

Witch Wraith: The Dark Legacy of Shannara

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From bestselling author Terry Brooks comes the final thrilling novel in a brand-new trilogy-
The Dark Legacy of Shannara!

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

For centuries the Four Lands enjoyed freedom from its demon-haunted past, protected by magic-enhanced borders from the dark dimension known as the Forbidding and the profound evil imprisoned there. But now the unthinkable is happening: The ancient wards securing the barrier between order and mayhem have begun to erode-and generations of bloodthirsty, monstrous creatures, fueled by a rage thousands of years in the making, are poised to spill forth, seeking revenge for what was done to them.

Young Elf Arling Elesedil possesses the enchanted means to close the breach and once more seal the denizens of the Forbidding in their prison. But when she falls into the hands of the powerful Federation's diabolical Prime Minister, her efforts may be doomed. Only her determined sister, Aphen, who bears the Elfstones and commands their magic, has any hope of saving Arling from the hideous fate her captor has in store.

Meanwhile, Railing Ohmsford-desperate to save his imprisoned brother-seeks to discover if his famed but ill-fated ancestor Gianne is still alive and willing to help him save the world . . . no matter the odds or the consequences.

Praise for Witch Wraith

"Terry Brooks has written a slam-bang conclusion to his The Dark Legacy of Shannara trilogy with the stellar Witch Wraith. . . . He has a keen eye for great world-building as well as unforgettable characters. . . . The Dark Legacy of Shannara trilogy is arguably his best work to date."-Associated Press

"The final chapter in Brooks's latest trilogy set in his beloved world of Shannara peaks in a bittersweet conclusion that seems to set the stage for future books. A must for the numerous die-hard Shannara fans."-Library Journal

Praise for Terry Brooks

"The Sword of Shannara is an unforgettable and wildly entertaining epic, animated by Terry Brooks's cosmically generative imagination and storytelling joy."-Karen Russell, New York Times bestselling author of *Swamplandia!*

"If Tolkien is the grandfather of modern fantasy, Terry Brooks is its favorite uncle."-Peter V. Brett, New York Times bestselling author of *The Desert Spear*

"I can't even begin to count how many of Terry Brooks's books I've read (and reread) over the years. From Shannara to Landover, his work was a huge part of my childhood."-Patrick Rothfuss, New York Times bestselling author of *The Name of the Wind*

"Terry Brooks is a master of the craft and a trailblazer who established fantasy as a viable genre. He is required reading."-Brent Weeks, New York Times bestselling author of The Night Angel Trilogy

"The Shannara books were among the first to really capture my imagination. My daydreams and therefore my stories will always owe a debt to Terry Brooks."-Brandon Mull, #1 New York Times bestselling author of the Beyonders and Fablehaven series
Terry Brooks is the New York Times bestselling author of more than thirty books, including the Dark Legacy of Shannara adventures Wards of Faerie and Bloodfire Quest; the Legends of Shannara novels Bearers of the Black Staff and The Measure of the Magic; the Genesis of Shannara trilogy: Armageddon's Children, The Elves of Cintra, and The Gypsy Morph; The Sword of Shannara; the Voyage of the Jerle Shannara trilogy: Ilse Witch, Antrax, and Morgawr; the High Druid of Shannara trilogy: Jarka Ruus, Tanequil, and Straken; the nonfiction book Sometimes the Magic Works: Lessons from a Writing Life; and the novel based upon the screenplay and story by George Lucas, Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace. His novels Running with the Demon and A Knight of the Word were selected by the Rocky Mountain News as two of the best science fiction/fantasy novels of the twentieth century. He lives with his wife, Judine, in the Pacific Northwest.9780345523532 excerpt

Brooks / WITCH WRAITH

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Railing Ohmsford stood alone at the bow of the Quickening and looked out at the starlit darkness. They were anchored for the night, the airship nestled in a copse of fir and hemlock, the sway of the ship in the soft breezes barely noticeable. It was well after midnight, and he should have been sleeping with the others. But sleep did not come easily these days, and when it did come it was haunted and left him wracked with a deep sense of unease. Better to stay awake where he could try to do something to control his thoughts, as dark as they were. Better to face his demons standing up, prepared to fight them off and hold them at bay.

