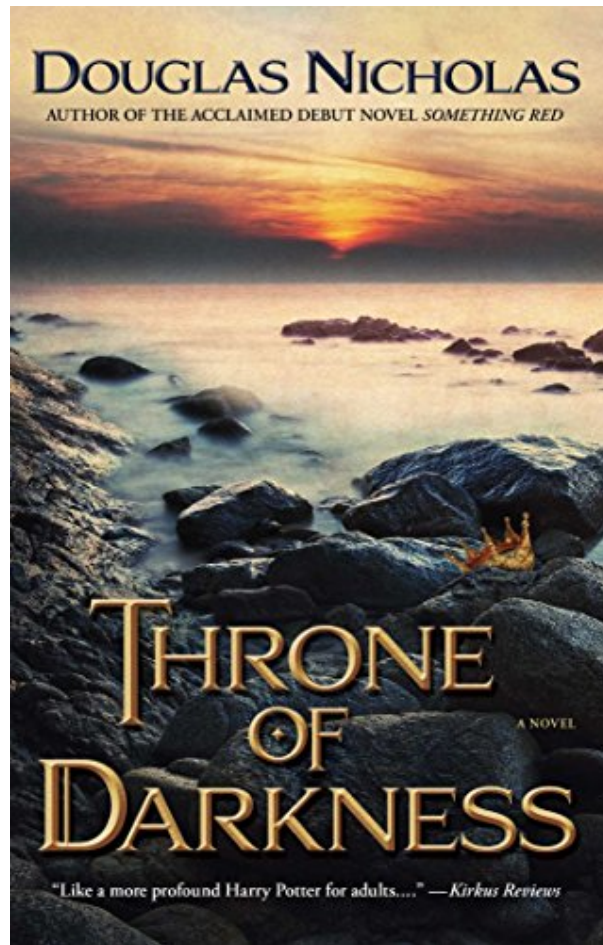
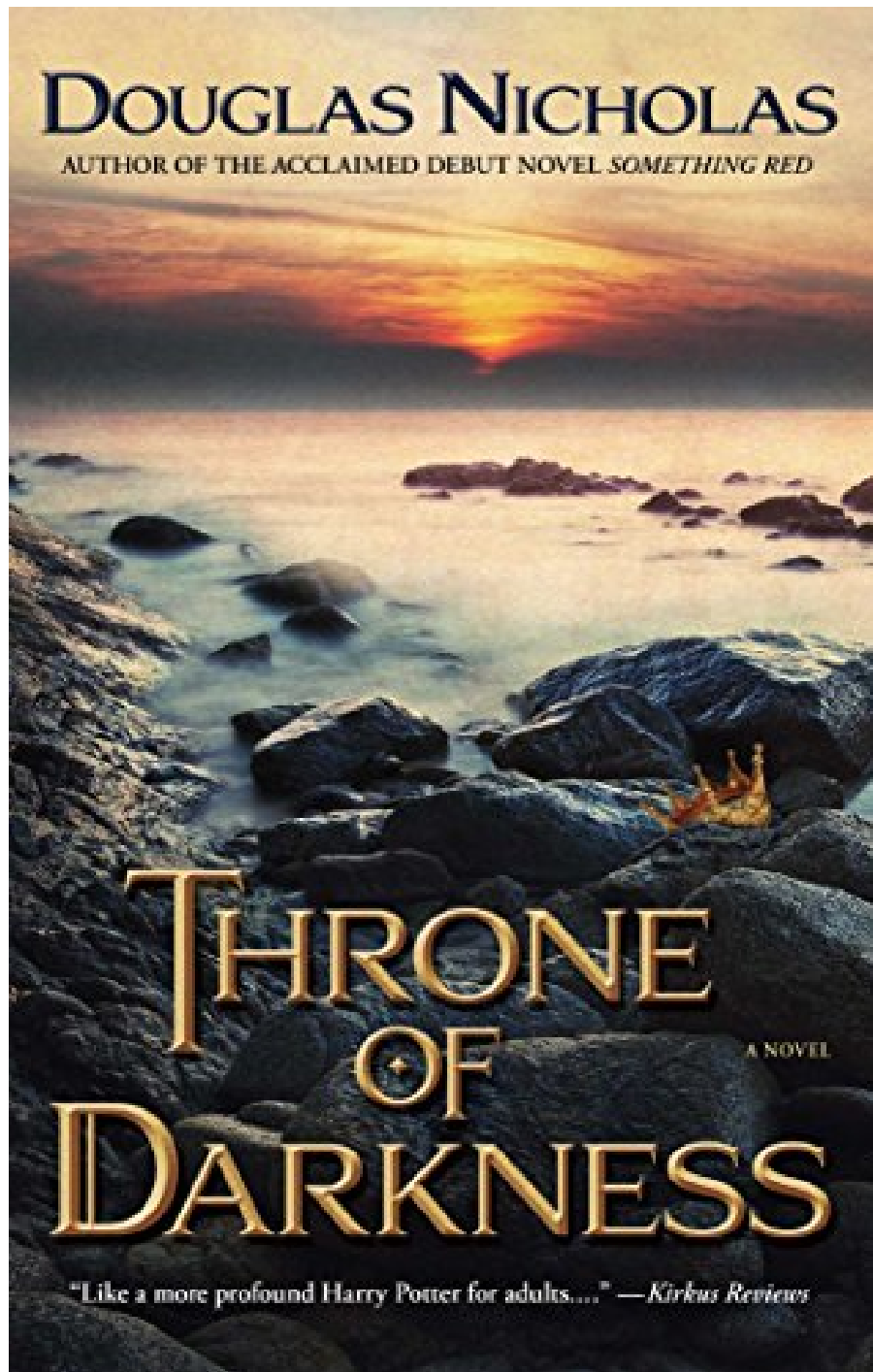


