

New York Times Bestseller

A DEL REY BOOK



0-345-31758-0

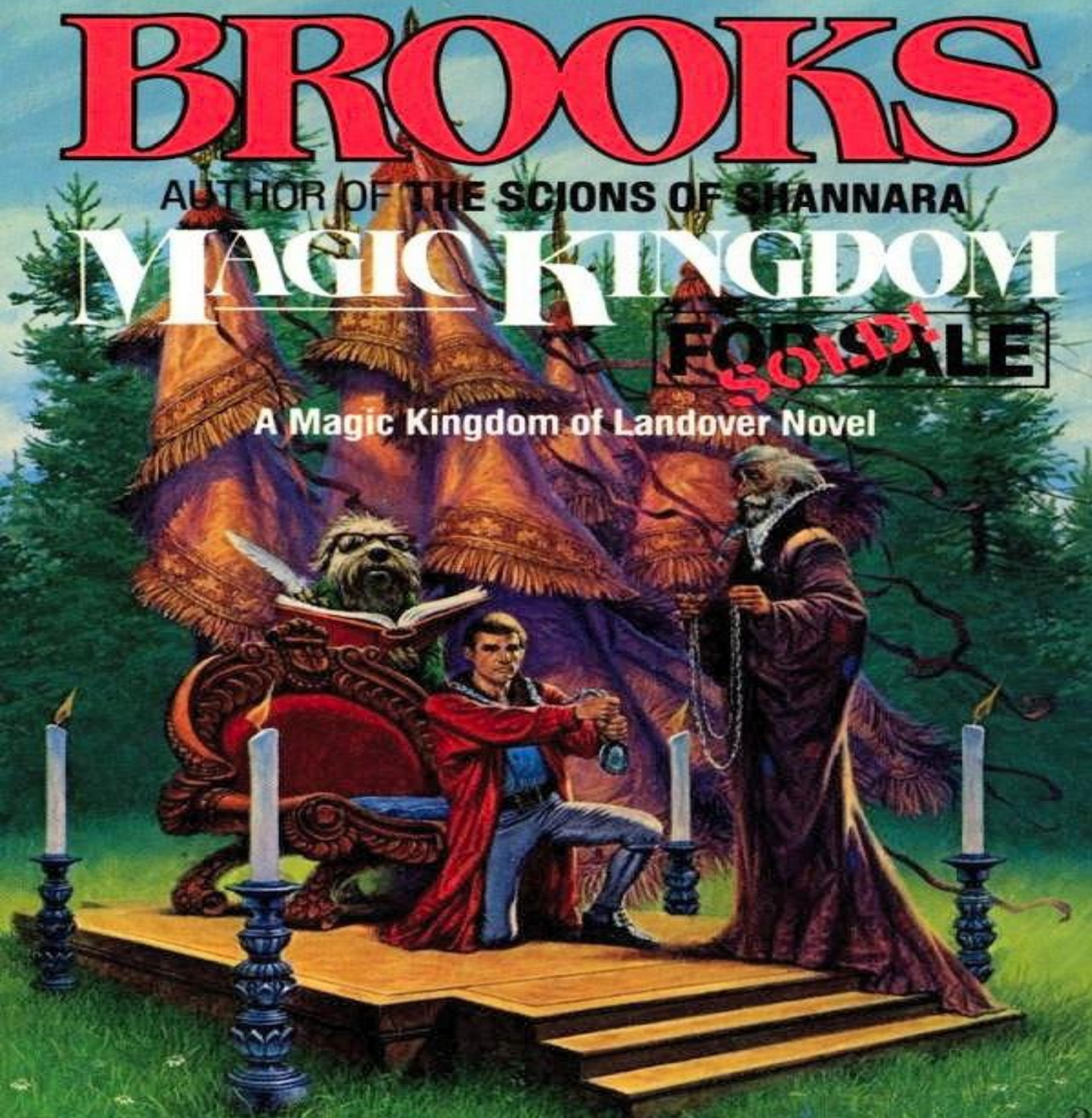
TERRY BROOKS

AUTHOR OF THE SCIONS OF SHANNARA

MAGIC KINGDOM

SOLD!
FOR SALE

A Magic Kingdom of Landover Novel



Magic Kingdom For Sale — Sold!

