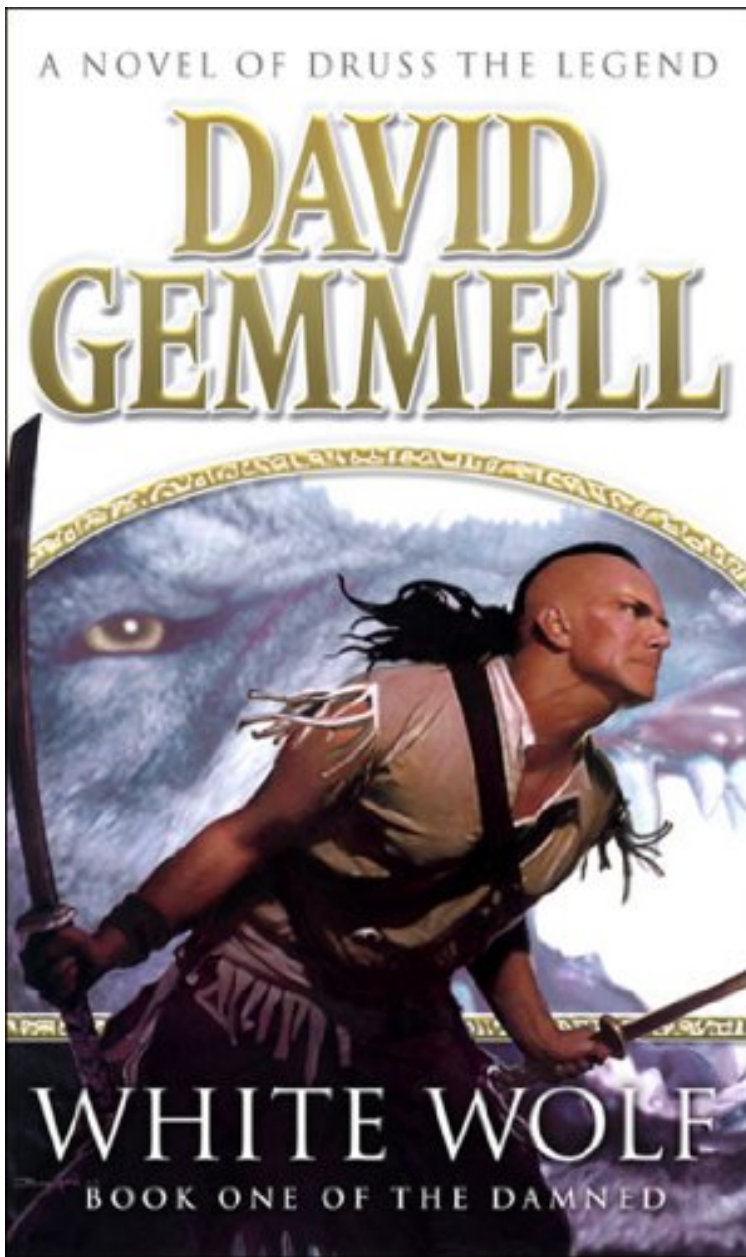


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# White Wolf



*Par David Gemmell*  
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**Par David Gemmell : White Wolf** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised White Wolf:

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**Description :** Description du produitWhite Wolf marks a return to the bestselling Drenai series and David Gemmells most popular hero of all, Druss the Legend.Skilgannon the Damned had vanished from the pages of history. No-one knew where he had gone, following the terrible triumph at Perapolis, and the assassins sent by the Witch Queen could find no trace of his passing. Three years later, a murderous mob gathers outside a monastery, faced by a single, unarmed priest. In a few terrifying seconds their world is changed for ever, and word spreads across the lands of the East -- Skilgannon is back.Now he must travel across a perilous, demon-haunted realm seeking a mysterious temple and the ageless goddess who rules it. With assassins on his trail and an army of murderous foes ahead, the Damned sets off on a quest to bring the dead to life. But he does

not travel alone. The man beside him is Druss the Legend. In this tale of love, betrayal and treachery, in a world torn by war, White Wolf examines the nature of heroism and friendship and the narrow lines dividing good and evil. From the Trade Paperback edition.

