

WPS 36023

REALMS OF FANTASY

STEALER OF SOULS

By Janni Lee Simner

Swords & Legends

By Bruce Boston

The Black Medallion

By Lisa R. Cohen

WITCH SNARE

By Jo Clayton

Terri Windling:

Merlin Legends

TELEVISION:

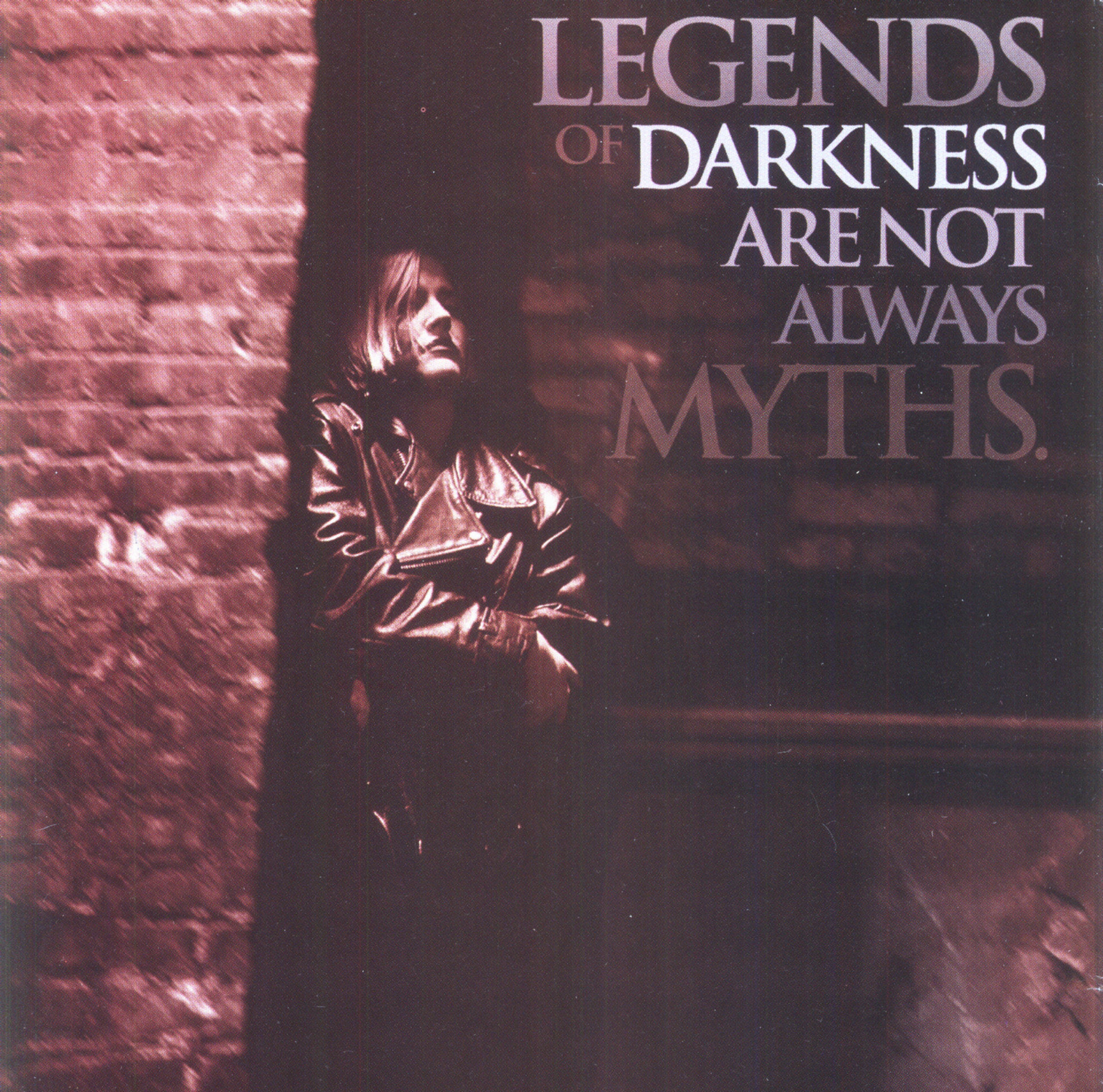
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COVER: Brom's half-elf, all-warrior can take on any beast, including an ominous dragon. ABOVE: Jim Warren's illustration *In the Flesh*. He has fun illustrating Clive Barker's work. See our Gallery on page 62.

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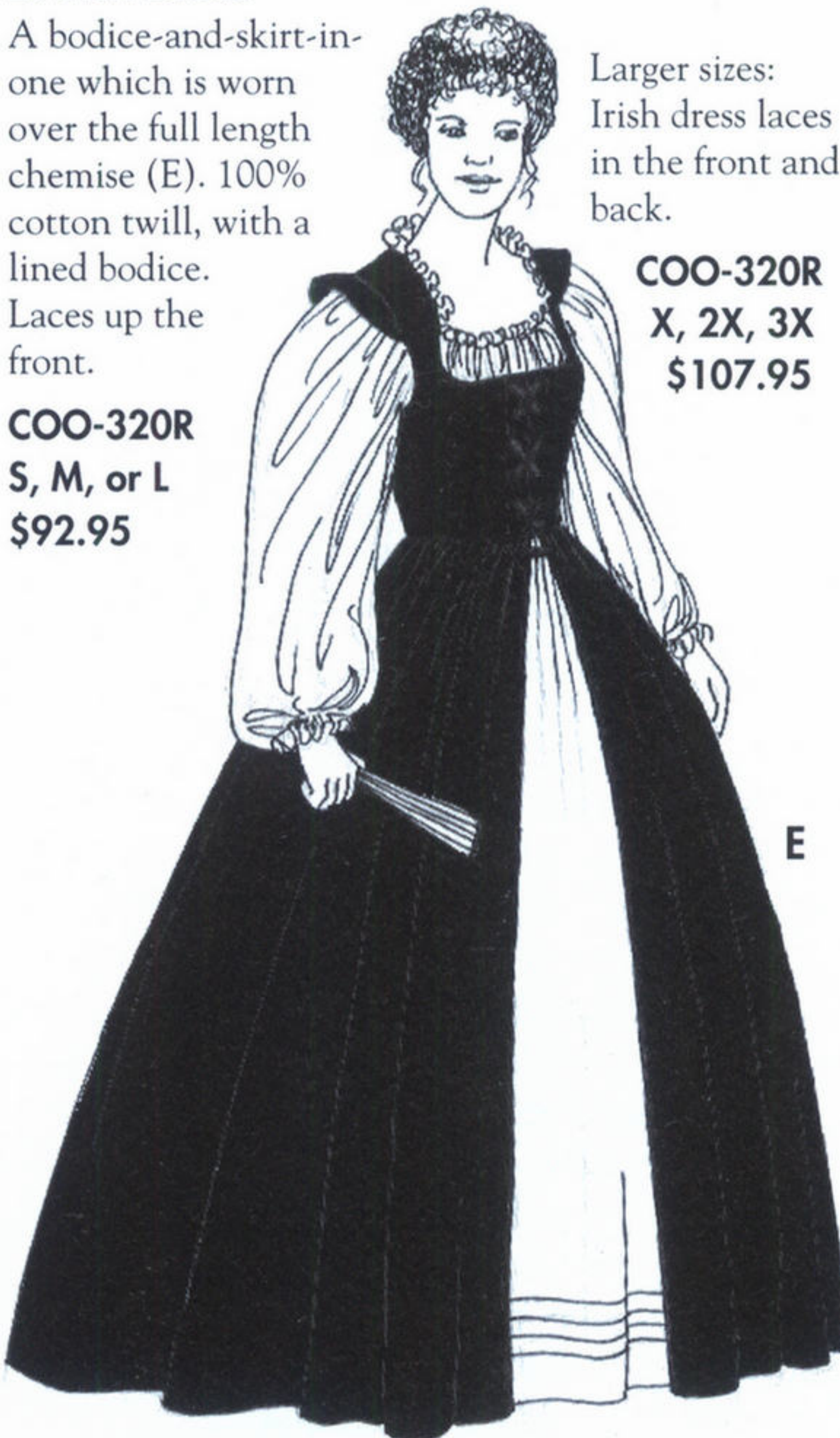
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More Dark Secrets of Publishing

IN THE LAST ISSUE, OUR WONDERFUL guest editorialist, Jeanne Cavelos, gave you a peek into the inner workings of the publishing industry. Since my mail has always leaned heavily toward the "I love your magazine, now how do I get published?" variety, I thought you might like to know a bit more about the publishing process.

Jeanne talked about how each publisher has its own "niche," an area in which they specialize, and how sending a Western to a publisher who specializes in science fiction won't get you very far.

But she failed to address the question that burns in two out of three of your hearts: "OK, fine, but how do I get published? I know not to send a men's adventure to Hobbit Publishing. But if I send a hobbit novel to Hobbit Publishing, how do I get it read by an editor and then distributed into the hands of the eagerly waiting masses?" You really want to know? OK. Here's the secret: research.

You need to go to the library and look at a publication called *The Literary Marketplace*. It lists every publisher in the United States, gives the editors' names and what the publisher specializes in. It will also tell you whether or not that publisher accepts unsolicited, unagented manuscripts. If they do, then it's simple. Type up your *magnum opus* (double spaced, always), put it in an envelope with a self-addressed, stamped return envelope, and mail it off to the editor at the house which your research has shown you to be your best bet. If it comes back rejected, you then send it off to the house that was your second best bet. This continues until you actually sell it, or you've tried every publishing house that accepts unsolicited, unagented manuscripts of this sort.

The key words here, though, are unsolicited and unagented. What do these mean? Unsolicited means just what it sounds like: You didn't ask anyone there if they wanted to see your book, and no one there said, yes, send it in. Unagented means that you don't have a literary agent representing you. That part's simple. But it often happens that publishers will look at unagented manuscripts, but not at unsolicited ones.

So, how do you get a publisher to solicit your manuscript? Again, go to the *LMP*, select your house and editor, and then write

a query letter. This is a letter in which you introduce yourself and tell them enough about your wonderful novel to pique their interest. At that point, they will send you a reply in the self-addressed, stamped envelope you've enclosed, saying, "Yes, sounds interesting; let me see three chapters and an outline." (This means the first three chapters, not any random three you feel like sending.) If they like what they see in the chapters and outline, they'll then ask to see the whole thing. It's just that simple, folks.

Somewhat less simple are the houses that won't accept unagented manuscripts (there are quite a few of these, but many houses that publish fantasy and science fiction will look at unagented manuscripts in those genres). If you want to send your novel to a house that will read only agented manuscripts, again, go back to the *LMP* and look in the agents section. From this section select an agent whose interests and business practices seem compatible with yours. Write that agent a query letter just as you would have done with the publishing house, again enclosing an SASE. From here on, the process will be identical, except once the agent has read your book and agreed to take you on, this is no guarantee that he or she will actually be able to sell the book. But at least you've made a start, and from that moment on you will be able to use the phrase, "My agent says ..." in frequent sentences to your friends.

So, let's say you've, one way or another, made a sale. Here it is! The Big Time! Watch out Hollywood, look out Broadway — your name will be in lights, and hordes of eager readers will haunt your signings and wait for you outside the stage doors when you make your appearances on *Letterman*. Right?

Ahem. Not quite.

If your book is like the vast majority of those published in SF and fantasy, it will be released as a mass market paperback, one of perhaps fifty or so to hit the stands that month. It will stay on the stands for three to five weeks (less if you're thinking about airports), and then be replaced by a newer title. Whatever sales you're going to make in the mass marketplace will take place in that brief span. (Specialty stores and independents will let you hang around a bit longer.) Six months later you get your copies. Sigh. Well, your editor said this was normal for first novels and she'd like to see something else from you. Maybe with the next book

And, as a well-known one-time SF writer once said, so it goes. ♣

REALMS OF FANTASY

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Once Upon A Time...

Once upon a time, you could always recognize the desk of a writer by the partially chewed pencils, paper basketballs, and eraser shavings that cluttered it. "The mess is part of the glory," the writer would say in justification. "Besides, I do my best work in this kind of situation!"

Of course, there's no getting around the fact that, in the era of the pencil, it took a much longer time to write fiction and nonfiction — and it was much more frustrating. Today's writers can enjoy the glory and forget the mess...

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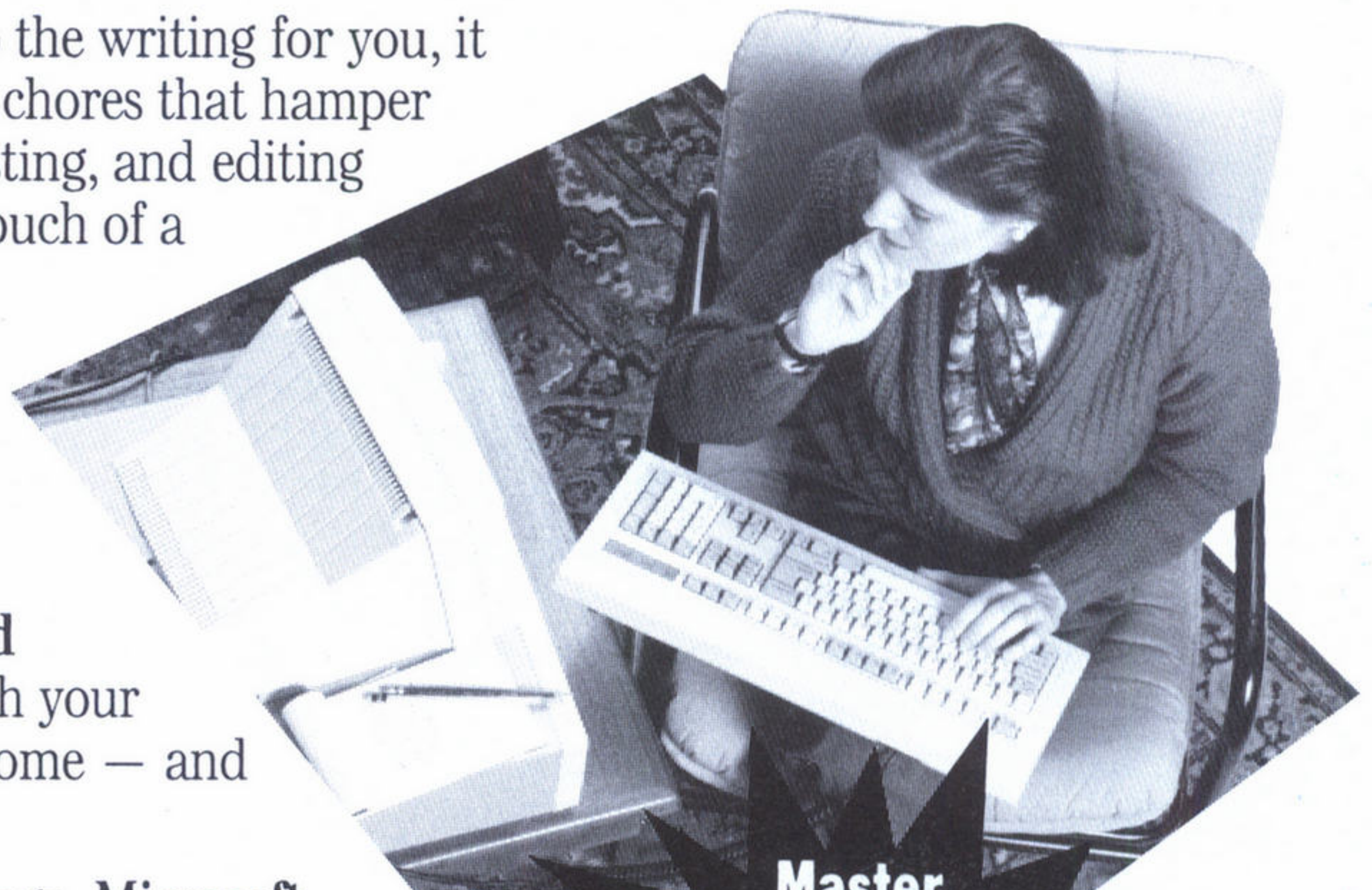
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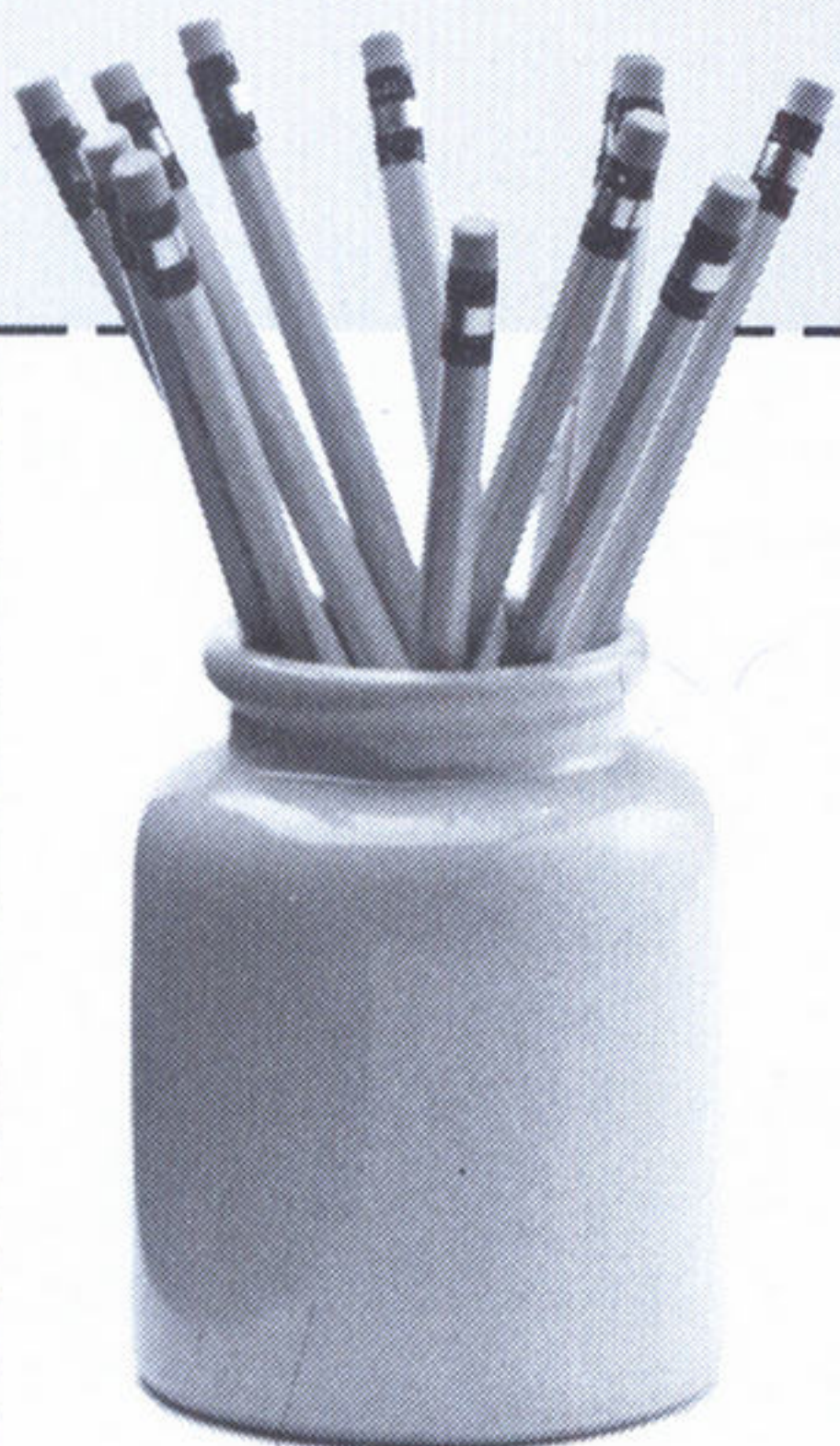
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Dear Shawna,

First of all, I would like to convey my immense appreciation of your magazine. Unlike most, it is captivating from cover to cover, and an inspiration to any writer, artist, or dreamer.

In response to Dan Perez's "Movies" article (February 1996) I must contend that no list of the best fantasy movies ever made could possibly be complete without inclusion of Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal*. Not only is it beautifully filmed, strong on plot and character development, and accompanied by a superb score, but it is also strikingly original. In the course of the entire film, not a single human face is ever seen to burst the bubble of our belief that we have been whisked off to another world entirely. The collaborative influence of Brian Froud (featured in one of your early "Gallery" sections) is clearly visible in the design of the landscapes and characters. This movie is truly a gem (no pun intended) in any fantasy movie collection.

Claire Acher
Montclair, NJ

Dan's column has generated a lot of comment. Read on for more on "the best fantasy films you never saw."

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Although I am a charter subscriber to your magazine, I've never envisioned myself writing, due to a low opinion of my own opinions. Two things have overcome my unwillingness.

First — maybe I live on another planet, but when I read the phrase "late, great Roger Zelazny," I almost fell out of bed! When did he, one of my favorite authors, die? I met him in the spring of 1992 under difficult circumstances, and he kindly signed the books I had and answered stupid questions like "What will your next Amber book be about?" with patience. I will miss his creativity greatly.

Second, I know every Tom, Dick, and Harry will have something to say about "the 13 best fantasy films you never saw," but I just have to throw in a couple of my pennies: I honestly cannot believe that *Ladyhawke* did not make the list. Besides being one of my all time favorite movies (and I have a broad range of likes), it has to be one of the best movies never seen by anyone. The acting is wonderful, with now-famous actors like Rutger Hauer, Matthew Broderick, and Michelle Pfeiffer, and supporting characterizations of top quality. The story is simple, but elegant, lushly filmed and nicely scored (the Alan Parsons Project — an excellent group no one ever listened to!). This film is funny, romantic, suspenseful, and satisfying on so many levels — perhaps now more people will see it!

Please continue to put together wonderful issues of your magazine. I keep every copy!

Sincerely,
Pat Primerano

Sadly, Roger Zelazny passed away last August after a long illness which he kept secret from everyone but his closest friends and family. We will all miss him greatly.

Dear Shawna,

Just a note to say I discovered your mag the other day next to Sovereign's sister *Science Fiction Age*, in a newsagent (British newsstand) in Surrey, UK, and my immediate impression was that it's a real gem. Beautiful artwork, good editorials and features, and stories that really hit the mark. Excellent!

Both Sovereign mags are by far the best literary/art SF mags kicking about at the moment — heaps better than the dark (and graphically rather drab) UK magazines, and less "techno" than *Analog*. So I take my hat off to you!

Sincerely,
Ben Ranson.

We're always happy to hear that we're being distributed well overseas — it's nice to be in the international marketplace both for us and for our writers and contributors. Thanks for writing.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I am responding to what Jeff Pusch said about writing fantasy.

I would just like to say that it is not always true. I have been a slave to fantasy for more than seven years. I am now a senior in high school and that is what I wish to do with my life. Although reading fantasy is fun, I would not say that it is better than writing it. For me it is usually as, if not more, fun than reading it. When reading any story, you read what a person has the characters doing. You are just a watcher but can never get involved. When you write, you get your chance to play God. You decide what people do, what challenges they have to overcome, and what their reward is for their deeds. When you are done you need not care what people think. If it is the best you could do, then forget what others say if they don't like it. It is your call if it is good or not *to you*. Well, even though I went off track a little bit, I would just like to say I love to write fantasy.

Steve Leavell

Steve, you make some good points about the power of writing, but perhaps it would be better to wait until you're out of high school before you decide what you want to do with the rest of your life! If you do decide to continue as a writer, it's very important that you learn the basic skills of writing, just as a carpenter must learn the basic

skills of hammer and nails. Good luck.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I love *Realms of Fantasy*. I've had a subscription for about half a year now. It's WAY COOL to find a magazine that publishes fantasy fiction.

Which brings me to my point. I am an, as yet, undiscovered author (actually I haven't really sent much out yet) and I was wondering how to submit a story to your magazine. Do you take unsolicited pieces, and what kind of stories are you looking for (I just finished the editorial about the secret factors in publishing)?

I realize this letter is trite and rather blunt. Please believe my writing is better than my e-mail!

Your friend and addicted reader,
Leslianne Wilder

Before you submit a story to this, or any other magazine, you must write for the writers' guidelines, a sheet of paper which will tell you exactly what you must and must not do in your submission. Send a self-addressed stamped envelope, marked guidelines, to the editorial address: Sovereign Media, 441 Carlisle Dr., Herndon, VA 22070.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

As a recent subscriber I wanted to congratulate the whole team on an excellent magazine! The James Gurney article in the December issue was excellent, as was the issue overall. As a side note — if *Realms* is published bimonthly, why does only a single month appear on the cover, instead of November/December, or some such?

Also, I wanted to suggest an editorial subject, mainly because I am hoping you could shed some light on something I find puzzling. It seems that the market for short fantasy is small, especially compared to the number of science fiction magazines on the shelves. Yet, there is a wealth of fantasy novels — again, not as many as sci-fi — but it would seem that there should be more fantasy magazines. (Maybe *Realms* should go monthly — hint-hint.)

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,
Max

While it may seem that there are more SF novels than fantasy, in reality, it's the other way around — fantasy outsells SF by a factor of three to one, so it's a mystery to me why it took so long for someone to think of a fantasy magazine.

Your letters and comments are welcome. Make sure you mark them as letters or they're likely to get mixed in with writers' guidelines requests. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, E-mail: s.mccarthy@genie.geis.com.

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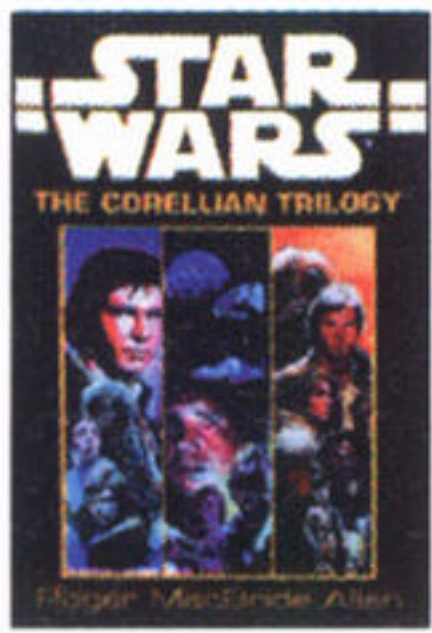
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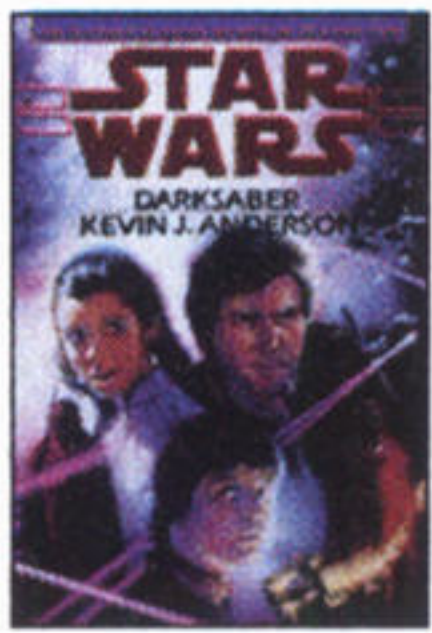
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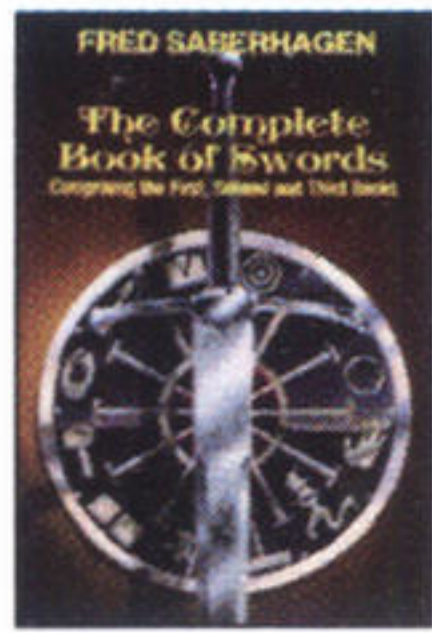
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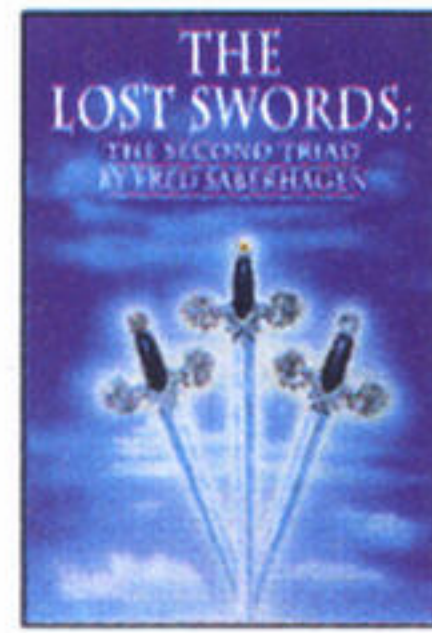
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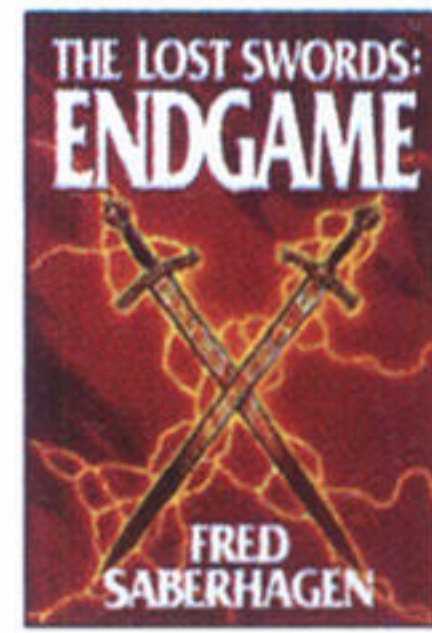
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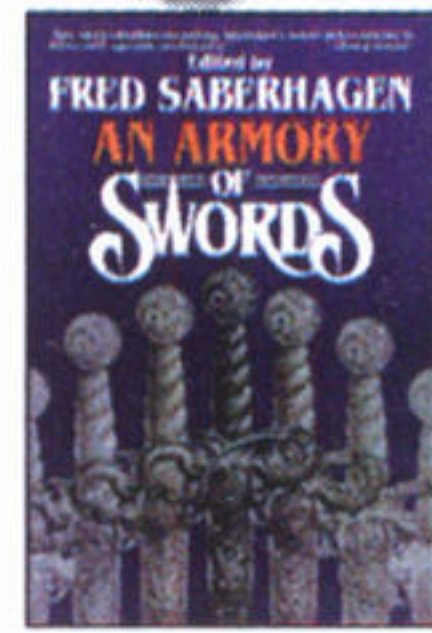
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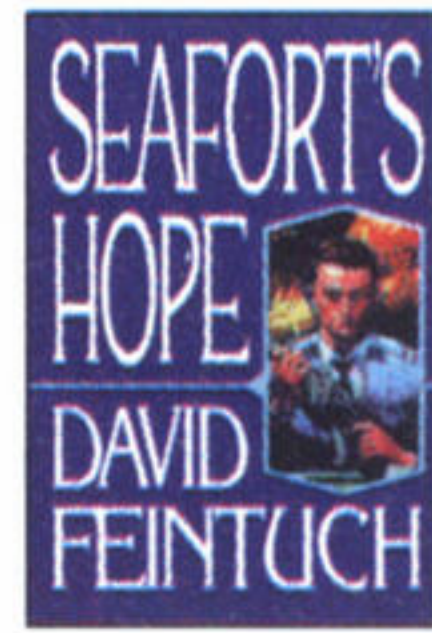
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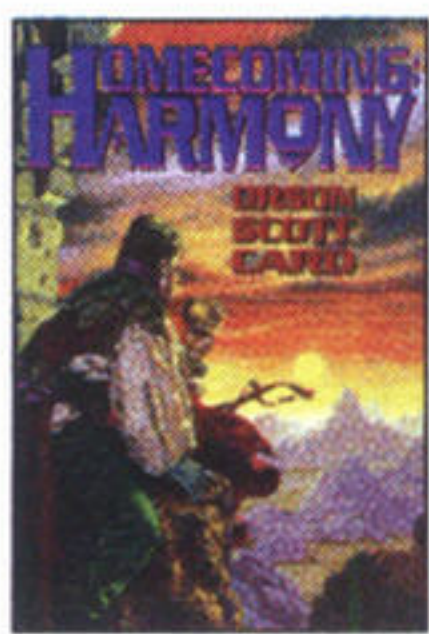
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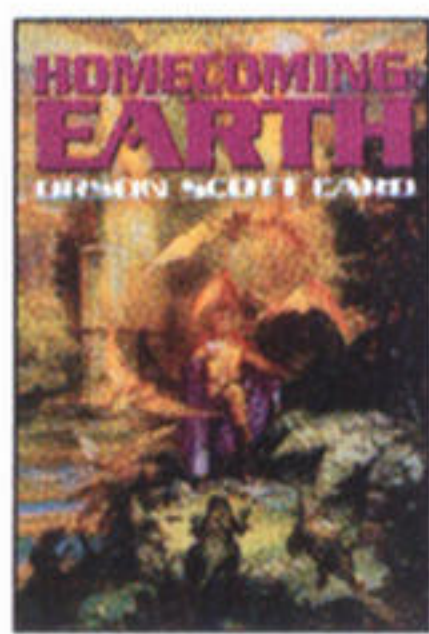
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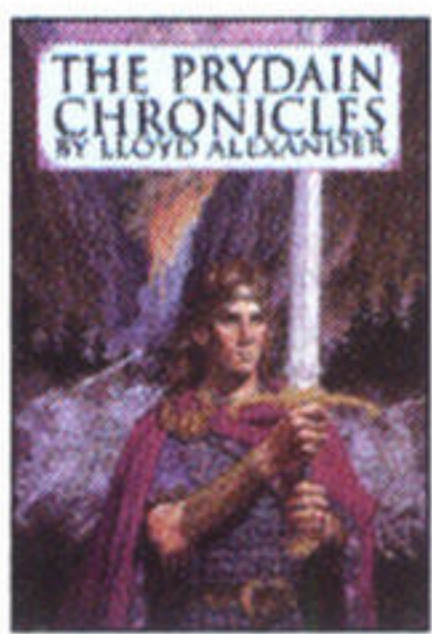
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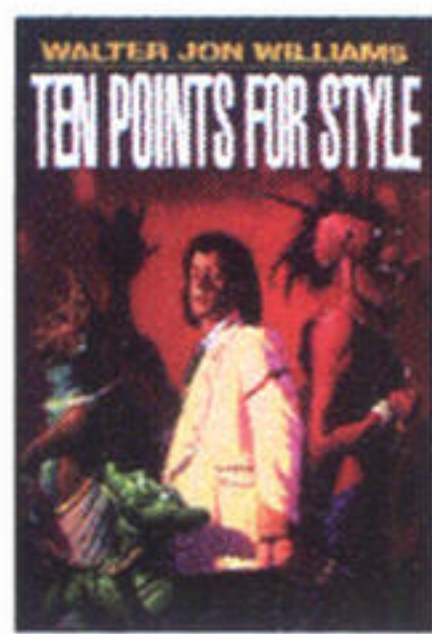
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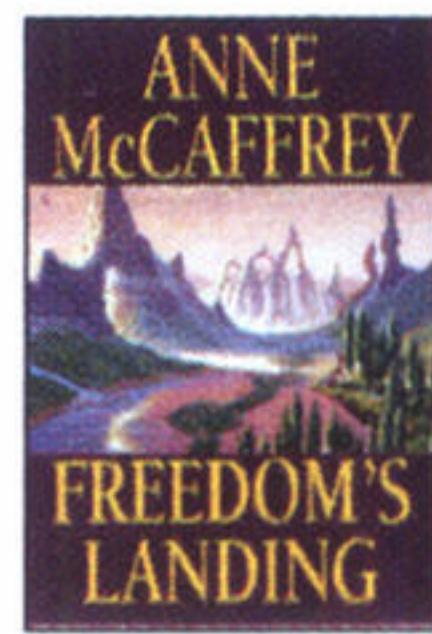
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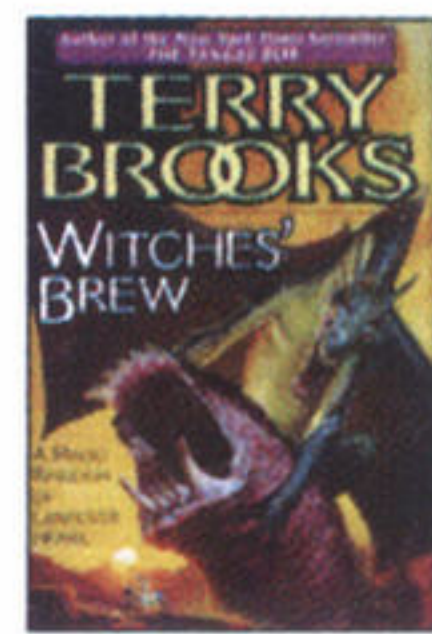
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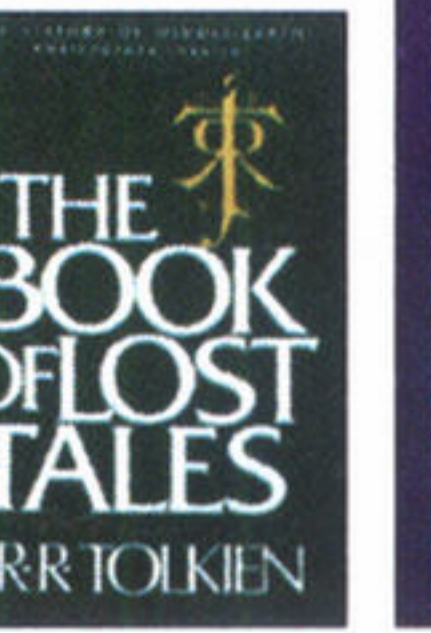
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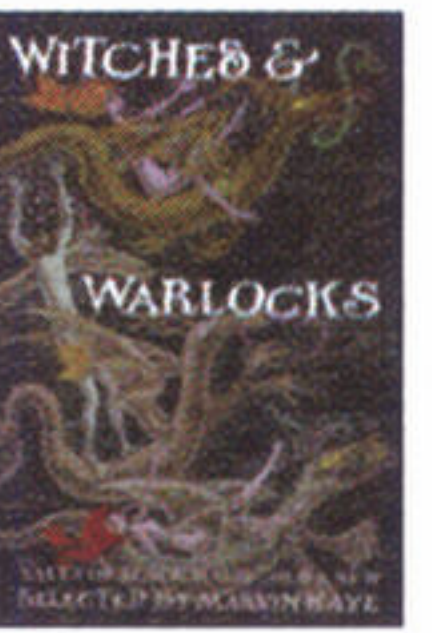
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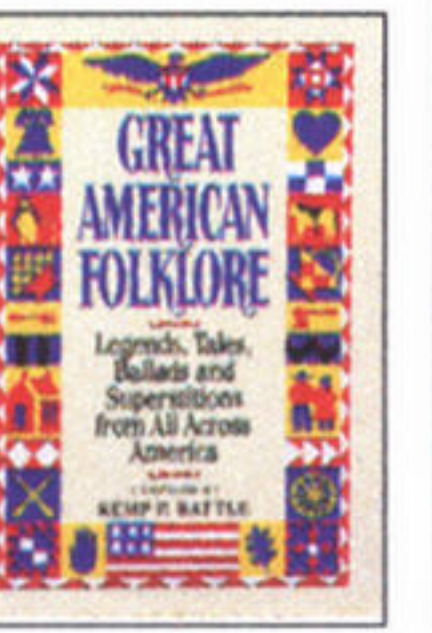
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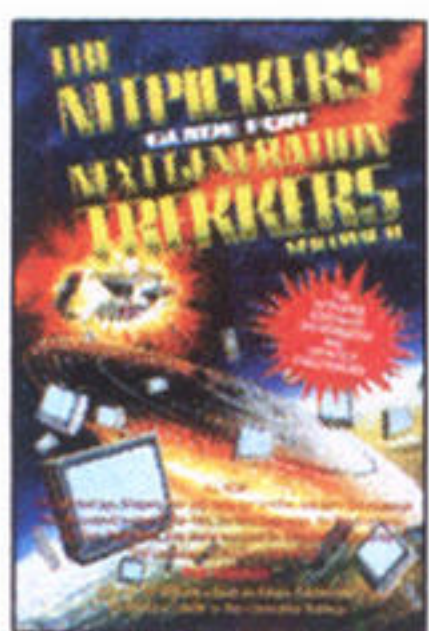
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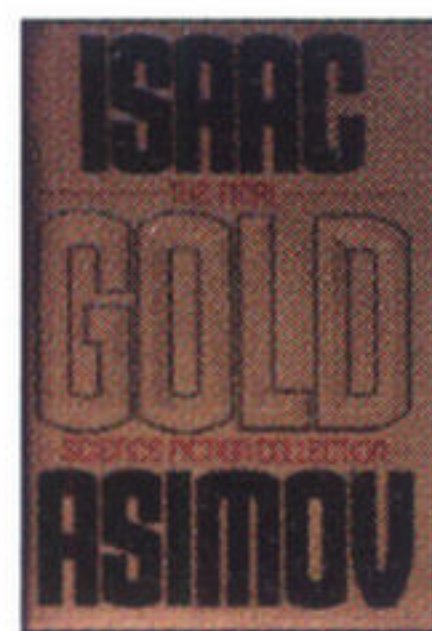
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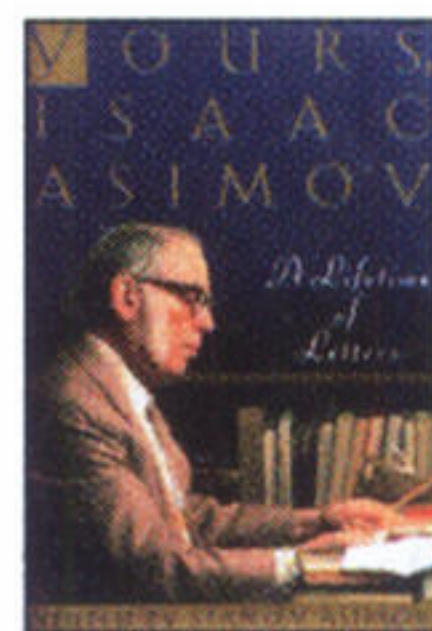
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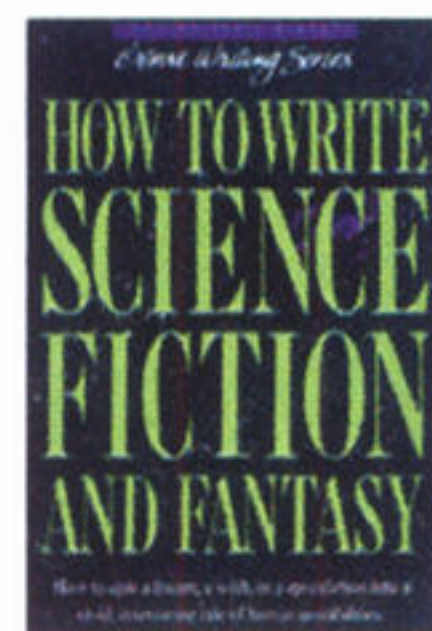
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BY GAHAN WILSON

Enjoy wondrous adventures with a giant barbarian, a thief, a magician, and plenty of neck-nickers.

WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING IS AN INTERESTING NEW OUTFIT IN THE FANTASY FIELD. They have brought out a great quantity of stuff in a very brief period of time and the material printed has been wildly varied in quality, category and intent.

The most impressive thing about them — and what decidedly sets White Wolf apart from the bulk of other book producing outfits in this highly conservative, sales-staff-driven era — is their complete willingness to experiment.

They have launched any number of odd novels penned by absolute unknowns, issued all manner of anthologies ranging from the boldly exploratory to the nebulous. They've grappled with a wide variety of formats including an elaborately produced card game about punkster werewolves.

I've no idea how well they've fared so far financially or critically, but I have quietly wished them well for their boldness and the long leashes they hand out to their editors. Now, with their issuance of *Ill Met in Lankhmar* (by Fritz Leiber, White Wolf Publishing, Clarkston, GA, 337 pp., hardcover, \$19.99), I'd like to applaud them in public.

Ill Met is a combination of what has been, up until now, the first two books in the collections of Fritz Leiber's superb fantastic tales about the doings of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser: *Swords Against Death* and *Swords and Deviltry*. The book is, one most profoundly hopes, to be the

first volume in a reissuance of the entire series. *Ill Met* will serve very well as an introduction to the World of Nehwon and its two leading heroes to anyone unfortunate enough not to have encountered them before.

Now I know that the unthinking would assume that anyone who had settled into the habit of reading a magazine entitled *Realms of Fantasy* has to be the sort of individual who's long ago read, and very probably reread, every word of Leiber's accountings of the swashbuckling and gloriously bizarre doings of Fafhrd, the huge Barbarian, and his small companion, the very urban and highly civilized Gray Mouser, but I — being old and wise and astoundingly perceptive — more than suspect it is quite possible that, even with the best intentions in the world, you may have been distracted by the lavish outpourings, not to say gushings of contemporary books of wonder, and therefore so busy plowing your way through their many, many *many* pages that you have never found the time for, nor perhaps even picked up whispers of, the thief-ridden, sinister city of Lankhmar, or the Sinking Land, or the Trollstep Mountains, or Ilthmar or even — it pains me to even consider the possibility! — Ningauble's Cave! If this does happen to be the case with you, then I thank the forces which have guided your eyes to this little column that I may herewith fervently urge you to get hold of *Ill Met in Lankhmar* as soon as it can be decently arranged and set about correcting the situation.

I was lucky enough to know Fritz Leiber — and it is tremendous luck to become friends with so rare and bright a soul — so, I feel impelled to tell the story of a particular magical moment I experienced because of his being in this world.

It took place early one morning in Providence, Rhode Island, during the first World Fantasy Convention. I'd got up a little ahead of the dawn in order to have a ramble around Lovecraft land, while all was peaceful and conducive to quiet meditations. After I'd finished and was returning to the hotel where the convention was being held I saw Fritz sauntering down the sidewalk ahead of me, apparently returning from the same sort of expedition. My first thought was to catch up to him, but then I realized he was having a fine time all by himself, looking up at lampposts still glowing in the early light and gazing at papers lazily blowing along the gutters,

Ill Met in Lankhmar introduces the fortunate reader to Fafhrd, the giant barbarian warrior and his companion, the Gray Mouser, novice wizard, swordsman, and master thief. Cover art by Mike Mignola.



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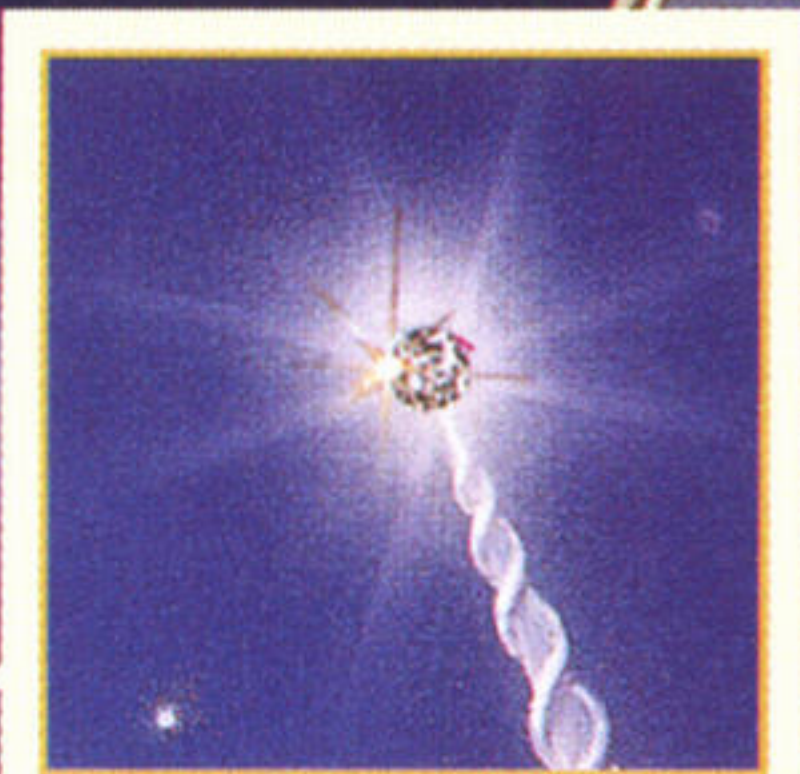


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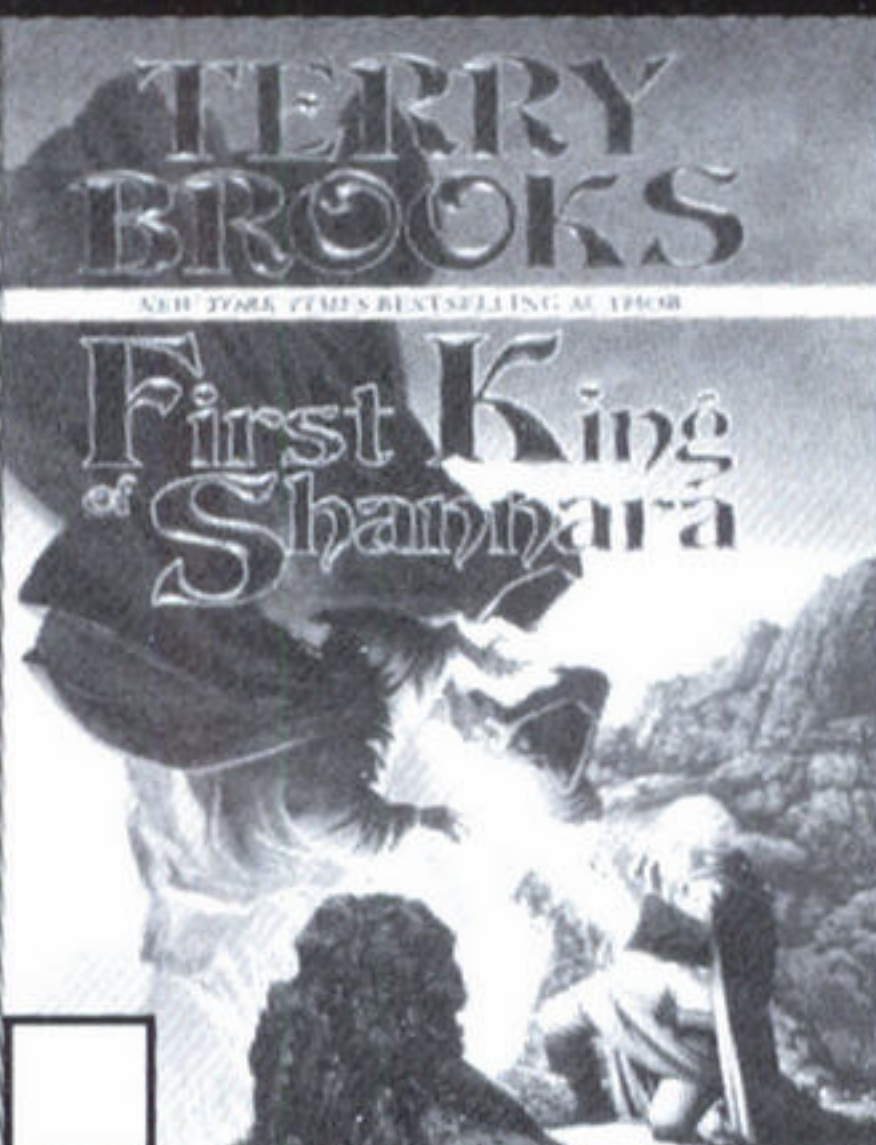
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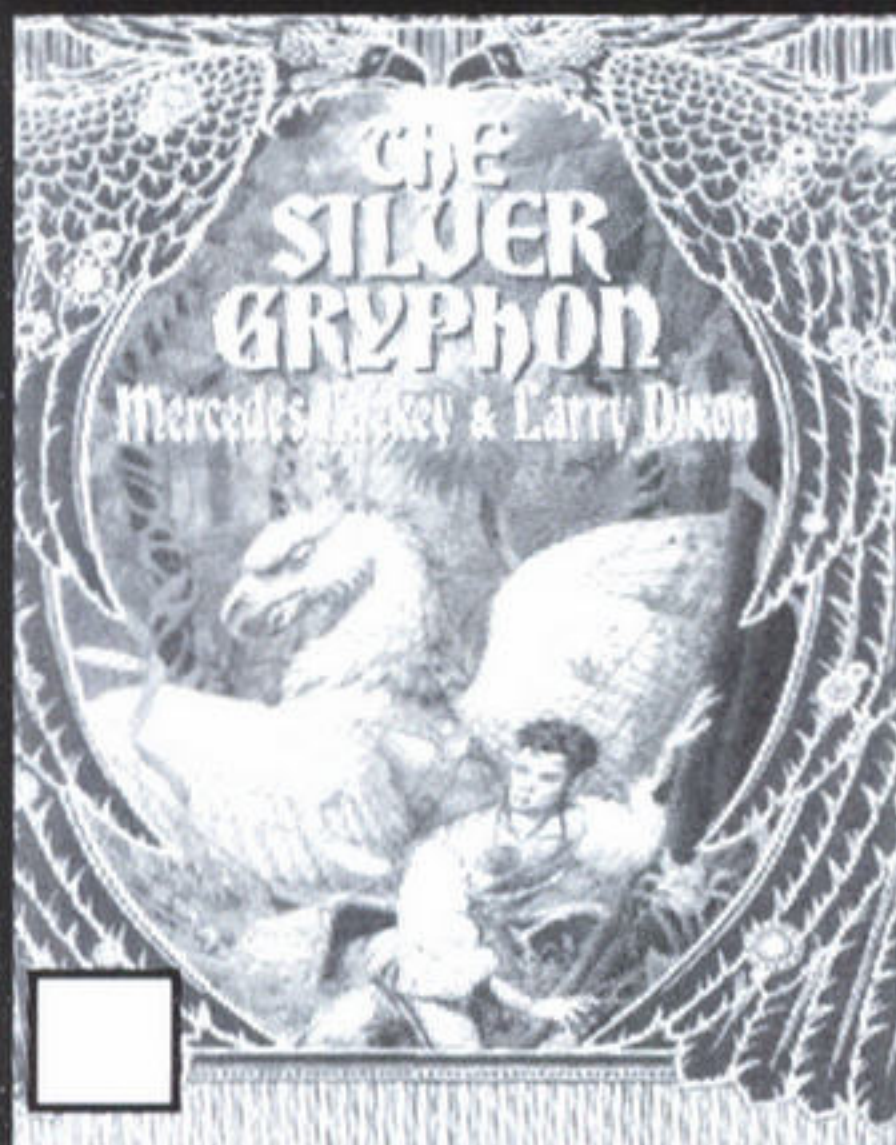
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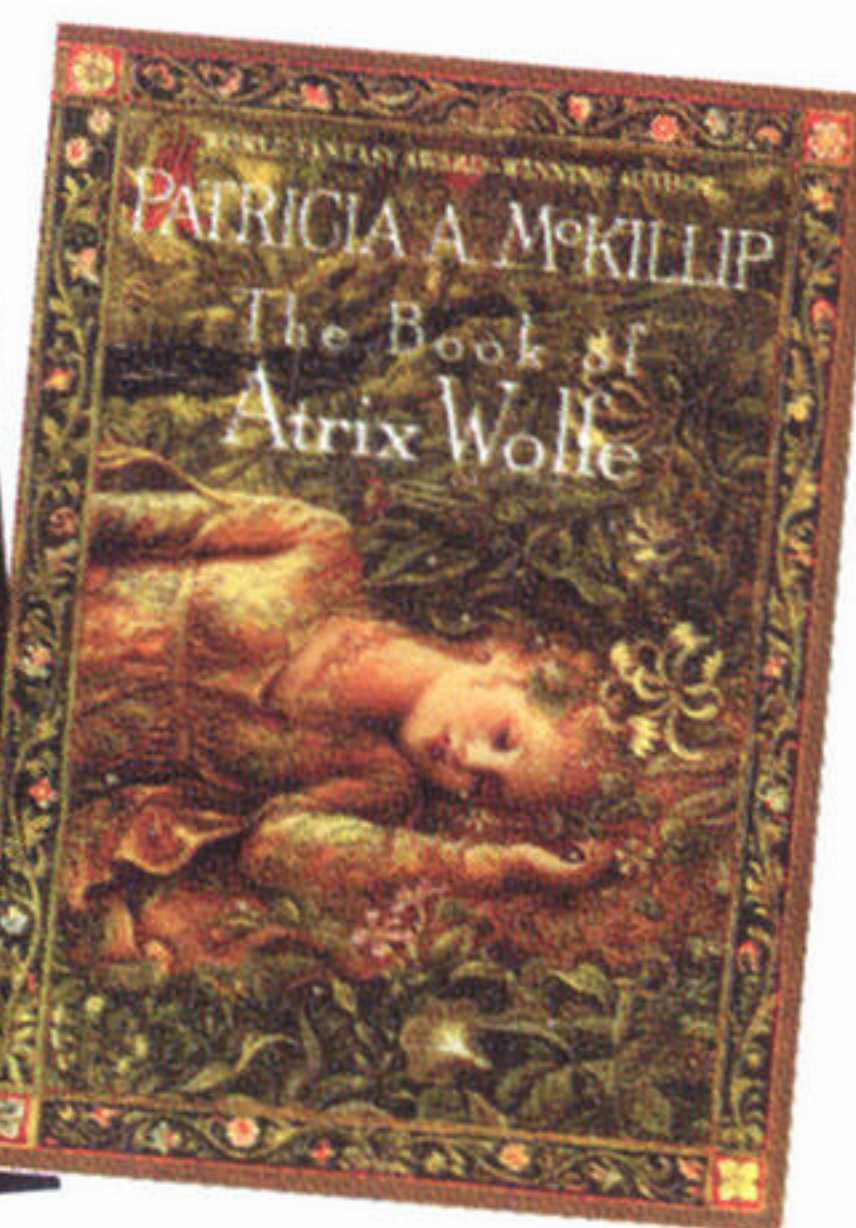
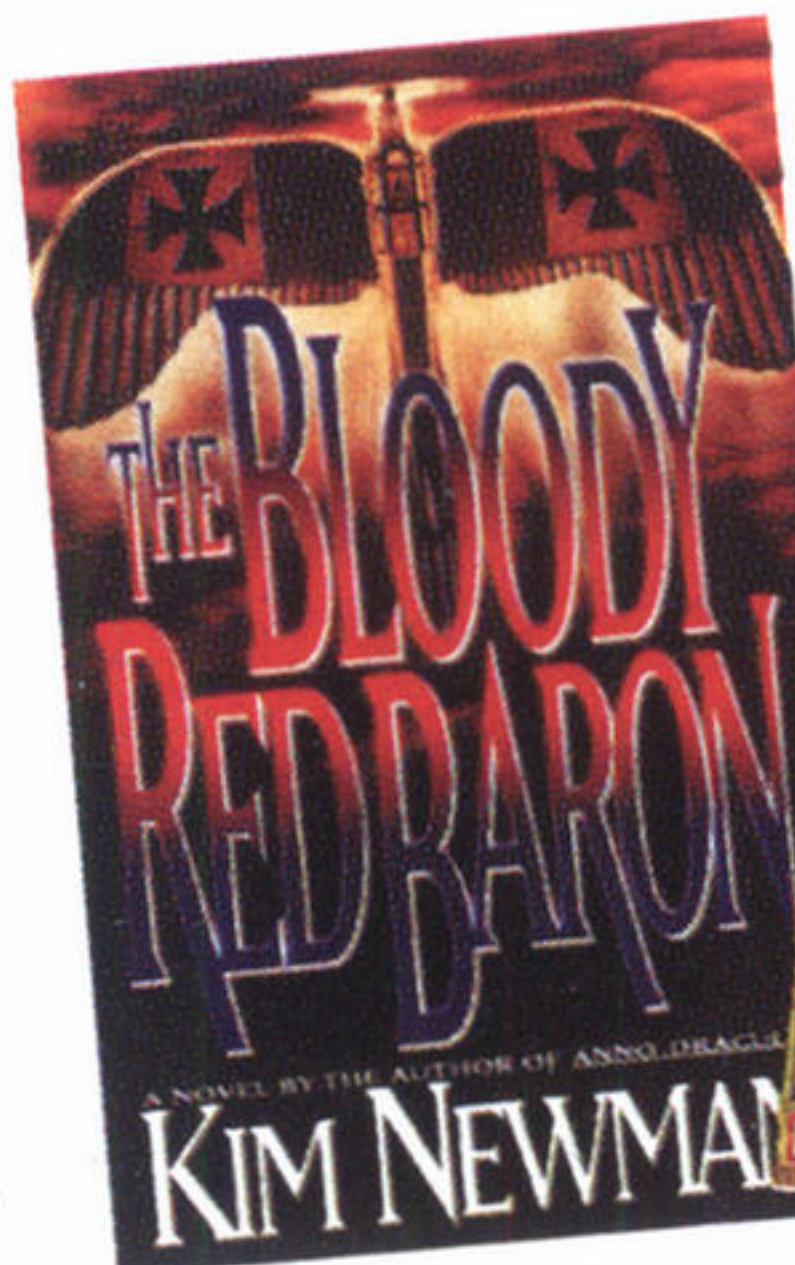
so I just let him be and ambled along a quarter block behind him.

I entered the large, empty lobby a pause after Fritz and watched him cross the big room. He looked at everything with such marvelous interest that all he saw was transformed to a wonder before my eyes, too! The pillars loomed as I had never noticed them loom before; the fancy plaster work of the ceiling took on something of the splendor of the Alhambra, and the carpet — ah, there are no words to describe how his gaze brightened and glorified the patterns of that carpet!

Then he stepped over to the elevator bank and gently, like a magician respectful of the great potency of his summonings, pressed an UP button. Sure enough — the doors of an elevator opened and revealed an interior which I had never before noticed, composed of congeries of sparkling gems, each one brilliantly illuminated with a brilliant faery fire of its very own. Carefully, full of awe, Fritz stepped inside the elevator and the doors gently closed on the sight of him gaping wide-eyed and entirely content at the splendors all around him.

Love & Sleep, by John Crowley, Bantam Books, NY, 502 pp., paperback, \$12.95.

Speaking of magic, John Crowley's *Love & Sleep* is not only all about it, it is a kind of



extended spell itself. It wraps around the reader, word by word, image by image, like thicker and thicker bandings of ectoplasm, swathing and charming, creating an atmosphere in order to tease hidden bits and pieces out of

you, to expose workings of your mind never really lit before, to lead you into speculations you are likely doomed to continue at some level for the rest of your life.

Crowley freely confesses the influence of Dame Francis Yates, a truly remarkable philosopher/historian who wrote a series of books on pivotal individuals of the Renaissance. Crowley's characters rival those in Yates' books.

In *Love & Sleep* Crowley first introduces us, carefully and affectionately, to a really marvelous bunch of characters, the main one, our basic eyes in the story, being one Pierce Mofgett, who, as a child, is first intrigued and then permanently inclined by a book he borrows from the state library in Kentucky and then voraciously absorbs: Alexis Payne de St'Phalle's *A Dictionary of Deities, Devils, and Demons of Mankind*.

Pierce grows to be a middle-aged teacher and historian who encounters yet another mind-shaking grinmoire, this one being the manuscript of an unprinted philosophical novel written by Fellows Kraft, a writer

Books to Look For

Luthien's Gamble, by R.A. Salvatore (Warner Aspect, \$18.95). Book Two in the "Crimson Shadow" trilogy, *Luthien's Gamble* should help establish this best-selling TSR author with a more mainstream audience. In it, Luthien Bedwyr, hero of *The Sword of Bedwyr*, must continue the struggle for freedom he began in book one.

The Alien Life of Wayne Barlowe (Morpheus International, 9250 Wilshire Blvd, Suite LL15, Beverly Hills, CA 90212 \$24.95). Though the artist is admittedly the husband of this magazine's editor, this collection of his work is well worth the fantasy enthusiast's time. Where writers take flights of fancy and turn them into books and stories, this artist renders them visible and gives them names.

The Waterborn, by J. Gregory Keyes (Del Rey, \$24.00). Taken from the nature mythologies of cultures as varied as Native American and Chinese, this first novel looks like a breakout book for the author, a Ph.D. student in belief systems and mythology.

The Dragon and the Djinn, by Gordon R. Dickson (Ace Books, \$21.95). This is the fourth book in the Dragon Knight series, in which a twentieth century American is transformed into a Dragon Knight and transported into a fantastic medieval adventure. In it, Sir James Eckert must complete a quest in the Holy Land and face the legendary Djinn.

The Judas Glass, by Michael Cadnum (Carroll & Graf, \$22.95). A lyrical yet terrible vampire romance, this novel shows what can be done with an overworked theme when reworked by an author with incredible talent and tremendous vision.

A Gift of Her Own, by Wendy Pini (Warp Graphics, \$16.95). The first in a series of nicely written and illustrated *Elfquest* books for children.

Darkness, I, by Tanith Lee (St. Martin's Press, \$24.95). A favorite among this magazine's readers, Tanith Lee returns with Book Three in her *Scarabae* series, a dark and complex tale of love, lust, murder and immortality.

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Pierce much admired in childhood who has faded into almost total obscurity in the few years' passage of time since his death. This book germinates and causes to sprout the seed planted by the prior volume.

What happens then takes hold of Pierce and all the other characters which Crowley has, with great art and skill, gotten us to care about and plunges them, with all their warm humanity, with all their enormous vulnerabilities and strengths, into deep, dark, swirling, positively bottomless cosmic waters. It's really quite a trip.

Taking the renaissance as his major sample, Crowley's novel speculates on one of the puzzles which, as a reader of a magazine such as this, I am sure you must have toyed with, or which must have toyed with you.

Why is history so oddly *different* from now? Why do separate chunks of it — when viewed in certain lights, from certain perspectives, from varying lengths of time — seem so incongruous as to be almost *sealed off* from one another? Why do they divide? How is it possible for them to have such totally different tonalities? Why do many mulling these things often get a sense of sudden shifts? Kraft's manuscript offers an explanation which, like all good science fiction or fantasy (take your choice or both at a gulp), seems hauntingly possible.

Just suppose " ... time and the world do not flow evenly forward together, but are subject to quite sudden, total, and irreversible alterations. Every now and then the observable universe passes through a sort of turnstile or baffle and comes out different on the other side — different not only in its physical extensions and the laws that govern them, but different in its past and future too: once the world was all like *this*; then it changed; now it's like *this*, and always has been."

A strange, lovely thought and Crowley brings it forth and develops it with characters who are — both imagined and real — marvelously alive and convincing. Including the frightening and finally frightened angel Madimi. You don't want to miss meeting the angel Madimi!

The Bloody Red Baron, by Kim Newman, Carroll & Graf, NY, 356 pp., hardcover, \$21.00.

It will be news to none of you that, urged on by the size of prior sales, a huge industry of vampire books has come into being. Authors of every kind and description are turning them out by the yard. What used to be one small corner of fantasy fiction has turned into a thriving genre all its own.

Of course, following the law put forth by the late, great fantasy master Theodore Sturgeon ("99 percent of everything is crap") (or was it "shit"?), most of the bloodsucking epics crowding the shelves of the chain book dealers is awful, tiresome stuff consisting of exhausted (and exhausting) reworkings of the old myth, sprinkled with remarkably tiresome innovations which you can — usu-

Continued on page 26

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BY TERRI WINDLING

Merlin and Melusine: Legends from the Breton coast of France.

A STORM WAS COMING, BUT THE WINDS WERE STILL, AND IN THE WILD WOODS OF Broceliande, before an oak, so hollow, huge and old it look'd a tower of ivied mason-work, at Merlin's feet the wily Vivien lay ...," wrote Victorian poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson in *Idylls of the King*. Drawing upon Mallory's *Morte d'Arthur* and older Arthurian sources, Tennyson created his epic poem of Arthur, Merlin and Camelot — including the story of Merlin's fatal seduction by a fairy enchantress. In Tennyson's version of the tale, Merlin is a gray-bearded old man seeking solitude from Arthur's court in the forest of Broceliande. Vivien (in other versions called Nimue) is the beautiful fairy who follows him there, intent on doing the old man harm and "fancying that her glory would be great according to the greatness whom she quenched." Tennyson's Vivien is a wicked creature who succeeds in trapping Merlin within a tower built of his own strong spells — not because he ever quite succumbs to her erotic charms, but because he is old, tired, underestimating the danger she presents.

There's a very different version of the tale that comes from Broceliande itself, an ancient forest that still exists in the Brittany region of France. According to this legend, Vivien is the daughter of a fairy and a Breton lord:

The Pre-Raphaelite painters were fascinated by Tennyson's portrayal of Arthurian legends in *Idylls of the King*. Here, Edward Burne-Jones illustrates *The Beguiling of Merlin*.



lovely and intelligent, with her mother's penchant for magic. Merlin meets her by the fairy fountain in the forest and is charmed by her beauty and her wit. They spend a year and a day together, then Merlin returns to Arthur's court. But he is a prophet; he knows it is his fate to end his days imprisoned by love. In resignation he goes back across the English Channel to the Breton wild-wood. Once again in Vivien's arms, his passion is rekindled, and he teaches her the spell that will bind them together forever at the heart of the forest.

British author Robert Holdstock has taken inspiration from Tennyson's more sinister version of the tale in *Merlin's Wood*, a contemporary novel that weaves together Arthurian lore with older Celtic legends. Setting his story on a present-day farm near the Forest of Paimpont (on the site of Broceliande), he creates a haunting picture of the timeless struggle between enchanter and enchantress — and its effect on all who live too close to the shadows of the wood. A.S. Byatt is another modern writer who works with ancient Breton tales in her extraordinary novel *Possession*, winner of the Booker Prize. The novel makes use of the legend of Melusine, and of the Drowned City of Is, but it also touches on the Merlin story and its place in Breton tradition.

"Today the storytelling begins," writes Byatt (in the voice of Sabine de Kercoz, a young woman in an isolated village on the coast of Finistere). "Everywhere in Brittany the storytelling begins at Toussaint [November], in the Black Month. It goes on through December, the Very Black Month, as far as the Christmas story My father told the tale of Merlin and Vivien. The two characters are never the same in successive years. Merlin is always old and wise, and clear-sighted about his doom. Vivien is always beautiful, and various and dangerous. The end is always the same. But my father, within this framework, has many stories. Sometimes the fairy and the magician are true lovers Sometimes he is old and tired and ready to lay down his burden and she is a tormenting daemon. Sometimes it is a battle of wits, in which she is all passionate emulation, a daemonic will to overcome him, and he is wise beyond belief and impotent with it. Tonight he was not so decrepit, nor yet so clever — he was ruefully courteous, knowing that her time had come, and ready to take pleasure in his eternal swoon, or dream or contemplation"

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 Cassanova Gava (**Conan**)
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Reading *Possession* and *Merlin's Wood*, as well as the older tales they draw upon, gave me the strong desire to see the land of "Little Britain" myself (as the early Celts called Brittany) — particularly as it lies just a ferry ride away from my Devon home. I phoned Rob Holdstock in London for advice, remembering that he had traveled there in preparation for writing *Merlin's Wood*. "Broceliande will disappoint you," he warned. "There's not much of it left anymore. Go if you must, but then head south to Carnac, for the standing stones. And west to Finistere — that's where you'll find enchanted forests." I filled my old car with books of Breton tales, sketch pads, paints, Celtic music tapes, and caught a late-night ferry from the south of England to St. Malo in Bretagne.

By morning, my traveling companion and I were on the road to the Forest of Paimpont, a forest of twenty-seven square miles that is all that remains of legendary Broceliande. In December, the oak and hawthorne were leafless; the winter sky the silver-white of old pearls. Rob had been right. Unlike the vast forest he'd conjured in his novel, the actual remaining wood of Broceliande was not particularly impressive; it seemed small, thin and spindly compared to the deep, tangled woodland of Dartmoor back home. And yet ... it was a haunted place, quiet and still in the morning light. I thought of the tales I had heard of this wood: White deer who were fairy women in disguise; to hunt them was to court one's own death. Infants brought to the fountain in the wood to seek the fairies' blessing. Sir Roland of Brittany had vowed not to touch a woman's lips with his own — until the night he came across a strange chateau in the depths of Broceliande. A lady of dazzling beauty invited the knight to come and rest until dawn. She enticed him with food, wine, and music, until finally he could resist no more — but as he bent down to kiss her lips, the sun came over the woodland. The chateau transformed into an oak grove, its furnishings into moss-covered rocks, the lady into a hideous hag, furious at losing her prey.

The Chateau de Comper still sits at the edge of the forest, partially inhabited and partially in ruins. This was where Vivien is said to have been born, and where she raised Sir Lancelot, and where she gave Arthur his sword (in her guise as Lady of the Lake). Not far from there is Merlin's Tomb, two slabs of stone in a holly grove where the old enchanter's body still lies imprisoned, according to some legends — or asleep with Vivien faithfully at his side according to others. The Val sans Retour (Valley of No Return) is one of the sites most steeped in magic. A footpath leads to a small hidden lake, beautifully set in the folds of the hills. It is said that on certain moonlit nights the waters will reflect the face of the man or woman whom one is destined to love. Morgana, Arthur's sorceress sister, enraged by the faithless love of a knight, once cast this valley under a spell preventing anyone who

had done wrong from finding their way out again. Indeed, the whole of the Forest of Paimpont seems to be under a subtle spell, an eerie, misty timelessness. We found ourselves driving in circles, although the wood was small and our map well-marked — lost despite my companion's usual infallible sense of direction ...

Finding our way out of Merlin's wood, we headed south for the Morbihan coast, which contains some of the most mysterious pagan monuments to be found anywhere in the world. Brittany is a Celtic land where pagan traditions lie just beneath, or entwined with, the Christian ones that followed. Celts arrived in the area sometime before the fifth century BC, naming the country Armorica (country of the sea). With the coming of Caesar in 56 BC, the land fell under Roman rule; later, in the fifth to seventh centuries, a new Celtic population arrived. They came from Wales, Devon, and Cornwall (primarily the later, judging by the similarities between the Breton and Cornish languages), driven from their own countries by the Angles and the Saxons. Although the independent Duchy of Brittany has long since been swallowed up by greater France, the Breton people still retain a language and customs all their own — and the land remains a vital stronghold of Celtic storytelling, music, and traditions.

The famous megaliths of Brittany are thought to be pre-Celtic, but (like Britain's Stonehenge) their origin is not precisely known. Although megaliths can be found throughout the Breton countryside in astonishing numbers, the Morbihan Gulf holds the greatest concentration of menhirs, cromlechs, dolmen, and tumuli. The district around the village of Carnac alone contains more than three thousand standing stones, arranged in westerly parallel lines ending in a semicircle surrounding the hamlet of Menec. Some legends say the stones were erected by the Korrigans — a dwarflike creature common to Breton folktales. Others say they were used for pagan astronomy, rites, or divination. A local Christian tale attributes the stones to Carnac's patron Saint Cornely: Attempting to convert a pagan tribe, he found himself faced by an angry mob. Calling upon heaven for aid, the pagans were instantly turned to stone, and still stand guard on Carnac's coast against the old religion's return. The effectiveness of this guardianship seems dubious when we look at the local practice, still extant in this century, of rubbing one's flesh against certain stones, at certain times of the waning and waxing moon, to aid fertility, childbirth, or to cure any number of ills. One night a year (generally Christmas night) these enormous stones walk down to the sea to bathe, dance, and refresh themselves — but great misfortune falls on anyone who would dare to witness the scene. They say there is treasure under the stones, but those who succeed at plundering it are dead by morning, or find that it turns to leaves and dust in their hand.

