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REALMS OF FANTASY

Return
of the
Sun Gods

By Kate Orman

TERRI WINDLING

Legend of Snow White

Sorceress & the Swordmaster

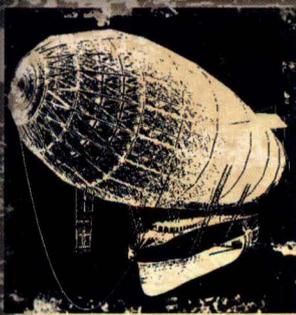
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REALMS OF FANTASY

ABOVE: Barry Windsor-Smith talks to *Realms of Fantasy* in our Gallery, starting on page 68.

COVER: Merlin and Arthur illustration © Scott Gustafson, 1998. For information about limited edition prints, please call The Greenwich Workshop at (800) 243-4246 or online at www.greenwichworkshop.com

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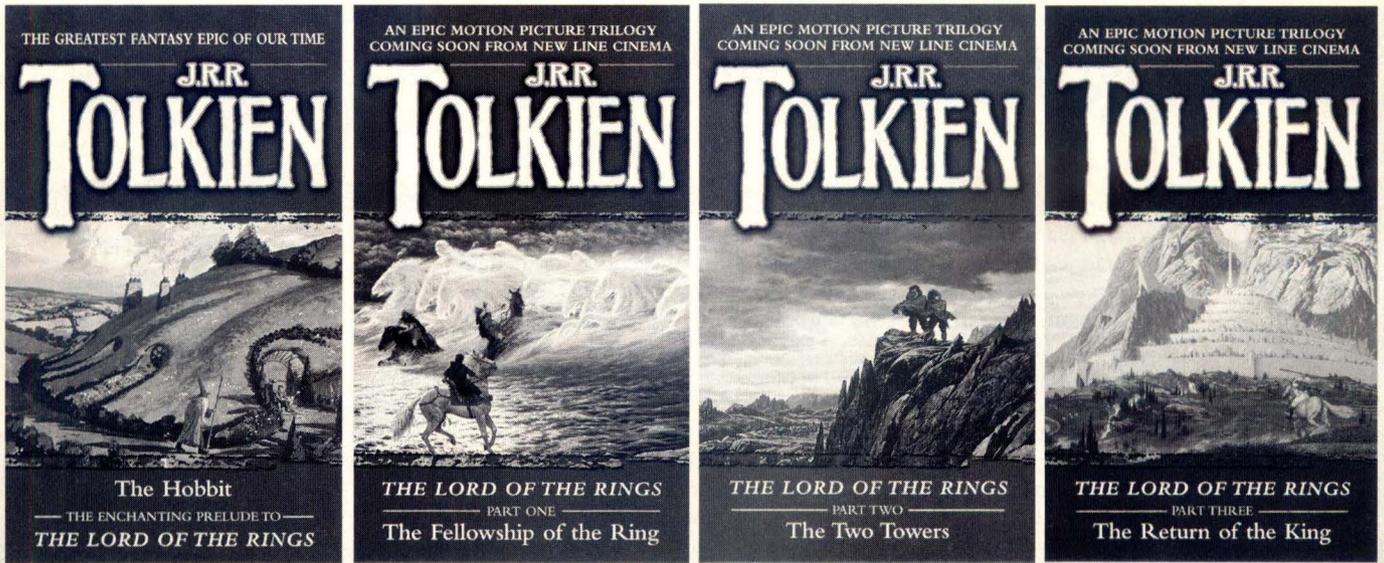
I'll be back in a minute to write this blurb—I have to go check on the kids...

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By David Phalen

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Putting the Magic Back into Life (and taking the science out?)

BEFORE I GET TO THIS ISSUE'S Guest Editorial, I want to wish a fond and sad farewell to our sister publication, *Science Fiction Age*. Scott Edelman was a fine editor and he ran one of the field's most respected publications. However, as readers more and more choose Fantasy over SF, the magazine could not garner enough readership to stay afloat. The following Guest Editorial notwithstanding, I think that long-time readers of this magazine know I've always felt strongly that there should be a place for both science and wonder in our lives, and I mourn the passing of one of the few remaining outlets for short SF.

And now on to this issue's runner-up, Mary Helen of Iowa. I find our society's current interest in alternative healing a fascinating turn of events, but until reading this essay, I never thought to connect it with our field. Thank you, Mary, for your thought-provoking contribution.

PUTTING THE MAGIC BACK INTO LIFE

Working from the Native American healing traditions, I practice "magic" on a daily basis. What I find most disturbing, when teaching and lecturing about Native and aboriginal cultures' healing traditions, is the skepticism of the present-day public. Where has the magic gone? Why is it so very difficult to believe? Why did we enthusiastically applaud for Tinkerbell, adult and child alike believing in Fairies, and now clap with our children because we want so desperately to believe? And yet, today, we don't.

My thought is, it began somewhere around the time of the discovery of penicillin and the invention of aspirin. The medical profession (including the first pharmaceutical companies!), invested themselves in this new "wonder drug" penicillin and this little white tablet, aspirin. They oo'd and ah'd, informed, educated, cajoled, coaxed, prodded, ridiculed, brow-beat, and ordered their patients attempting to get them to "buy into" health achieved by injection and pill. No magic—Science.

Now, every living being at that point in time had worn a wool sock smeared with Grandma's goop for a sore throat and had repeated her recitation of her favorite incantation: "Aches and pains, rash and cold, leave my granddaughter well and whole!" Everyone had taken Mom's Bitter Herb concoction for diarrhea along with stuffing two

potatoes in a sock placed carefully under the bed for three days. Each person who had ever suffered with an aching tooth had chewed on Doc's Wonder Bark to relieve the pain while carrying a piece of copper in his/her pocket to draw away the infection. And all of them had experienced some, if not total, recovery by these tried-and-true home-spun methods.

It wasn't enough to apply the goop, swallow the concoction, or chew the bark. Without the incantation, without the herbs being gathered at the proper Full-Moon time, without placing the potatoes under the bed, without carrying copper in the pocket, each subscriber and participant *knew* the remedy was only half administered and doomed from the onset. How, possibly, could health be restored without the Magic?

Where I find myself, educator and alternative healer, linked to the genre of Fantasy, is right at the heart. What I see being shared, brought back into the reader's arena of believability, is that ephemeral, that filmy, slippery, shape-shifting "something" that turns chaos into primordial creative-goo, turns wants and heart-desires into thought-forms, then material objects, turns will and intent into *life*. Raw, intense, messy, marvelously exuberant five-full-senses *life*.

May I never hear another person of any age say again, "I'm bored." Today should be filled with wonder. No moment should be lost. Yet, without magic in our culture's realm of believability, creativity suffers and boredom becomes the human cry.

It is here, in the Fantasy realm, where we once again can feel the chill from the Great Void. We can fire our intent as a lightning bolt into that Void and watch as dragons and sorcerers, shamans and oracles, jesters and fools, come parading out into the light of day to amuse, instruct, assuage, exemplify, and justify. And all the time, our lives are gaining in richness. The very texture of our daily lives enhanced, we become bolder creators of our own Life.

This, then, I see as the assignment of each Fantasy writer: to bring magic back to the human condition; expand the heart's borders of believability to hold such magic; and inspire the very tools of Creativity: the sword that will disembowel Boredom, the stone that will offer vision of kingdoms rife with adventure, and the crystal wand that will ignite heroism fresh and new, fighting the good fight for generations to come. ♣

REALMS OF FANTASY

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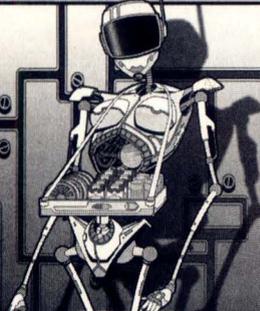
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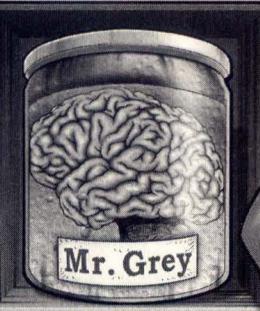


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CORNER

Dear Heinz and Shawna McCarthy,

Just to let you know that I found the February 2000 issue of *Realms of Fantasy* to be a very fascinating issue. I was completely consumed by the article entitled "Abduction and Ascension—Two Sides of the Same Coin?" I have always felt that the "grays," "angels," and even "elves" were stories that fell into one category. With elves, leprechauns, gnomes, or any other kind of "little people," they have been known to put humans to sleep. Humans awaken and find strange things happening to them, that seem close to what is called an "Oz Effect" made known by UFO abductees. There are many similarities with angels and grays. But, if we were to open up the Bible, we find stories on how this flaming, flying object followed Moses around and assisted Moses in the opening of the Red Sea. The mentioning of the burning bush—could this have been a UFO parked near a bush that made it look like it was burning? I could go on and on with this. But, it is easier to tell your readers to look at the trees and they will see the whole forest. Seek out the truth and ye shall find the truth (something my dad used to say to me ... uh ... heh). Please keep up the good work with your high-quality magazine—it is the best.

Sincerely,
Paul Dale Roberts
Elk Grove, CA

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I have just picked up the February issue of *Realms*, and "yes," I am one of the sorry slackers that didn't submit to your Editorial contest. I did, however, want to thank you for the winning entry placed in your column. Scott P. Fleming's "Jail Break" is an eye opener. I have been reading Fantasy for years, but I don't think I've ever realized how much I appreciated the stories I read and the freedom in which I can do so. So thank you Scott Fleming—it has been a pleasure.

Heather Brown
Calagary, AB

Dear Marty Baumann,

After reading your article on vampire movies in the April 2000 issue, I wanted to point out a few movies not mentioned therein—if I may? One of them, *Love at First Bite* (1977), depicts Dracula as a fun-loving, sophisticated man with his own wants and desires, chief among them female companionship. You also did not mention *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1995), in which a few of the kids in her high school become vampires through no fault of their own. If anything, present-day vampires are slowly, but surely, depicting vampires as sympathetic charac-

ters, such as the WB series *Angel*. In a few years, I predict, there will be more movies out there with positive images of vampires, an antithesis to *John Carpenter's Vampires*, or *Blade*. The moviegoing audiences will demand it.

Yours Truly,
Edyth L. McNair

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I've been a huge fan of *RoF* since the first issue I picked up at Barnes and Noble back in December of 1994. This is a top-notch magazine with information on all the fields of Fantasy I am interested in. The main feature being, of course, the marvelous short stories—some of which have struck me as among the greatest I have read ... as well as the coverage of books, movies, and games. I confess I even look forward to the ads, being a big collector of Fantasy paraphernalia. I especially look forward to the Franklin Mint ads to see what neat items they will come up with next. The magazine truly has everything a Fantasy fan could want—everything but a Web site!

Over the years, my involvement with the Internet has grown. With this involvement, my interest in discovering new Fantasy-related sites that are pleasing to look at and full of information. There are getting to be so many sites out there—I would love it if your magazine had a section that might screen these sites and point out the good ones, why they are good, and what they have to offer.

Hopefully, this idea flies, as it would be another industry first for *RoF*. I don't know how many readers out there are like myself, but if there are more than a few...?

In conclusion, though I have praised your advertising section—I do want to mention that I question the "Fantasy" relation of the ads on "Gorgeous Asian Women," "Men's Conversation Line," and "Russian Ladies..." I guess they are helping to pay for some of my favorite sections.

Colin Poole

Dear Mr. Poole,

Your idea for a Web site review section is quite interesting ... Any readers out there in agreement?

Dear Shawna,

I am writing in response to a letter from Judith Estes in your April 2000 issue of *Realms of Fantasy*. I think the parents in her middle school are right! Reading books about Harry Potter could encourage children in things like teamwork, thinking things through, and working together to accomplish something important. Worse! It could lead to reading books like Tolkien's *Hobbit*.

And that could lead to even worse things. Like reading *The Lord of the Rings*. In those books, they would learn about dreadful things like honor, sacrifice, overcoming prejudice, and the struggle to triumph over evil. Obviously children are much better off watching senseless violence on television. Oh, I am sorry, did I drip sarcasm on you? Seriously, as a librarian, I sincerely hope that Harry Potter books are never celebrated during banned books week.

Judy Schneider
Baltimore, MD

Dear *Realms*,

Please bring back the biography page at the end of the magazine! I love reading up on my favorite writers and artists, etc. It is always fascinating to hear an author's thoughts on their work—as well as encouraging to discover that many have not yet "quit" their day jobs.

Sincerely,
Trey Carson
Boca Raton, FLA

To all who wrote to us expressing this same concern ... we have not discontinued the Contributor's Column—it just "went missing" last issue.

Dear Shawna,

Your April 2000 issue of *Realms* was possibly the best collection of fiction to date! "The Dead Boy at Your Window" by Bruce Holland Rogers was eloquent, chilling, and effective for a story so brief. Tanith Lee's tale was true "story-telling" at its best, as usual. Those two were my favorites, but the other three were superb as well. Thank you for continuing to provide us with such incredible and unusual Fantasy-fiction.

Jared Lee

Dear Shawna,

I really enjoy reading *Realms of Fantasy*. I started collecting them from the onset. The first thing that caught my eye was the cover of course. It was the April 1995 issue, it had a unicorn on it. The thing I like most is the Gallery section. I also love the illustrations in the magazine. I am so glad you offer this Gallery section so I can see what different artists are doing in Fantasy art. I enjoy your articles and stories as well. Keep the wonderful artwork and stories coming and I will continue to eagerly await the next issue.

Amy Messenger Madison,
KS

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

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BY GAHAN WILSON

The Ash-Tree Press bears frightening (and fabulous) fruit.

BACK IN 1988 THE GHOST STORY SOCIETY WAS FORMED IN ORDER TO GIVE THOSE GENTLE souls who deeply enjoy quietly settling down into a comfortable chair along with a creepy bit of spooky reading a chance to communicate with, and even occasionally meet in person, others who share this peculiar but completely harmless inclination. The Society took hold and even thrived in its modestly unobtrusive way, and when 1994 rolled around to find the organization well and solidly established, two of its members, Christopher and Barbara Roden, hit upon the notion of bringing out a small collection of contemporary ghost stories which they felt their fellow organized enthusiasts of the spectral might find appealing.

The book was called *Lady Stanhope's Manuscript and Other Supernatural Tales* and they were all unabashedly and enthusiastically written under the influence of the classic masters of the form, which is to say those working from the Victorian era up until the end of World War II, favoring particularly those influenced by the legendary author of phantoms and related monsters: Montague Rhodes James.

The Rodens limited the print run to 150 copies since they doubted the volume would attract few buyers outside of the members of the Society, but as it turned out they were quite wrong and this now exceedingly scarce book currently commands quite a fancy price and is,

even as you and I are engaged in this communication, being sought after eagerly.

I don't know if it's some sort of law or merely a matter of custom, but if you bring out a book you must somewhere or other name its publisher, and the name the Rodens eventually came up with was The Ash-Tree Press. It was inspired both by the name of a town in British Columbia they were fond of and have settled into and by the title of a particularly horrific tale penned by the above-mentioned M.R. James.

Shortly after this book was successfully launched, David Tibet of the well-regarded Ghost Story Press announced that he had decided to abandon reprinting traditional spectral tales in order to concentrate on contemporary variations and, with a jaunty wave of the hand, gave his very best to anyone willing to step into the breach.

Intrigued and stimulated by this announcement of retirement from the one who would have been their major competitor if they dared to venture into that highly specialized domain, the Rodens got their toes a little wetter by reissuing M.R. James's long out-of-print children's Fantasy *The Five Jars*, then they waded a little deeper by doing the same with A.N.L. Munby's *The Alabaster Hand*, and finally they dove completely in by committing to an agreement with H.P. Wakefield's agents to print all of that remarkably creepy author's supernatural stories.

Now, in the year 2000, The Ash-Tree Press thrives and because of it you and I can be appalled and terrified not only by spectacularly horrendous masterpieces which have previously been impossible to locate save by the most determined literary sleuths—the Press has enlisted the help of the very best of such investigators such as Hugh Lamb, Jack Adrian, and Richard Dalby—a platform has also been provided for some of the solidest bone-chilling fiction currently being produced.

But the superb quality of the writing selected to be printed is not the only secret of the success of this venture; it's also due to the Rodens' combination of high style and very astute business judgment. For example: They know that while the demand for this sort of entertainment is intense it is also limited to a relatively small group of readers so they keep their press runs severely limited—usually under three hundred—and their Web sites (start at www.ash-tree.bc.ca) are full of specific detail such as the

Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, creators of the *Dragonlance* chronicles, return to *Krynn* in *Dragons of a Fallen Sun*.



Coming August 2000, the long-awaited sequel to
the *New York Times* bestselling *Soul of the Fire*

FAITH OF THE FALLEN

Richard Rahl and Kahlan Amnell, the heroes of *Soul of the Fire*, have returned.

When Richard is captured by a Sister of the Dark, Kahlan alone must raise an army against the Imperial Order. Although they are separated, Richard and Kahlan never lose sight of their pledge to fight the Order's evil forces.

Praise for Terry Goodkind and the *Sword of Truth* series

"Notable for its engaging secondary characters, the novel also evinces flashes of sly wit, as when an evil Chime takes the form of a menacing chicken. . . . Goodkind's ingenious world-building will keep readers captivated by the latest installment of his bestselling *Sword of Truth* series."

—*Publishers Weekly* on *Soul of the Fire*

"Terry Goodkind once again demonstrates that fantasy writing works as a vehicle for exploring adult themes. While employing all of the action and magic typical of the genre, he incorporates a rare sense of realism. Characters laugh, make love and die unexpectedly and brutally."

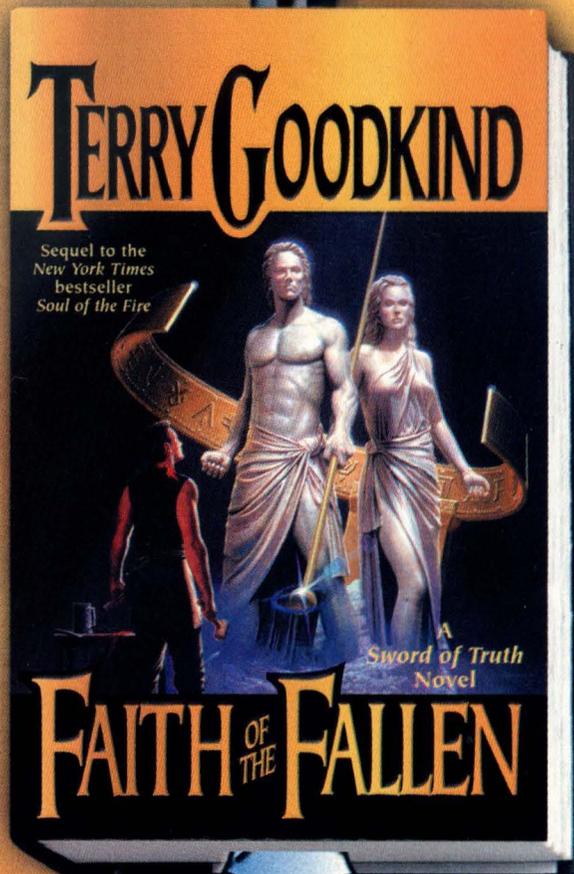
—*San Diego Union-Tribune* on *Temple of the Winds*

"Goodkind demonstrates that it's perfectly possible— from the reader's point of view, highly desirable—to write a commendably self-contained, shapely yarn within a previously defined scenario while leaving scope for plenty of new discoveries and embellishments."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Once again Mr. Goodkind catches us up in a cleverly plotted adventure in which the magic is fresh and characterization is both subtle and impressive."

—*Romantic Times*



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full tables of contents, the name of the jacket artist together with a reproduction of the jacket itself, information on other books particularly related to the one under discussion, and various other sorts of information which lusters-after-books are wont to mull and dream on.

They also know that the sort of people whose tastes in ghost stories lean toward the classic forms of the art are likely to be more ordinarily aware of the look, texture, heft, and even smell (old-book lovers are an amazingly sensual lot!) of the actual volume they are reading and so all of the Ash-Tree Press offerings are very handsomely bound with blood-red or jet-black cloth with varying textures; rich gold lettering stamped in with varied typefaces; distinctive red end papers; and they all come cozily wrapped in highly imaginative and attractive covers skillfully designed and drawn by excellent illustrators of the macabre such as Douglas Walters, Anthony Maitland, and Jason C. Eckhardt.

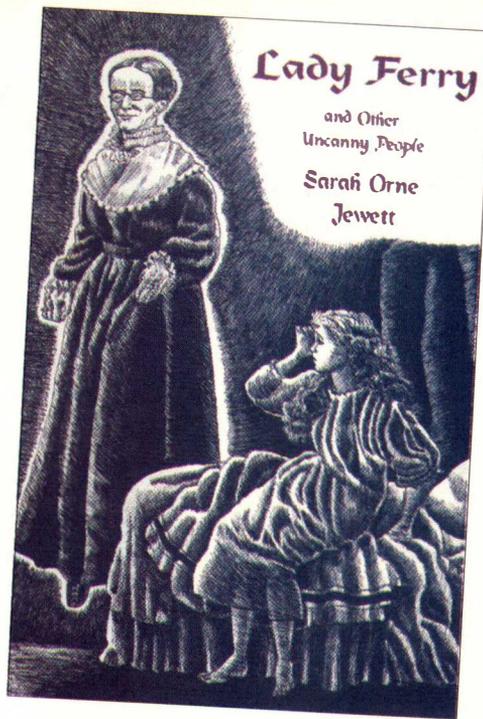
Just to give the general flavor, here is a sampling of Ash-Tree books now in print which I hope will show you how the varied selections demonstrate the wide variety of tone and approach which may be enjoyed within that marvelous genre they love so much:

The Terror in the Night by E.F. Benson, edited by Jack Adrian; The Ash-Tree Press, British Columbia, Canada; 160 pp; hardcover; \$38.50; and *The Passenger* by E.F. Benson, edited by Jack Adrian; The Ash-Tree Press, British Columbia, Canada, 152 pp; hardcover; \$39.00

E.F. "Fred" Benson was the son of a Canterbury Archbishop and the member of an intensely literary family which was plagued with an astounding variety of tragic tendencies, ranging from depression all the way to going outright berserk with a carving knife, as did his sister Maggie. He is better known to the world at large for his Mapp and Lucia books but for those of us fond of the fantastic (most particularly those relishing its more gruesome possibilities) he is venerated and cherished for having produced some of the most effectively hair-raising, gut-wrenching stories ever written.

Each volume has a photograph of Benson facing its title page as it is a charming custom of the Press to locate at any cost some portrait of the author so as to let you meet him or her face to face at the start. It is a good custom and a touching one, too, and it is most highly appropriate in a ghost story book to see the black-and-white wraith of the writers staring out at you.

Jack Adrian, who provides marvelously informative and entertaining introductions for both of these books (the story of how Benson fared as a misinformation expert in Great Britain's "War Propaganda Bureau," for instance, is worth the price of *The Passenger* all by itself—what a perfect choice of an agent to convince folk the enemy was a terrifying monster!) and who is one of the greatest rescuers of buried literary treasures currently breathing, has made a commitment



to the Ash-Tree Press to locate every snippet of fantastic tale-telling Benson produced and to gather them up into no less than five separate volumes, of which these marvelous books are merely numbers 1 and 2, and if you are in any way a devotee of really scary and occasionally downright nasty shockers of the very highest quality I would strongly suggest you grab these two whilst they're still in print (remember those limited press runs!) and wait in slaving, meeping anticipation—as I fully intend to do—for the remaining three.

Phantom Perfumes and Other Shades—Memories of Ghost Stories Magazine edited by Mike Ashley; Ash-Tree Press, BC, Canada; 244 pp; hardcover; \$42.50

Before I go on with this particular review I feel I must confess that I am unabashedly fond of the pulp magazines, those gaudy publications which were born in the Roaring

'Twenties and carried on like a ring-tailed bat-winged, striped baboon until they expired, struggling ungracefully, in the very early 'fifties.

I first came down with a serious fondness for spooky stuff by coming in contact with *Weird Tales*—*The Unique Magazine*. Then I carelessly brushed up against brightly colored covers of *Fantastic Tales* and *Amazing Stories* and the first thing you know the contagion just naturally spread and settled into my system.

One thing I didn't do, though, was read *Ghost Story Magazine*. To tell the truth, at the time I didn't even know it existed. Later in life as a smooth sophisticate I heard other pulp addict fiends speak of the magazine, but they always did so with an air of contempt, and it takes a lot to get contempt from a pulp addict!

Now and then, attending Fantasy conventions and other such low gatherings, I would come across a stack of *Ghost Story* at some dealer's table and sort of fumble through them but it would always end with me shrugging and turning away. I'm not sure just why. Some kind of protective instinct, I guess.

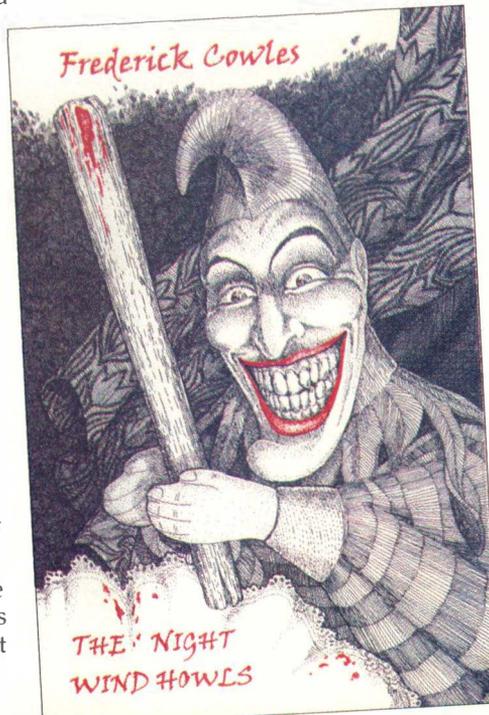
Now, innocently carrying out my duties as book reviewer for *Realms of Fantasy* magazine by preparing this special article on Ash-Tree Press, I picked up their publication of the collection by Mike Ashley of "seventeen of the very best tales to appear in *Ghost Stories* between 1926 and 1931," read his highly informative and occasionally hilarious Foreword, and then plunged into the stories themselves.

I don't know just exactly what it is about these particular works—but what their pseudonymed and often unidentifiable (in spite of the editor's best efforts) authors do is to take the nutsy, innocent, over-the-top charm a lot of pulp writing naturally has and then give it another rude boost that makes them especially amusing and touching.

Ashley's Foreword demonstrates the magazine had a firm company policy regarding the do's and don'ts on how one should write the things and it's certain that policy had to have been at least partially shaped by the *Ghost Story's* eccentric publisher, Bemarr (he changed his name from "Bernard" because he thought it wasn't macho) Macfadden, a man who had been a sickly child who forced himself into a sort of Hitler Youth regimen in order to become an ostentatiously healthy adult.

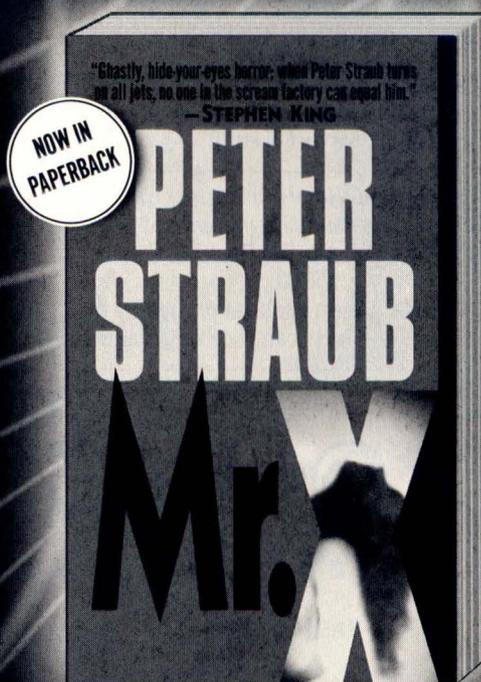
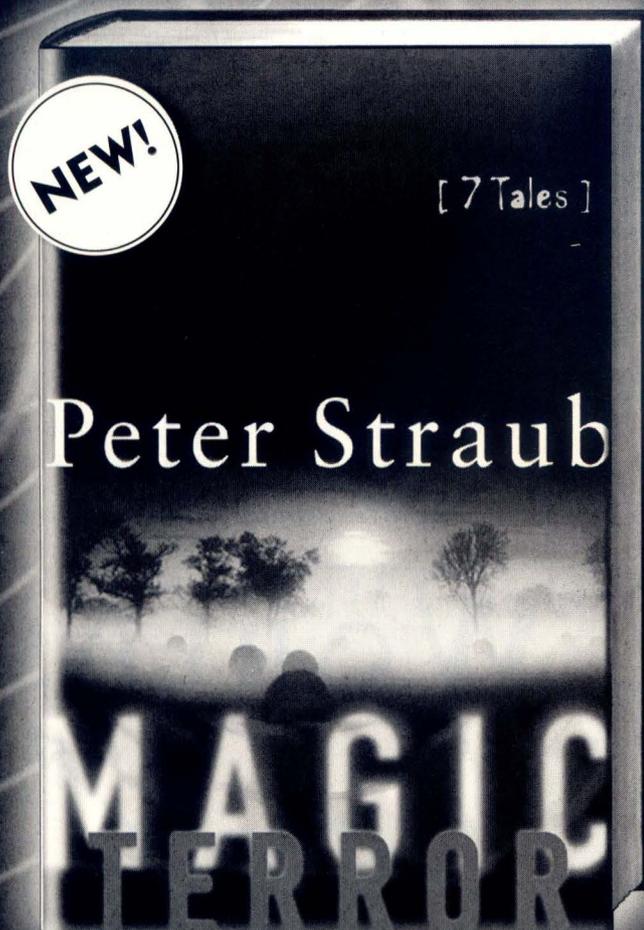
Macfadden made heaps of money with a magazine called *Physical Culture* and heaps more with *True Story*, the first of the many confession magazines which imitated it reverently. His high-handed attempts to make the public see things his way repeatedly got him into trouble, most famously by printing a story advocating a takeover of the United States by Japan so that the country would be run better.

However it came about, the stories selected from the magazine in *Phantom Perfumes* are primo old-time pulp, rare stuff, indeed, and if you have any affectionate



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leanings toward this very odd genre you will have a marvelous time perusing them.

One thing that you will find a great help and mood setter are the many reproductions of covers of the magazine which are printed full page in the book, all but one showing an attractive girl gaping in fear at the steady approach of some monster or sheeted spook. I strongly suggest you take the time to meditate on at least one of these for a moment to put yourself in the proper psychic state for perusing the eponymous "Phantom Perfumes" or other tales bearing even more unabashed titles such as "The Affair of the Clutching Hand" or "The Thing that Came Home from the War" or "Chained to a Bed of Roses" or "The Toad-Man Specter" or a couple which you might, on some dark and stormy night, save up to read as a two-parter: "The Woman with Two Souls" and "A Soul with Two Bodies."

I know you're thinking there's no way these stories can live up to their appellations, but you're wrong. They do.

Highly recommended, but only for those unfortunates—such as myself—who can't get enough of this sort of stuff.

The Night Wind Howls by Frederick Cowles, with an Introduction by Hugh Lamb and Afterword by Neil Bell; Ash-Tree Press BC, Canada; 391 pp; hardcover; \$50.00

This is the largest book yet printed by the Ash-Tree Press and is an excellent example

of an invaluable service it renders to those who have come across a gem or two of some obscure classical ghost-story writer and would like to read more of him or her but find they can't.

The truth is that—outside of appearances of their best short stories in theme anthologies—many of the works of the authors in this field are not only long out of print but their books are almost impossible to find and if they are finally tracked down they (quite understandably) turn out to be staggeringly expensive, unless you're lucky enough to find them in the hands of a dealer who doesn't know their present value.

Frederick Cowles seems to be more renowned for the rarity of his books than for the quality of his writing but the first of these is now (at least until this edition sells out) a thing of the past. *The Night Wind Howls* brings together all three of his ghostly short-story anthologies between one set of covers: *The Horror of Abbot's Grange* which was printed in 1936; *The Night Wind Howls* which was printed in 1938; and *Fear Walks the Night*, which was located by Hugh Lamb when he got in touch with the late author's wife, and printed under his care in 1993. The book also includes a typically excellent Introduction by Lamb, a Foreword by the author's son, and charming reproductions of the period covers of the first two volumes.

Cowles wrote very much in the style of M.R. James (there's that name again!) but he

was by no means, as I'm sure he would have been the first to admit, anywhere near as good as the master. I found that the bulk of his stories to be rather minor, particularly those in the first two books, but that does not mean they lack fine flashes of imagination. Almost all of them are—to some degree or another—amusing fun.

The problem is that since the great bulk of them are very short and direct it is extremely easy to find yourself speed reading through them if you don't watch yourself, and you suddenly come to and realize you've absent-mindedly gone through great clumps of them, paying each one less attention than the last. The effect is something like eating a bowl of peanuts without realizing you've done it.

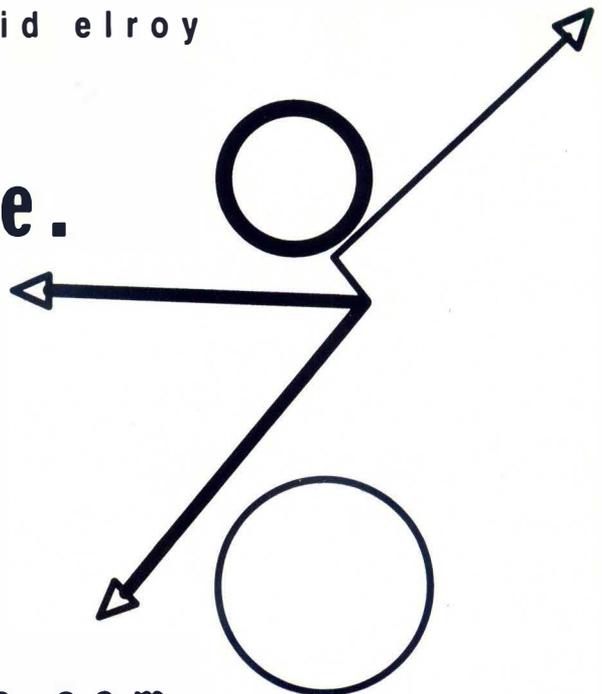
Most of the stories have all sorts of clever and really intriguing twists and notions on tried-and-true themes but, frustratingly, they very often fail to carry through into anything like a real plot or otherwise develop the potential of their departures from the norm that could form the basis for something really seriously interesting.

For instance, in "The Vampire of Kaldenstein" in *The Night Wind Howls*, he has a jaunty protagonist boldly walk up to the castle of a Dracula clone one sunlit afternoon and persuade the vampire's creepy but slow-witted Igor to take him on a tour of the premises but then nothing's done with the notion and in a paragraph or two we find ourselves wandering around in an entirely

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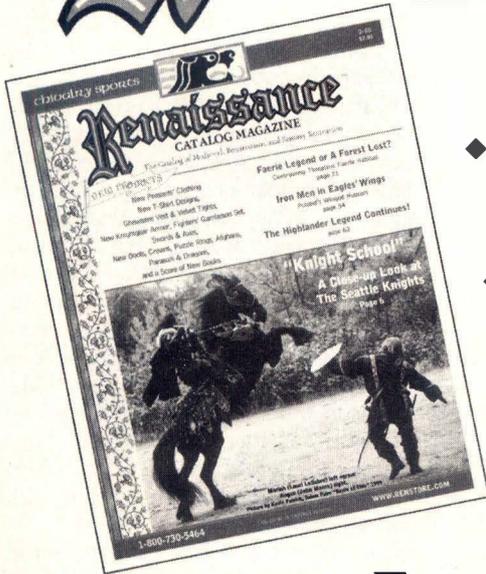
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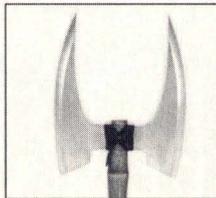
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different—and far less interesting—plot line. A marvelous opening for some really offbeat action is just abandoned.

Also there isn't much in the way of surprises or shocks in the stories. Once he's started off on a ghoulish trail it's pretty easy to see where it's all going to end even though there may be interestingly bizarre touches, and now and then some genuinely fine grue—I'll be the first to admit Cowles does have a real knack for the repulsive!—but one is hardly ever startled.

A story in *The Horror of Abbot's Grange* called "The Bell" is a definitely diverting rework of themes and monsters from two of James's best horrors. In "Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad" and "Count Magnus," the horror summoned by ringing the ancient bell with the Latin inscription running round its bottom summons up a hooded thing with a skeletal hand popping out of it instead of the very much more interesting tentacle of James's cloaked pursuer in "Magnus," and is not even remotely as effective as the brilliantly grotesque, malevolently stirring bedclothes which startles one so horribly in "My Lad."

