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December 1999



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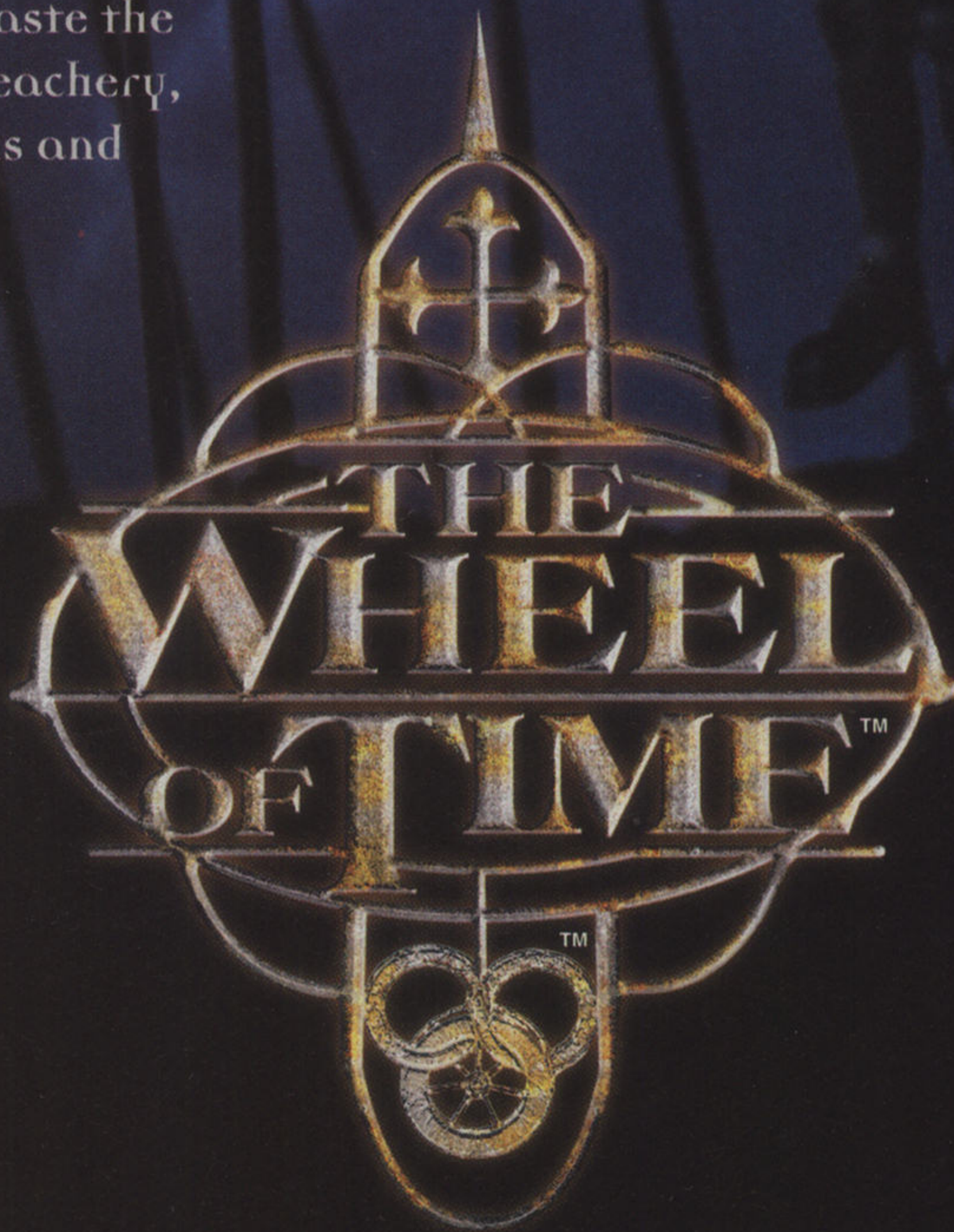
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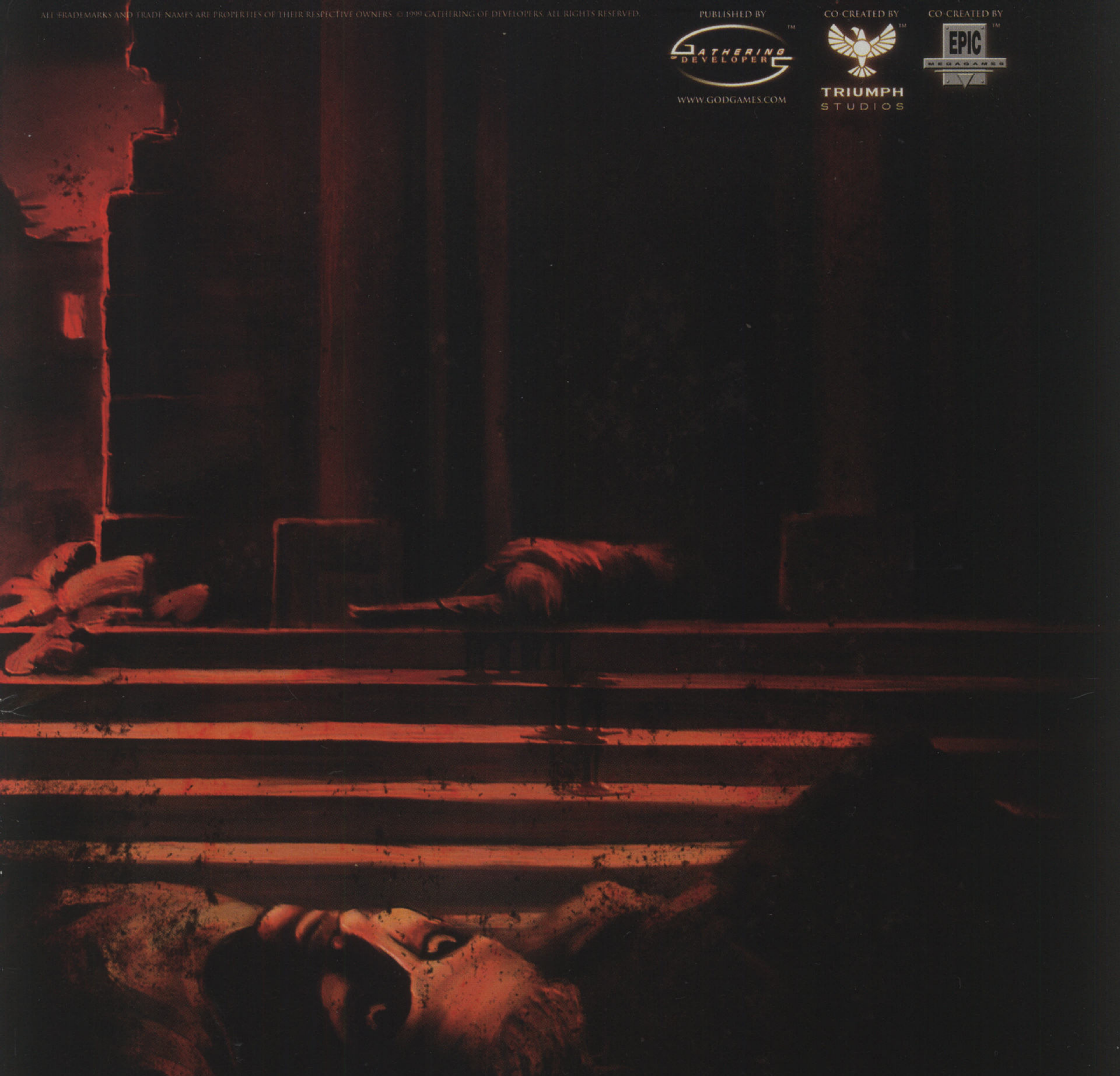
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AGE OF WONDERS™



ABOVE: Rowena Morrill's "Magenta Suitor" may not get a second date if he's not careful. For other fantastic encounters visit the Gallery on page 70. COVER: Luis Royo's deadly dream befriends a mini-devil.

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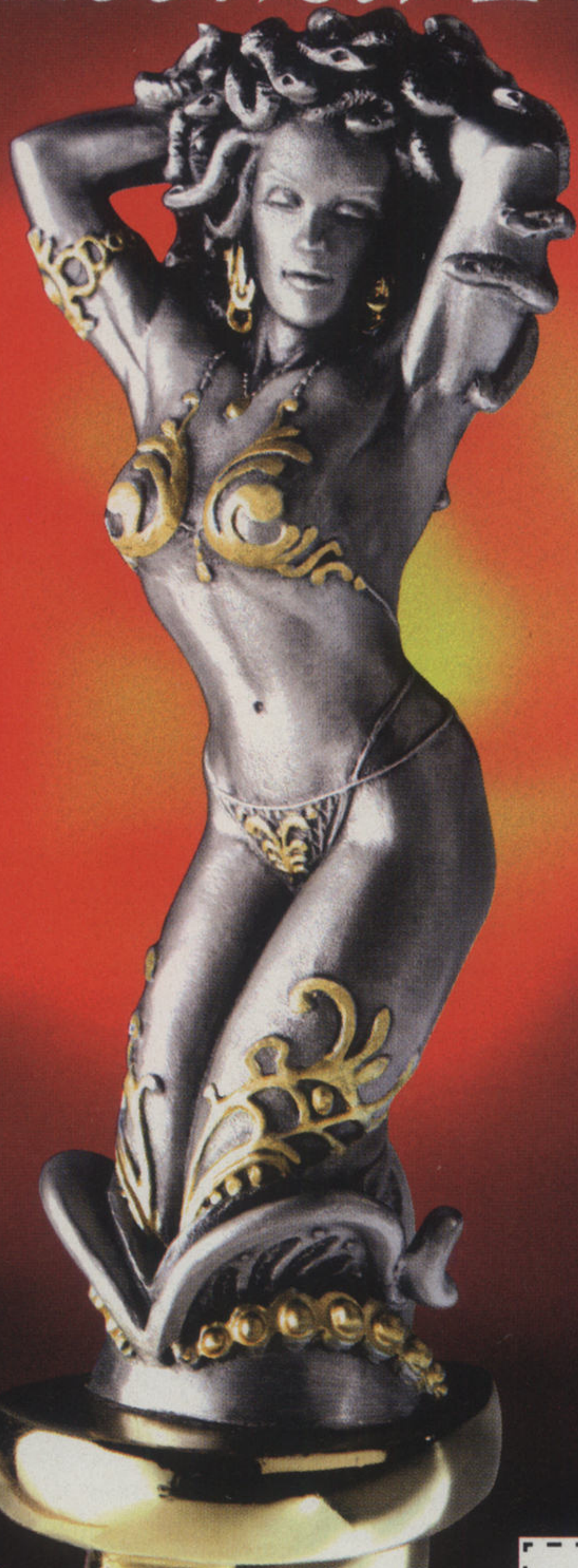
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It Ain't Valuable If They Ain't Buying.

BY PAUL T. RIDDELL

Over the past decade, I've been asked by quite a number of beginning writers about what the editors of genre magazines want in the way of stories and nonfiction. Even though I'm the last person in the world whose advice they should trust, I keep getting the question, "Well, I have a story; do you think (fill in the blank) would buy it?"

First, remember this basic point: Don't write a story unless you want to do so. Although a lot of writers, newbies and established, labor under the delusion that they have to write solely what editors already want to publish, the real trick is to offer a story that an editor didn't know s/he wanted, but that s/he, in retrospect, wanted to see in the slush pile. Writing with that goal in mind is actually a safer prospect than poring over market reports on what an editor will buy now: 1,500 people may read that an editor is buying Brand X stories and flood the magazine's mailbox with crap, but you, and only you, may come up with that one story that changes everything.

Even so, beginning writers in this business have a tendency to offer stories that they assume are innovative and new, but have been done to death for the last 50 years. The only fault lies with not understanding the market: Only the naive and deluded figure that anyone can make a living writing stories for SF magazines anymore, so only those who look at writing as a get-rich-quick scheme send in one of the Grand Clichés (the Adam and Eve story, the dinosaur hunt story, the shock ending story, among others) and expect it to sell.

Although editors are open to innovative stories, one has to remember that they generally have no interest in material unrelated to the magazine's purview. In other words, know your market. If the story doesn't have a hard scientific base, don't bother sending it to *Analog*, because it'll come back about as quickly as a hardcore porn story from *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. When you receive submission guidelines from a magazine, read them: if an editor says "No Horror" or "No Fantasy," this usually means that, no matter how groundbreaking your story may be, it'll come back on the mail truck with a big fat pink rejection notice on top. More importantly, if said story is a cliché as well as something outside their purview, you'll get it back even faster.

Now, the last time I dared to make an assumption about genre editors, I never heard the end of it from the Science Fiction Writers of America. That won't stop me from giving a reasonable list of what the vast majority of editors really don't want to see in their mailboxes each morning. We'll always find exceptions, but I'm offering generalities.

Numero Uno: If it's based on something you saw on a TV show or in a movie, don't bother. Most newbie writers are told to write what they know, which explains why everyone tries their hand at fan fiction. Editors usually see nothing wrong with fan fiction; they just don't want to see it in their mailboxes. Unless the editor specifically asks for a particular story from you, don't send him/her your three hundred-page *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, or *Babylon 5* novel. Don't send crossover fiction; nobody really wants to see your *Star Trek/The Young Ones* crossover spoof, and just because Patrick Stewart would like to see a crossover between *Star Trek* and *Beavis and Butt-Head* doesn't mean that the rest of the world wants it from you. Unless specifically requested, don't send your Ph.D thesis on the parallels between *Star Wars* and *Less Than Zero* and expect to get anything but a rejection notice. Most of all, nobody wants your *Star Trek: The Next Generation* porn stories, even if they involve Wesley and Worf. Especially if they involve Wesley and Worf.

This point also applies to attempting to one-up the story line of an established movie or TV show. Just because *Jurassic Park* was popular does *not* mean that an editor is interested in tales concerning the cloning of dinosaurs, titanotheres, trilobites, Neanderthals, space aliens, or TV news anchor-people from fossil DNA. We also don't want to see stories on how the *Titanic* was sunk by a choral vortex, a time-travel plot, or a Godzilla attack. Trust me: it's been done.

Numero Two-o: Leave your poetry at home. This is nothing personal, but the reason why so many editors put "No poetry" on submission guidelines is because they'd be buried in lousy genre-related poetry. I'm not saying that *your* poetry is bad; I'm just saying that very few editors are willing to pay for it. If you feel that you must write poetry because your soul demands an outlet, that's OK; practice your craft to the point where you receive offers to become Poet Laureate before submitting it to a genre magazine.

Continued on page 80

REALMS OF FANTASY

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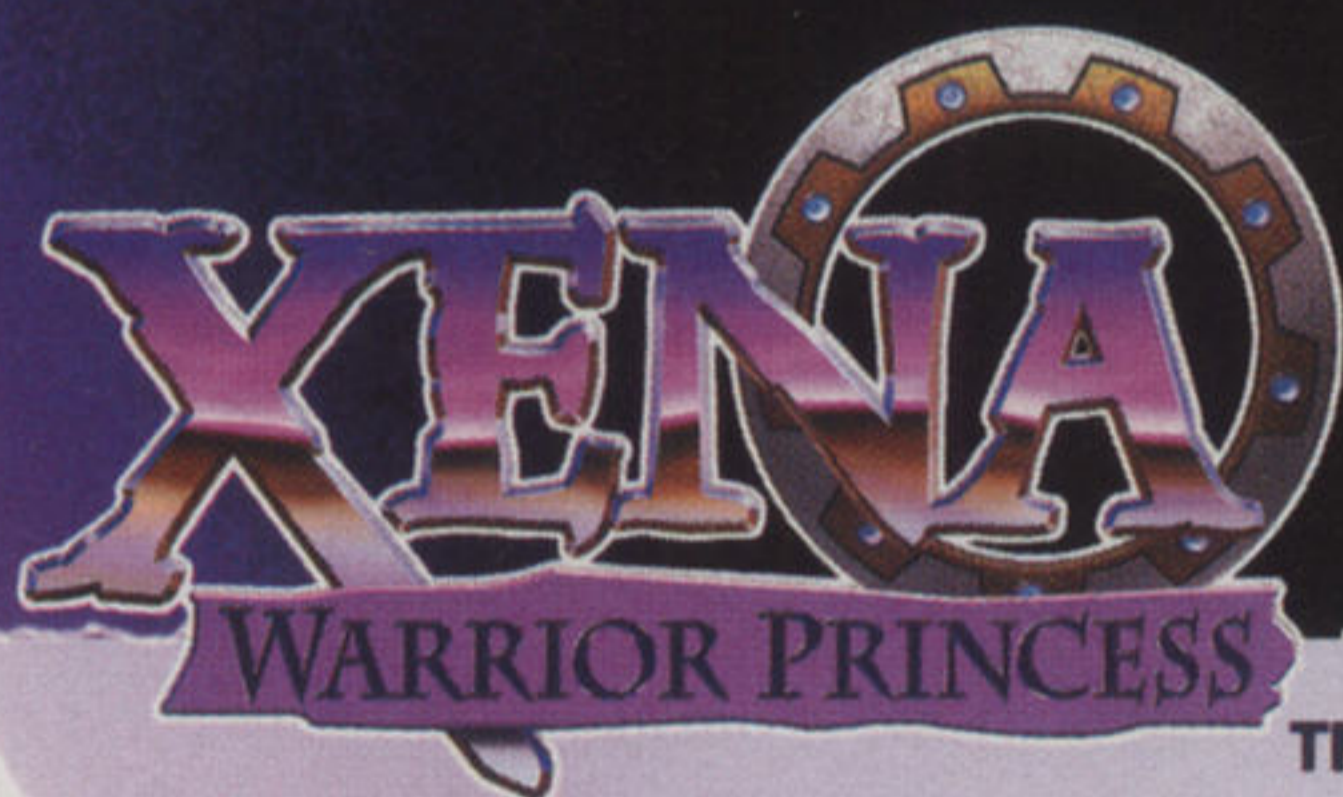
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BY GAHAN WILSON, JEANNE CAVELOS, AND BRIAN MURPHY

Everything Old is New Again: The Return of the Lord (Dunsany).

WAY BACK WHEN IN THE FABLED SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES (WHICH CAME VERY shortly after the truly God-awful fifties) many magical things occurred. The country simmered with a variety of rebellions ranging from mercilessly deadly to butterfly gentle; tie-dyed young folk wandered off from the old proven ways in droves; several men who would very probably have led this country in drastically different

directions than it has taken were bloodily slaughtered in full view of the press; and Lin Carter—an eclectic author of many pleasingly bizarre novels and short stories—managed to persuade Ian and Betty Ballantine, the founding publishers of Ballantine Books, to let him create and superintend a new division of the firm to be called Adult Fantasy.

The task to which Carter set himself and which he fabulously fulfilled was to track down and get back into circulation as many as possible of the very best of those glorious and legendary works of imagination which had long since gone out of print and become hopelessly unavailable to all but the most determined and pocket-heavy collectors of obscure wonders.

These paperbacks still exist, though growing yellow-

ish of page and frayed of cover, but since Ballantine was generous in their printings they may still be located at perfectly reasonable prices to those willing to haunt the dealers' rooms at strange conventions or contact book dealers specializing in hard-to-get volumes. And allow me to point out that many such dealers advertise in the pages of this very magazine.

I strongly recommend that you instigate a search since Carter's rescue efforts somehow or other (here you must imagine a gently ironic tone creeping into my voice) did not lead to a general reprinting by other publishers of towering giants such as James Branch Cabell, E.R. Eddison, William Morris, and the like and so—outside of their reincarnation as Adult Fantasy reprints—these beautiful and hugely influential works still remain as hard, if not harder, as ever to find, and have most certainly become even more expensive to buy.

Now (and here you are free to imagine a warm smile spreading across my face, a happy glitter shining in my eyes), many years after Lin Carter's heroic and downright historical series, dear old Ballantine Books has decided to launch what it is pleased to call Del Rey Impact which is (and I quote from their flyer) "a new imprint dedicated to re-introducing seminal classics of fantasy and science fiction that have inspired a generation or more of readers and writers." They intend to bring out one a month for starters and then go on to a bimonthly basis "through 2000" and—fortunate readers of this very happy news—they have had the smarts to start their series with two gorgeous books from one of the most absolutely towering and thunderingly influential masters of fantasy who ever breathed and imagined and wrote: Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, the 18th Baron Dunsany, professionally known as Lord Dunsany.

The only small complaint I have is that nowhere in their flyer nor in the first books' quotes and cover blurbs is the name Lin Carter so much as mentioned. I must admit this strikes me as being a little disrespectful and perhaps even a touch ungrateful.

But on to the wonderful book itself:

The old lord thoughtfully mulls the request of his people and then proves himself an extremely wily politician by calling for his son, Alveric, and instructing him to somehow journey into Elfland and there find and court its princess, Lirazel, and bring her back to the fields we know and marry her and have a son by her and in this way give the rather silly people of Erl their magic lord and still keep the lordship in the old lord's family.

John Waterman's classic "La Belle Dam Sans Merci" is the cover for the reissue of The King of Elfland's Daughter.



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The King of Elfland's Daughter sensibly starts out, as a good many fairy stories do, with a quest, albeit an oddly motivated one. It seems the people of Erl have gotten it into their heads that—though they have been perfectly happy with the rule of their present lord, as they have been for generations with the rule of a long string of other lords from the same family—they need some new thing and have arrived at the peculiar conviction that the time has come for them to be ruled over by a magic lord.

Aided by a witch named Ziroonderel who forges him a magic sword made from 17 thunderstones dug up from the soft earth under the cabbages in her garden, Alveric dutifully makes his way to Elfland and, after using the magic sword to overcome a few obstacles such as walking trees, he does locate and successfully court Lirazel.

In triumph he brings her back to Erl where they are married at the holy place of the Freer with all proper Christom rites, despite some unhappy muttering on the part of the Freer about those who "dwell beyond salvation" (i.e., Elves). In due course, the couple is blessed by the birth of a beautiful baby boy named Orion.

Now you would think from all this that we had arrived at, or were approaching, the end of the tale—or you would if all this hadn't taken place by midway page 31 in a 240-page book! There is very much more to come

because even though Dunsany's story concerns itself with magic and strange worlds not our own, it never takes leave of its senses and is down to earth enough to know that if a mortal man and the King of Elfland's daughter marry, not only are they likely to be plagued with the most serious sorts of problems, but so will all other folk concerned in the matter, both from those fields we know and from those we don't.

The King of Elfland's Daughter is likely Dunsany's masterpiece. Most critics and commentators, including Neil Gaiman in his really excellent introduction to this printing, agree it probably is, and that may well be the same as saying it could be the very best fairy story ever written. Although it will show you some of the most fantastic visions you have ever come across in print and present a great quantity of notions so marvelous you will truly gasp in wonder, it is in no way escapist reading.

Although this wonderful story does largely concern itself with such things as trolls and unicorns and elvish runes, you will find it contains some very instructive and illuminating and now and then rather merciless truths about our perfectly ordinary day to day lives. *The King of Elfland's Daughter* is indeed packed full with wondrous curses and enchantments

but, be warned—the curses are sharp enough to pierce your flesh and the enchantments strong enough to open your eyes!

It is obvious to me as a professional book reviewer that Charles de Lint had a great deal of fun writing *Jack, the Giant Killer* and *Drink Down the Moon*.

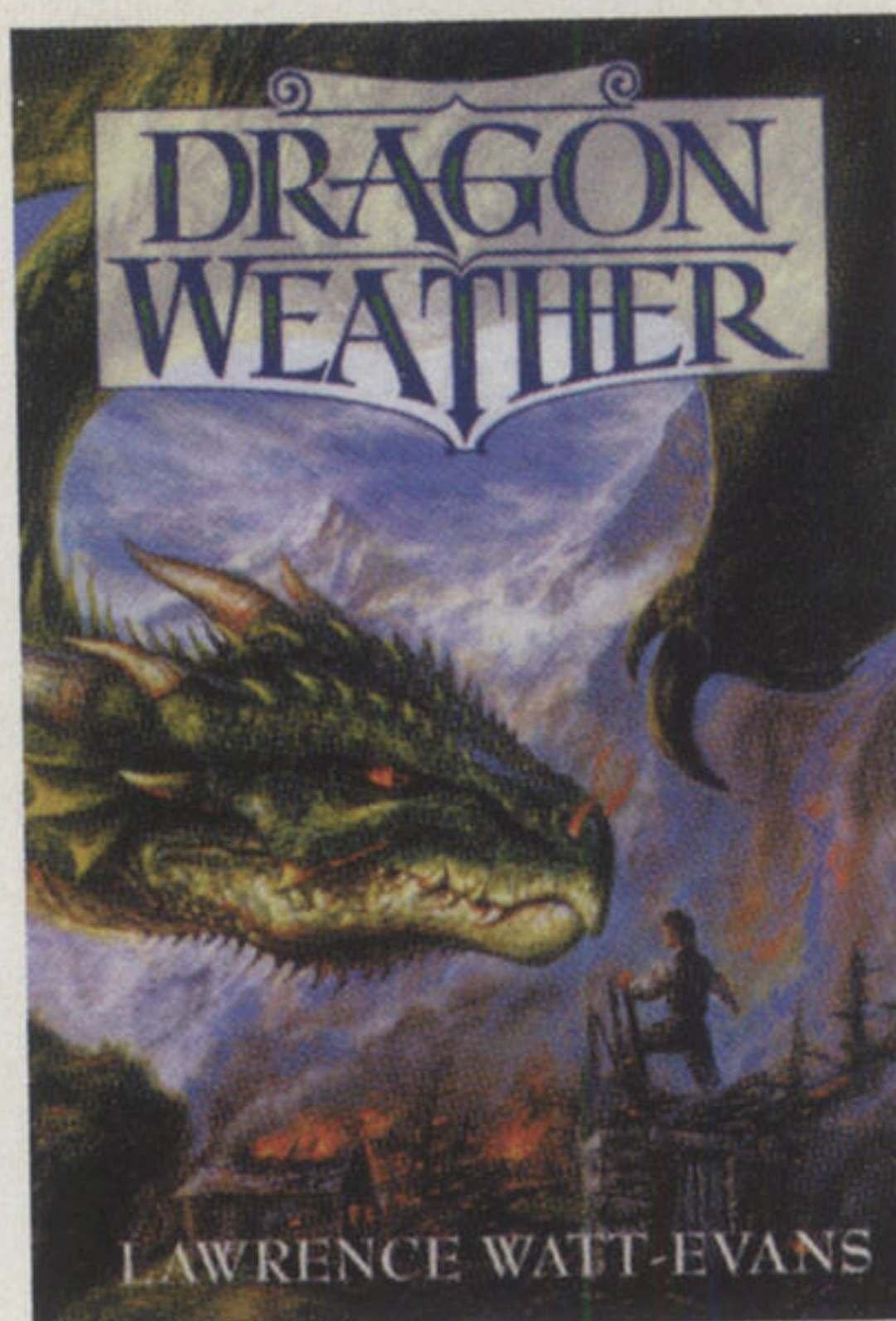
It may be your eyes widened in wonder when you read that statement and you started in your chair and asked yourself how ever in the world did I know Charles de Lint had fun writing those books? So I'll let you in on a little technical secret we book reviewers get taught right off in book reviewers school: You can usually tell someone's having fun writing a book if you're having fun reading it.

Now, thanks to Mr. Tom Doherty and his publishing house, we have both those books bound together in a handy trade paperback entitled *Jack of Kinrowan* (by Charles de Lint; A Tom Doherty Book, NYC; 412 pages; trade paperback; \$14.95) so you'll have the complete saga of what happened to Jacqueline (a k a "Jacky") Rowan when she put the red cap of a slain

Hob over her freshly chopped hair and found she'd stepped sidewise from the heart of Ottawa into the land of Faerie.

Unlike Lord Dunsany's fairy story reviewed above, which oftentime forces you into downright traumatic confrontations with what you've done or are doing with your life, *Jack of Kinrowan* is an unabashed and extremely well-crafted work of sheer escapism. True, it does start in a thoughtful fashion with the account of a very likeable young woman quite understandably feeling badly about an oaf who has clearly not treated her anywhere near as well as she deserves, and after-

ward the work does pause now and then in its headlong careening to offer bits of useful and encouraging advice as to how its readers might better handle some of life's little problems and now and then it will stop its riproaring action long enough to proffer sensible suggestions about how we might all get along a little better together, but its main business, and certainly its most enthusiastic pursuit, is to float you out of that clattering subway or bus



commute into frightening, dark-of-night confrontations with a pack of bikers whose helmets may just possibly contain no heads, or waft you far away from your lonely apartment with the dripping faucet and no watchable TV show into a twisty cave smelling of trolls and its damp stone floor vibrating from the thudding steps of giants, or allow you to forget completely the latest dangerous inanity voiced by some local, national, or interna-

tional politician because you are rapt with the view from the third-story window of a magician's retreat which not only gives you a vast, panoramic view of the whole city but indicates areas where evil's brewing by showing them gleaming a corpsy gray.

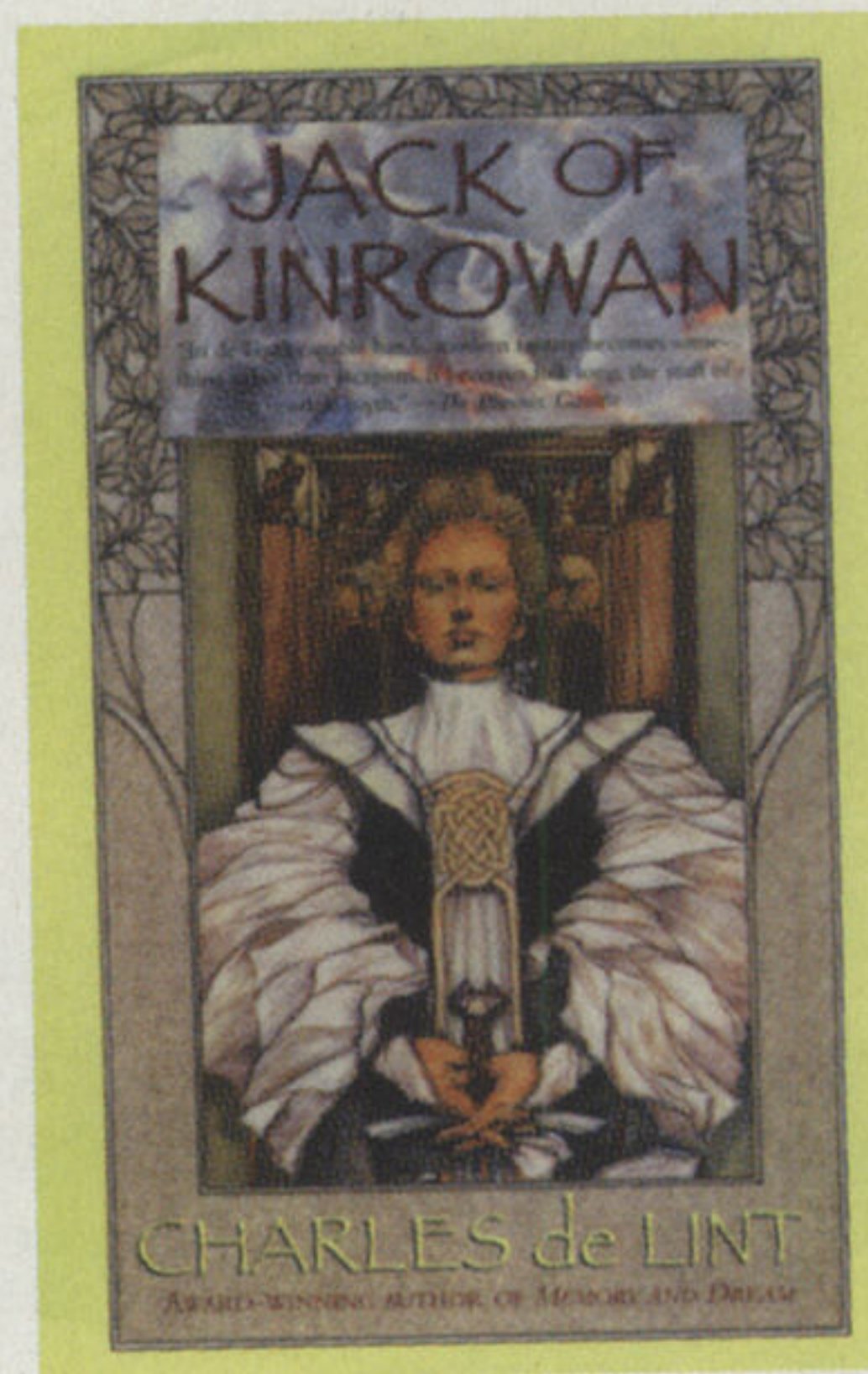
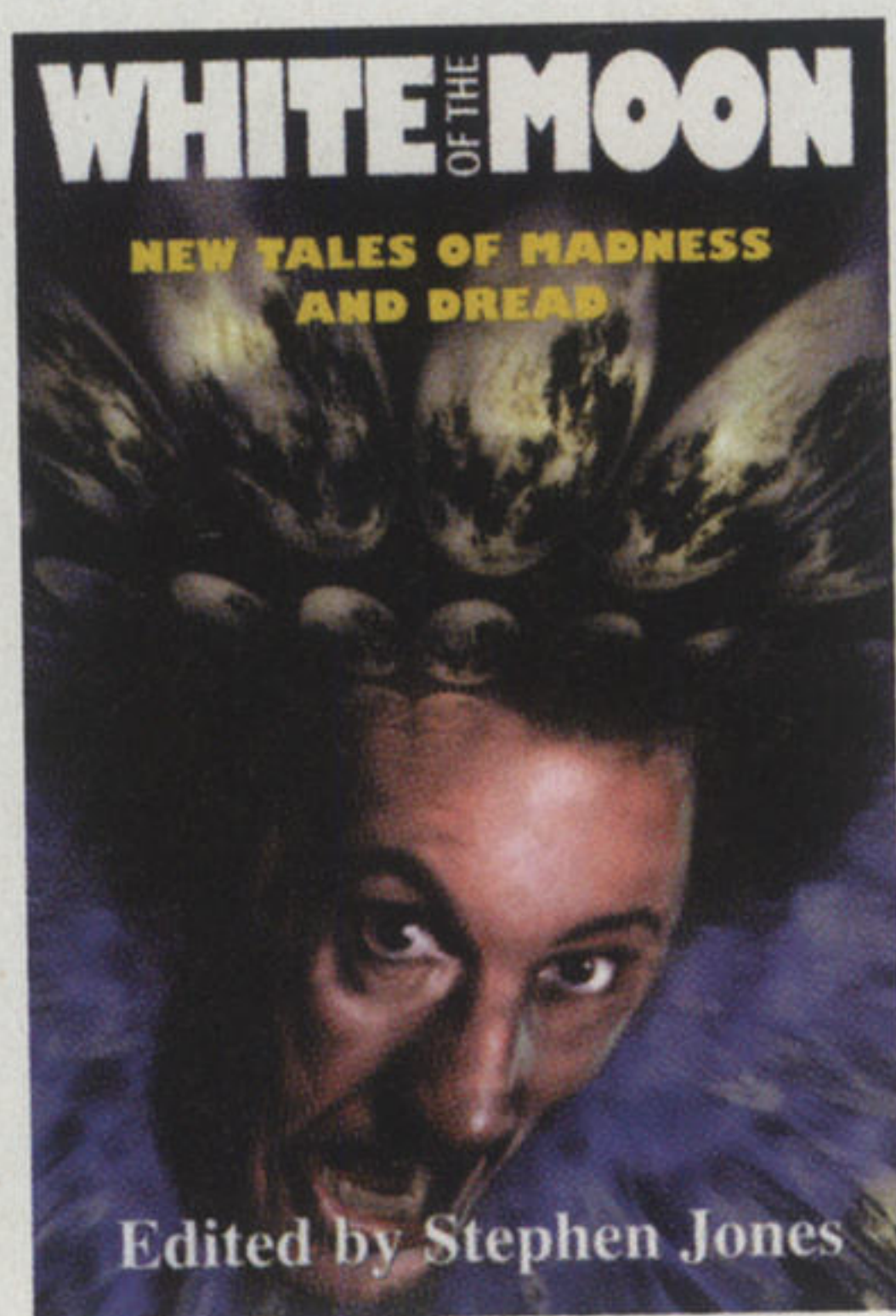
The basic notion behind the Jack stories is based on one of the classic spooky concepts: that an alien world and/or its creatures exist in the same space and time as our world and ourselves but that because of magic or a science-fictional ploy we are unable to see them. In this case it's magic and the world is that part of the world of Faerie which has followed its humans as they've traveled and migrated into new lands. The new land in these novels is Canada and the immediate locale is Ottawa which the Faerie call Kinrowan.

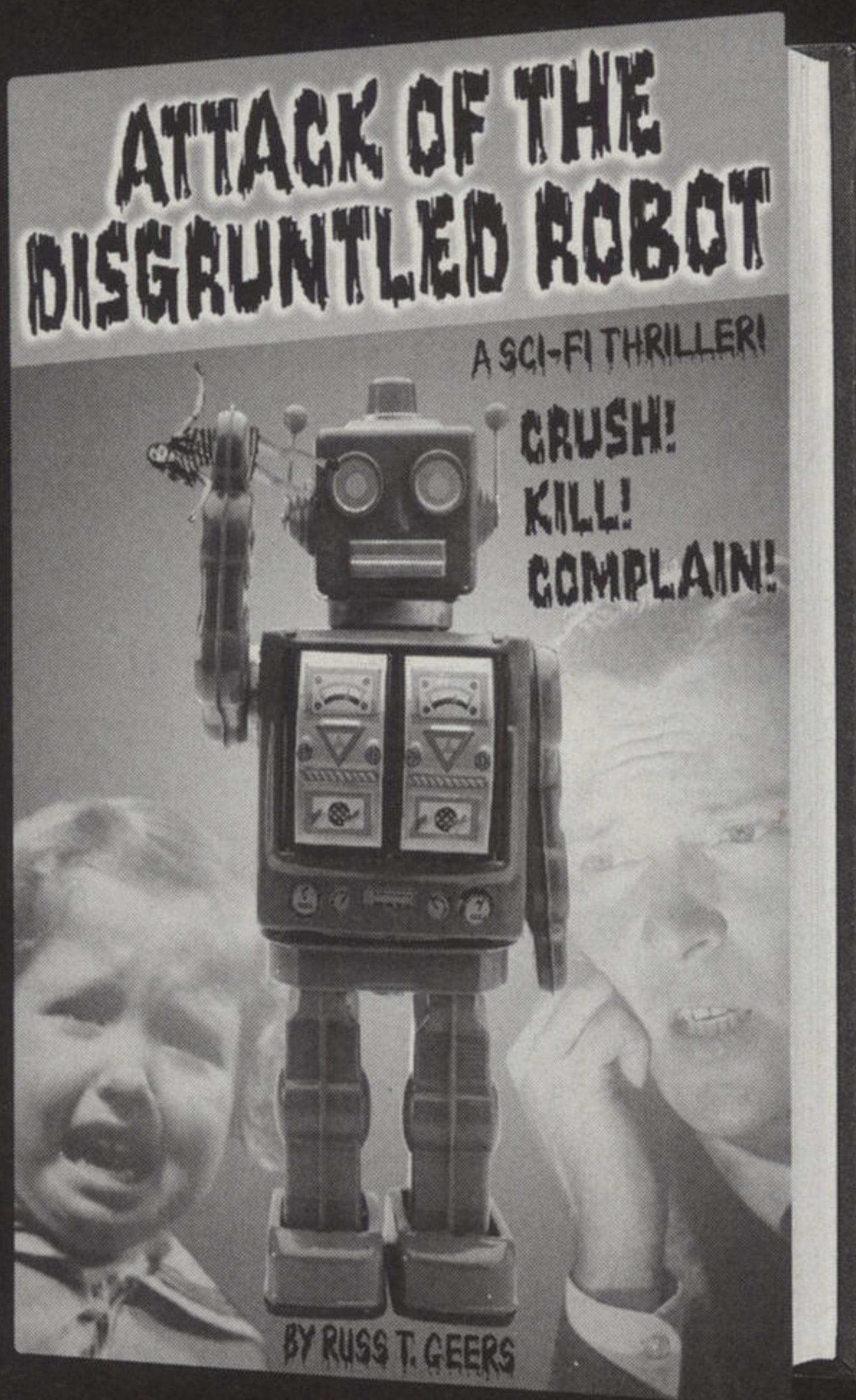
Charles de Lint has obviously done a thorough job of researching the actual legends of the world of Faerie and, what's more—and what is very rare, indeed—has gone out of his way to give open-handed credit to those scholars and researchers who spent so much time gathering all that useful information.

The first adventure concerns the ancient tensions between the two great more or less organized groups of Faerie, the Courts of the Seelie and the Unseelie. The Seelie are the good guys: the tricky but basically amiable Little People, essentially agreeable elemental sprites, good magicians, and so on; the Unseelie are unpleasant creatures such as giants, trolls, Bogles, and the meaner varieties

of the walking dead.

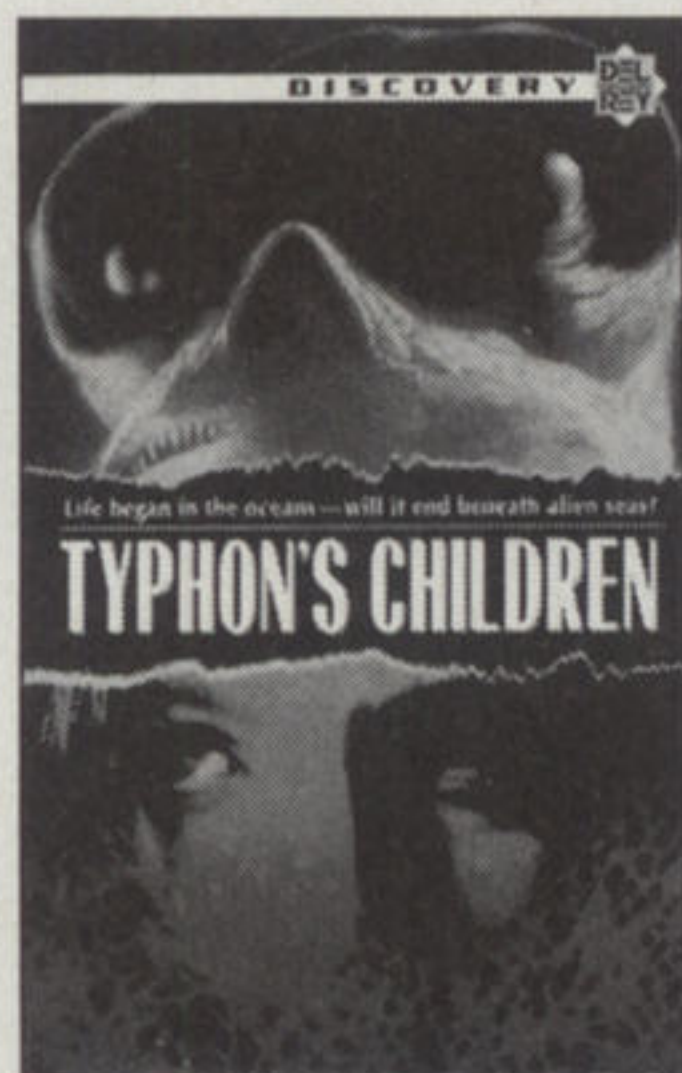
The author's amusing thesis concerning the present status of these two groups is founded on our species' ancient and rather ethnocentric idea that the powers of Gods and Spirits and such are essentially fueled by the number of human beings who believe in them and de Lint points out that Seelies have small nourishing support since very few people own the slightest belief whatsoever





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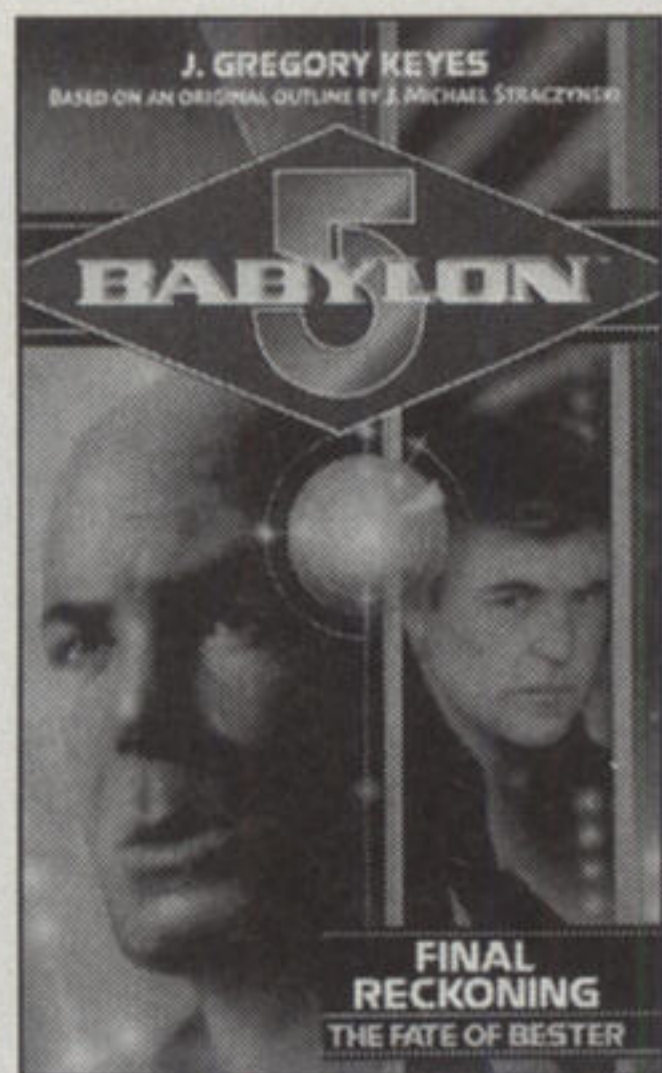
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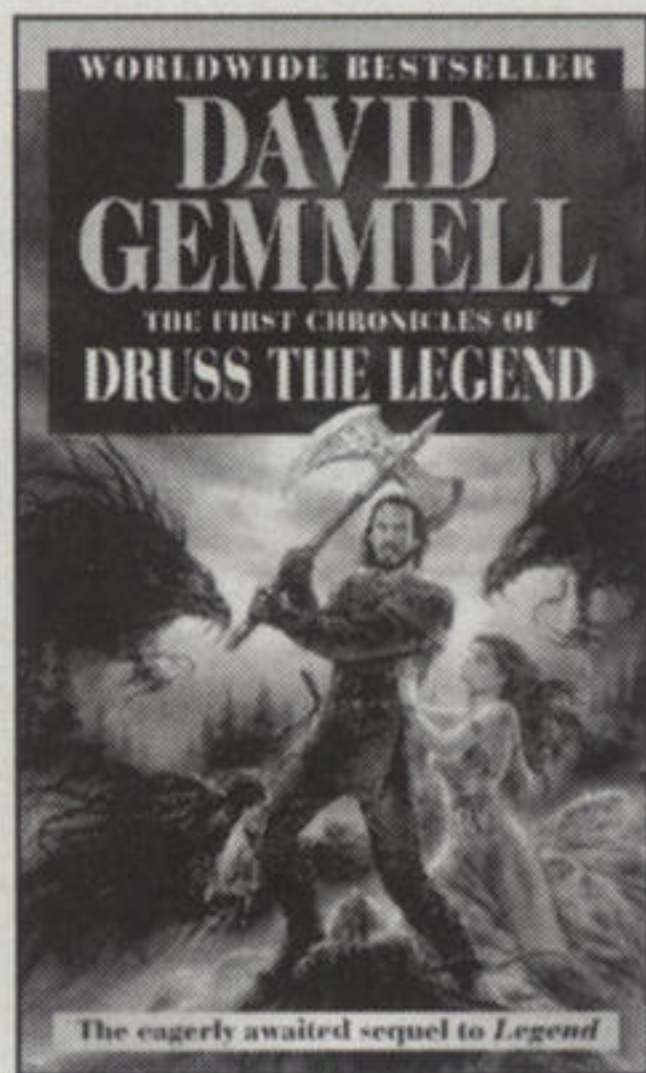
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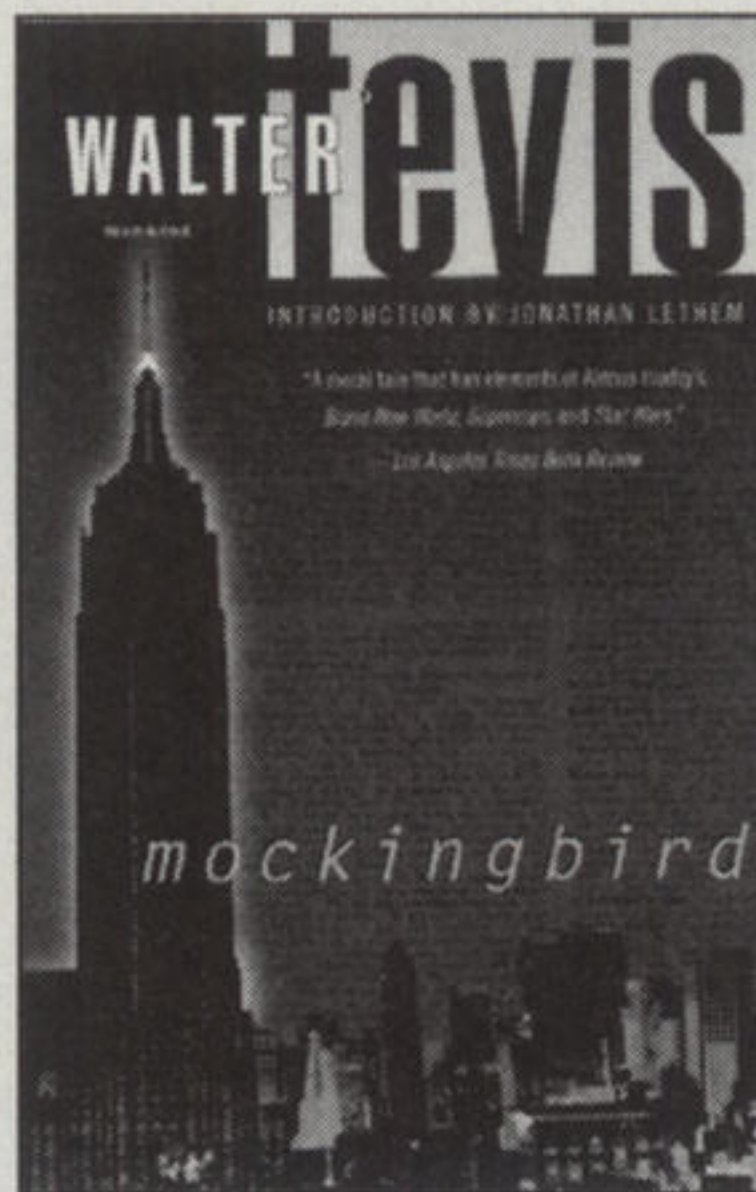
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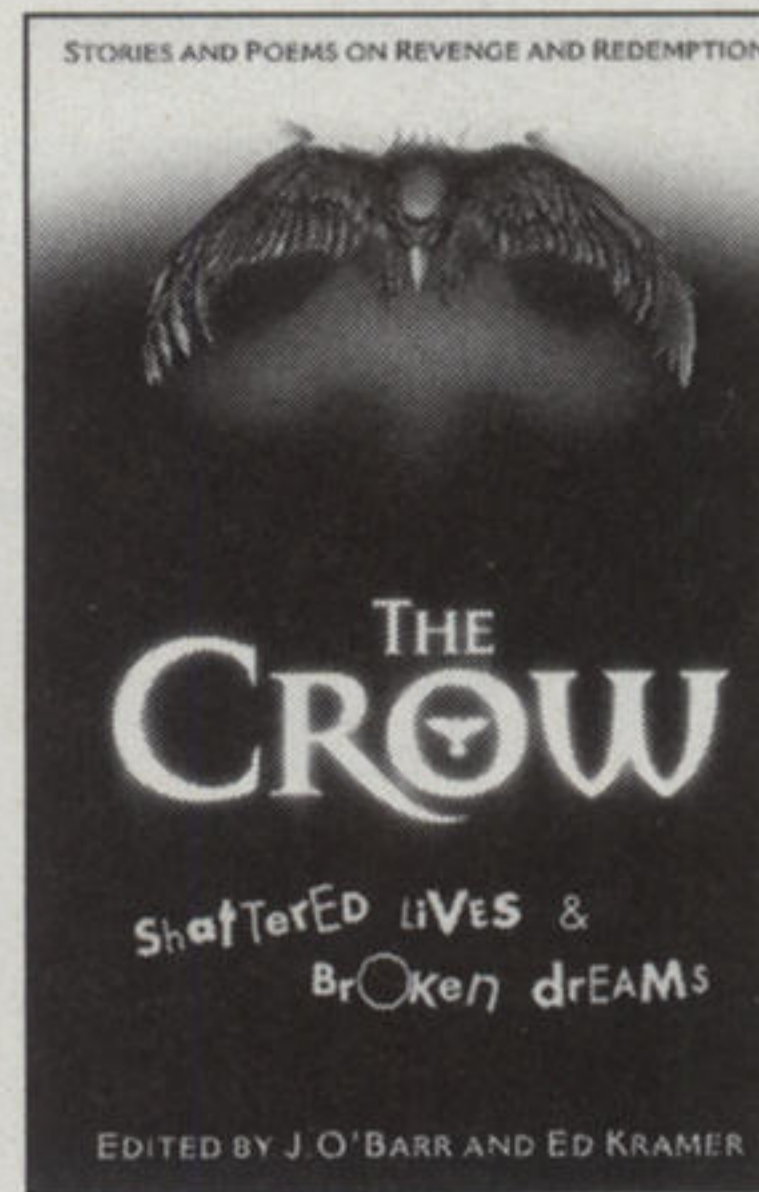
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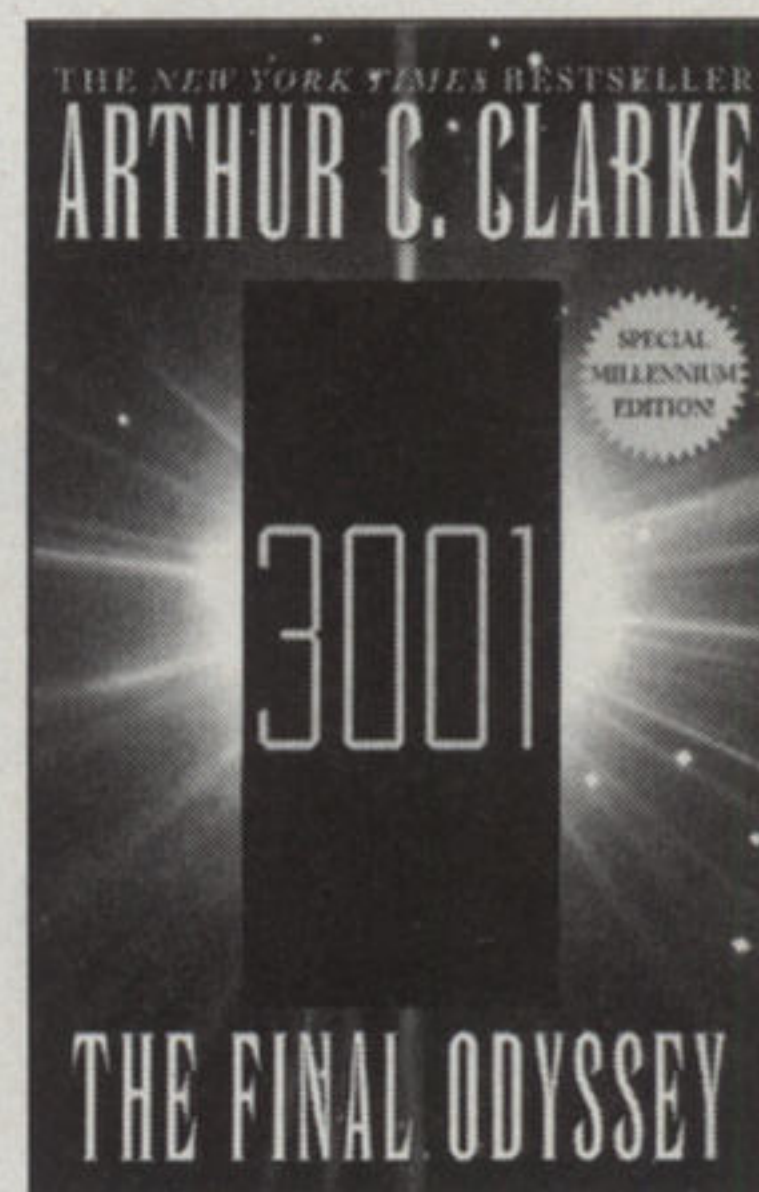
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in the existence of kindly little folk, gentle tree sprites, and the like as there is almost no contemporary propaganda promoting their possibility, whereas because almost all of us have from childhood on been exposed to the images in vast numbers of horror movies, studied vampires on our cereal boxes as we ate our breakfasts, and breathed through horrid masks every Hallowe'en, we all share a sneaky, unadmitted suspicion—especially on dark, windy nights—that there just might possibly be such fearsome and shadowy creatures as inhabit the Unseelie court, and therefore we give them succor and strengthen them.