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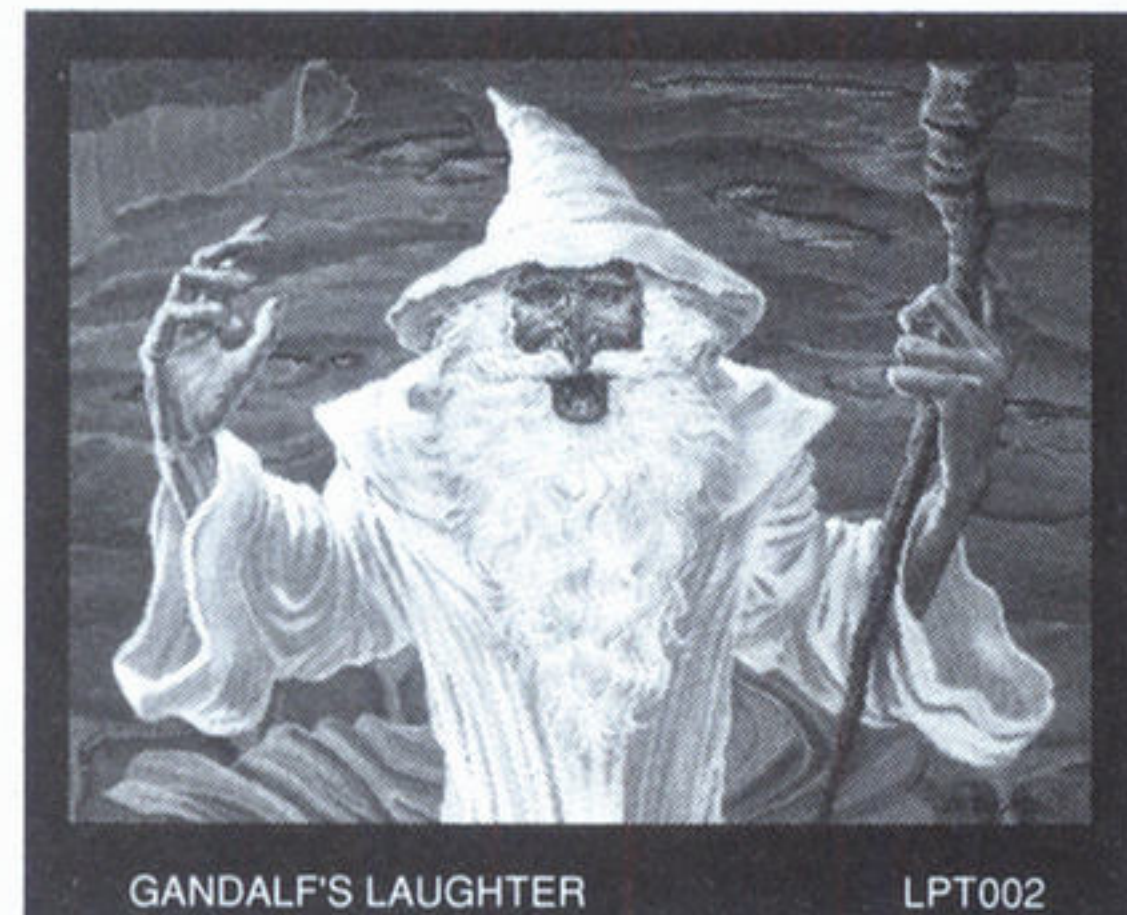
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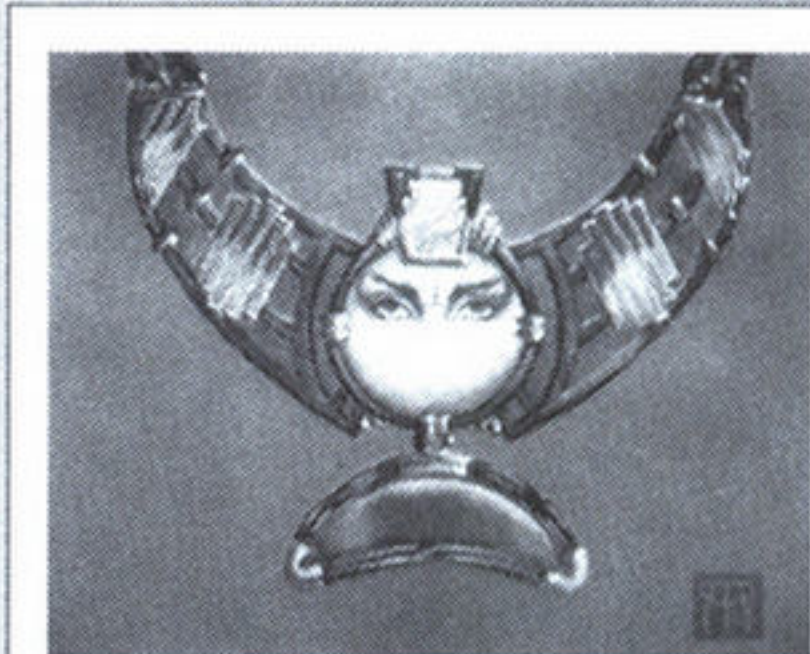


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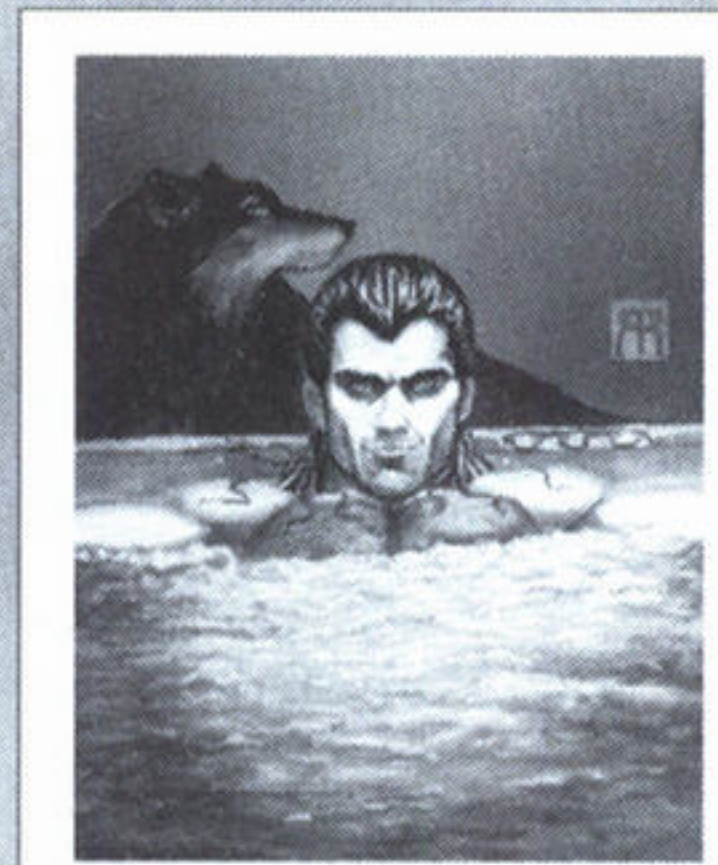


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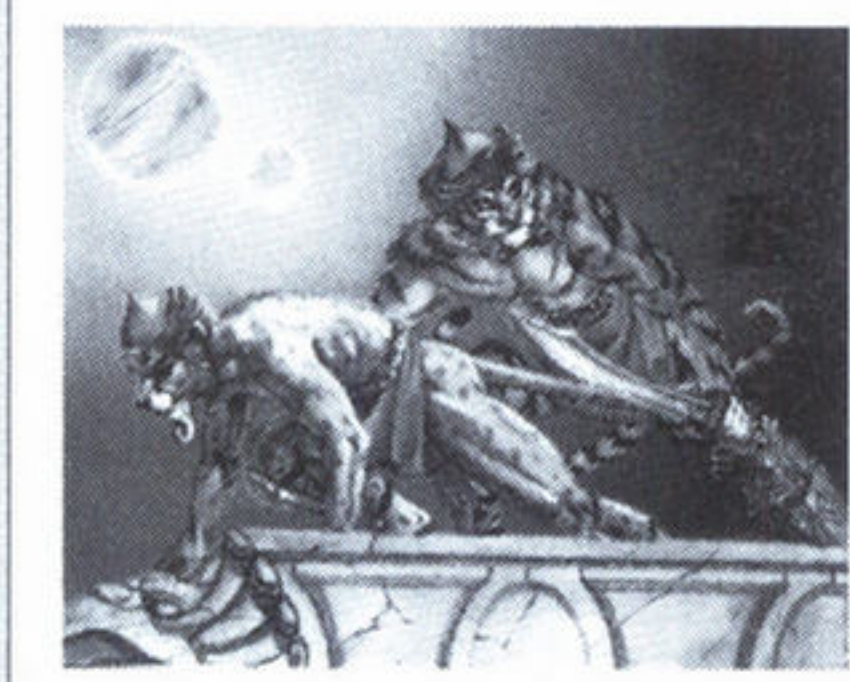
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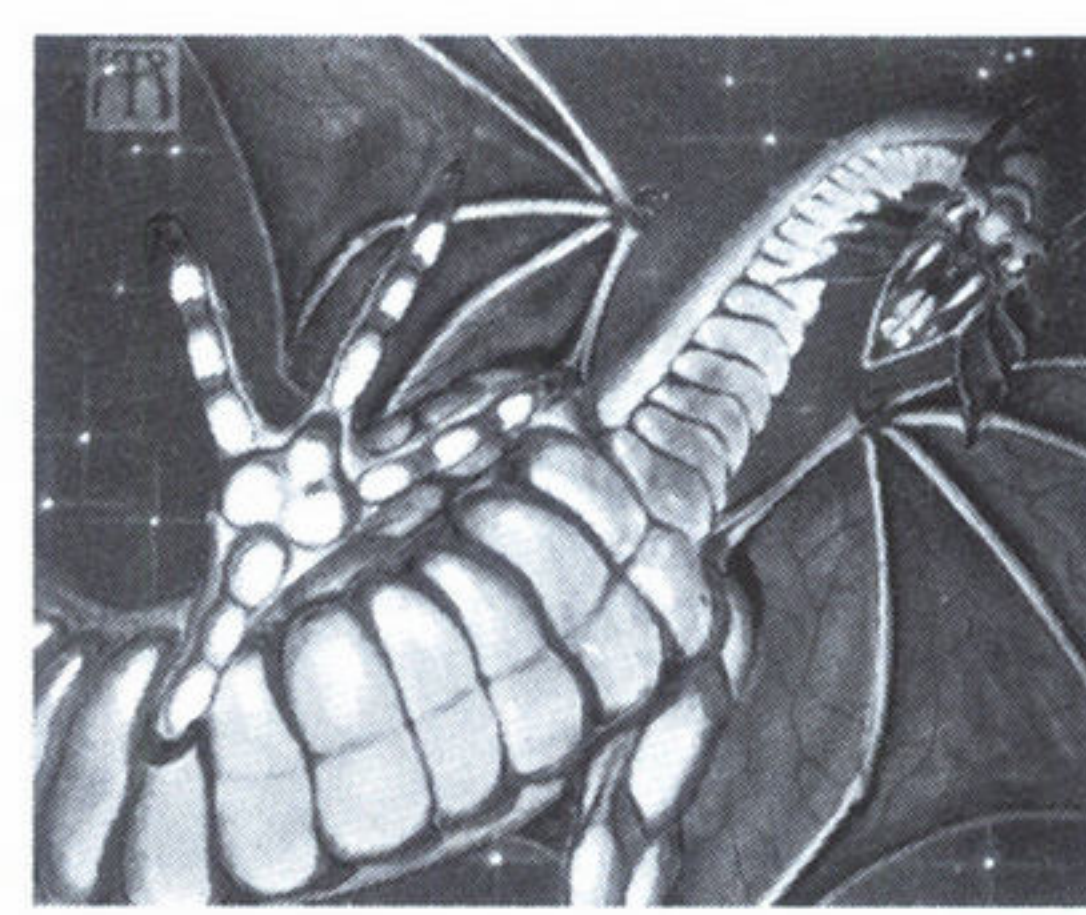
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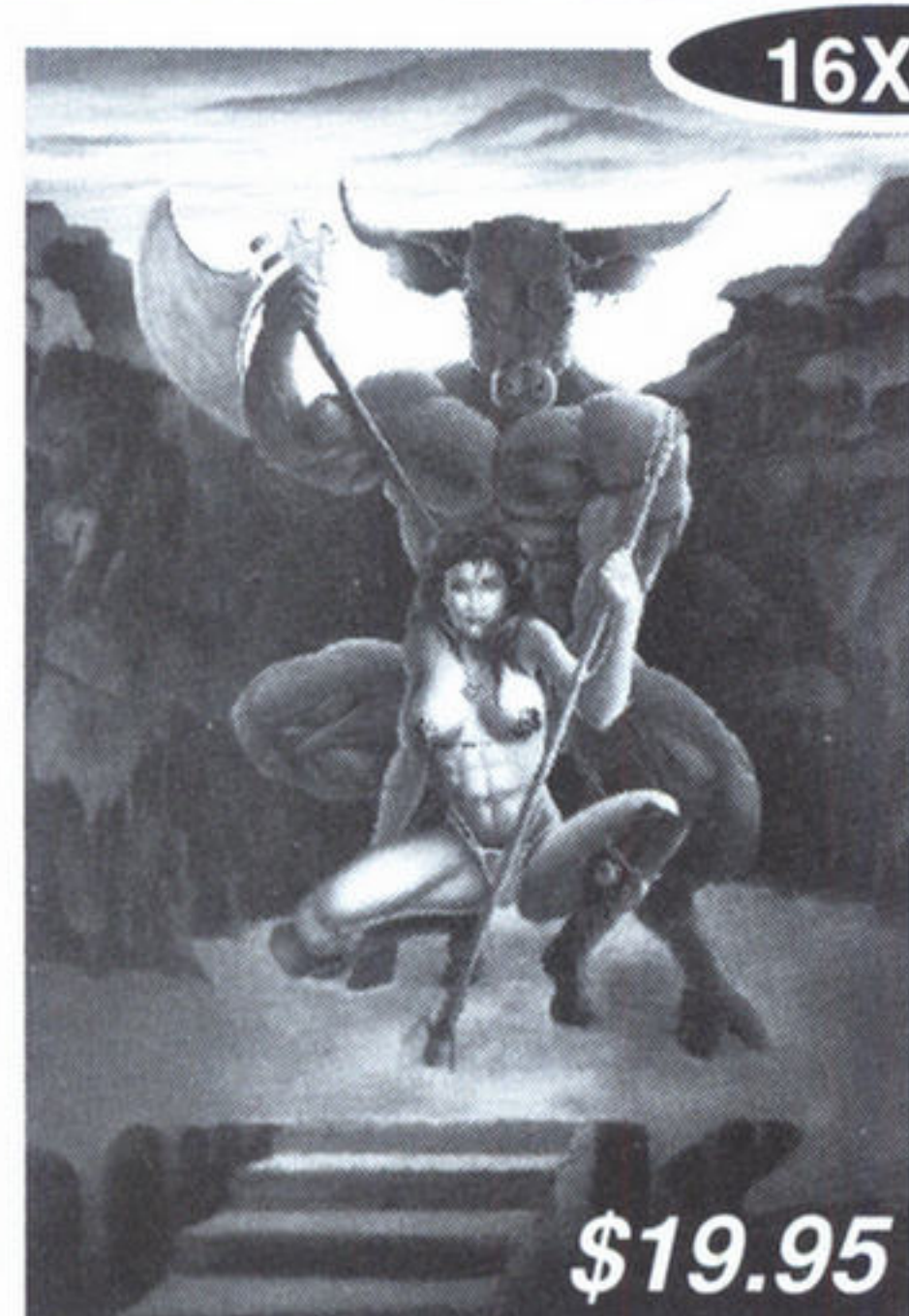
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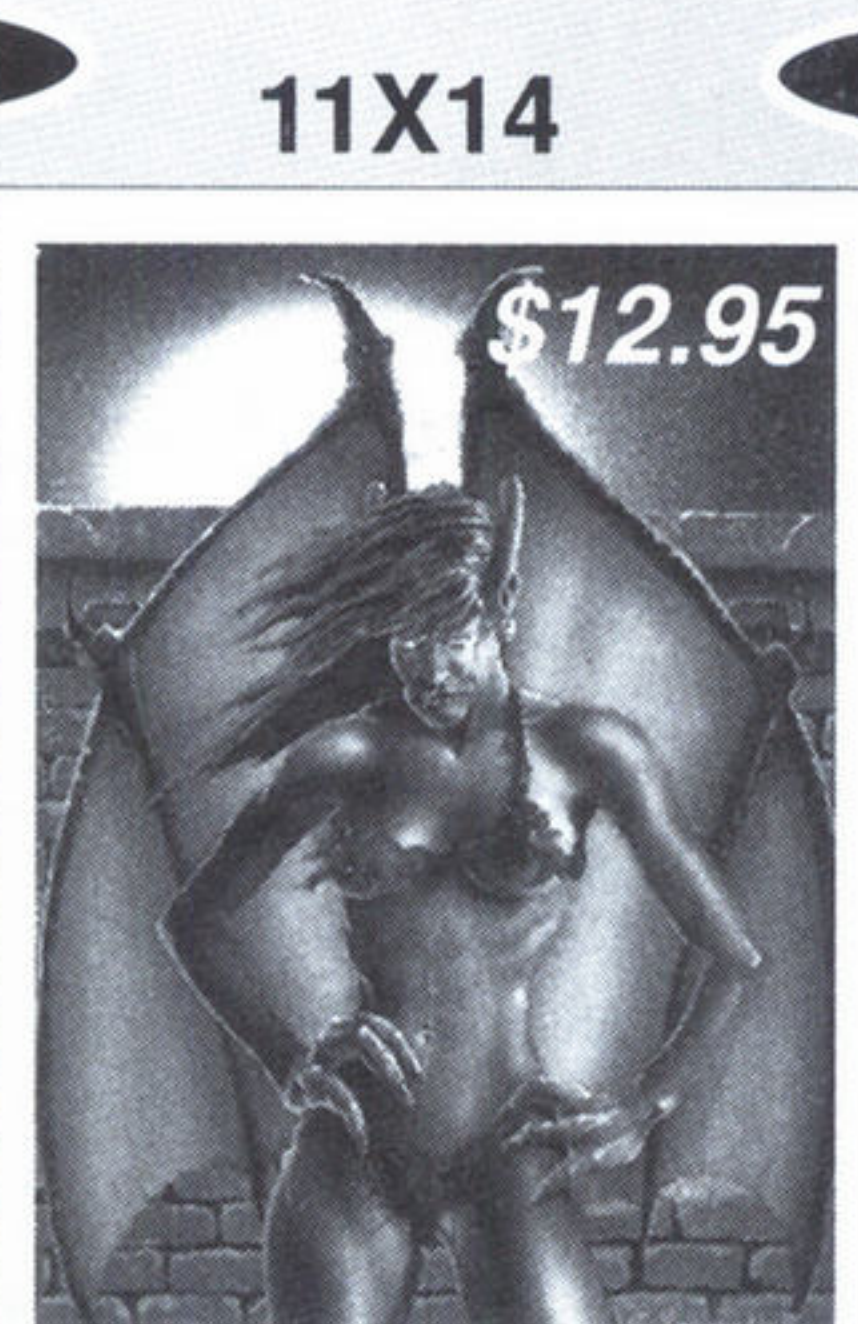
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Owings Mills, Maryland – The National Library of Poetry has just announced that \$24,000 in prizes will be awarded over the next 12 months in the North American Open Amateur Poetry Contest. The contest is open to everyone and entry is free.

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The poem should be no more than 20 lines, and the poet’s name and address must appear on the top of the page. “Each poem received will be acknowledged, usually within seven weeks,” indicated Mr. Ely. Every poet who enters will receive an evaluation of their artistry.



The Coming of Dawn, featured above, is one of The National Library of Poetry’s recent deluxe hardbound anthologies.

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Having awarded over \$90,000 in prizes to over 5,000 poets worldwide in recent years, The National Library of Poetry, founded in 1982 to promote the artistic accomplishments of contemporary poets, is the largest organization of its kind in the world. Anthologies published by the organization have featured poems by more than 100,000 poets. “Our anthologies routinely sell out because they are truly enjoyable reading, and they are also a sought-after sourcebook for poetic talent,” said Mr. Ely.

“We’re always looking for new poetic talent,” he added. “I hope you urge your readers to enter the contest. There is absolutely no obligation whatsoever, and they could be our next big winner.”

From Carnac we traveled west along the coast, past reedy shores, through fishing villages, and up through the old Forest of Carnoet. This wood too was full of legends — of saints, supernatural ferrymen, werewolves, and spectral huntsmen. Here was the castle of the Bluebeard of Cornouaille, who put his first four wives to death, for he had heard a prophesy that he would die by his child’s hand. When his fifth wife gave birth, she was able to save her child’s life with the aid of the murdered women’s ghosts. The cruel man eventually found his son and had him beheaded, but the boy tucked his head under his arm, threw a handful of dirt at the castle walls, and the castle collapsed, burying his bloodthirsty father alive. Also in Carnoet was the ruins of a tower where once a tragic young woman was imprisoned, walled up by the wealthy and jealous old man to whom she’d been given in marriage. She did not conceive an heir, to the old man’s great frustration, and her beauty faded as she pined away. One night a hawk flew to her window, and turned into a beautiful young man — a lord of Cornouaille, drawn to the tower by the sound of her sad songs. He returned to visit her nightly and the two soon became lovers ... until her husband discovered all and had the window hung with swords and knives. The hawk, mortally wounded, returned to his own castle to die. Pregnant now, cast out by her husband, she followed a trail of blood to her lover’s home. With his dying breath he gave her the ring by which their son, when he grew to manhood, could claim his father’s throne.

Marie de France elaborates this tale in her popular *Lais* of the 12th or 13th centuries (the date depending on which account you read). Born in France, Marie spent the greater part of her life with the English court, where she became famous as a poetess composing chivalric romances — many of them set in Brittany, and drawn from Breton sources. Also dating from the 12th century is the romance *Tristan in Brittany*, written by “Thomas the Anglo-Norman” and available in an excellent edition translated by Dorothy L. Sayers (better known for her mystery novels). The story is part of the Arthurian tradition and most of it takes place across the English Channel in Cornwall; but Tristan himself (whose name means “child of sorrow”) is Breton-born, and it is to Brittany he returns in the end. There, he marries Iseult of the White Hand although his heart still longs for the other Iseult, married to his uncle, the Cornish king. Ile Tristan (Tristan Island) lies off the western coast near the town of Douarnenez; it is here Tristan is said to be buried in one grave with Iseult of Cornwall.

The Ile de Sein in the Baie des Trepasses is another island with legendary associations. It is believed to have been the high seat of the Celtic religion, and a place of oracular magic. Nine druid priestesses, known as the Gallicinae, inhabited the island, with the power to raise the wind and sea, to turn themselves into

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animals, to cure wounds and diseases, and to see into the future. In Celtic times, the dead were sent to the women of the Ile de Sein; from there they traveled on to the summer lands of an Earthly Paradise. The Baie des Trepasses is one of the many locations given for the famous Drowned City of Is (also called Ys, or Ker-Ys in Breton tales). According to legend, Is was the capital of Cornouaille — a city so beautiful it inspired the name of Paris (Par-Is, "like Is"). Built by the sea, the city was protected by a dike, locked with a golden key. The king of Is had a daughter, Dahut — headstrong, proud, and wild. Dahut was seduced by a daemon or a fairy, who took the form of a beautiful young man. As proof of her love, he asked her to open the sea gate at night to let him in. She stole the key while her father slept, opened the gates, and the sea flooded in. They say on certain quiet moonlit nights you can still hear the bells of Is ringing from far under the waves.

Being a coastal nation with treacherous waters that have cost many lives, a great number of Breton tales involve fairy creatures who lived in the waves, seducing human men and women, luring them to their deaths. The Morgans of Finistere were sea fairies who lived in the shallows and sea-side caves; it was unlucky to walk the shore alone at night lest a Morgan be encountered. Mary Morgans were sirens who particularly liked young, strong fishermen, pulling them under the waves to live lives of ease in palaces of coral. The famous Fairy Melusine was part sea-serpent and part woman. She was happily married to a human nobleman, and even bore him several sons — until he spied the fairy at her bath in her true, half-serpent guise. Off the Pointe des Espagnols near Brest a fisherman was given a cup of sweet-smelling nectar by a mermaid. In it was a magic potion that would cause him to forget his sweetheart back on land, and follow the mermaid forever. Just as he raised the cup to his lips, he heard the sound of a church bell toll and he dashed the cup into the sea. The love potion spread over the waves, which is why the sea tastes salty today.

Inland from Brest is a moorland region that reminded me of Dartmoor back home — an empty land of windswept hills, blanketed with heather, crowned with granite tors. This region had its fairies, too: Korrigans, and ghostly Nightwashers (similar to Irish banshees), and household Lutins who helped or hindered with the chores according to their whim. Many Breton supernatural tales concern the doleful, wandering souls of the dead, traveling the earth doing penance for any harm they caused in life. The story of the Ankou was one of the most pervasive



Frederick Sandys, another Pre-Raphaelite painter enchanted by Arthurian legends, depicts Arthur's sorceress sister, Morgana.

throughout Brittany. He was the spirit of death: tall, white-haired, in a black flat hat and a long black coat, dragging or riding a wooden cart in which he gathered his crop of souls. To hear the terrible creak of the Ankou's cart was a warning that death was near — as was the knock of an owl at the window, a magpie on the roof, or a crow at the door.

In Morlaix, a beautiful old town of the region, Korrigans lived underground where they hoarded stolen coins, beat noisily on basins, and were generally a terrible nuisance. More sinister were the Teurst, who appeared in Morlaix in the guise of domestic animals. They delighted in doing wicked deeds, causing household arguments, and shrieking so horribly the sound curdled milk and turned beer sour. We heard neither Teursts nor banging Korrigans on the night we spent in the town of Morlaix, but listened instead to Breton music in a bar where an open pit fire threw heat onto ancient walls of cob and timber. Breton folk music is a form of Celtic music, similar to that of the Irish and Scots, but it has a distinctive sound of its own in the droning pipes, the Celtic harp, the lyrics sung in old Breton and French. Like Irish music, it has seen a strong revival in the last two decades, and many good recordings are available in the World Music sections of well-stocked stores. (Look for Alan Stivell's classic *Renaissance de la Harpe Celtique*, as well as recordings by guitarist Dan Ar Braz and the bands Kornog, Tri Yann, An Triskell, and Lyonesse.) The sound is stirring and primal, evoking the old Celtic spirit of the land.

Our journey ended at Tregastel-Plage, where pink granite boulders tumbled onto the beach and piled into islands out to sea. The rocks were magical, carved by the wind

Continued on page 71

DARK NIGHT



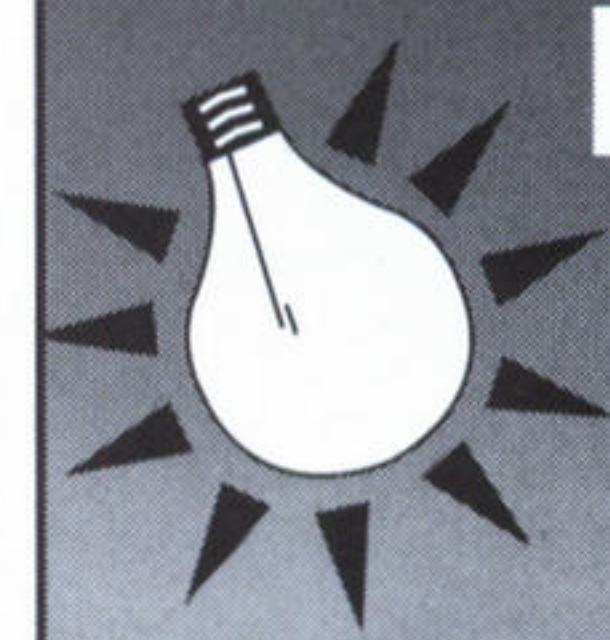
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Hercules and Xena put a new face on fantasy legends in their most ancient forms.

SINCE ITS INTRODUCTION IN JANUARY 1995, *HERCULES: THE LEGENDARY JOURNEYS* HAS BEEN a consistent ratings winner in the United States, the crown jewel among Universal Television's offerings, and the sole unqualified TV success of Renaissance Pictures, the outfit behind television's *M.A.N.T.I.S.* and *American Gothic*, as well as the feature films *Darkman* and *Army of Darkness*.

The show caught viewers' attention with a combination of pugilistic mayhem, sly humor, and the innovative use of the new generation of digital visual effects. All that, and especially the natural "good guy" appeal of Kevin Sorbo, have helped executive producers Sam Raimi and Robert Tapert breathe new life into the "sandal epic" genre, known to previous generations as a domain of overblown Hollywood epics, and bottom-line Italian movie moguls. And now, the show's success has spawned a spinoff series poised for equal success. *Xena: Warrior Princess* stars Lucy Lawless as the title character, repeating her role from three well-received *Hercules* episodes of last year.

Tapert, whose partnership with Raimi extends back to their college days, comments on the birth of *Hercules*. "We were approached by Universal Studios to do some *Hercules* movies for their 'Action-Pak' series of television films; we wanted to do *Conan*, but the rights weren't available.

"So we watched the old Steve Reeves *Hercules* movies, and realized that we couldn't use that stilted dialogue and guys-in-togas. So we invented our own Golden Age mythology, with green pastures, no togas, and a conscious effort to modernize the dialogue — without making it 'hip.' We also didn't want to emphasize Hercules'

feats of strength. Musclebound guys are hard to relate to, so we opted for a more athletic, good-looking kind of guy, someone you felt you could talk to."

Sorbo definitely has an athlete's body — he's 6 foot 3 inches tall and weighs 215 fatless pounds — but he's unlikely to be mistaken for a world-class weightlifter. "People are so used to Steve Reeves or Lou Ferrigno, they think that Hercules must have huge muscles," Sorbo says, "but the show's producers didn't want to go that way. Critics originally didn't like that, they just didn't understand what the show was all about. Once they realized he is supposed to be more of a decathlete, they loved it. People can identify with Hercules and say, 'Hey, he's like me,' and, 'I wish I could be like him.' He's approachable, attainable, the kind of guy you can share a beer with."

Upon the great success of *Hercules*, Universal turned again to the Renaissance partnership, and Tapert proposed a spinoff show, based on a character from the *Hercules* series. Xena, a warrior woman who, after doing her best to put Herc's head on a pike, was abandoned by her army when she learned that, deep down inside, she was really a compassionate person. Although no longer fighting for territory and the spoils of war, she remains a warrior, in defense of the defenseless and combatting the darkness of her barbaric times.

At the start, the biggest problem was that the syndicators were leery about a female action show. Plus, they worried she would be a female Hercules," says Tapert. "We did everything we could to make her different. I have to give a great deal of credit to Bridget Lin. In some respects, we westernized her character from *Swordsman* and *Bride with White Hair* films. A volatile dark character, yet still very feminine; you never know what she's going to do next."

Lucy Lawless, a New Zealand native, brings a natural thirst for adventure to the role. At 17, she abandoned college in mid-studies in order to travel the world, grape-picking on the Rhine and gold-mining deep in Australia's outback. She returned to Auckland, not yet 20, married, and mother to Daisy, now 7 years old. "Xena is as strong as any man or woman," Lawless says of her alter ego. "She's a bit dysfunctional, yet she understands the dark side of human nature. She's actually the person I could've been if I was born to different parents."

A highlight of both shows is the generous use of visual

Xena, no stranger to the gods, encounters Neptune. At its best, Flat Earth's work makes a living tableau from the conventions of fantasy art.



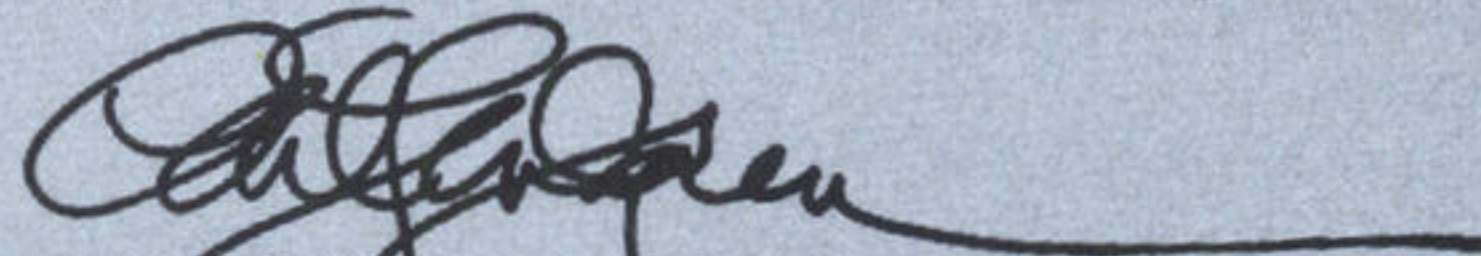


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Producer Robert Tapert directed an episode revisiting his favorite mythological film, *Jason and the Argonauts*, which features the famous fight with sword-wielding skeletons.

effects, including some work that is sharply reminiscent of Ray Harryhausen-style stop-motion work. "Technology has changed so much over the past few years," says Tapert. "In regard to desktop animation, it is now easier for us to go to CGI [computer-generated imaging] than to spend six or eight weeks building and working with models and prosthetics. Our FX guys are really on the cutting edge, working under incredible time constraints, yet they continue to excel, and deliver state-of-the-art effects on a TV schedule and a ridiculously low budget. They've allowed us to incorporate the Ray Harryhausen-style animation into the shows, when five years ago we couldn't have done that. They are really the unsung heroes."

Leading this troop of unsung heroes into the magical realm of visual imagination is the show's visual effects supervisor Ken O'Neill (*Dracula* and *Cliffhanger*), working with two veteran 3-D animators. Doug Beswick first learned the techniques in Art Cloaky's *Gumby* studios, and has subsequently worked on scores of FX-laden features, including *Star Wars*; Kevin Kutchaver's credits include *Return of the Jedi* and *The Addams Family*.

"Although I've done FX work since 1985," says O'Neill, "our effects company, Flat Earth, has been around for one year. We are a garage for visual effects that concentrates on 3-D creatures, like the stuff you see in *Jurassic Park* and *Jumanji*, yet we do it in a particularly cost-effective and timely manner. We generate up to 63 shots per episode of 3-D animation on a TV budget."

The earliest episodes of *Hercules* included a fair amount of location-based puppetry special effects, but the production has since gone over to the primary use of CGI for creature creation. And what creatures they are: giant snakes, *pterodactyls*, three-headed dogs, half-human snake demons, centaurs, assassins made of fire and water, two-headed

fanned-lizard serpents, bird women and, recently, eight (count'em) sword-wielding skeletons. Not only do Sorbo and Lawless have their hands full, but so does O'Neill.

According to O'Neill, the creature creation process begins with a series of sketches submitted for approval, until the staff comes up with an agreed design for the creature. "Next, I have a sculpture made up of the creature — a three-foot sculpture of the whole body — and a separate, larger-scale head is made, with more details, for close-ups. The sculptures are painted and sent to a scanning house, which is a place that takes a 3-D, physical object like a creature head, and digitizes it into data, a computer model. We can then manipulate it in the computer. We'll take that scanned data and flatten it out like a bear rug, and place a skeleton inside, which can then be used to define the way we want the creature to move around."

Certainly the biggest challenge was a pet project of producer Tapert. "*Jason and the Argonauts* is my favorite mythological film," he says. "I directed a sort of 'revisited episode' from *Jason*, which of course features the famous skeleton fight. It's really cool."

Sorbo agrees that the episode was quite a rush. "It was a dream episode. Even as a kid, this was a fantasy for me, watching those skeletons rising up out of the soil and then fighting Jason. I kept thinking, 'Of all the six billion people in the world, I'm the only one fighting the skeletons!'"

Flat Earth managed to bring the sequence in economically, without compromise, by making a few discreet inquiries in the appropriate Usenet newsgroups and locating a fellow animator who had created a detailed digital skeleton for another project. "We bought that skeleton model," explains O'Neill, "and modified it to match the skeleton that we used in the practical photography."

O'Neill marshaled all available resources to face the challenge of creating a sequence

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that would stand up to the masterful Harryhausen original, a bar-none classic in the annals of cinema effects. "I went back and researched what they did on *Jason*," he recalls, "then sat down with Rob and explained what we could do. Earlier this year, we had Hercules fight a character made of fire. For that episode, I had a guy dressed in a green suit, and choreographed all the action with him and Kevin's stunt guy. We then filmed it with the green suit guy fighting Kevin, then had Kevin do the fight by himself.

"In this episode, for each of the eight skeletons, I had guys wear numbered white T-shirts; we rehearsed the sequences until everyone had a feel for the choreography, then filmed it once with the T-shirt guys, then again, with Kevin fighting by himself.

"Once the material got back from location, I had the editors cut together two versions, one with the T-shirt guys, then one with Kevin fighting by himself that matched exactly, shot-for-shot. The animators then studied the T-shirt guys version and animated the skeletons with reference to the action of the individual T-shirt guys.

The numbered T-shirts helped the editors to recognize the continuity from shot to shot, allowing the sequence to be edited smoothly and rapidly, and provided a template that could be followed in editing the shots of Sorbo fighting alone; and the animators were able to use the T-shirt version as a reference, tracking each animated character's movements and appropriate reactions to Sorbo and the set.

But the T-shirt version was a guide, not a straightjacket; the animators stretched out with some moves never performed by the human actors — or any human actors. "These skeletons are running around themselves, throwing swords back and forth," says O'Neill. "Each had its own quirks and character. Some of them have got these little brows that are shaded so they can have their own personality. And I talked Rob into doing a shot where, during the fight, one of the skeletons loses its sword. Instead of picking it up, it reaches down and breaks off a rib and uses it like a sword."

Tapert left us with his thoughts for the future of both legendary heroes. "I love the fights in *Xena*, but the *Hercules* fights are getting just a little bit dull, and too repetitive. It's hard with a guy who punches people to continue to come up with new brawls that are interesting without going into too much kung-fu. But we are continuing to try, still being careful not to use too many gadgets.

"For both shows, we'll start to raise a few stories from the Bible. We're going to break out of some of the ruts in *Hercules* that we are falling into. Lucy is becoming more comfortable with *Xena* and becoming a much better actress. We plan to do a pure slapstick episode, and perhaps a few dark ones. So going light, then going real dark, we are expanding in all directions, and trying to give the audience an interesting mix." ❧

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BOOKS

Continued from page 15

ally with a groan of dismay — see coming at you from chapters ahead.

But the thing is not a total blight at all since it has encouraged some excellent writers — who, just like everybody else, have working digestive systems and utility bills and children needing new shoes — to try their hand at the game with excellent results. We may be inundated with a tidal wave of feeble fangmanship, but there is a fine little flotilla of noble neck-nickers floating gaily atop it.

Kim Newman, a talented British author who may oftentimes be spotted at fantasy conventions decked out in the Bloomsbury mode, is one of those who have turned the vampire vogue to our mutual advantage. His way of doing this is to have dived into writing a series of wittily horrific books which are both highly entertaining and cleverly designed to continue without getting the slightest bit winded for as long as the fanged fad lasts.

The first shot in this open-ended epic was *Anno Dracula*. It concerned the logical triumph of the Master Vampire over the forces of good except for a tiny glitch at the end which spoiled his takeover of Great Britain and temporarily sidelined him. It clearly demonstrated Newman obviously has the philosophical insight to grasp the simple truth that Universal Pictures got it right: No one no how can permanently kill vampires, werewolves, mummies, and other creatures like that on account of they will always find a sequel.

The sequel for *Anno Dracula* turned out to be *The Bloody Red Baron*. Many of the old characters survive into it, among them the redoubtable and highly connected Charles Beauregard, who is Newman's Dennis Nayland Smith, and — *ca va sans dire* — the naughty Count himself, but they are joined by sparkling new characters who are, as in the first book, mostly borrowed from history or literature.

We have, as the title hints, Germany's number one ace, Baron von Richthofen, but we also have Edgar Allen Poe, and you'll be pleased to know the two of them get on rather well together. We also have — here I scan multitudinous notes — many more celebrities of that era, since though Newman transforms it radically, he does so with respect and backs his effort with obviously solid research. We come across Franz Kafka, Mata Hari (very touchingly, I might add), and many, many lesser lights such as Hanns Heinz Ewers, a writer of occult novels which always struck me as bombastic and pompous. It pleased me to see him get his nose firmly twisted during the course of this tale.

One problem with Newman's constantly throwing all these known historic and fictitious characters at you is that it now and then disrupts your attention badly during

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the action of the plot and occasionally sabotages it completely. For example, when he hurled a character named Sydney Horler at me I actually had to put the book down and pace the room, until it finally came back to me that Horler was the hack author of a series about a not-so-hot Fu Manchu sort of villain named Dr. Vivanti, and a thoroughly forgettable (I forgot it, didn't I?) book called — *The Vampire* which Horler cranked out during another Stoker rip-off deluge long, long ago. *Plus ça change*

By the way, I do apologize for all these French clichés, but there's something about this book which brings them out.

Usually, though, Newman's trick of springing prefab characters at you is highly successful and often hilarious. I think my personal favorite is a sequence when one of his intrepid heroes is involved in an investigation of suspicious doings in the trenches and comes across a sinister underground and very front-line hospital wherein ghastly experimental surgery is being performed on wounded Allied vampires to see how much dissection they can take before finding it impossible to regenerate. It turns out the surgeons are none other than H.G. Wells' evil Dr. Moreau and his able, nay eager assistant is H.P. Lovecraft's ghoulish Herbert West. You never know who you're going to run into next.

Though the essential feel of the book is clearly patterned after the pulp series *G-8 and*

his Battle Aces (please don't misunderstand this as a knock — I am proud to tell the world that I love *G-8 and his Battle Aces!*), it also contains some genuinely horrendous stuff which I, unsurprisingly, enjoyed thoroughly, so do be sure and keep it out of your childrens' innocent little hands lest they grow up to be serial killers or writers of open-ended book series about vampires.

You certainly wouldn't want *that* to happen!

Gahan Wilson

The Book of Atrix Wolfe by Patricia A. McKillip, Ace, NY, 256 pp., hardcover, \$18.95.

In many fantasies, mages cast spells, create charms and shift shapes without a thought about the morality or repercussions of their actions. Most of us enjoy seeing the sorcerer turning that prince into a frog, whipping up whirlwinds to decimate the enemy, or blowing up the Death Star. I know I enjoy imagining wielding that kind of power, and perhaps daydreaming what I'd do with it — giving my pet iguana Igmoe the power to converse with me would be number one on the hit parade. Why does he love to sit on my head so much? But few works deal thoughtfully with the effects of having such incredible power, of being, if not omnipotent, virtually a walking timebomb. This issue forms the heart of *The Book of Atrix Wolfe* by World Fantasy Award-winning Patricia A. McKillip. *Atrix Wolfe* is one of the oldest and most powerful mages, and is also considered the

wisest. Yet when he is unable to convince two warring factions to break off their hostilities, in frustration he creates a dark Hunter, who in a horrible massacre destroys both armies. Realizing that he has created a worse slaughter than man could ever have made, Atrix rejects his magic and places all his power within a book, which he buries. But the book, and the Hunter within it, refuse to stay buried. Talis Pelucir, whose father, the King of Pelucir was killed in the massacre, finds the book and begins to experiment with the spells written inside it.

McKillip creates a strong sense of place with the descriptions of the castle where Talis lives, particularly in her descriptions of the crumbling castle keep that has been decimated in the massacre and the vitality and confusion of the castle's kitchen.