The really good news is that the last of the books, *Fear Walks the Night*, is a clear improvement over the first two and makes it obvious that writing volumes 1 and 2 taught Cowles some extremely valuable lessons. Again and again he revisits themes explored before at greater length and to much better effect. The

vampire challenge, for instance, is met much more successfully in "Princess of Darkness," there is a far-better-realized witch in "Lisheen" than in any of his prior writings, I thoroughly enjoyed a nasty little tale called "Death of a Rat," and a really grisly piece about a villainous "Professor" in "A Punch and Judy Show" not only struck me as highly satisfying, it inspired Linda Dyne to create a really creepy cover!

So—and this is typical of these exclusive anthologies Ash-Tree brings out—this collection gives us the chance to fully observe the ups and downs of a writer developing his talents, which is highly educational if you are going through similar ups and downs yourself, and it forms a larger story which is often more interesting than the stories that tell it.

I don't think Cowles ever really got to where he was trying to get but in his final book he managed to lay a finger or two firmly on it and in all three books he does entertain and—though it's an odd thing to say about someone who is doing his level best to interfere with your night's sleep—he never fails to be oddly lovable.

Lady Ferry and Other Uncanny People by Sarah Orne Jewett; Ash-Tree Press BC, Canada; 146 pp; hardcover; \$38.50

This last slim volume represents another extraordinarily valuable service which is regularly performed by the folk at Ash-Tree Press, and that is to gather up the spectral

fiction of well-known authors you might not have thought *did* that sort of thing and to put it into print.

As Jessica Amanda Salmonson points out in her excellent Foreword to *Lady Ferry*, the critical and scholarly establishments that deign to explain our literature to us oftentimes tend to exclude certain writings from the official canons of authors they regard highly because they feel they detract from the writer's dignity and—unfortunately for those interested in such things—ghost stories seem to strike them as particularly undignified.

Ms. Salmonson cites, as an outstanding example of this practice, the inability of those establishments—who otherwise have managed to do a highly creditable job of unearthing Jewett's work for posterity—to locate a singularly lovely story, "The Foreigner," for a full 62 years until it was finally found in the pages of the August 1900 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* by David Bonnel Green who rightly included it in *The World of Dunnet Landing*, after which it was very belatedly added to regular editions of Jewett's most famous work, *Pointed Firs*. Ms. Salmonson quotes Green as saying "the supernatural element may possibly have embarrassed editors and prevented them from collecting 'The Foreigner' along with Dunnet Landing stories."

In the light of that it almost saddens me to announce that *Lady Ferry and Other Uncanny*
Continued on page 80



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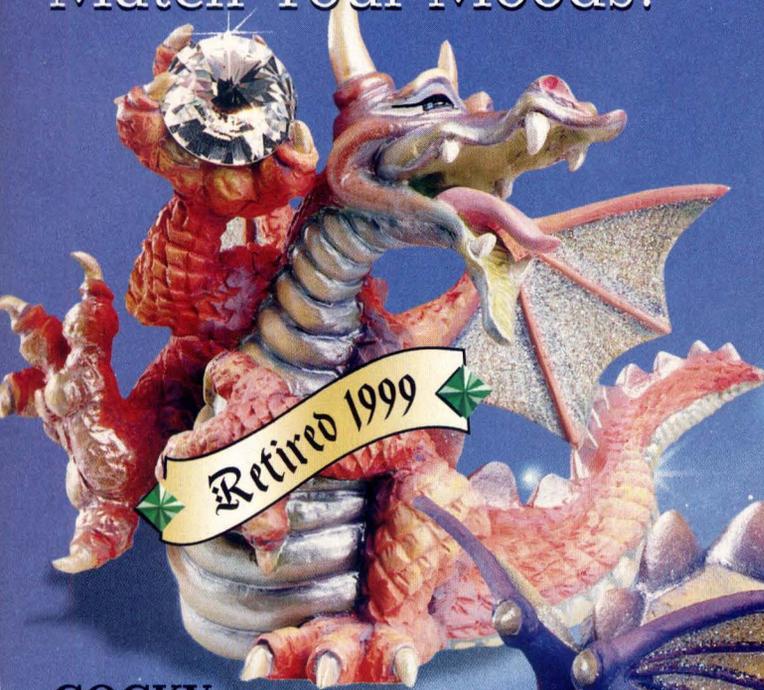


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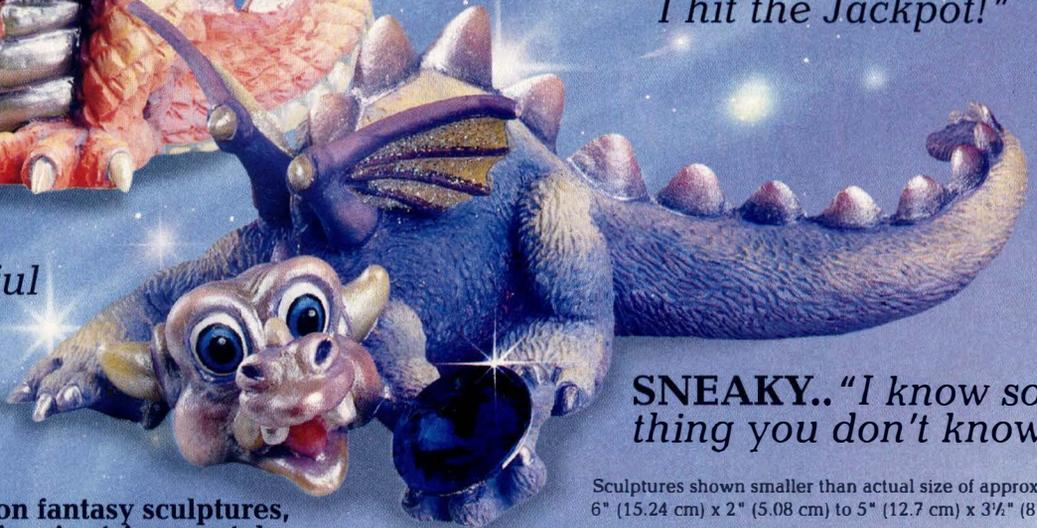
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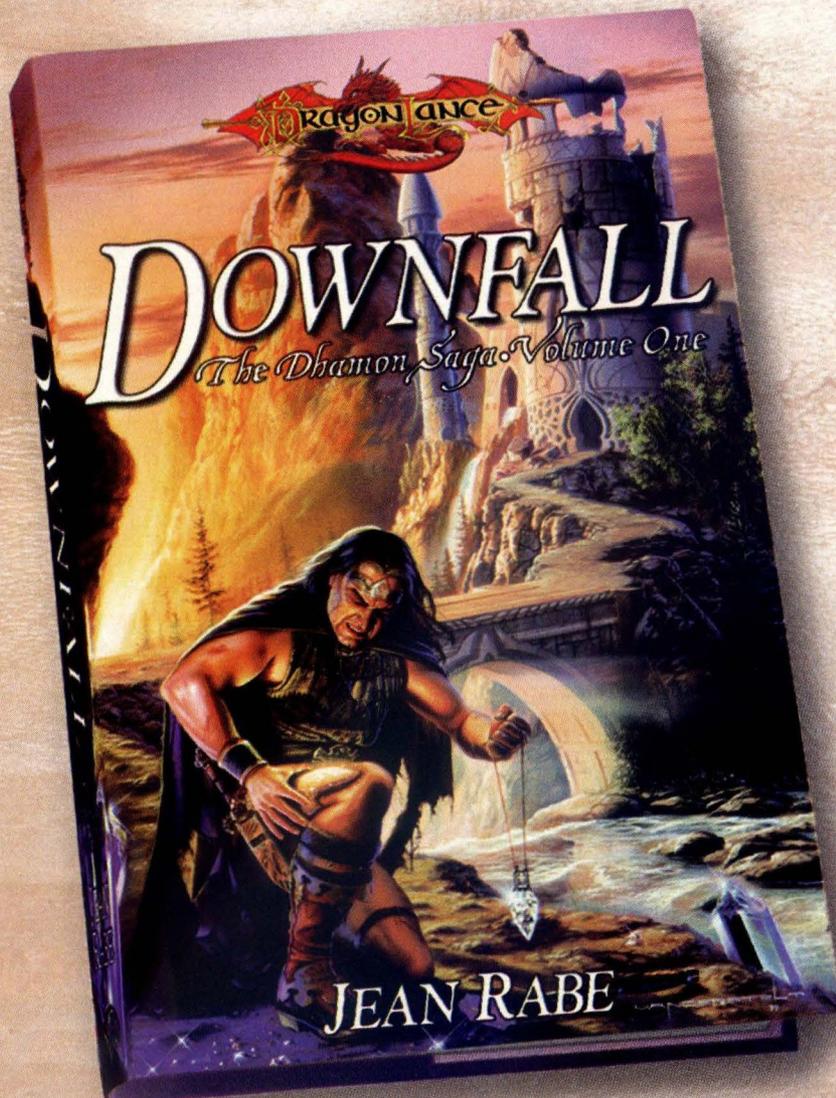
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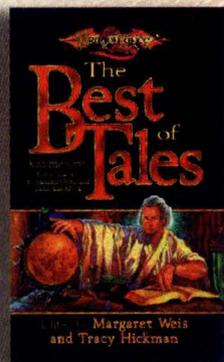
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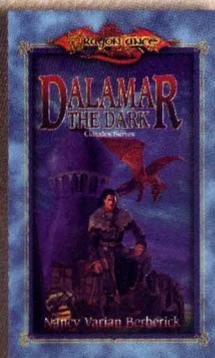


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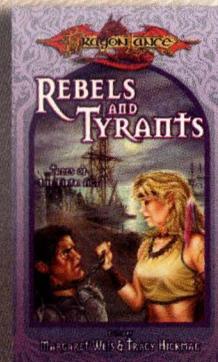
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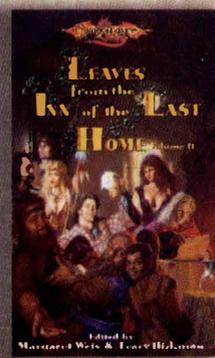
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BY RESA NELSON

The Hollow Man— now you can know him inside out.

IT'S AMAZING WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE TO LOOK AT YOURSELF IN THE MIRROR anymore." Chilling words. I once had a teacher who summed up the Constitution in a few simple words: You have the right to do anything you want—as long as you don't hurt anybody. The United States, for Americans at least, symbolizes freedom. The freedom to think. The freedom to choose. The freedom to step up to the plate and take your swings. The freedom to do whatever you want with your life. As long as you don't hurt anybody in the process.

H.G. Wells' novel, *The Invisible Man*, explores the failure of a man to do just that. When a scientist turns himself invisible, he lets his new-found power go to his head. When he loses sight of himself, he loses his perspective. Instead of considering how he fits into a world that can no longer see him, he decides that the world is his to be ruled.

The Hollow Man, a new film scheduled for release on July 28 by Columbia Pictures, is true in spirit to what lies at the heart of the Wells classic.

The story is about Dr. Sebastian Caine (played by Kevin Bacon), who leads a team of scientists on a high-level, top-secret, government experiment—they've developed a serum that invokes invisibility. They work 30 stories underground in Washington, DC at a former nuclear facility that's been converted into a labyrinth-like laboratory. As the movie opens, they've been able

to make only lab animals disappear.

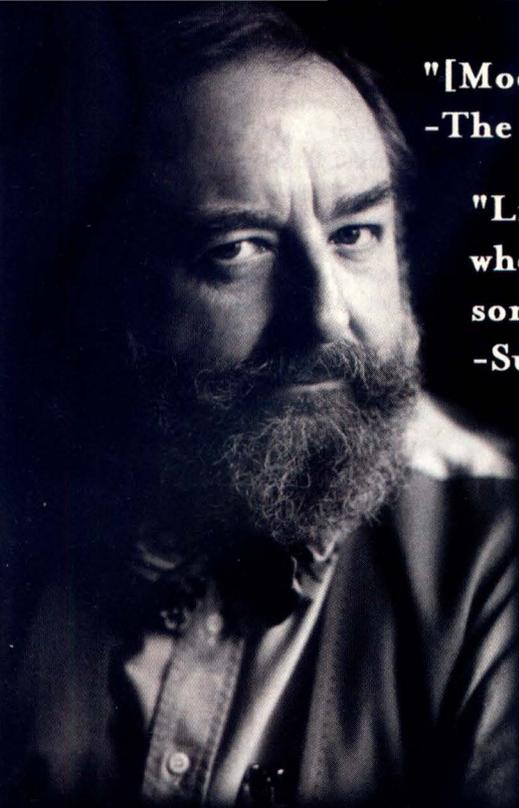
Then Sebastian injects himself with the serum. And slowly dissolves into the Hollow Man.

Greg Grunberg (from TV's *Felicity*) plays Carter, the team's cardiologist. While Sebastian is the team leader, Carter is a young scientist who looks up to him. The irony is that Carter is literally in charge of monitoring the heart of a man who is embracing power and letting go of his morals. And because Carter admires Sebastian so much, he's blind to the very heart that he's responsible for monitoring.

"Carter and Sebastian have a mentor relationship," Grunberg says. "I really respect what he's done. And I'm so infatuated with his wisdom and how incredible he is as a scientist that it really blinds me to his obses-

Elizabeth Shue and Greg Grunberg say "See ya" to Kevin Bacon.





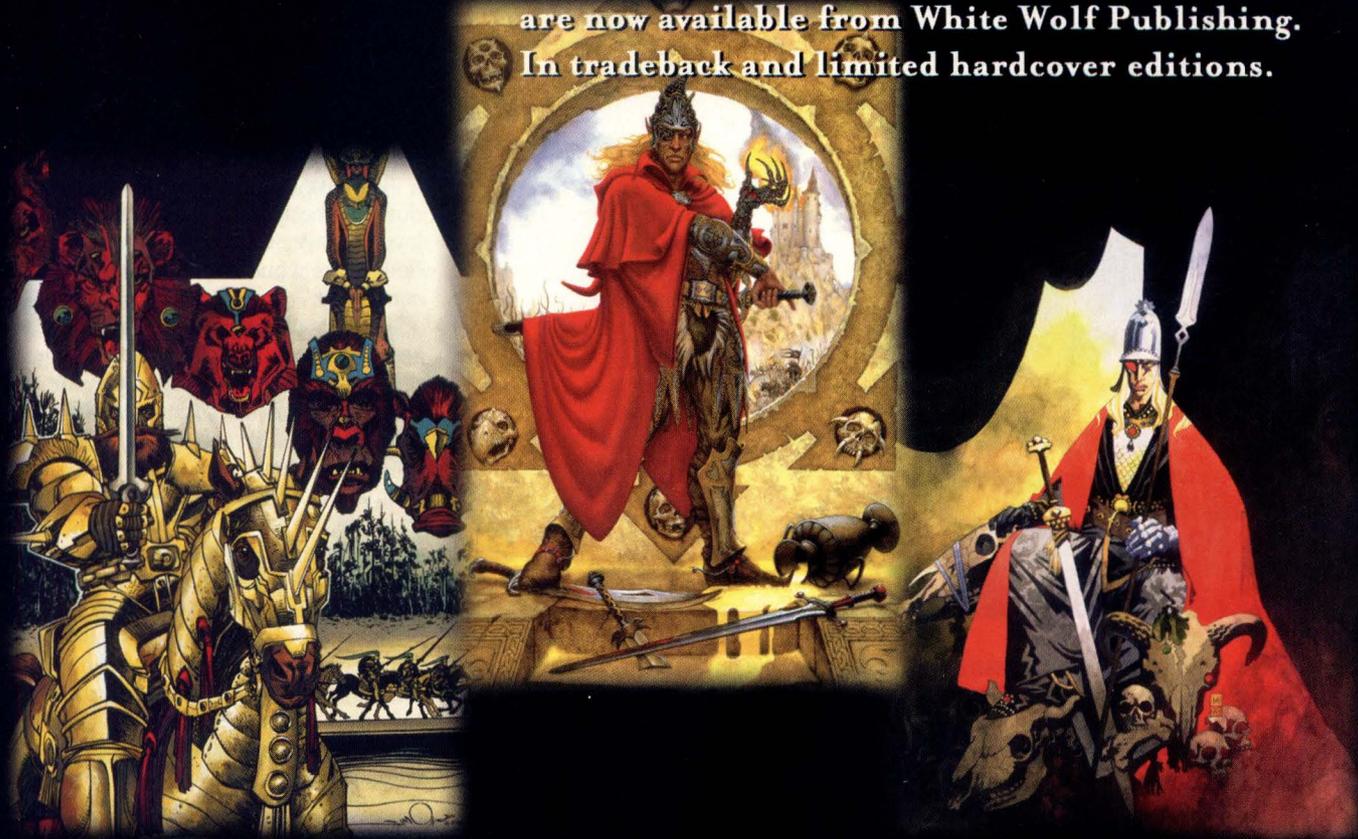
"[Moorcock] is a major novelist of enormous ambition."
-The Washington Post

"Like Tolkien... Moorcock has the ability to create a wholly imaginative world landscaped with vivid and sometimes frightening reality."
-Sunday Times

"If you are at all interested in fantastic fiction, you must read Michael Moorcock."
-Tad Williams

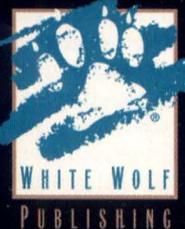
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MICHAEL MOORCOCK'S

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TOP: Kevin Bacon (Sebastian Caine) in the lab. BELOW: Elizabeth Shue (Dr. McKay) is on the run. OPPOSITE: The invisibility process proves that beauty is only skin deep.

tremendous pressure. They joke around. There's a life at stake—they're right there, they're doing exactly what they need to be doing. However, it's such a routine that they're able to joke, have music playing, and that kind of thing. So for my character, I was able to add that level of routine to it, and then I finally do come to the realization of, wow, things are not as I believed. This guy that I loved, that I looked up to—he might not be exactly what I'm hoping he is.

"Some of these movies—these effects-driven movies—are so fantastic visually, but the story doesn't carry, or the acting is something that you have to let go right through your head and hopefully you can make it through the movie. This isn't like that. We have superb actors. Elisabeth Shue, Josh Brolin, they're so experienced. That's something that really helped me in working in this film. My character comes into this situation in awe of these scientists. And, in a way, it was very easy for me. I'm on *Felicity*, but as far as film, this is the biggest thing that I've ever done, and so to work with this level of actors is just fantastic and awe-inspiring for me, and I could bring that to the character."

While *The Hollow Man* is rich in terms of its story, the special effects are rumored to be phenomenal.

"You've heard the term 'groundbreaking' before a million times, but nothing like this," says Grunberg. "No one has ever seen anything like this before. The little that I've seen blew me away."

The special effects account for almost half of the shots in the movie. The effects fall into two camps: how Sebastian becomes invisible, and how everyone is able to perceive him once he's become invisible.

"We didn't want it to appear anything like the later invisible man films ... the Chevy-Chase-type invisible man," says producer Alan Marshall (*Starship Troopers*, *Jacob's Ladder*, *Angel Heart*, and *Basic Instinct*). "We didn't want things floating around, cups of coffee floating around rooms, you see pens writing without anything attached to them. We were very careful, very specific, in that how we generated the scenes, and what took place within the scenes, was as realistic as we could make."

When Sebastian becomes invisible, it happens from the outside in. A combination of the chemical in the serum and a bombardment by radiation shift him out of the visible range on a cell-by-cell basis.

Essentially, Sebastian vanishes one cell at a time. It begins with his skin disappearing, which reveals what lies beneath.

Marshall describes what the effect looks like. "The whole business of injecting a serum into somebody's arm and seeing the skin strip away, leaving the bones and the arteries, and those arteries slowly disappearing, and then the heart disappearing, and the liver disappearing, and the intestines disappearing, until you're left with a skeleton. And then that eventually disappearing."

"We basically tortured Kevin Bacon," says visual effects supervisor Scott Anderson (*Starship Troopers*, *The Ninth Gate*, and *Babe*). "I say that laughingly, but we couldn't have done it without his cooperation. He stood in while we scanned him, took photographs of him, measured him, measured him again. We built computer models of him, went back and rechecked them, based on his measurements. We did performance studies of how his body and muscles worked. And then,



based on all that information and anatomical references, research, and everything we could get our hands on, we built all the parts we wanted to see, which is the grand majority of the interesting parts of the human body.

"We have everything from the outer skin down to the spinal column. It's not literally layer by layer, but it's sort of an interesting flow as we would envision different pieces coming off."

If you saw last year's *The Mummy*, you've seen a somewhat similar effect, but in reverse. The mummy began as little more than a skeleton and added parts to himself until he looked human again.

"The mummy tended to move like a mummy," says Anderson. "We needed [Sebastian] to move more like a living, breathing human. So the order of complexity that we studied—the human musculature and skeletal system and the areas in which we really had to access and develop the motion in order to match Kevin was phenomenally difficult. I think you see much more from us than you saw in *The Mummy*. Much more anatomical clarity. *The Mummy* tended to [show] brief glimpses, more for shock factor. And when [Sebastian has] eroded, he's sort of left clean. There's nothing damaging about our process. It's revealing, so it's very clean, in a sense. It's very clinical at times.

"And I think we have the most realistic version of the human body to hit the screens yet.

"It's by far the most work I've done in my career. We joke amongst our crew—they long for the simpler days of *Starship Troopers*. Not only is it a grand number of shots, but every sequence, every shot, is some of the most dif-

sion. It's basically the story of a man who becomes so obsessed with his creation that when the government wants to cut it off, [Sebastian] takes it under his own power. He's out of control.

"Even when he hints at his maniacal behavior, I'm the first to jump on his side and defend him. And that's what I love about [Carter]. He doesn't see it until it's almost too late."

Before stepping into his role as a cardiologist, Grunberg was able to get some real-life exposure to the medical world.

"We did training [by watching] open-heart surgery. We also went to an emergency room and saw how these doctors work under

ficult work I've been involved with. It was a great challenge."

Once Sebastian becomes invisible, the filmmakers were then faced with the question: How do you show an invisible man? How do you show his presence on screen without resorting to the old tricks of floating coffee cups and pens writing by themselves?

"Your brain is very used to establishing and identifying faces and bodies," Anderson says. "But when you remove that from the equation, then you have hollows and invisible areas. For instance, if he's wrapped in a sheet or if he's wearing clothing, the inside of that isn't necessarily what you'd logically think it is. And your brain needs a lot of help in integrating it, so it presented a very unique, not only challenge in motion, but in look and lighting to really integrate and tell the story.

"Wherever we could, we looked at references and tried to envision shells and sheets, the insides of things, the outsides. We thought a lot about: If this were hollow, what would we really be seeing? In some cases, we made little mock-ups. We held them up to the light and studied them. And said, 'OK, this is what you see, but this is what you really want to see.' And we did tests to refine some of the primary looks that we were going to rely on heavily.

"They make a mask for Kevin so he can wear that to be seen while they're all working with him. We've seen in invisible man movies before, you know, the bandages coming off, or make-up being used, but there's a certain lack of depth to some of those historical examples. And we wanted to really represent the Hollow Man. And so when you see into Kevin's mask, he's hollow inside it. You know he's hollow. You know that the front is there, that the insides are missing, and that the back is there. You see that constantly. You really feel that he's truly there, but he's not there.

"He's solid, but his representation is hollow to the world. There's nothing in him missing, but because you can't see him, he is hollowing out a gap in whatever he's interacting with."

So what's shown on film is the presence of a man who exists but who can't be seen. Although you can't see him, you're able to see the space he takes up.

"To show his physical presence," says producer Marshall, "when he's hunting down his fellow scientists so that they don't expose the problems to the government, we manifest him in water, in steam, in carbon dioxide. We manifest him in rain, in puddles. We manifest him in fire, and he disappears in fire. That side of it was extremely difficult. Most of this film was shot with what we call motion-control. It was under the auspices of a motion-control shoot that the actual camera dolly and the camera head are locked into a computer so we can repeat the moves from each take."

Grunberg describes what the process was like for him. "Let's say the camera moves in



TOP: Sebastian, Kensington, and Walton make adjustments to the latex mask that allows him to blend into society. BELOW: The transformation process can be disturbing for those Sebastian gets his hands on.

on my reaction. And it comes in, and I keep moving for the entire scene. I have a scene with Kevin. He's in the scene, and then he moves out—I have to now play that scene again to nothing, but pretend Kevin's standing there. And the camera does the exact same move within one-thousandth of an inch. So they can then match up those two prints and have me talking to an invisible person. Let's say he has diodes on his head or a hat—now they have to remove him. So they match the image of his being there to his not being there. It was very, very technical."

Grunberg says that when he works on the TV series *Felicity*, he's used to shooting six

pages of the script every day. By comparison, *The Hollow Man* required a full week to shoot just two pages. "It was just so labor-intensive. But for me it was nothing compared to what it was for Kevin. He's such a trooper.

"Kevin is such a consummate professional. He insisted on being there even when he may have been just a voice in a void. We're looking down a hallway, and he's supposed to be standing there, but he's invisible. He could have easily had someone else do the invisible thing; someone else could have been wearing the green suit. He insisted on being there to get the reactions as close to being right on, as if we were working with him."

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Bacon takes direction from Paul Verhoeven, who had to visualize most of the movie before the effects were created.

Director Paul Verhoeven had an equally difficult task. He had to use his imagination to visualize what the finished product would look like long before it came together.

"Paul's vision is the be-all and end-all of this particular script," says Marshall. "Because it's a very difficult thing to do when you consider that your main visual effect is also your main leading character.

"It was always the attention to detail and requirement that Paul had to engage in on a day-by-day basis to plan the shots so succinctly that eventually they will all come together. Because what you're doing is you're pre-empting your vision. Because of the visual-effects aspects of that vision, pre-empting seeing material by anything between eight months and a year before what you've perceived in your head and with storyboards comes to fruition.

"When we made *Basic Instinct*, for instance, we hardly had any storyboards because it was all in the written script. The difference between that and a visual-effects film—we had Sharon Stone and Michael Douglas and a few other actors, and they carried you through the day's shooting—in this, we have, yes, Kevin Bacon and Elisabeth Shue, but in the back of Paul's mind was, at the time he was shooting each of these scenes, was that Kevin isn't really there.

"Some of the visual effects are quite stunning. There are things that never have been seen before. We're breaking new ground, we think ... last year it was *Matrix*, and, hopefully, this year it's going to be *Hollow Man*. It's just the availability of pushing the envelope farther and farther."

The Hollow Man is a mix of action/adventure and Science Fantasy, with an *Alien*-like atmosphere. And if that's not enough, it's rich in what lies beneath the surface.

Remember those words? "It's amazing what you can do when you don't have to look at yourself in the mirror anymore." They belong to Sebastian.

"I think the line sums up the state of our character perfectly," Marshall says. "Which is that people do things when they don't have to account.

"[*The Hollow Man* is] reasonably close [to H.G. Wells' novel]—and that is also what

attracted us to it—that it's reasonably close to the original *Invisible Man* in that it was related again to a scientist. It was related in that the scientist couldn't return back to visibility and had to wear these funny bandages and sunglasses to make himself visible. Obviously, we have updated our character."

"The story overall, I think, has a great combination of spooky movie and Horror film," Anderson says. "It's almost like you're being haunted, but it's got the real action/Horror/thriller part as well. The movie weaves a nice web between a sort of creepy, eerie [feel] and the more visceral aspects of the Horror genre.

"It's definitely multifaceted. We have very subtle, very easy-to-miss effects to the wham-bam, in your face, you've-never-seen-this-before sort of aspects of it. And the film itself has some very subtle undertones but also a big, bold brashness to it at the same time."

In addition to exploring the idea of the loss of perspective as a result of the gain of power, *The Hollow Man* suggests that fear is based on what we can't perceive with our senses.

"The original teaser trailer was based on that theme," Anderson says. "That is, is what you're seeing real or imagined? And when an invisible man is running around, how can you be sure which one is which?"

"You think you're alone in a room, and are you necessarily alone in a room?" says Marshall. "And that unsettling aspect—almost back to walking in a dark alley. You're never quite sure whether you're in that alley on your own, or whether there is somebody hiding and following you in the shadow area of the wall. The thought of being stalked by somebody you can't see is quite terrifying."

"Even though we were creating this digital representation of Sebastian," Anderson says, "I was really tied to, and Paul was really tied to working and getting the performance out of Kevin. For all the technological marvels, the performance is still Kevin's. And that's an amazingly interesting aspect of how we used this effect. We didn't try to replace the actor. We almost tried to build on top of what the actor was providing. So, as much as possible, Kevin directed our performance. We worked off what he was doing. I think it's got to be pretty shocking for how recognizable he is when you don't see his face.

"The amount of interaction with the 'effect' and the other actors in the film is not only groundbreaking and difficult to do, but I think it's really rewarding for the richness that we're providing, and we all really have Kevin to thank for that, for being willing to undergo the torture.

"I think a lot of people trying to do digital characters or digital actors are trying to 'replace' the actor. And that's never been a goal of mine. I've never actually been interested in that. Yet here was a film that required that kind of technology, but I think in the right way: expanding what Kevin could do, not replacing what he did."

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BY TERRI WINDLING

Snow, Glass, Apples: The story of Snow White.

TO MOST PEOPLE TODAY, THE NAME SNOW WHITE EVOKES VISIONS OF DWARFS WHISTLING as they work and a wide-eyed, fluttery princess singing, "Some day my prince will come." (A friend of mine claims this song is responsible for the problems of a whole generation of American women.) Yet the Snow White theme is one of the darkest and strangest to be found in the fairy-tale canon—a chilling tale of murderous rivalry, adolescent sexual ripening, poisoned gifts, blood on snow, witchcraft, and ritual cannibalism ... in short, not a tale originally intended for children's tender ears.

Disney's well-known film version of the story, released in 1937, was ostensibly based on the German tale popularized by the Brothers Grimm. Originally titled "Snow-drop" and published in *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* in 1812, the Grimms' "Snow White" is a darker, chillier story than the musical Disney cartoon, yet it too had been cleaned up for publication, edited to emphasize the good Protestant values held by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Although legend has them roaming the countryside collecting stories from stout German peasants, in truth the Grimm brothers acquired most of their tales from a middle-class

circle of friends, who in turn were recounting tales learned from nurses, governesses, and servants, not all of them German. Thus the "German folktales" published by the Grimms included those from the oral folk traditions of other countries, and were also influenced by the literary fairy tales of writers like Straparola, Basile, D'Aulnoy, and Perrault in Italy and France.

Variants of "Snow White" were popular around the world long before the Grimms claimed it for Germany, but their version of the story (along with Walt Disney's) is the one that most people know today. Elements from

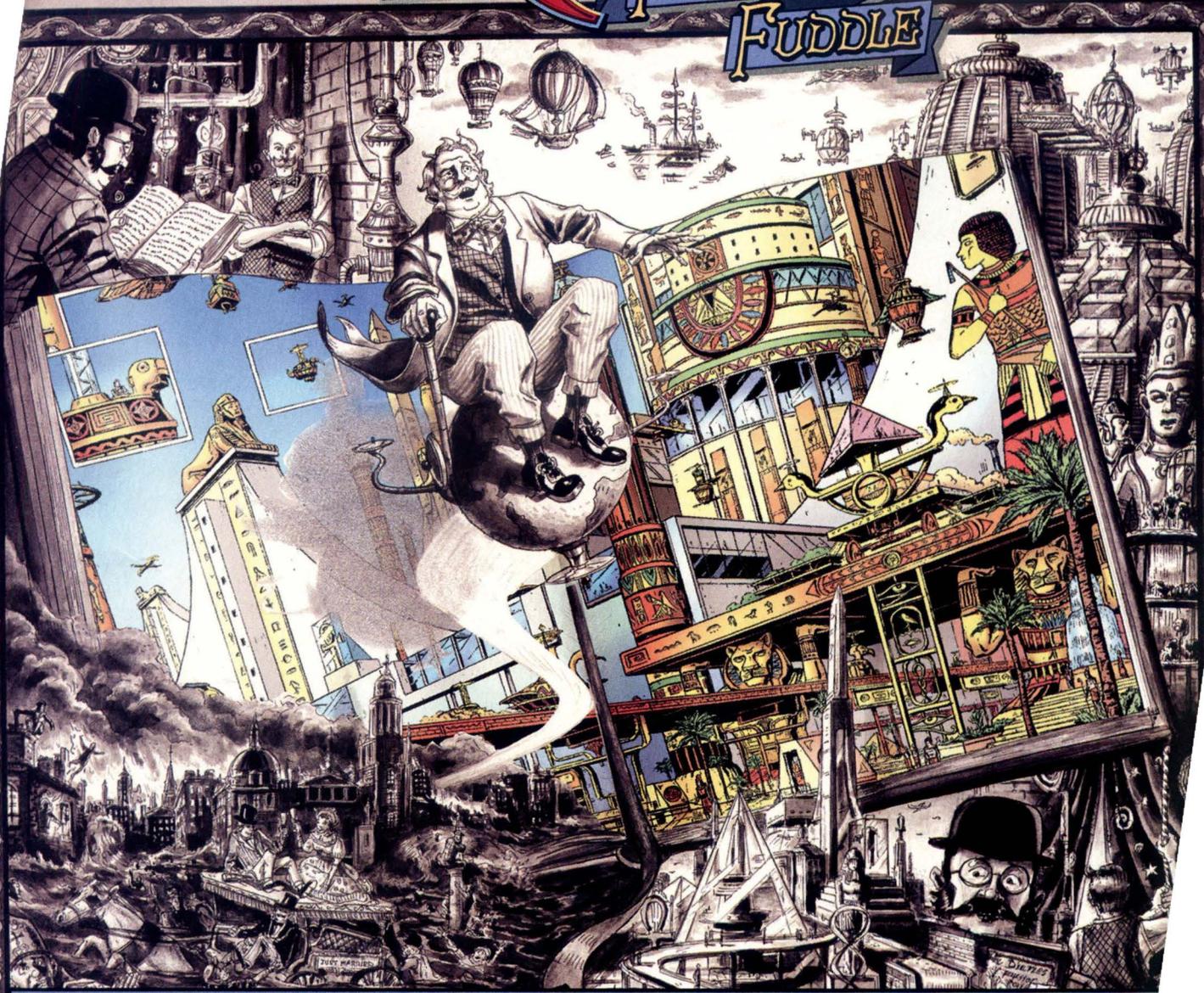
the story can be traced back to the oldest oral tales of antiquity, but the earliest-known written version was published in Italy in 1634. This version was called "The Young Slave," published in Giambattista Basile's *Il Pentamerone*, and is believed to have influenced subsequent retellings—including a German text published by J.K. Musaus in 1784 and the Grimms' text in 1812. In Basile's story, a baron's unmarried sister swallows a rose leaf and finds herself pregnant. She secretly gives birth to a beautiful baby girl, and names her Lisa. Fairies are summoned to bless the child, but the last one stumbles in her haste and utters an unfortunate curse instead. As a result, Lisa dies at the age of seven while her mother is combing her hair. The grieving mother has the body encased in seven caskets made of crystal, hidden in a distant room of the palace under lock and key. Some years later, on her deathbed, she hands the key to her brother, the baron, but makes him promise that he will never open the little locked door. More years pass, and the

In one version of the classic tale, Snow White is killed when a witch selling a dress laces up her bodice. From Snow White by Josephine Poole, illustration by Angela Barret.



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Walt Disney's animated version of *Snow White* expanded the role of the prince and emphasized the dwarfs, giving them distinct personalities.

baron takes a wife. One day he is called to a hunting party, so he gives the key to his wife with strict instructions not to use it. Impelled by suspicion and jealousy, she heads immediately for the locked room; there she discovers a beautiful young maiden who seems to be fast asleep. (Basile explains that Lisa has grown and matured in her enchanted state.) The baroness seizes Lisa by the hair—dislodging the comb and waking her. Thinking she's found her husband's secret mistress, the jealous baroness cuts off Lisa's hair, dresses her in rags, and beats her black and blue. The baron returns and inquires after the ill-used young woman cowering in the shadows. His wife tells him that the girl is a kitchen slave, sent by her aunt. One day the baron sets off for a fair, having promised everyone in the household a gift, including even the cats and the slave. Lisa requests that he bring back a doll, a knife, and a pumice stone. After various troubles, he procures these things and gives them to the young slave. Alone by the hearth, Lisa talks to the doll as she sharpens the knife to kill herself—but the baron overhears her sad tale, and learns she's his own sister's child. The girl is then restored to beauty, health, wealth, and heritage—while the cruel baroness is cast away, sent back to her parents.

