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Cover: Heavy back-up for the dwarves guarding their treasure is provided by "The Ice Dragon." Painting by Keith Parkinson.

Above: Dragons have graced the silver screen for almost as long as there have been movies. Disney's *Dragonslayer*, above, is among the best of them. See story beginning page 18.

Departments.~

7 EDITORIAL

Is it love — or just plain nepotism?

8 LETTERS

10 BOOKS BY GAHAN WILSON

When vampires are bad, they're really bad, but when they're good...

18 MOVIES BY DAN PEREZ

Celluloid Dragon's Teeth: a short history of dragons in film.

26 FOLKROOTS BY TERRI WINDLING

Tristan, True Thomas, and Morgan of Hed: Legends of Harps and Harpers

56 GALLERY BY TANITH LEE

Master fantasy artist Wayne Barlowe possesses an unusual sympathy, even empathy, with the worlds and beings he illustrates.

70 GAMES BY MARK SUMNER

Across darkest Kansas with time machine, jet pack, and a really big stun gun.

78 CONTRIBUTORS

REALMS OF FANTASY

Fiction.~

32 OLD FLAME

By Tanith Lee

Like moths to the flame go lovers to their fates, and no one and nothing in this world can stop them. A new story from the journals of St. Strange by one of fantasy's favorite authors.

40 THE PRETENDER

By Stephen Dedman

There's something about the Arthurian mythos that demands telling and retelling. Here is a truly remarkable account of some truly remarkable times.

46 MOTHERS' DAY

By Leslie What

Yearning for the pitter-patter of little feet around the house? You'd better read this ...

50 FALLING

By Kristine Kathryn Rusch

We try to remember that angels often come to mortals in disguise, but we often forget to inquire just what they might be disguising.

62 THE TRIGGER

By Dave Smeds

Would you like to be a superhero? Answer why or why not in 100 words or, better yet, read this story.

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DATE: February 1997

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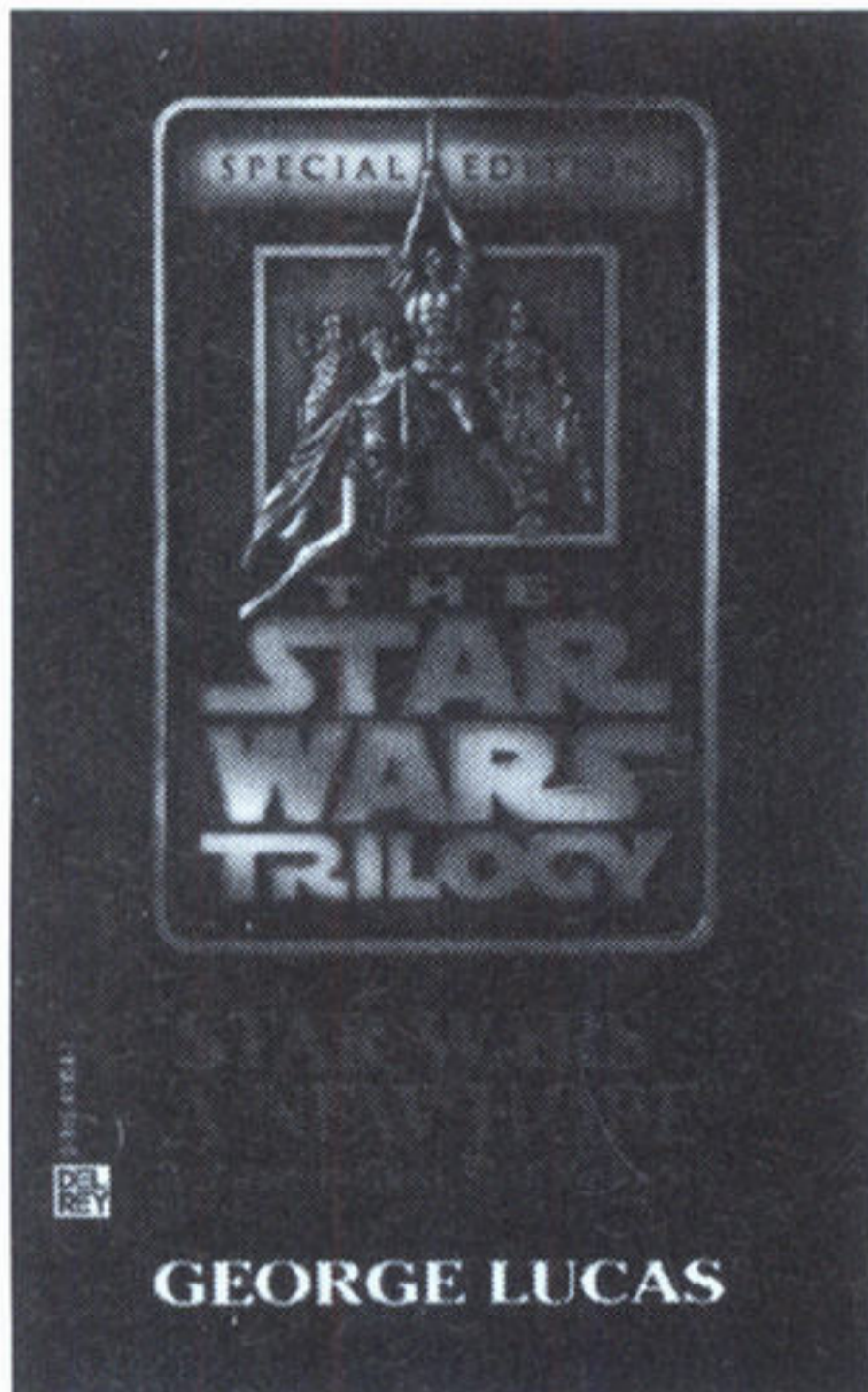
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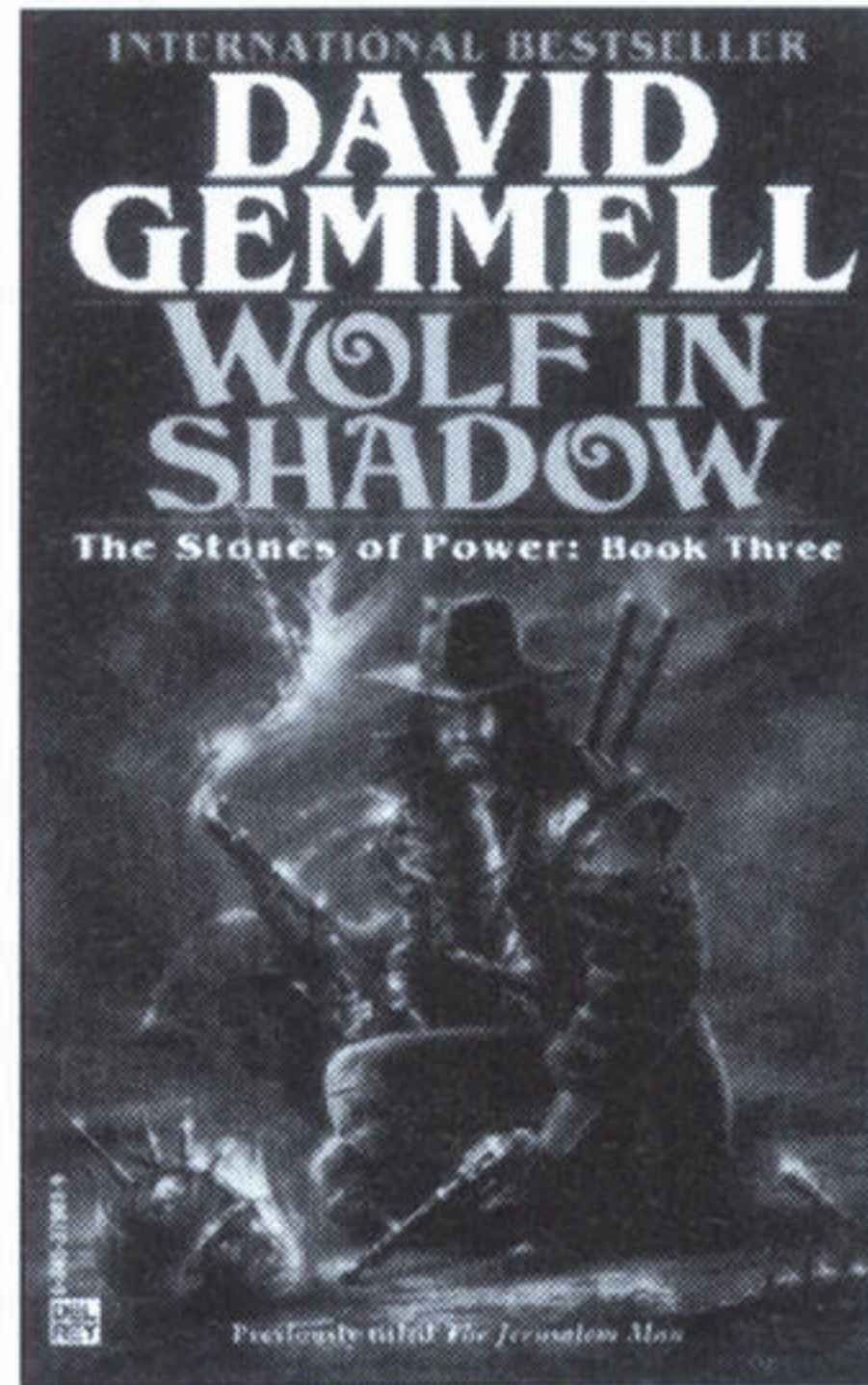
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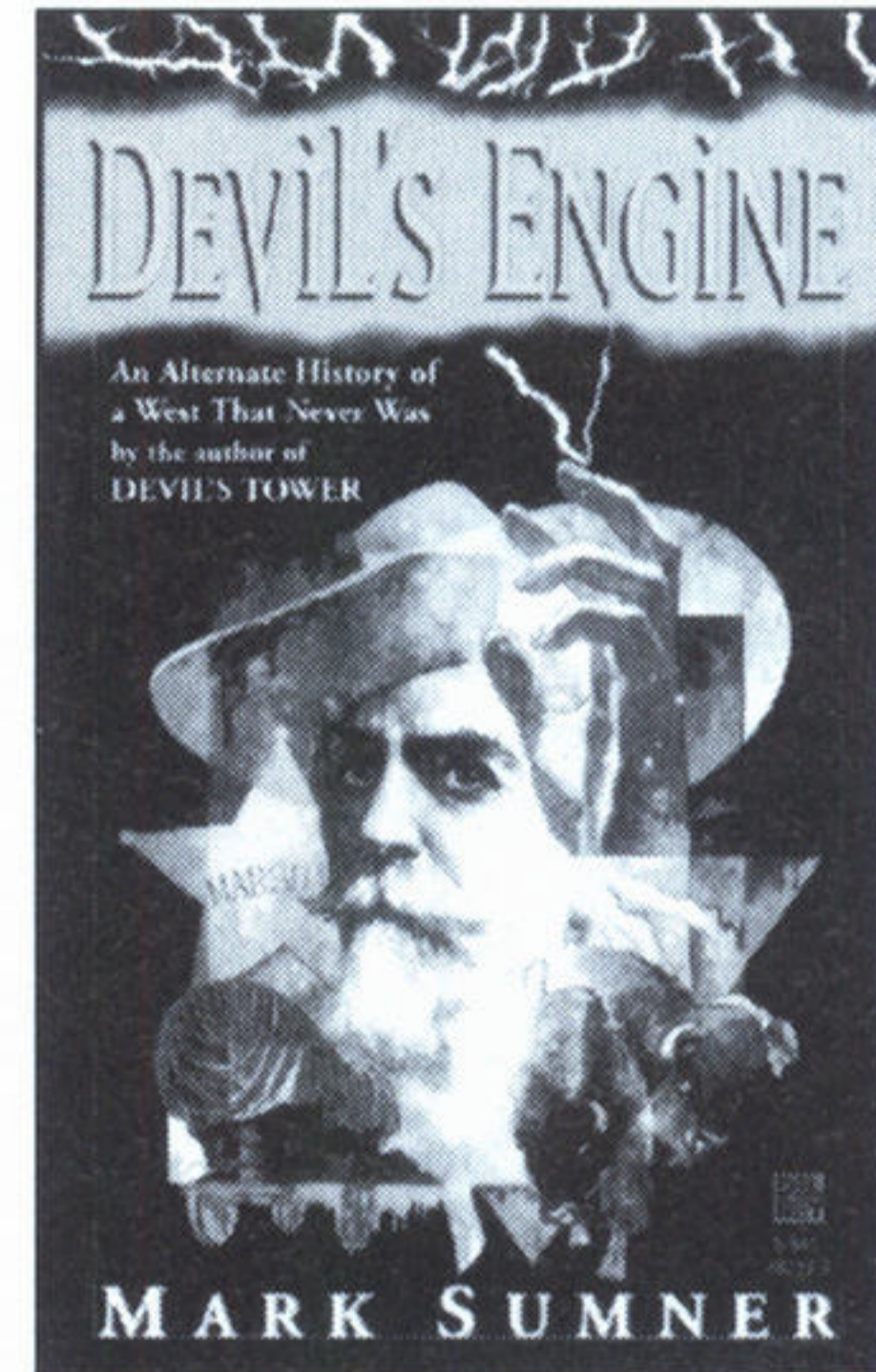
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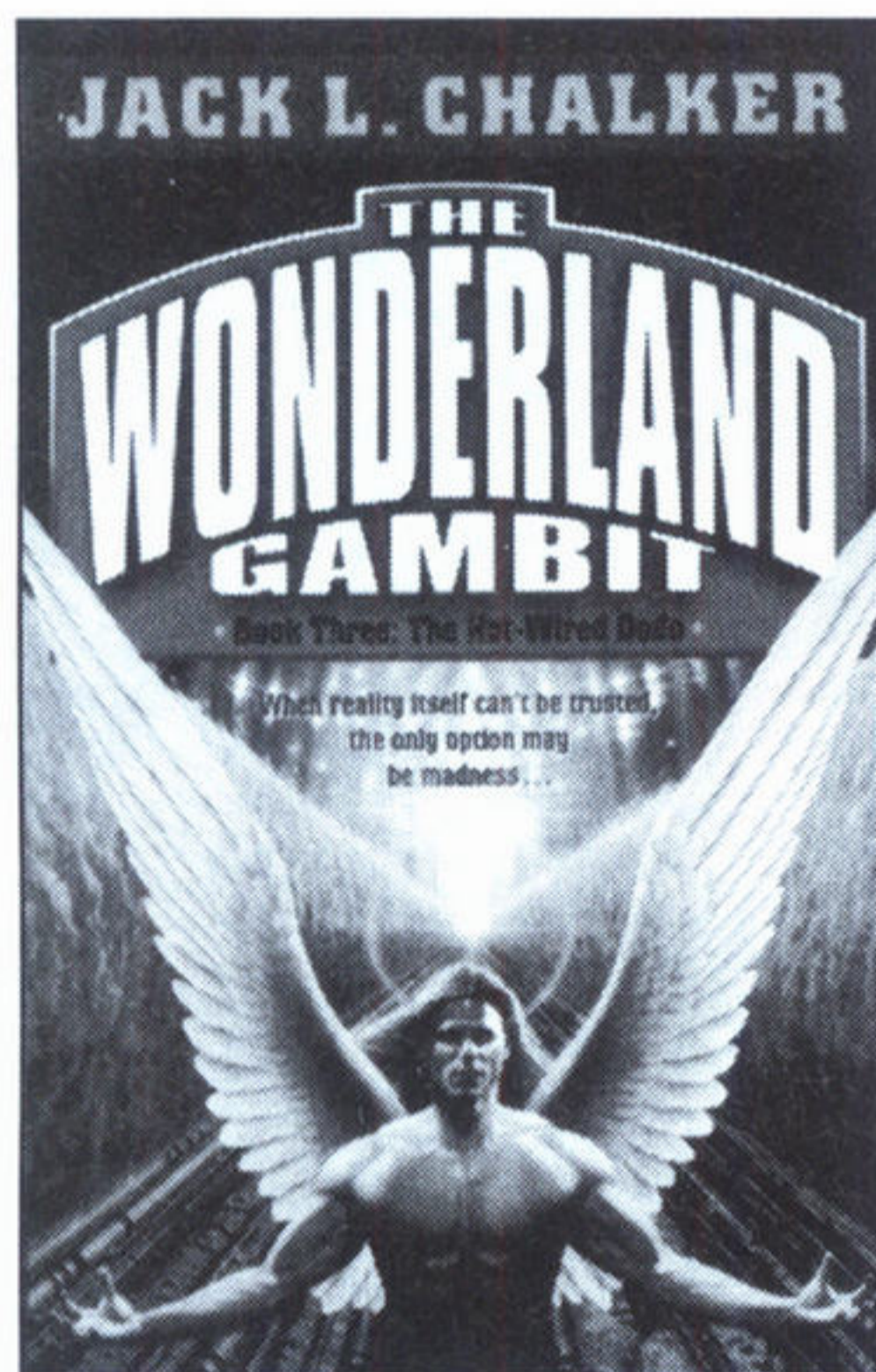
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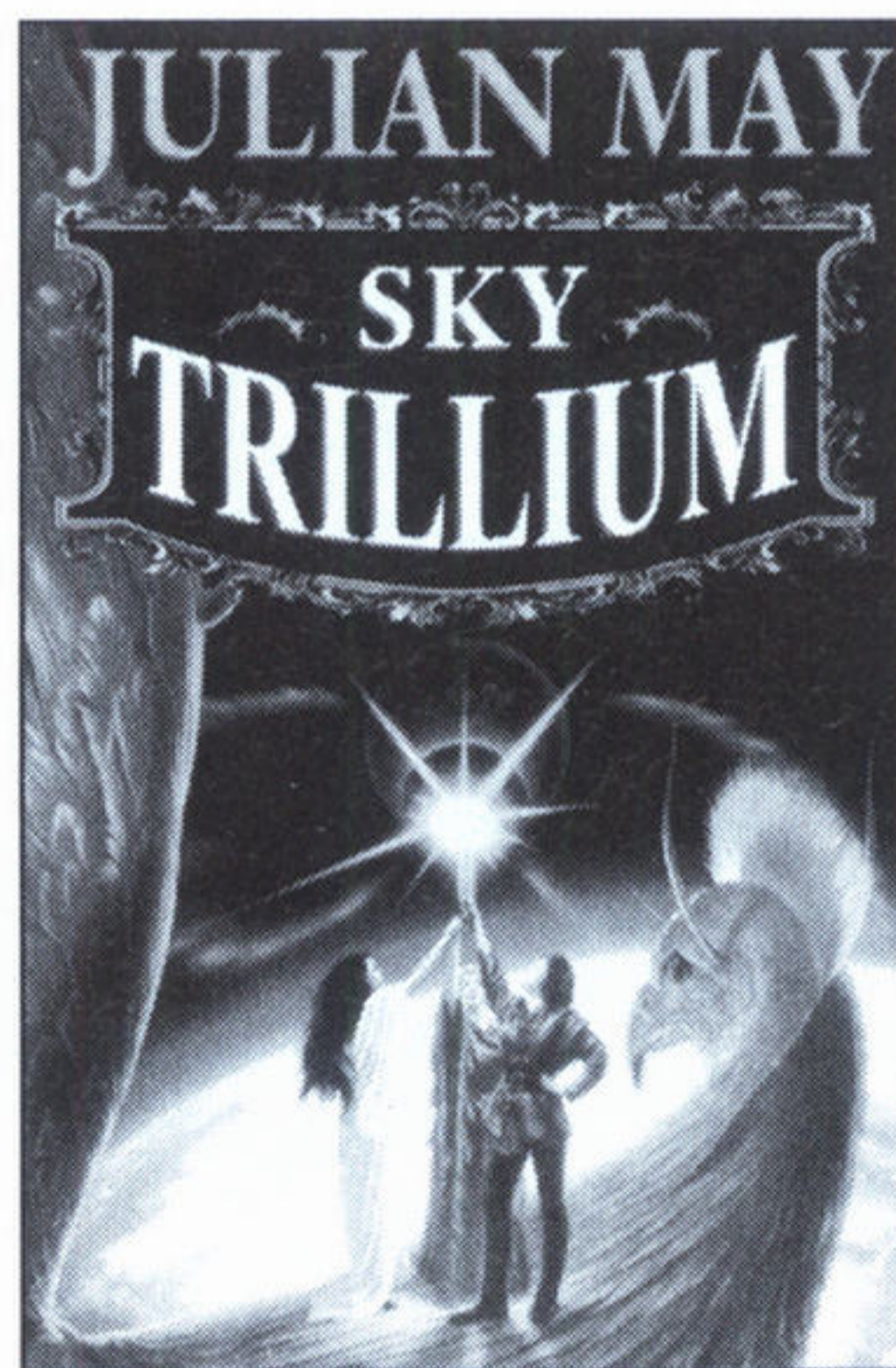
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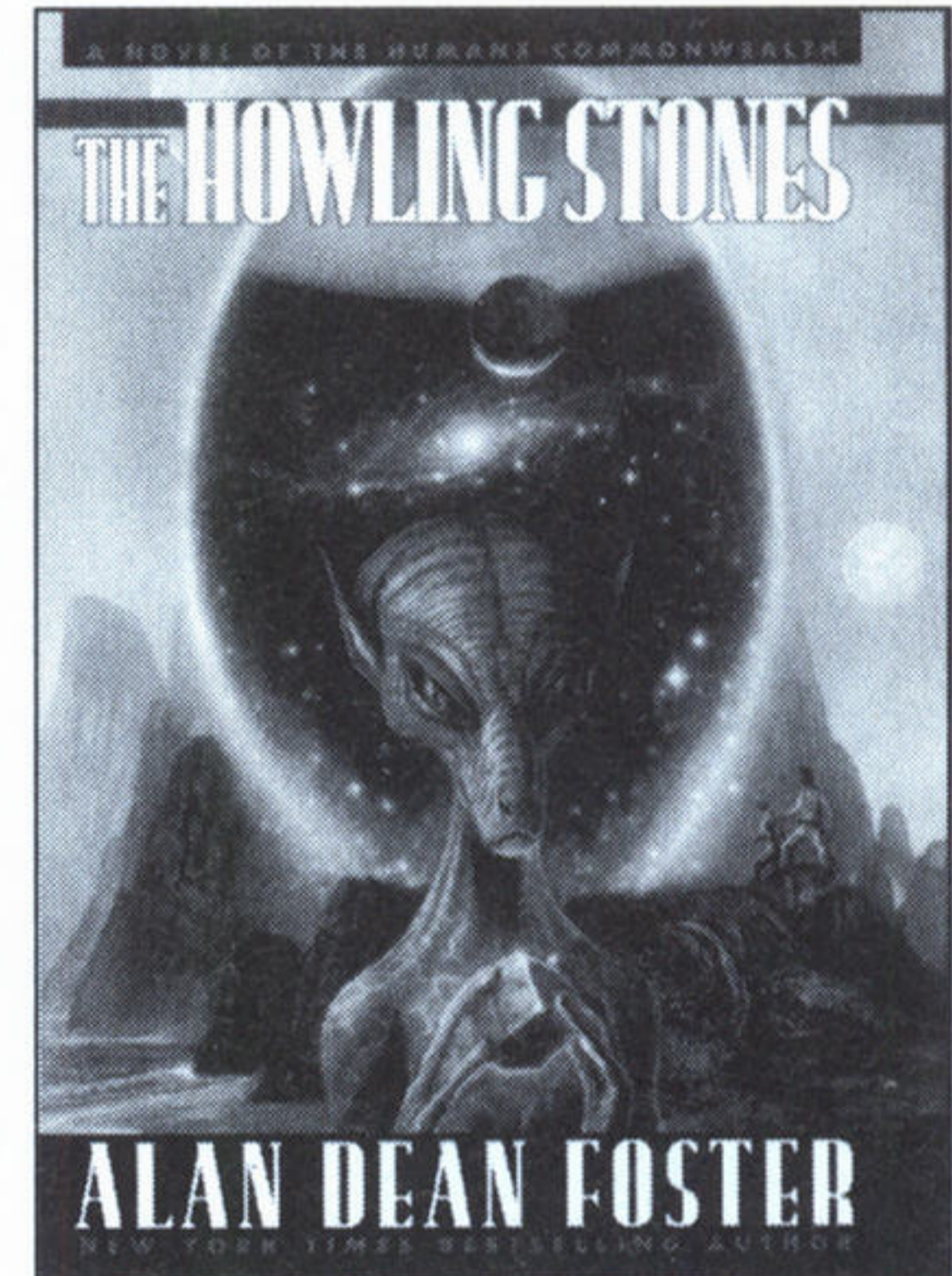
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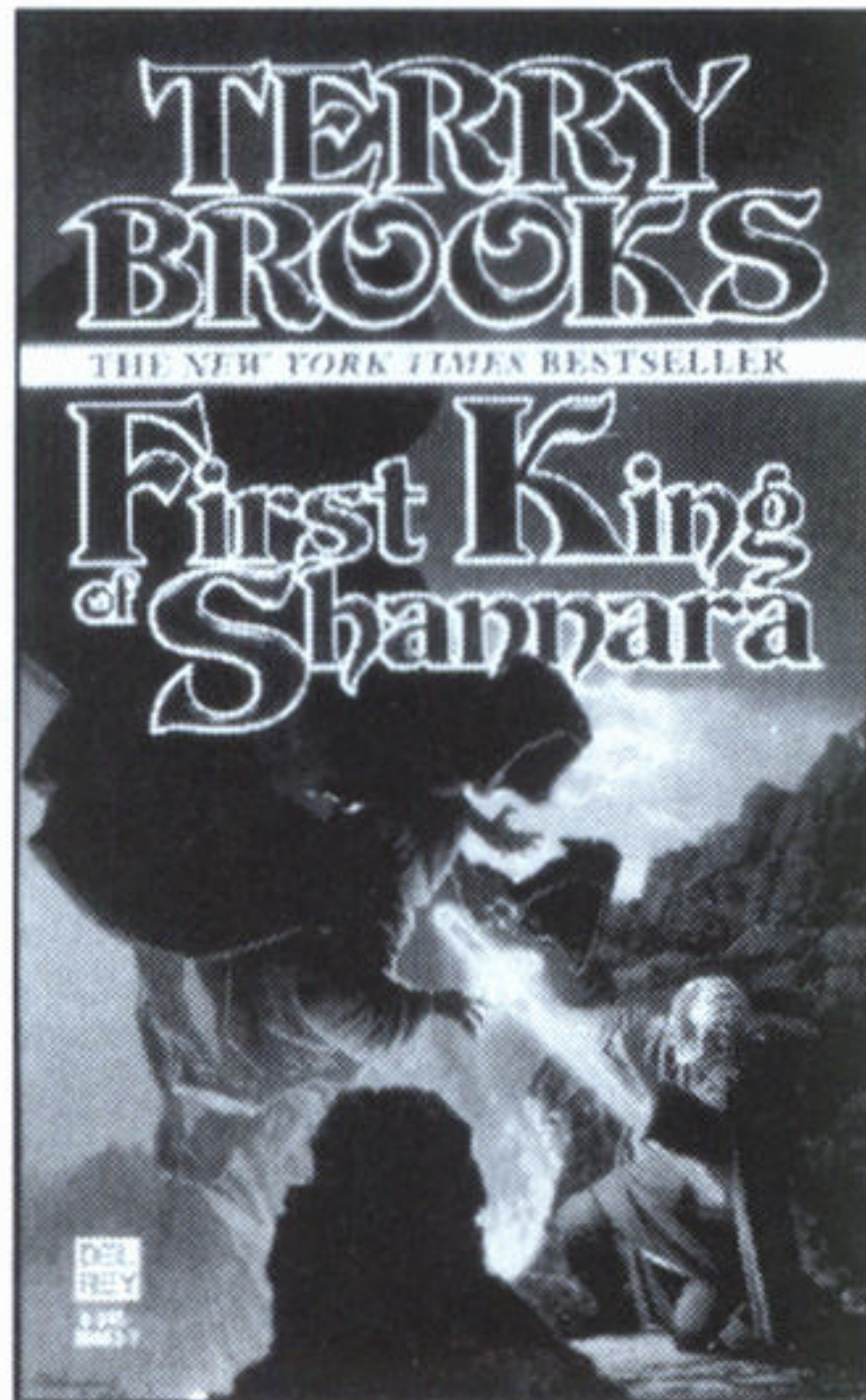
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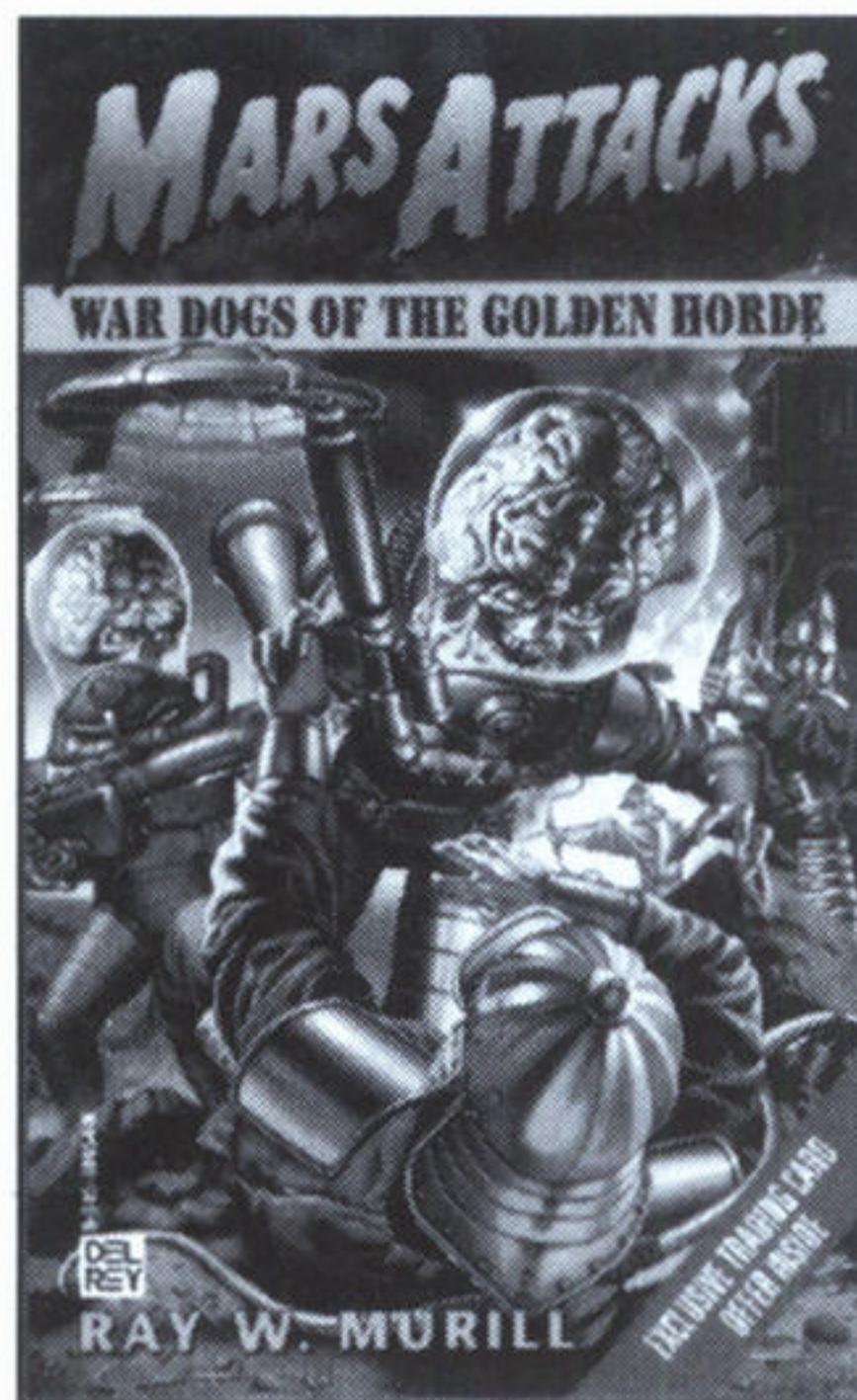
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RE: Extremely essential reading (of the extraordinary variety)

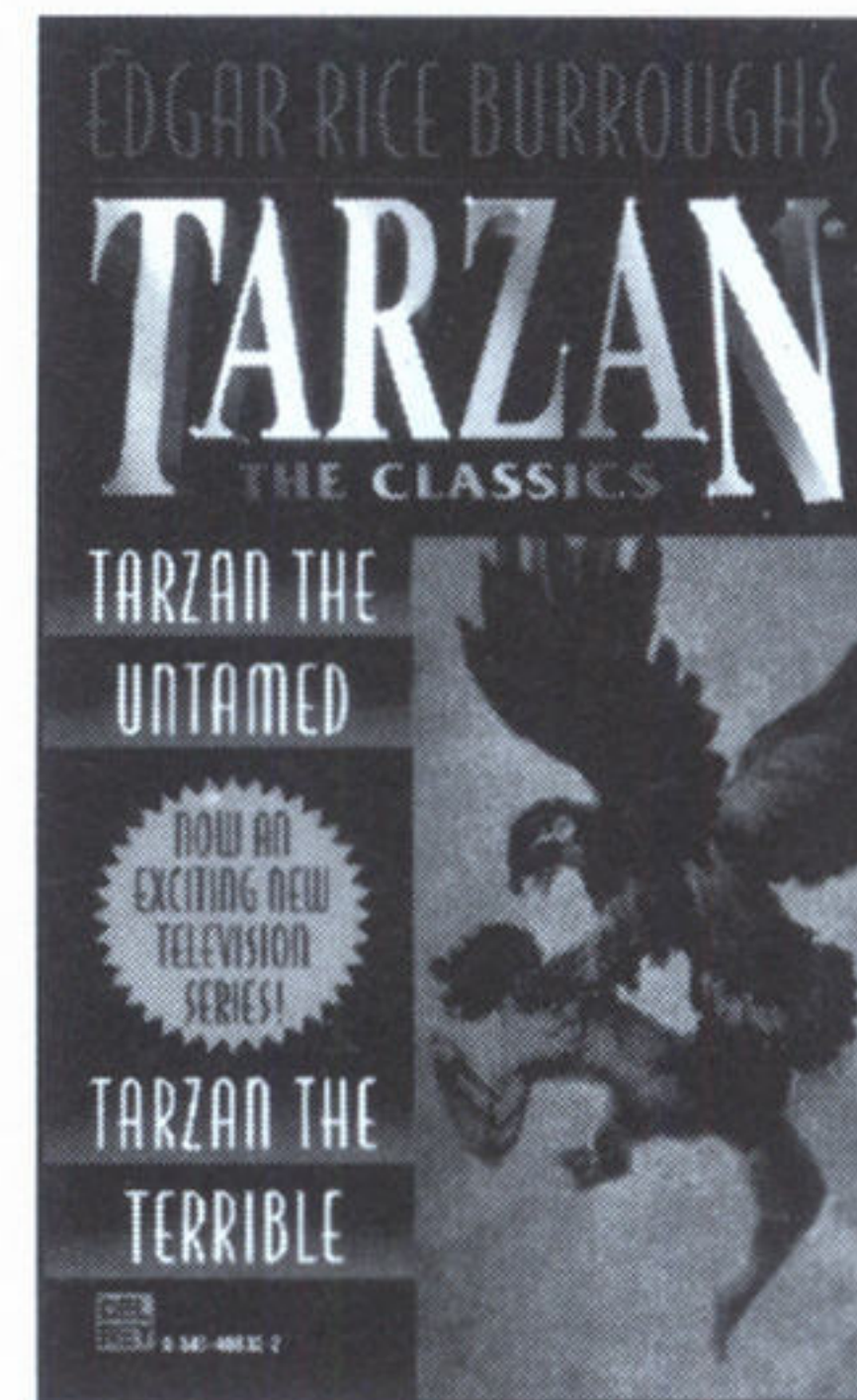
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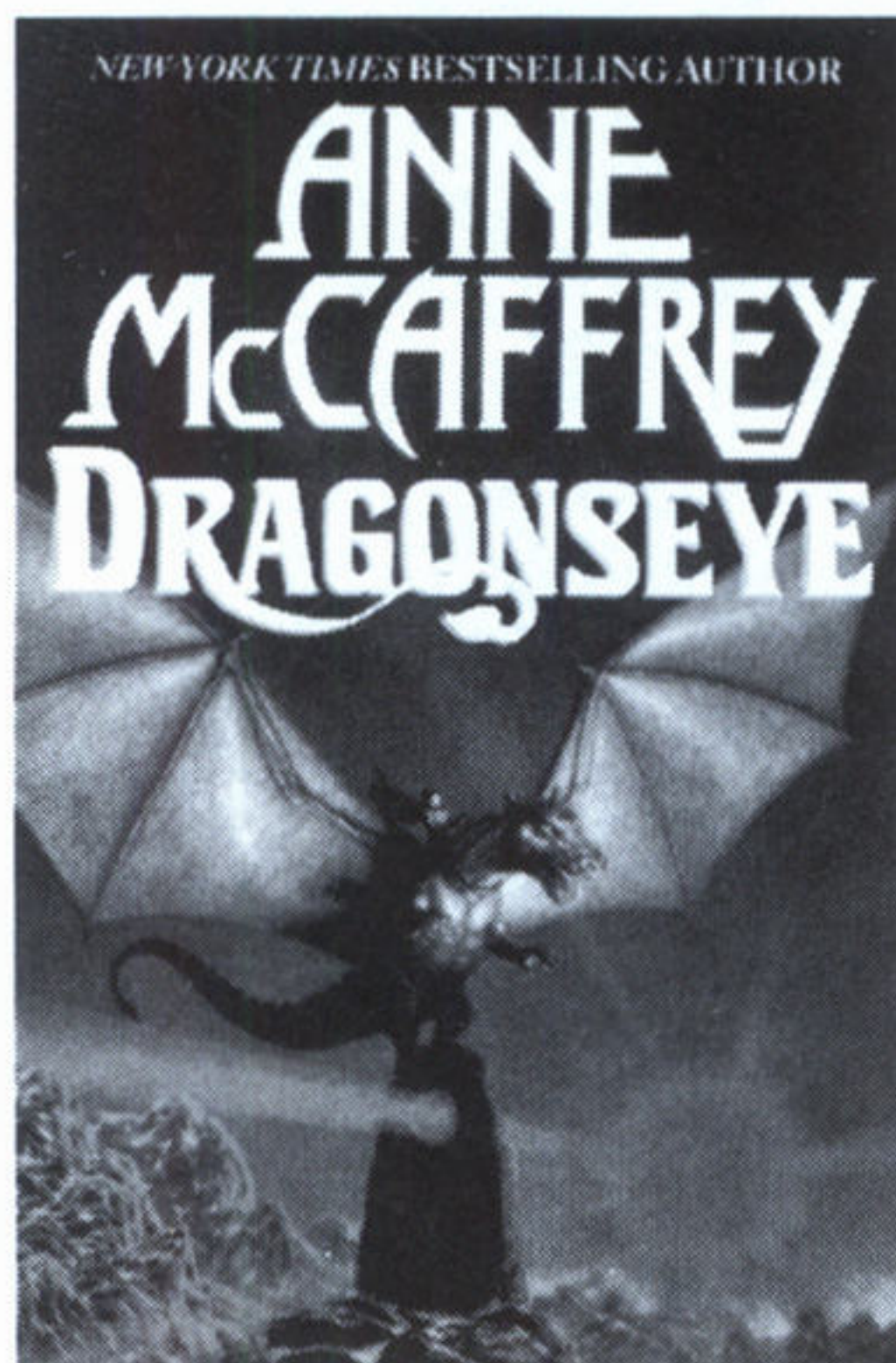
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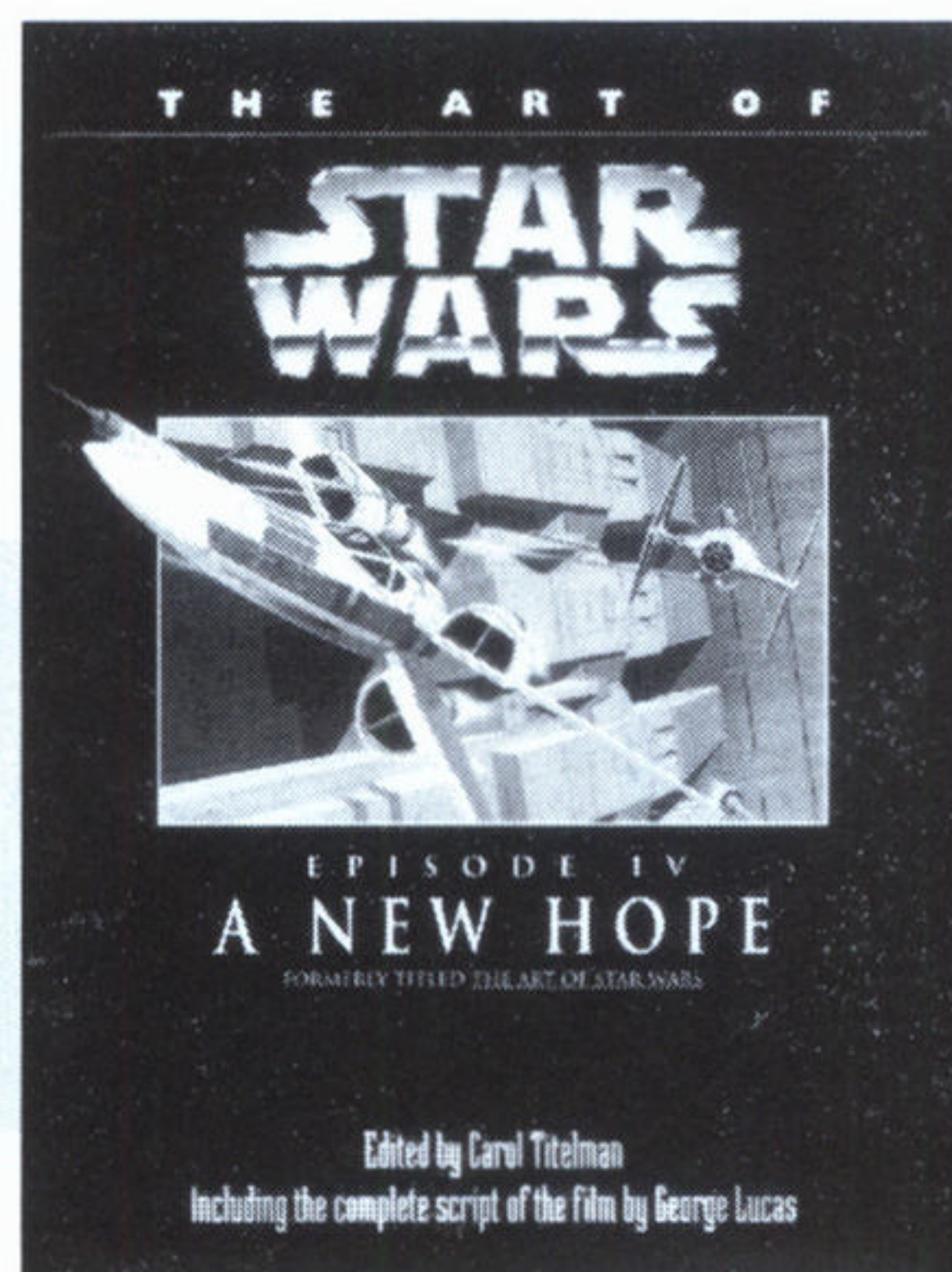
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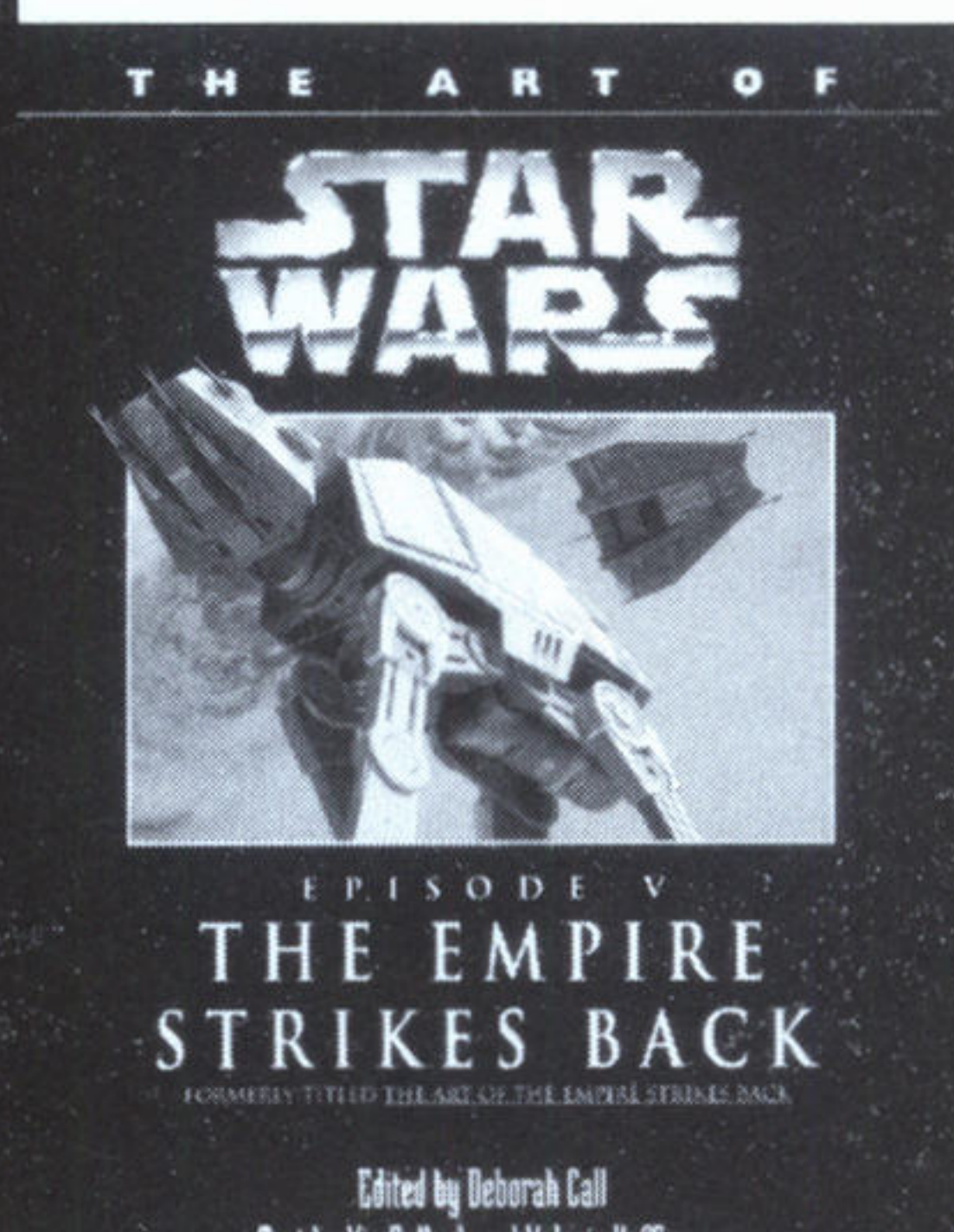
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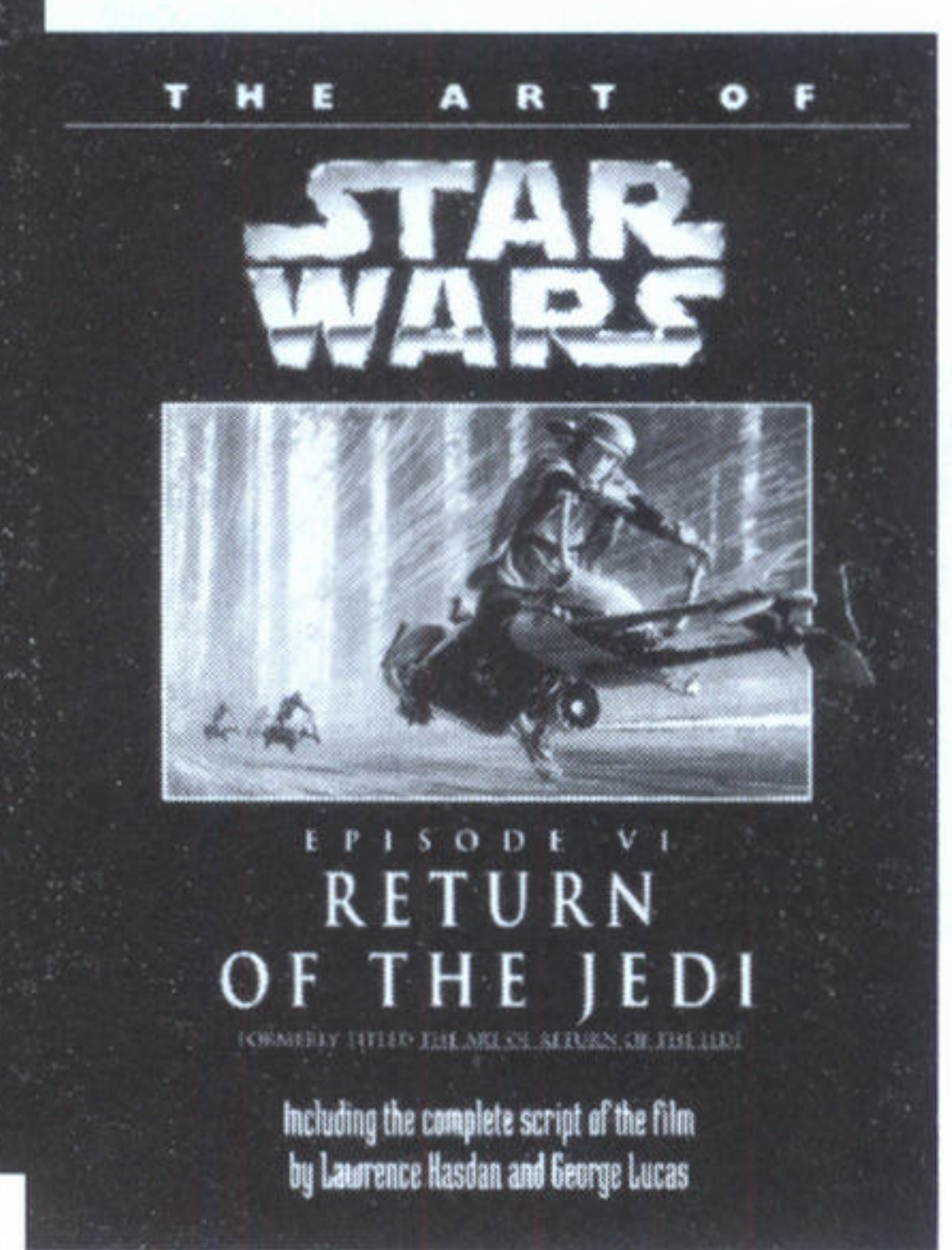
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ON SALE IN FEBRUARY AT BOOKSTORES EVERYWHERE

Is it love — or just plain nepotism?

A FEW YEARS BACK, when I first began editing this magazine, a great hue and cry arose among certain elements in the SF and Fantasy community, decrying the fact that in addition to this, my part time job, I held another full time job, that of a literary agent with a well-known agency. These elements suggested that I might abuse my position, publishing only fiction from my agency clients and neglecting other, worthy but otherwise represented writers. As anyone who has ever submitted a story to this magazine can testify, this is far from what has actually happened. I am an equal opportunity neglecter, taking as long (if not longer) to reject my clients as I do the rest of the writing pool.