So when Jacky Rowan puts on a Hob's red spellcap found in a city park and is flabbergasted to discover she is suddenly able to see a huge giant and other wonders she never dreamed were there, a kindly but fretful Hob named Dunrobin Finn takes pity on her, hoists her up next to him on the branch he's sitting on, stitches charms into her coat and running shoes so the giant likely won't see her or be able to catch her if he does, and before you know it our heroine is deeply involved in the uneven but very sprightly contest between two courts.

The second adventure emphasizes the *fiana sidhe* which is that very large portion of Faerie who are not joiners and therefore belong neither to the Seelie nor the Unseelie court. It also prominently features an extremely nasty wizard I think you'll enjoy,

and this time it is he who must be somehow or other taken care of by our bold Jacky.

Absolutely the best sort of reading for that long plane flight. You won't even notice the stuffy air, and tender little children will look at you enviously and ask their mothers why you're smiling.

Charles de Lint dedicated the book just reviewed to Katharine Briggs. It was a good, generous gesture and made me think it might be a proper use of a column directed toward a readership such as yourselves to praise those who are aware of this author and this book and make haste to introduce her and it to any others who might not have come across it yet.

Katharine Briggs began her career by writing children's books and plays and though she did go on to write two successful fantasy novels, her main interest during the rest of her life was to research and produce a rich series of books related to Faerie in folklore and the arts. These are all well worth tracking down (a particular favorite of mine is *Nine Lives: Cats in Folklore*) but her magnum opus is, without doubt, *An Encyclopedia of Fairies* (by Katharine Briggs, Random House, 1978), printed in Great Britain under the rather grander title: *A Dictionary of Fairies, Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies and Other Supernatural Creatures*.

There are, of course, a number of excellent books on this topic as Faerie has drawn the interest of some extraordinary folk, but for me this volume offers a peculiar combination of coziness and bottomlessness and thor-

ough efficiency that is truly unique.

It is, for starters, probably one of the most multitudinously varied listings of spectacularly evocative names ever assembled and it is a great joy to pick out those that pop out at you randomly and read them aloud in a relishing, unabashed way, all the time listening to how wonderful they sound and what they conjure and how they affect the small hairs on the back of your neck.

Here's a tiny sampling plucked at random from the heaped and spilling hoard: Kate Crackernuts, Joan the Wad, Jenny Greenteeth, Guytrash, Greencoaties, Tantkerabogus (otherwise known as Tanterabobus) (and watch out for him as he's particularly hard on the children), Wulver, Spriggans, Howlaa (a spirit who howls before storms, notes Briggs, but then goes on to add a corrective note so the reader will not be misled: "Actually, this is the sound made by the DOOINNEY-OIE."), and, of course, Whuppity Stoorie, a fairy who has the delightful failing of always giving herself away by dancing and singing to herself.

The *Encyclopedia* is as full a gathering of the extraordinarily numerous species of Faerie, of each type's varied and peculiar ways, and of the widely diverse effects their interaction with humans and animals produce as I'm aware of, but it is also a delicious gathering of stories and poems and folk quotes which will pull you gently in, keep you entertained for hours, and greatly enhance any country walks henceforth.

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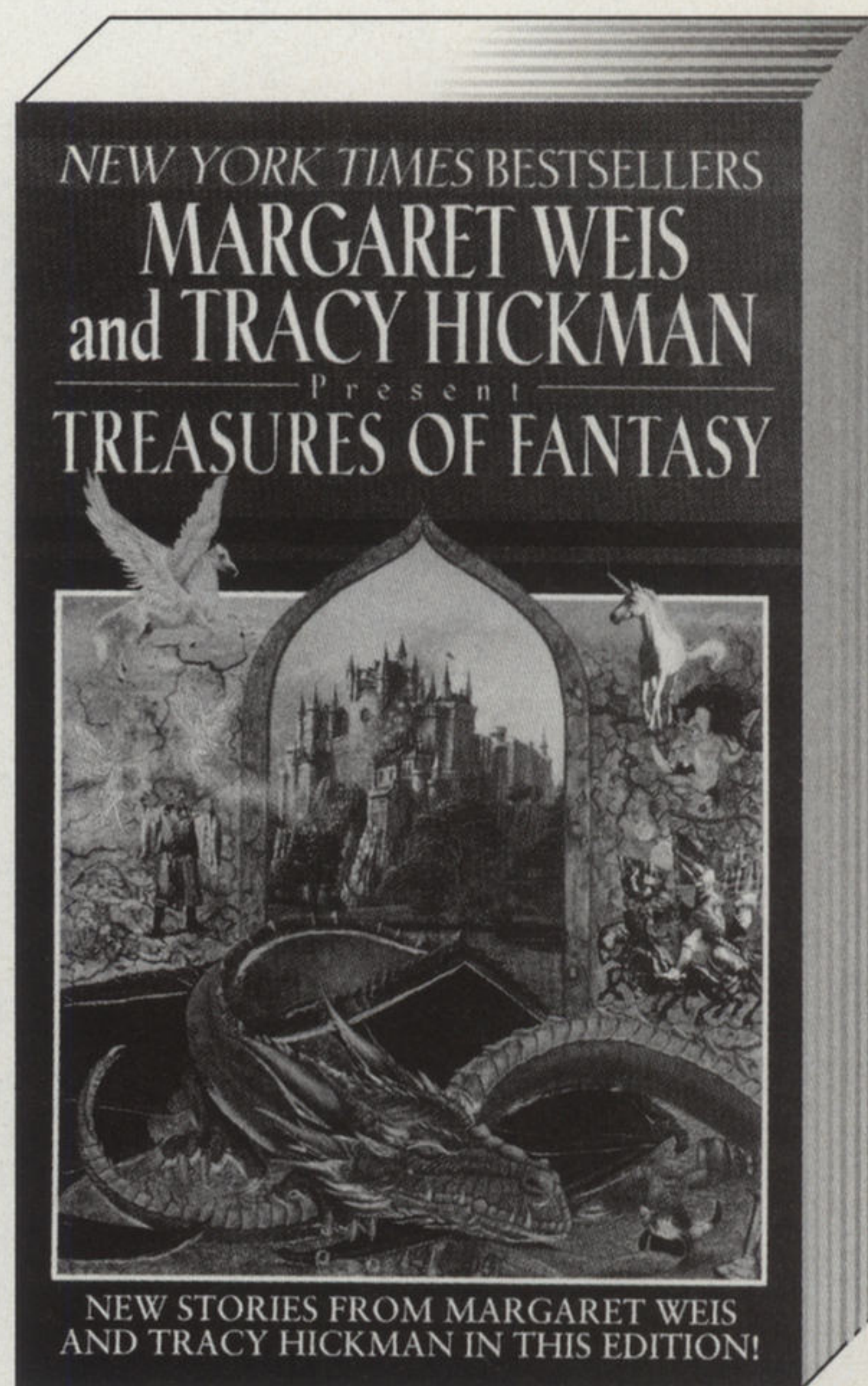
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I have tried, honestly I have, but I cannot resist quoting you a couple of samples. The first is the chorus from a Somerset folk song that tells of the dangers offered humans if they're careless around trees:

Ellum do grieve,
Oak he do hate,
Willows do walk
If you travels late.

The second, from William Butler Yeats, is very well known, but I'll give it to you even if you've read it before since it may be the finest and most succinct statement of Faerie ever written:

Come away! O human child!
To the woods and waters wild,
With a fairy hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping
Than you can understand.

There's no better book to read to someone, or have read to you.

Stephen Jones has come up with another highly satisfying gathering of ghastly grue in *White of the Moon, New Tales of Madness and Dread* (edited by Stephen Jones; Pumpkin Books, PO Box 297, Nottingham NG2 4GW, England; Hardcover, 339 pages; 16 pounds), an anthology of lunacy unbound starting with a tender introduction by the anthologist himself wherein he spins a sentimental and delicately wrought little autobiographical fantasy (I'm assuming it's a fantasy) describing himself murdering and likely dissecting his children (I'm assuming they're his chil-

dren) whilst under the spell of the full moon.

The proper tone thus tastefully and accurately set, we are presented with the second piece of fiction which is by Christopher Fowler. He writes it in the form of a confession to a very contemporary sort of murder and starts out with two marvelously creepy lines:

They keep asking me why I did it.

I try to tell them but they're not listening.

As is usual with his anthologies, Jones has assembled an extremely impressive list of top-ranking authors and inspired them to give the project their absolute best. Although sticking to the book's theme (people going crazy and doing awful things you hope to God you never see anyone actually do in person, especially if you're within range) is strictly enforced, the authors smoothly manage to range within it widely with none of them showing any sign of breaking into a sweat. Each tale is its own little isle of lunacy; there is not the slightest duplication in locales or characters and the authors' techniques and handlings spread from the notion's center with the infinite variety of the edges of a Rorschach blot.

David J. Schow, for example, has his loony deeply involved with a dusty, creepy treasure hunt; in a more gentle mood than is usual with him, Ramsey Campbell comes up with a touchingly nutty ghost; Edward Bryant vents a little of what I gather have been some pretty bitter personal experiences by examining

madnesses typical of Los Angeles; Kathryn Ptacek hopefully is in no way referring to her own personal history as she offers up a truly gruesome domestic vignette; Brian Stableford offers a cautionary tale demonstrating that one really must have natural aptitude in order to successfully execute traditional witchery; Steve Rasnic Tem has a particularly moving tale of a woman failing to handle too much horror and so falling into the pit; and Kim Newman suavely executes one of his glitzy, high-tech fantasies, this one a cautionary saga about what super spies of the future may likely have to contend with when they investigate tomorrow's sinister mad houses.

Of course, this is a far from complete list of the—ah—maddening offerings assembled but I hope it's been enough to make you want to run down to Nottingham and buy a copy of this excellent collection. It's my considered opinion that any reader who doesn't thoroughly enjoy *White of the Moon* must be totally insane.

Gahan Wilson

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, by J.K. Rowling; Scholastic, NY; 320 pp.; paperback, \$5.99.

Several times each year, publishers feel compelled to claim that they've discovered the next young adult classic. Comparisons to Roald Dahl's excellent *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* are common, but seldom

Continued on page 80

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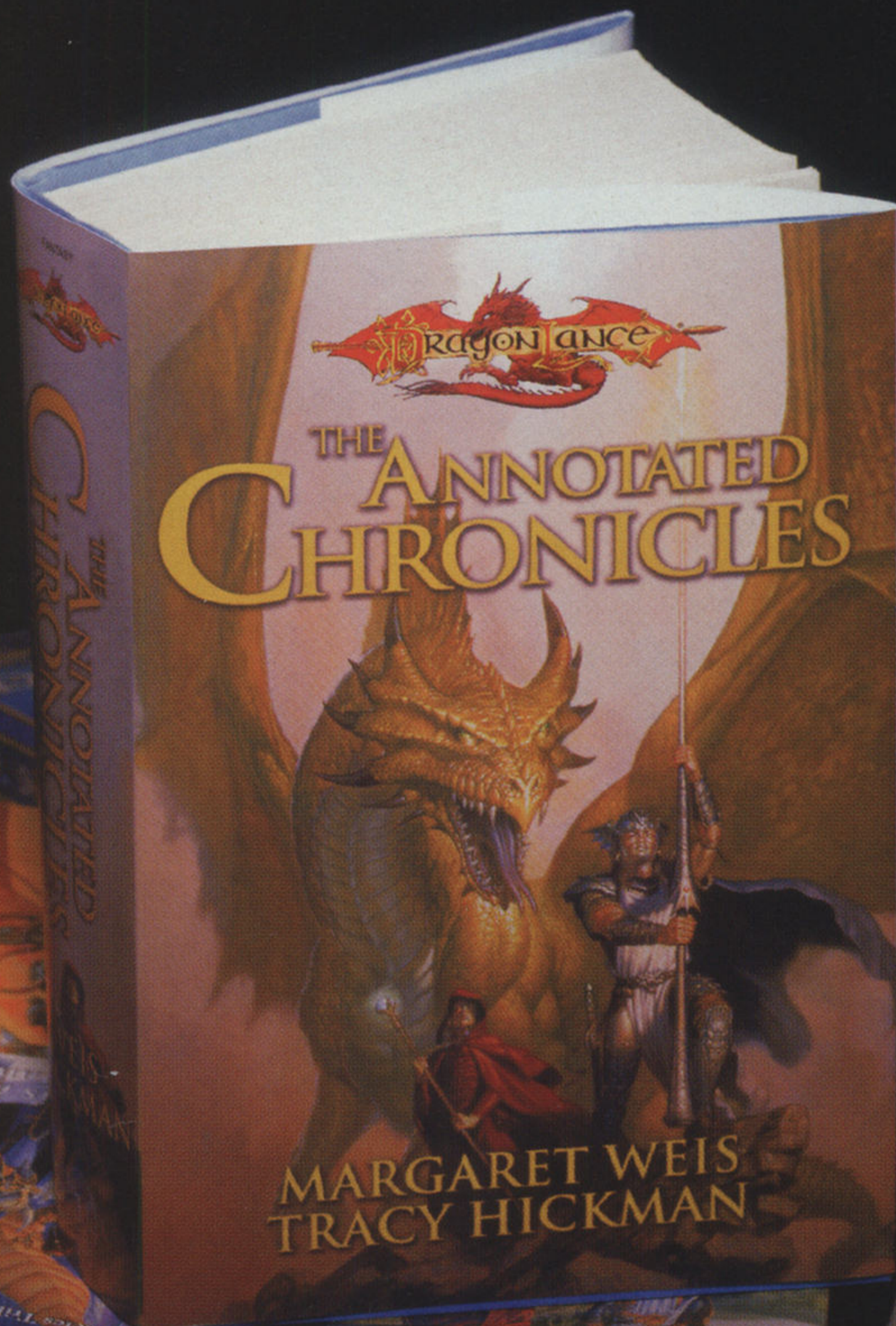
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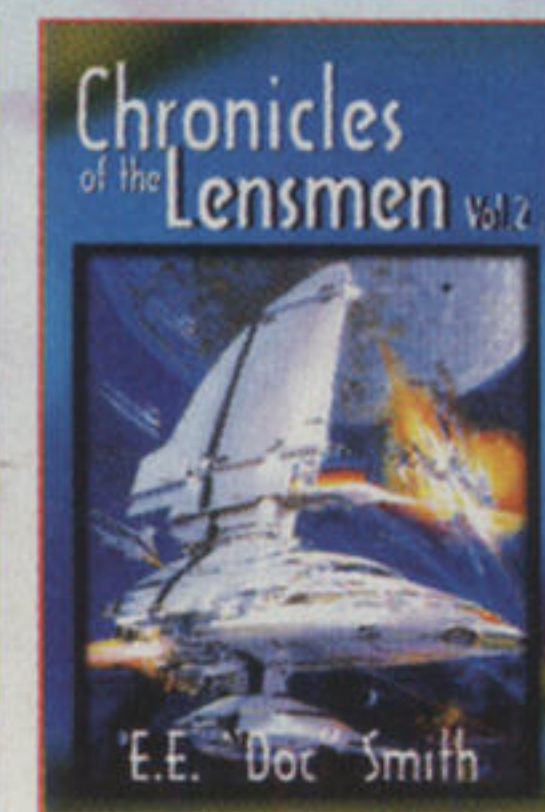
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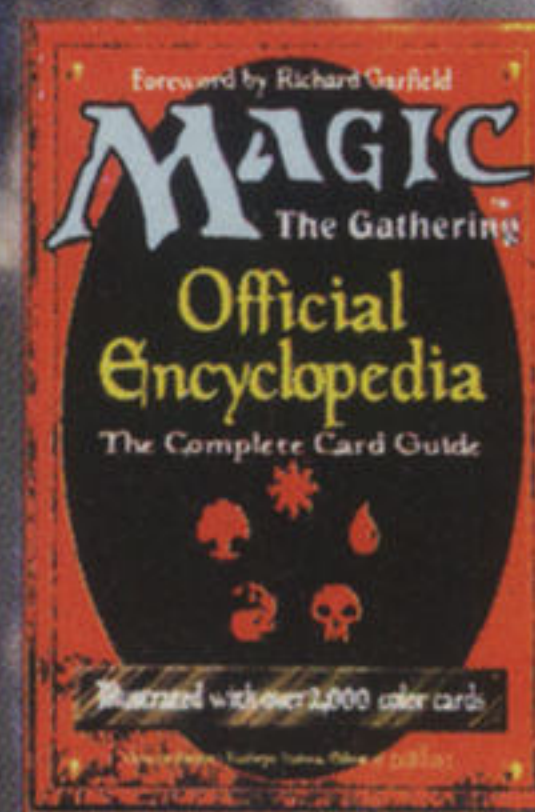
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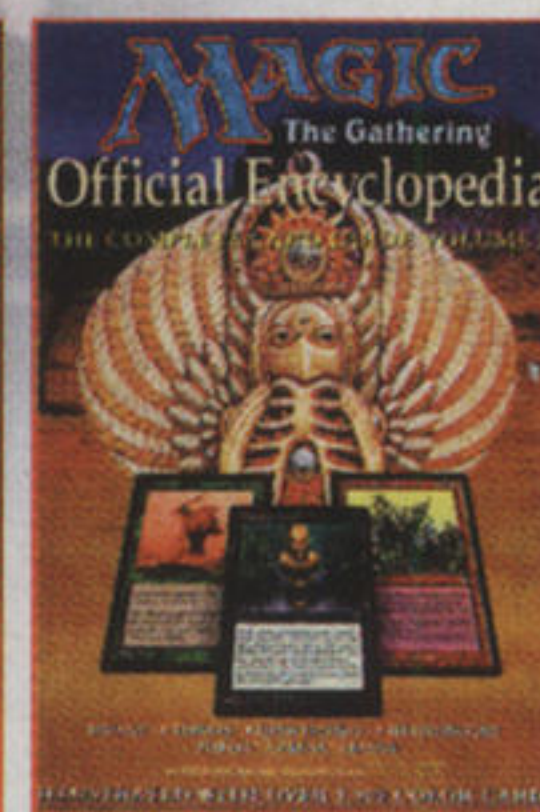
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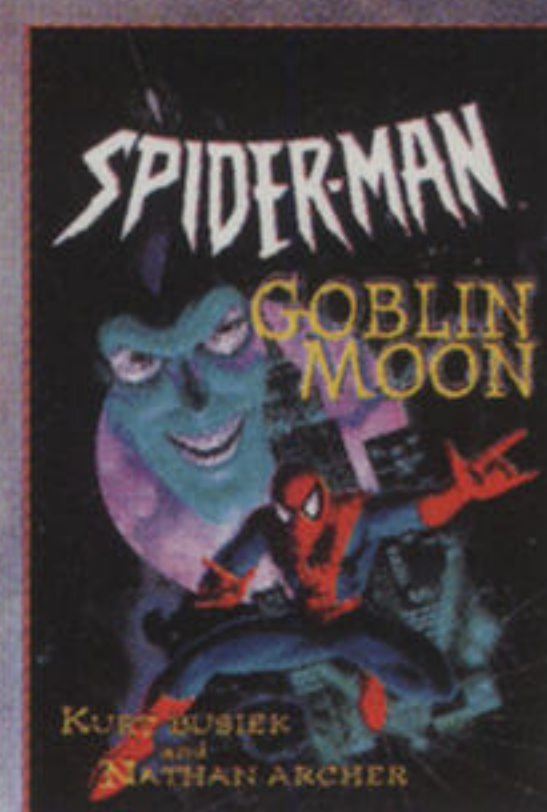
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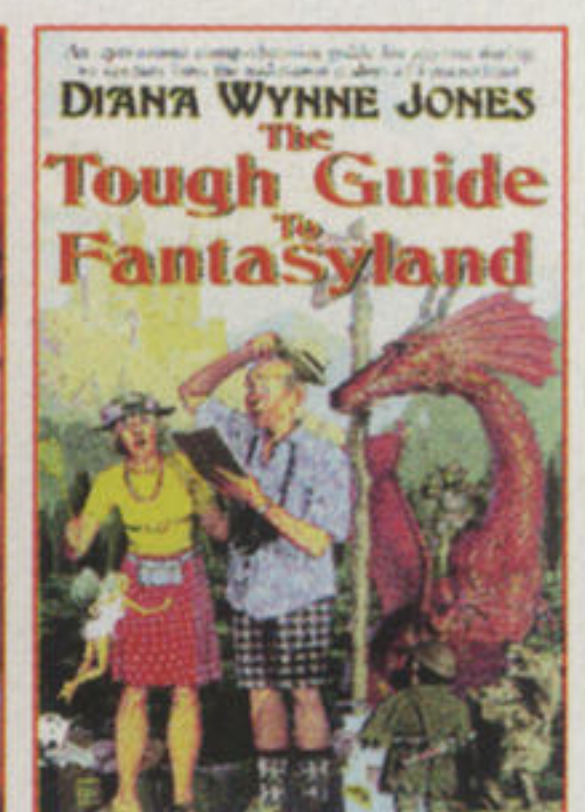
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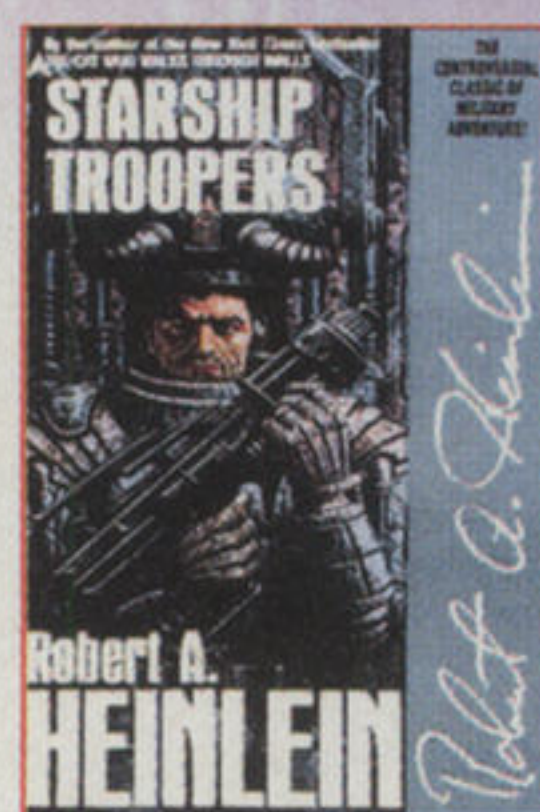
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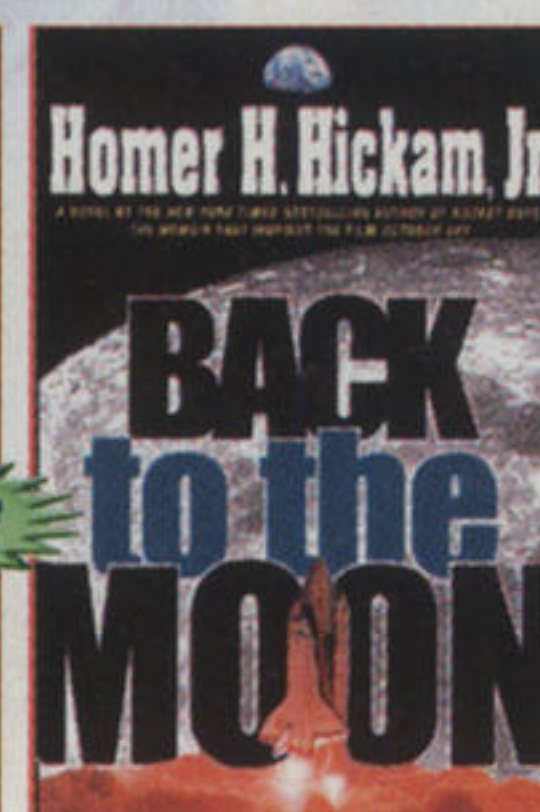
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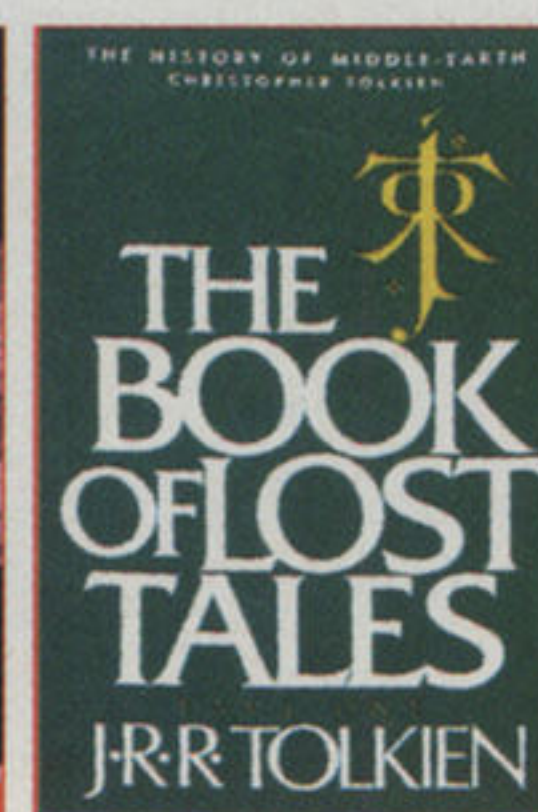
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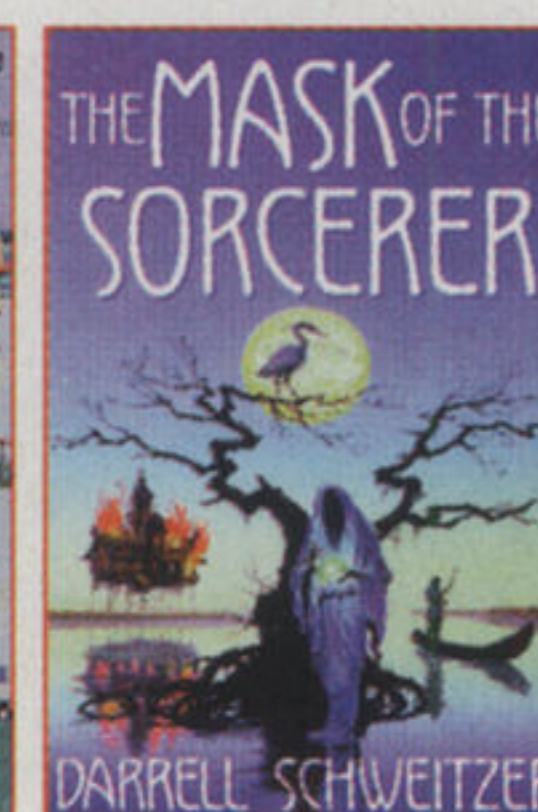
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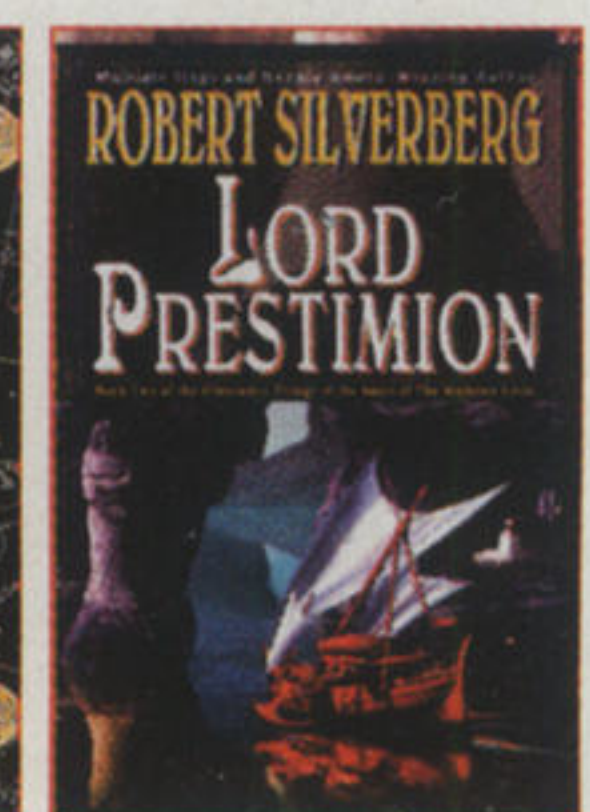
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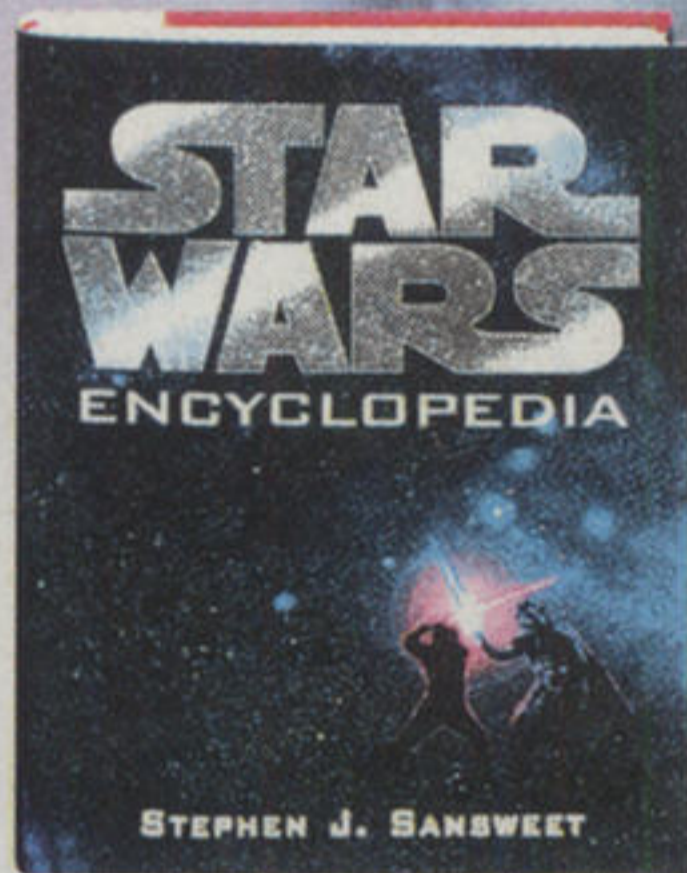
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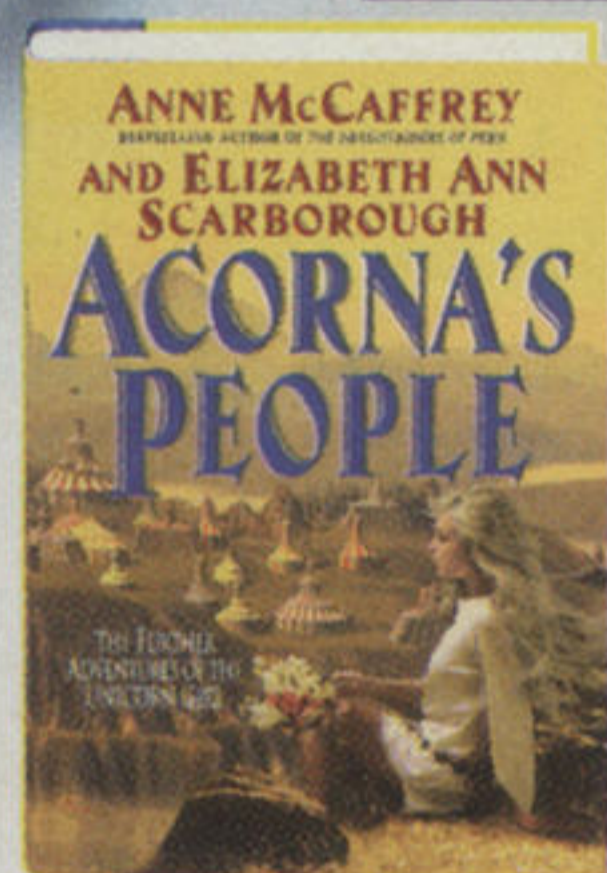
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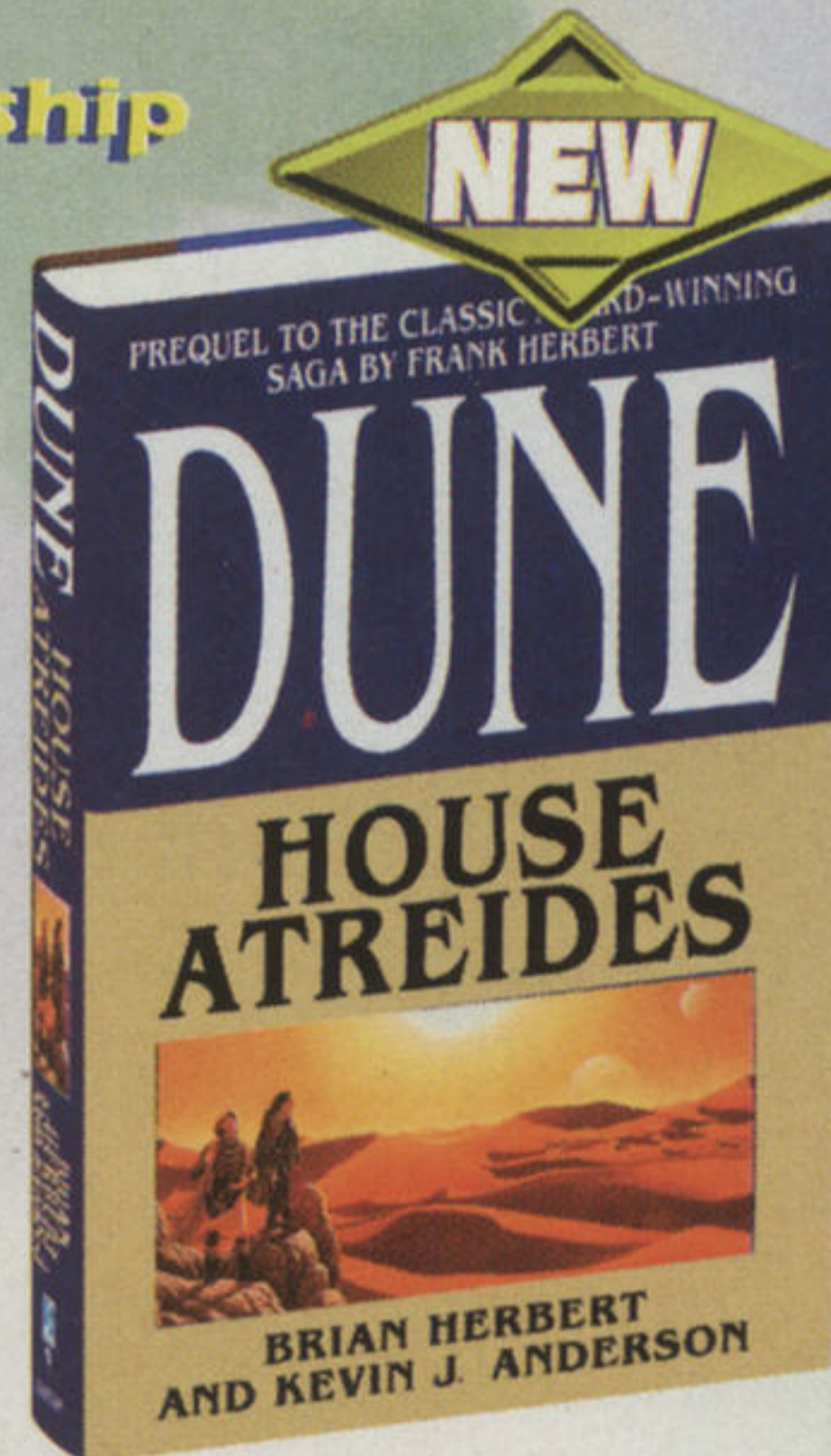
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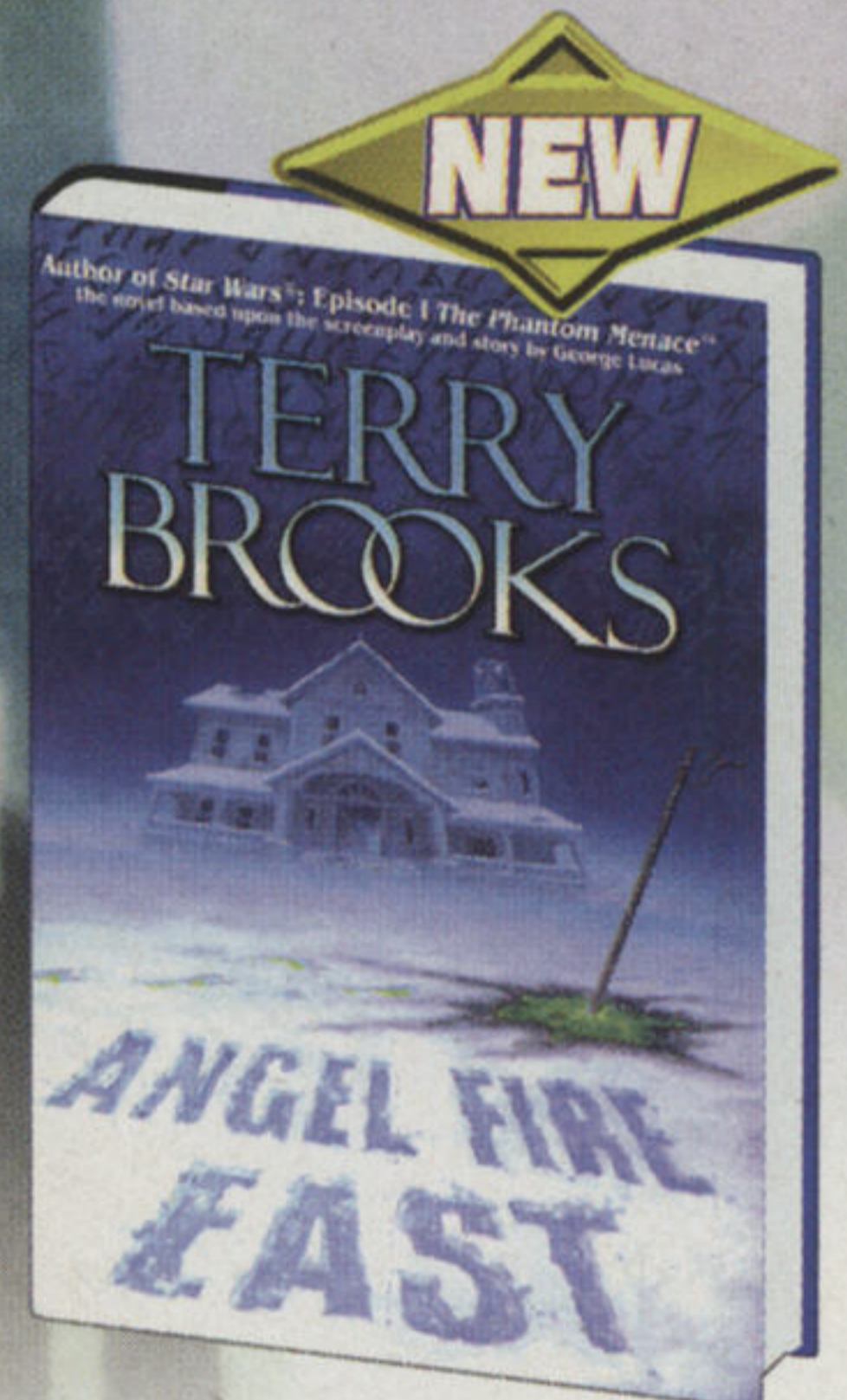
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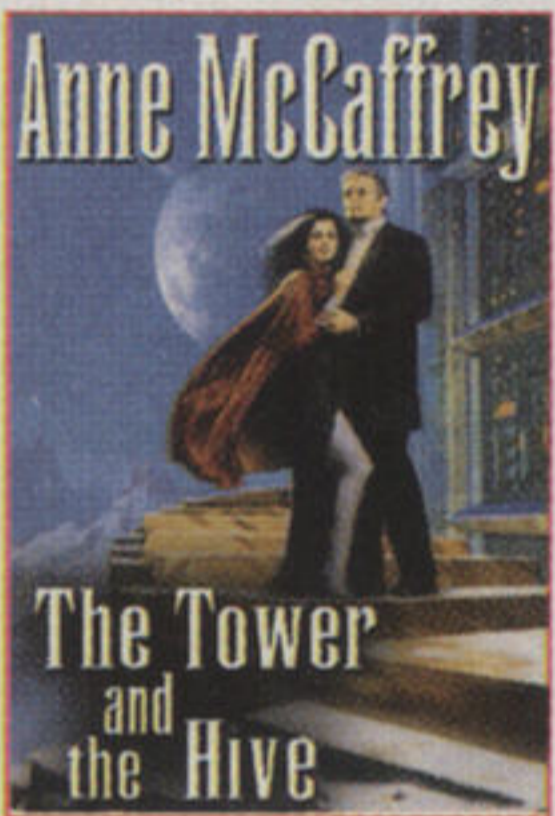
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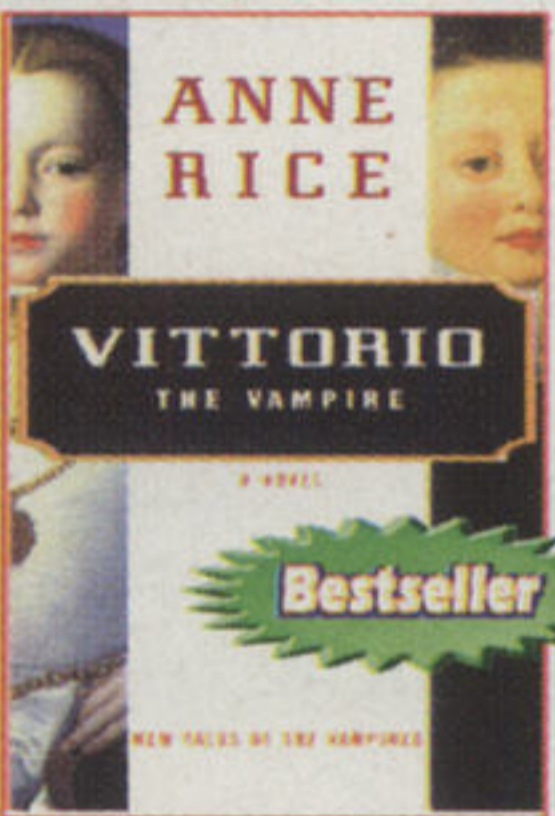
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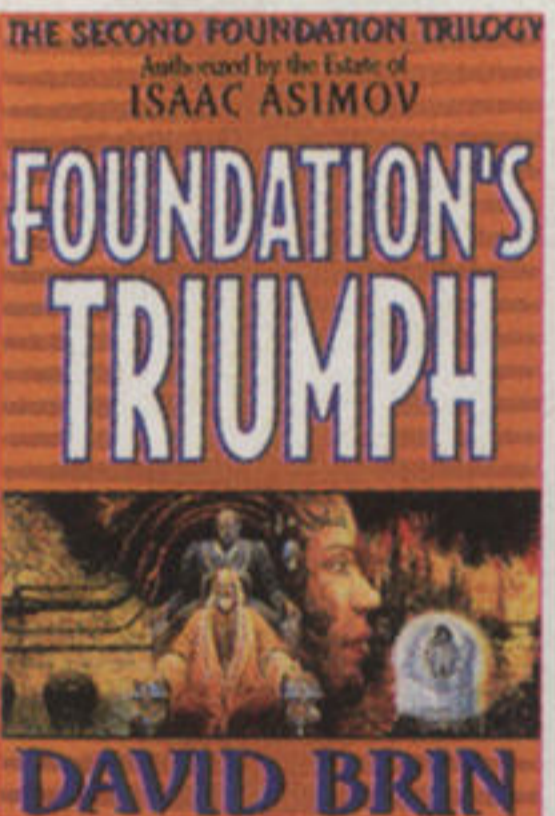
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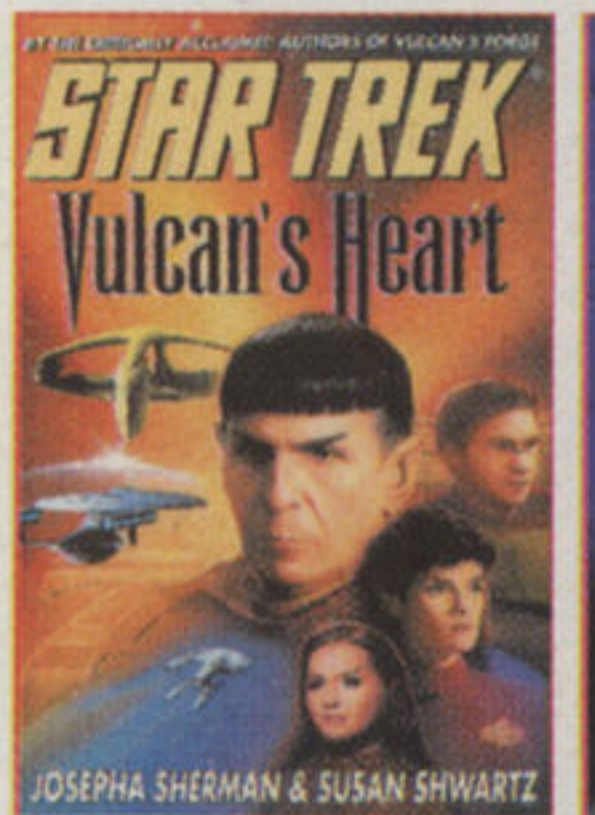
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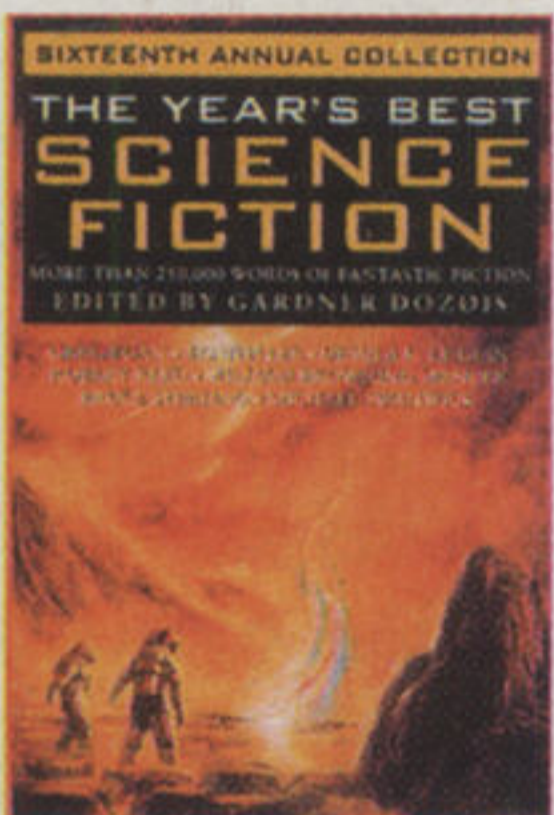
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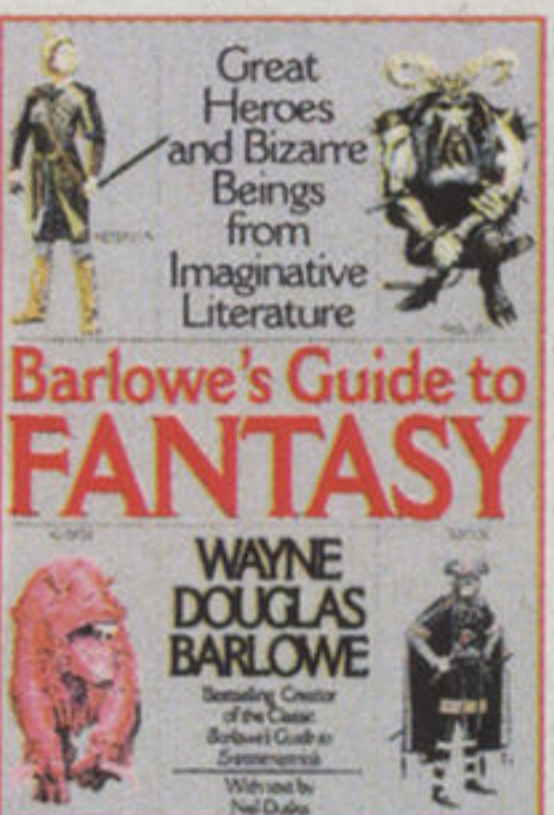
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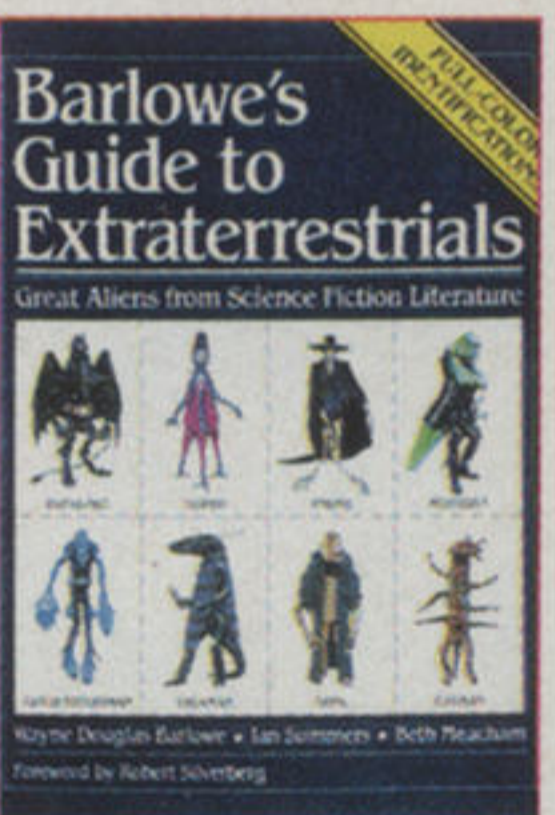
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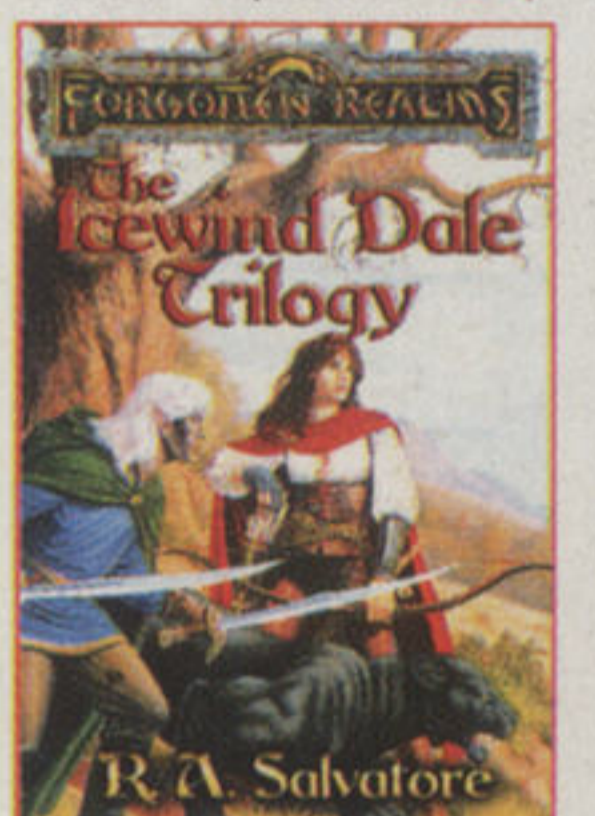
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BY TERRI WINDLING

Unriddling the World: Rites-of-Passage Myths and Fantasy Tales.

