



the
HUNTER
the **BEAR** *and the*
SEVENTH
SISTER

World of Arcas

B. I. WOOLET

THE HUNTER, THE BEAR, AND THE SEVENTH SISTER
A Novel

by
B. I. Woolet



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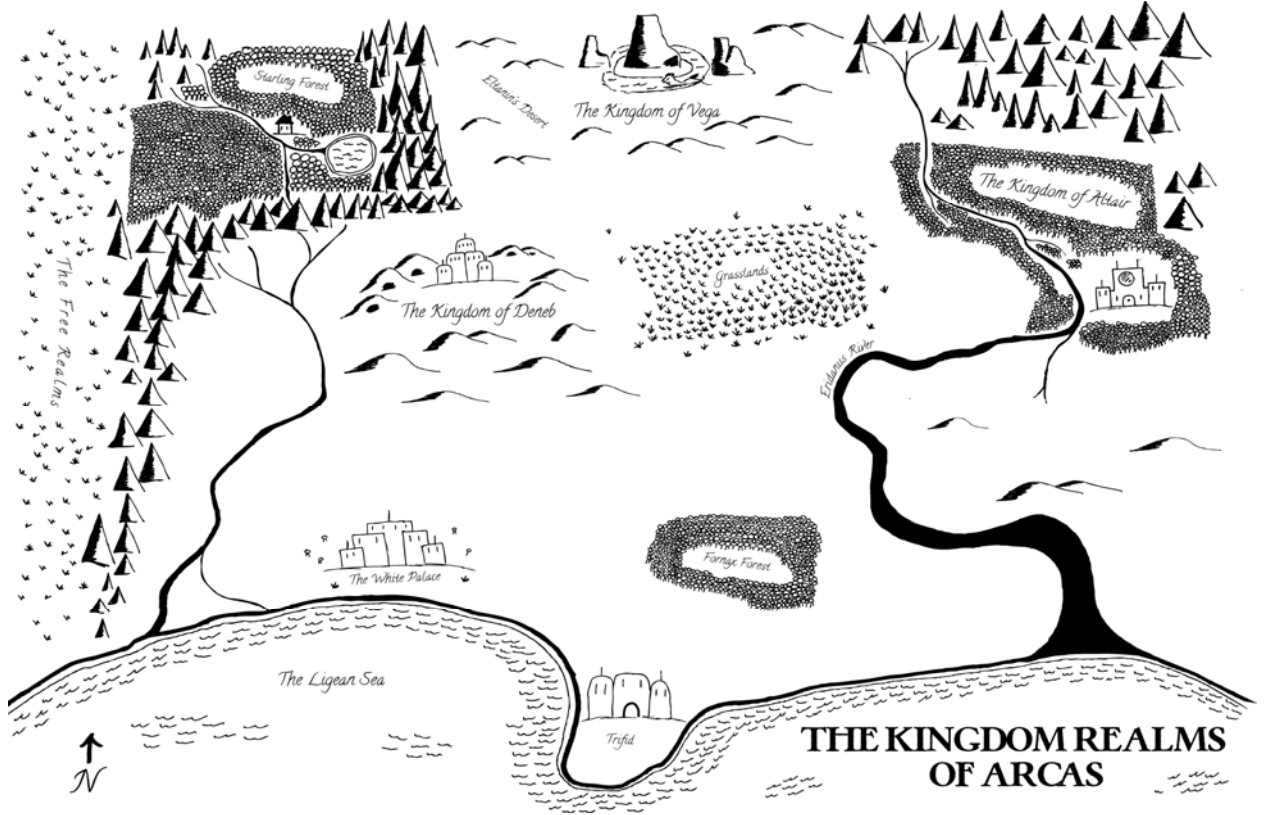
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First Edition

For our children who will inherit the ancient tales and create their own adventures inspired by the glorious heavens. May you always see shimmers of light piercing through the darkest night.

THE KINGDOM REALMS OF ARCAS



Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? Or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? Canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?

—Book of Job 38:31-33



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CHAPTER 1—A STRANGER IN THE NIGHT



Jackson held his sword firmly with both hands, for one would be foolish to challenge the powerful Draco with mere one-handed swordplay. Circling around him, the beast roared from his gut, flinging embers of fiery saliva through the air. Each hazardous droplet sizzled against the doubled-edged steel blade. Jackson dove to the ground on his knees, slicing the dragon's leg. His sword did no more damage than a mere twig, bouncing off each armored scale, merely scraping off the top layer of cool, thick oil, which protected the dragon from both water and flame.

