
Roger Zelazny

Jack of Shadows

Some there be that shadows kiss, Such have but a shadow's bliss.
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Foreword

PEOPLE SOMETIMES ASK me whether the title Jack of Shadows was intended to sound like a description of a playing card used in some arcane game, as well as representing my protagonist's name and a matter of geography. Answer: Yes. I've long been fascinated by odd decks of cards, and I had an extensive collection of them at one time.

"Ha!" they usually respond on hearing this admission. "Then this business about the cards and the reference to shadows ties this story in at some subterranean psychological level with your Amber books, right?"

Well, no. The last time I was down in the catacombs I couldn't locate any connection. I was simply attracted by the imagery. On the other hand, nobody ever asked me, "Why Jack?"

I could have answered that one: Jack Vance.

In this, my tenth book, I'd decided to try for something on the order of those rare and exotic settings I admired so much in so many of Jack Vance's stories. It seemed only fair then, once I'd worked things out, to find a title with "Jack" in it as a private bit of homage publicly displayed. Now you all know.

I suppose the inferences concerning a relationship to Amber could have been strengthened, though, by the fact that this book came out between the publication of *Nine Princes in Amber* and *The Guns of Avalon*, the first two books in that series—proximity breeding speculation and like that.

But while the setting may owe something to Jack Vance, the character doesn't. I took my opening quotation from *The Merchant of Venice* only because it seemed so apt once I'd pried it free of its context. The Shakespearean work to which I actually do owe a debt here came along about eight years after *Merchant*. I refer to *Macbeth*. True, *Birnam Wood does not come against Jack*, and the play contains no quote I wanted to uproot and employ here. But Jack's character undergoes an interesting progression, which owes something to Shakespeare's portrait of the bloody Scot. I don't care to say anything more about it, though, because I feel that introductory pieces should not spoil story lines. Someone named J. I. M. Stewart almost ruined *Vanity Fair* for me that way years ago.

This was not one of my experimental books, such as *Creatures of Light and Darkness*, *Doorways in the Sand*, *Bridge of Ashes*, *Roadmarks* or *Eye of Cat*. Those are the five wherein I worked out lots of techniques I used in many of the others. This was a more workmanlike job in that I knew exactly what I wanted to do and how to do it, with the protagonist—as usual—indicating the direction. Of the five, only *Creatures of Light and Darkness* preceded *Jack of Shadows*. Looking back upon Jack in this light I do feel that I might have gained a certain facility there for the brief, impressionistic description of the exotic which could have carried over into both *Nine Princes* and *Jack*. And maybe not. But if it owes it anything, that's it.

It is interesting to me, too, in looking at a story across the years this way, to see it in terms of what came after as well as what preceded it. I do feel that the shadow of Jack fell upon the protagonist of *Today We Choose Faces*. Also, there is something of Jack's sardonic attitude as well as his caution in the later tales of *Dilvish the Damned*—another wrongfully punished man whose character was twisted by the act.

I have also been asked several times whether the name that Jack assumes Dayside—Jonathan Shade—owes anything to the character of that name in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. Sorry. While I do enjoy playing an occasional literary puzzle game, I wrote *Jack of Shadows* before I came to *PALE FIRE*.

And yes, I did once do a short graphic prequel to this book ("Shadowjack") in collaboration with artist Gray Morrow, in *The Illustrated Roger Zelazny*. And no, nothing in that story is essential to the understanding or enjoyment of this one. It is a minor piece, and totally independent. So this is the story that Jack built—with a little help from me on the paperwork. Picture him if you will as a Figure on a playing card. Make it a Tarot. Maybe the Broken Tower. . .

Chapter 1

IT HAPPENED WHEN Jack whose name is spoken in shadow went to Igles, in the Twilight Lands, to visit the Hellgames. It was there that he was observed while considering the situation of the Hellflame.

The Hellflame was a slim urn of silvery fires, gracefully wrought and containing a fist-sized ruby at the uppermost tips of its blazing fingers. These held it in an unbreakable grip, and the gemstone glimmered coolly despite them.

Now, the Hellflame was on display for all to regard, but the fact that Jack was seen looking at it was cause for much consternation. Newly arrived in Igles, he was first noticed while passing amid lanterns, in line with the other on-lookers, who were moving through the open-sided display pavilion. He was recognized by Smage and Quazer, who had left their places of power to come to compete for the trophy. They immediately moved to report him to the Games Master.

Smage shifted his weight from foot to foot and tugged at his mustache until the tears rose in his squarish eyes and he began to blink. He stared up at his giant companion Quazer—hair, eyes, flesh all of a uniform gray—rather than regard the colorful bulk of Benoni, the Games Master, whose will was law in this place.

"What do you two want?" he inquired.

Smage continued to stare and blink until Quazer finally spoke in his flute-like fashion.

"We have information for you," he said.

"I hear you. Tell it," replied Benoni.

"We have recognized one whose presence here should be cause for some concern."

"Who?"

"We must move near to a light before I may tell you."

The Games Master twisted his head on his bulging neck, and his amber eyes flashed as he glared first at the one, then at the other.

"If this is some sort of prank—" he began.

"It is not," said Quazer unflinchingly.

"Very well, then. Follow me." He sighed; and with a swirl of his orange and green cloak, he turned and headed toward a brightly illuminated tent.

Inside, he faced them once again. "Is this bright enough for you?"

Quazer looked about. "Yes," he said. "He will not overhear us."

"Who are you talking about?" asked the Games Master.