He could not banish them, of course. He could not send them back to the empty places where they sometimes went, though increasingly less so these days.

Not that it mattered. He knew their faces. He knew their names.

Fear: that he might not be able to find Grianne Ohmsford and bring her back to face the Straken Lord because she was dead. Or because she was alive but could not be persuaded to leave the sanctuary in which she had placed herself, unwilling to risk a confrontation of the sort he was proposing. Or simply because she was Grianne and she had never been predictable.

Doubt: that he was doing the right thing in making this journey into the back of beyond because of a hope that had so little chance of succeeding. He should have been seeking

his brother in the Forbidding, hunting for him there and bringing him out again in spite of the odds. Time was running out with every passing hour, and his brother was alone and had no one to help him and no way of knowing if help would ever come. Redden depended on him, and it must seem to his brother as if Railing had abandoned him.

Shame: that he was deceiving his companions on this quest, that he was keeping information from them that might dissuade them from continuing. The King of the Silver River had warned him that nothing would happen as he imagined, that there would be results he had not foreseen. The Faerie creature had told him he should turn back and travel instead into the Forbidding—the one place he knew he could never enter, so great was his terror at the prospect.

He felt himself to be a coward and a deceiver. He was consumed by his doubts and his shame, and it was growing increasingly difficult not to reveal this to the others. He tried to keep it hidden, masked by his false words and acts, but it was eating at him. Destroying him.

He left the vessel's bow and walked back toward the stern, moving quietly, trying not to disturb the sleepers. Some were on deck, wrapped in blankets; some were below, rolled into hammocks. All slept save two of the Rover crew, who kept watch fore and aft. He saw the one at the stern and turned aside before he reached the man to take up a position near the starboard railing. Small creaks sounded as ropes and lines pulled taut and released again, and snores rose out of the shadows. He liked this quiet time, this confluence of shadows and sleep. Everything was at peace.

He wished he could be so.

It had only been two days now since they had set out from the Rainbow Lake, even though it felt more like twenty. They had debated among themselves that morning, on waking, as to the best route for their journey. The Charnals were unknown country to all but Skint. Even Farshawn and his Rovers had not come this way before. Railing and Mirai had traveled the Borderlands while conveying spare parts and salvage to customers, but had not gone farther north.

Railing favored coming up from the Rainbow Lake, following the corridor that snaked between the Wolfsktaag and the Dragon's Teeth to the Upper Anar, and then continuing on through Jannisson Pass east of the Skull Kingdom and its dangers and straight along the western edge of the Charnals to the Northland city of Anatcherae—much the same route his grandfather Penderrin had taken while searching for the tanequil all those years ago. From Anatcherae, once resupplied, they could continue on to their destination.

But Skint had thought differently.

What they needed most, he declared, was a guide, someone who was familiar with the Charnals and could help them find the ruins of Stridegate, where it was said the tanequil might be found. There were few who could do that, and he was not one. In point of fact, he

knew of only one man who could help them with this, one whose loyalty and knowledge they could depend upon. And even he would need persuading.

His name was Challa Nand, and he made his home in the Eastland town of Rampling Steep. But finding him would require that the company fly Quickening east of the Charnals and through the Upper Anar. It would necessitate abandoning the western approach to Stridegate and finding one that came in from the east. Challa could show them, if they were able to persuade him to their cause.

Railing knew he could rely on the ring given to him by the King of the Silver River to show them the way, but using it would mean either telling them about his meeting with the Faerie creature or lying about where he had gotten the ring. The ring could always be a backup if the need arose; the better choice was to keep it a secret for now.

So he agreed to Skint's proposal, and the others went along, all of them keenly aware that they were in unfamiliar territory and needed to reduce the risks they would encounter.

