



# Corranda's Crown



Written & Illustrated by  
Lee Edward Födi

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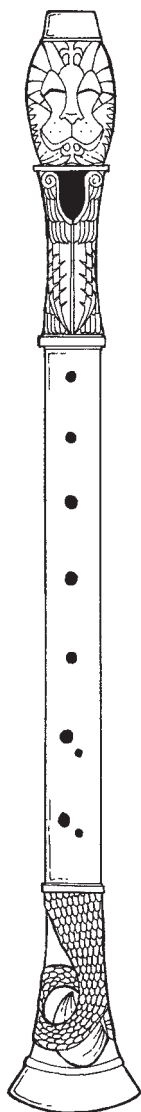
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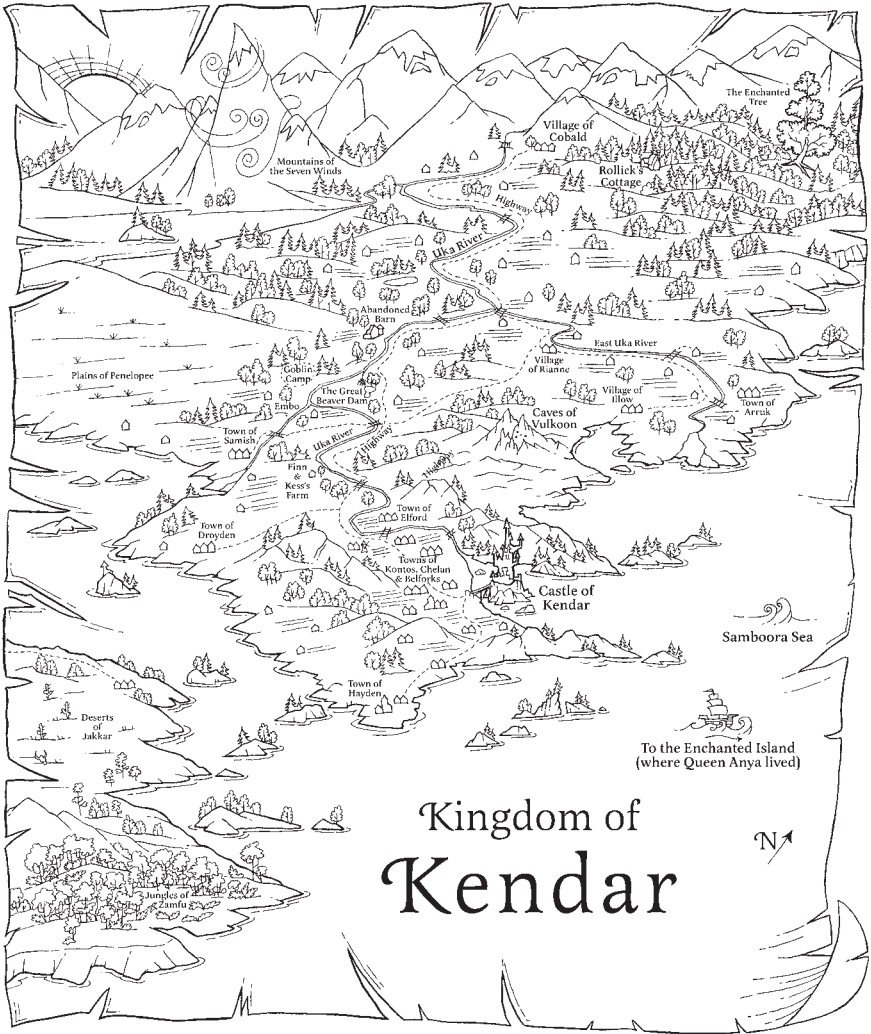
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# Kingdom of Kendar



## Chapter 1



# A Land Besieged

**D**ark times had fallen upon the kingdom of Kendar. The entire land was overrun with goblins, a strange and hideous breed of creatures that were threatening to cripple the very livelihood of the nation. Across the land, Kendar's scholar's and most learned citizens debated the mysterious origin of the goblins, but not even the most scientific minds could explain their appearance, nor find a solution for ending the infestation. Slippery and sneaky, the goblins preferred the darkness of night, and they were near impossible to catch. Those that were caught seemed to be replaced by new goblins almost immediately. The situation seemed hopeless. Only one thing was for certain: the goblins were multiplying with each passing day, while Kendar's human population seemed to be slowly disappearing, one by one.

