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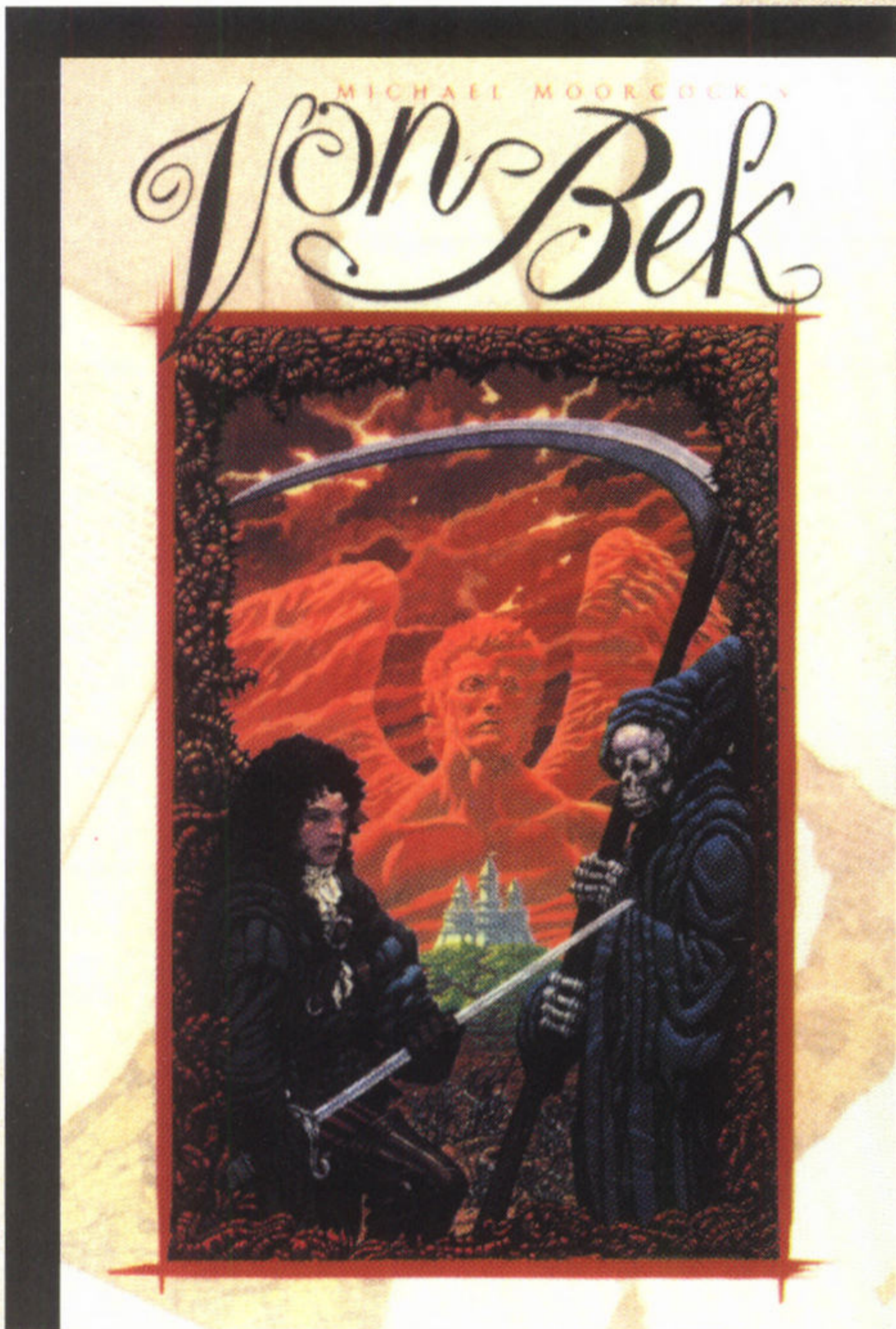


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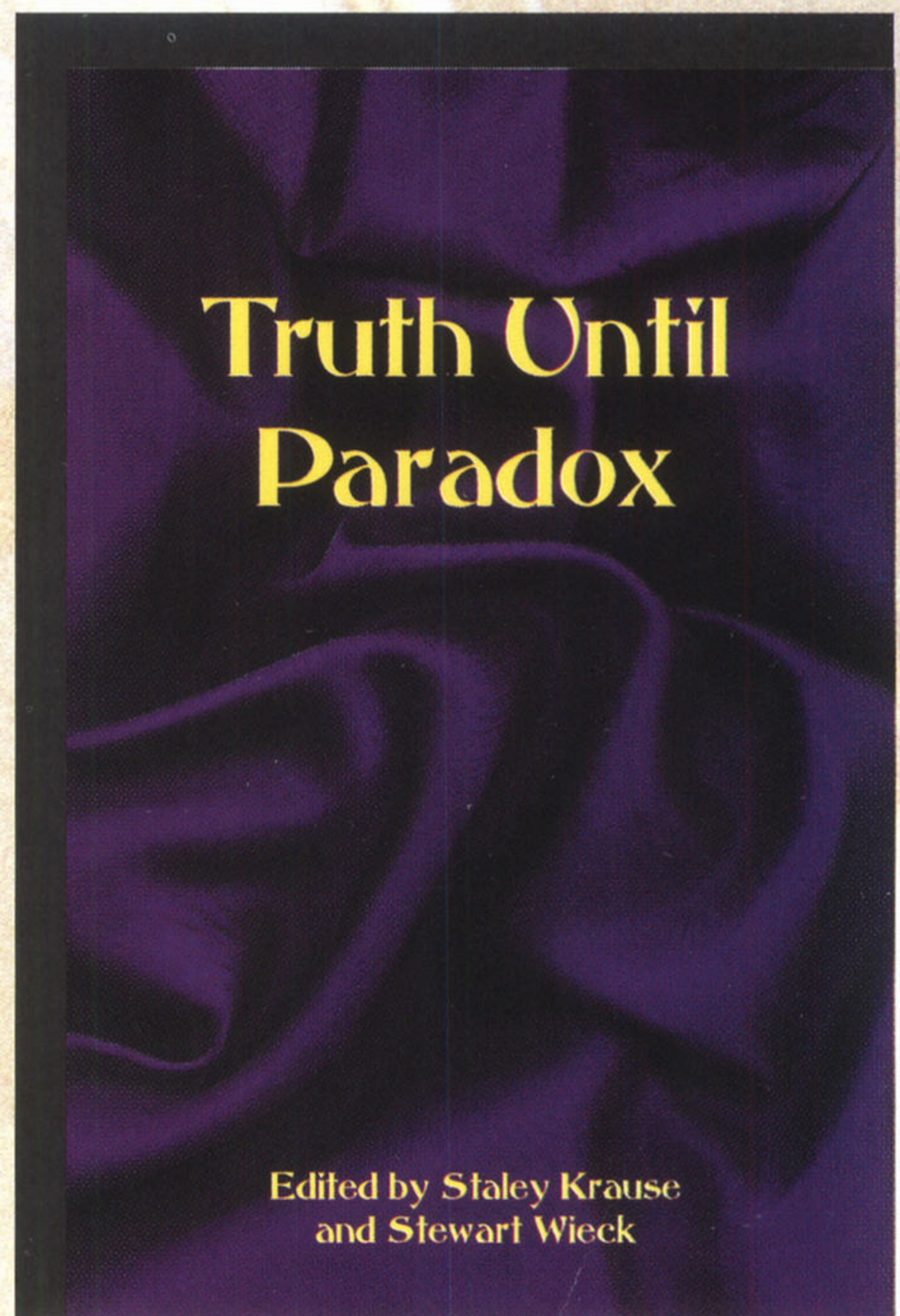
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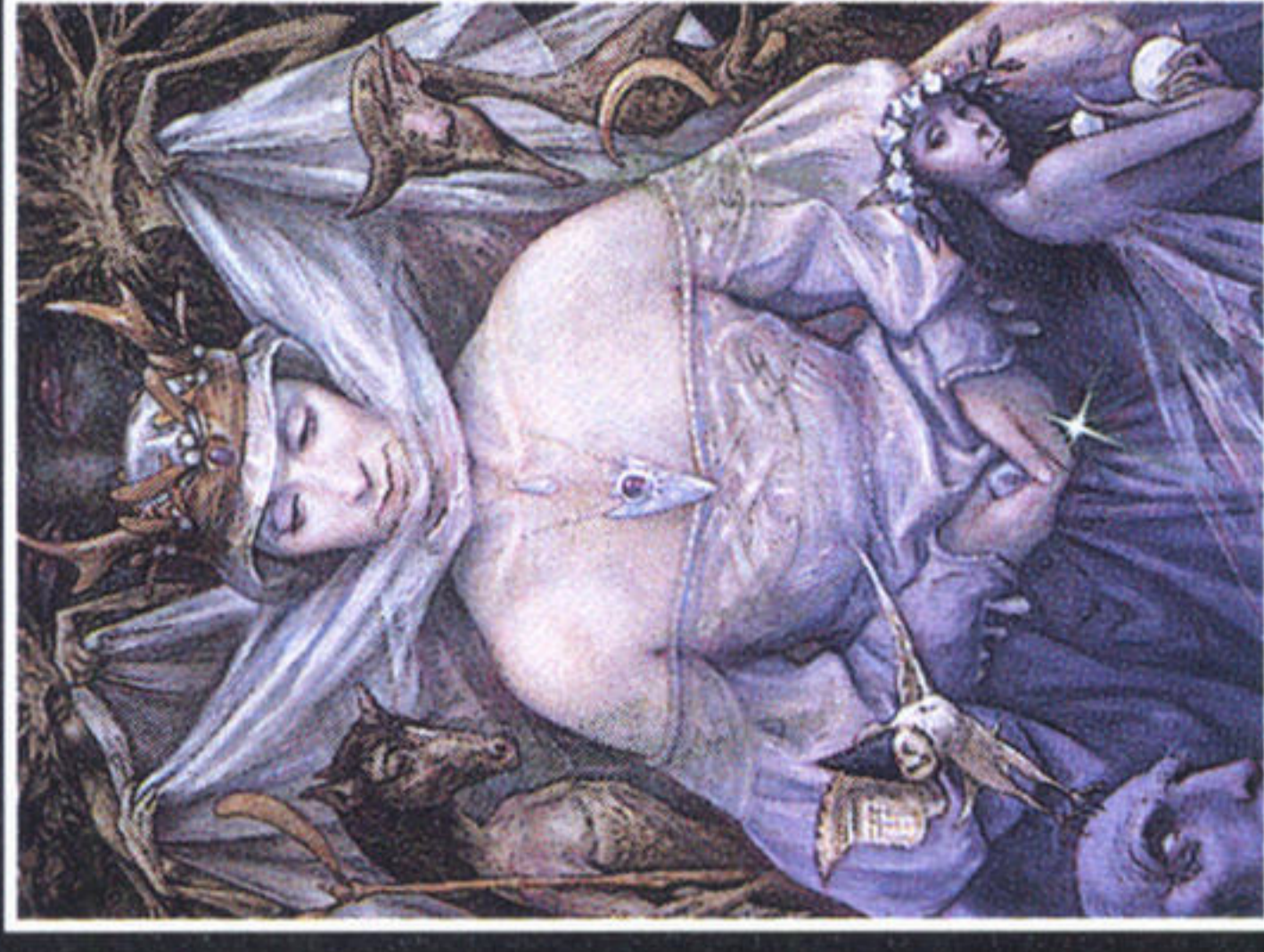
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COVER: This illustration of the icy birth of a fiery dragon was Bob Eggleton's cover for the Dann/Dozois anthology *Dragons*. ABOVE: Web Bryant's haunting vision captures the cemetery in "The Year of Storms," on page 46 of this issue.

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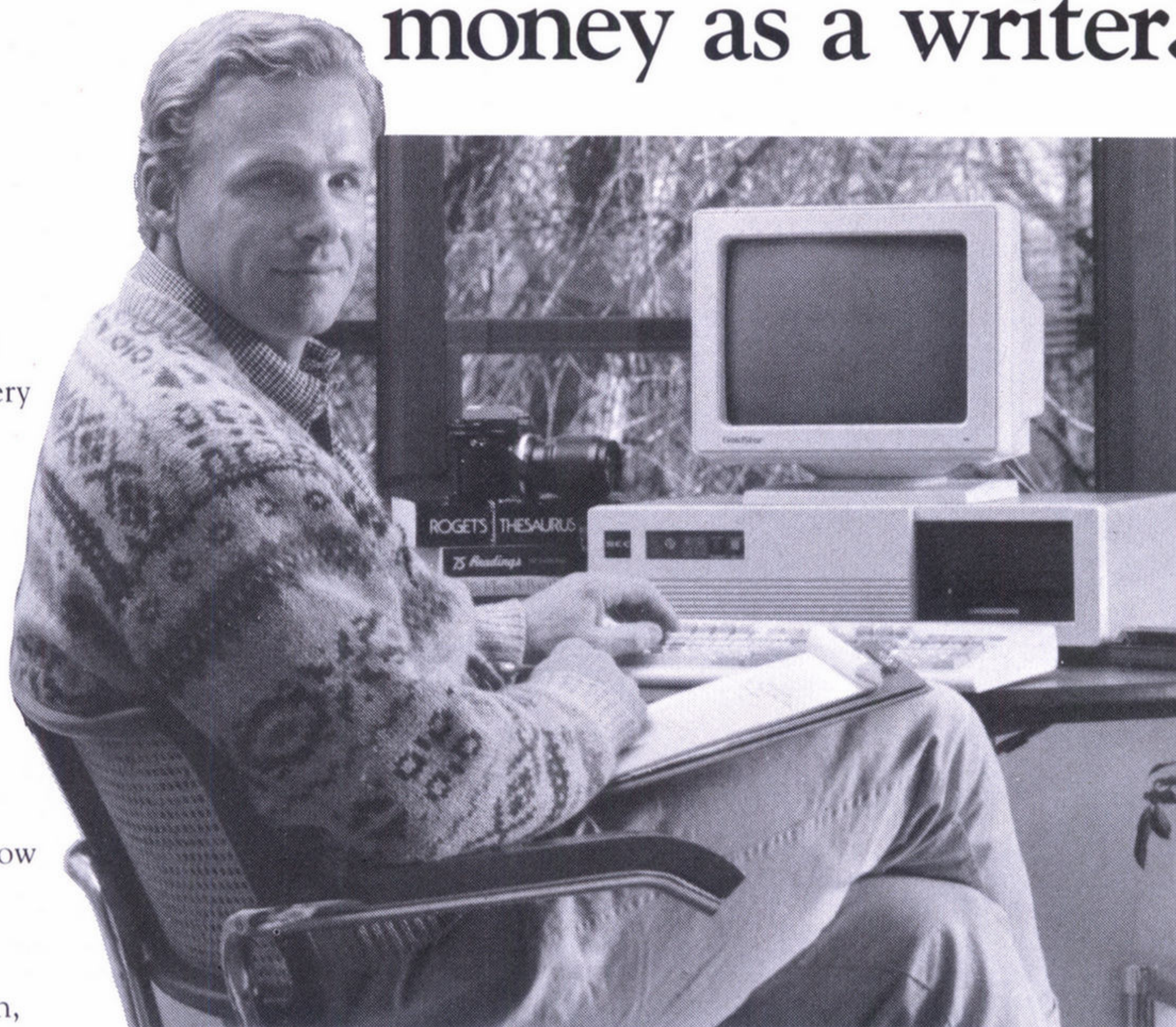
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Dear Shawna

I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate your providing such a fine magazine, covering my favorite subject matter in books and art. As an area that for too long has been characterized as the unsavory stepchild to Science Fiction, it was a most pleasant surprise to find your new magazine treating the genre with the respect and love it deserves. The articles are enlightening, opening a window into the creative province of the writers and artists who entertain and enchant us. Your articles on the mythic roots for much of today's fantasy works are well researched and intriguingly written. So please keep up the great work, and rest assured there are going to be many more readers out here looking forward to your next issue. By the bye, do you folks have an e-mail address which we out here in the on-line communities might use to send our letters to?

Dave Fouchey

Well, as a matter of fact, I'd been thinking about doing just that, and I guess I'll give it a shot. You can send your e-mail letters of comment to me at S.McCarthy@genie.geis.com. Please don't expect a personal reply, though, and do NOT send subscription problems, data or requests to that address. All subscription matters must go to the Virginia address. For those of you who subscribe to the GENIE on-line service, there's a Realms of Fantasy Bulletin Board available in the Science Fiction Roundtable 1 area, Category 28, Topic 8. I'm most interested in hearing your comments on specific articles or stories in our most recent issue.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Just a note to say how much I enjoyed your first issue. My job requires extensive travel, and upon one occasion, when I made it home, your magazine was waiting for me. My husband had ordered it, thinking I might like to read it on the road. I've never been a big magazine reader, finding that there are ample numbers of novels to fill my leisure time. So with half-interest, I tucked the new magazine in my travel bag and was off on a six-country tour.

Somewhere between Columbia and Rio I opened the magazine, and in thumbing through struck upon an ad for computer prints done by none other than Tom Cross, who once taught a computer illustration course I attended. I was impressed. So I continued to read, and found the mixture of stories and articles wonderful, some very thought-provoking. My husband made a good choice, and for the first time in a long time, I find myself eyeing the magazine racks, awaiting the next issue. My copy of the first issue has not only traversed six countries in the last month, but has also been lent to my travel mates. Now that it's back in the

States, it's still being loaned out to friends, and should one day return, well read.

Thanks for a wonderful collection of fantasy for all interests.

Tina. A. Halley

Well, I'd hoped that we'd produce a sophisticated magazine. Tell me, did it remember to say "please" and "thank you" in all six languages?

To Whom it May Concern,

I originally planned on writing to ask for your fiction guidelines, but I have to add something. All of the stories in your collectors' edition were (are) good, but two are excellent. "The Redemption of Silky Bill" and "Twixt Dusk and Dawn" I found very good. I'd still like a copy of your writer's guidelines, however, and I'm enclosing an SASE for them. I thank you for your time and cooperation.

Joanni Sheaffer

I'm delighted that you enjoyed our first issue, and I hope you found the second one as fulfilling. (For those of you who are wondering what "fiction guidelines" are, they are a sheet of paper that spells out, in great detail, what I'm looking for for the magazine and how it should be prepared and presented. An SASE is a self-addressed stamped envelope, which will carry them back to you. No one should submit anything to the magazine without a copy of these handy-dandy guidelines. (And if you expect a reply to or return of anything you send me, you must enclose an SASE.) Good luck in your writing.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I'm currently rereading *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and found Terri Windling's article on the Green Man a very interesting and coincidental bit of writing. I find it stimulating to read something contemporary that deals with a subject I have been interested in since my youth. The story by Roger Zelazny was simply delightful, It's so invigorating to dip into Zelazny's cosmos and see what's happening to his characters. I'll bet his name on the cover of your magazine got a lot of people to pick it up. I know I had to!

J.T. Fuqua II

I'm so pleased that you liked the Zelazny piece—I think Roger's one of the most talented authors around, and to be honest, it was my hope that his name on the cover would get a few people to pick up the first issue. I'm glad it worked!

Your letters and comments are welcomed. Make sure you mark them as letters or they're likely to get mixed in with writer's guidelines requests. Please send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760.

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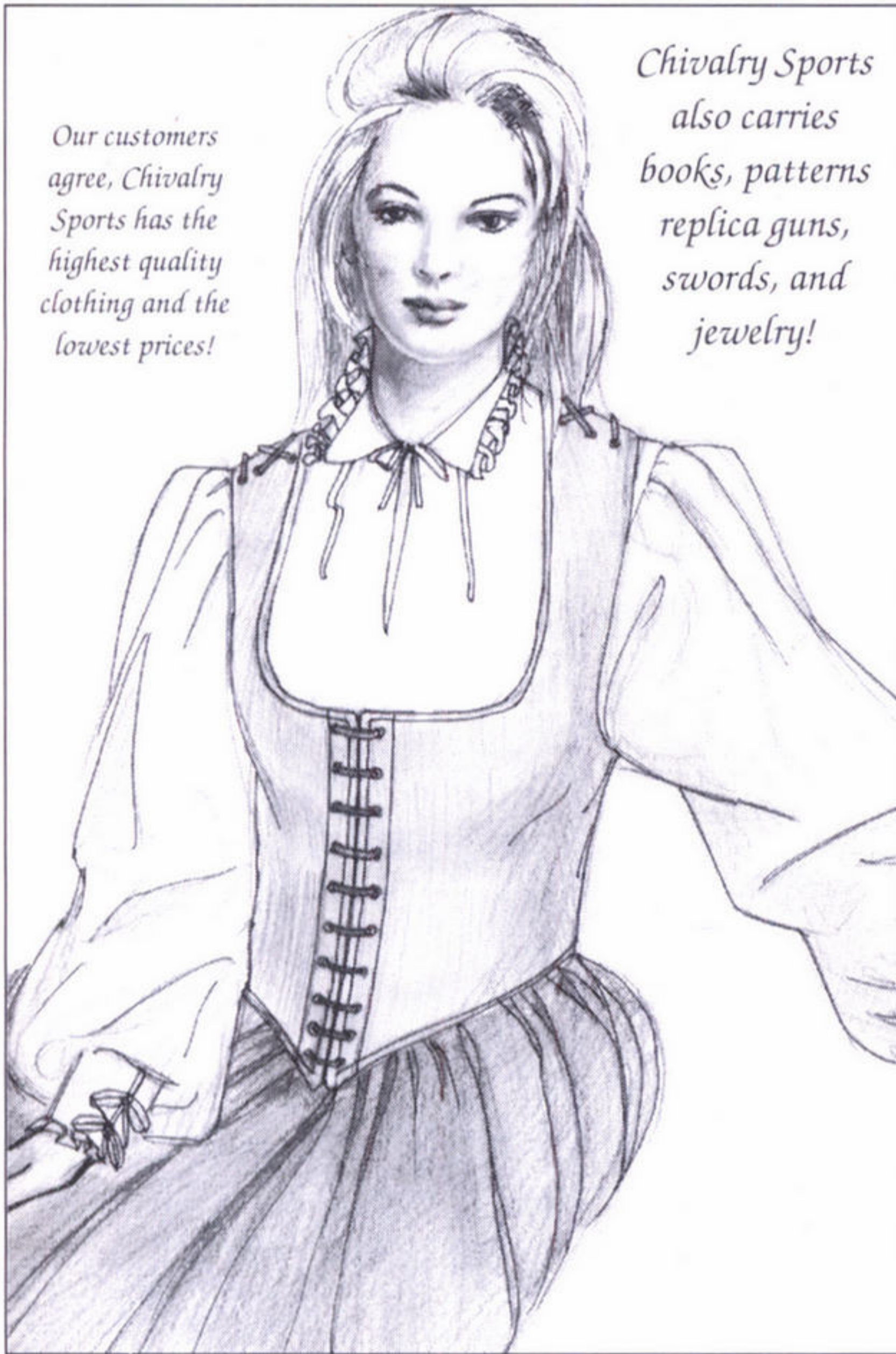
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BY SHAWNA MCCARTHY

The World Fantasy Convention focuses on fantasy writing and awards.

FIRST OFF, I'D LIKE TO WISH ALL OF YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS, A HAPPY CHANUKAH, A Solemn Solstice, and a Happy New Year, both Eastern and Western. There. I think that covers most of the holidays. If I've left any out, trust me, it's through ignorance and not intent. I must admit, though, that it feels odd to be writing about the winter holidays when, as I type this, it's Halloween. And, like every Halloween weekend for the past few years, I spent it in the company of creatures far more dangerous than vampires, werewolves, and goblins. That's right: I spent it with writers. Specifically, fantasy writers, at the sixteenth annual World Fantasy Convention.

This year's gathering was held in New Orleans, which, for my money, is where every convention of every kind should be held by national decree. You can have a real good time in New Orleans! Not that I did, mind you. No, not at all. Not a bit of it. Your faithful editor spent the entire weekend handing out copies of the magazine, giving out the editorial address, speaking on panels about how to write saleable stories, and flattering World Famous Writers into sending work to the aforementioned editorial address. Of course, a good deal of this flattery had to take place in restaurants serving world famous cuisine, since even writers need to eat. And, really, I can't help it if writers want to go to jazz clubs in the French Quarter to hear terrific music. What's an editor to do? If she wants to talk to the writers, she's gotta go where the writers are. Right?

All joking aside, however, I'd like to let those of you who have never attended one find out a bit more about what, exactly, the World Fantasy Convention is. First off, the WFC differs from most conventions in both size (limited to only 750 attendees) and make-up (it's attended

largely by professionals who make their living in the business). This makes it one of the few conventions where one can actually get some Real Work done. At larger cons (the World Science Fiction Convention, for instance, usually averages around 6,000 attendees), you spend most of your time trudging from meeting hall to meeting hall, hotel to hotel, looking for the people you were supposed to meet somewhere or other half an hour ago. Another difference: The WFC is dedicated completely and entirely to fantasy fiction. There are no gamers, no costumers, no Trekkers. It's all writers, editors, agents, and readers who are sincerely interested in learning more about the field they love. It runs for three days, and numerous panels are held each day on a variety of topics, some, as I noted above, appealing to beginning writers, and others on more esoteric sorts of things, like "Is the search for the soul the guiding principle of all fiction?" There are generally parties at night, and the whole thing is capped off at the end with a banquet, at which the World Fantasy Awards are given out. The winners this year are: Best Novel: *Glimpses*, by Lewis Shiner; Best Novella: "Under the Crust," by Terry Lamsley; Best Short Fiction: "The Lodger," by Fred Chappell; Best Anthology: *Full Spectrum 5*, edited by Lou Aronica, Betsy Mitchell, and Amy Stout; Best Collection: *Alone with the Horrors* by Ramsey Campbell; Best Artist: A tie between J.K. Potter and Alan Clarke.

I was especially pleased, at this year's banquet, to hear that artist J.K. Potter had won for Best Artist, since I had, only three days earlier, arranged to use his wonderful work in a Gallery section in this very issue.

If you're a serious reader with a deep and abiding love for fantasy fiction, you probably would enjoy attending the WFC. On the other hand, if you're more interested in other aspects of the fantasy field, like gaming, comics, or media, you'd probably be bored stiff. But not to worry—there are conventions out there for every possible area of interest. There are gaming cons, costuming cons, Regency cons, filksinging (sic) cons (if you have to ask what filksinging is, then you probably don't want to attend one). You can find them by checking *Locus* or *Science Fiction Chronicle*—each runs listings of upcoming cons. There's probably one in your area this weekend!

So go, meet your fellow fans and favorite authors, and find out more about this wonderful field we work in. ☛

I spend every Halloween weekend in the company of creatures far more dangerous than vampires, werewolves, and goblins. I spend it with writers. Illustration by John D. Batten.



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Folk tales are transformed for the love of the Beast.

RECENTLY I WATCHED THE WALT DISNEY CARTOON VERSION OF THE STORY *BEAUTY AND the Beast* along with a young friend (my excuse, of course, for renting a movie I actually wanted to see again myself). The movie is a visual delight—the animation is remarkable, the Broadway Musical style show tunes are rather witty, the Beast is sufficiently ugly and endearing, and Beauty, God bless her, is a rare media heroine who *actually reads books*. As with many of the best stories for children, my young companion and I *both* enjoyed it, even if we were laughing at different jokes. And yet, I found myself disturbed by the film and the broad liberties the filmmakers took in changing basic elements of the story—leading to the question of where precisely does one draw the line between the use and abuse of classic fairy tales in creating art for modern audiences. This is a question that concerns us in the field of adult fantasy literature, because so many magical works draw inspiration—either consciously or unconsciously—from the fairy tales of many cultures, as well as from folklore, folk ballads, and mythology.

Beauty and the Beast provides us with an interesting example to consider, because while we generally think of it as a folk tale, in fact, the story is a literary tale penned by two sixteenth century Frenchwomen. Various versions of “animal bridegroom” tales can be found in oral folk traditions around the world (as well as the myth of *Cupid and Psyche* which *Beauty and the Beast* resembles), but the story as we know it was written by Madame Le Prince de Beaumont, a French governess and educational writer living in London, and published in 1756 in a magazine “for Young Misses.”

De Beaumont’s tale was based, however, on a 362-page romance (*La Belle et la Bete*) published sixteen years ear-

lier by the aristocratic Gabrielle Susan Barbot de Gallon de Villeneuve (try saying that quickly five times), who wrote for an adult audience and the entertainment of the French court. Villeneuve’s story is as complex as it is lengthy, thick with characters and intricate subplots which have all been stripped away to the bare and timeless essentials of de Beaumont’s seventeen-page treatment of the story. De Beaumont also changed the tale in a significant way: in her version, the Beast becomes a sympathetic, even attractive, character *before* his transformation—while in the Villeneuve version (as in older animal bridegroom tales), Beauty requires reassurance again and again from a Good Fairy and magical dreams that choosing the Beast is a good idea. This is a significant change, for it alters the tone of the story from the symbolic to the psychological, making the power of perception—rather than obedience to good advice—the story’s theme. It was de Beaumont’s version that became the standard for the generations that followed, which is why she is most often credited with authorship of the tale—when it is not mistakenly credited to Perrault or d’Aulnoy (better known French fairy tale authors) or the ubiquitous Anonymous.

Early in the next century, the proliferation of printing presses caused the de Beaumont version of *Beauty and the Beast* to be widely disseminated in chapbook and pamphlet editions, often with credit attributed to neither de Beaumont nor de Villeneuve. Betsy Hearne, in her fascinating study of the tale (Chicago University Press, 1989), points out that during this period the story took on certain nineteenth century trappings absent from previous retellings. In the 1843 poetic version attributed to Charles Lamb, as well as the sumptuously illustrated Victorian editions that followed, the idea of *fate* is introduced. Beauty’s actions, such as going to the Beast’s castle in her father’s stead, are not simply attributed to either obedience or a sense of honor, but to an acceptance of a predestined fate that lies before her—a notion completely absent in the older stories. In the twentieth century the story was subtly altered again

Each artist, each generation, now uses the bones of such old stories to flavor the soup of new stories, served up to modern tastes. Art by Stephen Johnson.



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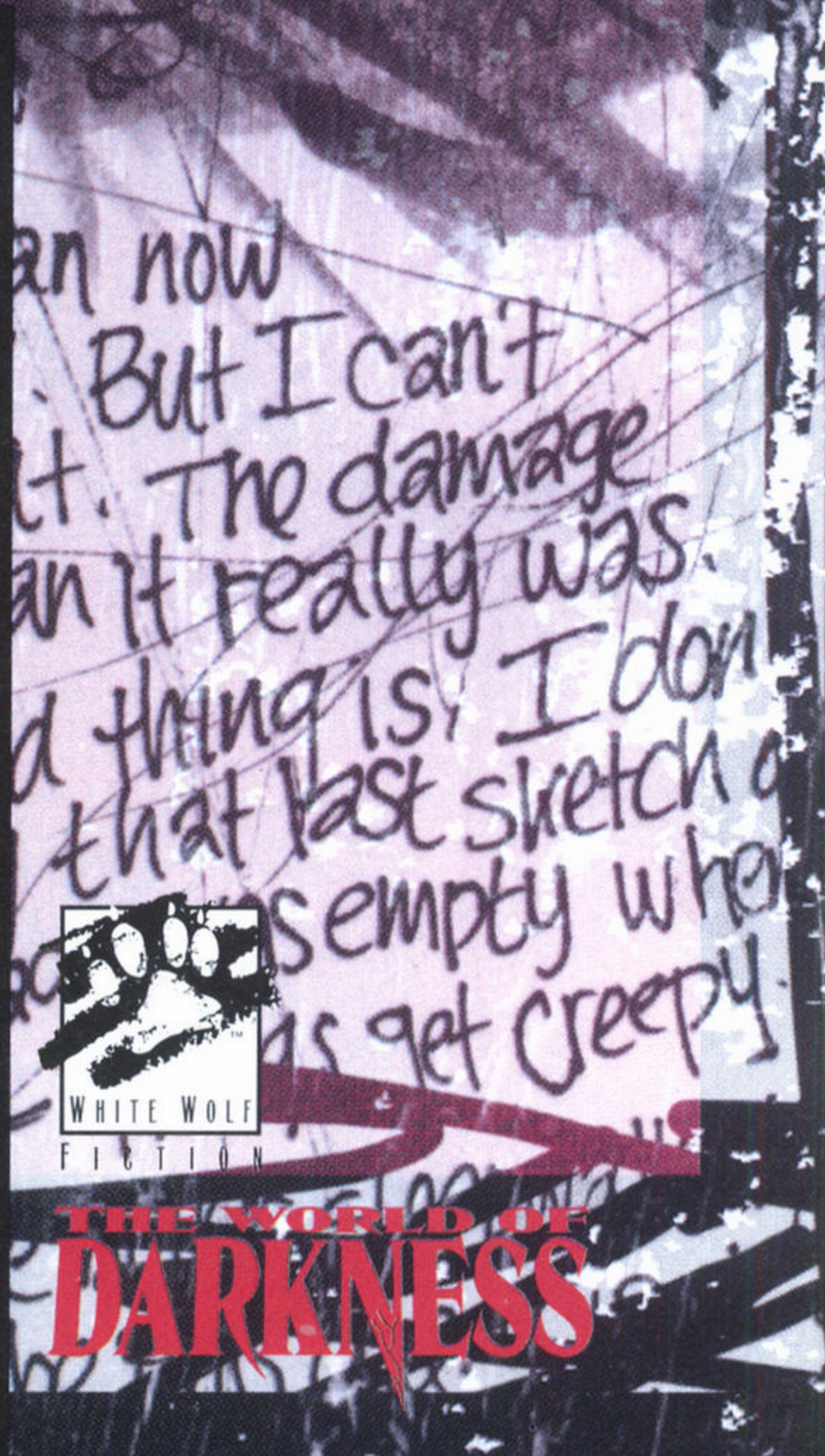
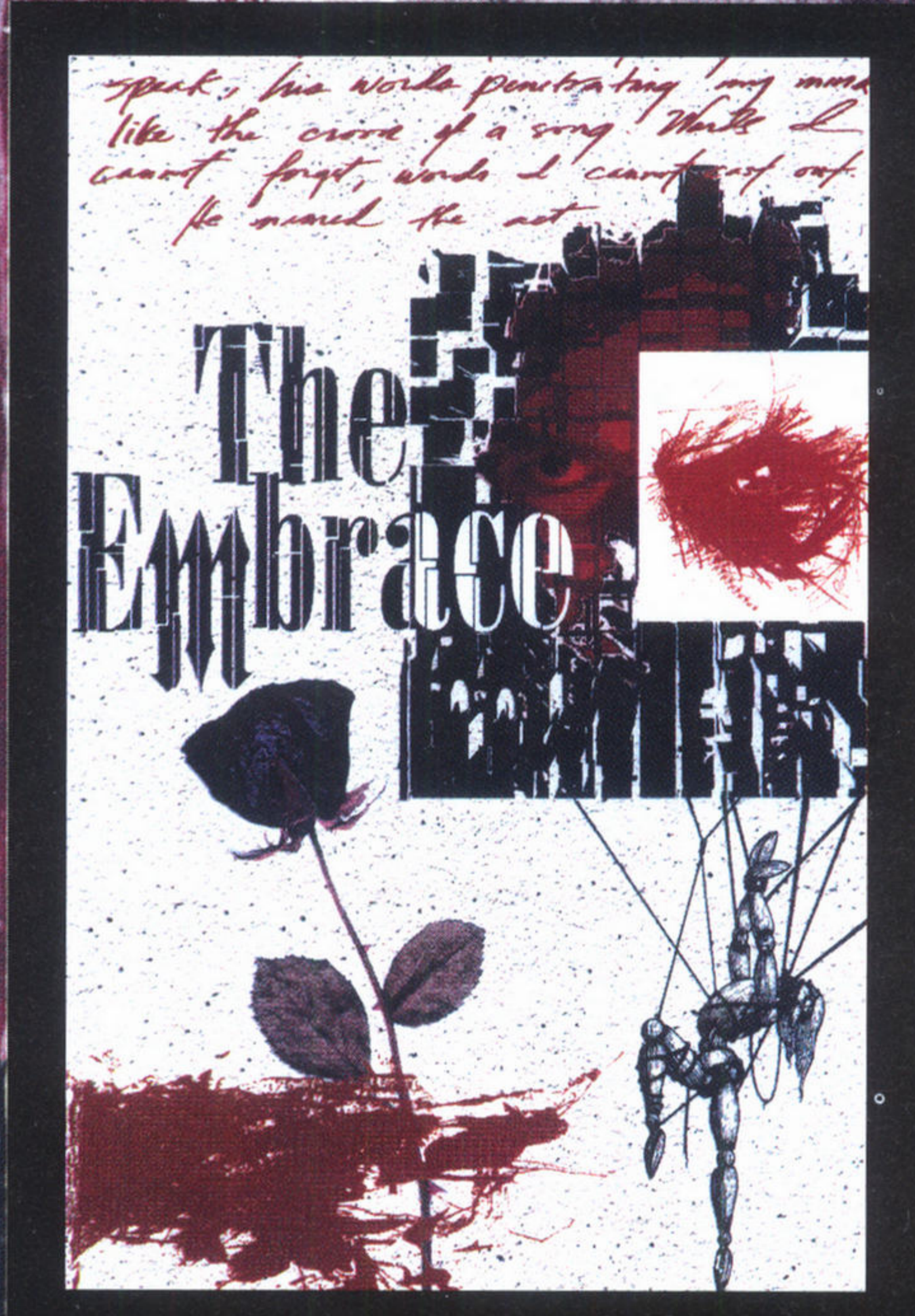
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and brought back into the realm of adult storytelling—even while illustrated editions for children multiplied like rabbits. (Betsy Hearne points out that the recent Library of Congress computerized printout listing editions of the tale is more than seven feet long.) French playwright Fernand Noziere wrote and produced an adult version of *Beauty and the Beast* with an Oriental flavor (as was the fashion of the time) in 1909. It is a humorous treatment of the tale, and yet beneath its light surface, it explores the sexual subtext of the story and the duality of body and spirit. In his version, all three sisters find themselves attracted to the Beast in his animal form. When Beauty's kiss turns him into a man, she states: "You should have warned me! Here I was smitten by an exceptional being, and all of a sudden my fiancé becomes an ordinary, distinguished young man."

This is a problem that has plagued most dramatic representations of the tale. The Beast is such a compelling character that it is usually disappointing in the end to end up with some pretty-boy prince. This is particularly notable in Jean Cocteau's otherwise extraordinary 1946 film, which still stands today as the best media presentation of the tale. Filmed in black-and-white with an astonishing amount of care, craft, and love, Cocteau created a masterpiece of fantasy storytelling—skillfully blending the magical elements with strong elements of realism to bring the fairy tale to vivid life. Cocteau's diary of the filmmaking process (*Beauty and the Beast: Scenario and Dialogs*) is highly recommended to readers interested in either the tale or fantasy filmmaking.

Cocteau made his version of *Beauty and the Beast* in France after World War II, a time when post-war blackouts and equipment shortages were daily problems, and when the idea of filming a fairy tale struck many as shockingly trivial. But Cocteau—unlike many filmmakers attempting to work with fantasy—avoids triviality through a deep understanding of his source material, as well as through an intense personal vision and an almost fanatical attention to details such as lighting and design. He aimed, he said, for the "clean, sculptured line" of poetry instead of the usual diffuse lighting and use of gauzes for magical effect.

Although it is a film that can be watched by children, the subtext is adult, and powerfully so. Beauty's nightly refusal of the Beast and the slow awakening of both her attraction and her sexuality are contrasted against the Beast's struggles with his own animal nature. He comes to her door covered with the blood of the hunt, and with anguish she sends him away again. This echoes the Scandinavian animal bridegroom tale, *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*, in which a young woman is sold by her father to a big white bear—but in the Scandinavian tale the sexuality is more explicit. Her animal husband comes to her bed every night in the dark, in

Continued on page 73

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BY GAHAN WILSON

Wrap your mind around novels of social flux by Jack Cady and Tim Lucas.

ALL TIMES AND PLACES LEND THEMSELVES WELL TO FANTASY, BUT SOME SEEM TO PROVIDE it and its subdivisions with an especially friendly environment. Victorian England, for example, was simply perfect for ghosts, and that same country's Elizabethan Era was so kindly disposed to Faery that contemporary illustrators find it almost impossible to resist costuming their little folk in clothes reminiscent of that era. The American '20s and '30s, with their gangsters and Great Depression, grew such gloriously hardy pulp superheroes and villains that they still thrive today in comic books and on huge screens with Dolby wraparound sound. And could any other period and locale have produced the writings of Edgar Allen Poe?

Here, America, and now, the '90s, may turn out to be one of the most spectacular breeding grounds of fantasy yet. It is overbold to make any sort of historical judgment from this close up, of course, but the climate of our country's steadily increasing social disassociation as it hurtles toward the year 2000 with all those millennial implications looming does make it promising territory, especially against the background of a whole world engaged in a general transition so vast and all-consuming that none of us can even begin to wrap our minds around it.

Almost all of humankind's ancient and established

ways of being and behaving find themselves in a state of cascading collapse, or fundamental reformation, or in a furious tooth and nail battle to preserve themselves. We seem to have arrived at a point where, as a philosopher character in a Saroyan play once put it, there is "No foundation; no foundation all along the line." All is in flux, the echoings of vast crumbings sound all around us, the once solid earth moves beneath our feet, things open which were always shut before and give us bright and dark glimpses of reality which one cannot help but suspect were denied to all our predecessors.

Jack Cady, an excellent and proven writer whose work I hope you are familiar with, has written a marvelous, demonic tale about all of this called *Street* (St. Martin's Press, NY, 212 pp., Hardcover, \$19.95). It is the exciting account of an epic contest between a romantic and courageous band of street people and an all too believable foul fiend, and it manages unconflictly to be both a stately, richly poetic novel with a wise and kindly heart, and a really neat little thriller that is cannily built to keep you turning its pages into the small hours of the night and then leave you unsleeping in your bed, staring apprehensively into the surrounding darkness.

The novel takes place in a Seattle loomed over by "sacred mountains above a land now turned profane" and plagued by a serial killer of the Green River variety who nastily slaughters whores and runaway children, then tucks their violated bodies away to rot in desolate hiding places after wrapping them with black silk ribbons "as a dark gift offered to a darkening world."

His atrocities outrage a tiny band of street people who have taken permanent shelter in an abandoned and desanctified church they call the Sanctuary, a big stone Gothic pile which has stood for ninety years, watching the upstanding folk who built it flee and the area around it turn from respectability to a dreary, run-down district of the town.

Across the street from it is a dismal warehouse of truck axles which is routinely pillaged by local thugs; nearby that is the embattled Cathedral Mansion Hotel, which has a stable population of retired ancients, slowly expiring in a state of single-room occupancy and a transitory plague of bikers and dope dealers.

Though each one of the characters hiding out in the Sanctuary is carefully crafted to make a little universe of

H.P. Lovecraft envisioned gods who could wipe out mankind. Cady and Lucas prove that mankind can do it all by itself. Illustration by J.K. Potter.



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philosophical points, Cady has studied his Herman Melville and all of them are flesh and blood and quite convincingly human.

The nameless narrator is an actor who is ashamed of having violated his art by misusing it to sell too many things too skillfully on television. When he eventually came to see himself as nothing more than "an accessory to bad taste," he abruptly sold his possessions, put the resulting money in a bank, and abandoned his successful pitchman's career to become a street person, or rather a series of street persons, since he is always carefully wrapped in a role, all of them developed with meticulous professional preparation and each role created given the same respect and love he would accord a living human. At the start of the novel, for instance, he is an aging Indian, a Tinglit fled from Alaska who supports his drinking habit by carving small blocks of soapstone into the likenesses of sacred animals and then selling them to a wholesaler of Native American artwork. He lives in the sacristy of the Sanctuary, a room exactly twelve by twelve by twelve.

The actor is hopelessly in love with another of the little group living in the Sanctuary: Silk, a beautiful, middle-aged ex-nun, who—after her church failed her and her subsequent husband died before they could have the children she'd hoped for—has decided to confine her love to small things, such as children's marbles and old-time hub caps which have been carefully shined.

Silk is totally unaware of the actor's love for her since most of her attention is spent on Hal, a character whom many of the readers of *Realms of Fantasy* will doubtless resonate to particularly since he is—in all respects save time and place—a romantic knight of old. He has dark eyes and white-blond hair, wears a

huge broadsword strapped across his back, and dresses in a medieval way. He stands guard over playgrounds and dark streets and has prevented many rapes.

The little party is rounded out by Elgin, a small, black poet who has a large, wide-nostriled nose, active as a hound dog's on the scent ("Sniffin' is my game."), and may be the wisest of them all, and Symptomatic Nerve Gas, a veteran of the Korean War, a "country boy who set off to see the world" and saw it was the pouring out and freezing of six thousand quarts of blood upon the snow. He stands on street corners, sometimes wearing a Halloween skull mask, and repeatedly calls out two phrases to passers-by: "Symptomatic nerve gas," and "Felony assault." After reading Cady's succinct and heartbreaking description of him as "an inarticulate man with a great message who does his best," I will never again pass a crazy man or woman calling out at us from a street corner with the same indifference.

The demon is a truly marvelous modern demon, absolutely perfect for our benighted time. It—the novel reveals the creature is not merely hermaphroditic, it is *trans*-hermaphroditic—lives in a gaudily festooned house ("strictly tinkerbell") behind an ornament-cluttered lawn because it can't stop buying things from catalogues and malls and TV pitchpersons and hardware stores because it is a pathetically and hopelessly compulsive shopper and consumer.

