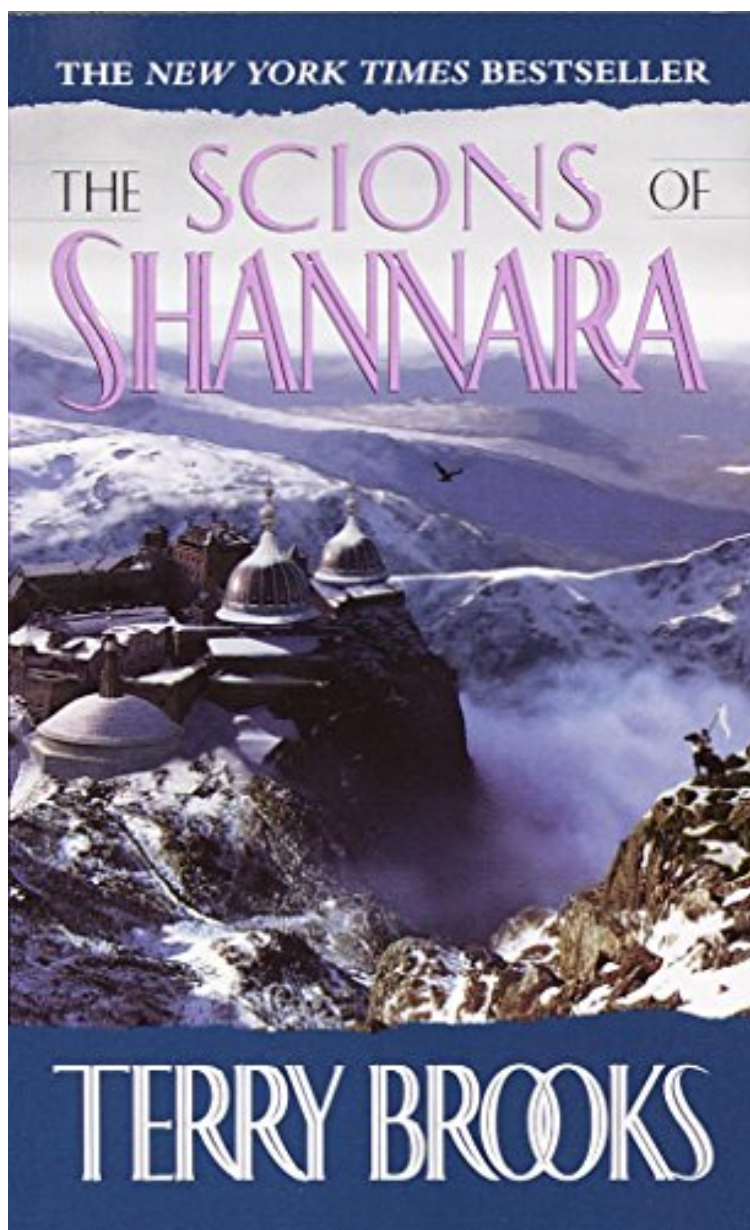


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# The Scions of Shannara



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The old man sat alone in the shadow of the Dragon's Teeth and watched the coming darkness chase the daylight west. The day had been cool, unusually so for midsummer, and the night promised to be chill. Scattered clouds masked the sky, casting their silhouettes upon the earth, drifting in the manner of aimless beasts between moon and stars. A hush filled the emptiness left by the fading light like a voice waiting to speak. It was a hush that whispered of magic, the old man thought. A fire burned before him, small still, just the beginning of what was needed. After all, he would be gone for several hours. He studied the fire with a mixture of expectation and uneasiness before reaching down to add the larger chunks of deadwood that brought the flames up quickly. He poked at it with a stick, then stepped away, driven back by the heat. He stood at the edge of the light, caught between the fire and the growing dark, a creature who might have belonged to neither or both. His eyes glittered as he looked off into the distance. The peaks of the Dragon's Teeth jutted skyward like bones the earth could not contain. There was a hush to the mountains, a secrecy that clung like mist on a frosty morning and hid all the dreams of the ages. The fire sparked sharply and the old man brushed at a stray bit of glowing ash that threatened to settle on him. He was just a bundle of sticks, loosely tied together, that might crumble into dust if a strong wind were to blow. Gray robes and a forest cloak hung on him as they would have on a scarecrow. His skin was leathery and brown and had shrunk close against his bones. White hair and beard wreathed his head, thin and fine, like wisps of gauze against the firelight. He was so wrinkled and hunched down that he looked to be a hundred years old. He was, in fact, almost a thousand. Strange, he thought suddenly, remembering his years. Paranon, the Councils of the Races, even the Druids--gone. Strange that he should have outlasted them all. He shook his head. It was so long ago, so far back in time that it was apart of his life he only barely recognized. He had thought that part finished, gone forever. He had thought himself free. But he had never been that, he guessed. It wasn't possible to be free of something that, at the very least, was responsible for the fact that he was still alive. How else, after all, save for the Druid Sleep, could he still be standing there? He shivered against the descending night, darkness all about him now as the last of the sunlight slipped below the horizon. It was time. The dreams had told him it must be now, and he believed the dreams because he understood them. That, too, was a part of his old life that would not let him go. "O dreams, visions of worlds beyond