the Beast tale. And the hob... The Beast, running with the analogy, is human. He was cursed by a witch with a monster's body, but if a girl could love him for what he truly was on the inside, and if he could change his ways, he would change back. He looked like a monster, but he was at the root of it all a human. And Beauty found that out eventually too. They fell in love, happy ending, both human, etc. The hob? Another race entirely. He had a tail. *points clearly at said tail and enunciates clearly* A tail, people. As much as I loved his character (and his tail was one thing that kept making me smile, actually), I kept

coming back to that flaw.***

So, as much as I truly loved the hob, the word "bestiality" kept flashing through my mind. *winces* I get that he's one of the fairy type creatures (wildlings?) in this story but he's another race. Plus, the hob had a tail. Which was cool. I liked his tail. But it also kept bringing back the fact that... the hob isn't vaguely human. He's another race entirely. I know I'm reading far too much into a simple, fantasy book, but hey. I can review however I like. That's an issue I had.

To wrap it up: did I enjoy this? Yes. Would I recommend it? Most likely. Do I think my rant is overly sensitive and I'm reading far too much into it? Yes. But it was like an itch through the entire book. I... had... to add it... or explode. Well, something like that.

But seriously. Good book that I enjoyed, and still will hopefully. It's one of those "simple" books that makes me feel young again because it's just so... normal. :) Any issues I have with it are easily overlooked, because even I realize that I can be overly sensitive. Do what you like with this review and the info/rant/opinion I gave.

Warnings/Heads Up/What's in this book - I won't rant about the hob/mating thing again. However, Aren is a speaker. She can see into the future - get's "visions" - and is also a speaker. I.e., a necromancer. She talks to spirits and puts them to rest. It was dealt with in a benign way and I didn't even think about it until after when I went, "Huh. She was talking to the dead. How did I not notice that?" I guess because reading about the bloodmages, in comparison she seemed benign. So, there you go. Romance with a hob, and the raising the dead thing. Oh, and I'm not sure if these count as curses, but there's "by the gods" and "insertsomefantasynamehere breath!" and variants of. Nothing incredibly explicit.

***Saying that... You might wonder if I have issues with werewolves and vampires. No. Their "powers" or abilities or curses, or whatever the author decides on, are tacked on. Vampires are humans only dead and needing lifeblood (depending on the story). Werewolves are... well, there's a lot of different ideas in novels as to what werewolves are. But they are human most of the time, with a "animal side." You have to take these books with a grain of salt. But at least, at the base make up of werewolves and vampires, they're human.

(first read on may 15, 2010)
excerpt from original review:

Plot: C+

Characters: B+

(Aren was dry for a while till Briggs began to flesh her out)

Writing style: C+

Three stars.

Elizabeth says

In Aren's country you've got two choices if you have magical abilities: Either you become a blood mage -

evil and mad sorcerers that draw on pain and misery - or you're used as fodder and die hideously. If you're a woman, the choice is made for you. That's why Aren guards the secret of her unreliable magical sight closely and lives as unobtrusively as possible.

When a fight between blood mages wipes out whole provinces and destroys any semblance of order, the once dormant supernatural inhabitants of the land return to claim back what was theirs. The magical cataclysm also shatters Aren's life. Her suddenly intensified talent forces her to witness the murder of her family by raiders.

But even if she uses her untrained magical abilities in protection of her village, she wouldn't be able to help them. So Aren seeks help of the Hob, a magical humanlike creature who is imbued with the power of the mountains. But his help comes with a price - Aren must become his wife to ensure the continuation of his race ...

Kathleen says

2.5 stars for *The Hob's Bargain*, written in 2001 by Patricia Briggs. Today she's a more reliable author, except her characters do sometimes bleed through (scroll to bottom). I love her Alpha & Omega series and also enjoy the Mercy Thompson series, including *Moon Called*.

Main spoilers are tagged

Plot: Set in Fallbrook, a small village in medieval Briton, *The Hob's Bargain* is light fantasy with a patina of romance. The village is under attack from raiders and other dangers. The heroine (Aren) asks the hob to protect the village. Aren is willing to sacrifice to save her people. (view spoiler) Aren and the hob (Caefawn) get up to all sorts of merry stunts outwitting the enemies -- bandits, ghosts, and a variety of magical "wildlings." There are threats from within the village too, religious fanatics who fear magic, as Briggs tries to blend the old pantheon of woodland gods with monotheism's "One God" (an incomplete plot thread). And all the while, Caefawn flirts with Aren -- that hilarious, sneaky tail of his!

