


Blitz of Spira #2

J.B. Hickock

Child of Wizardry



She was the heir to a heritage of magic -
that she knew nothing about!

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Child of Wizardry

Tales of the Last Valais, Part 1

by J.B. Hickock

In a place beyond space and time stands the Tree of Eternity, with thousands of worlds tangled in its branches.

This is a story of family and its lack, of ignorance and knowledge, of adventure and its costs.

Prologue

The village of Garoo was no different from any other village of Men: a small, poor place inhabited by poor superstitious people, suspicious of outsiders; a place where few ever came to and even fewer ever came from.

Still, in the heart of a blinding blizzard there came to Garoo a traveler, swathed in a dark cloak with a deep hood so none could see anything of the traveler's features. In the traveler's hand was a long stick he used to keep his balance in the deep snow and driving wind while his other arm was wrapped about something in his cloak.

He stumbled to the village's lone tavern and pounded on the door with the end of his staff.

There was no answer, so he pounded again.

The door was opened and the Mr. Gadsby, the tavern owner, peered out. "What do you want?" he demanded suspiciously. Gadsby was like the other people of Garoo - short and dark, with thick eyebrows that almost hid his suspicious gray eyes.

"To come in from the cold," the traveler replied.

Unnerved by the long sword the traveler wore at his hip, Gadsby stood aside and the traveler stepped in. He had to duck his head to fit through the low door and raised it to see a long low shabby common room decorated in both the latest and oldest in grime and filth.

Ignoring the tavernkeep and his wife, the traveler walked over to the fire and stood before it for a moment, enjoying the warmth.

Urged on by his wife, who brooked no argument from him, Gadsby walked up to the traveler.

“Do you want a room for the night?” he asked.

The traveler turned to face Gadsby and the folds of his cloak swung back to reveal a babe in his arm, swaddled in cloth and sleeping deeply. “No.”

Gadsby hesitated. “Then- what is it you want?”

The traveler held out the baby. “I want you to take her.”

Gadsby jumped back as if stung. “Take- I don’t know who-”

The traveler didn’t make a move or a sound, but something changed in his dark eyes that made the words die in Gadsby’s throat.

The Mrs. Gadsby stormed toward the stranger. “If you think we’ll take some-”

He turned his cold gaze on her and the Mrs. Gadsby was silenced, for perhaps the first time in memory.

The traveler took a small leather bag from his pocket and threw it onto a table. It landed with a golden clatter. “Her name is Amaldea,” he said, then pressed her into the Mrs. Gadsby’s arms.

Glancing once at the gold, she took the baby.

That done, the stranger held up a finger warningly. “What is hers is hers,” he said. “Do not take it from her.” He turned and strode back out into the snow and was never heard from again in the village of Garoo.

Later, the Gadsbys found the babe had a gold and emerald amulet fastened about her neck: ordinarily, the Mr. Gadsby would have melted it down or traded it off at the first opportunity regardless of the stranger’s words. But there was something about this trinket that made him fear to take it and whatever remonstrance his wife threw at him, she dared not either. So the girl grew to womanhood with her inheritance intact.

Chapter 1

On the day of her sixteenth birthday(though she did not know that) Amaldea was in the kitchen, cleaning the breakfast dishes.

To her, this seemed just another day in Garoo: dull, monotonous and hard, especially for a young woman all whispered to be fay.

She looked nothing like the people of the village, for she had grown to be tall, fair-skinned and fair-haired. Somewhat plain of face, she possessed quick wits and a disposition to wonder, neither of which were smiled upon Garoo, so she tried to keep them to herself.

Having long ago used up all the things she could think of today, she was thinking of her future as she washed. Her future was grim; she had no property, no dowry, no family, no real hope of marrying.

So lost was she in thought that she almost didn't notice when the mongoose sprang in through the open window and landed upon the counter beside the sink.

However, she did notice when the Mongoose sprang erect on his hind legs and began to speak. "I am here!" he shouted triumphantly in a shrill voice. "I have labored across the driest deserts, hiked through the deepest jungles, clambered over the highest mountains, yet here I am!"

