

# THREE CHORDS OF CHAOS



a bad-ass faerie tale

JAMES CHAMBERS

# THREE CHORDS OF CHAOS

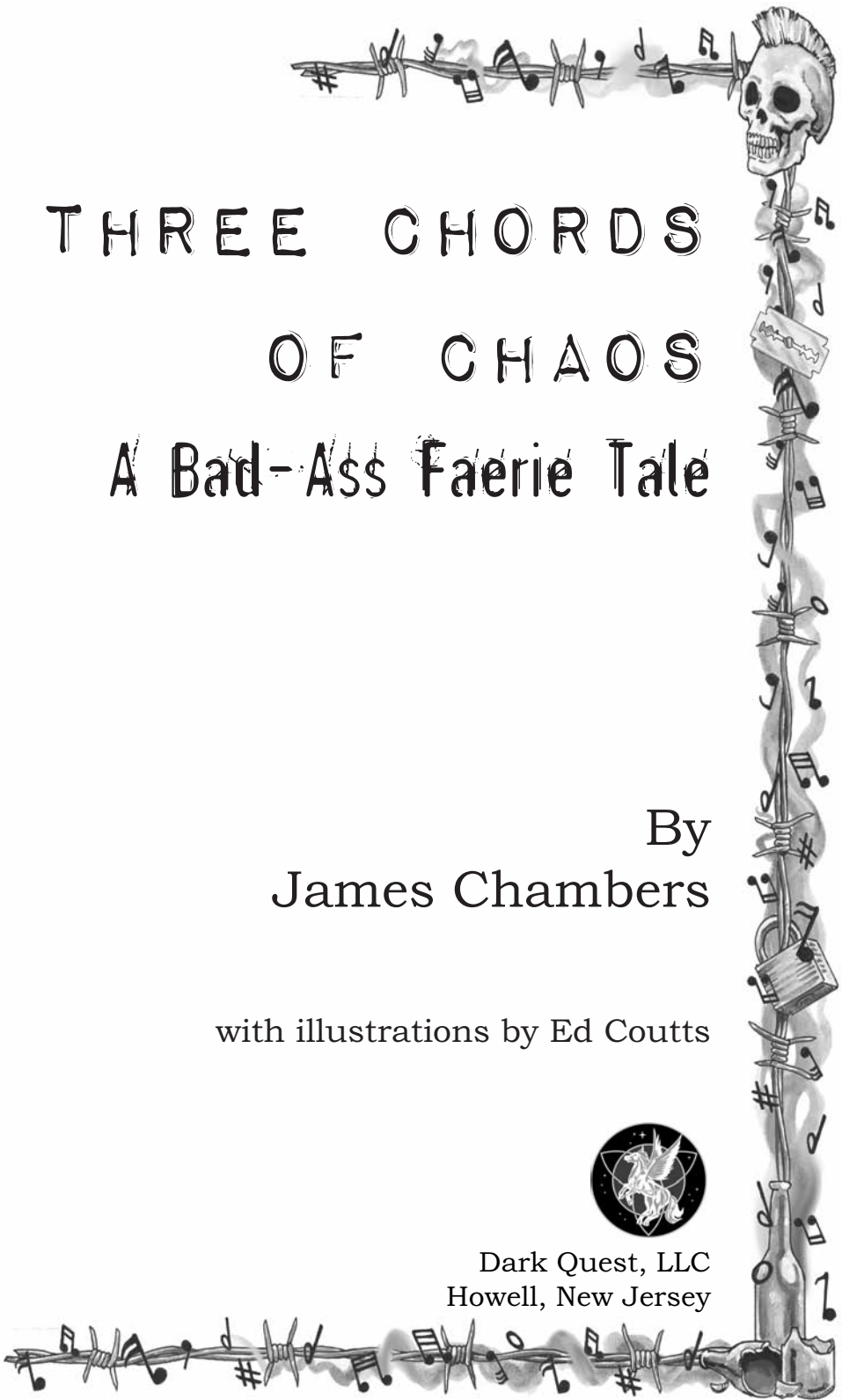
## A Bad-Ass Faerie Tale

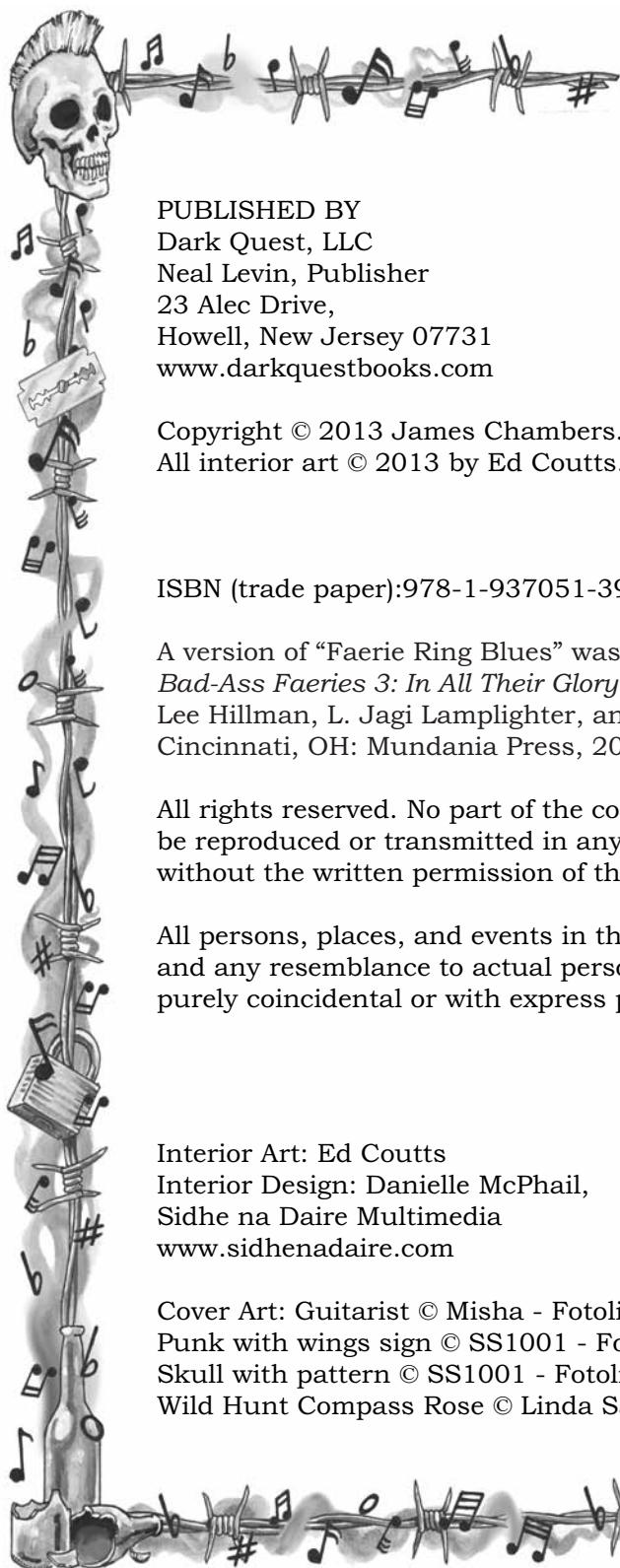
By  
James Chambers

with illustrations by Ed Coutts



Dark Quest, LLC  
Howell, New Jersey





PUBLISHED BY  
Dark Quest, LLC  
Neal Levin, Publisher  
23 Alec Drive,  
Howell, New Jersey 07731  
[www.darkquestbooks.com](http://www.darkquestbooks.com)

Copyright © 2013 James Chambers.  
All interior art © 2013 by Ed Coutts.

ISBN (trade paper):978-1-937051-39-6

A version of "Faerie Ring Blues" was previously published in  
*Bad-Ass Faeries 3: In All Their Glory*, Danielle Ackley-McPhail,  
Lee Hillman, L. Jagi Lamplighter, and Jeffrey Lyman, eds.  
Cincinnati, OH: Mundania Press, 2010.

All rights reserved. No part of the contents of this book may  
be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means  
without the written permission of the publisher.

All persons, places, and events in this book are fictitious  
and any resemblance to actual persons, places, or events is  
purely coincidental or with express permission.