The plot takes a darker turn when a new villain enters. (Too abrupt, and superseding the first villains.)

My take: The story itself is okay, and some parts are quite good, but in comparison to the author's newer work, it is weak. With no transitions, the POV hops from the heroine to the hero (confusing). It includes many boring info dumps, disguised as conversations: Long yawning narrations on the difference between soul and spirit, on the various types of magical creatures, etc. As for the plot, it's got promise, but the various sub-threads are not well developed, and some are left hanging.

So far ... 3 stars, if not for a plot reversal, where good, evil and justice become blurred by the good guys (odd in this genre, fantasy). See BIG spoiler: (view spoiler)

The hero: The hob is something else entirely -- not quite human, not fully animal. Built like an NFL linebacker but much stronger and faster, **Caefawn (the hob)** is a "wildling of the mountain" a magical, mischievous, dangerous creature with cinnamon red eyes, fangs, claws, gray skin, pointy ears, and a long playful tail with a tuft of fur at the end. Hobs are gregarious by nature, but poor **Caefawn is lonely** -- the last of his kind. His only friend is the Elemental Spirit of the Mountain, who is also his source of strength. (Caefawn reminded me of The Goblin King in the wonderful YA fantasy, *The Hollow Kingdom* (see my

review)

Oddly, the hob doesn't show up till ~25%, and plays a major role at ~40%.

A little hard to get a handle on the hob. A playful predator. A quick-witted giant. A wise old killer -- how old, we do not know -- full of mercy and compassion. But still a killer. Fear him. Love him. Um. But I did kinda love him. ?

The heroine: Aren is a widow at age 30, married for only one day. Like the hob, **Aren feels alone**, different, and distrusted. In a time when mage-blood is punishable by death, she has innate ability to see visions and speak to ghosts. As she grows as a character, she learns to almost revel in her magic, not to hide it (the hob helps with this). Apparently Aren is not hard on the eyes. The cover shows her in a skirt, but throughout the book she wore trousers. She felt like a prototype for Mercy Thompson, courageous, self-sacrificing, loyal, and merciful.

Romantic Aspects: Some flirting and playful banter, holding hands, caressing, a kiss or two. (view spoiler)

Some segments are excellent: A vicious attack scene. Wow. Heart thumping. Tense. Vivid. Also good: Up in the bell tower, and in the archer's house in Auburg. Also when (view spoiler) It brought a lump to my throat.

Plus, Briggs includes lots of cool magical elements in this fantasy: The Green Man, a Fetch, The White Beast, Hilligrims, Earthens, etc.

Also, I enjoyed the secondary characters, especially Kith, who brings to mind the berserker in Cry Wolf, Wandal the harper, Merry the innkeeper, etc.

Quibbles on Characterization:

No spoilers, but tucked away anyway. (view spoiler)

Jacqueline says

Third time reading this book. Just as good as the first two times! Oddly enough I noticed as I added a read date, read this the last time exactly 7years ago to the day.

My second reading of this book. I enjoyed it as much as I did the first time. This is a stand alone fantasy. So if you need a little fantasy fix and don't want to get into something epic this is a great read. One of the things that I appreciate about this story is that it is not, in fact, epic. I get tired of every character being the "one" destined to "save the world." I like to read small stories about not so important people. This one has a little romance in it. The writing is absorbing as is normal for Ms. Briggs.

Julie says

A favorite of mine. I absolutely adore this book and have re-read it several times. I just love the interaction between Aren(great name BTW) and the Hob. How he uses his tail to flirt is just too cute :)...Wish there was a sequel to this one...

Gavin says

This was a loose mix between a Beauty and the Beast retelling and a story of the Fae in a traditional fairy tale style fantasy world. It had a bit of romance but was also a little dark at times.

For hundreds of years the natural magic of the land has been suppressed by the blood mages. They hold a ruthless grip on magic. They kill any female showing signs of the gift and recruit or kill any male showing the sign. Aren of Fallbrook has been hiding her gift her whole life but when something breaks the blood mages binding spell on the magic of the land she has to start trusting her growing powers as her village comes under threat from both human raiders and the Fey creatures that are returning or awakening.