"Do you know of one called Jack, who always hears his name if it is spoken in shadows?"

"Jack of Shadows? The thief?—Yes, I've heard stories."

"That is why we wished to speak with you in a brightly lit place. He is here. Smage and I saw him only a few minutes ago. He was studying the Hellflame."

"Oh my!" The Games Master's eyes were wide and his mouth remained open after the exclamation. "He'll steal it!" he said.

Smage stopped touching his mustache long enough to nod several times. ". . . And we're here to try to win it," he blurted. "We can't if it is stolen."

"He must be stopped," said the Games Master. "What do you think I should do?"

"Your will is the law here," said Quazer.

"True. . . Perhaps I should confine him to some lock-up for the duration of the Games."

"In that case," said Quazer, "make certain that there are no shadows in the place where he is captured or in the place where he is to be confined. He is said to be exceedingly difficult to contain—especially in the presence of shadows."

"But there are shadows all over the place!"

"Yes. That is the main difficulty in keeping him prisoner."

"Then either brilliant lights or total darkness would seem to be the answer."

"But unless all the lights are set at perfect angles," said Quazer, "and inaccessible, he will be able to create shadows with which to work. And in darkness, if he can strike but just the smallest light, there will be shadows."

"What strength does he derive from shadows?"

"I know of no one who knows for certain."

"He is a darksider, then? Not human?"

"Some say twilight, but close to the dark— where there are always shadows."

"In that case, a trip to the Dung Pits of Glyve might be in order."

"Cruel," said Smage, and he chuckled.

"Come point him out to me," said the Games Master.

They departed from the tent. The sky was gray overhead, changing to silver in the east and black in the

west. Stars dotted the darkness above a row of stalagmitical mountains. There were no clouds.

They moved along the torchlit way that crossed the compound, heading toward the pavilion of the Hellflame. There was a flicker of lightning in the west, near, it seemed, to that place on the boundary where the shrines of the helpless gods stood.

As they neared the open side of the pavilion, Quazer touched Benoni's arm and nodded. The Games Master followed the direction of his gesture with his eyes to where a tall, thin man stood leaning against a tent pole. His hair was black, his complexion swarthy, his features somewhat aquiline. He wore gray garments, and a black cloak was draped over his right shoulder. He smoked some darkside weed rolled into a tube, and its smoke was blue in the torchlight.

For a moment Benoni studied him, sensing that feeling men know when confronting a creature born, not of woman but of an unknown darkstroke, in that place men shunned.

He swallowed once, then said, "All right. You may go now."

"We would like to help—" Quazer began.

"You may go now!"

He watched them depart and then muttered, "Trust one of them to betray another."

He went to collect his guard force and several dozen bright lanterns.

Jack accompanied the arresting party without offering resistance or argument. Surrounded by a party of armed men and caught at the center of a circle of light, he nodded slowly and followed their instructions, not saying a word all the while.

They conducted him to the Games Master's brightly lighted tent. He was pushed before the table at which Benoni sat. The guards moved to surround him once more with their lanterns and shadow-destroying mirrors.

"Your name is Jack," said the Games Master.

"I don't deny it."

Benoni stared into the man's dark eyes. They did not waver. The man did not blink them at all.

". . . And you are sometimes called Jack of Shadows." There was silence. "Well?"

"A man may be called many things," Jack replied.

Benoni looked away. "Bring them in," he said to one of the guards.

The guard departed, and moments later he returned with Smage and Quazer. Jack flicked a glance in their direction but remained expressionless.

"Do you know this man?" Benoni inquired.

"Yes," they said in unison.

"But you are wrong in calling him a man," Quazer continued, "for he is a darksider."

"Name him."

He is called Jack of Shadows."

The Games Master smiled.

"It is true that a man may be called many things," he said, "but in your case there seems to be considerable agreement. —I am Benoni, Master of the Hellgames, and you are Jack of Shadows, the thief. I'd wager you are here to steal the Hellflame." There was silence again. ". . . You need not deny it or affirm it," he continued. "Your presence is ample indication of your intentions."

"I might have come to compete in the games," Jack ventured.

Benoni laughed.

"Of course! Of course!" he said, swabbing away a tear with his sleeve. "Only there is no larceny even so we lack a category in which you may compete."

"You prejudge me—and that is unfair," said Jack. "Even if I am he who you have named, I have done nothing to give offense."

"—Yet," said Benoni. "The Hellflame is indeed a lovely object, is it not?"

Jack's eyes seemed to brighten for an instant as his mouth twitched toward an unwilling smile

"Most would agree on that point," he said quickly.

"And you came here to win it—in your own fashion. You are known as a most monstrous thief, darksider."

"Does that rule out my being an honest spectator at a public event?"

"When the Hellflame is involved—yes. It is priceless, and both lightsiders and darksiders lust after it. As Games Master, I cannot countenance your presence anywhere near it."

"That is the trouble with bad reputations," said Jack. "No matter what you do, you are always suspect"

"Enough! Did you come to steal it?"

"Only a fool would say yes."

"Then it is impossible to get an honest answer from you."

"If by 'honest answer' you mean for me to say what you want me to say, whether or not it is true, then I would say that you are correct."

"Bind his hands behind his back," said Benoni.

This was done. "How many lives do you have, darksider?" the Games Master asked.

Jack did not reply.

"Come, come now! Everyone knows that darksiders have more than one life. How many have you?"

"I don't like the sound of this," said Jack.

"It is not as if you would be dead forever."

