

The #1 *New York Times* Bestseller

NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE
FROM TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX!



ERAGON

CHRISTOPHER PAOLINI

ERAGON



Christopher Paolini



Published by Laurel-Leaf
an imprint of Random House Children's Books
a division of Random House, Inc.
New York

Sale of this book without a front cover may be unauthorized. If the book is coverless, it may have been reported to the publisher as "unsold or destroyed" and neither the author nor the publisher may have received payment for it.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Text copyright © 2002, 2003 by Christopher Paolini
"ERAGON" film artwork copyright © 2006 by Twentieth Century Fox
Film Corporation

Illustrations on pages ii–iii, iv copyright © 2002 by Christopher Paolini

All rights reserved.

Originally published in different form by Paolini International LLC in 2002. This edition was originally published in slightly different form in hardcover in 2003 and subsequently in paperback in 2005 by Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York. This edition published by arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers.

Laurel-Leaf and colophon are registered trademarks of Random House, Inc.

www.randomhouse.com/teens

Educators and librarians, for a variety of teaching tools,
visit us at www.randomhouse.com/teachers

RL: 7.0

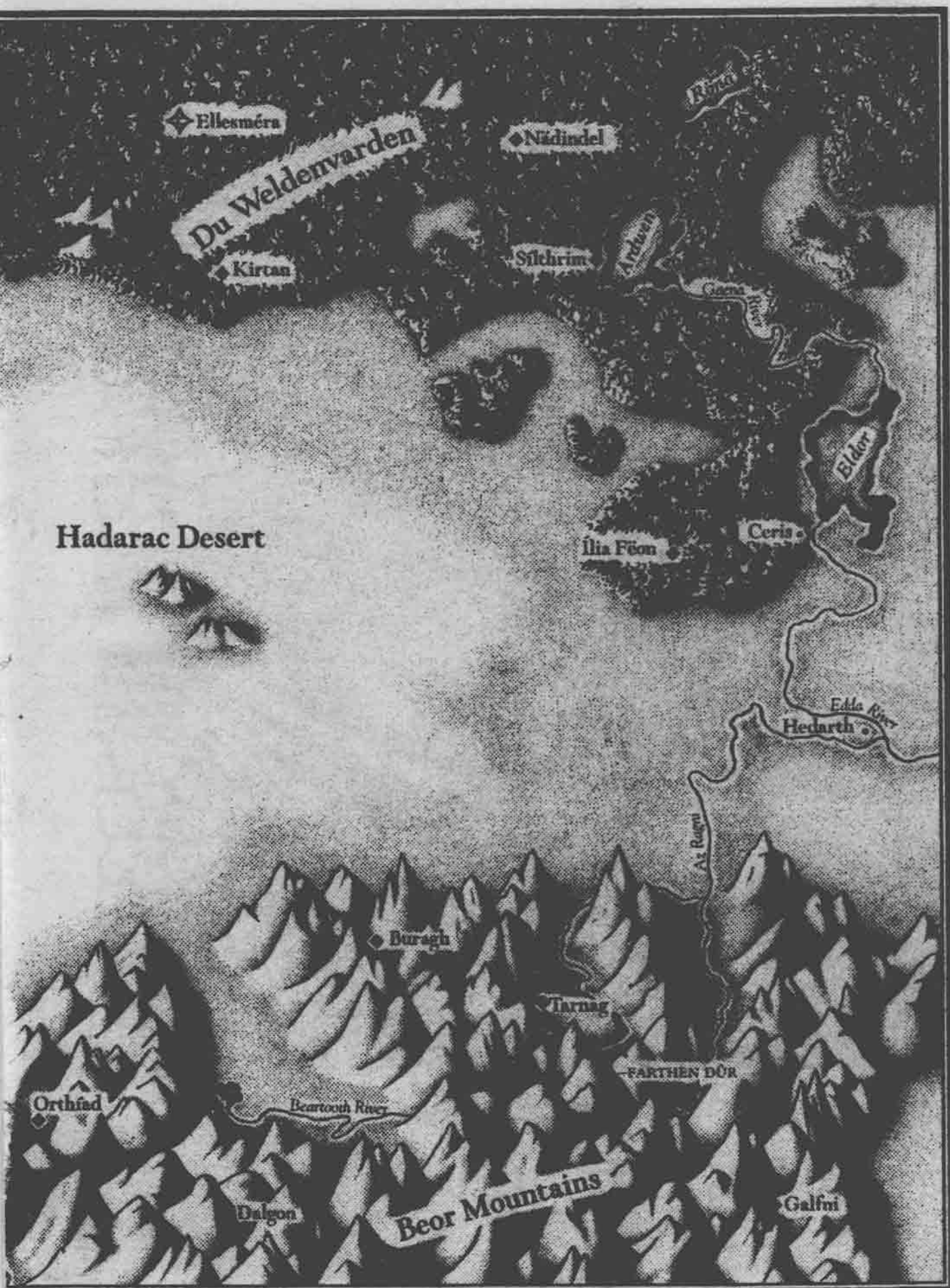
ISBN-13: 978-0-440-23848-5

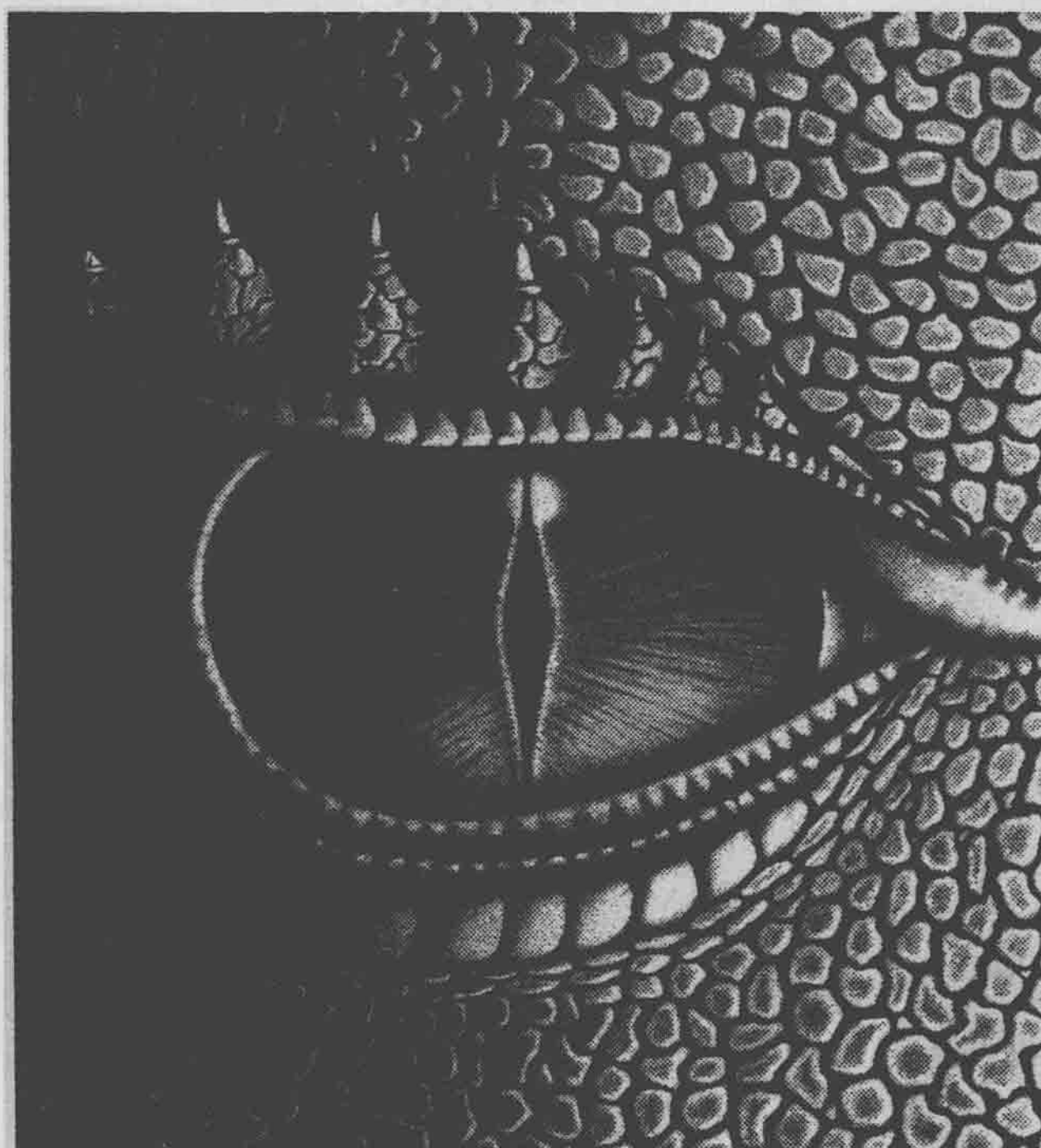
ISBN-10: 0-440-23848-X

October 2006

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1





*This book is dedicated to my mom,
for showing me the magic in the world;
to my dad, for revealing the man behind the curtain.
And also to my sister, Angela, for helping when I'm "blue."*