IN THE MID-PATH OF MY LIFE, I WOKE TO FIND MYSELF IN A DARK WOOD, "WRITES DANTE, IN *The Divine Comedy*, beginning a quest that will lead to transformation and redemption. A journey through the dark of the woods is a motif common to fairy tales: Young heroes set off through the perilous forest in order to reach their destiny, or they find themselves abandoned there, cast off and left for dead. The road is long and treacherous, prowled by wolves, ghosts, and wizards—but helpers also appear along the way, good fairies and animal guides, often cloaked in unlikely disguises. The hero's task is to tell friend from foe, and to keep walking steadily

onward. In older myths, the dark road leads downward into the Underworld, where Persephone is carried off by Hades, much against her will, while Ishtar descends of her own accord to beat at the gates of Hell. This road of darkness lies to the West, according to Native American myth, and each of us must travel it at some point in our lives. The Western road is one of trials, ordeals, disasters and abrupt life changes—yet a road to be honored, nevertheless, as the road on which wisdom is gained. James Hillman, whose theory of "archetypal psychology"

draws extensively on Greek and other myths, echoes this belief when he argues that darkness is vital at certain periods of life, questioning our modern tendency to equate mental health with happiness. It is in the Underworld, he reminds us, that seeds germinate and prepare for spring. Myths of descent and rebirth connect the soul's cycles to those of nature.

It has been almost a year since I last contributed a Folkroots column to this magazine, and in that time my own life, due to a long illness, has followed the cycle of the seasons: autumn's decay, winter's hibernation, the slow greening of spring. Having spent many months in the muffled Underworld that is part of a physical disability, myths of descent and resurrection have a particular resonance for me right now—yet I began this column a year ago, before I was aware that my own road was about to lead sharply downward. Myths have a way of doing this, whispering at the edge of consciousness in the stage of life when they're needed most. This is one of the most important roles such stories fulfilled in ancient societies, aiding in times of darkness, change, and to mark major rites of passage. In an earlier time, it wouldn't have taken a magazine deadline to bring these myths to my attention—but rather, a medicine man, shaman, or herb-wife consulted when my illness first appeared might have sat me down and told a story similar to this one, from the mountains of northern Mexico:

There was a young girl who married an old, old man, who used her ill. He worked her hard, beat her, starved her, and cast her off when she gave him no children, leaving her in the desert with no food, or water, or shelter. The young wife hid in the meager shade of rocks by day when the Sun was fierce. By night she walked, crying, for she could not find her way home. The nights were cold. Wolves prowled the hills and carrion birds followed her. She was hungry, thirsty, weary, and she walked till she could go no farther. Lying down by a wide, dry wash, she wrapped herself in her long white skirt. She said, "Let La Heusera (the Bone Woman) take me, for I am spent." She died. Wild animals ate her flesh. Her spirit watched over the white, white bones and knew neither sorrow nor fear.

The bones lay in that secret place until the Moon was full once more. And then La Huesera came and put them all in her woven sack. The old woman took the bones up to her

BELOW: In old folktales, a guardian often appears in the hero's hour of greatest need—a fairy, an angel, or an animal guide like the ones pictured in "Allies" by Susan Seddon Boulet.





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The harrowing rites-of-passage rituals of Australia's Aboriginal tribes are rooted in myths of the "Dreamtime," illustrated by Susan Seddon Boulet.

cave high in the mountaintops, then laid them out beside her fire. She sat and smoked. She smoked and thought. She smoked and she thought for a long, long time, and then she began to sing. "Flesh to bone! Flesh to bone! Flesh to bone!" the Bone Woman sang, and before too long the bones knit back together, covered in flesh. Where the girl had once been red and rough, now she was soft and smooth and plump. Her skin was as gold as daylight and her hair as black as night. La Huesera sang and sang. She blew a puff of tobacco smoke. The young woman's eyes flew opened and she sat up and looked around her.

The cave was empty. The ashes were cold. The old Bone Woman had disappeared. All that was left were tobacco seeds and she put them in her pocket. She left the cave and started for home, following the rising Sun. She knew she'd find her village walking this way, and so she did. She came upon her dwelling at last. The place was dark, deserted now. "That old man has died, that poor wife has died, come away from that place," the people said, for they did not recognize the lovely young woman who came to them out of the west. They gave her a name, a fine set of clothes, a new dwelling place, a goat, and a hen. They taught her human speech, for she had forgotten all that she knew. She planted La Huesera's seeds and tended the new plants carefully. In time, she married, and gave her young husband many gold-skinned daughters and black-haired sons, and her children's children's children still grow tobacco in that village today.

There are different versions of this basic story found in cultures the world over, particularly among the oral tales associated with healing rites. In the literal way we approach old folk and fairy tales in our modern world, it might seem just a simple "where-tobacco-comes-from" story or even a Cinderella variant: a mistreated girl is made beautiful, marries, and lives happily ever after. (I can picture the Disney version already, complete with a singing-and-dancing La Huesera.) I have no

abusive husband, and certainly didn't come through a year of illness with sudden supernatural beauty. So why would this tale apply to my recent journey through the dark woods of illness? Let's look at the tale again, as an ancient *curandera* (healer) might look. It doesn't really matter how the girl came to find herself in the desert—the Mexican equivalent of the mythic greenwood—for any life change or calamity can trigger events that lead into the dark. (Hansel & Gretel's parents abandon them there, Beauty takes her father's place in it, Donkeyskin chooses the dark unknown to escape a more dreadful fate.) The point is that she's there, alone, walking by night, miserable, *in extremis*, removed from the normal rhythms of life ... and thus ripe for transformation. It is in the darkest hour of need that the guardian figures in folktales appear, waiting by the side of the road as the hero stumbles by. In this case, our guide waits long indeed—she waits until the hero is dead. (It is notable that as the young woman surrenders to her fate, all fear and sorrow leave her.) Like folk tale crones who are fairies in disguise, La Huesera, scavenger of bones, is salvation cloaked in an unlikely form. The old woman carries the bones to a cave in the west, the place of the dead. Dead to her old life, if not to the world, the girl's spirit lingers, watches, and waits. Her patience is rewarded as her broken body is fashioned anew.

This "ritual death" is similar to shamanic initiation rites found in tribal cultures around the world. The initiate, in a state of trance, journeys into the spirit world—where his body dies, is shorn of flesh, and the bones are picked over by spirits who are then persuaded (if all goes well) to sew them all back together again. (If the ceremonial procedure fails, the initiate can die in this trance-state.) In this story, too, the young woman can be seen as a shamanic initiate. She lies down

wrapped in long white cloth, the color of initiation. She leaves her body, returns to it, and finally becomes "twice-born," emerging from the cave (the womb of the Mother Earth) with a sacred gift for her people. When she returns to her village, she is literally a new woman. She is given a new name, a new dwelling, and must learn to speak all over again. This, too, is common in initiation ceremonies found the world over. In one West African tribe, for instance, the initiate drinks a sacred brew which causes him to lose consciousness, whereupon he is taken into a special place deep in the jungle. When he wakes, he has forgotten his past, and must be taught to speak, walk, and feed himself. Returning to the tribe, he comes with a new name and new role to play.

The safe return from the jungle, the forest, the spirit world, or the land of death often marks, in traditional tales, a time of new beginnings—new marriage, new life, and a new season of plenty and prosperity enriched not only by earthly treasures but those carried back from the Netherworld. Thomas the Rhymer, after seven years in the woodlands of Faery (in old Scottish tales), returns to the human world with the gift of prophesy, the "tongue that will not lie." Merlin returns from his time of exile and madness in the forests of Wales with magical knowledge and the ability to speak with the animals. Odin hangs in a death-like trance for 10 days from the world-tree Yggdrasil, and comes back with the secret of runes from the dark land of Niflheim. The hero of our story has also survived a great ordeal, a rite of passage from a barren life into one of great fecundity—symbolized not only by marriage and children, but also by the precious tobacco seeds she brings for her people. To a modern audience, tobacco might seem a strange gift to appear in a healing tale since we now associate the plant with addiction, cancer, and death. Yet tobacco was once a sacred plant used only for ritual purpose and prayer—particularly as old, ceremonial strains had hallucinogenic properties. (Some tribal elders say that it's casual use for non-religious purposes is what makes it so harmful today.)

Rites-of-passage stories like the one above were cherished in preliterate societies not only for their entertainment value, but also as mythic tools to prepare young men and women for life's ordeals. A wealth of such stories can be found marking each major transition in the human life cycle: puberty, marriage, childbirth, menopause, and death. Other rites of passage, less predictable but equally transformative, include illness and injury, divorce, the loss of one's home, or the death of a loved one. With any sharp change or calamity, one can find oneself deep in the woods (an image, in Jungian psychology, which represents an inward journey). Rites-of-passage tales point to the hidden roads leading out of the dark—and remind us that at the end of the journey we're not the same person as when we started. Ascending from the Netherworld (that gray landscape of ill-

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ness, grief, depression, or despair), we are "twice-born" in our return to life, carrying seeds—new wisdom, ideas, creativity, and fecundity of spirit.

During the winter months, still sequestered in bed, I came across Alan Garner's strange and brilliant collection of essays, *The Voice of Thunder*—an autobiographical look at mythology, rural England, and Fantasy literature. Garner is the author of *The Owl Service*, *Elidor*, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, and other classics of our field. In his essays, he examines the things that formed him as a writer and a man. One of these was an intense relationship with the land on which he was born (where Garners have lived for generations): the Alderley Edge in Cheshire, rich in myth and history. Another was the childhood illness that kept him bedridden for several years, bringing him face to face with death. During this time, the boy taught himself techniques (similar to shamanic rites) enabling him to travel outside his body and to alter the flow of time. In his essays, Garner speaks frankly about his journeys into another world reached through the plaster ceiling over his bed—and the myths he studied later in life that gave words to his youthful experiences. "I have often been asked," he says, "whether that childhood made me a writer. If I had not had the encounter with my death and the Damascan road provided by the Edge, would I have been granted the vision needed in order to write? If I had not been born with the

stamina of will and the bloody-mindedness required of all writing, should I have meekly accepted the doctors' diagnosis? All I can say is that many writers have been only children, and have suffered long and life-threatening illness in isolation from human company."

A childhood spent during World War II, years of blacked-out windows, short rations, shrapnel in the road, and bombers overhead. "My wife," Garner writes, "claims to find, in recent children's literature, little that qualifies as literature. She asked herself why this should be, after a Golden Age that ran from the late Fifties to the late Sixties. And she found that generally writers of this Golden Age were children during the Second World War: a war raged against civilians. The atmosphere these children and young people grew up in was one of a whole community and a whole nature united against pure evil, made manifest in the person of Hitler. Parents were seen to be afraid. Death was a constant possibility... Therefore, daily life was lived on a mythic plane: of absolute Good against absolute Evil; of the need to endure, to survive whatever had to be overcome; to be tempered in whatever furnace was required...."

There is, unfortunately, truth in Garner's characterization of much current Fantasy fiction, although I certainly hope we don't require a war to produce fine writers in coming generations. What we *do* need is to remember that Fantasy (even more than

other kinds of fiction) is a rites-of-passage literature—whether its themes are based on collective battles or on private, individual ones. The best Fantasy is rooted not only in myth but in life experience—while the worst draws experience secondhand from film, television, and other books.

Our field is plagued with mediocre tales inspired by Tolkien's masterwork, for instance, while ignorant of Tolkien's source material—his extensive knowledge of European myths, history, theology, and languages, and his experience of a war that threatened the land and the life he held dear. Attempting to re-create Tolkien's world-view through, say, a middle-class American suburban upbringing, is nothing short of ridiculous—and the painful results are evident on all too many bookstore shelves. As fantasist, we must look to the quests, ordeals, and trials that form (as Susan Cooper says) the shape of our *own* imagination and all its unconscious preoccupations. Through myth, symbol, and metaphor, the true fantasist transforms the personal into the universal—creating stories that not only entertain but provide the mythic tools we need to face the ordeals, the monsters, the wolves, of our modern age.

"I see much current fantasy and science fiction in full retreat from real human needs," writes Ursula K. Le Guin (in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, a collection every aspiring Fantasy writer should read.) "Where a Tolkien prophetically faced the central fact of

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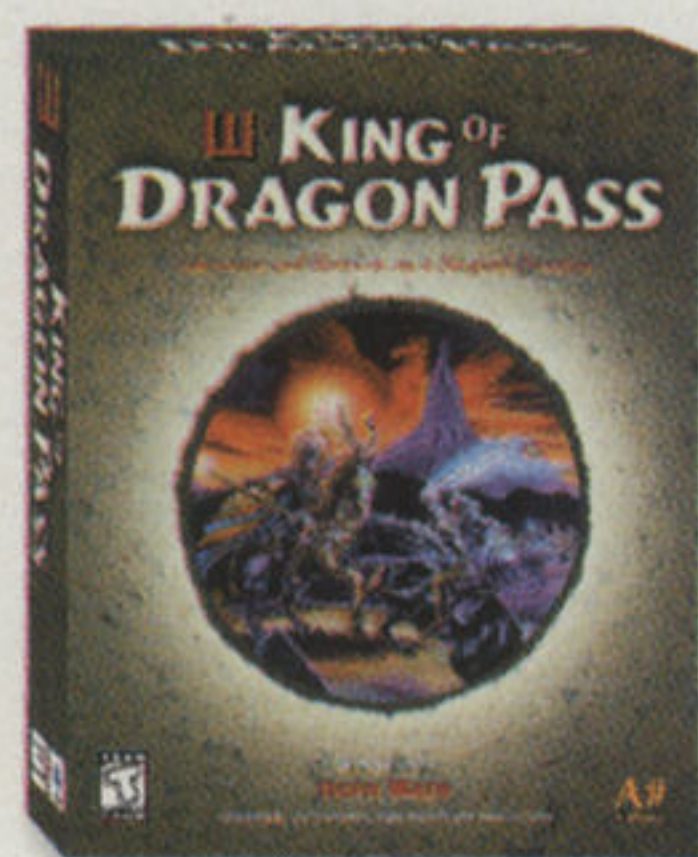
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our time, our capacity to destroy ourselves, the present spate of so-called heroic fantasy, in which Good defeats Evil by killing it with a sword or staff or something phallic, seems to have nothing in mind beyond instant gratification, the avoidance of discomfort, in a fake-medieval past where technology is replaced by magic and wishful thinking."

These kind of books (no titles are needed, we all know the ones she is talking about) have, at best, but a cursory knowledge of myth, folklore, and epic myth cycles—usually gleamed secondhand from other works of modern fiction. Magic in these books operates like science, or car mechanics, or a cake recipe: Follow the manual and it works like *this* when you push the button. Yet the magic of our human heritage, formed by centuries of stories, dances, songs, sacrificial ordeals, and ritual acts, is evoked, not manufactured—the science lab is not going to help us here. Magic is a symbol, a metaphor, an integral part of a mythic belief system—and of the mage, or shaman, or storyteller's relationship with the numinous world. Take myth away, and the magic in a Fantasy book is nothing more than special effects, or Le Guin's phallic staff of wish-fulfillment. The myth *is* the magic, moving us through the dark, through the fire, flaying flesh from bone. By following the myth to its end, the hero of the tale, and the reader, and the writer, all participate in the final rebirth—putting us back on the road to the east with tobacco seeds in our pocket.

One of the most difficult journeys we face in our lives is also the most universal: the one that forms our transformation from child to adult. In many tribal societies, this transition is marked by elaborate ceremonies symbolizing the death of the child-self, re-born into adulthood. The male puberty rites of Aboriginal tribes in Australia, for example, are harrowing. The boys are abducted by older men, carried away from their mothers, who weep and wail over the "death" of their sons. Isolated, the boys endure weeks of fasting, feats of physical endurance, prayer, instruction, and ritual circumcision. "Underlying the Aboriginal world view," notes folklorist Robert Lawlor, "is the belief that people only reach fruition by accepting the risk and adventure of continual death and rebirth. In the Mardudjarra language, the novice *mur-dilya* (uncircumcised boy) is named *bugundi* after being circumcised as part of his puberty initiation. The word *bugundi* is formed from the combination of *bugu*, death, and *yudirini*, both being born and returning. The word *bugu* is applied to women during pregnancy, childbirth, and menstruation, indicating that women, by their very nature, continually participate in the initiatic experience." The female puberty rite is less extended and far less arduous, reflecting Aboriginal belief that women participate in the Mysteries naturally throughout the course of their lives, whereas men must be laboriously inculcated with this special knowledge. At the onset of menstruation, a girl is secluded in an isolated hut



The Vision Quest is a ceremony designed to enable communication with the numinous world, as portrayed here in Susan Seddon Boulet's "A Time of Vision."

built by her mother or grandmother, and visited by older women who instruct her in women's rites and traditions. Although there are ritual taboos on what she can eat or touch at this time, the menstrual cycle is not considered unclean by Aboriginal people as it is in other parts of the world (in parts of Africa, Asia, and some Native American tribes) where women "on their moon" are considered a corrupting influence. To the Apaches, by contrast, a young girl's first blood is a cause for tribal celebration. An elaborate feast and dance ensues, with rituals to petition the spirits to gift the young woman with four basic things: physical strength, good disposition, prosperity, and a healthy old age. The four days of the dance are arduous ones for the young initiate, but she is sustained by the power of Changing Woman (one of the great founders of Apache culture) whom she embodies during the ritual.

The "Vision Quest" is another ceremony used to mark major life transitions and common to many different tribes. The length and form of the ritual varies from region to region, but generally one goes to an isolated spot on a hill or mountainside where one prays, and sings, and "cries for a vision" over the course of four days—abstaining from all food, water, or sleep for the duration. The physical difficulty of the ordeal puts one into a highly receptive state, breaking down the usual barriers between human perception and the world of the spirits.

The rich tradition of adolescent rites-of-passage myths is equaled by a wealth of modern Fantasy tales with coming-of-age themes. We see this particularly, of course, in the field of Young Adult fiction—in which the works of Alan Garner stand out among the very best. Other books of note include Susan Cooper's *The Dark Is Rising* sequence, Lloyd Alexander's "Prydain" series, Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass*, Robin McKinley's *The Blue Sword*,

Diana Wynne Jones' *Fire and Hemlock*, Martha Brook's *Bone Dance*, and the haunted tales of Robert Westall. Ursula K. Le Guin's extraordinary "Earthsea" books and Joyce Ballou Gregorian's under-rated "Tredana" trilogy are notable for starting out as adolescent coming-of-age stories and then moving far beyond to the trials and quests of mature adult life. Other excellent coming-of-age stories can be found on the adult fantasy shelves, including Patricia A. McKillip's gorgeous *Riddlemaster of Hed*, Midori Snyder's enchanting "Oran Trilogy," Jane Yolen's folkloric *Sister Light, Sister Dark*, Caroline Stevermer's delightful *College of Magics*, Richard Bowes, brutal *Minions of the Moon*, Will Shetterly's poignant *Dogland*, and the homespun American lore of Orson Scott Card's *The Seventh Son*. On the mainstream shelves, you'll find beautiful books weaving folklore into magical coming-of-age tales set in the modern world in Linda Hogan's stunning new novel *Power*; Heinz Insu Fenkl's haunting *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, Seamus Deane's Irish tale *Reading in the Dark*, Brian Hall's hilarious *The Saskiad*, and Alfredo Veja Jr.'s rich Yaqui/Chicano story *La Maravilla*, all highly recommended.

Marriage is another time of transition surrounded by ceremony and myth—best evoked, in contemporary Fantasy fiction, by Smokey's marriage to tall Daily Alice in John Crowley's *Little, Big*.

Childbirth is represented in numerous mythological tales—from virgin and other miraculous births (found in traditions all over the world) to more treacherous conceptions (such as that of King Arthur's son, Mordred; and of Arthur himself.) *Soul-string* by Midori Snyder is a Fantasy book in which childbirth is an integral part of a magical rite of passage, based loosely on the Scottish ballad "Tam Lin," with its bold, pregnant heroine.

Parent-and-child relationships are explored in the myths and fairy tales of every culture around the globe. In modern Fantasy fiction, I recommend *Song for the Basilisk* by Patricia A. McKillip, *Through a Brazen Mirror* by Delia Sherman, *The Winter Prince* by Elizabeth Wein, and *The Dubious Hills* by Pamela Dean.

Menopause is a rite of passage rarely tackled by the average Fantasy novel—yet *Tehanu* by Ursula K. Le Guin (the fourth book in the "Earthsea" quartet) and *The Broken Wheel* by Joyce Ballou Gregorian (the third book in the "Tredana" trilogy) provide strong portrayals of the changes that mark older men and women's lives.

Death is another subject rarely dealt with as a primary theme—yet Le Guin, once again, does not shy away from any of life's major passages, and her "Earthsea" series (the third book in particular) explores this one beautifully.

Despite the fact that magical storytelling is one of the oldest of human artforms, as a genre the modern Fantasy novel is young indeed. Most contemporary writers came into the field in the post-Tolkien years of the late 1970s and

Continued on page 88



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BY SCOTT EDELMAN

Tim Burton's newest Fantasy flick proves to be neither *Sleepy* nor *Hollow*.

HOLLYWOOD INSIDERS HAVE BEEN TELLING US FOR YEARS THAT FILMMAKING IS A dirty business, but until visiting the set of Tim Burton's new Fantasy flick *Sleepy Hollow* (starring Johnny Depp, Christina Ricci, and Casper van Dien), based on the classic Washington Irving tale, I never realized that this was meant to be taken *literally*. An hour's drive north of London, on private property in the Lime Tree Valley near the town of Marlow, an actual town of Sleepy Hollow has been built. Rich Heinrichs, production designer, leads us gingerly



Johnny Depp's Ichabod Crane is a buff and tough New York constable investigating a series of murders in Tim Burton's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

through the small village. As we splatter each other with mud, he explains the benefits and drawbacks of filming in this naturalistic setting:

"The lovely thing is that it's this bowl-shaped hollow. What comes along with that is that all the water collects and runs down into the center of the town. In a downpour, it becomes a raging torrent that runs down our main street." The two thousand tons of crushed concrete the production has used to fill the declivity did little to help with the drainage, as can be proven by the sinking, slipping, and sliding that we do as Heinrichs leads us between the buildings. But Casper van Dien, whom genre fans will know from his recent starring roles in *Tarzan and the Lost City* and *Starship Troopers*, and whom for *Sleepy Hollow* has stepped

into the role of the bully Brom Bones, manages to put it all in perspective:

"It's a dirty, dirty set," says van Dien, adding with genuine enthusiasm, "but it's really, really cool."

The short story master Washington Irving would likely be surprised to find that anyone this close to the millennium would find anything cool about a story he conjured up over 175 years ago. This native New Yorker dreamed up more than one Fantasy icon, for in addition to giving us the Headless Horseman from "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," he was also responsible for the most famous late sleeper on the planet, "Rip Van Winkle." "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," with its well-known archetypes of the gawky Ichabod Crane, the oafish Brom van Brunt, and the fearsome Headless Horseman, has been transformed from words into moving images before, most notably Disney's 1949 animated version.

At press time, Paramount's new *Sleepy Hollow* is headed for a late November release, but in mid-February, *Realms of Fantasy* found the man

who would remake a classic past midnight in his mist-shrouded village. Two short scythes held high over his head, Tim Burton helped choreograph the climactic fight scene with Johnny Depp, this generation's Ichabod Crane; van Dien; and none other than Darth Maul himself, Ray Park, embodying the Headless Horseman.

It's late. The cast and crew have been working hard, and Burton has allowed himself a moment of silliness. He dances around the set while the artificially aged buildings loom around him, waving the weapons like pincers and shouting "I'm a praying mantis!" But then it's quickly back to business again, to film the complicated fight scene that those involved have dubbed "The Waltz." Fresh bark mulch is scattered so the actors will be able to keep their bearings, and to prevent the area

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LEFT: The good news: You got cast in a movie. The bad news: It's not really a speaking part. Tim Burton with his *Headless Horseman*. ABOVE: Johnny Depp as Constable Ichabod Crane is perhaps looking for a more comfortable chair in this scene from *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

near the covered bridge from turning into something out of Woodstock.

Ray Park, garbed in black, is wearing a blue hood. How he will appear on screen is a mystery known at the moment only to the magicians at Industrial Light & Magic, who will be deleting both hood and head in post-production. He is armed with two swords as he faces off against Johnny Depp with a long scythe and van Dien with the two short scythes Burton had been handling earlier. Producer Scott Rudin seems pleased with the night's progress as he stands beside us to watch the actors' intricate movements. Filming runs as long as there is darkness on the outdoor set. Luckily, Burton finds the energy to answer some questions the following afternoon.

Garbed in his trademark black beret, Burton met with us at The Compleat Angler, an elegant restaurant on the banks of the Thames, and as we sipped tea and ate pastries, the director known for such unique visions as *Beetlejuice*, *Edward Scissorhands*, and *The Nightmare Before Christmas* explained how his relationship to the Headless Horseman concept, as with many people, was not from Irving's original prose.

"I was more familiar with the Disney cartoon than the actual story," he explained. "It's funny, because in America, anyway, most kids never read the story, but they know the story of the Headless Horseman. I don't know quite where that comes from."

It was instead the Disney short cartoon version that first exposed him to the classic tale. "I liked it a lot. That was one of the reasons I wanted to work at Disney. They created that really wonderful sense in that chase of it being funny and scary and visceral—doing a lot of different things all at once. The layout, the color, and the design

of that was so beautiful. I remember the feeling of seeing that, and it tapped into lots of different things. It was funny and scary. I don't think they made that many good short cartoons, but that was one of my favorite ones because it had great imagery and atmosphere all the way through."

In bringing the classic story of Ichabod Crane to life, Burton strays from the cliché image we all have in mind of the timorous teacher, as described by Irving: "He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together.... To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield." Not quite the image brought to mind by heartthrob Johnny Depp, nor the one that Burton asked him to inhabit. Burton and Depp's Ichabod is instead a constable sent upstate from New York City to solve a series of baffling and gruesome murders.

"I've worked with Johnny twice before," says Burton. "He's perfect for this. It's fun to work with somebody and each time it be different. It gives you good energy. Seeing him do something different is fun. The thing that attracted me, at least from this script and the idea of an Ichabod character as a character, is that he's in his head. He's very much not in tune with things on a certain level, and then on another level very much in his head—versus a character with no head. You've got this sort of in-and-out-of-it quality which is great. Because it's really human to me. Actually, for me in a different

way it captures the spirit of what I always thought of as that character, which is a gawkiness. It is a sort of out-of-it quality.

"Being very intelligent has its bad qualities as well. I think he's a person who had a trauma, and is split in that he's intelligent, but lives in his head in his intelligence, and is cut off from any other aspect of his personality. A certain kind of intelligence can turn into tunnel vision. He's got a quality that I hope is coming through, the sort of feeling that Peter Cushing or Vincent Price would give, in the sense that they're very intense, and they're their own singular person. They're outside the realm of everything else. You don't really know much about him in a certain way.

"But we're still working on it," adds Burton, with a laugh. "He could end up being something else."

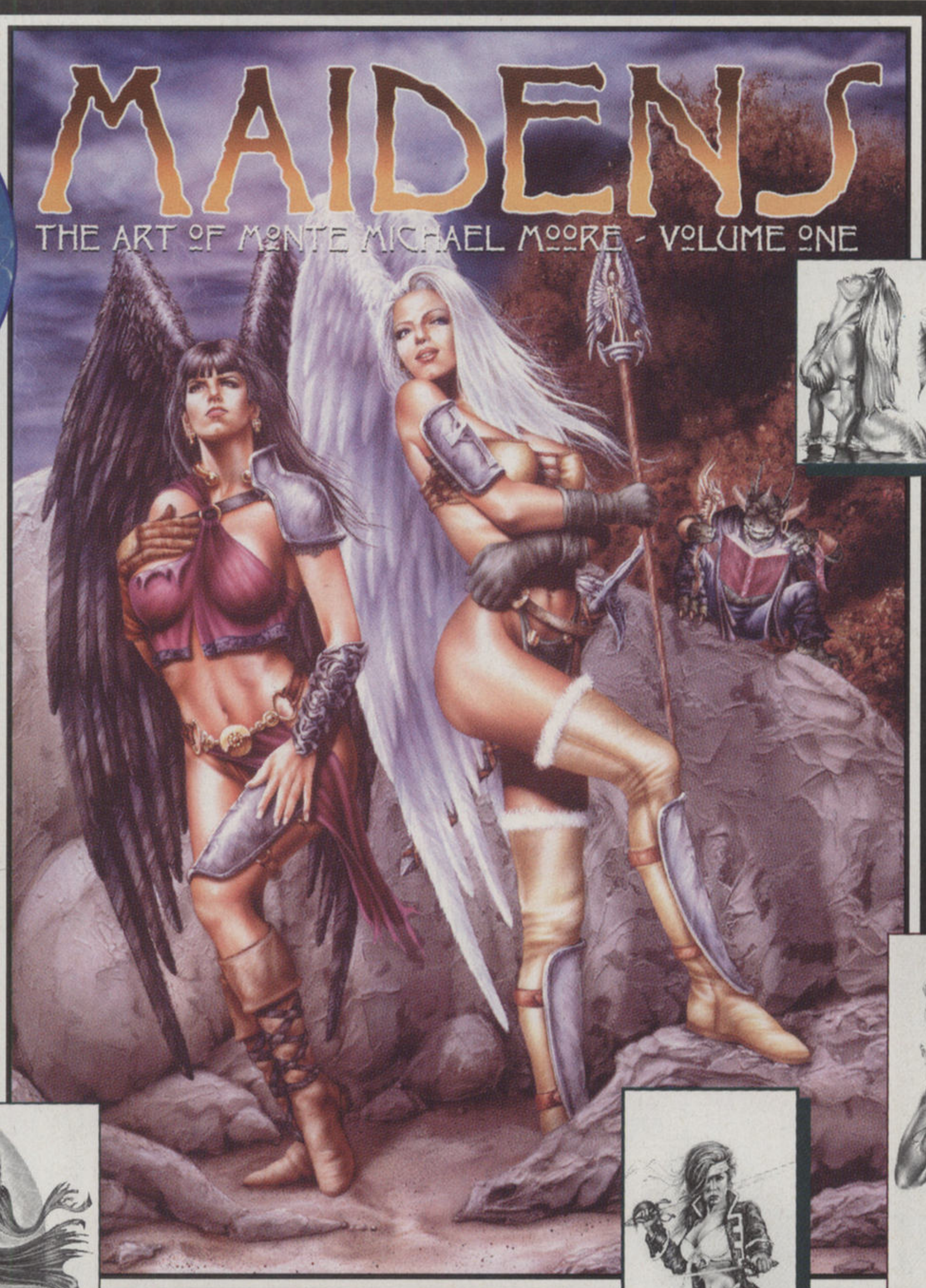
As we speak, Burton is in the grip of a cold, perhaps brought on by freezing cold nights in the town of Sleepy Hollow. But he would not trade away the spontaneity allowed by having created an entire town, as opposed to filming in front of partial backlot sets.

"My favorite time—it's the hardest time—but it's being on the set where you're making stuff. There's just a good atmosphere there, so it's great when you can create as much of it there, and then add as little as possible. It makes it a more immediate experience. And I think with this it allows the horseman character to have a fluidity.

"It's kind of a problem in a way. I enjoy doing it on the spot. It's hard to do that with a medium like this because you need all the elements planned, and it's all created elements. I enjoy that process so much, because you're just there on a set. That's the only time you're there in those circum-



Angels Mermaids... and DRAGONS ... Oh my!



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Tarzan's Casper van Dien co-stars as the bullying Brom Bones.

Rich Heinrichs, the architect of this recreated Sleepy Hollow in his role as production designer, has worked with Burton many times before, all the way back to *Frankenweenie*. He explained for us the process of turning a dreamworld into such a concrete reality. "We were experimenting with a lot of different ideas, starting with, 'What if we went to Tarrytown in upstate New York, took over some of their historical areas, and added some buildings to it?' But the architecture of the time, as great as it looked—there was a purity to it, a simplicity to it, that wasn't lending itself to the kind of story that we wanted to tell. The fun stuff was going to be very expressionistic anyway. What we were trying to express here was a little Dutch community in upstate New York that's kind of huddled and fearful and uneasy. We tried to not anthropomorphize the houses, but there is a definite expressive character to it which was important to us. We also scouted towns here, but ending up falling in love with the idea of building the town. The opportunity to do something like this doesn't come along every day.

stances. You're there with everybody in costume, the smoke, the lights, everything at that moment. It's hard to look at a storyboard now and go, 'Well that's it,' because things suggest themselves when you're there that make a difference. We're not

going to be adding a lot of stuff in the movie. We're trying to create the atmosphere—to make it the least added-in-later as possible. We're trying to create the atmosphere on the set with the photography, the costumes, everything adding together."

"It has its own air of believability to it," says Heinrichs of the town that he and his crew have spent six months building from scratch. "We're not going for any historical accuracy. A hodgepodge of architectural styles. I classify it under 'Colonial Expressionism.' There's a big push-pull trying to

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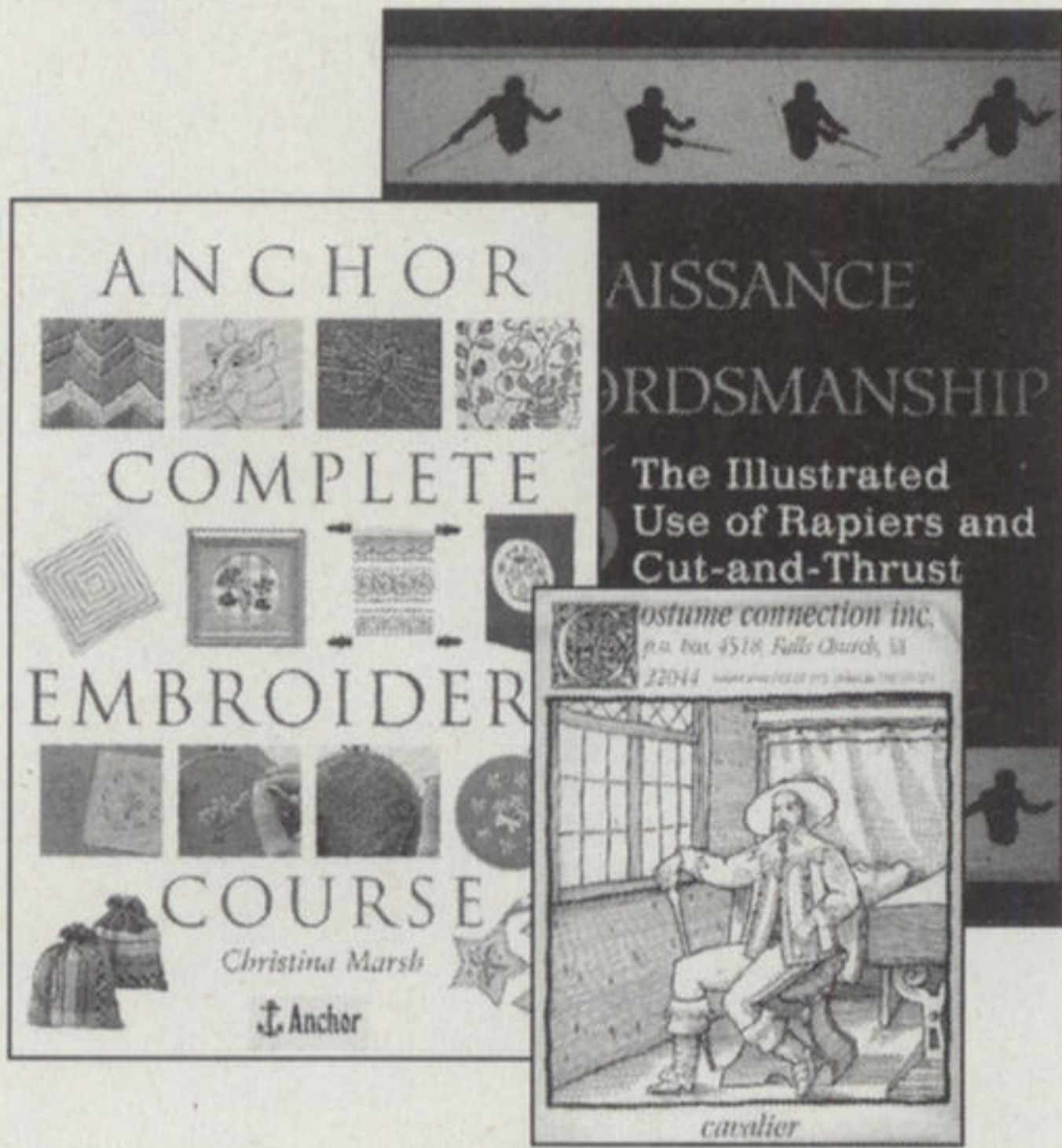


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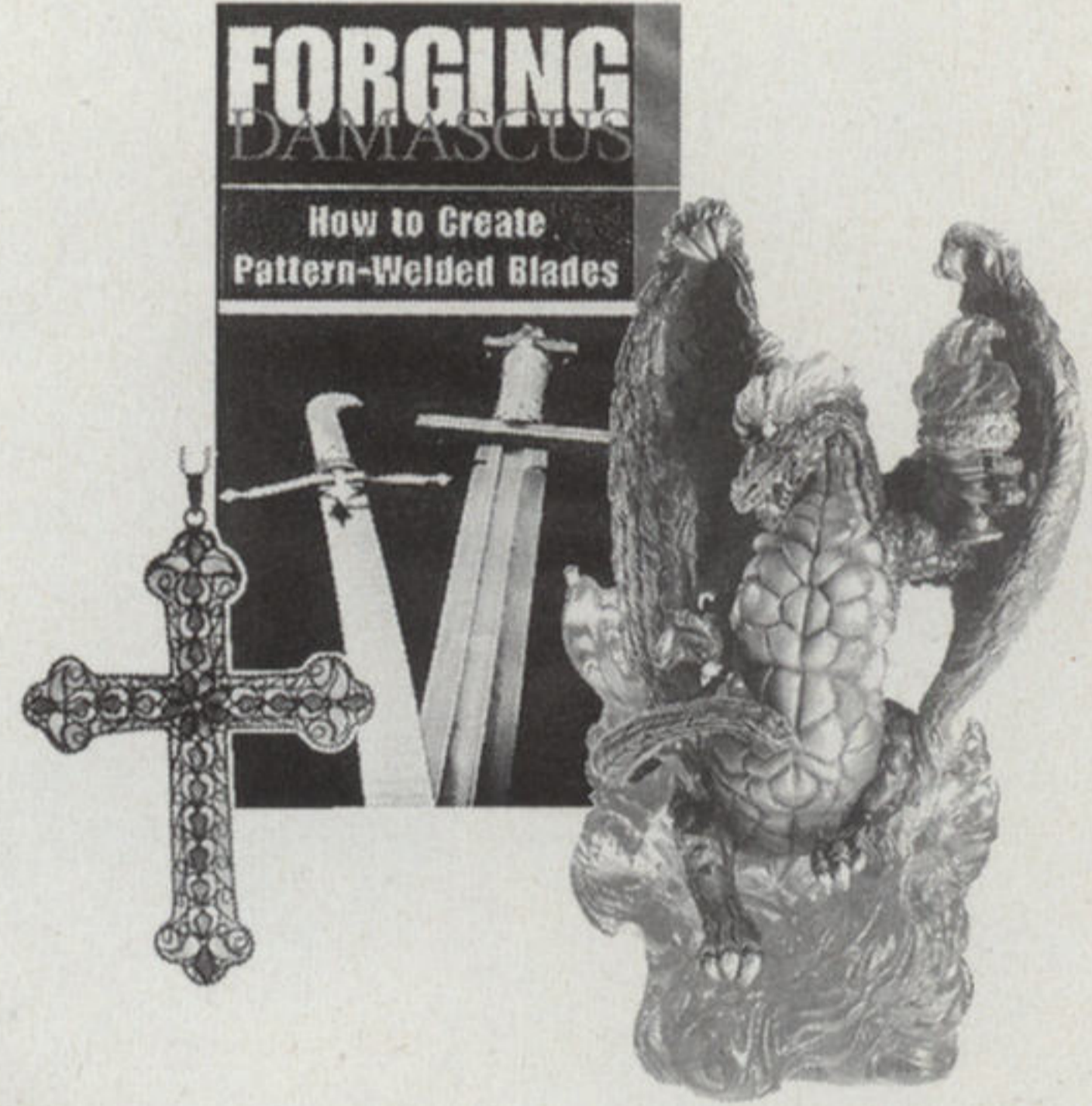
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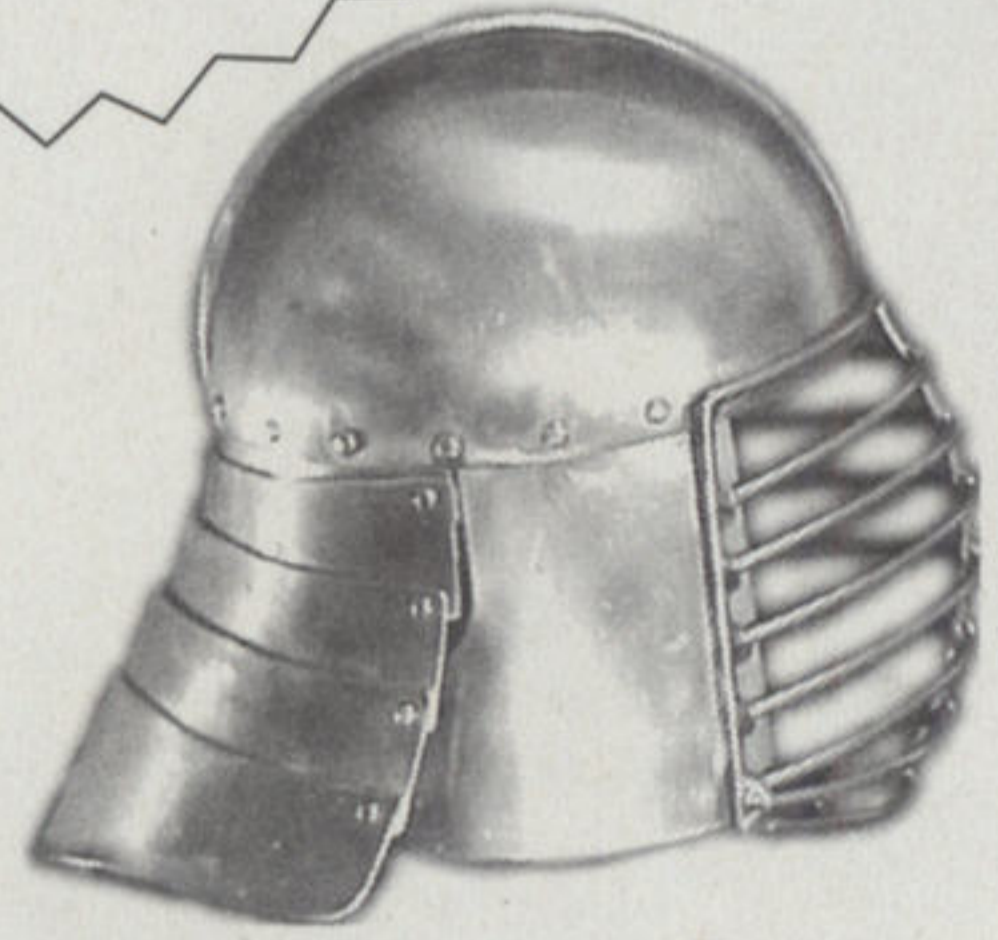


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AFTER SHOCK

"PLEASE, SIGNOR," THE CORPORAL SAYS in fairly decent English, shouting over the rising wind. "You are not permitted up there!"

I look down at him. "I'm well aware of that, but I'm all right. Really. Get back inside before you get hurt."

The patterned stone floor of the Piazza San Marco beckons three hundred feet below as he clings to one of the belfry columns and leans out just far enough to make eye contact with me up here on the uppermost ledge. His hat is off, but his black shirt identifies him as one of the local carabinieri. Hopefully a couple of his fellows have a good grip on his belt. I can tell he's used up most of his courage getting this far. He's not ready to risk joining me up here. Can't say as I blame him. One little slip and he's a goner. I've developed a talent for reading faces, especially eyes, and his wide, black pupils tell me how much he wants to go on living.

I envy that.

Less than an hour ago I was just another Venice tourist. I strolled through the crowded plaza, scattering the pigeon horde like ashes until I reached the campanile entrance. I stood in line for the elevator like everyone else, and paid my eight thousand lire for a ride to the top.

The Campanile di San Marco—by far the tallest structure in Venice, and one of the newest. The original collapsed shortly after the turn of the century but was replaced almost immediately with this massive brick phallus the color of vodka sauce. Thoughtful of them to add an elevator to the new one. I would have hated climbing all those hundreds of steps to the top.

The belfry doubles as an observation deck: four column-bordered openings facing each point of the compass, screened with wire mesh to keep too-ardent photographers from tumbling out. The space was packed with tourists when I arrived: French, English, Swiss, Americans, even Italians. Briefly I treated myself to the view—the five scalloped cupolas of San Marco basilica almost directly

Tragedy happens
in the blink of an eye,
but redemption
can come
like a bolt from the blue.

By F. Paul Wilson Illustration by John Hanley

below, the sienna mosaic of tiled roofs beyond, and the glittering, hungry Adriatic Sea encircling it all—but I didn't linger. I had work to do.

The north side was the least crowded so I chose that for my exit. I pulled out a set of heavy wire clippers and began making myself a doorway in the mesh. I knew I wouldn't get too far before somebody noticed, and sure enough, I soon heard cries of alarm behind me. A couple of guys tried to interfere but I bared my teeth and hissed at them in my best impression of a maniac until they backed off: Let the police handle the madman with the wire cutter.

