

LIAM NEESON
Locked Inside **THE HAUNTED HOUSE**

REALMS OF
FANTASY

Curtis 02271

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:
FROM
Star Wars
TO
TOLKIEN:
The Brothers
Hildebrandt

Gahan
Wilson on
Robert E.
Howard

1999
NEBULA
Winner
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REALMS OF FANTASY

Fiction

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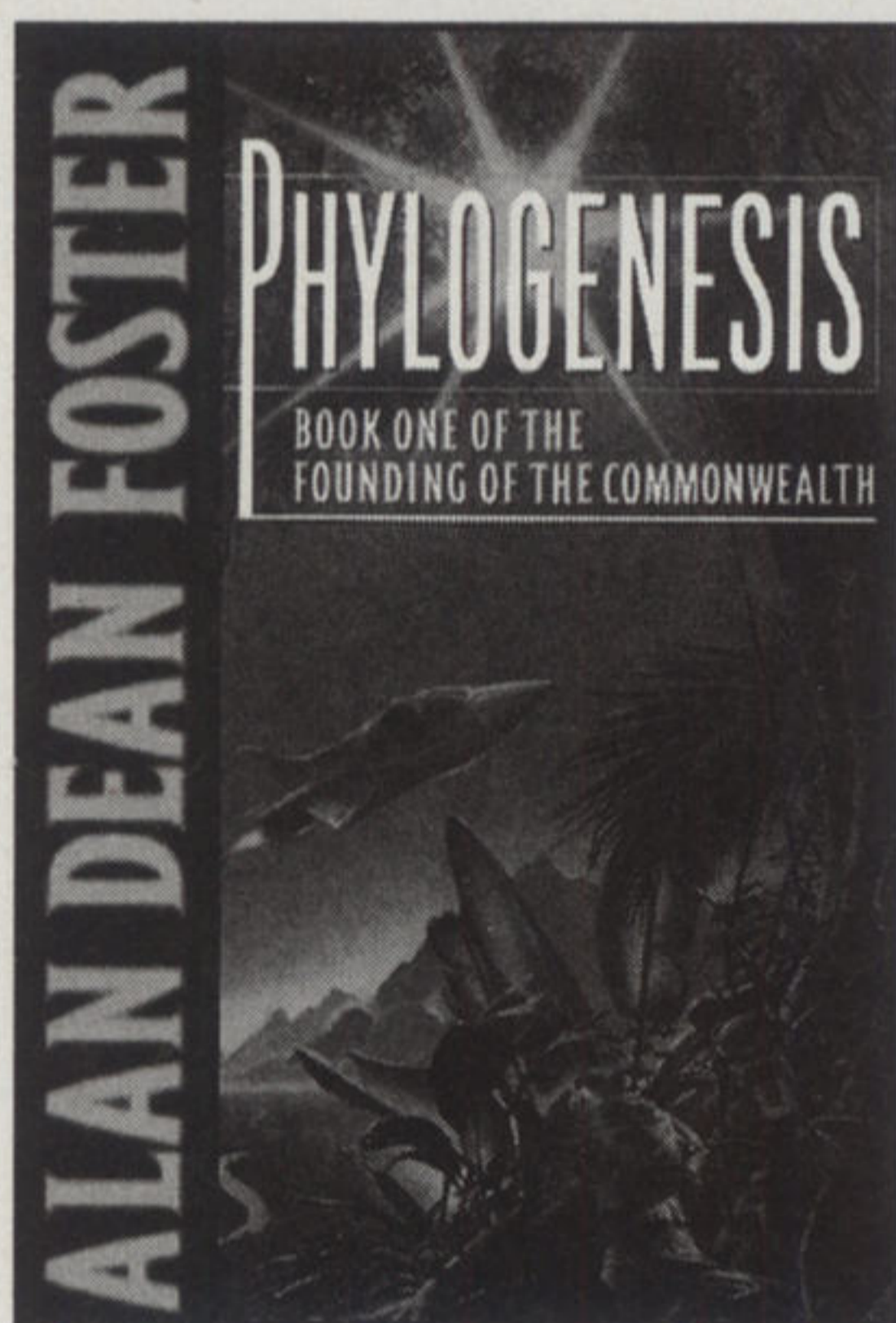
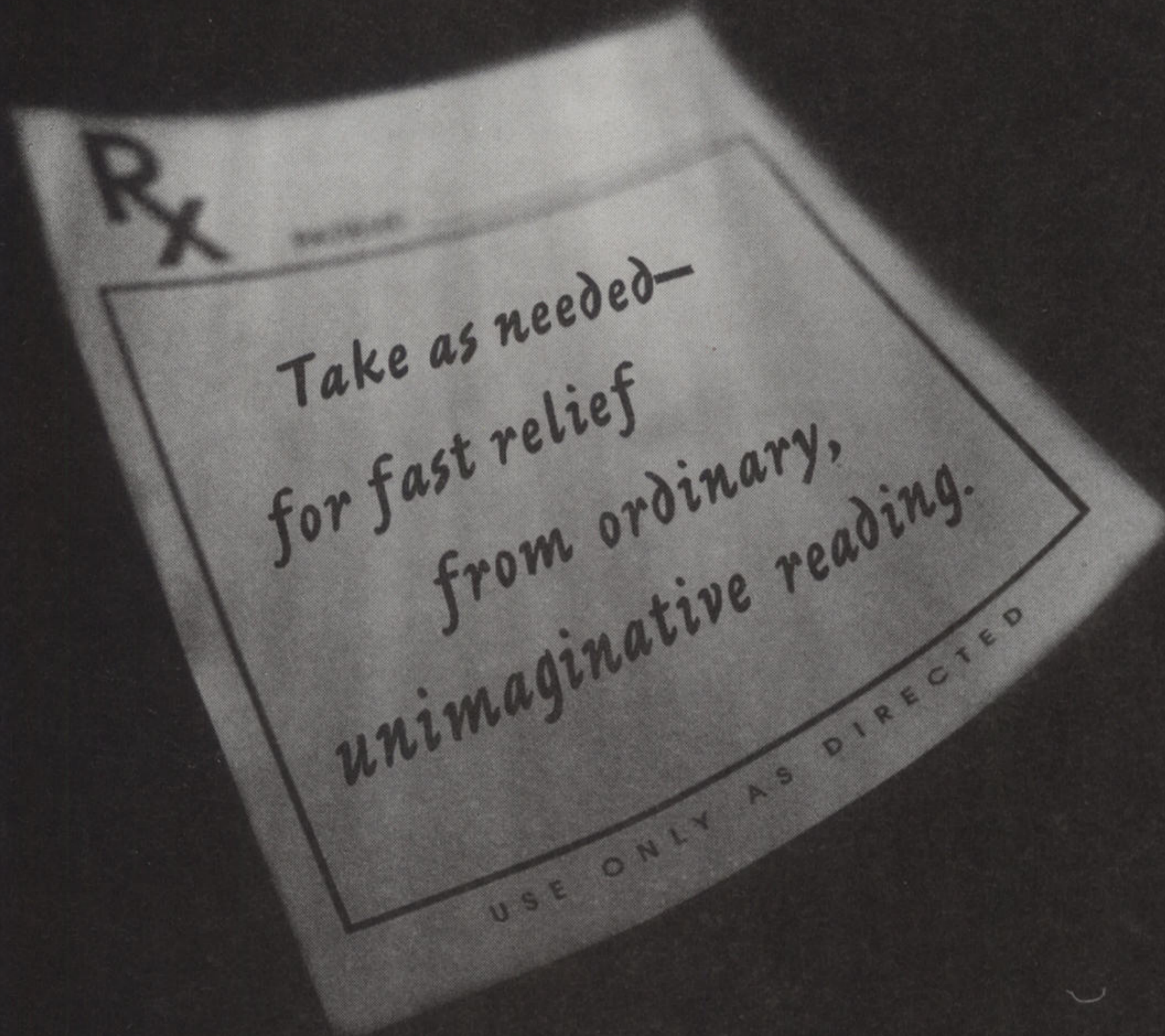
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Princes and vampires, heretics and warriors—and finally, a game for girls.

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ABOVE: Greg and Tim Hildebrandt envision a different Atlantis with their 1980 Atlantis Calendar. Dive to even deeper depths in our Hildebrandts' Gallery on page 66. COVER: The Story of Perseus by Greg Hildebrandt teaches young girls the dangers and pitfalls of being a maiden.

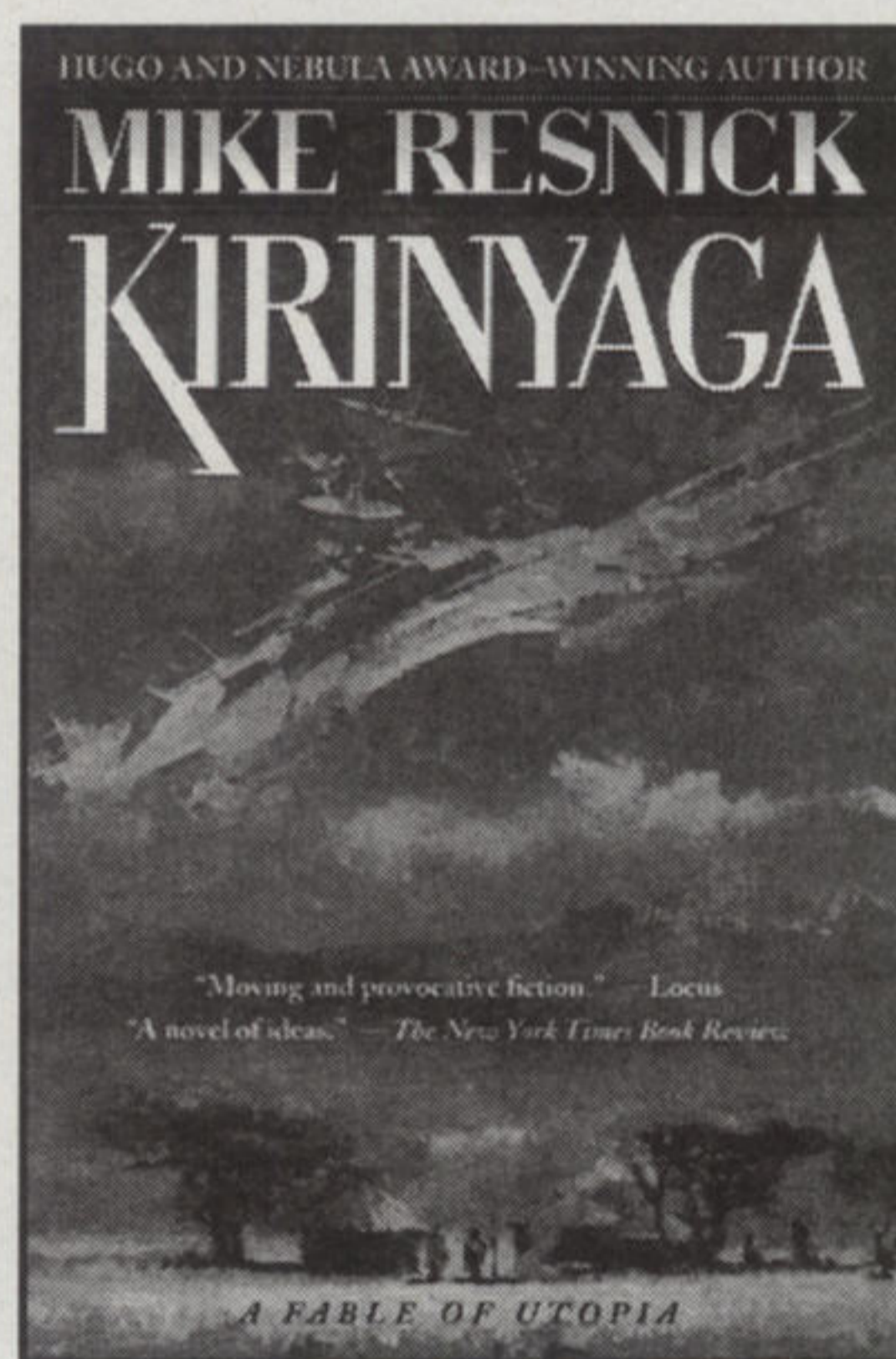
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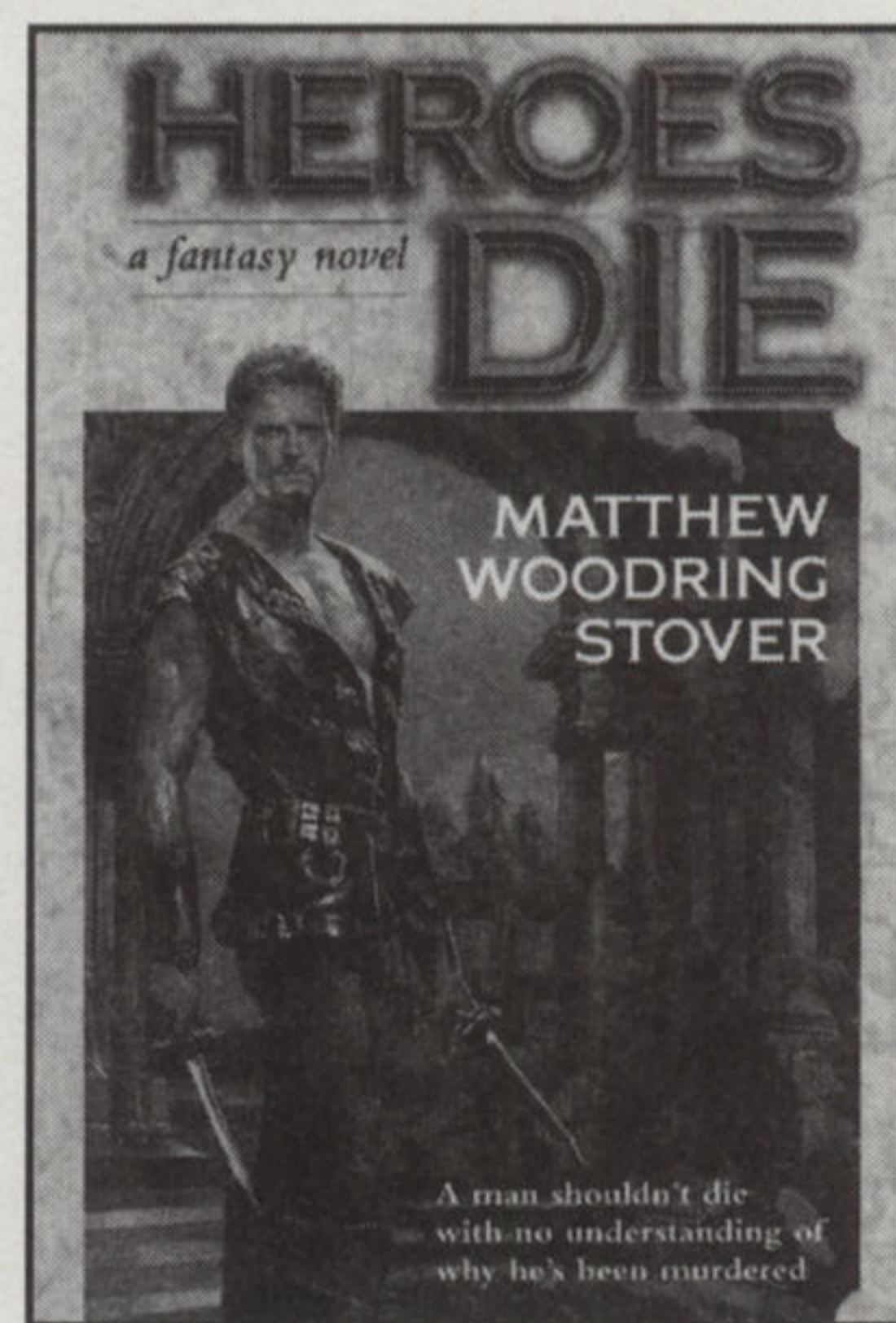
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News and Who's Who

I think that with this column I'll take a break from our regularly scheduled programming, which mainly consists of my rambling on at great length about the weather or my kids, or how to write Fantasy or how not to write it, or whatever other trivia is on my mind when I sit down to do my Editorial.

This time I want to talk about some of the people whom you've come to know and love in the pages of this magazine. Many of you, for instance, have inquired as to the whereabouts of Terri Windling, our redoubtable Folkroots columnist. She's been missing for the past three issues, and her loyal fans and readers have been getting increasingly angry at me for, they suppose, showing her the door.

Fear not, oh Windlingites—Terri will return with our next issue (we hope). Unfortunately, she's been unwell these past few months, and one more deadline (i.e., ours) was not what she needed to help her get well. While she's been gone, we've been lucky enough to have the wonderful Heinz Insu Fenkel, scholar and close friend of Terri's, to fill in, allowing us a rare (in our field, anyway) look at folkloric traditions outside the Western canon. Once Terri's back on board, Heinz and she will alternate columns, giving Terri a much-needed break and you an opportunity to discover traditions both rich and different from our own. When you're at your local bookstore, don't forget to look for Terri's work, including her co-editorship with Ellen Datlow of *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* as well as her own *The Armless Maiden*.

Next, I'd like to give a shout out to Gahan Wilson, our hard-working and sorely underappreciated book reviewer. For those of you who don't know, or who just hadn't really thought about it, yes, he is the same Gahan Wilson who became internationally famous for his morbidly hilarious cartoons in *Playboy* and *The New Yorker*. We're lucky to have a reviewer of his caliber and grateful for his presence, and we'd like you to show your gratitude by looking for his book *The Cleft and Other Odd Tales* just out from Tor. And while I'm plugging books by friends of RoF, I might as well mention *Barlowe's Inferno* by

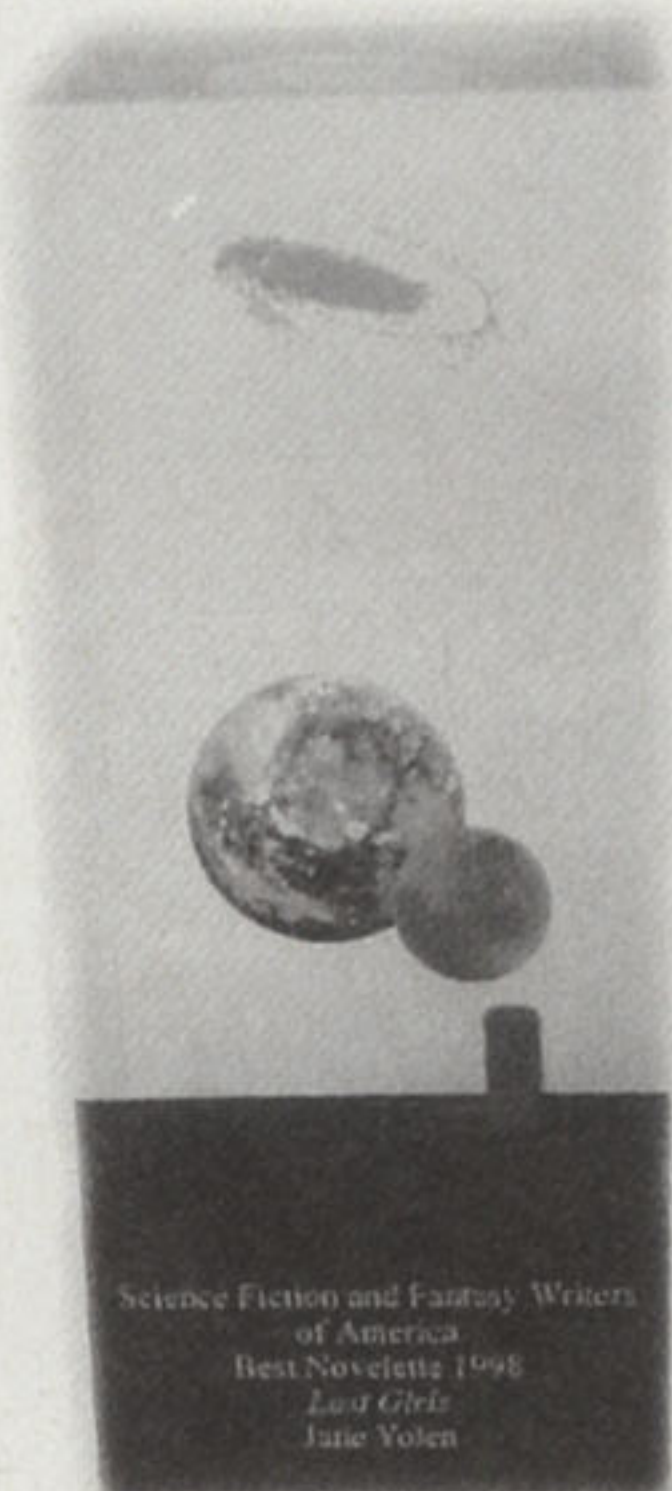
my very own husband, Wayne Barlowe. Gahan gave it a very nice mention in the last issue, but I thought I'd take shameless advantage of my position here and give it another shove in the direction of your bookshelves. Just don't read it late at night.

I'd also like to thank both Jane Yolen and the members of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America for awarding this magazine's first-ever Nebula to the wonderful story "Lost Girls." Thanks, Jane, for letting us have this fabulous piece, and thanks, SFFWA, for recognizing its greatness.

Finally, a long overdue and sadly inadequate THANK YOU to Becky McCabe, my overworked and underpaid assistant. Without her diligence and organization, this magazine would never see print. She collects the mail (and deals with the snarling post office officials), opens it, reads all the manuscripts, sends most of them back (some with soothing notes attached), and gives me the pick of the litter. I then select those stories you read in these pages and give the rest back to Becky to return. She also sends the books to our reviewers, deals with recalcitrant columnists (including me), and gets the contracts to the authors and the stories to the publishers. In short, she does everything.

So, of course, I get the glory as the Editor, and Becky gets her name in 12-point type in the masthead. Thanks, Becky. I quite literally couldn't do it without you.

One final thought, one that doesn't have anything to do with the staff, but with you, the readers. I know that many of you are in high school, and if you're anything like I was in high school (and I think all teenage Fantasy and Science Fiction readers are pretty similar underneath it all), you may be getting a hard time from some of your peers. (Well, they're not really your peers—you're smart enough to read this magazine and they probably have trouble with the back of the Wheaties box, but you know what I mean.) You can probably guess where I'm going with this—the tragedy that happened in Colorado is not the solution. You're better, stronger, and smarter than any of the idiots that are beating you down, and in 10 years you'll be able to buy them and sell them. Now that's vengeance. ☘



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LAURA CLEVELAND
Copy Editors

Contributors:

Resa Nelson, Heinz Insu Fenkel, Jeanne Cavelos, Karen Haber, J.K. Potter, Terri Windling, Gahan Wilson, Mary O'Keefe Young, Annie Lunsford, Web Bryant, Paul Salmon, Ken Graning, Stephen Johnson, Tom Canty, John Berkey

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AMANDA ZELONES
Finance Manager

CARI WYNNE
Production Assistant

ALI LORAINÉ
Production Assistant

KATHY PAULHAMUS
MARY NOLAN
SANDRA HILLYARD
Subscription Customer Service

Curtis Circulation Company
Worldwide Distribution

ARTHUR O'HARE
Newsstand Consultant

Advertising Offices:

JOE VARDA
Advertising Director
(703) 733-2160

JENNIFER HAEFELI
Advertising Assistant
(703) 733-2171

11305 Sunset Hills Road, Reston, VA 20190
703-471-1556 / FAX: 703-471-1559
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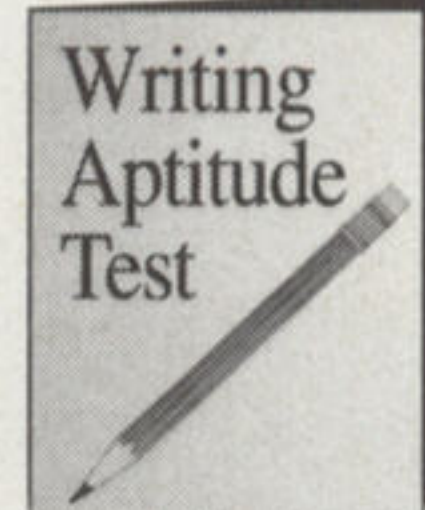
Irvin, Coloma, MI. "Too many writing schools do not appear to necessarily care if the person can really write."

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Dear Shawna,

Great issue! Loved the Letters section and enjoyed movie review of *The Mummy*. I'm looking forward to it. It seems as though Holly-weird has taken steps back what with the releasing of an age-old classic like *The Mummy* and Disney's new animated *Tarzan*. Has no one any new ideas? There is *The Matrix* which I would watch if not for the fact that Keanu Reeves is in it! I have to admit I am dying to see the new *Star Wars* though. Please also tell author Denise Lee she is one cute-looking lady and her story is really incredible! She is incredibly talented, attractive, and an R.N. to boot! I think I am in love!

Ah well, keep up the great work,
Darren Fox

Dear Shawna,

I just received the June issue of *ROF* and read the Letters section. I think you've been had, or I've been had, or both. There's a letter by James D. Ireland that I think is a fake for a number of reasons. (1) James D. Ireland is a pseudonym of mine. (2) The statements in this letter are almost identical, though highly exaggerated versions of statements I made to a local writing group not long ago. The similarities are simply too great to be coincidence. (3) There's a clod who sometimes attends this writing group who has pulled this stunt before with other writers.

All right, how to explain this. I gave a sort of mini-workshop for the writers group after having all of them read an issue of *ROF*. Then we dissected the stories. The points I made were as follows. (1) I thought "Dragon of Conspiracy" was not up to Eakin's best stories because I felt the ending left me hanging. But I also said it was wonderfully written. (2) I did say Biscoff's "A Ghost of a Chance" was more a vignette than a short story, but that wasn't meant as a criticism. Vignettes are human, too, and just a different approach. (3) I said "Northwest Passage" by Derryl Murphy would have been a much better story written in past tense rather than present tense, and that I could not enjoy stories written in this style. I did not say it is "the height of pseudo-literary writing and has no place in the real world." (4) All the flattering parts of the letter I said almost word for word. (5) I did say I was afraid I was going to have to cancel my subscription, but not because of quality. I told the group there was a four-dollar-a-pill illness in the family, and that magazine subscriptions would have to go unless something changed. I also said if that happened would someone please, please, please let me read their copies. I'm not sure how to prove any of this, but if it is the same clod, he has in the past used an address that is set in New Castle.

In any case, please know the comments in that letter are not mine, and that I think *ROF* is the finest Fantasy magazine on the market.

Sincerely yours,
James A. Ritchie
New Castle IN

After some back-and-forth E-mailing, it was in fact determined that the letter in question was a forgery. We regret the error, but admit to being utterly clueless as to why someone would want to do this. Perhaps if you don't have any opinions of your own you feel that you need to steal them from someone else? From someone else's pseudonym, in fact? Oh well—live and learn, I guess.

Hey Shawna,

I caught a somewhat recent copy of *ROF*, and for the life of me I can't understand why you bought the story "Secret in the Chest." It's just another feminist author bagging on men, probably because she has an ax to grind. Where is the magic? Where are the fights? Why can't any new Fantasy writers give us good stuff along the lines of Kurtz, Howard, or Jordan? Why do we always get namby-pamby pap or washed-down Arthur legends? I remember "Twixt Dusk and Dawn." Now that was good. Why don't you buy more stuff like that? And what's with all the WWII nonsense, or tales from the American Plains. I thought Fantasy is supposed to take us into premechanized worlds. At least your art segments are good. I appreciate that you are trying to publish something of quality, but the ads have more fantasy characteristics than the fiction. I don't care, prop airplanes don't belong within your pages.

Brittany Thompson
Fullerton, CA

Well, readers, I think I will hold my tongue on this one. Maybe some of you would like to respond to Brittany's letter? Champions appreciated.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

As always, I give much praise to your wonderful magazine, especially the Folk-roots section. There is, however, one matter I would like to touch upon. Why are the issues being shipped without their protective covers? I have just received the most recent issue (April 1999) in rather shabby condition minus the paper-protector. I do love the covers and would very much like to preserve them.

Melissa J. Boynton
Skowhegan, ME

I think I received more mail in the past two months regarding the lack of protective covers than I did regarding the content of the magazine.

In fact, the letter above was probably one of 20 or so about the April issue in particular. My own issue came to me in a rather mutilated state. Hopefully, whoever is in charge of protective brown wrapping at Realms circulation (I have no idea who that might be) will take note.

Dear Shawna,

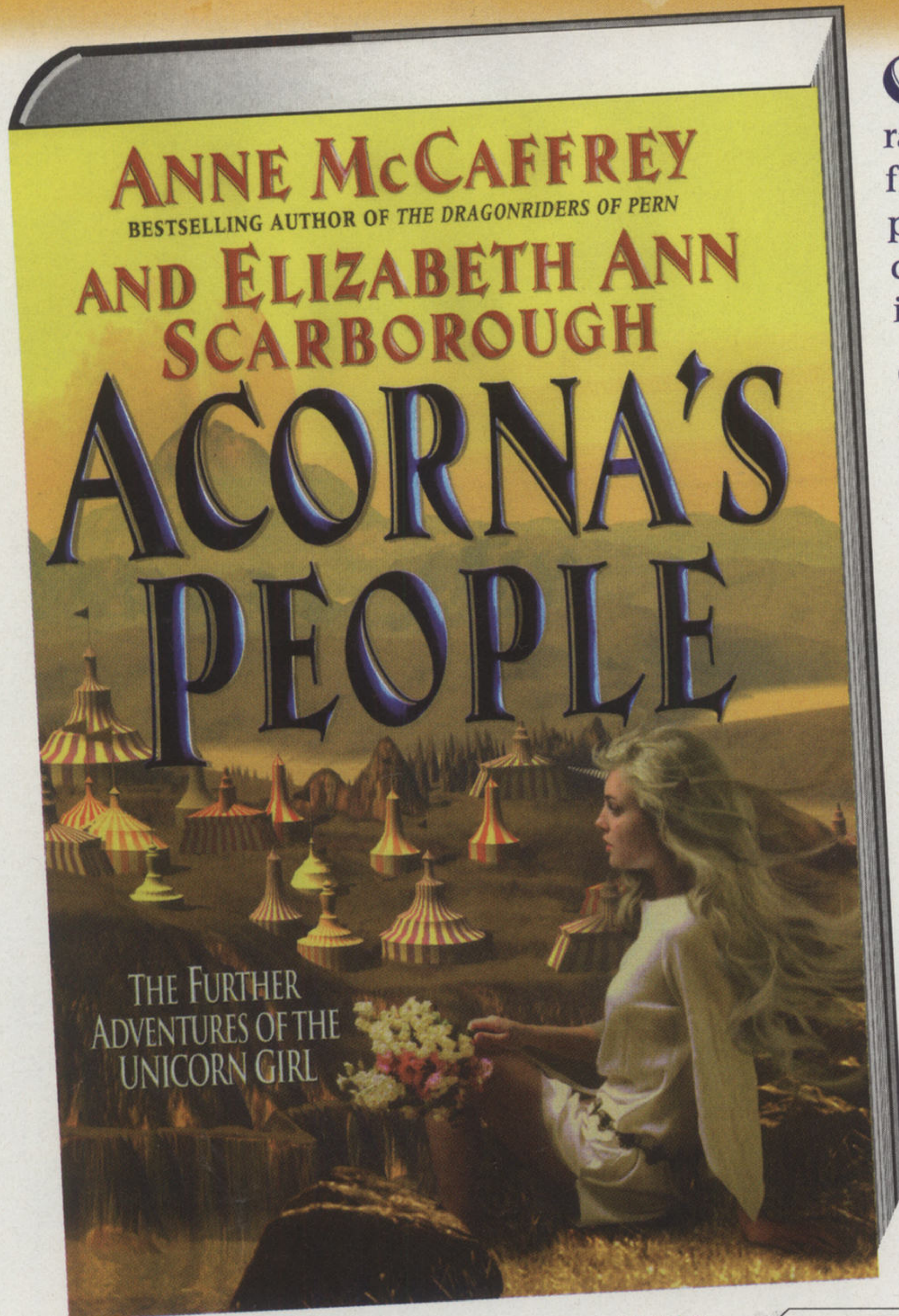
I can't help but feel that Rebecca McCabe may have given up on her writing talent a bit too early. I can assure you that if I'd sent all my early stories (or even all the ones from the first 20 years of my career) to *Redbook*, *Yankee*, and *The New Yorker* exclusively, I would most likely be unpublished and would probably have given up by now. The new writer has to aim low. Yes, you should send a story around to the better-paying markets first, the way all the pros tell you to, on the off chance that you might be the first person in a generation to sell an over-the-transom story to *Playboy*. (Actually, I think I'd leave *Playboy*, *The New Yorker*, and a couple of the other biggies off the list entirely, to start. If you're out of your weight class in more modest markets, you will soon know it. There will always be another story.) But having accumulated all those rejection slips, the writer can then either give up or get serious. Aim a bit lower. Start sending to magazines that might actually publish you. Particularly look for fiction magazines that seem to have several unknown or first-time writers in every issue. Don't necessarily expect the highest pay. I wonder how it would have been for Ms. McCabe if she had started selling regularly in the small press for a penny a word. This would certainly have encouraged her to write more, as it encouraged me when I was 20. Thirty sales later, you land a story in a larger market, and the transition doesn't seem all that much of a leap. You cannot expect to climb the ladder all at once.

Best,
Darrell Schweitzer

Rebecca replies that she is extraordinarily pleased that you chose to make a reply to her June issue Editorial. She is a huge fan of your work and was excited to have a hand in including your tale "Bitter Chivalry" in the February 1999 issue. She feels, however, a bit upset at the suggestion that she has put aside her novel et al. because she was looking for that "big sale" to a huge magazine. Rebecca has frequently written for pennies in the past. Money was never an issue, and over the years she has amassed a large collection of "paid in copies" magazines.

Your comments are welcome. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, E-mail to: shawnam896@aol.com