Jackson sprung to his feet, sparing not even a moment for Draco to take advantage of the failed attack. Rolling behind the creature, jumping to his feet, then running from the hurling flames, Jackson determined he must aim behind the ears where the tough scales smoothed into thick flesh. Dust and wind whirled around him as Draco rose in the air. The dragon arched his hovering body and flared his heated nostrils for the final attack. No decent strategy would save Jackson now that the beast was suspended above him.

Jackson knelt on the ground in surrender, digging his hands into the earth as if the ground would help him cling to his endangered life. As the powerful reptilian wings swooped one last time and the head leaped downward to finish him off, Jackson cast two fistfuls of dirt at the dragon's eyes. Stunned, confused, and temporarily blinded, the creature fell to the ground and shook its head rapidly from side to side, clawing at his own face to remove the grainy intruders.

Jackson ran up close—unnoticed by the preoccupied beast—jumped on its back, and sliced across the nape of the neck just behind the ears. Blood squirted and spit from the wound. Flaring with anger and pain, Draco blindly turned to spit fire toward the direction of the blow. But Jackson had calculated the beast's reaction. Swooping underneath the dragon's neck as it twisted, Jackson slashed a last blow across the trachea, cutting the very breath from Draco before the mammoth creature collapsed heavily to the ground. The intense battle left Jackson with pink, warm cheeks and his slightly heightened breath formed tiny clouds in the crisp autumn air.

At Jackson's childhood home in the city, a teen would never have this freedom to fight

imaginary beasts without ridicule. There were too many eyes watching, judging every movement outside the closed blinds and closed doors. The only acceptable form of fantasy came from a screen and a gamepad. But in the forty acres of woods bordering his backyard, and the hundreds of acres of farmland surrounding them now, he could grab a stick and thrash at the air, trees, and bushes as much as he desired. Holding the large sword-length, bark-covered, rough stick like a javelin, he torpedoed it through the woods since its use against dragons and otherworldly beasts had ended in triumph, and he had no other use for it now.

The stick may have traveled far in an open field, but the thick Indiana woods altered its path after several feet as it knocked against bark, tangled and spun in branches, then finally dove on top of the leaf-covered undergrowth. Jackson paused to pull a small flashlight from his pocket. He knew the trail by heart, and he wasn't usually scared of the dark, but logic told him wandering in the woods blindly in the night lacked judgment. Plus, a little light on the path would usually frighten off the occasional rabid raccoon or crazed coyote.

Ahh, there's the spot!

His favorite place to stargaze was a large, circular clearing in the middle of the woods. Several log benches surrounded an enclosed, gigantic campfire created by small boulders taken from Farmer John's fields through the years. On a warm summer's day, Jackson would lie on the soft grass and gaze at the sky. But with fall dew saturating the ground's surface from the cooling night air, he chose to lie on one of the benches instead. The bench was sturdy and heavy and long enough to stretch out his legs. It was homemade outdoor furniture assembled back when Farmer John's son was still a kid living on the farm and working with his dad. Grandpa and the farmer were good old-fashioned friends and good old-fashioned neighbors.

Though Jackson grew up in the nearest medium-sized city forty-five minutes away, he always loved visiting his grandpa in the country. Grandpa would often take him out to the clearing. They would lie on the ground and look at the constellations in the clear night sky. Almost three years had passed now since Gramps died. Jackson's family moved out to the country soon after, inheriting the old farmhouse. Though he had no one to share the night sky with anymore, Jackson still enjoyed gazing solo and reading through the constellation books Grandpa had given him years ago.

No one else shared Jackson's love of the stars like Grandpa. No one else seemed to have much knowledge or interest in constellations or gazing at the starry night sky. That was okay though. Lying out in the clearing, he often pretended Grandpa was still right there next to him. Time had passed, but the scenery was the same, and he still felt his aged mentor's calming presence.

Sometimes, Jackson would bring the constellations to life, making up stories about Leo and Orion fighting battles together against Ursa, the giant wild bear. Jackson missed his bright-belted friend, Orion. He wouldn't roam this fall sky until around midnight, but once full winter hit in late December, he could find him before 10 p.m., which was usually the latest he was allowed to stay out.

Wait! There are the Pleiades! The seven tightly clustered, individual sparkles were barely

visible over the eastern horizon and shining through the bare branches of a tree. Orion wouldn't be far behind. Jackson chuckled as he remembered the Greek tales of scandal surrounding these beautiful, bright stars. *Ha! Even when beautiful women are frozen in time and space, they still manage to create drama and spontaneous lunacy in the men around them.* Continuing to scan the night sky for dippers, heroes and other mythical creatures, Jackson's eyes grew heavy.

