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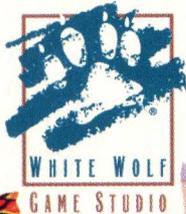
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REALMS OF FANTASY



COVER: The heroic warrior and his valiant dragon take flight in this painting by Sanjulian.
ABOVE: The fantasy lands of James C. Christensen come delightfully to life in our Gallery this issue. See story page 62.

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An extraordinary epic adventure begins with . . .

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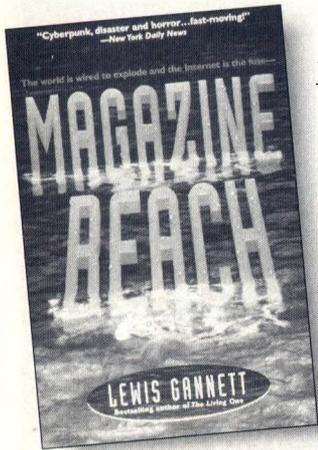
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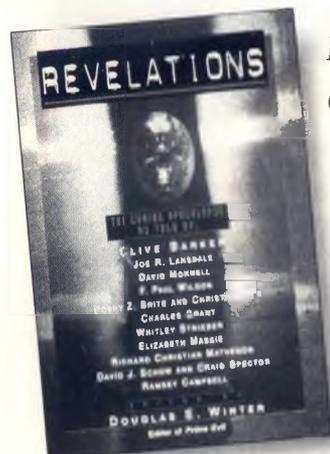
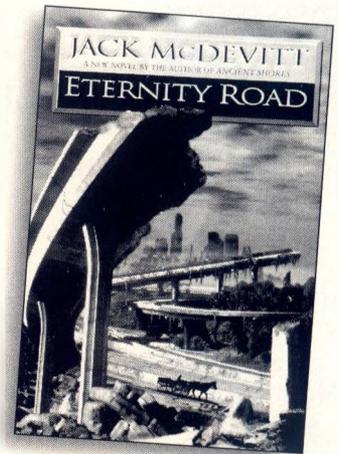
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A T E Prism



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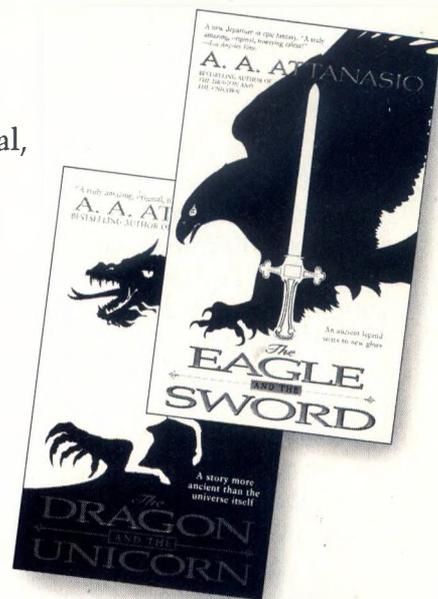
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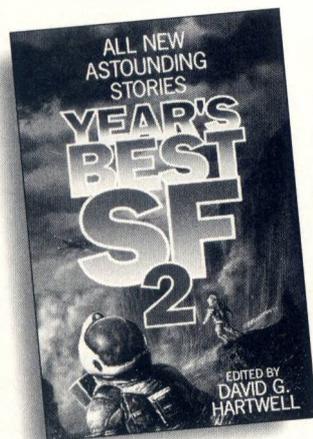
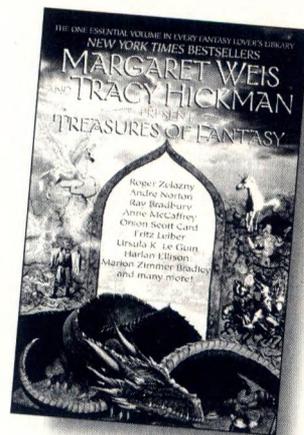


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Hanging On

A few months ago, I offered to get my daughter a brand-new bedroom set. New bed, new dresser, new nightstand — the works. I thought she'd be thrilled — her bedroom furniture had consisted of her father's boyhood bed, an infant changing table/dresser with the changing slab removed, and an old unfinished-furniture nightstand I'd used as a college student. Not exactly the ensemble most 9-year-olds would consider appropriate. However, like most mothers, I was in for a surprise. Far from being thrilled, she burst into tears. "No, no, no! I don't want to sleep in a new bed. I want my old one. And I've had my dresser since I was a baby! Please don't make me get a new one."

To this day, some six months later, she's still mentally debating the pros and cons of new bedroom furniture, and nine times out of ten, this internal discussion ends up with both sides in tears. I'm staying out of this personal battle of hers — I want her to be happy, and I realize how difficult it can be to put away familiar things and venture into unknown (and more adult) territory.

That's why (she gets to the point of the editorial) I can understand the appeal of thirty-book fantasy quest series to the fantasy reader. It's familiar, it's comfortable, it's predictable — it's what you've known all your fantasy-reading life. You open the pages and you know exactly where you are and who you're with. You know the characters like you know your own family, and you know the history of the land probably better than you know U.S. history. There's something extremely satisfying about getting back together with people you almost consider old friends — you find out what they've been up to since you've seen them last, and you follow them

through new and exciting adventures, always knowing that there will be more to come.

I admit, I enjoy series novels myself, though not in the fantasy genre. I read mystery series, and I wait eagerly for each new installment to appear. I buy them on sight and devour them overnight. Problem is, even as I'm reading them, I'm aware of their popcorn-like quality. Like a giant bag of popcorn, they're often nice long books, but also like a giant bag of popcorn, after it's gone, you still feel hungry. There's often no real substance to the series novel, simply because of its format. When an author is locked into the same characters and setting for each novel, there's no real room for growth, or change or dramatic development, since any such attempts would immediately alienate a goodly percentage of the fans. Think about it — how would you feel if your favorite series suddenly killed off the main character, or got him or her married or with child? Certainly any such change would dramatically alter the series' flavor and direction and, while you might like such a change, legions of other readers might hate it.

So, what's the point? Well, I've suggested to my daughter that we move her old furniture into the guest room, where it will always be should she want to sleep in it, look at it, touch it, or just be around it. In that same way, I suggest to you that you venture out into uncharted territory sometimes in your reading. Sure, you can read volume 29 in *The Swords of the Emperor* series, but after that, why not try a new, quirky, stand-alone novel by an author you've never heard of? We all want to keep what we're used to, but if we don't take cautious steps towards change, we could end up sleeping in our childhood rooms forever.

Shawna McCarthy

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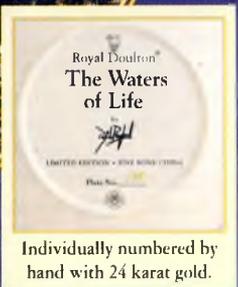
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Hello,

I have been reading your "Folkroots" column since the first issue. I finally decided to write to you after reading your wonderful article on shapechangers.

As an undergraduate (I did my B.A. in archaeology with a strong interest in the arctic) I came into contact with a great deal of Inuit folklore. The shapechanger motif is quite common, and there are many stories about people marrying animals in human form, including a fox-wife story. Shapechanging is also connected with shamanism in the arctic; a shaman could "undress" down to the skeleton and put on a new form. The "skeletal motif" carved on many Inuit and Thule (direct ancestors of Inuit) animal sculptures is related to this.

There are also Dorset (precursors to, but not related to the Thule) carvings which obviously depict shapechanging, such as half-bear, half-human figures and seals with human faces. Dorset's human's tubes also have shapechanging motifs, most depict a pair of walruses on either side of a seal with a human face. Unfortunately, there are no ethnographic records of Dorset peoples — they are known only from archaeology as they disappeared long before Europeans explored the new world.

Anyway, thank you many times over for your wonderful column. It helps me remember the magic that attracted me to folklore in the first place when I get bogged down in dry, academic papers. I am in the first year of a two-year M.A. in folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Blessings,
Niko Silvester
St. John's, NF Canada

To Ms. Windling:

I enjoy reading your columns very much. They are one of the reasons that I faithfully buy the magazine. I especially enjoyed the February 1997 column about harpists. My sister-in-law is a professional concert harpist and I am studying the Celtic harp myself.

I have also enjoyed your columns on Merlin, shape-shifters, Celtic music and Wales. Looking forward to all your future columns. Oh, and the anthologies that you and Ellen Datlow edit are jewels.

Linda Bass
Silver Spring, MD

Dear Ms. McCarthy;

I am returning the story called "The Pretender." There are so many errors I will point out the worst. Sir Galahad was not queer for any man and he was not slain by

Mordred and Agravaine. Galahad found the Holy Grail and this was because he was the only pure knight.

Scott Hornoff
Cranston, R.I.

"The Pretender" is a retelling of an Arthurian legend. The author has taken a well-known tale and added some unusual detail to make it his own. You didn't really believe that knights of old ran around making clacking noises and pretending to ride horses when you saw "Monty Python's Holy Grail" did you? It was the screenwriter's/comedic troupe's added touch to make the story fresh and funny. In "The Pretender," Stephen Dedman has written a piece, albeit a serious one, with an ironic twist or two. While we can appreciate your desire to defend Sir Galahad's "honor," isn't a new slant on an old tale always welcome?

To Dan Perez;

Enjoyed your take on dragons in the February 1997 *Realms of Fantasy*. There was a minor glitch in the section about Larry Cohen and "Q". You noted Cohen also directed *Basket Case* (1982); he didn't. That lusty chunk of excellent poor taste is courtesy of Frank Henenlotter (director, writer, editor) and producer Edgar Levins. Cohen's 1975 take on mutated youngsters — the disturbing classic *It's Alive* was the film I think you meant to mention.

Another "dragon" flick occurs to me, a film so abysmal in execution it is worth watching for laughs; *Viking Women and the Sea Serpent*, an execrable 1958 Roger Corman production worthwhile solely for the opportunity to ogle Abby Dalton in minimal Viking togs.

Craig W.L. Anderson
Linden, CA

Dear Shawna;

Before I get to my point, I want to say I am just "simple folk." I am not an all-knowing, all-seeing demi-god writer, nor do I have a Ph.D in English. I love ROF to the depths of my ignorant soul. I have my own personal likes and dislikes when reading anything, but on the whole I can honestly say I have not been offended by anything you have published.

There are some stories that I immediately pick up and read again and there are those where my only thought is "why was this printed?" But I move on. I am not under the delusion that these tales were written just for me, and I truly do believe you shouldn't have to pass an IQ test to read them. The publisher and author get my money, and I like to think my purchase makes the author realize that they are reaching someone. I hope that Tanith Lee and Orson Scott Card

are not sitting around threatening to retire their pens because I am too stupid to appreciate their works. They take me away from this reality by building me another, that is all I ask for.

In closing, I think that there are a lot of people out there that read for pure enjoyment and simply find something else if what they are reading isn't to their taste. To all the pompous critics out there with your breasts heaving in indignation — we "simple folk" out number you, so close your mouths and turn the page.

Kristal Fye
Moshannon, PA

I hereby deem you a "worthy" reader. Nice to know there are people who read for the sheer joy of it. Nothing better than sitting down with a good book or magazine and feeling the "real world" become (at least briefly) inconsequential beside the written world on the page in your hand.

Dear Ms. McCarthy;

The August issue was a true gem. Despite the utter surprise of finding a fantasy magazine which so totally appealed to me, the editorial was a real eye-opener. So thank you on a number of counts.

Your editorial is blu-tacked to the wall in front of me, guiding my shaky hand as I feverishly type my submissions (10 pci, double-spaced in really clear type). I was impressed to find someone saying what all those writer's guides and handbooks seem to lack. I like how you laid it all out, told it like it is, without pandering to the writer's ever present sensitivities. Thank you again, best of good fortune and just keep going. I love it.

Yours,
Nic Harrison
Edinburgh, Scotland

Glad to hear someone is out there paying attention. Let me take this opportunity to mention that I am receiving quite a number of manuscripts in various stages of "undress;" ie. single-spaced, battered and without an SASE or sufficient postage. For those of you who have written a nasty note lamenting the fact that you haven't heard regarding your manuscript ... Please be advised I have a scrap box full of manuscripts returned to us for insufficient postage, not to mention the ones who do not include it in the first place...

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

BY GAHAN WILSON

Two books of fantasy remind us that we are part of the Earth's ecology.

TWO OF THE BOOKS TO BE REVIEWED ON THIS OCCASION ARE PROFOUNDLY INSPIRED BY AND concerned with our Earth's ecology and the trouble it's in due to humanity's peculiar attitude to the world on which it lives and upon which it is entirely dependent for continued survival. The suicidal perverseness of this attitude has always fascinated me. I have done a number of cartoons on the theme born out of rage and a dim hope that a senator or some other powerful type might see one of them in *Playboy*, laugh, reconsider and say: "You know this funny picture fellow may have a point — perhaps destroying the planet is a silly thing to do!"

A well-intentioned exercise, true, but I have always had the profoundest doubts regarding the power of humor when it comes to really weird and nasty societal forces. One of the most sparkling periods in history of brilliant, innovative, unrelenting satire was in Germany during the

rise of Hitler. George Grosz, Kurt Weill and dozens of other fabulous artists created works which are terrifyingly awesome to this day, but when it came down to the crunch, all Hitler had to do was to tell his minions and his crazed population to either chase those irritating people out of the country or kill them and they did it and the Circus was closed, the clowns removed from sight, and the tent burnt along with all those piles of books.

My own most resounding personal proof of the possible futility of the use of humor for effective instruction came when a cartoon of mine was printed in full color showing a man and his wife cowering behind the chairs and sofas of their suburban home, looking through the vast picture window of their living room at hordes of lions and tigers and bears rampaging destructively across their manicured lawns and neatly-trimmed shrubbery. The man, shaking his fist in impotent rage, cries out: "I knew this would happen if those goddam ecologists had their way!"

I remember being quite proud of this drawing and dreaming more dreams than usual about impressed senators, but all that came to an end when I received a touching note from my father, a firm anti-ecology man, saying he'd come across my little offering and of how moved he was to see that I had finally come around to his point of view.

It is more than likely that Sheri S. Tepper's *The Family Tree* (Avon Books, NY, NY; 384 pp.; \$23 hardcover) will fail to convince any senators (indeed, even more likely than when I tried it back then with my cartoon!), or possibly even her father, but she most certainly and decidedly *has* succeeded in producing a perfectly marvelous book.

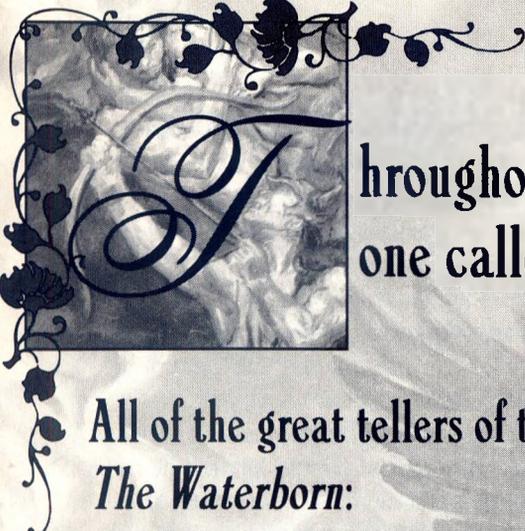
It's a pearl, frankly. It's one of those very, very rare fantasy works that starts out just right, develops perfectly, and resolves in a totally satisfying manner consistent with all the premises presented. There isn't a word misplaced in it so far as I can see. It's been a long time since I have been so pleasantly entertained.

The novel starts out by following two different stories in two different worlds: the first is this world, full of people like you and me, but afflicted with bizarre alterations on an increasingly vaster scale; the second is a marvelously Ozzy sort of world (I think a shade more Ruth

Continued on page 17

In Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West we discover she wasn't always that way. Cover art by Douglas Smith.





Throughout the land they sang the praises of the one called J. Gregory Keyes....

All of the great tellers of tales heartily hailed his firstborn creation, *The Waterborn*:

R. A. SALVATORE declared it "*Remarkable.*"

PIERS ANTHONY pronounced it "*Stunning.*"

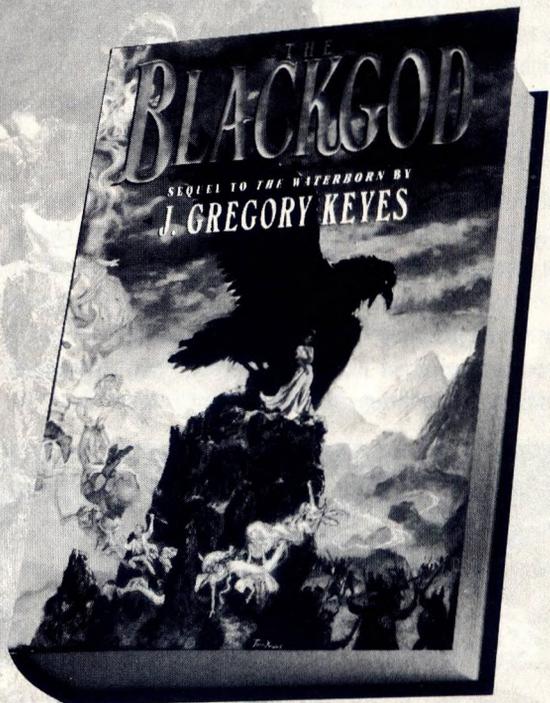
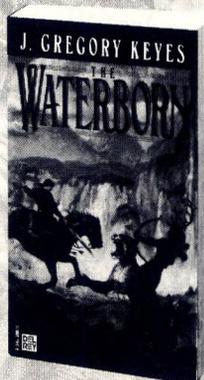
DAVE DUNCAN decreed "*[It] raises high fantasy to rare heights.*"

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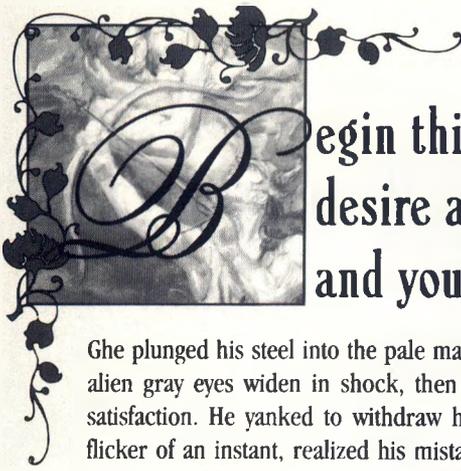
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Ghe plunged his steel into the pale man's belly, watched the alien gray eyes widen in shock, then narrow with terrible satisfaction. He yanked to withdraw his blade and, in that flicker of an instant, realized his mistake. The enemy edge, unimpressed by its wielder's impalement, swept down toward his exposed neck.

Li, think kindly of my ghost, he had time to think, before his head fell into the dirty water. Even then, for just a moment, he thought he saw something strange: a column of flame, leaping out of the muck, towering over Hezhi. Then something inexorable swallowed him up.

Death swallowed him and took him into her belly. Dark there, and wet, he swirled about, felt that last, bright blow like a line of ice laid through his neck flutter again and again and again, hummingbird wings of pain. It was most of what remained of him, though not all. The little spaces between the memory of that blade stroke were like a doorway into nothing, opening and closing with greater and greater speed, and through that portal danced images, dreams, remembered pleasures—danced through and were gone. Soon all would gambol away like fickle ladies at a ball, and he would be complete again, just the memory of his death, and then not even that.

But then it seemed as if the sword shattered, raced up and down his spine like rivers of crystal shards; and the belly of death was no longer dark, but alive with light, charged with heat and lightning, burning, pouring in through that doorway. The light he recognized; he had seen its colors blossoming from the water as his head parted from his body. The doorway gaped and wrapped around him, bringing not darkness, not oblivion, but remembrance.



He was Ghe, the Jik, one of the elite assassin-priests who served the River and the River's children. Born in Southtown, the lowest of the low, he had risen—the memory stirred!—he had kissed a *princess*! Ghe clenched and unclenched his unseen hands as he felt the ghost of his lips brushing hers. He realized, dully, that he had kissed many

women, but that the only actual, *particular* kiss he could remember was hers.

Why was that? Why Hezhi?

They had set him to kill her, of course, because she was one of the Blessed. His task had been to kill, and he had failed. Yet he had kissed her. . . .

Abruptly his memory offered mirror-sharp images, a scene from his past—how long ago?

He was in the Great Water Temple, in the interior chamber. Plastered white, the immense corbeled vault above him seemed to drink up the pale lamplight in the center of the room. More real, somehow, was the illumination washing down from the four corridors that met in the chamber, though it was dimmer still than the flame. He knew it for daylight, rippling through sheets of falling water that cascaded down the four sides of the ancient ziggurat in whose heart they stood, curtains of thunder concealing the doorways of the temple. In that coruscating aquamarine and the flickering of the lamp, the priest before him seemed less real than his many shadows, for they constantly moved as *he* stood still.

On his knees, Ghe yet remembered thinking of the priest standing over him, *You shall bow to me one day*.

"There are things you must know now," the priest told him, in his soft, little-boy voice; like all full priests, he had been castrated young.

"I listen for the fall of water," Ghe acknowledged.

"You know that our emperor and his family are descended from the River."

Ghe suppressed an urge to rise up and strike the fool down. *They think because I am from Southtown I know nothing, not even that. They think I am no more than a throat-slitter from the gutter, with the brains of a knife!* But he held that inside. To betray his feelings was to betray himself, and betraying himself would betray Li—Ghe-in-the-water who Li was.

"Know," the priest went on, "that because they carry his water in their veins, the River is a part of them. He can live through them, if he chooses. The power of the Waterborn has but one source, and that is the River."

Then why do you hate them so? Ghe wondered. *Because they are part of the River, as you will never be?*

The priest wandered over to a bench and sat down, taking his quivering shadows with him. He did not sign for Ghe to arise, and so he remained there, prostrate, listening.

"Some of the Waterborn are blessed with more," the man

went on. "They are born with rather more of the River in them than others. Unfortunately, the human body can contain only a certain amount of power. After that ..."

The priest's voice dropped to a whisper, and Ghe suddenly realized that this was no mere rote litany any longer. This was something *real* to the priest, something that frightened him.

"After that," he went on, sounding like nothing so much as an eight-year-old boy confiding some terrible childhood discovery, "after that, they *change*."

"Change?" Ghe asked, from the floor. Here was something he did *not* know, at last.

"They are distorted by their blood, lose Human form. They become creatures wholly of the River."

"I don't understand," Ghe replied.

"You will. You will see," he answered, his voice rising to a firmer, more dissertative pitch. "When they change—the signs are discovered in childhood, usually by the age of thirteen—when they change, we take them to dwell below, in the ancient palace of our ancestors."

For a moment, Ghe wondered if this was some silly euphemism for murder, but then remembered the maps of the palace, the dark underways beneath it, the chambers at the base of the Darkness Stair behind the throne. Ghe suddenly felt a chill. What *things* dwelt there, below his feet? What horror would disturb a priest merely to discuss it?

"Why?" Ghe asked cautiously. "If they are of the Blood Royal ..."

"It is not only their shape that changes," the priest explained. He looked squarely at Ghe, his pale eyes lapis shards in the light shimmering down the facing hall. "Their minds change, become inhuman. And their power becomes great, without control. In times past, some River-Blessed have passed unprotected; we have missed them. One was even crowned emperor before we knew he was Blessed. He destroyed most of Nhol in fire and flood.

"Below," he whispered, "they are safe. And we are safe from them."

"And if they know their fate?" Ghe asked. "If they try to escape it?"

"We know what happens when the Blessed are not contained," the priest murmured. "If they cannot be bound beneath the city, then they must be given back to the River."

"Do you mean ...?" Ghe began.

The priest hissed with the intensity of his reply. "The Jik were not created to carry on assassinations of enemies of the state, though you now serve that purpose well. Have you never wondered why the Jik answer to the priesthood and *not* the emperor directly?"

Ghe thought for only an instant before replying. "I see," he murmured. "We were created to stop the Blessed from running free."

"Indeed," the priest replied, his voice relaxing a bit. "Indeed. And more than a few have been killed by the Jik."

"I live only to serve the River," Ghe replied.



But now he could see the lie, of course. The great lie that was the priesthood. They existed not to serve the River but to *keep Him bound*. Those whom the River blessed were given their power for a purpose, so that He might walk the land rather than live torpidly within His banks—so that the god of the River might roam free. And the priests *bound* the River's children, though they pretended to worship Him.

Far from worshipers, Ghe could see now, the priests were the *enemies* of the River. They had fought for centuries to keep the Royal Blood checked, diluted. That was why they had set him to kill Hezhi, the emperor's daughter—kill that beautiful, intelligent girl. And he would have done it, had not her strange barbarian guardian been unkillable! Ghe had stabbed him in the *heart* with a poisoned blade, and still he stood back up, chopped off Ghe's head—

He flinched away from that thought. *Not yet*.

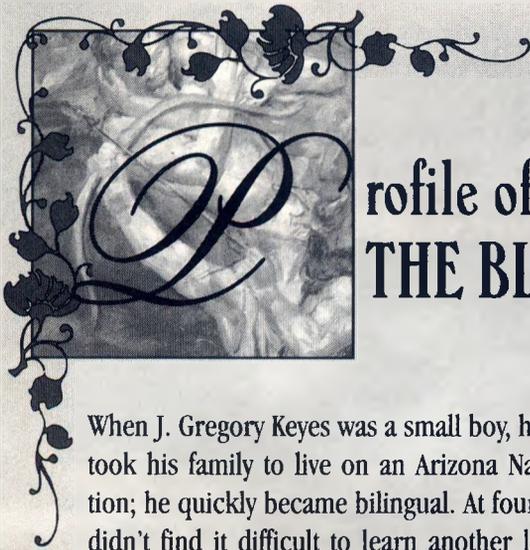
However it had happened, it was fortunate that he had not slain Hezhi. Much depended upon her, he realized. The River had many enemies plotting against Him, and now Ghe, the River's only true and loyal servant—now *he* had those enemies.

And he knew his task with a wonderful, radiant certainty. His task was to save Hezhi from *her* foes, for she was the River's daughter, and more. She was his hope, his weapon.

His flesh.

Soon enough, Ghe knew, he would open his eyes, would creep back up to the light, take up his weapons, and make his way where Rivers do not flow. A wrong would be righted, a god would be served, and perhaps, just perhaps, he would once again kiss a princess.

**Remember—this is just the beginning. What mind imagined this wondrous world?
The answer lies on the next page.**

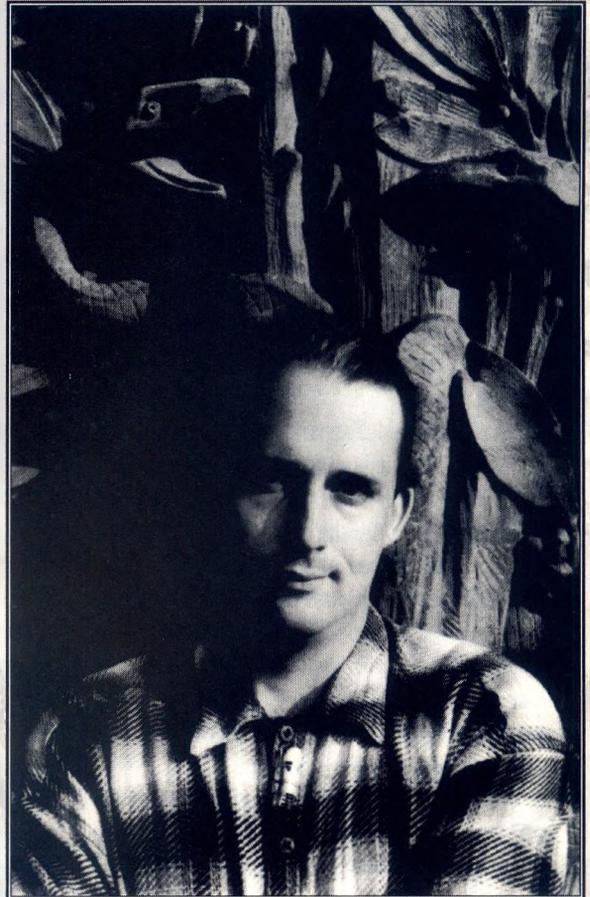


Profile of J. Gregory Keyes, author of **THE BLACKGOD** and **THE WATERBORN**

When J. Gregory Keyes was a small boy, his father's job took his family to live on an Arizona Navajo reservation; he quickly became bilingual. At four years old he didn't find it difficult to learn another language, and Navajo became as much a part of him as English. Keyes's early experience in the Navajo culture was the beginning of a lifelong fascination with linguistics, rituals, myths, and legends. It wasn't only the Navajo reservation that had an impact on his imagination; equally important were the long evenings his extended family—some of Choctaw ancestry—spent spinning stories. These early experiences produced in him an emotional connection to other worlds that indelibly marked Keyes's memory and his impressionable soul—a connection that culminated in the thirty-two-year-old author's first fantasy novel, **THE WATERBORN**.

THE WATERBORN evolved from a world history class Keyes took as an undergraduate. The class discussion centered on civilizations, like Egypt and Mesopotamia, that arose from the organizational demands created by flood control and irrigation. Keyes's imagination began to race, until he was obsessed by a vision of a city upon a river that was actually, rather than metaphorically, alive. This city, as he dreamed it, had a dominating or even vaguely malevolent relationship with its "children." He held this powerful glimpse in his head for over twelve years until it forced itself onto the page and became **THE WATERBORN**.

In many fantasies, there is a circular movement to the stories. And Greg Keyes's life has imitated the genre in which he has chosen to write. At nine years old he read his first real science fiction book, *Moon of Mutiny* by Lester del Rey, so it was with no small amount of awe that he welcomed the publication by Del Rey Books of the first book of his trilogy. And now, Del Rey is pleased and proud to join Keyes in continuing his odyssey of imagination with **THE BLACKGOD**.



© Neil Keyes

Plumly Thompson than L. Frank Baum) (and this is by no means a put down as I am ferociously fond of Ms. Thompson's successes) in which we follow, very Ozzily, indeed, an accumulating group of colorful, widely diverse adventurers marching over a fabulous landscape in an attempt to resolve their various quests.

The character we travel with in our world is Dora Henry. As a small child she lived surrounded by music. Not just music, understand, but MUSIC, the sort that comes out of flowers smelling great and interesting rocks and landscapes and cats looking down at you in surprise from tree limbs. That kind of music. She was also intensely aware of everything about her and saw nothing wrong in talking openly with plants and animals who, she seemed to remember, talked back.

Of course "reality" eventually interceded, but in her case with more damaging results than usual due to her thoughtless mother and father who were grand at cranking out offspring but clueless as to what to do with the children thus presented. They bullied Dora, the first born, into being the caregiver of her siblings instead of themselves and the exhaustion produced by unending tasks and duties eventually muffled, then killed, her music.

Happily, Dora's Grandmother plucked her away from her silly parents before she was killed along with the music. Dora grew up to become a plainclothes cop. All seemed to be going reasonably well, if on the muted side, when she ran into Jared Gerber, another bully and a total control freak, and found herself lovelessly married.

So far all too real a story line, but then Jared comes across a weed (spared by Dora) and his unsuccessful but steadily escalating attempts to kill it end with the plant sending him into intensive care full of weird positions. The weed thrives in spectacular fashion, along with a growing multitude of fellow weeds and the many other strange forms of vegetation that are now suddenly popping up all over town. Right about here two really important things happen to Dora: she finally realizes she has married a nasty nut and leaves him to move into a place of her own and she discovers that if she talks to these new plants they will turn their leaves in her direction and definitely listen.

Meanwhile, in the other world, the person we mostly follow is young Nassifeha, otherwise known as Opalears. She abides in the large harem of the Sultan of Tavor, not as one of his wives but taken in as a compensation for palace intrigue, having caused the completely unfair deaths of her mother and

father when she was a very young child and leaving her a helpless orphan.

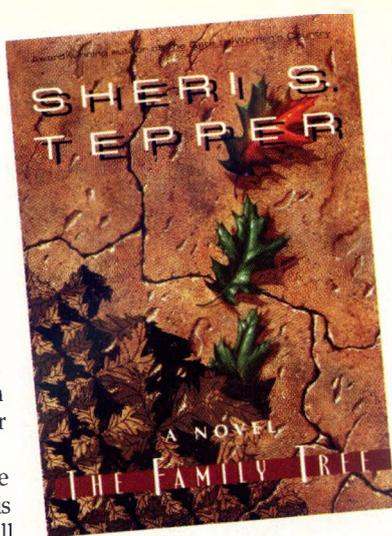
Opalears spends her early years at the harem doing a variety of odd jobs but has lately, due to her fondness for reading, become a talented storyteller. Because of this she is culled from the other women by Soaz the eunuch and brought before the Sultan. She is informed by that worthy that she will accompany and entertain his son, Prince Sahir, on his

journey to St. Weel where it is hoped that the malaise which has lately been plaguing

him will be cured by the wise and more than slightly scary Weelians who abide there. To avoid problems during encounters with other desert travelers she is dressed as a boy and her name is shortened to the masculine Nassif.

As the caravan makes its way from one strange and interesting place to another it acquires new members, each one of whom has a goal the planned journey will conveniently touch. The first to enlist is young Prince Izaker of Palmaia, who, it turns out, is a scholar of religion and a budding sorcerer. He wishes to travel with the company as it will bring him close to Sworp where, perhaps, lives the Seeress who announced a grim prophecy to all and sundry on the day of Izaker's birth. "He must," she said, "Solve the Great Enigma or die with all posterity."

Other extremely interesting sorts merge



BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

Dreamfall, by Joan D. Vinge, Warner Aspect paperback \$6.50. The half-human outcast Cat returns to battle bigotry. He must fight for the native Hydrans, ariel beings whose thoughts fall from the sky. Once, Cat was both pawn and bait. Now, he has become the target. Multiple award-winning author scores again. A must-read for fans of Joan D. Vinge's spiritual fiction.

