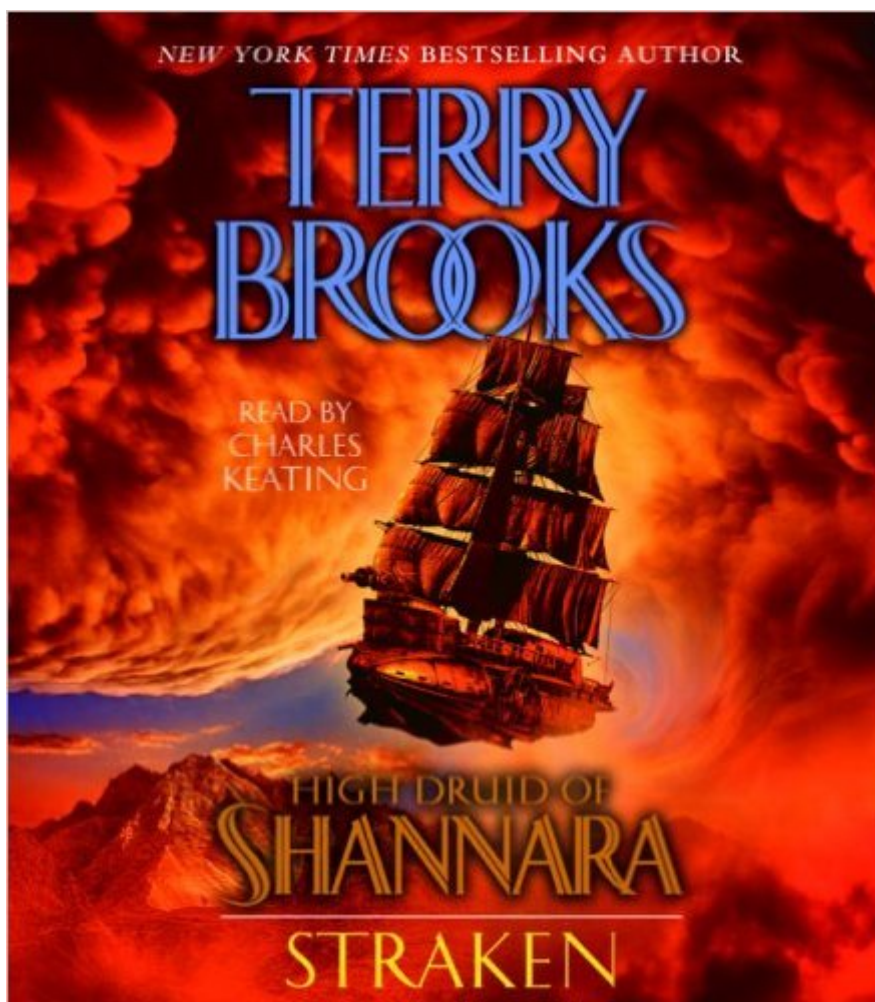


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High Druid Of Shannara: Straken



Synopsis

The High Druid of Shannara trilogy draws to a thrilling close as a young hero nears completion of his trial by fire, a banished ruler fights for her life in a wilderness of dread, and forces of darkness and light square off in a battle unto death for the right to absolute rule. Prepare to be spellbound by the masterly hand of bestselling legend weaver Terry Brooks, conjuring at the peak of his skills. For reasons known only to himself, the King of the Silver River has charged young Penderrin Ohmsford, barely more than a boy, with the daunting task of rescuing his aunt, Grianne, Ard Rhys of the Druid order, from her forced exile in the terrifying dimension of all things damned: the Forbidding. With the noble dwarf Tagwen and the prodigal elven princess Khyber Elessedil by his side “and with the outcome of the bloody war between the Federation and the Free-born at stake” Pen has accepted his mission without question. But not without risk . . . or sacrifice. Because Shadea Ru, the ruthless Druid responsible for imprisoning the true Ard Rhys and usurping leadership at Paranor, has sent her agents and assassins in relentless pursuit of Pen and his comrades. And in securing the talisman he needs to breach the Forbidding, Pen has paid a devastating price. Now if the Free-born forces “already decimated by the Federation’s death-dealing new weapon” should fall, Shadea’s domination of the Four Lands will be assured. Nothing short of Pen’s success can turn the tide. But Pen’s challenge grows greater when he learns that his parents, Bek Ohmsford and Rue Meridian, have fallen into Shadea’s hands. He must try to help them “but once within the walls of Druid’s Keep, where Shadea’s minions and dark magic lurk at every turn, Pen’s survival is far from assured. Yet it will all pale in comparison to the horrors that wait inside the Forbidding” horrors poised to break free upon the Four Lands when the time is right. . . .

