



## The Red Wyvern

Katherine Kerr  
Bantam Books

\$12.95

At the heart of *The Red Wyvern* is a civil war waged in the land of Deverry—the same realm featured in *Days of Blood and Fire*, *Days of Air and Darkness*, and other Katherine Kerr novels. Prince Maryn, the rightful ruler, tries to wring Deverry from the grasp of the usurper-king, Burcan the Boar. The unfolding conflict provides an excellent backdrop for the novel's lavish characters, among them the villainous Merodda. Burcan's conniving sister proves a delightful villain. Part viper, part Lady Macbeth, Merodda helps secure her brother's place on the throne by poisoning his enemies and using her magic to eavesdrop on those who will inevitably defy him. Merodda's daughter, Lillorigga, flees Deverry before the war, allying herself with those loyal to Prince Maryn. Lilli's scrying powers are just beginning to manifest themselves. Fearful of her

treacherous mother, Lilli confides in a dweomermaster named Nevyn. Nevyn is a pivotal figure whose invocations turn the tide of battle and whose wisdom provides important insights in the darkest moments of the war.

The war becomes a series of engaging conflicts. When one of Prince Maryn's captains is slain in battle, the reader feels the anger of his men as they watch the enemy display their captain's severed head on the castle wall. When Burcan is injured in the battle for Dun Deverry, the reader feels sympathy for the wounded villain. There are unpredictable moments when a character dies, and moments where a character acts decisively and the reader bears witness to the consequences. Some rather shocking consequences, actually.

The war itself is the story's obvious highlight. The author moves fluidly from one side of the battlefield to the other, showing the strain on both sides. There's barbarism, noble sacrifice, and the death of innocence within opposing forces. The battle scenes are visceral, engaging, believably violent, and handled with epic flair. The disintegrating shield-walls, the falling bastions, the surge of the gate-rams, and the images of flocking red wyvern banners make the siege of Dun Deverry a visual experience.

*The Dragon Mage* series spans several points throughout Deverry's history, but in this first novel, making the leap between time frames is difficult. Each time period introduces new characters, and it isn't always clear that these characters are actually reincarnations of characters from earlier periods in Deverry's past. For instance, Merodda is reincarnated as Mallona, and later as Raena, but it's too early to

know how closely these incarnations will overlap, or what impact they will have on one another. The prologue and epilogue clearly harken to periods described more fully in later novels, but many of these bridges are still under construction. *The Red Wyvern* braces us for things to come but does not entirely prepare us for them. Thankfully, the characters from the period of Deverry's civil war are rich and memorable. It will be interesting to see what befalls them in other lifetimes.

As a roleplaying resource, *The Red Wyvern* provides Dungeon Masters with a wealth of ideas for running and detailing adventures around "the castle siege," particularly in the BIRTHRIGHT® setting where kingdoms rise and fall like the sun.

-CHRIS PERKINS

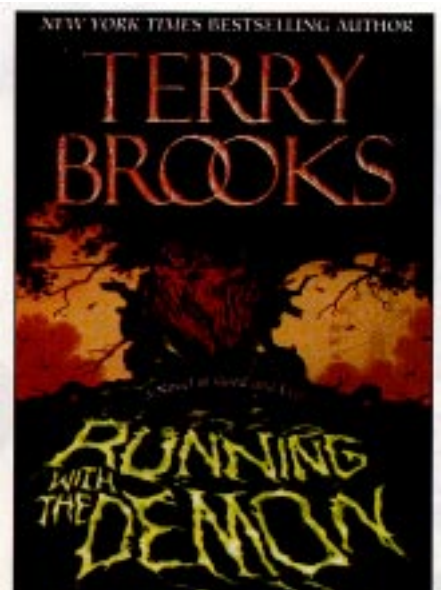
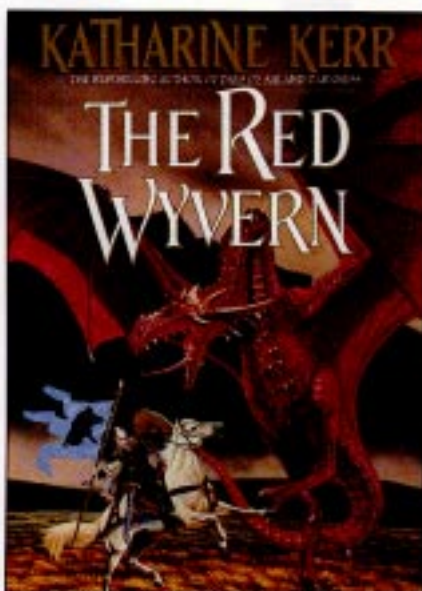
## Running with the Demon

Terry Brooks  
Del Rey

\$25.95

Terry Brooks new novel, *Running with the Demon*, is a departure from his popular *Shanara* series. *Running with the Demon* chronicles a powerful struggle between good and evil set in the modern world.