THRONE OF DARKNESS: A NOVEL BY DOUGLAS NICHOLAS



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Review

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Douglas Nicholas is an award-winning poet, whose work has appeared in numerous poetry journals, and the author of four previous books, including *Something Red* and *Iron Rose*, a collection of poems inspired by New York City. He lives in New York's Hudson Valley with his wife Theresa and Yorkshire terrier Tristan.

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The youth found himself facing a small band of grown men. The alley—just a walkway, really, between the two buildings—was so narrow that only two could come at him abreast, and he had an instant to take in an impression of several shadowy forms behind the two leaders. The one with the club was on Hob's left; beside him was a knifeman. Behind them were perhaps four others; perhaps five. The group, recovering from the failure of its ambush, was beginning to advance again, the ones in front gauging the danger the young man's dagger presented, the ones behind urging attack.

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Now Hob looked hard at the knifeman, on his right, and with a loud wordless cry ran at him. Three paces short of closing with the bravo, Hob sprang at the right-hand wall; his right foot struck it two feet above the alley dirt and he pushed off mightily, propelling himself leftward across the alley, landing in a crouch before the club-wielder. Hob's left hand came up to catch the man's wrist and check the cudgel's downward progress; his right hand also came up, up, the dagger-point leading, sliding beneath the man's rib cage, piercing his heart. The club-man froze, struck dead by this internal thunderbolt, and fell back, his body tangling in the legs of the men behind.

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But there was no chance of his living through an encounter with a half-dozen men. "Jack!" he bellowed, as loud as he could. At that moment the rearmost of his enemies gave a truncated yelp; his head was snapped partway around, and he toppled over onto his back. The group halted its advance, and the bravos turned to see what threatened them from the alley front, all except the lead knifeman, who did not dare take his eyes from Hob's blade, swaying this way and that, an adder preparing its strike.

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Hob's attacker, unnerved, allowed himself to be distracted, a fatal mistake. Hob lunged. His right leg went out before him, his knee bent; his right foot planted itself well ahead of his body; his right arm speared straight toward the man's throat, the outstretched dagger tearing into muscle, artery, windpipe: an irreparable injury, the door to death flung open. The bravo's eyes widened in horror; he dropped his own knife to grasp

his neck; he sank down, dying.

Hob looked about him. Jack stood in the middle of several men, one unconscious, the rest dead or dying in the mud of the alley. Beyond him, holding a cord of gray silk on which hung a gold coin, stood the grim form of Sinibaldo, "the shadow of the shadow of Innocent III," whom Hob and Jack had met only that morning.

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Perfect for fans of Game of Thrones, this novel from acclaimed author Douglas Nicholas continues the gripping dark fantasy series that Kirkus Reviews describes as “a more profound Harry Potter for adults.”