Prsentation de l'diteur Skilgannon the Damned had vanished from the pages of history. Following the terrible triumph at Perapolis, the General had taken the legendary Swords of Night and Day and ridden from the lands of Naashan. No-one knew where he had gone, and the assassins sent by the Witch Queen could find no trace of his passing. Three years later, a mob intent on murder gathers outside a distant monastery - facing them stands a single unarmed priest. In a few terrifying seconds their world is changed for ever, and word spreads across the lands of the East. Skilgannon is back. Now he must travel across a perilous, demon-haunted realm seeking a mysterious temple, and the ageless goddess who rules it. With assassins on his trail, and an army of murderous foes ahead, the Damned sets off on a quest to bring the dead to life. But he does not travel alone. The man beside him is Druss the Legend. In a world torn by war, White Wolf is a page-turning tale of love, betrayal and treachery, which examines the nature of heroism and friendship and the narrow lines that divide good from evil, redemption from damnation. .co.uk David Gemmell is Britain's most popular writer of hard-edged heroic fantasy. White Wolf opens a new subseries, "The Damned", set in the world of his Drenai saga and featuring the invincible axeman Druss the Legend--now well into middle age. But the central character is Skilgannon the Damned, deadly wielder of a very special pair of swords and a former general whose nickname comes from a war atrocity that he does not deny. His attempt to make a new life as a monk ends abruptly when civil unrest threatens the monastery and Skilgannon's old fighting skills come into play with appalling effectiveness. In flashbacks to decades earlier, a young Skilgannon painfully and plausibly learns the warrior's art, until his boyhood finishes in a blaze of horror. He finds true love, but his lady is also in love with power and gives the orders for a city-wide bloodbath that makes him forever The Damned. Now known as the Witch-Queen, she won't forgive him for leaving her... Other stories intertwine with Skilgannon's. There's a young lad who wants to be a swordsman; a fey girl haunted by voices; twin brother fighters, one with a personality ravaged by brain cancer; and Druss the Legend, still indomitable but beginning to worry about his heart. Their paths entwine in a land full of disorder, hostile troops, desperate refugees, and escaped arena beasts (sorcerous hybrids of man and animal). Gemmell excels at combat scenes, with a pace, timing and gripping conviction rare in the genre. He makes it clear, with grim compassion, that opponents aren't just straw men to be knocked over. Skilgannon is forced to kill people he admires, or who admire him; even legitimate self-defence turns sour when we hear the version told by the dead man's fiance. At the climax, Skilgannon, Druss and their surviving companions stage an audacious assault on a particularly obnoxious villain's well-defended fortress. Much bloodshed follows, with satisfactory settlement of many debts and a final gleam of hope for the future. More tales of Skilgannon will surely follow. --David Langford Extrait Smoke from the burning buildings still hung in the air, but the rioting mobs of yesterday had dispersed now, as the two priests walked slowly down the hill toward the town. Heavy clouds were gathering over the eastern mountains, promising rain for the afternoon, and a cool wind was blowing. The walk from the old monastery buildings to the little town was one that Brother Braygan usually enjoyed, especially with the sunshine glinting from the white buildings, and glittering on the rushing river. The chubby young priest loved to see the colorful meadow plants, so small and ephemeral against the backdrop of the eternal, snowcapped mountains. Not so today. Everything seemed different. The beauty was still there, but now an underlying sense of menace and real peril hung in the air. Is it a sin to be frightened, Brother Lantern? he asked his companion, a tall young man, with eyes of cold and brilliant blue, upon whom the pale robes of the acolyte seemed out of place. Have you ever killed a man, Braygan? Lanterns reply was cold and disinterested. Of course not. Or robbed, or raped, or stolen? Braygan was shocked and stared up at his companion, his fears momentarily forgotten. No. Then why do you spend so much time worrying about sin? Braygan fell silent. He never enjoyed working alongside Brother Lantern. The man said very little, but there was something about him that was wholly disturbing. His deep-set sapphire eyes were fierce, his lean face hard, his expressions unyielding. And he had sword scars upon his arms and legs. Braygan had seen them when they worked in the fields in the summer. He had asked him about them, but Lantern had ignored him. As he ignored questions concerning the harsh and warlike tattoos upon his back, chest, and arms: an eagle with outstretched wings and open talons between his shoulder blades, a large spider on his left forearm, and the snarling head of a leopard upon his chest. When asked of them Lantern would merely turn his cold eyes on the speaker and say nothing. Yet in all else he was an exemplary acolyte, working hard and

never shirking his duties. He never complained, nor argued, and attended all prayer and study meetings. When asked he could quote verbatim from all sections of holy script, and knew also much of the history of the nations surrounding the land. Braygan turned his attention back toward the town, and his fear returned. The soldiers of the Watch had done nothing to stop the rioters. Two days ago the mob had attacked Brother Labberan, and broken his arms when he went to teach at the church school. They had kicked and punched him, then struck him with rods of iron. Labberan was not a young man, and could easily have died. The two priests came to the small bridge over the river. Braygan trod on the hem of his pale blue robes and stumbled.