It was a perfect night to be outside—no mosquitoes, no gnats, no flies, and a gentle wind rustling the browning leaves. Some leaves still held on to branches and some floated to the ground with each trickle of wind that whispered past. A brief rest before returning home wouldn't hurt, and his parents always knew where to find him, so he relaxed further, pulled his hoodie over his chilled ears, set his phone on the bench just above his head, and gave in to the peaceful surroundings.

"Jackson! Jackson, wake up!" a voice beckoned him from his dreams.

It must be his dad, who often would come out to fetch him when it got too late. The air felt slightly warmer, the wind blew rapidly across his hands and face, and he heard distant thunder echoing through the sky. Jackson turned his head toward the light, slowly opened his eyes, and squinted at the face above him. But this time, the light was not from his father's flashlight. This time, it was neither his father's face looking down at him nor his father's voice speaking to him. Jackson's stomach instantly tightened, and his eyes shot open as every nerve exploded with adrenaline.

"AHHH!" Jackson yelled, jumped from his seat, and sprinted toward home. Heart pounding and head spinning, he tried to reason what he saw. The most logical conclusion would be a ghost. What other creature would be glowing white against the darkness? But, ghosts were translucent, right? Well, not that anyone he knew had ever met a ghost, but that's how it was in the movies. This creature was definitely solid, alive.

Jackson's knowledge of the trails paid off. He didn't see anything behind him and just around the corner should be a clear, straight path back to the farmyard. Maybe he over-reacted; maybe he was just dreaming. But just as Jackson rounded the wooded bend, something was wrong. He was back at the campfire, back at the clearing, and back within sight of the glowing creature.

Something was definitely wrong! No one knew these trails better than Jackson. Perhaps he turned himself the wrong way in panic. Backtracking, he raced away from the clearing again and turned the corner anew. Terror consumed his eyes and numbness tingled through his extremities as the next turn revealed, once again, a path back to the clearing.

"You can't run from me, Jackson." The calm, clear voice pierced through the darkness immediately behind him.

"UHH!" Jackson bellowed as he turned and ran from the being who appeared without warning.

Jackson could hear the creature rapidly pursuing him. Yet, he did not hear the sound of feet thumping behind him; it was more the sound of wind. This wind moved differently than the constant rush of air the coming storm pushed through. This wind rushed against his neck with

rhythmical reverberation. *Phoom, phoom, phoom, phoom.* The leaves rustled and clattered in response and even the branches appeared to sway in rhythm. Running past the cold fire pit again, Jackson headed toward another familiar path, but the trail was entirely gone.

All paths, which he knew should be there, seemed to be covered with a waving kaleidoscope of impenetrable trees and brush. Jackson did a one-eighty, scanning the tree line for any final route of escape. But as he turned, the blazing, lighted creature hovered right in front of him. Jackson fell to his knees and covered his head as if protecting himself from a blow. Surely, if the being didn't vaporize him, he was fated to die this very moment of a heart attack. He cowered on the ground, awaiting certain death. Jackson's arms involuntarily fell from his head to the earth beneath him as he vomited repeatedly from both exhaustion and fear.

CHAPTER 2—THE WHITE SWAN



“I’m sorry, Jackson,” the voice apologized. “I hadn’t expected my arrival to cause you such stress.” The celestial being relayed both strength and compassion in his voice. “I’m not here to hurt you. I need your help.”

Jackson wiped his mouth on his sleeve and breathed deeply, staring into the moist grass and leaves beneath him. Though he was positive an aneurism would strike him dead any moment, curiosity overcame his dizziness, exhaustion, and fear. Jackson slowly lifted his eyes toward the brightly glowing being in front of him.

The first sight to behold was the creature’s shoes: smooth, silky, and bright white. They resembled boot-high moccasins in size and shape, yet they were so white and un-scuffed they appeared to have never touched the ground. Golden topaz gems fastened the middle of each shoe.