It's only another victim of what may be the major sin of this era, the demented and insatiable urge to find "happiness" *out there*, to buy it, or make it love us, to somehow, *anyhow* get our clutches on it, only to find we are still as hollow as ever, already looking past it (now it's ours and it hasn't worked at all) to the next new thing, which—this time,

surely—will fill the chasm in our gut. Why *else*, Cady points out, would it have lusted after and then killed over and over and over again and again and again, leaving each sad little corpse "a cast-off, gotta-have-it item and today's refuse"?

The determined pursuit of this dreadful, must-be-destroyed fiend by the gutsy little band of outcasts—their many failed attempts to put him down, the truly frightening counter-attacks they suffer—is not only exciting reading, it's full of wry and instructive ironies and generously packed with kindly revelations. I did not consciously appreciate, for instance, the vast difference between a role and a disguise until the actor taught it to me. I both profited from, and was thoroughly entertained by, this book.

Throat Sprockets by Tim Lucas (Delta Books, NY, 232 pp, Paperback, \$9.95).

This novel is also inspired by the pretty mess things have come to in contemporary Western society, but it's a whackier attack on the problem, and the approach it takes is almost purely cinematic, both in theme and in treatment.

This shouldn't come as any great surprise since *Throat Sprockets* is a first novel by an author who has already established a solid reputation as a film critic who specializes in a transmutation of that art form which has become nearly a way of life to many, namely the home-played VCR cassettes and laser disks. Anyone who has developed what even approaches a serious addiction in this area is bound to be familiar with the magazine he co-edits and publishes with his wife, Donna: *Video Watchdog: The Perfectionist's Guide to Fantastic Video*, or they certainly should be, if they aren't, as it is the best general guide I know of on the subject. If you spend more time than you should watching old movies on your television set, *Video Watchdog* will save you a lot of heartbreak and wall kicking, believe you me.

The novel is the story of a young advertising man who is reasonably happy with his life until he spends a lunch hour at the Eros—a lovingly depicted old movie theater which has descended from grander days and a number of more respectable appellations to its present incarnation as a down-at-the-heels emporium of porno flicks—and finds himself permanently blown away by a strangely haunting, weirdly constructed film called *Throat Sprockets*.

The title is a reference to the little round wounds which are left in the throat of one bitten vampirically. The film grants our hero (who is as nameless as the one in *Street*, which may or may not signify some kind of trend) a number of satori, the ones most immediately outstanding being: 1. No prior bloodsucking film he's ever seen has even begun to convey the courage it takes to actually sink one's teeth into the living flesh of another human's throat, and 2. The casual exposure of the unabashedly nude female

BOOKS TO LOOK FOR

The Wizard at Home, *The Seven Towers*, Book 2, By Rick Shelley, Roc Books, January. Taking up directly where the popular *Wizard at Mecq* left off, the Wizard Silvas must come to terms with his own immortality. If you enjoy high medieval fantasy, you'll probably like this one.

Shudder Again, Edited by Michelle Slung, Roc Books, January. An all new collection of stories intended to make you shiver with both fear and desire. Contributors include Ray Bradbury, Harlan Ellison, T.H. White and, yes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The first volume, *I Shudder at Your Touch*, was a national bestseller.

Witch Fantastic, Edited by Mike Resnick and Martin Greenberg, DAW Books, January. These veteran anthologists always put together entertaining and well-paced collections, so if you're into witches, give this one a look.

The Triumph of the Dragon, by Robin

Wayne Bailey, Roc Books, February This is Book Three in the veteran TSR writer's Dragon series, and the publisher describes it as "Swords and Bolts—fantasy as detailed as hard science fiction." Sounds like an interesting twist, and perhaps worth a look.

The Road Home, By Joel Rosenberg, Roc Books, February. This is the seventh adventure in the author's bestselling *Guardians of the Flame* series, and the publisher tells me there are over one million copies of his books in print, so if you don't want to start with book seven, the previous six are still available.

The Stone Movers, By Patricia Mullen, Warner Aspect, January. A "Tolkeinesque" first novel that's been garnering lots of advance praise from writers as diverse as R.A. Salvatore and Andre Norton, this one could be a keeper.

—Shawna McCarthy

neck in our society is dazzlingly shocking since he now knows it is the most erotically stimulating part of a woman's body.

Nothing is the same for him after seeing the film. His marriage is destroyed by the burning obsessions it arouses in his breast; his career in advertising is stimulated to undreamed of and continuing successes by the almost complete indifference to it which the movie has permanently planted in him; henceforth the center of his life will be filled entirely with, and dedicated exclusively to, *Throat Sprockets*.

Of course the first thing he does is to track down a videotape of the film so that he can see it again and again, and this brings him in contact with a sleazy mail order supplier of dirty movies, which results in Lucas spinning a tiny sub-story that I think may eventually become one of those urban legends we all half believe. In any case, since it reveals no basic surprises of the greater novel's plot and since it gives such a nice flavor of the book's *Twilight Zone* spooky wackiness—I can't resist respinning the thing for you.

Seduced by our hero into a chatting mode on the phone, the dirty movie purveyor whispers of a legendary but impossible-to-find tape which features the nude and highly bawdy doings of a wildly famous, creamily skinned movie star taken just before she disappeared forever from the public ken. He confides that he ran a copy of this tape for his own vile entertainment before mailing its original off to a married man in Lubbock, Texas in exchange for a large sum of money.

The early phases of the tape revealed no surprises as it showed the movie star and her vaguely out-of-focus lover running through the usual amorous preliminaries, but when they were well joined and the action began to near its climax, the porno man was puzzled to see the male lover start to vibrate oddly and turn a burningly bright red as his shoulder blades protruded in a peculiar fashion, then enlarged, then flapped like wings, and when the head of this sinister, transforming creature leeringly turned to look at the porno man—as if aware of his presence!—he hurriedly leaned forward to reach out and punch the stop button on his VCR.

The porno man's conviction that he had barely escaped some ghastly fate by a hair was strongly reinforced when he telephoned his Lubbock client to warn him that his tape just might be dangerous and found himself instead listening to his client's stricken wife as she sobbingly told him how she had come upon her husband in his den with his drawers pulled down around his ankles and his eyes burned entirely out of their sockets....

Getting back to the book at large, our hero's ever deepening quest leads to an increasing confusion between *Throat Sprockets*, the movie, and his real life. For example, he notices that a cheap orange rug which is oftentimes seen in the movie (since it was filmed on a very small budget) is beginning to appear in actual restaurants, hotel rooms

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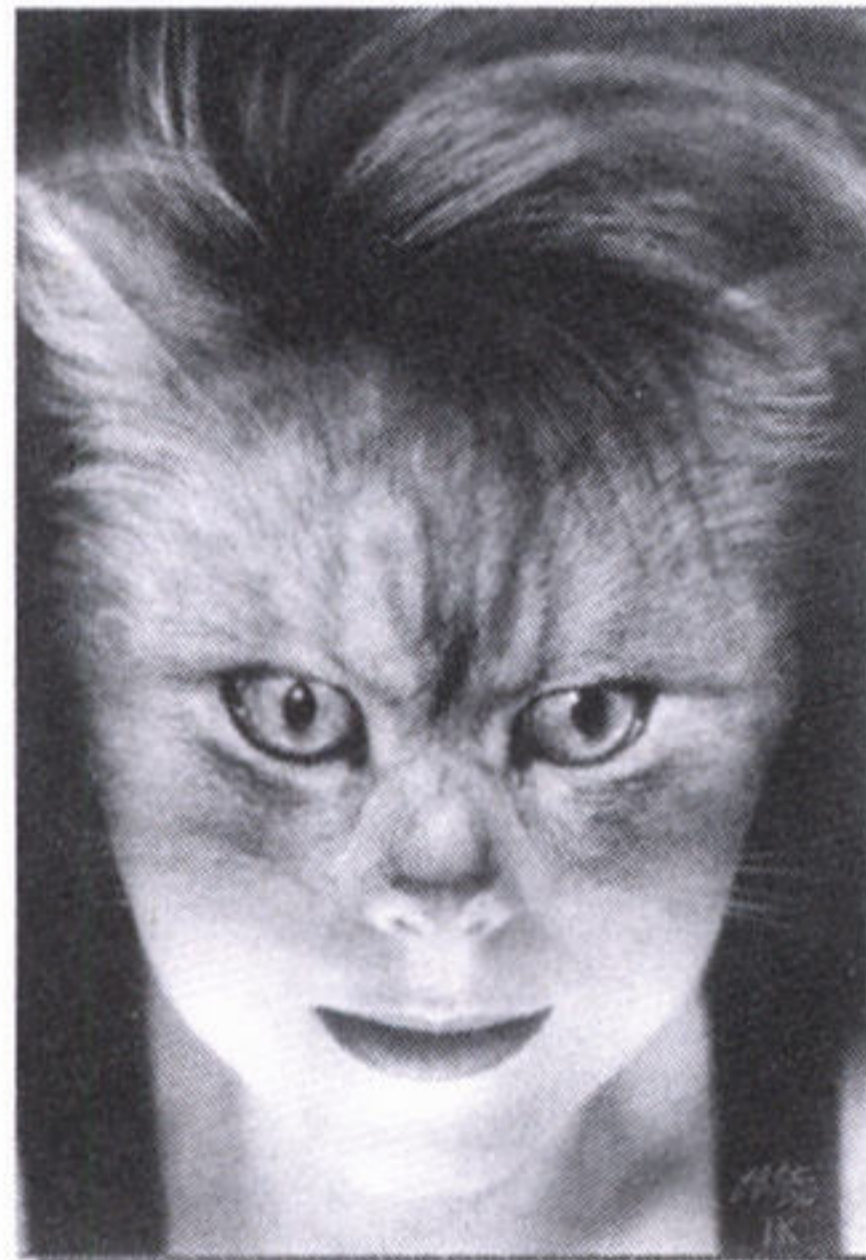
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and hospitals. He observes, too, the far more awesome and upsetting fact that various eccentric editing techniques employed in the film, up to and including weird splicings, are starting to show up in the structure of his life and in his thought processes. But of course none of this even begins to slow him down. He is past derailment by distraction. Nothing can surmount his overriding need to know about his beloved movie.

Even so, he notices that by subtle degrees, his personal hunt is slowly being overtaken by a general phenomenon. It becomes ever clearer that *Sprockets* is no longer his private, almost exclusive, obsession. All around him *Sprockets* has inspired a concealed but growing cult of other insatiates, and he is profoundly disturbed to see even this development most ominously and emphatically eclipsed as *Sprockets* gets its first small mention in *TV Guide!* *Sprockets'* underground notoriety is steadily expanding into fame.

Our nameless hero, like those central witnesses in H.G. Wells' swelling tales of universal destruction, remains the novel's central figure to the end. It becomes ever clearer that he is a romantic figure—albeit one along the lines favored by our contemporary society's grossly bizarre notions of the tenderer emotions. Our poor hero is cast in the grotesque mold of such great American superstars of passion as Judge Wachler, Jean Harris and O.J. Simpson. Without doubt *Throat Sprockets* is a painfully accurate love story for our times, and God help us all.

An impressive first novel from Tim Lucas, and I eagerly look forward to all those that will surely follow. But, for heaven's sake, no matter what great literary successes may come—please don't abandon *Video Watchdog!*

The Hastur Cycle, Mysteries of the Worm, The Shub Niggurath Cycle, all edited by Robert M. Price; Cthulhu's Heirs, edited by Thomas M.K. Stratman (Chaosium, CA. 302 pp., Paperback).

Let us end our little survey on a lighter note, getting away from all these somewhat depressing speculations on our society's slow drift from pointlessness to self-destruction, and consider a jolly little series of anthologies based on the mythos of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, who envisioned a pantheon of monstrous gods and other supernatural entities which, with varying degrees of indifference, have at one time or another mulled over the pros and cons of mercilessly wiping out our species.

Their publisher, Chaosium, is an outfit which, up to now, has pretty much exclusively confined its activities to role-playing games, the outstanding one of which—to me, at least—is their highly successful *Call of Cthulhu* which was initially created way back in 1981 by Sandy Peterson (who's recently developed the electronic *Doom* game and its sequel, if you want to talk about the marvelously depressing!) and which has thrived

ever since, breeding endless new editions and expansions to the increasing delight of its masochistic aficionados.

Now Chaosium has launched a line of books they have unsurprisingly chosen to name *Call of Cthulhu Fiction*, and they have wisely selected Robert M. Price to be its supervising editor.

Robert M. Price is a complicated, eccentric fellow, who combines a fine sense of humor with a passionate interest in things Lovecraftian. He went public with all this back in Halloween of 1981 with Volume 1, Number 1 of *Crypt of Cthulhu*, which he modestly describes as "a pulp thriller and theological journal." It is an amusingly flippant but deadly serious magazine which is dedicated to the study and enjoyment of spooky literature, particularly that of Lovecraft.

So far Chaosium has brought out four books in their new series. The first is *The Hastur Cycle* and commences an instructive and highly entertaining subseries. This book gathers together obscure short stories, plays and poems concerning Hastur, a mysterious entity of the Lovecraftian mythos, and illuminates them with a general essay by Price on the roots and development of the theme, both in works by Lovecraft and others preceding and following his *oeuvre*. It contains seminal works by Ambrose Bierce, Robert W. Chambers and Arthur Machen, and stories which followed Lovecraft by stalwarts in the horror field, including Karl Wagner, James Blish and Ramsey Campbell.

The second book is *Mysteries of the Worm*, a careful gathering of Robert Bloch's Lovecraftian stories which has been expanded from the original edition and equipped with an afterword and certain textual revisions by the author. There is also a general forward and informative story introductions by Price.

The third book, *Cthulhu's Heirs*, is a collection of new mythos fiction, very competently assembled and introduced by Thomas M.K. Stratman. It is, I am happy to say, on the wild and woolly side and not only contains thrillers by the towering and widely renowned, but lustily horrific contributions by newcomers. A grand book to curl up with on a dark and stormy night if you got da noive.

The fourth volume is the second in the cycle series, this one entitled *The Shub Niggurath Cycle—She Who Is To Come*. Price introduces and has great fun exploring and expounding on the goatish doings of the Dark Mother of the Woods. He starts by presenting us with a small antholette of M.R. Jamesian antiquarian-style spookers exploring the more traditional usage of horrendous goats, which features a story by the occultist Lewis Spence and the unfortunate M.P. Dare. It then moves fearlessly along to more contemporary workers in the field, including a couple of tales by Lin Carter, and wraps the dark tome up with a satisfying *final* sort of tale, "To Clear the Earth," by the redoubtable Will Murray. Good clean fun! ☘



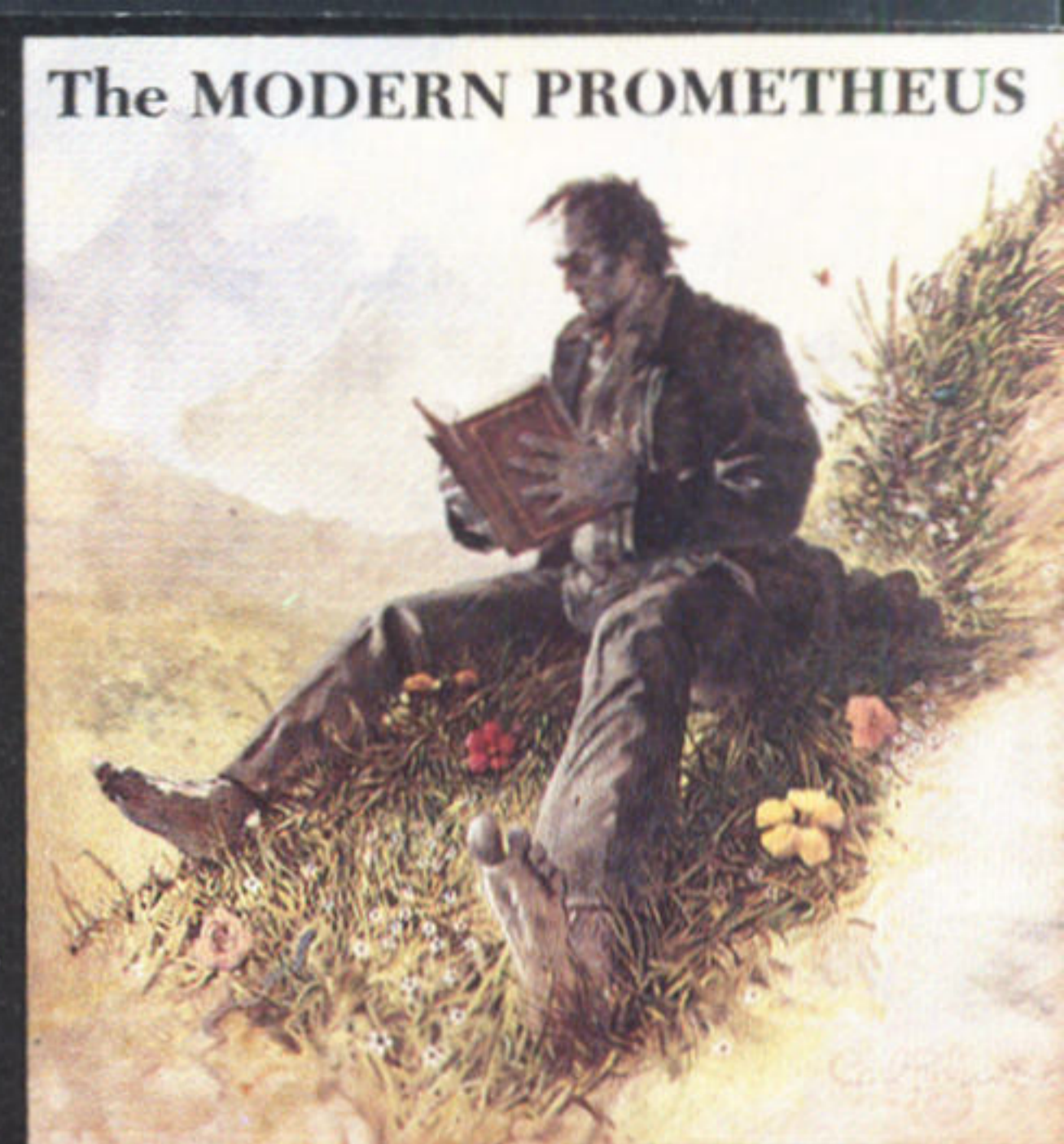
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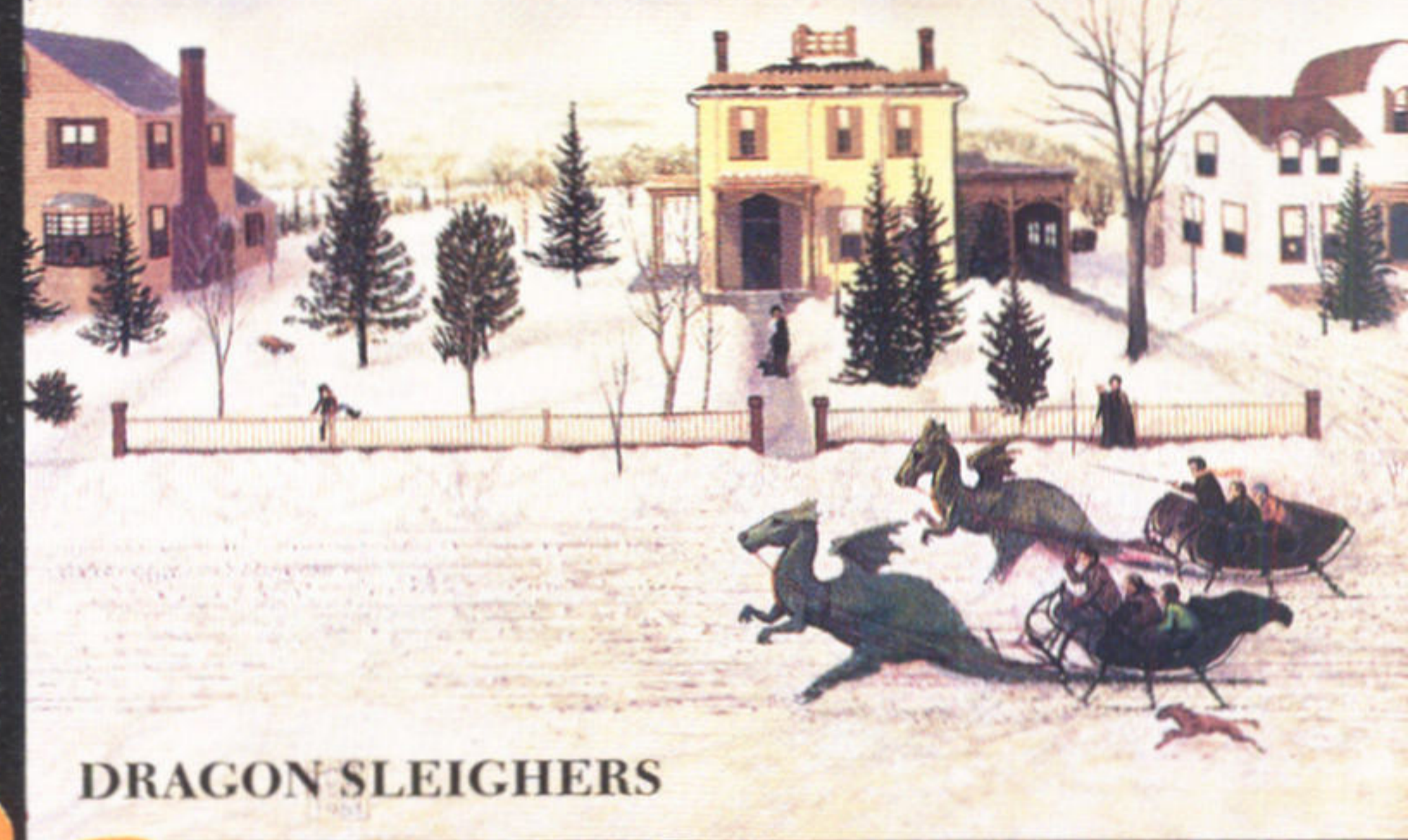
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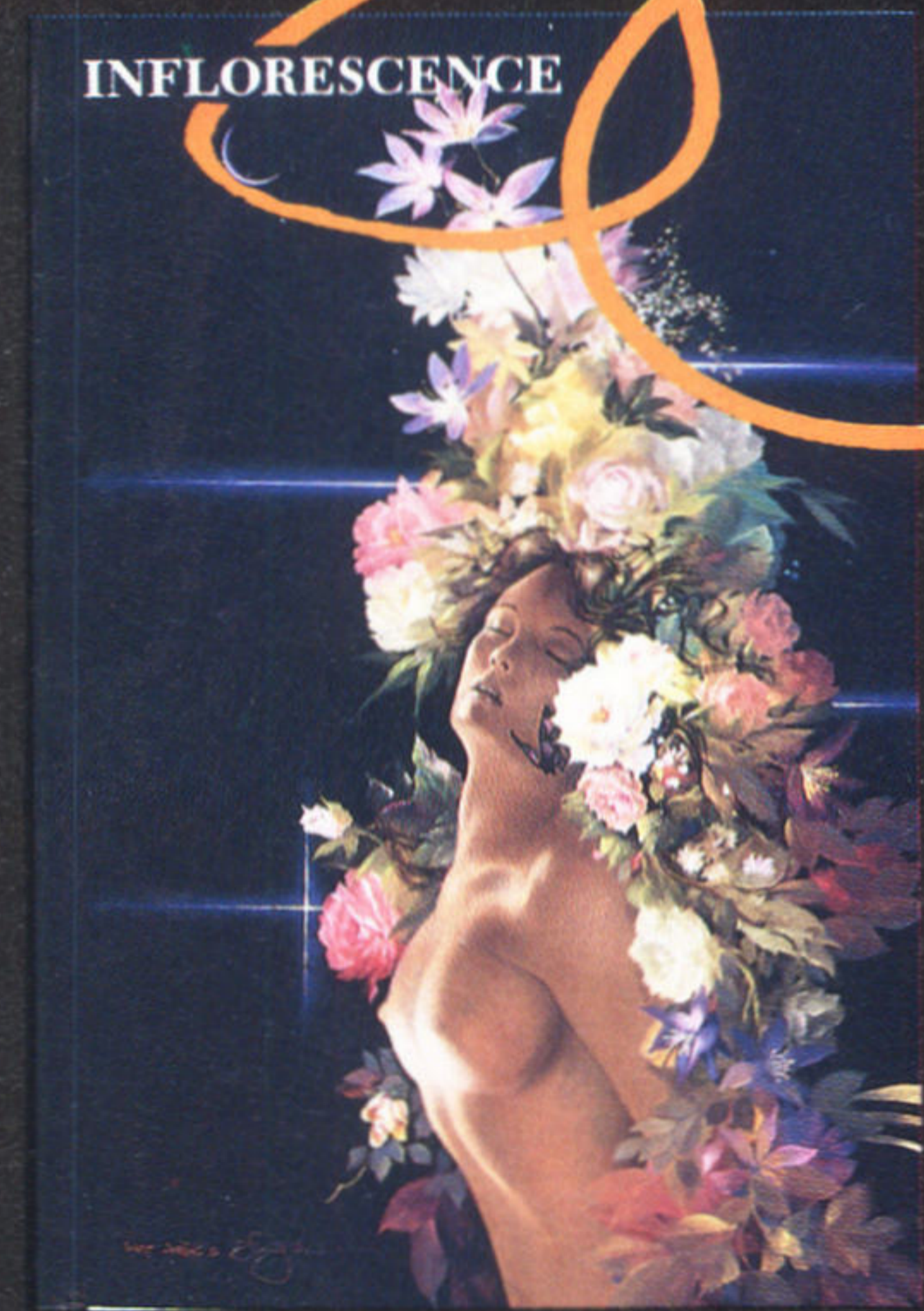
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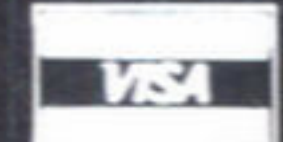
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Chris Carter scares the bejabbers out of his audience in *The X-Files*.

YOU MUST EXCUSE ME; I TEND TO GET A LITTLE WEIRD ON FRIDAY EVENINGS. I PAUSE IF there are unexplained clicks on the phone line, try to decipher the subtexts concealed within the juxtaposition of items on the eleven o'clock news, and ponder the exact nature of the ingredients in my Lean Cuisine dinner. God forbid a car passing outside should sweep the room with its headlights...you might not hear from me for a week.

Paranoid? You bet, but I've got reasons: I've just been watching *The X-Files*.

You can imagine the type of show the Fox network could have made from the concept of a couple of FBI agents staging inquiries into UFOs, cattle mutilations, and all manner of paranormal phenomena. Fox, after all, is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, parent company of that paragon of journalistic integrity, *The Star*. Given such lineage, the resurrection of the Sunn Classic filmmaking style—all cynical, sanctimonious, *Chariots of the Gods* posturing—was not out of the question.

Fortunately, series creator and co-producer Chris Carter had a purer goal in mind: to scare the bejabbers out of his audience. As portrayed on *The X-Files*, it ain't just the little green men we have to worry about. Sure, there are weird things afoot in the heart of "normal" America: children channeling digital code beamed to them from outer space; people disappearing into the night, only to return carrying bits of implanted metal that send supermarket grocery scanners into cardiac arrest. What's really scary, though, is what the show's protagonists—UFO-believer agent Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and skeptical forensics expert agent Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson)—regularly discover in the course of

their investigations: that the government knows these things are out there, that they've always known, and that they're none too eager to share that knowledge with the rest of the world. At its best, *The X-Files* plays as a paranoiac's dream-come-true, its heroes trapped in a conflict that pits strange doings in hometown America against the machinations of a shadow government that operates in its own, presumably malevolent, interest. David Lynch, meet Erich Von Daniken.

The establishment of a genuinely creepy scenario, along with the technical excellence exhibited in the show's every frame (these guys could teach the folks over at *Homocide* a thing or two about steadicams), have not gone unremarked by the media press, a number of whom have already declared *The X-Files* a *Twilight Zone* for the '90s.

While producer Chris Carter acknowledges the compliment, he's also quick to point out the distinctions: "We deal with the same thing, which is the unknown. Beyond that, the way the stories are told—*Twilight Zone* was an anthology, this is not—make the differences more notable than the similarities.

"[*Twilight Zone* creator Rod Serling] was telling fables, almost allegorically. You see a lot of that in *The X-Files*, but each of the episodes of *The Twilight Zone* had a bigger message, a bigger purpose, and that was to illuminate something about the human comedy. We don't set out to do that, we don't set out to be instructive—there's no message behind each *X-Files* episode. Although there is something you can take from it, we're not teaching in the same way."

But if *The X-Files* is intended as pure shudders, they're high-grade shudders, and so unconventional that it took two pitches to convince Fox executives to give the series a whirl. "I had to give them more detail," says Carter of the two selling sessions. "I had to tell them more of what this could be, week after week. No one understood what it was; even after we made the pilot, no one understood what it could be. It was just a matter of convincing them that it could be something other than a pair of FBI people investigating UFOs week after week."

The streets of Vancouver stand in for *The X-Files*' various U.S. locales. Shot on a not-inconsiderable budget of \$1.2 million per episode, and a schedule that sees each story wrapped in about eight twelve-hour days ("I don't

Agents Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) and Fox "Spooky" Mulder (David Duchovny) investigate unexplained phenomena in *The X-Files*.



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The FBI finally succeeds in shutting down the X-Files and separates the two agents, leaving Fox Mulder alone to face all manner of paranormal phenomena.

know that we've ever done it in those eight days," Carter admits), the program's sheer unconventionality makes for especially arduous shooting conditions.

"One-hour episodic drama is the hardest show in town," says Carter. "Beyond that, when you have shows that succeed in the format—*L.A. Law*, *Picket Fences*—these shows are done as ensembles, so you've got a lot of people to carry the work load. They're done

as interiors on standing sets inside buildings. We are really doing a little movie each week: we are out usually about five, six of the eight days we are shooting; we can't go back to standing sets. This all takes a lot of intensive production attention. We're doing a different little movie each week, with two characters who have to carry most of the work load."

Given the conditions under which they're working, Carter concedes that the show

could not succeed without the skills of his front-line production personnel: "I call both John Bartley, who's the director of photography, and the art director, Graham Murray, our secret weapons, because they have an instinct for what we want. The more shows you do, the more everyone gets a feeling for it, it becomes a shorthand, something you don't need to talk about anymore. John knows that we like things dark, we like hard-cast shadows; he's got a tremendous touch with these things. The same with Graham."

Complex as an *X-Files* shoot might be under normal conditions, an additional complication arose this year with Gillian Anderson's pregnancy. Aware that the actress' condition would necessitate her being spared the grueling demands of location shoots, and eventually require her to be absent from the show completely, Carter capitalized on the situation, working in a plotline in which the FBI shuts down the X-Files and separates the two agents, conveniently segregating Scully to a forensics lab. (Scully was later kidnapped by aliens, allowing Anderson to take a one-episode sabbatical, while giving the ever-pragmatic Carter a chance to feature an unsettling shot of the heretofore unmaternal agent great with child and strapped into an alien machine.) Says Carter of these plot developments, "It was all part of a larger design. It was a wedding of my original desire, which was to do an epic episode in which the FBI was finally successful in doing

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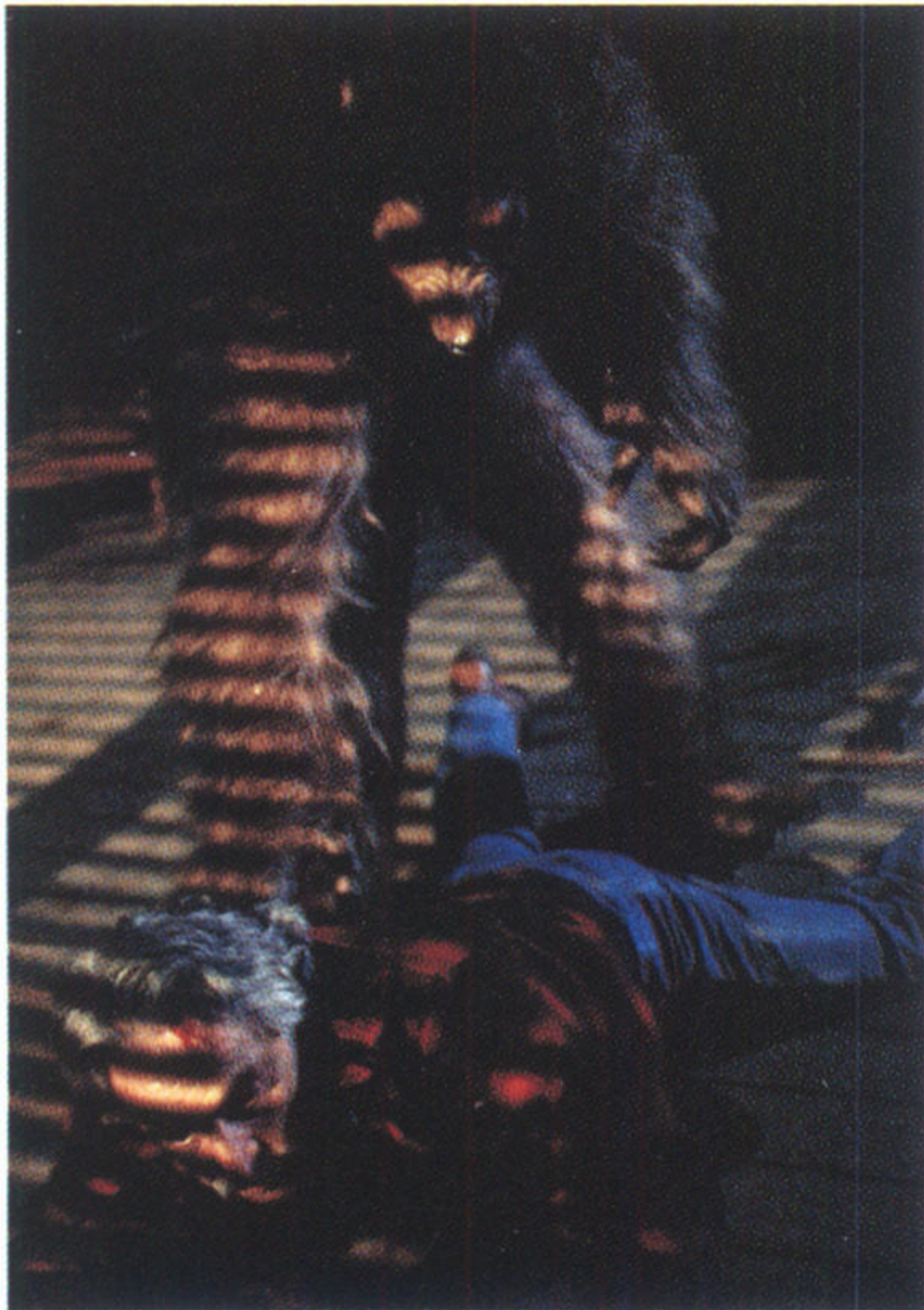
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A manitou creature attacks and kills a man on an Indian reservation in last season's "Shapes."

what they had set out to do in the pilot, which was to close the X-Files, and at the same time give us a way to separate them so we could have Gillian in a more stationary—sedentary, if you will—place for the rest of her pregnancy. It worked out that it was an interesting idea even if she wasn't pregnant.

"Luckily, nature conspired to make our schedule. She was due September twenty-second, she had the baby the twenty-fifth. Thank goodness for that, because we were flying a little bit by the seat of our pants. There were schedules and contingencies, but beyond a certain point we would have been sunk. Luckily, Piper Anderson, as she has now been christened, was very cooperative."

Biological necessity may not have motivated another significant plot-twist, but Carter concedes that the season-closer assassination of Deep Throat—an enigmatic mole who regularly supplied Mulder and Sculley with vital information—was no less wrenching: "I was very fond of the character—as was a lot of the audience, I came to find out—but I think as soon as you rest on your laurels, as soon as you become comfortable with something, is when you may be heading in the wrong direction. If this guy were to show up and just deliver the information that couldn't be gathered or gleaned anywhere else but from him each week, we would have fallen into a rut I didn't want to fall into. It was, I guess, a shot across the bow for the audience, saying to them, 'Expect anything. Nothing is sacred; you'd better pay attention because there's always a chance that what you least expect could happen.'

"I didn't want to lose Jerry Hardin, who I came to like as a person and as an actor. I liked the character he played, I liked the way Mulder played off him. As soon as you give up something like that, you have to come up with something else. You create work for yourself but, at the same time, you create



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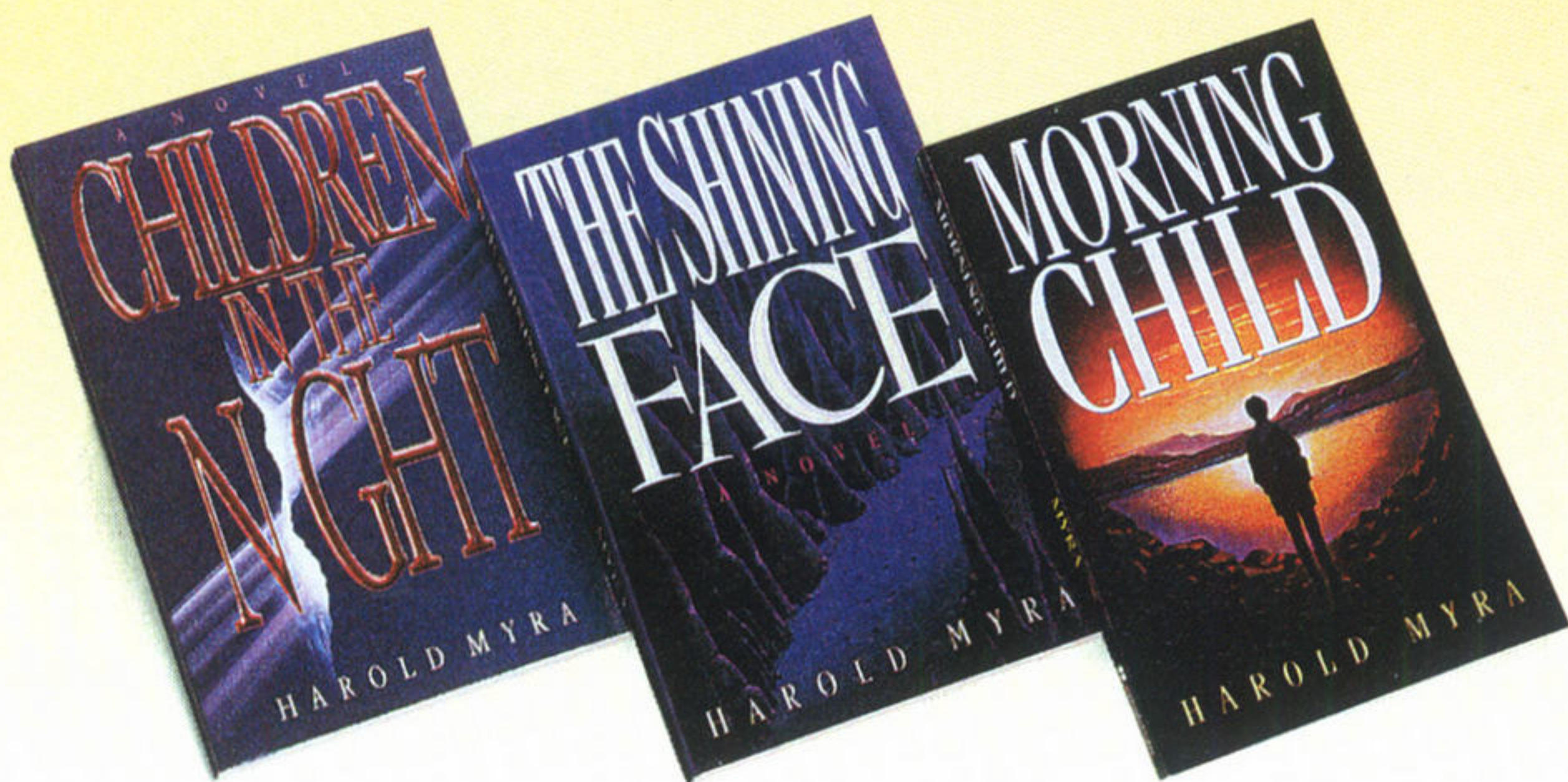
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interest for yourself."

Keeping up interest shouldn't be a problem, given *X-Files*' predilection for avoiding the obvious when incorporating all those crop-circles, secret mutation projects, and military mind-control experiments into their plotlines. (In one especially delirious episode, Carter and Co. managed to touch upon vampirism, cattle mutilations, and extrasensory perception, before settling in on a story about psychotic adolescent super-genius clones. And how was *your* day?)

"To come at anything from a different angle than the angle it's been approached from before means having to be more than clever," explains Carter, who personally scripted over one-third of last season's episodes, and this season extended his efforts to directing. "It's having to be craftier than that. Trying to be fresh about the approach to anything when, for some, the tendency is to go toward tabloid takes a lot of thought. Breaking a story for *The X-Files* is very much an instinctual thing for me and for the other people who have come to be so good at it on the staff."

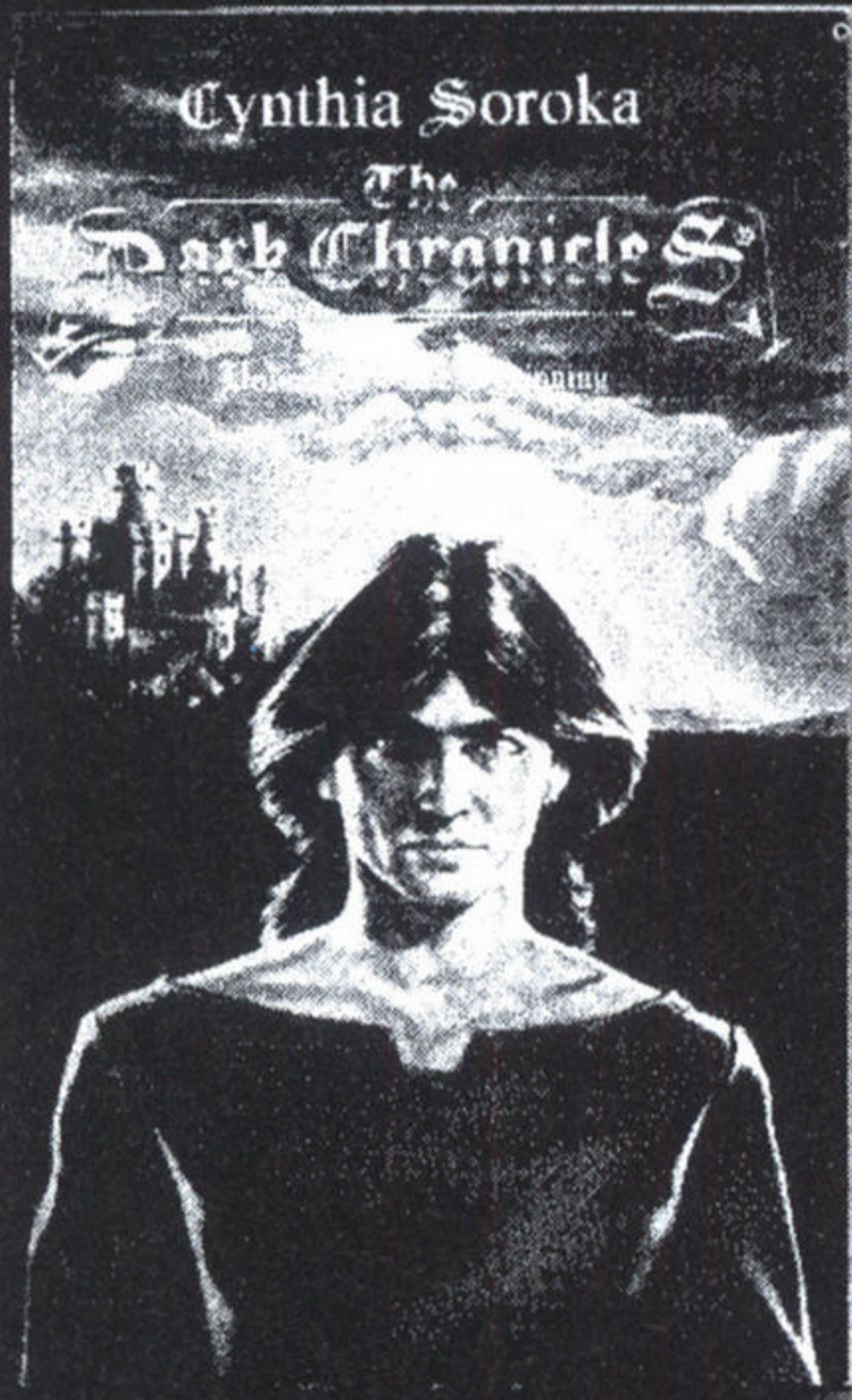
Amazingly, for all the unflinching treatment of graphic material in an *X-Files* episode—at times, the show toys with a *Silence of the Lambs* level of explicitness—Carter claims that the series has had few difficulties with the Fox Standards and Practices Department: "In terms of the amount of violence on-screen, I think we're very, very careful and have done a great job of trying to live by the letter of Fox standards. There are certain things we can't do: I can't show somebody getting a shot or a needle puncturing skin. A lot of the violence takes place off-screen; it's the result of the situation that we show. If a body lying on the autopsy table is gruesome or gross, it's something that we're able to show tastefully and in a serious way, so as not to be gratuitous or grotesque or [to exploit] its gross-out value. These are the things that make the show seem real, and the show is only as scary as it is real."