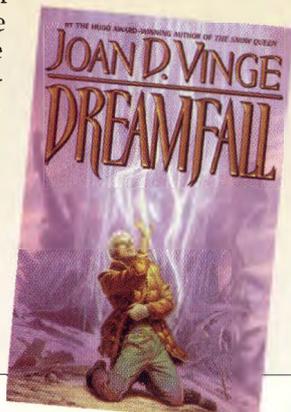
The Horse King, by Richard A. Knaak, Warner Aspect paperback \$5.99. Continuing saga from the Dragonrealm universe. Horse King Lanith allied with the Void Lord launch a war of genocide, torture and unbelievable terrors. Darkhorse, Cabe Bedlam and Emperor Gryphon, helpless before the powers that threaten to destroy Dragonrealm call upon the Green Dragon's half-human daughter Yssa ... perhaps she is their only hope to prevent eternal domination. Magic and adventure replete with war lords, monsters, sorcerers and demons.

A Legend Reborn, by Steven Frankos, Ace paperback \$5.99. Conclusion to the saga begun in "Beyond Lich Gate." Aitchley and Berlyn fight to bring magic back to the world. They must escape from the realm of the dead armed with the sword of Procurus. The Elixir of life and a magical ring. The quest nears its final destination in the imperiled land of Vedette where dreams of hope and a hero's return hang in the balance. Explosive fantasy by the author of *The Wheel Trilogy*.

Winds of Dawn, by Deborah Potter, Mythspinner Press paperback \$12.95. The introductory novel in a five-book series of mythic fantasy. Mortal and immortal races struggle together on the planet Maradane. The Maran Chronicles brings long-forgotten powers, the last mystics, into a new world to forge and colonize amidst the turmoil of a vast enemy realm. This stunning first tale lays the groundwork for future sagas involving the colonist's descendants and an unseen race of sorcerers.

The Great Legend, by Rex Stout, Carroll and Graf paperback, \$5.95. This story, once serialized, appears for the first time in book form. The place is Troy, the warrior Idaeus. His affairs with Helen of Troy and Hecamed are passionate diversions played out on a canvas of war-torn Troy and Greece. It is Troy's ninth year of siege and Idaeus must choose between reason and passion, his private battle with emotion, and the classical battle of two warring cities. Author Rex Stout is also the creator of the character Nero Wolfe.

The Mammoth Book of Dracula, edited by Stephen Jones, Carroll and Graf Trade paperback \$10.95. An anniversary tribute to Bram Stoker's "Dracula," first published in 1897 — this anthology presents variations on the dark legacy of Dracula. Chilling stories both modern and fantastic by Dracula disciples Ramsey Campbell, Peter Tremayne, Kim Newman and Brian Stableford are guaranteed to get under your skin.

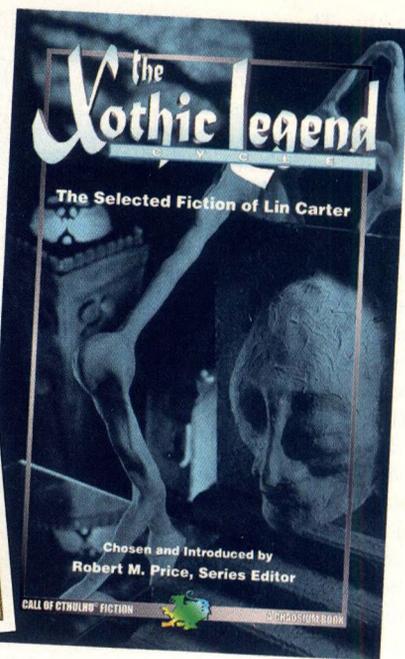
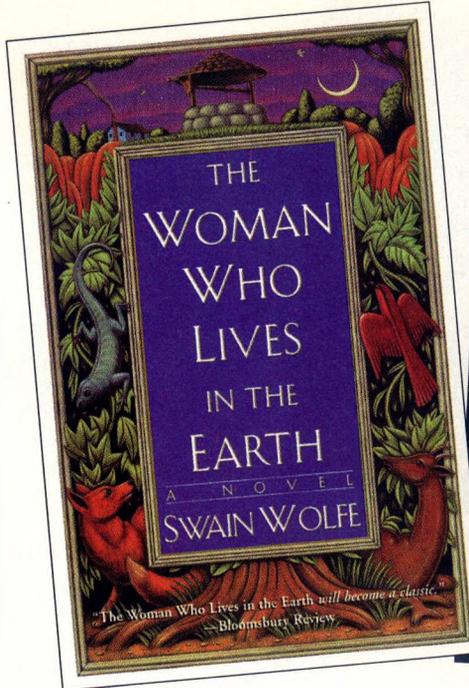


with the caravan, such as the pretty but plumpish Countess Elianne who has roused the cannibal appetite of the dire Duke Fasahd and an Onchiki family who have left their cozy little home along with an assortment of Veebles when bad weather blew the roof from their house and forced them to follow fortunes selected from the box hidden underneath the floor.

But don't be misled into thinking that the other world has anything like a monopoly on weird and wondrous characters. Back here and now on our planet, Dora finds herself tracking a serial killer of scientists and getting ever more deeply involved in the ancient and complex doings of the family Dionne, whose goatish members strongly smell of Pan, and what was that corpsy visitor flapping its wings over her new, small house?

Also she has gotten very deeply involved with the plants, so much so that they guard her bike with twists of vine, make lanes for her where she wants to walk, weave a hammock for her in her brand new garden and whisper her to sleep at night with *Doradoradora*.

All this is remarkable stuff and I found myself sinking deeper and deeper into it, enjoying the expansion of nuances, the skillful fulfillment of little hints, but then Tepper has the two worlds meet and, dear reader, I will only say that this is — or at least it certainly was for me — one of those rare moments of pure, genuine magic that makes



the dedicated reader of fantasy a dedicated reader of fantasy.

I won't go into any specifics, I won't give a hint, I will only promise that if you read the book from its start and let it work its spell, once you encounter that moment (and the many wondrous ramifications of it quietly revealed thereafter throughout the rest of the book) you will thank me profoundly for keeping my trap shut.

If I used one of those ridiculous star systems of rating I would give *The Family Tree* all five or ten or whatever the silly number was. Things being what they are I will simply say you should not deprive yourself of the many pleasures in this book.

The Woman Who Lives in the Earth (Harper Perennial, NY, NY; 171 pp.; \$10 paperback) is the first novel of Swain Wolfe. It, too, concerns itself with the ecology and



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the fact that we are a *part* of that ecology and the grave importance in understanding that we are a part of that ecology.

It is far less sophisticated in structure and overall tone than Tepper's book because the author has set out to tell it in the simple way that legends are told. It's carefully structured to suggest the awesome sort of stories children make up to explain deep neighborhood mysteries to one another, or the tales tribal elders build to carry basic moral teachings painlessly from generation to generation.

The imagery of Woman is built to be simple and striking; extremely Jungian and archetypal. It is sometimes subtle and sometimes as resoundingly heavy-handed as are the images in our dreams and in real legends. My guess is that Mr. Wolfe very consciously has set out to create a real legend, very much on purpose shamelessly borrowing all real legendary's tricks. I think he's done this in hopes that his message will strike the chord of awe in his readers necessary to make that message stick in their minds and force them to pass it on to others. In this I, for one, wish him all the luck in the world.

The story's heroine is Sarah, young and eager to learn, curious about all things. She is well-based, being the daughter of Aesa and Ada, a very hard-working farmer and his hard-working wife and the sort of caring, understanding, kindly parents all humans should have but — alas! — few do.

With considerable sweat and ingenuity the couple have built themselves an excellent little spread and what with the crops and the blacksmith work and weaving Aesa and Ada do on the side, all should be going very well for them but, most unfortunately, a great drought has come and lasted and lasted and things are not going well at all. Not for Sarah's people, not for anyone in the region. Even the family well is drying up.

One day they take the wagon into nearby Henrytown, a mean little collection of shanties, a hard nut of a place made even harder by the deadly dryness all around. Aesa and Ada do a little trading at the store and though its proprietor pays even less than usual citing the drought as his excuse, they get enough from him to survive and the promise of possible blacksmith work for Aesa.

All would have gone well enough if Sarah had not come across a pack of village children tormenting a fox they've tied to a rope.

Sarah berates the unpleasant band of brats and, as they stand jeering confusedly, she bends over the body of the fox. It appears to be dead, but the moment she touches it, it stirs and opens its eyes. She frees it from the noose around its neck and the creature runs off, neatly escaping the pesky children who pursue it.

All of this is watched with hard eyes by a thin, crouched woman wearing a lizard-skin turban which causes her to be referred to throughout the book as the Lizard Woman. She immediately comes to the added conclusion that Sarah is probably a witch or worse.



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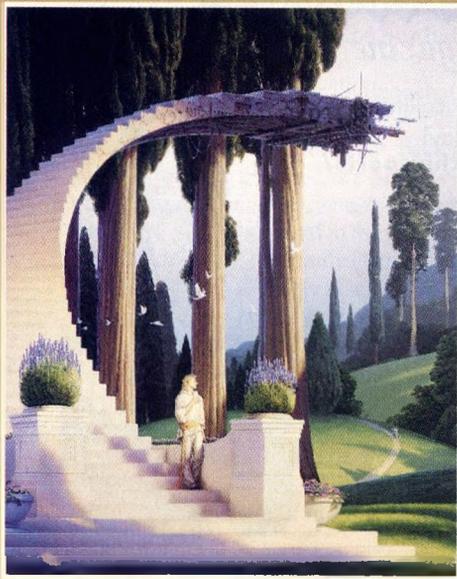


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Muttering silly protective incantations, she follows her to the store and there she stares at the little girl in a growing hallucinatory frenzy until the child looks back at her in puzzlement. Terrified that she has attracted the notice of what she conceives to be a fiend, the Lizard Woman tumbles onto the floor in a twitching fit, shouting accusations.

The little family manages to leave Henrytown safely enough in spite of this ruckus, but the Lizard Women, far from done with Sarah, contacts the ominous Triune, a group of three men which mean-spirited Henrytown has appointed to ferret out, snoop on, and punish any odd or possibly dangerous folk. The Triune ride fat horses, take numerous and scrupulous notes to preserve a record of their doings, and wear many small mirrors in their clothes to ward off evil and reflect the images of their observers (this last touch being, I think, the best in the book!). Obviously, they being people of this sort, what the Lizard Woman has to say about Sarah immediately inspires their deepest and most enthusiastic interest.

Having told how she managed to activate her enemies, Mr. Wolfe's legend goes on to tell how Sarah gathered allies: her wise old grandmother Lilly; the helpful magic entity, Marishan Borisan, who Sarah perceives as a fox though it is not a fox; the Yellow Sailor, one of an ancient magical race presently in hiding from the rest of the world and an owner of a secret long lost to newer comers.

I won't tell you how the combination of all this works out because that would surely spoil the charm. If *The Woman Who Lives in the Earth* is to function, you must work your way through all of its charms and invocations on your own, seeing its wonders and visions with your own eyes, solving its riddles with your own heart. That's the way magic always functions. Of course I'm sure that, being a reader of *Realms of Fantasy*, you are very well aware of that!

So far, judging from the stacks of blurbs the publishers have assembled, the teaching in this legend of Mr. Wolfe's has been very well received. I hope it continues to do so and that its spell is expandingly effective since the main burden of its teaching is that we be kind to one another, and it is most painfully obvious we are a world sorely in need of absorbing that simple truth.

The folk at Chosium are primarily known for creating and enthusiastically expanding the role playing game *Call of Cthulhu* which is most ingeniously based on Howard Phillips Lovecraft's stories, and it's my firm feeling HPL would have loved the thing, especially its two fundamental rules: 1. Though you may win a few battles against the mythos monsters you will surely lose the war, and, 2. The steady loss of sanity points guarantees you go mad in any case.

I received a copy of the original version of the game when it was sent to me by someone who had noticed that its map of Arkham was the one I had developed for Derleth's *The*

Arkham Sampler in my misspent youth. I'd based it on a doodle HPL had made of Arkham south of the Miskatonic River that had been printed in *Marginalia*. I expanded the doodle by means of clues in the texts (discovering which road you'd take to head off to Insmouth, for example) and by sending inquiring letters to people who knew Lovecraft such as Derleth and Bloch, both to check if my notions met with their approval and to see if they had any additional input of their own, which they did.

I loved the game so much I wrote a long article praising it for the now defunct magazine *Twilight Zone* and that prompted a friendly response from Chaosium and that has led to a lasting and happy association between us. To this day I continue to have an affectionate interest in their Cthulhu related productions, including a recent series of books labeled "Call of Cthulhu Fiction."

The latest of these I've received is *The Xothic Legend; The Selected Fiction of Lin Carter* (Chaosium, Inc., Oakland, CA; 272 pp.; \$10.95 trade paperback) which is edited, introduced, and heavily annotated by Robert Price, and it is a positively fascinating peek at the complexities underlying the pastiche bug, particularly as it applies to those bitten by the Lovecraftian variety of the species.

Lin Carter was a prolific writer of fantasy, much of it openly and unabashedly inspired by other writers whose work he particularly admired and enjoyed. His deep love of fantasy also involved him in a wide variety of related projects, the most notable being the marvelous Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series wherein he dug up, and caused to have reprinted, works by William Morris, Lord Dunsany, George Meredith and others whose books, though legendary and absolutely basic to anyone seriously interested in wondrous tales, had been so long out of print that it was difficult to get your hands on them even if you had heaps of money.

The subheading of *Xothic* is a trifle misleading but Price's introduction is careful to correct it by pointing out that the book does not contain any of Carter's stories presented as quotes from the *Necronomicon*, *Book of Eibon* or other such dark, fictional texts. It does, however, seem to include all the fantasies placed in times contemporary with Lovecraft's era and August Derleth's. This last is important since a good deal of these pastiches, including the novel *The Terror Out of Time* (long planned by Carter, but assembled here by Price for the first time from many diverse sources) are not based on Lovecraft's fiction alone, but also Derleth's version of it as presented in his so-called "posthumous collaborations" which were really Derleth's spinoffs from fragments in HPL's commonplace book or from notions inspired by hints and paragraphs in his published works.

Indeed, Price goes to some lengths to point out that one of the most fascinating

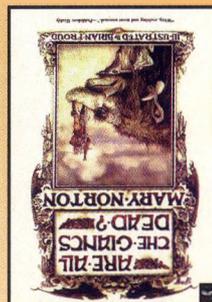
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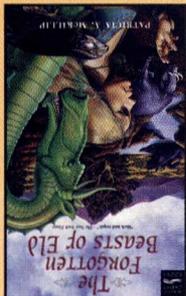
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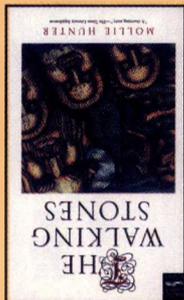
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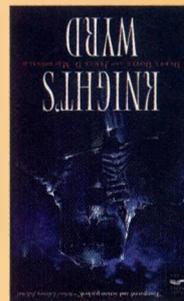
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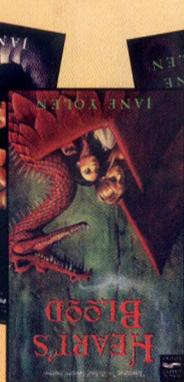
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TRILOGY BY JANE YOLEN

TRILOGY BY DIANE DUANE

BY DAN PEREZ

In a land of magical creatures a boy must become A Warrior of Virtue.

RONNY YU IS A DIRECTOR WHO IS WHO IS ACCUSTOMED TO TAKING RISKS WITH HIS work. He's an Asian filmmaker whose best-known film is 1993's *The Bride With White Hair*. In the colorful Hong Kong genre of supernatural costume fantasies, *Bride* is a departure, in that its emphasis is more on mood and romance than action and special effects. *Bride*, which starred Hong Kong superstar Leslie Cheung, positively drips with atmosphere and tension between its star-crossed lovers, members of two warring clans (one of which is led by a sinister, incestuous pair of Siamese twins). It became Yu's breakout film, and, along with current U.S. interest in the Hong Kong film industry, paved the way for his first Hollywood-financed production, *Warriors of Virtue*, which will be released here by MGM/UA.

In *Warriors*, a teenager named Ryan (Mario Yedida), who is unable to attain his dream of playing football due to a chronic limp, is magically whisked to a fantastic parallel world known as Tao, which is populated by humans and by Rooz, kangaroo-like creatures endowed with human characteristics. Tao is under siege by a self-centered, unpredictable warlord (Angus MacFadyen) who controls the Lifesprings, magic pools imbued with the power that nurtures Tao. Ryan must join forces with the Rooz known as the Warriors of Virtue to defeat Komodo the warlord and return Tao to peace and harmony.

The story is the brainchild of the Law brothers, Dennis, Ron, Chris, and Jeremy, medical doctors raised in Hong Kong and now practicing in the U.S. They served as producers, and their father, Joseph Law, is the executive producer. "What touches me," says Yu, "or what made me decide to make this film, is basically from the

dialogue I had with the Law Brothers' father. He told me his intention to put up the money to make this film. He wanted to make a film that, for the kids nowadays in our theaters, has a more positive message other than just kung-fu kangaroos fighting each other or fighting the bad guys. He's willing to take a risk, to put up so much money, \$36 million, to do this film. That really touched me, along with the fact that these characters are going to be all animatronic characters, which, for me, is a very big challenge. I'd never done it before, and I wanted to learn about it. And the story is told through the eyes of this thirteen-year-old boy who has a problem, a leg problem, which really hit home because I had polio when I was nine months old."

Since this was his first Hollywood effort, Yu was concerned that his atmospheric style might not appeal to western audiences. "I was a little bit nervous about it," he says. "Should I go for my own style, like always, or should I go for something more traditional Hollywood? I talked to some Chinese directors, like John Woo, and I talked to some American directors, and I got two sides.

According to John, he said, 'Listen, Ronny, forget about your style; forget about the Hong Kong style. Put your step firmly into Hollywood first — you have to make the film where the people here are more accustomed to it. After you've done that — you've firmly established that you're a player in Hollywood, then you can start injecting your own style.' On the other hand, Sam Raimi, who is the producer on my next project, said, 'Ronnie, don't worry about it. People are hiring you to make this film because they appreciate the style you can bring to it. Don't worry about the audience — just go in there and do it. As long as you have a good story to tell, you can show it in the way you see fit.' With *Bride With White Hair*, I had never made that kind of film before, so I went in without

In the alternate world of Tao, a thirteen year old boy must overthrow the evil warlord Komodo (Angus MacFayden) right, with the help of the kangaroo-like Rooz.





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Three of the Rooz warriors are captured and held in the Warlord's lair. *Warriors of Virtue* is the largest scale film production shot almost entirely in Beijing, China.

any preconceptions and shot it as I saw fit. And apparently since people liked that style, I just used the same style."

One of the biggest challenges in making the film was coming up with believable animatronic suits for the Rooz. The idea of "kung fu martial arts kangaroos," as Yu refers to them, seems to verge on the ridiculous. Why kangaroos? "I was curious too, when they first told me, but the answer is, they said, because among all the animals,

only the kangaroos are fighting standing up. They fight with both hands, almost like a boxer. So I thought 'Hey, that's a good idea.'

Whatever I did, it had to go beyond people seeing the [effects] as somebody put a mask on. I had to achieve that. Otherwise, we're dead. So I worked with the creator of these animatronic suits, a gentleman by the name of Tony Gardner, and I said, 'Tony, you've got to give me emotions, you've got to bring it from their eyes, from their facial movements,

through the air.' "All the kangaroos are airborne," Yu says, "and that means we had to do a lot of wire rigs. We had five kangaroos, and each of them had four wires attached to their harnesses. So we're talking about twenty wires, and we have six people pulling the wires to get them airborne because we don't have that equipment here like in the States, where they have hydraulics, machines, and all that. Everything is man-powered here — the pulling, the dropping, the landing and all

from body language — everything. Treat this like an actor, like a human actor. Don't treat it like an animal."

The film was the largest scale production of its kind to ever be shot almost entirely in Beijing, China. It featured an international cast and crew drawn from the U.S., Australia, Iceland, and elsewhere. The language barrier was a challenge, notes Yu, who speaks English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. "It was the language and the cultural shock that the crew members had — how to make them comfortable in a strange environment. Also, because of the complexity of the animatronic things, how could I communicate with those actors inside the suits, because they wore these huge heads, and inside were so many motors."

The martial arts sequences were also daunting, because the animatronic suits had to be rigged to gracefully leap

ANIMATING THE ROOZ

To create the nimble animatronic Rooz for *Warriors of Virtue*, director Ronnie Yu sought out veteran special effects technician Tony Gardner, whose shop, Alterian Studios, created and fabricated the complex kangaroo suits. Gardner's previous credits include work on *Darkman*, *Hocus Pocus*, *The Addams Family* and its sequel, as well as television's *SeaQuest DSV* and *Lois and Clark*.

Alterian Studios was hired to build a prototype kangaroo suit for the production. "The project really caught our interest," Gardner says, "because of what they were planning on having the kangaroos do. The fact that they wanted them to talk—there are five of them sitting in a room having an argument at one point. Things like that. It sounded really exciting. So we went off on our own and did designs for all five of the characters to sort of illustrate how different they could look from one another and how you could put their personality into their appearance so you could see who they were at a glance without looking cartoony."

After the production department approved the concepts, manufacturing work on the suits themselves began in earnest with the focus, according to Gardner, "being on designing a mouth system that wouldn't look like flapping puppet lips. That, to me, was the major hurdle. Everything has had this one axis of movement for the last twenty-seven years. We checked with speech pathologists and we got into anatomy very heavily and how the muscle structure works, and we designed something that recreated phonetic mouth shapes for all the vowels, and then wrote some software and had some computer boards made, and came up with a puppeteering system that could be driven, for the mouth and dialogue, by one performer who could control the jawbones, the tongue and all the lips as well as the corners of the mouth and all the musculature. All that would be performed by one person, who would basically be in control of the lip synch and the character's voice at the same time.



Director Ronnie Yu surrounded by the Tony Gardner's animatronic warriors.

"We worked on finessing that, and we pretty much nailed it. We designed something that people in our industry have been trying to do for a good six years now. We were able to achieve it on this project, and have a scene where five people were talking very animatedly and very emotionally about a particular subject matter and have them all be alive and be able to ad lib in the moment and not be stuck in a program. The biggest challenge in the beginning was the



One of the challenges for f/x technician Tony Gardner and his crew was to keep the Rooz looking proportional despite the various animatronic devices hidden inside the costumes.

that. That takes a lot of coordination and the [attention to the] safety factors."

At one point in the filming, a battle scene called for 2,000 extras, which was a problem because Chinese law forbids the assembly of 2,000 people in the same place at one time. Yu's solution was to hire the Chinese army itself for the scene. "We went to the government," he says, "and the government loaned us the tank division of the Republican Army, so they were very disciplined in the way they marched and makes it believable that they are troops. So we had 2,000 troops wearing

costumes — just getting them in costume alone took eight hours."

Despite the film's monumental scale (most Hong Kong films have a tenth of the budget), its numerous large sets and locations, and an international cast and crew, Yu's biggest concern remained the believability of the Rooz. "Everybody, including my cameraman, thought 'Wow, can we do it, or will this become silly?' But you've got to have confidence. You can't worry too much. Go in with your gut feeling, and if you're right, you're right." 

best reward in the end."

Steps were taken in the overall design of the suit so that the limbs, head and tail were all proportional. "Nothing looked out of synch," Gardner notes. "Like a lot of times you put a mechanical head on somebody and they look like a Q-tip. There's this skinny body and this big bulbous head—there are 50 motors in it or whatever. That was the one thing we wanted to stay away from because it just screams what it was. The goal was to keep the whole body proportionate and design some body language where you've got a sense of mass and weight from the characters—it wasn't just somebody wearing a big padded suit or something. The most difficult of which was Yee, the biggest, most muscular strong guy of them all. He's like seven feet tall and looks like he weighs 300 pounds and the guy inside the suit, Doug Jones, is like six feet four. I think he weighs in at 145. He's like skin and bones, basically. When we're building all these huge muscle shapes on a guy who's basically a skeleton, suddenly we've got a

ton of places that we can hide motors, batteries, transmitters, receivers, you name it. In a weird way he became the easiest because there was all this hiding space we could work with."

For the many stunt sequences, separate suits were created. "The main guys each had two mechanical heads and seven spare head skins, seven pairs of hands, six pairs of feet, and three different types of tails. Then each one of those characters was doubled by a stunt person (or two or three or four) and those people had additional heads, with obviously no mechanics in them, and hands and feet and tails that were all loose-jointed so that they weren't encumbered by anything in any way. They could use their body weight to throw the tail to the left or right or whatever they wanted to do. The muscle suits for the stunt people were used as needed for a particular shot because a lot of times the stunt people would be two feet shorter than the actor, but they were best person for that particular stunt. We kind of had to mix and match it."

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BY TERRI WINDLING

Wile E. Coyotee and other sly trickster tales.

NOW LISTEN, I'M GOING TO TELL YOU A STORY. THIS WAS BACK WHEN ALL THE ANIMALS were people, before the Human People came. Creator called all them Animal People together and said, "There's going to be a change. New people comin', and you old people got to have new names. You come 'round tomorrow morning, and you can pick your own new names, first ones first until they're gone." And then he goes to home to bed. Well that Coyote, he goes back to Mole, his wife, and he's all frettin' now, he's scratchin' and he's thinking hard, and Mole, she's lookin' nervous 'cause there's always trouble close behind when Coyote starts to think. "Mole," he says, "build up that fire, I'm going to stay awake all night. I'm going to be the first in line tomorrow at Creator's door. I'm going to get a strong new name. A better name. A power name. Maybe I'll be Bear," he says. "Or maybe I'll be salmon. Or maybe I'll be eagle, and then they'll treat me with respect." So Coyote, he sits down beside that fire and tries to stay awake, but just a little while later he's fast asleep and snoring. Mole lets him sleep. She's thinking if Coyote gets a better name than maybe he'll just up and leave, that mangy, sneaky thing. She waits until the sun

"Trickster" is an important figure in the folklore of many cultures. In artist Mark Wagner's painting "The Initiation of Horse Boy" Trickster takes the form of a coyote and fools a boy into thinking he is a horse.



is high, and then she goes and wakes him up. Coyote runs right over to Creator but he's much too late. All the power names are gone. All the little names are gone. The only name that's left now is Coyote — which nobody wants. Coyote sits down by Creator's fire, quiet now, and sad. It makes Creator start to feel real bad to see him sit like that. He says, "Coyote, my old friend, it's good you have the name you have. That's why I made you sleep so late. I got important work for you. Them Human People are comin' and you got to go and help them out. They won't know anything, those ones, not how to hunt, or fish, or dress, or sing, or dance, or anything. It's your job now to show them how to do it all and do it right." Coyote, he jumps up and he's all smilin' now, with all them teeth. "So I'll be the Big Chief of these new people!" Coyote says. Creator laughs. "Yeah, somethin' like that. But you're still Old Coyote, you know. You're still a fool; that's what you are. But I'll make things easier for you. From now on you'll have these special powers: to change your shape, to hear anything talk except the water, and if you die you can come back to life. Now go and do your work." Coyote left that tipi very happy. He went to find them Human People and to do his work. He went to make things right...and that's when all the trouble began.

"Trickster" is an important (often sacred) figure in the folklore of numerous cultures all around the world: a paradoxical creature who is both very clever and very foolish, a culture hero and destructive influence—often at one and the same time. In the legends of many societies, it's Trickster who is responsible for giving humans fire, language, hunting skills or even life itself...but he's also the one who brought us death, hunger, difficult childbirth, illness and other woes. Alan Garner (the great British fantasy writer and folklorist) calls Trickster: "the advocate of uncertainty...He draws a boundary for chaos, so that we can make sense of the rest. He is the shadow that shapes the light."

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Crow is one of the many forms that Trickster takes in native American folklore. Art by Tom Pohrt from the Barry Lopez book *Crow and Weasel*.

nardine the Fox are all different aspects of the Trickster myth; other Tricksters include Maui of Polynesia, Legba, and Spider in Africa, Brer Rabbit in Black American lore, and the shape-shifting Foxes found in South America, China, and Japan. Trickster is a powerful presence in the legends of most Native American tribes, a divine fool or sacred clown who generally takes one of the following form: Raven, Rabbit, Hare, Spider, Bluejay, Mink, or Coyote. "Trickster is both serious culture hero and comedian," says anthropologist Richard M. Dorson (*Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers*), "a regular rascal, always hungry, scheming, greedy, and an old 'letch' to boot...The Indians know his character, relish his predicament, and applaud his come-uppances."

In *Giving Birth to Thunder, Sleeping With His Daughter*, the brilliant naturalist writer Barry Lopez (*Of Men and Wolves*) gathers together tales from over forty Native American tribes concerning the most engaging Trickster of them all: Old Man Coyote. "No other personality is as old, as well known, or as widely distributed among the tribes as Coyote. He was the figure of paleolithic legend among

primitive peoples the world over and, though he survives today in Eurasian and African folktales, it is among native Americans, perhaps, that his character achieves its fullest dimension. In an essay on the psychological roots of the character, Stanley Diamond likened Coyote to a primitive essence of conjoined good and evil; at a time in the history of man when there was no rigid distinction between good and evil, Coyote was."

Coyote tales are often very funny, and sometimes quite scatological or overtly sexual. These later tales were left out of early collections by white anthropologists, giving a rather skewed version of this complex and ribald creature. Such Trickster stories are told both as entertainment and as teaching tales — and in many tribes they are only told during the short, dark winter months. Among such peoples, it is considered unlucky or simply disrespectful to draw Coyote's attention at any another time of year. These tales — although they vary from teller to teller, and from occasion to occasion — will often end with a common ritual prayer, asking Creator to bring the end of winter and speed the arrival of spring.

It is during the winter month of February that I sit here in the Arizona desert contemplating Old Man Coyote and his sack full of Trickster tales. Wild coyotes, cousin to the Coyote, prowl by my office door, menace my cats, and howl outside the bedroom windows at night. They are beautiful creatures, wild, untameable, sensibly wary of humankind. It is not at all unusual to spy coyotes in the Sonoran desert, but there seem to be more and more of them lately—drawn by my attention, the old tales would say; and I'm inclined to believe them. It is one thing to read Coyote tales, as I first did years ago, from out of a scholarly book while living in New York City—quite another to walk this dry, hot land and hear Coyote's eerie song while the night sky arches overhead and mountains ring the horizon. It is in this place that I truly begin to appreciate just how myths are drawn from the bones of each land's geography, from the marrow of the earth. And how very different oral stories become when they are committed to the printed page, divorced from daily life, from wind and rain and claw prints in the dirt. Too often collections of Trickster tales read (to urban and suburban readers) like simple children's fables: *This is why the beaver's tale is flat, this is why the sky is filled with stars.* What is missing is the sly humor, the ambivalence and duality understood by the indigenous story teller and his or her audience. It is that duality and complexity that makes the Trickster myth cycle as much of a natural force as coyote howls in the desert dark.

Sit down, have some coffee, pay attention now. Here's another one about Coyote. He's walkin' there by that lake yonder, that lake over there by my uncle's place. And Coyote, he's tired, he's hungry, his bag is heavy, and he sees some geese. So he sets this big heavy bag down on the ground. "Coyote, Coyote" say them geese, "what's in that big old heavy bag?" "It's songs," he says. "Coyote," says them geese, "how come you have so many songs?" He puffs up his chest and he smiles with all them teeth and then Coyote says, "I have strong visions, and that's how come I have so many songs." "Well okay then, let's have us a big dance." But Old Coyote shakes his head. "These are powerful songs. You can't mess around with these songs. If you want to dance, you're going to have to dance just like I tell you to dance." "Well okay," them geese agree. They pound down the grass by the edge of that lake and make a big place for dancing. Coyote takes out his dancing sticks. "Now you got to close your eyes," he says. "These songs are medicine songs. If you open your eyes you might get hurt real bad." So the geese all close their eyes and Coyote sings and the geese commence to dance. "Keep your eyes closed!" Coyote says, and he hits one of them geese with his sticks. "Wait, stop!" says Coyote. "This here geese opened his eyes and now he's dead! You'd better all keep your eyes closed." And then them geese, they start to dance again. Coyote

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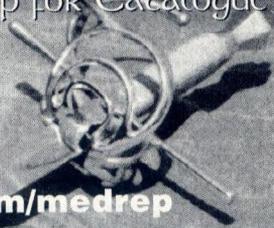
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Poetry Contest

\$48,000.00 in Prizes

The National Library of Poetry to award 250 total prizes to amateur poets in coming months

Owings Mills, Maryland – The National Library of Poetry has just announced that \$48,000.00 in prizes will be awarded over the next 12 months in the North American Open Amateur Poetry Contest. The contest is open to everyone and entry is free.

"We're especially looking for poems from new or unpublished poets," indicated Howard Ely, spokesperson for The National Library of Poetry. "We have a ten year history of awarding large prizes to talented poets who have never before won any type of writing competition."

How To Enter

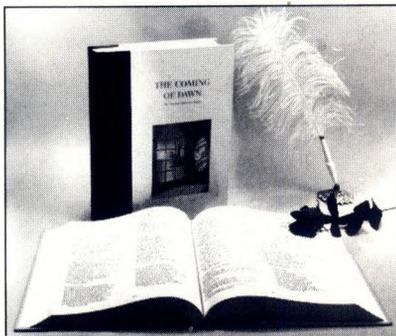
Anyone may enter the competition simply by sending in **ONLY ONE** original poem, any subject, any style, to:

The National Library of Poetry
Suite 1759
1 Poetry Plaza
Owings Mills, MD 21117-6282

The poem should be no more than 20 lines, and the poet's name and address must appear on the top of the page. "All poets who enter will receive a response concerning their artistry, usually within seven weeks," indicated Mr. Ely.

Possible Publication

Many submitted poems will also be considered for inclusion in one of The National



*The National Library of Poetry publishes the work of amateur poets in colorful hardbound anthologies like **The Coming of Dawn**, pictured above. Each volume features poetry by a diverse mix of poets from all over the world.*

Library of Poetry's forthcoming hardbound anthologies. Previous anthologies published by the organization have included *On the Threshold of a Dream*, *Days of Future's Past*, *Of Diamonds and Rust*, and *Moments More to Go*, among others.

"Our anthologies routinely sell out because they are truly enjoyable reading, and they are also a sought-after sourcebook for poetic talent," added Mr. Ely.