I worked frantically and squeezed through onto the first ledge, then used the mesh to climb to the second. That was hairy—I damn near slipped off. Once there, I edged my way around until I found a sturdy wire running vertically along one of the corners. I stopped and used the wire cutters to remove a three-foot section, which I left on the ledge. Then I continued on until I reached a large marble sculpture of a griffinlike creature set into the brick on the south side. I climbed the sculpture to reach the third and highest ledge.

And so here I am, my back pressed against the green-tiled pinnacle as it angles to a point another 30 feet above me. The gold-plated statue of some cross-wielding saint—St. Mark, probably—pirouettes on the apex. A lightning rod juts above him.

And in the piazza below I see the gathering gawkers. They look like pigeons, while the pigeons scurrying around them look like ants. Beyond them, in the Grand Canal, black gondolas rock at their moorings like hearses after a mass murder.

The young national policeman pleads with me. "Come down. We can talk. Please do not jump."

Almost sounds as if he really cares. "Don't worry," I say, tugging at the rope I've looped around the pinnacle and tied to my belt. "I've no intention of jumping."

"Look!" He points southwest to the black clouds charging up the coast of the mainland. "A storm is coming!"

"I see it." It's a beauty.

"But you will be strike by lightning!"

"I know," I tell him. "That's why I'm here."

The look in his eyes tells me he thought from the start I was crazy, but not this crazy. I don't blame him. He doesn't know what I've learned during the past few months.

THE FIRST LESSON BEGAN THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY, ON A STORMY Tuesday evening in Memorial Hospital emergency room in Lakeland, Florida. I'd just arrived for the second shift and was idly listening to the staff chatter around me as I washed up.

"Oh, Christ!" said one of the nurses. "It's her again. I don't believe it."

"Hey, you're right!" said another. "Who says lightning doesn't strike twice?"

"Twice, hell!" said a third voice I recognized as Kelly Rand's, the department's head nurse. "It's this gal's third."

Curious, I dried off and stepped into the hallway. Lightning-strike victims are no big deal around here, especially in the summer—but three times?

I saw Rand, apple shaped and middle aged, with hair a shade of red that does not exist in the human genome, and asked if I'd heard her right.

"Yessiree," she said. She held up a little metal box with a slim aerial wavering from one end. "And look what she had with her."

I took the box. *Strike Zone™ Early Warning Lightning Alert* ran in red letters across its face.

"I'd say she deserves a refund," Rand said.

"How is she?"

"Been through x-ray and nothing's broken. Small third-degree burn on her left heel. Dr. Ross took care of that. Still a little out of it, though."

"Where'd they put her?"

"Six."

Still holding the lightning detector, I stepped into cubicle six and found a slim blonde, her hair still damp and stringy from the rain, semiconscious on the gurney, an IV running into her right arm. A

nurse's aide was recording her vitals. I checked the chart when she was done.

Kim McCormick, age 38, found "disrobed and unconscious" under a tree bordering the ninth fairway at a local golf course. The personal info had been gleaned from a New Jersey driver's license. No known local address.

A goateed EMS tech stuck his head into the cubicle. "She awake yet, Doc?"

I shook my head.

"All right, do me a favor, will you? When she comes to and asks about her golf clubs, tell her they was gone when we got there."

"What?"

"Her clubs. We never saw them. I mean, she was on a golf course and sure as shit she's gonna be saying we stole them. People are always accusing us of robbing them or something."

"It says here she was naked when you found her."

"Not completely. She had on, like, sneakers, a bra, and you know, panties, but that was it." He winked and gave me a thumbs-up to let me know he'd liked what he'd seen.

"Where were her clothes?"

"Stuffed into some sort of gym bag beside her." He pointed to a vinyl bag under the gurney. "There it is. Her clothes was in there. Gotta run. Just tell her about the clubs, OK, Doc?"

"It's OK," said a soft voice behind me. I turned and saw the victim looking our way. "I didn't have any clubs."

"Super," the tech said. "You heard her." And he was gone.

"How do you feel?" I said, approaching the gurney.

Kim McCormick gazed at me through cerulean irises, dreamy and half-obscured by her heavy eyelids. Her smile revealed white, slightly crooked teeth.

"Wonderful."

Clearly she was still not completely out of her post-strike daze.

"I hear this is the third time you've been struck by lightning. How in the—?"

She was shaking her head. "It's the eighth."

I grinned at the put-on. "Right."

"S'true."

My first thought was that she was either lying or crazy, but she didn't seem to care if I believed her. And in those half-glazed eyes I saw a secret pain, a deep remorse, a hauntingly familiar loss. The same look I saw in my bathroom mirror every morning.

"If that's true," I said, holding up her lightning detector, "you should find one of these that really works."

"Oh, that works just fine," she said.

"Then why—?"

"It's the only way I can be with my little boy."

I tried to speak but couldn't find a word to say. Stunned, I watched her roll over and go to sleep.

No way I could let her go without learning what she'd meant by that, so I kept looking in on her during my shift, waiting for her to wake up. After suturing the 20-centimeter gash a kid from the local supermarket had opened in his thigh when his box cutter slipped, I checked cubicle six again and found it empty.

The desk told me she'd paid by credit card and taken off in a cab, lightning detector and all.

I spent the next week hunting her, starting with her Jersey address; I left messages on the answering machine there, but they were never returned. Finally, after badgering the various taxi companies in town, I tracked Kim McCormick to a Travelodge out on 98.

I sat in my car in the motel parking lot one afternoon, gathering courage to knock on her door, and wondering at this bizarre urge. I'm not the obsessive type, but I knew her words would haunt me until I'd learned what they meant.

It's the only way I can be with my little boy.

Taking a deep breath, I made myself move. August heat and humidity gave me a wet slap as I stepped out and headed for her

door. Nickel clouds hung low and a wind-driven Wal-Mart flyer wrapped itself around my leg like a horny mutt. I kicked it away.

She answered my knock almost immediately, but I could tell from her expression she didn't know me. To tell the truth, with her hair dried and combed, and color in her cheeks, I barely recognized her. She wore dark blue shorts and a white Lacoste—sans bra, I noticed. I hadn't appreciated before how attractive she was.

"Yes?"

"Ms. McCormick, I'm Dr. Glycer. We met at the emergency room after you were—"

"Oh, yes! I remember you now." She gave me a crooked grin that I found utterly charming. "This a house call?"

here don't have to wind around hills and valleys, so they're laid out as the shortest distance between two points.

Ahead the sky was growing rapidly more threatening, the gray clouds darkening; lightning flashed in their ecchymotic bellies.

The light had dimmed to late-dusk level by the time she turned off the blacktop and bounced northward along a sandy road. She stopped her car about 50 yards from a small rise where a majestic Nelson pine towered over the surrounding scrub. She got out with her gym bag in hand and hurried toward the tree in a limping trot. Wind whipped her shorts around her bare legs, twisted her hair across her face. A bolt of lightning cracked the sky far to my left, and thunder rumbled past a few seconds later. I gaped in disbelief

I can tell he's used up most of his courage getting this far.

"In a way." I felt awkward standing on the threshold. "I was wondering about your foot."

She stepped back into the room but didn't ask me in. "Still hurts," she said. I noticed the bandage on her left heel as she slipped her feet into a pair of backless shoes. "But I get around OK in clogs."

I scanned the room. A laptop sat on the nightstand, screen-saver fish gliding across its screen. The bed was unmade, two Chinese food containers in the waste basket, a Wendy's bag next to the TV on the dresser. The Weather Channel was on, showing a map of Florida with a bright red rectangle superimposed on its midsection. The words "Severe Thunderstorm Warning" crawled along the bottom of the screen.

"Glad to hear it," I said. "Listen, I'd ... I'd like to talk to you about what you said when you were in the ER."

"Sorry?" she said, cocking her head toward me. "I didn't catch that."

"I said I'd like to ask you about something you said when you were in the ER."

"What was that?" She said it absently as she hurried about the room, stuffing sundry items into her gym bag, one of which I recognized as her lightning detector.

"Something about being with your little boy."

That got her. She stopped and looked at me. "I said that?"

I nodded. "It's the only way I can be with my little boy, to be exact." She sighed. "I shouldn't have said that. I was still off my head from the shock, I guess. Forget it."

"I can't. It's haunted me."

She stepped closer, staring into my eyes. "Why should that haunt you?"

"Long story. That's why I was wondering if we might sit down somewhere and—"

"Maybe some other time," she said. "I'm just on my way out."

"Where? Maybe we can go together and talk on the way."

"You can't go where I'm going," she said, slipping past me and closing the door behind her. She flashed me a bright, excited smile as she turned away. "I'm off to see my little boy."

I watched her get into a white Mercedes Benz with Jersey plates. As she pulled away, I hurried to my car and followed. Her haste, the approaching storm, the lightning detector ... I had a bad feeling about this.

I didn't bother hanging back—I doubted she knew what kind of car I was driving, or would be checking for anyone following her. She turned off 98 onto a two-lane blacktop that ran straight as the proverbial arrow toward the western horizon. A lot of Florida roads are like that. Why? Because they can be. The state is basically a giant sandbar, flat as a flounder's belly, and barely above sea level. Roads

as she pulled off her shirt and shorts, stuffed them into the bag, and seated herself on the far side of the trunk.

"She's crazy!" I said aloud as I gunned the engine.

I pulled past her car and stopped as close to the tree as the road would allow. Amid more lightning and thunder, I jumped out and dashed up the rise.

"Kim!" I shouted. "This is insane! Get away from there!"

She started at the sound of my voice, looked up, and threw her free arm across her breasts. Her other hand gripped the lightning detector, its red warning light blinking madly.

"Leave me alone! I know what I'm doing!"

"You'll be killed!" I picked up her gym bag and held it out to her. "Please! Get back in your car!"

Her face contorted with fury as she slapped the bag from my hand, then covered her breasts again. "Get out of here! You don't understand and you'll ruin everything!" Her voice rose to a scream. "Go away!"

I backed off, unsure of what to do. I debated grabbing her and wrestling her to safety, but did I have the right? As crazy as this seemed, Kim McCormick was a grown woman, and very determined to be here. A daylight-bright flash, followed instantaneously by a deafening crash of thunder and a torrent of cold rain, decided it. I ducked back toward my car.

"Keep your windows closed!" I heard Kim shout behind me. "And don't touch any metal!"

Drenched, I huddled on the front seat and did just that. The storm roared in with maniacal fury, lashing the car with gale-force winds and rain so heavy I felt as if I'd parked under a waterfall. I couldn't see Kim—couldn't even see the big Nelson pine. I hated the thought of her getting soaked and risking electrocution out there in the lightning-strobed darkness, but what could I do?

Mostly I resented feeling helpless. I fought the urge to throw the car into gear and leave Kim McCormick to her fate. I had to stay ... *needed* to stay. I felt tenuously bound to this peculiar woman, by something unseen, unspoken.

The lightning and thunder finally abated as the storm chugged off to the east. When the rain had eased to a steady downpour, I lowered the window and squinted at the pine, afraid of what I'd see.

Kim was still huddled against the trunk, looking miserable: hair a rattail tangle, knees drawn up, head down, but seemingly none the worse for the terrible risk she'd taken.

I stepped out and tried not to stare at her glistening, pale skin as I approached. She glanced up at me. The bright excitement of an hour ago had fled her eyes, leaving a hollow look. I reached into her bag and pulled out her shirt. I held it out to her.

"Now can we talk?"

KIM POINTED TO A PINK SCAR THAT PUCKERED HER RIGHT PALM. "That's from the first time I was hit," she said.

I'd followed her back to her motel, waited while she took a quick shower, then brought her here to Cajun Heat, my favorite restaurant. She'd seemed pretty down when we were seated, but a couple of Red Stripes and an appetizer of steamed spiced shrimp had perked her up some.

"That one was an accident," she said. "I was visiting my sister in west Texas last year. She and her husband and I had been fishing on White River Lake when it started to get stormy. We came ashore and I was standing on the dock, helping unload the boat. It hadn't even started raining yet, but somehow I took a direct hit." She

**"It's the only way
I can be with
my little boy."**

rubbed the scar. "I had a fishing rod in my hand, my palm against the reel. That's all I remember. Karen and Bill were knocked off their feet but they told me later they saw me fly 20 feet through the air. I broke my forearm when I landed. My heart had stopped. They had to give me CPR."

"You were lucky."

"Yeah, maybe." She stared at her palm with a rueful smile. Her wet hair was pulled back and fastened with an elastic band, making her look younger than her 38 years. "Karen still jokes about how she thinks Bill was maybe a little too enthusiastic with the mouth-to-mouth."

"So the first strike was accidental. After what I saw today, I gather the next seven were anything but. Dare I ask why?"

Kim continued staring at her palm. "You already think I'm nuts. I don't want you thinking I'm a complete psycho."

"Try me."

"Hmm?" She glanced up. "Sorry. I'm a little hard of hearing, especially when there's background noise."

"I said, 'Try me.'"

She looked me in the eye, then let out a deep sigh. "Immediately after that first strike, I saw my son Timmy. I could see the lake and the dock and the boat, but they were faint and ghostly. I was standing right where I'd been when I got hit, but I could see my body sprawled behind me. Karen and Bill were running toward it, but slowly, like they were swimming through molasses, and they too looked faint, translucent. Timmy, though—he looked perfectly real and solid, but he was far away, hovering over the water, waving to me. He looked healthy, like he'd never been sick, but he was so far away. He kept beckoning me closer but I couldn't move. Then he faded away."

The pieces fell into place, and there it was, staring me in the face. Somehow I'd sensed it. Now I knew.

"When did he die?"

She blinked in surprise, then looked away. "Almost three years ago." Her eyes brimmed with tears but none spilled over. "Two years, eleven months, two weeks, and three days, to be exact."

"You had a very vivid hallucin—"

"No," she said firmly, shaking her head. "He was *there*. You can't appreciate how real he was if you didn't see him. I'm a hard-headed realist, Dr. Glycer, and—"

"Call me Joe."

"OK. Fine. But let's get something straight, Dr. Joe. I'm no New-Agey hollow-head into touchy-feely spirituality. I was an investment banker, and a damn good one—Wharton MBA, Salomon Brothers, the whole nine yards. I dealt with the reality of cold hard cash and down-and-dirty bottom lines every day. As far as the after-life was concerned, I was right up there with the big-time skeptics. To me, life began when you were born, you lived out your years,

then you died. That was it. Game over, no replay. But not anymore. This is real. I don't know what happened, or how it happened, but for an all-too-brief time after that lightning strike, I saw Timmy, and he saw me, and that changed everything." She closed her eyes. "I thought I was getting over losing him, but ..."

No, I thought as her voice trailed off. You never get over it.

But I said nothing.

"Anyway, at first I tried to duplicate the effect by shocking myself with my house current, but that didn't work. I concluded that to see Timmy again I'd need the millions of volts only lightning can provide. So I went back to Texas and hung around that dock during half a dozen storms but I couldn't *buy* another hit."

"Are you trying to die?" I said. "Is that it?"

She tossed me a withering look. "I have a Ruger 9mm automatic back at my motel room. When I want to die, I'll use that. I am *not* suicidal."

"Then what else do you call flirting with death like you did today? And you've been hit *eight* times? The fact

that you're still alive is amazing—you've had a fantastic run of luck, but you've got to know that sooner or later it's going to run out."

The waitress arrived then and we dropped into silence as she set steaming plates of jambalaya before us.

"You don't know much about lightning, do you," Kim said when we were alone again.

"I've treated my share of—"

"But do you know that it's usually not fatal, that better than nine out of ten victims survive?"

Truthfully, I hadn't known the survival rate was that high. "Well, you're closing in on number 10."

She shrugged. "Just a number. The first shock on that dock in Texas should have killed me. The usual bolt carries a current of 10,000 amps at a hundred million volts. Makes the electric chair look like a triple-A battery. Of course the charge only lasts a tiny fraction of a second, but that first one was enough to put me into cardiac arrest. If Karen and Bill hadn't known CPR, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

She dug into her jambalaya and chewed for a few seconds.

"Good, isn't it," I said.

She nodded. "Delicious."

But she said it with no great conviction, and I got the feeling that eating was something Kim McCormick did simply to keep from feeling hungry.

"But where was I?" she said. "Oh, yes. After failing to get hit a second time in Texas, I started studying up on lightning. We still don't understand it completely, but what we do know is fascinating. Do you realize that worldwide, every second of every minute of every day there are almost a thousand lightning flashes? Most are cloud to cloud or cloud to air. Only 15 percent hit the ground. Those are the ones I'm interested in."

This was the most animated I'd seen her. I leaned across the table, drawn by her enthusiasm.

"But tell me," I said. "You're from Jersey. You were first struck in Texas. What are you doing here?"

"It's where the lightning is. The National Weather Service keeps track of lightning—something called 'flash density ratings.' According to their records, central Florida is the lightning capital of the country, maybe the world. You've got this broad strip of hot, low-lying land between two huge, cooler bodies of water. Take atmospheric instability due to wide temperature gradients, add tons of moisture, and *voila*—thunderstorm alley."

"Seems you've been pretty successful around here—if you can call getting hit by lightning success."

She smiled. "I do. I started up around the Orlando area because of all the lakes. Being out in a boat during a storm is the best way to get hit, but I started thinking it was too risky, too easy to get knocked overboard and drown. Or take a direct hit from a positive giant."

"A what?"

"A positive giant. They originate at the very top of the storm cell, maybe 50,000 feet up, and they can strike 30 miles ahead of the storm. You've heard of people getting struck down by a so-called 'bolt from the blue'? That's a positive giant. I don't want to get hit by one of those because they're so much more powerful than a regular bolt. Almost always fatal." She pointed her fork at me. "See? Told you I'm not suicidal."

"I believe you, I believe you."

"Good. Anyway, I settled on golf courses as my best bet. The landscapers take down a lot of the little trees but tend to leave the really big ones between the fairways." She showed me a pink, half-dollar-sized scar on her right elbow. "That's an exit burn from the strike at Ventura Country Club." She parted her hair to reveal a quarter-sized scar on her right parietal scalp. "This one's an entry at Hunter's Creek Golf Club. I could show you more, but not in public. I've got other scars you can't see. Like a mild seizure disorder, for instance—I take Dilantin for that. And I've lost some of my hearing."

I was losing my appetite. This poor, deranged woman. "And did you see ...?"

"Timmy?" She smiled. Her eyes fairly glowed. "Yes. Every single time."

Kim McCormick was delusional. Had to be. And yet she was so convincing. But then that's the power of a delusion.

But what if it wasn't a delusion? What if she really ...?

I couldn't let myself go there.

"One of these times ...," I said.

"You're right, I suppose. And I'm prepared for it. I've got a solid will: how I'm to be cremated, where my ashes will go, and a list of all the charities that'll share my assets. But I stack the deck in my favor when I go out. That's why I get under a tree. Odds are against taking a direct hit that way. You get a secondary jolt—a flash that jumps from the primary strike point—and so far that's worked just fine for my purposes. Plus I keep low to the ground to reduce my chance of being thrown too far."

"But why do you undress?"

"I figure wet skin attracts a charge better than wet fabric."

I shook my head. "How long are you going to keep this up?"

"Until I get closer to him. He seems nearer here than he was in Texas, but he's still too far away."

"Too far for what?"

"I need to see his eyes, hear his voice, read his lips."

"Why? What are you looking for?"

A lost look tinged with terrible sorrow fluttered across her features. Her voice was barely audible. "Forgiveness."

I stared at her.

"Don't ask," she whispered before I could speak. "Subject closed." She shook herself and gave me a forced smile. "Let's talk about something else. Anything but the weather."

I STAND ALONE ON A ROTTED WHARF, ENGLUFED IN FOG. THE STAGNANT pond before me carries a vaguely septic stench. No sound, no movement. I wait. Soon I hear the creak of wood, the gentle lap of a polished hull gliding through still water. A dark shape appears, with the distinctive curved bow of a gondola. It noses toward me through the fog, but as it nears I notice something unusual about the hull. It's classic glossy black, like all gondolas, but the seating area is closed over. I realize with a start that the hull is a coffin ... a child's coffin ... and bright red blood is oozing from under the lid. I shout to the gondolier. He's gaunt, the traditional striped shirt hanging loose on his bony frame. His face is hidden by his broad straw hat until he lifts his head and stares at me. I scream when I see the scar running across his left eye. He grins and begins poling his floating sarcophagus away, back into the fog. I jump into the foul water and swim after him, stroking frantically as I try to catch up. But the gondola is too fast and the fog swallows it again, leaving me alone and lost in the water. I swim in circles, my arms growing weaker and weaker ... finally they refuse to respond,

dangling limply at my sides as I slip beneath the surface ... water rushes into my nose and throat, choking me ...

I awoke gagging and shaking, dangling half on, half off my bed. It took me a long time to shake off the aftereffects of the nightmare. I hadn't had one like that in years. I knew why it had returned tonight: my afternoon with Kim McCormick.



Over the next few days I realized that Kim had invaded my life. I kept thinking of her alone in that motel room, eating fast food, her eyes glued to the Weather Channel as she tracked the next storm, planned her next brush with death. The image haunted me at night, followed me through the day. I found myself keeping the Weather Channel on at home, and ducking off to check it out on the doctors' lounge TV whenever I had a spare moment.

I guess my preoccupation became noticeable because Jay Ravener, head of the emergency department, pulled me aside and asked me if anything was wrong. Jay could never understand why a board-certified cardiologist like myself wanted to work as an emergency room doc. He was delighted to have access to someone with my training, but he was always telling me how much more money I could make as a staff cardiologist. Today, though, he was talking about enthusiasm, giving me a pep talk about how we were a team, and we all had to be players. He went on about how I hardly speak to anyone on good days, and lately I'd barely been here.

Probably true. No, undoubtedly true. I don't particularly care for anyone on the staff, or in the whole damn state, for that matter. I don't care to make chitchat. I come in, do my job—damn efficiently, too—and then I go home. I live alone. I read, watch TV, videos, go to the movies—all alone. I prefer it that way.

"Sometimes believing is seeing."

I know I'm depressed. But imagine what I'd be like without the 40 milligrams of Prozac I take every day. I wasn't always this way, but it's my current reality, and that's how I choose to deal with it.

Fuck you, Jay.

I said none of this, however. I merely nodded and made concurring noises, then let Jay move on, satisfied that he'd done his duty.

But the episode made me realize that Kim McCormick had upset the delicate equilibrium I'd established, and I'd have to do something about her.

Just as she had researched lightning, I decided to research Kim McCormick.

Her driver's license had listed a Princeton address. I began calling the New Jersey medical centers in her area, looking for a patient named Timothy McCormick. When I struck out there, I moved to Philadelphia. I hit pay dirt at CHOP—Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Being a doctor made it possible. Physicians and medical records departments are pretty tight-lipped about patient information when it comes to lawyers, insurance companies, even relatives. But when it's one doctor to another ...

I asked Timothy McCormick's attending to call me about him. After having me paged through the hospital switchboard, Richard Andrews, MD, pediatric oncologist, knew he was talking to a fellow physician and was ready to open up. I told him I was treating Kim McCormick for depression that I knew stemmed from the death of her child, but she would give me no details. Could he help?

"I remember it like it was yesterday," he told me in a staccato rattle. "Sad case. Osteosarcoma, started in his right femur. Pretty well

advanced, mets to the lung and beyond by the time it was diagnosed. He deteriorated rapidly but we managed to stabilize him. Even though he was on respiratory assist, his mother wanted him home, in his own room. She was loaded, and equipped a mini-intensive care unit at home with around-the-clock skilled nursing. What could we say? We let her take him."

"And he died there, I gather?"

"Yeah. We thought we had all the bases covered. One thing we didn't foresee was a power failure. Hospitals have back-up generators, her house didn't."

I closed my eyes and suppressed a groan. I didn't have to imagine what awful moments those must have been, the horror of utter helplessness, of watching her child die before her eyes and not being able to do a thing about it. And the guilt afterward ... oh, Lord, the crushing weight of self-doubt and self-damnation would be enough to make anyone delusional.

I thanked Dr. Andrews, told him what a great help he'd been, and struggled through the rest of my shift. Usually I can grab a nap after 2 AM. Not this time. I sat up, staring at the Weather Channel, watching with growing unease as the radar tracked a violent storm moving this way from Tampa.

I called Kim McCormick's motel room but she didn't answer. Did she guess it was me and knew I'd try to convince her to stay in? Or was she already out?

As the clock crawled toward 6 AM I stood with keys in hand inside the glass door to the doctor's parking lot and watched the western sky come alive with lightning, felt the door shiver in resonance with the growing thunder. So *much* lightning, and it was still miles off. If Kim was out there ...

If? Who was I kidding? Of course she was out there. And I couldn't leave until my relief arrived. I prayed he'd show up early, but if anything, the storm would delay him.

Jerry Ross arrived at 6:05, just ahead of a pair of ambulances, and I dashed for my car. The storm was hitting its stride as I raced along 98. I turned off onto what I thought was the right road, fishtailing as I gunned along, searching for that Nelson pine. I almost missed it in the downpour, and damn near ditched the car as I slammed on the brakes when I spotted it. I backed up to the access road and kicked up wet gravel as I headed for the tree.

The sight of her Mercedes offered some relief, and I let out a deep breath when I spotted the pale form huddled against the trunk. I barely knew this strange, troubled woman, and yet somehow she'd become very important to me.

I skidded to a stop and ran up the rise to where she sat, looking like a drowned rat. Halfway there the air around me flashed noon bright and the immediate crash of thunder nearly knocked me off my feet, but Kim remained unscathed.

"Not again!" she cried, not bothering to cover her breasts this time. She waved me off. "Get out of here!"

"You can't keep doing this!" I dropped to my knees beside her and tried not to stare. I couldn't help but notice that they were very nice breasts, not too big, not too little, just right, with deep brown nipples, jutting in the chill rain.

"I can do anything I damn well please! Now *go away!*"

I'd been here only seconds but already my clothes were soaked through. I leaned closer, shouting over the deafening thunder.

"I know what happened—about Timmy, bringing him home, the power failure. But you can't go on punishing yourself."

She gave me a cold blue stare. "How do you—?"

"Doesn't matter. I just know. Tell me—was there a storm when the power went off?"

She nodded, still staring. The red blinker on her lightning detector was going berserk.

"Don't you see how it's all tied together?" I cried. "It's guilt and obsession. You need medication, Kim. I can help."

"I've *been* on medication," she snapped. "Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft, Effexor, Tofranil, you name it. Nothing worked. I'm not imagining this, *Doctor*. Timmy is there. I can feel him."

"Because you *want* him there!"

More lightning—so close I heard it sizzle.

"Damn you!" she gritted through clenched teeth during the ensuing thunderclap. I didn't hear those words, but I could read her lips. She closed her eyes for a second, as if counting to 10, then looked at me again. "Do you have any children?"

I didn't hesitate. "No."

"Well, if you did, you'd understand when I say you *know* them. I *know* Timmy, and I know he's *there*. And since you've never had a child, then you can't understand what it's like to lose one." Her eyes were filling, her voice trembling. "How you'll do anything—risk

I'm no New-into

everything—to have them back, even for an instant. So don't tell me I need medication. I need my little *boy!*"

"But I do understand," I said softly, feeling my own pain grow, wanting to stop myself before I went further but sensing it was already too late. "I—"

I stopped as my skin burst to life with a tingling, crawling sensation, and my body became a burning beehive with all its panicked residents trying to flee at once through the top of my head. I had a flash of Kim with strands of her wet hair standing out from her head and undulating like live snakes, and then I was at ground zero at Hiroshima ...

... *an instant white-out and then the staticky blizzard wanes, leaving me kneeling by the tree, with Kim sprawled prone before me, flaming pine needles floating around me like lazy fireflies, and a man tumbling ever so slowly down the slope to my right. With a start I realize he's me, but the whole scene is translucent—I can see through the tree trunk—and pale, drained of color, almost as if it's etched in glass, except ...*

... *except for the tiny figure standing far across the marsh, a blotch of bright spring color in this polar landscape. A little girl, her dark brown hair divided into two ponytails tied with bright green ribbon, and she's wearing a yellow dress, her favorite yellow dress ...*

... *it's Beth ... oh, Christ, it can only be Beth ... but she's so far away.*

A desperate cry of longing leaps to my lips as I reach for her, but I can make no sound, and the world fades to black, my Beth with it ...

I sat up groggy and confused, my right shoulder alive with pain, and looked around. Lightning still flashed, thunder still bellowed, rain still gushed in torrents from above, but somehow the whole world seemed changed. What had happened just now? Could that have been my little Beth? Really Beth?

No. Not possible. And yet ...

Kim's still, white form caught my eye. She lay by the trunk. I tried to stand but my legs wouldn't go for it, so I crawled to her. She was still breathing. Thank God. Then she moaned and moved her legs. I tried to lift her but my muscles were jelly. So I cradled her in my arms, shielding her as best I could from the rain, and waited for my strength to return, my mind filled with wonder at what I had seen.

Could I believe it had been real? Did I dare?

Still somewhat dazed, I sat on Kim's motel bed, a towel around my waist, my clothes draped over the lampshades to dry. When she'd come to, we staggered to my car and I drove us here.

The room looked exactly as before, except a Hardy's bag had replaced the Wendy's. Kim emerged from the bathroom wearing a flowered sundress, drying her hair with a towel. She was bouncing back faster than I was—practice, maybe. She looked pale but elated. I knew she must have seen her boy again.

I felt numb.

"Oh, God," she said and leaned closer. "Look at that burn!"

I glanced at the large blister atop my left shoulder. "It doesn't hurt as much as before."

"Oh, Joe, I'm so sorry you caught that flash too. I feel terrible."

"Don't," I said. "Not as if you didn't warn me."

"Still ... let me get some of the cream they gave me for my heel. I'll make you—"

"I saw someone," I blurted.

She froze, staring at me, her eyes bright and wide. "Did you? Did you really? You saw Timmy? Didn't I tell you!"

"It wasn't your son," I said.

She frowned. "Then who?"

"Remember by the tree, just before we got hit, when you asked me if I had any children? I said no, because ... because I don't. At least not anymore. But I did."

Agey hollow-head touchy-feely spirituality.

"Did?" Kim said, staring at me.

"A beautiful, beautiful daughter, the most wonderful little girl in the world."

"Oh, dear God! You too?"

My throat had thickened to the point where I could only nod.

She stumbled to the bed and sat next to me. The thin mattress sagged deeply under our combined weight.

"You're sure it was her?"

Again I nodded.

"I didn't see her. And you didn't see Timmy?"

I shook my head, trying to remember. Finally I could speak. "Only Beth."

"How old was she?"

"Eight."

"Timmy was only five. Was it ...?" Her own throat seemed to clog as she placed her hand on my arm. "Did she have cancer too?"

"No," I said, and the memory began to hammer against the walls of the cell where I'd bricked it up. "She was murdered. Right in front of me." I held up my left arm to show her the seven-inch scar running up from the underside of my wrist. "This was all I got, but Beth died. And I couldn't save her."

Kim made a choking noise and I felt her fingers dig into my arm, her nails like claws. "No!" Her voice was muffled because she'd jammed the damp towel over her mouth. "Oh-no, oh-no, oh-no! You poor ... oh, God, how ...?"

I heard a sound so full of pain it transfixed me for an instant until I realized it had come from me.

"No. I can't. Please don't ask. I can't, I can't, I can't."

How could I talk about what I couldn't even think about? I knew if I freed those memories, even for a single moment, I'd never cage them again. They'd rampage through my being as they'd done before, devouring me alive from the inside out.

I buried my face against Kim's neck. She cradled me in her arms and rocked me like a baby.

"WHAT ABOUT TIMMY'S FATHER?" I SAID, BITING INTO MY EGG McMuffin. "Does he know about all this?"

After clinging to Kim for I don't know how long, I'd finally pulled myself together. We were hungry, but my clothes were still wet. So she took my car and made a breakfast run to Mickey D's. I sat on the bed, Kim took the room's one upholstered chair. The coffee was warming my insides, the caffeine pulling me part way out of my funk, but I was still well below sea level.

"He doesn't know Timmy exists," she said. "Literally. We never married. He's a good man, very bright, but I dropped him when I learned I was pregnant."

"I don't follow."

"He'd have wanted to marry me, or have some part in my baby's life. I didn't want that." My expression must have registered how offensive I found that, because she quickly explained. "You've got to understand how I was then: a super career woman who could do it all, wanted it all, and strictly on her own terms. I went through the

pregnancy by myself, took maternity leave at the last possible moment, figuring I'd deliver the child—I knew he was a boy by the third month—and set him up with a nanny while I jumped right back into the race. I saw myself spending a sufficient amount of quality time with him as I molded him to be a mover and a shaker, just like his mother." She shook her head. "What a jerk."

"And after the delivery?" I said, guessing the answer.

She beamed. "When they put that little bundle into my arms, everything changed. He was a miracle, by far the finest thing I'd ever done in my life. Once I got him home, I couldn't stop holding

him. And when I'd finally put him into his bassinet, I'd pull up a chair and sit there looking at him. ... I'd put my pinkie against his palm and his little fingers would close around it, almost like a reflex, and that's how I'd stay, just sitting and staring, listening to him breathe as he held my finger."

I felt my throat tighten. I remembered watching Beth sleep when she was an infant, marveling at her pudgy cheeks, counting the tiny veins on the surfaces of her closed eyelids.

"You sound like a wonderful mother."

"I was. That's no brag. It's just that it's simply not my nature to do things halfway. Everything else in my life took a back seat to Timmy, I mean *way* back. It damn near killed me to end my maternity leave, but I arranged to do a lot of work from home. I wanted to be near him all the time." She blinked a few times and sniffed. "I'm so glad I made the effort, because he didn't stay around very long." She rubbed a hand across her face and looked at me with reddened eyes. "How long since Beth...?"

"Five years," I said. The longing welled up in me. "Sometimes I feel like I was talking to her just yesterday, other times it seems like she's been gone forever."

"But don't you see?" Kim said, leaning forward. "She's not gone. She's still here."

I shook my head. "I wish I could believe that."

The lightning episode was becoming less and less real with each passing minute. Despite what I'd seen, I found myself increasingly reluctant to buy into this.

"But you saw her, didn't you? You *knew* her, didn't you? Isn't seeing believing?"

"I don't know. Sometimes believing is seeing."

"But each of us saw our dead child. Can we *both* be crazy?"

"There's something called shared delusion. I could be—"

"Damn it!" she said, catapulting from the chair. "I'm not going to let you do this!" She yanked my pants from atop the lampshade and threw them at me. "You can't take this from me! I won't let you or anybody else tell me—"

I grabbed her wrist as she stormed past me. "Kim! I *want* to believe! Can't you see there's nothing in the world I want more? And that's what worries me. I may want it too much."

I pulled her into my arms and we stood there, clinging to each other in anguished silence. I could feel her hot breath on my bare shoulder. She lifted her face to me.

"Don't fight it, Joe," she said, her voice soft. "Go with it. Otherwise you'll be denying yourself—"

I kissed her on the lips.

She drew back. I didn't know where the impulse had come from, and it was a toss-up as to which of us was more surprised. We stared at each other for a few heartbeats, and then our lips were together again. We seemed to be trying to devour each other. She tugged at my towel, I pulled at her sundress, she wore nothing beneath it, and we tumbled onto the unmade bed, skin to skin, rolling and climbing all over each other, frantic mouths and hands everywhere until we finally locked together, riding out a storm of our own making.

AFTERWARD WE CLUNG TO EACH OTHER UNDER THE SHEET. I stroked her back, feeling guilty because I knew it had been better for me than her.

"I'm sorry that was so quick," I said. "I'm out of practice."

"Don't be sorry," she murmured, kissing my shoulder. "Maybe it's all the shocks I've taken, but orgasms seem to be few and far between for me these days. I'm just glad to have someone I can feel close to. You don't know how lonely it's been, keeping this to myself, unable to share it. It's wonderful to be able to talk about it with someone who understands."

"I wish I did understand," I said. "Why is this happening?"

"Maybe all those volts alter the nervous system, change the brain's modes of perception."

"But I've never heard of anything like this. Why don't other lightning strike victims mention seeing a dead loved one?"

"Maybe they *have* seen them and never mentioned it. You're the only one I've told. But maybe it has to be someone who died during a storm. Did Beth—?"

"No," I said quickly, not allowing the scene to take shape in my mind. "Perfect weather."

"Then maybe it has to do with the fact that they both died as children, and they're still attached to their parents. They hadn't let go of us in life yet, and maybe that carries over into death."

"Almost sounds as if they're waiting for us," I said.

"Maybe they are."

The temperature in the room seemed to drop and Kim snuggled closer.

Later, when we went back to pick up Kim's car, we walked up to where the lightning had struck. The top of the Nelson pine was split and charred. As we stood under its branches, I relived the moment, seeing Beth again, reaching for her ...

"I wish she'd been closer," I said.

"Yes." Kim turned to me. "Isn't it frustrating? When I took my second hit, up in Orlando, Timmy was closer than he'd been in Texas, and I thought he might move closer with each succeeding hit. But it hasn't worked that way. He stays about 50 yards away."

"Really? Beth seemed at least twice that." I pointed to the marshy field. "She was way over there."

Kim pointed north. "Timmy was that way."

I swiveled back and forth between where I'd seen Beth and where Kim had seen Timmy, and an idea began to take shape.

"Tell me," I said. "Which way were you facing when you saw Timmy in Texas?"

She closed her eyes. "Let me think ... the Sun always rose over the end of the dock, so I guess I was facing east."

"Good." I took her shoulders and rotated her until she faced east. "Now, show me where Timmy was in relation to the end of the dock when he appeared in Texas."

She pointed northeast.

"I'll be damned," I said and trotted down the slope.

"Where're you going?"

I reached into my car and plucked the compass from my dashboard. Sometimes at night when I can't sleep I go out for long aimless drives and wind up God knows where. At those times it's handy to know which direction you're headed.

"All right," I said when I returned to Kim. "This morning Timmy was that way—the compass says that's a few degrees east of north. If you followed that line from here, it would run through New Jersey, wouldn't it?"

She nodded, her brow furrowing. "Yes."

"But in Texas—where in Texas?"

"White River Lake. West Texas."

"OK. You saw him in a north-northeast direction. Follow that line from West Texas and I'll bet it takes you—"

"To Jersey!" She was squeezing my upper arm with both hands and jumping up and down like a little girl. "Oh, God! That's where we lived! Timmy spent his whole life in Princeton!"

It's also where he died, I thought.

"I think a trip to Princeton is in order, don't you?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, God, yes!" Her voice cranked up to light speed. "Do you think that's where he is? Do you think he's still at the house? Oh, dear God! Why didn't I think of that?" She settled down and looked at me. "And what about Beth? You saw her ... where?"

"East-northeast," I said. I didn't need the compass to figure that.

"Where does that line go? Orlando? Kissimmee? Did you live around there?"

I shook my head. "No. We lived in Tampa."

"But that's the opposite direction. What's east-northeast from here?"

I stared at the horizon. "Italy."

A WEEK LATER WE WERE SITTING IN THE UPPERMOST PART OF KIM'S Princeton home waiting for an approaching storm to hit.

She had to have been earning *big* bucks as an investment banker to afford this place. A two-story Victorian—she said it was Second Empire style—with an octagonal tower set in the center of its mansard roof. One look at that tower and I knew it could be put to good use.

I found a Home Depot and bought four eight-foot sections of one-inch steel pipe, threaded at both ends, and three compatible couplers. I drilled a hole near the center of the tower roof and ran a length through; I coupled the second length to its lower end, and ran that through, and so on until Kim had a steel lightning target jutting 20-odd feet above her tower.

The tower loft was unfurnished, so I'd carried up a couple of cushions from one of her sofas. We huddled side by side on those. The lower end of the steel pipe sat in a large galvanized bucket of water a few feet in front of us—the bucket was to catch the rain that would certainly leak through my amateur caulking job at the roofline, the water to reduce the risk of fire.

I heard the first distant mutter of thunder and rubbed my hands together. Despite the intense dry heat up here, they felt cold and damp.

"Scared?" Kim said

"Terrified."

My first brush with lightning had been an accident. I hadn't known what was coming. Now I did. I was shaking inside.

Kim smiled and gave my arm a reassuring squeeze. "So was I, at first. Knowing I'm going to see Timmy helps, but still ... it's the uncertainty that does it: *Is it or isn't it* going to hit?"

"How about I just say I don't believe in lightning? That'll make me feel better."

She laughed. "Hey, whatever works." She sidled closer. "But I think I know a better way to take your mind off your worries."

She began kissing me, on my eyes, my cheeks, my neck, my lips. And I began undoing the buttons on her blouse. We made love on the cushions in that hot stuffy tower, and were glazed with sweat when we finished.

A flash lit one of the eight slim windows that surrounded us, followed by a deep rumble.

"Almost here," I whispered.

Kim nodded absently. She seemed distant. I knew our love-making had once again ended too quickly for her, and I felt bad. Over the past week I'd tried everything I knew to bring her through, but kept running into a wall I could not breach.

"I wish—" I began but she placed a finger against my lips.

"I have to tell you something. About Timmy. About the day he died."

I knew it had been tough on her coming back here. I'd seen his room—it lay directly below this little tower. Like so many parents who've lost a child, she'd kept it just as he'd left it, with toys on the counters and drawings on the wall. I would have done that with Beth's room, but my marriage fell apart soon after her death and the house was sold. Another child was living in Beth's room now.

"You don't—"

"Shush," she said. "Let me speak. I've got to tell you this. I've got to tell *someone* before ..."

"Before what?"

"Before I explode. I brought Timmy home from the hospital to a room that was set up like the finest ICU. All his vital signs were monitored at the hospital by telemetry, he had round-the-clock skilled nursing to give him his chemotherapy, monitor his IVs, draw blood for tests, adjust his respirator."

"Why the respirator?" I couldn't help it—the doctor in me wanted to know.

"The tumor had spread to his lungs—he couldn't breathe without it. It'd also spread to many of his bones, even his skull. He was in terrible pain all the time. They radiated him, filled him with poisons

"...something called shared delusion."

that made him sicker, loaded him with dope to ease the pain, and kept telling me he had a fighting chance. He *didn't* have a chance. I knew it, and that was why I'd brought him home, so he could be in his own room, and so I could have every minute with him. But worse, Timmy knew it too. I could see it in his eyes when they weren't glazed with opiates. He was hanging by a thread but no one would let it break. He wanted to go."

I closed my eyes, thinking, Oh, no. Don't tell me this ... I don't want to hear this ...

"It was the hardest decision of my life. More than anything else in the universe, I wanted my little boy to live, because every second of his life seemed a precious gift to me. But why was I delaying the inevitable? For him, or for me? Certainly not for him, because he was simply existing. He couldn't read, couldn't even watch TV, because if he wasn't in agony, he was in the Demerol zone. That meant I was prolonging his agony for *me*, because I couldn't let him go. I *had* to let him go. As his mother, I had to do what was right for *him*, not for me."

"You don't have to go on," I said as she paused. "I can guess the rest."

Kim showed me a small, bitter smile. "No, I don't think you can." She let out a deep shuddering sigh and bit her upper lip. "So one day, as a thunderstorm came through, I dosed a glass of orange juice with some ipecac and gave it to Timmy's nurse. Ten minutes later, while she was in the bathroom heaving up her lunch, I sneaked down to the basement and threw the main breaker for the house. Then I rushed back up to the second floor to be with Timmy as he slipped away. But he wasn't slipping away. He was writhing in the bed, spasming, fighting for air. I ... I was horrified, I felt as if my blood had turned to ice. I thought he'd go gently. It wasn't supposed to be like that. I couldn't bear it."

Tears began to stream down her face. The storm was growing around us but I was barely aware. I was focused on Kim.

"I remember screaming and running back down to the basement, almost killing myself on the way, and resetting the breaker. Then I raced back upstairs. But when I reached him, it was too late. My Timmy was gone, and I hadn't been there. He died alone. *Alone!* Because of me! I killed him!"

And now she was sobbing, deep wracking sounds from the pit of her soul. I took her in my arms and held her tight against me. She virtually radiated pain. At last I understood what was fueling the engine of this mad compulsion of hers. What an appalling burden to carry.

"It's all right, Kim," I whispered. "What you saw were muscle spasms, all involuntary. You did the right thing, a brave thing."

"Was it right?" she blurted through her sobs. "I know it wasn't brave—I mean, I lost my nerve and changed my mind—but was it *right*? Did Timmy really want to go, or was it me just thinking he did? Was his suffering too much for him to bear, or too much for

me? That's what I've got to know. That's why I have to see him close up and hear what he's trying to say. If I can do that, just once, I swear I'll stop all this and run for a basement every time I hear a storm coming."

As if on cue, a blast of thunder shook the little tower and I became aware again of the storm. Rain slashed the windows and the darkened sky was alive with flashes. I stared at the steel pole a few feet before me and wanted to run. I could feel my heart hammering against my ribs. This was insane, truly insane. But I forced myself to sit tight and think about something else.

"It all makes sense now," I said.

"What?"

"Why we're seeing Beth and Timmy ... they didn't *give up* their lives—life was *taken* from them."

Kim bunched a fist against her mouth. She closed her eyes and moaned softly.

"Through love in Timmy's case," I said quickly. I cupped my hand behind her neck and kissed her forehead. "But not in Beth's."

Kim opened her eyes. "Can't you tell me about it? Please?"

She'd shared her darkest secret with me, and yet I couldn't bring myself to talk about it. I was about to refuse her when a deafening blast of thunder stopped me. I was dancing with death in this tower. What if I didn't survive? Kim should know. Suddenly I wanted her to know.

I closed my eyes and opened the gates, allowing the pent-up past to flow free. A melange of sights, smells, sounds eddied around me, carrying me back five years ...

I steeled myself and began: "It was the first time in years I'd allowed myself more than a week away from my practice. Twelve whole days in Italy. We were all so excited ..."



Angela was first-generation Italian American and the three of us trooped to the Old Country to visit her grandparents—Beth's great-grandparents. While Angela stayed in Positano, yakking in Italian to all her relatives, Beth and I dashed off for a quick, two-day jaunt to Venice. Yes, it's an overpriced tourist trap. Yes, it's the Italian equivalent of Disney World. But there's not another place in the world like it, and since the city is supposedly sinking at the rate of two-and-a-half inches per decade, I wanted Beth to experience it without a snorkel.

From the day she was born, Beth and I shared something special. I don't think I've ever loved anyone or anything more than that little baby. When I was home, I'd feed her; when I wasn't on call, I'd get up with her at night. Most parents love their kids, but Beth and I *bonded*. We were soul mates. She was only eight, but I felt as if I'd known her all my life.

I wanted her to be rich in spirit and experience, so I never passed up a chance to show her the wonders of the world, the natural and the man-made. Venice was a little of both. We did all the touristy stuff—a gondola ride past Marco Polo's and Casanova's houses, shopping on the Rialto Bridge, eating gelato, crossing the Bridge of Sighs from the Doge's palace into the prison; we took boats to see the glassblowers on Murano and the lace makers on Burano, snagged a table at Harry's Bar where I treated her to a Shirley Temple while I tried a Bellini. But no matter where we went or what we did, Beth kept dragging me back to Piazza San Marco so she could feed the pigeons. She was bonkers for those pigeons.

Vendors wheel little carts through the piazza, selling packets of birdseed, two thousand lire a pop. Beth must have gone through a dozen packets during our two-day stay. Pigeons have been called rats with feathers, and that may not be far off, but these have got to be the fattest, tamest, feathered rats in the world. Sprinkle a little seed into your palm, hold it out, and they'll flutter up to perch on your hand and arm to eat it. Beth loved to stand with handfuls stretched out to both sides. The birds would bunch at her feet, engulf her arms, and even perch on her head, transforming her into a giggling mass of feathers.

I wasn't crazy about her being that close to so many birds—thoughts of the avian-borne diseases like psittacosis that I'd studied in med school kept darting through my head—so I tried to limit her contact. But she got such a kick out of them, how many times could I say no? I even went so far as to let her talk me into doing her two-handed feeding trick. Soon I was inundated with feathers, holding my breath within a sea of fluttering wings. I couldn't see Beth but I could hear her distinctive belly laugh. When I finally shook off the pigeons, I found her red faced and doubled over with laughter.

What can be better than making a child laugh? The pigeons grossed me out, but so what? I eagerly grabbed more seed and did it again.

Finally it was time to leave Venice. The only flight we could book to Naples left Marco Polo at 6:30 the next morning, and the first public waterbus of the day would make a number of stops along the

Canal where we were the only craft moving. We followed that for a while, then turned off into a narrower passage. After numerous twists and turns I was completely disoriented. Somewhere along the way the canal-front homes had been replaced by warehouses. My apprehension was rising, and when the engine began to sputter, it soared.

As the taxi bumped against the side of the canal, the driver stuck his head into the cabin and managed to convey that he was having motor trouble and needed us to come up front so he could open the engine hatch.

I emerged to find him standing in front of me with his arm raised. I saw something flash dimly in his hand as he swung it at me, and I managed to get my left arm up in time to deflect it. I felt a blade slice deep into my forearm and I cried out with the pain as I fell to the side. Beth started screaming, "Daddy! Daddy!" but that was all she managed before her voice died in a choking gurgle. I didn't

**We stared ... for a few
heartbeats, and then our
lips were together again.**

way and get us to the airport with only a few minutes to spare. Since I didn't want to risk missing the flight, I had the hotel concierge arrange for a private water taxi. It would pick us up at five AM at a little dock just a hundred feet from our hotel.

At 10 of 5, Beth and I were standing by our luggage at the end of Calle Larga San Marco. The tide was out and the canal smelled pretty rank. Even at this hour it was warm enough for short sleeves. I was taken with the silence of the city, the haunted emptiness of the dark streets: Venice on the cusp of a new day, when the last revelers had called it quits, and the earliest risers were just starting their morning coffee.

Beth was her usual bossy little self. As soon as she'd learned to string words together, she began giving directions like a sergeant major. She had no qualms about telling us what to wear, or what to buy in the supermarket or a department store, or setting up seating arrangements—"You sit there, Mommy, and Daddy, you sit there, and I'll sit right here in the middle." We called her "the Boss" in private. And here in Venice, without her mother around, Boss Beth took charge of me. I loved to humor her.

"Put the suitcases right there, Daddy. Yours on the inside and mine on the outside so that when the boat gets here we can put them right on. Now you stand right over here by me."

I did exactly as she told me. She wanted me close and I was glad to comply. Her voice trailed off after that and I could see her glancing around uneasily. I wasn't fully comfortable myself, but I talked about seeing Mommy in a few hours to take her mind off our isolation.

And then finally we heard it—the sputtering gurgle of an approaching *taxi acquei*. The driver, painfully thin, a cigarette drooping from his lips, pulled into the dock—little more than a concrete step-down—and asked in bad English if we were the ones going to the airport. We were, and as I handed him our two suitcases, I noticed the heavy droop of his left eyelid. My first thought was Bell's palsy, but then I noticed the scar that parted his eyebrow and ridged the lid below it.

I also noticed that he wasn't one to make contact with his good eye, and that his taxi didn't look to be in the best shape. A warning bell sounded in my head—not a full-scale alarm, just a troubled chime—but I knew if I went looking now for another taxi, we'd almost certainly miss the plane.

If only I'd heeded my instincts.

Beth and I sat together in the narrow, low-ceilinged cabin amidst the driver wound his way into the wider, better-lit Grand

know what he'd done to Beth, I just knew he'd hurt her and no way in hell was he going to hurt her again. Bloody, agonized arm and all, I launched myself at him with an animal roar. He was light and thin, and not in good shape. I took him by surprise and drove him back against the boat's console. Hard. He grunted and I swear I heard ribs crack. In blind fury I pinned him there and kept ramming my right forearm against his face and neck and kneeling him in the groin until he went limp, then I threw him to the deck and jumped on him a few times, driving my heels into his back to make sure he wouldn't be getting up.