For now, the system is obviously working. Although ABC's comedy block attracts more viewers, *The X-Files* is luring a substantial number of eighteen to forty-nine year olds over to the Fox network. The combined critical and popular success has had a heartening effect on all involved. "It's a remarkably positive and enthusiastic group of people who work on this show," says Carter. "It's a stroke of luck and I'm knocking wood right now, because I've got a lot of people who have come together, who like working on the show because they like the show, they feel proud of it, they feel there is incentive because everyone else likes the show too. It's one of those things where good work and good response creates a good working environment."

"It's a chance in a million. A lot of very talented people have come together to do good work. I have to say it's a very special situation." ☛

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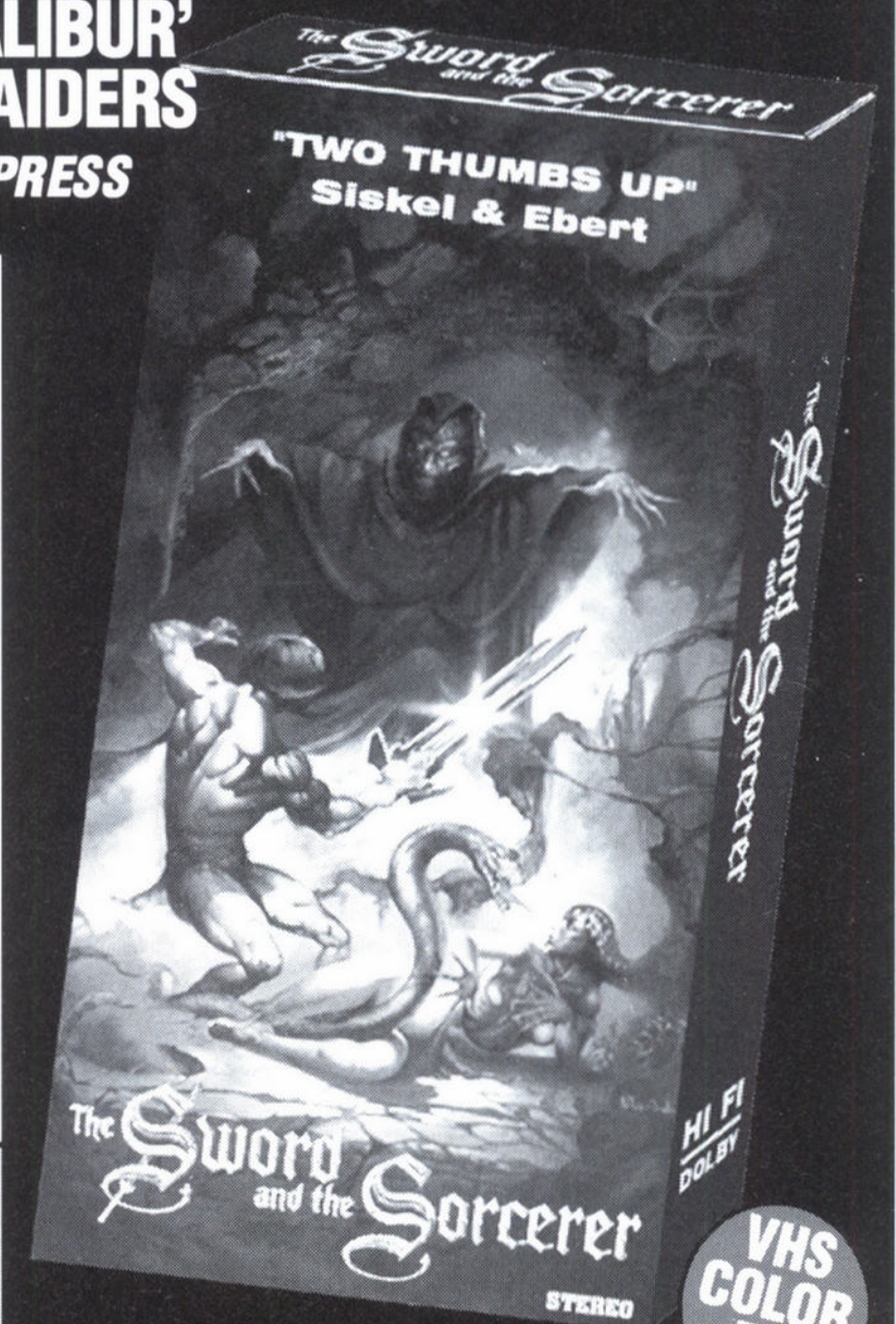
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*Here is a tale of despair and revenge,
fate and luck, which should teach
those of you considering it never to
underestimate a woman.*

THAT NIGHT, IN THE YELLOW hotel high above the port, silence became my enemy, as it sometimes does. I had become used to the rush of the sea, timbers complaining, the vocal life of ships. Now the noises began in my head, the long, thin drone, the feeble futile flickering notes above. I got up and dressed in the salt-stained trousers and shirt of my voyages. Outside the room, the murky gaslight quavered, and at regular intervals the lamps had failed, giving over the long corridors, with their mottled walls and spaces of matting, to the dark.

Below, in the large communal rooms, no one was abroad. But dim sounds reached me from the port, and the droning and whining in my ear drew off. Then, sweet as crystals, I heard the song of nightingales, not one but many.

Two wide doors stood open on a courtyard. Out beyond the vagaries of the false light, a blue night sky had brought forth all its stars. The single tree that centered the court was heavy in foliage, and here the nightingales sat singing.

At the base of the tree was the shape of a man like a statue, and in front of him was a glass hubble-bubble that faintly gleamed and gave off a gurgling sigh.

I hesitated, and his hand came up, beckoning me. He said in French, "Good evening. You are welcome."

Then I approached and sat down, facing him in the dark, across his little mat. He handed me without preface or delay the mouthpiece of the smoking, bubbling hookah. It was of ancient amber, bleached in the starlight. I sucked the scented fumes into my body, and light as a cloud, a cool stillness rose up in me—opium had been mixed with the tobacco.

We smoked for some minutes without speaking. Then the old man—he looked as old as the amber—made that graceful gesture I have seen in several lands, a sort of gliding over the air before the body of a stranger, which asks some information.

I told him my name, where I had come from, and where I intended to proceed.

His head was swathed in a white turban clean as an English blanc-mange, and over this rested a veil, patterned and fringed at its edges. His hands were ringed in blackened silver and green gold.

He listened courteously, and then, giving me once more the mouthpiece of the hubble-bubble, he said, "And will you hear a story?"

"I'd do that gladly."

He smiled. He said, "In your childhood they told you no tales."

"That's true."

"And now you hunger after them."

"Also true."

He took the mouthpiece again and filled his old silver lungs with the smoke. So the story started, its phrases made visible. And since we continued to pass the mouthpiece between us while he spoke, his words soon seemed to issue also from my lips.

AS THE POT-SELLER CAME TO THE ROAD, WHICH ran across the desert, misfortune befell him. The road was broad and powdered with dust. It extended from the distant city, an artery without blood; traffic seldom moved along it—some carts, a bicycle perhaps, every third day. Now as the skinny man, with his pack of pots, ventured out upon it, he heard a curious, ominous noise.

He hesitated, looked about him. The desert was empty but for its sands and rocky slopes, bristled by a few of those thin and twisted shrubs that never hope for water. The sky was yellow, flushed blue only at its edges, and hollow and filmed at once, also empty.

The noise was on the road. It rushed toward the man. At the road's shore stood his daughter, carrying other pots, and he waved at her to be still.

From the haze then there emerged, throbbing and shining and smoking, a monster. It was a car, a beautiful black car with a square cabin of glass windows, and golden lamps that blinded in the sunlight.

Transfixed and half-disbelieving, though he had seen such things now and then, the pot-seller waited there, in the road's middle. And to the hooting of the oncoming and impatient car he responded only with a muttered prayer.

Too late, he jumped aside. Intolerant, the car caught his drooping load of pots with its bumper, rounded as a hip in Paradise, and thundered on.

The pots scattered, shattered. He was left there, after the car had gone back into the haze, staring at these brown shells all over the roadway, with his daughter vainly going among them, trying to pick up anything whole.

"Leave it, Rebaidah. Leave it, I say. God's heavy on us."

The girl glanced at him. He was a man, the superior one, and her father. She must always obey. She left the rubble, and they crossed over the road and went down a path in the desert, toward the village they had been told of.

Rebaidah was very beautiful, but she did not know this. Plump as ripened fruit, with narrow waist and wrists and ankles. Her black hair curled and hung, under its rag, to her thighs. She did not cover her face, which some eastern queen had somehow conveyed to her, through generations of ignobility. Her eyes were purple-black with a sapphire glaze.

After an hour on the path, they came upon the village. Its name was Murum, and it was an oasis of the desert, full of deep wells. Along the streets of windowless stone houses, huge trees lifted their pillars, wreathed in foliage that gave only a glint of green.

Into the shade of these giants they walked, the pot-seller and his daughter. He said to her sharply, "Don't look up. Such trees are full of evil spirits."

But Rebaidah was glad of the coolness on her skin.

Soon enough, they came into the village market, where there were no trees at all, and going humbly to the place where itinerants were allowed to crouch, the pot-seller laid out the pitiful remnants of his wares. The girl assisted him, then stood by and fanned him with a plaited fan.

As was usual, only servant women came to inspect the goods in the market, and even their faces were covered over with thick dark veils, showing just the eyes. But close by there was a shop with a red awning, and under this the barefaced men of the village of Murum sat drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. One of these men began to stare at Rebaidah. Now this, of course, had happened before. She was poor and worthless and did not hide her countenance. However, something in the man's persistent scrutiny unnerved her. She sensed some new element, not solely passing lust mingled with contempt. Here there was a hunger.

And presently, the man got up, leaving his companions, and strolled over to the pot-seller's station.

"You've done well, to sell so many so quickly."

"No, alas, bless God. My pots were broken, by a motorcar."

The man smiled, finding this funny. "We shall all have motorcars quite soon." He smoked his cigarette, then threw it down half consumed. He was rich, and in the village they called him 'Handsome', although his looks were not exceptional.

"I'll buy the last of your pots. My servants are clumsy and break a great number."

The pot-seller made a fawning gesture.

The rich man, Handsome, looked full at Rebaidah, and she lowered her eyes, because naturally he was superior.

"And what else will you sell?"

The pot-seller was surprised.

"What, do you want the girl?"

"I'll take her and give you—oh, the price of a fat goat in milk."

"But she's my daughter," said the pot-seller, thinking no doubt of how she cooked his food at night, rubbed his feet, fetched water, and fanned him.

"As you wish," said Handsome. He turned slowly, and the pot-seller said, "Two goats."

Handsome laughed out loud. "Is she worth so much?"

"She's all I have, and she's a virgin."

The bargain was concluded on the spot, a pair of the other men coming to witness it, and a boy servant sent to fetch the money. The notary drew up a contract that neither the pot-seller nor Handsome, and certainly not Rebaidah, who anyway was not shown it, could read. Each man made his mark.

As the hot sun set upon Murum, the pot-seller sat alone in the dust, and a woman led Rebaidah away to the house of her new master.

HER LIFE HAD ALWAYS BEEN HARD. NOW IT WAS AS SOFT AS CREAM. Her world had been large and arid, now it was condensed, blue with shade, and punctuated by liquid.

The house had several rooms, which gave on a courtyard, and here there was a tank of water. Steps led up onto the roof, where stood a pavilion patterned with vermilion. Orange trees grew in pots and vines clung round and flowers bloomed. Here Rebaidah might sit all day and eat sweets, hidden from the roofs of other houses. Her tasks commenced at evening, when Handsome came home from his day of business and coffee in the market. Then she would wash his hands and feet, serve him the meal the servants brought, and finally go to bed with him in an upper room. Of her duties she liked this the least, but it did not trouble her unduly. Once the first pain was over, she found it quite easy to please Handsome, whose nose

would run in his paroxysms of joy. Only, from time to time, he liked to sleep with his head on her belly, and then she lay for hours awake, pinned down and unable to move, in the close black night of the room.

Handsome was delighted by her, called her his gazelle, but soon became quite used to her, seldom bothering her more than once or twice a night. He adorned her with silver bracelets and gold earrings. She wore light silky garments, and though she must go veiled in the house, once up on the roof she might remove this safeguard. Otherwise she must never leave the premises.

Her entire existence, from her earliest memory, had been one of wandering about, sleeping more often than not on the ground, sometimes chased by dogs, frequently without food. She was accustomed to her father's grumbling, and the grumbling of Handsome was new yet familiar. On the wall of one of the rooms, he kept a curved sword with a crimson tassel at the hilt. It meant no special thing to her. It was a man's.

She had asked nothing of her previous life and expected nothing. Surely she had been lucky, and comfort must be better.

Yet, even so, she found that strangely her eyes would stray to the outer door. That she would gaze at those servants who passed in and out. At night, pinned by the hairy boulder on her stomach, she would strain to catch some outer noise of the village, the mew of a cat or the whisper of the large tree which grew beside the house.

It was this tree, more than the vines of the arbor, that made Handsome's roof so secluded that Rebaidah might unveil there. From the start the tree had been a thing of marvel to the girl, for it seemed the tallest tree in the world, going up and up beyond the house, its leaves so massed that they were black, and only the midday sun would sew among them a handful of green sequins.

Yet Handsome spoke ill of the tree. "A haunt of demons, so my father would have said. We'll cut them all down before too long, cut down all the trees in Murum, and the streets will be wider and more modern."

Rebaidah did not debate with Handsome, would not have thought to. She said only that the trees gave shade to the streets, meaning that this was why she had noticed them.

But Handsome, thinking she had put up a tiny, frail opposition, cuffed her gently. "No shade will be necessary. Soon we men will travel by motorcar. In the morning I'll drive to the marketplace to meet my associates, and they too will drive there. In the evening, we'll return, and at the sound of the cars, our women will come through the rooms to meet us. That's a fine smell, the blue smoke of the gasoline. The air will be perfumed by it. And I'll build up the wall. You won't miss your tree."

Rebaidah sat on the roof and thought of this. She began to look up into the tree, which her father would have told her not to do. She had heard old stories. Of creatures like enameled snakes that lived among boughs, luring the foolish to commit wrong acts, tempting with gifts of fruit. Such ideas seemed nonsensical to Rebaidah. Life was very simple. You had only to do always as you were told.

Sometimes in the afternoons, as she lay on her cushioned couch beside the pavilion, Rebaidah heard faint laughter sprinkling over the sky. She knew that other women, the possessions of the richer men of Murum, were also up on their roofs, among the pots of flowers. She did not think that any of these would visit her, stepping over from one roof to another, for she was an alien and not even a wife.

However, one day, near sunset, when the sky was the color of apricots, Rebaidah opened her eyes from her doze, and a figure was moving out from the limbs and leaves of the tree. She wore, the newcomer, a dark silky dress like Rebaidah's own, and like Rebaidah was bright with ornaments, with little golden discs even tied into her hair, like stars in the night. She too was unveiled, and Rebaidah, who had never seen her own beauty, caught her breath at the beauty of this other.

The visitor did not speak but she laughed. Her laughter was like water in a fountain, or a breeze through the tree. She came forward in swift brief glidings, stopping always after a few steps and tilting her gorgeous head, as if to see what Rebaidah would do. And Rebaidah, rather shy, did not speak either, but only held out her box

of pink sweets.

Finally the visitor reached Rebaidah. She put a slim hand into the box and drew out a sweet. Raising it to her lips, she licked the sweet with a tongue even pinker.

"Sit down, if you will," said Rebaidah.

And the girl sat down by her side.

A lovely smell came from her. Not of perfumes, or even of cleanliness. It was a natural aroma, like that of a scented flower. Rebaidah breathed it in, and they ate the sweets, not speaking.

Then the girl lifted her hand to Rebaidah's unveiled face. It was a contact as mild as a leaf. Oddly, it made Rebaidah laugh also.

Then the girl leaned and kissed her, full on the mouth, in a delicious kiss, like kissing a sun-warmed nectarine.

Rebaidah had no recollection that she had ever been kissed by a woman, and only one man had ever pressed his lips on her, and that was Handsome in his snotty transports of joy.

She was at first startled, and at her reaction, her companion drew back, as if in fright. It was Rebaidah who must reach out and take the girl's hand, to show that she had not minded.

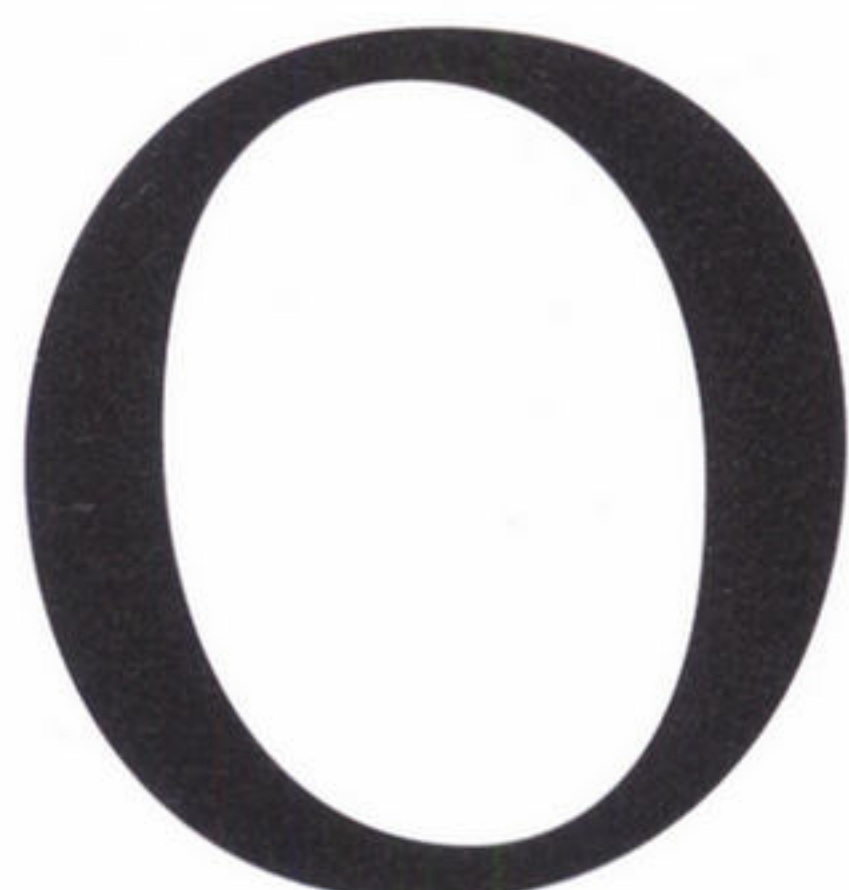
When she did this, the girl with golden stars in her hair leaned forward and kissed Rebaidah over the heart.

There could be no wrong in this. Only one man might touch a woman in such a way, but women, who were inferior and without soul, did not matter. Even so, Rebaidah was amazed. A lightning had gone through her. She did not know whether to jump up and run off, or to sit still and discover what would happen next.

At that moment she heard the well-known steps in the street below of Handsome, returning in company with two or three of his peers. At the door of his house they were parting with loud sounds as unlike the feathery laughter of the visiting girl as could be imagined.

And already the girl had sprung to her feet and was gliding away. She vanished in among the branches of the black tree, no doubt stepping off from there onto the adjacent roof which was her own. It had not occurred to Rebaidah that some considerable distance separated the house of Handsome from his neighbors. In her obedience and docility, Rebaidah had never much looked at or thought upon anything.

In any event, a real star had burst out in the sky, which was now losing its amber and turning blue, and the door had let in her lord, so she hurried down.



PREVIOUSLY REBAIDAH DID NOT TELL OF HER encounter with the beautiful visitor. What Rebaidah did away from him was of no importance to Handsome. The servants ignored her.

Thereafter though, Rebaidah would sit on her roof, with boxes of green and rose sweets and thirst-quenching drinks set by, and she would wait. Nor was she disappointed.

After the first occasion, the wonderful acquaintance would come to her every afternoon, always about the same time, in the hour before the sunset. Now she did not hesitate, but walked directly to the couch, seated herself, ate the sweets and sipped the juices. After this she would begin to caress Rebaidah in the same appetizing way, tasting her and giving back to her mouth the essence of lemon and peach.

Soon enough they would stretch out, face to face, on the cushions, under the cool shadow of the protecting tree.

"Oh, I love you," said Rebaidah, her head on the other's breast. "Tell me your name."

Her lover laughed. Rebaidah did not mind this. For now she knew that the laugh itself was the name.

Handsome frowned as he ate his spicy mutton, cleansing his fingers at intervals in the water bowl on which petals floated.

"That tree," he said, to no one in particular, for only Rebaidah and a woman servant were there, "that tree angers me." Then he ate some more of the saffron rice, drank his sugared coffee, and said, "My father would have cut it down. Old men talk of evil spirits. We must respect old men, God says so. Well, the moment has come."

That night he mounted Rebaidah three times, so that she was sore and ached, and now this deed of his made her nauseated, and she was astonished that she should mind it, for he was her master and she must serve him the very best she could. But Handsome did not notice her retching; he thought these were spasms of enjoyment.

When he slept he did not put his head on her belly, but one leg had swung across her, fastening her down.

She lay and listened for the murmur of the tree, but no wind had risen from the desert. Not a sound was to be heard.

It seemed to Rebaidah that an illness settled on her, and she might die. She did not know that she was heart-sick or that there was anything she might do. For what could she do, after all? A laugh was not a name, a woman did not matter, a tree could not defend itself.

In the morning Handsome rose early, washed himself and prayed, and ate a meal of bread. Then he went out and called men, laborers who were ready for any work. They came at noon and circled round the great dark tree, where it towered up like a column from the dusty street. It was as ancient as the oasis, perhaps, but it was bad luck. It might fall upon the house. Vermin climbed the limbs. Demons loved it. God did not care so much for a tree as for His prime creation, a man.

Rebaidah had been told to avoid the roof that day. So she sat, veiled, in a room of the house, which seemed hot as a furnace. Sometimes she retched into a bowl, like the bowl in which her lord had rinsed his hands. The older servant women muttered. They thought she was pregnant.

Oh, the thunder of axes. Unlike God, had Rebaidah ever truly cared for anything? Now she did not know what went on in her. She vomited and sank back in a sort of faint. Dimly, from a great distance, she heard the cracking, tearing and dreadful falling of the tree down into the gap of the street, and the smashing of its branches and the rustling sigh of all its broken leaves.

WHEN REBAIDAH WENT UP ONTO THE roof after this event, she was screened by the green lattices of the vines. She noticed that the other houses were too far away for anyone to have stepped across. Although she still heard the laughter of women, it was at a distance, and unlike that of her visitor, it was graceless and stupid.

The debris and corpse of the great tree had been removed. It would be burnt in ovens, so that men could be cooked for and fed. Stools would be made from it that wives might kneel beside and lave their husbands' feet.

Rebaidah knew that her beloved would not return to her and yet...

And yet... Again and again now she would go down into the lower house. She would stand and stare at the outer door. It was always locked, opened only by the male servant just before her master's return.

All her life, she had wandered the earth so wide and so cruel. But now she was confined within a cage.

Did she hear the sweet wild laughter out there on the sunset street? The girl from the tree could not have vanished. Women had no souls, and so, how could they die?

Five nights later, when Handsome, lingering in the market with his friends, was late, Rebaidah went to the preparatorily unlocked door and slipped through it. One servant saw her go and gaped in disbelief.

But Rebaidah was not herself. She had begun painfully to grow. She had rebelled. She was full of hurt and panic and the desire to run into the desert.

Despite all this, or because of it, she lost herself in the village of Murum. Fearful, fretting, she slunk about the streets where the other trees stood so tall. She was veiled, she had remembered enough to do that, and most took her for a servant. Often she concealed herself, and generally behind the trees.

Darkness came, the shadows clustered. In the stone houses the oil

lamps were lit, unseen. The village was black, and overhead now the stars shone hard as the points of swords—as hard as the point of the curved sword Handsome kept upon his wall. Rebaidah started to think of this sword, and suddenly she became aware that the crimson tassel that dripped from it was like a gout of blood.

Then she turned to fly away along the streets, but Murum held her in. She was soon lost again.

Meanwhile, he had come home and found Rebaidah gone, and the female servant had come groveling and confessed the appalling thing she had seen, how Handsome's possession had sneaked out of the door, out onto the public and forbidden street.

His rage was terrible. He roared like a lion, so neighbors arrived, asking what was amiss. Handsome told them freely. Their faces turned to stone, like that of the houses, badly made and windowless.

At last, Handsome strode into the room where the sword hung on the red cord. He lifted it off and held it a second, stricken and non-plussed, in his reasonable hands. Life was so simple. How had this madness come about? But he knew, they all would, what he must do.

He left his house alone, the sword balanced firmly in his right hand. He stalked the thoroughfares, and people shrank from him. As the facts of the affair came drifting down in his wake, men cursed their need of womankind, and women fell on their faces and grieved.

She was not so far away. She had come about in a circle. She stood there pathetically, in a dry little space beside a well, and here a lamp rested on the ground to give light to those who sought water.

Handsome sought only her, and very clearly he beheld her, curved like an instrument of pleasure, her face veiled like the moon in cloud.

"Bitch," said Handsome.

Rebaidah only gazed at him in despair. She had gone as far as she could. The logic of existence returned to her. There was no escape.

So she stood meekly, her head slightly raised, not in pride, but to assist him.

And he, with a terrific swing of his arm and the flash of the sword like a wave, struck the head off her body. For a few moments she continued to stand upright, headless, and by the time she had toppled down, her head had rolled into the lamp and put it out.

She was thrown into a hole, unmarked. Her head was another item altogether. For Handsome there was only praise. He had done the correct thing, setting an example to other less steadfast men, and teaching a lesson to disobedient women, who must be virtuous.

REBAIDAH'S HEAD WAS SET UP ON THE WALL OF HANDSOME'S HOUSE, on a spike. It gazed sadly and stoically down into the street, and men looked at it sternly, and the servant women averted their eyes lest the wickedness of Rebaidah infect them too. There was no veil, of course. She had lost her right to modesty.

Sometimes crows flew over to inspect the head, but they did not peck at it. The sun dried it, and gradually, rather than rotting, it became old and withered. The eyes turned white, and the hair was like black straw.

Every evening Handsome gazed up at the head. He thanked God for delivering him from the toils of Woman. But sometimes in the night he would dream that Rebaidah came to entice him, and as she rubbed her naked form against him, his seed would jet out into the bed. This caused him great humiliation, and he filled the mattress with stones to worry him in slumber and keep the sin of waste away.

The trees of Murum began to prey upon his mind also. He urged the other men of the village to have all the trees cut down. He was influential and rich. Eventually he got his way. And hour by hour, for seven days, the streets rang to the thud of the axes.

As they sat under the red awning and debated the unwisdom of the earth, the men murmured that now all the shade was gone from Murum. Handsome reminded them that the village was prosperous and soon they would each be very wealthy. Every man would have his cool motorcar and need not fear the heat of the sun.

That night in the first lilac of evening, as Handsome returned to his house, he looked up at Rebaidah's head fixed on his wall.

A horrible shock passed through Handsome, as if he had been suddenly plunged from crown to toe in icy water. For there on the

spike above the wall was fixed, not the head of the slut, but his own head, with its black mustache and small sharp eyes.

Handsome dropped to his knees and entreated God for mercy, but as he did so, he noticed that the head, his own, disappeared entirely, and instead he saw up on the wall a piece of the neighboring house.

Presently Handsome got the boy to fetch a ladder and go up the wall to see. The mystery was soon explained, or deepened. For Rebaidah's mummy had gone from the spike, and in its place a mirror had been attached, slanted somewhat toward the street. It was an ordinary mirror that any rich man might have in his house. For sure, Handsome believed that it did in fact belong to him. And for this reason he flogged his servants, male and female both, and the dark was noisy with outcry. But from none of them could he get the avowal that they had set out to trick him. Nor could he anywhere locate the missing head of Rebaidah. At length he learned that her markerless grave had also been despoiled and lay empty as a gourd.

"She has had some lover," shouted Handsome.

Then there were quarrels. Men swore and doors slammed.

A silence came down on the village of Murum unlike the midnight silences which had been before.

And out of the silence, as figments blown by the fierce warm night wind of the desert, came the cars.

In the morning, Handsome thought he had been dreaming, for he had heard them all night long, driving with a low harsh purring that reverberated inside the base of his skull, up and down the streets of Murum.

Out on the thoroughfare he found their tracks, like the pad marks of animals. There were very many, and every street was the same.

The other villagers stole forth timidly. The women whispered at the wells, the whisper trees had once made. The men met in the marketplace.

"What can it mean?"

"Who has so many motorcars?"

"I saw them, twenty or more. They rolled by, one after the other. Beautiful machines—but I didn't like them. I stepped back inside."

"It went on all night. Who slept?"

Handsome said, "Why are you afraid of cars? It's a symbol of the prosperity to come."

That evening at home, when he had eaten his meal—which was tasteless and had been so since Rebaidah had ceased to wait on him—he walked into the room where the sword hung on the wall. From a cabinet he took out a bottle of arrack and, begging God's pardon, drank a small amount, which quickly rushed to his head.

Then he strode up to the roof, to the garden with the pavilion, and here he sat under the wide black sky, into whose hair the stars had been tied. He smoked, and he waited.

How intent, the silence of the village, and it seemed to Handsome he must strain to hear anything, but there was nothing, not the mew of a cat, or the rustle of a leaf. And then the low and trembling purr of engines blew from the desert.

It was an awful sound, so thick and live, like the rumble of a panther.

It poured into Murum and engulfed it, and from a hundred roofs, the startled faces stared down, and below the black cars passed, at no great speed, one after another.

They were very beautiful, the cars. The vehicles of the very, very rich. The dim roof lamps of Murum shone on their sides like water, but the cars had lights of their own. Gold and silver headlamps blazed and flashed, and in the square black cabins of glass, bold yellow glimpses, a smooth hand with diamonds, a silk-stockinged shameless foot in a ruby shoe.

How black the cars were, and in their flanks, a glimmer of green. They were like reptiles which purred. They rubbed their naked scales against the night.

Round and round Murum they drove, up and down and back and through. They came from nowhere and they went to nowhere. Murum was theirs.

A score of men, of whom Handsome was not one, ventured out into the streets. They stood transfixed, and the cars drove by them.

The men saw into the high black cabins lit and sparkling only with glimpses—a cigarette holder of crystal, a bare pearl shoulder—between and above the bumpers and fenders like coal, and the spokes of wheels picked out with honey flame. But the lamps splashed out sight and the purring roar made them giddy.

You could not stand in their way; plainly they would run over you. The men who had gone out hurried in again.

The cars drove on and on, round and about, up and down and through.

W

HEN THE DAWN CAME, IN A THIN line like blood, they ebbed away, drove off into the wasteland in a cloud of vapor.

The village smelled sweet as jam with gasoline. There was an oily film on everything. On the rooftops the gardens of the opulent died

quietly. The water of the wells tasted of metal and ozone.

The men met in the market under the awning. The coffee congealed in the cups and the cigarettes burned away like cinders.

They were hollow-eyed. There was nothing to fear. Why should they fear this? No harm had been offered. But Murum lay spread out like a man pinned to the desert for a whipping. It waited, brittle and taut. The noise of the cars still hung in the ear and the fumes of the cars were between men and the sky, between them and God.

"What's caused this?"

"It is a curse."

"But why?"

Handsome said, "It's that bitch. She brought some evil. Oh, I would have called it superstition. But not now."

"Demons," said an old man.

They sat hunched over, bowed by terrible fate, which had struck them undeservingly.

But as the day flowed out they dispersed hastily to their homes and shut and locked them.

Only Handsome came that night down to the entrance of his house and positioned himself there, with the sword in his hands. As he did this, his servants ran off by a back way to other buildings, where they took refuge.

The cars arrived as the black bloom of night's flower filled all the sky, and one by one they drove by Handsome's house, until the last one appeared, and this one stopped before his door.

It was a car made of jet and sprinkled by jade. A figure had the wheel, which seemed of polished gold. He looked like a man, in the black and white evening dress of the city, his hair a black mirror, his face in shadow. But behind him in the glorious light, on the black velvet seat like a shell, were two women. Both were beautiful and dressed also for the city, in dark satins shot with lizard blue and serpent green, beaded as if with rains. Their black hair was piled up with combs. Emeralds coiled their arms, which were uncovered. And their silken ankles were bare and their feet in slippers made of water.

They laughed and played together, like two pretty and innocent, sensual children, but to Handsome it was the game of harlots, and one of them was Rebaidah. He saw her there, safe in the armor of the motorcar which did not need a tree to shade it, even from the bone-hard moon. He saw her wealth and her happiness, her unveiled face and hair, her naked limbs, her jewels. And he saw too how her neck was joined to her shoulders by a ring of delicate twigs and leaves twisted with opals.

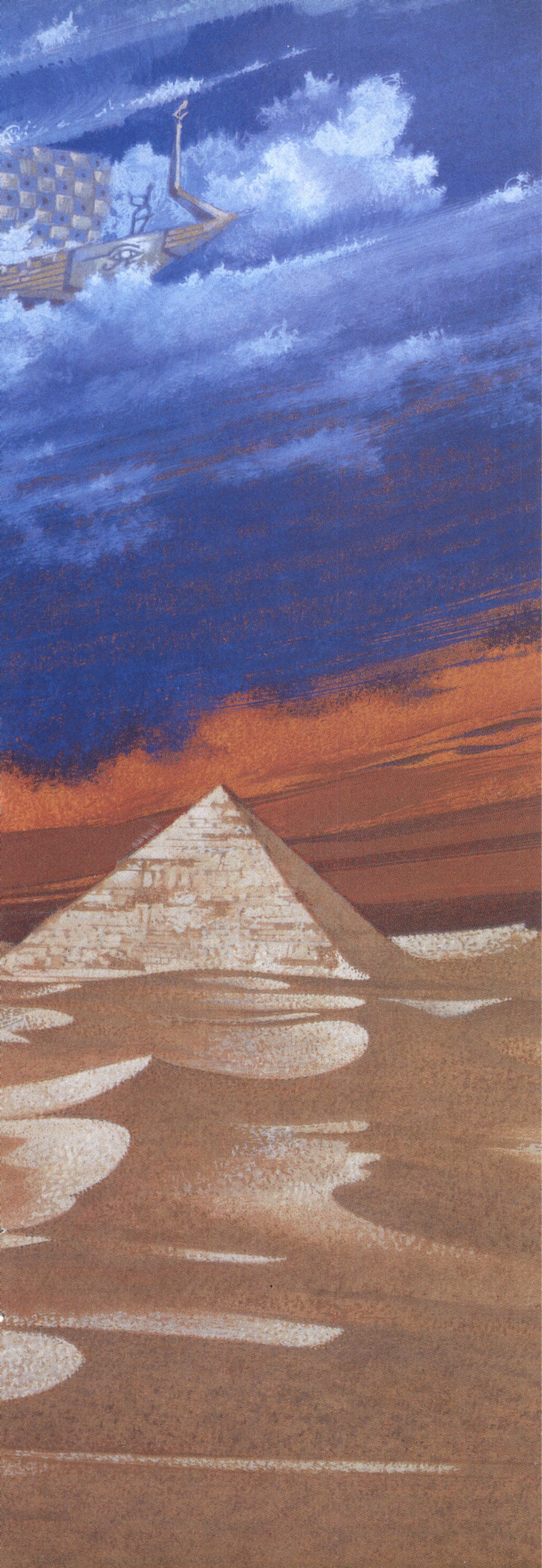
He wished to tell her that she had offended God and was condemned. But Handsome had no voice. He wished to use the sword but had used it up. He moved into his house, and soon he heard the car drive on, and its motor was lost in the motors of all the other cars, which were now once more driving round and round Murum, round and round, and round and round, forever.

Yet as they passed, from their golden windows these creatures threw

Continued on page 77



K. Gruning



Those who challenge the gods on their heights must be willing to risk a great fall.

THE CHAPTER OF BRINGING A BOAT INTO HEAVEN

BY NOREEN DOYLE
Illustration by Ken Graning

FOR THE SAKE OF MY OWN IMMORTALITY, WHICH IS by no means assured despite all that I am about to tell, I will write my name here in red hieroglyphs: *Ankhesenast*. It is a good name and was borne by two of my sisters, both of whom lived and died before me. Therefore I came to be called Ankhesenast-tashery, or Little Ankhesenast. I had a brother, born to our mother Nefert during the intercalendrical days when I was four years old. I hesitate to write his name, because immortality did not suit him very well the first time, and I do not believe that he would want it again. Nevertheless, as it would impede my tale to write again and again "my brother" and never his proper name, and as I did indeed love him, I shall set his name down here: *Harkhuf*.

Harkhuf loved nothing better than shipyards. One day he said to me, "Sister, I am going to build a ship. It will be more beautiful than the solar barque of Amon-Ra!" He pointed to the sun god sailing on celestial currents high above our heads. "We'll sail up the Nile on the wind, and we'll drift down the Nile on the current, and then, someday, we will take it into heaven. More than anything, Tashery, this is what I want, my beautiful ship."

For all his other faults, my brother Harkhuf was no liar. He kept his word, and I will tell you how he did so.

OUR FATHER, INTEF, SON OF MAYA, WAS CHIEF OF SHIPWRIGHTS AT THE royal shipyards in Perunefer, which is not far from Memphis. It hap-

pened that I came from bearing Intef's midday bread and beer when priests of Amon-Ra visited Perunefer. They had just received sacred geese for the Great Temple in Thebes. These were noisy creatures in cages, sticking their long necks between the wooden bars and hissing evilly at everything. I offered my service as a porter because I had only an empty basket and the geese seemed more than a burden for these skinny old men.

The priests recoiled. "These are sacred geese, one of which bears upon his sacred skin the mark of Amon-Ra! Keep your impure hands from the god's birds or the god himself will deal with you! Be of some use to us. Take us to Intef son of Maya."

The priests were shaven and immaculate, smelling of gloomy myrrh from Punt and of foul soil from geese. I did as they requested; our father offered them bread and beer, baked and brewed, he declared, by his own daughter, Tashery, since his wife, Nefert, had died. They declined, explaining this was a fast day for them, and besides, they were here on temple business.

"Ah," said our father, leading them away. "Yes, yes, it is done."

Our father had built for them one of the little boats borne upon the shoulders of priests during high festivals, bearing amidships a shrine in which the sacred image of the god sits shrouded. They had come all this way from Thebes to Intef son of Maya, they said, because he had constructed the great ship *User-Hat*, which travels the river during the Festival of Opet. It was only fitting that the same man should construct the little ship for the god.

Intef accepted these accolades easily. "It is only with exaggeration



H, BE QUIET, TASHERY. HOW WILL YOU ever make it to the Blessed Fields after you die if you're afraid to kill an evil spirit? Even for a good soul, there are many demons to be slain." He began to recount their awful names...

that a man should be uncomfortable," he would say.

I sat beside my brother Harkhuf in the thin, dusty shade of a palm, while he chiseled mortises into the edges of discarded planks. He had been coming to Perunefer since he was a very small child and had grown up with shipbuilding as a farmer's son grows up with farming.

Everyone, including the king (life! prosperity! health!), knew Intef as the greatest craftsman in all Egypt. Harkhuf basked in this praise, dreaming and making promises of his own greatness, for it was pleasant in our father's shadow. Sometimes the shipwrights taunted him: "Harkhuf sits like a royal prince in the shade of that tree over there, playing with scraps of wood and a toy chisel!"

"Soon I will have real work," Harkhuf said to me. "I am to become like our father, the greatest shipwright in all Egypt! Amon-Ra himself will envy the boat I build and want it for his own!"

Intef came up to lay a hand upon Harkhuf's shoulder. "Let the god see this wonder before he envies it. Fancy speech is good for a magician, but not for a shipwright. You've spent most of your twelve years watching, Harkhuf, which is quite enough. Make yourself useful now. Go to Widiya. And you too, Tashery. Fetch water for Widiya and do whatever else he asks of you."

I shuddered at the order, smiled at our father, and obeyed.

Once, Widiya had surprised me in our garden, where he had waited until I returned from market. He assaulted me, but only spilled his seed on our lettuce patch. When Intef came home and found Widiya red-faced, the foreman explained that he was here to purchase some linen I had woven and I was driving a hard bargain. "Purchase? I give it to you," Intef had said. Then he admonished me: "Shame, Tashery, for making such trouble for Widiya. How can you expect ever to become his wife if you behave so!" I remained

silent because Widiya was our father's best foreman. Intef wanted Widiya to succeed him as chief of shipwrights at Perunefer, which would not be an easy thing because Widiya was foreign-born and worshiped strange gods. An Egyptian wife might make things easier for him when the time came to plead his case in the royal court.

But I cheered myself that day by telling myself that Intef son of Maya had built a sacred barque for Amon-Ra! This would make Harkhuf proud.

Intef put Harkhuf into the care of his shipwrights, most of whom were, like Widiya, hairy men from Byblos and other Syrian cities. They were building a very ordinary little boat for the inspector of cattle. It was fourteen cubits long and made of acaciawood.

The shipwrights allowed Harkhuf to work alongside them. They gave him good planks in which to cut mortises and drank the water I brought in a heavy skin bag. When it was empty, Widiya took it and put it on his head.

"When will you put on your wig for me, Tashery?" he said. Widiya was shorter than most men, even shorter than Harkhuf. He tried to make himself an Egyptian by shaving his beard and half his head. Today he had forgotten and looked a little like a baboon with an Asiatic nose. Widiya laughed with his men and made obscene gestures with chisels.

Harkhuf turned on the shipwrights, the chisel held like a knife toward them. "You'll leave my sister alone, or you will have no head on which to put a wig!" And he rushed at Widiya, very nearly circumcising the Syrian then and there.

Widiya fell into the dirt, as if to accommodate Harkhuf's intent. Harkhuf menaced him until I pulled him away. "This is our father's best foreman," I whispered. "What would Intef do without him?"

Widiya picked himself up, arranging his skirt in a cool manner, but his eyes burned into Harkhuf like coals upon linen.

"Harkhuf wants his sister for himself." Widiya picked up his tools. He and his men went back to work, leaving Harkhuf quite to himself.

"You should be careful," I said. "Intef wishes Widiya to become an important man some day. You know that our father won't tolerate any abuse of him."

"Oh, I know, Tashery. I am Intef's son," Harkhuf replied. "And you are my sister. No man may speak of my sister that way." Then he went about his work.

Later that day a fleet came upriver and cheer returned to the hearts of the shipwrights. It brought cedarwood from the mountains around Byblos, which are higher and colder than any we have in Egypt.

Whenever cedarwood comes into Egypt, men rejoice. I do not know why the gods have denied Egypt cedar trees, which provide the only wood suitable for the sacred ships which carry the gods in processions. Perhaps it is punishment for having allowed Osiris, the good god who was king of Egypt, to be murdered on Egyptian soil. As everyone knows, upon his return from good works throughout the world, Osiris was thrown into the Nile by his jealous brother, Set. Yes, I think it is on account of a kinsman's treachery that there are no cedar trees in Egypt. And I think there never will be.

The shipwrights fell upon that cedarwood like starving men upon bread. The acacia is a crooked tree. You cannot get a very big plank from it, so you have to build a ship as you would a brick wall, joining very short planks end-to-end until you are satisfied with the length. With cedar, however, you can have planks almost as long as you like. So every shipwright is eager to work this aromatic wood, the most wonderful on this earth. It is no wonder that the mountains where cedars grow as thick as bulrushes are called the God's Land.

The king's men drove the shipwrights back with whips. "Hey, are you common thieves, trying to steal the king's new ship before it's built?"

Intef became furious and whipped the king's men with his tongue. "No one lays one blow upon these shipwrights without first laying

a blow upon me!"

Of course, the king's men dared not touch the royal shipwright, but they warded away the workers nonetheless.

Then Intef gathered his men again. "Get back to work! Would you show yourselves to be like Harkhuf, whose laziness you're so fond of mocking? Look, he alone kept to his place. There will be no cedarwood ship for the king until the inspector of cattle has his acaciawood boat, so get to it!"

They did as they were told, grumbling, "Prince Harkhuf should have stayed in the shade."

Widiya did not grumble. He grinned, small-eyed, like a mouse in a grain bin.

Intef's men made room for Harkhuf in the acaciawood hull and handed up the next strake. Harkhuf had cut its mortises himself, to match the tenons protruding from the strake below. My brother brought the pounder down once, then again. He was not making very much progress. Smiles lurked behind the beards of the foreign men. Harkhuf beat down on the strake again and again and again, becoming stronger and angrier with each chuckle from the Syrians.

When the wood squealed, everyone knew something was wrong. Intef tried to seize the pounder from Harkhuf's hands. Like the king smiting a foreign foe with his mace, Harkhuf laid the final blow. It produced a terrible crack, and a cry went up from the shipwrights.

Others came to help pry up the strake. Beneath it, two of the tenons were splintered. An inspection revealed that mortises in the new strake were askew and much too shallow.

"Hey, that's not how we'd marked them to be cut! A blind man could see that," Widiya said.

Harkhuf balked at this charge. He had done only as the foreman instructed, he swore, and pointed to the markings Widiya had made on the plank. Intef did and was unimpressed. They indicated that the mortises were to be straight and deeper than Harkhuf had cut them.

"Widiya lies," Harkhuf cried. "He tricked me and added those marks because I beat him!"

Intef flew into a rage. "What is this! We are honorable craftsmen who can keep our hearts cool, not desert dust-makers with hearts always afire. In twelve years you have learned nothing here, Harkhuf: neither to build ships nor to respect honest workers."

Our father chased Harkhuf away. At the gate Harkhuf collided with the priests of Amon-Ra. To save their precious boat from falling off their shoulders, the priests dropped their cages and many of the geese got away. The priests wailed and chased the birds all through the shipyard, shrieking for the shipwrights and porters to keep their impure hands from their sacred birds or else the god himself would deal with all of them!

