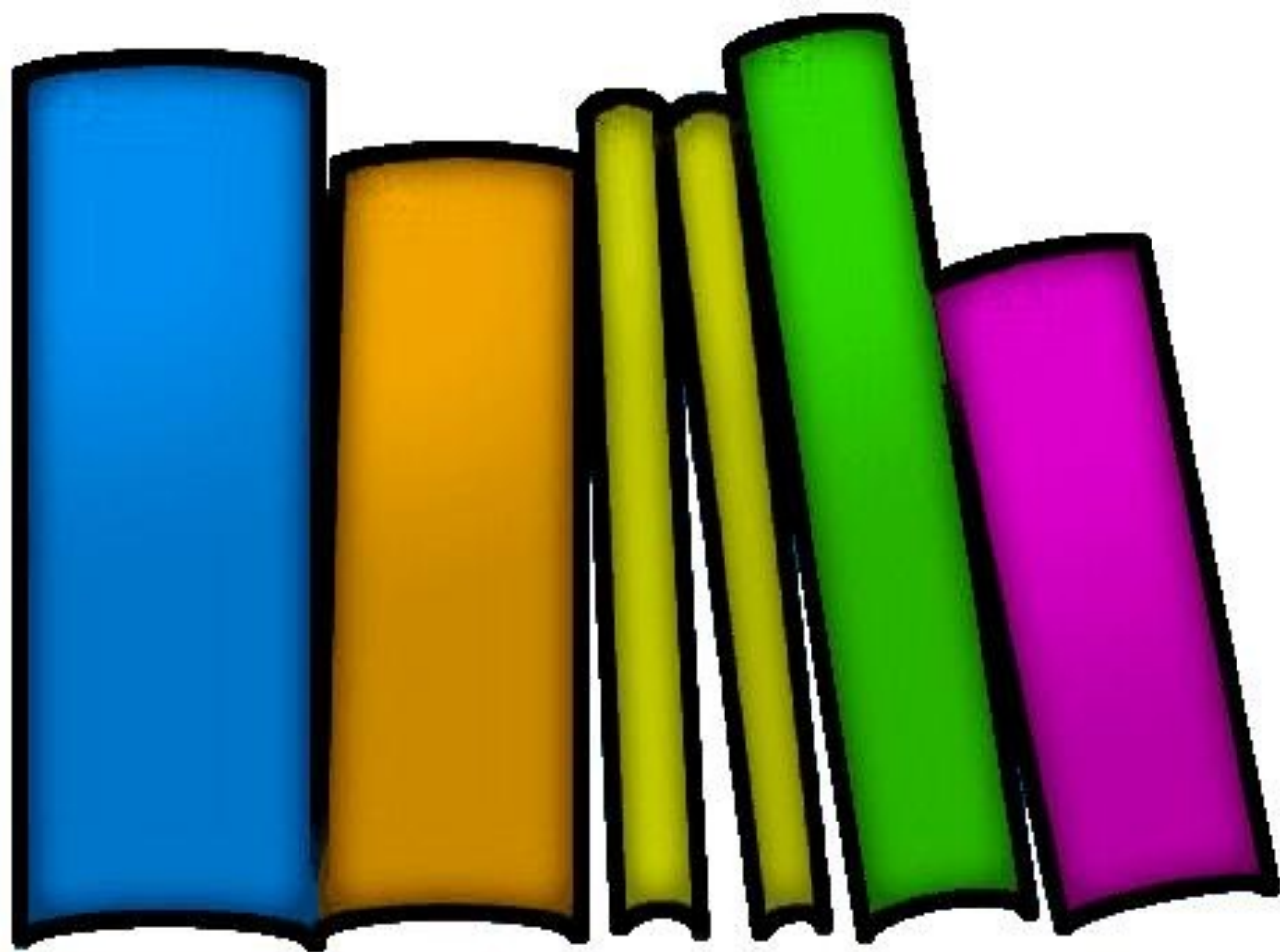


# **02 The Champion of Garathorm**

**Moorcock, Micheal**



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Other Mayflower Books by Michael Moorcock THE BLACK CORRIDOR THE JEWEL IN THE SKULL MAD GOD'S AMULET THE RUNESTAFF THE SWORD OF THE DAWN THE KNIGHT OF THE SWORDS THE QUEEN OF THE SWORDS THE KING OF THE SWORDS THE STEALER OF SOULS STORMBRINGER THE SINGING CITADEL THE ETERNAL CHAMPION PHOENIX IN OBSIDIAN THE TIME DWELLER BEHOLD THE MAN THE FINAL PROGRAMME COUNTESS OF BRASS The Champion of Garathorm Michael Moorcock The Chronicles of Castle Brass Being a sequel to the High History of the Runestaff of which this is the second volume Mayflower Granada Publishing Limited First published in 1973 by Mayflower Books Ltd Frogmore, St Albans, Herts AL2 2NF Reprinted 1974 A Mayflower Original Copyright Michael Moorcock 1973 Made and printed in Great Britain by C. Nicholls & Company Ltd The Philips Park Press, Manchester Set in Intertype Plantin

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A Note to the Reader While it is a sequel to the previous volume in the series called The Chronicles of Castle Brass, this particular book may also be read as a sequel to the second book in the Eternal Champion series, Phoenix in Obsidian. Michael Moorcock

Then the Earth grew old, its landscapes mellowing and showing signs of age, its ways becoming whimsical and strange in the manner of a man in his last years. The High History of the Runestaff and when this History was done there followed it another. A Romance involving the same participants in experiences perhaps even more bizarre and awesome than the last. And again the ancient Castle of Brass in the marshy Kamarg was the centre for much of this action.. The Chronicles of Castle Brass

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## BOOK ONE DEPARTURES

1 REPRESENTATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES Dorian Hawkmoon was no longer mad, yet neither was he healthy. Some said that it was the Black Jewel which had ruined him when it had been torn from his forehead. Others said that the war against the Dark Empire had exhausted him of all the energy he would normally need for a full lifetime and that now there was no more energy left. And some would have it that Hawkmoon mourned for the love of Yisselda, Count Brass's daughter, who had died at the Battle of Londra. In the five years of his madness Hawkmoon had insisted that she was still alive, that she lived with him at Castle Brass and bore him a son and a daughter. But while causes might be the subject of debate in the inns and taverns of Aigues-Mortes, the town which sheltered beneath the great Castle of Brass, the effects themselves were plain to all. Hawkmoon brooded. Hawkmoon pined and shunned human company, even that of his good friend Count Brass. Hawkmoon sat alone in a small

room at the top of the castle's highest tower and, with chin on fist, stared out over the marshes, the fields of reeds, the lagoons, his eyes fixed not on the wild white bulls, the horned horses or the giant scarlet flamingoes of the Kamarg, but upon a distance, profound and numinous. Hawkmoon tried to recall a dream or an insane fantasy. He tried to remember Yisselda. He tried to remember the names of the children he had imagined while he had been mad. But Yisselda was a shadow and he could see nothing of the children at all. Why did he yearn? Why was he full of such a deep and lasting sense of loss? Why did he sometimes nurse the thought that this, which he experienced now, was madness and that the dream - that of Yisselda and the children - had been the reality? Hawkmoon no longer knew himself and had lost the inclination, as a result, to communicate with others. He was a ghost. He haunted his own apartments. A sad ghost who could only sob and groan and sigh. At least he had been proud in his madness, said the townsfolk. At least he had been complete in his delusions. 'He was a happier mad.' Hawkmoon would have agreed with such sentiments, had they been expressed to him. When not in the tower he haunted the room where he had set up his War Tables - high benches on which rested models of cities and castles occupied by thousands of other models of soldiers. In his madness he had commissioned this huge array from Vaiyonn, the local craftsman. To celebrate, he had told Vaiyonn, their victories over the Lords of Granbretan. And represented in painted metal were the Duke of Koln himself, Count Brass, Yisselda, Bowgentle, Huillam D'Averc and Oladahn of the Bulg Mountains - the heroes of the Kamarg, most of whom had perished at Londra. And here too were models of their old enemies, the Beast Lords - Baron Meliadus in his wolf helm, King Huon in his Throne Globe, Shenegar Trott, Adaz Promp, Asrovak Mikosevaar and his wife, Flana (now the gentle Queen of Granbretan). Dark Empire infantry, cavalry and flyers were ranged against the Guardians of the Kamarg, against the Warriors of Dawn, against the soldiers of a hundred small nations. And Dorian Hawkmoon would move all these pieces about his vast boards, going through one permutation after another; fighting a thousand versions of the same battle in order to see how a battle which followed it might have changed. And his heavy fingers were often upon the models of his dead friends and most of all they were upon Yisselda. How could she have been saved? What set of circumstances would have guaranteed her continuing to live? Sometimes Count Brass would enter the room, his eyes troubled. He would run his fingers through his greying red hair and watch as Hawkmoon, absorbed in his miniature world, brought forward a squadron of cavalry here, drew back a line of infantry there. Hawkmoon either did not notice the presence of Count Brass on these occasions or else he preferred to ignore his old friend until Count Brass would clear his throat or otherwise make it evident that he had come in. Then Hawkmoon would look up, eyes introspective, bleak, unwelcoming, and Count Brass would ask softly after Hawkmoon's health. Hawkmoon would reply curtly that he was well. Count Brass would nod and say that he was glad. Hawkmoon would wait impatiently, anxious to get back to his manoeuvrings on his tables, while Count Brass looked around the room, inspected a battle-line and pretended to admire the way Hawkmoon had worked out a particular tactic. Then Count Brass would say: 'I'm riding to inspect the towers this morning. It's a fine day. Why don't you come with me, Dorian?' Dorian Hawkmoon would shake his head. 'There are things I have to do here.' 'This?' Count Brass would indicate the wide trestles with a sweep of his hand. 'What point is there? They are dead. It is over. Will your speculation bring them back? You are like some mystic - some warlock - thinking that the facsimile can manipulate that which it imitates. You torture yourself. How can you change the past? Forget. Forget, Duke Dorian.' But the Duke of Koln would purse his lips as if Count Brass had made a particularly offensive remark, and would turn his attention back to his toys. Count Brass would sigh, try to think of something to add, then he would leave the room. Hawkmoon's gloom coloured the atmosphere of the whole Castle Brass and there were some who had begun to voice the opinion that for all that he was a Hero of Londra, the duke should return to Germany and his traditional lands which he had not visited since his capture, at the Battle of Koln, by the Dark Empire lords. A distant

