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"A fantastic story of intertribal rivalries, Machiavellian scheming . . .  
and fierce battles." —*The New York Times Book Review*

# STONEHENGE

A NOVEL



Bernard  
Cornwell

Author of the *New York Times* Bestseller  
*Sharpe's Havoc*

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*A NOVEL OF 2000 BC*

BERNARD CORNWELL

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In memory of BILL MOIR, 1943-1998

## Synopsis:

One summer's day a stranger carrying great wealth in gold coins comes to the settlement. He is killed by one of the chief's sons in the old temple. The mysterious treasure, assumed by some to be a gift from the gods, causes great dissension within the tribe. Three brothers perceive it in a different way but they share one dream. Lengar, the warrior, knows it can fuel his ambition to be a great ruler and take power for his tribe. The second son has the vision to see that the building of a vast temple will create a place for the gods but also confirm the power of the people who build it. But it is the third son, the man of peace, the lover of the sun bride, who will be the creator and the master-builder of the Temple of Shadows.

Discover a time of ritual and sacrifice... A land steeped in blood and glory... A family of brothers whose deadly rivalries and glorious ambitions will forever mark the world. In this rousing epic, Bernard Cornwell has created the most compelling and powerful human drama of its kind since Ken Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth* and Edward Rutherford's *Sarum*.

## **PART ONE**

**'The Druid's groves are gone — so much the better: Stonehenge is not — but  
what the Devil is it?'**

**Lord Byron, Don Juan**

**Canto XI, verse XXV.**

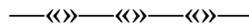
## The Sky Temple

The gods talk by signs. It may be a leaf falling in summer, the cry of a dying beast or the ripple of wind on calm water. It might be smoke lying close to the ground, a rift in the clouds or the flight of a bird.

But on that day the gods sent a storm. It was a great storm, a storm that would be remembered, though folk did not name the year by that storm. Instead they called it the Year the Stranger Came.

For a stranger came to Ratharryn on the day of the storm. It was a summer's day, the same day that Saban was almost murdered by his half-brother.

The gods were not talking that day. They were screaming.



Saban, like all children, went naked in summer. He was six years younger than his half-brother, Lengar, and, because he had not yet passed the trials of manhood, he bore no tribal scars or killing marks. But his time of trial was only a year away, and their father had instructed Lengar to take Saban into the forest and teach him where the stags could be found, where the wild boars lurked and where the wolves had their dens. Lengar had resented the duty and so, instead of teaching his brother, he dragged Saban through thickets of thorn so that the boy's sun-darkened skin was bleeding. 'You'll never become a man,' Lengar jeered.

Saban, sensibly, said nothing.

Lengar had been a man for five years and had the blue scars of the tribe on his chest and the marks of a hunter and a warrior on his arms. He carried a longbow made of yew, tipped with horn, strung with sinew and polished with pork fat. His tunic was of wolfskin and his long black hair was braided and tied with a strip of fox's fur. He was tall, had a narrow face and was reckoned one of the tribe's great hunters. His name meant Wolf Eyes, for his gaze had a yellowish tinge. He had been given another name at birth, but like many in the tribe he had taken a new name at manhood.

Saban was also tall and had long black hair. His name meant Favoured One, and

many in the tribe thought it apt for, even at a mere twelve summers, Saban promised to be handsome. He was strong and lithe, he worked hard and he smiled often. Lengar rarely smiled. 'He has a cloud in his face,' the women said of him, but not within his hearing, for Lengar was likely to be the tribe's next chief. Lengar and Saban were sons of Hengall, and Hengall was chief of the people of Ratharryn.

All that long day Lengar led Saban through the forest. They met no deer, no boars, no wolves, no aurochs and no bears. They just walked and in the afternoon they came to the edge of the high ground and saw that all the land to the west was shadowed by a mass of black cloud. Lightning flickered the dark cloud pale, twisted to the far forest and left the sky burned. Lengar squatted, one hand on his polished bow, and watched the approaching storm. He should have started for home, but he wanted to worry Saban and so he pretended he did not care about the storm god's threat.

It was while they watched the storm that the stranger came.

He rode a small dun horse that was white with sweat. His saddle was a folded woollen blanket and his reins were lines of woven nettle fibre, though he hardly needed them for he was wounded and seemed tired, letting the small horse pick its own way up the track which climbed the steep escarpment. The stranger's head was bowed and his heels hung almost to the ground. He wore a woollen cloak dyed blue and in his right hand was a bow while on his left shoulder there hung a leather quiver filled with arrows fledged with the feathers of seagulls and crows. His short beard was black, while the tribal marks scarred into his cheeks were grey.

Lengar hissed at Saban to stay silent, then tracked the stranger eastwards. Lengar had an arrow on his bowstring, but the stranger never once turned to see if he was being followed and Lengar was content to let the arrow rest on its string. Saban wondered if the horseman even lived, for he seemed like a dead man slumped inert on his horse's back.