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Customer Reviews

And so, another Terry Brooks trilogy has come to an end. With *Straken*, Brooks has now ended his High Druid of Shannara series, and he does it on a pretty good note. This has certainly been his strongest series for quite a while now, but even so, the last book has some major faults that keep it from being wonderful. According to his web site, he is writing a "Pre-Shannara" trilogy next, which is supposedly about the fall of the civilization that led to the way the Four Lands are today. It seems different enough, and I hope that it stays that way, as *Straken* (not to mention this entire series) shows that he really needs a break from it. Maybe completely changing the focus will help. When we last left our heroes, Grianne Ohmsford, the High Druid (or "Ard Rhys") had been captured in the Forbidding (an alternate plane where the druids had imprisoned all of the demons of the world) by a demon with ambitions beyond the Forbidding. In fact, they were plans to destroy it and unleash the imprisoned demonic hordes on Shannara itself. Grianne's rival druids had imprisoned her there, ostensibly because of her evil past, but mostly because they are hungry for the power she wields. But they don't know about the demon's plans, and they are unwittingly helping him. Meanwhile, Pen Ohmsford, Grianne's nephew, has sacrificed the woman he loves and a part of his body in order to forge the Darkwand, a way into the Forbidding so he can rescue his aunt. Pen's parents have been captured by the druids and must escape themselves, while Pen's friends fight desperately to come to his aid. But even if Pen succeeds in freeing his aunt, he finds he must still face the demon that has escaped the Forbidding, before it destroys the only thing that stands in the way of waves of demonic invaders.

The past six years have brought us six new Shannara novels from Terry Brooks. (You realize that it took him four years to write *Elfstones*?) Each has disappointed in its own fashion, and *Straken* is no different. Perhaps my rating is due to nostalgia; the original trilogy and *Heritage* (a four-book series) were so good that it's probably impossible to sustain that sort of excellence. Maybe with a different author, I would've rated this book a three of five. But this is Terry Brooks, an author I once celebrated as among the best, who has of late fallen into the trap of over-using themes and characters. He has rewritten the same book several times, trading his ingenuity and characterization for tired storylines and cliched plots. *Straken* bothers me for several reasons, but principally I think that it is because Mr Brooks has uncovered one of the mysteries that made his former books so

engaging. Like peering into the Druid's mind in *Voyage of the Jerle Shannara*, we are once again admitted to a previously closed wardrobe: the Forbidding. Imagination surely made it more terrifying than what is portrayed in the 400 or so pages of *Straken*. Its landscapes, like those of Parkasia, are drab and boring; this is a new world--it should have a bit more verve, even if it is inhabited by demons. Other concerns are wooden characters, boring villains (the Moric seems surprisingly similar to the Changeling of Elfstones), predictable plot, lack of intrigue, and few plot twists. Almost all of the elements that made his first two series so good are absent from the last two. It saddens me to read one of his books in a night and find myself wishing to finish it rather than savor it. Good books are meant to be read past your bedtime for more than one night.

What was shaping up to be the best Shannara-based serial since "The Heritage of Shannara" stumbles on the finish line. Despite a promising start and a strong middle, "The High Druid of Shannara" goes out more with a whimper than a bang, due to several pointless chapters, unbelievable coincidences, the undermining of previously established plot-points and too much stupid behaviour on the part of its antagonists. Grianne Ohmsford was banished into the world of the Forbidding by her treacherous fellow Druids, under the leadership of Shadea a'Ru. What they failed to understand is that they themselves were being played, as by sending Grianne into the Forbidding, they unknowingly released a demon into their own world who has since been manipulating events in order to secure the destruction of the Ellcrys - the magical tree that stands as a barrier between this world and the demons of the Forbidding. The only thing that could stop such a thing from happening was Grianne's young nephew Penderrin "Pen" Ohmsford, who was sent by the King of the Silver River to fetch a talisman that could send him into the Forbidding and return with his aunt, before using it again to send back the demon. Gaining possession of the talisman (called a darkwand) cost Pen something he loved dearly, but before he's even had a chance to grieve properly, he finds himself surrounded by an airship fleet of Druids. Discovering that his parents Bek and Rue are held captive at the Druid Keep of Paranor, (and knowing he has to get there anyway if he's to use the darkwand correctly), Pen agrees to accompany them.

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