"The Young Slave" contains motifs we recognize not only from "Snow White" but also "Sleeping Beauty" (the fairy's curse), "Bluebeard" (the locked room), "Beauty and the Beast" (the troublesome gift), and other tales. An aunt-by-marriage plays the villain here—but a scheming stepmother is front and center in another peculiar Italian tale, titled "The Crystal Casket." In this second "Snow White" variant, a lovely young girl is per-

sueded to introduce her teacher to her widowed father. Marriage ensues, but instead of gratitude the teacher treats her stepdaughter cruelly. An eagle helps the girl to escape and hides her in a palace of fairies. The stepmother hires a witch, who takes a basket of poisoned sweetmeats to the girl. She eats one and dies. The fairies revive her. The witch strikes again, disguised as a tailoress with a beautiful dress to sell. When the dress is laced up, the girl falls down dead, and this time the fairies will not revive her. (They're miffed that she keeps ignoring their warnings.) They place her body in a gem-encrusted casket, rope the casket to the back of a horse, and send it off to the city. Horse and casket are found by a prince, who falls in love with the beautiful "doll" and takes her home. "But my son, she's dead!" protests the queen. The prince will not be parted from his treasure; he locks himself away in a tower with the girl, "consumed by love." Soon he is called away to battle, leaving the doll in the care of his mother. His mother ignores the macabre creature—until a letter arrives warning her of the prince's impending return. Quickly she calls for her chambermaids and commands them to clean the neglected corpse. They do so, spilling water in their haste, badly staining the maiden's dress. The queen thinks quickly. "Take off the dress! We'll have another one made, and my son will never know." As they loosen the laces, the maiden returns to life, confused and alarmed. The queen hears her story with sympathy, dresses the girl in her own royal clothes, and then, oddly, hides the girl behind lock and key when the prince comes home. He immediately asks to see his "wife." (What on earth was he doing in that locked

room?) "My son," says the queen, "that girl was dead. She smelled so badly that we buried her." He rages and weeps. The queen relents. The girl is summoned, her story is told, and the two are now properly wed.

In a third Italian version of the tale, it's the girl's own mother who wishes her ill—an innkeeper named Bella Venezia who cannot stand a rival in beauty. First she imprisons her blossoming child in a lonely hut by the sea; then she seduces a kitchen boy and demands that he murder the girl. "Bring back her eyes and a bottle of her blood," she says, "and I'll marry you." The servant abandons the girl in the woods, returning with the eyes and blood of a lamb. The girl wanders through the forest and soon finds a cave where 12 robbers live. She keeps house for the burly men, who love her and deck her in jewels every night—but her mother eventually gets wind of this, and is now more jealous than ever.

Disguised as an old peddler woman, she sells her daughter a poisoned hair brooch. When the robbers return, they find the girl dead, so they bury her in a hollow tree. At length the fair corpse is discovered by a prince, who takes it home and fawns over it. The queen is appalled, but the prince insists upon marrying the beautiful maiden. Her body is bathed and dressed for a wedding. The royal hairdresser is summoned. As the girl's hair is combed, the brooch is discovered, removed, and she comes back to life.

In a Scottish version of the story, a trout in a well takes the role we now associate with a magical mirror. Each day a queen asks, "Am I not the loveliest woman in the world?" The trout assures the queen that she is ... until her daughter comes of age, surpassing the mother in beauty. The queen falls ill with envy, summons the king, and demands the death of their daughter. He pretends to comply, but sends the girl off to marry a foreign king. Eventually the trout informs the queen that the princess is still alive—so she crosses the sea to her daughter's kingdom, and kills her with a poisoned needle. The young king, grieving, locks his beloved's corpse away in a high tower. Eventually he takes another wife, who notes that he always seems sad. "What gift," she asks, "could I give to you, husband, so that you would know joy and laughter again?" He tells her that nothing can bring him joy but his first wife restored to life. She sends her husband up to the tower, where he find his beloved alive and well—for his second wife had discovered the girl, and removed the poisoned needle from her finger. The lovers thus reunited, the good-hearted second wife offers to go away. "Oh! indeed you shall not go away," says the king,

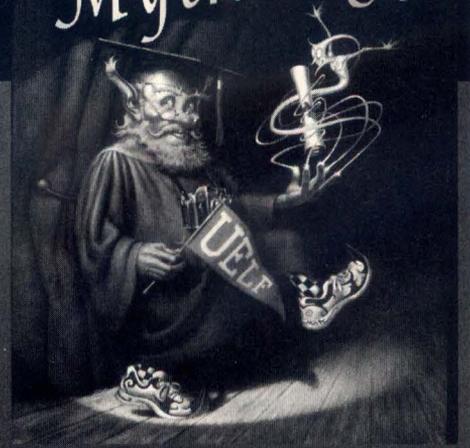
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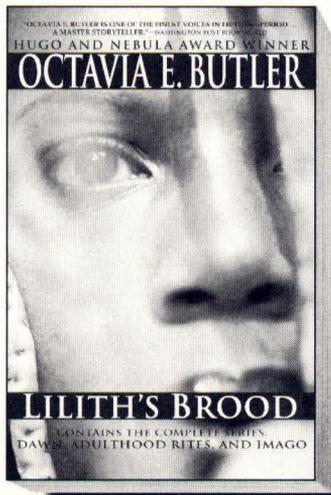
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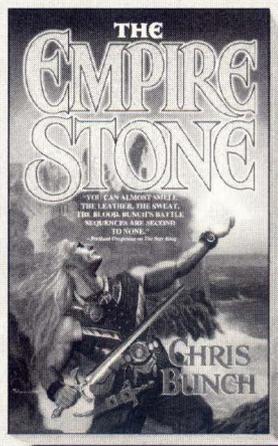
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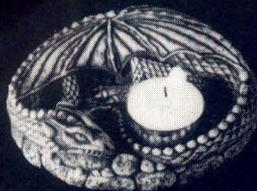
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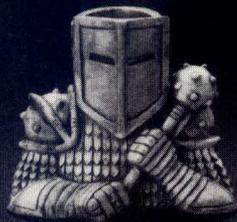
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"but I shall have both of you now." They live happily together until (blast that trout!) the jealous queen gets wind of the fact that her daughter has come back to life. She crosses the ocean once again, bearing a poisoned drink this time. The clever second wife takes matters in hand. She greets the wicked queen on the shore, and tricks the woman into drinking from the poisoned cup herself. After this, the young king and his two wives enjoy a long, peaceful life. (I've always particularly liked this rendition, contrasting the toxic mother-daughter relationship with the envy-free bond forged between the two wives.)

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm collected their version of "Snow White" from Jeannette and Amalie Hassenpflug, family friends in the town of Cassel. (Ludwig Grimm, their brother, was engaged to marry a third Hassenpflug sister.) The Hassenpflug's tale contains several elements from the earlier Italian stories, combined with imagery distinct to the lore of northern Europe. Dwarfs do not appear in the Italian variants, for instance, as dwarfs play little part in the Italian folk tradition. The Nordic and Germanic traditions, by contrast, contain a wealth of magical lore about burly little men who toil under the earth, associated with gems, iron ore, alchemy, and the blacksmith's craft. The Grimms' version starts, like so many fairy stories, with a barren queen who longs for a child. It's a winter's tale in this northern clime, set in a landscape of vast, icy forests. The queen stands sewing by an open window. She pricks her finger. Blood falls on the snow. "Would that I had a child," she sighs, "as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window-frame." Her wish is granted, but the gentle queen expires as soon as her baby is born ... or so most readers now believe. Yet the death of the queen, the "good mother," was a plot twist introduced by the Grimms. In their earliest versions of the tale (the manuscript of 1810, and the first edition of 1812), it is Snow White's natural mother whose jealousy takes a murderous bent. She was turned into an evil stepmother in editions from 1819 onward. "The Grimm Brothers worked on the *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* in draft after draft after the first edition of 1812," Marina Warner explains (in her excellent fairy-tale study, *From the Beast to the Blonde*), "Wilhelm in particular infusing the new editions with his Christian fervor, emboldening the moral strokes of the plot, meting out penalties to the wicked and rewards to the just to conform with prevailing Christian and social values. They also softened the harshness—especially in family dramas. They could not make it disappear altogether, but in Hansel and Gretel, for instance, they added the father's miserable reluctance to an earlier version in which both parents had proposed the abandonment of their children, and turned the mother into a wicked stepmother. On the whole, they tended towards sparing the father's villainy, and substituting another

wife for the natural mother, who had figured as the villain in versions they were told.... For them, the bad mother had to disappear in order for the ideal to survive and allow Mother to flourish as symbol of the eternal feminine, the motherland, and the family itself as the highest social desideratum."

It should also be noted that early Grimms' fairy tales were not published with children in mind—they were published for scholars, in editions replete with footnotes and annotations. It was later, as the tales became popular with lay readers, families, and children, that the brothers took more care to delete material they deemed inappropriate, editing, revising, and sometimes rewriting the tales altogether.

Whether mother or stepmother, the murderous queen remains one of the most vivid villains in folkloric history. She orders the death of an innocent girl, demands her heart (or liver or tongue), then boils, salts, and eats the tender organ with a gourmand's pleasure. "The term 'narcissism' seems altogether too slippery to be the only one we want here," writes Roger Sales (in *Fairy Tales and After*). "There is, for instance, no suggestion that the queen's absorption in her beauty ever gives her pleasure, or that the desire for power through sexual attractiveness is itself a sexual feeling. What is stressed is the anger and fear that attend the queen's realization that as she and Snow White both get older, she must lose. That is why the major feeling

invoked is not jealousy but envy: to make beauty that important is to reduce the world to one in which only two people count." The queen's actions are attributed to vanity run amok, but perhaps also fear and self-preservation. She is a woman whose power derives from her beauty; it is this, the tale implies, that provides her place in the castle's hierarchy. If the king's attention turns from his wife to another (or even his daughter, as it does in stories like "Allerleirauh"), what power is left to an aging woman? *Witchcraft*, the tale answers. Potions, poisons, and self-protection. In the Grimms' tale, an enchanted mirror serves not only as a clever plot device and a useful agent of information, but as a symbolic representation of the queen's insecurity, solipsism, and growing madness. Snow White, too, is a mirror—a reversed mirror of the queen, reflecting all she is not. Each day she becomes more lovely, more good—as the queen becomes the opposite.

Snow White's father, the king, is notable only by his absence, his apparent indifference, and his failure to protect his own child. Yet, as Angela Carter once pointed out in a comment about Cinderella's father, the king in "Snow White" is also "the unmoved mover, the unseen organizing principle. Without the absent father there would have been no story because there would have been no conflict."

Blood is a recurrent image in this story, warm red blood against virgin white snow.

Three drops of blood symbolize Snow White's conception. And the death of the (good) mother in childbirth. And menstruation: the beginning of both sexual maturation and the (bad) mother's hatred. The queen demands blood on the knife of the hunter as proof that her daughter is dead, as instructed. The bloody meal she then makes of the heart carries the echo of ancient pagan beliefs in which ingesting an enemy's flesh is a method of claiming their strength and their magic. Fairy-tale writer Carrie Miner reflects that as children come forth from a mother's womb, "it seems as though some women feel they 'own' their child—that it's nothing but an extension of them. This theme is beautifully wrought in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. The consumption of the apple by Snow White seems to mirror the stepmother's desire to consume her daughter—to take Snow White's very essence into herself." The queen in Anne Sexton's poem "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (from her brilliant collection *Transformations*) cries: "Bring me her heart ... and I will salt it and eat it." The hunter, however, let his prisoner go and brought a boar's heart back to the castle. The queen chewed it up like a cube steak. 'Now I am the fairest,' she said, lapping her slim white fingers."

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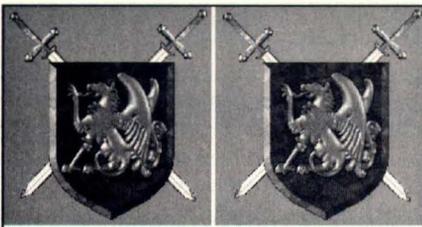
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as novelist Midori Snyder has pointed out, is often the fate of heroines in the arc of traditional folk narratives. Unlike sons who set off to win their fortune, who are journeying *toward* adventure, the daughters are outcasts, running *away*. The princes usually return at the end of the story, bringing treasure and magical brides. Princesses do not return; they must forge new lives, new alliances. Snow White's journey begins with the huntsman, who is the queen's henchman in Grimms, and the queen's lover in other versions of the tale. He defies his mistress and does not slay the girl, but he is no true ally, merely a coward. He declares that Snow White is too beautiful to kill, but note that he does not lead her to safety; he abandons her in the forest, aware that wolves will soon finish his job. Yet even here, the girl's blossoming beauty, the agent of all of her troubles at home, begins to assert itself as a form of power in the world of men. Beauty aids her once again when she finds the house of the dwarfs and falls asleep in one of their little beds. Anger toward the unknown intruder turns to wonder as they watch her sleep; enchanted by physical perfection, the dwarfs decide she may stay with them. This was later revised by the Grimms, and Snow White must consent to a long list of household duties before they'll agree to her stay. (The Disney version takes this one step further, and Snow White does the work unasked.) The change not only emphasizes the virtues of a proper work ethic, but it leads attention away from the sheer peculiarity of a ripe young girl keeping house with seven burly, earthy, and clearly unmarried men. Bruno Bettelheim, author of *The Uses of Enchantment*, who looked at fairy tales through a Freudian lens, claimed the dwarfs "were not men in any sexual sense—their way of life, their interest in material goods to the exclusion of love, suggest a pre-oidal existence." This reading of the tale ignores the fact that the dwarfs take the place of robbers or human miners found in older renditions of the story. Some of the older narratives assure us that the robbers "loved the girl as they would a sister," while others are mute on the subject, or else intriguingly ambiguous.

Soon, the queen learns that Snow White still lives. She determines to kill her young rival herself. Here the queen stands revealed as a full-fledged witch, sorceress, or alchemist, creating potions in a "secret, lonely room where no one ever came." Disguised as an old peddler woman, she sells the girl poisoned bodice laces, then combs her hair with a poisoned comb. After each of her visits, the dwarfs return home to find their young housekeeper dead. "Why couldn't she heed our warnings?" asked "The Seventh Dwarf" in a poem by Gwen Straus (from *Trail of Stones*). "Time and again we told her to stay inside the house, to do her tasks away from the door. We urged her daily, but she was a flitting but-

terfly... She was driven by something." In imagery old as Adam and Eve, the disguised queen comes one last time to tempt Snow White with a crisp, red apple. "Do you think I did not know her...?" writes Delia Sherman, explaining the princess's point of view in her heart-breaking poem "From Snow White to the Prince" (published in *The Armless Maiden*). "Of course I took her poisoned gifts. I wanted to feel her hands coming out of my hair, to let her lace me up, to take an apple from her hand, a smile from her lips, as when I was a child." In Sherman's poem, Snow White is every abused child who ever longed for a parent's love. "Don't curse me, Mother," echoes Olga Broumas in her poem "Snow White" (in *Beginning With O*). "... No salve, no ointment in a doctor's tube, no brew in a witch's kettle, no lover's mouth, no friend or god could heal me if your heart turned in anathema, grew stone against me."

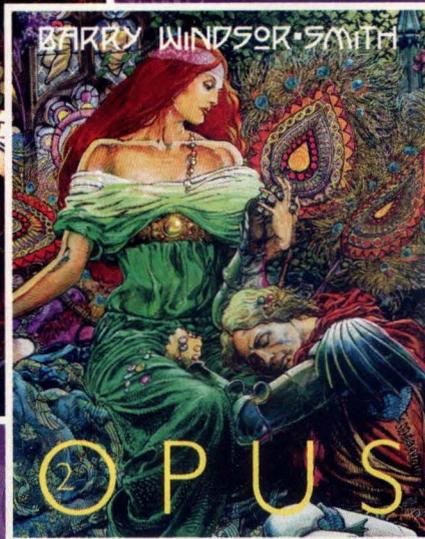
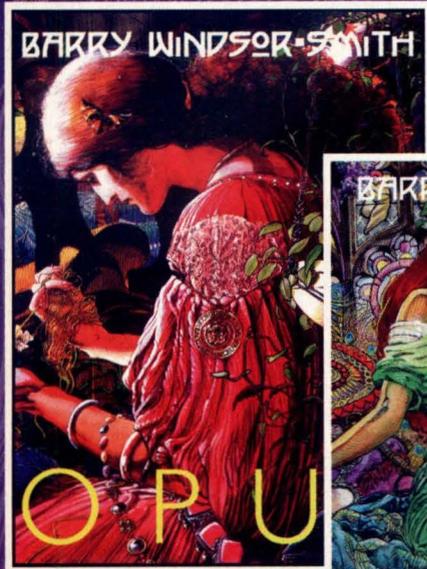
In other versions of the story, taking on local coloration as it travels around the world, the princess is slain through poisoned flowers, cake, wine, pomegranate seeds, a golden ring, a corset, shoes, coins, or the ink of a letter. The dwarfs (robbers, miners, or monks) can revive her once, and even twice; but with the third act of poisoning, she seems indisputably dead. Her body (too beautiful to bury, and strangely incorruptible) is then carefully, almost fetishistically, displayed in a clear glass casket—or else on a woodland bier, or a four-poster bed, or a shrine surrounded by candles. (In other variants, she is thrown into the sea, abandoned on a doorstep or windowsill, sent to the fairies, stolen by gypsies, even carried on a reindeer's antlers.)

There are various ways Snow White's spell of death/sleep is broken, but generally not with a kiss. That seems to be a modern addition. The poisoned item must be removed, usually by pure accident. In the chaste Grimms' version of the tale, where the necrophiliac imagery is strictly toned down, Snow White's body is handed over to a prince who happens to be passing by. Struck, as all men in this tale are struck, by the girl's extraordinary beauty, he swears he can't live without her. The dwarfs consent. (He's a prince, after all.) "I will prize her as my dearest possession," the prince promises the sad little men. As his servants bear the casket away, one stumbles and the fatal piece of poisoned apple flies from her mouth. "Oh heavens, where am I?" she cries as she wakes. "You're with me," he quickly assures the girl. (He is, remember, a stranger to her. Only in the Disney film do they meet at the onset of the tale.) He declares his love, offers marriage, and promptly spirits the beautiful maiden away. One dwarf protests this end to the story in Gerald Locklin's poem "The Dwarf" (in *Disenchantments*): "She went away from us upon a snow-white steed, the forest virgin scented with the rain

Continued on page 87

THE BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH COLLECTION

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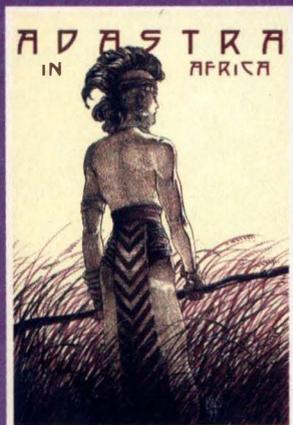
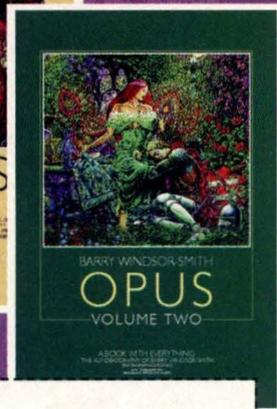
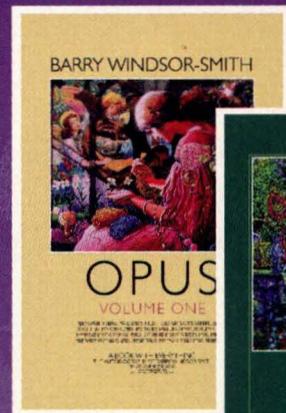
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Rose's dad says things are getting better, even if the Aztecs have moved into the house next door. He says you can't have everything, these days.

Rose Last is laying across her bed at an angle, one foot dangling, the other up in the air with the sandal hanging off her toe. She's got red-brown hair tied up with a rubber band and a chewed pen stuck in her mouth.

It's been three days since Sousaphone disappeared. Rose's room smells like the dog, an accumulation of molecules on every surface, from Sousaphone's nights snoring under her bed or days spent laying around watching her do homework. Rose never noticed the sharp smell until the dog was gone.

She unclenches her teeth from the pen, presses the point against the screen of her book. The text vanishes, replaced with a hi-res drawing of an Aztec temple.

She operates the book with her thumbs, skipping across the Net to the Found Dog reports. In all of Canberra, no one has reported finding a waddling dachshund with a cat claw scar through his left eyebrow.

Rose rolls onto her back and closes her eyes. She's day dreaming about the temple, the pyramid rising high above the marketplace. Hundreds of people, thousands of people, walking up and down and buying and selling. Glossy black hair shining in intense sunlight, coppery bodies leaking sweat. She tries to imagine all those voices, all those limbs jammed together.

There are a lot of Found Dog reports. Rose's mum reckons there are more cats and dogs than people, these days.

Rose lays back, dreaming.

Rose rides her bicycle up and down the curve of the street, standing up on the pedals. Living on the edge of Canberra is like living at the bottom of a bowl, the hills rising up around you, dotted with houses, covered with waving yellow grasses. The hot sky comes all the way down.

It's late afternoon, the shadows of the telephone poles just starting to stretch themselves across the road. She hasn't seen anyone for more than half an hour.

Rose's dad says it's like Sunday every day, these days.

It's been four days since Sousaphone went missing, four days since she broke up with Macca. He was too pissed off to help her look for her dog. Maybe he'll help when he's cooled down a bit. He got on really well with Suzy. Better than he got on with me, thinks Rose. Sousaphone hated most people but would always come when Macca called.

The footpath is glaring hot, whiter than paper. Fire-colored butterflies drift around. Rose levers her shoe off, flicks away a stone that's been pressing into her sole.

Like the other houses in the curving street, the Lasts' house is made of orange bricks, red roof tiles, aluminum around the windows. The front lawn is lush green, sparkling with spray from tiny holes in a plastic hose. Half the lawns on Rose's street are dead, the windows of the houses boarded up or broken.

The new neighbors have dug up their front garden. When old Mr. Smith died, his lawn and his roses died too. The Aztecs have gotten rid of the brown, drooping plants and replaced them with sand. Cactuses

When a neighborhood changes, it can sometimes be hard for the old-timers to adjust. But what happens when the "neighborhood" is the world?

Cactus Land

BY KATE ORMAN
Illustration by John Picacio

are dotted around in the square of the front yard. Mr. Smith's fence is still there, narrow white poles like stripes, to keep the dogs off his roses.

In the back yard, they're growing veggies. Rose can just see the sharp stakes sticking up over the wooden fence between the two houses. Mum says that's a good idea, sometimes it's hard to get things at the supermarket.

Rose stops at the underpass. She gets off the bike and starts wheeling it, trying to look as though she's not staring into the angular shadows in the tunnel under the road. Dad says she's not allowed to go through the underpass if the man is there.

As her eyes adjust, she can see something moving around in there. Something close to the ground. For a moment she thinks it might be Sousaphone, sniffing around in the shade. She nearly calls Suzy's name.

But now she can see the man's white beard. The hairs are clumped up like wires. He's laying in the shade. Is he looking back at her?

Rose pushes her bike along, up to the road. A couple of cars go past, then the road is clear in both directions. The wind hums in the telephone wires overhead, like voices. Rose wheels the bike across. She'll ride along the footpath, well clear of the underpass.

She glides up to one of the telephone poles, putting down a foot to stop herself. In the dry, cracked ground around the base of the pole, a tiny cactus is growing.

Half the classrooms at school are empty. Dad says it's good, there are more teachers-per-pupil.

Macca is going around the class with a list. "It's for the dance troupe," he explains. "Put your name and phone number. Girls on this side, boys on that side." Rose watches as people scribble down their names. Macca is wearing jewelry, a fake gold plug clipped to his lower lip. A couple of the girls have got their hair tied up in those double ponytails, sticking up above their heads like rabbit ears.

Soon enough he's thrusting the list under her nose. "Put your name and phone number on the left side."

Rose looks up and down the list and hands it back to him. Macca protests, "Everyone's doing it."

"I can see that."

"You don't have to dance just with me," says Macca. "It's a big group dance."

"I've seen it on the vision," says Rose. "It's not you. I just don't want to do it."

"Yeah, where have I heard that before," says Macca. He grins, irregular teeth sticking out above the fake plug.

Rose is out in front of the house, watering the lawn. She keeps looking over at the house with the cactuses. She can't decide whether she hopes someone will come out or not.

She keeps getting the feeling that her parents aren't telling her something. There's some secret they don't want her to know. Sometimes she wonders if they're planning to get divorced.

The Net and the vision are full of Aztec facts. The year is 2027: in the Aztec calendar, that's the year Two Reed. The last year in a bundle of 52 years, the end of an Aztec century. They used to smash all of their pots and statues, put out the fires. Restart everything.

Rose's dad sometimes talks about the millennium. How everyone thought the world was going to end at midnight. The electricity going off, intensive care units crashing, planes falling out of the sky. Just snap, everything ending at once.

The Aztecs would sit on their rooftops in the dark, staring into the distance. Up on the sacred hill, the priests would be trying to get the new fire started on the chest of a sacrificed slave.

Rose's dad says that come midnight everyone just stood there, looking at one another. When the lights didn't go out, they started laughing, shouting, honking their horns. Rose's dad crashed his car driving home in the morning.

Rose was born 14 years after that. Sometimes, when his friends come round for beer, her dad makes off-color jokes about it. Things like, "More than just blanks in my gun." Rose's mum looks like she's eaten something sour and the men laugh nervously, clutching their tinnies. Later Rose remembers that none of them has got kids.

Rose remembers more cars on the street when she was a kid, getting lectures on not running onto the road. More people in the shopping centers. And everywhere, be careful, Rose: people like the man under the underpass. People at the shopping centers, asking her mum for money. "There were never so many beggars when I was a girl," her mum would say.

A lot of people left the city during the early 'twenties. The big malls echo like caves now, all those shops closed: clothes shops, sports shops, music shops, cafes. A lot of people are dying, too. Mr. Smith was so covered in cancer spots they said he looked like a jaguar.

Rose's mind is wandering through that marketplace again. Sixty-thousand people coming into the city every day. The Aztecs made people bring them gold, food, skins, feathers. Even millipedes and spiders, because they owned everything. Everything poured into their cities, like holes in the landscape.

And when they ran out of enemies to fight, their cities started fighting one another, like dogs fighting over bones. With no more enemies to sacrifice, they would capture one another's warriors and sacrifice them. Like they had eaten everything, and there was nothing left to eat but themselves.

Rose has only seen any of the new neighbors once. She was sitting in the front yard, playing with Sousaphone.

A woman came out of the house. Rose didn't even see her, at first, too busy getting Suzy to drop the tennis ball she had in her mouth.

The woman was wearing a shirt and a wrap-around skirt. It's not just at school, thought Rose, the fashion is getting in everywhere. Even her mum had looked at the skirts in a catalogue.

The woman was standing next to one of the cactuses, plucking away the red fruits and then dropping them into the basket.

The woman gave Rose a sharp look. She ducked down behind a bush, talking to Sousaphone, loud. "Did you bury something? In the garden? Bad dog!" Suzy gave her a puzzled look, and went on romping around with the ball.

She only got a glimpse of the woman. But she saw her face, the noble nose, the glossy black hair tied up in those rabbit ears, the copper color of her skin.

Rose puts on the vision in her room while she does homework. It's hard to concentrate without Sousaphone interrupting her every five minutes.

She flips channels. Cartoons, an old film, a nature show. Someone on a current affairs show is saying the Aztec movement is the best thing to happen to Australia as far back as he can remember.

"People say it sounds old-fashioned, but I'm an old-fashioned

"It's wishful thinking to say that some world and start changing things."

man. This country needs a good cleaning-up. The Aztecs were experts at discipline. The young people are learning not to take drugs, not to drink."

The interviewer looks down at his notes. "Is it just a fad? Or do you think young people accept the Aztec view, that intoxication makes you a channel for dangerous, some say, occult powers?"

"It's wishful thinking to say that some magic power could just break into our world and start changing things. In some ways I wish it would." They laugh. "No, it's got to do with behavior. Making choices about the kind of society you want to live in."

Rose's phone rings. "Hello?"

"It's me," says Macca's voice. "I can't see you."

"The screen isn't working."

"Yeah, the screen isn't working."

"I'm doing my homework," Rose tells the blank screen. "I can't talk for long."

"Listen," says Macca. "I wanted to ask if you wanted to go to the visions with me on the weekend. On Saturday night."

"No thanks," says Rose.

"You don't want to be sitting at home alone on a Saturday night," he says. "Not even your dog to keep you company."

"Don't be a prick," says Rose. Suddenly everything inside her mind is coming out. "I don't want to go to the dance with you and I don't want to go to the visions with you. All right?" Silence on the phone. "Write it down so you won't forget it."

"Do you know what they used to do to girls who wouldn't do what they were told?"

"Piss off."

"I mean the Aztecs."

"Yeah, I know what you mean."

"Are you still looking for your dog?"

"Yeah, I'm still looking. I haven't seen Sousaphone since the last time you were over here."

"Since you dropped me, you mean."

"Grow up."

"They ate dogs, you know."

"What?"

"Haven't you seen the vision? They didn't have cows and pigs. They cooked up their dogs and ate them."

"You're disgusting, Glenn Macdonald."

"Sausage dog on the barbecue."

"You're disgusting." Rose pushes her thumb into the hang up button. She lays back on the bed, but she can't get comfortable.

Rose pushes open the gate and walks up the garden path, between the cactuses. The Sun is going down. But she's not going to wait for mum or dad to get home so she can ask permission. She doesn't care how much the Aztecs try to scare her. If they've eaten her bloody dog, she's going to kill them.

She bangs on the front door. If she'd called Macca back, he'd probably have come over with her. It doesn't matter. Maybe no one's home. She bangs on the door again.

The front door opens, slowly. There's a man looking down at her. He has a high forehead, a Roman nose. His shiny black hair is cut dead straight across his forehead, gathered up at the back of his skull into a sort of ponytail. He's not wearing anything except a loincloth.

"You've gone to a lot of trouble to come and see me," says the

man, with a polite smile.

He opens the door for her. The house is dimly lit inside. She can see the woman, sitting on the floor, looking up from a loom.

"Look," she says, "I don't want to disturb you, you've probably got lots to do—"

"Be welcome." He stands to one side so she can go in.

Rose looks around. There's no one on the street. No, she has to find out. It will probably be OK if the woman is there, she decides.

The living room is nearly empty. Just some mats on the floor, some little statues next to the fireplace. The woman's loom is attached to her by a belt, the cloth attached to the wall on a picture hook. She gets up out of the loom as Rose comes in.

The man sits down on a mat. Rose sits down on another one, drawing her legs up beside her.

"My name is Temictli," says the man. He has heavy earrings that pull on his earlobes, a plug in his lip, real gold. "I hope you're in good health."

"Um, you too. I'm Rose Last. From next door."

"I am a feather worker" says Temictli. "Are you studying?"

It takes Rose a moment to realize he means, Do you go to school. "Yes."

"What profession will you follow?"

"What will I do when I grow up?" she says. "Um, I want to be a vet."

The woman comes back in with a pottery bowl full of fruit and flowers. She smiles at them, and goes back to her weaving.

"Look," says Rose. "I can't find my dog. Did you—I want to know if you've seen her. I mean, I want to know if you've got her."

Temictli nods, thoughtfully. For a moment, Rose thinks he means yes.

"I am sorry to disappoint you," he says, "but we don't have your dog."

"Oh," says Rose. "Sorry. I mean, I just wanted to check."

"Of course." He doesn't seem pissed off. "We will be sure to look for her."

"She's a little dachshund, with a scar on her left eyebrow." A phrase from the vision comes into her head. "You have befriended me."

Temictli seems impressed. "The heart of our Lord has granted things," he says.

"You're real, aren't you?" says Rose.

Temictli picks up a flower from the serving bowl, turning the blossom in a large hand. His face is lit by the fire on one side, shadowed on the other. He says, "We walked through the wilderness for two centuries. We were unwelcome everywhere. We walked over stones. We ate the poisonous snake and the spiny cactus." Rose has seen this on the vision, the Aztecs' long walk to their new home. "On our journey, we found the dead city of Teotihuacan. Vast streets, huge temples pushing up to the sky. How great those ancients must have been."

Temictli sounded like he had been there in person, he had walked those thousands of miles. "By the time we reached the shores of Lake Texcoco, we knew we were the chosen people. How did we know? Because we had survived. Nothing had been able to kill us. Not the animals, not the thirst, not the beating heat of the Sun. Within two centuries we had built our own city up out of the swamp. The greatest city in the world." He isn't boasting, thinks Rose, it's just a fact. "But we had not forgotten Teotihuacan. If those giants could fall..."

magic power could just break into our
In some ways I wish it would."

"And then Cortez came along," says Rose. She looks at Temictli, wondering if that was rude, but he's as calm as ever.

"We were shattered," says Temictli. "Our children lost all the greatness that we had enjoyed. But we never disappeared."

"I saw on the vision," says Rose. "The re-enactments in Mexico, and the folk traditions—"

"No," says Temictli. "The Spanish carried us away in their minds. Our shadow has frightened you ever since."

Rose doesn't know what to say. She's just listening to him in the darkening room, eyes on his half-lit face.

"We could never have disappeared from the world," says Temictli, reasonably. "Without us, who would sustain the Sun with the killing of men? The gods gave their own flesh to make the world. In return, they must be fed."

He turns the flower around in his hands. "We were like petals falling from a tree. A gust of wind, and everything we had built was gone."

He pushes the bowl toward her. It's full of those red cactus fruits, like a bowl full of hearts.

Temictli fixes her with black eyes. "The debt must be paid," he says.

When Rose gets home, her parents are sitting in the dark: The power has gone out again. That's twice this week.

"There's sandwiches," says mum. "I'm sorry there's nothing hot. Where did you get to?"

Rose sits down at the table. "The library," she fibs.

"There's no vision, of course," says mum. "So we'll have to make our own entertainment."

"When I was your age," says dad, "we thought everything was going to end in a nuclear war."

"Father," says mum sharply.

"I used to have nightmares about it. The flash." There are three empties on the table in front of him. "Trying to find something on the radio, and getting just static. Everything ending suddenly. All at once, you know."

Rose's mum is looking at her dad. Neither of them will look at her.

"You can do without electricity," says Rose's dad. He sounds like he's going to cry. "You can do without the vision. You can do without most things, if you have to. We got on all right after it turned two thousand. You know. How everything was a bit unreliable for the first few months." Rose doesn't nod, she's heard the stories over and over. "But there's one thing you can't do without."

Rose looks at her dad. He's drinking from his can of beer. "You get married, Rose."

"Please," says her mum.

"When you grow up, get married, and have lots of kids."

Rose shifts in her seat. "Yes dad," she says.

The next day the police come to the door. No one has seen Glenn Macdonald for over 24 hours. Rose tells them about her phone conversation yesterday. A policewoman gets her book out and records everything Rose says. She reckons Rose might have been the last person to talk to Macca before he disappeared.

The electricity is back on. Rose is watching the vision, slumped, one leg thrown over the arm of the chair. Mum and dad are out in the back yard, talking about a garden, like they do every Saturday afternoon.

On the vision, there are people all over Black Mountain, walking around on the dead grass. A bunch of them are dressed up as Aztecs. The comm tower is a spike pointing up to heaven.

Rose leans closer to the set, trying to see if they have coppery skin, sharp foreheads.

Someone knocks on the door. Rose untangles herself from the chair, dropping the remote on the floor. Does she want it to be Macca? She pads across to the front door on bare feet.

Temictli the Aztec is at the door. He has Sousaphone with him. Rose drops to her knees, the dog waddling up to her. "Hey, Suzy, hey!" The dog is in her arms and wriggling, licking her face. "My Suzy woozy Sousaphone!"

Temictli watches them with the hint of a smile on his face. "Thanks, mister," says Rose, looking up at him. "I'm really—thank you."

Temictli nods. "I will be keeping you from the important things you have to do," he says, and turns to go.

"Do you have any kids?" says Rose.

Temictli pauses. "I have two sons and one daughter," he says. "About your age."

"What are they going to do when they grow up?"

"They're going to rule the world," says Temictli.

Rose sees herself 20 years from now, walking barefoot across the red sands. The desert is choked with cactus, long spines catching at her clothes like pointing fingers.

When it rains, the prickly pears will be covered in fat red fruit, swollen with water hoarded in sticky scarlet flesh.

The Sun drums down on an almost empty Earth. There is no one to the horizons. The country has been cleaned up, picked to the bones. Her feet are wearing, are burning away to nothing.

That afternoon she takes Sousaphone for a walk. Suzy barks at the underpass, but the old man is gone. Rose walks her dog down the hill to look. The underpass booms with the smell of old urine. Crickets are buzzing in the afternoon heat, the only sound.

When she gets home she's soaked with sweat. Suzy laps at a bowl of water in the bathroom while she takes a shower. Afterward she lays on the bed, imagining.

In the evening she can hear smashing noises coming from next door. The electricity has gone again, the vision keeps switching itself on and off. Sousaphone cowers under the bed.

Rose pushes back the curtain. All the lights are going out in all the houses. Even the skyglow is gone. All of Canberra must be in flickering darkness.

You can see flashes of the news on the vision. Up on Black Mountain, they're kindling the new fire. On another channel, there's a rattlesnake, pushing its way out of a dead skin in thick, muscular movements.

