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**Grimdark Fantasy *The Black Company* as Revisionist Heroic
Fantasy**

Diploma Thesis

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedl jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne.....

Podpis.....

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Introduction

Both Glen Cook and *The Black Company* series are relatively unknown, especially when put side to side with literary giants like J. R. R. Tolkien, Michael Moorcock or George R. R. Martin. Despite that, Glen Cook's unheralded masterpiece is the forebearer of a modern genre of fantasy that is currently enjoying immense popularity. That genre is the grimdark. Grimdark seems to be a particularly niche genre of high fantasy as there appears to be little to none academic texts that would even make an attempt at a serious examination of the genre. The genre labels like dark fantasy and grimdark fantasy seem to be thrown around haphazardly along with the examples of novels and stories that allegedly represent these genres. The ultimate objective of this thesis is to make sense of the grimdark. That means forming a proper definition of the genre, exploring its roots and providing enough textual evidence in form of fantasy novels that fit the established definition and the philosophy behind the grimdark. Without these steps, the grimdark, or any other genre for that matter, should not be taken seriously.

The thesis opens with a brief introduction to the author and the plot of the analysed trilogy. Rather than cluttering the paper with biographical details, attention is paid to Glen Cook's writing style and more importantly his other works outside *The Black Company*. After that, the summary of the plot is presented. For obvious reasons, the focus of the thesis is only on the first trilogy of the Black Company novels rather than the whole of the saga which encompasses twelve full-length novels and a number of additional short stories that exist both separately and as a part of the novels. The first trilogy, *The Black Company* (1984), *Shadows Linger* (1984) and *The White Rose* (1985), will be from this point forward collectively referred to as *The Black Company*. However, I am reserving the right to quote from and to discuss events that do occur in the later books when the situation is deemed appropriate for such action. The only academic source of information on the author Glen Cook and his writing comes from John Clute's *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997), this particular book was invaluable in the process of making this thesis and it therefore deserves special attention in this introductory part. The thesis then continues with a short theoretical part where the used terminology is explained and a brief background to the archetype theory is presented.

The analysis and discussion of the trio of the most frequently appearing archetypes in fantasy, more specifically in heroic fantasy, follows next. As it is stated in the theoretical part, the archetype chapters are more of a discussion of the archetypes rather than an analysis following the archetypal theory of, for instance, C. G. Jung. The point is to figure out the extent of Cook's revisionism of a heroic fantasy and the reason for the transformation or the omission of a particular fantasy character archetype. About a half of the thesis deals with the character archetypes, first in general with the help of various secondary sources and authors like Joseph Campbell or Vladimir Propp and later with a consideration to *The Black Company* itself.

The later parts of the thesis deal with the genre. The genre of high fantasy is presented and defined, and the work of J. R. R. Tolkien is discussed. Tolkien's colossal influence on the whole of the fantasy genre will be discussed in these chapters, both in positive and negative terms. Much like Clute, the authors whose writings were highly formative for these specific parts were one of the leading experts on fantasy Brian Attebery and the writer of fantasy and science fiction Michael Moorcock.

In the final parts, the text proceeds with the discussion of the grimdark genre and its possible influences and sources of inspiration along with some examples of what is, in this paper's view, a work of the grimdark.

1. Introduction to the author and the plot

The author of *The Black Company* saga is an American writer Glen Cook. Cook's first published piece of literature was a short story "Song from a Forgotten Hill" in 1971¹ although he did not get any serious recognition as a writer until his *Dread Empire* series of fantasy novels starting in 1979. The *Dread Empire* is a series of eight books, some of them prequels and at least seven short stories set in a world noticeably resembling the real-world China, Europe, and India. Cook's *Dread Empire* is by no means his best work, but it does lay down some of the signature themes and features of Cook's writing like the preoccupation with war or highly unromanticized soldier characters. What *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* points out as characteristic for Cook's writing is "a sense of the emotional cost and degradation involved in both war and magic."² Cook's style of writing will be revisited in the later parts of the thesis. His other work outside *The Black Company* worth mentioning is the *Garret P. I.* series, here Cook blends the themes and elements of crime and detective fiction featuring a cynical, hard-boiled detective Garret with overtly fantastic elements such as magic, wizards, elves or dwarves. Currently the *Company* novels and the *Garret* novels are considered to be his best works that seem to have gathered a substantial following as there is a new book in the series every couple of years with no end in sight.

Cook's work has also been connected with a revisionist type of fantasy. By a revisionist fantasy we understand a conscientious attempt to make the condition of fantasy new by discarding standard genre tropes.³ This paper considers *The Black Company* and the genre it represents as a revisionist heroic fantasy, hence the name of the thesis but that is not the only revisionist work of Cook. *The Swordbearer* (1982) and *The Tower of Fear* (1982) are Cook's standalone fantasy novels that even the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* recognizes as revisionist fantasy novels. Glen Cook is an unusually prolific but inconsistent writer.⁴ The total of sum of his texts well exceeds fifty but only a handful of them (mainly the above-mentioned texts) are worth a read not to mention an academic pursuit. However, those which are worth it are thoroughly

¹ John Clute, and John Grant, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 225, accessed February 19, 2021, https://archive.org/details/encyclopediaoffa0000unse_s7g7

² Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 226.

³ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 810.

⁴ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 226.

unique and carry a significant value both in terms of entertainment and scholarly examination.

Since *The Black Company* does not boast a vast readership all over the globe and some readers of this thesis might not be familiar with the set of novels, I will now take the time to introduce the plot and some of its primary characters.

The trilogy of novels deals with a mercenary unit, the Black Company, that unknowingly and out of desperation enters a service of the Lady. The Lady is a seemingly evil, all-powerful sorceress who alongside her husband once almost conquered the whole world. In the past, she was defeated by a mysterious woman called the White Rose. Even in defeat, her and her husband's power was so great that they could not have been killed. Instead, they were imprisoned in a magically guarded tomb.

The events of the first novel start after the Lady manages to break free from her prison. She seeks to re-establish and expand her empire and for that reason, she employs the Black Company. The Black Company was once a highly respected and feared armed group that was known to shape the history of the world based on which side of the many conflicts they chose to sign their contract with. During the events of the books the Company is facing a considerable decline. It now consists of about a thousand infantry men and four mildly powerful wizards. Majority of the new recruits are enlisted from the ranks of escaped convicts, murderers and vagrants with nowhere else to go. The first and the only recruit to join the Company during the course of the first novel is Raven. Raven is an unusual recruit, he is cold and brutal, even by the Company's standards, but what is curious about him is that he is no vagrant. He is a noble from a privileged family.

With Raven on their side the Company makes their way across seas to finally do some fighting for their new employer. At the site of an aftermath of one of the battles, the reader is greeted with the images of what will become the staple of Cook's writing – the ultraviolence. The narrator Croaker and the band arrive at a village where the poor villagers are either dead or being tortured to death. In the middle of the horrific scene there is a small, deaf-mute nine-year old girl being raped by the same officers that the Company is working for. The sight is enough to make even the hardest men of the Company feel sick. Uncharacteristically, it is the cold Raven who kills the men in quick

fashion and saves the girl. The Black Company names her Darling and she becomes Raven's surrogate daughter and protégé.

The majority of book one shows the Company fighting various enemies of the Lady. Her enemies are singularly known as the Rebel, a movement inspired by the prophesy of the White Rose reincarnation. The Company manages to defeat several members of the Rebel faction, some of them even powerful wizards in their own right. Despite wanting to be seen as the humanity's last hope against the Lady's oppression, the Rebels are far from being the force of good fighting for freedom and justice. They are cruel, corrupt and capable of the same brutality that the forces of the Lady display. During the climactic final battle of the first novel, the Rebel has the upper hand. Their forces outnumber the Lady's by quite a wide margin, and they lay siege to Lady's seat of power – the Tower at Charm. For their accomplishments and for the fact that Lady's commanders cannot be trusted, the last line of defence consists of the members of the Black Company. The Lady's commanders are powerful wizards known as the Taken, Cook's equivalent to the Ringwraiths found in the *Lord of the Rings*. However, the Taken are not shown as just extensions of their ruler's will. They each have their own agendas and hate each other as much as they hate the Rebel. During the final battle, the Taken fight among each other, sabotaging the entire war effort. The Lady employs a magical form of biological warfare in the last-ditch attempt to turn the tide of the battle in her favour while the Rebel army is preparing for a final push, spearheaded by a young girl strapped to a throne-like platform. The girl was meant to be the reincarnated heroine White Rose but both sides knew that was not the case. The fake White Rose dies alongside all the rebels, the magic-made disease that one of Lady's Taken invented proves effective and the battle is won.

In the aftermath of the great battle, Raven takes Darling and deserts from the Company. Apparently, Darling was directly hit by the magic disease, but survived while everyone who was around her at the time died. This makes Raven, Croaker and other officers of the Company realize that Darling is, in fact, the true reincarnation of the White Rose and Raven deserts to keep her safe from the Lady, her prophesied enemy.

The narrative of the second novel picks up six years after the Battle at Charm and it follows mostly Darling and Raven. The Black Company is sent to investigate a case of body snatching, apparently someone has been digging up corpses from a local

burial site. That someone is Raven. He has been selling the corpses to strange humanoid creatures inhabiting a place known as the Black Castle. Unbeknownst to Raven, the creatures have been using the dead bodies in their scheme to resurrect the Dominator, the sealed husband of the Lady. Raven sees the members of the Company investigating the area and assumes that they are looking for him. He takes Darling and escapes once again. The Lady learns of this scheme, out of fear of having to share her power with her husband she orders a full-scale attack on the Black Castle. The Company and Lady's Taken suffer major losses but they emerge victorious.

During the battle, the Captain of the Black Company orders some of the core members, including Croaker and the wizards to flee. The Captain has uncovered a conspiracy among the Taken to betray the Company. The men escape and meet up with Darling who was left abandoned after Raven allegedly died after slipping and falling in a public bath. The Company breaks away from the Lady and her empire and now intends to help Darling, the new White Rose, to fulfil her prophecy of destroying the evil that is represented by the Lady.

The final book of the trilogy deals with the newly founded rebellion that is being led by Darling herself who is now much older and more seasoned. The core of the new rebellion comprises of what is left of the Black Company after the battle at the Black Castle and subsequent battles with the Taken and the Lady's Empire. The rebels come up with a way of defeating the Lady. In the fantastic world of *The Black Company*, by knowing a wizard's name and pronouncing it one may rob the wizard of all of their magical powers, rendering them a common human. Croaker and the Company attempt to learn Lady's true name by searching through documents in her supposed place of birth. In one of these raids Croaker is captured by the Taken, when he is about to be tortured and killed the Lady intervenes. It turns out that Lady is much more concerned with the inevitable resurrection of her husband than with Darling's rebellion and asks for a truce and momentary alliance. The search for the documents continues but shifts towards the search for the Dominator's true name which proves unsuccessful. During the time spend with the Lady, Croaker's early infatuation with her turns into love as he starts seeing her more human side.

Both the White Rose rebellion and the Lady's Empire prepare to fight the Dominator and his minions. Raven makes an appearance, in surprise to no one, his

death in a bathtub was staged. The combined forces release the Dominator from his weakening prison in attempts to destroy him once and for all. Thanks to Darling's magic, he is unable to use his unbeatable powers, but his physical strength is still monstrous. He effortlessly kills many core members of the Black Company, including the Lieutenant, who was the Company's captain at the time and Elmo, Croaker's best friend. The Dominator is eventually pinned to the ground, cut to pieces and burned. During the confusion of the battle the Lady sees an opportunity to deal with the White Rose as well. She utters the White Rose's true name, robbing Darling of her powers. In turn, one of the Company's wizards, Silent, speaks for the first time in the trilogy of the novels, breaking his lifelong vow of silence and utters the real name of the Lady. Both women are now powerless. In an attempt to get back in the good graces with Darling, Raven tries to kill the weakened Lady, but Croaker stops him. In the aftermath, the number of the sworn brothers of the Black Company drops to a mere six. Croaker, as the last surviving semi-officer is elected as the new Captain. Lady's empire crumbles and she decides to travel with Croaker and the Company on more adventures.