relative now reigned as Chief Citizen there, presiding over a form of elected government which had replaced the monarchy of which Hawkmoon was the last living direct descendant. But it had never entered Hawkmoon's mind that he had any home other than his apartments in Castle Brass. Even Count Brass would sometimes think, privately, that it would have been better for Hawkmoon if he had been killed at the Battle of Londra. Killed at the same time that Yisselda had been killed. And so the sad months passed, all heavy with sorrow and useless speculation, as Hawkmoon's mind closed still more firmly around its single obsession until he hardly remembered to take sustenance or to sleep. Count Brass and his old companion, Captain Josef Vedla, debated the problem between themselves but could arrive at no solution. For hours they would sit in comfortable chairs on either side of the great fireplace in the main hall of Castle Brass, drinking the local wine and discussing Hawkmoon's melancholia. Both were soldiers and Count Brass had been a statesman, but neither had the vocabulary to cope with such matters as sickness of the soul. 'More exercise would help,' said Captain Josef Vedla one evening. 'The mind will rot in a body which does nothing. It is well known.' 'Aye - a healthy mind knows as much. But how do you convince a sick mind of the virtues of such action?' Count Brass replied. 'The longer he remains in his apartments, playing with those damned models, the worse he gets. And the worse he gets, the harder it is for us to approach him on a rational level. The seasons mean nothing to him. Night is no different to day for him. I shudder when I think what must be happening in his head!' Captain Vedla nodded. 'He was never one for overmuch introspection before. He was a man. A soldier. Intelligent without being, as it were, too intelligent. He was practical. Sometimes it seems to me that he is a different man entirely now. As if the old Hawkmoon's soul was driven from its body by the terrors of the Black Jewel and a new soul entered to fill the place!' Count Brass smiled at this. 'You're becoming fanciful, captain, in your old age. You praise the old Hawkmoon for being practical - and then make a suggestion like that!' Captain Vedla was also forced to smile. 'Fair enough, Count Brass! Yet when one considers the powers of the old Dark Empire lords and remembers the powers of those who helped us in our struggle, perhaps the idea could have some foundation in terms of our own experience?' 'Perhaps. And if there were not more obvious answers to explain Hawkmoon's condition, I might agree with your theory.' Captain Vedla became embarrassed, murmuring: 'It was merely a theory.' He raised his glass to catch the firelight, studying the rich, red wine within. 'And this stuff is doubtless what encourages me to voice such theories!' They both laughed and then they drank some more. 'Speaking of Granbretan,' said Count Brass later, 'I wonder how Queen Flana is coping with the problem of the unregenerates who still, from what she has said in her letters, inhabit some of the darker, less accessible parts of underground Londra? I have had little news from her in recent months. I wonder if the situation has worsened, so that she devotes more time to it' 'You have had a letter from her recently, surely?' 'By messenger. Two days ago. Aye. The letter was much briefer, however, than those she used to send. It was almost formal. Merely extending the usual invitation to visit her whenever I desired.' 'Could it be that, of late, she has become offended that you have not taken her up on her offer of hospitality?' Vedla suggested. 'Perhaps she thinks you do not feel friendship for her.' 'On the contrary, she is the nearest thing to my heart save for my memory of my own dead daughter.' 'But you have not indicated as much?' Vedla poured himself more wine. 'Women require these affirmations, you know. Even queens.' 'Flana is above such feelings. She is too intelligent. Too sensible. Too kind.' 'Possibly,' said Captain Vedla, as if he doubted Count Brass's words. Count Brass understood the implication. 'You think I should write to her in more - more flowery terms?' 'Well...' Captain Vedla grinned. 'I was never capable of these literary flourishes. Your style at its best (and on whatever subject) usually resembles communiques issued in the field during the heat of a battle,' Captain Vedla admitted. 'Though I do not mean that as an insult. On the contrary.' Count Brass shrugged. 'I would not like Flana to think I did not remember her with anything but the greatest affection. Yet I cannot write. I suppose I should go to Londra - accept her offer.' H

stared around his shadowed hall. 'It might be a change. This place has become almost overpowering gloomy of late.' 'You could take Hawkmoon with you. He was fond of Flana. It might be the only thing likely to attract him away from his toy soldiers.' Captain Vedla caught himself speaking sardonically and regretted it. He had every sympathy for Hawkmoon, every respect for him, even in his present state of mind. But Hawkmoon's brooding was a strain on all who had been even remotely connected with him in the past. 'I'll suggest it to him,' said Count Brass. Count Brass understood his own feelings. Much of him wanted to get away from Hawkmoon for a while. Yet his conscience would not let him go alone at least until he had put the idea to his old friend. And Vedla was right. A trip to Londra might force Hawkmoon out of his brooding mood. The chances were, however, that it would not. In which case, Count Brass anticipated a journey and a visit involving more emotional strain on himself and the rest of his party than that which they now experienced within the confines of Castle Brass. 'I'll speak to him in the morning,' Count Brass said after a pause. 'Perhaps by returning to Londra itself, rather than by involving himself with models of the place, the melancholy in him will be exercised...' Captain Vedla agreed. 'It is something we should have considered earlier, maybe?' Count Brass was, without rancour, thinking that Captain Vedla was expressing a certain amount of self-interest when he suggested that Hawkmoon go with him to Londra. 'And would you journey with us, Captain Vedla?' he asked with a faint smile. 'Someone would be needed here to act on your behalf...' Vedla said. 'However, if the Duke of Koln declined to go then, of course, I would be glad to accompany you.' 'I understand you, captain.' Count Brass leaned back in his chair, sipping his wine and regarding his old friend with a certain amount of humour. After Captain Josef Vedla had left, Count Brass remained in his chair. He was still smiling. He cherished his amusement, for it had been a long while since he had felt any at all. And now that the idea was in his mind, he began to look forward to his visit to Londra, for he only realised at this moment to what extent the atmosphere had become oppressive in Castle Brass, once so famous for its peace. He stared up at the smoke-darkened beams of the roof, thinking sadly of Hawkmoon and what he had become. He wondered if it was altogether a good thing that the defeat of the Dark Empire had brought tranquillity to the world. It was possible that Hawkmoon, even more than himself, was a man who only came alive when conflict was threatened. If, for instance, there was trouble again in Granbretan - if the unregenerate remnants of the defeated warriors were seriously troubling Queen Flana - perhaps it would be a good notion to ask Hawkmoon to make it his business to find them and destroy them. Count Brass sensed that a task of that nature would be the only thing which could save his friend. Instinctively he guessed that Hawkmoon was not made for peace. There were such men fashioned by fate to make war, either for good or for evil (if there was a difference between the two qualities) - and Hawkmoon might well be one of them. Count Brass sighed and returned his attention to his new plan. He would write to Flana in the morning, sending news ahead of his intended visit. It would be interesting to see what had become of that strange city since he had last visited it, as a conqueror.

2 COUNT BRASS GOES A-JOURNEYING 'Give Queen Flana my kindest compliments,' said Doria to Hawkmoon distantly. He held a tiny representation of Flana in his pale fingers, turning the model this way and that as he spoke. Count Brass was not entirely sure that Hawkmoon realised he had picked the model up. 'Tell her that I do not feel fit enough to make the journey.' 'You would feel fitter once you had begun to travel,' Count Brass pointed out. He noticed that Hawkmoon had covered the window with dark tapestries. The room was lit now by lamps, though it neared noon. And the place smelled dank, unhealthy, full of festering memories. Hawkmoon rubbed at the scar on his forehead, where the Black Jewel had once been imbedded. His skin was waxy. His eyes burned with a dreadful, feverish light. He had become so thin that his clothes draped his body like drowned flags. He stood looking down at the table bearing the intricate model of old Londra, with its thousands of crazy towers.

interconnected by a maze of tunnels so that no inhabitant need ever see daylight. Suddenly it occurred to Count Brass that Hawkmoon had caught the disease of those he had defeated. It would not have surprised the Count to discover that Hawkmoon had taken to wearing an ornate and complicated mask. 'Londra has changed,' said Count Brass, 'since last you saw it. I hear that the towers have been torn down - that flowers grow in wide streets - that there are parks and avenues in place of the tunnels.' 'So I believe,' said Hawkmoon without interest. He turned away from Count Brass and began to move a division of Dark Empire cavalry out from beyond Londra's walls. He seemed to be working on a battle situation where the Dark Empire had defeated Count Brass and the other Companions of the Runestaff. 'It must be exceptionally - pretty. But for my own purposes I prefer to remember Londra as it was.' His voice became sharp, unwholesome. 'When Yisselda died there,' he said. Count Brass wondered if Hawkmoon was blaming him - accusing him of cohabiting with those whose compatriots had slain Yisselda. He ignored the inference. He said: 'But the journey itself. Would that not be exhilarating? The last you saw of the outside world it was wasted, ruined. Now it flourishes again.' 'I have important things to do here,' Hawkmoon said. 'What things?' Count Brass spoke almost sharply. 'You have neglected your apartments for months.' 'There is an answer,' Hawkmoon told him curtly, 'in all this. There is a way to find Yisselda.' Count Brass shuddered. 'She is dead,' he said softly. 'She is alive,' Hawkmoon murmured. 'She is alive. Somewhere. In another place.' 'We once agreed, you and I, that there was no life after death,' Count Brass reminded his friend. 'Besides - would you resurrect a ghost. Would that please you - to raise Yisselda's shade?' 'If that were all I could resurrect, aye.' 'You love a dead woman,' Count Brass said in a quiet, disturbed voice. 'And in loving her you have fallen in love with death itself.' 'What is there in life to love?' 'Much. You would discover it again if you came with me to Londra.' 'I have no wish to see Londra. I hate the city.' 'Then just travel part of the distance with me.' 'No. I am dreaming again. And in my dreams I come closer to Yisselda - and our two children.' 'They never were children. You invented them. In your madness you invented them.' 'No. Last night I dreamed I had another name, but that I was still the same man. A strange, archaic name. A name from before the Tragic Millennium. John Daker. That was the name. And John Daker found Yisselda.' Count Brass was close to weeping at his friend's insane mutterings. 'This reasoning - this dreaming - will bring you much more pain, Dorian. It will heighten the tragedy, not decrease it. Believe me. I speak the truth.' 'I know that you mean well, Count Brass. I respect your view and I understand that you believe that you are helping me. But I ask you to accept that you are not helping me. I must continue to follow this path. I know that it will lead me to Yisselda.' 'Aye,' said Count Brass sorrowfully. 'I agree. It will lead you to your death.' 'If that is the case, the prospect does not alarm me.' Hawkmoon turned again to regard Count Brass. The count felt a chill go through him as he looked at the gaunt white face, the hot eyes which burned in deep sockets. 'Ah, Hawkmoon,' he said. 'Ah, Hawkmoon.' And he walked towards the door and he said nothing else before he left the room. And he heard Hawkmoon shout after him in a high, hysterical voice: 'I will find her, Count Brass!' Next day Hawkmoon drew back the tapestry to peer through his window down into the courtyard below. Count Brass was leaving. His retinue was already mounted on good, big horses, caparisoned in the Count's red colours. Ribbons and pennants waved on bolstered flame-lances, surcoats curled in the breeze, bright armour shone in the early morning sunlight. The horses snorted and stamped their feet. Servants moved about, making last minute preparations, handing warming drinks up to the horsemen. And then the Count Brass himself emerged and mounted his chestnut stallion, his brazen armour flickering as if fashioned from flame. The count looked up at the window, his face thoughtful for a moment. Then his expression changed as he turned to give an order to one of his men. Hawkmoon continued to watch. While looking down upon the courtyard, he had been unable to rid himself of the sensation of observing particularly detailed models; models which moved and talked, yet were models nonetheless. He felt he could reach down and move a horseman to the other side of the courtyard, or pick up Count Brass

