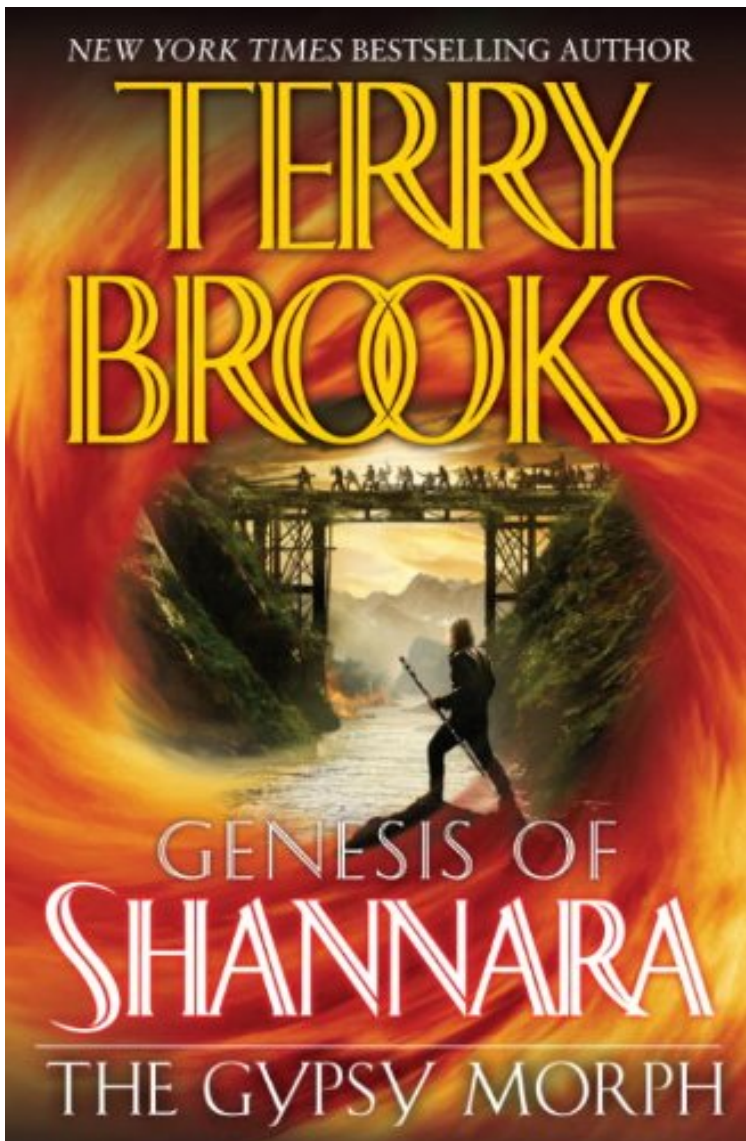


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# The Gypsy Morph



*Par Terry Brooks  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurBONUS: This edition contains an excerpt from Terry Brooks'sThe Measure of the Magic.Terry Brooks won instant acclaim with his phenomenal New York Times bestseller The Sword of Shannara. Its sequels earned Brooks legendary status. Then his darkly enthralling The Word and the Void trilogy revealed new depths and vistas to his mastery of epic fantasy. Armageddons Children and The Elves of Cintra took Brookss remarkable mythos to a breathtaking new level by delving deep into the history of Shannara. And now, The Gypsy Morph rounds outwith an adventure of unforgettably imaginative scopethe first phase of a new chapter in this classic series. Eighty years into the future, the United States is a no-mans-land: its landscape blighted by chemical warfare, pollution, and plague; its government collapsed; its citizens adrift, desperate, fighting to stay alive. In fortified compounds, survivors hold the line against wandering