The only thing that counts in this arena is talent. If a story is good, it gets published, regardless of who wrote it, who represents them, where they live, what they do, what color their hair is, or, to get to the real point of this editorial, even who they're married to.

Unbelievable though it may be, some of you may not read the editorial first and have already flipped through the magazine to see that this month's Gallery features excerpts from the upcoming HarperCollins book *Barlowe's Guide to Fantasy*. Great book, huh? Terrific art, fabulous text, just the sort of thing that should appear in the pages of *Realms of Fantasy*, the only full-color fantasy magazine on the market. Couldn't be more appropriate, right? Well, as it happens, I totally agree, and so does our esteemed publishing team of Carl and Mark.

There are, however, factions at loose in the publishing world who may take exception to its publication in our pages. Why? Because Wayne Barlowe, the author/illustrator, happens to be my husband. Now were Wayne Bar-

lowe not my husband, there would be no doubt whatsoever that this work should appear in our pages. There wouldn't even be a discussion. However, since he happens to be married to me, there was a certain amount of conscience-searching and head-scratching that went on before we decided to go ahead with its publication. In the end, though, we felt that there was no reason to penalize Wayne simply for being married to me (he might well argue that he's already been penalized enough!). So there you go. Those of you who have been patient and well-behaved enough to read this editorial first are now permitted to turn the pages and look at the work that has caused all the fuss. We all hope you like what you see.

In other magazine-oriented business, I'd first like to correct a correction that appeared in the last issue: We omitted the copyright line that should have appeared with Harlan Ellison's essay "Trimalchio in West Egg". The line should have read "© 1996 The Kili-manjaro Corporation. All Rights Reserved."

And on a sadder note, some of you may be aware that fantasy artists Don Maitz and Janny Wurtz were the victims of a crime at last year's World Fantasy Convention. Some 23 paintings were stolen from a Federal Express truck on October 26, 1995. None have yet been recovered, and a reward of \$5,000 is now being offered for information leading to their return. The missing art can be viewed on the World Wide Web at <http://www.westol.com/~trystane> or by sending an SASE to Don Maitz, 5824 Bee Ridge Road, Suite 106, Sarasota FL, 34233. If you see these paintings, you are encouraged to contact either the FBI or Fed Ex. Any information any of you might have will be greatly appreciated. ✎

Shawna McCarthy

REALMS OF FANTASY

VOLUME 3

NUMBER 2

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Dear Realms;

I must say that I was absolutely shocked by your publication of a story by Don Webb, "The Beautiful Wassillissa". This was little more than plagiarism of the old Russian folk tale titled "Fair Vasilissa and Baba Yaga", which can easily be found in Oxford's Myths and Legends series: *Russian Tales and Legends*.

I will grant you that Mr. Webb's tale was updated, but in my opinion, it was little more than a rewrite. The characters, plot, and drama all remain the same. If this was some sort of homage to old Russian tales it completely escaped me.

Raymond D. Johnson
East Liverpool, Ohio

The story in question is one of many that I've published in the age-old tradition of re-told fairy tales. The fairy tale being retold in "The Beautiful Wassillissa" is the old Eastern European story of Baba Yaga. Perhaps if you reread it with this in mind, its inclusion will make more sense. Perhaps you haven't noticed, but we've also published retellings of "Little Red Riding Hood", "Sleeping Beauty", and "The Little Mermaid", among others.

Dear Ms. McCarthy;

Barclay Shaw's chess table prompted this letter to you. When I turned the page and saw the photo, my eyes devoured the sculpture for several moments. Viewing this work of fantasy art was a transcendental experience.

Devoting extra page space to the sculptured chess table was a wise decision. May I suggest when you receive future artwork so visually evocative that you consider a two page centerfold? I am a reader, not an artist, yet I have inadequately expressed how much I was moved by Mr. Shaw's chess table.

Great credit to Harlan Ellison for nurturing his dream and a special thanks to Mr. Ellison (and you) for sharing a view of the fantasy art nouveau chess table with your readers.

Lida E. Quillen
Talbott, Texas

Exceeding the limitations and scope of our ordinary existence is what fantasy art and literature should be about. Nice to hear you enjoyed the experience.

Dear Realms of Fantasy;

We were delighted to see your article, "Beloved Childhood Images", by Jane Yolen. One of our Kay Nielsen paintings was featured along with other wonderful images from the impressive exhibition at the Chrysler Museum.

However, our gallery was left out of the listing of places specializing in illustrations for children — as far as we know we are the only gallery dealing solely in original vintage art for children (no books, no prints—just

paintings, watercolors and drawings created primarily between 1880 and 1950). We also exhibit once a year in March at the Works on Paper show in New York City.

Many Thanks,
Kendra Krienke
Allan Daniel
New York, NY

Dear Ms. McCarthy;

This is a great magazine! I simply loved Chris Bunch's story "A Matter of Honor" in your October 1996 issue. For some months after seeing the books, I have been contemplating the purchase of the Anteros series written by Bunch and Allan Cole. This convinced me. I hope to see another one of his stories in an upcoming issue!

Also, I think I almost suffered heart failure when I saw that October's "Gallery" did an article on one of my favorite fantasy artists: Keith Parkinson! I spent two years reading the *Death Gate Cycle*, and while devouring the stories I just could not take my eyes off the covers. To see some of his work close up, my favorite "Death Gate" novel cover, "The Hand of Chaos", was like a personal gift. With Terry Brooks writing the article, I could not have asked for anything more. Thank you for a terrific magazine.

Carmen Welsh
Miami, Florida

We are delighted to know that our October Issue influenced your decision to read more of Chris Bunch's and Allan Cole's work. Consider Keith Parkinson's artwork a personal gift to you and all our other ROF readers. We are sure you will find many such "heart-stopping" pleasures in future ROF issues.

Dear Ms. McCarthy;

As you can see I am way behind on my issues of ROF (since I just started June today), but am still faithful to the cause. I agree 100 percent with your thoughts of choosing stories for the magazine, as well as the thoughts of the Marx Brothers' movie producer. Being exposed to the new ideas and/or styles generates a synergy which makes the magazine even more interesting. Also, one of the reasons I enjoy the Marx Brothers' films is because of the "culture" that they contain. Cartoons are another example of slapstick or comedy pieces that contain classical background music or show Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd performing the Barber of Seville. Thanks for the great magazine, and keep my brain doing "one-armed pushups".

T. J. Kubacki

Thanks for the words of support, T.J., I was fascinated to learn that about Bugs and Elmer. You mean in that other opera the real words weren't

"Kill the wabbit! Kill the wabbit!" (I do hate to have to add this, but please, no cards or letters — I was just joking.)

Dear Ms. McCarthy;

Strange, how fate twists our lives together in seemingly coincidental ways. One day, I am enjoying the Folkroots department of Realms, reading the history of "Cinderella." The next day I happen upon the television show, "Party Girl." The connection, you ask. Well, this particular episode exemplified the simpering stupidity that permeates "modern" tellings of the Ash Girl's story. The heroine of the show, through no effort or virtue of her own wins the affection of a Prince charming. Who would have expected such a thing from a show called "Party Girl?" Oh well.

Also, Ms. McCarthy, I would like to thank you for opening my eyes, and my mind to new types of fantasy. The whole magazine, from the cover, to the Gallery, the stories, to the reviews and editorials are superb.

Thank you,
Jeannie Bachman
Westover, WV

Dear Shawna;

I frequently feel compelled to write to various authors and express my extreme adoration and/or gratitude for their work. This desire has come upon me most often when reading ROF. I put down the magazine and can go on thinking about a piece for days, like a song that won't leave your head. Tanith Lee, Robert Silverberg, Deborah Wheeler, Gahan Wilson and Janni Lee Simner are a few of the writers I've decided to write to after reading their fabulous stories - only to put it off until it seems too late. That, and I don't have their addresses. If I mail a letter to an author in care of you and your magazine - would it be forwarded to that person, or is their a better way to convey my affection for various writers and their work?

Shelly Harrick
Bethesda, MD

We'd be happy to forward any mail to the author, artist or columnist indicated. Letters to the Editor is also a good forum for that sort of thing. Just be sure to mark the letter accordingly. We cannot emphasize strongly enough - Letters to the Editor, letters to a contributor and story queries need to be plainly marked as such, or they might get mixed up with the very substantial guideline request pile!

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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When vampires are bad, they're really bad, but when they're good...

THE WORST THING ABOUT DOING A COLUMN OF CRITICISM, SUCH AS THIS ONE, IS THAT IF you don't watch yourself very critically you tend to become overly critical.

It's perfectly understandable, of course, really only human, to find yourself peering just a shade too sharply at new arrivals, discover you're not enjoying the book by author "X" presently in your hands as much as you'd expected to, only to suddenly realize it's because you're so busy comparing it to X's first book that you're not giving the poor thing a chance of being enjoyed on its own, and that even the glowing recollection of book one is liable to sputter and fade if you don't stop being such a grump.

Take vampires, for instance; it's very easy to go overboard and become very cranky about vampires in this line of work. If you don't watch yourself like a hawk—or at least an alert bat—you can find yourself brooding

about what a highly esoteric enterprise the writing of vampire stories *used* to be; how it was only taken up by a minuscule group of authors who usually strayed from ghost tales or mysteries or occasionally wandered from less obviously related imaginary provinces like novels of light humor or fables for children.

From this elitist height it is easy to proceed to how wonderfully discriminating those old authors were, as witnessed by the fact that the tiny few who did indulge themselves in narrations concerning neck biters did it so extremely sparingly that a good many of the very best practitioners had the exquisite good sense to realize when they had given the matter their best shot and were entirely satisfied to leave it at having produced only one or two such works in their entire literary lives.

Of course that realization will automatically lead you to dark broodings upon the fact that up until as recently as forty years ago, it would have been possible to pack all the really worthwhile short stories concerning vampires into a single anthology, and that a discriminating collector of the genre would easily have found room for every first rate novel on the theme on one single shelf of his library—and that one of modest length.

From there, it's a tiny step to downright peevishness; the tendency to snarl to oneself and bark bitter little laughs as you make your way down the street frightening mothers and small children as you bemoan the loss of long gone writers of the J. Sheridan LeFanu-type hunched quietly over their Chippendale tables, squinting in dim candlelight at the slow progress of their quill pens scratching their way down another manuscript page of precious somethings like *Carmilla*.

"They don't write 'em like that anymore!" you're likely to exclaim to yourself at this point, and you might even go so far as to take a vicious swing at a park-side planting of posies with your knobby cane to the great alarm of a passing cat or dog.

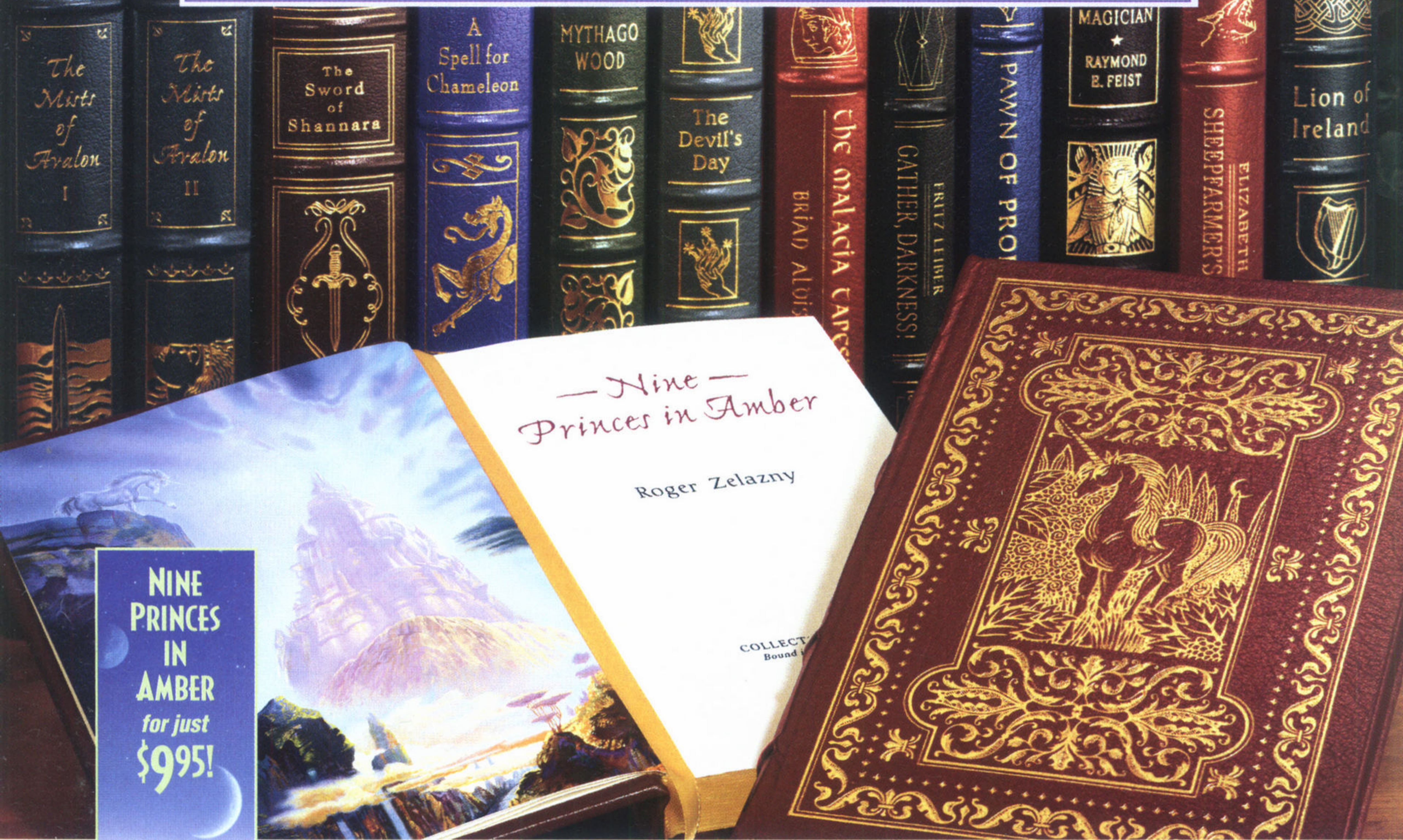
Then, as if all of this were not bad enough, you may dive headlong into bitter fantasies about the new breed of writers of vampire epics, seeing your visions of these hated beings with remarkable clarity in your mind's eye: cold, determinedly efficient mass producers of wordage brilliantly fluoresced by tubes of light mounted to slide on tracks, surrounded by banks of gleaming electronic gear, tapping smartly on coil-connected keyboards in

Although written for young adults, Susan Whitcher's *Enchanter's Glass* is enjoyable for all ages. Cover art by Victor Lee.



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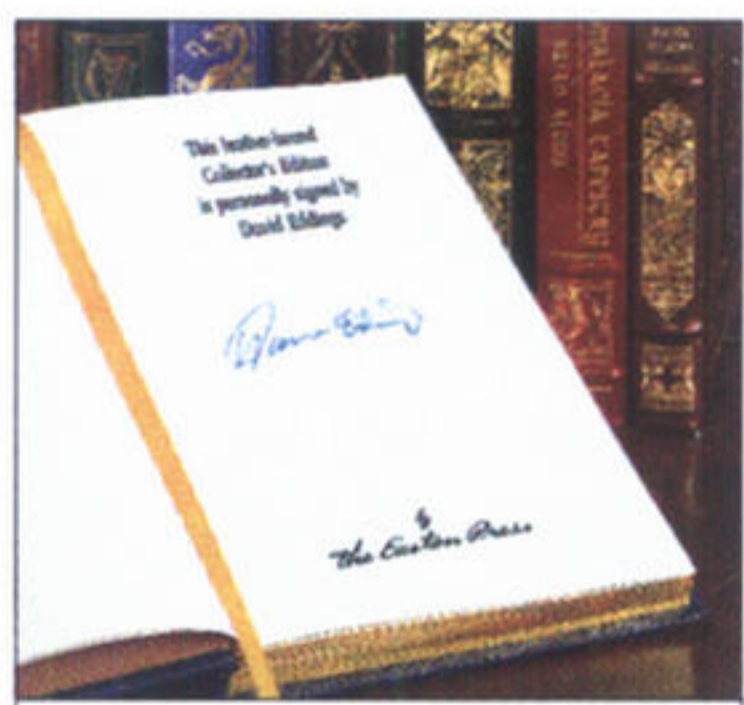
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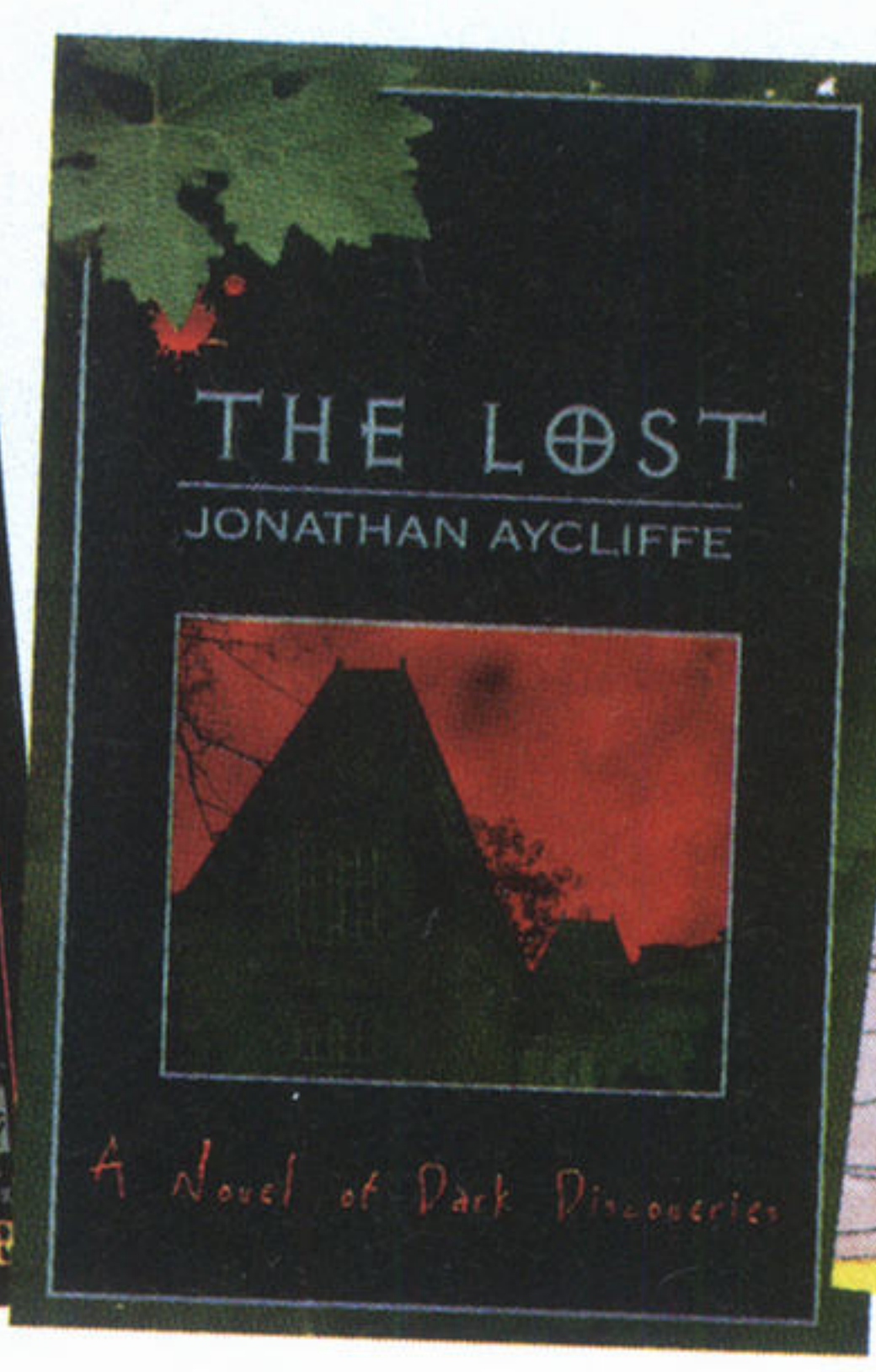
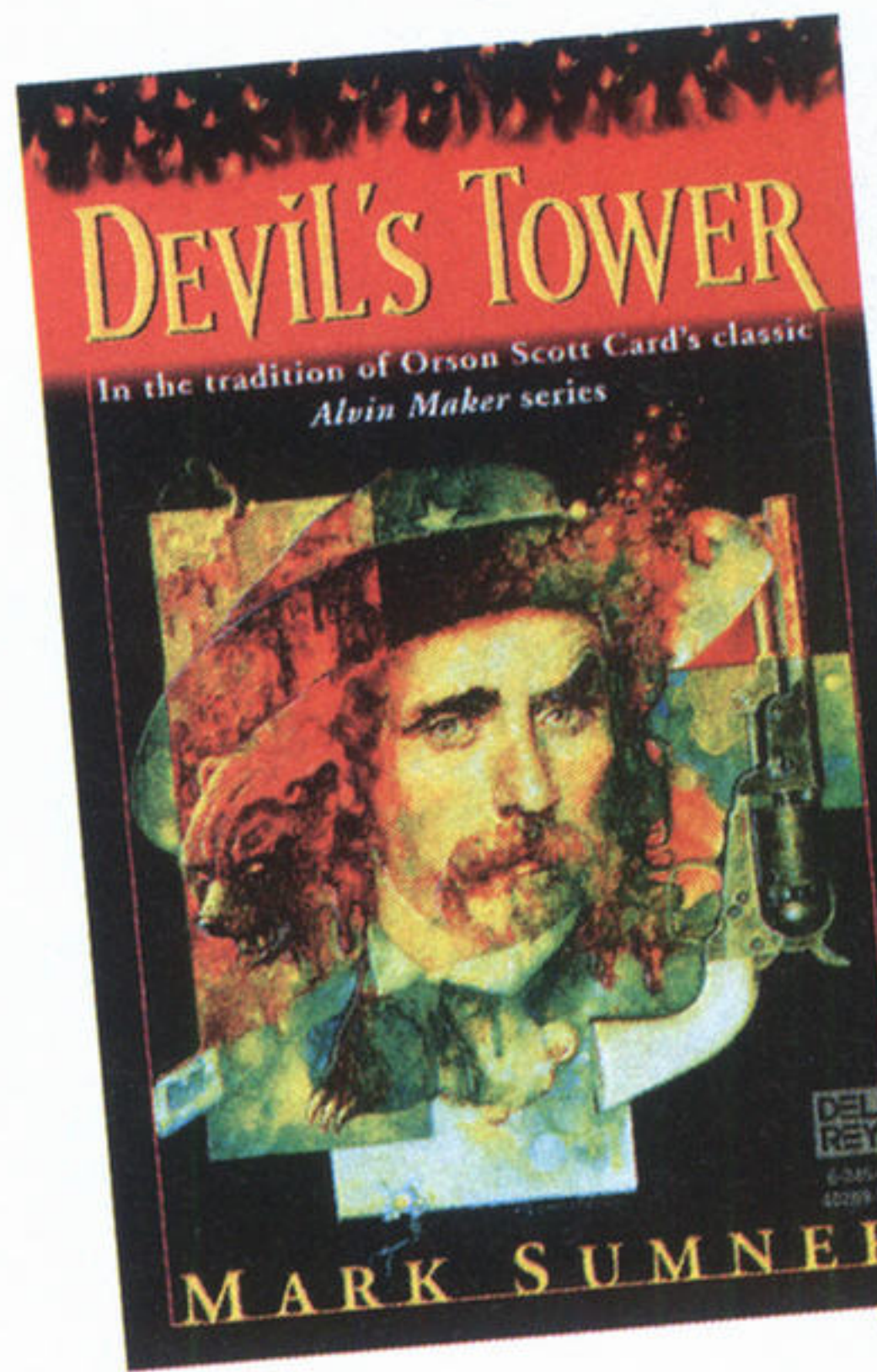
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order to produce line after line of glowing, smoothly scrolling copy aimed to stuff yet another big, fat book in an endless series of other big, fat books minutely and tediously detailing the dismal doings of their trendy undead.

And this last bit is true — there *are* hacks as dismal as those described and their books *do* feature abominably boring bloodsuckers and it *is* depressing to see how bloody well they sell ...

... *but* it was ever thus, friends, ever thus, so let us cool it, let us chill out. There may have been M. R. James with his *Count Magnus* and Lewis Carroll with his *Walrus and the Carpenter*, but never forget there was also Thomas Preskett Prest and his *Varney*, so really bad vampire books are hardly a new invention. Also it's highly reassuring to note that, with the passing of many years since *Varney* was written and the slow dawning of a sort of Buddhist detachment which has been produced thereby, old *Varney* turns out to be an amusingly campy romp and no real harm done whatsoever. I treasure a three-volume copy, myself, and like to browse through it by the fire on cold



Sundays with cookies and Cambric tea.

Also, if there was not a vampire vogue afoot I think it would be highly improbable for Jonathan Aycliffe to get his very neatly turned chiller published. *The Lost* (Harper Prism, NY, 166 pp.; Hardcover; \$16.00) is a slim little book for starters, and is very-hand-somely-produced to boot. I was very impressed by the jacket design by Richard Hasselberger, who used nicely moody pho-

tographs by Daniel Fromm. It's an excellent mood-setter for the spooky goings on within and a classy job all round. The combination of *The Lost* being a small book amid a sea of whale-sized volumes and having a cover which whispers insidiously rather than bellows for attention is a highly laudable move for Harper Prism and represents a bit of chance-taking I am glad to publicly applaud.

The story takes place in our contemporary era, but its format and approach are unabashedly traditional. As a matter of fact, Aycliffe may have — in a period possibly overburdened with Bram Stoker pastiches (there, you see? Here I go again getting cranky about vampires!) — done a better job of following the Master's lead than any of the others.

It isn't just that, as in *Dracula*, the story is told in the diverse first person format via quotes from letters, personal records, newspaper accounts, and the like, *The Lost* also scrupulously and highly effectively follows Stoker's approach of insidious and hinting accumulation and, most importantly of all, uses his techniques of humor and affectionate and touching observation of character and convention to very effectively contrast this ominously growing proof of dark events, awakening all about with the basic innocence of those slowly being surrounded by it.

This last aspect is the one most often mishandled or apparently not even understood or possibly not even observed by the bulk of would be followers of Stoker's basic structure. That is a great pity because it is the fundamental source of *Dracula's* power.

The essence of what I think made (and makes) Stoker's book so particularly successful is his marvelous delineation of the gentle and totally unready little world which is about to be mercilessly invaded by a sinister, mysteriously powerful and ever so incomprehensibly *foreign* menace. Like *Fu Manchu*, another classic xenophobic novel, *Dracula* is — more than anything else — all about the fear of foreign cultures.

Like Stoker, Aycliffe postulates a likable, enormously well-intentioned group of English folk, and he does the master one better by having them markedly even more innocent and insulated than their surrounding

Books to Look For

The Once and Future King, by T.H. White, Ace Paperback \$16.95. The Wart, an owl called Archimedes, Merlyn, Jenny, and Lance. T.H. White's beloved fantasy classic is newly packaged in a handsome trade edition that will lure readers both fresh and familiar to the land of Camelot. This Arthurian tale of adventure and loss, lovers and laws, magic all powerful and magic gone awry, is back for those who have not journeyed to Camelot in awhile. And for a new generation of readers — shining Camelot awaits you.

H.P. Lovecraft: A Life, by S.T. Joshi, Necronomicon Press, Trade Paperback \$20.00. S.T. Joshi, a leading authority on Lovecraft, examines one of this century's most influential horror writers. Joshi's work, the first comprehensive biography on H.P. Lovecraft in over twenty years, details early influences on the author, probes the myths surrounding the man and his work, and presents a critical and sympathetic look at Lovecraft and his incredible literature.

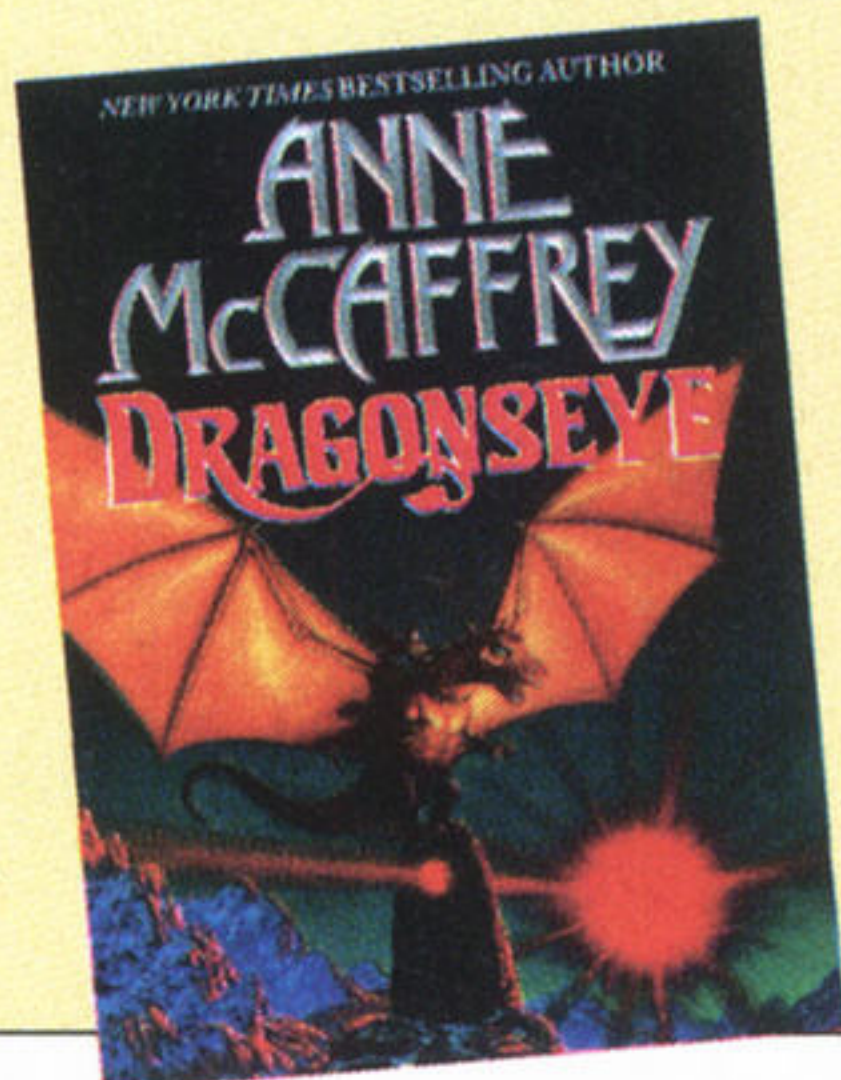
The Dragon King: The Crimson Shadow, by R.A. Salvatore, Warner Aspect Hardcover \$19.95. The Crimson Shadow returns in this conclusion of Salvatore's epic trilogy. Luthien Bedwyr and his magical cape, with its indelible scarlet silhouette, must battle King Greensparrow, now a fierce and hellish dragon. Is Luthien's alter ego powerful enough to destroy

this beast, this mage-killer, this vast and terrible being?

The Chronicles of the Holy Grail, edited by Mike Ashley, Carroll and Graf Paperback \$12.95. A collection of specially commissioned stories to enchant and beguile any Arthurian scholar. Works by Steve Lockley, Tanith Lee, Parke Godwin and others follow the quest for the Holy Grail. A guide to Arthurian characters is included at the onset of the book. All aspects of the Grail Legend from the Fisher King to the torture of Lancelot's quest lie herein. And only one shall succeed, only the pure in heart will gain the Grail!

The Blackgod, by J. Gregory Keyes, Del-Ray Hardcover, \$24.00. Sweeping adventure continues in this sequel to *The Waterborn*. The River, all powerful and all-consuming, comes up against his wayward daughter, Hezhi. A new myth in the making, *The Blackgod* is a stunning novel sure to enthrall any fantasy lover.

Dragonseye, by Anne McCaffrey, Del-Ray Hardcover \$24.00. (A *Dragonriders of Pern* Novel). Threadfall. Impending doom for future generations unless they can be forewarned. Deadly silver strands that fall from the sky destroying animals, plants, all living matter. Dragons and dragonriders created and trained to battle the Thread. Potent fantasy by the New York Times Bestselling Series Author, Anne McCaffrey.





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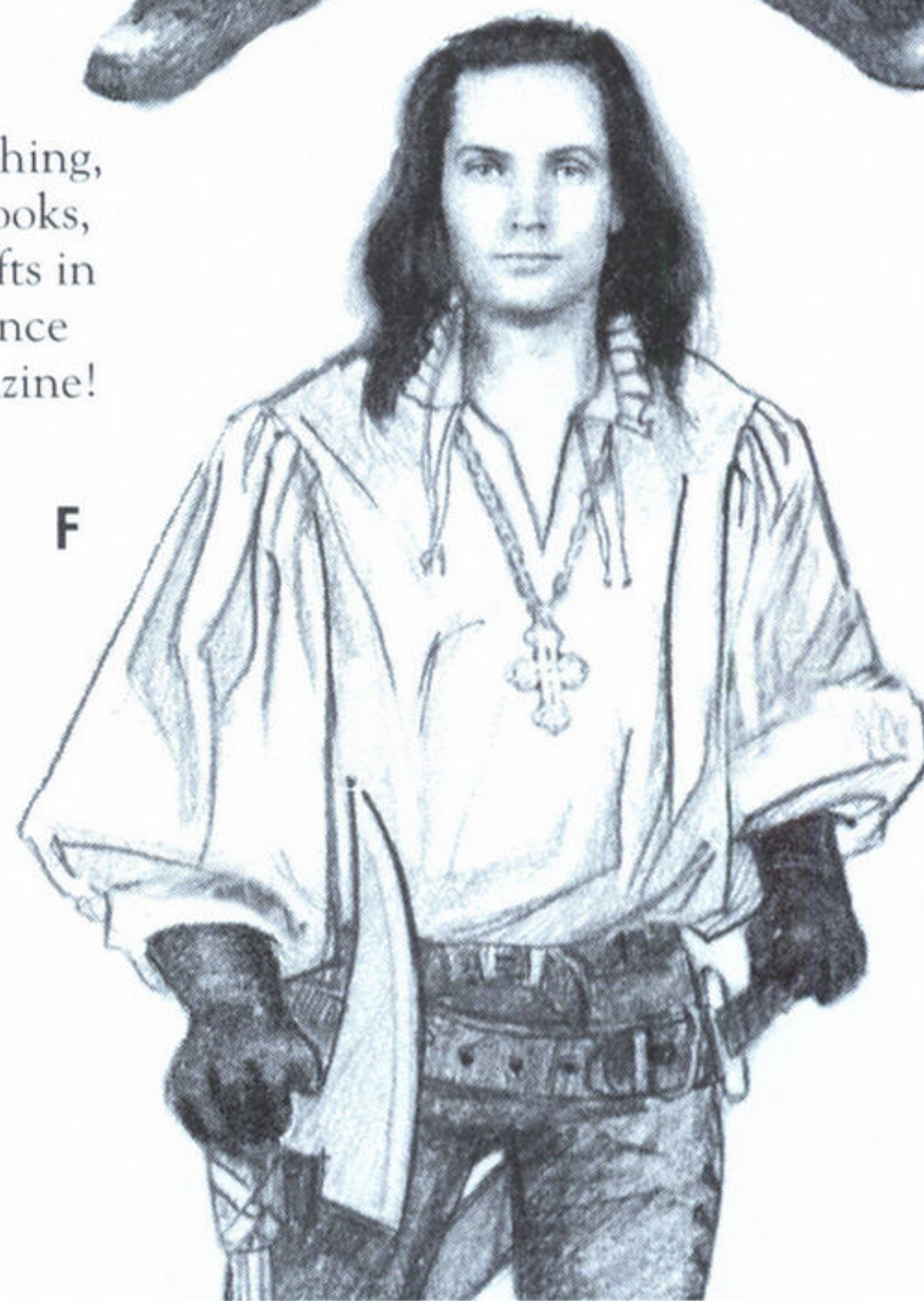
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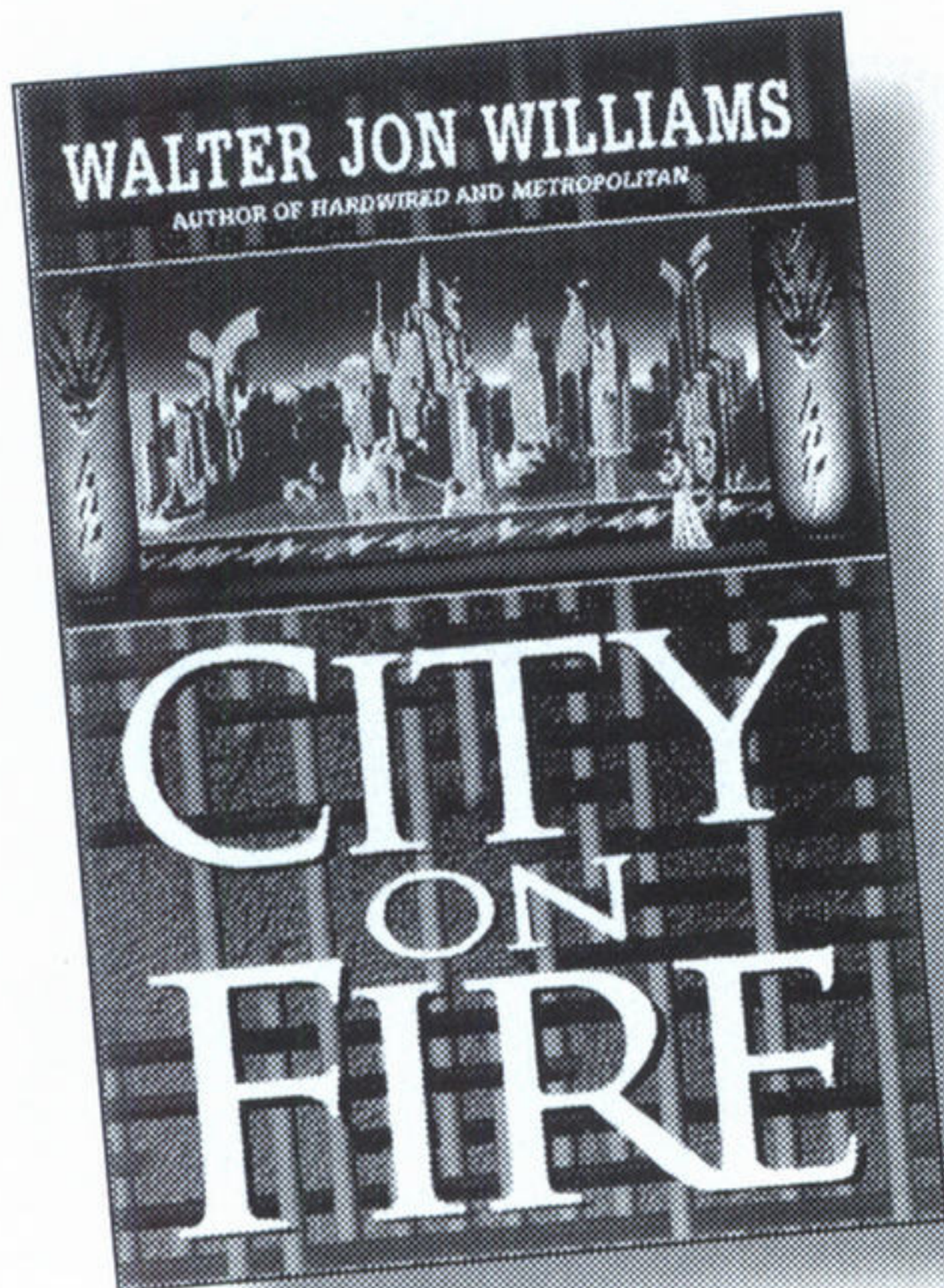
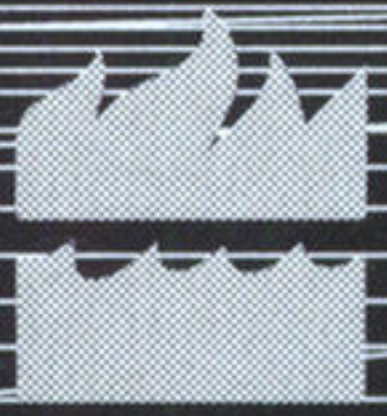
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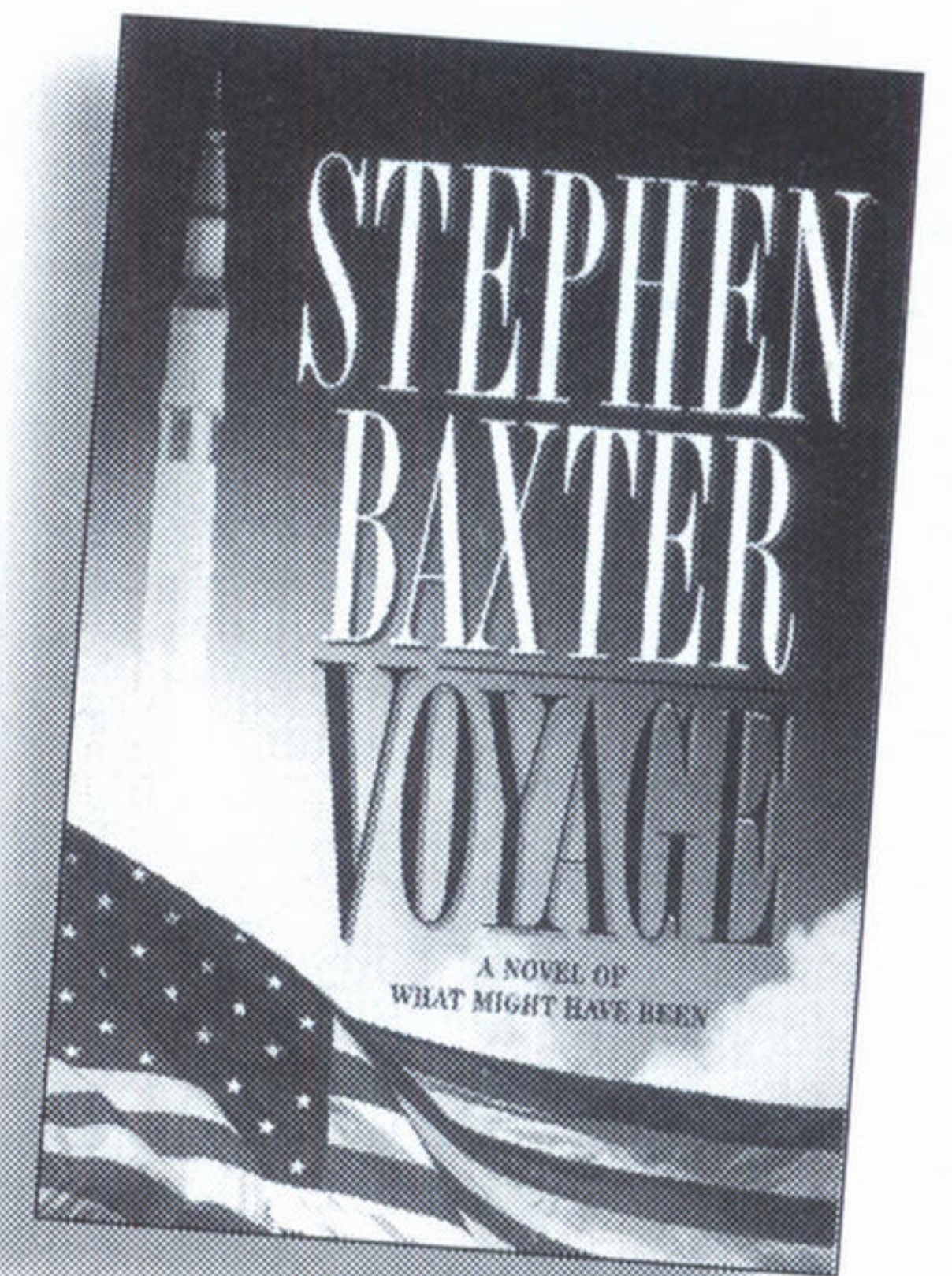
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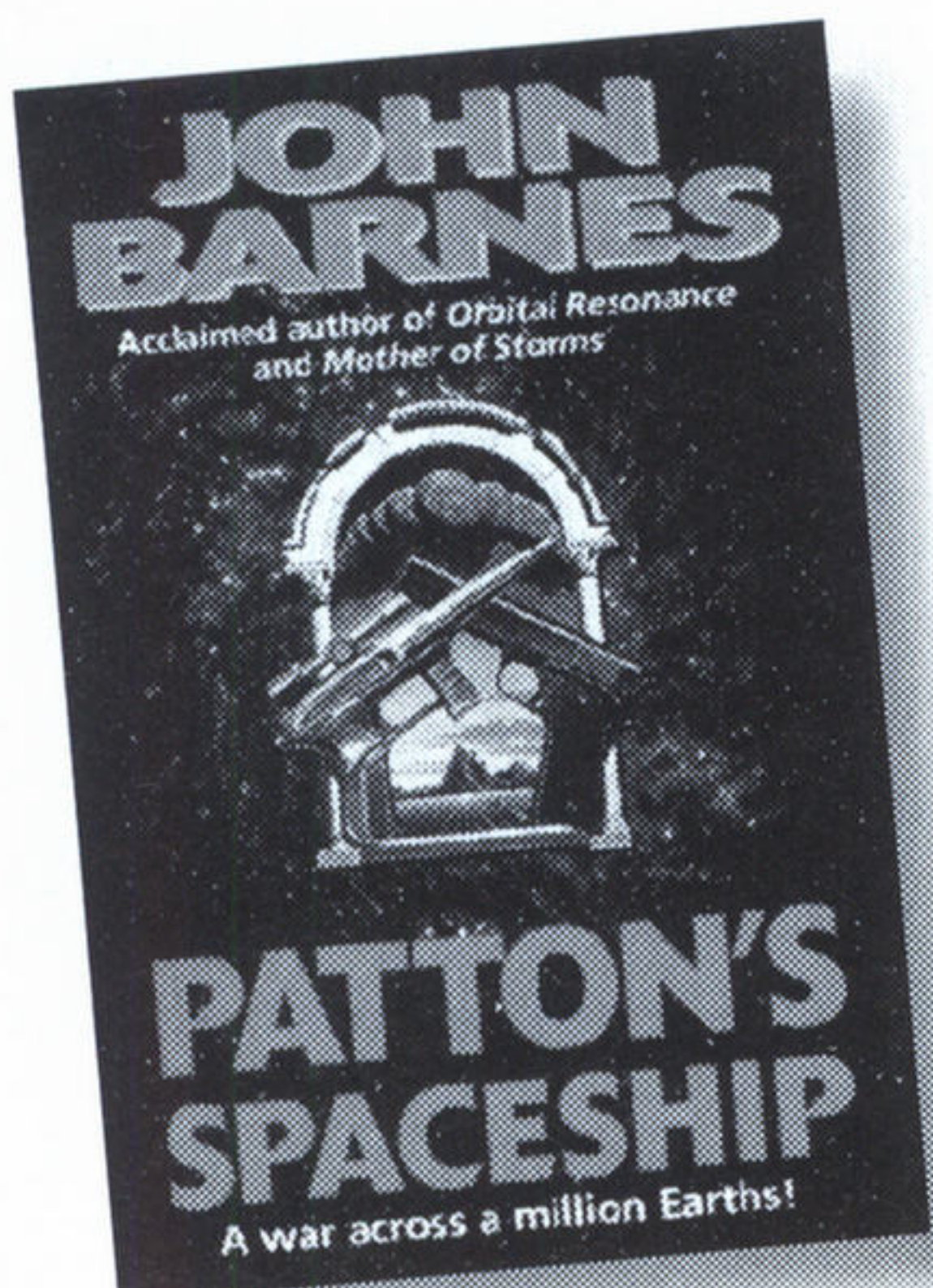


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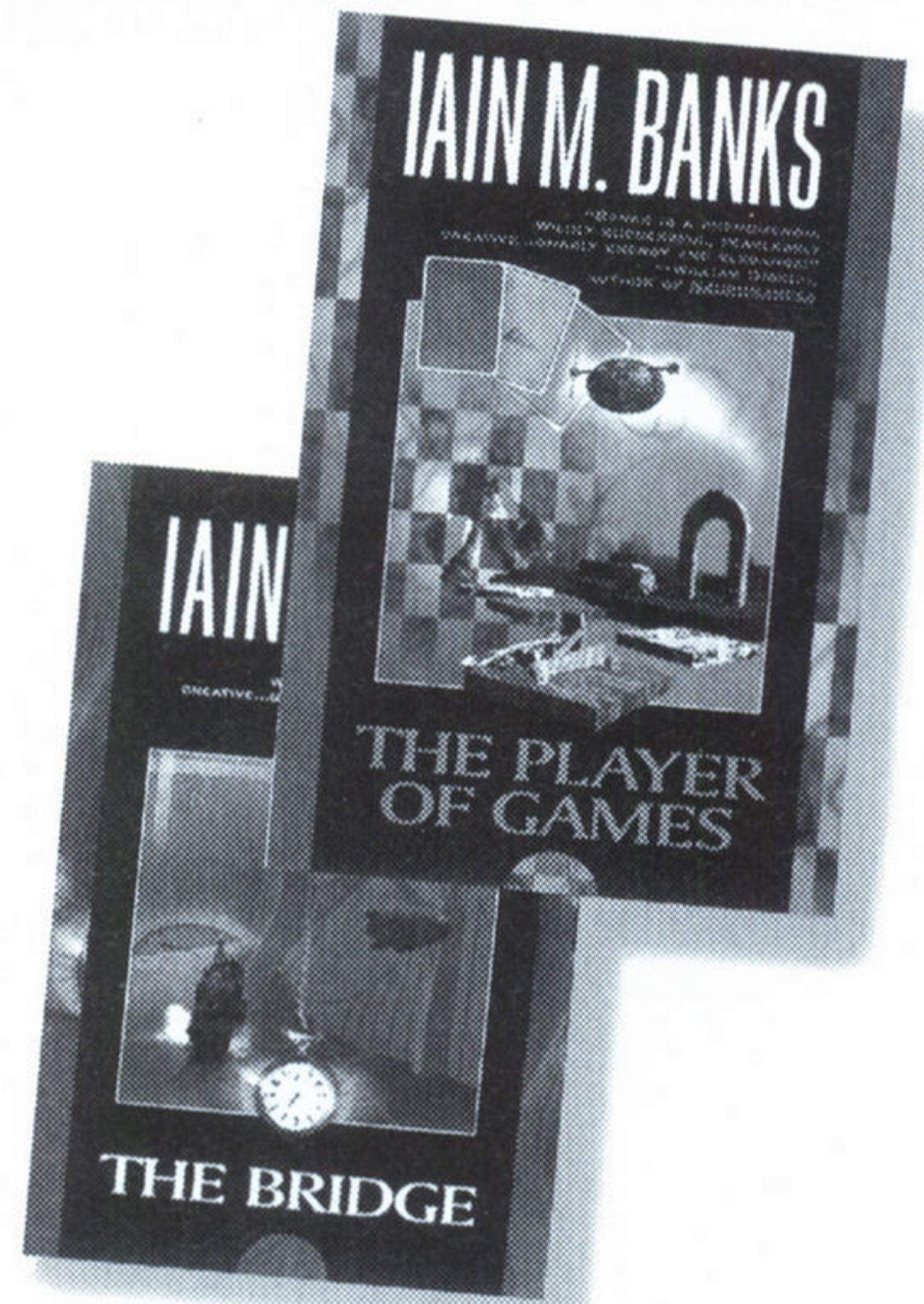


