



Fable: Edge of the World

By Christie Golden

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The official prequel novel to the Xbox 360 videogame, Fable:™ The Journey

It's been almost a decade since the events of Fable 3, when the Hero vanquished the threat across the sea and claimed his throne. As king he led Albion to an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity. But on the night of his wedding to his new queen, ominous word arrives: The darkness has returned.

Beyond a harrowing mountain pass, the exotic desert country Samarkand has been overrun by shadowy forces. Within the walls of its capital city, a mysterious usurper known only as the Empress has seized control. To protect his realm, the king must lead his most trusted allies into a strange land unknown to outsiders. As they forge ahead along Samarkand's ancient Great Road, populated by undead terrors and fantastic creatures once believed to be the stuff of legend, the king is drawn ever closer to his greatest challenge yet.

But soon Albion is engulfed in a war of its own. As the darkness spreads, town by town, a treacherous force has infiltrated the queen's circle. Now the fate of all that is good rests with a faint flicker of hope . . . that somewhere, somehow, heroes still do exist.

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Fable: Edge of the World By Christie Golden Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #994414 in Books
- Published on: 2012-08-21
- Released on: 2012-08-21
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.19" h x .55" w x 5.48" l, .46 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Christie Golden is the *New York Times* bestselling author of more than thirty novels, including *Star Wars: Fate of the Jedi: Ascension*, and several short stories in the fields of fantasy, science fiction, and horror. Her media tie-in works include *Vampire of the Mists*, which launched the Ravenloft line in 1991, more than a dozen *Star Trek* novels, and multiple Warcraft and Starcraft novels, including *World of Warcraft: Thrall: Twilight of the Aspects* and *StarCraft II: Devil's Due*.

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Chapter One

“My lord, if I may?”

Jasper’s voice was slightly high-pitched and filled with suffering so long tolerated that it was no longer even felt. In other words, he sounded completely normal.

The monarch looked into the mirror as he fiddled with his crown. The cursed thing never seemed to fit correctly on his head. His eyes met Jasper’s in the mirror and he nodded.

“Please. And if you can do anything that makes this ermine stole feel less as if it’s made of armor, I’d be grateful for that too.”

“Alas,” said Jasper as he stepped beside the young king he had tended since the monarch’s birth, “while it is indeed in actuality merely the weight of two stuffed minklike creatures, I can sympathize with the symbolic weight it places on Your Majesty’s shoulders.”

“It’s the crown, not the wedding outfit, that has the symbolic weight,” the king shot back good-naturedly. “I can’t wait for the ceremony.”

“Then may I say that Your Majesty is among the very, very fortunate few,” noted Jasper.

The king chuckled. “It’s nice to have you back, Jasper.”

Jasper, once the king’s butler, had spent the last few years serving in a different capacity. He was now the steward of a magical, and quite secret, Sanctuary. Established by the late king, the Sanctuary was the present king’s birthright as he was both the son of a Hero of Albion and a Hero himself. When the then-prince, sickened by his older brother Logan’s cruelty to his own people, had chosen to lead a rebellion to take the crown, the loyal if acerbic Jasper had fled with the future king and Sir Walter Beck. Together, the three had found the Sanctuary, which had served as a sort of headquarters for the rebellion. Once Logan had been overthrown, Jasper had remained there, continuing to probe the mysteries of the place.

But for this occasion--a royal wedding--he had been recalled to his old duties. And while he attempted to appear much put-upon, the monarch knew Jasper well enough to realize that the old butler was secretly quite pleased.

So, for that matter, was the king himself--and, he dared believe, his entire kingdom. Nine years had passed

since the monarch had stood against both his brother and the darkness that had threatened to wipe out all of Albion. The king had not been quoting a cliché when he spoke of the symbolic weight of the crown. His days gathering followers and fighting hobbes, balverines, and the occasional gap-toothed bandit seemed like a stroll in the garden compared to the very gray duties of ruling a kingdom. He had made choices he was proud of, and some he was not, and not one of them had been clear or simple. More lives had been lost than he would have wanted, but in the end, his people were now safe, happy, and well on their way to regaining prosperity without having to make deals with the devil.

Speaking of devils???

“No whispers of Reaver returning?” he asked of Jasper, who seemed to know everything about everyone. “It’d be just like him to try to spoil today.”

“I can honestly say that I have not heard a breath of Mr. Rea-ver’s whereabouts, and I am buoyant with delight at the fact.”

“Ben Finn’s just gotten back from wandering about, and Page’s network hasn’t heard anything either,” the king said. “We may just have gotten lucky.”