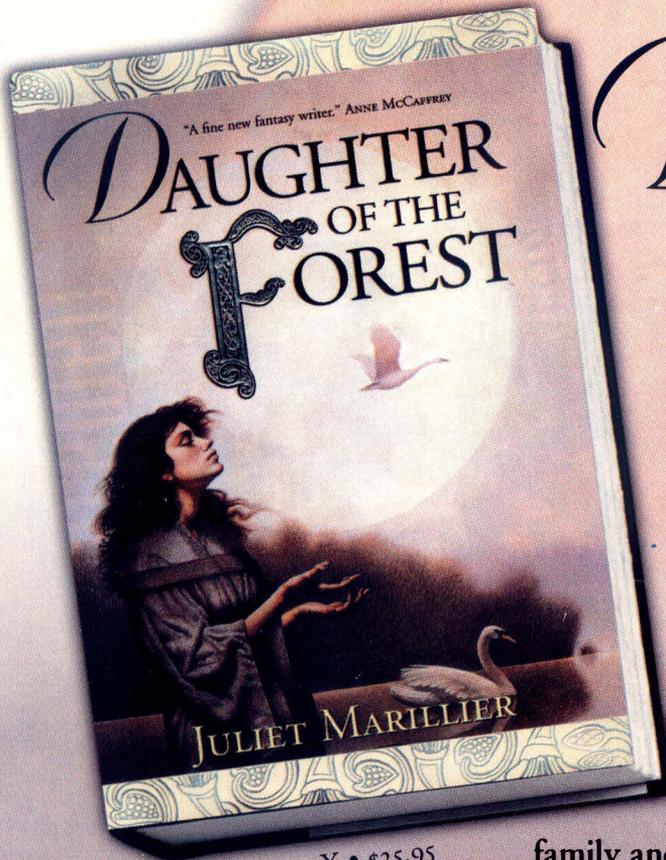
There's a crowd up on the mountain, surrounding the big slab. Through the people you can get glimpses of someone laying on the stone, the fire just starting to catch.

The vision gives up with a sigh. Rose sighs too, annoyed. You'd think they could keep the electricity going, at least, so we could do something in the evening.

But like Rose's dad says, you can't have everything. 🐉

"The gods gave their own flesh to make the world. In return, they must be fed."

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MOUSERS

Not only had Mindy known Bud her whole life, she was playing with him when he died, so it was not surprising that she had nightmares about it. One moment he was in fierce pursuit of a scrap of crumpled newspaper; the next, with a strangled cry, he had fallen limp on the floor. What came back in the dreams was the horrible loose weight of him, the way he shifted in her arms and his agile tail flopped against her legs as she took the stairs two at a time, screaming for Mom. The vet was of the opinion that he was dead before he hit the floor. "Cats can have heart attacks, too," he said. "He probably didn't feel more than momentary discomfort."

"That's good," said Mom, miserably. "I've seen animals die slowly, and I've seen them die quickly, and quick is better."

"Quick sucks!" shouted Mindy, and ran off to kick the wall and cry by herself in the restroom.

Dad—whose cat, technically, Bud had been—got quiet over the next several weeks. Mindy would find him, stopped in the middle of balancing the checkbook or weeding the radishes, staring at some place where Bud should have been energetically

DOG PEOPLE
SAY CATS
AREN'T
LOYAL, BUT
CAT
PEOPLE
KNOW
BETTER ...

By Peni R.
Griffin

*Illustration by
Laurie Hardin*

"helping" him. She thought she knew what was happening inside him, and she didn't understand how he could take it so quietly. When her numbness was disrupted by the sight of the empty window by the birdfeeder, or the blank top of the refrigerator (which impressive height Bud had been able to scale in a single bound), she would burst into tears again and have to find something insensate to beat on.

Mom started going around the house with plywood, saw, and tape measure, talking about rodents. "Mousers like Bud don't grow on trees," she said. "As soon as they realize he's gone, they'll start coming inside."

No one suggested that the remaining two cats could take up the slack. The senior cat, Mom's Isis, was too arthritic, and hadn't seriously hunted since she turned over the boss cat duties to Bud 10 years ago. Mindy's Puffball, though young and spry enough for anything, had never caught anything more challenging than lizards, which she played with and released.

Isis and Puffball, to Mindy's annoyance, were upset about Bud's death in all the wrong ways. As long as an older cat than Puffball and a more vigorous cat than Isis had been in charge of yard patrol, waking Mom up to get breakfast, and settling territorial disputes, they had both been content to accept his judgments, let him have first refusal of leftover cereal milk, and respect his possession of the most comfortable armchair. Without him, vigorous Puffball was reluctant to cede authority back to sedentary Isis, who in her turn was not about to back down from a cat as young and feckless as Puffball. So they stalked around the house and yard, jerking their tails and hissing whenever they met, even over the food bowls, and displaying no sorrow at all. Mindy could have smacked them.

"Leave them alone," said Mom. "Their social order is disrupted and they have to work it out."

"But do they miss him?" demanded Mindy. "Can't they be sad about it?"

"Cats are pragmatic," said Mom. "You don't often see one in mourning."

They hadn't settled it by the time Dad came home from the Humane Society with a new disruption in the form of a kitten—gray, with white chest and feet, and a tail slightly longer than his body. Isis and Puffball, agreeing for the first time since Bud died, puffed their tails and hissed when they saw him.

"His name's Nimrod," said Dad, petting him. Nimrod twisted and reared, waving his paws in the air in an effort to catch his fingers.

"I hope that's prophetic," said Mom.

"It's a stupid name," declared Mindy. "It's longer than he is."

"But not longer than his tail," said Dad, making his fingers moving targets for Nimrod to chase. "The tail is what sold me. Bud's was just like that at this age. That extra length is what gave him the balance to leap farther and higher than any other cat in the neighborhood. Ack!" He stilled his hand with Nimrod's front feet inside it, and gently pushed his claws back into their sheaths with his thumb. "Paddy paws, babe. We don't use claws on Daddy 'round here."

Nimrod, purring like a refrigerator, looked up at him with pale greenish-blue eyes, his pupils nearly invisible.

"Be careful you don't teach him to play rough," said Mom. "Mindy, we'd better go tell our kitties we still love them. There'll be plenty of time to get friendly with Nimrod after he's safely imprinted on your dad."

So Mindy found Puffball and fussed over her, but her mind was on the kitten. No way he could take Bud's place, tail or no tail. He was so tiny! Smaller than Puffball when she'd come from the pound, and even full grown, she weighed only eight pounds. Bud had been a lean, muscular 11 pounds on his last trip to the vet.

The fact that Nimrod hadn't got a chance of taking Bud's place made him easier to take. He was cute as a kitten could be, partly because he had no idea how small and unthreatening he was. Whenever he encountered one of the older cats, he marched up to her, ears erect and tail sticking up behind him like a flag in the stern of a bat-

tlefish, every tuft of fur clearly proclaiming: "Hi! I'm boss cat!" These encounters always ended with Nimrod being sent casually head over heels. From this he would recover, lick his fur in a "Just wait till I'm bigger" manner; and then, half an hour of napping, chasing string, or scarfing down Kitten Chow later, back he would come, tail and ears up, evidently convinced he was bigger now.

Dad was proud of him. "Lookit that," he said, as Nimrod rose unperturbed from the corner where Isis had thrown him. "He'll be a firecracker when he grows up."

"I just hope we can keep the fort till then," said Mom. "Isis has been listening to the walls. Something's got in."

Mindy could hear them, too, mysterious scratches and thumps behind the sheetrock at the head of her bed. In the daytime, they were swallowed by normal household noise, but at night they sounded as big as racoons, at least. Rodents had never come into the house during summer before, waiting till cold and rain made the shelter of the walls worth the risk of meeting Bud. "You should go after them," Mindy told Puffball when she perched alertly on the pillow, watching the unmoving wall, but making no attempt—as Bud had used to do on winter nights—to paw her way through or seek for openings in the baseboard.

Nimrod did, scabbling his claws eagerly along the varnished wood; but the attempt was cuter than it was useful. And when he located a cricket, and pounced at it, it got away handily. Dad encouraged him by tossing crumpled paper, string, and a feather on the end of a cord for him to chase; but Mindy remembered how Puffball had chased all those things when she was a kitten, too, and it hadn't taught her to hunt.

The nightmares about Bud's death had faded by now, but Mindy still dreaded bedtime, that long period of laying in the dark, waiting to hear rodents of unknown size go by six inches from her ear. The fact that she only heard them some nights made sleep no easier. Every time a bug blundered across a bare shoulder, or the breeze from the window blew a fold of nightgown across her skin, she would sit up, convinced a mouse was in the bed with her. When Puffball slept with her, reassurance was immediate—lousy hunter or not, she'd hardly ignore a mouse sharing the furniture with her. When she wasn't, only turning on the lights and searching the bed sufficed.

One night, Mindy dreamed she was trapped between the sheetrock and the outer wall, shrunk to kitten size and pursued by rats. Clinging with needly claws to the rough wood, she climbed straight up the inside of the house's outer shell of clapboard, knowing she should turn and face the ominous shapes below. Bud would have gotten the drop on them and broken their backs. But she was so small, and the rats (which she could see behind her without turning her head, because it was a dream) filled all the space and then some, cracking the sheetrock as they muscled their way deliberately after her. "Bud!" she screamed, but all that came out was a pitiful meow. "Bud!" The lead rat seized the trailing edge of her nightgown in his teeth, and sent her plummeting past the ranks of rats, down and down and down, and then she saw a flash of orange fur and the flicker of an unusually long tail.

Rowr! Thump!

Mindy woke up, shaky and disoriented, heart fluttering. "Bud?" she gasped. That had been his deep, loud, war cry, the thump of a solid landing on the prey! She sat up and turned on the light, half-expecting to see him shaking a rat to death in the middle of the room.

Instead, a mouse scurried for the door, Bud and Nimrod in pursuit. Mindy flew off the bed after them, snapping on the light just in time to see the mouse vanish under the baseboard and Bud hurtle through the wall, the tip of his tail vanishing with a flick into the sheetrock. Nimrod threw himself into the wall and bounced back, mewing in frustration as Mindy blinked and gasped, her brain stuttering: But, but, but—

THE MOUSE VANISHED UNDER THE BASEBOARD AND BUD HURTLIED THROUGH THE WALL, THE TIP OF HIS TAIL VANISH- ING WITH A FLICK.



Nimrod scabbled his claws against the baseboard, looking up at her and saying, "Mew, mew, mew" accusingly, as if it were her fault he couldn't continue his pursuit. "You saw him," Mindy said. "You and the mouse both."

"Mew!" complained Nimrod. Isis hissed from the top of the stairs. Remembering that they needed to encourage him, Mindy crossed the hall to pet him. "G-good kitty! You almost got him, huh? Good, good kitty!" Isis watched her disapprovingly.

"What's the commotion?" asked Dad, stumbling out of the master bedroom in his pajamas.

"Mew mew mew," pleaded Nimrod, running to meet him and patting his bare ankle.

"A mouse," said Mindy. "He chased it, but it got away." Had she seen Bud? She couldn't have; and anyway, if anyone had a right to see Bud's ghost, it was Dad, not her.

"Good boy, Nimrod!" crowed Dad, picking him up to fuss over him. "Better luck next time. Can you find where it disappeared, Mindy? We'll have to plug up the hole in the morning."

With Nimrod's help, they located it—a crack under the baseboard that looked too small to let a cockroach through, much less a mouse. Dad marked it with a pencil, and shooed Mindy off to bed, where she found Puffball sprawled elegantly across the avail-

able space. She picked her up and resettled her in the curve of her stomach—you could do that with Puffball, though any other cat, disturbed out of sleep, would stalk off—to rub her head. "I love you best," she promised, rousing a sleepy purr. "You're my own sweet pretty kitty. But you're completely useless with mice, you know."

"Purr," said Puffball, evidently not regarding this as a serious character flaw.

"I couldn't really have seen Bud's ghost. Could I? I mean—I could've still been dreaming."

"Purr."

"You'd know if Bud were still around, wouldn't you? Of course you would. You know everything that goes on around here, even if you don't do anything about it."

"Purr." Puffball shoved her head into Mindy's hand, and the conversation devolved into love-talk, and thence to sleep.

Mindy kept her eyes open as summer passed and Nimrod grew. Despite his best efforts, Puffball established herself as boss cat in both house and yard, apparently by sheer cuteness. Why this should matter to Nimrod, who was every bit as cute, or to the swaggering stray tom cats, Mindy had no idea. Whatever the reason, the strays all bowed before her, and Nimrod gave up challenging her a dozen times a day to focus on hunting.

Inside the house, he relentlessly pursued crickets, roaches, Isis's tail, crumpled paper, leaf shadows, and noises in the walls. In the yard he stalked birds, grasshoppers, toads, lizards, and mysterious rustlings. Mom, Dad, and Mindy all praised his catches, when he made them—usually grasshoppers and lizard tails, in the early weeks. Mom and Dad argued about whether to praise him for catching lizards or not. Dad maintained that his kitten intellect was too limited to distinguish between discouragement of his hunting a particular animal from discouragement of his hunting in general. Mom maintained that he was demonstrating a strong enough hunting urge to survive being steered away from beneficial animals.

Mindy was less interested in what he hunted than in how he learned to do it. Did he figure out on his own that Bud's old spots by the compost heap, the woodpile, and the landscape pond were the best places to lurk, or—did someone show him? Was that hunch in his shoulders instinctive, or imitative? Was his tendency to pounce on things that weren't quite in his pouncing range an indication of overconfidence, or the result of modeling himself on someone with a longer pounce?

She told herself not to be silly. After all, Puffball and Isis would notice if Bud were still around, and cats didn't have ghosts, and she had been half asleep when she ran into the hall.

But Puffball, Mindy noticed, though she had taken over most boss cat perks and responsibilities, never got into Bud's chair, though she sometimes stared at it. And Isis still walked around Bud's spot at the top of the stairs. It made you wonder.

Unlike everyone else in the whole world, probably, Mindy's family brought their cats in at dusk. This dated back to when Mom was in high school and her cat, the legendary Pecos Bill, had gone out hunting at 9 PM and been found crushed in the street at 10 PM. This story meant more to Mindy now than it had before Bud's death, and she became ruthless in tracking down the cats as the light began to dim each evening. Isis, who hardly ever went outside anymore, was the easiest; Puffball, the hardest. Nimrod usually came running at the second call, so Mindy got worried one July night when she got Puffball into the house in 10 minutes, and still had seen nothing of Nimrod a quarter-hour later.

"Niiiiimrawd," she called, pacing the perimeter of the yard. "Nimmy Nimmy Niiiiimrawd!" Hummingbirds darted out of her way as she sought among the Turk's caps; sparrows and doves scattered as she checked out the bird feeder; tadpoles wiggled across the water at the landscape pond; a skunk continued unperturbed to turn over melon rinds in the compost heap. As she approached the pavilion roof that protected the wood pile, a flicker of orange-yellow movement darted away from her peripheral vision, and

DAD CROUCHED
DOWN AS THE LEAN
YELLOW CAT RAN
UP TO BAT THE HEM
OF HIS BATHROBE
AND RUB AGAINST
HIS LEG, AND THEN
WAS NOT THERE.



Bud's full-throated hunting call darted away from her ears.

Mindy sprinted around the wood pile, the two cats' names crowding each other in her mouth.

In the straggle of blue sage encroaching on the wood pile, Nimrod's chest and paws flashed in the twilight as he tossed a limp mouse in the air, caught it, and tossed it again. For a moment, the flopping tail reminded her of Bud; but she hastily transformed it in her mind to a cat toy, something that had never had life.

"Good boy, Nimrod!" Mindy advanced to pet him, and Nimrod crouched over his catch, a tiny parody of a protective growl emerging from his half-grown throat. "Don't worry, I won't take it away from you. You're a brave bold boy, catching a big fat mouse like that all by yourself!" If it had been by himself. Mindy looked around as she petted his ears and spoke admiringly. It was an awfully big mouse for his first catch, and any number of stray cats could have been responsible for that mature hunting cry.

But would a stray cat have let Nimrod take its mouse away?

"Meow," said Nimrod, in a squeaky adolescent voice, and began rumbling his refrigerator purr.

Mindy waited in the grass till he was done playing with the mouse and had eaten about half of it—long enough that Dad came looking for her and got his own chance to fuss over his cat

for being a mighty hunter. "I'm not a hundred percent sure he caught it all by himself," said Mindy. "I think another cat ran off as I came up."

"If he's found a mentor among the strays, that's fine," said Dad. "It's probably a female. I can't see a tom letting him keep the mouse, but a female might get maternal."

There were no yellow females in the neighborhood, but Mindy let it go. They went in together, Nimrod draped proudly round Dad's shoulders, and spending the rest of the evening comfortably purring on his chest as they watched a video of Dad's favorite movie, *Ghostbusters*.

"You think maybe cats have ghosts?" Mindy asked, as he rewound it.

"Oh, Mindy," sighed Mom.

"It's OK," said Dad. "I wonder the same thing. Sometimes I wake up and feel Bud on my chest, but when I reach up to pet him, he's not there."

"Stop it, both of you," said Mom. "Dead is gone, and that's the end of it. You're torturing yourselves if you go looking for Bud's ghost."

Mindy dreamed of the death that night, and lay awake afterward, clutching Puffball, thinking that Mom was probably right. There was plenty else to think about—day camp, keeping up with her part of the garden, swimming and biking and picnicking. Puffball pushed her head into her hand, purring. Bud's death was ages ago. Done with.

But Bud would never be warm and spry and alive again, and someday Puffball would be limp, dead weight. So would Isis. So would Mom and Dad. And Mindy herself—someday—and that was the point at which she squeezed Puffball too tight and had to lay alone in the dark, listening to the walls.

Mom found, early in August, the first signs that rats had made it into the living area. Mindy heard her cry of outrage when she found the tooth marks in the baking potatoes intended for supper. "Now I'll have to take everything out of the pantry and find out how they got in. Not to mention scrubbing the place down."

"Dad and I'll help you," said Mindy.

"No, you won't," said Mom. "You have no idea what horrible things you can catch from dried rat droppings. You're not even going to be in the house."

So Mindy stayed outside while Mom, in dust mask and rubber gloves, scrubbed out the pantry with bleach water. The temperature was in the high 90s and there was no window unit in the kitchen, so Mom came out periodically to breathe, looking limp and pale. "You need to learn to catch rats soon," said Mindy to Nimrod, who sat on her bare foot and watched the inaccessible hummingbirds darting in and out of the hibiscus. "I don't think Mom can do it."

"Purr," said Nimrod.

Something rustled in the flowerbeds, and Mindy poked her head through the porch railing, trying to see. "Bud?" she called softly. "If you're here, why aren't you scaring the rats off?"

In the garage, the circular saw began to whine again, cutting wood and metal into shapes suitable for covering rat holes.

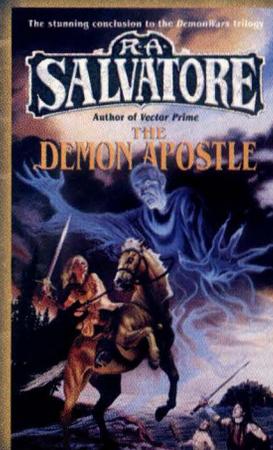
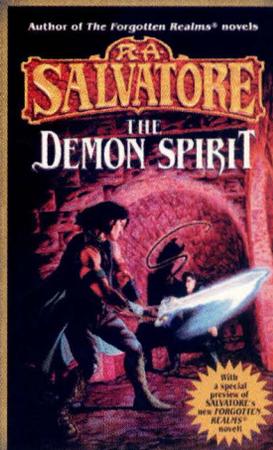
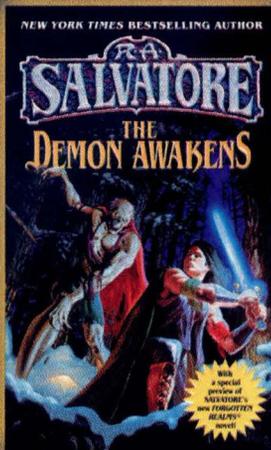
Nimrod, having caught one mouse, began to catch them regularly and bring them up to the house to collect his praise. Mindy learned to look out through the screen door before opening it, so he wouldn't dart in with one, and she wouldn't step on any of his neatly arranged corpses. "I like the way Bud did it better," she grumbled, as Dad scooped up three with a shovel.

"Bud's stomach was bigger," said Dad. "You were too little to remember, but when he was Nimrod's size, we had to deal with this, too. Later on he'll eat them all." He carried the shovel off toward the compost heap, held at maximum extension from his body.

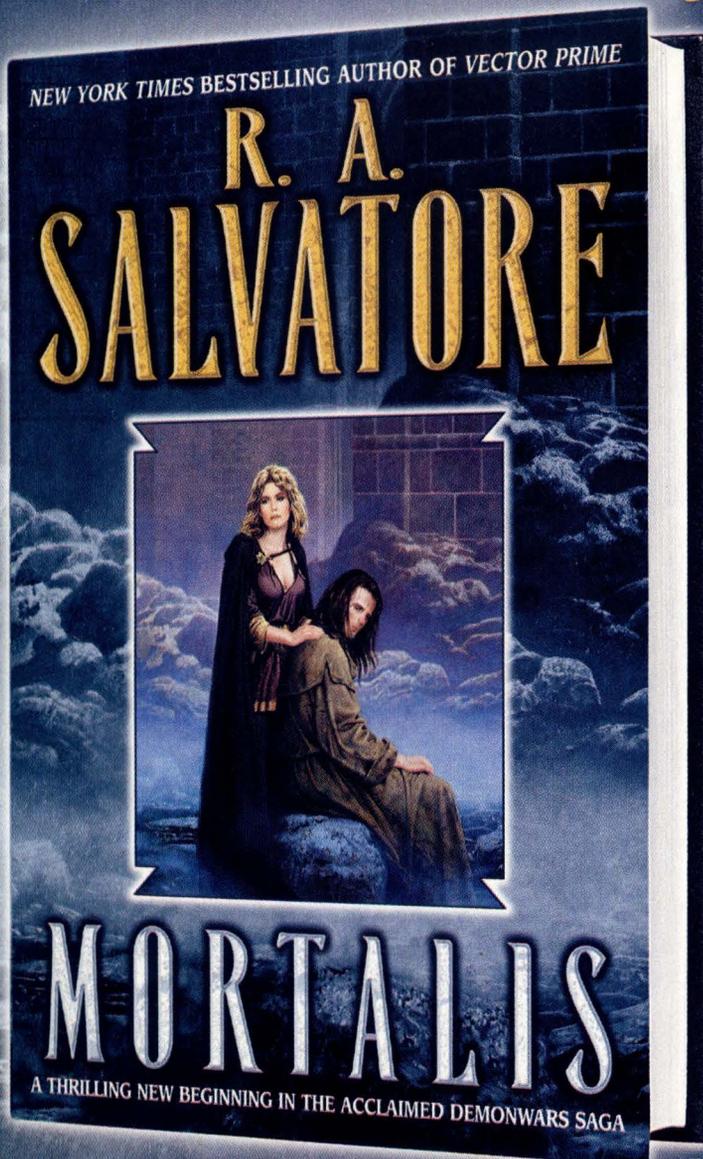
School started, and Mindy hesitated to bring many of her friends home—friends with new houses, whose yards were boring

Continued on page 85

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IF YOU EMBARK ON A QUEST
FOR POWER, BE ASSURED IT
WILL FIND YOU WHEN YOU
LEAST EXPECT IT.

THE 4TH OF LAW POWER



"Girl, am I to understand that you are *threatening* me?"

Marta eyed her would-be robber with mixed curiosity and amusement, but the raven on her shoulder was just amused. Its croak sounded very much like a chuckle.

The girl in question stepped away from the scraggly bramble bush she'd been hiding behind and took a firmer grip on her sword. She wasn't that much younger than Marta, though her bedraggled condition and the obvious fear in her eyes made her look like an armored waif. Her hair was deep black to Marta's red gold, and worn in a long braid down her back so it wouldn't catch on her mailshirt.

The girl waved her sword in menace, or something like it. "I told you to step down!"

Marta sighed. "Oh, very well. I could use a stretch." Marta slid from her seat and stood beside her red and blue cart in the grassy clearing. The mare took the opportunity to munch some of that grass while Marta looked the girl slowly up and down, taking in her dirty, pinched face, her patched clothes.

Marta's eyes lingered for a moment over the mailshirt well fitted to the girl's slim frame, and again on the gleaming sword. "I gather this is your debut as a ... well, what shall I call you? A highwaygirl?"

Whatever reaction the girl had expected, Marta clearly wasn't giving it to her. "I'm not to be trifled with! Do you know what blade this is?"

Marta sighed gustily. "Since you asked—the style is *shortscythe*. It's clearly Master Solthyr's work and to my knowledge he only made seven finished blades of that type. Four are still in the King's Armory at Lyrksa. Two were stolen from Master Solthyr himself by the pirate Longfeather last year. It's said that Longfeather gave one to his patron, the Chief of the Five Isles, and kept the other himself. Let's see ... that only leaves *Shave the Cat* unaccounted for. Would this be it?"

BY RICHARD PARKS

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN MONTLEONE



Smartilone

The girl just stared at her. "Who are you?"

Marta smiled. "My name is Marta, Black Kath's Daughter. Shall we get on with this? I have business to attend."

"Business, she calls it," said the raven. He sounded casual enough, but he had also quietly removed himself to a safer perch atop Marta's brightly painted cart. Marta, for her part, could not bring herself to be so concerned. Despite the girl's rough appearance and obvious desperation, Marta just could not see harm in her. *She wants to be fierce, but I don't think it's in her nature*—Marta hesitated then. She felt a sudden rush of ... recognition. That was the only word that fit, which was strange since Marta had no idea what she was recognizing. Try as she might, Marta could not quite grasp it. She took a little of her annoyance out on the raven.

"Do be quiet, Bone Tapper. Next she'll be asking me to explain you and, frankly, I'd rather not. Now then, what is it you want, girl?"

"Y-your gold."

"So I assumed. You can't have it," Marta said. "Was there anything else?"

There wasn't, because the girl gave up. She put *Shave the Cat* back in its sheath and sat down on the grass. Marta thought she was going to cry, but she didn't. She seemed too angry for that.

"But I don't *want* to die," she wailed. "Damn all, it's not *fair*."

Marta put her hands on her hips. "By the Seven, girl, who asked you to die?"

"What choice do I have?" the girl asked, all misery. "I can't sell my father's sword; it's all I have left of him. I won't beg, I *can't* steal, and the only work I've been offered is in a brothel. Maybe that's better than dying, but by the time I knew for sure it'd be too late."

Marta nodded. *Her father's sword. Of course.* "Your name is Sela, isn't it?"

For a moment the girl seemed to forget her anger and frustration to stare, wide-eyed, at Marta. "Is there anything you don't know?"

"Many things, including what's to be done with you. Let's think about that later, shall we? Bone Tapper and I will camp for the night and have a bite of supper first. Would you care to join us?"



he food at Marta's campfire was simple but abundant. Sela tucked in to the barley soup, hard bread, and cheese, and didn't emerge for some time. Her hunger dulled enough, apparently, to give curiosity a chance again. "How did you know my name?"

"No mystery there. If you had *Shave the Cat* from your father, then your father was Master Solthyr. That makes you Sela, for there was no other child."

"You knew my father?"

"Somewhat," Marta said, since it was her nature to tell the truth, unless of course there was a good reason not to. "For a person who never actually met him, that is. Most of those who follow the Arrow Path to the Laws of Power become aware of each other, in time."

Sela frowned. "My father was a swordsmith, not a magician."

Marta laughed. "When mastery reaches a certain level, in any field, there's very little difference."

"If you're Arrow Path then you're a witch," Sela said. "At least that explains the talking raven." She glanced at Bone Tapper, happily pecking at a soup bone on a nearby rock. There was no fear or accusation in Sela's tone, just more curiosity. "So. What would you have done, if I hadn't changed my mind this afternoon?"

"Depends ... are you any good with that?" Marta nodded toward the sword.

"A bit," Sela said. "The King's own Weaponmaster was training me, as a favor to my father. Father felt it would help keep the local swains at bay. He was too busy to do it himself."

"Well trained, then. I probably would have had to kill you," Marta said frankly. Noting the look on Sela's face, she smiled again. "Take that as a compliment, for what it's worth."

"I-I'll try to remember it so."

"Also for what it's worth, I'm sorry about your father, but did he make no provision for you at all? Had he no property?"

Sela shook her head. "Almost nothing. Father was a master, true enough, but not very practical. He was paid well but he spent most of it importing different types of steel, or precious metals and stones for finishing. And he was always testing, experimenting with exotic fluids for quenching, Tobek firecoke.... It all cost a great deal."

"Improving his art," Marta said.

Sela looked grim. "That may be, but when he died both his art and his worth to the King went to the grave with him."

"Small wonder. A king's gratitude is the dearest coin he possesses, and the wise one spends it no more than he must."

Marta considered. The girl would be trouble, clearly, but what sort? There was good trouble and bad trouble. One was absolutely necessary for her quest; it stirred the cauldron of possibilities. The other was just plain difficulty of the quite, ordinary sort, and best avoided.

There was only one way to find out, unfortunately. Marta sighed. "I suggest a temporary alliance. With me. At least until you get a better grip on your future."

"I think I would be foolish to refuse. But why would you be so kind?" Sela asked.

"Kindness," said Bone Tapper, glancing up from his soup bone. "What a notion."

Marta sighed. "I'm afraid Bone Tapper speaks the truth there. I'm on a dangerous path, and that extends to anyone with me. You may not think I've done you a favor before long."

"Father spoke of the Arrow Path sometimes. You're seeking the Seven Laws of Power. That still doesn't explain why you would want to help me."

"I'm afraid it does. Once the quest for the Laws of Power has begun, it can neither be put aside nor abandoned. Seek and you will find them. Hide from them and they will find *you*. So, once the quest has begun, by definition there *are* no random encounters. See how simple it is?"

Bone Tapper finished eyeing the one last scrap of meat on his soup bone and decided it wasn't worth the trouble. He rejoined the conversation. "You call that simple? I call it horrible."

Marta nodded. "That, too."

As always along the Arrow Path, Marta had no destination in mind. Instead she had a goal, and the direction she chose to reach it was based on instinct and little else. After two days' travel from the time of Sela's arrival they were very close to the Southern Sea. There was more than a hint of salt on the wind. Sela spotted the tower first, but before she could say anything Marta was already reining in the mare. "Is that a watchtower of some kind?" she asked.

Sela nodded. "There are others like it all along the coast, but the Sea Kings haven't raided since my grandfather's time, and the Lord of the Five Isles is well bribed not to do so now. Some of the more remote outposts have fallen into disuse, I suspect."

"I'd say we have the proof of that right here," replied Marta.

The tower was on a narrow spit of land and solidly built of fitted stone but had not been maintained, by the look of it, for some time. Vines grew from base to crevices, some of which had fallen to half-bury themselves in the rocky ground or roll off into the churning sea. Seabirds nested in the niches and broken stonework; their harsh cries filled the air.

Marta called to Bone Tapper, perched in his normal spot atop the wagon. "Have a look around, please."

The raven grumbled something inaudible and flapped off toward the tower. That the nesting birds didn't take very kindly to his intrusion was an understatement.

"They're trying to kill him!" Sela said.

"They'll fail," Marta said, *grinning*. "Or if they don't, it's his own fault. Lazy thing could use the exercise."

In truth, the raven seemed to dodge the mobbing birds nimbly enough. After a moment he was past their frantic attacks and flew into what looked like an archer's window near the top. He didn't fly out right away. He didn't even fly out after a few minutes. By the time a quarter-hour had passed even Marta was apprehensive.

"Something's wrong, and I don't think it has anything to do with birds."

Marta backed the cart up until she found a spot of grass. She jumped down from the bench and fetched water and a bit of hay from the wagon, but she left the mare's harness on. "We may have to leave in a hurry."

"We're going in after Bone Tapper?" Sela said. "Couldn't that be dangerous?"

"Of course," Marta said. "To both questions. Are you coming?"

Sela nodded, though she clearly wasn't happy about it. She unsheathed *Shave the Cat* and fell into step beside Marta. "He's not really a raven, is he?"

Marta glanced at Sela. "What gave him away? The fact that he can talk?"

Sela reddened a bit but shook her head. "Magic would explain that, as it could almost anything, I suppose. Yet there's just something ... well, *not raven* about him. More than speech. His whole manner is human."

Marta smiled. "Grumpy human, rather. I see you pay attention, Sela. That's rarer than it should be. Now pay attention to this tower. We can discuss Bone Tapper after I get my hands on his feathered hide again."

Sela glanced sideways at Marta but didn't say anything else until they were almost within bowshot of the tower.

"You're not carrying a weapon," she said.

"If by that you mean a sword, I seldom do."

"Then what you said about killing me yesterday was just a bluff?"

Marta sighed. She wasn't sure what path Sela was considering and didn't have time to find out. "Not all weapons are steel. Let me show you something."

Marta reached down and picked up a big chunk of broken limestone, about the size of a gourd. It was heavy; Marta braced her wrist with her right hand and held the piece up on her left palm, like a bust on a pedestal. In a moment what had been a large chunk of rock was no more than a collection of pebbles, falling to rattle faintly into the grass and leaves. Marta dusted her hands on her tunic. Sela just stared, mouth open.

Marta smiled. "What Power Holds, Weakness Frees. That's the First Law of Power. It can have great effect, properly applied."

"Y-you could do that to a person?"

Marta shrugged. "In a manner of speaking. It depends on the person, and what flaws are there to use. Do you want to find out?"

"Not in the least," Sela said. "But doesn't this mean that now I know the First Law? Am I on the Arrow Path?"

It was all Marta could do to keep from laughing. "First, knowing the name of the Law is not the same as knowing what the Law is. You have to understand what it means, and that's trickier. The name is usually the last thing you discover. Second, you don't stumble upon the Arrow Path; you choose it."

"I don't think I'll make a decision just now," Sela said.

"Wise. Shall we continue?" Marta asked. Sela nodded, slowly. Together they reached the edge of the woods. There was still an open strip of weeds and small bushes about 10 yards wide between the woods and the tower. There was no way to cross it unseen if anyone was watching. "Nothing for it. Let's go."

Marta slipped across the open ground as quickly and quietly as she could, with many quick glances upward at an empty window

high above the entrance. No one appeared in the window. There were no arrows shot or javelins flung down. Marta considered this a good thing, certainly, but it didn't reassure her very much.

There was no need to open the door; it had fallen off its hinges some time before. She slipped just inside, listening very carefully and giving her eyes time to adjust. The first floor was more or less what she expected; debris on the floor and dust over all. But the dust on the stairwell had been disturbed, and that very recently, by Marta's reckoning. She motioned Sela inside, and they waited a bit for the girl's eyes to adjust to the gloom. Then Marta took a deep breath and started up the stairs.

Bone Tapper screamed.

Well, not exactly. It was more like a squawk. As if he were consciously trying to squawk terror as a normal raven would, not—as Marta already knew from her time with him—as was usual for him at moments of genuine terror where conscious thought of any kind did not apply.

What are you trying to tell me, Bone Tapper?

No more, Marta decided, than she had already surmised for herself. She followed the sound with a sort of determined fatalism, Sela close behind. The squawking became intermittent as they approached the top floor of the tower, then stopped. Marta signed, as best she could for Sela to wait, and listen. She went up the next several steps alone.

The top floor of the tower was a rough wooden platform already showing signs of decay. The roof above where the seabirds roosted had not yet fallen in, but there were patches of sunlight streaming through here and there. Together with what came from the windows there was more than enough light to see by. What Marta saw first was Bone Tapper, caught in a net hanging from the ceiling. The second thing she saw was an arbalest. The man holding it stood by the wall just behind where the stairs reached the floor.

"Come up the rest of the way, m'lady. And please don't do anything silly."

Marta sighed and did as she was told. The floor creaked ominously under her slight weight, though it seemed likely that an unsound floor was currently the least of her problems. She studied her captor, as he did the same to her.

He had long blond hair that he wore in ringlets under a seaman's cap. He was youngish, and handsome in a rough sort of way. His clothes were those of a common seaman but the disguise was spoiled by his boots and gloves. They were of rich green leather and stylishly cut, almost aristocratic.

Marta didn't ask his name. She didn't need to. The traces of finery that he could not abandon and the pheasant's tailfeather stuck through the crown of his cap told Marta everything. The child of a scullery maid and either a fisherman or a minor lord, depending on which story you believed. A corsair with pretensions to nobility and the gold to indulge them.

"Longfeather," she said.

There might have been a muffled squeak from the stair below, or it might have been the tower settling. Marta hoped the pirate assumed the latter. No such luck.

"Tell your companion to join us. And quickly."

"Run, Sela," Marta said.

Longfeather pointed the arbalest a little less casually. "I wouldn't advise it."

Marta smiled grimly. "We only met a few days ago. What makes you think the girl cares what happens to me?"

WHATEVER HIS
PRETENSIONS OF
NOBILITY AND
REFINEMENT, HE
WAS A PIRATE, A
THIEF AND, WHEN
THE OCCASION
DEMANDED, A
MURDERER ...

"That," he said.