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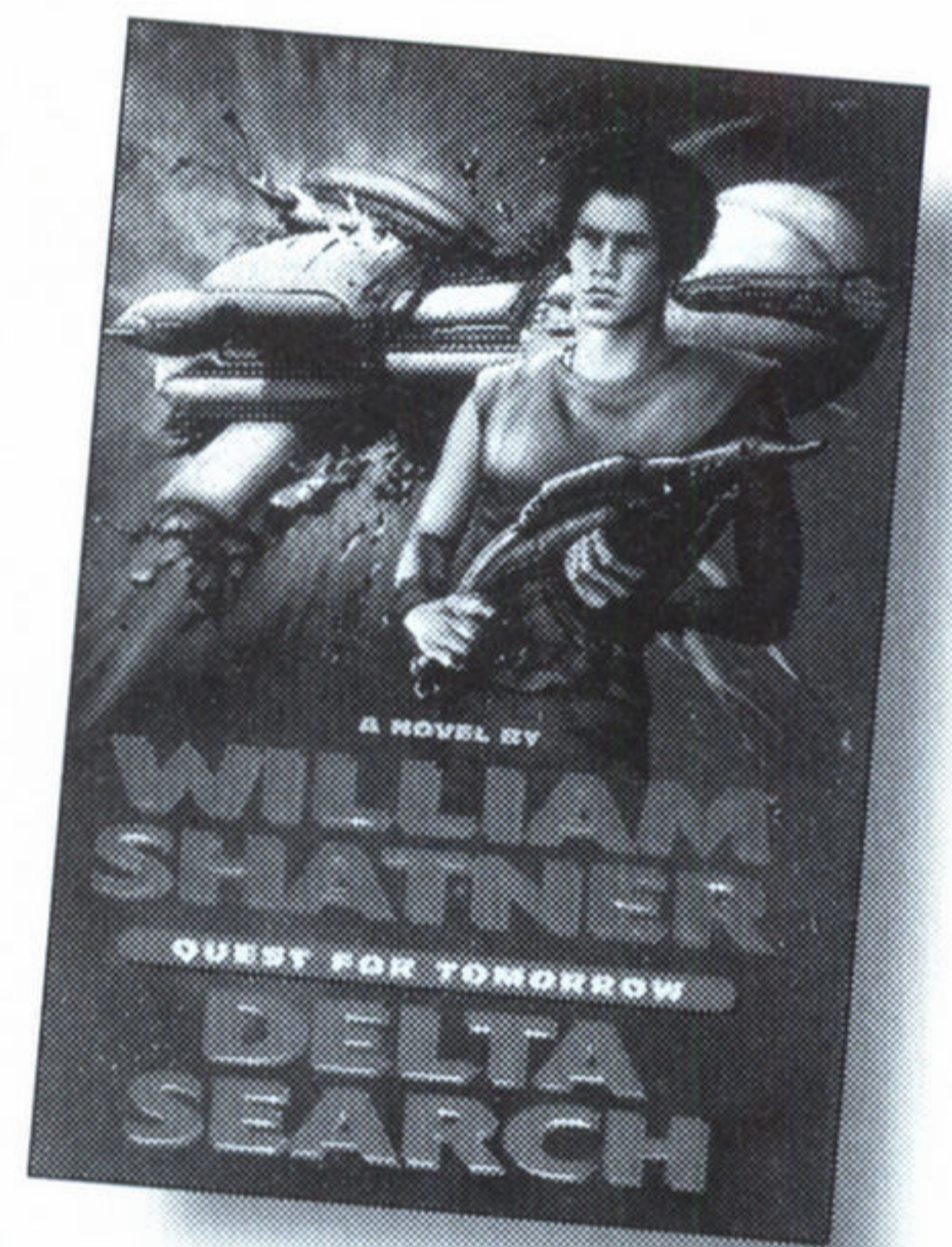
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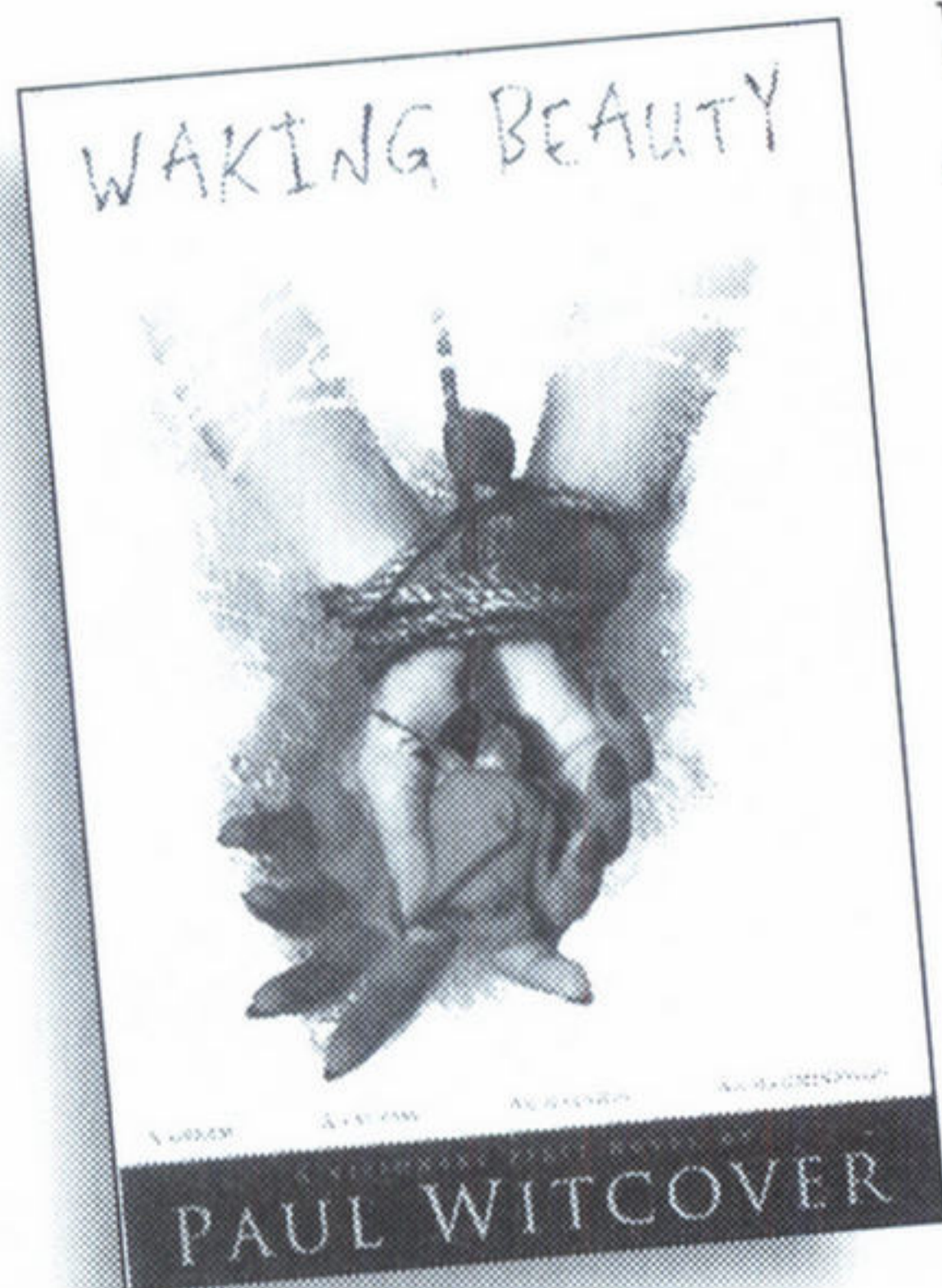


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island population since they are, every one, totally involved in the tiny world of a prep school tucked away in Cambridge.

The hero, Michael, is an interesting variation on this norm since, while he has been brought up to be thoroughly and without doubt English, he is of Romanian descent. He is even a titled lord of that country, although his grandparents and father abandoned all such titles and attendant holdings when they left their native land and the monarchy collapsed after the second World War.

The native English (I've never heard that expression before and wonder if I've made it up!?) characters are totally lovable and boundlessly naive. Michael's mother could not be kinder, his fiancée Sophie more trusting, but my particular favorite is Arthur Drewe, M.A., the headmaster of King William's School, where Michael is employed. Drewe is a beautifully-realized scholar without a clue.

As *The Lost* commences, Michael has acted upon the sublimely romantic decision to leave his position with King William's and go to Romania where he plans to locate and lay claim to his family's castle in the remote Carpathians and turn it into an orphanage that will house some of the unclaimed or outright denied children that the cruel blunderings of the fallen dictator, Ceausescu, has loosed upon the land.

He wanders helplessly within the post-Communist bureaucracy and he is meanly

and perversely shunted further and further away from his objective by adroit use of incomprehensible foreign technicalities until he comes across the intelligent and darkly attractive Liliana Popescu who takes him under her wing — for devious reasons only made slowly clearer to the reader — and guides him magically through the labyrinth.

As he stumbles about in foreign climes, the Brits back home are by no means untouched by the forces his activities are stirring up. His mother finds herself plagued with frightening nightmares of her dead husband, Michael's father, desperately crying incomprehensible warnings. Students find themselves frightened. Horribly repulsive, yet somehow hideously seductive whisperings come from dark, leaf-cluttered corners of King William's grounds, and poor old Headmaster Drewe's attempts to investigate immediately attracts the whisperer's loathsome attention.

Meantime Michael — now rather foolishly calling himself Mihai — finds himself wandering ever deeper into his, by now, quite clearly sinister heritage. He is thrilled when Liliana locates the family's mansion in Bucharest, now at least partially used by the psychiatric officialdom, but during his visit there the past takes off its gloves, so to speak, and he and we are henceforth plunged by Aycliffe into increasingly scarier terrain.

I will not go further into the plot (there is one slight flaw concerning the book's jacket,

namely that the copy does, perhaps, give away a little too much) except to say that Mihai does, indeed, visit Vlaicu Castle and thereby comes very much face to face with his inheritance. I assure you that if you enjoy this sort of thing at all you will have a fine, frightening time as Aycliffe hints at and then delivers nasty surprises, ghastly revelations and increasingly appalling villainies.

So, it would seem, the vampire story is surviving its enormously swollen popularity quite well, thank you very much!

Devil's Tower: by Mark Sumner: Del Rey, NY: 340 pp.; Softcover: \$5.99

It would be hard to find a more contrasting mood to *The Lost* than Mark Sumner's *Devil's Tower*. Whereas Jonathan Aycliffe is all elegance and his ambience is about as old world as humanely possible, Sumner's approach to the fantastic is totally rowdy and rambunctious. His universe is brand-new-born and still very much in the process of noisy creation.

From the start, *Devil's Tower* is unabashed frontier brag and joyfully shameless legend building. Heroes abound, villains ply their evil schemes enthusiastically, and both sides must deal with an endless parade of monsters and wonders of nature, each one trying to top the one before like, say, Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie attempting to best one another during a quiet watch at the Alamo

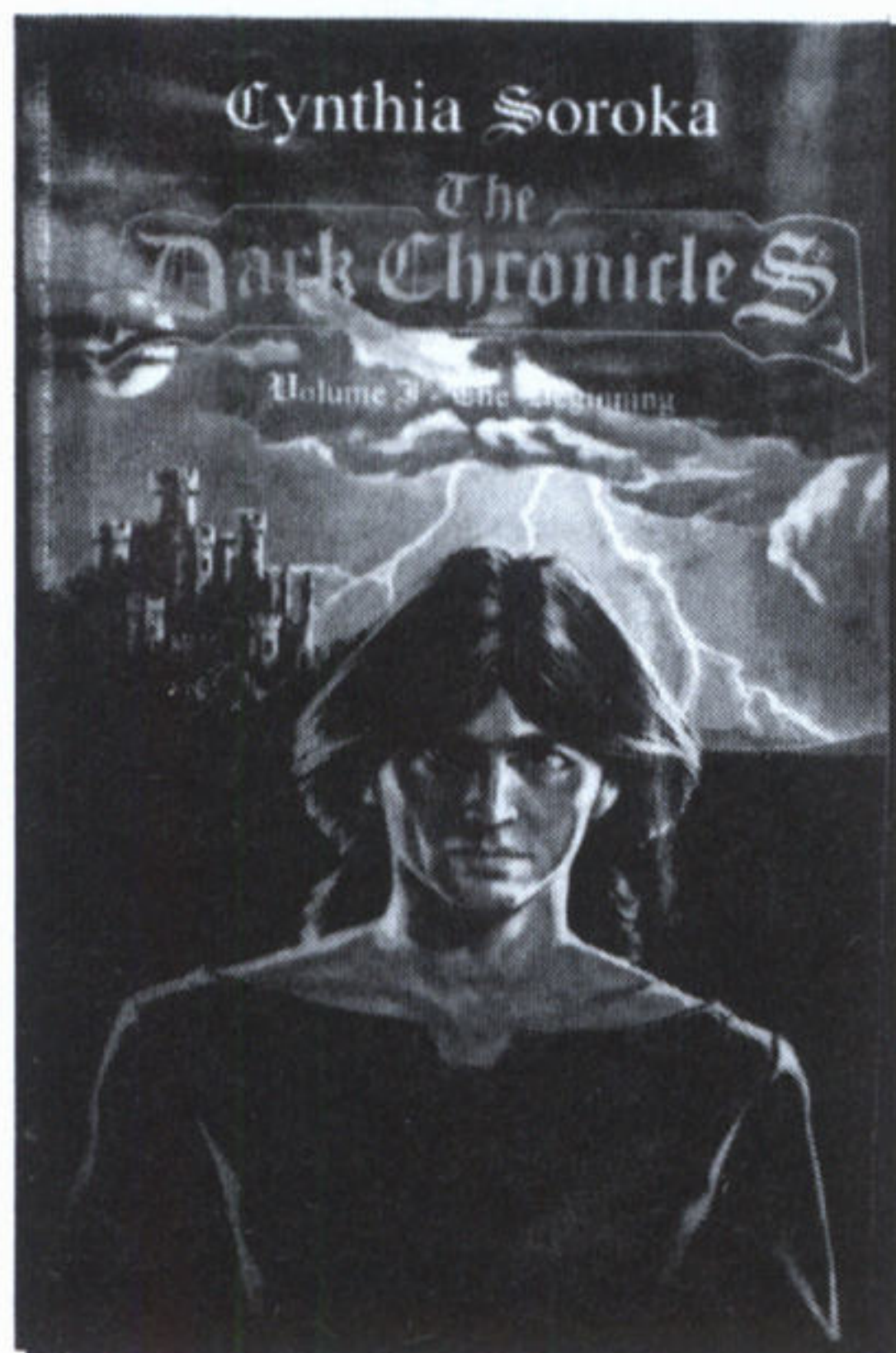
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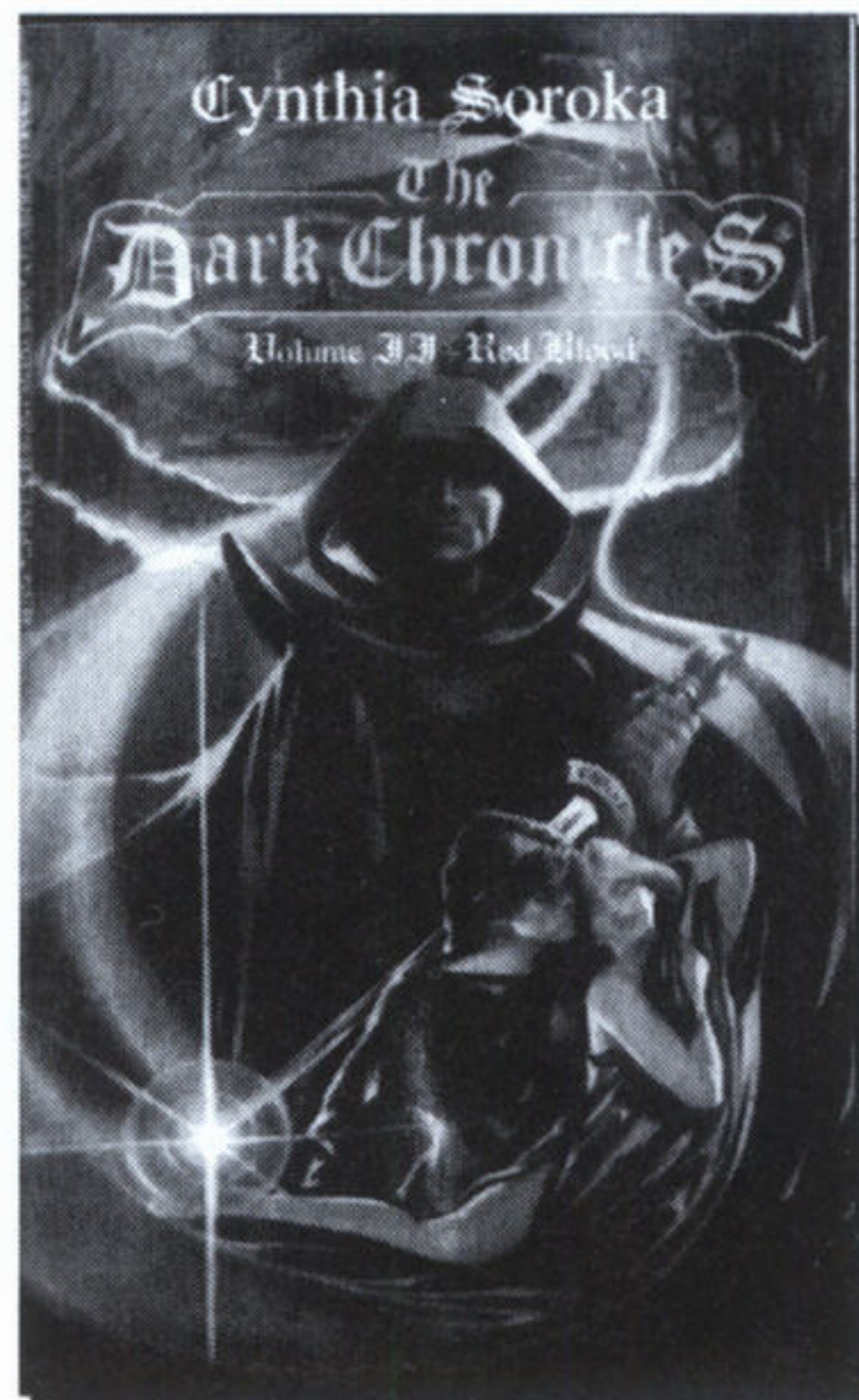
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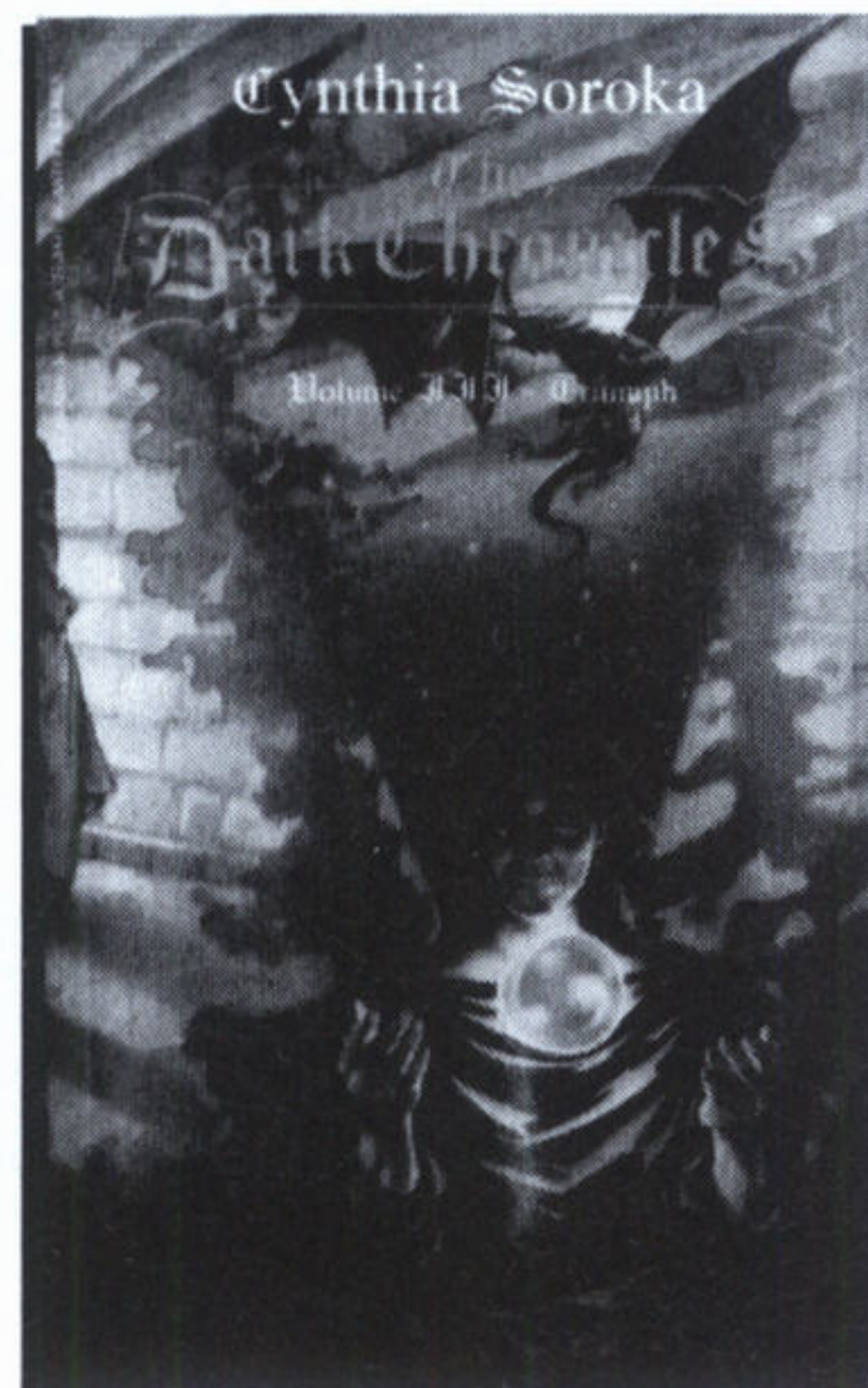
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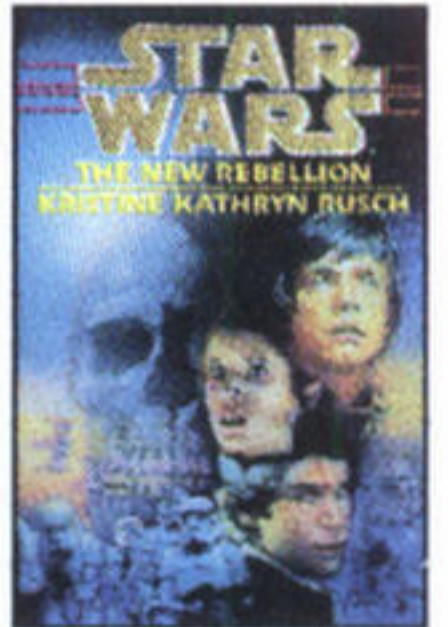
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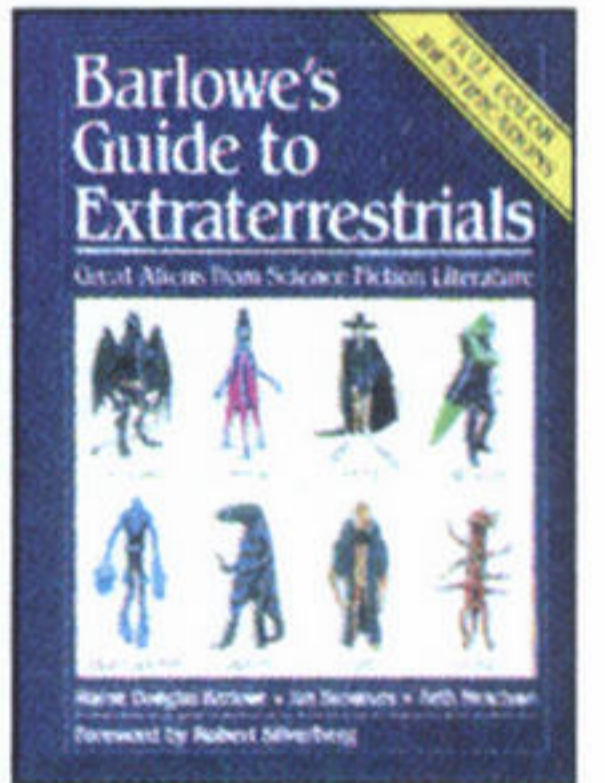
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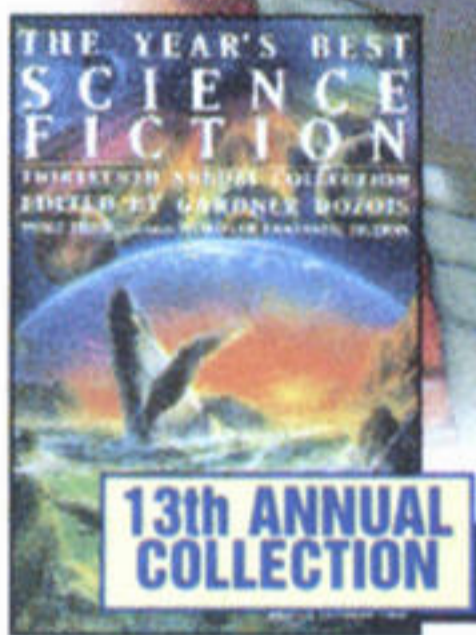
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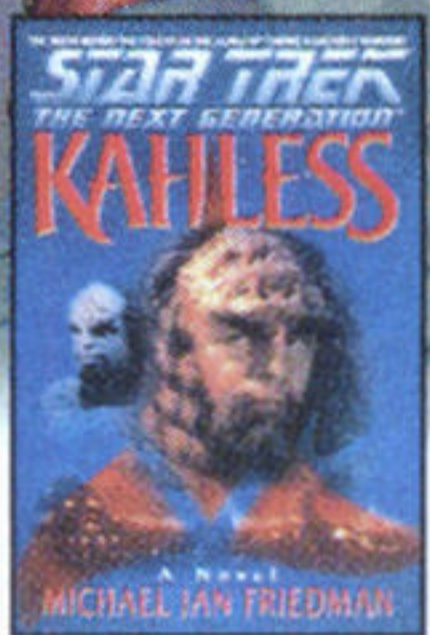
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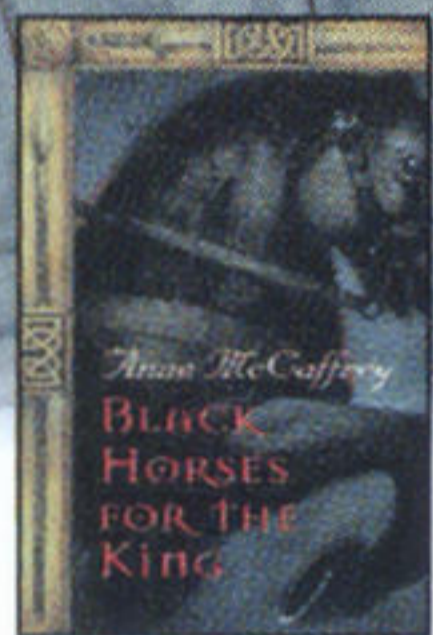
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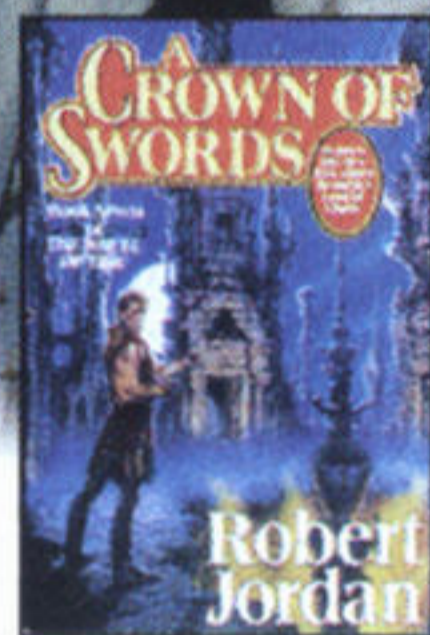
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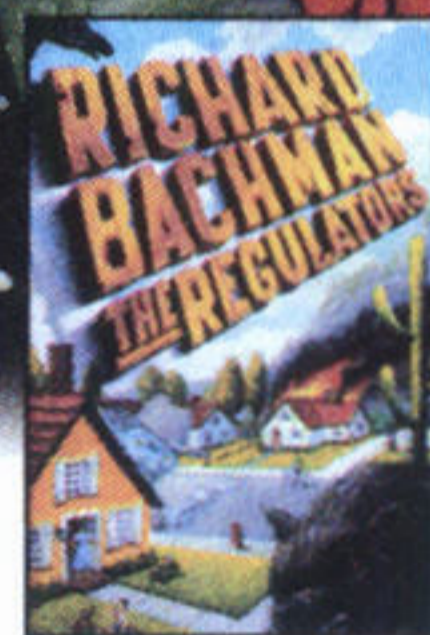
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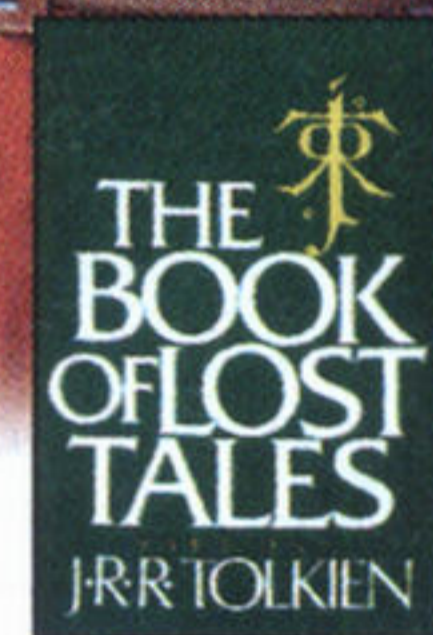
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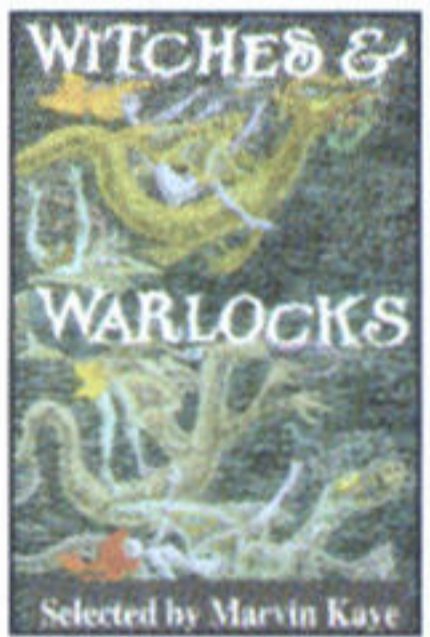
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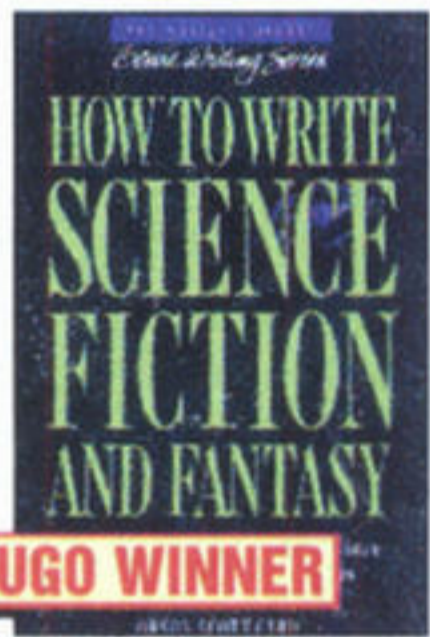
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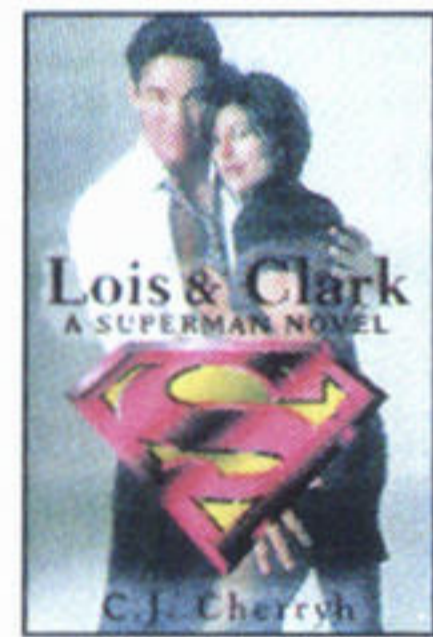
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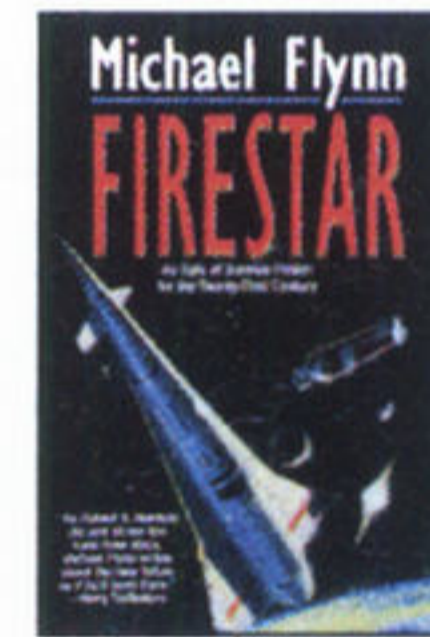
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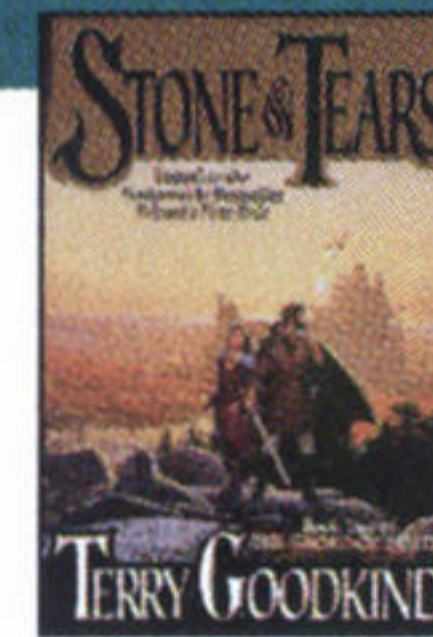
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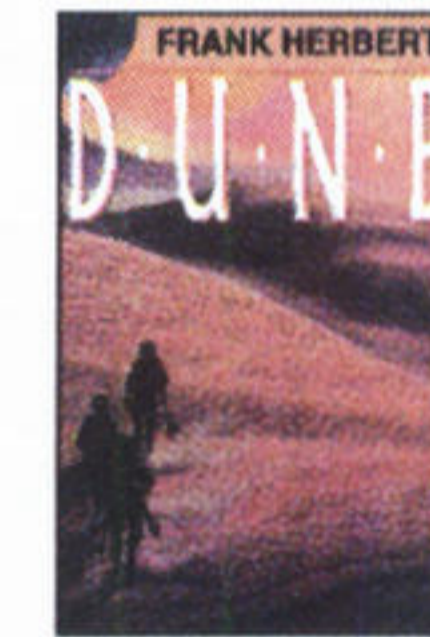
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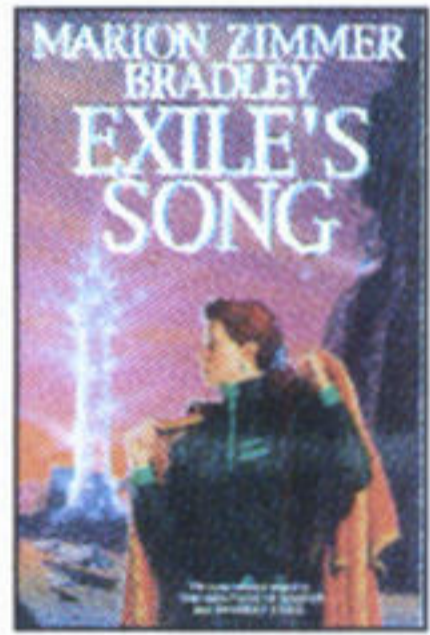
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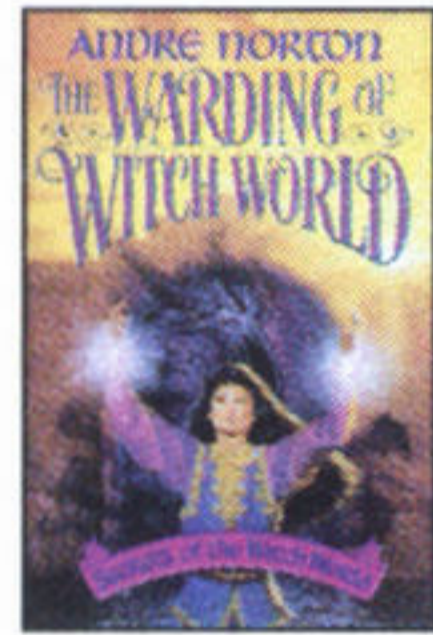
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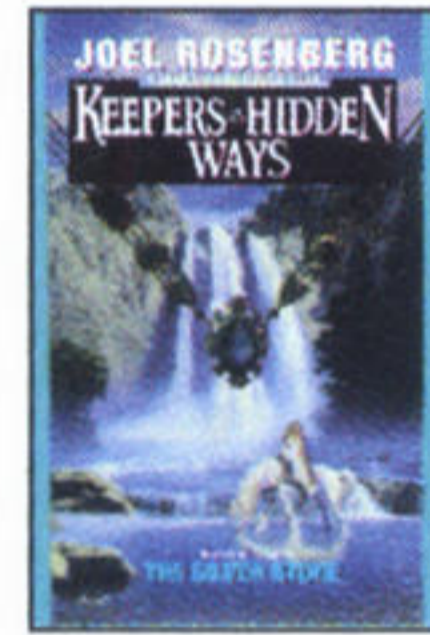
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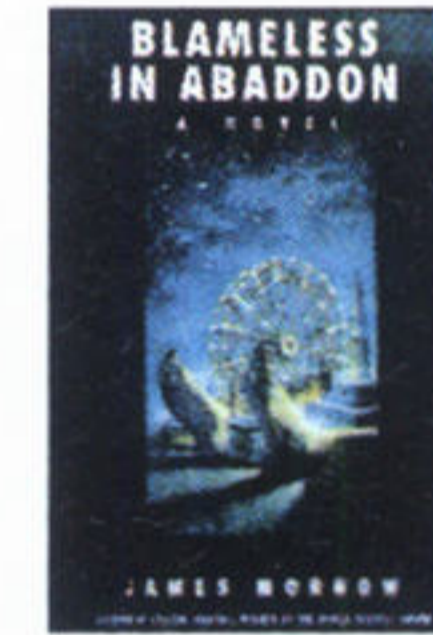
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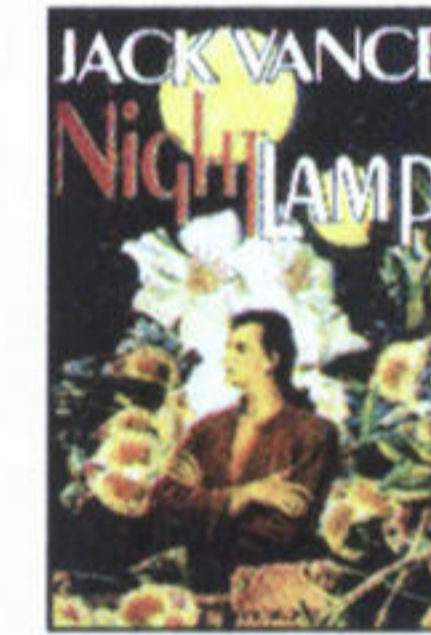
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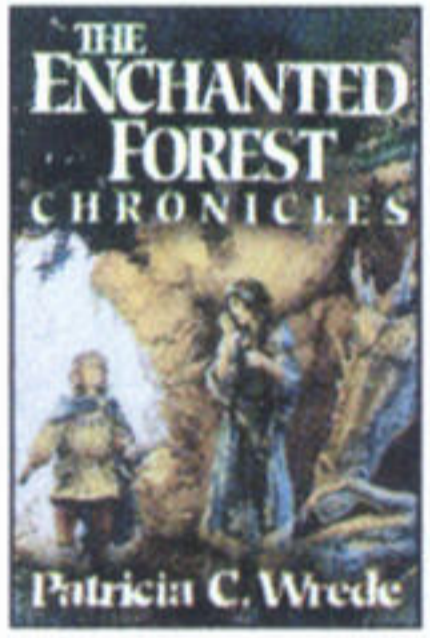
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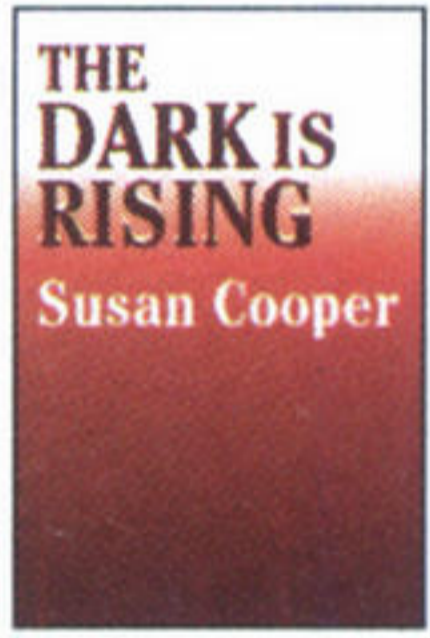
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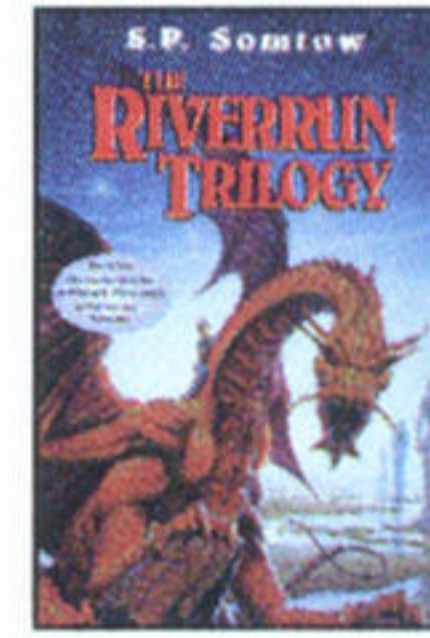
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Celluloid Dragon's Teeth: a short history of dragons in film.

FEW CREATURES FROM MYTHOLOGY HAVE CAPTURED OUR IMAGINATIONS THE WAY DRAGONS have. Perhaps it's because our planet was once dominated by dragons which walked, swam and flew; only catastrophe on a global scale could interrupt the rule of the dinosaurs. But the idea of dragons predated the dinosaurs in human imagination: the ancients knew well that to travel beyond the boundaries of the known world was to encounter strange and terrifying beasts. *Here be dragons*, they wrote at the edges of their maps. And dragons were a part of the human psyche, as well, symbols our deepest needs and fears. A constellation loops across the night sky of the Northern hemisphere, and the ancients named it Draconis, the dragon. Today we still call it Draco.

Dragons were associated with the gods by most cultures. For example, Tiamat was the dragon goddess of Babylonia. It's thought that the dragon myth originated in Babylonia, built on a foundation of Egyptian myths, and spread throughout Asia and Europe. In Chinese mythology, dragons were not exclusively evil; many were revered for their wisdom and beneficence. The dragon brought rain, and with rain came prosperity and happiness. Even some New World cultures have their dragon myths, such as the Central American Quetzalcoatl and the South American river spirit Anaconda.

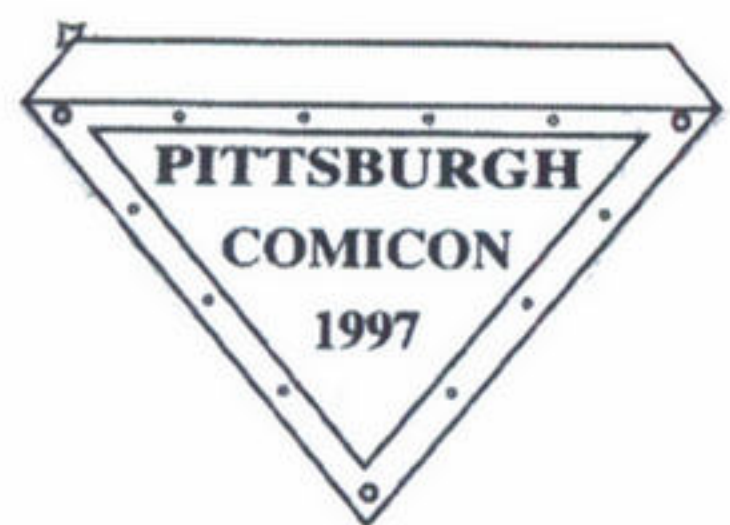
Dragons are a natural for the movies, of course. However, while many movies feature a dragon incidentally, there have only been a few movies where dragons have played a significant role. Technology has frequently been a barrier: portraying a huge, scaly, winged creature convincingly has always been a difficult task for moviemak-

ers. 1996 was a good year for dragons, with the release of *Dragonheart*, now available on video, so here's a look at some dragons throughout movie history.

One of the first dragons to be portrayed on film was Fafnir, the dragon from the anonymous Middle High German epic *Nibelunglied* ("song of the Nibelungen"), in Fritz Lang's 1924 *Die Nibelungen*. *Nibelungenlied*, which tells the story of a fabled race of dwarves called the Nibelungen, was also the inspiration for Richard Wagner's opera cycle, but Lang, who directed the classic *Metropolis*, was inspired more by the original source material. He filmed *Die Nibelungen* in two parts: *Siegfried* and *Kriemhilds Rache* (*Kriemhild's Revenge*). *Siegfried* features a battle between the eponymous hero and Fafnir, a full scale, fire-breathing dragon, after which Siegfried bathes in the dragon's blood in an attempt to gain immortality. In *Kriemhilds Rache*, Siegfried's widow Kriemhild seeks revenge by marrying Attila the Hun. Both parts of the movie feature splendid forest and mountain sets. *Die Nibelungen* is available on video-

The computer wizards at Industrial Light & Magic created "Draco," seen here flying above Dennis Quaid in last summer's *Dragonheart*.





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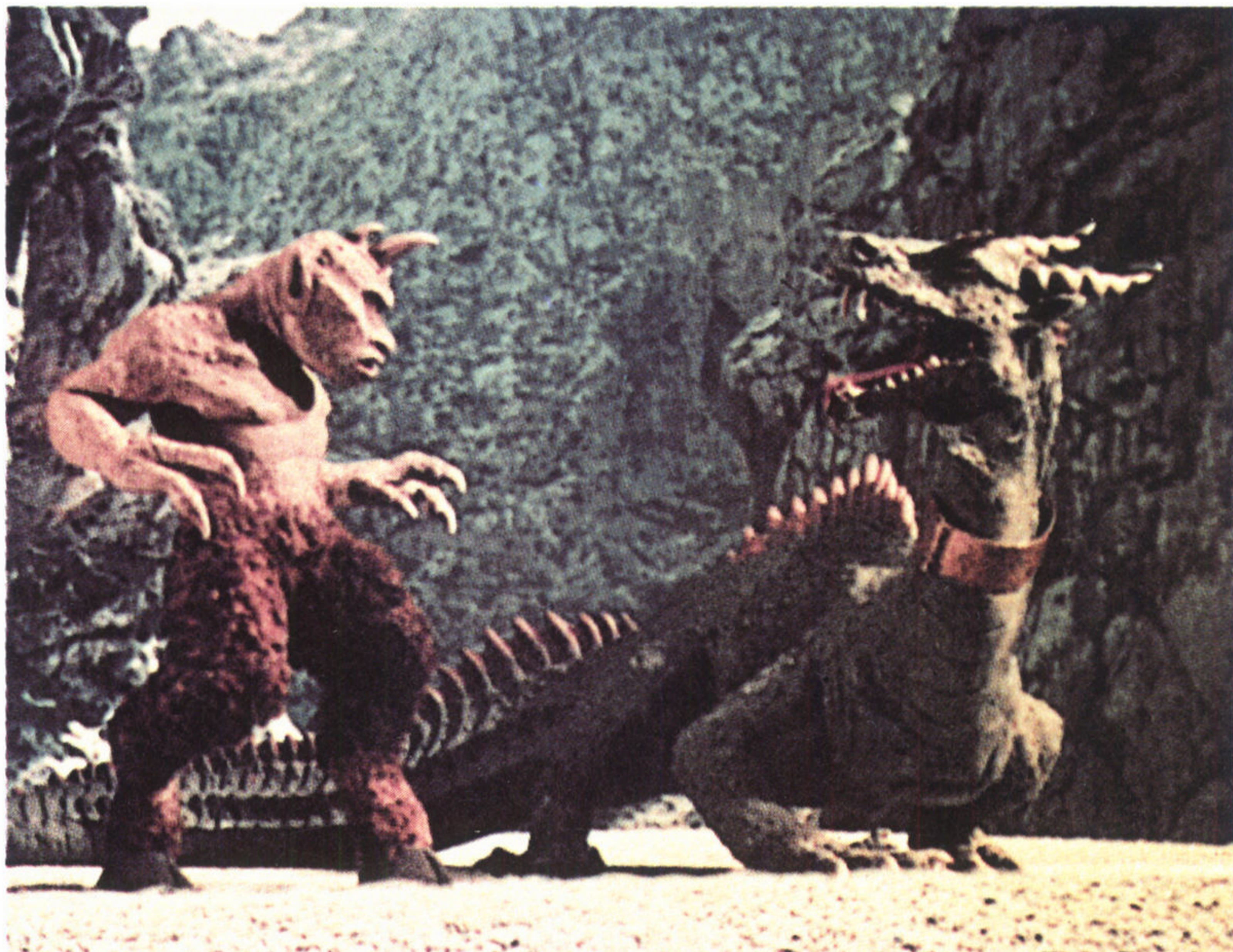
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In *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, special effects legend Ray Harryhausen created a variety of mythical creatures including a horned cyclops and "Roc," a two-headed dragon.

tape, but it's difficult to find; the laserdisk is more accessible, and however you get your hands on it, it's well worth seeing.

Ray Harryhausen is a legend in his own time, at least among fantasy film buffs, for creating a spectacular array of creatures from mythology over the years with his stop-motion Dynamation process. In 1953, *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*, loosely based on Ray Bradbury's short story "The Fog Horn," featured Harryhausen's Rhedosaurus. Nominally a dinosaur, the Rhedosaurus is surely kin to dragons as well. It runs amok after being revived by nuclear blasts, and is finally dispatched with a radioactive isotope projectile (fired by a young Lee Van Cleef) in a spectacular Coney Island sequence.

