

The Serpent's Tooth



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From Publishers Weekly In this fantasy retelling of King Lear, Paxton intriguingly posits that the daughters' treatment of the old king demonstrates a conflict between matrilineal and patrilineal cultures. Leir, a leader of the Quiritani people from the Great Land, conquers the Painted People of Iron Age Britain. He fathers a daughter with each of three major queens, his favorite child being the youngest, Cridilla, who is trained, like her sisters, to join a long line of women warriors. When famine overtakes the land in Leir's old age, his oldest daughters secretly agitate his overthrow and a return to the rule of the Goddess. Cridilla, who loves a chieftain of the Quiritani of the Great Land, refuses to join her sisters when they make their false and honeyed promises to the king and is banished when her pregnancy is revealed. Later, Cridilla determines to battle her sisters and save her father, since she realizes

that the old ways cannot return. Unfortunately, the magic Paxton brought to the Tristan and Isolde legend in *The White Raven* makes but a dim appearance here. Too much attention is devoted to the rituals and omens of the Goddess and not enough to character and plot development. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus Reviews Retreading ancient legend for the modern British mytho-fantasy fiction devotee is Paxson's specialty (e.g., *The White Raven*, 1988, a return to the saga of Tristan and Iseult); this time out, she's tracking down the Lear story, first amid dusty tomes like Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of England*, and then in her own busy imagination. It's around the fifth century B.C. when Paxson kicks things off, with the Celts (here, the Quiritani) recently arrived in Britain, subduing the land under the leadership of King Leir. Leir manages this feat, despite continued resistance from weird pockets of recalcitrants like the Old Race and the Painted People, largely by getting children off local queens--exclusively women-children, three in number: beautiful Rigana, Gunarduilla the warrior-woman, and little Cridilla, who loves Leir dearly, and is Paxson's heroine. After an enlightening stint on the Misty Isle with She-Bear, who trains Cridilla in the ways of war, and some bizarre coming-of-age rites at the Womb Cave, Cridilla sticks by her father as his ragtag kingdom begins to unravel. She also gets pregnant by a princeling from the Great Land, or Europe. This is all interesting enough, but about halfway through, when Leir exiles Cridilla for telling him the truth about the nature of her love for him, Paxson reclines back into the ever-beguiling Shakespearean version of the legend, leaving few surprises in store. Rigana and Gunarduilla turn on the old man, rebellion erupts, and Cridilla returns--though Paxson serves up a happy ending, leaving her to live and rule. It's all just a little too familiar and rehearsed, with multitudinous settings that pass by in a fog. Perhaps, then, a reasonable selection for the Marion Zimmer Bradley crew, but by no means a standout. -- Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

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