"It is a long way back from the Dung Pits of Glyve at the Western Pole of the world, and one must walk. It sometimes takes years to constitute a new body."

"Then you've been there before?"

"Yes," said Jack, testing his bonds, "and I'd rather not have to do it again."

"Then you admit that you have at least one more life. Good! In that case, I feel no compunction in ordering your immediate execution—"

"Wait!" said Jack, tossing his head and showing his teeth. "This is ridiculous, since I have done nothing. But forget that. Whether or not I came here to steal the Hellflame, I am obviously in no position to do it now. Release me, and I will voluntarily exile myself for the duration of the Hellgames. I will not enter Twilight at all, but will remain in Darkness."

"What assurance have I of this?"

"My word."

Benoni laughed again.

"The word of a darksider who is a piece of criminal folklore?" he finally said. "No, Jack. I see no way to assure the safety of the trophy but by your death. As it is within my power to order it, I do so.—Scribe! Let it be written that at this hour I have judged and ordered this thing."

A ring-bearded hunchback, whose squint made lines on a face as brittle as the parchment he took up, flourished a quill and began to write.

Jack drew himself to his full height and fixed the Games Master with his half-lidded eyes.

"Mortal man," he began, "you fear me because you do not understand me. You are a daysider with but one life in you, and when that is gone, you will have no more. We of darkness are said not to have souls, such as you are alleged to possess.' We do, however, live many times, by means of a process which you cannot share. I say that you are jealous of this, that you mean to deprive me of a life. Know that dying is just as hard for one of us as it is for one of you."

The Games Master dropped his eyes.

"It is not—" he began.

"Accept my offer," Jack interrupted, "to absent myself from your games. Allow your order to be fulfilled, and it will be you who will be the ultimate loser."

The hunchback stopped writing and turned toward Benoni.

"Jack," said the Games Master, "you did come to steal it, didn't you?"

"Of course I did."

"Why? It would be hard to dispose of. It is so distinctive—"

"It was for a friend to whom I owe a favor. He desired the bauble. Release me and I will tell him that failed, which will be no less than the truth."

"I do not seek your wrath upon your return—"

"What you seek will mean little compared to what you will receive, if you make that trip necessary."

". . . Yet a man in my position cannot readily bring himself to trust one who is also known as Jack of Liars."

"Then my word means nothing to you?"

"I am afraid not." And to the scribe he said, "Continue your writing."

". . . And my threats mean nothing?"

"They cause me some concern. But I must weigh your vengeance—several years removed— against the immediate penalties I will suffer if the Hellflame is stolen. Try to understand my position. Jack."

"I do indeed," he said, turning toward Smage and Quazer. "You of the jackass ears and you— gynandromorph!—neither will you be forgotten!"

Smage looked at Quazer, and Quazer batted his eyelashes and smiled. "You may tell it to our patron, the Lord of Bats," he said.

Jack's face changed as his ancient enemy's name was spoken.

Because magic is slowed in Twilight, where science begins, it was perhaps half a minute before a bat entered the tent and passed between them. During this time, Quazer had said, "We compete beneath the banner of the Bat."

Jack's laughter was broken by the creature's passage. When he saw it, he lowered his head and the muscles at the hinges of his jaws tightened.

The silence that followed was interrupted only by the scratching of the quill.

Then, "So be it," said Jack.

They took Jack to the center of the compound, where the man named Blite stood with his huge axe. Jack looked away quickly, and licked his lips. Then his eyes were drawn irresistibly back to the blade's bright edge.

Before he was asked to kneel at the chopping block, the air about him came alive with leathery missiles that he knew to be a horde of dancing bats. More of them poured in from the west, but they moved too quickly to cast him shadows that mattered.

He cursed then, knowing that his enemy had sent his minions to mock him in his passing.

When it came to a theft, he generally succeeded. He was irritated at having to lose one of his lives on a sloppy job. After all, he was who he was . . .

He knelt and lowered his head.

As he waited, he wondered whether it was true that the head retained consciousness for a second or two after being severed from the body. He attempted to dismiss it, but the thought kept returning.

But could it be, he wondered, more than simply a botched job? If the Lord of Bats had laid a trap, it could only mean that one thing.

Chapter 2

FINE LINES OF light traced in the blackness— white, silver, blue, yellow, red—mainly straight, but sometimes wavering. They crossed the entire field of darkness, and some were brighter than others. .

Slowing, slowing. . .

Finally, the lines were no longer infinite roadways or strands of a web.

They were long thin rods—then sticks— hyphens of light. . .

Ultimately, they were winking points.

For a long while he regarded the stars uncomprehendingly. It was only after a great time that the word "stars" seeped into his consciousness from somewhere, and a tiny glimmer began behind his staring eyes.

Silence, and no sensations but seeing. . .

And again after a long while, he felt himself falling—falling as from a great height, gaining in substance, until he realized that he was lying on his back staring upward with the full weight of his being once again on him.

"I am Shadowjack," he said within himself, still unable to move.

He did not know where he was lying or how he had come to that place of darkness and stars. The sensation seemed familiar; however, the return felt like something previously experienced, though long ago.

A warmth about his heart spread outward, and he felt a tingling that quickened all his senses. With that he knew.

"Damn!" was the first word he spoke, for with the return of his sense of smell came a full awareness of his situation.

He was lying in the Dung Pits of Glyve at the West Pole of the World in the realm of the sinister Baron of Drekkheim, through whose kingdom all who seek resurrection must pass.

He realized therefore that he was on a mound of offal in the middle of a lake of filth. An evil smile crossed his face as he considered for the hundredth time that while men begin and end in such fashion, darksiders could claim nothing better.

