

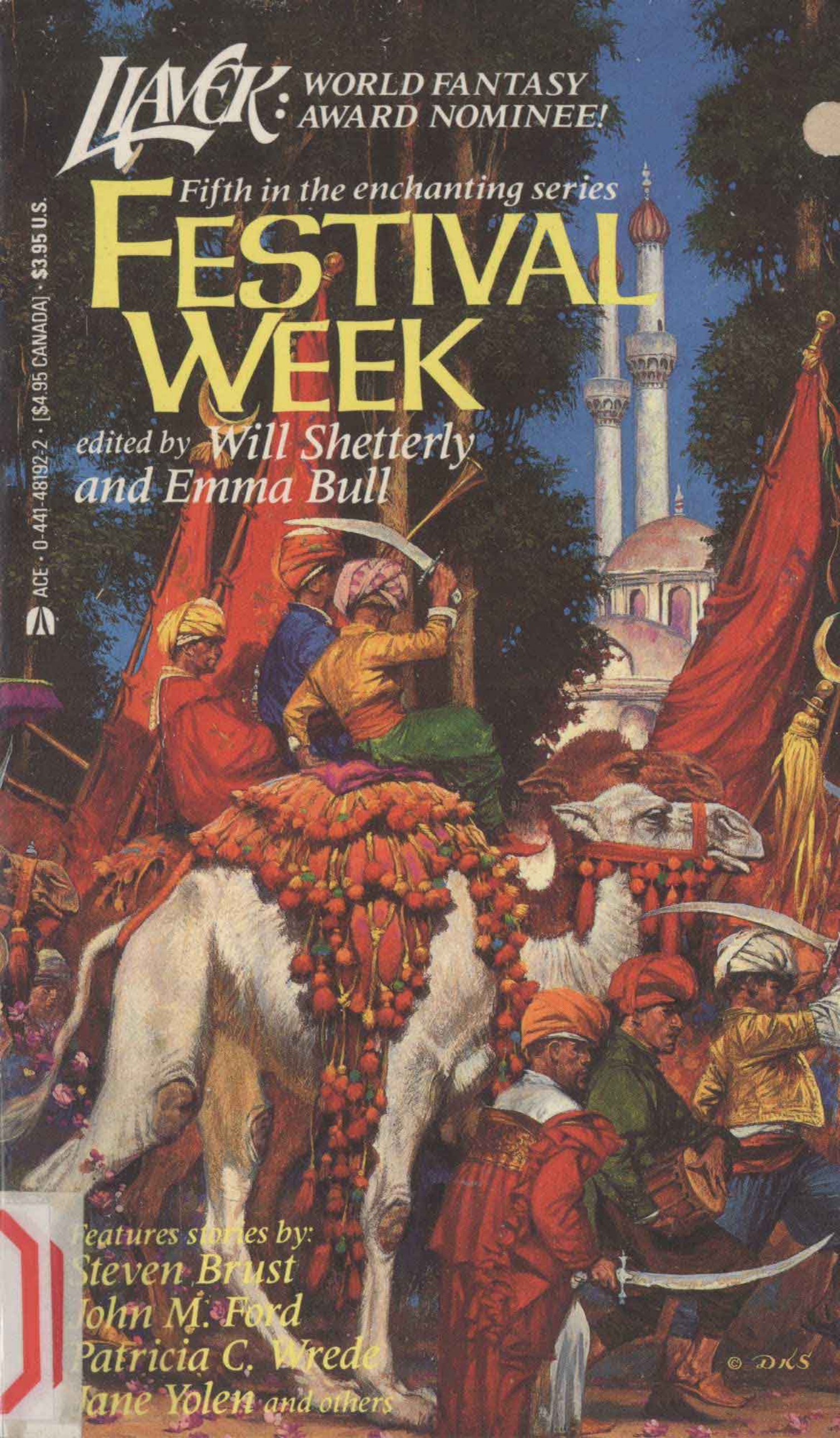
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FESTIVAL WEEK