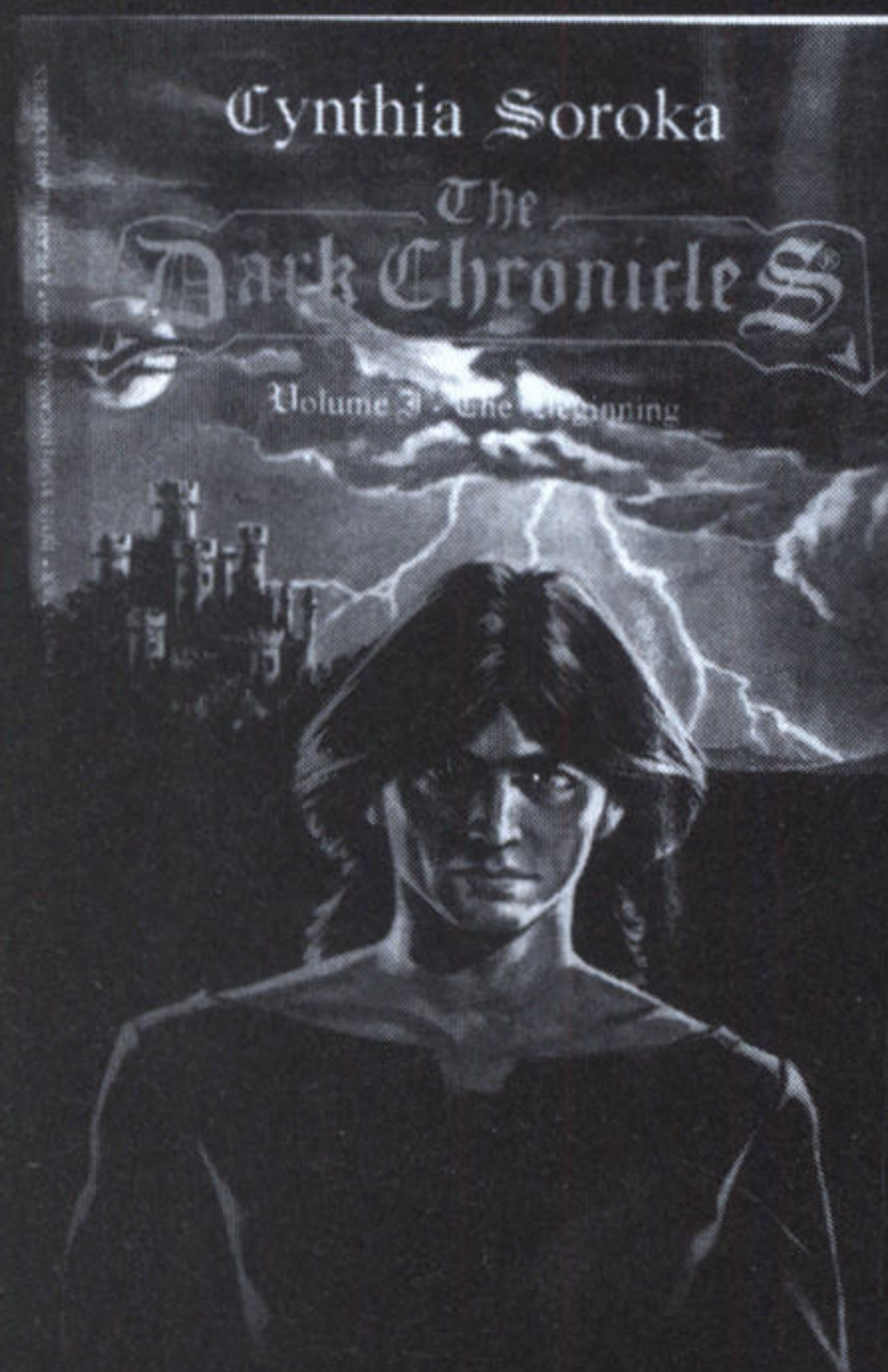
After a slow beginning, McKillip's storytelling ability draws us in, and amid the familiar trappings of medieval fantasy, something very special and different begins to take shape. A story in which morals and consequences are more important than striking a heroic pose and zapping your enemies into dust. And while it may be fun turning slimeballs into actual slime, McKillip's book offers its own unique rewards. With deeply drawn characters forced to confront complex situations, *The Book of Atrix Wolfe* is unpredictable and surprisingly moving. And those are qualities all too rare in fantasy today.

Jeanne Cavelos

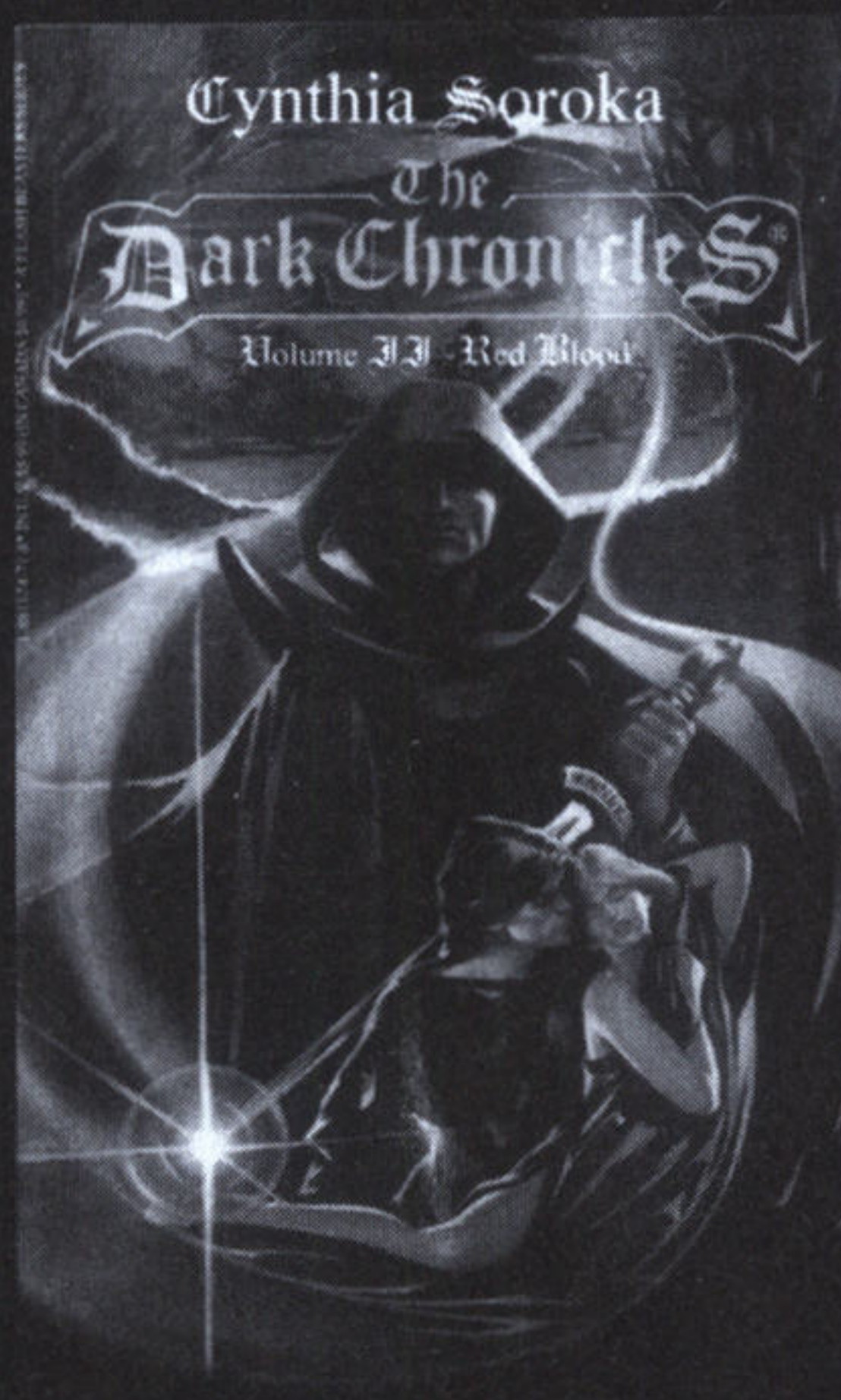
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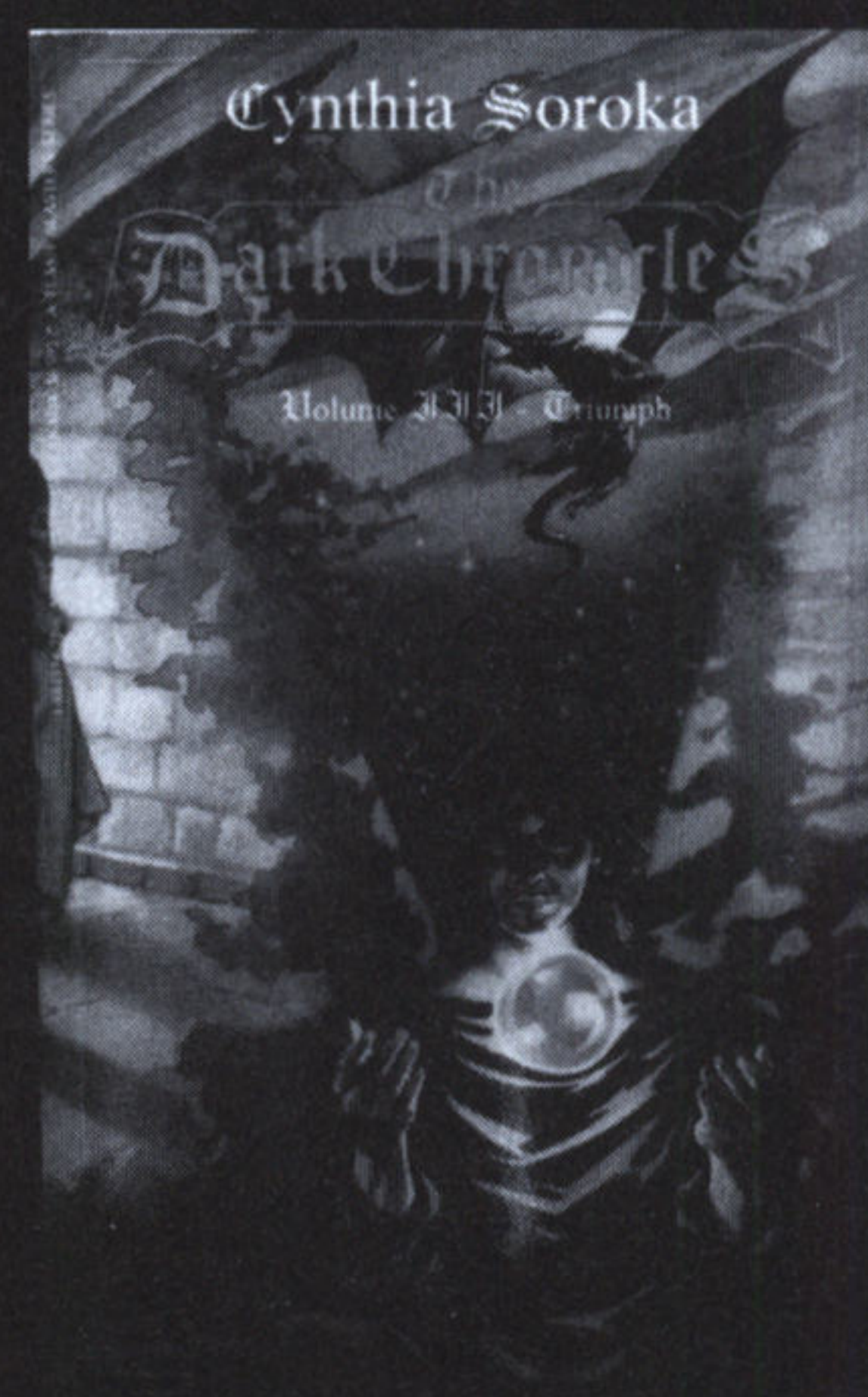
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SARAH'S WINDOW

THE SHADOW LINGERED AT Sarah's window, balanced on air, certain to fly away the next step I took. Another moment and it would be gone. Another moment and I would call the police, report my daughter missing, and spend the rest of my life convincing myself I'd imagined it.

Maybe I'd read too many of Sarah's bedtime stories; I didn't take that next step. What I did was whisper, very low, "Wait."

The shadow waited, in complete silence, while the trees outside rustled in the autumn wind, casting shadows on Sarah's dresser. I felt strange, as if with that one word I'd passed some sort of test. But maybe that shouldn't

It's said that we all have our price, but even we never know just how high it will be.

have seemed strange. There were often tests like that in Sarah's stories, after all.

I swallowed, hard. "I want my daughter back."

The shadow laughed, his voice crackling like fire on dry wood.

"What makes you think I took her?" The shadow slid down from the window and into the room. All at once it wasn't a shadow at all, but a man, nearly twice my height. His thin arms were gnarled like tree branches, his hair brown and wild as September leaves. He sat on the edge of Sarah's bed, staring at me through clear, blue-green eyes, like the lake where I had taken Sarah swimming just before school started.

I clenched my hands into fists by my sides.

BY JANNI LEE SIMNER
Illustration by J.K. Potter





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How dare he hold something of my daughter in his eyes? How dare he sit so easily on her bed?

"I want her back." There was an edge of steel in my voice. I was glad; I remembered something in the stories about how they didn't like steel. "I know what you are."

More laughter. "I go by many names. Which would you prefer?" He counted them off on his tapered fingers, like items on a grocery list. "Faery, witch, devil, stealer of souls. A psychopath, maybe, whom you'd put behind bars — if you could catch me. You won't, though. The window screen is open, and even if it weren't, there are cracks around the sill." He lifted a stuffed tiger from Sarah's pillow and turned it over in his hands.

I leaped forward and grabbed the tiger away from him. He let the animal go, as if he'd never really wanted it in the first place. I clutched it to my chest, smelling the scent of Sarah's long hair, feeling very much like a child myself.

There are times when feeling like a child isn't something a father can afford to do. I threw the animal down again.

"You stole her," I said.

"Stole is such an emotional word." The man — faery, witch, whatever — spoke with the calm of a still, clear night. "You say we steal children, and with that you call up all manner of awful images. You see us coming, under shadow of night, to spirit your young ones away with our false words, our songs, our spells. There's magic that can do that, of course, not even very strong magic, and I'm not so noble that I wouldn't use it, if I felt the need."

HE TOOK THE FRILLED edge of Sarah's blanket between his fingers. "But I haven't felt the need. Not through all my long years, and certainly not tonight. Your daughter followed me quite willingly, stepping out her window to a sky full of stars, reveling in her sudden light limbs, and never, not once, looking back." He smiled, and his teeth shone brighter than the lamp by Sarah's bed. "Not all lost things are stolen. Surely, even with your short human life, you know that much."

He was lying, twisting words. I wanted to rip the blanket out of his hands, to grab him by the neck and shake him until he returned Sarah to me. But I feared that he'd only turn back to shadow and slip through my fingers. "She's my daughter," I said, surprised at how my voice shook. "She wouldn't run away."

"You really believe that?" His eyes glittered like a frozen river in the sun.

"Sarah loves me." It was one of the few things on this earth I knew for certain. I expected him to deny it, but he didn't.

"She also loves other things. Her freedom. The taste of starlight on her tongue. The whispering softness of the wind in hair. That's the trouble with humans. You love so many things that you can't possibly be true to them all."

Sarah was my only child. I was raising her alone. His words weren't true. They couldn't be true. "Not for us." The words rippled through the air, and only then did I know that I'd spoken aloud.

"Yes. For you just the same as for everyone else. I'll show you." His voice held the chill edge of a challenge, and I realized I was still being tested.

He started back toward the window, long legs gliding across the room. I ran after him, knowing he might slip through my fingers, but knowing I at least had to try to hold him back.

At the very last moment, he stepped aside. I crashed into the window sill, banging my elbow against the frame. I winced and turned to face him. He was gone.

Or almost gone. "Look out the window," a voice said.

I did. I saw our yard two stories below, faintly lit by a lamp near the house. I saw a battered tire swinging from a tree. I saw a blanket stretched between two branches, one side pulled down to turn it into a tent.

I heard a girl's crystal laugh, tumbling out into the autumn air, so near I could almost reach out and touch it.

"Sarah!" I leaned out the window, as far as I could, straining to see her. Nothing. For a moment I almost flew down the stairs, almost ran into the yard to look for her. She could have been behind a tree after all, or beneath the tent. But if she really were right in the yard, she would have come when I called. I looked out, into the dark night, beyond the yard in spite of how close Sarah sounded.

I almost didn't see it. A flicker, at the edge of my vision, not of light but of velvet darkness. Some instinct kept me from turning to look at it directly. Instead I stared straight ahead, willing the flicker to grow, to spread across the rest of my vision.

For a moment the sky blurred, like a picture held too close to my face. Then it snapped into focus, so fast my head ached.

There was no yard outside, not anymore. Only endless dark and pinpoints of light that glittered like newly cut diamonds. I let out a breath. I knew for certain, now, where Sarah had been taken. Through the window, to a place of empty sky and cold, distant stars. She was alone there and probably frightened. I had to find her.

I climbed over the sill, finding footholds against the old stone house. Very slowly, I started to climb down the stones. Sarah's laugh grew fainter. I climbed faster. The wind

picked up, but I held firmly to the rock.

A shadow came up beside me, the same shadow I'd first seen poised at Sarah's window. I tensed, tightening my grip on the wall. I could feel the house, cool beneath my fingers, but I could no longer see it, any more than I could see the trees of my own backyard.

Shadow fingers reached for my shoulders. Shadow hands pushed me away from the wall.

I SCREAMED, EXPECTING TO crash to the ground. But then I realized something strange. I wasn't falling. I was surrounded by black sky, soft as freshly spun silk.

The shadow laughed. Wind whispered through trees I couldn't see. And fainter than either of these sounds, Sarah giggled once and was silent. I panicked then, opening my mouth to call after her.

Starlight spilled onto my tongue, and with it a sharp tang of joy. The words fell back into my throat, and laughter bubbled up instead. I felt suddenly strange, light and giddy. For an awful moment I didn't care that my daughter was missing. For just a moment, I couldn't even remember her name. I knew only that I wanted to fly among the stars, to spin in circles until I turned dizzy. I felt like a child again.

There are times when feeling like a child isn't something a father can afford to do. I forced my mouth closed, biting my lower lip. I swallowed, tasting something bitter at the back of my throat.

"Go on," the shadow voice laughed. "Go on and find your daughter."

I held myself very still, staring into the dark. A chill wind blew. The cold gave me strength. I clenched my fists, digging my nails into my palms. The pain gave me strength, too. Slowly, I pulled myself upright. Impossibly, the sky held my weight as I stepped forward. I started after Sarah, one step following another, even though I could no longer hear her. She was my daughter. Somehow, I would bring her home.

The stars grew brighter. When the wind blew again it was warm, caressing my cheek with the sweet scent of spring. I took another step.

"I'm doing this for Sarah," I whispered.

In stories, the last test is always the hardest. I should have remembered that. As I spoke my lips parted, just for a moment. I tasted spring, and childhood, and the ability to run for all time without tiring.

And in that moment my words were no longer true. ♣



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Here's a touching little piece on the respective value of getting what you wish for—or not getting it.

SNOW

BY AL SARRANTONIO
Illustration by Laurie Harden

ON THE DAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS, a few rogue snowflakes fell. They drifted like unsure intruders; dropped, reluctant parachutists, from a sky still clear and blue-cold with autumn.

They fell on Eva's nose and melted, fell onto Charles' outstretched tongue and were warmed into water.

"I wish it would snow forever!" Eva said.

"And ever!" Charles said.

"We'd build forts and go sledding!"

"Have snowball fights and dig tunnels!"

"Forever!" Eva said.



"And ever!" said Charles.

"We'd never have to go to school again!"

"Hurrah!"

And, in other places, other Charleses and other Evas said the same things.

The skies darkened.

It began to snow.

IT SNOWED ON CHRISTMAS—ALL TWELVE DAYS OF IT. IT SNOWED, INCH upon inch of white, falling in flat layers from an always-gray sky.

Eva and Charles sledged, drank hot chocolate, and cheered. They had snowball fights, and built forts.

And still it snowed.

It snowed for twenty days, then twenty days more. Each day it snowed. Drifts sat on snow drifts. There were layers of snow, geologic demarcations, that traced the storm's history.

School was canceled again and again.

Eva and Charles cheered, played Monopoly inside as snow layers climbed up the sliding glass door of the family room, topped Mother's bushes, made their tiny twig fingers wave goodbye as they went under.

It snowed.

And snowed.

And...

Snowed.

"It's never going to stop," Mother said, staring out at the snow with her haggard face, a cold cup of tea nestled forgotten in her hands "It's going to snow forever."

"And ever!" Charles laughed, and then he and Eva went out to build another snow fort as Father, in the driveway, cursed his snowblower, which coughed and then died.

It snowed.

And snowed.

And snowed some more.

There was no school, and then there was no mail. There were no packages. The stores, the malls, the Seven-Elevens, winked out one by one. People drew into their homes like ticks, battling their walks and driveways before finally giving up. Snow plows roared, then died like dinosaurs at the end of their reign. They plowed sideways into curbs and then sputtered out, their drivers hopping out as if afraid, tramping hurriedly home through the disappearing streets.

It snowed.

And snowed.

Eva and Charles played, built walls of snow that were eaten, threw snowballs that were swallowed. Soon they could almost reach the house's gutters with their mittens. They ran huffing in to drink the last of the hot chocolate, topped by the last of the marshmallows.

It continued to snow.

And snow.

And snow.

AND THEN:

"I'm sick of snow," Charles said.

"Me too," said Eva.

They stood, looking from their family room at the mountains of snow, the layers of snow, the valleys of snow, the plateaus of snow. Snow made the windows white, the Earth white; filled every nook, each cranny; sifted into every corner and crack and edge of the world. They had done all the sledding they could stand; all the snow forts they could build had been built: the first ten buried like Pompeii, the last five in degrees of backyard burial even as they watched. A thousand snowballs lay entombed: lumps of white coal waiting to be turned into diamonds by the crushing, building weight of snow.

Through the sliding glass door, only a thin line of gray sky could be seen at the top, above the geologic layers of snow.

And, in the gray sky, it snowed.

"I'm sick of snow," Eva said.

"So am I," said Charles.

They were weary of snow boots, of gloves and mittens; tired of tasseled hats and long johns and layers of socks; disgusted with dressing like astronauts each time they went out.

In the kitchen, where Mother and Father sat all but lifeless, staring at their teacups, the radio called for more snow, crackled, went silent.

At the top of the sliding glass door, the last line of sky was filled in by snow, enclosing the world, making it go away.

"I'm afraid of snow," Charles said.

"Me too," Eva said.

And, in other places, other Charleses and other Evas said the same things.

Eva said, "Then we'll tunnel our way out."

"Yes!" said Charles.

THEY MOUNTED THEIR EXPEDITION like professionals.

Whistling, smiling, Charles rummaged through his room, through the cellar, through the attic. Eva organized. Charles loaded his arms with layers of socks and his book on Admiral Byrd. Eva piled up digging tools from the garage, the camping stove, Sterno cans for heat and cooking, and whatever was left to cook. She stuffed their school backpacks full with flashlight batteries and candy bars, comic books and automobile flares, boxes of matches, pots, and pans. In the pockets she put sunglasses against the glare, and her Walkman with tapes and Charles' lucky baseball card. She zipped the backpacks closed, afraid the straining seams would burst.

They dressed in their best clothes: ski parkas stuffed with goose feathers, snow pants with elastic straps to keep them in place. They had gloves with leatherette palms and fingers for gripping, crisp blue jeans, flannel lined. They wore two pairs of wool socks, gray and thick, and thermal underwear, and turtlenecks under sweat-shirts that said 'GO ARMY!'

Outfitted and backpacked, they stood before the sliding glass door in the family room.

Eva looked at Charles, and Charles nodded.

Slowly, Eva unlocked the door, slid it back on its rails.

A wall of snow, smooth and white, high and wide, confronted them.

"Ready?" Eva said.

Charles said, "Ready."

They began to dig.

THEY DUG.

And dug.

Scoop by scoop, handful by handful, Eva pushed snow back at Charles, who pushed it back into the room behind. A depression in the wall formed, kid-high and wide; the depression deepened and deepened until there was a little room made of snow, with snow walls, snow ceiling and snow floor, which they moved deeper into as they dug.

And dug.

And dug.

Charles looked back through their deepening tunnel. He saw the room they had left, the house they had left, far behind them, a shrinking cave opening.

And there—Mother and Father just glimpsed, beyond the family room piled with snow, heads lowered to the kitchen table, unmoving.

"Dig!" Eva ordered, and Charles turned away, taking Eva's handfuls of snow, her scoop and hand-shovelfuls of snow, packing them tight into the walls and ceiling and floor as they inched forward, onward.

DARKNESS DEEPENED IN THEIR TUNNEL. EVA, PANTING IN HER SNOW-suit, stopped to hand Charles the big flashlight. Charles clicked it on. The walls gleamed blue-white. But already Eva was digging again, throwing snow back at Charles to pack away.

He lay the flashlight on the tunnel floor and went to work, inching the light forward.

Forward.

IN THE SNOW, ON THE FLOOR UNDER EVA'S HAND, SOMETHING SOLID struck her fingers.

She brushed away snow, pushed away snow, packed away snow—and there beneath her lay a line of chicken wire across their path.

"Wha—?" Charles began.

"The fence!" Eva shouted. "It's the top of our backyard fence!"

And now Charles could imagine it, there beneath them in the far reaches of their yard, the line of wire tacked to posts.

Charles began, "That means—"

"We're four feet up!" Eva said.

They sat still, hushing their breathing.

Above them, far above, they heard the swishing of snow, the falling of snow.

"Keep digging!" Eva said.

"I'm tired!" Charles said. He lifted the flashlight, heavy in his hands, and shined it back behind them, where the light was lost in the far reaches of blue-white tunnel.

"We'll rest later!" Eva said, her own breath panting steam in the air.

Charles put the flashlight back down, pointed it at the wall of snow in front of them.

They dug.

And dug.

STOP!" EVA SAID, BREATHING HARD. Charles dropped to the floor, leaned his back against the wall, let his arms drop like weights to his side.

"Tired..." he said.

Eva, still panting, brushed her heavy mittens one against the other, clearing them of snow. She reached into her pack and brought out candy bars and juice packs, potato chips and cookies.

Charles, gaining strength, began to eat, then drank. He ate everything she gave him.

"We don't have much more," Eva said, frowning.

Charles took the pack from her and dug in, finding more cookies.

"I'm hungry!" he said, ripping them open, letting Lorna Doones drop to the floor before he scooped them up.

Above them, snow swished and fell, brushed and fell, piled and fell.

AFTER THEY BEGAN TO DIG AGAIN, THE FLASHLIGHT BEGAN TO DIM.

Almost at once, Eva's hand found something else solid in the floor. She and Charles brushed and pushed snow away.

The edge of something square revealed itself.

"What—" Charles said.

Eva pushed more snow away, dug down and around, threw snow away with her fingers.

The corner of a box, steel with glass underneath—

"A phone booth!" Eva said.

She brushed more snow away, uncovered a sign with a bell on it, more glass below.

Charles shined the light down, saw the curve of a man's hat, the man slumped down, hand frozen to the dangling receiver, the man's face turned up toward him, *frozen* —

"Yahhhhh!" Charles said, scrambling back.

Eva took the flashlight, looked down into the booth herself.

"He's dead. Nothing we can do," she said, and immediately put the flash down again, aiming it ahead. "We're getting close to town."

She began to dig again, in the dimming light.

THEY LEFT THE PHONE BOOTH behind. Soon they uncovered a telephone pole. They dug around it, leaving it standing straight and brown through the middle of their tunnel, creosote-smelling, with one steel footrest angled up like a pointing finger. They dug, and Eva's arms ached. Her fingers were numb with cold and work—but still she pushed and brushed and pulled at snow, raked it back at Charles who packed and pounded and beat and smoothed it into the walls and ceiling and floor. They felt the afternoon wear on, could feel the cold night coming, feel the snow falling, and sighing, and drifting, and souging above them.

They dug.

And dug, and then Eva's nearly frozen fingers touched something solid beneath her, and she excavated around it.

She gasped, pulled her hand back.

The top of a head.

Black hair.

The flashlight was nearly out, a barely glowing bulb. She pulled it close, and Charles crawled up next to her.

Pushing more snow away, she uncovered a curve of feathers surrounding the head, rising in front to a war bonnet.

"Mr. Gray's wooden Indian!" she exclaimed.

Charles said, "We're in town! Next to the drugstore!"

Shaking the flashlight to make it brighten, they pushed the wall farther on. They dug and scraped and packed and bored, and soon hit the front of a store window, a wide plate of glass etched with Mr. Gray's name in large, arching letters.

Pressing their cold faces to the glass, they looked down into the store. There was blackness within.

"Darn!" Eva said, shaking the flashlight viciously, startled to find it go bright for her.

"Shine it inside!" Charles urged.

She directed the beam inside the drugstore. She played it over the soda fountain, over the glass cases, the prescription counter, the floor.

The beam fell on the dead figures of Mr. Gray, Mrs. Gray.

Eva turned the flashlight off. She and Charles lay in the dark, in the cold, listening to their own deep breaths and their own caught sobs.

Charles began to cry outright.

Eva smacked him with her mittened hand.

"Quiet!" she said.

"But I saw Mom, and Dad—"

"Yes!" Eva said.

"We might as well stay right here," Charles sniffled. "We might as well let it happen here...."

Eva said nothing, listened to the snow above them, the snow falling. Drifting.

Murmuring...

"No!" she said. "I won't give up!"

"We have no food, no light—nothing!"

"Dig!" Eva ordered, shaking the flashlight again and turning it on.

This time it only fluttered, a weak orange glow, making the tunnel around them look like Halloween.

Charles sobbed, "I...can't..."

"Well I can!"

Eva began to bore up, angling away from the side of the drugstore. She dropped handfuls of snow on Charles in the pumpkin light until

he stopped crying and once more began to push and pack and pound.

They dug up.

Up.

EVA SENSED THE SNOW WAITING FOR THEM. AS SHE CLIMBED, SHE FELT and heard it, the wash of snow, the gentle fall, the dusting and breathy blowing of snow. It reached out to her ears and heart, pulled her up toward its inevitable self. Behind her, Charles sniffled and worked, inching the dying flashlight up with one hand while he pounded and smoothed with the other.

The flashlight went out; Halloween went away, leaving them with night.

Charles dropped the flashlight, listened to it slide down the steep tunnel like a sled until it was gone.

In the dark, they dug.

And dug.

AND DUG.

And then the wall of snow in front of Eva suddenly went away: fell down around her in a shower leaving a hole.

The tunnel opened into dim light.

Eva and Charles climbed out onto the world.

IT WAS SNOWING.

THE PLANET WAS WHITE. SNOW DRIFTED, TWIRLED, AND FELL.

And fell; dropped in whispering breaths from the gray-white sky; shimmered pure and crystalline; fell fluffy and piled and moved like dust over the surface of the Earth. From north to south, east to west, the world was white.

It snowed.

And snowed.

"Oh, Eva, what are we going to do!" said Charles, his eyes once more welling to tears.

Above them, the gray-white clouds darkened to gray.

Darkened still more.

Night was coming.

And it snowed.

"What—" Charles began, sobbing, but his sister took his arm and pointed.

"Look!"

There, through the drifting, swirling, gently lashing snow, was a dim point of light in the near distance.

"A star!" Charles said.

Eva took Charles' arm.

They tramped through the snow.

BUT NOW, THE LIGHT BEGAN TO STUTTER AND DIE. SNOW OCCLUDED it, and suddenly it was gone.

"No!" Charles cried.

The star blinked back on.

They hurried, and then they reached it: a star on the ground, a five-pointed lamp dimming, half buried by snow.

"Is it—" Charles said, but he knew what it was, even as Eva began to brush snow away from it. She uncovered the top of the town Christmas tree, taller than any building.

Down there, under all the packed and piled and layered snow, was a huge branching evergreen tree with red bulbs and strings of fat lights and thick silver strands of tinsel.

The star flickered.

Went out.

Eva stood, and she and Charles watched as the snow drifted and accumulated and covered the top of the last point of the star.

To every horizon was snow; mountains and hills and valleys of snow.

Only snow.

"Oh, Eva! What are we going to do?" Charles said.

Eva looked at Charles and said, "I don't know."

Darkness fell.

It snowed.

AND SNOWED.

Snow covered their tracks, drifting and sighing, swirling and filling. Eva and Charles wandered, flashlightless, freezing. Snow drifted and moved and mounted and fell in the dark-white world. The earth glowed dark blue-white, the air was a curtain of dark white.

It snowed.

On hands and knees, exhausted, they crawled until they could crawl no more.

"I...can't," Charles whispered, and stopped, turning over to sit in the snow.

Eva sat down beside him.

"Neither," she whispered, "can I."

She looked up, felt soft snow caress her cheeks, dance across her eyebrows, melt on her warm-cold nose.

"I wish it would stop snowing," Charles said.

Eva closed her eyes, felt snow tap on her face like fingers, slide down her cheeks, mingling with tears, which crystallized into snow.

"Me too," she said. "I wish it would stop snowing."

There came a hush in the air.

Above, in the sky, Charles saw something that was not snow. A tiny light appeared in a tiny split of clouds. A swirl of falling snow blew aside and more tiny lights appeared.

"Stars!" Charles cried. "Real stars!"

Beside Charles and Eva there was a sound in the snow. A sudden tunnel appeared. A bright stab of light shot out, followed by a muffled boy bearing a flashlight.

Behind him came a snowsuited girl and another boy, all hat and scarf and ski jacket.

Other tunnels opened—a thousand tunnels, with other stabbing beams of light followed by other boys and girls.

"Look!" Charles shouted, pointing at the sky.

All over, flashlights were turned off and eyes were turned upward. The night was full of stars and vanishing clouds.

It had stopped snowing.

IN THE NIGHT, BY THE LIGHT OF THE friendly moon, they brought up the world from below.

Through the tunnels, they carried up food and light and shelter. They brought up candy and juice packs and cookies and cake. They tunneled into empty K-Marts, carried up batteries by the boxful, chairs and tents and sleds and blankets. They brought up propane stoves and heaters, they brought up comic books and tape players and toys. They brought up more toys.

The starry night drained into rose dawn, and gave them day. They stood staring open-mouthed at the stranger Sun. They cheered as it climbed high into a cloudless firmament, cheered as it warmed their faces, made them throw off watch caps and ski masks and ear muffs and scarves. They cheered and sang and continued their work, totting up an entire new world from below.

In the golden afternoon Charles stood smiling, Eva beside him. He laughed at the sight of a forming puddle of melted snow.

"Maybe it'll all melt, right back down to the Earth!"

"I hope," Eva shouted loud, "it never snows again!"

A cheer went up, everywhere.

In the sky, behind the sun, like a shy and peeking visitor, a thin cloud appeared, joined soon by others.

The skies darkened.

It began to snow. ❄️

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PAVANNNE FOR A DEAD PROSS

BY JO CLAYTON

Illustration by John Berkey

HANA ANEZKA HARMONY walked home from her night job through rain-wet streets, the demon called Tooth pacing beside her in the form of a large black Rottweiler.

Hana was small, with short black hair that the damp air teased from sleekness and turned to a tangle of tight curls and hazel eyes that could look either green or yellow according to the way the light hit them. Sometimes it seemed they changed with her moods, dark when she was angry and almost gold when she was laughing and pleased with life.

She was neither happy nor angry this night, just tired and thinking that she'd been long enough in this west-coast city with its roses and rain and the material minds of its folk; even their rages were too simple to be interesting. The air was too clean, the structures built for use not dreams. Dreams. She'd

When a serial killer stalks the streets of a magic city, only one witch can bring him to justice.





BERKEY

The man has killed such girls before. We felt the death of a girl of Maria's kind two moons ago. He will kill again, perhaps the one we call to us ...

begun dreaming about the old places and thinking it was time to see what time had done to them.

The air had a nip to it, a reminder that winter was coming. She pulled the silk shawl closer around her body, the long red fringe swaying against the sleeves of the black shirt and against the black trousers she stuffed into knee-high boots.

When she went by the small park, the three White Ladies dancing on the bridge over the creek beckoned to her. She smiled and waved from a safe distance and walked on. Even for her these were dangerous beings. Though their intentions seemed friendly enough, it was impossible to tell how their moods might take them.

They beckoned more urgently and curiosity caught hold of her. With Tooth whining uneasily beside her, she walked to the edge of their summoning field and signed to them: "I am no meat for you."

The signs flowing from one to the other as if they were merely three aspects of one being, the White Ladies signed: "Maria is dead. Killed."

Tooth growled, a rumble starting deep in his throat. He liked Maria, liked the way she petted him and scratched between his ears after she'd got over being frightened by his size and looks. His outlines shimmered as he began fighting the form Hana had imposed on him.

Hana spoke a sharp word in the old tongue and he sat on his haunches, soft growl rumbling in his throat, his ears tight to his head, his eyes on the White Ladies.

Maria was a fourteen-year-old runaway, an illegal from a family of illegals; she never talked about her parents, only her grandmother back in Mexico. Her mother's mother. The old woman was a witch of considerable local repute and she'd inherited the gift, though it had totally skipped her mother. Once she'd discovered the White Ladies, she had made compact with them and enticed men here for them. She got their money and credit cards, the Ladies got their needs filled. It was not a bad bargain for either side, given their circumstances, though it was less than good for the men who followed Maria to this bridge.

Hana frowned. "You want me to find you another girl?"

"That's not it. There are many girls like Maria here. We will call one to us when the time is right. We want you to find the man who killed Maria and bring him here. He has robbed us of value and must pay for what he took."

"Why should I spend my time for your value?"

"If you will bring us that man, we will allow you three requests. You may ask for the answers anywhere you find one of us and at any

time. If you ask for what we cannot give, you may ask again without losing the turn."

"Why give so much for so little?"

"The man has killed such girls before. We felt the death of a girl of Maria's kind two moons ago. He will kill again, perhaps the one we call to us, robbing us yet again of value. We pay a fair price. No more and no less."

Hana moved briefly inside the summoning range, bowed and stepped clear. "By Moon and Water I accept this compact." As the White Ladies began to retreat, she signed: "Wait. Do you have anything that belonged to Maria?"

They opened their pale green eyes wide and looked at her as if she didn't understand what she was saying. In a sense they didn't, because the physical things of this world meant nothing to them.

Hana waved the last question away, signed: "Did you see Maria die? Could you show me where it happened?"

"We saw nothing, we only felt the wrenching away from us and the ceasing to live, and we felt a lust that was mixed with the death. This was very strong. This came to us on the wind, but the wind blows where it will and into many places where we may not go."

She knew they meant another wind than that which was rising with the dawn and tugging at her hair. No help in them for locating the place where the girl died. "When did the wind speak?"

"When the moon was high. We danced her farewell and waited for you to pass."

"Will you do a thing for me? Will you take water from the creek and hold it in the cup of your hands and allow me free passage to look into that pool?"

The forms of the White Ladies blurred and shifted, then they stood again with the Lady in the center holding her hands cupped together, the moonlight glinting on the water contained in that chalice of living ivory.

"By Moon and by Water we give you passage. Come look."

"Stay, Tooth. Wait for me here." The hairs on her arms standing up, her stomach knotted, her breath coming in shallow gasps, Hana waded into the zone of summoning and walked onto the bridge.

Without speaking to the White Ladies, who stood as motionless as if they were carved from stone, she bent over the water, and summoned the image of Maria. When the face was clear, she whispered a small charm and breathed on the water.

It wrinkled and pocked, then smoothed out.

An image formed — fading almost immediately — of an alley, several dumpsters, and a heap of black plastic bags set out for collection.

She bowed, walked quickly back to Tooth, and stood beside him a moment, listening. It was getting close to sunup and she could hear the grinding roar of the garbage trucks. "That alley is probably somewhere around here, Tooth. Different parts of the city, different days of collection. Hm." She dropped her hand on his head, something she didn't often do. The short black hair and slightly loose skin was soft and warm under her palm. He leaned against her almost as if he were the dog whose form he'd taken.

Tooth. Mostly, she called him to be a bodyguard on her way home from work and for times when she had to go into places where her size and sex invited attack. Otherwise she left him to live his unnatural life elsewhere. That's what one did with demons. They were less dangerous than the White Ladies because they were more predictable and more easily constrained, but they did have their dangers if the controller got careless. Yet, in a peculiar way, they'd known each other for longer than she liked to think about and she'd got rather fond of him.