The stranger was an Outlander. Even Saban knew that, for only the Outfolk rode the small shaggy horses and had grey scars on their faces. The Outfolk were enemy, yet still Lengar did not release his arrow. He just followed the horseman and Saban followed Lengar until at last the Outlander came to the edge of the trees where bracken grew. There the stranger stopped his horse and raised his head to stare across the gently rising land while Lengar and Saban crouched unseen behind him.

The stranger saw bracken and, beyond it, where the soil was thin above the underlying chalk, grassland. There were grave mounds dotted on the grassland's low crest. Pigs rooted in the bracken while white cattle grazed the pastureland. The sun still shone here. The stranger stayed a long while at the wood's edge, looking for enemies, but seeing none. Off to his north, a long way off, there were wheatfields fenced with thorn over which the first clouds, outriders of the storm, were chasing their shadows, but all ahead of him was sunlit. There was life ahead, darkness behind, and the small horse, unbidden, suddenly jolted into the bracken. The rider let it carry him.

The horse climbed the gentle slope to the grave mounds. Lengar and Saban waited until the stranger had disappeared over the skyline, then followed and, once at the crest, they crouched in a grave's ditch and saw that the rider had stopped beside the Old Temple.

A grumble of thunder sounded and another gust of wind flattened the grass where the cattle grazed. The stranger slid from his horse's back, crossed the overgrown ditch of the Old Temple and disappeared into the hazel shrub that grew so thick within the sacred circle. Saban guessed the man was seeking sanctuary.

But Lengar was behind the Outlander, and Lengar was not given to mercy.

The abandoned horse, frightened by the thunder and by the big cattle, trotted west towards the forest. Lengar waited until the horse had gone back into the trees, then rose from the ditch and ran towards the hazels where the stranger had gone.

Saban followed, going to where he had never been in all his twelve years.

To the Old Temple.



Once, many years before, so long before that no one alive could remember those times, the Old Temple had been the greatest shrine of the heartland. In those days, when men had come from far off to dance the temple's rings, the high bank of chalk that encircled the shrine had been so white that it seemed to shine in the moonlight. From one side of the shining ring to the other was a hundred paces, and in the old days that sacred space had been beaten bare by the feet of the dancers as they girdled the death house that had been made from three rings of trimmed oak trunks. The smooth bare trunks had been oiled with animal fat and hung with boughs of holly and ivy.

Now the bank was thick with grass and choked by weeds. Small hazels grew in the ditch and more hazels had invaded the wide space inside the circular bank so that, from a distance, the temple looked like a grove of small shrubs. Birds nested where men had once danced. One oak pole of the death house still showed above the tangled hazels, but the pole was leaning now and its once smooth wood was pitted, black and thick with fungi.

The temple had been abandoned, yet the gods do not forget their shrines. Sometimes, on still days when a mist laid on the pasture, or when the swollen moon hung motionless above the chalk ring, the hazel leaves shivered as though a wind

passed through them. The dancers were gone, but the power remained.

And now the Outlander had gone to the temple.

The gods were screaming.



Cloud shadow swallowed the pasture as Lengar and Saban ran towards the Old Temple. Saban was cold and he was scared. Lengar was also frightened, but the Outfolk were famous for their wealth, and Lengar's greed overcame his fear of entering the temple.

The stranger had clambered through the ditch and up the bank, but Lengar went to the old southern entrance where a narrow causeway led into the overgrown interior. Once across the causeway Lengar dropped onto all fours and crawled through the hazels. Saban followed reluctantly, not wanting to be left alone in the pasture when the storm god's anger broke.

To Lengar's surprise the Old Temple was not entirely overgrown for there was a cleared space where the death house had stood. Someone in the tribe must still visit the Old Temple, for the weeds had been cleared, the grass cut with a knife and a single ox-skull lay in the death house where the stranger now sat with his back against the one remaining temple post. The man's face was pale and his eyes were closed, but his chest rose and fell with his laboured breathing. He wore a strip of dark stone inside his left wrist, fastened there by leather laces. There was blood on his woollen trews. The man had dropped his short bow and his quiver of arrows beside the ox-skull, and now clutched a leather bag to his wounded belly. He had been ambushed in the forest three days before. He had not seen his attackers, just felt the sudden hot pain of the thrown spear, then kicked his horse and let it carry him out of danger.

'I'll fetch father,' Saban whispered.

'You won't,' Lengar hissed, and the wounded man must have heard them for he opened his eyes and grimaced as he leaned forward to pick up his bow. But the stranger was slowed by pain, and Lengar was much faster. He dropped his longbow, scrambled from his hiding place and ran across the death house, scooping up the stranger's bow with one hand and his quiver with the other. In his hurry he spilled the arrows so that there was only one left in the leather quiver.