himself and send him off away from Londra in another direction all together. He had vague feelings of resentment towards his old friend which he could not understand. Sometimes it occurred to him, in his dreams, that Count Brass had bought his own life with that of his daughter. Yet how could that be? And neither was it a thing which Count Brass could possibly conceive of doing. On the contrary, the brave old warrior would have given his life for a loved one without a second thought. Still, Hawkmoon could not drive the thought from his skull. For a moment he felt a pang of regret, wondering if he should, after all, have agreed to accompany Count Brass to Londra. He watched as Captain Josef Vedro rode forward and ordered the portcullis raised in the gateway. Count Brass had left Hawkmoon to run things in his place; but really the stewards and the veteran Guardians of the Kamarg could run things perfectly well and would make no demands on Hawkmoon for a decision. But no, thought Hawkmoon. This was not a time for action, but a time for thought. He was determined to find a way through those ideas which he could feel in the back of his own mind and yet which he could not, as yet, reach. For all his old friends might disdain his playing with toy soldiers' he knew that by putting the models through a thousand permutations it might release, at some point, those thoughts, those elusive notions which would lead him to the truth involving his own situation. And once he understood the truth, he was sure he would find Yisselda alive. He was almost sure, too, that he would find two children, perhaps a boy and a girl. They had all judged him mad for five years, yet he was convinced that he had not been mad. He believed that he knew himself too well - that if he ever did go mad it would not be the way his friends had described. Now Count Brass and his retinue were waving to the castle retainers as they rode through the gates on the first stage of the long journey to Londra. Contrary to Count Brass's suspicions, Dorian Hawkmoon still held his old friend in great esteem. It caused him a pang of sorrow to see Count Brass leaving. Hawkmoon's problem was that he could no longer express any of the sentiments he felt. He had become too single-minded in his considerations, too absorbed in the problems which he attempted to solve in his obsessive manipulation of the tiny figures on his boards. Hawkmoon continued to watch as Count Brass and his men rode down through the winding streets of Aigues-Mortes. The streets were lined with townsfolk, bidding Count Brass farewell. At last the party reached the walls of the town and rode out across the broad road through the marshes. Hawkmoon looked after them until they were out of sight, then he turned his attention back to his models. Currently he was working out a situation in which the Black Jewel had not been set in his forehead, but in that of Oladahn of the Bulgar Mountains, and where the Legion of the Dawn could not be summoned. Would the Dark Empire have been defeated then? And if it could have been defeated, how might that have been accomplished? He had reached the point he had reached a hundred times before, of reenacting the Battle of Londra. But this time it struck him that he, himself, might have been killed. Would this have saved Yisselda's life? If he hoped, by going through these permutations of past events, to find a means of releasing the truth he believed to be hidden in his mind, he failed again. He completed the tactics involved, he noted the fresh possibilities involved, he considered his next development. He wished that Bowgentle had not died at Londra. Bowgentle had known much and might have helped him in this line of reasoning. There again, the messengers of the Runestaff - The Warrior in Jet and Gold, Orland Fank or even the mysterious Jehamia Cohnalias, who had not claimed to be human - might have helped him. He had called to them for their help in the darkness of the long nights, but they had not come. The Runestaff was safe now and they had no need of Hawkmoon's help. He had felt abandoned, though he knew they owed him nothing. Yet could the Runestaff be involved in what had happened to him, was happening to him now? Was that strange artefact under some new threat? Had it set into motion a fresh series of events, a new pattern of destiny? Hawkmoon had a sense that there was more to his situation than anything which the ordinary, observed facts might suggest. He had been manipulated by the Runestaff and its servants just as he now manipulated his model soldiers. Was he being manipulated again? And was that why he turned to the model

deceiving himself that he controlled something when, in fact, he was controlled? He pushed such thoughts aside. He must devote himself to his original speculations. And thus it was that he avoided confronting the truth. By pretending to search for the truth, by pretending that he was single-minded on that quest, he was able to escape it. For the truth of his situation might have been intolerable to him. And that was ever the way of mankind.

3 A LADY ALL IN ARMOUR A month went by. Twenty alternative destinies were played out on Hawkmoon's wargame boards. And Yisselda came no closer to him, even in his dreams. Unshaven, red-eyed, acned, his skin flaking with eczema, weak from lack of food, flabby from lack of exercise, Dorian Hawkmoon had nothing of the hero left in him, either in his mind, his character or his body. He looked thirty years older than his real age. His clothes, stained, torn, ill-smelling, were the clothes of a beggar. His unwashed hair hung in greasy strands about his face. His beard contained flecks of distasteful substances. He had taken to wheezing, to muttering to himself, to coughing. His servants avoided him as much as they could. He had little cause to call on them and so he did not notice their absence. He had changed beyond recognition, this man who had been the Hero of Koln, the Champion of the Runestaff, the great warrior who had led the oppressed to victory over the Dark Empire. And his life was fading from him, though he did not realise it. In his obsession with alternative destinies he had come close to fixing his own; he was destroying himself. And his dreams were changing. And because they were changing he slept even less frequently than before. In his dreams he had found names. One of them was John Daker, but much more often now did he sense the other names - Ereko and Urlik. Only the fourth name escaped him, though he knew it was there. On waking, he could never recall the fourth name. He began to wonder if there was such a thing as reincarnation. Was he remembering earlier lives? That was his instinctive conclusion. Yet his common sense could not accept the idea. In his dreams he sometimes met Yisselda. In his dreams he was always anxious, always weighed down by a sense of heavy responsibility, of guilt. He always felt that it was his duty to perform some action, but could never recall what that action was. Had he lived other lives that had been just as tragic as this one? The thought of an eternity of tragedy was too much for him. He drove off, almost before it had formed. And yet these ideas were half-familiar. Where had he heard them before? In other, earlier dreams? In conversation with someone? With Bowgentle? In Danark, the distant city of the Runestaff? He began to feel threatened. He began to know terror. Even the models on his tables were half-forgotten. He began to see shadows moving at the corners of his eyes. What was causing the fear? He thought that possibly he was close to understanding the truth concerning Yisselda and that there were certain forces pledged to stop him; forces which might kill him just as he was on the point of discovering how to reach her. The only thing which Hawkmoon did not consider the only answer which did not come to mind - was that his fear was, in fact, fear of himself, fear of facing an unpleasant truth. It was the lie which was threatened, the protecting lie and, as most men will, he fought to defend that lie, to stave off its attackers. It was at this time that he began to suspect his servants of being in league with his enemies. He was sure that they had made attempts to poison him. He took to locking his doors and refusing to open them when servants came to perform some necessary function. He ate the barest amount necessary to keep alive. He collected rain water from the cups he set out on the sills of his windows and he drank only that water. Yet still fatigue would overwhelm his weakened body and then the little dreams would come to the man who dwelt in darkness. Dreams which in themselves were not unpleasant - gentle landscapes, strange cities, battles which Hawkmoon had never taken part in, peculiar, alien folk whom Hawkmoon had never encountered even in the strangest of his adventures in the service of the Runestaff. And yet they terrified him. Women appeared in those dreams, also, and some might have been Yisselda, yet he experienced no pleasure when he dreamed of these women, only a sense of deep disquiet. And once



fleetingly, he dreamed that he looked in a mirror and saw a woman there in place of his own reflection. One morning he awoke from such a slumber and instead of rising, as was his habit, and going directly to his tables, he remained where he lay, looking up at the rafters of his room. In the dim light filtering through the tapestries across the window he could, quite plainly, see the head and shoulders of a man who bore a strong resemblance to the dead Oladahn. The resemblance was most in the way the head was held, in the expression, in the eyes. There was a wide-brimmed hat on the long, black hair and a small black and white cat sat on the shoulder. Hawkmoon noticed, without surprise, that the cat had a pair of wings folded neatly on its back. 'Oladahn?' Hawkmoon said, though he knew it was not Oladahn. The face smiled and made as if to speak. Then it had vanished. Hawkmoon pulled dirty silk sheets over his head and lay there trembling. It began to dawn on him that he was going mad again, that perhaps Count Brass had been right, after all, and that he had experienced hallucinations for five years. Later Hawkmoon got up and uncovered his mirror. Some weeks before he had thrown a robe over the mirror, for he had not wished to see himself. He looked at the wretch who peered back at him through the dusty glass. 'I see a madman,' Hawkmoon murmured. 'A dying madman.' The reflection aped the movement of the lips. The eyes were frightened. Above them, in the centre of the forehead, was a pale scar, perfectly circular, where once a black jewel had burned, a jewel which could eat a man's brain. 'There are other things which eat at a man's brain,' muttered the Duke of Koln. 'Subtler things than jewels. Worse things than jewels. How cleverly, after they are dead, do the Dark Empire lords reach out to take vengeance on me. By slaying Yisselda they brought slow death to me.' He covered the mirror again and sighed a thin sigh. Painfully he walked back to his couch and sat down again, not daring to look up at the ceiling where he had seen the man who so much resembled Oladahn. He was reconciled to the fact of his own wretchedness, his own death, his own madness. Weakly, he shrugged. 'I was a soldier,' he said to himself. 'I became a fool. I deceived myself. I thought I could achieve what great scientists and sorcerers achieve, what philosophers achieve. And I was never capable of it. Instead, I turned myself from a man of skill and reason into this diseased thing which I have become. And listen. Listen, Hawkmoon. You are talking to yourself. You mutter. You rave. You whine. Dorian Hawkmoon, Duke von Koln, it is too late for you to redeem yourself. You rot.' A small smile crossed his sick lips. 'Your destiny was to fight, to carry a sword, to perform the rituals of war. And now tables have become your battlefields and you have lost the strength to bear a dirk, let alone a sword. You could not sit a horse if you wished to.' He let himself drop back onto his soiled pillow. He covered his face with his arms. 'Let the creatures come,' he said. 'Let them torment me. It is true. I am mad.' He started, believing he heard someone groaning beside him. He forced himself to look. It was the door which groaned. A servant had pushed it open. The servant stood nervously in the opening. 'My lord?' 'Do they all say I am mad, Voisin?' 'My lord?' The servant was an old man, one of the few who still regularly attended Hawkmoon. He had served Hawkmoon ever since the Duke of Koln had first come to Castle Brass. Yet there was a nervous look in his eyes as he replied. 'Do they, Voisin?' Voisin spread his hands. 'Some do, my lord. Others say you are unwell - a physical disease. I have felt for sometime that perhaps a doctor could be called ...' Hawkmoon felt a return of his old suspicions. 'Doctors? Poisoners?' 'Oh, no, my lord!' Hawkmoon controlled himself. 'No, of course not. I appreciate your concern, Voisin. What have you brought me?' 'Nothing, my lord, save news.' 'Of Count Brass? How fares Count Brass in Londra?' 'Not of Count Brass. Of a visitor to Castle Brass. An old friend of the count's, I understand, who, on hearing that Count Brass was absent and that you were undertaking his responsibilities, asked to be received by you.' 'By me?' Hawkmoon smiled grimly. 'Do they know what I have become, in the outside world?' 'I think not, my lord.' 'What did you tell them?' 'That you were not well but that I would convey the message.' 'And that you have done.' 'Aye, my lord, I have.' Voisin hesitated. 'Shall I say that you are indisposed ...?' Hawkmoon began to nod assent but then changed his mind, pushing himself from the

bed and standing up. 'No. I will receive them. In the hall. I will come down.' 'Would you wish to - I will prepare yourself, my lord? Toilet things - some hot water?' 'No. I will join our guest in a few minutes. I will take your decision to them.' Rather hastily Voisin departed from Hawkmoon's apartment plainly disturbed by Hawkmoon's decision. Deliberately, maliciously, Hawkmoon made no attempt to improve his appearance. Let his visitor see him as he was. Besides, he was most certainly mad. Even this could be one of his fantasies. He could be anywhere - in bed, at his tables, even riding through the marshes - and only believing that these events were taking place. As he left his bed-chamber and passed through the room in which his model tables had been set up, he brushed at ranks of soldiers with his dirty sleeves, he knocked over buildings, he kicked at a leg so that an earthquake took place in the city of Koln. He blinked as he came out onto the landing, lit by huge, tinted windows at both ends. The light hurt his eyes. He walked towards the stairs which wound down to the great hall. He clutched a rail, feeling dizzy. His own infirmity amused him. He looked forward to his visitor's shock when he appeared. A servant hurried up to help him and he leaned heavily on the young man's arm as, slowly, they descended. And at last he reached the hall. An armoured figure stood admiring one of Count Brass's battle trophies - a lance and a dented shield which he had won off Orson Kach during the Rhine Cities Wars, many years before. Hawkmoon did not recognise the figure at all. It was fairly short, stocky and had a somewhat belligerent stance. Some old fighting companion of the count's, when he was a mercenary general, almost certainly. 'Greetings,' wheezed Hawkmoon. 'I am the present custodian of Castle Brass.' The figure turned. Cool, grey eyes looked Hawkmoon up and down. There was no shock in the eyes, no expression at all as the figure stepped forward, hand extended. Indeed, it was likely that Hawkmoon's own face betrayed surprise, at very least. For his visitor, dressed all in battered armour, was a middle-aged woman. 'Duke Dorian?' she said. 'I am Katinka van Bak. I've been travelling many nights.'

