

TERRY BROOKS

BESTSELLING MASTER STORYTELLER OF FANTASY

THE WISHSONG OF

SHANNARA

VOLUME THREE OF THE LEGENDARY
SHANNARA SERIES



The Wishsong of Shannara (The Shannara Series)

Book Jacket

Rating: ★★★★★

Tags: Fiction, General, Fantasy, Science Fiction & Fantasy, Shannara
(Imaginary place)

EDITORIAL REVIEW:

Horror stalks the Four Lands. The Ildatch, immemorial book of evil spells, has stirred to eldritch life, sending its foul Mord Wraiths to accomplish at last Mankind's destruction. Once again Allanon, ancient Druid Protector of the Races, must seek the help of a descendant of Jerle Shannara. Brin, daughter of Wil Ohmsford, born with the magic of the Wishsong which alone can open a way to the Ildatch, reluctantly joins him on his perilous journey east; meanwhile her younger brother Jair learns that Brin will fail and die, unless he can reach her in time. And as Brin walks into the trap the Ildatch has set, Jair must travel through the very heart of evil to reach her...

The Wishsong of Shannara by Terry Brooks

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A change of seasons was upon the Four Lands as late summer faded slowly into autumn. Gone were the long, still days of midyear where sweltering heat slowed the pace of life and there was a sense of having time enough for anything. Though summer's warmth lingered, the days had begun to shorten, the humid air to dry, and the memory of life's immediacy to reawaken. The signs of transition were all about. In the forests of Shady Vale, the leaves had already begun to turn.

Brin Ohmsford paused by the flowerbeds that bordered the front walkway of her home, losing herself momentarily in the crimson foliage of the old maple that shaded the yard beyond. It was a massive thing, its trunk broad and gnarled. Brin smiled. That old tree was the source of many childhood memories for her. Impulsively, she stepped off the walkway and moved over to the aged tree.

She was a tall girl-taller than her parents or her brother Jair, nearly as tall as Rone Leah-and although there was a delicate look to her slim body, she was as fit as any of them. Jair would argue the point of course, but that was only because Jair found it hard enough as it was to accept his role as the youngest. A girl, after all, was just a girl.

Her fingers touched the roughened trunk of the maple softly, caressing, and she stared upward into the tangle of limbs overhead. Long, black hair fell away from her face and there was no mistaking whose child she was. Twenty years ago, Eretria had looked exactly as her daughter looked now, from dusky skin and black eyes to soft, delicate features. All that Brin lacked was her mother's fire. Jair had gotten that. Brin had her father's temperament,

cool, self-assured, and disciplined. In comparing his children one time-a time occasioned by one of Jair's more reprehensible misadventures-Wil Ohmsford had remarked rather ruefully that the difference between the two was that Jair was apt to do anything, while Brin was also apt to do it, but only after thinking it through first. Brin still wasn't sure who had come out on the short end of that reprimand.

Her hands slipped back to her sides. She remembered the time she had used the wishsong on the old tree. She had still been a child, experimenting with the Elven magic. It had been midsummer and she had used the wishsong to turn the tree's summer green to autumn crimson; in her child's mind, it seemed perfectly all right to do so, since red was a far prettier color than green. Her father had been furious; it had taken almost three years for the tree to come back again after the shock to its system. That had been the last time either she or Jair had used the magic when their parents were about.

"Brin come help me with the rest of the packing, please."

It was her mother calling. She gave the old maple a final pat and turned toward the house.

Her father had never fully trusted the Elven magic. A little more than twenty years earlier he had used the Elfstones given him by the Druid Allanon in his efforts to protect the Elven Chosen Amberle Elessedil in her quest for the Bloodfire. Use of the Elven magic had changed him; he had known it even then, though not known how. It was only after Brin was born, and later Jair, that it became apparent what had been done. It was not Wil Ohmsford who would manifest the change the magic had wrought; it was his children. They were the ones who would carry within them the visible effects of the magic-they, and perhaps generations of Ohmsfords to come, although there was no way of ascertaining yet that they would carry within them the magic of the wishsong.