The story started out well. The early stages were intriguing and Aren was a likeable enough lead character. The story was told at a slow pace but was surprisingly dark in tone at times. One of the big flaws was the Hob himself. They guy was actually a bit of a bore. Another problem was that the story just dragged on way too long. The stuff that was intriguing in the early stages lost its appeal or never developed into what it promised and the result of that was the last 25% of the story turned into a bit of a slog to finish.

Rating: 2 stars.

Audio Note: Jennifer James Bradshaw gave an OK performance. Her general narration and voices were fine but she tended to read a little slow and lacked the ability to convey emotion well with her voice.

Tracey says

This is another in a long line of read-so-long-ago-a-reread-feels-like-the-first-time books. I didn't remember a thing about it, except that I loved it then - and I loved it now.

The story centers around Aren, a woman who has lived in a remote farming village all her 29 years, and who had just about resigned herself to being a spinster when her father engineered a match for her. One reason the resignation wasn't as bad as it might have been, and why marriage isn't as simple as it might have been, is that she has a secret: she has a gift. She can see things that will happen (though usually not clearly enough to be very useful), and find lost things. Magic isn't just discouraged in these lands, it's hunted out; necromancers

long ago found a way to suppress all natural magic and monopolize power for themselves, through bloodshed. Boys are given a choice of serving the necromancers (which could mean becoming a necromancer - but probably means dying) or ... dying. Girls with gifts have no choice - they are simply killed. Her brother many years ago chose to die under his own power rather than in any way fall under their power; a childhood friend wasn't, in many ways, so lucky.

And then, suddenly, one day everything changes. The necromancers' hold on magic is broken - and so is Aren's life when raiders maraud through her village. And they're not the worst of the dangers her people face, as with the loosing of magic, the wildlings are returning - all the creatures of magic who have survived the long drought, most of whom are not fond of humans. Except perhaps as lunch.

In short, the village is besieged, and isolated, and needs help - and Aren gambles on a legend and goes up onto the hill called The Hob, seeking the newly awakened Hob and the Hob's Bargain. Hobs are benevolent - but that doesn't necessarily mean that what he wants in exchange for helping them defend themselves will be easy to pay.

I loved this book. It has what is now (though not then) "paranormal romance" stamped all over it, from a not-great cover (which does, however, feature Duck) to the blurb on the back - and that's not fair. It could have been (Patricia Briggs was just cutting her teeth on this one) - but there were none of the trappings such things are saddled with now. For one thing, it gets about a PG rating, and that's for violence.

Characterization is always key for me; if I can't at least like someone the book is toast. Here I love all the main characters - not because they're all nice and sweet and good, but because they're real, they interact, they have histories and depth and their own lives. Aren is wonderful - prickly, smart, determined, strong - and still not a Mary Sue, with all of that. When Aren's friend Kith is "offscreen" I can believe he is off being the star of his own story; he doesn't just begin and end when he's featured in a scene. Caefawn is my hero - what a marvel of a race, and a marvel of a character. And I believe that's the best use of a tail I've ever seen. Even Aren's horse, Duck, is three-dimensional - Patricia Briggs is one of the writers who, as Judith Tarr puts it, Gets It Right when it comes to horses. And the evil necromancer is everything an evil necromancer should be.

It isn't, perhaps, a challenging read - and in fact I picked it up after Shadowfever with the intent of getting away from harrowing world-altering fantasy. There have been an awful lot of books in my currently-reading lists lately that involve entire villages razed and children lying dead in the streets. In point of fact, Hob's Bargain doesn't evade such things; there are some grim moments, as the world is altered here too, and such cataclysms are never gentle. But it was swift and beautifully written, and - in case I didn't mention it - I loved it.

Crystal Starr Light says

Unfulfilled Fantasy Potential

Aren has been married to Daryn all of one day when raiders appear, killing her entire family. She feels guilty, knowing she had the sight, and might have been able to save them had she not been so busy hiding her ability from those that would kill her. Now, she must find a way to get rid of the raiders and the magical creatures that have suddenly appeared.

I adore Patricia Briggs. The first book of hers I read, “Steal the Dragon”, completely captivated me. It was exciting, adventurous, and romantic, all without being clichéd and stupid. That book made her a “buy on the spot” author—one of only two on the list.

