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### Villainy in the Social Fantasies of Carol Kendall

#### Abstract

Looks at the interplay of social forces in Kendall's fantasy trilogy and how conflict between good and evil is replaced by more realistic conflict between differing perspectives and solutions offered by tolerance and balance.

#### Additional Keywords

Kendall, Carol. The Firelings; Kendall, Carol. The Gammage Cup; Kendall, Carol. The Whisper of Glocken

## Villainy in the Social Fantasies of Carol Kendall

Donna R. White

CAROL Kendall is one of the twentieth-century's most underrated fantasy writers, possibly because she is not as prolific as many of her contemporaries. Although she has written mysteries for adults and for children as well as retellings of Asian folktales, she is primarily known as the author of three fantasy novels for children: *The Gammage Cup* (first published in 1959); its sequel, *The Whisper of Glocken* (1965); and *The Firelings* (1981). These three fantasies weave important social themes and moral concepts into well-paced adventures that have a thread of subtle humor running through them. The long gaps between publication dates help to explain Kendall's relative obscurity; establishing a literary reputation as a children's writer can be difficult when a writer's initial child audience has grown up before her next book is published. In 1960 *The Gammage Cup* received recognition as a Newbery Honor book—a rare achievement for a fantasy novel at that time. American society, particularly that element of it charged with overseeing the development and well-being of children, viewed fantasy with a measure of distrust. Only after the publication of the first three volumes of Lloyd Alexander's *Chronicles of Prydain* in the latter half of the 1960s did children's fantasy find a welcome mat out at the door of the educational establishment. For Kendall to have earned notice from that establishment in 1960 indicates that she is a writer of distinction who deserves attention from literary critics. Now, at the beginning of a new century, fantasy has achieved new respectability: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, a children's fantasy by fledgling British author J. K. Rowling, made the *New York Times* bestseller list in January of 1999. Three sequels about Harry Potter have been equally successful, inspiring the *New York Times* to create a separate bestseller list for children's books. Children who love the Potter books have developed an appetite for fantasy that publishers are rushing to satisfy with new fantasies and reprints of older works. There are new editions of many excellent older fantasies, including Kendall's *The Gammage Cup* and *The Whisper of Glocken*. This is therefore an excellent time to reexamine the works of authors such as Kendall.

Kendall's books do not fit easily into any of the sub-genres of fantasy that critics have devised. Although they take place in a fully realized Secondary World, they do not exhibit any of the other trappings of high fantasy; nor are they sword-and-sorcery novels or what Alan Garner calls "mandrakes in the garden" fantasy,

in which fantasy elements intrude into a realistic setting.<sup>1</sup> Unlike much children's fantasy, Kendall's books do not contain toys coming to life or anthropomorphized animals that walk, talk, and dress like humans. If these fantasies are going to be categorized at all, a new sub-category of the genre is needed. Because of their overriding emphasis on sociological issues, Kendall's fantasies can be termed "social fantasy." Social fantasy concerns itself with the balance and interaction of contrary social forces, such as the conflict between individuality and conformity or between conscience and religion. Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea books would fit into this category, although they privilege anthropology over purely social issues. Certainly *The Farthest Shore* qualifies as social fantasy, with its exploration of the social problems that result from a loss of magic in Earthsea.

In the case of Carol Kendall, the balance between social forces is of primary interest. Running through all of her fantasies is what may be the fairest sense of fair play ever seen in literature. Every issue is multifaceted, and Kendall tries to explore each facet with an open mind. The true theme of her books is social balance. Many fantasies, particularly those written for children, set up an opposition between the forces of good and the forces of evil and allow Good to triumph. The underlying assumption seems to be that the immature minds of young readers can only distinguish between polar opposites like black and white; they cannot appreciate gray. Kendall, on the other hand, sets up oppositions between different social forces and demonstrates that they all have certain strengths and weaknesses. She invariably concludes that these opposing forces are interrelated and mutually dependent, and that balance between them is vital to a healthy society. Nowhere is Kendall's sense of fair play clearer than in her treatment of villains, which has become increasingly complex from novel to novel. Even in her first fantasy, *The Gammage Cup*, villainy is not a clear-cut matter; by the time we reach *The Firelings*, the lines between good and evil have completely disappeared.

