

OF  
NATURE  
AND  
KINGS

RIVERS HOUSEAL



NOGGINNOSE  
PRESS

## **Of Nature and Kings**

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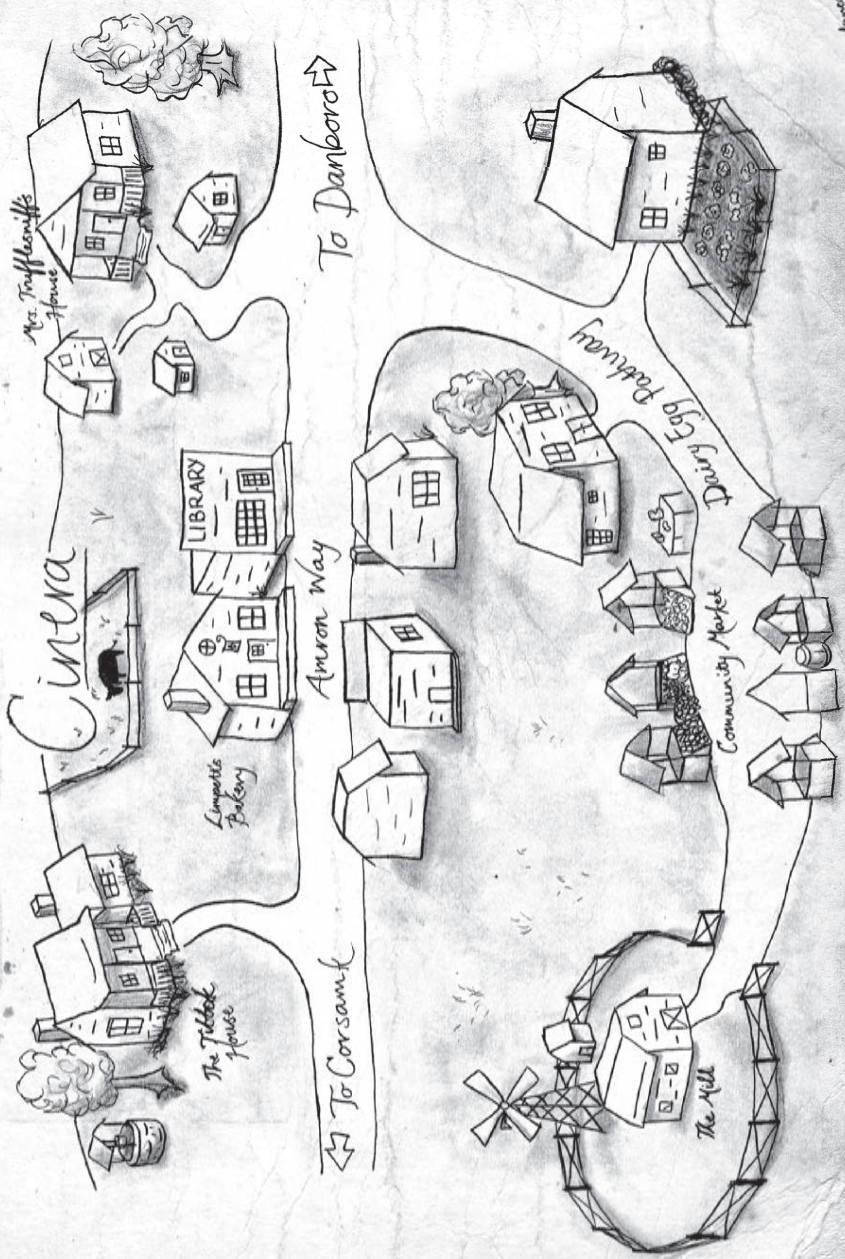
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*To my parents,  
grandparents,  
and host of friends.  
You never doubted me.  
You've taught me to  
remember who I am,  
and Whose I am.*

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Amron

## *Troom-Poom*

**L**acter Tibbak was in a private boat, on the romping Noctial Sea, with no one to bother him. The only sound was the wind in his sails . . .

Oh, and that distant shriek, slowly growing louder.