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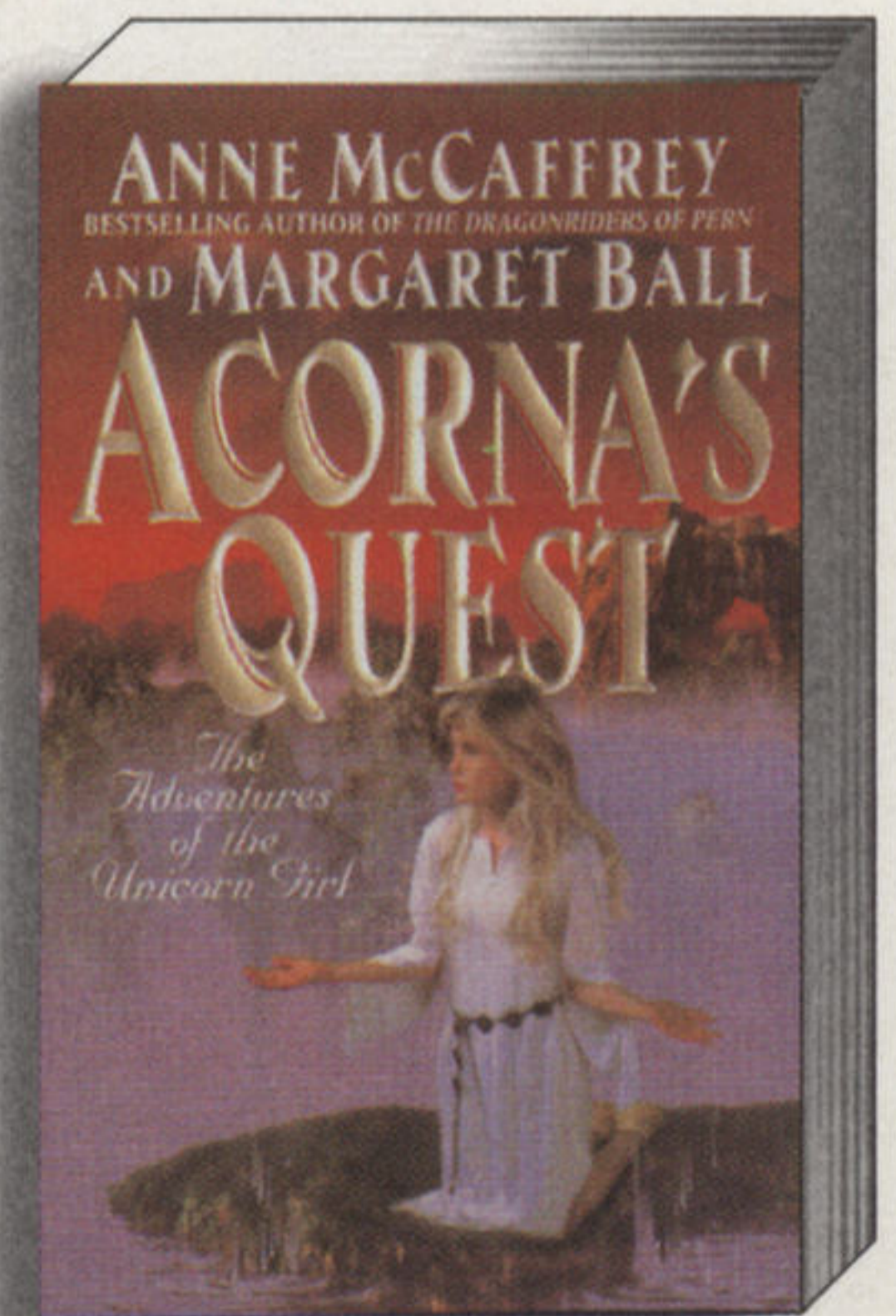
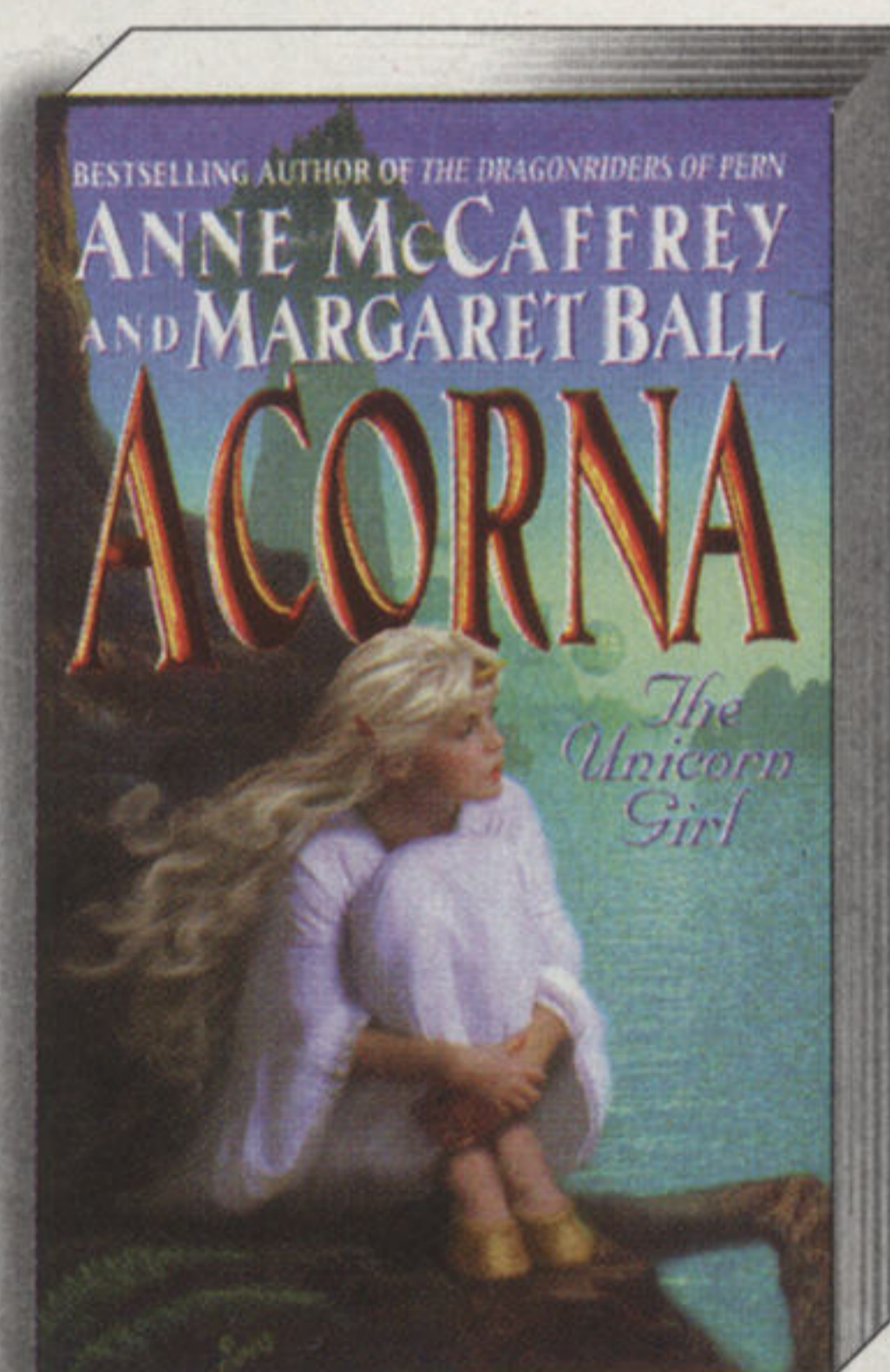
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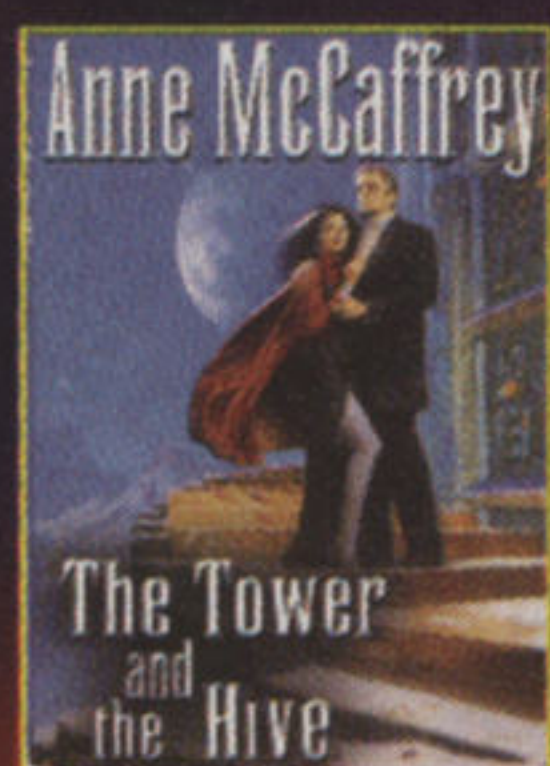
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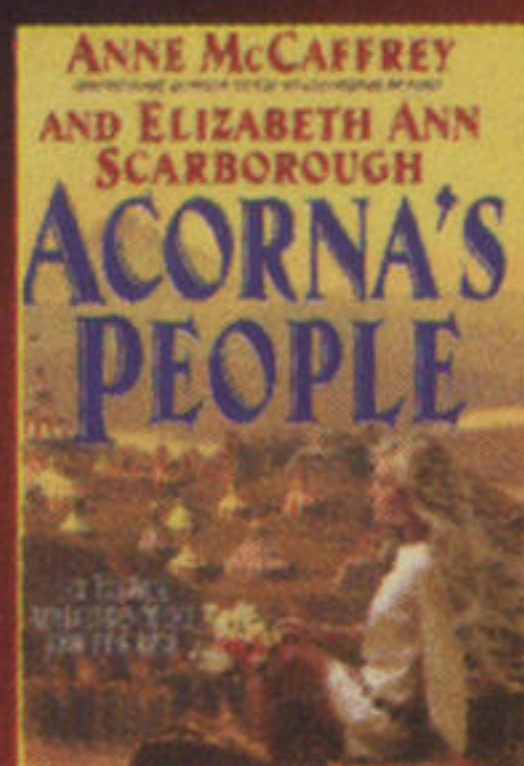
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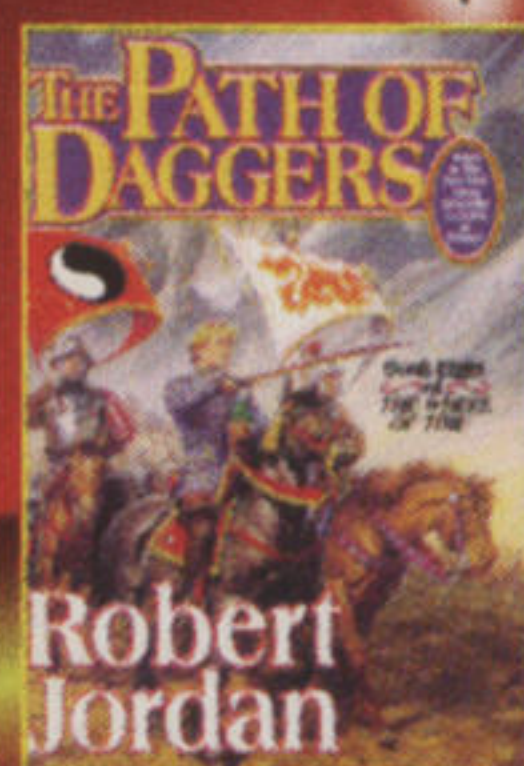
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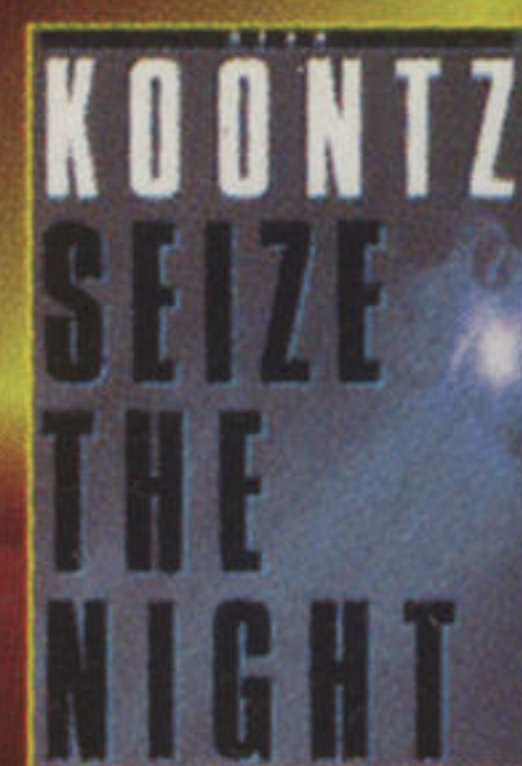
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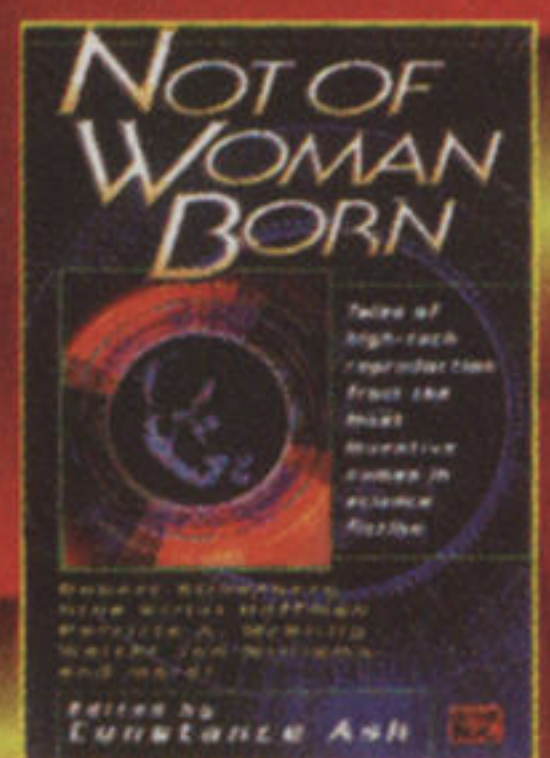
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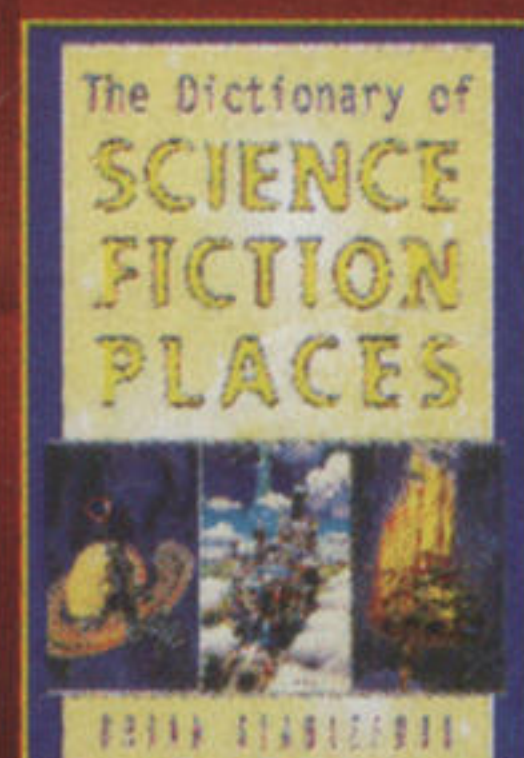
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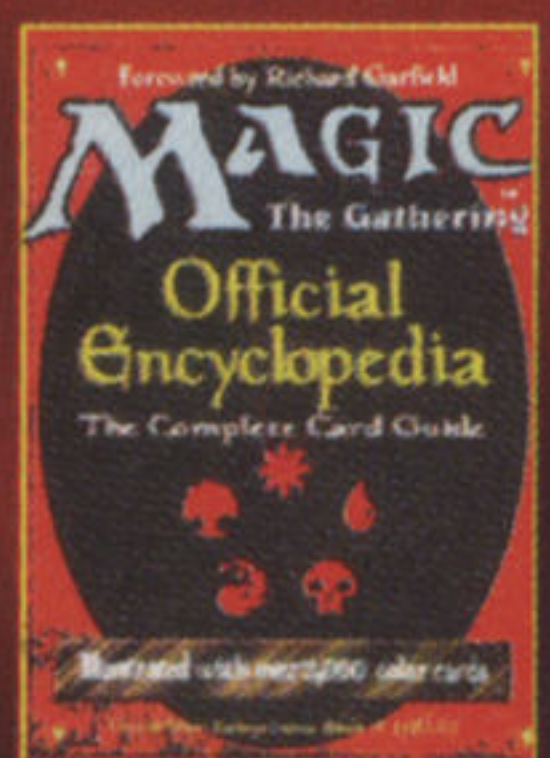
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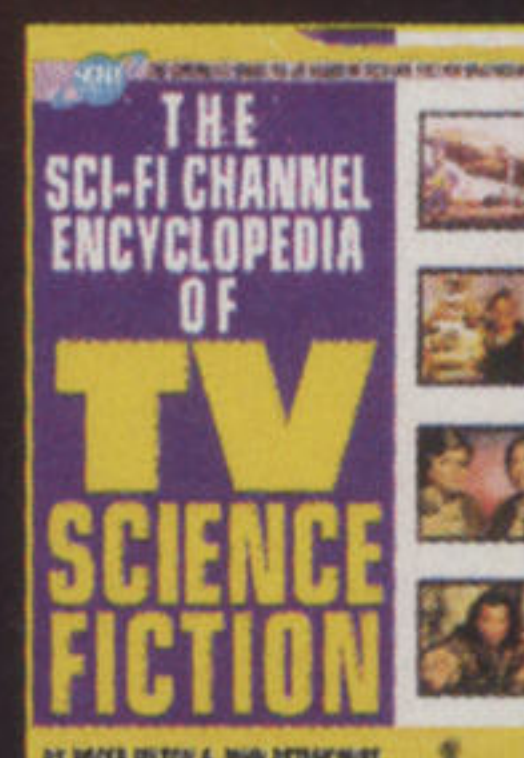
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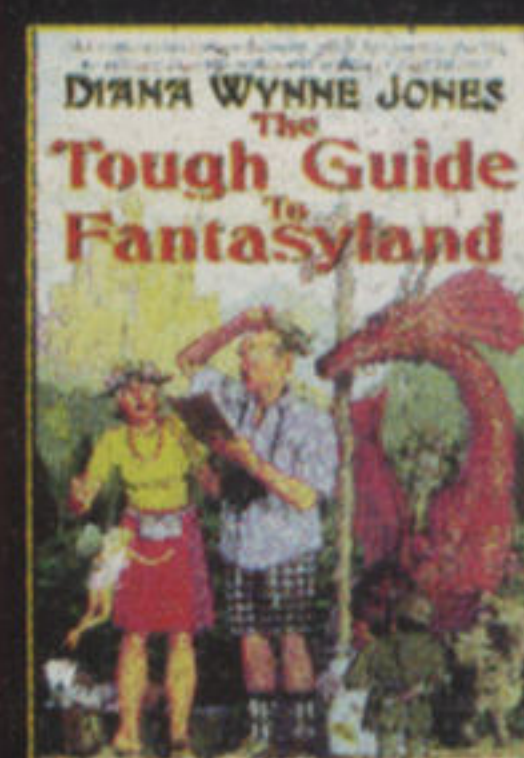
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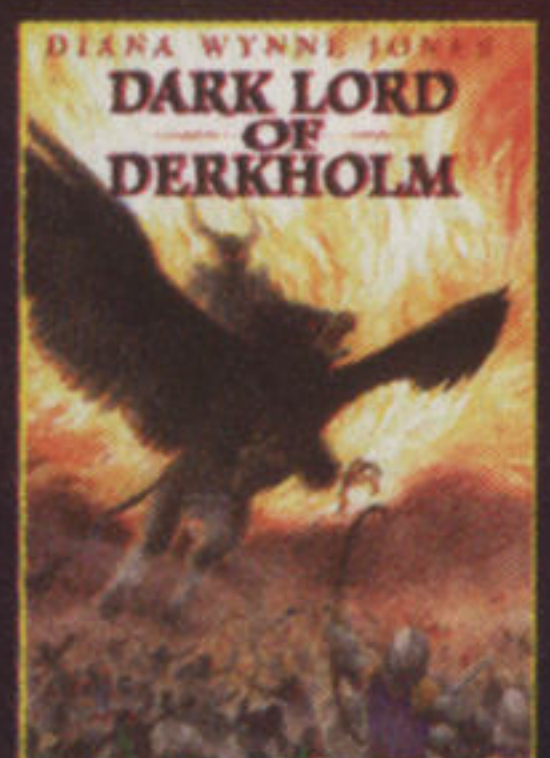
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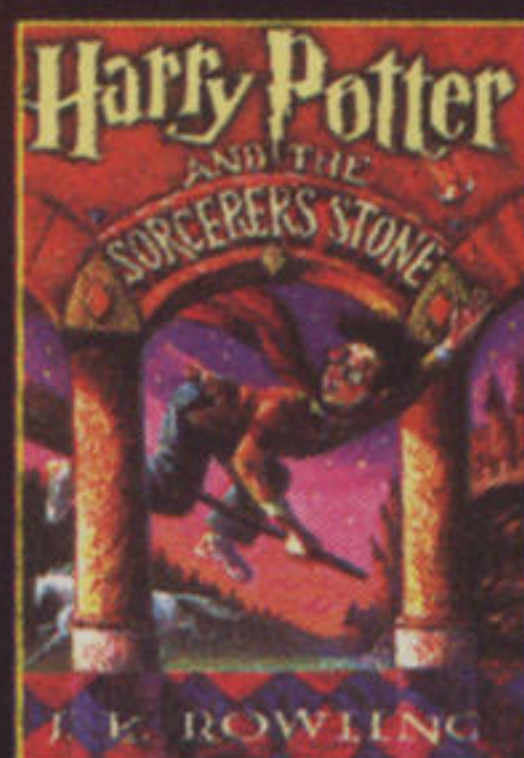
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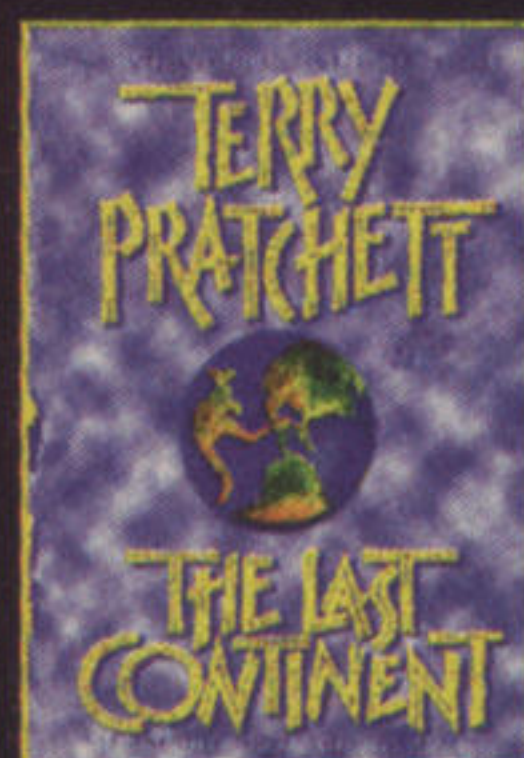
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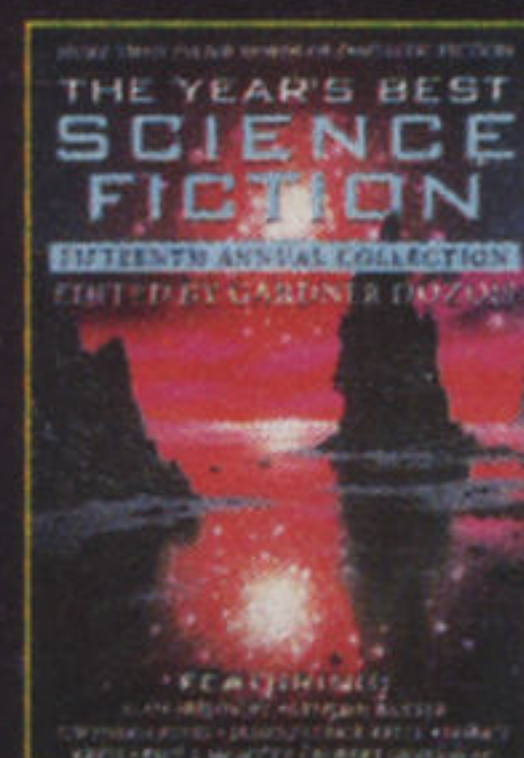
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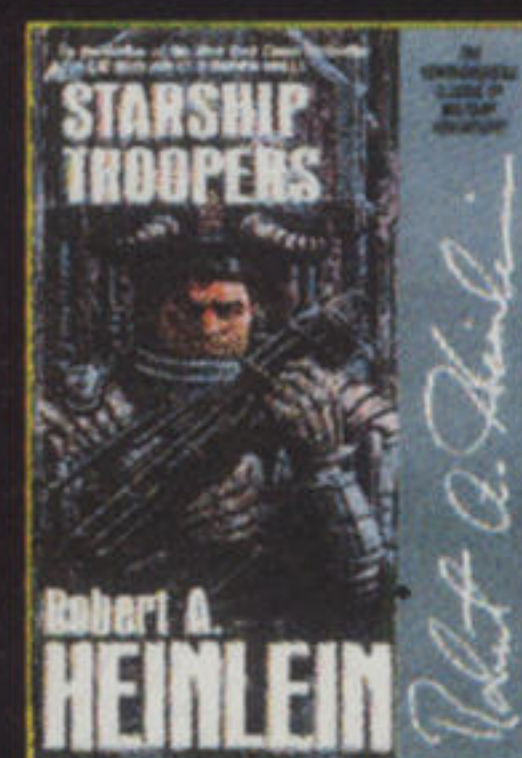
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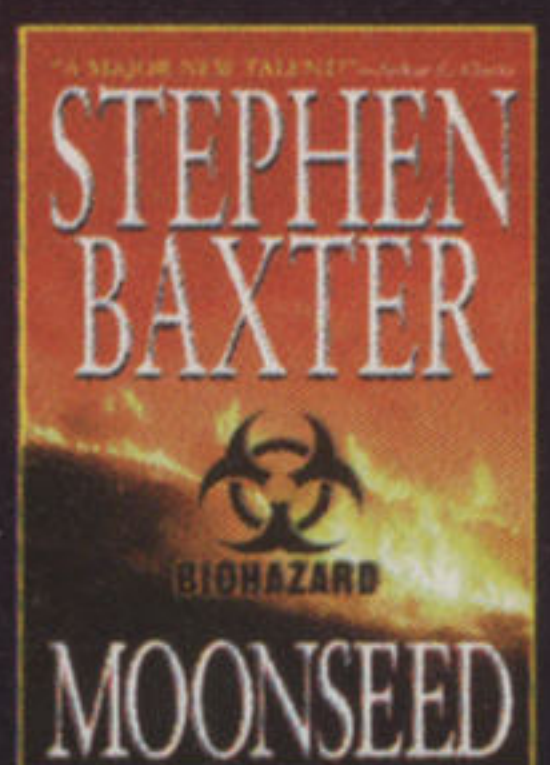
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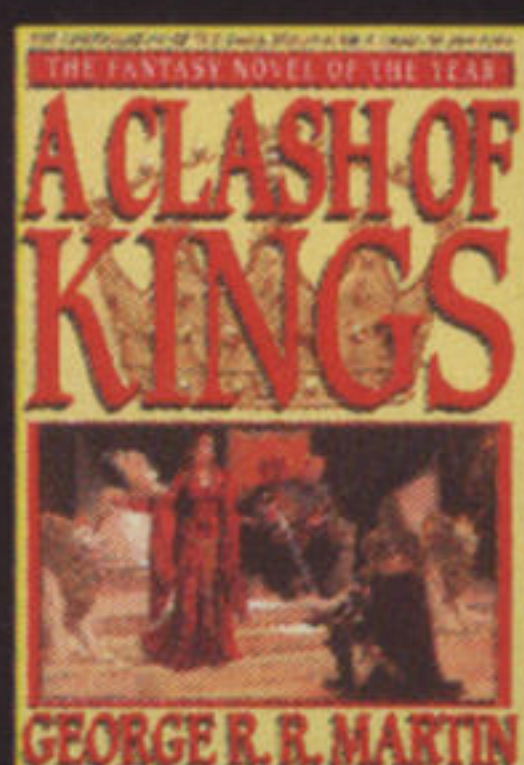
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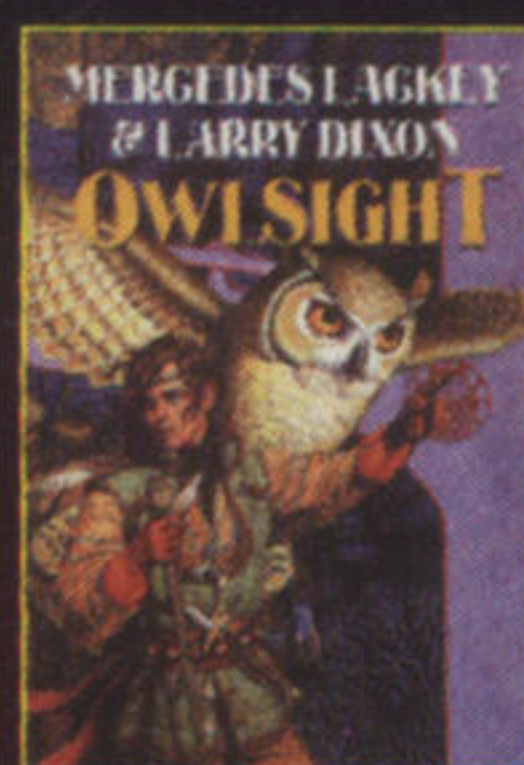
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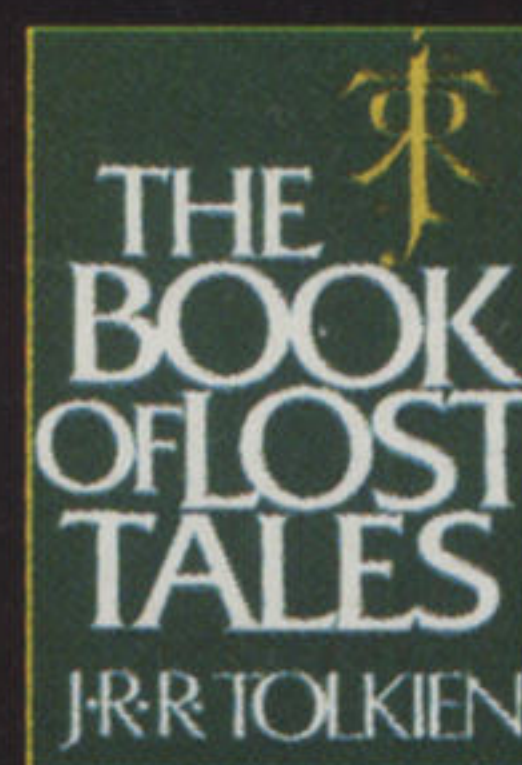
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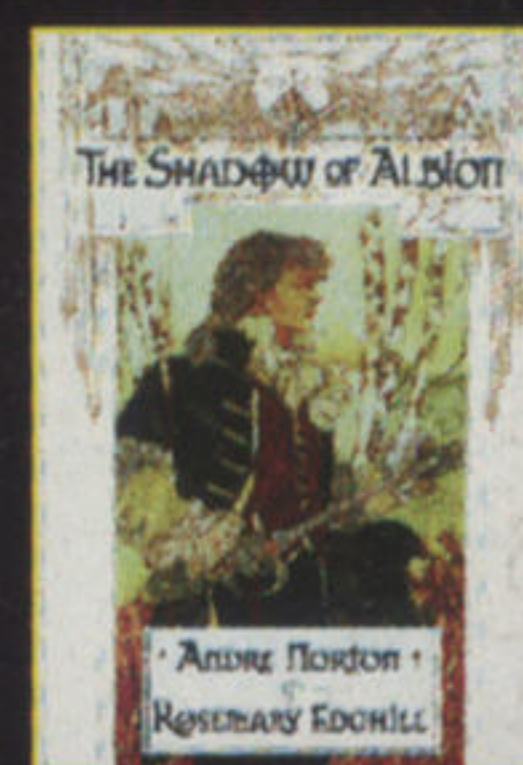
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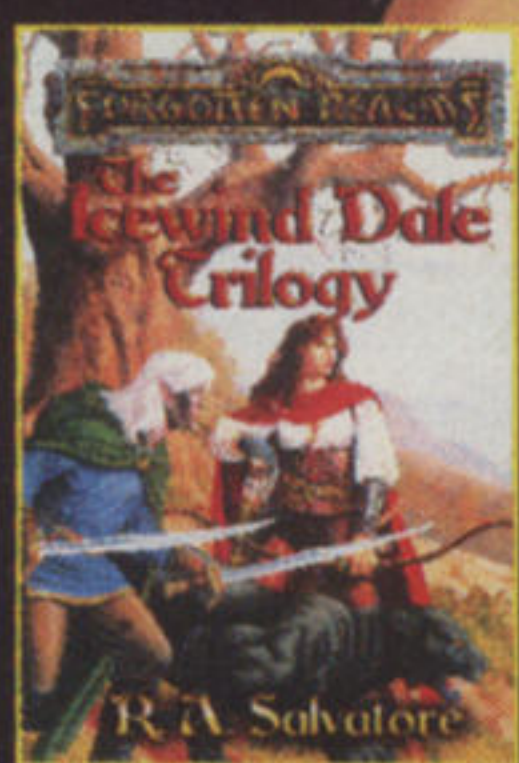
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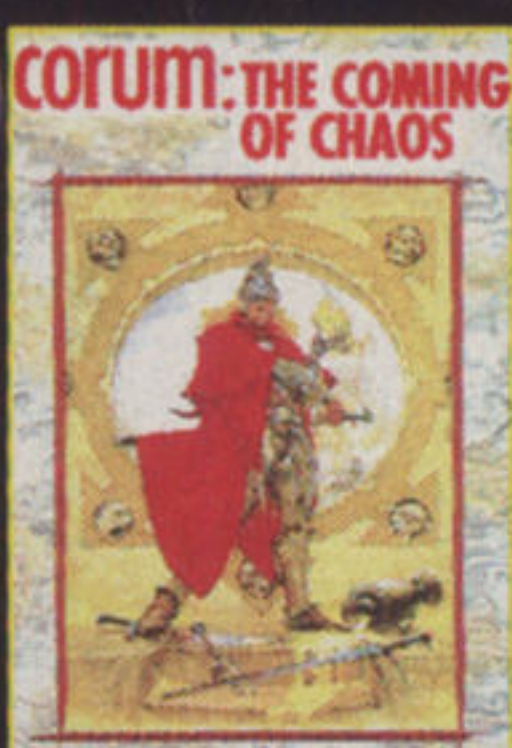
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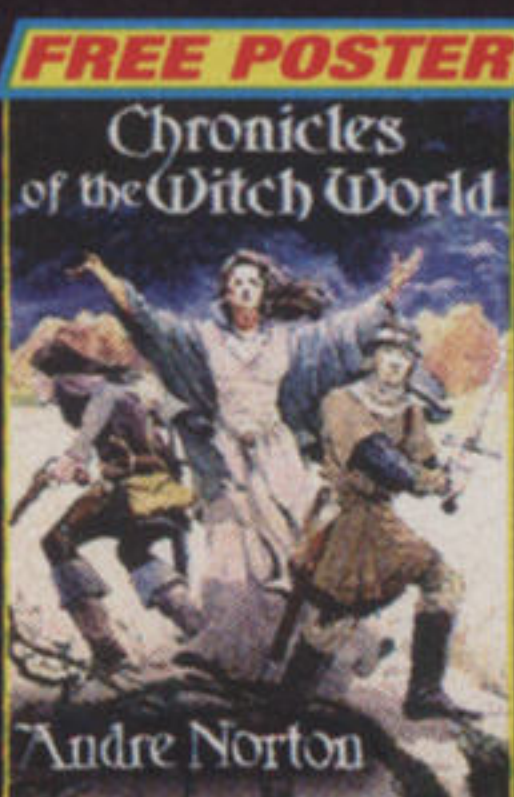
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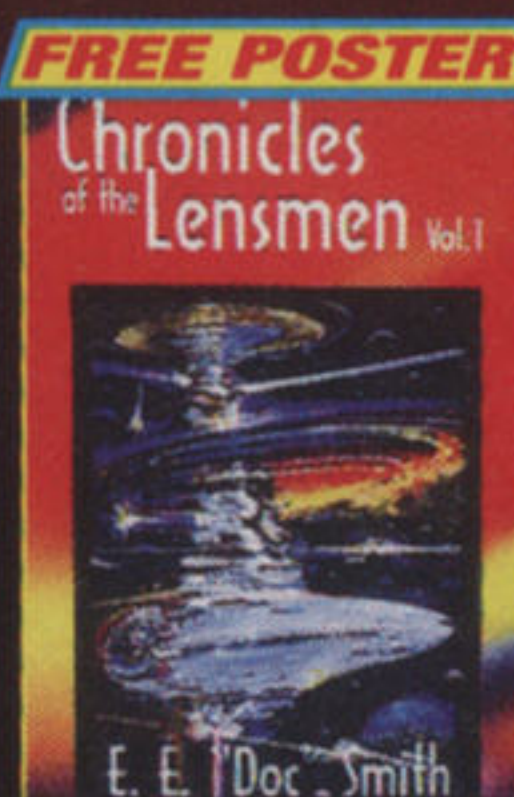
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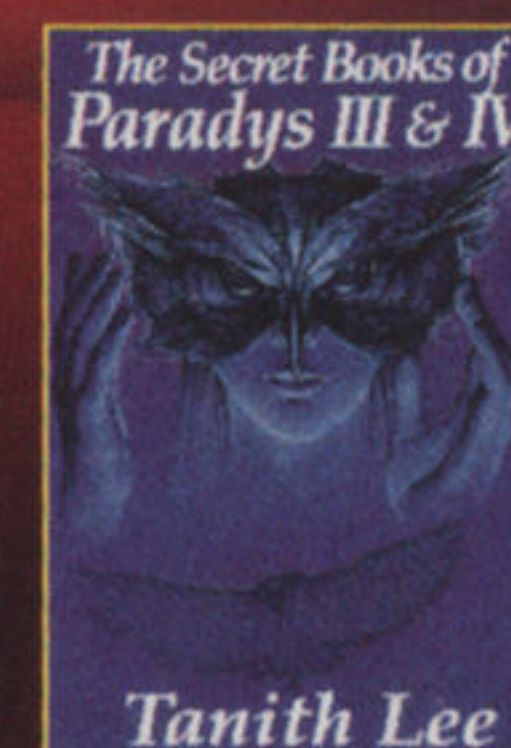
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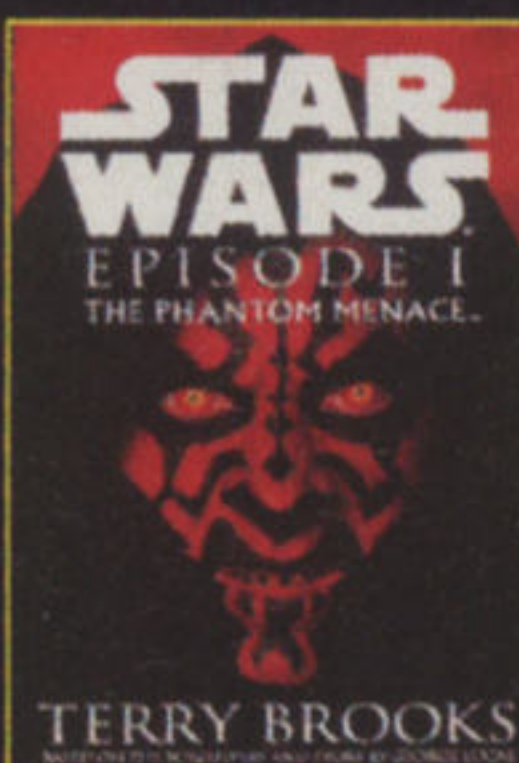
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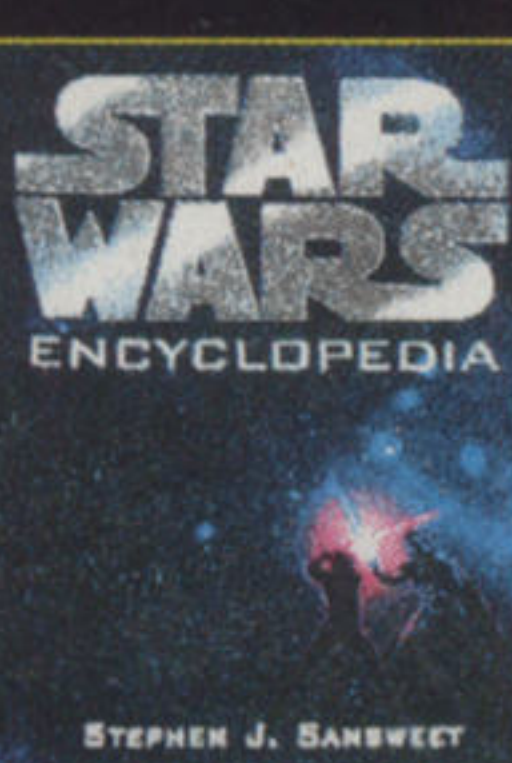
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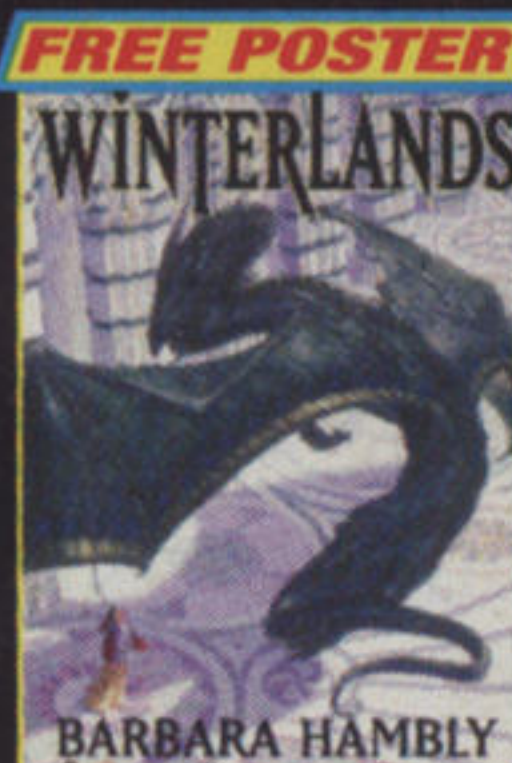
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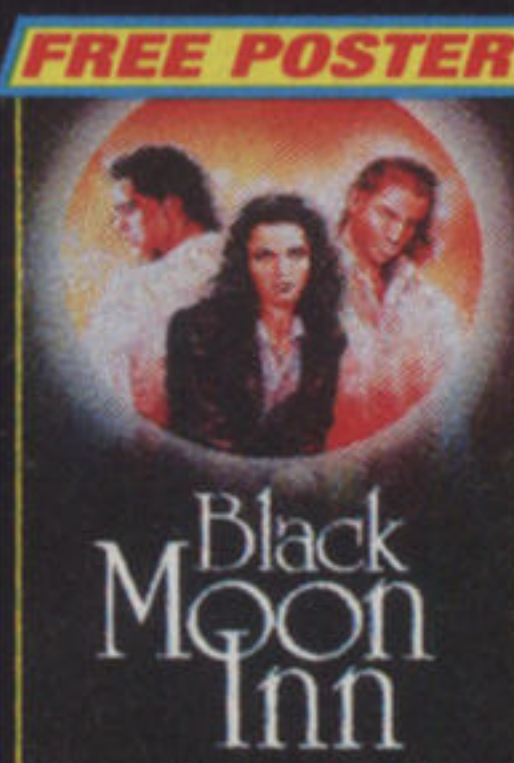
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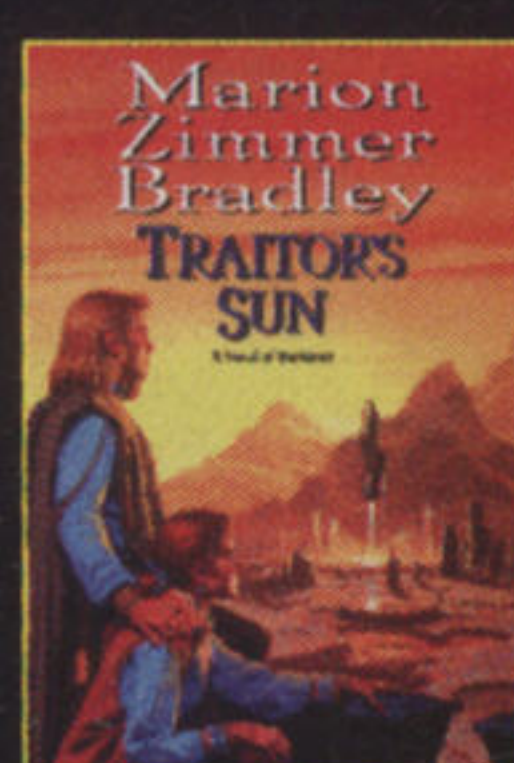
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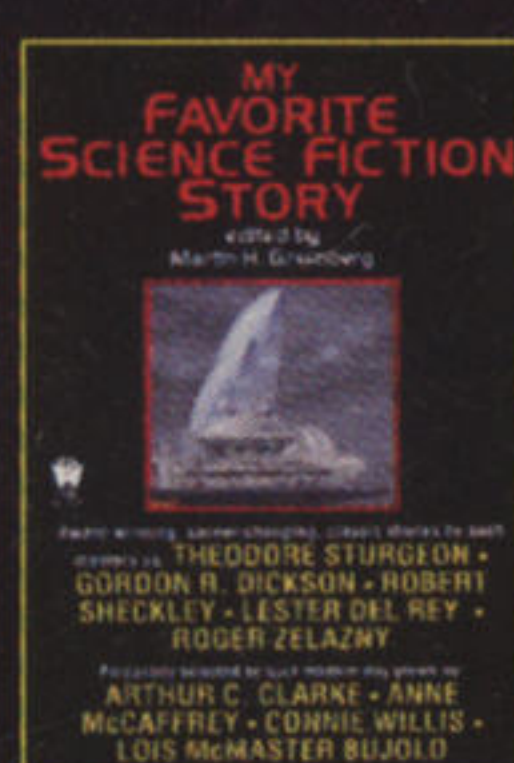
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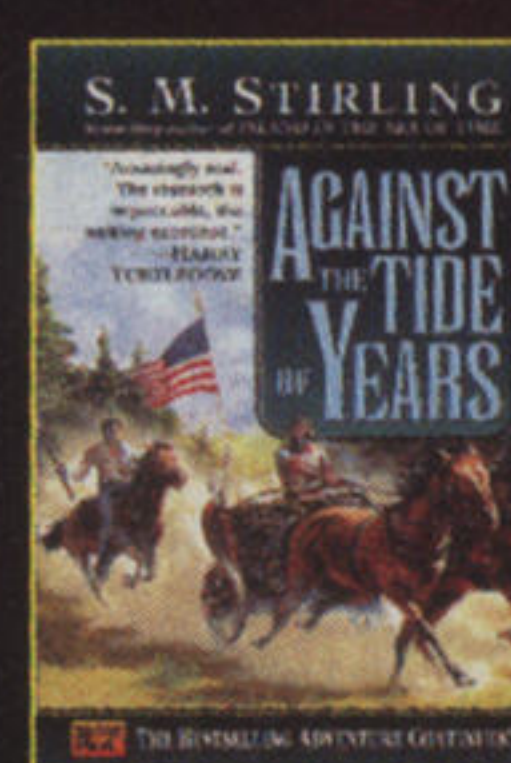
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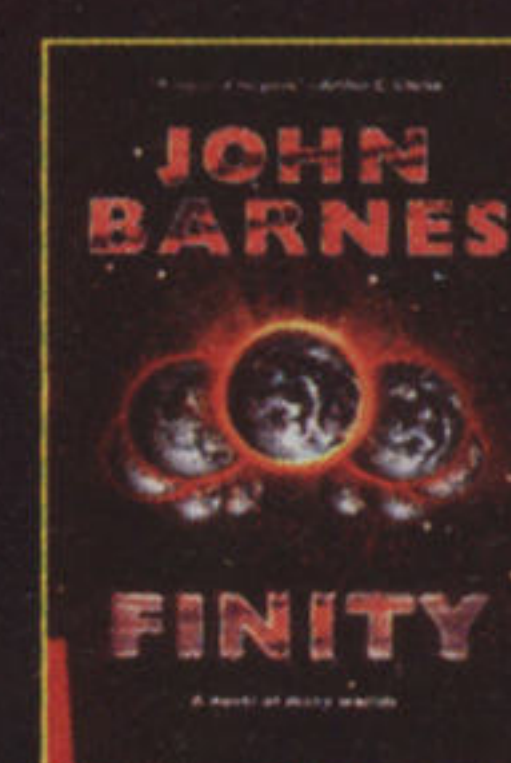
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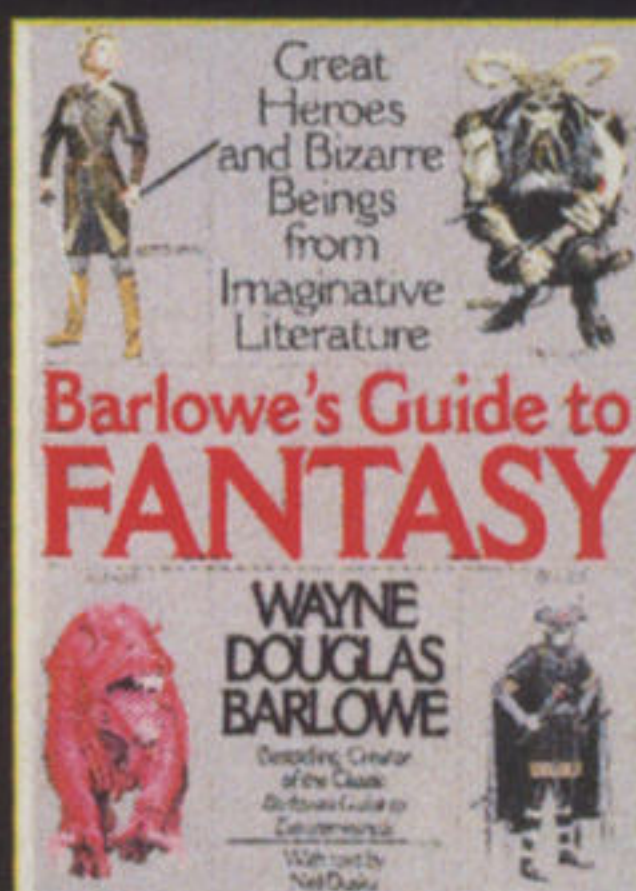
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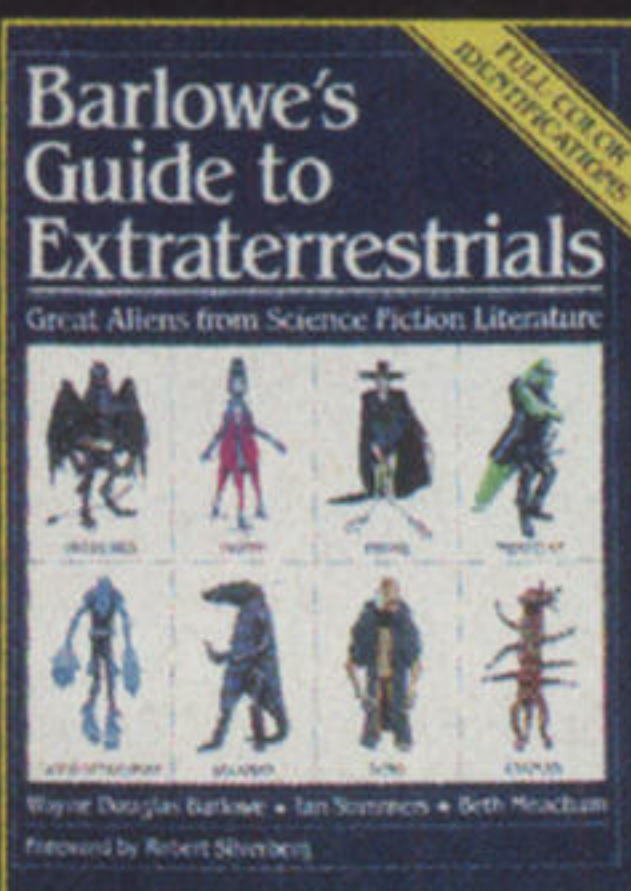
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BY GAHAN WILSON

Joyce scares the witch out of us, Goldstein goes underground, and Santa has some on the side.

A VERY SHORT WHILE AGO I HAD THE PLEASURE OF READING AND PASSING ON TO YOU my praises of Graham Joyce's *The Tooth Fairy*, and now it is my good fortune to have read a second book of Mr. Joyce's, *Dark Sister* (Tor; New York, NY; 300 pages; hardcover; \$22.95), and be able to laud it every bit as enthusiastically if not even a little bit more so. It would seem that Tor Books has decided to take up the mission

of introducing the American public to this really superb writer of Fantasy and I think it behooves us to grant that dear old firm three loud huzzahs (I pause to listen) for its perspicacity and to do all we can to aid and abet Tor in its noble campaign.

The Tooth Fairy was a coming-of-age fantasy which seemed to me to do such a spectacularly effective job of opening up and moving along that whole genre that henceforth anyone attempting to do any serious writing about the Young encountering the Very Strange ought to consider the book to be required reading, and I have not changed my mind.

The tale of *Dark Sister* vitally concerns itself with the same theme but not as the main focus. Its central point of view aimed mostly at how the adults in the story handle being thrown into contact with the strange and not just youngish adults at

that but old ones and very old ones and even some very, very, *very* old ones, too.

It's a novel about Witchcraft, about how way far back its roots wiggle deep into our history, how it's entangled with and touches upon so many supposedly mundane daily details of our lives and how it continues to thrive among us in a sprightly manner despite the most august and solemn assertions by various high authorities, both priestly and scientifically secular, which have solemnly and repeatedly and quite mistakenly reported its demise.

We are brought into *Dark Sister* as Alex, a young archaeologist, removes some boards covering a fireplace in the old house which is the new home of himself; his wife Maggie; and their children, Amy and Sam. A somewhat sinister note is very effectively sounded right off the bat when they find the corpse of a long-dead blackbird among the suddenly exposed rubble, but that is soon completely topped when a chimney sweep (who severely disappoints everyone by not turning up covered from head to toe in Dickensian soot) comes across an ancient, leather-

bound diary that has been resting hidden in the darkness for long uncounted years.

The diary was written by a woman named Bella and it is obvious from her many references to the powers of herbs and magical charms that she was some kind of a serious witch. When Sam comes down with a touch of conjunctivitis, Maggie, who has been more and more absorbed in fascinated study of the diary, cannot resist the urge to trot around to the local health food stores, buy what ingredients she can find at them for an eye nostrum writ down by the diarist, and put them together as directed, even though she lacks something called eye-bright since none of the health food people ever heard of the stuff.

After it doesn't work she acts on a tip garnered during her first shopping tour and checks out an obscure shop called the Omega which is located in a quaint Victorian arcade and finds that its proprietor, an ironic, bearded man named Ash, not only carries eyebright and knows its Latin name (*euphrasia officinalis*) but its com-



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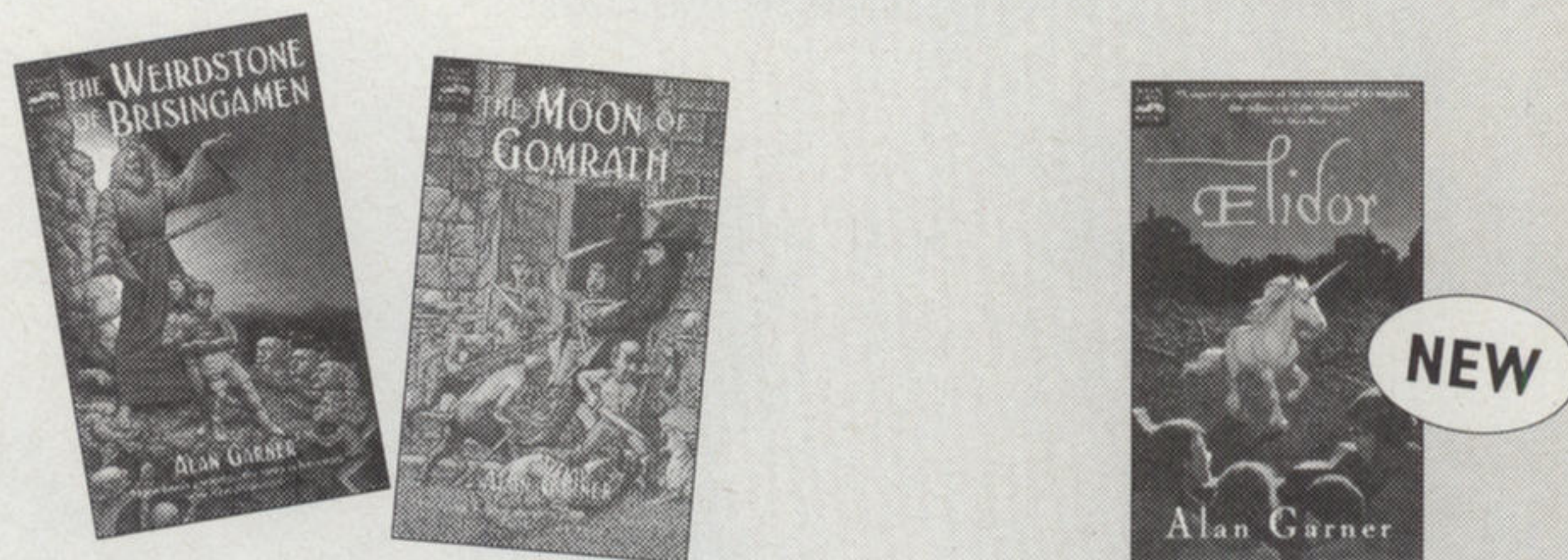


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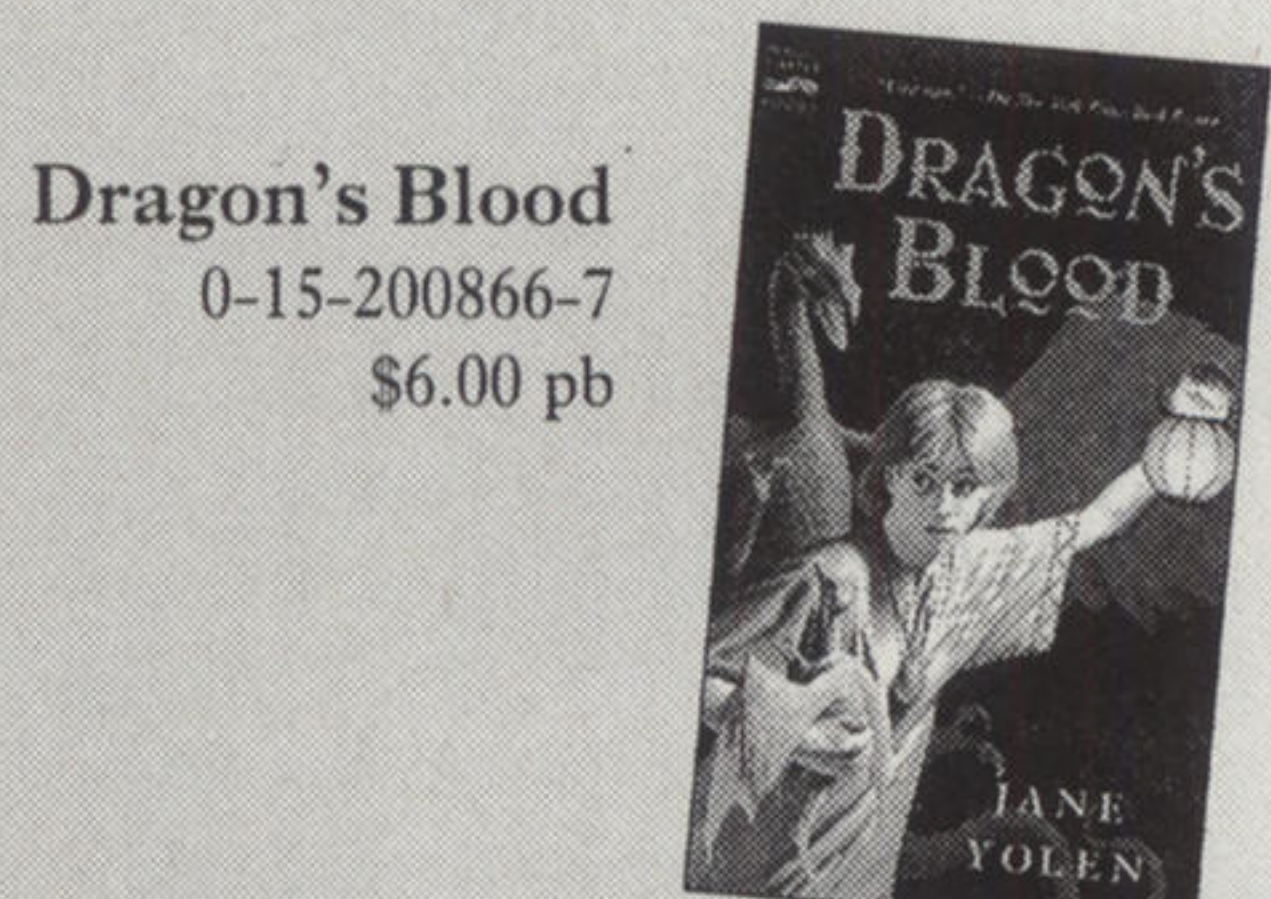


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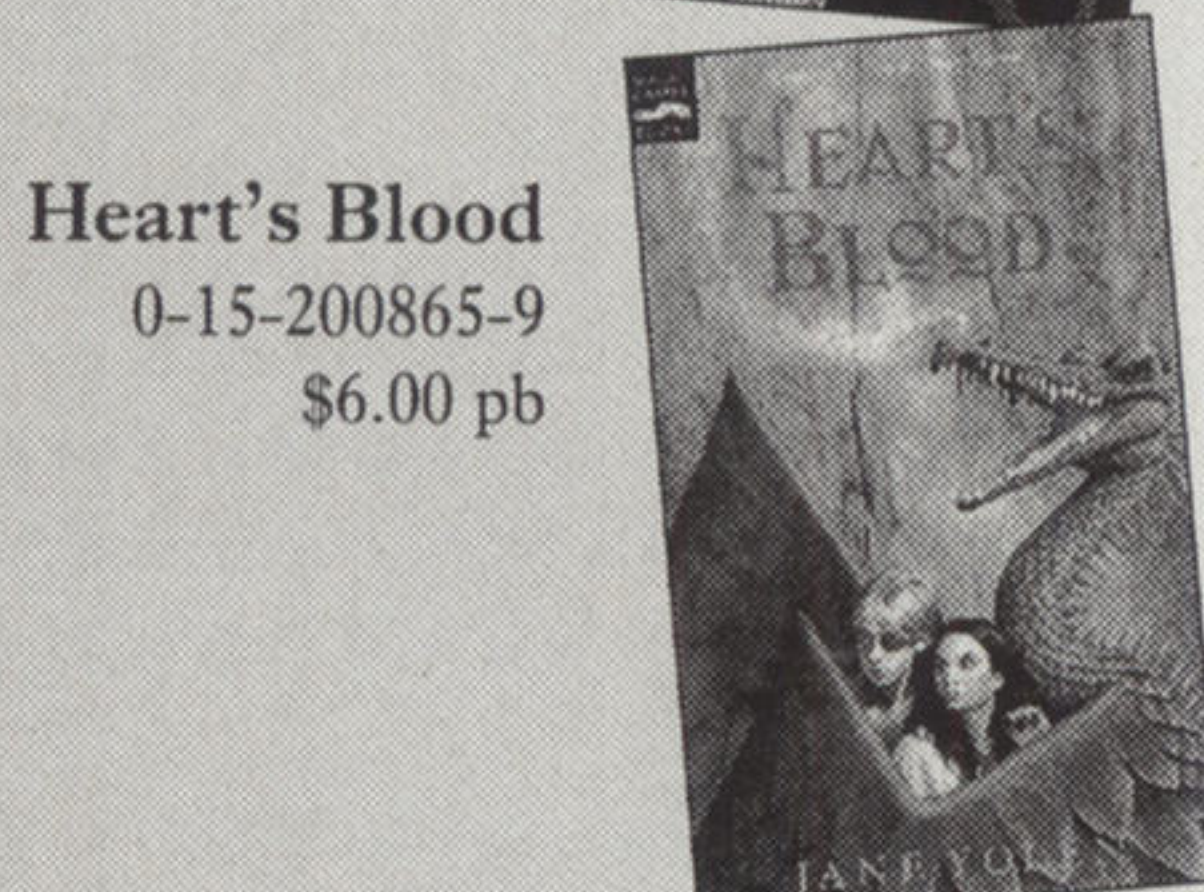
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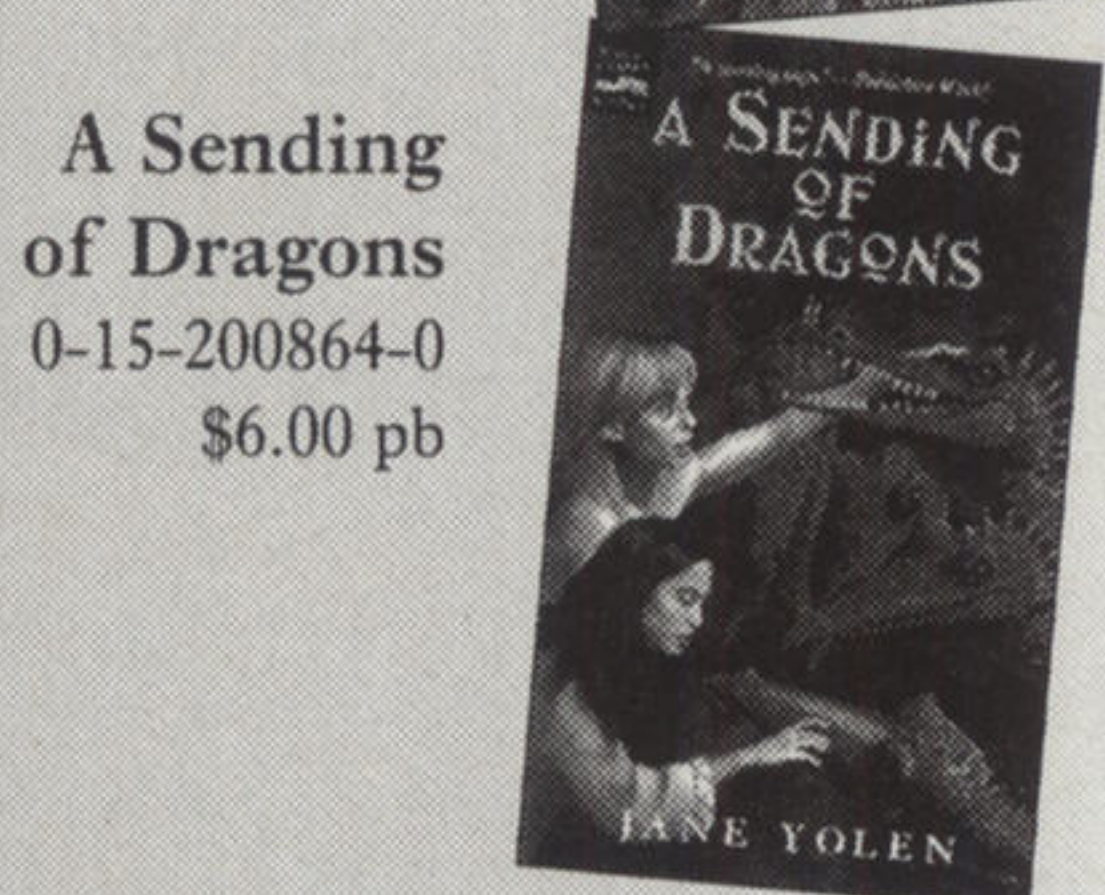
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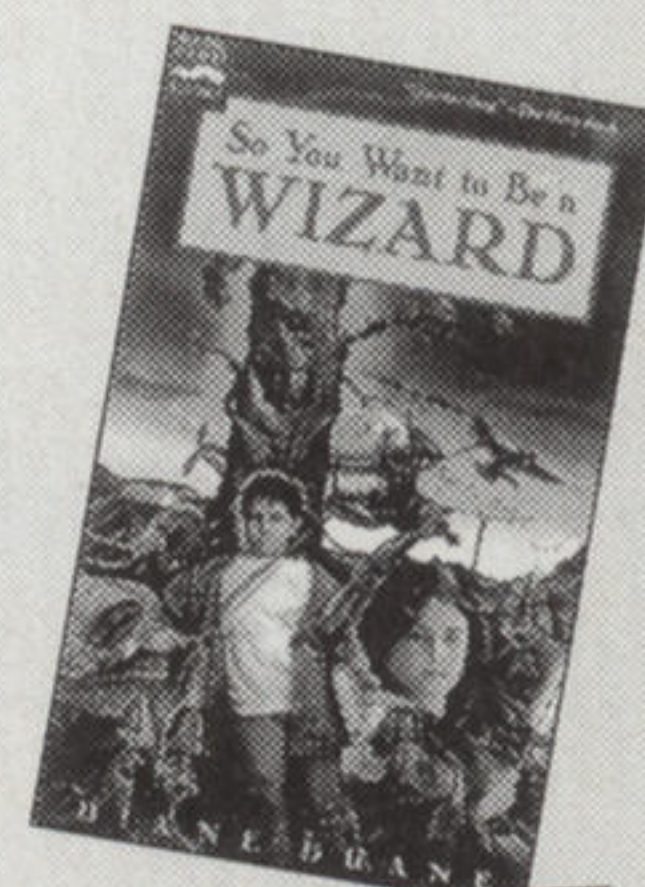
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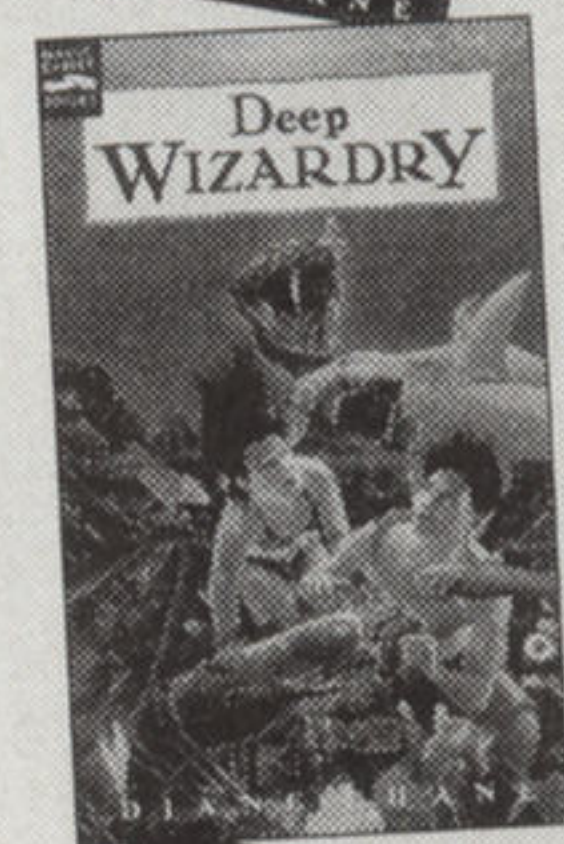
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mon one (euphrosyne) and he also is able to point out to Maggie that it is not only good for sore eyes but is highly regarded as an effective aid in starting up and strengthening the knack of clairvoyance.

This last attribute is very convincingly demonstrated when not only does young Sam's conjunctivitis clear up rapidly after an application of Maggie's new and improved concoction, he also becomes able to have increasingly clear and ever more frightening glimpses of an extremely terrifying old crone who wears raggedy black clothes of an ancient cut, sometimes rides on rats, and is clearly out to do him serious harm.

The best part of *Dark Sister* is its characters, and the best of them are a brilliant but extremely eccentric child psychologist named De Sang who is one of the best descendants of Doctor Van Helsing I've encountered in a very long time, and a simply wonderful old country witch called Liz.

It is quite a testimony to Graham Joyce's craft that the other characters in the book are so solidly built that they are not blown away by this colorful twosome, particularly Liz. If you were to put either one of them in most of the fantasies of this sort I've read of late, they would blast every page in the book not about them into virgin white sheets. Not a villain or hero or passerby in any of those books would manage to survive the smallest contact with them at all. The briefest meeting and they would turn them into drifting smoke. I put it to you seriously: You will be making an awful mistake if you don't allow yourself to meet these wonderful people.

And they won't go away once you've met them; especially Liz. I can tell you Liz is going to be with me for the rest of my life. I am going to meet her on country walks. She is going to whisper encouraging things to me in dark places from here on in. I do believe she will be extremely helpful in letting me know when I am playing the fool, and if I pay attention and listen to her I do feel she may well guide me helpfully around a few other little personal foibles which I have now and then tossed into my way. If anyone could, she's the girl.

Dark Cities Underground, (by Lisa Goldstein; Tor Books; New York, NY; 253 pgs; hardcover; \$22.95) is a far less serious piece of work than *Dark Sister* but it is extremely well built and a thorough success in stylishly entertaining the reader. It has a finely wrought puzzle box of a plot which will not only provide you with many amusing surprises but also give you an excellent, highly polished set of mental toys to play with on your own after you have finished reading the volume.

The core notion its author, Lisa Goldstein, uses to lure us in to start with is the consideration of the surprising number of towering children's classics there are describing wondrous magical lands of Fantasy which were written by adults who implied, with a completely straight face, that they were merely



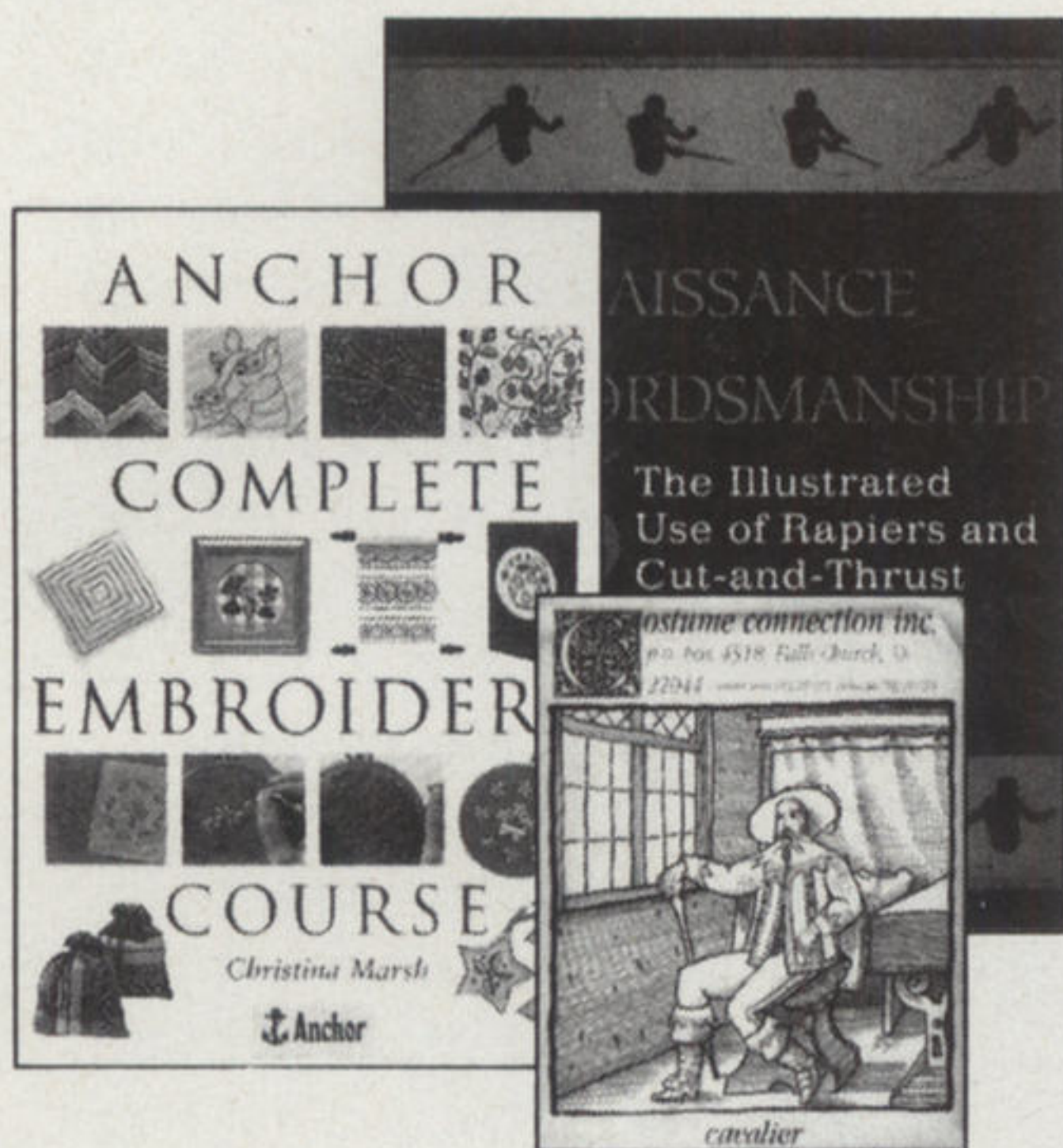
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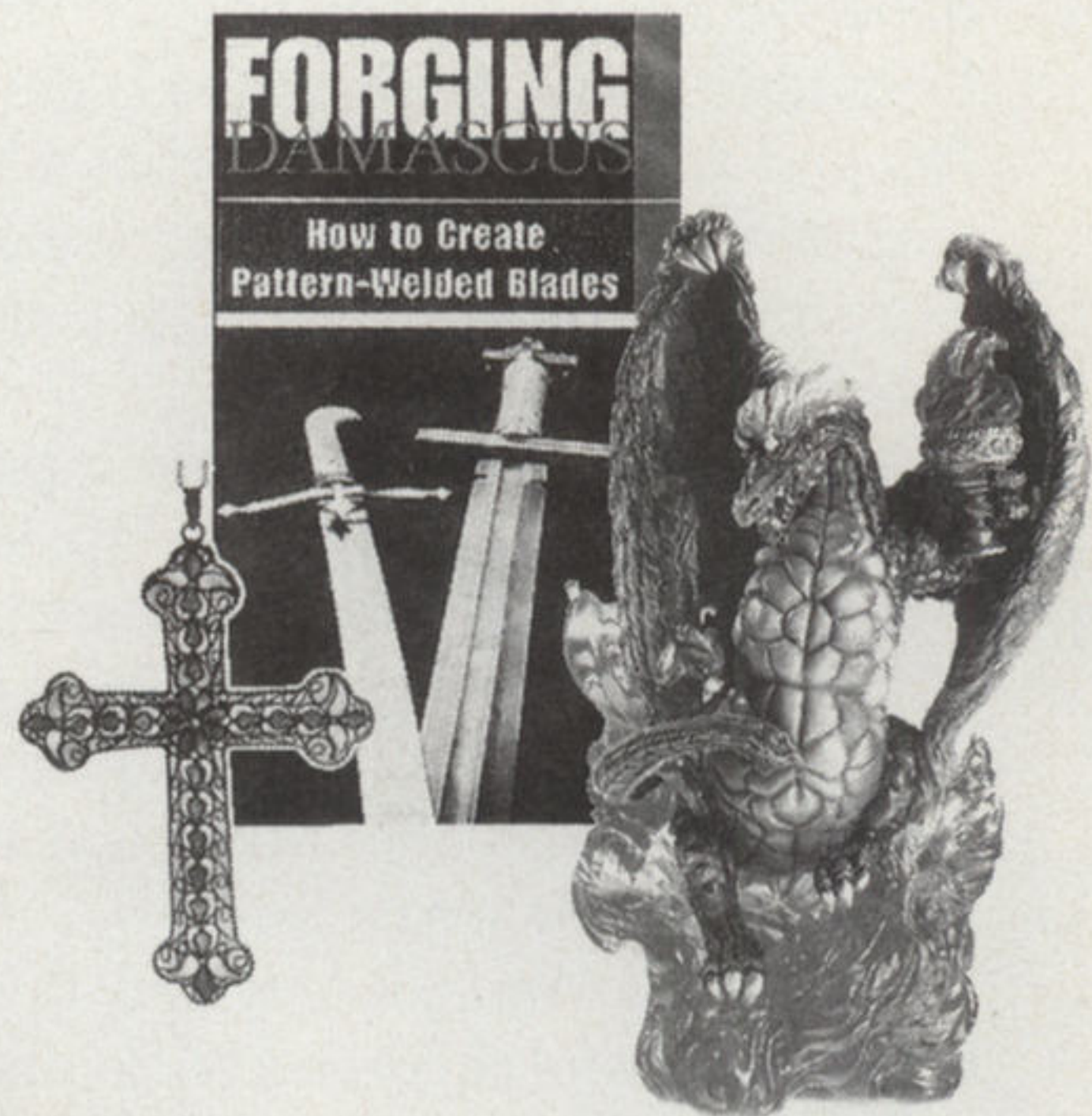
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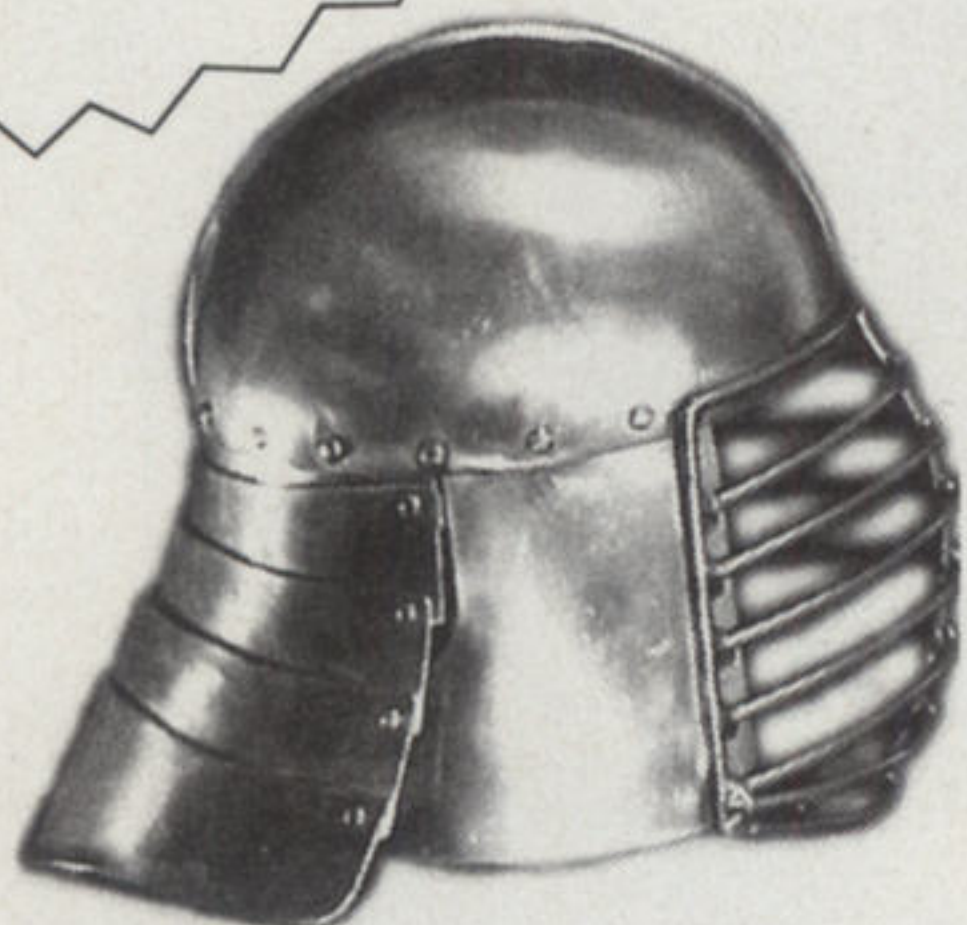


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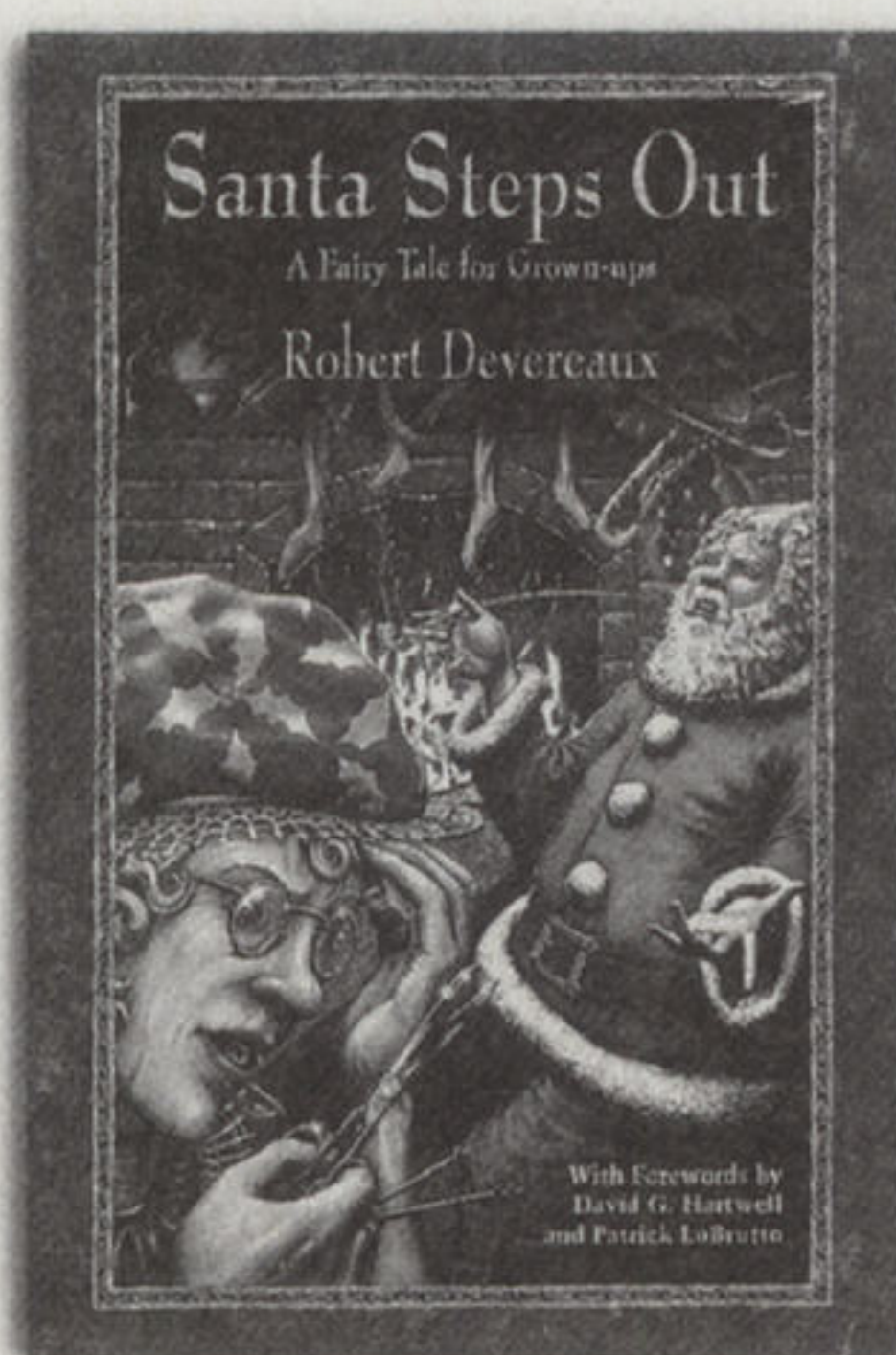
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writing down the accounts of children who had actually been to those marvelous places.