2. Archetypes, Tropes and other concepts

This short chapter serves to name and define some of the key theoretical concepts that will be used in the following chapters. The concept of archetype is considered in Jungian terms as “an explanatory paraphrase of the Platonic eidos,”⁵ meaning idea or form. In his 1921 book *Psychological Types*, Jung himself uses the term eidos as an idea that is used to:

[...] designate a certain psychological element intimately connected with what I term image (q.v.). The image may be either personal or impersonal in its origin. In the latter case, it is collective and is distinguished by mythological qualities. I then term it primordial image.⁶

The label primordial image is particularly important because Jung considers archetype to “embrace the same idea as is contained in primordial image”⁷ and while he uses the two terms interchangeably, he does seem to favour the term primordial image throughout the book. Jung attributes a certain transcendent and timeless quality to the primordial image and establishes it as an essential and inherent part of the human mind. In his further descriptions of the concept, Jung says that the primordial image (and also the archetype) is collective, meaning that it is common to entire societies or time periods.⁸ The Jungian archetypes are therefore primordial images within the collective unconsciousness linked to fundamental experiences of humans. Jung also argues that archetypes are what connects and unifies the systems of major symbols of the world’s literature, myth, and religion.⁹ It comes as no surprise that these descriptions are noticeable similar to the definition of the archetype that this thesis chooses to subscribe to.

⁵ Jean Nox, *Archetype, Attachment, Analysis: Jungian psychology and the Emergent Mind*, (Hove, New York: Brunner-Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2003), 33, accessed March 5, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/JeanKnoxArchetypeAttachmentAnalysis/page/n1/mode/2up?q=>

⁶ C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types or The Psychology of Individuation*, trans. H. Goodwin Banes, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1923), 547-548, accessed March 5, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/Vol06PsychologicalTypes/page/n7/mode/2up>

⁷ Jung, *Psychological Types or The Psychology of Individuation*, 476.

⁸ Jung, *Psychological Types or The Psychology of Individuation*, 555.

⁹ Vincent B. Leitch, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 988. PDF e-book.

While C. G. Jung is an important antecedent in the development of the term archetype and archetypal criticism as a whole, the critic and theorist who is most widely connected with the archetypal literary criticism is Northrop Frye. The archetypal approach to literature was established in Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). Frye views the sum of all works of literature as:

A "self-contained literary universe" which has been created over the ages by the human imagination so as to incorporate the alien and indifferent world of nature into archetypal forms that serve to satisfy enduring human desires and needs.¹⁰

In the literary universe, Frye identifies four plot forms or structural principles that he calls the four mythoi. This paper does not deal with Frye's mythoi so naming them without any further discussion is deemed as appropriate. The four major genres of mythoi correspond to the four cycles or four seasons in the natural world, these are comedy (spring), romance (summer), tragedy (autumn) and satire (winter).¹¹ Unlike Jung, Frye's approach to archetypes seems to steer away from the notion of the human unconscious and the collective unconscious and rather focuses on the functions and the roles that archetypes play in, specifically, literature. Frye believes the literary archetypes to "play an essential role in refashioning the impersonal material universe into an alternative verbal universe that is intelligible and viable, because it is adapted to essential and universal human needs and concerns."¹²

This paper views the definition of archetype found in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1957) by M. H. Abrams as adequate enough for use:

The term archetype denotes recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character-types, themes, and images which are identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams, and even social rituals. Such recurrent items are held to be the result of elemental and universal forms or patterns in the human psyche, whose effective embodiment in a literary work evokes a profound response

¹⁰ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and, Winston, 1988), 13. PDF e-book.

¹¹ Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 13.

¹² Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 13.

from the attentive reader, because he or she shares the archetypes expressed by the author.¹³

Abrams offers a decent balance between Jung and Frye and their notions of the archetype. The following couple of chapters should not be seen as serious Jungian analyses of the character archetypes, nor do they follow the schema of Frye's mythoi model. Both authors were mentioned to provide an academic background to the concept of the archetype and the following chapters themselves are mainly discussions of frequent patterns of action or themes that seem to be tied to the particular character archetypes.

Another frequently used term that appears a number of times and requires clarification is the trope. Trope tends to carry a negative connotation but that is not necessarily the intention of this thesis, the definition of the term that this paper follows is taken directly from the Merriam-Webster dictionary as a "common or overused theme or device."¹⁴

Joseph Campbell is an author whose work is mentioned across multiple pages and deserves extra attention in the theoretical part. Campbell was an American professor of literature and a scholar of comparative mythology. His most widely known book and a book that this thesis often draws from is *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949). The book discusses Campbell's theory of the mythological structure of the archetypal hero's journey. The principle idea of the hero's journey is that there is a single constant mythological structure that we can observe in virtually any hero story. He organizes the units of the myth pattern into three acts with five to six stages each. Campbell also discusses and describes the character archetypes which are labelled in this thesis as the Hero, the Dark Lord and the Mentor.

¹³ Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 12.

¹⁴ Noah Webster, "Trope," in *Merriam-Webster*, accessed March 5, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

3. The Hero Archetype

Heroes are the backbone of most fantasy fiction novels. Upon closer inspection, one might notice that the fantastic heroes tend to fall into a series of predictable patterns. This chapter will attempt to identify these patterns by taking a closer look at some of the fantasy's most widely known heroes like Rowling's Harry Potter, Tolkien's Frodo, Lucas' Anakin Skywalker and others.

The first pattern of the fantasy hero type can be identified as early as at the hero's birth. In his study of the archetypal mythological hero, Campbell states that the hero can be endowed with an incredible power at the moment of their birth.¹⁵ While this might not necessarily be the case for most of the protagonists mentioned above, we can find a similar case of unnatural circumstances of birth in the character of Harry in the *Harry Potter* (1997) series. Harry does not really have an extraordinary power in his own right, his birth, however, does hold a special significance. The power of his birth is associated with a prophecy where a boy would be born at a certain, specific time with a power to defeat the Dark Lord. This leads us to a trope commonly found among the fantasy heroes and that is the hero as "The Child of Prophecy". An expert on imaginary worlds and world-building Mark J.P. Wolf says that when a populace of a fantasy world find themselves threatened by an evil force or a Dark Lord, they often look for hope in prophecies that predict the arrival of a saviour who will rescue them.¹⁶ He also states that the hero is unaware of his role as the saviour at first but gradually comes to accept it. Wolf offers many heroes as examples of the saviour trope, Baum's Dorothy Gale from the *Oz* (1900) novels, Neo from the *Matrix* franchise or Anakin Skywalker from the *Star Wars* franchise.¹⁷

It is no coincidence that most of the heroes mentioned above had to endure a difficult childhood without parents. Being orphaned at birth or at a young age is one of the most recurrent tropes of the heroic fantasy. Wolf writes that having missing parents allows the young heroes to freely venture out on adventures without having anyone worry about them as well as having a free spot for a new parental figure, a spot that is

¹⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Commemorative Edition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 273. PDF e-book.

¹⁶ Mark J. P. Wolf, "Saviors," in *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2019), 51. PDF e-book.

¹⁷ Wolf, "Saviors," 52.

often occupied by a wise mentor character. Again, Wolf's examples include characters like Frodo, Harry Potter, Dorothy Gale and Luke Skywalker.¹⁸ I would also like to include an example of my own that fits the "Orphan Trope" and helps this paper transition into the next trope – George R. R. Martin's Jon Snow. What makes Jon Snow's disposition a trope is not necessarily his upbringing. Jon was raised believing that he is, in fact, a bastard and that Ned Stark is his biological father and that his mother died. This would make him only a partial orphan, a partial orphan does not fit the description of the orphan trope that well. Jon is the prime example of what I have labelled as the "Secret Heir Trope." What makes Jon the secret heir is the real identity of his parents, both of them being of royal blood. Another example of this trope would be Tolkien's Aragorn. Aragorn was orphaned at an early age, fostered by elves and for a long time his true royal lineage was kept from him.

The archetypal heroes of the fantasy are often low-born, common and average people whose heroic role in the world has to be discovered first. That is not to say that other types of heroes, more specifically high-born heroes do not exist. Both John Snow and Aragorn, as described previously, seem to exhibit attributes that make them distinctly unordinary. Both have royal blood and Aragorn himself belongs to a notably peculiar race of humans whose lifespan well exceeds that of ordinary people. For these reasons, the qualities of the two heroes are far from being the typical features found in what I have decided to call the "Everyman Hero Trope." As far as this trope is concerned, Wolf writes that many heroes live in an isolated part of the secondary world like Shire in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) or Tatooine in *Star Wars*. The heroes then journey deeper into the world, often feeling like newcomers, experiencing the fantastic oddities of the unknown parts of world for the first time alongside the reader and they may be reluctant at first,¹⁹ to answer what Campbell calls the "call to adventure."²⁰ Among other obstacles that these characters face, the burden and the acceptance of the role of the hero is an integral part in the characters' development and growth into confidence.²¹

¹⁸ Wolf, "Saviors," 52.

¹⁹ Wolf, "Saviors," 51.

²⁰ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Commemorative Edition*, 50.

²¹ Wolf, "Saviors," 52.

In a sense the fantasy stories with the “Everyman Hero Trope” also permit a coming-of-age approach to reading. Lily Alexander, one of the contributors to *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* (2018) and a scholar of a narrative theory examines how genres work together within the formation of fictional worlds.²² She says that works of Tolkien in particular effectively combine the genres of fantasy, action and coming-of-age.²³ Alexander did not provide any specific examples but one might assume that both Frodo and Bilbo from *The Hobbit* (1937) exhibit the same character development of growing from innocence to wisdom we may find in many coming-of-age novels. The same could be said about Harry Potter, Luke and Anakin Skywalker, or even Martin’s Jon Snow, despite Jon Snow not really being all that ordinary.

3.1. The Hero in The Black Company

Before delving into Cook’s treatment of the Hero archetype and the tropes commonly connected with it, it is worth mentioning how the respective authors, Tolkien and Cook, chose to write their characters.

Tolkien is known for his elaborate backstories and detailed character descriptions. Frodo, for example, is portrayed down to the smallest detail like his cleft in the chin. Undoubtedly, Tolkien considers it important for the reader to be able to visualize his characters and to know their place in the world. The characters do have their own extensive family trees, Houses and bloodlines. Cook, on the other hand, is minimalistic in his descriptions. Majority of characters are defined by a single trait. The wizard One-Eye has one eye, Goblin is small and toad-looking, Raven is dark, the Lady is beautiful. Cook is extremely sporadic with sharing details about his characters. Even the appearance of the protagonist, Croaker, is not really illustrated until the fifth book in series where Croaker is described as follows:

He’d been diminished by his wound but he was still a big man, four inches over six feet tall. He was about forty-five years old. His hair was an average, unnoteworthy brown. He’d begun to go bald in front. His eyes were hard, humorless, icy blue, narrow and deeply set. He had a ragged, greying beard surrounding a thin-lipped mouth that seldom smiled. His

²² Lily Alexander, “Genres,” in *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2019), 262. PDF e-book.