*The Gammage Cup* introduces a society of small hobbit-like beings called Minnipins, who live along a river in the Land Between the Mountains. This imaginary country has a distinctly English flavor, particularly in the first book, which is not surprising since the story was conceived while Kendall was sharing her husband's sabbatical year in England. Minnipin villages are much like English villages. According to their oral history, the Minnipins had emigrated in ancient times, led by the legendary hero Gammage, to escape their enemies, fierce hairless beings called Mushrooms. Most of the Minnipins in the enlightened town of Slipper-on-the-Water no longer believe the legends; they prefer to believe the stories

about Fooley the Balloonist, who flew beyond the mountains and returned with mysterious relics from a foreign culture. Fooley's descendants have become the town leaders—the conservative, narrow-minded, socially elite Council of Periods.<sup>2</sup> Few Minnypins have the courage to stand up against the Periods, but Slipper-on-the-Water does include among its inhabitants five confirmed individualists who prefer to think for themselves. These five—Muggles, Mingy, Gummy, Curley Green, and Walter the Earl—are distinctly individual, yet they retain a strong commitment to the welfare of the community.<sup>3</sup> When the twelve Minnypin villages hold a contest to determine the finest village in the Land Between the Mountains, the Council of Periods decides that homogeneity is the way to win. The five nonconformists naturally refuse to cooperate, so they are cast out of Slipper-on-the-Water. Ironically, their banishment leads to their discovery of an imminent invasion by the ancient enemy, the Mushrooms, and the five misfits lead the other villagers in a decisive battle that saves the land of the Minnypins.

*The Gammage Cup* abounds in subtle social satire, much of it constructed around the legendary figure of Fooley the Balloonist. The cultural artifacts at the Fooley Museum are incorrectly labeled, and Fooley himself is wrongly revered. Rather than being a great adventurer, he was merely an ignoramus who was accidentally carried off in the balloon and who had no idea where he had been while he was away. The resultant misinterpretation of the meaning and purpose of the artifacts he has brought back sheds humorous light on the nature of art and poetry and on social stratification. The Minnypins mistake a genealogical chart for a painting, so all future art is patterned after this family tree. All true poetry must be modeled after “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” Kendall even lampoons literary criticism through the Minnypins’ efforts to interpret this children’s poem. Thanks to these artifacts from a supposedly enlightened civilization, the Minnypins have a disdain for history and creativity that provides a parody of contemporary American society. The efforts of Walter the Earl to convince the Minnypins to embrace their own glorious history rather than the false Fooley history and the efforts of the other four nonconformists to establish lives of creative individualism highlight the natural enmity between society and the individual.

In the first part of the novel, the villains are the authoritarian Council of Periods and the plain folk in Slipper-on-the-Water who accept their absolute rule. This allows Kendall to develop her intended theme, which she describes as “conformity, comma, the evils thereof” (“International Journeys” 20). She explains: “It was an idea generated by a certain amount of anger at the powerful influences

that marshaled people, particularly women, into the niches prepared for them, and bullied them into staying there” (20). This does not sound like a strong feminist statement in 2001, but it was a fairly radical position for a children’s writer to take in 1959. Kendall shows a strong interest in issues of gender equity in her fantasies, but she is equally concerned about social inequities of other kinds, in this instance the pressure to conform. The opposition between conformity and nonconformity is clearly developed in *The Gammage Cup*. All five nonconformists are held up against the narrow-minded Council of Periods and the cringing conformity of their fellow villagers. In *Slipper-on-the-Water*, to be different means to be a social outcast. The physical exile that follows makes actual what was already a social reality.