Then I leaped to Beth and found her drenched in blood and just about gone. He'd slit her throat! Oh, Lord, oh, God, to keep her from screaming he'd cut my little girl open, severing one of her carotid arteries in the process. The wound gaped dark and wet, blood was everywhere. Whimpering like a lost, frightened child, I felt around in the wound and found the feebly pumping carotid stump, tried to squeeze it shut but it was too late, too late. Her mouth was slack, her eyes wide and staring. I was losing her, my Beth was dying and I couldn't do a thing to save her. I started shouting for help, I screamed until my throat was raw and my voice reduced to a ragged hiss, but the only replies were my own cries echoing off the warehouse walls.

And then the blood stopped pulsing against my fingers and I knew her little heart had stopped. CPR was no use because she had no blood left inside, it was all out here, soaking the deck and the two of us.

I held her and wept, rocking her back and forth, pleading with God to give her back to me. But instead of Beth stirring, the driver moved, groaning in pain from his broken bones. In a haze of rage as red as the Sun just beginning to crawl over the horizon, I rose and began kicking and stomping on the driver, reveling in the wonderful crunch of his bones beneath my soles. I shattered his limbs and hands and feet, crushed his rib cage, pulped the back of his skull, and I relished every blow. When I was satisfied he was dead, I returned to Beth. I cradled her in my arms and sobbed until the first warehouse workers arrived and found us.

KIM CLUTCHED BOTH MY HANDS; TEARS STREAMED DOWN HER CHEEKS. Her mouth moved as she tried to speak, but she made no sound.

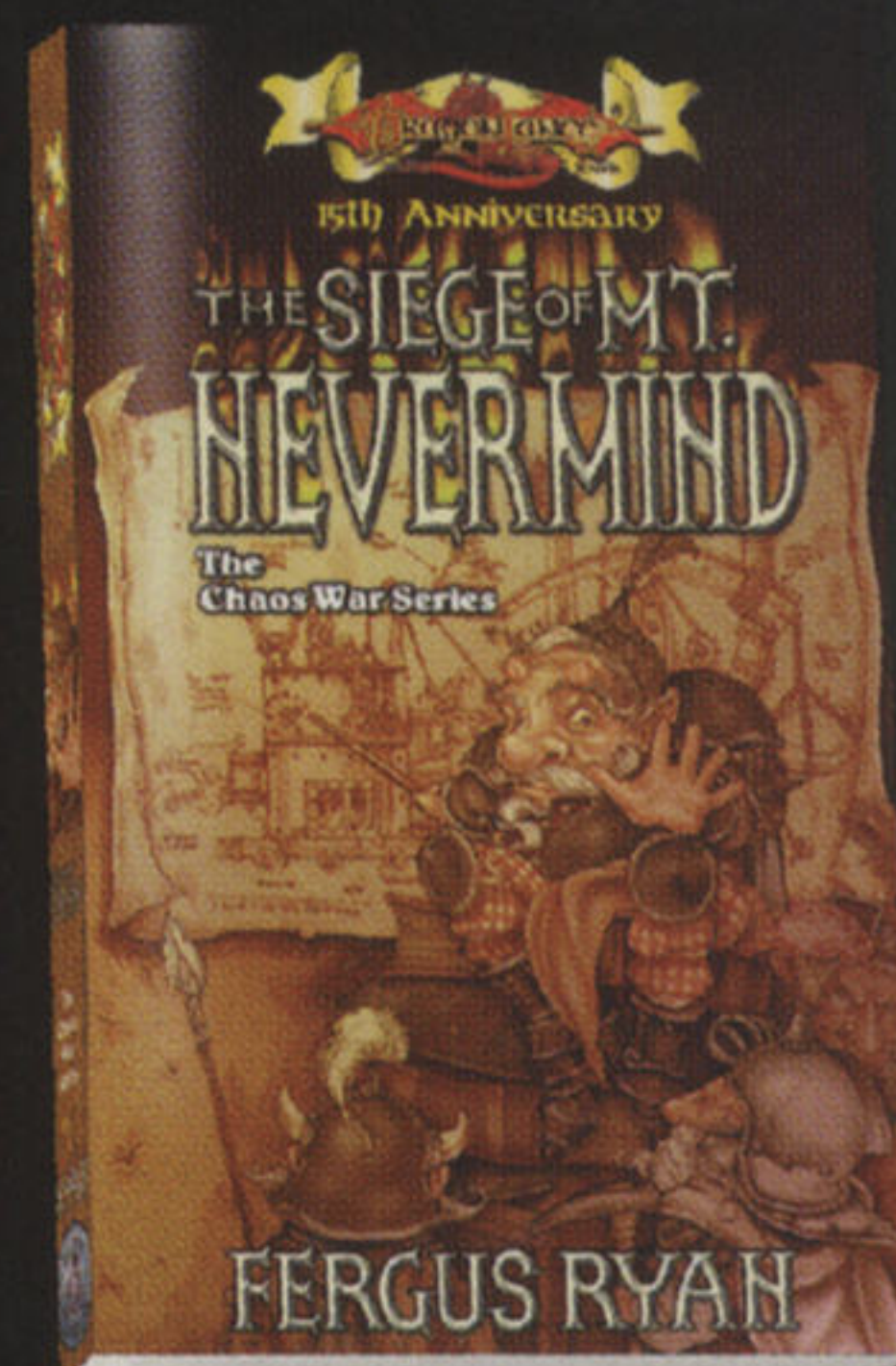
"The rest is something of a blur," I said. "An official inquiry into the incident—two people were dead, so I couldn't blame the Venice

Continued on page 78

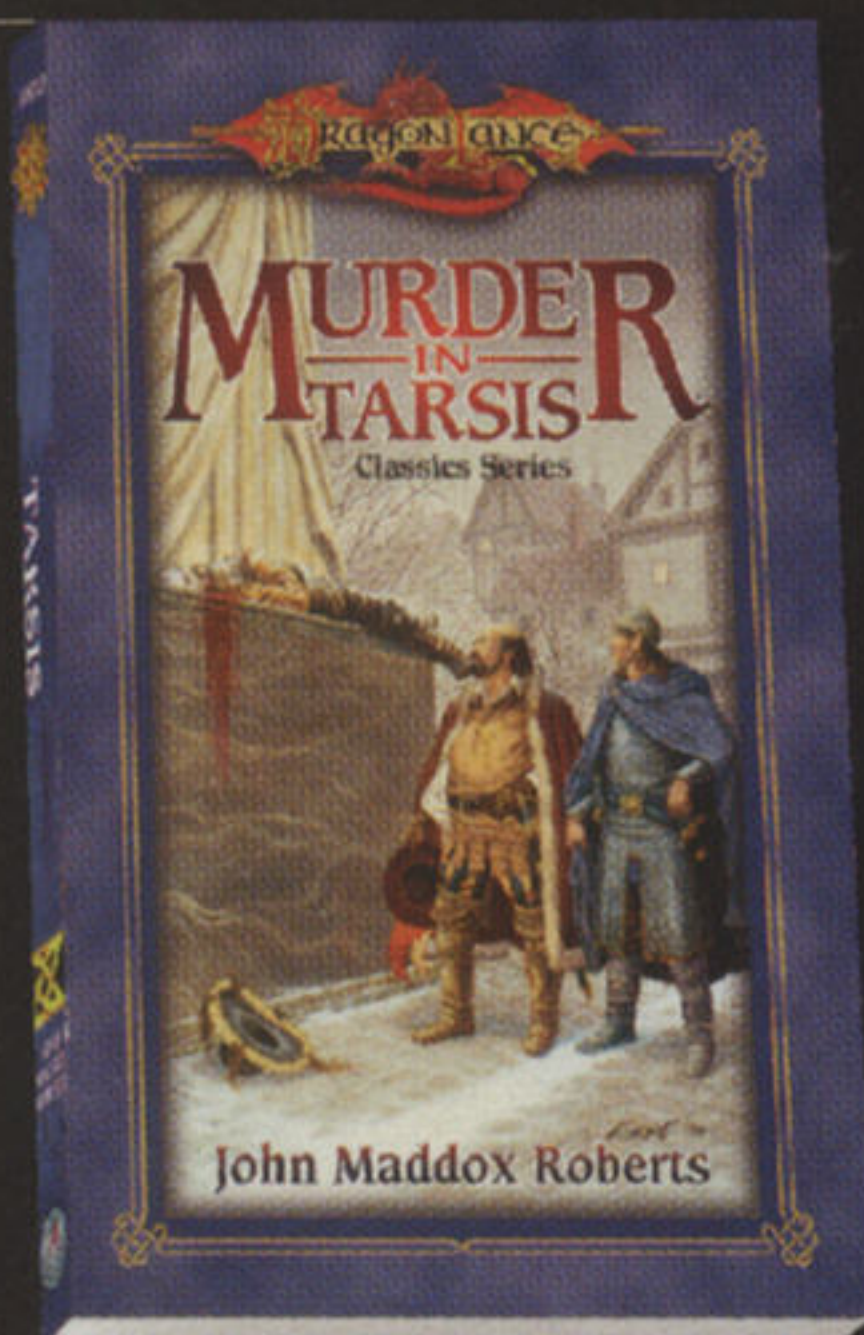
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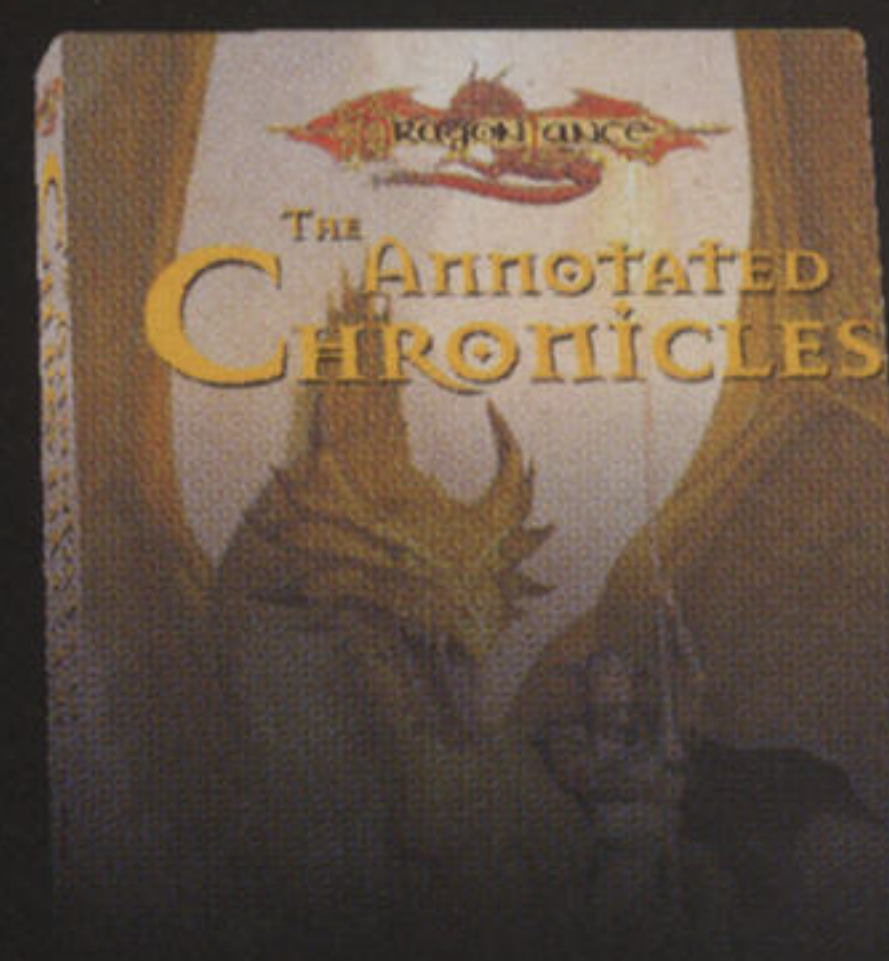
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THE QUEEN IN THE HILL

By Kage Baker

Illustration by
Michael Whelan

I WILL TELL YOU ABOUT MAEVE. Me, you wouldn't be interested in, for there is nothing extraordinary about my life. My mother had been shamed, was about to drown herself in the Loire when one of the immortal Lords spotted her and offered her his protection. This was just before Justinian became emperor of Byzantium, I think, in the time the mortal men reckoned the sixth century after the birth of Christ.

But my mother's savior was about the usual business of the immortals who work for their Company, which is to walk among mortals and preserve fine and rare things that would otherwise be destroyed by them. The Lords and Ladies do this, as I understand, because there will come a day in the distant future when men will need the things they have wasted: beasts and plants that have become extinct, forgotten knowledge from ancient texts. In that hour the Company will be able to open its strongholds and come to mankind's rescue, shower-



down its harvest of their treasures. Who could find fault with such benign masters? Especially as their mercy does not extend to things alone; they save people, too.

Anyway, the mortal girl came with the Lord to this mountain, to this ancient stronghold that the immortals call Eurobase One, and some weeks later she died giving birth to me, for she was not strong.

I was strong, but I was not perfect as a child must be perfect to be given eternal life. They were very kind to me anyway, the immortal Lords and Ladies. I've never lacked anything, never gone hungry a day in my life! I was lucky that I could live with them, and not with the ignorant savages in the mortal world down the mountain.

And they gave some thought to my future, too: I was apprenticed to old Claude, who was an artist, a genius, master of gardens without peer. The Lords and Ladies themselves said it was a thousand pities he couldn't be made immortal, but mortal and aging he was. So I was given to him, to climb the high ladders and prune where

...I was not perfect as a child must be perfect to be given eternal life.

he directed, and to kneel for hours on the cold earth, planting out hyacinth bulbs where he pointed with his stick. He taught me his art. I was very grateful.

But I don't know where Maeve came from.

I was 16 when I saw her first, the little creature with the hair like moonlight. She had got into the pergola somehow, though the gate was locked, and she had tugged her feeble brother after her. They were in there making a mess of the pomegranates, pulling them from the espaliers, bowling them around and breaking them open, scattering the red beads without even tasting them. It was their tiny crazy laughter that called us.

Old Claude was so angry with them he lost all sense; for he was especially proud of those trees. He advanced on them howling curses, waving his stick. The children stopped, staring at him, but they did not run as sensible children would. The boy cowered and sank down, hiding his face, covering his big blind-looking eyes. The girl remained on her feet. She looked at Claude with no fear at all, though his stick was whistling in the air and his eyes were staring out of his head in wrath.

He kept coming, and when I saw that she would not move I ran to put myself between them. I crouched over her and Claude's stick came whistling down on my back. That only made him more angry, and he beat me with all the strength of his old arm. I didn't mind; I have a strong back. I said, "Master, the little girl is mad! She didn't know it was wrong!"

I was mistaken to think this would make him stop belaboring me, because he got in three more good blows before we heard one of the Lords laughing.

"Stop! Stop, if you please, worthy Master Claude!" he called, striding down the walk toward us.

It was the Lord Aegeus, still chuckling as he surveyed the ruin all about us, the broken branches, broken fruit. The child ran to him and buried her face in his cloak, and he swept her up in his arms, where she looked at us disdainfully.

I knelt at once, but Claude remained on his feet. He took liberties; the Lords and Ladies allowed it because he was an artist. His back was stiff with his anger. His jowls were flushed red with it. He clasped his shaking hands on the knob of his stick and stared at Lord Aegeus in silence, so that the Lord had to speak first.

"Worthy Master, my apologies," said the Lord, smiling. He knit his brows at the little girl, pretending to be stern with her. He said, "Naughty Maeve! Look what you've done now! Did you spoil this pretty garden?"

And she said, "Oh, no!" though her tiny hands were pink with the juice, and that was the only color to her skin anywhere. She looked like a ghost, she was so white.

Claude made a sharp noise in his throat. I looked over at the little boy, who was still trembling where he lay.

The Lord said, "You didn't? Who was it, then?" And she pointed her finger at the boy and said,

"It was Fallon!"

The Lord looked as though he wanted to laugh afresh, but he bit his lips and then he said: "Now, you know that's not true. Poor Fallon doesn't do things unless you tell him to do them. You're the one always getting into mischief, little fairy! I want you to apologize to our dear Master Claude for all this mess."

She dimpled and said, "No!" and Claude shouted:

"Most divine Lord, never in 75 years of faithful service have I seen such wanton vandalism!" Lord Aegeus looked at him rather coldly as he said:

"Sadly true, Master, for everyone knows the young people of today have no respect for their elders. I can assure you that this child will not misbehave here again, however. Calm yourself!

Your boy will clean everything up." And his gaze turned to me and he said, "Rise, boy. And, please, accept my thanks for moving so quickly! My poor cherubs would have broken like eggshell if your Master had actually landed a blow."

I rose awkwardly and ducked my head in acknowledgment of the Lord's thanks. I wondered, how could they be his children? The Lords and Ladies do not beget their own kind, I knew that. They take mortal children and give them immortal life, if the children are sufficiently perfect. But the girl and boy did not look like any mortal children I had ever seen. They were so little and pale, and their eyes were so big.

Anyway, Lord Aegeus carried them away, and I cleaned up the mess they'd made.

I saw her sometimes now and then, over the next few years. Sometimes the boy would be with her, though less and less as time went on. There were rumors that he was a genius of some kind, but he never looked well.

She grew up very quickly, and not in the way of being tall, if you know what I mean; she looked like a woman within a few years, with high little breasts filling out the bodice of her gown. She would wade through the beds of annuals picking big bunches of flowers, which drove Claude to distraction, but now that he was aware she was a special favorite of Lord Aegeus he knew better than to complain.

Maybe it was keeping his anger to himself that did for him at last, because he had a stroke when I was 20. After that I was Head Gardener, and won the title of Master when I devised the three-level topiary walk for the north slope.

The Lords and Ladies were enchanted with it. They love beautiful things, and they respect artists. Master Simeon by the age of 22! I had all I could ask for in life.

And then I was given more.

When I was summoned to Lord Aegeus's study, I thought he had some request to make relative to my art, maybe for a new kind of rose or rare fruit. They like such things, the Lords and Ladies. Lord Aegeus was seated by the fire in his study, and across from him in another chair sat his assistant, the Lord Victor. Lord Victor was young as immortals go, not really much older than me, and he looked younger already.

Well, they waved me to a third chair; and I sat hesitantly and another mortal stepped forward and poured wine for me, the same

wine the Lords themselves were drinking. I thought to myself, *This is what it is to be an artist!* and I bowed respectfully over my cup and said, "Thank you, divine Lord."

Lord Aegeus said, "Oh, you're quite welcome," with a wave of dismissal. He was staring at me in an assessing kind of way, and so was the other Lord. I kept a humble silence, as Claude had kept his insolent silences, and it worked: Lord Aegeus cleared his throat and said at last, "Well! You've certainly grown into a sturdy fellow since that day in the pergola! You were only Master Claude's boy then. And you're the Master yourself now, are you not? What's your name?"

I told him it was Simeon and he laughed out loud, and the Lord Victor smiled thinly. Lord Aegeus said:

"Simeon! That's appropriate, I must say! Up in the treetops all the time, and as hairy as a monkey too! But come, don't take offense. All your tests show you're a supremely healthy young simian, and quite a bright one at that."

I murmured my thanks for the compliment. Lord Aegeus said, "Quite," and had a sip of his wine. Then he said, "You've had a few sexual encounters, but you don't seem to have formed any long-term relationships. In light of that, we would like to make you a proposition."

I didn't know what to think. He burst out laughing at the look on my face and Lord Victor turned red.

"No, no no!" said Lord Aegeus. "It's only this, good Master Simeon: My dearest Maeve must have a mate, and we've chosen you for the honor!"

I just said "Oh," feeling as though I had been struck over the head. He went on:

"It should have been Fallon, but he passed away, poor creature. Pity. Still, we learned a lot from him; and dear Maeve is wonderfully vigorous! We have great hopes of her. Now, you needn't be nervous! She may look like a child, but I can personally attest that you won't have to teach her a thing!" He grinned broadly and Lord Victor stared down at the floor.

I had a gulp of wine and nerved myself to ask him, "But—if she's your favorite, divine Lord—won't you mind?"

"Mind? Good heavens, no. She's a charming girl, but she is a mortal, as you are. She certainly can't bear *me* children! I'll admit I'll miss our golden afternoons, but the plain fact is she ought to be bred while she's in her prime." He said the last leaning forward, holding my gaze in a matter-of-fact way.

I said, "I didn't think she was mortal, exactly," and he said:

"All too mortal, I regret to say! And human enough for you. But we need very much to see if we can produce something more human still, and so—wedding bells for Maeve."

For a moment nobody said anything, and then Lord Victor cleared his throat.

He said to me, "Does this offend you?" And I said,

"Oh, no, divine Lord," and Lord Aegeus said,

"Of course he isn't offended! Good sensible solid fellow that he is. Besides, you're rather a romantic choice, I think. You were her knight-errant, once upon a time in the pergola. Yes, throwing yourself between my baby darling and the wrath of Claude! Oh, that's good, wrath of Claude!" Lord Aegeus turned laughing to the other Lord, who didn't seem to think much of the joke.

I was thinking about Maeve with her tiny perfect face, with her moonlight hair, with her big liquid eyes and silvery laugh. I thought about the bodice of her gown. I told myself that it really would be a great honor, to be awarded such a wife. I said,

"But will she love me?" and the Lord Aegeus assured me,

"She can be quite affectionate, my friend. You'll treat her well, of course—she has never been treated otherwise—and really she doesn't require much! Flattery, presents, a sense of romance. In addition to the obvious physical attentions," and he almost leered as he said it. That was a disconcerting thing, seeing a divine Lord with such an expression. They look so wise and noble as a rule.

But I agreed to take Maeve, because I did think she was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. I think I'd have agreed even if I'd known about the tests that followed, to be certain my sperm count

and motility were all that was desired. They were painful and embarrassing tests, but I told myself it was no worse a thing than careful cross-pollination in an orchard or a greenhouse. And what rose or apple blossom was so fair as Maeve?

But she didn't love me.

She was in a furious sulk the day of our wedding. Still she was lovely, her pouting lips were sensual. Lord Aegeus gave her to me in the pergola, to make it the more romantic, as he said. He had her gowned all in white like a bride, and—to give her a sense of ceremony—placed my hand in hers. He even broke open a pomegranate and presented it to me to feed her, and at first she spat out the bright seeds without even tasting them, fierce; but he spoke to her sternly and she obeyed at last, and crunched them sullenly. They crimsoned her tiny mouth, made her more desirable still.

So it was done, and Lord Aegeus placed his hands on our two heads and said, "Be fruitful and multiply, my children!" Then he gave us a bottle of wine, a good vintage from the Lords' and Ladies' own cellars, and left me to manage the rest of it.

I TOOK HER TO MY SUITE IN THE SERVANTS' QUARTERS, HOPING she would be impressed with how important her new husband was. But she thought nothing of all my rooms, or my bromeliads, or my drafting table, or any of my things. All she would say was, "Hairy Beast!" and flounce away from me. She made a game of it, answering *Hairy Beast* to anything I said to her: Would you like to bathe, wife? *Hairy Beast!* Shall I light a fire, wife? *Hairy Beast!* Shall I play the lute for you, wife? *Hairy Beast!*

But I still had the bottle of good wine, so I went into my kitchen and prepared a wedding supper: partridges in a sauce of shallots and cream, with fresh bread and white grapes. I set it out, poured the wine, and seated myself; she came at once and clambered up into the chair opposite, trailing her bridal finery. Without a word she fell to, reaching into the dish and taking a whole partridge to eat with her hands.

Even in that she was graceful, tearing daintily with her little sharp teeth. I didn't get much of the food, watching her spellbound as I did. You wouldn't believe a girl could have such terrible manners and be so enchanting. She smeared partridge grease on the winecup when she drank, sucked the bones loudly, greedily tore the soft center from the loaf, even blew her tiny nose in her napkin; but it was all beauty and refinement in my eyes. Beautiful people can do such things and still be loved.

I drank more of the wine than she did, and it made me bold. When the partridges were all gone and Maeve was idly rolling grapes around on the table, I said:

"What about that bath now, wife?" And she mocked me, she said,

"What about that ba-ath now, wife? I don't want to bathe with you. You're ugly and hairy and old."

I told her I wasn't so old, that I was much younger than Lord Aegeus, and she stared with a blank face; then she shrugged so beautifully and said,

"But you *look* old." Her gaze wandered to the partridge bones in the dish and fixed on them, suddenly intense. Without looking up at me she said: "Make the bones come alive again!"

I told her I couldn't, and she said:

"Yes, you can! Just make them stand up in the dish and sing! Fallon could make them do that. Why can't you?"

I told her I wasn't as clever as Fallon. She raised scornful eyes to me.

"Can you make me a new gown without cutting any cloth?"

I told her no, and she said:

"Fallon could! Can you make that stick in the fire grow green leaves again?"

I told her I couldn't, and she said:

"Fallon could! He could make anything I told him to make, he was so clever. So why should I play with *you*, stupid thing?"

I set aside my winecup and I said, "Because Fallon is dead, and you're my wife."

She chewed her lower lip and sighed: "My poor Fallon. I was supposed to be Queen in the Hill. He would have done everything

for me. We'd have had lots of babies, and they'd have done everything for me, too. Everybody would have brought me presents and played with me!" Tears welled in her eyes, perfect as diamonds. I reached out a hand to stroke her shoulder and she did not draw away. I said,

"Don't cry, Maeve! I saw Fallon. He could never have made babies with you, wife. He was too sick."

"He could!" she insisted. "Fallon wasn't sick! He was just what I wanted him to be. Don't you remember?"

I said, "Remember what?" and she got a sly look in her eyes.

"Ha! You don't have the Memory. Big people don't remember things how they were, but we do. We remember everything from the beginning of the world. Fallon did, and I do, but you can't. Big people think they're so clever, but they're not. We have always been more clever than you."

I said, "Who? You and Fallon?" and she shook her head and said,

"Our kin!" as though I was just too stupid to waste time on. I said,

"We'll make a new family," and she said,

"I won't play with you! You don't have the Memory, and you can't make the bones stand up and sing!"

Forgive the plainness, but there was one bone at that table standing up and singing, and I got to my feet and said to her: "Lord Aegeus couldn't do those things either, but you've played with him. We're married, and you'll play with me now."

She stuck her lip out in anger. I wanted to bite it. She said, "He gave me nice presents."

I said, "So will I. Have you ever seen blossom and apples on one bough? I can make those. I can make a rose as bright as your hair, without a single thorn. I could make a pleasure garden all the divine Lords and Ladies would want for themselves, but it would be yours alone. I can make marvels in the earth, nobody else has the skill to make such places! Even Lord Aegeus. You see?"

I don't know if she saw, crazy as she was, but she didn't fight when I picked her up and carried her away to the bath.

And that was strange, because when we were out of our clothes she was so like a baby I lost all desire. I could have washed her and towed her as chastely as though I were caring for a child, then; but it seemed our nakedness had the opposite effect on Maeve. She had been capricious snow and ice; now she was a little licking tongue of fire. She laughed and laughed and scrambled all over me in the warm water. I couldn't hold back from her, no man could have, mortal or immortal.

And, I ask you, was it wrong? When she was my wife, and the divine Lords and Ladies themselves had ordered us to love?

Anyway she liked me very well after that, and let me take her to my bed, and I slept with her in my arms half afraid I'd roll over and crush her, so little she was, a feather, a flame, a snowflake. My wife.

Have you ever been in love like that? I don't think people were meant to live that way forever. How could they? They'd never get any work done. And how can you pay attention to anything but the beloved?

Maeve was a late sleeper, too. Although she walked fearless in sunlight, as dead Fallon had been unable to do, she much preferred the night for wakefulness and play: so of course I kept her favorite hours, though no Master Gardener should do that.

I had duties, and I ignored them. The divine Lords and Ladies (and, see, this is another example of their generosity) were gracious enough to overlook this fault. They even sent gifts to my quarters, rare wines, fine foods, jewels and gowns for my darling. She accepted the presents and was happy.

My hedges went untrimmed, and the annuals went to seed and weeds grew between the stones in the garden paths, but no bolt fell from heaven. Indeed, the Botanist Lord himself took time from his rare specimens to go out and oversee the work that had to be done before winter set in, bringing in all the potted citrus to the solarium, spreading out straw with his own noble hands!

When she and I weren't making love, or eating, or sleeping, I sat at my drafting table and plotted out the most beautiful garden in the

world for Maeve. She loved to climb up beside me and watch as I worked out the proportions or rendered proposed views in colored chalk. I explained that it was a bower of night, to be at its best in the darkness, like my pretty wife.

She was impatient that it went so slowly. Fallon, I was assured, could have drawn up such plans in an hour and had the garden miraculously in place before nightfall of one day. That much was surely her fantasy! Fallon may have been a genius, but I know my own work; and no garden is made that way.

Once I asked Maeve where she and Fallon had come from, and she gave me that look as though I were really too stupid to be troubled with and said: "We were stolen."

But I never learned more about it, because she wouldn't say who had stolen the children, or from whom. Perhaps she didn't know.

When she would get bored with watching me she would want to do something else again, so we would, and I thought to myself that even dead Fallon couldn't have worked his miracles if he'd had to stop and do what I was doing every couple of hours. And it seemed to me a fine thing that I should have Maeve's bed and he should have his grave. He may have been a genius, but every time I had ever seen him he had been curling away from the sunlight like a blind worm. My little queen deserved a man, I thought. She'd have a much better life with me!

And, as anybody might have expected the way we were going at it, Maeve had lost her appetite for breakfast before the snows fell. By the time the first bitter storm came down on the Cevennes, there was no possible doubt she was carrying my child.

Now she had no desire for anything but presents, and she was so querulous I had a hard time of it bringing them quickly enough. Her favorite gifts were clothes; Lord Aegeus was kind enough to see that his tailoring staff came to us weekly for measurements and fittings. Warm robes in rich brocade, nightgowns of silk for Maeve's weary swollen body, slippers lined with fleece. When she ordered it I would set aside my work and brush her hair for hours, marveling at the glitter it had, like snow on a bright day. She would close her eyes and croon to herself in pleasure.

Once again I was caring for a child who had to be coaxed to eat and to take the medicines the divine ones prescribed, who had to be comforted and sung to and held. I told her stories, I told her about how I'd begin her garden as soon as the snows were gone and what rare flowers I'd plant there. This was not conversation, you understand; she wasn't interested in talking, but I thought she liked the sound of my voice.

There was an early thaw that year, and word came from the Lords and Ladies that I ought to tend to my duties again. I protested that I must stay by my wife, for she needed constant care. By way of answer Lord Aegeus himself came and spoke softly to my little darling as I prepared our supper and brought a sparkle to her dull eyes. He did me the honor of dining with us; and in the course of our meal suggested that Maeve ought to be moved to the Infirmary, as her condition was becoming precarious. There would be nurses to wait on her and I would be freed to prepare the gardens for spring.

I looked doubtfully at Maeve; but she babbled happily with the Lord, more than she would ever deign to speak with me. I saw she wanted to go. So I agreed.

THE ONLY THING I COULD DO THEN WAS WORK, DESPERATELY. And how I loved my work for the peace it gave me. Can you understand? There was so much to do after the winter, but it wasn't enough; I paced out the area for the wonder I was going to make, Maeve's night garden, and cut the terraces myself and laid the forms for the concrete retaining walls and the stairs and balustrades. I spoke at length with the Botanist Lord and we prepared seedlings, slips, and shoots. There were fine big hedges and trees in pots that could be moved on rollers to the locations I wanted and set in place, to shade my darling's pleasure as though they'd grown there 30 years. The Lord was impressed when he saw my designs.

But Maeve was not impressed, when I would come to the Infirmary in the evenings to tell her what I'd been doing. Sometimes she seemed barely to remember me. Sometimes she was impatient and disdainful. Sometimes the Lord Aegeus was with her, chatting intimately when I'd come in, and he'd scold her when she was rude to me.

All the while our son kicked in her womb.

So in the morning I couldn't rise early enough, and the lawns had never been so perfectly in trim, and Maeve's own exquisite garden took on such form all the immortal Lords and Ladies came out of the mountain to wonder at it. They took me aside and told me how proud of me they were. They told me I was going to far surpass old Claude. They gave me commissions for designs, pot gardens for their private suites. I devised a way to build a running stream and ferny grotto in a sitting room for the Lord Marcus. I devised an arbor of roses black as ink, approached along a walk framed by black irises and black velvet pansies, for the Lady Ereshkigal. I devised an apple with the savor of Black Elysium Liqueur for the Lord Nathan. Immortals have eclectic tastes. But I had their respect, and that was a great consolation to me.

I was hard at work when our little boy was born. Lord Aegeus was with her.

It was the Lord Victor who came to me with the news. I was setting the framework of the arbor in place, down on my hands and knees packing in the earth with a maul, when I looked up and saw him there.

He was a cold-looking young man, Lord Victor, with his green eyes and his pointed red beard; so when I saw that coldness laid aside and real compassion in his eyes, I knew something terrible had happened. I scrambled to my feet.

He said, "Master Simeon, Maeve is delivered of a son." And I said, "Has she died?"

He shook his head. I said, "What is it, then?" and he cleared his throat before he answered me.

When he spoke it was with such delicacy, and such chill, and such anger I was almost more concerned for his discomfort than my own. He said:

"I have been delegated to inform you that you have the Company's profound thanks for your contribution to their breeding program. A hybrid was successfully delivered this afternoon and,

It wasn't until years later that I knew what Lord Victor meant.

I found my boy by chance, in the warren of residential rooms attached to the Infirmary. It doesn't matter what I was doing there.

I looked in through a door and saw the youth who might have been dead Fallon, except that what clumps of hair he had were the color of mine. He had his mushroom-white hands pressed over his eyes and was rocking himself to and fro on his bed, thumping his big head against the wall. But all across that wall, and on the floor and even in corners of the ceiling, were scrawled mathematical formulae of such complexity I was dumfounded, though my grasp of engineering mathematics is better than most mortals'.

Do you know what it is to be cuckolded by a dead man, when he is no more than a film of ashes in his sunless grave? I know.

And it wasn't the first time I felt like a cuckold.

When Maeve had recovered sufficiently from the birth they gave her to a mortal I barely knew, who worked in their kitchens, and he got her with child but did not treat her well, so the immortals took her from him even sooner than they had taken her from me. The child was another boy.

She was passed then to the Lady Belisaria's mortal valet, and had another son; and then to the mortal who cleaned the pipes in the baths and reflecting pools, and produced yet another son. I lost track of her bridals after that.

Which is not to say I never saw her. I did glimpse her, now and again, wandering in the gardens to pick flowers or fruit. It was seldom, though, because she was seldom in any condition to walk far. And as the years went on Maeve's tiny perfect face became somehow a parody of itself, the features too sharp, the sweet mouth a little twisted.

But I finished her garden.

It far surpassed my topiary walk; the Lords and Ladies said so. How clever of me to make a moon garden, all white and scented flowers and silvery herbage, best enjoyed under the stars! The scale was a little inconvenient for the immortals, as all the stone seats were set low and the stair risers, too; but the neophyte classes, the children being transformed into immortals, found the place and made it their own. They played there in the long summer evenings and the dark trees echoed back their laughter. I had wanted children to laugh in that garden, but they were not my children.

**Sadly true, Master, for everyone
knows the young people of today
have no respect for their elders.**

although he does not have the desired characteristics, his survival proves that the program still has a 53.3 chance of producing its objective. Do you know what that means, mortal man?"

I stammered, "No, my Lord."

He said it meant I was divorced now.

I dropped the maul where I stood and I don't think I said anything. He grimaced and closed his eyes before he went on to say:

"The girl will be assigned to another mortal male. They'll try her again, to see what another genetic mix might produce. You're a clever fellow; you must have seen that the Company had plans for Maeve! And you will be rewarded for your efforts, at least: bigger and finer rooms for you, and your operating budget will be tripled."

I said, "May I see the boy?" and he said, simply,

"You don't want to see the boy."

Still, it was good that the place was used and loved. There was a moment, after I had planted the last narcissus bulb and opened the valve for the fountains, when I wanted to spray it all with Greek fire and destroy it in its completed perfection; but really that would have been a very stupid and ungrateful thing to do. If there is one thing the Lords and Ladies despise, it is wanton destruction, and surely I was better than the mortal men of the villages below us.

So I maintained it and kept it beautiful. I was kneeling there one day when the Lord Victor came and sat on the steps beside me, watching a while. I was pruning the miniature roses. This must be done as carefully as paring a baby's fingernails, for they are not hardy bushes.

After a time he said, "How are you feeling these days, Master Simeon?"

I told him I was very well and thanked him for asking.

He was silent, staring at the little bushes. At last he said,

"I'm leaving this mountain soon. I'm going off to do some field work at last."

I said, "Are you, my Lord?" and he made an affirmative sound. He stared out over the lawns, not seeming to see them. His hand went up to stroke his mustache. He said,

"It's a miserable posting, really. I'm being sent out to chase around after Totila. The Ostrogoth fellow, you know. He's all set to crush Rome again, and the Company needs someone on the spot to protect certain of its interests. I've been accessing data all week. Aegeus thinks I'm out of my mind."

I didn't know what to say so I just made sympathetic noises, and anyway I could tell that he was only speaking to me as a mortal man speaks to his dog. He went on:

"He's right—it's not a good way to begin a career. Not for someone with executive training. I'll be wading into the mortal muck with the Preserver Class operatives! If Aegeus knew I'd requested it, he'd really be horrified."

"But I'm having a, what would you mortals call it? A crisis of faith, perhaps. Not a good thing, when one has a career to consider. I'd really rather not question my beliefs, but the longer I stay here in the midst of all this—" he waved a hand at the pleasure gardens all around us—"the harder it becomes. I think I need to go down into the mortal places and watch *real* cruelty, real stupidity, real vanity. Perhaps then I can look at Aegeus with some sense of perspective. Perhaps then I'll learn to appreciate his point of view. Perhaps ..."

His gaze drifted back to me. He sighed, supposing maybe that I had no idea what he was talking about. He said,

"Do you know the myth of Jesus, Master Simeon?"

I told him of course I did. We are all taught about the dark superstitions that the mortals slave under, down there in their villages. Lord Victor said,

"Do you suppose the Christ left Heaven for Earth to save mortal souls? Or is it possible he left because God's behavior disgusted him?"

I said it might be so.

He was silent a long time after that. At last he got to his feet, and his shadow fell across the work I was doing. He said, very quietly,

"Master Simeon, I do beg your pardon." I squinted up at him where he loomed dark against the sun and I just nodded, for I couldn't think how to answer him. Then I looked down at my roses again and I saw his shadow move away from me.

I heard he went down into the mortal world not long after.

Maeve was passed from mortal to mortal, and bore them

all nothing but sons, which would have made her a very desirable wife indeed down in the mortal places where women were slaves, as I understood; but it did not seem to be what the immortals wanted from her. This even though some of the boys were quite presentable, kitten-faced children who could converse rationally and walk in the sunlight. Like their mother, they saw no particular virtue in courtesy or other social graces, and like her they were petted and spoiled by the Lords and Ladies who raised them. Most of them were little geniuses. They were not given eternal life, however.

And then, miraculously, Maeve bore a daughter to the mortal Wamba, who worked as a masseur in the Executive Gymnasium. What a celebration there was! Wamba was given new rooms and all the finery he could wear, and as a further favor he asked if he might divorce Maeve and marry one of the bath attendants, whom he had loved for some time. This was granted to him.

I don't know if Maeve cared. She basked for a while in the glory of having produced a daughter, and really a very pretty one; I saw the little girl when they were parading her around. She was not so pale as her mother, her skin was like rose petals and her hair like white gold; but she had the same great wide eyes and delicate face.

Yet Maeve, it seems, grew jealous of all the attention paid to her daughter. They caught her pinching the baby when she thought

she was alone with it. The infant was taken away to be raised by Lady Maire and Maeve found herself in real disgrace for the first time in her life.

Lord Aegeus had no time for her, now. All his attentions were focused on little Amelie, the daughter. It was decided that Maeve had performed her duties admirably and would henceforth be allowed to rest. They allotted her a single room adjacent to the Infirmary. She would be given no new husbands, as her health had begun to suffer from constant breeding.

So I asked if I might have her back.

The Lords and Ladies bestowed her on me gladly enough, commending me for my sense of responsibility, but warned me that marital relations were best not resumed. They didn't need to tell me so much; Maeve had become a small wizened thing by this time, collapsed and sagging like an old woman, though she can't have been 30 yet. Her skin had begun to mar, also, with thick white blotches like scar tissue. The Lords and Ladies told me it was from too much exposure to sunlight.

But I couldn't leave her indoors by herself, so I swathed her in a hooded cloak and carried her about with me, and set her in the shade as I worked.

She talked constantly. Mostly it was bitter complaints about the way no one ever brought her presents anymore, and how unfair life was. Sometimes she would wander in her mind and hold long conversations with Fallon. I don't think she recognized me even when her mind was clear. I wasn't angry about this. There had been so many, after all, and I don't think time and memory were the same for her kind as they were for me. Whatever her kind might be.

I wondered if this was how the immortal ones regard my own race. Are we so brief and small and foolish in their eyes?

Anyway, she didn't last long.

I had taken the midday meal with her, spooned soup into her toothless mouth and napkined her little chin, nodding my agreement to the stream of complaints that never stopped, even while she was eating. Then I carried her to the shade of one of the vast trees I had had transplanted for her, for we were in her own garden that day. I set her down where she could see me and went to arrange the new bedding plants around the fountain.

I heard her talking to Fallon again, and was grateful, because it meant I wouldn't have to keep nodding to show I was paying attention. After a while I noticed she had grown silent and I turned. She looked as though she had gone to sleep.

I buried her in the narcissus bed, and then I went to tell Lord Aegeus. Perhaps I should have told him first, but she was already beginning to crumble in on herself; and I was afraid he might have some further use for her poor body.

I found Lord Aegeus in Lady Maire's quarters, and they each

had one of little Amelie's hands and were pacing carefully beside her as she toddled along, chatting together over her head like happy parents. He actually looked blank for a moment when I told him my news.

But then he was instantly sympathetic, clapping me on the shoulder and commending me for my careful attention to dear old Maeve, and telling me how grateful he was I'd made her last days comfortable. He swung the baby up in his arms and held out her dimpled hand to me. He said,

"You must thank your Uncle Simeon, Amelie. He was a good friend to your biological mamma." And the child patted my cheek and smiled at me with an intelligence that was, maybe, just a bit more human than Maeve's. Lady Maire exclaimed,

"Isn't the sweet thing clever!" And Lord Aegeus kissed Amelie between her wide eyes and agreed that she was the cleverest, most precious little girl in the whole world. I don't think he noticed when I left.

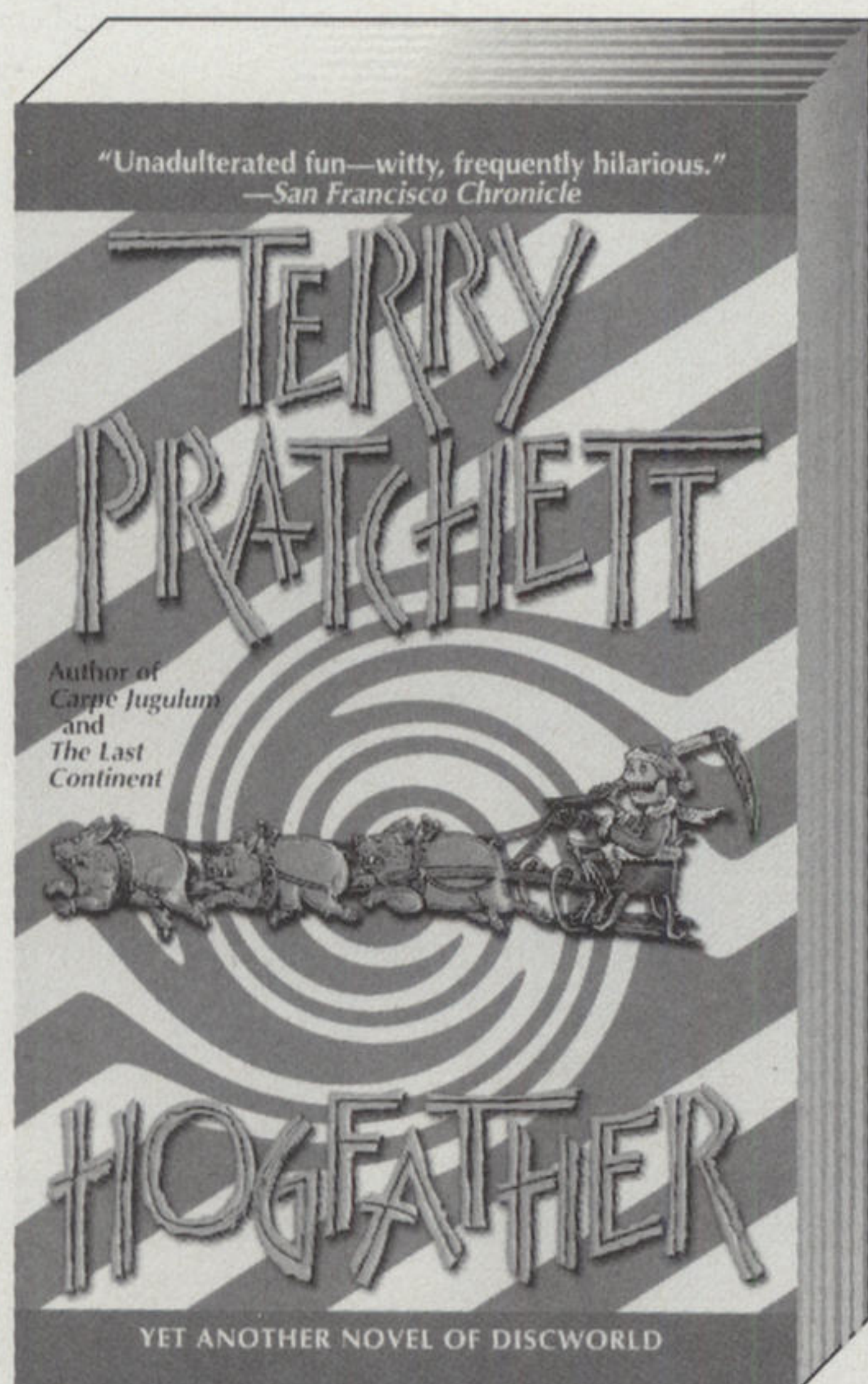
I planted a rose bush to mark the grave. It wasn't one of the elegant ones the Lords and Ladies so love. It was a wild rose with a single-petaled flower. It bears many thorns, it is half bramble; but the perfume of its white roses is intense, though they bloom in an hour and the petals scarcely last a day. ♣

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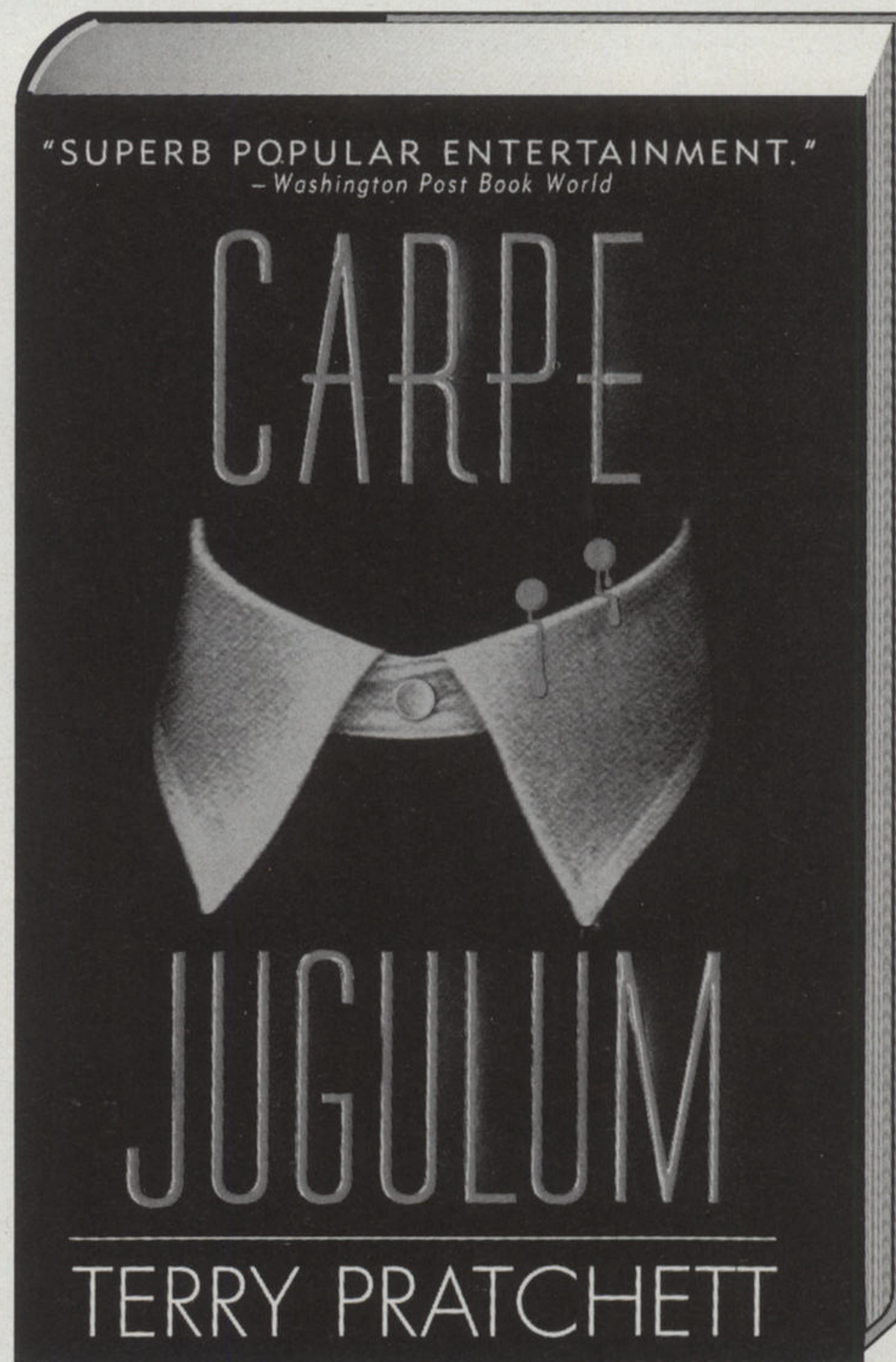
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When they kicked Gillian's future husband out of Faerie on his 17th birthday, they didn't give him much time to pack. He was allowed to take three things—at least Gillian understood why it had to be three, sitting shivering and numb beside him on the back seat of his '70 Chevy Impala while he tried to explain everything. The arm he had around her shoulders seemed uncomfortable and strange as their combined breath turned into November frost on the windshield. There were many things about his story that she didn't understand or believe, but she had read enough fairy tales to know why the number had to be three.