Brin had named it the wishsong. Wish for it, sing for it, and it was yours. That was how it had seemed to her when she had first discovered that she possessed the power. She learned early that she could affect the behavior of living things with her song.. She could change that old maple's leaves. She could soothe an angry dog. She could bring a wild bird to light on her wrist.

She could make herself a part of any living thing-or make it a part of her. She wasn't sure how she did it; it simply happened. She would sing, the music and the words coming as they always did, unplanned, unrehearsed-as if it were the most natural thing in the world. She was always aware of what she was singing, yet at the same time heedless, her mind caught up in feelings of indescribable sensation. They would sweep through her, drawing her in, making her somehow new again, and the wish would come to pass.

It was the gift of the Elven magic-or its curse. The latter was how her father had viewed it when he had discovered she possessed it. Brin knew that, deep inside, he was frightened of what the Elfstones could do and what he had felt them do to him. After Brin had caused the family dog to chase its tail until it nearly dropped and had wilted an entire garden of vegetables, her father had been quick to reassert his decision that the Elfstones would never be used again by anyone. He had hidden them, telling no one where they could be found, and hidden they had remained ever since. At least, that was what her father thought. She was not altogether certain. One time, not too many months earlier, when there was mention of the hidden Elfstones, Brin had caught Jair smiling rather smugly. He would not admit to anything, of course, but she knew how difficult it was to keep anything hidden from her brother, and she suspected he had found the hiding place.

Rone Leah met her at the front door, tall and rangy, rust brown hair loose about his shoulders and tied back with a broad headband. Mischievous gray eyes narrowed appraisingly. "How about lending a hand, huh? I'm doing all the work and I'm not even a member of the family, for cat's sake!"

"As much time as you spend here, you ought to be," she chided. "What's left to be done?"

"Just these cases to be carried out-that should finish it." A gathering of leather trunks and smaller bags stood stacked in the entry. Rone picked up the largest. "I think your mother wants you in the bedroom."

He disappeared down the walkway and Brin moved through her home toward the back bedrooms. Her parents were getting ready to depart on their annual fall pilgrimage to the outlying communities south of Shady Vale, a journey that would keep them gone from their home for better than two

weeks. Few Healers possessed the skills of Wil Ohmsford, and not one could be found within five hundred miles of the Vale. So twice a year, in the spring and fall, her father traveled down to the outlying villages, lending his services where they were needed. Eretria always accompanied him, a skilled aide to her husband by now, trained nearly as thoroughly as he in the care of the sick and injured. It was a journey they need not have made-would not, in fact, had they been less conscientious than they were. Others would not have gone. But Brin's parents were governed by a strong sense of duty. Healing was the profession to which both had dedicated their lives, and they did not take their commitment to it lightly.

While they were gone on these trips of mercy, Brin was left to watch over Jair. On this occasion, Rone Leah had traveled down from the highlands to watch over them both.

Brin's mother looked up from the last of her packing and smiled as Brin entered the bedroom. Long black hair fell loosely about her shoulders, and she brushed it back from a face that looked barely older than Brin's.

"Have you seen your brother? We're almost ready to leave."

Brin shook her head. "I thought he was with father. Can I help you with anything?"

Eretria nodded, took Brin by the shoulders, and pulled her down next to her on the bed. "I want you to promise me something, Brin. I don't want you to use the wishsong while your father and I are gone-you or your brother."

Brin smiled. "I hardly use it at all anymore." Her dark eyes searched her mother's dusky face.

"I know. But Jair does, even if he thinks I don't know about it. In any case, while we are gone, your father and I don't want either of you using it even a single time. Do you understand?"

Brin hesitated. Her father understood that the Elven magic was a part of his children, but he did not accept that it was either a good or necessary part. You are intelligent, talented people just as you are, he would tell them. You

have no need of tricks and artifices to advance yourselves. Be who and what you can without the song. Eretria had echoed that advice, although she seemed to recognize more readily than he that they were likely to ignore it when discretion suggested that they could.

In Jair's case, unfortunately, discretion seldom entered into the picture. Jair was both impulsive and distressingly headstrong; when it came to use of the wishsong, he was inclined to do exactly as he pleased-as long as he could safely get away with it.

Still, the Elven magic worked differently with Jair...