As Harkhuf fled and the priests bayed like dogs, I heard the Syrians say, "Aia, mourn for Intef who has no son!"

WHEN I ARRIVED HOME, HARKHUF WAS WAITING FOR INTEF IN THE garden. That was Intef's usual punishment for Harkhuf; my brother knew what was expected of him. Behind the garden's high wall he could see no river boats to inspire him to fancy.

How my heart ached while Harkhuf sat there, weeping at the injustice done to him. He sat on his knees, staring up at the only boat he could see: the solar barque of Amon-Ra.

Intef came home bristling and hot-hearted. He threw a toy sword at Harkhuf.

"You have grievously embarrassed me, Harkhuf. Foreign ambassadors say to me, 'Intef son of Maya, there are secrets our own sea gods would wring from you if they could!' Priests say, 'Only Intef son of Maya can build the god's sacred barque.' Yet Harkhuf can't even chisel a little mortise and then must lie about it afterward! What will people say? Ask anyone, and people will say that there is no such a child as 'Harkhuf son of Intef.'"

"I have watched you work," Harkhuf protested, "and all your shipwrights too. Since I was a child I have cut mortises and fashioned tenons from pieces of wood you have given me. Widiya—"

"Do not tell me of Widiya. Tell me only of Harkhuf. No, I will tell you of Harkhuf: he has seen and has not learned. He is fit only to be

a soldier."

Harkhuf fell upon his knees and prostrated himself before our father. "O Intef son of Maya! Let me show you what I know!"

"O Harkhuf, I would prefer that you show me what I know."

Intef walked away.

Harkhuf ran to me. "Oh, Tashery! I do not want to become a soldier. I want to build ships, just like Intef son of Maya."

"Be patient. Not everyone's moment of glory comes when he'd like it, or even as he'd like it," I said. Having witnessed the foolish running about of the skinny old priests, I was feeling very wise. "You held that chisel as if it were a sword, the pounder as if it were a mace. Perhaps you'd make a fine general."

Like a lion caged for the amusement of the royal court and not bred for it, Harkhuf tore apart bushes and flowers and lettuces which he and I had carefully tended. "I am not a soldier!" he wailed, beating the toy sword against the wall.

In the shadows, I saw that he had scratched pictures of men into the bricks. Most had beards like foreigners, but one did not. Harkhuf flayed them with his toy sword and pummeled them with bare fists until his flesh bled.

"I want to know how you do these things! What are you hiding from me? Tell me!" With the sword he hacked away the figure of the beardless man until there was nothing left.

A FEW DAYS LATER HARKHUF HAD RECOVERED HIS SPIRITS ENOUGH TO venture from the garden. I think that Intef threw him out, but I cannot be certain. I found him sitting by the river, shoulders drawn up tight and chin upon his knees. I wept for him, because what our father said was true: Harkhuf had not learned very much, despite all the days he had spent in Intef's shadow.

We idled an hour throwing stones into the river. This occupied me until Harkhuf began to mutter, "Watch them sink, just like every boat I will ever build."

Although his fear was as likely to be true as not, I could not let him suffer so. I pointed to bundles of reeds broken loose from the bank by the current. "Look, the river makes boats that don't sink at all. Assuredly Harkhuf son of Intef can do what a marsh does!"

He jumped up, stomping his feet like a dancing dwarf. "Aia, Tashery! Yes!"

That very day Harkhuf began to build a raft. Having no wood, he made do with papyrus, like poor fishermen and cowherds must. He tied the ends up tight, making them hold themselves high off the water, and put a small board atop the reeds for a firm deck. I decorated stem and stern with bunches of lilies and cornflowers. By nightfall he was poling it along, laughing. Only another raft or a boat might catch him now. I rejoiced with and for him.

"Show it to our father. It will make him proud."

"No. It is for us alone, Tashery. Intef son of Maya has enough ships of his own."

For a long time he did not go to Perunefer again. Harkhuf wanted only his raft, and for a while Intef indulged him without complaint. The fish Harkhuf brought home for supper put Intef in a forgiving mood.

Sometimes I went with Harkhuf. We pretended that we were in the Blessed Fields, where the souls of good men and women go after Osiris the Good One has judged them. We fought fly-demons and wicked-fish gods with Harkhuf's toy sword. Sometimes Harkhuf pretended that they were the shipwrights of Perunefer. We always won.

Once, we came upon a goose with a lame wing. Harkhuf said, "Look, Tashery, an evil spirit! Horus has wounded it for us. Let's finish it off."

Before I could stop him, Harkhuf had struck it with his sword. I began to cry.

"Oh, be quiet, Tashery. How will you ever make it to the Blessed Fields after you die if you're afraid to kill an evil spirit? Even for a good soul, there are many demons to be slain." He began to recount their awful names, plucking a feather from the goose with each one.

Now, there are indeed many evil spirits between death and the Blessed Fields which every soul must overcome. The means for

defeating these demons are contained within the *Chapters of Coming Forth by Day*, which some foreigners call the *Book of the Dead*. I write these *Chapters* now to earn my keep. But I will not list the demons' names here; this is not my purpose today, and I welcome the change. Suffice it to know that in the end, the goose was naked. On its pale skin there was a birthmark in the form of a sunshade. This is a sacred mark of Amon-Ra.

"Oh-ho!" cried Harkhuf. "It seems that I haven't slain a demon after all. It is a god!"

"A god! Harkhuf, my brother, what are you going to do now that you have slain a god?"

Harkhuf sat cross-legged and wiselooking, while I cowered like a beaten dog at the stern. Fear sat in my stomach like bad beer. The priests had intended to bring that goose to Thebes, the great seat of the god. It was the god. What would we do now?

"I know!" he said at last. "My tutor has told me stories about King Unas. Have you heard them?"

I had not, because I did not have a tutor and, therefore, knew no history. Of course I know about these things now, else I would make a very poor scribe: the gods Ra, Geb, Osiris and Horus ruled Egypt in the earliest times. After them, Narmer united Upper and Lower Egypt, and the more than fifty other kings who followed him wore the Double Crown of a unified land. Unas was one of those who succeeded old King Khufu and, like Khufu, built a pyramid, though not so grand as any guarded by the Sphinx. Unas's pyramid, called "Beautiful of Places," is at Saqqara. I have been there more than once.

Harkhuf said, "The brother of my tutor has charge of the offerings in the mortuary temple of Unas. He told me that in the pyramid of Unas are poems that boast of how King Unas ate the gods. Five gods helped him: Horn-Grasper lassoed his prey; Serpent Raised-Head held it still; He-upon-the-Willows bound it; Khonsu the Hawk gutted it; and Shesmu cooked it. Gods trembled because Unas was a master of cunning. Unas was the raging bull of heaven. He ate the entrails of every god when they came with their bodies full of magic. So Unas came to know all their magic."

"But nobody worships Unas anymore," I said. "Oh, he has priests who feed him, yes, but no one loves him as we love Amon-Ra or the king. If he came to have all this magic by eating gods, it didn't do him any good. I'm rather sorry for him."

"Bah! You'd be sorry for a tearful crocodile, Tashery. How do we know that the king doesn't eat gods and men? He's far away in Thebes and we can't know what he does. I am going to learn things the very same way that Unas did. Amon-Ra is king of the gods and does nothing but sail all day and all night forever in his own barque. That's what I want to do. So I will eat this goose which is the god and know everything that he knows."

And Harkhuf did, then and there, raw entrails and all. To me he offered a little bit of the heart.

"Come, Tashery. I'll be lonely if I'm immortal without you. I would offer you all the heart, but that's the seat of knowledge and I want it for myself. So take just a very little bit."

His hands were slicked red, looking hard and shiny with blood as though made of polished carnelian. Despite what he had just done, they did not tremble but remained as steady as stone. Was this my brother?

I knew my brother's temper and feared what he might do, now that he had the god's magic. Our mother Nefert was dead, and Intef had much work in the shipyards, so Harkhuf had no one else to care for and love him but me. It not being fit that someone who knew no magic should care for a magician, I ate a very little bit of the heart of Amon-Ra.

Also, perhaps with just a little bit of magic I would not have to marry Widiya, I thought.

The god's heart slipped down my throat like a living thing. It was full of blood and as salty as the Great Green. I was certain it was going to crawl its way up my throat again. A dizziness seized me, and for a moment the world seemed very small and round, like a goose egg.

"I'm a magician like the god now," Harkhuf said. "Let's go to Perunefer tomorrow, Tashery, because I'm going to make a ship

mightier than my raft. We will sail all across the Great Green, from Sinai to Crete and beyond."

AT DUSK OF THE NEXT DAY, WHILE THE PRIESTS WERE OCCUPIED WITH their oblations, Harkhuf stole a bull calf from the temple herds. I cannot relate how he did this; I only know that he appeared at our gate with it and told me to meet him along the river.

When I met him, the moon was high. He had a copper knife fitted with a bone handle. He held it to the bull calf's head.

"What are you doing?"

"You ate a little bit of the god's heart, Tashery. You must know!"

On account of that very little bit of the god's heart, I did know. The spell is a popular one in the *Chapters of Coming Forth by Day* and is called "The Chapter of Becoming a Heron."

He slaughtered the calf, saying, "Harkhuf son of Intef is upon this earth, and what I have slaughtered is in heaven! Do I not know the magic of every being?"

Voices carried on the wind, faint but full of power like the voices of every fire in the starry heavens, replied, "Our faces are gracious to you who come."

My brother was no longer my brother but a handsome heron, with tall legs like reeds and feathers like Sinai turquoise.

"Join me," he said, and flew away.

I fell to my knees, covered my face with my hands, and wept. Never had I watched the image of a god point out a guilty man, or even a magician conjure a god in a bronze bowl filled with oil, and yet I never doubted that these were real things. But I could not believe what had just occurred before my own eyes. Here was my brother, a heron hatched out of an egg. The world was born that way, hatched by the Great Cackler Goose. I knelt as witness to no less.

Harkhuf soared higher than temple flagpoles on upstream breezes. At length I stared, waiting for his feathers to fall and his wings to become arms and for him to plummet into the river.

"Come back, Harkhuf! You will be hurt!"

He did not come back. Far overhead he cried, "Join me!"

"Join you? Aia, Harkhuf, how?"

Words came to me as if in a dream. But I knew them as if they were my own name, emblazoned upon my own heart: "I am a swallow, I am a swallow! Hail sweet-scented gods!"

Wings carried me above this earth. I tasted the high air, felt the touch of the most meager wind upon my feathers, and defied it with the flick of one wing.

"Isn't this wonderful, Tashery?" my brother called. "Look at the men down there. They are no bigger than grapes!"

Temples looked like misshapen bricks. Boats in the harbor were leaves in a pond. Torches, mere embers. We soared over the Nile together, teasing crocodiles and harrying watchmen in their slumber. We flew over the pyramids at Giza and Saqqara and through the halls of the northern palace, seeing wonderful things.

Giza and Saqqara inspired Harkhuf. It was through the great tombs there that the likes of the old miser Khufu ascended to the solar barque. Harkhuf caught their warm, nighttime drafts beneath his wings and flew up to meet the moon.

Up he went, with me at his tail. I tried to call to him, but the air did not carry my voice. Soon I had very little voice at all. Still he went up until he could go no further.

He tipped wing and plunged down. This frightened me, for I did not know if he had fallen. But no, he was only sulking again.

"The moon's just a pale thing," Harkhuf said, "the put-out eye of Horus. None of this interests me."

He led me among ships moored at the temple quays, beautiful ships, each from the hand of Intef or his father Maya. Some had a god's head facing forward at both bow and stern, and were towed about on feast days to mark the height of the Nile's inundation or some other great event.

Before dawn, Harkhuf alighted in the shipyard of Perunefer. I followed, circling his head.

He found the beginning of a boat just laid upon the blocks. It was of ordinary acacia-wood, five planks scarfed and joined together to

make a central strake forty cubits long. Its port side already had tenons protruding from its mortises to receive the garboard, which is to say, the very next strake.

"This is mine," he said.

"However are you to move it?" I was still giddy with flight and did not think to ask why our father's acaciawood planks now belonged to Harkhuf.

Harkhuf spread his wings wide and let loose a violent cry. He struck his beak hard into the muddy earth and said, "I am the divine crocodile who dwells in his terror, who seizes his prey like a ravaging beast!"

I have never seen so large a beast in all my years. He was nearly as long as the strake. He was like the crocodile god Sobek in his rage.

"Well?" His voice rumbled like an earthquake. "I will need rope."

In my fear I did not question him. I alighted in the mud, very near his great white teeth and yellow eyes. Would I be quick enough to fly away if I had to? He opened his mouth as if to swallow me.

I said, "I am the pure lotus springing up from divine splendor...."

I wrapped myself around the strake, and Harkhuf the crocodile took my roots gently in his jaw. This way we pulled the strake into the harbor, then to the river, where we hid it in the marshes.

By daybreak we were brother and sister again. I was very tired, but Harkhuf seemed to have the endurance of a god. He took lumps of mud in his hands and fashioned them into little men, and made for them adzes and awls and mallets from sticks and grass. They all had beards and appeared very Syrian, except the tallest, which looked like a proper Egyptian.

Harkhuf said over them, "O answerers belonging to Harkhuf son of Intef, let you do my labors for me...."

Each figure bowed at its thick waist and said, "Truly, I am here and will do whatsoever you ask of me."

And they did, to the very word and to the crack of Harkhuf's grass whip. But I did not watch. I ran home and hid in the house. I did not want to see any boat, either upon the Nile or within the sky.

WE DID NOT TELL INTEF WHERE WE HAD BEEN. HAD HE KNOWN THAT we had taken the acaciawood (which was soon to vex him and lead to Widiya beating another man for the crime), he would not care if Harkhuf and I appeared as king and queen, he would have rightfully beaten us anyway! But, as it happened, he believed that I had gone to see a lover and asked if it was Widiya. Harkhuf told him nothing.

"So, it's not Widiya. I don't understand why, Tashery. I will arrange a contract between you and Widiya when we have finished this boat for the king."

I nodded, silent.

Intef went on, "Now, about Harkhuf. It is good that he does not have a lover. The life of a soldier's wife is a lonely one. I have hired Pahesy, who saw campaigns in Asia, so that Harkhuf will know the sword better than he knows boats before he is circumcised and taken into the army."

Harkhuf overheard this and sulked in the garden. "Oh, that lame soldier who fought in Asia will teach me, all right," he told me. "But I will be doing other things."

For a while I did not understand what my brother meant. Each day, Pahesy took Harkhuf away. He taught him the sword and the bow and how to shoot running as well as standing. My brother made remarkable progress, so Pahesy said.

But suspicion smoldered within me, because Harkhuf never spoke of his own progress. Intef was far too busy to notice and took Harkhuf's reticence for granted. I was glad for this; with Intef so occupied, so was Widiya, and thus I had no trouble from him. While I imagined this was because of the little bit of the god's heart, I knew in my own heart that it was only the king's cedarwood ship. In time it would be finished. And in time I would marry the dreadful Widiya

for the sake of our father's generous ambitions.

As a remedy for my own fears, Harkhuf's modesty continued to plague me. So one day I followed my brother and old Pahesy.

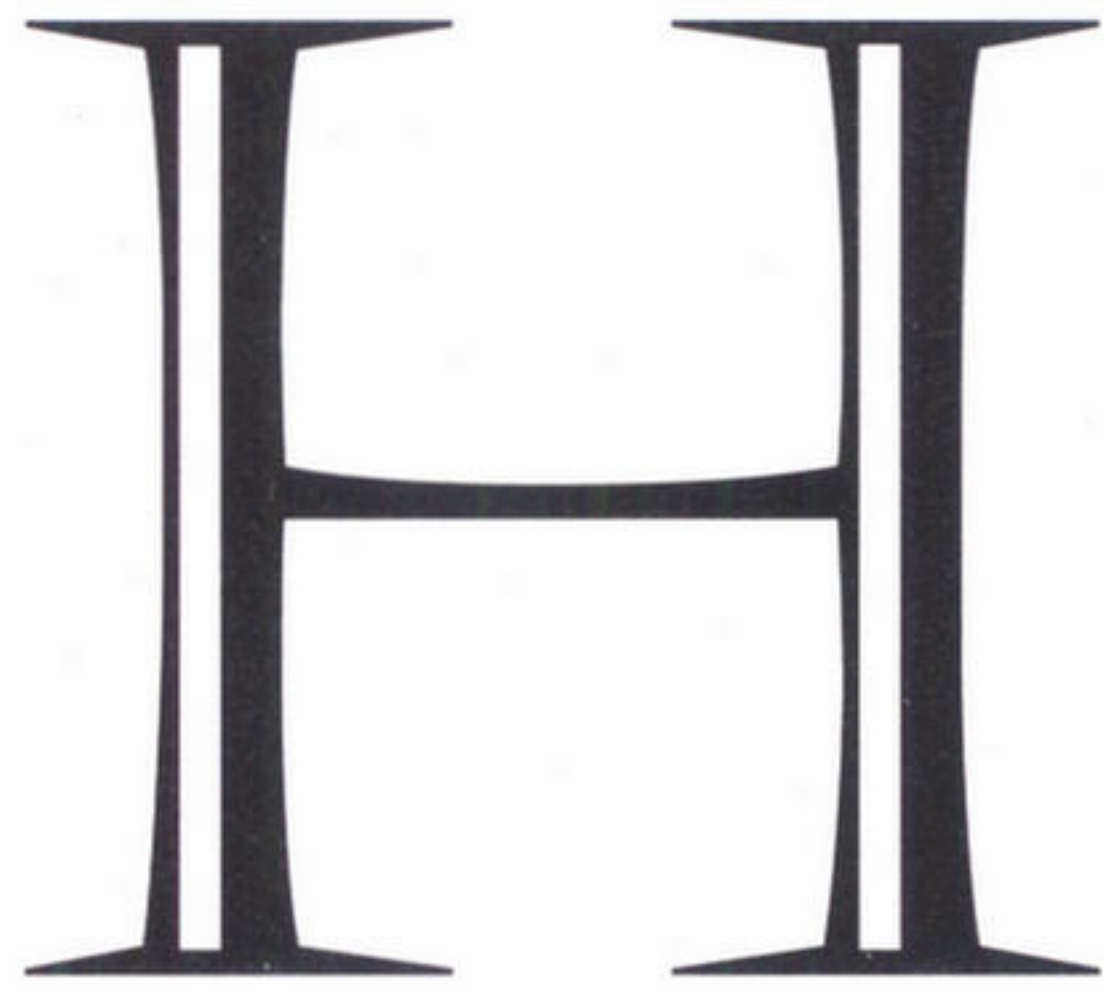
They did not get far beyond the gate when Harkhuf said, "Come in peace! May it behold me...with my attributes, and with my form, and with my faculties of mind, and with all other attributes ordered and perfect, even as a soul...."

He withdrew from the folds of his kilt a clay answerer. This answerer took my brother's place at Pahesy's side. The soldier neither saw nor heard what had just transpired. Likewise passersby, women with their children, royal messengers, and donkey-drivers, paid no mind to this strange sight.

With the soldier thus accompanied, Harkhuf went his separate way. I followed like a cat. He went deep into the marsh, to a place where firm ground met the river with only a little growth of reeds between them.

He and his answerers had built a ship of acaciawood, or most of a ship, or rather, most of what might have been a ship. It did not yet have cabins or deck, only a hull eight strakes high, into which he was fitting frames so finely crafted that I knew he had stolen them.

Poor Harkhuf! His ship would never float like anything other than a bundle of sticks. Tenons had broken in their mortises, so the strakes buckled. The lashes which aid in holding the ship together were slack and badly arranged. The sternpost leaned to port. He had tried to hew the hull smooth with an adze but only made it rough like a crocodile's hide. The ship's shape was no more fair than a child's toy



ARKHUF SPREAD HIS WINGS WIDE AND let loose a violent cry. He struck his beak hard into the muddy earth and said, "I am the divine crocodile who seizes his prey like a ravaging beast!" I have never seen so large a beast in all my years.

boat and, in fact, quite a bit worse.

"Do you see it?" he said.

"Of course I see it," I answered. "It's nearly forty cubits long and higher than my head. How could I not see it?"

"No one else can," Harkhuf said slyly, and I knew he had been about the god's magic again. "It's only for those of us who have eaten the god. I have missed you, Tashery. Come help me tonight. I need more frames."

I helped him as he liked, taking the form of a swallow while he became a serpent. Having set these frames into the hull and fastened them to the strakes by means of lashing (the frames were intended for a smaller boat and did not fit well), Harkhuf tried to decide what to do next. In this he failed.

"Doesn't the god know?" I said.

Harkhuf looked upon me like a crocodile upon a calf. "Do you know these secrets, Tashery, you who have eaten a little bit of the god's heart?"

"No, I do not. Otherwise I would help you, because I love you, Harkhuf."

This satisfied him, and he no longer looked hungry. He told me in great confidence, "The god did not build the barque in which he sails heaven. Therefore, he does not know these things."

"Perhaps then you'd best speak to Intef son of Maya. No one knows more of ships than he."

About this my brother said, "So I have been told."

THE NEXT DAY WE ARRIVED AT THE SHIPYARDS AS ANOTHER SYRIAN fleet brought cedarwood into Perunefer: Intef refused to see us, as he was busy ordering the cargo ashore. Harkhuf tried to help by seizing hold of a cedarwood plank and dragging it toward the storehouses.

Intef beat him off with a stick. "Get away, Harkhuf! This is work for shipwrights and porters. By every god, you'd think your father was the brickmaker, not Intef son of Maya."

Limping away, Harkhuf whimpered like a child torn from his mother's breast. He quite forgot his errand, so I comforted him with songs.

"Tashery, we will launch my ship tomorrow, and everyone will know that I am Harkhuf son of Intef. Look, the temple holds festival tonight and everyone is going. Let's feast first!"

"Yes," I said, hoping to feast long. I feared that his ship might drown the both of us. I wanted a good meal before I went to meet Osiris Judge of the Dead! Even more than that, I feared that the ship might not drown the both of us, and that I would then have to marry Widiya. But O, how our father would mourn!

The next day everyone in Memphis jostled his neighbor along the riverbank for a view. Harkhuf and I stood on the deck of his ship as it sat upon its blocks in the marsh.

Drums sounded from the temples. Sistra rattled, and flutes perfumed the air with music. Such a joyous mood overtook us all as smoke billowed over the walls of Perunefer! Priests were making sacrifice; we could smell meat and garlic and bread and beer.

Harkhuf danced upon the deck. "So this is what the glory of a magician feels like! Was King Unas ever so joyful, my dearest Tashery?"

With that, he ordered the answerers to launch his ship. Its tenons creaked, and the lashings strained in their mortises like horses at the bit. Harkhuf's ship slipped down a channel he had cut into the mud.

WHILE THE SERPENT GOD WRAPPED himself about Harkhuf's body, my brother transformed himself into a crocodile and brought his jaws about to take the serpent's head in his teeth. The serpent flashed his own fangs...

It stuck there, listing to starboard. The deck planking, much of it unfastened to the beams below, slid forward and came to a halt at the stem, which the sudden stop had broken.

"Aia! Tashery, they've broken my ship! My beautiful ship!"

At that very moment a great blast of trumpets sounded from the temple. A barque sailed from the harbor into the river. It was seventy-five cubits in length, with a great sail worked by many men, and cabins fore, aft, and amidships. The steering oars were capped with the head of the king (life! prosperity! health!) and were so tall that the steersmen had to sit atop the roof of the after cabin. Everything was shielded in gold and electrum, overlaid with malachite, real lapis lazuli, and carnelian. Such a sight, this new cedarwood ship of the king!

I was laughing and clapping, for I knew that our father had laid his hand upon many parts of the royal ship and his heart upon all of them. People's whispers of "Intef son of Maya" came wind-borne to us through the reeds.

Harkhuf stared at the splinters beneath his feet, at the buckled strakes and crooked stem. "They're all laughing at my beautiful ship. Tell me, Tashery, how could our father build that barque in one day? We saw the wood come from Byblos only yesterday."

"Oh, they're not laughing at your ship, Harkhuf. They are joyous at our father's. And that's the same royal ship he began months ago, after the acaciawood boat for the inspector of cattle was finished."

He did not believe me, and continued to insist that Intef had built a vast ship in one day.

"So did you!" I laughed, and I pointed to his raft.

During the festivities it had floated out into the river, dislodged from its mooring by little children playing in the reeds. The flowers I had tied fore and aft were broken away, leaving only bare stems.

This poor, bedraggled thing was now in plain view of everybody. Widiya saw it and said, "We're not giving Harkhuf any credit at all. I believe his father is a poor fisherman! Hey, get away from there, Tashery! When your father Intef son of Maya delivers the marriage contract to me, I will show you a truly large, strong ship of mine!"

I searched for words that might strike Widiya lame in both his hands, but together the god's magic and my own heart failed me. After all, Widiya was our father's best foreman, and Intef wanted nothing more than for Widiya to inherit his place.

When dusk fell, we went home. I followed Harkhuf into our garden, where his little answerers assembled in a dutiful row.

Tears filled his eyes. "Mine is a beautiful ship."

I dried them with the sleeve of my dress. "Yes, Harkhuf, it is."

Each answerer crumbled to dust beneath a blow of his fist. He said, "While we fly as heron and swallow out over this earth, Tashery, I've noticed something. Look toward the Four Pillars of the sky: the east, the west, the south, and the north. All about me I see mountains and deserts, and the Nile is a skinny little thing. There is so much more land upon this earth than water, that to sail upon the Nile is not worthy of me."

This bordered on blasphemy; the Nile is the life of Egypt and worthy enough to carry the gods on holy days. I did not tell him this. Having eaten the god, assuredly Harkhuf knew.

"And what might be worthy of you, my brother?"

He brought his palms toward the sky, as if to encompass all Four Pillars in a lover's embrace. "I am going to build my beautiful ship.

We will sail heaven. More than anything, Tashery, this is what I want."

"Do you know how to do this? Amon-Ra sails heaven, and you did indeed eat Amon-Ra, but Amon-Ra did not build his own barque! You told me so yourself."

"I will learn to build a barque," Harkhuf said, and with his toy sword he crushed the tallest, beardless answerer.

TOGETHER AS HERON AND SWALLOW, WE spent the night riding the winds above the hills and below the milky moon. Harkhuf

would not have any games nor even go to the shipyard, but flew into "Beautiful of Places," the pyramid of Unas. Although I did not want to follow, I dared not allow my brother to go alone. Burial places are houses of the dead, well guarded by spells. For all that, nothing stopped us, because with our magic there were no doors barred to us. This is one of the promises of the *Chapters of Coming Forth by Day*.

We read the poems on the walls, more than two hundred in all. Many are the very oldest versions of the *Chapters*, although I did not know this at the time. I knew only that they spoke of strange and mysterious things that meant something to me because I had eaten a little bit of the god's heart. These poems said that no one—no spirit, man, or goose—spoke ill of Unas. There was nothing that Unas could not do.

Harkhuf read one poem aloud: "The dignities of Unas cannot be denied him, for he has swallowed knowledge...."

He caught an easterly breeze beneath his wings and flew home. He landed in the garden and passed through the doorway. I flew in and circled like Isis mourning for her slain brother-husband Osiris.

Harkhuf studied Intef while he slept. Our father's hands were hardened from days at the adze, his skin split from hours at the chisel. The bow drill had burned blisters into his palms, yet his fingers remained supple enough to lash a hull together as finely as a weaver makes a basket. His back was knobby from the weight of long planks placed upon his shoulders but remained as strong as a bull's. Some said that a blind man could learn to build a ship by feeling the texture of the skin of Intef son of Maya. Harkhuf planned more than that.

"I am no soldier! I am Harkhuf son of Intef! I am the divine crocodile who dwells in his terror, who seizes his prey like a ravaging beast!"

Harkhuf the crocodile fell upon our father and devoured him. Then, having taken back his mortal form, he danced. "I know ships! I know ships! I have learned! I am Harkhuf son of Intef, and will prove it!"

I flew about the house, crying the swallow's cry, mourning our dear father.

"Be quiet, Tashery, or I will eat that last little bit of the god's heart by eating you!"

I did as he commanded. I was very much afraid to die because I feared that the evil I witnessed was my own. How I mourned! Osiris would never judge me good. Eater-of-the-Dead would devour my soul, or I would be thrown into the Fiery Lake. Such are the fates of the wicked. And how wicked was I, she who did not want to become wife to the frightful Widiya, she who did not prevent the murder of her own father, she who might even have prayed for it, had she loved him any less.

Harkhuf returned to his acaciawood ship, stuck in the mud like a dead hippopotamus, and tore it all down. I helped him, hoping that he had learned remorse, but he had not. He never said, "O my poor father, that I ate him! Let me make a greatness for my father's name." He sang only, "I know ships! I have learned!" and set about to prove it.

As for me, well, I did not say anything at all.

Harkhuf began to build the ship anew, with all the skill Intef ever had. He now understood everything that he could not learn sitting in our father's shade.

From the lakes of the shipyards of Perunefer he stole the finest cedarwood. He made no little answerers but did everything himself. He worked through twenty-one days and twenty-one nights without stopping for food or drink. When priests offered sacrifices in the temple, he turned that way and breathed the smoke of roasting flesh. Harkhuf had become a god. I was certain of it.

In the end, Harkhuf's boat measured one hundred cubits in length, more than thirteen in beam, and four from sheer to bottom.

Such beauty! Such fairness of line! Such strength! The ship he built exceeded all others in every measure. Stem and sternpost were like lotuses braided with cornflowers. At fore and aft gauzy linen shrouded little shrines of open woodwork. The stanchions for the steering oars reached high, and each steering oar had a tiller in the form of a snake. The cabin was painted and gilded and inlaid, its roof bowed to follow the gentle curve of the deck, its door hung on bronze hinges. The ship's bottom was as beautiful as its cabin, the hull was hewn as smooth as polished basalt.

Each part of the ship, from the central strake to the mast to the mooring post, said, "Tell me my name," and Harkhuf did. Then the wind, and then the river and its banks, and then the ground on which we stood said, "Tell me my name," and Harkhuf did. This spell is called "The Chapter of Bringing a Boat into Heaven."

The ground buckled like a sea wave. The river and its banks undulated, and a great wind filled the sail without stirring a single reed. The barque rose up into the air.

Harkhuf grabbed hold of the mooring rope and climbed it like a monkey. He danced upon the deck and laughed. "I know what no god knows! I am god! I am god! I am god! I am filled with magic!"

He sailed west to east, east to west, dancing like a Nubian dwarf. All of this earth smelled of cedarwood. Harkhuf was in his glory, and I loved him.

Along the riverbank, a man appeared. He wore the Double Crown of Egypt and old-fashioned clothing, and I had never seen his likes before, except in statues and reliefs within the mortuary temples at Saqqara and Giza. He had with him three men arrayed for a desert hunt, a serpent, and a hawk.

"I am the raging bull of heaven!" said the man wearing the Double Crown. "Who are you to rage so much like I?"

Harkhuf said, "I am Harkhuf son of Intef."

"I have never heard of 'Harkhuf son of Intef.' What are you?"

"I have eaten Amon-Ra and am god. Who are you?"

The man wearing the Double Crown said, "I am Unas Son of Ra, King of Egypt. I eat the entrails of every god when they come with their bodies full of magic. I've eaten Amon-Ra too. Did you eat all

of Amon-Ra?"

"All but a very little bit," Harkhuf replied. "I have also eaten a mortal man named Intef son of Maya who knew things that Amon-Ra does not. See, could Amon-Ra build his own barque?"

Unas looked at the ship from all sides. "Indeed not. This most magnificent of all boats is not the work of Amon-Ra and is clearly the work of Intef son of Maya. I am pleased to see that Intef had a son, after all. So fine a ship has never before been seen, either in heaven or on this earth. I want to know the magic of this shipwright whom you have eaten, Harkhuf son of Intef."

"Come closer, then," my brother said with a hungry gleam, "and I will tell you."

Neither Unas nor my brother was a fool, but Unas was the master of cunning. At his word one of the human-headed gods caught a lasso about Harkhuf's waist. Harkhuf cried out to his magic. He became a heron, but the lasso entangled his feet, and the serpent god darted up to hold him tight.

While the serpent god wrapped himself about Harkhuf's body, my brother transformed himself into a crocodile and brought his jaws about to take the serpent's head in his teeth. The serpent god flashed his own fangs and withdrew. As my brother lunged, the second human-headed god seized Harkhuf's crocodile jaws and held them tight.

"O Tashery!" Harkhuf cried, taking on his mortal form again. "My ship! My beautiful ship! It is all I want, my beautiful ship!"

The hawk god came forward, slit Harkhuf's throat with his talons, and gutted him with his beak. The last human-headed god threw Harkhuf's body overboard into a cauldron, and Unas ate him.

When he had finished his meal, Unas turned to me. I lay prostrate on the ground before him, as if he were the living king. I hid my face and wiped away the kohl flooded by tears from my eyes.

Unas said, "And what about you? Are you too a god? You are filled with something. I believe that you ate that very little bit of Amon-Ra not eaten by Harkhuf son of Intef."

Unas was cunning for having eaten all the gods. I had eaten only a tiny portion. What was it that the heart of Amon-Ra might have given me that it had not given Harkhuf or Unas?

I could become a crocodile, or a heron, or a hawk, but Unas had eaten all these gods, and eaten even my brother, who himself had eaten almost all of Amon-Ra. So I knelt there as myself, a mortal woman named Ankhesenast-tashery.

I told him my name and said, "I ate only a little bit of Amon-Ra's heart. Perhaps you should eat me too, because although you boast of having eaten all of the god, I do not believe that you've tasted the very little bit that I have."

"I have eaten all of Amon-Ra!" Unas said. "Prove to me that you have eaten a little bit of Amon-Ra's heart, Ankhesenast-tashery."

I said, "I loved our father, although he wished upon me as husband a terrible man. I loved my brother, although he killed our father. Where else but from the heart of a god could I have learned such love? I see no love in you, King Unas."

This made Unas very angry. He raised his foot as if to crush me. I offered him my arms. He raised his hand as if to smite me. I offered him my breasts.

He set down his foot, withdrew his hand. "You are not filled with magic. You are filled with love."

And he left me.

SO TODAY I PLY MY TRADE WITH THAT VERY LITTLE BIT OF THE GOD'S heart I ate so long ago. I write for those who seek me out their *Chapters of Coming Forth by Day*. I provide them the means by which to overcome demons that they could not otherwise defeat. These means are not the sword or the crocodile's teeth, but the swallow's sad song and the beauty of a lotus.

I kept my brother's ship and hid it in the hills. When my body is placed within this earth and my soul is received into the Blessed Fields, I will come back for it and bring the boat into heaven.

But know all you who read this that never, ever shall I become a god. ☛

She was offered her heart's desire if only she'd betray her dreams. But what seems simple under the sun is far more complicated beneath the moon.

THE MOON IS DROWNING WHILE I SLEEP

BY CHARLES DE LINT
Illustration by Carol Heyer

If you keep your mind sufficiently open, people will throw a lot of rubbish into it.
—William A. Orton

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS what there was, and if nothing had happened there would be nothing to tell.

IT WAS MY FATHER WHO TOLD ME THAT dreams want to be real. When you start to wake up, he said, they hang on and try to slip out into the waking world when you don't notice. Very strong dreams, he added, can almost do it; they can last for almost half a day, but not much longer.

I asked him if any ever made it. If any of the people our subconscious minds toss up and make real while we're sleeping had ever actually stolen out into this world from the dream world.

He knew of at least one that had, he said.

He had that kind of lost look in his eyes that made me think of my mother. He always looked like that when he talked about her, which wasn't often.

Who was it? I asked, hoping he'd dole out another little tidbit about my mother. Is it someone I know?

But he only shook his head. Not really, he told me. It happened a long time ago—before you were born. But I often won-

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CAROL MEYER

dered, he added almost to himself, what did *she* dream of?

That was a long time ago and I don't know if he ever found out. If he did, he never told me. But lately I've been wondering about it. I think maybe they don't dream. I think that if they do, they get pulled back into the dream world.

And if we're not careful, I think they can pull us back with them.

"I'VE BEEN HAVING THE STRANGEST DREAMS," SOPHI ETOILE SAID, more as an observation than a conversational opener.

She and Jilly Coppercorn had been enjoying a companionable silence while they sat on the stone river wall in the old part of Lower Crowsea's Market. The wall is by a small public courtyard, surrounded on three sides by old three-story brick and stone town houses, peaked with mansard roofs, dormer windows thrusting from the walls like hooded eyes with heavy brows. The buildings date back over a hundred years, leaning against each other like old friends too tired to talk, just taking comfort from each other's presence.

The cobblestoned streets that web out from the courtyard are narrow, too tight a fit for a car, even the small imported makes. They twist and turn, winding in and around the buildings more like back alleys than thoroughfares. If you have any sort of familiarity with the area you can maze your way by those lanes to find still smaller courtyards, hidden and private, and, deeper still, secret gardens.

There are more cats in Old Market than anywhere else in Newford and the air smells different. Though it sits just a few blocks west of some of the city's principal thoroughfares, you can hardly hear the traffic, and you can't smell it at all. No exhaust, no refuse, no dead

THERE'S A GREAT *big stone on top of her torso so she's only visible from the breasts up. Her face is in repose, as though she's sleeping, but she's under water, so I know she's dead.*

air. Old Market always seems to smell of fresh bread baking, cabbage soups, frying fish, roses and those tart, sharp-tasting apples that make the best strudels.

Sophie and Jilly were bookended by stairs going down to the Kickaha River on either side of them. The streetlamp behind them put a glow on their hair, haloing each with a nimbus of light. Jilly's hair was darker, all loose tangled curls; Sophie's was soft auburn, hanging in ringlets.

In the half-dark beyond the lamp's murky light, their small figures could almost be taken for each other, but when the light touched their features, Jilly could be seen to have the quick, clever features of a Rackham pixie, while Sophie's were softer, as though rendered by Rossetti or Burne-Jones. Though similarly dressed with paint-stained smocks over loose T-shirts and baggy cotton pants, Sophie still managed to look tidy, while Jilly could never seem to help a slight tendency toward scruffiness. She was the only one of the two with paint in her hair.

"What sort of dreams?" Jilly asked her friend.

It was almost four o'clock in the morning. The narrow streets of Old Market lay empty and still about them, except for the odd prowling cat, and cats can be like the hint of a whisper when they want, ghosting and silent, invisible presences. The two women had been working at Sophie's studio on a joint painting, a collaboration that was going to combine Jilly's precise, delicate work with Sophie's current penchant for bright flaring colors and loosely rendered figures. Neither was sure the experiment would work, but they'd been enjoying themselves immensely, so it really didn't matter.

"Well, they're sort of serial," Sophie said. "You know, where you keep dreaming about the same place, the same people, the same events, except each night you're a little further along in the story."

Jilly gave her an envious look. "I've always wanted to have that kind of dream. Christy's had them. I think he told me that it's called lucid dreaming."

"They're anything but lucid," Sophie said. "If you ask me, they're downright strange."

"No, no. It just means that you know you're dreaming, *when* you're dreaming, and have some kind of control over what happens in the dream."

Sophie laughed. "I wish."

I'M WEARING A LONG PLEATED SKIRT AND ONE OF THOSE WHITE cotton peasant blouses that's cut way too low in the bodice. I don't know why. I hate that kind of bodice. I keep feeling like I'm going to fall out whenever I bend over. Definitely designed by a man. Wendy likes to wear that kind of thing from time to time, but it's not for me.

Nor is going barefoot. Especially not here. I'm standing on a path, but it's muddy underfoot, all squishy between my toes. It's sort of nice in some ways, but I keep getting the feeling that something's going to sidle up to me, under the mud, and brush against my foot, so I don't want to move, but I don't want to just stand here, either.

Everywhere I look it's all marsh. Low flat fens, with just the odd crack willow or alder trailing raggedy vines the way you see Spanish moss in pictures of the Everglades, but this definitely isn't Florida. It feels more Englishy, if that makes sense.

I know if I step off the path I'll be in muck up to my knees.

I can see a dim kind of light off in the distance, way off the path. I'm attracted to it, the way any light in the darkness seems to call out, welcoming you, but I don't want to brave the deeper mud or the pools of still water that glimmer in the starlight.

It's all mud and reeds, cattails, bulrushes and swamp grass and I

just want to be back home in bed, but I can't wake up. There's a funny smell in the air, a mix of things rotting and stagnant water. I feel like there's something horrible in the shadows under those strange, overhung trees—especially the willows, the tall sharp leaves of sedge and water plantain growing thick around their trunks. It's like there are eyes watching me from all sides, dark misshapen heads floating froglike in the water, only the eyes showing, staring. Quicks and bogles and dark things.

I hear something move in the tangle of bulrushes and bur reeds just a few feet away. My heart's in my throat, but I move a little closer to see that it's only a bird caught in some kind of net.

Hush, I tell it and move closer.

The bird gets frantic when I put my hand on the netting. It starts to peck at my fingers, but I keep talking softly to it until it finally settles down. The net's a mess of knots and tangles, and I can't work too quickly because I don't want to hurt the bird.

You should leave him be, a voice says, and I turn to find an old woman standing on the path beside me. I don't know where she came from. Every time I lift one of my feet it makes this creepy sucking sound, but I never even heard her approach.

She looks like the wizened old crone in that painting Jilly did for Geordie when he got onto this kick of learning fiddle tunes with the word "hag" in the title: "The Hag in the Kiln," "Old Hag You Have Killed Me," "The Hag With the Money" and god knows how many more.

Just like in the painting, she's wizened and small and bent over and...dry. Like kindling, like the pages of an old book. Like she's almost all used up. Hair thin, body thinner. But then you look into her eyes and they're so alive it makes you feel a little dizzy.

Helping such as he will only bring you grief, she says.

I tell her that I can't just leave it.

She looks at me for a long moment, then shrugs. So be it, she says.

I wait a moment, but she doesn't seem to have anything else to say,

so I go back to freeing the bird. But now, where a moment ago the netting was a hopeless tangle, it just seems to unknot itself as soon as I lay my hand on it. I'm careful when I put my fingers around the bird and pull it free. I get it out of the tangle and then toss it up in the air. It circles above me, once, twice, three times, cawing. Then it flies away.

It's not safe here, the old lady says then.

I'd forgotten all about her. I get back onto the path, my legs smeared with smelly, dark mud.

What do you mean? I ask her.

When the moon still walked the sky, she says, why it was safe then. The dark things didn't like her light and fair fell over themselves to get away when she shone. But they're bold now, tricked and trapped her, they have, and no one's safe. Not you, not me. Best we were away.

Trapped her? I repeat like an echo. The moon?

She nods.

Where?

She points to the light I saw earlier, far out in the fens.

They've drowned her under the Black Snag, she says. I will show you.

She takes my hand before I realize what she's doing and pulls me through the rushes and reeds, the mud squishing awfully under my bare feet, but it doesn't seem to bother her at all. She stops when we're at the edge of some open water.

Watch now, she says.

She takes something from the pocket of her apron and tosses it into the water. It's a small stone, a pebble or something, and it enters the water without a sound, without making a ripple. Then the water starts to glow and a picture forms in the dim flickering light.

It's as if we have a bird's-eye view of the fens for a moment, then the focus comes in sharp on the edge of a big still pool, sentried by a huge dead willow. I don't know how I know it, because the light's still poor, but the mud's black around its shore. It almost swallows the pale, wan glow coming up from out of the water.

Drowning, the old woman says. The moon is drowning.

I look down at the image that's formed on the surface and I see a woman floating there. Her hair's all spread out from her, drifting in the water like lily roots. There's a great big stone on top of her torso so she's only visible from the breasts up. Her shoulders are slightly sloped, neck slender, with a swan's curve, but not so long. Her face is in repose, as though she's sleeping, but she's under water, so I know she's dead.

She looks like me.

I turn to the old woman, but before I can say anything, there's movement all around us. Shadows pull away from trees, rise from the stagnant pools, change from vague blotches of darkness into moving shapes, limbed and headed, pale eyes glowing with menace. The old woman pulls me back onto the path.

Wake quick! she cries.

She pinches my arm—hard, sharp. It really hurts. And then I'm sitting up in my bed.

"AND DID YOU HAVE A BRUISE ON YOUR ARM FROM WHERE SHE pinched you?" Jilly asked.

Sophie shook her head and smiled. Trust Jilly. Who else was always looking for the magic in a situation?

"Of course not," she said. "It was just a dream."

"But..."

"Wait," Sophie said. "There's more."

Something suddenly hopped onto the wall between them and they both started, until they realized it was only a cat.

"Silly puss," Sophie said as it walked toward her and began to butt its head against her arm. She gave it a pat.

THE NEXT NIGHT I'M STANDING BY MY WINDOW, LOOKING OUT AT THE street, when I hear movement behind me. I turn and it isn't my apartment any more. It looks like the inside of an old barn, heaped up with straw in a big, tidy pile against one wall. There's a lit lantern

swinging from a low rafter beam, a dusty but pleasant smell in the air, a cow or maybe a horse making some kind of nickering sound in a stall at the far end.

And there's a guy standing there in the lantern light, a half dozen feet away from me, not doing anything, just looking at me. He's drop-down gorgeous. Not too thin, not too muscle-bound. A friendly, open face with a wide smile and eyes to kill for—long moody lashes, and the eyes are the color of violets. His hair's thick and dark, long in the back with a cowlick hanging down over his brow that I just want to reach out and brush back.

I'm sorry, he says. I didn't mean to startle you.

That's okay, I tell him.

And it is. I think maybe I'm already getting used to all the to-and-froing.

He smiles. My name's Jeck Crow, he says.