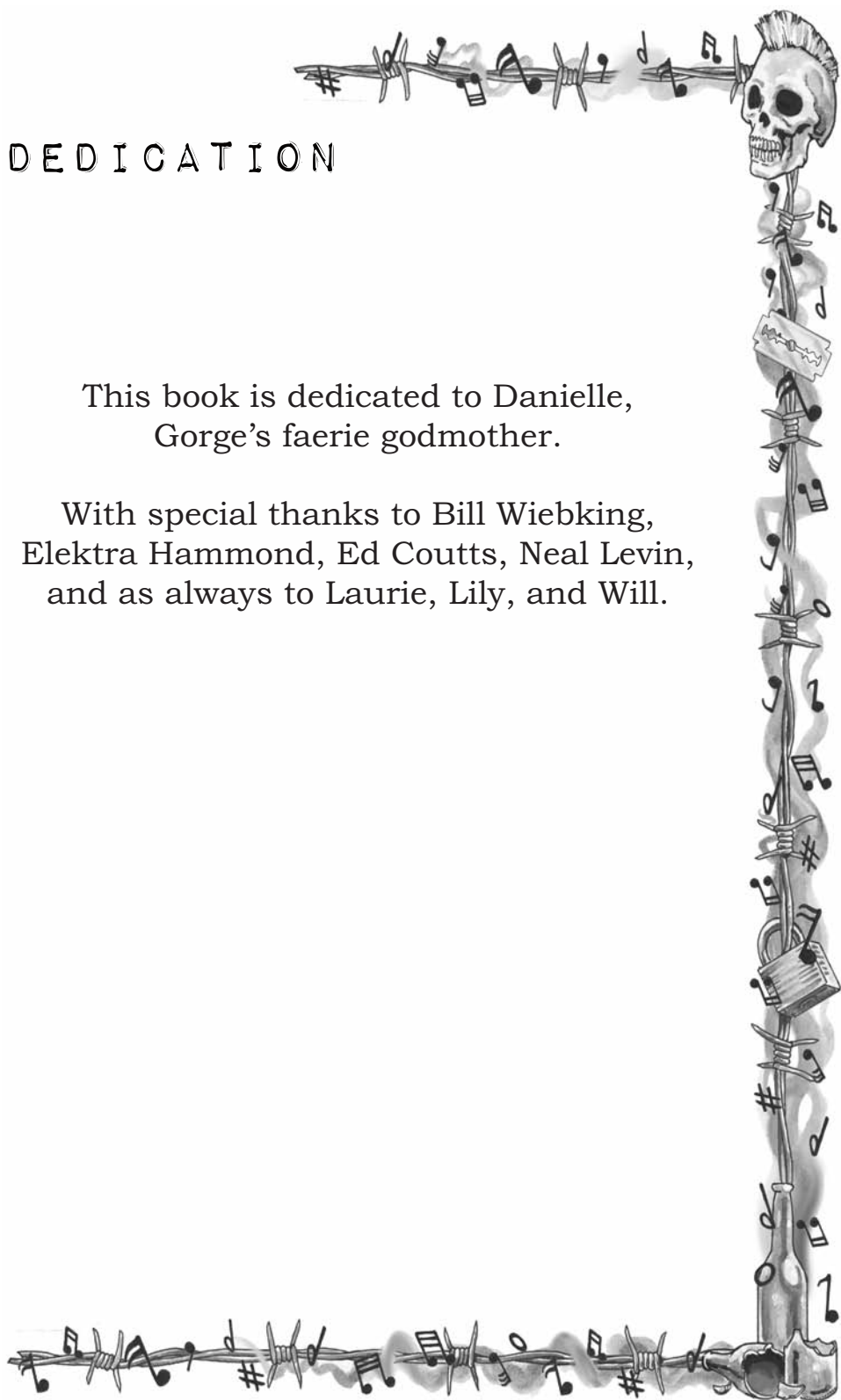
Interior Art: Ed Coutts  
Interior Design: Danielle McPhail,  
Sidhe na Daire Multimedia  
[www.sidhenadaire.com](http://www.sidhenadaire.com)

Cover Art: Guitarist © Misha - Fotolia.com  
Punk with wings sign © SS1001 - Fotolia.com  
Skull with pattern © SS1001 - Fotolia.com  
Wild Hunt Compass Rose © Linda Saboe

# DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Danielle,  
Gorge's faerie godmother.

With special thanks to Bill Wiebking,  
Elektra Hammond, Ed Coutts, Neal Levin,  
and as always to Laurie, Lily, and Will.







# FIRST VERSE

**GORGE RELEASED NOTE AFTER BLISTERING NOTE, AND THE** audience soaked up his music like a rain of razor blades. They danced, whirled, and smashed together; they bled magic that flowed across smoky air, shimmering red and yellow with flashing stage lights, to feed the hungry core inside him. He hadn't felt magic this pure and vibrant since his days in the Kingdoms; how ironic, he thought, to find it among these nihilistic, rebellious, angry young mortals. His left hand throttled the guitar neck, fingertips gliding among the frets, tapping and pulling the strings to slash out biting riffs until he reached a crescendo—

—and then let it all come crashing down.

Gorge dropped his hands to his sides as his last notes reverberated.

Caught off guard, Social Contract Dispute lost the beat, faltered. Someone in the audience shouted, "Fuck you!" into the lull. Another threw a beer bottle at the stage.

Gorge grinned.

Even their praise was crude and furious.

He screamed into the microphone, then let D.S. Dent pick up the song.

He worked the strings again, exploring a scale he'd learned as a child, perfecting Social Contract Dispute's music. The notes didn't belong in this world; they rose from his guitar in crude remembrance of music he'd played a long time ago in a place now lost to him, a ghost of what they were meant to be—yet they drove the crowd wild. Gorge led them to undiscovered sounds more potent and thrilling than anything else they had ever heard. Their energy surged. Into the stink of hot sweat and spilled beer drifted a whiff of burning copper, the scent of an invisible charge only Gorge understood as his magic flowed into the crowd on the music, then returned amplified by their love, worship, envy, and awe. He reveled in the parasitic

## 2 • THREE CHORDS OF CHAOS

feedback loop, the power so chaotic and electrifying it overflowed him and spilled into Dispute, elevating their music to the sound of demigods. The amplifiers vibrated and roared; the song soared; the club quaked; and the crowd snapped their heads back and forth, waved their arms, and twisted their bodies in hot, kinetic spirals.