²³ Alexander, “Genres,” 269.

face bore scattered reminders of a childhood pox and more than a few memories of acne. He might have been moderately good-looking once. Time had been unkind. [...] He'd described himself as looking like a child molester waiting for a chance to strike.²⁴

His appearance is detailed enough to be considered satisfactory but comes much too late. For that reason, we must assume that the lack of description is an artistic choice that the author chose to make. It is not only the appearance of the characters that seems minimalistic compared to Tolkien. Tolkien's names help the reader to place them in the correct place in the world. Names like Baggins, Burrows, Brandybucks indicate a clearly Hobbitish culture. Names like Ñoldor, Fëanor or Vanyar sound much different from the Hobbit names and indicate a different, Elvish culture. The names are of great importance in the world of *The Lord of the Rings*, it is Aragon's family name and bloodline that allows him to ascend to kingship. Cook's characters do not really have names. Especially the members of the Black Company. They forsake their old names and gain a new one, most often based on their appearance, role or other noticeable characteristic. The captain of the company is named the Captain, the lieutenant's name is the Lieutenant and the physician is called Croaker, croaker being a slang for a doctor or a person who constantly grumbles, both of which apply to the novel's protagonist. What is of even lesser importance than the names are the characters' origins. Croaker's history before joining the Company is mostly unknown and unremarkable. Throughout all the novels his childhood was mentioned only once. His parents were abusive and beat him regularly, he had at least two sisters and learned his craft from an ancient, nameless man. When he saw a banner of the Black Company floating near his village he did not hesitate to abandon his kin and enlisted as the Company's physician and later annalist, no one in his family tried to stop him, no one cared, in his own words: "To those people I am dead."²⁵

Glen Cook's treatment of the archetypal hero tropes is a matter worth exploring because it greatly diverges from what we have established on the previous couple of pages. The trope of the hero as "The Child of Prophecy" by no means applies to Croaker. Croaker was never born or conceived under unusual circumstances, nor was he

²⁴ Glen Cook, *Dreams of Steel*, (New York: Tor Fantasy, 1990), 48. PDF e-book.

²⁵ Glen Cook, *Shadow Games*, (New York: Tor Fantasy, 1989), 48. PDF e-book.

bestowed with extraordinary power as a child. Croaker is no prophesied saviour. That title goes to Darling; she is the one who is the reincarnation of the White Rose and a prophesied saviour of the world. A particularly interesting deviation from this trope of the Hero archetype is that Darling does not become anything more than a minor character until the book three. Uncharacteristically for the high fantasy genre, Cook has his prophesied saviour reduced to a background character for the majority of the trilogy. Darling fulfils a role somewhat similar to that of Frodo in the *Lord of the Rings*. Both characters are crucial to the ultimate defeat of the Dark Lord, although Frodo's participation seems to be much more direct and impactful. Frodo traverses the dangerous, hostile land of the enemy with nothing but a guide and a manservant. He scales mountains, overcomes adversities, fights Gollum, who can be considered his dark alter ego and finally succeeds in his quest by completely destroying the Dark Lord. Frodo is, without a doubt, the hero in *The Lord of the Rings*. Darling's participation in the defeat of the Dark Lord is equally as important, albeit noticeably more subtle. Rather than displaying individual heroism worthy of the prophesied hero, Darling is more of a figure to which other heroes flock to. She gathers armies, comes up with battle strategies and uses her nullifying magic to only weaken, rather than destroy the Dark Lord. Darling is never put in a situation where she has to directly face-off against her enemy in a single combat. The fact that she does not participate as directly as Frodo does not necessarily diminish her heroism. Her role is simply that of a supporting hero, while the Black Company, the distinctly unheroic group of murderers, rapists and nameless nobodies, do the direct fighting.

The "Secret Heir" trope is not present in the books. The "Orphan Trope" does have a representation that is somewhat applicable and again, it does not involve Croaker. It is Darling, who is the prophesied saviour and an orphan as well. I consider Darling to be a member of the Company, even though she did not officially enlist as a member. This paper has previously mentioned that young heroes tend to be connected with a motif of coming of age or maturing caused by the burden of the role of the hero. That is true for the character of Darling, Darling undergoes a development from a scared mute-deaf girl in book one to a lovestruck teenager in book two to a battle-hardened, solemn leader in book three. Darling, however, does not get enough space for a reader to witness her journey, a lot of her development happens during the narrative gaps in the time-skips between the novels.

The “Everyman Hero” trope does apply to both Croaker and Darling. Both live in somewhat isolated part of the world away from the main conflict until the conflict finds them. Croaker and the Company travel to another continent where they are newcomers and have to adapt. Also, Croaker could be considered an average person because he does not particularly excel at anything. He is not as strong as Raven or the Lieutenant, he is not as brave as Elmo, he is not as knowledgeable about the world as One-Eye or Goblin, he is not as intelligent and assertive as the Captain. Croaker’s trait that separates him from the rest of his companions is a trait shared by many heroes from fantasy like Frodo or Harry Potter and that is his innate goodness. Croaker is a decent person, at least compared to the rest of the characters of *The Black Company*.

We have discussed the hero archetype extensively and while it is true that a hero does not necessarily has to embody all of the above-mentioned tropes, they generally do accommodate most of them, Harry Potter and Luke Skywalker especially can be counted among the most archetypal of heroes. Glen Cook’s hero is a matter entirely different. Croaker is considered to be the protagonist and yet, the only pattern that he shares with the low-born archetypal hero is that he is unremarkable. Darling is a much more likely candidate, but she is a minor character for most of the story and in the end, she does not do enough to justify her role as the hero of the saga.

The conclusion that I have arrived to is that Cook does away with the exaggerated impact that a single person can have on the imaginary world and offers a new type of a heroic protagonist, a fused entity of sorts. That entity, of course being the Black Company as a whole.

A great deal of attention and detail is paid to the Company’s history, composition and tradition, a much greater deal of attention than Cook pays to the individual characters. This focus on the organization as a whole rather than the individual parts is the first major piece of evidence supporting the idea that the hero of the Black Company novels is not Croaker or Darling but, in fact, the Black Company itself. In the previous paragraphs we have mentioned that the characters remain mostly anonymous, their names often have no meaning outside the Company because they could not exist individually outside the Company. Croaker is the Company’s annalist which is the most important and respected position after the captain. Cook has Croaker frequently read from the Company’s annals which becomes almost a religious ceremony

where the men would sit around and listen to Croaker's sermon-like reading, highlighting the importance of the Black Company as a collective organism. Another hint that supports this concept is the name that Cook gave to the series of novels, *The Black Company*. If we consider the names of some of *The Black Company*'s cousins like *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Hobbit* they each have the name of the hero in the title of the book. Harry Potter is the hero of the *Harry Potter* novels, *The Lord of the Rings* requires a bit more thought but the Lord in the title refers to Frodo, who is the ring-bearer, the lord of the ring and the novel's hero and *The Hobbit* refers to a single particular Hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, the novel's hero. It is not unlikely that Cook did the same with his title. If we consider the Company as a fused entity, then the established patterns that fantasy heroes tend to fall into fit almost perfectly.

A collective hero is not a complete novelty in the works of fantasy. One might argue that the Fellowship of the Ring in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is a collective hero as well. However, Tolkien never puts the same emphasis on the collective brotherhood the same way Cook does. The Fellowship was formed with a single task of taking the One Ring to Mordor so it may be thrown into the fires of Mount Doom. After the death of Boromir, the group splits and everyone, except Frodo and Sam, go to pursue different goals. It appears that the original Fellowship is reduced to two people, or fails and is completely dissolved, or has multiple objectives that it seems to pursue at the same time. At this point one might question the need for such an organization to begin with. Cook's Black Company is more united and persistent in its goals. The men of the Company are allowed to split and follow their own goals only after the main objective has been accomplished and when they do split, they are no longer considered to be members of the brotherhood. In contrast, Aragorn and his companions, who are pursuing a different goal than Frodo and Sam or Merry and Pippin, still call themselves the Fellowship of the Ring, despite abandoning the original objective of destroying the Ring. This suggests that the Fellowship is too erratic in both its objectives and membership. Tolkien gives his characters much more freedom of action than Cook does which allows them to act independently from the organization. With this in mind, we cannot possibly consider the Fellowship to be a collective hero in the same manner the Black Company is. The Fellowship is and always was a band of individual heroes rather than a fused entity and while the members of the Company may die or desert, the

existence of the Black Company itself as a fused entity and a collective hero is undeniable.

4. The Dark Lord Archetype

The Dark Lord is a type of villain who seems to be specific to works of heroic fantasy inspired by the works of J. R. R. Tolkien. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997) states that the Dark Lords are, or intend to be, the rulers of the world, and are a corrupt parody of the gods.²⁶ Other definitions include the Dark Lord being a “satanic figure of colossal but warped power.”²⁷

Most heroic fantasies follow Campbell’s structure of the archetypal hero’s journey. The villain, who may appear in a form of the Dark Lord, plays an integral role. Campbell himself describes this figure as:

The tyrant-monster is known to the mythologies, folk traditions, legends, and even nightmares, of the world; and his characteristics are everywhere essentially the same. He is the hoarder of the general benefit. He is the monster avid for the greedy rights of “my and mine.” The havoc wrought by him is described in mythology and fairy tale as being universal throughout his domain. This may be no more than his household, his own tortured psyche, or the lives that he blights with the touch of his friendship and assistance; or it may amount to the extent of his civilization. The inflated ego of the tyrant is a curse to himself and his world—no matter how his affairs may seem to prosper. [...] Wherever he sets his hand there is a cry (if not from the housetops, then—more miserably—within every heart): a cry for the redeeming hero.²⁸

In this description, what Campbell highlights as traits essential to every Dark Lord archetype are greed and ambition, the despair and destruction that this type of character causes to the populace of the fantasy world are only by-products of his actions. Campbell also mentions the hero in his description. We have discussed the Hero archetype extensively in the previous chapter, but it is important to see the hero and the Dark Lord as interconnected. It is the Dark Lord who gives the hero an

²⁶ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 250.

²⁷ W. A. Senior, “Quest Fantasies,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 190. PDF e-book.

²⁸ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Commemorative Edition*, 20

incentive to embark on their journey and it is the defeat of the Dark Lord that is the journey's ultimate objective. Thanks to the Dark Lord the hero is able to develop as a character. To put it simply, without the Dark Lord there would be no hero.

In order to get a complete understanding of the Dark Lord archetype, we have to consider the role of the villain in fairy tales in theory of Vladimir Propp. Propp writes that the role of the villain is to be in a fight or other form of struggle with the hero.²⁹ Or as he himself puts it:

The sphere of action of the *villain*. Constituents: villainy

(A); a fight or other forms of struggle with the hero (H); pursuit (Pr).³⁰

³¹Much like the hero, the Dark Lord surrounds himself with a retinue of loyal companions. They act as an extension of the Dark Lord's will and perform actions that the Lords themselves are unable to carry out. They also act in the Dark Lord's stead in the time when the character has been reduced to the state of a malignant sleeper. The companions may be individual characters, but more often than not, they represent a single entity and are labelled as such, like the Ringwraiths in *The Lord of the Rings* or the Death Eaters in *Harry Potter* novels.

What seems to be particular for the Dark Lord archetype, especially compared to other villains in literature, is their cyclical nature or cyclical state of being. W. A Senior, in his contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, calls this a cyclical history that stresses "the possibility of the reappearance of the Dark Lord, or of another, in the future."³² In the narrative of a heroic fantasy, the hero confronts the Dark Lord and defeats them, however, the cyclical history of the archetype dictates that there is still a possibility of the Dark Lord's reappearance in the future. The cyclical nature of the Dark Lord character is not only tied to future timelines, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* points out that the Dark Lord may be a malignant sleeper who has awakened

²⁹ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 79. PDF e-book.

³⁰ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 79.

³¹ This brief explanation might seem a bit simplistic at first but Propp does supply the villain with a plethora of functions and structural elements that occur within the fairy tale in a fixed, consecutive order. He defines the villain based on the series of constant functions that they perform. This chapter deals with the villain and not the structure and I will therefore omit any further discussion of Propp, but the important point is that these fairy tale functions do occur in the works of fantasy as well.

³² Senior, "Quest Fantasies," 190.

after being defeated but not completely destroyed in the previous timeline.³³ The state of the malignant sleeper is therefore a part of the cycle where the defeated archetype lost most of their power and awaits their inevitable resurrection. The resurrection marks another crucial part of the cycle which can happen at any point during the story. In *The Black Company* the new cycle of the Dark Lord's existence starts some time before the events of the first book take place. In Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, the archetype is resurrected in the fourth book of the series which is roughly the halfway mark in the overall story. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the Dark Lord is not resurrected at all and instead spends the whole of trilogy in the state of a malignant sleeper whose ultimate resurrection is prevented by the hero. What we can infer from these examples is that the part of the cycle in which the Dark Lord archetype currently appears varies considerably, although the parts or the stages of the cycle, the defeat, the reduction to a malignant sleeper and the resurrection do seem to be in a fixed order.