He would have fallen, but Brother Lanterns hand grabbed his arm, hauling him upright. Thank you, said Braygan. His arm hurt from the iron grip, and he rubbed it. There were some people moving through the rubble. Braygan tried not to stare at them nor at the two bodies hanging from the branches of a tall tree. I am frightened, Brother, he whispered. Why do people do such hateful things? Because they can, answered the tall priest. Are you frightened? Of what? The question seemed ridiculous to Braygan. Brother Labberan was beaten close to death, and there was hatred everywhere. Threats had been made against the church and its priests, and the terror continued. Crossing the bridge they moved past the smoldering buildings and on to the main street. Braygan was sweating now. There were more people here, and he saw several dark-garbed soldiers standing in a group by a tavern door. Some of the townsfolk stopped to stare at the priests as they made their way to the apothecary. One man shouted an insult. Sweat dripped into Braygans eyes and he blinked it away. Brother Lantern had reached the apothecary door. It was locked. The tall priest tapped at the wooden frame. There was no answer. A crowd began to gather. Braygan tried not to look at the faces of the men. We should go, Brother Lantern, he said. Somebody spoke to Braygan, the voice angry. He turned to answer, but a fist struck him in the face and he fell clumsily to the ground. A booted foot caught him in the chest and he cried out, and rolled toward the wall of the apothecary. Brother Lantern stepped across him and blocked the path of Braygans attacker. Beware, said Lantern, softly. Beware of what? asked the man, a heavily built and bearded figure, wearing the green sash of the Arbiters. Beware of anger, brother, said Lantern. It has a habit of bringing grief in its wake. The man laughed. Ill show you grief, he said. His fist lashed out toward Lanterns face. The priest swayed. The blow missed him. The attacker stumbled forward, off balance, and tripped over Lanterns outstretched leg, falling to his knees. With a roar of rage he surged upright and leapt at the priest only to miss him and fall again, this time striking his face on the cobbles. There was blood upon his cheek. He rose more warily and drew a knife from his belt. Be careful, said Lantern. You are going to hurt yourself further. Hurt myself? Are you an idiot? I am beginning to think that I might be, said Lantern. Do you happen to know when the apothecary will be arriving? We have an injured brother and are in need of herbs to reduce his fever. Youre the one wholl need the apothecary! I have already said that I need the apothecary. Shall I speak more slowly? The man swore loudly then rushed in. The knife lanced for Lanterns belly. The priest swayed again, his arm seeming to brush against the charging mans shoulder. The Arbiter surged past Lantern and struck the apothecary wall headfirst. Slumping down he screamed as his knife blade gouged into his own thigh. Lantern walked over and knelt beside him, examining the wound. Happily though I suppose that is arguable you have missed the major artery, he said, but the wound will need stitching. Rising, he turned toward the crowd. Does this man have friends here? he called. He needs to be attended. Several men shuffled forward. Do you know how to treat wounds? Lantern asked the first. No. Then carry him into the tavern. I will seal the cut. And send someone to fetch the apothecary. I have many duties today and cannot tarry here long. Ignored by the crowd, Braygan pushed himself to his feet, and watched as the injured man, groaning in pain, was carried to the tavern. Lantern glanced back at Braygan. Wait for the apothecary, he said. I will be back presently. With that he strolled toward the tavern, the crowd parting for him. Braygan felt light-headed and vaguely sick. He took several deep breaths. Who was that? asked a voice.