4 NEWS FROM BEYOND THE BULGAR MOUNTAINS I was born in sea-drowned Hollandia,' said Katinka van Bak, though my mother's parents were traders from Muskovia. In the battles between our country and the Belgic States, my kin were slain and I became a captive. For a while I served - in the manner you can imagine - in the retinue of Prinz Lobkowitz of Berlin. He had aided the Belgics in their war and I was part of his spoil.' She paused to take another slice of cold beef from the plate before her. Her armour was discarded and she wore a simple silk shirt and a pair of blue cotton breeches. For all she leaned her arms on the table and spoke in blunt, unladylike tones, she was not unfeminine and Hawkmoon found himself liking her very much. 'Well, I spent much time in the company of warriors and it became my ambition to learn their skills. It amused them to teach me to use sword and bow and I continued to affect an awkwardness with weapons long after I had mastered their use.' 'This means I succeeded in not arousing any suspicion as to my plans.' 'You planned to escape?' 'A little more than that.' Katinka van Bak smiled and wiped her lips. 'There came a time when Prinz Lobkowitz himself heard of my eccentricity. I remember his laughter when he was taken to the quadrangle outside the dormitories where we girls lived. The soldier who had made me his special protegee gave me a sword and we duelled, he and I, for a while, to demonstrate to the prince the charming artlessness with which I thrust and parried. This was fine amusement indeed and Prinz Lobkowitz said that as he was entertaining guests that evening it would be a novel idea to show me off to them, something to make a change from the usual jongleurs and such who normally performed such functions. This suited me well. I fluttered my lashes and smiled shyly and pretended to be pleased that I had been granted such an honour - pretended that I did not realise they were all laughing at me.' Hawkmoon tried to imagine Katinka van Bak fluttering her lashes and playing the ingenue, but the effort defeated his imagination. 'And what happened?' He was genuinely curious. For the first time in months something was happening to take his attention away from his own problems. He rested a

unshaven chin on a scabrous hand as Katinka van Bak continued. 'Well, that evening I was presented to the delighted guests who watched me girlishly duelling with several of Prinz Lobkowitz's warriors. They ate much as they watched, but they drank more. Several of the prince's guests - men and women - offered to buy me for large sums and this, of course, increased Prinz Lobkowitz's pride that he owned me. Naturally, he refused to sell. I remember his calling out to me: ' "And now, little Katinka, how many other martial arts do you pursue? What will you show us next?" 'Judging my moment to be the right one, I curtsayed prettily and, as if with naive boldness, said: ' "I have heard that you are a great swordsman, Your Grace. The best in all the province of Berlin." ' "So it is said," replied Lobkowitz. "Would you do me the honour of crossing swords with me, my lord? So that I may test my skills against the finest blade in this hall?" 'Prince Lobkowitz was taken aback by this at first, but then he laughed. It was hard for him to refuse in front of his guests, as I'd known. He decided to indulge me but said gravely: ' "In Berlin there are different stakes for different forms of duelling. We fight for a first body-cut, for a first cut on the left cheek, for a first cut on the right cheek and so on - up to duelling to the death. I would not like to spoil your beauty, little Katinka." ' "Then let us fight to the death, Your Grace," I said, as if carried away by the reception I had received. 'Laughter filled the hall then. But I saw many an eager eye looking from me to the prince. None doubted that the prince would win any duel, of course, but they would be gratified at seeing my blood spilled. 'Lobkowitz was nonplussed, too drunk to think clearly, to work out the implications of my suggestion. But he did not wish to lose face in front of his guests. ' "I would not kill such a talented slave," he said jovially. "I think we should consider some other stake, little Katinka." ' "My freedom, then?" I suggested. "Neither would I lose so entertaining a girl ..." he began. But then the crowd was roaring at him to take more sporting an attitude. After all, they all knew he would play with me for a while before delivering a token cut or disarming me. ' "Very well!" He smiled and shrugged and accepted a blade from one of his guards, stepping from his table to the floor and taking up a fighting stance before me. "Let us begin." I could see that he intended to display his own skill in the manner in which he would prolong the duel. 'The fight began clumsily enough. Awkwardly I thrust and insouciantly he parried. The crowd of guests cheered me on and some even began to make wagers on how long the duel would last - though none wagered that I would win, of course.' Katinka van Bak poured a cup of apple juice for herself and swallowed it down before going on with her story. 'As you have guessed, Duke Dorian had become a swords-woman of no mean ability. Slowly I began to reveal my talent and slowly it dawned on Prince Lobkowitz that he was having to use more and more of his skill to defend himself. I could see that he was beginning to realise that he fought an opponent who might well be his match. The idea of being beaten by a slave -and a slave-girl, at that - was not a pleasant one. He began to fight seriously. He wounded me twice. Once in the left shoulder and once in the thigh. But I fought on. And now, I recall, there was absolute silence in the hall, save for the sound of our steel and of Prinz Lobkowitz's heavy breathing. We fought for an hour. He would have killed me if he could.' 'I remember,' said Hawkmoon, 'a tale I heard when I ruled in Kohl. So you are the woman who ... ?' 'Who slew the Prince of Berlin? Aye. I killed him in his own hall, before his own guests, in the presence of his own bodyguards. I took him in his heart with a single clean thrust. He was the first I killed. And before they could believe what they had seen I had raised my sword and reminded them all of the prince's bargain - that if I won the duel I should have my freedom. I doubt if any of the prince's close retainers would have kept that bargain. They would have slain me there and then if it had not been for Lobkowitz's friends and those who had had ambitions upon his territories. Several of them gathered round me to offer me positions in their households - as a novelty, you understand, rather than for my battle-skill. I accepted a post in the guard of Guy O'Pointte, Archduke of Bavaria. On the spot. The archduke's guard was the largest there, you understand, since he was the most powerful of the nobles assembled. After that, the dead prince's men decided to honour their master's bargain.' 'And that

how you became a soldier?' 'Aye. Eventually I became Guy O'Pointte's chief general. When the archduke was murdered by his uncle's family, I left the service of Bavaria and went to find a new position. And that, of course, is when I met Count Brass. We've served as mercenaries together in half the armies of Europe - and often on the same side! At about the time your count settled here in the Kamarg, I went east and joined the permanent service of the Prince of Ukrainia, where I advised him on the reconstruction of his army. We put up a good defence against the legions of the Dark Empire.

'You were captured by the Beast Lords?' Katinka van Bak shook her head. 'I escaped to the Bulgar Mountains, where I remained until after you and your comrades had turned the tables on them at the Battle of Londra. It fell upon me to help restore Ukrainia, the prince's youngest niece being the only surviving member of the family. I became Regent of Ukrainia, through no particular wish of my own.

'You have renounced that position, then? Or are you merely visiting us incognito?' 'I did not renounce the position and I am not visiting you incognito,' said Katinka van Bak firmly, as if chiding Hawkmoon for trying to hurry her in her story. 'Ukrainia was invaded.' 'What? By whom? I thought the world at relative peace!' 'So it is. Or was until a short time ago when we who dwell to the east of the Bulgar Mountains began to hear of an army which had gathered in those mountains.' 'The Dark Empire resurgents!' Katinka van Bak held up a chiding hand to silence him. 'It was a rabble army,' she went on. 'Certainly it was that. But I do not think it was the remains of the Dark Empire army. Though it was vast and had powerful weapons at its disposal, no individual comprising it resembled another. They wore different styles of clothing, carried different kinds of weapons, belonged to different races - some of which were by no means human. Do you follow me - each one looked as if he belonged to a different army.' 'A band comprised of soldiers who survived the conquerings of the Dark Empire?' 'I think not. I do not know where these came from. All I do know is that every time they ventured from their mountains - which they had made their own and turned them into an impregnable fortress - almost - no expedition ever sent against this army was ever successful. Each force was wiped out. They kill whole populations - to the last new-born baby - and strip villages, cities, whole nations of everything of value. In that respect they are like bandits, rather than an organised army with some ultimate purpose. These seem to attack countries for loot alone. And as a result they extend their activities further and further, returning always with their booty, their stolen food and - very occasionally - women, to their mountain stronghold.' 'Who leads them?' 'I know not, though I've fought them when they came against the Ukraine. Either several lead them or none does. There is no one to reason with, to parley with. They seem moved only by greed and a lust to kill. They are like locusts. There is no other description which fits them better. Even the Dark Empire allowed survivors for it planned to rule the world and needed people to serve it. But these - these are worse.' 'It's hard to conceive of an aggressor worse than the Dark Empire,' said Hawkmoon feelingly. 'But,' he added quickly, 'I believe you, of course, Katinka van Bak.' 'Aye, believe me, for I'm the sole survivor. I thank you for the life I've led. It has given me the experience to know when a situation is lost and how to escape the consequences of such a loss. No other creature remains alive in Ukrainia or many other lands beyond the Bulgar Mountains.' 'So you fled to warn the lands this side of the mountains? To raise an army, perhaps, against this - powerful rabble?' 'I fled. That is all. I have told my story to anyone who would listen, but I do not expect much will be done as a result. Most will not care what has happened to those dwelling in such distant parts, even if they believed me in the first place. Therefore, to try to raise an army would be fruitless. And, I'll add, any human army which went against those who now occupy the Bulgar Mountains would be utterly destroyed.' 'Will you go on to Londra? Count Brass will be there by now.' Katinka van Bak sighed and stretched. 'Not immediately, I think. If at all. I am weary. I have been riding almost without pause since leaving Ukrainia. If you do not object, I'll remain at Castle Brass until my old friend returns. Unless I have a whim to continue on to Londra. At the moment, however, I have no inclination to move beyond these walls.' 'You are, of course, fully welcome,' said Hawkmoon.