Color is the main symbol of the apparently irreconcilable differences between the five and their neighbors. Although green is the village’s official color, the nonconformists sport cloaks, sashes, and front doors in a rainbow of individual colors. When a town meeting is called to force the rebels to change their colors, Muggles, the most practical of the nonconformists, tries to explain that the differences run deeper than a preference for orange sashes:

I don’t think it’s doors or cloaks . . . or orange sashes. It’s us. What I mean is, it’s no matter what color we paint our doors or what kind of clothes we wear, we’re . . . well, we’re those colors inside us. Instead of being green inside, you see, like other folk. So I don’t think maybe it would do any good if we just changed our outside color. We would still be . . . be orange or scarlet inside, and, well, we would do orange and scarlet things all the time. (91-92)

Thus Kendall sets up a clear conflict between the five individualists and their more conservative neighbors. However, the conflict is not between good and evil. The nonconformists are not particularly good; in fact, Kendall calls attention to their less admirable characteristics, such as egotism and laziness. They are, nevertheless, completely misunderstood and undervalued by their society. Likewise, the Council of Periods is not evil, but merely ultra-conservative and unimaginative. When the country is threatened by the hostile Mushrooms, the Periods willingly accept unimportant roles in the battle and fight as bravely as anyone else. They are also willing (albeit reluctantly) to learn the unpleasant truth about their revered ancestor Fooley, and eventually they embrace their five outcasts with a celebration of vibrant colors. Muggles once again explains: “Good friends, I once said we weren’t all the same color inside, but I know now that I was wrong. At least, well—

The night of the battle we were all the very same color—a sort of shimmering gold, like the ancient writing on the swords” (218).

As everyone comes to realize, understanding and acceptance are the keys to creating and maintaining social balance in *Slipper-on-the-Water*. Each side learns to value the other. In a more traditional fantasy, the Council of Periods would have been disbanded in the last chapter, and Walter the Earl, now a military hero, would have been declared mayor of the village, but Kendall chooses a different path. When the mayoral Period offers to resign, the villagers (including the five former outcasts) refuse to let him. Why remove a perfectly good mayor just because his ancestor was not the great man they once thought him to be? Besides, Walter the Earl is much too absorbed in his scholarly research; he would make a lousy mayor. The Council of Periods remains the bureaucratic voice of the village.

Another social issue that concerns Kendall is gender inequity. Long before modern feminism found its way into children’s literature, Kendall managed a small victory for equal rights by liberating Muggles from the patriarchal disdain of her society. In *Slipper-on-the-Water*, Muggles is no one of importance. She runs the Fooley Museum, a job that seems to entail only a daily dusting of the artifacts, and she makes candy for the village children. As a single woman, she does not even have the status of wife and mother. Her disorderly housekeeping is a disgrace to the whole village. Muggles’s self image is so low that at first she dares only dream of being an individualist. When she faces exile with her four friends, however, she discovers a new freedom to express herself and a confidence in her own skills and abilities that allows her to talk back even to the Periods. In fact, Muggles emerges as the leader of the exiles, and the other four readily recognize her leadership and turn to her for advice, direction, and decisions. Far from resenting her assertiveness, they express their appreciation for it by decorating her cloak with glittering stones. However, feminism is not a major issue in the book. Muggles is presented as an individual rather than as a female, and it is her unwillingness to conform to social expectations that sets her apart from society rather than any chafing against patriarchal restrictions. Her ostracism is no different in quality than that experienced by the male nonconformists. Patriarchy is not a villain in *The Gammage Cup*.

In order to reconcile the two opposing forces at play among the Minnipins—conformity and individualism—Kendall brings in another set of villains. The Mushrooms, or Hairless Ones, are ancient enemies from a past the Minnipins have all but forgotten. These are the only Kendall villains who do not receive fair play. The Mushrooms are one-dimensional villains similar to Tolkien’s orcs. When

Mushrooms approach, the Minnipins' swords begin to glow and words appear on the blades: "Bright when the cause is right." The Mushrooms are an impersonal force that unites the Minnipins; their presence functions as a plot device more than anything else. Far from giving them fair play, Kendall wipes them out entirely. The fact that the Mushrooms are totally decimated in the final battle disturbs Donnarae MacCann, a noted children's literature critic; she refers to this battle as an act of genocide (519). More than likely, however, it is simply an act of inexperience on the author's part. After all, *The Gammage Cup* was her first children's fantasy, and most available models for children's fantasy polarized good and evil in a similar fashion.