She thought about the wind that carried the smell of Maria's death to the White Ladies, then looked speculatively down at Tooth. "You think you could sniff out Maria's body?"

He rose from his haunches and walked ahead of her for several steps, his ears pricked, his head up, turning side to side. He then stopped, his body taut, alert. After a moment, he turned his head and looked at her. Though she heard nothing in her inner or outer ears, she got a powerful sense of impatience/inquiry with a subtext of anger.

"Go ahead. I'll follow."

He trotted along the sidewalk, his powerful body as graceful as a dancer. She followed, almost running, her boot heels clicking loudly on the concrete, more noise than she was comfortable with, but that didn't matter. Finding the body before the garbagemen was what mattered.

She slowed each time she came to a cross street or an alley, glanced down it to make sure it wasn't the one from the vision, then hurried across after Tooth. Twice she saw garbage trucks several blocks off, heading away. Not the one she expected, not yet.

Tooth growled and stopped beside two dumpsters pushed out onto the sidewalk, a pile of the black sacks beside them. Hana ran faster. As she passed the nearest cross street; she saw one of the dirty white sanitation trucks stop to make a pickup.

When she reached Tooth, he was nosing at one of the sacks. She took her hideout knife from her boot and slit the sack open.

Maria's face twisted with some emotion — it was hard to say what — her hands were frozen into claws and several of the nails were broken. With the sound of the garbage truck loud in her ears, Hana scraped a fragment of skin from under one of those nails and wrapped it in a handkerchief, then cut off a lock of the girl's curly black hair and tucked it in her pocket. "Now, let's get out of here, Tooth."

HANA'S APARTMENT WAS IN AN OLD BRICK BUILDING WHOSE WINDOWS leaked when it rained, something that kept the rent down to a sum she could manage. It was an efficiency, with a wall-bed, a tiny kitchen and even tinier bathroom that might once have been a walk-in closet. A tall, rickety highboy stood against one wall, leaning tiredly on an equally ancient wardrobe that was the only closet space she had.

She squatted by the lowest drawer of the highboy, took out two squares of raw silk, a beeswax candle, and the special matches she kept in a silver box. Behind her Tooth was wandering about the apartment sniffing things, though he carefully avoided the pentagram beneath the throw rug. He was enjoying himself. She usually dismissed him in the hall outside, so he'd never been in the apartment before. Over her shoulder, she said, "Stand by the door, Tooth. I'll send you home as soon as I've finished this."

She felt anxiety/resistance, but he did what she said.

She took her tools to the middle of the room, kicked aside the throw rug and settled herself in the center of the pentagram. She was so tired her hands were shaking, but she had to get the speci-

mens preserved until she could deal properly with them. "Be very quiet for the next few minutes. Look away, think of something else, if you will." She shook out her handkerchief over one of the silk squares, folded the silk into a packet around the fragment of skin, lit the candle and dripped wax on the packet to seal it. She repeated this with the lock of Maria's hair. She blew out the candle and got to her feet.

"Tooth, you did good and I thank you." She stepped across the line of the pentagram, started for the door. "Let's go in the hallway and I'll turn you loose."

He sat on his haunches and stared at her. There was no threat in his gaze and no red in his eyes, just a calm resistance. She felt a powerful no.

"You don't want to go home?"

Ambivalence first, then acceptance.

"Well, Tooth, I'll tell you true. If you stay here, you stay bound?"

Shrug.

She rubbed at her chin. Demons were feral creatures. No matter how tame they could seem, they could turn deadly in the blink of an eye. If you didn't dismiss them immediately after serving the purpose for which they were summoned, you got used to them and started treating them like the creatures whose shape they'd assumed. What happened after that, after the guard was down, was usually fatal.

"I am uncomfortable with bondage," she said slowly. "I can live with short-time ties on you, because I don't have it in my face all the time. This, I don't know."

Sense of laughter.

"Hunh. That's easy for you to say." She moved away from the door to pull down the bed. "We'll continue this later. I'm tired and I need sleep. If you get hungry, there's milk and some hamburger in the refrigerator. Feel free to eat anything you can get at and change shape if you need to. Um. I'm not supposed to have animals in here. If you're going to stay around, you can't make a fuss and if someone tattles to the manager and he shows up, you should play shadow in the corner."

WHEN SHE WOKE, TOOTH WAS STRETCHED OUT ON THE BOTTOM OF the bed, breathing slowly and loudly in what she would have sworn was a snore. Did demons sleep? It startled her that she didn't know. She poked him with her toe.

If he wasn't asleep he did a good imitation of waking with a snort and a growl—which turned to a whine when he remembered who she was and where he was. He jumped off the bed, trotted to the door and scratched at it.

"Oh no you don't. Bathroom for you, Tooth, if that's what you want. And clean up after yourself."

He whined some more, then trotted over to the bathroom door and oozed through it. She chuckled, shook her head. "Learn something new every day."

She swung her feet over the side of the bed, sat a moment running her hands through her hair and rubbing her eyes, trying to force herself awake enough to consider what she had to do. It was definitely time to get out of town. She glanced at the small travel alarm. "It's 1:30. I really must have been tired." She yawned, moved her shoulders. "Come on, woman, you've got things to do."

She reached for the phone on the table beside the bed, dialed a familiar number and waited through the usual fifteen rings before her boss picked up the phone. "Mr. Adami, Hana Harmon here. No I'm not sick, I'm just letting you know I quit. I know about notice, but I can't do that. My ex has showed up and he's already tried to kill me twice, so in another couple hours I'm outta here."

She hung up.

Tooth was sitting on his haunches staring at her.

Question?

"Why not just go? Mr. Adami's basically a nice man. He'd worry if I disappeared without an explanation. Might even go to the police. If you provide a box they can put you in, mortals mostly don't bother wondering about you, and they forget you existed

once you've been gone a few months."

Question?

"What does it matter what they think? There are so many more of them than there are of us, my friend. They can keep coming at you and coming at you until you smother under the weight of them. Shadow and subtlety mean safety here."

Question?

"Give me a minute to get cleaned up, then we'll get started on this business."

SHE DRESSED IN SWEAT PANTS AND A T-SHIRT, PULLED THE BED together and swung it up into its wall-slot, and kicked the rug aside.

"Tooth, I'm going to activate the pentagram so you'd better go sit in the kitchen; you'll be more comfortable there."

Agreement.

He trotted quickly into the kitchen, but she was amused to see that he flung himself down where he could look through the door and watch what she was doing.

She fetched her skrying mirror and the silk packets from the cedar box where she'd left them along with two more of her candles, the ones with the wax mixed with oil pressed from windflower seeds. It wasn't the name they had in modern texts, but the name she'd known long before any of those texts were written, and the purpose it served was written nowhere.

With the lines of the pentagram glowing silver around her, she lit the first candle, breathed in the smoke rising from the wick; the musky sweetness of the burning oil caught in the back of her throat as it always did. She used the hem of her T-shirt to wipe off the mirror, then broke open the packet with Maria's hair and dropped a bit of it into the candle flame. Chanting the ancient words, she held the mirror over the candle until the smoke from the burning hair turned it black. Holding the silver oval with the tips of her fingers, she brought it close to her mouth and blew gently at the smoke.

The mirror cleared and she saw an office with a desk and a lighted lamp. A girl was forced down on the desk, stripped naked. A man had a cord of some kind around her neck and was strangling her as he sodomized her. She was still fighting him as the image cleared, reaching around, clawing at his wrists. An instant later, her arms went limp, her head dropped, and the mirror reflected only Hana's face.

Hana set the mirror down very gently, rubbed her fingertips on her T-shirt. In her long life she'd seen many ugly things and this was only one more, but she'd never got used to them. She doubted she ever would.

She'd hoped to get a look at the man's face, but that hadn't happened. No matter. Next step. She set the mirror next to the candle, dropped the remainder of Maria's hair on the mirror, then used her finger to draw a circle about it, blocking it from the rest of the pentagram's heart. She lit the second candle, composed herself, then unwrapped the second packet and took out the tiny fragment of the killer's skin. She sang the words, then dropped the skin into the candle flame. "Bind and bring," she sang, in words from a language very few spoke any longer. "Bind and bring the man to me."

When she felt the rubbery thrum of the bind-cord, she pinched out the candle flame, stretched over and touched the glowing line of the pentagram, enjoying the hot tingle before the glow faded. "So that's done."

She got to her feet, stretched up as high as she could reach, then strolled toward the kitchen. "You leave anything in the fridge, Tooth, or do I have to order a couple pizzas?"

HANA ANEZKA HARMONY WALKED ALONG THE NIGHT DARK STREET, moving in and out of shadow with a black dog Tooth gliding along close to the walls half a block behind her. She wore a tight, short black skirt and a red top with narrow straps over the shoulders; on her bare arms were dozens of thin bracelets, cheap aluminum rounds tinted gold and silver, blue and red. Her boots were red patent leather and reached up past her knees. One hand rested on a large, red patent leather purse, the other arm swung free, the ban-

gles clashing softly through the noise from the cars driving past and the sounds coming out of the bars and all-night shops that lined this section of street. She'd pulled a glamour over herself, erasing the years until she seemed little more than a child, Maria's age along with Maria's look.

The moon was up and full, the sky clear of clouds. It was a good time for the kind of hunting she meant to do.

She walked past girls standing in twos and threes beside the light standards. One of the triads started toward her, but Tooth came out of the shadows and bared his teeth at them. When he started growling and moving toward them, they backed off.

She stood under the lamp waiting. She could feel him out there tugging against the bind-cord, circling round and round her. Under her breath she sang the old words that called him to her. Over and over she sang them as she felt him coming closer

A gray Ford Taurus eased from the line of cars and stopped beside her. It was him. The poison in him nearly choked her, but she strutted to the car and knocked on the window.

The window slid down, she leaned in, her bangles clashing softly as they touched the metal. "Want a date, huh?"

"You're new." His voice was a reedy whisper. He wore a cowboy hat that shaded his face so all she could really see was his chin. He sat with one gloved hand on the wheel, the other out of sight beside him.

"Yeah," she said. "You wanna talk, you pay my time."

"Yes. That's it. I ... I'd like to talk." The hidden hand came up holding some bills, four fifties, fanned so she could see and count them. "I have a place," he said. "If ... if you'll come, spend the night" He leaned forward, put the bills on the dash, got out his wallet and took two more fifties from it.

"All night? You gotta come up with more than that."

Gloved fingers shaking a little, he took out two more fifties and added them to the pile. "That's four hundred. It's all I've got."

"OK. But I hold the money and if you get freaky, I'm outta there."

"No, no, I don't like that kind of thing. I promise you, nothing like that." He popped the lock. "Hurry, I don't like this place."

She trotted round to the passenger side, opened the door and got in, reaching for the money on the dash. There was a quick, cold gust of wind, then Tooth was in the back seat, crouched low and out of reach of the rearview mirror.

He caught her wrist. "Not yet. Shut the door. I don't want you grabbing it and running out on me."

She shrugged, pulled the door shut. This time when she reached for the money he didn't stop her, just triggered the locks again. She tucked the fifties in her purse and slouched in the corner of the seat, watching him. *Bait and control and don't alarm the prey.* He was good at this. It made her feel rather sick to think of how he'd honed his skill.

He didn't talk as he drove. It wasn't a pleasant ride; he was too hesitant sometimes or too suddenly bold, though he was careful to obey the traffic lights. By the time he stopped before a small, old office building in an area of such buildings, all of them dark and deserted, she was ready to start chewing on her fake fingernails.

"I've got an office here. The building doesn't look like much, I know, but my place is clean and private, quite comfortable actually. There's an espresso machine if you'd like coffee. You just sit here in the car until I get the door unlocked. There's no night watchman, so we can have a nice time without worrying about nosy neighbors."

Before he opened the door, he slipped a small box from a slot in the dash. "Just sit here and wait 'til I call you," he repeated, then was out the door and in the shadowed alcove of the building's entrance before she could get a good look at him. She tried the door, but it was locked again.

"Must be one of those remote control gadgets, Tooth. This one is smooth."

A soft snort from the back seat.

"Yes. He doesn't know us, does he? Be ready. I'll give you all the time I can, but I don't want to spook him."

Silent laughter.

With the lines of
the pentagram glowing silver around her,
she lit the first candle, then broke open the packet
with María's hair and dropped a bit of it into the flame.

"That was a bad pun, wasn't it?" She took a tissue from her purse, wiped every surface she could remember touching.

Curiosity.

"Fingerprints, Tooth. Nasty things to leave behind in the wrong places. These mortals keep records like you wouldn't believe and they get better at it all the time."

HE WAS BACK FOR HER A MOMENT LATER, OPENING THE DOOR FOR her with a clumsy courtesy that was supposed to conceal the way he was using his glove to clean her prints off the handle. She was grimly amused by this small irony because she'd been wondering how she was going to manage that without alerting him. She stood in the way so he couldn't shut the door while she patted her bag, counted her bangles, ostensibly making sure she had everything she'd brought with her until the gust of cold air brushing past her legs told her Tooth was out of this metal cage.

The man took her arm, moved her aside, locked the door, and walked her to the entranceway. His touch was light, but the way he was holding her, he could tighten his grip very fast if she tried to get away. She pretended she didn't notice.

HIS OFFICE WAS ON THE FOURTH FLOOR. HE STOOD ASIDE AND LET her go in ahead of him, then followed, locking the door behind him.

The outer room was neat, with new paint and a carpet on the floor, a desk and computer station near the door to the inner office. There was a glass table with white legs, magazines laid out on it, a square white wooden couch with dull orange pillows. There were half a dozen prints on the wall, motel art of the most bland and meaningless. Hana could imagine him bringing girls in here and watching them relax as they saw this desperately ordinary room. *Trap-door spider. Walk into my parlor said the spider to the fly. Yes, indeed.*

He brushed past her, unlocked the door to the inner office, opened it, and bowed her in.

This room was much the same as the other — neat, low-end expensive, reassuring. A big desk with a simulated mahogany top and a black swivel chair behind it, with studs hammered along the seams in a fake pseudo-Spanish look. He touched her shoulder very lightly, his gloved fingers just brushing her. Then he stepped away. "Would you mind taking off your clothes and sitting in the chair?"

"You're paying, you get it." She set her purse on the desk, opened it, and began pulling off her bangles. She put them in the purse and brought out a small silver snuffbox. She walked over to him, sway-

ing her body, holding the box on the palm of her hand. "Some good stuff, you wanna try?"

Before he could say anything she used her thumb to flick open the lid, then blew the contents of the box into his face.

He held his breath and grabbed at her, but Tooth was suddenly there between them, his shoulder slamming into the man's soft gut.

He gasped, and before he could stop himself, breathed in the dust. A moment later he was standing blank-faced as a shop-window mannequin. She took the hat off him and looked at him for a moment. Such an ordinary man. Neither old nor young, somewhere around forty. Light brown hair, thin, receding at the temples. Round face. Not fat but doughy, the features blunted, almost embryonic. "Eh, Tooth, you wouldn't think that was the face of a monster, would you?"

Impatience.

"You're right. We'll both feel cleaner after this is over."

With Tooth walking in front of them, they moved through the dark streets to the park where the White Ladies were waiting. Hana took him by the elbows and pushed him into the gluey sphere of summoning.

He struggled a moment as that ambient force canceled the powder spell, but the trap-door spider was caught in a stickier web than any he had ever spun and step by step, fighting all the way, whatever cries he might have made smothered by the high drone of the White Ladies, he was drawn to the bridge.

Hana watched as long pale hands caught his and pulled him into the circling dance. His face was a silent scream, then he turned again, and all she saw was the back of his head.

Hana sighed. "Not a nice end, Tooth, though he deserves it more than most. Come on. I want to get out of these horrible clothes."

She glanced back one more time before she turned into the street where her apartment was. She could still see the bridge and the silent circling figures. They would dance him round and round 'til the bones of his feet were bare. Until all the life was sucked out of him and his bones would go into the water of that other stream that this stream only echoed. The White Ladies danced for their dinner, the same dance that was the mourning dance for the dead Maria.

She shrugged and walked on, the demon Tooth ambling beside her. "You still wanting to hang around this place, Tooth? If so, I'd better explain about bus travel and we'd better reconfigure your form. I don't think you'd like riding the baggage compartment all that well." 🐞

WITH VORPAL SWORD IN HAND

Nonsense poems probably aren't so silly to the creatures that live in them—how would you like to be the Jabberwock for instance?

BY BRUCE BOSTON

Illustration by Marc Sasso

BRILLIG WASN'T A MEMBER OF THE SLITHY Toves—he had never been inducted into the club—but he used to hang with the Toves a lot. Drinking and clowning around at Magpie's Tavern. Cruising the open road with their bikes on full bore. Winding through the Tulgey Woods at all hours of the day and night, scaring the whiskers off straight-cat tourists. More often than not you could find Brillig with the Toves, his plain leather jacket standing in stark contrast to the lurid emblems and insignias emblazoned on theirs. Brillig even helped the Toves construct a life-size replica of the long-dead Jabberwock. They had paraded it around the square at Minabut Crossing, snarling the traffic for miles in every direction.

Yet whenever it came to actually joining the Toves, whenever Thor, the slithiest of the Toves and leader of the club, put the question to him, Brillig always begged off.

"How about it, Brill?" Thor would say, running a hand through his greasy, gray-blond locks.

"Not yet," Brillig would mumble, "I'm going to join someday, but not now. I'm not ready yet." He would shuffle his booted paws, and stare down into his greenbeer or sidewise or out across the loose



Marc Sardo
©

prairie, anywhere except into Thor's glaring wall-eyed countenance, which was no bright plum at the best of times.

Thor would hawk and spit—a limp bullet-cud of shag and pepper juice—and stalk off shaking his head. Sometimes he would give Brillig a playful cuff on the ear first, a cuff so playful it left Brillig's skull ringing for hours.

And so it was that whenever the Toves pulled up to their clubhouse for a riff of private revelry, Brillig was always left behind, standing on the doorstep. Only members of the Toves were allowed inside the clubhouse. Brillig had never seen so much as a lick of its rafters.

BRILLIG KNEW THAT INITIATION INTO THE Slithy Toves involved an arduous ritual, a night of torsion and rictus, of raw borogroves and a host of other plenum victuals. He didn't have the stomach for it. He also knew that if he joined the Toves he'd have to hitch up with one or more of the Tove Mamas. Their rank and roly-poly sexuality terrified and repulsed him thoroughly. Truth be told, Brillig didn't care for the Toves and their randish ways one bit. Yet Brillig had a life plan, and hanging with the Toves was a crucial part of it. At least for now.

By day Brillig worked as a nitstickler at the offices of Dim, Dim and Sweet Cousin. When he wasn't nitstickling, he was downgrading thubs. It was a drear, deadening job, like most in Lewistown, but it left his mind free to meander and dream, to map out the particulars of his life plan. What Brillig dreamed and schemed about most often...was the vorpel sword.

Legend had it that long ago, in a night ripe with red slaughter—when the jubjub bird sang in the Tulgey Woods, when the beamish moon still plowed the sky untouched by man or beast—the Slithy Toves had stormed the seaward castle and stolen the sword from its salty shrine. Somewhere in the Tove clubhouse the vorpel sword was supposedly hidden, and Brillig meant to find it and have it for his own. Then he could tell Dim, or Dim, or in his wildest imaginings even the fair and seldom-spied Sweet Cousin, just what they could do with their nits and thubs. With vorpel sword in hand, with its magical powers in tow, he could venture forth into the wider world to make his fortune. He would leave Lewistown behind forever, coughing on the dust of his boots. If Sweet Cousin was nice enough, he might decide to take her along with him, at least for a while.

Brillig's life plan was not very realistic. It was full of complicated and improbable subplots, subject to constant revisions. But it did have scope.

IN EVERY FAMILY, TRIBE, GROUP, CLUB, CLAN, ASSOCIATION...THERE is always an established pecking order. And so it was with the Toves. At the top of their grubfest sat Thor, most often firmly astride his coal-black Harley. Not far behind, constantly vying for *numero dos*, came Knickerbock and Bluelip. After that there was Draft, Mandlebrot, Tecumcari, Andiron, Cuttlebone, and half a dozen or more other Toves with names equally improbable and apt. And at the base of the Tove hierarchy, most often the butt of Tove jokes, awkward and incapable, almost more mascot than member—they all agree—there was Mangle.

When they staggered out of Magpie's each night, steamed to the gill sockets, ripped to the flanges, Mangle always staggered the last and the longest. When they cruised the open road, their bikes roaring in tandem against the stars, it was Mangle who always brought up the rear.

There had been a time when Mangle was a respected member of the Toves. Until one day on an uffish dare, he had driven his bike head-on into a dead bandersnatch. Apart from its vicious claws and fangs, the bandersnatch is a big cuddly ball of fur, widely known to be the softest of all God's creatures. Yet clinging to strange ways even in death, a deceased bandersnatch can often decay and petrify in the space of a few hours. Mangle might just as well have driven

his bike head-on into a stone wall. After that, he'd never been quite the same.

As Knickerbock put it, "That Mangle's drinking with only half a stein."

"Yeah," Bluelip added, chuckling, displaying a row of teeth so crooked they could have lined the King's Highway, "And it ain't got no handle on it."

Of all the Toves, Mangle was the easiest to fool, the easiest to manipulate, the most likely, Brillig concluded, to let him into the Tove clubhouse even though he wasn't a member. And thus it was Mangle, of all the Toves, that Brillig chose to pursue and befriend.

MONDAYS AT MIDDAY. FRIDAY AFTERNOONS. THE THIRD WEDNESDAY of every month. Sometimes in velveteen and leather. More often in taffeta and swak. Blond and braceleted and thonged. Always unannounced yet always welcome. Majestic and indifferent as an ocean liner slicing the wide blue sea at thirty knots with no whisper of a storm in sight...Sweet Cousin came sailing into the offices that bore her name.

She would glide down the aisle of the high drear room, past the rows of scrubbed desks, with nary a glance for the lackeys bent to their tasks all around her. Eyes would glance up furtively from nits and thubs. Breaths were drawn and ruffs expanded. Wherever and whenever Sweet Cousin passed, a tantalizing fragrance lingered momentarily in the air she had deigned to grace with her presence. She made Brillig think of sticky buns and double cream. There was no other way he could describe it.

Somewhere in the suites beyond the main office, in a sleekly appointed domain where Brillig had seldom ventured and was never allowed to tarry, Sweet Cousin would engage in a lengthy managerial parley with Dim and Dim. Then she would come gliding back, once more teasing the air and all who breathed it with her remarkable mouth-watering fragrance. As she disappeared into the street, from which she had sprung like an apparition, the entire room expelled a collective sigh of longing. Longing honed to sheer distraction since it could never be fulfilled.

Afterward, Brillig's mind began to wander more than usual. His life-plan reveries took on a crushing immediacy. He would begin to hatch scenarios full of romantic interludes and erotic innuendo...until Dim's long, yellowing claws, or Dim's short, well-gnawed, graying claws, came tap-tap-tapping on the pile of work before him.

"Stickle!" one or another Dim would yell at him in a nerve-wrenching screech. "Stickle! Stickle! Stickle!"

Images of Sweet Cousin would recede into the misty realms of fantasy. Perhaps she had never really been there at all.

ANYTIME HE COULD GET MANGLE ALONE, BRILLIG WOULD START asking him about the clubhouse. If Mangle began to stutter, Brillig knew he was on the right track. Mangle usually talked in a slow drawl, full of pauses and *non sequiturs*. The pauses gave his mind time to catch up with his mouth. The *non sequiturs* occurred when his thoughts took one of their unpredictable detours. Whenever Mangle was nervous or unsure of himself his slow drawl degenerated into an even more protracted stutter.

Brillig's conversations with Mangle were like the ones he had with Thor about joining the Toves. They were essentially the same conversation over and over again. Only in this case, Mangle never seemed to remember that they'd had it before.

"Tell me about the clubhouse," Brillig said.

Mangle mulled this over for a while. One could see the thoughts slowly turning behind his large, sad eyes. "It's a house," he concluded.

"How many rooms does it have?" Brillig asked.

Mangle began counting off the rooms on one paw. When he got up to four and that didn't work, he tried the other paw. "It's got rooms," he finally said. "Lots of rooms."

"Is there a special room?" Brillig coached.

"Special? What do you mean...special?"

"You know, where you keep trophies and stuff like that."

"Trophies?" A long pause. "I gu...gu...guess you could call it a ta...ta...trophy."

"I'd sure like to see it," Brillig told him.

"It wu...wu...wouldn't be right," Mangle said. "You're not a ma...ma...ma..." Mangle's mind took a sudden detour. "Hey, Brill, I got a switchblade. Did I ever show you my switchblade?"

"Yeah," Brillig said, gritting his teeth, managing a grin, "you did. But I sure could see it again."

I'D LIKE TO OUTGRABE HER MOME RATHS," Knickerbock observed, picking an unidentifiable gobbet of food from his splayed goatee, popping it into his mouth.

Bluelip guffawed, exposing a tongue so coated it could have braved a polar trek. "Yeah," he agreed. "And I'd like to gallumph her tumtum tree."

Brillig's paws tightened on the handlebars of his bike until his knuckles ached. He squinted his eyes shut. He saw black. He saw red. It enraged him to the core that the Toves should discuss his dream paramour in gutter parlance.

They were hanging in the parking lot outside Needleman's Motorcycle Emporium. Inside, Cuttlebone and Draft were wandering up and down the aisles, looking for some new fangdoddles to paste on their fenders. Needleman was trailing behind them, sweating profusely, trying to wait on them as quickly as possible and get them out of the store. The Toves, by their mere presence, had scared all the other customers away.

Across the street, a slung limo had pulled up and debouched Sweet Cousin, who had subsequently floated along the cobbles into the Wonderland Boutique. The Tove's vile suggestions had accompanied her nothing-less-than-stunning passage.

"Hmnn," Thor said speculatively, "Does anyone besides me smell sticky buns?"

The repetitive parameters of Brillig's life seemed to be closing in about him. He felt as if he were entrapped in a circular maze. All that he desired remained beyond his reach. At every turn a raft of deadening details came rushing upon him. Mangle's stutter. The tapping discolored claws of this Dim or that Dim. Bluelip's fetid laughter. The clubhouse door slamming in his face. The sheaves of thubs, ready for downgrading, stacked in tottering towers against the walls of the office. The price of new potatoes at Christmas. Brillig couldn't stand it any longer.

"I'm ready to join," he suddenly announced, turning to Thor. "I'm ready to become a Tove."

Thor looked at him askance. Given his wall-eye, it was about the only way he could look. "That's great, Brillig," he laughed. "That's slithy! I don't know why it's taken you so damn long. I was starting to wonder if maybe you were just spying on us or something."

This time Thor cuffed Brillig playfully on *both* ears, knocking him off his bike.

"LET'S RIDE," THOR SAID.

Knickerbock slid off his barstool. "Let's taste the wild wind!" he added.

Bluelip chugged the rest of his greenbeer. "Bugs in our teeth!" he shouted.

They all staggered out of Magpie's and into the muddy yard, with Brillig, Mangle, and a gaggle of Tove Mamas bringing up the rear.

As Brillig mounted his bike, he felt a pair of meaty arms closing about his chest. One of the Tove Mamas—Big Calves? St. Louie Sal?—had mounted behind him. Now that he was scheduled to become a Tove, the Mamas had begun to stake out their claims. Without glancing back, Brillig kicked his bike into action. He wobbled uncertainly onto the road, unaccustomed to the added weight. Truth be told, he didn't even *like* motorcycles.

Slu...uurp! Slu...uu...uurp!

It *was* St. Louie Sal—he could tell by her whiskey-soaked breath—and she was earnestly licking the inside of his ear! Brillig grimaced

and hunched further into the wind to escape her wet attentions.

Cruising the open highway, winding back and forth through the Tulgey Woods, roaring unchecked through the deserted night-town streets of Lewistown, ignoring the traffic lights, disrupting the sleep of sober citizens. With no real mischief to be found, Thor motioned them back the way they had come.

When they reached the Tove clubhouse, Sal gave Brillig a twist of her heavy hips and a slow drunken wink—the clear threat of further liberties to be taken—just before she slammed the door in his face.

MANGLE PAUSED AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS.

"I ga...ga...guess it's OK," he said for the third time, "since you're going to be a Ta...Ta...Tove."

He'd said it once when he'd finally given in to Brillig's demands, and a second time when he'd snuck him in through the back of the clubhouse. Brillig had less than a day left before he'd have to undergo the ritual of initiation. He could hear the Toves drunken singing downstairs, the coarse and frightening laughter of the Tove Mamas. Once he had the vorpel sword in hand, Brillig thought, they'd all be rag history.

"Sure it's OK," he told Mangle for the third time. "I've been wanting to see it for so long. Now that I'm going to be a Tove, there's no reason I should have to wait any longer."

"Maybe we should ask Th...Th...Thor?"

Brillig brushed it away. "Nah, you don't want to bother him now. He's partying."

Mangle paused for a full minute, thinking it over. Brillig was almost ready to strangle him. *Strangle Mangle*, he thought, *strangle Mangle*. He was afraid he was losing it. His ruff was damp with sweat and his forepaws were trembling. Finally Mangle began to shuffle forward, motioning for Brillig to follow. At the end of the hall he paused before a door no different than any of the others. He turned to face Brillig.

"I'm only doing this, Brill," Mangle said, "'cause you're my ba...ba...best friend." His eyes looked even sadder than usual.

Brillig felt a wave of guilt wash over him. He let it ebb and fade before replying. "You're my best friend, too, Mang," he said, patting him on the shoulder. After all, Brillig thought, it was true. Despite the fact that he could barely stand Mangle's company, he had never bothered to make any other friends.

Bending down to the floor, Mangle pried up a loose board and extracted a key. He held it out to Brillig.

"No, Mang, you go first." What if there was a booby trap, Brillig thought, and Mangle had forgotten about it?

As the door was like any other door, the room was like any other room. More diminutive than most since it was at the end of the second story, and its slanting ceiling accommodated the eaves of the roof. A naked bulb hung from a chain—Mangle had turned it on—and there was only a single piece of furniture: a long wooden table on which a glass case rested.

Brillig could feel the gimbling of his heart, hear the breath whiffling in his lungs. He advanced across the room and peered into the case. It was so coated with dust he couldn't make out a thing. He wiped it off with the sleeve of his jacket, but even the inside of the glass was dirty and opaque from years of neglect.

"Here, Mang, you have to help me," Brillig said, grabbing one end of the case.

Mangle sighed and grabbed the other end. Now that he had come this far, he seemed resigned to whatever was to follow. Together they lifted, and lowered the heavy case to the floor.

Brillig was disappointed once again. Just like any other door...just like any other room...and just like any other sword... It was there all right, but there seemed to be nothing special about it. No jewels on the hilt. No fine craftsmanship. No runes engraved upon its blade. It wasn't even a very long sword, and it looked dull and rusty from disuse. Like everything else in the room, it was coated with dust.

"Da...da...don't touch it," Mangle warned, "It can do fu...fu...funny things to your head."

Continued on page 71



D. MARTIN
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*Some magics are trifling things — love charms, good luck pieces, tokens like that.
Others are far from small, and they burrow deep into the flesh and bone.*

LEUKA AND PHLEGO

BY LISA R. COHEN
Illustration by David Martin

THEY BROUGHT THE THIEF TO US BECAUSE THEY thought we were witches, Leuka and I. Because we were sisters living together alone past the age of marriage and were strange to them in our looks and our ways, they thought we were witches. And because he was unawakened and yet still living, they thought he was under a spell and

that only magic could save him. They were wrong on all accounts. Yet in the end, they were not wrong to bring him to us, not for what they thought, for even magic couldn't save him in the end, but for one other reason.

It was late morning and I had been up since dawn doing the plain, hard and pleasant work that our small place demands with its two aging roans, six sweet cows, three chuckling hens, and one old fat mean sow that I could not truthfully bear to slaughter, so much was she like a cranky third sister. I

was not tired from those small labors, oh no, not I, but merely beginning to hum smoothly like a mill under full flow. I had just swept the plow over my left shoulder to take it up to the fields when I heard the children shouting from the road below the meadow.

"Leuka," they called, though they should have known she was never seen before twilight, and "Phlego! Phlego! We need you."

I stopped and waited for them to appear, which was very soon after, because they were running, pushing and pulling the cart

with its burden. They were not just children, but included Jarn, the wood chopper, and Darden, the farmer's eldest son, who was strapping and almost as strong as I. The younger children, the boy and the girl, ran ahead when they saw me standing. They grabbed at my free hand and my apron, both speaking at once and out of breath, so I couldn't understand a word.

I could see now that the burden on the cart was a man, and not moving. I leaned the plow against the pump, to get it out of the way, and went into the house to fetch my sister's bag and clean linen and a basin for water. By the time I emerged with these things, the men and children had reached the yard and stood there panting and uncertain.

I should say that although I am not bad tempered like my sister, I have little patience for the social niceties of the folk of this part of the world. I can never keep straight the order and place of 'halloos' and 'fare-th'-wells' and handclasps and waves and the endless donning and doffing of clothing. I don't try, so perhaps they thought me graceless and gruff when I turned without preamble to the limp burden in the cart. They stayed their tongues while I looked to see what they had brought us.

It was a man, as I'd guessed, but not from anywhere nearby. The men of these western mountains are big boned and honey-haired. Their cheeks are seamed and brown, like Jarn's, or round and pink like Darden's, and their eyes are blue or brown like flowers or the earth. But this man, this still and quiet figure, was none of these.

He was small and small boned, and his hair was sleek black like the shiny pinfeathers on the throat of a crow. His skin had the ivory smoothness of fine, fired river clay, and his long eyelashes made wide, fringed crescents on his pale cheeks. I had seen men (and women too) of this aspect before, but not here and not for a long while.

I leaned close to his mouth to feel if he still had breath. My lips touched his throat to feel the faint and slow rush of blood there. His skin was cool, although the day was hot, and I could see no blood on him, nor bruise nor break anywhere.

"What happened?" I asked, gently feeling his head for lumps or soft spots. There were none and I continued to cautiously poke and prod.

"I found him," said Jarn, released at last from silence. "By the river, as I carried my whetstone to the bank. He was lying on the path, his arm dangling in the water. I thought him dead and went to fetch the farmer."

"But he wasn't dead," said the young farm boy, "and the water wouldn't stick to him."

"No," said the young girl, his sister. "And the dogs were afraid and the river frogs were quiet."

"Aye," said Jarn. "He smells of the Gray. And so we thought ... we did not know what else to do with him."

"Did you find his horse?" I asked, turning over his hands and holding them before me. They were exquisite hands, bird-boned and smooth, the nails clean and evenly cut.

"Horse?" asked Jarn, as though such animals were only seen in traveling circuses and never carried strangers through the woods.

"He's come a long way to fall in our woods, by our river," I said. "But his boots are nearly new and he smells of horse. A gray horse," I held up a hair plucked from his trousers. It was easily figured, yet I knew they took it for magery from their uneasy quiet.

"I saw no horse," said Jarn, looking behind him this way and that as if the offending horse had snuck up behind to prove him blind. "Can we leave him with you?"

I thought about it for a minute, but only that long. I could find nothing wrong with him, and I was as good a healer as the battlefield can make of a woman. He would be as well off here as anywhere. If there was magic involved, as I was sure there was, then he would be better off with Leuka at hand than elsewhere. And besides, I owed a boon to the small boned, black haired people of the North.

"We will keep him," I said. "But take your cart." I reached over the low sides of the wagon and got my arms under him and lifted him

up. He was only a little heavier than the plow so it was no hardship to carry him into our house and lay him on my bed.

To examine him more closely I stripped him of his clothes and the only jewelry he wore, a black medallion cast in slick, heavy metal. He bore a bruise or two, but small and yellowing and nothing to account for this deathlike sleep. I pulled up the eyelids to find the eyes were rolled up into the corners as if he were trying to look into his own mind. Hazel eyes they were, the irises shot with veins of copper and the black centers very small.

I covered him with my quilts, hung comfrey, and wolfbane round the bed and set a pot of myrrh to smoke. None of these actions made any visible change in his condition. Though I had not expected that they would work immediately, I knew they would do their good in time. Then I called one of Leuka's rats to come watch over him and went back out into the heat of the day.

There was no need to stay by the house, for the rat would find me if there was trouble. The field did need plowing if we were to have bread this winter. I worked happily under the blazing sun, pushing the plow through the rich, moist mountain earth. There are those who would waste this work on horses, but I don't understand that. There is no greater pleasure for me than to use my long muscles, to strain in concert with the wood or the dirt or the water. After the battlefield, no end seems so glorious as making something grow.

The plowing took the whole rest of the day, and, though I thought about our visitor from time to time, and mused upon his presence here, I have to say that mostly I abandoned myself to the soil and the sweat and the strain. By the time I was finished with the first third of the field, the sun was sliding sideways and down along the great copper bowl of the sky. I realized it would be sunset when I reached the house.

I quickened my pace a little, thinking Leuka did not like to be surprised with visitors under the best of circumstances. I feared for our patient should he awaken and encounter her before she'd had her cup of *theine* or her pipe.

She greeted me in her customary way when I entered, which is to say, with a wordless snort and flip of her hand. The water was just boiling on the stove and her pipe and stinking herbs waited by her cup. The orange blaze of the sunset was still strong in the sky, so she had the hood of her robe pulled down to the tip of her white nose as she shuffled monklike around the kitchen. I left her to it.

Understand that I love my sister dearly and begrudge her none of this; her ill temper, her weak eyes, her worn black robe that would fit me, her, and Tawfik the miller all together; her foul smoking mixture, her strange conceits, her magic. All of it is her and I would not change the smallest thing about her unless she wished it. Still I am no martyr. I went to wash myself under the hand pump and fished two stone bottles of ale from the cool hollow under the porch. Sitting on the stairs in the sunset, with my hair still wet and the well-oiled feeling of fatigue in my shoulders, I sat and drank the first bottle.

I opened the second one as darkness fell, and it wasn't until the smell of frying onions reached me that I roused myself and came indoors. Leuka was sitting at the table when I entered, only now she had her sleeves pushed up to the elbows and the hood thrown back off her face. Her ivory-colored hair hung in its customary tangle across her shoulders and down her back.

There was a mess of potatoes, onions, and eggs frying on the stove and only the faintest reek of her vile tobacco hung in the air. She studied me over the top of her cup as I took the frying pan from the stove to the table and dug in with the wooden spoon.

"There's a man in your bed," she said when my mouth was good and full. I nodded, chewing. I do not like to be rushed at my food. Good eating is like good work — to be engaged in with an unfettered will. I swallowed and sipped my ale.

"Jarn found him in the woods," I said.

"And decided *we* needed him more than the crows and foxes," Leuka answered. "What's wrong with him?"

"I hoped you would know," I answered. "Go and look at him."

"I did," said Leuka. "He stinks of horse and magic. And man-

hood." She added, making that grimace that reminds me of a *pikpik* that has stuck its face in snow and doesn't much like it. It's the whiteness of her eyelashes that makes me think of snow. Leuka is not fond of men.

"He is who he is," I said, shrugging. "Whoever he is."

"He's no prince," said Leuka. "He's no soldier either, nor farmer, nor miller, nor baker, nor wood chopper."

"No," I agreed, remembering those hands. "None of those." I spooned more potatoes into my mouth. Leuka eats little, but she likes to cook, at least she does cook, for which I am grateful.

"No hosteler," she went on. "No priest, no healer — unless healers in the northlands you love so much carry hidden daggers tucked into their boots."

"I don't remember them that way, but it was a long time ago that I needed their services."

"Hm," said Leuka.

"Let me see the dagger," I said. She brought it forth from the voluminous folds of her robe. I wiped my hands on my apron before I took it. Its sheath was cunningly worked in black leather; the blade as fine and delicate as the hand that would hold it. There was a sigil of some kind on the pommel in that runic northland script that I recognized but could not read. Also a maker's mark at the base of the blade. There was oil along its edge.

"Well made," I commented. "Well tended."

"Cared for like a lover," said Leuka. "Who loves a dagger so?"