In 1958's *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, the Arabian hero Sinbad (Kerwyn Mathews) must break the spell of an evil sorcerer (Torin Thatcher) who has shrunk a princess to tiny size. For this film, Harryhausen created a wingless, horned dragon which guards the sorcerer's cave, as well as other creatures like the giant horned cyclops and two-headed Roc (which has a giant two-headed chick!). There's also a famous swordfight between Sinbad and an animated skeleton. 1963's *Jason and the Argonauts* was another Harryhausen showcase, this time drawing from Greek mythology. Jason, Hercules and the other Argonauts encounter a cavalcade of creatures like the bronze giant Talos, bat-winged harpies and, most impressively, a terrific seven-headed Hydra which guards the Golden Fleece. Harryhausen, who painstakingly animated the creature's seven heads one frame at a time, has said that sometimes he would come back to his studio after answering the phone and not remember whether a particular head was moving

up or down. The finale of *Jason and the Argonauts* also features an incredible battle between the Argonauts and a group of animated skeletons. Like many of Harryhausen's films, *Seventh Voyage* and *Jason* have rousing, exotic musical scores by the great Bernard Hermann.

Another nifty stop motion dragon appears in 1964's *7 Faces of Dr. Lao*, an engaging fantasy directed by George Pal, adapted from Charles Finney's novel *The Circus of Dr. Lao*. Tony Randall plays six roles in this tale of a traveling Chinese circus that visits a 19th-century Western town. The seventh face of Dr. Lao turns out to be a goldfish that transforms into a dragon-like Loch Ness Monster animated by Jim Danforth.

No list of dragon movies would be complete without a mention of Godzilla. The enormously popular fire-breathing, fin-backed behemoth started out as a heavy in 1956's *Godzilla, King of the Monsters*, a heavily edited version of the 1954 Japanese film *Gojira*. Destroyed after stomping Tokyo, Godzilla was resurrected for an impressive number of sequels, in which he became a good guy (or as good a guy a 400-foot-tall reptile with radioactive breath can be), defending the Earth from an increasingly silly succession of giant rubber monsters. Like the *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, Godzilla was reanimated by nuclear experimentation, and both movies ushered in the wave of giant radioactive critter movies, from *Them* to *The Amazing Colossal Man*. Other noteworthy Godzilla films include 1964's *Gozilla vs. The Thing*, in which the giant moth known as Mothra (along with her giant caterpillar offspring which trap Godzilla in a huge cocoon) is introduced, and 1965's *Ghidrah, the Three-Headed Monster*, in which Godzilla

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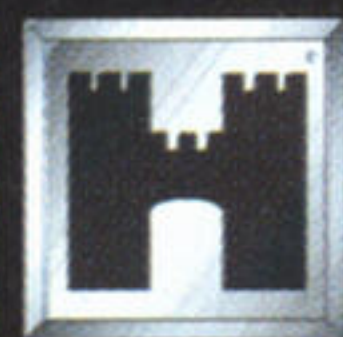
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Dark and gritty, Disney's 1981 film *Dragonslayer* used the "go motion" animation technique to create one of the best dragon movies to date.

teams up with former enemy Mothra and giant pterodactyl Rodan to do battle with a three-headed, fire breathing winged dragon from outer space.

Perhaps the least convincing dragon ever to star in a feature film is 1962's *Reptilicus*, recently released on video. A oil drilling

team in Denmark unearths some pulsing prehistoric flesh, which regenerates into a giant dragon that spits corrosive green slime all over the camera lens (I kid you not). The dragon is nothing more than a big marionette, flopping around Copenhagen and inspiring at least as much wonder and dread

as Ed Wood's paper plate flying saucers. Co-written and directed by (again, no kidding) Sidney Pink.

A somewhat more successful low-budget effort was 1985's *Q*, from Larry Cohen, who directed the midnight movie favorite *Basket Case*. *Q* stands for Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent worshipped by the Aztecs. And while a great big dragon critter (animated by David Allen) terrorizes the rooftops of New York, a serial killer who worships it is mutilating people for sacrifices to it. The movie is elevated from grade Z status by Michael Moriarty's quirky, amusing performance as a small time hoodlum who discovers the monster's nest (at the top of the Chrysler Building!). Almost as amusing is a pre-*Kung Fu: The Legend Continues* David Carradine looking seriously uncomfortable in his role as a street-wise police detective hunting for the difficult-to-pronounce Quetzalcoatl.

Steven Spielberg and Ron Howard conjured up a dragon in 1988's *Willow*, a likeable fantasy adventure about the hobbit-like title character (Warwick Davis) who discovers and cares for a human baby destined to become a queen. There's plenty of action and romance, courtesy of Val Kilmer and Joanne Whalley and comic relief is provided by a couple troublesome brownies. The ugly two-headed dragon (go motion animated by Phil Tippett) was called the Eborsisk, a Spielbergian jab at film critics Roger Ebert and Gene



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In *The 7 Faces of Dr. Lao* a goldfish transforms into a dragon.

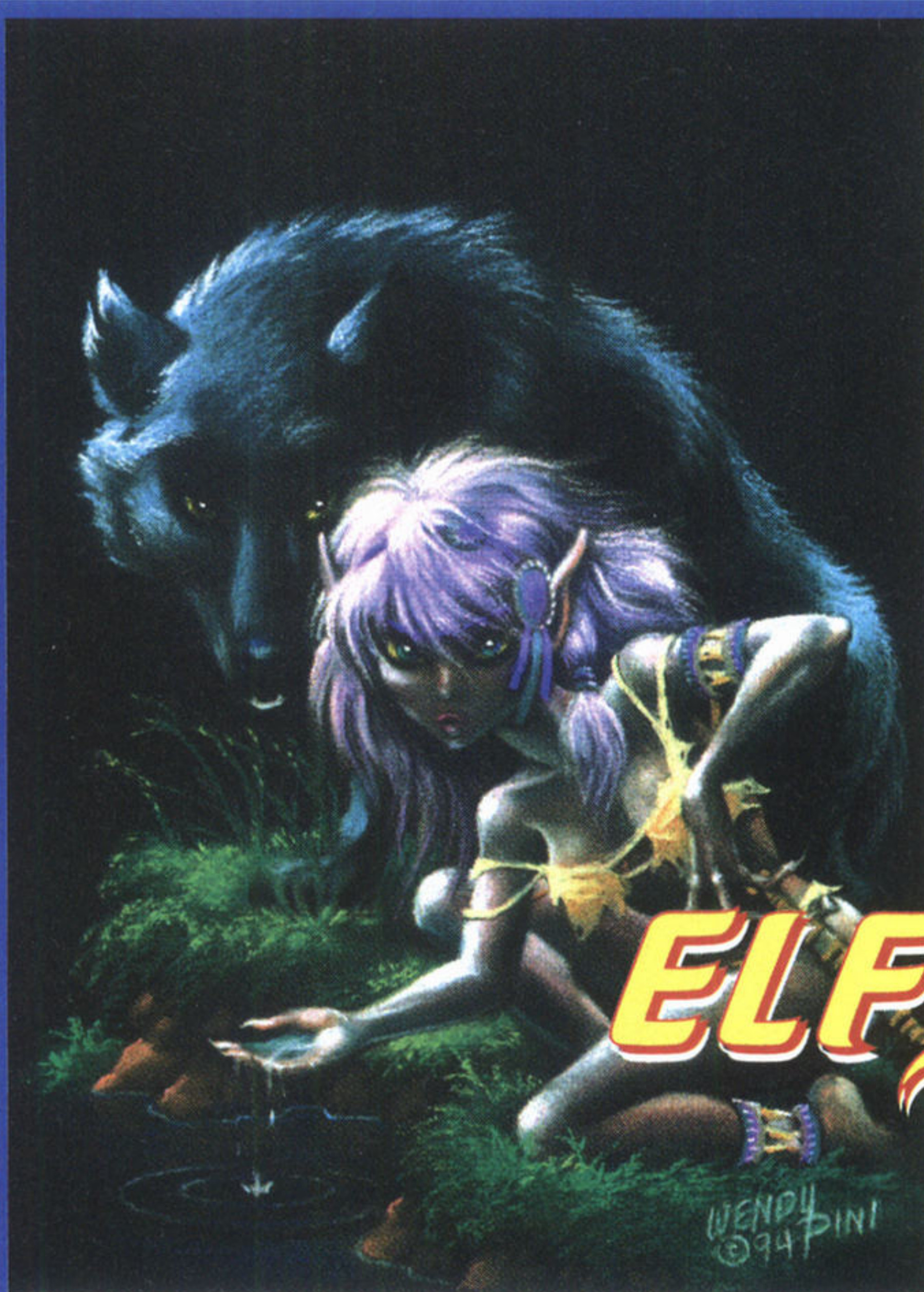
Siskel, and, getting it all out of his system, Spielberg named the skull-masked evil general Kael (a jab at critic Pauline Kael). Film critic sniping aside, *Willow* is a lot of fun.

Disney entered the dragon's den in 1977 with *Pete's Dragon*, a combination of live action and cartoon animation, in which a runaway boy is befriended by a friendly dragon named Elliott (voice by Charlie Callas). May be a bit too syrupy and sweet for adult tastes, but the youngsters will like this musical just fine. And in 1981 Disney would produce a dragon movie for adults in the form of *Dragonslayer*.

Dragonslayer was a milestone in many ways. It was the first Disney/Buena Vista fantasy film to be unapologetically grim; in this film the beautiful princess ends up as baby dragon chow. In fact, the gritty Middle Ages atmosphere hangs like a pall of dragon smoke over much of the movie. But don't be deterred: *Dragonslayer* is a well-realized fantasy movie with an interesting story and believable characters, chief of which is Vermithrax Pejorative, an ancient, dessicated and very unpleasant dragon. Vermithrax was the first creature to be animated via go motion, which used rods attached to the stop-motion dragon to move it slightly during the frame exposure, resulting in a realistic motion blur lacking in most stop motion footage. Cutting edge technology at the time, go motion was combined with a full-size animatronic head and neck to create memorable sequences, such as when Vermithrax pursues a would-be dragonslayer through a cave, crawling along like a giant bat.

The actors in *Dragonslayer* are good, too. Peter MacNichol is appealing as the young wizard's apprentice who decides to slay Vermithrax, Ralph Richardson is great as his mentor Ulrich, and Caitlin Clark is resourceful as a girl who masquerades as a boy to avoid being sacrificed to the dragon (and whose true identity is revealed in another Disney first: a brief, tastefully done nude scene). One of the best dragon movies to date.

Which brings us to *Dragonheart*, released
Continued on page 77



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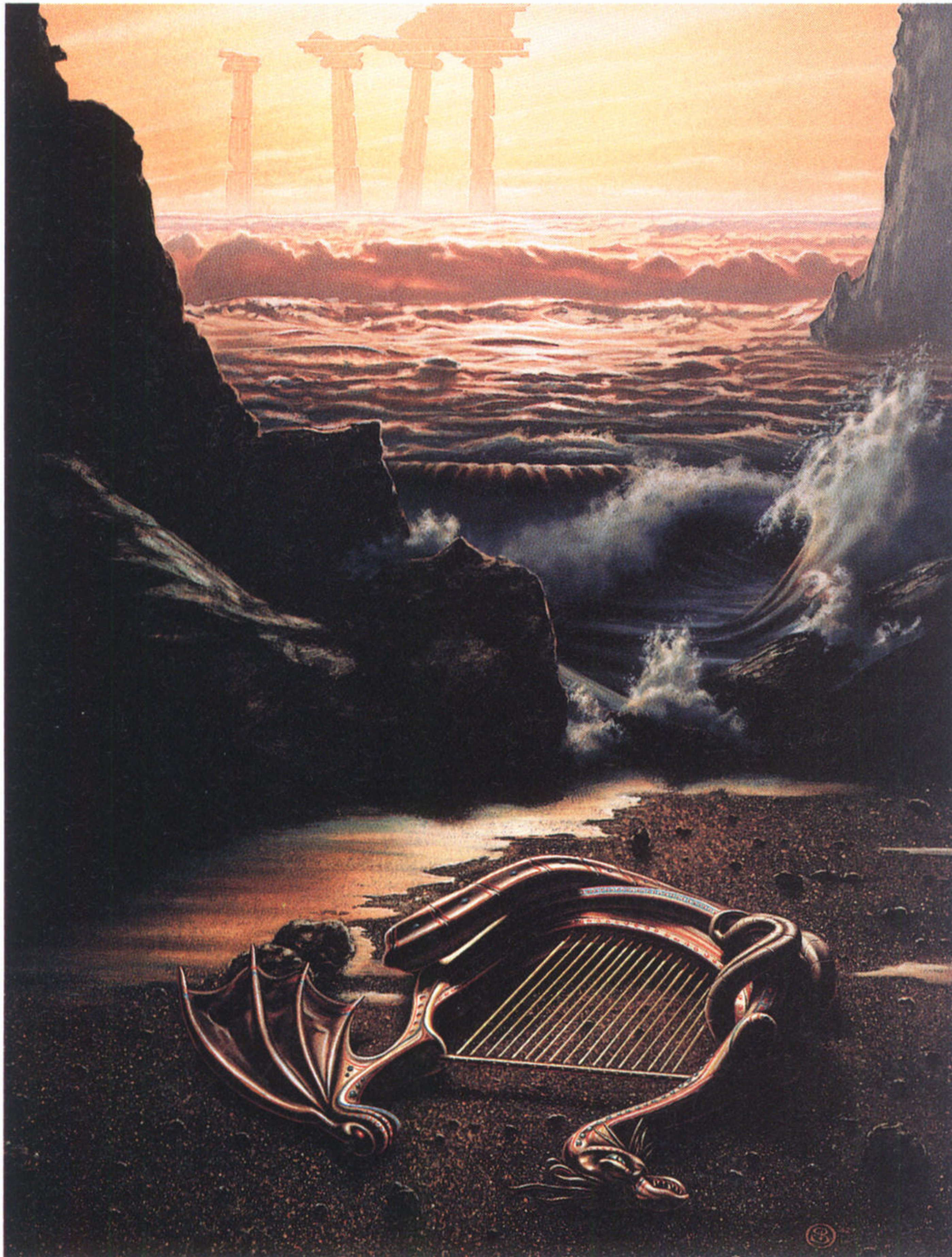
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BY TERRI WINDLING

Tristan, True Thomas, and Morgan of Hed: Legends of Harps and Harpers

A TALE FROM SCOTLAND'S ISLE OF SKYE RELATES HOW MUSIC FIRST CAME TO THOSE lands. A poor youth found a strange instrument (a triangular harp) floating in the waves. He fished it out, set it upright, and the wind began to play the strings — an eerie, lovely sound the like of which had never been heard. The boy could not duplicate the sound, although he tried for many long days. So obsessed did he become that his widowed mother ran to a wizard (a “dubh-sgoilear”) to beg him to give her son the skill to play the instrument — or else to quell his desire for it. The dubh-sgoilear offered her this choice: He would take away the boy's desire in exchange for the widow's body, or he'd give him the gift of music in exchange for her mortal soul. She chose the latter and returned home, where she found her son plucking beautiful, heavenly music from the strings of the harp. But the boy was horrified to learn the price his mother had paid for his skill. From that moment on, he began to play

The harp has always been associated with magic and enchantment. Painting by Barclay Shaw.



music so sad that the birds and the fish stopped to listen. And that, concludes the old Scottish tale, is why the music of the harp sounds poignant to this very day.

From Ireland comes another tale about the earliest harp music: Boand was the wife of the Dagda Mor, a deity of the Tuatha De Danann (the faery race of Ireland). As Boand gave birth to the Dagda's three sons, the Dagda's harper played along to ease the woman's labor. The harp groaned with the intensity of the pain as the woman's first child emerged, and so she named her eldest son Goltraí, the crying music. The music made a merry sound as Boand's second son was born, and so she named the child Gentraí, the laughing music. At last the final infant emerged to music that was soft and sweet. She called the child Suantraí, the sleeping (or healing) music. These three strains of music are still found in the repertoire of Celtic musicians — as echoed by the Scots-English ballad recounting the trials of King Orfeo (a harper in the oldest songs, a fiddler in later variants), who played three strains of music before the king of the faery underworld: the notes of joy, the notes of pain, and the enchanted faery reel.

In a previous column, we looked at the stories to be found in Celtic folk ballads [see *Realms of Fantasy* issue #2] — noting that the modern revival of interest in such music, beginning in the 1970s, has paralleled the modern revival of interest in fantasy fiction (and the birth of the fantasy publishing genre in the same decade.) It is not surprising that the audiences for folk music and fantasy stories overlap, for both art forms are rooted in the lore and legends of our folk heritage. If you look on the fantasy bookshelves these days, you'll find quite a number of novels imbued with the poignant strains of ancient songs. Bards and wandering minstrels are staple characters of books set in medieval or imaginary lands ... and more often than not, a small, hand-held, Celtic-style harp is the instrument they play. The quick-witted Morgan of Hed in the splendid “Riddlemaster” books of Patricia A. McKillip was one of the first (and remains one of the best) harp-toting protagonists in contemporary fantasy fiction. Since then, writers like Patricia C. Wrede (*The Harp of Imach Thyself*), Kristine Kathryn Rusch (*The White Mists of Power*), Charles de Lint (*Into the Green*) and numerous others have created memorable bardic characters, while Ellen Kushner has told the quintessential harper tale in her award-

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It is not difficult to see why the harp has such a hold on the imaginations of writers in the fantasy field, for it is an instrument that has always been associated with magic. Early harps were most often made of willow wood, a tree sacred to the Goddess, a symbol of the moon, of fertility, and of enchantment. The strings of the harp symbolize the mystic bridge between heaven and earth; mankind stands poised in the middle, striving now toward one and now toward the other as represented by the tension of the strings (portrayed in Bosch's painting "The Garden of Delights", where a man hangs from the strings, crucified.) The harp has been associated with early pagan religions, its music called "the voice of the gods", although it was later absorbed into the Christian church and the celestial choir.

It was thought that the harp as we know it today originally came from Ireland, spreading across Scotland and Wales and over the English Channel to Europe. But in 1992 the music historians Keith Sanger and Alison Kinnaird published *Tree of Strings: Crann Nan Tued*, a thorough, well-written history of the harp giving strong archeological evidence that the earliest instruments came from Scotland. (The harp is found carved onto Pict-Scottish stones at least 200 to 300 years earlier than pictorial representations elsewhere in the world.) According to Sanger and Kinnaird, these large, floor-standing instruments



In this detail from Heironymus Bosch's triptych, "The Garden of Earthly Delights," the body of a poor soul is crucified on the strings of a harp.

(triangular in frame, probably strung with horsehair) entered Wales sometime between the 6th and 9th centuries during waves of immigration from the north, while the Irish

are likely to have come into contact with the harp through their religious communities established in the west of Scotland. When the Irish brought the instrument home, they altered the shape and gave it metal strings. This is the harp we know today as the Gaelic harp, or "clarsach".

Sanger and Kinnaird point out that it's not entirely accurate to call the harp a "folk" instrument. For many centuries the harp firmly belonged to the aristocracy; it was not an instrument to be found (like the fiddle and whistle) in a poor man's croft. Harpers were trained and educated; they were esteemed (and esteemed themselves) quite highly compared to other musicians. For common people, the opportunity to hear the music of the harp was rare indeed. In Scandinavia, harps were noble instruments by law; a commoner who dared to play the harp could find himself sentenced to death. This gave the instrument a powerful aura of otherworldliness, surrounding harp music with magical legends and supernatural associations.

The ancient *Volsunga Saga* recounts the death of Gunnar, brother to Sigurd the Dragon-slayer. Thrown into a pit of poisonous snakes by vengeful enemies, Gunnar kept death at bay by playing a mystical song upon his harp, enchanting the serpents to sleep. For an entire day and night he played, but as the dawn broke over the land his tired fingers fumbled and one snake sunk its poison into Gunnar's hand.



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The Scottish harper Glenkindie (like the fiddler Jack Orion) could "harp the fish out of the salt sea, or water out of a stone, or milk out of a maiden's breast though baby had she none." He plays a sleeping spell in order to seduce the daughter in a great lord's hall, but his serving man, in pursuit of the same woman, harps Glenkindie to sleep in turn and steals the maiden away for himself. The sinister Elf Knight uses a similar trick to seduce the Lady Isobel — but she is a quick-witted young woman and escapes the encounter with her maidenhead intact.

Thomas the Rhymer is the most famous harper of Scottish balladry. The Queen of Faery (known to have a fancy for handsome mortal musicians) seduces Thomas and steals him away to Faerieland for seven years. When she sends him home again, it is with the gift (or the curse) of "the tongue that cannot lie". (Ellen Kushner's novel-length retelling of this ballad is an enchanted and sensual work; I highly recommend it.) In Arthurian romance, Tristan disguises himself as a wandering harper when he travels from Cornwall to Ireland, seeking the cure for a poisonous wound inflicted by an Irish hero. It is there he encounters the fair Iseult and determines to win her for his Cornish king, never dreaming that he will come to love her himself, and thereby seal his doom. (For retellings of this story, see Rosemary Sutcliffe's *The Enchanted Cup*, Diana L. Paxson's *The White Raven*, and Dee Morrison Meany's *Iseult*.)

In Russia, the harp was known as a "gusla", and the wandering harpist as a "guslar". One legend tells of a Tsar who is captured while traveling in the holy lands. His brave Tsarita dons men's clothes, takes up her gusla, and follows his path. Playing before the infidel king, she wins her husband's freedom. The guslars of Russia are comparable to the bards to be found in Celtic lands: trained in archaic poetic modes, severe and highly formal, and were performed as sung recitations while accompanied by the harp. In the British Isles, in ancient times, the bards were held in the highest esteem. They were scholars, historians, geneologists, valued advisors to nobles and kings, and believed to possess certain magical powers; their satires could curse, even kill, a man, while their poems of praise lifted fortunes.

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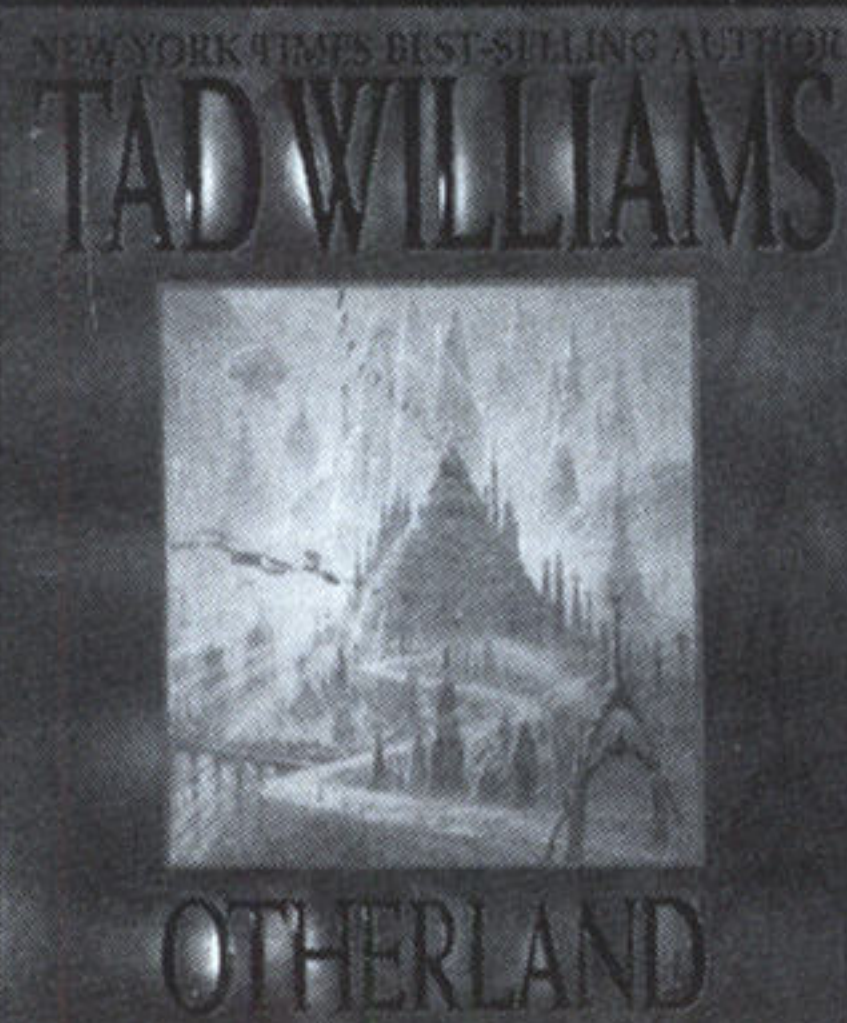
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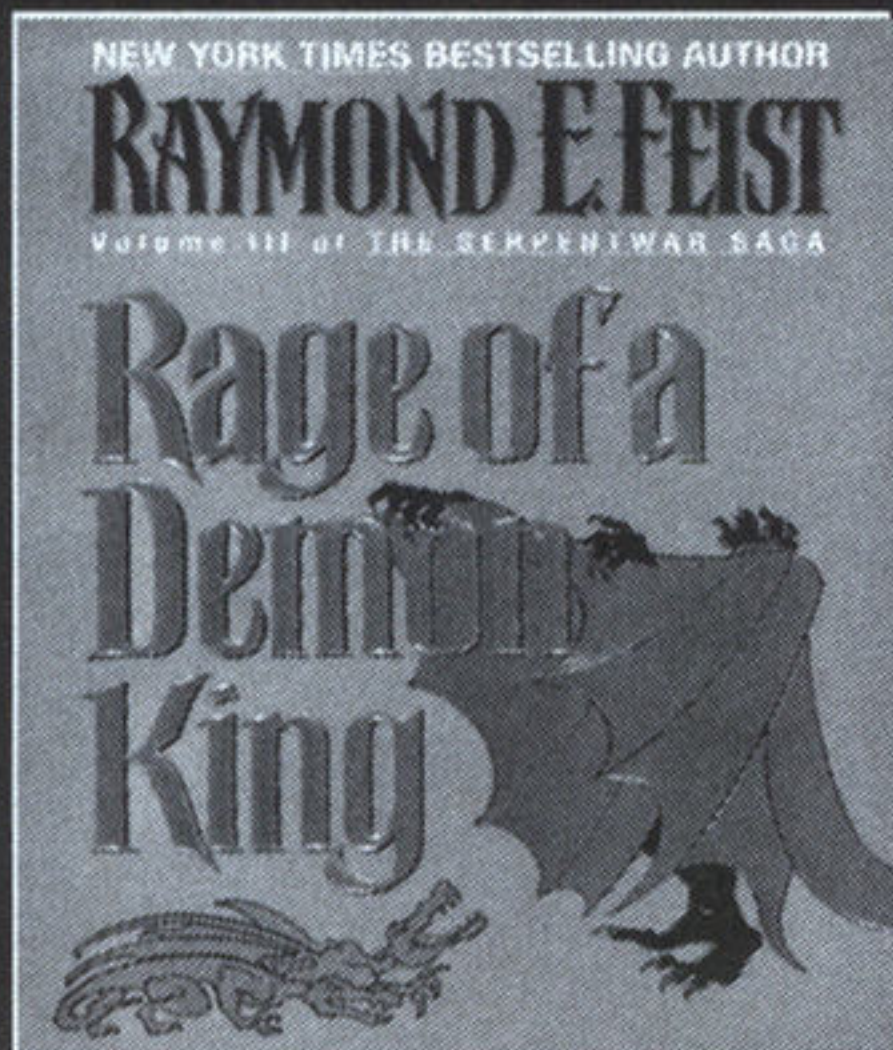
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In Ireland, the "fili" (a hereditary position requiring at least six years of training in one of the poetic colleges) composed poetry but did not perform it; the "reacaire" would chant or recite with musical accompaniment from a harper. In Scotland, these three separate positions came together in the person of the bard. While not quite as highly trained as the fili, he nonetheless composed poetry himself, performed, and generally played his own harp.

Until the 15th and 16th centuries, fili and bard used formal syllabic verse. When "amhran" appeared (one of the basic meters of folk poetry), it swept across Europe and the British Isles, carried by traveling troubadours. As the strict rules of poetry became more relaxed, the role of fili began to disappear — speeded by the political events undermining the Irish and Highland Scottish social structures. In the early 17th century, the Irish poetic collages collapsed; in Scotland, the less strict bardic training survived another hundred years. After this, harpers began to take on roles that combined those of the fili and the wandering troubadours. Their status fluctuated, then fell drastically. The British Crown considered traveling harpers to be political subversives; Queen Elizabeth I turned the bards into outlaws, uttering her famous proclamation: "Hang the harpers wherever found." Cromwell joined in by enacting a vicious harp-breaking policy. By the time of the famous 1792 gathering of harpers in Belfast, the proud old profession of bard was virtually extinct; wandering harpers were generally poor men with no alternative means of support (like the famous blind harper O'Carolan, whose music is still played by harpers today.)

In the early 1800s, harp music and its attendant folklore underwent a public revival, aided by the efforts of the Dublin poet-musician Thomas Moore. Moore wrote poems to Irish folk tunes and published them with tremendous success; his popularity rivaled Byron's and Scott's during his day, and his songs are still sung. In 1810, modern mechanization allowed a new type of harp to be patented which permitted musicians to play in all musical keys. This brought the harp back into classical orchestras and unleashed a flood of new music. The harp became a popular parlor instrument — particularly among genteel young ladies (whom, it was claimed, enjoyed the excuse to flash their slim ankles to admirers.) Even in the area of classical music, the harp had an aura of magic and enchantment. The Victorians, with their strong interest in folklore, spiritualism, and the "Celtic twilight", embraced the music of the harp with a fervor that is almost hard to imagine today. A wealth of Victorian "fairy music" for the harp was written, published, and performed — music which eventually fell out of fashion along with the mystical medievalism and Arthurianism of the Pre-

Raphaelites, the spiritualism and florid fantasies characterizing the Age. Despite its great popularity during its day, the existence of this 19th century "fairy" music was nearly forgotten altogether until English harp player Elizabeth Jane Baudry released a recent CD entitled *Harp of Wild and Dreamlike Strain: Romantic Victorian Harp Music*.

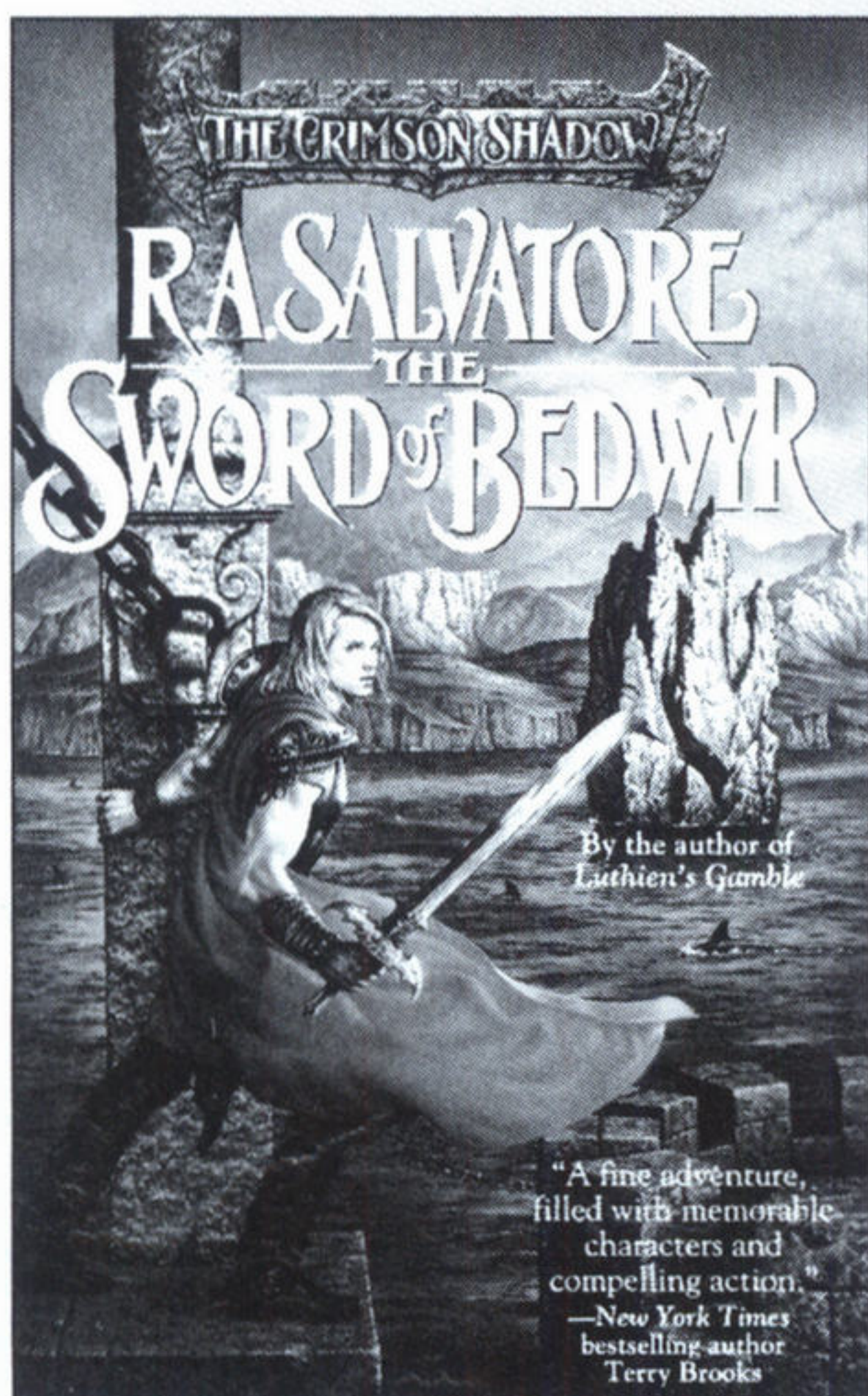
Jane lives down the road in my Devonshire village, so I visited her in her tiny, magical cottage, crowded with five harps, two sons, countless books, Pre-Raphaelite prints on the walls. As a harp teacher, as well as performer (with concerts held across the British Isles), Jane is largely responsible for the fact that there are few places one can walk in the village without hearing someone, somewhere, practicing classical or Celtic harp. With her long dark hair and long skirts she might have stepped from a Rossetti painting herself, and her breadth of knowledge about Victorian culture (and harp music in general) is impressive. As I sat by the fire on a crisp autumn day, Jane served tea in delicate china cups and she talked to me about harp music, harp legends ... and the fairies.

"The fairy music [on the new CD] is the result of a journey into the Victorian fascination with the transcendental. All the music has lain forgotten in the vast archives of the British Library, and has never before been recorded or even performed in modern times. Its composers, once famous touring virtuosi, are now long dead and forgotten." Most compelling was the discovery that so many elements of the Victorian psyche are distilled in the music: a revolt against Darwinism and the birth of the scientific age, the spectacular rise of the spiritualist movement affecting even the Royal Court, a nostalgia for our rural past as the industrial revolution tightened its hold and the rise of the middle classes with their demand for accessible music. "Furthermore, the Victorian love affair with Scotland contributed to the popularity of the harp, Scotland's oldest national instrument. There was an interest for the first time in our folk heritage. The erotic imagery of fairies was an obvious outlet for the repressed sexuality of the time. Orgiastic paintings of naked frolics became respectable provided the participants had wings! Fairy music for the harp is the essence of Victorian idealism."

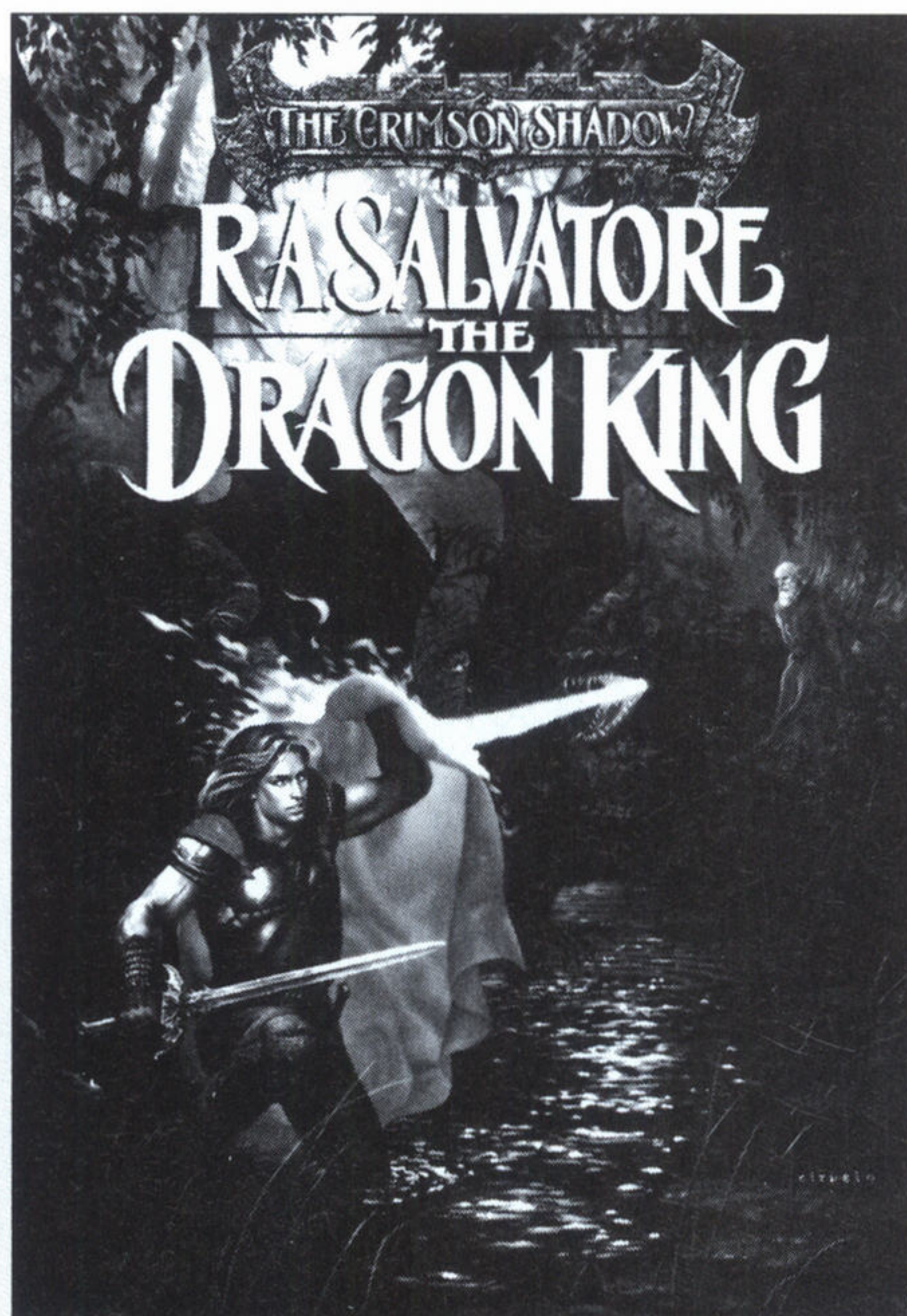
Harp of Wild and Dreamlike Strain is a recording of lush, fey, and sensuous music written for the harp by 19th century composers such as Felix Godefroid, Charles Oberthur, and John Balsir Chatterton. Jane had unearthed this music while doing research at the British Library in London. Amazed by both the quantity and the quality of the "fairy" music, she soon made plans to put together a recording of selections from this work. The CD was recorded on location in the 19th century ballroom of Buckland Manor—an eighty-five-room country manor house, virtually empty now, rising from the Devon countryside like the house in a gothic

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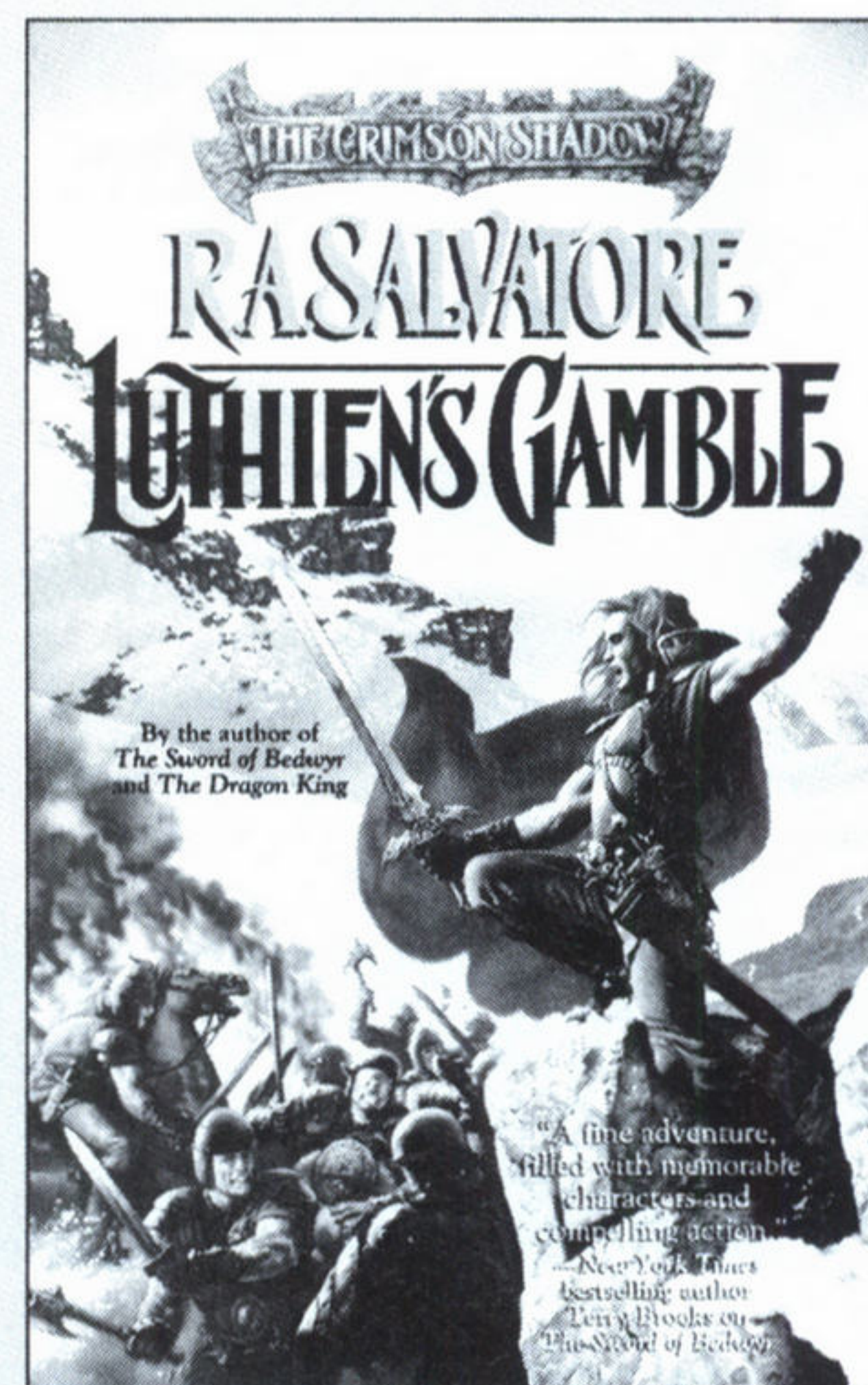


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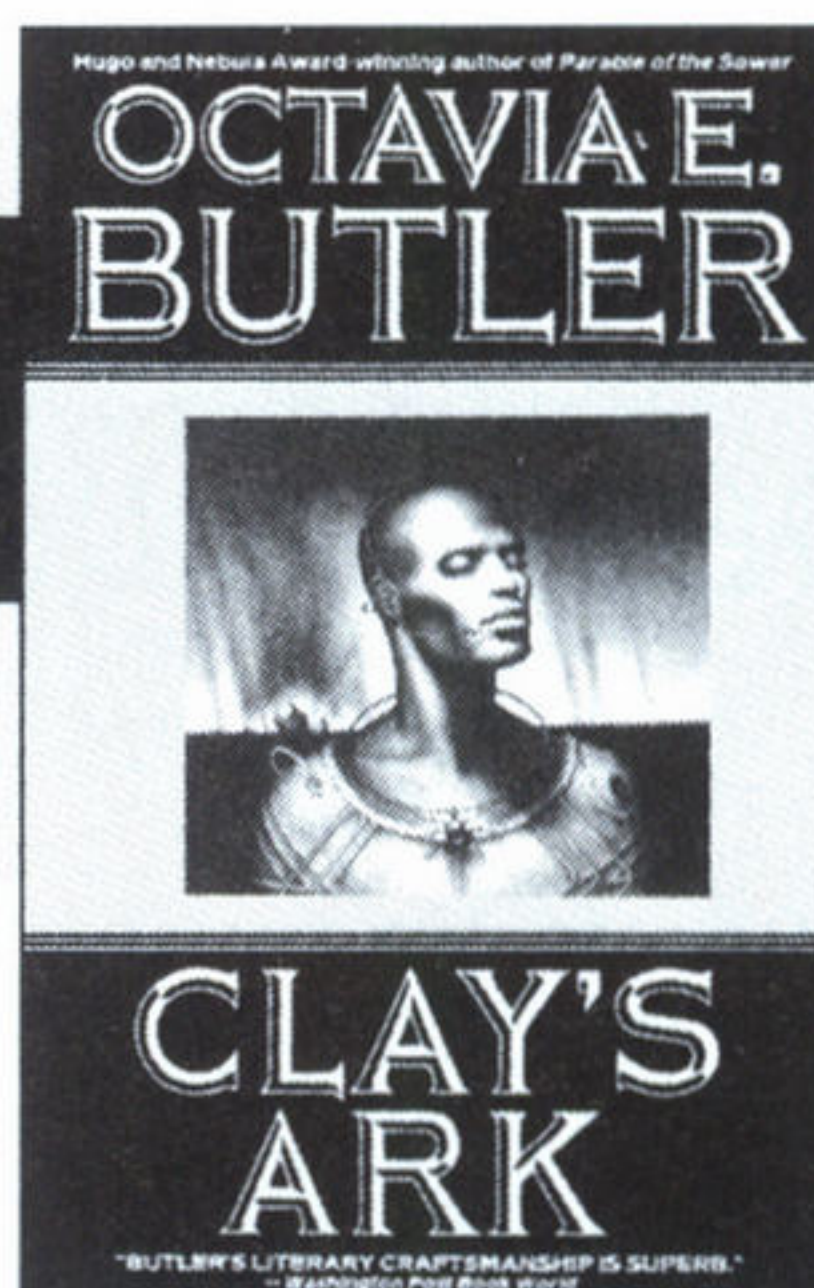
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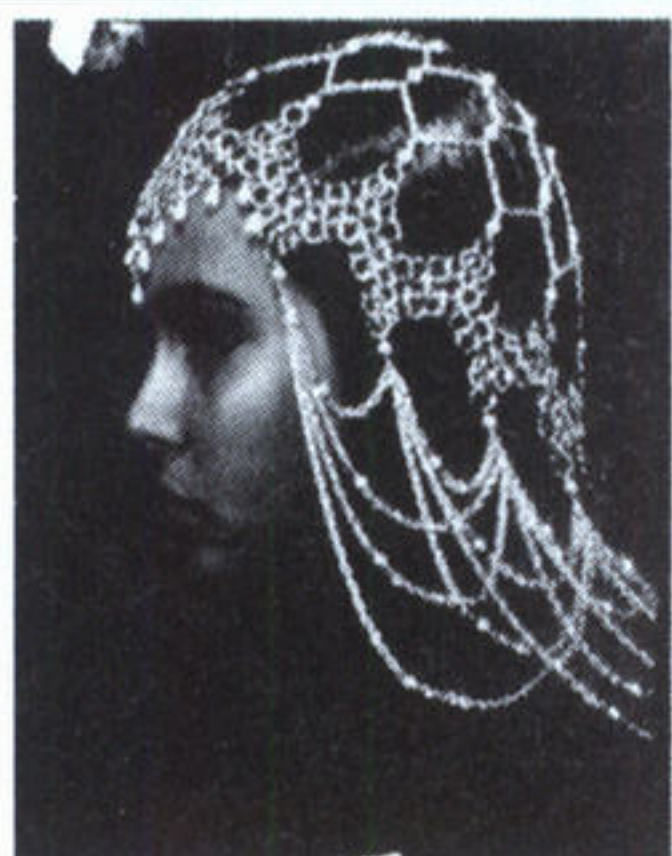
romance. "As I played, looking out on a hundred acres of untouched parkland on a golden autumn day, the wind gusting, empty urns filled with blown leaves, I felt goose-shivers down my spine ... knowing this music hadn't been played in a century. The last time it had been performed, the manor's ballroom had just been built."

The late 20th century has seen another revival of interest in harp music which (just as in Victorian times) is entwined with an interest in all things folkloric, fantastic and mystical. I was fortunate to be a student in Dublin in the mid-1970s, when the contemporary Celtic music renaissance was first building up its steam — a thrilling time to see new bands like Clannad adapt the Celtic harp to a new Celtic sound, or to catch sight of The Chieftain's legendary harper Derek Bell in the smokey rooms of an old Dublin pub. The Breton harper Alan Stivell began to build a following about the same time, and has gone on to inspire more young harp players than any other single musician. Stivell's magical *Renaissance de la Harpe Celtique* is a CD that tops the list of recommendations for anyone interested in Celtic harp music. Dominig Bouchaud is another master harp player from Brittany whose brilliant recordings mix Celtic tunes with works by modern composers.

In Scotland, Robin Williamson refers to himself as a modern-day bard: part poet, part story-teller and part musician. His performances are spontaneous, eccentric, and often enchanting. (I recommend his two-volume recording *The Legacy of the Scottish Harpers*.) Sileas, from Scotland, consists of two talented harper/vocalists: Patsy Seddon and Mary Macmaster. (Sileas na Ceapaich was a 17th century poetess who composed in both bardic and amhran metres. Women harpers and poets were rare, and too often open to slander as "loose-living" women. In the Dark Ages it was strictly against the law for women to harp.) Seddon and Macmaster are also the core of The Poozies, an all-women band performing Celtic and other music on harp, accordion and guitar. Their first two CDs are delightful ("Chantoozies" and "Dantoozies"), but keep an eye out for the next one coming up featuring their terrific new vocalist Kate Rusby.

Ireland's Derek Bell has recorded several solo releases, including *Carolan's Favorite* and *Ancient Music for the Irish Harp*. Dordan, with Kathleen Loughnane on harp, performs a lovely mix of Irish and Baroque music, while Maire Ni Chathsaigh, one of Ireland's finest harpers, has collected a wealth of ancient Irish tunes on *The New Strung Harp*. Savourna Stevenson mixes jazz and new music with Celtic themes and lyrics by contemporary poets on her latest CD, a collaboration with the brilliant vocalist June Tabor.

The American musician Deborah Heson-Conant is now world famous for her sizzling jazz harp; she has quite a few recordings out,



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including my favorite, *Naked Music*. South America has a strong harp-playing tradition of its very own; Alfredo Rolando Ortiz, a master player of the Paraguayan harp, has collected music from throughout the region in *The South American Harp, Vols. I and II* — a beautiful introduction to this work. From Canada, Loreena McKennitt is one of the most popular vocalist/harp-players today. Her reputation is well deserved; no fantasy lover should miss her recordings of Celtic tunes, ballads, magical poems (from Shakespeare to Tennyson and Yeats.) Her recent work, with its Moorish influences, is her best work yet. (I recommend *The Visit* and *The Mask and the Mirror*.)