Before delving into the discussing of the archetype in the chosen trilogy, it might be worth taking a closer look on the theory of cyclical history among other Dark Lord archetypes in the fantastic literature, more specifically Tolkien's Sauron and Rowling's Voldemort. Sauron was defeated centuries before the events of *The Lord of the Rings* take place. It took the combined efforts of various races and the heroism of a man named Isildur to finally defeat the Dark Lord. However, as it is common for this particular archetype, the Dark Lord was not vanquished completely. Sauron becomes that which was labelled previously as a malignant sleeper. He lies dormant for many hundreds of years before he finally comes back, although his resurrection seems to be incomplete. He is severely weakened and without a corporeal body. Rowling's Voldemort finds himself in a similar position. Sometime after the birth of the book's hero, Harry Potter, Voldemort attempts to slay the hero but fails and is critically damaged. The Dark Lord is unable to die but similarly to Sauron, he loses his physical form and it takes him the majority of Harry's childhood to recover and resurrect.

4.1. The Dark Lord Archetype in The Black Company

Glen Cook has two variations of the Dark Lord archetype, the Lady, and her husband the Dominator. Both have been defeated centuries before the events of the first novel

³³ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 250.

and both have been reduced to the state of a malignant sleeper. It is the Lady who reawakens fist. Her empire has crumbled, and her influence waned over the time, her power, however, is far from diminished. She murders the people responsible for her awakening to stop them from bringing her husband back as well and even manages to steal some of his power for herself. After coming back the Lady does what most Dark Lords do, she attempts to satisfy her immense greed and ambition by conquering the world.

As the name of the archetype suggests, most Dark Lords share a certain association with the dark. Sauron is known also as the Dark One, Sauron the Dark or the Lord of the Black Land. Lord Voldemort is often called the Dark Lord. Darth Vader in *Star Wars* has a variation of the word dark directly in his name. The Dark Lord in *The Black Company* is just called the Lady. Her association with the dark is non-existent, the Lady is more often associated with the light instead. When meeting the Lady for the first time, Croaker describes her as a “glorious light, too brilliant to look at long.”³⁴ One can also notice the paradox, in which the collective hero of the story, the Black Company, is associated with the dark in their name whereas the Dark Lord is associated with the light. This can be understood as a symbolic blurring of the line between the good and the evil. Cook portrays his heroes as not particularly good and his villains as not entirely evil which is, as we will learn later, appropriate for the genre.

When it comes to the Dark Lord’s companions the Lady is no exception. The Lady’s equivalent to Sauron’s Ringwraiths are called The Ten Who Were Taken or the Taken for short. The Taken were originally Dominator’s enslaved servants but the Lady has claimed them for herself when she broke out of her prison. They are grotesque but immensely powerful creatures with bizarre names that reflect their appearance or traits. The Howler is named for his random outbursts of uncontrollable screams, The Hanged Man has a neck bent to one side after being hanged and The Shapeshifter is a large, filthy man with an ability to shape shift. As with his other characters, Cook opted for a naming scheme based on appearance and ability. What separates the Taken from, for example, the Ringwraiths is their distinct lack of loyalty to their master. The Taken spend as much effort fighting each other as they do the Lady’s enemies. About half of them, mostly the female half, is still loyal to her husband and plots with the enemy to

³⁴ Glen Cook, *The Black Company*, (New York: Tor Fantasy, 1996), 60. PDF e-book.

betray the Lady. In particular, the Taken known as the Limper serves as one of the primary antagonists during the course of the first novel, despite being on the same side as the Company. Cook abandons the sense of unity that is commonly found among the members of the Dark Lord's retinue and instead gives the characters more independence. The companions are independent enough that they often have agendas of their own, these agendas oftentimes conflict with the agenda of their master. This independence also allows them to develop from one role, or one archetype, to another. The character of Soulcatcher transitions from the role of a Dark Lord's companion to the Mentor archetype to a Dark Lord archetype herself in the later books. Soulcatcher is defeated but not destroyed by the Company and becomes a malignant sleeper for the next fifteen years, then awakens and once again becomes the Company's enemy and a threat to the world.

The Lady herself is an unusual Dark Lord. She is not satanic and far from being an Antichrist. Much like the companions, Cook gives her character a room for development, a peculiar concept for the established archetype. Rather than being an omniscient evil being like Sauron or a human corrupted by his lust for power and immortality like Voldemort, Cook brings the archetype down to a more human level. The Lady is a subject to human and earthly vices. She gets jealous, angry, frustrated, she derives pleasure from defeating and punishing her enemies and even from her contact with the narrator for whom she develops feelings. In desperate times, the Lady is capable of compromises as well. In book three she joins the heroes in the battle against the newly emerging Dark Lord, her husband the Dominator. The Dominator is the second Dark Lord to appear in the novels and is the more archetypal of the two described so far. He does not have the same luxury of being able to develop like the Lady does and is not humanized in any way. He is simply known as "the ancient evil of the north."³⁵ The Lady eventually loses her status of the Dark Lord and becomes a travelling companion of the Black Company and a lover to Croaker. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* calls her appropriately a "semi-retired and reformed"³⁶ type of a Dark Lord.

³⁵ Cook, *The Black Company*, 14.

³⁶ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 270.

5. The Mentor Archetype

According to the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, the Mentor prepares the hero on their upcoming journey. Their role is often to educate the hero on the unfamiliar world that they find themselves in and to point out a path they should follow.³⁷ If the hero possesses any innate abilities, it is the Mentor who instructs the hero on how to use them. The Mentor may accompany the hero on their quest, helping them with any difficulties that they might encounter, or the Mentor may simply train, prepare and point the hero in the right direction before sending them off on the quest on their own.

This type of archetype is more frequently identified as the “Wise Old Man” archetype. The term was developed by both C. G. Jung and Joseph Campbell. Jung describes the archetype as “the superior master and teacher, the archetype of the spirit”³⁸ who “always appears in a situation where insight, understanding, good advice, determination, planning, etc., are needed but cannot be mustered on one's own resources.”³⁹ Campbell based his theory on the work of Jung, so it is not surprising that he would adopt the same terminology, in Campbell's own words:

Wise Old Man of the myths and fairy tales whose words assist the hero through the trials and terrors of the weird adventure. He is the one who appears and points to the magic shining sword that will kill the dragon-terror, tells of the waiting bride and the castle of many treasures, applies healing balm to the almost fatal wounds, and finally dismisses the conqueror, back into the world of normal life, following the great adventure into the enchanted night.⁴⁰

Tolkien's Gandalf is one of the most archetypal mentors in the genre. He looks like an old man, and he is old and undoubtedly wise, and Gandalf is also a wizard. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* says that in high fantasy, the Mentor archetypes, or the patrons, as they call it, are typically wizards,⁴¹ a stereotype that is based on one of the

³⁷ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 637.

³⁸ C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler, trans. R. F. C. Hull, 2nd ed., vol. 9 (London: Routledge), 35. PDF e-book.

³⁹ Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 216.

⁴⁰ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Commemorative Edition*, 15

⁴¹ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 748.

first mentors in fantasy literature, the universally well-known wizard Merlin from the Arthurian legends.⁴² Gandalf possesses all the features necessary for him to become the most archetypal of mentors. His role in the novels is that of a guide and an instigator, he always shows up when he is needed, he gives Frodo the one ring and sends him on his quest. Later, Gandalf is the one who, in Campbellian terms, “points to the magic shining swords that will kill the dragon-terror.” He does so by pointing out the critical weakness of the Dark Lord and guides the hero towards it. More than everyone else in the fictional world, Gandalf always knows what needs to be done, however, his mentor status forbids him from carrying out the quest on his own.

Another perfect example of the Mentor Archetype is Rowling’s Dumbledore. Dumbledore performs the same functions in the *Harry Potter* books as Gandalf does in *The Lord of the Rings*. Dumbledore sends Hagrid, the gentle giant, to bring Harry over to Hogwarts, starting the chain of events that would eventually lead to the fulfilment of a prophecy and a defeat of the Dark Lord. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005) Dumbledore devises a plan that exploits the Dark Lord’s weakness and allows the hero to defeat him, although Dumbledore is killed shortly after.

Death of a mentor is a frequent trope of this archetype. It often leads to further development of the Hero archetype and makes the Dark Lord, or his companions appear more imposing. Both Gandalf and Dumbledore die at one point, although Gandalf’s death is not permanent, it still has a profound effect on Frodo, Aragorn, and others. Dumbledore’s death has a similar effect on Harry, it is also the stimulus that Harry needs to take a more active role in the fight against the Dark Lord. The death, however, is not the end for many mentor characters, their role continues even after being killed. Gandalf returns as Gandalf the White, symbolizing the spiritual factor of the archetype.⁴³ Dumbledore briefly returns as a spirit to guide and educate Harry when the hero nearly dies and enters a limbo state of sorts. Characters of Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi from *Star Wars* would re-appear at various times as Force spirits to warn and instruct Luke when the hero needs guidance the most. *The Encyclopedia* calls the characters that exist on the threshold between two states as liminal beings and offers examples like Chiron, the mentor of Hercules and, again, Gandalf who at one point

⁴² Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 637.

⁴³ Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 215.

finds himself both dead and alive.⁴⁴ Another character who resides on the threshold between life and death is Mycroft, the undead mentor of Garret in Glen Cook's *Garret P.I.* stories.⁴⁵ The *Encyclopedia* does not necessarily make a connection between the liminal beings and the Mentor archetype but it does say that being on the threshold gives them "both wisdom and the ability to instruct"⁴⁶ which is what this paper views as a fundamental concept where the archetype is concerned.

5.1. The Mentor Archetype in The Black Company

The Black Company features a number of wizards, none of which, however, fit the description of the archetype established in the previous chapter. Silent is the most powerful of the trio of wizards in the Company. He took a vow of silence and during the course of the first three books, he spoke only once, preferring instead a form of sign language which he later teaches to Darling, a fellow mute. Silent provides little in terms of advice and guidance, in the fight against the Lady it is revealed that Silent knows the real name of the Lady. The real name of a wizard in Cook's fictional world means one can rob them of their power in an instant. He, however, did not choose to share it with his companions and uses the name only when his love interest, Darling is in danger. Silent knows the critical weakness of the Dark Lord but rather than pointing it out to the hero, he keeps it to himself and exploits it himself. This type of behaviour is thoroughly uncharacteristic for the archetype and automatically rules him out as a potential Mentor.

The other two wizards are One-Eye and Goblin. The two wizards are mostly known for their ongoing feud where they would "prank" each other with their magic, much to the amusement of the members of the Company. Both are notorious gamblers, drunkards, and overall degenerates. Despite being over a hundred years old they seem to possess a distinct lack of wisdom and serve as a comic relief in the novels. They provide advice only when knowledge of sorcery is necessary and when they eventually die, their death is permanent, they do not appear in any shape or form after they are killed in the later books.

⁴⁴ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 581.

⁴⁵ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 582.

⁴⁶ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 581.