The most influential of them all, so far as the premises of *Dark Cities Underground* are concerned, is beyond any doubt the huge inspiration of pretty little Alice Liddell on Lewis Carroll's creation of the *Alice* books but there are plenty of others, the most outstanding among them doubtless being J.M. Barrie's heavy dependence on the young Peter Llewellyn Davies for the tales of *Peter Pan* and A.A. Milne's somewhat relentless employment of his own son as the model for Christopher Robin in the *Winnie the Pooh* books.

Actually I'd guess this last one is probably what started Ms. Goldstein off since her hero is the rather wistfully damaged Jeremy Jones who, in middle age, has still far from shaken off the effects of his mother, E.A. Jones, using him just as Christopher Milne was used in *Winnie* when she wrote *Jeremy in Neverwas*, *Jeremy in the World Below*, and the other highly successful children's books about the little boy who took his stuffed dragon through a hidden door into a strange world underground.

Jeremy's reaction to this and to the ridiculous referential fame which has pursued him



since ("Say—are you the kid in the Jeremy books!?!") is to have developed a lifestyle which is so effectively unobtrusive as to approach invisibility. He also has become expert in the practice of repression, having clearly started the practice at a very early age.

Unfortunately for Jeremy's hopes of continuing on in this benumbed condition, Ruth (henceforth "Ruthie") Berry, a product of the 1960's bohemian movement and the single mother of her daughter Gilly, has succeeded in selling a publisher the notion of her doing a book on E.A. Jones and the Jeremy books.

At first her project moves along expected lines but the deeper Ruthie digs into the matter the more she begins to suspect there is something odd about the business, that there may be one or more peculiar secrets lurking underneath the surface of her topic.

She contacts Jeremy and with her somewhat out-of-date but still effective hippie ways actually manages to persuade him to consent to an interview, which only confirms her suspicions that there is far more involved in the creation of the

Jeremy fantasies. As the plot unfolds you'll discover why all the subways of the world are interconnected and find yourself spending considerable time in the London Underground (there's a reason why it opened only two years after the first *Alice* book appeared!) and discover why its Circle Line goes in a circle and why its District and Metro lines are mortal enemies. You will also learn why the BART line mentioned earlier is shaped in the form of the Hebrew letter Aleph.

But that's just a beginning: wait till you discover the connections between all this and the Isis and Osiris myth, observe how the bodysnatchers Burke and Hare figure into the brew, and find out why Sarah Kendall's husband was murdered and chopped up into many pieces and see why knowing the answers to all these things may turn you into an archetype!

Ignore that last. Reading this book is well worth the risk. Besides, face it, you've always been an archetype. This will just make you a better one.

The price of *The Savage Tales of Solomon Kane* (by Robert E. Howard; Illustrated with plates by Gary Gianni; Wandering Star, London, England; 389 pgs plus Appendices: \$150.00) is steep for sure, but it is fair. It's been a very long time since I've seen



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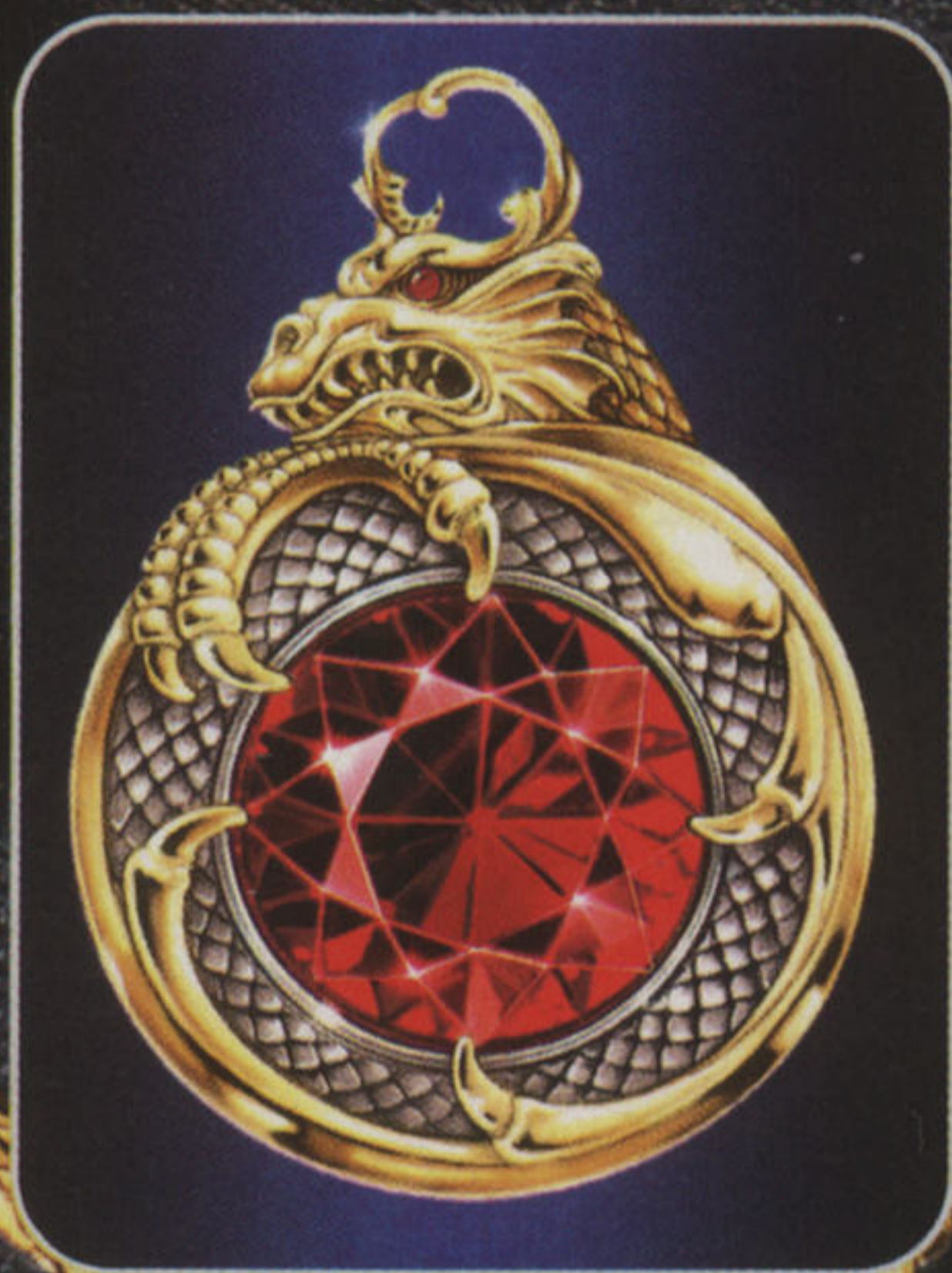
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a book this handsomely and properly produced. Let me stress *properly* because a good many of the expensive volumes I've come across attempting to head in the direction of this one didn't get the *gestalt* right. It takes more than good paper and excellent printing. If the illustrations are gaudy but dumb, or if the illustrator is good but just hopelessly miscast for the author, the whole thing falls apart. Sometimes it's something like the fabric of the binding being smooth where it should be rough that does it all in; sometimes it's the wrong celebrity introduction.

But this one gets it right all down the line.

I've always thought Solomon Kane was, with the possible exception of Bran Mak Morn, the best of Robert E. Howard's adventurers. He's much scarier than the other brawlers because he's essentially nuts. He's a fanatic—Howard often calls him that in just that word—he's a mad ideologue. If he disapproves of you, you're in real trouble

because it isn't you he's disapproving of, it's your type. Once he's decided to go after you there is no chance of averting or modifying the attack because there's never going to be any possibility of discussion. If you don't mash him he is going to mash you and one quality Solomon Kane does share with Conan is near unmashability. God help the villain or monster that Kane decides must die.

The book is based on Glenn Lord's *Red Shadows* though it has two more items in it, a fragment titled "Death's Black Riders," which originally appeared in Lord's *The Howard Collector*, and a variant version of the poem *Solomon Kane's Homecoming*. Some final text corrections were made for this edition (all of them described in the Appendix) with the assistance of Lord. It is, therefore, the complete Solomon Kane.

Gary Gianni supplied the illustrations, four full-color plates, the cover, and a great

Continued on page 31

BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

The *Granite Shield*, by Fiona Patton, DAW paperback, \$6.99. A prequel to *The Stone Prince* and *The Painter Knight*. Rhys and Llew, brothers raised together, may well be driven apart by

war and betrayal. A family gifted with the magic of the Flame—an action-adventure tale fueled by the gods themselves. Will the Branion Realm be torn asunder, or will the Flame prevail?

The Demon Apostle, by R.A. Salvatore, Del Rey hardcover, \$25.00. The author of over a dozen novels including *The Demon Awakens* and *The Demon Spirit*, has written another rousing and masterful DemonWars adventure. This, the conclusion to his "epic symphony of good vs. evil," is a must-read for all fans of Salvatore's work. A novel of sweeping adventure, unforgettable characters, goblin hoards, and an elf-trained ranger called Elbryan Wynden. Readers will be filled with mourning and with true hope as they immerse themselves in this enchanted world of a book.

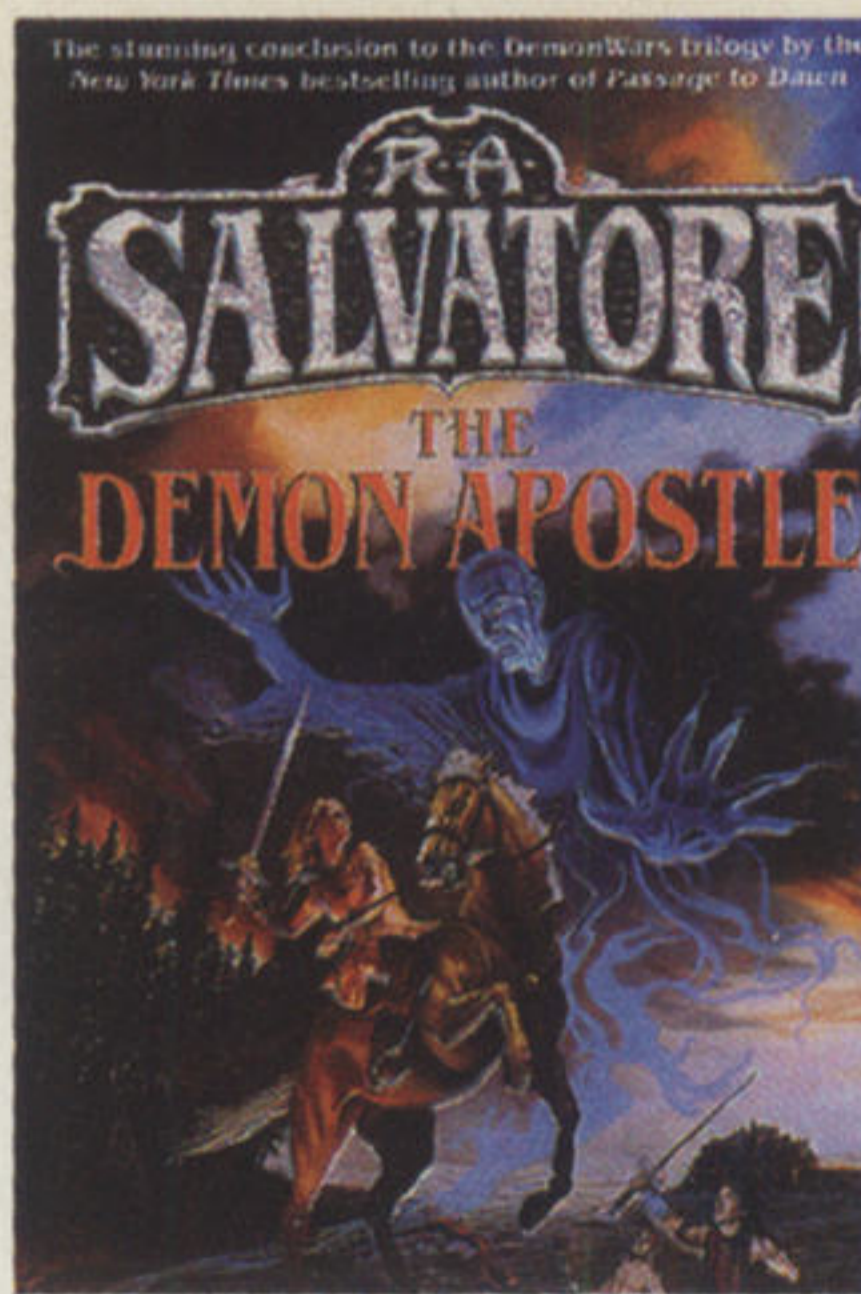
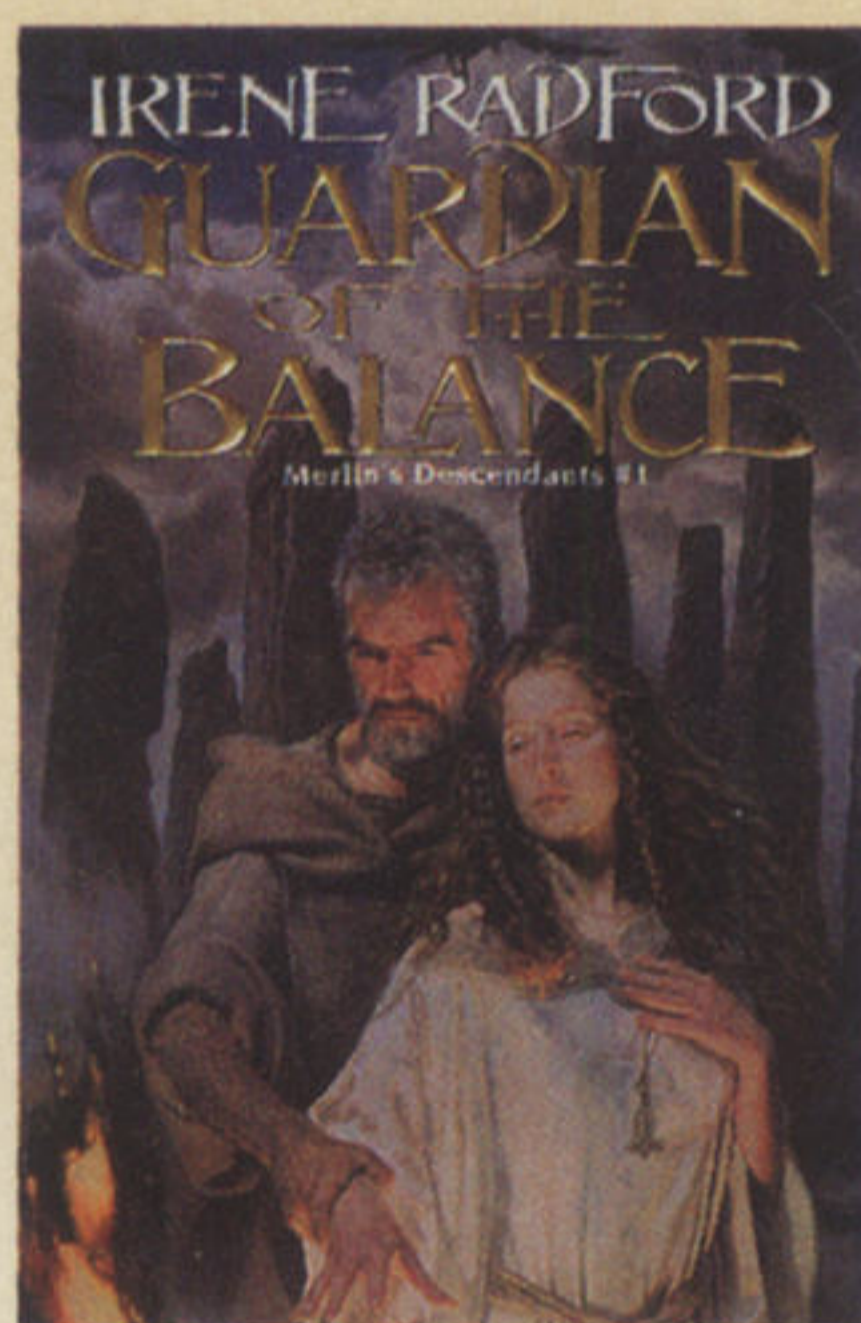
Guardian of the Balance (Merlin's Descendants #1), by Irene Radford, DAW hardcover, \$23.95. A new and exciting foray into Authurian fiction by the author of *The Dragon Nimbus Trilogy*. This is the first

in a series of four stories involving Merlin and his descendants. Merlin's daughter, Wren, product of a broken vow of celibacy with the earth-goddess, is the heroine of the tale. During travels with her father, she learns of the old

ways and must come to terms with the powers of her magical inheritance. Here we have the struggle between the new Christian faith and the magic of the old gods. A compelling read for those who cannot ever read enough about Arthur, and a good read for those who have affection for tales of traditional Fantasy.

The Shadow of Ararat, by Thomas Harlan, Tor hardcover, \$26.95. A book praised by such authors as Orson Scott Card and Ellen Kushner, this novel

is set in circa 600 AD—on our timeline. In this alternative history the Roman Empire is still standing and at war with Persia in a battle of both magic and conventional warfare. Centered around four characters: a Hiberian student attending a school for sorcerers, a young female warrior expert in the arts of covert warfare, a teacher who has abandoned his post and his vows, and the Emperor's youngest brother, this detailed and powerful tale is an exceptional read for both Fantasy and history lovers alike.

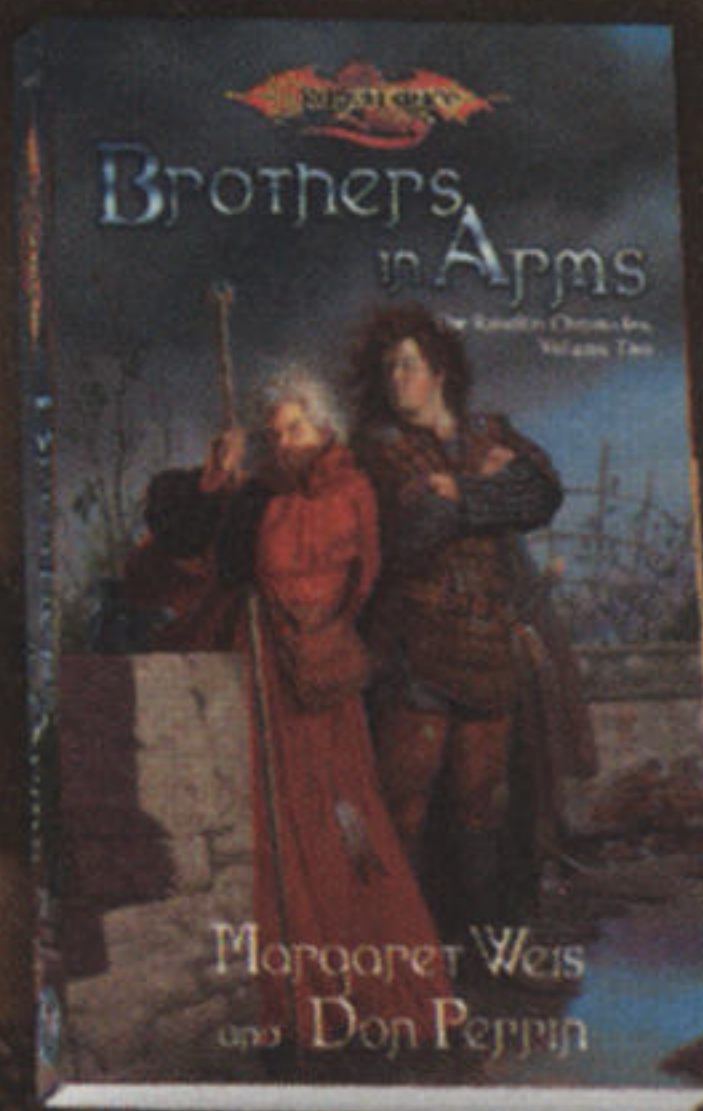


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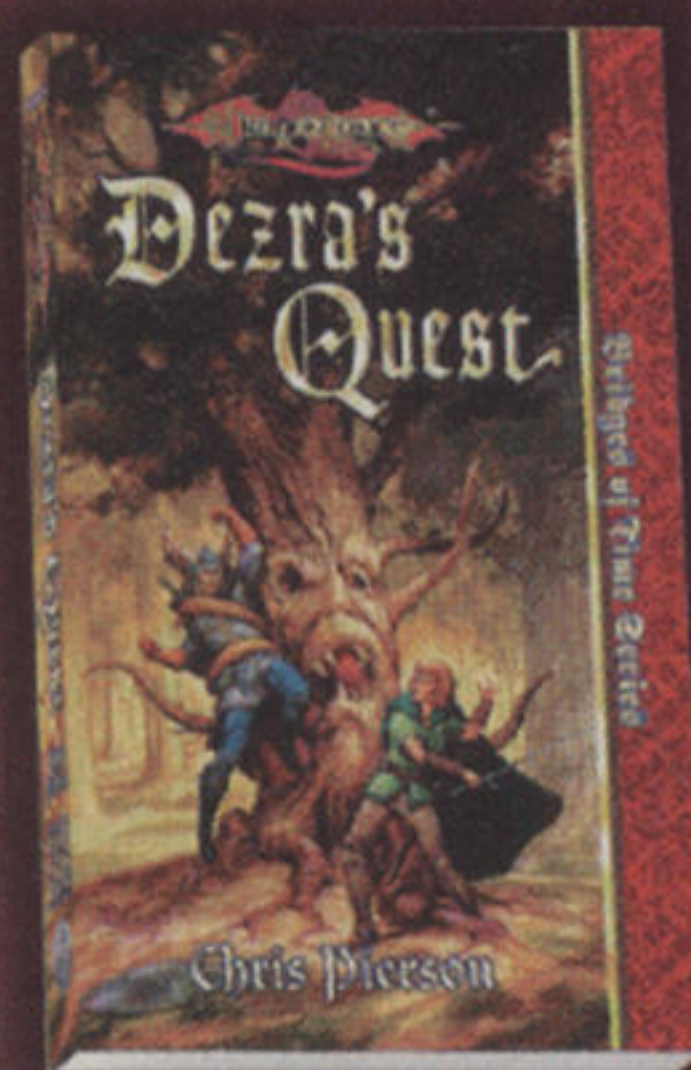
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DEFY CHAOS



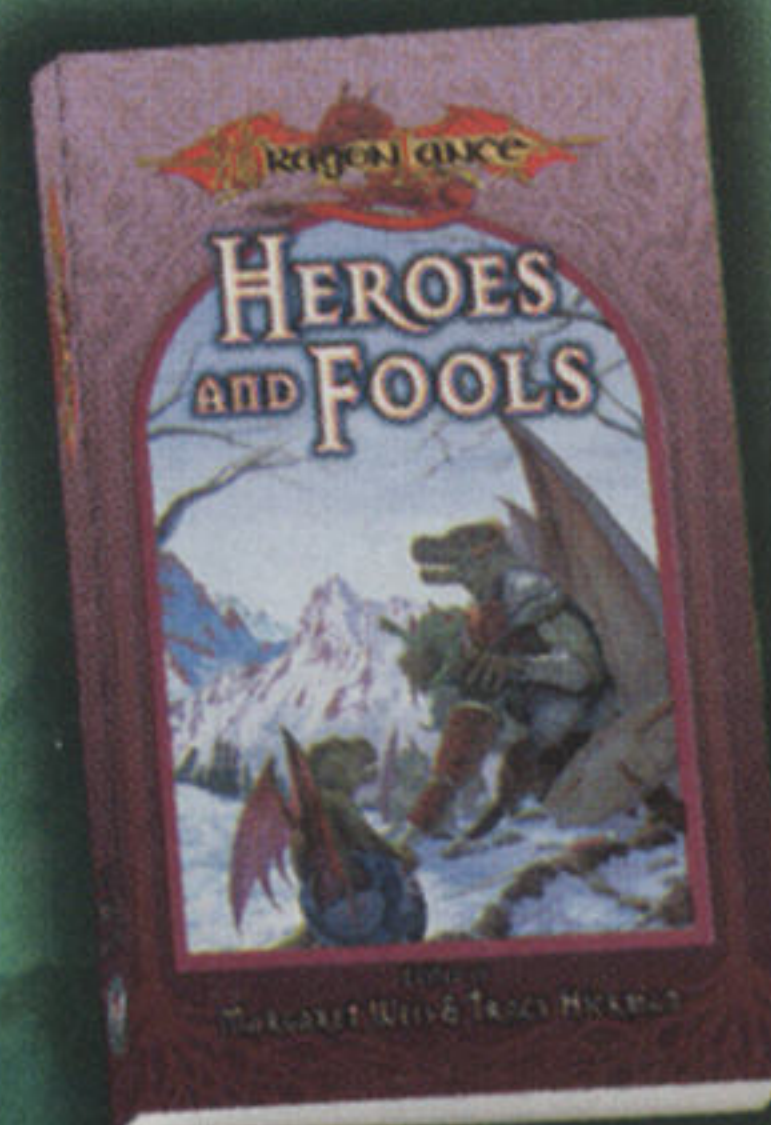
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BY RESA NELSON

Hollywood goes back to basics with a remake of *The Haunting*.

HOLLYWOOD KNEW HOW TO MAKE A GREAT HORROR FILM IN THE OLD DAYS. FROM THE very beginning, when movies were silent, horror movies were about mood and atmosphere. They weren't centered around the graphic special effects of blood and guts. They were about things that go bump in the night. One of the greatest horror directors of all time, Alfred Hitchcock, knew that the most powerful element of a horror film was often what you didn't show to an audience. Scary movies used to be about the power of suggestion. They used to tap into our deepest, darkest fears.

When I was very young, I managed to sneak watching a movie on the family TV set. It was a movie that I intuitively knew would be forbidden by my parents. They didn't want me to watch scary movies. They thought I'd have nightmares. But once something is forbidden, especially by our parents, it becomes that much more desirable. So while they read or talked in another room, I kept the volume low and watched the forbidden horror movie on our black-and-white TV. The scene that finally scared me so much that I turned off the TV and went running back to my parents was a scene set on a stage in a theater. Something had gone wrong with the performance. The curtain was drawn. Then, inexplicably, a knife is driven through the curtain and slowly rips downward. Everyone holds their breath, watching the knife as it cuts the cloth. You know that something horrible is about to happen, but you don't know what it could possibly be. Those moments while you wait, watching the knife, listening to the ripping sounds, are unbearable. You want it to end because it promises something horrible, and yet you don't want it to end because you don't want that horrible thing to happen. You're caught in a terrible limbo. Finally, the knife stops, and a body hanging on the end of

a rope swings through the cut made in the curtain. The audience goes into a panic and screams. That's when I was so terrified that I could no longer watch. And now, decades later, just thinking about that scene is likely to give me nightmares tonight, and my parents will be entitled to say, "I told you so."

Within the past 20 years or so, horror films took a sharp turn. *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th*, and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (as well as their sequels and knock-offs) redefined horror as a graphic display of every possible way a human being could be maimed, dismembered, and

BELOW: Lili Taylor goes toward the light. RIGHT: Catherine Zeta-Jones and Lili Taylor can't believe their eyes.



killed. Over time, audiences have become so desensitized to graphic violence that they laugh when they see it. Horror films devolved from being genuinely frightening to little more than 90-minute video games. Think of it: For an entire generation, that's the definition of horror.

In the past few years, *Scream* breathed new life into the horror genre by holding a mirror up to it. The *Scream* series is a hip, intelligent parody of the horror movies of the past couple of decades. While mocking the slice-and-dice formula, *Scream* also finds a way to stick to it. Because of its success, studios have been scrambling to get back on the horror bandwagon.

And now, there's a sign that horror films may be on the brink of taking yet another sharp turn in the road that could breathe even greater life into the genre.

In a nutshell, everything old is new again.



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DreamWorks SKG is bringing back the true horror film in its offering of *The Haunting*, based on Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel, *The Haunting of Hill House*. *The Haunting* is scheduled for release on July 23.

Producers Susan Arnold and Donna Arkoff Roth, under their Roth/Arnold Productions banner, have produced such movies as *Forces of Nature*, *Grosse Pointe Blank*, *Unstrung Heroes*, and *Benny & Joon*. They have a reason for pioneering a return to the true horror film. For one thing, Arnold and Roth have been fans of Jackson's novel since they were teenagers. But they were also fans of classic horror films. In fact, you could say that they're continuing in the footsteps of the family business. Arnold's father, Jack Arnold, directed some of the great horror films, including *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *The Incredible Shrinking Man*. Roth's father, Samuel Arkoff, produced several horror cult classics.

"We wanted to do a different kind of movie, and it was a great opportunity to pay homage to our fathers," Susan Arnold says. "There was a period of time in the 'fifties and early 'sixties when there were the most amazing character-driven supernatural thrillers. We thought it would be really fun to rediscover those kinds of wonderful films in a style appropriate to filmmaking in the 'nineties."

This isn't the first time *The Haunting of Hill House* has been made into a movie. In fact,

Robert Wise produced and directed a version of *The Haunting* in 1963, starring Julie Harris and Claire Bloom. It's a version that's mostly faithful to Jackson's novel, but unavoidably limited by the technology and low budgets of the early 'sixties.

One of the great strengths of Jackson's novel lies in its characters. *The Haunting of Hill House* focuses on two men and two women who come to Hill House and live there for a short time for the sake of an experiment that attempts to uncover the unexplained phenomena that's rumored to occur in the house. The question is this: Is the house genuinely haunted, or are the unexplained events caused by something else?

The man behind the experiment is Dr. Montague, a doctor of philosophy whose real vocation is exploring the supernatural. Dr. Montague approaches his supernatural experiments with a scientific eye, with the hope of publishing his work about haunted houses. The problem is, he needs to find a haunted house before he can write about one. Despite his façade of science and research, Dr. Montague is at heart a ghost-hunter. When he discovers the existence and history of Hill House, he puts everything on the line, including his reputation, in order to rent Hill House for three months and recruit others to join him in the experiment.

In DreamWorks SKG's *The Haunting*, Dr. Montague has become Professor David Marrow (Liam Neeson of *The Phantom Menace*

and Academy Award Best Actor winner for *Schindler's List*).

"The character of Marrow was very interesting," Roth says. "We needed somebody who had a built-in authority. Someone who would be the leader and who you would feel safe with. There is so much about Liam as an actor that makes you feel like you are in good hands, yet he is so bright that you are drawn into how complicated he is."

In Jackson's novel, Montague (now Marrow) has to look long and hard for people who are willing to spend their summer in a remote New England house that's reported to be haunted. He resorts to looking through the records of psychic societies, sensational newspapers, and parapsychologists' reports. He assembles a list of about a dozen candidates and sends invitations to them. In the end, only two respond.

The first is Eleanor, or "Nell," Vance (Lili Taylor of *Ransom*, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, *Girls Town*, and *Cold Fever*). Nell has spent her entire adult life taking care of her invalid mother, who has recently died. Nell lives with her sister and brother-in-law. In her early thirties, Nell is faced with the fact that she has never had a life of her own, but suddenly has possibilities of creating a life for herself—and she sees the invitation to Hill House as a first step. Nell was chosen for the experiment because of a bizarre experience that she had as a child. Soon after her father died, showers of stones rained both inside and outside her

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house for three days. When Nell, now an adult, goes to Hill House, she becomes the focus not only of our attention, but of the attention of the house itself.

Speaking of the role of Nell, Arnold says, "It was the hardest part to cast. Nell has to have strength and power way deep inside of her, yet she has to have a sort of fragile exterior. She is a very complex person, and we needed an extraordinary actress to play her. We were very lucky to get Lili Taylor. Her face is able to convey many conflicting emotions at the same time."

The only other candidate who responds to the invitation to stay at Hill House is Theodora or "Theo" (Catherine Zeta-Jones of *The Mask of Zorro* and *Entrapment*). Theo is the antithesis of Nell. While Nell has lived a life based on duty and conscience, Theo is independent and carefree. Theo's history with psychic phenomena is recorded in the results of a laboratory experiment in which she once participated. Theo is a proven clairvoyant.

"Theo is so fabulously extroverted and everything that Nell isn't," Arnold says. "Catherine really has the essence of Theo: her exuberance, her beauty, and her love of life. She is able to play a character who is kind of shocking but also has a vulnerability underneath."

The last person to join the experiment at Hill House is Luke Sanderson (Owen Wilson of *Armageddon*, *Permanent Midnight*, and *Anaconda*), the young man who is destined to

inherit the house. In Jackson's novel, Luke is described as a liar and a thief, although his sins amount to no more than stealing pocket change from his aunt's purse and cheating at cards. More important, Luke is skeptical of psychic events. The house is rented out for the experiment under the condition that a family member, Luke, be present at all times. Luke considers Hill House to be the cash cow of his future, so he has a vested interest in keeping an eye on it.

"Owen is so smart, talented, and funny," Roth says. "We wanted Luke to be an incredibly bright, funny guy who is like a breath of fresh air when he appears on screen."

When this quartet of characters comes together, we become aware of a fifth, and possibly the most important, character: Hill House itself. On the first page of Jackson's novel, she states that Hill House is not sane.

One of the reasons the filmmakers were so intrigued with the book is Jackson's premise that a place itself can be evil. Jackson was inspired to write *The Haunting of Hill House* when she drove by a burned-out building. Later, when she learned the history of the building and the horrible things that had happened there, she considered the idea that the house itself was responsible for the tragedies that had occurred in it.

There are two intriguing elements to Hill House. The first is its history. In Jackson's novel, Hill House was built in the 1800s by a man named Hugh Crain as a country home

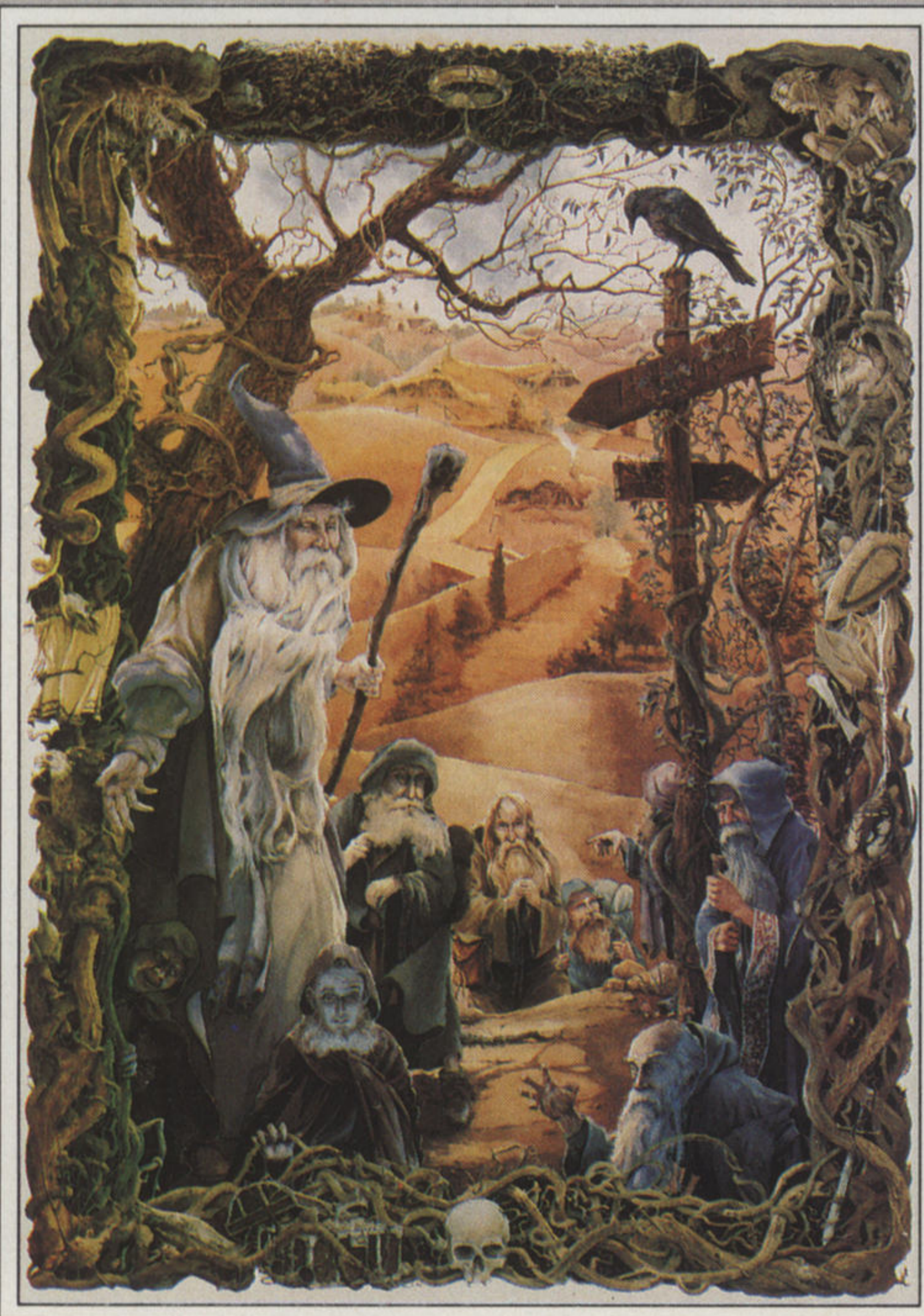
(more like a mansion, by modern-day standards) for his family. However, his young wife died as her carriage overturned in the driveway when she was approaching the house for the first time. Hugh Crain had two young daughters, who were raised in Hill House. He married twice more, each of his wives dying. Eventually, Hugh Crain himself died. His daughters grew up; one left Hill House for marriage, the other stayed and grew old there. The married daughter eventually hired a companion to take care of her sister, and when the elderly daughter died, the companion inherited the house, instead of the surviving sister. The companion was not only blamed for the elderly sister's death, but committed suicide in the house. Since then, anyone who attempted to live in Hill House stayed for no more than a few days, but no one was willing to say why.

As the story progresses, Jackson reveals that Hugh Crain had something of a sick and twisted mind. Hill House was designed by Hugh Crain himself.

Which leads to the second interesting element of Hill House: its design. The book suggests that the designer's psychoses led to a house whose architecture is off-kilter as a result. The house is a huge and sprawling maze, full of doors and passageways. A map is necessary to navigate your way through the house, and even a map is no guarantee that you'll end up in the right place.

Continued on page 78

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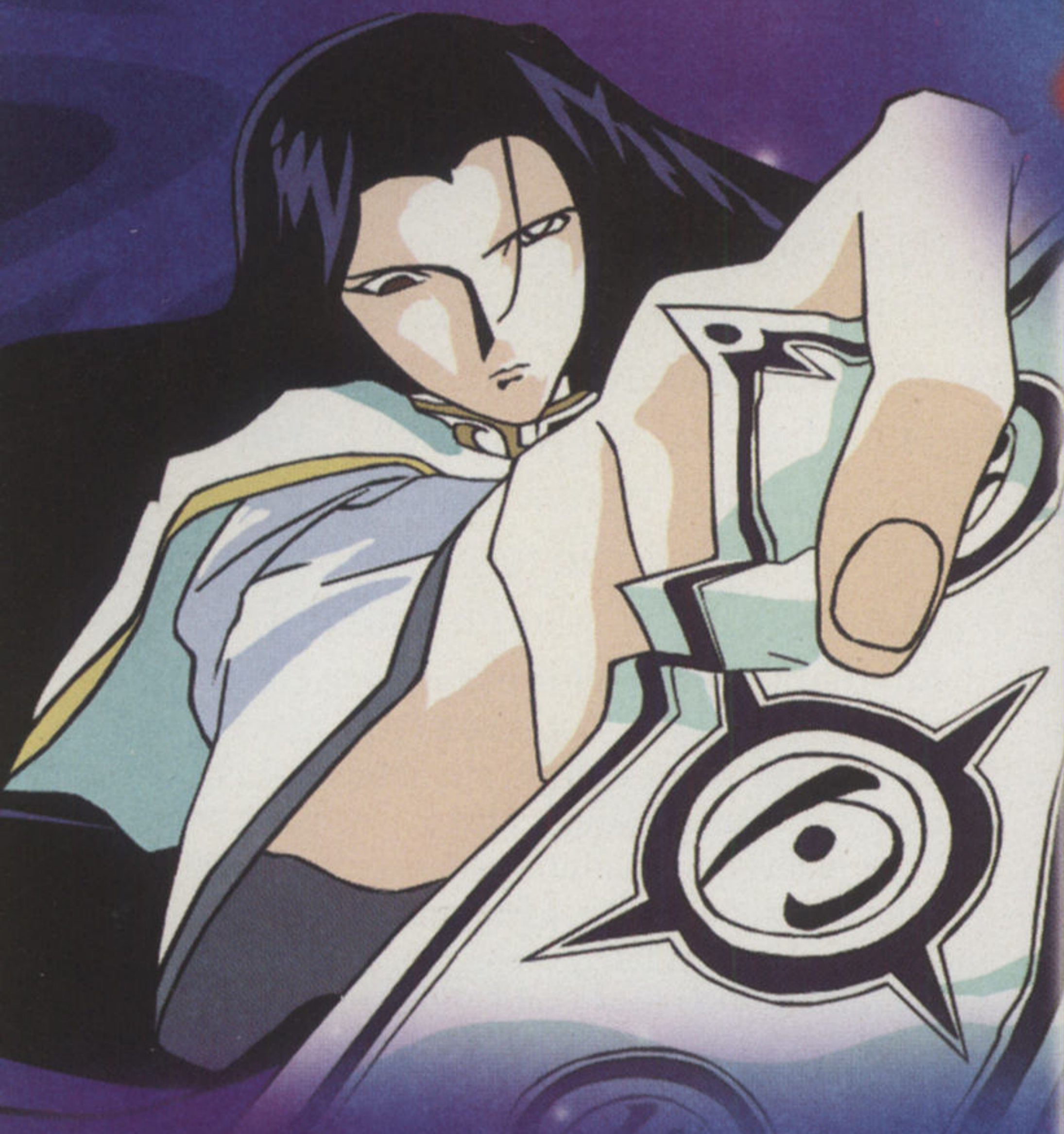
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SEVERAL YEARS AFTER MY FATHER'S DEATH, I DREAMED HE WAS A SECURITY GUARD AT A steel plant. It was a gigantic place, dark and terribly hot, sparks flying everywhere from the mammoth vats of red-hot pig iron being poured in the background. The plant stretched on endlessly, the air inside thick with the force of the heat and full of the dull roar of intense flames. In the middle of this place, which was automated, there was a small glass booth, and that is where my father sat all alone, wearing not the typical two-tone blue of a security guard's uniform, but a bright orange jumpsuit he had once brought home from the Santa Cruz County Jail. He had worked there for a time after retiring from the army. Now he was dressed as a convict.

I woke quietly from the dream, still resonating with its emotional charge. It was a hot and windless summer evening in Davis, California, in a house without air conditioning, but I felt oddly cold, as if I had just returned from that scene in my dream and the 100-plus-degree heat was relatively chilly by comparison. In the transi-

tional state of consciousness after waking, I recall thinking the steel plant was "hot as hell." And then I realized that my father was a security guard there—in hell—in a scene right out of Dante's *Inferno*. For years to come nothing relieved the haunting sense of guilt I felt after waking that night—but as I was finishing my first book more than 15 years later, I remembered this story my father told me after his second return from Vietnam.

The Return of the Prodigal Son by Rembrandt shows that while father/son relationships are always complex, they're not always fair.



THE MEN AND THE MONKEYS (a Montagnard myth)

In the old days the men and the monkeys lived together. They were friends. But the men were jealous of the monkeys because the monkeys had good fields with lots of rice and the men's fields were bad and produced very little. But the men knew that if you looked at their fields from the ground they looked very good and if you looked at the monkeys' fields from high up on a hill, they looked small and bad. So the men showed the monkeys the fields from the different heights and tricked them into switching.

When harvest time came, the crops were bad for the monkeys and they had nothing to eat. So they went to their friends, the men, for advice, and the men told them, "You have to kill your children for food." Now the monkeys still trusted the men for their wisdom about the fields, so they went home, and crying all the while because they were so sad, they butchered all their children.

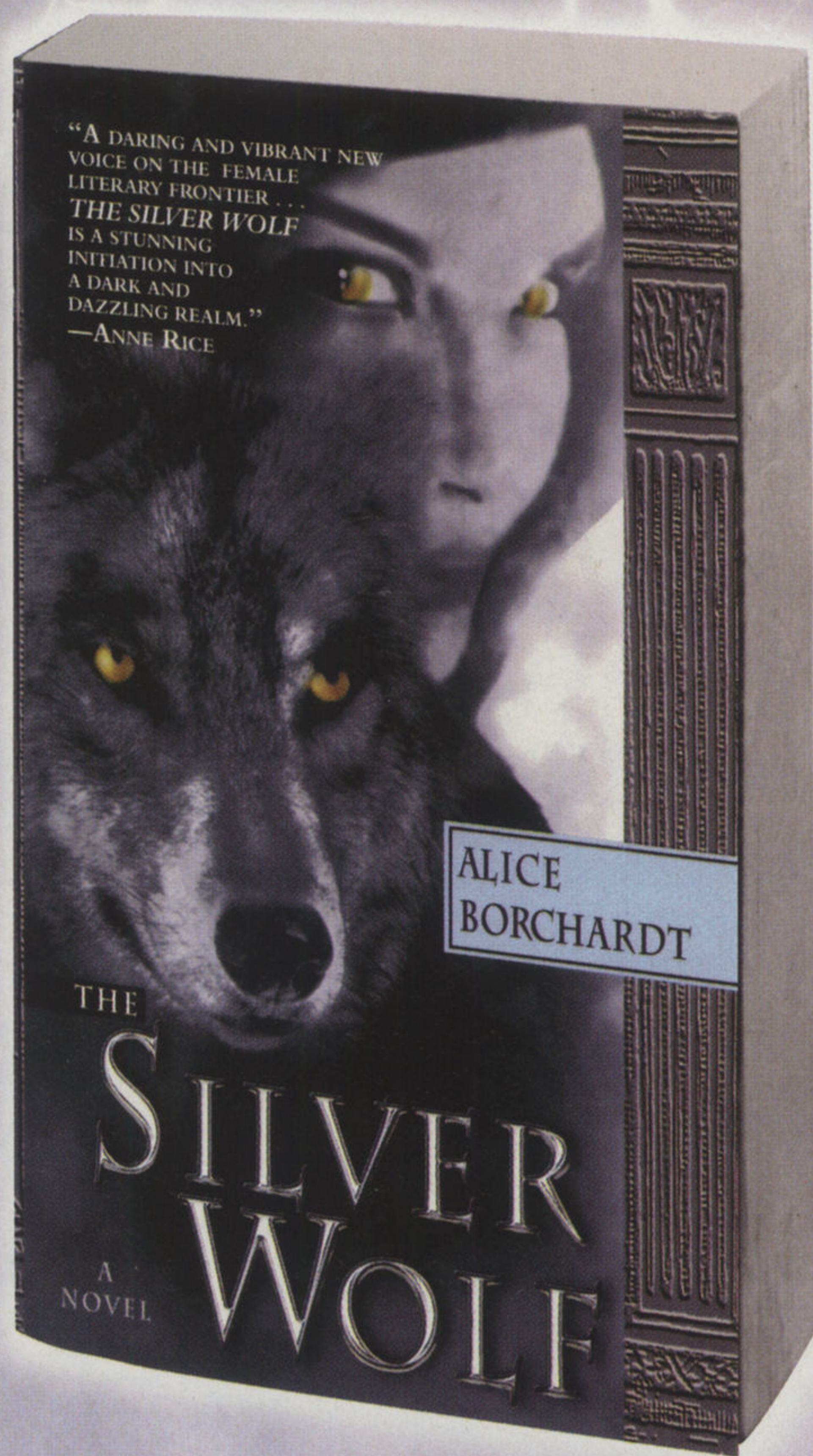
That night the men sneaked into the monkeys' village and stole all the meat. The next morning, when the monkeys came to the men's village, they saw them eating meat, and the men said it was just bird meat. But the monkeys recognized the flesh of their own children—how could they not?—and now they were afraid of the men. They ran from the men's village into the deep forest and from then on, they lived wild.

Now the monkeys steal corn and rice from people and they're always screaming in anger because a long time ago men lied to them and stole the spirits of their children.

At the time, I had only the vaguest idea of what this story meant; I certainly had no clue about the significance of my father telling it to me then. I was only 11 years old, able to get the gist of a fable or a parable, but hardly equipped to analyze text and context.

In retrospect, I find both the story and the context of its telling charged with layers of ironic meaning. My

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father had served two tours of duty in Vietnam, working with Special Forces in the highlands as an adviser to local Montagnard groups who had been recruited to do counterinsurgency against the Vietcong. He sympathized greatly with the plight of the Montagnards, who are an indigenous group oppressed by the Vietnamese in much the same way Native Americans suffer in the United States. This story, he said, had been told to him by a Montagnard chief in the village of Buon Romen.

The ironies, of course, are many. In the story, which is an explanatory myth, the distinction is between the men (Montagnards) and the monkeys, but this had been told by a chief who must have understood that in his listener's mind the story would have greater metaphorical meaning. American soldiers often referred to the Vietnamese (and other Asians) as monkeys because of their small stature, whereas Asians often referred to Americans as monkeys for their hairy bodies and their "animal" smell. So the issue of who betrays whom in the myth becomes an elaborate web of possible meanings. If the men are the Americans and the monkeys are the Montagnards, what is the betrayal? What if the men are the Vietnamese and the monkeys are the Montagnards?

Perhaps the Montagnard chief was only recounting an explanatory myth at face value, but knowing what I know about the



Fathers—they ask a lot of their sons. Abraham Sacrificing Isaac by Laurent de La Hire.

wisdom and eloquence of chiefs, I think the truth was probably more complex. In all likelihood, this story was designed to evoke guilt in my father for his complicity with one of the armies that forcibly recruited Montagnard sons from their villages. The fact that my father then told the story to me—his half-Asian son—adds a poignant irony, especially because he had often fondly called me his "little monkey" when I was younger.

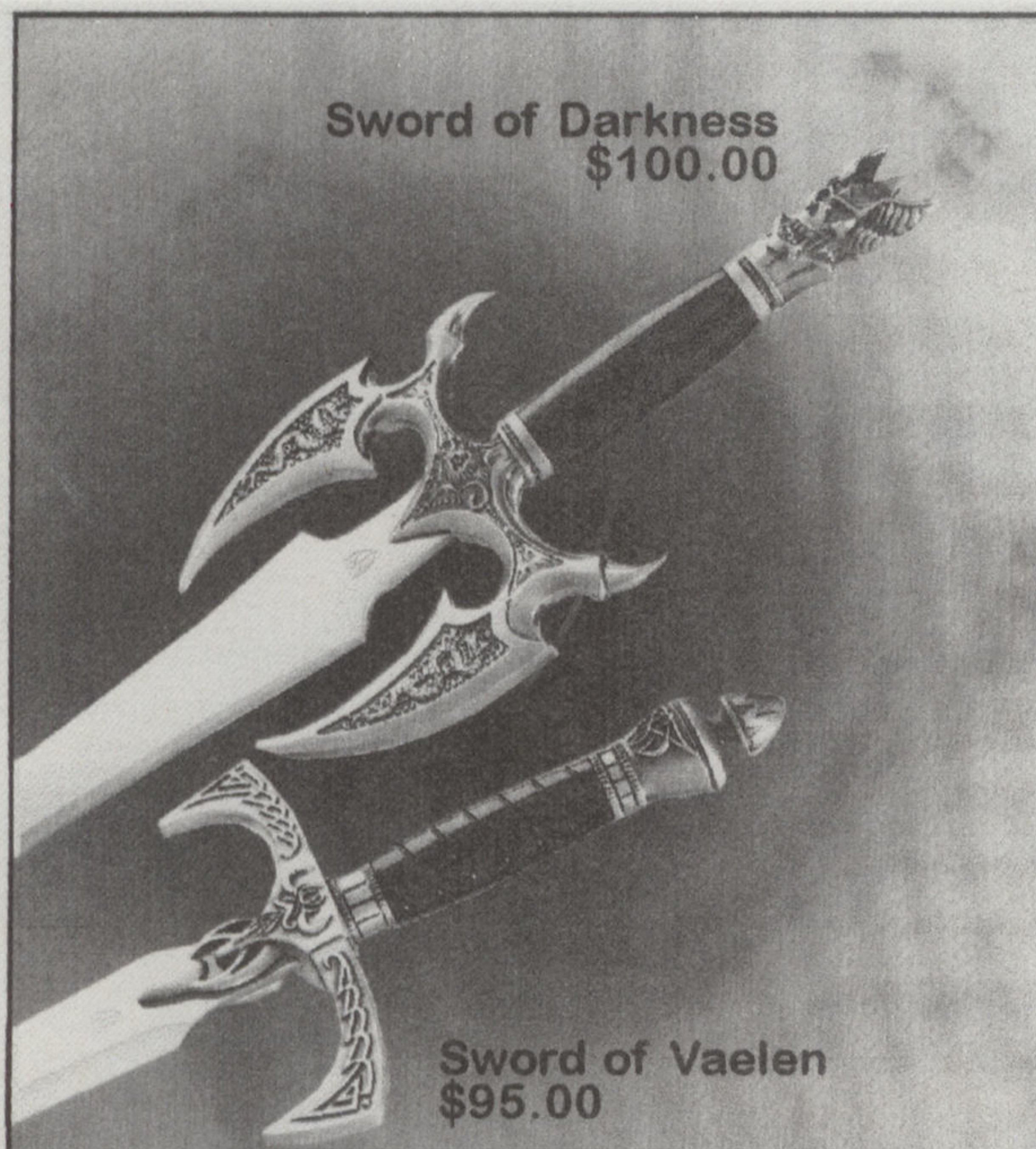
Classical mythology, traditional folk tales, and the Bible are full of tales having to do with the conflict between fathers and sons: Laius and Oedipus, Godfather Death and his godson, Abraham and Isaac. Because themes are amplified when they serve the rhetoric of culturally resonant stories, sons

kill fathers and fathers kill sons often through symbolic substitutes. The blame for the violence is often placed on the father, but in reality the culpability goes both ways, often implicating the father more strongly.

After all, as one of the most famous father-son myths reminds us, Oedipus didn't simply kill his father; his father had set the chain of events in motion by pinning his son's ankles so he could not walk and then leaving him on an exposed mountaintop to die. The irony, of course, is that Oedipus kills Laius during an argument about right of way while he is walking to Thebes.

The origin of the Olympian gods can be traced back to the myth of the Titan, Chronus (Saturn), devouring his children. One of his sons avoids this fate with the help of his mother, and eventually, Zeus (Jupiter) is able to overthrow his father and establish the pantheon of Classical gods and goddesses.

