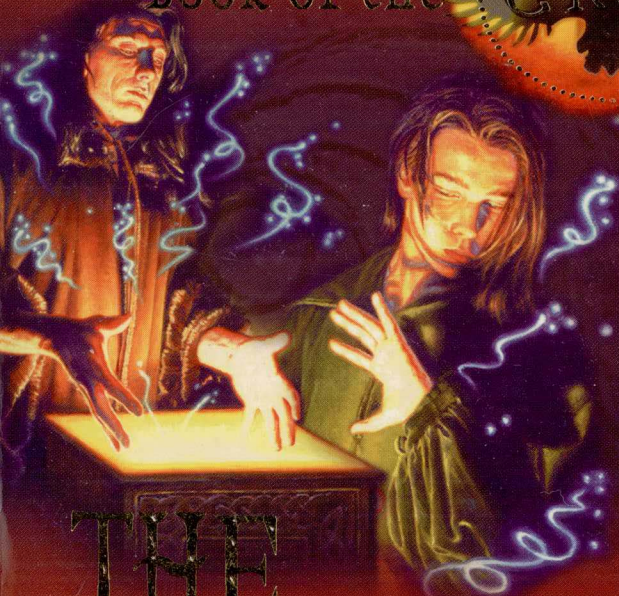


# CATHERINE FISHER

volume 2 of the  
book of the



# THE INTERREX 2

CATHERINE FOSTER

THE  
INTERTEXT

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藏书章

RED FOX

# To Maggie and Roger

A Red Fox Book

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The strain on his arms was agony. Clutching the rope, he hauled himself up, hand over hand, gripping with aching knees and ankles.

‘Hurry up!’ The Sekoi leaned precariously from the tower ledge above, its seven fingers stretching for him. Behind it the Maker-wall glimmered in the light of the moons.

Raffi gave one last desperate pull, flung his hand up and grabbed. A hard grip clenched on his; he was dragged on to the ledge and clung there, gasping and soaked with sweat.

‘Not bad,’ the creature purred in his ear. ‘Now look down.’

Below them, the night was black. Somewhere at the tower’s smooth base Galen was waiting, a shadow with a hooked face of moonlight, staring up. Even from here Raffi could feel his tension.

‘Now what?’ he hissed.

‘The window.’ Delicately, the Sekoi put its long hand out and wriggled it through the smashed, patched pane. A latch clicked. The casement creaked softly open.

The creature’s fur tickled Raffi as it whispered, ‘In you go.’

Raffi nodded. Silently he swung his feet in and slithered over the sill, standing in the still room.

In the moonlight he sent a sense-line out, feeling at once the tangled dreams of the man in the bed, the sleeping bodyguards outside the door, and then, as he groped for it, the bright mind-echo of the relic, the familiar blue box.

It was somewhere near the bed.

He pointed; the Sekoi nodded, its yellow eyes catching the light. Raffi began to cross the room. He knew there was no one else here, but if Alberic woke up and yelled there soon would be. The tiny man seemed lost in the vast bed, its hangings purple and crimson damask, heavy and expensive. Probably stolen. Beside the bed was a table, a dim shadow of smooth wood, and he could just see the gleam of a drawer-handle. The relic box was in there.

Galen's box.

Inch by inch, Raffi's hand moved towards the drawer.

Alberic snuffled, turned over. His face was close to Raffi now; a sly face, even in sleep. Soundlessly, Raffi opened the drawer, pushed his fingers in and touched the box. Power jerked through him; his fingers clenched on it and he almost hissed with the shock. Then it was out, and shoved deep inside his jerkin.

Glancing back, he saw the Sekoi's black shape breathless against the window; behind it the stars were bright. He backed, carefully.

But Alberic was restless, turning and tossing in his rich covers; with each step back Raffi felt the dwarf's sharp mind bubbling up out of the dark, a growing unease. As he turned and grabbed the window he felt the moment of waking like a pain.

Alberic sat bolt upright. He stared across the dark room; in that instant he saw *them* both, and a strangled scream of fury broke out of him. In

seconds Raffi was out, slithering down the rope after the Sekoi, so fast that the heat seared the gloves on his hands, and as he hit the bottom and crumpled to his knees he heard the dogs erupt into barking and the screeching of Alberic's wrath.

Galen's hand grabbed him. 'Have you got it?'

'Yes!'

The dwarf's head jutted from the high window. 'Galen Harn!' he screamed, his voice raw. 'And you, Sekoi! I'll kill you both for this!'

He seemed to be demented with rage; someone had to haul him back inside. 'I'll kill you!' he shrieked.

But the night was dark. They were already long gone.





# **Flainsdeath**



*As the Makers shaped the world, Kest began to brood in his secret place, remembering the scorn of Flain and Tamar's jokes. And in a cave under the ice he began his experiments, making tiny beasts from parts of others, giving them forbidden life. And these things he kept hidden from Flain's wrath.*

### Book of the Seven Moons

'Are you sure you've got everything?' Rocallion asked anxiously.