The character that fits the Mentor archetype the most is, unexpectedly, one of the Company's greatest enemies, the Soulcatcher or Catcher for short. Soulcatcher is a sister of the Lady, she is one of the companions of the Dark Lord and initially, she is the one who employs the Company and brings them over to the continent where the events of the majority of the first three books take place. In this sense, she fulfils the same role of an instigator as Gandalf or Dumbledore. Soulcatcher is the who sends the hero on their quest. In terms of assistance and guidance, one might argue that the Soulcatcher fulfils this function rather well. She does appear when necessary and whenever the Company is facing a tough opponent like Raker or the Limper, Catcher is there to devise a battle plan, using her immense intellect and magical power. Soulcatcher is evil but not thoroughly amoral, she does display a certain degree of honour and responsibility. After Croaker is knocked unconscious by the effects of the Lady's magic, Soulcatcher stays with his paralyzed body and guards him until he is able to recover. Croaker himself was surprised to see this level of compassion that the Soulcatcher was capable of exhibiting:

I suspected that this one Taken had a sense of honor, a sense of duty toward those who had accepted his protection. He would not admit it, though. Never. That would not fit the image of the Taken.⁴⁷

Croaker refers to the Soulcatcher as "he," despite her appearance being androgynous:

Soulcatcher's slight body is always sheathed in black leather. He wears that head-hiding black morion, and the black gloves and black boots. Only a couple of silver badges break the monotony. [...] Small, soft curves interrupt the flatness of Soulcatcher's chest. There is a feminine flair to his hips and legs. Three of the Taken are female, but which are which only the Lady knows. We call them all he. Their sex won't ever mean a thing to us.⁴⁸

So far, the Soulcatcher has been displaying patterns commonly found among the Mentor archetypes. She does provide aid and guidance to the hero and she does put the Company on the path towards the destruction of the Dark Lord, although that is where

⁴⁷ Cook, *The Black Company*, 61.

⁴⁸ Cook, *The Black Company*, 35.

the similarities with the archetype end. The Catcher attempts to kill Croaker at least three times, she sabotages her sister's war effort and outright kills some of her fellow Taken all in hopes of usurping some of the Lady's power and influence for herself. These actions are very much unlike those of her more archetypal cousins like Obi-Wan Kenobi or Gandalf. On many occasions, Soulcatcher is shown to be utterly insane. In the seventh book *She is the Darkness* (1997), the Lady comments on her sister:

I have never known why my sister does any of the things she does. She has never been rational. Two does not follow One in her scheme, nor does Three come before Four. She is capable of spending incredible energies and vast fortunes on the execution of a prank. She is capable of destroying cities without ever being able to explain why. You can know what she is doing but not why or you can know why she is doing something but not what. She was that way when she was three years old, before anyone knew she was cursed with the power, too.⁴⁹

The Catcher suffers from a condition closely resembling a magically induced schizophrenia. Instead of hearing voices in her head (a symptom of schizophrenia), she is known for producing various sounding voices from under her mask, both male and female. A reader might observe some of the functions commonly connected with the Mentor archetype in her behaviour but overall, it is not enough to justify calling her the mentor to Cook's protagonist. Instead of being wise she is insane, instead of tutoring and caring for the protagonist, she betrays them and attempts to kill them multiple times, instead of helping defeat the Dark Lord she attempts to usurp the title for herself. After being killed, the Catcher comes back to life not to provide a helpful advice in a situation of a dire need but to torment Croaker and the Company some more.

⁴⁹ Glen Cook, *She is the Darkness*, (New York: Tor Fantasy, 1998), 143.

6. High fantasy

This paper has examined the character archetypes that characters in fantasy commonly fall into. The goal of this chapter is to first discuss and describe the genre in general and later with a careful consideration to the Tolkien tradition.

Firstly, a distinction between fantasy and science fiction, the two often overlapping genres, is to be discussed. Professor of fantasy and science fiction, Brian Attebery says that both genres tend to have overlapping audiences of fans, many of them claiming that fantasy is just a subgenre or a branch of science fiction and vice versa. Attebery proposes that these genres fall into what he calls fuzzy sets. This means that the division is not established on the basis of defining characteristics but by core examples, or in Wittgenstein's terms, family resemblance and degree of membership. Works of fantasy fiction and science fiction are allowed a partial membership in the respective genres so the question whether a particular piece of work is a work of science fiction or a work of fantasy tends to be redundant. We can rather categorize the literature as being mostly fantasy and marginally science fiction, or mostly science fiction and marginally fantasy. This, of course, leads to the inevitable hybridization of the genres.⁵⁰

When discussing the historical dimension and development of the genres the distinction does seem to be somewhat clearer. The term "science fiction" seems to have originated from authors like H. G. Wells, E. A. Poe and Jules Verne in pulp magazines of the 1920s through 1950s.⁵¹ These authors were noted for their precision and accuracy when writing about science. Some of the major themes of the genre also arrived with the works of the above-mentioned authors. Wells, in particular, was known for his themes of alien invasions in *The War of the Worlds* (1897), human experiments in *The Invisible Man* (1897) or time travel in *The Time Machine* (1895). These themes did become a mainstay in the science fiction genre up to date.

Attebery describes the history of fantasy as longer and more complicated with a lack of a single defining moment. He does, however, identify some of the key developments in the history of fantasy among the Romantic and Gothic writers and their

⁵⁰ Brian Attebery, *Stories about Stories, Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, (USA: Oxford University Press, 2014), 39. PDF e-book.

⁵¹ Attebery, *Stories about Stories, Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, 39.

interest in the supernatural. Other key developments include the revival of the fairy-tale during the Victorian and the Edwardian era and the unexpected boom in popularity of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.⁵² The importance of fairy tale in the development of the genre should be further elaborated. A philosopher and literary critic Tzvetan Todorov emphasizes the role that fairy tale plays in the development of the fantasy genre as it "gives us the first, and also the stablest form of narrative" as well as being the place where supernatural events appeared initially.⁵³ The structure of fairy tale is the same as the one we usually find in works of high fantasy. This theory concerning the copy-and-paste structure of most fairy tales was established in 1928 by a Soviet scholar and folklorist Vladimir Propp. Propp suggests that there is a limited set of functions that appear in a fixed order that give the tale its structure. To give an example, Propp's functions number fifteen to twenty, the guidance, struggle, branding, victory, liquidation and return⁵⁴ do correspond very well to the *Lord of the Rings*. Frodo is guided to vital location where he struggles with Gollum, a creature corrupted by the one ring and the Dark Lord, he is branded by having his hand mutilated but achieves a victory by overcoming the power of the ring and its owner, he resolves the crisis of the story and returns to the place where his adventure started. One might find many more examples in the works of Tolkien and Rowling as well. To summarize this long paragraph, the genre of fantasy is deeply rooted in the tradition of the fairy tale, especially its structure, or in Attebery's own words, some of the history's greatest fantasies are simply "fairy tales, writ large."⁵⁵

Another indispensable part in the development of the fantasy genre is myth. This paper adopts Attebery's notion of myth and that is "any collective story that encapsulates a world view and authorizes belief."⁵⁶ What is important to mention is that fantasy writers do not simply invent myths but rather rewrite, reinterpret and recreate them.⁵⁷ During the course of their existence, myths tend to lose some of their context, or as Attebery puts it, they "come down to us stripped of context," and it falls to fantasy or

⁵² Attebery, *Stories about Stories, Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, 39

⁵³ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard, (Cleveland/London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 163. PDF e-book.

⁵⁴ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 50-55

⁵⁵ Brian Attebery, *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 10. accessed February 23, 2021.
<https://archive.org/details/fantasytradition00atte>

⁵⁶ Attebery, *Stories about Stories, Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, 2.

⁵⁷ Attebery, *Stories about Stories, Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, 4.

rather the authors of fantasy to supply them with new context, essentially giving them a new meaning.⁵⁸ Tolkien himself modelled his work on *The Lord of the Rings* on the Christian myth. He made use of some of the elements of the sacred like prophecy, miracle, resurrection, or transformation.⁵⁹ *The Lord of the Rings* is virtually a narrative of salvation through sacrifice. When discussing the myth and its role in the development of fantasy, the main conclusion that Attebery arrives to is “that fantasy, as a literary form, is a way of reconnecting to traditional myths and the worlds they generate.”⁶⁰

Now that this paper has discussed some of the roots and key concept in the development of the genre it is time to attempt to formulate a proper definition. In his contribution to Sandner’s *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* (2004), an American critic Gary Wolfe manages to compile various definitions of the fantasy by many prominent authors like Tolkien or E. M. Forster into a single, comprehensible chapter. The most frequently used definition of the literary fantasy is “fictional narrative describing events that the reader believes to be impossible.”⁶¹ Wolfe criticizes this definition for the use of such an imprecise term as “impossible” as well as the fact that it places too much emphasis on the response of the reader.⁶² The definition suggests that fantasy is a supergenre of sorts that incorporates anything that the reader finds impossible, even genres that would otherwise be better labelled as gothic fiction, horror fiction or science-fiction. Forster’s take on the definition states that fantasy “implies the supernatural, but need not express it.”⁶³ To me, Forster’s description does seem to hold a bit more weight, especially in the “need not express it” part. A reader cannot be perplexed by the supernatural events and cannot constantly seek rational explanations for what they are reading. It is not fantasy’s job to explain itself to the reader. The readers themselves have to embrace a certain attitude when reading a work of fantasy. For a reader to hesitate between what is natural and supernatural is normal and expected, Todorov even makes the hesitation an integral part of his own definition of the fantastic.⁶⁴ J. R. R. Tolkien offers another point of view by adding “arresting

⁵⁸ Attebery, *Stories about Stories, Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, 3.

⁵⁹ Attebery, *Stories about Stories, Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, 1.

⁶⁰ Attebery, *Stories about Stories, Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, 9.

⁶¹ Gary Wolfe, “‘Fantasy’ From Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy,” in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Sandner (Westport, CT, London: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 271. PDF e-book.

⁶² Wolfe, “‘Fantasy’ From Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy,” 271.

⁶³ Wolfe, “‘Fantasy’ From Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy,” 272.

⁶⁴ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre*, 32.

strangeness” and “freedom from the domination of observed fact” into the mix of descriptions.⁶⁵ These two views are not too difficult interpret as an enchanting sense of wonder and complete freedom of imaginative creativity, both of which, without a doubt, do play a major role in the creation of a fantastic text.

In the previous paragraphs we have learned that fantasy is, more often than not, inspired by a real world myth and shares structure with that of the fairy tale. The definitions of the fantasy in literature are numerous but the point where many of them seem to coincide in is what W. R. Irving calls “an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility.”⁶⁶ This paper does view this description as satisfactory enough for the general label of fantasy but, of course, not the subgenres like heroic fantasy, dark fantasy or military fantasy.

6.1. The Tolkien Formula

Claiming that Tolkien alone is the grandfather of fantasy would not be strictly correct. While it is true that the huge boom in popularity of the genre can be attributed to Tolkien, there is another author whom the title of the grandfather of fantasy suits better and that is George MacDonald. MacDonald’s 1893 essay “The Fantastic Imagination” discusses the fairy-tale in a manner that is noticeably similar to what Tolkien wrote in his own essay “On Fairy Stories” in 1947. MacDonald’s essay helped define the fantasy genre while it was still in its infancy and was the author who started the tradition of combining the mythic materials with the structure of a fairy-tale. One more thing that MacDonald stresses as important is that it is the responsibility of the author to adhere to the principle of moral truths, no matter how fanciful and fantastic the narrative gets.⁶⁷ The concept of morality in fantasy is an idea that we will revisit later. George MacDonald’s other works of fiction like *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* (1858) or *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) did influence many following authors of the fantastic in the twentieth century. Among these authors were names like C. S. Lewis, Lewis Carroll, or J. R. R. Tolkien himself.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Wolfe, “‘Fantasy’ From Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy,” 272.

⁶⁶ Wolfe, “‘Fantasy’ From Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy,” 272.

⁶⁷ Attebery, *Stories about Stories, Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, 27.

⁶⁸ Mark J. P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*, (New York, London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2012), 136. PDF e-book.

The popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* alone is enough for one to think that nothing even remotely resembling the novels existed before and one might even be forgiven for thinking that Tolkien is the founder of the fantasy genre in literature. However, from an academic point of view, the genre and other authors writing in the genre did exist before Tolkien and many of them were hugely influential in their own right. We have mentioned in the previous paragraph the importance of George MacDonald whose influence, in many ways, even eclipses that of Tolkien. Attebery claims that Tolkien's work is, arguably, not even the best, the most innovative or the first modern piece of fantasy. What separates him from the rest is that his work is the one that is the most typical, the most identifiable and therefore the easiest to reproduce.⁶⁹

The colossal following and the demand of the public for more of the same or similar have caused the modern fantasy to be shaped after Tolkien's best-seller. To name an example, Terry Brooks with his *Shannara* series, and especially the first book of the series *The Sword of Shannara* (1977) does appear to be a complete imitation of *The Lord of the Rings*. In Attebery's theory, *The Lord of the Rings* has become the core example of the high fantasy genre. For a genre that is defined by its freedom of imaginative creativity and sense of wonder, its characters, setting and plot have become unexpectedly predictable and rigid.⁷⁰ The predictability is manifested in what Attebery calls a fantasy formula that is roughly as follows:

Take a vaguely medieval world. Add a problem, something more or less ecological, and a prophecy for solving it. Introduce one villain with no particular characteristics except a nearly all-powerful badness. Give him or her a convenient blind spot. Pour in enough mythological creatures and nonhuman races to fill out a number of secondary episodes: fighting a dragon, riding a winged horse, stopping overnight with the elves (who really should organize themselves into a bed-and-breakfast association). To the above mixture add one naive and ordinary hero who will prove to be the prophesied savior; give him a comic sidekick and a wise old advisor who can rescue him from time

⁶⁹ Brian Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Sandner (Westport, CT, London: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 306. PDF e-book.

⁷⁰ Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 301.

to time and explain the plot. Keep stirring until the whole thing congeals.⁷¹

What Attebery calls fantasy formula I would preferably call the Tolkien formula or Tolkien tradition because it does seem to follow specifically the structure and tropes used in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Attebery does mention that it is not necessarily a bad thing when authors follow the formula as long as they add a spark of originality. The authors themselves are not entirely to blame for the extreme abuse of the Tolkien tradition, the current market for fantasy books does seem to push the authors towards the formula.⁷² Terry Brooks himself enjoyed a substantial amount of success from the Tolkien-hungry fans and his books that blatantly copied Tolkien's plot and characters sold extremely well.⁷³ Trying anything more original and distinct from the formula often resulted in a failure or a mediocre reception.⁷⁴

6.2. Breaking of the Formula

The other extreme is the exact opposite of what we have mentioned previously and that is the complete dismissal and refusal of the Tolkien tradition, a breaking of the formula. An English writer of science fiction and fantasy Michael Moorcock is one of the most important authors who strongly criticised the works of Tolkien and his subsequent admirers. In his famous essay "Epic Pooh" (1978), Moorcock compares the works of modern high fantasy stemming from the influence of Tolkien as the prose of the nursery room that is meant to soothe and console and is enjoyed for its lack of tension, very much like the children stories about the fictional teddy bear Winnie-the-Pooh.⁷⁵ Moorcock claims that what, in his eyes, ruins *The Lord of the Rings* is its infantilism and overt moderation.⁷⁶ The infantilism is quite self-explanatory by comparing the heroic fantasy to a children story but the part about the criticism of Tolkien's moderation is best described with a quote from Moorcock:

⁷¹ Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 302.

⁷² Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 303.

⁷³ Edward James, "Tolkien Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 74. PDF e-book.

⁷⁴ Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 303.

⁷⁵ Michael Moorcock, "Epic Pooh," in *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings* (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008), 4. PDF e-book.

⁷⁶ Moorcock, "Epic Pooh," 7.

Writers like Tolkien take you to the edge of the Abyss and point out the excellent tea-garden at the bottom, showing you the steps carved into the cliff and reminding you to be a bit careful because the hand-rails are a trifle shaky as you go down.⁷⁷

This is a point where mine and Moorcock's opinions converge. Reading *The Lord of the Rings* does make one feel that Tolkien's moderation is a bit excessive. As the quote suggests, the main characters seem to be led by the hand through every difficult situation they find themselves in. None of the characters ever fail, get lost or die. The only major death in the trilogy is that of Boromir whose death is more of a punishment for straying away from the established moral principles. When a more morally pure character like Gandalf the Mentor dies, it is through an act of heroism and sacrifice, an act for which he is rewarded with a Christ-like resurrection. The fact that the characters are not really in danger despite living in a world that faces a complete annihilation does take most of the tension away from a piece of work that is advertised as a heroic or epic fantasy. Through the excessive moderation, Tolkien manages to somewhat diminish the heroism of his heroes. The fact that no one ever really dies was criticised as a mistake by a more contemporary fantasy writers like George R. R. Martin, whose work is closer to authors like Glen Cook or Michael Moorcock.

Moorcock himself is best known for his Elric of Melniboné novels, first one being *The Dreaming City* published in 1961, twenty-three years before the first Black Company novel. The Elric novels feature a protagonist who defies standard expectations that readers tend to have of a heroic fantasy. Elric is thoroughly cynical, brutal and unhinged, although he does have moments of unexpected compassion and kindness. He resembles the character of Raven from *The Black Company* novels to a point where a discussion whether Cook based Raven on Moorcock's protagonist would not be completely out of the question. Elric also participates in enough sex, violence and drug abuse that would turn a Tolkien worshipper pale. Calling Elric an amoral character would not be strictly incorrect, however, only by conventional definitions of morality. Rather than calling him amoral a better solution is to say that he has his own set of moral principles that he more or less adheres to. For these reasons and the reasons mentioned above the Moorcock fantasy has come to be known as the anti-Tolkien

⁷⁷ Moorcock, "Epic Pooh," 8-9.

fantasy, a variation of the genre characterized by its refusal of the “idealized” aspects of Tolkien’s world.⁷⁸

The breaking of the formula does not end with Moorcock. Other writers like the above-mentioned George R. R. Martin did their share in popularizing the new transformed type of fantasy that unlike Tolkien, puts less emphasis on individual heroism, the destiny of the world or the fantastical element of wonder. For better or worse, Martin instead opts for an approach emphasizing political intrigue, war (although not war of good versus evil as we would expect from the genre), and the unpredictability of the plot which is, again, not something one expects from a work of the rigid and predictable epic or high fantasy. Martin does share some features with Moorcock like the distinct fondness for taboo topics that include incest and ultraviolence or the morally questionable behaviour of their heroes. Despite that, I am reluctant to call the work of Martin as anti-Tolkien. Martin did not necessarily aim to break the formula but rather took a risk writing outside the formula in a style that draws the most from historical fiction, medieval realism and realism in general and succeeded. Before Martin and after Moorcock, however, there is a gap in the development of high fantasy. The major author whom I believe to be the steppingstone for Martin is the author of *The Black Company*, Glen Cook.

⁷⁸ Adam Roberts, *Get Started in: Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, (London: Teach Yourself, 2014), 39. PDF e-book.

7. Glen Cook and the Roots of the Grimdark

“With the Black Company series Glen Cook single-handedly changed the face of fantasy—something a lot of people didn’t notice and maybe still don’t. He brought the story down to a human level, dispensing with the cliché archetypes of princes, kings, and evil sorcerers. Reading his stuff was like reading Vietnam War fiction on peyote.”⁷⁹

This is a quote by Cook’s fellow author of high fantasy Steven Erikson who is best known for his *Malazan Book of the Fallen* (1999) epic fantasy series. The quote is what originally sparked the idea for a more detailed academic pursuit of the mentioned cliché archetypes in the earlier parts of this thesis and the pursuit of what exactly was it about the face of fantasy that Cook single-handedly changed and how. The quote might be a bit of an overstatement that gives Cook too much credit for transforming fantasy, we have mentioned previously that Moorcock had started the trend well before Cook even put pen to paper. Despite the obvious exaggeration, the value of Cook’s work is, in this paper’s view, immense. Cook’s work, in particular his work on *The Black Company* is to be considered as the progenitor and the core example of the grimdark subgenre of epic fantasy. The term grimdark itself does face a number of problems that mostly stem from the lack of a proper definition, proper texts that would represent the genre and little to none academic examination. The rest of the thesis will attempt to answer all of the three mentioned areas of concern starting with the two subgenres that are believed to be at the heart of the grimdark.

7.1. The Military Fantasy

The Encyclopedia of Fantasy says that what is characteristic for the Black Company novels is its hard-boiled cynicism and refreshing exclusion of the usual moralizing tropes of the genre.⁸⁰ The cynicism and hard-boiled realism do seem to be the staple of Cook’s work. These characteristics can be traced as early as in Cook’s first epic fantasy *The Dread Empire* in 1979, where he combines elements of military fiction with the

⁷⁹ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/174474-with-the-black-company-series-glen-cook-single-handedly-changed-the>

⁸⁰ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 226.

fantastic, resulting in a fiction often labelled as military fantasy. The approach of this thesis to fantasy includes trying to steer away from the subgenres of the fantasy. The reason for that is that they are never clearly defined, they overlap too much and there seems to be a new subgenre for every new piece of fantasy. The exception is the military fantasy subgenre. It is a subject worthy of exploring because it does appear to be an integral part of what we will later label as the grimdark. Clute's *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* describes military fantasy as a genre that is concerned with warfare, pays enough attention to logistic details connected to warfare and is often based on real-world military history. In military fantasy, magic is treated as a heavy artillery or a biological weapon and its use is usually constrained by some ideological or ethical ideas.⁸¹ Both of Cook's epic fantasies, *The Dread Empire* and *The Black Company* are prime examples of military fantasy. There is no doubt that Cook brought his own experience to the books after serving several years in the United States Navy. When asked in an interview about the popularity of *The Black Company* among the American soldiers during the first Gulf War, Cook had this to say:

The characters act like the guys actually behave. It doesn't glorify war; it's just people getting on with the job. The characters are real soldiers. They're not soldiers as imagined by people who've never been in the service. That's why service guys like it. They know every guy who's in the books, and I knew every guy who's in the books. Most of the early characters were based on guys I was in the service with. The behavior patterns are pretty much what you'd expect if you were an enlisted man in a small unit.⁸²

Cook does away with the romanticized notion of war and soldiers and instead introduces a band of men for whom warfare is a profession and a lifestyle. The members of the Company are capable of great atrocities and great acts of heroism alike depending on what the job currently demands. Much like we can later observe in *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996) by Martin, the war in *The Black Company* is, for the most part, not the war of good versus evil. Attebery's villain with no particular characteristics except a nearly all-powerful badness does not exist in Cook's world, nor do the other

⁸¹ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 645-646.

⁸² Strange Horizons interview from 2005 with Glen Cook, <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/interview-glen-cook/>

parts of the Tolkien formula and despite the lack of a clearly defined evil opposition, the world is still grim and dark enough.

7.2. The Dark Fantasy

When discussing Cook's fantasy and using terms like grim and especially dark, one cannot avoid talking about another overused and frequently misused subgenre of fantasy which is the dark fantasy.

The subgenre originally emerged after the success of Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974) which is a horror that does contain apparent elements of the fantastic. Edward James and the authors of *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* say that the label dark fantasy came to existence by merging the horror with the fantastic.⁸³ Roz Kaveney of *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* also puts dark fantasy in relation to its sister genre, the paranormal romance. This paper views the distinction between the two subgenres as shaky at best. Kaveney states that the dark fantasy template features a male protagonist while the paranormal romance features a female one, however, she does immediately provide a borderline example of dark fantasy with a female protagonist and elements of the erotic and the romantic. The author provides more examples of dark fantasy, this time outside the realm of literature. *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *True Blood* (2008) are television shows for younger audiences or young adults that, according to Kaveney, influenced the development of the genre.⁸⁴ Notice that the protagonists of both shows are young women and *True Blood* in particular is oversaturated with eroticism which would make them works of paranormal romance rather than dark fantasy, although the existence of paranormal romance as a separate genre is a questionable matter as well. The eroticism does not arise from the paranormal romance genre. Both of the above-mentioned television shows deal with the supernatural creature of a vampire. Vampires partake in the act of blood sucking and that involves penetration and exchange of bodily fluids. We can safely assume that that is where the eroticism comes from. The fixation on sexuality and eroticism could be traced all the way to Bram Stoker and his masterpiece *Dracula* (1897). The work is full of homoeroticism and sexual subtext despite not featuring a

⁸³ James, "Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy," 73-74.