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**FESTIVAL
WEEK**

*edited by Will Shetterly
and Emma Bull*



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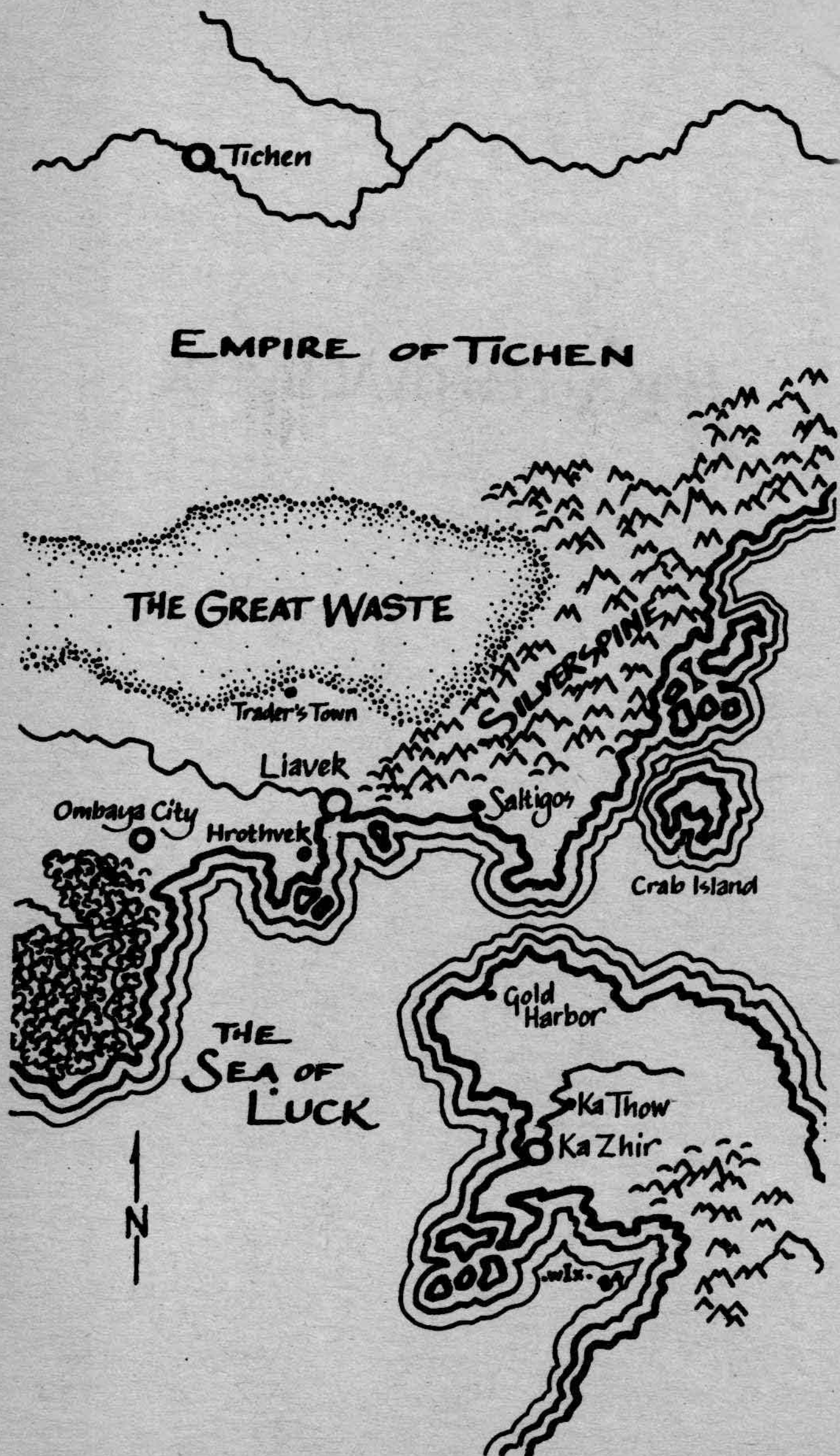
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**To you—all of you—who have
spent your holidays with us in Liavek**