For whatever reason, I’ve been in the mood for some nice, fun fantasy—nothing too “meaty” or “epic”. So that’s why I reached out for Briggs’ “Hob’s Bargain”. And I felt I got much less than I “bargained” for.

What went wrong? If I had to come up with one word to describe this experience, it would be “boring”. This fantasy is the antithesis of what I think a fantasy should be. Fantasy should be fun, exciting, a learning of new magic and a land of wonders and new characters. Sure, there were cool characters or interesting magic, but when they are bathed in boringness, it’s hard to generate any interest in finishing a novel.

Now that I’ve finished (a feat in and of itself!), I almost felt like there were three story ideas slammed into one novel. The first part was “Raiders Attack and Kill the Family, Leading to a Journey”; then the novel turned into “Learn about the Magic that You Suddenly Are Able to Use”; rounding out with “Epic Battle Show Down with the Bloodmage that Comes from Nowhere”, sprinkled in the later half with “Fall in Love with the Ugly Guy”. Perhaps if it had stuck to one storyline, I would have been able to like this (I did like it when Aren started learning new magic, and the concept was pretty interesting).

The first part was solid. I liked our protagonist’s introduction (even if the first person past was a slight surprise—books from this early era tended to be written in third person past), how she is in her late 20’s but married (happily) a much younger man. The raider attack was intense, the pain of losing her family heartrending. But then Aren declares her ability to the townspeople, runs back to her cottage and sits in a cellar for a week. I don’t quite understand the motivation behind her actions. I know she promised to tell people about her ability if something bad happened, but then why leave and go to the cottage and do nothing with this ability? If she was brave enough to declare her ability, why not also go into the fight? I know people need to mourn, but it just felt awkward.

After her “mourning”, she gets out and seeks to investigate the nearby villages to see if there are survivors. Wait, so all it takes is a week in a cellar, and she is okay, no emotional scars, nada? When they arrive at the nearby town, Aren, her friend, Kith, and the minstrel, Wandel, learn the town has been devastated. Apparently, someone performed uber-magic and has decimated the area and released the area from the bloodmage’s binding. What?? What about the raiders? Where have they gone? You’ve been hiding in a cellar for a week, come out, and then instead of doing something about the raiders, you look into a completely different event? Does this make any sense? And what is with the short sections in third person past from the point of view from the hob?

They escort the people back to Fallbrook then BAM! A few months later! So...they did NOTHING about the raiders in the intervening months? Really? The men of the town didn’t bother to band together and attack these guys? Apparently not—instead, Aren is going on patrols, doing manly things because, well, that’s acceptable for her now. What happened so that Aren could get these advantages? Was it just her abilities? Was it the fact she was now an outsider? Why is such a long gap even in this book? What does it give the story?

For some reason, NOW Aren must find a way to get rid of the raiders (and some fae beings that have popped out of nowhere). So she gets the idea: Hob’s Mountain! The Hob! You know, the guy in the title that has BARELY appeared in this novel. He could help them. He helped her ONCE before when fighting a fae, so of COURSE he could help against MANY raiders. D’OH! She runs her horse into the mountain and BAM! There he is. Whew, good thing he wasn’t hard to find or anything! It’s a mountain after all—a small area to

hunt over. She barely has to convince him to help when he is off, racing along to tease and confuse the raiders. But the villagers must seal the deal with a bargain: a woman must marry the hob and the hob will help.

Finally! It's past the halfway point through the book, and we are at the "Hob's Bargain" that the title promised us!

Aren promises to marry the hob in exchange for his help and then...nothing happens. Yup, they don't decide to band together to defeat the raiders. Instead, the Hob takes her home to see his "mom" (the mountain spirit). Then he teaches her a new ability that she develops rather quickly, all the while the raiders are still in hiding, and NO ONE IS ATTACKING THEM. These are the most laid-back villagers EVER.

But Aren and the Hob, named Caefawn, have plenty of time for Meaningful Glances, Witty Banter, and Playful Jesting. I'll pause from my snarking to admit: I actually liked the idea of Aren pairing up with a guy who doesn't have marble abs, amber eyes, and an Adonis profile. However, the romance part of it came in too little, too late. The hob has barely been in the novel. The romantic undertones are too muted and/or too forced (because there is SO little time left in the novel to build up the budding romance organically). And Aren pairing up with a non-human? Uhhhhh...