"That" was Sela coming up the stairs, her sword sheathed, both hands carefully kept in plain sight.

Longfeather smiled. "Well, and well indeed. Set a trap for a gull and catch a pair of swans. This is my lucky day."

"You should have run, you know," Marta said.

Sela nodded glumly. "Father always said that, if there was a bone for common sense, I was born without it. To which I always replied something to the effect that the nut never falls far from the tree. Doesn't seem as funny now."

Longfeather had put Sela with Marta and the both of them against the far wall but, except to take Sela's sword and keep the arbalest trained on them, seemed to pay them little heed. Every now and then there came a faint pecking sound as Bone Tapper worked at the cords of the net, but Marta didn't dare look and betray his progress, if any. Longfeather, if he heard, also paid it no notice. He seemed deep in thought.

"If you're wondering what to do with us," Marta said finally, "I could offer a few suggestions. Letting us go comes to mind."

"I'm a pirate of some reputation," Longfeather said, "and knowing that, what would you suppose the odds are of my agreeing to any such notion?"

Marta heard the words and read his intent. Whatever his pretensions of nobility and refinement, he was a pirate, a thief and, when the occasion demanded, a murderer ... Marta blinked, hearing the words echo in her mind as something important, something just beyond her reach. She ignored the feeling. There was no time. "I do know who you are," Marta said, "and I also know that you wouldn't be hiding alone in an abandoned watchtower snaring, of all things, *gulls* for food if you weren't—shall we say—in straits?"

Longfeather dismissed that with a wave of one immaculately gloved hand. "A temporary setback."

"Your patron is unhappy with you, yes?"

For a moment Marta clearly had the pirate's full attention, then he shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of dismissal that didn't quite come off. "Boranac of the Five Isles is known for his temper. It never lasts long."

"No, because whatever makes him angry has a tendency to disappear. I gather you chose this way to disappear rather than his way."

Longfeather's pretense at calm did its own disappearing act. "The greedy sod seized my ship! He knew the last venture had been profitable."

"You were holding out on him, weren't you?" Sela said. Marta glared at her, but it was too late. A new notion apparently came into the pirate's mind.

"You both know entirely too much about me. Yes..." The word came out as a hiss. "Now it makes sense," he said. "The girl's sword, the talking raven ... oh yes, I heard him. When the snare first sprang and he was too surprised to pretend. You're a finder witch and this charming child with the master blade is an assassin. Of course, who would suspect? Boranac sent you, didn't he?"

"It's my father's sword!" Sela said hotly. "The one you didn't manage to steal!"

"Add revenge to the mix. Oh, the tale gets better and better. Well, at least I know now what's to be done."

Marta sighed. "I don't suppose it would do any good to point out that you're full of horse apples?"

"Spare me. You think I'm not so familiar with lies that I can't see them?"

"Too familiar, I imagine," Marta said. "To the point you can see little else. But it won't make any difference if Boranac finds you, will it? Let us assume what you say is true, and the Chief of the Five Isles did send us. You kill us and he'll just send someone else. Probably several someones, who'll find you as easily as we did."

Longfeather glared at her. "Then you admit it."

Single-minded thing, aren't you? Marta shrugged. "I merely ask you to more fully consider your situation."

Longfeather seemed to do just that. "It is a problem," he admitted, "but I have no alternative."

Marta shook her head. "That's another point on which you are mistaken. I can arrange it so that Chief Boranac never finds you."

Longfeather smiled grimly. "I could throw myself into the ocean from this tower and arrange the same thing. Probably in a less painful manner than what you have in mind."

"Longfeather, I swear I can keep you alive and well. Safe from the Chief of the Five Isles for as long as you—or he—lives."

Longfeather pointed the arbalest at Marta's heart. "I don't believe you," Longfeather said. "Unfortunately for you—"

He was interrupted by a small thundercloud of black feathers and anger. Bone Tapper—whom everyone but Marta had quite forgotten—hurled himself out of the net as one last cord parted under his beak. He flew straight at Longfeather's face. Startled, Longfeather threw up the arbalest and fired. Unfortunately for Bone Tapper his aim was more lucky than skilled. Feathers flew, and Bone Tapper bounced off the wall, rolled, and was still.

It was all the time Sela needed. She crouched, rolled, and came up with the sword Longfeather had made her drop. She nimbly dodged the now-useless arbalest that the pirate threw at her.

Marta stared at the limp raven, numb.

"What cannot be taken, can be given," she said softly, too soft for the others to hear. The Second Law of Power.

There were limits on all things, and that included Marta's power over Bone Tapper. She

could not have ordered him to sacrifice himself this way; that he had to do on his own. She was more than a little surprised that he had. *I wonder*—Marta heard the hiss of steel on leather and forced her attention back to the here and now.

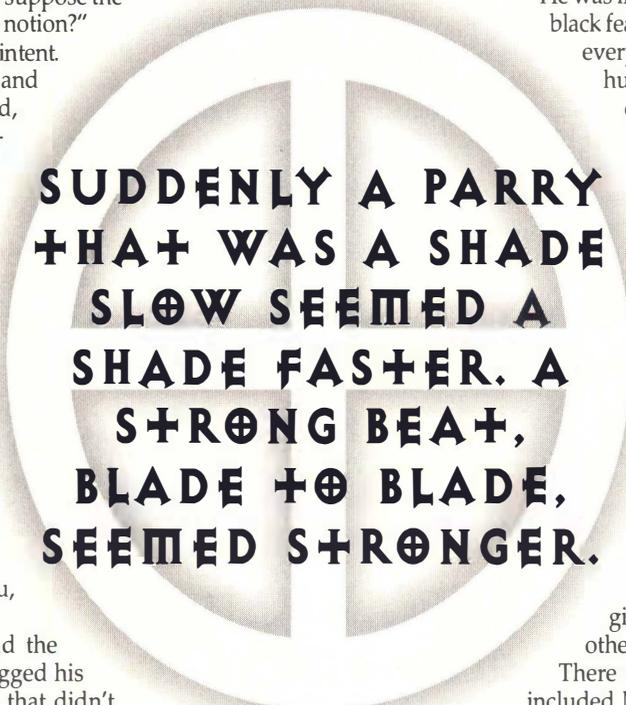
Longfeather had his own sword out, a mirror copy of the one Sela held. It was clear enough from his posture and movement that he knew how to use it.

"I'm not going to enjoy this," Longfeather said. "Just so you understand."

Sela looked grim. "For my part, I plan to enjoy it a great deal."

Marta admired Sela's courage but not her sense. Longfeather was a veteran of many such fights, with his life in the scales on each. There was no way Sela's experience could match his.

The first moments of the duel confirmed as much. Sela was quick, and parried and moved well. Longfeather was quick too, and he was stronger. He proved it by beating past her parries on two occasions. The first time he barely missed her chest. The second tore a ragged hole in her mailshirt at the shoulder. Sela winced but did not lose either her guard or her composure, for which Marta was grateful. She needed the time Sela was providing. She also needed the application of the final Law of Power she possessed. Softly, so that only she could hear, Marta spoke its name.



**SUDDENLY A PARRY
+ THAT WAS A SHADE
SLOW SEEMED A
SHADE FASTER. A
STRONG BEAT,
BLADE TO BLADE,
SEEMED STRONGER.**

“The Appearance of Power, Once Accepted, Becomes Power Itself.”

The Third Law. Marta had considered collapsing the floor under Longfeather's feet; it would be easy enough to do with an application of the First Law. But in a structure already weak from time and rot the result would be impossible to predict. She chose the Third Law instead and hoped she chose right.

“She's better than you are, Longfeather. You're a fool if you haven't noticed.”

Marta worked her understanding of the law like a sculptor and Sela was the vessel. Suddenly a parry that was a shade slow seemed a shade faster. A strong beat, blade to blade, seemed even stronger. A fast lunge of Sela's appeared, to both herself and Longfeather, to be even faster.

Longfeather pulled back a bit, frowning.

Marta smiled. It was working. She kept shaping, refining, adding. Nothing real, since she had nothing of substance to work with. A bit of illusion, one spoken suggestion, a furtive wave of her hand and a stronger wave of concentration, all bits of the humblest magic her mother had taught her, now put to greater service by knowledge of the Third Law.

The pirate was starting to perspire, and Sela was starting to smile again. The only thing needed right then for Longfeather to believe in Sela's superiority was for Sela to believe it too.

“He's good, Sela, but not as good as he thinks. It's mostly bluff.”

“Woman, be silent!” Longfeather snarled, but he had no more breath or effort to spare on Marta.

Perfect.

Longfeather was in full retreat, his parries growing more and more desperate, his attacks half-hearted and tentative. The tip of Sela's sword sliced the top of Longfeather's sword hand and he dropped the blade, cursing in pain. Another moment and Sela had her point at his throat.

“Kill me if you're going to,” he said. “But don't gloat about it. I never did.”

Sela took a firmer grip on the hilt but Marta held up her hand. “Sela, no.”

Sela blinked. The effect of Marta's magic was beginning to fade from her, and the anger of battle with it. Still, there was more than enough remaining. “Why not? He robbed my father, and the pain of that helped carry him to his grave. He killed Bone Tapper. He was going to kill us too!”

“Which would have been a mistake on his part. Should we make one of our own? Killing him would be a waste, and the Powers hate waste.” She turned to Longfeather. “Are you willing to bargain *now*? Or shall I have Sela finish you?”

Longfeather eyed the sword at his throat. “I'm hardly in a position to argue.”

Marta shrugged. “Argue? No. Still, the choice is very much yours. Has to be. Otherwise any agreement we make will have no force.”

Longfeather didn't think about it too long. “Name your terms.”

“Just these: You will serve me as I direct until either you die or the Chief of the Five Isles does ... and however he dies, you must play no part in it. In return, I will keep you hidden and safe until what time as your debt is paid.”

Sela shook her head vigorously. “The bastard won't keep his word. Don't listen to him!”

Marta smiled again. “Sela, if you don't trust him, trust me—he damn well *will* keep his word. He won't have any choice.”

Marta stood by the raven's still form while Sela gathered up the rest of Longfeather's weapons, including her father's other sword. She looked a little ill. “I didn't enjoy that as much as I thought I would. I might have died ... or killed. I can't say I care for either result.”

“You may have to use that sword again, Sela. Such things happen. But if I were you I'd consider my reasons very carefully.”

She nodded. “I will.” She paused, then added. “I'm sorry about Bone Tapper. He wasn't so bad, if a little crusty.”

Marta just nodded. When she spoke, it was to the raven. “You

were willing to sacrifice yourself to save us. Life for life, and that was your debt. It is paid.”

With those words the raven grew, and changed. In a moment the body of a small, wiry man lay in the raven's place, with dark hair replacing most of the feathers. A man who was, as both Sela and Marta could plainly see, very much alive. “Not so bad, indeed,” he huffed.

Sela gasped. “He was faking!”

“Doubtless,” Marta said.

The man who had been Bone Tapper rolled to a sitting position. His dark eyes were bright with exultation, even as he groaned. He pointed to a streak of red on his shoulder. “I wouldn't call *this* faking. Or this ...” he said, indicating an egg-sized knot on his forehead. “It stung like hell. Still, as I recall, you seemed to imply my ‘willingness’ to sacrifice myself coin enough. You didn't say I actually had to *do* it.”

Marta laughed. “True enough. My word is given, Bone Tapper. You are free.”

The man who had been Bone Tapper didn't have to be told again. He got up and hurried down the stairs as fast as he could, unused to human legs as he clearly was. He didn't look back, or spare one more word in Marta's direction.

Sela blinked. “That's it, then? It's done?”

“Why? What were you expecting?”

Sela thought about it. “Well, I don't know, really. You and he were together for a long time, I gather. Some sort of regret, perhaps?”

“What is there to regret? His debt to me is paid and he is his own man again. I wish him joy with it, and hope he makes a better go as a human being than he managed the first time around. I have my doubts, though.”

“I suppose we'll never know. So. Are we finished here?” Sela asked.

“Almost.” Marta put on Longfeather's discarded gloves. They were of thin leather on the palm and fingers but the wrist and cuff were much thicker and stronger. The gloves were a bit large for Marta but they would serve.

As would Longfeather.

Marta held up one gauntlet. “Time to go.”

The goshawk that had been watching the scene from the rafters with sullen rage clumsily hopped down to land on Marta's wrist, fighting for balance. He clearly didn't have the full knack of perching yet. “I never agreed to this!” he wailed, which was a difficult thing for a goshawk to do.

Marta followed Sela down the stairwell, the goshawk riding precariously on her wrist. “This is *exactly* what you agreed to, Longfeather,” she said. “Think about it.”



hey traveled for three days along the coast. Neither Sela nor Longfeather questioned Marta about this. Sela was in no particular hurry and Longfeather was still too much in a sulk to pay attention.

After nightfall on the third day Marta sat on a fallen log in a clearing some distance from their camp. She wasn't sleepy—she was expectant. She waited, but not for very long.

Bone Tapper slipped out of the trees. He approached Marta hesitantly and knelt at her feet. He looked terrible. His clothes were torn; there was a trickle of blood from his scalp and the bandage on his shoulder was showing signs of red as well.

“Hide me,” he said.

Marta glared at him. “What happened?”

Bone Tapper shrugged. “A man has to earn his way.”

“And I suppose the folk you ‘earned’ your way from will be along soon?” For answer, somewhere to the west came the baying of hounds. Marta shook her head in disgust. “You know what you're asking, don't you?”

“Better than anyone,” he said, his frustration more than a little evident. “Still, I've decided there are worse things than being a raven. It's not fair, though.”

Continued on page 84

RETURN^{TO} PLEASURE ISLAND

George twiddled his thumbs in his booth and watched how the brown, clayey knuckles danced overtop one another. Not as supple as they had once been, his thumbs—no longer the texture of wet clay on a potter's wheel; more like clay after it had been worked to exhausted crackling and brittleness. He reached into the swirling vortex of the cotton-candy machine with his strong right hand and caught the stainless-steel sweep-arm. The engines whined and he felt them strain against his strong right arm, like a live thing struggling to escape a trap. Still strong, he thought, still strong, and he released the sweep-arm to go back to spinning sugar into floss.

THE PRICE OF PLEASURE MIGHT BE TOO HIGH FOR SOME, BUT FOR OTHERS, IT'S JUST RIGHT.

*BY CORY DOCTOROW;
ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID BECK*



A pack of boys sauntered down the midway, laughing and calling, bouncing high on sugar and gee-stresses. One of them peeled off from the group and ran to his booth, still laughing at some cruelty. He put his palms on George's counter and pushed against it, using them to lever his little body in a high-speed pogo. "Hey, mister," he said, "how about some three-color swirl, with sprinkles?"

George smiled and knocked the rack of paper cones with his strong right elbow, jostled it so one cone spun high in the air, and he caught it in his quick left hand. "Coming riiiiight up," he sang, and flipped the cone into the floss-machine. He spun a beehive of pink, then layered it with stripes of blue and green. He reached for the nipple that dispensed the sprinkles, but before turning its spigot he said, "Are you sure you don't want a dip, too? Fudge? Butterscotch? Strawberry?"

The boy bounced even higher, so that he was nearly vaulting the counter. "All three! All three!" he said.

George expertly spiraled the floss through the dippers, then applied a thick crust of sprinkles. "Open your mouth, kid!" he shouted, with realistic glee.

The boy opened his mouth wide, so that the twinkling lights of the midway reflected off his back molars and the pool of saliva on his tongue. George's quick, clever left hand dipped a long-handled spoon into the hot fudge, then flipped the sticky gob on a high arc that terminated perfectly in the boy's open mouth. The boy swallowed and laughed gooiily. George handed over the dripping confection in his strong right hand, and the boy plunged his face into it. When he whirled and ran to rejoin his friends, George saw that his ears were already getting longer, and his delighted laugh had sounded a little like a bray. A job well done, he thought, and watched the rain spatter the spongy rubber cobbles of the midway.

George was supposed to go off-shift at midnight. He always showed up promptly at noon, but rarely left as punctually. The soft one who had the midnight-to-six shift was lazy and late, and generally staggered in at 12:30, grumbling about his tiredness. George knew how to deal with the soft ones, though—his father had brought him up surrounded by them, so that he spoke without his father's thick accent, so that he never inadvertently crushed their soft hands when he shook with them, so that he smiled good-naturedly and gave up a realistic facsimile of sympathy when they griped their perennial gripes.

His father! How wise the old man had been, and how proud, and how stupid. George shucked his uniform backstage and tossed it into a laundry hamper, noting with dismay how brown the insides were, how much of himself had eroded away during his shift. He looked at his clever left thumb and his strong right thumb, and tasted their good, earthy tastes, and then put them away. He dressed himself in the earth-colored dungarees and workshirt that his own father had stolen from a laundry line when he left the ancestral home of George's people for the society of the soft ones.

He boarded a Cast Member tram that ran through the utilidors underneath Pleasure Island's midway, and stared aimlessly at nothing as the soft ones on the tram gabbled away, as the tram sped away to the Cast housing, and then it was just him and the conductor, all the way to the end of the line, to the cottage he shared with his two brothers, Bill and Joe. The con-

ductor wished him a good night when he debarked, and he shambled home.

Bill was already home, napping in the pile of blankets that all three brothers shared in the back room of the cottage. Joe wasn't home yet, even though his shift finished earlier than theirs. He never came straight home; instead, he wandered backstage, watching the midway through the peepholes. Joe's Lead had spoken to George about it, and George had spoken to Joe, but you couldn't tell Joe anything. George thought of how proud his father had been, having three sons—three! George, the son of his strong right thumb, and Bill, the son of his clever left thumb, and Joe, the son of his tongue, an old man's folly, that left him wordless for the remainder of his days. He hadn't needed words, though: his cracked and rheumy eyes had shone with pride every time they lit on Joe, and the boy could do no wrong by him.

George busied himself with supper for his brothers. In the little wooded area behind the cottage, he found good, clean earth with juicy roots in it. In the freezer, he had a jar of elephant-dung sauce, spiced with the wrung-out sweat of the big top acrobats' leotards, which, even after reheating, still carried the tang of vitality. Preparing a good meal for his kind meant a balance of earthy things and living things, things to keep the hands supple and things to make them strong, and so he brought in a chicken from the brothers' henhouse and covered it in the sloppy green-brown sauce, feathers and all. Bill, being the clever one, woke when the smell of the sauce bubbling in the microwave reached him, and he wandered into the kitchen.

To an untutored eye, Bill and George were indistinguishable. Both of them big, even for their kind—for their father had been an especially big specimen himself—whose faces were as expressive as sculptor's clay, whose chisel-shaped teeth were white and hard as rocks. When they were alone together, they went without clothing, as was the custom of their kind, and their bodies bulged with baggy, loose muscle. They needed no clothing, for they lacked the shame of the soft ones, the small thumb between the legs. They had a more civilized way of reproducing.

"Joe hasn't returned yet?" Bill asked his strong brother.

"Not yet," George told his clever brother.

"We eat, then. No sense in waiting for him. He knows the supper hour," Bill said, and since he was the clever one, they ate.

Joe returned as the sun was rising, and burrowed in between his brothers on their nest of blankets. George flung one leg over his smallest brother, and smelled the liquor on his breath in his sleep, and his dreams were tainted with the stink of rotting grapes.

George was the first one awake, preparing the morning meal. A maggoty side of beef, ripe with the vitality of its parasites, and gravel. Joe came for breakfast before Bill, as was his custom. Bill needed the sleep, to rest his cleverness.

"God-damn, I am hungry!," Joe said loudly, without regard for his sleeping brother.

"You missed dinner," George said.

"I had more important things to do," Joe said. "I was out with an Imagineer!"

George stared hard at him. "What did the Imagineer want? Is there trouble?"

Joe gave a deprecating laugh. "Why do you always think

GEORGE SHUCKED HIS SHIRT AND NOTED HOW MUCH OF HIMSELF HAD ERODED AWAY DURING HIS SHIFT.

there's trouble? The guy wanted to chat with me—he likes me, wants to get to know me. His name is Woodrow, he's in charge of a whole operations division, and he was interested in what I thought of some of his plans." He stopped and waited for George to be impressed.

George knew what the pause was for. "That's very good. You must be doing a good job for your Lead to mention you to him."

"That little prick? He hates my guts. Woodrow's building a special operations unit out of lateral thinkers—he wants new blood, creativity. He says I have a unique perspective."

"Did you talk to Orville?" Orville was the soft one who'd brought them from their father's shack to the Island, and he was their mentor and advocate inside its Byzantine politics. Bill had confided to George that he suspected Orville was of a different species from the soft ones—he certainly seemed to know more about George's kind than a soft one had any business knowing.

Joe tore a hunk from the carcass on the rickety kitchen table and stuffed it into his mouth. Around it, he mumbled something that might have been yes and might have been no. It was Joe's favorite stratagem, and it was responsible for the round belly that bulged out beneath his skinny chest.

Joe tore away more than half of the meat and made for the door. "Woodrow wants to meet with me again this morning. Don't wait up for me tonight!" He left the cottage and set off toward the tramstop.

Bill rolled over on his bedding and said, "I don't like this at all."

George kept quiet. Bill's voice surprised him, but it shouldn't have. Bill was clever enough to lie still and feign sleep so that he could overhear Joe's conversations, where George would have just sat up and started talking.

"Orville should know about this, but I can't tell if it would make him angry. If it made him angry and he punished Joe, it would be our fault for telling him."

"Then we won't tell him," George said.

Bill held up his hand. "But if we don't tell him and he finds out on his own, he may be angry with us."

"Then we should tell him," George said.

"But Joe and this Woodrow may not get along after all, and if that happens, the whole thing will end on its own."

"Then we won't tell him," George said.

"But if they do get along, then they may do something that would make Orville angry," Bill looked expectantly at George.

"Then we should tell him?" George said, uncertainly.

"I don't know," Bill said. "I haven't decided."

George knew that this meant that Bill would have to think on it, and so he left him. He had to catch the tram to make it to his shift, anyway.

The soft one with the six-to-noon shift left as soon as George arrived, without a word. George was used to soft ones not having anything to say to him, and preferred it that way. He was better off than Bill—soft ones always wanted to talk to Bill, and he hated it, since they never had anything to say that Bill wanted to know. The weather needed no discussion, Bill said. And as for the complaints about the shift's Lead, well, one soft one was just about the same as any other, and Orville had told them that at the end of the day, they worked for him, not for any Lead.

Joe liked talking to the soft ones. Joe liked to talk, period. He told the soft ones lies about their childhood in the shack with their father, and told them about how his brothers tormented him, and even talked about the weather.

When he got back home, he told his brothers all over again, everything he'd told the soft ones.

George had memorized the SOP manual when they came to the Island, five years before. It clearly said that the floor of the booth would be disinfected every three hours, and the surfaces polished clean, and the pots and machines refilled. The soft one with the six-to-noon shift never did any of these things, which could get him disciplined by their Lead, but George didn't complain. He just wiped and disinfected and restocked when he arrived, even though he had to be extra careful with the water, so that he didn't wash any of himself away.

Boys ran up and down the midway, baking in the midday Sun. They reminded George of the boys he'd gone to school with, after the social worker had come to his father's shack. They'd teased him to begin with, but he'd just stood with his hands at his sides until they stopped. Every time he started a new grade, or a new kid came to the school, it was the same: They'd tease him, or hit him, or throw things at him, and he'd stand strong and silent until they stopped, even if it took months. His teachers quickly learned that calling on him in class meant standing in awkward silence, while he sat stoic and waited for them to call on someone else. The social worker could make him go to school with the soft ones, but she couldn't make him act like one.

George watched the boys carefully, as carefully as he had when he stood silently in the schoolyard, not seeming to watch anything. He was better at spotting a donkey than any of the soft ones. When a boy was ready to turn, George could almost see the shape of the donkey superimposed on the boy, and he radioed a keeper to pick up the donkey come morning. He got a bonus for each one he spotted, and according to Bill, it had accumulated to a sizable nest egg.

George looked at the inventory and decided that the fudge was getting a little long in the tooth. He'd start pushing fudge-nut dips, and by the end of his shift, the tub would be empty

and he'd be able to give it a thorough cleaning and a refill from fresh stock. "Hey guys!" he called to three boys. "Is anybody hungry?" He dipped a floss and held it up, so that it oozed fudge down his wrist. The boys shyly approached his booth. George knew from their manner that they were new to the Island: probably just picked up from a video arcade or lasertag tent on the mainland that afternoon. They didn't know what to make of their surroundings, that was clear.

"Step right up," he said, "I don't bite!" He smiled a smile he'd practiced in the mirror, one that shaped his soft, flexible features into a good-natured expression of idiotic fun. Cautiously, the boys came forward. They were the target age, 11-to-14, and they'd already accumulated some merch, baseball hats and fanny packs made from neoprene in tropical-fish colors, emblazoned with the Island's logomarks and character trademarks. They had the beginnings of dark circles under their eyes, and they dragged a little with low blood sugar. George dipped two more and distributed them around. The eldest, a towheaded kid near the upper age range, said, "Mister, we haven't got any money—what do these cost?"

George laughed like a freight train. "It's all free, sonny, free as air! Courtesy of the Management, as a reward for very special customers like you." This was scripted, but the trick was to sell the line like it was fresh.

The boys took the cones from him timidly, but ate ravenously. George gave them some logoed napkins to wipe up with and ground the fudge into his wrists and forearms with one of his own. He looked at his watch and consulted the laminated timetable taped to the counter. Thirteen-hundred hours, which meant that the bulk of the Guests would be migrating toward Actionland and the dinosaur rides, and it was time to push the slightly down-at-the-heels FreakZone, to balance the crowds. "You boys like rollercoasters?" he said.

The youngest—they were similar enough in appearance and distant enough in ages to be brothers—spoke up. "Yeah!" The middle elbowed him, and the youngest flipped the middle the bird.

"Well, if you follow the midway around this curve to the right, and go through the big clown-mouth, you'll be in the FreakZone. We've got a 15-story coaster called The Obliterator that loops 50 times in five minutes—running over 95 miles per hour! If you hurry, you can beat the line!" He looked the youngest in the eye at the start of the speech, then switched to the middle when he talked about the line.

The youngest started vibrating with excitement, and the middle looked pensive, and then to the eldest said, "Sounds good, huh, Tom?"

The eldest said, "We haven't even found out where we're sleeping yet—maybe we can do the ride afterward."

George winked at the youngest, then said, "Don't worry about it, kids. I'll get that sorted out for you right now." He picked up the white house phone and asked the operator to connect him with Guest Services. "Hi there! This is George on the midway! I need reservations for three young men for tonight—a suite, I think, with in-room Nintendo and a big-screen TV. They look like they'd enjoy the Sportaseum. OK, I'll hold," he covered the mouthpiece and said to the boys, "You'll love the Sportaseum—the chairs are shaped like giant catcher's mitts, and the beds are giant Air Jordans, and the suite comes with a regulation half-court. What name should I put the reservation under?"

The eldest said, "Tom Mitchell."

George made the reservation. "You're all set," he said. "The monorails run right into the hotel lobby, every 10 minutes. Anyone with a name tag can show you to the nearest stop. Here's a tip—try the football panzerotto: it's a fried pizza turnover as big as a football, with beef-jerky laces. It's my favorite!"

"I want a football!" the youngest said.

"We'll have it for dinner," the eldest said, looking off at the skyline of coaster-skeletons in the distance. "Let's go on some rides first."

George beamed his idiot's grin at them as they left, then his face went slack and he went back to wiping down the surfaces. A moment later, a hand reached across the counter and plucked the cloth from his grip. He looked up, startled, into Joe's grinning face. Unlike his brothers', Joe's face was all sharp angles and small teeth. Nobody knew what a child of a tongue was supposed to

look like, but George had always suspected that Joe wasn't right, even for a third son.

"Big guy!" Joe shouted. "Workin' hard?"

George said, "Yes." He stood patiently, waiting for Joe to give him the cloth back.

Joe held it over his head like a standard, dancing back out of reach, even though George hadn't made a grab for it. George waited. Joe walked back to his counter and gave it back.

"We're dozing the FreakZone," Joe said, in a conspiratorial whisper. He put a spin on We're, making sure that George knew he was including himself with the Island's management.

"Really," George said, neutrally.

"Yeah! We're gonna flatten that sucker, start fresh, and build us a new theme land. I'm a Strategic Project Consultant! By the time it's over, I'll be an Imagineer!"

George knew that the lands on Pleasure Island were flattened and rebuilt on a regular basis, as management worked to stay ahead of the light-speed boredom-threshold of the mainland. Still, he said, "Well, Joe, that's marvelous. I'm sure

WHEN A BOY WAS READY TO TURN, GEORGE RADIOED A KEEPER TO PICK HIM UP COME MORNING.

you'll do a fabulous job."

Joe sneered at him. "Oh, I know I will. We all do just fabulous jobs, brother. Just some of us have fabulous jobs to do."

George refused to rise to the bait. He could always outwait Joe.

Joe said, "We're thinking of giving it a monster theme—monsters are testing very high with 11-to-14s this year. Dragons, ogres, cyborgs, you know. We may even do a walk-through—there hasn't been one of those here since the 'sixties!"

George didn't know what Joe wanted him to say. He said, "That sounds very nice."

Joe gave him a pitying look, and then his chest started ringing. He extracted a slim phone from his shirt pocket and turned away. A moment later, he turned back. "Gotta go!" he said. "Meeting with Woodrow and Orville down at Ops!"

Alarm bells went off in George's head. "Shouldn't Bill go along if you're meeting with Orville?"

Joe sneered at him, then took off at a fast clip down the midway. George watched him until he disappeared through one of the access doors.

Bill was clearly upset about it. George couldn't help but feel responsible. He should have called Bill as soon as Joe told him he was meeting with Orville, but he'd waited until he got home.

He'd been home for hours, and Joe still wasn't back. Bill picked absently at the dinner he'd made and fretted.

"He didn't say how Orville found out?" Bill asked.

George shook his head mutely.

"Why didn't he invite me?" Bill asked. "I always handle negotiations for us."

George couldn't eat. The more Bill fretted, the more he couldn't eat. It was long dark outside, hours and hours after Joe should've been home. Bill fretted, George stared out the window, and Joe didn't come home.

Then, an electric cart's headlights swept up the trail to their cabin. The lights dazzled George, so he couldn't see who was driving. Bill joined him at the window and squinted. "It's Joe and Orville!" he said. George squinted too, but couldn't make anything out. He took Bill's word for it and joined him outside.

It was indeed Orville and Joe. Orville was driving, and Joe was lolling drunkenly beside him. Orville shook hands with Bill and nodded to George, who lifted Joe out of the cart and carried him inside.

When he got back, Orville and Bill were staring calmly into each other's eyes, each waiting for the other to say something. Orville was dressed in his working clothes: a natty white suit with a sport-shirt underneath. His bald head gleamed in the moonlight. His fleshy, unreadable face was ruddy in the glow from the cabin's door. George bit his tongue to keep from speaking.

"He's drunk," Orville said, at last. Orville didn't beat around the bush.

"I can see that," Bill said. "Did you get him drunk?"

"Yes, I did. We were celebrating."

Bill's eyes narrowed. "So you know."

Orville smiled. "Of course I know. I set it up. I thought you'd approve: Joe clearly needed something to keep him out of trouble."

Bill said, "This will keep him out of trouble?"

Orville leaned against the cart's bumper, pulled out a pipe, stuffed it and lit it. He puffed at it, and watched the smoke wisp away in the swamp breezes. "I think that Joe's going to really like life with the Imagineers. They're Management's precious darlings who can do no wrong. Anything they ask for, they get. There won't be any more discipline problems."

Bill said, "Why not?"

Orville grinned without showing his teeth. "Where there's no discipline, there're no discipline problems. He can work whatever hours he wants. He'll have access to anything he needs: budget, staff, an office, whatever. It's his dream job."

Bill said, "I don't like this."

George wondered why not. It sounded pretty good to him.

Orville puffed at his pipe. "Like it or not, I think you'll have a hard time convincing Joe not to do it. He's sold."

Bill went back into the cabin and closed the door.

"He took that well, don't you think?" Orville asked.

George said, "I suppose so."

Orville said, "Is everything working out all right for you? Shifts OK? Coworkers?"

George said, "Everything's fine. Thank you."

Orville tapped his pipe out on the bumper, then got back into the cart. "All right then. Good night, George."

George started cooking dinner for two. More and more, Joe spent the night in a suite at one of the hotels "working late." George didn't know what sort of work he was doing, but he sure seemed to enjoy it. He hardly came back to the cabin at all. The first time he'd stayed out all night, Bill had gone back to the Island and gotten Orville out of bed to help him search. After that, Joe started sending out a runner, usually some poor Ops trainee, to tell them he wasn't coming back for dinner. Eventually he stopped bothering, and Bill stopped worrying.

One night, a month after Orville had come out to the cabin, George slathered a muskrat's carcass with mayonnaise and lemon and dragonfly eggs and set it out for him and Bill.

Bill hardly ate, which was usually a signal that he was thinking. George left him half of the dinner and waited for him to speak. Bill picked his way through the rest, then pushed his plate away. George cleared it and brought them both mason jars full of muddy water from the swamp out back. Bill took his jar out front of the cabin and leaned against the wall and stared out into the night, sipping. George joined him.

"We're getting old," Bill said, at last.

"Every night, the inside of my uniform is black," George said.

"Mine, too. We're getting very old. I think that you're at least 30, and I'm pretty sure that I'm 25. That's old. Our father told me that he thought he was 50, the year he died. And he was very old for one of us."

George thought of their father on his deathbed, eating the food they chewed for him, eyes nearly blind, skin crazed with cracks. "He was very old," George said.

Bill held his two whole hands up against the stars. "When father was my age, he had two sons. Can you remember how proud he was of us? How proud he was of himself? He'd done well enough that he could lose both his thumbs, and still know that his sons would take care of him."

George shifted and sighed. He'd been thinking about sons, too.

"I've wanted a son since we came to the Island," Bill said. "I never did anything about it because I couldn't take care of Joe and a son." Bill turned to look at George. "I think Joe's finally taking care of himself."

George didn't know what to say. If Bill had a son, then he couldn't. They couldn't both stop working to raise their sons. But Bill always made the decisions for them. George didn't know what to say, so he said nothing.

"I'm going to have a son," Bill said.

Bill did it the next night. He told Orville that he'd need a month off, and after eating the dinner George made for them, he made a nest of earth and blankets on the floor of their cabin. George sat in the corner and watched Bill as he stared at his thumbs. It was the most important decision one of their kind ever made: a clever son of the left hand, or a strong son of the right. George knew that his son would come from the left hand. In the world his father had put them into, cleverness was far more important than strength. After all, Bill was having the first son.

Bill put his clever left thumb in his mouth and slowly, slowly, bit down. George felt muddy tears pricking at his eyes. Bill's hand coursed with silty blood. He ignored it, and used his strong right hand to take the severed thumb from his mouth and bed it down with infinite care in the nest he'd built.

George cautiously moved forward to peer at the thumb, which was already moving blindly in its nest, twisting like a grub. Bill looked on, his eyes shining.

"It's perfect," George breathed.

George felt an uncharacteristic welling up inside him, and he put his arm around Bill's shoulders. Bill leaned into him, and said, "Thank you, George. This family wouldn't exist without you."

They both slept curled around the nest that night.

By morning, the thumb had sprouted tiny arm- and leg-buds, and it inched itself blindly around the nest. George marveled at it before going to work.

Joe stopped by his stand that day. His belly was bigger than ever, and his skin was cracking like their father's had. "Big guy!" he shouted, vaulting the counter into George's stand. "Where's Bill today? He wasn't at his post."

George said, "Bill had a son last night. From his left hand."

Joe rolled his eyes, which had gone the murky yellow of swamp water. "Wonderful, right? Ugh. There are better ways to achieve immortality, bro. I'm designing a crawl-through for HorrorZone: You're an earthworm crawling underneath a graveyard. It's gonna be huge: maggots as big as horses, chas-

ing the Guests through the tunnels; huge ghost hands grabbing at them. We're building a giant tombstone as the weenie, you'll be able to see it from anywhere on the Island. We'll build out over the midway for HorrorZone—it's the biggest rehab we've done since they brought in electric power."

As usual, George didn't know what to say to Joe. "That sounds very nice," he said.

Joe rolled his eyes again and started to say something, but stopped when three Guests came up to George's booth. George hardly recognized the Mitchell brothers. The youngest was already three-quarters donkey, so dangerously close that it was a miracle he hadn't been picked up already. He was hunched over, and his hands were fused into fists. His hair had grown down over his shoulders in a coarse mane, and his lips bulged around his elongated jaws.

The middle and eldest were well on their ways, too. The points of their ears poked out from under their hair, and they carried themselves painfully, forcing their legs and hips upright.

George flipped over his phone and punched 911, but left it out of sight below the counter. Loudly, he said, "Come on over, boys! You look like you could use one of George's triple-dips, the best on the midway!"

From the phone, he heard the security operator say, "Thank you, George, we'll be along in a moment." Surreptitiously, he racked the receiver and smiled at the boys.