Six years later, after they were married, Drew made a special box for his treasures and kept them in their bedroom closet. The most beautiful to look at was the Longbow That Never Misses Its Target, a *femme fatale* with deadly curves. After a few years, though, she made him stop using it in bowhunting season, unsure what to do with the blue-eyed, white-furred squirrels that he kept bringing home, or the wounded rabbit that knew five words of English, or the corpse of a stag with a tiny crown nestled immovably between its antlers. The Wallet of Unending Food she finally persuaded him to throw away when their daughter was born, for its everlasting contents had never been very tasty, and in the end were beginning to grow putrid and stink. That left the Nut-Brown Jacket, which didn't have any special properties that she could see, except that her husband always looked particularly handsome when he wore it. His thinning hair seemed suddenly thicker and raven-black, his softening features became chiseled like some late-night action hero, and his eyes flashed when he looked at her like a falcon seeking its mate. Sometimes he would come up behind her and slip his jacketed arms around her

*Oh, what fools these mortals be!
And yet how wise, how wealthy, how wonderful.*

GLAMOUR

BY BRUCE GLASSCO

Illustration by Mary O'Keefe Young



The most beautiful Misses Its Target, a

waist, and she would feel herself growing weak against his body the way she had during their first starry kiss.

As the years passed and their daughter grew, the burning curiosity she had felt toward all things Faerie on that first November night gradually cooled. Sometimes whole weeks would pass when she would forget that her husband had spent his childhood as the plaything of beings less human than any television aliens, distracted as she was by all the minutiae of dry cleaning and car payments and mortgages.

After their daughter had left for college, though, there came a night when Drew was out bowling, and Gillian came across her old high school yearbook on a shelf she was dusting. The first picture in the book was of her and Drew on the school lawn, him with his arm around her shoulders, and the jacket giving him all the splendor of a year's worth of spontaneous summer days and dancing fall nights. As she stared at the picture, the jacket's smell came back to her in a rush, leather and deerskin, flowers and crackling ozone. Before she knew what she was doing, she was kneeling in the closet and opening the chest, feeling the scent wash over her like her own lost youth.

As she drew the jacket out of its resting place and shook it, the air was suddenly filled with whirling flakes of light like shattered pearls, like distant fireflies, like momentary flashes from a Fourth of July sparkler. Wherever they landed, they clung for a moment and then disappeared like melting snow. She realized then as she looked around that whatever they landed upon was subtly changed. The carpet was no longer worn but thick and inviting, begging you to dig your naked toes into its luxuriant, deep fibers; the jogging shoes were once again the sneakers you dreamed of in childhood, the ones you knew would make you jump higher than dreams and run faster than regret. Suddenly never a mirror was so otherworldly in its hidden dark depths and dazzling true reflections, never a doorknob so brassy and turnable, never a wall with paint so like a waterfall of pure white silk.

When she was able to tear herself away from the unexpected beauty, she decided to experiment. When she shook the jacket over the back of an armchair, suddenly never a chair had seemed so comfortable, so deep, so tempting with its warm embrace that her legs began to ache with the passion to lose herself in its billowy cushioned softness. Then she took it downstairs and rubbed it across the kitchen counter, and the beige Formica around it gleamed like a kitchen in a Mr. Clean commercial, or like an unscuffed ballroom floor lit to reflect the dazzling heels of a whirling technicolor Fred and Ginger. When Drew came home he found her with the jacket draped around her shoulders, staring into the bedroom mirror at a dazzling red-haired beauty she had never imagined she could become.

He put his arms around her from behind, and for a moment the mirror showed a breathtaking couple who might have advertised Brazilian vacations. Then the image began to fade, until all that was left was a middle-aged man and woman with the average distribution of wrinkles and extra pounds. Her neck, which moments before had seemed a soaring Pre-Raphaelite cathedral spire, once again reminded her of a chicken, and her hair returned from the color of dangerous fire to the color of rust. His midriff remembered gravity.

"It always fades," he said softly in her ear. "But the jacket's made from the stuff, so there's always more. See?" He shook it gently, and again for an instant the air was filled with twinkling motes like distant stars.

Later that night, in bed, he explained it to her.

"It's called Glamour," he said. "As near as I could figure, it's what Faerie is built out of. All of it: trees, grass, palaces, everything. Even the fairies, the way rock candy is made out of sugar. The Queen had a brownie executed once for stealing some eggs, and there weren't any blood or organs or anything when the headsman lifted his ax. The inside of his neck was the same shade of green as his skin."

He was lying behind her, so she didn't have to worry about the expression on her face when he mentioned the Queen.

"After that," he went on, "the head and body just eroded to dust and blew away. That's the stuff that the jacket is made of."

"I see," Gillian replied distantly. Her excitement at her discovery had faded, and she remembered belatedly why long ago she had quit pestering Drew for his stories of the Other Side. No matter what the story was when he began to tell it, at some point the narrative would always turn to the Queen, and then his voice would take on a wistful tone that he never seemed to use for any other subject. He knew that mentioning her annoyed Gillian, but he didn't seem able to help himself.

"Executed a brownie? That doesn't sound like her." She kept her tone neutral.

"Oh, she didn't have much choice. The eggs belonged to the King of Eagles, and there was a big diplomatic uproar—it's a pretty interesting story, actually, if you'd like to hear about it...."

"Some other time, dear. It's been a long day." She rolled over and turned out the light.

Perhaps a few flakes of Glamour were still sticking to her, for that night her dreams were more thrilling in their pageantry, more achingly vivid, more breathtaking to lose than any other dreams she could remember, so that when she rose to the surface of wakefulness she felt robbed and alone. It was still the middle of the night, and Drew was a warm lump beside her. She realized suddenly that her cheeks were wet, that she was weeping bitterly in absolute silence. Her husband never woke up as she sobbed herself back to sleep.

Three months later, a messenger arrived through an open bedroom window. In the long tradition of the Faerie court, it was a raven, and a pale green calling card was tied to its leg with lavender yarn. "They were always about a hundred years behind us in terms of etiquette," Drew said as he untied the knot while the bird hopped and fidgeted. "They loved things like calling cards. Languages of flowers. Birthstones. I remember a tea ceremony once that lasted for three days."

The name on the card was an unreadable spiderweb of loops and whorls. Above the name, a date and time were printed in block capitals. She recognized both the writing and the printing.

Suddenly Gillian was 16 again, filled with the panic of a ringing phone. "It's him," she said. "The Other one."

The card seemed a thousand miles away from her, and she had to struggle to remember what day it was. "Oh, he was always terrible about remembering to ask in advance, always showing up at the last instant and expecting me to be ready ... oh, when does it say? How much time do we have? What day ...?"

"It's today," Drew said quietly. The doorbell rang.

WHEN HE WAS 16, DREW PHILIPS WAS TO THE GIRLS OF HIS HIGH school what an industrial-strength superconductive magnet would

to look at was the Longbow That Never *femme fatale* with deadly curves.

be to a pile of paper clips. It wasn't just that he was good looking, though he could have made a dozen Hollywood studios rich from his smile alone. It wasn't his good manners either, though parents of sons were fond of using him as an object lesson in that dying art, nor was it the even-handedness that led him to court the overweight wallflowers with the same unflagging intensity that he showed to the cheerleader fashion queens. It wasn't even his wonderful unpredictable imagination, though all the girls talked about how he could make a trip for ice cream seem like a quest for the Holy Grail. No, what made Drew Philips irresistible was his confidence. His manner seemed to say that he had already navigated the reefs and shoals of adolescence a thousand times before, and that if you stuck close to him he could chart you a course with the same effortless grace. So they did stick close, boys and girls alike, whenever he turned the intensity of his gaze toward them.

No one was more surprised than the bookish Gillian when he asked her to the Junior Prom. Like the other girls she had featured him in her secret fantasies dozens of times; he had captained pirate ships that claimed her as plunder in the roaring oceans of a hundred sweaty nights. To see him sitting next to her in his car on dry land was so thrilling that she had to clutch tight to the door handle and remind herself how to speak.

The other girls told her that Drew had a special way of dumping you that didn't make you feel bad. They said that he had a knack for making the last date so romantic that you didn't mind it at all, as if the whole relationship was a sad movie that was perfect at just its own length and no longer. Gillian didn't want to think about that, so she decided that as long as it lasted, she'd at least try to match his famous imagination. She sensed in him a burning desire to get over or under or around the small-town dullness they lived in, and so she tried to top his schemes. He took her out roller-skating at midnight, and she blew her babysitting savings to rent a hot-air balloon for an afternoon. He taught her how to tickle trout out of the stream, and she taught him how to snorkel in the lake, swimming beneath him facing upward, their legs fluttering in unison as she looked up at the rippling green surface and his clear, gray eyes looking down through his mask at her.

They never told each other their plans in advance, but they would hear each other's knock on their windows, and away they would go. The weeks turned into months and still they dated, and not even the naked envy of her classmates could pull her off the giddy mad cloud that she lived upon, morning and afternoon and night.

A week before his 17th birthday, while the two of them were having a furtive picnic on the roof of City Hall, they were interrupted by an enormous black bird landing beside them, holding something long and flat and white in its beak. Gillian couldn't tell whether it was an envelope or just a piece of bark, but whatever it was, Drew took it and examined it gravely, and then he gathered up the picnic cloth and the plastic forks and the potato salad and hurled them out into a sudden wind that rose from nowhere, so that together they flew like a banner of regret across the October sky.

A week later, on his birthday, the two of them were walking to school through a fog thick as an unremembered dream. Suddenly he stopped, turned, and kissed her. "It's my last day," he told her, and before she could ask any questions he kissed her again. "Thank you." Then he pressed something wrapped in silk into her hand,

turned, and walked away into the fog. That was the last anyone saw of him for 24 hours.

The next morning, he walked out of the fog again, offering no word of explanation to his frantic parents or the police. The rest of the day they kept him in bed. Everyone could tell he was different somehow, but no one could say how, and the doctor checked him and said he was healthy enough. Anyway, everyone knew that Drew had never been sick a day in his life. That evening, he asked if he could see Gillian, and his parents grudgingly let him take the car. It was in the car's back seat that he told her his story, while frost traced early November stars on the windows.

"I have to tell someone or burst," he told her as soon as he had parked the car in their favorite spot. "You're the only one who might understand, Gill. I don't know if they can really care about people, but I think that he came about as close as they can come with you. Do you know how rare that is?"

"What are you talking about?" Gillian said stiffly. She had her hands jammed in the pockets of her winter coat, sitting next to him on the back seat, watching her breath and his rising in clouds. She was wondering if she was about to be dumped, but was beginning to realize that something far stranger was going on.

"Oh, this is hard ... I should start at the beginning. The other Drew ... the one who's been living in my place here for the last 17 years. He isn't human. He's a Changeling."

Of course, she didn't believe him. She thought that his imagination had finally run away with him right over the edge of sanity, as he sat beside her and told her of his 17 years in the Faerie court. He told her of the hard work of his days as a page, how the lords treated him as a slave and the ladies as a pet. How he learned to hunt and dance and sing in the high treble that no young fairy could imitate.

"Then," he said, "when I was 16, the Queen finally noticed me." After that he sat silent for a while.


Eventually, of course, he had to take Gillian to the place where he had hidden his three treasures. He blindfolded himself, and she watched him use the Longbow to shoot the last straggling maple leaves off a tree so distant she could hardly distinguish it in the half-light. She helped him take a feast out of the Wallet of Unending Food, and saw for herself that the volume of food could never fit back inside. Slowly, she began to believe. She'd spent half a year with the other Drew, and already she saw that this was someone different.

"But if you've spent all your life in ... the other side, then how did you know to look for me?" She didn't look at him as she spoke. "Do you have any memory of me at all?"

He was tasting an apple from the Wallet, and he made a wry face and put it down. "There's a place," he said, "a kind of hill, betwixt and between. We met there yesterday. He's done this many times before, you know. He made a fire, and then we ... how do I put this? I guess you could say that we baked a cake. He poured in all of his memories of the past 17 years, and I poured in all of mine, and we mixed them together. When the cake was ready, we broke it in half and ate it. We shared each other's memories. A great kindness, really, so that I would know the world I was coming back to. Does that make sense?"

"So you remember...?"

"I remember everything, yes. But don't expect me to be what he was. I'm not. As they would say, I'm only a mortal."



Like the other her secret

THE TWO OF THEM KEPT DATING FOR THE REST OF THEIR SENIOR year, as much from habit as anything else. Gillian listened with wonder to his stories of the faerie court, and at times he seemed so otherworldly that she could almost believe that she had the old Drew at her side once again. Later she realized that those were the times when he was wearing the fairy jacket.

She noticed that the envy of the other girls had died down considerably by the time of the Senior Prom; Drew was no longer pestered by blushing beauty queens begging him for a dance. After that they went their separate ways to college. Gillian dated other guys, but the liveliest of them seemed dull compared to her memories of the other Drew; the most serious of them immature. Eventually she realized that she was doomed to love a figment, and when she met Drew in his jacket at their five-year reunion, she fell into his arms almost gratefully. Half a figment was better than none.

On the morning of her wedding, she opened her jewelry box and took out the gift that the other Drew had given her before he walked into the fog. It was a silver pendant in the shape of a crescent Moon, with a hinge on its side. She kept no other jewelry in the box, for the silver made anything else beside it seem like a candy necklace melting in the rain.

Next to the necklace in the box was the note that had been tied to it. In Drew's awkward block capitals it said OPEN THIS ON YOUR WEDDING DAY, and it was signed with his beautiful but illegible script. She had picked it up and put it down in an agony of impatience at least once a day for the previous six years, and she opened the clasp at last with trembling fingers.

It was filled with sparkling dust, which, when she let out her breath, flew up in a cloud and shimmered out of sight. But all the guests agreed that never a bride in the history of their town had shimmered down the aisle so heart-tuggingly gorgeous, never a gown so radiant, never before a summer's day so perfect, or a night so drenched with stars.

IN ALL THE YEARS OF THEIR MARRIAGE, THERE WERE TWO QUESTIONS she had never dared to ask her husband: whether he knew how to find the gates that led to the Other Side, and whether he knew where the other Drew had gone. She felt in her bones that if she were to take a single step down those roads, she would be lost forever, not only to her family and her world, but to herself.

When she heard her first love knocking on her front door, she realized in panic that in 25 years she had learned nothing, nothing at all that would help her resist his touch.

HE HAD NOT CHANGED A HAIR FROM THE DAY HE WALKED INTO the fog. Still 17 glorious years old, still dashing as a pirate king and handsomer than any teenage idol, he smiled his dazzling grin and kissed her on the cheek as soon as he had crossed their threshold. He was wearing traveling clothes from a bygone era, rough breeches and a sky-blue tunic. A scarlet feather trailed extravagantly from his cap.

"Miss me?" he said smiling, shaking Drew's hand, bowing to Gillian, his princely eyes taking in the front hall that suddenly seemed worn and shabby compared to him. Gillian stood by the door and didn't know what to do with her hands.

"Come into the kitchen," said her husband. "You'll have come a long way. Your messenger only just got here, but we'll be happy to fix you something."

"Many thanks, many thanks," murmured his younger double. They showed him the way, and he sat at the kitchen table like a king on his throne, with the two mortals perching on their chairs on either side like eager petitioners. No one made a move to get any food. He looked from one to the other and chuckled.

"Ah," he said, still smiling. "It's been a long time for you two, hasn't it? I was so glad to hear when the two of you knit up your destinies. You'll have to show me the wedding pictures sometime. And how is your daughter? She's—what—five? Eleven?"

"Our daughter is 18," Gillian said slowly. "She's a freshman at Stanford. She's terribly bright."

"Oh, splendid, splendid! When I heard about the birth I arranged for a few Morae to come over and fate her up a bit. They were so pleased ... not much call for fairy godmothers these days, eh? Glad to hear it's working out."

There was an uncomfortable silence. Gillian was the first to remember her duties as a hostess, and she opened the refrigerator to make sandwiches. She was thinking, "*Once upon a time I hopped a boxcar with him. We rode for 20 miles. What happened to that girl? Will he wonder?*" She was beginning to decide that she did not like the way their guest was making her feel, and she was experiencing the beginnings of a new emotion that she could not yet name. Aloud, she said, "How long do you plan on staying?"

"Oh, after ages and ages of petitions, the Queen's finally granted my request for a new Changeling spot. I'm on my way to the Hill Between to get reshaped, and then it's a few more sweet years of milk and pies and candy." He seemed enormously pleased with himself. "But I wanted to stop off and see you folks one last time before I give this body up. If you see me again, you surely won't recognize me."

Gillian noticed that her husband was practically biting his lips to keep from blurting out a question, and she took pity on him. "What I'm sure Drew is dying to ask you," she said, "is how things are going with the Queen."

"Oh, that and all the court gossip," her husband said politely, glancing gratefully at her before returning his full attention to their guest.

There was a great deal of court gossip. The two Drews finished off an entire plate of sandwiches while they talked, the smooth tones of the fairy alternating with excited questions from the mortal about Lord Whatsit and Baroness Whoever. Sitting across from them, left out of the intrigue and adultery and deceit of the Fay, Gillian had plenty of time to examine the emotion that was growing inside her like old embers blown by a strong wind. At last she recognized it. It was anger.

Partly it was anger at the way he was ignoring her. The most thrilling thing about the Changeling Drew, she realized now, was his attention. When he focused on you, you knew that you were the most fascinating creature in this or any other world. Being ignored by him was like falling off the map of the universe.

Why was that, she thought? Why should that ridiculous feather stuck in his cap on the table seem more alert, more alive, more *real* than both the two mortals and all the rest of their kitchen put together? The kitchen she loved seemed cheap and shoddy, pasted scraps of tin and cardboard next to the splendor of their inhuman visitor. Worse, worst of all was her husband. How could she ever have imagined that she loved this overweight, uncultured slob? Compared to his double he was ignorance, ugliness, sloth, and

girls she had featured him in fantasies dozens of times

decay. The Changeling's perfection made every flaw as blatant as bird droppings on the roof of a new Corvette. Gillian realized that she was standing now, the room dimmed by tears. The two Drews stared at her in surprise.

"It's you!" she whispered fiercely to the visitor. "I blamed it all on your Queen, but you've been just as bad! Every falling-off in our marriage, every disappointment, all the distance and the pain and the disillusion, all of them came from you! Why, why did you have to get born here of all places? Why couldn't you stay back on your own side of the fence? Why give us glimpses of a world that we can't ever have? Why did you have to feed us both these damned stupid *useless* dreams ...?"

Her Drew was shocked to speechlessness. The other Drew looked mildly amused, as if he had heard all this before.

Gillian didn't know if she was trying to save her marriage or destroy it for good. She just knew that, now that she had started, she had to see it through. She grabbed the visitor by the front of his tunic and pulled him to his feet, blizzards of Glamour swirling around his shoulders.

"Go away!" she cried. "Take your damned Glamour and go! Quit making everything in our world look like cheap dime-store trash! Promise never to come back so we can finally quit looking for you, so we can live in the world the way it is and not keep comparing it to some stupid perfect fairy dream. Is that too much to ask?"

The Changeling put out a hand to her, and she pushed him desperately hard in the middle of his chest. He fell backward and sat down heavily on the kitchen floor, Glamour flying around him like fireworks. Gillian collapsed to the floor beside him, her head in her hands. "I'm sorry," she wept, "I'm sorry, but I just can't take it anymore."

Eventually, she felt a cautious arm going around her shoulders. She buried her face on her husband's chest and sobbed.

Slowly, the other Drew rose to his feet and adjusted his clothing. Then he knelt beside the human couple and rested a hand on both of their shoulders.

"Gillian," he said softly. "There's something you need to know about us. Gillian, *we can't love*. Not me, not the Queen, not any of us. She picks you up like a bargain-bin paperback, out of boredom, and drops you for the same reason. Mortals can love us—in truth, some of you can't love anybody else. *But we can't love you back*. Did you ever wonder why I dated you for so long, when I had the whole school to choose from?" Mutely, Gillian nodded.

"The Folk have to give gifts, Gillian. For every favor a reward, for every ill deed a punishment. I owed Drew here a gift of thanks for 17 years of his life in this glorious world of yours. I dated all the girls in his school until I found the best one, you. I gave you to him and him to you. You were the best gift I could find. One of the best in all my lifetimes, truly."

Gillian raised her tear-streaked face to his, and he leaned forward and kissed her on the cheek. Then he stood and strode to the back door. On the threshold he paused.

"I need to give you something for your hospitality. Would either of you like to go with me to the Hill Between? Drew can tell that the view up there is lovely, and you can just see across the border to the Other Side. It isn't far."

Gillian's husband didn't hesitate. "I can't go," he said. "My wife needs me here."

Gillian looked from one to the other, her vision blurred, and as she looked she found the way of seeing that she had been seeking unconsciously for years. She saw all the stupidity and ugliness in her husband that was not a reflection of her teenage lover, but at the same time she saw the Drew who was the father of her daughter, the Drew who made her laugh when he acted like a clown, the Drew who loved her as she loved him. Wiping away her tears, she smiled at the man beside her.

"I think ... I think I'm all right now, dear," she said. "I don't want to see it, but you go ahead, for old time's sake. A look across the border is fine. I know you'll be back soon."

"Really," he said, wavering, "I don't have to go, if you'd rather I didn't..."

"I insist."

Finally, with reluctance, he agreed. "I'll be back by suppertime," he said. She held his hands briefly, then turned away.

"I know you will, dear."

When the other Drew opened the back door, the yard was filled with fog.

With the men gone, Gillian surveyed the kitchen. From end to end it was covered with a thick coating of Glamour. Never a faucet had gleamed before with such potential for clear crystal outpouring; never a frying pan so hungry to transform food with its warmth. The refrigerator rose majestically like the Ice Fortress of the Snow Mage, and the floor was the worst of all. In its polished reflections it seemed to hint at an impossible upside-down realm of castles and towers and temples that would haunt a person's dreams forever, by being so near yet so unreachable.

I'd never be able to cook in it again, Gillian thought. *The teakettle would whistle arias, and I'd be too afraid of finding gold coins from some king's treasury in the oatmeal, or cracking an egg and letting loose a basilisk. That world beneath looks like a fine place to visit, but this is where I have to live.*

From the closet she brought out a whiskbroom and a dustpan. On her knees, careful not to look too deeply into the reflected world, she began to sweep up the Glamour. At first it resisted her, but after she had scrubbed out a corner it began to come away in flakes. Each scuff and gouge and stain and scrape that she brought back from beneath the Glamour's smooth perfection reminded her of her family, their clumsiness and carelessness and unthinking love.

Two hours later, the kitchen was back to normal, and her copper dustpan was full of shining dust (never in human memory a dustpan so capacious, never a broom so bristling and eager to sweep). For a moment she hesitated, her foot near the pedal of the kitchen trash can. Then she changed her mind. She found an empty jam jar in a cupboard, washed it, and carefully funneled in the Glamour. Then she screwed the lid down tight, and set it in the window to catch the late-afternoon sunshine while she cooked dinner. It shone like a beacon to her husband when he emerged from the fog a short while later. Never before was glass so transparent yet gleaming, never a cylinder so pregnant with possibility, never sunlight refracted with such blinding golden dazzle. Like the epitome of all containers it stood, the finest jar in this or any world, so that even after the Sun had set it glowed on with its own eternal light. ♣

Be it ever so humble—

or smelly, dark, and

slimy—there's no place

like home.

THE GIANT'S TOOTH

Edgar Twonky had no intention of getting eaten by a giant the morning he left for Cottleston Fair.

Sometimes these things just happen.

He was ambling along, humming tunelessly while he dreamed of what he might buy for Melisande with the money he hoped to make from his eggs that day, when an enormous hand swept down from the sky, scooped him up, and deposited him in a mouth the size of a cave.

The tongue on which he landed was coarse and soggy, like a bed of rain-soaked ferns. It flung him toward the back of the mouth, where a vast bulb of red flesh dangled above the gaping black hole that would, Edgar presumed, be the last thing he ever saw. With a leap, Edgar grabbed the dangling piece of flesh. It was moist and slick, and far too wide for him to put his arms around. Digging his fingers into the soft surface, he hung on for dear life.

"Gunnarrgh!" said the giant, causing Edgar's fleshy perch to swing back and forth in a dizzying way.

When the giant's mouth was open, Edgar could see. When it closed, he found himself in a darkness deeper than any he had ever known.

"Gunnarrgh!" repeated the giant.

Edgar's grip was loosening, and he was expecting to fall into the waiting hole at any second, when he heard a creaky voice call, "Over here! Hurry!"

Twisting toward the voice, he was astonished to see a flash of light—a torch!

"Hurry!" repeated the voice.

"Gunnarrgh!" said the giant for a third time. Edgar flung himself forward, landing on the giant's tongue once more. The great pad of flesh rippled alarmingly as the giant tried to swallow him. Digging his hands into its surface, which consisted of pulpy red fibers thick as his wrists and long as his arms, Edgar clung to the tongue like a barnacle to a ship's bottom.

"Come on, come on!" cried the voice behind the torch. "I can't hold this out here forever. It'll make him sneeze, which will almost certainly kill you!"

Reaching forward, Edgar grabbed another handful of tongue, and pulled himself along the rough surface. Fighting the motion of the tongue (which was accompanied by disgusting gagging sounds from the giant) he dragged himself hand over hand toward the beckoning torch, which was yards away. He had just reached a wart, wider than a tree stump, when the giant made a last, desperate attempt to swallow him. Edgar managed to get himself on the forward side of the wart—toward the teeth and away from the throat—and braced himself against it.

"Gak gak gak!" hacked the giant.

Edgar leaped forward, landing within a foot of the torch. A withered hand reached out to him. He grabbed it thankfully, and was pulled into the most astonishing room he had ever seen.

Well, it wasn't a room, exactly.

It was the inside of one of the giant's back teeth. But the flickering light of the torch showed that it had been hollowed out to make an area large enough to hold a table and two chairs. The back wall—back being the side toward the giant's throat—had niche about six feet long and two feet wide carved into it. The ceiling was low—too low for him to stand at full height—and everything was too close together, giving the room a cramped feeling. That feeling was made

BY BRUCE COVILLE

ILLUSTRATION BY
JOEL NAPRSTEK



Joel F. Naprette

worse by the clutter of items that covered both floor and table: cups, plates, knives, pitchforks, shovels, coils of rope, chunks of wood, and an old wagon wheel, among other things.

"Salvage," wheezed a voice behind him.

Edgar turned and received yet another surprise. His rescuer was a woman. Half a head shorter than Edgar, she had long stringy gray hair and eyes that burned with fever brightness. Her clothing, of which she had several layers, was an odd mix, some of it coarse homespun, some costly velvet. Nearly all of it was tattered and worn. It hung heavy on her body, as if it was slightly damp.

"By salvage," said the old woman, "I mean the stuff in the room, not you—though I suppose you might qualify as well. First time since I've been here that I've actually been able to save someone. Silly things all panic and slide down his gullet before I can do a thing to help them. That was very good, the way you managed to grab on to something. Quick thinking. I like that in a man."

"Thank you," said Edgar nervously. He looked around. "How long have you lived here?"

The woman shrugged. "Hard to say. There's no way to keep track of the time, after all—no sunrise or sunset, no full moon or new, no summer or spring, winter or fall. It's all the same here in the giant's mouth." She stroked her hair. "I do know that I was young when I came here," she added, a slightly mournful note coloring her voice. "Young and pretty, some thought. And my hair was black as a raven's wing, or at least that's what the boys all said. Now come on, ducky. Sit down, sit down. I haven't had a visitor in ... well, ever, actually."

"Then why two chairs?" asked Edgar.

"I live on hope," replied the woman as she thrust the torch into a bracket carved into the yellow wall. She returned to the table and cleared it with a sweep of her arm. "Sit," she said, gesturing to the seat opposite her. "Sit."

Edgar crossed to the table—it took only two steps to reach it—and joined her. He tried to pull the chair away from the table, but found that it was solidly joined to the floor. Only then did he realize that it had been carved from the tooth itself.

"It was something to do," said the woman with a shrug. She flipped her gray hair back over her shoulders and said, "My name is Meagan."

"And I'm Edgar."

"Good name," Meagan replied, nodding in approval.

Edgar smiled. "I seem to owe you my life."

Meagan arched an eyebrow. "I hadn't really thought about it that way. But now that you mention it, I suppose you do. Not that it's much of a life here in the giant's mouth."

"How do you live here, anyway?" asked Edgar, glancing around the room once more. "Where do you get your food?"

Meagan shrugged. "I scavenge."

"Scavenge what?"

"Anything that comes along that doesn't go down his gullet." She gestured toward a pickax that leaned against the enamel wall. "I've dug bits of meat out of his teeth that would feed a family of 10."

Edgar shuddered, and decided not to ask what she did for water. He was afraid he already knew the answer. He leaped ahead to the bigger, more important question.

"Have you ever tried to get out?"

"What do I look like?" she asked bitterly. "Of course I've tried

to get out. I tried every way I could think of. Finally, when it became clear I wasn't going to make it, I gave up and accepted my fate." She narrowed her eyes. "You, you come in here and find me waiting to help you—you have no idea of what it was like for me when I first got here. No light, no one to explain, no one to talk to, weep with, hold. Just me, alone, in the dark, trying to find a way to survive. Just me in this hole, which back then was barely big enough to hold me, just big enough to keep from getting swallowed. I thought I would die of loneliness. I thought I would die of fear. More than once I considered just flinging myself down the big oaf's gullet. But that's not my way, Edgar. I cling to life—cling to it like a leech if I have to. So with every flash of light that came when the giant opened his mouth, I took stock of where I was. With every flash of light, I learned a little more. Many was the hour I spent huddled in this tooth, weeping to myself, wondering what was to become of me. But I didn't give up. I never gave up. I drank from pools of spit. I snatched passing food. And when I found my first tool, I began to dig, to make myself a home. Chip, chip, chip, I picked away at this tooth."

She paused, and actually chuckled. "He didn't like that, I can tell you. Oh, the roars of pain! I thought I would go deaf. And the shaking of his head. First time it nearly killed me. I would have had to give up, if I hadn't managed to grab a piece of leather harness that was tied to an ox he snatched up once. Used it to tie myself down. Then it didn't matter how he shook his head, I was safe."

She leaned across the table, fixing her glittering, half-mad eyes on Edgar. "Did I try to get out? Of course I tried to get out. But in the end, I made myself a home here. And I'm alive, while all the others he swallowed before and after are gone. But even so, it's lonely here, Edgar. At least, it was. Now you're here, that will be different."

"But I've got to get out!" cried Edgar.

"Well, be my guest," she said, gesturing toward the hole through which she had dragged him. "The door is open. Don't let me stop you."

"You don't understand," groaned Edgar. "I'm supposed to be married next week."

"That's very unfortunate," said Meagan sharply. "But it doesn't really change things. This is your new home—or, at least it is as long as I choose to share it with you." Her eyes glittered in the torchlight, and Edgar caught just a hint of menace in her tone. "After all," she continued, "I built this place. And it's barely large enough for one. You could throw me out, I suppose, and take the place for yourself. But you don't seem the type. Besides, after all the years I've survived living this way, I'm about as tough and nasty as they come. So I wouldn't advise you messing with me, Mr. Edgar. You might be surprised at what a woman can do."

Edgar, who had no intention of messing with this strange, repellent woman, put up his hands and said, "I'm not going to do anything to hurt you. After all, I owe you my life."

"Interesting point," said Meagan.

Night inside the giant's tooth came in two stages. The first was when the giant himself lay down to rest, which changed the floor into a wall, and the rear wall into the floor. Everything not locked in place—including Edgar—tumbled to the back of the tooth when this happened.

Meagan laughed, not unkindly. "Sorry," she said. "I should have warned you."

Stage two came when Meagan decided to put out the torch, which she only did after first checking to make sure that she had her flint and steel for relighting it tucked securely in her pocket. Prior to this she had gathered some soggy fabric and piled it in the carved niche he had noticed earlier. He understood now that this was her bed.

Edgar took his rest on the opposite side of a barrier she had erected between them, huddled on a collection of tattered pieces of damp cloth that she offered him—everything from a lace tablecloth to a single shirt sleeve. (“Almost managed to save that fellow,” she muttered as she handed him that particular item.)

As he lay in the dark, wrapped in misery, he thought of Melisande, wondering if he would ever find his way back to her, and what she would do if he did not. He had a horrible few moments when he imagined her giving up on him and marrying Martin Plectman, but beat the idea from his mind so fiercely that it was nearly 10 minutes before it came creeping back.

After several hours he finally did drift into a fitful slumber—only to be jolted back into wakefulness by a deep rumble, something like a cross between a thunderstorm and an avalanche. It eventually tapered off to a high-pitched keening that Edgar thought for a moment must be the wail of a lost soul, and ended with three short peeps.

“What was that?” cried Edgar in horror.

“What was what?” asked Meagan groggily. It was clear from the sound of her voice that she had slept through the appalling sound.

Before Edgar could answer, it started again.

“That!” he cried, once the last of the peeps was over.

“You woke me up for that?” snarled Meagan incredulously. “It’s just the giant, snoring. Forget it and go back to sleep.”

The snoring started again. When it was over, Edgar wanted to ask Meagan how long it had taken her to learn to sleep through the horrible racket. But she was already snoring herself, and he dared not wake her again.

He was still wide awake, though completely exhausted, when Meagan lit the torch again. Only a few moments later the giant groaned and lurched to his feet, causing everything that had fallen to the wall the night before to return to the floor.

“I’ve been thinking,” said Meagan, as she kicked the loose fabrics against the wall, “and I’ve decided that you’re going to have to build a home of your own. This place really is too small for the two of us. Odds are good I’d end up killing you.”

Although she sounded genuinely regretful, she was also firm on the point.

Edgar, who was still determined to think of this as a temporary situation, felt that digging out his own home would be a waste of time and energy. On the other hand, he was not the sort to impose—certainly not the type to force himself into the abode of a woman who did not want him there.

“Where do you suggest I make this home?” he asked, trying to keep both the snarl and the whine out of his voice.

“Well he has nearly 30 more teeth to choose from!” snapped Meagan. “However, I’d suggest you stick with the molars. They’re roomier.” Then, as if the idea of being pleasant was still new to her, she patted back her hair and said, “It might be nice if you built nearby. More neighborly, if you know what I mean. Best thing to do is start with a tooth that already has the beginnings of a hole. I’ll help you look, if you want.”

“Thank you,” said Edgar. “I’d appreciate that.”

And so, after a breakfast so gray that Edgar decided he didn’t really want to know what it consisted of, they left Meagan’s home to search for a tooth where he could live. Meagan carried the torch, and they both had picks and knives and coils of rope strapped about them. Before they left, Meagan anchored another rope to one of the chairs inside her tooth.

Edgar understood why when they stepped down onto the giant’s gums. A narrow trench between gumline and teeth provided a good foothold. Even so, the flesh was moist and slippery, and without the anchor rope it would have been all too easy to slide into the damp cavern of the giant’s mouth. His tongue, pulsating beside them like a pink and fleshy whale, was a constant danger. Even worse, when they first started out they had to dodge into the gap between Meagan’s tooth and the next one while the giant poked at their hiding spot with the tip of his tongue, as if he was trying to dislodge an irritating bit of food that had become stuck there.

It was a humbling thought for Edgar to realize that “an irritating bit of food” was, in fact, precisely what he had become.

“Does he ever use toothpicks?” he asked Meagan nervously.

“Too stupid,” replied the woman. “Come on, he’s done now. Let’s go.”

The tooth directly next to Meagan’s was strong and solid, with no obvious place for Edgar to begin excavating a home. The one next to that, however—the farthest one back in the giant’s mouth—had a hole twice the size of Edgar’s fist. The odor of decay hung rank about it, but Meagan said that would disappear when Edgar had cut away the rot.

It had taken a while to find the hole, since they had had to crawl all over the tooth looking for it. Unlike the opening to Meagan’s home, it was on the tooth’s outer side, facing the cheek rather than the tongue. They had reached that side by crawling on their bellies through the same gap between the teeth where they had taken shelter earlier.

“Nice location,” said Meagan when they found the opening. “Safer than mine, though not quite so convenient for snagging food. I suppose you might give yourself a door on the other side of the tooth as well, once you’ve dug through it. Need to be careful, though, not to weaken it too much.”

Before Meagan would let him start to work she bound them both to the tooth with a combination of ropes and leather straps. When she had driven Edgar nearly mad with checking and rechecking to make sure they were secure, she nodded and said, “Dig in.”

Edgar swung the pick and knocked away a chunk of the yellowed enamel.

The outraged roar of pain that rose from deep within the giant nearly deafened him. At the same time, the giant slapped his hand against his cheek. The mushy cheek wall pressed Edgar and Meagan against the tooth. The torch went out with a sizzle.

“Meagan!” cried Edgar. “Are you all right?”

The question—and her answer—were lost in the giant’s reverberating “Owwwwwwieeee!”

Despite the horrifying darkness, the awful squishiness of the cheek pressed against him, and the fact that he could scarcely breathe, Edgar almost felt sorry for the giant. Then he reminded himself that the only reason the creature was suffering this way was that it had tried to eat him.

“Now you see why I strapped us down,” gasped Meagan after the bellowing died down. “I’m afraid you’ll have to work in the

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dark for now. I won't be able to light the torch again out here."

Edgar located the hole by touch, then began chipping away at it. Without light the work was excruciatingly slow, since he could not take mighty swings with the pick. Instead he began tap-tap-tapping at the tooth, and in this way began to enlarge the hole. This method, although much slower, was clearly safer, since the giant merely moaned rather than howling in pain, and did not again slap his hand to his cheek. They did have one bad moment when he began digging at the back of his mouth with his fingertip, trying to dislodge whatever was bothering him. But Meagan had tied them down with slip knots, and as soon as she saw the light at the front of the giant's mouth, she knew what was coming and loosened the ropes so they could again take shelter in the gap between his teeth.

The giant's blunt and dirty fingertip prodded against their hiding place, but was far too wide to get at them. He did try his fingernail a couple of times. It came somewhat farther into the gap between the teeth, but by cowering back they were able to avoid it. Edgar longed to attack the probing nail with his pick, but Meagan held him back.

By the time they decided to rest, Edgar had managed to enlarge the hole to the point where he could get his head and shoulders into it. His arms ached, and he longed for some light. But he reminded himself that Meagan had done the same thing all on her own, with no company and no hope of light for relief, nothing but her own will to survive driving her on.

When they returned to the tooth where she made her home and she lit a fresh torch, he found himself looking at her with new respect.

The outer coating of the tooth was hard, but brittle, and broke away fairly easily. After about four feet of this, the material changed to something dense and yellow, tougher to work with the pick.

It took five days—which is to say, five of the times between when they slept—to reach this inner material. Two days before that, the hole had been big enough for Edgar to crawl completely into it. Though it was big enough for him to fit inside comfortably—if you consider being curled in a ball comfortable—Meagan did not make him move there immediately, as he had once feared she would.

They had grown more easy in their companionship as the work on Edgar's home had continued, and he had come to think of her not merely as someone sharing a disaster, but as a genuine, if somewhat irascible, friend.

Finally the time came when the excavation in the tooth was big enough for Edgar to take up his home in it. He moved his things—that is, the two or three items Meagan had given him, as well as a pitchfork (the single thing he had managed to snag on his own)—to his new abode.

After a day, he was surprised to find Meagan knocking at the edge of the hole he had made.

"I missed you," she growled. Then she showed him a bottle of wine she had recovered from a wagon the giant had swallowed two years earlier (she kept a calendar carved in her wall) and which she had been saving for a special event.

He invited her in and they had a small party, sitting in the dark-

ness and discussing what he should do next to make his tooth more homey.

The following day, they ran a rope from Meagan's home, through the gap between it and the next tooth, and then along the outer wall of the teeth to Edgar's door, which made it easier for them to visit each other whenever they wanted.

While he continued work on his new dwelling, Meagan taught him how to snatch things from the tide of food and rubble that poured down the giant's throat three times a day. When she "went fishing," as she called it, she first secured a safety rope about her waist, anchoring the other end of the rope to one of the chairs inside the tooth. Normally she pulled things in with the help of a long pole that had a hook on one end. But if something particularly good came rushing past that was too far out on the tongue for her to snag simply by leaning for it, she would fling her whole body onto the surface of the tongue, then use the rope to haul herself back.

Once they saw an old man go past, but he was all the way in the center of the mouth, and they were not able to reach him despite their best efforts.

His cry of despair as he disappeared down the giant's gullet echoed in Edgar's dreams for many nights afterward.

ONCE EDGAR WAS TRULY SETTLED HE BEGAN TO EXPLORE THE GIANT'S mouth in search of a way out. Although he did not tell Meagan this was what he was doing, he suspected she was able to guess. Not that it made any difference. He could find no way of escape. His greatest hope had been to climb out of the giant's mouth while he was sleeping. But the moist walls of his lips were too slick to climb easily. Twice he tried using the pickax to help him make the climb, but both times this caused the giant to rub his mouth, with results that were nearly fatal. (The second time he barely made it back to Meagan's tooth, where she set his broken bones, but gave him no sympathy for the pain that kept him awake for seven nights running.)

It was like being at the bottom of a well; easy enough to fall in, impossible to climb out.

Despite his misadventures at the front of the giant's mouth, Edgar continued his explorations, until he had at last reached the most distant of the giant's molars. He carried a torch with him, which he lit and waved to Meagan when he reached the far side.

When he returned from that trip, he was burning with a new idea. "If we strung a rope directly across the center of his mouth, we might have better luck snagging things as they went by," he said.

"The giant would rip it out," replied Meagan.

"Well, what if we didn't make it permanent? We could put in a couple of hooks or pegs or something, one on each side of his mouth, and run the rope between them when we wanted to use it."

"Might work," said Meagan dubiously. "We'd have to put the pegs in the upper teeth, though; if we try it with the lower ones he's sure to snap it with his tongue right away."

THE NEXT DAY EDGAR AGAIN MADE HIS WAY TO THE FAR SIDE OF the giant's mouth. As he traveled, he tucked a rope into the narrow trench that ran along the edge of the teeth.

He made the trip without incident, except for one frightening

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moment when he was at the front of the mouth and the giant happened to make a clucking sound. Then the violent forward movement of his whalelike tongue almost flattened Edgar.

After some searching, he found an upper tooth with a small hole, into which he pounded a peg. Then he waved his torch to Meagan, to let her know that he was going to take up the slack on the rope.

Once they had the rope tight he swung himself onto it. Then, moving hand over hand, he inched his way toward the center of the giant's mouth.

His ambition was rewarded when the giant tossed a cart full of melons into his mouth. Although it went directly down the center, Edgar was able to retrieve not only a pair of the melons, but one of the wagon wheels, which he thought would look nice in his new home.

When he returned to the other side, Meagan grudgingly admitted that it had been a good idea. Just how good an idea it became clear as the weeks rolled on and they were able to retrieve more and more items from the flow that rolled down the giant's throat three times a day.

The most unexpected of these items was a young man named Charles, who Edgar snatched from certain doom by hanging upside down from the rope and reaching out to him.

When he escorted Charles home with him, Meagan muttered about things getting too crowded in the giant's mouth. But when Edgar said that Charles could live with him until they were able to build a home for him, she settled down.

Charles turned out to be clever with his hands, and it was not long before they were hard work at making a home for him in the tooth between the two they had already hollowed out.

Many hands making lighter work, the home took less time to construct than Edgar's had, and soon they were turning their energies to new and better ways to salvage things.

DURING EDGAR'S SECOND YEAR IN the giant's mouth they rescued Farley. His arrival upset Meagan even more than Charles's had, and she began muttering that she didn't like having so many men around. On the other hand, she seemed to find Farley attractive, and once it became clear that he returned the compliment, she stopped fussing. They built his home in the tooth above hers—the first in an upper tooth—and soon the two of them were visiting each other several times a day to consult on various ideas and projects.

Their masterpiece was a system of buckets for collecting fresh water whenever the giant took a drink. This freed them from reliance on the giant's saliva, which was a great relief to everyone. Even better was when they could save some of the occasional flood of beer. Such a catch was always a signal for a party—which helped make up for the dangerous (not to mention putrid) belches that the giant inevitably unleashed an hour or so later.

Next to be pulled to safety, about six months later, were a pair of sisters named Babette and Cleo, and their dimwitted brother Herbert. The time had come to begin building homes in the teeth on the other side of the mouth. Babette and Cleo chose to live together. Herbert took the tooth above them.

Once their homes were complete, Edgar began thinking about doing some bridgework.

Before too many more years had passed, a thriving community had risen in the giant's mouth. The people got on well enough, though there were occasional conflicts—as there always will be when you have people locked together in a crowded space.

To the surprise of no one save Edgar, he turned out to be the one who usually solved these conflicts, and eventually he was elected mayor of Giant's Mouth Township. They gave him a jewelled scepter which they had managed to retrieve one afternoon when the giant swallowed a king. (They had tried to save the king, too, of course, but his grip was weak and flabby, and he had not been able to hold on when Herbert reached out to him.) Many was the night Edgar sat in his tooth and looked out the window he had carved on the tongeward side, feeling warm and cozy at the sight of the lights twinkling on the other side of the giant's mouth.

In this way the years rolled on.

And then, one afternoon while he was setting a rope, Edgar was suddenly yanked from the giant's mouth.

It happened because the giant, who was in a foul mood that day, became particularly irritated by the feeling of things moving in his mouth. Edgar was stringing a rope across the roof of his mouth in order to do some salvage work when the giant reached in and began to scratch at the roof of his mouth. Although the rope was less to him than a silk thread would be to a human, it caught on his fingernail. When he pulled his hand out, one end of the rope came free—and with it, still clinging to the end, came Edgar.

As he hurtled out of the giant's mouth, two things caused him to blink. The first was the unexpected brightness of the sun, which he had not seen except at a distance, for so many years. The second was the horrifying distance that separated him from the ground.

Knowing he could not keep his grip on the saliva-slick rope, Edgar made a desperate leap and landed on the giant's collar. The giant swatted at him, as one would at an annoying insect, but Edgar quickly scrambled under the giant's collar, where he held as still as he could, scarcely breathing.

All through the long, hot day he stayed there, peering sideways at the world below, longing for it, thinking of how he had missed it.

Finally night darkened the sky, bringing with it the stars that he had not seen in so many years. Their beauty made him weep.

The giant lay down to sleep.

Edgar climbed out onto his chest. He stood, staring out at the rising moon, the river on whose water it was reflected, the dark ridge of the distant mountains, and the road that led back to his village, back to Melisande.

He wondered if she had waited for him, or if she had married Martin Plectman after all.

The giant's clothing was so coarsely woven that the threads were almost like the rungs of a ladder. Now that he was lying down, it was only a few hundred feet to the ground.

Edgar took a deep breath of the clean, clear air and released it with a sigh.

Then he began to climb the giant's shirt, not down, but up, onto the giant's chin, where the stubble grew so thick it was like a forest of small pine trees. Across the loose and pendulous lip Edgar climbed.

Then he lowered himself back into the moist cavern of the giant's mouth, where his home and friends lay waiting. ♣

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*They say we all become our mothers eventually.
But sometimes we become more.*

THE WITCH'S CHILD

THE OLD WOMAN SAT BY THE FIRESIDE and rocked the cradle. She was dressed in layers of shapeless black clothing, all of them far too large for her. Brambles and thorny branches wound around the clothes, holding everything together.

The woman talked without ceasing, sometimes to the child in the cradle and sometimes to herself. She spoke in several languages, one sinuous and sibilant, one thick and guttural, one a flat monotone. A low litany of complaint ran through all the languages: The room was too small and too smoky, the quality of food the tradesmen brought was not as good as it used to be, the child was too noisy. Sometimes she would begin stories, fabulous tales of places she had been and things she had seen, but they soon dwindled to nothing. All of them ended the same way, in complaints and hopelessness.

*By Lisa Goldstein
Illustration by Broeck Steadman*

The child was not hers. A year ago her neighbor, a hateful, interfering woman, had climbed over her fence and had scabbled through the vegetables in her garden. The old woman had come to the window and rapped on the glass with a gnarled stick. She was well aware of how she looked to the other woman, of her reputation in the village. Witch, they called her. She did not mind.

"Leave off!" she called. "Get out of my garden!"

"Please," the woman said, straightening up. The witch saw now that she was pregnant, though the woman herself probably did not know that yet. "I'm dying for a taste of your rampion. I must have it."

The witch nodded to herself. She knew the child the woman was carrying would be a girl. And she had long wanted a girl, someone who would be herself,



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her other self, someone who could start over again and not make the mistakes she had made. "I will give you my rampion," she said, "if you will give me the child when it is born."

"Yes," the other woman said, barely hearing her. "Yes, anything." And she bent again to the plants and rooted through them.

The child, though, had proved a disappointment, like so much else. She was only a little over a year old and was already showing signs of disobedience, of wanting her own way. Sometimes she would even pull away when the witch held her, though the witch was careful not to let the thorns scratch her flesh. The witch had named her Rapunzel. This was a private joke, the only kind she had; the word meant "rampion" in one of the languages she had picked up in her travels.

As Rapunzel grew she became more and more willful. She would cry when she didn't want something, or dirty her dresses, or forget to clean up after herself when she played with her few toys. In time the witch learned not to expect much of the child, to think of her as she thought of all the others who had failed her.

The worst disappointment came when Rapunzel was five. One day she came to the witch and said, "May I go outside the garden, please?"

"And why would you want to do that?" the witch said. "There is nothing outside my garden, nothing you can't get from me."

"I want to play with Anna, please."

"Anna? Who is Anna?"

"She lives in the village. She talks to me through the fence when she goes to market."

"Wretched child!" the witch said. "Here I take the trouble to raise you, to teach you all I know, to tell you my stories, and you want more!"

Rapunzel began to cry. "I want—"

"What did I tell you about crying?" the witch said. "What did I tell you about wanting? You must cry when I cry, and want what I want."

But Rapunzel would not stop sobbing. And in truth the witch was afraid, though she would never admit it to the child. There were wonderful things outside the wall of the witch's garden, enchanting things, or at least they would appear so to a child, though the witch knew that all enchantments fade on closer view, and that nothing in this world is as good as it first seems.

And so she hired men to build a strong, round tower, a tower with one round room at the top and no way up or down. The men were

While they worked together the witch would tell one of her stories. Rapunzel thought the stories started promisingly enough, with descriptions of the witch wandering through strange lands or being summoned by a king to work some magic. But they always ended the same way, in a welter of despair and loose ends. "But what happened to the prince?" Rapunzel would say. "What happened to the dragon?"

"You miss the point of the story entirely," the witch would say. "I don't know why you can't understand the simplest things. I am trying to teach you that there is nothing outside the tower worth seeing or doing; there is no hope in anything."

Rapunzel grew. Sometimes she gazed out her window at the distant village and wondered what it would be like to live there. But the witch would call at any time of the day or night—"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!"—and she learned to leave a task half finished so that she might look busy when the witch came.

One day she heard a voice that was not the witch's calling out the words she had heard so often: "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!" Terrified, she peered out the window and saw an outlandish figure, tall, slim, dressed in varicolored clothes. She guessed, from the stories the witch told her, that the person was what was called a "man."

A strange thrill took hold of her, an excitement so great she could barely move. Trembling, she undid the long skein of hair and felt the familiar heavy pain as the man climbed to the top of the tower.

"Who are you?" she asked when the man came through the window into the round room.

"My name is Stefan," he said. "But a better question would be, Who are you? I know your name because I heard the woman call to you, but everything else about you is a mystery. I heard her call to you, and I saw you let down your hair, and I thought that you were the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. You are like a flower that grows unseen in the middle of a wasteland. But why has that old witch locked you up here? Why are you not free to move around the village, to talk to other people?"

Heat spread through her body, though the day was not warm. "Because—because that is the way we live, the way we have always lived. It would be ungrateful of me to want to leave the tower."

"Nonsense!" the man—Stefan—said. "Ridiculous nonsense! You were born to walk among people, to show off your beauty. Look—"

... THE WITCH WAS CAREFUL NOT TO

apprehensive; they did not like to set foot in the witch's domain, and they feared what she might do with her fortress when it was finished. But she paid well, and they did their work, though they grumbled.