It's at the 2/3 mark that a BRAND NEW plot comes riding in: Aren sees a bloodmage journeying to the village to take over Kith, a berserker in the King's Army before he lost his arm. Aren has to save his life...so how can she defeat the bloodmage? She runs out, grabs the spirits of a bunch of fae...and does NOTHING with it. The big, final "showdown" is one of the most underwhelming in history (and something stupid ALMOST happens that made me facepalm).

It breaks my heart to give a Briggs book two stars, but I can't justify three stars for this book even if it is written by one of my favorite authors. The book had a lot of potential, but it ultimately failed by getting bogged down in too many details and subplots and forgetting what the whole point of the story was supposed to be. Not Briggs' best work; read "Steal the Dragon", a much better fantasy novel or the Mercy Thompson series, her urban fantasy foray.

(And is it just me, or is there something, I don't know, AWKWARD about the reprint cover? Aren, looking like a cheap Cindy Crawford model, holding a...AHEM...)

Olga Godim says

A re-read.

This is one of Briggs' earlier novels, before the Mercy Thompson series, and it's a stand-alone. It's a nice book with interesting characters, but I read it just after Moon Called, and the contrast was glaring. This book is much less mature. The heroes are less alive. The plot is less focused. The relationships are less realistic. Nevertheless, I enjoyed it but I would caution you: don't read it back to back with Briggs' later novels, either Mercy Thompson or Alpha & Omega.

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In this novel, wild magic of the land was bound by bloodmages centuries ago. Now, the bloodmages' bonds are broken, and wild magic rushes back. And not all of it is benevolent to humans.

The protagonist Aren is a peasant girl from a remote little village in the mountains. Although Aren has some magical abilities, she hides them from her neighbors, lest a bloodmage should learn of her magic gift and kill

her. Magic is forbidden to the peasant women in her world.

When wild magic returns to Aren's land, it coincides with a horrible war somewhere, but the consequences of both calamities are devastating to Aren's life. Her family are all killed by raiders – deserters from the war. Wild magic rolls through the land uncontrolled, reclaiming its own and threatening the entire village. And being a mage, as Aren is, is still considered illegal, punishable by death, even though it seems that all the bloodmages perished in the war.

Mourning her family and shunned by the other villagers because of her magic, Aren feels utterly alone.

Despite her all-consuming grief, she knows she must do something to save her village. There is no one else, but her path won't be easy or simple. And her magic only complicates matters.

I enjoyed this novel despite its sometimes-murky logic and holes in the plot. Aren's personality, kind and courageous, more than made up for all the flaws of the book. Her unfolding love story was charming. And then there was the hob with his tail. Who would've guessed that a hob's tail could be so sexy?

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### **Mara says**

I've been thinking of reading one of Ms Briggs earlier stories for some time. But all were part of a series, and I had (still do) so many books in my TBR shelf that I dragged my feet at the idea. The Hob's Bargain appeared on my Amazon page, and the magpie in me won at the cry: oh shiny!

I really enjoyed the romp this book provided, the grief and sorrow too. My only nit was that the heroine was supposed to be a 30 yo woman, but I was given a young woman instead. Not a teen exactly, but neither much out of it. Do not misunderstand me, she's intelligent, but I still got the impression of a child some what.

Please read Jacob's review: <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show....> He said it all :D

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### **Jamie Collins says**

An unexceptional little standalone fantasy story. Briggs is a good writer, but this is just not the kind of story I enjoy, particularly since it includes lots of fey-like creatures.

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### **Jacob Proffitt says**

This is a fun book with a deeply sympathetic character it was easy to fall in love with. Aren is stronger than she thinks she is, and more powerful. And compassionate as well—way more than I could have managed. Briggs does a great job creating a story and setting with very broad strokes of power and struggle brought down to an isolated village in a valley far from the devastation wrought by war but feeling its effects nonetheless.

This is facilitated by creating three forces her villagers need to struggle against, all frighteningly more powerful than they are. Of these, the bloodmages are the most powerful, and the most implacably evil. Their power is built on the death and subjugation of others and a mad craving for more that only grows as their power grows.