Kendall's treatment of external villains is much more sophisticated in the sequel, *The Whisper of Glocken*. The book begins with the flooding of the village of Water Gap. Five Minnipins from Water Gap are reluctantly thrust into the role of heroes, sent beyond the mountains to determine the cause of the flood.<sup>4</sup> Whereas *The Gammage Cup* confronts issues of conformity and individualism, the theme of the sequel is the nature of heroism. The events of the second book take place five years after the battle with the Mushrooms. Glocken, the young bell ringer from Water Gap, has so thoroughly idealized the Five Heroes of Slipper-on-the-Water that he is sorely disappointed when he meets them in person and finds them less than heroic in appearance and personality. Glocken dreams of becoming a hero himself, but he finds that the reality is not as glorious as his dreams. His four Water Gap companions also learn valuable lessons about themselves—lessons about mutual need and support. When Glocken finally does become a hero (twice), he does not recognize the fact because he is intent on doing what must be done. His first act of heroism is to overextend his strength directing a rescue party to save his companions from a huge pit. But his real moment of heroism occurs when he finds the lost bell of his ancestor (the original Glocken) and plays its magical tone to destroy the dam that is causing floods in the Land Between the Mountains. Glocken becomes a hero simply by being himself, and the same thing is true of each of his companions.

The villains in *The Whisper of Glocken* are a race of large beings who bear a strong resemblance to medieval humans. They have constructed the dam that is flooding the Minnipins' valley. These Hulks, as the Minnipins christen them, are not one-dimensional enemies like the Mushrooms. The meeting between Minnipins and Hulks is a complicated clash of cultures with each side trying to understand the other. In fact, the Minnipins find much to admire in the Hulks' engineering skills and efficient work habits. The Hulks, in their turn, feel

compunction about having inadvertently damaged the Minnipins' homes and crops.

Just as the Minnipins are astounded by the giant size of the Hulks, the Hulks marvel at the tiny stature of the Minnipins. Although the five Water Gap heroes are terrified during their first encounter with the giants, their trusty swords, which light up in the presence of dangerous enemies, refuse to glow against the Hulks. The Hulks insist that they want to be friends, that they will not harm the Minnipins, that they want to make amends for flooding their homes. However, as Glocken realizes, good intentions might not be enough: "Folk so large and coarse couldn't help but smash little things, no matter how friendly they thought themselves. They were big, and they lived big" (142-43).

Kendall easily could have made the Hulks into evil villains: they take four of the Minnipins prisoner, steal their gold, lock them up, and intend to take them back to the Hulks' own country to be displayed in cages. The most damning evidence of villainy is the Hulks' readiness to kill the Diggers—the small, apelike creatures the Minnipins have befriended. But the Hulks are not the embodiment of evil; they are simply crude, coarse, greedy people. To them, the Diggers are animal nuisances that damage the foundations of the dam. They view the Minnipins as live toys and treat them accordingly. Only when a particularly brutish Hulk tries to stop the Minnipins from escaping does one of the swords light up with its magic power.

Unlike the Mushrooms, the Hulks are not presented as a faceless mob. Several of them are individuals, particularly the red-headed captain. The captain ensures the Minnipins' safety, protects them from the clumsy curiosity of his men, and apologizes for the damage done by the dam. By making the Hulks individual and human, Kendall confuses the traditional polarity of good versus evil. The strange behavior of the swords reflects the confusion, for except during the escape, the swords refuse to glow against the Hulks. Since their operating principle is "Bright when the cause is right," fighting the Hulks is clearly not a right cause. The swords' magic is purely defensive and will not work against the Hulks because the Hulks in their own way want to help the Minnipins. The Minnipins in turn do not wish to hurt the Hulks—they only want to stop the flooding of their land. In their final encounter, the Hulk captain begs the Minnipins to come with him to his country and be taken care of rather than to perish on the mountain. In response, the Minnipins warn the captain to remove his men from the dam before it is destroyed by Minnipin magic. Each group shows concern for the welfare of the other, yet

their goals cannot be reconciled. Villainy in this book is presented as cultural misunderstanding and conflicting societal goals.