It's 1215 in northwest England—the eve of the signing of the Magna Carta—and mystical Irish queen Maeve and her unlikely band of warriors must protect the region from a chilling fate. Word of a threat reaches the Northern barons: King John has plotted to import an African sorcerer and his sinister clan of blacksmiths, whose unearthly powers may spell destruction for the entire kingdom. Along with her lover, Jack, her gifted niece, Nemain, and Nemain's newlywed husband, Hob (whose hidden talents will soon be revealed), Maeve must overcome a supernatural threat unlike any she's seen before.

With his characteristic blend of historical adventure and intoxicating mythological elements, Nicholas once again “goes for the throat...with brilliant writing and whip-smart plotting” (New York Times bestselling author Jonathan Maberry). This is a richly woven tale that will leave you hungry for more.

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- Number of items: 1
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- 352 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Still really good series, but needs some plot shake-ups to add interest.

By Judy Lesley

Throne of Darkness is the third book in this series following *Something Red: A Novel* and *The Wicked: A Novel*. It is now 1215 and our group has been contacted by a representative of Pope Innocent III with a secret mission he wants to commission Molly for. The roles of traveling musicians and healers will give Molly, Nemain, Hob, and Jack perfect access to carry out this mission, if they decide to aid His Holiness. King John is well aware that the nobles of northern England are in rebellion against him. His solution is to bring a supernatural force into his country to destroy all those who oppose him. This is evil on a large scale and the representative of the pope has made Molly an offer he thinks will convince her to accept. Molly, however, is an Irish Queen unable to return to her native land at this time so the forgiveness of the Catholic Church is not what motivates her. How will these two Irish Queens, Maeve (Molly) and her granddaughter Nemain, along with Hob, husband of Nemain, and Jack, Molly's lover, remove this powerful evil which King John has set in place against those who don't support him?

Interestingly enough, I received an e-ARC of this third novel through NetGalley before I had read either of the first two books. I was so intrigued by the description of *Throne of Darkness* that I decided to read the first two books before beginning this one. I was very impressed by both *Something Red* and *The Wicked* and gave both books a 5 star rating in reviews. Then I was ready to enjoy this one. And I did enjoy it, only not quite as much as the first two because by now the pattern of the storytelling was very familiar. The three novels are constructed in exactly the same way so by the time I got to this one it was obvious what would happen in which section of the book. I think new books in the series need to be set out in different ways to give readers the element of surprise and suspense to keep them (and me) from anticipating (and being correct about) the next move by the characters. I am very fond of all four of the principal characters and those returning from previous adventures are very welcome appearances, but something big needs to happen in the next book. I kept waiting throughout this novel for Hob to develop in a major way and yet it didn't happen. Plus, what happened to Jack in this story was never supposed to happen again. No explanation was given for that and I would have liked to see one.

This novel was still a very good reading experience for me; it just didn't knock my socks off. Readers new to the series can very easily begin here because enough background information is given so this story makes

complete sense but I am very glad I began this adventure by reading the books in order. I am looking forward to the fourth story in the series and will absolutely read that one too.

I received an e-ARC of this novel through NetGalley.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Third in Douglas Nicholas's Something Red series

By misplaced cajun

Molly and her troupe find themselves in an odd situation, conscripted by none other than the Roman Catholic Church to deal with issues involving King John. Seems the nation's ruler has enlisted the help of a sorcerer who leads a group of shapeshifters intent on ridding the country of John Lackland's northern enemies. These shapeshifters, two hundred in number, would decimate the northern lords, including Sir Jehan and Sir Odinnell. Having heard of their past deeds involving issues of a more otherworldly and evil nature, the Church hopes that Molly, Nemain, Jack, and Hob can rid the country of these monstrous beings and the magus who controls them. In exchange for their help, the Church's representative promises their support for Molly and also swears forgiveness of her heathen ways.

So Molly and all are blackmailed into service, so to speak. If they are successful in their task, Molly won't burn at the stake (according to the Pope's man) and if they aren't, they'll most certainly be dead anyway. But how can Molly and team refuse when to do so would greatly impact their friends and supporters in the north?

While Nicholas doesn't delve too deeply into the history of the time, *THRONE OF DARKNESS* is woven around the unease and restlessness of England in 1215 and the signing of the Magna Carta. King John (for those of us who can't keep the monarchies straight) is the very same of Robin Hood fame. He's also the king who lost Normandy to France causing all sorts of upheaval. And he did indeed war with Pope Innocent III but no mention of attempted alliances with Muslim nations.