When he could move his right hand, he began to rub his throat and massage his neck. There was no pain, but that last dreadful memory came vividly to mind. How long ago had it been? Several years, most likely, he decided. That was average for him. He shuddered and forced away the momentary thought of the time when his last life would be expended. This shudder was followed by a shivering which did not cease. He cursed the loss of the garments which by now had either moldered with his former body or, more likely, had been worn to tatters on the back of another man.

He rose slowly, requiring air but wishing that he could forego breathing for a time. He tossed aside the eggshaped stone he had found in his hand. It would not do to remain long in one place now that he was almost himself again.

The East was in all directions. Gritting his teeth, he chose what he hoped to be the easiest way.

He did not know how long it took him to achieve the shore. Though his shadow eyes quickly accustomed him to the starlight, there were no true shadows for him to consult.

And what is time? A year is one complete passage of a planet about its sun. Any subdivisions of that year may be determined in accordance with other motions of the planet . . . or the motions of its inhabitants.

For Jack, the four annual fluctuations of the Twilight represented seasons. Within these time units, dates were always to be determined more specifically by means of the stars—which were always visible—and the application of magical principles to determine the moods of their governing spirits. He knew that the daysiders possessed mechanical and electrical devices for keeping track of time because he had stolen several of these. But since they had failed to function darkside, they had been of no use to him except as trinkets to pass on to tavern girls as amulets of great contraceptive power.

Stripped and stinking. Jack stood upon the shore of that dark and silent place. After catching his breath and recovering his strength, he began his eastward trek.

The land slanted slightly upward, and there were puddles and pools of filth all about him as he made his way. Rivers of it ran to the lake, since all filth eventually comes to Glyve. Fountains occasionally erupted, jetting high and splattering him as he passed. There were cracks and crevasses from which the odor of sulfur dioxide constantly arose. Hurrying, he held his nose and prayed to his tutelary deities. He doubted that his petition would be heard, however, since he did not feel that the gods would devote much attention to anything emitted from this particular portion of the world.

Moving on, he rested little. The ground continued to slope upward, and after a time small crops of rock began to appear. Shivering, he picked his way among them. He had forgotten—purposely, of course—many of the worst features of this place. Small, sharp stones tore into his soles, so he knew that he tracked bloody footprints as he went. Faintly, at his back, he could hear the sound of the many footed things that emerged to lick at them. It was said to be bad luck to look back at this point.

It was always with a certain sadness that he reflected on the loss of blood from any new body which also happened to be his own. The texture of the ground changed as he advanced, however, and soon it was smooth rock on which he trod. Later, he noted with satisfaction that the sounds of feet had died away.

Mounting ever higher, he was pleased by the diminution of the odors. He reflected that this could simply be the result of a numbing of his olfactory abilities after the steady bombardment they had endured. This fact, whatever its cause, seemed to give his body time to consider other matters; and of course his mind followed. In addition to being filthy, sore and tired, he now realized that he was hungry and thirsty as well.

Struggling with his memory as he would with a warehouse door, he entered and sought. He retraced

his previous journeys from Glyve, recalling every detail that he could. But, seeking as he walked, no correspondences came, no familiar landmarks.

When he skirted a small stand of metallic trees, he realized that he had never come this way before.

There will be no clean water for miles, he thought, unless Fortune nods and I come upon a rainpool. But it rains so seldom in this place. . . It is a land of filth, not cleanliness. If I tried a small magic for rain, something would note it and seek me. I would be easy prey as I now stand without shadows. The I would either live in a vile way or be slain and be returned to the Dung Pits. I'll walk till death is near then try for rain.

Later, his eyes caught sight of an unnatural object in the distance. He approached it warily and saw that it was twice his height and a double armspan in width. It was of stone and its facing surface was smooth. He read there the carved, large-lettered message which in the common darkside tongue said: WELCOME SLAVE.

Beneath it was the Great Seal of Drekkheim.

Jack felt a great sense of relief, for it was known to a few—those few who had escaped the Baron's service and with whom Jack had discussed the subject—that such markers were placed in the most lightly patrolled areas of the realm. The hope was that a returnee would then undertake a lengthy detour, entering some area where the chances of capture would be better.

Jack moved past it and would have spat, but his mouth was too dry.

As he moved forward his strength continued to leave him, and it took him longer to regain his balance each time he slipped. He knew that he had missed what ordinarily would have been several sleep-periods. Yet he saw no place that appeared safe enough for sleeping.

It grew more and more difficult for him to keep his eyes open. At one point, as he stumbled and fell, he was certain that he had just awakened from sleep-walking a great distance, unaware of the area through which he had passed. The present terrain was more rugged than that which he had last remembered noting. This gave him a glimmer of hope which, in turn, provided sufficient resolve for him to rise once more.

Shortly thereafter, he saw the place that would have to be his haven, for he could go no farther.

It was a place of tumbled, leaning stones, near to the foot of a sharp slope of rock which led on to even higher ground. He scouted the area, crawling as best he could, seeking signs of life.

Detecting nothing, he entered. He moved as far within the stony maze as he could go, found a reasonably level spot, collapsed there and slept.

He had no way of telling how much later it was when it occurred; but something within the deep pool that is sleep came to him and told him. Drowner-like, he struggled toward the distant surface.

He felt the kiss upon his throat and the fall of her long hair that lay on his shoulders.