The larger social issues are reflected in miniature in the relations among the five protagonists. At the beginning of the book, the reluctant heroes neither like nor understand one another. Serious personality clashes almost destroy their mission on numerous occasions. They do not become an effective, cohesive team until they embrace their differences and discover that, in certain situations, other people's annoying traits can be life-saving strengths. For example, Gam Lutie's bossy stubbornness, which causes difficulties from the start, is also responsible for effecting an organized escape from the Hulks. Coming to terms with their personal differences prepares the Minnipins for dealing with cultural differences in their encounters with the Hulks. The heroes are doubly prepared by first meeting the smaller, seemingly more primitive Diggers; the Minnipins are tempted to take care of the Diggers in the same way the Hulks want to take care of the Minnipins, but the Diggers resist the idea, preferring to meet on terms of cultural equality. The Minnipins insist on a similar equality with the Hulks. Once again, Kendall stresses social balance.

Kendall's third fantasy, *The Firelings*, takes an even more sophisticated approach to the concept of villainy, completely undercutting the opposition of good versus evil. This book also explores a more daring theme: the nature of religious faith. The Firelings are a cooperative society of small beings very like the Minnipins, but rather than living in a river valley, they live on the side of a volcano.<sup>5</sup> They call the volcano "Belcher," and he is their god. On occasion, including one within living memory, the Firelings have pacified Belcher with a "Morsel," or human sacrifice. When the novel opens, Belcher is acting up again, and the villagers are once more discussing ways to pacify him. The adults cling to the old ways, but the young people are free of the superstitions that rule their elders. Five young Firelings help a sixth escape his fate as a sacrifice as they all desperately search for the legendary Way of the Goat that will lead their people to safety.

Just as the setting of the first two books was inspired by Kendall's stay in England, this third fantasy was born during a visit to Yellowstone National Park's famous geysers. Belcher is a literary descendant of "Old Faithful," and his mud geysers are used to interpret his divine will. Setting is vitally important in this novel, establishing a somber tone, influencing every act and event, and motivating every character. Kendall establishes and maintains this setting in a masterful way, never striking a false note. A feeling of oppression and imminent danger builds

throughout the story, and the brooding landscape remains in readers' minds long after they finish the novel. The volcanic setting is the first candidate for villain in the book. In the minds of most of the Firelings, Belcher is a demanding and threatening god; however, a handful of more enlightened villagers recognize him for what he truly is: an impersonal force of nature. Although the threat of destruction is very real, true villainy cannot exist without conscious intent. A potential natural disaster is not a villain.

Religion itself is another possible villain. At first Kendall seems to be making religion a black and white issue by pitting enlightened youngsters against superstitious elders; however, she soon demonstrates that under their fear and guilt, the elders are well-meaning and responsible (if ignorant) adults seeking an alternative to the total destruction of their society. When escape from the volcano becomes a viable alternative, the adults gladly embrace it, and instead of sacrificing a child to an angry god, they follow the younger Firelings on an unknown and perilous path to safety.

Throughout the novel Kendall seeks to create a balance between trust in tradition, particularly religious tradition, and a legitimate questioning of authority. The figure of MudLar is a fascinating symbol of this search for balance. He is the clearest candidate for villain in the book. Although Kendall seems to cast MudLar, the hereditary religious hermit and mystic, as a mountebank who preys on the fears of his ignorant society, later events prove the hermit to be an intelligent man devoted to freeing his people from their own need of him.