World's Largest Poetry Organization

Having awarded over \$150,000.00 in prizes to poets worldwide in recent years, The National Library of Poetry, founded in 1982 to promote the artistic accomplishments of contemporary poets, is the largest organization of its kind in the world. Anthologies published by the organization have featured poems by more than 100,000 poets.

"We're always looking for new poetic talent," said Mr. Ely. "I hope you urge your readers to enter the contest. There is absolutely no obligation whatsoever, and they could be our next big winner."

© 1987-1997 The National Library of Poetry

snatches another one and commences to strangle him. That geese is squawking, and Coyote says, "That's right, my friends, sing loud as you can!" But one old geese, he opens one eye just a peep, and now he sees what's goin' on. "Run away, brothers!" he cries, and off they go—but not before that old Coyote fills his belly real good....

I recently asked Midori Snyder, a writer of fantasy novels living in Milwaukee (author of *The Flight of Michael McBride*), for her thoughts about the Trickster. "Jung has argued that the Trickster is 'undifferentiated energy' spinning out in the universe...but this couldn't be farther from the truth for the poor dupe who feels all of the Trickster's energy directed at him! Polite society delights in Trickster's boundless energy, his refusal to observe the normal taboos, his gigantic appetites — which reflect our own appetites in their most unvarnished, unsocialized state. Uncle Tompa, a Trickster from Tibet, straps a sheep's liver between his legs in order to pose as a woman, seducing a wealthy man into nights of sumblime sex and then marriage. As the wedding gifts are packed on Uncle Tompa's horse, and the crowd assembles to wish the "bride" farewell, Uncle Tompa raises his skirts and reveals his true anatomy, much to the merriment of the crowd and the utter shame of the wealthy man. In the Winnebago Trickster cycle (from Radin), the Trickster spends most of the epic engaged in typically bawdy, glut-tonous, disasterous activities (my favorite being when he takes his 'member' out of his box where he keeps it and sends it like a torpedo through the water to lodge between the legs of a chief's nubile daughter. It takes an old woman, unscrewing it like a cork with an awl, to get it out!). But in the closing episodes of the epic, the Trickster travels through the land, ordering nature, carving out a place for humans to live within the wonder of it all. Among the Khoi-san of South Africa, Mantis does the same, creating, organizing, shaping the world which man will inhabit. Even Prometheus in European myth is both Trickster (when he steals fire from the gods) and culture hero (when he lifts the darkness for mankind)."

Ellen Kushner (the Boston-based author of the fantasy novel *Thomas the Rhymer*) is the co-producer and host of a nationally-broadcast radio show called "Sound & Spirit," an excellent program which often addresses mythological themes. In a recent show on the subject of Tricksters, she made this interesting observation: "...I was having too much of an Us/Them reaction [to Trickster tales]—you know, the dread: 'How quaint that Other cultures have created these not-quite-animals to express their mythic world-views—'And then it hit me. Bugs! Bugs Bunny! That's the American folk- Trickster! He checks out totally on the international animalometer: superficially a rabbit, he munches carrots and lives in the ground, but he also builds things, knocks on doors, lights

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matches, impersonates policemen, wears drag...and, of course, bonks people with hammers. Now, I have to confess, I didn't really like Bugs Bunny cartoons when I was little—they were irrational, violent, they made me uncomfortable—but I sure did watch them all the time. And that's something to remember. Whether you're a 20th century person watching Trickster on the family altar in your livingroom, staring into the communal campfire of the movie theater, or hearing the stories in a sweatlodge or under the stars...one thing you have to remember is: Trickster is not your friend! Trickster's acts may benefit people, or damage them—Trickster doesn't really care, as long as the trick is a good one." (For more information on Sound & Spirit, or a playlist of the Trickster show, the program's web page address is: WWW.WGBH.ORG/PRI/SPRIT.

Wile E. Coyote (from those old Chuck Jones "Roadrunner" cartoons) is another well-known modern Trickster, sharing many characteristics with Old Man Coyote from the ancient tales: a cleverness matched by foolishness, a tendency for his tricks to rebound on himself, and the ability to regenerate himself over and over again every time he's squashed flat! (Check out Ian Frazier's hilarious fantasia "Coyote v. Acme," reprinted in *The Year's Best Fantasy & Horror, Vol. IV*)

In Asia (as in Great Britain and France), Fox is the animal most associated with Trickster myths. In Chinese legends, foxes can attain magical powers in one of two ways: by long years of arduous study (after which they are rewarded with the power to become human); or by posing as a human man or woman, seducing a member of the opposite sex, then stealing his or her life-force. Ellen Steiber is the Tucson-based author of *Shadow of the Fox* and other books for children; she has often worked with Japanese *kitsune* (fox-wife) legends and had this to say about Asian Tricksters: "One thing that occurred to me in working with fox legends is that *kitsune* assumes many of the same functions as the western devil and his female counterpart, Lilith. All of them shape-shift, tempt and deceive humans, play malicious tricks, and are capable of possessing their victims and driving them to madness. Yet it is only western culture that considers these characters evil. In cultures where they're seen as Tricksters, they are neither wholly benign nor malignant but figures who simply live outside our moral laws and manifest the kind of divine ambiguity that the Greeks assigned their gods—figures capable of tremendous harm or tremendous good."

This duality, Barry Lopez concurs, is the hardest thing for western readers to understand about figures like Raven, Great Rabbit, or Old Man Coyote. "The dichotomy itself is an artificial one, a creation of the western mind." There are several good books about Trickster tales showing the fuller range of this complex archetypal character. (I recom-

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mend the Lopez book listed about, *The Trickster*, by Paul Radin, *The Incredible Survival of Coyote*, by Gary Snyder, *Coyote Tales* by Mourning Dove, *Old Man Coyote*, by Clara Kern Bayliss, *African Folktales*, by Roger D. Abrahams, *Kitsune*, by Niyoshi Nozaki, and *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth*, by Norman O. Brown.) But even better, I'd like to direct you to some modern fiction making use of Trickster themes, for in this way Trickster is truly brought alive for the modern reader. At the top of the list are two books by Thomas King, a Native writer from Canada whose stories are so clever and sly that he is surely part-Trickster himself. His slim collection *One Good Story That One* contains several hilarious Coyote stories, and Coyote is a prime mover-and-shaker in King's witty magical realist novel *Green Grass, Running Water*. Louis Owens is a part-Cherokee writer whose suspenseful murder-mysteries are infused with myth and magic; the modern Trickster figure in Owen's 1994 novel, *Bone Game*, is a wise-cracking Indian drag-queen at a college in California. Susan Power, of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, includes a young *heyo'ka* figure (a kind of sacred clown, who must do everything contrarywise) in her gorgeous, multi-generational novel *The Grass Dancer*; this is a book I highly recommend, a moving and magical love story.

In the fantasy field, if you've got access to a good used bookstore keep an eye out for Zora Greenhalgh's *Contrarywise*, a quirky "imaginary world" fantasy based on Trickster myths from around the world (published in the 1980s). More easily available: the tales of Canadian "urban fantasy" writer Charles de Lint, who has worked extensively with Native legends (mixed with Celtic myths and other folk traditions that have found a home on Canadian soil). Crow and Coyote characters appear in much of de Lint's more recent work, including *Spirit Walk* and *The Ivory and the Horn*; while his latest novel, *Trader*, contains a wonderfully vivid Trickster character inspired by Raven tales. De Lint's new book (and this is a tease, I fear, because it isn't published yet) is even more of a direct Trickster tale, involving Raven and Coyote and a flock of punky "crow girls" on modern city streets. This terrific book is called *Someplace to Be Flying*; be sure to look out for it next winter (when it's appropriate to read Coyote tales once more!)

In addition to folklore on Coyote, it's also rather fascinating to read about the animals themselves, as I discovered while researching a Trickster character for a novel of my own (*The Wood Wife*), a couple of years ago. When we hear them howling in the desert hills at night, it's not *always* because they are gathering their cubs, teasing the local dogs, or announcing a kill — sometimes, according to the researchers who have watched them extensively in the wild, coyotes sing just for the sheer pleasure of it, harmonizing, each one taking a different note which compliments the others. For naturalistic coyote



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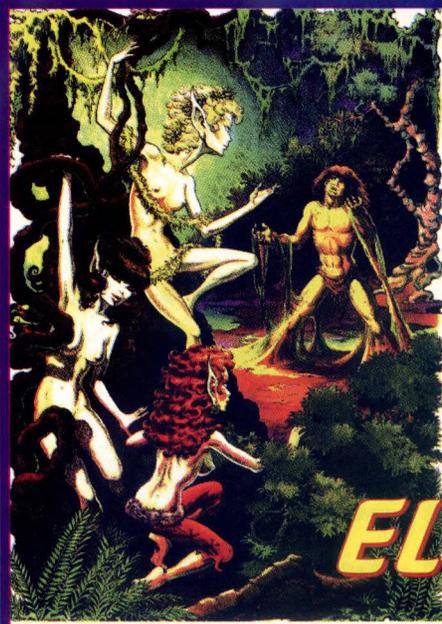
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lore, I recommend *God's Dog* by Hope Ryden, and *Coyote*, a breathtaking book of photographs by Wyman Meinzer. There are also two charming children's picture books about these enigmatic creatures: *Coyote Dreams*, a gentle tale about a boy who dances with coyotes in the night (text by Susan Nines, illustrations by Ronald Himler), and *Cleo and Coyote*, about the partnership of a coyote from Utah and a dog from Queens (text by Elizabeth Levy, terrific illustrations by Southwestern painter Diane Bryer). You might also look out for a lovely tape of music called "Coyote Love Medicine" performed on Native American flutes by Jessita Reyes (Talking Taco Tapes, 5402 Timber Trail, San Antonio, TX, 78228).

On the Sound & Spirit "Trickster" program, Ellen Kushner pointed out that we're still captivated by Tricksters in modern society, those "bad boys" of film and music and art, the Jack Nicholsons, Mick Jagers and Dennis Rodmans whose sheer outrageous behavior is exactly what their audiences enjoy. Not all Trickster energy need be destructive (or self-destructive), however. Mark Wagner, for example (whose distinctive work accompanies this month's column) is an artist I think of as having more than a little Trickster energy. This is a man who fills his car with paint when he heads through the desert — for he likes to stop on empty stretches of remote Western highways to paint eagles, wolves, spirit dancers, and other creatures right onto the black asphalt: works that will soon deteriorate with traffic, with wind and sun and rain. And yet, for a brief while, a bit of beauty glows on an isolated roadway—an anonymous bit of mysterious Trickster magic is left behind.

I have one last Trickster image to share with you before the sun goes down, and the winter ends, and the tales are done. When I began this article, several weeks ago, I had taken my work and books with me to a ranch several hours drive from here, on a remote part of the Apache reservation in eastern Arizona. I was working out of the bunkhouse while a friend participated in a cattle drive. Early one morning I wandered outside, where the desert spread a vast distance around and it seemed I stood at the center of the world. Horses, maybe a dozen of them, were grazing in a nearby field. The sun was climbing over the cliffs as I perched on an old rusted tank, a cup of coffee in one hand, Mourning Dove's *Coyote Tales* in the other. All was quiet and very still—until a huge coyote shot across the land, in hot pursuit of a desert jack-rabbit of equally enormous size. This spooked the milling horses, who turned and thundered in my direction. I jumped and ran, and only when I reached the bunkhouse did I turn again. The horses had stopped, abruptly. There was an electric wire between them and me. My jeans and my book were drenched with coffee. I could almost hear Coyote laugh. Good trick, Coyote. But he, of course, was now nowhere in sight. ☘



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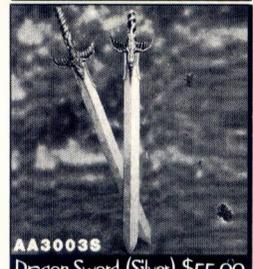


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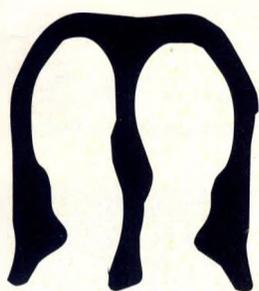
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BAD MEDICINE

BY MARTHA WELLS

Illustration by Alan Pollack



Mac was taking his morning constitutional on the path that led sideways up the mountain. The morning air was cold and clear, and the path's sudden turns took him out onto ledges where the pines dropped abruptly away, and the view of the town cupped in the little valley below made him stop a moment to admire it.

Coming around one of those abrupt turns, he saw a hiker standing at one of the natural vantages, looking down at Silverpan in all its quiet 6:00 am glory. Tourists were the town's mainstay, and though it was too early in the year for snow and the influx of skiers, it was still a place for those who liked hiking, camping and fishing. Mac was irritated at the interruption to his morning solitude, but prepared to be neighborly if he had to. This might be one of the guests at the hotel.

Coming up the path, Mac saw that the hiker was facing away from him. The sun hadn't

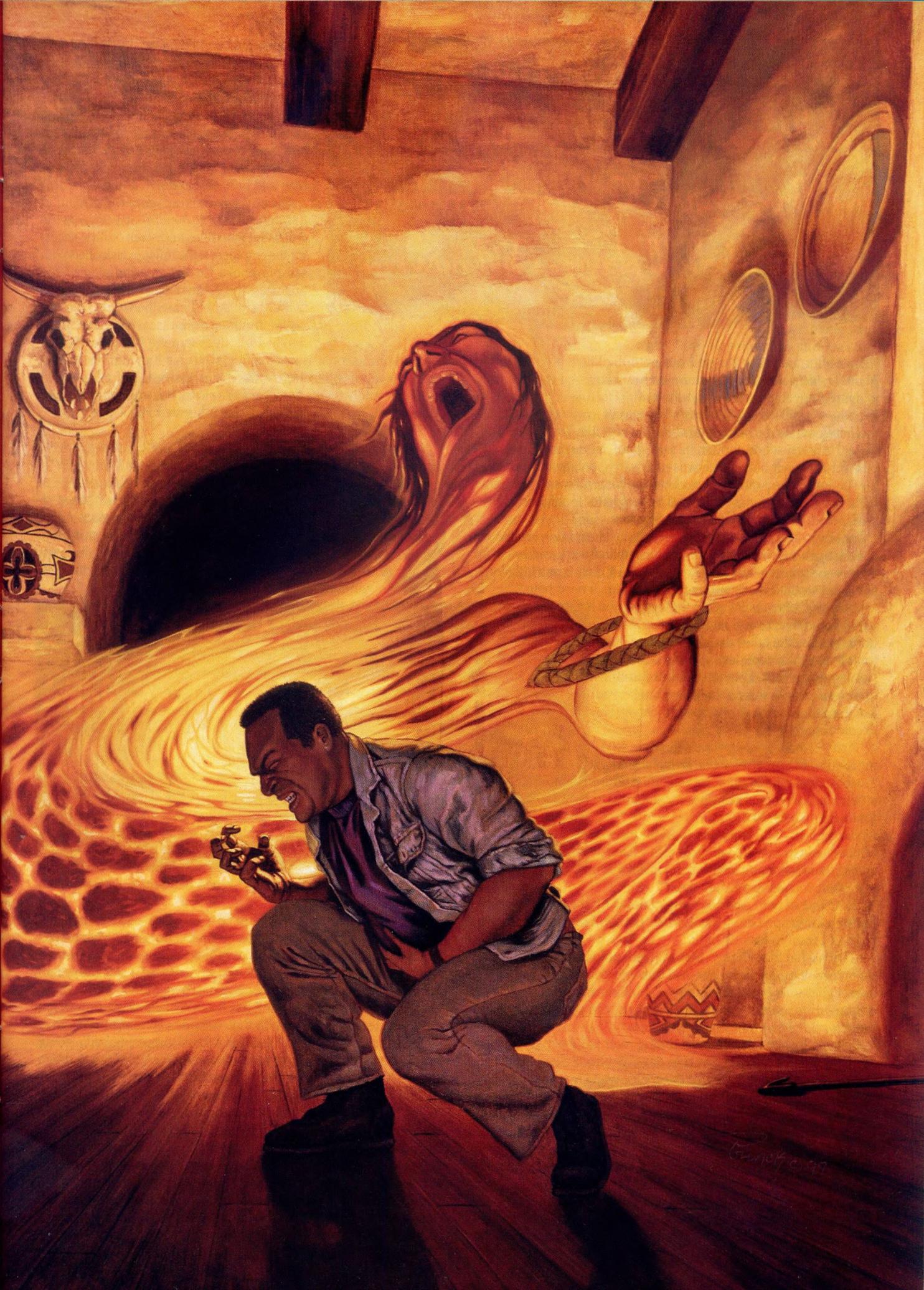
quite reached this part of the mountain and the ledge was still cloaked in predawn shadow, so it was difficult to make out anything else. The hiker didn't turn around at the approach of the big elderly black man, who was making no effort to be quiet.

Mac stopped a few feet behind him, not wanting to startle him, and said, "Good morning."

The hiker turned and Mac saw his eyes. They were twin coals of white fire in empty sockets, unearthly, impossible, and glowing with a cold heat. Mac froze, caught by surprise and utterly vulnerable.

Then the last edge of the sun topped the peak on the other side of the valley, and yellow dawn light washed the ledge, dissolving the hiker in its radiance.

Mac stood there a moment, considering the empty ledge, the smudged imprint of hiking boots in the dirt and pine needles. Then he shook his head in disgust and said to himself, *I can tell right now this is gonna be a hell of a day.*



"My name is Anthony Rivera... Six months ago I paid a witch who lives in Albuquerque 30 dollars to make me a star basketball player. And now..."

That afternoon Mac stepped out onto the kitchen porch of the Thundershield Lodge for fresh air, and saw a boy sitting on the stack of damp firewood, barefoot and shivering. His first impulse was to ask why the hell Charlie Jimenez's boy wasn't in school and did his mother know he'd lost his shoes? But he saw this boy was too old to be the Jimenez boy, though he was skinny enough and spare to pass for a 12 year old. And it was not nearly cool enough, even in the shadow of the peak whose rocky slope came almost down to the wide wooden porch, for a native of Silverpan to be shivering.

Mac said, "You came here to see somebody, son?"

The boy's head jerked in surprise. He hadn't heard the screen door squeak open. His big eyes were frightened and wary and brave all at the same time. He was Hispanic, maybe 14, dark hair a little long, jeans and sweater dusty and ragged. He said, "I need help."

"Do you?" Mac answered. In these days, you had to watch out for vandals and thieves and serial killers and sociopathic children with guns, besides the other dangers you had always had to watch out for. He was also wondering if the boy was a runaway and only wanted a handout. The hotel didn't throw leavings out the back door as if people were stray dogs, but served them in a civilized fashion in the church pantry on Main Street. He said, "Who told you to come here?"

"Arce Cardenas, a *curandero* who lives in Albuquerque. He told me to come to Silverpan, to the ski hotel, and ask for Ben Murphey." The boy's voice had gotten softer and he wrapped his arms tightly around his knees, in nervousness or embarrassment or both. "I think I'm in the wrong place."

Mac sighed. "No, you're in the right place. Come inside and I'll hunt Ben out to listen to your troubles." The boy hesitated, and Mac added, "You've come a long way for this, son, you gonna turn to jelly just when you get to the doorstep?"

"No. No, I'm not." The boy jumped down off the firewood, came through the heaped dead leaves to the porch. "I did something stupid and I want to make it right."

"That's what they all say," Mac said, not unkindly, and held open the screen door. As the boy passed through, Mac glanced up at the mirror that was positioned above the inner doorway. It showed only an ordinary boy, nothing less, and more importantly, nothing more.

He took the boy into the small dining room off the main kitchen, which in the old private mansion days had been a servants' hall, and now was a break room for the cooks, wait crew, and busboys. Mac gestured for the boy to take a seat at the old Spanish mission table and yelled back into the kitchen area, "Carl!"

His assistant chef appeared in the doorway, wiping his hands on his apron. "What's up?"

"Think you can find me a plate of the special for this customer?"

"I think I can scrape one up." Carl grinned.

"I'm not hungry, you don't have to," the boy objected.

"Yeah, sure." Mac eyed him sardonically. As if he couldn't tell when somebody was half-faint from smelling the dissipating aromas

of lunch.

"I don't have any money. It all went for my bus ticket."

"I didn't ask for your money."

"It's his way of being nice, kid," Carl explained. "And it's no use to argue with him. Special coming up!"

"Send somebody upstairs for Ben, too," Mac told him. He sat down at the table.

The boy was looking around the room at the antique stable tools that hung on the walls, the schedules and stack of time sheets for the employees, the roll top desk piled with sample books for the catering side of the business, the cellular phone. He shook his head. "I still think I'm in the wrong place."

"We run four businesses out of the Thundershield Lodge, son. We run a hotel, with condominiums for seasonal visitors; we run a four star restaurant; we run a catering service for weddings, parties, and other social occasions; and we take curses off people foolish enough to get put under them. Now which one are you interested in?"

"The magic." It was a whisper.

"I thought so."

Carl brought a plate of the special, which happened to be trout with vegetables and rice, and a glass of ice tea. Mac watched the boy eat for a few minutes, and noted somebody had cared to bring him up with decent table manners. "What happened to your shoes?"

"I sold them to buy a bus ticket. They were good basketball shoes, like the players on TV. That's how it started. I wanted to play basketball professionally, like those guys. The Lakers and the Celtics, you know."

Mac didn't know. He didn't read the sports sections of any of the papers the hotel took, and he hadn't watched TV since Ed Sullivan died. He nodded anyway. It was typical. There was always something they wanted: money, a token of power, health, or a dream fulfilled. "Hard work's the only way to get that, son."

The boy was carefully scraping the last of the sauce off the plate with a roll when Ben Murphey came through the door from the back staircase. Ben looked a little like a younger Burl Ives and a little like Santa Claus, but the resemblance ended before it reached his personality. He glared at Mac. "Do you know that we have a wedding for 65 people to pull off in under a week?"

"Am I blind? Am I deaf? Of course I know," Mac retorted. He said to the boy, "Tell him your story." When he hesitated, Mac added, "Oh, he'll listen all right."

Ben's eyes narrowed at the implied threat, but he sat down at the table anyway. The boy took a deep breath and said, "My name is Anthony Rivera. I did a very dumb thing. Six months ago I paid a witch who lives in Albuquerque \$30 to make me a star basketball player. And now.... Now the witch says I owe more. I said I would get a job and pay more money, but the witch wants me to... to kill my sister. I said no, I won't do that, nobody can make me do that. So the witch is going to kill me, and I think something bad's going to happen to my sister anyway. She's only three." He looked down at the table, cheeks darkening with embarrassment.

"You're right." Ben sighed. "That was a dumb thing to do. Kids today.... There's always a catch in these deals. Don't you listen to your granny?" He picked up the antique crystal salt shaker and turned it around on the table thoughtfully. Mac knew that what he was actually doing was examining the boy's reflection in the facets, as he had examined it himself in the mirror above the entryway. No, you couldn't be too careful these days. Satisfied, Ben put the shaker down and said, "You sign a paper with this witch?"

"No." Anthony looked up, brightening. "Is that good?"

Ben shrugged. "Wouldn't matter if you had. I was just curious. You couldn't bargain your sister's life away if you wanted to. It isn't yours to give. Did you see an improvement in your basketball playing?"

"Yes, I made the team in my school, and we won our first two games."

"Anything spectacular? Anything that couldn't be explained by the fact that you probably practice your brains out?"

"Well... no, not really. And I do play every night almost, at the YMCA."

"I think his witch is a con artist," Ben said, looking over at Mac.

"I don't know." Mac shook his head. "Why threaten the sister?"

"A play for more money."

"He offered more money."

"So she's a sick con artist."

"He," Anthony corrected. "It's a man."

"He's a sick con artist."

"He has a witch bundle that talks in his house," the boy offered.

"Did you see it?" Ben asked.

"Yes."

"So he's a con artist with talent. I'll go down to Albuquerque and kick his ass, and he'll leave you alone."

"No," Mac said slowly, thinking of the hiker up in the pass. "I think I'll go."

Ben's jaw dropped. "The wedding—"

"Will you climb off me about that wedding? Mrs. Rosenbaum is a civilized woman who knows she can't rush a master craftsman like myself in the practice of one of my arts. She also knows she can't switch caterers at the last minute without going into Albuquerque, and taking second best. It's us or botulism surprise at the barbecue place next to the trailer park. So I have more than enough time." Mac leaned forward and tapped the table for emphasis. "You got

it, not money, not gifts or favors. That's how we protect our reputation." Ben looked over at Mac meaningfully. "We make our living off weddings, tourists, and skiers."

"I can cater a Jewish wedding standing on my head," Mac grumbled. "I'm going down to Albuquerque this afternoon, and if I get any more grief over it I might just do that wedding standing on my head, and you can explain my attitude to Mrs. Rosenbaum." The Florida issue had been a low blow and he hadn't gotten over it yet. "And when I went to Florida I hadn't had a vacation in 20 years," he added.

Ben sighed, resigned. "Be careful, you ain't been out on one of these in 20 years."

Mac's brows lowered menacingly. "You be careful. There's no retirement in this business."

A

fter rescheduling meetings with the baker, the salad chef, and Mrs. Rosenbaum, and leaving detailed instructions with Carl about dinner and breakfast tomorrow in case this took longer than he thought, Mac went next door to McCullar's Grocery and Ski Supply for a package of athletic socks and a plain blue pair of Keds from the sale bin for Anthony. Then he gassed up the Buick and started the drive down the pass for Albuquerque. Most of the time the drive took was spent explaining to Anthony who Muddy Waters was.

It was nearing twilight when Mac pulled over to the curb of a wide residential street and said, "This house?"

Anthony nodded.

This was one of the better neighborhoods. The houses were on big plots, most built in the Santa Fe style of adobe, with rock or cactus

gardens, or green lawns watered at great expense. The witch's house was a two-story adobe with a square tower rising out of one corner, modeled after the cliff houses at Mesa Verde. It had big windows and a wide red tile inlaid porch that should have been welcoming. It should have belonged to an artist, or to someone with a fancy for indoor flowering plants and lots of children. It was not the house of a *brujo*, or a con artist.

Now Mac regretted not stopping at Anthony's house to drop him off. He said, "It much of a walk from here to your place?"

"About five minutes. We live in the apartments three streets over."

Mac turned off the car and put the keys in his jacket pocket. "You go on and walk home. This may take a little longer than I thought." He hesitated a moment, then looked over at

the boy. "Don't you come back here. Ever. Not for any reason of life or death. You understand?"

Anthony nodded, biting his lip. "Yes."

They both got out of the car. The sun was descending into the Three Sisters in a haze of pink, orange, and red, and pools of shadow spread up the house's walls, but Mac could see a man's figure seated on the steps. He took the car's side mirror and twisted it until he could see the front of the house. The mirror failed to capture the man's reflection. Mac nodded to himself, reached back through the open window and picked up an empty soda bottle and its metal screw-cap. Anthony said, "Be careful, mister."

Mac walked up the stone-paved path, past graveled terraces, artfully arranged rocks, cacti, and yucca. The man stood up from the steps of the porch, hands in the pockets of his battered army jacket. He might have been white under all the dirt and dust and beard straggle; it was difficult to tell. A good copy of a street person, Mac decided, though the WWII army jacket had been a mistake. No, he didn't need a piece of rock crystal to look through to see this creature's true nature.

...he could see its eyes were empty
black pits. It grinned, showing brown
teeth, and said, "We been waiting for
a visitor, old man..."

too much to do here."

Mac had told Ben about seeing the hiker's shade on the trail this morning, and they had agreed the etheric gateway could use some extra watching. The Murphey family guarded the Way-Between-Worlds in the mountain that towered over Silverpan pass, controlling the fancies and spirits that leaked through, keeping worse from getting through at all. Mac added, "We're here to practice our other craft, not run the hotel. That's a sideline."

"Our 'other craft' didn't pay for your trip to Florida last year."

Anthony interrupted, "I can get a job and pay you every week." He was weak with relief that he was getting the help, that it only appeared to be a question of who and when.

"We can't take your money," Ben told him. "It's a little family rule we have."

"Why? We pay the *curandero* when he helps us."

"The *curandero* won't touch *mal puesta*, black magic, even to save someone's life, because he can't afford to have his reputation tarnished by having anything to do with it. Well, we'll take on a case that involves *mal puesta*, but we won't take payment of any kind for

As he came closer, he could see its eyes were empty black pits.

It grinned, showing brown teeth, and said, "We been waiting for a visitor, old man, we just didn't expect you."

The smell of death weighed down the air and made Mac wish for a can of Lysol. He needed no more evidence that the witch who had threatened Anthony had nothing to do with the native magic of the Southwest, the hybrid magic of the pueblo Indians and the Spanish settlers, than this. There was no magic on earth that could fashion a sending like this to speak to him. It had come from the gateway. He said, "I don't talk to the hired help when I'm on business. Why don't you step out of the way so we can get on with this?" He was holding the empty soda bottle in his right hand, his thumb over the bottle's mouth.

It said, "You are the hired help, you old bastard."

Mac said, "Vulgarity is its own reward," and shook the empty soda bottle and dropped it in front of the thing.

The shade took a startled step back, then dissolved into formless color, swirling around like a dust devil. One end was drawn slowly down to the bottle and then the rest was sucked inside with a little pop of displaced air. Mac grabbed up the bottle and screwed the metal cap back on tight, then dropped it into the trashcan near the porch. "Hope they recycle you into something useful."

He walked up the steps and, since he was evidently already expected, opened the door.

The entryway was high and arched, finished smooth and tan with more adobe, decorated with Acoma and Zuni pottery tucked into wall niches. The witch bundle Anthony had mentioned hung near the corner where the short hall opened out into the big two-story living room. It was made of shredded rattlesnake skin and coyote hair, and cackled at Mac in a high thin voice as he passed by.

Big blackened antique rafters crossed the high ceiling, and there was more pueblo pottery, as well as Navajo blankets and sheepskin rugs, and Spanish colonial and American-victorian antiques. If this was a friendly visit Mac would have admired the room mightily, but knowing a gateway wizard was here he could only think it represented booty. Looted treasure, symbolizing the local magic the gate wizard meant to eat out of the deserts and the mountains.

Mac didn't like the word "magic." That word implied something outside reality instead of at the core of it. But there was no other word for the music that moved the world, that people could hear if they tried hard enough, and no one could understand you if you didn't use their words for things. This being from outside wouldn't understand anything at all.

A step on the hardwood floor behind him and Mac turned to see the man himself. The creatures on the other side of the gate were shapeshifters; here their power was limited, and they were bound into whatever shape they had taken to come into this world. This one was Hispanic and nearing middle-age, because that was what Anthony or anyone else he meant to fool would have expected of a *brujo*. The gate wizard said, "You've sprung my trap too soon. I was hoping for Ben Murphey, but I suppose he'll come after you." He paused, his smile laced with malice, "You're Aristide Quentain DuBois."

So I've walked myself into a trap. But they wanted Ben. Well, they got me instead. Mac's smile was dry. "You must have a friend down at the Albuquerque DMV. I don't hide my true name, I just don't go by it around here. And you don't want Ben to come after me. He's not as civilized about these things as I am." He was willing to bet he hadn't met this particular visitor from the gate before. The ones he had run into in the past had neither the desire nor the ability to make his acquaintance again. But that had been a long time ago, and this creature was young and strong, he could feel that much.

It said, "I'll have all of you eventually, so I suppose the order of precedence doesn't matter."

He knows as little about us when we're at home as we know about him, Mac thought. "Well, you try."

The gate wizard smiled, then Mac was somewhere else.

The room he stood in now was a small closed-in box of white-plastered adobe, lit by firelight. The heat was intense, the air thick with

He felt the bite of the glass on his fore-
arms and then his fingers were wet
with blood, and he was moving faster
and faster into the darkened sky.

woodsmoke, human sweat, and the odors of sickness. He swayed, dizzied as much by the atmosphere as by the sudden transition.

A hand on his back steadied him.

Mac took a deep breath. *First off, where the hell am I?* He seemed to be standing with a crowd of other men, watching a ceremony. The small wooden altar was set up against the far wall; laid out in front of it were the corn fetishes, medicine bowls, flints, the other paraphernalia of a ritual cure in a pueblo. Which pueblo? Mac wondered. *Acoma, maybe.* The medicine men in the room were dressed only in breechcloths, their long hair tied back and black bands painted across their eyes. Mac looked down at himself and realized he was one of them, that was why no one had reacted to his appearance. The shock of that made the room blur, and reality trembled.

For a moment he was almost free, snapping up through time and back into his own body, but then the room solidified around him again. The gate wizard was holding him here, whether he was really in the past or if this was only some kind of a mental projection. And if it was the past, how far back? With the room stripped of furnishings and the men dressed only in the traditional ceremonial gear, it was impossible to tell if this was the 1800s or the 1950s.

The patient was a middle-aged man laying on a blanket in the center of the room, shuddering with pain. An old doctor, his body thin almost to the point of emaciation but with tough stringy tendons and muscles like small rocks standing out under brown skin, was performing the cure. He worked an eagle feather over the patient's body, flicking it back and forth across the man's stomach and chest. Then the doctor leaned over a bowl and spit something — stones, thorns, or pieces of bone — into it.

Somebody with skill, power, and no conscience had introduced foreign objects into the patient's body that were slowly killing him. The doctor was working them out and into his own body with the eagle feather, then spitting them out into the refuse bowl nearby. Mac had always figured that nine out of ten of the witchcraft incidents documented in the pueblos and Spanish villages had been the products of superstition and hysteria, like the Salem witch trials. This was not one of those nine out of ten.

He had never seen this ceremony performed. He had learned his craft years ago from Ben's grandfather, when Mac was a young man and had first been drawn up into Silverpan Pass by a calling he couldn't understand. The magic the Murphey family used had diverged so much from the magic of the pueblos that it had become a thing in itself, and bore only passing resemblances to the native craft.

The doctor was leaning over the bowl to spit out the latest

object when he gasped, and started to choke.

The others moved forward, trying to help, trying to work the object out with the eagle feathers, but nothing helped. Wheezing sounds were coming out of the doctor's throat, and he was desperate to breathe. Then he doubled over, clutching his midsection.

The gate wizard was using this to learn. Introducing foreign objects into a human body was one of the basics of *mal puesta*. It didn't matter. Mac couldn't stand by and watch the *curandero* die from the thing he'd removed from the patient's body. He gave a mental nod to the gate wizard. *Point one to you*, he thought.