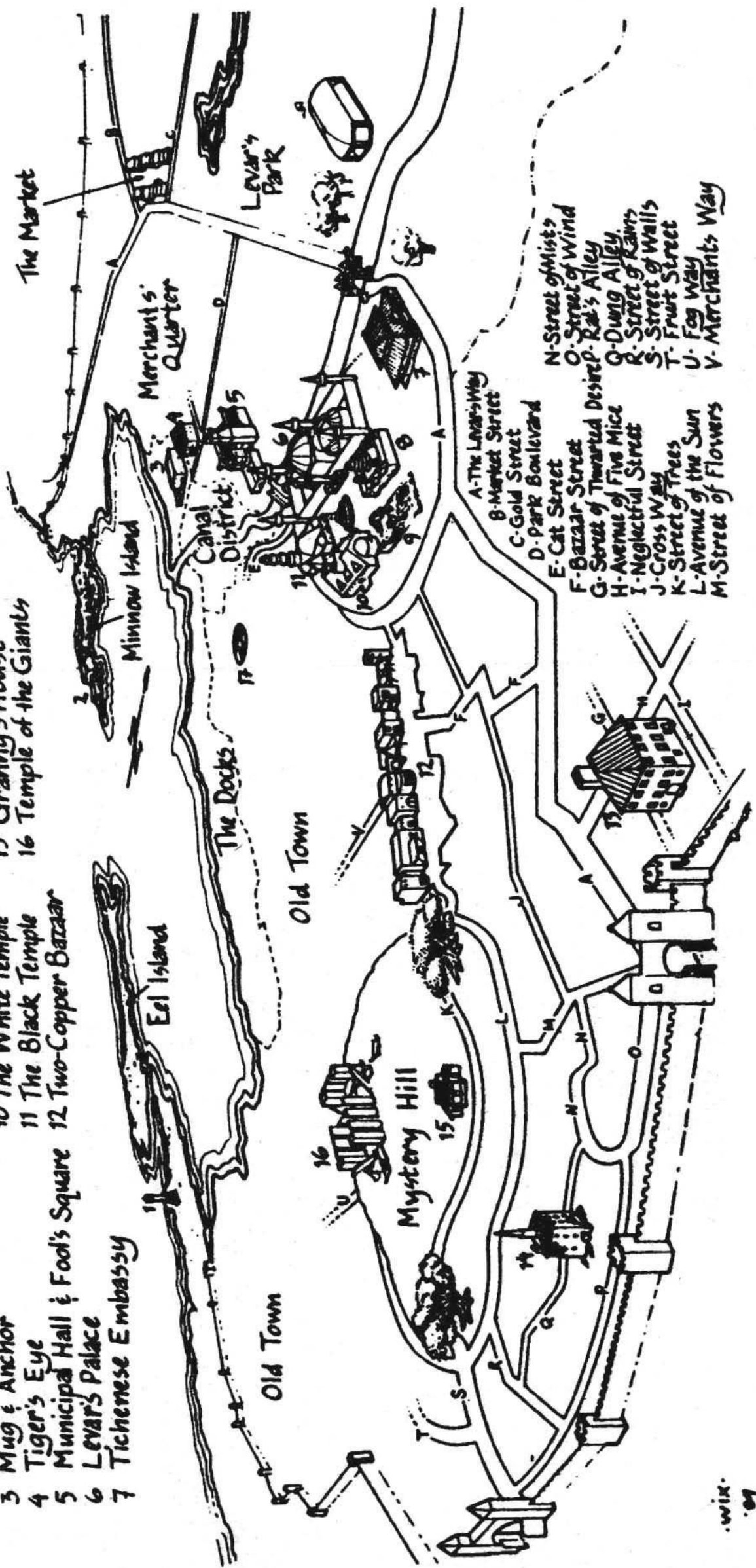
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13 House of Responsible Life 17 Wizard's Row (usually)

- 8 The Red Temple
- 9 The Gold Temple Ruins
- 10 The White Temple
- 11 The Black Temple
- 12 Two-Copper Bazaar

