



ISLAND OF THE LOST CHILDREN

EZ BEGÜNDE LÛTE ERSCHRËN,
EZ WAS SËRE ERSCHRAHT
ER TRUOG EZ HARTE HÔHE
MIT DER SÏNEN MAHT

— MIDDLE HIGH GERMAN —

THE BOY WAS SORELY FRIGHTENED,
AND BEGAN ALOUD TO SHRIEK;
HIGHER THE MIGHTY GRIFFIN FLEW,
WITH OUTSTRETCHED BEAK

— ENGLISH TRANSLATION—

FAVORITE MEDIEVAL TALES

LONG AGO in Holland a mighty king and queen gave birth to a remarkable son named Hagen. Even as a small boy, Prince Hagen showed great promise of courage and valor.

One summer, Hagen's father held a royal tournament. The palace and city swarmed like a beehive. In the daytime, jewels and armor glittered in the sunlight. At night in the feast halls, the sounds of harps and lutes filled the air.

On the eighth day, however, all the feasting and mirth turned to bitter sorrow. For into the midst of the sport and laughter appeared an evil griffin, a monster with the body and hind legs of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle.

The griffin lit upon a tree. Beneath it sat Prince Hagen with his nursemaid. When the maid saw the hideous creature, she ran away screaming, leaving the frightened young prince alone.

Seizing the moment, the griffin swooped down from the tree and grabbed Hagen with its claws. As it soared away, its wings roared like the wind and spread darkness over the land like a storm cloud.

The king and queen and all their guests watched in horror as the monster and Hagen vanished into the sky.

Hagen's parents nearly went mad with grief. Messengers were sent to scour the land. But they came back with neither news of the monstrous bird nor the kidnapped child. Forced to conclude that their son had been slain, the king and queen were left to their sorrow.

In truth, Hagen was not slain. The monster had already eaten that day, so his appetite did not compel him to kill the young

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prince. Instead, the griffin carried Hagen over land and sea until they came to a deserted island.

There, on the summit of a cliff, the griffin delivered Hagen to its nest. The monster's young began to play with the terrified boy as cats would torment a mouse. During their play, a young griffin seized Hagen and flew off with him. Hagen screamed and fought, until the griffin dropped him, and Hagen crashed to the ground.

Badly bruised and scratched, the boy dragged himself into the underbrush to hide from the flying monsters; and there he fell into a deep sleep.

The next morning Hagen awoke, feeling cold and hungry. He crept out from his shelter, hoping to find wild berries to eat.

Behind Hagen were tall pine trees; in front of him was a sandy slope stretching down to a rocky beach, where the black sea crashed with a mighty force. No roots or berries grew in that desolate place by the sea. The ground was parched and barren.

As the boy looked fearfully about, he saw three ghostlike figures moving among the pines.

Cautiously, he drew near and saw that the figures were young maidens, wearing garments woven from the gray moss that hung from the tree branches.

The eldest of the girls stepped forward bravely. "Why do you hunt us?" she asked.

"I don't," said Hagen. "I was kidnapped and brought here yesterday by a griffin."

The maiden, whose name was Hilda, was relieved to discover that Hagen was not a wild creature, but a mere child like herself.

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She saw that he was bruised and battered from his terrible journey. So she led him to the cave where she and the other two young girls were hiding from the griffins.

In the cave, the three maidens made Hagen lie down on a bed of moss. They washed dirt and blood from his hands and face and gave him water to drink.

When Hagen asked them for food, they shared the herbs they had gathered at daybreak before the griffins had stirred.

After he had eaten, Hagen told the girls his name and how he had arrived at the island.

Each maiden then explained how she, too, had been kidnapped by the griffin and how she had escaped the monster's claws and found the others. For three years now the maidens had lived together in their cave, safe from the griffins and other wild creatures of the wood.

The eldest of them, Hilda, was the daughter of a king in India; the next oldest came from Sweden; and the youngest came from Portugal. All three loved Hagen and gave him food and water each day to help him recover from his terrible ordeal.

With no hope for escape, Hagen and the three maidens lived together on the lonely island for four summers and four winters. They never ventured beyond the edge of the wood for fear of the griffins.

One night, a terrible storm hit the island. Lightning struck the pines. The sea roared and lashed the shore. The children huddled together as salt water gusted into the opening of their cave.