In the story of Daedalus and Icarus, the father designs wings of feathers and wax that permit escape from an island prison. Daedalus warns his son not to fly too high or too low, but Icarus, full of the joy of flight, soars too close to the Sun. The heat melts the wax that holds his wings together and he plummets into the sea where he drowns. This story is thematically similar to the story of Phaethon, son of the Sun God and a mortal woman. Phaethon seeks out his father one day, and in his pleasure, Apollo grants



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him anything he wishes, not realizing that his son's greatest wish is to take his place for a day. When Phaethon announces his desire, Apollo cannot help but acquiesce because he has sworn an oath. He tries to dissuade the boy with dire warnings, but Phaethon insists on driving the chariot of the Sun. The results are disastrous. He loses control of the horses, and he flies everywhere, scorching Heaven and Earth until Zeus himself intervenes and strikes the boy dead with a thunderbolt.

These father-son tales are all about the consequences of trespass, or, put another way, the cost of disobeying the law of the father. They function primarily as cautionary tales that serve the best interest of the patriarchy by helping maintain the father's authority within both the family and the culture.

A more unusual story of trespass is "Godfather Death" from Grimms' Fairy Tales. A poor father is so desperate to find a godfather for his son that he runs out to the highway to ask the first man he comes across. He meets God, then the Devil, but he rejects them both as unsuitable—God because he is unfair and the Devil because he is deceitful. Finally, the father meets Death, and accepts him because he makes all men equal. Death appears at the christening to stand as godfather, and he watches over the boy as he grows up. When he is ready to make his way in the world, Death gives the

youth a gift that makes him the best doctor in the world. Death sternly warns the youth that his gift is not to be abused, but eventually, the young doctor falls in love with a sick princess and he abuses Death's gift in order to marry her and inherit her father's kingdom. Death takes the young doctor away to a cave full of candles that represent human lives. He shows the young doctor his candle, which is sputtering, on the verge of going out. The youth pleads for Death to light him a new candle, appealing to the fact that he is his godson, after all, but Death lets the flame sputter out and the youth dies. Godfather Death gets his revenge for the youth's transgression.

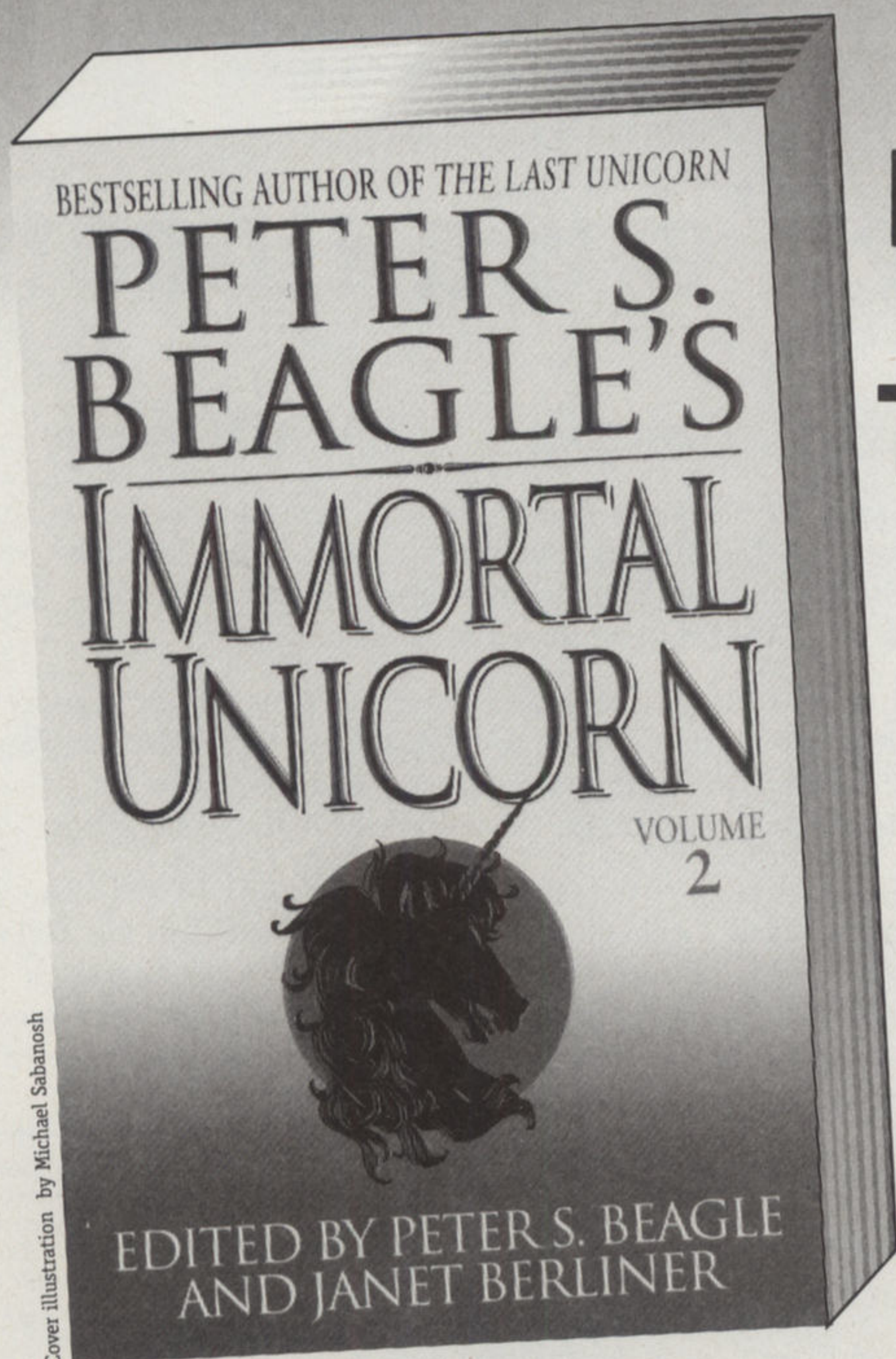
"Godfather Death" is unusual because it actually contains four father figures: the devoted father (who gave the boy life), God and the Devil (one of whom the boy will meet in the afterworld), and Death (who takes his life). Did the boy's father betray him by daring to judge God and rejecting him as godfather? Would his fate have been any different if God had been his godfather? Could one reasonably expect a happy ending with Death serving as godfather? For added resonance, readers never learn if, in the end, the young doctor's soul was consigned to Heaven or Hell.

In fairy tales, the male equivalent of the wicked stepmother or the witch (both evil counterparts of the good mother) is typically a giant, an ogre, a devil, or a hostile

king. In some tales like "The Twelve Brothers" (a variant of "The Seven Ravens"), there is a king who sets out to kill his sons, but in most cases, as in "Jack the Giant Killer" (prettied up into "Jack and the Beanstalk") and "The Brave Little Tailor," the main character's major obstacle is a giant. These figures may be read as symbols for the father, whose authority and power, from a child's perspective, often seem colossal.

Stories of giant slaying can also provide a metaphor for sons as they grow older and begin to achieve a sense of themselves as distinct from the father. Sometimes feelings of rage and fantasies of destruction are an early step toward a son's understanding that he is separate from his father, that his father is not always right or honorable, and that we often have to leave our fathers behind, literally and figuratively, in the journey toward adulthood. In this way, I think stories of giant slaying and patricide show, in a dramatic and extreme way, a process of separation that can often feel like the end of the world when parents and teenagers are going through it.

The significance of stories about fathers willing to sacrifice, or murder, their sons is often less apparent, and perhaps because of this, more disturbing. In one of the most famous of these stories, the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, God tests Abraham by requiring him to sacrifice his son. After



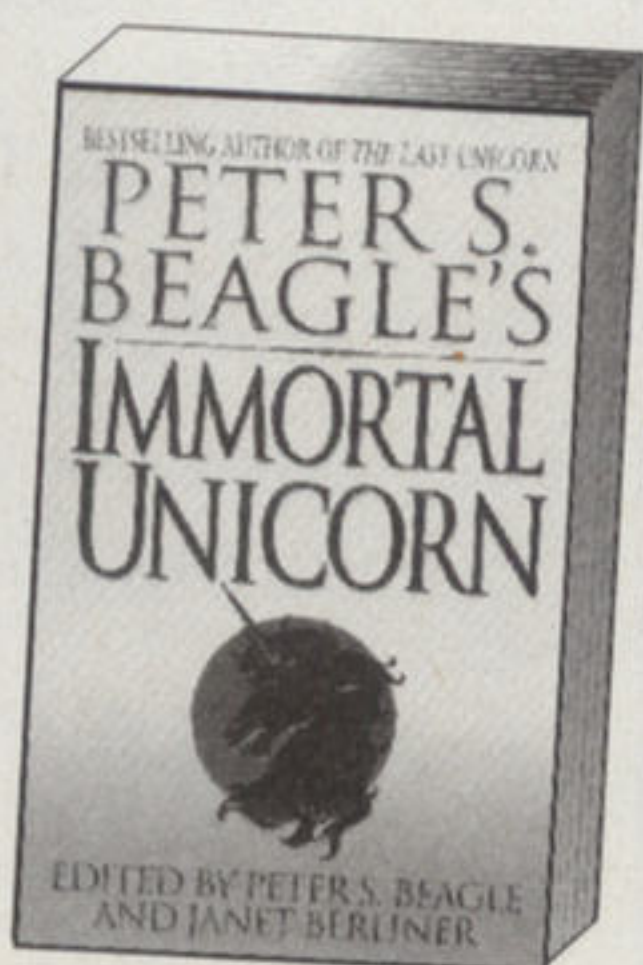
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much anguish, Abraham takes Isaac up to an altar on a mountain. But just as he is about to slit his son's throat, God, now convinced of Abraham's loyalty, intervenes, and a ram magically appears, tangled in a bush. Abraham is permitted to offer it in Isaac's place. From a father's point of view, this is a gut-wrenching story of divided loyalties—that of culture versus family. In this case, Abraham's loyalty to God (culture) is rewarded, and the substitute sacrifice offers him the best of both worlds, with both culture and family intact. From the point of view of the son, however, this might seem like a story about a father who cares more for his God than for his own flesh and blood; the happy outcome is not as convincing, and he is left with the traumatic images of a God that demanded his death and a father willing to kill him.

The New Testament introduces a different sort of father figure to remedy the harsh and demanding God of Abraham. The Gospel of John puts it quite explicitly: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The change is quite radical: Instead of demanding that fathers sacrifice sons to prove their loyalty to Him, God the Father, the God of the New Testament, actually sacrifices his own son for the sake of humankind. And whereas the Old Testament God relented at the last moment by offering Abraham the substitute

sacrifice, this God allows His son to die on the cross. No substitutes. His devotion to humankind is that profound.

But if we examine the doctrine of the Trinity, the logic goes even further: God and Christ are one and the same, and so God has actually let Himself be killed by humans in order to show His devotion to them. To illustrate His promise of everlasting life, He even rises from the grave.

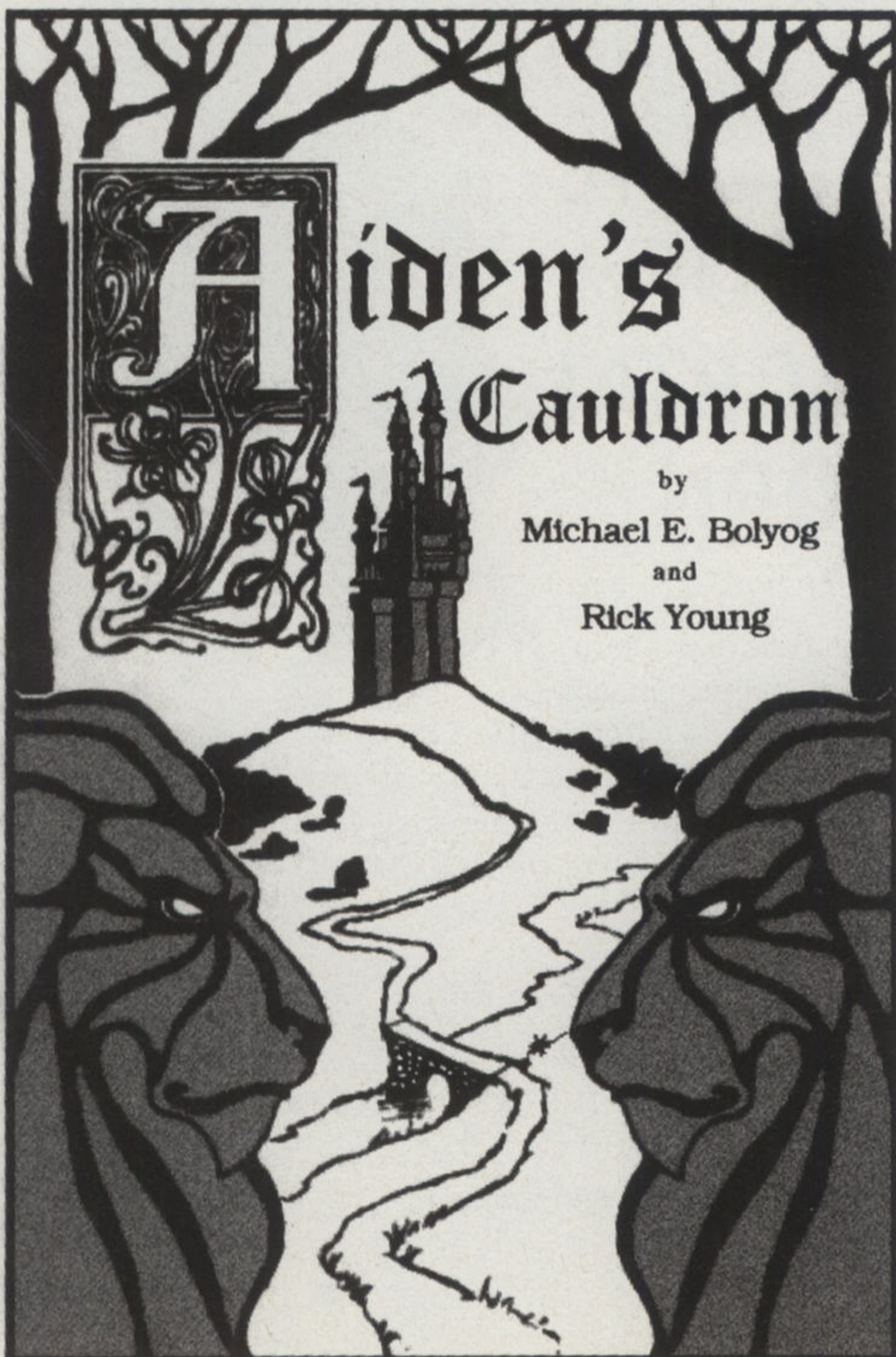
And yet, even this story cannot avoid an ironic charge from a son's point of view. In his last moments on the cross, Christ laments to his Father, "Eli, Eli, lama sabach-tani?" ("My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?").

One of the parables told by Christ in the Gospel of Luke provides the most striking contrast to harsh father figures. The story of the prodigal son is about a young man who takes his inheritance early and moves to another land where he squanders everything and becomes destitute. When he is so low that he has to fight animals for food scraps, he decides to return home and throw himself at the mercy of his father. The reunion is not what the son or the audience of the parable would expect. Instead of punishing his son or receiving him with stern chastisements, the father rejoices and throws a magnificent feast. But the prodigal's older brother, who had stayed to serve his father, is upset and refuses to celebrate. When his father comes to plead with him,

he says, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"

"My son," the father says, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we have to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and now is found."

I suppose the world would be a better place if all men grew up into fathers like the one with the prodigal son. Most of us make do with the problematic relationships handed down to us through generations of patriarchs. It's ironic that my father, by negative example, has inspired me. I know that my dream of seeing him in hell will always be with me. It is one of my Ur-myths, and I know that whenever I see fathers and sons in conflict, I will be reminded of it. In the strange and logically inexplicable way that fantasies and dreams do their work, I know the dream resolved something for me. I can only think that my father would appreciate the irony—that his resorting to a story instead of addressing the issue at hand would lead to such a resolution so far in the future. That's the thing about good stories—sometimes you don't understand them until their tellers are long gone. ♣



Aiden's Cauldron is about loyalty and the value of being good.

— Los Angeles Times, Community News Supplement

Sendraak's Writings

Aiden's Cauldron

by

Michael E. Bolyog and Rick Young

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BOOKS

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number of black and white illustrations and spots, and they have been masterfully incorporated into the book.

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The action black and whites are in the great swirling tradition of unabashed drawers of derring-do such as John Allen St John and are cannily shuffled in with spot drawings of weapons and ships and dead monster's skulls with many repeats as was the tradition in the pulps of yore, and it is truly a delight to hold this well-bound book with its pages pleasant to the touch and to read these fine bold stories interspersed with such fine bold drawings.

May this project of Wandering Star meet with great success and inspire many other ventures.

Since books like this seldom make it to your local chain bookstore allow me to inform you that you may order a copy of this book from: Conquistador, 158 Kent House Rd., Beckenham, Kent BR3 1JY England; Tel/Fax: 011 44 (0) 181 659 9714.

I think it may have been a couple of years since I last mentioned *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror, Twelfth Annual Edition* (by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling; St. Martin's Press, New York, NY; 624 pages; Hardcover; \$29.95/Griffen Trade Paperback \$17.95) the fantastically reliable annual compendium of the best in Fantasy and Horror edited by two of the best editors in the business. These extraordinary books also include lengthy and amazingly informative essays on the editors' estimations on the state of their specialties for that year, together with detailed listings and recommendations of works which have been produced during that period.

As always I would like to announce my amazement that these busy people can manage to find the time to repeatedly do such unflinchingly scrupulous work and, again as always, wish to point out to you that since they *have* done it you would be silly indeed not to take advantage of all that expert work.

Gahan Wilson

Santa Steps Out: A Fairy Tale For Grown-Ups, by Robert Devereaux; Dark Highway Press, Fort Collins, CO; 272 pgs.; Hardcover; \$39.95

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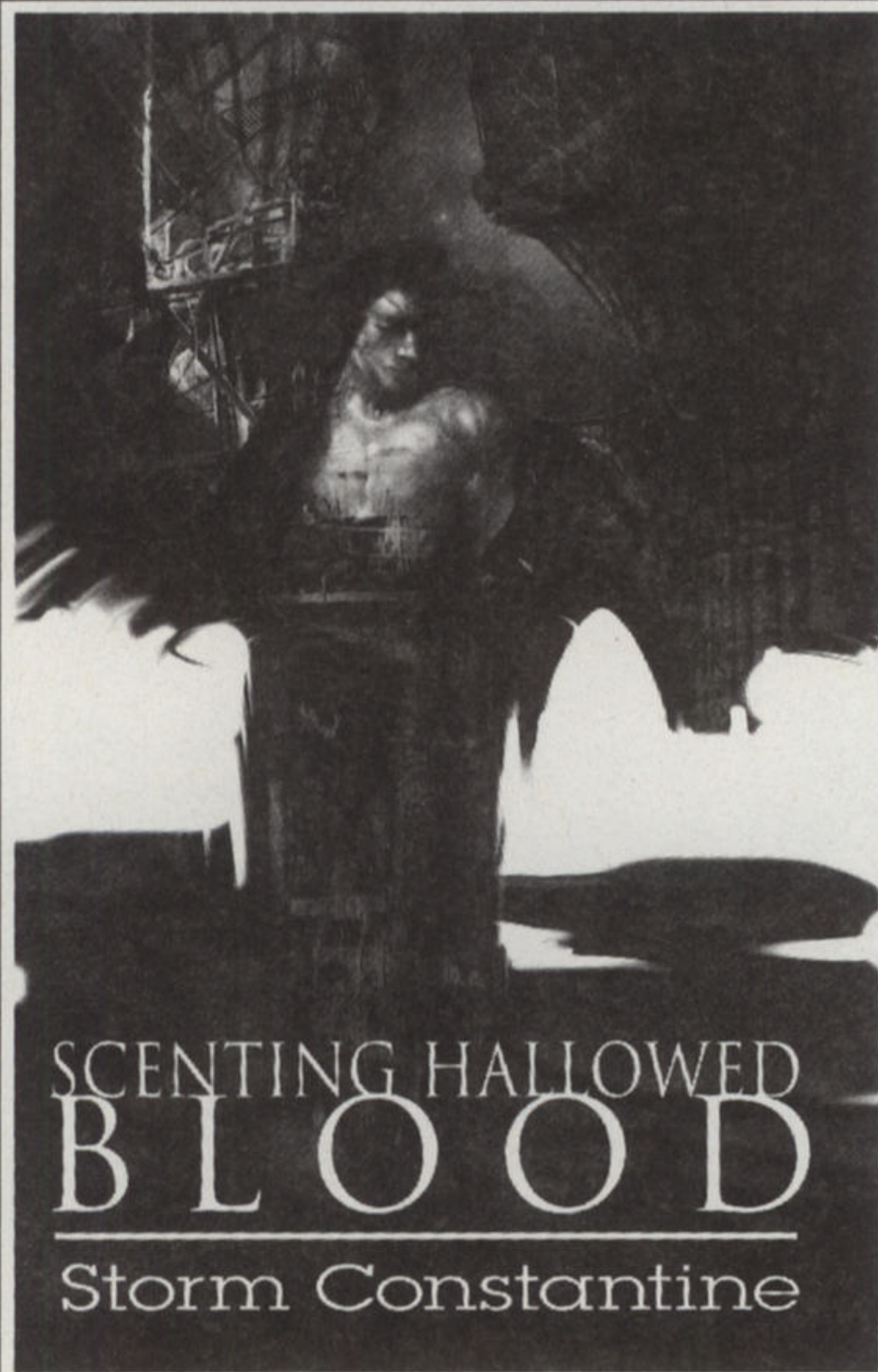
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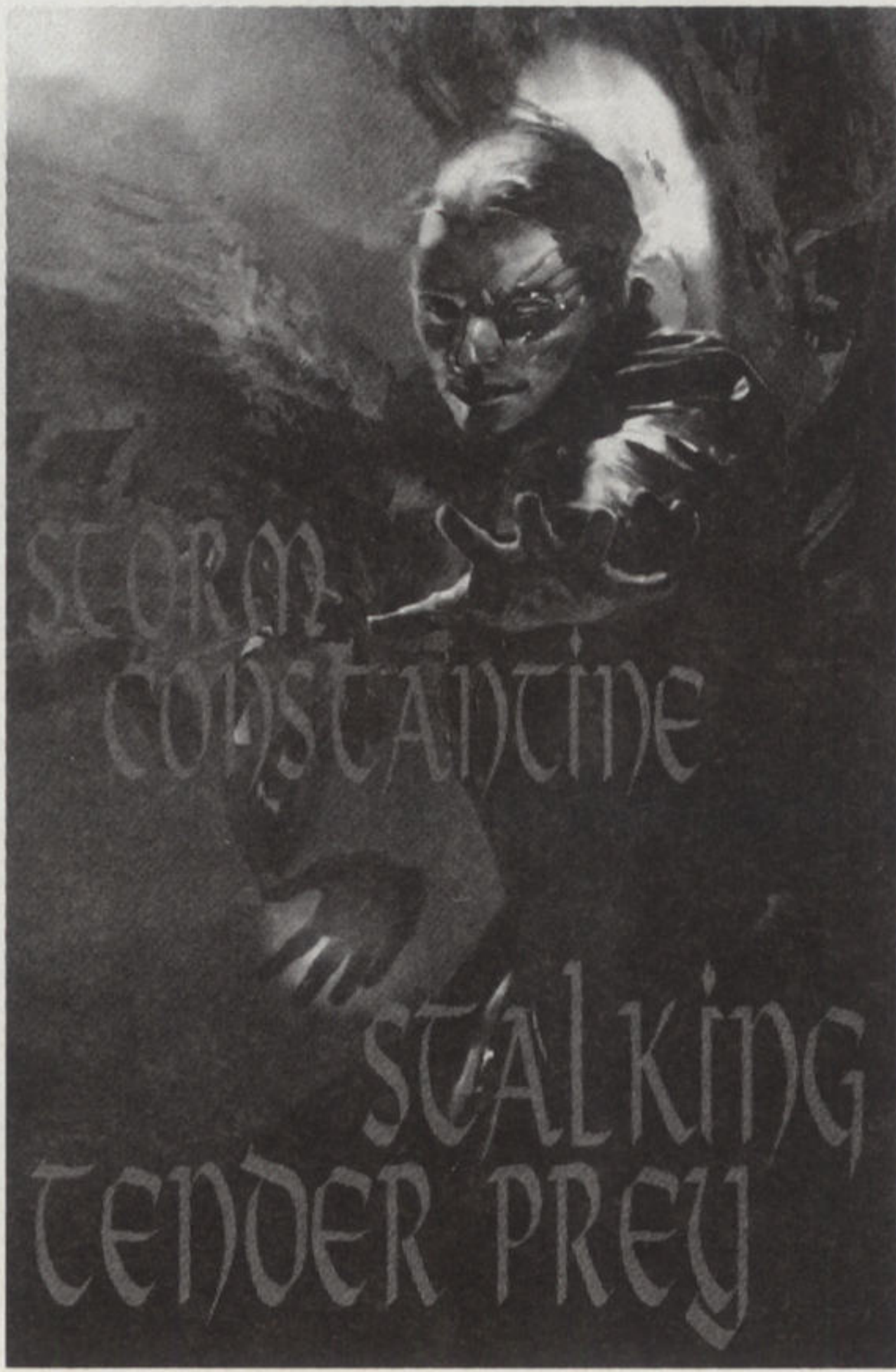
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few of your childhood myths intact. As David Hartwell says in his Foreword, it's a book "so dirty it overwhelms you."

It all starts when Santa runs into the Tooth Fairy. It's Christmas Eve, and as he delivers presents to a home, the Tooth Fairy is simultaneously visiting to retrieve a tooth from beneath a child's pillow. It's not long before Santa's focus on the children of the world and his staid wife begins to waver, and he succumbs to the Tooth Fairy's charms.

Their wild affair awakens memories in both of them, memories of a time before they were St. Nicholas and the Tooth Fairy, a time before the Christian God gave them these identities, when they were instead a satyr and a nymph, living lives of unending revelry. Santa revels in this "not-Santa" part of him, betraying Mrs. Claus in an affair that lasts over 20 years before he finally gets caught.

The revelation of Santa's infidelity occurs only through the interference of the Easter Bunny. Lonely and horny, he finds the elderly Mrs. Claus infinitely appealing and decides the way to her heart is through uncovering her husband's treachery. The shock awakens ancient memories and lusts in Mrs. Claus as well. She does not turn to the Easter Bunny, who's a bit of a pervert. Instead she opts for a round of payback with Santa's elves. Hey—I warned you to stop reading.

The book is shocking, and is filled with graphic sex. Yet in its violation of our sensibilities and our cherished childhood icons, in its topping of its over-the-top scenarios, *Santa Steps Out* manages to be at once fascinating, funny, and enlightening. Reading about Santa as a real person rather than a cartoon, living his bizarre life with his wife and the elves at the North Pole, engages the imagination with a power seldom felt in Fantasy. The images Devereaux creates resonate with all the associations Santa carries for us. In unmasking Santa's and the others' depravity, the book is both hilarious and revealing. All the characters have kept their sexuality hidden to conform to their sanitized roles, yet that sexuality is a part of them and cannot be denied. In the same way, we may repress our sexuality and other aspects of our personalities, preferring to live in a world where we are as good and caring and sanitized as Santa. Yet those other traits exist and are as much a part of us as the persona we choose to present the world.

Any such realizations, though, are overshadowed by the sheer power of the shocks, blasphemies, miracles, laughs, surprises, and gross-outs Devereaux pummels us with. It is for good reason that David Hartwell calls the book "the single most outrageous novel I have ever read." Devereaux's most outrageous achievement is that as he destroys our childhood myths, he rebuilds them in a twisted yet equally magical and compelling way. If you're ready to take a wild ride down the chimney, this is a book you'll never forget reading, and one you'll find yourself telling all your friends about with delight.

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A traditional Hungarian folk tale has a call-and-response rhythm of “Soup? Bones!” This tale is far from traditional, but the response phrase is there...

i. How the Old Woman Found Her Pelt

When Rózsa felt the longing in her old bones, it was the 33rd season of that year. She began to pay careful attention to the time as it went by: the Season of Fat Snow when the flakes came down so big that one of them on your tongue filled you up for a day; the Season of Sugar Snow which always came at Christmastime and was all sparkly like the sugar sprinkled over apple *rétes*, followed by the Season of Squeaky Snow (which some people found particularly hard on the nerves), then the Season of Crusty Snow, of Dirty Snow, of Stone Snow, and

finally, to that very day, which was the start of the Season of Earthy-Smelling Snow.

The longing made her walk to the banks of the Duna to breathe the river air and fill her lungs with the scent of damp cold dirt with just the tinge of a metal. Poor Rózsa! She lived so long in the village of Zebegény that she'd forgotten she was *táltos*. After 85 years, everyone who knew it (because they had seen her born with all her teeth) had died and so couldn't tell her.

The first time she had felt the urge to come to the river was six years before. It had begun as a vague restlessness, hard to fix like a memory out of place. That was the year János died. He left her with the memories of a marriage rich in love but poor in fruits: they had no children. János's death left a hole in

ROZSA-NÉNI AND FARKAS ASSZONY

(Auntie Rosa and the Wolf Woman)

BY DEBORAH THÉRESE D'ONOFRIO
ILLUSTRATION BY PATRICK ARRASMITH



her so large it swallowed her heart, devoured her withered, empty womb, and pressed all the way up into her throat. Sometimes the emptiness choked her when she tried to talk and Rózsa had to push it back before she could get a sound out.

But the seventh year, this year, the feelings caused Rózsa to become disgruntled with filling the rigid image of a widow that the village expected. She looked down at her feet and her thick-soled, black, Old-Lady shoes. Her stockings, heavy woolen things she knitted to keep the winter cold away from her old bones. And when she looked out at the river, its surface roiling and angry, the ice still hugging the banks where it fled for protection from the Sun, she wondered at how much the river looked the way she felt inside.

The Duna called to her. The forest and mountains called to her. And at night the Moon called to her. All this talking and what did they say? The nomadic feelings inside hinted that her territory was far and wide but, as she had nowhere to go outside Zebegény, those feelings scared Rózsa very much.

With a great sigh and deliberate steps, Rózsa turned to climb the bank and head home. She also felt the urge to clean house, to order, neaten, tuck things in, and rearrange. Now that was something she knew what to do with! Having such a definite purpose as that lightened her heart and lifted her spirits.

ROZSA CLEANED ALL WEEK UNTIL ALL THAT WAS left to do was the attic which she saved for Sunday after Mass. No one would bother her. Now that the Season of First Shoots was near (following as it did on the heels of the Season of Earthy-Smelling Snow) the young village girls to whom she taught crocheting and spinning would not come back for lessons until the Season of Crunchy Topsoil which signaled the end of harvest.

Rózsa had thought that teaching the young girls all she knew of the domestic arts would have given her a purpose, possibly fill the empty spaces János left. But most girls were flittery like young sparrows. If they had any potential at all, their parents whisked them away to toil at home and wasted them as just another pair of hands to help with the harvest, prepare meat for winter, drive the horses to market, or cook for the hired hands, regardless of whether their talents actually lay in any of these things. The adults turned them into little mirror images of themselves and every other woman who came before them since the time Árpád and the Magyars quit raising hell across the Carpathian Basin and settled down.

Rózsa began sorting through a large cedar chest, pulling from it baby clothes she sewed but never had the occasion to use, doilies she crocheted but never found a place for, cloth she wove for a dress she never quite decided to make. She set things in piles. She found herself thinking about which of her students she'd like to give them to. Rózsa puzzled over why she felt obliged to find these things another home and why she felt no sense of loss in doing so.

She worked until late in the day sorting through chests and around old furniture when her hand struck something hard and woody in the corner back behind the chifforobe. Because it was covered with one of János's discarded shirts, the object took a few minutes to untangle and pull free. It was a wooden hoop, one that had been made from a year-old birch. Big enough when set on end for a seven-year-old child to step through without stooping.

"M' Isten," Rózsa said and sat down with a "hoowph" on top of the closed lid of another chest. "Well."

She pressed the hoop, now dry and brittle, to her chest and for the first time in 7 years, Rózsa knew exactly what to do.

Soup?
Bones!

ii. How Julianna Heard the Old One's Call

Julianna began her journey before she even knew where she was going. The oldest of three sisters, Julianna was leaving home at 12 years old to find her way in the world. It was the Season of Longest Days so traveling should be easy. She knew that if she followed the Duna, it would take her to Budapest. The river flowed through the middle of the city. But she had no earthly idea what to do once she got there.

For a reason she would never know, her mother didn't like her much. Ever since she was born, her mother tried to make Julianna into something she was not: wrapping her hair in hot irons to make it curly because it was straight, slapping her to make her hush because her laugh was too loud, sending her to Rózsa-néni's house in Julianna's village of Zebegény to learn domestic arts because she was "too dumb" to learn from her mother. Her father was sad to see her leave, but he didn't have the money to either educate or dower her. Any money she made in Budapest she had to send home to help with her two younger sisters. Julianna loved her sisters so this didn't bother her. And she was glad to leave her mother's house.

Julianna carried everything she owned in the world in a bundle made from a fine piece of cloth that she was given three years ago by the widow woman the village girls called Rózsa-néni, or Auntie Rózsa. The cloth was particularly fine, just like Sugar Snow. It even sparkled like Sugar Snow because the thread that Rózsa-néni spun had a fine strand of moonlight through it. In fact the story goes that Rózsa-néni disappeared three years ago because she went out to the banks of the Duna on the night of the full Moon to collect moonbeams, and the *táltos* wolves spirited her away. They knew this because the old lady's footprints marked the mud where she'd stood and tracks from a wolf took up after that. And because they found a hoop freshly made from a year-old birch, which everyone knew was used for the magic of transformation. If they'd have been sharp, they'd have seen the wolf with blue-silver eyes watching from the forest as they searched the banks for the old woman. A wolf that never attacked man nor sheep nor goats, that only hunted among the stars.

Imagine that, Julianna thought. Rózsa-néni a *táltos* and we never knew.

And they had treated her like they never knew it, too. While Rózsa-néni's husband was alive, the villagers gossiped as to why they never had children and whether he would stay with her. When he died, they tittered that he finally had made his escape. But mostly, they ignored her.

Oh, they were sorry now, all right. Now that they knew she was a *táltos*. Especially those who laughed at her gifts, who called them silly trinkets from an old lady and either sold them or threw them out. What potential might they have carried? What wishes now unfulfilled? Julianna remembered Rózsa-néni telling her once,

Fear made her COLD until she felt
as if frost drew through her veins.

"Touch the things I have left and I will be with you always." She fingered the fine cloth of her bundle and wished Rózsa-néni were with her now.

Julianna walked and walked until she thought her feet would fall off. Always following the Duna, she listened for the water lapping the stony shore, occasionally glancing toward the roiling black water out in the deep, dangerous middle. Finally she saw Budapest in the distance and she stopped walking because she was so unsure. Fear made her cold until she felt as if frost drew through her veins the way it outlined leaves during the Season of Crunchy Topsoil. Besides that, there was an aching below her belly for the past three days that she'd never felt before. Food did not cure it; neither did sleep. She felt small in a big world, like a cub strayed from its pack. She cried but that didn't help either. The only good thing that came out of that was the crying tired her out. She found a place under an oak tree where she slept through the afternoon and into the night.

Sometime after midnight, Julianna woke. The aching had subsided, but she was cramped up in the joints from laying on the cold ground. When she moved, she discovered that she was wet between the legs. In the strong moonlight, she could see that there was blood.

Although it was the first time she had bled, she wasn't afraid. Her mother, despite her faults, did tell her the ways of women. If for no other reason than to keep Julianna from being caught unawares and "the stupid girl would get herself pregnant before she even knew she could." But there on the bank of the Duna, Julianna had nothing to staunch the bleeding. She could have used her one change of clothes but they were the best things she owned. She had nothing else except the cloth that Rózsa-néni had given her. Much as she hated to do it, Julianna untied the ends, carefully put her clean clothes in the branches of the tree to keep them from getting dirty, and folded the cloth into a thick pad which she fixed around herself. Then she lay down again and finished the night's sleep.

THE NEXT MORNING JULIANNA WOKE A LITTLE LESS apprehensive, a little more rested, and still with no clear idea of where she needed to go. But somehow when she came to a dirt road, one that branched off and headed away from the Duna, she yielded to the urge to take it and climbed into the Buda hills. After an hour, she came to a large house with whitewashed plaster walls and brilliantly colored, hand-painted flowers surrounding the windows and doors. It had a neat front yard and a breathtaking view down onto the Pest side of the city. A rather young-looking woman waited for Julianna by the gate. This woman ran a boardinghouse for young country girls who came to the city to find work. Respectable people who wanted to hire a maid, someone to watch their small children, or companions for their old ladies came there. They paid a fee to cover the girls' room and board to date and took the girls to work in their homes. In the meantime the woman taught the girls skills such as weaving, spinning, and crocheting lace. If their talent lay elsewhere, she brought in someone to teach music, painting, or even mathematics—whatever was appropriate. The house had become famous for its crochet work and what they sold supported the girls no one wanted to hire—the ones who were ugly or had some crippling feature. If you worked hard and did your best, the woman would not send you away. This woman knew a girl was coming to her today, but she did not yet know that it was Julianna.

JULIANNA CAME UP TO THE GATE AND NEARLY COLLAPSED FROM hunger and the day's exertion. The woman caught her and, as she fell, Julianna looked into wild, blue-silver eyes. A young woman with old eyes; a *táltos*. It was the same *táltos* Julianna knew back in her village. (The girl didn't know it.) She did not catch on even when the woman said to call her Rózsa. (Well, it *was* a popular name, after all.) But Rózsa recognized Julianna. She brought the girl inside the house.

Through the open doorways, Julianna saw that there were 18 girls of various ages sitting in the garden doing piecework. Some spun, some worked at a loom, some crocheted lace. Their thread shimmered in the sunlight, like dew on a spider's web. They laughed.

Sometimes they sang. When Rózsa introduced Julianna to them, they stopped what they were doing, looked up pleasantly, and greeted her. Julianna saw that their clothes were clean and pretty, that the girls wore their hair in beautiful braids, and they all seemed well fed. Only now did Julianna realize that she left her good clothes in the tree by the Duna and she wanted to cry.

Two of the older girls put down their work and helped Rózsa get Julianna into the open-air, hot-spring bath in the rear of the garden. They didn't flinch at her dirt-encrusted skirts. Businesslike, they removed her menstrual rags and congratulated her on her recently acquired womanhood. It made Julianna feel better about this. As she soaked in the tub, she let the hot water loosen her joints and strip away the outer evidence of her journey. She told Rózsa about her mother, how that woman tried to make Julianna into something she was not. She said she thought this was why her mother sent her away, because she was too hopeless a case.

Although Rózsa knew her story already, she let Julianna talk. (That's because 90 percent of beauty is introspection and then forgiveness.) The other girls listened with rapt attention, pausing in their work to offer sympathy, laugh at the funny parts, or ask questions to better understand. When she finished, Rózsa began to scrub Julianna's hair. The soothing massage of her head, the gentle pulling of her hair, served to relax Julianna even more. Before she succumbed to the lure of sleep, Rózsa told this story:

The Wolf in the Deerskin Suit

Long, long ago, beyond the seven-times-seven lands, beyond the glass mountains, there was in the Great Forest a wolf cub that had lost its pack. When after searching for one year, one month, one day, one hour, and one minute he couldn't find his own kind, the cub, now a young wolf, took up with a herd of deer that he found grazing near the Duna. He figured one group was as good as another.

The deer were pretty nervous about having a wolf in the herd, even one who wanted to be a deer. "If you want to take up with us you have to eat grass and plants." So the wolf said, "All right, I'll eat grass and shoots like the deer." And so he did. But wolf teeth aren't made to chew grass and wolf stomachs aren't made to digest plants. He was more often sick as not and he began to lose weight. Still, it made his new herd happy and he continued to do it.

When eating grass wasn't enough to content them, the herd started getting nervous that the wolf didn't look like a deer. Again he bowed to pressure and he sneaked into a farmer's house to steal the deer head mounted on the wall and the deerskin rug that the man had laying on the floor. The wolf put the deer head over his own head. He now had a mighty impressive-looking set of antlers—and ones that wouldn't fall off in the winter either. He squeezed his fat paws into the hoofs from the rug and threw the rest of the skin over his furry back. He thought he looked very elegant in his deerskin suit and so he went on like that.

One day the farmer and his friends went out hunting. They saw the herd grazing by the Duna. "Look at the rack on that stag," exclaimed the farmer. "If I shoot him, I can have its head mounted on my wall and his skin on my floor. It will replace the ones I had stolen from me."

Well, the deer heard the men coming and they started to run. But the wolf in the deerskin suit had a hard time making tracks with his feet all jammed up in those tiny deer hoofs. Besides, all that grass-eating had weakened him; he wasn't as strong or as fast as he used to be. The hunters got him with the first shot.

When the farmer ran up to claim his prize, he was astonished to find that the "deer" he shot was already skinned and the head mounted and ready for the wall. The others noticed the scrawny wolf but he was so skinny and mangy neither the farmer nor his friends wanted to take the wolf skin home.

"It is too bad, this wolf is so thin," said one man. "He was sure a lousy wolf."

"Yes," said the farmer. "And in spite of this fine suit, he didn't make too good a deer either."

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*It does no good to deny your gifts—the further away you push them,
the more beautiful and dangerous they become.*

The Girl Who Loved Fire

BY K.D. WENTWORTH

Illustration by Broeck Steadman

ELIZA FOUND IT A GREAT BOTHER TO BE BORN TO FIRE. From her earliest memories, she had been embarrassed by the way flames surged toward her, hungry-like, and licked at her clothes when she strayed too near the hearth so her apron was always singed. They flew at her in great fat sparks when Pa lit his pipe, even flashed down during thunderstorms so that all the trees were blasted for a good 50 yards around the house.

Such goings-on alarmed Ma and made her more heavy-handed over small things than she might have been, even though it was through her line the gift had been passed down. Eliza's pa, though, was a free-thinking man and knew a money-making opportunity when he saw it. "I suspect," he said, just after her 16th birthday, "there's more than one who will pay up front for a fine healthy girl who has herself such a way."

"Yes, sir, Pa." Eliza had no mind to marry anyone, but knew better than to argue that morning or any other. She picked up the bucket and set off to fetch fresh water for Ma, who was inside the cabin baking bread. The day was middling warm for spring, mocking-



You tricked me! it sparked

And now

birds circling each other and carrying on like there was no tomorrow. The sweet fragrance of wild roses filled the air, but out of the west the smell of smoke caught her attention. She stopped at the fence and turned her head in an effort to locate it.

"Hey, there, Eliza McMurphy!" Angus Trent rounded the bend in the path and stood before her, a big, bluff man breathing hard as a hound what had chased after rabbits the whole day long and half the night too. He mopped at his balding head, which was all shiny with sweat. "You was just the one I come looking for."

"Afternoon, Mr. Trent." Eliza dropped her gaze and stared at her feet. Although she had often played with his daughters before his wife passed on, the Widower Trent now made her nervous, something in the way he looked her over like a prize calf.

"I been burning off my fields," he said, "but the wind done whipped around to the west and them flames got plumb away from me. They's headed up the hill toward my barn now." He glanced back over his shoulder, his face scrunched up with worry. There was a burn on his neck where a flying ember had marked him, and his cheeks were smudged with soot. "I got all the younguns out beating it back, but the dang thing has a real sly way, and I don't think they're gonna be able to turn it. Run and ask your pa can you come and coax it back."

"She's busy," Pa said, walking up behind her.

Eliza could feel the fire six fields over, burning merrily and fit to bust with satisfaction. It was happy, nigh almost delirious with freedom, and hungry enough to consume a dozen barns. "Pa, let me go," she said real low, so it didn't sound sassy. "Won't take but a few minutes and I can fill the bucket on my way back."

"She's got chores to do," he said to Trent, almost as though she weren't there. "If your barn gets burnt, it'll be your own damn fault. You should have been more careful."

"Careful is as careful does." Trent scowled. "I recall as you weren't so shy of asking for neighborly help when it was your creek up and overrun its banks and threatened to carry off your prime breeding stock."

Beyond the hill, the fire whispered and chuckled, leaped a ravine, and streaked along Trent's meadow. Eliza hung her head with shame at being forced to hang back. "Please, Pa!"

"I'll send over a suckling pig," Trent said, his face rigid. "Soon as we do the slaughtering this fall."

"Generous to a fault." Pa winked. "All right, daughter. Go along and take care of it, but see you hurry. Your ma is waiting on that water, and we both know she is not a patient woman."

Eliza nodded and lit out, bucket swinging. Trent caught up with her in two strides.

"Sorry about Pa," she said. "It's not right to take payment for something that don't cost us nary a thing."

"That's your pa," he said grimly as they climbed a stile. "Don't see nothing 'cept what's in it for him."

Smoke billowed up into the afternoon sky like a great black flower, and she felt the cunning, roaring heat of the fire long before she saw the first red-gold curl of flame. The crackling resonated deep down in her bones like the most wonderful song she had ever heard or thought to hear, like a dance that wanted to whirl her around and around. She stood transfixed, staring up into the writhing wall of fire. It was so almighty beautiful—

Trent took her arms in his callused farmer's hands and shook her. "Get hold of yourself, girl!"

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak, then clenched her hands at her sides and walked across the blackened grass toward the merry flames. Ash rose at every step and the air was singed, full of acrid smoke. Her eyes teared and burned, and she held her apron over her mouth in order to breathe. The heat built on her cheeks as she inched closer and closer. Never had she been called to a fire grown so large, not even the time the Tierneys' house had burned, and three of them, including the baby, had died. Not even then, and that had been already too late.

When she was so close she felt her dark-brown braids would burst into flame, she stopped. "How are you called?" she asked as the fire licked sensuously at a split-rail fence.

Ash-Maker! it said in a joyous burst of sparks. *Soul-Taker! Ember-Heart!*

"That's three names," she said. "Which is the truest?"

I have not yet decided, it said, then leaped the fence altogether to caper around her in cunning little flames.

Now that was a difficulty. To speak to it properly, Eliza had to know how it regarded itself. Sweat trickled down her neck, soaked the back of her dress. "Surely one of those names fits better than the others." She sidestepped an overeager flamelet that dashed at her bare feet. "Ember-Heart?"

Leaf-Swallower! Sky-Rider! Star-Leaper! The fire's voice grew more exuberant, and sparks rained down upon her head.

She threw her arms over her hair and winced as the sparks ate through her sleeves. "Stop that!" Another dress spoiled. Ma would take the stick to her again.

Girl, it said in hungry little curls of flame, *come closer.*

Eliza felt its pull. She planted her feet in the burned grass and clasped her hands behind her back. "No."

Yes, it said, and blazed up for a second so bright, red-gold, and glorious she had to blink tears away.

Her hands tightened until her nails bit into her own flesh. "I won't," she said as calmly as she could manage. Fires sensed weakness, fed on fear nearly as well as dry tinder. "Stop throwing sparks at me."

If I stop, I'll die, it said pettishly.

"You don't have to die," she said. "I'm asking you nice as can be to just turn around and slip back out into the fields, eat up the stubble, like you was supposed to do in the first place. Stay away from the house and the barn and especially the children."

I have walked the clouds, it said, *raced the wind, ridden the rain on the wildest of nights. You are only of the dull, solid ground and have no right to demand anything of me!* And it took off racing toward the barn like it hadn't even noticed it before.

"Wait!" she called, but the fire heeded her not. She turned, heart pounding, to Trent who was watching from a safe distance. "This doesn't have the feel of a man-born fire. How did you start it?"

He wiped his face with a smudged bandana. "From my hearth, same as always."

"And your hearth?"

He stared at the fire eating its greedy way toward his barn. A horse shrilled in fear and cinders sailed in the morning breeze like black snow. "Hell, I don't know. We bank the embers at night and never let it go out, no more'n most folks. Go after it, girl, 'fore it gets my stock!"

Biting her lip, she picked up her skirts and hopped the smoking fence. Ahead of her, the fire was rearing up, all orange and yellow

angrily.

you've come to watch me gutter and die.

at the edges, red as blood at its heart. It roared with pleasure. "Hold!" she cried. "If you take this barn, the men of these parts will feel duty-bound to beat you back and then drown you into cold, sodden ashes."

The fire hesitated. *And if I turn aside?*

"Then you can eat up all these lovely fields right down to the soil, until you are fat, satisfied embers that will glow red for days."

That's not enough, it said, for one who has danced the sky.

She edged closer, her heart touched. It tasted sweet and wild in the back of her mind, like honey from the heart of the woods. "You came of lightning, then?"

Birthered by stars! it cried, and leaped heavenward in a joyous swirl. *Suckled by the Sun! Fed by the Moon! I shall not turn aside from good fuel and desist into dying embers for the sake of mere flesh!*

"All things die," she said, "men and fires and rivers. Even stars fall to the ground when it comes their time."

But not me, it said. I shall range over this Earth until I have tasted everything it holds, and then I shall turn around and do it all over again.

"Then start with these fields," she said and darted around the flames so that she stood between them and the barn with its terrified animals. "Afterward, if you're still hungry, you can come back."

It reared up before her, taking the shape of a man, lithe and golden with eyes that flickered and danced. *You are fuel too, it said. Why don't I just embrace you?*

Her lips cracked from the wall of radiated heat and the hem of her dress blackened, but she felt an odd stirring within, an answering warmth where no one had ever touched her before. "How foolish to settle for such a small tidbit as myself," she said, "when you can have all those fine overgrown fields."

With a laugh, the man-form dove back into the flames and then raced away from the barn, out across the stubble of last year's harvest. Black smoke roiled into the clear blue air. Eliza wiped a weary hand back over her forehead. The fire was doomed now, leaving behind a blackened trail of ash. It would never be able to return that way.

"You did it, girl!" Trent's hand clapped her shoulder. "That was amazing, worth a dozen suckling pigs, but—" He winked. "Don't go telling your pa I said so."

"No, sir," she said, and watched the fire cavort across the fields with a sense of loss. "Everything dies," she told herself in a fierce whisper, but something, somewhere deep inside her wished this particular fire didn't have to, leastways, not yet.

LATE THAT EVENING, WHEN PA LAY ACROSS HIS BED LIKE A FALLEN log and Ma was all curled up against him, Eliza eased out from under her thin quilt on the opposite side of the cabin. She let herself out the front door, clad in only her shift. If her twin brothers up in the loft woke as she was leaving, they'd think she was going out to the necessary. Likely as not, they wouldn't hear her though. They was powerful deep sleepers.

The night was fine, a tad chill, because spring was barely begun, but the stars gleamed down like a handful of glass beads someone had scattered up there. She stood out in the yard, shivering. Were stars actually fires way up high in the sky, burning like torches to light the night? If so, why weren't they hot, like the Sun, beating

down on a body's head, and why didn't they ever go out? Why hadn't she ever felt them calling her like other sorts of fire?

Frogs croaked down at the cattail-choked pond. Their booming followed her as she skirted the scorched fields, which still smoked, the smell so acrid that breathing deep hurt her throat. The Trent fire had been herded toward the creek, which was wide enough to drown any flying sparks, and so had guttered out there on the grassy banks once the stubble had been all burned up.

This was not an ordinary fire, wrung out of flint by the hand of man. Someone had been careless, or perhaps even downright stupid. They had brought home fire born of lightning, which remembered the freedom of the sky. No one with any sense would have thought such could be put to homely tasks like boiling water and burning off fields. Wild-born fire could never be tamed. Everyone knew that.

She hunkered down by the creek bank, which was studded with young pines, and stared down at the star-dappled water with its sensuous eddies curling along the bank. Pa would switch her good, if he found out she'd sneaked out in the shank of the night, chores only a few hours away.

A few feet away, an ember popped in the burned grass. A tiny curl of flame darted outward, seeking fuel where there was none. She scabbled for twigs, acorns, anything that would burn. A pine cone came to hand and she tossed it into the heart of the tiny flame. With a satisfied sigh, it licked at the scales. The scent of resin filled the air.

Why? the fire asked, its voice dry and reedy, nothing like the joyous rush of that afternoon.

"I—don't know," she said and hunched her knees up under her chin. That was the pure, unsullied truth of it. She had no idea what had brought her here, or why she was putting herself out for something so wild and altogether heedless.

You tricked me! it sparked angrily. *And now you've come to watch me gutter and die.*

"Lord, no!" Whatever had brought her, it wasn't that. She felt a hollowness in her breast at the very thought.

Then you wish to imprison me again, like those other pale sparks in your homes.

No, that wasn't it either. It pained her sorely to see such a magnificent wildfire brought low like this, starved until it was tiny and insignificant, one flicker away from being altogether extinguished. "I shouldn't have come," she said, "specially since I got no idea what brung me."

The flames shifted, golden as the heart of the Sun. The pine cone smoldered. *You turned my mind aside from those lovely wooden buildings, trapped me down here against the creek where the water is too wide to leap and I can neither escape nor reach more fuel.*

"I had no choice," she said, stricken. "Wildfire and men cannot abide together."

There are always choices, it said. The pine cone cracked and fell open as the fire consumed its heart.

The breeze came up, tugged at the thick brown braid hanging down the middle of her back. Her hair would smell of smoke and pine when she returned home, as though she carried the scent of a lover's hands. As soon as Pa got a whiff of her, he would know she had been out galivanting in the middle of the night. "I got to go," she said.

Go, then! The flames, though much diminished, reflected in the moving water.

It had called to her as she cajoling her to join

Eliza stood up, gazing out at the creek. It was shallow here. She leaned down to dip a hand in the current, thinking. She had often waded here, where it was easy to ford.

The fire sighed as the interior of the pine cone crumbled into ash. With a sudden pang, she snatched up the rest and waded into the creek. Her bare feet struggled for purchase and she kept slipping on the stones. Halfway across, she fell to her knees, but held the smoldering cone high over her head. Just a few more feet, she told herself, though it was hard to make anything out by the few glints of reflected starlight on the water.

She struggled back onto her feet and waded onto the other bank where she tossed the remnants of the cone on the mossy shore. For a second she held her breath, thinking it was too late, the fire was beyond rekindling. Then the moss curled, blackened. A thin line of orange flame licked out from the interior of the cone.

She sat back on her heels, both relieved and dismayed. What was she doing, setting wildfire loose in the woods? Pa would have her hide. All the farmers in these parts would, if they found out.

The fire said nothing more, only licked desultorily at the moss so that smoke curled gray against the black night sky.

"Don't you go growing too big," she said, "or they'll come after you again."

I will devour these woods! it threw at her defiantly, *and when I am finished, I will leap back across this paltry water and roar over your pitiful houses, all you hold dear! Before I am done, your kin will lie blackened in my arms!*

Her heart beat in her ears like thunder. She had erred, mightily, and now, like as not, the whole countryside would pay the price for her stupidity. Briefly, she considered carrying water in her cupped hands to douse the still-small fire, but it was racing along the moss, quick as lightning, engulfing the thicket, licking at the vines. Too late. Already far too late.

Horried at what she had done, she fled back across the creek, and then the fields, her wet shift clinging to her legs like a second skin.

When she reached the cabin, Pa was sitting on a chair, tilted back against the wall just inside the door, waiting. He'd already cut a willow switch and held it ready in his hand. His face was lit by the flickering of the single candle on the bedside table. Poor tame creature that it was, its single flame leaned hungrily toward Eliza as she slipped inside.

"And just where you been out there half the night, missy?"

Eliza's heart raced. "At—the necessary, Pa."

He nodded so that the shadows danced across his grim face. "That how you come to be all wet from the knees down like that?"

She glanced at her soaked shift and flinched. "The grass," she mumbled. "It was wet. I—slipped."

He tapped the butt of switch against his hand. "And who else was out there with you, while you was doing all this slipping?"

"No one, Pa!"

Up in the loft, her twin 10-year-old brothers, Ike and Jonas, giggled. Pa glared up at them, then seized her arm and hustled her back outside into the night's cool black embrace.

It was so close to dawn the birds was beginning to twitter in the trees. Pa shoved her down into the dew-soaked grass at his feet. "Who was you meeting, harlot? Who shamed me by putting his sweaty hands on my daughter?"

She hunched over her wrenched arm. "No one, Pa, I swear!" The

scent of bruised grass rose from the ground and the chill wetness of it made her shiver. "I couldn't sleep, for thinking on that fire this afternoon, so I took me a little walk down by the creek, nary a man within two miles. T'weren't no harm in it!"

He flexed the switch between outstretched hands. "It's time you was married off, in fact past time, I reckon. Some girls are just naturally more hot-blooded than others, especially in your ma's line, but, mark my words, no decent, God-fearing man will lay out good money for damaged goods. I guess I'll just have to beat that disobedient streak out of you before you dishonor yourself beyond redemption!" He raised the switch.

"Pa, no!" She shielded her face with her arm, but he laid on her back, where the marks wouldn't show.

Ma appeared in the doorway, wrapped in her black go-to-meeting shawl, her face pale as the rising Moon. So quiet she was, while the blows fell, so still, that Eliza might have thought her mother didn't care if Pa went on, or left off. But Ma cared. Eliza knew that full well. Her eyes urged him to go on until he'd beaten the badness plumb out of her wicked child.

"Fire has a way of getting into your heart, then eating it up," she said, when Pa's arm finally gave out. Her voice was flat as bread that had failed to rise. "Fire sneaks into your other parts too, makes you burn for what you can't have, what can't nobody have. You'd best leave off wanting now, before it's too late." Her voice had the ring of someone who knew what she was talking about. "My ma, she made the mistake of dallying with fire after fire. In the end, it ate her up, right down to the bone."

"I was just—walking." She wiped at her tear-stained face with the back of one trembling hand.

Her mother stared off over her head into the darkness. "That's why your shift is all black with soot and you smell like you been sleeping in the smoking shed?"

Pa broke the switch with a loud crack and tossed it into the wet grass. "Angus Trent made an offer for you this afternoon." His mouth was twisted up all grim. "I told him no, that I could get double, maybe triple what he could afford from some of them rich planter folk down by Richmond way. But won't nobody offer on a soiled dove, if'n word gets around." He spat into the grass by her hand. "So I 'spect I'll have to consider any and all offers in the coming days."

Ma turned and padded barefoot back into the cabin.

"You get in there and wash your face." He crossed his brawny arms. "And be thinking how you're gonna explain your lack of purity to your husband, come your wedding night."

Eliza's heart turned to ice as she struggled back onto her feet. "No, sir, Pa. I ain't marrying no one, young nor old."

"I didn't hear no one asking what you wanted!" Pa took a step toward her like he was going to backhand her. "You're too all-fired young and foolish to make a decision like that for yourself."

She slipped past him into the cabin, and then into her bed. Her back throbbled so that she was forced to lie down on her stomach. Over on the table, the candle flame whispered mindlessly to itself until Pa snuffed it out with the flat of his thumb.