“I would touch wood when you say that, Your Majesty. Repeatedly.”

The king grinned. He glanced down at the other “old friend” who sat patiently at his feet, as he had done for over a decade. His border collie, Rex, had been a faithful ally on the long road to rule. Now that he was growing old, he slept more than he played, but was still alert and healthy. Rex’s eyes were fixed on his master, and he barked happily as he saw the king smile.

“Good dog,” said the king. “The best dog ever.”

Rex pranced a little at the praise, then sat down attentively. The king surveyed his reflection in the mirror and liked what he saw. Like Rex, he too was older, and time had begun to make its presence noticed in the crinkles around his brown eyes and the occasional thread of silver in his hair. His face was still strong and, if the blushing and giggling ladies of the court were to be believed, handsome. But he didn’t care what they thought. There was only one woman whose opinion mattered, and today, she would become his queen and his life’s companion.

“You do look happy, Your Majesty,” said Jasper, and there was an unusual hint of warmth and pride in his voice.

The monarch turned from the mirror. “I am, Jasper. My kingdom is content and growing, we are at peace, trade with Aurora is good, and I am about to be wed to the most wonderful girl in the world. And,” he added, whispering conspiratorially, “I’ll be happier still tonight.”

“One should hope so, Your Majesty.”

Chuckling slightly, the monarch clapped his old friend on the shoulder. “Let’s go. Can’t keep the love of my life waiting.”

Rex trotted after them, tail waving, as the king and his butler left the room.

The throne room was exquisite testimony to the majesty of the castle's design. Stairs covered with rich blue carpeting led up to a raised dais, upon which the throne itself was seated. The walls were lined with portraits of former royalty, and the whole was illumined by colorful light filtered through three stained-glass windows. The room's formality had been gentled through the use of flowers adorning the walls and fixtures, and a white canopy that draped from the ceiling. The throne was still present but had been moved back slightly to make room for a small table presided over by an elderly robed woman. All the guests had arrived and were chatting quietly among themselves. Over to the right, a quartet played.

A slender blond man stood by the door, peering into the room and fidgeting as the king and Jasper approached. The king grinned as the young man tugged on a collar that was apparently too tight. Even from behind, Benjamin Finn looked quite out of his element. As indeed he was. Finn, who had been one of many who had helped the monarch claim the throne, came from common roots and had spent most of his life as either a soldier or a mercenary. Nonetheless, the king knew the man's worth. Finn was brave if a little reckless, and a master sharpshooter, and the king appreciated his wit and rather tall tales. Despite his devil-may-care attitude, Ben Finn had a great heart.

"You look so anxious, one might think you were the one to be married today," the king said casually. Ben started, then glared at him.

"Crikey, don't do that. I'm likely to drop the rings, and it'd be all your fault."

"No, no, my best man would never do that, not if he doesn't want to start posing for 'Wanted' posters again."

"Too right," Ben muttered, but the king noticed nonetheless that the soldier put his hand in his pocket with an overly casual movement, making sure the rings were still there. As he did so, he glanced up at his friend and liege.

"Thank you again for the honor. I know that there would have been someone else you'd have picked if you'd had the chance though--and I would have cheered it."

The king sobered. Ben was right. One very important man was missing on this special day--his friend and weapons tutor, Sir Walter Beck. It had been Walter who had guided the then-prince on his quest, from that night when he, Beck, and Jasper had fled the castle, up until Walter's tragic demise. While Captain Jack Timmins had taken over Walter's role in things martial, no one had ever been as loyal as the knight, and the king knew he would never have quite that same kind of bond with anyone again.

"Walter would have been very happy today, wouldn't he?" the king said quietly.

"Your Majesty--wherever he is, I suspect he is happy."

The king nodded and took a breath. Ben was right. Walter was the last person who would have wished to cast any pall over his king's wedding day, and so, the king would not let that happen.

"Ready, sir?" asked Ben.

"Yes."

"You're sure? Because you know, you're the king; if you don't want to go through with it, if you're getting cold feet or anything like that--there's no one who's going to force you to do it, now, is there?"

“You’re babbling, Ben.”

“Oh. I am, aren’t I?”

“Come on. Let’s go.”

As they walked in, Rex trotting behind his master, they saw many familiar faces. Sitting in the area reserved for special guests of the kingdom were two others who looked as out of place as Ben clearly felt. One was an extraordinarily large and powerfully built man with a long, curling black mustache. He wore a thick-brimmed hat and his wide leather belt was adorned with a skull and crossbones. To look at him, no one would guess that he had a soft spot a mile wide for animals. This was Boulder, the taciturn bodyguard of King Sabine of the Mistpeak Dwellers.