Mac pushed forward through the others and said, "Hold him down."

They complied, pinning the struggling man to the hard-packed dirt of the floor. Mac fumbled in the bowl of instruments and picked out an obsidian blade, a hand-chipped circle of black volcanic glass, wondering if he knew how to do this. Yes, he did know. Now was no time for doubts.

He could feel the black glass radiating power into his hand. There was no spell to say: you focused, turned the right corner in your mind, and there it was. He made a slit in the man's belly, the obsidian cutting as clean as a medical laser. No blood welled up from the long deep wound, and he parted the flesh carefully. He could see that a small bundle of cactus thorns had worked its way down to the stomach and lodged there.

Mac gently dislodged the thorns, tossing them one by one into the refuse bowl. The only person in the room still breathing was the old doctor, who was staring determinedly at the ceiling. The others were watching in amazed silence, afraid to move and disrupt what he was doing. Even the man they had been trying to cure had sat up to watch.

Mac removed the last thorn, saw that the man's heart was still beating strongly, and pushed the incision closed with exquisite care. He rubbed the flat side of the obsidian blade along the wound, the skin closing beneath it with only a faint pink line left. He finished and set the blade aside, only a well-polished piece of obsidian again.

The doctor coughed tentatively, and rubbed his throat. He nodded his thanks, and the room gave a collective sigh of relief.

Mac nodded back, and his eyes happened to meet those of the watching patient. It was the gate wizard.

Darkness closed around Mac like the door of an unlit room slamming shut. Then he was standing in the living room of the Albuquerque house again, back in his own body, dizzy from the swift transition. The gate wizard was watching him with an expression half curious and half angry. An alien being looking through human eyes. Mac said, "And what did that teach you? How to cause the most pain with the least effort?"

The wizard's eyes narrowed. "I know all I need to know about pain. You are the one who doesn't understand. We live in a void, we need light, we need heat—"

Mac dismissed this with a shake of his head. "Good try, but I know too much about you. In 1850 when the gate out of this world first opened, if one of you had walked up to old Nathan Murphey and asked honestly for help, he would've given it to you. There have been a lot of years pass, and a lot of you trying to break through that gate. If just one of you had come to talk instead of coming to fight, things could be different. But you don't bring bargains, you bring war." Mac stared hard at the gate wizard, who looked so human but wasn't. "God Almighty, man, here I am. Talk to me. Make me an offer this world can live with."

The wizard's face changed for a moment, moving through a variety of emotions Mac couldn't decipher. Then it said, "Yes, you do know too much about us."

Mac's feet left the ground and he flung his arms over his head, just

in time to protect himself as he slammed into the glass skylight in the roof. He felt the bite of the glass on his forearms and then his fingers were wet with blood, and he was moving faster and faster into the darkened sky.

Mac called his own power, wrapping himself in fire and air. Now his opponent couldn't release him a few thousand feet over the New Mexican desert and let nature take its course. It was night now and the rush of the wind was cold as the gate wizard's power drove him like a blown leaf over the city lights of Albuquerque and into the southeast. Mac hadn't flown under his own power in years, since he considered it a terrible waste of skill unless there was an emergency, and he had almost forgotten what it was like. He caught glimpses of the fainter glow of small towns, headlights briefly illuminating the smooth scars of highways. He tested the wizard's hold on him, but was careful not to exert his full strength.

Suddenly the headlong flight slowed, turned downward. Mac hadn't considered the possibility of being rammed into the desert's surface but in this form he knew it wouldn't do him much damage. Then he recognized the muddy gray band rushing up toward him for what it was.

Mac crashed through the surface of the Rio Grande as if it were a mirror, water-shards scraping at him like the real glass of the skylight as he fell past. He was still breathing, not choking on dirty water, and that surprised him. He landed on the muddy bottom to a chorus of screams from a surprised gathering of *brujas*. Mac dismissed the fire with a shake of his head, and stood up unsteadily. He turned slowly, trying to take in his surroundings.

From this angle the river was a long wide canyon, high walls stretching up to meet the gray surface of the water overhead, muddy bottom covered with tangled weeds, sunken logs, tin cans, and other garbage. There had been legends about witches congregating at the bottom of the Rio Grande, but they were just that — legends. The gate wizard had made an air bubble on the riverbottom; Mac could see its boundary a few hundred yards off. It was a darker gray-green, and there were shapes moving past it that were probably curious fish.

There were about ten *brujas* sitting on the wreck of an old powerboat that was sunk half into the mud, and they had been playing *con-*

The wizard collapsed to the floor,
writhing... An almost human mouth
formed just long enough to howl an
inarticulate curse.

chanita, to judge from the cards that had scattered in their fright. "Oh, it's only him," one of them said in Spanish, and started collecting the cards again. All of them were old, and most wore the long black dresses that were the traditional wardrobe of widowed grannies, except for one nonconformist dressed in a multicolored bathrobe and beaded necklaces.

Mac's eyes went back to the top of the bubble. *God damn interfering... Do you really think you can keep me here like those helpless old brujas?* He raised his hands, made his power into a spear of contained energy and pushed it against the spell forming the bubble. The boundary holding out the river trembled, and 20 feet away a hole formed and water gushed through like a gully-washing rainfall. The *brujas* shrieked again and Mac stopped his barely begun effort. Yes,

he could break the boundary, but he could tell from the structure of the spell that the bubble was augmented with a trap that kept any prisoners from using their power over the air to fly to the surface.

The bubble shivered again, but the water slowed to a trickle. The wizard had gone much further than Mac had thought. If it had this much control over the earthly elements already, there wasn't much left for it to learn.

"Mac?" a familiar voice said, "You okay?"

He looked around and saw one of the *bruja*s coming toward him, stumbling a little on the uneven ground. He squinted and recognized Rosa, who ran a touristy *botanica* in Albuquerque. She was wearing old jeans and a sweatshirt, her long graying hair caught back in a ponytail. She was staring at him, her eyes shocked, and he realized he was dripping blood onto the filthy river bottom.

The glass had sliced through the sleeves of his jacket in two places, but the cuts weren't deep, just messy. Mac wiped the blood off on the scarf Rosa handed him. He was lucky he hadn't left his jacket in the car. "Just a byproduct of the war," he told her.

"He did that to you? Oh man, are we in trouble."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, honey. I'm glad you're looking well too. How did he get you?"

She sighed. "I started getting the idea something funny was in the air, you know? I thought it was a new *bruja* looking for trouble. All the regulars had been pretty quiet." She nodded toward the covey of old women playing cards on the wrecked boat. "That was because most of them were stuck down here. Then this strange man walks into my shop, and before I had a chance to do anything I was here."

Mac nodded, preoccupied. "Yeah, he was rounding up you ladies for practice, trying it out to work up to Ben and me."

"I thought about trying to break out, but the spell won't let us fly. I can swim a little, but most of the others can't."

Even if they managed to break out of their prison, the *bruja*s would be faced with the uninviting prospect of swimming up to the surface and fighting the current to the bank. Mac considered his options and wasn't happy with the result. "He's the strongest wizard who's ever made the crossover, the strongest I've ever been up against."

Rosa bit her lip. "Mac, I don't want to spend the rest of my life cooped up in this mud pit."

"Rosa, if I don't break me a gate wizard tonight, it'll be a mighty short life for both of us." *It's time to get clever*, he decided. Mac cleared a small space on the ground by kicking weeds and debris aside. Then he sat on his heels and scooped up a double-handful of mud on the cleared area, formed it into a rough head-shape, and made eyeholes and a mouth with his thumbs. Rosa had squatted down next to him, and now she said, "What's this?"

"He likes to talk. I'm giving him an opportunity."

They didn't have long to wait.

A distorted, craggy-featured face quickened into life in the mud. The gate wizard.

"We need to bargain," Mac said.

"Do we?"

Rosa started at the sound of its voice. The creature might have been standing on the muddy flat next to them.

"We do," Mac told it. "Ben will be coming after me by this time tomorrow. If you think you can handle him as easy as you have me, you're much mistaken." He saw Rosa glance sideways at him, but ignored her.

"What do you have to offer?"

"It's what you have to offer," Mac said. "You've learned how to curse a body with thorns, and you've learned the power of the air, but you don't have the most important skill. You can't shapechange in our world." The mud face couldn't betray emotion, but Mac thought he could sense the rise of greed. Out of the corner of his eye he saw that Rosa's face didn't change, and that she expressed her emotion only by blinking rapidly. "You'll need it to deal with Ben. I'll teach it to you, if you'll let me and the *bruja*s out of here, and leave the Thundershield Lodge alone."

There was a disapproving rustle near him, and Mac glanced up to see that he had an audience of interested *bruja*s gathered around

him, like a pack of grandmother crows in their black dresses. God help him if they should start to offer advice.

"You'd betray your master?" the mud face said.

"There are secrets of power in the Lodge he won't ever give to me, because I'm not his kind. Right, Rosa?"

Rosa nodded. All the *bruja*s nodded too.

"A bargain, then. I'll let you leave the river, but you must bring me the secret before I release the women."

"That's a deal." Mac smashed the mud face back into the dirt.

Rosa shook her head and let out her breath in a worried sigh. "Shapechanging? Mac, what are you thinking...."

One of the *bruja*s snorted and said, "We don't always see eye to eye with you, but we didn't give you away because we know you won't leave us here if you get out. But you're a damn fool to give that bastard monster the shapechange, even as part of a trick."

"Oh, I'm going to give it to him all right." Mac stood and dusted his knees.



Mac crossed the sky like a falling star, coming down to the house's graveled yard a will-o-the-wisp, and turning back into himself in time for his feet to touch the pavement. He glanced around the quiet street, and started when he saw Anthony sitting crosslegged on the car's hood, waiting in the dark. "Boy, did I tell you to go home?"

"I wanted to see if you were okay," the wide-eyed Anthony replied. "What are you going to do to him now?"

Can't tell these children anything, Mac thought. At least it looked like he was winning from the outside. He took his pocketknife and cut off one of the yucca stalks, then plaited it into a hoop about eight inches in diameter.

He stuffed the hoop into his pocket and walked back up to the house. Third time was the charm. And if the gate wizard won this confrontation, it would decipher the spell Mac had woven into the hoop and it would know one of the most powerful arts there was. Mac could've told himself that the wizard would have learned it eventually even if he didn't take this risk, but he was too old not to recognize that as a rationalization, especially since it wasn't a very good one.

The front door was open and the witch bundle silent in the foyer. The room was lit only by the moon and starlight coming in through the windows and the shattered skylight. Glass littered the living room floor, glittering like fairy dust. For a long moment Mac stood still, letting his eyes adjust. Then he made out the darker shadow near the end of the room: the gate wizard standing silently.

"Well?" it said.

Sweat stung the cuts on his forearms. He had told Ben there was no retirement in this business, but he hadn't taken his own advice. He had let himself get slack, and that had allowed this to happen.

Well, he would make up for it now.

"You'll need this." He crossed the darkened room, stopping about three feet from the wizard, and held out the plaited hoop.

The wizard stepped forward, but hesitated.

Mac said, "Don't trust me? I'm the one with the most to lose." Then the sick sense of the presence of *mal puesta* overwhelmed him, and he felt the thorns start to form in his stomach. For a second he wanted to pretend he hadn't sensed the spell and continue to hold out the hoop to the gate wizard, anything to get it to take those last few steps toward him. No, if it thought he was lying that would be disaster. Mac let himself give way to the pain, doubling over and clumsily backing away a few steps. His imagination helped by presenting him with a vivid picture of what the thorns were doing to his stomach lining.

The wizard strode forward, eager, and reached down for the hoop. At the last moment Mac pushed it at him, slipping it up over the creature's arm.

It stumbled away from him, clawing at the hoop, its human form

Continued on page 79

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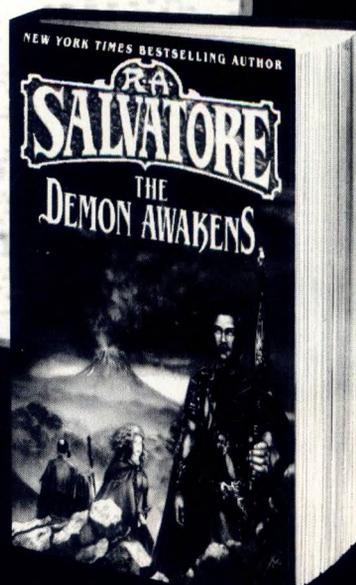
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*The meeting of new gods and old can crush
a world or give it new life.*

The **Horse** *from the* **Sea**

BY KIRSTEN M. CORBY
Illustration by Carol Heyer

BRISEIS SEADAUGHTER SAT ON THE wall built by giants, looking out. Before her were the tilled fields and the wild hills of the City's lands. On the far horizon, a narrow band of shining light, was that which she sought: the Sea. At her back, north of the City, lay all of the Land, rugged with mountains and carved by narrow inlets of the Sea. And north of the Land, beyond the last and highest mountains, lay the Desert, out of which the Strangers came, and at their head, the Conqueror.

They called themselves the Sons of the Wind, and although they were both blasphemous and mad, their dominion lay over the Land like a blight. They had come a-warring from the north with their horses and their iron swords, and even with the love of the land and the grace of the elders the People could not stand against them, against their lust for green grass and cool water, for all the good things of the Land. They came at the behest of their leader, he who was first into every captured town and whose sword was the most bloodied — the Conqueror, most terrible of all, who said he burned the Cities and tore the very Earth not for greed or love of human pain, but for his God.

And now the Conqueror, who called himself the Friend of God, was here in White-Flowers-Grow-from-the-Walls, the southernmost and last of the Cities. Uncontested he rode through the giant-built gates, to offer his unholy choice — accept the Will of God, or die.

That his wild tribes would run through the City's streets, that his foot would filthy the marble steps of the temples, grieved Briseis, for

though she was not of the Lady, she was priestess and should have been able to stop him.

But the old songs and prayers that had once strengthened the giant-built walls worked no longer. And to resist the invaders with only the naked stone of the walls, with flint-tipped arrows and pots of boiling oil, was to ask only death. Death for the People, for the City, but worse, for the Land, the very Earth, which the farcomers of the dead northern sands could never know how to care for and love. And so the People swung open the carved wooden gates, receiving the alien God so that in their secret hearts they could continue to serve their Goddess, who was the Land itself.

Briseis could not bear to see the Conqueror and his filthy horde receive the service of White-Flowers-Grow, the fairest City of the Land, and so, though she was priestess and should have been there, she had come to the outer wall to face the Sea and pray for a miracle, for deliverance. But on the moist wind from the south there was no answer, no word.

She turned. Below her in the City metal bells were ringing, and the howling horns of the Desertmen were sounding as they celebrated their final victory over the Land. In the white houses, the People huddled behind shuttered windows awaiting they knew not what, or else served the victors in the wine shops and common rooms. And in their hearts they wept, that the Earthmother, the Corn-daughter, the Sealord, and all the nameless gods of the wild places and the human places heard them not.

IT WAS TIME TO GO DOWN, TO LEAVE THE WALLS AND BE PRIESTESS and take up the griefs of the People. Briseis Seadaughter picked her way down the great unmortared stones of the now-useless walls and went into the streets of the City. She went by the deserted backways toward the heart of White-Flowers, to the place where the strangers would be thickest and the People's grief most great: the place of law where sat the beautiful stone temples and the fresco-walled House of the Queen.

As she rounded a corner into the sacred square the noise increased, and suddenly something was crashing down the street at her, something huge and black that snorted and stamped, and bore a man upon its back. The thing bucked and heaved over her, glaring at her with bloodied eyes and foam-flecked mouth agape, and the bearded, robed man who bestrode it yelled in some unknown tongue and slashed at Briseis with a rawhide quirt. Briseis shrieked and fell to the ground, cowering before the plunging legs of the monster. The rider gave a bark of harsh laughter and lashed his mount, which leaped forward, hooves drumming like death on the stones of the street.

Shivering, Briseis pulled herself up from the ground. An old woman sat in a doorway, watching her, a broken distaff in her hand.

"Grandmother, what —?"

"The Strangers' beasts," the old one answered. "A horse. Where have you been that you have not yet seen a horse, priestess?"

Holy Mother, a horse was a very demon! Was this why the northmen had conquered, because they could bend evil spirits to their will? Briseis did not answer the old woman, but moved forward into the Place of Law.

She quickly turned and entered the low green-marbled building on the left, which was the temple of the Seagod, the House of her Father. It was dark and cool inside as if underwater; the oil lamps of the sanctuary had been allowed to go out. She should relight them. But instead, she knelt on the stone steps before the plain slab of the altar, which housed a bowl of seawater and a chunk of naked rock, signs of the God in his two aspects, the Sealord and the Earthshaker, the angry force who brought earthquakes to tumble the Cities of men.

Briseis laid her forehead against the cool stone of the top step. "Father," she prayed, "help us." For a long time she beseeched the God who was in truth if not in fact her Divine Father. But as before, the God did not answer her, either by voice or touch of seawind or trembling of the earth.

Doubt and anger assailed Briseis's heart. Oh, why did the Earth-

shaker not strike, tearing down White-Flowers-Grow-from-the-Walls and burying the invaders in the rubble? Was the lone Desert God of the Conqueror stronger, then, than the Mother and Her consort? Then Briseis cowered, shocked at herself. To see the City destroyed was not a priestess's wish, and to doubt the Mother and the Father was to doubt herself.

But the Sealord did not even rebuke her lack of faith. All was silent in the temple. Briseis arose and went out of the temple into the empty square.

It was now past dark. The carousing of the victorious barbarians had moved from the streets and squares to the warm-hearthed rooms of the City's houses and taverns. The Place of Law was empty. Silently Briseis moved across it to the Lady's great white temple. If the God would not answer her, perhaps the Goddess would.

On the steps of the temple was a knot of ancient priestesses, huddled to one side and swathed in their white robes like a flock of ragged seabirds, clucking and chattering softly, anxiously among themselves, and pointing. For there was someone else upon the steps, too, someone robed all in black, who did not belong in that holy place.

It was a man. One of the Strangers, bundled in his dark Desert robes and reclining upon the white marble steps. As Briseis drew close she could see that he was asleep, his head propped against the foot of a pillar, arms folded across his chest and legs crossed at the ankle. Below him on the steps, half unsheathed, lay his great curved killing sword.

Fury leapt in Briseis. How dare he profane the Lady's house so, treating it no better than a common tavern, and leaving his tools of murder to lay about as well! The smouldering rage within her burst into hot flame. She could not defend the City, but in this small way she could defend the temple.

She stalked over to the gaggle of dowager priestesses. "Allow me, Grandmother," she said, plucking a stout wooden staff from the trembling grasp of one. She stepped to the Stranger and dealt him a tremendous blow across the legs.

The crones shrieked like rooks, and the Stranger was instantly awake and up, the sword unsheathed and hovering before her eyes. Briseis fell back a step, but did not let go the staff.

"How dare you defile the temple so!" she stammered, fear and anger nearly freezing her tongue. "You are not fit to mount these steps, let alone lie down on them! And take your killing blades away from here! Your kind may rule this City now, but the Place of Law has no room for you."

The sword moved, and the old priestesses screamed, cries of "Mother help us!" and "Mercy, Master, mercy!" intermingling. One old woman scuttled forward and threw herself at the Stranger's feet, wailing, "Forgive her, Lord, she knows not who you are." The man quickly checked his strike and lowered his saber. The tip grated on the marble steps.

"Don't you, then?" he said.

His voice was deep as the earthquake, and he was a creature all of black — black hair and eyes, black boots and Desert robes. His head was covered with a turban of fine black cloth, pinned with a deep red jewel. The hands that held the mighty sword were as huge as the voice was deep. He seemed as merciless as a killing wind off the Desert, as wild as a horse, as powerful as the Sea.

Briseis quailed, and her grip on the staff weakened, for she knew now who this must be.

"Kneel down, daughter," the old woman said. "Kneel down and beg for your life before Jereth bar-El, the Son of the Wind."

"The Conqueror," Briseis whispered, and defeated, she knelt.

"So I am called," said Jereth bar-El. He sheathed his sword: The sound was like a snake's voice. "Your rudeness is outweighed by your courage, girl." He sat down on the steps and rubbed his shins where her blow had stung them. "And by the fact that I now own this City and everything in it, and can sleep where I choose."

"The mighty Conqueror is too cheap to rent a room at an inn?" Briseis blurted, made giddy by relief that he had not killed her on the spot. The old priestess moaned and scurried back to her sisters.

“Father,” she prayed, “help us.” For a long time she beseeched the god who was in truth if not in fact her divine father. But as before, the god did not answer her, either by voice or touch of seawind or trembling of the earth.



Jereth bar-El frowned. “I need rent nothing. If it were my will, I could sleep in the very bedchamber of the Queen of this City. But we men of the Desert are not used to smoky oil lamps and the four walls of houses. We prefer to live in the open, touched by the wind, and under the eye of God.”

“And you think your God looks down upon the Lady’s temple?” Briseis asked. “Is it that he only looks, and cannot enter, being nothing but a spirit of the sand, who has no place in the living world?”

The Conqueror slapped his knee. “Enough questions!” he roared. “And you do not well to mock the Lord of Hosts. Who are you, woman, whose tongue is sharper than your wits?”

“I am called Briseis Seadaughter, priestess of the Earthshaker.”

“Seadaughter? What means this strange name?”

“In the Cities of the Land, it is not so strange,” she answered. “My Mother was priestess, a bride of the Sea, and so I am His child.”

“Priestess,” he said. “Ah, a temple prostitute, who sleeps with all comers.”

Briseis’s cheeks flamed. She had never heard the word before, but the intent was plain enough.

“The God comes to his priestesses in the form of their lovers,” she spat, “for if he were to show himself unchanged to any woman it would be more than she could bear.”

The barbarian laughed, “What nonsense,” and Briseis bit the insides of her cheeks in anger. Why bother to converse with such a heathen?

“Is the Sea so powerful, then?” he asked, and Briseis forgot her anger and stared at him.

“Have you not seen the Sea, Conqueror?”

“I have seen the many little bays and inlets that cut across this rugged Land. I have seen the light of the water shining on the horizon. But no, I have not seen the Sea.”

Briseis raised her finger and pointed at him, and she felt the weight of prophecy upon her.

“You cannot hope to rule this Land, O Son of the Wind, unless you know the Sea. For the Sea is the consort of the Land, the Sea feeds the Land, and the two are one. Lest your people love the Sea as the Sea loves the Land, you shall never be masters here.”

The knot of aged priestesses gasped, and the Conqueror frowned at her, for he knew the look and the words of a sibyl when faced with one. But he said only, “Then show me the Sea, priestess.” And he called for his great black horse, to ride out at night to face the Sea.

The huge animal came plunging up, led by two grooms, and Briseis’s heart failed her again. But when Jereth bar-El spoke to it in soft words and put his hand upon its nose, it grew quiet and its eyes were mild.

The Conqueror turned to Briseis where she stood staring. “If my People do not know the Sea, then yours do not know the Horse,” he said. “Come.” He drew her forward and placed her hand under his upon the beast’s neck, stroking.

The hair was coarse but slick, and the smell of the Horse was strong but not foul. The animal snorted softly, watching the woman from one eye.

“’Tis not a demon after all,” Briseis said wonderingly. The man looked surprised. “Indeed, no. The Horse is a noble beast, that serves

from love, not fear.” He slapped its neck. “This one is my brother, also a Son of the Wind.” With a powerful leap he was astride, and then he reached down, and with a rush and a gasp Briseis was pulled aloft and set before him on the saddle. “Tonight we ride to the Sea,” the Conqueror told his men, then touched his heels to the horse’s flanks, and they were gone.

It was like being at Sea in a coracle during a hurricane storm. Briseis would have screamed, but the man’s arm clasped her with a grip like iron, back against his muscled chest, and his voice said in her ear, “Feel it, do not fight it. Know the rhythm of the ride.” And there was a rhythm, a surging up and down and ever forward, like the incoming tide, and her body bent itself to it even as her mind

FOR THE PEOPLE, IT WAS A HALF-DAY’S WALK FROM the City to the Sea, but this Horse could make the journey in a bare hour. The darkness and the speed with which the Earth rushed by made it all seem not real; there was only the Horse that plunged endlessly under her, and the man that held her.

At moonrise they stopped on a wooded hill to let the Horse breathe. “This is a rich Land,” Jereth bar-El said, gazing at the gnarled olive trees around them, hung heavy with fruit all silver in the moonlight. “Green beyond the dreams of Desertmen. Ripe for the taking, like this fruit,” and he plucked a fat olive from the nearest tree.

Briseis bowed her head, her grief rising anew. “What can a sacker of Cities know of love for the Land?” she whispered.

The Conqueror smiled, a sight both gentle and terrible. “Only a man of the Desert, a child of the sandstorm and the killing sun, can truly love the green Lands. For only he knows their real worth.”

“You razed the City Red-Rock-at-the-Heart,” Briseis pressed. “Smashed the walls. Sowed the Earth with salt!”

“That City fought me,” said Jereth bar-El, “they defied the Will of God. I had no choice.”

“No choice!” the priestess cried. “No choice to kill, to burn the temple square?”

“Silence, woman!” the Conqueror snapped. “Think you that I loved it? No! What worth are dead Cities to a king? What good, people made sick by hate? What use to make a Desert from a garden? None!”

Briseis twisted in the saddle to stare at him. “Do you grieve, then, Conqueror, for the death of the Cities and the salting of the Earth?”

Sober, he continued, and he looked full into her eyes. “Aye, priestess, I grieve. But God has spoken to me. This Land is ours to rule, and no walls will stand before His Will.”

Briseis could no longer meet his eyes. “Perhaps you are not cruel,” she said. “but surely you are mad.”

He laughed. “Why, because I hear my God? Does not your Sealord speak to you?”

“He speaks,” she answered, “he used to speak. But no, you Strangers are mad with pride. For this Land belongs to the Lady, and is no God’s to give or take.”

“Pray, then, why did your City open its gates? Why do you ride

**“...There can be no Land without the Sea.
The Sea sends storms to water the Land.
Dead fish buried with the sown seeds feeds the earth
and makes the crops grow tall...”**



with me tonight? Where, priestess, is your Lady now?”

Briseis hung her head, for surely she had no answer.

“Even your Lady knows it,” he said. “Our time has come, and we will not be denied.” He laughed in his beard. “We ride!” And the Horse plunged down the hill.

Over another hill they rode, and another, past fields and groves and a tiny village hunkered down in the night. Then they topped the crest of the last hill, and there it was.

The Conqueror reined the Horse up sharply, and Briseis heard the breath harsh in his throat. “What is it?” he breathed in a bare whisper, as if he could not know.

Briseis smiled. “I told you,” she said. “Thalassa. The Sea.”

At the foot of the hill was a ruff of salt-loving plants then a dark strip of beach, and beyond, the ocean, wider than the world and traveling ever outward, ever southward, to finally touch and mate the curving bowl of night. The moon was just past full and the endless water was all silvered by its light like a queen’s mirror. The water was ever-moving; an infinity of tiny waves rising and subsiding as if in answer to the moon’s unspoken call. At the shore the motion was greater; the surf rushed in and rushed in, coiling and twisting and speaking to itself like a live thing; and in the waves the million tiny soft-bodied creatures that the People called the Moonchildren flowed like oil and gave a spectral light of their own.

Briseis turned in the saddle. Behind her the man was staring, staring at the vastness of the Sea, and his breath came shallow and fast. Briseis felt a flash of triumph at what she saw. For the friend of God was afraid. Then Briseis knew the truth of the prophecy she had spoken, for if he was afraid of the Sea, afraid of its storms and its tides and its depths, how could he hold the Land, which was turned and twined with it so intimately?

Briseis touched the Horse’s neck. “Ride down,” she told it and the man. “Ride down to the shore.”

Slowly, reluctantly, they obeyed.

On the slick flat sand where the waves came up they stopped. The horse snorted and sidestepped to feel the surf come up and wash its hooves, and the man tasted the salt spray on his lips for the first time, and the woman spread her hands and said a prayer to her Holy Father. A spoken prayer of ritual greeting, and a silent prayer of thanks, that he had made the Conqueror afraid.

Jereth bar-El stared out at the Sea. “A Desert,” he said. “It is like a Desert of water.”

“Not so,” the priestess said, “not so!” Forgetting her fear, she slid down the black shoulder of the Horse into the surf. Heedless of the water soaking her gown, she strode the beach to a tidal pool trapped in a nest of rocks. She bent, and searched, and came back to him with her hands full of the fruits of the Sea.

Green weed that could be washed and steamed and eaten with rice; a spiny urchin to be baked over hot coals and cracked open for the tender meat inside; a sand dollar for beauty and for a love-gift; and a murex shell which gave the purple dye for the robes of queens and sibyls.

These she showed him, and she told him the secrets of these gifts of her Father. He ate the raw weed, touched the soft shapeless flesh of the living murex nestled in its heavy shell, and pricked his finger

on the urchin’s bristling spines. And she told him more, of creatures too big to be imagined by men, of dragons that swam in the darkest depths, and of the Seapeople who came up to the rocks some moonlit nights and sang music too sweet for mortal ears to bear.

But all this time he sat high upon his Horse above the waves, one hand always clenched upon the reins, and his feet quite dry. Until Briseis reached up and took his strong and calloused hand in hers. “Come, new Lord of the Land,” she said, not without a dark delight at his fear. “Come and meet the Sea.”

And so at the sibyl’s touch he dismounted and half-slid, half-leaped into the surf. Briseis waded deeper into the water, pulling him beside her, their hands still held tight. His great cape tangled about his legs in the tide, and he unclasped it and cast it from him like the past. Together they faced the dark and endless plain of Sea.

He felt the hungry suck and drag of the waves. Farther out they walked until they came to the deep wave-carved drop-off, the end of the beach. Briseis knew it well, but the Desertman could not imagine. He stepped out once more, the ground fell away and he went under as if dragged. Briseis clasped him and drew him up, gasping and shouting, his beard streaming water.

He stumbled back a good distance, dragging the priestess with him. “How deep does it go?” he whispered, his voice tinged with awe and fear. “How deep, woman?”

“Forever,” she told him. “It never stops. Forever down and forever around. The world floats on it.”

He took her hand again and clasped it painfully. “Aye, priestess, I believe it. Even the Desert is not so . . . huge.” He wiped the beads of water from his face.

His turban was all askew from the dunking. He pulled it off distractedly, heedless of the pleats and the jeweled pin. Briseis took it from him, twining her hands in the fine cloth, all ruined now from the salt.

“The Earth is cradled in the embrace of the Sea like a child. Like a lover,” she told him, looking into his black eyes. “That, Desertman, is why you must know it. There can be no Land without the Sea. The Sea sends storms to water the Land. Dead fish buried with the sown seeds feed the Earth and make the crops grow tall. The Sea makes salt to season our meat. Even if the crops fail, the bounty of the Sea never does. Do you understand, Conqueror?”

“I do,” Jereth bar-El said, with the air of a man who has seen a Holy Mystery. “If not for the Sea, the Land would be a Desert.”

The priestess clenched her hands in the black cloth. “Indeed,” she answered. “Indeed.” She raised her head and looked outward. The wind streamed in her hair. “Your God of the sands cannot help you here.”

The man’s lips thinned. “He is with me even now,” he said. “He is Lord of the Four Quarters; He is everywhere.”

Briseis laughed. She raised her hand and spread it toward the waves. The wind picked up, snapping their sodden clothing. “My Father is Lord of the Four Quarters also. Look at him. He is everywhere!”

And then, as if at her cry, there came rolling up from nowhere a monstrous wave, curled over at the top and white with foam, which towered above them and then smashed down, crushing them under

a dragon's weight of water. Spun and tumbled like driftwood, Briseis burned with exultant triumph. For the God had surely heard her, and this was his wordless reply.

They came up together, choking and gasping, cast up like stormwreck on the verge of the beach. Briseis turned to the man beside her.

"That is the power of the Sea," she said.

"It is a power almost as great as my God's," he said, sighing, then coughed from the seawater. "I feel the truth of your words, sibyl. I must know the Sea, or it will destroy me. It is like a Horse — untamed, it will only throw a man and trample him to death." He leaned toward her, burning. "But how, priestess? How do I find the magic of your God?"

Briseis felt the waves pulling at her, caressing her. Her sodden shift clung close to her body like a magic skin, and the seawind touched her with chill fingers. It whispered in her ears. She stared into the nightblack eyes of the man. Her breath fluttered in her chest with an ancient knowing. She reached for him.

"There is but one way for a mortal man to take on the power of the Sea," she whispered.

The light in his eyes flared with comprehension. Swiftly he met her embrace.

A little way up the beach he covered her with his dark cloak and his dark self. She cried out; the man groaned; the surf shouted beyond them. Wrapped in night, smelling the Sea, and feeling the burning touch of the Desert, Briseis felt as transparent as crystal, open as a mussel shell, but safe as if in her Father's house. Above them, the stars seemed to hover very close, as if the Lady Herself were watching.

AFTERWARD, BRISEIS LAY WRAPPED IN THE CLOAK and in the smells of the man: horse, sweat, Sea salt in his hair and beard. The Conqueror lay beside her, breathing raggedly. Briseis turned her face away, unwilling to see him. He said nothing. "So, Desertman," she asked at last, "did you feel it?" though she dreaded to know the answer.

"Jereth," he said. "My name is Jereth." She looked at him, surprised. What was this?

"It means, lightning," he continued. "A rare thing in the Desert." Indeed, he had struck the Land like a thunderbolt. Briseis hid her face in the woolen cloth and began to weep.

"Now, what is this?" he asked, concerned. His hands ran over her back and shoulders. "Did he hurt you, when he joined us? I would not have had that."

"Oh!" Briseis gasped, staring at him. "You did feel it. The god did come!" Her voice dropped. "I feared I had only dreamed it."

"No." He was most serious. "There was a Presence. In truth, I remember very little. The sound of the water there, and a rushing like a Desert wind." He turned away from her then, and rose. He faced the water, naked, and spread out his arms. "I felt the magic of the Sea," he said to her and it. "Now I understand." And Briseis could see that in his eyes there was no longer any fear.

He dropped back down beside her. "And I remember you," he said. He pulled her close.

Briseis blushed to feel him so close, to feel his heartbeat and his breath on her cheek. "I looked in your eyes," she told him, "and I saw the God."