There's quite a bit of folklore in *THRONE OF DARKNESS*, indeed in the series as a whole. The bouda, magical white cows, and of course the Irish mythology with Molly at it's center. For a book I'd been so greatly anticipating, *THRONE* did not disappoint. I had hoped, though, that we would finally get Molly's story in Ireland. Apparently that story is set for the fourth installment in the series.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

quick and pretty tightly written overall

By J. Hamby

Fast, quick and pretty tightly written overall, this is a nice follow up to the already strong pair of novels where Nicholas delivers novels with the right mix of wonder and ever so slightly creepy horror -- at times more unease and used so effectively by the author that I find it working much better than being bludgeoned with heavy handed scare tactics.

A few problems. Slight though, they hopefully will be addressed and fixed for the hoped-for fourth novel. First, there was an odd bit of info dumping of "previouslies" that i found unnecessary. I am not sure why for such tight but short books, the author/publisher simply does not do a front piece that can catch up readers if needed. I remember it seemed ongoing series tended to do this more often. Now it seems there is a tendency to either simply plunge the reader in (preferable if it can be a bit confusing at times) or go this book's route and try to build it in. Problem here is it takes too much space and detracts for me. Especially since the elements repeated are rather simple. A minor quibble.

The other element I think needs to change a bit is that the plot is getting a bit formulaic. There is some advancement but it is minor in many ways. The author has pretty much set up an end game challenge for his

protagonists but little advancement happens to take them there. Instead the conflict is very similar to the ones in the two prior books.

Still Nicholas writes very well and makes the whole thing work as a fast paced adventure story with just the right amount of the supernatural that is fun and plausible in the world he has created.

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THRONE OF DARKNESS: A NOVEL BY DOUGLAS NICHOLAS PDF

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Review

"A darkly evocative tale that transports the reader back to 13th century England--withall the strife and bloodshed that entails. The unique combination of ancient Irish magic and eerie horror will keep readers rapidly turning pages late into the night. Utterly engrossing." (Jessica Leake, author of Arcana)

"Rich in historical detail, this suspenseful coming-of-age fantasy grabs the reader with the facts of life in medieval England and the magic spells woven into its landscape."—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

"A hauntingly affecting historical novel with a touch of magic." (Kirkus Reviews (starred review))

"Not for the faint of heart, this pulse pounding page-turner grabs you from the start and never lets you go. A wickedly clever and evocative combination of history, horror, mystery, and magic."—Booklist

"I love the writing, the vividness and poetic feel, maybe the sheer 'Irishness' of it. Beautifully observed moments abound in this: a waterfall, a snow-filled forest, a mountainscape. The sense of place is overwhelming; every stone, every flower pops out at you."—Cecelia Holland, New York Times bestselling author of The King's Witch

"I loved Something Red. Douglas Nicholas conjures up the distant thirteenth century with prose as magical as that practiced by his sorceress-queen. This is a stunning debut novel of lyrical power and suspenseful drama. The hair-raising finale will keep you reading far into the night."—Carol Goodman, national bestselling author of The Lake of Dead Languages

"Ablly conjuring the beauties and drawbacks of the past, and with an engaging and unusual cast-list, Something Red is a thoroughbred novel of nightmare terror, ruled by a force of sheer evil that seems, and may well prove, unstoppable."—Tanith Lee, award-winning author of The Silver Metal Lover

"Douglas Nicholas can artfully narrate a story. I was engaged from beginning to end . . . Something Red is sure to be a best seller."—Agenda Magazine

"Relax. Master storyteller Douglas Nicholas is about to transport you to far-away places, show you far-off times; but hold on tight: while the cresting rhythm of his cadenced prose mounts, your throbbing pulse—that same blood clock his characters tell time by—will pound unstopably, as identical horror howls fatally outside, smiles beguilingly within, and your skin senses stone sweat behind the castle's painted plaster walls, beneath midwinter-deep drifts of snow. When I say Something Red is a sensation, I mean precisely that: this

book's sensational!"—Ronald Christ, author of *Bonevardi: Constructing Magic*

"As a reader I was so enthralled with the tale, it was like leaving reality and stepping into a wondrous and mysterious time with so much magic in it . . . You will not be disappointed."—Great Minds Think Aloud