Dent's voice sliced through the din:

Thou shalt not kill  
We have a pill  
To make sure you're a goooooo boy  
And when it's time  
For you to die  
You'll die because we saaaaaay so  
*And you better not cry about it!*

The rest of Dispute and Gorge joined in for the chorus:

No cryin'  
No, no cryin'  
Don't be such a crybaby  
No cryin'  
No, no cryin'  
All we say you must believe

Social Contract Dispute would never again play this well or feel so deeply connected to an audience. Playing this gig, Gorge gave them both a gift and a curse, one that would launch their legend only to destroy them when they realized they could never live up to it without him. He didn't care. Tonight he played to lay down everyone in the club with the force of a neutron bomb. He hungered for their magic, and they gave it with pleasure.

He watched faces in the writhing crowd.

Skin pierced with shining steel.

Eyes adorned with savage swatches of make-up.

Hair teased into spikes, mohawks, and bursts of color, or swirling like stringy shadows.

Pale complexions, thin lips, and gaunt cheekbones.

Clean-shaven heads.

Bright eyes surrounded by dark circles.

They wore loose T-shirts and torn jeans. Black jackets and short skirts. Leather and ripped denim stitched together with safety pins. Button-down shirts stained with perspiration. Anarchy symbols, Union



Jacks, and band logo patches sewn pell-mell onto vests, sleeves, and jackets. Death's heads and angular letters scratched in white marks onto dark cloth. Chains hanging from necks, wrists, waists.

Tattoos on soft flesh crept out from beneath the edges of flapping clothes.

All of it bounced and swayed, a crest of human energy riding a wave of music.

And Gorge saw that it was good.

He stopped thinking about the music and let his hands roam where they wanted. Melodies welled up unchecked from the part of his soul that always hummed. As Social Contract Dispute ripped through one song after another, Gorge drove the crowd into a deeper frenzy. Struggling to keep up, the band dropped into a bare-bone, attack-dog rhythm. Mickey's bass machine-gunned notes; Reynolds' drums thundered. Dent punished the same three power chords again and again as he abandoned his lyrics for raw shrieks and groans.

The music mushroomed over the crowd like a slow-motion explosion.

The floor shook, and the walls quavered.

The club throbbed; to Gorge's eyes alone the walls seemed to weaken and bow as the music pushed them outward onto the surrounding darkness. A new song began, and he played a series of lightning-fast arpeggios, picking out an intricate lead that pushed even harder against the walls. The darkness seeped into the club, bringing with it a hint of bitter cold. He shunted magic through himself, sent it probing into the black.

*They're out there.*

*They hear.*

*I can almost sense—*

A discordant crash shattered Gorge's spell.

The darkness and the cold retreated; the walls snapped back into place.

Behind Gorge, Reynolds had beaten his snare off its stand. He fought to stay upright in his seat while he whaled on his remaining drums to keep up with Gorge's lead. Dent no longer sang but only flailed around the stage, twirling his mic at the end of its cord, his guitar slung around his back. People in the crowd tripped over each other, fell to the floor, or propped each other up, exhausted, off-balance.

Gorge smiled and chose mercy.

He fired off a last burst of notes then slowed the pace like a music box winding down, bringing everyone back to earth.

Social Contract Dispute followed his lead and finished the song.

The air thrummed with its echo.



The stage lights darkened. Blackness filled Motormouth's.

When the houselights glared, everything returned to normal; solid wood and fogs of cigarette smoke replaced wavering walls and cold darkness.

Gorge dropped his guitar—a black Stratocaster with a red anarchy symbol painted across its face—into its stand and flipped the audience the bird.

They cheered in response.

Dent jumped to the microphone, raised his fists above his head, and yelled, “*You are the disenfranchised! We are Social Contract Dispute*” He pointed at Gorge: “With *Max* effing *Chaos on guitar!*”

The audience howled for Gorge. He didn't linger to enjoy it.

Their adulation meant nothing without their magic pouring into him, and the less interest he showed in their acclaim, the more they heaped it upon him. He set his sights on a raven-haired woman at the bar, the only placid face in a sea of orgiastic expressions.

*Delilah.*

Her cool-ember eyes drank in Gorge, darting between him and her sketchbook as she scratched a charcoal pencil over the pages. Catching him looking, she lifted one of the two beers beside her, drank, and then saluted Gorge with the bottle.

Gorge pushed through the crowd to her.

He cupped the back of Delilah's head with one hand, twining his fingers in her soft hair as he kissed her, soaking in her warmth. After their lips parted, he grabbed the other beer bottle, tilted his head back, and drained it. Slamming the empty on the bar, he tapped Delilah's sketchbook.

“Show me,” he said.

Delilah ignored him, her smile a spotlight. “I *felt* that.”