A murmur of thunder sounded from the west. Saban shivered, fearing that the sound

would swell to fill the air with the god's rage, but the thunder faded, leaving the sky deathly still.

'Sannas,' the stranger said, then added some words in a tongue that neither Lengar nor Saban spoke.

'Sannas?' Lengar asked.

'Sannas,' the man repeated eagerly. Sannas was the great sorceress of Cathallo, famous throughout the land, and Saban presumed the stranger wanted to be healed by her.

Lengar smiled. 'Sannas is not of our people,' he said. 'Sannas lives north of here.'

The stranger did not understand what Lengar said. 'Erek,' he said, and Saban, still watching from the undergrowth, wondered if that was the stranger's name, or perhaps the name of his god. 'Erek,' the wounded man said more firmly, but the word meant nothing to Lengar who had taken the one arrow from the stranger's quiver and fitted it onto the short bow. The bow was made of strips of wood and antler, glued together and bound with sinew, and Lengar's people had never used such a weapon. They favoured the longer bow carved from the yew tree, but Lengar was curious about the odd weapon. He stretched the string, testing its strength.

'Erek!' the stranger cried loudly.

'You're Outfolk,' Lengar said. 'You have no business here.' He stretched the bow again, surprised by the tension in the short weapon.

'Bring me a healer. Bring me Sannas,' the stranger said in his own tongue.

'If Sannas were here,' Lengar said, recognizing only that name, 'I would kill her first.' He spat. 'That is what I think of Sannas. She is a shrivelled old bitch-cow, a husk of evil, toad-dung made flesh.' He spat again.

The stranger leaned forward and laboriously scooped up the arrows that had spilled from his quiver and formed them into a small sheaf that he held like a knife as though to defend himself. 'Bring me a healer,' he pleaded in his own language. Thunder growled to the west, and the hazel leaves shuddered as a breath of cold wind gusted ahead of the approaching storm. The stranger looked again into Lengar's eyes and saw no pity there. There was only the delight that Lengar took from death. 'No,' he said, 'no, please, no.'

Lengar loosed the arrow. He was only five paces from the stranger and the small arrow struck its target with a sickening force, lurching the man onto his side. The arrow sank deep, leaving only a hand's-breadth of its black-and-white feathered shaft showing at the left side of the stranger's chest. Saban thought the Outlander must be dead because he did not move for a long time, but then the carefully made sheaf of

arrows spilled from his hand as, slowly, very slowly, he pushed himself back upright. 'Please,' he said quietly.

'Lengar!' Saban scrambled from the hazels. 'Let me fetch father!'

'Quiet!' Lengar had taken one of his own black-feathered arrows from its quiver and placed it on the short bowstring. He walked towards Saban, aiming the bow at him and grinning when he saw the terror on his half-brother's face.

The stranger also stared at Saban, seeing a tall good-looking boy with tangled black hair and bright anxious eyes. 'Sannas,' the stranger begged Saban, 'take me to Sannas.'

'Sannas doesn't live here,' Saban said, understanding only the sorceress's name.

'We live here,' Lengar announced, now pointing his arrow at the stranger, 'and you're an Outlander and you steal our cattle, enslave our women and cheat our traders.' He let the second arrow loose and, like the first, it thumped into the stranger's chest, though this time into the ribs on his right side. Again the man was jerked aside, but once again he forced himself upright as though his spirit refused to leave his wounded body.

'I can give you power,' he said, as a trickle of bubbly pink blood spilled from his mouth and into his short beard. 'Power,' he whispered.

But Lengar did not understand the man's tongue. He had shot two arrows and still the man refused to die, so Lengar picked up his own longbow, laid an arrow on its string, and faced the stranger. He drew the huge bow back.

The stranger shook his head, but he knew his fate now and he stared Lengar in the eyes to show he was not afraid to die. He cursed his killer, though he doubted the gods would listen to him for he was a thief and a fugitive.

Lengar loosed the string and the black-feathered arrow struck deep into the stranger's heart. He must have died in an instant, yet he still thrust his body up as though to fend off the flint arrow-head and then he fell back, shuddered for a few heartbeats, and was still.

Lengar spat on his right hand and rubbed the spittle against the inside of his left wrist where the stranger's bowstring had lashed and stung the skin; Saban, watching his half-brother, understood then why the stranger wore the strip of stone against his forearm. Lengar danced a few steps, celebrating his kill, but he was nervous. Indeed, he was not certain that the man really was dead for he approached the body very cautiously and prodded it with one horn-tipped end of his bow before leaping back in case the corpse came to life and sprang at him, but the stranger did not move.

Lengar edged forward again, snatched the bag from the stranger's dead hand and scuttled away from the body. For a moment or two he stared into the corpse's ashen

face, then, confident the man's spirit was truly gone, he tore the lace that secured the bag's neck. He peered inside, was motionless for a heartbeat, then screamed for joy. He had been given power.