By Terry Brooks

Magic Kingdom of Landover, Book 1

ISBN 0-345-31758-0

CONTENTS

[Ben](#)

[Meeks](#)

[Landover](#)

[Questor Thews](#)

[Sterling Silver](#)

[Coronation](#)

[Paladin](#)

[Lords of the Greensward](#)

[Willow](#)

[River Master](#)

[Elderew](#)

[G'home Gnome](#)

[Crag Trolls](#)

[Crystal](#)

[Deep Fell](#)

[Nightshade](#)

[Fairy](#)

[Io Dust](#)

[Strabo](#)

[Abaddon](#)

[Iron Mark](#)

[Medallion](#)

[King](#)

[The End](#)

Ben

The catalogue was from Rosen's, Ltd. It was the department store's annual Christmas Wishbook.

It was addressed to Annie.

Ben Holiday stood frozen before the open cubicle of his mailbox, eyes slipping across the gaily decorated cover of the catalogue to the white address label and the name of his dead wife. The lobby of the Chicago high rise seemed oddly still in the graying dusk of the late afternoon rush hour, empty of everyone but the security guard and himself. Outside, past the line of floor-to-ceiling windows that fronted the building entry, the autumn wind blew in chill gusts down the canyon of Michigan Avenue and whispered of winter's coming.

He ran his thumb over the smooth surface of the Wishbook. Annie had loved to shop, even when the shopping had only been through the mail-order catalogues. Rosen's had been one of her favorite stores.

Sudden tears filled his eyes. He hadn't gotten over losing her, even after two years. Sometimes it seemed to him that losing her was nothing more than a trick of his imagination-that when he came home she would still be there waiting for him.

He took a deep breath, fighting back against the emotions that were aroused in him simply by seeing her name on that catalogue cover. It was silly to feel like this. Nothing could bring her back to him. Nothing could change what had happened.

His eyes lifted to stare into the dark square of the now-empty mailbox. He remembered what it has been like when he had first learned that she had been killed. He had just returned from court, a pre-trial on the Microlab case with old Wilson Frink and his sons. Ben was in his office, thinking of ways to persuade his opposition, a lawyer named Bates, that his latest offer of settlement would serve everyone's best interests, when the call had come in. Annie had been in an accident on the Kennedy. She was at St. Jude's in critical condition. Could he come right over...?

He shook his head. He could still hear the voice of the doctor telling him what had happened. The voice had sounded so calm and rational. He had known at once that Annie was dying. He had known instantly. By the time he had gotten to the hospital, she was dead. The baby was dead, too. Annie had been only three months pregnant.

"Mr. Holiday?"

He looked about sharply, startled by the voice. George, the security guard, was looking over at him from behind the lobby desk.

"Everything all right, sir?"

He nodded and forced a quick smile. "Yes-just thinking about something."

He closed the mailbox door, shoved everything he had taken from it save the catalogue into one coat pocket and, still gripping the Wishbook in both hands, moved to the ground-floor elevators. He didn't care for being caught off balance like that. Maybe it was the lawyer in him.

"Cold day out there," George offered, glancing out into the gray. "Going to be a tough winter. Lot of snow, they say. Like it was a couple of years ago."

"Looks that way." Ben barely heard him as he glanced down again at the catalogue. Annie always enjoyed the Christmas Wishbook. She used to read him promos from some of its more bizarre items. She used to make up stories about the kind of people who might purchase such things.

He pushed the elevator call button and the doors opened immediately.

"Have a nice evening, sir," George called after him.

He rode the elevator to his penthouse suite, shucked off his topcoat, and walked into the front room, still clutching the catalogue. Shadows draped the furnishings and dappled the carpeting and walls, but he left the lights off and stood motionless before the bank of windows that looked out over the sunroof and the buildings of the city beyond. Lights glimmered through the evening gray, distant and solitary, each a source of life separate and apart from the thousands of others.