Hawkmoon eagerly. 'It is an honour for me. You must tell me more of your tales of the old days. And you must give me your theories about this rabble army - where it might have come from, and so on.' 'I have no ideas on that subject,' said Katinka van Bak. 'There is no logical explanation. They appeared overnight and have been there ever since. Discourse with them is impossible. It is like attempting to talk reasonably to a hurricane. There is a sense of desperation about them, a wild contempt for their own lives as well as yours. And the clothing and forms of the soldiers, as I have said, is so disparate. Not one alike. And yet, you know, I thought I recognised one or two familiar faces in the throng which swept over us. Soldiers I'd known who had been dead these many years since. And I'll swear I saw Count Brass's old friend, Bowgentle, riding with them. Yet I heard Bowgentle was killed at Londra. 'He was. He was. I saw his remains.' Hawkmoon, whose interest up until now had been relatively faint, now became eager to hear all Katinka van Bak could tell him. He felt he was on the verge of solving the problem he had been working on all this time. Perhaps he had not been so insane, after all. 'Bowgentle, you say. And others who were familiar - yet dead?' 'Aye.' 'Did any women ride in the army?' 'Yes. Several.' 'Any you recognised ...?' Hawkmoon leaned across the table, staring intensely at Katinka van Bak. She frowned, trying to recall, then she shook her head so that her grey braids swung. 'No.' 'Tslot Yisselda, perhaps? Yisselda of Brass?' 'She who died at Londra, too?' 'So it's said.' 'No. Besides I should not have recognised her. She was a small child when last I saw her.' 'Ah,' said Hawkmoon, resuming his chair. 'Yes. I forgot.' 'That is not to say she could not have been there,' went on the warrior woman. 'There were so many. I did not see half the army which conquered me.' 'Well, you recognised Bowgentle, perhaps all the others were there - all those who died at Londra?' 'I said I thought the man I saw resembled Bowgentle. But why should Bowgentle or anyone else who was a friend of yours ride in such an army?' 'True.' Hawkmoon drew his brows together in thought. His eyes had lost their dullness. His movements had become somewhat more energetic. 'Say that he and the others were charmed, perhaps. In trances. Forced to do the will of an enemy. The Dark Empire has powers which could make such a thing possible.' 'It is fanciful, Duke Dorian ...' 'As would sound the History of the Runestaff, if we did not know it to be true.' 'I agree, but...' 'I have long cherished an instinct, you see,' Hawkmoon told her, 'that Yisselda did not die at Londra, for all there were many witnesses to her death and burial. It is also possible that none of our other friends died at Londra - that all were victims of some secret Dark Empire counterplan. Could not the Dark Empire have substituted bodies for Yisselda and the rest, then borne the real people away to the Bulgar Mountains - captured others, too? Could you not have fought an army of Dark Empire slaves, controlled by those who escaped our vengeance?' 'But so few did escape. And none of the Lords lived after the Battle of Londra. So who could be making such plans, even if they were likely. Which they most decidedly are not, Duke Dorian.' Katinka van Bak pursed her lips. 'I thought you a man of sense. A practical soldier like myself.' 'I thought so once - until this idea came into my mind - that Yisselda still lives. Somewhere.' 'I had heard that you were not wholly your old self ...' 'You mean that you had heard I was mad. Well, madam, I do believe I am mad. Perhaps I have indulged in mad follies, of late, but only because the idea - the central idea - has truth in it.' 'I accept what you say,' said Katinka van Bak evenly. 'But I would need considerable proof of such a theory. I do not have an instinct that the dead live...' 'I think Count Brass has,' Hawkmoon told her. 'Though he would not admit it. I think it is something he refuses to consider for he fears that he would go as mad as he thought me to be.' 'And that could also be,' agreed Katinka van Bak, 'but again I have no evidence that Count Brass thinks as you say. I should have to meet him again and talk with him in order to test your words.' Hawkmoon nodded. He thought for a moment and then said: 'But suppose I have a means of defeating this army. What would you say? If my theories led me to the truth concerning the army and its origins and that they, in turn, led me to an understanding of its weaknesses.' 'Then your theories would be in a practical direction,' Katinka van Bak said. 'But unfortunately there is only one way to test them and that

involves losing one's life if one is wrong. Eh?' 'I would willingly take that risk. When I fought the Dark Empire I soon realised there was no way to overcome it by direct confrontation, but if one sought weaknesses in the leaders, and made use of those weaknesses, then they could be defeated. That was what I learned in the service of the Runestaff.' 'You think you know how to defeat that rabble?' 'I think so, Katinka van Bak was by now half-convinced. 'Obviously I do not know the exact nature of their weakness. But I could discover it probably better than anyone else in the world!' 'I think you could,' Katinka van Bak exclaimed, grinning. 'I'm with you there. But I think it is too late to look for weaknesses.' 'If I could observe them. If I could find a hiding place, perhaps in the mountains, hide myself, and watch them, then perhaps I could think of a way of defeating them.' Hawkmoon was thinking of another thing he might gain from observing the rabble army, but he kept that idea to himself. You hid in those same mountains for a long while, Katinka van Bak. You, better than anyone save Oladahn himself, could find me a lair from which I might spy on the locusts!' 'I could, but I have just fled from those parts. I have no wish to lose my life, young man, as I told you. Why should I take you into the Bulgar Mountains, the very stronghold of my enemies?' 'Had you not nursed at least a little hope that your Ukraina might be avenged? Did you not think to yourself, even secretly, that you might enlist the help of Count Brass and his Kamargians against your foes?' Katinka van Bak smiled. 'Well, I knew the hope to be foolish, but...' 'And now I offer you a chance of taking that vengeance. All you need do is lead me into the mountains, find me a place that is relatively safe, and then you could even depart if you wished.' 'Are your motives selfless, Duke Dorian?' Hawkmoon hesitated. Then he admitted: 'Perhaps not wholly selfless. I wish to test my theory that Yisselda still lives and that I can save her.' 'Then I think I'll take you to the Bulgar Mountains,' said Katinka van Bak. 'I do not trust a man who tells me that anything he does is completely selfless. But I think I can trust you.' 'I think you can,' said Hawkmoon. 'The only problem that I can see,' added the warrior woman frankly, 'is whether you'll survive the journey. You are in extremely poor condition, you know.' She reached forward and fingered his garments just as if she were a peasant woman buying a goose in the market. 'You need fattening up for a start. Let a week pass first. Get some food into your belly. Exercise. Ride. We'll have a mock duel or two together...' Hawkmoon smiled. 'I am glad that you hold no grudge against me, my lady, or I should think twice about accepting that last suggestion at face value!' And Katinka van Bak flung back her head and laughed.

5 RELUCTANTLY - A QUEST Hawkmoon ached in every limb. He made a sorry sight as he stumbled out into the courtyard where Katinka van Bak already waited, mounted on a frisky stallion whose hot breath clouded the early morning air. Hawkmoon's mount was a less nervous beast, but known for his reliability and stamina, yet Hawkmoon did not relish the prospect of climbing into the animal's saddle. His stomach was griping him, his head swam, his legs shook, for all that he had spent more than a week exercising and eating a good diet. His appearance had improved a little, and he was cleaner, but he was not the Runestaff Hero who had ridden out against Londra only seven years earlier. He shivered, for winter was beginning to touch the Kamarg. He wrapped his heavy leather cloak about himself. The cloak was lined with wool and was almost too warm when closed. So heavy was the cloak that it almost bore him to the ground as he walked. He carried no weapons. His sword and flame-lance were in saddle scabbards. He wore, as well as the cloak, a thick quilted jerkin of dark red, doeskin leggings stitched with complicated designs by Yisselda, when she lived, and plain knee-boots of good gleaming leather. Upon his head was a simple helmet. Aside from this, he wore no armour. He was not strong enough to wear armour. Hawkmoon was still not healthy, either in mind or body. What had driven him to improve his physical condition to this degree had not been disgust with what he had become but his insane belief that he might find Yisselda alive in the Bulgar Mountains. With some difficulty, he mounted his horse. Then he was bidding farewell to his stewards, completely forgetting

that Count Brass had left the responsibility of running the province in his hands, and following Katinka van Bak through the gates and down through the empty streets of Aigues-Mortes. No citizens lined these streets. None, save the servants at the castle, knew that he was leaving Castle Brass heading east where Count Brass had headed west. By noon the two figures had passed through the reed-fields, passed the marshes and the lagoons, and were following a hard white road past one of the great stone towers which marked the borders of the land of which Count Brass was Lord Protector. Weary of riding even this comparatively short distance, Hawkmoon was beginning to regret his decision. His arms ached from clinging to his saddle pommel, his thighs gave him agonising pain and his legs had gone completely numb. Katinka van Bak, on the other hand, seemed tireless. She kept stopping her own horse to allow Hawkmoon to catch up, yet was deaf to his suggestions that they stop and rest for a while. Hawkmoon wondered if he would last the journey, if he would not die on the way to the Bulgar Mountains. He wondered, from time to time, how he could ever have conceived a liking for this fierce, heartless woman. They were hailed by a Guardian who saw them from his post at the top of the tower. His riding flamingo stood beside him and his scarlet cloak waved in the breeze so that for a moment Hawkmoon saw man and bird as one creature. The Guardian raised his long flaming lance in salute as he recognised Hawkmoon. Hawkmoon managed to wave a feeble hand in return, but was unable to call back in reply to the Guardian's greeting. Then the tower had dwindled behind them as they took the road to Lyonesse, with a view to skirting the Switzer Mountains which were said to be tainted still with the poisons of the Tragic Millenium and which were, besides, all but impassable. Also, in Lyonesse Katinka van Bak had acquaintances who would give them provisions for the remainder of their journey. They camped on the road that night and in the morning Hawkmoon had become fully convinced of his own imminent death. The pain of the previous day was as nothing with the agony he felt now. Katinka van Bak, however, continued to show no mercy, heaving him peremptorily upon his patient horse before climbing into her own saddle. Then she grasped his bridled and led horse and swaying rider after her. Thus they progressed for three more days, hardly resting at all, until Hawkmoon collapsed altogether, falling from his saddle in a faint. He no longer cared whether he found Yisselda or not. He neither blamed nor condoned Katinka van Bak for her ruthless treatment of his person. His pain had faded to a perpetual ache. He moved when the horse moved. He stopped when the horse stopped. He ate the food which Katinka van Bak would occasionally put in front of him. He slept for the few hours she allowed him. And then he fainted. He woke once and opened his eyes to receive a view of his own swaying feet on the other side of his horse's belly, and he knew that Katinka van Bak continued her journey, having slung him over the saddle of his own steed. It was in this manner, some time later, that Dorian Hawkmoon, Duke von Koln, Champion of the Runestaff, Hero of Londra, entered the old city of Lyon, capital of Lyonesse, his horse led by an old woman in dusty armour. And the next time Dorian Hawkmoon woke he lay in a soft bed and there were young maidens bending over him, smiling at him, offering him food. He refused to accept their existence for some moments. But they were real and the food was good and the rest revived him. Two days later the reluctant Hawkmoon, in considerably better condition now, left with Katinka van Bak to continue their quest for the rabble army of the Bulgar Mountains. 'You're filling out at last, lad,' said Katinka van Bak one morning as they rode into the sun which was turning to a glowing green through the rolling, gentle hills of the land through which they travelled. She rode beside him now, no longer finding it necessary to lead his horse. She slapped him on the shoulder. 'You've good bones. There was nothing wrong with you that couldn't be put right, as you see.' 'Health achieved through such an ordeal as that, madam,' said Hawkmoon feelingly, 'is scarcely worth attaining.' 'You'll feel grateful to me yet.' 'I tell you honestly, Katinka van Bak, I am not sure I shall!' And at this Katinka van Bak, Regent of Ukrainia, laughed heartily and spurred her stallion along the narrow track through the grass. Hawkmoon was forced to admit to himself that the worst of his aches had disappeared and he was