Now here they were, on their way to Rampling Steep, anchored at the northern edge of Darklin Reach not far from where the Rabb River branched east into the Upper Anar. If he listened closely, Railing could hear the murmur of the river's waters as they churned their way out of the mountains on their journey west to the plains and from there to the Mermidon. It was a distance of hundreds of miles, and it made him wonder if anyone had ever followed the river all the way from end to end. He supposed Gnome or Dwarf trappers and traders might have done so at some point, but he doubted that any had ever made a record of it.

"What are you doing?"

Mirai Leah was standing next to him. He hadn't heard her come up, hadn't realized she was there. He shrugged. "Can't sleep."

"Standing out here isn't going to help. You need to get some rest. Are you all right?"

He gave her a quick glance. Her hair was ruffled, and she was yawning. "You look like the one who ought to be sleeping."

"I would be if I weren't worried about you. What's bothering you, Railing?"

He could have given her a whole raft of answers, starting with how he felt about her and what it would mean to him if he caused her harm. But all he said was, "Nothing. I just couldn't sleep."

She draped an arm over his shoulders. Her touch made him shiver. "How long have we known each other?"

"Seems like forever. Since we were pretty small, anyway. I still remember when your parents

brought you for your first visit. They came to see Mother. I didn't like you then. You were kind of bossy."

"Not much has changed. I'm still kind of bossy. So when I ask you what's bothering you, it's because I know something is. So what's up?"

He brushed his red hair back and faced her. "Leaving Redden is eating at me. I can't stand it that I'm not going after him."

"Then why aren't you?"

"Because I think this is the better choice."

"Because you believe Grianne Ohmsford is alive and will come to Redden's aid?" She studied him a moment. "We've already discussed this, and I don't think that's what's troubling you at all. I think there's something else, something you are keeping to yourself. Redden's not here to confide in, so maybe you ought to try telling me."

Here was his opportunity. She had called him out on what she clearly recognized, and he could unburden himself by telling her about his meeting with the King of the Silver River. He could admit what he was doing, how he was manipulating them. But that was something he would never do. He didn't want her judging him. He wanted her to love him unconditionally and fully. He always had.

He fingered the ring, tucked deep in his pants pocket. "I need to go back to sleep. I'm sorry I woke you." He started to walk away, and then he stopped and turned around. "I want you to know that I'm doing the best I can. If anything happens to Redden because of me, I don't think I could stand it. I need you to believe that. I need you to support me and to . . ."

He trailed off. He couldn't make himself speak the words: Love me. "Good night."

"I will always support you, Railing," she called after him.

Without looking back, he gave her a wave and disappeared back down the hatchway into the hold of the airship.

He had thought he might sleep then, weary and heartsick. But after a short, unsettling nap he was awake again, wide-eyed and restless. Moreover, there was a tugging sensation that brought him out of his blanket and back up the ladder to the deck, where he stood peering out from the ship's railing and over the darkened countryside.

Something was out there. Something he must find.

He couldn't explain how he knew this, but the feeling was so compelling that he did not stop to question it. He needed to find out what it was. Ignoring it for even another moment was impossible.

He walked over to the sentry at the bow and told him he was going for a walk, but that he would be careful. The Rover clearly understood it would be a mistake to question the leader of their company, though he offered to accompany him. But Railing refused.

Once off the vessel and out in the night alone, Railing gave himself over to his strange compulsion, following his instincts. He felt oddly unthreatened. It might have been because of what he had survived in the Fangs—the days of attacks by the Goblins and the constant use of his wishsong magic to throw back the hordes in the debilitating struggle to stay alive. He had proved something to himself in those terrible days when others had died all around him. He had found, through his magic, a source of strength and resilience that he had not known he possessed. He had demonstrated to himself that he could be stronger than he had believed. Before, the wishsong had never been more than a means of ramping up the excitement on each new adventure, or of pushing ever harder against the limits that common sense told him not to exceed. But what he took away from the Fangs was something different. It was a belief that his magic provided him a shield and sword he could use to protect both himself and those close to him. It was a belief that fostered confidence.