"Yes."

"What does this do to your theology, Conqueror?" she asked him. He smiled with simple pleasure. "I feel my God with me now, as then. He is pleased. It was His Will."

Briseis sighed, and dropped her head on his shoulder. "Then I am a traitor, and all shall hate me."

"No." His arms tightened around her. "I will make you my Queen and both our Peoples shall honor you above all others."

"What?" Briseis lifted her head to look at him. She laughed.

He frowned at her a little. "My People do not take this lightly, to lie down with a woman. What we have shared, can we now take

it back?"

Briseis shifted uneasily. "I am priestess. This is my role, to bring the God to the People."

He touched her face, no longer angry. "You could do that better as Queen," he said, "than by giving yourself to strangers."

She had to laugh again. "But you are the ultimate Stranger!"

Now he laughed. "Ah, but no longer, thanks to you." He looked deep into her eyes. "Do you hate me, Briseis?"

He had never spoken her name before. "No, Jereth," she said, surprised to find the answer herself. "I do not hate you." She curved her hand around the heavy muscle of his arm. "But I do not love you, either."

His hands circled her waist, holding her, drawing her in. "We will see about that," he said, and he kissed her.

BRISEIS AWOKE SUDDENLY FROM A BLACK AND DREAM-
less sleep. It was the darkest hour of night, the time just before dawn. Beside her, the Conqueror slept still. But they were no longer alone. A great group of People, both her folk and Strangers, circled them where they lay.

One stepped forward, a gray-haired man holding a blazing torch. Briseis's heart leaped painfully within her. It was Esseril, high priest of the Sealord, the earthly master of her Father's House.

"Briseis," the elder said. "It is you."

Briseis reached for the ruins of her robe. "How have you come here, Grandfather?" she asked humbly.

The old man gestured with the torch. "They brought us. To look for you." Behind him stood a Desertman holding the reins of a huge roan Horse. He laughed. His teeth flashed white in the torchlight.

Jereth the Conqueror came abruptly awake, alert as a hawk. His men, mingled with the People, laughed uproariously and saluted him in their own tongue. The People stood mute, staring, or looked away.

Esseril Seapriest looked from Briseis to the Conqueror, his face a mask of sorrow. He came forward, tossing the torch to the ground. It burned fitfully in the sand. He grasped Briseis's hands and raised her up.

"So, Briseis," he asked, with grief in his voice, "did he hurt you? Did he — ?" His tongue stopped; that was the worst crime known to the People.

Briseis pulled her hands from his. "No, Grandfather," she answered. She cast her gaze around the circle. "He did not hurt me."

Esseril Seapriest looked at her, confused, uneasy. "Then what . . . ?" Briseis clothed herself in the dignity of her office. "He came to me, and I was the Mother to him," she said, in the ritual way.

There was an instant's charged silence.

Esseril made a sound of disbelief, of fear, deep in his throat. "You what?" he asked, and then repeated, his voice rising, "You what!"

Jereth arose and moved swiftly to Briseis, to stand behind her. But a woman of the People stepped forward, blocking his way with a blazing torch. He stopped.

It was Alia, chief priestess of the Mother's cult. She ignored the Conqueror and stared instead at Briseis.

"Seadaughter," she said. "A word with you."

"Yes, Mother," Briseis answered, voice low.

"I would speak of a prophecy, Seapriestess," Alia continued, voice cold as the winter sea. "A foretelling made this very night."

"Yes," Briseis whispered.

"Did you, Briseis, yourself, not prophesy that if the Strangers denied the Sea, they would be destroyed? Did you not!"

"I did prophesy," said Briseis.

Alia suddenly stepped forward, thrusting her torch at the younger priestess. Briseis flinched backward. Alia's face was contorted with fury.

"And now you say," she shouted, "now you say you gave yourself to this man! This enemy, this Conqueror? You laid down for him?"

"I did," Briseis breathed.

"Then what have you done, woman?" Alia Highpriestess cried. "You took him into the ritual! You gave the God to him!" She turned to the crowd of watchers. "She gave the God to him!"

The watching People sighed and groaned as one.

Alia Highpriestess turned back to Briseis. She shook her head. "Never has prophecy been made and broken by one woman in one night."

"Why, Briseis?" the old priest Esseril asked. "For what?"

Briseis looked from Esseril, to Alia, to the people beyond. She spread her hands. "For nothing," she said.

Then Alia Highpriestess named her with the new word the invaders had brought to the City. "Whore!"

She stepped up and struck Briseis backhanded across the face.

Briseis was dashed to the ground beside the guttering torch, and lay there, stunned. She had never been struck so before in her life; in the Land no one raised their hand to any Mother's daughter.

With a shout of rage, Jereth leaped forward, toward his men, toward a sword. Briseis dragged herself from the ground. "No!" She stretched her hand out to the Conqueror where he stood naked and unashamed. "Be easy, Jereth. It was well deserved." He stared at her, unsure. She turned her hand to staunch the blood from her broken lip.

Alia ignored the Conqueror. "Briseis Seadaughter," she said, "you shall be judged."

"Aye," Esseril Highpriest echoed, weary as a ghost. "You shall be judged."

The crowd of People and Strangers was silent, watching. Briseis bowed her head before the Mother's chosen.

"You have brought the God to the Strangers in ritual, in defiance of your own soothsaying," Alia said. "You have laid us open to the invader even as you opened yourself to this man."

"I do not deny it," Briseis sighed.

"You have profaned the Mysteries, woman. You have forsaken your bounden duty to protect the Land." She paused. The People drew close. Briseis closed her eyes.

"Briseis Seadaughter," Alia said for all to hear, "you are forsworn. And you shall pay the price."

The Conqueror stepped forward. "What price?" he asked. "What is the price?"

Alia Highpriestess stared through him. "Her oath shall be washed clean in her own blood. She shall be given to the God."

Briseis moaned like the wind going out of a sail. She fell to her knees in the sand.

Sacrificed! It was the gravest of judgments. Not twice in four generations had a priestess traded her life for her vows.

Jereth bar-El understood immediately. "No!" he shouted in the Desert tongue. His men erupted into action, moving to surround him where he stood over the priestess. Swords flashed in the torchlight. The People screamed and scattered across the sand. The Conqueror himself darted past Alia, past Esseril, to snatch a blade from the tall Stranger with the red Horse.

Esseril Seapriest moved toward Briseis, whether to seize her or shield her Briseis never knew. But Jereth was there first. His sword licked out, back; silver, then dark with blood.

Briseis screamed as if it were her own heart being torn. Esseril stood a moment, swaying, then collapsed to the beach. A dark flower blossomed on his chest.

Alia Highpriestess shrieked like a Fury and darted toward the old priest's body. The Conqueror's terrible sword flashed out at her. "No!" Briseis screamed. She flung herself forward, in front of the older woman, arms spread wide. Jereth jerked himself up short. He stared at her, mouth agape. "Are you mad, woman?" he shouted. "They'll have your life!"

"What of it?" Briseis cried. She crouched over Esseril's body where it lay crumpled at her feet. His blood was soaking the sand.

I did this, Briseis thought. I brought this into the Land.

Around them, the chaos was dying down as the People saw the seapriestess defenseless before her lover's sword.

"Briseis, come away!" Jereth said forcefully. "I'll not let them harm you."

She stretched her hands out to him. They were covered with Esseril's blood.

"I gave you a gift, Jereth," she sobbed. "See what you have now given me!"

The ready point of his sword dropped a fraction. "Briseis," he said, "no."

Alia Highpriestess spoke up from behind the young woman's shoulder. "Let us go, Conqueror. The ritual must be done."

Jereth glared at her. "Make one move toward her, woman, and there will be war."

Alia Highpriestess was unmoved. "There has already been war. But make one move to save her, Desertman, and there will be chaos. Her crime, her oathbreaking, shall not go unavenged. Even as you slay them the People of White-Flowers shall tear the City down around your ears. As each City hears of the forsworn Seapriestess who warms the Conqueror's bed, they shall arise anew. To quell them, you would have to set the Land aflame."

"I would do it," said Jereth grimly.

Highpriestess was now angry. "We have taken much from you, Conqueror, but only so much can we take. She has given you the God; she has given you the Land itself. This is treason. You have corrupted one of our own, a priestess. Let us deal with it ourselves."

"Enough of this!" Jereth barked. "Here!" He summoned his captains; the People cowered before their swords.

"No!" Briseis went up to Jereth. She pushed his sword away with her bare hands, slicing her palms, mingling her blood with Esseril's.

"I do not know what made me offer the God to you," she said to him. "I thought He spoke to me, but perhaps He did not. Perhaps I was mistaken."

He shook his head, eyes wide with disbelief. "No mistake," he said. "No mistake, Briseis."

"Be silent," she said, "and hear me. Alia speaks true. My broken vows cannot go unpunished." She moved closer to him and spoke for his ears alone. "You said you grieved, Jereth, for the salting of the Earth. And see the blood you have shed here tonight." She gestured with one bloody hand at Esseril's corpse. "But you have conquered, Jereth. You can be merciful. Let it end here."

His eyes devoured her. "I cannot let them kill you, Briseis."

"You cannot stop it, Jereth. They shall slice my throat on the altar or they shall tear me apart. My blood for Esseril's. My blood for the Land's. That is good — a priestess's trade."

He turned his face away from her. "Oh, God," he said. "Oh, my God."

"My Father is calling me, Jereth," she said. "Now let me go."

He dropped his bloodied killing sword in the sand and covered his face with his hands. "Go, then," he said, his voice muffled. "Go, and leave me." His shoulders shook, from anger or from tears. But Briseis knew he would not act, nor would his men.

She turned to Alia Highpriestess standing tall and furious behind her. "Take me," she said.

The woman nodded gravely. "It is always better so," she answered, "that the sacrifice goes willingly."

They turned. Before them all the People, Earthchildren and Strangers alike, parted to let them through.

AT A SHALLOW COVE IN THE LONG LINE OF THE BEACH lay the tiny seaside temple of the God, built of crumbling coral blocks and tended by an aged priest and priestess. Here Briseis knelt, in the sacred precinct before the temple doors. Behind her was the stony back of the hills where they came low here to meet the Sea. Before her was the surf, and between her and it, the stone altar of sacrifice.

Torches on high poles marked the borders of the sacred space. Among them stood the People, shifting and whispering restlessly as they waited for the rite to begin. Beyond them at the edge of the firelight stood the Desertmen, silent, watching.

Briseis sat motionless, eyes closed, waiting. No one approached her. Her cut hands stung and throbbed. No one had

At once there came a wind off the Sea, a wind like the nether breath of a hurricane. Highpriestess was knocked back. The People shrieked and scattered as the air filled with sand; the Desertmen fought to control their panicked horses.



washed or bound them; there was no point.

The sound of the crowd faded to silence. Briseis opened her eyes. Beyond the circle of People she saw the Conqueror, standing and watching. Their eyes met. His gaze burned her like a brand. His fists clenched. Beside him stood the tall Desert captain with the red Horse. He grasped the Conqueror's arm, speaking urgently in his ear. The Conqueror threw off his hands.

Briseis tore her eyes away and bowed her head. She would not look at him again.

Behind her, Alia Highpriestess had come at last out of the temple. The ritual began.

Drums and citharas began to sound, making music sweet and wild that throbbed in the blood. The People began to sway, moving to the ancient sound. The Desertmen beyond stood unmoving, apart.

A line of priests and priestesses snaked out of the temple, creeping toward Briseis over the sandy ground.

The drumbeats quickened. The initiates surrounded her in a loose circle.

A wide-eyed novice offered Briseis a potion in a shallow brazen bowl. It was a drug, which numbed her mouth even as it would numb her desire to fight and live. Briseis drank deep, although she felt no desire to flee. It was part of the ritual.

THE PRIESTS BEGAN TO CIRCLE HER IN A SUNWISE DANCE, spiraling slowly in. The People began also to step in an opposite circle, clapping and stamping their naked feet to the sound of the drums. The warm darkness of the drug flooded Briseis, dropping over her senses like a veil. The torchlights and the faces of the circling people blurred into a formless band of light. She swayed to the drumbeats pounding in her heart.

The godsworn spun in tighter, touching Briseis, brushing her with their hands. The music reached a frenzied pitch.

The circle closed. Briseis was grasped by many hands and raised on high. They bore her forward and laid her on the altar beneath the star-pricked vault of night.

She lay silent on the freezing stone, wholly transported, hearing the voice of the waves. It was good. She would pay the blood-price of peace in the Land; she would atone.

The priests fell back and raised a chant to the Sealord, heavy and sonorous with the words of the old tongue. The People came up close, to witness.

Only the Mother's chief priestess could do the deed. Alia stepped forward. She raised the knife.

At once there came a wind off the Sea, a wind like the nether breath of a hurricane. Highpriestess was knocked back. The People shrieked and scattered as the air filled with sand; the Desertmen fought to control their panicked Horses.

The wind rose and rose, howling like a thousand demons. Under its force, the waves rolled up the beach.

Awakened from her trance, Briseis cowered on the altar stone. The priesthood huddled in its lee.

The waves heaved sickeningly and crashed together. The wind became hot, hotter than the blast from an open forge, hotter than

the Desert. The water began to boil. Then there was a sound like thunder, like the earth breaking, and a huge Being rose up from the waters and came onto the shore.

It was a Horse, a tremendous Horse come out of the Sea. Its great eyes were as green as the waves, its coat white as Seafoam. The wind whipped its long and wild mane. Saltwater streamed from its flanks. The mighty Horse stood tall, towering above the altar, and looked at all the people.

"We are not pleased," it said.

Jereth bar-El gave a whoop of wild laughter. "My Lord!" he cried triumphantly. He ran down the beach and splashed into the surf before the white legs. "My Lord, my God," he exulted, "You have come!"

The People gasped and shivered at these words. The Desertmen yelled with delight.

Jereth knelt in the surf before the God of his kind. "My Lord, I beg you," he beseeched, "save the woman. Keep her from the Sea God."

But Briseis knew the prayer was not needed. She sat up on the altar stone, raising a hand to shield against the light which spilled from the God's radiant form. She knew that voice; it had whispered in her ears before. She knew those green, green eyes.

"Father," she said.

Alia Highpriestess gasped and put a white hand to her mouth. But the old priest of the temple was nodding, as tears ran freely down his cheeks.

The Horse bowed His great head, acknowledging the truth. "Aye," he said, in a voice that shook the Earth. "The Desert God, the Sealord; I am One."

Desertmen and People alike cried out with awe at these words. Many flung themselves upon the ground.

Jereth bar-El's eyes were huge and black with shock. "My Lord," he whispered, "I knew I felt You with me, when the woman came to me."

The Horse — the God — regarded him gravely. "Did I not give out a prophecy, that the Desert must know the Sea to survive?"

"Yes," the Conqueror murmured, "yes."

The God gazed sternly at the men of the Desert. "I brought you forth from the Desert for a purpose," He intoned. "I bid you go south so that you may know a kinder face of the Mother, and be not so filled with the urge to destroy. The People of the sands are strong, but they are also terrible. A time for softening has come. The Mother welcomes you into the Land."

Briseis felt a thrill of awe and fear at these words. She knelt straight-backed upon the altar stone.

"But Father," she hardly dared ask, "why the fighting? Why the killing? Why the war?"

The Horse pranced restlessly, and burning golden hoofprints were left in the sand. "Did I not loose the spells of binding on the City walls?" He demanded. "Did I not open the gates?" He shook His massive head. "But no, you are a stubborn People, who believe you own the gift of the Earthmother by right. You are too proud. I raised up the Wind from the Desert to bring you the taste of iron: to teach you humility." The God looked at Jereth, at Bri-

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Covered with strip malls and Wal Marts, it's hard to believe today that our land once held mysteries. But it surely did.



RIDERS OF THE RAINBOW RIDGE

In the summer of 1873 I journeyed into the Rocky Mountains with the intention of making a collection of sketches and studies with which to begin my career as a painter of landscapes on a heroic scale. I had traveled in the mountains when I was a boy, but this was the first time I had gone there since completing my studies in the ateliers of Europe. I would have done better to attach myself to a larger party, but the last of the Ute Indians who formerly roamed these wastes had been confined to reservations, and the country pronounced pacified. I was young, and believed myself immortal. And so it was that two weeks into my journey I found myself with a panicked pony on a treacherous mountain path with a storm coming on.

Thunder hammered the heavens, and from the rocky slopes around me a volley of echoes replied. My pony shied and I grabbed for the saddle horn. Then the rain blasted down. The earth gave way beneath the pony's feet and I hung on for dear life as she scabbled down the hill. On the plains, the rain clouds that rolled down each afternoon from the Rockies had been a delight to the artist's eye, but now I was in the eye of the storm.

Lightning blinked sudden as a photographer's flash powder, illuminating the harsh sweep of the heights. But a daguerreotype would have caught only the surface of the scene. Even as I clutched at the mane I was searching for a way to convey not only the image but my response to it. An etching, I thought wildly, might capture those dramatic contrasts of black and white, if Gustav Doré had tried to picture some titanic conflict of the gods.

This time the answering roll of thunder was behind me.

My pony had come to a trembling halt. Weak-kneed I slid from the saddle, clung for a moment, and looked around me. My paintbox and bedroll were still tied to the saddle, but they were the only familiar things I could see.

As swiftly as it had come the storm hurried on. The embattled cloud shapes that had warred above me were galloping eastward. At the rate the storm was traveling, it would soon be drenching Denver and all the comforts of civilization I had left behind. By now rain would be sluicing the pack trail I had been following into the mountains. But the ridge from which the pony and I had fallen cut me off from the road. The scars of our descent crossed the colorful striations of the slope at an angle so steep it was nearly vertical; there was no getting back that way.

Clouds parted to the westward and the ridge blazed suddenly in rainbow bands of ochre and rose. Snowy masses of cloud drew back to reveal a golden sky, across which two black birds were winging as if to lead the way to the long valley that lay between the mountains' purple folds. The light that blazed beneath the clouds outlined each stunted pine and stone and displayed with sudden brilliance a trail, winding through the rocks below. I tugged at the pony's rein, and placing my feet with exaggerated care, led her slantwise across the side of the hill.

I was catching my breath after the last slide down to the trail when I heard someone moan. The mare's head came up, her ears swiveling, and I saw that what I had taken for a heap of stones beside the trail was a man, a Winchester rifle fallen by his side.

The pony stood with dangling reins as I knelt and gently lifted him. He gasped, and I saw new crimson staining the

BY DIANA L. PAXSON
Illustration by Ken Tunell



white linen ulster he wore. I pressed the skirt of his coat against it, but if he had taken a bullet through the lungs most of the bleeding would be internal. As if he had heard my thought, he shook his head.

"No good ... " he whispered, and I heard the blood bubble in his chest, "I'm a goner."

"I'll get help. Does anyone live nearby?"

His lips quirked with bitter humor. "Hangtown. I ride ... rode ... for the Triple Knot. I won't last ... long. Get out ... while you can." His skin was the color of clay.

"I can't leave you to die alone!" I took his hand, and felt his fingers already growing cold.

He fought for breath. "Tell Mr. Harbard ... the Stone Gang's out again. He'll try ... 'n recruit you ... to fight 'em. Don't do it, or you'll end up ... like me ... "

I shook my head. "I'm no gunslinger. I came into this country to paint the mountains."

The dying man tried to smile. His gaze moved from my face to the ridge behind us, radiant in the sunset as a bridge of light. Then he coughed and the bright blood stained his lips. I could feel the life fading out of him as his eyes closed.

Dusk was falling when I heard a rattle of hoofbeats coming up the trail. I had been walking for more than an hour, leading my pony with the gunman's body slung over the saddle. I stiffened, but I had no weapon, and anyone could see that Smith was no threat any longer. The rider swept around the bend, sitting the big grey like part of it, and slid to a halt before me. In the dim light all I could see was a beardless chin beneath a broad hat. But the butts of a pair of Colt-45s poked out of well-worn holsters, and a rifle was balanced on the saddle bow.

"Smith?" The rider indicated my passenger.

I nodded. "I found him up there—"

"Rainbow Ridge." The stranger nodded. "I'll take him home."

My pony danced at the blood smell, but the other horse stood like a rock as we hauled Smith up behind the cante, arms and legs dangling.

"Thanks, Mr — " There was a questioning pause.

"William Carter," I replied, "from Denver. Do you work for the Triple Knot?"

"I'm the old man's daughter—" Teeth flashed in a white grin beneath the hat as the big horse turned, and I saw hanging down her back a pigtail of blonde hair.

"Tell him the Stone Gang's out," I called as she began to move away.

The girl lifted a hand in acknowledgment. Then, with a yip she slapped her mount's neck and the big horse broke into a smooth canter back down the trail.

It was full dark by the time I saw lights ahead and covered the last mile into Hangtown. From the name I had expected shanties, but in the Rockies towns sprouted like mushrooms, and though the storefronts might be an illusion, their paint was new. There was even a hotel. After a week on the trail all I wanted to do was sink into the narrow bed in my room, but it was long past the dinner hour and my stomach was growling, so I stowed my gear and went out once more.

The hotel keeper had told me I could get a meal at the White Horse Saloon. From the noise the place was popular, but I doubted that eating was what most of its customers had in mind. As I approached, the double doors swung open and a pair of struggling figures shot through. The source of propulsion stood framed in the doorway, a big, broad-shouldered man with a bristling red beard, on his vest a sheriff's star.

I waited a few moments before entering, but for the time being the excitement was over. Mr. Bygg the bartender, round, red-faced, with eyes as brown as his own beer, greeted me with a grin. My ale, when it came, was topped with foam like the mountain snows, and the pretzels in the basket on the bar were so good they reminded me of

Germany. A plate of steak and hash browns, he told me, was on the way. I took a long, appreciative drink, and leaned back on the bar.

Two or three women in the satin and lace of dance hall girls were working the tables. They were less shop-worn than usual, and I eyed them with interest. I had seen some posters by a painter in Paris who specialized in nightclub scenes— for these girls, I thought, I would use a brighter palette and a softer line.

"Not bad, huh?" said the cowpoke next to me. "They're from Vanna's place next door. Sometimes she drops in herself for a beer or two with the boys."

I nodded, still watching the tables where men drank and gambled.

"You're new in town, ain'tcha," my companion continued. "Look like an Easterner to me—"

I suppose I did. Most of the men here were big, with skin burned dark and hair bleached light by the sun. I had always been small, wiry, with dark hair already beginning to thin. Their clothing was faded to earth tones by hard wear, while my outfit had been bought new in Denver.

"I've been to New York, yes, and even abroad," I answered, "but I'm no greenhorn. My folks came out to Denver when I was six. I was guiding greenhorns — a party of artists — into the mountains when I was 14. I got interested in painting and accompanied them back East to study."

He drew back a little, trying to decide whether a painter-fellow was manly enough to be worth his time. I grinned and continued to survey the scene. The doors swung open and a new group came clattering in. Cowpokes, I thought at first, seeing the hats and spurs. But there was a kind of watchful arrogance in the way they moved that attracted my attention. Then I noticed their gunbelts and understood.

"I see the Triple Knot boys are here," said my companion, carefully neutral. They were not disliked, I thought, watching as the newcomers claimed a table, but they were dangerous. A study in chiaroscuro. I smiled, considering the preponderance of black leather. But one of them was wearing a light-colored ulster, like ... he turned, and my breath stopped.

I couldn't be mistaken! I had spent the past 10 years of my life training my eye to record and remember. The man in the ulster was getting up now, coming with some of the others toward the bar. He turned, as if he could feel my stunned gaze, and frowned.

"You got a problem, compadre?" He came up to me, hand drifting toward the butt of his revolver.

"Excuse me," I stammered, "but do you have a brother? You look like someone I — used to know —"

"Not that I ever heard tell." He looked me up and down. His friends were moving towards us now, with a watchful interest that reminded me of wolves.

"I must be mistaken," I said quickly, flushing under his sardonic grin.

"I reckon you are at that." He laughed and turned away.

I reached for my drink with a trembling hand. The cowpoke beside me snorted disdainfully, but my reaction wasn't caused by fear — at least not physical fear. I could not be wrong! The face, the outfit, even the accent were those of the man who had died in my arms not six hours before.

I had meant to ride on the next day, but had come into the mountains to paint, and the morning light showed me a vista as glorious as I had ever seen, and it seemed wasteful not to take advantage of the opportunity the fates had put in my path. In the sunlight, my night fears seemed foolish. Still exhausted by my own battle with the storm, I must have been confused by the clothing into imagining a resemblance between my dead man and the man in the saloon.

I arranged with my landlady to keep the room another day or two, packed up my sketchbook and pencils, and ambled out, looking for a good spot to work up some preliminary studies. By this time next year, I thought hopefully, I should have several works ready for the galleries. Western landscapes were popular. I could be the next Bierstadt or Moran, one of those artists who, by portraying

the land not as desolate or threatening but as a place of wonder and majesty, were changing the way people viewed the West.

I found a spot by the river that looked promising and set up my easel. My only company was a raven that balanced in the top of a pine.

As I blocked in the mountains, I reflected that this country was like a fighter, once brash and violent, now battered and weathered by the years. But the strong bones still gave him a harmonious shape. For

when the lamplight caught a gleam of silver that I realized someone was sitting there.

The chair at the head of the table was carved in the neo-Gothic style so popular now in Europe. Its occupant was rather formally dressed in a suit of good black broadcloth, a white shirt with a string tie, and a brocade vest of midnight blue. A silver-headed walking stick leaned against the wall.

As he rose to greet me and his head came fully into the light I

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a moment I stopped, chalk poised in my hand. Through eyes suddenly blurred, I saw that man stretched out like a fallen giant, wrapped in a blanket of trees. Then I blinked, and the fancy passed.

My task now was composition. Meaning would come later, when I chose the colors and laid in the lights and shadows that would lead the eye of the viewer where I wished it to go.

I was finishing my first series of sketches, wondering whether I should continue here or go farther up the valley in search of additional views, when I heard hoofbeats on the trail. I looked up, shading my eyes with one hand.

It was a girl on a gray horse, dressed, like the one who had taken away my dead man's body, in masculine attire. I stared, but this one had auburn hair, not blonde. Still, they were alike enough to be sisters.

"Your name Will Carter?"

I nodded suspiciously.

"My dad's got a job for you."

The fine hairs prickled on my arms and I remembered how the dying man had warned me, and I shook my head. "I wouldn't be any use to him. I'm an artist. I don't even go armed."

"That's all right. We've got enough hired guns," she grinned. "Dad wants you to paint some pictures in the dining room. He'll pay well, and give you a bed and your meals while you're working there."

I frowned, considering the offer. I had intended to camp out during most of this trip, and my stash wouldn't last long if I stayed in town. But in the end that wasn't what decided me. There was a puzzle here that maybe Mr. Harbard could help to solve.

If I had hoped to question my mysterious gunman again, I was to be disappointed. The Triple Knot Ranch was a ways up the valley, but the family had a house just outside of town, beside the creek where the graceful aspens grew. It was a finer building than any I had yet seen, two-storied, with wings built out of each side and a steep roof to shed the winter snows.

A tall woman with grizzled hair answered the door, still holding her broom. Behind her waited another, very pale, with smooth dark hair drawn back in a knot. Her gown was of ivory silk, tucked and pleated with an elegance surprising for so remote a place as this. I found myself bowing over her hand as if she were one of the great ladies whose salons I had attended in London and Berlin. She did not seem a very likely mother for the two Annie Oakley types I had met earlier, but she was clearly the lady of the house.

"Mr. Carter—" Her voice was as cultivated as her ensemble. "You are very welcome to my home. My husband is expecting you."

I took off my hat and followed the older woman down the hall. The dining room occupied most of the west wing. I wondered where, in this place, they could find enough people of culture to fill the long table. Above a wainscoting of pine the walls were smoothly plastered. A whale oil lamp cast a mellow illumination over one end of the polished table, but the other end was in shadow. It was only

blinked, then my vision focused, and I saw a man somewhat past middle age, with graying hair worn long, and a silver beard.

"Thank you for coming—" He motioned to me to sit down. A cut-glass decanter and some shot glasses stood on a tray before him. "Will you drink with me?"

An officer, was my first thought. Harbard would have been the right age for the war. No doubt that was where he had lost his eye. North or South, I wondered? His voice had an unusual intonation, as if English were not his first language, but it gave no clue where he was from.

I seated myself and took the glass he offered me. I had expected whisky, but the drink was something else, honey-sweet with an aftertaste of fire.

"So, what brings you to our valley?"

"Chance—" I sipped and smiled at the gentle glow as the stuff went down. "I came into the mountains on a sketching trip, and got lost in the storm."

Harbard nodded. "You have studied art, then? Perhaps in Europe?"

"In Germany, and before that with Albert Bierstadt. I went with him on his first trip into these mountains in '62, to help with the horses. The only paintings I'd ever seen were store signs, and a few genteel watercolors. Bierstadt—" I shook my head, still at a loss to describe the power of his paintings, the way they had moved me. "When I looked at his landscapes, even when the scene itself was before me, it was like looking into a different world. And when I looked back at the mountains, it was as if I had never seen them before."

His single eye held mine. "All men look, but not all men can see ...," he said softly. "That is why I called you here."

I cleared my throat. "Your daughter said you wished to offer me a commission?"

"Yes. I will pay well, and you will still have time to complete your work before summer's end." He indicated the plastered area above the paneling on the walls. "I have the paints you will need, and the surface is prepared. Paint the mountains as you see them. Paint them here, for me."

Why paint the mountains, I wondered, when he could step outside his door and see them as they truly were? In my experience, people who lived out West wanted romantic pictures of ruined castles or sentimental scenes of tidily fenced fields. It was the folks who lived in the great cities who craved wilderness, albeit safely varnished and framed. But I had learned already that it was not for the artist to quibble with the man who paid him. This would give me a chance to see how my sketches translated into paint, and besides, I could use the money.

"You want murals of the mountains," I echoed, to be sure I understood, "done in the style of Bierstadt? There are those who criticize him for making the lighting more dramatic and adding features to enhance his scenes."

Smiling a little, he shook his head. "I want paintings in the style of Will Carter. Use your vision, and paint what it shows you."

I moved my things over from the hotel that night and began work the next day, first going outside to make rough sketches of the view in each direction, and then preparing outline drawings to transfer to the walls. From time to time the lady of the house would look in, but if her opinions on appropriate decor for her dining room differed from those of her husband's she did not say so.

THIS TIME THE SHOCK AT WHAT I SAW WAS LESS. BUT THE FEAR WAS MORE. I WENT OUT OF THE HOUSE AND GAZED SOUTHWARD...

I did not see Mr. Harbard again. He had gone out to the ranch, I was told. But he would be back in two weeks, and hoped the work would be completed, as a dinner party was planned.

I promised to do my best, and progressed more rapidly than I had expected. In the early stages I was concerned with composition and balance, choosing angles that were both harmonious in themselves and would suit the proportions of the room. It was an interesting challenge. Bierstadt had prided himself on precise observation of fauna and flora, and sometimes took stereographs in addition to sketching. But as I had told Mr. Harbard, the vision of the eyes was subordinate to that of the heart. A daguerreotype captured external reality, but flattened and diminished it. I had never yet seen a photograph that captured the spirit as a painting could do. Still, in the first stages, for both artist and photographer the problems of composition were the same.

By the end of the week I had transferred my designs to the walls. The work went more swiftly than expected, and soon I was laying in the underpainting. To the uninitiated eye, those broad swathes of color were a jumble of abstract harmonies. My task was to envision the scenes for which they were the foundations. Already some aspects of the final interpretation were emerging. The colors on the eastern wall were pale and clear as the dawning, while those in the north were dark and dim. Looking from one wall to the next, one would not only change directions, but move through the day.

I began the overpainting in the east, where the first layer of color had had the most time to dry. Swiftly, a landscape of jagged mountains began to take shape on the wall. Light from a radiant sky refracted from snowfields, gleamed from rock faces, shimmered in cascading waterfalls that poured down into blue depths. The paint dried more quickly than usual in the thin mountain air. I worked as if possessed, and to my surprise by the end of that day the wall was almost done. Absorbed in detail, as yet I could only guess at the effect of the whole. A last brush stroke defined a line of wind-twisted trees, then I clambered down from the ladder and wearily moved to the other end of the room.

And gaped at what I saw.

I was accustomed to the way an occasional fortuitous combination of brushstrokes could add impact to a scene, but something else was happening here. Had I worked too quickly, I wondered, so that the layers of oil paint had melded and run? Somehow, the soaring rock faces had become a complex of walls and towers, and everywhere I looked, there were faces, — in the snowfields, in the trees, even in the stones. I had not intended to paint them. Close up, they were invisible, but when I stood back, my portrait of the mountains that closed off the eastern end of the valley had become an animate wilderness, vibrating with chaotic energy.

I am tired, I thought then. It is a trick of the light. The picture will look different in the morning.

And indeed it did. But though the morning light banished some

of the wildness, the faces, shimmering with a playful and inhuman glee, still grinned at me from the wall.

I told myself that dawn was an uncertain time, neither wholly night nor day. The southern wall would be simpler — a line of dry hills in the pitiless clarity of the noonday sun. And once more the painting trance overwhelmed me. Daylight was fading in the windows and someone had lighted the lamps when I realized that the work was completed. With mouth gone suddenly dry with appre-

hension, I climbed down from the ladder and stepped back to see.

This time the shock at what I saw was less. But the fear was more.

I went out of the house and gazed southward. What I saw with my naked eye was only what I expected to see. It was unnerving to realize that in painting I had somehow bypassed the perceptions of the conscious mind to project into the picture some unrealized anxiety. I flinched at the thought of what Mr. Harbard would say. But perhaps it was only my own imagination that saw figures, humanoid or serpentine, that flickered in and out of vision, those boulders that glowed like coals, I thought hopefully.

The next morning I asked one of Mrs. Harbard's women for her opinion of the two murals I had completed, not mentioning the images I feared she would see. But the woman pronounced them a good likeness, and asked if I would like beer or coffee with my lunch that day.

Considerably relieved, I set to work on the western wall. The scene here was to be the end of the valley, where the lush intermingling of forest and grassland sloped upward toward low hills gilded by the setting sun. Whatever visions might be hidden in this scene must surely be benign.