For a moment he rested there, trying to muster his remaining strength. He seized her hair with his left

hand, as his right arm moved about her body. Forcing her away from him, he rolled to his left, knowing from his waking instant what must be done. With just a fraction of his old speed, his head dropped forward.

When he had finished, he wiped his mouth, stood and stared down at the limp form.

"Poor vampire," he said. "There was not much blood in you which is why you wanted mine so desperately, yet were so weak in its taking. But I, too, was desperate in my hunger. We do what we must."

Wearing the black skirts, cloak and tight-fitting boots he had appropriated, Jack moved onto higher ground now, occasionally crossing fields of black grasses that wrapped about his ankles and attempted to stop him. Familiar with these, he kicked his way through before they could fasten too tightly. He had no desire to become fertilizer.

Finally, he located a rainpool. He observed it for hours, from many vantages, for it would be an ideal spot to snare a returnee. Having come to the conclusion that it was unguarded, he approached it, studied it, then fell to the ground and drank for a long while. He rested, drank again, rested again, and drank once more, regretting that he lacked the means to carry some of it away with him.

Still regretting, he stripped and washed the filth from his body.

Later, he passed flowers that had the appearance of rooted snakes—or perhaps they were indeed rooted snakes. They hissed and threw themselves flat in their attempts to reach him.

He slept twice more before he located another rainpool. This one was guarded, however, and it took all the stealth and cunning of a thief to obtain a drink. Since he also obtained the dozing guard's sword, and since the man then had no further use for it. Jack supplied himself with the bread, cheese, wine and change of clothing which were available there.

The rations were sufficient for one meal. This, in addition to the fact that there was no mount in the vicinity, led him to the conclusion that there was a guard post in the neighborhood and that relief might be arriving at any time. He drank the wine and refilled the flask with water, damning the smallness of the container.

Then, as there were no nearby crevasses or caves wherein he might secrete the remains, he departed quickly, leaving what remained there.

He ate slowly as he moved, his stomach at first protesting this strange invasion of privacy. He finished half the food in this fashion and saved the rest. Occasionally, he would see a small animal. He took to carrying several stones in his hands, with the hope of bringing one down. But they all proved too fast for him or he too slow. He did however, gain a good piece of Hint when renewing his supply of stones for the seventh time.

Later, he hid himself when he heard the sound of hoofbeats, but no one passed near. He knew that he was deep into Drekkheim now and he wondered toward which of its boundaries he was headed. He shuddered when he considered that at one point it abutted the westernmost boundary of that nameless realm which held High Dudgeon, place of power and keep of the Lord of Bats.

Toward the bright stars, from the dark ground, he hurled another petition, for whatever it was worth.

Climbing, circling, sometimes running, his hatred grew more rapidly than the hunger within him.

Smage, Quazer, Benoni, Blite the executioner and the Lord of Bats. . .

One by one he would seek them and have his revenge upon them, beginning with the lesser and building his power as he went, until the encounter with the one who even now might be too near for safe dreaming.

Nor did he dream well.

He dreamed that he was back in the Dung Pits. This time, however, he was chained, so that like Morningstar—who sits forever at the Gates of Dawn—he must remain in that place forever.

He awakened drenched with perspiration, despite the slight chill in the air. It seemed as if the noxious odors of that place had come to him briefly and in their fullest intensity once again.

It was not until considerably later that he was able to finish his rations.

But the hatred sustained him; it nourished him. It quenched his thirst or caused him to forget it. It gave him the strength to walk another league whenever his body bade him to lie down.

He plotted their ends, again and again. He saw the racks and the pincers, the flames and the braces. He heard their screams and their pleas. In the lower chambers of his mind, he saw the gobbets of flesh and gouts of blood and rivers of tears he would extract from them before he allowed them to die.

. . . And he knew that despite the pains of this journey, it was the wound in his pride that stung most. To be taken so easily, handled so casually, dismissed so abruptly—it was like the swatting of an annoying insect. They did not treat him as if he were the power that walked the shadowland, but rather as if he were a common thief!

This is why he thought in terms of torture rather than a simple sword thrust. They had hurt his feelings by killing him in this manner. Had they done it differently, he might have been less aggrieved. The Lord of Bats, it was he whose guile stirred by envy and revenge had planned such an insult. He would pay.

Hating, he drove himself onward. Although the hatred warmed him, it did not serve to prevent an increasing awareness that the temperature was growing colder. This was so despite the fact that he had not attained a significantly greater altitude for a long while.

He lay upon his back and studied the dark globe that occluded stars at midheaven. It was the focus of the Shield forces—that sphere held perpetually away from dayside's light—and someone should be seeing to its maintenance. Where were the seven Powers of the listing in the Book of Ells, whose turn it would be to run Shield duty? Surely, whatever the internecine warfare of the moment, no Power would fail to observe a Shield truce when the fate of the entire world depended on it. Jack himself had run it countless times—even in league with the Lord of Bats on two occasions.

He longed to essay the spell which would give him sight of the current page of the Book of Ells, to see

whose names were recorded there It occurred to him that one of them might be his own. But he had not heard his name spoken since his awakening in the Dung Pits. No, it must be another, he decided.

Opening his being, he could feel the terrible cold of the outer darkness as it seeped about the edges of the orb at the Shield's apex. It was only an initial leakage, but the longer they waited the more difficult the sealing would be. It was too important to take chances with. The spell-wrought Shield kept the darkside from freezing into All-winter as surely as their force screens prevented the daysiders from frying in the merciless glare of the sun. Jack closed his being to the inner chill.