I don't know why, but all of a sudden I'm feeling a little weak in the knees. Ah, who am I kidding? I know why.

What are you doing here? he asks.

I tell him I was standing in my apartment, looking for the moon, but then I remembered that I'd just seen the last quarter a few nights ago and I wouldn't be able to see it tonight.

He nods. She's drowning, he says, and then I remember the old woman from last night.

I look out the window and see the fens are out there. It's dark and creepy and I can't see the distant glow of the woman drowned in the pool from here the way I could last night. I shiver and Jeck comes over all concerned. He's picked up a blanket that was hanging from one of the support beams and lays it across my shoulders. He leaves his arm there, to keep it in place, and I don't mind. I just sort of lean into him, like we've always been together. It's weird. I'm feeling drowsy and safe and incredibly aroused, all at the same time.

He looks out the window with me, his hip against mine, the press of his arm on my shoulder a comfortable weight, his body radiating heat.

It used to be, he says, that she would walk every night until she grew so weak that her light was almost failing. Then she would leave the world to go to another, into Faerie, it's said, or at least to a place where the darkness doesn't hide quicks and bogles, and there she would rejuvenate herself for her return. We would have three nights of darkness, when evil owned the night, but then we'd see the glow of her lantern approaching and the haunts would flee her light and we could visit with one another again when the day's work was done.

He leans his head against mine, his voice going dreamy.

I remember my mam saying once, how the moon lived another life in those three days. How time moves differently in Faerie so that what was a day for us, might be a month for her in that place. He pauses, then adds, I wonder if they miss her in that other world.

I don't know what to say. But then I realize it's not the kind of conversation in which I have to say anything.

He turns to me, head lowering until we're looking straight into each other's eyes. I get lost in the violet, and suddenly I'm in his arms and we're kissing. He guides me, step by sweet step, backward toward that heap of straw. We've got the blanket under us and this time I'm glad I'm wearing the long skirt and peasant blouse again, because they come off so easily.

His hands and his mouth are so gentle and they're all over me like moth wings brushing my skin. I don't know how to describe what he's doing to me. It isn't anything that other lovers haven't done to me before, but the way Jeck does it has me glowing, my skin all warm and tingling with this deep, slow burn starting up between my legs and just firing up along every one of my nerve ends.

All I can feel and smell is him. And then I wake up in my own bed and I'm all tangled up in the sheets, one hand between my legs....

SOPHIE FELL SILENT.

"Steamy," Jilly said after a moment.

Sophie gave a little bit of an embarrassed laugh. "You're telling me. I get a little squirmy just thinking about it. And that night—I was still so fired up when I woke that I couldn't think straight. I just went

ahead and finished and then lay there afterward, completely spent. I couldn't even move."

"You know a guy named Jack Crow, don't you?" Jilly asked.

"Yeah, he's the one who's got that tattoo parlor down on Palm Street. I went out with him a couple of times, but—" Sophie shrugged, "—you know. Things just didn't work out."

"That's right. You told me that all he ever wanted to do was to give you tattoos."

Sophie shook her head, remembering. "In private places so only he and I would know they were there. Boy."

The cat had fallen asleep, body sprawled out on Sophie's lap, head pressed tight against her stomach. A deep resonant purr rose up from him. Sophie hoped he didn't have fleas.

"But the guy in my dream was nothing like Jack," she said. "And besides, his name was Jeck."

"What kind of a name *is* that?"

"A dream name."

"So did you see him again—the next night?"

Sophie shook her head. "Though not from lack of interest on my part."

THE THIRD NIGHT I FIND MYSELF IN THIS ONE-ROOM COTTAGE OUT OF a fairy tale. You know, there's dried herbs hanging everywhere, a big hearth considering the size of the place, with black iron pots and a kettle sitting on the hearthstones, thick hand-woven rugs underfoot, a small tidy little bed in one corner, a cloak hanging by the door, a rough set of a table and two chairs by a shuttered window.

The old lady is sitting on one of the chairs. There you are, she says. I looked for you to come last night, but I couldn't find you.

I was with Jeck, I say and then she frowns, but she doesn't say anything.

Do you know him? I ask.

Too well.

Is there something wrong with him?

I'm feeling a little flushed, just talking about him. So far as I'm concerned, there's nothing wrong with him at all.

He's not trustworthy, the old lady finally says.

I shake my head. He seems to be just as upset about the drowned lady as you are. He told me all about her—how she used to go into Faerie.

She never went into Faerie.

Well then, where did she go?

The old lady shakes her head. Crows talk too much, she says, and I can't tell if she means the birds or a whole bunch of Jecks. Thinking about the latter gives me goosebumps. I can barely stay clearheaded around Jeck; a whole crowd of him would probably overload my circuits and leave me lying on the floor like a little pool of jelly.

I don't tell the old lady any of this. Jeck inspired confidences, as much as sensuality; she does neither.

Will you help us? she says instead.

I sit down at the table with her and ask, Help with what?

The moon, she says.

I shake my head. I don't understand. You mean the drowned lady in the pool?

Drowned, the old lady says, but not dead. Not yet.

I start to argue the point, but then realize where I am. It's a dream and anything can happen, right?

It needs you to break the bogles' spell, the old lady goes on.

Me? But—

Tomorrow night, go to sleep with a stone in your mouth and a hazel twig in your hands. Now mayhap, you'll find yourself back here, mayhap with your crow, but guard you don't say a word, not one word. Go out into the fen until you find a coffin, and on the coffin a candle, and then look sideways and you'll see that you're in the place I showed you yesternight.

She falls silent.

And then what am I supposed to do? I ask.

What needs to be done.

But—

I'm tired, she says.

She waves her hand at me and I'm back in my own bed again.

"AND SO?" JILLY ASKED. "DID YOU DO IT?"

"Would you have?"

"In a moment," Jilly said. She sidled closer along the wall until she was right beside Sophie and peered into her friend's face. "Oh, don't tell me you didn't do it. Don't tell me that's the whole story."

"The whole thing just seemed silly," Sophie said.

"Oh, please!"

"Well, it did. It was all too oblique and riddish. I know it was just a dream, so that it didn't have to make sense, but there was so much of a coherence to a lot of it that when it did get incomprehensible, it just didn't seem...oh, I don't know. Didn't seem fair, I suppose."

"But you *did* do it?"

Sophie finally relented.

"Yes," she said.

I GO TO BED WITH A SMALL, SMOOTH STONE IN MY MOUTH AND have the hardest time getting to sleep because I'm sure I'm going to swallow it during the night and choke. And I have the hazel twig as well, though I don't know what help either of them is going to be.

Hazel twig to ward you from quicks and bogles, I hear Jeck say. And the stone to remind you of your own world, of the difference between waking and dream, else you might find yourself sharing the moon's fate.

We're standing on a sort of grassy knoll, an island of semisolid ground, but the footing's still spongy. I start to say hello, but he puts his finger to his lips.

She's old, is Granny Weather, he says, and cranky, too, but there's more magic in one of her toenails than most of us will find in a lifetime.

I never really thought about his voice before. It's like velvet, soft and smooth, but not effeminate. It's too resonant for that.

He puts his hands on my shoulders and I feel like melting. I close my eyes, lift my face to his, but he turns me around until I'm facing away from him. He cups his hands around my breasts and kisses me on the nape of my neck. I lean back against him, but he lifts his mouth to my ear.

You must go, he says softly, his breath tickling the inside of my ear. Into the fens.

I pull free from his embrace and face him. I start to say, Why me? Why do I have to go alone? But before I can get a word out he has his hand across my mouth.

Trust Granny Weather, he says. And trust me. This is something only you can do. Whether you do it or not is your choice. But if you mean to try tonight, you mustn't speak. You must go out into the fens and find her. They will tempt you and torment you, but you must ignore them, else they'll have you drowning too, under the Black Snag.

I look at him and I know he can see the need I have for him, because in his eyes I can see the same need for me reflected in their violet depths.

I will wait for you, he says. If I can.

I don't like the sound of that. I don't like the sound of any of it, but I tell myself again, it's just a dream, so I finally nod. I start to turn away, but he catches hold of me for a last moment and kisses me. There's a hot rush of tongues touching, arms tight around each other, before he finally steps back.

I love the strength of you, he says.

I don't want to go, I want to change the rules of the dream. But I get this feeling that if I do, if I change one thing, everything'll change, and maybe he won't even exist in whatever comes along to replace it. So I lift my hand and run it along the side of his face. I take a long last drink of those deep violet eyes that just want to swallow me, then I get brave and turn away again.

And this time I go into the fens.

I'm nervous, but I guess that goes without saying. I look back but I can't see Jeck anymore. I can just feel I'm being watched, and it's

not by him. I clutch my little hazel twig tighter, roll the stone around from one side of my mouth to the other, and keep going.

It's not easy. I have to test each step to make sure I'm not just going to sink away forever into the muck. I start thinking of what you hear about dreams, how if you die in a dream, you die for real, that's why you always wake up just in time. Except for those people who die in their sleep, I guess.

I don't know how long I'm slogging through the muck. My arms and legs have dozens of little nicks and cuts—you never think of how sharp the edge of a reed can be until your skin slides across one. It's like a paper cut, sharp and quick, and it stings like hell. I don't suppose all the muck's doing the cuts much good either. The only thing I can be happy about is that there aren't any bugs.

Actually, there doesn't seem to be the sense of anything living at all in the fens, just me, on my own. But I know I'm not alone. It's like a word sitting on the tip of your tongue. I can't see or hear or sense anything, but I'm being watched.

I think of Jeck and Granny Weather, of what they say the darkness hides. Quicks and bogles and haunts.

After a while I almost forget what I'm doing out here. I'm just stumbling along with a feeling of dread hanging over me that won't go away. Bogbean and water mint leaves feel like cold, wet fingers sliding along my legs. I hear the occasional flutter of wings, and sometimes a deep kind of sighing moan, but I never see anything.

I'm just about played out when suddenly I come upon this tall rock under the biggest crack willow I've seen so far. The tree's dead, drooping leafless branches into the still water at a slant, the mud's

I come up spluttering and choking on the foul water.

And then I hear the laughter.

I look up and there's these things all around the edge of the pool. Quicks and bogles and small monsters. All eyes and teeth and spindly black limbs and crooked hands with too many joints to the fingers. The tree is full of crows and their cawing adds to the mocking hubbub of sound.

First got one, now got two, a pair of voices chant. Boil her up in a tiddy stew.

I'm starting to shiver—not just because I'm scared, which I am, but because the water's so damn cold. The haunts just keep on laughing and making up these creepy little rhymes that mostly have to do with little stews and barbecues. And then suddenly, they all fall silent and these three figures come swinging down from the willow's boughs.

I don't know where they came from, they're just there all of a sudden. These aren't haunts, nor quicks nor bogles. They're men and they look all too familiar.

Ask for anything, one of them says, and it will be yours.

It's Jeck, I realize. Jeck talking to me, except the voice doesn't sound right. But it looks just like him. All three look like him.

I remember Granny Weather telling me that Jeck was untrustworthy, but then Jeck told me to trust her. And to trust him. Looking at these three Jecks, I don't know what to think anymore. My head starts to hurt and I just wish I could wake up.

You need only tell us what it is you want, one of the Jecks says, and we will give it to you. There should be no enmity between us.

I LOOK DOWN INTO *the water and I see my own face reflected back at me, but then I realize that it's not me I'm seeing, it's the drowned woman, the moon, trapped under the stone.*

all black underfoot, the marsh is, if anything, even quieter here, expectant almost, and I get the feeling like something—*some things* are closing in all around me.

I start to walk across the dark mud to the other side of the rock until I hit a certain vantage point. I stop when I can see that it's shaped like a big strange coffin, and I remember what Granny Weather told me. I look for the candle and see a tiny light flickering at the very top of the black stone, right where it's pushed up and snagged among the dangling branches of the dead willow. It's no brighter than a firefly's glow, but it burns steady.

I do what Granny Weather told me and look around myself using my peripheral vision. I don't see anything at first, but as I slowly turn toward the water, I catch just a hint of a glow. I stop and then I wonder what to do. Is it still going to be there if I turn to face it?

Eventually, I move sideways toward it, always keeping it in the corner of my eye. The closer I get, the brighter it starts to glow, until I'm standing hip deep in the cold water, the mud sucking at my feet, and it's all around me, this dim eerie glowing. I look down into the water and I see my own face reflected back at me, but then I realize that it's not me I'm seeing, it's the drowned woman, the moon, trapped under the stone.

I stick my hazel twig down the bodice of my blouse and reach into the water. I have to bend down, the dark water licking at my shoulders and chin and smelling something awful, but I finally touch the woman's shoulder. Her skin's warm against my fingers, and for some reason that makes me feel braver. I get a grip with one hand on her shoulder, then the other, and give a pull.

Nothing budes.

I try some more, moving a little deeper into the water. Finally I plunge my head under and get a really good hold, but she simply won't move. The rock's got her pressed down tight, and the willow's got the rock snagged, and dream or no dream, I'm not some kind of superwoman. I'm only so strong and I have to breathe.

The woman is drowned. She is dead. You have come too late. There is nothing you can do for her now. But you can do something for yourself. Let us gift you with your heart's desire.

My heart's desire, I think.

I tell myself, again, it's just a dream, but I can't help the way I start thinking about what I'd ask for if I could really have anything I wanted, anything at all.

I look down into the water at the drowned woman and I think about my dad. He never liked to talk about my mother. It's like she was just a dream, he said once.

And maybe she was, I find myself thinking as my gaze goes down into the water and I study the features of the drowned woman who looks so much like me. Maybe she was the moon in this world and she came to ours to rejuvenate, but when it was time for her to go back, she didn't want to leave because she loved me and dad too much. Except she didn't have a choice.

So when she returned, she was weaker, instead of stronger like she was supposed to be, because she was so sad. And that's how the quicks and the bogles trapped her.

I laugh then. What I'm making up, as I stand here waist deep in smelly dream water, is the classic abandoned child's scenario. They always figure that there was just a mix-up, that one day their real parents are going to show up and take them away to some place where everything's magical and loving and perfect.

I used to feel real guilty about my mother leaving us—that's something else that happens when you're just a kid in that kind of a situation. You just automatically feel guilty when something bad happens, like it's got to be your fault. But I got older. I learned to deal with it. I learned that I was a good person, that it hadn't been my fault, that my dad was a good person, too, and it wasn't his fault either.

I'd still like to know why my mother left us, but I came to understand that whatever the reasons were for her going, they had to do

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*Her people thought Sunshell had the power to save the tribe—
so why didn't she feel powerful?*

THE YEAR OF STORMS

BY JUDITH BERMAN

Illustration by Web Bryant

THE DAY AFTER THEY FINISHED THE LAST OF THE DRIED venison, the southside king came to Flicker House. He arrived in the afternoon, streaming wet from the storm, accompanied by only two attendants. No one expected him. Sunshell's aunts had climbed into the damp and smoky rafters to take stock of what little was left of the stores. Uncle Vanguard lay in his room napping away the afternoon, as he had napped away much of the last year. Mother was also in bed, much too ill to get up. Uncle Fool was in his room, too, but Sunshell knew *he* hadn't been napping; strange irregular knocks and thumps sounded every once in a while against the wall of his room that faced the central hall, and once Sunshell was certain she heard the croak of a very large frog.

Sunshell herself sat glumly near the fire with most of the other residents of Flicker House, trying to ignore the smoke and her empty belly, and the way Many and Cormorant had been ignoring *her*. The wind and pounding surf outside were so noisy, and the king came in so quietly, that it was some moments before she noticed that he stood by the door with water streaming from his rain hat and cape. By that time Aunt Aureole was clattering down from the rafters, calling for someone to wake her husband. She ushered the king and his attendants to the hearthside, took their wet things, brought shredded cedar bark for



them to dry themselves, and presented the king with a dish of dried seaweed. She was much flightier than usual, and Sunshell could tell she was embarrassed at having so little to offer the king.

The king had wonderful manners; he ate just a bit to show his appreciation, but left the rest, mindful of the scarcity of food this spring in Deepriver Town.

He was growing thinner just like everyone else, and his handsome face looked very sad and worn today. When Uncle Vanguard appeared, blinking and trying to smother his yawns, the king greeted him warmly, but it was plain his mind was elsewhere. After the usual pleasantries, the king said abruptly, "My two boys left early this morning to go seal hunting."

Vanguard blinked. "I thought you had forbidden that."

"Hundreds of times," said the king. "They have been asking me to go every day, ever since it was clear their older brother would not return. What is it now?—nearly a year since my eldest and his cousin paddled out in their canoe and never came back? Ever since, I have been saying no. How could I risk losing two more of my children? And the storms are much worse now than when Harpoon disappeared."

"These are not ordinary storms," said Vanguard, stifling another yawn. "The Bright Ones have been gone for a year. Something is amiss in the world."

"That's just it," said the king. "Something *is* wrong and they seem to think it's their job to fix it. And now the people are hungry. Kings' sons are supposed to be great hunters. I should have seen it coming, but I didn't. I thought they would obey me. I didn't know how much it bothered them." His voice broke, and he paused for a moment, biting his lip. He didn't say it, but Sunshell had heard others do so: it was the *king's* job to fix these things, not his sons', not anyone else's.

Then the king sighed. "I certainly thought my wizard would honor my wishes, but they wheedled a charm against wind and wave from him and sneaked out under cover of darkness."

"Resurrecting is watching over them for you, though," said Vanguard.

"Apparently he has lost sight of them already. I have been all around the town, and every wizard tells me something different. One says they have already capsized and drowned; another says they are castaways upon an island and will have to repair their canoe. Resurrecting says they will return. I don't believe any of them. The wizards could not find Harpoon when he disappeared either. Even if he lay at the bottom of the ocean, they should have been able to see his body, but everything has remained hidden this last year. I want to consult Fool."

Vanguard shifted uncomfortably on the wooden platform. "Well," he said, "Fool does have a way with the weather."

"He told me I would never see Harpoon again, and he was the only one who divined that correctly. If he tells me my other two boys are gone forever, I will give up hope."

Vanguard sighed himself. After a moment he said, "Cormorant. Cormorant, boy, go call your father."

They always sent Cormorant. No one else wanted to do it.

Cormorant rose from beside Many with visible reluctance and climbed the stepped platforms of the hall to the door of his father's room. It served him right to have to disturb Fool, Sunshell thought, the way he and Many had been acting. "Father," Cormorant called softly and hesitantly.

Fool had very sharp hearing. "Why do you interrupt me?" boomed his deep and angry voice.

Cormorant shrank back a step. "The king is here, Father. He wants to talk to you."

There was a silence in the hall. The wind roared, the rain pounded on the roof. "A moment," the voice said.

Fool emerged from his room smiling and pleasant, though in Sunshell's mind no smile ever erased the cruelty of his square and heavy-browed face. He passed by his son without a glance or a touch and descended toward the king.

"I want you to look for my sons," the king said.

Fool nodded slowly. He pressed his hands together and inhaled.

Then, all at once, his eyes rolled into his head. He began to hum, and voices pierced the air around him, spirit voices, high clear whistles. Smoke from the fire billowed around Fool but did not touch him. Sharp knocks rattled along the walls under the rafters. Somewhere, under their feet, a massive frog croaked twice. Fool's body shook all over. His hands floated trembling into the air until they hung over his head. Sparks shot out of them. Sunshell watched scornfully. She had seen these small magics before. They were not what made her afraid of Fool.

Fool's show went on for some time, and then it stopped as suddenly as it began. His eyes rolled forward again.

"What did you see?" asked the king, tense and anguished.

"You will not see your sons again," said Fool, panting a little. "I am sorry, sir."

"Well, then," the king said, rising. "Well, then." He started blindly toward the door. Sunshell wanted to run after him and say, *Don't believe Fool! He pretends! He lies! He's lost his power just like the rest of them!* But she couldn't, not in front of Fool. And Fool *had* been right about Harpoon, the only thing any wizard had seen right all year.

Halfway to the door, the king came to himself and turned. Manners exquisite as always, he held out a beautiful dagger to Fool, a king's copper dagger varnished with oolachan oil, with a wooden pommel inlaid with pearlshell and abalone and carved like the radiant sun. Payment far in excess of the services rendered, as was the proper way for a king. It was too bad the king could not summon more than good manners in the face of fast-approaching starvation.

Fool took the dagger, expressionless. And then the king shook himself, as if recalling some other duty. He took a few steps back toward Vanguard.

"Which ones are the Swimmers?" he asked.

"The twins?" Vanguard said. "Oh, Many and Sunshell." He gestured vaguely toward first one side of the hearth, then the other.

The king stepped down into the square hearthwell again. "The father's dead, isn't that right?"

Sunshell huddled against her aunt; she wasn't used to being the object of royal attention. But the king walked over to Many.

"The father's dead," said Vanguard. "The mother's ill. She's my sister-in-law."

Many seemed untroubled by the king's regard. He stared up at him, solemnly. The king nodded once. "We may want the twins," he said. "We may want them. Maybe they can help." He retraced his steps, jamming his rain hat on his head, and ducked into the storm. His attendants followed reluctantly.

DINNER THAT NIGHT WAS dried seaweed in broth, three moldy dried clams, and a quarter of a cake of hemlock sapwood. Mother took only a little food and water, and hardly seemed to recognize her children. Many and Sunshell tried to talk to her but soon Aunt Aureole shooed them away. "Let her rest," Aureole said snappishly. "Give her some peace."

Many was restless and angry after that. He drummed on Aureole's now-useless cooking boxes with a stick and threw twigs and bits of rubbish at Sunshell, until finally she jumped up from the fire and ran after him, shouting. Then Aureole yelled at Sunshell, as if Many's misbehavior were *her* fault.

Sunshell came back to the fireside reluctantly and plopped down beside Aunt Brighthead, who twined away at yet another in an endless series of spruce-root rain hats. Sunshell picked up her own misshapen attempt. Sunshell had recently taken up trying to copy her

youngest and quietest aunt, both Brighthead's incredibly fine and even stitches, and the way she sang serenely to herself as she worked, shutting out the world. Sunshell had had little success on either count. She was too hungry, too anxious, too frustrated; she could not concentrate.

Now Sunshell was distracted yet again by a familiar, hesitant voice:

"Shall we go yet, sire? Is it time now to bring summer to the Mountain Land?"

"It is not yet time," intoned another familiar voice.

"Shall we prepare yet to make flesh for the people of the Mountain Land?"

"No," Many said, "it is not yet time. Do not put on your salmon mask just yet."

Not *again*. All spring Many had been at this game, over and over again, as if he couldn't think about anything else, and Cormorant, as always, followed his lead. Sunshell looked around, furious. Many now sat cross-legged atop a cooking box in the solemn and courtly posture so recently assumed by their king. Cormorant, squatting below, had assumed the role of attendant, or perhaps an overly obsequious house lord. Grownups thought Many a cute boy, with his round face and his clever, soot-black eyes, but all Sunshell could see now was an obnoxious, heartless brat. "Stop it!" She threw down her hat and jumped to her feet. "Why do you keep *doing* it?"

Cormorant flicked a nervous glance over his shoulder, but he went on. "The people are hungry there," he reminded Many. "The children and the sick and the old ones will begin to die soon."

"Let them die, then," said Many. "It is nothing to us."

"Stop it, stop it!" she yelled, advancing on them.

"What shall we do while we wait then?" asked Cormorant, shuffling back a judicious step.

"We shall feast!" Many cried. "We shall feast on drowned men!" and with that he leapt from the cooking box onto Cormorant, who transformed himself half-heartedly from the lord of the sockeye salmon into a fisherman drowned in a storm; he fell backward, limp, onto the hard dirt floor at Sunshell's feet and let Many bite his thin arm unresisting. He yelped when Many's teeth sank farther than he evidently expected.

"Stop it!" Sunshell kicked at them hard. "Why do you do it? It's cruel!"

Many sprang to his feet, his eyes hard, bright and angry. "Well, the Bright Ones haven't come yet, have they?"

"That doesn't give you the right to mock them!"

"I'm not mocking them!" Many said. "We're all starving, aren't we?"

"Nobody knows why they're staying away! Nobody!"

"I'm a salmon! I can *play* at being a salmon if I want!"

"The Bright Ones aren't cruel!" Sunshell said, and she struck at her twin. Many lunged at her, teeth bared, but she danced backward and landed another punch. Cormorant sat up and watched the argument with his sad and nervous eyes.

"Children!" Aureole snapped from the other side of the fire.

Sunshell subsided, fixing her gaze angrily on the blackened beams that framed the hall's half-closed smoke vent. Many climbed atop the wooden box again. He should have known what was wrong with his game. Before this last year, she and Many had always known each other's thoughts, had always understood everything the same way. They were twins, and all twins were salmon, immortal Bright Ones who had schooled for a time into a human womb. Sunshell and Many shared the same flesh, the same birth, the same powers. They had swum here together from the Land of Wealth beyond the ocean. So everyone said.

They had always done everything together. But last summer, in the month of blackberries, the world had begun to change. The sockeye salmon had mysteriously disappeared from the river. Then the winter storms had started months early, rain, and gales, and terrible seas, and the southside king's son and his steersman disappeared on an unseasonable seal hunt. None of that, at first, had driven a wedge between her and Many. They both had expected that the kings of Deepriver Town, or their wizards, would discover the source of the Bright Ones' anger, that something magical and heroic

would happen, and the salmon would return.

Instead everything only got worse. Swallow died, struck by a falling tree limb as she and Fool returned from Round Bay Town. Cormorant had already been motherless, and now he lost the sister who had taken his mother's place. They had all loved Swallow, Many and Sunshell nearly as much as Cormorant, and her funeral had been grim and wet and horrible. Sunshell had barely been able to speak for days.

At first, she blamed Fool. He had always claimed he could call or calm the winds. He should have been able to slow the gale, stop the tree branch, heal the blow. But over time, as the ocean grew too rough for even the most intrepid fishermen and sea hunters, and the king salmon did not come to the river, and then the silver salmon, and then the humpbacks and the dog salmon, Sunshell realized she had made a mistake. No one could discover why the Bright Ones did not come, not the kings with their hereditary powers, nor the wizards aided by dreams and spirit messengers. The inexplicable divine anger aimed now against the Mountain Land had sapped everyone's strength. It wasn't Fool's fault he had lost his power; but she still hated him for pretending it wasn't gone.

S OON ALL THE SHORES AROUND Deepriver Town had been scoured clean of shellfish and seaweed, and the forest hunted empty of game for many days' walk in all directions, and the people began to eat old food, last year's leftovers. Then Mother fell ill, and Fool could not cure her. He had put on a grand show, singing and drumming all night, all to no effect. That was when Sunshell first realized how far apart she and Many had grown. "I don't want him to do it," she had said. Not that her opinion, or Many's, mattered. They might be twins, but no one treated them differently because of it.

"He'll make Mother better," Many argued.

"He can't! None of them have power any more!"

Many hit her, nearly weeping. "They have power! They're going to stop the storms! He's going to cure Mother!"

Fool hadn't cured Mother, but Sunshell couldn't bring herself to say told-you-so. Something painful rooted deeper and deeper inside her as the year wore on. She had heard what the aunts were saying among themselves, the thing that Cormorant had just now repeated so callously: the children and the sick and the old ones would die first. First the weak, like Mother, then the strong, like Fool: eventually all would grow so hungry and thin they would just lie down and die. No one mentioned whose fault it would be. She knew it in her heart, though. She and Many were twins, Bright Ones. They weren't mortal. Their powers should transcend the human ones of kings and wizards. They should be able to save the people, to stop the storms and call their kin. The endless winter and looming starvation weren't the kings' fault. They were hers and Many's.

"When *will* we go to the Mountain Land, sire?"

Sunshell looked down at her hands, rage blazing in her. Why wouldn't they stop!

"Please, sire," said Cormorant, softly, hesitantly. "Let us know. We are used to donning our salmon masks and swimming to the Mountain Land; it is our way."

Many did not answer for a long moment. Sunshell raised her head, hating him as she had never done in her life.

Then he scowled. "We will go when the humans return the strangled children to the water!"

Cormorant stared up at Many, perhaps as appalled as Sunshell at Many's newest and grisliest addition to their make-believe. "Stran-

gled?" he said hoarsely. "Children?"

"Yes," Many said. "We will go when they return the strangled children to the water."

Sunshell jumped to her feet. "Stop it, stop it!" And she leapt on Many and began punching him with all her strength. He yelled and hit back.

Then a firm hand gripped her shoulders and hauled her to her feet. Sunshell twisted and lashed out. "That's enough!" said Aunt Aureole, smacking her on the cheek and sitting her down forcibly on the wooden platform so hard her teeth clattered.

Many scrambled to his feet and glared at Sunshell. Cormorant stayed squatting by the cooking box, forlornly glancing at first one, then the other of the twins. Singing to herself, Aunt Brighthead put down her half-finished rain hat and went to throw another damp log on the fire.

THE NEXT MORNING MESSENGERS came from the south king's hall with an invitation for the lord of Flicker House, who was Uncle Vanguard. The king had convened a council to discuss what the starving townsfolk should do. Nothing new would come out of it, Sunshell was certain. They were only going to send out another doomed seal-hunting expedition. Or else the king would once again ask the wizards about the Bright Ones' absence, and the wizards would pretend to discover something heretofore hidden from them: a virgin's menstrual napkin, placed in the river by a sorcerer; a salmon bone eaten by a dog. No one knew anything. No one could do anything. They just talked to puff themselves up.

The council went on all morning. It rained, heavily. Fool was in a bad mood and paced around the central hearth. He frowned at the children and they scattered. He frowned at the young men and the aunts, and they shrank out of his way, too. He frowned at the smoke hanging in the air; the smoke scattered from him, and sought everyone else. Sunshell thought he was angry because he had not been invited.

In the early afternoon messengers came again from the king. For a moment Fool's frown lifted, but the messengers wanted someone else. "The twins," they said. "The salmon children." If Sunshell had not been so terrified of the gaze that Fool now turned upon her and Many, she would have had more time to be astonished at this invitation. As it was, before she could even draw a breath, the aunts had wiped their faces, straightened their clothes, thrown rain capes over them, and rushed the two of them out the door with the messengers.

Her heart pounded as they followed the messengers down the shore toward the king's hall. She wanted to ask Many what he thought was going to happen, but she was too shy to say anything in the presence of the king's messengers, and she was still too angry at Many to speak to him at all.

When they reached Sun House Sunshell was reluctant to enter, and the messengers had to push her and Many inside. At least it was warm and dry there. A large fire billowed up from the great hearth, enveloping a crowd of people in smoke: all the king's attendants and counselors, his wizard and his carver and his tally-keeper, his two wives and *their* attendants, all the southside house lords—with a sinking heart Sunshell saw the northside king as well, sitting on her king's right, and the northside lords, the warriors and the great wizards.... They all stared at the new arrivals.

Her feet froze to the floorboards of the top platform. Many had descended one level; now he stopped and looked back questioningly at her. The messengers gave her a shove forward. Then, to her

dismay, her king's elder wife rose and came toward them, holding out her hands. No escape. The queen led them to the back of the house, to her husband's great carved and legless seat. She spread new, fine mats upon the seat for them. The kings had risen and now stood on each side. They both wore their most exquisite finery: cloud robes, carved crowns with flicker feathers and ermine capes, and earrings and nose rings of iridescent sunshell.

"Sit, please, honored guests," the queen said in her pure, high voice. Many sank down upon the mats. Sunshell didn't know how she could possibly sit upon the southside throne, between the two kings of Deepriver Town, but the queen lifted her bodily and set her on the great carved seat.

The queen brought a box of warm water from the hearth and washed their heads with it, first Many's, then Sunshell's. She dried their heads with the softest shredded cedar bark. Then she anointed their faces with tallow. The younger queen brought a pouch of the finest deerskin and handed it to the elder. The elder queen put her hand in it, and when she brought it out, it was red with ocher. Three times she brought her hand to Many's forehead without touching. The fourth time she began to paint his face copper-red, color of kings and salmon.

Sunshell wanted to run away. She hated the way everyone stared at them. She hated the queen's touch upon her face, those long smooth fingers that had never gutted a fish or grubbed for roots. She hated the queen for being alive and healthy while Mother was dying. She didn't care that the queen had lost three sons and a nephew to the year of storms. She wished the queen had fed them the tallow instead of rubbing it on their faces, because she could see that, after anointing herself and Many, the box was quite empty, and no matter how much the kings pretended to honor the twins, they had no food for them. She wanted to bite the queen and scream. She didn't understand any of this.

The elder queen wiped her hands and the younger put away the paint bag and tallow box and the rest of the cedar bark. Then the king knelt down, unbelievably, before Sunshell and Many, arms wide in supplication.

"Attend to me, I beg you, Bright Ones!" he declaimed. "Hear why I invited you into my house! I pray to you to work your great power for us! Bring us good weather here in the Mountain Land! Oh, great wizards, Noble Swimmers, Rich Ones, pity us, press down the waves! Let it be summer in our world!" Then he took headbands of finely woven cedar bark and tied them upon the twins' heads. The headbands bore eagle tailfeathers that stood upright above their foreheads like crowns.

It was too cruel a mockery. Sunshell started to cry. The fact that the king looked so deadly serious as he prayed made it all the worse. Everyone in the hall looked serious.

Then the northside king came and knelt beside his fellow. "I pray to you, Great Swimmers, great wizards, Bright Ones, guardians of the western gate into our world, pity us, bring us food, Bright Ones, make us flesh, grant us mercy! Bring your kin to my house, and we will honor them. Bring your kin to the Mountain Land so we do not starve!"

She and Many returned through the rain to Flicker House. She was still crying; Many ignored her.

They had only seaweed and sapwood that night for dinner.

AUNT AUREOLE SENT THEM AWAY NEXT MORNING FOR FIGHTING. IT started over the eagle-feather crowns, which Sunshell had taken off for the night and refused to put on again. Many, on the other hand, was vehement that they wear their crowns and the tallow and ocher "until the Bright Ones come."

"The Bright Ones aren't going to come just because they prayed to us," Sunshell retorted angrily. They began to argue, forgetting that their raised voices would disturb Mother, and then they were pummeling each other, yelling. The aunts rushed into their room and separated them bodily. Each received a sharp smack on the cheek, and a short but very sharp lecture from Aureole, and then they were pushed out into the pouring rain, "and don't come back

until you learn to get along!"

At least Aureole had banished Many, too. That gave Sunshell some comfort.

Pointedly ignoring her brother, Sunshell plodded along the beach, buffeted by wind and rain. At some point Cormorant appeared, trailing after the two of them. The houses seemed silent and empty, the town already abandoned. Out of habit Sunshell stopped by Mountain Peak House to marvel at the huge cedar planks of its beautifully painted front: each six feet wide and twenty feet tall, without a crack or a knot.

At the far end of town, Sunshell discovered the northside king and two of his sons standing waist-deep in the icy river. They were driving piles to repair the town's salmon weir, the north king's duty and prerogative. *Thunk! thunk! thunk!* Sunshell watched them glumly for a while. Then she became aware that Many and Cormorant stood behind her. The mere sight of Many's red-painted face and eagle-feather crown made her furious. She pushed between them roughly and stamped through the door into Orca House.

"Hello, little Swimmer," Satiating called to her from the hearthwell. Sunshell ran to him. He hugged her and sat her down beside him. But then Many and Cormorant followed her in the door, and Satiating gave them the same warm greeting. She wished they would go away, leave her alone, let her sit with the old man in peace. "We have stories here," Satiating was saying. "No food. I hope you didn't come for food."

Satiating was an old man, the only twin in Deepriver Town other than Sunshell and Many. He was an oolachan, and he had the narrow head, sharp nose, and the small neat hands of the first fish to run in the year. Satiating was the one who had examined Sunshell and Many at their birth and seen that they were silver salmon. He had known the names silver salmon should have: Sunshell for a girl, after the iridescent abalone of their skin; and One-of-the-Multitude for a boy, because the Bright Ones always came in such countless numbers. Oolachan, he had told them, were called Satiating because they were so wonderfully oily.

Satiating leaned forward, peering into the hearthfire, as if searching for a story there. Involuntarily Sunshell followed his gaze and looked into the fire, too. Then her attention was caught by another resident of Orca House, who sat on the opposite side of the hearth.

The woman was tall and thin, with long black hair. Her delicately boned face was far more gaunt than when Sunshell had last seen her. She was called Dreaming Woman, not her original name, but the only one anyone used. Dreaming Woman stared at Sunshell very strangely.

Sunshell wrenched her gaze away and tried to focus on the story Satiating had begun. "All the First People were hungry," Satiating was saying. "'You should marry a twin-woman,' Wily One's aunt advised him. 'And where can I find a twin-woman, aunt? There are no twins in our village.' 'Search in the cemetery for the coffin of a twin-woman,' his aunt told him. So Wily One went to the cemetery and called out to the dead until one answered him, 'Yes, yes, I am a twin.' He pulled down her coffin from the tree, took out her corpse, and then—" Satiating looked at Sunshell, closed one eye and let the other one grow very big. "And then he peed on her," he said. Cormorant and Many giggled, but Sunshell found herself unable to laugh.

Satiating leaned over toward Sunshell, wiggling one eyebrow up and down comically. "He had to put salt water on her, or she could not come back to life."

"I know that," Sunshell said crossly, turning away from him. Usually she loved his stories, but she didn't like this one. She didn't want to hear about twins, or starvation, especially twins who could end starvation. And Dreaming Woman kept staring hollowly at her....

Satiating sighed and straightened. "The corpse came back to life and turned into a beautiful woman. Wily One married her. 'Call your kin,' he ordered her. She went down to the river and waded into the water. Immediately salmon began to jump in the river. Wily One caught them. Soon all their houses were filled with dried salmon. Wily One became very proud," Satiating sat up straight, crossed his arms, frowned sourly, and looked toward the rafters, "and very fat," he spread his arms wide on each side of his skinny

waist and puffed out his cheeks, "and ver-r-ry lazy."

"He spoke crossly to his wife and struck her if she so much as looked at any of his younger brothers. One day he was lying around in his house, stuffing his face with salmon, when a bone stabbed the inside of his mouth. He pulled the bone out, threw it to the ground, and cursed it. 'You come from the dead, and you dare poke *me*, Wily One, creator of the rivers and bringer of light to the world?'

"His wife, the twin-woman, began to cry. 'Please don't insult my kin,' his wife said to him. 'The Bright Ones come from the source of life, not from the dead.'

"The next day, Wily One stuffed himself with salmon again, and again a bone got stuck in his mouth. He pulled it out and threw it to the ground, cursing. 'A corpse brought you to me, and you dare stick me in the mouth?' 'Please don't insult my kin,' his wife wept. Things went on in this way for a while. Finally one day Wily One was eating, eating, eating, when he nearly choked on a salmon bone. He retched the bone onto the floor, and then cursed, 'You filthy bone! You come from a corpse! How dare you choke me, Wily One?'

"This time, without a word to him, his wife rose. 'Come, mother, come, father, come, brothers, come, sisters, come all, come away.' The dried salmon wriggled out of the boxes and flopped down from the rafters, and followed her out the door, into the ocean. As soon as the salt water touched their skin they came alive again, and they all swam off into the west. And Wily One was poor and hungry again."

Satiating paused, and dipped a drink of water from a box that sat next to him. Outside, the wind howled and whined. Sunshell found herself close to tears. "But why don't the Bright Ones come *now*?" she asked. "If someone insulted a salmon bone, or—or something, how can we find out?"

Before Satiating could swallow his mouthful of water and reply, Cormorant said, timidly, "Many says they don't come because of the strangled children."

Rage blazed in Sunshell: at Cormorant, for taking Many's invention seriously, and at Many, for being so horrible as to come up with the notion in the first place.

"It's not a game, stupid!" she screamed at them. "This is real! Stop playing your stupid game!" And she ran out into the rain, ran along the beach until she was crying so hard she could not see any more and had to stop.

THE RAIN AND SPRAY FROM THE wild surf drenched her. *Thunk! thunk! thunk!* The northside king was still driving piles, as if he believed Many and Sunshell really could bring the Bright Ones. Behind her, footsteps crunched in the gravel. A hand fell upon her shoulder. Reluctantly, she looked around. There stood Dreaming Woman, long black hair whipping around her gaunt face like a storm of black lightning. Sunshell's tears dried up all at once. A cold prickling ran up and down her spine. She did not want to talk to Dreaming Woman.

"Why are you so angry at your twin, little Swimmer?" the woman asked.

Sunshell wiped her nose with her hand. "I'm hungry." Her voice sounded pitiful enough.

Dreaming Woman reached a hand out to touch Sunshell's forehead. Hair snaked wildly around that outstretched arm. "All year my dreams have been blurred, as if something stood in the way. But in the last four nights I have had four clear dreams, little Swimmer, and you were in two of them. I do not understand these dreams, but I think you are the one who will make them clear to me."

Sunshell shook her head, icicles cutting into her spine. She didn't

want to hear. She didn't want to be the one burdened with the woman's dreams. But the ice had frozen her to the bone and she could not move.

"On the first night," Dreaming Woman began, "I saw your king's eldest son sleeping deep under the water. He held a heavy stone in his arms. The crabs had eaten his face to the white bone, and they had eaten his hunter's headband, too. He called out in his sleep but I could only hear the water murmur, because I am not a Swimmer like you, Bright One. And I saw that many fathoms above him his brothers paddled homeward in the summer sunlight, ignorant of what lay below them, their gunwales low to the water with the weight of many seals."

Sunshell felt panic stirring inside of her, but still she could not move.

"On the second night," Dreaming Woman continued, "I saw a swarm of Bright Ones, as numberless and bright as the stars in the seam of heaven, and I saw you swimming away from them, swimming toward the Mountain Land. You were dreaming, little one, and I saw your soul enter the top of your head. It was your bright salmon soul returning from the Land of Wealth, bringing a restless and unhappy dream.

"On the third night I saw you with your fellow Swimmer, your twin, weeping in the cemetery, beneath the tree where your mother's coffin hung."

"No!" choked Sunshell, shocked out of her paralysis.

"On the fourth night," Dreaming Woman said, "I saw a cave deep in the woods, a stony cave lit only by firelight, and from a rack in the cave hung two tiny babies, split open like fish to dry over the smoky fire, and I knew—"

"NO!" Sunshell screamed, and finally her legs obeyed her. She pounded down the beach.

Dreaming Woman shouted after her, "It was as your brother said! The Bright Ones will not come because of the lost children!"

Sunshell returned to Flicker House despite Aureole's ban. She arrived soaked to the skin and desperately hungry. Aunt Brighthead gave her a little dried seaweed; even the old sapwood cakes were finished now. Mother was worse. Her breath was labored and uneven, and she smelled wrong. She did not respond to Sunshell's voice. Sunshell found herself shouting at Mother, pushing her, rocking her, crying, trying to make her wake up and speak. Then Brighthead came and pulled her away, and held Sunshell's arms tight until the frenzy crumbled away and left her weak and limp as a blade of last year's grass. She wept for a long time, Brighthead holding her, and then she sat dully on the dirt beside the hearth, staring into the flames. Rain beat upon the roof.

If only she *could* talk to the Bright Ones and beg them to come. If only she *could* press down the violent waves with a thought, call forth the sun from behind the clouds. If only she did have the powers of a true Bright One: the Bright Ones could cure Mother with the power of life they owned, that allowed them to die and return every year.

If only she could talk to Many. "Why do the kings think we can stop the storms?" she wanted to ask him. "Why would we have made the storms? The people must think we hate them, to make them starve, to drown them. Or is it just the kings' joke? Why would they joke? I can't stop the storms, Many! I don't know how!"

If only Mother would wake up and talk to her.

NO DINNER THAT NIGHT. SHE LAY DOWN NEXT TO MOTHER AND TRIED to sleep. The wind gusted outside, and the house creaked and moaned. Rain rattled on the roof. Many breathed peacefully, as though his soul had already sailed to a land of sunshine. A cold draft spiraled through the room and she huddled deeper into the furs. Her stomach hurt.

Then Sunshell heard a soft, muffled sob, a desperate, helpless sound. It was not Many. It came through the wall from Uncle Fool's room. It must be Cormorant.

The sobbing went on and on, winding through the noise of rain and wind, through her hunger, through the chill and smoky darkness. Such a small, soft sound to be hidden from light. She thought he must be hungry, like her. Perhaps he cried in his sleep.

Her own sleep came and went, in gusts like the wind, sweeping over her and fleeing away. Each time, fragments of faces and voices swirled around her, spun away and dissolved. It was growing light outside. Sunlight spilled through cracks in the wallboards, golden, blinding, hot sunlight; it filled up the house, and now she was in another house, an immense, warm, bright place in which the very air glowed as coppery and lustrous as if made of the substance of the sun. They were feasting there. Mountains of fresh berries, red and gold and blue, lay in dishes inlaid with pearlshell and abalone. Barbequed salmon was heaped on one side, seal meat on the other. Roasted cinquefoil and clover roots perfumed the air. One immense dish, larger than three men lying end-to-end and wonderfully carved like a whale, was filled with nothing but strips of seal fat in oolachan oil. And the feasters—

They spun and flashed with light as they turned in the air, dancing, joking, laughing. They were blue and silver like abalone and red as oil-slicked copper. They laughed and sang. The smoke that rose from their great bonfire poured up to a roof that lay in the highest, bluest arch of heaven. They held her hands, the Bright Ones, dancing with her, their touch bright as sunlight and warm and comforting as human skin. "Please feed me," she begged them. "I'm so hungry. Please feed me." But in that instant she was wrenched backward out of their hands. She was pulled violently through the door of the house, and tumbled down the sandy beach. The beach and the sunlit town receded rapidly into the distance, and wind-whipped rain veiled everything, and waves thundered past her, as she was pulled backward toward the Mountain Land, into darkness and pain...