And so it proved. What was disconcerting this time was the sheer volume of images that appeared. Faces grinned from boulders, slender forms emerged from tree trunks like the dryads of old. But they had none of the vapid prettiness the Old Masters had portrayed. They were vital, sensually compelling, but at least they were smiling.

It was with a lightened heart that I turned to the fourth and final wall. For the north I had chosen midnight, a dramatic scene of mist and moonlight. Surely, I thought as I painted, this scene would be too dark for any figures to appear.

By the end of the day my arm was so tired it was all I could do to lift my hand. The painting, too, seemed dark and heavy. But not empty. Eyes gleamed in the moonlight, misshapen limbs emerged from the mist, looming shapes appeared whose forms from moment to moment seemed to change.

I suppressed a shiver and began to put my paints away. Always before, when I finished a commission, I had hated to let the painting go. But I would be happy to see the last of these murals. I only hoped that my patron would be pleased.

Doors and windows had been thrown open all day to air the room, but the atmosphere still held an echo of the sharp turpentine smell of the oil paints when Mr. Harbard returned. I awaited his verdict on my work with some trepidation, but he surveyed the murals in silence, head tipped to one side so that he could see.

"I hope that you are pleased, sir. I had to work quickly."

"You have a good eye," he answered with a faint smile.

His wife came in then and they began to discuss the arrangements for the dinner. I let out my breath in a long sigh. Through

my relief it occurred to me to wonder if Mr. Harbard had approved the paintings because he did not see the strange figures that inhabited them— or because his single eye saw them only too well. I found the latter idea rather disquieting, and distracted myself with thoughts of where I would go next. The murals would not matter to me then.

"And of course, Mr. Carter, you will join us—" Startled, I realized my host was speaking to me. "I am sure my guests would like to meet you."

Instinct yammered at me to take my pay and flee, but Mr. Harbard's courtly invitation was impossible to refuse.

As I sat down with the others that evening it occurred to me that aside from the fact that it was all male, I certainly could not fault the company. Judge Pole, "Grizzly" Donner, the sheriff, and Fred Lord, who ran the general store, had to be the valley's leading citizens. The sheriff was the only one I had seen before. Close, he looked bigger than ever, with canvas pants stuffed into his boots and a flannel shirt showing beneath his coat. People said he'd been a lumberjack and a blacksmith before taking the job of sheriff here. He could shoot, but preferred to enforce order with a fist as hard as one of his own hammers.

"I hear the Stone Gang hit Reg Ramshead's place up the valley," he commented, catching a sizzling steak on the point of his knife and flipping it to his plate from the platter. He handed the platter to me and I took a somewhat smaller piece of meat and passed it on.

"But he stopped them," answered Mr. Lord, spooning snowy mashed potatoes onto his plate and topping them with beans and gravy. "He knew what he was facing when he settled up there." He turned to our host. "Isn't that why you let him have the land?"

The storekeeper was youngish, solidly built with changeable hazel eyes and abundant wheat-colored hair worn rather long. His frock coat was of a heathery golden tweed.

"It is not just that he should always bear that burden," said the Judge, sipping his wine. He was more formally dressed in sober gunmetal gray, and his dark hair was already streaked with silver. I realized suddenly that he was missing his right hand, and wondered if he and Mr. Harbard had been together in the war.

The door opened and one of the women brought in a bowl of fresh green peas, which I had not seen in a while, while another followed with crusted loaves of fragrant bread still warm from the oven. I applied myself to my food in appreciative silence.

"Live and let live, I say," said Donner. "Let 'em have the badlands, so long as they stay out of my town."

The Judge set down his glass with a click like the cocking of a pistol. "If they can attack the outlying ranches with impunity what's to stop them from coming here? It's not just cattle they're after, you know. They abducted Brag's wife, and we had to raise a posse to get her back again. They have threatened to take Miss Vanna next time. I'm afraid force is the only law they understand."

Mr. Lord nodded vigorously, and I remembered that the proprietress of the White Horse was his sister. "If we're going to teach them a lesson, Harbard, we'll need your men."

We all looked toward the head of the table. One of the two big dogs sitting at Harbard's feet thumped its tail on the floor as its master dropped a scrap of meat. There was a lot left on his plate, and I wondered if he had eaten at all.

"Perhaps it is time," he said at last. "My boys will be glad for the exercise."

"Okay," Donner looked from him to Judge Pole. "I'll do it on your say-so. When do you want to go?"

Dinner had been replaced by several peach and apple pies that deserved more attention than they were getting. The planning proceeded as the whisky bottle went round. Eventually there was a pause long enough for me to try and excuse myself, but Mr. Harbard held out one hand.

"My apologies, Carter. We have gotten to talking about our own

business when I meant to drum up some more business for you. If you can paint people as well as you do scenery, I thought to commission some portraits of my friends here to hang on the walls."

I turned back to the others, automatically considering them with a painter's eye. For the sheriff, I would choose a background of mountains, and paint the man himself laughing at the stormy skies. And for a moment then I imagined the picture, but there was something odd about Donner's clothing, and I saw a hammer in his hand.

I blinked and looked at the others. In my mind Judge Pole stood straight and severe. At first I thought he was wearing judge's robes, then I saw some kind of cloak, and realized he was holding a sword. Skin prickling, I glanced quickly at Lord, and my inner vision clad him in the same kind of fancy dress as the Judge, but he was standing in a field of golden grain.

This was what had happened when I was painting the murals, I thought in panic, but now it wasn't even waiting for me to put brush to canvas. I had prayed for inspiration to guide my vision, but not like this, not now!

"Well, sir, what do you say?"

Harbard's face blurred as I looked at him. In the shadow that patched his missing eye I saw a whirl of stars that expanded until that was all I could see.

"No—" I whispered, "I can't do what you want. Please, let me go!" Shaking my head blindly, I stumbled toward the door.

I packed up my things that night and headed out the next morning after breakfast. My horse was alone in the corral, and I wondered how early Harbard had left. But he was no longer any concern of mine. I had found a bag of gold coins on my dresser when I went up to bed, but I would have left even without it. I turned my pony's nose up the trail toward Rainbow Ridge. Gradually the unreason-

THE OUTLAWS FOUGHT WITH AN ELEMENTAL FURY THAT WAS TERRIFYING.

ing anxiety that had oppressed my spirits began to lift, and I found myself whistling.

Lulled by my pony's rhythmic motion, and distracted by the ever-changing play of light in the clouds above the canyon, I forgot to pay attention to my surroundings. Before I had even identified the sound that startled me as the crack of a rifle all hell broke loose around me. Another shot sang past my ear, and I ducked. My pony reared, there was a moment of vertigo, and then I hit the ground and lay gasping, listening to the receding clatter of hoofbeats as my mount stamped down the trail.

Gunshots reverberated from stone. It took a few more moments to realize that they were not shooting at me. I heard more hoofbeats, and managed to scramble to the shelter of the rocks before the oncoming rider could trample me. As he passed, a boulder hurtled down the cliffs and struck him from the saddle. A bearded face peered down to see the effect of the shot, its features twisting in malicious glee, and I flinched, for I had painted that face on Mr. Harbard's eastern wall.

In the next moment I told myself that the man must belong to the Stone Gang, and that was why he looked so rough and wild. A Winchester barked from somewhere nearby and another outlaw fell from the cliffs with a cry. Then I cowered back behind my boulder as a knot of struggling figures surged down the trail.

It was easy enough to tell friend from foe, but as the fight went on neither the Triple Knot boys nor the desperadoes from the Stone Gang looked like any men I had ever seen. The fighting was all

Continued on page 80

FALLEN ANGEL

BY JANE YOLEN

Illustration by Steven Adler

*Three children
and a heavenly
being — is this a
recipe for disaster
or delight?*

DOWN AND DOWN HE FELL, HIS wings wrapped around him for warmth. They were now useless for flying, the feathers having been severely burned in the awful flames.

Angels are ordinarily immune to the terrible cold of space, but featherless, he was freezing. The slight warmth lent him by the wings' structure was not enough. His teeth chattered and he shivered uncontrollably as he fell.

His passage was a long flash of light.

"I SAW THE MOST AMAZING FALLING STAR LAST night," Courtney said. "It was the brightest ever."

"I saw it, too," Maddy said. "Do you think it was a USO?"

"U-F-O, dummy!" Judson thought his younger sister could be positively stupid sometimes.

"Or an alien?" Maddy continued, unconcerned with Judson or his frequent judgments.

"Dad says there's no such thing," Judson said — always his final argument.

"It was so bright. It looked like it fell right into Miller's Pond."

"It did!" Maddy confirmed. "Right in. An alien!"

"No such thing." Judson couldn't have been more definite. He wanted to be a scientist when he grew up. But he went along to the pond with the others, in the cause of scientific accuracy, of course.

THE ANGEL LAY CURLED IN THE MUD BY THE pond, his white gown still pristine but his glorious hair for once in tangles. His wings looked like leafless fronds. There was a smudge of mud along one cheekbone. He breathed heavily

through his aquiline nose.

The children ringed around him. Maddy put her thumb in her mouth, something she did in moments of great stress or concentration.

"Do you think it's a woman?" Judson asked. "Or a man?" It was really difficult to tell. The broad shoulders and large hands seemed to argue for a man; the gown and long red hair, the perfect beauty, for a woman.

"An alien," said Maddy, the thumb popping out of her mouth like a cork from a bottle.

"An angel," said Courtney.

And they all knew the moment she said it that she was right.

"But what about the ... um ...?" Judson asked, running a hand through his hair nervously. He wondered if scientists were allowed to discover angels. "Those don't exactly look like wings, you know."

"Angels have wings," Maddy said. But she said it hesitantly, as if she were suddenly uncertain about the call. The thumb went back in her mouth.

"Those *are* the wings," Courtney said, pointing to the frond-like structures fanning out from the angel's back. "only broken and burned."

"Re-entry!" Judson said, happy to be on scientific ground again. "Like rockets coming back from space. I don't suppose angels carry heat shields."

"Like a falling star," Courtney said.

Maddy had no idea what the older two were talking about, but she had been the only one watching the angel while they chattered. "'ook!' she cried, then took the thumb from her mouth. "Look!"

They looked. The angel had opened one eye. It was sky blue and perfect.

What the angel saw with that one eye was this: a 12-year-old girl with hair the color of a mouse's



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back, who had the day before sneaked a drag on a cigarette and hated it, but lied to her friends saying she liked it a lot, and worried more about that lie than the one puff; a 10-year-old boy, his hair cut in a raitail, who had called his older sister a forbidden name the night before to his friends, and was feeling awful about it because actually he secretly admired her; a girl aged seven, in braids, who had taken her sister's favorite comb, but had only the slightest guilt associated with it since she was planning to give it back, so the angel could not tell the size or shape of the comb. All this the angel saw in the blink of his perfect eye.

"A*!|*e*!u**a*h*," sang the angel. And then he said, "O*u*c*h," because his wings hurt. It was a strange sound for a strange sensation. Angel wings *never* hurt.

"The angel spoke!" Maddy cried, but since they had all heard it, Judson elbowed her roughly to make her shut up.

The angel made a sound like *tch* with his perfect mouth, and Judson felt immediate shame, a shame so deep and profound that his face turned crimson from the neck up and he had to look away or sob.

"Sorry, Maddy," he whispered.

"T*e**a*b*s*o!v*o!" said the angel. When it was clear that none of the children understood this, he closed his perfect eye and heard inside, the language that they had been speaking. He opened the eye again. "I*t**s**o*k*a*y*," he sang; but the words seemed clumsy in his mouth, faithless. They lacked the beauty of Latin, the power of Hebrew, the familiarity of Aramaic or Greek. But they were all these children knew, so they would have to do.

"Are you — like — an angel?" Courtney asked at last.

The angel looked puzzled. "L*i*k*e*?" Then, receiving no response from the children, he added in speech rather than song, "Very like."

"He means he is," said Maddy, her thumb nowhere near her mouth now.

"He means" — Judson was adamant — "sort of."

"How can he be *sort of* when he is *very* like?" Courtney said.

"S*T*O*P*!" the angel sang out. Children of this era, it seemed, were enough to try even an angel's patience.

The children were stunned into silence.

"I am an angel."

"Oh!" They said it together, as if they couldn't quite believe it and yet had to, a kind of resignation tinged with awe. "Oh!"

The angel was pleased with their response and sat up. Or at least he tried to sit up. But he was awkward, which made him feel so unlike himself that, for a moment, he actually hesitated.

Courtney leaned over and grabbed his left arm, Judson his right. Maddy touched his white gown and gave the hem a little tug. Together they managed to help the angel sit. His wings, featherless and brittle, drooped behind.

"You hardly weigh anything," Courtney remarked.

"I am insubstantial," the angel replied.

"Not exactly," Judson said. "You do weigh *something*. Just not a lot. Maybe gravity is different here than" For a moment he was stumped. "Than in ... wherever."

"Heaven," Maddy said.

The angel smiled. His teeth were perfect.

"We don't believe in Heaven," Judson reminded her.

"I do," Maddy said.

"You are seven," said Judson.

"So?"

"So what do you know?"

"Maybe" — Courtney interrupted them — "maybe Heaven is a real place, so believing doesn't count, and —"

"E*N*O*U*C*H*!"

They shut up and stared at the angel — a bit resentfully. Their parents had always encouraged the spirit of inquiry in them. The dinner table was a daily free-for-all.

The angel was beginning to suspect that Earth had changed in the millennia since he had last visited. In those days belief had been a constant, and children had not argued or spoken out of turn, and he had had wings that worked and did not hurt.

Suddenly the angel hated all change. Which was an odd thing in

The angel made a sound like tch with his perfect mouth, and Judson felt immediate shame...

itself, as it was the very changeless nature of Heaven that was the cause of his present misfortune. Hadn't he tried to change things just a bit? Which provoked the flames. Which had led to his wings being seared, and thence to his falling down and down and down. The memory of the fall was suddenly quite vivid, and the angel felt faint.

"I want," the angel said aloud and in perfect English, "to go home." He cried a perfect tear.

Maddy's thumb went back into her mouth, and Courtney patted the angel's shoulder. "Everything will be all right. You'll go back. Of course you will."

"Not with those wings," said Judson.

And they knew — even the angel — that he was right.

THEY TALKED ABOUT IT TILL SHADOWS BEGAN TO FORM AROUND the pond. The angel occasionally sniffled, more like a child than a grown-up. They talked about feathers, about birds, about outer space. The angel told them all about Heaven, too, which they did not entirely credit.

"It sounds incredibly boring," said Judson, who couldn't stand to be bored, not for a minute. "All that marching about in formation. And singing."

"And so clean." Maddy had smudges on her nose and around her mouth, mostly from popping her thumb in and out. She was not normally a clean child by any means.

"But it's home," Courtney explained with a great deal more patience than she usually showed. "And that's why he misses it."

"So he should," agreed Maddy.

But Judson did not agree. He rolled his eyes up till only the whites showed. "If I had to sing all day ... A*L*L*E*L*U*J*A*H*!" He gave a remarkably good imitation of the angel, even though he was not on pitch. "And if I had to be grateful and gracious or any other g word to someone mighty, I would have taken a jump, too."

"Good," said Maddy.

"Good what?" Judson was puzzled.

"Another g word the angel has to be."

The angel stood. "The dark is coming and I am afraid, not being used to darkness."

Courtney stood, too, and put out her hand. "Then come home with us. Mommy and Daddy won't mind."

WHICH THEY DIDN'T, BECAUSE NEITHER OF THEM COULD see the angel. Not his perfect eyes or perfect teeth or perfect smile. Not his perfect white gown or perfect red hair. Or his bedraggled, seared, and drooping wings.

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND," SAID JUDSON AS THEY LED THE ANGEL from the living room, where they had tried unsuccessfully to introduce the angel to Mommy and Daddy.

Mommy had looked up and said, "Can *who* stay in the guest room,

dear?"

And Daddy had said, "Invisible playmate, darling."

Mommy had answered, "Aren't they a little old for that?"

And Daddy had responded, "Encourage imagination, sweetheart. You of all people ..."

So they put the angel in the guest room anyway, with its double bed and bear-claw quilt. There was an electrified candle sconce for a bedside light.

"You can put your gown in the closet," Courtney said. "There are hangers."

"Or fold it up and put it in the dresser," added Maddy. "Do you know how to do that? I could teach you." She had learned how in Montessori school.

"Or just throw it down by the bed," Judson said. "I do. My shirt, that is. I don't wear a gown. Boys don't, you know."

"Why would I take my gown off?" the angel asked. "How would I take it off?"

"Because it's dirty," said Courtney. "You've been in it all day, in the mud and everything."

"Angels don't get dirty," Maddy reminded her, "'member?"

"That's in Heaven," said Judson. "Not on Earth."

About that time they realized that the angel could not have taken off the gown even if he wanted to.

"There are no wing holes!" Courtney said. "Or at least not any big enough to pull wings through. How did you get it on in the first place?"

"There was no first place," said the angel. "I have always worn this gown." He said it as if that were explanation enough. And indeed it was all the explanation they were ever to get.

They said good night to him then. And since angels don't have to eat, they went down to their own supper. It was a children-only supper because Mommy and Daddy were having a dinner party for grown-ups later on, so the children could discuss the angel over the meal the entire time.

It was Judson who first mentioned making new wings. It was Courtney who remembered the swatches of material Aunt Isabelle — who did interior decorating — had sent them. But it was Maddy who got up from the meal silently and went to her room without explanation, returning with a large, battered box kite.

"That's it!" Judson said

"Clever girl," added Courtney.

Maddy was much too full of herself to put her thumb back into her mouth. The only thing she put there was her dessert. And Courtney's as well. Courtney was back on a diet.

"We'll have to get extra dowels, though," Judson said. "There aren't nearly enough."

"What's a dowel?" asked Maddy.

So he showed her. "These sticks."

"Do you think we've got enough material?" asked Courtney.

"Sheets?" asked Maddy.

"If we have to," Courtney said. "Although they aren't as tough as the stuff on those swatches, since that's drapery material. Has to be tough to stand up to outer space."

"To go where no angel has gone before," Judson intoned.

That started them giggling as they got up from the table. Then — to forestall their mother asking questions — they cleared the table without being reminded.

"Invisible friend or not," Mommy remarked later to Daddy, "they are growing up. Imagine, clearing the supper dishes without my saying a word."

"Encourage responsibility, sweetheart," he answered, and went out to greet their arriving guests.

"Growing up," mused Mommy to herself, "or else up to some-

thing." But because the guests had all come at once, she didn't get a moment to check, and by the time her dinner party was in full swing she had forgotten all about it.

THE CHILDREN WORKED QUIETLY IN COURTNEY'S ROOM until nearly 11. They got only one angel-sized wing made, using the old dowels from the battered kite and binding them with a combination of glue, tape, rubber bands, and an old lanyard Judson had made in Boy Scouts the one year he had gone to den meetings.

Courtney had used up half the thread in her sewing basket making vanes of the material — a veritable patchwork of curtain, sofa, and rug swatches that she attached to the dowels with a chain stitch.

"Will it hold?" Maddy asked, coming over to look.

In answer, Courtney tugged on the material. The dowels bent alarmingly but did not break, and the material — to everyone's relief — stayed firmly attached.

"But the angel needs two wings," said Maddy, moving back to the door, where she was acting as lookout.

Judson's face was grim. "And we are about out of everything."

"We'll think about that tomorrow," Courtney said.

Just then Maddy cried out, "Oh!" which meant the guests were going home.

"Tomorrow, then," Judson said before he sneaked down the hall.

"I will give you a reward for your unselfish help," he said. "Angels can do that, you know."

"Tomorrow," Maddy echoed, going through the door into her own room.

Courtney nodded and pushed the wings into her closet. She was so tired from the work of the evening and the excitement of the day, she fell asleep still in her clothes and dreamed she was an angel. An angel with wings of flame.

IN THE MORNING MADDY CAME INTO COURTNEY'S ROOM LEADING the angel by the hand. His gown was as pristine white as it had been the day before, his red hair no longer in tangles. But he did not look quite as perfect as before. In fact he looked ...

"Insubstantial!" said Courtney. She meant she could see through him, as if he were a bad photograph taken with too much light.

"You're fading," remarked Judson, coming into the room. "And you," he added accusingly to Courtney, "slept in your clothes. Mommy's going to be furious."

"But the angel slept in his," said Maddy.

"Mommy is not the angel's mother," Judson told her.

"I have no mother," the angel said. "Only a *F*a*t*h*e*r*."

"Poor angel," said Maddy, patting his hand. "You can share ours."

Courtney sat up on her bed, her legs tucked up under her. "We made one wing for you," she said. "But we are going to have to figure out how to make another."

"We are out of ... stuff," Judson explained.

"Towels," said Maddy.

"Dowels, stupid," said Judson. "With a *d*."

"I meant that," said Maddy.

"Sure you did," muttered Judson; but suddenly remembering his deep shame of the day before, he kept one eye on the angel.

The angel did not seem to notice, but he nodded his increasingly insubstantial head. The red curls bobbed with the effort.

"The angel didn't sleep well," Maddy said.

"Your mother turned out the light."

"She does that," Judson said, happy to be back on safer ground. And then in a remarkable imitation of his mother's voice, he added, "Because once you're asleep, it doesn't matter." He grinned. "The light, I mean."

"The light," the angel said in a voice as hard as adamant, "always matters."

Judson gulped aloud.

"But," the angel was quick to add, "it is not that I did not sleep well, dear children. I did not sleep at all."

"Poor angel," said Maddy.

The angel shook his head. "But I *never* sleep. Angels don't. Still, I was afraid of the dark all the night long. Although as nights go, I don't suppose it was especially long."

"Not in June," said Judson. "In June the nights are short."

"When you are scared,"

Courtney added, "fear makes things *seem* longer."

"And when you are happy," Maddy said, "time seems shorter."

Now the angel really looked perplexed. "I should think it would be the other way around."

"Long or short, we have got to make you another wing,"

Courtney said. "That means more dowels. And more material."

"But how?" asked the angel.

"We don't know yet," Courtney admitted. "But it doesn't mean we won't know soon. It's just going to take time."

The angel sat down on Courtney's bed, carefully folding his drooping wings behind him. They could see the double-wedding-ring quilt through him.

"I don't think we have all that much time," said Maddy. She popped her thumb determinedly into her mouth and looked very stressed indeed.

BUT THOUGH THEY SAT FOR AN HOUR DISCUSSING THE WING, the children could come up with no real solution. They did, however, agree on three things: that it was useless to ask their parents, that it was dangerous to ask their parents, and that it was crazy to ask their parents.

So they did.

The angel did not understand this logic. But then he had never had children. Angels don't.

"WE HAVE FOUND AN ANGEL, MOMMY," COURTNEY SAID.

Hunched over her keyboard — the novel was *not* going well— Mommy looked up crossly.

"He sleeps in his clothes," Maddy said.

Judson rolled his eyes up until only the whites showed.

Mommy sighed. "And what does this angel need?"

"Wings," Judson said under his breath.

"Don't mumble, Juddie. You know I have a slightly deaf ear."

The children all thought Mommy was slightly deaf only when it suited her.

"It needs wings!" said Judson, almost shouting.

"If it needs wings, then it can't be an angel," Mommy said sensibly. "Angels already have wings."

"I told you," Judson whispered to his sisters, "that this was going to be useless."

"I am working now. Remember, don't bother me unless you are" — and Mommy laughed gaily — "bleeding from an important orifice." She thought she was being clever.

The children had heard it before.

They went away.

"Daddy is at the university today, so there's no help there," said Courtney. "If only he were a regular father, he'd have a workshop in the garage instead of a lab off in town."

"With dowels," Judson said.

"What's a dowel?" Maddy asked automatically, and then, remembering that she already knew, stuck her thumb unhesitatingly in her mouth.

THEY WENT OUT INTO THE GARDEN AND STRIPPED SEVERAL branches from a birch tree, but these were too flimsy. Then they tried a track from Judson's model railroad set, but it didn't bend at all. They found an old telephone cord in the tool drawer, and that was impossible. Strips of cardboard didn't work either. Or knitting needles or crochet hooks or pipe-cleaners.

"It's no good," Courtney said at last, almost in tears.

The angel sat silently on her bed. He was practically an outline and his facial features kept fading in and out, in and out.

The last they saw of him was when he dipped once toward earth... And then the angel was gone.

"Like the Cheshire Cat," said Judson, to no one in particular.

"I am cold," said the angel.

Maddy went immediately into Courtney's closet for something to throw over the angel's shoulders. She emerged without any clothing, but clutching a hanger. "What about this?" she asked.

"Hangers!" Judson and Courtney called out together.

"Brilliant," Courtney added.

"Genius!" said Judson. It was his highest compliment. "Absolute genius."

"There are lots more of them on the floor," Maddy said.

"I think they breed there," said Courtney.

Judson giggled.

While the angel watched, somewhat bemusedly, the children each gathered an armful of hangers. Slowly they twisted them out of hanger shape and fashioned a second wing. They taped the ends together, then tied them with the old telephone cord for good measure, so that the wing armature had a lovely shape and lumpy parts.

Then Courtney cut up a pair of her old blue jeans, ones that were much too small. "The heck with dieting," she said. "I'm never going to fit in these again." She checked to see if the angel had noticed the minor swear word before cutting up her mother's Grateful Dead T-shirt, which Courtney had borrowed permanently several months before. Jeans and T-shirt went into the making of the wing vanes.

The end result was much more elegant than the first wing, and much more solid.

"Maybe we should do them both this way," Courtney said.

"No time!" Maddy pointed to the angel, whose outline was now wavering. Then she popped the pointing finger into her mouth.

They tied the new wings tightly to the angel's broken pair with ribbons from the Christmas box. The angel was quite a sight. But once they went outdoors and he unfolded the new wings, the patches of color caught the sun and he looked quite beautiful.

"Lovely," the angel said. And then he sang out, "B*e*!i*s*s*s*i*m*a!" He began to take on substance again.

"What's *bellissima*?" asked Maddy.

"I think it's *lovely* in Latin," said Courtney.

Maddy smiled. "Are you going to go home now?" she asked the angel.

"Up ... there?" Judson added, waving an uncertain hand toward the sky.

"Heaven," Courtney whispered.

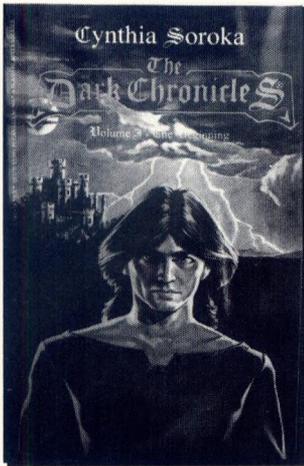
Continued on page 73

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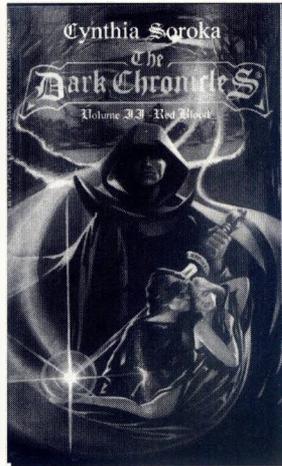
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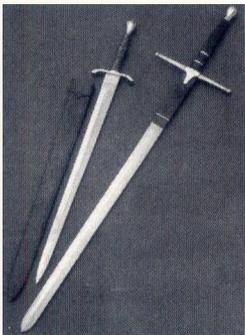
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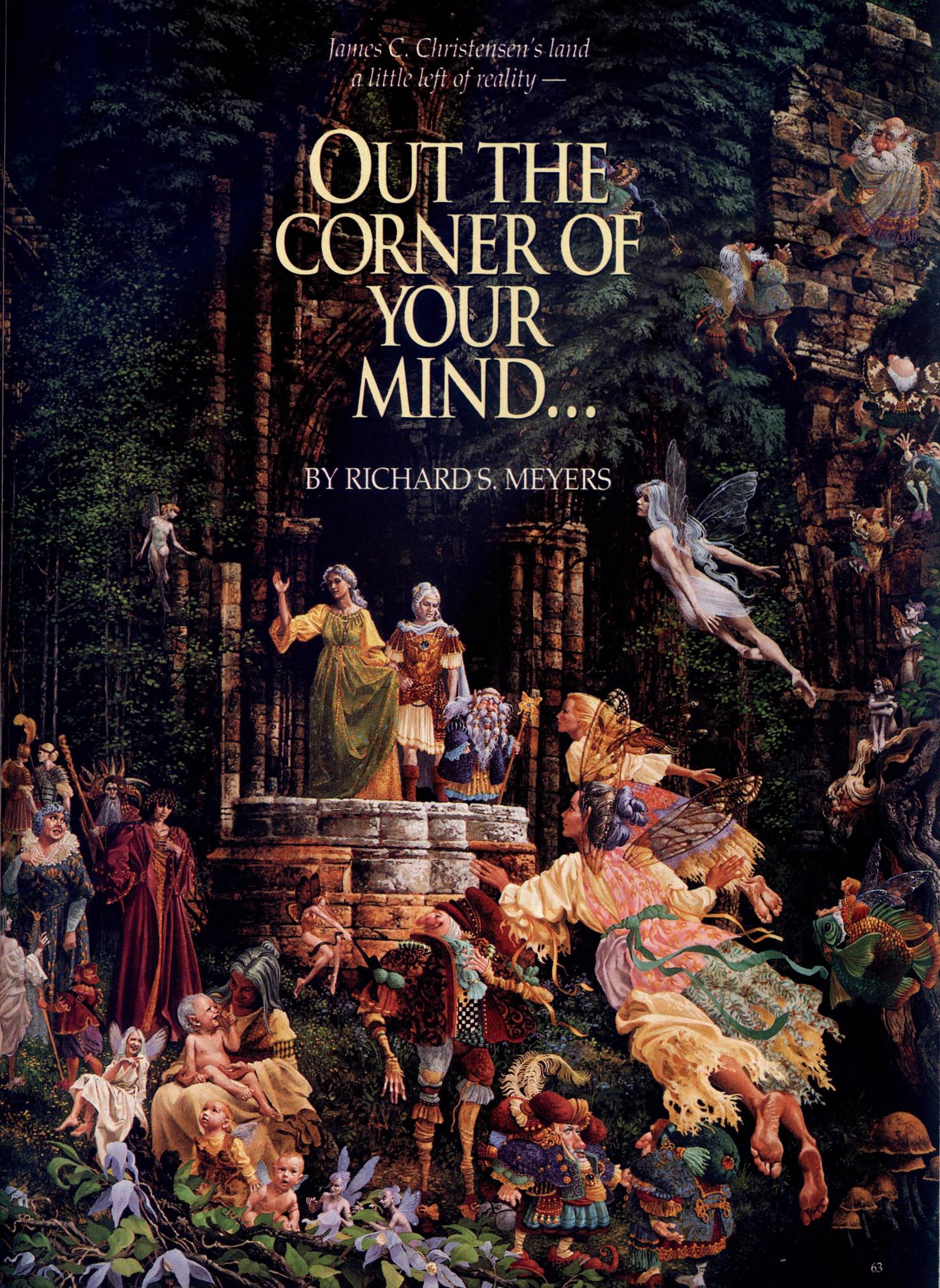
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*James C. Christensen's land
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OUT THE CORNER OF YOUR MIND...

BY RICHARD S. MEYERS





Jokes, riddles, puns, plays-on-words, symbolism ... you can't go far on the journey of imagination that is James Christensen's life's work without walking face first into one of those things. No matter how dark or light the subject matter, there always seems to be a secret smile playing around the lips of Christensen's incredible characters.

"I paint what I see," says many an artist, and it is certainly true in Christensen's case, despite the fact that he sees floating fish, hunchbacks, faeries, trolls, dwarves, and the like. But to this artist, this is the stuff of everyday life. Sometimes they are people we seem to know, transformed by special art effects and the Christensen costume department into something else again. And sometimes

they are symbols of something that touches many, if not all, of us.

Christensen's ability to engage, excite, and exercise a viewer's imagination has made him a significant presence in today's fantasy art world, but his unique universe view was forged in an enviable youth. "I was born in 1942 and raised in Culver City, California, right next to the old Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios," he explains. "My friends and I would jump the fence at night and land right in the middle of a Western town or Tarzan's jungle."

Given Christensen's ongoing love of movies, not to mention almost every other kind of entertainment, it's little wonder that his own work took on a grand theatricality that knows no budgetary restraint. "A lot of

people think of my work as glimpses through a window into a whole other world, but I've always thought of them as taking place in a shadowbox or on a sound stage. If you could look just a few feet on either side, you'd see the studio wall or floor, rather than more forest or checkerboard or whatever."

So potent is his art, however, that Christensen is virtually alone in that estimation. One of the reasons is that his work is much more than heavily art-directed cinematic moments; they are practically dripping with symbolism, mythology, legend, in-jokes, out-jokes, and somewhere-in-between-jokes. All of this is the result of not just a "misspent" youth, but a young adulthood filled with imagination and wonder.

"During the day I read. During the



evenings I listened to the golden age of radio dramas and comedies. On weekends I haunted the movie theaters. In school I was as interested in fantastic stories of sword and sorcery as I was in the history of our world." Christensen's destiny was shaped by art studies at UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles) and his Mormon upbringing. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sent the 19-year-old Christensen to Uruguay and Argentina, where the young artist broadened his experience with local legends.

To support his wife, Carole, and his children, there followed the years he dubbed "anything for a buck." That's when his all-too-rare book covers were painted, as well as distinguished work in the *Enchanted Worlds* book series from Time/Life.

In addition to freelance illustration jobs, Christensen taught junior high school, which led to his becoming an art professor at his alma mater, Brigham Young University — where he has remained until this day. With the tenuous security of a teaching position and a six-month experience touring the great art museums of Europe, Christensen embarked on a full-fledged fine art career in 1980.

This "art of imagination" eventually appeared in such publications as *Omni*, as well as the *American Illustration Annual* and Japan's prestigious *Outstanding American Illustrators* book. Ultimately Christensen's paintings came to the attention of David P. Usher of The Greenwich Workshop, publisher of limited edition fine art. Although, at the time, there was virtually no category in

LEFT: For Once Upon a Time — this image of a bard telling his stories to characters who usually appear in them — Christensen pays homage to the Edward Burne-Jones' knight, Waterhouse's Lady of Shalott, and even Ian Ballantine, among others. TOP: How many allusions and symbols can you find in Tea for Toucan? ABOVE: Your Plaiice or Mine? Notice his watch is at the eleventh hour . . .



the art world known as fantasy fine art, Usher saw visionary possibilities in Christensen's work.