Newly freed from domination by the bloodmages, the wild world awakened is more unpredictable. I might call them fey, as many fit the traditional definitions, but I rather like Briggs' term of "wildlings". They can vary from the earth spirit of the entire valley to the subtler dryads, nyads, ghosts, and fetches that plague individuals or haunt specific patches of readily defined niches. Much of the story involves learning the old lore afresh to find how to coexist/appease/defeat these forces newly released from slumber.

Finally, you have the raiders newly arrived in their valley. These "merely" human antagonists might not be as frightening as the others but their predations are as much an existential threat and as seemingly implacable. Indeed, they're the first we meet as Briggs takes us from an easy, even pastoral, beginning into heartbreak and loss.

Aren's mettle is tested right from the start as her home is one of the first to meet the new threats coming to their valley. Her grief drew me to her immediately and evoked an intimacy that carried me through the discovery phase of the story. My interest flagged a bit periodically in this early phase, actually. Never enough to break with the story, but events were sometimes telegraphed a bit too simply and Briggs lingered a bit on some of the emotional lows in the early novel, I think. Since much of the action was episodic throughout the novel (with the goals mainly short-term and quickly achieved), the early pacing issue stood out more than it might otherwise have.

That said, the last half of the story was extremely hard to put down, with the episodic nature of the action clearly on a unified vector but without being predictable or boring. Briggs does an excellent job shepherding the emotional journey of both Aren and Caefawn as they unite in their struggle for survival of both themselves as individuals and of the village Aren feels obligated to. The only distraction in this latter part of the book was how much I despised the village itself. I get that people are petty and that bickering and bad blood can fester, but these people added needlessly stupid on top and that I had a much harder time with. Well, that and Aren's ties to the village. In retrospect, I kind of wish Aren and Caefawn had given them all the finger and rode off on their own little adventure together alone. Good thing that didn't occur to me or I might have lost my emotional investment.

And the reason it didn't occur is that the action was fast and engaging and Aren's ties to her home made sense even if I had a hard time with them myself. i.e. they fit her character even if I disagreed with the validity of those ties. If the village had been wiped off the face of the valley by the end and Aren and Caefawn had ridden into a moderately safe sunset, I'd have been content.

But that would have robbed me of a conclusion that bumped the book a full star on its own. All the threads of the story turned out to be much more three dimensional than I'd expected and the conclusion had a strong payload that left me stunned for a bit (and yes, there were tears). The strong finish more than compensated for any passing stutters in the beginning and left me with a warmth I'm still basking in somewhat.

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### **Jane Stewart says**

I wanted it to be over. Too much telling, not showing. The physical book is better than the audiobook.

#### **AUDIOBOOK PROBLEMS:**

I do not recommend this as an audiobook. It should be read, not listened to for three reasons. The first problem is knowing if something is a vision or is happening. For example Aren is talking to a man, has a vision, and then continues talking to him. At first I thought the entire thing was conversation. Then I

realized, no she was having a vision in the middle of the conversation. For most of her visions, I was confused. In the physical book the visions are in italic, but the italic is not communicated by the narrator.

The second problem is hard-to-follow-point-of-view-changes. I had trouble figuring out who was talking and some of the actions. Most of the book is first person narrated by Aren, but parts are third person. This is a fine style and it works well with another audiobook I'm listening to. But somehow in this book the transitions are not clear. For example Aren is narrating: I walk here, I do this. He is lonely. He sees them walking. (It switched to third person Hob's point of view without telling me.) Maybe the physical book has paragraph separations or something. But several times I was confused about point of view.

My third problem was the narrator. She used a generic American accent for first person narration which was excellent. Then she used a fake-pretend-British-like accent for all dialogue which was bad. It was such a disconnect to be in Aren's thoughts with the American accent but as soon as Aren speaks it's the fake British accent. Second, I really hated this accent. I don't know what it was. It wasn't genuine. I like British accents, but this was disturbing. Here are examples. I've beane thayah befowah (I've been there before). He combed down (He calmed down). I knaow it's hahpenning (I know it's happening). It hut (It hurt). But I must repeat the narrator was excellent when speaking generic American. She has a wonderful voice, with good tone, pacing, and speed.