The goblins themselves were repugnant monsters. They had greasy gray flesh and scraggly, crooked bodies covered with warts. Their eyes were large and round, while their noses were either large and fleshy or long and hooked, bursting with pimples and sprouting curly hairs. Some had ears so long and twisted that no cap or hood would cover their heads, while others sported jagged, rotting teeth caked

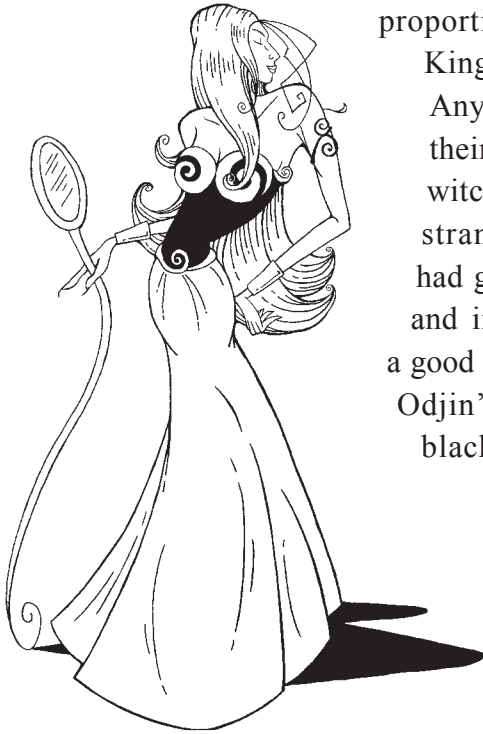


with the leftovers of last week's meals. They did not walk, but rather skittered or crawled, sometimes on all fours, moving about on disfigured limbs that creaked and clicked with bony joints. Even their names were ugly, for the goblins were called such vulgar things as Kanker or Tick, or maybe Flem or Fester; still others went by the likes of Retch and Rott and Skab and Skurvy.

Some of the beasts were tall and lean, while others were fat and squat with huge bellies that burst the buttons on their clothes—if they were to wear any, which many did not. They came in many shapes and sizes, though it was hard to say if any was more repulsive than the next or the last. Still, despite their varied appearances, the goblins shared one common trait: their cruel, crooked hearts. Indeed, it was as if someone had stolen all the best parts of human nature, only to leave behind that which was greedy and grotesque.

As the years passed and the goblins continued to increase in number, it became obvious that the vile vermin were being controlled by a single source of dark magic. Many rumors spread across the land, but most people believed that the person behind the goblin plague was the strange and secretive witch known as Odjin the Beautiful. The sorceress was well named, for she was as enchanting and becoming as the goblins were ugly. In truth, there was only one thing more important to Odjin than her beauty, and that was power. She hungered for power as a tempest hungers to rain upon the earth, and she made it no secret that she had desires for the throne of Kendar.

At last, the goblin infestation grew to such epidemic



proportions that Kendar's King Daron and Queen Anya called Odjin before their court to plead for the witch's aid. Odjin was no stranger to the palace. She had grown up in the castle and in her youth had been a good friend to King Daron. Odjin's fascination with black magic, however, had long ago created a rift between the two and by the time Daron took the throne as Kendar's king, he and the sorceress were barely

on speaking terms. Now they were true enemies, and it was only in this grave crisis that King Daron would even tolerate Odjin's presence in his castle.

As Odjin entered the palace, the guards and courtiers gasped at her beauty. Odjin was tall, slender, and pale, with long golden hair that fell upon her shoulders in thick curls. Her eyes were blue with long fluttering lashes and her lips were round and full. She carried a golden mirror with a long curving handle that she used to gaze vainly upon her reflection. She was proud and confident in her beauty, and she wielded it like a weapon.

Odjin made no secret of her hostile nature as she enter-

ed the royal throne room. She refused to kneel or even curtsy before the king and queen. Daron scowled at the witch, while Anya's kitten rose from the queen's lap to arch her back with a threatening hiss.

"Easy, Pasha," Queen Anya whispered in a soothing voice, gently stroking her pet. "You must display better manners than this for our guest."

"Horrid creatures," Odjin remarked as she paused to stare at her reflection in her long-handled mirror. "I, for one, cannot abide animals."

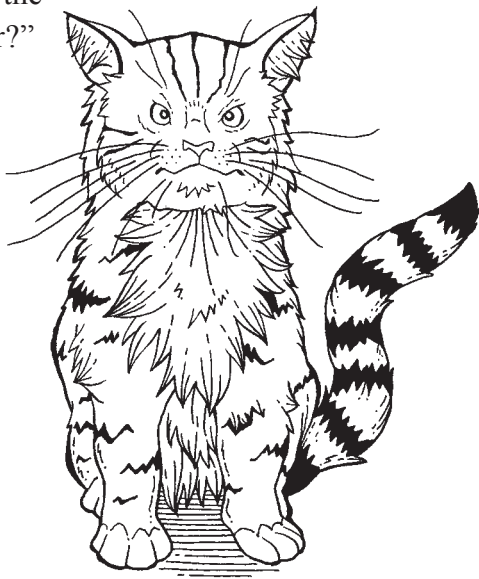
"Yet you abide these wicked goblins," King Daron said. "These beasts have nearly taken over our entire land! They are eating our crops and dirtying our rivers. Soon there will be nothing left of Kendar!"