⁸⁴ Roz Kaveney, "Dark Fantasy and paranormal romance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 215-216. PDF e-book.

single sex-scene. Stoker manages to accomplish that with the help of the featured vampires.⁸⁵ Kaveney rounds up her description of the dark fantasy in a wholly unsatisfactory manner as:

A genre of fantasy whose protagonists believe themselves to inhabit the world of consensual mundane reality and learn otherwise, not by walking through a portal into some other world, or by being devoured or destroyed irrevocably, but by learning to live with new knowledge and sometimes with new flesh [...] Dark fantasy is a literature of accommodation and endurance, rather than of transcendence or despair; its intrinsic affect is the bitter-sweet and its presiding erotics the polymorphous. It is a genre to which a sense of the liminal is central and crucial and foregrounded, where in most other fantasy genres it is optional.⁸⁶

If we are to subscribe to the notion that this description is too broad, incomplete or just plainly wrong then the other approach, one established by John Clute, has to be considered as well. Clute compiled his description of the dark fantasy with the help of authors and editors like Gary K. Wolfe and Chris Morgan. Wolfe says that the term dark fantasy can be used interchangeably with the term gothic fantasy⁸⁷ which is a label notably similar to gothic fiction or gothic horror. One cannot help but notice the contradiction that follows this statement shortly after:

We define DF (dark fantasy) as a tale which incorporates a sense of horror, but which is clearly fantasy rather than supernatural fiction. Thus DF does not normally embrace tales of vampires, werewolves, satanism, ghosts or the occult.⁸⁸

The previous paragraph in the encyclopedia mentions that the terms dark fantasy and gothic fantasy are interchangeable while this quote forbids the use of vampires in the dark fantasy genre. Vampire is one of the signature villains of gothic fiction. Bram Stoker and Sheridan Le Fanu both featured vampires in their respective works. This

⁸⁵ Michal Šubrt, "Bram Stoker's Storytelling in *Dracula*," thesis, 38.

⁸⁶ Kaveney, "Dark Fantasy and paranormal romance, 218.

⁸⁷ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 249.

⁸⁸ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 249.

begs the question that either dark fantasy and gothic fantasy cannot be used interchangeably or that the works of Stoker and Le Fanu are not to be considered gothic fiction or gothic fantasy. This thesis favours the former. As a whole, the quoted description is once again unsatisfactory, but it does bring up a point that was echoed previously by Edward James in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* and that is the dark fantasy as a hybrid of horror and fantasy. Clute, James and Kaveney as well do seem to include the sense of horror in their description of the dark fantasy. Kaveney herself states that the work of Clive Barker falls within the realm of dark fantasy.⁸⁹ Barker is a prominent English horror writer whose work is frequently being adapted into films. His horror stories and novels like the *Books of Blood* (1984) or the *Hellraiser* (1986–2018) series do contain overt elements of the fantastic like ghosts, demons, and magic. Another author whose work invites a comparison with the dark fantasy genre is Howard Phillips Lovecraft. His work is best described as a combination of fantasy, science fiction and horror. Under the simplified definition of the dark fantasy genre as a horror with overt elements of the fantastic the work of Lovecraft would fit quite well. Despite that, Lovecraft and his texts seem to be in a league of their own when it comes to the genre. The genre that Lovecraft is known for is named after him as the Lovecraftian horror or a cosmic horror. Lovecraftian fantasy, his horror and the philosophy behind it is, however, distinct and unique enough to a point where any form of comparison with a genre as poorly defined as the dark fantasy is almost an insult.

The final description of the dark fantasy that we will quote and discuss is once again from *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, where Clute writes:

The term can sensibly be used also to describe tales in which the eucatastrophe normal to most fantasy is reversed – tales in which the Dark Lord is victorious, tales in which the land, normally and object of desire, and an arena for the working out of a desired story, is itself an object of horror.⁹⁰

This description seems to be applicable to Cook and his *The Black Company*. After the events of the first book, the Dark Lord of the story, the Lady manages to defeat all opposition and becomes the de-facto ruler of the world. Even though she does

⁸⁹ Kaveney, “Dark Fantasy and paranormal romance, 217.

⁹⁰ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 249.

not do anything particularly evil with her newly gained power, we can still see hints of oppression of the general populace during the course of the second book. In this sense, the land does become an object of horror of sorts for the civilians. The Company itself earns an especially nasty reputation among the populace as the champions and enforcers of the Dark Lord's new regime. The example that Clute provides is Stephen Donaldson's high fantasy series of novels *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* (1977–2013).⁹¹ Donaldson's take on the high fantasy does appear to be similar to that of Moorcock. His protagonist, Thomas Covenant starts off as utterly unappealing, amoral and cynical and yet, he is the one who is chosen to save the fictional world. This thesis views *The Black Company*, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* and the work by Moorcock as works that are genre-wise the closest to the abstract dark fantasy and therefore this description does have some merit to it, although not enough to provide a reliable template.

We could spend more time looking at and discussing various definitions of the subgenre by other authors but the chances of finding one that shares features with others while also being the one that this thesis agrees with are slim. Across the mentioned secondary sources and their authors, the descriptions of the genre vary too much to be taken seriously. The works of fiction that fit the genre according to these authors also range considerably from horror classics like Stephen King's *Carrie* to pulp television shows like *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* or *True Blood*. What is the most troubling is the distinct lack of the prototypical or archetypal text of the dark fantasy. There is no novel or story that manages to accomplish to be the text that other texts are compared to, in other words, there is no core example of the dark fantasy. As we have mentioned previously, Attebery's theory states that the division between genres is mostly based on the resemblance to the core examples. There is also no author who manages to do what Tolkien did to high fantasy and its subgenre, the heroic fantasy. With these facts in mind, we have to conclude that the dark fantasy subgenre does not have enough academic support to sustain itself as an independent genre.

⁹¹ Clute and Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 249.

8. The Grimdark

The term grimdark itself is coined from the words grim and dark that appear side by side in a signature quote representing the *Warhammer 40 000* fictional universe: In the grim dark future there is only war.⁹²

The *Warhammer 40 000* incorporates all novels, stories, tabletop and video games set in the same dystopian universe that originated in 1987 and was invented by a British manufacturer of miniature wargames Games Workshop. The invention of the universe was the single most important moment in the history of the genre and therefore a further elaboration and description is necessary, starting with the rest of the above-mentioned quote.

To be a man in such times is to be one amongst untold billions. It is to live in the cruellest and most bloody regime imaginable. These are the tales of those times. Forget the power of technology and science, for so much has been forgotten, never to be re-learned. Forget the promise of progress and understanding, for in the grim dark future there is only war. There is no peace amongst the stars, only an eternity of carnage and slaughter, and the laughter of thirsting gods.⁹³

The universe is set in the far distant future where humanity discovered space travel along with a multitude of other species in the space, nearly all of them hostile. The universe does have its own version of magical powers that are common for both science fiction and fantasy. On the paper, the *Warhammer 40 000* does appear to be a generic hybrid of science fiction and fantasy with its universe, alien species or magical powers inspired by those found in, for example, Lucas' *Star Wars* universe. This could not be further from the truth. The wonderful fictional world found in works of Rowling, Tolkien, Lewis, or Lucas can be considered the perfect escapist's paradise where the forces of good and evil exist separately, and one does not have to wonder which is which. As the quote suggests, the world of *Warhammer 40 000* is an ugly place. The humanity finds itself at war with nearly every sentient being in the galaxy. Most of them being superior to humans in terms of technology, science or physical prowess. Demons

⁹² Dan Abnett, *Eisenhorn*, (London: Games Workshop, 2005), preface. PDF e-book.

⁹³ Abnett, *Eisenhorn*, preface.

exist, as well as entities powerful enough to be called gods. Unsurprisingly, the gods are hostile to humanity as well in a similar fashion to the Lovecraftian Great Old Ones. The inevitable annihilation of humanity is postponed only when a man of unprecedented magical powers is born, the Emperor of Mankind. The Emperor is mistakenly hailed as a god and due to the infighting caused by human traits such as greed and jealousy, the Emperor is killed. Even after death, however, he is not allowed to rest. As the last glimmer of hope for the humanity against the encroaching terrors of the universe the corpse of the Emperor is strapped on a golden throne in the capital city and artificially kept somewhere between life and death through the daily sacrifice of thousand humans who were unlucky enough to be born with magical powers. The events of the novels and video games take place during this time. The Emperor has been rotting on the throne for thousands of years and nobody really knows when will he cease to function completely. The underlying concept is that when he is gone, and that could happen at any time, the humanity will be gone with him.

The sense of impending doom and apparent hopelessness are at the heart of the grimdark. One might argue that Tolkien's Middle-Earth is a place of impending doom and apparent hopelessness as well. The Dark Lord does appear to be winning and the situation does get significantly more hopeless when Boromir and Gandalf die, and the Fellowship of the Ring is disbanded. Despite that, *The Lord of the Rings* never truly reaches the domain of the grimdark. The reason for that are the books' invincible heroes and more importantly, the all-knowing and all-powerful character of Gandalf, the Mentor archetype. Tolkien's pure heroes never fall, never stray from the path and never fail. With heroes like these, the world can never be truly hopeless or doomed. Another concept essential to the grimdark is the Moorcockian cynicism and moral ambiguity. Glen Cook does a good job at portraying the cynicism through the eyes of the novel's narrator, Croaker the self-proclaimed cynic. Croaker is an oddity in the books as he is one of only a handful of decent characters with some sort of moral values that he, however, rarely tries to impose on others. Consider the following quote:

“Croaker! Lookee here!” Whitey came charging toward where I sat with the Captain and Silent and one or two others. He had a naked woman draped over his shoulder. She might have been attractive had she not been so thoroughly abused.

“Not bad, Whitey. Not bad,” I said, and went back to my journal.

Behind Whitey the whooping and screaming continued. The men were harvesting the fruits of victory.

“They’re barbarians,” the Captain observed without rancor.

“Got to let them cut loose sometimes,” I reminded him.

The Captain agreed reluctantly. He just does not have much stomach for plunder and rape, much as they are part of our business. I think he is a secret romantic, at least when females are involved.⁹⁴

The irony here is that Croaker is the secret romantic and not the Captain. Croaker is troubled by the behaviour of his brothers-in-arms but is cynical enough to a point where he sees no reason or no hope in even attempting to show them the right way.

Previously, we have mentioned that what is essential to the philosophy of the grimdark is the sense of impending doom and apparent hopelessness. While the former is a staple of heroic fantasy in general, the latter requires a bit more elaboration. The grimdark worlds are only seemingly hopeless. The point is not to invoke catharsis by piling up suffering after suffering on a main character or to dismiss the world as nihilistic. It is through the apparent hopelessness in the face of an overwhelming force that the human characters are able to display the greatest acts of heroism. If we consider the concept of apparent hopelessness in *The Black Company*, the textbook example would be the final climactic battle with the Dominator. The Company’s plan succeeds, and the Dark Lord is robbed of his magical powers, all thanks to the prophesied hero, but the villain is still far from finished. The Dominator still possesses an overwhelming physical power and near-invincible body while the prophesied hero is powerless. The situation seems hopeless and in that hopeless situation the Company manages one last desperate attack. They rush the Dominator, sweep him off his feet and pin him to the ground with the weight of their bodies. The man who holds him down gets ripped apart but manages to die on top of him, keeping the Dark Lord pinned while the rest of the Company hack him to pieces and burn him. This sort of an unfair struggle of the

⁹⁴ Cook, *The Black Company*, 47.

powerless versus the powerful is what characterizes the philosophy of heroism in the works of the grimdark.