AND THEN, FAR BELOW OR above her, through endless fathoms of water or air, she saw something else. Not Deepwater Town, the town of her exile, but something else: two dim little specks of light, tiny as ants. They grew into two tiny identical swollen faces with protruding tongues. Tiny twin-babies, Bright Ones. The strangled children.

Lost in the Mountain Land. They could not return to the Land of Wealth, just as she could not stay. They rested in the arms of Cormorant's sister, one on each side, and she, Swallow, looked as if she were sleeping, black hair tumbled around her serene and lovely face. Except that tears trickled down from each closed long-lashed eye, and she crouched in a coffin that was wrapped tight with wizards' knots, knots of pain and death.

Sunshell woke and lay open-eyed in the dark for a time. Then she noticed that the rain had stopped and the surf sounded strangely distant. She rose and in the dark groped her way to the central hall.

The first gray light of dawn spilled through the smoke vent. Restless, she crossed the hall and passed outside. The waves were breaking out by Seagull Rock. Spring tides again; that meant the long-unseen moon was nearly full. She wandered down the exposed beach toward the breakers, looking for seaweed, or a dead fish or crab. In the churned fine gravel she found a battered moon-snail shell, a piece of rope, and some small sticks of driftwood. Lower down, a newly uprooted alder lay across the gravel. The tide was still receding. She climbed onto the base of Seagull Rock and sat down dully to watch the churning waves. A piece of seaweed glistened at her feet, not the good kind. She picked it up and bit into it. It was very tough.

As the day began, other townspeople emerged from their houses and began scouring the beach. Sunshell thought she saw Dreaming Woman in the distance, with a basket. No one came near her, though. She was startled, then, when a shape flickered in the corner of her

eye and she turned to find Many standing silently beside her.

Behind him, Cormorant climbed down Seagull Rock toward the jumble of boulders now exposed below it. Suddenly Sunshell felt she had to unburden herself to Many.

"I had a dream last night," she said.

To her surprise Many squatted down beside her. "What did you see?"

She didn't want to say it, but her mouth opened and the words came out anyway. "I saw the strangled children."

He blinked at her once but did not answer, rocking back and forth on his haunches. "I saw them!" she insisted. "Twin babies! They can't get back to the Land of Wealth!"

He stopped rocking. "Who strangled them?"

"I don't know. They were already dead."

He was silent for a long time. Finally, he said, "I had a dream. Months ago."

Sunshell stared at him. She felt as if someone had hit her in the stomach. "And you didn't tell anyone?"

"I couldn't," he said. "I know it's bad luck, but I was... I was too scared. I had the dream twice. A voice shouted in the distance. That was all. The voice was angry. I thought—I thought the Bright Ones were angry at you and me. I thought they meant *we* were the children. That we had—to be strangled, sent back to the Land of Wealth, for the Bright Ones to return."

"Many," Sunshell said, appalled. "Not *us*! They're babies! I *saw* them!"

All at once she understood him again, at last, after so long. They both had been suffocating from guilt, but his had been worse, because he had hidden the dream that explained how to bring the Bright Ones back. The horrible make-believe he played with Cormorant, the cruel king of the Bright Ones refusing to come, had been the only way he could talk about his guilt and fear. Poor Many. If he had dreamed of the feast in the great copper house that was the summer world, he wouldn't have been afraid of going home. Sunshell found tears on her face. She wiped them away impatiently and offered him the piece of rubbery seaweed. He bit off a mouthful and handed it back.

"They were in Swallow's coffin," Sunshell told him.

"Well," Many said. "I..." For a long moment he stared down at Cormorant, who was looking under a stone. "I suppose we'll have to get them." He took a deep breath. "We can't let Cormorant go with us."

Sunshell nodded. Suddenly she jumped to her feet. "Cormorant! Behind you!"

Cormorant turned, and saw it. A medium-sized crab, a live one. He seized it by its front pincer and bore it to them, grinning from ear to ear. They tore it to pieces and finished every last shred of meat.

CORMORANT STUCK WITH THEM all day. He even came into their room and sat with them while Aunt Brighthouse tried, to no avail, to get Mother to swallow some chewed seaweed in broth. In the end Mother would barely even swallow water. She seemed to be more bones than flesh; Sunshell thought she could see Mother's skull grinning out from behind her face, ready to shed its pitiful mask of skin and reveal its true face to the world.

Aunt Brighthouse sighed, smoothed back Mother's hair, and backed from the room, holding the pathetic dish of seaweed. A moment later, the deerskin on the door twitched, and a face looked in at her, Fool's heavy-browed, square-chinned face. Sunshell stum-

bled backward into Many, who had been close behind her. Cormorant edged toward the door and ducked out as soon as his father's back was turned.

Fool closed his eyes. Singing in a creepy monotone, he began to stroke the air above Mother's face, breasts, belly, loins, down her legs and up her arms. He was, Sunshell realized suddenly, the only one in Deepriver Town who still looked well-fed.

She fled the room. Many joined her a moment later. They looked down toward the central hearth, where Cormorant sat hunched by the fire, scuffing the dirt with his feet.

"Now," Many whispered. "Before it gets too dark."

But Aunt Aureole came up to them, lips pressed tightly together. "He says he's going to try to cure her again tonight," she said. "Come on, we'll have to move things around a bit."

Cooking boxes, blackened heating rocks, a pile of firewood, old mats, a pair of broken tongs, a spoon, drying clothing, Aunt Brighthouse's hat-twining materials; all these had to be moved aside or put away and the floors swept, and meanwhile gloomy afternoon descended slowly toward rainy, windy evening. Torches were lit, and wood thrown on the fire. Finally the preparations were done. Fool emerged from his own room, dressed now in his bear-claw crown and Sea Monster robe and holding his soul-rattle. He directed Sunshell's aunts to bring Mother to the hearth and lay her down upon the mats that were already arranged there.

Sunshell and Many waited until Cormorant's back was turned; then they slunk slowly and casually around the edge of the hall, grabbing torches on the way. No one noticed them go. Everyone was more interested in Fool's dramatic leaping descent to the fire-side than in two wandering children.

Still, when they stood outside the door in the whipping rain, they found Cormorant beside them, gazing at them expectantly. "Where are you going?" he asked.

Sunshell and Many looked at each other. Many's shoulders sagged.

Cormorant repeated, "Where are you going?"

"To the cemetery," Many answered finally, looking away.

The beach was empty of people now, the sky above it a murky gray. The white foam of the breakers shone in the dim light. They hurried along the town's shoreline path, between the row of cedar-plank houses and the clutter of the foreshore, the drift logs and the discarded fishing tackle, the empty drying racks, the big and little canoes, the shed that sheltered the north king's immense black warship. Their torches fretted and smoked in the rain. At the crest of the hill that stood behind the north side of town Cormorant stopped. "Why are you going this way? What are you doing?"

Sunshell turned away without answering and set off down the muddy path that led into the deep woods. It was pitch black under the trees, and her torch illuminated little. The path was treacherous from exposed rocks and roots and the slippery mud. A hundred feet overhead, wind roared through the treetops. Rain pattered down through the countless layers of branches. "Come on," Sunshell called back to Many and Cormorant, impatient.

"Why are we going this way?" Cormorant protested.

Again no one answered him. The forest grew deeper as the path wound up another, taller hillside. As they climbed higher, they rose into the wind again; it whistled over the crown of the hill, lashed at the trees, tore at the meager flame of their torches.

At the top lay a mossy knob of stone amidst the ancient hemlocks and firs. The light was better there. From that clearing they could see a bit of the beach, and Seagull Rock, and the wide straits between Deepriver Town and Fort Island, the long rows of white-capped, choppy swells rolling in from the southeast. Fort Island itself was barely more than a darker shadow on the water, disappearing already into the rainy dusk.

AROUND THEM THE WIND BLEW, THE TREES BENT, ROPES CREAKED. Sunshell raised her torch. Wooden boxes hung in the trees on all sides, high over their heads. Big painted boxes, tiny plain boxes, all wrapped tight with rope and lashed in the treetops. The air stank of mold and death. To one side, half-swallowed in a rank mound of grass and cur-

rant bushes, Sunshell saw a skull, a weather-whitened rib.

"Which one was it?" Sunshell asked Many.

"Let me think," he said, and he turned away from the clearing, a small light disappearing into a vast world of forest and darkness. Sunshell followed, reluctant to be parted from him, and Cormorant crowded after, clutching her arm. "What are you looking for?" he demanded, his voice high and brittle.

Many stopped, holding the torch high. "This one."

"Are you sure?" Sunshell craned her neck. Twelve or fifteen feet above them a box rested on a heavy branch. It looked too small and too old to hold Cormorant's sister. "It had a flicker and a sea lion painted on it."

"I can see the painting from this side," said Many.

"What are you doing?" Cormorant shouted at them, jerking Sunshell's arm. "What are you doing here?"

"We didn't bring a rope," Sunshell said, and for a moment she stood poised between relief, because they would have to go back home now, and terror, because if they did leave, she would die still bearing the heavy burden of guilt.

"Climb on my shoulders," Many said. "There's a little branch up there." He crouched down. Gingerly, bracing herself with her free hand against the wet and slimy tree trunk, she climbed onto his shoulders. He stood up slowly and she reached for the first branch. Her heart pounded louder than the distant surf. Sunshell was reminded of one of Satiating's funniest stories, about how the first king of the wizards had climbed upon his fellows' backs to reach Wily One's coffin, only to lose his magical tail. There was nothing at all funny about what they were doing now.

She groped, found another foothold, another handhold, gripped the narrow end of her torch between her teeth, and reached down for Many's outstretched hand.

"Don't leave me here!" Cormorant yelled. "Don't leave me!"

An immense gust of wind shook the trees, and all around them coffins swayed and creaked in the wind. Another gust; nearby, a rotten coffin burst, and bones showered down like rocks. A skull rolled away down the path.

THE TWINS REACHED SWALLOW'S coffin. It smelled of damp cedar and decayed flesh. Now Sunshell could clearly see the flicker painted on it. Her whole body started to tremble, but she made herself ignore it. Cormorant shouted at them, and she ignored that too. She handed Many her torch. With numb and weak hands she began to work at the cedar-withe ropes that bound the lid to the box. They were still strong despite the passage of the year. Balancing precariously, she climbed farther out on the limb for a better angle. The branch swayed sickeningly in the wind. She pulled loose one knot, then another, then another. She and Many lifted one side of the heavy lid, and Many stuck the flickering torches inside—

It was not what Sunshell expected. No lovely Swallow. No terrible strangled babies. Only a single shrunken bundle wrapped in cedar-bark mats.

"What are you doing?" Cormorant yelled down below. "Stop it! Stop it! Come down!"

"We have to unwrap her," Sunshell said desperately. She thought maybe the babies rested inside the mats.

Balancing the lid awkwardly in the branches of the ancient and twisted fir, they pulled away the mats, and the moldering wool robe beneath. Swallow sat in the box with her arms curled close to her body, legs drawn up against her arms. Her hair was still black and

luxurious but beetles had been chewing at the roots. Her skin was dull brown, eye sockets hollow, teeth bared. She looked a little bit like Mother now. There were no babies with her.

"Look at her forehead," Many breathed.

"Stop it! Come down!" Cormorant screamed over and over again. "Stop it! Please, stop it!"

Sunshell craned her neck to look, as if the babies might mysteriously be found there. What she saw was that on Many's side, old blood stained Swallow's forehead. Whatever had struck her had driven clean through her skull in one narrow slice, and left the rest of her head untouched. "She died when a tree branch fell on her," Sunshell said.

"That's not from a tree branch." Many said. "That looks like an axe blade made it."

Sunshell was shaking so hard she could barely hold herself in the wind-tossed tree. She clutched at the ropes binding the coffin to trunk and branches. "But where are the strangled babies?"

"She died on the way home from Round Bay," Many said. "She and Uncle Fool were visiting relatives in Round Bay Town all spring, and on the way home they camped on shore one night and a branch fell on her and she died. And Fool brought her home and made the coffin himself from the roofboards."

Sunshell knew what he meant: the story they had been told did not explain what they saw before them. But that wasn't what mattered. What mattered was that her dream had been as false as all the wizards' visions. There were no babies. She could not make the Bright Ones come. For a few hours she thought she had dreamed true. She thought Dreaming Woman had dreamed true. It was all a lie. She and Many could not save Deeveriver Town.

Cormorant was still yelling at them. The wind blew rain at the torches and the flames guttered; the dancing light caught something in Swallow's hand that Sunshell had not seen before.

Numbly she reached out and pulled at it. It slipped from Swallow's shrunken fingers; a band of tightly woven cedar bark, red-dyed, with an abalone disk on the front and an ivory seal bound among the strands.

Many and Sunshell stared at it for a long moment, and then as if with a single thought they flung the coffin lid back on the box and hastily knotted the ropes. They scrambled down the tree. When Cormorant saw them reach the ground, he flung himself on Many in a rage, but in the dim and wildly dipping torchlight, he happened to catch sight of what Sunshell held in her hand.

He screamed, in wordless, helpless agony. Then he tore into the darkness. Sunshell and Many ran after him. But Many tripped and fell and dropped the torches, and the torches smoked and went out, and suddenly they were alone among the coffins and the moaning, wind-tossed trees.

"Cormorant!" Many yelled. "Cormorant, come back!" Straight overhead another coffin groaned and burst, and a little avalanche of falling bones and rotten wood struck Sunshell. She batted at the pieces, caught hold accidentally of a skeleton hand, and screamed, throwing it wildly away.

They clutched at each other. Sunshell found Many's hand in the darkness. He gripped her tightly. At least she still had Many. His hand, like hers, was sticky from pitch and slippery from mud and wet bark and fallen leaves, and like hers it was cold and trembling. Hand in hand, they made their way down the path, feeling their way slowly with their feet, until the cemetery smell receded behind them, and the rough salt smell of ocean rose to meet them, and the lights of the town, splinters of orange firelight slipping through doorways and smoke vents and cracks in the walls, lay spread out under a curtain of rain along the shore ahead of them.

Later, Sunshell knew she and Many should have gone straight to Sun House, to tell the southside king about the headband. But they were cold, wet, and shaken, and miserable over their failure to find the strangled twin-children. They both wanted comfort, even the second-best comfort of the aunts. So they let their feet follow the familiar shoreline path toward home.

It was not until Sunshell pushed through the deerskin door of

Flicker House that she remembered the curing session Fool had undertaken. The first thing she saw was Fool crouched in the circle of jittery orange firelight, arms reaching toward the sky, hands trembling with power, eyes rolled into his head. He sang in his deep bass voice and shook his rattle; spirit drums boomed beneath the earth and whistles split the air shrilly. Mother lay at his feet. Over Fool's head, just above his outstretched fingertips, fluttered a small, white bird, Mother's soul. Fool was trying to coax it back to her.

Most of the residents of Flicker House sat scattered around the upper platforms of the hall, watching the show. When Sunshell and Many came in, a young man named Anxious, who sat closest to the door, turned, saw them; his loud exhalation of astonishment caught the attention of the man next to him, who in turn nudged old Aunt Cloudy. "Ho!" Aunt Cloudy exclaimed, quite loudly. Heads turned throughout the hall. Startled voices murmured.

The reaction bewildered Sunshell. Then Aureole jumped to her feet and screeched. The screech caught Fool's attention. His eyes rolled forward in their sockets, and he turned to look straight at Sunshell. He froze, staring fixedly at her in a cold fury. The drums faltered and stopped altogether and the whistles died. The little white bird slipped through the air and fell lifeless at Fool's feet, then became a toad and hopped away.

FOOL THREW DOWN THE RATTLE and bounded up the platforms toward her. The look on his face terrified Sunshell. She ducked out of the house and ran frantically along the shore looking for a place to hide, zigzagging between the canoes and sheds and drying frames. She heard Fool's heavy footsteps on the gravelly shorefront path, at first distant, then suddenly, without transition, close behind. She circled the shed that housed the northside king's warship and doubled back toward Flicker House again. The monument to the north king's grandmother reared out of the darkness. She lost her footing on the wet beach-grass and skidded into it; then she bounced away and was on her feet again. She was tired, so tired, so weak. Rain beat on her face. The northside houses slipped past in the dark, Mountain Peak House, Foam House, Thunder House. Then she reached the south side of town again. Falling Out of Heaven House, Squirrel House, Sun House.

Sun House. The southside king was kind. He had wizards.

Again, without transition, footsteps crunched on the gravel in front of her. Sunshell glanced up, saw Fool, dove beneath his outstretched arms through the Sun House door, tripped on the threshold beam, fell, and tumbled down all four stepped platforms into the king's enormous hearthwell.

She pulled herself, dizzy and smarting, to her feet. The fall had knocked the wind out of her. The king and his attendants were on their feet, too, open-mouthed; all the people of Sun House, it seemed, were staring at her. As Sunshell tried desperately to draw a breath, a hand fell heavily on her shoulder—

And suddenly she stood outside Sun House again, in the pouring rain, in Fool's painful grip. She cried out weakly, struggling. His fingers dug into her like talons, they *were* talons, curved, and white as bone... She screamed.

"Give that to me!" Fool's voice rasped harshly in her ear. "Give it to me, little freak, or I will roast you and eat you like the salmon you are!"

And then the king and his wizard and armed warriors and attendants with torches burst out of Sun House. The king looked as Sunshell had never seen him, blazing hot and as strong and quick as a mountain lion. Sunshell struggled and pulled at Fool's grip until it

felt as if her whole arm were being ripped to shreds, and suddenly she broke free and ran for the king, who caught her and held her close.

"Give it to me, child," said the king.

"Give it—?" Sunshell began, and then Many was at Sunshell's side, tugging on her hand. Belatedly she remembered what she still held after all this time, and she lifted up the headband for the king. Torchlight illumined its shimmering disk of abalone and the ivory seal. Beyond the headband she could see Fool, tensed as if ready to spring.

The king took the headband from Sunshell's grubby hand and stared at it for a long moment. He brought it to his lips. Then he pulled it away and looked down at Sunshell with a fierce expression. "This smells like death! Where did you find it?"

Sunshell couldn't speak. She heard Many answer for her. "We found it in Swallow's coffin. Sunshell had a dream."

"Swallow?" The king said in amazement. "Swallow?"

"Swallow had it in her hand. And her head wasn't right," Many went on. "It looked like an axe hit it —"

"An axe?" The king's arms dropped to his side and he gazed straight ahead, toward Fool. Fool's cruel and well-fed face glowered at them. How wrong Sunshell had been to think all power had deserted the human world. Fool had power in plenty, just no power to heal.

The breakers pounded and the wind and rain ripped at the smoky torches; nothing else seemed to move. At last Fool spoke. "I see," he said, coolly, "that you have finally heard news of your eldest son."

And then, the king said slowly, in anguished comprehension, "Harpoon wasn't going seal-hunting when he left last summer. He went to find Swallow! You killed them both! Why? I told you when you took her away that I would have let them marry!"

"Marry?" Fool said. "Oh, I would have let them, if they'd waited. But they couldn't wait. He came to rescue her. It was his fault Swallow got killed. She got in the way. Trying to protect them. Him and his rock-headed cousin. If they hadn't come —"

The king said, voice breaking, "She had it in her hand. And you wrapped her up without looking. You couldn't look at your daughter after you'd killed her. You brought her home all wrapped in mats and wouldn't let anyone touch her or look at her. And I thought it was grief —" He wiped tears from his face. "Why did you have to kill them?"

Fool did not respond, gazing out into the darkness. For a moment Sunshell found herself actually pitying the man. He had always treated Swallow as coldly and harshly as Cormorant, but she could see it was true: he hadn't meant to kill his daughter.

Then, Many yelled, "Make him tell you about the babies!"

"Babies?" The king exclaimed.

"The ones Sunshell saw in her dream! Twin babies, in Swallow's coffin!"

The king was beside himself. "Swallow was *pregnant* when you took her away last spring?"

Fool had mastered himself again. He turned a contemptuous gaze upon the king. "Twin children have divine powers," he said. "Of course I wasn't going to let her keep them. Your son shouldn't have tried to interfere."

"What did you do with them?" the king screamed. "Where are they?"

Fool smiled. "Far from water, and fully under my control."

A dark, heavy sensation filled Sunshell's belly, one that she knew had nothing to do with hunger. It was dread of what was going to follow.

Fool raised one hand in the air and groped, groped at the wind—And again his hand fell cruelly on Sunshell's shoulder, and again he had her by his side. The talons dug into her, and this time two sets of them pinned her arms to her side, huge talons ten times bigger than eagles' claws. Helplessly she watched the king grab hold of Many, to keep him from charging Fool. "Let her go," said the king.

"No," said Fool, "This little Swimmer will keep me in salmon for quite a while."

Continued on page 75



J.K. Potter

THE MASTER OF PARADOX

BY NIGEL SUCKLING

When it comes to imagination, I have an idea that J.K. (Jeff) Potter and I are soul brothers, and that my work calls to him in much the same way that his calls to me.

J.K. Potter discovered morphing at least ten or fifteen years before Hollywood began to use the technique, and because his imagination has not been cossetted or chained down by a lot of brain-dead movie studio executives, he has been able to create the gallery of extraordinary images you will see here.

You will discover your own favorite images in this rogue's gallery.... I suspect that your overwhelming sensations will be shock and dismay. Many of Potter's images actually assault the eye, and of course this is the artist's intention. These images of bodies in revolt, machines in strange and uneasy alliances with flesh, technology erupting from nature like a skeleton from a fume of decaying flesh, are the work of a practicing anarchist. You will find strange, satiric riffs, disturbing eroticism, and even images of pure and wistful fantasy. Above all, you will again and again find the transpositions of a mind that is capable of making bizarre and exhilarating connections.

—STEPHEN KING

J.K. POTTER'S CAREER AS A PHOTOGRAPHER BEGAN AS A humble retoucher for professional portrait photographers. "This was way back before the advent of electronic cameras and computer retouching, so everything was done using traditional paints, pencils and dyes. My job was to use an airbrush to clean things up, to make people's complexions perfect and to sanitize every flaw. I was the guy who magically removed all the poisonous zits from high school yearbook pictures. For years I worked for these vanity factories removing thousands of wrinkles and bags under the eyes by performing cosmetic surgery directly on the photograph or negative. I straightened ties, smoothed down hair, trimmed the fat from countless chins and even zipped up the mayor's pants once because the photographer was too embarrassed to point it out to him."

Potter soon started experimenting: "After a while I started digging out scrap prints of people from the garbage and airbrushing their hair off, making them into pinheads. I would give the most conservative businessmen the weirdest haircuts and transform bulbous noses into obscene proturbances. My fellow workers found this a morale-lifting form of amusement and started bringing in photos from home for me to mutate. Even one of my bosses, an accomplished portrait photographer, gave me a photo of his wife and asked me to airbrush her clothes off as a joke. He told me to use my imagination; I dutifully did as I was told, and superimposed her figure into a steaming hot tub for effect. He thought it was hilarious but, as I recall, she never talked to me again."

The South has had an incredible influence on his work, he feels: "To me Louisiana is like one big movie set. It really is the weirdest state in the Union and its history includes many notable fantasists, including Lafcadio Hearn, Clarence Laughlin and Anne Rice."

The atmosphere of New Orleans permeates many of his pictures.



PREVIOUS PAGE: Dragon Consul is the illustration for *The Father of Stones* by Lucius Shepard. The model created her own costume, but J.K. added the tie-dye effect by airbrushing through antique lace. ABOVE: The Anubis Gates was painted in 1989 for the cover of Tim Powers' book of the same title. The cheerless top-hatted character was rescued from an old glass negative, and has so far proved to be one of J.K.'s most cooperative models.

Before he lived there, he often used to drive there because it was so photogenic. Potter loves the cemeteries and the sub-tropical climate with its lush vegetation—Spanish moss, palmettos and palm trees. He likes the Southern Gothicism of the place. New Orleans is not old by European standards, but it looks old thanks to the rampant vegetation and climate. Things decay rapidly and there is a feeling that if people abandoned the place it would not be long before nature reclaimed it.

Another attraction of New Orleans is its cemeteries. Lying, as it does below sea level, it has a high water table, or had until the land was drained. Early settlers found that they had a problem burying their dead because the coffins and bones tended to float to the surface. This led to elaborate funerary architecture, helped by many wealthy families and a French penchant for large tombs. Graveyards are generally peaceful places full of interesting art, sculpture and textured marble. They are also full of angelic models who don't get bored holding the same pose all day, while Potter explores the changing effect of sunlight and shadow on their features.

J.K.'s interest in things old is not confined to cities and cemeteries. Much of the equipment he uses is fairly

antique, and he cannot bear to see old cameras in glass cases: "I want to get my hands on them to explore their possibilities. I see no need to throw things like that away or consign them to museums." When people see J.K.'s polished work they usually assume that he has the most sophisticated equipment available, but in reality, he says, he is a "garage artist" in the same way that some bands are "garage bands," and he loves the sensation of flying by the seat of his pants.

So what equipment does he usually use? Does he, for example have a motor drive on his camera? The question draws a rather pitying look: "That would be almost like using a video camera. It's like comparing an automatic rifle with a bow and arrow. With a bow you usually have only one chance to get a shot. It can also be like that with a still camera."

Potter loves his cameras but does not want them to do all his thinking for him. He used a view camera for years, and most of these pictures were taken using simple four by five inch place cameras with over-the-head hoods. He doesn't use light meters, and uses the electronic flash only occasionally.

It's not that he is a Luddite, just that in this era of technological acceleration he believes people tend to discard their old tools before they have learned how to



cutting edge of modern illustration, and this is true enough, but he uses very basic techniques which evolved in the thirties and before. He does nothing in the darkroom that was not possible then. It is his imagination that is well ahead of its time.

He uses combination printing, whereby landscape and sky can be shot separately and the negatives then masked and printed onto the same piece of paper in the darkroom. Multiple exposure led to the famous Victorian ghost pictures, those purporting to show ectoplasm emanating from various mediums. One of Potter's heroes is John Heartfield, who used the Dadaist invention of photomontage to savage (and still impressive) effect. The Surrealists developed a range of ideas and techniques which were really the foundation of J.K.'s work—techniques such as solarization and total or partial negative printing.

Although he will yield up to a point when quizzed on technique, he does get irritated by too persistent questioning. This is, in part, just a natural professional reserve about the secrets of his trade, but more importantly it is because he sees technique as a secondary thing: "All the toys and gadgets in the world will not make you into an artist. Too much emphasis on nuts and bolts and microchips will sterilize your work every time."

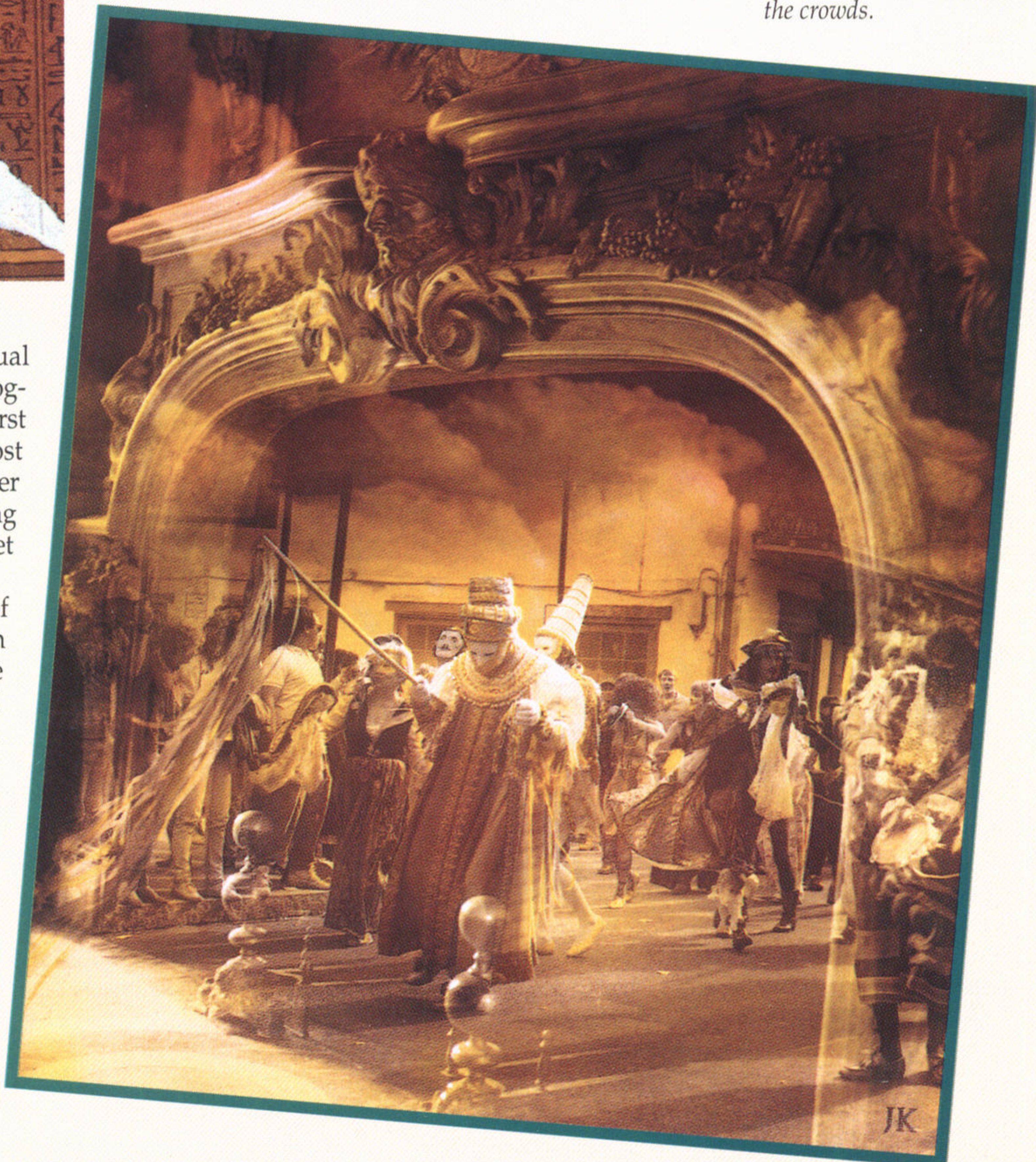
Potter says: "For me the darkroom is a ritual place, and although it may sound melodramatic, I believe it is a place where actual magic can occur. I remember one of my early darkrooms as being a very unsafe toxic waste dump, with chemical stains dripping down the walls and dismembered mannequin parts suspended from the ceiling. And my first

BELOW: Mardi Gras Phantasm (1992) resulted from shooting a street scene during the Mardi Gras festival, J.E.'s favorite time of the year as a photographer. The fireplace is in the Palace of Versailles. This image rose spontaneously as he donned a mask, and mingled anonymously with the crowds.

use them properly. He is happy with gradual progress, and despite being a professional photographer, was thirty-five before he acquired his first 'smart' 35mm camera. He loves it. It is the most compact means of taking photographs he has ever possessed, but he has no intention of abandoning all his old cameras and using it all the time, let alone fitting it with a motor drive.

Potter has a talent for making a virtue out of necessity. Many of his techniques originated from penury but his attitude was always: "What the hell—if I can't afford the right equipment, I'll fake it." Even now, he prefers to improvise with old equipment, rather than rushing out to buy the latest gadget on the market. His first fisheye lens, for example, was a common front door peephole available in any hardware store. Before he could afford an airbrush (and the ones he does use date back to the twenties) he used ordinary aerosol spray paints and elaborate stencils glued on to window screens. He enjoys creating dramatic special effects as simply as possible.

This is one of the paradoxes of Potter's work. It has been described as being at the





ABOVE: In *Mermaid at Low Tide* J.K. fuses elements of figures. Potter's ideas give his pictures their strength. It's the fusion and juxtaposition of his ideas and images that make his pictures so powerful. Using photography he plays on certain of our preconceptions. The mermaid is now somehow truer than if it was a free-form painting.

darkroom sink was made out of a lidless coffin, unused I believe. At present my darkroom is much more austere and practical.

"I put the negative in the enlarger, which is like a large slide projector, creating a beam of light in the darkness which shines down on the photographic paper. I activate the enlarger with a foot pedal and my hands intersect the beam of light. Using my hands, I can control how much light shines on different parts of the paper. Sometimes I have to contort my fingers into strange shapes, rather like making shadow animals, to fit the contours of varied elements in the photograph. This is called burning and dodging, and it allows me to lighten or darken specific areas, often drastically

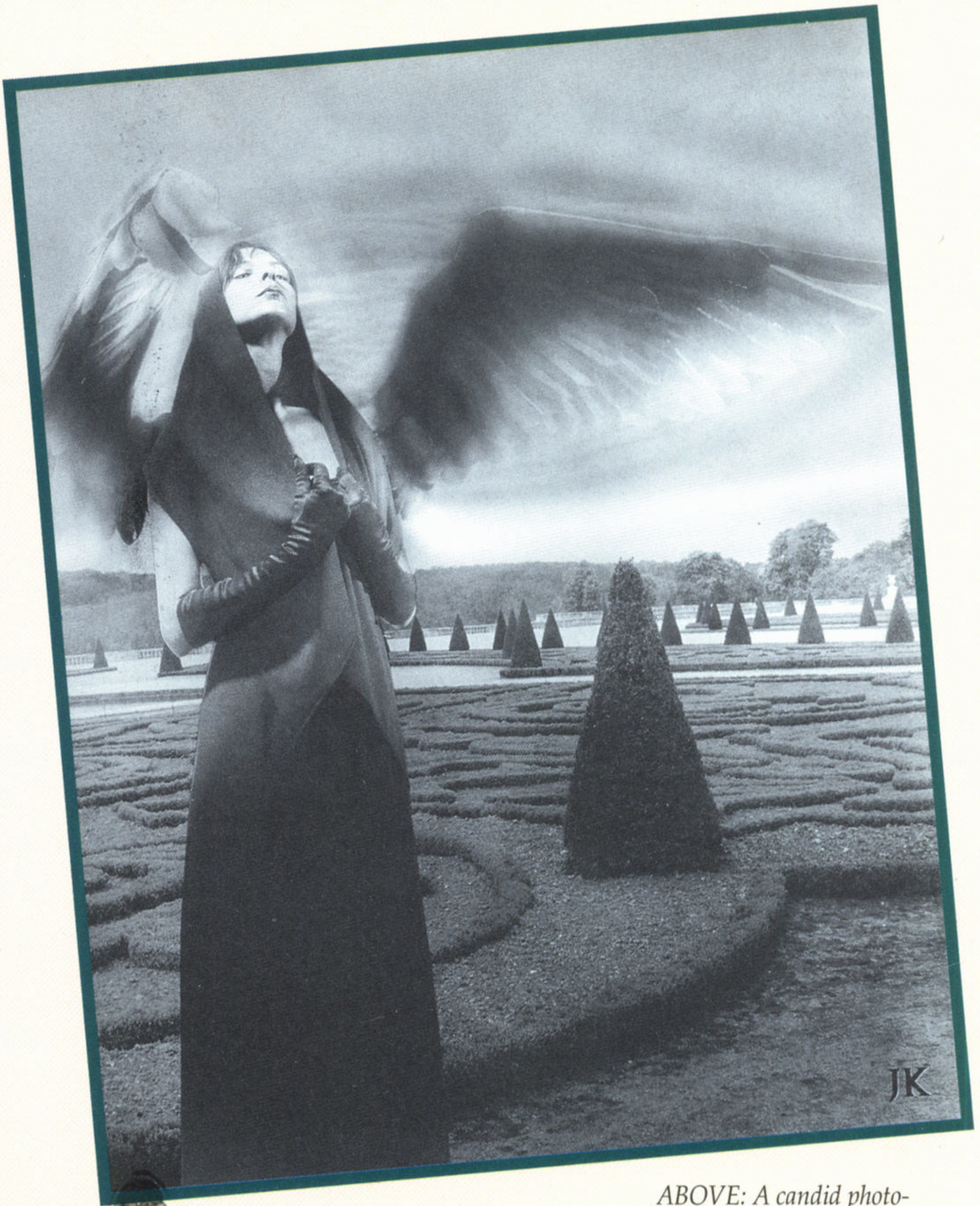
changing the mood of the picture by a mere wave of the hand. The developing trays are always nearby. When the white paper is immersed in the chemistry the image gradually materializes, almost as though it is emerging from a fog bank. If I don't like what I've done, I go back and try again."

The computer-assisted film technique called 'morphing' (now commonly used in commercials, musical videos and feature films) is a series of minute changes. Potter discovered this technique years before Hollywood and can create bizarre morphs without computers. In theory he is all in favor of computer graphics, synthesized imagery and digital retouching and sees them as the way forward for illustration, but he is in no



rush to get his hands on the technology, if only because the resolution quality of computer-produced pictures has simply not yet caught up with what he can produce in the darkroom. Besides, he really *likes* the clutter and smell of chemicals in his darkroom.

Bonus surprises arise from his rather chaotic system of filing. To find a picture he has in mind often means wading through piles of other material, which again can throw up fresh associations. Occasionally, it happens that two negatives, for example, fall to the floor together, and in picking them up Potter finds himself looking at something new and unexpected. Most of the time, though, his pictures are the result of his imagination actively looking for a means of expression, and



applying itself to the possibilities of the world around him. Generally, when taking a picture he has an idea of where it might lead.

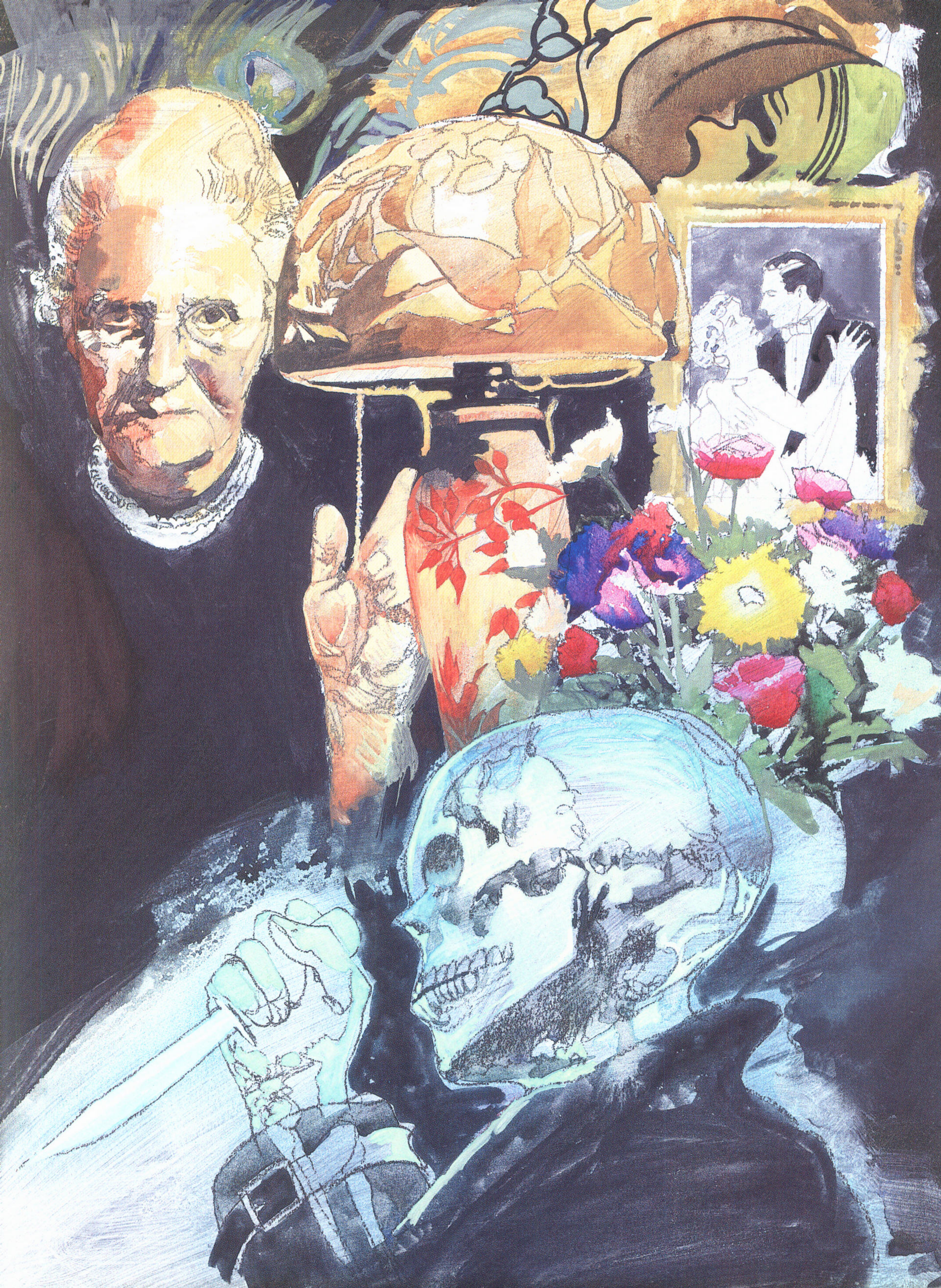
Cynics may suppose that his predominant use of black and white film is prompted by his—to them—parsimonious approach, but in fact he would continue to use monochrome even if it was more expensive than color because he loves it, and loves hand-coloring the pictures when color is called for. All the color pictures here began life as monochromes, color being added later as either his mood or the demands of the commission dictated.

A principle which has always guided J.K. Potter in his work is: "Just because something doesn't exist doesn't mean it cannot be photographed." It may be a cliché, he says, but all along his aim has been to make dreams tangible, and he feels blessed to be able to do it.

His friend Jack Hunter Daves says: "Potter has two photographic techniques that cannot easily be imitated. One is mind photography. He simply points the camera at his feverish forehead and onto the film will appear a nightmarish image. When this proves unreliable he photographs his neighbors and friends. Dark-room magic is unnecessary. His mailman is a shrieking head who walks on a single hand instead of legs. The paper boy has a toenail instead of hair. His couch has eyes and his basement door is a giant piranha mouth."

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ABOVE: A candid photograph of his model was taken through a large mirror and shot from the hip. The wings were added later in his studio. The background is Le Notre garden in the Palace of Versailles. Dark Angel may not exist but that doesn't mean she can't be photographed.



Most of us have, sadly, never done it, but don't all of us wish we could, just once, whirl madly around a dazzling ballroom with the one we love in our arms and all fear of death and the night behind us—dancing...

THE LAST WALTZ

THE RECREATION ROOM OF THE KARL WAINWRIGHT MEMORIAL Convalescent Home, Inc. was not a ballroom, but there was music—guitars and pagan drums echoed off the bare white walls. The dancers moved a step slower than the music, old men and women in bright, cheerful colors. Some leaned on canes or metal braces; others sat in wheelchairs and danced with their arms alone until the music ended.

"Places!" Mary Terry, the woman who led them, was the only young person in that place. She was dark-haired with lovely smooth flesh and bright green eyes. She smiled a lot.

The dancers obediently re-formed the lines broken in the heat of the dance; Mary went to change the cassette.

"'All Night Long,' Mary!" called a bent old man in an "I'd Rather Be at the Beach" T-shirt.

Mary laughed. "Mr. Bellamy, that's twice today already. I think we should try something else—"

"Miss Terry, I've come to dance."

A very small, very frail-looking woman stood in the open doorway. Her hair was the color of old silver; she wore it pulled tightly away from a face as delicately lined as a china cup. She wore a long black dress that hung on her like an overlarge cape. Every step made her wince.

Mr. Bellamy kicked at an imaginary stone. "Aw, you know what she wants to do...."

BY RICHARD PARKS
Illustration by Paul Salmon

Death looked down at the black leather and chains. He gave them up with a thought, taking a shape more shadow and mist than human. His face remained the same, but now his voice carried the echoes of many voices. "Eva Kessler, come with me."

Mary glanced at him, and his voice fell to a mutter. She moved quickly to take the old woman's arm, but the lady pulled away.

"I've come to dance," she repeated, a little louder. There was an echo of another time and country in her voice.

Mary smiled again, only now the smile was forced. "Frau Kessler, you know what the doctor said."

The old woman said nothing, but the tired glance she gave Mary was clear enough. *Child, at this point it doesn't much matter what the doctor says.*

The others were calling now, impatient. Soon the hour would be over, and the nurses would come with their little pink pills and tight rictus smiles. "Time for our naps...."

Mary took the woman's arm again and this time held on. She whispered, "Eva, if I disobey Dr. Mendel again I might lose my job."

"Again?"

"Yesterday," Mary said gently. "'The Hungarian Waltz'? We were interrupted."

Eva tried to reclaim her dignity. "Yes...of course. I didn't mean to cause trouble for you."

Mary shook her head. "It's all right, really. I will come visit you later, if you'd like. You did promise to show me the steps."

"I'd like that very much." Eva turned to the others. "You needn't worry. I'm going." She turned very stiffly and went back out into the corridor.

BEHIND EVA KESSLER THE STACCATO SOUNDS—SHE WOULD NEVER call them music—began again, and in the corridor the reality of where she was reasserted itself with more bare white walls and the reek of pine-scented disinfectant. This was the truth, Eva reminded herself. Not the bright colors or the dances that meant nothing to those here who chose to do them. They were new, that was all. As new as the dancers were old. As if time could be fooled by new clothes, new sounds....

And they say no one believes in magic these days. Eva Kessler tried to smile, but the pain wouldn't let her.

WHEN MARY CAME TO EVA'S ROOM THAT EVENING, SHE FOUND THE old woman sitting at a small table laid out for tea. An electric pot steamed near a centerpiece of dried wildflowers, and Eva poured while Mary looked around the room. No matter how many times she had seen it, she never tired of looking. The furniture was made of rich, deep woods. There was a canopied bed and large mirrored dresser. There was one picture on the wall—a faded photograph of a young man and woman in evening dress; behind them a hundred couples were frozen in mid-waltz beneath a crystal chandelier. With time running out, Mary asked the question she had long wanted to ask.