Later, he succeeded in slaying a small, dark-furred creature as it dozed atop a rock. He skinned it and cleaned it with his blade, and as he had not come across any kindling he ate the meat raw. He cracked its bones with his teeth and sucked the marrow from them. He detested such rude living, although there were those among his acquaintances who preferred it to the more civilized. He was pleased that there were none to witness his repast.

As he walked on, there came a tingling within his ears.

Jack of Shadows, and. . . .

That was all.

Whoever had spoken had had a shadow fall across his lips at that moment. It had been all too brief, however.

Jack turned his head slowly and knew the direction. It had been far ahead and to his right. Over a hundred leagues, he guessed. Possibly even in another kingdom.

He gnashed his teeth. If only he knew his present location, he could at least guess as to the source. As it was, he could have heard anything from a fragment of a tavern tale to a piece of a plot by someone already aware of his return. The possibility of the latter occupied his mind for a long while.

He increased his pace and did not rest at the time he had planned. He decided that this hastened his good fortune, when he discovered a rainpool. He found it free of surveillance, approached it and drank his fill.

He could not quite make out his reflection in the dark waters, so he strained his eyes until his features became faintly discernible: dark face, thin, faint lights for eyes, silhouette of a man with stars at his back.

"Ah, Jack! You've become a shadow your self!" he muttered. "Wasting away in a cruel land. All because you promised the Colonel Who Never Died that cursed bauble! Never thought it would come to this, did you? Was the attempt worth the price of failure?" Then he laughed, for the first time since his resurrection. "Are you laughing, too, shadow of a shadow?" he finally asked his reflection. "Probably," he decided. "But you are being polite about it because you are my reflection, and you know I'll go after the bloody jewel again, as soon as I know where it lies. She's worth it."

For a moment he forgot his hatred and smiled, the flames that burned at the back of his mind died down and were replaced by the image of the girl.

She had a pale face, with eyes the green of the edges of old mirrors. Her short upper lip touched the lower moistly in a faint pout. Her chin fit within the circle of his thumb and forefinger, and copper, catenary bangs flowed over matching brows like the wings of a hovering bird. Evene was her name and she stood up to his shoulder in height. She wore green velvet to a narrow waist. Her neck was like the bark-stripped base of a lovely tree. Her fingers moved like dancers on the strings of the palmyrin. This was Evene of the Fortress Holding.

Born of one of those rare unions between darkness and light, the Colonel Who Never Died was her father and a mortal woman named Loret her mother. Could that be a part of the fascination? he wondered once more. Since she's part of light, does she possess a soul? That must be it, he decided. He could not picture her as a darkside power, moving as he moved, emerging from the Dung Pits of Glyve. No! He banished the thought immediately.

The Hellflame was the bride-price her father had set, and he vowed to go after it again. First, of course, came the vengeance. . . But Evene would understand. She knew of his honor, his pride. She would wait. She had said that she would wait forever, that day he had departed for Igles and the Hellgames there. Being her father's daughter, time would mean little to her. She would outlive mortal women in youth, beauty and grace. She would wait.

"Yes, shadow of a shadow," he said to his other self within the pool. "She's worth it."

Hurrying through the darkness, wishing his feet were wheels, Jack heard the sound of hooves once more. Again he hid himself, and again they passed. Only this time they passed much nearer.

He did not hear his name spoken again, but he wondered whether there was any connection between the words he had heard and the riders who had come near.

The temperature did not decrease, not did it rise again. A constant chill was with him always, and whenever he opened his being he could feel the slow, steady leakage in the Shield above him. It would be most noticeable in this land, he reasoned, since the Dung Pits of Glyve lay directly beneath the Shield's apex, the sphere. Perhaps the effects had not yet been felt farther east.

He travelled on and he slept, and there were no further sounds which could be taken as pursuit. Heartened, he rested more frequently and occasionally deviated from the route he had set by the stars to investigate formations which might hold rainpools or animal life. On two such occasions he located water, but he found nothing that would provide nourishment.

On one such excursion he was attracted by a pale red glow coming through a cleft in the rock to his right. Had he been moving more quickly, he would have passed it unnoticed, so feeble was the light that emerged. As it was, he was picking his way up a slope, over gravel and loose stones.

When he saw it, he paused and wondered. Fire? If something was burning, there would be shadows. And if there were shadows. . .

He drew his blade and turned sidewise. Sword arm first, he entered the cleft. He eased himself along the narrow passage, resting his back against the stone between steps.

Looking upward, he estimated the top of the rocky mass at four times his own height. A river of stars

flowed through the greater blackness of the stone.

The passage gradually turned to the left: then terminated abruptly, opening onto a wide ledge that stood perhaps three feet above the valley's floor. He stood there and considered the place.

It was closed on all sides by high and seemingly natural walls of stone. Black shrubbery grew along the bases of these walls, and dark weeds and grasses grew at a greater distance from them. All vegetation ceased, however, at the perimeter of a circle.

It lay at the far end of the valley, and its diameter was perhaps eighty feet. It was perfectly circumscribed and there were no signs of life within it. A huge mossy boulder stood at its center, glowing faintly.

Jack felt uneasy, though he could not say why. He surveyed the pinnacles and escarpments that hedged the valley. He glanced at the stars.

Was it his imagination, or did the light flicker once while his eyes were elsewhere?

He stepped down from the ledge. Then, cautiously, keeping close to the left-hand wall, he advanced.

The moss covered the boulder entirely. It was pinkish in color, and it seemed to be the source of the glow. As he neared it, Jack noted that it was not nearly as cold in the valley as it was outside it. Perhaps the walls provided some insulation.