So he proceeded through the night's shadows without fear. He did not hesitate in his search for what was calling to him or consider turning back. His mind was made up. The voice reminded him of his summoning by the King of the Silver River two nights earlier, and he wanted to know why that was. While it was different-different enough that he was certain it was something else entirely—it shared a kinship that intrigued him.

Railing.

His name, spoken clearly. Spoken by a voice he could not mistake because he had known it all his life.

It was Redden who called to him.

He brushed aside his shock and pushed ahead at a quicker pace, listening for more. Everything was still again, the voice gone as quickly as it had come. Yet the pull on him persisted. He pushed through woods and soon no longer knew in which direction he was going—or even from which he had come. He was proceeding blindly, responding to the lure with a heedless disregard for his own safety, and he finally began to wonder if he was in danger and did not recognize it.

Railing.

Again, his brother's voice.

Now he slowed, no longer willing to rush ahead, worried that he had overstepped himself. He was lost at the very edge of Darklin Reach, which was not only strange but dangerous country. He was moving away from the Rabb; he knew this because he could no longer

hear its rush. The silence was deep and pervasive, and only the cries of night birds broke its hush.

Ahead, just visible through the trees, a silvery glimmer caught his eye.

He wove his way through the woods and stepped out at the edge of a small lake. Fog lay eerily across its rippling surface. The waters lapped the shoreline and chopped about its windswept center in small bursts of spray. Though he tried, the boy could not make out what lay on the other side. The trees ringed the lake like a palisade, trunks dark and thick and seemingly impenetrable ten feet from where he stood. In the distance, through the gaps, he could spy the peaks of mountains.

Railing.

"I'm here, Redden," he shouted back, feeling foolish for speaking aloud to a voice that was only in his head.

Laughter greeted his response, filling the air in long raucous peals that shattered the silence and spun out around the lake in waves. Railing took a step back, unsure of what was happening, knowing only that it wasn't his brother he was hearing but something else entirely. The laughter was unsettling, inhuman. The boy would have bolted if not for the continuous tugging from inside his body, which held him rooted in place.

Then, from somewhere out in the middle of the lake, a dark shape began to form, sliding across the surface of the water as it came toward him.

Raaaaiilingg.

His brother's voice again, but it had a whining, pleading quality that it had never before possessed. He shuddered at the sound, unnerved by the neediness of its tone. But he stayed where he was, waiting on the thing that crested the lake's surface and drew ever closer. He did not feel the fear that might otherwise have driven him into the woods. What he felt instead was a deep, inexplicable revulsion.

When the dark shape reached him, it was fully formed. It stood upon the waters and looked down on him.

"Brother." Redden Ohmsford addressed him in a hollow, empty voice.

Railing was dumbstruck and could not respond.

"Did you think that if you did not come for me, I could not in my turn find a way to come to you? Did you abandon me with the expectation that I would simply vanish from your life and leave you in peace? Leave you to court Mirai alone? Did you believe that, even in death, I would not find a way to rejoin you?"

Railing fought back against a rising tide of despair. "You are not my brother. My brother isn't dead. I would know it if he were!" He swallowed hard. "What are you? A shade? A changeling?"

The creature before him shimmered and began to transform again. "Perhaps I am you."

And just like that Railing was looking at his mirror image-every detail recognizable, every line and feature in place.

"Why did you call to me? What do you want?"

"Oh, it isn't what I want. It's what you want."

"That's not true. This is all coming from you. And you are not me!"

"Well, then, descendant of Valemén and Druids, who am I?"

Railing racked his brain for an explanation, for a memory, for any hint of who or what this thing was. But he could not seem to think straight looking at a duplicate of himself.

"I have known your kin, and your ancestors great and small. I have spoken to some over the years. I spoke to Brin Ohmsford when she went in search of the Ildatch. And to Walker Boh when he went after the Black Elfstone." The laughter returned, whispery and prodding. "Does that not tell you who I am?"

It did. Abruptly, Railing found the answer-both from his memories of his family's history and from the stories told him by his father and repeated endlessly by his brother and himself.

"You are the Grimpond. You are a sha..."

Other Books

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