“You'd have to be dead not to,” Gorge said. “You're sitting less than a hundred feet from the amps.”

“Uh-uh, not the music. The magic.” She flipped open her sketchbook. “Look.”

Gorge riffled the pages. Delilah's sketches leapt off the paper. The faces of the audience took on a second life in charcoal lines and textured smudges. Gorge's face rose from the stage, a giant with spidery hands wrapped around his guitar, a comb of blurry fingers drawn for each one to show the motion of his music. Delilah had captured the shapes of his body as it twisted to the rhythm—and rising from his back was the faintest outline of wings.

“You saw my wings?” Gorge said.

Delilah nodded. “Not only that.”

She flipped forward a few pages.

Gorge studied her sketches of the club. The crowd rendered in muddy blurs, the stage a burst of light broken by the shadows of Gorge and Social Contract Dispute—and behind them a black cloud speckled with white flecks like feral eyes glowing in the night, its inky tendrils streaming through the air, the walls disintegrating into it.

The darkness.

The Way of the Bone.

The stage and the audience seemed to float in it.

“You saw *this*?”

“The magic was so *bright*. It lit up my whole body. It was like . . . god, it was almost as good as sex.”

“Did they see my true face?” Gorge kept a perpetual glamour cast over himself to make his appearance more human, but his fae features sometimes bled through.

Delilah shook her head. “It was faint, even for me, and I know what to look for.”

“And you have a strong charge of my magic in you already. There was more power than I could hold onto tonight. I let some spill into Dispute. Poor bastards. Next time they pick up their instruments they’ll wonder where it all went.”

“What’d you do to these people?”

Gorge glanced around. Everyone looked fine, everything back to the familiar grind and hustle between sets. People who’d appeared ready to faint or cry or scream while he played seemed unfazed now. He shrugged.

“They believe,” he said. “Shitty as this world is, they *believe* in this music like their lives depend on it. They punched the power off the charts. I’ve never felt magic this strong before in the mortal world, only in the Kingdoms. To have actually seen the darkness—I wasn’t sure it was possible from this world even to touch the Way of the Bone—”

Three women interrupted Gorge. Eighteen years old at most, and wrapped in patchworks of tight clothes layered over Tartan skirts and stockings spotted with holes tucked into high, laced boots, they quivered with excitement. They wore their hair shaved over one ear and long on the other side, each girl’s dyed a different flare of color: pink, green, and red.

“Could we . . . ?” one of them said.

“Could we get an autograph?” the second one said.

Gorge squinted at them. “Got a pen?”

The third one giggled and handed him a marker, her hand shaking.

“Where do I sign?” Gorge asked

The girls tugged down their shirt collars for Gorge to sign above their cleavage.

He looked to Delilah, who laughed and gave him a nod.

Gorge scrawled “Max Chaos” on each girl’s skin then returned the marker. The girls blushed and thanked him. One darted in and kissed him on the cheek before they rushed into the crowd to show off their autographs.

“Don’t let *that* go to your head,” Delilah said. “Don’t get any ideas about groupies.”

“I don’t play with children. I’d only break them.” Gorge offered Delilah his hand. “And why would I need to when I already have the perfect woman? You’re the only one I want. And it’s time for us to get out of here and prove it.”

Delilah smiled and reached for Gorge’s hand; then she paused and shot straight up in her seat. “Damn, look who just walked in.”

Making his way through the club, surrounded by a mosquito cloud of hangers-on, walked a man in a white suit, a red handkerchief blooming from his chest pocket, black leather vest shining beneath his jacket. Hair surrounded his head in a meticulously wild fashion that looked as if it took hours’ worth of styling to appear careless. He carried an ebony cane with a silver top.

“Peter Peters,” Gorge said. “Bastard.”

“Hush. That man’s going to put me in his gallery if it kills one of us. Wait here.” Delilah kissed Gorge and stroked the back of his neck. “You don’t mind, do you?”

“I’d wait a thousand years for you if you asked.”

As Delilah squeezed into the crowd, Gorge ordered another beer and sighed.

He felt eyes watching him, tickling the back of his mind.

Somebody wanted something from him. Someone always did in these places, and when a man with a short, scraggly beard and aviator-frame eyeglasses parked himself on the next stool, Gorge braced to put him in his place. A few years older than the rest of the crowd, the man wore clean blue jeans and a threadbare sports jacket over a Misfits T-shirt. He ordered a beer. The sound of his voice rankled Gorge.

Without looking at the stranger, he said, “Fuck off, record man.”

The man gaped. “What . . . ?”

Gorge glared at him. “I said, ‘Fuck off, record man.’”

“Who pissed in your beer, asshole?” the man said—but he didn’t leave.

“You can shove whatever you think you’re going to pitch me right up your ass,” Gorge told him. “Not interested.”

"Relax," the man said. "I'm not pitching anything. I don't work for a record company."

"You want *something* from me. You stink with want. Like a hungry dog."