CONTENTS

Prologue: Shade of Fear.....	1
Discovery	8
Palancar Valley	12
Dragon Tales	27
Fate's Gift	51
Awakening.....	55
Tea for Two	68
A Name of Power.....	82
A Miller-to-Be	87
Strangers in Carvahall.....	91
Flight of Destiny	102
The Doom of Innocence.....	109
Deathwatch	119
The Madness of Life	132
A Rider's Blade	134
Saddlemaking	157
Therinsford.....	162

Thunder Roar and Lightning Crackle	180
Revelation at Yazuac	189
Admonishments.....	198
Magic Is the Simplest Thing	209
Daret.....	222
Through a Dragon's Eye	235
A Song for the Road	247
A Taste of Teirm.....	252
An Old Friend	260
The Witch and the Werecat.....	289
Of Reading and Plots.....	306
Thieves in the Castle.....	310
A Costly Mistake.....	322
Vision of Perfection	341
Master of the Blade	350
The Mire of Dras-Leona.....	359
Trail of Oil	365
Worshippers of Helgrind	372
The Ra'zac's Revenge.....	385
Murtagh	389
Legacy of a Rider.....	397
Diamond Tomb	404
Capture at Gil'ead	415

Du Sundavar Freohr	428
Fighting Shadows	438
A Warrior and a Healer	452
Water from Sand.....	463
The Ramr River	474
The Hadarac Desert	484
A Path Revealed	493
A Clash of Wills.....	507
Flight Through the Valley	517
The Horns of a Dilemma	539
Hunting for Answers.....	553
The Glory of Tronjheim	574
Ajihad	588
Bless the Child, Argetlam	615
Mandrake Root and Newt's Tongue.....	634
Hall of the Mountain King	643
Arya's Test	664
The Shadows Lengthen	684
Battle Under Farthen Dûr	702
The Mourning Sage	722
Pronunciation Guide and Glossary	732
Acknowledgments	739
A Special Preview of <i>Eldest</i>	743

PROLOGUE: SHADE OF FEAR

Wind howled through the night, carrying a scent that would change the world. A tall Shade lifted his head and sniffed the air. He looked human except for his crimson hair and maroon eyes.

1

He blinked in surprise. The message had been correct: they were here. Or was it a trap? He weighed the odds, then said icily, "Spread out; hide behind trees and bushes. Stop whoever is coming . . . or die."

Around him shuffled twelve Urgals with short swords and round iron shields painted with black symbols. They resembled men with bowed legs and thick, brutish arms made for crushing. A pair of twisted horns grew above their small ears. The monsters hurried into the brush, grunting as they hid. Soon the rustling quieted and the forest was silent again.

The Shade peered around a thick tree and looked up the trail. It was too dark for any human to see, but for him the faint moonlight was like sunshine streaming between the trees; every detail was clear and sharp to his searching gaze. He remained unnaturally quiet, a long pale sword in his hand. A wire-thin scratch curved down the blade. The weapon was thin enough to slip between a pair of ribs, yet stout enough to hack through the hardest armor.

2 The Urgals could not see as well as the Shade; they groped like blind beggars, fumbling with their weapons. An owl screeched, cutting through the silence. No one relaxed until the bird flew past. Then the monsters shivered in the cold night; one snapped a twig with his heavy boot. The Shade hissed in anger, and the Urgals shrank back, motionless. He suppressed his distaste—they smelled like fetid meat—and turned away. They were tools, nothing more.

The Shade forced back his impatience as the minutes became hours. The scent must have wafted far ahead of its owners. He did not let the Urgals get up or warm themselves. He denied himself those luxuries, too, and stayed behind the tree, watching the trail. Another gust of wind rushed through the forest. The smell was stronger this time. Excited, he lifted a thin lip in a snarl.

“Get ready,” he whispered, his whole body vibrating. The tip of his sword moved in small cir-

cles. It had taken many plots and much pain to bring himself to this moment. It would not do to lose control now.

Eyes brightened under the Urgals' thick brows, and the creatures gripped their weapons tighter. Ahead of them, the Shade heard a clink as something hard struck a loose stone. Faint smudges emerged from the darkness and advanced down the trail.

Three white horses with riders cantered toward the ambush, their heads held high and proud, their coats rippling in the moonlight like liquid silver.

On the first horse was an elf with pointed ears and elegantly slanted eyebrows. His build was slim but strong, like a rapier. A powerful bow was slung on his back. A sword pressed against his side opposite a quiver of arrows fletched with swan feathers.

3

The last rider had the same fair face and angled features as the other. He carried a long spear in his right hand and a white dagger at his belt. A helm of extraordinary craftsmanship, wrought with amber and gold, rested on his head.