Poor thing, she found herself thinking, only minutes old, and

talked it down, the rest of its victims... She shuddered.

now gone as surely as though it had never existed at all. She would never forget the golden purity of it.

Never.

The Widower Trent kept finding excuses to drop by the cabin over the next few days and, once word got around that Pa was now entertaining offers, there was a steady parade of what folks called "gentlemen callers," not that her preference mattered one whit.

Ma watched her with an intensity that was unsettling and enlisted the aid of her tow-headed brothers. She was never alone for even a second, except in the necessary, and even then, one of them waited for her just outside.

And always in the back of her mind was the presence of the secret fire down on the other side of the creek, born of lightning, its ungovernable heart forged of the same stuff as stars. She was fairly confident it had heeded her advice about not gorging itself and growing too large, for there had been no smoke in the sky off in that direction, nor any word of alarm. She knew she should feel guilty for helping it survive, but somehow could not.

And so the days passed, as she scrubbed and fetched, hoed the kitchen garden to prepare the soil for the early potato sets, and almost, *almost*, got used to being looked over by prospective suitors like a prize heifer.

"Called back a fire what had already burned up a house?" one caller said, and she lost herself in the memory of the dark powerful fire that had taken the Tierneys' cabin, how it had been prideful and overeager, filled to busting with the spent lives of three good people. It had called to her as she talked it down, cajoling her to join the rest of its victims, so that she need never be troubled by fragile flesh again. She shuddered.

"Told the blacksmith's fire just how hot to burn?" another exclaimed later that day. "I reckon that could be right useful. We have a fine forge on my plantation and a kiln too."

Her hand hesitated on the hoe. The blacksmith's forge had been lovely, fed with the best hickory, confident and proud, easily persuaded into banking itself and tempering the smith's horseshoes and plowshares at the proper temperature. The smith had been so grateful he'd given her ma a big pale-blue mixing bowl, sent all the way from England. Like the sky, it was, early in the morning, when the light was pure and no one had gotten around to spoiling the day.

Her pa's voice rose, quarrelsome as always. She didn't bother to make out the words.

"Well, I brung the price with me," the newcomer answered. His voice was low and powerful, like the aftermath of thunder. "But I aim to see exactly what I'm buying. I don't take nothing on faith."

"Ask anyone in these parts," Pa said. "She's born to Fire sure enough. They've all seen what my girl can do."

"Mr. McMurphy, I wouldn't buy so much as a coon dog before I let it hunt, much less take a gal, said to have such a big talent, to wife. I want to see for myself."

Eliza looked up from the newly turned raw red earth and shaded her eyes with a trembling hand; being looked over like a brood mare made her dreadful skittish. The speaker was a young man, not more than five and twenty, with a head of hair black as a raven's wing, and eyes to match. He rode a blood-bay gelding with a deep chest and fine clean lines that spoke of money. One gloved hand lay propped over the other on his gleaming saddle horn.

"Strike a match, then," Pa said.

A smile tugged at the stranger's lips and looked good there. Eliza thought he was not so off-putting as the others who'd been through here in the past few days. "A match?" he said.

"Go on."

The young man pulled a box of matches out of his pocket and struck one against his boot.

The match flared, red and gold, a tiny perfect flame. Eliza felt its small life, already waning, its hunger for more. Poor thing, so mortal. The flame reached crazily for her.

Pa beamed. "See?"

"Well, I'll be damned!" The stranger shook the match out just before it burned down to his fingers.

Eliza pressed her hands over her eyes, sickened.

The saddle creaked as he turned back to her. "What's your name, girl?"

"Eliza," she said without looking.

"And you're right partial to fire, like your pa says?"

"Reckon so," she said. "Leastways, more'n most people." She raised her chin then and looked him full in the face, seeing a strength as well as a kindness that had not been in any of the others who'd come calling. He had youth on his side, as well as not being hard to look upon. His face was lean and angular, his brow wide. If Pa made her go with him, she supposed she could do far worse.

He struck another match and she could not look away from the tiny doomed flame. "Don't!"

He cocked his head, then swung down from the bay, still holding the lighted match out. "Why not?"

"Because it's cruel!" She snatched the match from his hand and rushed inside the cabin to cast it onto the hearth fire. The flame merged with the embers keeping the morning's coffee warm, no longer single, but better off than sure extinction.

He followed her, boots clumping. The smell of horse and well-soaped leather came with him. "Why'd you do that?"

She wrapped her arms around her chest. "Because it was dying." The flames danced up in the hearth, quietly joyous. She stooped to add kindling. "I hate it when they go out. It's so—" Her voice trailed away. "It's terrible sad."

"But it's not as if fire were truly alive," he said softly, "not like folks and dogs and grass. Fire has its allotted time, like all of God's creation, and that time is meant to be short."

"Who are you to say that?" She knuckled a tear out of the corner of her eye.

"Fire used to run in my line," he said, "several generations back, but it didn't breed true. I've heard tales at my grandmam's knee of how each of her five younguns was born with the knack, but lost it as they grew."

The thought of losing her connection was horrifying. Could that happen to her? How could they bear it? She whirled and dashed back out of the cabin, past the twins, who were quarreling over who would hold the stranger's horse, and Pa, who was toting a bale of hay on his shoulder out to the heifers in the corral. Ma stared after her, mouth agape, hands mired in sopping wash.

Eliza's slim bare feet made no sound in the springy spring grass, nor left any prints by which to trail her. "I ain't never going back, never!" she murmured over and over under her breath, like a truth that had to be witnessed until the whole world acknowledged it. Finally, she slowed. There had been no shouts behind her for some time now. Noon was coming on. She could feel her stomach hol-

Once fallen, we stars must out here among the

lowing; she'd worked out in the garden since dawn with nothing more than a stale biscuit to tide her over.

The wind was coming up. Dark-bottomed clouds scudded across the sky. The smell of rain rode heavy in the air. She waded into the creek to bathe her hot face, then glimpsed her distorted reflection in the water. A brown-haired girl looked back, eyes gray as smoke, cheeks red with exertion. There had to be more to life than doing chores and being switched, when she was contrary, and then bearing babies to some man, she thought. Trading Pa for another man who would expect even more of her was not at all to her fancy.

A wisp of smoke drifted across the creek, scented with pine and hawthorn, grass and briar. She breathed it in before she thought, then looked up, her pulse racing. "Ember-Heart?"

I have not taken a name. The reply was faint, but not the least bit weak.

She splashed to the mossy bank on the far side and then clambered out and wrung the water from her skirts. "I wondered where you'd got to."

Safe for the moment and mightily bored, came the answer. *I am meant for so much more than this that safe might as well be dead.*

"Don't you go saying that!" She got to her feet and padded into the dark, cool spaces between gray-barked trees. The wind gusted and made the branches rattle.

I can never return to the skies, it said. *Once fallen, we stars must burn ourselves out here among the rocks and dirt until nothing remains but cinders.*

"Then you wasn't just born of a star." She edged around a charred thicket; surely it had come this way. "You was once a star yourself?"

Come closer, it said slyly, *and I will show you.*

The blood pounded in her ears. It was all-out foolish, venturing so near. Fires was crafty, cunning creatures, more appetite than sense, and this'un was wilder than any fire she'd ever known. Her fingers grasped a slender sapling and it bent with her weight. "How'm I to call you?"

Ash, it said, and a smoky sadness drifted on the breeze.

"Wasn't you going to eat up the whole countryside?" She followed tendrils of smoke through the trees, then down a gully. Last year's leaves rustled underfoot and gave off the musk of earth mixed with rot. "I thought you was gonna lay waste to everything between here and Camden Mills."

I have not the heart for it anymore. The fire sounded closer now. *I have nearly forgotten what it was like to cleave the skies.*

She broached a small clearing where tender green shoots poked their heads up through the charred soil. This area had evidently burned off a few days ago. Just beyond, she glimpsed a bright shaft of naked flame, weaving, writhing, sinuous as a snake. Its brilliant yellow-orange coils formed, broke apart, merged, an elegant dance without end. She could not look away from it, could not even think.

You feel pale, it said, *almost without substance. Have they no fuel in that tasty wooden box you call home?*

Eliza shook herself, and turned away with a laugh, arms hugged around her chest. "I ran away," she said, "before lunch was spread."

Ran away?

"A man came," she said, "to take me to wife." But then she could not think of how to explain. Hot tears trickled down her cheeks, a surprise, because she'd thought she'd left such foolishness behind with dolls and pinafores. "It's hard to be born with this gift. Folk never see you for yourself. They only want what you can do."

And if this man took you, it said, *would you then mate?*

Farm bred, she had seen enough in the barnyard to have some idea what it was husbands and wives were supposed to do together. She blushed and pressed her cheek to the scorched bark of an oak. Flakes of ash drifted to the ground. "Well, I don't want a husband, so it don't matter one whit."

Fires mate, it said, *come together in heat and roar and draft to make something between them much finer and more all-consuming than ever we could manage on our own.*

"Don't say that!" She found herself trembling.

Thunder rumbled in the distance. *You do hunger,* it said, *but not for fuel, as I first thought. For that which no creature crafted of flesh can ever give you.*

"No!" She whirled and headed blindly back toward the creek. It had been a terrible mistake to come here. She must go home, take her switching, apologize to the young man. Sturdy and clear-eyed, he was the best of all who had come asking, probably far better than she deserved. Maybe it wasn't too late—

With a crackle, flames streaked from behind and reared up before her, blocking the way. Orange and gold and yellow, shot through with red, so beautiful, delicate and strong at the same time, warm as the Sun beating down on her face, soft as the breeze from a butterfly's wings. Like flowers, she thought, sprouting up to glory in the light.

What do you want? it asked.

She backed away, hands clenched into fists. "I—don't know!"

You must reach out and take what you desire. The fire's patterns were a kaleidoscope, weaving and changing before her eyes could fully focus on the one before her, forever new.

Fire kindled within her, danced in answer, so that the two of them, flesh and flame, were mirror images, opposites and yet identical. Behind her, across the creek, she felt the stonelike chill of all she had left behind, a yawning chasm of inert fuel. Before her was life, warm and fluid, brief though it might be.

She stretched trembling hands out, soaking the warmth up. When had she become so cold? Had it overtaken her a moment before, or had she lived in the world of men chilled from the instant of her birth and never realized?

Lie with me, it said, *so that we might have joy of each other before what is left of the fuel in this place is exhausted and I subside into ashes.*

She stared. "Surely you know better than to think I could come that near!"

Give me your hand.

Conniving beast, she thought. It wanted to devour her to give itself another few minutes of life, then leave behind her charred bones to be gnawed by foxes, hardly enough even to give a decent Christian burial. She shook her head.

Then go, it said, *and let me die in peace.*

Thunder rumbled again, closer this time. Several cold raindrops struck her in the face. She watched the fire dwindle until it was just a bright glimmer in the grass. "No," she whispered and leaned down. It was still so beautiful, hypnotic. A terrible loneliness overwhelmed her, far worse than she had ever felt watching even the loveliest flame fade. She stretched out a finger to it. "Don't leave me."

In answer, the tendril of flame twined sinuously around her finger like a vine. She flinched, but it did not burn; the sensation was like

burn

rocks until nothing remains but cinders.

being danced upon by tiny feet. And the warmth! Rather than searing, as she had feared, it sank into her body like summer sun beating down on her skin, deeper and deeper until she glowed with well-being and joy, warmed from within as she had never been before.

Pleasure, electric and sweet, coursed through her body until she could not stand still and the two of them danced through the thicket, along the banks of the creek, wove between the trees. Everywhere she left smoking footprints behind in the grass.

The wind whipped her face now. Leaves turned inside out so that their pale undersides were turned to the sky. Lightning flashed, followed by the crack of thunder, much closer than before. She felt its wildness up there, calling to her, to the two of them now combined. She ached with the fire's loss of the skies, of that sweet freedom. To be abandoned here, amidst rocks and dirt, so that no matter how much fuel she consumed, she, who had been born of stars, would eventually gutter and die. That was very bitter. No wonder lightning-born fires were always so angry and wild.

Rain beat down, blown sideways by the wind. The drops tasted of iron, chill and glorious on her tongue. Lightning blazed again. An oak across the creek sheered in two and crashed into the water. A tiny fire blazed up in the heart of the fallen oak and she felt its confusion, its shock at being stranded here.

So it was for me, the fire said. So it still is.

To be a child of the skies and marooned like this to die ... so sad. Her tears mixed with the rain pelting her face.

"Eliza!"

She heard her name and looked up. Pa beckoned to her from across the creek and the young man was beside him.

"You get across this stream, girl, before you get yourself struck dead!" Pa was angrier than she had ever seen him.

The fire appeared again, dancing over her hands in tiny melancholy flickers. *Go, it said. Leave me here. I am fated to be extinguished in this forsaken place, but you are not.*

She pressed the flame to her heart. "No!"

"Lordamighty!" her father said. "Look at that! She's on fire!"

In answer, the young man plunged into the creek and waded fiercely toward her. Eliza turned and fled back through the trees. He was fast though and she heard his boots crashing behind her.

Climb, said the fire, so that I might be closer to the sky when the end comes.

She leaped for the lowest branch of a huge sycamore and pulled herself up, her bare toes struggling for purchase on the bark. The wind sang against her face as she climbed and she almost could understand what it was saying, even though she had not been born to Air.

The young man stopped beneath the tree. "Eliza!" he called. "Come down from there! That's dangerous in a storm like this!" Her name sounded strangely sweet in his deep voice.

Thunder cracked and the air reeked of burned iron. The breath was ragged in her lungs as she continued to climb. Rain beat against her and the increasingly slender limbs were slick, but the sky was so close now. Within her, she shared the fire's rising excitement.

One last time, it said, and emerged into her fingers again, reaching.

She was as high as she could go now, the limbs barely sturdy enough to take her weight. She wrapped her legs around the trunk and stretched out her arms to the sky and the clouds and behind them, unseen, the stars.

There was a flash, so bright that, even though her eyes closed

reflexively, she could still see it through her eyelids. The sky blazed with electric *white* fire and the flames on her fingers leaped to join it. She felt a great pain as though something were being torn out of her. She tumbled backward and fell. The first branch struck her full against the temple. She did not note the second.

She woke to someone's arm cradling her aching head and a spoonful of warm chicken broth at her lips. Lightning still crackled behind her eyes. Her lips felt numb. "Ma?" she croaked.

"No," a deep voice said, "it's Aaron. You must eat."

She blinked up at the concerned face of the young man who had come calling after her. She hurt all over, especially her left leg and the palms of her hands, which were heavily bandaged. She was so cold, her teeth were chattering. "What—happened?"

"Swallow," Aaron said firmly and put the spoon to her lips.

She did. The mellow broth tasted good.

Aaron refilled the spoon. "I'm afraid it will be a while before you can hold a spoon again, but the doctor said the burns will heal clean. You should have full use of your hands."

She tried to turn her head to look for Ma and the boys, but even that small effort exhausted her. What she could see of this room was large and airy though, too much so to be her own cabin. "Where are we?"

"After the doc set your leg and bandaged your hands," he said, "I swathed you in blankets and brought you in my wagon to our plantation. My mother will tend you, when I am busy, but I mean to see after you myself, when I'm able."

"And Pa?" She tried not to think of how angry he'd been.

"Paid in full," he said, "so now you and I can be married." His dark-brown eyes were steady. "I will treat you well, Eliza, I promise."

She felt as though ice had crystallized in her every joint, that she would never be warm again. "But you don't even know me."

"I know your way with fire is fine and true," he said; "and, to be honest, I've taken a fancy to you." He tenderly touched her face. "You are mine now."

And so, as soon as she could hobble upright on a crutch, they were married. Aaron proved a kind and gentle husband, considerate in most ways and no worse than most men in the rest. The two of them never spoke again of the burn scars on her palms or how she had risked her life to return a wildling fire to the stars.

In return, she instructed the plantation forge to burn properly and the kiln how to fire the pottery. She presided over the burn-off blazes out in the fields, when the stubble was torched in the spring, and prevented them from running wild.

In time, she birthed three fine children of her own, two boys, raven-haired as their father, and a sweet girlchild, none of whom had her way with fire. She watched them grow, honored her husband, kept her house in splendid order, and was known far and wide as a good neighbor to all.

But though she thrived, though she had all any mortal woman could want, she was never really warm again, not in her most secret places. Each spring, when thunderstorms rumbled across the countryside, she sat out on the split-rail fence, face upturned to the swirling silver-gray clouds, and remembered how a star had once danced inside her heart, how, for a breathtaking second, she too had strode toward the stars on crackling legs of fire. ❧



In the land of liars, the truth-teller can



HOW THE HIGHLAND PEOPLE CAME TO BE

NICTAY PAUSED IN HER LEAF GATHERING. FROM THE JUNGLE shadows, she watched the battlefield. Not long after the Moon warriors had retreated with their captives, women of the Red Crown Village had come into the bloodied fields of maize stubble to care for wounded brothers and husbands, to wail for the dead, to grieve for the defenders who had been taken captive. The attackers had lost men, too. Red Crown warriors led some of the Moon warriors into the village as prisoners. Other Red Crown warriors helped the women to carry the wounded and the dead.

Soon, Nictay knew, those men would return across the field of battle and satisfy themselves that the invaders had not lingered in the jungle to set an ambush. Once they were sure that all the able-bodied Moon warriors had retreated, they would scour the jungle for stragglers like the one Nictay had found. But Nictay meant for the big, scarred Moon warrior to be *her* captive.

She whispered her apologies to the plants as she pulled off more leaves. "Forgive me, Her Daughter. My need is great. I thank you for what I must take." Then she hurried back to the tree where her Moon warrior sat with his obsidian-toothed club in his lap. Among his fresh wounds were traces of old ones; he had many white scars on his arms and legs, and one on his cheek. His nose had been broken some time in the past and healed crooked. His expression was so passive, his posture looked so relaxed that he seemed to be merely taking his ease. But his skin looked gray. He had lost a lot of blood.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Do your priests care how their sacrifices are named?" His words came slowly, as if he were drunk on balche. But it was blood loss, no doubt. Nictay's words had been heavy in her mouth like that when she had bled herself, seeking a vision.

Nictay bound the leaves to his legs with cotton string. "I have already told you. I am not from this village. My people do not make sacrifice of their captives. Our gods demand only the sacrifice that they take themselves upon the sea. Fishermen drown, and the gods are satisfied." She gave him a water gourd. "Drink."

He sipped, watching her. "If you are not of these people," he said, "then they will think you are of mine." The water had helped. Words slipped more easily from his lips.

go unrecognized—if such a one even exists.

BY BRUCE HOLLAND ROGERS

Illustration by Jaques Bredy

"I am not dressed as one of your women."

"No," he admitted, taking in the details of her plain cotton cloak, her shell necklace. "But they will not stop to consider. It will not go well for you."

"That is why you must stand. We must get away from here."

"You saw my legs. Leave me! The gods have made their decision about me. Maker of Himself has decided." Breath whistled through his crooked nose.

"You are as good as dead if I leave you. And if I save you, your life is mine."

"The gods have decided."

"No god attacked you, but men. You fought well. Swinging your great club, wearing your feathered helmet ... how great a prize you seemed! That is why so many tried for you. Now stand."

"But my legs ..."

"The Red Crowns cut you many times, yes, but they did not sever the tendons. Up!" She picked up her spear, then strained to lift him. He made no effort to stand.

"Why should I go with you?"

"Because you'll die if you stay!"

"If I'm to save myself, let me crawl after my own men."

"I need you."

His gaze on her was hard, speculative. "Need me for what?"

Nictay pursed her lips. She could tell him the truth, but the trials of her village meant nothing to foreigners. Once again, she would have to lie.

"Come with me, and I will make you a rich and powerful noble."

He grimaced. "I am a Nacom of the Moon People. Would you make me greater than that?"

So he was indeed a great warrior. A veteran. A general. He was just what she was looking for. "I would make you a rival to the greatest Nacoms of the Middle People," she said. "That jade you wear on your breastplate, the feathers of your helmet, are nothing compared to the wealth my people take from the sea."

The warrior grunted. "Who are you to offer these things?"

"I am a princess."

The sound he made was like soft laughter, but bitter. "You haven't the look of nobility."

"Our customs are not like yours," she said, "and I do not travel in my regalia. Why should I call attention to myself?"

"A woman alone is of interest whether she is high or low," he said.

"And so I have come here by stealth. Will you quibble with me until the Red Crowns come? Stand! I have need of a warrior like you." She strained again to lift him.

Shakily, he rose. He said, "There is no honor in bleeding to death in the jungle, Shell Woman."

"You will be honored among my people. Alive."

"As if I could walk all the way to the sea. I don't have that many steps in my legs."

"Take one," she said.

Leaning against her, he took a step, trembling. He made a bitter face, as if embarrassed by his weakness. She had been about to offer to carry his club, but thought better of it.

"Another step now," she said, looking over her shoulder toward the village. "And another."

"Caan Cuy," he said. "My name is Caan Cuy."

"I am called Nictay," she said. "The Princess Nictay."

AT HOME, HER GRANDMOTHER HAD WARNED HER ABOUT LIES. SHAKING a half-shucked corncob at her granddaughter, she had said, "One day you will reap a harvest from them that you do not expect." But how could Nictay fulfill the tasks that her visions set for her except by lying? Foreigners would not want to give her willingly what she sought when she ventured into enemy lands to spy. So she had pretended to be a trader from a nonexistent city, a representative of a noble, offering cacao on terms that were almost too good to be true. Greed made the enemy merchants eager to offer her protection and information. They gave her gifts of city clothes, and she ended up looking more and more like who she pretended to be. She had lied

her way to the valley of the Middle People, had seen their Island City in the center of a mountain lake. She had seen how powerful they really were. And she had learned that the Middle People had overrun and destroyed villages and even whole cities that opposed them.

When she first learned this, when she first confirmed the ferocity of the Middle People, she despaired. Not long ago, Nictay's village had never even heard of the Middle People. Now, because of the Middle People raiders, Nictay's people had been forced to take refuge on an island off the coast; but without fresh water, the island was no place to settle for good. Were Nictay's people to be extinguished by this new enemy?

But Nictay had learned of more than the Middle People's ferocity. She had discovered something that gave her hope. The Middle People did not sack all the villages and cities they warred against. Many people were driven from their ancestral lands, never to return. But the Middle People respected enemies who fought as they did, who traded captives in battle. If her people could learn these foreign ways, they might negotiate, if not peace, a sustainable enmity that would let them return to their own lands. The only costs would be some tribute, perhaps fish, and the obligation to fight the Middle People now and then in Flower Wars, losing a few villagers as captives for sacrifice. This was better than annihilation.

How could her people learn to fight Flower Wars, those ritual battles to exchange captives? The obsidian-toothed war clubs were unknown to Nictay's village until the first Middle People raiders had come. Nictay's people fought and hunted with spears. They did not know how to block and attack with a shield, how to slash at an enemy's legs and take a captive. They didn't know how to fix the obsidian points into the club's flat blade, like teeth in a shark's jaw.

Certain that she must discover how to teach these new ways, Nictay returned to her village. She bled herself and fasted for a vision.

Then the First Mother showed her the path she must walk. She must take a captive. Not one of the Middle People, but a warrior who fought like them. She must bring home a master of the obsidian club, some fighter from the southern peoples: the Jaguar Tails, the Red Crowns, the Dog Eaters. Or a Moon warrior, a man like Caan Cuy.

So it was that she had crossed the jungle alone. She had seen a war party leaving the Moon City, and she had followed them to the Red Crown Village. Hidden in the jungle, she watched the battle unfold. Caan Cuy was brilliant, cutting at the legs of his enemies with the black teeth of his club, knocking them down with his shield. He might have taken many captives had the Red Crowns not ganged up on him.

It had all gone perfectly. Caan Cuy, her captive, a teacher for her people, had been wounded just enough to be left behind, but not so badly that she had no chance of saving him. He would be the teacher her village required.

THEY WERE SLOW. CAAN CUY'S LEGS STIFFENED ON THE SECOND DAY, and he took even shorter, shakier steps. Then the rains came. Water fell in torrents through the canopy. Big drops pelted their skin like pebbles wherever they crossed a clearing open to the sky. In places, the mud was slick and greasy. In others, it was watery and sucked at their feet.

From time to time, she noticed that he would look toward the south as if considering a return to his own people. She would make up stories, then, of the riches that her father bestowed on warriors. She did not worry yet what Caan Cuy would do once he learned that her father was a simple fisherman, that there was no emperor among her people. What would he say when he found no stone palaces, when he saw that the only riches were in fish and fruit and shells? She would deal with that later. What mattered was getting him back to her people, pressing him closer to them and farther from the Moon City.

On the third day, Caan Cuy's fever began. He stopped often to stare through the rain-grayed air, as if he saw enemies where there were only more trees.

They were hungry all the time. Nictay could not leave Caan Cuy to hunt for fear that she would not find him again. She crushed ants

with her fingers. They were sour, and it took so long to gather them that they were hardly better than nothing.

In the middle of the fourth rain-soaked night, Caan Cuy groaned out, "Water!" He waved his hands before his face. "Water!"

In the darkness, Nictay groped for the gourd. She brought it to him, but he pushed it away and said, "Too much water!" She made him drink anyway, and once he had taken a swallow, he drank eagerly. Then his hands flailed again against the rain. "Too much water!"

His fever made him careless. The next day, he just missed stepping on a yellowjaw serpent. Later, clumsy with exhaustion and walking ahead of Nictay, he stumbled and fell face-first into a pool. He had mistaken a mat of waterlilies for solid ground. When he got his feet beneath him, he stared at the logs in the pool that moved toward him. But they weren't logs. Crocodiles. Still he stood watching until Nictay had splashed in beside him to pull him back to solid ground.

His wounds no longer bled. Nonetheless, every day a little more of his strength left him, a little more of his wits drained away. When he dropped his obsidian-toothed club for the third time, Nictay picked it up and carried it herself.

"Sleep," Nictay encouraged him at the end of the fifth day. "Soon you will be among new friends."

She awoke to hear the whistling of his breath, which reassured her. But something was wrong. In the bluish phosphorescent light of the jungle, she saw black flowers blooming from Caan Cuy's sandaled feet and her own hand. As she puzzled at them and willed herself to alertness, she felt the wetness on her hand, the faintest tickle of a tiny tongue. A bat. She closed her hand around it and flung it away. When she rose, the bats feeding on Caan Cuy flew off.

That was when she heard the nearby cough of a jaguar. Was it stalking them? She spent the rest of that night wide awake, listening, knowing that a spear was little discouragement to a hungry jaguar, but unwilling to resign herself to the cat's mercy, unwilling to sleep.

IN THE MORNING, THE RAIN CONTINUED, AND CAAN CUY COULD not rise. Nictay yanked on his arms to drag him, inches at a time, through the mud to the base of a tree where he could sit up, leaning against the black trunk. She removed the leaves that bound his wounds and decided not to replace them when she saw the moldy splotches on his skin. The warrior's eyes were glassy. Sweat beaded on his lips.

"We will rest today," Nictay said, kneeling beside him.

Caan Cuy grinned at her, or grimaced. It was hard to tell. He let his head drop back against the tree trunk. An ant crawled close to his eye, but he made no effort to sweep it away.

They were still many days from the coast. "I would leave you and go for help, if we were nearer."

The Moon warrior shut his eyes. "I am dying," he said.

"No!" Nictay pinched his chest, hard. He did not flinch or open his eyes. "You will live!" But she knew that as long as they lingered in the jungle rains, he would only get weaker. "Do you hear?" she shouted very close to his ear. "You will not die! I need you!" But what would he care about what she or her village needed? "You will not die!"

Caan Cuy did not move. He made no sound.

"I am a princess!" she shouted. "Great honors await you!" She shook him. "I forbid you to die!"

Laughter. Nictay held herself very still. She heard a woman's laughter nearby. Where was it coming from? Nictay looked around. She saw nothing but leaves and vines. The voice seemed to come from in front as much as behind, from the left as much as the right, below as much as above.

The shells of Nictay's necklace rattled as she jumped to her feet. "Who's there? Show yourself!"

The laughter continued, then ceased. "Who am I?" asked a womanly voice, neither young nor old. "Why do you not tell me instead who you are? Who trespasses at my front door?"

Trespass? Front door? There was nothing here but dense jungle, as far as Nictay could tell. But if she had truly trespassed, then a show of righteous confidence might be best. Nictay stood up

straight. "I am the Princess Nictay," she said. She remembered what Caan Cuy had called her. Shell Woman. "Princess Nictay of the Shell Woman clan," she elaborated. "If you have aid to offer, I would thank you to show yourself and offer it. If not, I would thank you to leave us."

"Ah, a princess," said the voice. "But why is your head shaped like a commoner's? You don't have the look of nobility."

"Among my people," Nictay said, "no mother shapes her child's head." That much, at least, was true. Nictay's village was small. There were no nobles among them.

"And this man?" asked the voice. "Why does his head have a noble shape?"

"He was once from a band of foreigners who have been adopted into my clan."

"Why do you forbid him even the respite of death?"

"He is a great fighter," Nictay said, then added, "He is my general. I need him. He is Nacom Caan Cuy, leader of the shark warriors, captor of men, slayer of enemies."

"Yet you carry the war club."

"Women are warriors among my people," Nictay invented. "We are captors of souls on the battlefield as well as in our houses. We know the pains of both battle and childbirth."

"I had not known there were such people," said the voice with a touch of mockery.

"Not heard of us? Not heard of the ... the Highland People? We are the greatest rivals to the Middle People. We are their closest enemy, and we are their match. Or haven't you heard of the Middle People, either?"

"I know about them," said the voice. The jungle around Nictay had been dark already, but now the gloom deepened. "I know about the Middle People. But you Highland People—" There was mirth in the voice. "—you were unknown to me. Until now." Nictay felt the ground tremble. The tree trunk that Caan Cuy was propped against seemed to swell, then flatten out against Caan Cuy's back. The high canopy overhead receded, as if the whole jungle were growing taller, as if the sky were receding, or as if the ground where Nictay stood were sinking. Vines and ferns shrank back into the ground, leaving it barren.

"What is happening?"

The voice gave no answer. Nictay was sure now that she was dropping, that the ground where she stood was sinking deep into the earth. The last gray light dimmed to blackness, and still the ground trembled. When it stopped, the air was still. No rain fell. No insects churred. No night birds sang. And the blackness was absolute, without the blue phosphorescent glow of decaying wood or the green sparks of fireflies.

Caan Cuy breathed. Nictay heard her own heart beating. That was all.

Nictay knew now that the voice had been the voice of a goddess. She knew she should have spoken with more respect. Honesty would have served better than lies, though now that she had told such an inventive lie, she could hardly take it back. The goddess had seemed amused by what Nictay had said, and the truth now might anger her. If she was not already angry. Who can guess at the thoughts of the gods?

"Lady," Nictay said, kneeling though she didn't know if even a goddess could see in such gloom. In utter blackness, even a jaguar might be blind. "Lady, if I have given some offense, I am sorry. I did not know you. I did not understand your nature." Her voice echoed.

No answer came.

The ground under Nictay's knees was hard. She felt it with her fingertips, rapped it with her knuckles. It was not mud, or even hard-packed earth, but cold, unyielding stone. "Lady," Nictay said, "if it is shelter that you grant us, I thank you."

Again, silence.

Nictay had carried no fire, or any means to start one. And now even if she could strike a spark, what could she use for fuel?

She stood. She waved Caan Cuy's club overhead. The ceiling, if there was one, was out of reach. Was this a cave? There might be

drop-offs that she couldn't see. She inched forward, tapping the stone floor with her toes before she shifted her weight. She waved the club before her, flinching when at last it grazed something solid. A wall. She felt it with her other hand. The wall was flat, with regular seams where great blocks of stone fit together. It was a made wall. This was not a cave, but a stone house or temple like the city peoples built.

Gingerly she felt her way along the wall. It extended for a long distance without interruption, and when Nictay could no longer hear Caan Cuy's breathing, she went back to him.

"Caan Cuy?" She found his form in the blackness and nudged him. He did not stir, but his breathing was regular and strong. She groped for the water gourd, poured a few drops past his lips, then groped about again. There was another wall opposite the first. She followed it in both directions, returning again when she could no longer hear Caan Cuy's whistling breath.

She went back to him once more, tried again to rouse him. He groaned but did not awaken. She felt his neck. The fever had broken. Now if they did not die of thirst or starvation, he might live after all. She sat beside him in the blackness. At least here she did not think there were bats or jaguars. Here she might sleep in peace.

SHE DREAMED MANY TIMES OF WAKING, OF TAKING A NARROW stairway back to the surface of the world. Then she woke to find herself still in the darkness. Or did she dream that, too? Were all her awakenings also dreams? At last she opened her eyes to orange light. Flames burned steadily against the high walls, far above her. She moved, and felt stiff as if from a week of sleeping. Her eyes were so dry, so crusted with sleep that it hurt to blink. Her tongue felt swollen, her throat papery. The pressure of her bladder was so painful, though, that she didn't need to thump her breastbone to see if she were truly awake. She exhaled what would have been a groan if her throat were not so dry, and she sat up.

"There's water," said Caan Cuy. He was sitting with his back to the wall. Light danced in his dark eyes. "And food."

She looked to where he pointed. Three water jugs and two bowls of fruit were against the wall. There were breadnuts, too, and palm hearts. Next to these was a shallow basin for washing. There was even a chamber pot.

"Someone's looking out for us," Caan Cuy said. "But who? Where are we? I don't remember coming here."

Nictay held her hand up to silence him. She drank from one of the jars, then took the pot down the corridor, beyond where the last flames curled up from the walls. In the half-darkness, she relieved herself. Leaving the pot behind, she returned to Caan Cuy, knelt beside the basin, and washed her shaking hands. She tore the yellow rind of a guava with her teeth and swallowed the pink flesh. She devoured a second one. A third. Then she sighed, far from satisfied, but no longer desperate. She looked at Caan Cuy. "We are guests," she said. "Or prisoners. I do not know which." She told him how they had come there, though she did not mention how she had lied to the goddess.

"I might have guessed a Power's hand was in this," Caan Cuy said. "Those are no ordinary lamps." He nodded toward the flames that curled out from the walls. "I see no wick, no channel for oil. The stone itself seems to burn."

"You seem ... better."

"I am healed." He slapped the scars where his wounds had been. "We slept a long time. And she restored my strength. She knit my wounds." He looked at the walls. They seemed to rise forever. The ceiling was so high that the orange glow of the flames did not reach it, if there were a ceiling at all. "What can she want from us?"

"So very little," said a voice that seemed to emerge from the walls.

Caan Cuy sat up very straight. Nictay looked around, though naturally the goddess did not reveal herself. "I desire only that you should entertain me. Princess, you say that women are warriors as much as the men among the Highland People."

Nictay exchanged a glance with Caan Cuy. "That is what I told you, Lady."

Caan Cuy frowned.

"And if you are such close neighbors to the Middle People, you must surely play the ball game as they do."

Nictay had seen the ball courts of the Middle People. The game they played there was known, in different forms, to all the city peoples. She nodded, though she had never played the game herself, nor heard of any woman who did.

"And your general? Speak to me, Nacom Caan Cuy of the Shell Clan."

"I am of the Swallow Clan," said Caan Cuy.

"You *were* of that clan," Nictay said, "until my people adopted you."

Caan Cuy considered her, eyes narrowed.

"I play the ball game," he said.

"Then you both shall play for me," said the voice of the Power. "You will play to the sacred count. Each point shall add a day, beginning with the day after One Deer. The first player to rest again on One Deer shall return home to the city of the Highland People...."

"The city of Highland People?" Caan Cuy said. "I have never heard of such a place!"

Nictay pleaded with her eyes, but the Moon warrior said, "Lady, when I win, you must return me to the Moon City. That is my home."

After a moment, the voice said, "And you, Princess Nictay. What is your true home? For there are no Highland People, no great rivals to the Middle People. And you are no noble. Where, truly, are you from?"

Nictay bowed her head. "From a village by the sea. It is called Kana's Place."

"Did you think you could deceive me? I am the firstborn of earth and sky. My ear is everywhere. There are no peoples I have not heard of. You have never stepped into a ball court, have you? But you are in one now, and you play for your life." At these words, the corridor changed shape, growing wider. Walls formed at either end, with smaller chambers perpendicular to the first: an I-shaped court. "Choose your ends," said the voice. "Then prepare. The winner returns home. The loser dies to honor me."

Caan Cuy considered the court for a moment, then walked to one end. Nictay went to the opposite end. In the smaller, back-court chamber, she found leather guards for her forearms and shins. She tied them on, not certain that she was doing it right, and remembered what she could of the rules. They traded serves. The served ball must bounce on the server's own side no more than once ...

She tied on the yoke that would protect her hips.

Her grandmother had been right about lies. But how could Nictay have done otherwise? Would she have lied to a goddess, *knowing* she was a goddess? Of course not! She would not have lied to anyone at all if honest appeals could have done her any good in foreign lands. She had been a powerless woman among a powerless people. She'd been using her wits because her wits were all she had.

What were the chances that she could beat a warrior who had practiced at this game? How could she use her wits in a game that depended instead on strength?

The voice of the goddess said, "From One Deer, I advance you both to Two Yellow. The rest of the points you must earn. Begin!"

Nictay strode to her side of the court. Caan Cuy stood in his back chamber. He held a ball. He said, "I am grateful to you, Shell Woman, for saving me. I give you my thanks. But we are enemies now."

"I want to live as much as you do," Nictay said. "But we are not enemies."

"Begin!" said the goddess.

Caan Cuy threw the ball. It bounced in his court, in Nictay's court, and skipped toward the back chamber. Nictay lunged at it, swinging her arm through the empty air. As she landed, she knocked over a marker stone. The ball bounced into the back chamber.

"A point for the chamber and a point for the stone," said the goddess. "Caan Cuy's count is Four Dog."

Nictay got up slowly, rubbing her shoulder. She returned the marker stone to its position and retrieved the ash-colored rubber ball. She squeezed it in her hand. How hard must she throw it to get

it to bounce in the right way?

Nictay threw. The ball bounced twice on her own side.

"Caan Cuy's count is Five Monkey," said the goddess. "Nictay remains at Two Yellow."

BY THE TIME NICTAY MADE HER FIRST SUCCESSFUL SERVE, CAAN CUY'S score had run the course of 20 day names and stood at Eight Deer. On the rare occasions when she returned the ball, Caan Cuy always knocked it back to her side where it often died before she could reach it. He never ran into his own marker stones. Nictay, on the other hand, concentrated so hard on returns that she often knocked her own stones down. Caan Cuy even scored by hitting her marker stones with the ball. By the time she got one serve past him to advance to Three Thunder, he had run through the 20 day names again, resting on Two Deer and Nine Deer on the way to One Tooth.

At this rate, he would cycle through the 260 sacred days before Nictay had even reached 13 Rain.

It was hot. Nictay's skin was slippery under the leather guards. Her throat burned.

When her turn came to serve, she held the ball.

"Throw," said the goddess.

"I thirst."

"Warriors do not stop to drink in the midst of battle," the goddess chided.

"And we fight a battle through a year of day names. Would you keep us from resting through a whole year? Give us drink."

"Throw."

"He scores two and three points at a time. Is the outcome in question? Only let me slake my thirst before I die."

From his side, Caan Cuy called out, "No food, no drink, no rest until the game rests again at One Deer. That is the nature of the game."

"Throw," said the goddess. "Thirst will drive you to finish the game. March to your water jug, warrior, though there is death at its bottom. Throw."

So Nictay threw. Caan Cuy returned with his hip. Nictay ran to meet the ball, tripped on a marker, and struck the ball with her hand. "A point for touching with the hand. A point for the marker. From One Tooth, Caan Cuy leaps to Three Jaguar."

Then Nictay saw it, the way out of this game. And she laughed bitterly, for it was a dangerous way, one that the goddess had surely understood from the start.

NICTAY PLAYED A LITTLE BETTER AS THE GAME CONTINUED. She became more aware of the placement of the marker stones. More of the balls that she slapped with her hips or kicked with her shins went where she wanted them to go. She had advanced all the way to Six Dog when Caan Cuy scored the point that brought him to One Jaguar and began the final count toward One Deer. He scored the next point, then the next.

It was Caan Cuy's turn to serve. The Nacom had not spoken since many serves ago. Now he said, "I cannot lose, Nictay, yet you continue to play with determination. You are a proud woman."

"She is a liar," said the voice of the goddess.

"I knew that from the start," said Caan Cuy. "But I salute her even so." And he bowed to Nictay.

"You say you cannot lose," Nictay said. "Have you also considered that you cannot win? I play for my life, Caan Cuy. Do you think I will surrender it lightly?"

"It is not a matter of surrender," Caan Cuy said, and served the ball. Nictay made no attempt to return it. The ball bounced in his court, in hers, and into the back chamber.

"Point for Caan Cuy. He rests at Four Thought."

"You need 11 points to rest at One Deer," Nictay said. "I make you a gift of this one." She hurled the ball hard. It passed all the way into Caan Cuy's back chamber, striking the wall.

"Point for Caan Cuy," said the goddess. "He rests at Five Blade."

"Why did you do that?"

"Don't you understand yet, Nacom?" Nictay said. "This is the game that neither of us is meant to win. This game is for the goddess's pleasure, and it is a bitter delight she takes."

"I do not understand."

"Serve," said the goddess. "Do you not thirst? Serve and bring the game to a close."

Caan Cuy threw the ball. Nictay rushed to meet it, caught it in her hand and kicked over a marker stone at the same time.

"One point for touching, one for the stone," said the goddess. "Caan Cuy stands at Seven Marksman."

"A few more points," Nictay said. She threw the ball into Caan Cuy's back chamber again. "That gives you Eight Lefthanded."

Caan Cuy served again. Nictay knocked over a marker stone before the ball had even come to her side, and she kicked another stone as the ball passed through her court.

"One point for the back chamber, two for the stones," said the goddess. "Caan Cuy rests at Twelve Snake."

"Do you see it now?" Nictay asked. She served into the back chamber again, giving up another point. She still rested at Six Dog, not yet halfway through the count. Caan Cuy was at Thirteen Death, only a point from victory. But he couldn't win. "We play not to surpass a certain score, but to rest there."

Caan Cuy held the ball, considering.

"It is true that I lied to you," Nictay said. "I am no princess. But my people need a warrior like you. That much is true. I would have said anything at all to keep you from despairing, to encourage you to come with me rather than die in the jungle. I lied, but with good reason. And it is for that reason that I will not lose this game. Nor will I let you win it. I must live to return to my people. I must bring you with me."

"That is not possible. The bargain of the goddess ..."

"Serve!" cried the goddess's voice. Caan Cuy threw. His serve was good, and as it passed by, Nictay knocked over a stone.

"Two points," said the goddess, laughing. "Caan Cuy skips One Deer and rests at Two Yellow."

"This is her game," said Nictay, "to deny us food or drink or rest as long as we play. And how long will we play? When either of us has the power to keep the other's score from ever resting on One Deer, just how long will we keep this up?"

"We will play until we are too weak to play," Caan Cuy said, nodding. "We will play until we die of thirst."

"There is another way," Nictay said. "But you must trust me."

"She is a liar," said the goddess. "You know this about her already, Nacom."

"I must live, and I must keep you alive," said Nictay. "Liar or not, you can trust me more than I can trust you. I need you. You do not need me."

"Tell me," said Caan Cuy. "I will consider."

SO IT WAS THAT, EXHAUSTED, THEY PLAYED ON. CAAN CUY DELIBERATELY knocked over his own markers, as Nictay knocked over her own. It took a long time for them to tie the score, and all the while the voice of the goddess reminded Caan Cuy that Nictay was untrustworthy. At the same time, she told Nictay to consider whether Caan Cuy would ever go with her back to her village. Clearly, what he wanted was to return to his own people, not serve hers.

When the score stood at Thirteen Death for each of them, it was Nictay's serve. Her papery throat burned when she asked, "Will you trust me, Nacom Caan Cuy of the Moon People?"

"You cannot," said the goddess.

Across the court, he met her eyes. "I will."

"She is a liar."

"And I will trust you, Caan Cuy. Just have a care. Do not trip over a stone as the ball sails by."

"He will betray you."

Continued on page 88

A Brother Grimm

IN

the winter of 1859, Wilhelm Grimm discovered a carbuncle on his back, a reddish brown abscess lodged in his flesh like a glowing coal. A doctor was summoned, a physician whose lancet was steady and true, but the piercing of the carbuncle brought no respite. By the time his family gathered at his bedside, Wilhelm no longer recognized them. ☀ "Brennen Sie die Bücher!" he shouted, throwing up his arms to shield himself from some invisible assailant. His glistening eyes locked on a point beyond his brother Jacob's shoulder. ☀ "Calm down, *kleiner Bruder*," Jacob said, squeezing Wilhelm's blazing hand. "You must rest." ☀ "Burn the books!" Wilhelm shouted again, spitting words across the room. But the rage quickly faded, replaced by a cold fright. "My dreams have come true," he whispered, tears joining the flow of sweat from his face. His head rolled back and forth on the down pillow. ☀ Wilhelm's hands clenched and wrestled the blankets. His face turned crimson, red

as an ember against the starched white sheets. "All my dreams ..." he groaned. Then he was still. ☀ Jacob's heart chilled as Wilhelm grew colder and his face drained of color. This was not victory. Dortchen, Wilhelm's wife, began to sob. ☀ "Little brother," Jacob whispered, "do not leave." For the first time in his life—the first time in three-quarters of a century—he was alone. ☀ Sleep would not come. Part of Jacob felt dead, slain with his brother. His ears still rang with screams. "Burn the books," Wil had cried. What had he meant? Wilhelm had written a score of books and collaborated with him on a dozen more. Together they had published the famous *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, the beloved fairy tales. Why had his last words repudiated his whole life? ☀ The darkness held no answer but the howl of the wind through the panes. ☀ After a time, Jacob fell into troubled sleep. ☀ His dream began quite simply. He walked among the snow-covered tombstones of *Matthäikirchhof* cemetery, searching for Wilhelm's resting place. The

Oh, those
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By Sten Westgard

Illustration by Stephen Johnson



ice-choked wind obscured the ground and stung his eyes. Half-blind, he stepped too far and fell into an open grave, landing with a shock. Wilhelm lay beside him, uncoffined, uncovered, *alive*. A great look of fright held his brother's face and tears streamed from his eyes.

"You are alive!" Jacob said.

"No, I am taken," Wilhelm cried.

Heart swelling, Jacob hugged his brother to his chest, "I knew the fever could not take you. I knew it was not your time."

"Run, elder. Please."

He heard the scrape of shovels. Dirt rained down on his back. He stood but the hole began to close. In an instant, it piled up to his knees.

"Stop!" he shouted. But the shovels did not cease. Heavy soil covered his limbs and trunk in a blizzard.

"Dear Heaven, st ..."

He was buried. He could not raise his hands to shield his head nor draw air into his lungs to scream. Dirt pressed close upon his eyelids and scraped against his pupils. Yet though his lungs drew no breath, he lived. He lived and tasted a soil of ashes, dead loam that filled his mouth and pressed itself down into his lungs, his veins, even into the chambers of his heart.

Beside him came a tremor. Somehow, Jacob knew his brother's thoughts.

This is how we treated them, Wilhelm told him.

Jacob did not understand, but he could not question. Time passed, and he felt a change, a transformation in the tips of his fingers and toes as they lengthened and stretched upward like shoots in quest of daylight. Soon he knew that he had reached the surface; he breathed the cool evening air through the tendrils of his fingertips, drank the morning dew through the lacework of his toes. Sunlight sank into him like steaming honey, pouring slowly down into his body. Still his extremities grew, soaking up more light, intertwining with the roots of his brother. They grew together, merging limbs and thoughts. Soon Jacob could not tell where he left off and Wilhelm began.

We will soon flower, Jacob, Wilhelm said in an exchange of blood and sap, *but that will be our last pleasure. She is coming.*

What do you mean? Jacob asked.

We called her *Rapunzel*.

Rapunzel, Jacob wondered, but the thought was lost as he flowered and the wind caressed his petals.

There came a scratching, like pins pricking his fingers. It grew harsher, and he felt teeth gnawing at his green stalks, as if a pack of rats were chewing off his hands.

Pull away, elder. Wilhelm pleaded. *She has her mother's appetite.*

Jacob could not. One by one, he lost his fingers; pain raged down the roots and blossomed in his brain. Through bleeding stumps, he heard *her*—greedy laughter as she chewed, panting breaths as she searched for more, joyful cries as she tore off another shoot. Beside him, Wilhelm struggled in the same agony. Still the woman was not sated. She dug at their roots, stripping away the soil. She excavated them slowly, consuming their flesh one inch at a time.

Jacob cried out in maddened terror, *Why?*

We sealed her high in a tower so she buried us deep in the ground. This is their justice.

Finally she reached Wilhelm's chest. Jacob watched the woman tear into Wil's flesh, breaking back ribs so she could feast on his

organs. Shorn of limbs, trapped in the ground, he could do nothing but watch as the long tresses of her hair danced over Wil, growing sticky and snarled with clotted blood.

"Now he is ours," Rapunzel said. She fastened her teeth on Wilhelm's still-beating heart and Wil screamed as he had on his deathbed.

She turned to Jacob, smiling with stained teeth. She reached out with her sharp-nailed hand. "He is ours, Grimm. Ours forever unless you burn the books." Then she dug into his chest like a quintet of knives ...

Jacob awoke with a gasp, clutching his chest, gulping in air. When his heart slowed its pounding, he realized it was just a dream. There was nothing to be done. But he knew for the memory of Rapunzel's appetite, he would sleep no more. Throwing on his dressing gown, he headed downstairs.

WILHELM'S BODY LAY ON THE KITCHEN table, his face pale as snow. Dortchen stood beside the body, wiping his skin with a damp cloth, dabbing now and again into a mug of water. She did not look up.

"I could not sleep," she said. "So I decided to be useful."

Jacob gazed at the wrinkles on Wilhelm's face. How quickly those lines had bent in smile, how easily they had drawn back in laughter.

"I thought all would be well by now," he whispered.

Dortchen set down the rag. "Can you lift him, Jacob? He's got to have a clean shirt."

With a grunt, Jacob lifted his brother up to a sitting position, revealing a back grown purple and discolored. Although he knew from his years in the Hessian army that this was common, he could not shake the impression that his brother's back looked burned.

Dortchen eased the shirt over Wilhelm's head. As Jacob shifted his hands to give her more room, his fingers ran across the carbuncle. Only a small, flaking scab remained.

"I still cannot believe it," Jacob said. "A man does not die of a single boil."

"It was the drop that broke the dam," Dortchen said. Slowly she buttoned the white, high-collared shirt. Its bleached cloth made Wilhelm's face look even more ghostly. "So many years on such a weak heart."

"He had beaten fevers before. I am his elder and yet I stand."

"Wilhelm was always the weaker brother, Jacob. You knew that." Then, in a quiet voice, she added. "We should be glad we had so much time with him."

Jacob lowered him back onto the table. "At least he died knowing that his dreams came true," he said. "He was husband, father, author, and the true creator of the *Hausmärchen*."

"Those were never his dreams, Jacob. He only had nightmares."

"What?" Jacob asked. Wilhelm had been the dreamer, he the journeyman.

"Ach, Jacob, I shouldn't tell you but it hangs on my chest. A night never passed without the visit of nightmares."

"He never told me." Jacob stared again into his brother's face, wondering what other secrets had been kept from him.

Dortchen pulled a frock coat over Wilhelm's shoulders. "He swore me to silence. He did not wish to plague us with his nightmares."

"He will have no nightmares in Heaven, Dortchen."

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ING OFF HIS
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Dortchen tried to smile. "I pray you are right, Jacob."

As he let the body back down, Jacob brushed against the mug, knocking it off the table. It shattered on the floor and seemed to shout, achieving speech as it burst into shards.

To his ears, it cried *Brennen Sie!*

THEY LAID WILHELM'S COFFIN IN HIS STUDY, SETTING IT ATOP THE desk where he wrote his greatest works. Mourners streamed past—students from the University, members of the *Akademie*, Berlin society, and admirers of the *Hausmärchen*—laying their hands on the casket-wood, or placing a lemon or a rosemary sprig among the flowers and wreaths. Many stopped to tell Jacob which of the Grimms' Tales was their favorite. So many lives touched by the stories.

Eventually the house grew quiet; Jacob heard the wind shake the windows, as if to gain admittance to the study.

So often that was the only sound we listened to, he thought. That and the scratching of our quills. All gone now. No more collaborations, no more shared books. How can I write beside an empty study?

The pallbearers arrived. Herman, Wilhelm's eldest surviving son, came in with Jacob's coat and cane. Herman's eyes had the same azure tint as his father's. Even in grief, his face held a vitality that his father had lacked.

"We're ready to go, Uncle."

Jacob gripped Herman's arm, the flesh of Wilhelm's flesh, so strong and young. "But two months ago, we gathered in such happy circumstances. There, the minister recited marriage vows, not burial rites."

"I'm glad Father lived long enough to meet Gisela," Herman said.

"He was so proud of you, Herman. As am I."

Outside, Jacob stepped into the *Droschke* with Herman and began the ride to the cemetery. The hoofbeats on the cobblestones reminded him too much of the hammering of coffin nails.

"Gisela sends her father's condolences," Herman said.

"And how is Achim?"

"Concerned about the future. Father had been preparing another Foreword to the *Hausmärchen*."

"I see. This will be the seventh edition?"

"If it is completed, yes. But Father's introduction is unfinished. Achim hopes you will take up the work."

"Ach, Herman, I have not worked on the tales for 40 years. Wilhelm wrote the bulk of that work."

At the *Matthäikirchhof*, Jacob leaned both on the cane and on Herman, taking each step slowly, boots crunching on the icy snow. The wind sent cold spears through his cloak. Mourners were huddled together, hats and shoulders brushed with snow, standing around the open grave as if it gave off warmth.

"With Father's death, there will be a demand for another printing of the Grimm's Tales. We must assure his place—and yours—in history."

"There are so many other projects left undone. We had barely begun the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*."

"The *Hausmärchen* will take only a few days, a week at most."

"I will see what I can do, Herman."

The crowd parted for them. Dortchen and the rest of the family were already there, staring at the coffin and the open grave. Jacob peered into the hole, noticing how the gravediggers had carved the frozen earth. Their shovels had left half-circle scars along the sides, so that a hundred smiles lined the hole as it awaited Wilhelm's body.

Presently the minister began the oratory, speaking quickly to shorten exposure. The wind drowned out his words. Jacob watched the cleric's lips, but heard only the moaning wind. All around, snow stirred like albescent flames, driving into the eyes of the mourners, filling the grave with a chalky mist. As the coffin was lowered, it disappeared into the wintery fog, as if the snow had swallowed Wilhelm instead of the earth.

Jacob fumbled for a piece of dirt. The clump was frozen solid, more stone than soil. He threw the earth into the hole, but with the screaming of the wind, he did not hear it land.

AFTER THE BURIAL, JACOB SAT ALONE IN WILHELM'S STUDY. Beneath the scent of flowers and herbs, it smelled of spilled ink, musty paper, and polished leather spines. Copies of the *Hausmärchen* filled an entire bookcase, all the editions and printings and translations arranged in order. He picked one at random. Every story brought back a conversation, a sliver of time preserved in print. On this page lay Frau Viehmann, the eggseller who gave a tale with every dozen—even more when Wilhelm bought her soup. The next tale was from old Krause, the sergeant of dragoons who traded his stories for a pair of trousers. And then those from Dortchen and her sisters, during the happy times when Wilhelm walked without a cane, when his laugh was loud and his eye was quick.

Over his shoulder, he heard Dortchen. "You see him in the stories, don't you?"

Jacob nodded. "I look at these pages and remember your parents' *Gartenhaus*. In the early days, we sought out women as much as stories; Wil coaxed *Hansel und Gretel* and *Rumpelstilzchen* from your lips more for your smile than for the tales themselves."

Dortchen laughed softly. "Yet for every tale I spun, he wove a tapestry."

"Yes, he worked magic with the stories. I only wish ... I wish I had died in his place so he could write a few years more."

"Please, Jacob. Let us contemplate no more death today. It is hard enough already."

He felt ashamed. "I am so sorry, Dortchen."

She shook her head. "You know, I have not felt such an ache since the death of little Jacob. I had thought then that I could never feel worse. Jacob was my firstborn, but Wilhelm ..."

"As long as we have the *Hausmärchen*, Wilhelm will always be with us."

Dortchen nodded and left. With a shudder, Jacob put the *Hausmärchen* back on the shelf and headed upstairs.

EVEN BENEATH THE SHEETS, JACOB COULD NOT shake the funereal chill. As midnight fell upon the house, he brought out more blankets and placed extra coals in the warmer. Still he shivered. And he thought again about the strangeness of the burial; in his mind's eye, he watched the snowy mist swallow Wilhelm's coffin over and over again. The image blew about his thoughts as he drifted into sleep.

He dreamed of flames and the smell of charred flesh. A vast fireplace stood before him, thick with ashes that spilled from the hearth and blanketed the floor. In the grate, tiny coals glowed at the end of blackened bones.

Before him, Jacob saw two feet bound in rags.

"Do you recognize my voice, Grimm?" a voice crackled.

He looked up. A soot-smudged woman stood before him, holding a glowing poker.

"*Aschenputtel*?" Jacob said. He tried to stand, but the woman swung the poker at him.

"You and the younger called me that," She jabbed. Jacob retreated in the cinders. She pursued, her poker dancing back and forth like a spark. "You stole my voice and gave me yours, a puny thing with few words and little courage. Your pages took away my mother and gave me a step-mother."

"Leave me alone!" Jacob shouted, scrambling backward. His hand reached out blindly and felt a large stone. He raised his arm to throw it. She laughed. Then he saw—it was not stone, but blackened skull. Holding it in his hand, flesh on bone, he suddenly knew whose skull it was.

"If you will not burn books," *Aschenputtel* said, "we will burn flesh."

"What is this place?" he shouted.

"You still don't understand. You never did. I left the slipper on purpose, but you made it an accident. I tested the Prince to see if he could find me, but you turned me into a hiding coward. I wore cinders as a disguise, but you—"

"Stop this madness. You are a nightmare, nothing more!"

She darted forward. Jacob tried to shield himself. Burning pain spread across his hand. A scream ripped from his lungs.

Aschenputtel's laughter popped like timber in a stove. "Flesh and paper burn with equal ease. It is your choice: sacrifice your books or burn with your brother."

Flames ran up his arm. Bones curled and cracked as he writhed in the ashes. Her words seared into his brain.

"This is but one of your fates, Grimm, one of thousands. You thought we were playthings to sculpt and fire and glaze, but we *Märchen* are real. You knew how it felt to write. Now you know how it feels to be written."

Her words continued but Jacob no longer heard; the fire reached his head. Before his eyes boiled away, he saw his glowing limbs twist and turn gray, cinders falling from him like dust. Then he was blind and deaf, a creature of soot. A broom scattered his ashes to the wind...