I thought about that. I had been with and without killing steel in my life. I cannot say I ever loved a blade. I was partners with a sword once, when I was a soldier; the one of us no use without the other, a marriage of necessity, not passion. In my youth I had felt a flush grow in my cheeks for want of a tempered broadsword; forged of black metal so heavy no man in three-score villages could wield it. A traveling armorer carried it around in a cart from town to mountain town and did his business among the curious crowd that gathered. He made a true sport of it, with criers and wagers and every manjack who could hoist it over his head gave it a try, for the armorer promised that he who could wave it thrice, parry, stab, and lunge would have it for his own.

Of course I tried. Of course the thing was meant for me, down to the shape of my palms in the grip. Up over my head it went, waving once, twice, thrice around without breaking a sweat, though it weighed twice as heavy as the sleeper in my bed. But then, by chance, I stepped back for the parry and turned my thick ankle on a rock. Taken off guard, for I was joyous until that moment, not in fighting mettle, I fell and dropped her. Black Pearl I had already named her. Black Pearl. If I'd finally owned her, I might have come to love her, but as it was I could only call it infatuation.

I tipped back the bottle of ale in silent toast to Black Pearl and shook my head. A sword; a broadsword — companions, colleagues, heart's desires. But a dagger is only a servant and only in secret at that. I slipped the knife back into its sheath.

"A thief," I said.

"Or an assassin," said Leuka.

"Do you not recognize the Destroyer's secret mark?" I held it up,

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pommel pointed toward her. "What assassin would carry a signed blade?"

"The same kind who gets himself poisoned," said Leuka. "A stupid one."

"Poison," I said. I had not thought of that. "Can you save him, then?"

Leuka shrugged. "Do I want to?" she asked. "Seems to me we might be better off if he died in the night of his own accord."

"I would be disappointed if that happened," I said. Leuka snorted and picked up her pipe. She knocked the stem against her teeth and her knee bounced up and down a little under the table as it did when she was thinking. I carried the frying pan back to the stove, scraped the last brown crumbs of onion from the cast iron, wiped the pan with an oiled cloth, and hung it from its hook. Then I gathered up the onion skins and potato peels, dropped them in the bucket, and with the lamp from the table to light my way, took them out to the sow's pen and tipped them onto her dinner table.

Pearl heard me coming and snuffled over to see what her serving maid had brought. Yes, Pearl. Black Pearl. Named for my long lost broadsword, but it suited her even better. From her first moment in the world she was a queenly pig — largest of the litter, black, strong, forthright, brave. Fierce in defense of her babes, though we took them all away from her. 'Savage' she had been called and 'mean' also, but who would not be so? Caged as she was, children all stolen for the dinner table, sentenced to death herself? I thought she treated us with forbearance for all we had offered her. Leuka laughed to hear me call a pig a queen. Still, it was something to say about a pig, that I felt a kinship with her and was not ashamed of that.

When I returned to the house, I found the kitchen empty but for a haze of tobacco. From the direction of my room came flashes of blue magelight and the sounds I had always associated with Leuka at work — the creaking of floorboards, tuneless humming, the crackle of small flames. I snuffed the lamp.

My shoulders ached pleasantly from the day's labors. I stretched them and yawned. Leuka's bed was the same tiny cot she'd had from childhood, usually shared by the white-haired, pink-eyed rats she bred, but it offered more comfort than the floor. Leuka would work until daylight poked its sharp nose through the shutters. Whether or not she could save him, she would do her best for my sake. I walked past my bedroom doorway and turned my head away so I couldn't see what transpired there.

I have been a soldier on the battlefields of Ys. I have passed through lands of famine, lands of plague, and even over the border of the Gray. My gaze has fallen, ready or not, on terrible things of many kinds. I never dwell on them; they do not haunt me dream-time or day, but they are always with me, running under my skin like blood. These are things that I wish were not a part of me. One of these disturbing memories would be my sister, in all her naked, white, fey, wild glory, dancing her healing magic.

LEUKA IS OLDER THAN I SO I CANNOT ATTEST TO THE TRUTH OR FALSEHOOD OF THE STORY, BUT OUR PARENTS CLAIMED HER A CHANGELING, AND LEUKA HERSELF DOES NOT DISPUTE IT. AS LONG AS I HAVE KNOWN HER, SHE HAS BEEN THE WAY SHE IS. HER SKIN IS WHITE — NOT PALE, NOR FAIR, BUT

white like skimmed milk, and her hair is the color of the moon when it is the only thing in the sky. She is small, but small like a child, not a dwarf. Although her eyes are pink and crimson and rimmed with white lashes, they are neither long nor tip-tilted.

She detests the sun, for it blinds and burns her. That she is as ill-tempered and capricious as any Brownie cannot be denied. But I know that she was not born with magic in her, for I watched her learn it. I know that she is mortal for I have dragged her back from the edge of the Gray myself once, and it was only by the strength of my arms that I did not lose her.

Some are surprised to hear that our parents, finding a changeling in their cradle, did not leave her on a hillside for the wolves. I pity them their own parents then, if they were of the set of mind to do such a thing. But that is unfair, for there are not many like the Dream Breather in this world and none like the old Death Cheater at all anymore. I wonder why they did not seek the child stolen away and so make three of us. Perhaps the Death Cheater did search, he was so often gone adventuring, but if so, he never spoke of it to me, though he told us rollicking tales enough until the time he returned no more.

FOR THREE DAYS MORE THE THIEF LAY unwaking in my bed and Leuka worked to save him. Hard she labored at her task. Harder than I labored to finish plowing the upper field or plant it with wheat. Harder than I toiled at grinding a new millstone from a great boulder I found in the field. Harder still than I searched the woods for his horse, clucking and calling in what north-land speech I could remember to no avail. She worked so hard I began to fear for her and regretted pressing this on her.

Mind, I am not easily frightened by magic. I have long noted the transformations wrought in my sister when she practices her art. For all her changeling look and temperament, magic does not come naturally to her. Most nights she works like a farmhand, slow to start, steady as she warms to it, but with no real zest or pleasure. There are bad nights when spells don't come at all and the magelight flickers and the peace of the mountain air is shattered by her curses. After nights like these she wakes up late and sour, and I find much to entertain me in the barn.

But there are also nights, admittedly few and far between, when the magelight glows a strong bluish white and magic flows between the timbers of the old farmhouse so strongly that I can feel it like a shower of sparks along my skin. It is at these times that the transformation of Leuka is most amazing and terrible to me, for it evokes a fierce, wild joy in her. While I don't begrudge it, she is not my sister Leuka then, but White Leuka and Starchild Leuka and Leuka Who-Strikes-Sparks-From-The-Moon.

The three nights she worked to save the little thief, however, were like none of these. The magelight burned true for her all right, but like a fever burns — hot and yellow-white and sore. Leuka, so quick to vent her feelings good or ill, fell silent and sullen and would not speak of what occurred. Her hard little heels drove me from her bed before dawn, but she said no word to me, only dropped like a boulder into the warm spot where I had lain. Her skin was both sweating and icy to the touch.

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Nor was the thief unscathed. Under Leuka's hand, his poisoned sleep lost its peaceful, deathlike aspect, and he tossed like a coracle in the surf of his dreams. Now he stiffened and straightened, punched out at demons of the air. Now he shouted hoarse words in the dialect of the barrens or sometimes in the courtly tongue of the great northern city of Bellai. Now he sweated awful, sickly sweet-smelling oil from his pores and his body shook from the laboring of his heart.

On the morning of the fourth day, the rats and I woke of our own volition; Leuka had not come to bed. I hastened to find her, for my room has no drapes and sunlight shines unhindered through every room of the house but hers.

I found her in a heap on the floor by the bed where the thief lay unmoving, and for one moment I thought them both dead. But the thief shifted in his sleep and sighed peacefully and Leuka roused at my touch, though I was not reassured by her condition.

She was weak as though feverstruck, squinting helplessly into the light with black wings of fatigue under each eye. Though she would never let me carry her unless she was unconsciousness or just short of death itself, she took my arm and leaned upon it. I led her to her bed.

When I lifted the covers to her chin, she caught my hand and whispered urgently: "Can you hear it, Phlego?"

I listened very carefully, for a very long time until I was sure the breeze carried only birdsong, bee-drone, and the lowing of milk-heavy cows before my heart could beat again and I could answer.

"No, I cannot hear it, Leuka."

"Good," she said and was instantly asleep.

BUT SHE WAS AWAKE AND BOILING WATER when I returned later with two rabbits I had caught in the garden. I had forsworn the fields that morning in favor of the barnyard and had been well-rewarded.

"I thought you'd sleep 'til tomorrow," I said, taking the small cauldron down from its shelf.

"Hmph," said Leuka. Her pipe lay empty beside her cup and her attention rested on something she turned between her fingers. I put the cauldron next to Leuka's boiling pot and got the knife and a board to cut on.

"Your patient seems better," I ventured, laying the rabbits out on the board.

"Hmmm," said Leuka. She did not look up at me. I recognized the thing between her fingers as the black medallion I'd taken from the thief's throat. I lifted the knife, pressed the tip to the joint of the rabbit's leg and held it there for a while. Then I put it down on the board beside the two little carcasses and came and knelt at Leuka's side.

"So will you tell me, or do I have to ask?" I said.

"I'll tell you," said Leuka. But she did not go on.

"What is that?" I asked, gesturing to the medallion.

"I'll tell you that too," said Leuka. "But you tell me something first."

I knew what she wanted. "I will swear again to you I didn't hear it, Leuka," I stopped and listened. "I still don't. Do you?"

She pursed her lips. She looked tired. There were blue shadows under her milky skin and blue veins showed underneath.

"No," she said. "Not now. But I thought I might have done..." I

laid my hand over her hand where it rested on the table. Two hands; one small and marble white, the other large, rough, and brown. I had already sworn my oath to her all those years ago when I dragged her from the Gray, and an oath does not need repeating.

"Tell me," I said. "What kind of poison is it that turns the mage-light yellow?"

"You noticed that, did you?" she said. "You're not so thick about these things as once you were, old Phlego."

"Strange poison indeed. And strong and sticky. Not like a tincture that runs in the blood. No. Not a juice. It was like a living thing itself — a gray and yellow snake in the blood. But no, not that either, for it was not alive, nor had it flesh. A vapor, then? A sticky yellow vapor that swayed like a snake in the air as I called it out. That'll have to do," Leuka continued.

"You know how it is when you call out a poison, Phlego? No? Well, it isn't hard. Even a lummo like you could do it. You seek the poison, you see? Find the stain in the blood. Easy. Then you call it out. Poof! Up it rises in little flecks and vanishes and the blood is clean. But not this. It did not want to leave his veins. No. A nice warm home they made for slithering through. Would not let me pull it free. Strong poison, yes. Smart poison? What kind of thing is that?"

"Magic?" I asked.

"Well, of course it's magic, oaf," said Leuka. "What else would it be? Cabbages? No, the question is: *What* magic? *Who's* magic? What can make a living thing out of a thing that has never lived?"

"You can," I said. "When you make the broom sweep round the house of its own accord."

Leuka shook her head, "My little trick is a trick and no more. A little flick and flibbet and dancing go the straws, dancing goes the dust. The straws were once alive and the wood also. And the broom does not learn to *want* from it. That is the difference. Do you see?"

"I think so," I said.

"You think so," Leuka mocked. "Well there is only one magic that could create a thing like what rose from our friend's veins — death magic, that baneful art."

"But you got the poison out after all, didn't you?" I asked. My knees had cramped on the floor, so I rose and rubbed them and took her long-boiling pot from the stove. I shook smoke-scented *theine* leaves from their corked jar and made a ball of them in the teapot and poured the water over.

"Yes," she said. "I got it out. But I did not clear it. For after I had wrenched it from his veins, it sought refuge in mine, and I had to turn it here and turn it there so that finally it turned itself whole in that direction which is neither."

"Into the Gray?" I asked, setting steeping pot and cups on the table. I sat in the chair across from her. She nodded.

"That was the moment I thought ... well, never mind what I thought," she said.

"I have a question," I said. "If a poison is so strong that it can jump up and fight White Leuka in her own house, why did it not kill him outright?"

"Why should it?" she asked. "I told you this poison had a will. With him alive it had a body, two eyes, and a hand to hold a dagger with."

"The poison worked the man?"

"Could have," said Leuka.

"But it dropped him by the river," I said. "Why would it do that?"

"That is one thing I would like to ask him when he wakes."

The *theine* had steeped enough for my taste. I poured some into my cup. Leuka would wait 'til it was tanning strength. I sipped at it, letting the heat of it go through me, for I was cold though the night was not. Talk of magic makes me thus. And death magic is far worse, for it comes from the Gray and bears its scent.

I have heard it called the stink of evil, but I would not call it that. Evil is ever part of us; it is in everyone and not something to invade us from the outside. I have been a soldier, I have been in war. I have felt evil grow in my own heart from anger and from fear, it was never so foreign as a poison in my veins. Think now. Who does not know this: *If I say nothing, though it cause a death, they will not blame me.* Or this: *It does not matter if they die for they are my enemies and not men like*

me. Or this: *If only one survives it must be me.* That I know is the evil which grows into the likes of the Destroyer, who razed a continent from end to end before he died. And no small thing for being familiar. But it is our own ill, not from a foreign source, and we must claim it and reshape it before we can be healed of it.

But the Gray is otherwise and other in all its ends and means, and antithetical to man in every way. It is not evil, yet it can swallow us. It has no heart, no ill intent in itself toward mankind and yet where it is, we cannot be unless we become a part of it. Death is part of it. In our own times, in our own ways, we may come to the Gray in peace, melt and fade away and leave no shadow upon the earth. With that I have no quarrel. But let the Gray reach out untimely, there it is that makes me cold. Let there be a will and a want behind that reach and I am truly frightened.

"We let him wake, then?" I asked.

"You said you would be disappointed if he didn't," said Leuka.

"I think I would rather live with my disappointment than otherwise," I said.

"Wisdom gained too late," said Leuka, pouring her own *theine* black and thick into her cup. "For now he lives, and even I won't kill a living man without knowing first that he's my enemy."

HE WOKE THE NEXT MORNING. I HAD FINISHED WITH COWS AND chickens and small repairs in the barn. I had stopped by the pump to rinse guano and straw off my hands when he came faltering out onto the porch like a faun, half wrapped in my bedclothes, the rest dragging behind. He leaned against the post rail blinking into the sunshine as if he never expected to see such loveliness again. Then his eyes lit on me.

"Are you the white angel?" he asked. He spoke in the language of these parts but with that gentle northern drawl I found so easy upon the ear many years past. If he was a servant to a shade I could not tell; it certainly didn't sound in his rough and pleasant voice.

"No," I said as the last trickle of water from the pump ran through my fingers. "My sister Leuka is your white angel, though I wouldn't call her that to her face. I am Phlego."

"Phlego?" he mused. "By what right did your mother name you Phlego with that thatch under your hat the color of flaming embers?"

"I asked her that many times," I said, wiping my hands on my apron. "But her only answer was that they named Leuka first and I was the opposite of Leuka." I pumped a little water into the wooden priming cup and brought it to him. "But then mothers have their own fey logic," I went on, handing him the cup. "What did yours call you?"

"I wish I knew," he said, taking the rough thing in his graceful hands. "The brothers at Tiltern Abbey called me Potboy until I was seven. Crow is what I go by now."

"Strange name for a northland monk," I said.

"Yes," said Crow, "it would be." He turned the cup and sipped from it. Sweat sprang out on his brow. I waited but he said no more. Well Leuka would have him talking easier than I when she woke. I wondered if I should stay by the house and guard her, but Leuka had said he was no shade and only a shade could break her wards. Even if his feebleness was sham, all he could do would be to wake her from her sleep and woe betide him then.

"I have work to get back to," I said, finally. "You're welcome in our house as long as you choose to be our guest."

"I thank you," said Crow, surprise lightening his voice. "But don't worry, it won't be for long." I took the priming cup from his hand and put it back in its place by the pump. Then I hoisted the new millstone I had ground onto my back and headed down toward the mill. I had taken only three steps when he called me back. He was on his feet again, clutching the post rail for support, his other hand at his bare throat.

"I don't suppose you found a fierce, gray horse waiting loyally by my fallen carcass?" he asked. I shook my head no, and he actually smiled.

"Well," he said. "Perhaps there are to be small mercies after all."

BUT NOT FROM LEUKA. I'D INTENDED ONLY TO GIVE THE MILLER THE stone and return to the house before darkness fell. But such plans are often upset as I should well know by now. Nothing could make that stone fit right enough for old Tawfik, and damned if he didn't make me take it back with me, though he paid me in loaves even so. I'd hoped to be there when Leuka woke and met the waking Crow, but by the time my feet found the porch stair, the sun was setting and I found they'd already made acquaintance.

Crow sat stiffly in the chair that ordinarily was my own. He wore his clothes, though not his boots, and his chin was gray with stubble. As I closed the door behind me, his eyes — brown in the dim light — shot to mine and seemed to beg entreaty, yet he said no word. Leuka paced behind him, pipe dribbling smoke from between her clenched teeth. She did not deign to look up, nor speak to me either.

"I told you not to call her 'angel'," I said to Crow. His eyebrows climbed his forehead and a sweat broke on his upper lip but still he was silent.

"Can you not see he's bound?" Leuka snapped at me.

"No," I said, calmly. "There are no bindings on him."

"Well he is," said Leuka. "Tongue and all so don't bother questioning him."

"Why?" I asked. "Has he tried to harm you?"

"Harm me?" cried Leuka. "Only talk my head right off. Crow he calls himself. Ha! Magpie, maybe." Crow made a noise that was very magpielike through his closed lips.

Leuka exhaled a ribbon of smoke that coiled round Crow's neck and tapped him on the head. He winced, but not from pain.

"Then he's told you where he came from?" I asked. "How did he happen to come here?"

"How would I know?" said Leuka. "He woke me with his chattering before the sun had decently set and would not quit, though I warned him more than once." Crow shook his head vehemently at this, or as vehemently as he could, which was not very.

"Well," I said, leaning down to look into Crow's face. "Do you think you could just answer some questions? Without chattering?" He frowned at that, shook his head, then rolled his eyes and nodded. I looked up at Leuka, who was scowling.

"Oh we've been down that road before," said Leuka. "Twice now he's promised to speak only when spoken to."

I shrugged. "You'll have to trust his word sooner or later," I said. "Unless you want to have him at our supper table forever, sister...?" Crow's eyes widened at that, flicked anxiously to Leuka's face, then to mine, then hers again. She made a noise of disgust.

"I suppose not," she said, and made a flick of her fingers. Crow pitched forward out of the chair as though an immovable rock he'd been lifting from his lap had just flown free. For a moment, fury blazed green in his eyes and up he jumped with fists clenched and breath indrawn to speak. Then he caught himself and his head shook as if he would explode with the effort. He slammed both fists on the table and stormed out the front door, bare feet and all.

I said nothing to Leuka, only picked up my tipped chair, but she answered anyway.

"It was badly handled, I know," she said. "If he had been a woman I'd have done it better. You know I can't abide men."

"Did you really not get anything from him?"

She gave a snorting kind of laugh. "How could I not?" she said. "But nothing useful besides the name Crow, if that is his name, which I am sure it is not."

"He told me more than that this morning, and I thought him taciturn." I said.

"What did he tell you?" Leuka asked.

"That he's from the northlands we already knew, but he told me Tiltern Abbey was his home and that his mother never named him, so no name is really his own. He's acquainted with the Old Tongue, he let slip, though nothing said of magic. Oh, and he's not contented with his horse."

"Not?" said Leuka, surprise in her voice. "Well, that's something at least." And she pulled the pipe from her teeth and looked at it,

perplexed. It had gone out, thank the heavens, for the air was thick enough.

"Shall I call him back for supper?" I asked. "He'll get over his temper when he's hungry enough."

"No," she said. "And get out yourself. I need peace and quiet to think this through."

I sighed. The rabbits sat unnoticed on the table. No supper again tonight but what I cooked myself, which was usually ashes and grit by the time I was done, but out I went. At least there was plenty of ale in the spring.

CROW WAS PERCHED LIKE HIS NAMESAKE ON THE RAIL OF BLACK Pearl's pen. She eyed him with some curiosity, snuffling under his feet and wondering, no doubt, if he would fall and land on her supper table. She's never turned up her snout at a little meat and, mut-ton, chicken, or Crow. I doubt it would give her pause.

He didn't look up as I came near, but he heard me coming, for when I got close by he muttered, "She's an ugly old sow."

"Mean, too," I said. "But don't hold it against her. You're a stranger to her and she has reason to mistrust strangers."

Now that the weight of mortality had lifted from his face I could see he was young. Far from home, too, for all he was glib in the language. And injured, poisoned, though he was healing fast. Ten years ago had found me in similar straits, in his homeland, though that was during wartime, when all rules were bent and broken. Still his folk had been kind to me, and through me, Leuka. So we owed him that much, I thought.

"She is as she is," I said. "But she has a good heart."

"For a pig," said Crow.

"For anyone," I said. And I could have meant either Leuka or Black Pearl and would have said the same for either of them.

"Now," I said, "are you well enough to walk with me for a bit?"

"I guess I could," he said, remembering at last he had no fight with me. He climbed down on the safe side of the sty's gate, to Pearl's disappointed grunts. *Sorry, Majesty, I thought, but no supper for any of us tonight.*

The sky was deepening to its night colors of blue, indigo, and black and the stars peeped through slowly like flecks of silver spat from a crucible. There would be a moon, but she was not up yet and the smell of grass and clover rose up sweetly from the ground as I led him through the low pasture.

"I wasn't chattering like a magpie," said Crow after we had walked a bit.

"Oh?"

"I'd hardly said 'Good Morning, Mistress' when she clapped that invisible hand over my mouth and dropped me in the chair."

"Mm,"

"All I wanted to do was thank her for saving my life. You wouldn't think that was a blood insult, would you? But then how can you know what will affront *them*. You southerners are bad enough, with your thin summer skins, but fey folk" He trailed off. We were climbing alongside the cow path. Overhead a single star fell out of the black, drawing a tiny silver arc that lasted but a moment.

"I'm sorry," he said after a bit. "I know you call her 'sister.' It's just that the fey have dealt ever harshly with me. And always the same way, more or less."

The pasture ended in a short steep stair of tumbled rocks. I climbed up, but Crow hesitated.

"I have no boots," he said.

"The rocks don't go on long," I said, and I held out my hand to him. He looked doubtful, but took it anyway.

"Where are we going?" he asked at last.

"You'll see soon enough," I answered. We climbed in silence for the short distance and came out at the edge of a darkling patch of woods, mistwoven and mysterious. There was a fragile path of sorts and I lead him round and up and through, until we could hear the sound of water running gently over rocks. The mist was thick here, and sulfurous as Leuka's pipe. I took Crow's bony elbow to keep him with me. We ended in a clearing, carpeted with

grass and fog. Mist rose in a gusher from the center of the clearing, folding over on itself like cream in a churn.

"What is this?" Crow whispered, almost to himself. "A fairy ring? A witch's cauldron?"

"A bath," I said and tossed a pebble into the steam geyser. We both heard it splash into the pool below.

"This mountain has a fiery heart as well as an icy crown," I said. "Half her springs run cold, the other half run hot, always one by the other."

I pulled my apron over my head and dropped it by the pool's edge, and dropped boots and trousers next to it. The mist and darkness clothed me as I stepped into the water and stepped from rock to rock until I found my soft-bottomed sitting place. The water was hot enough to poach a fish in, but I was a big fish and not worried. I could hear Crow moving on the grass beyond the mist, but I was not sure if he moved closer or farther away since I could not see him.

"There are pools like this in the Barrens," I said. "That's where I first came to the habit and it's stayed with me ever since. Won't you join me, Crow?"

"I might," he said. He sounded as though he was farther away now, moving around the edge of the clearing. "But tell me, Phlego, why do you go to all this trouble? Why do you not just ask me the questions on your mind?"

"What questions are those?"

"The same as your sister had," he said. He passed behind me, ever circling. "Who am I? How did I come to such a bad end? Will I bring my troubles across your threshold?"

"The first two you'll tell me or not as you like," I said, stretching my legs in the water so the soft silt rose around them. "The third I'll find out for myself."

"It does not frighten you, the thought of trouble?"

"What if it does?" I shrugged. "Does fear stop trouble from coming?"

"If it did I'd be the most carefree man on earth," said Crow. He chuckled, and it was not a young man's laugh. Crow was older in the dark. I would remember that. He was in front of me now, on the other side of the pool, not far from the edge.

"You'd have made a good soldier, Crow," I said. I could feel the heat sinking into my heavy bones.

"How do you know I was not a soldier once?" The mist shifted and I caught enough of a glimpse to see he was barechested now. The black medallion hung at his throat. I wondered that Leuka had returned it to him.

"Your hands," said I. "No sword wielder's hands could ever have stayed unmarked as they are."

He looked down at them. The mist rolled over him, hiding him from my sight. "Not all soldiers carry swords," he said, seriously.

"I suppose a dagger could do as much in the service of a king. But an assassin is no soldier."

"Is that what I am?" said Crow, laughing.

"Could be," I said. "Could be."

"Yet fearless Phlego doffs her armor, makes herself helpless before me."

"Your blade is in your boots," I reminded him. "Your boots are under my bed."

"What kind of an assassin would leave his weapon behind?" he

For a moment, fury blazed green in his eyes and up he jumped with fists clenched and breath indrawn to speak. Then he slammed both fists on the table ...

said. I heard the splash as he stepped in.

"Aiee!" he yelped. "You didn't tell me I would boil!" Gracelessly he stumbled through the water, fell beside me. For an instant I felt the rough softness of his skin against my heat-numbed leg before he moved away. Mist cleared away around us, lit silver by the rising moon. Crow sat blowing and fanning himself, cheeks flushed and youthful again in the kind light.

"I might have known," he said, "that flame-haired Phlego would bathe in *mountains' blood*." He used a word from his own tongue that described the liquid rock that flowed from cracks in the earth in that part of the world.

"Too hot for you?" I asked.

"It's a wonder the skin hasn't fallen off my bones," he replied.

I smiled at that. "I know something even more wondrous," I said.

"Tell me."

"I know a soft place between my legs that if you put your hand on it will give us both relief."

His copper-struck eyes opened wide. "I beg your pardon, gentlewoman?" he said delicately.

"Give me your hand," I said. I knew I had him then, for he stammered, blushed, and would not look at me when I took his hand, though he gave it easily enough. Then I put it between my legs and pushed down upon it. Together we easily broached the soft bottom of the pool to find the cold spring beneath. Icy water flowed up and mingled with the hot, but better than that, our hands together lit on the hard, smooth cylinders cached therein. I pulled one out and uncorked it in the air, and drank a draught of cold ale. I swallowed before I dared look him in the face, for I knew I could never contain myself. Slowly he pulled his hand out from between my legs, stone bottle clenched in his fist. I could bear the expression on his face no longer and let out a laugh such as I haven't had since my days in Ys.

It was better still when he joined me.

Together we laughed loud under the rising moon, he louder than I.

"Gentlewoman you are not!" he said after he had managed a swallow from his own bottle. "To tease a shy virgin like myself."

"Ah," I said. "Virgin, is it? That explains the eagerness."

I eased myself up on a flat stone and rested my elbows on the grassy bank behind me. After years of soldiering with men I have little modesty, yet I could feel him watching me even as he laughed and I smiled. Leuka may not abide men, but I love their company and miss it every day.

He reached out his beautiful hand to me of his own will this time and was not shy at all, nor virginal. His touch was gentle and sweet and though he had to get to his knees to reach and kiss me, there was no awkwardness in him.

What is it like, I wonder, to make love with a man who matches or surpasses you for size and strength? I have never done it. Oh there are men equal to me in size, in height, breadth of muscle, or even just in weight. Some who would have tried me with a will if only I had shared it. But there is something in me that wants always to be the one whose arm rests upon the other's shoulder, who carries the weight of both as we ride and rise, ride and rise.

So it was that I was lying back and could not see the thing that came upon us in the glade.

I saw this: Crow above me, his face changing from sweet half-dream to wide-eyed nightmare as he looked up at *something*. His hands rose blindly to his throat. They found the black medallion, clawed at it with frantic horror.

No, he screamed in his own tongue. And something else I did not catch the sound of. I would have thrown him off so I could stand and meet it, had not the *thing* lashed out and done it for me. I saw a gray hoof, taloned and supple like no horse's hoof I ever saw, slash sidewise at the hand that held the trinket. The beautiful hand exploded in bone and blood, and Crow and amulet flew off me into the mist landing with a double splash. But I was up by then with a bottle of ale in either hand and facing it.

A horse. A shadow horse.

How can I describe it but to say that there were two and both were one: the gray horse — fierce and wild, its flanks sleek, its haunches muscled, with a cruel face and hair like that of a woman from the east where they cut it not but wind it round and round itself, and weave it with knots — and the shadow horse; gray also but shaggy and matted, with long, rank plaits hanging from its back and belly. This was the owner of the supple clawed foot, strangely jointed legs, bulk of a torso like slaughterhouse scraps clumped together in a pile. It had a face too, but not a horse's face — the twisted face of a demon on a neck like a fat serpent. Its eyes held a keenness; an ancient malevolence no animal's eyes could possess. Both were real; both were shadow as they — it — glared at me from the grassy flat, being neither all of one nor of the other at any given moment.

It sized me up, naked and nearly weaponless; up to my knees in water, toes rootling among the rocks, and decided, I reckon, that I was not much of a hindrance between it and its goal, Crow or his amulet, whichever it was after. It tossed its heads and stepped to the left.

I threw the first bottle true. It hit the demon square on the side of its head, and shattering, tore away half its face. I would have swarmed up after it, but the moment I blinked the wound moved from the demon's face to that of the gray horse and was gone. I stopped before I took a step, but so did the creature. At least I had its attention.

"I am Phlego," I said, pleasantly. "And have fought in the Valley of Ys against Aubrec the Destroyer. I introduce myself so that you may know who kills you if you do not hold."

The thing whickered like a horse, though the sound of demon laughter was in it too. Whether it spoke to me in words or not I cannot say, but speak to me it did: "Do not fight me, Phlego," it said. "I have no quarrel with the Flame from the South, only with the thief from the North."

I heard a moan from behind me, the splash of a Crow foundering in water. "Thief or no, he is my guest," I said. "I cannot let you molest him further."

"You cannot stop me," it said, and it took a step to the right.

I threw my other bottle, put some strength in it this time, aiming lower. It caught him in the left foreleg, and the sound of cracking bones was loud in the silver-tinged darkness. The demon horse rocked forward into the place where its leg had been and thick black blood gushed out from the torn haunch for a moment. Then,

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as before, the thing changed back and forth, and the gray horse part inherited the wound and then it was whole again. So it is with creatures out of the Gray, where time runs back and forth for them like quicksilver in a tube.

It gave its whickering laugh again, but there was anger in it from the pain I had inflicted.

I half-turned where I stood and yelled, "Crow. Run!" As I spoke, I kicked up the amulet I had found with my rootling toes and caught it in the air. I danced backward in the water as the demon horse leapt for me, my feet finding the stones they knew so well. But the demon horse was not so well-prepared. Its weight broke through the fragile bottom of the hot spring and drove its legs into the icy stream below. That lower stream was deep and it ran through soft and sucking mud. Down it sank and stuck, and although it wrenched its double body, both horse and demon were embedded.

Still it was not helpless. It clawed after me with heads and hooves and teeth, catching me off balance as I slithered in the churned up mud. It grabbed at me, bearing down upon me with the weight of its chest. And though I had intended otherwise, I grappled with it there in my bath.

I pummeled it with fists and feet and, though my blows landed heavy on its putrefying flesh, still it had me pinned. It forced me under the water. Once. Twice. Again. The water boiling and icy at once, not the treat it had been an unimaginable time ago. Back and forth we wrestled. It fought me with claws and hooves and teeth, yet always my left arm was there to block and never did it find purchase in my flesh.

Still I clutched the amulet in that hand and noticed that my left hand blows hit deeper and shook the creature more than any other blows I laid upon it. The demon horse saw it too and its teeth lunged to the left time and again, forcing me to keep my hand under the water and so losing its strength.

In truth all of me was losing strength, from the effects of blows and more from lack of air, for it crushed me under its weight and dunked me too quick and deep to allow me a decent breath.

The boiling water closed over my face again. I punched the amulet hand as deep as I could into its belly, just below where I hoped it had a heart, and felt it shudder. Nonetheless, I could also feel myself sinking, through a bloody red haze into realms of gray.

And then it was like the moon had fallen on us, everything bright and bluish white. Magelight! The horse demon screamed with real vigor this time and reared up off me, so I could take a breath at last, though less of air than water and stink. Its clawed legs writhed in silver flames above me, and horse head and demon head twisted round as if it would bite its own back in two places. I scrambled on elbows and heels out from underneath it, before it came down again. It jerked free its hind haunches from the sucking mud and leapt straight for me.

Then it turned in mid-flight in that direction not on any compass rose and vanished.

I lay there on my back in the mud drinking breaths like they were draughts of water. Even though I heard my name being called, it came from far away, and they could not hear me answer. When next I opened my eyes it was to the sight of Leuka's worried scowl.

SHE WOULD HAVE WRAPPED ME IN A GOSSAMER BLANKET AND BORNE me down the hillside in a faerie carriage if I had not brushed her off. Bruised and mud-spattered I might have been; half-drowned too, if truth be told, still it was no worse an injury than I might have suffered any other day of war. No bones broken, no big ones anyway. Nothing gushed blood or hung awry and that was good enough for walking in the King's army. I told her so and she stamped away, cursing, to the house.

I washed away as much muck as I could in the churned and tepid water. My spring was ruined for good, but it was still cleaner than I. Then when I finished, I dried myself with my damp and trampled apron and dressed once again in my clothes.

I noticed as I dressed that I still held the amulet wrapped around my fist. I unwrapped it and dropped it in the pocket of my apron. It was only then that I became aware of the sound of weeping from the trees beyond.

"Crow?" I called as I made my way into the woods in the general direction of the sound. He did not answer right away, but the weeping ceased and he shifted in his seat. Leaves drifted down upon my head.

"For someone not born a crow, you certainly have taken the name to heart," I said peering up at him. He sat, knees tucked to chest in the crotch of a tree, still naked.

"Don't look at me," he sniffed. "Unless you've never seen a coward."

"Oh I've seen plenty," I said. "Even in a mirror once. Fly down now, Crow, and let me see your busted wing."

"Leave it, Phlego," he said, miserably. "Just go your way and in the morning I and everything of mine will have vanished."

"Have it your way," I said and shrugged. "I'll be damned if I thought you were the kind of man who loves a maid and vanishes in case he's called to answer for a bastard."

"What!" he said. "I never ... Phlego, that's not fair."

"I'll say it isn't," I said, leaving the woods as I spoke. I walked slowly, without looking back, past his rumpled clothes, all the way down to the rocky ledge between the woods and pasture, halfway across the grass before he caught up.

"Phlego, wait," he called, panting, as he ran after me, cradling his injured hand.

He was half-dressed now; trows unbuttoned and falling open, shirt on one arm and flapping over the other shoulder, still bootless, the amulet a dark circle against his pale chest.

Amulet.

I felt in the pocket of my apron. It was empty.

Whenever I think I understand anything to do with magic I can usually guarantee that I am wrong, so I said only, "If you're coming to propose marriage, I'll tell you now, I will not leave my sister's house."

"But would she have me here?" he asked, solemnly.

"Never," I said. "And nor would I, and don't look too relieved or I'll have to break your beak."

"Relieved?" he asked. "You mean you ...?" He made a disgusted noise, stopped walking, had to run again to catch up to me, for I kept on. "Why did you do it, Phlego? It's only me it wants. Let me go cleanly and it won't be back again to trouble you."

"Not quite the words of a coward," I said.

"Oh, I'm brave enough after it goes," he said. "Don't let that fool you. I'll be quaking in my boots come moonrise next."

"Your boots are under my bed," I reminded him. "You'll have to get by Leuka to retrieve them. And if you truly are a coward you could never face her."

"Oh, I could get the boots and never have to face her," he said, sounding cocky, but looking abashed at my glance.

"The fiend didn't lie, Phlego," he said, eyes cast down to the ground. "I really *am* a thief."

THE HOUSE WAS LIT UP WITH THE ORANGE GLOW OF LANTERN LIGHT and the welcome smell of simmering meat greeted us at the door. My eyes closed, and my mouth dribbled at the prospect.

I had carried a millstone, set it in the mill, had my way with a young man and wrestled a demon in one day and all on an empty stomach. Whatever confession there was to be had from Crow would have to wait.

If Leuka was still angry with either of us, she didn't show it. She put food in front of me at the table without a word and made Crow sit in a chair by the stove while she bathed and bandaged his hand.

He bore it like a soldier, though likely out of fear of Leuka's tongue-binding spell and then joined me for a bowl of rabbit stew. I ate three to his one and Leuka ate nothing. No one spoke until the last of the gravy was sopped up in the bread and I'd retrieved the last six stone bottles of ale from under the porch.

"Now," I said, putting one before him. "Tell us your tale, Crow. Begin at the beginning and don't spare us the gore, for I think we must know everything before the next rising of the moon."

Crow shot a glance at Leuka, who had pulled up her high stool. She sat perched there by the stove with a white rat on her shoulder and her hood pulled down so that only the white tip of her nose and her unlit pipe stuck out, but she made no move to stop him, so he opened the bottle took a swig and cleared his throat.

"I won't spare you the gore, or even the parts where I make a fool of myself, for that makes up the bulk of it," he said, ruefully.

Leuka snorted a laugh from inside her cowl.

"But the beginning is twenty-three years ago, at the very beginning of my life, are you sure you want to hear it all?"

Now I looked to Leuka, and we both waited for her answer.

"Yes," she said, surprising us both. "Tell it all. But give me the amulet first. I think it's found its way back to you already and I wouldn't want you to conjure up anything with a careless word."

Crow looked down at the amulet as if it burned him, and jerked it from his neck with his one good hand. He put it into the upturned palm Leuka extended, and she closed white fingers around it and drew it into her robe.

He was silent a good long while after that and I wondered, if he regretted having told us even as much as he had. Far easier after so many years, I thought, to keep running from trouble like his, than to stop and face it. But perhaps he had come to the end of the road at last, and had nothing but a solid wall before him and so was forced to turn.

He began: "I have said I was a thief, Phlego," he said and his voice was the older voice, the one that had known sorrow. "But I did not begin that way.

"I was brought up by the monks of Tiltern Abbey. You mentioned that you've seen my homeland, Phlego, then perhaps you have seen my home. No? That's a shame. Tiltern Abbey is listed in Gwyol's *Numinous* as the most blessed of all worship places. It sits on a shoulder of rock over the tidal bay of Ayk. The water has undercut the rock there, so on a mist risen morning the old Abbey seems to float far from land over an ocean of cloud. Not that an orphaned potboy ever gets much time to gaze over the parapets, you understand. From my point of view Tiltern Abbey was a dungeon and a slop pit and gauntlet of slaps and pinches to be run with a full bucket.

"The monks raised me from the time my mother left me at their doorstep, or cast me into the bay, or whatever thoughtful thing she did with me before she died. All told, until the Gray Lady came into my life, I lived with them thirteen years. If all the Gray Lady had done was lure me from their midst, I would be thanking her now, not cursing her as I do." He stopped and spat on the ground. I smelled the familiar stink of burning thistle. Leuka's pipe had begun to dribble smoke.

Crow took a long swallow of ale and went on. "For the first six years of my life I questioned nothing. It never occurred to me there was anything more than darkness and drudgery to life. Although nobody asked me personally what I thought of the wonder of God's works, if they had, I'd have answered that I wondered why He had bothered. I might have gone on this way and worked my way up to the exalted post of scullery butt or cook's lad, but when I was seven I happened to cross the courtyard with two buckets at the very moment that the choir began to sing. I had likely heard them two

thousand times or so before, but, for the first time something penetrated my dull little heart and I *heard* them.

"Are you a religious woman, Phlego? Do you follow the church?"

"Not any church you'd know," I said. "I have my own covenant and I keep it to myself."

"It's that way for me as well now," said Crow, nodding. "But not back then. Not at that moment. I swear to you Phlego, at the moment that the choir lifted up their voices I heard the voice of God. Their God. The one the brothers prayed to, though they were deaf to Him.