"Well. . ." she said slowly, staring wide-eyed at him. "That's. . . good. I'm glad to know that. Who are you?"

"Why, I am Howard!" he declared, theatrically spreading his arms wide.

She stared at him blankly.

"Howard, the Mongoose?" he said helpfully.

Amaldea shrugged.

The Mongoose stared at her quizzically. "You don't know who I am, do you?"

She silently shook her head.

The Mongoose sighed. "Kids nowadays," he muttered, "no respect for tradition." He turned back to her. "Well, since your education has obviously been sorely neglected, I shall begin with my story." The Mongoose sat back on his haunches, cleared his throat, and began. "More years ago than you could count, I was but an ordinary Mongoose about my ordinary business.

"Unfortunately, one winter my business included starving to death: the land was in the grips of a terrible famine, and there was nothing to be had. Strive as I could, through the swamps and streambeds and fields, I could find no toads or snakes or fish to slake my hunger.

"In desperation, I snuck into one of the great houses of men to forage. But woe to me I had, in my ignorance, entered the home of a family of powerful sorcerers. I was caught, and sentenced to die for trespassing, but your ancestor, the head of the family, saw in me great promise and spared my life. He offered me a choice; I could go free, to starve, or he would bind me, to serve your family as long as it existed. Rather than starve, I submitted to his demand," the Mongoose paused, and a note of sadness entered his shrill voice as he continued. "Ever since, I have loyally served the family down to this day. Now, where are your teachers, little mage? I should speak to them sharply for the disgraceful way they have brought you up!"

She blinked at him, rather perturbed. "I . . . have no teachers."

He blinked owlishly at her. "No teachers? Then-

“I’m an orphan,” Amaldea explained. “I have no family.”

The Mongoose stared at her for a moment, then stood on his back feet and did a little dance. “At last!” he shrilled. “I am free, free at last! They are all dead!” he stopped abruptly, and stared at her with a worrying light in his eye. “All but for you,” he said, and bared his teeth in a feral grin, “I’ll have to do something about you.”

Bong! She hit him over the head with a pot. “Now look!” she snapped while he cowered. “I don’t know who or what you are, but I’m not about to let you ‘do something’ about me!”

“I wasn’t gonna hurt you!” he whined, rubbing his head. “I was just having a little fun, is all!”

Bong! “I’m not someone you can have fun with!” He focused on her blearily. “I’m starting to get that,” he croaked.

Bong! She hit him one more time.

“What was that for?” he cried.

“That was so you won’t forget!” Amaldea snapped.

“Amaldea!” the Mrs Gadsby shouted. “What’s going on!”

Bong! Amaldea dropped the pot over Howard just as the Mrs. Gadsby stormed into the kitchen.

“Who were you talking to?” she demanded. The Mrs. Gadsby was a tall pale woman, absolutely convinced that Amaldea was a troublemaker bent on ruining the tavern.

She raised her bony hand threateningly. “If you’ve been having boys back here. . .”

“No!” Amaldea cried desperately. “I was just talking to myself!”

“About what?”

“Nothing!” Amaldea said. “About nothing at all!”

The Mrs. Gadsby grunted, unconvinced of her

innocense, but dropped her hand and turned away. “Get back to work!” she snapped, storming out again.

Amaldea heaved a sigh of relief and pulled the pot off of Howard. “Are you okay?” she asked.

“Oh, yes!” he chirped cheerfully. “Now, let me start on your education, young girls. Say, when did you become twins?” he wobbled, then cocked his head to the side. “Triplets?” He burbled, then fell down.

Chapter 2

Some time later, Howard stood on Amaldea's leg while she sat in the crook of an oak tree. It was Sunday, when the people of Garoo went to their church. Amaldea never felt comfortable there and the Mrs. Gadsby was none too eager to be seen in public with the girl; nor was the rest of the family, for that matter, so Amaldea had Sunday mornings to herself.

She preferred to spend her free time in the copse of trees above the village overlooking the stream. It was cool in the summer heat and few other people came here.

Today, Howard was teaching her of her family's history.