#### ABOUT THE STORY:

I liked the idea of Aren and Hob together, but that relationship was not developed. I didn't feel any emotional connection between them. He seemed like a helpful and caring teacher. I would have liked seeing his loneliness, his pain, his desires, and how he felt when doing things with Aren. Throughout the book there is a lot of the narrator's feelings, for example Aren saying I feel so tired, or I haven't eaten since yesterday. But there are no feelings of anyone else, so I wasn't drawn in to anyone else.

The author's strength may be scene description. But her weakness is not enough action moving the plot or about the plot. There were multiple story lines, and they were not well developed. There was not enough information and interaction with the numerous raider groups. Some scenes felt contrived when Aren thought characters were dead but later learned they were not. When Hob came into the story it was a little better. But on balance it was boring.

The biggest problem is too much telling and not enough showing. The result is that it reads like a newspaper article. Newspaper articles summarize events. They can be satisfying and enjoyable, and maybe that's why so many people like this. But it could be so much better. There was such potential. The author created wonderful creatures. And I liked the world and the plot set up, but the author just did not give me plot development and "showing." An example of her "telling" is in the following excerpt.

"He hadn't found any ghosts here, but I met most of the rest of the very weak and horrid. Poltergeists he said were both powerless and mindless, not worth the effort of approaching them. The weaker benevolent spirits like driads and nyads he'd shown me as well. The dryad had been soft spoken and solid seeming. He reminded me of the ancient oak he called home. The nyad had been shy, leaving as quickly as she'd responded. Caefawn hadn't seen her, though he'd been sitting beside me the whole time. Some of the spirits we'd looked for like the willow wisps we couldn't find. I could tell it made Caefawn sad, though he didn't say anything. One or two of the creatures had attacked me. Sometimes their attacks were physical, like the noglan throwing sticks. More often they were mental. As I learned to defend myself the Hob would find a new stronger more contentious thing to call. Caefawn said that most of the stronger spirits like the earth guardian would know when I was about and come on their own if they chose. I could summon the lesser spirits whether they willed it or not. Some of them I could dominate if I chose, but it made me increasingly

uncomfortable to do so. It felt wrong, even evil to do more than defend myself. Gram always said that if something felt wrong, it probably was. "So what's it tonight?" I asked cheerfully. I was starting to feel brave in the night. Facing off with noglans and ghosts had made me less afraid of the darkness, silly me. Still it was easier than facing the villagers."

Following are my questions about the above "telling." We don't see her meeting, saying hello, interacting with, or fighting sticks with any of these creatures. What did the dryad say to her that was soft spoken? Why did she see the nyad and Caefawn not? Where and how did they look for the willow wisps? She says one or two attacked her. How many was it? When a creature did a mental attack, what was it like? How did she feel and respond? She said she learned to defend herself. What exactly did she do to defend herself? How did she summon the lesser creatures? Build a fire? Chant? What did she do to dominate? Sit on them? Stare at them without blinking? She has interesting descriptions but she doesn't show "actions."

One last jab if I might - Harry Potter and The Hunger Games do NOT suffer from lack of "showing."

If you're interested, see Crystal's 2 star review at <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...> She does a good job describing the plot problems.

#### DATA:

Unabridged audiobook reading time: 10 hrs and 16 mins. Swearing language: none. Sexual content: none. Setting: unknown time unknown place, similar to feudal days in Europe or England. Book copyright: 2001. Genre: young adult fantasy. Ending: happy.

#### OTHER BOOKS:

I'm not having good luck with this author. I've read three of her books and given 2 or 2 1/2 stars to all of them.

Moon Called - too much telling not enough showing.

Cry Wolf - last half too drawn out. Some things missing.

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#### **Bry says**

This was a pretty easy read, but no where near as suspenseful, grabbing, and interesting as Brigg's other books. Sadly, it was pretty disappointing, but then again it is also one of her earlier works.

I found the characters to be drab, their relationships rushed, and the way to much time devoted to descriptions of the lands, which I know is important in fantasy books but was still overdone.

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#### **Shanon says**

Hob's Bargain is a great story. Aren, the main character – grows a lot throughout the book starting out a scared girl that was unwilling to accept herself and her magic. However, she learns to accept herself and the powers she has and makes a new friend along the way. Some of my favorite scenes in the book were when Aren and Caefawn spent time in their lessons. I wish there was more time devoted to her time spent with Caefawn but I understand it's hard to include EVERYTHING in one book.