"Your appraisal of the situation is certainly dramatic, if nothing else," Odjin said.

"You think I overstate the seriousness of this matter?" Daron demanded.

"No, it is a dreadful plight," Odjin said with a slight curl of her lips. "Yet I fail to see what any of this has to do with me!"

"Let us dispense with these games," King Daron snapped. "For all I know, these horrible monsters are



being churned from the spells of your very own cauldron. But if you have not made the goblins, Odjin, then at the very least I believe you control them.”

“Really, my lord,” Odjin mocked, “you grant me far too much credit.”

“I grant you nothing,” King Daron growled, slamming his fist on the arm of his throne. “But I know that you want something. It’s your way. So tell me what it is, Odjin. Tell me what it will take for you to end this madness.”

Odjin looked up from behind her golden locks, and smiled sadly. “Alas, my Lord,” she murmured, “you, of all people, should know what I desire.”

“That which you know you cannot have,” King Daron retorted.

“Odjin, this behavior does not become you,” Anya interrupted. “Let us negotiate an end to this situation in good faith.”

“Yes,” King Daron agreed. “Name your price, Odjin, to end this plague!”

“My price!?” Odjin hissed, “My price!? Wealth, power, domination!” The witch paused to laugh, and the court stirred nervously at her behavior. “But I know you shall give me none of these things,” Odjin added. “So then I will ask for one thing, my king, one thing only.”

“Then name it,” King Daron said, his voice growing un-easy.

“Look into my eyes, my lord,” Odjin pleaded. “Gaze deep into my eyes and know my beauty.”

“No!” King Daron cried, and he instantly cast his eyes away. “It’s a trick! No one look into this witch’s eyes, lest



you fall under her power! Curse you, Odjin! I don't know what plots you are hatching, but I will not have you casting your spells in my court!"

"Fool!" Odjin sneered. "You've had your chance, Daron. The next time we meet, I shall not be so civil."

"Be gone with you, Odjin," King Daron proclaimed, rising out of his throne to stand at his full height. Despite his age, he was still an intimidating figure, and even Odjin flinched as he spoke his next words. "You have defied me once too often and now your insidious nature has been betrayed here, for all to see. So if you will not help Kendar, then as far as I'm concerned, you're against it. So be gone with you! If I could prove that you were behind this plague, then I would cast you in irons! But our laws are just and

true, and without this proof you must go free.”

Odjin locked her eyes upon the king, and though he would not directly return her stare, Daron could feel the hatred that flowed from her heart. “Very well,” the witch finally said. With a flick of her hair, she turned her back on Kendar’s throne and left the court.

Queen Anya’s kitten watched the witch go with a parting snarl.

“Yes, Pasha,” Queen Anya whispered, as she scratched the kitten’s gray ears. “I sense it as well. She harbors a dangerous power beneath her beauty.”

King Daron dismissed the court-and with a heavy sigh sunk wearily into his throne. As a young man Daron had been a man of courage, but now he was old and weary, his once fire-red hair turned gray like the ash of a barren hearth.

“This is my fault,” King Daron fretted to his wife, now that they were left in private. “Odjin’s anger against Kendar begins with me, and yet now I am too old to fight her, while she remains young and strong.”

“You must have faith, Daron,” Anya told him. “You do not fight this battle alone.”

“Aye,” the King murmured sadly. “But the kingdom seems to have aged with me. We have become nothing more than a court of old men.”

“You do Kendar much discredit,” Anya claimed. “Do not underestimate our strength.”

“A kingdom’s strength begins with its leader,” Daron stated. “Once I was strong, but now I have failed Kendar. I have not even left an heir to lead her into the future, no

prince to defend her.”

“No, not yet,” Anya said.

“Not yet? What do you mean, not yet?” Daron asked. “We have tried to have children for twenty years, all without hope. Now it’s too late.”

“It’s never too late,” Anya said, taking Daron’s hand and comforting him with her warm brown eyes.

“Your optimism never ceases to amaze me,” Daron confided to his queen. “An heir? How do you think we will manage it now, so late in our lives?”

“Because I am with child now, Daron,” Anya whispered, leaning over to kiss her husband on the cheek. “You will be a father yet!”

“A father!?” Daron exclaimed, his eyes opening wide with astonishment. Anya let out a girlish laugh at Daron’s reaction. In spite of himself, the king’s face was now beaming with happiness.

“It’s good to see I can make you smile yet,” Anya told him.

“Me, a father? At my age?” Daron murmured in disbelief.

“You see, there are miracles at work within the world yet,” Anya told her husband, caressing his arm. “Dark times may lie ahead, but still there is hope.”