Blade in hand, Jack entered the circle and advanced. Whatever the cause of the strangeness of this place, he reasoned that it might be a thing he could turn to his advantage.

But he had taken scarcely half a dozen steps within the circle, when he felt a psychic stirring like something bumping, nuzzling against his mind.

Fresh marrow! I cannot be contained! came the thought.

Jack halted.

"Who are you? Where are you?" he asked.

I lie before you, little one. Come to me

. "I see just a moldy rock."

Soon you will see more. Come to me!

"No thank you," said Jack, feeling a growing sinister intent behind the aroused consciousness which had addressed him.

It is not an invitation. It is a command that I place upon you.

He felt a strong force come into him, and with it a compulsion to move forward. He resisted mightily and asked, "What are you?"

I am that which you see before you. Come now!

"The rock or the fungus?" he inquired; struggling to remain where he stood and feeling that he was losing the contest. Once he took one step, he knew the second would come more easily. His will would be broken and the rock thing would have its way with him.

Say that I am both, although we are really one.— You are stubborn, creature. This is good. Now, however, you can no longer resist me.

It was true, His right leg was attempting to move of its own accord, and he realized that in a moment would. So he compromised.

Turning his body, he yielded to the pressure, but the step that he took was more to the right than straight ahead.

Then his left foot began inching its way in the direction of the rock. Struggling while submitting, he moved to the side as well as ahead.

Very well. Though you will not come to me in a straight line, yet will you come to me.

The perspiration appeared on Jack's brow as step by step he fought; and step by step he advanced in a counterclockwise spiral toward that which summoned him. He was uncertain as to how long it was that he struggled. He forgot everything: his hatred, his hunger, his thirst, his love. There were only two things in the universe, himself and the pink boulder. The tension between them filled the air like a steady note which goes unheard after a time because of its constancy, which makes it a normal part of things. It was as if the struggle between Jack and the other had been going on forever.

Then something else entered the tight little universe of their conflict.

Forty or fifty painful steps—he had lost count—brought Jack into a position where he could see the far side of the boulder. It was then that his concentration almost gave way to a quick blazing of emotion and nearly allowed him to succumb to the tugging of that other will.

He staggered as he beheld the heap of skeletons that were lying behind the glowing stone.

Yes. I must position them there so that newcomers to this place will not grow fearful and avoid the circle of my influence. It is there that you, too, will lie, bloody one.

Recovering his self-control. Jack continued the duel, the piles of bones adding tangible incentive to the effort. He passed behind the boulder in his slow, circling motion, passed the bones and continued on. Soon he stood before it as he had done earlier, only now he was about ten feet nearer. The spiral continued and he found himself approaching the back side once again.

I must say that you are taking longer than any of the others. But then you are the first who thought to circle as you resigned yourself to me.

Jack did not reply, but as he rounded to the rear he studied the grisly remains. During his passage, he noted that swords and daggers, metal buckles and harness straps lay there intact; garments and other items of fabric appeared, for the most part, half-rotted. The spillage from several knapsacks lay upon

the ground, but he could not positively identify all the small items by starlight. Still, if indeed he had seen what he thought he saw lying there among the bones, then a meager measure of hope, he decided was allowable.

Once more around and you will come to me, little thing. You will touch me then.

As he moved. Jack drew nearer and nearer 'to the mottled, pink surface of the thing. It seemed to grow larger with each step, and the pale light it shed became more and more diffuse. No single point that he regarded seemed to possess luminescence of its own; the glow seemed an effect of the total surface.

Back to the front and within spitting distance . . .

Moving around to the side now, so close that he could almost reach out and touch it . . .

He transferred his blade to his left hand and struck out with it, gashing the mossy surface. A liquid appeared in the mark he had made.

You cannot hurt me that way. You cannot hurt me at all.

The skeletons came into view again, and he was very close to that surface which looked like cancerous flesh. He could feel it hungering for him, and he was kicking bones aside and hearing them crunch beneath his boots as he moved to the rear. He saw what he wanted and forced himself to go another three steps to reach it, though it was like walking against a hurricane. He was just inches from that deadly surface now.

He threw himself toward the knapsacks. He raked them toward him—using both his blade and his hand—and he snatched also at the rotted cloaks and jackets that lay about him.

Then came an irresistible pull, and he fell himself moving backward until his shoulder touched the lichen-covered stone.

He tried to drag himself away, knowing in advance that he would fail.

For a moment he felt nothing. Then an icy sensation began at the point of contact. This quickly faded and was gone. There was no pain. He realized then that the shoulder had grown completely numb.

It is not as terrible as you feared, is it?

Then, like a man who has been sitting for hours and rises too quickly, a wave of dark dizziness rushed through his head. This passed, but when it did he became aware of a new sensation. It was as though a plug had been pulled in his shoulder. He felt his strength draining away. With each heartbeat it became more difficult to think clearly. The numbness began to spread across his back and down his arm. It was difficult to raise his right hand and grope for the bag at his belt. He fumbled with it for what seemed to be ages.

Resisting a strong impulse to close his eyes and lower his head to his chest, he heaped the rags he had gathered into a mound before him. With his left hand aching upon its hilt, he moved his blade beside the pile and struck it with the flint. The sparks danced upon the dry cloth, and he continued to strike them even after the smoldering had begun.

When the first flame arose, he used it to light the candle stub some dead man had carried.

He held it before him and there were shadows.