predators, rogue militias, and hideous mutations spawned from the toxic environment, while against them all stands an enemy neither mortal nor merciful: demons and their minions bent on slaughtering and subjugating the last of humankind. But from around the country, allies of good unite to challenge the rampaging evil. Logan Tom, wielding the magic staff of a Knight of the Word, has a promise to keep protecting the world's only hope of salvation and a score to settle with the demon that massacred his family. Angel Perez, Logan's fellow Knight, has risked her life to aid the elvish race, whose peaceful, hidden realm is marked for extermination by the forces of the Void. Kirisin Belloruus, a young elf entrusted with an ancient magic, must deliver his entire civilization from a monstrous army. And Hawk, the rootless boy who is nothing less than destiny's instrument, must lead the last of humanity to a latter-day promised land before the final darkness falls. The Gypsy Morph is an epic saga of a world in flux as the mortal realm yields to a magical one; as the champions of the Word and the Void clash for the last time to decide what will be and what must cease; and as, from the remnants of a doomed age, something altogether extraordinary rises.

Chapter One

Wills walked the empty corridors of Hell, looking for the code. He walked these same corridors every day, all day, searching, thinking that there had to be some place he had overlooked and that on this day he would find it. But he never did. And knew in his heart that he never would. It was over. For all of them. In more ways than one. The others were already a long time dead. The entire command, wiped out by whatever virus had wormed its way in, sliding down through the air vents past the filters and cleaners and medico screens and whatever other safeguards the builders had installed all those years ago. They hadn't all died at once, of course. Eight of them had, and that was now more than two years ago. At least, that's how long he thought it had been. Time was uncertain. The rest had died one by one, some sickening right away, others staying healthy and providing false hope that a few might survive. But none of them had. Only him. He had no idea why. He had no sense of being different from the others, but obviously he was. Some small genetic trait. Some antibody peculiar to him. Or maybe he was mistaken and it was just plain old luck. He was alive; they were dead. No sense to any of it. No prize awarded to the last man standing. Just a mystery without a solution. Abramson and Perlo had been the last to go. If you didn't count Major "whatever-her-name-was." Anders, Andrews, something like that. He couldn't remember anymore. Anyway, there was never much hope for her. She got sick and stayed sick. By the time she died, she had already been dead for weeks in every way that mattered, her brain fried, memory emptied, mouth drooling. Just lying on the floor making weird sounds and staring at them. Just gibbering about nothing, her eyes wide and rolling, her face all twisted. He would have put a stop to it if he could have made himself do so. But he couldn't. It took Perlo to do that. Perlo hadn't harbored the same reservations he had. He "hadn't liked her anyway, he told them. Even when she hadn't been sick, when she was normal, she was irritating. So it was easy, putting the gun to her head and pulling the trigger. She probably would have thanked him if she could have, he said afterward. Two weeks later, Perlo was dead, too, shot with the same gun. He'd decided he couldn't stand the waiting and pulled the trigger a second time. Left the gun with an almost full clip for the other two, an unspoken suggestion that they might be wise to follow him. They hadn't taken the hint. Abramson had lasted almost seven months longer, and he and Wills made a good pair in that short time. They were both midwestern boys married young, gone into the service of their country, officer training, fast track to promotion, full of patriotic duty and a sense of pride in wearing the uniform. Both had been pilots before assuming command positions. All that was dead and gone, but they liked talking about how it had been when things were better. They liked remembering because it made them feel that even though things had turned out the way they had, there had been a reason for sticking with it, a purpose to their lives. It was hard for Wills to remember what that purpose was, now. Once Abramson was gone there had been no one to discuss it with, and over time the nature of the reason had eroded in the silence of the complex. Sometimes he sang or talked to himself, but that wasn't the same as having someone else there. Rather, it made him think of all the stories of prisoners who went slowly mad in solitary confinement, left alone with themselves and the sound of their own voice for too many months. Or too many years. It would be years for him if nothing changed, if he didn't find anyone, if no one came.