We are so much of the time alone, he thought. Wasn't it strange?

He looked down again at the catalogue. Why do you suppose they had sent it to Annie? Why were companies always sending mailers and flyers and free samples and God-knew-what-all to people long after they were dead and buried? It was an intrusion on their privacy. It was an affront. Didn't these companies update their mailing lists? Or was it simply that they refused ever to give up on a customer?

He checked his anger and, instead, smiled, bitter, ironic. Maybe he should phone it all in to Andy Rooney. Let him write about it.

He turned on the lights then and walked over to the wall bar to make himself a scotch, Glenlivet on the rocks with a splash of water; he measured it out and sipped at it experimentally. There was a bar meeting in a little less than two hours, and he had promised Miles that he would make this one. Miles Bennett was not only his partner, but he was probably his only real friend since Annie's death. All of the others had drifted away somehow, lost in the shufflings and rearrangings of life's social order. Couples and singles made a poor mix, and most of their friends had been couples. He hadn't done much to foster continuing friendships in any case, spending most of his time involved with his work and with his private, inviolate grief. He was not such good company anymore, and only Miles had had the patience and the perseverance to stay with him.

He drank some more of the scotch and wandered back again to the open windows. The lights of the city winked back at him. Being alone wasn't so bad, he reasoned. That was just the way of things. He frowned. Well, that was

his way, in any case. It was his choice to be, alone. He could have found companionship again from any one of a number of sources; he could have reintegrated himself into almost any of the city's myriad social circles. He had the necessary attributes. He was young still and successful; he was even wealthy, if money counted for anything-and in this world it almost always did. No, he didn't have to be alone.

And yet he did, because the problem was that he really didn't belong anyway.

He thought about that for a moment-forced himself to think about it. It wasn't simply his choosing to be alone that kept him that way; it was almost a condition of his existence.

The feeling that he was an outsider had always been there. Becoming a lawyer had helped him deal with that feeling, giving him a place in life, giving him a ground upon which he might firmly stand. But the sense of not belonging had persisted, however diminished its intensity-a nagging certainty. Losing Annie had simply given it new life, emphasizing the transiency of any ties that bound him to whom and what he had let himself become. He often wondered if others felt as he did. He supposed they must; he supposed that to some extent everyone felt something of the same displacement. But not as strongly as he, he suspected. Never that strongly.

He knew Miles understood something of it-or at least something of Ben's sense of it. Miles didn't feel about it as Ben did, of course. Miles was the quintessential people person, always at home with others, always comfortable with his surroundings. He wanted Ben to be that way; he wanted to bring him out of that self-imposed shell and back into the mainstream of life. He viewed his friend as some sort of challenge in that regard. That was why Miles was so persistent about these damn bar meetings. That was why he kept after Ben to forget about Annie and get on with his life.

He finished the scotch and made himself another. He was drinking a lot lately, he knew-maybe more than was good for him. He glanced down at his watch. Forty-five minutes had gone by. Another forty-five and Miles would be there, his chaperone for the evening. He shook his head distastefully. Miles didn't understand nearly as much as he thought he did about some things.

Carrying his drink, he walked back across the room to the windows, stared out a moment, and turned away, closing the drapes against the night. He moved back to the couch, debating on whether to check the answer-phone, and saw the catalogue again. He must have put it down without realizing it. It was lying with the other mail on the coffee table in front of the sectional sofa, its glossy cover reflecting sharply in the lamplight.

Rosen's, Ltd. — Christmas Wishbook.

He sat down slowly in front of it and picked it up. A Christmas catalogue of wishes and dreams — he had seen the kind before. An annual release from a department store that ostensibly offered something for everyone, this particular catalogue was for the select few only — the wealthy few.

Annie had always liked it, though.