Saban, terrified by his brother's scream, shrank back, then edged forward again as Lengar emptied the bag's contents onto the grass beside the whitened ox-skull. To Saban it looked as though a stream of sunlight tumbled from the leather bag.

There were dozens of small lozenge-shaped gold ornaments, each about the size of a man's thumbnail, and four great lozenge plaques that were as big as a man's hand. The lozenges, both big and small, had tiny holes drilled through their narrower points so they could be strung on a sinew or sewn to a garment, and all were made of very thin gold sheets incised with straight lines, though their pattern meant nothing to Lengar who snatched back one of the small lozenges that Saban had dared pick up from the grass. Lengar gathered the lozenges, great and small, into a pile. 'You know what this is?' he asked his younger brother, gesturing at the heap.

'Gold,' Saban said.

'Power,' Lengar said. He glanced at the dead man. 'Do you know what you can do with gold?'

'Wear it?' Saban suggested.

'Fool! You buy men with it.' Lengar rocked back on his heels. The cloud shadows were dark now, and the hazels were tossing in the freshening wind. 'You buy spearmen,' he said, 'you buy archers and warriors! You buy power!'

Saban grabbed one of the small lozenges, then dodged out of the way when Lengar tried to take it back. The boy retreated across the small cleared space and, when it appeared that Lengar would not chase him, he squatted and peered at the scrap of gold. It seemed an odd thing with which to buy power. Saban could imagine men working for food or for pots, for flints or for slaves, or for bronze that could be hammered into knives, axes, swords and spearheads, but for this bright metal? It could not cut, it just was, yet even on that clouded day Saban could see how the metal shone. It shone as though a piece of the sun was trapped within the metal and he suddenly shivered, not because he was naked, but because he had never touched gold before; he had never held a scrap of the almighty sun in his hand. 'We must take it to father,' he said reverently.

'So the old fool can add it to his hoard?' Lengar asked scornfully. He went back to the body and folded the cloak back over the stumps of the arrows to reveal that the dead man's treads were held up by a belt buckled with a great lump of heavy gold while more of the small lozenges hung on a sinew about his neck.

Lengar glanced at his younger brother, licked his lips, then picked up one of the arrows that had fallen from the stranger's hand. He was still carrying his longbow and

now he placed the black-and-white fledged arrow onto the string. He was gazing into the hazel undergrowth, deliberately avoiding his half-brother's gaze, but Saban suddenly understood what was in Lengar's mind. If Saban lived to tell their father of this Outfolk treasure then Lengar would lose it, or would at least have to fight for it, but if Saban were discovered dead, with an Outfolk's black-and-white feathered arrow in his ribs, then no one would ever suspect that Lengar had done the killing, nor that Lengar had taken a great treasure for his own use. Thunder swelled in the west and the cold wind flattened the tops of the hazel trees. Lengar was drawing back the bow, though still he did not look at Saban. 'Look at this!' Saban suddenly cried, holding up the small lozenge. 'Look!'

Lengar relaxed the bowstring's pressure as he peered, and at that instant the boy took off like a hare sprung from grass. He burst through the hazels and sprinted across the wide causeway of the Old Temple's entrance of the sun. There were more rotted posts there, just like the ones around the death house. He had to swerve to negotiate their stumps and, just as he twisted through them, Lengar's arrow whirred past his ear.

Thunder tore the sky to shreds as the first rain fell. The drops were huge. A stab of lightning flashed down to the opposite hillside. Saban ran, twisting and turning, not daring to look back and see if Lengar pursued him. The rain fell harder and harder, filling the air with its malevolent roar, but making a screen to hide the boy as he ran north and east towards the settlement. He screamed as he ran, hoping that some herdsman might still be on the pastureland, but he saw no one until he had passed the grave mounds at the brow of the hill and was running down the muddy path between the small fields of wheat that were being battered by the drenching rain.

Galeth, Saban's uncle, and five other men had been returning to the settlement when they heard the boy's shouts. They turned back up the hill, and Saban ran through the rain to clutch at his uncle's deerskin jerkin. 'What is it, boy?' Galeth asked.

Saban clung to his uncle. 'He tried to kill me!' he gasped. 'He tried to kill me!'

'Who?' Galeth asked. He was the youngest brother of Saban's father, tall, thick-bearded and famous for his feats of strength. Galeth, it was said, had once raised a whole temple pole, and not one of the small ones either, but a big trimmed trunk that jutted high above the other poles. Like his companions, Galeth was carrying a heavy bronze-bladed axe for he had been felling trees when the storm came. 'Who tried to kill you?' Galeth asked.

'He did!' Saban shrieked, pointing up the hill to where Lengar had appeared with the longbow in his hands and a new arrow slotted on its string.