The Greenwich Workshop started releasing Christensen limited fine art prints in 1985, and the artist's group of collectors grew until his editions now routinely sell out. At the moment, Christensen's art is also gracing a variety of offerings — from jigsaw puzzles, cards, and calendars to works in porcelain.

"There's a magical quality about this," he says. "These characters have lived in my head as painted pictures, and now to be able to walk around them is the next best thing to their coming to life. It's a delightful revelation for me." Christensen's images have come back to books as well. In 1994, the Greenwich Workshop designed and produced an extraordinary book of his art, *A Journey of the Imagination*, then collaborated with him, Alan Dean Foster, and Renwick St. James to create *Voyage of the Basset* — a wonderful adventure fantasy book.

It is with *Basset* — the heartfelt story of a



19th-century professor's journey to save imagination itself — that Christensen has focused his career, both literally and figuratively. "It's been a real luxury to immerse myself in this adventure. This voyage, which I first proposed more than four years ago, reflects a lot of what I feel about life, my work, and my message: the discovery of new places and new things, about our surroundings or about ourselves.

Ultimately what makes Christensen's work so exciting and perennial is that his fan-

tastical images come from his everyday experiences as well as historical allegory. There's so much to see, think about, and enjoy in his paintings and porcelains. His seemingly impossible images always mean something. His self-portrayed hunchbacks are everyman, with the hump representing our responsibilities. His layers of clothing symbolize the layers of personality and defenses with which we protect ourselves. His rivers stand in for life, and his boats are our voyages through the years. His checkerboard floors are the whites and blacks, darks and lights, yins and yangs of existence.

And his trademark floating fish? Well, they are our guides to the realms of higher understanding or the signposts to the fantastic wonders all around us that we may take for granted. Or maybe they are something else again. What do you think? 🐟

Many of the major works of James C. Christensen are published by The Greenwich Workshop, Inc. Call (800) 243-4246 for more information.

Voyage of the Basset, the sister voyage to that of Darwin on the Beagle, featuring Professor Aisling and his menagerie of discoveries. TOP LEFT: The Invisible Door presents one large, obvious allegory, but many others which are open to interpretation. You get to decide which is which. BOTTOM LEFT: Aslan in Eden is an homage to C.S. Lewis, incorporating things from the Chronicles of Narnia as well as the Perelandra Trilogy.





*To find strength beyond desperation takes courage,
of course. But it also takes hope.*

A DARK FIRE, BURNING FROM WITHIN



MORE THAN A WEEK HAD PASSED SINCE THE NIGHT of Fires, though flames still sparked throughout the old city, streaking the night red. Beda kept watch while Allard slept. Being with child had made finding a comfortable sitting position increasingly difficult; Beda shifted to a crouch, determined not to fall asleep. Her

skin was blackened and dry from crawling through the burned rubble. She found it very soothing to finger the necklace her mother had given her the last time she had seen her mother alive. The links were polished and fine, so delicate the silver chain felt soft as water. A silver teardrop hung from the necklace. "There is strength in tears," her mother had whispered. "A strength that comes from remembrance."

✦ Beda remembered how her mother had pressed the teardrop necklace into her hand, then clasped her own hand against Beda's in a brief, poignant handshake. Too soon, before there was even time enough for tears, her mother had rushed away to go into hiding with Beda's father. At the time they thought it safer to hide

BY LESLIE WHAT
Illustration by David Beck

in small groups. Beda regretted that decision now. Would her mother and father have survived had they all stayed together?

She took her journal from the breast pocket of her tunic and created it open to a blank page. The paper felt soft, almost alive with warmth from her body. She wrote with shaved charcoal: "Allard and I spent the day hidden inside the remains of an abandoned library. We were sheltered from the street view by a five-foot-tall fragment of rose-stone façade. Flesh may burn, but the buildings we have made from sweat and brick shall persevere."

Allard slept with his back pressed against the still-warm stone wall. Despite his deafness, he flinched just as a shell exploded in the distance. Beda did not understand how he could have a physical reaction to noises he did not hear, but Allard swore that sound was independent of the listener.

The night air was hot. Allard had tied his tunic around his waist, exposing his scarred chest. As Beda stared at him, she imagined she were painting his picture. She so wanted to remember him, should they ever become separated. She had few mementos to remember those she loved: the necklace from her mother; a journal that had once been her father's.

***In the distance, a soldier
screamed to buildings,
"Come out and fight us, cowards!"
Gunfire echoed through
the empty streets.***

Seven years ago, when the fighting broke out, Beda had made a time capsule from a wine jug sealed with wax. She had made a promise to herself to leave some small memory of her life behind, something tangible that might survive the war, even if she did not. She had filled the jug with scraps of canvas cut from portraits, locks of hair, and small treasures from her room: a folded page from a book; a tiny doll; some coins; a piece of a favorite quilt; and buried it in a hollow tree near her home. There were times when she could barely remember what her father looked like.

Beda set down her journal and gazed up at the sky through the shattered windows. As she cupped her swollen belly in her hands she sensed a weak flutter that felt as if she were being tickled from the inside. Stay strong, my child, she thought, for you shall yet prevail. She drew her hand — with the thumb and forefinger held out at right angles — in a diagonal line beginning near her belly and travelling up across her chest to the shoulder. The sign meant *God*, and was the first sign Allard had taught her. May your God protect us both, she thought.

Her back ached. She sat up and lifted her head high enough to gaze out over the sill at the ruins of the road. What was left of the stone façade burned hot enough against her cheek that she blinked back a tear. Outside, threads of smoke rose up through the rubble.

Allard's breathing was shallow and repetitive, a lulling chant. To stay awake Beda sucked in a deep and deliberate breath, then meted out the exhalation. Her cracked lips bled with a stabbing pain. She licked them with her tongue, but that only made the burning worse.

In the distance, a soldier screamed to buildings, "Come out and fight us, cowards!" Gunfire echoed through the empty streets. From faraway, Beda heard an explosion, perhaps another building that had previously sheltered the resistance. There was a high-pitched wail like an infant, but it stopped so quickly, Beda guessed it was only the wind. Her hands again went to her belly. It seemed silly to check herself so frequently. She had no way of knowing whether she would live through the day, let alone live until the baby was born. For now at least, the baby was still. Only Allard kicked; he had slept fitfully for the past hour.

She recognized the smell of eucalyptus as its ash scattered into their building, stinging her eyes. She wanted so to sleep, if only to pass the time. Soon enough it would be her turn to rest, when Allard took his turn guarding. Awake or asleep, there was little to be done but wait to be discovered.

Around her the crumbling plaster walls revealed gray beams like the ribs of a skeleton. Shelves lay toppled throughout the room. Books burned to ash maintained the shape of fragile shells that were once stories' skin.

She clasped her hands together as Allard so often did. I pray that I may live long enough for the baby to be born, she said to Allard's God. Please. She pursed her lips and blew the paper's cells apart, as if it were a dandelion gone to seed.

In her mind she pictured Allard, his sunken dark eyes with just a hint of eyebrow, the rest having burned away; his front teeth broken. When he smiled, the look was impish. When he cried she often needed to turn away, unable to face him. Mentally, she traced the scars running from his shoulder down his chest that forced his skin to buckle and shine like molten glass.

In a while, Allard stirred and awakened. He looked up and spoke to her with his fingers, slowing his movements when she gave him a puzzled look to show she could not follow his signs. *We leave at dusk. Can you wait?*

She raised her hand to answer, her swollen fingers awkward and slow. Her empty stomach made it impossible to concentrate on the signs, and in desperation she spelled out most of the words in letters. *I heard something. Must we go?*

Perhaps you heard the other fighters.

Months had passed since the general surrender. It grew harder to hope that other pockets of resistance yet fought, and a wave of doubt squeezed her gut. She shifted position, trying to quell the cramp. *I'm afraid. I don't want to go.*

We must get away from the city. It's not safe here.

She looked down, no longer embarrassed to let Allard see her burned legs streaked with dirt. *It's not safe anywhere.*

He shrugged and stretched out his arms. *Yes. But we must get away. A fighter without a weapon can only run. We must find the settlement outside the city. From there we can plan our attack.*

I'm afraid, she signed, worried he did not respect her helplessness.

He raised his head above the level of stone and looked out at the street. *Tell me what you hear.*

She shuddered and felt a dull pain in her back. *A scream from far away, gunfire. A growl, followed by roaring.*

Lord Wolfe.

Yes.

Beda had seen the man called Lord Wolfe just once, on the Night of Fires. Lord Wolfe was a giant, two meters tall, and very thick. His hair and eyes were dull black specked with yellow. He had let it be known that he cared only to save what he could of the buildings; the inhabitants didn't matter much, because they could be easily replaced by slaves.

Perhaps a hundred of the doomed remained hidden after the general surrender. Beda had wanted to leave early on, before the city was taken, but Allard had convinced her to fight on, to fight for their freedom even if that meant fighting to the death. If they were caught, he had pleaded, they would become slaves. To a free man, Allard said, death was preferable to slavery.

But things had changed for Beda once she was with child. She felt a gentle flutter in her stomach, now, reminding her of the life within her. No! she thought. Allard is wrong. Anything is better than death.

Allard signed, *We are weak and may starve if we don't eat soon.* He stared at her stomach. *The baby will die first, then you.* He sat straight. *Lord Wolfe is waiting to see if we can still fight back.*

His words were harsh, but he stared at her with a kind and loving look. He gently pulled her close to him. She felt like a foolish innocent, and the muscles in her back tightened as she tried ignoring his gentle caresses. Then, he brought his mouth to her ear, and she lost the sounds of siege to her lover's breath. He slipped his hands up under her tunic and she relaxed, then surrendered to him.

She pressed her hips to his; he hugged her closer and she pulled his tongue into her mouth. There was a bitter taste that quietly dissolved into something sweet and moist. She rubbed against him, careful not to make noise that might alert the enemy to their presence.



FEELING BUOYED, BEDA CRAWLED AWAY TO the innermost corner of the room to urinate. There she found a small book, blackened by fire, which lacked only its cover and a few inside pages. It was a record of another mother's journal, the stories of her children's births and how she had cared for them after. The hope that surged through Beda was quickly replaced by a

fear that she might die before reading to the end.

Beda slid the mother's journal into her pocket beside her own journal and made her way back toward the wall where Allard sat in a crouch. He rose to check the street and as the winds started up, gestured that she should follow him. *Clear. Let's go.* He climbed over the broken wall and reached back to help her.

A full moon lit her path and as she stood on the street her fear crept upward, beginning as a cold shiver in her feet and rushing through her blood up to her fingertips. Every muscle trembled and she pulled back, wanting to return to the shelter of the library.

I see a place, Allard signed. *Across the street.* He started ahead; Beda had no choice but to follow. She lifted her foot and touched down the toes on the uneven pavement. The winds had stopped blowing so she paused to listen for soldiers. She stepped with her other foot, then paused again. She crossed the street, careful not to step on anything—paper, glass, rocks—that might create enough noise for Lord Wolfe or his pack to hear. She knew Allard hated the need for such timidity. *I wish I could be brave as he,* she thought.

The building ahead had a jagged stone façade that seemed to hover above its foundation, staring down at her like a mask. She saw movement in one of the upper window frames and caught up to Allard, motioning for him to look. *Other survivors?* she asked. *Let's call to them.*

No. We don't know whether they are friends or betrayers.

She hesitated, looked back, and thought she saw a woman's face. But when Allard motioned her away from the shadows she followed him. A sudden gust blew specks of dust into her eyes. It was too hot and dry for there to be any tears left; she wiped away the grit with the end of her sleeve.

As she stopped before a burned-out storefront to peer inside, Beda saw something shimmering, perhaps the glint of metal reflecting off water. A small miracle to notice this, but that was how Allard's God worked, through such small miracles. They climbed around a burning plank into a dusky room. At the back of that room a water pipe had broken overhead and filled a small tin can. Beda lifted the can and touched her tongue to the stale water. She decided it was safe enough to drink. After a few sips, she handed the water to Allard, who pretended to drink, then gave the can back to her. She drank, unable to stop until there was only a little water left. Not until she had finished would he take his share.

She suspected the room had been a hiding place. They found a bulging tin without a label. The tin gurgled when Beda shook it, and when she brought it close she heard something faintly, a whisper so quiet, it seemed almost imagined. The question was whether to eat the hissing contents and die from that, or go on and die from starvation. She put the tin down and looked toward Allard.

Here, Allard signed. He had spied something in the corner of the room and as she walked closer she saw it was a link of sausage. Another small miracle. They cowered in darkness to eat. The sausage was sour and chewy, pungent with black pepper and spices. Her belly rumbled. She took small bites in order to keep herself from stuffing it all into her mouth at once. She placed half of her portion into her pack to save for tomorrow.

Now it was her turn to sleep.



BEFORE DAWN, ALLARD AWAKENED HER. *We have to go. This is not a good place. Too easy to get in.* He led her to a hole at the side of the room that led into another room without windows. Moonlight trickled in through the rooftop, much of which had collapsed and now gaped open to the sky.

Night crossed into daylight and again into darkness. Allard lay on the uneven concrete, asleep with his head in her lap. Light peeked through the holes in the ceiling, allowing Beda to read from the mother's journal. She grasped one page between her forefinger and thumb and slowly, very slowly so that the paper did not crackle, turned the page to the next. She read about giving birth, about suckling the newborn, about soothing the crying infant with a finger dabbed in wine.

In many ways, this journal was like the jug of wine she had left hidden in the tree beside her house. Both were attempts to leave messages for the future. Beda laughed, realizing for the first time that, because of the baby, she too was like the jug of wine as well. She moved Allard aside and went to find a place in the darkness to relieve herself. When she returned, Allard was awake and up pacing.

I don't want to stay, he signed. *Let's look for another place as soon as the winds return to cover our footsteps.*

There isn't a better place. I don't want to go.

Standing still is like waiting to die, he answered.

He could not understand her need to stay in one place, and stood to search for another hiding place. There was no choice but to follow.

I see something there, Allard signed. He pointed toward a pile of smoldering lumber. The heat rose in waves that filled her with nausea. *Find the gap between the timbers,* he signed. He dropped to the ground and slithered beneath some burning wood.

Beda, clumsy because of her girth, bumped into the wood and the pile collapsed, narrowly missing her. She grimaced, but did not cry out.

Quickly, Allard signed. He pulled her free, and they scurried away. But even the wind could not cover so great a sound.

Beda heard shouting and explosions as the soldiers approached. Panicking, she stood still, too terrified to follow Allard. She watched him move farther away from her. Instinctively, she touched the teardrop necklace and felt a sense of calm wash over her. She looked around for shelter and saw, off to her right, a possible safe place. She jumped into an alcove leading to a doorway. Immediately, she was sorry, for Allard had run on ahead without her. She watched him stop and turn before realizing she was no longer near him. She was about to come away from the door to signal him when she heard footsteps rapidly coming up from behind.

Soldiers, closing in!

Allard could not hear them. One step forward to warn him posed too great a risk of giving herself away. If she were caught now, her baby might never be born! To save her lover meant to sacrifice her baby. She took a step forward, retreated, and in the end did nothing. The footsteps grew louder and faster as the soldiers rounded the corner.

At once, torches lit the street. Scores of thugs ran past, barking commands, snorting and laughing as their low-slung weapons dripped flame. The army was dressed in a thick, black leather armor. Their breastplates were molded, grotesquely muscular exaggerations polished to a high sheen. Some did not even bother to carry weapons, so strong was their presence. They were giants, needing only boots with which to stomp ants.

Beda's knees weakened and she sucked in her stomach and pressed flat against the wall to keep from being seen. Her breathing slowed; she dared not turn to see if anyone stood near. She heard shouting and more gunshots from Allard's direction. Her hand grazed an indentation in the wall: the edge of a hole large enough to jump through. She counted to 20, then listened carefully for footsteps or laughter or the ragged breathing of soldiers. When she was certain that no one was near, she jumped through the hole and into

a tiny hall. From there she found the entrance to a small dark room. The only light came from a sliver of moonlight that peered through a hole in the crumbling plaster. She hurried to the hole and stood on her tiptoes to press her cheek to the wall and gaze outside to the street with one eye.

She could not stand to watch Allard being led away. She had betrayed him. She hoped he did not know. Her shoulders sagged, her womb pressed against her bladder, her ankles and hands seemed rooted to the ground, filled with a fluid that made her legs heavy as cement. In the darkness, she pictured Allard, as he looked sleeping beside her. He is still here with me, she told herself, and imagined his crooked smile, his dark eyes, the sweet taste of his mouth. She pictured him as if he were really there with their babe! Her breathing calmed, and Beda took out her journal and began to write in the dark because she was afraid that if she waited for daylight she might forget what had happened. It would not matter if her words spilled onto each other like sand.

Outside the window, soldiers sent up flares to light the city. They did this whenever they captured a new prisoner. Beda tried not to let the show demoralize her further, and watched as soldiers roamed the streets, shooting off their weapons. The night looked festive and alive with light. Again soldiers approached, their slow march pulsing like a heartbeat. Something dark and shiny came close. She pulled her head away from the opening and held her breath until the shadow had passed. Only then did she dare step away from the wall; she faltered and gaged on the hot dusty air.

When her head stopped pounding she scooted far away from the window and climbed through a broken wall leading into another room. There were signs that someone else had been there recently: human waste deposited in one corner of what might have been a kitchen, a lean-to wall that hid a wood stove.

She felt the dull and hollow pain of hunger. She opened her pack to nibble on the hard sausage. She imagined the taste of rusty water. Her mouth was bone dry, and she stood, feeling brittle, unsure what to do next. Her body ached. Her bones were stiff, her breasts tender, and there was a sharp pain at the back of her eyes, probably from reading in near darkness.

She lay on her burgeoning belly, weight on her elbows, one cheek resting against the peeling skin on her hand. Footfalls clattered from somewhere off in the distance. Glass exploded, and more gunshots fired. With her eyes pressed shut, she made herself imagine Allard holding their child. She wept, feeling so ashamed that she was now too weak to fight back. Her tears made her think of her mother. "There was strength in tears," she had said. Beda brought the teardrop necklace to her lips and made a promise: to survive. To have her child. Perhaps I do fight back, she thought. By staying alive, by daring to carry this child. Perhaps I fight back by believing in a future.



URING THE NEXT DAY SHE READ THE mother's journal to the end, pausing now and then to jot a few notes in her own journal. The roof above her had burned; the ceiling was more gone than there. It was so very still that Beda wondered, Could anyone else still be hiding?

After the dark settled in Beda carefully stepped across the floor to search for food or water. She found a bit of leathery meat and enough water to quench her thirst. She made her way through the broken and charred furniture to the wall, where she gazed out at the street. She listened closely, unable to hear so much as a whisper. Silence hovered outside below a visible layer of smoke. Beda waited for a wind to startle the buildings and cover the sound when she cleared her throat.

She headed outside and made her way into the street, to the west, and a part of the city she was more familiar with. She heard a whisper from behind her, the voice ragged and low. The air was thick with ash; she stilled her breathing to keep from coughing as she stood frozen in shadow to listen. Silence answered back and she

stepped forward. The toes touched down and her foot settled over the pavement. She stepped with the other foot, moving slowly forward as if she were turning the pages of a book.

Then, she saw him, Lord Wolfe, standing no more than 30 paces ahead. His back was turned to her and his cape shiny as blood. He raised his arms, and suddenly, all she saw was blackness, as if he had taken all of the city beneath his cape.

Beda froze in her place. There seemed no point in fighting him any longer. She prepared to call him, but enveloped in the winds, she heard the whispering of her mother.

Remember us! Fight, her mother whispered. Every day you remain alive is another small victory.

Beda choked back her sorrow. She spotted a blackness in the shadow and ducked behind a burned-out doorway. She felt along a shattered wall, searching for an opening into another room. Her belly tickled as the baby swam inside her. She found a doorway and stepped into a fire-blackened room. She made her way to a brick wall beneath a shattered high window, then crouched to wait for the moon. Eyes closed, again she found strength by imagining that Allard stood beside her.

Her memories also brought strength. She smiled and brought her fingers from belly to shoulder, thanking Allard's God for teaching her that. Knees hugging her chest, she watched the street, anxious for the moon to rise.

I will do more than wait for my death, Beda thought. I will resist

*I will do more than wait for my death,
Beda thought.*

*I will resist by remembering.
She opened her journal and began to
write a message to her child.*

by remembering. She opened her journal and began to write a message to her child. "You did not issue from a slave," she wrote, "but from a free woman." She wrote what she remembered of life in the old city before the war. "My mother's name was Lodyma," she wrote, "and my father's name Ewald." She wrote all that she remembered about her sisters, and the names of all the children who had once been her friends. When she finished, she tore the binding to release the paper. She folded each page to make slender packets that would fit between cracks in the bricks' mortar. Again, she thought she heard the sound of a child's cry muffled by the wind. She said another prayer, this one for that child. Beda felt a tickle start on the inside of her belly and work its way down to her pubic bone: her baby, kicking, her baby fighting to survive.

Someday, she prayed, my child will return to this very place, and when that happens, my child will learn her history. Beda hid the folded papers, whispering what she remembered of the blessings Allard had taught her because she hoped those blessings would keep her messages safe.

She steeled herself to leave, understanding at last why Allard had always wanted to keep moving. It was harder to stay still without giving up hope. The night was dark and without wind, but she did not want to stay any longer in the building. Beda crept out to hide in the shadows.

"Let me survive," she prayed, "so that I might have my babe." When Allard's God did not answer her, Beda bargained with him. "If you cannot save my child," she whispered, "then please let someone else's child find their way back to this place. I must not let my child be sacrificed for naught!"

The winds started up, loud enough to cover her footsteps. A small miracle, she thought, but a miracle, nevertheless. She turned, and respectfully bowed to the building, and to the thick walls made from bricks. There her story hid, awaiting its chance to escape, to spread across the world, like a dark fire, burning from within. ♣

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FALLEN ANGEL

Continued from page 60

"If they will have me back," the angel said. "If *H*e* will let me in."

"How could he not?" said Maddy. "He's your Daddy."

The angel smiled. It was a perfect smile. "Give me your hands, children."

They held out their hands to him and he enclosed them in his perfect palms.

"I will give you a reward for your unselfish help," he said. "Angels can do that, you know."

"We didn't do it for a reward," said Courtney, ending with a little squeal as Judson stepped solidly on her foot.

"Of course you didn't," said the angel. "That is what *unselfish* means."

"Could I have a new Barbie?" Maddy asked.

Judson interrupted. "I'd like a Pentium. And Windows 95. And—"

"World peace," Courtney said, closing her eyes. "That's what we all want. World peace."

"Not within my powers," said the angel. "But I can give you each contentment."

"What's contentment?" asked Maddy. "Happiness," Courtney explained.

Clearly all three were disappointed. "We are already happy," Judson said.

"Well, most of the time."

"All of the time," the angel said. "Ever after."

Then he pumped his new wings, which creaked rather ominously for a moment, then seemed to expand and grow into themselves as if they and the angel had become melded together. Standing on his tiptoes, the angel raised his arms heavenward and leaped into the air, singing, "***H*A*P*P*I*N*E*S*!**"

The last they saw of him was when he dipped once toward Earth. The skull of the Grateful Dead wing patch winked, grinning beatifically. And then the angel was gone.

"Happiness," said Courtney with a strange sigh. "I don't feel particularly happy right now. In fact I feel sort of sad. The angel is gone and I miss him."

"The alien," Judson said. "Not the angel. An angel wouldn't have promised us a reward and then backed off."

"Aliens don't have wings," said Maddy.

THEY NEVER TOLD THEIR PARENTS OR THEIR friends. They knew they would never be believed. But over the next 80 years of their lives — full and varied and interesting lives — the three of them were indeed happy.

Once Judson was interviewed by the *Wall Street Journal* about one of his important inventions. The interviewer asked, "To what do you credit your enormous success and the success of your sisters?"

"To an angel," Judson said. But he winked when he said it, looking at 87 a lot like the skull on the second angel wing, all bone and a mile-wide grin. "An angel." ☛

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The most terrible phrase in the English language is surely those three little words, "in my day."

A TALE THAT STARTS "LONG AGO" IS CERTAIN TO INCLUDE COLORFUL CHARACTERS AND improbable events. A good "Once upon a time" may be relied on for fun. But when you face an "In my day," or its equally unpleasant cousin "When I was a child," you know you are in for a highly moral, painfully instructive spiel, full of hardships and fortitude in the face of want. Why, my own father did not go to school in the comfort of a bright yellow bus. Instead he trod the twelve miles back and forth to class on his own two feet. Rain and shine, sleet or snow. Especially snow. And he had no money for fancy things like shoes. He wore

bread wrappers on his feet. Bread wrappers, by gum. Held on by twist ties around his starvation thin ankles as he breasted the neck deep snow drifts. It was, of course, uphill both ways.

These stories generally have some expressed positive value. They are said to teach patience, and moral strength, and to guard Pop's wallet against the assault of some new and frivolous luxury. But primarily, these stories are meant to show that things were not so easy in the old days. It was not some air bag, satellite dish, Internet world back then. We had it rough.

Why in my day, computer role-playing games didn't have fancy graphics with hundreds of colors and stereo sound to relay every grunt and swing of the sword. We made do with text messages and the occasional beep. And were happy to have it.

Back in those dark days, there was a simple role-playing game that went under the name of *Hack*. It was a very appropriate title. While other role-playing games insisted on items like plot and background, *Hack* dispensed with all that and got straight to the sword play. After creating a character, the gamer was presented with an endless string of monsters to dissect, new weapons to

discover, and trinkets to collect.

The whole game was played out with nothing but text characters to stand in for graphics and a series of randomly generated dungeons to provide a backdrop. It was extremely simple, intrinsically silly, and as addictive as heck. Over the years, *Hack* appeared under hundreds of names and on dozens of computer systems. My favorite has always been the *Dragon Crystal* cartridge for the little Sega handheld.

Not any more. Now, in these flashier, more graphically endowed times, Blizzard has recreated the original experience of *Hack* in a new even more addictive form. *Diablo* takes the mindless slashing action of the old standard, adds hundreds of new monsters, dozens of magical spells, a box full of mini-quests, and wraps it all in some of the most gorgeous graphics to ever hit a monitor.

Like most role-playing games, a session with *Diablo* starts with the creation of a character. The choices here are rather limited. There is a muscular male fighter, a lissome female scout, and a bookish wizard. The folks are defined by the usual set of characteristics — strength, intelligence, dexterity — values so traditional they go back into the mists of role-playing's origins.

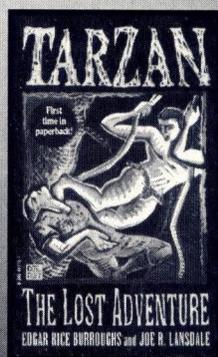
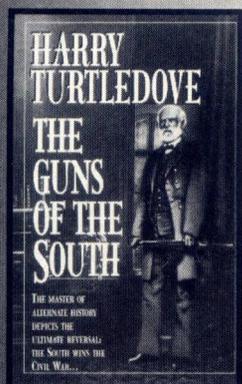
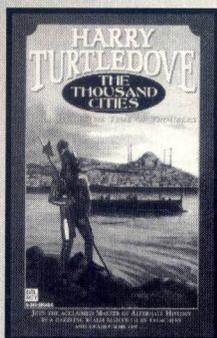
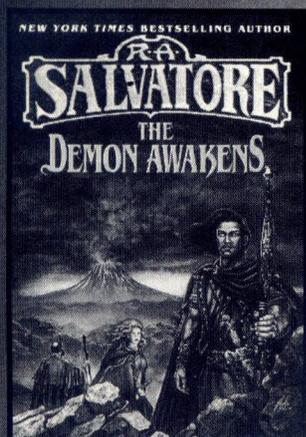
Once past the character creation phase, the gamer gets a first taste of the world of *Diablo*. Your on-screen avatar is landed on the outskirts of a small village. In a wonderfully realized three-quarters perspective, characters can explore the town and meet its residents. It's a tiny place, and its residents are as stock as they come: sturdy blacksmith, helpful barmaid, antisocial witch ... nothing that hasn't been seen before. But like most aspects of *Diablo*, it's the quality of the presentation that sets this village apart from similar scenes in a hundred other games. The graphics and well coordinated voices make these folks more than standard background. From the villagers, you'll soon learn that there are foul deeds going on at the village church. Unholy demons and power mad leaders have ruined the sanctity of the building, leaving it full of all sorts of nasty beasts. Valiant adventurer that you are, those beasties will soon be dropping by the score.

As you pass deeper and deeper into the tunnels beneath the desecrated church, you'll find more and tougher creatures. There are sword-toting skeletons, acid-spitting beasts, and winged succubi that hurl balls of fire and lightning. Your job is simple: kill them all.

Blizzard Entertainment's *Diablo* delivers the traditional fantasy role-playing game, wrapped in some of the best graphics to hit your computer monitor!



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That's not to say that *Diablo* is totally without plot. The villagers will point out particularly vexing situations to be solved. These little quests will often result in rapid improvements in your character's abilities, or weapons and armor of better quality — all things that'll be needed to face the nasties of the depths. But don't expect Shakespeare. This is a game about turning beautifully rendered monsters into beautifully rendered piles of bones and gore.

By the time you reach the bottom of the dungeon and face the terrible *Diablo* himself, you'll have left quite a path of destruction. But the game doesn't have to end with this final battle. *Diablo* includes a wide variety of multiplayer options, everything from one-on-one modem play to multiplayer action over a special Internet called *Battlement*. Best of all, Blizzard supplies this service free of charge. Playing with a trio of fellow adventurers over the net can be a whole different game — especially when one of your companies decide to ice you and steal everything you've gathered.

Blizzard has already redefined the action strategy genre with its best-selling and groundbreaking *Warcraft* series. Now *Diablo* has shown that they have the stuff to compete in the top ranks of adventuring. With their new game *Starcraft* on the way, makers of interstellar warfare games had better watch out before this Blizzard storms over yet another market.

EXOTIC LOCALES, DANGEROUS FOES, AND ONE EXCITING GAL

According to many experts, we're only a couple of years away from synthetic actors. Already several short features have been made featuring characters nearly indistinguishable from their flesh and blood colleagues and *Toy Story* showed that audiences are willing to accept characters who are nothing but a collection of pixels. Certainly *Baywatch* demonstrates that millions of viewers will tune in to see characters who are at least partially artificial.

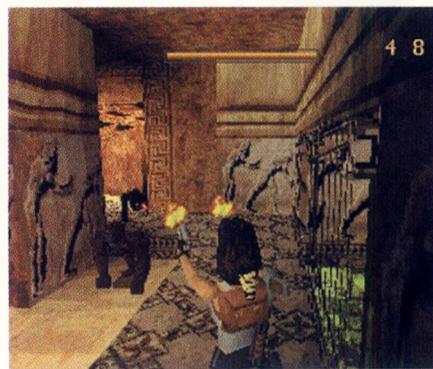
But if the recent trends in videogames are any indication, the *Baywatch* beauties could soon be the most average women on the tubes. Compared the female characters of games like *Tekken 2* and *Killer Instinct*, those lifeguards might as well be teenage boys.

Joining the ranks of the digitally enhanced

is Laura Croft, the female star of Eidos' action-adventure epic, *Tomb Raider*. Besides being phenomenally proportioned, Laura is one tough customer.

Originally a rich and pampered aristocrat, Laura has been through some rough times of late. First, her plane crashed in the Himalayas. By the time she made her way down from the mountains, she was no longer the same girl who had left her home in England. Unable to accept the changes, her family eventually disowned her. Left to herself, Laura turned to writing travel journals to fund her continued travel. Along the way she acquired a whip, a gun, killer shorts, and enough attitude to send Indy Jones running for his mamma.

In exploring a series of ancient ruins and lost caverns, Laura faces dangers ranging



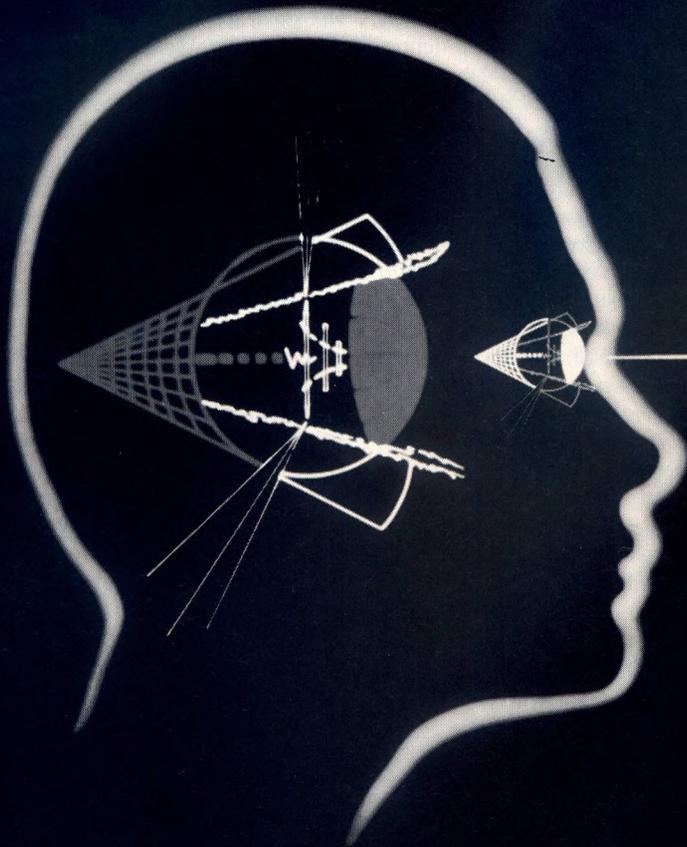
from deadly dogs, perilous traps, and even a towering T. Rex. To survive this gauntlet of danger, our girl Laura has to jump, kick, punch, shoot, swing, swim, and run. The scope of the adventure is immense, with an incredible number of locations and effects. Especially impressive are the water filled passages. The water flows, sloshes, and just flat out feels like water.