The small country of Wales has one of the strongest harp music traditions in the world (and indeed, the World Harp Festival is held each year in Cardiff, South Wales.) It was not so long ago that harp playing was still common among Welsh school children and harpers could be found at wayside inns and country pubs. The telyn (triple harp) is the Welsh national instrument, beautifully played by a number of musicians, foremost among them Robin Huw Bowen (*The Sweet Harp of my Land*). You might also look out for Nansi Richards, who learned to play from itinerant gypsy harpers, and for recordings by the Welsh trio Aberjaber, with harp player Delyth Evans.

For modern bards and harp enthusiasts, two magazines are good references sources for festival announcements, CD reviews, historical information, etc.: *Sounding Strings* (P.O. Box 12508 Bathgate, West Lothian, EH48 3YA) and *The Folk Harp Journal* (4718 Mayclette Drive, Anaheim, CA, 92807-3040). For a copy of Sanger and Kinnard's book *Tree of Strings*, write to Kinnor Music (Shillinghill, Temple, Midlothian EH23 4SH). I also recommend *A Harp of Fishbones: Folk tales of the Harp* by Russell Walton (The White Row Press, 135 Cumberland Road, Dundonald, Belfast BT16 OBB, Northern Ireland.) To order Elisabeth Jane Baudry's lovely CD, **Harp of Wild and Dreamlike Strain**, as well as other harp recordings (both Classical and Celtic, including U.K. imports), contact Sylvia Woods Harp Center in California (phone: 818-956-1363).

"O wake once more!" Sir Walter Scott once commanded the ancient harps of Scotland. "If one heart trob higher at its sway, the wizard note has not been touch'd in vain. Then silent be no more! Enchantress, wake again!" Two hundred years after he wrote those lines, Sir Walter might have reason to be pleased. Harp music, including Scottish harp music, is a field that is lively and popular once again; numerous recordings are available, and harp festivals grow from year to year. Still as poignant as the music for which the first harper's mother bargained her mortal soul, still as magical as the music played for the birth of the Dagda's three strong sons, "the wizards note" rings out in songs — and stories — all around the world. ♣

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THE MOTH CAME FROM SOMEWHERE AND FLEW INTO THE lamp. Meeting the hot glass it seemed dismayed. The ship's Mate rose and held out his hand to the moth. "Now, Pretty. Don't scorch yourself." And the moth dropped into his hand, its fans folded, and waited as, careful not to brush those fragile wings, he took it to some dark place of the ship.

When he came back we had refilled the glasses, his, too.

"The sea's as calm as honey in a dark jar," he said.

"And the stars are spilled sugar. A sweet night."

"He's drunk," said the Captain to me. He hugged the Mate.

"And a poet," I said.

The Mate smiled.

"Shall I tell you a story, then?"

Plainly he did this often, for their faces opened, easy as the oiled hinges to windows. We sat expectantly, I no less than the others.

IN THE BROWN LATE SUMMER WEATHER, the town of San Dove baked on its hill, as it had for five centuries. The walls were of medieval design, and studded by towers. All around, the vineyards and the field hung heavy with the noise of cicadas. It was not the time, as spring is, to fall in love. Yet it happened.

Angesia was coming from Mass, with her Spanish duenna. The duenna was suitably a thin crone, in black, with a black spiderweb veil; Angesia a goddess, with hair the color of golden coins beneath a veil of old white lace.

When Raolo de Cerini saw them, perhaps he thought he had seen them before. It was Sunday, and he was on

his way to take some wine with a friend at a reputable tavern which stood in the shade of an olive tree. But then, it must have seemed that, even if the wine had its origin in the personal vineyard of God, something new had occurred. Journeys and friendships were set adrift. It was the first day of the world.

Raolo crossed the square, and reached Angesia and her duenna just where the basilica cast the last of its burnt purple shadow. Angesia stopped at once, lit by the rays of the sun.

"Signorina, pardon me. I mistook you for another — " and he bowed to the duenna — "the little cousin of my father's uncle." Then, to Angesia, very softly, "No, actually for an angel from the church."

"Don't whisper to her, young man," said the duenna, who, despite her accent, was no fool, nor deaf — he had hoped her to be both.

"Again, your pardon. Let me remember my good manners. My name is Raolo de Cerini."

The duenna made an accented noise. Angesia crossed herself, and her peach like blush paled entirely away.

Raola said, guessing only too well, "What's the matter, ladies?"

"She," said the duenna, moving between Raolo and his angel, "is Angesia, the daughter of Alessandro Versuvio."

Raolo lifted his face to heaven. He addressed God, not caring for a moment who heard. "Sir, you're unkind. I would have gone to evening Mass. You know that I often do. Why punish me this way simply over a cup of wine at the Olive Tree?"

For he now knew that he had fallen in love on sight with the daughter of his father's closest enemy. Indeed, there had been a blood feud between the two families for twenty-seven years.

From the Journals of St. Strange

OLD FLAME

BY TANITH LEE

Illustration by Mary O'Keefe Young

*Like moths to the flame
go lovers to their fates,
and no one and nothing
in this world can stop them.*

NOW THERE ARE OTHER STORIES OF THIS SORT. TWO HOUSES AT WAR with each other, two young lovers, one of each name. Especially there is the famous story.

However, things did not fall out quite in that way, although the feud casts itself a shadow over everything, longer by far, and darker than the noon shadow of the basilica tower.

Raolo went home and pleaded eloquently. Angesia wept and refused food, and prayed every hour to the Madonna. After two weeks of this, perhaps worn out by the energies of youth, Alessandro Versuvio sent a servant to his enemy, Thomaso de Cerini. There was presently a meeting by night in an obscure library, with a priest and a scholar to keep the peace. Then another meeting, less formal, in a wine shop which was, to the Olive Tree, a full moon to a star.

Rumor went around the town. Could it be that despite the spilled blood between them, the angry ghosts of nine men, the houses of the wax taper and the volcano were to make friends? San Dove hoped so, for it would mean a party. Both families were wealthy, and each had two or three marriageable sons and daughters.

In the end the news was out. Angesia Versuvio was betrothed to Raolo de Cerini. There was to be a wedding and a feast with tables set in the square, and pieces of money distributed, and side-shows, dancing dogs, and cannons fired from the old battlements.

Raolo met his beloved once more on a high terrace where her hand was put into his. She was pale as a lily, then red as a poppy. This he told her and that he would love her forever. She believed him, nat-

The room of Livia had a yellowish tinge; the old plaster, certain hangings. And her bed, with its canopy of yellow wood. It was a room left over from long ago, 1500 perhaps. And still, it was even older. In one corner stood a priceless statue of tawny marble that had been dug up at Rome. It was of the goddess Diana. Livia's husband had given it to her upon their marriage, when Livia was just sixteen. In the opposite corner stood a Virgin. But one might be excused for thinking this, too, pagan, and besides, an image of Hekate. It was so dark. But how had the darkness been achieved? Some oddity of shadow. Some weathering of the stone of which the icon was made. The blue veil was inky, and the white gown, painted with golden stars, gauzy-looking, almost stained. And the lowered face, usually in such a statue so serene and gentle, appeared clandestine — sly. Some trick of the candle that burned before it? An unfortunate trick.

Livia did not kneel to pray. She put a dish of wine before the Virgin, and a withering blood-red rose from the dance.

"You were a woman," said Livia de Cerini to the Virgin Maria. "You know a woman's heart. A sword went through you, so it says."

Then she crossed the room and put her hand on the shoulder of the Diana, whose face was simply pure and cruel.

"Let us go hunting," said Livia de Cerini. "Bring down a little deer in the wood. Bring down the great black boar and lop his tusks."

Then she turned away and went and lay on her bed. Her eyes, which often were unsleeping, stared up into the yellow canopy.

Legions had marched past the place long, long plague, heaps and mounds of corpses

urally. That night the house of Versuvio was full of orchestral music and dancing.

Some might have noted a woman standing aside. She was very beautiful, and yet the beauty had been overlaid, as if by a curious smoky powder. Grief, they said; those who noticed, and knew. She was tall and slender, her black hair caught back in a style that would not have looked amiss in the paintings of the early 1500s, when the town was less than two centuries old. A circlet of antique sallow pearls coiled about her throat. She was not more than thirty, not too old yet for marriage herself. But there was no chance of that. The smoky powdering aside, Livia de Cerini had given herself to love only once. The night after that night, they had found him dead by the town wall. The dagger was gone from his ribs, but someone had written a malediction in his blood. It was the Versuvios who had killed Livia's husband. And though the feud might now be healed, her heart had not healed, nor ever would.

What did she think then, watching the golden lovers dance by, under all the burning candles of the volcanic house? No one could tell. She smiled at them. She bowed courteously to her soon-to-be relations. She spoke politely of small matters. She accepted a dance even with Alessandro Versuvio. He remarked after, "I thought she'd dance well; she's a graceful woman. But she was stiff as an iron spike." Even so, to be, while dancing, an iron spike, is not to be unlikeable, or bestial, or unholy.

And yet ...

LIVIA HAD CLIMBED THE STAIRS TO HER ROOM IN THE HOUSE OF DE Cerini.

It was now after two o'clock, and at last all the human noises had died down. A mouse stirred somewhere, and the wooden partitions creaked as the cool of earliest morning briefly relieved them of a lingering day's heat. Soon enough it would be dawn again. The light of truth, that brooked no duplicity.

When the candle at last went out, the room was black. The window faced across a passage on to another wall. She had chosen it for this reason. Livia did not want to look out between her grill and see children playing or the garden trees.

Once the dawn began to filter down, she got up again. She changed her clothes, put on her cloak, and stole out from the room and down through the house. Generally a woman of her class would not go out into the streets of town without a servant, but now she did it. She would say later she had gone to early Mass.

Instead, she took a byway, and walked briskly, ignoring the women who were already stealing out to fetch milk or water. Grey cats coming home from killing things in the alleys of San Dove saw Livia with their yellow eyes, and knew her as one of their own.

Eventually she went through a narrow overhung street, behind an orchard, and out through a little ruined gate into the fields beyond. Soon she came to a grove of trees. The sky was only just properly light, and the grove very overcast. In the middle of it was a lump of stone. Once it had been an altar, no one knew to which ancient god. But now and then, even in this day and age, the altar had been visited. Blood had marked it less than a year old, and there were some recent feathers scattered. Livia brushed these aside.

She put her hands, one palm down, the other a fist, on the altar. She looked up into the sky between the trees, rather as Raolo had looked up after the face of God.

"I have no name for you. I remember my grandmother told me Our house was glorious once, and had its roots in the Old World. We were named for wax. For a candle. But my grandmother told me, the candle is different when it's lit."

A breeze stirred the boughs above. Cow-bells sounded unreal, across fields where lines of poppies dripped blood-red in the corn.

"I call the fire," said Livia de Cerini. "I call the fire to the wax taper. The old fire, old as destruction. She told me. It's ours. Give it to me." She raised her open hand, her fist now, as well as her face. The light

pared her skin of many of her thirty years. She might have been sixteen again. But her eyes were black as wells from pain and rage, hatred, and a terrible strength.

"Send down the fire to me. The fire old as our house, for the destruction of our enemies. They all forget. I won't."

And then she leaned and spat on the altar and opened her hand over it. Something like a red poppy splashed there. She had been working all this while at her palm with a brooch pin. There is a picture of Medea the Sorceress at Pompeii that looks just this way.

Nothing stirred in the grove. Legions had marched past the place long, long ago. And nearby, during the plague, heaps and mounds of corpses had been burned.

The birds did not sing. And when Livia walked back through the gate and was going under the orchard trees, a dead russet finch fell from among the apples at her feet.

She retired to her room that day. When someone or other sent asking, she replied that they must forgive her. It was an accustomed ailment.

Thomaso never heard of it. He was a busy man, and everything had been settled. He had forgotten the noise fourteen years since of Livia screaming and weeping over her husband's body.

But Livia lay on her back on her bed, sometimes taking a little sip of water. She lay thinking of the archaic fire, that the name of de Cerini, with its ideas of tapers and candles, truly represented.

And on her table by the mirror stood one pale ochre candle, with its grey virgin wick poking out. There was a small red streak of blood

the broken wall that the true Vesuvius had destroyed, and the doomed duchesses and queens of the 1500s, who had poisoned or sent hired assassins by night, and who died by their own cold hands.

As she stared at the candle then — quite ordinarily, as if she had touched it with a taper; it came alight.

"Ah," said Livia. This sound was a deep sigh. Had she been holding her breath since yesterday morning? "Ah."

The flame seemed of the usual sort, yellowish, yet very clear. A very clean flame. With at its base, about the wick, a tempting friendly rosiness of color.

How kindly it looked, the sort of light to give a child in the dark. Like the lit lamp, perhaps, Medea carried, her other hand having the sword to hack into bits her younger brother and later, once he had betrayed her, her own sons by Jason.

"Yes," said Livia now.

And then she breathed fiercely on the candle, to blow it out.

The flame bent, flickered. It straightened up. Its light was stronger.

Livia blew on it more harshly. The flame flattened, and arose. Livia took up the candle-snuffer and held its cup down over the flame for the count of seventy-one heartbeats.

And when she drew off the snuffer, the flame burned out like a golden flower, and the rosy core was for a moment like a drop of blood, before it melted down again — into a rose.

"That's good," said Livia.

She drew a chair near to the candle. She sat, smiling. Not so many had seen her really smile, and never like this.

"Take what you want from me," said Livia. "Leave me just enough to carry you where you are going. And there you'll feast, flame. A marriage breakfast."

SHE WAS RECEIVED WITH GREAT COURTESY AT THE HOUSE OF VERSUVIO. Small cakes were offered, and coffee, and a glass of a famous wine.

Angesia, her mother, and the duenna, met Livia de Cerini in a parlor made over to the women of the house.

"It was most thoughtful of you to call. We shall be friends now, I hope?" said Angesia's vague and gracious mother.

Livia bowed. She was very pale and seemed tired beyond any tiredness her carriage drive across the town could have occasioned. But then, she was no longer young. She had had, they said, her sorrows.

On the ebony table she placed a narrow, upright box.

"Indulge me," said Livia. She glanced at the girl, Raolo's beloved, through whom the feud had been ended. "A foolish tradition of long ago. I can recall my grandmother told me of it. I wanted to do the same."

"A present?" asked the duenna.

"Nothing so glamorous. I'm sorry if I disappoint. It is a burning candle. The flame is sanctified. For Angesia. A symbol of what she has achieved between our families."

Then the box was undone, and there the candle stood, beaming its soft topaz welcome.

"But... still alight?"

"Oh yes," said Livia. "Sanctified, as I told you. An old custom."

"But how did the flame not go out?" asked the duenna, twitching her pinched nose.

"I was very careful. Besides, a specialty of the wax. It burns slowly. It should be thirty days before the flame consumes the taper. Just the time till her marriage day."

Angesia sparkled. "I'll put it in my window."

"No," said Livia, "by your bed. So that it can protect you."

"A holy flame?" said the mother. "I see, it has been sanctified by the church. How thoughtful. Will you take some more wine?"

"You're too hospitable, Signora. But I have my little tasks in the house. I must go back."

In the returning carriage, Livia, her body aching, her head filled by a black stone, smiled. Dozing, she dreamed of Angesia's funeral, the flowers thrown on her coffin. All roses die. Even angels fall.

THREE DAYS LATER, RAOLO MET HIS LOVER IN THE GARDEN OF THE

*ago. Nearby, during the
had been burned.*

near its base, which, as the day went by, turned brown, like a fault in the wax.

THAT NIGHT THERE WAS A GREAT STORM. THESE WERE NOT UNCOMMON at the summer's end. But it was almost quite dry, with just a dash of rain. The thunder boomed and cracked and the houses seemed to shake, and off some of the Medieval wall-towers pieces burst at the vibration. There was lightning too. A stone pine was struck just below the town and blazed so violently, the fire brigade was called out with six mules pulling the engine and the pipes attached to the fountain in the basilica square.

Raolo, the young lover, stood at his window. His eyes also blazing, hoping Angesia was not afraid, or wishing she was and he there to comfort her.

Thomaso de Cerini and his secretary ignored the noises and the flashing of the bolts, working late in a room over the gate of the house.

But Livia had closed her shutters. She stood at the center of her chamber, and waited for the old fire of heaven to come in to her, by-passing roof and walls.

She had no fear, even if she had gone up in flames herself. Indeed she had water ready, for though she cared nothing for her life, she needed to do one more thing before she perished. However, the levin-strike did not come. Neither the room nor she were seared. Near four in the morning, not long before the dawn, the storm beat away on huge black wings.

Then Livia went and stared down at the virgin candle, standing there by the mirror in the middle of the room, between the cold virgin Diana and the ominous Virgin Maria. Livia stared and stared. The chamber was in a twilight darkness for there were no lights, and yet some sort of sheen or gleam had come in there that might have been an uncanny glow emanating from the woman herself.

There was a faint, rich, gilded cast also now to her like that of all the paintings she resembled, the plotting, child-slaying Medea on

Versuvio house. The duenna sat in an arbor some way off, stitching.

"What is it, my love? Don't you care for me today?"

"Oh, Raolo. How can you say it? But I'm weary today. I've had such strange dreams."

"Of me? Or of whom? I'll kill him."

Angesia laughed, but she was not herself. There was no color in her cheeks that always bloomed for him. Even her hair had lost some of its luster. Some woman's trouble? Or perhaps nervousness. A bride might be uneasy, even if very much in love.

He took her hand.

Angesia said, "Always I dream something flutters down. For three nights I dreamed it."

"Something? What?"

"Oh, golden and shining, with a sweet face."

"Yourself then. I'll allow it. You may dream of yourself. Why, even I do that."

"No, no, Raolo. It isn't that way. It settles on my chest. At first it's so light. And it fans me with its bright wings. And then ... then it becomes so heavy. I try to push it away. I beg it to go. It only smiles at me, and all the while it's heavier and heavier. And then ... I forget. But when I wake up my head hurts."

Raolo held Angesia in his arms. He kissed her. "A natural fear. You're such a gentle girl."

But the duenna, when five days later Angesia told her worry, replied, "You must visit the priest. Some demon is jealous of you."

"There aren't such things as demons," declared Angesia, but she seemed unsure. Even her mouth was pale. Her hair was lank and once or twice she complained of dizziness.

Neither had the duenna felt so very well, but at her age she did not often expect to. She subscribed to the belief that to be old was to be enfeebled and so thought herself, though others had seldom observed it.

Alessandro, however, was suffering with his gout, shouting with pain as the doctor attended to his foot. His wife was liverish. A younger daughter lay in bed with a fever, but she was prone to such things. The servants were irritable. Even the horses stamped and shied in the stable, and the dogs howled at night until threatened.

Birds which had nested in the garden trees flew off. But who marked the birds?

When Angesia visited the priest, he gave her a benign sermon on the virtues of fear in a young wife. He told her she was blessed in her reticence and should put herself in the hand of the Almighty.

The following morning, Angesia, having got up, fell back again in a faint. But she told the duenna that the priest had explained everything to her. There was nothing to be alarmed at. Once with her husband, she would lose her difficulty and become, she hoped, a perfect wife.

Meanwhile, the sick child vomited into a bowl, Alessandro found he had a rotten tooth that must be drawn, and the two oldest servants of the house were discovered dead in one afternoon. But the old die and sometimes the young also.

During this time, too, the sanctified candle burned mildly on the night table by Angesia's bed. Through the day it was barely visible, so soft and circumspect the flame they forgot it. And at night, as the house lay tossing and murmuring and Angesia became a stone in her strangled stupor, the flame blazed like a good heart in a faulty world.

They said in the streets of San Dove there was something amiss with the house of Versuvio. God prevail and save them all or the wedding would not be celebrated, the tables not be laid, the money not be given out, and not a single dog would dance.

Livia de Cerini had recovered from her brief illness. She was very sorry to hear of the sickness in the Versuvio house. But autumn was a time of chills and maladies. These things would pass. She would pray.

ON THE SEVENTEENTH DAY, ANGESIA WAS TO TRY ON HER WEDDING dress, but Raolo found her lying on a couch in the garden. The duenna had hung about Angesia's neck, along with the golden cross, an amulet that smelled of rosemary.

"You must see a doctor," said Raolo, his heart blundering in his breast.

"Oh, I'm well. Only tired. It's so hot. The trees have fruited twice. Not ours, of course. There's some pest in the orchard. Not a single apple."

Raolo stared at her face. It had grown thin and waxen. All at once, he glimpsed how she would look when very, very old, her beauty gone and all her strength. And he knew with a piercing clarity that he, also then old and frail, would love her still as utterly as he did now.

"Angesia," he cried, and caught her to him. But she had fallen into a deadly slumber. She, who had hung upon his every word, was oblivious to him.

Her lids were blue. Her wrists showed every vein.

And upstairs, the sick child was being despaired.

Raolo looked about him and scales fell from his eyes. He saw how the autumn leaves had turned black on the trees, not falling but decaying where they clung. He saw the sculpted evergreens infected with a yellowish pall. Near the little fountain, a frog crouched on a stone. It was quite dead, and when he touched it with a stick, dropped forward in the water.

Raolo had left Angesia on her pillows. He went to the duenna, who started at his approach.

"How are you?" he asked.

"I feel my age," she replied. "Not well."

"There's too much sickness in this house. How's the little girl, lit-

The duenna, when *"You must visit*

tle Aelia?"

"Alas." The duenna had a look of cobwebs where before she had had a glint of steel.

"Someone," said Raolo, "has put an evil eye on you all."

"What nonsense. It was only in my youth they believed in such things." But the duenna's eyes had sharpened, coming out of a mist like hard black flints. "Who'd do it?"

"God knows. We ended the feud. Are there other enemies?"

"Not one. Signore Alessandro Versuvio is honorable. There were no other quarrels."

"What then?" Raolo looked about again. In the aging morning's sultry light, the old house of the Versuvio leaned. Every crack and fault was apparent. The sun sent down here a yellowish glaze. And oddly, in an upper window there was a faint yellowish gleam which answered it ... was it a face that looked out? ... a smiling face of some strange type, foreign, but not in the sense of race ... but of time?

"What window is that? Is it Angesia's room?"

"So it is. Where the doves nested in the vine. Though they flew away seven days ago. And see, the vine is dying. It was 100 years old. Here's a lesson to us all."

No there was no face. Only the mysterious light.

Raolo said angrily, "What is shining in the room?"

"Shining? Nothing. Unless ... could it be ... the holy candle? I thought yesterday its light had grown brighter, but that would be as it burns down. It's to last thirty days. A clever contrivance."

In the town, the bell of the basilica began to ring on a dull, sunken note. "That is the dirge," said the duenna. She crossed herself, and a look of sadness not fright woke in her eyes. "The tolling bell. We are always reminded."

"And so I have been. I won't lose her! Tell me, old lady, about this candle — from where does it come?"

"Why, from your own house. Your kinswoman brought it, as a gift."

"Who?"

"Livia de Cerini. A good woman. It was to guard Angesia. It had been sanctified."

"By whom?"

"She didn't say, young man. By the church, surely."

Raolo turned about. He heard the bell, he saw the strange glimmer in the window, the dying trees, the shape of the girl who was everything to him lying like an empty doll.

Livia ... Raolo could remember that, as a child, he had always been afraid of her. But they said to him she was a poor tragic woman whose husband had been stabbed to death the night after her marriage night. Raolo had trained himself to think this of her too. She was not sullen but sorrowing, not a witch but a widow.

"Take me up to Angesia's room," said Raolo.

The duenna roused. "Not proper!"

"She's there, and you're with me. Do what I say. Or do I go to Alessandro?"

Grumbling yet galvanized, the old duenna led Raolo up through the house and reaching Angesia's door, pushed it wide, then stood there in the doorway, like a centurion guarding the route from both sides.

What an adorable room it would have been to him. The slender maiden's bed with its floral curtains. The wallpaper of flowers that had been laid over the ancient plaster. Her little prayer place with a tiny dainty Virgin of white Carrara marble. Her Bible with a red rib-

"Young man," said the duenna, "think what you say. You will have to give a reason. This witch Livia has practiced against us. It will start up the feud again like a hungry wolf."

Raolo thought. He left the candle, walked out of the room, moved the duenna and shut the door. He was young. Never in his life had he met such a terrible and stupid dilemma, caught between the horns of pure evil and immovable etiquette.

"Where do you sleep, old lady?"

"That room ... there."

"Take her in with you. Say you're ill, old, say you're so sad to be losing her. Just a night or two. She has a heart like a cherry, so sweet. She won't refuse."

"Even there ..."

"But better than in that room!"

RAOLO WENT TO THE BASILICA. THERE HE ASKED TO SPEAK TO AN important man, a priest and scholar, educated, and a friend of his father's.

It took some while to explain, and Raolo was impatient. Besides, there seemed to be two entirely separate conversations going on. Raolo would talk of the feud and of Livia and her resentment and that she might be unwhole of heart, and the priest would begin to question Raolo, tactfully and sympathetically, as to whether he, Raolo, had inflamed thoughts of his bride.

At length, Raolo told the story of the illness at the Versuvio house

five days later Angesia told her worry, replied, the priest. Some demon is jealous of you."

bon lying on a table, some flowers in a vase, her rosary, a pair of embroidered gloves — his present — which every night were put beneath her pillow, and now lay there on it, waiting.

By the bed on the table was an innocent novel, a pitcher and glass, and one candle in a sconce. But the candle burned by day.

"That," he said. "Is that the one?"

"Yes," said the duenna.

Raolo strode across the room, came to the candle, and looked into it. Ah, but it smelled, like the room, of Angesia. Honeysuckle and salt, vanilla, and clean sand. The perfumes of a girl.

The light was docile, slight. How had it been evident from the window?

No, there was nothing here.

Raolo had turned, and as he did, he saw his shadow cast huge on the opposite wall by the dim, dulcet light. His shadow was brutish, uncouth, horrible. He knew from that. He turned back and hissed, "Magic!" And then he blew with all the might of his strong lungs, to quench the candle flame.

The flame would not go out. Seven or eight or nine times he tried, till black stars stood in his eyes. And when he could not put it out, he seized the sconce and the wax splashed red-hot on his hand.

"No — don't try to move it!" said the duenna, distressed in her turn. But Raolo did try, and the sconce would not move. The candle would not move, either, when he tried. And at last, trying this too, the table would not. It seemed each had been cemented to each. Or each was iron.

"She mustn't sleep here," he said, breathless and nearly faint from his exertions, with red stars now on his sight from the flame, so he could not see anything as it should be, and all the room seemed now grotesque.

But the duenna said, "It's in all the house. That Smell — I smell it even in the garden. I hadn't thought. May God forgive me."

"Then she must leave the house."

and of going to the room of Angesia who lay below so sick, and of seeing the candle which could be neither moved nor blown out.

Then the priest began to lecture Raolo quite sternly on the effulgent and apparently immovable properties of lust.

"Sir ... please ... I don't refer to that, I'm content to wait — after all, it will only be some thirteen days now till our consummation —"

"Nevertheless, she is a young and innocent girl, little more than a child. Your urges must be controlled. Remember, the main purpose of the act is the procreation of children for God's glory. If there is pleasure in the doing, that is God's beneficence. And for a woman there seldom is pleasure. All she may hope for is gentleness, respect, and dutifully to please her husband."

Raolo cursed, which was a mistake. The priest then lectured him upon oaths and their imprudence.

Raolo burst out: "Father, it's an exorcism that's needed here! Her life's in awful danger."

"My dear, misguided son, it is all too plain. You only want to wrest her from her house. You must be guided by me or your marriage will be a disaster."

After a portion of another hour of this, Raolo bit hard on his tongue. He bowed his head, consented to pray with the priest, did so, accepted a penance, and left him with thanks, saying that now he saw his own error. Raolo at least was no fool.

But having escaped the priest's chamber, bereft of hope, what now? He could not go to the de Cerini or to Versuvio, for they were older men, both swept up in their own concerns. Having mended the feud as they believed to assist their children, they expected no further requests. And everything the duenna had said, besides, was crystal clear.

Raolo passed down into the body of the basilica. It was by now well into the afternoon. The light hung in long amber curtains between the pillars that were of a color like sour cream. On the altar was a white cloth with gold and above were paintings, quite good

ones of angels and of the Virgin, beautiful in blue, with a lovely mouth. This mouth indeed spoke for all the world to God, when He, so busy at His affairs, must be reminded.

Raolo knelt alone on the stone floor. Somewhere he heard the chanting of priests less wise, less powerful, perhaps less stupid than the man to whom he had spoken. But Raolo gave up his faith in men for a moment. It was for a woman he prayed, and to a woman, a Woman beyond all women.

"I salute you, Maria, perfect rose."

His whispered words lifted into the cool air. An old adage came to him: *It takes a stone to crack a stone.* And a woman, maybe, to stay a woman.

"Help me ... help me ..."

He prayed for Angesia. Again he told it all. The candle, witchy Livia, the wall of etiquette; the trap in which he found himself.

When he was done, tears were on his face. He stood up and brushed them away. Then going out, the fermented heat of the ebbing day struck him. Mounting his horse, he rode quickly up the winding streets of San Dove, passed the beckoning inn of the Olive Tree, and made his way from the gate and down the dusty road among the fields. He did not quite know what he did. In this manner we are sometimes guided.

NIGHT SPREAD HER CANOPY OVER THE TOWN. IT WAS DEEP BLUE AND gemmed by stars. Below, lights were answeringly lit, and then

*And such a delicious sleep came in then, into the
would have known could only be the honey*

mostly extinguished. In such places you get up at dawn, or an hour or so after, and seek your latest bed, except for festivity, at ten.

In the house of Versuvio, the poor child Aelia survived. She was drowsy and had slipped into a sort of sleep.

Angesia, who had gone to the bedside to pray for her sister, fainted on the stair and woke up in the room of the duenna.

"Stay here with me, little girl. Your poor old lady needs you."

So Angesia stayed. But about one o'clock she woke, and seeing the duenna slept, Angesia crept away to her own room.

On former nights, Angesia had lain here thinking of her lover. Although she had been kept ignorant of most of the private delights of marriage, her body had some notions of its own. The educated priest had been stupid not merely in his theories of evil.

Now, though, she was far too exhausted, and, had she known, too weak, to think of anything of or for Raolo beyond a loving blessing, like that of some aunt who venerated him. She lay down on her bed and in the dark the candle, which never lost its light, seemed to blossom into a golden tree.

And so Angesia prayed to the candle. Can anything have been more natural, or more appalling?

"Keep me safe. I'm so foolish to be afraid. Watch over me, dear light."

And then she closed her eyes.

Her dreams now had ceased to be unpleasant, nor did she remember them. She seemed to be floating through the midnight sky and all the stars spangled around her. The candle was no longer a candle, but a softly golden companion whose enormous wings bore her up. Now they passed over the sinking moon and the smiling divine face of Angesia's guardian was bent over hers. "May I kiss you?"

"Oh, dear friend, what else?"

And so the beautiful calm face leaned near, the tender face, like that of a mother, and with its silken texture brushed Angesia's brow, her eyes, her lips.

And such a delicious sleep came in then, into the sleep of life, that

— had she been anything save dreaming — Angesia would have known that it could only be the honey of death.

The candle flame was nothing but a vampire. God knows how often it had aided the more evil members of the ancient house of de Cerini before. Now it sucked the vitality from every stone and every beam of the building and out of every breast it drained, drop by drop, the vibrancy of the heart. It seems that never before during the feud had anyone thought to call this fire. No doubt it took a special talent and a particular pain, an old pain, aged like itself.

And from Angesia the flame seduced not only her life, but all her spirit.

Was ever anything so filthy?

Perhaps.

In Livia's room, the occupant slept peacefully, making not a sound. A shimmer lay over all things, a gilding not quite visible, by which however, one might see the oddly sly and malevolent Virgin, and before her the dish of wine. And there the pagan Diana whose arrows brought death. Under her feet stretched a mouse, slain not by an arrow but a rodent-catching mechanism of the house. The creature was very fresh, an offering garnered when the servants had gone to bed.

And the face of Livia, so unlike the face in Angesia's deathly dream: A face of wax, composed, in the way one sees faces of the dead, who have forgotten all and know everything.

THE INN THAT RAOLO CAME TO AFTER A LONG RIDE IN THE GATHERING dark was itself very old. In the courtyard a lamp hung from the bough of a twisted ancient fig tree, and here white moths were circling. Every so often one would reach the lamp flame and burn up with a green flash.

The young man saw this omen with a heavy heart. But he dismounted, securely tied the horse, and walked into the dimly lit inn. He was thirsty and weary, at a loss. The processes of thought had stopped in him and lain down to sleep or they were also quite worn out.

Sitting at a rough table, he let the woman who waited bring him wine, and some bread. No one else seemed to be in the house save for a white cat that lay, paws tucked in, on a bench watching him like a sphinx.

Presently a clock struck near the stair. It was 11 p.m. The hour itself seemed desolate, a final aspect of his depression. He drained his cup and poured another.

Then he noticed someone else had come silently into the room. The cat saw too, got up, and went at once to the arrival. It was a priest who bent down and smoothed the cat over with a lean hand.

He seemed, the priest, to be of some wandering mendicant order. His coarse dark robe was belted by a rope. But when he pushed back his hood, a face appeared that matched the hand, lean and pale, without any tan from the weather. Where had he been wandering, to get no sun? His head too, though shaven for the tonsure, had elsewhere long dark hair. When his wine was served him, he drank it in a slow graceful way. Raolo was reminded, despite his trouble, of some old painting of an apostle perhaps, taking rest on his endless journey.

Then with no warning, the priest spoke to Raolo. "Will you join me, my son. There are only the two of us, and this cat. And see, the cat is already here."

Raolo did not have it in him to protest and so he took his drink to

the priest's table and sat down. The cat now lay under the priest's right hand purring, her eyes shut to midnight slits.

"Do you go a great distance, father?" Raolo asked, from courtesy.

The priest replied, "I go with you, my son, to San Dove."

Startled, Raolo said, "With me ... ? What do you mean?"

But the priest said, "Eat your bread for the strength it will give you. In an hour we shall be on the road. It is a long ride."

"If you — if you wish to ride with me, father, then of course. But ... do you have business in the town?"

"Your business, that is the business I have."

"How can you know it?" blurted the young man.

"You told it in the church. You asked for help there. One refused you, but news travels. At the house of the Versuvio, I will do what I can."

Raolo frowned. It seemed to him some other had overheard him, either his pleas to the important religious who would not listen or believe, or his prayer. Somehow some message had been sent ahead of him.

"But do you know it all? Something vile and supernatural — an exorcism —"

"I know it all. I am here. In an hour. We will ride together for the town."

WHEN THEY ENTERED SAN DOVE, IT WAS DAWN — THE CANOPY drawn back and the sky a creamy blue. Cocks crowed and birds

sleep of life, that Angesia of death.

sang and soon the basilica bell began to sound.

But when they reached the house of Alessandro Versuvio and his kin, there was no sign of activity. No bird of any sort trilled in the garden. No morning noises came of broom or bucket, and not one shutter opened.

Raolo banged on the gates loudly with his heart pressing at his throat like a knot of thunder. Finally an old servant opened up, wrapped in a blanket, shivering and watery-eyed.

They met, Raolo and the priest, with Alessandro in his library. He was dressed for he had not been to bed. His face was swollen still where the tooth had been pulled, and his eyes were heavily blotted with shadow.

"This is an early visit. You catch us unprepared."

The priest answered. "The house of de Cerini wishes you and yours nothing but good; witness the young man here with me. But there is one woman who has wished you nothing but ill. You sense some evil on you? Her curse is destroying you. May I continue?"

Alessandro sank down in his carved chair and gripped the arms. He said, "My wife is ailing. They're all sick. My horses fret, my dog lies on his side. My daughters ..." And then, with a lash of rage, "Who has worked against us? Raolo, tell me who."

Despite the warnings, Raolo saw he would have to speak. He did so.

Then the priest raised his hand for silence. Rage, shame, terror, each lay down, as the cat had done at the inn.

The priest gave all the story quickly and in such a way that the de Cerini were vindicated. Then he took the hand of Raolo and gave it to Alessandro Versuvio. Raolo said, "My own father will judge that woman."

"Swear that, and there is still no feud."

It was sworn on the name of God.

"Now," said the priest, "we will go up to the chamber of your daughter Angesia. The old lady, her chaperone, shall come in. A

cure works best by night, when the flame is at its strongest. Till then, we will watch."

So they climbed the stairs and the frightened, pasty servants stared at them. The duenna was summoned and arrived coughing, brittle as one of the black leaves in the garden. Yet at the sight of the priest, she curtseyed. Angesia lay in her bed. She could not wake, though the duenna and Raolo coaxed her. Raolo tried to lift her in his arms to take her out of the room. But somehow he could not. He, young and very strong as he was, could not raise her up. She was heavy and stuck as if cemented to the bed, as the candle in its sconce to the table, and the table to the floor.

The candle burned kindly all this while. None attempted to put it out. They did not look at it at all, not even the priest. He told them only to open the window and let in the sunlight. He said Raolo must sit to one side of the girl and hold her hand. "Press her fingers sometimes, and tell her things you have done when happy. Speak of your wedding." At this Raolo shed tears. Would the wedding ever be? But then he did as bid, talking now and then to her white fallen face, that had crumpled down like a flower after heavy rain. To her lank hair spread deadly on the pillow, he spoke. Her beautiful body under the coverlet might only have been a bolster. They could just see her breath. That was all.

The duenna sat in a corner telling her rosary, praying softly, sometimes in her native Spanish. Alessandro paced the room, sat, then paced the room.

It was the priest who kept quite still, his head hooded and bowed. But from him there radiated a quietness that began to fill up the space. It became easier and easier to forget the unquenchable candle squatting there drinking up the life of the house, sucking out the soul of Angesia.

Was night the time for exorcism? If he said so, then so it must be.

Sometimes servants rapped at the door. Some food was brought. Otherwise they were sent away. Occasionally one or the other of the people, aside from Angesia and the priest, had to absent themselves briefly. Save for these comings and goings, they did not stir.

The room became like a sundial, for it had the sun most of the day. Now the rays passed over the floor, gilding this furnishing, next that one, tinting this face with color, now drawing all color away.

Time passed with a curious motionless quickness.

Far beyond the house and garden of Versuvio worked the muted noises of the town, its carts and horses, bells and shouts. But *they* were held fast in a tomb of silence.

In the afternoon's ending, the sun touched at last Angesia's face, and for a second the father and the lover saw reflected there a blush of life. Gold in her hair, a kiss on her cheeks. But then the sun moved on and shadow came back and they saw the true fore-shadows of death.

By then the bizarre nature of that room, keeping together candlelight and sun, male and female, sleep and waking, life and unlife, had hypnotized them. Raolo's eyes were reddened but dry. The duenna had left off her prayers, though she watched under her crinkled lids like a snake.

The sky beyond the window turned to amber, then to pearl, and then to lapis lazuli.

The priest rose, and as he did so a huge ripple seemed to break about him and spread, ring upon ring, through the chamber.

"Close the shutters now. The sun is down, and night is beginning."

And as they closed the shutters, Alessandro and Raolo together, a deeper darkness formed and then a wilder light. The candle flamed now. It was pure gold and at its core a petal of ruby. It was a second sun that had a heart of blood. And it was still as it made of colored vitreous.

"Stand away from the bed," said the priest.

But in that golden candlelight, he seemed now only thin and insignificant and human. What could he do? Surely nothing. Some ritual, some prayer. He would try and fail. They would be lost.

The era would have become again that of Diana the huntress, Medea the sorceress, and of Hekate the witch-goddess before whom

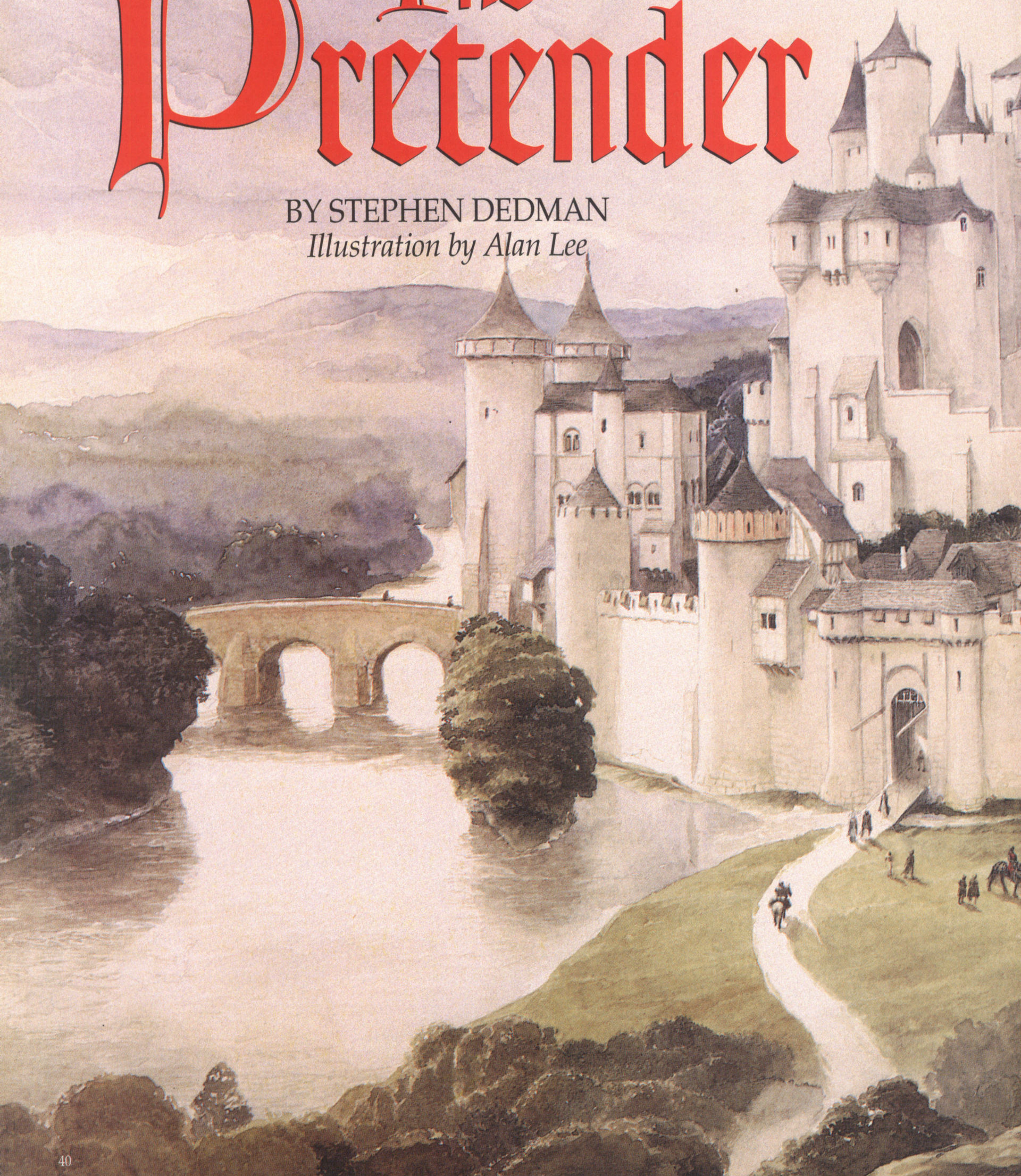
Continued on page 68

There's something about the Arthurian mythos that demands telling and retelling. Here is a truly remarkable account of some truly remarkable times.

The Pretender

BY STEPHEN DEDMAN

Illustration by Alan Lee

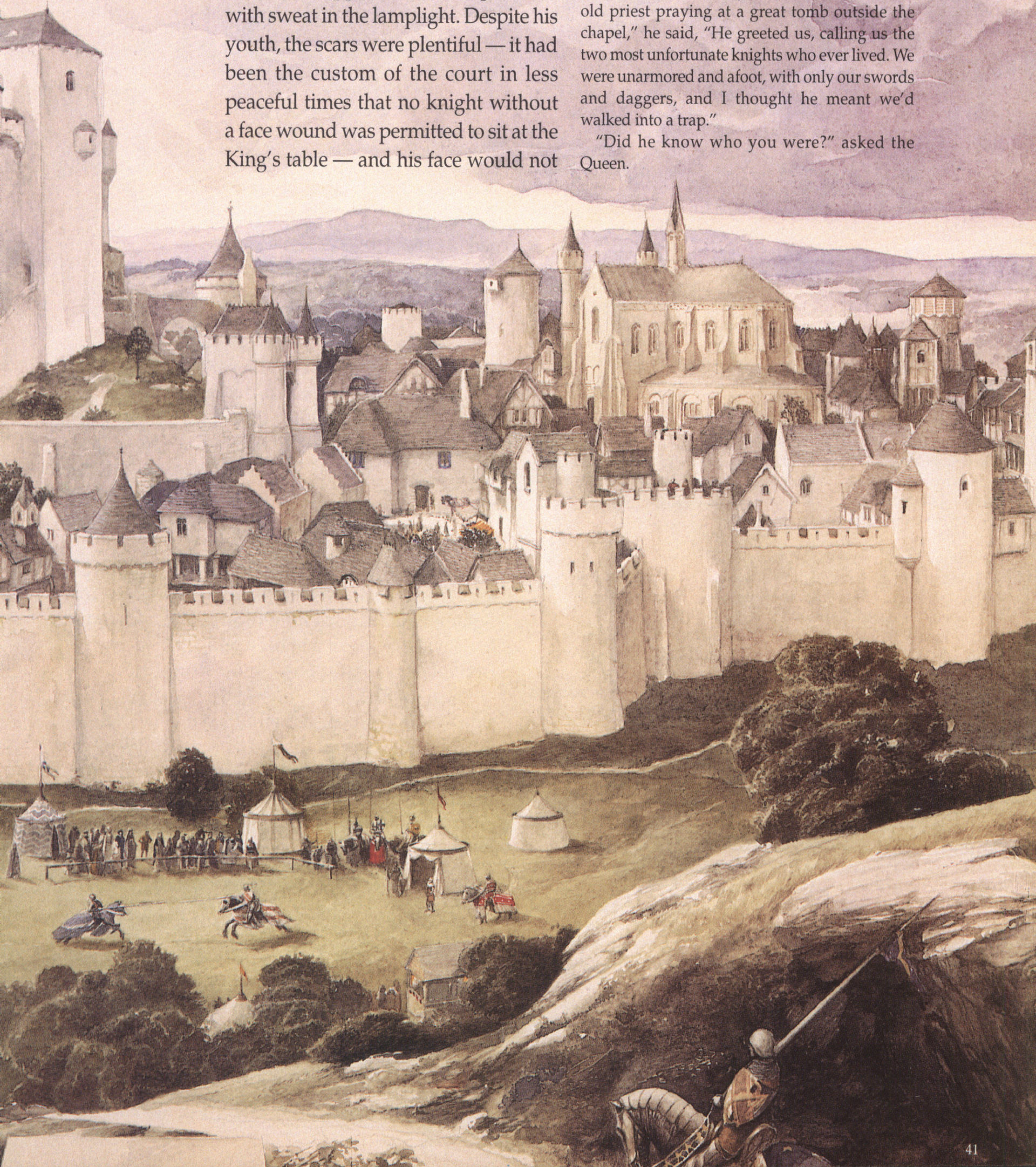


THE KNIGHT STOOD before the King and Queen, still in his armor. His face was flushed, except where it was scarred, and his close-cropped black hair glistened with sweat in the lamplight. Despite his youth, the scars were plentiful — it had been the custom of the court in less peaceful times that no knight without a face wound was permitted to sit at the King's table — and his face would not

have been beautiful even without them. But his body was muscular and powerful, and even in armor he moved with the grace of some mythical beast, part cat, part dragon. He had been the Queen's lover for four years, and was also dearly loved by the King. He drew a deep breath, feeling as out of place in their chamber as a dead rat on a banquet table.

"We were on our way to Mass, and we saw an old priest praying at a great tomb outside the chapel," he said, "He greeted us, calling us the two most unfortunate knights who ever lived. We were unarmored and afoot, with only our swords and daggers, and I thought he meant we'd walked into a trap."

"Did he know who you were?" asked the Queen.



The knight nodded. "Mordred asked him why we were so unfortunate, and the priest told him that," he hesitated, "that he was the son of the greatest king England would ever know, and that he would destroy him."

"How did Mordred take this?" asked the king, softly.

"He laughed; he told the priest his father was the late king Lot and that he'd had no hand in his destruction, and the priest laughed back. He said Mordred was no more Lot's son than water was dry; he named *you* as Mordred's father." He resisted the urge to stare down at the fresh rushes on the floor, and looked the King squarely in the face. "He then said that you'd had all the baby boys born that May-day cast out to sea in a boat that sank, drowning all but him."

There was a long silence in the small chamber, and then the Queen asked, "And what did the priest say to you, Lance?"

"Nothing," replied the knight. "Mordred was standing nearer the old man than I was, and he drew his sword and slew him before I could prevent it. I wish now that I'd killed him there and —"

"No," said the King, his face grey. He tried to smile, but only succeeded in grimacing. "Nothing else the old man said was true; why should the prediction that Mordred would destroy me be different?" He stared at the horn window, watching it grow dark, then reached for the Queen's hand.

"Mordred does not favour Lot," said Guenever, quietly. "It has often been remarked on —"

"Neither do Agravaire or Gareth," replied the King, wearily. "I wouldn't swear that any of them are Lot's sons, except perhaps Gawaine; Margawse has long had a passion for young knights. Apart from their other obvious attractions, it kept them loyal to her rather than to Lot." He shook his head, "I don't know who Mordred's father may have been, but it wasn't I. I've never lain with a woman in my life, Guen; you must believe that."

"And the story about the boat?" asked Lancelot.

"That may be true; I've heard it before," replied the King. "But it was none of my doing; even had I wanted to, my arm wasn't so long as to reach to Lothian and Orkney, not with Lot and Margawse still alive. Lot might have done it, or it might simply be a slander."

"What would you have me do, sire?"

"Nothing."

"But if Mordred believes these tales —"

Arthur shrugged his mighty shoulders, "Mordred is an intelligent young man, and I have no other heir ..."

Guenever stared. "Arthur!"

"You may go, Lance," said the King, his voice betraying his weariness, "If you would, watch Mordred for me, and tell me who else he tells about this, and see that he comes to no harm."

Lancelot bowed his scarred head. "Yes, my liege." They watched him walk out and close the door, then Guenever said softly, "Mordred was born on May-day?"

"Or the night before. It's difficult, now, to find anyone who was there and might remember. Why?"

Guenever's lips moved slightly as she calculated. "So he was begotten the summer before. Was that during her time as ambassador from Lot's court?"

"Yes," replied Arthur. "Lot must have known that the child wasn't his, but that doesn't make him mine. Margawse had her own knights there to protect her, and there were many others at court who she could have seduced easily enough. Oh, she wiggled her eyelids and chest at me while she was here, but only succeeded in making herself look foolish. Neither of us knew then that she was my sister; Merlin did not tell us who my father was until much later," He sighed. "I wish he were still here."

"Your father?"

"No, Merlin. He warned me about Mordred before he was born — he even said it would be better if he died as young as possible, though he never suggested a massacre of boy-babies. If I'd done that so soon after being crowned, it would surely have destroyed me; no knight would have sworn allegiance to a murderer of children." He closed his eyes. Merlin had also advised him not to marry Guen-

ever, warning him that she would fall in love with Lancelot, but he'd ignored his counsel. Though he was fond of Guenever, their marriage had been politically motivated. Guenever's father Leodegrance had been a staunch ally of Uther Pendragon's, and Arthur had badly wanted his support. Unfortunately, Leodegrance had also shared the Pendragon's hatred of sodomites — and he was offering a dowry of a hundred knights and the great round table, the wheel of a giant's chariot that Uther had given him.