"How are you enjoying your stay, boys?" he said.

"It's th aw-thome!" the youngest said around his clumsy teeth.

George handed him a cone piled high with floss, then started building two more for his brothers. Joe smirked at them. George hoped he wouldn't say anything before security got there.

The eldest said, "I don't think my brother's feeling too good. Is there a doctor here I

can take him to?"

The youngest, face sticky with confection, kicked his brother. "I'm fine!" he said. "I wanna go on more rideth!"

His brother said, "We'll go on more rides after we see a doctor."

The youngest dropped to his knees and cried. "No!" he said, hammering his fists on the ground. "No no no no!" George watched in alarm as the boy went all the way over to donkey. His cries turned to brays, and his shorts split around his haunches and tail. His shirt went next, and George smoothly vaulted the counter and stood in front of the donkey, blocking him from passersby. The other two made a run for it. George snagged the middle by his collar, but the boy tore free and took off down the midway. George looked about wildly for security, but they still hadn't arrived.

Then Joe tore past him, moving faster than George had ever

THIS WAS PLEASURE ISLAND. INDULGING YOUR VICES WAS A DANGEROUS PASTIME HERE.

seen him go. He caught the boys and stuffed one under each arm, kicking and squirming. He grinned ferociously as he pinned them beneath his knees at George's feet. He clamped his hands over their mouths. "Got 'em!" he said to George.

A security team emerged from the utilidor beside George's booth, wearing clown makeup and baggy pants. Two of them tranquilized the boys and the third fitted the donkey out with a halter and bit. The clown slapped the donkey's haunch appreciatively. "He's a healthy one."

The security team disappeared down the utilidor with the Mitchell brothers: two boys and a donkey. Joe smacked George on the back. "Did you see me catch them? Like greased lightning! Bounty, here I come!"

George didn't mind sharing his bounty with Joe, so he just smiled and nodded and went back around to his booth.

Bill named his son Tom. Names weren't very important to their people, but the soft ones' world demanded them. Within a week, Tom was eagerly toddling through their cabin, tasting everything, exploring everything. His eyes shone with curious brilliance. The clever son of a clever son.

George loved Bill's son. He loved to watch Tom as he gnawed at their bedding, as he dug at the floor in search of grubs. Tom was clearly delighted with his surroundings, and George basked in Tom's delight. Bill could barely restrain himself from picking Tom up and hugging him every moment. The only time he left George alone with Tom was a few precious moments after each evening's meal, when he would duck into the woods to find some new toy for Tom: a crippled chipmunk; a handful of pretty rocks; a discarded beer can. The son built bizarre towers out of them, then knocked them down in a fit of giggles. Tom ate all day long, and spoke a steady stream of adorable nonsense.

Bill hardly spoke to George. Their evening meals were given over to watching the son eat. George didn't mind. Talking to the Guests all day wore him out.

When Tom was two months old, Joe came by George's booth. "Well, it's final. Tomorrow, we shut down the midway. Too old-fashioned—it's only stood this long because some of the older Imagineers had an emotional attachment to it. I told 'em: 'That's your demographic, not the target demographic.' So we're knocking it down. HorrorZone's gonna be huge." He skipped off before George could say anything. His ears were long and pointed. It wasn't the first time George noticed it, but now he could see that Joe's hunched-over gait wasn't just because of his belly.

George built a dozen cones for the Guests, but his heart wasn't in it. Besides, most of the Guests already had their hands full of gummi spiders and snakes, from the Actionland Jungle Treats buffet. His thoughts were full of Joe, and he turned them over in his slow, cautious manner. Joe was turning into a donkey. He didn't think that one of their kind could turn into a donkey, but this was Pleasure Island. Indulging your vices was a dangerous pastime here. He should tell Bill, but there was no phone at the cabin. He couldn't send a runner for him, because this was family business. His shift wouldn't end for hours yet, and this was too important to wait.

Finally, he called his Lead. "I have to get offstage. I'm having a bad day."

Technically, this was allowed. Management didn't want any-

one onstage who wasn't 100 percent. But it was something that none of the brothers, not even Joe, had ever done. The Lead was surprised, but he sent over a soft one to relieve George.

Orville and Bill were sitting out front of the cabin, watching Tom, when George got back. He wrung his hands as he approached them, not sure of what to say, and whether he should talk in front of Orville at all. He held his left thumb in his right hand, and it comforted him, a little.

Bill and Orville were so engrossed in Tom's antics that they didn't even notice George until he cleared his throat. Orville raised his eyebrows and looked significantly at Bill.

"I just saw Joe," George said. "On the midway. His ears are pointed, and he's walking all hunched over. I give him a few days at the most before he's all the way gone." George held his breath, waiting for Bill's reaction.

"Too bad," Bill said. "It was inevitable, I suppose. A child of the tongue! What was father thinking?"

Orville smiled and puffed at his pipe. "Don't you worry about it, George. Joe's going to be much, much happier. Focused. If you'd like, I can bring him out here to live. Little Tom could have pony rides."

Bill said, "I don't think that's such a good idea. Joe's too wild to play with a child."

Orville put a hand on his shoulder. "You'd be amazed at how docile he'll become."

Bill scooped up Tom, who was up to his waist now, and who liked to grab onto Bill's nose. "We'll see, then." He retreated into the cabin with his son.

Orville turned to George and said, "You've probably heard that we're taking down the midway tomorrow. The others are all being reassigned until the rehab is done, but I thought I'd see if I could get you a couple of months off. You could stay here and play with Tom—it's not every day you get to be a new uncle."

Orville had always taken obvious pleasure in the transformation of boys into donkeys. It was the whole why of Pleasure Island, after all. Orville seemed especially pleased tonight, and George thought that he was as surprised about Bill as George was.

George, not knowing what to say to any of it, said nothing.

It didn't take long for George to start missing the midway. Stuck at the cabin with Bill and Tom, he sat against an outside wall and tried not to get in the way. He prepared meals in silence, taking a long time in the woods, gathering up choice morsels. Bill and Tom ate on the floor, away from the table. Bill chewed the tougher morsels first, and then put them in Tom's mouth with his crippled left hand. Most of the time, neither of them took any notice of George.

One day he prepared a whole day's worth of meals and left them on the table, then walked to the utilidor at the other side of the woods. He boarded a tram and rode to the old midway entrance.

The midway was fenced in with tall plywood sheets, and construction crews bustled over the naked skeletons of the new HorrorZone. Heavy machinery groaned and crashed. Nothing but the distant silhouettes of Actionland's skyline were familiar. George tried to imagine working here for years to come. An overwhelming tiredness weighed him down.

He took the tram back to the cabin and stripped off his clothes. They were browner than ever. His arms felt weak and tired. He suddenly knew that he would never have a son of his own.

Bill and Tom were playing out front of the cabin. He sat in his usual spot against the wall and watched them. "Bill," he said, softly.

"Yes?" Bill said.

"When will I have a son of my own?" Bill always knew the answers.

Bill gathered Tom up to his chest unconsciously while he thought. "I suppose that once Tom is grown, you could take some time off and have a son of your own."

To his own surprise, George said, "I want to have a son now."

Bill said, "That's out of the question, George. We're too busy with Tom." On hearing Bill's annoyed tone, Tom leaned into him.

George said, "I'm not busy. I am old, though. If I don't have a son soon, I won't be able to care for it until it's old enough to care for me."

Bill said, "You're thinking like Father. We're living with the soft ones now. Orville will make sure that you and your son will be fine until he's grown."

George never won arguments with Bill. He went inside the cabin and set out dinner.

Orville visited the brothers the next morning. He chucked Tom under the chin and shook hands with Bill. Then he took George out into the woods for a walk. "Your brother tells me you want a son of your own," he said. George nodded, and stooped to put a small, mossy log in his basket.

"Bill doesn't want you to, huh?"

George didn't feel very comfortable discussing the family with Orville. That was Bill's job. After some thought, he said, "Not right now."

Orville said, "I can see that that makes you unhappy. No one should be unhappy here. I'll see what I can do. Come down to Ops tomorrow morning, we'll talk more."

When George got back to the cabin, Bill was lying on his back on the floor, laughing while Tom climbed all over him. Tom still babbled, but they were real words now, though nonsensical. With his constant talking, he reminded George of Joe, and that made him even sadder.

George had never been to Ops before, but he knew where it was, in a collection of low-slung prefab buildings hidden behind the topiary sculptures near MagicLand. He clutched his right thumb nervously as he stood and waited in the reception area for Orville to come and get him. The secretary had taken his name and buzzed Orville, and now kept sneaking him horrified looks. George's family were the only of their kind to leave their homeland and join the soft ones, and here at Ops, there were any number of low-ranking babus who'd never heard tell of them.

Orville was all smiles and effusion as he breezed through the glass security door and pounded George on the back. "George! I'm so glad you came down!"

He took George by the arm and led him away, stopping to wink at the secretary, who looked at him with a mixture of disgust and admiration.

Orville's office was buried in a twisting maze of door-lined,

fluorescent-lit corridors, where busy soft ones talked on telephones and clattered on keyboards. He led George through his door, into an office as big as George's cabin.

Orville paced and talked. "Did I say I was glad you came? I'm glad you came. Now, let's talk about Bill. Bill's happy. He's got what he wants. A son. He doesn't have to take care of Joe. It's good for him."

He paused and looked at George. George nodded.

"OK. There's a problem, though. You want a son, too, only Bill won't allow it."

It didn't need any comment, so George kept quiet.

"My thinking is, Bill's so busy with Tom, he wouldn't really notice if you were there or not. You're an adult, you can take care of yourself. Do you see where I'm going with this?"

George assumed it was a rhetorical question.

"Right. What I'm thinking is, there's no reason that both of you shouldn't have your own son. This is Pleasure Island, after all. No one should be sad on Pleasure Island. You've worked hard and well for us for a long time here. We can take care of you."

George felt an uncomfortable sensation in his stomach, a knot of guilt like rising vomit.

"I thought about having another cabin built in the woods, but that's no good. I think that you and Bill need your own space. So let me bounce my current thought off you: We'll put you up in the new Monster's Arms, that's the hotel we're building for HorrorZone. It's way ahead of schedule, almost finished now. There's a penthouse suite that you can take for as long as you like. It's only temporary, just until you and Bill have had some time to raise up your sons. Then, we'll get the whole family together back at the cabin."

The guilt rose higher, choking George.

"Don't worry about eating, either. I've briefed the house chef on your tastes, and he'll send up three squares every day; everything a growing boy needs." He flashed a grin.

"And forget about Bill. I'll smooth things over with him. He'll see that it's for the best."

Finally, George had something to say. "What about Joe?"

Orville had been almost dancing as he spoke, enchanted with his own words. He pulled up short when George spoke. "What about him?"

"I want to live with him again," George said.

"He's gone, you know that." Orville pointed his fingers alongside his ears. "Hee-haw, hee-haw. The monthly ferry will take him to the mainland tomorrow."

"I don't care about that," George said. "I want him there."

Orville said, "I don't think that's such a good idea, George. You're going away to concentrate on you—Joe's a handful, even now. I don't want you distracted."

George said, "I want Joe."

Orville stared at him. George set his face into a blank mask. Finally, Orville said, "If that's what you want, that's what you'll get."

George didn't have anything to fetch from the cabin, and Orville thought it would be best if he spoke to Bill alone, so he sent George to the stables to get Joe. The donkey stables were beyond Ops, at the very edge of the island, opposite the docks where the ferries brought new boys in. A different kind of boat docked there, large utility freighters that brought in everything the Island needed and took away braying, kicking herds of jackasses.

ON THE ISLAND, DONKEYS WERE PRIZES, A SIGN THAT A BOY'S EVERY WISH HAD BEEN GRATIFIED.

The donkeys shifted nervously in their stalls. George smelled horse-apples and hay, and heard fidgeting hoofs and quiet, braying sobs. He wasn't clear on what happened to donkeys when they went back to the mainland, but he had an idea that it wasn't very pleasant. On the Island, donkeys were prizes, a sign that a boy's every wish had been gratified. What happened afterward wasn't something they were encouraged to think about.

He walked down the clean, wooden aisles, peering into the stalls, looking for Joe. Finally, in a dark stall in the very darkest corner of the stables, he found him. A large, pot-bellied jackass that leaped up and brayed loudly at him when he clucked his tongue at it.

"Joe?" he asked softly.

The donkey brayed again and kicked at the stall's door. It was already splintered from many such kicks. George opened the catch and was nearly trampled beneath Joe's hoofs as he ran out and away, braying loudly. George chased his brother. He didn't start very fast, but once he got going, inertia made him unstoppable.

He cornered Joe at the door that led out to the Island. The donkey was kicking at it, trying for escape. George locked his strong right arm around Joe's neck. "Stop it, Joe," he said. "I'm taking you out with me, but you have to stop it."

Joe's eyes rolled madly, and he struggled against George, kicking and biting. George waited in silence until the donkey tired, then used a bridle hanging on the wall to lead Joe out of the stables.

When Joe saw Orville waiting for them, he went wild again. George caught him by the hind leg and dragged him to the ground, while Orville danced back with a strange grace.

Orville grinned and said, "I guess he doesn't like me very much." He came forward and darted an affectionate pat on Joe's haunch.

Joe brayed loudly and George kept his own counsel. Orville led them down a utilidor and into an electric tram with an open car. George led Joe in and held onto his neck while Orville sped down the utilidor. He drove up a service ramp and out into HorrorZone, then to the doors of the newly completed Monster's Arms.

George and Joe lived in the Monster's Arms. Every morning, Orville paid them a visit and snuck looks at George's thumbs. They were intact. George wanted to have a son, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. Orville's visits grew shorter, and his manner grew more irritated. Still, George had no son.

One day, he waited until Joe was napping, and slipped out through the iron-maiden elevator, right down into the utilidor.

The tram driver recognized him and took him out to the cabin. The last mile of the utilidor was dusty and disused.

George leaped off the tram and walked quickly to the cabin, his heart racing. It had been so long since he'd seen Bill and little Tom. He missed them terribly.

The little cabin was even smaller than George remembered it, and it looked sad, sagging and ramshackle. He hesitated at the door, then, feeling a stranger, knocked.

There was movement inside, but no voices, and the door stayed shut. George opened the door.

It was a disaster. The kitchen cupboards were smashed in, the little table knocked over and splintered, the bedding scattered and soiled. Deep shadows collected in the corners.

"Bill?" George called, softly. A shadow stirred, an indistinct figure within its depths.

"Bill, it's George. I missed you. I need to talk with you. I'm confused."

The shadow stirred again. George crept forward, peering, his old eyes night-dimmed.

Bill huddled in the corner, wracked and wasted. He stared up at George through eyes filmed with tears. He held up his hands. They had already begun to shape themselves into hoofs, but George could still see that both his thumbs were gone. His ears were pointed and long.

"Oh, Bill," George said.

His brother let out a braying sob, and George saw he had no tongue.

Orville came looking for them the next morning. "Where are the sons?" George asked him, while stroking the donkey's head in his lap. Orville smiled a slightly abashed smile. "I'm keeping them safe. I didn't think that Bill was in any shape to take care of them."

George said, "I'll take care of them. Bring them here. Joe, too—he's in the room. I'll take care of them all."

Orville smiled his abashed smile again, then gave George an ironic salute. "Yes, sir," he said. He patted Bill's haunch and smiled to himself.

George didn't know how to respond to irony, so he held his brother more tightly. Eventually, Orville went away, and then came back a while after that. He drove an electric cart. In the front seat, three sons bounced—Tom, bright and curious; another, strong and big; a third, whose little pot belly jiggled as he talked and talked and talked. In a trailer, Joe kicked and fought against his bonds.

George let him out first, then took the sons to the porch. Joe and Bill stared at each other for a long moment, then Bill brayed out a long, donkeyish laugh.

Orville looked with proprietary satisfaction at the donkeys, then at the sons, then at George. He wagged a finger at George, as if to say, I'll be back for you, someday. Then he got into his tram and drove off.

George went back inside and made dinner for his family. ♣

MOM and Dad

BY SHERWOOD SMITH
ILLUSTRATION BY MAHENDRA SINGH

at the HOME FRONT

Before Rick spoke, I saw from his expression what was coming.

I said the words first. "The kids are gone again."

Rick dropped onto the other side of the couch, propping his brow on his hand. I couldn't see his eyes, nor could he see me.

It was just past midnight. All evening, after we'd seen our three kids safely tucked into bed, we'd stayed in separate parts of the house, busily working away at various projects, all of them excuses not to go to bed ourselves—even though it was a work night.

Rick looked up, quick and hopeful. "Mary. Did one of the kids say something to you?"

"No. I had a feeling, that was all. They were so sneaky after dinner. Didn't you see Lauren—" I was about to say *raiding the*

flashlight and the Swiss Army Knife from the earthquake kit but I changed, with almost no pause, to "—sneaking around like ... like Inspector Gadget?"

He tried to smile. We'd made a deal, last time, to take it easy, to try to keep our sense of humor, since we knew where the kids were.

Sort of knew where the kids were.

How many other parents were going through this nightmare? There had to be others. We couldn't be the only ones. I'd tried hunting for some kind of support group on the Internet—*Seeking other parents whose kids disappear to other worlds*—and not surprisingly the e-mail I got back ranged from offers from psychologists for a free mental exam to "opportunities" to MAKE \$\$\$ IN FIVE DAYS.

So I'd gone digging again, this time at the library, rereading all those childhood fav-

I'LL BE BACK IN A MINUTE TO WRITE THIS BLURB—
I HAVE TO GO CHECK ON THE KIDS...



WE DID IT OUT OF LOVE. OUR DUTY AS WE CAN'T POSSIBLY PROTECT THEM IN

rites: C.S. Lewis, L. Frank Baum, Joy Chant, Ruth Nicholls, and then more recent favorites, like Diana Wynne Jones. All the stories about kids who somehow slipped from this world into another, adventuring widely and wildly, before coming safely home via that magic ring, or gate, or spell, or pair of shoes. Were there hints that adults missed? Clues that separated the real worlds from the made-up ones?

"Evidence," I said, trying to be logical and practical and adult. "They've vanished like this three times that we know about. Doors and windows locked. Morning back in their beds. Sunburned. After the last time, just outside R.J.'s room you saw two feathers and a pebble like nothing on Earth. You came to get me, the kids woke up, the things were gone when we got there. When asked, the response was, and I quote, 'What feathers?'"

But Rick knew he had seen those feathers, and so we'd made our private deal: Wait, and take it easy.

Rick rubbed his hands up his face, then looked at me. And broke the deal. "What if this time they don't come back?"

We sat in silence. Then, because there was no answer, we forced ourselves to get up, to do chores, to follow a normal routine in hopes that if we were really, really good, and really, really normal, morning would come the same as ever, with the children in their beds.

I finished the laundry. Rick vacuumed the living room and took the trash cans out. I made three lunches and put them in the fridge.

I put fresh bath towels in the kids' bathroom.

At one o'clock we went to bed and turned out the light, but neither of us slept; I lay for hours listening to the clock tick, and to Rick's unhappy breathing.

DAWN. I MADE MYSELF GET UP AND TAKE MY SHOWER AND DRESS, all the while listening, listening ... and when I finally nerved myself to check, I found a kid-sized lump in each of the three beds, a dark curly head on each pillow. R.J.'s face was pink from the Sun—from *what* Sun?—and Lauren had a scrape on one arm. Alisha snored softly, her hands clutching something beneath the bedclothes.

I tiptoed over and lifted the covers. Her fingers curled loosely around a long wooden wand with golden carving on its side. If it wasn't a magic wand, I'd eat it for breakfast.

Alisha stirred. I laid her covers down and tiptoed out.

"A MAGIC WAND?" RICK WHISPERED FIERCELY. "DID YOU TAKE IT?"

"Of course not!" I whispered back. "She'd have woken up, and—"

"And what?" he prompted.

I sighed, too tired to think. "And would have been mad at me."

"Mad?" Rick repeated, his whisper rising almost to a squeak. "Earth to Mary—we are the parents. *They* are the kids. We're supposed to keep them safe. How can we do it if they are *going off the planet every night?*"

I slipped back into Alisha's room. She had rolled over, and the wand had fallen off the mattress onto her blue fuzzy rug.

I bent, my heart thumping so loud I was afraid she'd hear it, closed my fingers round the wand, and tiptoed out.

"HMM." RICK WAVED IT BACK AND FORTH. IT WHISTLED—JUST LIKE any stick you wave in the air—but no magic sparks came out, no lights, no mysterious hums.

"This has got to be how they get away," Rick murmured, holding

the wand up to his nose and sniffing. "Huh. Smells like coriander, if anything."

"Except how did they get away the first time?"

"Good question."

I felt my shoulders hunch, a lifetime habit of bracing against worry.

Rick grimaced. "I know what you're thinking, and I'm thinking it too, but maybe it's OK. Maybe the other world isn't a twisted disaster like ours."

"But—why *our* kids?"

Rick shrugged, waving the wand in a circle. "Found by a kid from another world? Some kid who knows magic, maybe?" His voice suspended, and he gave me a sort of grinning wince. "Kid magician?" He laughed, the weak, unfunny laugh that expresses pain more than joy. "Listen to me! Say those words to any other adult and he'll dial 1-800-NUTHOUSE."

I gripped my hands together, thinking of my kids, and safety. I said, "Touch it on me."

"What?" Rick stared.

"Go ahead. If it sends me where they go—"

Rick rubbed his eyes. "I'm still having trouble with the concept. Right. Of course. But we'll go together." His clammy left hand closed round my equally damp fingers, and with his right he tapped us both on our heads.

Nothing happened.

Rick looked hopeful. "Maybe it's broken."

"I don't think we're that lucky," I muttered,

and went down to fix breakfast.

The kids appeared half an hour later, more or less ready for school. The looks they exchanged with each other let me know at once that they were worried—desperately—about something.

Then three pairs of brown eyes turned my way.

"Um, Mom?" R.J. said finally, as he casually buttered some toast. "Did you, uh, do house cleaning this morning? You know, before we woke up?"

"No," I replied truthfully, watching his toast shred into crumbs. He didn't even notice.

"Did you, like, find any, um, art projects?" Lauren asked.

"Art projects?" I repeated.

R.J. frowned at his toast, then pushed it aside.

Alisha said, "Like a stick. For a play. A play at school. Uhn!" This last was a gasp of pain—someone had obviously kicked her under the table. Her eyes watered, and she muttered to Lauren, "What did you do that for?"

"The play was last month, remember?" Lauren said in a sugary voice, rolling her eyes toward me. "Mom helped paint scenery!"

I fussed with my briefcase, giving them sneakier looks than they were giving me, as I watched them trying to communicate by quick whispers and pointing fingers. Rick came in then, looked at us all, and went out again—and I could hear him turning a laugh into a cough.

"YOU ALL REMINDED ME OF A BUNCH OF SPIES IN A REALLY BAD movie," Rick said later, when I was driving us to our respective workplaces. He grinned. "All squinting at each other like—"

"Rick." I tried not to be mad. "It is *our* kids we're spying on. Lying to. I feel terrible!"

He said, "I don't. At least they're home—"

"They're not at home. They're at school."

"They're safe. The wand's in the trunk of the car, by the way. And



PARENTS IS TO KEEP THEM SAFE, AND SOME WORLD WE'VE NEVER EVEN SEEN!"

as soon as I can, I'm going to take the damn thing out and burn it, and make sure the kids *stay* safe."

I sighed as I drove past palm trees and billboards—the once-reassuring visual boundaries of mundane reality. Mundane made sense. It was safe, because there were no reminders in that everyday blandness that the rules we make to govern our lives are not absolute, and that safety is an illusion.

I dropped Rick off at his printshop. Sighed again when I parked the car.

And I sighed a third time when I sat down at my computer, punched up Autocad, and stared at the equations for the freeway bridge I was supposed to be designing.

WHEN WE GOT HOME, THE FIRST SIGN THAT SOMETHING WAS UP was the house—spic and span. Usually housecleaning is something that gets done when Rick and I feel guilty, or when it's gotten so cluttered and dusty I turn into the Wicked Bitch of the West and dragoon everyone into jobs.

I knew, of course, that they'd given the place a thorough search—but at least they hadn't made a mess. I considered this a Responsible Act, and brought it up to Rick later, when we got ready for bed. And didn't a Responsible Act deserve one in return?

"Very responsible," he agreed. "Won't it be a pleasant, refreshing change to sleep the entire night, knowing they are safely in their beds?"

"Did you destroy the wand?" I asked.

He studied the ceiling as though something of import had been written there. "No. Not yet. But I will."

HOME LIFE WAS NORMAL FOR ABOUT A WEEK.

At least on the surface.

The kids tried another surreptitious search, more oblique questions, and then finally they just gave up. I know the exact hour—the minute—they gave up because they really gave up. Not just their secret world, but everything. Oh, they ate and went to school and did their homework, but the older ones worked with about as much interest and enthusiasm as a pair of robots, and Alisha drifted about, small and silent as a little ghost.

I hated seeing sad eyes at dinner. We cooked their favorite foods. Rick made barbecued ribs and spaghetti on his nights, and I fixed Mexican food and Thai chicken on my nights—loving gestures on our part that failed to kindle the old joy. R.J. and Lauren said "Please" and "Thank you" in dismal voices, and picked at the food as though it were prune-and-pea casserole.

Alisha didn't talk, just *looked*.

I avoided her gaze.

EIGHT DAYS LATER I PASSED BY LAUREN'S ROOM WITH A STACK OF clean sheets and towels, and heard soft, muffled sobs. Her unhappiness smote my guilty heart and I was soon in our room snuffling into my pillow, the clean laundry laying on the carpet where I'd dropped it.

We're the parents. They are the kids.

That's what Rick had said.

I got up, wiped my face on one of those clean towels, and went back—not sure what I'd say or do—but I stopped when I heard all three kids in Lauren's room.

"I can't help it." Lauren's voice was high and teary. "Queen Liete was going to make me a maid of honor to Princess Elte—my very best friend! Now we've missed the ceremony!"

"You can't miss it, not if you're the person being ceremonied." That was Alisha's brisk, practical voice. Even though she's the youngest, she's always been the practical one.

"Celebrated," R.J. muttered. "How much time has passed there? What if they think we don't want to come back? That we don't care any more? Brother Owl was going to teach me shape-changing on my own, without his help!"

Lauren sniffed, gulped, and cried, "I wish you hadn't picked up that stupid wand, Alisha. I wish we'd never gone. It's so much worse, being stuck here, and *remembering*."

"I don't think so." That was R.J.'s sturdy voice. "Somebody got the wand, but nothing can take away what I remember. Riding on the air currents so high, just floating there..."

"Learning a spell," Alisha put in, "and seeing it *work*. Knowing that it had to be us, that we made all the difference."

"You're right," Lauren said. The tears were gone. "Only for me the best memory was sneaking into the Grundles' dungeon. Oh, I hated it at the time—it was scarier than anything I'd ever done—but I knew I *had* to get Prince Dar out and, being a girl, and an outworlder, and a very fast runner, I was the *only one* who could get by those magic wards. I liked that. Being the only one who could do it."

"Because of our talents," Alisha murmured longingly.

"Because we saw the signs, and we believed what we saw," R.J. added, even more longingly.

Gloomy silence.

I tiptoed away to pick up the towels and sheets.

RICK WAS IN THE GARAGE, SUPPOSEDLY WORKING ON REFINISHING one of the patio chairs, but I found him tossing the sander absently from hand to hand while he stared at R.J.'s old bicycle.

"You haven't burned the wand," I guessed.

He gave his head a shake, avoiding my eyes. "I can't."

"I think we ought to give it back," I said.

He looked up. His brown eyes were unhappy, reminding me terribly of R.J.'s sad eyes over his untouched dinner.

"They're our kids," I said. "Not our possessions." I told him what I'd overheard.

"Talents," he repeated when I was done.

I said, "What if Alisha had been born with some incredible music talent? She'd be just as lost to us if she were at some studio practicing her instrument eight hours a day, or being taken by her music coach to concerts all over the country."

"She'd be safe," Rick said.

"Not if some drunk driver hits her bus—or a terrorist blows up her concert hall. We taught them to be fair, and to be sensible. But to be totally safe in this world we'd have to lock them in a room. The world *isn't* totally safe. I wish it were."

Rick tossed the sander once more from hand to hand, then threw it down onto the workbench. "They lied to us."

"They didn't lie. Not until the wand disappeared. And we lied right back."

"That's love," Rick said. "We did it out of love. Our duty as parents is to keep them safe, and we can't possibly protect them in some world we've never even seen!"

"Think of Lauren, making friends. For five years we've worried about her inability to make friends—she's never fit in with the kids at school."



WE LIVE IN OUR HOUSES AND FOLLOW SENSIBLE AND STEADY AND KEEP THE

"She needs to learn to fit in," Rick said. "In this world. Where we live."

I felt myself slipping over to his way of thinking, and groped for words, for one last argument. "What if," I said. "What if those people from the other world find their way here, but they only have the one chance—and they offer the kids only the one chance to go back? Forever? What if we make them choose between us and that world? They've always come back, Rick. It's love, not duty, that brings them back, but they don't even know it, because they've never been forced to make that choice."

Rick slammed out of the garage, leaving me staring at R.J.'s little-boy bike.

I WAS IN BED ALONE FOR HOURS, NOT SLEEPING, when Rick finally came in.

"I waited until Alisha conked off," he said, and drew in a shaky breath. "Damn! That kid racks up more under-the-covers reading time than I did when I was a kid, and I thought I was the world's champ."

"You put the wand back?" I asked, sitting up.

"Right under the bed."

I hugged my knees to my chest, feeling the emotional vertigo I'd felt when Lauren was first born, and I stared down at this child who had been inside me for so long. Now a separate being, whose memories would not be my memories. Whose life would not be my life.

And Rick mused, "How much of my motivation was jealousy, and not just concern for their safety? I get a different answer at midnight than I do at noon."

"You mean, *why didn't it ever happen to me?*"

His smile was wry.

They were gone the next night, of course.

It was raining hard outside, and I walked from room to silent room, touching their empty beds, their neatly lined-up books and toys and personal treasures, the pictures on their walls. Lauren had made sketches of a girl's face—Princess Elte? In R.J.'s room, the sketches were all of great birds, raptors with beaks and feathers of color combinations never seen in this world. He'd stored in jewelry boxes the feathers and rocks he'd brought back across that unimaginable divide.

Alisha's tidy powder-blue room gave nothing away.

The next morning I was downstairs early, fixing pancakes, my heart light because I'd passed by the three rooms and heard kid-breathing in each.

I almost dropped the spatula on the floor when I looked up and there was Alisha in her nightgown.

She ran to me, gave me a hug round the waist.

"Thanks, Mom," she said.

"Thanks?" My heart started thumping again. "For pancakes?"

"For putting it back," she said. "I smelled your shampoo in my room that day, when the wand disappeared. But I didn't tell the others. I didn't want them to be mad."

I suddenly found the floor under my bottom. "Your dad put it back," I said. "We were in it together. We didn't mean to make you unhappy."

"I know." Alisha sat down neatly on the floor next to me, cross-legged, and leaned against my arm, just as she had when she was a toddler. "We didn't tell you because we knew you'd say no. Not to be mean. But out of grownup worry."

"We just want to keep you safe," I said.

She turned her face to look up at me, her eyes the color of Rick's



playing in the dark

*Afraid of the dark?
You shouldn't be.*

By David Phalen

The kids are supposed to be sleeping, but they're playing in the dark instead.

Steve—at 10, the oldest—shoves a tenebrous handful of shadow down the back of Mary's nightgown. It melts to a cloudy gray while she squeals her indignation and counterattacks with a murky spray that she flings from the umbra of the globe sitting on the desk near the window. Jon-Jon digs a bright hole into the blackness of his closet. He rounds it out after a short entrance, then wriggles inside and scoops out a fort. Black smudges splatter

onto the floor just outside the closet door, creating an inky puddle, impenetrable even to the probing rays of the nightlight plugged into the socket next to the bookcase. Jean—at five, the youngest—lies on her bottom bunk, moving outstretched arms up and down, kicking her legs together and apart. When she carefully gets up, the bright image of an angel glows on her rumpled bedspread.

Steve and Mary team up to attack Jon-Jon's fort, grabbing great armfuls of shadow from under the beds, burying the

ray of light from his entrance. When his protests grow loud enough that the children fear their parents will hear, they relent. They help him once again clear the penumbra of his entrance, scooping gray blobs behind them like cats digging in a litter box. Fine grains of night splatter throughout the room, leaving Jean's angel with black freckles. She yells at them to stop.

The older children shush Jean. While the boys continue honing the fort, Mary goes over to distract her sister with the building of a darkman. The two girls round an inky mound into a base, then crawl through the obscurity of the room, pulling patches of shade into a ball to pile on top of it. The partial figure stands like a shadow in a globe of brightness. For its head, the sisters have to creep into the room's most caliginous corners, pulling together wisps of shadows and hints of obscurity. Mary properly sizes and shapes the scraps, then hands the dusky head to Jean, who holds it like a sacrament, while

SCHEDULES AND PICK JOBS THAT ARE BILLS PAID, BUT IN MY DREAMS I FLY.

eyes, their shape so like my mother's. "And we wanted to keep you safe."

"Ignorance is not real safety," I pointed out. "It's the mere illusion of safety."

Alisha gave me an unrepentant grin. "How many times have you said about us, *they're safer not knowing?*" she retorted, and then she added, "That's why we always go at midnight, and we're only gone a couple of hours. We can do that because the time there doesn't work like here."

"But another *world*. How can we set safety rules? We don't know what happens." I held her tightly against me.

"You send us to school," Alisha said, pulling away just a little, so she could look at me again. "You don't know what happens there. Not really."

I thought back to my own school days, and then thought of recent media orgies, and felt my heart squeeze. "True. But we're used to it. And habit and custom are probably the strongest rules we know. Can we go with you to the other world? Just to see it?" I asked.

Alisha shook her head. "There's a big spell. Prevents grownups, because of this big war in the past. Only kids can cross over—not even teenagers. One day we'll be too old. I know you'll be real sorry!"

I tried to laugh. It wasn't very successful, but we both smiled anyway. "It's not every set of parents who have kids who cross worlds—you'll have to give us time to get used to it."

She hugged me again, and flitted away to get dressed.

"R.J. HAS TAKEN TO TELLING ME STORIES," RICK SAID A FEW DAYS later. "Not—quite—admitting anything, just offering me these stories instead of me reading to him."

Only Lauren went about as if nothing were different, everything were normal. Keeping the other world secret was important to her,

so we had to respect that, and give her the space to keep it.

"Alisha told me more about magic," I said that next week.

The kids were gone again. A spectacular thunderstorm raged like battling dragons outside. We didn't even try to sleep. We sat in the kitchen across from each other, hands cradling mugs of hot chocolate. Rick had put marshmallows in it, and whipped cream, and just enough cinnamon to give off a delicious scent.

"Magic." He shook his head.

"The amazing thing is, it sounds a lot like the basic principles of engineering."

"I think R.J. has learned how to turn himself into a bird," Rick said, stirring the marshmallows round and round with his finger. "They fly in a flock, and watch for the Grundles, who I guess have a bad case of What's-yours-is-mine as far as other kingdoms are concerned." His smile faded, and he shook his head. "Nothing will be the same again, Mary—we can't even pretend to be a normal family."

"Is anybody?" I asked. "I mean, really?"

What is normal?

We live in our houses and follow schedules and pick jobs that are sensible and steady and keep the bills paid, but in my dreams I fly, as I did when I was small.

"The universe is still out there just beyond the palm trees and malls and freeways," I said. "And the truth is we still don't really know the rules."

What we do know is that we love our children, will always love them, until the stars have burned away to ash, and though parents are not issued experience along with our babies' birth certificates, we learn a little wisdom and a lot of compromise as the children grow.

Rick said slowly, "Well, I hope Lauren and her sword-swinging princess pal are kicking some serious Grundle butt."

We remember how to laugh. ♣

Mary scrapes together enough left-over silhouette to bring it to a shade that matches the rest.

The boys look out from the glow of their finished fort as Mary lifts Jean high enough to place the head on the arc of the darkman's sloping shoulders. All of the children look at the figure for a moment, then, in a burst of giggles and whispered instructions, they bustle about the room looking for the finishing touches. Steve pulls two hangers from the closet and bends them into rough approximations of arms. He sticks them into the darkman's shoulders, one arm straight out (a gesture encompassing some great expanse), the other arm bent (as if beckoning). Jon-Jon tilts a white baseball cap at a jaunty angle on the man's head. Mary pokes the stub of a candle into the middle of his face for a nose, and Jean insists on carefully placing two bright yellow marbles as eyes. They glitter with the reflection of light around the man.

When they finish, the children laugh and race through the circle of light surrounding the darkman in an impromptu

game of tag: ducking and chasing, bouncing lightly over beds, dodging behind chairs. The room grows increasingly murky as they kick up pockets of shade and motes of dun.

Inevitably, their father comes into the room. The children scramble for their beds, but Jon-Jon is left in the closet, most of his body still covered in the darkness of his fort, but his head spotlighted from behind by brightness streaming from the cavern he has made. The tight curls of his hair are drenched in shadow.