It was one of the black-armored soldiers, a thin-faced man with deep-set dark eyes. Brother Lantern, answered Braygan. He is our librarian. The soldier laughed. The crowd began to drift away. I do not think you will be further troubled today, said the soldier. Why do they want to harm us? We have always sought to love all people, and I recognized many in the crowd. We have helped them when they were sick. In the famine last year we shared our stores with them. The soldier shrugged. Not for me to say. Why do you not protect us? asked the priest. Soldiers obey their order, priest. The martial code does not allow us to obey only those orders we like. Were I you I would leave the monastery and journey north. It will not be long before it is attacked. Why would they attack us? Ask your friend. He seems to be a man who knows which way the wind will blow. He paused. During the fight I saw he had a dark tattoo upon his left forearm. What kind was it? It is a spider. I thought so. Does he perhaps also have a lion or some such upon his chest? Yes. A

leopard. The soldier said nothing more, and walked away. For three years now Skilgannon had sought to recapture that one perfect moment, that sense of total clarity and purpose. On rare occasions it seemed tantalizingly close, like a wispy image hovering at the corners of vision that danced away when he tried to focus upon it. He had cast aside riches and power, and journeyed through the wilderness seeking answers. He had entered the priesthood here at the converted castle of Cobalsin, enduring three mind-rotting years of study and examination, absorbing and largely dismissing philosophies and teachings that bore no relation to the realities of a world cursed by the presence of Man. And each night the dreams would haunt him. He would be wandering through a dark wood seeking the white wolf. He would catch a glimpse of its pale fur in the dense undergrowth and draw his swords. Moonlight would glisten on the blades, and the wolf would be gone. Instinctively he knew there was a link between the swords and the wolf. The moment he touched the hilts the beast would disappear, and yet, such was the fear of the wolf, that he could not resist the lure of the blades. The monk known as Lantern would awake with a start, fists clenched, chest tight, and roll from his narrow pallet bed. The small room, with its tiny window would seem then like a prison cell. On this night a storm was raging outside the monastery. Skilgannon walked barefoot along the corridor and up the steps to the roof, stepping out into the rain. Lightning blazed across the sky, followed by a deep rumble of thunder. It had been raining that night too, after the last battle. He remembered the enemy priest, on his knees in the mud. All around him were corpses, thousands of them. The priest looked up at him, then raised his thin hands to the storm. Rain had drenched his pale robes. The tears of Heaven, he said. It still surprised Skilgannon that he remembered the moment so powerfully. Why would a god weep? He recalled that he had laughed at the priest, and called him a fool. Find yourself a god with real power, he had said. Weeping is for the weak and the powerless. Now on the monastery roof Skilgannon walked through the rain and stared at the undulating landscape, gazing out toward the east. The rain eased away, the clouds clearing. A bright, gibbous moon illuminated the glistening land. The houses in the town below shone white and clean. No rioting crowds tonight, no rabble-rousers. The fires in the merchant district had been doused by the storm. The mob will gather again tomorrow, he thought. Or the next day. What am I doing here, he wondered? The fool in the town had asked whether he was an idiot. The question dogged his thoughts. He had looked into the man's eyes as he had stitched his wounded thigh. The glint of hatred shone there. We will sweep your kind from the pages of history, the man had said. Your kind. Skilgannon had looked at him lying upon the tavern table, his face gray with pain. You might kill the priests, little man. It will not be hard. They do not fight back. But the pages of history? I think not. Creatures like you do not have such power. A bitter wind rippled across the rooftop. He shivered then smiled. Pulling open his soaked robes, Skilgannon let them fall to the floor. Standing naked in the moonlight he stretched the muscles of his arms and back, then moved smoothly into the Eagle pose, the left foot hooked behind the right ankle, the right arm raised, the left arm wrapped around it, the backs of the palms pressed together. Motionless he stood, in perfect balance. In this moment he did not look like a priest. His body was well muscled and lean, and there were old scars upon his arms and chest, from sword and spear. His breathing deepened. Then he relaxed. The cold did not touch him now, and he began to move smoothly through the exercises that had sustained him in another life; the Shooting Bow, the Locust, the Peacock, and the Crow. His muscles stretched, his body loose, he began a series of dance-like movements, leaping and twirling, always in perfect balance. Warm sweat replaced the cold sheen of rain upon his naked flesh. Dayan's face appeared in his mind. Not in death as he had last seen her, but bright and smiling as they swam together in the marble pool of the palace garden. His stomach tightened. His face betrayed no emotion, save for a tightness now around the eyes. Drawing in a deep breath he moved to the edge of the parapet and ran his hand along the foot-wide ledge. Water droplets clung to the smooth stone, making it greasy. The man known as Lantern vaulted to the ledge and stood some seventy feet above the hard rock upon which the monastery had been built. The narrow ledge ran straight for some thirty feet, before a sharp, right angle turn. He studied the ledge for a few moments, then closed his eyes. Blind now he ran forward then leapt high, twisting his body through a tight pirouette. His right foot landed firmly on the ledge and did not slip. His left caught the lip of the right angle. He swayed then righted himself. Opening his eyes he looked down once more on the rocky ground far below. He had judged it perfectly. A small part of his mind wished that he had not. Turning he leapt lightly back to the roof and donned his robes. If it is death you want, he told himself, it will be coming soon. For two days the thirty-five priests remained mostly within the grounds of the old Cobalsin Castle and its outbuildings, only venturing to the meadows east of the town. Here they tended the three flocks of rare sheep and goats, from whose wool, and the garments they fashioned from it, the priests earned enough to support themselves and the headquarters of the church in the Tantrian