“Lacter Tibbak, didn’t you hear me?” demanded the source, now quite close to him. Lacter started and turned to see the speaker.  
*Oh. Tampa.*

“What were you doing looking off?” she bossed. Lacter realized with regret that he wasn’t on the sea; he was standing by the well and his mother Zebrida was waiting for water. Reluctantly, he filled the bucket and hurried to the house, followed closely by Tampa. When he reached the door, he dared not waste any more time but went straight for Zebrida.

She was not angry, but firm. “Lacter dear, I understand that you love to daydream. Next time, perhaps you can wait until I have the water I sent you for before you go sailing to the far reaches of Londane. No, thank you son; I think you’ve done all you can. Go out and enjoy your last day of autumn. I expect snow tomorrow!”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “In Fenier—in fact, throughout all the world of Londane—seasons change overnight. If you can imagine going down to sleep on the last day of verdant summer and waking up to every tree shining red, yellow, and orange in autumnal blaze, you will have proven your sufficient understanding.” (excerpted from Cannon Frambool’s *Explanation of Seasons*; a publication of Cailin River Press, 4th centum, thirty-fifth year)

Lacter didn't need to be told twice. He was off to daydream—now, with the freedom to seek out the adventures he dreamed of. In his eagerness to be at this freedom, he almost bowled over his younger sister Zemara.

Lacter's sprinting boots hesitated long enough to steady her. "Sorry, Zem!" he called, back to his hurry and already as far as the pathway. Ever-gracious Zemara simply shrugged and waved.

Lacter's favorite town in all Fenier was Cinera, his hometown, for the myriad of thrills and adventure it promised. *Psh!* Lacter snorted to himself. A character in one of Tampa's novels had soliloquized about such a thing—Lacter had read it and laughed. But to avoid sounding grumblesome and overparticular, he had to keep the thought in mind and try to believe it. Truth be told, he'd have said Cinera was boring. And quiet. And uneventful.

The autumn breeze frolicked in his dark brown hair, causing his thin shirt to flap in the breeze. It was a chilly wind, and he was glad for his wind-proof leather trousers and boots. His eyes lit up as he spotted the sign for his favorite place in boring, old Cinera:

Limpett's Bakery.



"Wull, uh giss et idn't too turrible," he mumbled, his mouth full. Once again, Mr. Limpett had loaded him up with his famous froom-poms.

"Your words and the way you're eating that froom-pom contradict," observed Knardo Limpett, the baker, a merry gleam in his eyes.

Lacter gulped the froom-pom down. "No, no, Mr. Limpett, I meant Cinera, not your froom-poms! They're delicious!" He wolfed



down another to prove his point. Lacter loved the old man with the beard and the smudged apron, and hoped he wasn't offended. "Say, how do you make these, anyway?" he asked, attempting to change the subject. "And where'd they get such a funny name?"

"It's all related, you see: the name describes how they're made. First, you make the dough out of crumpk and wittlesnash, and then you froompenate the dough, and pommel it flat. Froompenate, pommel. Froom, pom. Froom-Pom. You see?" explained Knardo, clearly an expert on the subject. Lacter nodded enthusiastically.

After a thoughtful pause, Knardo turned and gazed at Lacter with an oddly penetrating look. "So. You think Cinera 'isn't too terrible', eh?" he questioned, abruptly changing the subject back again.

"Uh . . . yessir," Lacter admitted. He fidgeted as he sat under Knardo's strange, steady countenance. Knardo motioned for the boy to be seated, and gave Lacter another bowl of froom-poms.

"Zebrida will never forgive me," he muttered. Then he cleared his throat and began. "Here, my boy, is a tale. The latter part of the tale will, I grant you, concern Cinera, but it is nevertheless a tale. But to begin, the tale is about all of Londane—even parts not known."

Lacter's face crinkled with incredulity. *Not know about a part of Londane? And if it's "not known" . . . how does he know about it?*

Knardo went on. "There was once a time in Fenier when people were afraid to step out of their doors."

"They were?"

"They were. The reason they feared was . . . *sigh* . . . raiders."

Lacter raised an eyebrow skeptically. "Raiders. In Fenier."

"Yes. Now pay attention. These raiders were from a country you've probably never heard of."

“I’d have heard of it if it were this side of the Sliter Islands,”  
Lacter joked.

“My boy, you might want to be quiet so you can hear what  
I’m saying.”

There was silence.

“It isn’t.”

If this story tickled your noggin and  
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P R E S S

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