"This is a beautifully written work, with evocative prose which captures the essence of traveling in winter in Middle Ages England."—Snarky Writer

"Written with great skill, this atmospheric, yet gritty, story will remain with you, and it is a wonderful addition to the long line of stories devoted to the magic of fairy tales."—Book Hog

"Something Red absolutely blew me away. This is one of the best debuts I've read in years and the story itself still haunts my dreams. It was all the best elements of Irish folklore, historical fiction, and a very frightening mystery at its cores."—Chaotic Compendiums

"Douglas Nicholas can artfully narrate a story. I was engaged from beginning to end."—Agenda Magazine

"The poetic nature of the language, the increasing of the novel's atmospheric spook and the members of the traveling family made Something Red a winner." (MindingSpot)

"Douglas Nicholas has written a gut-wrenching, harrowing novel in Something Red; however, he's also written a touching, realistic story about what made a family, love, and life during a 13th century English winter . . . Nicholas' storytelling painted this novel with historic realism that made it pop right off the page. . . If you like a non-stop thrilling roller coaster ride, hop on board with Something Red!" (Popcorn Reads)

"Nicholas's beautiful prose, his detailed portrayal of life in medieval England, interesting characters, and underlying supernatural themes make this book a real gem." (BookBrowse)

"The most stunning debut novel I have ever read. The language is beautiful and descriptive; the novel is an incredible sensory experience for the reader." (Examiner.com)

"Nicholas handles characterization, setting and atmosphere deftly and expertly . . . Something Red is an excellent debut from a gifted author." (Shelf Awareness)

"Memorable . . . Legendary." (Pate Books)

"This darkly atmospheric debut novel is well worth its measured plot-building for its horrific, unexpected ending." (Library Journal (starred review))

Throne of Darkness is a satisfying adventure that successfully blends history and fantasy. I very much enjoyed reading it, which is not something I can say about many books these days. (Lawrence Watt-Evans, author of *The Obsidian Chronicles* and *The Legends of Ethshar* series)

"This series keeps getting better and better. THRONE OF DARKNESS finds Hob and his comrades facing terrifying threat as they continue on their quest to reinstate Maeve and Nemain to rightful places as queens of Ireland. Nicholas weaves a web as potent as any of Queen Maeve's to transport us to 13th Century Britain. This is by far my favorite medieval historical series!" (Carol Goodman, bestselling author of *THE BLYTHEWOOD TALES* and *THE LAKE OF DEAD LANGUAGES*)

"THRONE OF DARKNESS takes you directly to thirteenth-century England and sticks you there until the story is done with you. The sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the period – and the people who inhabit it -- are brought vividly to life. Too often books with an historical basis have a bit of period window dressing and characters that feel as if they are on loan from a Renaissance Faire – people with an essentially modern way of understanding the world, place holders for the reader. What Nicholas gives us is the Middle Ages in all of its fantastic weirdness and characters that belong there, serving a story that's well worth reading." (Greg Keyes, New York Times bestselling author of the KINGDOMS OF THORN AND BONE series)

"Series newcomers will quickly feel right at home, and returning readers will enjoy learning more about their favorite characters." (Publishers Weekly)

"A metropolitan collection of fascinating historical fiction...ever more complex with its liberal dose of magic and mysticism." (Booklist)

"The meticulous detailing of the early 13th-century setting is only one of the pleasures of this series (after *Something Red* and *The Wicked*) that mixes historical fiction and horror. Mostly told from the point of view of Hob, the narrative gives readers the added pleasure of his continuing evolution from gangly young man to husband and now knighted warrior." (Library Journal)

The meticulous detailing of the early 13th-century setting is only one of the pleasures of this series (after *Something Red* and *The Wicked*) that mixes historical fiction and horror. (Library Journal)

"Nicholas's background as a poet lends the prose richness, with lyrical descriptions of the English countryside that do not slow the suspense one bit." (Historical Novel Society)

"[With] a glorious mix of magic, history and mythology, Nicholas has created a winning series. I cannot wait for the next entry." (The Nameless Zine)

About the Author

Douglas Nicholas is an award-winning poet, whose work has appeared in numerous poetry journals, and the author of four previous books, including *Something Red* and *Iron Rose*, a collection of poems inspired by New York City. He lives in New York's Hudson Valley with his wife Theresa and Yorkshire terrier Tristan.