worlds, of warnings and truths, of things that could and sometimes must be. He stepped away from the fire and started up the narrow pathway into the rocks. Shadows closed about him, their touch chill. He walked for a long time, winding through narrow defiles, scrambling past massive boulders, angling along craggy drops and jagged splits in the rock. When he emerged again into the light, he stood within a shallow, rock-strewn valley dominated by a lake whose glassy surface reflected back at him with a harsh, greenish cast. The lake was the resting place for the shades of Druids come and gone. It was to the Hades horn that he had been summoned. "Might as well get on with it,?" he growled softly. He walked slowly, cautiously downward into the valley, his steps uneasy, his heart pounding in his ears. He had been away a long time. The waters before him did not stir; the shades lay sleeping. It was best that way, he thought. It was best that they not be disturbed. He reached the lake's edge and stopped. All was silent. He took a deep breath, the air rattling from his chest as he exhaled like dry leaves blown across stone. He fumbled at his waist for a pouch and loosened its drawstrings. Carefully he reached within and drew out a handful of black powder laced with silver sparkle. He hesitated, then threw it into the air over the lake. The powder exploded skyward with a strange light that brightened the air about him as if it were day again. There was no heat, only light. It shimmered and danced against the nighttime like a living thing. The old man watched, robes and forest cloak pulled close, eyes bright with the reflected glow. He rocked back and forth slightly and for a moment felt young again. Then a shadow appeared suddenly in the light, lifting out of it like a wraith, a black form that might have been something strayed from the darkness beyond. But the old man knew better. This was nothing strayed; this was something called. The shadow tightened and took shape. It was the shade of a man cloaked all in black, a tall and forbidding apparition that anyone who had ever seen before would have recognized at once. "So, Allanon,?" the old man whispered. The hooded face tilted back so that the light revealed the dark, harsh features clearly. "O the angular bearded face, the long thin nose and mouth, the fierce brow that might have been cast of iron, the eyes beneath that seemed to look directly into the soul. The eyes found the old man and held him fast.--I need you--The voice was a whisper in the old man's mind, a hiss of dissatisfaction and urgency. The shade communicated by using thoughts alone. The old man shrank back momentarily, wishing that the thing he had called would instead be gone. Then he recovered himself and stood firm before his fears. "I am no longer one of you! aO? he snapped, his own eyes narrowing dangerously, forgetting that it was not necessary to speak aloud. aOe You cannot