The story flowed nicely and kept a good pace. The reader isn't bogged down with too much detail but has just enough to understand the world & picture the many wildlings. I was intrigued by the Earth Spirit's Shaper, The Mountain, Kith (and the other berserkers), and of course The Hob.

If I had to describe the story in one word it would be SWEET maybe bordering on CUTE. This story contains happy endings galore. A little unrealistic – but then a Hob isn't something you can realistically see when walking down the street so I guess I'll let it slide.

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### **Moonlight Reader says**

Read this ages ago - I love Patricia Briggs's fantasy, but this one wasn't my favorite. I prefer her Raven series, and Dragon Bones.

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### **Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says**

I've got several friends who love the Mercy Thompson urban fantasy series, so last time I went to the library I looked for the first book in that series, *Moon Called*. It was checked out, so after I recovered from my sad I took a look through Patricia Briggs' other books and decided to try this one.

*The Hob's Bargain* is definitely not urban fantasy--it's kind of an old-school type of fantasy, set in a small town in a medieval kingdom, where sorcery has a (deservedly) bad reputation and magical powers are frowned upon, though a lot of folk quietly use their healing powers or other magic and hope that no one will notice or make a fuss. But the town is under attack by lawless raiders who are trying to kill them off. To make matters worse, the previously bound magic in the kingdom has been loosed, a lot of people have died, and strange creatures are also attacking people.

In a nearby mountain lives a strange-looking manlike being called the Hob. He's kind of like a big, muscular guy with dark grey skin, movable elvish ears, magical powers, and a prehensile tail. The Hob rather unwillingly (his mountain tells him he has to do it) develops a relationship with the townspeople and with one young woman in particular, the recently widowed Aren, who has suddenly developed the Sight and other magical powers that she doesn't yet understand how to use and control. Clearly she needs the Hob's help, and perhaps he needs hers as well.

Aren is, according to the author's website, "a woman who started out as a good mediaeval housewife then was honed by survival into a woman of strength and character." Great description, and it's good to see her grow as a person and learn to stretch herself.

I really enjoyed this. Aren isn't always kickass, but she's a determined and honorable person. There's some good exploration of interpersonal relationships here, some intriguing magical world-building, and a little interspecies romance.

4.5 stars.

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## **Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says**

This was a lovely book. Although short, it was a full meal, rich with humor, magic, the struggle between good and evil, and a nice little romance.

Aren was a great heroine. You see her go from meek and frightened to powerful and independent in her own right. Ms. Briggs excels at writing loveable characters who I care about, cheering along as they grow, and as they fight the good fight. She did a great job of showing Aren come into knowledge of her gifts, and I admired her ability to survive so much turmoil.

How I did love the Hob. Wild and elemental, flamboyantly-dressed, a bit mischievous, but good-hearted, just what the doctor ordered for Aren. I certainly haven't seen a romantic hero like him before. He helps to heal the broken places inside of Aren, and she does the same for him. Not the usual kind of romance, but a very good one, all the same.

The magic was enthralling. This book has some pretty dark aspects with the bloodimages and the evil wildlings. Some of the darkness on the land is downright creepy, adding another layer to this story. Yet, the wild beauty of the elemental spirits of the land called to me. I almost wish some of them were real. Well, almost.

I'm on a roll here with the horse theme. Aren's horse Duck is yet another equine character I've fallen in love with.

I truly did enjoy reading this book. Yet another one of Patricia Briggs books I will add to my keeper shelf and treasure for future rereads.

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## **Allison says**

*The Hob's Bargain* is a high fantasy that focuses on a small farming valley and a small town with medieval-type trades. There's supposedly a lord who should be protecting the people, but a magical disaster has cut the valley off and the people are on their own. The disaster awakens old magic, some friendly and some feral, so the townsfolk are suddenly dealing with a resurgence in angry Fae as well as an army of raiders.

What makes the story interesting is the mish-mash of old magical creatures running wild, the strong heroine who is rejected by the town because of her own taboo magic, and the mischievous hob who is the prejudiced town's only hope of survival. There's a tiny little bit of romance - just a touch, and it's very sweet.

I found this an enjoyable, quick read, perfect for a lazy Saturday afternoon. It's the first book I've read by Patricia Briggs - I decided to start with her older works instead of a series that isn't finished yet. So I can't speak to how this compares to the quality of her later work, but I do know I'll be looking for more by her.

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