"Is this you?"

"It was. Vienna, 1932. Before the Nazis."

"You were very beautiful," Mary said and immediately blushed.

"I didn't mean..."

Eva smiled. "I know."

Mary almost didn't ask the next question, but she felt a need to move forward with Eva, as if hesitation would provoke doors to

close before she could step through. "Who's that with you?"

"Ernst Falken. We were to have been married, only he managed to get himself shot. An idealist, he was. Never did think things through."

"I sympathize with him." Mary sighed. "I seem to be saying all the wrong things tonight."

Eva waved it away. "It was all so long ago. Ernst. The war. So much has changed. Sometimes...sometimes it's as if all the things in my life happened to someone else long ago, and I am cursed with this other girl's memories. But the dancing belonged to me. I do miss the dancing."

Mary saw a way out. "You promised to show me that waltz step again."

"Put the music on."

The Victrola must have been ancient, but it gleamed like a new thing. A 78 was already in place. Mary lowered the stylus, and the "Hungarian Waltz" scratched and popped its way back out of time. Mary got up from the table, lifted one corner of her dress slightly as if clearing the skirts of an elaborate ball gown and, the other arm around an imaginary partner, stepped slowly through the motions of the dance. Eva watched her, smiling. In another minute she was laughing.

Mary's arms fell to her sides helplessly. "I told you it needed work."

Eva shook her head, wiping a small tear from each eye. "You do the steps beautifully, child. As well as I ever did."

"Then why were you laughing?"

"It was the *way* you did them. Like the demonstrations of the waltz I've seen from time to time—expert dancers showing their range, I suppose. The way our nuns recited the day's lesson—very correct, very formal, very dull. You don't have the heart of it, Mary, but how could you? The waltz wasn't a relic to us—it was *ours*. For fun, for friendship, and once, just once, for love. We danced it *so*." Eva put her arms in the air and gazed languidly into the handsome, dark eyes of a memory, and when she moved her arms in that phantom embrace, nothing else seemed to exist for her.

Mary watched, fascinated. "I'd give a lot to have seen you dance in Vienna," she said. "It must have been wonderful."

Eva did a little curtsy, graceful despite the chair. "It was," she said frankly. "I met Ernst at Herr Sandor's New Year's ball, and before the first dance was over, he asked me to marry him. I fluttered my fan and blushed most becomingly, though I had already said yes in my heart. It was a year before I let *him* know that, of course."

As she spoke, the light slowly faded from her eyes.

Mary touched her hand. "Are you in pain again, Eva? There's a resident on call—"

Eva shook her head. "I can't be in pain again, Mary. It never leaves. I'm just a little tired. And I'm expecting someone tonight."

Mary was halfway out of her seat, beginning her apologies when the words sank in. "But it's after visiting hours...."

"It won't make any difference."

Mary understood, though she didn't want to. "Eva, please don't talk that way. I hate to think you've given up hope."

"But I haven't," Eva said earnestly. "You fear for me and that's

sweet, but try to understand—hope has more than one face, more than one name. So much of my life was beyond my power to change: the Nazis, Ernst, the war that destroyed the world I knew and brought me to this one. But I've made myself a promise, Mary—this thing tonight will not be beyond me. That is my hope, and I ask for none other. Can you remember that? Whatever happens?"

"I don't understand," Mary said. "But I will remember."

TIME WASN'T A RIVER—IT WAS A MAD, RUSHING TORRENT. THE BOY in the studded black jacket rode it as long as he dared, felt it batter and tear at him. When it finally let go, he was left dazed and shaken in one more place he didn't know; one thought alone had the strength to remain focused through the confusion and fear.

They'll find me... I have to hide!

He looked around, tried to see something, anything he recognized. Nothing. He was on the grounds of what looked like a hospital. Floodlights pushed back the friendly darkness from all but the few shadows underneath the window where he crouched. Beyond that a brick wall rose high and featureless, its surface bathed in the damned revealing light. No way out there. And he couldn't stay where he was, not for long.

The window above him was dark, its square panes reflecting the light. It was a chance, and he took it. One more quick look around, and then he slipped inside into blessed darkness.

His eyes didn't even get a chance to adjust before the lamp went on. He was blinded for an instant, and in that instant the knife was in his hand. He didn't remember reaching for it. He didn't remember having it. He did remember what it was for.

The old woman sat in a high-backed, antique stuffed chair, her hand still on the lamp chain. Fear took him again, drove him forward with quick purpose.

Mustn't let her scream.

She didn't scream, but he had nothing to do with that. He never reached her. She looked at him with reddened, ancient eyes and she stopped him cold.

"You," she said, "won't do at all."

I know where I am now, he thought wildly. This is the loony bin.

He'd lost his chance; there was no way he could reach her before she cried out. He inched forward slowly, letting her see the knife. "Just stay calm, lady. I don't want to hurt you."

She smiled at him. "Yes, you do."

Almost true. He *was* going to kill her. He didn't want to, but she'd seen his face. She had to die now. Another step closer...

"Young man, are you as deaf as you are rude? I said you wouldn't do and I meant it."

He was almost close enough. Just keep her talking... "Wouldn't do for what?"

"Death, young man. Mine. Don't be dense." Her eyebrows arched just the slightest bit.

He stopped again. He couldn't help it. "What are you talking about?"

She cocked her head to one side and considered him with exaggerated patience. Another step. He was close enough now. No time to lose...

"I survived the Nazis," she said. "How can I look at Death and not know him?"

Pinned, like a moth to cardboard. No chance for the quick kill, no chance to snatch a moment to himself before the summoning voices howled again. No chance not to remember. He knew who he was, and so did she.

"I ought to hurt you," he said.

"I dare say you learned a thing or two about that from the SS." Eva sighed. "Did they teach you how to dress, too?"

Death looked down at the black leather and chains, an actor caught in doublet and hose and the play long over. He gave them up with a thought, taking a shape more shadow and mist than human. His face remained the same, but now his voice carried the echoes of many voices. "Eva Kessler, come with me."

She picked up a silken fan from the night stand, spread it open and

made several slow passes before her face, considering. "No," she said finally.

No?

"Mrs. Kessler—"

"Frau Kessler," she corrected sternly.

"*Frau* Kessler. It was not a request. You don't have a choice."

"Certainly not," she agreed. "A lady addressed in such a manner would have to refuse."

"I make no distinctions," he said in his best hollow, echoing voice. It conjured images of empty rooms and darkened hallways, of loneliness and desolation.

The old woman was not impressed. "Am I to believe you'd use that same bit of theater to scythe a Basque shepherd? Leather jacket and boots, the...what you call... switchblade?"

"I am what's expected." So odd to be answering questions. He didn't think he was supposed to, but it had never come up before. He felt uncertain for an instant—he, the only certain thing about anyone's life. He felt the anger returning. "I said come with—"

He reached out for her arm, and Eva rapped him smartly across the hand with the edge of her fan. He drew back in pain and surprise, staring dumbly at the line of red across his knuckles. "How did you do that?"

"Impatient lovers required the same, long ago. I do remember." Whatever that memory was, it made her smile.

The young man stared at his hand. "No. I should have been able..." He paused, then finished, "It's what I do."

"It's not *all* you do; you said so yourself."

"Said what?" Questions again. A new feeling. He was starting to enjoy it.

"That you are what's expected. Is that true?"

He finally looked at her. "Yes," he said, rubbing his hand.

"You're not what I expect."

"Didn't say that. Just...what's expected. Sorry." Damn, why was he apologizing?

Eva nodded gravely. "I understand now."

He shrugged. "The Age of Information. Everyone knows what Death is supposed to be: war, horrible diseases with little names, kids killing one another for a pair of shoes...."

He didn't look so young anymore. The weariness in his eyes was almost a mirror to Eva's, except there was pity in hers.

"So much to be, isn't it?" she said. "So much expected."

He didn't answer; he was listening to something else. "They're calling me." His face went white with sudden pain.

"What's wrong?"

He grimaced. "When I'm late the burden of pain...shifts, a little. Incentive."

"Whose pain now?"

"Some people I haven't met. But mostly," he said, "it's yours. Frau Kessler, please..."

"Please what?"

"I would think you know."

She shook her head. "I would think *you* know. What am I expecting?"

"It doesn't matter; I told you." He made an expansive gesture at the world. "It's them."

Eva Kessler shook her head. "It's just their world, and I've lived in it long enough to pay for greater sins than mine. But right here, right now, it's me. I'm what matters. Listen to me."

It was as if Eva Kessler had drawn the curtains against the outside world. The other voices were locked out, and for that time of silence he listened. When he finally spoke again, it was with the simple earnestness of a child.

"I'm a creature of the moment, Frau Kessler; I don't know, *couldn't* know if what you've told me is the truth. Is it possible? Was there ever such a wealth of time that I could have been as you say?"

"You could be now. It's possible."

"It's too much to ask."

"For one moment's peace? A moment that will be yours as much as mine?"

The hell of agony Eva Kessler visited was everything she had feared, save one—it wasn't forever. She wasn't sure how long she had spent there. But now the wracking pain was gone. A moment longer and even the memory of it was a weak, ghostly thing.

He smiled bitterly. "Why do you think I tried to hurry with you? With everyone? I'm so far behind... But sometimes—never quite but almost—I catch up. Can you imagine what that means to me? When it happens I steal a moment of my own, a little time away from the voices calling me. But the price is high, Frau Kessler. Their pain is always waiting to settle accounts."

Eva nodded. "For everything there is a price, always. But I pay my own way."

He stared at her. "You can't be serious."

"Is this a time for jokes?"

"But...you don't know what you're saying! You can't know!"

"You carry my pain now, so don't tell me the funds can't be transferred, so to speak. It's a simple transaction—all the pain of dying in the world, a moment of time purchased for every moment I can bear it. But the time I buy belongs to me, and I'll have it as I wish. Are you really so certain it can't be done?"

Death shook his head slowly. "I don't know that, but I do know how much pain a moment can hold. You don't."

"I know how much peace a moment can hold, young man. And you don't. Would you like to learn?"

He smiled a little sadly. "Very much."

"Then let's try, shall we?"

He hesitated. "But after...if it works, I mean...I can't promise it will be everything you expect. I don't know how to be what you want."

"You've forgotten, and that's not the same thing. Listen."

Eva started the Victrola again, and the scratchy, distant music filled the small room. "Listen," she repeated, and as he did, the music seemed to heal itself; time and distance both smoothed away like a dying frown. When the scene around them began to change in time to the music, both of them silently thanked the other for the gift.

THE HELL OF AGONY EVA KESSLER VISITED WAS EVERYTHING SHE HAD feared, save one—it wasn't forever. She wasn't sure how long she had spent there, how much time borne before her will failed her. But now the wracking pain was gone. A moment longer and even the memory of it was a weak, ghostly thing.

Eva was almost startled. *Odd how the pain is the first thing we forget.*

She tried to remember what the pain was like while she sat at her father's table in Herr Sandor's ballroom, but across the music and laughter a young man sought her out, and, once she saw him, it no longer seemed to matter. His face she both knew and remembered at once, and under her father's stern but indulgent gaze he took Eva's hand.

"May I have this dance?"

She smiled radiantly. "What kept you?"

He bowed for answer and she curtsied; together they moved to join the others in the center of the room.

"We have—" he began, but Eva put a finger to his lips. "You don't want to know how much time?" he asked, surprised.

She shook her head. "I spent too much of my life waiting for it to end. I won't make that mistake now." Eva gathered the hem of her gown. "Shall we?"

His first steps were clumsy, unsure. "I said I didn't know how."

"And I said you've merely forgotten. With me, now."

Eva guided him through the first faltering steps till the music took him, and after that he needed no help at all. He remembered what to say, what not to say. Eva blushed at the right times, smiled at others, and together they never missed another step in a dance that lasted only as long as the music played.

THE DANCERS IN THE EXERCISE ROOM EYED THE VICTROLA SUSPICIOUSLY. Mary faced them with a smile. "Today," she said, "we're going to do a waltz."

She was ready for the groans, quickly accepted, quickly dismissed. It was harder to dismiss Dr. Mendel when he waved to her from the open doorway. Mary thought of Eva Kessler and took a long, slow breath.

"Excuse me." She left all the old voices to mutter darkly to themselves and froze her smile in place as she stepped to the doorway. "Yes, doctor?"

He gave a little cough. "Mary, I admit it was nice of Mrs. Kessler to leave you her records, but, considering the patients' reaction, do you really think this is a good idea?"

Mary kept her gaze level. "Yes, doctor, I think it's an excellent idea. And, since this is my specialty and the job I'm paid to do, I also think my opinion should be the one that matters. Was there anything else?"

Dr. Mendel, looking a little like a small boy at his first spanking, mumbled that, no, there wasn't really anything else. He watched from the doorway as Mary went back to the old men and women waiting for her.

"We've done a lot of new dances over these last few months, and I think we've had fun. But now it's time to remember what it was like to dance the first time you learned to dance, something that was a part of what you were. We were interrupted the first time we tried this, so let's start again. Who remembers how to do a waltz? And by that I mean, 'who used to dance the waltz?'"

Nothing at first, then, slowly, a hand went up. Mr. Bellamy, still in the "I'd Rather Be at the Beach" T-shirt he always wore to the class. He held up his hand like someone admitting a crime. Slowly, by ones and twos, more hands were raised.

"When Carol and I were courting," he said and then finished as if speaking for them all. "Too many years ago, Mary. I don't think of it very much now."

Mary smiled again. "Perhaps it won't be so hard if you help each other remember. Perhaps it won't seem so long. What happens first?"

"He takes her hand," said a stout lady with hair like a snowball.

Mary shook her head, still smiling.

"They wait for the music," said a woman in wheelchair, "to catch the tempo."

Mary shook her head again, looking at Mr. Bellamy. "What's first?" she asked.

Mr. Bellamy frowned so deeply his face was one big wrinkle. Then he brightened. "The gentleman asks the lady to dance."

"I'm waiting," Mary said.

"May...may I have the honor of this dance?"

Mary started the music. □

DROWNING

Continued from page 45

with her, not with us. Just like I know this is only a dream and the drowned woman might look like me, but that's just something I'm projecting onto her. I *want* her to be my mother. I want her having abandoned me and dad not to have been her fault either. I want to come to her rescue and bring us all back together again.

Except it isn't going to happen. Pretend and real just don't mix.

But it's tempting all the same. It's tempting to let it all play out. I know the haunts just want me to talk so that they can trap me as well, that they wouldn't follow through on any promise they made, but this is *my* dream. I can *make* them keep to their promise. All I have to do is say what I want.

And then I understand that it's all real after all. Not real in the sense that I can be physically harmed in this place, but real in that if I make a selfish choice, even if it's just in a dream, I'll still have to live with the fact of it when I wake up. It doesn't matter that I'm dreaming, I'll *still* have done it.

What the bogles are offering is my heart's desire, if I just leave the moon to drown. But if I do that, I'm responsible for her death. She might not be real, but it doesn't change anything at all. It'll still mean that I'm willing to let someone die, just so I can have my own way.

I suck on the stone and move it back and forth from one cheek to the other. I reach down into my wet bodice and pluck out the hazel twig from where it got pushed down between my breasts. I lift a hand to my hair and brush it back from my face and then I look at those sham copies of my Jeck Crow and I smile at them.

My dream, I think. What I say goes.

I don't know if it's going to work, but I'm fed up with having everyone else decide what happens in my dream. I turn to the stone and I put my hands on it, the hazel twig sticking out between the fingers of my right hand, and I give the stone a shove. There's this great big outcry among the quicks and bogles and haunts as the stone starts to topple over. I look down at the drowned woman and I see her eyes open, I see her smile, but then there's too much light and I'm blinded.

When my vision finally clears, I'm alone by the pool. There's a big, fat, full moon hanging in the sky, making the fens almost as bright as day. They've all fled, the monsters, the quicks and bogles and things. The dead willow's still full of crows, but as soon as I look up, they lift from the tree in an explosion of dark wings, a circling murder, cawing and crying, until they finally go away. The stone's lying on its side, half in the water, half out.

And I'm still dreaming.

I'm standing here, up to my waist in the smelly water, with a hazel twig in my hand

and a stone in my mouth, and I stare up at that big full moon until it seems I can feel her light just singing through my veins. For a moment it's like being back in the barn with Jeck, I'm just on fire, but it's a different kind of fire, it burns away the darknesses that have gotten lodged in me over the years, just like they get lodged in everybody, and just for that moment, I'm solid light, innocent and newborn, a burning Midsummer fire in the shape of a woman.

And then I wake up, back home again.

I lie there in my bed and look out the window, but it's still the dark of the moon in our world. The streets are quiet outside, there's a hush over the whole city, and I'm lying here with a hazel twig in my hand, a stone in my mouth, pushed up into one cheek, and a warm, burning glow deep inside.

I sit up and spit the stone out into my hand. I walk over to the window. I'm not in some magical dream now; I'm in the real world. I know the lighted moon glows with light borrowed from the sun. That she's still out there in the dark of the moon, we just can't see her tonight because the earth is between her and the sun.

Or maybe she's gone into some other world, to replenish her lantern before she begins her nightly trek across the sky once more.

I feel like I've learned something, but I'm not sure what. I'm not sure what any of it means.

"HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT?" JILLY SAID. "God, Sophie, it's so obvious. She really *was* your mother and you really *did* save her. As for Jeck, he was the bird you rescued in your first dream. Jeck Crow—don't you get it? One of the bad guys, only you won him over with an act of kindness. It all makes perfect sense."

Sophie slowly shook her head. "I suppose I'd like to believe that, too," she said, "but what we want and what really is aren't always the same thing."

"But what about Jeck? He'll be waiting for you. And Granny Weather? They both knew you were the moon's daughter all along. It all means something."

Sophie sighed. She stroked the sleeping cat on her lap, imagining for a moment that it was the soft dark curls of a crow that could be a man, in a land that only existed in her dreams.

"I guess," she said, "it means I need a new boyfriend."

JILLY'S A REAL SWEETHEART, AND I LOVE HER dearly, but she's naive in some ways. Or maybe it's just that she wants to play the ingenue. She's always so ready to believe anything that anyone tells her, so long as it's magical.

Well, I believe in magic, too, but it's the magic that can turn a caterpillar into a butterfly, the natural wonder and beauty of the world that's all around me. I can't believe in some dreamland being real. I can't

believe what Jilly now insists is true: that I've got faerie blood, because I'm the daughter of the moon.

Though I have to admit that I'd like to.

I NEVER DO GET TO SLEEP THAT NIGHT. I prowls around the apartment, drinking coffee to keep me awake. I'm afraid to go to sleep, afraid I'll dream and that it'll all be real.

Or maybe that it won't.

When it starts to get light, I take a long cold shower, because I've been thinking about Jeck again. I guess if my making the wrong decision in a dream would've had ramifications in the waking world, then there's no reason that a rampaging libido shouldn't carry over as well.

I get dressed in some old clothes I haven't worn in years, just to try to recapture a more innocent time. White blouse, faded jeans, and hightops with this smoking jacket overtop that used to belong to my dad. It's made of burgundy velvet with black satin lapels. A black hat, with a flat top and a bit of a curl to its brim, completes the picture.

I look in the mirror, and I feel like I'm auditioning to be a stage magician's assistant, but I don't much care.

As soon as the hour gets civilized, I head over to Christy Riddell's house. I'm knocking on his door at nine o'clock, but when he comes to let me in, he's all sleepy-eyed and disheveled and I realize that I should've given him another couple of hours. Too late for that now.

I just come right out with it. I tell him that Jilly said he knew all about lucid dreaming and what I want to know is, is any of it real—the place you dream of, the people you meet there?

He stands there in the doorway, blinking like an owl, but I guess he's used to stranger things, because after a moment he leans against the door jamb and asks me what I know about consensual reality.

It's where everything that we see around us only exists because we all agree it does, I say.

Well, maybe it's the same in a dream, he replies. If everyone in the dream agrees that what's around them is real, then why shouldn't it be?

I want to ask him about what my dad had to say about dreams trying to escape into the waking world, but I decide I've already pushed my luck.

Thanks, I say.

He gives me a funny look. That's it? he asks. I'll explain it some other time, I tell him.

Please do, he says without a whole lot of enthusiasm, then goes back inside.

WHEN I GET HOME, I GO AND LIE DOWN ON the old sofa that's out on my balcony. I close my eyes. I'm still not so sure about any of this, but I figure it can't hurt to see if Jeck and I can't find ourselves one of those happily-ever-afters with which fairy tales usually end.

Who knows? Maybe I really am the daughter of the moon. If not here, then someplace. ♣

Mission: Rescue MERLIN!

BY S.N. DYER

Illustration by Annie Lunsford

DAY 1: THE OLD MAN TRAPPED IN THE CORNISH CAVE IS POSITIVELY IDENTIFIED AS MERLIN—archmage, adviser to King Arthur, architect of the Round Table. Of course, we would proceed with the same urgency were he instead a drunken shepherd, a troop of Girl Guides, or a Nazi war criminal, but his celebrity adds flair to the already dramatic situation. The number of journalists, tourists, and well-wishers has doubled since the announcement. I am forced to request additional officers for crowd control. Local con-

struction companies contribute men and equipment, and the Red Cross is doing their usual bang-up job with the coffee and donuts. After the jet to New York, the Concorde to London, and the local hop, I am in need of a snack.

Mrs. Farnum, in charge of the emergency canteen, is holding aside a large jelly donut, two crullers, and a pot of mocha for the man we hope soon to free. "After fourteen centuries of captivity, he's bound to be famished," she says.

DAY 2: Attempts to blast away the boulder blocking the seaside cavern fail, despite explosions that tumble the rocky cliffside into the ocean, frighten the local sheep, and jangle our coffee nerves. I put out a call for mining engineers, and we will next try to sink a tunnel down through the cliff and into the cave from above.

Scotland Yard has sent a detective. Evidently they have determined it was attempted murder, and not a spelunking accident. Now that there is an APB on Merlin's ex-girlfriend Nimue, things are even more up in the air. We have no idea if this will eventually show on *Rescue 911* or *America's Most Wanted*.

Mrs. Farnum promises sandwiches for dinner. We tire of donuts.

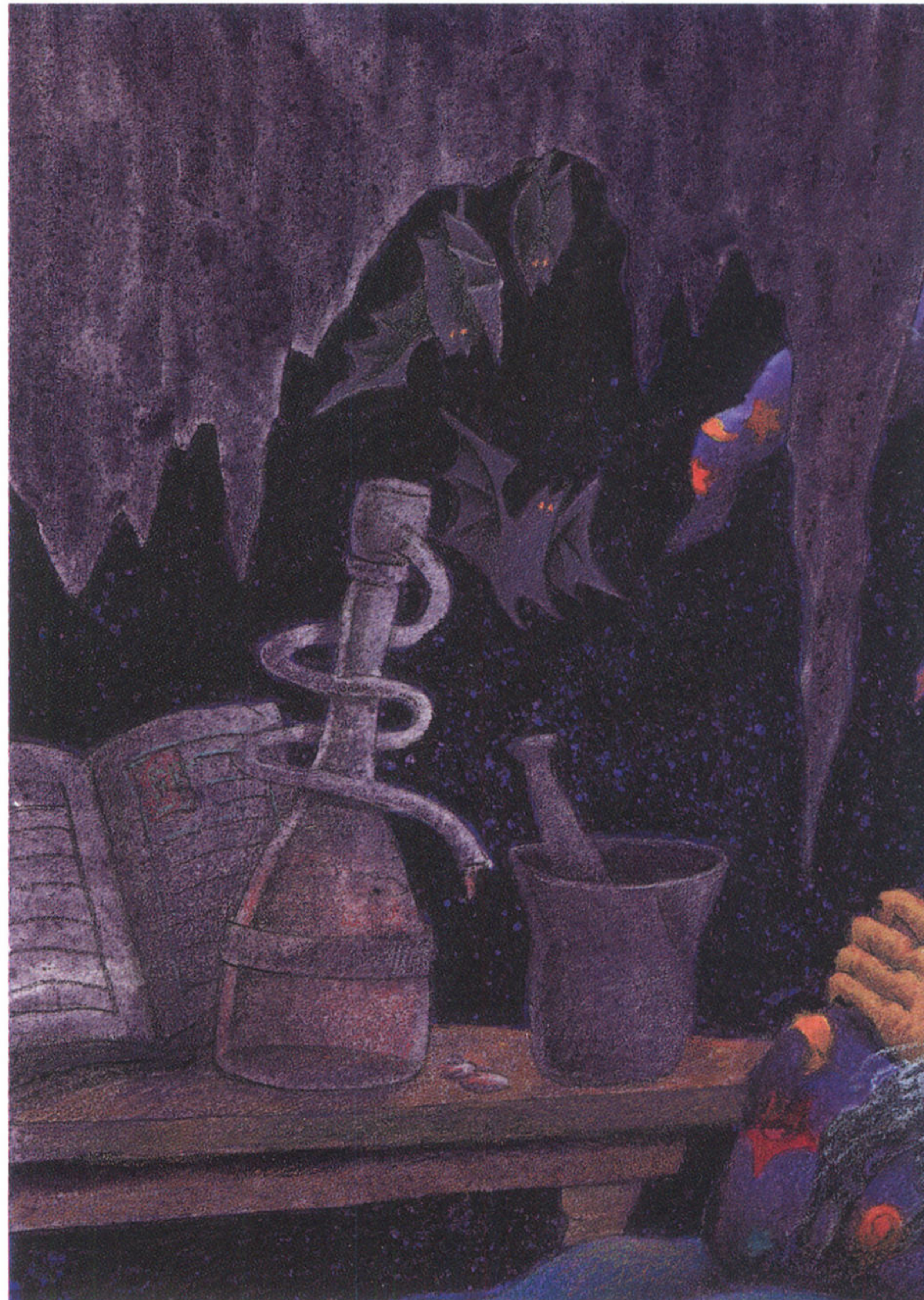
DAY 3: The shaft goes well—ten feet down already. I am unable to cross the site to the command trailer without tripping over geologists and loiterers and cameramen. I order the scene cleared. A man from NBC sneaks in and promises a movie deal: I will be played by Karl Malden. I order him evicted as well. Attempts to communicate with the trapped man in Latin, Anglo-Saxon, and Old Gaelic have failed. Apparently he is not familiar with Morse code. Paramedics are standing by. Mostly, they play poker with the linguists.

The sandwiches are thin slices of lamb on buttered white bread. I don't know how much longer we can keep up the pace.

DAY 4: Down thirty feet. Only very thin men, immune to claustrophobia, work in the tunnel. Three volunteers are evacuated to the hospital. We hear nothing from the trapped man. Dr. Chambers thinks he is sleeping. He must be very old.

Ted Turner is airlifting in barbecue. Mrs. Farnum seems hurt by this. Her hair is falling from its net. Blond. Long.

DAY 5: The tunnel fails. Forty feet down we strike an impenetrable glowing wall that shatters even diamond drill bits. The geologists



argue over who will investigate, and I am forced to evict them all from the scene. I catch Dr. Chambers dispensing stimulants and order him evicted as well. My men are strong. Coffee and donuts should be stimulant enough.

DAY 6: The naval yards respond to our pleas with two heavy construction helicopters. Each can lift over three metric tons. The boulder does not budge. Mrs. Farnum is close to tears. I hear a man making light of the donuts and order him cleared from the scene.

The crowd now fills three acres, and there are tents and trailers. The atmosphere is festive, yet apprehensive. Hourly at least one of the audience plummets into the sea and requires rescue. This gives the paramedics something to do, but we all grow concerned despite our brave fronts. It has been fourteen centuries and six days. How long can he survive in there?

DAY 7: The Navy sends ships bearing cranes; although these are able to lift a sunken warship, they are unable to move the boulder. I begin to suspect unnatural forces. Now we are crawling with mystics, physicists, and philosophers. Consensus has it that if we all link hands and pretend the huge rock is gone, it will be. That is our plan for first light.

Our gums are beginning to bleed. Mrs. Farnum will ask the Red Cross to send an emergency dental team.

DAY 8: I order the mystics, physicists, and philosophers evicted from the scene.

DAY 9: All along, my men have been clearing the site of lunatics with helpful suggestions. Last night, resting with my back against the canteen, I awake with a hand across my mouth.

"Don't say a word," whispers a stranger. I barely see him in the sparks from jackhammers, trying again to undermine the boulder, and the forlorn flicker of the coffee maker, beside which Mrs. Farnum dozes fitfully. She looks quite peaceful, with a smudge of confectioners sugar on her turned-up nose. I wrestle the attacking lunatic to the

ground, then charitably allow him to gasp out his plan. "Malory said 100 knights could not move the rock that holds Merlin captive." He shows me the relevant passage in the *Morte d'Arthur*. Scotland Yard evicts him from the scene; I keep his book.

The London McDonald's will be sending Big Macs. We are happy about the change, even Mrs. Farnum. Where shall I find 101 knights?

DAY 10: The knights cannot all fit on the ledge. An MBE nearly drowns in the ocean, and the head of an ancient family breaks his collarbone. Happy paramedics finally use their rescue helicopter. I direct engineers to drill holes into the boulder, sink iron bars, and attach nylon lines. We will free Merlin at first light.

Mrs. Farnum serves meager fare to the exalted flock with new zest. I believe a baronet has proposed to her. I order him evicted and request a replacement noble. It is now fourteen centuries and ten days. We begin to lose hope.

DAY 11: At dawn, 38 baronets and 63 life peers (35 captains of industry, 10 philanthropists, 7 actors, 6 musicians, and 5 rock stars) attempt to move the boulder. The average knight is 71 years old, emphysematous, and suffers from glaucoma. Only the rock stars seem young, though dissipated. A guitarist is rude concerning Mrs. Farnum's bear-claws. I order him evicted from the scene, and ask for a sculptor to fill his slot. A ballet dancer arrives instead. He pirouettes on the boulder, distracting us.

As we start off to the rescue, Mrs. Farnum waves her handkerchief and blows kisses. I wonder, is one for me?

DAY 12: Seven knights have heart attacks, twenty-three suffer from heat exhaustion, and all have rope burn. We evacuate the lot. Tourists are beginning to leave. They sense it is hopeless. There is a whale beached near Brighton. Perhaps it can be saved.

DAY 13: No rescue attempts today. We sit about, drinking coffee and worrying—except for the paramedics, who go body-surfing with the linguists and are forced to rescue themselves. I am out of ideas. Mrs.

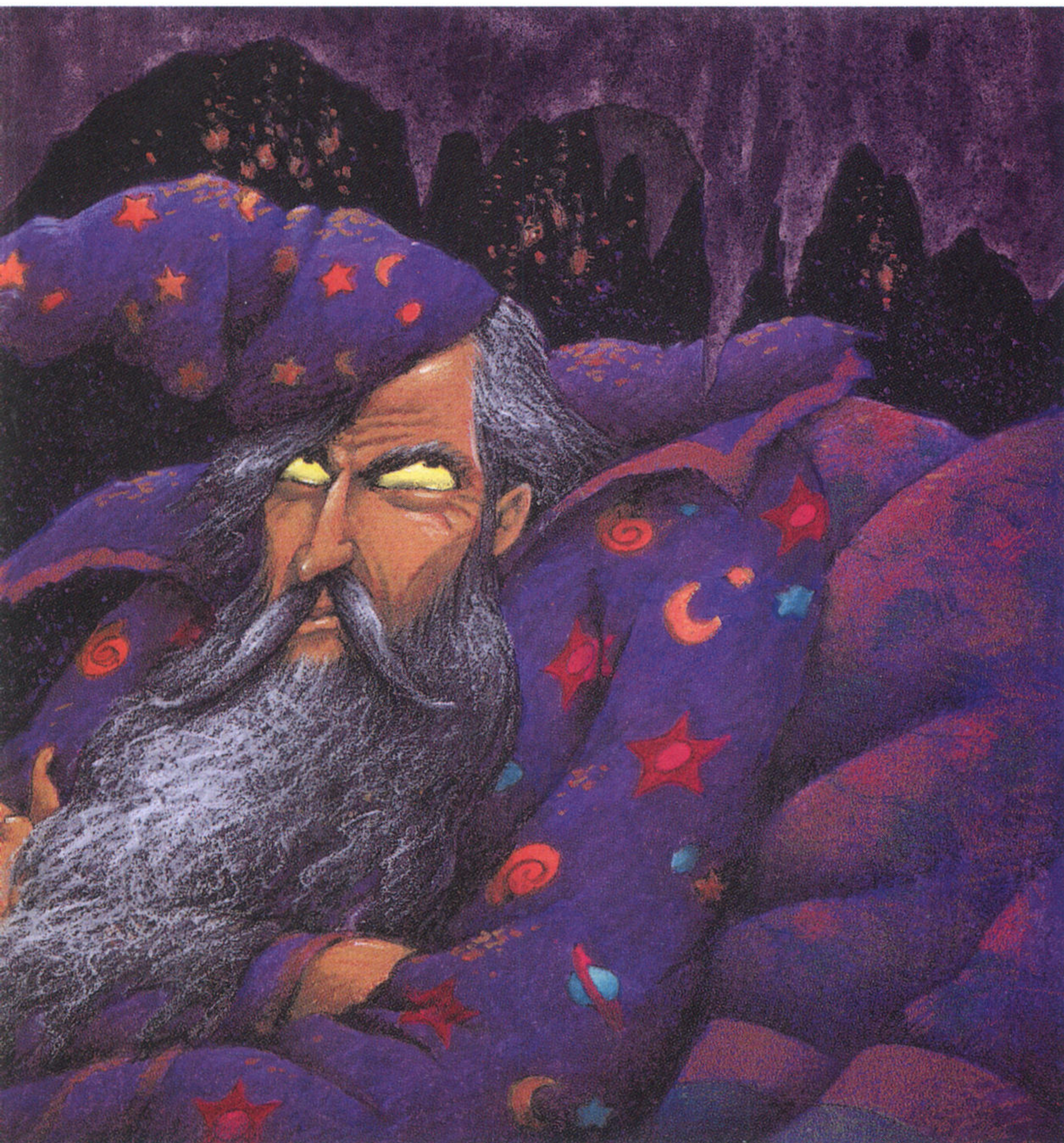
Farnum saves me a creme-filled chocolate donut with candy sprinkles. I am touched. Then news arrives to rekindle hope.

DAY 14: So many to acknowledge for pitching in to help, and now the Queen. She arrives at dawn. One hundred and one body-builders, wrestlers, weight lifters, and pub bullies approach in single file, and she taps each shoulder with a sword and says "Arise, sir knight."

Mrs. Farnum urges me to join the line, but it would be selfish; we need the muscle. I send a 230-lb longshoreman in my stead. For their own safety, I order the Queen and her retinue evicted from the scene.

At noon, the new knights grasp the ropes and pull. For the longest time, the boulder stays put. Then, with a thunderous noise, it springs free of the cavern mouth and propels itself into the sea, pulling along several knights, who then require rescue. Scotland Yard and the paramedics rush into the cavern. They emerge with Merlin, unseen on his stretcher, and load him in the helicopter. Everybody cheers, or cries, or both. Mrs. Farnum kisses me, then shuts down the canteen. I stay behind, to supervise closing the cave. We don't want any local children to become trapped for fourteen centuries and fourteen days.

POSTSCRIPT, DAY 68: Nimue is apprehended working as a bar girl in Stockton, California. Either Edward Asner or Edward Albert will play me in the upcoming *Movie of the Week*. After recuperating, Merlin leaves to winter on Ibiza. Mrs. Farnum will be joining him as soon as she finishes at a mining disaster in Kent. ♣



BY MARK C. SUMNER

Master of Magic melds fantasy elements with a rich strategy game.

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS *CIVILIZATION*.

Actually, that's not quite true. First there were kingdom management games from *Hammurabi* to *Empire* that let you put yourself in the role of conqueror. But when *Civilization* came along, the rest of them were revealed as only the rough hand-axes of the early Silicon Age. *Civilization* was the real thing—a laser pistol of a program. With one wonderful package, Sid Meier and Microprose showed that a rich, complex strategy game could be shoehorned into an easy-to-use package. They also redefined the term “wasting time,” as *Civilization* proceeded to eat days out of the lives of those who became addicted. The program had real depth and more lasting appeal than anything that ever crossed a hard drive.

Then, just when it looked like we might actually get some work done, Microprose got together with Simtex Software and struck again with *Master of Orion*. This time, the task of empire building was flung into space. *Master of Orion* took the elements that made *Civilization* great—like a web of technology advances—and welded on an effective science fiction scenario. The space-age version beefed up one of the most interesting sections of the original with a greatly expanded role for diplomacy. In space no one can hear you scream, but they sure keep track if you break a treaty.

So, having taken us through 6,000 years of *Civilization* and then rushing forward to *Orion*, where was left for Microprose to send us? Why, to Arcanus and its companion plane of Myrror. This time around it's strategy among the dwarves, elves, and orcs with the latest release from the Simtex/Microprose team—*Master of Magic*.

In *Master of Magic*, you play a lowly wizard who has

managed to bring a tiny hamlet under his/her thumb. From there, you'll have to be exceptionally clever, and perhaps a little lucky, if you're going to work your way up to domination of not one, but two worlds.

If you've played either of the previous games, you'll quickly spot the family roots. The map and city layout draw heavily from *Civilization*, the diplomacy engine is a dead ringer for the one in *Orion*. Even those darned Klackons—overproducing insectoid pests last seen thumping Our Hero in *Master of Orion*—have found their way into this game. But don't think *Magic* is just *Orion* in hobbit's clothing. This newcomer pulls its ideas from other sources than just its stablemates.

First off, it's obvious that the designers over at Simtex have dealt more than a few hands of Wizard's of the Coast's *Magic: The Gathering* card game. From the colored mana, to the names of the items, to the “rare,” “very rare,” and “uncommon” spells, there's a lot of their *Magic* in this *Magic*. And players of *Magic: The Gathering* may find that this is the computer game for them. Not only is there a strong common flavor, this game also brings something of the style of the card game to life. Until Microprose brings out the computer version of *Magic: The Gathering* (which is currently in development both as a PC game and in a network version), this program should scratch that itch for digital spell throwing.

At the start you have to decide what kind of magic you're going to throw. Are you a wizard? A sorceress? Maybe a good witch or a bad witch? There are a number of ready made shoes to step into, ranging from a scholarly Merlin to a darkly sorcerous Kali. If the standards don't suit you, you can mix and match, pulling spell books from a number of disciplines and tagging your wizard with her own name and image.

The D&D roots behind *Magic* are at their clearest when you're dealing with “heroes.” Heroes come along now and then. Wandering wizards, fighters, thieves, barbarians. And they're all willing to lend their service to further your cause—for a price. These magical mercenaries capture a lot of the feeling of a traditional role-playing character. They have names and faces and special skills, and they advance through levels of ability as they acquire experience in battle.

Magical weapons also have their place in the game. While the heroes can sling normal iron in a pinch, you

Microprose presents *Master of Magic* to fantasy gamers who want to explore and conquer magical worlds.



Fallen Empires



In the southern oceans of Dominia Prime lay a continent of great kingdoms. Far from the war between Urza and Mishra, the lands of Sarpadia prospered. But as the climate changed, resources dwindled and empires crumbled. Hideous new species arose in the forests and seas, forcing the Sarpadians to fight for their very survival; Icatian towns mustered Phalanxes to defend themselves from Orcish raiders and the misbegotten spawn of uncontrolled black magic. Recruit these toughened warriors and vicious predators for your *Magic: The Gathering* duels, but beware lest you fare no better than the *Fallen Empires*.

MAGIC
The Gathering

WIZARDS
of the
COAST
COVER

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can also load them down with more magical gear than ever filled a ten level dungeon, turning them into the most formidable units in the game.

But take care. One little misstep and that hero that you've carefully tended since the beginning of the game, complete with all his nifty gear, may end up as nothing more than a heap in the dust. By the time you're deep in the game, if one of your heroes falls, you'll be either crying or cursing.

The objective of the game is simple: kick out the other wizards and become the sole magical power in Arcanus and its companion plane of Myrror. As in Microprose's other strategy offerings, you have several ways of achieving this end. But one thing is the key in all these games—stay on top in the smarts department. Keeping ahead in both *Civilization* and *Orion* lay in riding the wave of advancing technologies. Fall behind in these areas, and your armies quickly become obsolete. No matter how many chariots you line up, you're going to lose if the other guy is building Sherman tanks.

In *Master of Magic*, players get their edge through the acquisition of new magical abilities. The more "mana" you are able to pump into research, the faster you add new recipes to your book of spells. If you don't spend enough mana on the research needed to fill your larder with more and more advanced spells, you'll have about as much luck as Molotov without his cocktail.

The magic system in the game incorporates everything from simple spells designed to aid or hinder a single combat unit, to grand enchantments that can affect an entire world. The library of available spells is huge, and by the time you've learned all that you can learn, the game will be near its end. With the variation between wizards and types of magic, you'll play this game a long time before you've mastered every spell.

One of the peachiest points of the game is how each of the spells has its own animation and sound effect. Summoning monsters and casting global enchantments also come complete with sharp light shows. When it comes to variety and depth of graphics, this game excels, easily passing its predecessors in every area.

So with elements from the most popular fantasy games, spiffy graphics, crisp sound, and a game engine from the best strategic programs ever to hit a computer, *Master of Magic* has to be an unadulterated hit, right? Surprisingly, wrong. The game has a lot going for it, but it's also got its share of problems. Some of these are minor, but others are serious—and puzzling.

The more puzzling downside in *Magic* is the places where it failed to borrow enough from its famous predecessors. Right from the beginning, you'll find that city management has been vastly simplified from the capabilities of *Civilization*. While this does make it easier for the beginner to get moving, it robs the more advanced player of one of the best

features of the ancestor game. I would urge Microprose to restore these capabilities to a future version.

Similarly absent are the trading aspects in this game. *Civilization* and, to a lesser degree, *Orion* made trading big parts of the game. *Civilization* backed up trading with special units, roads and railroads, and established trade routes. Played carefully, it really is possible to bring down an opponent with warfare of only the economic kind. Sadly, trade is omitted from *Master of Magic*. Sure, you can tell your city to make trade goods, and you get money. But the stuff never seems to really go anywhere.

But the best problem with *Master of Magic* is the most surprising one of all: the game is too easy. I must have burned about six gallons of midnight oil before I could consistently wrestle *Master of Orion* at its toughest level. As for *Civilization*, I...well, I still can't consistently tackle *Civilization* at the highest skill. But when I sat down at *Master of Magic* and flipped on the easy level, I beat it first time out. All right, that's the easy level. So I upped it to normal. And beat it. Yeah, but then I did have all my *Orion* and *Civ* experience behind me. So I pumped it up to hard. And I beat it again. And hard is as hard as it gets.

Don't get me wrong, the game can be challenging, and if you're not experienced in this kind of game, it'll probably off you in no time. But the AI in *Master of Magic* seems incapable of the kind of relentless troop management that made *Civilization* and *Orion* so tough to beat. Perhaps Microprose intended *Master of Magic* for the gamer who was not previously a strategy fan. If that was the idea, then leaving out the multiple layers of complexity was a good idea. Certainly, *Magic* already offers a truck load of options when considering the heroes, weapons, and spells provided in the game. But it would sure be nice if it had a setting to turn on all the familiar features for Microprose veterans. And until they improve the AI, the replay value of the game is limited to those who have not yet mastered the mechanics of play.

Still, *Master of Magic* is an ambitious product with elements that could endear it to fantasy gamers everywhere. Compared to games like *Warlords II*, which merely brushed a layer of fantasy across a standard wargame, *Master of Magic* is a very deep game. Heck, you can spend a lot of time researching just so you can see that nifty new monster or spell.

Now, let's hope Microsoft turns up the screws and gives those computer players an IQ enhancement. After all, it's no fun if you don't lose every now and then. Just once, I want to see what it looks like when those guys cast *me* into the void.

AD&D Player Packs: survival kits for adventurers, \$19.95, TSR, Inc.

All right, I'll admit right off that I didn't need this product. After all, I have all the

manuals, dice, and player development pads that would be needed to go on a role-playing binge with most of North America. (And maybe Brazil on the side.) But did that stop me from buying it? Naw, too neat.

The Player Packs come in several varieties—thieves, fighters, etc. But the one that I picked up was the Wizard's Pack. Inside each pack you get all the material you need to set up and maintain a character of the appropriate type, including the requisite portions of the AD&D rules and a couple of lead figures for those who prefer to do their gaming with thumb-sized surrogates. Some of the information inside is unique to the packs (Though not, of course, as good as the novelette TSR packs in with *The Road to Urik* adventure. And yes, I'll sign your copy.) All of this comes shoveled inside a cool little plastic case for twenty bucks.

Is it a good buy? Probably not. I couldn't begin to tell you what the pieces would cost if you added them up, but my guess is something considerably less. Does that matter? Not to me. The case is spiffy, the information nicely organized and, hey, who couldn't use another set of dice?

With as much material as a character can accumulate over the course of a gaming lifetime, these cases seem the perfect way to haul around your underground alter-ego. And for me, the little black bag looks perfect for a wizard—kind of like a doctor's bag for someone who packs something a little nastier than aspirin.

Dragon's Lair, Available on many formats including: PC CD-ROM, 3DO, and Sega CD.

Long before the big-budget theatrical releases, Don Bluth and his cast of expert animators put their pens to work on a very different kind of cartoon. In a day when arcade machines had graphics that made it hard to tell a man from a mountain, *Dragon's Lair* arrived to deliver animation and color that no pixel-oriented machine has yet equaled.