"Well, what could I do? I dropped the buckets and ran to join the choir." He stopped to take another long pull on the ale, found himself with dregs and spat again. "Could I trouble you for another?" he asked, "To wash the taste away?"

"It's smooth tasting," I said, handing him a second bottle. "And that hides the strength."

"I tell it better drunk, Phlego," said Crow smiling sweetly at me. I remembered what he had whispered in my ear, "Sunset Phlego. Flame-haired Phlego." His accent was thicker now, not the refined town accent he'd worn for so long, but the real Barrens' lilt.

"Your story," I said. "You'd joined the choir."

"No, no," he said. "Not joined. How could I *join* the exalted choir? I was a potboy, a slop carrier. It was absurd. I didn't even speak the language, the high Ballerai.... Lucky for me the choirmaster was in a mocking mood. He laughed himself sick at the sight of me wanting to stand among those clean, sweet singers in my drenched rags. To make the joke richer he put me up there with them, set me a melody, gave me the shape of words, and bade me sing.

"So when I tell you they asked me to join the choir, Phlego, do I have to tell you how beautiful my voice was?"

I shook my head, no.

"Aubrec, ninth and last *skaur* of Ayk, came himself to hear me sing one summer night only a year later. The choirmaster said it was only because his retinue happened to stop nearby and needed entertainment. But I know now it was my voice that brought him fifty leagues off his road. Morbidly fat he was, hairless, with terrifying eyes like black glass buttons, but when I knelt at his feet to have my head touched, he was kind. Who would have thought a man whose armies leveled the land from Sealip to Ys could be kind?

"He gave me a dagger as a gift and called me Little Laush. Do you know what that is? A *laush* is an animal of the northernmost sea. They come down to Ayk Bay in winter to rub against the stones, and they sing."

"I've heard the song of the *laush*," I said. "I'd heard of Little Laush the singer too, but I didn't say so."

"The name stuck of course," said Crow. "Little Laush for five more years, and every year Aubrec made a stop at Tiltern Abbey and every year the abbey got richer and the Northern Reach became the Barren Reach as the Destroyer leveled the land. I wish I could say I didn't love that life half so well as I did, knowing now on what suffering it was built. What I did know was that I was a scut boy no longer; that I didn't carry buckets; that God had looked down from his high tower and plucked me out of one life and into another brighter one. And all because of my voice.

"When I was thirteen the whispering started. This year? Next year? Or could it wait 'til next? It couldn't wait too long because, of course, it would change unless they stopped it. Well, no matter to me. What use is there for balls in a monastery? And if I had to choose between Potboy and Little Laush, well, what choice was there to be made? No choice, Flame haired Phlego. None at all.

"And then came the lady with the gray robes and the gray eyes and the welcoming smile," He fell silent again, and still, not even lifting the bottle to his lips.

My own bottle was empty and my throat was dry, but I didn't dare open the last, for fear of making a sound. I have been where Crow was now, out on the edge of a high cliff, looking down upon my life and the choices I have made. It's a lonely place and a dangerous one, but sometimes there is a great need to walk up to the edge and back again alone. When he spoke again his voice was lighter, as though he'd dropped some burden there.

"It wasn't the first time she'd heard me sing," he went on. "She'd come with the *skaur*'s retinue before. I remembered her, for she never spoke, but always patted my head and smiled warmly and gave me a candy. But this night she came to my room afterward. And by God she showed me a use for them. It took a time or two or three, for I was a slow learner in those days, but once I got the idea I was a convert.

"Can you guess this part of the tale, Phlego? What she offered me? How eagerly I went with her? She stole me away in a flying carriage drawn by a team of wondrous gray horses. There traveled I, Little Laush, crouched on the floor under a jeweled rug, my cheek pressed against her silk clad foot, thanking God for sending her to my rescue. Poor fat-faced little fool...." He made a sound and I looked at him. To my amazement he was laughing. That old crow's chuckle soft in his throat.

"It was long ago, Phlego, and I have said if it were not for what she did with what she stole, I would still be thanking her for saving me from a life in Little Laush's robes."

"Tell me the rest of it, then," I said, and uncorked a third stone bottle for him and one more for me, leaving only one. I laid another curse on the demon horse for the loss of twelve others.

"Well, I never got to the wonderful land she'd promised me, for the instant the Northlands vanished from sight she reached out her loving hand and changed my fate forever. How did she magic out my voice? I haven't the faintest idea. I was occupied with other things at the time. All I know is she touched my throat and then I heard something that might have been it float past my ear. Then the flying carriage lighted for a moment and out I went. Though I can't swear she kicked me in the rump in farewell, I always remember it that way.

"She dropped me in an ice field, perhaps it was at the very top of the world. I only know it was too cold what diamonds are to ice. I wandered numb inside and out and would have surely died very quickly had I not literally fallen among thieves.

"Of course I did not know it then. In fact I knew nothing at all until I woke in their tunnels under the ice and found myself among the *Wiacara*. Have you heard of these northernmost folk? They are almost legend in my own land, so I don't know if word would ever spread to yours. Very magical they are indeed, for they move about in the most barren part of the world where nothing lives and they take the animal forms of *holk* and *duor* and even *laush* at will. In fact, I wonder if there are really any animals living in that white wasteland, or only the *Wiacara* in animal form.

"Devoted thieves they are too," he went on, "when they get near enough to something worth stealing. Of course when you have nothing at all, anything is worth stealing.

"I won't reveal all their secrets, for I owe them my life, but truly there is nothing they don't have at least one of in their tunnels under the ice. They range far and wide in their animal forms and have touched every land but one, and no one but the three of us has ever been the wiser.

"Why did they take me in? Well, I guess there was a shortage of pink-cheeked, crow-voiced, adolescent fools at that time of year, for they collected me — stole me from the Gray, or so they told me later when I had learned to speak their language. I took Crow as my name and my spirit, for the gray lady had robbed me of my kinship with the *laush*. I lived with them a long time. Though I never learned to take an animal shape as they did, I learned everything there is to know about thieving, to my great regret.

"Now that I had skills, they let me travel with them when they went to hunt for treasure. I sailed on stolen boats and rode on stolen animals. Sometimes the *Wiacara* traveled with me in their man forms; sometimes I was seemingly alone, though animals flocked by me. I went with them everywhere but my homeland, for I was ashamed to return there as Crow and be recognized.

"And still I could not but hear the tales of Aubrec the Destroyer and how he had won over Ys and all the northlands with a weapon so devastating that not even the immortal fey could stand before it." His roughening voice had hardened there and I

could feel the betrayal in it. He stopped speaking and the house creaked round us in the sudden quiet.

It was Leuka who broke the silence. "We know that part," she said, and her voice was every bit as hard.

"Shall I skip ahead then?" Crow asked, lightly. "To the part where I took the epic tragedy of my life and turned it into high comedy?"

"Good idea," said Leuka. *Oh, sister, thought I. Don't hold it against him.* But how could she not?

"Right, then," said Crow. "I'll need that last ale of yours, Phlego, to pull me through this part as it is all still fresh enough to bring the blush to my cheeks." I uncorked it and put it in front of him. He tipped it up and finished it in three deep draughts. His cheeks were flushed enough then and his crook-toothed smile was bright.

"You see," he said. "I had a plan for my revenge"

IT WAS A BAD PLAN FROM THE START; THE first thing Crow did was walk across the border into the Gray. The Wiacara brought him as far as the edge of the world for there was not a land they couldn't reach from their own, but they would not go there, being in their way as immortal as the fey.

He stole from them everything he thought he would need, thieving tools, charms against poison, wards against animals and against drowning, all manner of small scrying glasses, anything he thought might be useful, for who knew what lay on the other side. Then he stole himself away, and crossed over in the shadowland.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU THINK of the Gray? Whirling clouds of empty space shot through with shrieking ghosts? Or a quiet place where dearly departed rise like smoke from the ground to greet you? Or do you think of nothing at all?

I will tell you, for I have been there. It is all these things and none. It is a place where everything is itself, stripped of our notions of it. We see a thing on this side of the border and we know it is "rock" or 'tree' or 'sword.' But *there* a rock is itself, not our idea of a rock. Words fall short, but let me say a rock looks the same in the Gray, but it is not 'rock,' it is itself. And at the same time you might know it as you know a rock, but you no longer know 'rocks' at all. And so it is with anything that you could name, including yourself. For when I was there I was myself, but I was not Phlego, and though I knew myself, myself was something I no longer knew. Confusing yes, and more so there and in the flesh, for here I may sit back and muse upon what I know, but were I there, I would not have knowledge of 'musing' or 'knowing' or least of all 'I.'"

So it was no wonder the second thing Crow did was to get lost. What was he seeking? A shadow in the Gray. And how long did he wander? Who can say. Time slides in that place, and rolls over itself and falls and shatters and all the pieces jump up and join again, so there is time but it does not matter. And so he wandered, in despair that was no more nor less than itself, not even knowing he was lost. Not even remembering what "lost" was.

It was his own voice finally saved him at the last. He did not recognize it by its sound, only he knew it like a part of his own

*They
died not as
men die but as
if they were
made of a
thousand
thousand tiny
pieces and each
piece was being
ripped away,
one piece at
a time.*

self calling so high and sweet and clear that he could not but follow. And so he came upon a place that was *other* even unto the Gray.

For what was it in that shifting place, but a spot of fixity — a stone castle that was a castle, with a gray moat and a gray drawbridge and high, gray walls that were most definitely stone. There was a straight stone road running from the castle gate and when Crow stepped upon it, suddenly he knew he had found her at last.

But even now his plan failed him, for if he stepped off the stone path he lost himself again and the road led only to the front gate. Too, the voice of Little Laush was working on him, his own voice of long ago. He had never heard it before but from between the ears of a potboy and he'd never really had any idea of what that sound evoked. Now he knew.

It sounded like home.

And so the third thing that Crow did in the shadowlands was to walk down that straight stone road and fall on his knees before that cold gray castle gate and beg to be let in.

The gate swung open. The drawbridge lowered. Crow crossed over the swirling mists below and passed unhindered through the barbican and into the courtyard of the most terrible of all places.

"I WOULD NOT TELL YOU WHAT I SAW THERE," said Crow, his voice was almost gone. I had to lean close to hear the words, "but you asked me not to spare the gore, so I won't. For immortals were all around me and all were dying and none of them dead. Their screams were terrible, Phlego. They died not as men die but as if they were made of a thousand thousand tiny pieces and each piece was being ripped away, one piece at a time.

"There was no clear place to walk, but I still had my revenge to take, so over them I climbed. They were stacked higher than my head in places, none of them whole, all

twitching, retching, and writhing, and the flagstones were slick with their dark blood. My hands, my face, and my boots were painted in it by the time I reached the keep.

"Nor did it end there, for they were piled up the stairs, two deep, but up I climbed, slipping with every step. They grabbed at me and I kicked their hands away, their beautiful white hands, ribboned in red. Forgive me"

His voice cracked on the word and he stopped, looked down at his own bandaged hand. I thought to say something to comfort him, but forgiveness was not mine to give, and Leuka stayed silent. Crow collected himself, bravely in that merciless silence. "I came, finally, to the top of the stair and a door. Her door. The door opened at my touch and though my hand was wet with blood it left not so much as a smudge. There she sat, unchanged from last we met, eyes gray and kind, smile welcoming, toying with a black medallion that hung around her slender neck. I stopped, for it had finally come to me that my plan had gone awry.

"Too late by a long way, as anyone with half a wit would have guessed. She spoke to me in my own voice and I could not resist her in any way. What she said, I did, and it was no spell, only that my will had abandoned me, for it was as if I were telling my own hand to open or close." He looked down at the injured hand again in its

bloody bandage, "and so I became attendant to those who would not die.

"A nice word, attendant, for it sounds as if I cared for them or eased their suffering. Ha! I only piled them higher and deeper to make room for the rest, for still their numbers grew. Days were spent with a pitchfork in my hands and every inch of me matted with their blood and nights — well, that's a private matter and you will not get it from me without putting another spell on my tongue." He looked fiercely at Leuka, who still had not moved. Five other rats had joined the one that had sat on her shoulder, but she bore them without twitching.

"Go on," was all she said.

"All that time, though my arms and legs worked to her command, my mind remained my own and I asked myself over and over what had I done to deserve such a fate. Surely what evil I had done had not been my own fault, and yet it was my voice that had brought such suffering to a land and a people and surely some of that debt was mine to bear.

"Sad and sorry was I, as you could well imagine. The most miserable rag of a scrap of a man in all creation, I was sure of that. So pathetic was I that even one of the living corpses in the bailey took pity on me and offered me his friendship.

"He was not too badly off as these pathetic creatures went, though that would not last. Most of his parts were intact, only torn and bleeding, and you could see what he'd been in life — tall and brash, with thick red hair like yours, Phlego. Not fully fey, like some, but any faerie blood was enough to be a curse in that place.

"He paced me as I made my slow stomping way around the courtyard, asking me questions as if it mattered who I was and where I'd come from and if I liked the color cyan better than the color blue. Every day he found me, and, though I cared not at first whether he did, I came to count on him to cheer me as I worked.

"Don't laugh," said Crow, though neither of us was laughing now. "I told you I was a coward and a fool. Add self-pitying to that and callous to the pain of others and you have Crow, then and now."

"No," said Leuka, "A chattering magpie, still. Get on with it, boy, there's not much time left. Look!" And she held out her hands. They were empty.

His hand flew to his throat. I looked. There it was. With shaking hand he took it off over his head and laid it on the table between us. I kept my eye on it and vowed to myself not to look away.

"One day, he asked me if I'd given thought to leaving. And do you know I hadn't, not once, until he said it and then I could think of nothing else.

"'Nobody leaves the Gray,' I told him.

"'She does,' said he. 'On her gray horse.'"

"But how could I ride a demon horse, I wondered aloud. Surely it would kill me first.

"'Ah, yes,' says he, 'unless you have an amulet of power to control it.'"

"And so it went between us, back and forth this way, and I could tell he wanted me to do it where he could not. He told me everything to do; what words to use to soothe the beast and drive it, and what turnings to take to find my way back to the world, though how he knew these things, he would not say.

*The evil
thing fought me
at every turn,
its horrible
head turning
back to bite the
amulet from
my throat,
jerking and
bucking as if I
were a burr
upon its saddle.*

"And finally there was nothing to do, but do it. I went to him, for he'd given me back my will and begged him to come with me.

"'That I cannot do,' he said. 'But when you go you will take the memory of me with you and perhaps that will be enough.' He would not be swayed from this. That night, in her bedroom, when her mind was occupied with other things, I stole the amulet, this amulet, and hung it round my neck. I jumped from the tower window onto the back of the nightmare and spoke the words of power and off we flew.

"I followed his route exactly, but he did not know, nor did I, how hard a thing it is to be master to a demon. Oh, how sick I was upon its back, or backs, really, for there were two and splitting me between them was its wish. Poisoned I was and retching and rancid inside from its flesh. I spoke the words to take it east or west or up or down, and harder and harder it became. The evil thing fought me at every turn, its horrible head turning back to bite the amulet from my throat, jerking and bucking as if I were a burr upon its saddle, which I suppose I was.

"And sometimes I felt my own will weakening to its, like my hands and eyes really weren't my own.

"If I were braver I would have jumped from its back. And yet I thought somehow, that when I came to the place the old man had directed me, somehow I would be free of it. We came to earth on the edge of a cliff not far from here. I jumped off its back, threw the amulet down, and shouted: *Go!*

"It went, vanished like it did from the pool. I walked away to heave my guts out in the forest. I was so glad to be back among the living that I even celebrated with a little dance of joy. I walked in the woods until I fell down and slept. When I woke, there was the amulet about my throat and the gray thing standing over me."

We looked. There it was about his throat, though I would swear it then and I swear it now, on the lives of all I have loved, I never

took my eyes from it and never saw it move. Again he took it off, this time holding it in his hand.

"I threw it everywhere I could think of — in fire, in water, once even over the edge of the mountain. Every time, the horse thing vanished and every time returned, whether in an hour, or a day, or more, I could never predict.

"And still I sickened and still I walked. Finally I admitted she had won and lay down by a stream hoping to die before she came and found me."

"When I woke here, there was a white angel hovering over me — sorry, Leuka, but that you were to me — and the wretched thing was gone from my neck. I dared to hope I was free at last."

"We drove it off this time," I said. "Perhaps if we drive it off enough times it won't come back."

"She'll come herself," said Crow, touching the thing that had found its way to his throat again. "This is more than my friend thought, though I don't know what."

"The magpie's right," said Leuka. "She'll come herself and soon. It's lure to her as Little Laush is to the rest of us." No one argued she was the only one vulnerable to that bait. We fell silent, each thinking our own thoughts. After a while Crow got up from the table.

"Excuse me," he said and stepped past me.

"Don't be a fool," said Leuka. "There's nowhere to run."

"I hadn't thought to run," said Crow stiffly, "But my boots are in there and if I have to walk that road again, I'd rather do it fully clothed."

"Oh," said Leuka. She waited until he'd reached the door of my bedroom before she added, "In that case, best do up those trousers, too."

He bore it with dignity and said not a word. Nor did Leuka and I, though we were left together. The house settled around us in the dying night, and I heard the whisper of the wind in the meadow grass. A little while later, Crow emerged, shod, tied, and tucked as best as he could with his one good hand. Leuka lifted her hood from her eyes and her pipe twitched, but when she spoke it was not to torment him further, but only to say, simply, "She's here."

She stood and the rats rained down off her shoulders. There was a cold, cruel smile upon her face I had not seen before. Her cowl came back off her face. Perhaps it was the first time Crow had seen her properly, for he gasped. She paid him no mind, but walked to the front door and threw it wide and stepped out, white and fey and wild onto the porch. I followed, and Crow came after me.

It was still night outside, but the darkness was muddy and moonless and though it was not yet dawn, still the dark was breaking. In our barnyard I heard the whicker of a horse and looked out over Leuka's shoulder. There indeed she — they — stood: A gray-robed woman and her gray horse, each much like the other, slim, graceful, and noble of face, and there was a lick of wind around them, ruffling in their hair.

She did not look like a fiend. She did not look like a devil or a monster. She did not look like one who had given counsel to the Destroyer, nor like one who had stolen a young man's voice and used it to bring death to the immortal fey. If evil had a face it was not hers, for hers was so like the Dream Breather's own that, much as I might have wanted to, I would have been hard pressed to deny our kinship.

I have said there was no light yet in the sky; no moon, no stars, and only the dimmest flicker of lantern-glow, yet clearly we could see her and she us, though she had eyes for no one but Leuka. She seemed to grow larger at the sight of her, puff herself up and take on a stark yellowish light.

"Now I begin to understand," she said, her voice high and sweet, like a child's. Well, of course it was. I recognized it as that lilt that called me from my deathbed in the house of a Barrens' fisher family and coaxed me to tread along a stone road for a while, until I found my sister who had gone before me. I felt a veil of fear fall over me even now, but Leuka shared it not. She gave a snort and spat upon the ground.

"Well, if it took you that long," she said, in much the same tone of disgust she usually bestowed upon me, "It's no wonder our parents left the cradle out for the shades to steal."

The lady's hand tightened upon her horse's rein and the beast at her side seemed to shimmer and come apart for an instant. But she only smiled and the smile was so warm and kind, I shivered.

"That is but an old wives' tale," she said. "The shades never steal children."

"Only their voices, then?"

"I am no shade," said the lady, her sweet tone turning to ice and stone.

"Half-shade then," said Leuka. "For why else would the Death Cheater have left you in the shadowlands?"

"Jealousy," said the lady. "He could not bear that my mother had been unfaithful to him. This was his cruel revenge, much as he might deny the accusation. The cruelty of the immortals is legendary in my realm. As were the immortals themselves until I opened the road for them."

"You have that to answer for as well," said Leuka. "Among other things."

"Perhaps," said the lady. "But when shall I answer? There is but one true immortal left and that is I. Who will be my final judge?"

"I'll volunteer," said Leuka.

"Noble indeed," said the lady, "But not necessary. Truly. I don't understand your hostility. You should try to make an ally of me."

"Why?" asked Leuka. "So I might live forever while all those I love fall around me? Do you think I regret my mortality? Never. It's a great gift you have granted me, given that I can use it when I think the time is right."

"Then there is even less reason to hate me," said the lady. "I don't understand. Surely it is not for the sake of that bit of rat meat you have hiding in your doorway."

There came a whispered curse behind me, a single word in the Old Tongue. I had never asked him where he'd learned it, but I had my suspicions. I had learned it from my father, the Death Cheater — big, brash, flame-haired adventurer that he was, he valued nothing more for his children than we be educated in the classical manner.

Crow had not spoken to be heard, but perhaps sound carried like sight in the space between us, for the gray-robed lady turned her attention to him at once.

"Ah, child," she said, wistfully. "You have been long away from me." I heard him draw a shaking breath and his eyes were cast down.

"I'm sorry," he said in that hoarse whisper, all that was left of his voice.

"What?" I said, sharply, but he ignored me.

"You'll be forgiven, child," said the gray-robed lady as warmly as a mother might. "If you'll just return what you borrowed and promise to stray no more, you may come home again."

"Thank you," said Crow. He took a step toward her, would have taken more if I had not grasped his shoulder.

"What are you doing?" I whispered to him.

"Forgive me, Phlego," he said, aloud. "I told you I was a coward."

"I didn't believe you," I said and held firm, though he tried to shake my hand off.

"You cannot hold him," said the lady. There was a flash of yellow-gray light and suddenly my hand was thrown from his shoulder as though lightning had touched it. I cried out from the shock of it and the gray horse laughed.

Crow walked forward again, eyes downcast, boot-heels shuffling in the dirt. The lady's eyes were on him, on his throat, I would say and what rested there. She held out a hand for him.

Magelight flashed again, blue-white this time and Leuka's voice rang out across the barnyard, "Hold, you stupid starling."

He stopped again in mid-step. The lady in gray seemed to shimmer, shimmer again, splitting into two, yet not two, as did her horse.

"You are the stupid one," she said, to Leuka and her double voice was only half sweet child's.

Many things happened at once: The gray-robed lady turned the force of her magelight upon Leuka and in doing so, dropped the reins of her horse. Swiftly it moved to stand before me, its double heads both laughing; horse and fiend.

"Phlego," it said, mockingly. "I am called Fury, the Smoke from the Pit. I introduce myself so that you may know who kills you." And on that word it rose up upon its four hind legs and struck out at me. Back I went and back again to clear the range of its hooves and talons. But it was fast and followed me. I grappled with it, striking out when I could with whatever came blindly into my hand — rocks, sticks, stones. Still they were little use against it. How I wished I had that amulet in my hand. But no, I didn't really wish that.

It knew I had no real weapon against it, save my strength and so it struck me without fear. One of its blows caught me in the ribs and I flew through the air, crashing down through wooden slats.

A squeal of rage told me where I'd landed, and fair sore as that blow left me, I moved with deft speed to get off Black Pearl's dinner table. That distraction was my undoing, for the horse thing grabbed my apron, as I ducked, in one taloned claw and with the other raked my back as if to open me up.

It dropped me and I fell, writhing, for I could not move and knew

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AN ARTIST FOR

Jim Warren's bizarre creations can make you work up a cold sweat or tickle your funny bone.

BY MIKE RESNICK

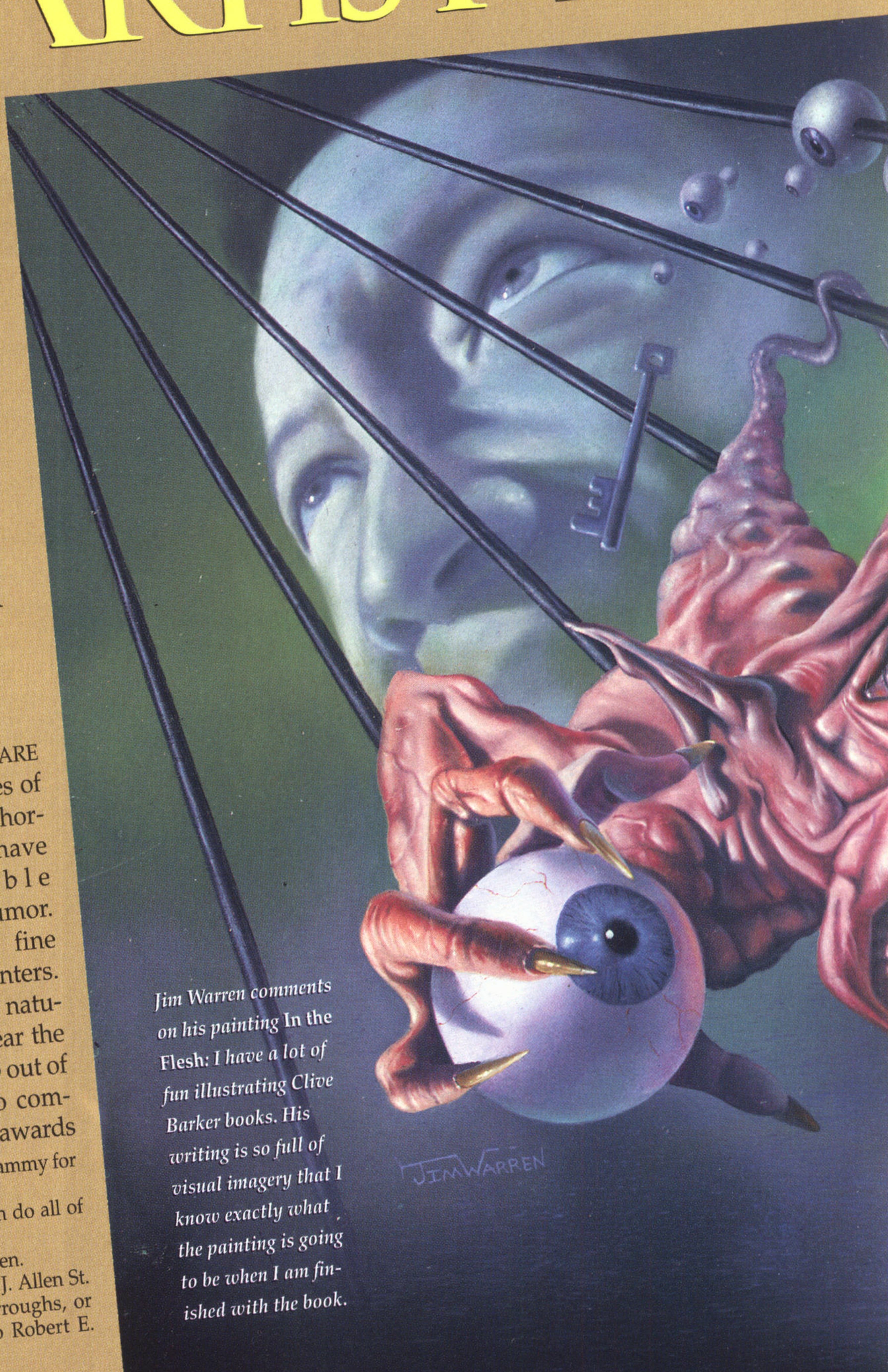
SOME ARTISTS ARE good at scenes of unmitigated horror. Some have remarkable senses of humor. Some are fine portrait painters. Some can paint wildlife so naturalistically that you'd swear the animals are about to jump out of the picture. Some are so commercial that they can win awards from other fields, like, say, a Grammy for best album package.

And some—a very few—can do all of the above, and much more.

Which leads me to Jim Warren.

Jim is to Clive Barker what J. Allen St. John was to Edgar Rice Burroughs, or what Frank Frazetta was to Robert E.

Jim Warren comments on his painting In the Flesh: I have a lot of fun illustrating Clive Barker books. His writing is so full of visual imagery that I know exactly what the painting is going to be when I am finished with the book.



JIM WARREN

ALL SEASONS





JIM WARREN

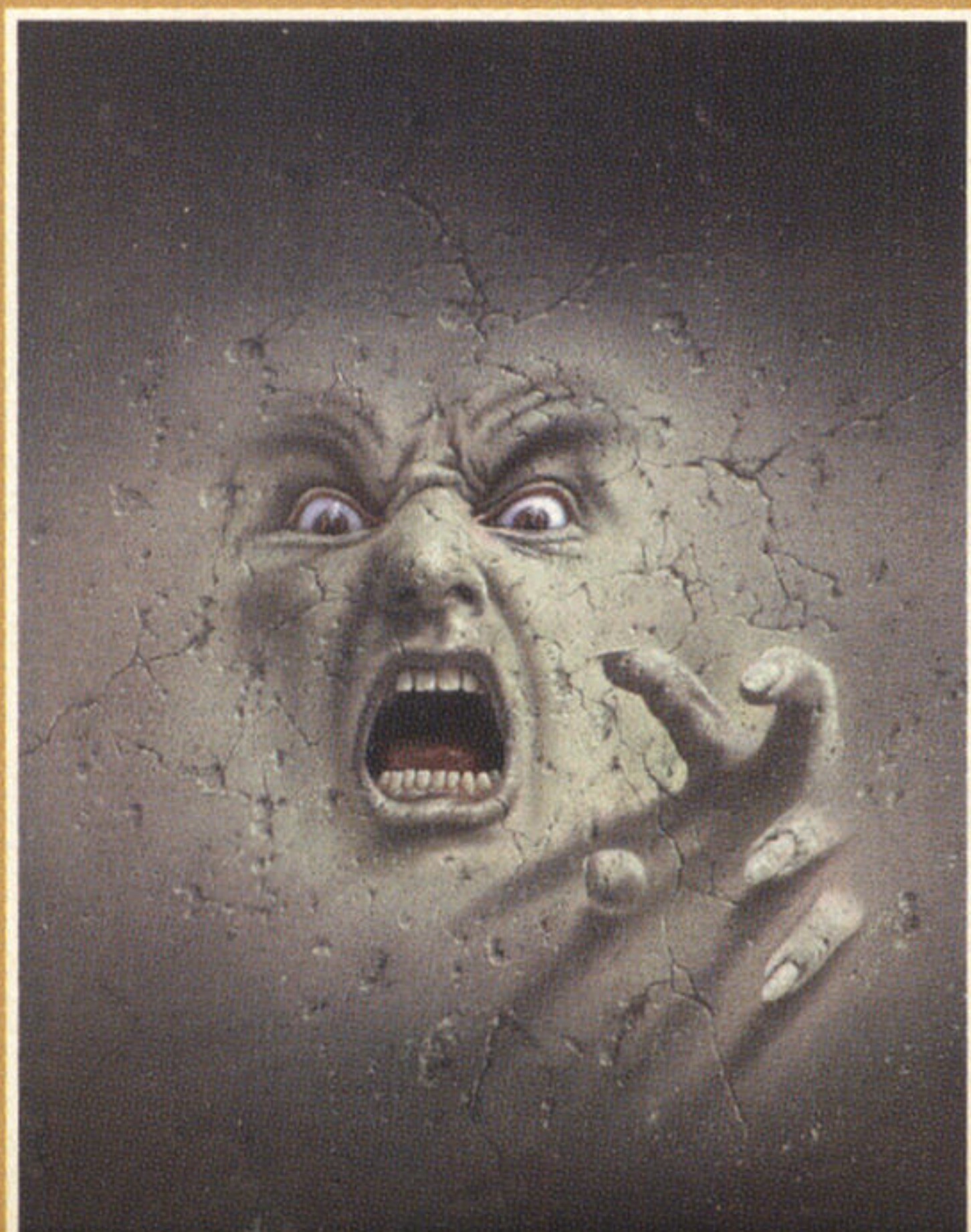
LEFT: This painting was originally done for a book entitled *Maniac*. My daughter calls it the "ouwie man." I guess it speaks for anyone who has something to be mad about (and who doesn't?). It can also be seen on the TV shows *Roseanne* and *90210*. RIGHT: I half-jokingly call this my family portrait. The models for *Waxworks* are my mom, dad, niece, my wife's grandma, and of course me. BELOW: *Wall of Fear*: Although I prefer painting children, women, and nature, it's not so much the subject matter that determines my enjoyment but whether the painting works artistically.

Howard: an artist so identified with an author's work that it's almost inconceivable to think of any other artist taking his place. Jim's cover paintings for *In the Flesh* and *Inhuman Condition* are absolute classics of horror illustration.

And yet the same mind that can drive you into a cold sweat contemplating named and nameless horrors can also tickle your funny bone with equal facility. One of my favorites is the cover he did for an anthology I edited, *Dinosaur Fantastic*, in which a dinosaur, looking for all the world like a typical fan that you might run into at a convention, is reading a book called *Dinosaur Fantastic*, the cover of which depicts a dinosaur reading a book called *Dinosaur Fantastic*, which in turn depicts...but I think you get the idea. I just love the expression on the dinosaur's face; he looks like he'd make a great poker-playing and beer-drinking buddy.

Another charming cover graces Esther Friesner's anthology *Alien Pregnant by Elvis*. Jim just took the title and gave it a straight illustrative treatment, and the result is a real eye-popper.

Jim lives down the road from the Salvador Dali Museum, and when he's in one of his surrealistic moods, even Dali could have learned a thing or two from him. As evidence, I offer the cover painting to Clifford D. Simak's *All the Traps of Earth*.





ABOVE: *Blood of the Wolf*: "What kind of guy paints this !#%*&?" I was once asked. "The same kind of guy who gets up in the morning and gives his baby a wagon ride around the block," I answered. RIGHT: *Mermaid Tea Party*: As a native Californian, I love painting surf, sun, and women. Several months after I moved to Florida, my paintings began to take on the look of my new environment. The wild trees, the manatees... I don't know where the tea party idea came from. It was just there one day. The models are my daughter (bottom), nieces, and cousin.

Of course, he knows what's necessary to make a living, and he's done his share of work for Hollywood and the recording industry. His album cover for Bob Seger's "Against the Wind" won him his Grammy and is considered a classic in the field.

Which should not imply that Jim is known only in the science fiction and recording fields. John Travolta, for example, says of Jim: "I find Jim's art to be wildly original and inspired."

The great Wyland, America's leading marine life artist, notes, "I've admired Jim Warren's work for years."

Nancy Cartwright, the voice of Bart Simpson, adds, "Jim Warren's art really communicates. The word *underachiever* isn't even in his vocabulary."

Celebrities tend to put their money where their mouths are, and Jim has done privately commissioned paintings for Prince and Alice Cooper, among others.

In preparing this article, I asked Jim why he seems to prefer science fiction and fantasy to most other forms of art. The answer, given his work, was unsurprising.

"Illustrating works of imaginative fiction gives me the greatest possible freedom."

I pointed out that Michael Whelan has just announced that he'll be taking a two-year sabbatical because he can no longer stand to deal with inept art directors.

"I've never had that problem," answers Jim. "I enjoy the give and take with the people who commission my work—and they let me do what I want most of the time."

Which author does he most like to illustrate?

"Clive Barker. He's distinctly graphic."

Of all the authors he has not yet illustrated, which one would he most like to paint a cover for?

"Stephen King—mostly because everyone always asks which King books I've done."

Major influences on his work?

"Norman Rockwell, Andy Warhol, and Boris Vallejo."

How long does the typical painting take?

"Usually from three days to two weeks. And I always work in oil."

Jim has sold more than one hundred fifty cover paintings, but covers and record albums are just part of his output. He has done everything from puzzles to greeting cards to commissioned portraits to fine gallery art.

"In fact," he points out, "I started as a fine artist, not an illustrator or a horror artist. I went back to my original direction four years ago. I was becoming stereotyped, doing everything horror."

Did doing so much horror—and doing it so well—bother him psychologically?

"My attitude toward horror is: Real men don't get nightmares."

What kind of art does he most enjoy doing these days?

"Horses, kids playing on dolphins. Not cover art."

My own guess is that by the end of the decade, his most famous painting will be *Earth—Love It or Lose It*. It's not only a beautifully conceived piece of work, but it has a slogan that rivals Walt Kelly's immortal "We Have Met the Enemy and He is Us."

Jim is booked well in advance, but can usually make time for a cover that appeals to him. Most of his work these days consists of fine art and fantasy portraits. He also has collaborated with Wyland. Their first painting, *Mermaid Dreams*, was unique in that they cut the work exactly in half: Wyland did the bottom half, an underwater scene, while Jim did the top half, which shows a mermaid clinging to a rock.

More and more, painting the natural appeals to Jim, rather than painting the supernatural.

But when you're as popular in the supernatural field as Jim Warren is, your audience doesn't always let you pick and choose what you want to do. And it's a lead-pipe cinch that Jim's hundreds of thousands of passionate fans will keep him doing fantastic cover art, at least on a part-time basis, for the foreseeable future. 🐉



JIM WARREN

BY MARK SUMNER

Orcs have more fun in Tides of Darkness. Storytelling begins with Once Upon a Time.

I LIKE ORCS. THAT'S QUITE A CONFESSION, I KNOW. THESE GUYS ARE BRUTAL, EVIL, CRUDE, conniving, traitorous, and generally seen as downright ugly. That's all true of lawyers, of course, and I hold no soft spot for them. But somehow in orcs I find these traits endearing. Out of all the Tolkienesque creatures of darkness, orcs seem the most like us.

They have their strengths and weaknesses. They gamble, cuss, and drink on duty — all well-known human foibles. They're a little more vicious than we like to think we are, and they tend to do their talking with a club. They're the dark side of us, but if you can get past the tusks

and warty skin, I secretly suspect these guys have more fun. They're sort of the Klingons of the fantasy world. Orcs have never looked better than they do in Blizzard Entertainment's new title, *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness*.

Less than a year ago, Blizzard came out with their first *Warcraft* title *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans*. This might lead you to believe that this is only a minor upgrade from the previous game. After all, there's been a trend recently to toss out new versions of top sellers: *X-Com: Terror from the Deep* and *Wing Commander IV*. Most of these are no more than "episodes," using much of the same game engine, graphics, and design. But *Warcraft II* is no bug fix. This is a real upgrade, something all too rarely seen. Every feature that made the first program great is still there.