much more capable of sustaining long horseback journeys now. He was still subject to occasional stomach gripes and he was by no means as strong as he had once been, yet he was almost at the stage where he could enjoy the sights and smells and sounds around him for their own sake. He was amazed at how little sleep Katinka van Bak seemed to need. Half the time they rode on through the best part of the night before she was ready to make camp. As a result they made excellent time, but Hawkmoon felt permanently weary. They reached the second main stage of their journey when they entered the territories of Duke Mikael of Bazhel, a distant kinsman of Hawkmoon's and for whom Katinka van Bak had once fought during the duke's squabble with another of his relatives, the now long-dead Pretender of Strasbourg. During the occupation of his lands by the Dark Empire, Duke Mikael had been subject to the grossest humiliation and he had never quite recovered from it. He had become distinctly misanthropic and his wife performed most of his functions for him. She was called Julia of Padova, daughter of the Traitor of Italia, Enric, who had formed a pact with the Dark Empire against his fellows and had been slain by the Beast Lords for his pains. Perhaps because of the knowledge she had of her father's baseness, Julia of Padova ruled the province well and with considerable fairness. Hawkmoon remarked on 'the wealth which was evident everywhere about the countryside. Fat cattle grazed on good grass. The farmhouses were well kept and shone with fresh paint and polished stone. Their gables carved in the intricate style favoured by the peasants of these parts. But when they came to Bazhel, the capital city, they were received by Julia of Padova with only moderate politeness and her hospitality was not lavish. It seemed that she did not like to be reminded of the old, dark days when the Dark Empire had ruled the whole of Europe. Therefore she was not pleased to see Hawkmoon, for he had played such an important part against the Empire and thus she could not help but be reminded of it -of her husband's humiliation and of her father's treachery. So it was that the party did not remain long in Bazhel, but struck on for Munchenia, where the old Prince tried to smooth them with gifts and begged them to stay longer and tell him of their adventures. Aside from warning him of what had happened in Ukrainia (he was sceptical) they told him nothing of their quest and reluctantly bade him farewell, armed with better weapons than those they had carried, and dressed in better clothes, though Hawkmoon had retained his big leather cloak, for the winter was making itself evident across the whole land now. By the time Dorian Hawkmoon and Katinka van Bak reached Lincolnia, now a Republic, the first snows had begun to fall in the streets of the little wooden city, rebuilt from that which had been completely razed by the armies of Granbretan. 'We must make better time,' Katinka van Bak told Hawkmoon as they sat in the tap-room of a good inn near the central square of the city. 'Else the passes in the Bulgar Mountains will be blocked to us and our whole journey will have no point.' 'I wonder if it does have point,' Hawkmoon said, sipping a negus with some relish, holding the steaming winecup in his gloved hands. He had now changed beyond recognition from the creature he had become at Castle Brass, though all who had known him before that time would have recognised him immediately. His face had become strong again and muscles rippled beneath his shirt. His eyes were bright and healthy and his skin glowed. His long fair hair shone. 'You wonder you'll find Yisselda there?' 'That, aye. And I wonder if the army is as strong as you thought. Perhaps they were lucky in the manner in which they overwhelmed your forces.' 'Why do you think this now?' 'Because we have heard no rumours. No a single hint that anyone in these parts has received even a inkling of this force which occupies the Bulgar Mountains.' 'I have seen this army,' Katinka van Bak reminded him. 'And it is vast. Believe me in that. It is powerful. It could take over the whole world. Believe me in that also.' Hawkmoon shrugged. 'Well, I do believe you, Katinka van Bak. But I still find it strange that no rumours have come to our ears. When we have spoken of this army there is never another who confirms what we say. It is no wonder that little attention is paid to us!' 'Your brain sharpens,' said Katinka van Bak approvingly, 'but as a result you are less able to believe the fantastical!' She smiled. 'Is that not often the case?' 'Often, aye.' 'Would you turn back?' Hawkmoon



studied the hot wine in his cup. 'It is a long journey home. But now I feel guilty, leaving my duties to the Kamarg to go upon this quest.' 'You were not performing those duties very well,' she reminded him softly. 'You were not in a position to do so - mentally or physically.' Hawkmoon smiled grimly. 'That is true. I have benefited a great deal from this journey. Yet that does not change the fact that my responsibilities lie firstly in the Kamarg.' 'It is a longer journey to the Kamarg, now, than it is to the Bulgar Mountains,' she said. 'You were at first reluctant to go on this quest,' he said. 'But now you are the most anxious of us to complete it!' She shrugged. 'Say that I like to finish what I begin. Is that unusual?' 'I would say it was typical of you, Katinka van Bak.' Hawkmoon sighed. 'Very well. Let's go to the Bulgar Mountains, then, as quickly as our horses will take us. And let us make haste back to the Kamarg when our errand is done. With information and the strength of the Kamarg we shall find a way of defeating those who destroyed your land. We'll confer with Count Brass who, almost certainly, will have returned by then.' 'A sensible scheme, Hawkmoon.' Katinka van Bak seemed relieved. 'And now I'll go to bed.' 'I'll finish my wine and copy your example,' said Hawkmoon. He laughed. 'You still manage to lure me out, even now.' 'Another month and our situation will be reversed,' she promised. 'Goodnight to you, Hawkmoon.' Next morning their horses' hooves galloped through shallow snow and more snow was falling from an overcast sky. But by the early afternoon the clouds had cleared and the sky was blue and empty over their heads while the snow had begun to melt. It was not a serious omen but it was an omen of what they might expect to find when they approached the Bulgar Mountains. They rode through a hilly land which had once been part of the Kingdom of Wien, but so crushed had been that kingdom that its population had all but disappeared. Now grass had grown back on the burned ground and the many ruins were vine-covered and picturesque. Later travellers might come and marvel at such pretty relics, thought Hawkmoon, but he could never forget that they were the result of Granbretan's savage lust to rule the world. They were passing the remains of a castle which looked down on them from a rise above the path they followed when Hawkmoon thought he heard a sound from the place. He whispered to Katinka van Bak who was riding just ahead. 'Did you hear it? From the castle?' 'A human voice? Aye. I did. Could you hear the words?' She turned in her saddle to look back at him. He shook his head. 'No. Should we investigate?' 'Our time runs short.' She pointed to the sky where more clouds were gathering. But by now they had both pulled in their horses and were still looking up at the castle. 'Good afternoon!' The voice was strangely accented but cheerful. 'I had the feeling you would be passing this way, Champion. And from the ruins now stepped a slim young man wearing a hat with a huge brim, turned up at one side. There was a feather stuck in the band. He wore a velvet jerkin, rather dusty, and blue velvet pantaloons. On his feet were soft doeskin boots. He carried a small sack over his back. At his hip was a plain, slender sword. And it was with horror that Dorian Hawkmoon recognised him. Hawkmoon found himself drawing his sword, though the stranger had offered him no harm. 'What? You think me an enemy?' said the youth, smiling. 'I assure you that I am not.' 'You have seen him before, Hawkmoon?' Katinka van Bak said sharply. 'Who is he?' He was the vision Hawkmoon had had when he lay upon his bed in Castle Brass, before the coming of the warrior woman. 'I know not,' said Hawkmoon thickly. 'This has a terrible smell of sorcery to it. Dark Empire work perhaps. He resembles - he looks like an old friend of mine - yet there is nothing evidently the same about them ...' 'An old friend, eh?' said the stranger. 'Well I am that, Champion. What do they call you in this world?' 'I do not understand you.' Reluctantly Hawkmoon sheathed his sword. 'It is often the case when I recognise you. I am Jhary-a-Conel and I should not be here at all. But such strange disruptions have been taking place in the multiverse of late! I was wrenched from four separate incarnations in as many minutes! And what do they call you, then?' 'I still do not understand,' said Hawkmoon doggedly. 'Call me? I am the Duke von Koln. I am Dorian Hawkmoon.' 'The Duke von Koln's greetings again, Duke Dorian. I am your companion. Though for how long I shall remain with you I know not. As I say, strange disruptions are...' 'You babble a considerable amount of nonsense, S

Jhary," said Katinka van Bak impatiently. 'How came you to these parts?' 'Through no volition of my own was I transported to this wasteland, madam.' Suddenly the young man's bag began to jump and writhe and Jhary-a-Conel lowered it gently to the ground, opening it and drawing out a small, winged black and white cat. The same Hawkmoon had seen in the vision. Hawkmoon shuddered. While he could find nothing to dislike about the young man himself, he had a terrible premonition that Jhary-a-Conel's appearance heralded some unpleasant doom for him. Just as he could not see why he thought Jhary-a-Conel resembled Oladahn, neither could he work out why other things were familiar, too. Echoes like those which had convinced him that Yisselda still lived . . . 'Do you know Yisselda?' he said tentatively. 'Yisselda of Brass?' Jhary-a-Conel frowned. 'I do not believe so. But then I know so many people and forget most of them, just as I might well forget you some day. That is my fate. As, of course, it is yours." You speak familiarly of my fate. Why should you know more of it than do I?' 'Because I do, in this context. Another time neither shall recognise the other. Champion, what calls you now?' As a Champion of the Runestaff, Hawkmoon was used to this form of address, though it was rare for most to use it. The rest of the sentence was a mystery to him. 'Nothing calls me. I am upon a quest with this lady here. An urgent quest." 'Then we must not delay. A moment." Jhary-a-Conel raced back up the hill and into the ruined castle. A moment later he emerged leading an old yellow horse. It was the unloveliest nag Hawkmoon had ever seen. 'I doubt if you would be able to keep up with us mounted on that creature," Hawkmoon said. 'Even if we had agreed that you should accompany us. And we have not agreed.' 'But you will.' Jhary-a-Conel put a foot into a stirrup and swung himself into his saddle. The horse seemed to sag under his weight. 'After all, it is our fate to ride together.' 'That may seem preordained to you, my friend,' said Hawkmoon grimly, 'but I share not such belief.' And yet, he realised, he did. It seemed to him that it was perfectly natural that Jhary-a-Conel should ride with them. At the same time he resented both Jhary's assumption and his own. Hawkmoon looked to Katinka van Bak to see what she thought. She merely shrugged. 'I've no objection to another sword riding with us,' she said. She cast a disdainful look at Jhary's horse. 'Not,' she added, 'that I think you'll be riding with us for long.' 'We shall see,' Jhary told her cheerfully. 'Where do you ride?' Hawkmoon became suspicious. Suddenly it occurred to him that this man might be a spy for those who now occupied the Bulgar Mountains. 'Why do you ask?' Jhary shrugged. 'I wondered. I had heard of some trouble in the mountains to the east of here. A wild band who swoop down to destroy everything before returning to their retreat.' 'I have heard a story like that," Hawkmoon admitted cautiously. 'Where did you hear it?' 'Oh, from a traveller I met on the road.' At last Hawkmoon had heard confirmation of what Katinka van Bak had told him. He was relieved to find that she had not been lying to him. 'Well,' he said, 'we ride in that general direction. Perhaps we shall see for ourselves.' 'Indeed,' said Katinka van Bak with a crooked smile. And now there were three riding for the Bulgar Mountains. A strange threesome, in truth. They rode for some days and Jhary's nag appeared to have no great trouble in keeping pace with the other horses. One day Hawkmoon turned to their new companion and asked him: 'Did you ever have occasion to meet a man called Oladahn? He was quite short and covered all over in red hair. He claimed to be kin to the Bulgar Mountain Giants (who, to my knowledge, has ever seen). An expert archer." 'I've met many expert archers, among them Rackhir the Red Archer who is perhaps the greatest in all the multiverse, but never one called Oladahn. Was he a good friend of yours?' 'My closest friend for a long while." 'Perhaps I have borne that name," Jhary-a-Conel said frowning. 'I have borne many, of course. It seems vaguely familiar. Just as the name Corum or Urlik would seem familiar to you.' 'Urlik?' Hawkmoon felt the blood leave his face. 'What know you of that name?' 'It is your name. Or one of them, at least. As is Corum. Though Corum was not a human manifestation and would therefore be a little harder for you to recall.' 'You speak so casually of incarnations! Do you really mean to claim you can recall past lives as easily as I can recall past adventures?' 'Some lives. By no means all. And that is just as well. In another