Jackson’s gaze ventured farther up to a diamond-contoured cloak made of the same silky white material as the shoes. The body appeared to be that of a man’s: feet, legs, hands, arms, and shoulders. His muscles were developed and powerful, but not overwhelming like a Hercules or a professional body-builder. The garment reached his neck with a split, rounded collar that stood up. In perfect coordination with the shoes, the middle was buttoned down from the lower neck to the waist with golden topaz gems. Diamond designs flowed intricately throughout the chest and arms. Behind this incredible suit of clothing, there appeared to be a beautiful display of feathers. At first, Jackson assumed this was part of the garment, as its color perfectly blended with the fair white. Refocusing his eyes, Jackson realized that these feathers were not an adornment. The man standing in front of him had wings: large, powerful, feathery, real-live, working wings.

An angel! thought Jackson. Excited, though still terrified, he straightened his torso upright, still sitting on his calves and gawked at the face. Bleached blond hair shone off his head like fiery sunshine waving wildly in the violent wind, while emerald green eyes pierced into Jackson’s soul with a concerned urgency. His skin was smooth but well defined by his clear,

strong chin and cheekbones. With a new calm and awe, Jackson thought that this must be the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

“Are you an angel?” Jackson managed to release the words spinning around his brain.

“My name is Cygnus,” he revealed with his voice fighting through the wind and a crack of thunder. “There’s no time to explain now. We must leave. Don’t be afraid, Son of Earth. You can trust me.”

Cygnus immediately began drawing a door in the air. Like a flaming laser, light shot through his fingers. Once the arched drawing was complete, reality collapsed to the ground like falling water. The trees and the darkness vanished behind shades of blue and orange dancing about in the dazzling portal.

“It’s time. Let’s go,” ordered Cygnus.

Still on his knees, absorbing the sight of the shimmering doorway and the celestial being with both awe and confusion, Jackson remained frozen, motionless.

“Go where?”

“There’s no time to explain. We need to go now!” Cygnus urged just as a bolt of light shot down through the sky, piercing a thick sycamore. Jackson startled as his eyes leapt toward the sounds of creaking and snapping nearby.

“HEEEELLLLPPP!” Jackson yelled as half the tree collapsed downward, headed right for his body. With one hand, Cygnus grabbed Jackson off the ground as effortlessly as if he were a mere toddler, and threw him into the portal away from the crashing tree and away from the world he knew.

Falling.

Falling.

Falling.

He flailed his arms and legs as if swimming through the air would slow his descent. Jackson attempted once to open his eyes, but the intense wind quivering past his face and the unfeigned fear of immediate death kept his vision sealed shut.

If Jackson could have relaxed and ceased his continuous, panicked screaming, he may have enjoyed the serenity of the nearing world below him. Bright air and a smooth breeze emitted perfect warmth around his terrified, free-falling body. The calm, encompassing heat of coral, crimson, and gold radiated through the soft blue sky while the land below teemed with green.

Lush grass blanketed a valley, which was outlined by a forest climbing upon rolling hills and mountains of thick trees and brush. Behind the soft, rounded tops filled with trees and shrubbery loomed taller peaks edged with steep, sharp rock and topped with light speckles of fresh snow. The valley revealed deer-like creatures feasting on grass, gray rabbits chasing one another, and black squirrels skipping amongst the trees. An abundance of animal life filled the surrounding forests. Songs of birds, bellows of goats, and gobbles of turkeys accompanied the vibrant yet secluded woodland hills.

Just as Jackson was losing consciousness in preparation for a deadly collision with the ground, he felt large spurts of wind behind him increasing in speed and proximity.

Instantaneously, his yelling ceased as his breath was nearly taken from him by an arm swooping around his chest. The rapid descent relaxed from a free-fall to a glide.

“Don’t worry. You’re safe.”

Cygnus had grabbed him. Catching his breath and calming a bit, Jackson slowly lifted his eyelids. In the distance, he saw flying animals silhouetted through the clear sky while bright light and warmth radiated on all sides of his face. Jackson looked both to the right and overhead several times, perplexed that the light and heat he observed was being emitted from two separate suns.

“Do I see two suns?” Jackson asked baffled by the sight.

“There are actually three suns here. Much of the time, we see all three in the sky, though part of the day, only one or two remain visible.” Cygnus turned his position of flight. “See? You were just looking at the golden sun and the setting crimson sun. On this side, you can see the rising coral sun.”

Each of the three suns appeared unique and distinguishable. The golden sun looked to be the smallest and shone bright yellow like Earth’s sun. The crimson and coral suns were larger and both similar in size but one rose and set with an orange hue and the other a warm red. Thus, the inhabitants of this world could easily tell the passage of time by the differing colors and location of these three suns.

“Where are we?” Jackson asked with both awe and confusion.

“My home. Welcome to Arcas.”