"Like a . . . what?" The man shook his head and extended his hand. "Jake Blaze, hungry dog."

Gorge ignored the hand. "That's your name?"

"Max Chaos is giving me shit about my name? What's in a name, anyway? Everyone here? We're all who we want to be even if that isn't who we are. That's why this shit matters."

"What shit is that?"

"The music—especially the way you play it." Jake drank some of his beer. "That's all I want—to talk to you about your music. You're a hard gig to catch. I watched you play with Bonzo's Pajamas at CBGB, like, what, three months ago? Been trying to catch you again ever since. Out almost every night, club after club, hoping you'd sit in for a set somewhere. I'm not the only one. You have any idea what kind of crowds you could draw with a little publicity?"

"More than a dive like Motormouth's could hold. Is that your thing? You a promoter? Want to help me take my career to the stars and make a million dollars? You've got dollar signs and limousine lights in your eyes, Jake, and you drink shitty beer. Again, I say, *fuck off*."

Jake eyed the label on his beer bottle. He'd picked the cheapest brand. "No, that's not me, I'm only a fan, and—"

Gorge tipped over his empty beer bottle so that it fell with a hollow *thunk* pointing at Jake. "Liar."

He stood, but before he slipped away from the barstool, Jake grabbed him by the arm.

"Okay, I'm a writer. All right? I write for *Music Maze*. But I'm not trying to milk the golden calf. All I want is your story."

"What makes you think I have one to tell?"

"Seriously? You're Max Chaos. Totally unknown until this year. You're a phantom except when you're on stage, and no one but you ever knows where or when that will be. And when it happens it's like a bomb going off. I've interviewed musicians from My Revolver, Out of Step, TV Party—all the bands you've jammed with. Even they didn't know you were sitting in till you showed up. If you're trying to make yourself into a legend, it's working. I want to break *that* story. I get the scoop on who Max Chaos is and what he's all about—forget *Music Maze*, I'm writing for *Rolling Stone*."

"You come to me to juice your pathetic career and wonder why I say 'fuck off,' which, by the way, you still haven't done. Or do you not understand the meaning of 'fuck off'?"

Jake gave Gorge a dismissive wave. "You'd benefit, too. You don't even have to give me your real name. I can help you spread the word, grow the legend. People have been coming in from L.A., Nashville, even Seattle to catch you play. Bands are driving here from Minneapolis and D.C., sleeping on couches to catch a few gigs on the chance you might sit in with them. Hell, man, I saw Robert Quine out looking for you last week. Like it or not, you're on fire. A little press could fan the flames. I don't want to blow out your game, but feed me enough to light the fuse and then take whatever you want out of it."

"What the hell would a pisswater-drinking writer know about what I want?"

Jake sighed and shook his head. "Whatever, man. I spent too long looking for you to be put off by you bitching about my taste in beer. Are you going to give me an interview or what? Or are you waiting for me to throw some money on the bar? You want to get paid? You act all about the music, but maybe you're all about the money. Maybe you're nothing special after all, and we're just wasting our time. So, tell me, which is it?"

Gorge flagged another beer from the bartender and let Jake wait.

He watched Delilah sitting with Peter Peters and his retinue of sycophants, wannabes, drug connections, and whores. They laughed and waved cigarettes in front of their faces. Gorge hated how the talentless prick dangled his gallery to manipulate hopeful artists. The lucky bastard banked his rep off connections to Basquiat and Warhol, and his gallery had launched a couple of up-and-comers, making it a hot spot, but mostly he showed crap. Gorge wished he could drag Peters to the Kingdoms to show him real art and true beauty. The pompous fool might break down crying from despair when he returned to this world. Delilah exceeded them all, a true artist with a creative heart and soul worth more than any thousand of the so-called artists Peters promoted. Gorge wanted to yank Peter Peters' head back by his hair and scream in his face to give Delilah a show—but a show would only mean something if she landed it on her own.

Gorge squinted at Jake. "Seems I've got a few minutes to kill. You want my story?"

Jake nodded. "That's all I want."

"Order yourself a decent beer and a good whiskey for me, and I'll tell you."

"You bullshitting me?"

"Only one way to find out."

Jake waved for the bartender, ordered the drinks, and paid.

He slid the whiskey to Gorge. "So where are you from?"

"Not from around here," Gorge said.

"I figured that. You've got that look. What are you, Middle Eastern, Asian? Dye your hair, right? That silver-black thing can't be natural."

With a withering stare, Gorge said, "I'm not from your world."

Jake groaned and threw his head back. "You *are* shitting me."

Gorge shook his head. He placed his left hand open on the bar. A flicker of green light flared in his palm.

"What the hell's that?" Jake asked.

Gorge touched the light to Jake's chest, above his heart. Jake flinched then froze and grew calm. Gorge sang:

Two things you will do for me  
The first, you will *believe*  
All the words I have to say  
All the wonders I will tell

He withdrew his hand and sipped his whiskey.