The day they left the witch set a ladder against the wall and took Rapunzel to the top of the tower. "This is where you will live from now on," she said. "When I call you will let down your hair"—for the child had long hair, beautiful hair, that fell in waves like a waterfall—"and I will climb up on it to visit you." And the witch went back down the ladder and then took the ladder away, leaving Rapunzel alone in the tower.

This time the child did not cry. She was learning that crying did no good, that it did not move the heart of the stony old woman. She began to walk around the room, examining her prison.

The years passed. The witch would call, and Rapunzel would let down her hair, and the witch would climb up. Sometimes the witch would bring her food, or take away her slops; sometimes she would bring embroidery for them both to work on, or set other tasks for her.

he said, motioning to her embroidery work. "You have scissors here—why have you never cut off your hair and made yourself a ladder?"

"I never thought of it. I never thought of leaving. I cannot leave."

"Why not?"

"Because I cannot. Please," she said, feeling once again that thrilling mixture of terror and delight, as so many new things opened to her at once, "please do not ask me again."

"Very well. But may I come to visit you again?"

"No. No, she will find out."

"I will take care that she does not."

"Then yes. Yes." Stefan bent to kiss her hand. "Oh, but be careful! You do not know her. You must be careful!"

Stefan came to visit her many times after that. He must have watched the tower carefully, because he called to her only after the witch had gone. She found herself thinking of him when he wasn't there, her heart pounding, her mouth dry. He gave her a ribbon; she hid it away from the witch's penetrating gaze and took it out

only when she was sure she was alone, stroking it as though it was his body.

One day the witch climbed to the top of the tower and stood staring at Rapunzel as though she had never seen her before. "You look different," she said finally. "You are fatter, I think. You are growing older, even you. Ah, how old I must be getting, if you are already a woman!"

What about me? Rapunzel thought. *Why do you always talk about yourself, never about me?* It was a new thought, and she felt suddenly fearful and guilty, as though the witch could hear her.

"In fact, you look—I would almost say you look pregnant, if I did not know better," the witch said. "And pregnancy is one thing I know about. I knew that woman was pregnant before she did, the one who tried to steal my rampion."

"What woman?" Rapunzel asked.

"Never you mind," the witch said, smiling slyly. The smile faded. "If I find you are pregnant I will kill you, do you understand me? I told you long ago—you are not to see anyone but me."

"What does that mean—to be pregnant?"

The witch smiled again. She was glad, Rapunzel saw, that she was so innocent, that there was so much she did not know. But it did not matter; she would ask Stefan, who told her so many things.

But Stefan turned pale when she asked him her question. "It means—it means you are about to have a child," he said.

"How can that be?" she asked.

"How can she have kept you so innocent?" he said. "What we did together—that is what made you pregnant. It is my child too. Come, we must leave right away. Hurry! I hate to think what she will do to you when she finds out."

"She said she will kill me."

"Quickly then! Give me the scissors. I'll cut your hair and we'll go."

"No," she said, hesitating. "No, I can't. I would hurt her terribly if I left her."

"And she will kill you if you stay. Come!" He snatched up the scissors. "Come here and I'll cut your hair."

"I can't—I don't know the world outside, how to behave, what to do—"

"I'll teach you everything. I'll show you everything." He took her in his arms, and in so doing he drew her closer to the window. Despite her words she came with him, though slowly. "I love you."

They climbed the garden wall and ran, ran for miles, until they could go no farther.

R

APUNZEL SAT AND ROCKED THE CRADLE. SHE AND Stefan had not one child but two, twins, a boy and a girl. They had started over in another village, far away from the witch's domain. Stefan had apprenticed himself to a farmer and had hopes of having his own farm in a few years.

She missed the old woman. It was unreasonable, but there it was. She had known nothing else for so long. The dress she had escaped in had worn through after long use, and she did not even know how to choose new clothing. She took to wearing clothes that were like the witch's, buying a black skirt here, a black dress there, and fastening them all together with spiny thorns and brambles.

She heard some of the comments they made about her in the marketplace, whispers about her odd appearance and strange ways of doing things. They were kinder to her face, but even so she was unsure of what to say to them. She stayed at home more and more, leaving Stefan to buy their food in the market. There were far too many people in the world, she thought, at least a hundred in the village alone.

Stefan assured her that she would feel more comfortable out of doors soon, but she doubted it. He tried to help her as much as he could, but he was away most of the day and too tired to say much when he came back.

One day they had a terrible argument. He had come home after a long day in the fields, and he wondered aloud why there was no supper prepared for him.

"How was I to know you wanted supper?" Rapunzel asked. The boy was crying again; that meant the girl would start soon. She rocked him in her arms hopelessly, knowing that it would do no good. "I have never lived on a farm. I have never even seen a married couple. The witch never taught me how to cook. I know nothing, nothing about anything!"

"I'm sorry," Stefan said. "I'm hungry, that's all."

"Sometimes I wonder why I ever left the tower."

"How can you say that? The witch—"

"The witch! I knew where I was with her, what she expected me to do. Everything was easy, every day was the same. There's noth-

LET THE THORNS SCRATCH HER FLESH.

"So does she," Rapunzel said, and as she said it she knew that in some way it was true.

But Stefan was laughing. "She! She loves no one but herself, you know that!"

He cut her hair in one quick motion. She gasped, but he was already tying the long rope of it to the corner of her bed, the bed in which they had spent so many blissful moments.

He helped her out the window. She hung on the ladder of her hair for a moment, feeling free, feeling as though she were about to fly. The wind lifted her short hair off the back of her neck, and it was such a strange sensation that she laughed.

"Hurry!" Stefan said. "Climb down!"

She went down quickly and he followed. Together they ran to the garden wall. "You!" someone called. It was the witch. "Ungrateful child!"

Stefan turned and threw the scissors at her. The blade hit her arm, cutting through her layers of black clothing. She howled.

ing here for me. The children cry all the time. The room is too small and too smoky."

Stefan laughed.

"Don't you laugh at me!" she said, furious.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't laughing at you. I was just thinking—well, that's what the witch used to say, or so you told me. She used to complain like that."

"And what if she did? I learned everything I know from her. I learned that there is nothing good in the world, that everything disappoints sooner or later. Even this house, these children. Even you."

"Oh," Stefan said. "Please don't say that. It isn't true. I'll show you—"

"You'll show me what? You haven't shown me anything yet!"

Even as she argued she knew she was being unfair. She was the one who hadn't wanted to go outside, who had made excuses when Stefan tried to teach her something. But the world was such a terri-

Continued on page 89


PAINTING OUT LOUD:

ROWENA MORRILL

SHE'S KNOWN FOR HER FABULOUS colors, seamless technique, and exuberant depiction of male and female flesh. But over the phone, artist Rowena Morrill is soft-spoken, controlled, even reticent. Her artwork is where she really lets go. For Rowena, each painting is an aria.

"Color, to me, is like the melody in music," she says. "I try to make the paintings beautiful, colorwise. And I like really strong imagery—that's what I really aim for. I want to evoke a response from the viewer. If you go to a recital, you want to have your socks knocked off by the musician. And to the extent that I'm able to do that with painting, that's certainly my intention."





"I'm not a scholarly type. I don't take an academic approach. Mine is more romantic, even passionate. I think that comes from my musical background: Two of my grandparents were opera singers. My mother and her twin sister are wonderful pianists. Even my sister is a singer. For me art is not primarily an intellectual process. It's full of passion and intensity."

The artist herself is upfront about painting what she likes. "I've always loved sensuous artwork. I've always

BY KAREN HABER



PREVIOUS SPREAD: "Sorceres"—curl up with a good book! ABOVE: "Magenta Suitor," from Rowena Chromium Trading Cards. BELOW: Samuel R. Delany named this monster from *Flight from Neveryon* after Rowena because he knew she loved to paint them. OPPOSITE: The cover from C.J. Cherryh's *"Arafel's Saga."*

just loved to look at very sensuous things: luscious silk, beautiful hair—I love to see the rich beauty in nature and I like to paint that way."

"Rubens is one of my favorite artists because I love the lusciousness of his work, the textures of the hair, the skin, the satin. After all, what is painting a human being about? It's about the gorgeousness of being human, the sensuousness, the appeal.

"It drives me *crazy* when I feel as if I have to rein it in—I want the gender differences to be obvious. That's what makes life fun."

Rowena's artistic passion extends to the technical side of the brush as well. She's meticulous about craft, essentially self-taught, and uncompromising.

"I don't want any brush strokes to show. Not one. I do a lot of glazing and scumbling: Old Masters techniques. I prefer simplicity and directness, taking the most direct path to the most finished illusion. I'm not one to dabble in thick medium, piling the paint on. The paint is a means to an end."

That end? "I want people to look at the work and see another world."

And that world must be perfect.



"If I go to the ballet I don't want to hear the ballerina grunting and clomping around. I want her to look as if she's flying. And that's how I want my painting to be. I want it to be a perfect illusion."

Rowena's international legion of fans is familiar with her bold use of color, evocative lighting effects, and seductive textures. They pay her tribute with Web sites devoted to her sensuous work. And in his book, *Masters of the Infinite*, Vincent Di Fate cites Rowena's glossy luminous images and smooth tonal transitions, and calls her a "consummate glaze painter."

After a peripatetic childhood as an army brat that included stays in Japan and Italy, Rowena expected to be a musician. But fate had other plans for her. "My first year in college I could see that I didn't have perfect pitch, wasn't a child prodigy. And that was that."

She left school, married young, and took up drawing while her husband was away on Air Force duty. "The first night of my first class I sat there and drew a still life. The end result looked very accurate. The teacher was very complimentary. From then on I was hooked."



It was a watershed experience, sending Rowena back to school (the University of Delaware) where she got a degree in art. "I ended up working part time and doing portrait commissions after school. I taught myself to paint by reading a lot of Old Masters books. And I worked out a technique for myself over four or five years of painting portraits. It would take me 30 coats of paint on the first one, 20 on the next, then 15, and suddenly I had a portfolio." Single again and in need of work, she set out for New York City. The rest is art history.

Rowena is viewed by many artists and fans as a pioneer, one of the first women to work in the "boys' club" of Fantasy and Science Fiction illustration. She says that she may have been an art pioneer but it wasn't intentional.

"I fell into illustrating accidentally. When I arrived in New York City in 1975 I had been doing portraits for several years. At that

time, very few people could paint the figure realistically. Realism wasn't in. So I was just in the right place at the right time."

"I had to make money and support myself, so I started going through the Yellow Pages, calling publishers. Ace Books gave me my first work, because I could do the figure realistically and that was what was needed for book illustration. It's as simple as that."

"I never had the feeling that I was storming the barricades. In fact, it was a tremendous advantage to be a woman: I was treated very politely, while I would hear stories from the men who didn't get the same treatment. I really had an edge, being a woman."

"Since I come from a background that has little to do with Fantasy, I have to work very hard to achieve fantastic art. I didn't grow up reading comic books or Fantasy. About the only things in the genre I did read were H. Rider Haggard, fairy tales, and mythol-

SHE'S METICULOUS SELF-TAUGHT,

ogy. So I make a very conscious effort to achieve a fantastic look in my work. Fantasy and SF allowed me to actually paint subject matter very close to what I would have come up with on my own. I was delighted to have the opportunity."

Rowena works six days a week in her studio. "I love to work from life but because of deadline concerns I have to use photographs. In her retrospective book, *The Fantastic Art of Rowena*, she writes: "Because of the infinite variations of light hitting the endless diversity of human form, I find it necessary to have models for all the figures I paint to get a credible result. However, I frequently make drastic changes from the original reference."

She recalls working on a cover for *Blue Adept* (Del Rey). "I used the same model for the warrior and for the genie. The woman model was sick that day. This turned out to be a real bonus because it gave her the slightly demented look I wanted her to have in the painting."

For *Alchemy and Academe* (Ballantine), she says: "My model for the wizard was a professional actor who delivered such a hilarious monologue on magical spells while posing for the photograph that I could hardly stop laughing long enough to take a few pictures. I loved painting his expres-



ABOVE: The "Crimson Demon" shows you don't need to be gorgeous to attract babes! RIGHT: The mermaid's tail is "The Mermaid's Tale." OPPOSITE: Beauty and innocence contrast starkly with evil in the cover for Richard Peck's "Ghosts I Have Been."



ABOUT CRAFT, ESSENTIALLY AND UNCOMPROMISING.

sive face, putting as many colors into his white beard as I possibly could while still keeping it white."

Her artistic interest remains on textures, often skin, and frequently male. In *The Fantastic Art of Rowena*, she writes: "Here I must rave on about how beautiful the male figure is and what a joy it is to paint. It goes without saying that I mean the male figure at its best, namely lean and muscular."

Even if the male pictured is dangerous and threatening, Rowena sees no reason to make him unappealing. In *The War Hound and the World's Pain* (Pocket Books, Michael Moorcock), "I wanted it to look as if this devil were coming to get you. This is [a] painting in which I feel the threatening creature has a distinctly captivating side. I personally wouldn't mind being carried off by him."

On the topic of horrible-monsters-threatening-beautiful-sexy-girls, she says, "I do most of them with a light satirical touch, not to be taken seriously."

Rowena continues to paint book covers and accept private portrait commissions. In addition to *The Fantastic Art of Rowena*, and various Web sites, her work has been featured in a series of trading cards, calendars, and in a portfolio of prints over the years. She recently collaborated with Thomas Hauser on a children's book, *Martin Bear and Friends* (1998, Hastings House), providing 12 elaborate illustrations. In the works is another retrospective book of her paintings.

Rowena's new print company, Vivo D'arte, made its debut with two inkjet prints of her work on canvas. "The accuracy is really incredible," she says. "They're done in small editions, maybe three hundred, and I actually paint on each print, and sign each one by hand."

This is one artist who doesn't see herself going in digital directions. Rowena says that she hopes all artists, regardless of their training, get some grounding in classical techniques: "I don't think learning how to draw could ever hurt anyone. It's a great pleasure and a joy."

Her future plans involve more concentration on her own flamboyant personal visions. "I'm doing more of my own work, based on my own ideas. I've just done 10 new paintings and they're much more personal statements than my book covers."

She's also begun to write poetry. "I'd like to illustrate my own work," she admits. "I

get a lot of ideas for stories that might turn into something."

For Rowena, one of the great pleasures of being a painter is the communication that occurs between artist and viewer. "When I go to a Science Fiction and Fantasy convention it just charges my batteries. Getting

together with the fans is a delight. It's the fuel that keeps me going. I love to hear what people are saying about my paintings."

So speak loudly the next time you see a display of Rowena's work. The artist who believes in "painting out loud" might just be listening. ♣



MOVIES

Continued from page 32

decide how far to take it away from a movie like *The Crucible*—I would call that pretty accurate. It's stylized, but is rather historically accurate. We're not trying to do a history lesson here. We're trying to get a certain feeling.

"The feeling you get is entering a dream-like state. It's just slightly mad up there."

Colleen Atwood, the costume designer who's worked with Burton on *Mars Attacks!*, *Ed Wood*, and the aborted *Superman Lives*, agrees that it is sometimes necessary to bend history in service to the story: "It's based on period, but it's also a Fantasy," she says, as she holds up an embroidered gown. "I took the period research and I pushed it into the world that we wanted to create in *Sleepy Hollow*. It's not like I'm doing a Merchant-Ivory, where it's got to be a perfect period piece. I'm doing a Fantasy, a cross between a fairy tale and a folktale."

The idea of turning this folktale into a big-budget motion picture began in the feverish mind of Kevin Yeagher. Yeagher, whose most recent genre work has been for *Starship Troopers* and *Bride of Chucky*, was also responsible for designing and creating the Crypt Keeper character for *Tales from the Crypt*. He began adapting the Irving story into film to broaden himself from solely working on special make-up effects. Says Yeagher, who is credited with the story (along with *Seven* screenwriter Andrew Kevin Walker), and who is also responsible for creature effects on the film: "I don't want to just do dead bodies and decapitations for the rest of my life."

Yeagher is happy to share the credit with the man who thought of it first. "I have to give Washington Irving credit," he explained as he stared over three extremely lifelike replica severed heads. "It's a childhood story that we all grew up with—at least Americans did. I grew up in love with the story, and when I got in the movie business, I always wanted to do it as a feature. I had this idea of doing a new take on the old story. Because the old story is really short—about a 20-minute read or less—and it really kind of comes down to the chase which is at the very end of the story with Ichabod Crane and the Headless Horseman; I wanted a new version, to tell a new tale. This *Sleepy Hollow* is *real*. What would happen if the tale actually came from a real place?"

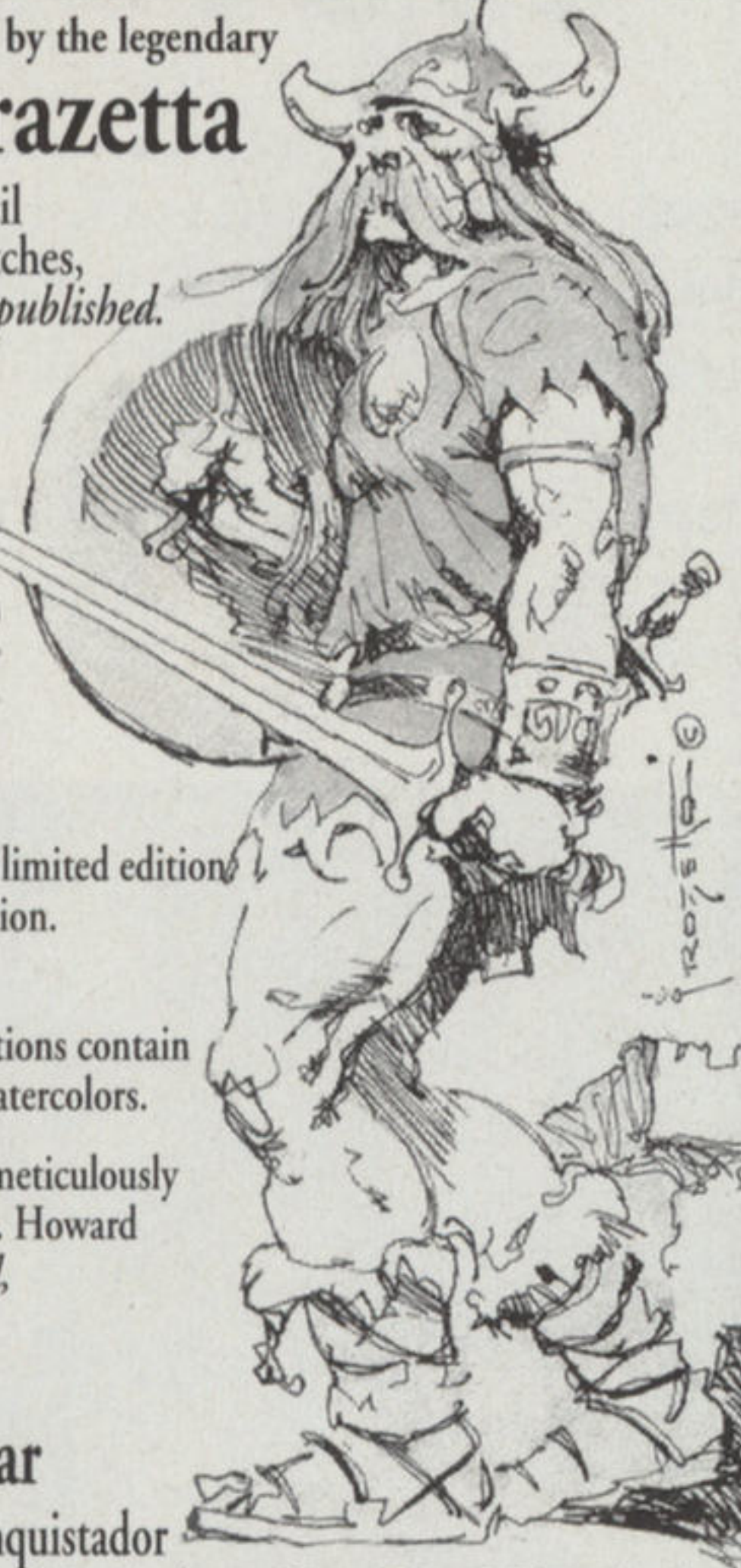
"I came up with the idea five or six years ago. Then I got hold of my agent, and she introduced me to a young writer named Andy Walker who just got into town and was shopping around a script called *Seven*. I gave that a read and fell in love with it; it was such a great script. And I thought, 'This would be a perfect guy to team up with,' so we started to finish bashing out the rest of it for about three months in my

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house, and came up with pretty much the whole story, all the detail, and ended up meeting [producer] Scott Rudin. He loved it.

"I was originally interested in directing it, but once Tim Burton heard about it, and wanted to do it—with Tim on board, I stepped down in a second."

For Yeagher, working with Tim has "been great. He's very creative, and he comes from animation, so he comes from the same place I come from. We talk the same game. It takes him a while to see something. A lot of directors will lay everything out for you, and say, 'This is what I want exactly, and if you vary from that, you're going to be in trouble.' Tim wants your ideas. He asks a lot of things. Having now gone through a show with him, [I know] the best thing to do is to present him with several different options. He likes to improvise a lot.

"What's interesting is that it was a very serious, serious thing, and Tim has brought his sense of humor to it, which he does to everything, and it's been really interesting to watch it happen. There's a quirky sense of humor that he brings to everything that has made its way in. I think it's become better because of that, a thing I didn't expect."

Yeagher is not the only one to sing the praises of director Burton. Joss Williams, *Sleepy Hollow's* special effects supervisor, who has worked with Terry Gilliam on *Brazil*, Steven Spielberg on *Indiana Jones and*

the Last Crusade, and Jim Cameron on *Aliens*, feels that "he's an effects guy's dream. To work with somebody like Tim, he's so—laidback is not the right term—he knows what he wants. But he allows you to put your own interpretation into it as well, which is fantastic for us.

"With Tim it's a teamwork thing. You can go in there and talk to him, ask him how he sees it, suggest how you see it to him. And if your suggestion is better than the way he's seen it, he'll use yours. If it works, it works, and there's none of this ego stuff."

Contrary to the case on many film sets, the actors are also unburdened in the ego department, particularly in the case of Casper van Dien, who in real life exhibits none of the persona of his bullying character Brom Bones. On the set, he rushes over to talk whenever he's not needed in front of the camera.

"I'm the biggest fan of movies," he says, his grin electric. "For *Starship Troopers*, to keep my energy up, I would sing show tunes. And people would go, 'What are you on? What are you doing?'"

"I'm on life! I'm in heaven. I'm doing something that I really love to do, and I'm getting paid to do it. It's a big candy store for me. I'm getting to work with great people and I'm having a blast."

That kid-in-a-candy-store attitude extends to his feelings about his costars, such as Johnny Depp: "He's a very profes-

sional actor. He's very generous, very giving. I get along great with him. I had a lot of respect for him beforehand, because I've appreciated the choices he's made as an actor.

"I look around and I want to find the people I admire. It's good to model after people in this industry, or in life in general, who are successful, because if you do things they do or if you see things that they do that might help you in your business or your craft, you use that and you take it and maybe it will help. It should help you if you want to be successful.

"I was already a fan of his. I liked almost all of his movies. And I walked up and I told him that I really appreciated his work. I wanted to tell him that I was a fan of his. I hadn't done that with anyone before. So I kind of felt almost weird about doing it, but I thought I might as well tell him the truth."

Van Dien's enthusiasm for the project was infectious, and as he headed for another round of battle with the Headless Horseman, the words of Joss Williams reverberated in my mind as I sunk more deeply into the mud. Said Williams: "I suppose the story of *Sleepy Hollow* isn't just horror—it's classy horror. If there can be class to chopping somebody's head off, then that's what we're doing." Based on the promise shown by the assembled cast and crew, a dose of classy horror is waiting for you in *Sleepy Hollow*. ♣



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AFTERSHOCK

Continued from page 44

authorities for that—revealed that the killer had overheard the hotel arranging our water taxi ride. He borrowed a friend's boat and beat the scheduled taxi to the pick-up spot. The court determined that he was going to kill us, steal whatever valuables we'd bought or brought, and dump our bodies in the Adriatic. They suspected that Beth and I weren't his first victims.

"I was released, but then came the nightmare of red tape trying to return Beth's body to the States. Finally we brought her home and buried her, but my life was changed forever by then. The world was never the same without Beth. Neither was my marriage. Angela never said so, but I know she secretly blamed me for Beth's death. So did I. Angela and I split a year later. She couldn't live with me. Who could blame her? I could barely live with myself. Still can't."

"But you're *not* to blame," Kim said.

"I had a chance to save Beth before we stepped onto that water taxi, but I didn't take it. And Beth paid for it."

We sat in silence then, each mired in our pools of private guilt. Gradually I realized that the flashes outside were less frequent, the thunder not quite so loud.

"I think it's passed us by," I said.

Kim glanced around, frowning in disappointment. "Damn. We'll have to wait for another storm. That could be next week or next month around here." She pointed to the steel pole. "Oh, look. It's wet."

Fine rivulets of water were coursing down the surface of the steel.

"So much for my caulking skills. I'll see what I can do tomorrow."

Kim got on her knees and leaned forward to touch the wet surface and—

—the tower seemed to explode. I had an instant's impression of a deafening *buzz* accompanied by a rainbow shower of sparks within a wall of blazing light; boiling water exploded from the galvanized bucket as multiple arcs of blue-white energy converged from the pole onto Kim's outstretched arm. Her mouth opened wide in a silent scream while her body arched like a bow and shuddered violently, and then a searing bolt flashed from her opposite shoulder into me ...

... the whiteout fades, as do the walls of the tower, leaving ghostly translucent afterimages, and I know which way to turn. I spot the tiny figure immediately, still in her yellow dress, standing so far away, suspended above the treetops. Beth! I call her name but there is no sound in this place. I try to move toward her but I'm frozen in space. I need to be closer, I need to see her throat ... and then her hand goes to her mouth, and her eyes widen as she points to me. What? What's the matter?

I realize she's pointing behind me. I turn and

see Kim's ghostly figure on the floor ... so still ... too still ...

I came to and crawled to Kim. Her right arm was a smoking ruin, charred to the elbow, and she wasn't breathing. Panicked, I struggled upright and knelt over her. I forced my rubbery arms to pound my fists on her chest to jolt her heart back to life—once, twice—then I started CPR, compressing her sternum and blowing into her mouth, five thrusts, one breath ... five thrusts, one breath ...

"Come on, Kim!" I shouted. I was so slick with sweat that my hands kept slipping off her chest. "Breathe! You can do it! Breathe, damn it!"

I saw her eyelids flutter. Her blue irises had lost their luster, but I sensed an exquisite joy in their depths as they fixed on me for a beseeching instant ... the tiniest shake of her head, and then she was gone again.

I realized what she'd just tried to tell me: *Don't ... please don't.*

But it wasn't in me to kneel here and watch the life seep out of her. I lurched again into CPR but she resisted my best efforts to bring her back. Finally, I stopped. Her skin was cooling beneath my palms. Kim was gone.

I stared at her pale, peaceful face. What was happening in that other place? Had she found her Timmy and the forgiveness she craved? Was she with him now and preferring to stay there?

I felt an explosive pressure building in my chest, mostly grief, but part envy. I let out an agonized groan and gathered her into my arms. I ached for her bright eyes, her crooked-toothed smile.

"Poor lost Kim," I whispered, stroking her limp hair. "I hope to God you found what you were looking for."

Just as with Beth, I held Kim until her body was cold and stiff.

Finally, I let her go. I dressed her as best I could, and stretched her out on the cushions. I called the emergency squad, then drove my car to the corner and waited until I saw them wheel her body out to the ambulance. Then I headed for the airport.

I hated abandoning Kim to the medical examiner, but I knew the police would want to question me. They'd want to know what the hell we were doing up in that tower during a storm. They might even take me into custody. I couldn't allow that.

I had someplace to go.



I arrived at Marco Polo Airport without luggage. The terminal snuggles up to the water, and the boats wait right outside the arrival terminal. I bought a ticket for the waterbus—I could barely look at the smaller, speedier water taxis—and spent the two-and-a-half-mile trip across the Laguna Véneta fighting off the past.

I did pretty well leaving the dock and walking into the Piazza San Marco. I hurried through the teeming crowds, past the

flooded basilica—a Byzantine toad squatting in a tiny pond—on the right, and the campanile towering to my left. I almost lost it when I saw a little girl feeding the pigeons, but I managed to hold on.

I found a hotel in the San Polo district, bought a change of clothes, and holed up in my room, watching the TV, waiting for news of a storm.

AND NOW THE STORM IS HERE. FROM MY perch atop the Campanile di San Marco I see it boiling across the Laguna Véneta, spearing the Lido with bolts of blue-white energy, and taking dead aim for my position. The piazza below is empty now, the gawkers chased by the thunder, rain, and lightning—especially the lightning. Even the brave young carabinieri has discovered the proper relationship between discretion and valor and ducked back inside.

And me: I've cut the ground wire from the lightning rod above me. I'm roped to the tower to keep from falling. And I'm drenched with rain.

I'm ready.

Physically, at least. Mentally, I'm still not completely sure. I've seen Beth twice now. I should believe, I want to believe ... but do I want it so desperately that I've tapped into Kim's delusion system and made it my own?

I'm hoping this will be my last time. If I can see Beth up close, see her throat, know that her wound has healed in this place where she waits, it will go a long way toward healing my own wound.

Suddenly I feel it—the tingle in my skin as the charge builds in the air around me—and then a deafening zzzt! as the bolt strikes the ungrounded rod above the statue of St. Mark. Millions of volts slam into me, violently jerking my body ...

... and then I'm in that other place, that other state ... I look around frantically for a splotch of yellow and I almost cry out when I see Beth floating next to me. She's here, smiling, radiant, and so close I can almost touch her. I choke with relief as I see her throat—it's healed, the terrible grinning wound gone without a trace, as if it never happened.

I smile at her but she responds with a look of terror. She points down and I turn to see my body tumbling from the tower. The safety rope has broken and I'm drifting earthward like a feather.

I'm going to die.

Strangely, that doesn't bother me nearly as much as it should. Not in this place.

Then in the distance I see two other figures approaching, and as they near I recognize Kim, and she's leading a beaming tow-headed boy toward Beth and me.

A burst of unimaginable joy engulfs me. This is so wonderful ... almost too wonderful to be real. And there lies my greatest fear. Are they all—Beth, Kim, Timmy—really here? Or merely manifestations of my consuming need for this to be real?

I look down and see my slowly falling body nearing the pavement.

Very soon I will know. ☘

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EDITORIAL

Continued from page 6

Numero Three-o: When a submission guideline says "No Horror," it's for a reason. Don't get me wrong: I like Horror. Scratch that: I like *good* horror, and so do quite a few editors. Unfortunately, most Horror magazines have to reject horror just because their readers don't want to see it (if you remember how badly readers of *Science Fiction Age* bitched about the occasional Fantasy submission before Sovereign Media started *Realms of Fantasy*, consider how many would shet blood over a good old-fashioned Horror tale appearing in *SF Age*), no matter how great the story may be. And that's assuming that your story is great: Most Horror stories received by an editor are flat-out godawful, and that's just an accurate assessment of Sturgeon's Law. Just pay attention to those submission guidelines, and you'll save a lot of return postage.

Numero Four-o: Skip the Twilight Zone endings. Rod Serling (and the cadre of screenwriters who worked for him) managed to get quite a bit of mileage from surprise endings; of course, he and his writers were geniuses. A well-written surprise ending is a welcome joy to an editor; however, if that surprise ending is "And they called themselves Adam and Eve," that story probably won't see print, no matter how good it is. Or, to put it another way, the ending to the original *Planet of the Apes* movie was impressive and startling for about 15 seconds. Of course, that was over 30 years ago.

Numero Five-o: If you feel compelled to submit Ferdinand Feghoot tales, don't be surprised when they get kicked back. For those not old enough to remember, in the days before Shawna McCarthy became Editor, the pages of *Asimov's* used to be full of Ferdinand Feghoot stories. FF tales were attempted humor stories whose punchline involved a really dumb pun, and the entire story was nothing but preamble to that pun. If you want to write humor, write something with some pith to it, and skip the dumb puns. (Yes, I know that SF fandom is inordinately fascinated with puns, but not every reader is a literary coprophagist.) Try wit—it's the sniper rifle of humor.

Numero Six-o: No wish-fulfillment Fantasies. Every editor has to deal with a certain number of these. They're fairly obvious to spot. The most common are the so-called "Lieutenant Mary Jane" *Star Trek* short stories, where the new member of the *Enterprise* crew (amazingly named after the author of the story) not only falls in love with the crew member of his/her choice, but manages to save the day while the rest of the crew sits around with its collective thumb up its collective butt. Everyone puts a part of himself/herself into a story, but that doesn't mean that we want to read about how you want to get even with the jocks and cheerleaders you knew in high school, how you wish that you could get a perfect job instead of the mini-

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mum-wage nightmare you found yourself in, or how you'd love to bang that member of your chosen sexual persuasion until his/her eyes bled. Or, if you do, we want it in an intriguing or at least entertaining way. We all have our demons, and unless yours are a hell of a lot more interesting, we don't want yours.

Numero Seven-o: Just because you know all the in-jokes doesn't mean that everyone else does. The main limitation to a good in-joke is that it'll only make sense to a limited percentage of your readership. A well-constructed inside joke is one that will convulse someone familiar with the subject, but won't disrupt those innocent of that knowledge. A story that depends upon a particular in-joke that applies to, say, spot welders or entomologists is going to fall dead if your potential editor is ignorant of those professions.

Numero Eight-o: Don't try to usurp the staffers. This is a notice for those preferring to write nonfiction. If a magazine is interested in non-fiction submissions, and you have the idea for an essay or article that hasn't been covered before, send in a query. The worst thing that could happen is that one editor may say "no." However, if you're trying to write something under the jurisdiction of a staffer, you're usually wasting your time.

In the food web of journalism, film and music critics are generally and rightly considered to be the bottom-feeders of the business. Since every idiot considers him-/herself an authority on pop entertainment, editors get lots and lots of offers for movie and music reviews. A writer with a unique interpretation of a particular film or book (for instance, as Ernest Hogan did several years ago, noting the parallels between Cervantes' *Man of La Mancha* and Thompson's *Fear and Loathing In Las Vegas*) may get invited to submit a guest review, but sending your unsolicited review of *Star Wars: Episode One to Analog* could generally be considered a waste of time. Columnists are generally chosen for their ability to enhance the experience of reading a magazine: almost everybody wants to write a regular column for a magazine or newspaper, so generally those spots go to those with the talent or the connections. Nothing personal, you understand—it's just that most columnists are incredibly insecure as it is, and a good editor won't replace their articles with those from a complete unknown.

With this in mind, try to concentrate on more functional works than something already covered by an existing columnist. This should be a mantra: these comments naturally don't cover all situations, but they should be used as basic guidelines. Ignore them at your peril, or the peril of your postage budget. ☛

Paul T. Riddell is a Michigan-born, Texas-raised essayist currently residing in a fortified ranch on Mount Briscoe overlooking downtown Dallas. More of his essays, articles, and diatribes are available at "The Healing Power of Obnoxiousness" at <http://www.hpoo.com>

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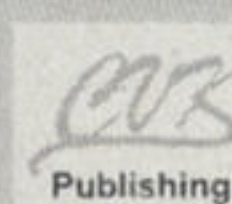
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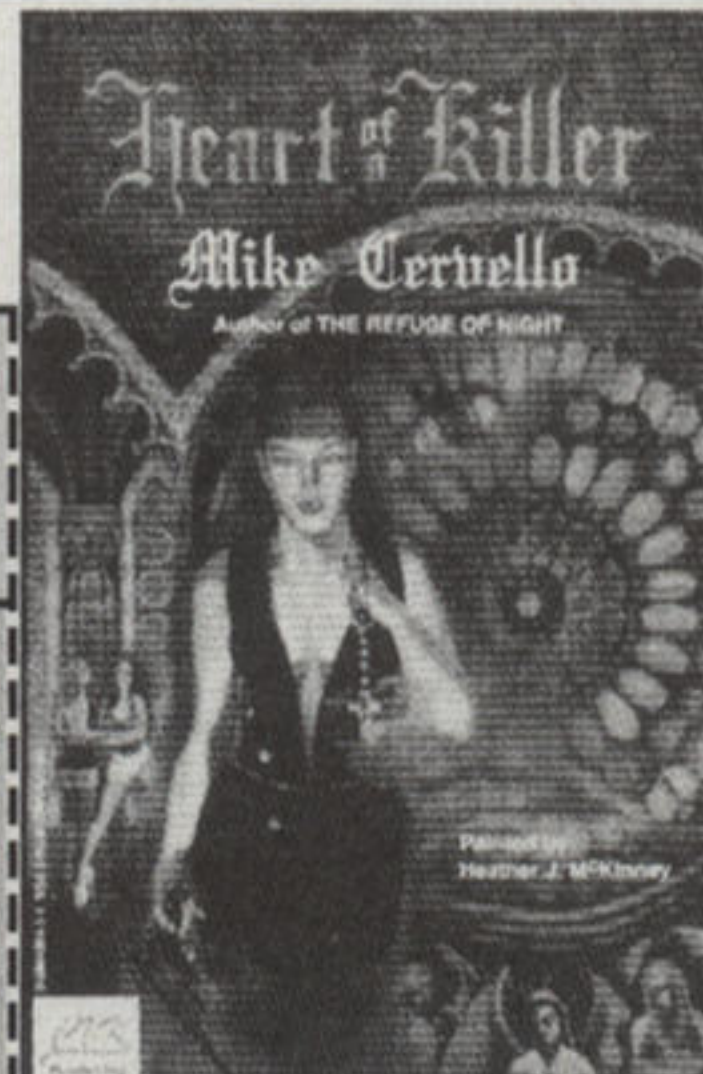
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BY ERIC T. BAKER

Demons, Vampires, and Shaolin Monks— These Games have Something for Everyone.

THE CLASSIC FORMAT FOR FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAMES IS THE DUNGEON CRAWL. THIS format goes all the way back to the invention of *Dungeons and Dragons*. The first *D&D* adventures were always taking the characters down into some lost dungeon where an incredible variety of creatures defended piles of treasure. The point was to kill the creatures and take the treasure, which earned experience points that made the characters more powerful so they could fight tougher monsters, take their treasure, earn more experience points, and so on. When programmers started to create Fantasy role-playing games (FRPGs) for



RIGHT & BELOW: Be sure to stock your dungeon with lots of monsters in *Dungeon Keeper 2*.

computers, they immediately adopted the dungeon-crawl format. Not only are dungeon crawls fun, but their limited scope and fixed system of rewards and advancement went hand in glove with all the things that computers do well.

Even back at the dawn of *D&D*, however, two obvious questions nagged at players: "What were all these monsters doing in one place, and why weren't they fighting each other?" As the genre became more sophisticated, these questions were answered in various ways by various scenario writers and games-makers, but one of the best answers was given by Bullfrog Productions in July of 1997. They reasoned that not only must there be a powerful magic-user recruiting and managing these monsters, but they took the next step and imagined what this magic-user's reaction must be to all these heroes constantly invading his dungeon, killing his

monsters, and walking off with his treasures. They concluded that he would not be happy about it.

Thus was born *Dungeon Keeper*, where players took the role of a powerful wizard trying to defend his dungeon from the preys of marauding heroes. Under the tag line, "It's good to be bad," *DK* went on to be one of the best-selling games of that year. Now, two years later, *DK* is back with a new edition, *Dungeon Keeper 2* (Electronic Arts for the PC).

Despite its FRPG roots, *DK2* is actually a real-time strategy game. As the keeper, you start with a dungeon heart and a squadron of imps. The imps are not fighting monsters, but they are the key to creating an effective dungeon since they do all the grunt work. Their first job is always to dig a path, the dimensional portal from which the rest of the monsters that will stock the dungeon will appear. Of course, those monsters need a place to lair, so the next job is to have the imps dig out a big room for that. The monsters need something to eat, so after the lair, the imps are best instructed to create a chicken hatchery. Those four chambers give the keeper the bare essentials of a dungeon, and from this modest beginning he can get as fancy as he likes and as dangerous as the scenario demands.

There are three modes in which *DK2* can be played: The base is the campaign mode where you try to extend your dungeon until you control the entire kingdom. This game has 12 levels plus two bonus levels. On each level you battle a lord of the realm of increasing power until you finally face the King. This mode also acts as a tutorial for the game; a narrator instructs you on how to build and use your dungeon, revealing a little more each level. Besides the campaign mode, there is the skirmish mode, where you can play against the computer or against other players over the Net. Here, instead of trying to conquer the kingdom, you are just trying to rule the visible map. The third mode is called "My Pet Dungeon" and it lets you create a dungeon with all the options, free from the



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distractions of heroes or other players. The objectives here can be reached without ever fighting a hero, although if you want to have those pesky do-gooders wander in now and then to let your monsters hone their skills in combat, you can turn on that option as well.

Once you have a basic dungeon built, what sort of monsters it attracts depends on what other rooms you build. Building a library brings warlocks who will research spells for you when they aren't providing support fire in combat. A workshop will attract trolls, which are not only good fighters, but will also build doors and traps for the imps to install in other parts of the dungeon. Prison and torture chambers are interesting. Not only do they attract mistresses, who are good in hand-to-hand combat and throw spells, but they allow defeated heroes to be either imprisoned or tortured. Imprisoned heroes sometimes convert to your side. Tortured heroes sometimes give you information. Dead heroes laid to rest in graveyards (another room you can build, one that will attract vampires) will rise as skeletons and do your bidding.

Dungeon Keeper 2 strikes a nice balance between being completely automated and requiring the player to track every detail. Once the basic dungeon is built, it will maintain itself for a while. Creatures will go to the training room and research spells for you, and they will fight whatever heroes arrive. Eventually, however, if you don't keep the imps out tunneling for gold and gems, you will run out of money. On the turn that payday arrives and your monsters find no money to be had, that is the turn they will take themselves back into the portal, abandoning you and your dungeon. Also, monsters tend to get bored and unhappy if they aren't kept busy. Unhappy monsters will go to their lair and sulk. There are a couple of ways around this. The simplest is to give them a slap with your "hand of evil," the cursor you use to direct things on the map. If you have a torture chamber, you can pick them up and drop them in it so one of the mistresses can apply a quick attitude adjustment to the critter. The other thing you can do is open a casino. Off-duty creatures will flock to it to gamble with their pay. Everyone's morale increases, until one monster hits the jackpot, and then they all leave for some reason.

Building and stocking your dungeon in *DK2* is simple to do and very well explained. What is not nearly as simple and much less well explained, is how to fight for it and with it. In *DK2*, each type of monster has been assigned a fighting style and best results are obtained by putting the creatures in formations that take advantage of each monster's talents. This is easier said than done.

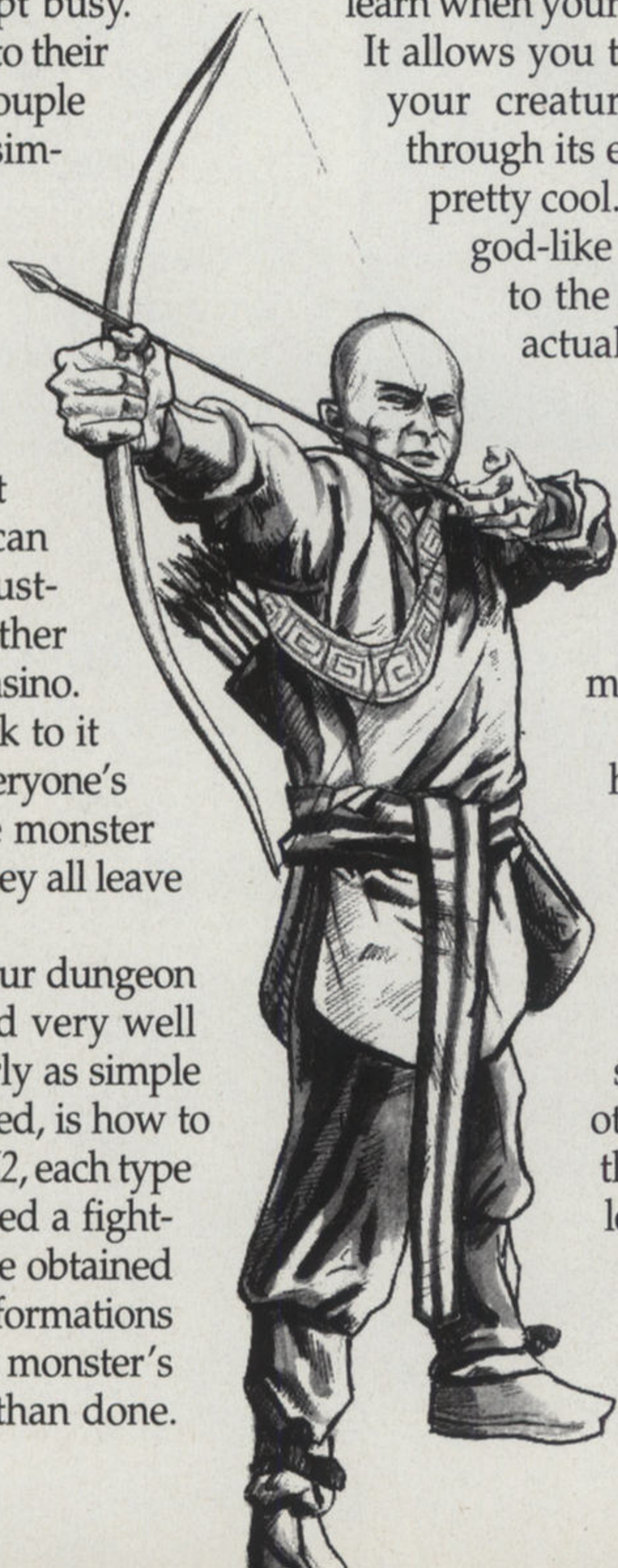


ABOVE: A view to a kill for in Jerusalem by Night. BELOW: Aiming for conquest in Blood of the Valiant.

There is no way to tell monsters to "Stand here and wait for the enemy." You pick them up with your hand of evil, drop them in the enemy's path, and try to time it right so that they will get over being stunned from the drop before the enemy arrives. If the monsters are dropped too far ahead of the enemy, they wander off to do other things before the enemy arrives. Putting your monsters in the right place at the right time takes practice.

Another area where the programming of *DK2* could have been improved is in "possession mode." Possession is a spell you learn when your warlocks research it for you. It allows you to take possession of one of your creatures and see the dungeon through its eyes. This, in and of itself, is pretty cool. You go from the top-down, god-like view you've been enjoying to the first-person perspective of actually being down in and walking through the dungeon you have been building. While not rendered as well as *Quake 2*, the 3D perspective is fine. The problem is in the attach mode.

There are a lot of things your hand of evil can't do out of your own dungeon, like drop monsters. To get monsters out of your dungeon and over attacking someone else's, you need to possess one, and then "attach" others to you so you can lead them the fighting. The problem is that the other monsters seem to take the "attach" part a little too literally. As soon as you have executed the command on them, they



walk straight for you and try to occupy the exact pixel where your possessed character is. This makes it hard to not only attach anyone else, but it also makes it hard to even move. In order to gather a raiding party, you have to get everyone you want in the same room and then you have to perfect a sort of run-and-grab-and-keep-running technique. It is even harder to learn than getting your monsters to line up. A little more care in the programming would have made this unnecessary.

Overall, *Dungeon Keeper 2* is an excellent, involving game. It has that thing that all good real-time strategy games have: you'll always want to play just five more minutes to see something that you have been building come to fruition. Its basics are easy to learn, while its advanced techniques take time and practice to master. There is a wealth of rooms to build, monsters to command, and spells to cast. Plus, with three different modes, it is hard to exhaust the possibilities of the gameplay. It is a fun and involving twist on the oldest formula in the book.

At the top of the list of good news out of GenCon this year was the reissue of *Feng Shui* (Atlas Games, 1999), the terrific paper-and-dice RPG version of the *Shadow Fist* collectable card game, which is itself due to be reissued next year. New supplements for *FS* will follow from Atlas, but the reissue is also a boon to Ronin Publishing, which puts out the licensed *FS* supplement, *Blood of the Valiant* (1999, \$20).

Blood of the Valiant is the source book for The Guiding Hand, the faction of the Secret War native to 1850 AD China. Briefly, in case you are unfamiliar with *FS*, the game is based on the over-the-top cinemagraphic action displayed in the Hong Kong movies of John Woo, Tsui Hark, Jackie Chan, and their brethren. Through the limbo of the nether world, four periods of Earth history can be traveled to in the game, each corresponding to a popular genre of Hong Kong films.

Feng Shui adds the Secret War to this historical background. Thus, the Manchus are victims of the faded Eaters of the Lotus while the Western Powers are directed by the Ascended. The subject of *BotV*—the Guiding Hand—is a secret society founded by a Shaolin priest, dedicated to China for the Chinese. They preach Neo-Confucianism, the Hand hate the Lotus for having allowed China to come to this pass, and they hate the Ascended as animals daring to rule men. Still, winners and losers in the Secret War are scored by the counting of Feng Shui sites, and even in their home juncture of 1850, the Hand do not control as many sites as the other factions in the war. They are underdogs everywhere they fight.

Blood of the Valiant makes full use of the Hand's underdog status, and contains hints for playing them both in their usual roles as imperturbable, philosophy-spouting villains, and in a heroic, Hand-centered campaign, where they are also, of course, imperturbable and philosophy-spouting. After all, Hong Kong and American films are full of Shaolin heroes, so if the GM is willing to ease up on

the ethnic intolerance and tough-love morality of the Hand, then players can make use of the six new archetypes and three new Kung Fu paths available in *BotV*. Of course, if the Hand stay villains, players can always play renegade members of the sect, something that any cult as structured and unforgiving as the Hand is likely to create dozens of. In fact, the long and excellent adventure at the back of the book revolves around just such a Hand turncoat.

Besides the archetypes, Fu paths, and adventure, *BotV* also contains a chapter on the history of the Guiding Hand and another chapter on their philosophy. Since the Hand don't fight with horrible spells or fearsome cybernetic beasts, it is important to understand the Neo-Confucianism that drives these fanatic monks into battle with such horrors.

On the other hand, not everyone likes Neo-Confucianism. Many players crave a more old-time religion. Judaism, Christianity, Mohammedism, or even Vampirism. All are on display in *Jerusalem by Night: A City Sourcebook for Vampire: The Dark Ages* (White Wolf, 1999, \$17.95). It tells the tale of the fabled city of Jerusalem in the year 1197, with Islam back in control of the city, and the truce with the latest Crusaders now five years old.

The crown jewel of the book is the fourth and largest part, a rogue's gallery of all the vampires living in Jerusalem at the time of the game. World of Darkness supplements are notorious for packing more vampires into a location that you would believe it was possible for the humans there to overlook, but as a pilgrim city, Jerusalem's high vampire population makes more sense than that of most places. With such a huge and transient population, and without modern recordkeeping and communication, vampires can prey nearly at will and there is no one to notice.

And, of course, it is fascinating reading with all the histories and plots of the three dozen vampires presented in the center of the book. One of the great strengths of the World of Darkness background is the huge canvas on which it is written, so that despite the focus on one particular city, the histories presented in the vampires section take you everywhere in the world.