The Queen had remained virgin until her thirtieth year, when Lancelot had come to Camelot. Like Arthur, she had soon fallen in love with the young man, and the king had appointed him her champion and bodyguard as a gift to both of them. Occasionally, Lancelot's conscience would trouble him, and he would leave Camelot on quests, but always returned to Guenever. His King he loved without desire, just as Arthur had come to love Guen, and none of the ill that Merlin had predicted had come to pass.

"Mordred is your sister's son; you *can't* acknowledge him as your own."

"No," replied Arthur. "But I need an heir, Guen, or all we've achieved will melt away like snow as soon as I'm dead. You don't remember what Britain was like between my father's dying and my becoming King, with no one to unite the baronies and lesser kingdoms, and Cerdic and Claudas and ... if you were to marry Lance after I die, then it might gain us a few more years, but even he would need a successor eventually,"

"And what about Mordred?"

"If he should ask any of us, we can tell him the truth; what more can we do?"

SIR DINADAN LAY ACROSS ARTHUR'S bed and mused. "Finding the father of a child of Margawse's would be like going on a quest for all the splinters of the true cross." Arthur snorted, and removed his crown — a thin circlet of gold, designed to be worn inside a helmet, but which somehow felt heavier than his jousting armor. Dinadan, better known as a satirist than a fighter, had been his friend for many years, and his lover since Camelot had been built. "Don't say that in front of her sons, for Jesu's sake."

Dinadan looked up innocently. "So she had a passion for young men, and indulged it when she could; where's the harm in that? And what did they think that fool Lamorak was doing in her chamber every night? Who do *you* think Mordred's father was?"

"I don't know. I think she actually wanted a child who would give her power; she tried hard enough to seduce me," Dinadan laughed aloud, and the King grudgingly smiled, "I could ill afford to be amused at the time. I'm afraid Leodegrance was still alive and very influential and I was terrified of being unmasked — we all believe Lot had sent her down here as a spy, but Margawse never used that against me," he said, as though it had just occurred to him.

"Probably too upset that anyone could resist her."

"Perhaps, but it gave her a weapon, one that neither she nor Lot ever used ... " He shrugged, collapsed onto the bed next to Dinadan, then turned on his side and kissed him. "Who was the second most powerful man in court twenty-three years ago?"

"Merlin. Not exactly a youngster, but he always liked pretty women. So has Kay; pity few of them return the liking. I think it's his tongue, myself; too sharp, and he likes using it too much, it could do someone a lot of damage ... " Dinadan looked Arthur up and

down. "Kay was young then, too, and as seneschal and your brother, he might have enough influence to interest Margawse. But Mordred doesn't exactly look like any of you."

"No." Mordred was tall and handsome, and his hair was golden, as Arthur's had been in his youth — but there the resemblance ended. He didn't resemble Margawse, either; she'd been tall, wide-hipped and full-breasted, with green eyes, a powerful laugh and long hair the color of fresh blood. Sir Kay was brown-eyed and running to fat, and his thinning hair was brown; Mordred, though well-muscled, gave an impression of slightness, of hunger. Partly it was his narrow face and his dark eyes — deep and intense, like those of his grandfather Gorlois, or his Aunt Morgan.

"Perhaps he doesn't believe it ... and even if he does, why should he love you less for thinking you're his father?"

THERE WERE SEATS FOR A HUNDRED AND FORTY-ONE KNIGHTS AT the Round Table, several of them never used except by the palace cats. Margawse's sons watched silently as the name of Tristram magically appeared in gold letters on the seat that had previously belonged to Sir Marhaus.

"They say that Lancelot was barely able to defeat him," murmured Mordred to Gawaine a few hours later when the feast had ended and the brothers had retired to Mordred's chambers. It had been two years since his encounter with the priest near Peningues, though he had never mentioned the incident, "Do you remember that Merlin predicted that the two greatest knights and best lovers would fight beside Colombe's tomb?" Gawaine merely grunted from behind his cup of wine, "Strange, when we consider how many ladies you and Gaheris have loved ... everyone knows that Tristram is loved by Mark's wife, La Beale Isoud, but who do you suppose Lancelot's lady might be?"

"I neither know nor care," replied Gawaine, quietly.

"Fitting, though, that he has taken the seat of a man he killed." He glanced at Agravaine and Gaheris, then into his cup before saying, "I wonder whose seats ours were, before we came to sit in them. Do you remember, Gawaine?" No answer. "Weren't you once the second greatest of Arthur's knights, or was that Lamorak?"

"Hold your tongue," replied Gawaine, as the aging Agravaine's once-beautiful face turned pale. "The King already has a fool, he doesn't need another,"

"And the fool he has, he loves dearly," said Mordred. "Gods, but we are a sad and sorry lot."

"If ye're talking about our father, now —" said Gaheris, unsteadily getting to his feet and reaching for his belt knife.

"Your father," snapped Mordred. Gaheris froze, then fell back down on his stool, almost upsetting it. The others stared in silence, and then Gawaine said, "So that's it."

"Yes," Mordred turned to Gareth. "Get out of here, keep your pretty hands clean." Gareth turned to Gawaine, who nodded, then walked unsteadily out of the room.

"You knew?" asked Mordred.

His eldest brother shrugged. "I was old enough when ye were born to count the months, even if *they* weren't. Gareth was the only one still at home; I don't know what he may have heard. Who told ye?"

"A priest, near Peningues. He's dead now."

"Did he say who your father was?"

"Arthur."

Gawaine snorted. "That's ridiculous."

"Why? Because he's a sodomite? Our mother could have seduced a coil of rope."

"You dare!" snapped Gaheris. Gawaine, moving with surprising speed and precision for a man so obviously drunk, grabbed Gaheris's right wrist and twisted it, forcing him to drop his knife. "Hear him out."

"You know it's true." Mordred sneered at Gaheris. "You murdered her, not for lying with your father's killer, but out of jealousy because she wouldn't lie with you. You would have murdered Lamorak, too, but even naked and unarmed and half asleep he was too quick for

you, so you let us think *he'd* murdered her."

Gawaine let go Gaheris's arm as though it were something indescribably foul. "Is this true?" Gaheris glared at him, but said nothing, and Gawaine slapped him across the face with all his strength.

"Oh, excellent," said Agravaine, the colour slowly seeping back into his face. "How's he going to talk with a broken neck?"

Mordred laughed bitterly. "Well, that's Lothian justice for you, isn't it?"

"I didn't mean to kill her," said Gaheris, sullenly. "It was Lamorak I wanted dead, not her; anyway, it was Agravaine's idea, but *he* didn't have the courage. *You've* killed women who were trying to save their men, Gawaine, you must understand ..."

"Then you have what you wanted," said Mordred. "Strange how everyone wants something. Pretty Gareth wants to be Lancelot in battle, pretty Agravaine wants to be Lancelot in bed ... it seems almost everyone wants to be Lancelot, except Arthur, who'd rather be pretty Guenever. I wonder what it is that Lancelot wants? To be King, perhaps?"

"And that's what ye want, isn't it?" growled Gawaine.

"I'm the King's son; who better?"

"You're no son of Arthur's, boyo," said Gawaine, advancing on his youngest brother like a great tree slowly falling. "I don't know who or what your father was, but it —"

"I *am* his son," said Mordred, thumping his chest and staring into Gawaine's blazing blue eyes. "I feel it. I know it, in here."

Gawaine spat precisely into his wine cup. "Ye'll feel the point of my spear in there, come morning. I may not be the greatest knight in court any more, but I can still —"

"Kill your own brother?"

"Half-brother." He glowered down at Mordred, then shook his head. "Arthur would pardon me."

"Arthur pardons everyone," replied Mordred. "He's pardoned more murderers than you could count; he'd pardon Lancelot and Guenever for adultery if anyone ever had the guts to accuse them — but there's one person the King can't pardon."

"And who's that?"

"Himself. If the people and the priests knew about his lust for the great Lancelot —"

"What a man *wants* isn't a sin," snapped Gawaine. "Anyway, ye have no proof."

"How he and Dinadan amuse each other, then."

"And what good would that do ye? Ye don't remember what the land was like before Arthur's day: I do. He's been the best King we've ever had."

"I agree," said Mordred, calmly. "I have no wish to usurp Arthur, merely to succeed him. Swear that you will not hinder me, Gawaine, and I'll accuse no one of anything."

Gawaine considered this, then drew his dagger from his belt. "You will swear to this, too?" he asked.

"Of course," replied Mordred.

That was remembered as the year that Arthur defeated Claudas; that Brumant l'Orgilleus was consumed by flames while sitting in the Siege Perilous; and that Lancelot first saw his bastard son Galahad, and went mad.

GALAHAD WAS SIXTEEN WHEN HIS NAME APPEARED ON THE SIEGE Perilous, the seat reserved for the greatest knight in the world; he was also the most beautiful young man anyone had seen since the arrival of Gareth Beaumains more than twenty years before. He was loved, and hated, as his father had been, and by the same people.

He had a gracelessness about him, the result of a cloistered upbringing, and soon acquired a reputation for churlish manners. He declined all offers of love, courtly and otherwise — even those of Guenever — as politely as he knew how. Dinadan may have been the first to recognize that the young knight was in love with his King — or it may have been Mordred, but Mordred spoke to few people in court, and never to Galahad.

That was the year of the quest for the Grail, and so it was that the young knight and the grey-bearded satirist were riding together

through the South March. "The King and Queen love my father well, don't they?"

"In their own ways, yes," replied Dinadan. "And your father loves them as he can. He loves the King, but does not desire him; he both loves and desires Guenever. The Queen loves your father, but she needs to possess what she loves; she believes he betrayed her by lying with your mother all those years ago, and may never forgive him. Almost everyone loves the King and your father — except for Sir Agravaine, who desires Guenever but loves only himself. Sir Kay loves no one but Arthur and Guenever, not even himself — and I love gossip, and have already filled your ears with too much of it. Who do you love, young sir?"

Galahad blushed. "The King is a great man,"

"That he is — but he is also the king, and his kingdom is more to him than his own happiness, which is why he may not always do as he pleases, no matter how much he may love you. He fears that if you were to become his heir after being his lover, you might find it difficult to keep the allegiance of many of his knights."

Galahad considered this. "Me, his heir? Is this one of your famous jokes?"

Dinadan smiled; it was well known that Galahad lacked a sense of humour. "Arthur may seem eternal, but he's as mortal as any man, and has already seen some sixty summers. When he dies he expects your father to marry Queen Guenever and become King — and you, being your father's only son, will be next in line for the throne."

The two knights rode along in silence until sunset, when they set up their pavilions. Mordred and Agravaine found them there an hour before dawn and slew them both in their sleep.

LANCELOT RETURNED TO CAMELOT A YEAR AND A DAY AFTER SETTING out on his quest for the Grail, and found the King alone, staring northwest over the battlements. It seemed to Lancelot that Arthur had aged a decade or more since Galahad had come to court; there was now more silver in his hair and beard than gold, and he moved without his old vigour. "I'm glad you're back," he said, softly, without turning around. "It seems the best of my knights have gone, and many may never return. There's been no word of Galahad in three months. Your cousin Bors said he dreamed that Galahad found the Grail and has been taken bodily to heaven, but I suppose I'm the only one who's dreamed of Dinadan. Old fool should have stayed here. How did you fare?"

"I was found unworthy," replied Lancelot as quietly. "Where is Bors?"

"He went searching for Galahad and Percivale. I wish him every success."

Lancelot nodded. "How is the Queen?"

"Not happy. She spends most of her days beating Kay at chess. I'm glad you're back," he repeated. "We all are. This is as much of my realm as I've seen in more than a year, and there are people who need to see me, but I haven't dared leave Guen with no one to defend her. Even Gawaine is gone, doing penance for killing Yvonet in a friendly joust," He shrugged. "I've made Gareth king of Lothian and Orkney; Gawaine was pleased to let him have it, and his other brothers made no protest, but it means I'm losing yet another good knight."

"When are you going?"

"In a few days. London, then Oxford, Caerleon, Cardiff, and back again before it begins to snow. Go and see Guen; she's missed you as sorely as I have."

LANCELOT WAS ASLEEP IN GUENEVER'S BED WHEN MORDRED AND thirteen knights, armed and armored as for battle, came to the door. "Traitor knight, Sir Lancelot of the Lake!" called Agravaine, loudly enough for his voice to be heard throughout the castle. "Come out of the queen's chamber for, know you well, you shall not escape."

"Who is it?" whispered Guenever.

"It sounds like Agravaine," Lancelot replied softly, "but smells more like Mordred." He looked around the dark room. "Is there anything in here that I might use as a weapon or shield?"

Guenever shook her head. "How many of them do you think there are?"

"Ten, at least." He glanced at the furniture, finding nothing that would make a dent in armor or hold against a sword for more than a few buffets, then reached for his robe and began winding it around his right arm and hand.

"Traitor knight, come out and fight!" Yelled Agravaine.

"They're going to kill us, aren't they?"

"Me, yes. They may want you alive."

"Why?"

"Because you're the Queen, and you have a better claim to the kingdom than —" He stopped.

"Arthur's dead, isn't he?"

"I don't know. If he is, Mordred can't very well accuse us of adultery ... but Mordred will have to convince people of his death before he can claim the throne. He'd have a far better claim if you were to marry him than he would as Arthur's bastard. I suspect that's the choice he'll offer you." He bit his lip. "If I'm killed, pray for my soul, and my kin will come to save you." Before she could speak, he padded over to the door. "Fair lords, leave your noise, and I shall open this door and admit you."

There was a moment's silence, and then Agravaine replied, "A wise choice. You could never defeat us all."

"First, I will have your word that the queen is not to be harmed."

"You have it."

"I must hear it from Sir Mordred." Silence. "Or is he such a coward that he has sent you to do what he dares not?"

"The Queen shall not be harmed," replied Mordred, his voice barely audible through the solid door.

"I can't hear you!"

"The Queen shall not be harmed, and you shall both be brought alive before the King."

"Before Arthur."

"Before Arthur. I swear it."

Lancelot smiled slightly, then opened the door, just wide enough for one man to enter. Sir Colgrevice charged in, and Lancelot slammed the door shut behind him and barred it, plunging the room back into darkness, and hit the knight across the face so hard that his helm was knocked askew. He caught the blade of Colgrevice's sword in his right hand, wrenched the weapon from his grasp, and thrust it through his visor. As quickly as possible, he and Guenever stripped him of his armor, which Lancelot then donned. There came a sound of splintering wood from the corridor outside.

"Someone's thought to fetch an axe, at last," muttered Lancelot, picking up Colgrevice's shield.

"Can't you take me with you?"

Lancelot shook his head. "I would need more knights to protect you, and a horse for you to ride. Bar the door when I'm gone; stay in here as long as you can." He kissed her, then donned his helmet and strode towards the door.

"Traitor knight, come out and —" Agravaine fell silent as the door opened and he saw a knight in full armor before him; before he could speak again, Lancelot brought his sword down between his neck and his shoulder, cleaving through his chest.

He heard the door slam shut and the bar slide home behind him. He held his ground, so that his foes had to climb over their fallen allies to reach him. The corridor was narrow, so that only two knights could meet him at a time, and he quickly mowed his way through them: Sir Gingalin and Sir Astamore, Sir Mador de la Porte and Sir Gromer Somir Joure, Sir Petiphase of Winchelsea and Sir Galleron of Galway, Sir Florence and Sir Lovel, Sir Meliot and Sir Melion.

When only Sir Curselaine and a barricade of dead knights remained between himself and Lancelot, Sir Mordred turned and fled. Curselaine fell a moment later, his helmet and skull in two pieces, and Lancelot clambered over the pile of armored corpses to give chase. He saw Mordred banging on the door of a chamber, and dash in as soon as it was opened. Lancelot hesitated outside for a moment, then ran to the stables.

"IS ARTHUR DEAD, THEN?"

Mordred stared sullenly through the rain at the empty road, until Gaheris repeated the question. "I don't know. Aunt Morgan sent me a message to say she saw a vision of him killed on Salisbury Plain, but that may be to come, or she may be lying."

Gaheris nodded. "What will you do if he returns?"

Mordred scowled at him, but there was a knock on the chamber door before he could speak. "Yes?"

"Sir, the Queen would speak with Sir Kay."

"Then she will speak with me," replied Mordred. "Tell her I shall attend her presently."

"Do you want me along?"

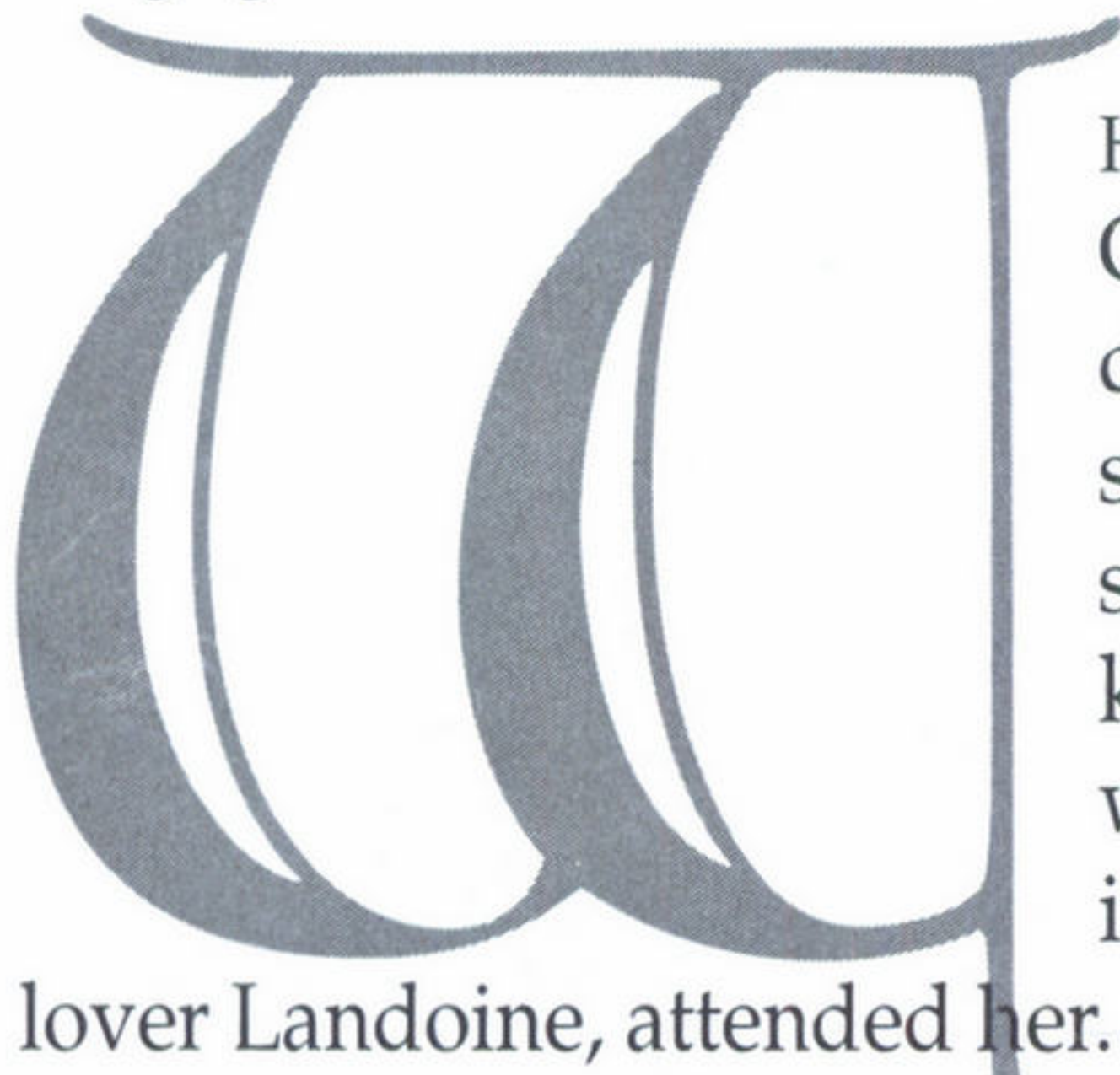
"No. Keep an eye on the road, and be sure that if Gawaine or Gareth return that they speak only to us. Tell them Lancelot has slain Agravaine, Lovel, and Florence, no more." He stood.

"Not that you hid in a lady's chamber while Lancelot was killing him?"

"Not unless you want Gareth to know who murdered our mother," replied Mordred, "and who let Lancelot ride out unchallenged."

"He was wearing Colgrevice's armor, and Colgrevice —"

"Lies dead in Guenever's chamber. I'll call you if I need help bringing him out."



HERE IS SIR KAY?" ASKED Guenever. She had dressed in her best robe; several others were strewn over the dead knight near the doorway. Four of her ladies, including Mordred's

lover Landoine, attended her.

"In his chamber," replied Mordred, smoothly, "awaiting punishment for the foul crime of sodomy. What would you with him?"

"He is seneschal of this castle; he, not you, rules in Arthur's absence." She did not refute the charge; the portly Kay loved beautiful men as well as women (he'd been one of the many men lured into Margawse's bed during her visits to Camelot), and it was well known that his sarcastic tongue lashing of young knights was often the spite of a scorned or abandoned lover. She wondered who they'd used to entrap him.

"Do you expect my knights would follow such a man — such a sinner?"

It was an obvious trap, one that Guenever avoided easily. "And your claim to the throne, Mordred? Arthur has other nephews."

"But no other sons."

"He has no sons," Guenever responded. "I don't know who your father was, Mordred. Have you asked your Aunt Morgan? I'm sure she knows."

Mordred bristled. He had asked Morgan le Fay, and he was sure she'd used her magic to look back to his conception though he was also aware of the rumors that Queen Margawse had often enjoyed three or four lovers in a night. "I do not need Dame Morgan to tell me what I already know."

"Then perhaps you will believe the Lady of the Lake. Arthur told me he would visit her, and ask her, when he came to Caerleon."

If this rocked Mordred, he contrived not to show it. "And if he does not return, Lady?"

"Do you believe he will not?"

Mordred opened his mouth to answer, then glanced at the Queen's attendants. "Lady, I would speak with you alone."

Guenever hesitated, then nodded. "Don't shut the door," she warned Landoine. "I would not wish to be accused of entertaining knights in my chamber."

"If Arthur is dead, my Lady, would it not be better for the kingdom if we were to marry?"

"For the kingdom?"

"The land must have a King; marrying you would strengthen my claim greatly."

"I am already married," said Guenever, softly. "To marry another while the King lives would be treason."

"I could have you burnt for treason tomorrow," Mordred snarled.

"If the King were dead," continued Guenever, "Lancelot's presence here would *not* be treason. But I am prepared to wait for Arthur to return."

"How long will you wait?"

Guenever smiled sweetly, "Have you heard the bards sing of Odysseus and Penelope, Mordred? I've always admired Penelope."

Suddenly, there was a shout from the corridor outside. He turned around to see a page, breathless, holding onto the door frame. "My lord, Sir Gaheris sent me to tell you that your brother Sir Gareth has returned."

Mordred glared at him, then turned back to Guenever without his expression changing, "You have fifteen days," he whispered, "On the morning of that fifteenth day, if Arthur has not returned, you will be burnt or married." And he hurried out of her room.

THE STAKE WAS SET UP IN THE SQUARE OUTSIDE ST. STEPHEN'S Church, and Guenever was led towards it clad only in her smock, while Mordred watched from the safety of a balcony. "Lancelot will rescue her," murmured Gareth, behind him.

Mordred flushed. Sir Kay had escaped the night before he was to be burnt, and he suspected that Gareth — though never a friend of Kay's — had been involved. He could ill afford another embarrassment; too many knights had already ridden out of Camelot, supposedly to search for Lancelot or Arthur or Gawaine, leaving him barely enough to maintain a guard. He had yet to appoint a seneschal to replace Kay, and the castle stank. The only good news was that no one had — as yet — risen to challenge him. "He may try," he growled. "I want you and Gaheris waiting by the gate."

"I won't fight him," replied Gareth.

"Then go unarmed, and hope he doesn't fight you, but stop him!" He turned to Gaheris. "You may arm yourself, or not, as it please you, but go with him." His half brothers stared at him coldly, but obeyed. Mordred watched as Guenever was tied to the stake, and then a horn sounded from the castle's tallest tower; four blasts, signifying four riders.

The rescue was swift, but bloody; twenty knights were slain by Lancelot and his three kinsmen, and many more fled from them before Lancelot slashed through the ropes holding Guenever to the stake. He handed the Queen a gown and kirtle before lifting her onto his horse, then rode at full speed towards the gate. Gareth stepped aside to let him pass; Gareth did not, but was knocked senseless with a buffet from Lancelot's shield. Mordred, watching in rage from the balcony, drew his sword and ran towards the gate.

An unknown defender of the Queen had ensured that the bundles of wood at the base of the stake were green and damp, producing little flame but much smoke. In the confusion, no one saw Mordred murder Gareth and Gaheris — and their deaths, like the others, were blamed on Lancelot.

ARTHUR WALKED ACROSS THE BATTLEFIELD AT CAMLAUN, HIS HORSE having been slain beneath him hours before. Gawaine's ghost had appeared to him the night before, warning him to delay the fighting until Lancelot had arrived, but an argument between two of his young knights and two of Mordred's Saxon allies — supposedly someone had drawn a sword to slay an adder spotted in the grass — had escalated into a battle which killed thousands.

Gawaine had gone to France to avenge his brothers and had

Continued on page 69

MOTHERS' DAY

BY LESLIE WHAT
Illustration by Janet Aulisio

FOR SEVEN CENTURIES The Piper and his one-hundred children have lived at the center of the world, in a cave inside the mountain overlooking *Hameln*. The cave is dark and ever-moist, with air that reeks of mold, of unwashed bodies, of excrement from toddlers who will always stay toddlers. The youngest children constantly complain of boredom; they crash into the walls like confused bats. The teens act increasingly insolent and dour. Not one of the inhabitants could say that he was truly happy, especially The Piper, who rues the day when he demanded his due.

"Why must I continue to put up with these beasts?" moans The Piper. The children, being children, do not listen. The Piper threatens to leave them, a hollow threat, for where would he go? The cave is the only home he has ever known; he doubts that he could exist for long in the world above ground. He is accustomed to living in darkness, accustomed to this place, where everything stays the same. Knowing that his lot will not improve without action, he for-

*Yearning for the pitter-patter
of little feet around the house?
You'd better read this ...*

mulates a plan. "You little fools must all have mothers," says he. "Mothers who will care for you and fix your meals, bandage your scratches, and lay cold cloths to your feverish heads. Mothers who will be stern, yet just, who will excel at discipline."

Alas, the dankness has left his pipe so warped it will not play, and he must leave his cave in search of the enchanted tree, the source of all his magic. From that tree he will fashion a new pipe. With that pipe he will entice scores of women to his enter into his service. The reward is great, yet he is filled with trepidation at the thought of leaving the sanctity of his cave.

One morning The Piper orders the eldest girl to fix breakfast for the others. The Piper walks toward the ring of light that surrounds the great rock door leading to the world above. He presses his shoulders against the door. Grunting, he heaves it open. He clammers onto the mountainside. There's a lightness to his step; for a moment he feels a sense of near joy. Children cursing at their lumpy oatmeal is the last thing he hears before the heavy door slips back into place.

He is as sick and tired of the bitter concoction as any of them, but they have long ago finished up the last of the rats, and there is nothing good to eat until he gathers up the nerve to march into the town and strike a bargain for food.

He has reason to fear he lacks bargaining skills.

His eyes burn and his skin itches from the heat of the sun. Beneath



He scours the forest for impossible to view the tree at just

him, the ground shakes from some commotion within the cave. The Piper grinds his teeth, for even here he cannot ignore those rude beings on the other side of rock, who demand that their diapers be changed at once!

He scours the forest for the enchanted tree, impossible to view unless one faces the tree at just the right angle. When at last he spies the tree, he approaches, and bows down before it. He asks its permission to cut off a branch as thick as sausage. The air in the world above is warm and dry, a strong sulfuric odor from the factories hovers just above the town. Hurry, he tells himself, hurry. He fears he will be burned up into dust if he remains much longer. The Piper traces his steps nearer to home, and crouches beneath an oak where he can watch the Weser Valley below. Curious, he thinks, how two worlds co-exist independent of one another. He pulls the leaves to dry for later use as tobacco, then takes out his knife to whittle and hollow out the branch.

Birds sing. A snake rustles the dry grass. A horsefly buzzes nearby, waiting its chance to land and sting him. These beasts do not distract him as they have in the past, for he is already distracted thinking of the children. He hates how their carrying on has affected his concentration. "Curse those horrid children," says he, spitting on the ground. How much better his life would be now had he but demanded a ransom for their safe return.

He alternates between a sense of dread and anticipation of going back to the cave. He steels his mind to finish carving his pipe. It will take some time for the wood to cure properly, but The Piper is too anxious to wait another day. He stands to play a few notes of the sweetest song the world has ever known.

Indiana No Place:

One Mother's Day at the breakfast table, Kira Dumas announced to her family — her husband Bill; their ten-year-old son, Bill Jr.; eight-year-old Ellen, small for her age; Sparky, their elderly beagle — that she was leaving. Bill Jr. pretended not to hear, and continued punching Ellen in the stomach. Ellen howled in angry pain. "Mom!" she cried, "Make him stop!" Bill Senior, who in reality had not heard his wife's announcement, again asked about the whereabouts of clean blue socks, which he was planning to wear to church. "I can't wear brown with blue," he said, pointing to his pants.

The ringing in her ears that she had suffered from all week became unbearable. "Tinnitus," the doctor had called it, and apologized because there was nothing to be done.

"Honey! Didn't you hear me?" asked Bill Senior.

"Shut up," Kira said in a snarl. Bill Senior looked mildly surprised, but was quickly distracted by the Sunday funnies. Old Sparky shuffled close to lick Kira's knee, managing to snag her stockings before having one of his increasingly frequent episodes of incontinence at her feet.

Her family watched with quizzical expressions meant to be endearing as Kira stood to walk out the door. Perhaps they did not believe that she was leaving. "Have a nice day," she called.

She heard the dog whimper, the children wail, her husband threaten to spank them.

The day was nippy but clear, a day on which she would normally have reminded her children to wear their coats when going outside. She found herself standing on I-65, her right thumb stuck into the lane. A shiny milk truck slowed to stop. Beneath the squealing brakes she heard a more melodic whistle, the tune strangely soothing and familiar.

THE TOWNSFOLK WHISPER TO ONE another that something is rotten in their fair city. Two score of strange women have gathered here. These women came alone yet now prowl the streets en masse. They sleep at the Dorint Hotel, as many as four to a room.

At first they seemed lost, though when interrogated, adamantly refused to leave Hameln.

One day the clouds above the town open to the heavens. The winds pick up and swirl dust into patterns like tiny galaxies. A single beam of white sunlight shoots, true as an arrow, into the heart of the mountain where, legend has it, the Piper is said to have taken all the children.

The townspeople stop whatever they are doing to stand outside and stare at the mountain. "Listen," says one old man to his wife, "Do you hear that hornpipe?"

"No," says his wife of sixty years. For some time he has suspected she is hard of hearing.

Their daughter, visiting for the day from Munich, says, "How beautiful the music!" and announces, quite suddenly, that she will not be staying for dinner.

Milano, Italia:

13 Maggio.

Violetta must have asked her husband a thousand times to lower his voice when berating her in front of the children. She drank a cup

the enchanted tree, unless one faces the right angle.

of wine, wishing she had something more potent to mask the headache and ringing in her ears.

"Violetta! Get me dinner," said her husband.

She could take it no more, and said, "Enough!"

Her husband seemed surprised, and abruptly sat back at the table. It wasn't long, however, before he was pounding his fist, demanding once again to be served. The oldest boy, Giorgio, brought out the bread basket and Violetta watched the four boys fight with their father over who would eat the biggest chunk. It ruined her appetite, the way they behaved like animals.

She cleared her throat. "I'm prepared to go," she said.

Her husband laughed. The children, perhaps following his example, giggled.

"Accept my apology," she whispered to the little ones. She served the tomato salad and a brick of hard cheese. "Arrivederci," Violetta said, and left by the side door.

THE TOWNSFOLK STARE IN AMAZEMENT AS THE STRANGERS, AND A few of their own, gather in the cobblestone square to form an orderly line. From there, the women — the young, the old, the ageless — mouths pursed in beautiful smiles, fingers spread and palms raised to the sky, smiling with sisterly love — begin their journey to the mountain. They reach the mountain foot and reconfigure their line to hike along the path in single file.

The old man and his wife watch the spectacle with friends and neighbors who, like them, have lived in Hameln all their lives. "Isn't that your daughter?" someone says, but the old man, scoffs, certain that his daughter will realize her madness in time to turn back.

Suddenly, a great door opens along the mountain face, revealing a black chasm. The women squeal with delight, hands clasped in wonder and seeming prayer. They run and are enveloped in darkness. The old man's wife starts forward. The old man suspects it is not to go after their daughter and holds her back by clutching her skirt and arm.

"Let me loose," she begs. "I hear him calling."

The old man tightens his grip.

The chasm closes to a slit and then disappears, and the mountain is as it has always been. People rub their eyes and stare at each other, perhaps afraid to speak about what they have seen. The old man wonders if they have experienced some mass hallucination, but refuses to allow any discussion of the matter, even later, when his wife weeps over the loss of their daughter.

THE PIPER SMILES POLITELY AT EACH NEW VISITOR. "WELCOME," HE says, "Welcome." The women meet his glance, but pass him by in search of their new quarters. Perhaps, he thinks, they do not realize that he has called them here to serve him. Given time they will learn, he thinks. For the next few days he works hard seeing to everyone's

comfort. He barely sleeps, as there are now many extra mouths to feed. Tomorrow he must go above ground to dig up bulbs and roots and sour grass for stew. As he had expected this period of adjustment he tries to be of good cheer.

Still, it surprises him that the children are no better behaved than before. He had thought the simple presence of these women would be enough to make some difference. In a few more days, as he is washing the feet of the one known as Kira, he begins to wonder if something has gone wrong with his plan.

"What hurts the most," said Yitzhak Berhman (interviewed by the *Jerusalem Post*) about the mysterious disappearance of his wife Sarah, "is imagining the ease of the seduction. I mean, the guy calls her once, and shpt! She's gone. She didn't even give me a second chance."

The Piper does not know how difficult it is to find good help these days. The women he has brought here have all refused to care for, as they call them, other people's children. Instead, they spend their days frolicking in a warm spring. They teach each other languages The Piper cannot speak nor understand. They sing and drink freely of trollius nectar, which is said to contain an intoxicant. Worse, the eldest girl, no doubt taken in these wanton creatures, has lately begun refusing to complete her chores. She thumbs her nose at him when he beckons her, and sneaks away to cavort with the women who will not be mothers.

Ernesto saw his Men's group every other Tuesday in a small room provided by the Our Lady Of Guadalupe Catholic Church. At the meetings' end they took turns praying for their wives' safe return. Each bent his knees before the shrine of St. Jude to ask for a second chance. Each prayed before the saint of impossible causes, but after so many years, only Ernesto still expected a miracle.

Has the Piper forgotten how to play a song of leadership? It seems his music does not appeal to one's desire to serve, but rather to one's need to escape. The Piper himself is not immune; the music makes him wish he could abandon this miserable life.

He stands in the world above, and aims his pipe in a new direction. He waits for the winds to pick up and spread his message across the globe. He hopes to encounter some primitive tribe, some backward people whose sensibilities differ from those of these modern women.

If he were a religious man he might ask for guidance. If he were an honest man he might admit defeat. But The Piper is a stubborn man. He decides his pipe is out of tune. Again he seeks out the enchanted tree, and whittles another pipe. When this new pipe works no better, he sinks into despond, for now The Piper suspects it is the world which is out of tune, and there is little to be done about that. The Piper does not entertain the thought that it is he who is out of tune. That he has had his day and must now have his night, unhappily ever after. 🍷



M. F. ...

3 11 11

3

FALLING

She leaned over the sink, still spotted with grease from last night's meal, and mashed the Gaines Burger between her fingers. She hated the smell of the dog food — it reminded her of ancient tennis shoes and unwashed feet — but taking care of Rufus was her job, just like it was her job to take care of Hiram. Rufus's tail beat a rhythm on the kitchen floor. Big dumb creature. He didn't know this was his last meal.

She grabbed the blue plastic dog dish and stepped over the dog. He was a setter mix, with long red setter fur, and would have been pretty if Hiram brushed him and removed the burrs. Instead, Rufus's fur was matted and gone in patches where the fleas had gotten too bad. She had spent fifteen hard earned dollars on a cedar bed because she didn't want the fleas in the house, but the damn dog wouldn't lay in it. Wasted money, Hiram said, and as usual, he was right.

Only it was his dog. His dog, his house, his woman. His, his, his. There wasn't any room for hers. Never had been, never would be.

She set the dish in its place next to the unused cedar bed. The dog shoved his face into the bowl before she even let go. His cold nose brushed the fleshy side of her hand. She snatched it away as if he'd bit her.

Damn thing. Three hours from dead and he was already spooking her. She wasn't sure if she had the stomach for this.

She wasn't sure if she hadn't.

She went back to the sink, washed her hands with the generic dish soap and rubbed them dry on a thread-bare dishtowel, one of the few remaining from

We try to remember that angels often come to mortals in disguise, but we often forget to inquire just what they might be disguising.

KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH
Illustration by Michael Gibbs

her wedding presents. Then she leaned her forehead on the cool glass of the window above the sink.

She could just tie up the dog in the bedroom and burn down the house. There was a gallon of gasoline in the shed, plenty of rags and matches. It would be easy.

Maybe they'd even think the dog's bones were hers.

The idea made her shudder. Hiram would know. He'd know what she'd done, and he'd find her. And after he beat her senseless, he'd stick the law on her. Arson was a crime. She knew that much. A felony. Butchering a man's dog and leaving it on his back porch, that was just an annoyance.

And a message. One that even Hiram, big, ham-handed Hiram, wasn't too dumb to miss.

HE'D LEFT THE PICK-UP TRUCK. SHE'D WAITED THREE WEEKS FOR this day. Three weeks for him to ride with Wheezer to the shop. She hadn't even dared to suggest it. He'd want to know why she would need the truck. If he even bothered to ask. Last time, he'd just slapped her across the face until her lower lip split and her cheek swelled so large it looked like she kept an apple in it.

There, he'd said. So's you look pretty for that lover a yours.

Lover. As if anyone would take her. The pretty'd been beat out of her ten years ago. Now she was so skinny her clothes hung on her. Her hair, always too thin, hung limply around her face. Hiram wouldn't let her cut it. She'd lost two teeth to her marriage, both up front, and even though she'd saved one in milk just like she read in a ladies' magazine, she found out, when she reached the dentist, that she couldn't afford the price to stick the tooth back in.

Thirty-three and she looked older than her mother had at fifty.

It was time.

It was past time, if truth be told. She just hadn't been ready before.

She was ready now.

She sighed once, making a little fog circle on the window, then pushed away from the sink. The dog was licking the last crumb of Gaines Burger out of the dish.

She took the leash off its peg and the dog looked up, tail flapping, tongue lolling, big dumb eyes bright with the prospect of a walk.

"Come on," she said. "Last supper, last ride. It's a day of lasts for you."

She hooked the leash to the dog's collar and pushed open the screen door. On the way past the gun rack, she grabbed the newest shotgun, and slipped a box of shells into the pocket of her grandmother's apron.

JOHNSON CREEK ROAD, UP PAST THE CHERRY HILL TRAILER PARK, turned into a one-lane dirt path that led to an ancient clear-cut no one had bothered to replant. The land was desolate there, and barren. A fire had gone through two summers before, and not even the underbrush had dared grow back. On those few days that she'd had the truck, she'd take it up there to sit and be alone. Hiram didn't know that's where she went. He didn't think about what she did as long as his house was clean, his food was prepared, and his wife was waiting when he got home.

It was only when she asked that she got in trouble.

So she didn't ask any more.

Not God, not the Devil, not anybody.

Certainly not Hiram.

The dumb dog seemed to enjoy being in the back of the truck. She'd half hoped he'd fall out and choke himself, but despite her heavy foot on both the pedal and brake, the dog kept his balance. He bounced like a child's spring toy on the rutted road, but every time she glanced in the rearview, he seemed to be grinning.

At least he'd go out happy.

Which was more than she could say for herself.

She finally found her spot, a gravel turn-around designed for logging trucks. She parked, set the emergency brake and got out of the pick-up.

The dog wiggled with glee. His tail was banging the metal, loud thumps that echoed in the stillness. She stared at him for a moment, weighing everything. If she shot him in the truck, she wouldn't have to put him back in it.

She wouldn't get any blood on her clothes — at least, not until she put him on the porch. And, truth be told, she didn't need to put him on the porch. She could leave him in the truck and walk off. If she had half a day's head start, Hiram would never find her.

She took out the shotgun and the shells, her mouth dry. When they'd been courting, Hiram took her into the mountains and taught her to shoot. *No woman should live in the west and not know a gun*, he'd said. He'd valued her then. She'd been a prize he'd won, a pretty bright-eyed girl filled with hopes and dreams. Somewhere she'd stopped being a prize, and even before that, the dreams were gone.

The gun was heavy. She loaded it carefully, her fingers shaking, the dog whimpering for his freedom. She couldn't look at him. It was one thing to think about Hiram's face when Wheezer dropped him off, the dog splayed and bloody on the porch. It was another to shoot the only real companion she'd had the last few years.

A sacrifice, for her sake. Neither she nor the dog had done anything to deserve Hiram anyway. The dog's existence was just as miserable as hers. She was doing the charitable thing.

She was putting it out of its misery.

She licked her lips. They were chapped and raw. She'd been biting them again and not even realizing it. The air was chill with

early spring and, in the distance, insects buzzed softly. The dog whimpered again, then sat down, clearly confused by her actions. She raised the shotgun, put the dog in the sight, and rested her right forefinger on the trigger.

The dog cocked his head, eyes bright, uncertain what she was about to do, but trusting her to do it well. Like she had been when she met Hiram, all fresh and bright and full of curiosity.

Full of trust.

The dog cringed in front of Hiram.

The dog trusted her.

"God damn it all to hell," she said, and set the gun down carefully so that it wouldn't go off by accident. "God damn us all to hell."

He probably already had, and she was in it. Spending eternity with Hiram and Rufus, the dog who trusted her.

She sat on a stump and crossed her left arm over her stomach, as if she were holding the hurt inside. The dog whined and his tail thumped against the metal. He still didn't understand the game, but he knew that the rules had just changed.

All those weeks of wishing for this moment. Then the opportunity came, and she couldn't even get her revenge right. Maybe she was spineless, just like Hiram said.

"Hey ya."

Butchering a man's dog and leaving it on his back porch, that was just an annoyance. And a message.

She whirled, hand on her mouth. The shotgun was too far away to grab.

A man stood on the crest of the ridge. He was lean and long limbed — rangy, her mother would have said — with a natural athleticism that made his cityfied cowboy boots look less like an affectation and more like a reward. His jeans fit snug and so, she suspected, did the shirt beneath his brown leather bomber jacket. His hair was dark and side parted, just a shade too long.

The only thing she couldn't quite see was his face.

"Didn't mean to spook ya," he said, holding his hands to the side to show that they were empty.

"N-no one comes up here," she said, and cursed herself for sounding stupid.

"Now that's not true." He let his hands drop. "You're here and I'm here. We're not no one."

Somehow he'd made it down the hill to her. The dog wasn't even barking. He stopped beside her stump. He smelled of aftershave, soap, and leather. "Jake Haskill."

She nodded, stood, and wiped her fingers on her grandmother's apron. The shells pulled it sideways, and she tried to tug it into place. "Hi," she said.

He grinned. His face wasn't sinister at all. It was pleasant, with even features and a thin nose, and hooded, sensual eyes. "When someone gives his name, it's polite to give yours back."

"Oh." She made herself smile, felt the falseness of it in the rigidity of her muscles. "Mrs. Hiram Brewster."

"No," he said softly. "I mean *your* name."

It'd been so long since anyone'd used it that she'd almost forgotten she'd had one. "Lisa."

"Well, Lisa Brewster, your dog looks mighty uncomfortable in that truck."

Rufus was straining at his collar, leaning off the side of the flatbed.

"He does, doesn't he?" she said as she went to him. She untied his leash and opened the tailgate. Rufus jumped down, then led her back to the stranger.

Jake Haskill crouched, making the movement look easy. He held out his hands and Rufus went right to them. His fingers were long, supple, and clean, the nails trimmed and white. Hiram's hands were oil-stained, and permanent grit stained his nails. He bit them, making his stubby fingers look even shorter.

"A brush, a flea bath, and this dog'd be beautiful," he said.

She flushed. She knew that, but she had never done it. She'd always thought of the dog as Hiram's even though, in truth, he was hers.

Haskill's eyes met hers over the dog's head. "Funny," he said, "how people and their dogs look alike sometimes."

She smiled — a real smile this time. "You saying I need a flea bath?"

"No." He stood. "I'm saying you need some attention." His hands approached her face so slowly that she could see the calluses on his fingertips. She had plenty of time to pull away, but she didn't. When he touched her, his fingers were soft. They brushed her hair off her face, touched the fading yellow and green bruise from the night of her decision, and then traced the line that had formed between the edge of her left nostril and the corner of her mouth.

The movement wasn't sexual. It was caring. Her eyes burned and she backed away.

He let his hand drop. "The man who did that should be shot." His voice remained low and caring. "Not his dog."

She blinked, wondering how he knew. "You from here?" she

asked, thinking maybe he'd seen her and Hiram that night he sent her into the canned goods at the Safeway.

"Not any more," he said. He eased out of the crouch, using Rufus's back for leverage. When he stood, he was nearly twice her height.

"I could shoot him for you," he said so quietly she wasn't certain she heard him right.

"Who *are* you?" she asked.

He smiled then. It was as if a light shone down from the heavens. Blinding.

"I'm your guardian angel," he said.

SHE WASN'T SURE SHE BELIEVED IN ANGELS. SHE WASN'T SURE SHE believed in God any more, let alone his minions on Earth. She'd left it all behind as a sort of Sunday school fancy. The angel fad a few years ago had left her bemused and wistful, wishing that she'd

believed in something so strongly.

But she believed him. She wasn't sure how or why, but she believed him. Enough so that she drove home at his insistence, cleaned the house, brushed and bathed the dog, and then did the same for herself.

He'd promised he would come and save her, and she believed him.

Hiram didn't notice the changes except to bitch that she'd move the remote from the arm of his chair to a neat box on top of the end table. She used to think she liked it when he didn't notice. He never touched her then. But now she felt an odd hollowness, as if he should have seen the changes in her, as if he should have known how close he'd come to losing dog, truck, and wife.

But Hiram didn't have a guardian angel.

He didn't need one.

He had her.

Three days she waited, and they were the longest of her life. The cycle was starting again. She could feel it in Hiram's agitation, in his restless movements, hear it in the way he slammed the truck door at night. His voice grew sharper, his gaze clearer, and his grip tighter. He watched her instead of the television. She felt the tension in her back, in her arms. Once he'd brushed her shoulder while she was doing dishes and she'd jumped. Her fear made him smile, and for the rest of the night, he bumped her at odd

moments, hoping she would jump again.

She didn't, at least not in the way he wanted. She'd jumped later, when the wind kicked up outside, knocking the garbage can into the house. She'd thought it was Haskill. She'd *hoped* it was Haskill. And she'd been wrong.

It started after dinner the third night. He'd brought home two steaks — nearly eight dollars in meat — and told her to cook it right. Usually she'd tried to make him cook the steaks, but this time he wouldn't. It felt like a test, it probably was a test, and she knew right away she'd fail.

That's how his tests were. If he had to test her, she'd already done something wrong.

She broiled the steaks medium rare, made some glorified potatoes, and added a fresh salad. She didn't use the good china — those had been his mother's and would have seemed obvious — but she used the wedding plates, the ones that were given to them instead of the Coronet that she bought when she learned his temper sometimes ran to smashing dishes.

He didn't say anything as he ate, and he left the TV off — a bad sign. He didn't allow any radio either, and he drank three beers before dinner. She hovered. She made certain his coffee cup was always full, his salt-and-pepper shakers were beside his fork as he

*She wasn't sure she
believed in
angels. She
wasn't sure she
believed in God
any more, let alone
his minions ...*

liked them, and his salad dressings arrayed in front of his plate so that his choices were visible. He didn't look at her while he chewed. Instead he studied the food as if he were inspecting it.

She was so nervous that she couldn't eat, but she forced bites down. He'd yell at her for not eating, for wasting a good steak, but he'd never notice if she ate too much.

Unless, of course, she started wearing it on her hips.

Finally, when he was done, she whisked his plate away and put a bowl of canned peaches and chocolate sauce in front of him. He stirred them around, letting the juice mix with the sauce, before he dropped his spoon. It landed with a clatter against the side of the bowl.

"Why'd you have to go changing things?" he said, his voice a half notch too loud.

The dog whined and thumped his tail against the linoleum.

"I didn't change nothing," she said, and hoped she didn't sound too defensive.

"The remote. I couldn't find the goddamn remote yesterday. And the dog. It's a boy dog. He don't need no fancy shampoos."

At the mention of the word "dog", Rufus slinked behind the television. He always disconnected the cable wire when he did that. She prayed that Hiram wouldn't see.

"I used a flea bath," she said. "The house was infested."

"Then leave him outside." Hiram belched and pushed his plate away. "Dogs don't need baths."

She nodded, thinking the dog was never meant to live outside either. Rufus, for all his size, was unable to tolerate extremes of any sort.

"And you've been looking a little too clean yourself." He grabbed her wrist. His fingers wrapped around the bone, squeezing tight. His knuckles were white. He was cutting off the blood flow to her hand. "Who is he?"

"There's no one, Hiram," she said, wishing she could yank her hand away. That would only aggravate him more. The only chance she had was to remain calm. Sometimes that calmed him.

"No one," Hiram said. "No one. That's why you're wearing nice clothes now and combing your hair."

She had taken to wearing some shirts that she'd found in the back of her closet, shirts that she had liked and hadn't wanted to ruin. It was a small concession to her meeting with Jake Haskill, small enough, she'd thought, that Hiram wouldn't notice.

But Hiram noticed everything.

"Who is he?" Hiram asked. Her hand was turning red. It tingled.

"Hiram," she said softly, "you're hurting me."

He brought her arm up to her chest and shoved, letting go at the same time. She tumbled backwards and slid into the cabinets. A knob slammed into the side of her back, sending a sharp pain through her side and stomach. She felt the blood drain from her face.

"Now," he said, "I'm hurting you. Get up."

She couldn't. Her back hurt too much. But she put an arm on the countertop and pulled just the same. If she didn't try to do what he wanted, he would hurt her again.

He stood in front of her, his face red, his eyes small and bloodshot, a tiny piece of steak in the fine hairs on his upper lip. "Who —"

A knock on the door made him stop, whirl toward the sound, and then back toward her.

"Is that him?"

Then, without waiting for her answer, he stalked to the door,

pulling it open. Wind whipped in, bringing large drops of rain, and a chill so deadly that she felt it deep in the hot kitchen.

"What the hell do you want?" Hiram asked.

"My car broke down. I was wondering if I could use your phone."

The voice was Jake's. It made her heart pound. She had almost believed she'd invented him.

"You're a goddamn yuppie. You should have your own fucking phone. Go down to the Iverson's. They're the next house over." And Hiram slammed the door shut.