Between these two rode a raven-haired elven lady, who surveyed her surroundings with poise. Framed by long black locks, her deep eyes shone with a driving force. Her clothes were unadorned, yet her beauty was undiminished. At her side was a sword, and on her back a long bow with a quiver.

She carried in her lap a pouch that she frequently looked at, as if to reassure herself that it was still there.

One of the elves spoke quietly, but the Shade could not hear what was said. The lady answered with obvious authority, and her guards switched places. The one wearing the helm took the lead, shifting his spear to a readier grip. They passed the Shade's hiding place and the first few Urgals without suspicion.

4 The Shade was already savoring his victory when the wind changed direction and swept toward the elves, heavy with the Urgals' stench. The horses snorted with alarm and tossed their heads. The riders stiffened, eyes flashing from side to side, then wheeled their mounts around and galloped away.

The lady's horse surged forward, leaving her guards far behind. Forsaking their hiding, the Urgals stood and released a stream of black arrows. The Shade jumped out from behind the tree, raised his right hand, and shouted, "Garjzla!"

A red bolt flashed from his palm toward the elven lady, illuminating the trees with a bloody light. It struck her steed, and the horse toppled with a high-pitched squeal, plowing into the ground chest-first. She leapt off the animal with inhuman speed, landed lightly, then glanced back for her guards.

The Urgals' deadly arrows quickly brought

down the two elves. They fell from the noble horses, blood pooling in the dirt. As the Urgals rushed to the slain elves, the Shade screamed, "After her! She is the one I want!" The monsters grunted and rushed down the trail.

A cry tore from the elf's lips as she saw her dead companions. She took a step toward them, then cursed her enemies and bounded into the forest.

While the Urgals crashed through the trees, the Shade climbed a piece of granite that jutted above them. From his perch he could see all of the surrounding forest. He raised his hand and uttered, "Istalrí boetk!" and a quarter-mile section of the forest exploded into flames. Grimly he burned one section after another until there was a ring of fire, a half-league across, around the ambush site. The flames looked like a molten crown resting on the forest. Satisfied, he watched the ring carefully, in case it should falter.

The band of fire thickened, contracting the area the Urgals had to search. Suddenly, the Shade heard shouts and a coarse scream. Through the trees he saw three of his charges fall in a pile, mortally wounded. He caught a glimpse of the elf running from the remaining Urgals.

She fled toward the craggy piece of granite at a tremendous speed. The Shade examined the ground twenty feet below, then jumped and landed nimbly in front of her. She skidded

around and sped back to the trail. Black Urgal blood dripped from her sword, staining the pouch in her hand.

The horned monsters came out of the forest and hemmed her in, blocking the only escape routes. Her head whipped around as she tried to find a way out. Seeing none, she drew herself up with regal disdain. The Shade approached her with a raised hand, allowing himself to enjoy her helplessness.

“Get her.”

6 As the Urgals surged forward, the elf pulled open the pouch, reached into it, and then let it drop to the ground. In her hands was a large sapphire stone that reflected the angry light of the fires. She raised it over her head, lips forming frantic words. Desperate, the Shade barked, “Garjzła!”

A ball of red flame sprang from his hand and flew toward the elf, fast as an arrow. But he was too late. A flash of emerald light briefly illuminated the forest, and the stone vanished. Then the red fire smote her and she collapsed.

The Shade howled in rage and stalked forward, flinging his sword at a tree. It passed halfway through the trunk, where it stuck, quivering. He shot nine bolts of energy from his palm—which killed the Urgals instantly—then ripped his sword free and strode to the elf.

Prophecies of revenge, spoken in a wretched

language only he knew, rolled from his tongue. He clenched his thin hands and glared at the sky. The cold stars stared back, unwinking, otherworldly watchers. Disgust curled his lip before he turned back to the unconscious elf.

Her beauty, which would have entranced any mortal man, held no charm for him. He confirmed that the stone was gone, then retrieved his horse from its hiding place among the trees. After tying the elf onto the saddle, he mounted the charger and made his way out of the woods.

He quenched the fires in his path but left the rest to burn.

DISCOVERY

8

Eragon knelt in a bed of trampled reed grass and scanned the tracks with a practiced eye. The prints told him that the deer had been in the meadow only a half-hour before. Soon they would bed down. His target, a small doe with a pronounced limp in her left forefoot, was still with the herd. He was amazed she had made it so far without a wolf or bear catching her.

The sky was clear and dark, and a slight breeze stirred the air. A silvery cloud drifted over the mountains that surrounded him, its edges glowing with ruddy light cast from the harvest moon cradled between two peaks. Streams flowed down the mountains from stolid glaciers and glistening snowpacks. A brooding mist crept along the valley's floor, almost thick enough to obscure his feet.

Eragon was fifteen, less than a year from man-