capital, Mellicane. The town itself remained ominously quiet. The bodies of the hanged foreigners were removed and the soldiers departed. Many among the priests hoped that the terror was at an end, and that life would soon return to normal. Spring was coming, and there was much to do, gathering the wild flowers to provide the dyes for cloaks and tunics, purchasing and preparing the secret blends of oils that would make the clothes they crafted waterproof, and help to maintain the richness of color. The garments made here were highly prized by the nobles and the rich of the cities. Lambing season was also in full flow, and the spring cull was due. Merchants would soon be arriving to buy meat and deliver produce and supplies for the coming season. The mood in the monastery was lighter than it had been for weeks, and the injured Brother Labberan had overcome his fever and it was hoped would soon be on the road to recovery. Not everyone, however, believed the worst was over. On the second morning Brother Lantern sought out the abbot. We should leave and head west, said Brother Lantern. Abbot Cethelin, an elderly priest with wispy white hair and gentle eyes, beckoned Brother Lantern to follow him to his study in the high tower. It was a small room, sparsely furnished with two hard-backed chairs, a long writing desk, and a single, narrow window, overlooking the town. Why do you wish us to leave, Brother? asked the abbot, gesturing for Lantern to take a seat. Death is coming, Holy Brother. I know this, answered the abbot, softly. But why do you wish us to leave? Brother Lantern shook his head. Forgive me, but your answer makes no sense. This is merely a respite. The storm is coming. Even now the rabble-rousers will be encouraging the townsfolk to come here and massacre us. So tomorrow or the next day crowds will begin to form outside. We are being cast in the role of enemy. We are being demonized. When they break through the gates they will cut us all down. They will rage through these buildings like a fire. Once again, Younger Brother, I ask: Why do you wish us to leave? You want to die here? What I want is not the concern. This is a place of spiritual harmony. We exist to offer love and understanding in a world too often bathed in blood and hatred. We do not add to that suffering. Our purpose is enlightenment, Younger Brother. We are seeking to enhance the journey of our souls as they yearn to be united with the Source of All Things. We have no fear of death, it is merely another step of the journey. If this building was ablaze, Holy Brother, would you sit within it and wait for the flames to devour you? No, Lantern. I would take myself to a place of safety. That, however, does not equate with the situation we are facing. Fire is inanimate and nondiscerning. We are ordered to offer love in the face of hate, and forgiveness in the face of pain. We cannot run away when danger threatens. That would be like saying we have no faith in our own philosophy. How can we obey our teachings if we run in the face of hate? It is not a philosophy I can share, said Lantern. I know. That is one of the reasons you cannot find what you seek. You do not know what I seek, answered Lantern, a touch of anger in his voice. The White Wolf, said the older man, softly. But you do not know what it is, nor why you seek it. Until you do, what you seek will always be lost to you. Why did you come here, Younger Brother? I am beginning to wonder that myself. His keen blue eyes held to the abbot's gaze. How much do you know of me? I know that you are a man rooted in this world of flesh. You have a keen mind, Lantern, and great intelligence. I know that when you walk through the town the women admire you, and smile at you. I know how hard it has been for you to obey the rules of celibacy. What else do you wish to hear? I have tried to be a good priest, said the tall man, with a sigh. I have immersed myself in this world of prayer and kindness. I thought that, as time passed, I would come to understand it. Yet I do not. Last summer we risked our lives in the plague to help these townspeople. Two of the men whose lives we saved took part in the beating of Brother Labberan. One of the women whose child we brought back from the brink of death was buying for her husband to break Labberan's face. They are scum. The abbot smiled. How simple love would be, Younger Brother, if we only had to bestow it on those who deserved it. Yet, what would it be worth? If you gave a poor man a silver coin, then that would be a gift. If you expected him to pay you back, then that would make it a loan. We do not loan our love, Lantern. We give it freely. And what will be achieved if you let them kill you? Will that add one spark of love to the world? The abbot shrugged. Perhaps. Perhaps not. They sat in silence for a few moments. How did you know of the White Wolf? asked Lantern. It is only in my dreams. How do you know it is a wolf? countered the abbot, when you have never seen it? That does not answer my question. I have a gift, Lantern. A small gift. For example, as we sit here now I can see you, but I also see glimpses of your thoughts and memories. They flicker around you. Two young women very beautiful one with golden hair, the other dark. They are opposites; one is gentle and loving, the other fierce and passionate. I see a slender man, tall with dyed yellow hair and a womanly face. Cethelin closed his eyes. I see a weary man, kneeling in a garden, tending plants. A good man. Not young. Cethelin sighed and looked at Lantern. You knew these people? Yes. And you carry them in your heart. Always. Along with the White Wolf. It seems so. At that