Her family was Valais, she had learned; after years without a family name, years of wondering, she now knew it. To Amaldea, it now seemed surprisingly trivial: it made no difference to her life now, she was still an orphan with no family to take her away from the Gadsbys and Garoo.

She did have a talking mongoose now, but that didn't seem to benefit her much.

"What can you teach me of use?" she asked.

Howard cocked his head to the side. "Use?"

"What can you teach me that will help me leave here," Amaldea elaborated.

"Ah!" Howard said delightedly. "I was just coming to that, for it is my task to begin your education in the magical arts of your family!"

"Great," said Amaldea. "How do we start?"

"Do you have an emerald amulet of some sort?" Howard asked.

"Yes," Amaldea said and showed it. "Here."

"Good," Howard hopped onto her shoulder and

pointed to an acorn. "Call that to you," he said.

Amaldea glanced at him, then said: "Acorn, come."

The Acorn steadfastly refused to move.

"No," Howard said. "That's not how to do it."

He hopped onto a branch so he could look her in the face. "A word is not always what you think of it: change it, change the word until it sounds exactly like what it means to you, to command that acorn to come." He hopped back onto her shoulder. "Now; command it to come, using your words."

Amaldea thought for a moment, then said a word.

The acorn shifted, but did not break free from its twig. "Ow!" Amaldea grunted and clutched at her head.

"Very good!" Howard congratulated her. "Do not let the pain worry you, it will pass."

And indeed it was already gone. "Why- why did it hurt?" Amaldea asked.

"Because you're out of practice," Howard replied. "With time it will disappear completely and never return."

A sound below made them both quieten and glance down: a boy little older than Amaldea was walking below down to the river. "That's Gal," she hissed to Howard. "Hi, Gal!" she called and waved.

He stopped in surprise and looked wildly about, then glanced up, a little nervously. He smiled widely on seeing her. "Hi, Amaldea!" he called, waving wildly. "What are you doing up there?"

"I'm watching you!" she called back.

"Oh." He seemed mildly disconcerted by this.

"Well. . . don't watch me too hard!" he said.

Amaldea sighed. "I won't. What are you doing?"

"I'm going down to the river!" he said, pointing to it.

“Well, have fun!” she said.

Looking slightly relieved, Gal walked away.

Amaldea heaved a sigh of relief. “He’s hard to talk to,” she said to Howard.

“I see,” he said with a nod. “Well, I think that’s enough for today.”

“Yeah,” Amaldea agreed. “And if Gal’s here, that means they’re out of church; I better get back before they start to miss me.” That last was said a trifle sarcastically.

They climbed down the tree, then turned and started back toward the village.

Gal watched them go, nervously glancing at Amaldea then quickly away, lest she turn and see him staring at her.

Chapter 3

Time passed as it always did in Garoo: slowly.

Across the hot summer Amaldea learned more magic on Sundays and late in the night-time: at times it proved maddeningly complex, with peculiar mental exercises Howard said were required to entrap the tides of magic to one's will.

Howard said that she should be able to see the tides and winds of magic, to be able to manipulate them as easily as she might ordinary tools, but the only sign Amaldea ever saw of magic was when she made something move without touching it.

The fateful day dawned red as blood: a hot late summer day that was yet tinged with the scent of oncoming winter.

On that day, as on any other, Amaldea slaved in the kitchen, helping to cook, washing the dishes, dodging the Mrs. Gadsby's offhand slaps when she thought the girl was not moving fast enough.

After a long time of that on a particularly bad day after a frustrating night of magic, Amaldea's patience was wearing thin. Then a wicked thought occurred to her.

She slipped away to the kitchen door and glanced out at the Mrs. Gadsby, deep in conversation with a few of her cronies.

Amaldea quickly glanced about; no-one was watching. She pointed toward the Mrs. Darby's skirt. "*Rise,*" she whispered.

The Mrs. Darby screamed, pandemonium ensued, and Amaldea ducked away from the door, giggling to herself.

After the sun had set and Amaldea finished in the

kitchen, the Mrs. Darby sent her to her room, and she promptly slipped out the window, Howard perched on her shoulder.