- 1 Salt Point Lighthouse
- 2 Fin Castle
- 3 Mug & Anchor
- 4 Tiger's Eye
- 5 Municipal Hall & Food's Square
- 6 Levar's Palace
- 7 Tichenese Embassy



- N-Street of Mists
- O-Street of Wind
- P-Rak's Alley
- Q-Dung Alley
- R-Street of Rams
- S-Street of Walls
- T-Fruit Street
- U-Fog Way
- V-Merchants Way
- A-The Lanes-Way
- B-Market Street
- C-Gold Street
- D-Park Boulevard
- E-Cat Street
- F-Bazaar Street
- G-Street of Twisted Desire
- H-Avenue of Five Mice
- I-Neglectful Street
- J-Cross Way
- K-Street of Trees
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THE FLEEING YEAR



Consequences

by Walter Jon Williams

WHITE SAILS CUT precise arcs against a background of vivid color: green sea, blue sky, black volcanic sand. Spindrift shone like diamonds as it spattered over the weather rail. *Birdwing* heeled in the strong gust; timber and cordage groaned as they took the strain. Captain Derec SuPashto adjusted his stance to the increased tilt of the deck: his mind was on other things.

Birdwing and its convoy was about to be attacked by the Liavekan navy.

"My compliments to the ship's wizard, Facer," he said. "Ask him if he can veer this wind two or four points."

"Sir."

A veering wind would be useful, Derec thought, if Levett could conjure one up. But whatever happened, let it stay strong.

"Starboard a point, Sandor."

"Starboard a point, aye aye."

"Break out our colors, SuKrone."

"Sir."

Derec's first reaction on seeing the three Liavekan warships was not one of anxiety, but rather relief. *Birdwing* would finally have a chance to prove itself to Ka Zhir, and that chance was desperately needed.

As the streaming black-and-gold Zhir ensign broke out overhead, Derec studied the enemy with narrowed eyes: three bright ships on a shallow sea the color of green baize. The lead galleass was a big one, thirty oars or more per side, white foam curling

from its massive ramming prow. It was painted purple with scarlet trim; a rear admiral's blue pennant fluttered from its maintop and gold leaf winked from the carved arabesques that decorated the stern. The second galleass, three cables astern, was smaller and lighter, its rigging more delicate: it would be at a disadvantage in this strong wind, this choppy sea. It hadn't been painted; its sides were the bright color of varnished wood. Astern of the second enemy was a small xebec—its military value was negligible unless it could get under an enemy's stern in a dead calm, in which case it could pound away with its bow chaser until its opponent was nothing but driftwood. Likely it served as a tender, or was used for chasing down unarmed merchantmen. Derec's impulse was to discount it.

A brave sight, these three, on the green ocean. They seemed entirely in their element.

Derec knew that appearances were deceiving.

He wondered what the Liavekan admiral was thinking as he stood on his fine gingerbread poop. The Liavekan squadron had been lurking along the coast between Ka Zhir and Gold Harbor for the obvious purpose of attacking a convoy: and now a convoy had appeared, twelve caravels and two huge carracks, all crammed to the gunnels with trade goods. The Liavekan squadron, waiting behind a barren, palm-covered islet, had duly sprung their ambush and were now driving toward their prey. But what in hell, they must wonder, was the escort?

A ship of *Birdwing's* type had never been seen in these waters. The stout masts and heavy standing rigging marked her as northern-built, a Farlander ship able to stand up to winter gales in the high latitudes, but even in the north she would cut an odd figure. She was too narrow, flat-sided, and low for a carrack. The forward-tilting mainmast and bonaventure mizzen would have marked her as a galleon, but if she was a galleon, where were the high fore- and sterncastles? And where were the billowing, baglike square sails the Liavekans had come to associate with those heavy, sluggish northern ships? *Birdwing's* square sails were cut flat, curved gently like a bird's wing, hence her name.