incarnation I might not remember this one, for instance. Yet my name has not changed, in this case, note.' Jhary laughed. 'My memories come and go. Just as yours do. It is what saves us.' 'You speak in riddles, friend Jhary.' 'So you often tell me.' Jhary shrugged. 'Yet this adventure does seem a little different, I'll admit. I am in the peculiar situation, at present, of being shifted willy-nilly through the dimensions at present. Disruptions on a large scale - brought about by the experiments of some foolish sorcerer, no doubt. And then, of course, there is always the interest that the Lords of Chaos show when such opportunities are offered. I would imagine they are playing some part in this.' 'The Lords of Chaos? Who are they?' 'Ah, it is something you must discover, if you do not know. Some say that they dwell at the end of time and their attempts to manipulate the universe according to their own desires are a result of their own world's dying. But that is a rather narrow theory. Others suggest that they do not exist at all, but are conjured up, periodically, by men's imaginations.' 'You are a sorcerer yourself, Master Jhary?' asked Katinka van Bak, falling back to join them. 'I think not.' 'A philosopher at least,' she said. 'My experience moulds my philosophy, that is all.' And Jhary seemed to tire of the conversation and refused to be drawn further on that particular topic. 'My only experience of the sort you hint at,' said Hawkmoon, 'was with the Runestaff. Could the Runestaff be involved in what is happening in the Bulgar Mountains?' 'The Runestaff? Perhaps.' Snow had fallen heavily on the great city of Pesht. Built of white, carved stone, the city had survived the Dark Empire sieges and now looked much as it had done before Granbretan had ridden out on her conquerings. Snow sparkled on every surface and its glare, as they approached at night under a full moon, made it seem that Pesht burned with white fire. They arrived at the gates after midnight and had some difficulty rousing the guard who let them in with a considerable amount of grumbling and querying their business in the city. Down broad, deserted avenues they rode, seeking the palace of Prince Karl of Pesht. Prince Karl had once courted Katinka van Blak and asked her to be his wife. They had been lovers for three years, the warrior woman had told Hawkmoon, but she would never marry him. Now he had married a princess from Zagredia and was happy. They were friends. She had stayed with him during her flight from Ukrainia. He would be surprised to see her. Prince Karl of Pesht was surprised. He arrived in his own ornate hall in a brocade dressing gown, his eyes still thick with sleep, but he was pleased to see Katinka van Bak. 'Katinka! I thought you planned to winter in the Kamarg!' 'That had been my plan.' She went forward and seized the tall old man's shoulders, kissing him swiftly on both cheeks in the military fashion, so that it seemed more as if she was presenting a soldier with a medal than greeting an ex-lover. 'But Duke Dorian here persuaded me to accompany him to the Bulgar Mountains.' 'Dorian? The Duke of Koln. I have heard much of you, young man. It is an honour to have you under my roof.' Prince Karl smiled as he shook Hawkmoon's hand. 'And this?' 'A companion of the road,' said Hawkmoon. 'His name is a strange one. Jhary-a-Conel.' Jhary swept off his hat in an elaborate bow. 'An honour to meet the Prince of Pesht,' he said. Prince Karl laughed. 'A privilege to entertain a companion of the great Hero of Londra. This is wonderful. You will stay for some time?' 'For the night only, I regret,' said Hawkmoon. 'Our business in the Bulgar Mountains is urgent.' 'What could possibly take you there? Even the legendary mountain giants are all dead now, I gather.' 'You have not told the prince?' said Hawkmoon in surprise, turning to Katinka van Bak. 'Of the raiders. I thought...' 'I did not wish to alarm him,' she said. 'But his city is not so distant from the Bulgar Mountains that it cannot be in danger of attack!' Hawkmoon said. 'Attack? What is this? An enemy from beyond the mountains?' Prince Karl's expression changed. 'Bandits,' said Katinka van Bak, darting a hard, meaning glance at Hawkmoon. 'A city of the size of Pesht has nothing to fear. A land so well defended as yours is under no threat.' 'But ...' Hawkmoon restrained himself. Plainly Katinka van Bak had a reason for not telling the Prince of Pesht all she knew. But what could that reason possibly be? Did she suspect Prince Karl of being in league with her enemies? If so, she should have warned him earlier. Besides, it was inconceivable that this fine old man would ally himself with such a rabble. He had fought well and nobly

against the Dark Empire and had been imprisoned for his pains, though he had not been subjected to the indignities normally visited upon captured enemy aristocrats by the Dark Empire. 'You will be weary from so much riding,' said Prince Karl tactfully. He had already ordered his servants to prepare rooms for his guests. 'You will want to seek your beds. I have been selfish in thinking only of my own pleasure at seeing you again, Katinka, and meeting this hero here.' He smiled and put his arm around Hawkmoon's shoulders. 'But at breakfast, perhaps, we can talk a little. Before you leave?' 'It would please me greatly, sire,' said Hawkmoon. And when Hawkmoon lay in a great bed in a well-appointed room in which a comfortable fire blazed, he watched the shadows playing on the rich tapestries which decorated the walls and he brooded for a few minutes on the reasons for Katinka van Bak's reticence before falling into a deep and dreamless sleep. The big sleigh could have taken a dozen armoured men and could have been sold for a fortune, for it was inlaid with gold, platinum, ivory and ebony, as well as precious jewels. The carvings cut into the wood of its frame were the work of a master. Hawkmoon and Katinka van Bak had been reluctant to accept the gift from Prince Karl, but he was insistent. 'It is what you will need in this weather. Your riding beasts can follow and thus be fresh when you need them.' Eight black geldings pulled the sleigh and they were clad in harness of black leather and finished with silver. Silver bells had been fixed to the harness, but these had been muffled for obvious reasons. The snow was falling thickly and the roads which led to Pesht were all slippery with ice. It was logical to use a sleigh under such circumstances. The sleigh was piled with provisions, with furs, with a pavilion which could be quickly erected in even the worst weather. There were ancient devices, relatives to the flame-lances, on which food could be prepared. And there seemed enough food of all kinds to feed a small army. Prince Karl had not been expressing mere politeness when he had said he was delighted to receive them. Jhary-a-Conel felt no reluctance in accepting the sleigh. He laughed with pleasure as he climbed in and seated himself amidst a profusion of expensive furs. 'Remember when you were Urlik,' he said, addressing Hawkmoon, 'Urlik Skarsol, Prince of the Southern Ice. Bears drew your carriage then!' 'I remember no such experience,' said Hawkmoon sharply. 'I wish I could understand your motives in continuing this pretence.' 'Ah, well,' replied Jhary philosophically, 'perhaps you will understand later.' Prince Karl of Pesht bid them farewell personally, waving to them from Pesht's impressive walls until they were out of sight. The great sleigh moved swiftly and Hawkmoon wondered why the speed of its travelling filled him with a mixture of exhilaration and misgiving. Again Jhary had mentioned something which roused an echo of memory. And yet it was obvious to him that he could never have been this 'Urlik' - for all he seemed to remember dreaming once of such a name. And now the going was speedy, for the weather had been turned to their advantage. The eight black geldings seemed tireless as they strained in their harness, dragging the sleigh closer and closer to the Bulgar Mountains. But still Hawkmoon had a terrifying sense of familiarity. The image of a silver chariot, its four wheels fixed to skis, moving implacably over a great ice plain. Another image of a ship - but a ship which travelled upon another ice plain. And they were not the same worlds - that he was sure. Neither was either one this world, his world. He drove the thoughts away as best he could, but they were persistent. Perhaps he should put all his questions to Katinka van Bak and Jhary-a-Conel, but he could not bring himself to ask them. He felt that the answers might not be to his taste. So they drove on through the swirling snow and the ground rose steeply and the speed of the travelling decreased a little, but not very much. From what he could see of the surrounding landscape there was no evidence at all of recent raids. Sitting with his hands on the reins of the eight black geldings, Hawkmoon put this to Katinka van Bak. Her answer was brief: 'Why should there be such signs? I told you that they raided only on the other side of the mountains.' 'Then there must be an explanation for that,' Hawkmoon said. 'And if we find the explanation we might also find the weakness.' Finally the roads became too steep and the geldings' hooves slipped on the ice as they strove to haul the sleigh behind them. The snow had abated and it was late in the afternoon.

Hawkmoon pointed to a mountain meadow below them. 'The horses may be pastured there. The grazing is reasonable and - look - a cave where they might stable themselves. It is the most we can do for them, I fear.' 'Very well,' agreed Katinka van Bak. With great difficulty they managed to turn the horses and lead them back down the path until they reached the snow-covered meadow. Hawkmoon cleared snow with his boot to indicate the grass below, but the geldings needed no help from him. They were used to such conditions and were soon using their hooves to clear the snow so that they might graze. And since it was almost sunset, the three decided to spend the night in the cave with the horses before continuing into the mountains. 'These conditions are an advantage,' said Hawkmoon. 'For our enemies have little chance of seeing us.' 'True enough,' said Katinka van Bak. 'And similarly Hawkmoon went on, "we must be wary. For we shall not see them until they are upon us. Do you know this area, Katinka van Bak?' 'I know it fairly well,' she told him. She was lighting a fire inside the cave for their cooking stoves, provided by the prince, did not give out enough heat to warm the cave. 'This is snug,' said Jhary-a-Conel. 'I would not mind spending the rest of the winter here. Then we could travel on when spring comes.' Katinka offered him a glance of contempt. He grinned and kept silent for a while. They led their horses now, beneath a cold, hard sky. Save for a little withered moss and some stunted grey and brown birches, nothing grew in these mountains. A sharp wind blew. A few carrion birds wheeled away amongst the jagged peaks. The sounds of their breathing, of their horse hooves clicking on the rocks, of their own slippery progress, were the only sounds. The scene viewed from these high mountain paths was beautiful in the extreme, yet it was also deadly. It was dead. It was cold. It was cruel. Many travellers must have died in these parts during the season of winter. Hawkmoon wore a thick fur robe over his leather coat. Though he sweated, he did not dare take any of his clothing off for fear he would freeze to the spot when he stopped. The others, too, wore heavy furs - hoods, gloves and boots as well as coats. And the climbing was almost always upward. Only occasionally might a path take a downward turn, only to soar again around the next bend. Yet the mountains, for all their deadly beauty, seemed peaceful. An immense sense of peace filled the valley and Hawkmoon could barely believe that a great force of bandits hid here. There was no atmosphere to indicate that the mountains had been invaded. He felt as if he were one of the first human beings ever to come this way. Although the going was difficult and very wearying, he felt more relaxed here than he had felt since he had been a child in Koln, when the old Duke, his father, had ruled. His responsibilities had become simple. To stay alive. And at last they reached a slightly wider path where there was room enough for Hawkmoon to stretch to his full length had he so desired. And this path ended suddenly at a big, black cave entrance. 'What's this?' Hawkmoon asked Katinka. 'It seems a dead end. Is it a tunnel?' 'Aye,' replied Katinka van Bak. 'It's a tunnel.' 'And how much further do we journey when we reach the other end of the tunnel?' Hawkmoon leaned against the rock wall, just inside the entrance to the tunnel. 'That depends,' said Katinka van Bak mysteriously. And she would not say more. Hawkmoon was too weary to ask her what she meant. Jerking his body forward, he plunged into the tunnel, leading his horse behind him, glad that snow no longer dragged at his boots once he had gone a few yards into the great cavern. Inside it was quite warm and there was a smell. It was almost like the smell of spring. Hawkmoon remarked on it, but neither of the others could smell the odour so that he wondered if perhaps some perfume clung to his big fur cloak. The floor of the cavern levelled out now and it became much easier to walk. 'It is hard to believe," said Hawkmoon, 'that this place is natural. It is a wonder of the world.' They had been walking for an hour, with no sight of the other end of the tunnel, when Hawkmoon began to feel nervous. 'It cannot be natural,' he repeated. He ran his gloved hands along the walls, but there were no signs of tools having been used to create them. He turned back to the others and thought, in the gloom, that he noticed peculiar expressions on both their faces. 'What do you think? You know this place, Katinka van Bak. Are there any mentions of it in the histories? In legends?' 'Some,' she admitted. 'Go on, Hawkmoon. We shall soon be at the other side

'But where does it lead?' He brought his body fully round to confront them. The fireglobe in his hand burned dully and turned his face to a demonic red. 'Directly to the Dark Empire camp? Do you truly work for my old enemies? Is this a ruse? You have neither of you told me enough!' We are not in the pay of your enemies,' said Katinka van Bak. 'Continue, Hawkmoon, please. Or shall I lead?' Still he stepped forward. Hawkmoon involuntarily put a hand to the hilt of his sword, pushing back his grey fur cloak to do so. 'No. I trust you, Katinka van Bak, yet everything in me warns me of a trap. How can this be?' 'You must go on, Sir Champion!' said Jhary-a-Conel quietly, stroking the fur of his small black and white cat, which had emerged from his jerkin. 'You must.' 'Champion? Champion of what?' Still Hawkmoon's hand gripped the sword hilt. 'Of what?' 'Champion Eternal,' said Jhary-a-Conel softly still. 'Fate's soldier...' 'No!' Though the words were all but meaningless, Hawkmoon could not bear to hear them. 'No!!' His gloved hands flew to his ears. And that was when his two friends rushed at him. He was still not as strong as he had been before his madness. He was weary from the climb. He struggled against them until he felt Katinka van Bak's dagger pricking his eye and he heard her urgent voice in his ear: 'Killing you is the easiest way to achieve our purpose, Hawkmoon,' she said. 'But that would not be the kindest. Besides, I am reluctant to cut you off from this body, should you desire to return to it. Thus I shall only kill you if you make it impossible for me to do ought else. Do you understand?' 'I understand treachery,' he said savagely, still testing his strength against their clutches. 'and I thought I smelled the spring. I smelled traitors, instead. Traitors who posed as friends.' One of them extinguished the fireglobe. The three stood in blackness and Hawkmoon heard the echoes of his own words. 'Where is this place?' He felt the dagger point prick his eye again. 'What are you doing to me?' 'It was the only way,' said Katinka van Bak. 'It was the only way, Champion.' It was the first time she had called him that, though Jhary had used the term frequently. 'Where is this place?' he said again. 'Where?' 'I wish that I knew,' said Katinka van Bak. And her voice was almost sad. Then she evidently struck him on the back of the head with her armoured gauntlet. He felt the blow and guessed what caused it. For a moment he thought that it had not succeeded in its intention of driving consciousness from him. Then he realised that he had sunk to his knees. Then he realised that his body seemed to be falling away from him in the blackness of the cave. And then he knew that her blow had done what she had intended, after all.