Raffi finished arranging the black and green beads and looked round. 'Maybe a few more candles.'

'I'll get them sent up. Will the keeper be ready?'

They both glanced across the dim room. Galen was sitting by the fire, in an upright chair. He seemed to be day-dreaming, staring deep into the flames, but when Raffi reached out for the keeper's soul, he couldn't find it; it was walking far away in some place he hadn't yet learned to reach. 'He'll be ready in his own time.'

Rocallion nodded, pulling berries nervously off the holly. He was a young man to be frank in of so big a manor, Raffi thought, but he seemed to run it well. The fields they'd travelled through yesterday had been well-ploughed, the cottages in good repair. And now Rocallion was worried; it made Raffi worry too.

'No more news of the Watch?' Raffi asked.

Rocallion perched on the edge of the bench. He nearly put the holly berry in his mouth, then tossed it absently into the fire. 'Only the rumour of that patrol out at Tarnos. That was two days ago. Before the leaf-fall.' He gazed out at the darkening sky. 'It should keep them indoors. But on Flainsnight, you never know.'

Raffi nodded, crossing to the window and leaning his hands on the sill. He knew that whatever the weather the Watch would be prowling tonight. In the damp chill of the autumn twilight the countryside beyond was misty, the far hills faint blurs. In the cloud-ragged sky the moons were bright, all seven of them, with Pyra a fiery-red point in the east. There were no other lights, anywhere.

'Raffi!'

He turned, instantly.

Galen was standing, tall and dark, his hawk-face sharp in the firelight. Power was moving around him; Raffi could see it, the blue tingles and sparks. It made him shiver.

'I'm ready,' the keeper said softly. 'Let them in.'

The room was dark, as it should be, with no light but the fire. As the door opened Raffi saw the shapes of Rocallion's tenants slip into the room, twelve or so men, the ones he could trust, with their wives and a few children. In the dimness they were nervous shadows, the creak of a bench, a whisper.

The air of the room was sharp with sorcery and fear. All of them knew that if the Watch caught them they'd pay heavily. Money, cattle, even their children might be taken away. Rocallion would lose most. But they wouldn't die, Raffi thought bitterly. Not like he and Galen would die. Slowly.

He shivered. But Galen had begun.

‘Friends. This is the night of Flainsdeath. Tonight we do what the faithful have done for centuries, since the Makers themselves were here.’ He frowned. ‘In these days of evil we have to meet in secret; I salute the courage of each of you in coming. Tonight the Watch will ride out. But if you have kept the secret, we may be safe.’

His black eyes watched their tense faces. So did Raffi.

They were scared. That was natural. Or he hoped it was.

Galen paused. Then his voice lowered. ‘Before we start, I have some news for you. Two months ago the boy and I came out of Tasceron, the Wounded City, the City of the Makers. While we were there we saw and heard things I couldn’t explain if I wanted to. But this is the point. The Makers, at last, have spoken to the Order. They’ve sent us a message. They’ve promised us they will return.’

The silence was complete, as if no one breathed.

Then someone said, ‘Is it certain?’

‘I heard the voice myself, across space and time. The boy heard it, and others. They told us to wait.’ He rubbed the edge of his hand wearily down his cheek. ‘How long, I don’t know. We must all pray it will be soon. Kest’s creatures multiply, and the Unfinished Lands still spread. The Watch grows in strength. We need it to be soon.’

They were astonished. Their amazement was so strong Raffi felt he could almost have touched it; it was sharp as the holly hanging from the roof, bright as the berries the fire scorched. But they believed.

The keeper turned abruptly, ignoring the sudden buzz of whispers. ‘Are your sense-lines out, boy? I may be too busy.’

Raffi nodded; he'd already checked them, a net of energy lines around the house, stretching out as far down the moonlit lanes and trackways as he could manage. If anyone crossed them, he'd know.

'Then we'll start,' Galen said.

He sat, waved a hand, and Raffi climbed to his feet, nervously waiting for the whispers to quieten.

Finally they were all looking at him.

He had only done this once before, though he had heard the story of Flain's death most years since he was small. Now he would recite it, from memory, from the Book of the Seven Moons. After that the keeper would enter the Silence, maybe for minutes, maybe for hours. Until he woke, like Flain had woken, bringing them the secret Word. And then the candles would be lit and, at last, they'd eat. Raffi was desperate for food. He'd been fasting all day, and now his stomach rumbled quietly. Gripping his fists, he began quickly.

'The soul that had been Flain travelled deep into the Otherworld, always seeking the way back. After hours and years and centuries he came to a low place, no higher from the floor than his knee, and he crawled among the veins and wormholes of the Underworld. Through the mines and tunnels of Death he crept, to a wide cavern lit only by red flame. In the centre of the cavern lay a casket, made of gold and calarna wood, and the soul of Flain crossed the soft sand to the casket and opened it.

