



The White Rose

By Glen Cook

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She is the last hope of good in the war against the evil sorceress known as the Lady. From a secret base on the Plains of Fear, where even the Lady hesitates to go, the Black Company, once in service to the Lady, now fights to bring victory to the White Rose. But now an even greater evil threatens the world. All the great battles that have gone before will seem a skirmishes when the Dominator rises from the grave.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Born in 1944, Glen Cook grew up in northern California, served in the U.S. Navy, attended the University of Missouri, and was one of the earliest graduates of the well-known "Clarion" workshop SF writers. Since 1971 he has published a large number of SF and fantasy novels, including the "Dread Empire" series, the occult-detective "Garrett" novels, and the very popular "Black Company" sequence that began with the publication of *The Black Company* in 1984. Among his SF novels is *A Passage at Arms*.

After working many years for General Motors, Cook now writes full-time. He lives near St. Louis, Missouri, with his wife Carol.

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Chapter One: The Plain of Fear

The still desert air had a lenslike quality. The riders seemed frozen in time, moving without drawing closer. We took turns counting. I could not get the same number twice running.

A breath of a breeze whined in the coral, stirred the leaves of Old Father Tree. They tinkled off one another with the song of wind chimes. To the north, the glimmer of change lightning limned the horizon like the far clash of warring gods.

A foot crunched sand. I turned. Silent gawked at a talking menhir. It had appeared in the past few seconds, startling him. Sneaky rocks. Like to play games.

"There are strangers on the Plain," it said.

I jumped. It chuckled. Menhirs have the most malevolent laughs this side of fairy stories. Snarling, I ducked into its shadow. "Hot out here already." And: "That's One-Eye and Goblin, back from Tanner."

It was right and I was wrong. I was too narrowly focused. The patrol had been away a month longer than planned. We were worried. Lately the Lady's troops have been more active along the bounds of the Plain of Fear.

Another chuckle from the block of stone.

It towered over me, thirteen feet tall. A middle-sized one. Those over fifteen feet-seldom move.

The riders were closer, yet seemed no nearer. Blame nerves. Times are desperate for the Black Company. We cannot afford casualties. Any man lost would be a friend of many years. I counted again. Seemed right this time. But there was a riderless mount....I shivered despite the heat.

They were on the downtrail leading to a creek three hundred yards from where we watched, concealed within a great reef. The walking trees beside the ford stirred, though the breeze had failed.

The riders urged their mounts to hurry. The animals were tired. They were reluctant, though they knew they were almost home. Into the creek. Water splashing. I grinned, pounded Silent's back. They were all there. Every man, and another.

Silent shed his customary cool, returned a smile. Elmo slipped out of the coral and went to meet our brethren. Otto, Silent, and I hurried after him.

Behind us, the morning sun was a great seething ball of blood.

Men piled off horses, grinning. But they looked bad. Goblin and One-Eye worst of all. But they had come back to territory where their wizards' powers were useless. This near Darling they are no greater than the rest of us.

I glanced back. Darling had come to the head of the tunnel, stood like a phantom in its shadow, all in white. Men hugged men; then old habit took charge. Everybody pretended it was just another day. "Rough out there?" I asked One-Eye. I considered the man accompanying them. He was not familiar.

"Yes." The dried-up little black man was more diminished than first I had thought.

"You all right?"

"Took an arrow." He rubbed his side. "Flesh wound."

From behind One-Eye, Goblin squeaked, "They almost got us. Been chasing us a month. We couldn't shake them."

"Let's get you down in the Hole," I told One-Eye.

"Not infected. I cleared it."

"I still want a look." He has been my assistant since I enlisted as Company physician. His judgment is sound. Yet health is my responsibility, ultimately.

"They were waiting for us, Croaker." Darling was gone from the mouth of the tunnel, back to the stomach of our subterranean fastness. The sun remained bloody in the east, legacy of the change storm's passing.

Something big drifted across its face. Windwhale?

"Ambush?" I glanced back at the patrol.

"Not us specifically. For trouble. They were on the ball." The patrol had had a double mission: to contact our sympathizers in Tanner to find out if the Lady's people were coming alive after a long hiatus, and to raid the garrison there in order to prove we could hurt an empire that bestrides half a world.

As we passed it the menhir said, "There are strangers on the Plain, Croaker."

Why do these things happen to me? The big stones talk to me more than to anyone else.

Twice a charm? I paid attention. For a menhir to repeat itself meant it considered its message critical. "The men hunting you?" I asked One-Eye.

He shrugged. "They wouldn't give up."

"What's happening out there?" Hiding on the Plain, I might as well be buried alive.

One-Eye's face remained unreadable. "Corder will tell it."

"Corder? That the guy you brought in?" I knew the name though not the man. One of our best informants.

"Yeah."

"No good news, eh?"

"No."

We slipped into the tunnel which leads down to our warren, our stinking, moldering, damp, tight little rabbit-hole fortress. It is disgusting, but it is the heart and soul of the New White Rose Rebellion. The New Hope, as it is whispered among the captive nations. The Joke Hope to those of us who live here. It is as bad as any rat-infested dungeon--though a man *can* leave. If he does not mind a venture into a world where all the might of an empire is turned upon him.

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Users Review

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