Slowly, he began to page through it. The offerings jumped out at him, a collection of gifts for the hard-to-please, an assortment of oddities that were essentially one-of-a-kind and could be found nowhere but in the Wishbook. Dinner for two in the private California home of a famous movie star, transportation included. A ten-day cruise for sixty on a yacht, fully crewed and catered to order. A week on a privately owned Caribbean island, including the use of wine cellar and fully stocked larder. A bottle of one-hundred-and-fifty-year-old wine. Hand-blown glass and diamond creations, designed per request. A gold toothpick. Sable coats for little girls' dolls. A collector's chess set of science fiction film characters carved from ebony. A hand-woven tapestry of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The list of offerings went on, item after item, each more exotic and strange than the one before. Ben took a strong pull on his scotch, almost repulsed by the extravagance of it all, but fascinated nevertheless. Then he thumbed ahead into the center of the catalogue. There was a transparent bathtub with live goldfish encased in the framework. There was a silver shaving kit with your initials inlaid in gold. Why in God's name would anyone...?

He caught himself midway through the thought, his eyes drawn instantly to an artist's rendering of the item being offered on the pages that lay open before him.

The promo of the item read as follows:

MAGIC KINGDOM FOR SALE

Landover — island of enchantment and adventure rescued from the mists of time, home of knights and knaves, of dragons and damsels, of wizards and warlocks. Magic mixes with iron, and chivalry is the code of life for the true hero. All of your fantasies become real in this kingdom from another world. Only one thread to this whole cloth is lacking — you, to rule over all as King and High Lord. Escape into your dreams, and be born again.

Price: \$1,000,000.

Personal interview and financial disclosure.

Inquire of Meeks, home office.

That was all it read. The artist's colorful rendering depicted a knight on horseback engaged in battle with a fire-breathing dragon, a beautiful and rather thinly clad damsel shrinking from the conflict before a tower wall, and a dark-robed wizard lifting his hands as if to cast an awesome and life-stealing spell. Some creatures that might have been Elves or Gnomes or some such scampered about in the background, and the towers and parapets of great castles loomed against a gathering of hills and mists.

It had the look of something out of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

"This is nuts!" he muttered almost without thinking.

He stared at the item in disbelief, certain that he must be mistaken. Then he read it again. He read it a third time. It read the same. He finished his scotch in a single gulp and chewed on the ice, irritated with the nonsensicality of the offering. A million dollars for a fairy-tale kingdom? It was ridiculous. It had to be some kind of joke.

He threw down the catalogue, jumped to his feet, and crossed to the bar to mix himself a fresh drink. He stared momentarily at his reflection in the mirrored cabinet — a man of medium height, lean, trim, and athletic-looking, his face rather drawn, with high cheekbones and forehead, slightly receding hairline, hawk nose and piercing blue eyes. He was a man of thirty-nine

going on fifty, a man on the verge of passing into middle age too young.

Escape into your dreams...

He crossed back to the couch, placed the drink on the coffee table and picked up the Wishbook once more. Again he read the item on Landover. He shook his head. No such place could possibly exist. The promo was a tease, a hype, what the car business called puffing. The truth was masked in the rhetoric. He chewed gingerly at the inside of his lip. Still, there wasn't all that much rhetoric being used to promote the item. And Rosen's was a highly respected department store; they were not likely to offer anything that they could not deliver, should a buyer appear.

He grinned. What was he thinking? What buyer? Who in his right mind would even consider...? But of course he was questioning himself now. He was the one considering. He had been standing there, drinking his drink and thinking about how he didn't belong; and when he had picked up the Wishbook, the item on Landover had caught his attention right away. He was the one who felt himself the outsider in his own world, who had always felt himself the outsider, who was seeking always a way to escape what he was.

And now here was his chance.

His grin broadened. This was crazy! He was actually contemplating doing something that no sane man would even think twice about!

The scotch was working its way to his head now, and he got up again to walk it off. He looked at his watch, thinking of Miles, and suddenly he didn't want to go to that bar meeting. He didn't want to go anywhere. He walked to the phone and dialed his friend. "Bennett," the familiar voice answered. "Miles, I've decided not to go tonight. Hope you don't mind."

There was a pause. "Doc, is that you?"

"Yeah, it's me." Miles loved to call him Doc, ever since the early days when they went up against Wells-Fargo on that corporate buy-out. Doc Holiday, courtroom gunfighter. It drove Ben nuts. "Look, you go on without me."