'In the casket was a Word. And Flain saw the Word, and as he saw it all the secrets of the world came to him, and he knew the way out from Death, and the future; and far off and very faint, he heard the voices of the Makers – Tamar, Soren, Theriss – calling for him.'

Raffi stopped. In the silence the fire crackled,

smelling of pine and furzewood. Faces were red glimmers, sharp angles of shadow. As he sat down, all eyes turned to Galen.

The Relicmaster sat upright in his chair, his black hair glossy in the dimness, his eyes catching the flamelight. He sat easily, without moving, his face gaunt and calm. And as they watched, in the smoky hall, through the woodcrackle and the soft patter of hail on the shutters, they saw something begin to form, in the air before the fire.

A bench creaked, bodies leaned forward. A child said something and was hushed.

It came out of nowhere, out of the dark, and though they had all seen this happen before, the eerie chill of it was always new. Even Raffi felt the ice of fear touch his spine.

The casket was large, and strange, made of gold and calarna wood: Flain's casket, with its hinges gleaming. Slowly it became solid, until it was heavy, on a small table, the wood richly oiled.

Raffi stared. Every keeper made the casket differently; he had seen Galen perform the Flainsdeath summoning before, but never like this. It was so quick. Something was strange. Something was different.

Outside, the rising wind beat at the shutters. For a long moment Galen waited. Then he stood up, his hands on the lid.

'I open this,' he said, his voice hoarse and strange, 'as Flain did. Let the Word speak to us, let it teach us the secrets.'

It was back, the power that had possessed him before; the power that was the Crow. Dizzy with it, Raffi felt it crackle and rustle round the room like dark wings, making his fingers jerk and tingle, blurring some deep uneasy nagging in his head.

Now Galen was opening the lid, and as he lifted

it all the people gasped, because light came out of it, a widening slit, stabbing up into the smoke, throwing a brilliant glare on to Galen's face as he stared down into it, undazzled.

Raffi stood up. Something snagged in his mind, some warning. Outside, the wind howled and rattled.

With both hands, Galen was reaching eagerly into the casket. There were things he should have said, parts of the Litany. He wasn't saying them. Uneasy, Raffi shifted. 'Galen. The Responses.'

There was no sign he was heard.

'Galen?'

No one moved. Turning his head, Raffi saw why.

Shapes and swirls of energy were everywhere in the room, sparking up panelling, the folds of hangings, spitting along the tables. Amazed, the tenants stared around them. Small blue coils unwound, snapping back on themselves around Galen, leaving a faint smell of burning. Raffi had never seen anything like it before.

Then Galen spoke, abruptly. 'I see the Word!'

He lifted his eyes. They were black, as if blinded. Rocallion was standing; everyone was. A boy called out; there were noises from outside, horse hooves, running, a banging on the door. With a guilty shock Raffi dragged his mind back to the sense-lines; they were snagged open, torn wide.

'The Watch!' he hissed, but the keeper was rigid, the box in his hands pulsing with light.

'Would you hear the Word?'

'Speak it!' someone murmured, remembering the answer.

'I speak it.' Galen breathed sharply, as if a knife had stabbed him. 'The Word . . .' He sought for it, hands gripped tight, until suddenly his eyes cleared in shock. 'The word is . . . *Interrex*.'



The whole room stared at him in astonishment.  
Then the casket vanished, soundlessly.

Raffi moved. 'Rocallion, the Watch are here!' Shoving through the crowd he grabbed Galen's arm. 'They're here! At the door!'

'What!' The franklin stared at him in horror. 'But I've got men out.'

'They're through that! Listen!'

Voices were loud in the courtyard. A horse neighed, hooves clattered over the cobbles.

'Flainsteeth!' Rocallion leapt across the room and grabbed Galen. 'With me, keepers, now! Hurry!'

He dragged them through a door in the wall. Behind them Raffi could hear the table hastily dragged out, candles lit, the hurried children being pushed into seats. A Flainsnight supper was not illegal. Not yet.

They raced down a tiny stair, Raffi stumbling in the sudden dark. 'Your friends . . .' Galen gasped.

'Don't worry. They won't talk. Just a party.'

'Unless the Watch know we're here,' the keeper growled.

At the bottom was a corridor. Rocallion looked up and down it hastily, then opened a door opposite, hustled them through and bolted it behind him.

'Stillroom,' he hissed.

It was musky with herb smells, bunches of them hung from the ceiling. A bench was littered with glass phials and bowls. Someone was calling, far off in the house, but, ignoring it, Rocallion crouched and pulled a hidden catch near the hearth. Instantly a small panel slid open in the wall.

Galen crawled in, Raffi scrambling after him.

Rocallion's white face filled the gap. 'No one