When morning dawned, Hagen looked out at the sea and saw a deserted ship rolling on the waves.

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For a better view, he snuck down to the edge of the shore; and to his horror, he saw the drowned bodies of sailors sprawled across the rocks. The accident had attracted the hideous griffins, who were fighting over the corpses.

Hagen fled back to the cave and told his friends what he had seen. They all wept for the fate of the brave men who had died at sea.

The next morning Hagen rose early again and slipped back down to the water in search of any goods that might have washed ashore.

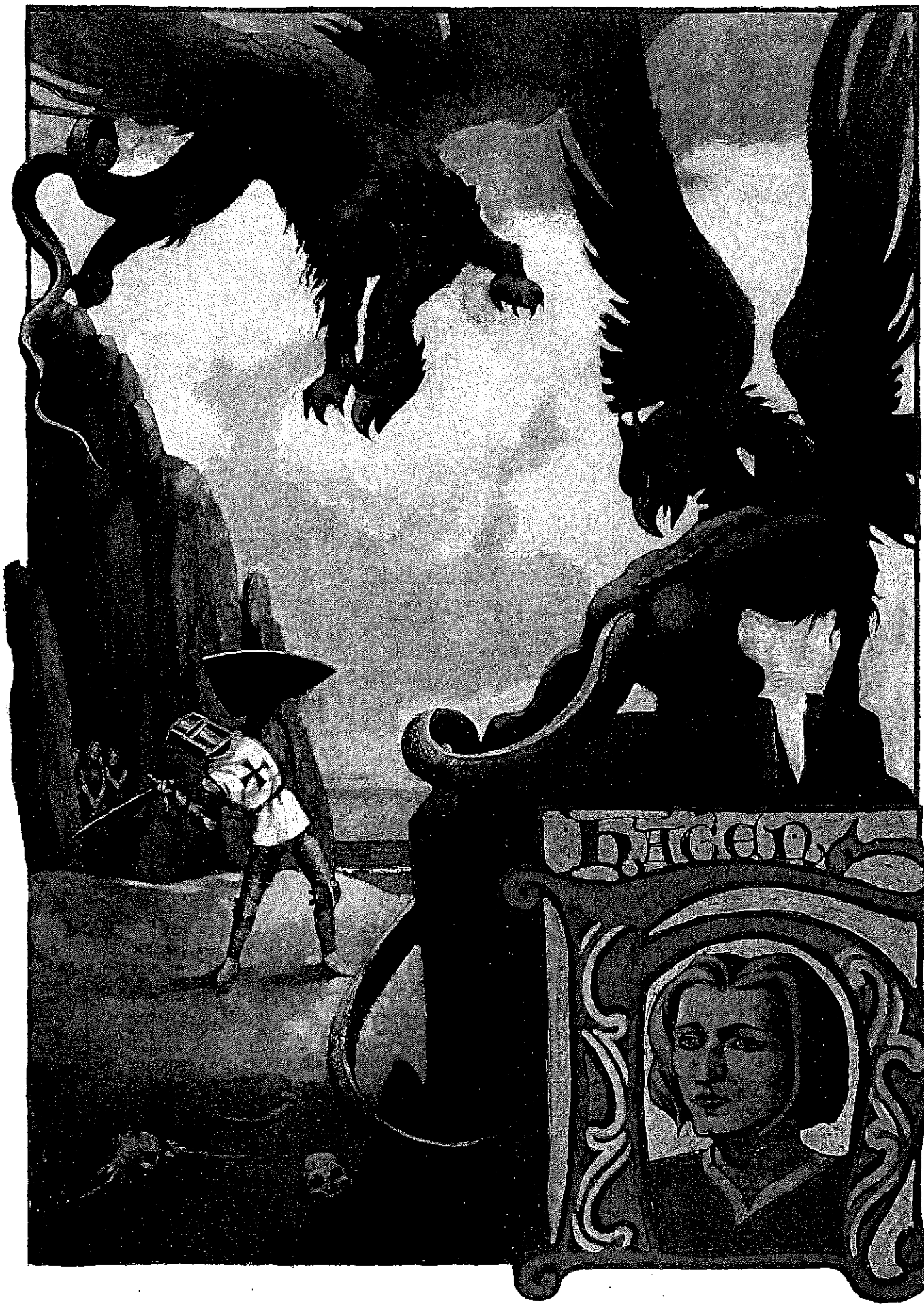
He found the rocks strewn with planks and chests from the ship. When he saw a drowned sailor clad in shining armor, he took the armor for his own. He buckled it around his body, then strapped on the warrior's sword and bow.