Nearing the ground, Cygnus and Jackson’s horizontal flight position moved to vertical as they glided to the ground. Before them rested a small cabin in the valley. It wasn’t elegant or large, but it felt inviting, just like a cabin should feel in a green valley surrounded by wooded hills and mountains. After all the heart-racing terror Jackson had just encountered, it felt like a place of rest, a place of peace.

But a dark cloud was rising out of this paradise.

“Is that a fire?” Jackson pointed at a tower of billowing dark gray smoke in the distance.

“I’ll check it out. Get in the cabin. I have a turkey sandwich waiting for you there.” Cygnus’s brisk walk turned to a run as he spread his wings and ascended over the cabin toward the distant smoke.

Jackson stood baffled, stunned, and alone. He looked to the west until the winged man disappeared over the hills. Abandoned in a strange world by a strange being, he studied the lively solitude around him. If he had grown up in the lush Smokey Mountains, perhaps the thick surrounding forest climbing upon mountains, weaving around streams, and echoing with wildlife would feel less massive and terrifying. But this wasn’t a flat Indiana woods. And if Arcas was home to a powerful, winged man, what other fearsome creatures roamed this world?

Jackson knew what he could possibly encounter in his backyard, and the scariest thing there was a white-faced opossum. Not because it is the most deadly creature in the Midwest, but because when one hissed at him from atop a tree branch with its freaky fangs and beady eyes, Jackson was certain he’d seen the devil incarnate.

Maybe it would be safest to just hide in the nice, little cabin, Jackson reasoned as he felt an eerie sense of being watched out in the open, exposed valley. The cabin was a better option than being trampled or eaten by any wild, alien animals running away from the distant fire. Jackson decided it was best to obey the man-angel and briskly walked to the cabin while his heart continued racing. As he crossed the threshold of the small home, he noticed a round, rock doormat lying before the front door decorated simply with three large circles and one diamond shape.

The quaint cabin looked as if it belonged to several different time periods. He twisted a glass doorknob screwed into an old, painted, manufactured door surrounded by rustic log walls, which appeared to come straight out of the American frontier. Inside, a homemade wood table stood in the center surrounded by two rusty folding chairs. Out of habit, Jackson's hand slid down the side of the inner wall for a light switch. But in a world with several suns, apparently there was no use for an amenity like electricity. He walked over to window, hoping to glimpse Cygnus again or the fire, but the window's direction only displayed more green hills and trees.

Jackson's stomach growled. Perhaps his mind and nerves were going to remain over stimulated and uncomfortable, but the aching in his stomach could be remedied. So, he sat at the rustic table in front of a blue plastic plate topped with a sandwich and a blue plastic cup already filled with dark red juice. It was apparent that he was an expected guest though plasticware "made in China" is not exactly what he would have predicted being served from in another world.

As he finished chewing his first bite of turkey sandwich and took a drink of the sour-sweet liquid nectar before him, Jackson contemplated his strange situation in a fantastical world revealed by a fantastical being. Though the alleged turkey was cut into large, uneven pieces lacking the moisture and frailty of typical deli meat, it still tasted relatively normal. Like real food, it calmed his uneasy stomach. Although Jackson had a hard time accepting what had happened so far, he knew what he'd felt was real: the intense fear, the increasing questions, the warmth on his skin from the three suns. Sure, he'd experienced dreams before that looked real, felt real, and sounded real, but they'd never tasted real.

Jackson had barely met his rescuer and couldn't even remember his name from the brief, traumatic encounter. But whatever type of creature he was, he constantly emitted a sense of power, beauty, and authority. Jackson felt drawn to him like someone who was so amazing in every way that upon shaking his hand, one immediately claims him. Perhaps, he was just grateful that this magnificent man saved him from the falling tree or from colliding with the ground. Perhaps, this angel creature was merely the only hope of safety and answers in this strange world. Whatever the reason, Jackson knew full well that the winged man had not only chosen him but chosen him by name.

A flying shadow interrupted the bright and warm light of the suns flowing through the windows. *Phoom. Phoom. Phoom.* The sound of slowing wings rattled against the outside door followed by a *knock, knock* against the solid wood. Jackson left his meal to reach for the handle as he searched for some logical reasons to excuse his embarrassing behavior in the forest earlier.

His panicked run followed by barfing episode was not exactly the first impression he liked to give.

Jackson smiled awkwardly as he prepared for a fresh introduction and pulled the door open. The terrifying creature standing in front of him and glaring at him with dark eyes was not Cygnus.