Sabine was as different from Boulder as could be imagined. Little more than half the big man’s size, he could best be described with words like “knobby” and “spry.” His beard was as pointed as his hat and his strange, upturned shoes. Propped up beside him as he sat was a staff that his gnarled hands gripped tightly. Affixed to the top of the staff was a purple bottle that served Sabine as a pipe. Smoke usually rose from its opening as Sabine puffed away on a long stem, but for the occasion, the Dweller leader had grudgingly agreed not to smoke.

The Dwellers had been the king’s first allies and had remained loyal friends. It was quite a trek from Mistpeak to Bowerstone, and the monarch was pleased to see that the cranky old man had made the journey.

Another who had made an even longer journey was the exotic Auroran leader, Kalin. Her only concession to the cold climate of Albion in winter was a cloak currently folded in her lap. Otherwise, her body and garb proclaimed her origins proudly, from her shaved and tattooed head and arms to her green, gold, and red robes. She was here not only as a true ally but as a countrywoman of the bride-to-be. Indeed, Kalin had been the one to introduce the couple. Kalin caught the king’s eye and gave him a sweet, fond smile. He returned it, then turned his attention to the front of the room as he and Ben walked up the stairs and stood on the priestess’s left. As it had been important to his fiancée to have the wedding performed in the traditional manner of her people, the elderly and wise Priestess Mara had accompanied Kalin across the ocean to officiate.

The music changed. All eyes now turned from the present king to Albion’s future queen. The king’s breath caught, as it did every time he saw her.

Laylah.

Tall and slender, delicate of feature with wide, doelike eyes, her lips curved in a smile that made his heart leap. The dusky golden brown of her skin and her ebony tresses contrasted with the creamy white of the formal gown. In her hands, she held a bouquet of native, riotously colorful Auroran blossoms.

Walking behind her as her maid of honor was the only true Bowerstone native besides the king himself--Page. She resembled Laylah slightly although her skin was much darker, her features fuller, and her long hair tightly braided in rows. The leader of the Bowerstone Resistance during Logan’s reign, Page had taken a great deal of convincing before she had come to believe that the current ruler could be trusted. And he supposed he couldn’t blame her.

He was delighted that Page and Laylah, though from completely different backgrounds, had become such

fast friends. Laylah could not be called a true innocent. She and her people had suffered, terribly and terrifyingly, from the dark horror known to them as the Nightcrawler. It was this darkness the king himself had helped to defeat, first in Aurora and later in Albion proper. But even though she had endured much, Laylah had a certain naivete about her.

This could not be said about Page. She was as hard as Laylah was soft. A shrewd observer of people, Page knew how to motivate and inspire her friends and stand up to her enemies. Her “organization” was still largely intact though now she offered what she knew--at least most of what she knew; the king suspected that she still kept a few things close to her vest--and had proven to be an invaluable resource. Page was that admirable though often oxymoronic thing, the pragmatic optimist. He was glad that Laylah had found not only a friend but one who could help her understand Bowerstone and its populace, both good and bad.

But all that, important though it was, could wait. All he saw now was the brave but gentle girl who had won his heart. Her cheeks turned a dark rose as she ascended the steps to stand beside him, and her eyes were bright with joy.

Most of the wedding ceremony was a blur to the king. He uttered his name when needed to, happily vowed to love, protect, and be true to Laylah, and had a moment of panic when he heard Ben swearing as he fumbled for the rings. Laylah extended her slender hand, and the king slipped the simple gold ring on the fourth finger.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a bearded Dweller standing outside the throne room, arguing with a guard. The guard was shaking his head, but Jasper quietly intervened and led the messenger as discreetly as possible to where King Sabine was seated. He heard Sabine’s distinctive yapping for an instant, then both he and the messenger hastened out.

The king’s heart sank. Something bad had obviously happened, and he was selfish enough, at this moment at least, to hope it was something Sabine could handle by himself.

He had a feeling it wasn’t.

Oh well, he thought as Laylah slipped a ring on his own left hand, such is the life of a king.

Even, it would seem, on his wedding day.

He clasped Laylah’s hand and turned to face the applauding crowd as Priestess Mara presented them as King and Queen of Albion. Laylah’s arm was slipped through his, the new royal couple nodded, smiling, to the well-wishers. But the instant they stepped through the doors, the king felt the strong grip of Sabine’s clawlike hand.

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