As Hagen started back to the cave, he felt a rush of wind and heard a screeching cry. Then he saw a huge griffin flying toward him.

Unable to escape, Hagen flashed his sword at the monster. The griffin attacked with its beak and tried to peck out his eyes, but Hagen sliced the air with his sword and cut the monster's wing. With another stab, he slashed the griffin's leg, and the creature fell to the ground.

The other griffins swooped down on Hagen. From their cave, the maidens watched in horror as the boy defended himself. He swung his mighty sword, killing one flying monster after another.

Finally, after the last griffin had fallen to the rocks, Hagen ran toward the cave. "Come out!" he shouted joyfully. "Feel the air and the sun! We're free!"



DRAGON



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The maidens rushed forward and praised Hagen for his great strength and courage.

After much rejoicing, the lost children started across the deserted island, in search of a smooth shore where a ship might be able to land. They walked day and night, guiding themselves by the sun and the stars.

With his sword and bow, Hagen fought off all the wild beasts. He was king of the woods — leaping like a panther and fighting like a lion. Together, he and the maidens hunted and fished. They gathered wood and made fires and feasted on wild boar and venison.

One day, they finally came to a sandy shore. Miraculously, a ship was sailing by. The lost children shouted and jumped up and down.

The vessel started in their direction. But as it came closer, the sailors saw the maidens in their strange mossy garments and mistook them for sea monsters.

The ship started to move away. But Hagen jumped on a rock and shouted for help. The sailors heard his words and realized that these were indeed humans. They turned around and hurried toward shore with great speed.

The owner of the ship, the Count of Garadie, invited the four children to come aboard, and he fed them a great feast.

At the table, Hagen explained how they had been carried off by griffins and how he had slain the monsters.

The count stared at him in astonishment, for all knew that one griffin was a match for five strong men.

“Tell me,” he said to the boy, “who is your father?”

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“He is King Sigeband,” answered Hagen.

The count smiled grimly. “Ah, it is well that you have fallen into my hands. I will now avenge myself on your father. He drove me from my castle and slew all my knights. I will hold you prisoner for his wicked deeds.”

Hagen held up his sword and stared coldly at the count. “I will not be your hostage,” the boy said. “If my father has done wrong, take us to him, and I promise he will repay you a thousandfold.”

The count ordered his crew to sail at once to the harbor of Balyan, the home of King Sigeband.

“Go to my mother,” Hagen told the count’s messengers. “Tell her that you know where her son is. If she doubts you, tell her that her son has a little cross the color of gold marked on his chest. By that sign she will know you are telling the truth.”

The messengers rode to the castle and were taken before the king.

When Sigeband heard they were from Garadie, he stiffened with anger. “How dare you enter here!” he said. “You know I have sworn to hang all of the people of Garadie.”

“But your son Hagen has sent us,” said a messenger. “We rescued him at sea.”

“How wicked your lies are,” said Sigeband. “My son Hagen died four years ago. We weep for him every day.”

“Well, he who calls himself Prince Hagen bears the mark of the cross upon his chest, a gold cross,” said the messenger. “He told us that his mother will know him by this sign.”

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The queen gasped. "Let us ride down to the harbor," she said. "And we can see for ourselves whether or not our son has returned."

The king and queen mounted horses, and, with their chief knights and ladies, they rode down to the harbor of Balyan.

When Hagen saw the party approaching, he came ashore to greet them.

The queen bade the crowd to clear a space. Then she asked Hagen to uncover his chest. There, for certain, was the mark of the gold cross.

The queen cried out with inexpressible joy and embraced her long-lost son.

No less was the joy of the king, who wept aloud before all his people. To the Count of Garadie, he promised peace forever more. And for the next fourteen days, he hosted a great feast for Hagen, the three maidens, the count, and all the court.

The whole land rejoiced. Soon thereafter, Sigeband bestowed his crown upon Hagen. And the young king asked the maiden Hilda to be his wife and his queen. Together, they ruled wisely for many years.