command me!"--I do not command. I request. Listen to me. You are all that is left, the last that may be until my successor is found. Do you understand--The old man laughed nervously. "Understand? Ha! Who understands better than me?"--A part of you will always be what once you would not have questioned. The magic stays within you. Always. Help me. I send the dreams and the Shannara children do not respond. Someone must go to them. Someone must make them see. You--"Not me! I have lived apart from the races for years now. I wish nothing more to do with their troubles!" The old man straightened his stick form and frowned. "OoeI shed myself of such nonsense long ago." The shade seemed to rise and broaden suddenly before him, and he felt himself lifted free of the earth. He soared skyward, far into the night. He did not struggle, but held himself firm, though he could feel the other's anger rushing through him like a black river. The shade's voice was the sound of bones grating.--Watcha--The Four Lands appeared, spread out before him, a panorama of grasslands, mountains, hills, lakes, forests, and rivers, bright swatches of earth colored by sunlight. He caught his breath to see it so clearly and from so far up in the sky, even knowing that it was only a vision. But the sunlight began to fade almost at once, the color to wash. Darkness closed about, filled with dull gray mist and sulfurous ash that rose from burned-out craters. The land lost its character and became barren and lifeless. He felt himself drift closer, repulsed as he descended by the sights and smells of it. Humans wandered the devastation in packs, more animals than men. They rent and tore at each other; they howled and shrieked. Dark shapes flitted among them, shadows that lacked substance yet had eyes of fire. The shadows moved through the humans, joining with them, becoming them, leaving them again. They moved in a dance that was macabre, yet purposeful. The shadows were devouring the humans, he saw. The shadows were feeding on them.--Watcha--The vision shifted. He saw himself then, a skeletal, ragged beggar facing a cauldron of strange white fire that bubbled and swirled and whispered his name. Vapors lifted from the cauldron and snaked their way down to where he stood, wrapping about him, caressing him as if he were their child. Shadows flitted all about, passing by at first, then entering him as if he were a hollow casing in which they might play as they chose. He could feel their touch; he wanted to scream.--Watch--The vision shifted once more. There was a huge forest and in the middle of the forest a great mountain. Atop the mountain sat a castle, old and weathered, towers and parapets rising up against the dark of the land. Paranor, he thought! It was Paranor come again! He felt something bright and hopeful well up within him, and he wanted to shout his elation. But the vapors were already coiling about the castle. The shadows were already flitting close. The ancient fortress began to crack and crumble, stone and mortar giving way as if caught in a vise. The earth shuddered and screams lifted from the humans become animals. Fire erupted out of the earth, splitting apart the mountain on which Paranor sat and then the castle itself. Wailing filled the air, the sound of one bereft of the only hope that had remained to him. The old man recognized the wailing as his own. Then the images were gone. He stood again before the Hadeshorn, in the shadow of the Dragon's Teeth, alone with the shade of Allanon. In spite of his resolve, he was shaking. The shade pointed at him.--It will be as I have shown you if the dreams are ignored. It will be so if you fail to act. You must help. Go to them! O the boy, the girl, and the Dark Uncle. Tell them the dreams are real. Tell them to come to me here on the first night of the new moon when the present cycle is complete. I will speak with them then--The old man frowned and muttered and worried his lower lip. His fingers once more drew tight the drawstrings to the pouch, and he shoved it back into his belt. "I will do so because there is no one else!" he said finally, spitting out the words in distaste. "But do not expect . . .!"--Only go to them. Nothing more is required. Nothing more will be asked. Go--The shade of Allanon shimmered brightly and disappeared. The light faded, and the valley was empty again. The old man stood looking out over the still waters of the lake for a moment, then turned away. The fire he had left behind still burned on his return, but it was small now and frail-looking against the night. The old man stared absently at the flames, then hunkered down before them. He stirred at the ashes already forming and listened to the silence of his thoughts. The boy, the girl, and the Dark Uncle--he knew them. They were the Shannara children, the ones who could save them all, the ones who could bring back the magic. He shook his grizzled head. How was he to convince them? If they would not heed Allanon, what chance that they would heed him? He saw again in his mind the frightening visions. He had best find a way to make them listen, he thought. Because, as he was fond of reminding himself, he knew something of visions, and there was a truth to these that even one such as he, one who had sworn the Druids and their magic, could recognize. If the Shannara children failed to listen, these visions would come to pass. From Publishers Weekly Generations after the events in the *The Wishsong of Shannara*, the most recent volume in Brooks's bestselling series, grave danger once again threatens the Four Lands. The Federation has conquered Callahorn, the other free men and the Dwarves, forbidding the practice of magic. The Druids and Elves have

disappeared, and Shadowenspelling OK? Yes sss , wraiths who suck out the lives and substance of other living things and take their forms, cast their dark influence everywhere. The ghost of the Druid Allanon summons three Ohmsfords, descendants of the protagonists of the earlier series, and gives each a quest to save their land. Par Ohmsford, who has inherited his family's gift of the wishsong, is told to find the long-lost Sword of Shannara. His uncle, recluse Walker Boh, is charged to find Paranor, the lost keeper?? of the Druids, and to restore the ancient order. Par's cousin, half-Rover Wren Ohmsford, is sent to bring back the Elves. In this first volume of a new series, the scions of Shannara--Par, his brother Collboth and friend Morgan Leah, the leader of the Dwarfish underground, Steff; and the leader of the human Movement, Padishar Creel--encounter danger and death in their quest for for the? the Sword. ( Mar. Copyright 1990

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