moment came the sound of the bell, heralding morning prayer. The abbot rose. We will talk again, Brother Lantern. May the Source bless you. And you, Elder Brother, answered Lantern, rising from his chair and bowing. There was so much about the world that Braygan failed to comprehend. People mystified him. How could men gaze upon the wonders of the mountains, or the glories of the night sky, and not understand the pettiness of human ambition? Fearing death, as all men did, how could they so easily visit death upon others? Braygan could not stop thinking about the hanging bodies he had seen before the burning buildings.

They had not merely been strung up by their necks. They had been beaten and tortured first. The young priest could not imagine how anyone could find pleasure in such deeds. And yet they surely had, for it was said there was much laughter in the crowd as the hapless victims were dragged to their places of execution. The young priest sat at the bedside of Brother Labberan, spoon-feeding him vegetable broth. Occasionally he would stop and dab a napkin to Labberan's mouth. The left side of the older priest's face was swollen and numb, and the broth dribbled from his mouth to his chin. Are you feeling a little stronger, Brother? asked Braygan. A little, answered Labberan, his words slurred. Splints had been applied to both of Labberan's forearms, and his hands were also swollen and blue with bruises. There was an unhealthy sheen on the man's thin face. Close to sixty years old, Labberan was not strong, and the beating had been severe.

Braygan saw a tear form, and slowly trickle down the old priest's face. Are you in pain still, Brother? Labberan shook his head. Braygan put aside the bowl of broth. Labberan closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep. The young priest rose silently from the bedside and left the small room. He took the empty broth bowl to the lower kitchens and cleaned it. Several other priests were there, preparing the midday meal.