Lengar stopped. He said nothing, but just looked at the group of men who now sheltered his half-brother. He took the arrow off the string.

Galeth gazed at his older nephew. 'You tried to kill your own brother?'

Lengar laughed. 'It was an Outlander, not me.' He walked slowly downhill. His long black hair was wet with rain and lay sleek and close to his head, giving him a frightening appearance.

'An Outlander?' Galeth asked, spitting to avert ill fortune. There were many in Ratharryn who said Galeth should be the next chief instead of Lengar, but the rivalry between uncle and nephew paled against the threat of an Outfolk raid. 'There are Outfolk up on the pasture?' Galeth asked.

'Only the one,' Lengar said carelessly. He pushed the Outfolk arrow into his quiver. 'Only the one,' he said again, 'and he's dead now.'

'So you're safe, boy,' Galeth told Saban, 'you're safe.'

'He tried to kill me,' Saban insisted, 'because of the gold!' He held up the lozenge as proof.

'Gold, eh?' Galeth asked, taking the tiny scrap from Saban's hand. 'Is that what you've got? Gold? We'd better take it to your father.'

Lengar gave Saban a look of utter hatred, but it was too late now. Saban had seen the treasure and Saban had lived and so their father would learn of the gold. Lengar spat, then turned and strode back up the hill. He vanished in the rain, risking the storm's anger so that he could rescue the rest of the gold.

That was the day the stranger came to the Old Temple in the storm, and the day Lengar tried to kill Saban, and the day everything in Ratharryn's world changed.



The storm god raged across the earth that night. Rain flattened the crops and made the hill paths into streamlets. It flooded the marshes north of Ratharryn and the River Mai overflowed her banks to scour fallen trees from the steep valley that twisted through the high ground until it reached the great loop where Ratharryn was built. Ratharryn's ditch was flooded, and the wind tore at the thatch of the huts and moaned among the timber posts of its temples' rings.

No one knew when the first people had come to the land beside the river, nor how they had discovered that Arryn was the god of the valley. Yet Arryn must have revealed himself to those people for they named their new home for him and they edged the hills around his valley with temples. They were simple temples, nothing but

clearings in the forest where a ring of tree trunks would be left standing, and for years, no one knew for how many, the folk would follow the wooded paths to those timber rings where they begged the gods to keep them safe. In time Arryn's people cleared away most of the woods, cutting down oak and elm and ash and hazel, and planting barley or wheat in the small fields. They trapped fish in the river that was sacred to Arryn's wife, Mai, they herded cattle on the grasslands and pigs in the patches of woodland that stood between the fields, and the young men of the tribe hunted boar and deer and aurochs and bear and wolf in the wild woods that had now been pressed back beyond the temples.

The first temples decayed and new ones were made, and in time the new ones became old, yet still they were rings of timber, though now the rings were trimmed posts that were raised within a bank and ditch that made a wider circle around the timber rings. Always a circle, for life was a circle, and the sky was a circle, and the edge of the world was a circle, and the sun was a circle, and the moon grew to a circle, and that was why the temples at Cathallo and Drewenna, at Maden and Ratharryn, indeed in nearly all the settlements that were scattered across the land, were made as circles.

Cathallo and Ratharryn were the twin tribes of the heartland. They were linked by blood and as jealous as two wives. An advantage to one was an affront to the other, and that night Hengall, chief of the people at Ratharryn, brooded on the gold of the Outfolk. He had waited for Lengar to bring him the treasure, but though Lengar did return to Ratharryn with a leather bag, he did not come to his father's hut and when Hengall sent a slave demanding that his son bring him the treasures, Lengar had answered that he was too tired to obey. So now Hengall was consulting the tribe's high priest.

'He will challenge you,' Hirc said.

'Sons should challenge their fathers,' Hengall answered. The chief was a tall, heavy man with a scarred face and a great ragged beard that was matted with grease. His skin, like the skin of most folk, was dark with ingrained soot and dirt and soil and sweat and smoke. Beneath the dirt his thick arms bore innumerable blue marks to show how many enemies he had slain in battle. His name simply meant the Warrior, though Hengall the Warrior loved peace far more than war.

Hirc was older than Hengall. He was thin, his joints ached and his white beard was scanty. Hengall might lead the tribe, but Hirc spoke with the gods and so his advice was crucial. 'Lengar will fight you,' Hirc warned Hengall.

'He will not.'

'He might. He is young and strong,' Hirc said. The priest was naked though his skin was covered with a dried slurry of chalk and water in which one of his wives had traced swirling patterns with her spread fingers. A squirrel's skull hung from a thong about his neck, while at his waist was a circlet of nutshells and bear's teeth. His hair

and beard were caked with red mud that was drying and cracking in the fierce heat of Hengall's fire.

'And I am old and strong,' Hengall said, 'and if he fights, I shall kill him.'