He jerked awake, bedclothes soaked in sweat. Purposefully, he stripped off the wet garments and put on a shirt and trousers. He did not intend to fall asleep again. With a blanket around his shoulders, he went down to the kitchen and brewed enough coffee to last him to the dawn.

LONG AFTER THE SUN STREAMED THROUGH THE kitchen window, Jacob shivered beneath a blanket. The chill would not leave. A part of him believed he was joining his brother in delirium.

When she came into the kitchen, Dortchen cried out. "Jacob, what has happened to you?"

"I fear Wilhelm's death has driven me senseless. I ... I am plagued by nightmares."

"You dreamed ..." she whispered. "What did you see?"

"I saw him cruelly tortured, I saw myself punished by devils who call themselves *Märchen*. They commanded me to bargain for his life."

Dortchen's eyes brimmed with tears. "His bane passes on."

She rushed from the room, returning moments later with her arms full of books: small pocket-sized tomes with ripped velvet bindings, larger ones with leather spines worn smooth by use, even an atlas-sized book with metal clasps fastening it shut. She dumped them onto the table.

"These are his diaries, the record of his nightmares," she said. "The oldest dates back to the time you and Wilhelm began collecting the tales."

Jacob gasped. "Over 40 years ago."

"Four decades of torment. Wilhelm's greatest secret." She rooted through the pile, selecting the most battered tome. "This is the first. Read it for me."

Jacob took the book from Dortchen's hands, feeling the dust coat his fingers. Wilhelm's wiry script covered every page, his dreams flooding over margin and spacing. There were mistakes, misspellings, but Wilhelm's hand was too hurried to correct them or cross them out. Jacob read the first lines:

"Ever since Jacob and I began recording the fairy tales, I have been plagued by abhorrent dreams. At first I dismissed them as the workings of a fatigued mind. But after repeated hauntings, I must question that judgment. Something stirs in the back of my thoughts, a fear that reason cannot quiet. By recording the dreams, I hope to assert a proper objectivity. On paper, I am convinced that these fancies will appear ludicrous and trivial.

"This night I found myself inside the *Märchen*, no longer an observer or recorder, but a participant. I found myself walking in the *Matthäikirchhof* cemetery, heading toward an open grave ..."

The rest of the words were too familiar. Jacob felt a vast chasm opening beneath him. His first dream had been Wilhelm's first dream over 40 years ago. He paged ahead to the second entry.

"... my arms warped in the flames, graying slowly to ash ..."

There lay Jacob's second nightmare, the fiery revenge of *Aschen-*

puttel, faithfully recorded in every detail. Only the victim had changed—where he had found Wilhelm's ashes, Wilhelm had found his own. Despite four decades, the dreams were mirrors of each other.

"His visions are my own," Jacob said, the pages shaking in his hands. "They will torture him forever unless our books are burnt."

"His dreams *have* come true," Dortchen said. "He rests with his nightmares, not with the souls of men."

With growing desperation, Jacob paged through book after book, seeing the agony of the Grimms. "Shall I live every one?" he cried.

Dortchen shook her head. "For 45 years, I shared his bed but not his dreams. How could I be spared if you were not?"

"Leave the diaries with me," Jacob said, gathering them in his arms. "I must know what befell him—what may befall me."

"How can I help, Jacob? What can I do?"

"I don't know, Dortchen."

Jacob secluded himself in his study. He did not tarry on the first pages of the diaries, but skimmed every book from the earliest to the most recent, searching for a pattern in the sequence of dreams. He found none. Without scheme or order, the vast collection lay before him, a chronicle of 10,000 nightmares.

The first tales shrugged off narrative, comprising a litany of horrors where the Grimms were drowned in blood, boiled in a bath of pitch, torn apart by brambles, slit across the throat by a pair of dancing scissors, dragged down a hill in a barrel full of spikes, pricked and stabbed by a thousand spinning needles, strangled by vines, swallowed by wolves, pecked to blindness by a flock of doves, danced to death in red-hot iron shoes, chopped into pieces by a quartet of axes.... The deaths went on and on, numbing the eye and mind, each torture a new variation of the deeds from the *Hausmärchen*. For every death in the Grimms' Tales, the *Märchen* had revenged themselves a thousandfold. Yet somehow Wilhelm had not despaired:

"I thank God that Dortchen and the others are free of dreams. So far these nightmares burden only the recorder. I have spent many hours trying to understand why I have been so uniquely afflicted. Perhaps we dip into their realm when we write, building a bridge between ourselves and the *Märchen*. As we touch them, they touch us. Fortune blesses Jacob, for though in my dreams he suffers, in flesh he displays no such ill. Perhaps I have protected him with these pages. If that be true, for as long as I can write, I will shield him from their wrath."

But Wilhelm's shaking hand recorded more than torture. Many tales were variants of the *Hausmärchen*, stories where characters spoke different words, accomplished different deeds, met different ends. These were older tales, Jacob realized—stories that lived long before the tales he and Wilhelm had collected. He read a dozen versions of *Aschenputtel*, where her slippers were not glass but velvet or vail or gold, where she was not a kitchenmaid by birth but a princess in purposeful disguise, where she was not a woman but a man, a knight disguised as a scarecrow, saving the kingdom from enemies until a princess recognized him in the fields. These dreams were not painful to read; they were a treasure, an apocrypha of the *Hausmärchen*.

The diaries also chronicled Wilhelm's decline. As Jacob read toward the present the legibility declined. Fragmented letters testified to his brother's weakening hand. To read the pages, the dreams had aged Wilhelm; his midnight exertions had brought him maladies of the heart and lungs. Despite failing health, though, he continued to record them and worry about their purpose:

"Even after decades of these nightly visits, fear stirs in me an ancient instinct for flight, like a doe who smells the wolf. But I have no place to run. In some horrible way, these nightmares are my companions. When I take to bed I no longer shiver but lie down with resignation. As every blink of an eye brings an instant of darkness, so every night adds further anguish.

"Yet I endure for a purpose. Since I took up the quill, no dream has plagued me twice. It is my solemn conclusion that these diaries have been my greatest defense. I know not how many nights it will take

for me to triumph, and I fear I will never have enough paper to record them all. But by recording the tales, my ink drowns them. They suffocate between the pages and trouble me no more."

But they did not die, brother. Like wraiths, they rose from the grave you made for them. How am I to rescue you? Or am I doomed to follow your path?

A SUDDEN POUNDING DISTURBED JACOB'S READING. FOOTSTEPS. The scent of incense drifted under the door. Outside his study, he found Dortchen at work with hammer and nail, fastening crucifixes to the walls. The minister from the funeral was here, walking from room to room, casting holy water on the floor. An assistant swung the incense burner, filling the house with pungent smoke.

"What is this?" Jacob asked.

"The minister has heard my confession," Dortchen said. "He has agreed to cleanse our house."

"I sense the evil spirits fleeing, Frau Grimm," the clergyman reassured. "They will trouble you no more."

"God bless you," Dortchen said.

"Herr Jacob, if I may have a moment?" the minister asked. Jacob allowed him into the study. The minister warmed himself by the fireplace.

"Death affects us in strange ways, Jacob," the minister began. "Frau Grimm says you are terribly distraught."

"It was a great blow to me," Jacob said. "To everyone."

"She told me that you suffer from nightmares about Wilhelm's soul."

Jacob looked carefully into the minister's eyes. Upon his face sat the stern look of a questioning teacher, who pauses in breath to better hear his student's answer.

"It is true, I believe that spirits visit me in my dreams," he said, words falling from him like chains. "They call themselves the *Märchen* and seek ransom for my brother. I do not know what to do."

The minister frowned. "You must not converse with these demons, whatever name they take."

"I worry they are not demons. They—"

The minister raised his voice, his beard shaking like a bush. "They are minions of Hell, Jacob! Do not let them tempt you from the righteous path."

"And what of Wilhelm? They claim to bargain for his life. If I do their bidding, they say he shall be returned."

"Stop your ears. The devil's words are lies and ashes. Your only hope is prayer. Confess your sins to God and pray."

The minister did not wish to listen. He had come only to instruct.

"Thank you, minister," Jacob said, kneeling before him. "I shall visit you soon. I ... I hope you will keep this matter to yourself."

The minister made the sign of the cross on Jacob's forehead. "Fear not, Herr Jacob. Grief has made you prone to fancies. It is natural for you to think these devils are the creatures you wrote about. That comes from too much creativity and too little prayer."

After the minister had left, Jacob found Dortchen sitting with her eyes pressed tightly shut, her hands clasped together as if the flesh could merge.

"I did not know what else to do, Jacob. If these spirits have Wilhelm, we need God's help to save him."

"You did the right thing," he said, comforting her. "Sorrow has made me weak. I am sure the minister's blessing will put an end to my dreams."

JACOB DID NOT TAKE TO BED THAT EVENING. HE WAS TOO AFRAID to tempt slumber. Instead he spent the night hours reading the diaries, filling himself with tea and sitting in a stiff chair. Soon, though, his eyes began to sag and his head nodded forward. Just past midnight he lost the strength to challenge sleep, and the dreams came to him again.

A voice like rattling bolts called out, "What are my names, Grimm?"

Shining light blinded Jacob's eyes. He tried to sit up but pain raked across his arm. Clutching his arm, he fell. Once on the floor, he tried to get his bearings through squinting eyes. A single lamp lit a vast hall, its light reflected a thousandfold; filigree gold filled the room like spun wool, coils and coils of glaring metal. The wiry strands nearest him dripped with his own blood.

The voice called again. "I am Terry-top, Purzingigele, and Ricdin-Ricdon. There, I just gave you three. Tell me the others and I'll free you and your brother."

Jacob knew the answer. He knew from the diary that he could not answer. "I haven't enough breath to say them all, *Rumpelstilzchen*."

The voice shrieked like the clashing of swords. "That is one, dear Grimm. Now the rest."

"I will burn no *Hausmärchen*," Jacob cried, "and I will give you no names."

"That was no answer!" the dwarf shouted. Something rattled through the air, disturbing the filigree coils. As they shifted, the air moaned through their whorls. They edged closer to Jacob and shredded his clothes. A bundle of flax landed at his feet.

"You have more names than there are stars," Jacob said. "More names than there are words. And I will not give in to you."

Another bundle flew through the air. The glittering coils bit into Jacob, drawing lines of blood across his flesh. Jacob heard the clanking of spurs and iron-toed boots. He turned toward the noise. His eyes ran with tears as he beheld the shining dwarf. Raiments of golden silk covered *Rumpelstilzchen*, curtains of gleaming light. His helm shone brighter than dawn on the summer solstice. His nails, his teeth, even the irises of his eyes shone like gold.

The voice laughed, a grinding of metal.

"When you took up the quill, you surrendered to us. No blessing will unwrite what you have written. Now tell me another name." The dwarf laughed again.

"Never!"

"I am glad you will not burn the books, Grimm. Now I can teach you all my names: Panzimanzi, Whuppity Stoori, Batzibitzili, Tom-tit-tot and Trit-a-Trot, Doppeltürk, Tarandando, Zorobubo, Titeliture ..."

The names went on and on, each accompanied by the attack of golden wire. Jacob lost track as his limbs were torn and the pool of blood beneath him grew larger, the only darkness in a room of light.

"You couldn't master Wil," he panted. "You will not master me. Why make me relive what failed to turn my brother?"

The dwarf's response grated his ear, a scraping of knives on pumice. "You think this is my doing, Grimm? I have not spun this gold, fool. Look to your brother for the source of your woe. With

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every sentence in the diary, he sealed your fate with ours. If you do not burn the books, you will relive all the nightmares until you join us on these pages, just as your brother did."

"You will steal my soul, too? Do you not fear God's wrath?"

"Before there were gods, there were *Märchen*. Now tire me no more. You have 10,000 names to learn, one for every book. I'll mine you of blood before you can speak half."

The dwarf's fists shook the spun gold, and the coils darted forward like giant mouths. Jacob raised his bloody hands as bullion teeth sank into him...

He jerked awake. He was back at his desk, the diaries scattered before him. With trembling hands, Jacob flipped through the pages, finding the name of Grimm everywhere. Wilhelm said he had captured the *Märchen* in the diaries, but had he ensnared himself as well? Had the act of recording turned teller into tale?

The questions multiplied in his head.

"You were screaming," Dortchen said. He looked up. She stood in the doorway, her old face pale in the early dawn.

"The dreams will not leave me, Dortchen," he said, feeling the strain in his throat. He looked away from her, hunting for his quill and ink jar among the mess.

"But the minister—"

"Calling them demons accomplished nothing."

"If God cannot help us, who can?"

"I don't know."

"If prayer can't free him, I'll save him with fire," she shouted. She ran into Wilhelm's study. Jacob followed. Entering the room, he saw Dortchen tossing copies of the *Hausmärchen* into the fireplace.

"What are you doing!?" he shouted.

"Better to burn books than let him suffer," Dortchen said, breathlessly. She reached for a match.

"This will do no good," he said. With sudden strength, Dortchen pushed him aside.

"Won't it?" she lit the match and held it to the pile. The books burst into flames as if soaked in oil. Within moments, fire cast the study in a harsh orange light.

"Dortchen, the first printing of the *Hausmärchen* was nine hundred books," Jacob said wearily. "Every edition, every translation, has had more than one printing. There are tens of thousands of them scattered across the continent and beyond."

"This is a beginning. A sacrifice. If all can save him, a few will lessen his suffering."

"Two hands cannot catch a rainstorm. To seek all the copies of the tales is folly."

"I'll scour every *Buchhandlung*, every library, every secondhand dealer."

"We shall never burn them all, Dortchen. We could wander for the rest of our lives and we would not find them."

"But what a fire they might make, Jacob. What a fire."

The blaze of books had burned itself out. Jacob stirred the cinders with a poker. It had taken Wilhelm so long to write the stories. How quickly they turned to ash.

Then a thought struck him. If the diaries had been Wil's downfall, could they also be his salvation? Could prose free as well as imprison?

"I must have time to write," he told Dortchen.

"That's what Wilhelm used to say," she whispered.

Returning to his study, Jacob flipped through the last diary

until he found a blank page. He grabbed his quill and ink jar. His hand shook as he began to write, quill tip clinking on the jar's glass lip. The story he sketched out came from no dream or tale: no setting was more familiar, no characters more dear, and no ending more important. With desperate imagination, he wrote line after hasty line, until exhaustion pulled him into a dreamless, thoughtless sleep.

A HAND SHOOK HIM AWAKE. WEARILY, JACOB OPENED HIS EYES.

"Are you all right, Uncle?" Herman asked.

"I'm fine," he lied. His back protested as he straightened; three nights with barely a moment's rest had taxed his body almost as much as his mind. Tonight he would have peace, but there was much work to be done.

"I've come about the *Hausmärchen*, Uncle," Herman said.

Jacob wiped his eyes with his hands. If he could only put them off these demands for a short while. "I need some air."

"I have to talk with you."

"Join me if you wish."

"Uncle, I beg you again to finish the *Hausmärchen*," Herman said as they descended to the street. Jacob walked with one hand on his back, the other on his cane. *Droschkes* rattled past, spattering passers-by with mud.

"Achim is besieged with orders," Herman continued. "Rheims the printer came to my doorstep to plead for a new edition."

Jacob shook his head. "Every word is how Wilhelm would have wanted it. How can I change a line? Even incomplete, it is better printed without my poor additions."

"You never held your quill in check before. Why now?"

"Herman, your father gave me room beneath his roof and shared his family with my bachelorhood. I will not repay my debt by marring his words. They are the only words left now."

"There is only a small pension for Mother and Gisela and I. We must create something for the future." Herman raised his voice, drawing the gaze of a passing group of soldiers. "You have not so many years left in your hand, Uncle. How will Mother keep the house if you, too, have left her virtually nothing?"

"Forgive me, Herman. When your father died, a part of me died with him. Give me time to grieve."

"Give me something to publish while you recover," Herman answered. "Father's

notes, his letters, anything would do right now. Every library cries out for more of the Grimms."

Jacob hesitated. He sensed a new danger, a dark temptation. Until his story played out, until he knew which books were dangerous and which were safe, there could be no more Grimms' Tales. His voice grew cold. "I can give you nothing, Herman. I must be on my way."

Abruptly he quickened his pace, crossing the street and leaving Herman behind.

JACOB SOUGHT OUT THE QUIET OF THE *TIERGARTEN*. BOTH HE AND Wilhelm had sought refuge in its secluded groves and clearings; often they had met each other along its tranquil paths, heading in opposite directions. Deep in thought, Wilhelm would pause only

DESTROY THE GRIMMS' TALES WHILE YOU HAVE A CHANCE. OBEY THE MÄRCHEN, THEY WILL DICTATE A TALE WHICH FREES US.

for a nod and then continue on his way.

In winter, the park was less hospitable. Bare trees pointed knobby branches to the sky while snowdrifts snaked between their trunks. The path itself was knee-deep in snowmelt, soaking through Jacob's boots after only a hundred yards. But he had a destination now, and nothing could deter him. Even as he tired, he took the winding turns to Wilhelm's favorite hollow, a place few friends knew, where his brother had found countless hours of sanctuary.

In the labyrinth of paths and alcoves, Jacob found the stone pool. A pool and nothing more, not even a bench or statue. Bare rosebushes surrounded the clearing, thorns clicking in the wind. Sunlight bounced off a sheer coat of ice. Water bubbled beneath, splashing like tiny hands slapping against the ice.

It would be here.

By the edge of the pool Jacob saw the goldfish. Thousands of them, some in schools and others by themselves, scattering and swarming like drops of oil. These fish were drops of sunlight, sparkling as if the pool contained a horde of diamonds. Despite the glare, he stared. Wilhelm had spent hours feeding the fish, losing himself in their never-ending motion. Now Jacob watched the sun dance on the pool, waiting...

A group of fish clumped together near the edge. They swam into a tightly packed oval. Jacob smiled as three gaps appeared inside the oval. Two small circles, blue dots no bigger than a fist, and a longer, wider line beneath. The goldfish never ceased to move but his eyes saw a shape in their motion. A face.

The sound of the fish grew louder, as if they were purposely beating their fins against the ice. Through the stirring of water, his ears began to hear words. "Jacob," the pool spoke.

He smiled. It was happening exactly as he had written. "*Kleiner Bruder?*"

"I don't have much time," Wilhelm said, his voice hoarse in the frothing water.

Jacob put out his hand. "Come forth, brother. Step from the water a free man."

"You have not freed me, Jacob. You have only made things worse."

Jacob gasped. "No. This is not what I wrote."

Wilhelm's face began to break up, the fish swimming apart. Some of them fled altogether, joining other schools in the pool. A moment later, the face took shape again.

"We no longer have power over our own stories. We live in the diaries now. Their pages are our sole existence."

Iron clamped around Jacob's heart. "Then why did you write them?"

"They were my only defense." Other fish approached, swimming fast and straight to dart along the edges of Wilhelm's face.

From the depths of hopelessness, everything became clear. "No, they were a trap, Wil. When you recorded their dying tales, you preserved the *Märchen* and bound us to the page."

"Listen to me," Wilhelm said. "Destroy the Grimms' Tales while you still have a chance. If you obey the *Märchen*, they will dictate a tale which frees us."

"The Grimms' Tales are too many."

"Then publish the diaries. Appease the *Märchen* and lessen our pain." More and more fish surrounded Wilhelm, a corona of gold. In the shimmering light they transformed into sharp-toothed eels.

"Printing the diaries would seal our fate. If each copy of our book weakens the *Märchen*, each copy of the diaries strengthens them. If their tales eclipse our own, they triumph, and we are still prisoners."

Märchen-eels attacked Wilhelm from all sides, coordinated like battalions, killing the fish that made up the face.

"Where do the tales go when they are no longer told?" Jacob blurted. "Where do they go when they are gone?"

"Jacob, you must not ... Their lives are our—" Wilhelm shouted, his voice the slap of fins and tails and cracking ice.

"Wil!" Jacob cried, reaching into the water. The pool was a vortex of eels and fish, water churned white by a flurry of mouths. Teeth

found his fingers and he jerked back in pain. A moment later, only a mass of floating corpses remained where Wilhelm's face had been...

Shining spots danced across Jacob's vision. As he blinked and backed away, the dream-tale faded. The tips of his fingers were cold and wet, but unbloodied. The pool was undisturbed save for the broken ice.

Wrapping a handkerchief around his freezing fingers, he headed home.

BACK IN HIS STUDY, JACOB FOUND HIS ENTRY IN THE DIARY FADED and washed away, replaced by a new version which matched the horror of the *Tiergarten*. His failure was total; the diary recorded only what the *Märchen* wanted it to record. Wilhelm's last entries remained. The calligraphy formed a language of its own. His eyes teared from the effort of reading the minute words:

"It has taken most of my life to understand why they punish me. The *Hausmärchen* are the tales of Jacob and myself, not tales of the *Märchen*. That alone is nothing, but our tales are the first to *replace* them. As more people believe in the Grimms' Tales, fewer believe in the *Märchen*. Their power wanes with every *Hausmärchen* sold; every time a child hear our tales, they die a little."

A dark chill crept up Jacob's back. No pen could save them. Nor could any fire cleanse the world of the Grimms' Tales. There was no longer an alternative to what must come.

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HAT EVENING JACOB GAVE HERMAN THE *HAUSMÄRCHEN* proofs and told him the tale of the tales. His nephew stared at the pages with terror.

"They are your burden now," Jacob told him. "You are a good and an able heir, but you must agree to my conditions."

Herman nodded.

"From this day forward, never speak to me of the *Hausmärchen*. Ignore everything I say about them, even to my deathbed ramblings. You may print as many editions as you wish, but make no changes to the text—not one. Publish our let-

ters, our notes, our early drafts, but never let the tale creep into your blood. However strong your scholar's instinct, do not ink your soul away."

"Thank you, Uncle."

"Don't thank me, Herman. The tales will weigh heavily on your shoulders."

Jacob took a carriage home. Had the *Märchen* heard his words? Did they know his intentions?

Returning home, he piled Wilhelm's diaries in the fireplace. The chimney moaned, spitting ashes, blackening his face.

Dortchen entered the room. "You have changed your mind?"

"These are the diaries."

"How will this help?"

"I cannot end his punishment, but perhaps I can end his suffering."

It took a dozen matches before one would light, but Jacob was patient. Although his heart hammered in his chest, he lit the first diary afire. Although his lungs felt icy and cold, he found the strength to blow on the flickering pages. Quickly the blaze grew until it had a life of its own.

Burn the books, you said. Well, I will, dear brother, I will. It cost us only eggs and coffee to buy the tales, but to make them our own, so much more. You sacrificed 10,000 nights trying to save me. All I can do is join your fate. Be it Hell or oblivion or some more monstrous tale, at least we will be together again.

In the curling smoke Jacob saw the *Märchen* faces, twisting and swirling as they rose in the air. In the dancing of the flames, they darted from page to page and book to book, desperate in their attempts to flee. The crackling of the fire resounded with their screams. Jacob's face grew flushed as he listened for Wilhelm's cry. And his skin felt hot as he listened, too, for his own. ❁



THE HOWLS

Love and obsession—sometimes its hard to

The line twitched ...

... and twitched again: a snake-like quiver that began where the rope vanished into a thick stand of cedars, then wormed along the length of the rope, traveling up the snowy bank to rattle the tiny bell hung just short of Zach's hands. Zach, half-dozing against the bole of a lone sentinel pine, snapped to attention, rising to his feet and spilling his rifle into the snow. He'd been dreaming of Lucia, thinking of her promise, and his cheeks were damp from the memory of her.

Shadows shifted in the dark of the forest, ghosts in the gloaming. Onyx eyes blinked through the cedar boughs, but none of the watchers ventured out into the twilight. They'd seen the rifle.

Zach wrapped the rope around his hands, numb fingers struggling to tighten in a grip that would hold the rope braced against the single loop around the pine. The bell tinkled merrily until he had himself set with his feet deeply planted in the snow. He waited.

Waited some more.

The rope twitched again ... then slithered toward the forest, slack vanishing as if it had been devoured by the snow. When the rope was nearly taut, Zach hurled his weight against it, sitting on his rump in the snow.

know where one ends and the other begins.

WINTER

BY BRIAN A. HOPKINS & JAMES VAN PELT

Illustration By John Hanley

There came a great howl of pain from the depths of the forest.

The rope jerked him back to his feet, nearly slamming him into the pine. He dug deep into the snow with his reindeer boots and braced himself. The rope strummed in the December wind like a harp string, a single chord lost amid the guttural howls rising from the cedars. Zach had his feet under him now. More importantly, he had the leverage of pain on his side. He hauled on the rope and it gave ground, retreating from the forest. From up and down the tree line came commiserating howls, their eerie echoes overlapping.

Arm over arm, Zach dragged the rope from the forest.

The wolf exploded from the shadows, snarling and snapping at the hooks in its jaw. It was a large male. A hundred and eighty pounds against Zach's one fifty on the rope. Timber gray shot with white, with eyes darker than midnight. Blood decorated the pristine snow as the wolf struggled to retreat back into the forest. Gouging the snow with frantic feet, it fought the rope for a minute, while Zach hauled it further and further from its anxious brethren. Then the animal realized its plight. It turned and charged the length of the rope, launching itself at Zach.

Zach lunged for the rifle, but the wolf was on him too quickly. Its greater weight drove him into the snow. Teeth snapped for Zach's jugular, but were hampered by the treble-hooks set deep in jaw and snout. One of the hooks caught the sleeve of Zach's parka. The wolf shook its head madly, jerking the man about on the ground, blinding him in a flurry of snow. Zach was disoriented. One minute he was looking at the overcast sky. The next his face was plowing up snow. He managed to struggle to his hands and knees, with the wolf temporarily beneath him, but the wolf twisted and snapped. Only Zach's quick reflexes saved his nose. As it was, the wolf's jaws closed on Zach's parka hood and the young man's neck was almost snapped as it shook him again, more fiercely than before.

Nearly wrenching his shoulder from the socket, Zach slipped free of the shredding garment and dived for the rifle. He was rolling and bringing it up when the wolf launched itself at him again. The wolf came down on the end of the barrel just as Zach pulled the trigger. The gun boomed, an ineffectual sound in the cold.

The wolf's weight bore Zach to the ground, rifle pressed uselessly against him. The jaws of the beast settled wetly against Zach's cheek, its breath rank in his nostrils. Zach lay beneath the animal and felt it struggling to breathe, felt a flood of warmth as it bled into the folds of his wool sweater. Red bubbles blossomed from its nostrils and burst just inches from Zach's eyes. One. Two. Three. And then no more.

Zach trembled, afraid to move. One of the hooks had grazed his cheek and the wound stung mercilessly. The wolf's black eye stared vacantly, only an inch away. The carrion smell of its final breath lingered in the air. From deep in the forest, the pack's lamenting howls swirled like a wind.

Finally, he shoved the carcass off his chest and sat up. A fantail of red decorated the snow. The bullet had entered low on the neck and exited just above the shoulder, shattering the wolf's backbone. Zach glanced up. Three wolves stepped out of the shadows to glower at him, their heads low, ears back. One was huge and all black, much larger than the dead one at his feet, easily over 250 pounds, a piece of forest shadow with gleaming eyes. Shocked, Zach did nothing for a moment. One never *saw* a wolf. That's why he hunted with the baited hook. They ruled the forest, but they were part of it too, blending so well that men only glimpsed them from the corners of their eyes, or saw hazy forms at the edges of the woods at dusk. Lucia hadn't seen the wolf that had attacked her.

Her arms were full of firewood, and she was nearly to the porch when she'd been hit low in the back. She screamed, and Zach was to her in an instant.

"I had a spasm," she said, sitting on the frozen ground, her pale face peeking out from the dark, fur-fringed hood. The firewood lay scattered around her. When she reached to touch her back, her hand came away covered with blood.

"It's not a wolf bite," she said later as he bathed her back. The ragged punctures filled sluggishly with blood, and the water turned

pink as he squeezed the rag in it. Already the skin around the bite had bruised into dark purples.

"Of course not," Zach replied. He lathered the rag in soap and washed the wounds again. Lucia shivered beneath his touch, her eyes shut against the sting. She'd pulled her sweater up under her armpits, and her trousers were pushed low on her hips so that he could cleanse the area. The air in their cabin was cold, the tiny cooking fire in the stove giving off barely enough heat to warm the pot of water.

"It must have been a bear," she said. "The cold drove it crazy. This endless winter makes animals insane."

Zach patted the bite area dry with a clean cloth. It came away spotted. "A bear. I think you're right," he said, trying to keep the lie out of his voice. The weight of the impending grief pulled down his face, and he wanted to melt into the floor. But she wasn't gone yet. She still stood in the room with him, the small of her back quivering under his touch. He soaked the cloth in alcohol. "This is going to hurt, but we've got to sterilize the area as much as possible. We've got to kill anything that might have gotten into the wound. An animal's mouth—you never know what they might have in their mouth."

Lucia nodded without opening her eyes. "I'll love you forever." She flinched against the press of the cloth. "I promised I'd love you forever. It has to have been a bear."

"Yes, dear, a bear." He put the damp rag against her back, and for a second she struggled against crying out, then lost. It was a tiny scream, really, hardly anything at all. It didn't compare to the howls late that night that woke Zach from his sleep, that filled the cabin as he frantically lit a lamp.

Her tiny scream didn't compare at all to the howls of the wolf that the flickering lamp revealed crouched at the foot of their bed. He glimpsed it for only an instant, a sleek animal with mostly gray fur, except for its feet and snout which were charcoal black. The change, when it came upon her, must have been sudden. No crying out. No thrashing in the bed. One moment he was asleep with his wife beside him, and the next a desperate animal filled his cabin with its animal voice. The wolf looked at him with Lucia's eyes, never once ceasing its dismal moan, and then it sprang through the window, shattering the glass and letting the bitter winter air into the room.

The real grief came then, like sluggish smoke, but he couldn't cry because he'd been stopping the tears since he'd seen the bite mark in her back. Held back for so long, they wouldn't come easily. Later, when the Sun rose and snow piled on the floor below the window, he began to cry. The tears froze on his face.

She had promised that she'd love him forever, and he had promised the same.

None of the wolves facing Zach was marked like Lucia. When he raised the rifle, they slipped back into the forest, and he was left with the dead male at his feet.

He set the rifle aside and drew the skinning knife from his belt. He knew he should hate the wolf. Of all the predators in the woods, the wolf was the worst. Howling at night, reminding every human that the planet was not theirs. Stealing what little livestock still remained. And, of course, their ferocious malevolence. Zach knew that the wolves on old Earth hadn't been this way. Jotunheim's wolves were something else, both more intelligent and more evil. He should hate them. But this wolf was a beautiful specimen, as splendid a beast as he'd ever encountered. Its luxurious, soft hide would fetch a handsome sum at market. Looking at the flat, lackluster surface of the wolf's eyes, however, eyes that had once glowed fiercely with life and health, Zach wondered if any credit or trade could possibly be worth the slaughter. For a moment, he felt regret, but then he thought of all those whom the wolves had taken. He thought of

Lucia. He thought of his life without her, and a cold not born of the wind set his jaw and hardened his heart.

As he tugged the wolf's hide away from its sternum and made the first cut, Zach hoped that what the old smithy had told him was true. If anyone should know, it would be Giles, the smith. Giles was the first of the second generation, born in the first month of humanity's arrival on this Godforsaken frozen rock they'd named Jotunheim after the mythological home of the Norse Frost Giants. Some said Giles's parents had been eaten by wolves or bears or some other predator that saw the colonists as just more prey. There were even those who said Giles's parents had turned into wolves. Zach did know that Giles had originally been a hunter, that he'd spent more than his share of youth in the deep snow and the forests, tracking down predators that had found openings through the fences built by first-generation colonists. Some said he searched for his parents, but none knew if he'd ever found them deep in the tangled woods. They only knew that after years in the forest, he'd finally come back to town to learn smithing, and he hadn't left since.

The fences were mostly gone now, torn apart by the winter storms, fiercer than any weather the colonists had predicted or imagined. Not that they'd had a choice. This frozen rock, with its eccentric axial shift and elongated elliptical orbit, was where they'd found themselves when the colony ship's core had gone into meltdown. It was put down here or die. Put down here and wait several hundred years for someone else to bring them the equipment they had lost in the crash landing. Now, without the fences, the animals went where they chose. And humanity's hold on this planet was a tenacious 306 souls. Correction: 305 since the wolves had taken Lucia.

The hide parted easily from the flesh, revealing pink meat and pale, white bone. There was very little blood now; the animal had pretty much bled out from the gunshot wound. Using the blade of the knife, Zach popped each rib free of the cartilage that held it to the sternum. Beneath the ribs and the red meat lay fallow lungs and the heart.

It was the heart that he was after.

He forced both hands and the knife into the cavity, the cartilage-capped ends of the ravaged ribs gouging his wrists. Pushing aside the lungs, he found the heavily muscled heart and half tore, half cut it from the gaping chest of the wolf. He raised the dripping red mass before his face and grimaced at it. The organ steamed in the bitter air. Warm blood trickled down his wrists. He could smell it, a salty copper wisp in his nostrils. He remembered the blood oozing from the puncture marks in Lucia's back, the smell of her blood on the cloth.

Giles had said the first generation had learned two ways to become a wolf. Lucia had suffered the first method, the common one.

Zach brought the heart to his mouth and bit.

"If you eat the fresh heart of the wolf," Giles had whispered, "you will become ... wolf. There's no science in it. The first ones didn't believe it either—it was too much like an Earth superstition—but Jotunheim's a different world. It's not Earth. Earth's rules don't apply."

"But are you still human?" Zach had asked. He thought of Lucia bound in the wolf's body. She had fled the cabin. Long hours he'd spent calling for her at the edge of the forest, but she'd never come.

Giles had looked haunted. "There's the rub, boy."

The heart was very tough. Nothing but heavy, corded, muscle tissue. For years it had pumped life through the powerful body of the wolf. It took Zach nearly 30 minutes to tear it apart, piece by piece, and get it down. Much of it he simply swallowed without chewing, fighting back his nausea. Blood ran down his chin, clotted in the back of his throat. Afterward, he waited, the wind and the wolves howling, the cold seeping through his reindeer boots and his blood-soaked wool sweater.

Somewhere back in the trees, he hoped a gray wolf with black paws and snout waited, too much wolf to come out, but not wholly unhuman ... still Lucia.

He tried to howl like the wolves, but his cry, though as sad and plaintive as the true calls from the forest, was a bitter mockery. He sniffed at the dead wolf, licked at the blood on his hands, growled

and scratched at the snow, and thought, over and over, "Wolf. Wolf. Wolf. Wolf. Wolf...."

Nothing happened.

An hour later, chilled to the heart of him, he collected his things and walked toward town, leaving the carcass and its valuable hide in the snow.

GILES DIDN'T ASK HIM ABOUT THE TORN COAT AND THE BLOODIED sweater. After snapping a glance up and down the darkening street, then closing the door, the old man scooped a mug of cider from a pot over the stove, poured a generous portion of rum into the hot liquid, and set it on the table before Zach.

"Nobody saw you, did they?"

"I don't think so. It was getting dark." After the long walk, it was all Zach could do to stay standing. His legs trembled, and the raw meal sat in his gut like a lead ball. He collapsed into a chair and studied the cider as if it might portend some resolution to the evening's madness.

"Where's the line and the hooks?" Giles asked. Firelight glimmered off the carbon imbedded in his knuckles. The dark gleam from his hands matched the black of the huge hammer standing on its head in the middle of the table. As a boy, Zach had watched him swing that hammer for hours on end, shaping a rod of glowing metal, the hammer an extension of the smith's tireless arm.

Giles's face was lined, his thin hair was white, and there was a bend to his back, but the hands still looked strong. They were a working man's hands. In the darkness in the back of the shop, behind a half-wall, a table of hot coals glowed dully beyond the firelight, casting monstrous shadows on the wall behind the drill press and lathe. Blackened metal bars, most twisted into odd, somehow carnal shapes, dangled from hooks in the roof beams.

Zach drank long from the cider, letting the laced drink wash down his throat and burn in his stomach before shaking his head. "I left them at the edge of the forest. We can get them in the morning."

Giles growled. "None of it will be there in the morning. Carcass will be gone. Rope will be gone. There are things in the forest none of us has seen yet."

Zach swallowed twice more before answering. He could still feel the weight of the dead animal on his chest, the feel of the dead muscle in his mouth. "How do you know I killed it?"

Giles pushed away from the table. "You're here, son. Either you eat the wolf, or the wolf eats you."

Outside, the wind picked up. Dusk had faded into night. Giles pulled a lever beneath the lone window sill to close the heavy, exterior shutter. With a start, Zach remembered doing the same thing the night Lucia had changed. She must have known, he thought. The shutter had been closed when they went to bed, but the wolf broke through the window cleanly to run away.

He eyed the closed shutter and trembled. He felt trapped suddenly. He resisted the urge to push Giles aside. He would have to open it when the old man went to sleep. "How long do I have ... you know ... before it happens?" Now that he'd taken the step, Zach wanted the trip to be over. Somewhere in the woods, Lucia waited for him. He knew it. He knew it like he knew that the eyes he felt from the trees since she'd left were hers. She waited for him, her love reaching across the chasm of species. The body might change; the life might change, but the love stood unweathered within him. It must be that way for her too. He clenched his hands on his legs, willing the wolf to come.

Reaching for a book on a shelf above the door, Giles said, "Can't really say." He opened the text to a well-marked page. "The first-generation scientists studied it best they could, but they didn't have the right equipment. Most of the really high-tech stuff was lost in the crash. There's things in here about DNA migration and cellular transpositions, but I don't know. Who understands any of this science anymore?"

He continued to talk, reading long sections from the text, but Zach couldn't follow what Giles was saying. A hard wind screamed around the corners of the shop, and in it Zach heard howls. Snow hissed against the door like dry sand. A week ago, he and Lucia had

huddled beneath a mountain of quilts, listening to the same wind, the same cold beating of wind-blown snow against their cabin, and they'd burrowed deeper, giggling at the forces thrown against them, two against the world, and it had been enough.

Giles said, "Could happen right now, as we're sitting here. Could take a month. Maybe it will never happen. Depends how much wolf you were before you started." The old man stared intently at him, and Zach resisted an urge to turn away. Did he look different? Had the change already begun inside him, waiting only for the outer shell, the human one, to fall away? "How do you feel?" asked Giles.

"Like nothing; I feel nothing." He smiled because it was true: He felt nothing. For the first time since Lucia had fled their cabin, the grief was gone, and instead he felt ... he felt ... eager. Yes, eager, and a bit frenzied.

Something scratched at the door.

Zach looked to Giles and saw by the man's expression that he had heard it, too.

There came the sound of more scratching and a couple of low growls.

"You were followed," Giles whispered.

"The wolves ..." Zach moaned, and he had to grip the edge of the table to keep from running to the door and flinging it open. They'd come for him. He was becoming one of them. He could feel it. He opened his mouth, but caught himself just before giving voice to one of their long mournful howls.

Giles hissed, "You oaf. Those aren't wolves." The growls from outside were suddenly punctuated with a deep, bass bark. "A hunter's hounds have picked up your scent."

Someone knocked on the door.

Zach's heart froze. "Don't answer it."

Giles glared at him. "You can't lock a man outside during a Jotunheim night, Zachary. You know that."

"But—"

Giles was already to the door, reaching for the latch. The hounds must have heard his approach, for they barked encouragement. Zach trembled. He fought the sudden desire to drop to all fours and flee to the room's darkest corner where he'd have his back against the wall.

The figure that filled the doorway appeared more animal than man, a great shaggy beast covered head to toe in thick, multihued fur from which peered eyes darker than the winter storm gusting past his broad shoulders. The cold wind tossed long, unkempt strands of silver hair about his parka-shrouded face. He was carrying a short-barreled rifle, the kind a hunter would use for work at close range, like in the depths of a forest. The weapon wasn't exactly aimed into the room, but it was carried such that, with only a minute shifting of position, it would be. Three hounds crowded past the stranger's legs, their drooling muzzles extending into the smithy, their eyes rimmed with red and their nostrils flaring. They were tall and shaggy, their lean bodies and long legs bred specifically for hunting in deep snow. Their teeth were an unhealthy yellow and their gums were black. All three growled softly.

Zach glanced toward where his own rifle leaned, against the wall just inside the door, well out of reach.

"Greetings," said the hunter, pulling the hood back from his swarthy face. He'd seen his share of hard winters outdoors. At some point, frostbite had taken most of his nose. When the wind blew the hair back from his ears, Zach saw that they were little more than shriveled flaps of skin, like dried fruit gone black in the Sun. "Mind if I come in?"

"A warm fire and some cider is all I have to offer," Giles replied without stepping back to let the hunter inside. "There's an inn just six doors down. I'm sure you'd be more comfortable there."

The hunter gave Giles a mostly toothless grin and indicated his dogs. "To tell the truth, it's the dogs I'm worried about. Their feet are so cold, they can barely walk. Best I'd get at the inn would be the chance to get them in out of the weather in the stable with the other animals." He glanced meaningfully past Giles's shoulder to the opulent warmth rising from the hearth in the back room. "No better place to warm them than at a smith's fire." He shifted the rifle in a

gesture intended to make it less threatening, but Zach suspected he was merely positioning the butt where it could be brought up under Giles's jaw.

Reluctantly, Giles stepped back from the door. "Come and warm yourselves, then. I am Giles. My guest is young Zachary from one of the farms along Cooper's Creek."

"Thank you," said the hunter as he crossed the threshold. "I am Brumley." With a population as small as Jotunheim's, nearly everyone knew everyone else. Brumley was legend, a man who appeared infrequently, accompanied by a smell of death that the colonists preferred over their fear of Jotunheim's beasts. The dogs flowed in around Brumley, fanning out as if to cover the room. The eyes of all three animals, however, were focused on Zach. He stared back, something ancient within him whispering that it would be unwise not to meet their gaze.

With the door closed to the wind and the snow, Giles brought the hunter a mug of cider and indicated that he should sit at the table. "Send your dogs into the back," bid the smithy.

But to reach the back room, the dogs would have to pass the table where Zach sat. The hounds remained near the front of the main room, their red-rimmed eyes fixated on Zach, their lips drawn back in silent hatred, growls like distant thunder slipping through their teeth.

The hunter's dark eyes studied the boy while Giles joked about animals being cantankerous and unpredictable. His commentary trailed off when it became obvious no one was listening. Zach noted that the hunter had yet to set aside his rifle. For a long minute, the tableau held, no one breaking the silence until a log popped loudly in the fire, causing Giles to jump and spill hot cider on his hand.

"Damn this weather!" yelled the smith. "Sets everyone on edge. Leave the dogs here if they won't leave your side."

Brumley gestured at the hounds, which flinched when he raised his hand. Two retreated to a corner. The third stretched on the floor beneath Brumley's chair.

"It's not that," confessed the hunter. He was talking to Giles, but he was staring at Zach. "A blood trail led me here." He showed his few remaining teeth to Zach in a grin that closely resembled those of the hounds. "The dogs hate the animal that made that trail." He shifted his rifle and the barrel was clearly pointed at Zach this time. "Step out of the shadows, boy, and let me see that stain on your sweater."

Giles stepped forward to intervene. He reached out as if to touch the hunter's arm, but at the last minute thought better of it and snatched back his hand. "I've let you into my home. Is it too much to ask that you not accost my other guest?"

"That depends," hissed the hunter, "on what kind of guest you keep. My dogs say this one reeks of wolves."

"Naturally," Giles retorted, "since he just this evening took revenge on the wolf that killed his young wife!"

"I heard that story. I also heard he let her go through the change. That true, boy? Didn't have the kindness to give her a human death, did you?"

Zach came out of his chair in anger. He pictured the big man's throat opening beneath his teeth. The image startled him. Brumley grabbed Zach's coat sleeve before the boy could do anything. Burying his nose in the sleeve, the hunter inhaled deeply. "This is good, farmer. It's wolf blood here. And fresh!"

Brumley pushed the sleeve past Zach's elbow, looking first at the unbroken skin of his forearm, then turning the wrist up to see the other side. "You know, a desperate young man, a very foolish young man, might let a wolf bite him, thinking that he'd join his bride in the forest. It'd be a dangerous game. You'd have to hope the wolf wouldn't kill you first. You'd have to hope that you could kill it in time." The hunter pulled Zach close. "Oh, and the irony: Becoming a wolf would destroy the human in him. All would be for nothing."

Brumley ran his hand up Zach's unbroken skin. "Where's the hide?"

Zach yanked his arm away. "I left it in the snow." He remembered the wolf, its chest wide open, with steam tendrils waving above it. Giles caught Zach's eye and mouthed the word "Revenge."

Zach said, "I had no interest in keeping it. I only wanted the wolf dead." He cast about in his mind for a way to get the hunter to leave.

Brumley grunted. "Revenge is a strong motivator. I understand the hunting blood. Was the wolf all black, farmer? Was it a black beast?" Brumley leaned across the table. Zach could smell him. It was the odor of deep forest and old kills, and oddly, disturbingly, Zach could tell where the smells were coming from off the hunter. The man's coat had its own multilayered reek, and it was different than his hands, which smelled of gun oil and dog, and this was distinct from the man's breath. Zach shook his head to clear his nose.

The hound under Brumley's chair growled at Zach, while the two lying in the corner just stared at him, their lips parted so their teeth caught the fire's sullen light in a dull, yellow gleam.

In his stomach, Zach felt the weight of the wolf's heart shift. It felt as if the mass had grown since he'd eaten it. He pictured the wolf's heart sending out tentacles into the tissue around it, injecting the agents of transformation within him.

Desperate, Zach glanced at Giles, but the smith returned the look blankly. Brumley still leaned toward him, waiting for an answer.

"I did see a black wolf, Brumley. It came to the edge of the forest with two others after I killed the one I'd hooked. It ran before I could shoot it."

Beneath the chair, the hound growled louder. Zach's left leg cramped suddenly, the muscle tightening. He imagined that cells within were marching into new formations, that his body was beginning to change.

Brumley backhanded the hound's head, snapping his knuckles against its skull, silencing the growl in an instant. "Where did you kill your wolf, farmer? How far away is this place where you saw the black wolf?"

"Not far. I'm sure he's still there." Zach closed his eyes. His eagerness to push the hunter out of the shop seemed patently obvious, even to himself. No one braved Jotunheim at night. No human could elude the beasts of Jotunheim in the dark, not even the legendary Brumley.

Giles cleared his throat. "Why the interest in this one wolf, Brumley?"

Brumley turned his attention away from Zach for a moment, and Zach dropped back into his seat, letting a breath escape in relief. The hunter's inspection was too deep, too knowing. When the man looked at him, Zach felt dissected, as if his chest, like the wolf's in the snow, was open for inspection.

Sighing deeply, and relaxing for the first time since he'd come into the room, Brumley sagged back into his chair. "Do you know anything of hate, Giles? When you're pounding on red hot metal to make replacement parts for the machines we can no longer duplicate, do you ever hate? I have pursued that wolf for 20 years." He took a long drink of cider, then let his chin fall into his coat, hiding his mouth, leaving only his ruined nose and penetrating eyes uncovered.

"I lost my family to Jotunheim," said Giles.

"My father became a great, black wolf, and he, in turn, took my entire household," said Brumley. The hunter gazed into the depths of his cider, lost in a long-ago moment. He said distantly, more to himself than to Giles, "I'll mount his head above my fireplace. I'll clean my boots on his fur."

Zach swallowed hard. His throat hurt. His teeth ached. Under his hands, his legs shook. If he stood, he was afraid he might collapse, but the shutters were closed. The hounds lay between him and the door. Risking it all, he forced himself out of the chair and walked to the window. "Maybe your father wanted his family with him. Maybe he loved them too much to be without them."

Brumley snarled, slamming his cup on the table. Giles' hammer bounced at the blow, the handle quivering for a second. "What do you know about love, boy? He didn't turn them into wolves. He killed them! I buried them all in the snow. A wolf is not a human, and the black wolf is not my father!"

Zach leaned on the lever, opening the shutters. Wind rattled the glass. "Do you know his howl?" Now that the shutter was open, the long, mournful call of the wolves sounded much clearer. "I think I hear Lucia sometimes in the wind." He was standing with his back to the room, but Brumley and Giles's reflections were clear in the glass. The dogs followed his every movement, their ears back, necks tense.

"She died a week ago, boy. All you hear is a wolf," said Brumley.

Zach gripped the windowsill. His eyes ached. All sounds were too loud: the breathing of the hounds, the crackle of the fire, the entangled harmonics of howls beyond the window. Zach realized that it was too late. He was changing. His muscles locked. Everywhere within him, tiny fingers contracted, and he fell to the floor, facing the men at the table and the hounds. A whine rose in the back of his throat, but he didn't think it made it out. Skin and capillaries, bone and blood, hair and organs flowed within him agonizingly.

Snarling, the hounds scrambled to their feet. Brumley looked at Zach, a sudden understanding etched on his face. His chair clattered to the floor as he surged up. "My God!" he bellowed, "the boy's—" He didn't finish his sentence. There was little time to waste on stating the obvious. He was already raising his rifle. Giles reached for his hammer.

Then things became very fluid.

All was motion: within, without. Brumley pivoted the gun around an inch at a time, as if he were hauling the gun's barrel through sluggish space. Zach's knee joints dislocated and reformed. The hounds advanced a step. Zach's jaw popped down and out. His tongue draped over strangely shaped teeth. And Giles swung his hammer, an underhanded motion.

Brumley's finger tightened on the trigger, his knuckle whitening.

Zach's bones relocated in complicated ways, thinning in places, reforming, dragging muscles into new alignments, anchoring them with ligaments and cartilage, and his skin burned in change, hair bursting through thousands of pores.

Slowly, it seemed, Giles's hammer caught the underside of Brumley's rifle, knocking the barrel up. An explosion, and the shot disappeared harmlessly into the ceiling. Then Giles was on the hunter, wrestling him to the floor, the two men struggling for control of the rifle and the hammer.

Zach kicked his clothes-encumbered legs. As the hounds crept closer, he shook himself free. The part of him that was still Zach marveled at the power in his own legs and the roll of muscle through his shoulders. He could kill one of these hounds. He knew he could. The knowledge came unbidden.

Brumley succeeded in freeing the butt of his rifle and managed to use it to strike Giles several times about the head and shoulders. The hunter rolled away, trying to get his feet under him, trying to bring the rifle back to bear. Giles gasped, "Run, Zach! Get away! Go to her!" while Brumley bellowed at his hounds to attack.

It wasn't until he'd ripped an ear from the nearest hound's head that Zach truly believed what he'd become. The blood in his mouth, the sound of his own teeth snapping through the hound's flesh, the heightened senses, his four feet on the ground ... it all came crashing in on him.

He'd truly become a wolf.

The first hound yelped and danced back, but the second dove low, trying to lock its vice-like jaws around one of Zach's forelegs. Instinct took over. Zach feinted left, while his teeth raked open a deep furrow on the hound's skull. The hound stumbled past and Zach used its clumsy body as a stepping stone, propelling himself up and through the window. Behind him, the hunter jacked another round into his rifle and fired. The bullet whined past Zach's ear, clipping and shattering a piece of window glass.

Snow crunched under his paws for the first time, but it felt familiar. The air was filled with new/old smells: a dozen kinds of trees, a distant creek, frozen moss, snow-heavy clouds. And animals: a muskiness of bear, a hint of squirrel, a feather of bird, and, of course, the wolves. Ears back, Zach ran, the cold wind a gentle kiss in his eyes, the taste and smell of Jotunheim—a different Jotunheim than

Continued on page 79

From Greg and Tim's *Urshurak*, a swordsman approaches across a mystical landscape. INSET, RIGHT: The cover of Greg and Tim's *Atlantis* Calendar, 1980.

A VISIT



From Tolkien to Star Wars

and everywhere

in between...

WITH THE

BROTHERS HILDEBRANDT



A long time ago in a galaxy named Detroit, identical twin sons were born—in 1939—to George and Germaine Hildebrandt. By age two, Tim and Greg were already crayon connoisseurs: Greg says that the red ones tasted best but Tim liked the blue ones better. When they weren't eating their tools they were using them to trace the great comic

strips and books of the era. One day, Mama Hildebrandt said, "Enough. Stop tracing. Start drawing."

Aided and abetted by their parents, the boys gobbled up art, Fantasy, and music. They read their way from Pellucidar to Mars, and fell in love with animation and puppetry. In high school, the Hildebrandt twins made 8mm Science Fiction films, constructing the models and making all the storyboards.

By the time they were 19, Tim and Greg had completed a stint in the army, attended Meinzinger School of Art in Detroit, and were employed—in animation—by Jam Handy Studios, a major film-production company.

Over the next few years they moved from their native Detroit to the East Coast, worked as filmmakers and children's book illustrators, did advertising art, and each got married.

In 1975 they were swept up in Hobbit fever when they saw the J.R.R. Tolkien Calendar, submitted samples of their work to Ballantine Books, and got a contract for the next calendar. Not only did their style lend itself perfectly to the subject, but their ability to work in shifts made them a powerhouse artistic team able to leap tight deadlines in a single bound.

BY KAREN HABER



ABOVE: From the classic Tolkien illustrations, King Theodon and Wormtongue by both brothers. RIGHT: *The Ring of Galdriel* by Greg.

The late Judy Lynn Del Rey dubbed them the "Brothers Hildebrandt," their Tolkien calendars sold out, and fans of fantastic art took notice of the dynamic Hildebrandt duo. They began to illustrate the covers of Fantasy novels that were written in the Tolkien vein, and this led to their interest in creating their own Tolkienesque saga, *Ushurak*, co-written with their friend Jerry Nichols.

Then came *Star Wars*. Or, rather, the *Star Wars* poster. The rest is movie/publishing/comic book/advertising art history. From the day that the art for the first *Star*

Wars movie poster left their studio they have been an inextricable part of the *Star Wars* universe.

Regardless of the subject matter, the Hildebrandts are celebrated for their joyous use of color, light, and composition. They work long hours—often seven days a week—in the same studio, often working on the same painting: Each brother takes a corner and they meet in the middle. There's always music playing in the background: jazz, rock, or classical, depending upon which brother gets to the radio dial first.

Among the many honors they've received are the Gold Medal from the Society of Illustrators, numerous illustration awards, both together and individually, and accolades from an army of fans. Their work has appeared in many formats: cover art, internal illustration, advertising, calendars, games, plates, cards, posters, movie preproduction drawings, and so forth. The twins keep a busy schedule of public appearances, and their work is carried in many galleries including Every Picture Tells a Story in Los Angeles and the Elizabeth Stone Gallery in



Birmingham, Michigan. Recently they created a Web site, www.spiderwebart.com, which not only features their own work but that of other artists as well.

Among their most recent projects are *Superman and the Last Goddess of Krypton* for DC Comics, *Star Wars: Episode One—Great Flap Book*, for Random House, and the Emerald Seven comic strip series for Frank Frazetta's *Fantasy Illustrated* magazine.

Genial, lively, enthusiastic, good natured, Tim and Greg sound like two big kids—and they say that they feel like it. And, of course,

they sound exactly the same. As we spoke, they were hard at work in their shared studio, finishing the sketches for a Superman graphic novel for DC Comics.

ROF: Obviously you work well together. But how do you handle artistic differences?

TIM: We don't differ artistically. But we are individuals and have individual differences.

ROF: What are the challenges of painting an icon like Superman?

GREG: We feel total responsibility and awe—you come to it with a sense of all the history behind it. Our earliest recollections of reading comics were when our grandfather used to read the Sunday funnies to us: Prince Valiant—and, of course, Superman.

TIM: We used to copy comics, used to copy comic book comics. I think it's a good way for kids to get started in illustration.

GREG: One of our first recollections is of drawing Superman—busting out of chains.

ROF: How do you feel when fans come up to you? Or when you realize that other artists are using your work as a benchmark?

GREG: I still feel like a kid on the east side of Detroit—trying to figure it out every day. Whatever's in front of me, it's not good enough, it's not right yet.

TIM: We're still in awe of the people we grew up with: N.C. Wyeth, Hal Foster, Howard Pyle—we're comparing ourselves with them. So when people come up to us and tell us they're our fans, it's kind of amazing.

GREG: You've got to be in the moment. We don't dwell on the achievements—we're interested in what's happening right now.

TIM: Besides, I always look at what I could have done better.

GREG: Yeah. You have to be your own worst critic in order to be a successful illustrator.

ROF: How did you decide on the right look for Superman?

GREG: We went to a gym and found models. A neighbor posed for Lex Luthor after I saw his bald head shining in the sunlight and called, "Hey, Lex!" And, of course, there's the influence of those great Max Fleischer drawings.

TIM: Nobody said, "You have to make it look a certain way." So we were free to bring our own interpretation to the thing. There's a sense that you're making it yours.

GREG: I've been waiting to do this all my life.

TIM: It's funny with us and comics. Some artists get into comics early and then get into painting later. We're just the opposite. Now, finally, we're working on comics.

ROF: What's next after Superman?

GREG: Batman, and then Wonder Woman. Those were the big three in our childhood.

ROF: What can you tell us about The Emerald Seven?

TIM: We were asked to work on an ongoing story for Frank Frazetta's *Fantasy Illustrated* magazine. So we sort of crossed *Captain Blood* with *The Fifth Element*.

GREG: We got my son, Greg, Jr., who's a writer, involved, helping us to spitball the plot. We'd already designed characters and a world, but we had to decide what we were going to do with it all, and fast. We were in a mad rush to finish the first 10 pages and



then had to make up the next 10 pages and make sure that they justified the previous 10. And so on. It was kind of like the old serials: making it up as we went along. It came to 48 pages, all told. We're thinking about publishing it as a collection.

ROF: You've got quite a few book projects in the works, haven't you?

TIM: We're all over the place. We don't like to be pigeonholed. But among the book projects we've got percolating are how-to books on art technique, Tolkien artwork, and a general retrospective.

ROF: And what about *Star Wars*?

TIM: We were invited out to Skywalker Ranch and saw a presentation on the unfinished movie, rough footage, models, and 10 minutes of composite footage. Incredible.

GREG: This movie is going to knock your socks off. They've got unbelievable special-effects technology, and they make the entire thing look like a different era from the other movies. It's amazing.

ROF: How did you get involved with *Star Wars* originally?

GREG: We got a last-minute call from the John & Murray advertising agency—George Lucas didn't like the original posters that had



ABOVE: Watch where you're pointing that thing! A dragon from Greg's *The Story of Perseus*. RIGHT: Superman, Lois, and Jimmy are all onboard for *The Last Goddess of Krypton*.

GREG HILDEBRANDT

YOU WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT WHAT YOU'RE DOING IS CLEAR AND UNDERSTOOD.

been done for *Star Wars*—and we were given a few photos of Darth Vader and Luke and Princess Leia.

TIM: We literally did it overnight, in shifts, taking turns sleeping and painting. When we walked in with it the next day they didn't believe it.

ROF: Were you asked to make any changes?

GREG: We were asked to put a slit in Princess Leia's skirt to make it look more pulpy.

TIM: We were the ones who suggested that the robots be included in the poster.

GREG: Of course, nobody knew how big *Star Wars* was going to be.