To the Liavekan admiral, Derec wondered, how did this all add up? A galleon with its upper decks razed, perhaps, in an effort to make it lighter, and furthermore cursed with an eccentric sailmaker. Some kind of bastard ship at any rate, neither

fish nor fowl, with a broadside to beware of, but a military value easily enough discounted. Everyone knew that northern ships couldn't sail to weather—unlike the oar-driven galleys and galleasses of the Levar's navy, galleons were doomed to sail only downwind. And the Liavekan's tactics were clearly aimed at getting the escort to leeward of its convoy, where it couldn't possibly sail upwind again to protect it.

You're in for a surprise, milord admiral, Derec thought. Because *Birdwing* is going to make those wormy hulks of yours obsolete, and all in the next turn of the glass.

"Wizard's compliments, sir." Lt. Facer had returned, sunlight winking from his polished brass earrings; he held his armored cap at the salute. "He might venture a spell to veer the wind, but it would take twenty minutes or more."

Within twenty minutes they'd be in gunshot. Weather spells were delicate things, consuming enormous amounts of power to shift the huge kinetic energies that made up a wind front, and often worked late or not at all.

"Compliments to the wizard, Facer. Tell him we'll make do with the wind we've got."

"Sir." Facer dropped his hat back on his peeling, sunburned head. For a sailor he had a remarkably delicate complexion, and these southern latitudes made things worse: his skin was forever turning red and flaking off. He was openly envious of Derec's adaptation to the climate: the sun had just browned the captain's skin and bleached his graying hair almost white.

Facer turned and took two steps toward the poop companionway, then stopped. "Sir," he said. "I think our convoy has just seen the enemy."

"Right. Cut along, Facer."

"Sir."

The Zhir convoy, arrayed in a ragged line just downwind of *Birdwing*, was now showing belated signs of alarm. Five minutes had passed before any of them noticed an entire enemy squadron sweeping up from two miles away. Derec had no illusions about the quality of the merchant captains: the convoy would scatter like chaff before a hailstorm. None of them were capable of outrunning a squadron of warships: their only chance was to scatter in all directions and hope only a few would fall victim to the enemy. Still, Derec should probably try to do

something, at least to show the Zhir he'd tried to protect their cities' shipping.

"Signal to the convoy, Randem," he said. "Close up, then tack simultaneously."

The boy's look was disbelieving. "As you like, sir."

Derec gave him a wry grin. "For form's sake, Randem."

"Aye aye, sir. For form's sake."

Signal flags rose on the halyards, but none of the convoy bothered an acknowledgment: the merchanters had no confidence in the ship's fighting abilities and were looking out for themselves. Derec shrugged. This was nothing more than he expected. At least they were clearing out and leaving an empty sea between *Birdwing* and the enemy.

Birdwing gave a shuddering roll as it staggered down the face of a wave; Derec swayed to compensate and almost lost his balance. His heavy breastplate and helmet were adding unaccustomed weight to his upper body. The helmet straps were pressing uncomfortably on his brass earrings, and the helmet was warming in the sun, turning into an oven.

Carefully Derec calculated his course and the enemy's. The wind was holding a point north of west: the convoy had been moving roughly north along the general trend of land. The enemy squadron was racing under oars and sail as close to the wind as their characteristics permitted: they were trying to gain as much westing as possible so as not to be pinned between *Birdwing* and the coast. Their course was more or less northwest: *Birdwing* was moving nor'-nor' east on a converging tack. Unless something prevented it, the ships would brush at the intersection of their paths; and then the enemy would be to windward of the *Birdwing*, which was just where they wanted to be.

At which point, Derec thought confidently, they were going to suffer a terrible surprise.

Birdwing's crew were already at quarters; they'd been doing a gun drill when the enemy appeared. There was nothing to do but wait.

"Wizard's compliments, sir." Facer was back, his leather-and-iron cap doffed at the salute. "The enemy is attempting a spell."

"Thank you, Facer." Suddenly the brisk warm breeze blew chill on Derec's neck. He turned to face the enemy, touched

his amulet of Thurn Bel, and summoned his power.