She whimpered, and caught the sound almost before it left her throat. Then she eased herself up, using the counter for leverage, and when she reached the top, she saw Hiram, staring in shock at his own reflection in the kitchen window.

And Jake Haskill behind him, Hiram's shotgun — the gun she'd had at the clearcut — jabbing the center of Hiram's back.

"A man shouldn't beat up a woman. For anything." Jake shoved Hiram inside.

He staggered once, then said, "I didn't —"

"You did. Look at her face. The bruises are still fading. I'll bet an X-ray'd show four or five broken ribs healed up now, but broken just the same. And no woman in her thirties should be missing two teeth, Hiram. You used to think she was the prettiest girl you ever saw. Look what you did to all that beauty."

Haskill's words made her want to hide her face. She'd thought maybe she was still pretty after seeing him at the clearcut. Hadn't he said she'd clean up real good? She had, but not good enough.

Nothing was ever good enough.

Hiram staggered forward, glancing over his shoulder as he did. Haskill was pushing him with the gun. He stopped shoving when Hiram reached his favorite chair. The remote sat on the arm, right where he'd left it.

Rufus tried to make himself small behind the TV.

She still couldn't catch her breath. The pain shot along her back, around, and into her heart.

"Laws in this country," Haskill said. "There're too lenient for guys like you." He poked Hiram in the back. "Turn around."

Hiram did, his shirt stretched over his chest, his pants falling slightly, his belly protruding. His skin was a sickly gray-white.

"She could press charges, and all your buddies'd show up and say that you never did nothing they didn't do, and your marriage seemed fine to them, and the judge, with no real evidence except her word against yours, would maybe give you community service or slap an injunction on you to stay away." The safety was off. She couldn't remember if the shot gun was loaded. Had she taken the bullets out? Had she brought the gun home? She couldn't remember that either.

"Who are you?" Hiram whispered. Sweat ran down his face. His shirt, dry a few moments before, was blotchy. His hands were shaking. She'd never seen him terrified before.

She stood, pain forgotten.

"What do you want with me?"

Haskill didn't move. Hiram cowered against his chair, looking more like the dog than a human being. No. Even Rufus had had more dignity when he'd looked down the barrel of the gun.

"Who are you?" Hiram asked, as if that were the important question. He apparently didn't see the need to deny what he'd done to her, or what he would do to her when Haskill left.

"I'm your judge, jury, and executioner," Haskill said. He grinned, took one step back to improve his aim, and —

*"I'm your judge,
jury and
executioner,"
Haskill said. He
grinned, took
one step back to
improve his aim.*

"No!" she said. Her voice came back with force.

Haskill stopped, looked at her with complete shock. Hiram kept his gaze on Haskill, face so gray that it looked as if he were already dead. Then she realized that Hiram wasn't moving, wasn't breathing, and neither was the dog. The neighborhood sounds, so familiar she didn't really hear them unless they changed, had disappeared. No frogs in the marsh down the hill. No clanking chain from the Iverson's dog. No children shouting down the street.

Silence.

Just her and Haskill.

"What?" he said. His voice had lowered. Almost a whisper. Almost. It had the same seed of threat that Hiram's did when he was giving her a test.

"I said no." She put a hand on her back and stood up all the way. A lump had already formed. She'd be black and blue for days.

"No? You were going to shoot his dog. You were going to run away. This man beat you and stole your life."

"Don't mean you need to shoot him," she said.

Haskill grinned. "You can shoot him then. It'd be better if you did, anyway."

"Better for who?" she asked. "You? My fingerprints on the gun, me with motive. No one's even seen you but me and Hiram. No one'd believe you were here."

"They don't need to," he said. His voice was rising with excitement. "Courts won't take care of him, but you can. They'll let you off for killing him. Happens all over. You got more than enough proof. All those doctor records. Your teeth. That new bruise on your back. Neighbors'll testify how he hit you over nothing. You'll get off."

"You think that's all I care about?" she said.

"You care about him?" Such contempt. All the pretty had gone from his face. He despised Hiram and it showed.

"I married him."

"But you don't love him."

"I did once."

"Once is a lot of bruises ago," he said.

"He's just doing what his daddy did, and his daddy before that."

"And that justifies it?"

"No," she said as softly as she could. "But it don't mean I have to do the same thing."

Her legs were still wobbly. Arguing had taken what strength she had.

"You're making yourself into a martyr, woman."

"Don't be so sure," she said. She walked over to him. He was tall and so thin. "You can get out now."

"You can't just throw me out. I'm your guardian angel."

She pushed him aside with her hip, and took the shotgun. It was frozen in place as if the air were ice. "You're no angel," she said.

"Fraid I am," he said. "You just didn't ask what type."

"Get out," she said again, and when she looked over her shoulder, he'd vanished.

She was on her own. Last chance. If she didn't do something now, Hiram'd kill her, just like Haskill said he would.

Hiram blinked, glanced around for a second, then straightened. "Give me the gun, honey," he said in a voice so fake it sent shivers through her.

She pulled back the right trigger. "You look at me, Hiram," she said, not letting any feeling come into her voice. She couldn't feel anything. If she felt something, it'd be fear, and he'd win.

He couldn't look at her. He was looking at her finger, resting on the second trigger.

He wasn't paying attention.

"You taught me never to point a gun at someone less you plan to

use it," she said. She sounded so calm. She didn't know where that calm came from. "I'll shoot you, Hiram, and this close it don't matter if my aim's good or not."

Slowly his gaze rose. The gray was back in his face. "You don't know what you're doing, girl."

"Oh, I know," she said. She was speaking, but her voice sounded far away. "I know exactly what I'm doing. I'm ending this, Hiram. You're giving me the dog, the truck, and all the money in our checking account. You get this house and all that's in it, and our savings, what little you didn't piss away. I'm taking the gun. And you don't ever look for me, and you don't have no one else look for me. Because if I ever see you again, I'll use this gun, Hiram. I won't think twice. You got that?"

He was staring at her as if she was speaking in tongues. "Where'd that man go?" he asked.

She shoved the shotgun into his chest. "Hiram. I was talking to you. You answer me."

"What'd he do to you?" Hiram asked.

"He made me stand up for you," she said and spit on the floor beside his feet. "I'm never gonna do that again. Now, you answer me, Hiram Brewster, or I swear to God I'll blow you away right here."

She must have sounded convincing, because he blinked in that way of his, and then he said, "All right. Truck's yours. Dog too. But you better get your money in cash and get the hell out of town because if I see you here, I'll beat the living shit out of you for treating me like this, girl."

"You're not touching me," she said. "Now sit."

He did, so fast that it surprised her. For all his talk, he was scared.

Of her.

"Don't you move," she said. She backed toward the TV, keeping the gun on him, and grabbed the dog by the collar. She had to pull. The dog knocked against the TV, making it jiggle on its stand. Hiram opened his mouth and she waved the gun at him.

"Don't move, I said."

He kept his mouth open.

She pulled the dog forward, took her hand off the collar just once, and grabbed the truck keys. Then she slung her purse over her shoulder, checking by feel for her wallet with

its precious bankcard, and keeping the shotgun on Hiram, grabbed the dog, and let herself outside.

She figured she only had a moment before he grabbed his own gun. She shoved Rufus in the front seat of the truck, slammed and locked the doors, and started it with one quick movement. Then she roared out of the driveway, the only vehicle on a very empty road.

TWO STATES LATER, SHE TRADED THE TRUCK IN FOR A \$500 CAR AND \$300 cash. That, and the remains of Hiram's paycheck would take her as far as she needed to go.

She didn't know how far that was. By the time she reached the Great Plains, she knew Hiram'd never find her. But she realized then that Hiram didn't scare her no more.

It was that tall, long drink of a man who claimed he was her guardian, appearing and disappearing at the right time in her life. He'd known too much, seen too much, and he'd had that same low threatening voice Hiram had.

That same love of hurt Hiram had.

She kept the shotgun beside her, and as she drove into the long and endless nights, she and Rufus watched the skies for falling angels. ♣

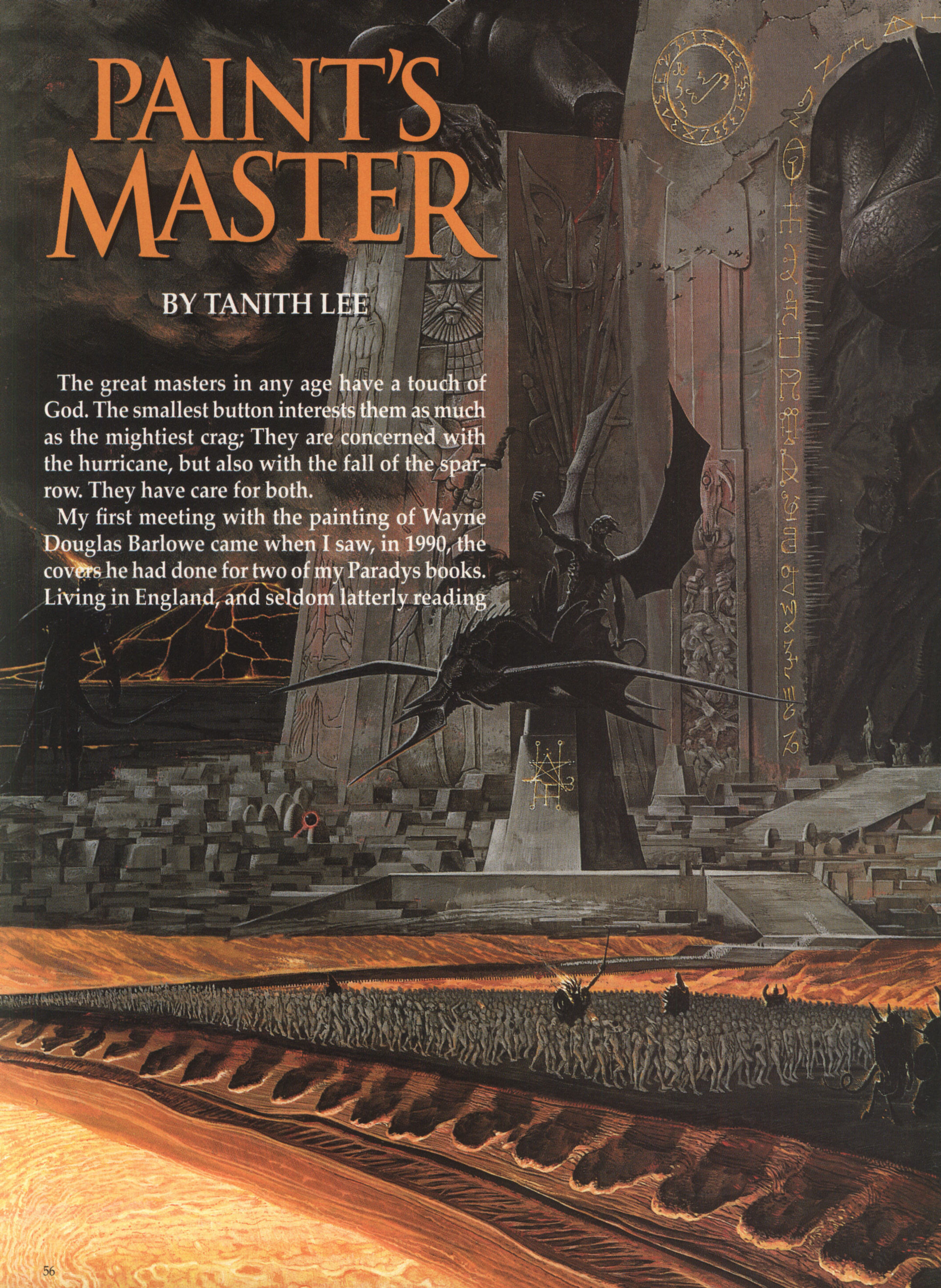
*She pushed him
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"You're no angel."*

PAINT'S MASTER

BY TANITH LEE

The great masters in any age have a touch of God. The smallest button interests them as much as the mightiest crag; They are concerned with the hurricane, but also with the fall of the sparrow. They have care for both.

My first meeting with the painting of Wayne Douglas Barlowe came when I saw, in 1990, the covers he had done for two of my Paradys books. Living in England, and seldom latterly reading



In "Wargate", from Wayne Barlowe's forthcoming *A Pilgrimage to Hell*, a huge blackened heart beats the cadence of an infernal procession as it streams out of the giant edifice commemorating the War between Heaven and Hell. In the foreground, led by a ravaged Minister of Hell, a burning Prince rides a wildly distorted soul.



Characters from Barlowe's *Guide to Fantasy* (left to right): A Trolloc, from Robert Jordan's *The Eye of the World*; Gorice XII, ruler of Witchland, from E. R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*; King Arthur's half sister Morgaine, from Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*; Bran Mak Morn, Robert E. Howard's Pict hero; Whitley Strieber's *Wolfen* (below right) stalk the streets of New York. Below: From *A Pilgrimage to Hell*, multi-eyed demon Moloch, destroyer of children and god of the Ammonites, sits legless and sullen. Floating about his crowned head are his belemnoid "horns", an evershifting array limned by the glare of a child-form brazier.

Fantasy or Science Fiction, I hadn't discovered his work. Doing so, I was overwhelmed. The two books were *The Book of the Damned* and *The Book of the Beast*. I was lucky enough that he subsequently painted the covers of two other Paradys tracts, *The Book of the Dead*, (which shows his remarkable ability with pure black and white), and *The Book of the Mad*.

I have had some good covers executed for my books, a few bad ones, and a few exceptionally fine. Barlowe's covers were — are — astonishing and wonderful. Along with the perfect draughtsmanship and surreal, disturbing, beautiful use of color — virtually the right colors, too, as carefully detailed in the novels — he displayed an unusual awareness of the writer's mind. I have never seen Paradys portrayed so exactly, just as, it seemed, evolved and imagined by me. Yet there had been no correspondence between the artist and myself. He had 'simply' read my books — mind you, something that not every artist troubles to do.

The latter two covers, when they arrived in due course, had all the same hallmarks. Especially the last cover (*Mad*), conveys, with a sinister playfulness reminiscent of Magritte, the book's aspects within aspects, the illusions that are real, reality that is not.

Evidently I am a total, and grateful, fan. So when I received *Barlowe's Guide to Fantasy*, I was excited and full of anticipation. Nor was I disappointed.

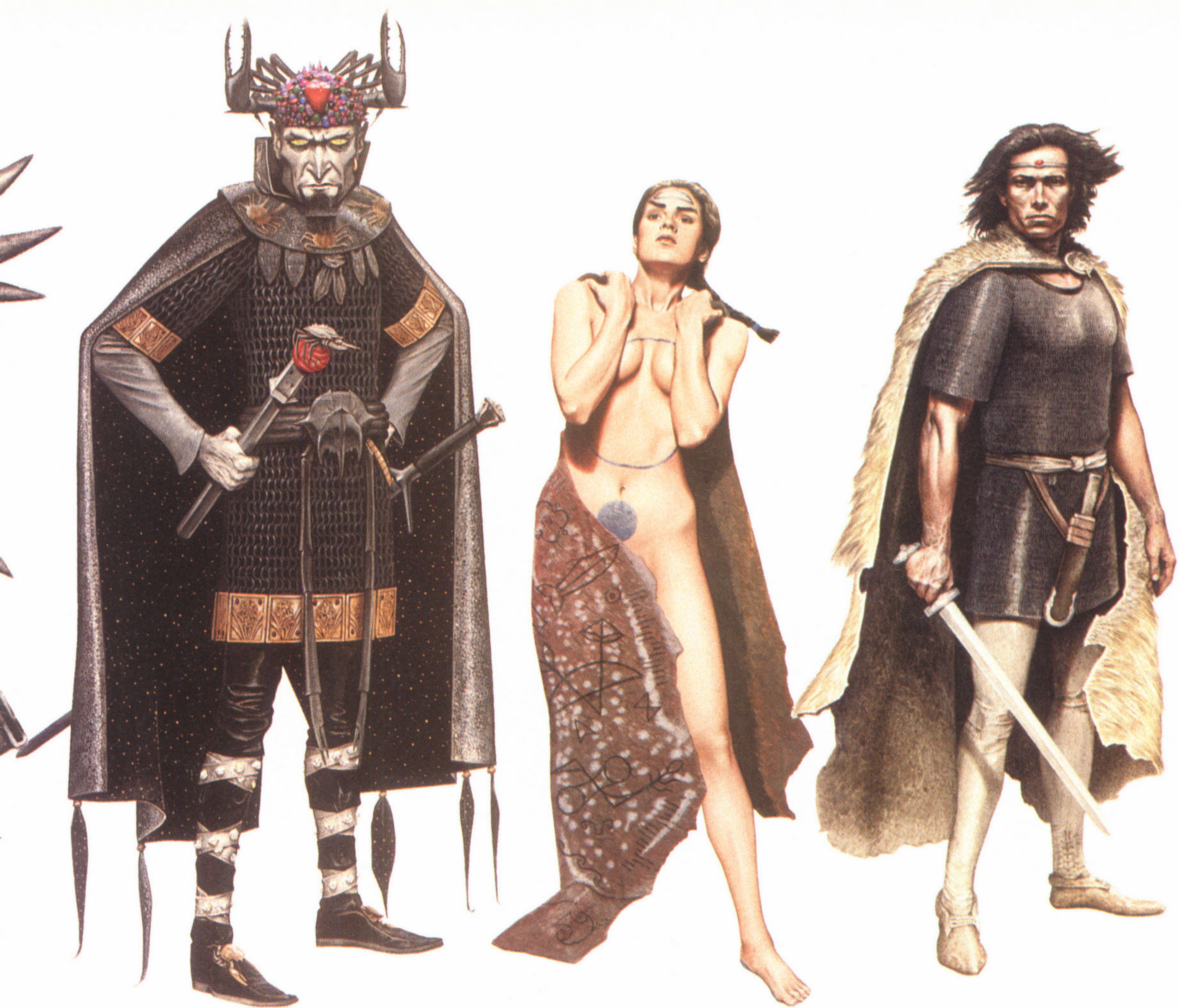
Although I don't know all the works that Barlowe has delved into here, I confess to certain personal delights. Such creatures are depicted as Beowulf's Grendel, the Shrowk for Lindsay's fabulous -in-all-senses *Voyage to Arcturus*, and the unnerving Nissifer from Vance's glorious *Dying Sun*. I frankly admit that books I might not



spontaneously incline to read now tempt me, due to the glamour — and sometimes terror — of their representatives on Barlowe's pages. And of course I turned to the image of my 'own' Chuz with bated breath — which then escaped in a shout of applause. Wayne Barlowe has caught exactly, (what else?) the marvel and horror of Chuz, dressed him ideally for his role, and added the asses jawbones which I, lover of the elegance and mystery of bones that I am, had felt him to be equipped with. This is definitely Chuz. How does Barlowe manage this? Surely other authors will recognize herein their inner monsters and demons, with an amazement similar to mine?

Good fantasy art is far from a facile medium. The exponent of fantasy' — both artist and writer — has an added need to make the subject more than normally real. Where one can believe easily enough, and with slight delineation, in a horse, there must be added assistance when summoning a unicorn. And where a lovely woman requires only to be shown — if she is immortal and ageless, then some other music must play about her. (See the completely believable ageless and immortal Lirazel on page 57. The lines and agonies of long life are all there, under the smooth complexion. The eyes each see a different vista. The tension of her limpid hands holds the serene *stress* of eternity, for which there is no cure.)

Not wishing to tend to psychoanalysis of the artist, still I feel that Wayne Barlowe, along with the largesse of talent, possesses an unusual nerve-end sympathy, even empathy, with the worlds and beings he illustrates. He has, I rather think, an intuitive flair for penetrating deeply into, and profoundly understanding, their natures — just as must the writer. Even the most wonderful artist may not have



this gift, or be unable to wield it to such a fulfilled extent. Barlowe's psychic muscle, as well as the gleaming musculature of his genius, is well-honed, limberly exercised, and at its peak.

But all this would falter, if not married, as here, to a flawless technique. Metal glimmers, flashes, jewels glow and spark, velvet looks velvet enough to stroke, a woman's skin divine enough to caress, scales harsh enough to set the teeth on edge. Swords that cut, warriors who humble with their eyes, landscapes that run to horizons of ozone and oxygen; these are the always-components of Barlowe's art. His figure-drawing is of the highest standard, and the sense of gesture-in-abeyance—a persona caught between one movement and the next—is very strong. In some there is the feeling of speed snatched by a camera, and in some a stony waiting.

He shines too with the light of the great portraitist in that the faces of his subjects differ markedly—a need that is not always adhered to in fantasy and SF art. Contrast for example, the independent boy-girl arrogance of Lackey's Kerowyn with the melancholy lush beauty of Dunsany's Lirazel. Kurtz's scholastic Camber with the almost-Steerpikeness (see *Gormenghast* by Mervyn Peake), of Pratchett's Mort. Note the baleful dignity of the terrible rending Grendel, (after all, although the Danes were heroes, he was there first), with the blind evil of the swine-thing, or fearful insectile Nissifer, shown elsewhere in disguise, and looking womanly, just as



Vance described her. While Burton's vampire catches exactly the leering, mocking, tricky funniness of this macabre creature, it manages to look wise as well as unconscionable, amused by all mortal things, in the tradition of its kind. Or consider the Griffin—complete with its skull—which is myth incarnate.

Then too the detail in some of the paintings begs and rewards use of a magnifying glass. Add the color, which is now dreamlike, now earthbound, ethereal, harsh, or almost excised to unbeatable effect—

White Lady, Mr Toad. The compendiums are visions that—very nearly—walk and breathe and think. With Barlowe's art there is never need to suspend disbelief. Miracles are made easy.

Behind the magical painting is the final bonus of this handsome volume. A top artist's notebook is always fascinating, and Barlowe's is a treasure-trove. Carcè on its witch-fanged crag, a parable of bleakness and grandeur, desolation, threat. Moorcock's warrior, whose velocity almost carries him off the page!

The carbon pencil sketches, exquisite in themselves, form instructive insights into work in progress. This is Barlowe's *A Pilgrimage to Hell*, whose title alone has such a somber Dantean overnote.

*Here in the heart of Hell to work in Fire
Paradise Lost: Book One*

—Milton

A Pilgrimage is not a work for the faint at heart.

The imagery is partly fueled, says Barlowe, by Milton. And the granite splendor and fireflights of



Left to right: Michael Moorcock's Corum Jhaelen Irsei, from *The Knight of the Swords*; Griffin's, from Greek mythology, were a hybrid of lion and eagle; Tanith Lee's Chuz, patron saint of the mad, from an aeons old race of demigods featured in *Delusion's Master*.

Milton seem indeed to uphold the texts of the pictures. While one scents flavors and tinctures not only of Gustave Doré and John Martin, but also of Breughel, Klimt, Blake, and even Turner at his most savage. (And personally I felt only a Wayne Barlowe is entitled to quote the influence of Albert Speer—a being of the Third Reich—but as Barlowe notes; 'What better inspiration for the monumental architecture of Hell?')

However, the paintings are unique to themselves, and demonstrate the artist at his most sublime — and terrifying.

Barlowe has said that many found this project to be 'disturbing' (a word I've had recourse to already.) And so it is. Disturbing, appalling, dismaying, overcast by the darkling of horror, lit with quivers that unsettle the nerves of the watcher. Demons clad in human skin and jewelled with eyes. Suffering souls, (their sins must truly have been unforgivable) slowly enmeshed in pregnant globes of darkness as they twist like dying plants.

Barlowe's Hell stands four-square and three-dimensional in glamour and majesty, and is as properly Awful as any devised by the Modiaevalists, or the antique saints of the Church Militant. I venture to say, worse. For at Barlowe's command are the modern understanding of psychology and the awareness of the Id, which, I suggest, have added enormous and alarming acuity both to the paintings and to the viewer's response.

A Pilgrimage to Hell is far from a book to be trifled with. Although it will ornament any collection of the rare and eccentric and any gallery of great paintings, it would be wise to beg the protection of one's good Angel before opening its covers.

Barlowe's panoply of ideas, proving yet again he is not only artist, but writer, vibrate through these apocalyptic scenes. Spun from a palette of soot and scarlet, grey, lilac ash, amber and gold, ... a flesh-clad presence like a decaying orchid, an avenue of carven, riven tenements, the palace of that celebrity, the Horseman of Pestilence. Monumental in every way, an epic canvas, are the mountainous War-gate towers, hung with a black heart that beats like a drum, while lava streams, and flame-crowned statues stand ready with their bows. A colossal warrior rides a beast of the pit, exalting in the *Right* of downfall — Barlowe's demons are proud of their fight and suffering, like any brave and conquered people. Overall their pale golden sigils float like heraldic insects. Depicted too, is the Guide of Barlowe's hapless anti-hero. No cool Virgil this, such as led Dante through the circles of the Doomed. Sargatanas is clad as a prince, richly and dramatically. He is a paragon of glorious dreadfulness, of sheer dread, behind whom quaking huge skies of sulphur seethe and boil.

On fine scales, the artist has balanced exactly sights that bewitch, with the most chasmic shadows. The reader and observer needs not only a taste for wonder, but courage ...

The complete work will be a Feast of Beauty and Terror, the nightmare triumph of a genius, himself quite unafraid to play with fire.

Barlowe's Guide to Fantasy, published by HarperPrism, is now available in bookstores. *A Pilgrimage to Hell* is scheduled for release by HarperPrism in 1999.

From *A Pilgrimage to Hell*, Barlowe's fearsome *Guide to Hell*, Sargatanas, is an endlessly metamorphic being, cruel and awe-inspiring. Here, he holds a soul, crushed into a common brick and newly levered from some Abyssal wall. Sargatanas stands, caught in a frozen moment of change, in his smoldering raiments of flesh, against a roiling backdrop as lesser demons, heads aflame, flash past upon scorched wings.



I ARRIVE IN MY TARGET'S NEIGHBORHOOD shortly after dusk. His house is a white clapboard relic of forties architecture badly in need of paint and landscaping. Parking my vehicle one street away, I circle the block on foot.

My target is not yet home, but his family is inside. Kitchen pans rattle. A teenage sister chatters on the phone near an open upper-story window. I melt into the shadow of an untrimmed bush, trying to flush the memory of my sister tying up our phone in just that manner.

Fate is kind tonight. The kid brother departs with friends, sleeping bag over his shoulder. Minutes later, the girls emerge wearing their best dresses, escorted by their parents. Late church. None of them see me behind the bush.

For their sake I hope they don't return too soon. I pull my mask from my pocket. I stare at the green bull's eye on the forehead and feel like a skier who has forgotten where the snow is. Sighing, I tug the fabric over my head.

I pull my .45 from my fanny pack. Methodically I screw the silencer in place and pop in a clip of ACP Glaser Safety Shells. No stray shots will be penetrating walls across the street.

At ten p.m., a Buick low-rider pulls up to the curb, filled with young men wearing the white headbands that tag them as members of *Las Luces*. My target steps out. The driver cranks up the stereo and peels out down the street in a cloud of dust and exhaust.

Would you like to be a superhero? Answer why or why not in 100 words or, better yet, read this story.

THE TRIGGER

BY DAVE SMEDS
Illustration by Jon Foster



My target laughs and flips the bird at his buddies. Chuckling, he stops beneath the streetlight and adjusts his headband, giving me ample opportunity to confirm his identity. He is wiry and brown-skinned, his hair a victim of prison barbers, his cheeks roughened by chicken pox scars. Raymond de Ocio. Nineteen years old, child of the barrio.

As he approaches the steps, I thrust my arm through a hole in the bush and put three rounds into his chest.

The impact knocks him onto the weed-choked lawn. He gurgles, jerks, and lies silent. The prefragmented ammo has done its job, sparing him a drawn-out death.

My mouth fills with the taste of blood. I have bitten my tongue. The saltiness nearly makes me vomit.

He's dead. This is not a moment to hesitate. I slide the .45 into the fanny pack and pull out the paint pistol. Standing up, trying not to look too closely at what's left of de Ocio, I mark the body. A splotch of fluorescent green blossoms on his hip.

The sound of the paint pellet sets a dog to barking in a house across the street, though the earlier noises had not roused the animal. A light goes on.

By then I'm vaulting the back fence of de Ocio's property and slipping around the side of his rear neighbor's home to my car.

I STORE THE VEHICLE IN MY GARAGE. THE CAR MY NEIGHBORS SEE IS parked in the driveway; the other one comes out only for missions. It's a plain white Ford Escort, as common and unremarkable a vehicle as I can find. Its description has never turned up in police reports of my hits.

From the garage I descend into my basement shop. Removing the barrel from my .45, I toss it into the bin to be recycled and replace it with a fresh one. I leave the weapon there with the rest of the contents of my fanny pack.

Caroline won't meet my eyes as I greet her in the living room. I wait, but she merely buries her nose more deeply in her book. My shoulders slump, and I climb wearily up the stairs to bed.

I choose the twin bed in the spare room, knowing whichever place I sleep, Caroline will take the other. She knows it's been one of *those* nights. As I try to fall asleep, I hear the subtle noise of pages turning.

"LAURA'S ON A WEIGHT PROGRAM," MY WIFE SAYS AT BRUNCH.

"I've never thought of Laura as overweight," I answer.

Caroline nods. "She's got an extra half pound on each calf. It's driving her crazy."

We chuckle. The small talk soothes me, as she knew it would. The silence of the night is over. We're almost like a normal couple, living a normal life.

"Want to see a movie tonight?" I ask, hoping to extend the mood. "The benefit exhibition should be wrapped up by early evening."

"I've got to scrub for an endoscopy by seven a.m.," she says with a you-forgot-again tone.

"Sorry. Tuesday, then?" That's bargain night at the cineplex.

"We'll see." She checks her watch. "You'd better hurry if you're going to be ready."

FULLY ARRAYED IN COSTUME — NOT JUST THE MASK, BUT THE BLACK jumpsuit, ammo belts, holster, boots, and dark glasses that I never wear in the field — I wait in my garage for the Jumper to arrive. Suddenly papers flutter from the abrupt displacement of air, and he's standing in front of me.

"All set?" he asks.

I nod. He pulls off a glove. We clasp hands, flesh against flesh to ensure that his zone of effect will encompass me, and we're gone.

We arrive in a roped-off circle in the midst of the indoor arena. Behind the plexiglas barricades, some of the crowd notices our appearance. A murmur rides from mouth to mouth.

The Jumper blinks out again, off to fetch another participant. Already a host of remarkable individuals are milling about the floor inside of the police cordons. A huge banner above declares "2nd Annual AIDS Benefit Exhibition" for those who've somehow forgotten why so many superheroes have been gathered in the same locale for a day.

I stumble as I leave the Jumper's materialization circle, dizzy from the teleportation. Growing steadier, I make my way toward the podium for the obligatory introduction and photo opportunity.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the Trigger," announces the emcee. The applause is substantial, but naturally what I hear most is the undercurrent of boos and hisses.

The uncomfortable moment ends as the Tank strides to center stage. While he navigates the obstacle course, knocking aside brick and concrete with his little finger, I drift as nonchalantly as I can manage to the staging area under the seats. Ms. Victory and the Human Catapult shake my hand as I pass by.

I breathe easier as I escape the view of the crowd. The staging area is thick with people, but they're colleagues, staff, security guards, and the handful of media types that have won press access, chiefly those who are taping the documentary footage of the event.

An aide points me to my rehearsal dais. I don't need the practice, but my assistants do. Recovered from the effects of the Jumper's taxi ride, I take out my pistol and give them the go-ahead.

First comes target shooting into standard paper silhouettes. Next is an array of mobile bull's-eyes. Third come the porcelain mannequins. Those are fun; they shatter impressively.

For the finale, Brick Wall strides up. Good choice; if I do miss, the bullets will just bounce off him. He tosses up a deck of cards, scattering all fifty-four at once.

"Ace of spades," I call, and fire.

The cards land, littering the dais. Brick Wall bends down and scoops up the ace. He inserts a finger through the hole left by my bullet.

One by one, I repeat the effort with the other aces.

"Fabulous," says a voice from behind. I turn. An attractive, thirtyish woman wearing the neutral colors of a television journalist approaches me, holding a bulbous microphone. Her fingernails are perfect.

"It's not that difficult," I say. "Any number of marksmen could do it, if they put in the hours of training that I have. You must be my assigned interviewer."

"Yes. Hilary Chase, with *Newswatch*. How do you do?"

She smiles, bright-eyed. A face like that would put any male at ease, but I can't banish the memory of that other woman journalist who writes those *Post* editorials about me.

"I'm still not sure I want to do this, Ms. Chase."

She nods in what seems to be an understanding way. "I'm not trolling for sound bytes, Mr ... uh, Trigger. Documentary format is a bit more civilized than news reportage."

"So they tell me." I wave the camera guy forward. Hilary's assistant unfolds director's chairs for us.

"You haven't given a videotape interview before," Hilary says. "I'd like to start from square one."

"I'm all yours."

She switches on the microphone. "You said once that you've had your power all your life."

The hovering camera, the extended mike, make me itch. But the words come. "When I was young I didn't understand what the power meant. All I knew was that when I met certain people, they would smell strange. I'd complain about the odor to my parents, and they'd hush me and tell me I was being rude."

"What was the smell like?"

"Like the dead possum I found on my Grandpa's farm one visit."

Hilary wrinkles her nose. "How did you stand it?"

"It would only last a while. Six hours, tops. I'd only smell it the first time I'd meet an individual. After that, I could encounter that person time and again and never smell anything out of the ordinary."

"And when did you realize what the odor meant?"

My eyes narrow as I look into my past. "When I was seventeen, I passed a man in the Concourse Mall. He stank so bad my eyes watered. I followed him for a few minutes. He had a distinctive face — his eyebrows merged in the middle. Two weeks later that face turned up in the papers. He had walked into a boutique with an assault rifle and blown away eleven people."

Hilary cringes. "So that was the first clue?"

"Yes. By itself it wasn't enough. But by the time I turned twenty, I realized that people who smelled so incredibly bad when I met them later turned out to be murderers. That was the age I became the Trigger."

Back where I practiced my target shooting, the Cipher is strolling among the scattered cards, his mask a disorienting miasma of shifting colors. He stoops and picks several up.

Hilary says something. "I'm sorry. What did you say?" I ask.

"I asked how you came up with the costume and so forth."

"I could hardly kill people and just leave them there. Random killings frighten people. If they see the paint mark and check the background of my targets, the public knows someone is looking out for them. The costume, the name — it provides a kind of reassurance. Even if it's not good enough for the police."

Hilary and I both glance at a pair of cops by the entrance. Here at the exhibition I'm protected by the sanction of the Brotherhood, but I still wish they weren't present.

"Your critics have said you're no better than the people you kill."

"It's easy for them to judge." My tone is testy, despite my effort to be calm. "I know what kind of person the smell leads me to. They're not all mass killers like that one in the mall, but they're the kind that kill by nature. I'm trading one murder for two, or three, or five."

"It's always this way?" A hint of skepticism emerges.

"I once met Joe Morgan, the guy who turned off his wife's life support equipment as her Living Will requested. He didn't have the stench. Nor did a neighbor of mine who killed a burglar in self-defense. My power has always led me to hardened killers."

"Have you ever tried anything a little less drastic than shooting them? If the murders haven't happened yet, surely there are other ways to prevent them."

My mouth turns cottony. "I tried that, early on. Just after I'd become certain what my power meant — and before I'd ever bought a gun — I smelled a man. I knew I had to do something, yet I didn't figure my word alone would accomplish much. So I contacted the Telepath. He agreed to a secret meeting, and he worked with me until he could be certain I was telling the truth." Across the staging area, a tall figure in a flowing azure cape turns our way. We wave. "He went to the cops, convinced them that the guy was a threat. They decided to deal with it by pressing a parole violation. The man went back to prison."

"And he killed someone in jail?" Hilary suggests.

"No. His wife had become pregnant by another man, and he sent one of his buddies to kill the baby."

Hilary blanches.

"It's impossible to know how the people I smell are going to accomplish their crimes. I can't let another innocent victim die."

"And so you kill them."

"Wouldn't you?"

"I ... " A line grows in the center of her forehead.

"Look. I don't like doing it. But the fact is, the murder rate in this city used to be half that of New York's. Now it's down to a quarter, and it's that high only because my kills are in the stats. I may not be able to fly or lift runaway trucks off a freeway, but I make a difference. Until a better way comes along, I'll do what I have to do."

Hilary swallows and asks for a break. The camera halts. Suddenly she looks up. I feel a presence beside me and turn. The Cipher is beside me, cards in hand.

He hands me the ace of hearts. "Look at this," he says. His voice seems to echo.

I glance down. The bullet hole sits dead center.

Something happens. I don't know how to describe it, but suddenly it feels as if I've moved; yet I am still in the folding chair, surrounded by the documentary crew. I blink at the card. The bullet hole is now to the lower right, missing the edge of the heart shape.

"What did you do?" I ask.

He stares back blankly. "I don't know," he states. His voice lacks the earlier otherworldly quality.

*My mouth
turns cottony. "I tried
that, early on. Just
after I'd become
certain what
my power
meant."*

Hilary shivers.

I've heard about the aftereffects of the Cipher's powers, but until now I haven't experienced it personally. The hair on my back doesn't settle down until long after the interview and exhibition end and the Jumper ferries me home.

FROM TIME TO TIME OVER THE NEXT TWO WEEKS

I recall the Cipher's strange behavior and try to figure out what it means. The best I can do is guess. That's the way it is with him. If it were different, folks wouldn't call him the Cipher.

One night, patrolling a park, I'm hit by a characteristic foulness. I blend into the brush. On goes my mask. Out comes my rifle. In seconds it's assembled.

The source of the smell is distant, near the limit of my ability to detect. I glide forward, keeping to the shadows. Stealth is critical, but so is speed. If I fail to locate him while the smell is present, I've lost him forever. As I filter through the rhododendron garden, I look out across a lawn and see a scrawny kid with glasses. He's leaning against a lamp post in plain sight. I'd say he's no more than fifteen, pale from a life indoors.

So young, yet he's ripe with "eau de morgue". I might as well do it now, while he's isolated. Tracking him down later will only complicate my life, and it won't save him.

A moth flutters into my face just I squeeze the trigger.

Blood blossoms across the teenager's lower torso. He collapses. I wipe my eyes, cursing. He drags himself beneath a park bench before I can take fresh aim.

I close in, alert in case he produces a weapon. But all he does is clutch the posts of the bench, hyperventilating. The bench shields him enough that I am going to have to get quite close before I can be assured of a clean shot.

I stop at fifteen paces, squat, point the rifle.

He shivers, staring at my mask, moaning softly. The wound stinks of ruptured intestines.

He no longer smells of murder.

I sway. Drawing in a deep breath, I search desperately for the stench. It isn't there. It has disappeared. Never before has it faded so soon after initial detection, nor so instantaneously.

I blink, step back. Suddenly I am running. I find a call box, dial 911, say enough to get the paramedics to the park. Then I get out of there.

I CAN'T GO HOME. I DRIVE AIMLESSLY UNTIL THE SUN TOPS THE downtown highrises. I end up in a donut shop. The news on the television above the counter tells me details I'd rather not know.

The kid's name is Stephan Demeter, age sixteen. The ambulance arrived in time. Despite heavy blood loss and six hours of surgery,

he has stabilized. The doctors are confident he will live. But the bullet has shattered his spine. He will be a paraplegic the rest of his days.

A witness saw me running from the phone booth. The cops are swearing to take this to the superhero community. The Brotherhood, however, is ominously silent.

Over and over, I try to understand what has happened. I can only conclude that Stephan Demeter's homicidal tendency was eradicated by my first shot. Perhaps now that he is a cripple, he will be unable to reach the particular time and place necessary to turn him homicidal. Perhaps being a target of violence soured his desire to inflict it. The maiming may have been necessary.

But had I killed him, that wouldn't have been necessary. And who's to say that this was never true before?

I stumble home. I am on the edge of a gigantic pit. I need my lifeline.

Caroline is not there. Her side of the closet is stripped. Her car is missing. Her make-up and perfume bottles no longer litter the bathroom counter. On the kitchen table is a copy of the *Post*, face open to an article about Stephan Demeter written by my usual nemesis. He was an "A" student, mild-mannered, from a good family.

I cannot bring myself to feel betrayal, or abandonment, or rage. The fact is, I can't feel anything at all.

THE BROTHERHOOD SENDS THE TELEPATH TO ME. I CONSENT TO A reading to reassure them I haven't gone over to the other side. With his support, I know the Brotherhood will keep me under its protection. He is convinced. But he has no answers for me.

"Arrange a meeting for me with the Cipher," I ask. I provide him with a rendezvous point and time.

"Of course," he replies. Dressed in civilian clothes, he steps to the door. Pausing, he gives me a strange look. He wipes the hand used to touch me while he read my mind. Then he's gone, leaving me with the memory of his troubled eyes.

THE CIPHER JOINS ME DURING A SLOW HOUR AT A LITTLE DINER A FEW miles outside of town. I recognize him by his walk. He seems to know me, too, though we've never seen each other out of costume before, nor do we know each other's real names.

"What did you do to me?" I ask.

He purses his lips, staring downward. "Nothing."

"After you gave me that card the bullet hole shifted. That was doing something."

"That wasn't under my control. It just happened," he says. "Surely you know I can't change anything at the level you're hinting at. Most of the time, when my gift manifests, it's just pointing out something that's already happening. What it points to is a mystery to me as much as anyone."

I sink back, defeated.

"I'm sorry, my friend." Reaching into his shirt pocket, he pulls out a playing card. I recognize it from the deck I used at the AIDS benefit. He turns it face up to reveal the joker. "We're a lot alike. Your power and mine come from some unexplained place. Just when we think we've got a handle on what the rules are, the rules change."

The coffee in my cup is bitter and opaque — a metaphor for my life. "I like my rules hard and fast," I tell him.

He shrugs. Sitting across from him, nothing about his meek style and emaciated little body hints of a superhero. I wait in desperation to hear his voice take on that special tone, to transform him as he was transformed at the arena.

"I guess there's only one choice left to you," he says quietly, one mundane human being advising another.

THE CIPHER IS RIGHT. I TAKE THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE GIVEN ME: I pack my bags, cancel my mail deliveries, and leave town.

I tell myself it doesn't matter where I go, but in reality, it does. Inevitably I end up in the one place I've always thought of as a refuge. My grandparents still have their farm up in the hills in Tennessee. They've always made it plain that any of us young 'uns could stay there as long as we wanted. My sister went once for a year. Now it's my turn.

The impact is indescribable. The property sprawls over a hillside ten miles from the nearest town. I see no one but family for six days. Like an asthmatic removed from all pollens and smog, I take deeper and deeper breaths until my chest nearly bursts.

Finally I realize why I'm inhaling so deeply. I'm trying to smell the odor. In the city a residual stink constantly taints the atmosphere. There's always a murderer out there somewhere, even if they're too far off for me to track. Here, the last homicide was a lynching of a black sharecropper at the turn of the century, and that was across the creek and down the road.

I have forgotten what a clean breath is.

My grandparents give me plenty of time to myself, thinking that I am recuperating from the loss of Caroline. I mend fences, rebuild a pump, do a lot of the heavy work that Grandpa and his hired man are getting too old to tackle. They can use me there full-time.

The peace is ideal, and yet more and more I perch in front of the television at night, watching the news. Grandpa tries to engage me in conversation. This is when he likes to rock in his chair and sip a little moonshine. We should be wearing each other's ears off like when I was a boy, but now I don't hear half his questions.

After a month, Grandpa catches me one morning looking out over the land, watching the mist burn off the hills on the far side of the valley.

"Time for you to go back," Grandpa says.

"Why do you say that?"

He leans on his shovel, gazing at the new calf in the lower corral. "This thing, sometimes it runs in families."

I lock eyes with him. "This ... thing?"

He coughs. "Like Skyrider and his daughter. Like the Huntress and her boys. You've met them, haven't you?"

"What are you telling me?" I whisper.

"Why do you think I live out here? I'm a city kid, raised in Memphis. I didn't leave all that behind without a reason." Grandpa sighs, looking more like ninety than seventy-five.

"Why didn't you ever tell me?"

"I was ashamed, Andy. I'm telling you now so you'll know I know what I'm talking about when I say you have to go back. God gave me a power. I couldn't bear to use it. So He kept giving it, until He found the vessel that would serve Him."

I shake my head. "I'm not the strong one, Grandpa. It's you. You were able to resist."

He waves my words away like a bug. "Don't you know what you smelled like, first time I saw you in your mama's arms?"

My knees suddenly have difficulty supporting me. "No. What did I ... smell like?"

"Like an April morning, my boy."

DESPITE THE COUNTLESS THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE AROUND ME IN THE city, I come back to find it a lonely place. I stay indoors, staring at the empty spot in the corner where Caroline kept her sewing machine. I clean and store the component pieces of my Steyr bullpup rifle in my backpack, but leave the backpack on the bench. Only after a week do I venture out, and only then because I know there's an old man in Tennessee who'll call to ask if I have.

On my third foray, I catch the whiff I've been dreading.

It permeates the financial district. The source is not in sight, so I stand at an intersection and wait. After two hours a car passes before me with a single occupant. The stench reaches a crescendo. I memorize the license plate number.

Later I access the Department of Motor Vehicles database. A positive I.D. comes up on my screen. George P. Dunwetter. Age forty-one. Caucasian. No traffic violations.

And no criminal record, as further digging reveals. He has a steady job as a C.P.A. Married, two kids in college.

He doesn't fit the profile. "God" is not making it easy on me.

I tail him more thoroughly than any target in the past. He and his wife go out often. They seem to enjoy each other's company. He arrives at work punctually, like a man who appreciates his profession. He sleeps at normal hours.

Time trickles away from me until there's a chance he's already committed the murder and gotten away with it. If my power means anything at all, I have to act upon it. I won't have another baby die.

Slipping into the calm of ritual, I choose my kill site. At the end of each workday George cuts through an alley on his way to the parking garage where he keeps his car. He's exposed there, and there will be few bystanders — at most two or three of the homeless people that migrate there at that hour, seeking a pile of cardboard or a doorway to shelter them for the night. No problem. My shot will be made from the roof of a distant building. By the time any witnesses fetch the police and the latter determine the trajectory of the bullet, I'll be long gone.

On a Monday, I take up my station. I pull the bullpup out of my knapsack and screw the barrel in place. I shove in a clip of .223 cartridges.

George is right on schedule. And he's unaccompanied. The only other people I can see are a pair of scrawny panhandlers loitering by a dumpster. They're out of the line of fire.

Just as I center George in the crosshairs of my scope, he stops walking. Fearing that he may suddenly change direction, I lift my finger off the trigger to wait for a better moment.

Magnified by the scope, even at this distance George's expression is clear and intense. It's disgust. It does not match the loving husband and dedicated worker I've tailed for days. Lifting my head, I see that it's the homeless men he's staring at.

Suddenly he resumes walking, hatred reflected in the stiffness of his gait.

I let him go.

Removing the clip and unscrewing the barrel from my bullpup, things are suddenly clear to me. I have a hunch how to deal with George P. Dunwetter.

ON TUESDAY, WHEN GEORGE WANDERS THROUGH THE ALLEY, I AM hidden inside a pile of packing material on one of the loading docks, completely out of his sight, but able to view his every move. He walks past without incident. Wednesday, the same. But Thursday is different.

This evening, unlike other times, only a single homeless man has taken up residence. Unshaven, sipping from a bottle concealed in a paper bag, he is wadding up paper and stuffing it into a fifty gallon refuse drum, probably to build a fire.

George arrives. He stops and stares at the homeless man. The bum notices him and tips his cap. Ignoring the gesture, George glances up and down the alley. No one in sight. His hand rises toward the pocket of his overcoat.

"I wouldn't do that," I say, rising from the pile of packing material.

George gawks at my costume and mask, and most of all at the pistol in my hand. His knees start to shake.

"What have you got in your pocket?" I ask.

He shakes his head. I point my weapon meaningfully. "Pull it out slowly and drop it on the pavement," I command.

Nervously he reaches inside the flap. A .38 police revolver rises slowly into view. He drops it, safety on, to his feet.

"Thank you," I say. I pull my trigger.

George cries out as the pellet strikes, splattering him with paint. Scratch one polyester business suit. The green rather matches his complexion.

I inhale deeply. The city smog invades my lungs. It smells sweet.

"Go home, George," I tell him.

He gulps, turns, and with an impatient gesture from me, flees down the alley.

Perhaps I've made a mistake. Maybe a good scare wasn't enough to cure him. But I'm putting it to the test. It will be years before I stop checking up on him.

I turn to the homeless man.

"You're the Trigger, ain't you?" he says.

His face glows with awe. The sight of me seems to mean more to him than the saving of his life. He reaches out a hand, tentatively, with palsied fingers.

Slipping into the ritual, I choose my kill site. At the end of each workday George cuts through an alley...

I take that hand and shake it. "You tell folks about this, all right?" I ask. "Especially that *Post* reporter."

He nods, holding his hand up as if he fears to wash it. Not that he *has* washed it recently. And suddenly, something is right with my world. I've never had the chance to see, to speak with, to touch, a person who wouldn't have lived, had it not been for the existence and acts of the Trigger.

He is here. He is real. He has just shaken my hand.

"Have a good day," he says. It's probably the only comment he can think up.

"I already have."

He doesn't try to follow as I leave. As I turn the corner, I shove my mask and my paint gun into my pack. Suddenly I'm just a pedestrian, strolling down the sidewalk toward my car.

On the next block, just before reaching the vehicle, I approach a small, thin man. Abruptly we stop, equally startled.

I'm looking into the eyes of the Cipher.

"What are you doing here?" I ask.

He shrugs, grinning sheepishly. "I just had a feeling I should come, that I should walk down this street, at this particular time." He holds out a piece of paper. "That probably means that this is for you."

Unfolding the note, I read, "Have you ever thought of moving to a new city?"

"I wrote that," the Cipher says. "But by the time I capped the pen, I couldn't remember *why* I wrote it. Maybe you can tell me."

The note makes my fingers tingle. I could tell him what it means. I will, in a few years. But for now I just say, "No. But can I keep it?"

"Sure," he says. "I hope it's useful."

"We'll have to see."

Nodding, hands in pockets, duty fulfilled, he walks off the way he came. I make it to my car and drive into the urban twilight.

WHAT THE CIPHER HAS PROPOSED IS THE EASY WAY OUT. IN ANOTHER city, I could go back to my old style of operation. There would be hardcore murderers aplenty, not a city so strip-mined by my previous forays that I no longer know if I have a true criminal in my crosshairs or not. I could do a lot of good moving to such a place.

But meanwhile, this city surrounds me, full of the aroma of hot dogs, pigeon droppings, and hosed-off cement. My job is not finished. The murder rate still hovers at about 25 percent of New York's. As I told Hilary Chase, that's because the statisticians have to count the people I kill.

Next year, it'll be 5 percent. Or 2 percent. Or zero. For a year, the Trigger is going to have a different *modus operandi*. I'm only moving when I'm good and ready.