'If you kill him,' Hirac hissed, 'then you will have only two sons left.'

'One son left,' Hengall snarled, and he glowered at the high priest for he disliked being reminded of how few sons he had fathered. Kital, chief of the folk at Cathallo, had eight sons, Ossaya, who had been chief of Madan before Kital conquered it, had fathered six, while Melak, chief of the people at Drewenna, had eleven, so Hengall felt shamed that he had only fathered three sons, and even more shame that one of those sons was a cripple. He had daughters too, of course, and some of them lived, but daughters were not sons. And his second son, the crippled boy, the stuttering fool called Camaban, he would not count as his own. Lengar he acknowledged, and Saban likewise, but not the middle son.

'And Lengar won't challenge me,' Hengal declared, 'he won't dare.'

'He's no coward,' warned the priest.

Hengall smiled. 'No, he's no coward, but he only fights when he knows he can win. That is why he will be a good chief if he lives.'

The priest was squatting by the hut's central pole. Between his knees was a pile of slender bones: the ribs of a baby that had died the previous winter. He poked them with a long chalky finger, pushing them into random patterns that he studied with a cocked head. 'Sannas will want the gold,' he said after a while, then paused to let that ominous statement do its work. Hengall, like every other living being, held the sorceress of Cathallo in awe, but he appeared to shrug the thought away. 'And Kital has many spearmen,' Hirac added a further warning.

Hengall prodded the priest, rocking him off balance. 'You let me worry about spears, Hirac. You tell me what the gold means. Why did it come here? Who sent it? What do I do with it?'

The priest glanced about the big hut. A leather screen hung to one side, sheltering the slave girls who attended Hengall's new wife. Hirac knew that a vast treasure was already concealed within the hut, buried under its floor or hidden under heaped pelts. Hengall had ever been a hoarder, never a spender. 'If you keep the gold,' Hirac said, 'then men will try to take it from you. This is no ordinary gold.'

'We don't even know that it is the gold of Sarmennyn,' Hengall said, though without much conviction.

'It is,' Hirac said, gesturing at the single small lozenge, brought by Saban, that glittered on the earth floor between them. Sarmennyn was an Outfolk country many

miles to the west, and for the last two moons there had been rumours how the people of Sarmennyn had lost a great treasure. 'Saban saw the treasure,' Hirac said, 'and it is the Outfolk gold, and the Outfolk worship Slaol, though they give him another name...' He paused, trying to remember the name, but it would not come. Slaol was the god of the sun, a mighty god, but his power was rivalled by Lahanna, the goddess of the moon, and the two, who had once been lovers, were now estranged. That was the rivalry that dominated Ratharryn and made every decision agonizing, for a gesture to the one god was resented by the other, and Hirac's task was to keep all the rival gods, not just the sun and the moon, but the wind and the soil and the stream and the trees and the beasts and the grass and the bracken and the rain, all of the innumerable gods and spirits and unseen powers, content. Hirac picked up the single small lozenge. 'Slaol sent us the gold,' he said, 'and gold is Slaol's metal, but the lozenge is Lahanna's symbol.'

Hengall hissed, 'Are you saying the gold is Lahanna's?'

Hirac said nothing for a while. The chief waited. It was the high priest's job to determine the meaning of strange events, though Hengall would do his best to influence those meanings to the tribe's advantage. 'Slaol could have kept the gold in Sarmennyn,' Hirac said eventually, 'but he did not. So it is those folk who will suffer its loss. Its coming here is not a bad omen.'

'Good,' Hengall grunted.

'But the shape of the gold,' Hirac went on carefully, 'tells us it once belonged to Lahanna, and I think she tried to retrieve it. Did not Saban say the stranger was asking for Sannas?'

'He did.'

'And Sannas reveres Lahanna above all the gods,' the priest said, 'so Slaol must have sent it to us to keep it from reaching her. But Lahanna will be jealous, and she will want something from us.'

'A sacrifice?' Hengall asked suspiciously.

The priest nodded, and Hengall scowled, wondering how many cattle the priest would want to slaughter in Lahanna's temple, but Hirac did not propose any such depredation on the tribe's wealth. The gold was important, its coming was extraordinary and the response must be proportionately generous. 'The goddess will want a spirit,' the high priest said.

Hengall brightened when he realized his cattle were safe. 'You can take that fool Camaban,' the chief said, talking of his disowned second son. 'Make him useful, crush his skull.'

Hirac rocked back on his haunches, his eyes half closed. 'He is marked by Lahanna,'

he said quietly. Camaban had come from his mother with a crescent birthmark on his belly and the crescent, like the lozenge, was a shape sacred to the moon. 'Lahanna might be angry if we kill him.'

'Maybe she would like his company?' Hengall suggested slyly. 'Maybe that is why she marked him? So he would be sent to her?'