In the years since, Readysoft has offered several scaled-down variations of the original on floppy disk, but now they're offering the real thing—the original Dirk the Daring and all his technicolor derring-do. Using various compression schemes, the original laser disc full of material has been squeezed onto a single CD-ROM. While it loses a few pixels in translation, it still looks amazingly good.

Just like the original, the game consists of making moves at just the right moment to steer Disk past snakes, tentacles, the lizard king, and a castle full of obstacles. And just like the original, missing your cue by a millisecond leads to instant death. With little interaction but go left, right, forward, back, and drawing your sword, the game can easily become frustrating and repetitious. It's not really a "game" so much as a test of your timing skills. But for those who dropped a Cadillac worth of quarters into the original machine, this version will give one heck of a nostalgia kick. 🎮

Continued from page 12

the shape of a man. In the legend of *Cupid and Psyche*, the beast whom Psyche has wed (Cupid, transformed by his jealous mother's spell) also turns into a man in her bed in the dark of night. When she lights a candle, breaking the prohibition against looking at her husband's human form, she is punished by losing him again until she obediently completes a series of tasks. In *Beauty and the Beast*, as the story has come down through the years, there is no insistence on obedience. Beauty's task is the opposite, to look where others would not and to see the fine heart that beats beneath the fur. The Beast's own task is patience and the reclaiming of the human within himself.

An American television production of the story in the 1970s (with Walter C. Scott as the Beast) failed, even with advances in film-making, to live up to the quality of Cocteau's earlier film. Robin McKinley was so enraged by this production that she sat down to write her first novel, *Beauty*, in response to it. It has since become a modern classic in its own right and arguably one of the finest modern versions of the tale, along with Cocteau's and Angela Carter's (discussed below). Like Cocteau, McKinley understood the importance of grounding magic in realism, and of using clean prose to echo the clean lines of the old de Beaumont story. Although published for Young Adults, it is an ageless story that manages to lengthen the tale into novel form without cluttering it with spurious detail. McKinley takes some liberties with the original material—Beauty's sisters, for instance, are likeable and sympathetic—and yet manages to stay true to the spirit of the original. Her heroine, unlike every other version, is no Beauty but a gawky, horse-mad, and intelligent young woman; the name is a gently ironic one. Her time in the Beast's castle is particularly well-rendered, and her rapture over the Beast's library (containing works from the future by Browning and Kipling) surely inspired the book-loving Belle in the new Walt Disney film.

Angela Carter is a writer who has understood how to work with the adult subtext of fairy tales better than any other contemporary author, and her early death of lung cancer two years ago was a great blow to the fantasy field. Carter has written a number of stories using fairy tale themes, most notably in her collection *The Bloody Chamber* (from which her adult "Little Red Riding Hood" film *The Company of Wolves* was drawn). Her version of *Beauty and the Beast*, a short tale titled "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," is both elegant and powerful. Although it is set in the modern world, it retains the timelessness of the best fairy tales by making the Beast's house a place where the laws of time are in suspension. Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" is another animal bridegroom tale reminiscent

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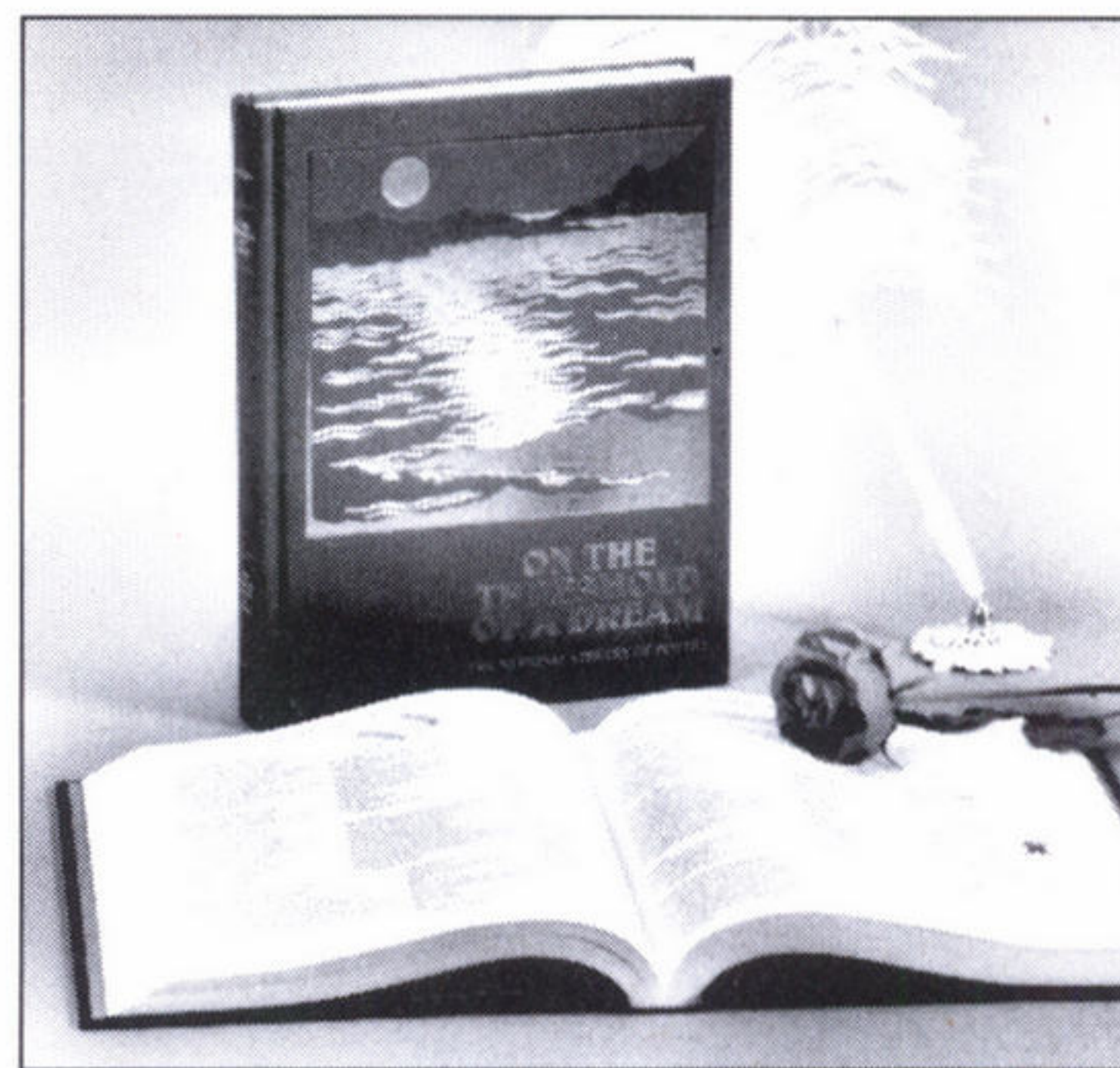
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of *Beauty and the Beast*. In this story, a profligate father loses his lovely daughter in a game of cards, delivering her up to a wealthy masked man who imprisons her in a crumbling mansion. This is a darker, gothic, more overtly sexual tale, as smooth as black velvet and as sharp as a thorn. In both stories Carter is careful to sustain the Beast's charisma to the very end.

Tanith Lee's story "Beauty," published in her excellent adult fairy tale collection *Red as Blood, or Tales from the Sisters Grimm*, takes "Beauty and the Beast" beyond modern city streets and into the far future. Lee retains the magical rose, the father, the three sisters, and the monstrous suitor who must not be refused. But the Beast in this case is an alien being, and the climax of the story is a clever one, the transformation centered on the heroine instead and her ideas about herself and her life.

Jane Yolen is a prolific writer who has worked for years with traditional tales in her various roles as writer, scholar, oral storyteller, and as the World Fantasy Award-winning editor of the Pantheon edition of *Favorite Folktales From Around the World*. Yolen's evocative treatment of the de Vileneuve/de Beaumont story comes in the form of a poem, "Beauty and the Beast: An Anniversary," published in her collection *The Faery Flag*. This poignant piece is from Beauty's point of view, years after the events of the story, reflecting on her years with the Beast and their solitary, childless lives. Folk singer June Tabor (along with musicians Hugh Warren and Mark Emerson) has recorded an exquisite musical rendition of the Yolen poem on her brand new CD "Against the Streams," which is highly recommended.

Some of the children's picture book versions of the tale are worth the interest of adult readers. The best of the classic illustrated editions features the peerless watercolors of Edmund Dulac, with text by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. Originally published in 1910, this Oriental flavored rendering is so beautiful that facsimile editions of it can still be found. Walter Crane's highly stylized version, published in 1875 and still reprinted today, is interesting as a piece of design, but falls short as an effective work of storytelling.

Of the more modern editions, the best of them, hands down, is Mercer and Marianna Mayer's *Beauty and the Beast*, published in 1978. Marianna Mayer's text is spare yet evocative, and her husband's illustrations are pure visual delight. His climactic illustration, where Beauty embraces the dying Beast, is so full of raw emotion that it alone is worth the price of the book.

Robert Gould is an artist and filmmaker who has long had a personal interest in the story of *Beauty and the Beast*. Gould's vision of the tale is portrayed in hardbound sketchbooks filled with gorgeous pencil sketches, designs, thumbnail roughs, and notes written in an almost calligraphic hand. His ver-

sion of the tale explores the psychological nature of the Beast's own imprisonment, and of Beauty's own transformative process, sparked by the alchemy of man, woman, and the mystery of the creative process.

There are many ways one can draw on old fairy tales (whether one is aware of doing so or not) to create modern works of fiction, film and art. The way fantasy writers today make use of fairy tales is limited only by the imaginations and skill of the writers themselves. No single version of *Beauty and the Beast* can be considered the "correct" one—for even though the basic story created by de Vileneuve and de Beaumont did not begin as a folk tale, it has its roots in that tradition and has gone back into it again.

And yet Disney's new *Beauty and the Beast* still disturbs me because this is not billed as a new story inspired by the old one. It is presented as if it were the classic tale, and such is the power of the Disney name that generations of children will perceive this as truth. And yet the simple, timeless elements of the de Beaumont story have been altered in several fundamental ways. The father has been changed into a harmless buffoon, his role in Beauty's imprisonment diminished into an accident of circumstance; Beauty's request for a rose and the father's unfortunate way of procuring one have been deleted; the jealous sisters have been deleted; an arrogant suitor, Gaston, has been introduced to be the real villain of the piece. In short, the heroes and the villains of the story are clear cut, unambiguous—Beauty and her father are always Good, Gaston and his minions are Bad.

In the old story, Beauty makes mistakes—she goes home, she forgets about the Beast, and by doing so, she almost causes his death. Here we have a perfect heroine who never grows, never undergoes a transformation of her own to echo the Beast's. The happy ending has been achieved, but the price for it has not been paid—except by the dull-witted characters unfortunate enough to be wearing the black hats.

I am reminded of something Jane Yolen once wrote, lamenting the fate of another fairy tale, *Cinderella*, at Disney's hands: "[The Walt Disney film] set a new pattern for Cinderella: a helpless, hapless, pitiable, useless heroine who has to be saved time and time again by talking mice and birds because she is 'off in a world of dreams.' It is a Cinderella who is not recognized by her prince until she is magically back in her ball gown, beribboned and bejeweled. Poor Cinderella. Poor us."

In Disney's beautifully animated film of *Beauty and the Beast*, we take one step forward with the creation of a literate and courageous heroine, and two steps backward as something vital at the core of de Beaumont's tale gets lost in the cracks of the musical razzle-dazzle. Poor Beauty. Poor Beast. Poor us and our children.

But hey, the film is entertaining and fun, so should we care? My opinion is: You bet. ♪

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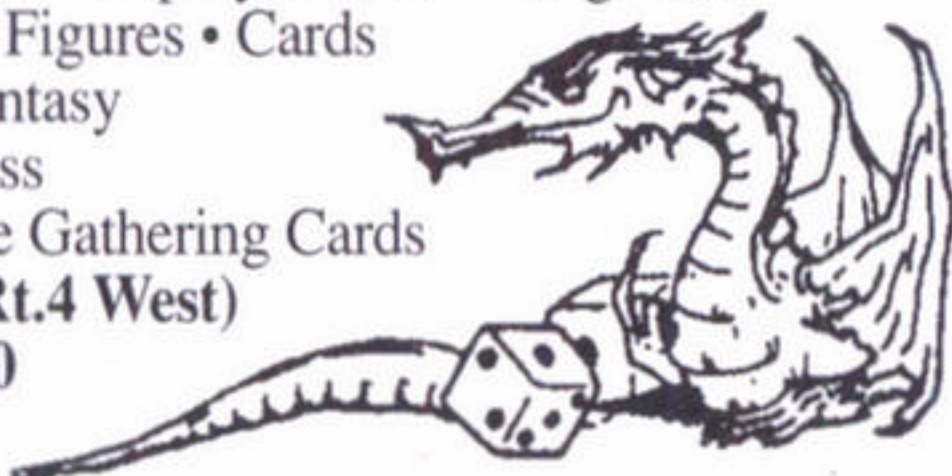
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YEAR OF STORMS

Continued from page 55

"Let her go!" yelled a child's voice. Cormorant hurtled out of the darkness. He rocketed into his father, hitting, kicking, biting, shouting. The talons loosened for a moment, and Sunshell wrenched herself away, ran toward the king. The king caught her and held her tight. Over her shoulder she saw Fool pry Cormorant forcibly from his arm. Cormorant began to scream as he had in the cemetery, a high, thin, desperate scream that ended only when his father struck him across the face.

The king said, slowly, heavily, "Let the boy come here."

Fool let go, a half-smile still on his face, and Cormorant crumpled to the ground. Sunshell felt Many's hand slip into hers again and she gripped it tightly.

Now the king's wizard, Resurrecting, strode forward. Fool held up his hand, as if in warning, but Resurrecting threw something, a bolt of light, an arrow, a squirming maggot, threw it right at Fool's head. Fool's head exploded in smoke like a ripe puffball. The next instant singing filled the air, Fool's voice; Fool's hands reached into the air and caught the smoke and pushed it together and the head reappeared in Fool's hands, still with that contemptuous half-smile.

Fool set the head back on his shoulders. He stroked the wind with his fingers, and thunder filled the air. A wave from nowhere broke over the king, drenching Sunshell and Many. It would have pulled them off their feet but for the king's strong grip on them. Another enormous wave smashed past them, breaking against the side of Sun House.

Resurrecting hurled a long-bladed copper knife at Fool. The knife sheared right through Fool, cutting him a hundred ways at once. Fool fell to the ground, hands and arms and feet and ropy intestines all in a bloody jumble. But again the sound of his deep bass voice, singing his wizard's song, filled the air. The bloody pieces of flesh and bone stirred, shifted, rose suddenly to become a man's form again. And then Fool stood as before, with his bear-claw crown and Sea Monster robe. From somewhere he had called a soul-rattle. He was no longer smiling.

He shook his rattle. A gale raged along the beach; Sun House quivered and groaned. A roof board flew away into the night like a leaf, then another. The king stood immovable, holding Many and Sunshell tightly to him. Summer powers, Sunshell thought: Resurrecting was using summer powers, lightning and copper, but Fool had summer all bound up. The king's wizard needed winter powers, storm and darkness!

Resurrecting must have had the same thought, for at that moment he reached up to his headband and took out a little pebble wrapped in twine. This time, he turned and hurled the pebble toward the open ocean. As

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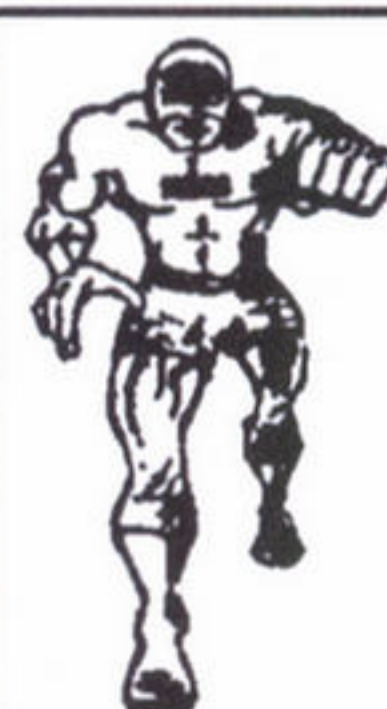
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the pebble flew, it grew larger and larger until it became a boulder the size of a man, and Fool flew with it, bound to it hand and foot by wizard's knots. He sailed through the spray-filled wind, robe flapping, black hair flying, mouth agape. The boulder flew and flew, past Seagull Rock, past the south point, out into the straits. It fell into deep water with a splash that sent luminous foam high into the air.

They waited. The wind blew fire from the torches in long smoky streamers. Surf boomed on the beach. Rain, ordinary winter rain, fell on them. No song came. The night went on. Resurrecting heaved a sigh and sagged slightly, and then, with a grimace, rubbed the shoulder of his throwing arm.

The king walked toward Cormorant's crumpled form. As the king bent over him, Cormorant moaned, whimpered, and then he opened his eyes. He swallowed.

"Sir..." he whispered. "Is it true? Did Father kill Swallow?"

"Yes," the king said.

Cormorant began to cry, painfully. "I knew he'd done something bad. I just never, I never guessed, I —"

The king laid his hand gently on Cormorant's forehead. Cormorant kept sobbing. "Father," he began, and then, "If Father kept her babies, he must have brought them back here. He has a place in the forest where he goes. He does his bad things there. He took me there once —"

"Tomorrow," the king said softly, "you had better show us this place in the forest."

They wrapped Cormorant in furs, and the king's herb-doctor bound the ugly gashes on Sunshell's arm, and then attendants carried them all back to Flicker House. The aunts shooed the twins away from Cormorant, so they climbed up to their room. Mother lay there in the dark, breathing laboriously. She was awake.

"I heard shouting," she whispered to them. "What happened?"

"Fool is dead," Many told her. "He drowned."

"Oh, that is good news," said Mother, and she fell silent again, except for her painful breathing.

Sunshell and Many curled up on one side of her, pulling a bearskin over them, and despite the hunger, despite all the terrible events of the evening, Sunshell fell asleep almost as soon as she closed her eyes.

The next day Cormorant led a party of men into the forest. They did not return until sundown, wet, cold, grim-faced, even the grown men exhausted. They brought home the mummified corpses of the twin-babies, along with tales about what else they had found in Fool's forest hut.

Under a downpour the kings laid the twin children in the water at the rivermouth. Swift currents bore the brown bundles out to sea. Sunshell waited on the shore, staring, long after they grew too small for her to see anymore: but she saw no flash of silver, no flick

of a rainbow tail. No miracle of resurrection.

Mother died the next morning. She just stopped breathing. Sunshell and Many were sitting by her side when it happened, and they stayed there, holding hands and crying silently and miserably until one of the aunts came to check on Mother and saw what had happened. One of the men pulled out a wall-board from Fool's room and right away started to make a coffin.

That day there was no food at all.

The day after that, Sunshell awoke feeling too weak even to open her eyes. The room was so silent and empty without Mother. She could hear her own breath, could hear shouts outside, people's distant voices...but no wind, she finally realized. The relentless pounding surf had faded to a whisper.

She pushed herself up, stiffly because of her wounds, dragged herself onto all fours, and crawled out to the central hall. The house was empty. Thin bands of sunlight striped the stepped platforms of the hall. She crawled outside. Warm sunlight poured over her like oil. The sky overhead was blue! From horizon to horizon!

"Oh, thank you," she said. "Thank you, Swimmers."

Dogs barked by the rivermouth. She could hear shouts, children's shrieks of joy. The sun gave her strength to climb to her feet, and to stumble, dizzy, along the beach. People milled on the big gravel bars at the mouth of Deep River, talking excitedly, laughing, crying. At the water's edge, the southside king, dressed in his cloud robe and sunshell crown, scattered eagles' down upon the water. His arms spread wide in welcome.

"They've come," Many said, appearing beside her.

Through gaps in the crowd Sunshell could see a battered and heavy-laden canoe approaching the shore. The two young men who paddled it toward the crowd on the beach looked gaunt and exhausted, but otherwise healthy enough. They were the king's living sons, and their canoe was filled with seals.

They stopped the canoe offshore, and the prince in front rose to his feet and began to sing...

"Come on," Many was tugging at her. "They're here! Look!" He pulled her to the top of the riverbank and pointed.

She looked down toward the river. They hung in the current, undulating gently, multitudes of them. They so crowded the green water that Sunshell could not see the riverbed from one side of the bank to the other. Silver-finned and copper-bodied, bearers of wealth, the Swimmers, the Bright Ones, waving gently like riverweeds, shining like red fire in the new sunlight, they waited. Waited to be greeted before they entered the king's weir. Waited to offer their great sacrifice. The Summer People had come. Only treat them well, and they will always return. Sunshell and Many clung to each other, both weeping now, staring at their kin who had come at last to save them. ♪

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TOLD BY SMOKE

Continued from page 31

out on the earth handfuls of seed. Or was this
only a fancy, for who else had seen them?

The village of Murum lies dead now, out in
the desert beyond the city road. The stone
houses crumble and have lost all semblance
of human habitations. Crows perch on the
walls. The wells are wet yet unwholesome.
Even so they quench the thirst of the gigan-
tic trees which grow there, trees black as
coals and jets, with only a hint, at midday, of
green. Cars cannot go down the streets,
through which enormous roots have pushed
their way. Those that venture there hear
laughter but meet no one. Those that laugh
there fall silent.

Only picture those pale hands with their
long, unearthly nails, casting out those hand-
fuls of glittering seed, like gemstones. Only
picture how Rebaidah's lover scabbled her
out of the hole in the sand and brought down
her poor dried head from the spike, and
kissed it back to loveliness and put her
together like a perfect doll, with a binding of
pleasure and vegetation.

But do not picture the people of Murum,
how they ran away like beaten dogs, weep-
ing and calling on God at the injustice. Do
not picture Handsome, with his chest of
valuables strapped to his back, pushing
along the road. Or the village left behind
them to the cars and the trees and the laugh-
ter, like the demons of childhood we would
like to love.

WHEN THE OLD MAN HAD FINISHED HIS TALE,
he sat looking at me, still puffing slightly on
the amber mouthpiece of the hookah, whose
spirit had lasted all this time, which was
probably not possible.

"I thank you," I said, "for the story. I like it
very much. Can I repay you?"

He grinned, quite uncouthly, showing all
his blackened teeth. The light was coming,
and his air of mystique and holiness was fad-
ing. His turban no longer looked white.

"There is my bowl."

I put some money into this, and satisfied,
he nodded and bowed his head. I was dis-
missed.

I stood up. At that moment, all the nightin-
gales which had sung on and on in the court
took flight at once. They flew up into the sky,
which had now a heart of aquamarine, and
turning, darting, fled away. The tree was
dead, I saw, and had had no foliage. Only the
birds had covered it, like leaves.

But already the day was full of other
sounds, coarse and unimportant. I could
sleep if I wished and dream of Rebaidah in
her earthly Paradise.

"Go in peace," muttered the old man, from
his dirty head-cloth.

I thanked him again and went out, trusting
as I did so that to go or be or live in peace
would never be my lot. ♣

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TANITH LEE WENT TO ART COLLEGE and worked in various jobs as a library assistant, waitress, and clerk until DAW Books published *The Birthgrave* in 1976 and she became a full-time professional writer. She has published nearly fifty books and collections and nearly a hundred and fifty short stories. She has won World Fantasy Awards for two short stories, and the August Derleth for her novel *Death's Master*. She lives by the sea with her husband, writer John Kaiine, and cat. Upcoming books include *Scarabae* blood opera *Dark Dance*, and *Personal Darkness*; *Heart-Beast*, *Elephantasm*, *The Secret Books of Paradys*, and for young adults: *Black Unicorn* and *Gold Unicorn*.

Charles de Lint is the Canadian author of *Moonheart*, *The Dreaming Place*, *The Little Country*, and numerous other books of fantasy, horror and suspense. He is also the author of the fairy tale novel *Jack the Giant Killer* which, like much of his work, mixes folklore and mythic motifs with modern settings. This story is based on the fairy tale "The Dead Moon."

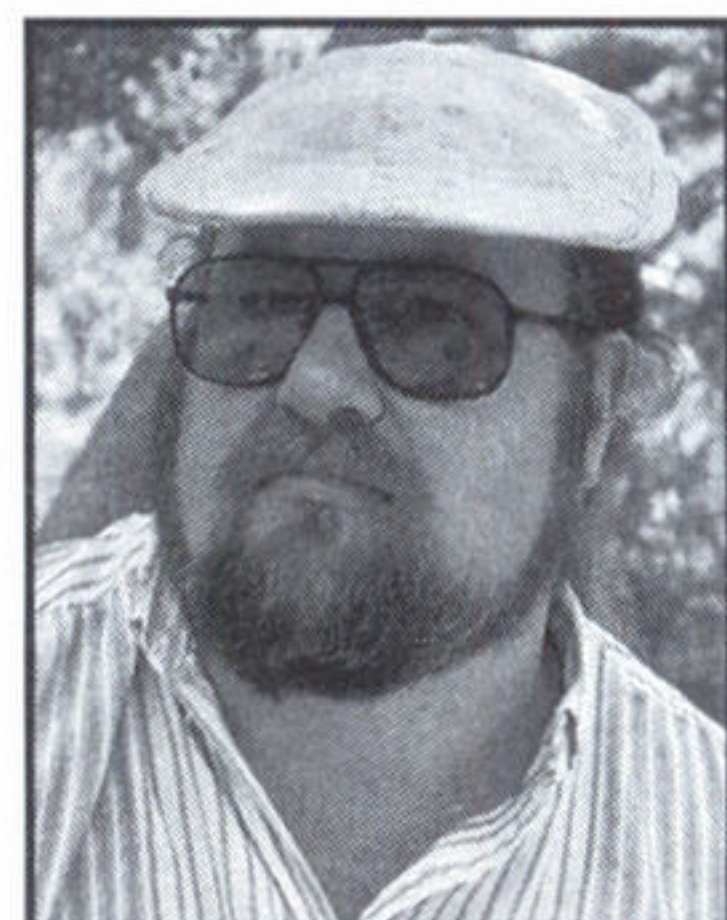
Judith Berman grew up in Idaho, attended high school and college in Vermont, and since 1979 has lived in Philadelphia. She has also spent extended periods of time in British Columbia and Alaska. She received a Ph.D in anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania in 1991, and attended Clarion (East) in 1994. Currently she is employed as a guest curator at a Pennsylvania museum. This is her first published story.

Noreen Doyle is a graduate student in the nautical archaeology program at Texas A&M University, specializing in the construction of boats in ancient Egypt and their place in Egyptian religion. When not researching or writing fiction (though this is her first sale), she produces seventeenth and eighteenth century style embroideries and refurbishes (and cleans) a twelve plus room Victorian house in Maine. Noreen is working on a science fiction novel and a number of short projects, besides speculating on a concept of high fantasy: free time.

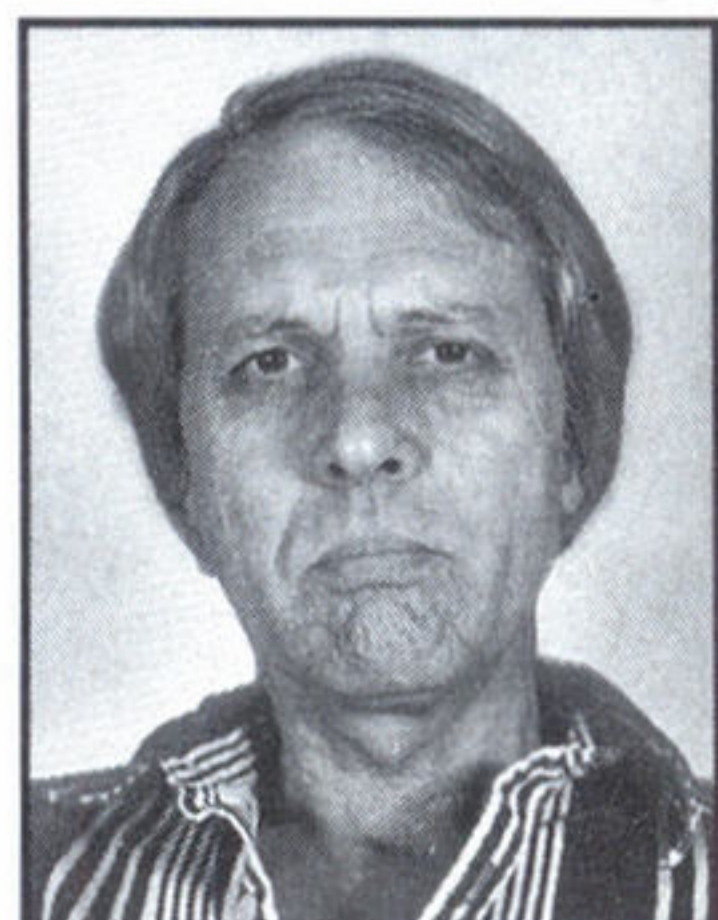
S.N. Dyer is a Nebula Award loser and lives with a six-toed cat (Hemingway also had six-toed cats. We suspect it's because

they like to retouch manuscripts. Or occasionally just erase one.)

Web Bryant's artistic skills cross many disciplines in commercial art. The graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University was part of the design team that created *USA Today*. Other achievements: art directing the first national children's newspaper, *Pennywhistle Press*; creating national award-winning maps and graphics; and being commissioned to paint portraits of a Supreme Court justice and corporate CEOs. His first love is painting, especially when he can work with the wonders of natural and directional light.



Richard Parks



Ken Graning

ARTIST **KEN GRANING**, HAS MANY years of experience as a professional illustrator. A 1956 graduate of Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, California, Ken's advertising and editorial illustrations have appeared in numerous magazines and countless trade publications, books, newspapers, posters, record album covers, corporate brochures, annual reports and many other forms. He has had many shows, including a one-man retrospective exhibition in Southfield, Michigan. Ken free-lances from his home in Auburn Hills, Michigan, and is currently devoting every spare moment of his time to developing a body of paintings depicting landscape and animal themes.

After twelve years as a coatings chemist, **Richard Parks** decided he'd rather play with computers and write than play with fingerpaints and write. So now he's a computer system manager and his work has started appearing in places like *Asimov's SF*, *Science Fiction Age* and *Dragon*, as well as various anthologies. "Coincidence? I don't think so. Doing what you love is good for soul and art and good work if you can get it. I recommend it highly."

Annie Lunsford has been freelancing since 1976. She won't reveal her age, only that she was "born after swing and before rock-and-roll." If you notice that she fancies the color purple in her illustrations, it is because she is a purple freak—she once owned a purple Austin-Healey. This artist has had illustrations in *Science Fiction Age*.

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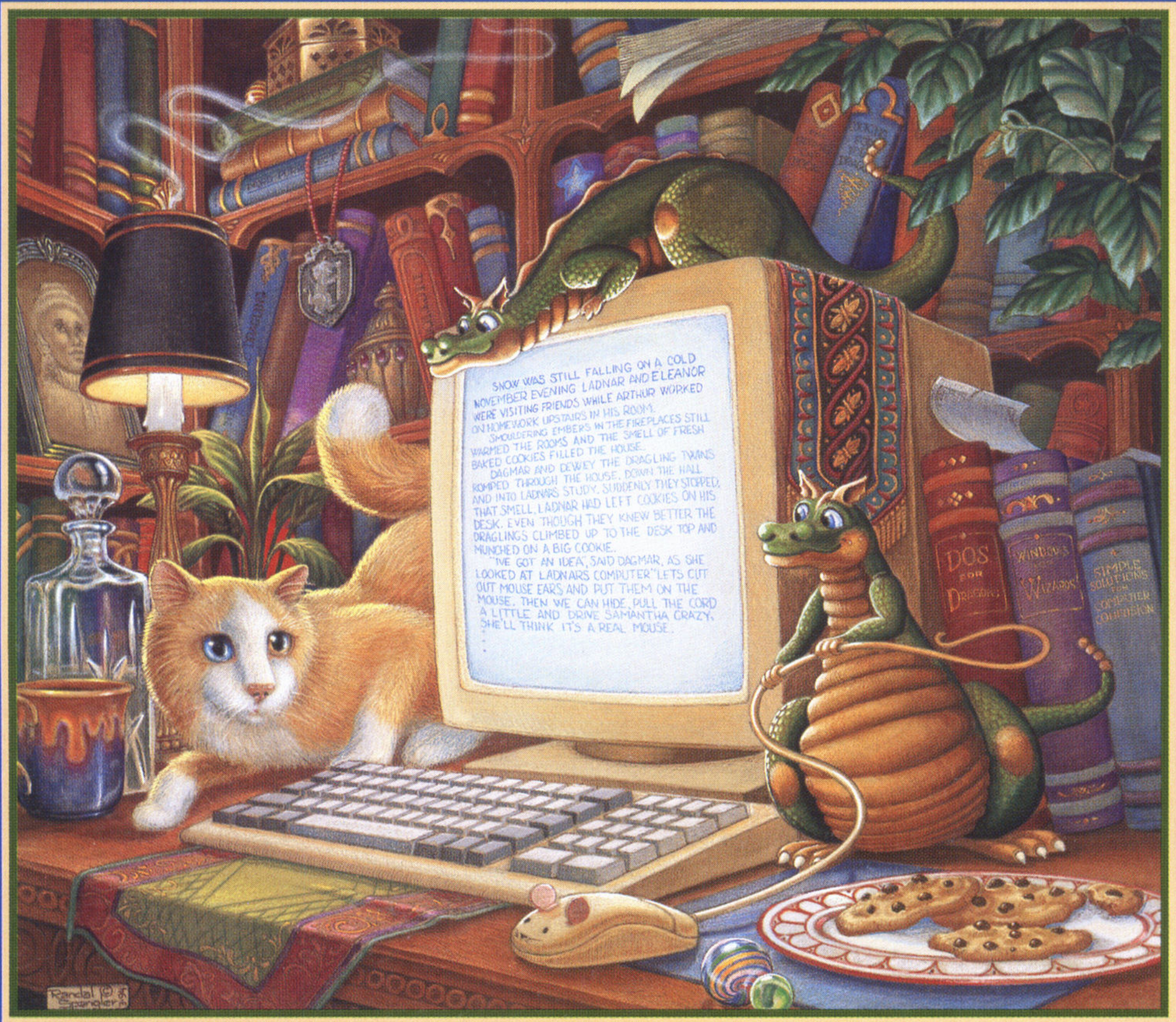


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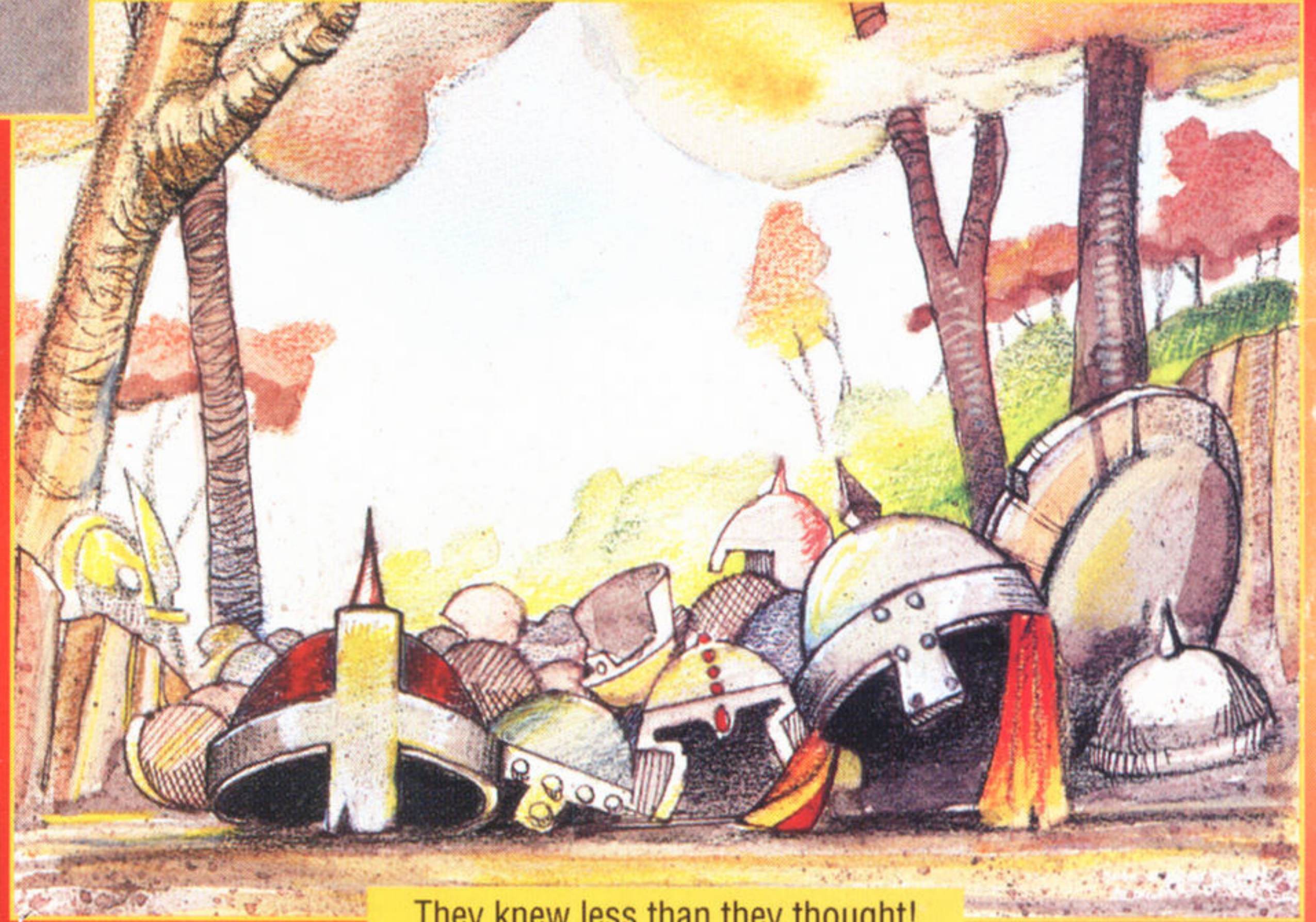
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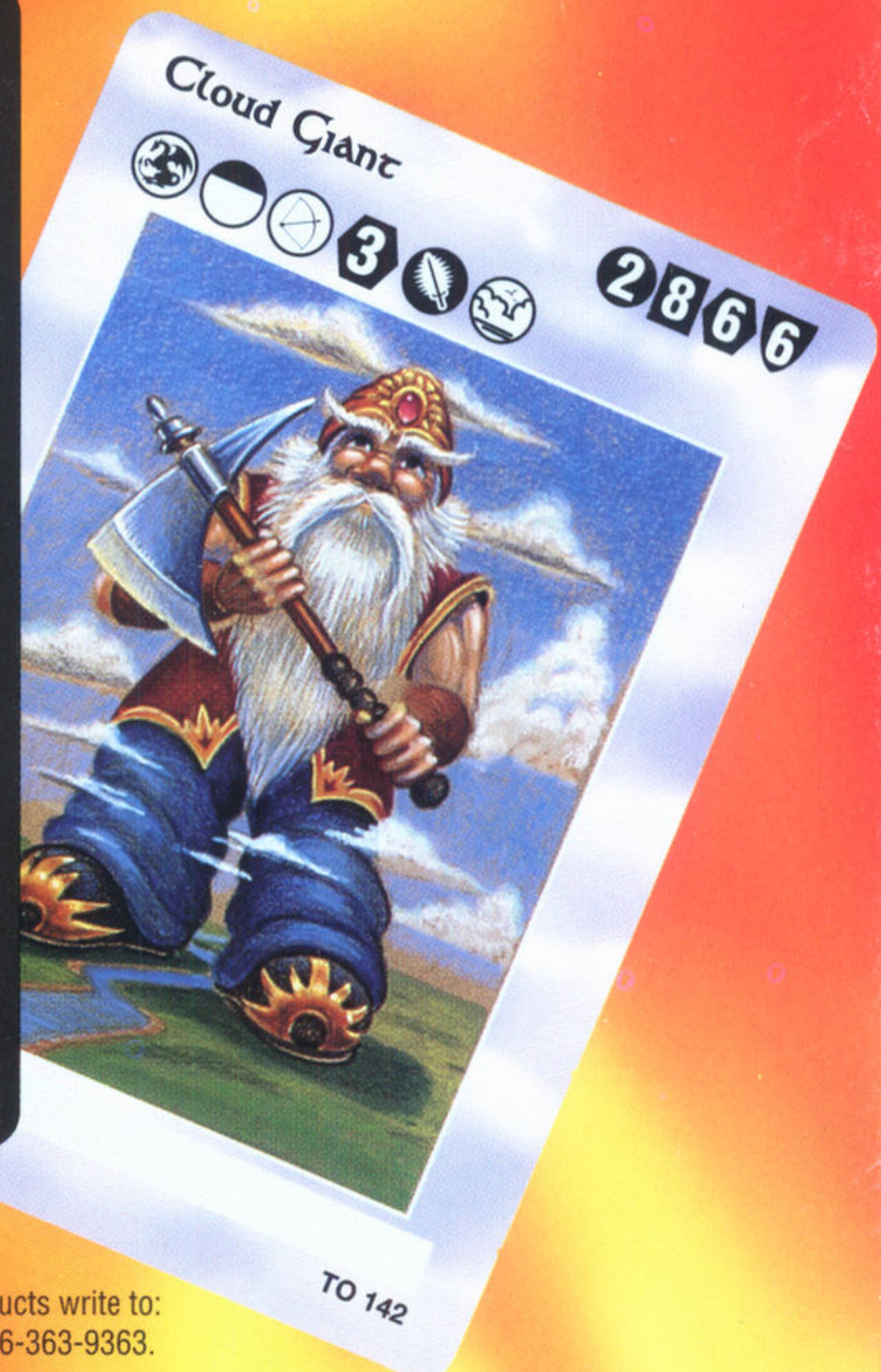
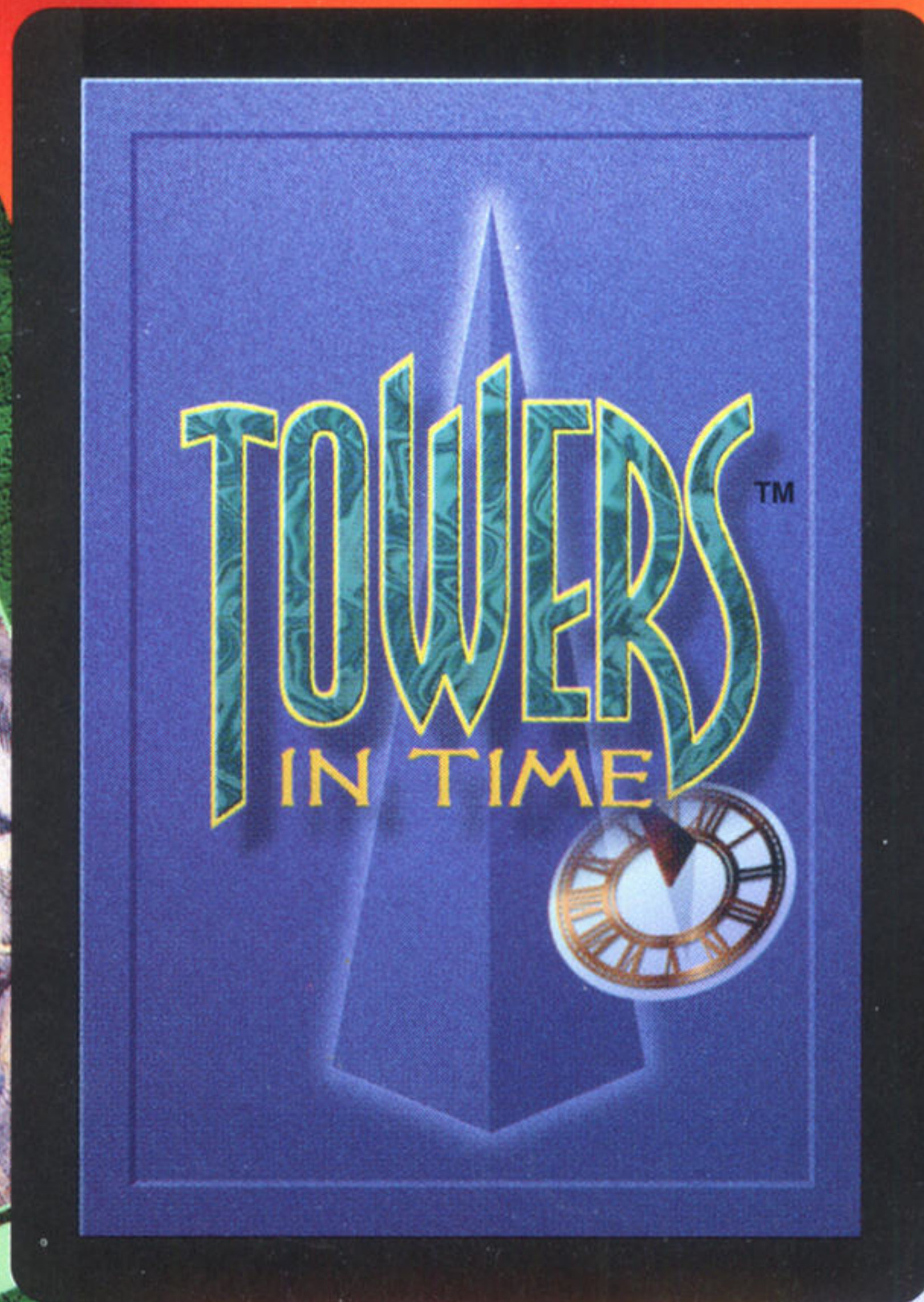
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