TIM: We got swept up into the tidal wave—it was a wild ride.

GREG: We had just done the Tolkien calendar, and *Star Wars* came after that, and it was like, wow!

TIM: When the fan letters started coming in with the Tolkien calendar, we were floored. We never expected anything like that. We'd never had that experience before.

GREG: We're eternally grateful to the fans. Neither one of us would be where he is, doing what he's doing, without them.

TIM: What's terrific is to see the gamut of fans: anywhere from four years old to 90. Imagination cuts across all boundary lines.

ROF: Back in the 'eighties you two separated for a while. How did you come apart, and how did you get back together?

TIM: We just wanted to see how we functioned as individuals. And then it was time to get back together.

GREG: Well, Tim was behind on a project—

TIM: Actually, it was Greg. He was working on two fairy-tale books, and I visited him—

GREG:—and I was pulling out my hair because the damned things were due in three days. So I asked Tim for help—

TIM:—and I said "Sure," and rolled up my sleeves. And then, ironically, I was in the same boat and Greg pitched in. So then we said, "I guess we're working together again."

ROF: Considering all that you've accomplished, what are your future goals?

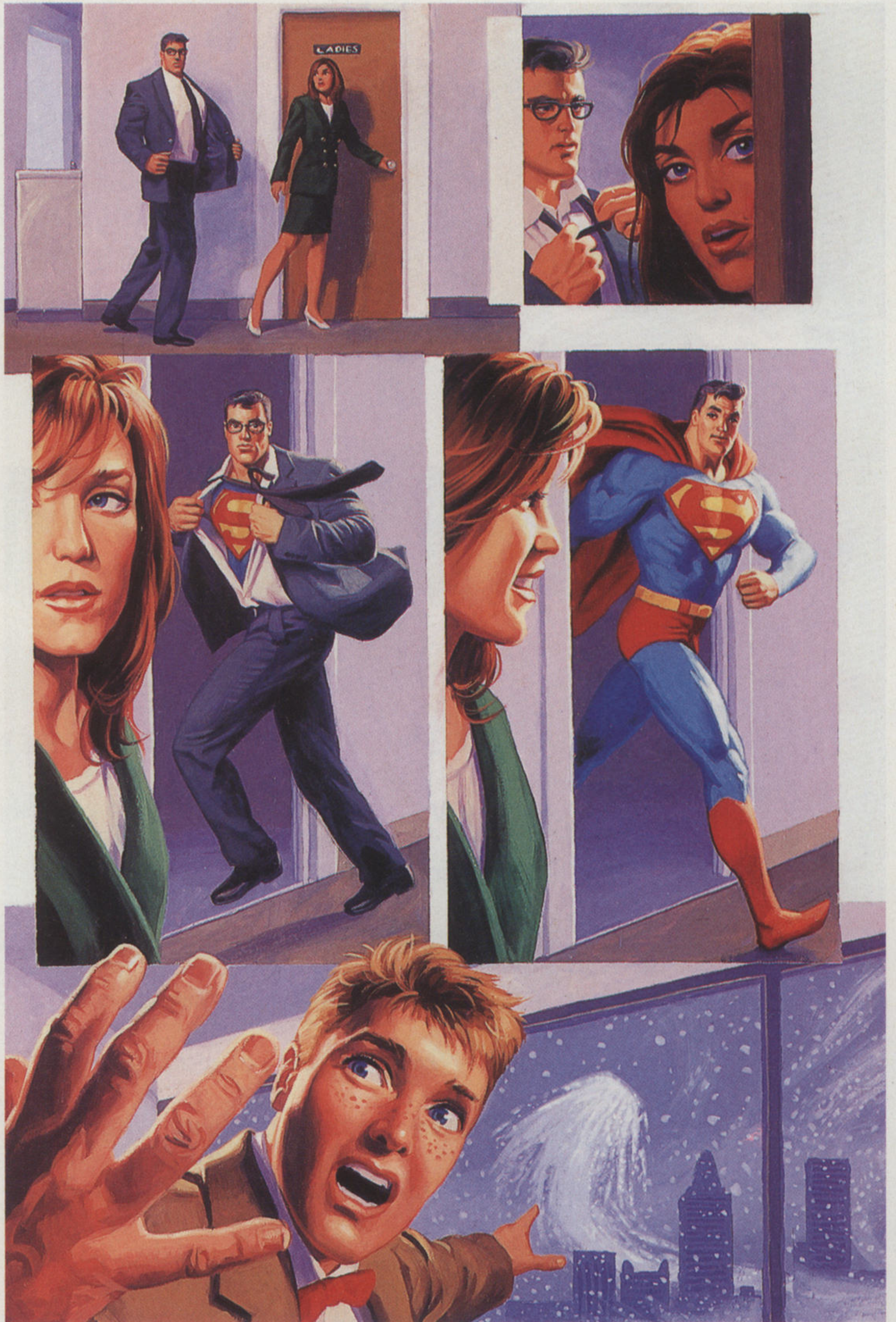
GREG: Animation.

TIM: Feature animation—both digital and hand drawn. After all, animation is where we started.

GREG: We loved *A Bug's Life*, and *Toy Story*. Incredible. Of course, I don't even know how to turn on a computer.

ROF: What's your artistic philosophy?

GREG: You want to make sure that what you're doing is clear and understood. To me, the audience is the other half of the damn



picture. I want them to be knocked out by what we do.

TIM: We're into very direct communication. That's probably why I stayed away from abstract art although I have nothing against it. But I don't want the audience to have to interpret.

ROF: Any advice for young artists?

BOTH: Learn the computer.

GREG: Don't give up. Don't give in to your internal critic. Accept that you have it and use it to push yourself. Keep moving ahead. Little by little you'll gather the information.

TIM: People say you're born with the talent. I don't know about that. What I think is that you're born with a determination, a drive that compels you to do this thing.

GREG: You've got to be kind of crazy. Really, you've got to be kind of nuts to stay in one room with a pencil in your hand and just work away all day, alone.

TIM: Or with your brother.

GREG: Just don't stop playing. Ever.

ROF: Any final words of wisdom?

BOTH: Don't eat your tools. ♣

Mailier

*Travel can be so broadening—new places, new sights, new friends....
It can really change your whole outlook!*

Darling Lizzie,

I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THAT I'M WRITING YOU FROM DUBLIN! AH, IRELAND, land of romance, land of mystery! You can catch a glimpse of the nut-brown Liffey flowing past the brewery at the end of our street.

Right after your father and I tucked ourselves in, the most awful screeching started up from the apartment next door. It's going on now, simply horrible—like the squealing of a truck's brakes, or a giant's fingernails dragging across a great big blackboard, or that annoying screen door on the Steinholtz's back porch that they never bother to oil. I tried to wake up your father and make him go talk to whoever it was, but he's sound asleep and snoring. So since I couldn't sleep, I decided to stay up and write you.

The plane trip went well, but it felt wonderful to get into a taxi after the airport—my feet were killing me by inches! The driver showed us a cathedral and some other buildings, but we were too tired to pay much attention. He was very good-looking, though, and I found out that he has relatives in New York that he visits from time to time. So I had to tell him a little about you, and I

By Bruce Glassco
Illustration by Tony Diterlizzi



accidentally let your phone number slip out, so don't be surprised if you get a call from Peter one day! Don't worry, he's a real gentleman. I like him almost as much as I liked Tom.

You still haven't written him, I suppose? Tom, I mean. Two husbands ago, maybe that's more than you can keep track of. He probably doesn't even know you've split up with Charlie yet. The poor man, a teacher too, all alone with no one to translate for him! But of course I'd be the last person to try to run your life for you, Lizzie. Do whatever you think is best.

All the time I keep telling your father what a pity it is that Lizzie isn't here to see all this, and he grunts, of course. That director of yours must be just dreadful not to let you have three weeks off—after all, it's only rehearsals. A once-in-a-lifetime chance to see Ireland, all expenses paid by your parents! And you're stuck in that dreary brownstone, with no one to see but those odd theater people. Not that I'm criticizing your friends, of course, dear. It's just that everyone knows opposites attract, and how are you ever going to meet your opposite if all your friends are just like you?

The people we saw were more interesting than the buildings, I thought. I was particularly fascinated by some of the young people with all the strange hair—punks, is that right? I suppose you're used to them in Manhattan, but we don't see many in Milwaukee! Some of them weren't even young anymore—I didn't realize the fad had been around so long. There was one sitting outside our apartment building who looked to be 70 or 80. I mean, he had all these piercings that were just sagging, and his purple hair had gray roots! He didn't look in very good shape when we unloaded our luggage. (Ralph said four suitcases were too many, but after all we're going to be here for a whole month.) Then when we went out for dinner, the doorman told us that the young man had died laying there, just that afternoon. Yes, right in front of our hotel! So already we're having adventures.

The noise from next door has stopped now, so I'm going to get some sleep. I'll write again tomorrow. Sweet dreams!

Love,
Your mother

Dear Lizzie,

Goodness, I've just had the most amazing adventure! Who says that Ireland is not the land of enchantment, the land of mystery, the land of twilight shadows glimmering on emerald lawns and the ruins of ancient hidden secrets! It's just like *Brigadoon*! But let me tell you everything, exactly the way it happened, and not go running on and on the way I sometimes do when I'm telling a story so that your father says "Get to the goddamned point, Abbie."

We'd had a fairly uneventful day, resting and getting over jet lag. I unpacked all the suitcases and wrote postcards to the bridge club, and your father watched rugby or snooker or one of those sports on television. As soon as we got into bed, though, that terrible screeching started again!

"Ralph!" I said to your father, "what's that horrible noise?" I said it right in his ear, because you know what he's like when he doesn't wear his hearing aids. He hardly ever wears them anymore, even when he's watching TV. He says the batteries are dead, but I give him new ones all the time, so it must be that he's too lazy to put them in.

"What noise?" said your father. So I yelled at him to put in his hearing aid so he could hear the terrible, screeching noise coming from next door, which now sounded like someone playing a catgut violin while the guts were still inside the cat. And he said, "Why should I want to listen to this horrible sound?" and I said, "Because you need to go next door and talk to them about it," and he said, "Why should I talk to them about it if I can't even hear it?" Your father can be so exasperating sometimes.

So I said, "Fine then, I'll do it. I'll just march next door and tell them that they need to stop wailing like a banshee." And your father said "Yes, dear," like he does whenever I win an argument, and then he rolled over and started snoring.

So I went into the hall and knocked on the door. And guess

what? The reason this person was wailing like a banshee? She *was* a banshee!

It took me a while to figure out. Her hair was the first odd thing. It sort of filled the whole doorway when she opened it, swirling around like Suzette's did in that dream sequence on *The Proud and the Promiscuous*. I thought maybe she had a wind machine in there behind her. And her figure! I thought all those potatoes were too starchy to give you a figure like that.

The strangest thing was, you couldn't quite tell in the light, but she almost seemed to be glowing, just a little, and hovering about half an inch above the floor. Oh, and her clothes—more like rags, really, and *definitely* out of style—they were constantly dripping water, the whole time I was there. Abbie, I said to myself, there's something odd going on here.

She looked at me with these enormous haunted eyes, and she said in the most charming little brogue, "I'm sorry, was I practicing too loud?"

I told her that some of us were trying to sleep, and she apologized and promised to stop. So I asked her what was she practicing, hog calling? and she said no, she was practicing a new wail. And somehow, right then like a bolt out of the blue I knew! She's a banshee! Because everyone knows they're the ones that wail, right?

My next thought was, Lizzie always says I'm silly to believe in ghosts and things, and what would she say if she saw me here talking to a real honest-to-goodness Irish specter! She didn't seem like a very dangerous spirit, though, standing there dripping in the hall. I wanted to ask her what it was like passing over to the other side, but that felt impolite, so I said "Wailing? That sounds fascinating!"

I think maybe she was flattered that I was so interested, because she invited me in for tea! Thinking of the story I could tell the bridge club back home, I said certainly, and I squeezed in past all the hair. The carpet squished a bit when we walked—all that water dripping from her clothes, I guess.

There were a few basic pieces of cheap furniture, but no accessories, so the whole place had a very un-lived-in feel. The only personal touch was a few of those modern music posters on the walls. What's The Cure? They certainly don't *look* like doctors.

So we sat down and she rolled out a caddie, and then she poured tea out of this dear little teakettle shaped like a frog. The tea was wonderful, except once when one of those long hairs of hers got in my cup. Also, I could smell maybe a wee nip of whiskey in it, which as you know I normally wouldn't touch, but since she was being so hospitable I thought it would be rude not to have a bit. And after our third cup, we started getting quite friendly, and she told me all about herself.

Such a sad story! Worse even than when Brandon died in that plane crash on *The Proud and Promiscuous*! She fell in love with the Lord of Cuthven back in 1272, she said, and he abandoned her, just like that fellow you were living with between Tom and Charlie—what was his name? Anyway, it was just like that, only worse because he threw her out of his castle into the bogs in the middle of winter, and she was running from wolves and fell into a pool and drowned. So she's been a banshee for ever so long, lying in the bog during the day and wandering around the countryside wailing all night. For a while she had to show up and wail right before the deaths of all of the Cuthven heirs, but the family died out in one of those nasty plagues, so from the 16th century on she's been wailing solo.

Then, about a year ago, they drained her bog to put up a nightclub! If it had been my bog I would have been upset, but she must have been getting tired of the whole Voice Sobbing in the Moonlight business. And she fell in love with the music there the first time she heard it. Gothic, she called it, and I told her I liked gothic romances, and she said well then didn't we have a lot in common?

She got tired of just listening, though, so she eavesdropped (from the actual eaves, apparently) on the young people as they were leaving. One of the young gentlemen had an audition with a club manager in Dublin, and she thought, with seven hundred years of wail-

ing experience, she should be able to get the hang of this new music of theirs. So she decided to follow this boy, just like Darren got his recording contract on *The P & P*. She dematerialized herself into the baggage compartment of the train, and then she walked up and introduced herself to this boy as bold as brass, which is something more people could get in the habit of doing, Lizzie. He was charmed, and he said his name was Snake, and he'd show her around the city. They arrived yesterday and rented the flat. Then the young man said he felt odd and needed to go out for some air, and she hadn't seen him since.

"Just like men!" I said, but she was sure he'd be back, because he'd left his posters and everything behind. You didn't learn much about men during seven hundred years in the bog, said I, and she said no, you don't learn much about people when you're wailing at them, especially when all the men who see you tend to have their horses bolt over cliffs and such. For about the first five hundred years, she was really wailing from the heart about this Lord of Cuthven or wherever, but now she was ready to start looking for someone else.

"How romantic," I said, "a five hundred-year crush. Not like some people who get married to perfectly good men and then ditch them to get married over and over again, till a body gets dizzy trying to keep track of all of this hypothetical person's ex-husbands, and who never stops long enough for any hypothetical grandchildren."

So then she wanted to know if I was married, and I said yes, in a manner of speaking, if you count a husband who hasn't touched me in an amorous mood since February 13, 1989, at 6:15 in the evening.

"Goodness me," said she, her big eyes open wide. "Sure and it sounds like we're both women wronged." I told her that I'd drink to that, and we finished off the rest of the teapot.

Oh, her name is Chiffon, like the margarine I guess. I'll try to write more tomorrow evening; the two of us are going out shopping in the afternoon. Ah, the romance of the Emerald Isle! Erin go bra, as they say over here!

Love,
Your mother

P.S. We got your postcard, but it looks as if you wrote it four months ago when you were still with Charlie, and then you forgot to mail it, and then you found it and scratched over our home address and put on our Dublin address because you didn't want to spend time writing a new postcard. Or was that just an oversight?

Only curious,
Your Mom

Dear Lizzie,

I'm afraid I made a mistake in my last letter. My new friend's name isn't Chiffon, it's Siobhan. Of all the strange ways to spell a perfectly good name! I saw her write it out: Siobhan of the Bean S dhe.

That reminds me—I've got to ask her for her recipe for Bean S dhe, and see if she'll swap it for my Three-Bean Salad. I'll be sure to send it to you, dear; I know how much you love those ethnic foods.

It took us both about half an hour this morning to get all her hair under control; she looks ever so much smaller without it streaming all over. Then we took a bus downtown. So many lovely stores here! I found the perfect pin to match that dress Tom gave you for your first anniversary—you'll see it next Christmas, dear. Siobhan spent a lot of time at the perfume counter—I guess when you spend seven hundred years lying in a bog, it's nice to smell like something other than peat for a change.

Then I helped her go shopping for clothes—something you haven't done with me for years, Lizzie. I got her some sensible blouses and skirts to replace the things she had on, which looked like about what you would expect from seven hundred years of bog water. We ended up buying everything she tried on, because

once she'd worn something for 20 seconds it was soaking wet, and how were we supposed to explain *that* to the nice lady who helped us?

Then she said she'd decided to go meet the club manager that the vanished Snake had made his appointment with, to see if he was there and maybe try to audition herself. So for that I helped her pick out a mid-length skirt to show off her legs without being too racy, and a lovely little halter top that should get the boys' attention if I'm any judge of men!

Then my poor feet started to give out—I really should see someone about them!—so we found a little Pakistani restaurant. I sneaked a towel out of the restroom and put it under Sib's chair, so her dripping wouldn't wreck the carpet.

The clothes I picked out really seemed to work on the waiter.



Siobhan spent a lot of time at the perfume counter—I guess when you spend seven hundred years lying in a bog, it's nice to smell like something other than peat for a change.

When he saw her he let loose with a perfect flood of this odd language—well, I guess it would be Pakistani, wouldn't it? And then she answered him in the same language! They talked for a bit, and then she wrote her name on her napkin and gave it to him along with our order.

"What was that all about?" I asked when he was gone.

"Oh, it was the sound of my voice he was liking, and he said he didn't usually do this, but he wanted to ask me out."

"He doesn't seem exactly your type," I said warningly, because as I've often told you, like should stay with like and all that. But Sib just shrugged and said he was cute.

"But how did you learn Pakistani?" I said.

"Oh, we're all good with languages," said she, "it comes with the job. It's a bit like speaking in tongues, you know, only you wail instead."

"Tell me about the wailing," I said. "It sounds like a fascinating career."

"That it was, for the first few centuries," said she, and I kept asking questions until she told me all about it.

It turns out that there are all sorts of different wails. There's the basic Come Hither, Come Hither, Feel My Cold Embrace My Love Wail, which she said works particularly well when you're hovering over quicksand. And the Hag Centuries Old Wail, for when she gets tired of looking 19. Then there's the Blighting Your Enemies Wail; the Chanted Loudly, Chanted Lowly Wail, and the Wail to Stampede Cattle and the Calling Fish from the Stream Wail and the Desiccation Wail and the Rocksplitter Wail and ever so many others! I wrote all the names down on another napkin.


"That sounds ever so exciting," I said when she had finished. And then I had the most splendid idea! You know how your father always tells me that I should get a hobby, because according to him I've got too much free time on my hands? Well, I said to Sib, as bold as brass or even more so, as bold as bronze, maybe, I said, "Could I learn how to do it?"

Sib thought about it for a bit, and then she said, "Well, you've got to be a woman wronged. But you'd be having plenty of that with your husband, now, wouldn't you?" And I said yes, and can you teach me a wail that would make him pay attention to me? Well she said, it didn't work on the Lord of Cuthven, who perished in fits in 1273 when he tried to kick a weasel and it sank its teeth into his ankle, but perhaps it would work for my Ralph.

Then she thought a bit more, and she said, "You aren't one of us, so you shouldn't have any trouble with The Curse."

"Curse," I said, "what Curse?" And she said "The Curse of the Bean S dhe. We're cursed that no man who hears the sound of our voice will ever make us happy. I'm afraid that must have been what happened to Snake—I frightened him away." She sniffled a little, as if she wasn't damp enough already, and I, said nonsense, you just haven't met the right man yet. That's one of those things that no one believes one's mother about until it finally happens, Lizzie.

On the way out, I heard this wailing that at first I thought was Sib practicing again, but it turned out to be an ambulance pulling up to the restaurant. I asked the maître d' what was wrong, and he said there'd been a little accident with one of the waiters back in the kitchen. But we left a good tip anyway.



ven when we could see the flames coming through the roof, we could still hear Sib singing inside, until the fire engines came and drowned her out.

This evening I went next door to visit, and Sib introduced me to Guinness. Now you know, Lizzie, I don't normally approve of beer, but Sib assured me that Guinness was something entirely different, because with all the hops and malt and so forth it's quite fortifying, like vitamins. Also she said it tasted like peat, so it reminded her of home.

After we'd each had a bottle, she taught me some warm-ups, and then she showed me how to build up a good wail. What you do is, you get a bubble of phlegm at the back of your throat, and then you sort of roll it around in different ways. That and breath control are the secrets. Then she taught me a really easy wail—the Wail to Make Your Body Transparent and Your Bones Show Through Like Glow-worms. We practiced in front of a mirror, and for the longest time I could only get my skin and the outer layer of muscle transparent, which was pretty disgusting, but at last I got all the way down to my skull, and then the rest of the skeleton. You know, I was right all along about my weight problem—I really do have large bones!

I thought about using the new wail on Ralph when I got back to my apartment, but of course he was sound asleep. And now that I think about it, perhaps this might not be the best way to get his attention? But if I concentrate, I can glow enough to write this letter by, so I'm saving electricity. Can you imagine what Evie Steinholtz and the girls back at the bridge club would say!

I'll write again soon! Love,
Your mother

My dear beloved daughter Lizzie,

We received your postcard today. I'm glad to see that you're so interested in my new friend. Just one question: When you say that her people are "yet another manifestation of the patriarchy's fear of the voice of feminine authority, and an embodiment of masculine culture's inherent subconscious self-destructive guilt over its systemic degradation of women," what does that mean, exactly?

Anyway, I don't see what you're worried about me for. I'm perfectly all right.

We called Evie Steinholtz at home because she's checking our mail, and she said I got another letter from poor Tom. I'm assuming it's like the last seven, that he still wants me to tell him where you're living. I can't bear to write him and tell him about your threat never to talk to me again if I do, so I told Evie to forward it to you. That's a bit more kindling for your fireplace, I guess.

I went with Sib yesterday to see the club manager and provide moral support, and it was a very—interesting—experience. We got Peter, the same nice taxi driver who picked us up at the airport, and when Sib read him Snake's note he knew all about the club. They were a bit rough there, he said, but good lads. The *Pig's Knuckles* was the name of the place. He let us off at the stairs in the back, and we went up to the manager's office. Sib looked just as smashing in the navy skirt as I had predicted, even sopping wet.

The manager turned out to be a large woman, covered with tattoos of skulls and snakes and other nasty things. Next to her Sib looked like a tiny speck, until she unbound her hair and got her normal size back. Then the manager told me to wait in her receptionist's office, which was really just a closet filled with three-year-old promotional fliers and moldy junk food. I cleaned up a bit while

I waited, and tried to hear Sib singing through the door. Fifteen minutes later Sib and the manager came out, and the woman had tears glistening in her eyes, and she said that Sib would be singing the next evening.

We had to take a bus back home, because our cab had gotten flattened by a truck backing up while we were inside. A pity, Peter seemed like such a nice young man! I guess now he won't be calling you in New York after all.

That night while I was bathing my tortured feet, Sib taught me how to do the Wail That Walks Unseen. That was a disappointment as far as your father was concerned, though. He didn't even notice when his midnight snack came to the bed hovering four feet up in the air! At least, there wasn't any difference in the way he treated me.

I need to go back to Sib's apartment soon with some disinfectant. That water that she constantly keeps dripping is starting to mildew the carpet, and we can smell it from here.

Take care, Lizzie. I know you miss us just as much as we miss you!
Love,
Your mother

Dear Lizzie,

Well, the concert was a disaster. Literally. If you've ever thought about going to a place like this, Lizzie, my advice is, don't. And don't roll your eyes and say "MO—THER!" at me. I've been there, and I know.

We hadn't seen the dance area of the *Pig's Knuckles* the first time, so I thought it would be like the disco on *The Proud and the Promiscuous*, but I was wrong. Not a single mirrored ball or neon sign in sight! Actually, it was too dark to see much of anything. And such a funny smell! Lots of beer, and some kind of burning plastic scent that I couldn't place. And my shoes kept sticking to the floor, as if I didn't have enough trouble walking already! It made me want to come back during the day with a mop.

And the children there were ... strange. All the men I know are desperate not to go bald, but not these boys. And one girl had an earring through her ... let's just say it wasn't a nice place and leave it at that, hmm?

I wanted to fit in, so I was wearing the tie-dye sweater that your Aunt Thelma gave me back in '73, but I don't think it helped much. Some of the children were looking at me oddly, but the manager found me a table way in the back and told a few people I was a friend of the singer's, and then she flexed her tattoos menacingly at them, and they left me alone. I drank some more Guinness, just to steady my nerves.

Then the manager introduced Sib, and out she came. I guess someone must have chosen a new outfit for her. She still looked lovely, but a bit loose if you know what I mean. She wore a leather jumpsuit and heels so high I was worried she'd fall and break her neck, and her hair was acting like one of those glass balls with the lightning bolts inside. All the boys sort of jolted when she came through

the door, like the lightning was real and it had hit them. She didn't have a guitar or a piano or anything. She just walked out, picked up the microphone, and started singing.

It wasn't all singing, actually. There was a lot of Wail worked in, not any of the ones I'd learned yet, but a whole new kind of melodic wail that rose up and went all over the major and minor and chromatic scales and then shot over the edge of them and started going up and down the spectrum, with stop-offs along the way on the Richter scale and the table of elements. My goodness! I felt like there were ears on the bottoms of my feet.

And all the little bald boys, they kind of shuffled forward, as if she was pulling them with strings. Pretty soon they were all jammed together within five feet of the stage, jostling and bumping each other to get closer, with their jaws hanging open like they were unhinged.

That was probably how the speaker got knocked over, although I was sitting too far away to see very well. I'm sure that speakers get knocked over all the time in a place like this, but not when the singer's clothes have already dripped out a gallon or so of bog water. When I saw the flames, I headed for the exit, but it was blocked with all of these screaming women, and I couldn't get past! Thank goodness I remembered the Wail That Passes Through Walls. Just before I got out I glanced back, and there were all the boys still standing there, clustering closer and closer around Sib as she kept on singing, her eyes shut tight, and the flames rising all around her.

Everyone who was standing at the back got out fine, which was basically all the women. One girl with something nasty done to her tongue tried to go in again for her boyfriend, but there was too much smoke and she came back out coughing. And even when we could see the flames coming through the roof, we could still hear Sib singing inside, until the fire engines came and drowned her out.

What with the ambulances and the police and everything, it took me a long time to get home. When I passed Sib's doorway, though, her light was on, so I knocked. "Come in," she said, and it sounded like she was crying, so in I went.

"Oh, those poor boys," was the first thing she said. Her eyes were all red and puffy. So I gave her a big hug and told her that it wasn't her fault that none of them had the good sense to leave. She said, did I know that for sure? And I said well, I didn't think they were her type anyway. And I told her that a good companionable cry would make her feel better, and it did, and then she offered me some tea, but then we decided unanimously that it had been such a trying day that we should skip the tea and go straight to the whiskey.

"I wonder if my mother was right about men," Sib said after a while.

"Oh, you never told me about your mother," I said, and Sib told me that she'd been orphaned in the great winter of 1263.

"But just before she died, my mother told me that the way to get a man to like you is not to say very much." She looked almost ready to cry again, but I put my arm around her and she stopped. "And I've tried to keep quiet, really I have, except for the wailing of course, but it's just no use! You know about our Irish blarney! My tongue will go a-wagging, and I've tried and tried, but I just can't keep it still!"

"Don't you even think about it," I told her. "Looks won't last forever, but a clever mind and a good heart will, and no man on earth is worth bottling up either one of them inside you!" Then I realized that Sib's looks *would* last forever, but I still think the moral applies, don't you?

I never realized how a few glasses of whiskey can put a disaster into proportion. I finally managed to get her and her hair to bed, and then I tucked her in the way I used to with you when you were an itty bitsy girl. She looked so trusting, lying there.

I miss you, Lizzie. When we have our changeover at LaGuardia on the way home, would it be too much trouble if you took an hour off your busy schedule and had lunch with us at the airport, before we go home?

I'm not looking forward to leaving. I feel like I've fallen into this country like a raindrop in a river. I could stay here forever, drinking

tea with Siobhan and giving her all the advice that she so desperately needs. Ah, well.

Love,
Your mother

Dear Lizzie,

We received your long letter. I'm glad you're so worried about me, and I'm glad that you finally took the time to write more than two sentences on the back of one of your theater postcards, but I'm quite all right, I assure you. There's no need for you to get so excited about our little adventures. Or if you want to get upset, wait until I've told you some of the things that I've done.

First of all, your father and I are going to stay a bit longer—we've canceled our return tickets. A wonderful thing happened when I finally got back after the fire. Your father was frantic! They'd interrupted whatever he was watching on TV to report about the club disaster, and he remembered that I had said I was going there, and he panicked! He was actually worried about me!

"I finally put those batteries in my hearing aid," he said, "and without you around, *damn* it was quiet."

He was so glad to see me alive that he took me out to dinner, and then we went out dancing in a place that looked *much* more like the *P & P* disco, and then ... well, never mind what we did then, Lizzie. You don't want to hear it any more than I want to talk about it, I'm sure.

Oh, Dublin is so beautiful in the spring!

Enough of that. Now, remember when I told you that you might get upset? Well, let me tell you what I've done.

You remember Tom, your second husband? You'll be happy to hear that I've finally accepted the fact that you and he aren't going to get back together. It's taken me five years, but I've accepted it. So I wrote him a letter forging your handwriting (you didn't know I could do that, did you?) and told him that you were stranded here in Dublin without any money, and could he please come and rescue you? And I gave him Sib's address.

I was peeking out my peephole when he showed up at her apartment two days later, with flowers no less! Of course she's good with languages, so she picked up his sign language in no time and told him that there had been a mistake. Then she invited him in for tea, and when he came out again the next day, he looked like he'd finally gotten over you at last, Lizzie.

I talked to them both yesterday, and he was surprised to see me here, but probably too happy to ask many questions. She's thinking about going back to Milwaukee with him, and maybe becoming a foreign language teacher in his school for the deaf. I think she'd be wonderful as a teacher. After seven hundred years in a bog, she'd certainly have the patience for it. And when I get home I'll introduce her to the girls and teach her how to play bridge. If we have another drought like last summer, I'm sure Evie Steinholtz would love to have Sib come over and drip into her garden.

But I haven't forgotten about you, Lizzie. I finally decided that my foot problem was the fault of my shoes, so I went out to look for a new pair. And the shoe-store owner who waited on me was absolutely charming, if a bit on the short side, and the shoes he gave me felt like they were wrapping my feet up in a rainbow! So I got one of the shopgirls aside to ask about him, and she said that not only was he cute, but really rich as well, because once she'd seen a pile of gold certificates inside the safe. Come on over and he's yours, Lizzie!

Well, I've got to sign off now. Ralph is taking me to see St. Patrick's Cathedral and the Guinness brewery and all the other sights that we haven't seen yet. Have I mentioned what a wonderful man your father is?

And if he ever backslides, I still haven't tried the Wail That Inspires Men to Follow You to the Ends of the Earth Until at Last You Lead Them Through Bog or Snow or Quicksand and They Perish, Still Reaching for the Hem of Your Skirt. It's always nice to have a backup, don't you think?

With much love,
Your mother ♣

GAMES

Continued from page 24

Every angle of Hill House is slightly wrong. Angles that should be right angles are a fraction of a degree off in one direction or the other. The stairs aren't level—they're on a slight slant. All of the doorways are a bit off-center, which is why the doors swing shut unless they're held open. The small ways in which Hill House is off-center add up to one big distortion. The house is a subtle version of a crazy house at a carnival.

"From the very beginning, we saw Hill House as being the central character in the film," says Arnold. "This house is the creation of a truly evil mind. It is Hugh Crain's vision of Hell. It wasn't something we could hope to find in the real world."

Production designer Eugenio Zanetti (*What Dreams May Come, Restoration*) mixed a variety of styles, including Gothic, neoclassic, Baroque, and Romanesque. The characters come to view Hill House as a living, creature that watches them constantly, so Zanetti chose styles that had an organic quality.

The interior of the house is a network of labyrinths. Zanetti first created a series of intricate sketches that were translated into a virtual image of the house's interior. Once the design was approved, Zanetti had only two months to build the first sets, which included the sumptuous bedrooms and Gothic corri-

dors that never seem to end. While Zanetti was designing enormous sets, including a magnificent great hall, an exotic red parlor, and an enormous central staircase, he was also creating a fascinating circular mirrored room that actually revolves like a music box when you step inside.

Because of the scale of the Hill House interior, its exterior had to be just as enormous and elaborate. The search was on for an existing building to serve as the house's exterior. After exhausting the possibilities in the United States, the production turned its efforts abroad and found what could be a real haunted house: Harlaxton Manor near Grantham, Lincolnshire, England. It was built by Gregory Gregory in 1832 as his family home. Although there is no evidence that the real-life Gregory had anything in common with the fictional Hugh Crain, Harlaxton Manor seems to be just as mysterious as Hill House.

Like the early horror films in this century, *The Haunting* promises to be frightening as a result of its power of suggestion. When Professor Marrow, Nell, Theo, and Luke arrive at Hill House and begin living there for the sake of Marrow's experiment, they begin a slow and harrowing descent into the spell cast by the house. Things do go bump in the night. The house seems to become very aware of their presence, and it's unclear what the house intends to do about it. But you know one thing for sure. The house does have something very specific in mind.

Nell is the key to the psychic events that slowly unravel at Hill House. She feels that her life is just beginning, and that the house itself is somehow a part of that. She struggles between feeling terror at the bizarre things that happen and a certain sense of belonging at Hill House.

And while Jackson tells you up front that the house itself is insane, you can't help but begin to wonder: Is it the house that's insane, or Nell herself, projecting her own insanity onto the house? (Remember, she's the one with the history of stones raining down inside and outside her childhood home.) Or is the house somehow driving Nell mad? Is the house driving a wedge between Nell and her newly made friends, or is Nell just imagining that she's antagonizing everyone around her?

The Haunting is directed by blockbuster-maker Jan De Bont (*Twister, Speed*). It's difficult not to wonder if a director of fast-moving action movies can slow down the pace for a ghost story that relies on atmosphere instead of graphic effects.

Roth believes he can. "Jan has proven to be a master at creating the kind of tension and terror we needed to feel in this house. I think some of the scariest things in movies are the things you don't see, and the mood Jan is creating really reflects that."

So as the first century of filmmaking begins to draw to a close, it looks like Hollywood is returning to something at which it once excelled: a true horror film. ♣



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HOUNDS

Continued from page 65

he'd ever known—strong in his nostrils.

It was like coming home.

Behind him, yellow light spilled out across the snow as the smith's door was flung open. The hounds came bolting out into the night, braying like banshees. Silhouetted in the light, the hunter charged after Zach, chambering another shell.

There was another shot. Snow leaped from the ground just to Zach's right. Then the inn flew past. The lumberyard. The computer center they'd shut down before Zach had even been born. The power plant with its plume of noxious black smoke. The school, the playground, and the last remnants of first-generation fences. And then he was free, nothing but snow flying out behind his paws, nothing but howls from the forest cheering him on.

Zach sprinted for the cover of the trees, head down, pushing for all he was worth. He dodged. Another shot zinged by. Quick on his heels, he heard the frantic patter of the hounds, pursuing. Although he was young and strong—a match for any one of them—he was no match for all three. If they caught him, they'd pull him down in a second.

But the woods now were closer, and they were a long way from the lights of the town. Filmy starlight filtered through thin clouding showed the path, but that was all. If he could only reach the trees, he could vanish in the dark confines forever.

Behind him he heard the hunter chamber another round. And then there came the metallic chink of metal on metal. It took Zach a few strides before he realized that Brumley's shell had misfired. Technology had lost to Jotunheim once again. Before Zach could celebrate his luck, a black shape flew from the woods. Zach barely caught a glimpse of it as it went by, a vision of black fur, glowing eyes, and gaping jaws. Brumley screamed as the huge wolf fell on him.

All around, wolves appeared. They rose from where they'd been lying on the snow, as if they'd been waiting for Zach all along. A vicious clamor of guttural, somehow more natural growls, replaced the rending snarls of the hounds. Blood and fur flew. The hounds cried out like dying sheep. They were quickly down in the snow, torn and bloody, two of them no longer moving, the third squirming in eviscerated agony.

Zach ran through this melee, straight for the woods. Behind him, the wind picked up and the snow began to fall again. Jotunheim sang its song of winter, a keening in the trees of the deep forest, a howling in the wind. Although dozens of wolves were calling, welcoming into the forest, he only had ears for one.

He hadn't gone far at all, barely past the first trees. Clear amid the other calls, a shining thread in the blanket of sound, he heard her howl.

It was the voice of Lucia. ♀

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ROZSA

Continued from page 37

THE GIRLS LAUGHED AND NODDED. ROZSA tapped Julianna on the shoulder. "Now out of the bath with you," Rózsa said, "then into bed. When you wake up, we'll get you dressed. I'm sure we have something that will suit you just fine."

Soup?
Bones!

iii. Csilla, the Woman Who Discovers She Needs a New Suit

For the third time that day, Csilla goes to the end of her street and stops, trying to decide if she should make the turn and walk to Rózsa Farkas's house. She's been making this short trip on and off for the better part of a month but never makes it past the intersection. Three times in one day though, this is a first.

Csilla has braided her graying hair and pinned it up so that it encircles her head like a halo. The wind plucks out tendrils that tease her cheeks like tickling fingers. She chides herself for forgetting to put on a babushka. When she's done doing that, she notices that she doesn't feel any better or worse for the scolding. Just empty and faintly sad. It's been like that for as long as she can remember, but now that she is almost to her change of life, it's become nagging.

She thinks of her life, her husband who loves her well enough. Her children, grown and happy with their own lives, grandchildren on the way. Everything as it should be and in order. This should come as no surprise; after all, she has lived her life just as she was supposed to. (If not how she wanted to.) When she was young she did as her parents expected; when she married, as her husband required; as an adult, as society demanded. Her children visit when they are supposed to. Her friends come to the parties she holds and invite her to play cards with them. She's had just the usual amount of misfortune, no more, no less. She has absolutely nothing to complain about. She has absolutely no right to feel unhappy. And when she goes through this litany, she isn't unhappy—she's guilty. The long and the short of it is, she feels bad, doesn't know why, and doesn't think she has the right to feel this way.

Csilla has known that for seven years the widow Rózsa Farkas has lived just outside the city. She even sent two of her own daughters to Mrs. Farkas for lessons in the domestic arts. Everybody did it. Yet Csilla herself has never set foot in the woman's house. Shortly before Mrs. Farkas set up house, rumors flew that several people spotted a wolf in the area. A wolf with silver-

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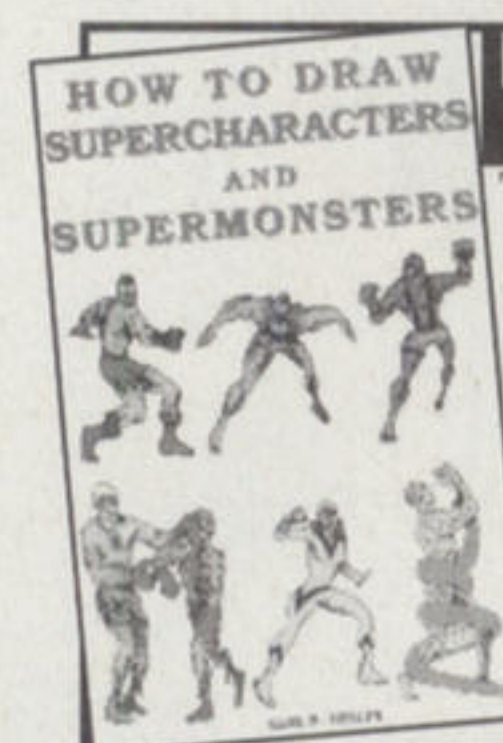
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blue eyes, a *táltos*. But knowing this scares Csilla most of all.

Csilla has also heard her neighbors gossip about the beautiful girl, Julianna, who lives with Rózsa Farkas. Julianna who came there four years ago and stayed. This girl has had men by the droves beg to marry her, but she has turned them all down. She's taken several temporary jobs, mostly to care for small children until they grew to the age when they required a tutor. She always returns to Rózsa Farkas and that woman always welcomes Julianna back with open arms. Most of the girls who have lived with Rózsa Farkas over the past seven years have left; several have married. A few have become great artists, teachers, or musicians. They all come back to visit, to show off their husbands, babies, or accomplishments, and they are all serenely happy. This last prods Csilla's curiosity most of all. It tempts her even more than seeing the lovely Julianna with her own eyes.

Csilla's husband is away for a week down in the city proper on business. Csilla can't bear to spend the night alone—the curiosity has finally gotten to her. She sets her feet on the road and makes the turn.

The walk to Rózsa Farkas's house takes longer than she anticipates. It's almost dark by the time Csilla reaches the gate. Good thing, too. If she thought that she might make it back home before night, she would have turned around right there, even at the front door. Rózsa Farkas comes out before Csilla rings the bell. When she smiles at Csilla, Csilla wonders at how timeless Rózsa Farkas looks. Maybe she was widowed young.

Rózsa Farkas takes Csilla's hands, the hands of a good woman, hard-working hands, with calluses and dry from the wear of harsh soap and wash water, with short no-nonsense nails. Rózsa Farkas squeezes these hands gently. Csilla notices that Rózsa Farkas's hands are worn too, but they are so much warmer than Csilla's. She is amazed at how much seems to pass between them, just by this touching of hands.

Rózsa Farkas leads Csilla inside and out to the back garden. The girls are working as ever. But how can they see, now that it's already early evening? The infant moonlight shines down on them and seems to burst apart at their laps. Csilla sees that it's the cloth or thread they are using that sparkles so; moonbeams fall from their fingers. The girl Julianna looks up and smiles at Csilla. She holds out her hand to the older woman who is compelled to take it.

"Come, you must stay with us a while and enjoy the hot-spring baths," Julianna says. "Then you can sit with us in the garden and tell things about yourself that you never knew."

Csilla goes out into the garden and warms herself in the water, naked as the day she was born. She thinks she is ready to throw out her old deerskin suit.

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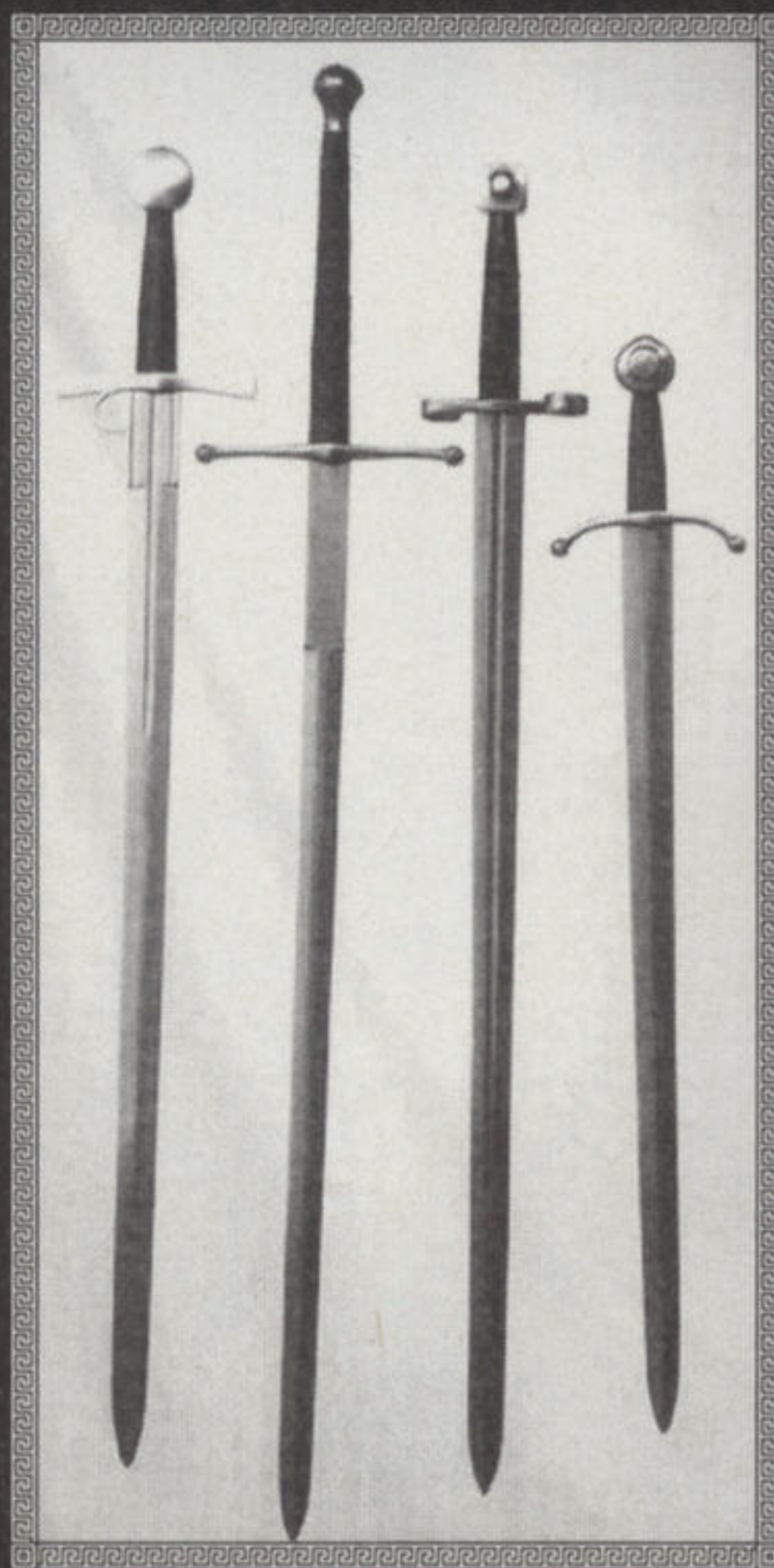
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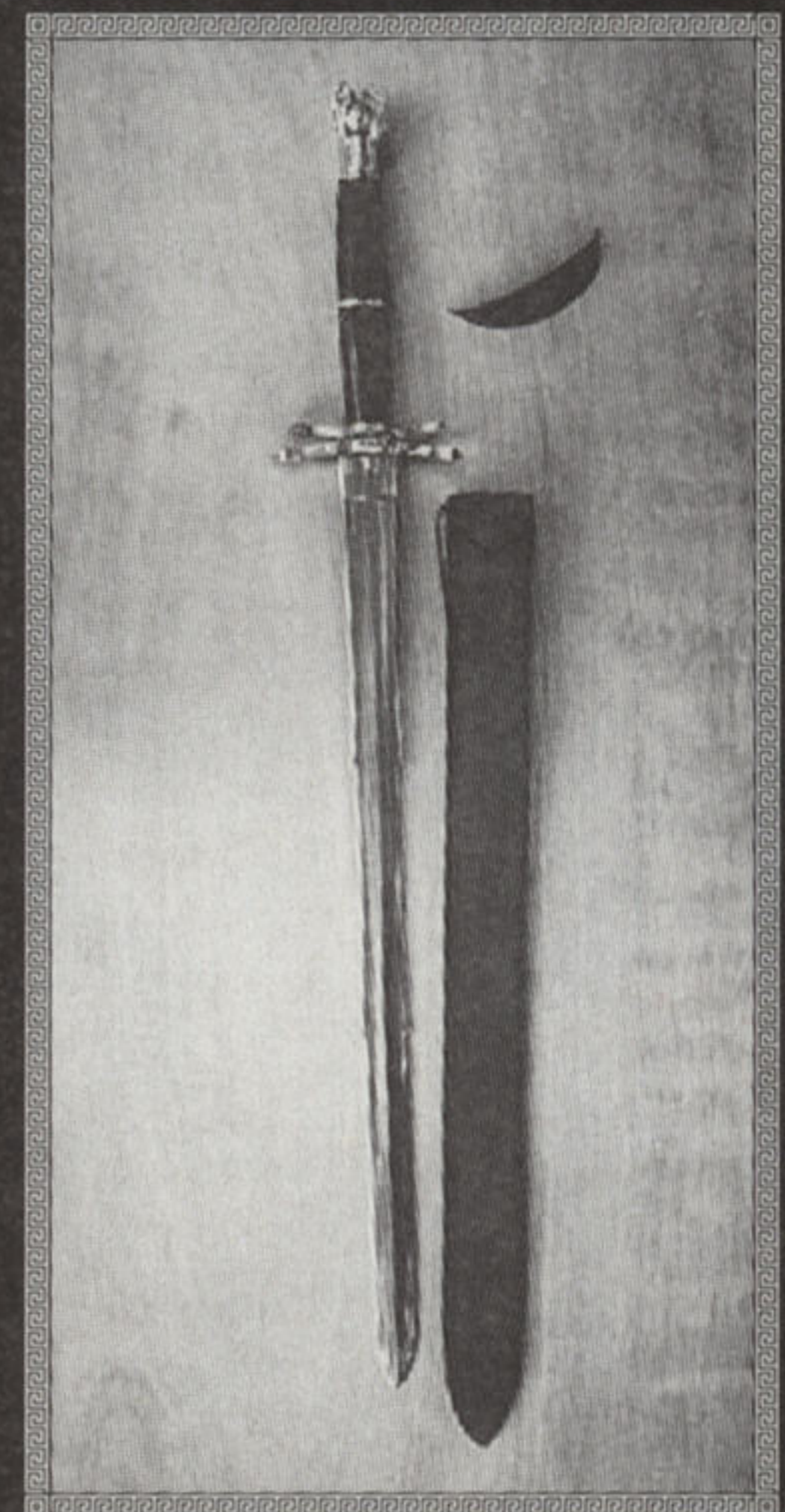
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BY ERIC T. BAKER

Princes and vampires, heretics and warriors—and finally, a game for girls.

SINCE ITS CONCEPTION, *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* HAS BEEN A ROLE-PLAYING GAME ABOUT keeping score. The more monsters your character killed, the more treasure your character gathered, the higher the level your character attained. Being at a higher level made the character more powerful, allowing “you” to kill more powerful monsters and collect greater treasure so that it could attain the next level and become more powerful and so on. One of the ways characters became more powerful was that at a high enough level, they attracted followers. Followers were Non-Player Characters (NPCs) who showed up to help the character out. The only problem was that while the rules explained when, who, and why high-level characters attracted these NPCs, it didn’t say what to do with them besides having them serve as backup while the character killed more monsters.

Birthright Campaign Setting (by L. Richard Baker III and Colin McComb. TSR, Inc., Renton, WA, 1999. boxed Set, \$30) changes that. *BR* is a campaign setting for high-level *AD&D* characters where they can not only lead followers, but also rule kingdoms, guilds, and temples. In a *BR* campaign, the characters no longer just adventure among the kings and masters of the world, they are the kings and masters in the world, with all the power and respon-

sibility that goes with those positions. The basic *AD&D* rules are still there, and the characters can still go on quests and adventures (killing monsters and gathering treasure), but they also have a higher level of play where they must juggle commerce, diplomacy, governance, and war.

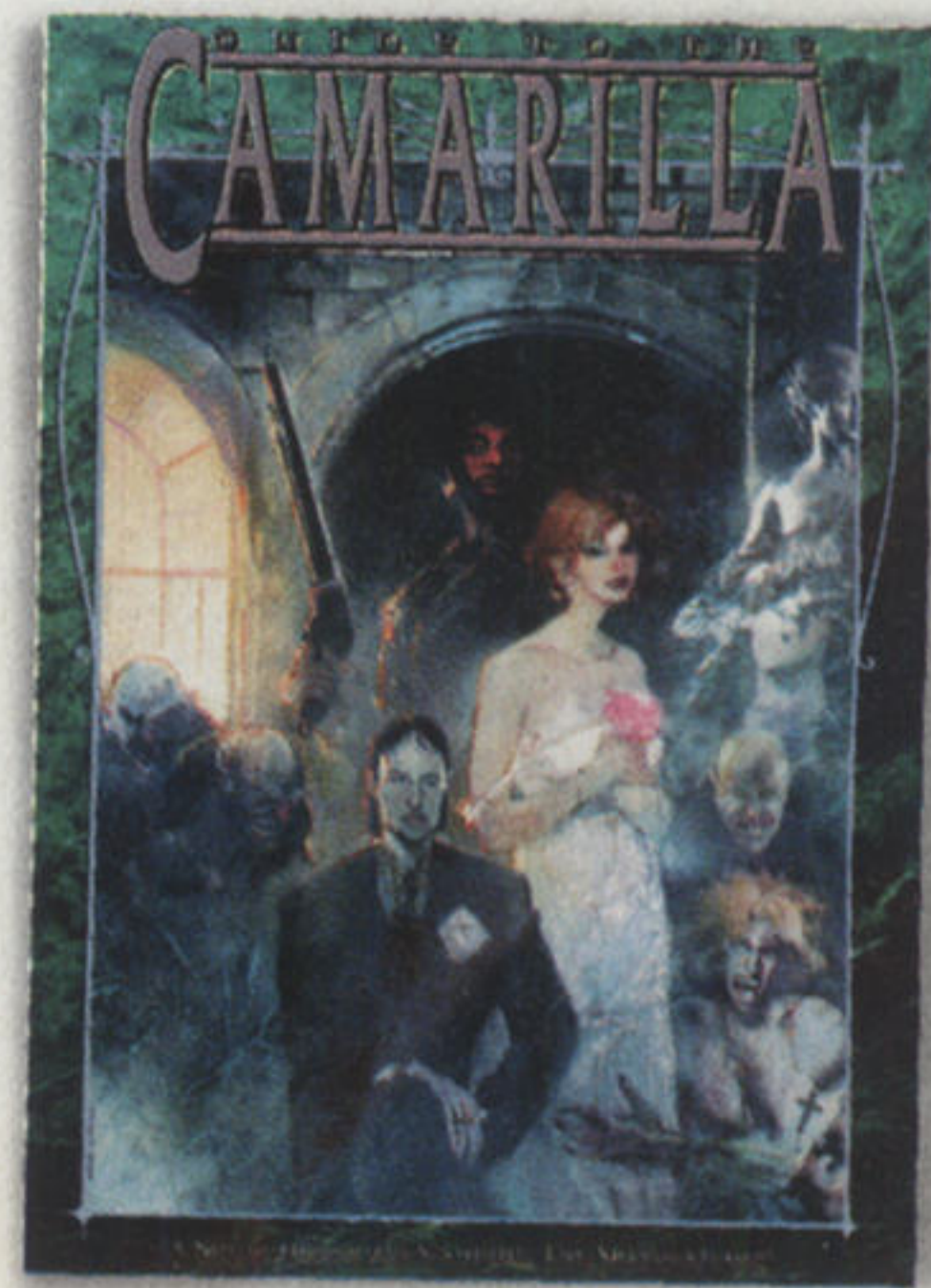
On the plus side, *BR* is a streamlined, elegant system. It is easy to understand, the choices for each Domain turn are right there on the charts, as are the results of when those choices are made and the dice are rolled to resolve them. There is also a stripped-down mass combat system that allows battles to be played quickly and cleanly while giving the players a real feel of being in command.

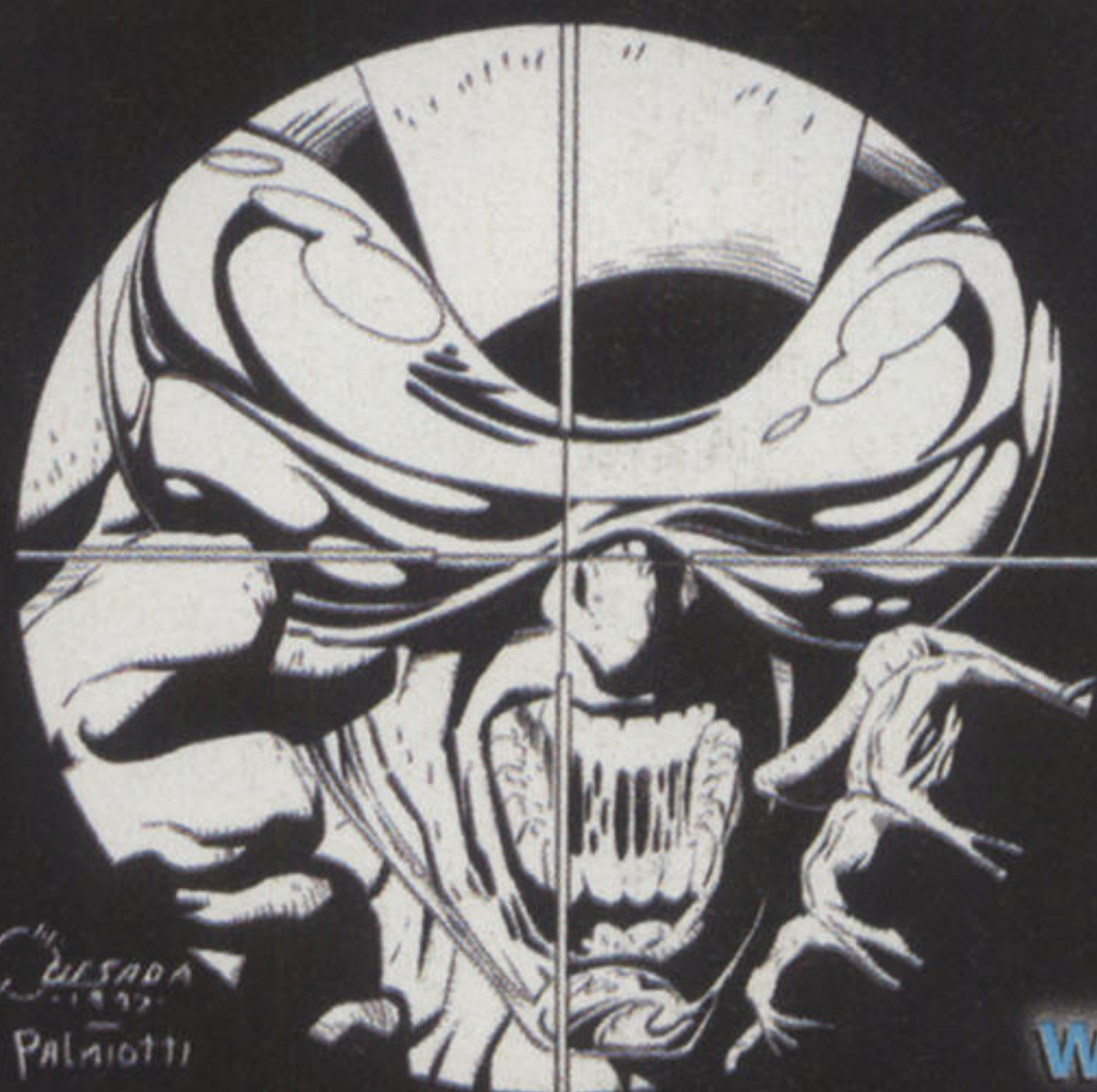
On the minus side, *BR* is its own world. It introduces the statistics Blood and Regency, which basically track how good of a ruler a character is capable of being and how good of a ruler it currently is. Wizards with a high enough Blood score get to use new, campaign-level spells, and the structure of which spells more mundane wizards can learn is adjusted. If you start a *BR* campaign from scratch, then this isn’t really a drawback, but it makes it harder to use *BR* as the campaign rules for your existing campaign. A bigger problem is that there is not enough explanation on how to run a *BR* campaign so that it feels like an RPG instead of a board game. Everything a character can do in a Domain turn is so clear cut; where does the freedom of action that is the strength of RPGs come in?