Good is embodied by the Word, and evil by the Void. The Word is the purpose behind all things; the Void is the equally strong force trying to destroy all things. The real world exists, and runs as it is supposed to, when the two forces are in balance. The key players in the struggle are Demons, humans who have given themselves wholly to the Void, and



the Knights of the Word, humans chosen to serve the Word. In between these powerful figures lie people like Nest Freemark, people who can use magic and have the potential to do great good or great evil depending on the choices they make.

John Ross, Knight of the Word, travels to Nest's home town to stop her from being tricked by a Demon into serving the void. The price John must pay for his knightly powers is steep. John Ross can see the future. He can see how things will turn out if the Void succeeds in its attempts to overthrow the balance. John's visions of the future heighten the tension throughout the story; John knows that failing to help Nest keep away from the Demon could mean the end of humanity. These two protagonists, John and Nest, complement each other well. John's struggle to prevent events that have already happened is mirrored nicely in Nest's own desire to learn who her father was.

*Running with the Demon* combines strong foreshadowing, realistic characters, and an interesting setting into an enjoyable read. Although the book suffers from predictability, Brooks finishes the novel exceptionally well, and it is sure to attract many fans.

-JESSE DECKER

## The Dragon and the Gnarly King

Gordon R. Dickson  
Tor

\$24.95

*The Dragon and the Gnarly King* is the third book in a series that began in 1976 with the World Fantasy Award-winning *The Dragon and the George*. This series is a must for any fan of medieval fantasy.

In the tradition of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Jim Eckert, a modern-day American, has been transported back in time to feudal England—but this is an England where magic works. Eckert is a novice magician who is reluctant to use his powers.

In *The Dragon and the Gnarly King*, Eckert is now Sir James, Baron de Bois de Malencontri et Riveroak, a knight with his own castle. The wizard Carolinus, one of only three AAA+ magicians in the world and Eckert's mentor, charges Sir James with maintaining King Edward on the throne and with rescuing the baby Robert, a ward of Eckert and his 20th-century wife, Angela.



Eckert sets out on a 14th-century quest with his best friends, Sir Brian Neville-Smythe, warrior extraordinaire, and Dafydd ap Hywel a mighty archer. The three are joined by an assortment of magical beings including a friendly sea devil and a hobgoblin.

The adventurers travel to strange lands, including the dangerous Kingdom of Lyonesse. Throughout the story, Dickson balances action, armed encounters, evil beings, and political intrigue with the wonders of magic—especially when the magician, Sir Jim, doesn't always know what he is doing.

This is a novel written with tongue placed lightly in cheek. Some of the more delightful scenes occur when Eckert and Angela must deal with 14th-century behavior. In one such scene, Jim has problems convincing a servant that a sound beating is *not* the best way to improve another servant's memory.

*The Dragon and the Gnarly King* is an enjoyable romp through a world of chivalry and magic.

—PIERCE WATERS

## War of the Gods

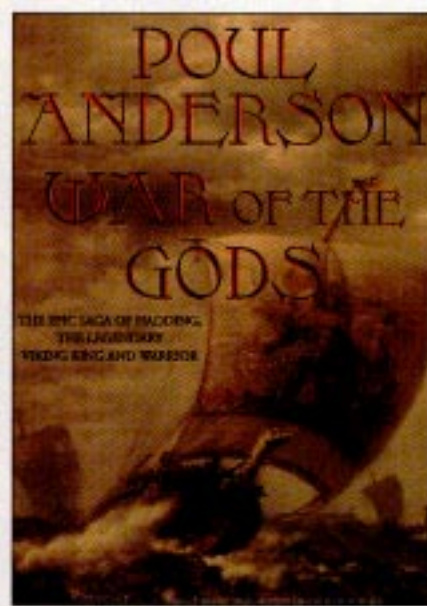
Poul Anderson  
Tor

\$22.95

One of the masters of fantasy and science fiction now turns his talents to a retelling of Scandinavian legend. Revealing the story of Hadding is no mean feat, for unlike Arthur, the Danish king has enjoyed relatively few chronicles. Starting with the few written legends that exist, Anderson adds liberal doses of revised Norse mythology to create the "complete" legend of Hadding in *War of the Gods*.

As the second son of a king embroiled in war, Hadding is fostered by giants who owe a debt to the boy's father. Among the giants, Hadding learns something of dark magic, though he himself does not indulge in it so wantonly as his ill-fated companion, the giantess Hardgreip.

After leaving the giants, Hadding meets a one-eyed stranger who prophesies great deeds in the young man's future. The stranger's identity is no mystery to those with even a passing familiarity with Norse mythology, and he assists his charge in much the same way Athena guides Odysseus in *The Odyssey*. Fortunately for those who like their heroes to achieve their own victories, the divine guidance abates long enough for Hadding to make his own conquests, proving his battle-prowess and king-craft through his own strength and wisdom.



Anderson's prose is muscular and poetic, comfortably echoing the Norse bards without sacrificing the clarity demanded by today's readers. The narrative evokes the wintry landscape of the Danes, while the dialogue is, like the characters, timeless and larger than life.

*War of the Gods* blends the best of history and mythology. Anderson deftly weaves full-blown fantasy with documented chronicle to elevate Hadding to his rightful place, firmly beside Arthur and Beowulf.

-DAVE GROSS