"That's enough," says Father, his voice low but stern. He picks up a handful of darkness off the floor by the doorway and tosses it like seeds sown to fog the room. He walks to the closet, picks up Jon-Jon, and carries him over to his bed. He reaches under the pillow and pulls out a dark rectangle, which he spreads over Jon-Jon's face. He finds similar shadows beneath the pillows of the other children.

"Go to sleep now," he says to the snuggling children. Tired at last from their play, or perhaps aware they might not get off so

easily if their father has to come in again, the children stay quietly in bed as he kicks at a black puddle near the closet, filling in Jon-Jon's hole. He looks thoughtfully for a moment at the darkman, then smiles in the distant way that the children know has nothing to do with them. He bends and picks the man up by the base, then walks him over to the window and tosses him out into the night.

He pulls an armful of darkness in from under the window's awning. He tosses it into the air in the room, where it drifts down, making the desks and bookshelves and beds murky. The room sinks into dusk, then into night once again. Father gives one final, stern look at the children, then grabs a last expanse of darkness. As he leaves, he spreads it like a blanket over the rectangle of light coming through the door.

The children stir slightly, but fall quickly asleep. Outside, their darkman dances about, his white hat tipped jauntily, a candle of a nose separating two flashing marble eyes. His wire arms beckon and engulf the sleeping world around him. ♣



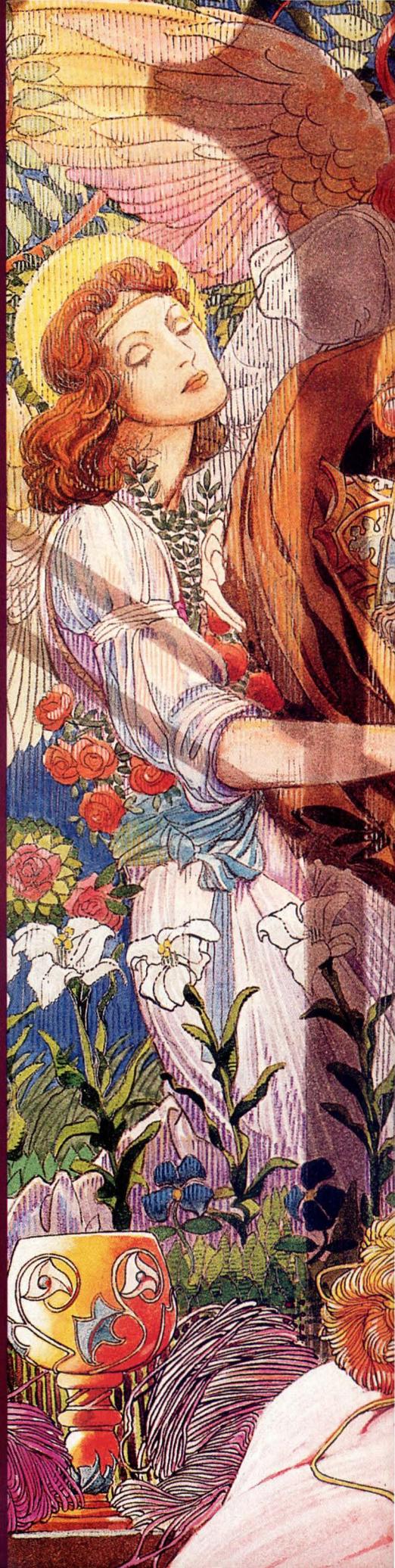
Q&A with Barry Windsor-Smith

DÉJÀ VUEWS

Barry Windsor-Smith has been at the top of the art pop culture pyramid since his fantastic and meticulous drawings first evoked Conan the Barbarian in the pages of Marvel Comics in 1970.

For over 30 years he has contributed his written wit and masterful penwork to various Marvel titles, including *The Avengers*, *Daredevil*, *Dr. Strange*, *The Fantastic Four*, *Iron Man*, *Machine Man*, and *The X-Men*. Founder, owner, and sole artist for The Gorbliney Press, Windsor-Smith was also writer and artist on *Archer and Armstrong*, *Eternal Warrior*, *Solar*, and *Unity* at Valiant Comics, where he was Valiant's creative director. Other credits include *Rune* (Malibu Comics), *Wildstorm Rising #1* (Image Comics), and *Barry Windsor Smith: STORYTELLER* which featured *The Freebooters*, *Young Gods*, and *The Paradoxman*.

BY KAREN HABER





With the death of King Arthur and the loss of Camelot, the weaver reflects on her past in *A Dream of Olden Days*.



Founder of Windsor-Smith Studio, the artist has worked as a painter, designer, publisher, teacher of classical drawing, and on Oliver Stone's film, *The Hand*. His latest published work is Barry Windsor-Smith: *OPUS 1*, the first volume of a four-book series chronicling his art and personal experiences.

Among his influences he cites Jack Kirby, the Pre-Raphaelites, Alphonse Mucha, Gustav Klimt, Shakespeare, Dickens, Harold Pinter, The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, and that's just for starters. Read on, and enter the unique artistic dimension inhabited by Barry Windsor-Smith.

RoF: What is your definition of art of the fantastic?

BWS: Fantastic and Fantasy have subtly different intimations. I've always felt that the most effective Fantasy painting or drawing is where the fantastic elements are in counterpoint to reality. Like surreal painting. Surrealism doesn't work unless the artist can represent realism with paint and brush. The more realistic the representation, the more surreal the fantastic elements will seem. Rembrandt, for instance, could've been a great surrealist if he'd had those sort of conceptual ideas, because his greatest ability was representing reality.

Then again, a perfectly painted dragon, for instance, in a perfectly painted Fantasy environment, isn't much of a turn-on. But that same dragon set against, say, a large, suburban living room painted with the realism of Norman Rockwell—that hits a button and fires off neural reactions. It's our sense of reality—of normalcy—being invaded that energizes the neurological pulse that defines the artist's Fantasy as truly fantastic.

RoF: Aren't you talking here about playing with conceptual expectations, juxtapositions, and perceptions of reality?

BWS: Yes, absolutely. Fantasy should juxtapose reality or it's not gonna work. It's all about perception, of course, but if reality is what you experience and Fantasy is what you imagine, then the two combined seamlessly enhance each other while simultaneously mucking with the foundations of perception. Fantasy for its own sake, like my *Mitras* [see illustration], say, speaks to an audience that is already accustomed to that symbology.

RoF: Would you describe your work as Romantic?

BWS: Romantic should really be in quotes. It's not widely understood as an art term these days. People think it means goofy love, or something. Am I a goofy lover? Or is my work a gothic novel? Yeah, OK—I'm a "romantic" artist. Turner, Ingres, and others were the pioneers, but you don't have to paint like them to be a Romantic painter. The Pre-Raphaelites were Romantics, so was Frederic Leighton, but a casual glance at his stuff and he looks like a Classicist.

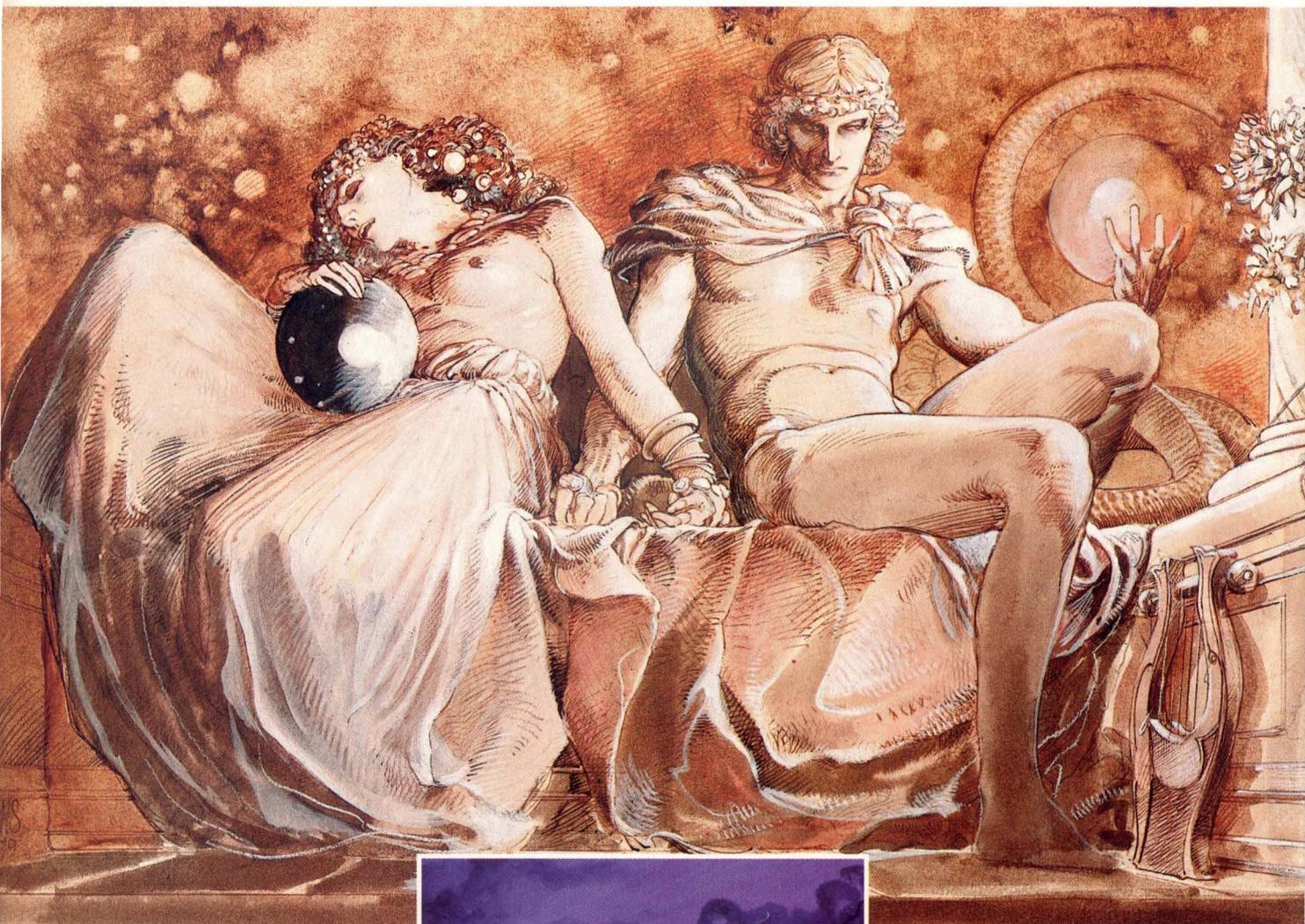
RoF: You appear to have several different styles—as though you "speak" in dif-

TOP: The contrast of the Mahometan tile with the 16th century Italianate court dress of the musician shows that this man is a *Mintrel in Exile*.

ABOVE: This reversal of the legend shows Medusa cutting off *The Head of Perseus*.

OPPOSITE TOP: While testing angles, Windsor-Smith decided to have the viewer looking head-on at the two gods rather than viewing them from below in his fourth version of *Artemis and Apollo*. OPPOSITE BELOW: *Mitras* is a Fantasy genre painting at its best.

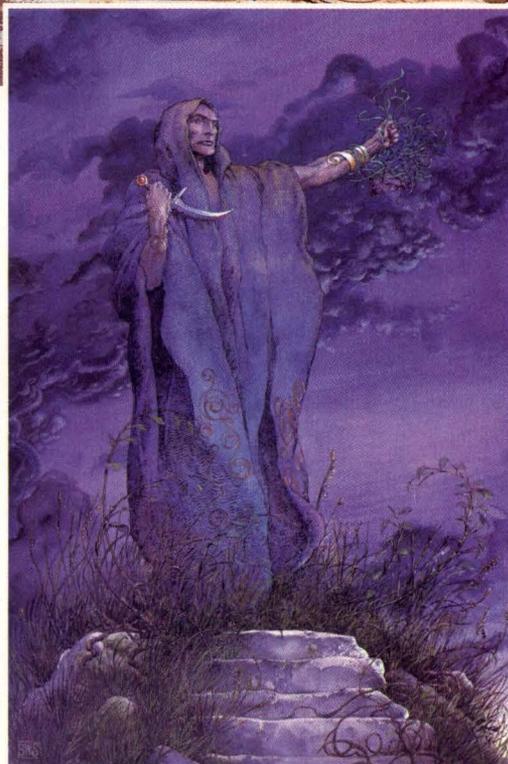
I can make my brain shift, like other people make their feet move.



ferent dialects—simple, almost primitive cartoons, then others that are so intensely detailed that they resemble engravings, and then the work that falls in between. What's your favorite style?

BWS: I have no favorite style, that's like having a favorite color: Most artists don't think that way. I never intentionally draw in different styles. What comes out of the pen or brush is the result of a different thought process at work. I can make my brain shift, like other people make their feet move.

I don't trust style much. It becomes a template if you don't watch out. Style can be perceived as technique, and technique becomes repetition, then you're intellectually dead. Dependence on style is just sleepwalking. Of late I've just been trying to assess myself and what I've done over the years.



RoF: Is your *OPUS* series part of that assessment?

BWS: Not "part of" so much as "all of." *OPUS* is a journey of discovery for me.

RoF: What are some of your favorite works in the book and why?

BWS: Gee, I'm not much of a self-fan. I usually hate everything I do, they're like interesting experiments gone wrong. It usually takes a few years for me to reconsider a piece; I'll take another look at it and think, "Oh, that's not as bad as I remembered." I do like my spontaneous stuff, images that just fell out of my head when I wasn't looking.

RoF: For example?

BWS: The *Weapon X* cover fell out of my pen one evening in about an hour. *Gypsy Eyes* is another that just happened—unlabored, not wholly considered—unplanned, really. It has presence,

I've been keeping this part of me a secret for decades, but now that I'm capable of disclosing the details I'm beginning to awaken from my self-imposed soul exile.

an immediacy in its unintentional effect. I'm OK with stuff like that. The original sketch emanates creative vibrations.

RoF: Let's talk about comics. Do you have a love-hate relationship with them?

BWS: There's so much more to it ... there's so much to say, or so much that should be said. In comics there's the art,

there's the craft, and there's the business. That's the same as rock, film, or anything else. I love the art of comics. It can transcend all other media in the right hands, or mind, y'know. The craft of comics is so misunderstood. So many big-name comics artists don't even understand their own medium. It's tragic and pathetic. And that's basically

why comics have never grown into a real and recognized art form. The business of comics ... I hate the business of comics. It's the business that's killed the art form.

RoF: Do you wish that you could push the medium to do more?

BWS: There're more genuine talents in the medium than ever before. They aren't getting rich because they're visionaries, though. If I were to push anything, I'd push the commercial publishers to hang up the superhero capes, and start paying attention, and money, to the real creative geniuses toiling in the field.

RoF: What do you think comics do best?

BWS: Comics have their limitations, of course, but it's up to the creativity and the vision of the individual. Along with telling a story, comics is about making pictures by hand. There is no photographic portrait that can come close to a good painted portrait; look at John Singer Sargent's portraits and tell me if I'm wrong. Comics art has its own overt personality, and at its best it is the creator's personality that we're exposed to.

RoF: Was Conan intentionally an example of your dualistic approach to aesthetics: a compelling and repellent character, both brutish and sensitive, attractive and ugly?

BWS: Not intentional so much as natural, I think. The original Howard character had no sensitivity, no gentleness. I doubt whether there was much at all attractive about him. In order to bring my particular version of Conan to life I had to invest him with some of my own characteristics. Yes, there was certainly dualism present there, on a subliminal level, of course.

RoF: Are any of your characters alter egos?

BWS: Sure, most of the males, and some of the females. But like any alter ego, the second personality is in contrast to the first. Like Clark Kent and Superman. Generally, any character that I've given my passion to will have to live with some of my personality traits. I'm Axus and Tristan Caine. Adastr's personality dwarfs my own, though, so I steer clear of her, 'specially when she's being bitchy. Aran Ana Kashan is me when I was younger, full of ideals and poetry, naive as a baby rabbit.

RoF: How do you feel about violence in comics these days?

BWS: It used to be action, not violence. It was symbolic and eu-phemistic. Jack Kirby's work epitomized comic book action: It was cartoony, and, to some extent, ballet-like. Today we have violence, though, and I believe it is thoughtless and indiscriminate.

Continued on page 86



ABOVE: *Wither*, one of three versions, shows off Windsor-Smith's meticulously detailed black and white line work. RIGHT: Barry Windsor-Smith classicized Conan the Barbarian in this *Saga* cover.



CHS

BY ERIC T. BAKER

The Nameless One awakes, Cthulu calls back, and magic goes post-modern.

LAST YEAR, INTERPLAY AND BLACK ISLE STUDIOS RELEASED A TERRIFIC COMPUTER ROLE-playing game called *Baldur's Gate*. Two things made it stand out from the many other CRPGs on the market. It was a direct port of the *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* pen-and-paper RPG, so if you were one of the hundreds of thousands of people who had played *AD&D* at some point in your life, then you already knew how the game was played. Just as important, it was huge. The game world came on multiple CDs and was displayed in killer, high-quality graphics. It looked like a high-end shooter or fighting game, but it played (through the inspired combination of real-time combat and multiple-pause settings) like *AD&D*. *BG* not only blew away existing CRPG players, but it brought new ones into the fold.

Now the *Baldur's Gate* producers are back with a new game called *Planescape: Torment*, another CRPG that uses the same game engine as *BG* to run the *AD&D* rules. This time, however, the quasi-medieval setting of *BG* has given way to the wild, mind-bending setting of *Planescape*, another campaign in the *AD&D* universe. Play centers around Sigil, the tire-shaped city at the center of all the planes of existence. In the paper-and-dice version, gateways in Sigil can take characters to every

heaven, hell, elemental, astral, and physical plane. *Torment* doesn't let characters go to all of the planes, but they make a healthy beginning of the grand tour as each player tries to solve the mystery of who his or her character is.

In *Torment*, players take the role of the Nameless One.

The character, although the player doesn't know it at the start, is immortal. Every time the character dies, it just wakes up again. The Nameless One wakes up to find itself just another corpse in the morgue. The character doesn't remember how it got there or who it is or what it is supposed to do, and the first part of the game is taken up with the character finding out about the world while the player finds out how to play the game. While not original, the idea of having the player



direct a character that doesn't know any more about the game world than the player does is a nice conceit.

The plot of *Torment* is about discovering the identity of the Nameless One through various quests. Being immortal, the character actually remembers spells and abilities rather than learning them, which means that larger experience point awards are often granted for asking the right series of questions to an NPC. Much more than *BG*, *Torment* places an emphasis on the "adventure game" elements of its plot. This means it is more important to ask the right people the right questions and to bring the right tools to solve the right puzzles than it is to develop pinpoint control of the combat interface.

Torment uses the *AD&D* alignment system (which in *AD&D* describes a character's moral perspective: law or chaos, good or evil) in a dynamic way. Instead of a permanent alignment, the character's alignment is changed according to its actions. Also, NPC alignment is subtler. When a character joins your party (and up to five NPCs can be following your character around) that character's alignment isn't revealed until the character acts according to it.

Planescape: Torment combines an interesting story line with an interesting main character. Its story-driven plot is as nonlinear as CRPGs get, and it is played amid beau-

The adepts in Post Modern Magick have a passion for power and pursue the charges that will make them stronger.





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tiful, multilayered environments with great special effects. It lacks a multi-player mode, but that just lets the story be better for the one player who is playing it. Computer role-playing games don't get any better than this one.

As the 1900s drew to a close, several Web sites and magazines published lists of the best role-playing games of all time. You're not going to get unanimity on a question like that, but what was striking was how one game kept placing in the top slot. The game was *Call of Cthulhu* from Chaosium Inc.

Originally written by Sandy Peterson (who would go on to do quite well as one of the co-designers of the classic computer game *Doom*), *CoC* was first published in 1981. Now it is out again in a brand-new hardcover edition, which has not so much been revised as it has been expanded. The original text is still there, but many essays, lists, and rules that were added in later years via supplements have been collected here so that the one book is now truly all you need to play the game.

Call of Cthulhu is based on the writings of H.P. Lovecraft, specifically his stories of what his publisher August Derleth called "The Cthulhu Mythos." Published in the '20s and '30s, these horror stories deal with tales of encounters with The Great Old Ones and their worshippers, encounters that almost always resulted in death or at least madness for the unfortunate protagonists of the stories. Given this source material, it is not surprising that *CoC* is not a game about heroic adventure in the *AD&D* mold. It is about heroes, but *CoC*'s heroes are much more ordinary, live in the 1900s on Earth, and are ultimately doomed.

Twelve statistics govern characters in *CoC*, but the two that stand out are Sanity and Mythos Lore. *CoC* was the first game that tried to model sanity as a governor for the characters' actions, keeping play on the model laid out in Lovecraft's books. The monsters and villains of his stories weren't so much evil as completely alien. To interact with The Old Ones and their minions was to catch a glimpse of how the universe really is rather than how we believe it to be. These glimpses erode the characters' sanity which is, after all, their ability to behave properly in a world that is becoming more and more unreal to them. Thus Sanity and Mythos Lore are linked. Every point of Mythos Lore earned reduces the character's maximum sanity total by the same amount. A character that completely understands the truth of existence cannot function in a normal way in human society.

The characters in a *CoC* campaign are ultimately doomed. That doesn't stop people from playing because the fight is in the service of the greater good. Even if the ultimate ending is inevitable, the little endings along the way are completely up in the air. As the rule

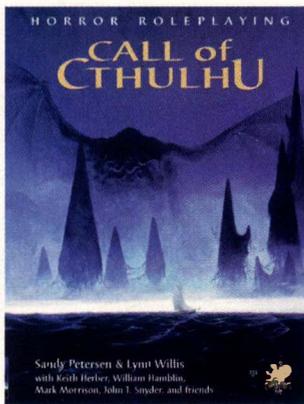
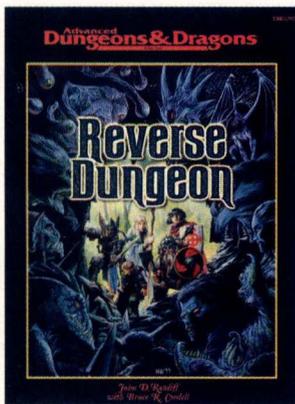
book itself points out, *CoC* is one of the very few games on the market where most players would rather throw their characters on a live grenade than experiment with the cool magical artifact they have just found. This "death at

instance, Amoromancy is based on love. Adepts in it gain charges by getting people to pay attention to them, spend time with them, and even fall in love with them. An amoromancer can then use those charges to power spells. The paradox is that the adept may not fall in love themselves. As soon as they do, all their charges, and thus all their magick, desert them. Personamancy is based on the power of masks. Adepts get charges for acting out roles and impersonating other people at the cost of never showing their own true emotions (their true face) to anyone. Giving into their passions in front of another person costs them all their charges.

Obviously these are not the pointed-hat wearing, spellbook-lugging magic-users of *AD&D*.

They aren't even the musty-tome-reading, madness-tempting sorcerers of *CoC*. The adepts of *UA*, as explained in *PoMoMag*, are an obsessed breed of society's dropouts. While not necessarily insane, they are driven by a passion for power to pursue the charges that enable their magick, a pursuit that makes it hard for them to hold down a 9-to-5 job, or even spend the requisite attention on maintaining a mundane career. In short, the rules of the game give the characters powers to do extraordinary things while forcing them to live interesting (in the Chinese meaning of that word) lives.

In addition to the 12 schools in the book, *PoMoMag* contains sections on the care and feeding of adepts, rules for creating and

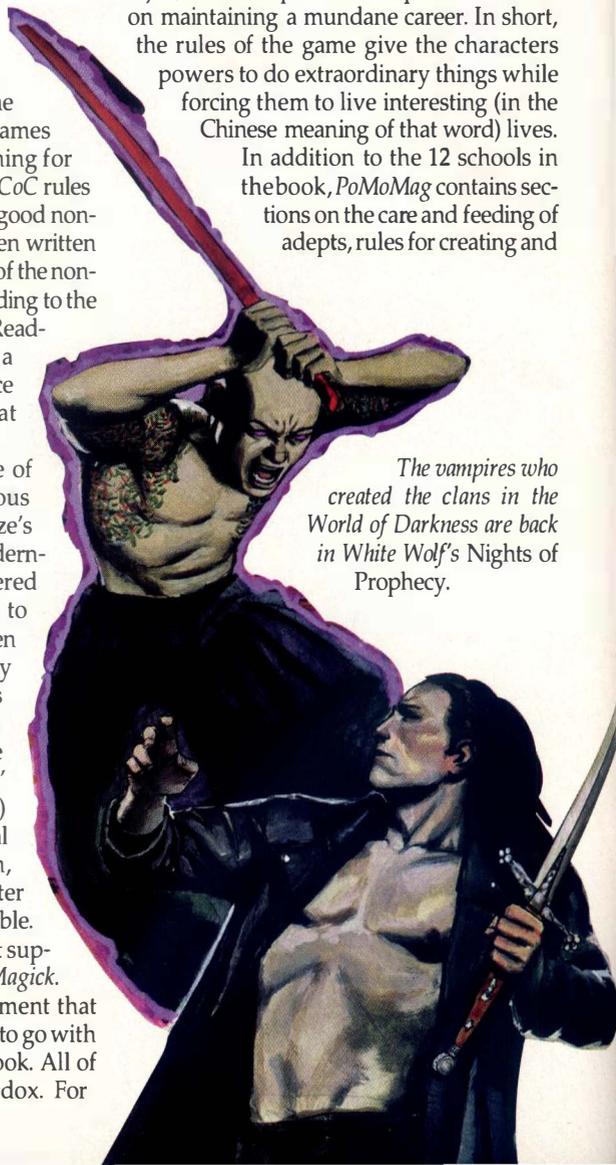


every turn" atmosphere makes the game all the more satisfying when the player's middle-aged, near-sighted librarian character manages to hold back an invasion of Deep Ones by finding and properly translating the right book and getting the right materials to the crab fishermen who are directly in the creatures' path.

CoC is terrifically well written. From the opening story by Lovecraft himself, to the small section on combat, to the long section on sanity, through the even longer section on magic, to the longest of all for Game Masters on how to make their games actually frightening and entertaining for the characters simultaneously, the *CoC* rules have the easy reading quality of a good non-fiction article. Most of what has been written about running role-playing games of the non-dungeon crawl variety has been adding to the strong foundation laid out in *CoC*. Reading the *CoC* rules and playing in a good *CoC* campaign is to experience what role-playing games can be at their very best.

Billed as "A Roleplaying Game of Transcendental Horror and Furious Action," John Tynes and Greg Stolze's *Unknown Armies* is set in the modern-day world that has been subtly altered by a porn star's mystic accession to join the Invisible Clergy, having been caught in living color and Dolby sound on videotape. This event has sparked a rebirth of interest in and practice of magick. (Yes, the game designers spell it with a "k" because they like the look. Deal.) This, however, is not the traditional magick of the hermetic tradition, the stuff that John Dee and Aleister Crowley tried to foist on the gullible. This, as the title of the game's latest supplement declares, is *Post Modern Magick*.

PoMoMag is a 190-page supplement that contains 12 new schools of magick to go with the six already in the main rule book. All of these schools are based on paradox. For



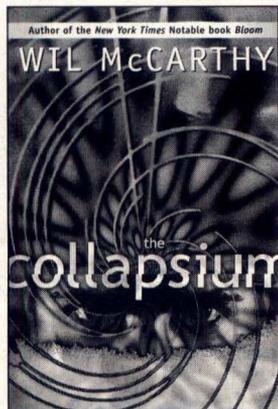
The vampires who created the clans in the *World of Darkness* are back in *White Wolf's Nights of Prophecy*.

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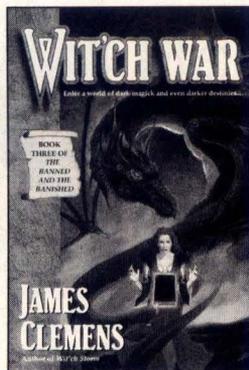


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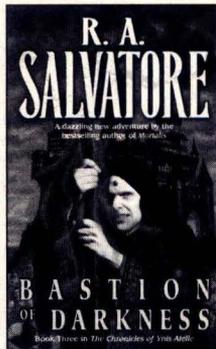
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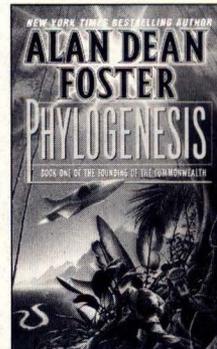
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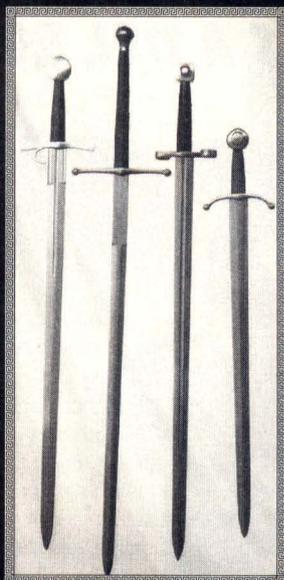
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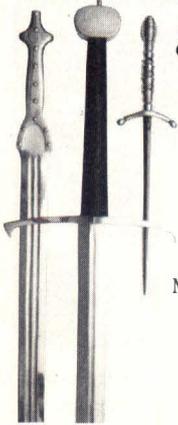
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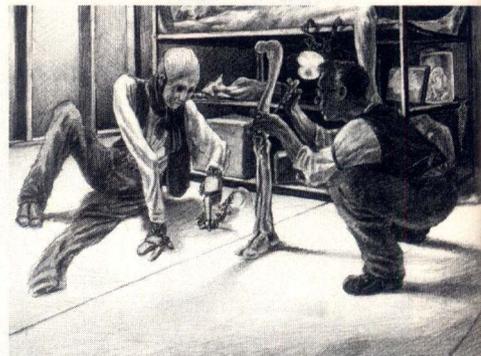
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playing automatons, write-ups of five new monsters, ten new artifacts, five new Cabals, and five NPC adepts. The how-to-play adepts essays are the most important part of these add-ons, the two-page spread on "Getting the Juice" being particularly helpful. This spread lets the GM and players know about how many charges their characters might expect to gather in a normal week of downtime. The monsters continue in the UA tradition that horrors you think might be real (UFOs, Spontaneous Combustion, Zombies) have actual scientific explanations, while the things you're sure are fake (Fairies, Demons, Ghost Writers) are actually magical phenomena. The Cabals and adepts are mostly characters useful for spicing up a campaign rather than being substitutes for the players' characters.

John D. Rateliff and Bruce R. Cordell, who between them have done some interesting things for TSR's AD&D line, have gotten together to produce the hundred-page adventure module *Reverse Dungeon*. It is built on the same conceit as the computer game *Dungeon Keeper*. Instead of playing heroic adventurers exploring a dungeon, killing monsters, and looting treasure, the players run the dungeon's monsters and try to defend their homes against marauding bands of adventurers.

The adventure is designed for one game master to run a party of players through, so



Unknown Armies: Post Modern Magick has created 12 new schools based on paradox.

the players start as a band of goblins defending their village against a party of first- and second-level heroes. In the second part of the module, the players can leave behind their goblins and take the roles of more powerful creatures like beholders and mind flayers. In the third part, the players find themselves defending the lowest reaches of the dungeon in the forms of vampires, ghosts, death knights, and more. In each case, the fun of the adventure comes in the Dungeon Master handing the players the usually hidden map of the dungeon and letting them decide where and what traps they want to lay, how they want to deploy their forces, if they want to seek allies, even if they want to leave the dungeon and make pre-emptive strikes on the good guys' lairs.

Reverse Dungeon is a good, clean change-up

pitch for a DM to throw a party that has been together for a while and is looking for a chance to stretch. The hurdles are getting the players to accept that it is no more unfair for the DM to run heroes against them when he knows all their plans than it is for them to run monsters against him when they know all his plans, and making the players comfortable in the roles of evil creatures. The Appendix of the module has some tips for this and makes the good point that villains are often much less bloodthirsty than their "good" counterparts. After all, many villains seek to capture their foes for ransom or torture. Heroes almost always kill their foes on sight.

Also out is *Nights of Prophecy* by White Wolf Publishing for their *Vampire: The Masquerade* RPG. *NoP* is "story telling and setting update," which means it contains five short adventures and a lot of background information about the World of Darkness.

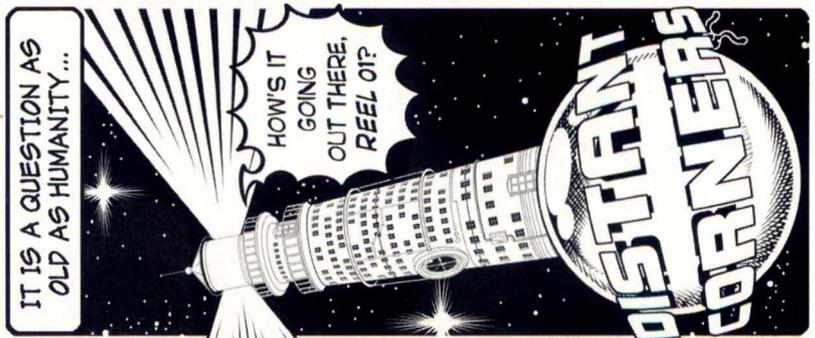
The longevity and success of the WoD lets White Wolf publish books and supplements that are different from those of their competitors. WW believes in laying out background and characters and letting Game Masters create their own adventures within that framework. They don't publish introductory scenarios in their core rule books and they almost never publish adventure modules. And when they do publish an adventure module, it is like *NoP*.

The Introduction lays out what is going on in the World of Darkness during this "Year of Revelations." It is not giving anything away to say that the original vampires, the ones that founded all the clans, are waking up, and boy, are they pissed. The events of the Introduction lead directly to the five scenarios, all of which deal with pivotal moments in the metaplot. "Return of the Succubus Club" details the reopening of everyone's favorite vampire hangout. "Walking After Midnight" is a fast-paced, over-the-top meeting/slugfest between the American Kindred and the Cathayan vampires. "To Grandmother's House" shows just what an awakened Antediluvian can do. "The Hunters Hunted" is an encounter between the Kindred and the strange new faction that is out to destroy them. "House of Lies" puts the characters on the trail of a brand new fragment from the Book of Nod.

In none of the five scenarios will you find a map. Each scenario contains almost as much background information on the situation at hand as it does descriptions of the events the characters will encounter. There are many NPCs, and while their full histories are given, none of them are written up with their full characteristics. For me personally, this is frustrating. I turn to a prewritten scenario because I don't want to go to the trouble of creating statistics for NPCs. This method does, however, let Game Masters tailor the statistics of the NPCs to the power level of their game. And if it is the sort of campaign where combat very seldom occurs, then the statistics aren't needed anyway. ♣

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BY ELI STONE



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POPI POPI

FIZZLE....

BOOKS

Continued from page 16

People, edited and introduced by Jessica Amanda Salmonson with a fine Preface by Joanna Russ, is the very first gathering of the supernatural fiction of one of America's greatest authors, Sarah Orne Jewett. On the other hand it's a cause for celebration because it did finally happen and we are lucky enough to at last be able to buy and read it.

Everything in this book is nothing less than wonderful and if you are interested in really serious, beautifully written Fantasy you should be kind to yourself and get hold of it and read it. These are not all ghost stories, there are witches and curses and telepathy and other strange things but I've never been much of a believer in sharp-edged categories. What is mentalism, for instance, but a visitation by the ghosts of thoughts?

The absolute gem of the collection is "Lady Ferry," a tale of apparent immortality which, as Joanna Russ points out, does rather better than Henry James did with "The Turn of the Screw" in leaving the matter as much afloat in ambiguity as everything else we experience. Do ghosts exist? Do we exist?

"The Gray Man" is perhaps, next to Mark Twain's "The Mysterious Stranger" and Melville's *The Confidence Man*, one of the best peeks an American author has given us at an awesome supernatural being; in this case

Death. It is just flat-out wonderful and I don't want to give away a thing about it except that I can't resist quoting one lovely line describing Death's complexion:

"He was well made and vigorous, but there was an unusual pallor in his face, a grayish look, as if he had been startled by bad news."

If you are interested in any of these books or curious to see what others are available, you can use the www quoted earlier or write: Ash-Tree Press, P.O. Box 1360, Ashcroft, British Columbia, Canada V0K 1A0.

I hope you do. ☺

Before plunging into the pool of new releases, it might repay us to briefly ponder the plight of older books, classics of Fantasy heretofore unavailable except by diligent haunting of used-book stores. One of the most innovative methods of reviving a backlist of wonderful titles has to be the new technology of "print on demand." John Betancourt, himself a talented writer, is currently dedicated to making his Wildside Press (P.O. Box 45, Gillette, NJ 07933, or www.wildsidepress.com) the leader in this exciting field. He now offers scores of handsome, fully professional trade paperbacks at reasonable prices. I can't pretend to review them all here—I've read some and not others—but after seeing and hefting several of his books, I wish to endorse them heartily.