Every shortcoming has been addressed. And every seam has been stretched to make this the best strategy game in years. For those who missed out on the first installment, this game

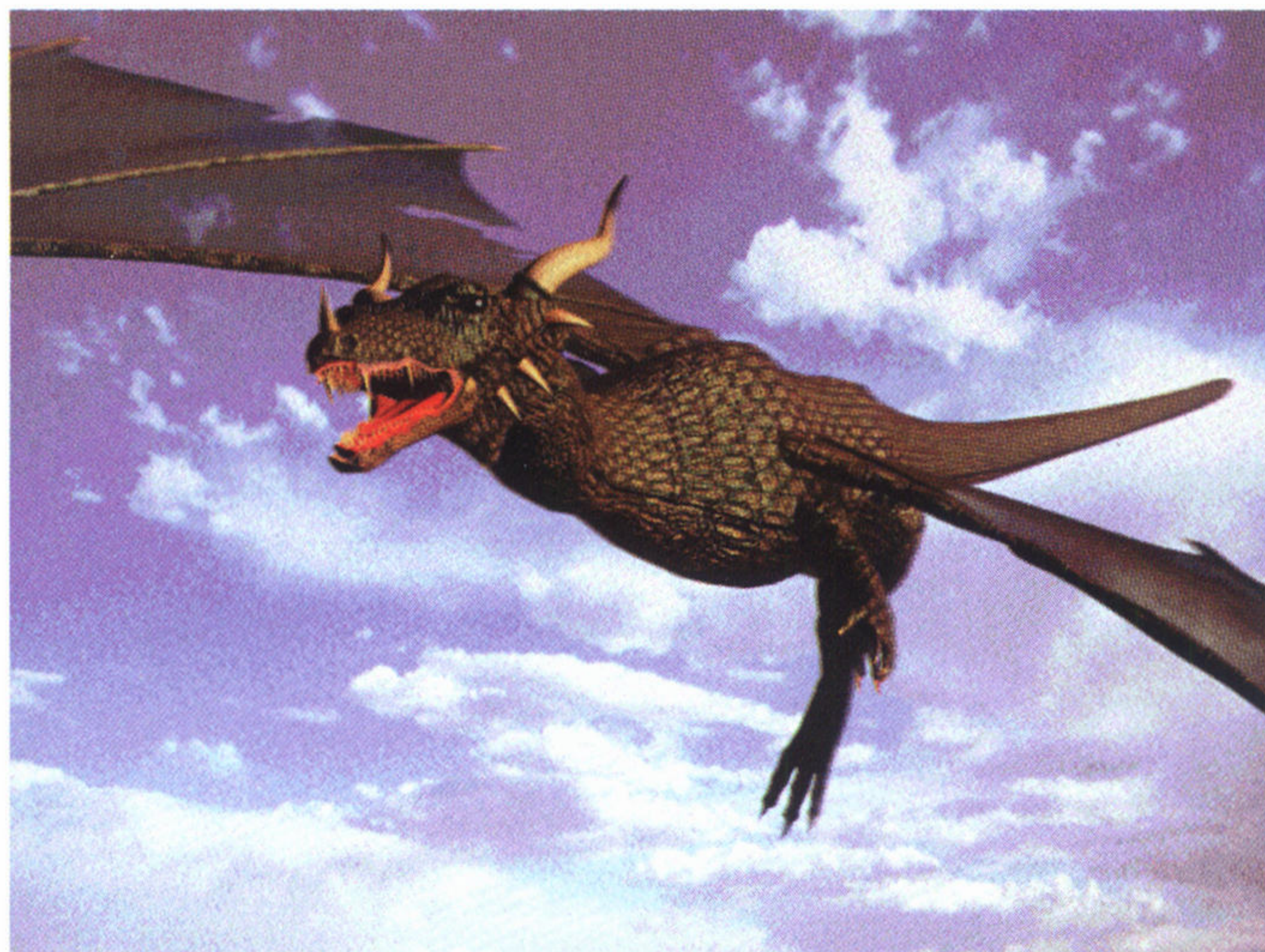
provides "real time" conflict between tribes of orcs and human settlements. Depending on the scenario in which you're involved, you may be called on to build a town, rescue hostages, burn an enemy village, escort prisoners, or thwart an enemy raid. While I can't say the game happens in what I would consider "real" real time — that is, unless you know someone who can build a house

in thirty seconds or less — it does take place over a smooth continuum, without the stops and starts common to most strategy games. This does add a lot to the tension of the game. Often you don't have time to casually survey the map and make cool, calm decisions. You move your units under the heat of enemy fire and make your decisions while wondering when their troops are going to fall on you in another wave of slaughter.

The list of improvements is long, but the one which is immediately obvious is the graphics. Like most recent DOS programs, the original *Warcraft* was

done in the 320-by-200 pixel, 256 color mode of VGA. Blizzard's artists managed to get recognizable figures in this mode, but they were understandably clunky. The pixelicious days are behind us. *Warcraft II* goes into SVGA territory and draws its graphics using a 640-by-400 pixel screen. The fourfold improvement in resolution results in a whooping difference in clarity. Trolls look trollish. Knights are more knightly. For sheer aesthetics alone, this is one of the best-looking games to ever cross a screen. Even better, the improved graphics have not come at the price of performance.

Sound was already glorious in the first *Warcraft*, and in this title it sets new standards. The CD pumps great military tunes. Each piece of equipment, along with every building, boasts its own digitized effect. Click on the blacksmith shop and you can hear the anvil ringing. Click on a human farm, and you hear the cluck of chickens. An orcish farm brings the squeal of pigs (fans of the other white meat can take this up with Blizzard). Orcs grunt and snarl. My favorite is the two-headed ogres. Give these guys their marching orders, and it can generate an argument among themselves.

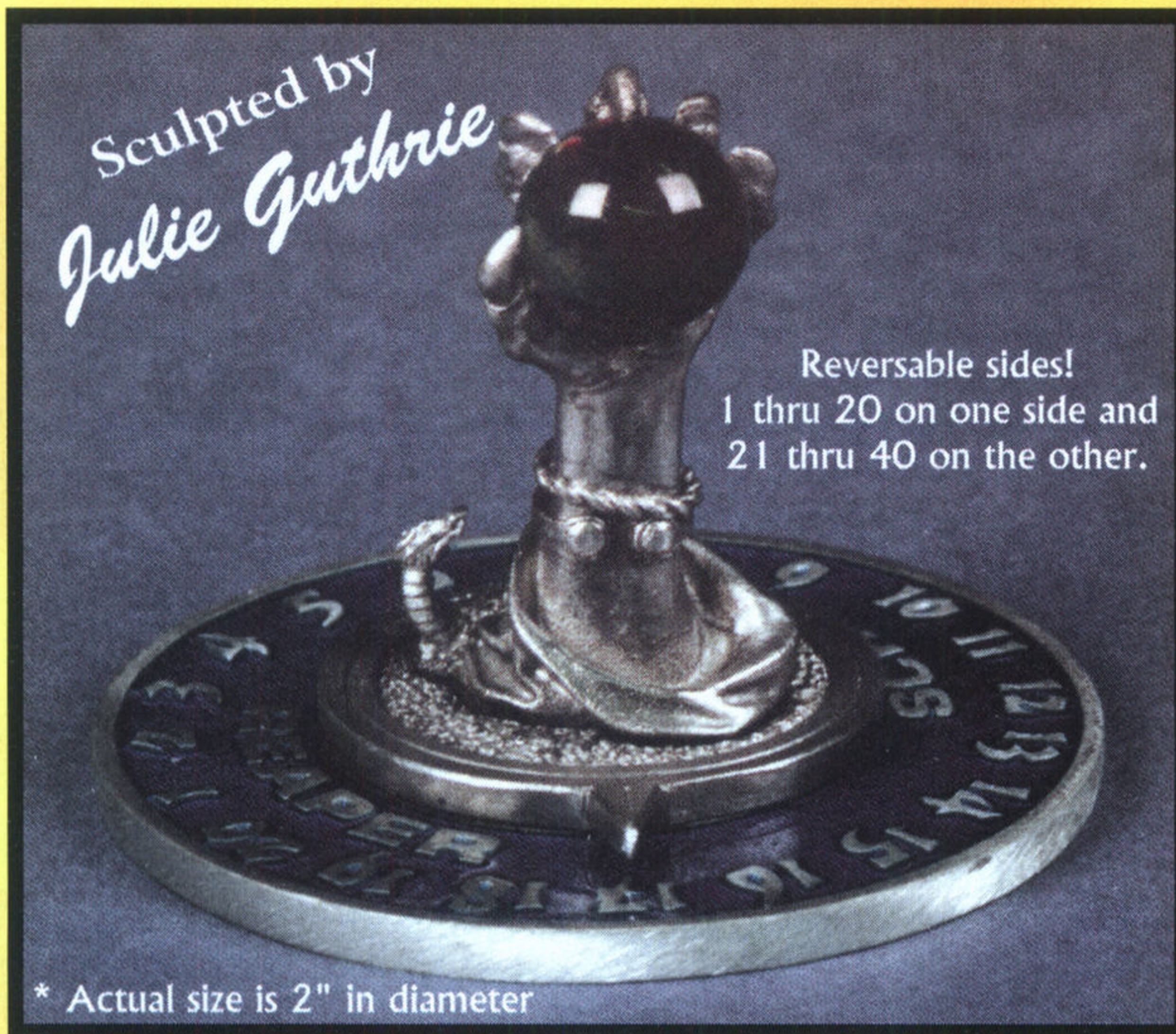


BELOW: *Warcraft II* is an unparalleled upgrade. Battling orcs, ax-throwing trolls, and two-headed ogres is nerve-racking fun. RIGHT: *Once Upon a Time* challenges players to tell a great story.

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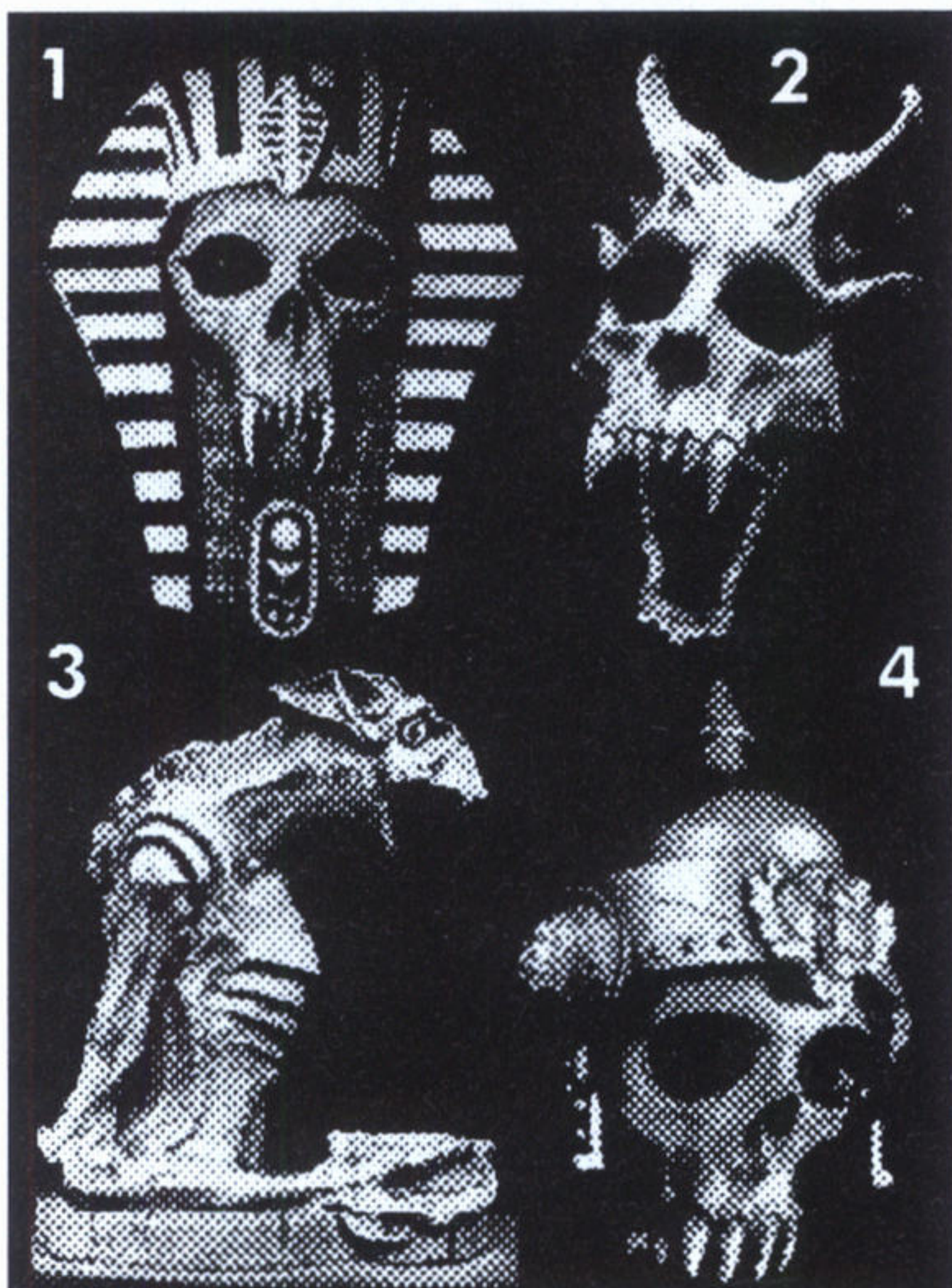
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More than graphics and sounds, the real growth in *Warcraft* is a growth in diversity. Diversity in units. Diversity in structures. Diversity in mission objectives. Diversity in game-play options. In the first *Warcraft*, the orcs had just entered the human world through a mysterious portal. But being newcomers in the land didn't make them shy. They set out to conquer themselves a kingdom. From the introduction to *Warcraft II*, it seems the orcs succeeded. They've driven the humans from their kingdom, forcing them to flee to a new land across the ocean. But one kingdom is not enough for these greedy orcs. They've boarded their own seacraft and now they're in pursuit, eager to bring some new lands under their power. This time the stakes are higher than ever. New allegiances have been formed.

Humans have thrown in their lot with elves, dwarves, and gnomes. Orcs have recruited the help of ax-throwing trolls and massive two-headed ogres. Where the first installment was restricted to the ground, this round will find you facing war on the sea, and even in the air.

Like the first installment, when you play *Warcraft* you get the choice of playing on either the orc or human side. The war takes place in a series of scenarios, some brief, some very, very tricksey. Taken together, the scenarios make up a lengthy campaign that ranges back and forth over the kingdom. Each win takes you closer to the ultimate confrontation between the two armies. Each lose sends you back for another try.

Of all the new features in *Warcraft II*, the one nearest and dearest to my heart is the scenario editor. I've loved such tools since Broderbund stuck a level editor in *Loadrunner* more than a decade ago. The scenario editor helps defeat the biggest flaw in any campaign-based strategy game — the end. Unlike games such as *Civilization* or *Masters of Orion*, which are based on randomly generated situations, *Warcraft* relies on pre-designed campaigns. Though there are a large number of battles in these campaigns, you will eventually, and sadly, reach the end. But with the scenario editor, you can extend the game as long as you feel like playing. Set up situations for yourself, or exchange them with friends. Expect to see plenty of these files hanging around the appropriate places on bulletin boards and networks. By the way, you have to have Windows 95 to use the editor. All of you holdouts now have an excuse.

Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness is the most enjoyable, playable, and refined product to come along in years. Not since *Masters of Orion* first landed on the shelves have I seen the clock read 3 AM for so many nights in a row. In the last year, several companies have tried to combine fantasy settings and strategy. None of them have nailed this target as well as Blizzard. This is the best strategy gaming you can buy.

Once upon a time, when we all played role-playing games and no one played any-

thing else, someone came along with fantasy card games. Atlas Game's *Once Upon a Time* is a completely different kind of card game. There are no rare cards here, no collector's value, not even any fighting. Well, maybe some fighting.

What there is in this game is a lot of fun, and a kind of challenge that you rarely encounter. *Once Upon a Time* is a game with a noble goal — storytelling. Each of the game's cards is decorated with some element appropriate to a fantasy tale. A talking rabbit, say, or a gleaming magical sword. To win the game, you must weave a tale around the cards in your hand, playing each card as you bring it into the story. Get rid of all the other cards, play your ending card ("and they all moved into the castle," or some such nicety), and you're the winner. Only it's not quite that easy, see. You can't just race through the game shouting out the names of your cards, you have to tell a real story. If you bend, fold, or mutilate the plot just to squeeze in another card, the rest of the players can call you on it.

Once Upon a Time is a social game, and the more people you bring to the table the more fun you're likely to have. The cards are attractive. There's nothing else to buy. And one box does for the whole table. Best of all, it's a challenge to your creativity. Take the challenge. Who knows, with a good enough deal, you could generate a plot for a new best-selling book.

Legend Entertainment Company's new *Shannara*, based on Terry Brooks' fantasy world, is a straightforward adventure game. This is familiar territory for Legend. They've turned out dozens of attractive, even award-winning adventures over the last few years, and their designers haven't failed them now. *Shannara* provides the gamer with lots of attractive graphics, some impressive — even frightening — animations, and a solid quest to unite the divided land of the Four Kingdoms.

Legend has heaped on the production values, packing the CD with more than thirty speaking parts, SVGA graphics with a crisp attractive look, a good back story, and wonderful music. If you're a fan of the *Shannara* universe, then this game has extra appeal. The story told here is a new one, not an adaptation of an existing Brooks story.

Overall, the *Shannara* game is a fine example of a modern adventure. The trouble is that modern adventures just aren't modern enough. Despite all the graphic glamour, a gamer from the text adventure days would feel right at home.

Make no mistake, these folks do the adventure thing well. It may just be that after twenty years and a few thousand games, the straightforward, pre-plotted adventure has lost its appeal. Adventure game sales have taken a drubbing at the computer stores lately. Apparently I'm not the only one who feels the need for some fresh direction in this genre. It would be a shame to see adventure games wither away on their CDs. ☹

FOLKROOTS

Continued from page 21

into faces, figures, and fantastical shapes. In the shelter of these rocks lived the Margot-la-Fee, peaceable fairies who spent their time raising children, tending herds of fairy cattle and sheep, and sunning themselves on the broad pink stones. If you asked them politely for bread or wool or milk, they were more than likely to oblige you. They were heard more often than seen, for they were shy of human eyes.

As the sun set over Tregastel, the sea became a sheet of silver. The tide turned and the winter wind swept long pink clouds across the sky. I fancied I could almost see the isle of Avalon on the horizon, where Arthur slept, attended by Morgana and her court of fairy maidens. The Bretons say that Avalon lies off the coast just off Tregastel-Plage. Sitting there, the line between story and fact seemed as vaporous as the clouds. It was indeed an enchanted land, enchanted by its natural beauty as much as by many centuries of stories — passed from mouth to mouth, family to family, enduring as the rocks. The sun sank low and I despaired, knowing no words of mine could conjure a fraction of the magic to be found in the simple lines of sand, sea, and stone. Nor, in just a few column pages, could I begin to convey the wealth of tales to be found at the heart of the Breton folk tradition: tales of saints, sirens, and sinners; of tricksters and devils; of wisemen and fools ... Far better to send you to the tales themselves, and some modern adaptations of them:

Folktales of Brittany by W. Branch Johnson and *Legends and Romances of Brittany* by Lewis Spence are two excellent English-language sources, while Katherine Briggs, Thomas Keightley and W.Y. Evan Wentz all include sections of Breton material in their various works on Celtic fairy lore and mythology. Modern fiction based on Breton tales includes the Holdstock and Byatt books mentioned above, Jack Vance's epic novel *Lyonese*, the "Broceliande" stories in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Kingdoms of Elvin*, and Evangeline Walton's beautiful story "The Judgement of St. Ives" (published in *Elsewhere*, Vol. I). Dorothy Sayer's translation of Tristan in Brittany can still be found in good libraries, and *The Lais of Marie de France* are available in several editions.

As we left Tregastel, heading for the ferry that would take us back to England again, I decided that I was inclined to prefer the second version of the Merlin story — the one where Merlin voluntarily gave Vivien the spell to entrap him forever. I could easily believe he would choose to spend eternity in these dream-haunted hills I'd favor the hills of Brittany myself, if I had to make such a choice [With thanks to Rob and Alan for sharing their books, and to Paul for sharing the journey.] ♣

VORPAL SWORD

Continued from page 47

There was no way for Brillig to know it, but these were the wisest words his friend had ever spoken to him. His paw closed upon the handle of the sword, and he lifted it from the table. At that moment, just as he had always hoped and anticipated, his life changed completely. Brillig felt an immense hunger rising from deep within his belly, a ravid fury expanding through his chest.

"Pu...pu...pu...put it down!" Mangle cried out. "Pu...pu...pu..."

Brillig looked across the room and realized all at once how much he hated Mangle, hated everything about him. His large, sad eyes, his constant stutter, his bumbling and incompetence, the way he had made Brillig beg and wheedle just to claim the prize that was rightfully his. Mangle was a creature who didn't deserve to live. Brillig leaped across the room and the sword seemed to dance before his eyes, to move with a life of its own in his hands.

Snicker-snack! Snicker-snack!

Mangle lay dead and bleeding at his feet, his clothes and his fur cut to ribbons. As the horror of his act struck home, Brillig hurled the sword away from himself and cried out incoherently.

This was truly the vorpal sword. It had killed the Jabberwock dead. It had decapitated that fabulous beast so that its head could be mounted and displayed as a trophy. And in so doing, it had been drenched with the Jabber's blood, imbued with the bestial frenzy of the Jabber's spirit, a spirit that now sought revenge on the creatures who had claimed its life.

Brillig heard the other Toves on the stairs. Thor was the first to appear in the doorway, with Bluelip and Draft not far behind.

"He's killed Mangle!" Bluelip exclaimed.

"Get him!" Thor said.

As the Toves advanced across the room, there was nothing for Brillig to do but take up his sword again.

Snicker-snack! Snicker-snack! Snicker-snack!

ALONE WITH VORPAL SWORD IN HAND, BRILLIG stood in the depths of the Tulgey Woods. Red devastation lay in his wake. The beamish moon, its once-virgin surface pocked and scarred by a thousand and one unwanted intrusions, shined down upon him. The fey creatures of the forest cawed and trilled and burbled all about him. Lewis-town and the world beyond awaited his call.

Somewhere in the night, most likely attired in satin and lace, distant and unattainable as ever, Sweet Cousin lay sleeping in her bed.

Within the raw canyons of Brillig's heart the spirit of the dead Jabberwock stalked, and chortled its terrible rage. There was no frabjous thought within his mind. No mimsy songs forevermore within his manxome soul. ♣

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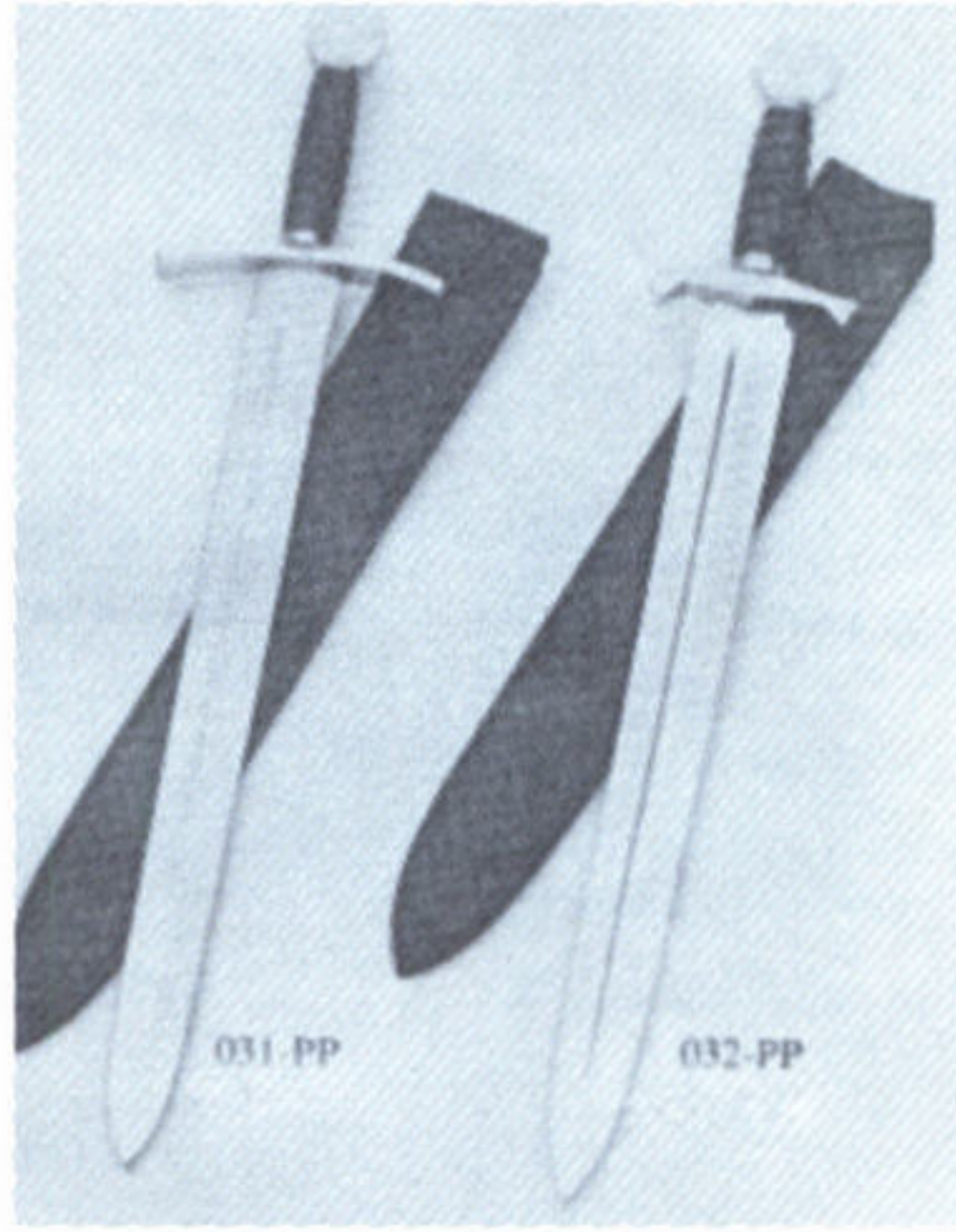
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LEUKA

Continued from page 61

as it went up on its hind legs that these would be the last things I saw: The demon thing, a ragged patch of sky above, and the soft brown eyes of an exiled queen

Goodbye, Black Pearl, I thought. *I never loved you less for being a pig and not a sword.*

And Black Pearl smiled back at me and charged the demon horse.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OF AN ANGRY PIG? Does the idea bring a laughable picture to your mind, of a great clumsy thing all huff and bluster? Then you are a fool for I tell you this — no panther in flight could possess more speed and purpose and deadly beauty than Black Pearl in her bloodlust. She thundered, screaming all the rage of her life, at the gray demon thing, rising up on her hind haunches to tear open its belly with her long, sharp teeth as it came down. They fell together in a snarling, screaming tangle and the ground shook under their weight as they tore and trampled each other about the yard. I rolled away from them as best I could and managed not to get caught beneath them as they landed, but that was all I could do.

The battle seemed to last a lifetime — blood and stink was everywhere, reminding me of Ys and the war. But stranger still it seemed to me that not two creatures were fighting, nor even three, but four: horse, demon, pig — and something, someone tall and gleaming, black and bright. Perhaps the blow that felled me had rattled my brains, for I could not clearly describe this fourth even now. Yet I will not forswear it, for as their struggle seemed to reach a peak, there was a roll of thunder and a flash of brilliance that was not light and I heard a husky woman's voice cry out words in a language I had never heard before, and they were gone. Gone. Horse, pig, demon, and whatever else. Gone.

I rolled away, coughing, and looked up to see what was happening between White Leuka and our sister from the Gray. I wished I had not.

I do not like seeing Leuka in her fey madness. It is worse to see her so and beaten. Magelight lashed the mountainside but it was yellow-gray not blue. Not that she was beaten yet, but though she was powerful, it had been many years since she'd wielded magic in battle, while the gray lady had used hers for nothing but.

Leuka saw me and cried out in the Old Tongue.

"The amulet, Phlego. Get me the amulet." I sat myself up and turned to Crow. Still frozen he seemed and yet he was not in the same position he'd been before. And then I realized what was happening to him, for as the battle raged he

was caught up and released in turn, so he jerked and twitched like a puppet in a windstorm.

With some effort I made it to my feet and went toward him, but I was slow, too slow. The gray lady — child of our mother, warden of our father — had learned the Old Tongue too, as well she might, for as I neared Crow, she seemed to swell again in size and the yellow magelight outshone the blue like the sun outshines the moon. Leuka was blown back into the house as if by a wind and I myself was thrown down against the rough edge of the millstone.

Suddenly freed, Crow pitched forward. But he did not fall and nor did he run to his erstwhile mistress. Instead he reached down into his boot, in a motion that was far too smooth to have come without practice, and drew and threw that black dagger and caught her in the throat.

The magelight blinked out.

There was a sound that could have been a child's soft sigh rising up into the air and if I'd been looking at Crow I think I might have seen that crook-toothed smile once more. But it was she who held my attention; the gray-robed lady. Slowly her hands went to the hilt of the dagger stuck in her throat. Slowly she pulled it out, looked at it, dropped it, bloodless, in the dirt. The slit in her gullet pulsed as she turned her head, but did not bleed.

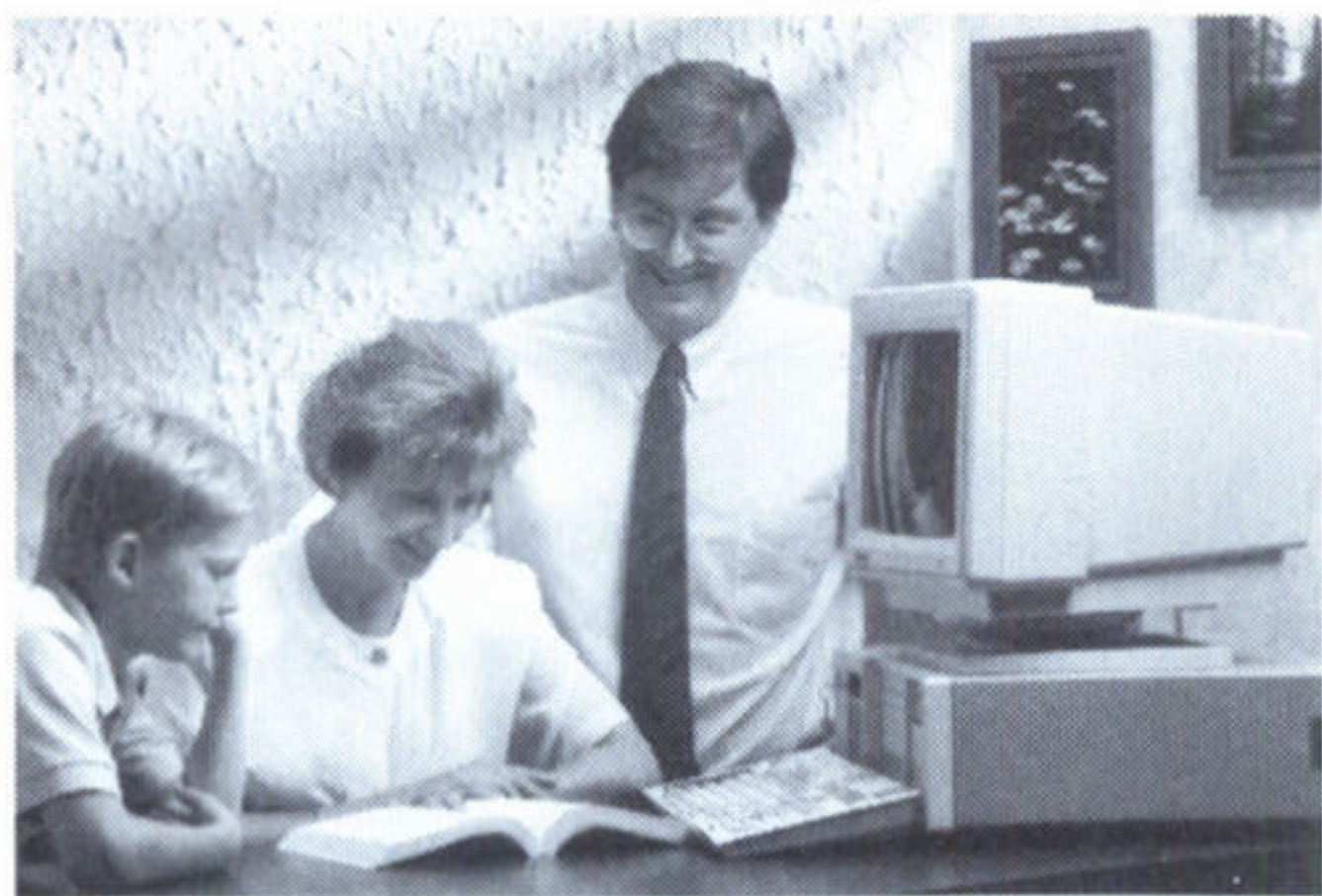
"You," she said, her voice sweet and high no longer, but low and croaking. "Crow!" I thought she had but called his name until I heard the flap of bird wings. I looked up but Crow was gone.

I have been a soldier. I have been in war. There are times in a battle when the whole of the war is no more than you and one other. There are times when the whole of the war is smaller still than that. As small as a black medallion dropped in the dirt in the middle of the night.

She saw it at the same moment I did. I was closer, but she had the advantage of speed. She lunged for it, four legs churning in the dirt, reaching out with two hands: one smooth, one clawed. I didn't bother trying. I was too angry for that — and with a mighty heave, I picked up the millstone I'd fallen against, and slammed it down upon both her and the amulet, with all my strength. I don't know if it killed her or not, for the millstone fell to the ground as if it had fallen on nothing but air. Nothing oozed out from under the sides, but there was a clap like thunder and the foul cloud that rose up around the stone smelled so distinctly of the Gray I do not doubt that she returned there. Without her voice she could have the distinction of being the only immortal there for a long time yet to come.

I fell to my knees and knelt where I had fallen, for I was too tired to rise. Leuka found me there some time later and the two of us, leaning one upon the other, limped

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silently together into the echoing quiet of our empty house.

IT WASN'T THAT LEUKA DIDN'T TRY, IT WAS that there was never a chance of undoing the spell from the moment it was cast. This she admitted to me at last, though she had worn herself thin trying to undo it.

"It's not a disguise or a transformation," Leuka said. "It's more that he is still himself, only that his very self is now a crow, and yet it is still Crow who is a crow and so there is nothing to unchange. Do you see that?"

I did, for I had gone myself into the Gray once.

Even then it took some doing to get her to stop and eat, or gods prevent it, sleep a while: Old Crow had won her over at last with his clumsy heroics, though I don't know why *that* of all things should have charmed her. Finally I convinced her that she had done enough. I tucked her away and then went out to the barnyard to seek a black-winged bird from the north.

I found him perched on the stone monument I'd made for Black Pearl out of the millstone. I knew it was him, for he didn't preen or peck at the ground like other crows, but only stood gazing at the house and the little epitaph I'd chiseled in the stone. More simply I knew him because I knew him. In whatever form, he was himself.

He cocked his head as I came near but did not fly away, so I sat on the ground beside him and told him what Leuka had told me. I think he must have known already, for he made no great outcry, merely made that familiar crow's chuckle deep in his throat.

"You're welcome to stay with us as long as you want," I told him, though I thought that would not be long. He was feeling the pull of the wild already. If he was still a man in bird shape, that would fade, and soon he would be a bird who sometimes dreamt he was once a man.

It changed nothing for me. I would always love him, bird or man. Should he stay, he would never be my pet, but always friend.

And one thing more.

"I will tell him your story if you want me to, Crow," I said. "Or I will keep it from him and tell him only that his father was a rogue and an adventurer who took advantage of an innocent gentlewoman one night under the moon."

Caw, cried Crow and ruffled his wings.

"All right then," said I. "Only the truth for our boy. And I shall name him myself with my own fey logic and call him Self or Solo or any name by which he will know that no one else can make or unmake him."

Caw, said Crow again and I had to agree. Much as I might want for him, our child would have to make his own way in the world in the end and choose for himself the name which best suited him, as do we all. ♀

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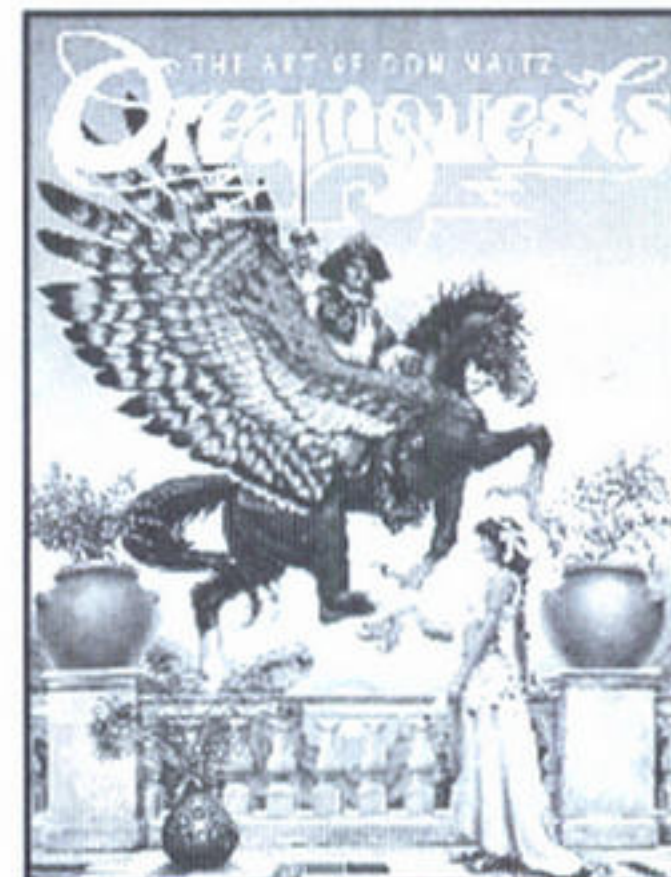
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Contributors

JO CLAYTON BEGAN AS A FARMER'S daughter, became a teacher in inner city schools in Los Angeles and New Orleans (with an interlude when she was trying to be a nun), left that when her third book was bought, and took up the writing life. Since 1977 she has written and sold 22 short stories and 32 novels, has helped edit two anthologies. Her latest book from Tor, *Drum Warning*, is the first of a fantasy trilogy called *Drums of Chaos*. **John Berkey** began working in a commercial art studio in high school. As a self-taught artist, several thousand paintings and forty-five years later, he still enjoys his work. His science fiction art began as science fact — a poster for NASA on the Mercury Project. Since then he has worked for most publishers and on a number of films and in advertising illustration. He has read that man's collective knowledge of our universe is about 4 percent — the remaining 96 percent — unknown. That 96 percent is a great subject to work and think on.

Al Sarrantonio's short stories have appeared in many magazines as well as anthologies such as *The Year's Best Horror Stories*, *Visions of Fantasy*, *Tales from the Masters*, *Great Ghost Stories*, and *The Best of Shadows*. His novels, spanning the science fiction, fantasy, mystery, horror, and Western genres, include *Moonbane*, *October*, *Totentanz*, *West Texas*, and *Campbell Wood*. He lives in New York's historic Hudson Valley, and is currently at work on a multivolume science fiction epic entitled *The Five Worlds Saga*, the first volume of which, *Exile*, will be published in 1996. **Laurie Harden** was raised in Mountain Lakes and now resides in Boonton. She is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, and she illustrates and does portraits and oil paintings.

Bruce Boston's work has appeared in *Science Fiction Age*, *Asimov's*, *SF Magazine*, *Nebula Awards* (HBJ), *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* (St. Martin's), and in hundreds of other publications. His novel *Stained Glass Rain* (Ocean View, 1993) has been called "the best book yet written about the '60s and its drug culture." (*Tangent*) His twenty-first book, *Sensuous Debris: Selected Poems, 1970-1995* is just out from Dark Regions Press. **Mark Sasso** began his art career as a

designer in the film industry. In his three short years as a freelance illustrator he has produced covers, posters, games, and prints, and interior illustrations for magazines. What free time he has is spent at the gym, staring at Frank Frazetta paintings, doing laundry, and going to the movies. He is currently working on *Star Wars* paintings for Topps Comics and is adapting a screenplay called *Johnny Blowtorch* into a comic book.

Janni Lee Simner has sold stories to more than a dozen anthologies for adults and children, including Susan Schwartz's *Sisters in Fantasy 2* and Michael Stearns' *Starfarer's Dozen*. Her first book, *Ghost Horse*, will be published by Scholastic next summer. She currently lives in Tucson, Arizona, where she enjoys hiking in the mountains that surround the city. Award-winning photographer and artist **J.K. Potter** grew up in the deep South but currently resides in the Massachusetts countryside. He is the illustrator of over thirty books and countless book covers. The first compilation of his work, entitled *HORRIPILATIONS*, was released in the United States by Overlook Press. *Realms of Fantasy* did a J.K. Potter gallery in February 1995.



Lisa R. Cohen



Janni Lee Simner

MIKE RESNICK HAS WON THREE Hugo Awards (including one this year for best novella). He is the author of more than thirty novels, including *Santiago*, *Stalking the Unicorn*, *Soothsayer*, and *A Miracle of Rare Design*; and the author of many short stories, including the award-winning *Kirinyaga* series.

Lisa R. Cohen has published fiction in *Pulphouse*, *F&SF* and *Story Magazine*. A graduate of Clarion '87, she has traveled widely in South America and narrowly in a lot of other places. She now lives with her husband in the depths of suburban British Columbia. **David Martin** began his career more than fifteen years ago producing covers for games, books, record albums, videos, miniatures, posters, cards, and prints. His Chesley-nominated work has found acclaim in the United States, as well as abroad, garnering the best color award at the 1995 World Fantasy Convention. He has illustrated covers for Tanith Lee, Michael Resnick, and many others. He lives in the Colorado Rocky Mountain. ☘



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