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Throne of Darkness CHAPTER 1

HOB OPENED THE SIDE DOOR of the tavern, stepped out into the squalid alleyway, and threw himself violently to the right. A faint rushing sound as the shaft of the cudgel clove the air, a glimpse of movement at the lateral extreme of the eye's ability—something had warned him, and thus the blow struck his shoulder, and that already moving away, so that he suffered no real injury, just shock and dismay.

He had a chaotic blurred vision of the wall opposite—whitewashed daub peeling away from the wattle, urine stains—dim-lit in this tunnel-like passageway, the two buildings so close together, sagging toward each other at the upper storeys, the eaves almost touching. Then he was down in the mire of the alley, rolling frantically away from his attackers, toward the rear of the inn. He planted a palm in the muck and used his momentum to roll up to his feet, as Sir Balthasar had taught him, a trick of the Norman knight to recover when unhorsed, or when the horse was killed beneath him. Even as he regained his feet he was running backward a few paces. He ripped his dagger from its leatherbound birchwood sheath and staggered to a halt.

The youth found himself facing a small band of grown men. The alley—just a walkway, really, between the two buildings—was so narrow that only two could come at him abreast, and he had an instant to take in an

impression of several shadowy forms behind the two leaders. The one with the club was on Hob's left; beside him was a knifeman. Behind them were perhaps four others; perhaps five. The group, recovering from the failure of its ambush, was beginning to advance again, the ones in front gauging the danger the young man's dagger presented, the ones behind urging attack.

Jack was inside the inn, but Hob had not had time or breath to call out, and his attackers were rapidly closing with him. A vision of Nemain flitted before Hob's eye: she had shown him some of Molly's battle sleights, and one involved her leaping at a boulder in a field, planting a foot, and bouncing off the stone to achieve a rapid change of direction in an attack.

Now Hob looked hard at the knifeman, on his right, and with a loud wordless cry ran at him. Three paces short of closing with the bravo, Hob sprang at the right-hand wall; his right foot struck it two feet above the alley dirt and he pushed off mightily, propelling himself leftward across the alley, landing in a crouch before the club-wielder. Hob's left hand came up to catch the man's wrist and check the cudgel's downward progress; his right hand also came up, up, the dagger-point leading, sliding beneath the man's rib cage, piercing his heart. The club-man froze, struck dead by this internal thunderbolt, and fell back, his body tangling in the legs of the men behind.

The bravo in the lead with the knife now swung backhand at Hob, a weak blow, an awkward blow, and dealt the young man a shallow cut on the shoulder. But Hob was already moving back, resetting his feet, weaving his dagger this way and that, seeking an opening against the lead attacker, as Sir Balthasar had taught him. His youth, his strength, and his reach of arm, coupled with intense instruction from one of the most formidable knights of the North Country, had made Hob a match for even a grown man, even a hardened thug.

But there was no chance of his living through an encounter with a half-dozen men. "Jack!" he bellowed, as loud as he could. At that moment the rearmost of his enemies gave a truncated yelp; his head was snapped partway around, and he toppled over onto his back. The group halted its advance, and the bravos turned to see what threatened them from the alley front, all except the lead knifeman, who did not dare take his eyes from Hob's blade, swaying this way and that, an adder preparing its strike.

Another man went down toward the rear. Hob heard the thud but was himself unable to take his eyes from his immediate adversary. A moment later the inn door banged open and Jack, a horrid gargling roar erupting from his ruined larynx, crashed into the group, pounding the first man he met into unconsciousness with a giant fist to the back of the neck, scooping the dropped cudgel from the ground, laying about him with irresistible fury.

Hob's attacker, unnerved, allowed himself to be distracted, a fatal mistake. Hob lunged. His right leg went out before him, his knee bent; his right foot planted itself well ahead of his body; his right arm speared straight toward the man's throat, the outstretched dagger tearing into muscle, artery, windpipe: an irreparable injury, the door to death flung open. The bravo's eyes widened in horror; he dropped his own knife to grasp his neck; he sank down, dying.

Hob looked about him. Jack stood in the middle of several men, one unconscious, the rest dead or dying in the mud of the alley. Beyond him, holding a cord of gray silk on which hung a gold coin, stood the grim form of Sinibaldo, "the shadow of the shadow of Innocent III," whom Hob and Jack had met only that morning.

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