It's an impressive debut for Laura Croft and the development team at Core Design who put this adventure together. The animation featured in *Tomb Raider* makes this an experience that's almost as much fun to watch as it is to play. The sense of depth and fluidness of motion is impossible to see in a still picture. This is one game that literally has to be experienced.

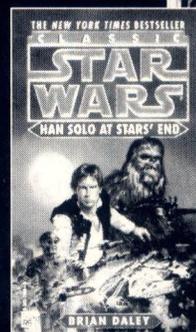
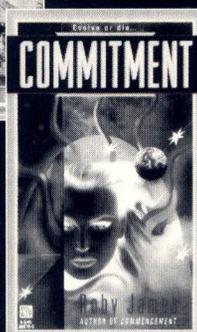
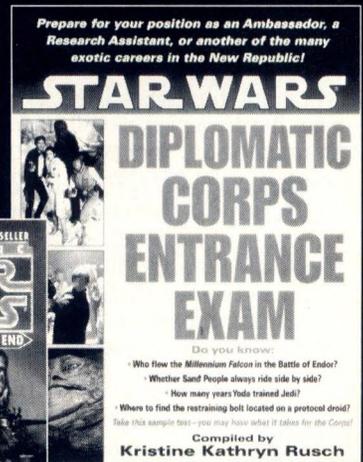
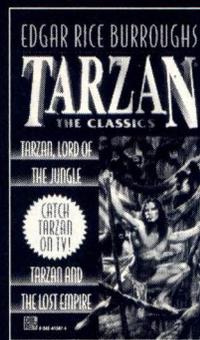
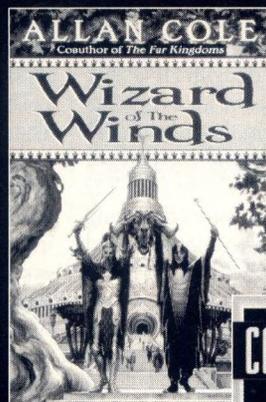
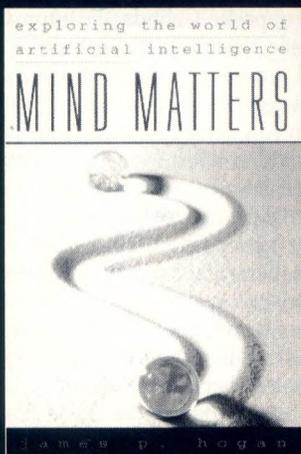
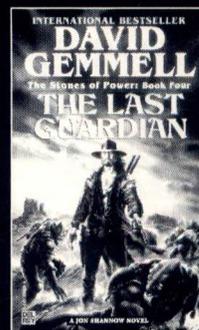
If you've recently purchased one of those new 3-D rendering cards for your PC, you might be wondering when you're going to see some payoff for the investment. The answer is now. *Tomb Raider* has been designed to take advantage of several of the new cards. When paired with the right hardware partner, the graphics quality of the images take a quantum leap. If you've been scoffing at these add-on cards as worthless gadgets, it's time you got down to the computer store and shelled out.

Seen in motion, this is the most beautiful game ever created and that beauty goes far beyond the main character. But hey, if you have to follow a character through hours of adventures, it might as well be the lovely Laura. ♦

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Thank you.

BOOKS

Continued from page 20

aspects of the Lovecraft material chosen by Carter to pastiche is it's skittery avoidance of HPL's hard core, serious writing. Almost all of the stuff he takes off from that is done by Lovecraft himself is inspired by the "revisions" Lovecraft batted out for clients like Hazel Heald, Adolph de Castro, Zelia Bishop and other such nonentities. Most of these he almost completely reworked so that their scribbles would be buyable pulp fiction. It's fun stuff but it's by no means the sort of work for which Lovecraft sacrificed himself to the lifelong poverty he endured.

Carter's stories are enjoyable takeoffs which drag in so much accumulated Cthuliania that they come perilously close to unconsciously verging on satire, but they never lack for action or wild plotting or color. Weird places abound, monsters are piled upon monsters like pineapples and papayas in the sidewalk bins of a fruit stand, and the copious use of italic phrases, especially those last lines which one has seen coming pages and pages before, are evocations of familiarity which are — at least for me — downright heartwarming.

The appellations of his scientists is so very, very old New England (one *does* wonder how all those Yankees managed to end up in the Sanbourne Institute of Pacific Antiquities in Santiago, CA!) that they are positively cuddly: Abner Exekiel Hoag, Arthur Wilcox Hodgkins, Harold Hadley Copeland—you want to give those names to teddy bears!

You will have noticed I keep returning to Price, his long introduction and his voluminous notes regarding the particular tales. I really feel the basic charm of the book is that it is a *genuine* posthumous collaboration, without the quote marks, between him and Carter. Two truly kindred souls: avid, highly intelligent aficionados of fantasy and of Lovecraft, one dead, one living, I believe they've come together far more successfully than either Derleth or Carter managed to do with HPL.

The book is obviously not for everyone, but if you are interested in this admittedly rather odd and arcane area of the literary landscape you are very likely to find *The Xothic Legend Cycle* an altogether charming book full of interesting revelations and insights. And a lot of fun.

Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West; by Gregory Maguire; Regan-Books, NY; 416 pp.; trade paperback; \$14.00

Books that tie into existing classics are plentiful in our time. Publishers have offered us a series of sequels to *Blade Runner*, new perspectives on *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Mary Reilly) and *Frankenstein* (The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein), a prequel to *Dracula* (The Diaries of the Family Dracul trilogy), and many others. Whether these books succeed or not depends on how much new their authors have to say about

these enduring situations and themes. While a number of these books have added depth and resonance to their sources, others have been rather empty, unimaginative attempts to cash in on a famous name.

It seems inevitable that someone would try his hand at tying into L. Frank Baum's classic *The Wizard of Oz*. But Maguire's first novel is anything but a cynical money-making enterprise. His book examines the nature of evil, the effects of repressive government, self-interest, prejudice, independent thinking, free will, guilt, and forgiveness. Maguire has serious themes to discuss, themes that have not been handled with such power and insight since George Orwell's *1984*. I believe Maguire came to this novel not with the thought, "Gee, I'd like to do a tie-in to *The Wizard of Oz*. I know — I'll tell the story from the Wicked Witch's point of view!" But starting with ideas that he wanted to convey, and then finding that the perfect mechanism for conveying those ideas, the perfect metaphor was the land of Oz and its infamous Wicked Witch.

Wicked is the story of Elphaba, a green-skinned outcast born to Munchkin parents. From the beginning, her parents find her difficult to love, with her odd appearance, scratching nails, sharp teeth, and violent aversion to water. And Elphaba grows into a young woman who finds it very difficult to accept love. When she is sent to Shiz University to study, she keeps to herself, reading constantly, the object of cruel gossip among the other girls. With her passion to learn and to make sense of the world around her, we can not help but love this smart, defensive, vulnerable character, one of the most fully and believably drawn in fantasy literature. She is one of the greatest female characters in the genre.

One of the many incredible feats Maguire accomplishes is to make us simultaneously fall in love with Elphaba's roommate and complete opposite, Galinda (the future Good Witch of the North), a petty, pampered, self-absorbed flirt who gradually discovers that Elphaba is her best friend.

They live in dangerous, repressive times. The Wizard has taken over the government and establishes a series of policies that gradually restrict the freedom of different groups within Oz, such as the talking Animals, taking away their rights and their possessions, and imprisoning them. Elphaba becomes determined to overthrow the Wizard, but she is met with failure every step of the way, failure that eats at her and leaves her hollow.

While the landscape of Oz is Baum's, Maguire brings a fresh, haunting new perspective to this land, a land with echoes of Nazi Germany. Some books you inhale in an afternoon; others require you to work over them to assimilate their density. *Wicked* is one of the latter; a book of thought and complexity, a book of psychological and political depth, and one of the most fully and vividly imagined fantasies of our time.

Jeanne Cavelos

BAD MEDICINE

Continued from page 40

blurring, becoming molten. Mac tried to straighten up, made it about halfway. He said, "There's one thing I didn't mention."

The wizard collapsed to the floor, writhing, formless flesh beginning to elongate into another shape. Mac thought it could still understand him. He continued, "Ben's my student, not the other way around. He came to the craft from another branch of the family. I'm training him to be my successor, the way I trained him to be the hotel's business manager. There are no secrets of the Thundershield Lodge that I don't already know."

An almost human mouth formed in the wizard's changing mass, just long enough to howl an inarticulate curse. Mac staggered, gasping, the pain in his stomach and abdomen redoubled.

The wizard's tortured body lengthened and shrunk simultaneously, becoming a long writhing shape that resolved into a four-foot-long diamondback rattlesnake. Mac would have preferred something less dangerous, but the wizard had been able to sense the strength in the hoop, and the shape it was imbued with had to be a powerful one.

Mac slumped against the wall, the pain almost enough to send him to his knees, and thought, *You overplayed your hand this time, old man.* Sweat blinded him for a desperate moment, then he forced his leaden legs to move. He stumbled to the fireplace, falling heavily against the stone facing and grabbing the poker. The snake writhed toward him, rattle working frantically, searching for the human enemy but for a moment too confused by its new senses to find him. Mac brought the poker down with all his remaining strength and smashed the snake's skull.

The pain lessened immediately, and Mac sat down heavily in one of the sheepskin-covered chairs. Tradition held that foreign objects introduced into a body by *mal puesta* disappeared once the person who had put them there died. He hadn't bothered to mention that to the wizard, either.

Mac reluctantly pushed himself out of the chair and winced at the twinge from his stomach. The damage had been done, and he wondered what his doctor would say to the sudden appearance of a bleeding ulcer in a man who had always had perfect health. He just hoped his insurance would cover it.

The gate wizard's death would also have freed Rosa and the other *brujas*, who should be flying back to Albuquerque now like so many falling stars.

I needed this. I needed to be reminded. The only retirement in our business is the permanent one. Maybe one vicious gate wizard had done him more good tonight than those two weeks in Florida had. He stood, slowly and carefully, and went toward the front door and the cool night air. ♣

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RIDERS

Continued from page 55

hand-to-hand now. The outlaws fought with an elemental fury that was terrifying; their opponents displayed a heroic valor that was as alien as it was beautiful. When I began to perceive some of them clad in armor, their oppen buck knives lengthening into swords, I hid my eyes, and did not look up again until all was still.

Sheriff Donner stood amidst the carnage. He was dressed in the garments I remembered, but the weapon he gripped was certainly a hammer, not a gun. Harbard's daughters moved among the fallen, keening softly. There were nine of them now. One of them lifted the body of my old friend the dying cowpoke in her arms and carried him away.

How long until he came back to life again? I wondered numbly. Would all those I saw lying dead on this bloody ground spend this evening getting drunk and boasting in Harbard's house or Vanna's saloon?

"You must remember this scene, when you are asked to paint the glory of war . . ." I whirled, for I had heard no footstep, and saw Harbard. His broad hat was drawn down over his eye, and a long black coat hung from his shoulders in sculptured folds. To my altered vision, the head of the staff on which he leaned looked like the blade of a spear.

"Is it glorious?" I asked. "Is that why you've been fighting the same battle for centuries?"

"Ah—" he let out his breath in a little sigh. "You understand."

"I saw the operas of Richard Wagner when I was in Germany. It's Ragnarok you're fighting, isn't it? But it goes on and on . . ."

"One day it will end. We do but test each other's strength until that day. And in every age I gather those who can serve me."

I recoiled from that single gaze. "I'm not a fighter."

"Not every warrior fights with a sword. Vision can be a weapon as well. You told us how the artists who paint these mountains are teaching your people how to see their beauty. When you painted my murals you saw what is — what if you could transform it by painting what should be? Stay, Will Carter. Fight for me with your brush as these others do with steel."

"It's not the same," I said desperately. "The rocks are rocks however I paint them, but what are you? I have to know what is real!"

Harbard looked at me for a moment, then laughed. "To see that truth would blind you. We are as we are — you saw what you expected. It is only the way in which reality appears to you that men can choose to see."

I stared at the ground, but at that moment even the stones seemed made of dancing motes of light, not solid rock at all.

"And can I choose to leave here?"

"I could keep you — it is not so easy to leave this valley as it is to enter. But I will not

do so." He sounded disappointed.

"Even though I may tell others what I have seen?"

"Who would believe you?" Harbard said dryly. "When you walk the streets of Denver once more, you yourself will think this some strange dream."

"I can't stay," I whispered, struggling to my feet. "I am still too in love with the surfaces of things."

"Be it so," he answered me.

I turned to thank him, but Harbard and all the others were gone. My pony, cropping at the sparse grass a few yards down the trail, was the only living thing I could see.

By the time I got to the top of Rainbow Ridge, my memories of the battle and everything that had gone before were already beginning to seem strange. My mount halted, blowing noisily, and I turned in the saddle to look back at the way I had come.

Overhead the clouds were building towers of white and silver, casting a shifting light over the slope that fell away below me in a mosaic of red and yellow ochre, sand and beige, and tender shades of rose. Beyond, evergreens banded the mountain with darkly luminous shade. Farther still the eye was drawn by the subtle sculpturing of dale and hill away to the sweet greens of the valley floor that rolled away into mysteries veiled by blue haze.

Did a town lie hidden there? Did those vague distances hold the men and buildings and animals that even now I could picture in my mind's eye? Above me two ravens circled and soared away westward. In their wake, the clouds shifted and the radiance grew until all I could see was light. Yet still I gazed, forcing my eyes to look until to keep them open brought me to the edge of pain. And in the final moment before I had to look away it seemed that I saw shapes within that brilliance — a rainbow bridge that arched toward a fortress with mighty walls and soaring towers — and it was beauty beyond any I had ever known.

And then my human vision failed me. Against my closed eyelids for a few instants there still flickered an after-image of rainbow radiance, but when I opened them the clouds had thickened, cutting off the sunlight. At my movement, my pony started forward, bearing me back into a world grown dull and desolate in the ordinary light of day.

Many years have passed since I rode down from Rainbow Ridge, and though at times I have seen flickers of that light that lies behind all surfaces, no painting I have ever finished has given me satisfaction, for the beauty I see in the mortal world will forever suffer by contrast with the immortal splendor I glimpsed that day.

And many times, remembering, I have wondered. What pictures might I have painted if I had accepted Mr. Harbard's proposal and stayed in that valley? Or is it only the final delusion to believe that human eyes might serve the vision of a god? ☛



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HORSE FROM THE SEA

Continued from page 49

seis, at all the people assembled. "I gave this man to this woman to signal My intent, and you defy Me?"

Alia Highpriestess, ever prudent, threw herself facedown in the sand. "Mercy, Earthshaker," she prayed. "We knew not. Forgive us."

The Horse arched His neck proudly. "Mercy indeed," He intoned, His voice like a bronze bell. "You are My beloved Peoples, My chosen ones. I bring you together not to war or hate, but as brothers born. Together you shall make a new People, and you shall be great!" The Horse reared triumphantly, and His cry echoed across the beach.

"Remember this night," the God admonished His People, "and always remember Whose children you are." He stamped his great golden hoof, and in a flash of light He was gone.

All the people let out their breaths in one long sigh. Above them a shooting star lanced through the fading sky of night, sign of the Mother's approval.

Jereth bar-El arose from the water and strode to the altar. He lifted Briseis from it. Delivered from the knife, she clung to him with the strength of returning life.

"The Lord of the Four Quarters," he said.

"Yes," she agreed, and began to sob with fear and with the relief from fear.

He regarded her gravely. "You will have to teach me about the Mother," he said.

Briseis smiled even as she wept. "I can bring the Mother to you," she whispered.

He laughed. Then he set her on her feet and brought her to face the assembled watchers. He took her hand.

"By the Word of God," he proclaimed proudly, "I, Jereth bar-El of the Desert, am King in this Land. And I tell you that I take Briseis Seadaughter, priestess of the Land, to be my wife and Queen. There shall be no more killing, no more war." He raised Briseis's hand to his lips and kissed it. "As we become one, so shall you all."

As the sun rose on the edge of the Sea, all the People alike cheered him with pride and joy in their hearts. Then they went forth, to tell all the Cities of the miracle that had occurred.

AND IN LATER YEARS THE Desertmen and the City folk did become one People, great sailors, great horsemen, and great warriors all, who went all over the world. And the tale was told of how the Daughter of the Sea hit the Son of the Wind with a stick, and of how this so amused the God that he bade them marry, even though they were enemies. And of how through this, the People became One. ♪



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Contributors

DIANA L. PAXSON IS A WRITER OF fantasy living in the literary household called Greyhaven in Berkeley, Calif. She has sold more than fifty short stories, many of them to anthologies such as the *Sword and Sorceress* series, *Elf Fantastic*, *Wizard Fantastic*, and many more. She is the author of *The Chronicles of Westria* and nine historical fantasies, including *The White Raven* (a mainstream fantasy based on the legend of Tristan and Iseult), the *Wodan's Children* trilogy, which tells the story of Sigfrid and Brunhild. Also now in paperback are all three volumes of a trilogy on the Irish hero Fionn MacCumhal (a collaboration with Adrienne Martine-Barnes), *Master of Earth and Water*, *Shield Between the Worlds*, and *Sword of Fire and Shadow*. She is currently working on the Great Arthurian Novel, to be titled *Hallowed Isle*.

"Riders of the Rainbow Ridge" reflects Paxson's deep interest in northern mythology. Other stories featuring Mr. Harbard have appeared in *Weird Tales from Shakespeare* and *Wizard Fantastic*.

Martha Wells was born in 1964 in Fort Worth, Texas, and graduated from Texas A&M University with a B.A. in Anthropology. Her first novel, *The Element of Fire*, was a finalist for the 1993 Compton Crook/Stephen Tall Award and a runner-up for the 1994 Crawford Award. *The Element of Fire* was published by Tor in hardcover in July 1993 and is currently available in paperback. Her second novel for Tor, *City of Bones*, was a 1995 hardcover and June 1996 paperback release. Both novels were on the Locus recommended reading lists. She shares her home in College Station with her three favorite things: her cats, her husband, and her tapes of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. She is currently working on the first of two novels for Avon, a fantasy which is set in the same world as *The Element of Fire*, but is not a sequel.

Leslie What began writing fiction in earnest in 1992. She has since retired from a career as a licensed vocational nurse and published her work in *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Sci-*

ence Fiction, *Hysteria*, and several regional publications. She has just completed her first novel, *Fingertalk*, a post-feminist comedic novel, and is at work on a second about magic in the modern world.



Steve Adler



Alan Pollack

KIRSTEN CORBY IS RECENTLY MARRIED and lives in New Orleans, La., with her husband and two cats. She studied history at Louisiana State University, and The New College of The University of South Florida in Sarasota. Kirsten works with her father and brother in their chain of coffee houses and espresso bars. "The Horse from the Sea," is the first short story Kirsten ever wrote though not the first she has sold. She has been published in the small press and currently has a story in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Sword and Sorceress Ten*. Kirsten still plays *Dungeons and Dragons* almost every week and finds it more fun than ever. She gets a lot of her story ideas from her dreams.

Steve Adler grew up in Peekskill, NY. He attended The Rhode Island School of Design from 1980 to 1983 and spent his final year abroad studying art in Rome. Steve has since moved to New York City where he has been an illustrator for more than eleven years. Recent clients include Microsoft, *Time Magazine*, United Airlines, and Sony Music.

Alan Pollack is a self-taught artist with roots in New Jersey. For the past two years, Alan was employed by TSR in Wisconsin, as a freelance illustrator, where he worked with and was greatly inspired by such artists as Jeff Easley and Brom. Past clients for his paperback cover art have been Berkley Publishing Group, Random House, and Harper-Collins. He is currently at work on role-playing game cards, including *Shadowrun* for Fasa and *Middleearth* for I.C.E. He cites major influences on his artwork to be the Hildebrands, Frank Frazetta, and Michael Whelan. Alan is attentive to the artists he admires and has had the privilege of working with, and trusts his artwork is a reflection of this ongoing learning process. ☺



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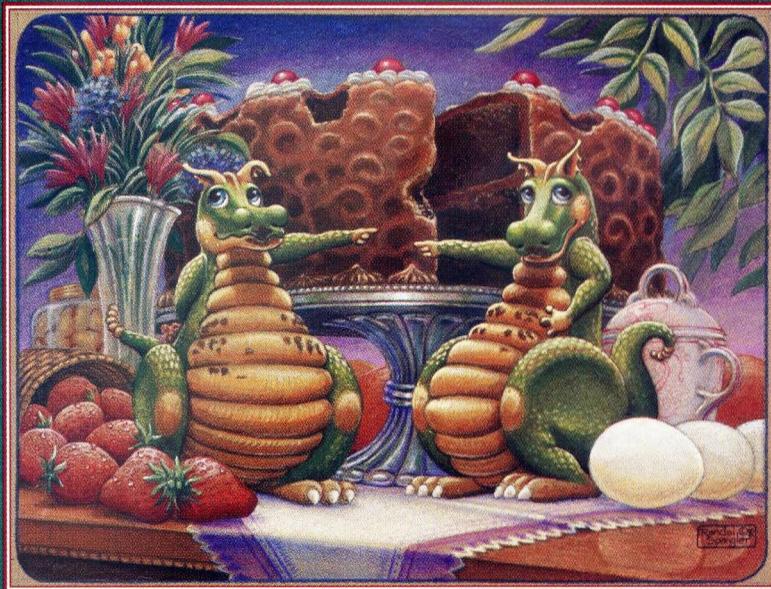


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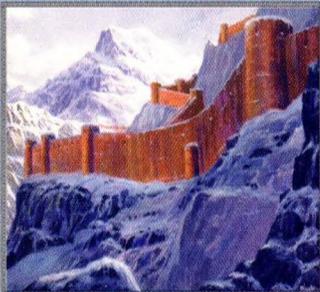
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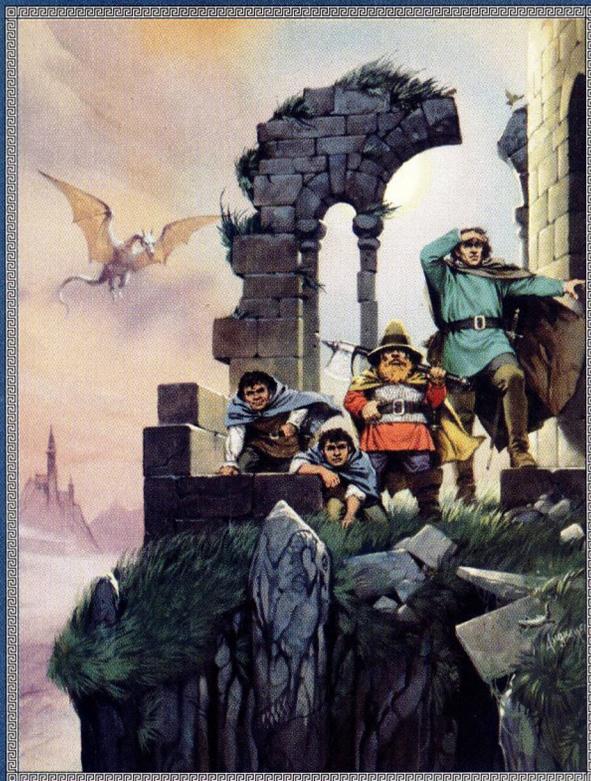
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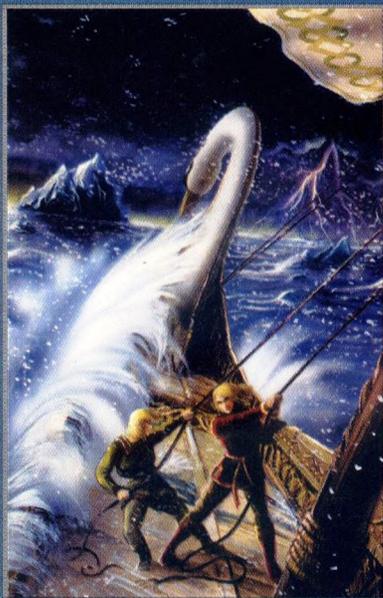


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THE DEMON AWAKENS

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The demon dactyl came awake. It didn't seem such a momentous thing, just a gradual stirring in a deep cave in a far, empty mountain. An unnoticed event, seen by none save the cave worms and those few insomniacs among the bevy of weary bats hanging from the high ceiling.

But the demon spirit had awakened, had come back from its long dormancy into the statuelike form it had left behind after its last visit to the world called Corona. The tangible, corporeal body felt good to the wandering spirit. The dactyl could feel its blood, hot blood, coursing through its wings and mighty legs, could feel the twitching of its mighty muscles. Its eyes flickered open but saw only blackness, for the form, left standing in magical stasis in the deep cave, head bowed and wings wrapped tightly about its torso, had been covered by magma. Most of the fiery stuff of that time long past had bubbled and flowed away from the cavern, but enough had remained to harden about the dactyl's corporeal form. The spirit had come back to Corona encased in obsidian!

The demon spirit fell deep within itself, summoned its powers, both physical and magical. By sheer will and brute strength, the dactyl flexed its wings. A thin crack ran down the center of the obsidian sarcophagus. The dactyl flexed again and the crack widened, and then, with a sudden powerful burst, the beast blew apart the obsidian, stretched its great wings out to the side, clawed tips grasping and rending the air. The dactyl threw back its head and opened wide its mouth, screeching for the sheer joy of the return, for the thoughts of the chaos it would bring again to the quiet human kingdoms of Corona.

Its torso resembled that of a tall, slender man, shaped and lined by corded strands of taut muscle and sporting a pair of tremendous batlike wings, twenty feet across when fully extended and with strength enough to lift a full-grown bull in swift flight. Its head, too, was somewhat human, except more angular, with a narrow jaw and pointed chin. The



dactyl's ears were pointed, poking up about the demon creature's thin tuft of black hair. Neither did that hair hide the creature's horns, thumb-sized and curling in toward each other at the top of the demon's brow.

The texture of its skin was rough and thick, an armored hide, reddish in hue and shiny, as if lit by its own inner glow. Shining, too, were the demon's eyes, pools of liquid black at most times, but shifting to fiery red orbs, living flames, when the demon was agitated, a glow of absolute hatred.

The creature flexed and stretched, extended its wings to their full glory, reached and clawed at the air with its humanlike arms. The demon extended its fingernails, transformed them into hooked claws, and grew its teeth—two pointed canines extending down over its bottom lip. Every part of the demon was a weapon, devastating and deadly. And undeniably powerful though this monster appeared, this demon's real strength lay in its mind and its purpose: the tempter of souls, the twister of hearts, the maker of lies. Theologians of Corona argued over whether the demon dactyl was the source or the result of evil. Did the dactyl bring the weakness, the immorality, to humanity? Was the dactyl the source of the deadly sins, or did it manifest itself and walk the world when those sins had festered to the point of eruption?

For the demonic creature in the cave, such questions hardly mattered. How long had it been? the dactyl wondered. How many decades, even centuries, had passed since its last visit to Corona?

The creature now remembered that long-ago time, savored the memories of the streaming blood as army after army had joined in delicious, desperate battle. It cursed aloud the name of Terranen Dinoniel, who had rallied the humans and the elves, chasing the dactyl's armies back to the base of this mountain, Aida. Dinoniel himself had come into this cave after the beast, had skewered the dactyl . . .

The black-winged demon looked down at a darker red tear marring its otherwise smooth hide. With a sickening crackle of bone, the creature's head rotated completely around and bowed, examining the second imperfection of its form, a scarred lump under its lower left shoulder blade. Those two scars were perfectly aligned with the dactyl's heart, and thus, with that one desperate thrust, Dinoniel had defeated the demon's corporeal body. Yet even in its death throes, the dactyl had won the day, using its willpower to bring up the magma from the bowels of Aida. Dinoniel and much of his army had been consumed and



destroyed, but the dactyl . . .

The dactyl was eternal. Dinoniel was gone, a distant memory, but the demon spirit had returned and the physical wounds had healed. What man, what elf, will take Dinoniel's place? the demon asked aloud in its hollow, resonating voice, always seeming on the edge of a thunderous roar. A cloud of bats shuddered to life at the unexpected noise and flew off down one of the tunnels formed when the lava had flowed from this spot. The dactyl cackled, thinking itself grand to be able to send such creatures—any creatures!—scurrying with a mere sound. And what resolve might the humans and the elves—if the elves were still about, for even in Dinoniel's day they had been on the wane—muster this time?

Its thoughts turned from its enemies to those it would summon as minions. What creatures could the dactyl gather this time to wage its war? The wicked goblins certainly, so full of anger and greed, so delighting in murder and war. The fomorian giants of the mountains, few in number but each with the strength of a dozen men and a hide too thick and tough for a dagger to puncture. And the powries, yes, the powries, the cunning, warlike dwarves of the Julianthes, the Weathered Isles, who hated the humans above all others. Centuries before powries had dominated the seas in their solid, squat barrelboats, whose hulls were made of tougher stuff than the larger ships of the humans, as the diminutive powries were made of tougher stuff than the larger humans.

A line of drool hung low from the dactyl's mouth as it considered its former and future allies, its army of woe. It would bring them into its fold, tribe by tribe, race by race, growing as the night grows when the sun touches the western horizon. The twilight of Corona was at hand.

The demon came awake.

There came a distant clamor . . .

Elbryan and Pony stared wide-eyed down the long slope to the village, at the swarming forms, at the large plume of smoke—too large to come from any chimney!—rising from one of the houses.

The goblins had come.

The two youngsters were stunned and terrified for many seconds. It



was too unreal, too beyond their experience and expectations. Images assaulted them, mingling with imagined scenes even more horrifying, and amid all of it welled utter denial, the hope against obvious reality that this simply could not be happening.

Jilseponie moved first, a single, tiny step, her arm reaching out helplessly. That almost involuntary motion seemed to break her trance, and she let out a shriek for her mother and ran full out for home.

Elbryan thought to call out for her, but indecision held his voice and kept him from immediately following. What should he do? What were his responsibilities?

A warrior would know these things!

With great effort, Elbryan tore his gaze from the dreadful spectacle below and glanced all around. He would gather together the other children, who were his scouts, perhaps even call in the older scouts from the vale, and charge down into Dundalis in tight formation, anchoring the defense.

But time was against him. He glanced about again, turned to the evergreen and caribou moss valley, and started to call out, thinking to bring in the patrol of older men.

Elbryan fell back behind the twin pines, catching the shout in his throat, gasping for breath. Just over the ridge, facing away from him, he saw the nearly bald head, the pointed ears, the chalky yellow skin of an enemy. With trembling fingers, Elbryan retrieved his short sword, and then he sank even deeper into the hollow, paralyzed with terror.

Elbryan held his breath, gasped once, then held it again. He didn't know what to do, then cursed himself silently for what he had already done!

In the hollow of the twin pines, he had lost sight of his enemy—the first, and often fatal, mistake!

Now he had to work hard to deny his terror, had to climb above the emotion and the physical barrier and remember the many lessons his father had given him. A warrior knows his enemy, locates his enemy, and watches its every move. Silently mouthing that litany, Elbryan inched his face toward the edge of the pine. He hesitated momentarily at the very last instant, certain the goblin was just on the other side, weapon poised to smash him as soon as he peeked around.

A warrior knows his enemy . . .

A sudden shift brought the field beyond the pines back into view,



and Elbryan nearly collapsed with relief when he saw the goblin had not moved and was still facing away from him, staring into the northern valley. That relief fast transformed into a sinking feeling as Elbryan realized the meaning of this creature's positioning. The patrol in the valley had been spotted, perhaps had even been already engaged, and this goblin had been set as sentry, watching for any other potential human reinforcements while its companions sacked the village.

That thought sparked anger in the young man, enough to overcome his fear. He clenched his short sword more tightly and slowly brought one leg up under him.

Without hesitation—for if he paused, he knew his courage surely would falter—Elbryan slipped out from behind the protection of the tree. Half walking, half crawling, he moved closer to the goblin, quickly covering a third of the distance.

Then he wanted to turn back, to run into the hollow and cover his face. The sounds behind him, from his home, bolstered him, as did the smell of burning wood carried by the wind up to the ridge. With a grimace of determination, Elbryan halved the distance to his foe. No turning back now. He scanned the area, and as soon as he was confident that this creature was alone, he stood up and rushed out.

Five running strides brought him to the goblin, who didn't hear his approach until the last second. Even as the goblin began to turn, Elbryan's sword came down hard on its head.

The sword bounced out wide. Elbryan was surprised by the force of the impact and that his sword had not cut into the goblin's skull. He thought for one terrible moment he hadn't hit the thing hard enough, that it would turn and skewer him with its crude spear. Desperately, the young man scrambled to the side, trying to ready a defense.

The goblin staggered weirdly, dropped its weapon, and fell to its knees. Its head lolled from side to side. Elbryan saw the bright red gash, the white of split bone, the grayish brain. The goblin stopped moving. Its chin came to rest on its chest, and it held the kneeling pose, quite dead.

Dead.

Elbryan felt his guts churning and labored for his breath. The weight of his first kill descended upon him, bowing his shoulders, nearly driving him to his knees. Again it was the smell of his burning village that cleared his head. He had no time now to ponder, and any sympathetic notions that he might have captured the goblin instead of



killing it turned perfectly ridiculous.

He looked ahead at the evergreen vale and noted to his dismay that a fight was going on down there. Then he looked back at the larger battle for Dundalis.

To where his parents were fighting, to where Pony had run.

Pony, the desperate young man whispered aloud, and before Elbryan even consciously knew what he was doing, he saw the trees going past him in a blur as he sprinted down the slope toward Dundalis.

Hundreds of miles away, in a windswept, forbidding land called the Barbacan, in a deep cave in a mountain called Aida, the dactyl basked in the sensation of war. The demon creature could feel the screams of those dying in Dundalis, though it had no idea where the battle was being waged. This was an action of a rogue goblin chieftain, perhaps, or one of the many powrie raiding parties, acting on their own initiative, bringing misery to the wretched humans.

The dactyl could not take direct credit, but that mattered little. It had awakened, darkness rising, and already its influence was spreading throughout Corona. Already the goblins, the powries, or one of the other races the demon would claim as minions had felt that awakening and had been given the courage to act.

The creature flexed its great wings and settled back in the throne it had shaped from the obsidian that had formerly served as its tomb. Yes, the dark vibrations were running strong through the stone. The sensation of war, of human agony.

It was good to be awake.



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