Major Adam Wills. That was who he had been, who the military would say he still was, serving his country deep in the bowels of the earth, a quarter mile underground beneath tons of rock and steel-reinforced concrete, somewhere in the middle of the Rocky Mountains. Where he had been now for five long years, waiting. He thought about that word. Waiting. He stopped walking and stood in the center of one of the endless corridors and thought about it. Waiting. For what? It seemed to change with the passing of time. At first, he had been waiting for the wars to be over. Then he had been waiting for someone to come to relieve those on duty in the missile command center who were left alive. Then he had been waiting to be

let out because he couldn't get out if someone in authority, someone who could tell him it was time to leave, didn't key the locks to the elevators from the surface. For a long time after he knew that there might be no one left in authority, he had simply been waiting for his transmitter signals to raise a response from any source. He no longer used a secure code. He simply opened all channels and broadcast mayday. He knew what was happening aboveground. The cameras told him much of the story. A bleak, barren countryside, a few wandering bands of what appeared to be raiders, a handful of creatures he had never seen before and hoped never to see again, and endless days of sunshine and no rain. Colorado had always been dry, but never like this. It had to rain sooner or later, he kept telling himself. Didn't it? Waiting for it to rain. The government had been all but obliterated even before he had been sent to Deep Rock, the nickname given to the missile command complex. He was still on the surface then, stationed at a base in North Dakota, living in military housing with his family. Washington had been taken out in the first strike, and most of the East Coast cities shortly after. The environment was already in upheaval, huge portions of the country all but uninhabitable. Terrorists were at work. Plague had begun to spread. His last orders had sent him here, joining the others who had been dispatched to the bunkers and the redoubts and the protected complexes that honeycombed the country. A general from the National Command Authority was issuing the orders by then and not just to them but to the whole country. The orders had been grim and everyone had known that things were bad, but they had also known that they would get through it. There had been camaraderie, a sense of sharing a disaster where everyone would have to help everyone else. No one had doubted that they would survive, that they could withstand the worst. After all, Americans always had. No matter how bad it had gotten, they had managed to find a way. They would this time, too. They were infused with pride and confidence, the certainty that they had the training, the skills, and the determination that were needed. They had even accepted without question that they would have to leave their families behind. Wills smiled despite himself. What blind fools they had been. He had quit believing when he heard the last radio broadcasts, heard the descriptions of mass hysteria, and listened to the final pleas and desperate prayers of the few reporters and announcers still on the air. The destruction was complete and total and worldwide. No one had been spared. Armed strikes, chemical warfare, plague infestation, environmental collapse, terrorist attacks—a checklist of assorted forms of madness that proved overwhelming. Millions were dead and millions more dying. Hundreds of millions worldwide. Entire cities had been obliterated. Governments were gone, armies were gone, everything even faintly resembling order was gone. He had tried to reach his family at the base in North Dakota, but there had been no response. After a while, he accepted that there never would be. They were gone, too—his wife, his two boys, his parents, all of his aunts and uncles and cousins and maybe everyone else he had ever known. It began to feel like everyone was gone except for those few hunkered down in Deep Rock, waiting their turn to go, too. Which, of course, had arrived all too soon. Wills walked on, walked on, walked on. He had no destination, no particular route, and no plan. He walked to have something to do. Even though the complex had only eight rooms, not counting storage lockers and the cold room. Even though there were only three short corridors that, when added together, measured no more than a hundred yards. He carried his handheld receiver, which was linked to the communications center, which in turn was linked to the satellite system. It was a waste of time, but he carried it out of habit. Someone might call. You never knew. At the cold room, he stopped and stared at the heavy iron doors. He imagined what lay behind them, but only for a moment, because that was all he could bear. Seventeen men and women, stacked like cordwood in an eight-by-ten space. Stacked with the perishable food, which had long since perished. He couldn't bear thinking about what was happening to the bodies, even at the freezing temperatures the cooling system maintained. He hadn't gone in there since he had added Abramson to the pile, and he was pretty sure he would never go in there again. What was the point? Still, he stood at the doors and stared at them for a long time, his mind conjuring dark images. In the old days, this wouldn't have happened; they wouldn't have all been grouped together where a virus could wipe them out. They would have been assigned to a dozen different command centers. You wouldn't have found more than two or three staffing any one, each center responsible for only a handful of silos. But near the end, when it became clear to someone in authority that an enemy strike was imminent, they had established this base, believing a central command center necessary. It had become home to dozens of teams moving in and out over a twenty-year period, each waiting for the call. His group of nine had been the last, but the team before his, the one on which Abramson served, had been unable to leave. The National Command Authority had ...

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