When you're as prolific of ideas as Larry Niven, you can afford to throw a few away.

Such seemed to be the case with Niven's sometimes solo, sometimes shared, world series that began in 1969 with the short story "Not Long Before the End" and continued in *The Magic Goes Away* (1978) and *The Magic May Return* (1981). Niven's notion was a winner: In prehistoric times a mystical source of "manna" allowed real magic to be performed until, like any finite resource unwisely exploited, the manna vanished, resulting in our magic-shorn world. But the game was never really coherently developed. Sometimes the setting was said to be BC 12,000, at other times reference was made to Classical Greece. Despite highpoints, this "Hard Fantasy" series lacked real rigor.

All that changes with the publication of *The Burning City* (Pocket, hardcover, 486 pp., \$24.95). Joining his talents with veteran collaborator Jerry Pournelle, Niven reinvigorates his 30-year-old concept, fleshing it out with engaging characters and some subtle touches of allegory and myth.

Our protagonist is Whandall Placehold, later to be called Whandall Feathersnake. We discover Whandall as a curious and bright young child living in Tep's Town, an isolated seacoast habitation generally devoid of most magic. Whandall's people are hereditary thieves, and the tripartite social structure of their city is generously substantiated in the manner of Delany's *Nevryona*, just as these authors did for a Los Angeles arcology in their *Oath of Fealty* (1981). The first half of the



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novel brings Whandall up to his early 20s, at which point the normally quiescent fire god of the city erupts in a major Burning that propels Whandall and some fellow refugees out into the wider world. A leap of two decades finds Whandall a prosperous yet still daring merchant. Summoned by a figure from his youth, an Atlantean wizard named Morth, Whandall eagerly returns to Tep's Town to settle some resonant old debts.

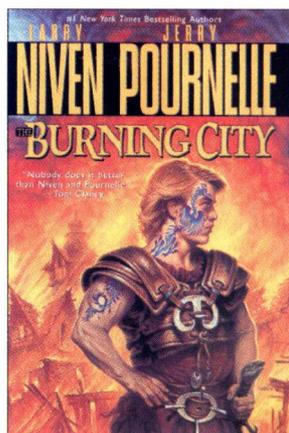
Pournelle and Niven provide a full quota of invention, speculation, and adventure. Their characters leap vibrantly off the page, especially Whandall, who functions as both a proto-Odysseus and quasi-Quetzalcoatl. This exemplary Hard Fantasy of a dwindling Golden Age redeems its predecessors, exuding a melancholy yet hopeful aura through its implicit credo that adaptation and evolution beat stagnation and despair every time.

Anyone who missed Van Reid's charming 1998 debut novel in hardcover now has a chance to catch up with a new edition of *Cordelia Underwood* (Penguin, trade, 400 pp., \$12.95) before moving on to her equally attractive fictional "cousin," *Mollie Peer* (Viking, hardcover, 336 pp., \$24.95). Reid's steam-punkish Fantasies hark back to the early work of James Blaylock and Tim Powers. Set in a fairy tale yet robustly real Maine during the eventful year of 1896, Reid's two complexly interlinked novels (with at least one more promised) will be devoured with immense

pleasure by anyone who enjoyed Blaylock's *The Digging Leviathan* (1984) or Powers' *The Anubis Gates* (1983).

The first book concerns a strange inheritance left to its strong-willed titular heroine by her semipirical Uncle Basil. Involving ghosts, buried treasure, heartbreak, chases, and rescues, this tale is told with surehanded virtuosity in a whimsical yet emotionally deep style hinting at the works of Jerome K. Jerome, Stephen Leacock, and fellow Downeaster Richard Grant. Reid's affection for his home state and a vanished way of existence combines with his madcap characters to produce compulsively readable books. Thankfully this novel forms only the first adventure of "The Moosepath League," an assortment of good-hearted bumbleres who threaten to steal the show from the more serious characters.

In *Mollie Peer*, Reid introduces a female lead even more feisty than Cordelia. Evoking echoes of spunky gal reporters from Katharine Hepburn to Mary Tyler Moore, Mollie works for the *Eastern Argus*, where she chafes under a crusty Lou Grant-like superior who refuses her the really good assignments. Her instinct for a hot story leads her into a dangerous world of smugglers and



abused orphans and into potential romance with a likable baseball player, Wyckford O'Hearn. Adhering to his same pattern of cross-cutting among separate yet converging narratives, Reid ties up many loose ends from the first book, but plants an equal number of mysteries for the third.

Like William Goldman's *The Princess Bride* (1987), Reid's brand of Fantasy, gentle yet ethically tough, understated yet exciting,

invites the reader to consider how much magic resides in the mundane world, and how easily we can open our hearts to everyday adventures.

After two well-received Science Fiction novels, N. Lee Wood turns her hand to a Fantasy with *Bloodrights* (Ace, hardcover, 392 pp., \$22.95). Not surprisingly, the novel shares some of the rationalistic world-building typically associated with SF (in fact, there are subtle hints that the era in question might actually be a post-apocalyptic future). Very little of a supernatural tenor actually occurs herein. Yet with its sweeping swordplay, its mix of oppressed peasantry and decadent urban elite, its stratified society of guilds and priests, *Bloodrights* reads like a prime Leigh Brackett-style planetary romance.

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Antonya Terhune, our heroine, is a seasoned survivor, a woman capable of bending nature and people to her iron will. Orphaned heir to the throne of all the Lands, she makes her first appearance as a wanderer in the winter woods. Enrolling in her ambitious schemes a brawny warrior named Keric, Antonya proceeds to foment a rebellion against her evil, usurping uncle P'tre. Her goals seem within reach until a major betrayal at the end of Book One. Book Two constitutes a cold slap of reality, as Antonya, captive in the Oracular City, ingests hard lessons of power. In Book Three, the delayed rebellion forges ahead under a freed Antonya, but all the characters are now hardened and disillusioned. Final victory proves a bittersweet reward.

Wood writes absorbing action scenes and military battles. Her emphasis on the gritty details of sex and politics, involving treachery and deadly compromises, makes this novel a more hard-edged, bloodier Fantasy than many. Quite a few of Lee's components are straight off the pulp shelf—Assassin's Guilds, for instance, introduced rather late in the text—but her zest for her tale carries the reader over the few threadbare patches. And in the end, the enigmatic essence of Antonya Terhune redeems any flaws.

Paul Di Filippo

Dragons of a Fallen Sun, by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman; *Wizards of the Coast*, Renton, WA, 548 pgs; hardback; \$27.95.

What happens when your gods leave you? What do you do when evil grows in your own backyard and your neighbors are eager to jump the fence to slit your throat? What do you do when the storms of chaos are bearing down and you find all defenses ill prepared? If you have the flavor for Fantasy on your tongue then you will certainly find the answers to these questions when you read *Dragons of a Fallen Sun* by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman.

After collaborating on more than 20 titles over 16 years, Weis and Hickman have returned to their old (and probably favorite) stomping ground. Once again, the two stir the waters of sword and sorcery to create another magically gripping story on the world of Krynn.

Dragons of a Fallen Sun is the first volume of the latest *Dragonlance* trilogy, "The War of Souls." This newest edition is set 40 years after the Chaos War, a war in which the gods sacrificed themselves for their creations, their children, their world. Weis and Hickman chronicle the adventures of heroes and heroines, some of whom we know from previous stories, and some we meet for the first time.

Dragons of a Fallen Sun intertwines a multitude of threads into one solid cord that is impossible to put down. In it, you will follow Gilthas, the manipulated elven king; Palin, an aging mage who is slowly losing his magic; Silvanoeshi, the displaced heir to the Silvanesti crown; Gerard, an overprotected Solamnic Knight; and Mina, a mysterious slip of a girl who leads armies and heals soldiers with indefatigable strength. There are also one or two Heroes of the Lance that jump into the mix, but to name them would be to give away some of the treats of the book.

For those who say that there is nothing new under the Sun in the Fantasy genre, this book will make you eager for more *Dragonlance*. Weis and Hickman have a wonderfully subtle way of proving that while heroes and courage are often needed, one must remember the basics before one can fight a war. Things such as friendship, trust, and promise. They show us complex relationships based around love and loyalty, which sometimes must be sacrificed for the greater good.

And the best part is that *Dragons of a Fallen Sun* is only Book I. The end of this story is just the beginning. From here on out, it will be tooth-and-nail fighting because losing these battles against the tides of darkness could mean genocide for all races of Krynn. ♣

Brian Murphy

BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

Darklost, by Mick Farren, Tor hardcover, \$24.95. LA vampires—stylish, sophisticated, and colony-bound. Victor Renquist, seeking to establish a new colony in LA, was just "one step ahead of exposure in NY." But this new home is no safe haven. Renquist is uneasy—and rightly so. A monster has been summoned by a cult called "The Council of Nine"—a monster that can destroy the colony forever. Renquist must battle the Council, the squid-like Cthulhu, and find a way to help the human called "Darklost," abandoned along the way to becoming Nosferatu ... Farren is well known as an underground journalist and "chronicler of LA's pop scene"—here he pens a terrific tale of urban vampire Horror that you won't want to miss!

The Kingless Land, by Ed



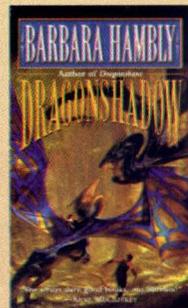
Greenwood, Tor hardcover, \$24.95. The land called Aglirta is without a king. The only hope for the restoration of its former peace and prosperity lies in the recovery of the Dwaerindim stones. Enter a warrior, a thief, a healer, and a sorcerer. These four become

the unlikely band that must awaken the Sleeping King and return order to Aglirta. Offbeat adventurers, treacherous tyranny, and a masterful Fantasy world bring this traditional tale to new heights.

Midnight Robber, by Nalo Hopkinson, Warner Aspect paperback, \$13.95. Hopkinson is winner of the "John W. Campbell Award" for best new writer. A story of urban decay and West Indian magic that lives up to its "advance billing," says *The New York Times*. A Caribbean-colonized planet called Toussaint is in

the midst of carnival time. Tan-Tan, the Robber Queen, and her "power-corrupted" father are thrust into the world of the New Half-Way Tree where they must deal with myths-come-to life and deadly creatures of folklore. A vibrant and original work filled with magic, myth, and mayhem. This special work will delight with its fresh viewpoint and unique, well-crafted characterizations.

Dragonshadow, by Barbara Hambly, Ballantine paperback, \$6.99. The acclaimed author of *Dragonbane* does not disappoint with this new tale of dragon lore. Lord John Aversin and his mage-born wife, Jenny Waynest, team up for their greatest quest to date. At stake—the safety of their kidnapped son, 12-year-old Ian. Hybrid monsters and demonspawn

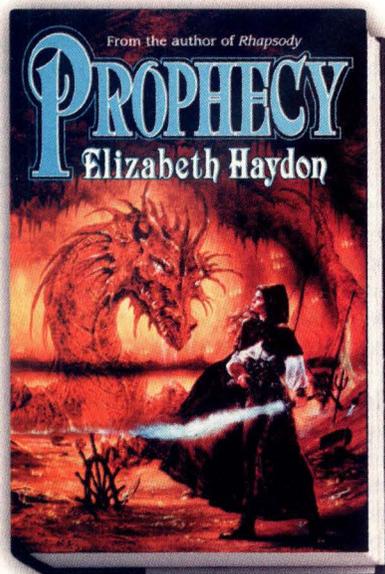


are responsible. The powerful pair must retain the help of the eldest and strongest dragon, Morkeleb the Black. But even he might be unable to assist. Civil war, unstoppable demons, and a set of unusual parents enhance the power of this fabulous dragon tale that will entertain and transfix all who read it...

The Haunted Wizard, by Christopher Stasheff, Ballantine paperback, \$6.99. The murder of a brutish prince starts off this tale of warring kingdoms and conquering forces. Royal wizard Matthew Mantrell and his "trustworthy dragon" set out to catch the

killer in the hopes of saving his enchanted land. Author Stasheff is a master storyteller of wizard tales and Fantasy adventure. The "wizard of rhyme" will encounter unholy forces of darkness, false druids, sorcerers, and spirits before this tale is through. ♣

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—*Romantic Times*

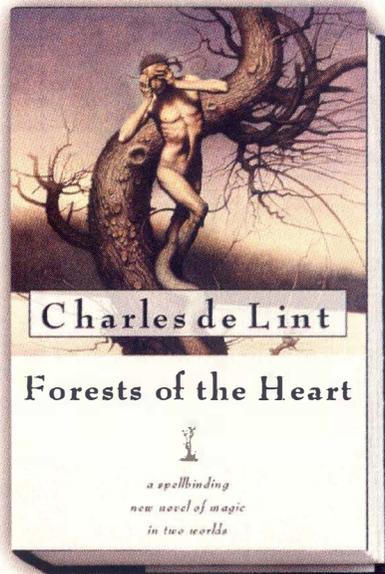
(4 ½ stars out of 5) on *Rhapsody*

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—*Starlog*

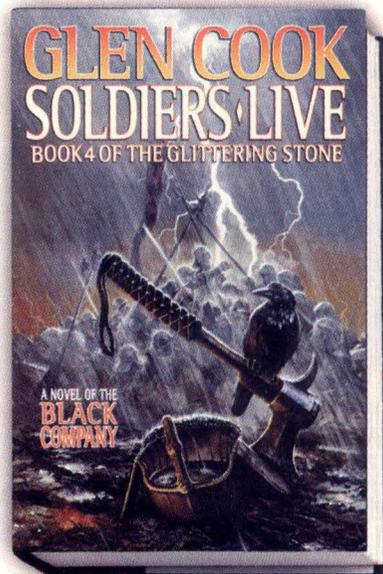
“It is hard to imagine urban fantasy done better than it is by de Lint at his best.”

—*Booklist*

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“Cook deserves high marks for much in this novel, including the gritty realism of the soldiers’ dialogue and of the attitude of the civilians. . . . Indeed, the book offers virtually everything a fantasy reader could ask for.”

—*Publishers Weekly* on *Water Sleeps*

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Marta raised an eyebrow. "Oh? How so?"
"You helped that brat of a girl, and she wasn't made a raven, or hawk, or horse, or whatever you need to serve you best."

"That's because she never asked anything of me. You did. Or have you changed your mind?"

Bone Tapper shuddered slightly. "No."

"As you were your own, now you are mine. As I will you, so shall you be." Marta repeated the ancient ritual of debt and bonding. It was a different sort of magic than that of the Laws, but even the Laws were not the sum total of everything. That might have been a Law itself, so far as Marta knew. Perhaps one day she would find out.

In a moment all was done. Bone Tapper flew off to join the once and future pirate on top of the cart. Marta rose, yawned, and stretched. Best to wake Sela in case there was trouble from Bone Tapper's pursuers, but that was just a precaution. Marta wasn't really worried. Or, for that matter, surprised. But the expectation she had felt for the past three days was gone.

Was this all I was waiting for?

Marta felt no other hints on the wind, no sense of the direction she should take now. She was disappointed but not, she reminded herself, as much as Bone Tapper must be.

"Poor raven," she said aloud, "it's much simpler to change your appearance than what you are—"

Marta stopped, suddenly short of breath. She felt dizzy, and fevered, but she wasn't ill. It was the same recognition she had felt before, sudden as a blow and much more powerful. The same thing, though fainter, when she'd met Sela, and again with Longfeather, though she'd foolishly ignored the feeling. Marta was not yet certain what it meant, but she knew it had to do with appearances. Sela's armor and pretended fierceness, Longfeather's refined pose ... Marta turned the words around, felt them with her mind, listened to them carefully, saw and heard the way they wanted to fit together. She was close, so very close ...

"Changing Appearance Does Not Mean Changing Nature." The Fourth Law of Power.
So simple.

Or rather, deceptively simple. As the Laws usually were.

Back at the camp there arose a clatter of avian squawks and screams, with Sela's angry warnings blending in. Marta sighed. Longfeather was just enough a real goshawk and Bone Tapper a real raven for trouble, and if murder wasn't in Sela's nature that might yet be overlooked in Longfeather's case. Still, Marta thought it might be the right sort of trouble.

After all, if she could keep those three from killing each other, by comparison finding the Fifth Law should be a walk on the beach. ♪

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MOUSERS

Continued from page 44

expanses of velvety grass and whose cats had no claws—because Nimrod, outside all day, usually had three or four catches lined up on the welcome mat. The neighbors began talking approvingly of Nimrod's prowess as he began venturing into their yards in search of prey.

But the rats still lurked in the walls, invisible scratchers nibbling away at the night. Nimrod, weighing almost as much as Puffball now, and standing about an inch taller thanks to his long hunter's legs, knew they were there, and knew it was his job to route them out. "Any day now," said Dad.

"And not a moment too soon," said Mom, heading into the attic with a flashlight and a stick.

A norther blew in the day before Halloween, driving the temperature into the low 30s and every rodent in the area into the nearest available shelter. Mindy sat at the table scraping pumpkin seeds onto newspaper, listening to the ghostly moan of the wind and ghostly skittering in the walls.

"Big, nasty, sassy things," grumbled Mom. "They've sprung all my traps and taken the cheese."

"We could try glue pans," suggested Dad. "Those only work once."

Nimrod scratched at the kitchen closet door. "Mr-row!" he demanded, slashing his tail, which no longer whipped wildly when he was upset, but seemed to be mostly under his control. "I could hear them gnawing in the closet when I got the newspaper," said Mindy. "Down in the corner behind the mop. Maybe if we put a trap right in front of it, they might run into it before they noticed when they break through."

"I guess it's worth a try," said Mom. She went up to the attic to collect her sprung traps, and Mindy carved eyes into the pumpkin. Round eyes. An upside-down triangular nose. Fangs. Whiskers. Dad watched her, and touched her shoulder, and said nothing, though he couldn't have not noticed that the pumpkin was nearly Bud-colored.

Nimrod squeezed into the closet with Mom as she set the trap, showing her where to put it, and protesting when she dragged him out and closed the door again. "You don't think closing the door will keep them in if they break through tonight, do you?" asked Dad. "We've closed up entrances as narrow as that crack under the door."

"Anything to slow them down," said Mom. "Besides, I don't want one of the cats wandering into it."

"Meow!" protested Nimrod, as if stung by her lack of confidence.

He was still lurking by the closet door when Mindy went to bed, her completed jack-o-lantern waiting on the counter for its transformation the following night.

Mindy and Puffball burrowed under the covers and curled up together in the abnormally deep darkness of winter, the curtains closed to exclude the cold draft off the window. The attic fan squeaked in the gusty wind, and trees tapped at the windows, disguising any other noises there might be. "It's a witch night," Mindy told Puffball. "Witches and ghosts and monsters. But you're not scared!"

"Purr," said Puffball.

Mindy didn't know that she had slept till she woke, Puffball tense beside her, quivering with a low growl. Puffball, who never growled. Mindy put her hand on her cat's back. "What is it? Show me."

Downstairs, a thump, a snap, and Bud's hunting call.

Mindy and Puffball burst out of the warmth of the covers and into the icy air, pelting downstairs. Bud howled again as Mindy snapped on the kitchen light, Nimrod calling in echo, frantically trying to dig his way under the closet door. Mindy snatched it open.

The rat blundered against her leg as it ran out, but Bud jumped straight through her to the high vantage of the kitchen stool. Nimrod followed, landing on the seat as Bud launched himself, with another yowl, directly onto the rat—

Through the rat—

Jerking his head and shaking it as if he were catching the rat on which Nimrod now landed solidly, jerking his head and shaking it.

Of course Bud can't catch rats, Mindy realized, as Puffball hissed, furred up to twice her size, on the safe stairs. They're solid, and he's not.

But Nimrod was solid enough for anybody, shaking as the rat squealed and then something snapped.

Bud stood in the middle of the floor, lashing his tail, watching Nimrod twisting out of range of the rat's suddenly loose and feeble claws and jaws. Feet thundered on the stairs. "Bud," called Mindy, softly.

Bud looked at her, his tail and ears alert, his eyes all black pupil, and then Dad stopped short on the stairs. "Rowr!" caroled Bud, triumphantly, leaping to meet him.

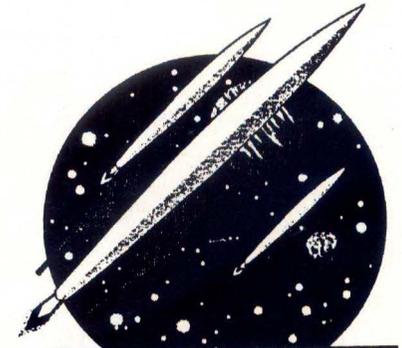
Puffball skittered out of Bud's way and Dad crouched down, reaching out, as the lean yellow cat ran up to bat the hem of his bathrobe and rub against his leg, and then was not there.

Mom nearly sent Dad flying down stairs as she ran into him from above. "What the—oh, good boy, Nimrod!"

"Rowr!" declared Nimrod, triumphantly, dropping the dying rat, tail as straight as an exclamation point. Mindy's eyes met Dad's, and she knew that he knew. Bud was gone, for good this time, but the nightmares had gone with him.

Mindy, suddenly shivering with healthy, happy cold, advanced to be the first to give Bud's heir his due. 

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It provides the worst possible example to youthful readers.

RoF: Are you still working with symbolism in your work?

BWS: 'Course. What other pictorial language is there? A picture without symbols is like a sentence without meaning. But I don't hit anybody over the head with it.

RoF: You've had a wide range of psychic and physically transcendent experiences. How have they influenced your work? What directions have they sent you in?

BWS: Most, maybe all, of my experiences are time transcendent. That's to say material events happening outside of linear, ordinary time. Experiencing the future, for instance. There's two, or more perhaps, schools of thought: Psychoneurologists claim it's "temporal lobe epilepsy," and theoretical scientists are just beginning to admit that ordinary linear time is a man-made myth. I go with the latter. Clock time is a state of mind, it's terracentric provincialism, and nothing more.

My *Paradoxman* series is about Time, not necessarily alien abduction and weirdo psychiatrists. I've done lots of stories or pictures where temporal transition is the focal point. Writing *Time Rise* for *OPUS* is my most important work so far.

RoF: IS *OPUS* an open-ended project?

BWS: It's finite in the physical sense. There'll be four books, one each year to 2003. *Time Rise* is the story of my other life, my private life. It was a very difficult decision for me to tell the tale, but after I was halfway through the first chapter I suddenly realized that I had to do it, there was never really any choice. It was just a matter of timing, I think. I would have never had the courage before now.

Let me explain that *OPUS* is a title for the book but the books are like dualities in themselves. There's the pictures and then there's the story. The two intertwine, but not in any usual way. I annotate the pictures so that people who want to hear me rattling on about them can do so.

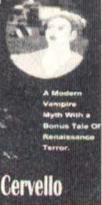
But the real verbal content is the *Time Rise* section, which will follow my life's strange encounters with what's called the paranormal. I've been keeping this part of me a secret for decades, but now that I'm capable of disclosing the details I'm beginning to awaken from my self-imposed soul exile.

RoF: Last question. Do you still feel tempted to add to artwork that you see as you did when you embellished the prints hanging on the walls of your parents' house?

BWS: Oh, yeah, all the time. There's this crummy Bauhaus drawing in the Museum of Modern Art, right here in New York, that every time I see it ... really, let me loose in MOMA for a day and only the Impressionists would get out alive. 🖌️

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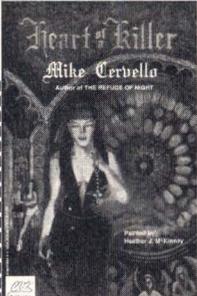


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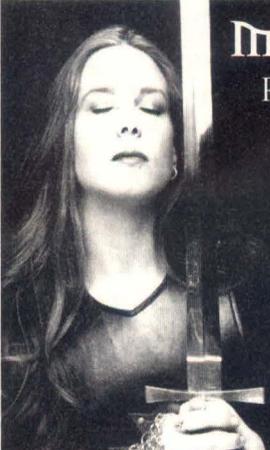
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FOLKROOTS

Continued from page 32

of evergreen, to while the mythic hours in a prince's castle. Was it right of her to take away her apple innocence from seven dappled dwarfs, to arbitrarily absent us from felicity?" Even Snow White protests in Delia Sherman's "Snow White to the Prince," saying: "... you woke me, or your horses did, stumbling as they bore me down the path, shaking the poisoned apple from my throat. And now you say you love me, and would wed me for my beauty's sake. My cursed beauty. Will you hear now why I curse it? It should have been my mother's—it had been, until I took it from her." The prince responds to her in Polly Peterson's poem "The Prince to Snow White": "Did you think that I found you, by chance, Maiden? Did you believe I was drawn to your crystal casket, like a hummingbird to its nectar, by the allure of ruby lips, the gaze of azure eyes?... You are beautiful, sublime, yet not so lovely as our daughter will be: your mother's daughter's child—her immortality." (Both the Sherman and Peterson poems can be found in their entirety at: www.endicott-studio/cofehous.html)

In the final scene of the Grimms' version, the queen is invited to Snow White's wedding, then forced to dance in red-hot shoes. "First your toes will smoke," writes Anne Sexton (in *Transformations*), "and then your heels will turn black and you will fry upward like a frog, she was told. And so she danced until she was dead, a subterranean figure, her tongue flicking in and out like a gas jet." It's a scene left out of the Disney film and most modern children's renditions.

Walt Disney made several other significant changes to the Grimms' fairy tale when he chose Snow White as the subject of his first full-length animated film. At the time, no one knew whether audiences would actually sit through an 84-minute cartoon, and the film was called "Disney's folly" as he poured more and more time and money into it. Walt Disney was fond of fairy tales, but he was not shy of reshaping them to suit his needs, turning them into the simple, comedic tales he believed that his audiences wanted (a generation marked by economic depression and two world wars). He emphasized the dwarfs, giving them names, distinct personalities, and a cozy cottage in a Sun-dappled wood full of bluebirds, bunnies, and flowers, not snow. The role of the prince is greatly expanded, and the square-jawed fellow becomes pivotal to the story. His love for Snow White, demonstrated at the very beginning of the Disney film, becomes the spark that sets off the powderkeg of the stepmother's rage. In this singing, dancing, whistling version, only the queen retains some of the real power of the traditional tale. She's a genuinely frightening figure, and far more compelling than little Snow White

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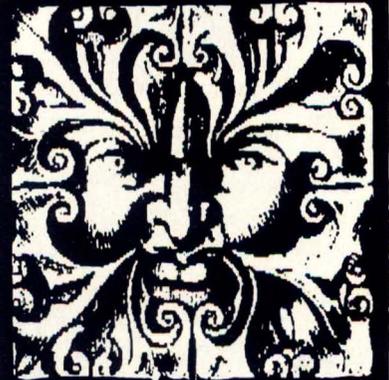
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(despite early notes in the making of the film in which, it's suggested, the queen should be a "vain-batty-self-satisfied, comedy type" and "verging on the ridiculous.") Snow White (who was drawn as a blonde at one point) is wide-eyed, giddy, and childish, wearing rags (Cinderella-style) at the start of the film, down-trodden but plucky. This gives Disney's rendition of the tale its peculiarly American flavor, implying that what we are watching is a Horatio Alger-type "rags to riches" story. (In fact, it's a story of "riches to rags to riches," in which privilege is lost then restored. Snow White's pedigree beauty and class origins assure her salvation, not her housekeeping skills.) Although the film was a commercial triumph, and has been beloved by generations of children, critics through the years have protested the sweeping changes the Disney Studios made, and continues to make, when retelling such tales. Walt himself responded, "It's just that people now don't want fairy stories the way they were written. They were too rough. In the end they'll probably remember the story the way we film it anyway." Regrettably, time has proved him right. Through films, books, toys, and merchandise recognized all around the world, Disney became the major disseminator of fairy tales in his century. "Disney's vision," writers Marina Warner, "has effected everybody's idea of fairy tales themselves: until writers and anthologists began looking again, passive hapless heroines and vigorous wicked older women seemed generic. Disney selected certain stories and stressed certain sides to them; the wise children, the cunning little vixens, the teeming populations of the stories were drastically purged. The disequilibrium between good and evil in these films has influenced contemporary perceptions of fairy tale, as a form where sinister and gruesome forces are magnified and prevail throughout—until the very last moment where, *ex machina*, right and goodness overcome them."

Fortunately, writers and anthologists have been looking again at Snow White and other fairy tales, finding that there is much more to the old material than Disney would have us believe. Prompted by writers like Angela Carter, A.S. Byatt, Margaret Atwood, Jane Yolen, Tanith Lee, Robert Coover, Emma Donoghue, and the poets mentioned earlier, fairy tales are being reclaimed from Disney cartoons and from shelves marked "children only," explored and restored as a fascinating part of the world's literary heritage. For modern, adult renditions of Snow White, I recommend the following: "Snow, Glass, Apples" by Neil Gaiman (published in *Smoke and Mirrors*, and in *The Year's Best Fantasy & Horror, Vol. 8*) is a gorgeous retelling, lush and dark, from the "evil" queen's point of view—as is Pat Murphy's affecting version, "The True Story" (in *Black Swan, White Raven*). Tanith Lee's dark Fantasy "Red as Blood" is the titlepiece of her now-classic fairy-tale collection, *Red As Blood*; while "Snow-drop" is a

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The hunter defies the queen and spares Snow White's life, but abandons her in the woods to fend for herself against the wolves.

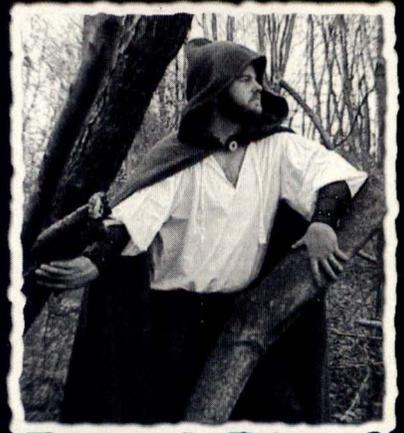
more contemporary treatment of the story, sensual, sophisticated, and disturbing (published in the anthology *Snow White, Blood Red.*) Lee's forthcoming novel *White As Snow* (part of the Fairy Tales series from Tor Books) is a dark winter's tale that merges Snow White with the Demeter/Persephone myth. Jane Yolen's "Snow in Summer" (in *Black Heart, Ivory Bones*) is a modern Appalachian treatment of the story. Michael Blumlein's "Snow in Dirt" (*Black Swan, White Raven*) is also a contemporary piece, satiric, clever, and strange. Donald Barthleme's acclaimed novel *Snow White* is a brash, witty, rather raunchy work of experimental fiction (first published in 1965 and somewhat dated, but still interesting). A.S. Byatt discusses the Snow White tale in her delicious essay "Ice, Snow, Glass" (published in *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Women Writers Explore Their Favorite Fairy Tales*); she also worked a related Grimms' tale, "The Glass Coffin," into her enchanting, award-winning novel *Possession*, and her short story "Cold" (published in *Elementals: Stories of Ice and Fire*).

For good picture-book editions of Snow White, try those illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman, Nancy E. Burkert, and Angela Barrett. Fiona French's *Snow White in New York*, set in 1930's high society, is also worth taking a look at. For nonfiction on the subject of fairy tales, I recommend the following: *From the Beast to the Blonde* and *No Go the Bogeyman* by Marina Warner; *Off With Their Heads* by Maria Tatar; *The Oxford Companion to Fairy*

Tales and Fairy Tale As Myth, Myth As Fairy Tale by Jack Zipes; *The Witch Must Die: How Fairy Tales Shape Our Lives* by Sheldon Cashdan; *Touch Magic* by Jane Yolen; *The Uses of Enchantment* by Bruno Bettelheim; Part I of *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar; *The Brothers Grimm and Their Critics: Folktales and the Quest for Meaning* by Christa Kamenetsky; and the classic reference volume by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson: *The Types of Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*. You'll find further information (and book recommendations) on three excellent fairy tale Web sites: Heidi Ann Heiner's "Surlalune Fairy Tale Pages" (members.aol.com/surlalune/frytales/index.htm); Kay E. Vandergriff's "Snow White Page" (www.scils.rutgers.edu/special/kay/snowwhite.html), and Christine Daae's "Introduction to Fairy Tales" (www.darkgoddess.com/fairy/).

Terri Windling is the author of *The Wood Wife*, *A Midsummer Night's Faery Tale*, *The Raven Queen*, and other books, as well as the editor of numerous anthologies. She divides her time between homes in Tucson, Arizona, and Devon, England. Previous Folkroots columns by Terri and Heinz Insu Fenkl can be found on the *Endicott Studio* for *Mythic Arts* Web site: www.endicott-studio.com. She wishes to thank Carrie, Karen, Heidi, Jenma, Midori, Kerrie, Becki, Ellen, and the other participants in the "Introduction to Fairy Tales" discussion board for their Snow White recommendations.

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Contributors

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KATE ORMAN lives in Sydney, Australia. She has written numerous *Doctor Who* novels for Virgin Publishing and BBC Books, including *Unnatural History*, co-written with her husband Jonathan Blum, which was short-listed for Australia's Aurealis award. Visit her Web site at www.zip.com.au/~korman/

TERRI WINDLING was raised in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, left home at 15 and spent the rest of her teenage years wandering through Mexico, Ohio, Boston, London, and Dublin. In the 1980s she worked as a Senior Editor in the New York publishing industry. She is best known for her two decades of editorial work in the field of Fantasy literature. Terri has published over twenty-five books and exhibited her artwork in galleries and museums across the U.S. and abroad. She has won five World Fantasy Awards and the 1997 Mythopoeic Award for Best Novel of the Year.

MAHENDRA SINGH was born in 1961 to a German mother and an Indian father. As a youth, he traveled extensively with his parents and was exposed to various cultures. His exotic heritage is reflected in the humorous, erotic, and sometimes bizarre nature of his exquisite pen ink and conte pencil renderings.

DAVID BECK's artwork has won numerous awards from the Society of Illustrators and Communication Arts. His work has graced the pages of *Science Fiction Age* and *Realms of Fantasy* several times in the past few years. His original canvases are avidly collected: The Grateful Dead own thirteen or more of his pieces.

JOHN MONTELEONE has been a diverse and successful illustrator for the past ten years. He has created realistic paintings for such clients as Time Warner, 20th Century Fox, and *Reader's Digest*. John's work was often featured on the covers of *Science Fiction Age*. He has been a professional kick boxer and is certified in Bruce Lee's Jeet June Do Kickboxing. He is also currently teaching Science Fiction Illustration at the School of Visual Arts in NYC.

KAREN HABER is the author of eight novels. Her short fiction has appeared in *Asimov's*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fic-*

tion, and various anthologies. In her secret identity as an art journalist, she reviews art books for *Locuus* and has profiled many of the top artists in the Sci Fi and Fantasy fields.

RICHARD PARKS is a Mississippi storyteller. Atypical of the breed, he cannot tell a lie with a straight face, and so he has to write them all down. Some of his better fibs have appeared in *Asimov's*, *Science Fiction Age*, *Realms*, and *Dragon Magazine*. He lives with a wife and three cats who don't believe a word he says, except on his birthday and certain designated major holidays. (From the Introduction to "Notes From the Bridge," *Blood Muse*, Donald I. Fine, Inc., edited by Esther Friesner.)

ERIC BAKER was born in Reno, Nevada but has lived in Fairfax, Virginia since 1970. He holds a degree in English from Virginia Tech and is an '89 graduate of Clarion. Eric sold his first story in 1992 but it was his third sale that appeared in print first. His work has appeared in *Amazing*, *F&SF*, *Asimov's*, and *SF Age*. He has also written two modules for BRTC's *Timelords* game system.

KEN GRANING teaches Traditional Illustration at the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit. Ken's advertising and editorial work has appeared in numerous magazines, books, newspapers, posters, brochures, and record album covers.

PAUL DI FILIPPO is a native Rhode Islander, born in 1954 and partnered with the wonderful Deborah Newton since 1976. Paul sold a story to *Unearth* magazine in 1977, but only began selling to any large degree in 1985, with near-simultaneous stories in *F&SF* and *Twilight Zone*. Since then, he has placed over 100 fictional pieces and numerous non-fiction essays and reviews. Mike Lawson and Paul form the writer known as "Philip Lawson," whose second mystery, *Muskat Courage*, appears this spring from St. Martin's.

PENI R. GRIFFIN's childhood was spent reading and taking long car trips as her family moved from Texas to Alaska, Alaska to Iowa, Iowa to Maryland, and Maryland back to Texas. She is married to Michael D. Griffin and they live in a ninety-year old house near downtown San Antonio. She is the author of *Margo's House*, as well as the Edgar-nominated mystery *The Treasure Bird*.

RESA NELSON attended graduate school at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, earning a Master's in sport management. She is currently a technical writer for Oracle Computer Corp. in Boston. Resa is a graduate of the 1985 Clarion Science Fiction Writer's Workshop. She has sold stories to *Science Fiction Age*, *Aboriginal*, and *Pulp-house*. She has written two novles that she is rying to sell. ☛

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