He set it upon the ground, and he knew that his shadow lay upon the boulder now.

What are you doing, dinner?

Jack rested in his gray realm, his head clear once more, the old, familiar tingle beginning in his fingertips and toes.

I am the stone who gets blood from men! Answer me! What are you doing?

The candle flickered, the shadows caressed him. He placed his right hand upon his left shoulder and the tingling entered there and the numbness departed. Then, wrapping himself in shadows, he rose to his feet.

"Doing?" he said. "No. Done. You have been my guest. Now I feel it only fair that you reciprocate."

He moved away from the boulder and turned to face it. It reached out for him as it had before, but this time he moved his arms and the shadows played upon its surface. He extended his being into the twisting kaleidoscopic pattern he had created.

Where are you?

"Everywhere," he said. "Nowhere."

Then he sheathed his blade and returned to the boulder. As the candle was but a stub, he knew that he must act quickly. He placed the palms of his hands upon the spongy surface.

"Here I am," he said.

Unlike the other darkside Lords, whose places of power were fixed geographical localities where they reigned supreme, Jack's was more a tenuous one, and liable to speedy cancellation, but it existed wherever light and objects met to make a lesser darkness.

With the lesser darkness about him, Jack placed his will upon the boulder.

There was, of course, resistance as he reversed their previous roles. The power that had compelled him fought back, became the victim itself. Within himself, Jack stimulated the hunger, the open space, the vacuum. The current, the drain, the pull was reversed.

. . .And he fed.

You may not do this to me. You are a thing.

But Jack laughed and grew stronger as its resistance ebbed. Soon it was unable even to protest.

Before the candle bloomed brightly and died, the mosses had turned brown and the glow had departed.

Whatever had once lived there lived no longer.

Jack wiped his hands on his cloak, many times, before he departed the valley.

Chapter 3

THE STRENGTH HE had gathered sustained him for a long while, and Jack hoped that soon he might quit the stinking realm. The temperature did not diminish further, and there came one light rainfall as he was preparing to sleep. He huddled beside a rock and drew his cloak over his head. It did not protect him completely, but he laughed even as the waters reached his skin. It was the first rainfall he had felt since Glyve.

Later, there were sufficient pools and puddles for him to clean himself as well as to drink and to refill his flask. He continued on rather than sleep, so his garments might dry more quickly.

It brushed past his face so rapidly that he barely had time to react. It happened as he neared a shattered tower that a piece of the darkness broke away and dropped toward him, moving in a rapid, winding way.

He did not have sufficient time to draw his blade. It passed his face and darted away. He managed to hurl all three stones which he carried before it was out of sight, coming close to hitting it with the second one. Then he bowed his head and cursed for a full half-minute. It had been a bat.

Wishing for shadows, he began to run.

There were many broken towers upon the plain, and one at the mouth of a pass led between high hills and into the range of mountains they faced. Because Jack did not like passing near structures—ruined or otherwise—which might house enemies, he attempted to skirt it at as great a distance as possible.

He had passed it and was drawing near the cleft when he heard his name called out.

"Jack! My Shadowjack!" came the cry. "It's you! It really is!"

He spun to face the direction from which the words had come, his hand on the hilt of his blade.

"Nay! Nay, my Jackie! You need no swords with old Rosie!"

He almost missed her, so motionless did she stand: a crone, dressed in black, leaning upon a staff, a broken wall at her back.

"How is it that you know my name?" he finally asked.

"Have you forgotten me, darlin' Jack? Forgotten me? Say you haven't. . ."

He studied the bent form with its nest of white and gray hair.

A broken mop, he thought. She reminds me of a broken mop.

Yet. . .

There was something familiar about her He could not say what.

He let his hand drop from the weapon. He moved toward her.

"Rosie?"

No. I could not be. . .

He drew very near. Finally, he was staring down, looking into her eyes.

"Say you remember, Jack."

"I remember," he said.

And he did.

". . .Rosalie, at the Sign of the Burning Pestle, on the coach road near the ocean. But that was so long ago, and in Twilight. . ."

"Yes," she said. "It was so long ago and so far away. But I never forgot you, Jack. Of all the men that tavern girl met, she remembered you the best. —What has become of you, Jack?"

"Ah, my Rosalie! I was beheaded—wrong fully, I hasten to add—and I am just now re turning from Glyve.—But what of you? You're not a darksider. You're mortal. What are you doing in the horrid realm of Drekkheim?"

"I am the Wise Woman of the Eastern Marches, Jack. I'll admit I was not very wise in my youth—to be taken in by your ready smile and your promises—but I learned better as I grew older. I nursed an old bawd in her failing years and she taught me something of the Art. When I learned the Baron had need of a Wise Woman to guard this passage to his kingdom, I came and swore allegiance to him. 'Tis said he is a wicked man, but he has always been good to old Rosie. Better than most she's known.—It is good that you remembered me."

Then she produced a cloth parcel from beneath her cloak, unfastened it and spread it open upon the ground.

"Sit and break bread with me, Jack," she said. "It will be like old times."

He removed his sword belt and seated himself across the cloth from her.

"It's been a long while since you ate the living stone," she said; and she passed him bread and a piece of dried meat. "So I know that you are hungry."

"How is it that you know of my encounter with the stone?"

"I am, as I said, a Wise Woman—in the technical sense of the term. I did not know it was your doing but I knew that the stone had been destroyed. This is the reason I patrol this place for the Baron. I keep aware of all that occurs and of all who pass this way. I report these things to him."

"Oh," said Jack.

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