I think Grandpa would like that. 🐣

Music from a Distant Age

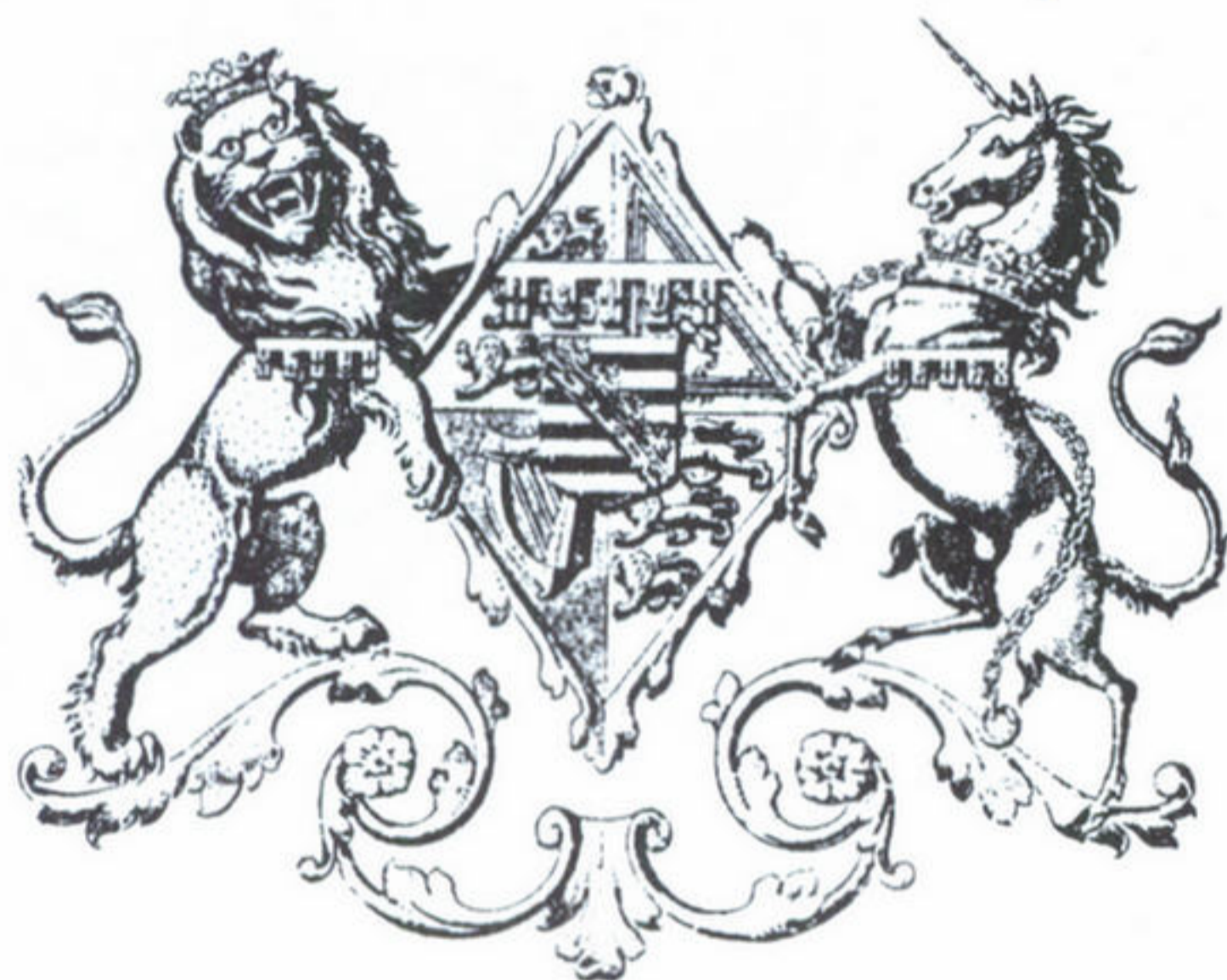
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OLD FLAME

Continued on page 39

were cut the throats of black dogs. While she, their own Angesia, must float down that River of the Dead which had belonged, not to a modern Christian century, but to that age of Night which had preceded it. A night embodied not in blackness, but in the burning flame of the candle.

"Oh God!" cried Raolo.

"He is here," said the priest, "as in all places." And he opened the breast of his robe and took out of it a tiny, tiny thing, and they could not, for a moment, decipher what it was.

YEARS AFTER, WHEN RAOLO AND ANGESIA had two or three gold children playing at their feet, only certain things were spoken or credited to that night. It was the night Livia de Cerini had died. They said she had been walking downstairs, lost her footing, and fell. They found her rigid as a rock at the bottom. Her eyes were wide, her lips stretched in a rictus, and her tongue sticking right out of her mouth. Her neck was also broken, doubtless from the fall, and her pearl choker had snapped. There were the beads of it, like whitish drops of blood, scattered everywhere. They said that far more pearls had been found, in the end, than could have been in the ornament.

But it was that night too that Aelia Versuvio's fever broke and she began to mend. The night when all the house of Versuvio turned for the better. An ailing horse stood up and wanted bran. A dog started to bark vigorously for his master. Apples appeared late in the orchard under the moon, and a wonderful crop they were. Doves flew back the next day, after the night, to nest in a vine that had been thought dead, but came alive again in enormous luxuriance.

Alesandro, too, said later that this was the night, or dawn, that a new sound tooth commenced to come in where he had had to have one pulled out. And for his daughter Angesia who had been close to death ... suffice it to say, she lived.

Those seeing the prosperity and health of the houses of the de Cerini and the Versuvios in after years tended to dismiss any tale of ill luck. Who could ever believe that exquisite Angesia had ever been near to death, with her golden hair, her apricot bloom, her luminous children, and her handsome husband.

But then, very few had been in Angesia's room that night — that particular and peculiar night.

AFTER A LITTLE, IN THE WEIRD GLOW THE candle gave, so vivid, so aureate, and yet so sickly, Raolo made out that what the priest held up was a tiny cage.

The bars of it were small as wires and set close. What was there? Never a bird. Perhaps a cricket?

Then the priest undid the cage, and something actually flew out.

As they watched it flit about the chamber of the dying girl, at first they could not understand what it was. But then, by the very action it performed, they knew. It was an act as old as the lights of mankind, as old maybe as the first lamp, the first candle.

Out of the cage had come a moth, the color of paper, dainty and flimsy as a little ghost.

This then, darting about the room, going to the wall, a picture there, to the Bible, to the vase of fading flowers, and about the head of Alessandro Versuvio who stared at it, about the duenna, who raised one hand and the moth skimmed over it. Such a faint, translucent, insubstantial thing. And drawn always one way.

No one made a sound.

Outside, cicadas would have given their percussive music, but the garden of Versuvio was dumb. In the house not a note, not really a breath.

The moth now reached the candle. As moths will always do. Nearer and nearer, drawn by that inevitable fascination which is death. Up on the filaments of its slender antennae, the eyes of the moth winked silver. But the candle gleamed more brightly. "Come to me," the candle said, the evil sorcerous candle, but as all candles do, "come to me to be warm."

And all at once, as a million, million times at any moment of any night, the moth dashed straight into the flame.

There was a splash of tigerish green. It lit the room. By its glare they saw, the three who watched, and perhaps the priest, the moth transfixed there in the heart of the ancient fire. And as they looked, they beheld how the flame was burned up by the moth. Drawn in, crushed, devoured, and turned to ashes. The flame burned in the moth. Went out. Was gone.

The room was black, and in the black the little being flew back into its travelling cage and the door was gently closed.

Do not protest. Say no word. Moths are consumed in flames. But in the hand of God, all things are one thing, and a flame may be consumed in the fire of a moth.

HE LOOKED AT ME, THE CAPTAIN'S MATE. Our cups were empty and had grown stale.

"She heard him then, the Virgin," I said.

He shrugged. "Something heard. Better to call power always by a lovely name."

Beyond the cabin, daybreak was spreading on the sea. The seagulls cried with mimic voices, the braying of asses, clucking of chickens: sure sign of land.

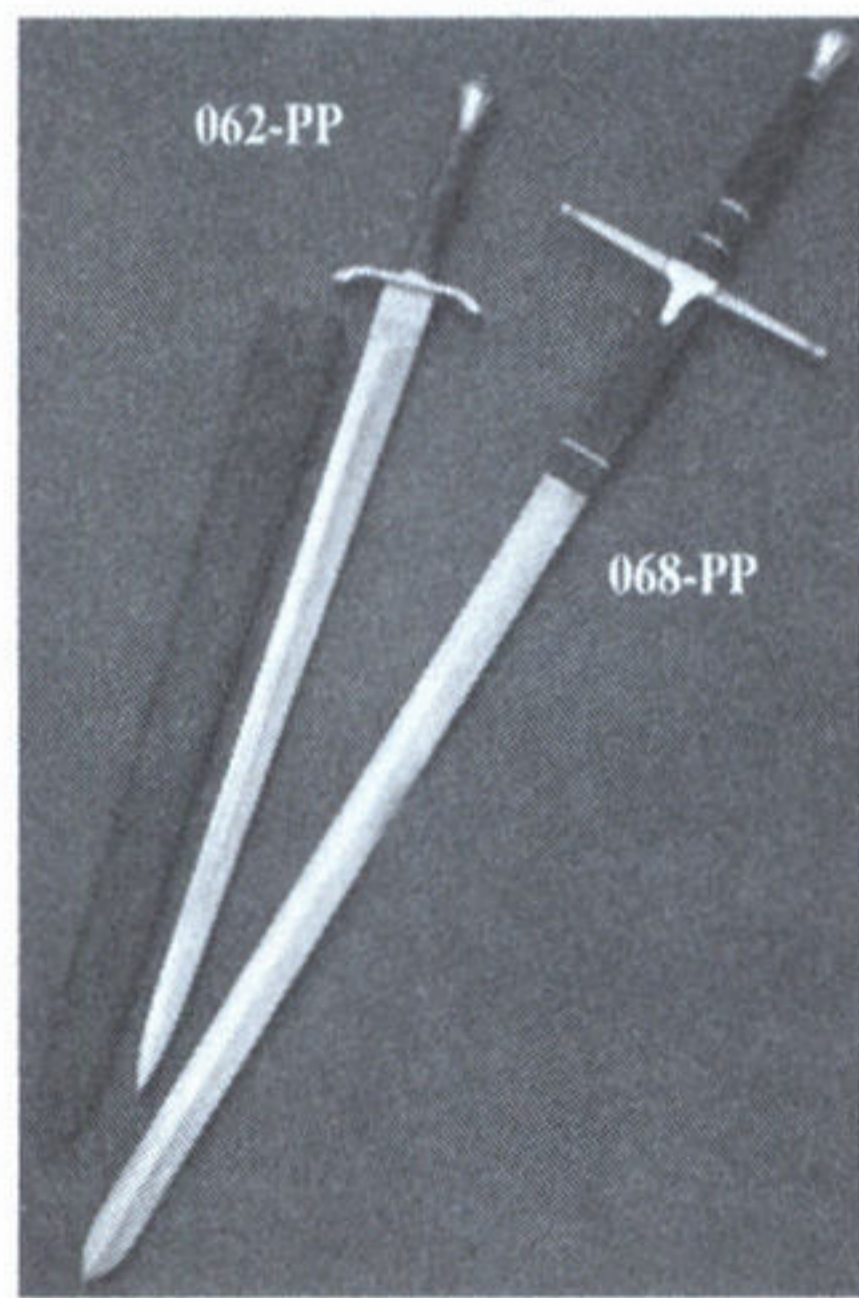
We drank one cup more for the departing night.

On the deck, we saw the ocean was barely moving. The poet Mate stood looking after the dark.

"A fine story. Thank you. May I use it?"

"It's yours. Everything belongs to each of us. Only, we seldom see." ✠

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THE PRETENDER

Continued from page 45

died there from wounds received in a duel with Lancelot; his last action had been to write a letter begging Lancelot to return to Britain to fight at the King's side. Arthur scanned the field looking for movement, and saw a man standing near the body of Sir Kay's unmistakable blood-red horse. As fast as his armor and his wounds would allow, Arthur ran across the plain towards him,

"Kay!"

The man turned, revealing a black shield with a silver bend. Mordred's shield. Arthur continued to charge towards him, drawing Excalibur as he ran.

"Father!" yelled Mordred, mockingly. He walked delicately between the bodies, his own sword drawn, "Why have you forsaken me?"

Arthur stopped a scant ten paces from him. "Do you want to know who your father was, Mordred? I asked the Lady of the Lake, and she told me. I warn you, you may not be pleased by the answer."

Mordred took a step towards him. "Tell me, then. Who do you blame for my begetting, and your downfall?"

"Agravaine," said Arthur. "Your pretty brother. Your mother may have the excuse of having been drunk, but he wasn't. I didn't believe it, either, until the Lady showed me their images in her crystal."

Mordred staggered slightly, and the blood drained away from his face. "You lie. I know I'm your son; the first time I saw you, I knew it, I felt it here." He thumped his breastplate with the pommel of his sword. "I could not have loved you as I did had you not been my father —"


"If you loved me, it wasn't because you wanted me as a father," replied Arthur, grimly. "But you couldn't admit that, even to yourself; you've never had that sort of courage."

Mordred advanced slowly, his face contorted by hatred. "You lie," he repeated. "I've had women, nearly as many as Agravaine or Gaheris. I have sons; I don't love you and I am nothing like you!" He rushed at Arthur, and swung his sword with all his strength. The king parried with Excalibur, and the inferior blade shattered, one fragment piercing Arthur's helm and skull. Arthur thrust once, piercing Mordred's shield, left arm, breastplate and chest, and both men collapsed onto the bloody plain.

SOME SAY THAT ARTHUR DIED AND WAS buried, with Guenever, in the Isle of Avalon. Others say that he sleeps with his favorite knights in a hidden cave, waiting for a champion to awaken him. No one knows what befell the bodies of his enemies, nor praises the wisdom or courage of the pretender. ♣

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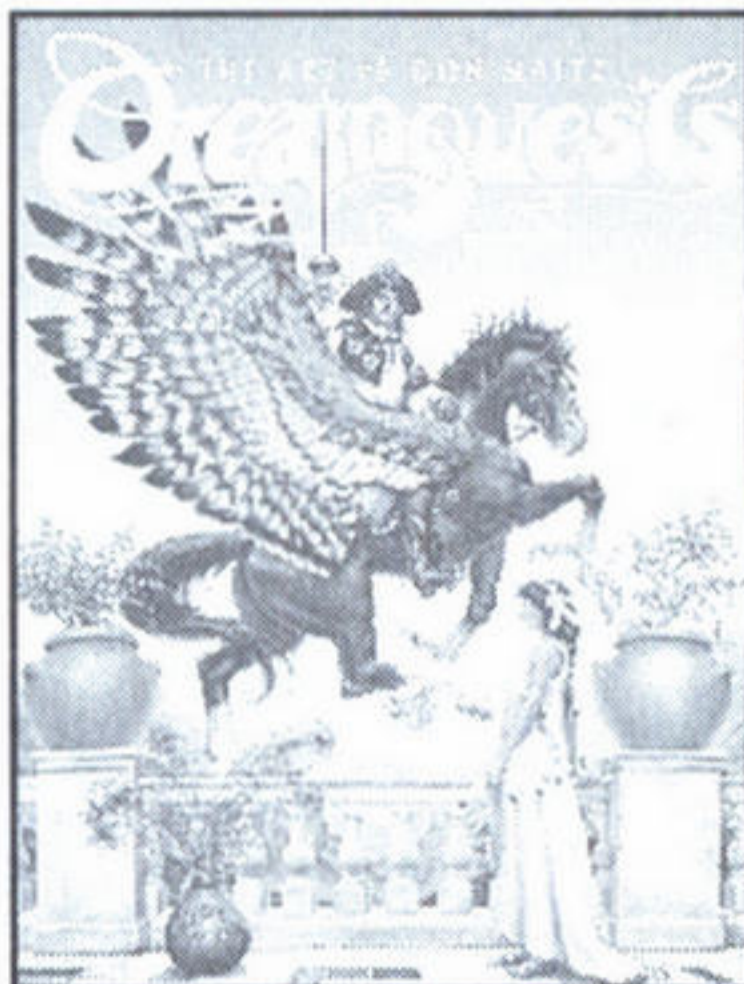
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BY MARK SUMNER

Across darkest Kansas with time machine, jet pack, and a really big stun gun.

EVERY YEAR I GO HUNTING. I load a heap of gear into my van, fill a thermos with black coffee, and take a fifteen hour drive one way to the extreme northwest corner of South Dakota. There, in the midst of canyons, cattle, and a few honest-to-God cowboys, I join a party in search of big game. I don't bring a rifle along. I hunt big beasts with a rock pick in hand and my nose to the ground.

The creatures that I hunt are, of course, dinosaurs. For the last few field seasons, I've been lucky enough to tag along with the crew from the University of Illinois as they scour outcrops of the Hell Creek Formation. This is where you find the tank-like triceratops, hordes of duck-billed hadrosaurs, and viscous carnivores of all sizes, including that favorite North American giant eating machine, *Tyrannosaurus rex*.

Now you can bring the dinosaurs home without the black flies, heat stroke, and back ache of a real trip into the badlands. *Dino Hunt*, from Steve Jackson Games, sends the player on a time travel safari, out to stun, capture, and bring back dinosaurs for their own little Jurassic Parks. Of course, when you get done you won't have any nice big bones for your trophy case. But you will have a set of really keen cards.

Dino Hunt is a card game, and it does contain collectable cards, but unlike many of the

collectable card games that have appeared over the last couple of years, it does not contain a whopping thick manual. The instructions for this game are printed on a colorful four page pamphlet. Simple rules don't mean that a game can't hold surprising depth and thousands of insidious strategies.

The goal in *Dino Hunt* is to capture dinosaurs and haul them back via time machine to present day. The set includes 109 cards, a "time track" which represents the Mesozoic period, and the necessary gear to keep track of play — including

a quartet of mini-dino markers. Cards are divided into two broad categories: dinosaurs and specials. The dinosaur cards feature a sketch of the creature, some basic information on when and where it lived, and details on how difficult it is to capture and hold.

Special cards provide tools, events, and experts to help you in your hunt — or to hinder your opponents.

To hunt dinosaurs, you place creatures at their appropriate point along the time line. The player then expends some of their allocated energy points in sailing back to meet them. Capture attempts are made with a roll of the die. In the case of a small dinosaur, or a relatively defenseless creature, a moderate roll may be enough to make the capture. To nab a *T. rex* or a nasty *Utahraptor*, you better hit a perfect six. A lesser role can result in failure. A really bad role can cost you energy, equipment, and the loss of your turn.

To aid yourself in your attempt to capture the creatures, you can employ an array of special cards. Hotshot marksmen can increase your chance of a hit. So can more powerful stun weapons. Radioactive ore can recharge your weapons, and plain old good luck can ward off disaster.

Working against you are the other players in the game. They may toss out a malfunction, causing your gun to misfire or a rogue dinosaur to chase away your prey. The interference doesn't stop there. Truly determined opponents can strike out with an extinction event, depopulating whole segments of the time line.

Once you have a dinosaur, you'll have to expend more

Steve Jackson Game's *Dino Hunt*, right, challenges you to "Bring 'em back alive!" In SSI's latest computer game, *War Wind*, below, you must learn to adapt or die!



MICHAEL WHELAN



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energy to get it back to the present time. Big dinosaurs take a lot of power to time travel. Small critters can go on an economy fare. Even during time travel your dinosaurs are not safe. Your opponents can hijack your specimen for their own dino park, or cause a mistake in your time travel. Only if you successfully complete the transfer, the dinosaur arrives safely in the present and is added to your display.

Game play continues as long as there are dinosaurs to hunt. When both the deck and the time line have been picked clean, it's time to tally up the winner. Here's where it pays off to hunt the bigger and more dangerous dinosaurs. Tiny Compsagnathus is easily caught and cheap to transport, but it's only worth two points toward victory. Compare this to the twelve points awarded for a massive Brachiosaurus, or the eleven awarded for a ferocious Giganotosaurus, and it's easy to see why bagging some of the big ones is worth the risk.

The game is simple enough to learn in a few minutes, and it's easy enough for an eight-year-old to pick up. But like all good strategy games, learning to play and learning to play well are two very different things.

When you're done snagging dinos for your personal park, there are other things to do with your stack of critters. For educators, SJG provides a sheet of additional activities using the cards to teach everything from paleontology to reasoning skills — a nice bonus. For the rest of us, there is the other kind of hunt — the one where you try to complete the card set. Like more collectable card games, "booster packs" are available which feature cards ranging from common to rare. There is also an ultra-rare "chase set" which replaces the hand drawn images of the dinosaurs with fossil photos edged in gold foil.

Dino Hunt is a fun, simple game on one of my favorite subjects, and is well-produced by one of my favorite game companies. Just watch out for those Utahaptors.

WAR WIND EQUALS WARCRAFT II TIMES 2

SSI's War Wind gives you a break from humans and orcs. For months now, Blizzard's Warcraft II has been leading the charts — with



good reason. With sharp graphics, extensive sound and voices, perfectly balanced play, and dozens of scenarios, the only thing wrong with Warcraft II is that there's not



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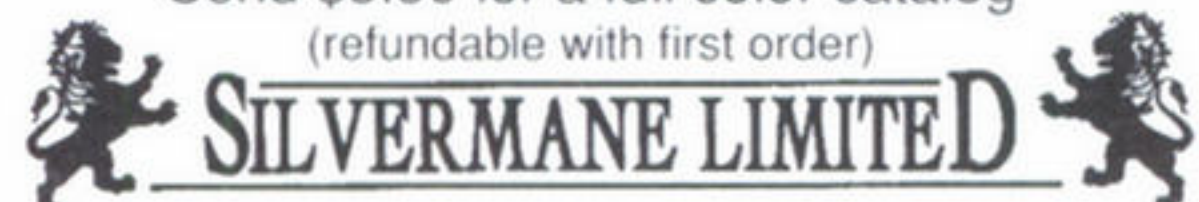
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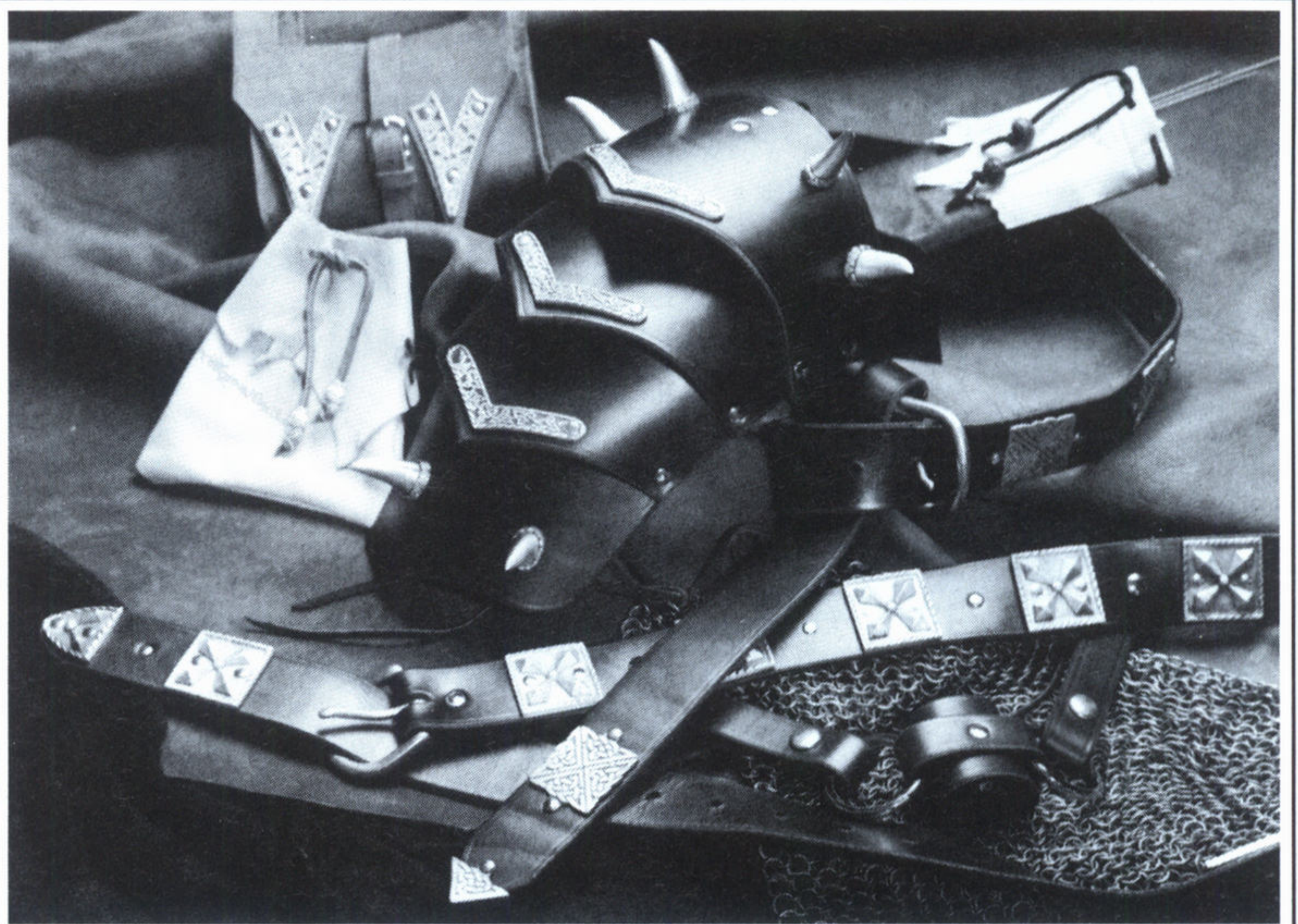
enough of it.

Well, for those that have been feeling the pinch, you can now get your action in a scenario that involves four competing armies, scads of new units, and dozens of distinctive buildings. No, it's not the latest *Warcraft* add-on pack, it's SSI's new real time strategy game, *War Wind*. For those unfamiliar with this style of gaming, *War Wind* offers a top down, angled perspective of objects and military units. With a click of the mouse, you can give orders to your troops: go over there, attack those guys, build a wall. Unlike many strategy games, the action never stops. If you sit around trying to think of what to do next, you're likely to find a pack of enemy soldiers making the decisions for you. In *War Wind*, you find yourself on a planet under the domination of the Tha'roon — critters which put me in mind of the Skeeksis from the movie *Dark Crystal*. They're smart, they've got psychic powers, and they're really, really ugly.

The Tha'roon are clever, but not physically up to the task of running a world. So they have made slaves of two other races. The Eaggra are a race of plantlike workers. They do the grunt work of keeping the Tha'roon empire running. Charged with expanding and defending the empire are the warrior reptiles, the Obblinox. Also wandering the planet is a race of nomadic magic users, the Shama'Li. At the game's opening, the world has reached a point of crises. Rebellion has entered the ranks of the Eaggra and Obblinox, threatening to topple the ancient empire. The player can choose to play as the Tha'roon, struggling to hold onto power while traitors pop up everywhere. Or you can be the Moses of one of the slave races, leading your people to freedom and ending centuries of oppression. You'll need to position your units, get them to work building houses and halls, then gather the resources you need to make and train new warriors. You'll have to work fast, because there's a time pressure in these scenarios. Whether you're revolting against the empire, or putting down those rebel scum, the best bet to winning is fast building and swift strikes. The surest victory is a fast victory.

Be warned: there's a definite learning curve to this game. Like Blizzard's classic, *War Wind* starts you off with simplified scenarios that have limited objectives and in which many buildings and units are unavailable. However, you'll find that these scenarios are several (several several) times tougher than the initial *Warcraft* campaigns. You'll need to master a complex set of units whose interactions can be complex, a range of buildings whose purposes can overlap, and learn to battle both enemy units and a hostile environment. It ain't easy running this alien's army. Expect to see your poor race being dragged back into slavery many times before you achieve your first victory.

SSI has long had a reputation for good quality strategy, and *War Wind* certainly does nothing to hurt that reputation. Play is fast, and often furious. ☛



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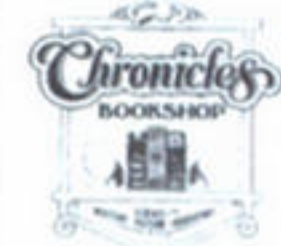
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BOOKS

Continued from page 16

with ever taller tales.

Heroism just goes on and on in this bodacious novel (Book One in what I am sure will be a very long series); men and women both are macho as macho can be and sentimentality absolutely drips from the pages, giving us vast numbers of touching death scenes and grievous wounds beyond counting which are much clucked over by fellow warriors.

There is, however, a childish unreality about those deaths and wounds very much along the lines I remember enthusiastically adopting as a kid playing Cowboys and Indians, based on the ridiculous movie serials we saw on Saturday matinees and, which I note, survive healthily to this day on Saturday TV. We died a lot during those games, rolling down the grassy slopes of parks or falling slowly towards the floors of concrete alleys, our backs sliding against the rear walls of apartment buildings as we clutched our chests and made terrible faces signifying the racking pain of bullets hurled by six-shooters through the heart.

Somehow we never really died during those shoot-outs, and our terrible wounds always healed completely by the time we'd scrambled back onto our feet, and the same goes for the heroes and heroines of *Devil's Tower* pretty much, though not for the villains, of course, as that wouldn't be right and proper. The villains stay dead even though they may take a lot of grimly determined slaughtering. They tend to be tough as rattlers and have the occasionally unnerving habit of persistently clambering bloodily back up for more just when you think you've given them the final, fatal bashing and are starting to relax.

The book is an alternate history which takes off with great gusto from the legendary, *not* the historic, American Wild West. The basic factor that has made everything different from the Wild West we know is that directly after the Civil War, magic happened, and various, oddly-chosen people discovered they had somehow acquired Powers of various sorts and descriptions.

Some could cast powerful spells by drawing with a stick in the dirt, for instance. Others could shout you to death with terrible howls; a select few could do you in with a kind of speaking-in-tongues known as "chattering." There was a great variety of these peculiar abilities and they were distributed unevenly to those lucky enough to get them. Some had a bunch of them to choose from; some had only one in their psychic holster.

There is no explanation for how or why the Civil War caused all of this to be unleashed (actually I'm only assuming the war had a direct hand in it) and I wouldn't expect much greater detail until, say, Book Three.

The result of all these powerful, new-made magicians wandering around was a huge

confusion in the American westward expansion, a dislocation so great that the expansion is failing if not actually moving in reverse back to the East.

Also, and very importantly, this sudden abundance of necromancy has totally revised the Old West definition of sheriff. The office is no longer occupied primarily by skilled gunslingers doing what they can to keep drunken cattlemen and occasional bank robbers more or less in line; now it has become the province of sorcerers who rule their towns as they please so long as they can defeat the challenges offered by journeymen wizards eager to usurp their residency by means of a magical challenge, and, since these challenges can involve the creation of violently homicidal house-high monsters, the profession of sheriff has become quite a bit chancier than heretofore.

Our Hero is Jake Bird, a young man whose obvious capabilities seem to have been seriously blocked when — as a small, trusting child — he observed none other than George Armstrong Custer ride into town and kill Jake's sheriff father just by telling him to die. Jake fled, became a wanderer and at the adventure's commencement is frittering away his life as a humble stable worker.

The action starts immediately with an admirable episode featuring a runty shaman riding into town on a dead, fly-filled horse in order to offer a magical challenge to Sheriff Priddy, an excellent character who I suspect was seriously influenced by Sumner seeing Burl Ives in one or more westerns. The aftermath of the ensuing conflict drags Jake from his hideout job and heaves him, not altogether willingly, into a life of ringtailed, b'ar-sized, yeller flower of the swamp adventure, as one of the greatest boosters and tale-toppers of this fine land of ourn might have put it in his glory.

I enjoyed tagging along.

Worldwar: Striking the Balance; by Harry Turtledove; Ballantine Books, NY; 465 pp.; Hardcover; \$23.00

Some time ago this column warmly welcomed the first book in Harry Turtledove's latest alternative history series, so it seems altogether fitting and proper that we applaud this one, which brings the series to its highly successful conclusion.

The basic notion behind *Worldwar* is a pun on its title since it combines World War II — pray God the biggest all-out global battle our species will blunder into — with the notion of a war of worlds, ours and a far-off planet inhabited by a Race of highly-efficient warriors who are most earnestly and wholeheartedly dedicated to the job of turning Earth into yet another successful colony of their interstellar empire.

Unfortunately for the Race, they have made two whopping blunders: 1. Their equivalent of the CIA convinced them that Earth's technology circa 1940 was what it actually used to be during the Middle Ages,

and: 2. The moment in time they chose for their invasion coincided with the very height of World War II, a period when our planet was more awesomely set up and ready for battle than ever before in its entire history.

Of course it is also a time when we Earthlings are fiercely divided in battle, configuring and reconfiguring complex and occasionally remarkably unstable alliances, so the Race does have an initial period of advantage while Roosevelt and Churchill and Hitler and Mao and Tojo and Stalin and all the other leaders and their peoples try to come to terms with this new situation.

There is wonderful opportunity for humor and social observation in the situation created, and Turtledove is just the man to take grand advantage of it. He does so magnificently, along with examining and playing with the many continuing difficulties our race has with keeping its mind on this New Big War, while not altogether losing track of all its continually interesting old little wars. The Kremlin, for instance, is still preoccupied with its inner power struggles; the Maoists still consider their ideology the first consideration, and the Jews and Nazis have by no means worked out their differences.

Of course *Worldwar* has a huge cast of characters, both real and fictitious. (The publishers have thoughtfully provided an alphabetical list of them with one-line bios at the start of the book.) They are a wildly mixed bag, and you will find your favorites among them as I have mine.

In this book, the member of the Race who stays with me the most is Tessrek, a researcher in human behavior who finds himself increasingly and confusingly involved with Liu Mei, a Chinese baby for whose existence he is, because of his experiments, largely responsible. How many diaper changings will this lizards researcher's detached, scientific point of view be able to survive? Will he be able to thwart the determined efforts of Liu Han, the baby's mother, (who is slowly but surely rising in the Party) to retrieve her child? And what in the Emperor's name would she do with Tessrek if she ever got him under her hand? Turtledove is highly illuminating with historical figures — and, of course highly entertaining. I found his Molotov and Stalin most interesting and educational. A character I found particularly fascinating was one who had, frankly, never really impinged upon my awareness before reading this series (I hope Turtledove is being made use of by bright teachers): one Otto Skorzeny, an SS Standartenfuhrer, a confidant of Hitler, and, it would seem, one of the most bone-chillingly scary villains of the Third Reich.

I really must look him up.

One last book I hope you might enjoy is *Gahan Wilson's Even Weirder* from Forge Books (a follow up to *Gahan Wilson's Still Weird*) as I certainly did everything I could think of to make it enjoyable. It's a collection of my cartoons, none of which have ever



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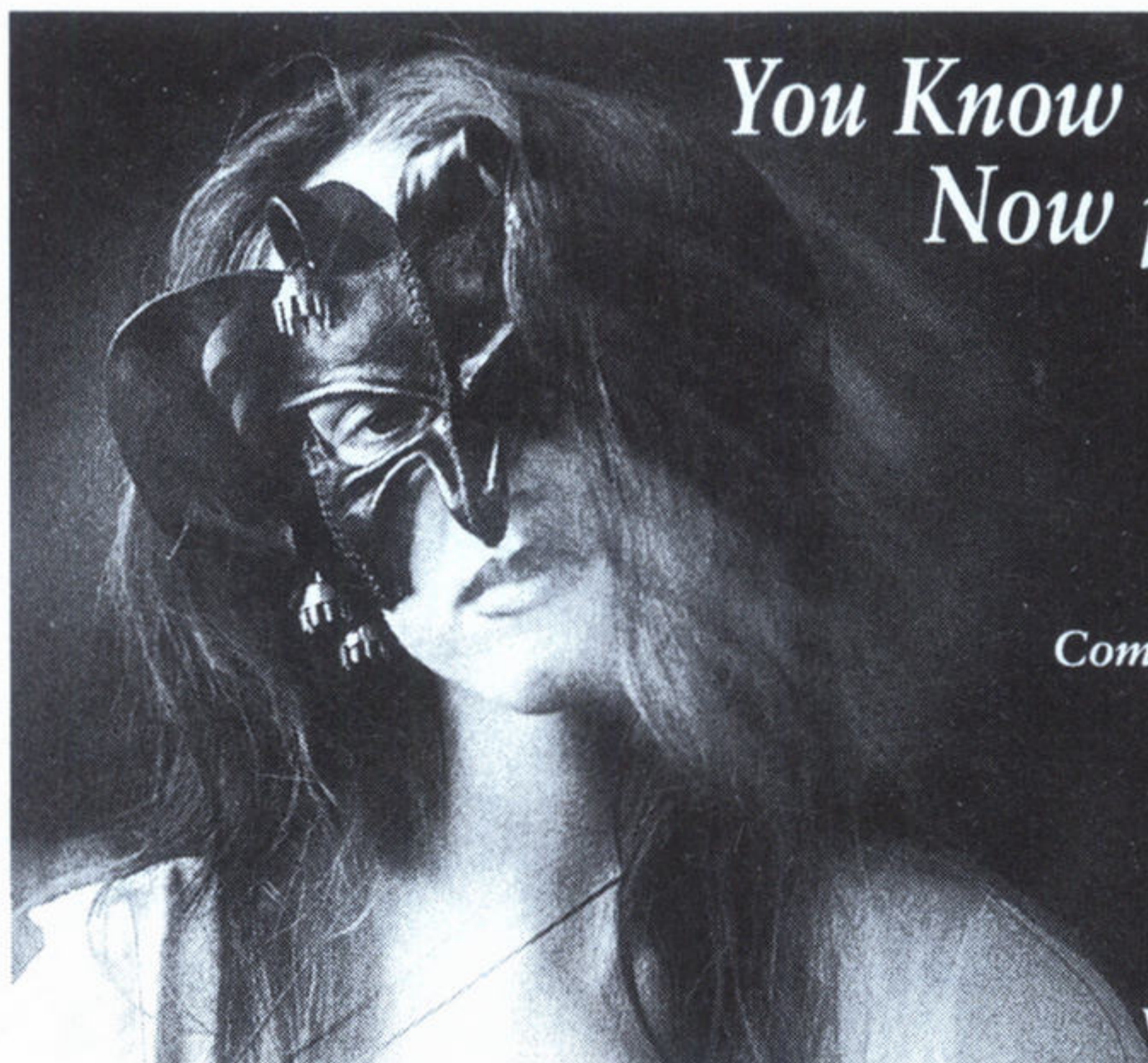


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been published in book form before. *Even Weirder* is decidedly within the realm of fantasy, therefore I hope you'll forgive me for sneaking it into this column.

— Gahan Wilson

Enchanter's Glass; by Susan Whitcher;
Harcourt Brace & Company, Hardcover;
\$17.00

A good children's book — like a good adult book — not only tells a tale that is exciting and entertaining, but carries levels of meaning that may only become apparent, to a younger reader or to an adult, after repeated readings. One of the great joys of falling in love with a fantasy novel is reading it again and again and discovering new nuances and new thematic connections.

Such a book is *Enchanter's Glass*, which tells the story of Phoebe, a girl who falls into the river one day and finds a piece of broken glass. This glass, rounded on one side and fractured on the other like a broken piece of a crystal ball, makes her see people differently when she holds it up to her eye. She first discovers this trait when she looks at Mr. Barnes through the glass. In the glass Barnes, who sells glass figurines and paperweights out of his house, becomes an evil sorcerer with a fiery beard and a tall black staff.

Phoebe soon discovers that Barnes's paperweight globes, with tiny figurines of knights, princesses, sorcerers, and fauns, actually imprison the spirits of people in her town. When she accidentally breaks the paperweight holding a faun, she finds that it held the spirit of a boy in her class, a boy she had always thought slow and stupid and geeky, who is actually none of those things now that he has been freed.

She finds herself in an alternate world, in which the people in her town are princesses and fauns, giants and sorcerers. And she herself may be a knight. Her father, an expert on Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, had explained that epic poem to her as showing the Life of the Mind, a place where imagination reveals a deeper level of inner reality (and isn't this what all great fantasy does?). Phoebe realizes that this alternate world is the Life of Her Mind, revealing her jealousies, cruelties, desires, and dreams. This adds a fascinating level of meaning to the adventures, sometimes scary, sometimes joyous, that Phoebe experiences.

Although *Enchanter's Glass* is published under the Harcourt Brace Children's Books imprint for ages ten and up, it is a powerful and enjoyable book for readers of all ages. There is a lot at stake in this book, and more than the lives of knights, princesses, giants, and fauns. If Phoebe can succeed in freeing the souls trapped in the globes within the Life of Her Mind, it means she will have had a transformative and restorative power on all those closest to her in reality: her parents, her friends, and most of all, herself. And isn't that what the very, very best fantasy does for us?

Jeanne Cavelos

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(Signed)
Mark Hintz, Publisher Nov 11, 1996.

MOVIES

Continued from page 23

last summer and newly released on home video. *Dragonheart* features, quite simply, the most stunning dragon ever committed to film in the form of Draco, an 18-foot-tall, 43-foot-long computer graphic dragon with a 75-foot wingspan. Building on the Oscar-



Draco and Bowen agree to help overthrow the evil King Eilon.

winning CG technology that produced the incredibly realistic dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park*, Phil Tippett Studios created a marvelously detailed dragon that not only walks, flies and swims convincingly, but one that actually performs for the camera. Draco's face was modeled after Chinese lion dogs so that it would be more expressive (and capable of dialogue) than dragons previously seen on the screen. Director Rob Cohen assembled clips from the movies of Sean Connery, who provides the voice of Draco, and these were used to give the computerized dragon a Connery-like personality. While some viewers couldn't adjust to Connery's brogue booming out of a giant, scaly reptile, others (myself included) kept forgetting that the dragon was even a special effect, so realistic is its look and movement.

Dragonheart is essentially a buddy movie, with the dragon teaming with the disillusioned knight Bowen (Dennis Quaid) to scam villages out of their money, a situation that lends much-needed humor to the story, in which an oppressive ruler (played by the anemic-looking David Thewliss) rises to power after being saved from certain death with a piece of Draco's heart. Eventually Bowen and Draco decide to help overthrow the despot, paying a terrible price in the process. And while the story is a bit overfamiliar, you won't be able to take your eyes off the screen whenever Draco is going through his paces.

I've most likely skipped over a few dragons in movies here and there, such as Smaug in the Rankin-Bass animated version of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, but I think we've hit the major high and low points along the way. With the advent of CGI technology, creature effects have truly come of age, and just about any monster or alien imaginable can now be presented realistically on the screen. As a result, I expect we'll see even more spectacular dragons in the future. Watch the skies... 🐉

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Contributors

KRISTINE KATHERINE RUSCH recently ended her reign as editor of *Fantasy and Science Fiction* magazine to pursue fiction writing full time. Kristine makes her home in Oregon where she lives with her husband and six cats. The idea for her story "Falling" came to her as she was driving behind a pick-up truck with a dog chained to the back bed. She is currently at work on the fourth of "The Fey" novels, entitled *The Resistance*. While Kristine says she will definitely miss editing, she is looking forward to focusing on her writing.

Leslie What began writing fiction in earnest in 1992. She has since retired from a career as a licensed vocational nurse and published her work in *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Hysteria* and several regional publications. She has just completed her first novel, *Fingertalk*, a post-feminist comic novel, and is at work on a second about magic in the modern world.

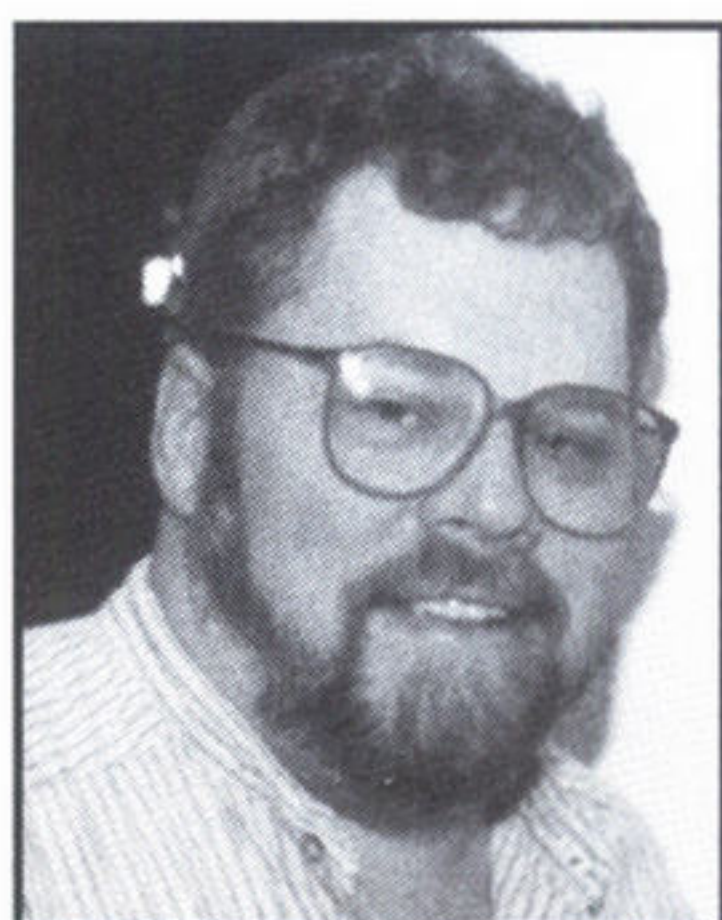
In addition to her commissioned work for most of the SF field's major magazines, **Janet Aulisio** is hard at work on a more personal series of paintings. Recently published work includes paintings for the games *Shadowrun* and *Earthdawn* for the FASA Corp.

Before turning to writing, **Dave Smeds** worked as a graphic designer. Since making the career change, he has published the fantasy novel *The Sorcery Within* and its sequel, *The Schemes of Dragons*. His short fiction has appeared in a number of anthologies, including *Full Spectrum 4*, *Return to Avalon*, *The Best New Horror*, *The Ultimate Superhero*, plus such magazines as *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* and *Pulphouse*. He was also the English-language rewriter of *Justy*, a Japanese "manga" science fiction comic book, published in the U.S. by VIZ Comics. Dave lives with his wife and children in Santa Rosa, California where he teaches Goju-ryu karate when he's not writing.

Jon Foster lives in Barrington, R.I. and works full-time as an artist/illustrator. He graduated from the R.I. School of Design and is currently working on card illustration for



Leslie What



Dan Perez

Iron Crown Enterprises and artwork for *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. He would like to keep his latest endeavor a mystery ... for now.

Stephen Dedman is a prolific short story writer, with appearances in magazines such as *Strange Plasma*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Asimov's Science Fiction* and *Pulphouse*. He has also sold fiction to anthologies including *Little Deaths*, *Alien Shores* and *The Last Dangerous Visions*. He lives in Australia.



Mary O'Keefe Young



Tanith Lee

ALAN LEE TAKES GREAT INSPIRATION from his walks in "Dartsmoor," the National Park near his home. Dartsmoor's curious rock formations, rivers, wilds and wastelands often provide the impetus for his artwork. Mr. Lee has two grown children, one studying art in college. He is currently at work illustrating the centennial edition of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tanith Lee went to art college and worked in various jobs until DAW Books published *The Birthgrave* in 1975 and she became a full-time writer. She has published more than 160 short stories and almost 60 books, and is a frequent contributor to *Realms of Fantasy*. Her latest English publications include *Reigning Cats and Dogs* and *When the Lights Go Out*. She lives near the sea with her husband, writer John Kaiin.

Mary O'Keefe Young graduated from Parsons School of Design in New York City in 1982. Mary tries to create a magical quality with her watercolors by using dramatic light. Capturing the beauty of human expression is of prime importance in her work. A love of the natural world and art history is also evident in her artwork. Mary's studio is in her home in White Plains, New York. She enjoys using family or friends as models and dressing them up in costumes which she has collected or sewn herself.

Media columnist **Dan Perez** has edited several magazines for Sovereign Media, including the *Sci-Fi TV Fall Preview*. He has short fiction in the anthologies *100 Vicious Little Vampires*, *Xanadu 3*, and *100 Wicked Little Witches*. Dan is a regular contributor to *Science Fiction Age* and *Sci-Fi Entertainment*. ☛

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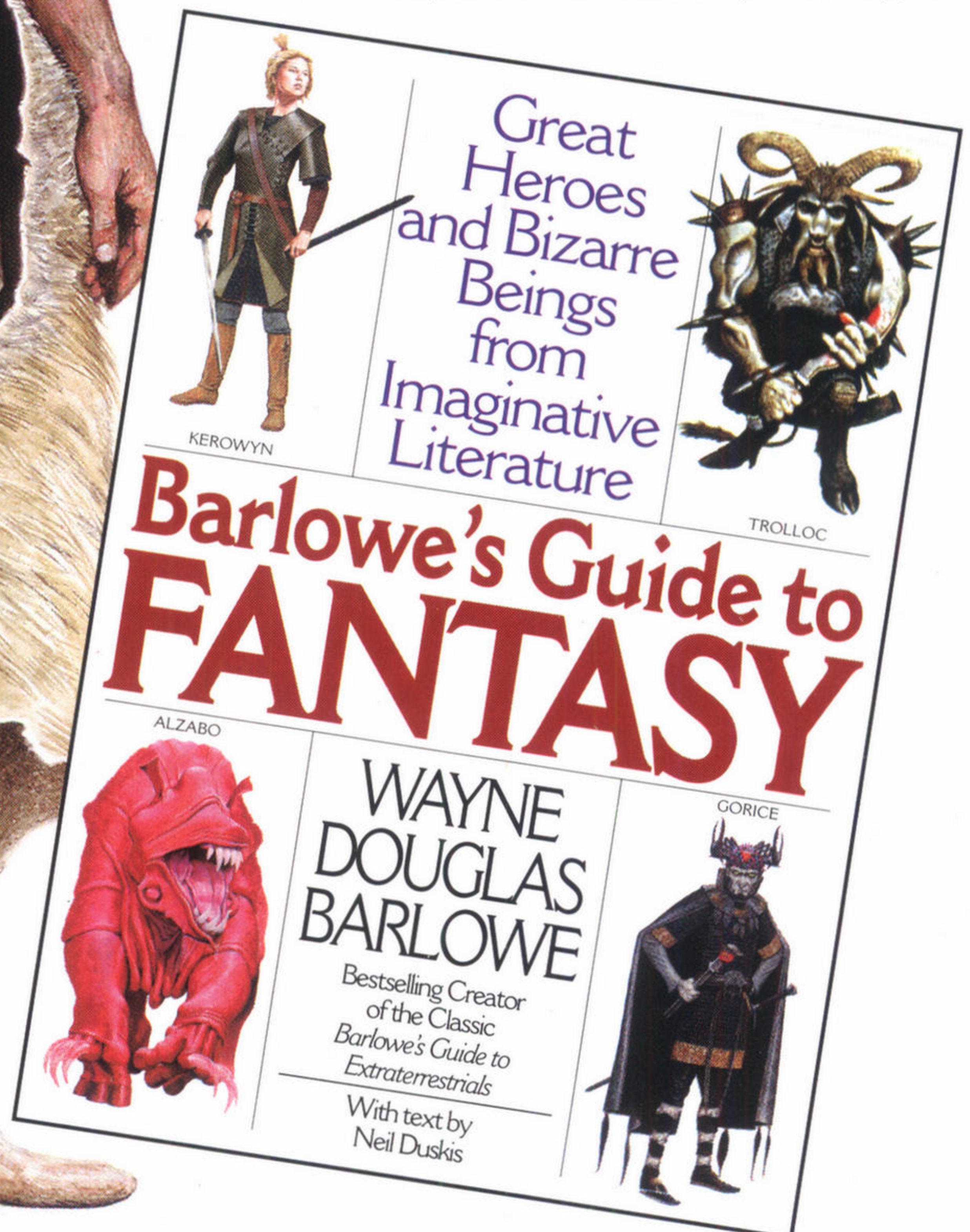


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