Awareness flooded his mind. He could feel the protective shields that Levett, *Birdwing's* wizard, had wound around the ship; from eastward he could feel a strong attempt to penetrate those shields. Derec called his power to him, but held it in reserve in case the onslaught was a feint. The attack faded grudgingly before Levett's persistent defense, then disappeared. Whatever it was, the probe had failed. Levett's protective spells remained intact, on guard.

That was the strategy Derec and Levett had formed weeks ago. The wizard's magic would remain defensive, and *Birdwing's* bronze cannon would bring the war to the enemy.

Derec let his hand fall from his amulet. He saw his officers standing around him expectantly; he gave them a smile. "Done," he said. "We're safe for the moment." He saw them breathe easier.

He looked at the enemy. Brightness winked from the enemy's decks: marines in their polished armor. He could hear the thud of kettledrums and crash of cymbals as the enemy quartermasters beat time for the rowers. A mile to leeward, in deeper, bluer water now, the galleasses were laboring in the steep sea, the smaller one having a particularly hard time of it.

Derec's awareness tingled: the enemy wizard was making another attempt. Derec monitored the assault and Levett's efforts to parry it. Once again the enemy was repulsed.

There was a flash from the flagship's fo'c'sle, then a gush of blue smoke that the wind tore into streamers across her bows. The thud came a half second later, followed by a shrieking iron ball that passed a half cable to larboard. The range was long for gunshot from the pitching deck of a ship beating to windward. Jeers rose from *Birdwing's* crew.

Another thud, this time from the smaller galleass, followed by another miss, this one coming close to clipping *Birdwing's* stern. The enemy were giving their gun crews something to do, Derec thought, rather than stand and think about what might come, their own possible mutilation and death.

There was a bump and a mild bang from *Birdwing's* main-deck, followed by a hoarse bellow. Derec stepped forward to peer over the poop rail; he saw one of the marines had stumbled and dropped his firelock, and the thing had gone off. Marcoyn, the giant marine lieutenant, jerked the man to his feet and

smashed him in the face. The marine staggered down the gangway, arms windmilling: Marcoyn followed, driving another punch into the marine's face. Derec clenched his teeth. Hatred roiled in his belly.

"Marcoyn!" he bellowed. The lieutenant looked up at him, his pale eyes savage under the brim of his boarding helmet. His victim clutched the hammock nettings and moaned.

"No interference with the sojers!" Marcoyn roared. "We agreed that, *Captain!*" He almost spat the word.

Derec bit back his anger. "I was going to suggest, Marcoyn, that you blacken the man's eyes later. We may need him in this fight."

"I'll do more than blacken his eyes, by Thurn Bel!"

"Do as you think best, Marcoyn." Derec spoke as tactfully as possible; but still he held Marcoyn's eyes until the marine turned away, muttering under his breath, his fists clenched at the ends of his knotted arms.

Marcoyn's strange pale eyes never seemed to focus on anything, just glared out at the world with uncentered resentment. He was a brute, a drunk, illiterate, and very likely mad, but he represented an element of *Birdwing's* crew that Derec couldn't do without. Marcoyn was the living penalty, Derec thought, for the crimes he had committed for the ship he loved.

Derec remembered Marcoyn's massive arms twisting the garrote around young Sempter's neck, the way the boy's eyes had started out of his head, feet kicking helplessly against the mizzen pinrail, shoes flying across the deck. Derec standing below, helpless to prevent it, his shoes tacky with Lt. Varga's blood . . .

His mouth dry, Derec glanced at the mizzen shrouds, then banished the memory from his mind. The enemy had fired their bow chasers once more.

The smaller galleass fired first this time, followed a half second later by the flagship. Interesting, Derec thought. The smaller ship had the better crew.

A strong gust heeled the galleon and drove it through the sea. The waves' reflection danced brightly on the enemy's lateen sails. The enemy squadron was half a mile away. If the ships continued on their present courses, *Birdwing* would soon be alongside the enemy flagship in a yardarm-to-yardarm fight, a situation ideal for the northern galleon.