Brother Anager approached him. How is he? asked the little man. Did my broth sit well with him? It was always his favorite. He ate well, Anager. I am sure he liked it. Anager nodded and seemed relieved. Small and round-shouldered, he had a nervous tic that caused his head to twitch as he spoke. It was most disconcerting to Braygan. It was the boys, you know, said Anager. They hurt him the worst. The boys? His boys. From church school. Braygan was nonplussed. Labberan's role was as a teacher to the local children. Two days a week he would travel into the community hall, offering lessons in writing and arithmetic. He would also tell them stories of the Source and His wonders. Teaching children was Labberan's joy. Our future lies with the young, he would say. They are the foundations. Only through the young can we hope to eradicate hatred. What about his boys? asked Braygan. After he was beaten by the mob some of the children came to where he lay and kicked him. You think it is over now, Brother Braygan? Yes. Yes, I think so. Everything seems calmer. It is these Arbiters, you know, said Anager. They stir up trouble. Is it true that Brother Lantern thrashed one of them? He did not thrash anyone. The man was clumsy and fell badly. It is said that there have been many killings in the capital, said Anager, blinking rapidly. He lowered his voice. It is even said they might loose the beasts. What if they come here? Why would they allow the beasts to come here? The war is in the south and east. Yes, yes you are right. Of course you are. They won't send beasts here. I saw one, you know. I went to the Games earlier this year. Ghastly. Huge. Four men went in against it. It killed them all. Horrible. Part bear, they said. Dreadful. A monstrosity. It is so wrong, Braygan. So wrong. Braygan agreed, and thought it best not to point out that priests were forbidden to watch blood sports. He left the kitchens and made his way up to the lower hall and out into the vegetable gardens. Several of the brothers were working there. As Braygan arrived they asked after Brother Labberan. He told them he thought him a little better today, though a part of his mind considered that to be wishful thinking. Brother Labberan was a broken man in more ways than one. For an hour Braygan worked alongside them, planting tubers taken carefully from large brown sacks. Then he was summoned to the abbot's offices. Braygan was nervous as he stood outside the door. He wondered which of his many errors had been pointed out to the abbot. He was supposed to have organized the mending of the chapel roof, but the new lead for the flashing had not arrived. Then there was the error with the dyes. It had not been his fault. The sack had split as he was adding the yellow. It should only have been two measures. More like ten had spilled into the vat. The result was a horrible, unusable orange color, which had to be flushed away. It wouldn't have happened had Brother Nasley not borrowed the measuring jug. Braygan tapped at the door, then entered. The abbot was sitting by a small fire. He bade Braygan to take a seat. Are you well, Younger Brother? he asked. I am well, Elder Brother. Are you content? Braygan did not understand the question. Content? Er . . . in what way? With your life here. Oh yes, Elder Brother. I love the life. What is it that you love about it, Braygan? To serve the Source and to . . . and to help people. Yes, that is why we are here, said the old man, looking at him keenly. That is what we are expected to say. But what do you love about it? I feel safe here, Elder Brother. I feel this is where I belong. And is that why you came to us? To feel safe? In part, yes. Is that wrong? Did you feel safe when the

man attacked you in the town? No, Elder Brother. I was very frightened. The abbot looked away, staring into the fire. He seemed lost in thought and Braygan said nothing. At last the abbot spoke again. How is Brother Labberan faring? He is not improving as fast as he should. His spirits are very low. His wounds are healing, though. I am sure that in a few days he will begin to recover. The abbot returned his gaze to the fire. Then he turned toward Braygan. Brother Lantern thinks we should leave. He believes the mob will gather once more and seek to do us harm. Do you think that? whispered Braygan, his heart beginning to pound. It cannot be true, he went on, before the abbot could answer. No, it is getting calmer now. I think that the attack on Brother Labberan was an aberration. They will have had time to think about the evil of their deeds. They will understand that we are not enemies. We are their friends. Do you not think so? You come from a large town, dont you Braygan? said the abbot. Yes, Elder Brother. Did many people own dogs there? Yes. Were there sheep in fields close to the town? Yes, Elder Brother, replied Braygan, mystified. I came from such a town. Men would walk their dogs close to the sheep, and there would be no trouble. Occasionally, though, a few dogs would gather together, and run loose. If they went into a field of sheep they would suddenly turn vicious and cause great harm. You have seen this? Yes, Elder Brother. The pack mentality asserts itself. They forget their training, their domesticity, and they turn . . . Braygan stammered to a halt. You think the people in the town are like those dogs? Of course they are, Braygan. They have come together and indulged in what they are led to believe is righteous anger. They have killed. They feel empowered. They feel mighty. Like the dogs they are glorying in their strength. Aye, and in their cruelty. These have been harsh years crop failures, plagues, and droughts. The war with Datia has sapped the nations resources. People are frightened and they are angry. They need to find someone to blame for their hardships and their losses. The church leaders spoke out against this war. Many have been branded as traitors. Some have been executed. The church itself is now accused of aiding the enemy. Of being the enemy. The mob will come, Braygan. With hatred in their hearts and murder on their minds. Then Brother Lantern is right. We must leave. You have not yet taken your final vows. You are free to do as you wish. As indeed is Brother Lantern. Then you are not leaving, Elder Brother? The Order will remain here, for this is our home and the people of the town are our flock. We will not desert them in their hour of need. Think on these things, Braygan. You have perhaps a few days to consider your position. From the Hardcover edition.