Jake looked stunned. "What was that? It felt so weird . . . ."

"I told you. Not from around here," Gorge said.

"Where from then?"

"The Enchanted Kingdoms, the realms of the sidhe."

Jake smirked. "What's that, like, Disney World?"

Gorge sneered. "That this world allows ignorant morons like you to call themselves 'writers' has never ceased to piss me off. No, you witless skid mark, the Enchanted Kingdoms, the land of the fae. I'm a faerie."

"A . . . *faerie*. But you're a guy. Ooooooh, you mean, like, you're from the West Village."

"No," Gorge said. "I mean the kind that steals your children and screws up your house if you don't leave us a little milk and honey. Despite what mortals think they know from movies and storybooks, we're not all tiny, cute, and female."

Gorge's spell compelled Jake to believe, but Gorge saw in his eyes that deep down he didn't understand.

"Humans think of us that way because the truth is scary," Gorge said. "How afraid can you be of something small enough you can crush it underfoot? Fortunately for you, we don't find mortals all that interesting, and we don't give a damn what you think of us."

"If you're a faerie, why don't you have wings?"

"That, Jakey, is a long and painful part of my story." Gorge drained the last of his whiskey and signaled the bartender for another,

indicating to add it to Jake's tab. "I was the greatest musician the Kingdoms ever saw, but the royal twats who ruled everything thought there was some music that should never be played. So, fuck them, I played it anyway. As punishment, they took my life away from me and banished me here."

"To . . . Motormouth's?"

"No. To your world. The *mortal* world. Turn on your brain, and stay with me. The Flock of Eternity—the assembled kings and queens of the Kingdoms—couldn't kill me outright. There are *some* rules about these things, after all. So they compromised with exile. They figured I'd go mad and die here, problem solved. Except I brought more magic with me than they knew. That was almost thirty years ago. When I'm strong enough, I'm going back to the Kingdoms, and I'm going to shove all the Flock's rules and their prissy fears right back in their faces. If tonight's any indication, that might be a lot sooner than I expected."

"What happened tonight?"

"Magic happened."

Delilah returned from Peter Peters' table. She leaned against Gorge and slid her hand along his back. "What a talentless prick."

"Still a 'no'?" Gorge asked her.

"I've got him up to a maybe. He wants to see new work. So that's good news, and I should be excited, but he's still a talentless prick with trash friends."

"Who's this?" Jake asked.

"Jake Blaze, meet Delilah," Gorge said. "Delilah, this brain dead rock zombie is Jake Blaze. Calls himself a writer. He sure as hell doesn't think—or drink—like one."

"She your girlfriend?" Jake asked.

"Girlfriend? That's *quaint*," Gorge said. "Delilah saved my life. Now she is my life."

"Oh," Jake said. "That's, um . . . deep."

"Deeper than the deep, blue sea, Jakey, and at the moment, I sense my life would like to be elsewhere. So ends our interview." Gorge stood and wrapped an arm around Delilah's waist. "Thanks for the drinks."

"Wait," Jake said. "You told me there were two things."

"True. I said I'd give you my story. I never said I'd let you keep it." Gorge touched Jake's chest again, the green light flickering in his palm, and sang:

Your loss is my gain  
Your pain my reward  
When I lift my hand  
All I told you will be *gone*



Jake's face blanked then refocused on Gorge. "Wait, you're leaving? I thought you were giving me an interview. I ordered drinks."

"Ah, Jake, how do you remember to breathe and stay out of traffic? Nighty-night, writer-man."

Gorge walked to the stage and put his guitar in its case.

Dent, Reynolds, and Mickey thanked him for the gig and invited him to jam again. Gorge knew he never would, though. Social Contract Dispute put their heart into their music, but they simply didn't have the talent to keep up with him. Gorge gave them a few words of encouragement and then left them to pack up their gear.

Stares and whispers followed him and Delilah across the club.

Gorge didn't like attention off-stage. He fixed an extra glamour around himself and Delilah so that no one noticed them actually leave—and then they ducked out a side exit.

Outside Motormouth's, New York City hummed with nightlife.

"Sort of shitty what you did to that writer," Delilah said.

"Vacuous minds must be made to suffer," Gorge said. "How else will they grow? Besides, it passed the time."

"Seems risky to me, talking to people like that then taking it back."

"No risk. All he'll have left is the nagging sense he's forgotten something very important," Gorge said. "If that sharpens his thoughts and opens his mind then I've done him a favor. People who can't change how they think are dead on their feet."

Halfway down 5th Street to Bowery, Gorge froze at the mouth of an alley.

"What is it?" Delilah asked.

"Something from the Kingdoms," Gorge said. "See it? Open your senses. Use what I taught you."

Delilah relaxed, closed her eyes for a second, then opened them and scanned the sidewalk back the way they'd come. She looked around the street, up at the buildings, then into the alley—and stopped. "By the dumpster."