The book has its flaws. The maps included in the geography section are very general, useful for getting an idea of where everything is relative to everything else, but not for plotting actual encounters. Nor are there floor plans. For an exotic city in an unfamiliar part of the world, it would have been useful to have the layouts of some common dwellings and businesses. In that same vein, it would have been nice to have the statistics and write-ups for just some, everyday humans whom all these vampires might possibly interact with.

Not a perfect supplement, *Jerusalem by Night* scores big points by being an interesting background set in a very interesting city. All the vampire write-ups are great, and even if you have to go to a map store to get an actual street map, you will still be able to




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BOOKS

Continued from page 16

deserved. The truth—although publishers don't want to face it—is that such books come along only once every five or ten years. A book that can delight and involve us so intensely as young adults that we remember it years later—and can still enjoy it years later—is a very special treasure. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* is such a book.

I've been hearing about *Harry Potter* since last year, when the book came out in hardcover and became a phenomenon among preteen and teenage readers. Now with the book just coming out in paperback, one sequel already on the shelves, and a second about to hit, it seemed time to find out whether all the praise for *Harry* was justified.

J.K. Rowling's story begins when Harry is a baby. Harry is present when his parents, both wizards, are attacked by the evil wizard Voldemort. Voldemort kills Harry's parents, but he is unable to kill Harry. Voldemort then disappears, and the legend arises that baby Harry somehow defeated or banished Voldemort. With no parents, baby Harry is left to be raised by his aunt and uncle, who are "muggles" or nonwizards. The opening section of the book, in which Harry, now 10 years old, struggles to fit in with the muggles, is one of the most delightful. Harry doesn't know of his wizard heritage and so doesn't understand why odd things sometimes happen around him. After his aunt gives him a really bad hair cut, Harry's hair grows back overnight. When his aunt tries to make him wear an ugly hand-me-down sweater, the sweater shrinks and shrinks as she tries to pull it over his head until it's so small "it might have fitted a hand puppet, but certainly wouldn't fit Harry." His aunt and uncle don't approve of anything magical or imaginative, so Harry is constantly being sent to his room, a spider-infested cupboard below the stairs.

Only when Harry turns 11 does he finally learn the truth about his background, when he is invited to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The rest of the book takes us through Harry's first year at the school and his discovery of an evil plot coordinated by one of the professors.

There are two main qualities that make *Harry Potter* such a delight. First is the sparkling, witty writing, which makes the book a joy to read. Here is the opening sentence, in which the author introduces Harry's aunt and uncle: "Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold

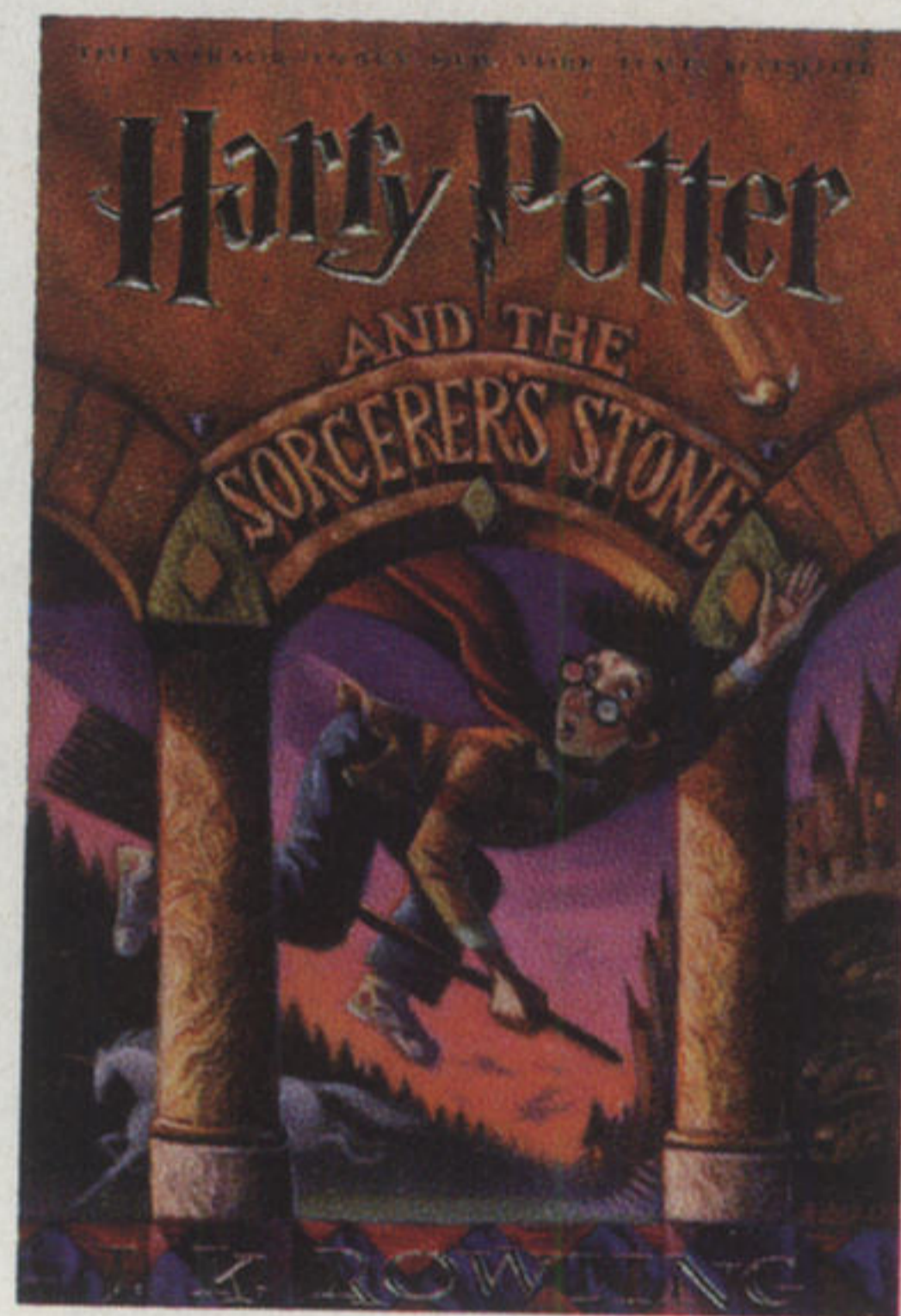
with such nonsense." The author speaks with such an appealing voice that we can't help but be drawn in.

The second great strength of *Harry Potter* is the incredible detail. The book is overflowing with fresh, funny, imaginative ideas and images. Harry's classmate Ron has a magic rat that sleeps constantly, waking up only long enough to defend Ron from danger before falling asleep again. A wizard's book contains a spell to give one's enemies jelly-legs. The magical sweet called Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans not only has chocolate and peppermint flavors, but also spinach and liver and even booger flavors. J.K. Rowling

piles on the delicious, delightful detail, weaving a magical story that mixes realistic, down-to-earth elements with fantastic ones in an irresistible combination.

Classics do only come along once every five or ten years, but J.K. Rowling's book is one, a treasure on a par with Roald Dahl's work that should be savored and shared, and one that can be enjoyed by readers young and old.

Jeanne Cavelos



Dragon Weather, by Lawrence Watt-Evans; Tor, New York; 400pp.; hardcover, \$25.95.

They say life isn't fair. They say it's hard and cruel and that your best bet is to muddle through it all, playing the safe cards. But what happens when Fate stacks the deck against you, then deals you a losing hand? According to Lawrence Watt-Evans's *Dragon Weather* you must *make* life fair by raging, fighting, and seeking justice and compensation from those who wronged you.

At the tender age of 11 Arlian witnesses the decimation of his entire village. Friends and family alike burn under dragon flame. While pinned under his grandfather's body and unable to move, drops of blood mixed with dragon's venom drip from his grandfather's skull into Arlian's mouth causing him to wretch and heave, unknowingly changing him forever. He will come to find out that he is now a dragonheart; long-lived and immune to disease, healing rapidly from injuries with little or no scarring. This accident will serve him well in the following painful years.

Hours pass and looters, intent on stealing from the dead, arrive and save the boy. Unfortunately, his salvation is short-lived as he's swiftly sold into the slave mines of Deep Delving.

Seven years pass. Seven years of darkness. Seven years of digging. And through an ironic twist of Fate, Arlian escapes the mines. He makes an oath to himself, swearing by all that he holds sacred, to find the men who made a profit from his life, hunt them down, and kill them. After which, he plans to go



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after the dragons that orphaned him. An ambitious enough scheme for a young man who has never been beyond the borders of his now ruined village, never seen a sword, much less hefted one.

Cold, hungry, and confused, Arlian is taken in by a ragtag band of women working in the House of Carnal Society. (Prostitute-slaves, really, their feet chopped off at the ankles so they can't run away. Truly, a grisly and torturous method of keeping such slaves from wandering off!) Through the frosty winter these sweet women teach this young man how the world works and what will be expected of him. They show him how to dress properly and behave like a lord so that he may move about freely and get close to those he's spent a lifetime hating.

Arlian works his way up the societal ladder of Manfort (the main hub of human society in Watt-Evans's wonderful world), eventually meeting his foes, the looting lords, on level ground. Seeking to satiate his need for

justice, Arlian discovers that there is much more at stake than a single boy's need for vengeance. Why had the dragons attacked his little village? How had the looters arrived mere hours after the attack when the closest town is more than a day's ride away? Who is the mysterious leader of the looters who calls himself Lord Dragon? And how is he controlling the Duke of Manfort. What is their connection to the House of Carnal Society? Now that he is a dragonheart, does this mean he is tainted somehow and may lose his humanity? Each answer raises more questions, and every question drives Arlian's desire for justice deeper and deeper, focusing it into a sharp obsession.

A thoroughly entertaining read from page one, *Dragon Weather* is fast-paced and action-packed. Lawrence Watt-Evans delivers a world brimming over with magic and mystery, duels and danger. And the best part is: The end is only the beginning.

Brian Murphy

BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

The *Sorcerer's Gun* (Book Two of the *Changeling Saga*), by Peter Garrison, Ace trade paperback, \$13.00. The "Growler," The Pale Man, two worlds, one war ... Fantasy

fiction both elemental and pure. Author Peter Garrison unfolds the saga of the Castle, a mazelike world about to be breached by a group of determined humans. Little can they imagine the evil that awaits them.

Rhapsody, by Elizabeth Haydon, Tor Books hardcover, \$27.95. A wonderful debut for author Elizabeth Haydon. A sensory experience combined with bold adventure and witty dialogue. This epic fantasy is a book both strong and eloquent, a tale crafted by a writer with a gift for language and character.

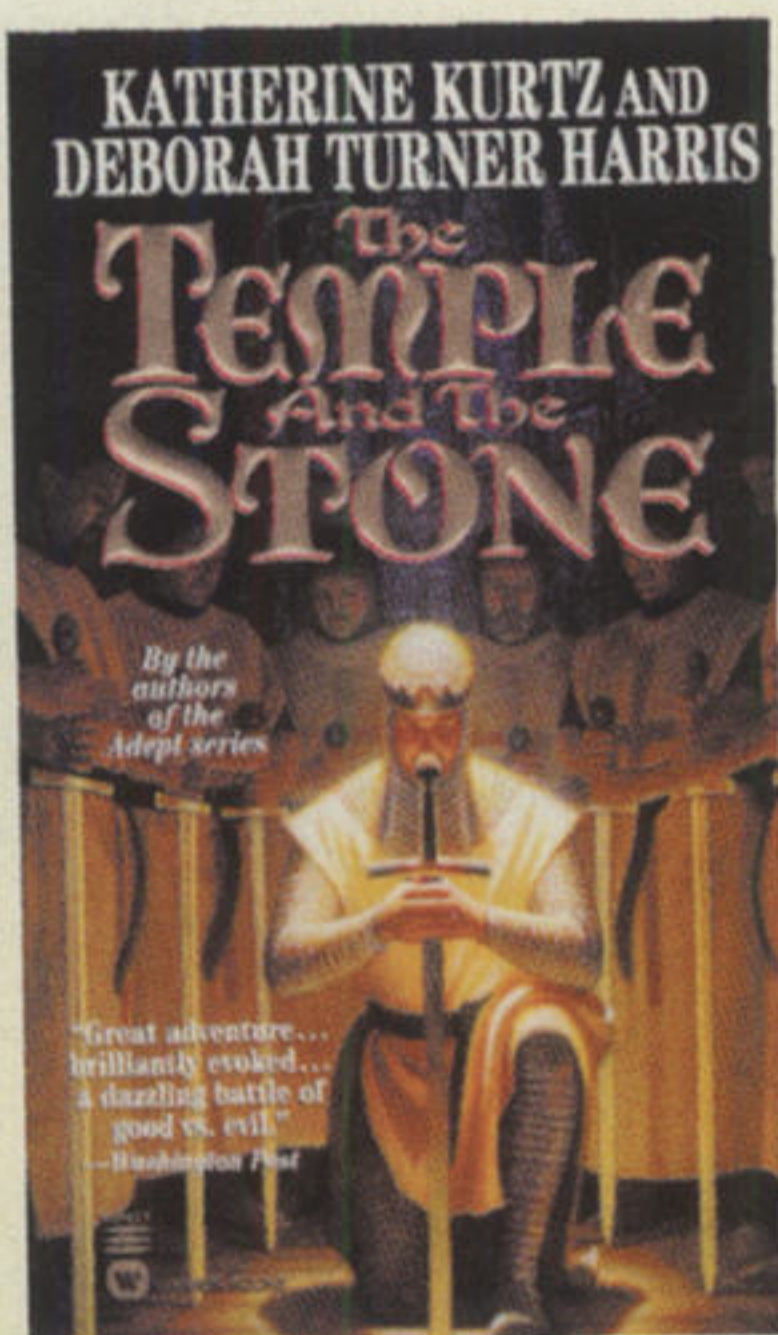
The Death of the Necromancer, by Martha Wells, Avon Eos paperback, \$6.99. C.J. Cherryh calls Martha Wells "one of the best new writers the field has to offer." A passionate thief of jewels named Nicholas Valiarde, vengeance, and equal parts decadence and elegance make up this stunning new tale by the author of *The Element of Fire* and *The City of Bones*. Missing children, corpses come to life, magical spells, and "traces of necromantic power" are found. Nicholas encounters unimaginable peril and awesome evil on his quest to avenge the death of his beloved godfather. Will this nobleman/jewel thief and his compatriots succeed in destroying Count Montesq, or

will an ever-present and pervasive force destroy their very souls?

The Temple and the Stone, by Katherine Kurtz and Deborah Turner Harris, Warner Aspect paperback, \$6.99. An acclaimed new

novel of the Knights Templar. These warrior priests of medieval times are legendary. Come to 13th-century Scotland for an astounding tale of a world at war. Frere Arnault de Saint Clair and a band of fellow Templars are led by mystic visions to enter the Highland insurrection. The uncrowned king, William Wallace, and his destiny are at stake. Legend holds that the Templars had occult power that guided the course of history.

The Stone Wars, by Madeline E. Robins, Tor Books hardcover, \$23.95. Author Delia Sherman calls this book "a dark and beautifully written valentine to New York City...held together by a thread of human decency and hope." Born and raised in the City of New York, the author combines striking energy and imagery with a unique fantasy tale. This is the story of John Tietjan and a handful of beleaguered survivors who must struggle to cope with a city that has been destroyed by a series of mysterious attacks. Starvation, alienation from the outside world, and violent gangs are the dangers this group encounters. A gritty, fascinating tale of Manhattan gone askew. An urban fantasy that will surely impress readers of fantasy fiction who think they have "read it all." ♣



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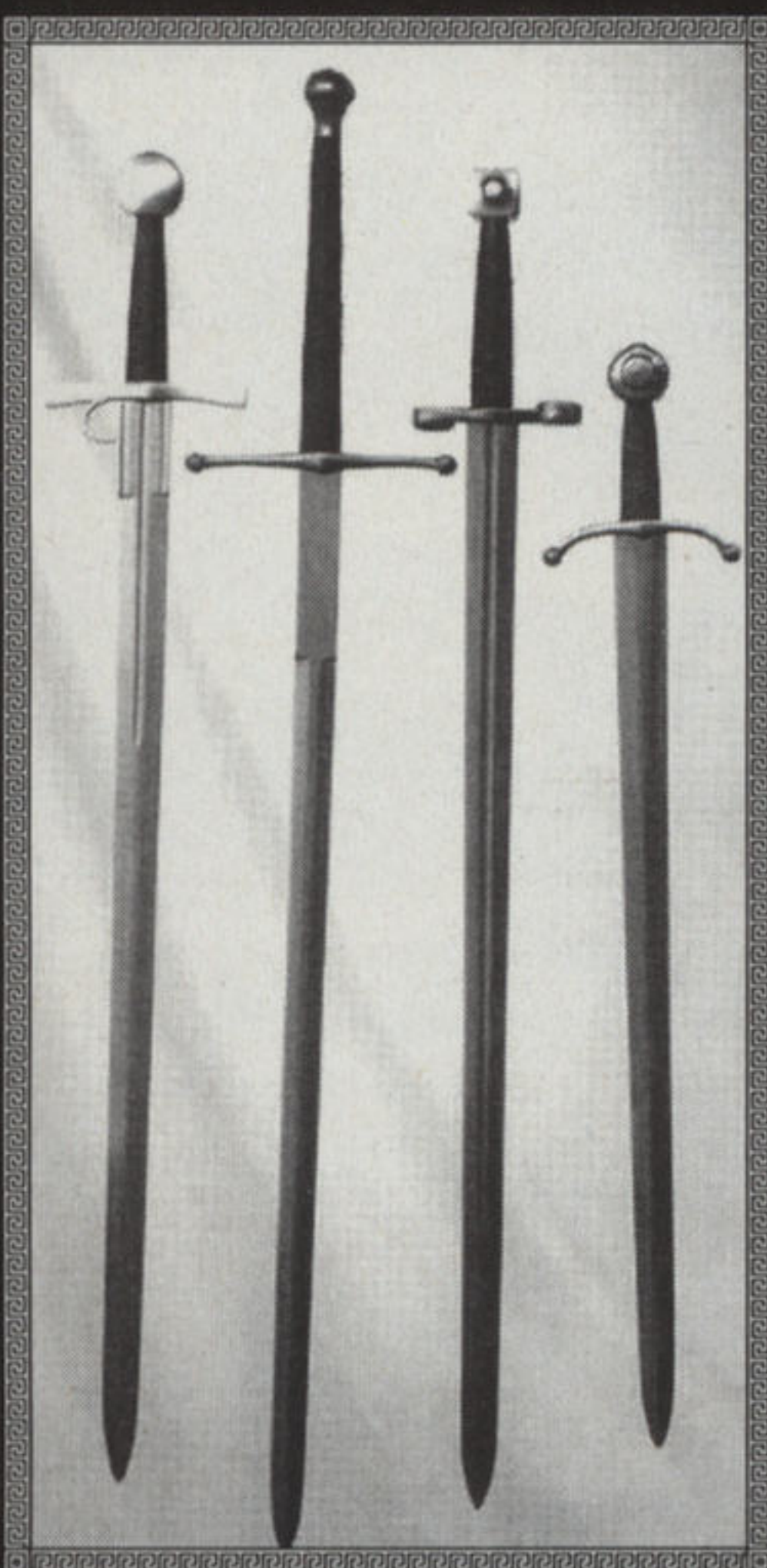
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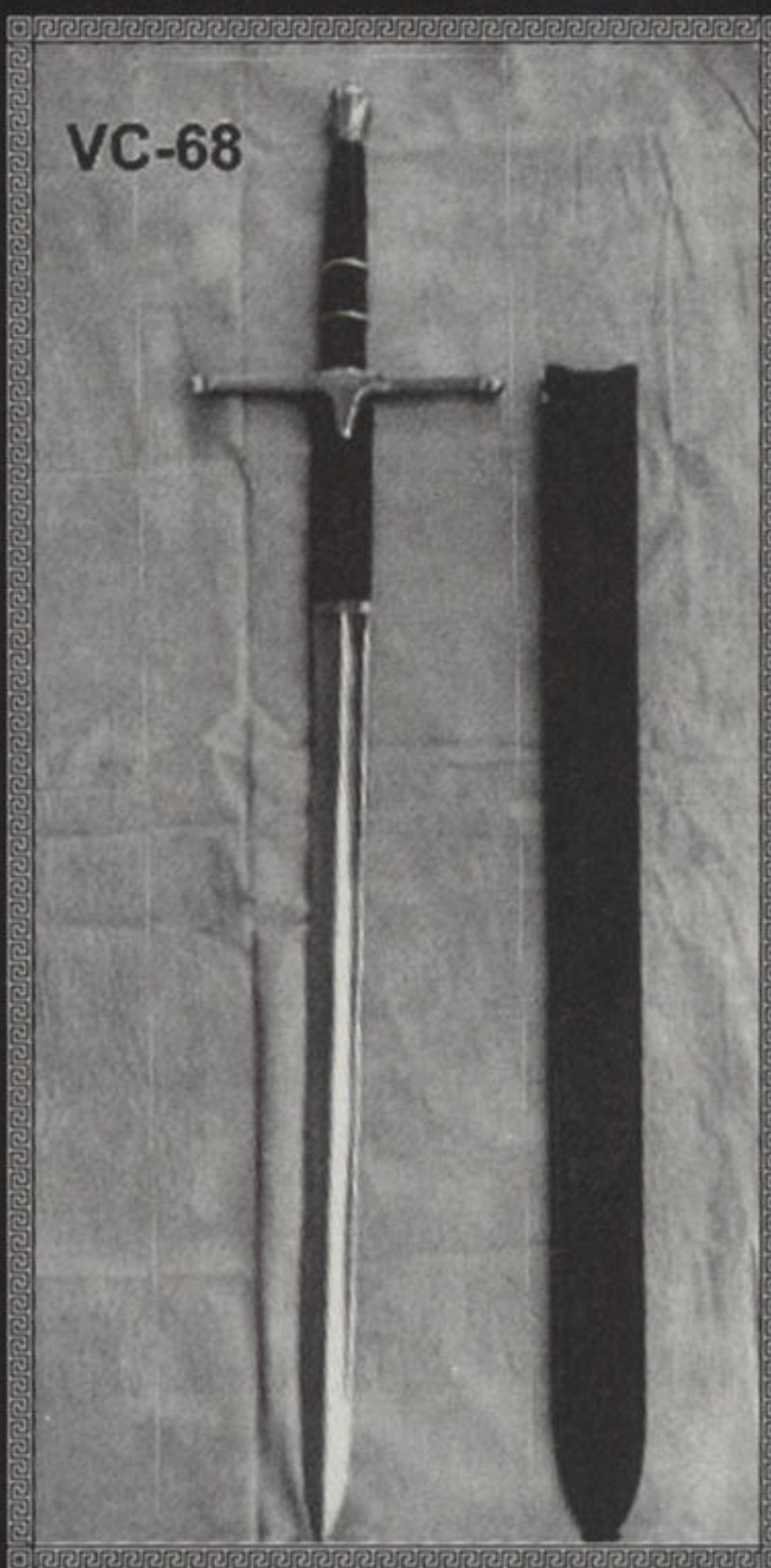
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FOLKROOTS

Continued from page 26

'80s—and were young at that time, writing for an audience that was equally youthful. This is reflected by the number of stories that have focused on coming-of-age material as opposed to older rites of passage. "Now my generation," Ellen Kushner has noted (interviewed in *Locus* magazine), "we're all hitting late-thirties to mid-forties. Our concerns are different. If we stick to fantasy, what are we going to do? Traditionally, there's been the coming-of-age [novel] and the quest which is the finding of self. We're past the early stages of that. I can't wait to see what people do with the issues of middle age in fantasy. Does fantasy demand that you stay in your adolescence forever? I don't think so. Tolkien is not juvenile. It's a book about losing things you loved, which is a very middle-aged concern. Frodo's quest is a middle-aged man's quest, to lose something and to give something up, which is what you start to realize in your thirties is going to happen to you. Part of the rest of your life is learning to give things up."

In traditional rites of passage tales, it is often our whole identity and our whole way of life we must learn to give up in order to make it out of the woods, and to knit flesh and bone back together. Like Ellen, I look forward to reading these "middle-aged" tales as the Fantasy genre matures—for the dark roads don't get less perilous, nor do they get less interesting. And when we survive them, we return from the west with new seeds, and new stories to tell.

"Literature exists at every level of experience," writes Alan Garner. "It is inclusive, not exclusive. It embraces; it does not reduce, however simply it is expressed."

Recommended reading (in addition to the books listed above): *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell; *Myths of Life and Death* by C.A. Burland; *Crossing to Avalon: A Woman's Mid-life Pilgrimage* by Jean Shinoda Bolen; *Alchemy* by Marie-Louise von Franz; *Shaman: the Wounded Healer* by Joan Halifax; *Daughters of the Earth: The Lives and Legends of American Indian Women* by Carolyn Neithammer; *Voices of the First Day: Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime* by Robert Lawlor. Previous Folkroots columns can be found on the Endicott Studio Web site: www.endicott-studio.com

I'd like to say thank you to my colleagues (and friends) Heinz Insu Fenkl, Midori Snyder, and Joe Monti—Heinz, for his terrific contributions to Folkroots over the last several issues, Midori Snyder for her insightful "Sleeping Beauty" essay in the last issue, and Joe for his lively interview of mythic fiction writer Charles de Lint. I'd also like to let readers know that Heinz and I will be sharing the Folkroots column henceforth, alternating from issue to issue. I hope you're all as intrigued as I am to see what he'll come up with next.—T.W.

WITCH'S CHILD

Continued from page 69

fying place. No one but she knew what it was like to go from a small, safe room to an infinity of space. The witch had ruined her; she could never live as other people did. She began to cry. The children cried louder.

"Don't," Stefan said. "Please don't."

"Go away," she said. "Go away."

They did not speak again that night. Stefan put together a supper but she was too miserable to eat anything. After the children fell asleep they went to bed and lay together uncomfortably. She woke stiff and sore; she had stayed in one position all night, not wanting to touch her husband. Stefan was already gone. One of the children cried, wanting to be fed.

She got up heavily, remembering every detail of their argument last night. She fed the children and cleaned the dishes from the night before; she had learned these few chores, at least. Then she sat back on the bed and looked out the window, as she had done so many times in her tower.

The witch had ruined her, that was all there was to it. Even if other people were happy—and she doubted it—she could never be one of them, could never look at anything without seeing misery and failure. This was her legacy from the witch, her only legacy; it was too late for her to learn differently. She would leave Stefan and the children, she would go somewhere where her bitterness and disappointment would not infect anyone else.

The girl began to cry. She picked her up and said softly, "I am going away."

The girl's cries diminished; perhaps she liked hearing her mother's voice. Encouraged, Rapunzel went on. "I have to go away. If I stay here you'll only become like me, the way I became like the witch, the way the witch is probably like *her* mother. You see, I grew up in a tower, a tall tower. The witch kept me in the tower as if in prison. I could not leave. When the witch wanted to see me she would call out, 'Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair.'"

Some movement of the child at her breast made her glance down. One of the brambles she had wound around herself had put forth a few buds and leaves. She was so startled she nearly stopped talking, but something within her forced her to go on. And the child had put out a hand to play with one of the flowers, and her crying had slowed.

"I let down my hair," she said. Suddenly Rapunzel remembered something else the witch had given her: her stories, the long days and nights of stories. The witch was a storyteller. And she—she was a storyteller too. "And the witch climbed up."

The child stirred again. More flowers had bloomed among the dead brambles and thorns. They grew quickly, a riot of smells and colors.

The crying stopped. "And then one day your father heard her," Rapunzel said, continuing the story of her life, the story she would never end. ♣

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Owings Mills, Maryland – The International Library of Poetry has just announced that \$48,000.00 in prizes will be awarded over the next 12 months in the brand new North American Open Amateur Poetry Contest. The contest is open to everyone and entry is free.

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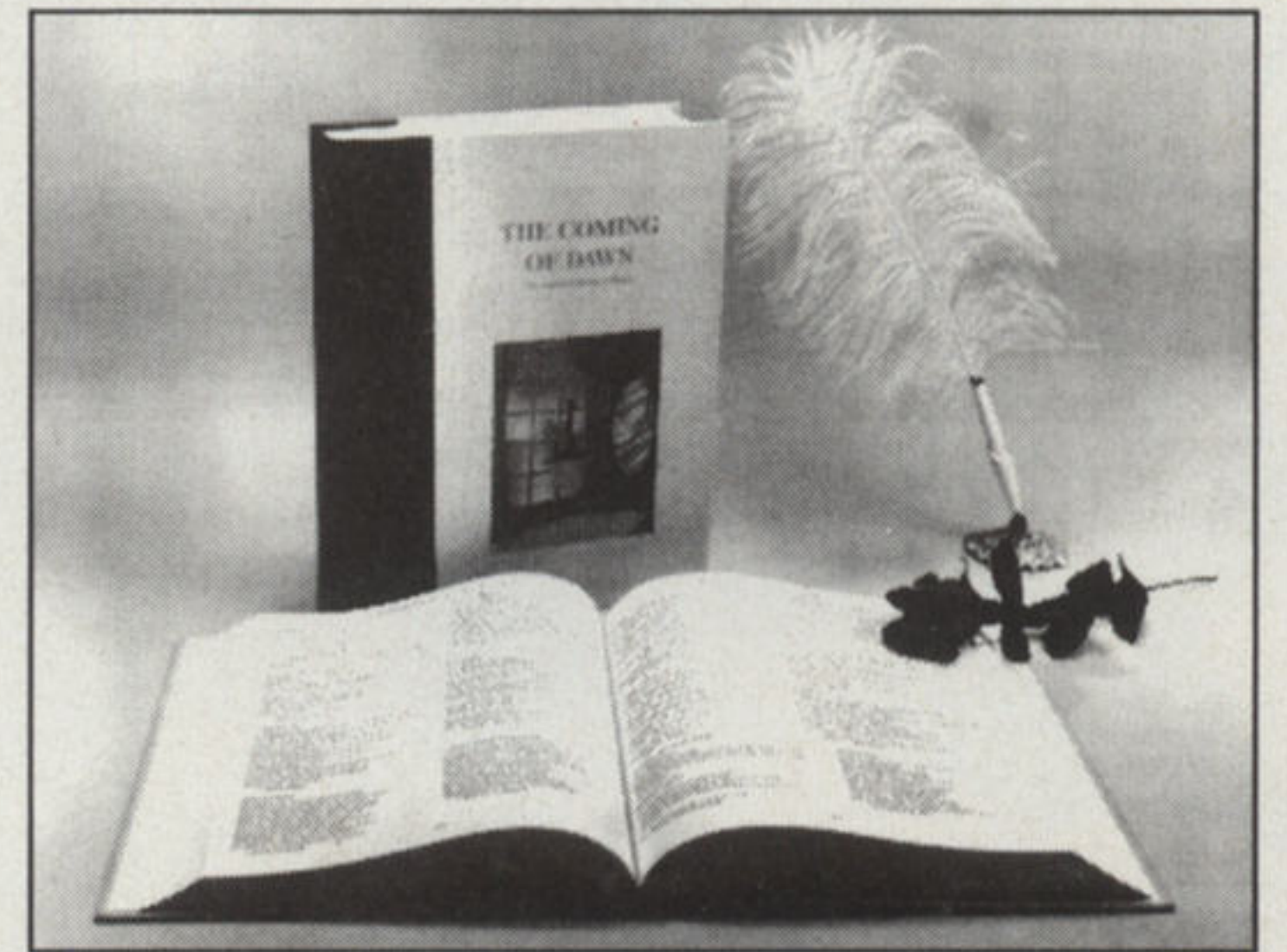
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The poem should be no more than 20 lines, and the poet's name and address must appear on the top of the page. "All poets who enter will receive a response concerning their artistry, usually within seven weeks," indicated Mr. Ely.



The International Library of Poetry publishes the work of amateur poets in colorful hardbound anthologies like *The Coming of Dawn*, pictured above. Each volume features poetry by a diverse mix of poets from all over the world.

Possible Publication

Many submitted poems will also be considered for inclusion in one of The International Library of Poetry's forthcoming hardbound anthologies. Previous anthologies published by the organization have included *On the Threshold of a Dream*, *Days of Future's Past*, *Of Diamonds and Rust*, and *Moments More to Go*, among others.

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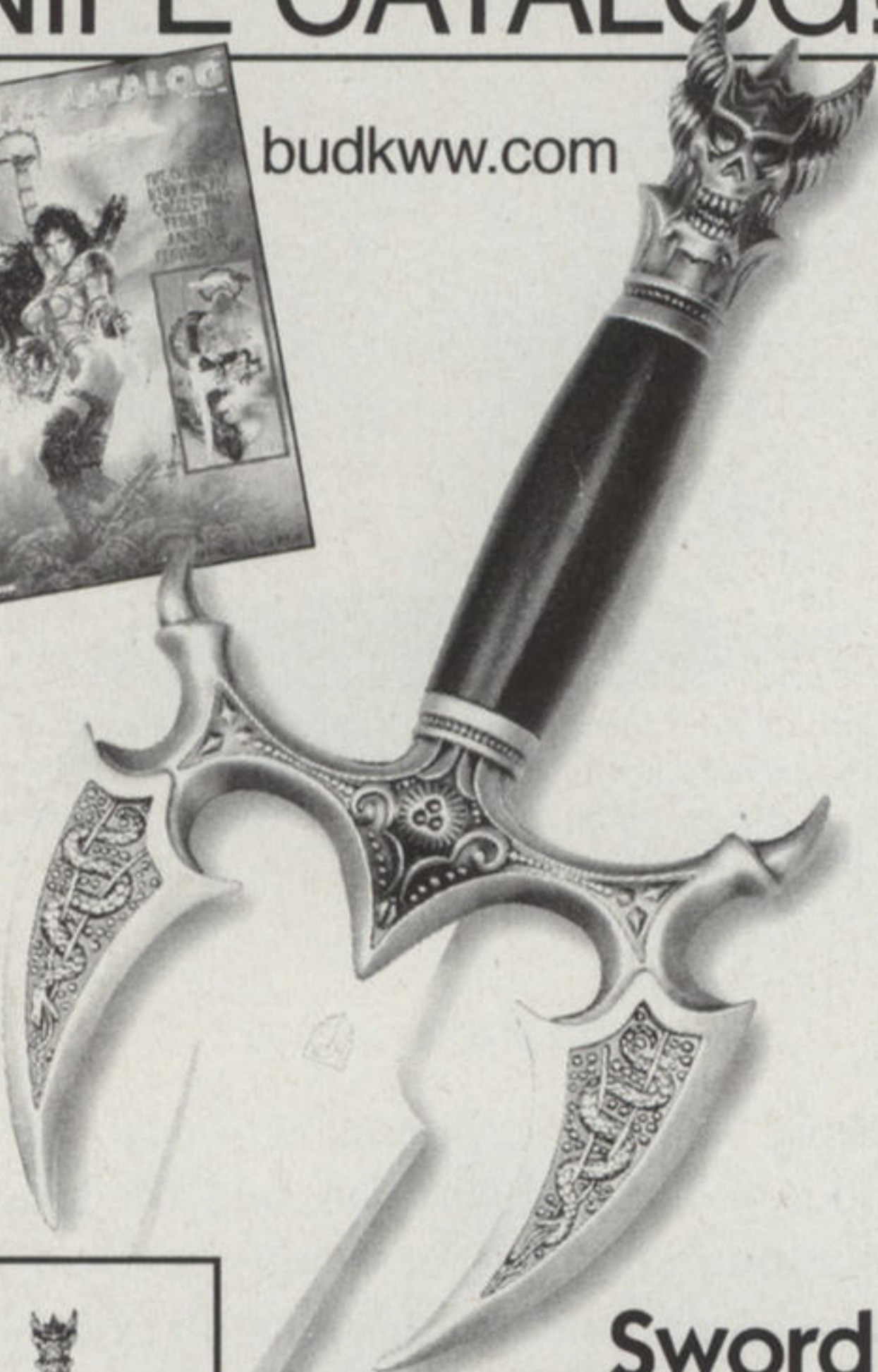
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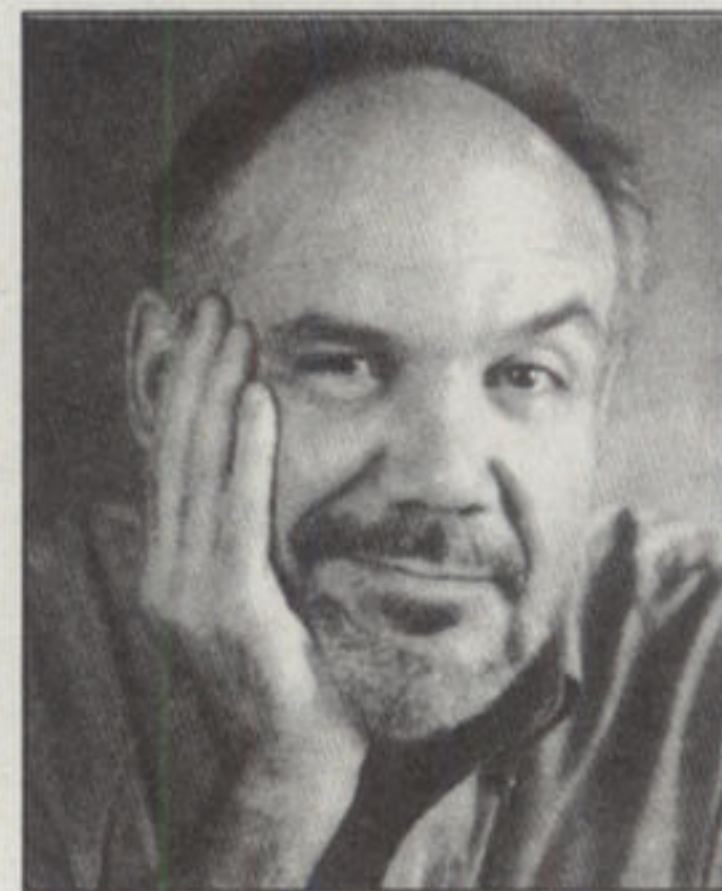
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BROECK STEADMAN is in the process of reinventing himself as an artist. His new medium is the computer and he is wild about the results. Steadman has recently ventured from his young adult cover series to more adult enterprises. *Playboy* magazine has published four of his slick editorial pieces and he has also just produced a second *Heavy Metal* cover. He is looking for someone who thinks the cover is as cool as he does. The artwork creates a chrome-machine world that evolved from photographs of broken toys and dismantled machines, including pieces of his wife's sewing machine and the Steadman television set. Broeck is currently at work on black and white interiors for *Analog* magazine and Hardy Boy cover art for Simon and Shuster.

MARY O'KEEFE YOUNG graduated from Parsons School of Design in New York City in 1982. Mary tries to create a magical quality with her watercolors by using dramatic light. Capturing the beauty of human expression is of prime importance in her work. A love of the natural world and art history is also evident in her artwork. Mary's studio is in her home in White Plains, NY.

JOEL NAPRSTECK teaches painting at "The Joe Kubert School of Graphic Art." He has worked as a free-lance illustrator for a number of years. His artwork has been published in *Science Fiction Age*, and he has recently completed two covers for DC Comics, "Batman," and "Superman." Joel has been concentrating on "pulp art," art with the lurid air and hard-boiled detail of a '30's pulp fiction jacket. He resides in Morris Plains, New Jersey.

BRUCE COVILLE's first book, "The Foolish Giant" was illustrated by his wife, Katherine. The Covilles have collaborated on a number of books, including "Sarah's Unicorn," "Space Brat," and "Goblins in the Castle." Before becoming a writer, Bruce worked as a toymaker, gravedigger, cookware salesman and on an assembly line. He eventually became an elementary school teacher. He left teaching in 1981 to become a full time writer - though it took another five years for him to achieve that goal. Bruce has published 67 books, with 20



Bruce Coville



Joel Naprstek

more under contract.

LISA GOLDSTEIN lives in a ninety year old house in Oakland, California with her husband and dog, Spark. Her latest book, "Dark Cities Underground," is just out (June '99) from Tor. It is about subway systems and children's books and Egyptian gods and Victorian grave robbers.

KAGE BAKER is best known for her Company stories (the unofficial history of Dr. Zeus Incorporated, 24th century developer of time travel and immortality), her novel "In the Garden of Eden," and its sequel "Sky Coyote." The third volume in the Company series, "Mendoza in Hollywood," is set for release in 2000. Showtime Entertainment has optioned all eight projected books of the Company series. She was a finalist for the John W. Campbell Best New Writer Award. Kage was born in Hollywood to a very large family and began writing at the age of nine.

F. PAUL WILSON is the award-winning, best-selling author of more than 20 novels and dozens of short stories. Over five million copies of his books are in print in the U.S. and his work has been translated into 24 foreign languages. He writes for the stage, screen and interactive media as well. Most recently he brought back his popular Repairman Jack character in the novels "Legacies" (1998) and "Conspiracies" (1999). Currently he resides at the Jersey Shore with his wife Mary, where he is working on a new Repairman Jack novel and haunting eBay for weird clocks and Daddy Warbucks memorabilia. (He can also be found on the Web at <http://www.repairmanjack.com>).

BRUCE GLASSCO is a Clarion graduate. This marks his second appearance in "Realms." He has stories in the Datlow/Windling anthologies "Black Swan, White Raven" and "Sirens and Other Daemon Lovers." He has also published poetry in "Weird Tales." He has a Ph.D in 19th century literature, writing about folks who hung out with Walter Scott, and he teaches at a community college in a part of Virginia so remote it does not show up on many maps. He has just acquired an instant family, and is finding that it's so cool that he realizes he should have done it years ago. 🐾



Kage Baker



Bruce Glassco

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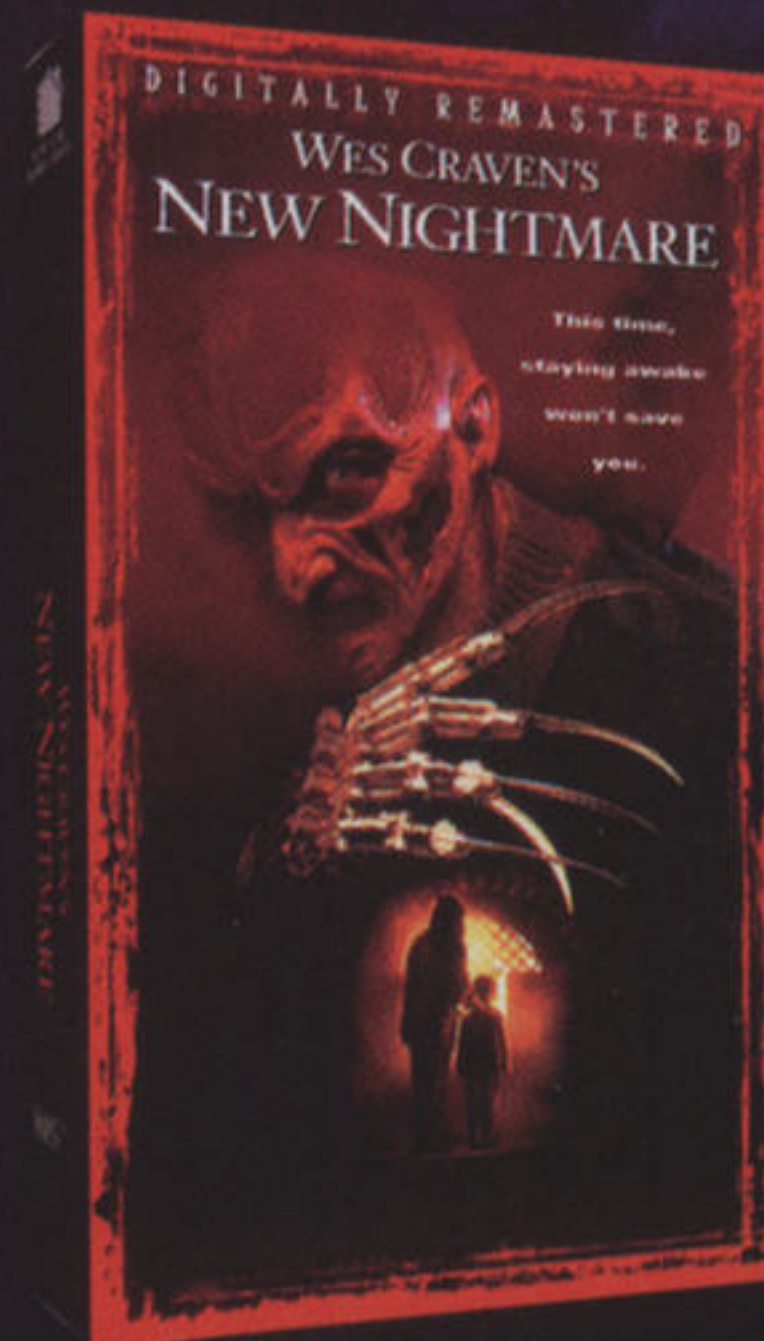
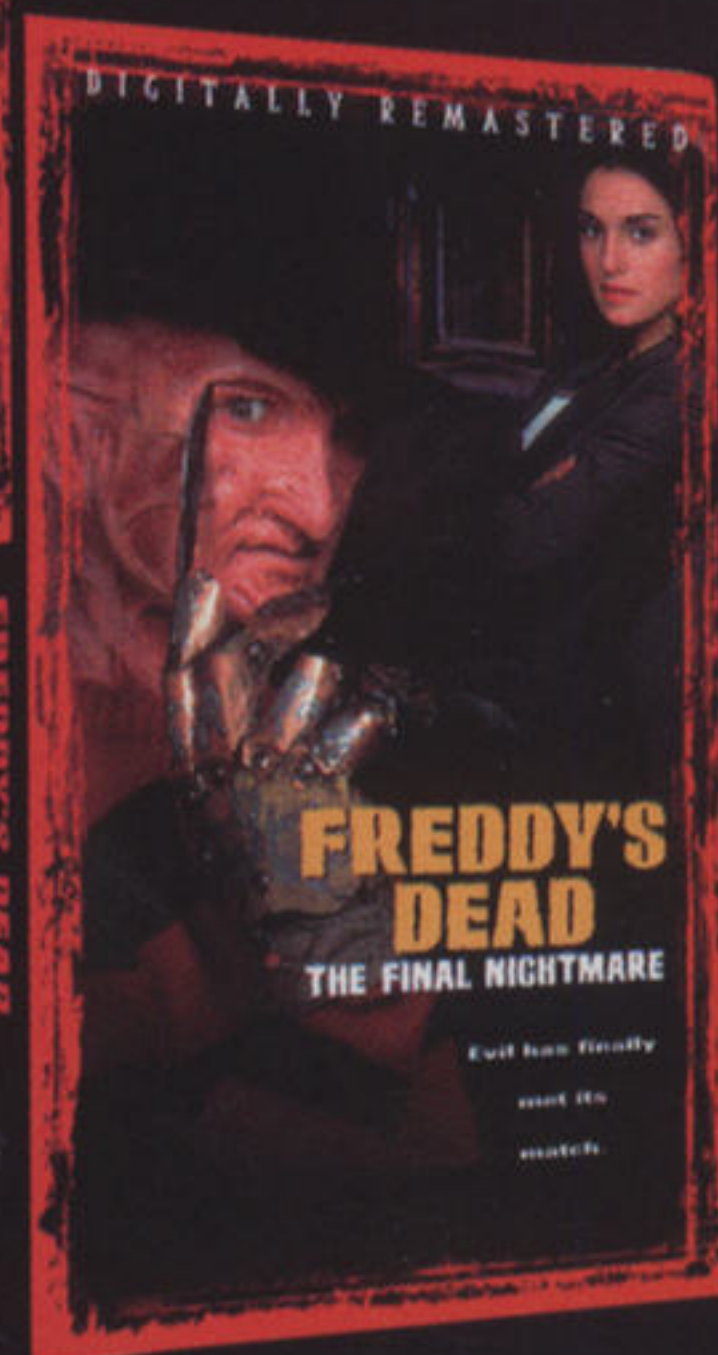
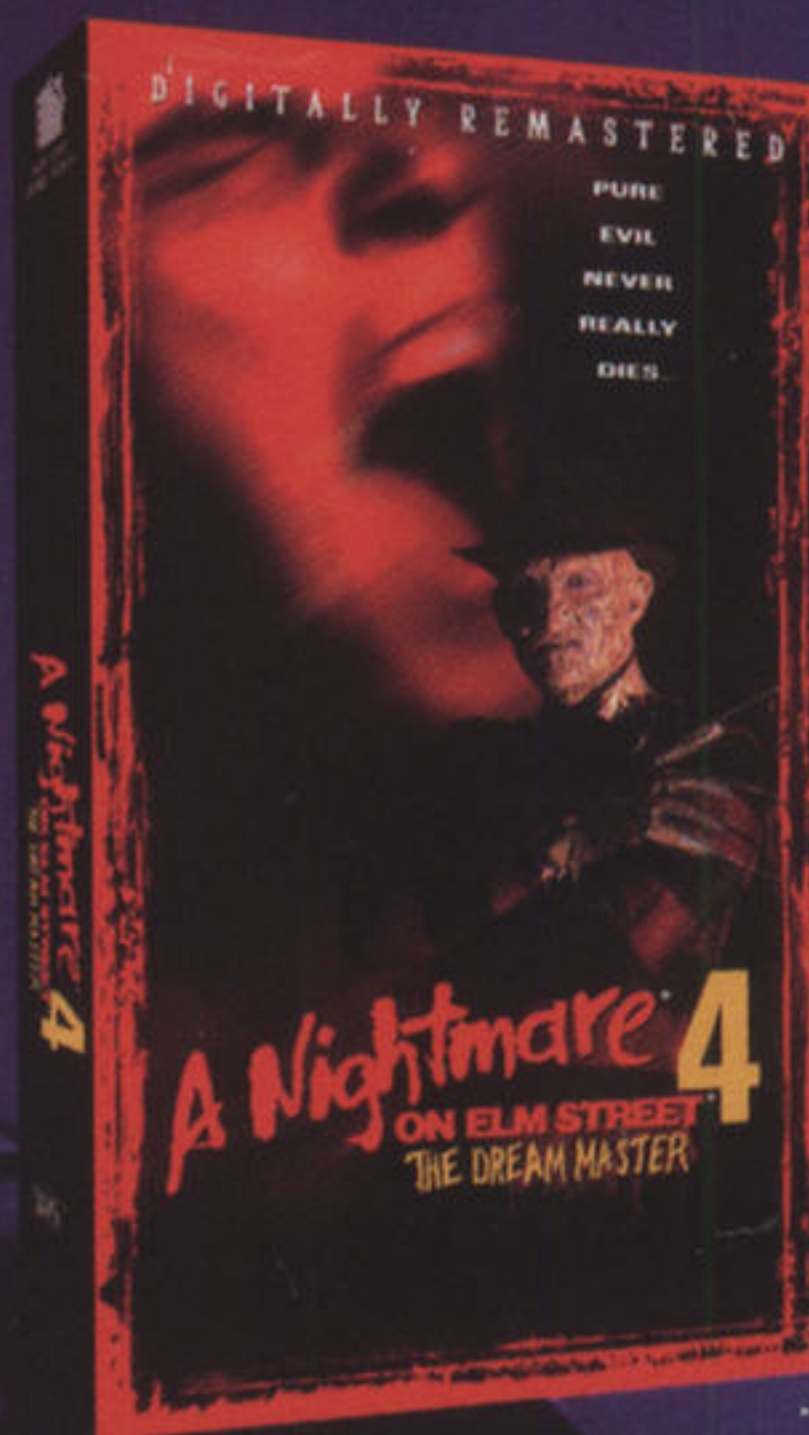
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