"Brin?"

Her thoughts scattered. "Mother, I don't see what difference it makes if Jair wants to play around with the wishsong. It's just a toy."

Eretria shook her head. "Even a toy can be dangerous if used unwisely. Besides, you ought to know enough of the Elven magic by now to appreciate the fact that it is never harmless. Now listen to me. You and your brother are both grown beyond the age when you need your mother and father looking over your shoulder. But a little advice is still necessary now and then. I don't want you using the magic while we're gone. It draws attention where it's not needed. Promise me that you won't use it-and that you will keep Jair from using it as well."

Brin nodded slowly. "It's because of the rumors of the black walkers, isn't it?" She had heard the stories. They talked about it all the time down at the inn these days. Black walkers-soundless, faceless things born of the dark magic, appearing out of nowhere. Some said it was the Warlock Lord and his minions come back again. "Is that what this is all about?"

"Yes." Her mother smiled at Brin's perceptiveness. "Now promise me."

Brin smiled back. "I promise."

Nevertheless, she thought it all a lot of nonsense.

The packing and loading took another thirty minutes, and then her parents were ready to depart. Jair reappeared, back from the inn where he had gone to secure a special sweet as a parting gift for his mother who was fond of such things, and good-byes were exchanged.

"Remember your promise, Brin," her mother whispered as she kissed her on the cheek and hugged her close.

Then the elder Ohmsfords were aboard the wagon in which they would make their journey and moving slowly up the dusty roadway.

Brin watched them until they were out of sight.

Brin, Jair, and Rone Leah went hiking that afternoon in the forests of the Vale, and it was late in the day when at last they turned homeward. By then, the sun had begun to dip beneath the rim of the Vale and the forest shadows of midday to lengthen slowly into evening. It was an hour's walk to the hamlet, but both Ohmsfords and the highlander had come this way so often before that they could have navigated the forest trails even in blackest night. They proceeded at a leisurely pace, enjoying the close of what had been an altogether beautiful autumn day.

"Let's fish tomorrow," Rone suggested. He grinned at Brin. "With weather like this, it won't matter if we catch anything or not."

The oldest of the three, he led the way through the trees, the worn and battered scabbard bearing the Sword of Leah strapped crosswise to his back, a vague outline beneath his hunting cloak. Once carried by the heir-apparent to the throne of Leah, it had long since outlived that purpose and been replaced. But Rone had always admired the old blade-borne years earlier by his great-grandfather Menion Leah when he had gone in search of the Sword of Shannara. Since Rone admired the weapon so, his father had given it to him, a small symbol of his standing as a Prince of Leah-even if he were its youngest prince.

Brin looked over at him and frowned. "You seem to be forgetting

something. Tomorrow is the day we set aside for the house repairs we promised father we would make while he was away. What about that?"

He shrugged cheerfully. "Another day for the repairs-they'll keep."

"I think we should do some exploring along the rim of the Vale," Jair Ohmsford interjected. He was lean and wiry and had his father's face with its Elven features-narrow eyes, slanted eyebrows, and ears pointed slightly beneath a thatch of unruly blond hair. "I think we should see if we can find any sign of the Mord Wraiths."

Rone laughed. "Now what do you know about the walkers, tiger?" It was his pet name for Jair.

"As much as you, I'd guess. We hear the same stories in the Vale that you hear in the highlands," the Valeman replied. "Black walkers, Mord Wraiths-things that steal out of the dark. They talk about it down at the inn all the time."

Brin glanced at her brother reprovingly. "That's all they are, too-just stories."

Jair looked at Rone. "What do you think?"

To Brin's surprise, the highlander shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not."

She was suddenly angry. "Rone, there have been stories like this ever since the Warlock Lord was destroyed, and none of them has ever contained a word of truth. Why would it be any different this time?"

"I don't know that it would. I just believe in being careful. Remember, they didn't believe the stories of the Skull Bearers in Shea Ohmsford's time either-until it was too late."

"That's why I think we ought to have a look around," Jair repeated.

"For what purpose exactly?" Brin pressed, her voice hardening. "On the chance that we might find something as dangerous as these things are supposed to be? What would you do then-call on the wishsong?"