Howard did not speak until they were under the trees far from Garoo. "Your skill is much improved," he said, hopping onto a branch so he could look at her properly. "But such pranks have a way of causing more trouble for the mage than their target."

"What does that mean?" Amaldea asked.

"All magic has a cost. If one thing goes up, another must go down; when you first moved a thing with your magic, it put a strain on you; it still does, but you have grown accustomed to it. But the cost is not always so simple, especially when you use your magic on another person: sometimes, there is no telling what the cost might be."

Amaldea listened to all this in silence, then nodded. "Okay. I'll be careful."

Howard nodded with satisfaction. "Good." He said. "Now, let's begin."

But before they could actually begin, they heard someone walking through the trees.

It was Gal: in the dim light, he was recognizable only by his outline. But he was tense, standing angrily with his hands in fists. Of a sudden, Amaldea realized how big he was; the town fool was as tall as her, but heavier, with broad shoulders and long, muscular arms.

"I saw what you did," he said hoarsely, his voice shaking. "I saw."

"Saw what?" Amaldea asked, her breath catching in her breast. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I *saw* you!" Gal insisted. "In the inn!" he stormed toward her and Amaldea took a frightened step back.

He loomed over her; his face twisted with roiling emotion, his hands clenched in fists, for a

moment he looked like he would hit her.

“Gal,” Amaldea said carefully, realizing she was treading on dangerous ground. “Please don’t tell anyone what you saw.”

“It was witchcraft!” he cried. “The parson says we must tell of witchcraft!”

“Then why are you here and not there?”

Amaldea snapped. Then a strange thought occurred to her. “Gal, why were you watching me in the inn?”

Gal didn’t say anything, but glanced away.

“Gal,” said Amaldea, taking a step toward him. “you mustn’t tell anyone about what you saw.”

“I must!” he cried.

“No,” she insisted. “You mustn’t. I didn’t hurt anyone, it was only prank. You wouldn’t want me to be hurt because of a prank, would you?”

Gal turned away again, pressing his hands to his ears. “Don’t cozen me, witch!” he snapped.

“I’m not a witch, Gal,” she said. “If you tell the Parson he’ll burn me, Gal; do you want that?”

“Stop!” he shouted. “Leave me be!”

She took another step toward him. Howard grasped at Amaldea’s ear, hissing at her to stop, but she pressed on. “Gal, do you want to see me burned?”

“Quiet!” he cried, his whole body shaking with tension.

“Gal. . .” she said, and gently placed her hand on his shoulder.

With an inarticulate cry he whirled on her, left hand raised to strike; Amaldea stumbled back.

“Don’t!” she cried. She felt a terrible pain in her head, then a great branch fell and struck Gal.

Epilogue

When Amaldea came to, her head ached like the branch had hit her head instead of. . . “Gal!” she cried, sitting up and looking around: Gal lay where he had fallen, the branch lying atop him. Amaldea knelt beside him, but even in the dim light she could see the pooled blood pouring from his head where the limb had struck. “Oh, no,” she gasped. “What have I done?”

“You protected yourself,” Howard said. “He was about to strike you.”

“He wouldn’t have,” Amaldea moaned, dropping her head in her hands. “If I hadn’t-”

“If you hadn’t pushed him,” Howard finished for her. “It was stupid, but that’s not a sin.” He hopped on her leg and pulled at her arm. “It’s too late; you can’t help him now,” he said authoritatively. “Now you have to take care of yourself; we must leave here, tonight.”

Amaldea didn’t move.

“Come on!” Howard snapped, shoving at her. “Move!”

Reluctantly, Amaldea rose to her feet; she started walking, and never looked back.

The Tales of the Last Valais continue in *Blitz of Spira*
#3: *Amaldea’s Vengeance*

What is Blitz of Spira?

Blitz of Spira means swords-and-sorcery; it means good fantasy: it means roaring adventures filled with giants, monsters, chases, escapes, true love, magic and miracles. It means a fun quick read without preachy messages or pretentious writings.

Blitz of Spira does *not* mean long-winded tales that take eighteen novels to tell; it does *not* mean cliffhanger endings that don't end so you have to wait a year to buy the next book to find out what happens next.