'True,' Hirc allowed, and the notion emboldened him to a decision. 'We shall keep the gold,' he said, 'and placate Lahanna with the spirit of Camaban.'

'Good,' Hengall said. He turned to the leather screen and shouted a name. A slave girl crept nervously into the firelight. 'If I'm to fight Lengar in the morning,' the chief said to the high priest, 'then I'd better make another son now.' He gestured the girl to the pile of furs that was his bed.

The high priest gathered the baby's bones, then hurried to his own hut through the growing rain that washed the chalk from his skin.

The wind blew on. Lightning slithered to earth, turning the world soot-black and chalk-white. The gods were screaming and men could only cower.

Saban feared going to sleep, not because the storm god was hammering the earth, but because he thought Lengar might come in the night to punish him for taking the lozenge. But his elder brother left him undisturbed and in the dawn Saban crept from his mother's hut into a damp and chill wind. The remnants of the storm gusted patches of mist within the vast earthen bank which surrounded the settlement while the sun hid its face behind cloud, appearing only as an occasional dull disc in the vaporous grey. A thatched roof, sodden with rainwater, had collapsed in the night, and folk marvelled that the family had not been crushed. A succession of women and slaves went through the embankment's southern causeway to fetch water from the swollen river, while children carried the night's pots of urine to the tanners' pits which had been flooded, but they all hurried back, eager not to miss the confrontation between Lengar and his father. Even folk who lived beyond the great wall, in the huts up on the higher land, had heard the news and suddenly found reason to come to Ratharryn that morning. Lengar had found the Outfolk gold, Hengall wanted it, and one of the two had to prevail.

Hengall appeared first. He emerged from his hut wearing a great cape of bear fur and strolled with apparent unconcern about the settlement. He greeted Saban by ruffling his hair, then talked with the priests about the problems of replacing one of the great posts of the Temple of Lahanna, and afterwards he sat on a stool outside his hut

and listened to anxious accounts of the damage done by the night's rain to the wheatfields. 'We can always buy grain,' Hengall announced in a loud voice so that as many people as possible could hear him. 'There are those who say that the wealth hidden in my hut should be used to hire weapons, but it might serve us better if we buy grain. And we have pigs to eat, and rain doesn't kill the fish in the river. We won't starve.' He opened his cloak and slapped his big bare belly. 'It won't shrink this year!' Folk laughed.

Galeth arrived with a half-dozen men and squatted near his brother's hut. All of them carried spears and Hengall understood that they had come to support him, but he made no mention of the expected confrontation. Instead he asked Galeth whether he had found an oak large enough to replace the decayed temple pole in Lahanna's shrine.

'We found it,' Galeth said, 'but we didn't cut it.'

'You didn't cut it?'

'The day was late, the axes blunt.'

Hengall grinned. 'Yet I hear your woman's pregnant?'

Galeth looked coyly pleased. His first wife had died a year before, leaving him with a son a year younger than Saban, and he had just taken a new woman. 'She is,' he admitted.

'Then at least one of your blades is sharp,' Hengall said, provoking more laughter.

The laughter died abruptly, for Lengar chose that moment to appear from his own hut, and in that grey morning he shone like the sun itself. Ralla, his mother and Hengall's oldest wife, must have sat through the stormy darkness threading the small lozenges on sinews so that her son could wear them all as necklaces, and she had sewn the four large gold pieces directly onto his deerskin jerkin over which he wore the stranger's gold-buckled belt. A dozen young warriors, all of them Lengar's close hunting companions, followed him while behind that spear-carrying band was a muddy group of excited children who waved sticks in imitation of the hunting spear in Lengar's hand.

Lengar ignored his father at first. Instead he paraded through the huts, past the two temples built within the great embankment, then up to the potters' huts and tanners' pits at the north of the enclosure. His followers clashed their spears together, and more and more folk gathered behind him so that eventually he led his excited procession in an intricate path that twisted between the rain-soaked thatch of the low round huts. Only after he had threaded the settlement twice did he turn towards his father.

Hengall stood as his son approached. He had let Lengar have his time of glory, and now he stood and shrugged the bear cloak from his shoulders and threw it, fur down, into the mud at his feet. He wiped the mist's moisture from his face with the ends of

his big beard, then waited bare-chested so that all the folk in Ratharryn could see how thick the blue marks of dead enemies and slaughtered beasts clustered on his skin. He stood silent, the wind stirring his ragged black hair.

Lengar stopped opposite his father. He was as tall as Hengall, but not so heavily muscled. In a fight he would probably prove the quicker man while Hengall would be the stronger, yet Hengall showed no fear of such a fight. Instead he yawned, then nodded at his eldest son. 'You have brought me the stranger's gold. That is good.' He gestured at the bear cloak that lay on the ground between them. 'Put everything there, son,' he growled.