In the earlier parts of this thesis we have discussed the character and hero's journey archetypes. The various archetypes have been described extensively, examples were provided and comparison to *The Black Company* was made. With the exception of the structure, which is the same in most works of heroic fantasy, the fantasy character archetypes seem to have undergone a substantial transformation, especially when compared to the more typical works of heroic fantasy and epic fantasy. The Mentor or the Wise Old Man archetype seems to have been omitted completely. In this paper's view, the omission or transformation of the fantasy character archetypes is a feature of the grimdark as well, although it is doubtlessly not exclusive to the grimdark only. Before crossing the finish line and inventing a definition of the genre alongside some typical examples in the realm of literature, the matter whether the grimdark is a genre of Anti-Tolkien fiction has to be addressed.

According to Robert Adams, the grimdark fantasy is the anti-Tolkien fantastical tradition.⁹⁵ Roberts is one of the few academics who deal with the label grimdark in a published piece of literature. His work itself, *Get Started in: Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2014) is a book far from what we could consider a study of the genre, so some leeway and healthy scepticism while reading it is encouraged. Despite that, the author himself is a respected writer and Vice-President of H. G. Wells Society and therefore his word does hold significant weight. Roberts says the grimdark is a genre where "nobody is honourable, and Might is Right"⁹⁶ and that "It owes a lot to Tolkien, but is determined as much by its reaction to the more idealized aspects of Tolkien's world."⁹⁷ The grimdark does break away from the Tolkien formula in various ways that were described throughout the thesis and this breaking of the formula was a huge step towards the development of the genre but to call the grimdark the anti-Tolkien tradition is not necessarily correct. Moorcock's fantasy is what is, without a doubt an anti-Tolkien tradition but his work does not show the signs of the grimdark philosophy outside the cynicism and moral ambiguity. It also does not deal with the theme of war in the same manner as Cook, Martin or any novel from the *Warhammer 40 000* universe

⁹⁵ Roberts, *Get Started in: Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, 25.

⁹⁶ Roberts, *Get Started in: Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, 41.

⁹⁷ Roberts, *Get Started in: Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, 41.

does and war and the military fantasy genre are at the centre of the bulk of the grimdark literature. Moorcock's novels could be considered grimdark only marginally, his work is better described as the above-mentioned anti-Tolkien tradition. The anti-Tolkien tradition certainly is responsible for the emergence of the grimdark genre but to use the two labels interchangeably would be inaccurate at best.

After a careful examination of the grimdark genre, its roots and the works of fiction that are thought to represent it, all that is left is to formulate a comprehensive definition that maintains a unique and distinct enough description when compared to the other subgenres of high fantasy.

The grimdark fantasy is a subgenre of high fantasy characterized by a sense of impending doom and apparent hopelessness. The characters tend to be cynics who are seemingly amoral but upon closer inspection a set of moral principles does reveal itself, although often distorted. The genre favours the theme of war, where it explores the negative aspects of human condition without making any moralizing comments. The grimdark may, or may not overlap with a heroic fantasy, however, if it does, it steers away from the established cliché archetypes. Other features that are typical, but not exclusive for the genre are graphic violence or ultraviolence and taboo topics like, explicit sex, sexual violence or incest.

Texts that could claim membership in this genre are Glen Cook's *The Black Company* series, George Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga, Joe Abercrombie's *The First Law* (2006–2008) trilogy, a number of *Warhammer 40 000 novels*, more specifically works like *Titanicus* (2006) and *Gaunt's Ghosts* (1999–2019) by Dan Abnett. Other works that share features with the grimdark but are not, strictly speaking, the best examples include Stephen Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* saga, Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* novels and short stories. From the non-western works of the grimdark, the best examples are Japanese graphic novels *Berserk* (1989) by Kentaro Miura and *Gantz* (2000) by Hiroya Oku.

Conclusion

In the analysis of the first three volumes of *The Black Company* I have discovered that Glen Cook's depiction of the discussed trio of archetypes varies considerably from his fellow fantasy writers like Tolkien or Rowling. The Hero archetype is seemingly non-existent, the fate of the fictional world is not decided through the actions of a single person who would exemplify the tropes and patterns commonly found among fantastic heroes. In fact, it was revealed that there is no individual hero in *The Black Company* at all. Cook's fantastic hero is the Black Company as a whole and the exaggerated heroism of an individual is omitted completely. The Dark Lord archetype is represented by the character of the Lady. The Lady displays many of the established features of the archetype like the immense greed, ambition and the cyclical disposition but she does not quite reach the sphere of the omniscient evil figure like Tolkien's Sauron does. Cook portrays her in a more human way than one would expect from the Dark Lord archetype and allows her to develop as a character. The Mentor archetype is missing completely. The character who resembles the archetype the closest turned out to be the unhinged Soulcatcher. The lack of a proper Mentor archetype seems to be a way of putting the heroes in more danger while avoiding the excessive moderation that can be, for example, found in the works of Tolkien.

The later parts of the thesis discuss the genre. Special attention is paid to J. R. R. Tolkien and his work *The Lord of the Rings* and especially the influence the work has over the whole of the fantasy genre. This paper has explored what has been labelled as the Tolkien formula and the way it tends to make the works of the genre extremely predictable and rigid. The formula has spawned a number of derivative fantasy novels, the most widely known one being *The Sword of Shannara* by Terry Brooks, but it also gave rise to a type of fantasy fiction that refuses and rejects the Tolkien tradition. This type of anti-Tolkien fantasy has been mostly invented and developed by Michael Moorcock and it does appear to be an important step in the development of both epic fantasy and eventually the grimdark fantasy. The label grimdark itself comes from the *Warhammer 40 000* universe and that is also where most of the philosophy of the grimdark originates from. After a careful survey of the literature that is considered to be either directly written in the genre or to be somehow influential on the grimdark genre, the promised definition is as follows:

The grimdark fantasy is a subgenre of high fantasy characterized by a sense of impending doom and apparent hopelessness. The characters tend to be cynics who are seemingly amoral but upon closer inspection a set of moral principles does reveal itself, although often distorted. The genre favours the theme of war, where it explores the negative aspects of human condition without making any moralizing comments. The grimdark may, or may not overlap with a heroic fantasy, however, if it does, it steers away from the established cliché archetypes.

Authors like Cook, Martin, Abercrombie or Abnett seem to fit this subgenre quite well and their works are therefore to be considered the best examples of the grimdark. Hopefully, in time people will come to appreciate the value of Glen Cook and his *The Black Company* as his work is the true and the first progenitor of the modern grimdark fantasy and the core example of the genre as well.

Resumé

Tato práce se zabývá převážně pojmem grimdark a s tím spojenými archetypy postav, které jsou typické pro díla hrdinského fantasy žánru. Konkrétně se jedná o archetypy Hrdina, Temný pán a Mentor. Tyto archetypy jsou rozebrány v první polovině diplomové práce, nejdříve obecně za pomoci různých sekundárních zdrojů a později s ohledem na vybraný primární zdroj s českým názvem *Černá legie* od amerického fantasy spisovatele Glana Cooka. Tuto sérii knih považuji za jeden z prvních a zároveň nejtypičtějších příkladů grimdark žánru, podle žánrové teorie Briana Atteberyho se tedy jedná o modelový nebo referenční text, který je v pomyslném středu grimdarku.

V prvních kapitolách této práce bylo zjištěno, že Cookovo pojetí výše zmíněných postavových archetypů se podstatně liší od toho, co bychom čekali od hrdinského fantasy. Bez zacházení do detailů, archetyp Hrdiny jako jednotlivce, který je předurčený ke spáse fiktivního fantasy světa, neexistuje. Cookův hrdina není jednotlivce, ale celé společenství lidí, celá Černá legie. Cook tímto svoje dílo oprostuje od typických klišé, které provází většinu literatury v tomto žánru. U archetypu Temného je situace podobná jako u Hrdiny. Cookovo pojetí tohoto archetypu se opět liší od ostatní žánrové literatury. Postava Paní, která reprezentuje tento archetyp je hlavně netradiční v tom, že se nejedná o typicky zlou postavu, jejíž jedinou charakteristikou je právě ono abstraktní zlo. Paní je překvapivě lidská postava, což je právě pro tento archetyp velice neobvyklé. Autor se tak bezpochyby snaží zdůraznit, jak tenká je hranice existující mezi dobrem a zlem. Posledním rozebíraným archetypem je Mentor. Tento archetyp se ve vybrané sérii knih vůbec nenachází, a to nejspíš z toho důvodu, že jeho samotná existence příliš usnadňuje život fantasy hrdinům. V grimdark světě neexistuje čistě kladný nebo záporný hrdina a z volby mezi dobrem a zlem se často stává rozhodnutí mezi větším a menším zlem. V takovém světě pro archetyp, který má za úkol vést hrdinu cestou dobra, není místo.

Zhruba zbývající polovina práce se zabývá právě žánrem grimdark. Nejprve je představen žánr fantasy jako celek. Poté je pozornost věnována autorovi, který měl na moderní fantasy asi největší vliv, a to je J. R. R. Tolkien. Tolkien je rozebírán hlavně z pohledu na jeho recept úspěchu a stylu, který se mnoho autorů v době, kdy se díky *Pánovi Prstenů* žánr hrdinského fantasy těšil největší pozornosti, pokoušelo napodobit. Tolkienův úspěch ale také vyvolal negativní reakce, a to hlavně od autorů jako je

Michael Moorcock. Jeho vlastní díla ve fantasy žánru a jeho kritické eseje byly jedním z nejdůležitějších momentů v historii žánru, který se v moderní době nazývá grimdark.

Žánr grimdark je představen v několika posledních kapitolách a je hlavně spojován s fiktivním vesmírem *Warhammer 40 000*, odkud samotný název pochází. Je to právě výše zmíněný vesmír, odkud byla převzata nejdůležitější část výsledné definice žánru. Jedná se právě o zdánlivou beznaděj a hrozící nevyhnutelnou zkázu, čemu musí lidstvo ve *Warhammeru* čelit. Zdánlivá beznaděj a hrozící zkáza jsou to, co tato diplomová práce považuje za primární charakteristiku děl psaných v grimdark žánru. Samozřejmě, že bez Moorcockova literárního cynismu a morálně pochybného chování postav by definice nebyla kompletní. Nejtypičtější díla grimdarku také pracují s tematikou války. Je nutné podotknout, že se nejedná o válku dobra proti zlu, grimdark mezi dobrem a zlem často nerozlišuje a také se nepokouší čtenáře poučovat o tom, co je dobré, a co zlé. Nejtypičtější díla, která do tohoto žánru tedy spadají jsou *Černá legie* od Glena Cooka, *Píseň ledu a ohně* od George Martina, knižní série *The First Law* od Joea Abercrombieho a samozřejmě knihy z vesmíru *Warhammer 40 000* jako jsou třeba série *Gauntovi duchové* nebo *Titanicus*. Další excelentní příklady této žánrové literatury, tentokrát mimo západ, jsou grafické romány *Berserk* a *Gantz* od Kentara Miury a Hiroyi Oku.

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ANNOTATION

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Title of Thesis: Grimdark Fantasy Black Company as Revisionist Heroic Fantasy

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Annotation: This master's thesis is concerned with character archetypes frequently associated with the works of heroic fantasy and the way they are portrayed in the work of a grimdark genre, *The Black Company* by Glen Cook. Then, both the genres of high fantasy and grimdark are discussed with particular attention being paid to authors like Tolkien, Moorcock and Cook. Finally, a definition for the grimdark genre is invented and typical examples from the realm of literature are provided.

ANOTACE

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Anotace:	Tato magisterská práce se zabývá archetypálními postavami, které jsou často spojovány s knihami hrdinského fantasy a způsobem, jakým jsou vylíčeny v grimdark díle <i>Černá legie</i> od Glena Cooka. Další části práce se věnují žánrům hrdinského fantasy a grimdark fantasy, kde je speciální pozornost věnována autorům jako je Tolkien, Moorcock a Cook. Práce se nakonec pokusí vytvořit přehlednou definici grimdark žánru a poskytne několik literárních děl, které jsou pro tento žánr typická.