## BOOK TWO A HOMECOMING

1 ILIAN OF GARATHORM Hawkmoon listened to ghosts. Each ghost spoke to him in his own voice. In Hawkmoon's voice... ... then I was Erekos and I slew the human race. And Urlik Skarsol, Prince of the Southern Ice, who slew the Silver Queen from Moon. Who bore the Black Sword. Now I hang in limbo and await my next task. Perhaps through this I shall find a means of returning to my lost love Ermizhad. Perhaps I shall find Tanelorn. (I have been Elric) Fate's soldier ... Time's tool ... Champion Eternal .., Doomed to perpetual strife. (I have been Corum. In more than one life I have been Corum) I know not how it began. Perhaps it will end in Tanelorn. Rhalina, Yisselda, Cymoril, Zarozenia ... So many women. (I have been Arflane. Asquiol. Aubec.") All die, save me. (I have been Hawkmoon ... 'No! I am Hawkmoon!' (We are all Hawkmoon. Hawkmoon is all of us") All live, save me. John Daker? Was he the first? Or the last? I have betrayed so many and been betrayed so much. Faces floated before him. Each face was different. Each face was his own face. He shouted and tried to push them away. But he had no hands. He tried to revive himself. Better to die under Katinka van Bak's knife than suffer this torment. It was what he had feared. It was what he had tried to avoid. It was the reason he had not pursued his argument with Jhary-a-Conel. But he was alone against a thousand - thousand manifestations of himself. The struggle is eternal. The fight is endless. And now we must become Ilian. Ilian, whose soul was driven out. Is this not a strange task? 'I am Hawkmoon. On

Hawkmoon.' And I am Hawkmoon. And I am Urlik Skarsol. And I am Ilian of Garathorm. Perhaps here I shall find Tanelorn. Farewell to the South Ice and the dying sun. Farewell to the Silver Queen and the Screaming Chalice. Farewell Count Brass. Farewell Urlik. Farewell Hawkmoon ... And Hawkmoon began to feel his memories fading from him. In their place came crowding a million other memories. Memories of bizarre worlds and exotic landscapes, of creatures both human and inhuman. Memories that could not possibly belong to a single man, and yet they were like those dreams he had had at Castle Brass. Or had he experienced them at Castle Brass? Perhaps it had been elsewhere? Melnibone? In Loos Ptokai? In Castle Erorn by the sea? Aboard that strange ship which travelled beyond the Earth? Where? Where had he dreamed those dreams? And he knew that he had dreamed them in all of those places and that he would dream them again in all those places. He knew that there was no such thing as Time. Past, present and future were all the same. They existed all at the same moment - and they did not exist at any moment. He was Urlik Skarsol, Prince of the Southern Ice, and his chariot was drawn by bears, moving across the ice beneath a dying sun. Moving towards a goal. Searching, as Hawkmoon searched for Yisselda, for a woman whom he could not reach. Ermizhad. And Ermizhad had not loved Urlik Skarsol. She had loved Erekoze. Yet Erekoze was Urlik Skarsol, too. Tanelorn. That was Urlik's goal. Tanelorn. Should it be Hawkmoon's? The name was so familiar. Yet he had found Tanelorn many times. He had dwelled there once and each time Tanelorn had been different. Which Tanelorn must he seek? And there was a sword. A sword which had many manifestations. A black sword. Yet it was often disguised. A sword ... Ilian of Garathorm bore a good sword. Ilian felt for it, but it was not there. Ilian's hands ran over chain mail, over silk, over flesh. Ilian's hands touched cool turf and Ilian's nose smelled the richness of spring. Ilian's eyes opened. Two strangers stood there, a young man and a middle-aged woman. Yet their faces were familiar. Hawkmoon said: 'Katinka van ...' and then Ilian forgot the rest of the name. Hawkmoon felt his body and was astonished. "What have you made me into...?" And Ilian wondered at those words, even though they came from Ilian's mouth. 'Greetings, Ilian of Garathorm, Champion Eternal,' said the young man with a smile. He had a small black and white cat on his shoulder. The cat had a pair of wings folded on its back. 'And Hawkmoon, farewell - for the moment, at least,' said the middle-aged woman who was dressed all in battered plate armour. Ilian said Vaguely: 'Hawkmoon? The name is familiar. Yet I thought for an instant I was called Urlik Skarsol, also. Who are you?' The young man bowed, showing none of the patronising mockery or condescension with which Ilian had become familiar, even when at court. 'I am Jhary-a-Conel. And this lady is Katinka van Bak, whom you may remember.' Ilian frowned. 'Yes ... Katinka van Bak. You are the one who saved me when Ymryl's pack pursued me ...' And then, for a moment, Ilian's memory faded. Hawkmoon said, through Ilian's lips: 'What have you done to me, Katinka van Bak?' He felt at his body in horror. His skin was softer. His form was different. He had become shorter. 'You have made me into ... into a woman!' Jhary-a-Conel leaned forward, his eyes full of an abnormal intensity. 'It had to be done. You are Ilian of Garathorm. This world needs Ilian. Trust us. It will benefit Hawkmoon, too.' 'You plotted this together. There was no army in the Bulgar Mountains! That tunnel...' 'It led here. To Garathorm,' Katinka van Bak said. 'I discovered this passage between the dimensions when I hid from the Dark Empire. I was here when Ymryl and the others arrived. I saved your life, Ilian, but they were able, with their sorcery, to drive your spirit from you. I was in despair for Garathorm. Then I met Jhary here. He conceived a solution. Hawkmoon was close to the point of death. As a manifestation of the eternal Champion his spirit could substitute for Ilian's for she is another manifestation of that Champion, you see. That story I told you. I knew it might bring you here - through the tunnel. The army I described does raid beyond the Bulgar Mountains. It raids Garathorm.' Hawkmoon's brain was whirling. 'I don't understand. I occupy another's body? Is that what you are saying? This can only be Dark Empire work!' 'Believe us that it is not!' said Katinka van Bak seriously. 'Though the Dark Empire has played some part, I feel, I

bringing this disaster about," said Jhary-a-Conel. 'The exact part is yet to be discovered. But only Ilian can you hope to oppose those who now rule this world. It is Ilian's fate, you see. Only Ilian Hawkmoon could not have succeeded ...' 'So you have imprisoned me in this woman's body ... How? What sorcery accomplished it?' Jhary looked at the grassy ground. 'I have some skill in the particular area. But you must forget that you are Hawkmoon. Hawkmoon has no place in Garathorm. You must be Ilian, or our work is wasted. Ilian - whom Ymryl desired. And because he could not possess her, he drove her spirit from her. Even Ymryl did not realise what he was doing - that Ilian's destiny is to wage war against him. Ymryl merely sees you, Ilian, as a desirable woman, albeit a fierce foe who led the remnants of her father's army against him.' 'Ymryl ...' Hawkmoon strove to hang on to his own identity, but it was slipping away from him again. 'Ymryl, who serves Chaos. Ymryl, the Yellow Horn. They came from nowhere and Garathorm fell to them. Ah, I remember the fires. I remember my father, kindly Pyran. With all his reluctance to fight, he battled Ymryl long ...' 'And then you took up Pyran's flaming banner. Remember, Ilian? You took up that burning flag, the fame of all Garathorm, and you rode against Ymryl's force ...' Katinka van Bak said softly. 'I had taught you the use of sword, shield and axe, while I guested at Pyran's court, after I fled the Dark Empire. And you put all my learning to splendid use until only you and I remained alive upon the field.' 'I remember,' said Ilian. 'And we were only spared because they were amused to discover our feminine sex. Ah, the humiliation I felt when Ymryl tugged the helm from my head! "You shall rule beside me," he said. And he reached out a hand still covered in the blood of my people, and he touched my body! Oh, I remember.' Ilian's voice became hard and fierce. 'And I remember that it was then I swore to slay him. Yet there was only one way and I was unable to follow it. I could not. And, because I resisted him, he imprisoned me...' 'Which was when I was able to rescue you. We fled. His pack followed. We fought it and destroyed it. But Ymryl's sorcerers found us. In his rage he made them reach out and drive your spirit from you.' 'Ah, the sending. Yes. They attacked. I remember nothing more.' 'We were hiding in the cave. I had some idea to take you through, back to my own world where I thought you would be safe. But then, when your soul went out of you, there was no point to it. I met Jhary-a-Conel, who had been drawn to Garathorm by the same forces which brought Ymryl. Between us we determined what we must try to do. Your memories were still within your skull. Only an - a essence - was lacking. So we had to find a new soul. And Hawkmoon's was not in use then, as he rotted in his tower at Castle Brass. With many misgivings we did what we had to do. And now you have your soul again.' 'And Ymryl?' 'He believes you - gone. He has doubtless forgotten you and thinks he rules all Garathorm with nothing to fear. His rabble army rides roughshod over all the land. Yet even those creatures have hardly been able to spoil Garathorm's beauty.' 'Garathorm is still lovely,' agreed Ilian. She looked from where she stood on the slopes of the hill, the cave mouth behind her, and saw her world with fresh eyes, as if for the first time. Not far off was the edge of the great forest - the forest which covered this world's single continent. Save for Garathorm, all the rest was sea containing the occasional small island. And the trees were huge. Some stretched several hundred feet into the air. The sky was wide and blue and in it burned a huge golden sun. The sun shone on flowers whose heads measured more than twelve feet across. It made their colours almost blinding in their intensity. Scarlets, purples and yellows predominated. Among the blooms flew butterflies whose proportions matched those of the flowers and whose colours were even richer. One particularly glorious insect had wings measuring nearly two feet long. And among the vine-hung boles of the trees fluttered green birds, their plumage glittering in the deep shadows of the forest. And Ilian knew that there was hardly a bird or a beast in that forest which a human had to fear. She breathed the thick air with relish and she smiled. 'Yes,' she said, 'I am Ilian of Garathorm. Who could wish to be anything else? Who would want to dwell anywhere but in Garathorm, even in these times?' 'Exactly,' said Jhary-a-Conel in some relief. Katinka van Bak began to unwrap a big fur cloak which Ilian did not recall having seen before.



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