Lengar stiffened. Most of the watching tribe thought he would fight, for his eyes bespoke a love of violence that verged on madness, but his father's gaze was steady and Lengar chose to argue instead of striking with his spear. 'If a man finds an antler in the woods,' he demanded, 'must he give it to his father?' He spoke loudly enough for all the crowd to hear. The people of Ratharryn had clustered between the nearer huts, leaving a space for the confrontation, and some of them now called out their agreement with Lengar. 'Or if I find the honey of the wild bees,' Lengar asked, emboldened by their support, 'must I endure the stings, then yield the honey to my father?'

'Yes,' Hengall said, then yawned again. 'In the cloak, boy.'

'A warrior comes to our land,' Lengar cried, 'a stranger of the Outfolk, and he brings gold. I kill the stranger and take his gold. Is it not mine?' A few in the crowd shouted that the gold was indeed his, but not quite so many as had shouted before. Hengall's bulk and air of unconcern was unsettling.

The chief fished in a pouch that hung from his belt and took out the small lozenge that Saban had brought from the Old Temple. He dropped the scrap of gold onto the cloak. 'Now put the rest there,' he said to Lengar.

'The gold is mine!' Lengar insisted, and this time only Ralla, his mother, and Jegar, one of his closest friends, shouted their support. Jegar was a small and wiry man, the same age as Lengar, but already one of the tribe's greatest warriors. He killed in battle with an abandon that was equal to Lengar's own and he was avid for a fight now, but none of Lengar's other hunting companions had the belly to confront Hengall. They were relying on Lengar to win the confrontation and it seemed he would do that by violence for he suddenly raised his spear, but instead of stabbing with the blade he held it high in the air to draw attention to his words. 'I found the gold! I killed for the gold! The gold came to me! And is it now to be hidden in my father's hut? Is it to gather dust there?' Those words provoked sympathetic murmurs for many in Ratharryn resented the way Hengall hoarded treasures. In Drewenna or Cathallo the chief displayed his wealth, he rewarded his warriors with bronze, he hung his women with shining metal and he made great temples, but Hengall stored Ratharryn's wealth in his hut.

'What would you do with the gold?' Galeth intervened. He was standing now, and he had untied his tail of hair which hung black and ragged about his face so that he looked like a warrior on the edge of battle. His spear blade was levelled. 'Tell us, nephew,' he challenged Lengar, 'what will you do with the gold?'

Jegar hefted his spear to meet Galeth's challenge, but Lengar pushed his friend's blade down. 'With this gold,' he shouted, patting the lozenges on his chest, 'we should raise warriors, spearmen, archers, and end Cathallo for ever!' Now the voices that had first supported him shouted again, for there were many in Ratharryn who feared Cathallo's growth. Only the previous summer the warriors of Cathallo had taken the settlement of Maden that lay between Ratharryn and Cathallo, and hardly a week passed without Cathallo's warriors scouring Hengall's land for cattle or pigs, and many in the tribe resented that Hengall appeared to be doing nothing to stop the taunting raids. 'There was a time when Cathallo paid us tribute!' Lengar shouted, encouraged by the crowd's support. 'When their women came to dance at our temples! Now we cower whenever a warrior of Cathallo comes near! We grovel to that foul bitch, Sannas! And the gold and the bronze and the amber that could free us, where is it? And where will this gold go if I give it up? There!' With that last word he turned and pointed the spear at his father. 'And what will Hengall do with the gold?' Lengar asked. 'He will bury it! Gold for the moles! Metal for the worms! Treasure for the grubs! We scratch for flint and all the while we have gold!'

Hengall shook his head sadly. The crowd that had cheered Lengar's last words fell silent and waited for the fight to start. Lengar's men must have thought the moment was close for they summoned their courage and closed up behind their leader with levelled weapons. Jegar was dancing to and fro, his teeth bared and spear blade pointing at Hengall's belly. Galeth edged closer to Hengall, ready to defend his brother, but Hengall waved Galeth away, then turned, stooped and fetched his war mace from where it had been hidden under the low thatch of his hut's eave. The mace was a shaft of oak as thick as a warrior's wrist topped with a misshapen lump of grey stone that could crush a grown man's skull as if it were a wren's egg. Hengall hefted the mace, then nodded at the cloak of bear fur. 'All the treasure, boy,' he said, deliberately insulting his son, 'all of it, in the cloak.'

Lengar stared at him. The spear had a longer reach than the mace, but if his first lunge missed then he knew the stone head would break his skull. So Lengar hesitated, and Jegar pushed past him. Hengall pointed the mace at Jegar. 'I killed your father, boy,' he snarled, 'when he challenged me for the chieftdom, and I crushed his bones and fed his flesh to the pigs, but I kept his jawbone. Hircac!'

The high priest, his skin mottled with dirt and chalk, bobbed at the edge of the crowd.

'You know where the jawbone is hidden?' Hengall demanded.

'I do,' Hircac said.