Birthright addresses a niche that needs filling in the RPG market, and does so in a workman-like manner, but it lacks the “killer application”



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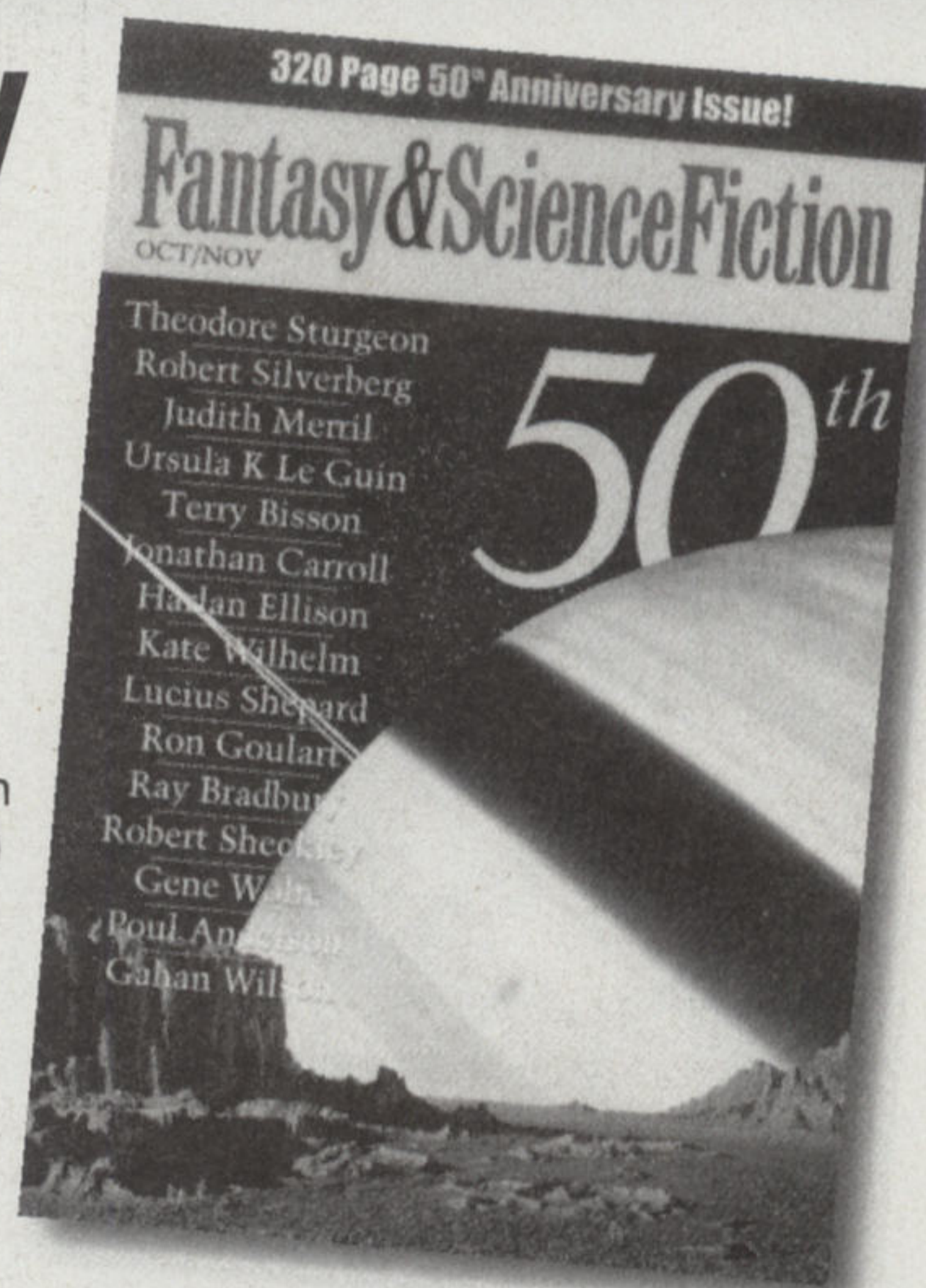
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ABOVE and RIGHT: If you are a Mac user, you'll be glad to know that *Quest for Glory: Dragonfire*, a medieval mystery "whodunit" from Sierra, will run very well on your machine.

shine. *BR* is the best game of its type on the market, but you find yourself wishing it was more.

Guide to the Camarilla. Development by Richard E. Danksy. White Wolf Publishing Inc., Clarkston, GA, 1999, 232 pgs., \$25.95
Guide to the Sabat. Concept, design, and development by Steven C. Brown, Andrew Greenberg, and Justin R. Achilli. White Wolf

Publishing Inc., Clarkston, GA, 1999, 224 pgs., \$25.95

New from White Wolf come these impressive twin campaign guides with beautiful Bill Sienkiewicz covers. If the third edition of *Vampire: The Masquerade* caught you up in the World of Darkness mythos but left you confused about how to actually bring all those many factions, sects, and monsters to life in a campaign, then

these books contain your answers. Just about everything that was missing from the main *VTM* rule book (with the glaring exception of an introductory adventure) is in these two guides.

Each book contains more history of each Sect, more history of each Clan, a revised and expanded character-creation process, more powers and abilities, notes on tactics and systems, long chapters on building a campaign setting and then running characters in it, and (my favorite) long lists of templates for various NPCs with which to populate the campaign. As might be expected, the *Camarilla* (the old-line, hide-from-humans sect) guide is a little easier to read and process than the *Sabat* (the rebel, humans-are-our-cattle sect) guide, but both are readable and informative. Besides a



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sample adventure, all these books really need are better indexes.

Depending on what sort of character or campaign you want to play or run, you probably don't need both books, but there is no recycled text in either book. Thus, if you want to know all there is to know (for now anyway) about both sects, you can buy both books and not feel cheated.

The Dragon and the Bear: The Novgorod Tribunal. By Simeon Shoul. Atlas Games, Roseville, MN, 1999, 194 pgs., \$23.95

With *The Dragon and the Bear*, *Ars Magica*, the outstanding FRPG currently available from Atlas Games, expands into the wild territory of medieval Russia and Poland. Complete, well researched, and well written, this book converts the medieval history of these two Eastern lands into a playable game setting. Inside is background on the Slavs and their magic. There are long, terrific sections on the two invaders that defined the times for this land: the Mongols from the East and the Teutonic Knights from the West. There is a listing of Slavic Fairies and mythic beasts, notes on the Convenants (hermetic and otherwise) in the region, and rules for Shamans. Appendices contain the Slavic deities, mystical artifacts, and (maybe most important) a listing of Slavic names. Not to mention the glossary and the index.

The only thing missing from *The Dragon and the Bear* is a sample adventure set in Russia, but there is plenty of information in the book to create one of your own. Either as questing ground for established campaigns or as fresh fields for brand-new convenants, *D&B* is a welcome addition to the *Ars Magica* world.

Heretic 2. Raven Software Corporation, published by Activision, Inc., 1999, for Win 95/98

All the things that game programmers are learning to do with the Quake II engine are becoming a little staggering. The same core programming that drove the wildly different games *Sin* and *Half-Life* is now being used to produce Raven Software's *Heretic 2*. The game is set in the same medieval Fantasy world of the other *Hexen/Heretic* titles, but there are some changes. For one, the view-point character now has a name: Corvus. For another, the player now sees Corvus from a third-person perspective. This change allows Corvus to overcome one of the limits that shackles his first-person brothers; he can actually raise his arms and climb instead of having to jump everywhere.

The story of *H2* is involving if linear. The settings are imaginative and beautifully rendered. The puzzles make no less sense than those in any other game, and the arsenal of weapons and spells that Corvus uses to handle the variety of monsters and menaces is inventive and fun. Hawk-shaped arrows, for instance, can be employed against the lords of Cloud Fortress. There



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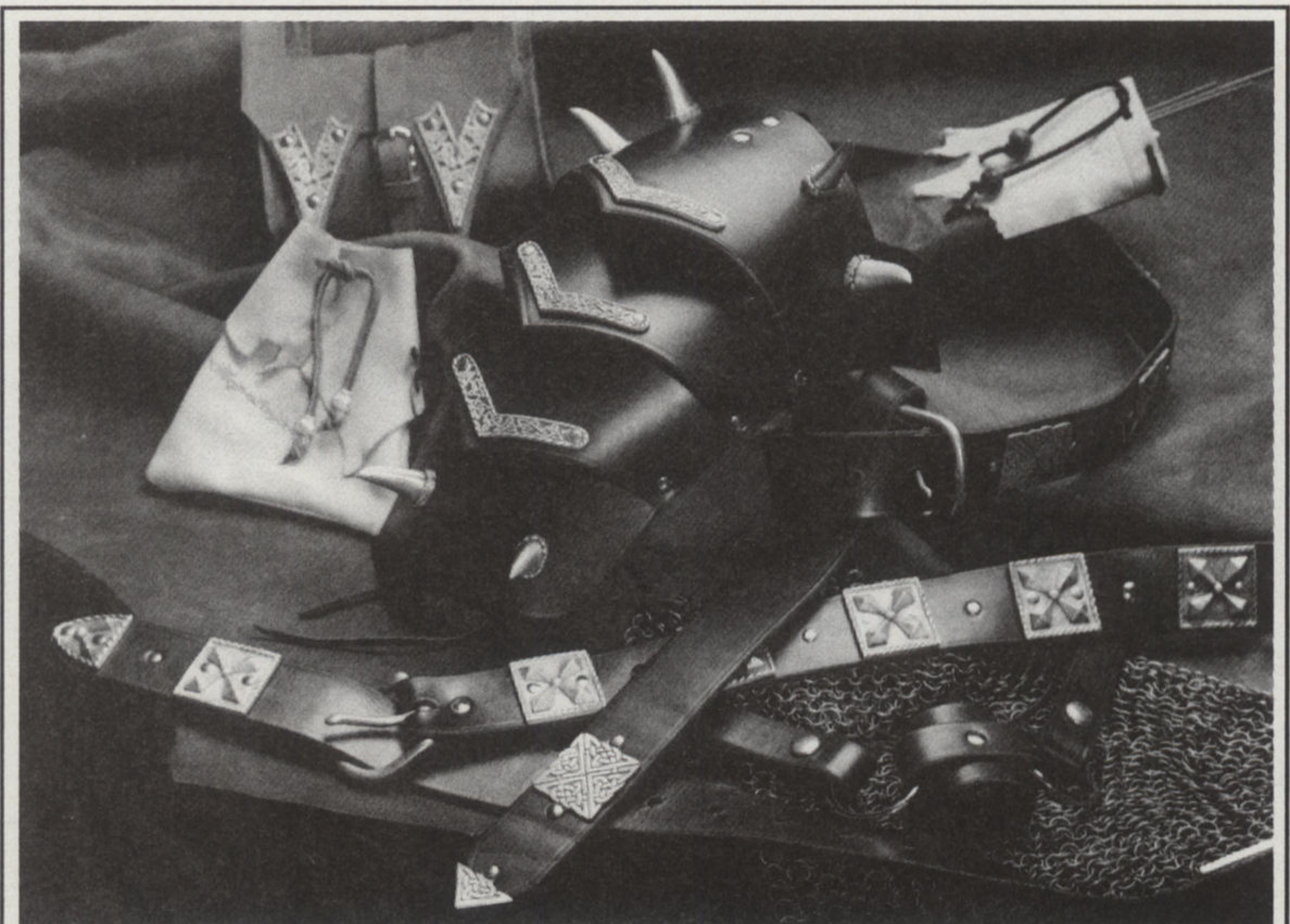
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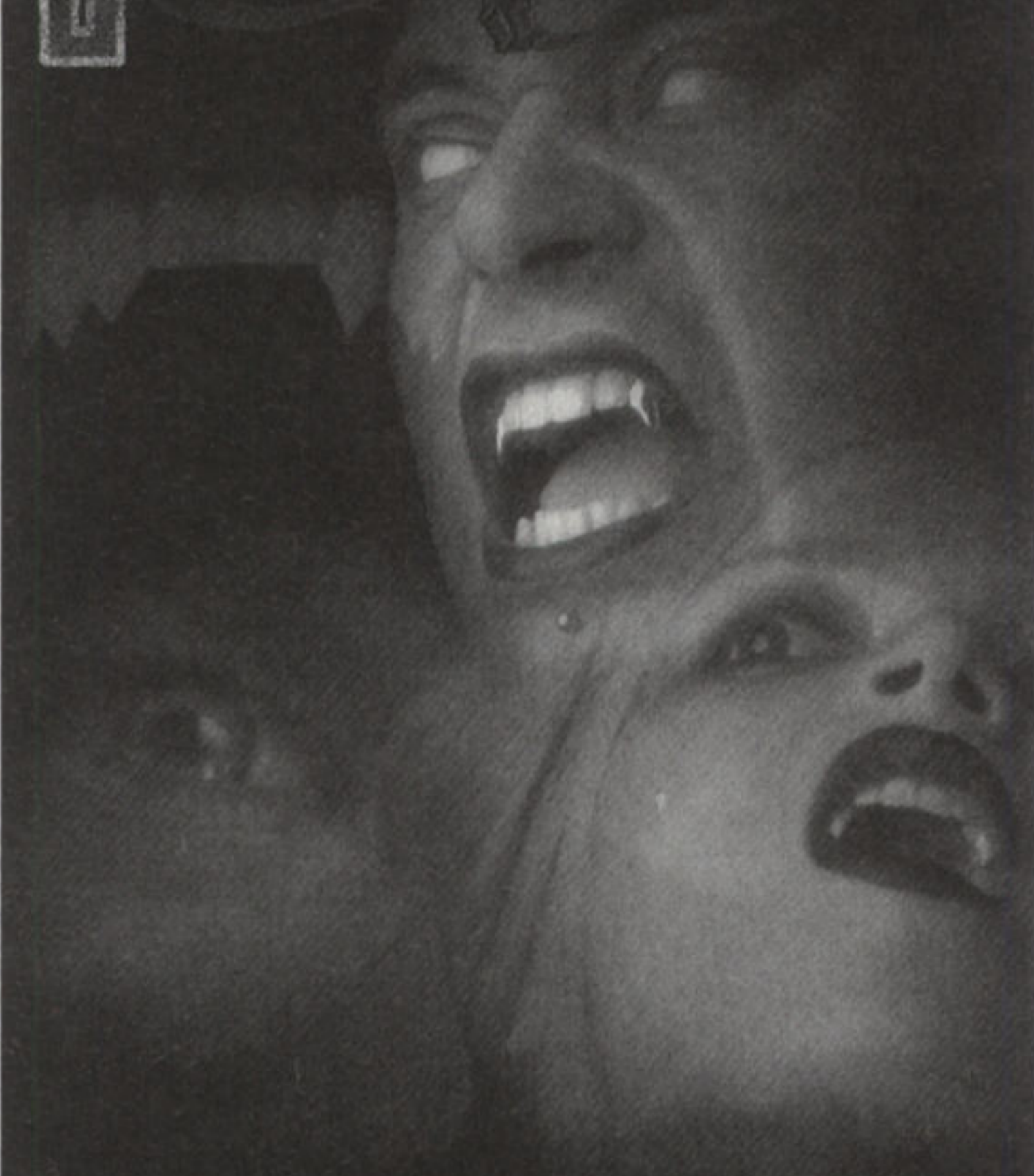
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are even allies to be found who fight alongside Corvus at different points. The only down point is another characteristic of the *Hexen/Heretic* series: Each level is huge. This is a good thing until it is time to load the next one, or quick load the one you're on. If you are going to do a lot of saving and quick loading, then the full install is probably the way to go.

Heretic 2 lacks the gestalt of combat clichés that makes *Half-Life* the spectacular game that it is, but for a combat game in a Fantasy setting, *H2* is the best thing created so far.

Quest for Glory: Dragon Fire. Yosemite Entertainment, published by Sierra On-line, Inc., 1999 for Win 95/98 & Mac OS \$49.95

If you would rather spend more time role-playing and solving puzzles than fighting and killing, then *Quest for Glory: Dragon Fire* is probably what you are looking for. Not that *QfG* lacks combat, but combat is not the focus of this game as it is in *H2*. Instead, the focus is story. The king is dead and the character is summoned to find out the whos, whys, and wherefores. To solve the mystery, the character enters the Rites of Rulership, only to find that the murders are not done yet. Many, many hours of game play later, the character will find one of the possible answers. "One of" because the game can be played as any of four different character classes and each one has its own set of endings, depending on how well the character does over the course of the adventure.

The game play itself is built around hand-painted backgrounds with 3-D-rendered objects and characters controlled by a Quicktime VR engine. Yes, you are in point-and-click land, but it is a well-designed one where weapons, spells, and items are readily available and easily used. The learning curve is very flat so that you can spend more time trying to solve the game, or solve it again if you didn't like the ending you got the first time.

To get the most out of *Quest for Glory: Dragon Fire*, you need to download the patch, but particularly if you have a Mac, it is great to have a long-playing and involving game that doesn't need any 3-D hardware to run.

Legend of the Five Rings CCG: The Hidden Emperor. By David Williams. Five Rings Publishing Group, Renton, WA, 60 card starters and eight card boosters

Legend of the Five Rings: The Hidden Emperor cards represent the next cycle in the story of Rokugan. With the Clan Wars over and a new Emperor on the throne, Empire tries to return to normal but, as is the way of things in game universes, fails. Winning the peace always seems to be harder than winning the war. The Scorpions are in disarray, the Crabs are at their weakest, the Dragons are divided among themselves, the Unicorns are the new strong arm of the Emperor, and



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Nagas walk the land. What this means for players is that the Dragons are getting new cards, the Naga get their own deck, and all sorts of new event cards are set to appear.

In a change in marketing direction, the full set of *HE* was not released all at once. Instead they were put out a month at time. The last should be on the shelves at the same time as this review, and the changes listed here are not the only ones to be found in the series.

Fortune Teller Collectables. L.A. Graphics, published by Precedence Publishing, Tempe, AZ, 1999. One fortune teller and three cards per pack, \$2.99

Fortune Teller is Precedence Entertainment's new card game targeted for preteen girls. It is probably the first collectible game intended to reach this market in America.



L.A. Leis, a graphic designer and illustrator, designed *FT* based on the classic schoolyard game of "cootie catchers." Legend Cards, the other part of the *FT* game, display mythical characters on their fronts and stories on their backs. These characters are inspired by a variety of mythologies, from Arthurian to Classic Greek. *FT*'s art is primarily the work of Leis, with contributions by artists Terese Nielsen and Ran Ackels.

There are a total of 36 Folding Oracles and 40 Legend Cards, each showing a different theme or aspect of life. I'm no expert on what games young girls like to play, but my wife assures me that they will play with the cootie catchers. She isn't sure that girls will be so taken with them that they will want all 36. In case they do, Leis is already designing an expansion set, which will contain more stories based on classic mythology and historic characters. ♡

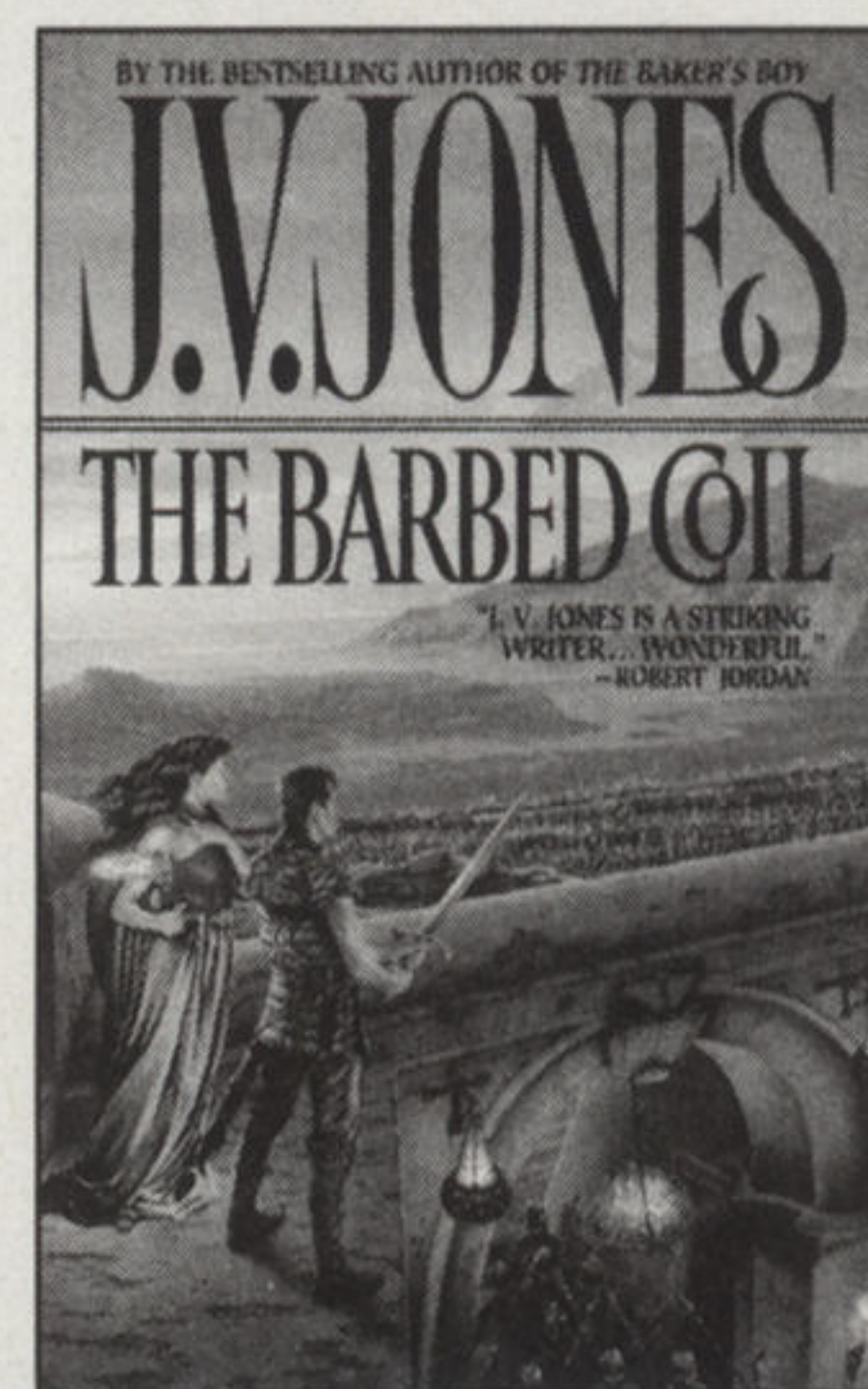
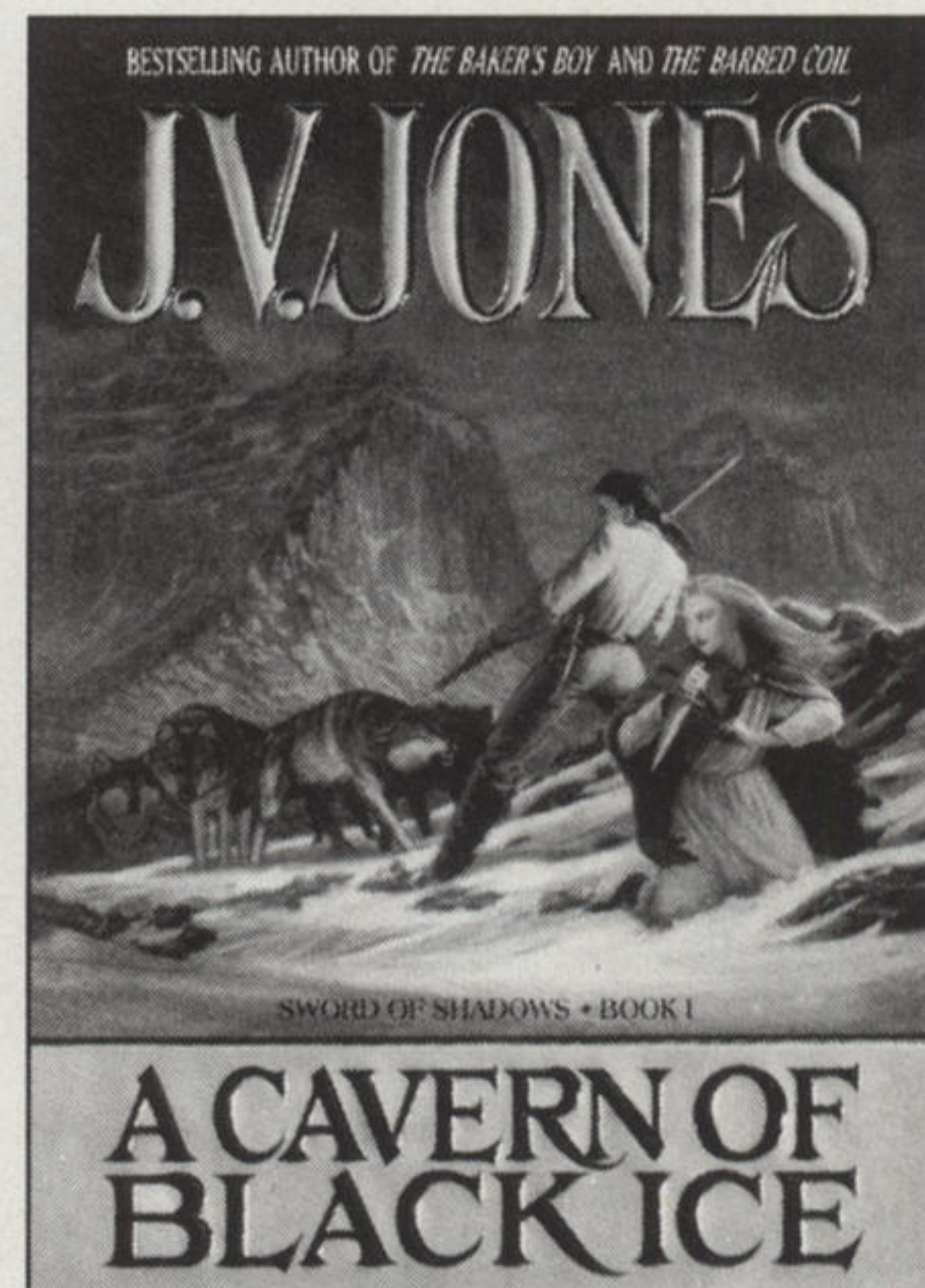
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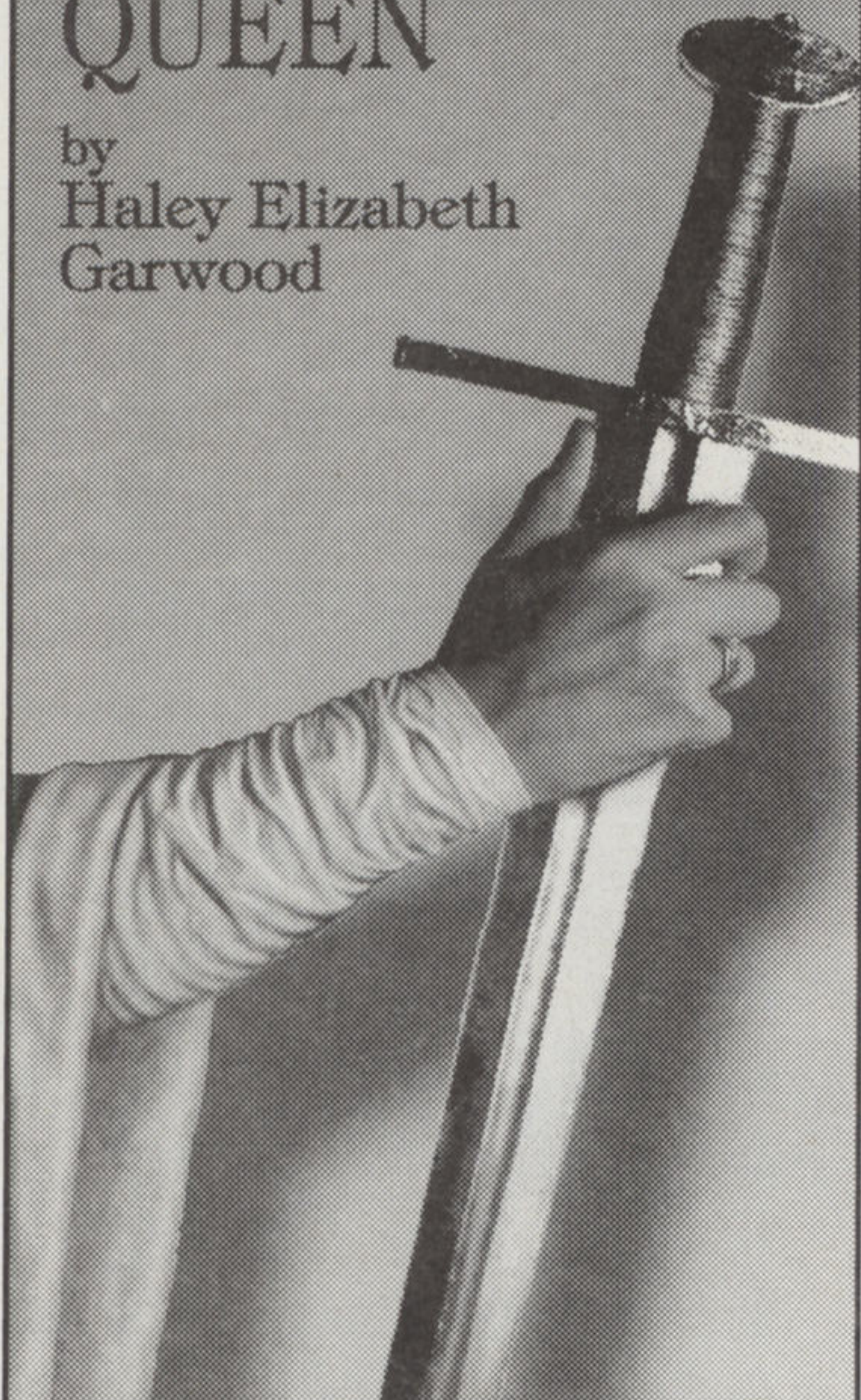
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HIGHLAND

Continued from page 51

He sat down. "Satisfied?"

He was an agile man. Even from where he sat, he might jump up and topple a stone in time, giving her two points, sending her past One Deer the way she had done it to him. But she had to trust him. There was no other way.

She took careful aim so that she wouldn't strike one of his markers with the ball. She served.

The ball bounced in her court. In his. It sailed toward the back chamber. Caan Cuy sat, arms folded.

Nictay knocked over one of her own stones.

"A point for the chamber," growled the goddess. "A point for the stone. Each of you rests at One Deer."

"Water," said Caan Cuy. "You promised."

A water jug appeared in the center of the court. Caan Cuy and Nictay met there. Each took a swallow, then Caan Cuy said, "Drink. Slake your thirst. You discovered the way home for both of us."

"She did," said the goddess as Nictay drank. "But as you ended the game in a way I did not intend, so shall I honor my pledge to you in a way that you did not intend." And before Nictay had finished drinking, the flames in the walls died. They were in utter blackness.

Light, barely perceptible and gray, grew around them. Gradually, the gloom lifted and they found themselves on a hillside. Rain fell on their faces. The water jug was still in Nictay's hands.

"Your clothes!" Caan Cuy said. He himself was dressed as he had always been, except that he no longer wore the yoke and pads of a ball player.

Nictay looked down at herself. She wore a cape of red and green feathers. There were sandals on her feet, and an enormous jade pendant hung down between her breasts.

Caan Cuy's obsidian-toothed war club lay on the ground near his feet. On the ground at Nictay's feet was another one just like it. The rain began to slacken.

"Princess," said a man who had been standing behind them. They both turned, startled. "Have we not rested enough? Your father awaits us."

"Ahkbal?" said Caan Cuy. "My brother?" He stepped forward to clasp the man's hand. "You are here?"

Ahkbal looked at him strangely. "I have never left, Nacom." He peered into Caan Cuy's face. "Are you ill? Is the fever still with you?"

Caan Cuy looked at Nictay, who had no assurance to offer. "I am—" Caan Cuy started. He shrugged. "I am all right."

"Princess?" said Ahkbal.

"Lead the way," she said. He gave her the same strange look, but he took the lead on the mountain path that brought them to the

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top of a ridge. On a ledge below, Nictay saw a party of nobles standing and watching the valley below. She gasped, and then looking into the valley, she froze.

Caan Cuy took her arm. "What?"

She nodded at the ledge. "My father," she said. "He is a fisherman, but there he stands among men of noble dress. Look at his robes! They are the clothes of a great man!"

"Of an emperor," Caan Cuy agreed.

"Princess?" said Ahkbal. "Is something wrong?"

Nictay stood up as straight as she could. In what she hoped would sound like the tones of a princess, she said, "Go ahead and announce us."

He bowed and left them.

"So that is what she meant," Nictay said. "She sent us home, but not to *our* homes."

"Some of the emperor's bodyguards are women. I know some of them. Women of the Moon City. But women never carried clubs and shields in my country!"

"Mittat!" Nictay said, recognizing a friend. But what was Mittat doing in the robes of a warrior?

"Is this place ...?"

"This is the valley of the Middle People," Nictay said. "But that city below us ..." She looked again at the palace, the temple pyramids, the houses of nobles, the huts, the surrounding fields. "I don't know it. I never saw it before."

"What can it be," Caan Cuy said, understanding now, "but the city of the Highland People?" He pointed out onto the plain between the highland city and the island city of the Middle People. Great rows of warriors lined up to face one another. Their feathered robes and painted shields were brilliant even at this distance, even under a gray sky. "Flower War."

"She gave us the home of my lie," Nictay said. "I wanted my people to be the equals of the Middle People."

"So it seems they are," Caan Cuy said. And with bitterness, he added, "Now they are my people, too. And yours are mine. I see priests of the Moon City attending your father down there. Your father, the emperor. And how many of my friends and yours will die down there today, women as well as men, in this Flower War of your making? In this world of your lie?"

She gave him a hard look. "I did what I had to do for my people, Nacom Caan Cuy, my general."

He looked away from her.

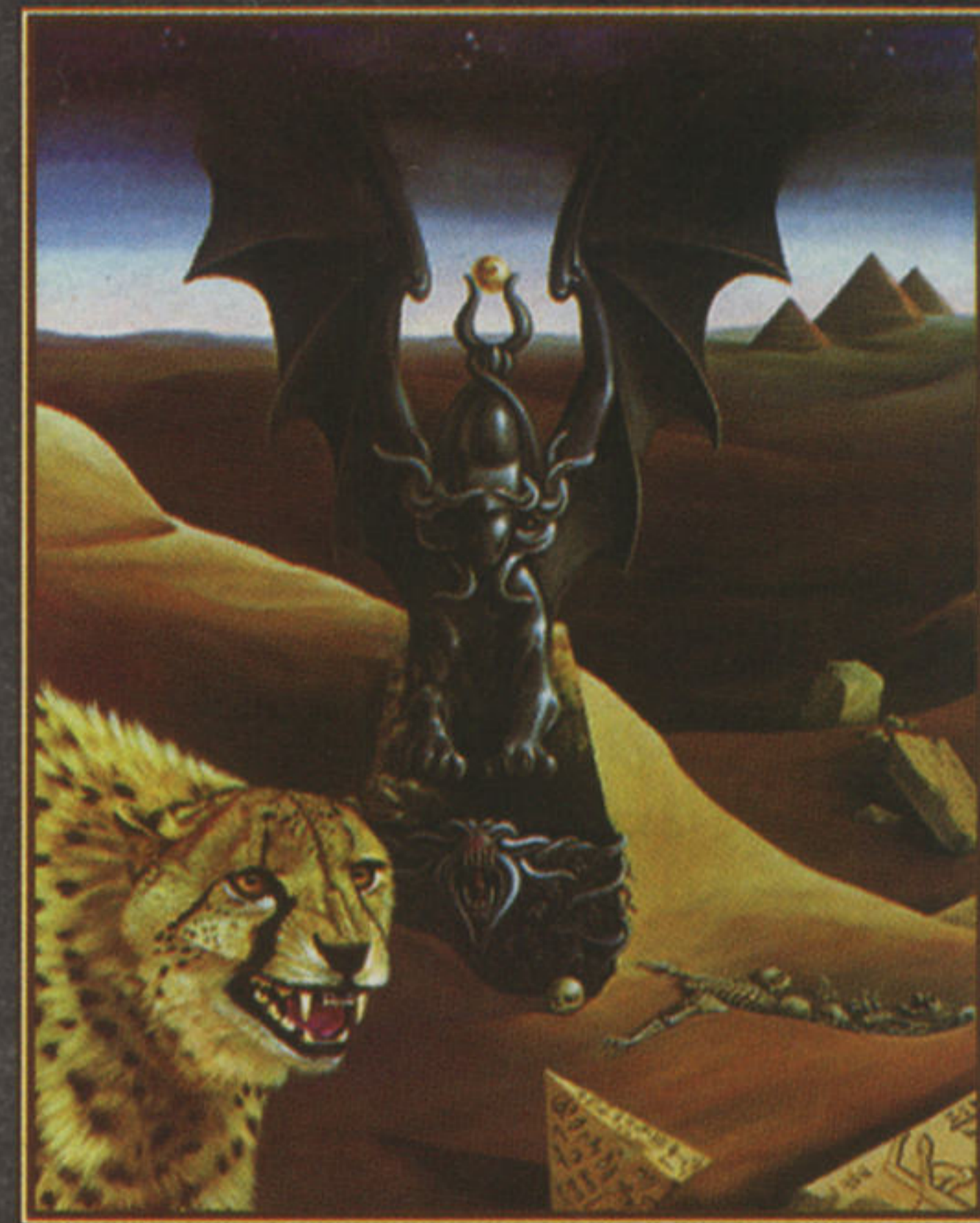
"Come," she said. "We have our lives. We have our new lives."

He met her gaze again.

"My father awaits us, Nacom." She nodded toward the ledge where the nobles watched the Flower War unfold. "Let us go to him. Let us discover what sort of world we have made."

She started down the path. And Caan Cuy, taking in a deep breath through his crooked nose, followed her. ♪

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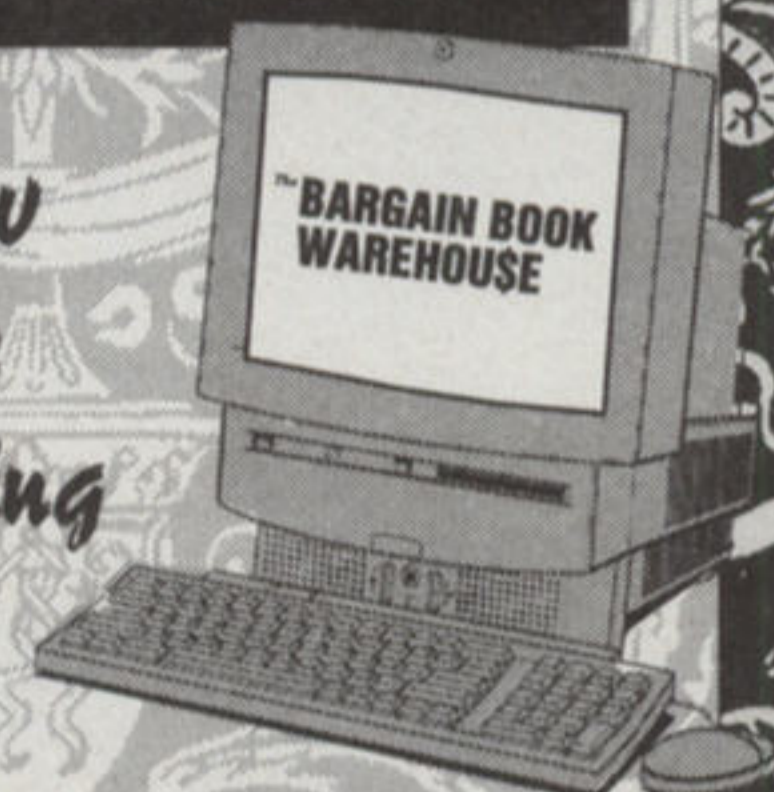
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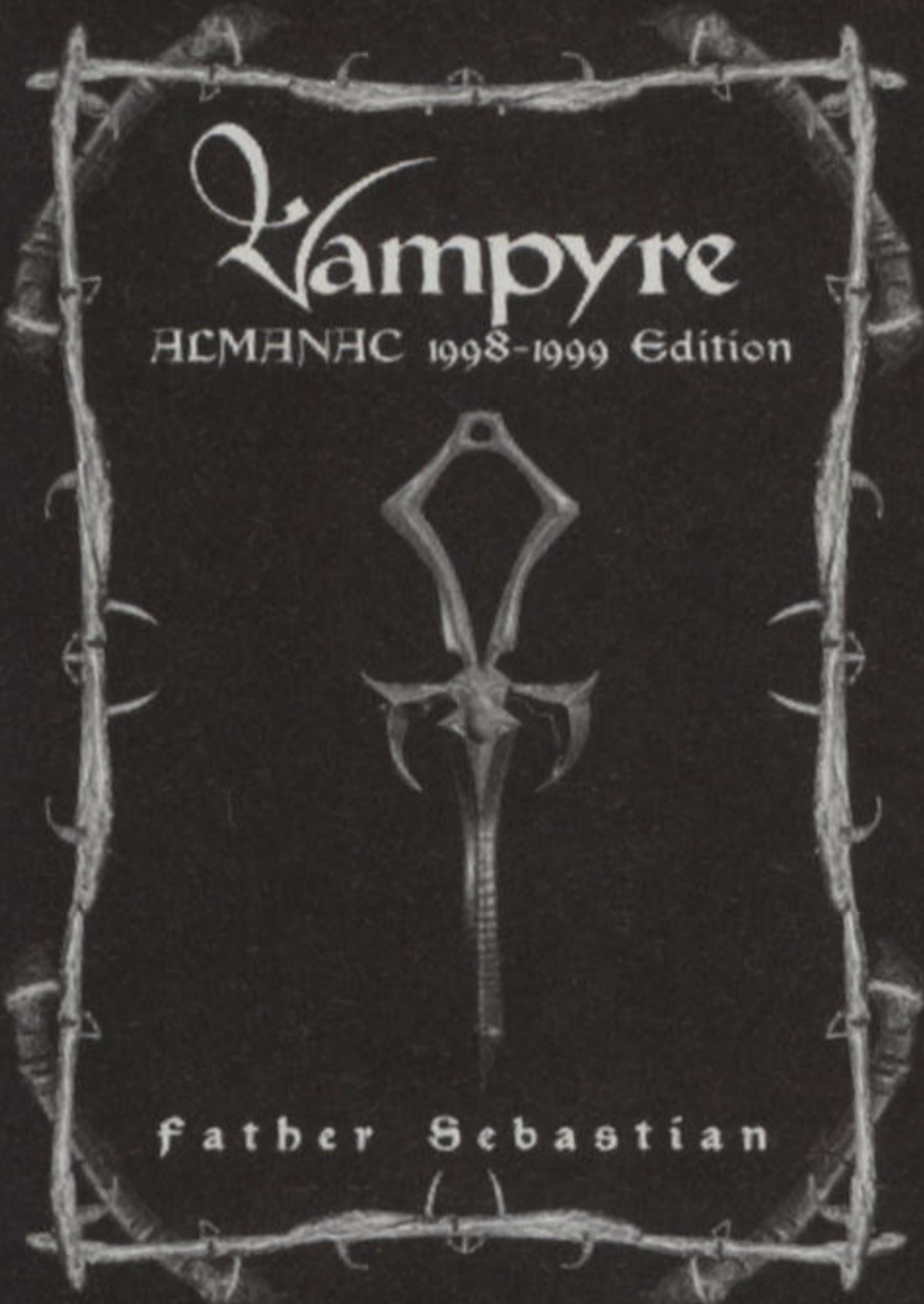
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Contributors

TONY DITERLIZZI has illustrated numerous role-playing games, and will be releasing a picture book entitled *Jimmy Zangwow's Out-of-this-World Moonpie Adventure* (say that eight times fast) next year from Simon and Shuster. He lives in Park Slope, Brooklyn with Angela and their really cool pug, Goblin. To see more of his paintings visit www.diterlizzi.com.

JOHN HANLEY graduated from the American Academy of Art with a degree in Design and Illustration. John then became an apprentice in a commercial art studio in Chicago where he ran packages and was frequently told... "We don't do people, stop painting people!" Laid off from this position the day before Thanksgiving, he now works free-lance with clients that include DC Comics, Marvel Entertainment, Warner Bros., Dreamworks SKG and other various editorial and advertising assignments... all with people in them.

BROECK STEADMAN is at work on a collection of projects including a cover for "The Mystery of the Haunted Toliet." Broeck is currently at work on black and white interiors for *Analog* magazine, Hardy Boy cover art for Simon and Shuster, and accurate, scientific depictions of people plus one snowman with a dislocated stick arm for various medical journals.

STEN WESTGARD has stories forthcoming in *Odyssey* (entitled "The Numbers of the Dead"), and three stories in *The Third Alternative*. He has appeared in *Odyssey* #3, *Tomorrow* #'s 8 and 20 and the fairy tale anthology *Black Swan, White Raven*. He is an active SFWA member and attended the 1995 Clarion East.

KAREN HABER is the author of eight novels. Her short fiction has appeared in *Issac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *The Sandman: Book of Dreams*, and many other anthologies, including *Alien Pets*, from DAW Books.



Bruce Holland Rogers



Tony DiTerlizzi



Sten Westgard



Debbie D'Onofrio

In her secret identity as an art journalist she reviews art books for *Locus* and has profiled many of the top artists in the Science Fiction and Fantasy field. She lives with her spouse, Robert Silverberg in earthquake country near San Francisco.

BRIAN A. HOPKINS has published more than fifty stories in a variety of professional and semi-professional magazines and anthologies. Upcoming appearances include stories in *Bending the Landscape: Horror, Whispering Willows, and Flesh and Marrow*. A collection of Brian's short stories, *Something Haunts Us All*, was published in 1995. His novel entitled *Cold at Heart*, was published as a trade paperback. Brian can be reached online at brian_a_hopkins@sff.net. He appreciates feedback.

DEBORAH D'ONOFRIO is a graduate of Clarion '95 and her previously published story in *Realms of Fantasy* won Honorable Mention in the New England Science Fiction Association 1998 Science Fiction and Fantasy Short Story Contest judged by Walter John Williams, Jane Yolen, and Ian Randal Strock. Her story for this issue is original, written in the style of a Hungarian folk tale.

BRUCE HOLLAND ROGERS currently writes full-time. He has an M.A. in creative writing from the University of Colorado and has taught there as well. He has a column that appears in *Speculations* about meeting the psychological and spiritual challenges of full-time fiction writing. Bruce has been nominated for a Nebula three times and actually won once for "Lifeboat on a Burning Sea." He was also an Edgar Allen Poe nominee a few years back. Bruce resides in Eugene, Oregon.

K.D. WENTWORTH has published over thirty stories in such markets as *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Alfred Hitchcock's*, and *Return to the Twilight Zone*. She has also published three novels and is at work on her seventh. In her spare time she is a fourth grade teacher/cafeteria riot control specialist. ☛

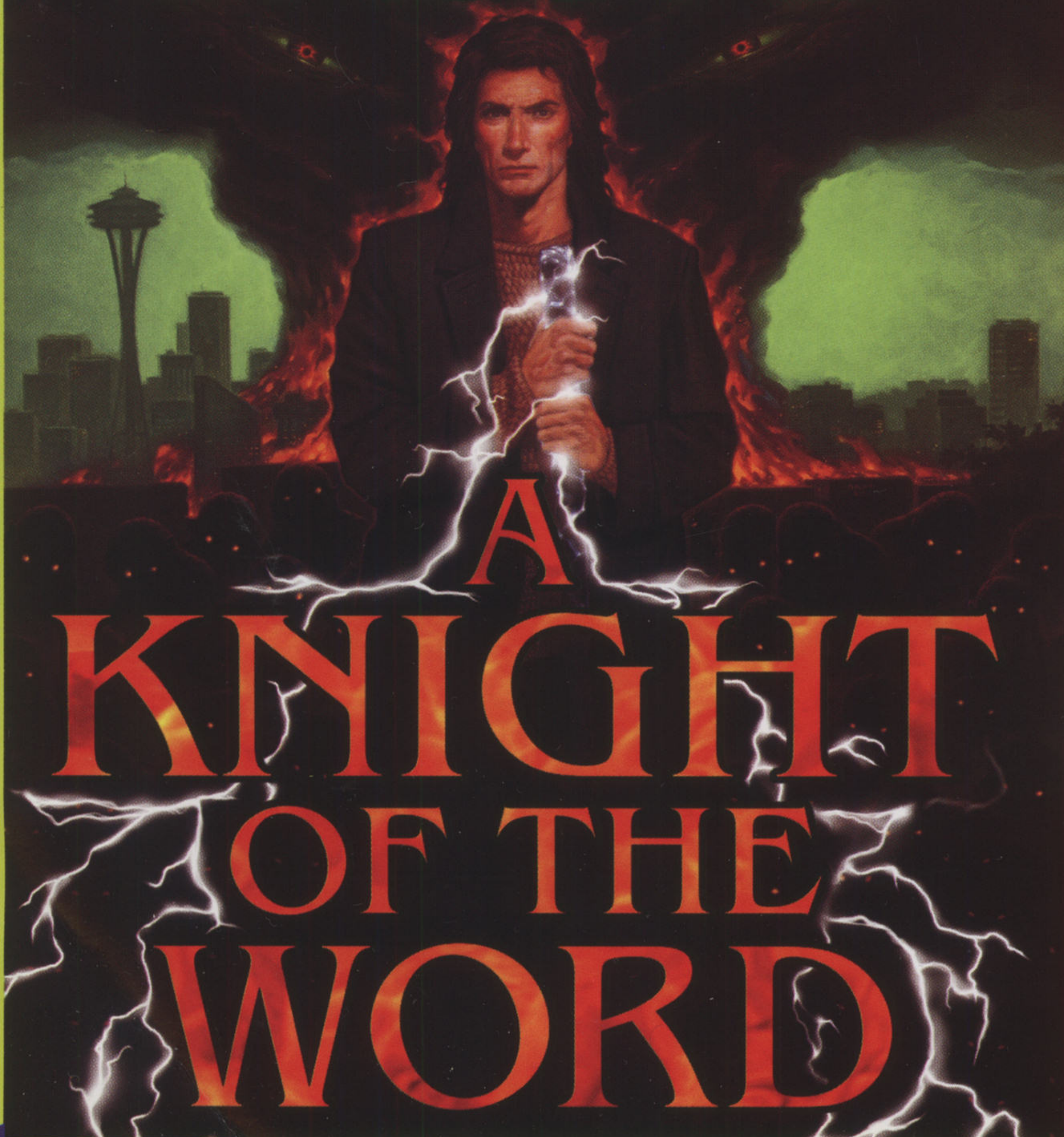
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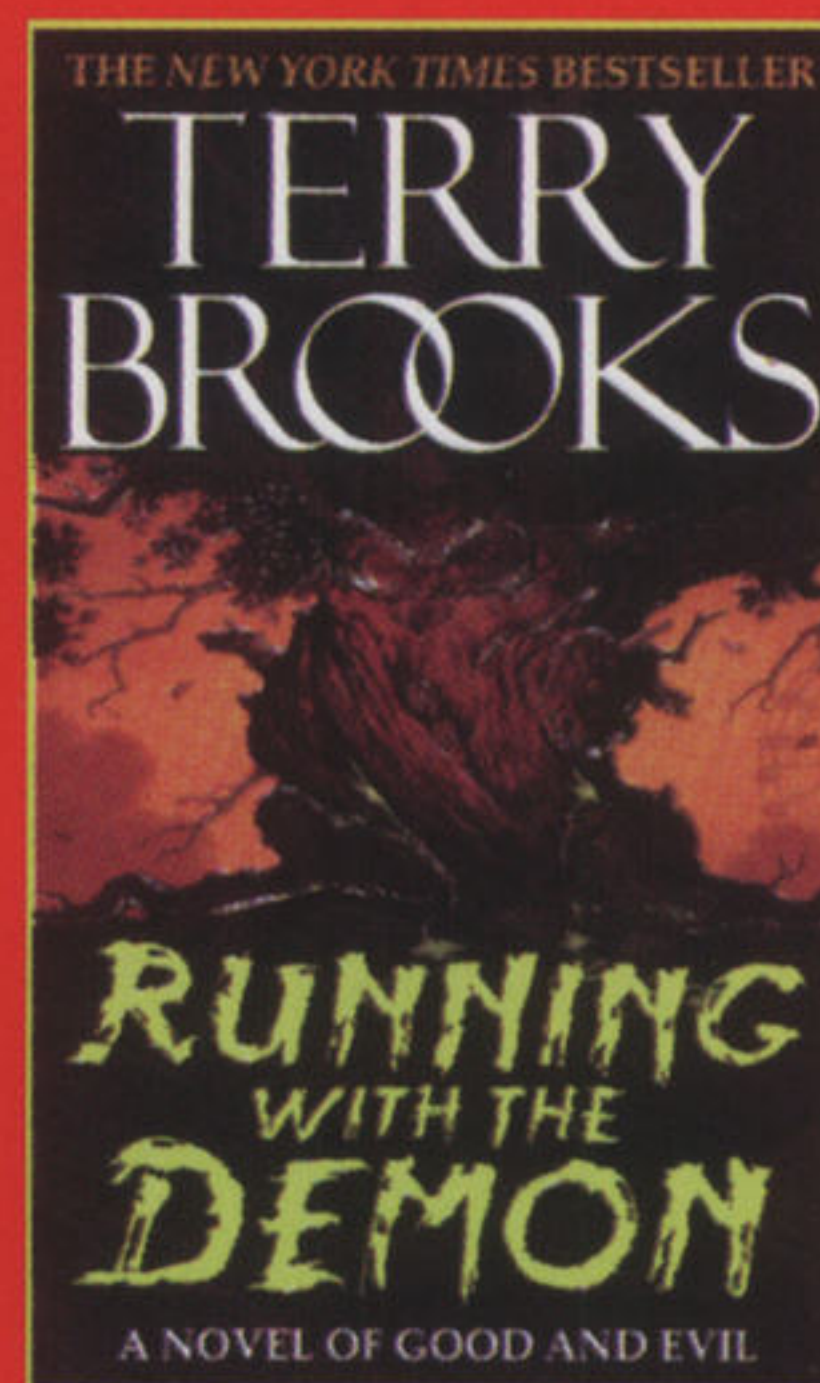
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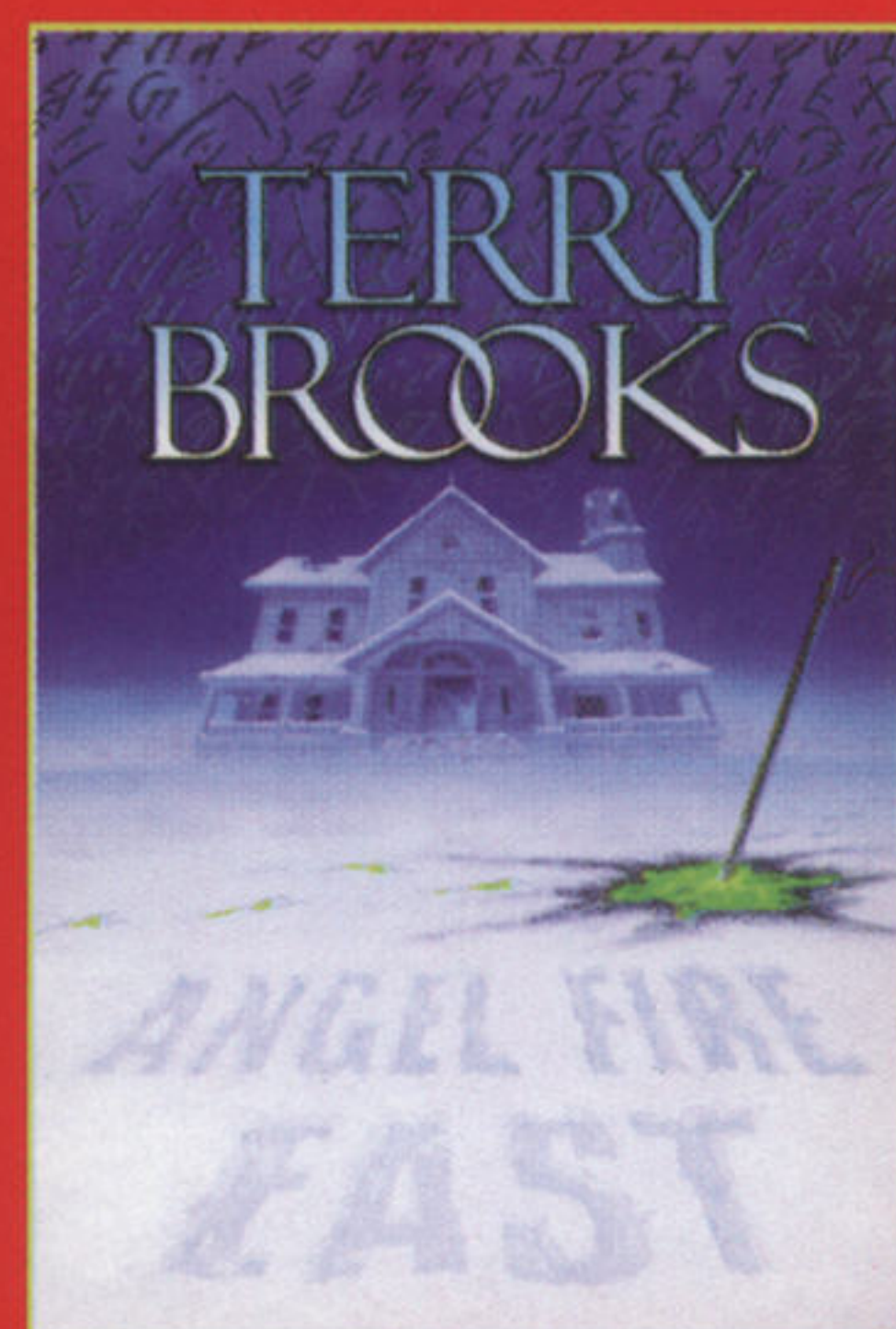
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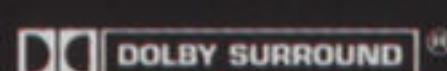
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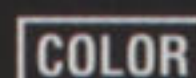


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