"Good," Gorge said. "What is it?"

Delilah squinted. "It's . . . a sprite."

"A wretch of a one, too. A garbage-picker," Gorge said. "We call them scrape sprites because you're liable to wind up scraping them off your shoes. He shouldn't be here. He's spying on me."

Gorge entered the alley, Delilah by his side.

The six-inch tall sprite paid them no attention. Stains and debris from rooting through the trash peppered his skin, hair, and clothes. He struggled to excavate the carcass of a roast turkey from a torn garbage bag and a pile of paper plates sodden with grease and soggy vegetables.

He grunted and whistled. He swore, then kicked a bottle cap into the air.

Gorge caught it.

When the cap didn't strike the ground, the sprite looked up from its food.

He wiped the back of his hand across his brow, knocking away some crumbs, and then stared at Gorge, one eyebrow raised. "Oh, you can see me," the sprite said, his voice gruffer than his size suggested.

"Clear as day," Gorge said.

"Well, you're drunk and I'm a hallucination! Wooooo! What the hell do you want? This is the Big Rotten Apple. Don't you know better than to make eye contact with strangers in alleys?"

Gorge laughed.

"What's funny!? Go on! Get out of here! Mind your own business, or I'll—" the sprite faltered as realization spread across his tiny, soiled face. "Huh. You're from the Kingdoms."

"I am," Gorge said.

"You look sort of familiar." The sprite squatted on the rump of the turkey and rubbed its chin. "Did we know each other, attend the same court perhaps?"

"No garbage-eating scrape sprite would ever have been allowed into the courts I attended," Gorge said. "Did the Flock send you to check up on me? To make sure I'm behaving myself?"

Wide-eyed, the sprite said, "The Flock of Eternity? Send me? To check on you? Hah! Who the hell are *you*? And why would the Flock waste their time with a sprite like me?"

"You're exactly the kind of bottom-feeding vermin I might overlook even in a mortal city," Gorge said.

"Okay, true, but why do you need checking up on? You steal someone's gold?" The sprite threw his hands up in the air. "Unless you're in exile, or—waitaminnit! I know who you are now. You *are* in exile."

"You're a terrible liar." Gorge snapped his hand out quicker than the sprite could dodge him and snatched him off the turkey. "*Snitch*. Were you going to report back about me? To who? Soniella?"

"I never heard of her!" The sprite tried to wiggle free. "And I'm no snitch, blagnabbit! I only come here for the garbage. Get a hankering now and then. Give you my word!"

"I don't believe you," Gorge said.

"It's true. Why would anyone in the Flock listen to me anyway?" the sprite said. "I eat garbage, for crying out loud. You *have* to believe me."

"No, I don't," Gorge said. "Nor do I want to."

Gorge hurled the sprite to the ground. Before he recovered, he stamped his foot down on him and crushed him to the pavement, grinding him in with the refuse and slime. The sprite shrieked.

Delilah flinched, glanced away.

When the screaming stopped, Gorge grabbed a cardboard scrap from the dumpster and used it to wipe what was left of the sprite from his shoe and flick it onto the garbage pile.

Delilah made a face. "Ew, *gross*."

"Sorry you had to see that."

"Did you have to kill him? What if he was telling the truth?"

"Doesn't matter," Gorge said. "I couldn't let him tell anyone in the Kingdoms that he saw me, and whether he'd been sent here or not, he never could've kept that to himself. The more they know about me back home, the sooner the pieces will form a picture, and I don't want them to figure out what I'm doing."

"He didn't see you until we walked over here and interrupted him."

"Maybe. Maybe not. Sprites are tricky," Gorge said. "Never trust one. Besides, no one will miss a scrape sprite. In some parts of the Kingdoms, fishermen use them for bait."

"Oh." Delilah shuddered. "Can we go home now?"

Gorge put his arm around her and walked her to the corner, where he hailed a cab.

In the shadows of the car, Delilah leaned into him, pulled his arms around her, and held his hands in hers. Gorge let the night's energy drift through his senses, seeking signs of other sidhe in the city. They were always around, often closer than he liked, and until he gathered the power he needed to open the Way of the Bone, he and Delilah needed to be like ghosts to them.



Three nights later Gorge hit the stage with Shake Appeal at Donnie D's, a hole in the wall too small to provide a stage. The staff cleared away a few tables and chairs for the band to play next to the bar. Shake Appeal's growing following jammed the place, and even more people poured in when word spread via the payphone outside the ladies' room that Gorge had joined them. By the time the band finished half their first set, the crowd overflowed onto the street.

Gorge played low key at first and let Shake Appeal lead, building anticipation for him to cut loose. They ripped through song after song, all of them under two minutes long, and Gorge's eyes roamed the crowd while he played. He recognized familiar expressions in the young faces, stark hair, and torn clothes. Intoxication, elation, anger, hope, and lust