Readers hear about MudLar long before they meet him. In the first chapter, Potter Ott, left to care for a nephew orphaned by a deadly lava flow, spews invective against both Belcher and the current MudLar. MudLar had encouraged the Firelings to offer a child as a human sacrifice ten years earlier. The sacrifice called for was Ott's nephew, but Ott saved his life by hiding him away in a cave. Instead of the potter's nephew, a luckless lad with webbed feet was sent down the Long Slip. Even though Ott's sacrilegious comments emerge from the drugged fumes of his pipe full of cherrychoke, readers are led to sympathize with Ott's personal views. To him, MudLar is a fake—a false prophet who claims to read the words of Belcher in the bubbling mud. Later evidence suggests that the religious hermit has reprehensible personal qualities. Skarra, MudLar's apprentice, kept in ignorance and isolation for most of his young life, shows signs of having been physically and emotionally abused by the religious leader, as well as thoroughly indoctrinated into the received truths of his religion. The prophecies that come down to the

Firelings from MudLar and his mud pots also suggest that MudLar is a cagey manipulator of words.

But Kendall suddenly transforms this villain into a heroic figure. Skarra, the abused apprentice, is in fact the child who had supposedly been sacrificed to Belcher. MudLar saved his life and raised him, although impatience with the child's slowness of mind has led to abuse. Even the abuse is held up to question: a MudLar's true mission is so demanding that training for it requires rigorous discipline. Far from preying on superstitious fears, MudLar is a true mystic and seeker of knowledge. When Skarra finds a chest full of goatskin maps, he discovers the true role of the MudLar: "There must be a chart from every MudLar since the first one had crawled out of the ashes. Had all of them spent their lifetimes searching for a way out? And when he became MudLar, is that how he would spend his lifetime?" (192). As it happens, Skarra does not spend his lifetime in that search because the current MudLar has already found the Way of the Goat, although he is fatally injured at the moment of his success. He refuses to die until he is sure his work is completed: "Not until the Promise of MudLars was fulfilled and Firelings were at last gone from the mountain that was trying to devour them and safe in another land" (222). By the strength of his will, MudLar holds on to a thread of consciousness until the last Fireling escapes.

If MudLar is not the villain, who is? The misguided villagers who want to pacify Belcher with a Morsel are not villains. They are happy and relieved to discover their last sacrifice never actually occurred. Even the oldest villager, whose misinterpretations of MudLar's prophecies cause much of the trouble, becomes a heroic survivor in the final chapters, and the town bully helps to keep up people's spirits by playing a drum accompaniment during their long trek to safety. According to one old woman, all this bully required to become a useful member of society was the firm guiding hand of his wife.

There are no villains in *The Firelings*. Kendall's sense of fair play had become so pronounced by the time she wrote this book that she gives everyone a fair hearing. Religion itself gets a fair hearing, not only through the complex portrayal of MudLar's character, but also in the part mysticism plays in the novel. The Firelings' religion does not turn out to be complete hokum; Skarra follows a mystic inner guide to lead the people to safety, and his faith stirs the others when they are on the point of giving up. MudLar possesses a preternatural sense of perception while in an apparent coma for most of the book, and his protective spirit seems to hover above the fleeing Firelings. Many of the misunderstood religious beliefs of

the Firelings are the means by which they eventually escape the volcano.

Kendall is well aware of her changing treatment of villains. As she explained during a panel discussion at a Children's Literature Association conference in 1986, "I have always looked on at least two sides of a matter—a method of thought that drives some people wild—but now I look at four, five, or six sides" ("International Journeys" 21-22). In *The Gammage Cup* and its sequel, she examines two sides of one social and one cultural divide very thoroughly, but in *The Firelings*, her increased complexity of vision has created an equally complex novel. The matters she looks at from these various viewpoints are invariably sociological concerns: how the individual interacts with society, how one society interacts with another, how religion functions within a society. *The Firelings* even takes on other difficult issues like drug addiction, child abuse, and madness, and considers them from various angles. Although there is a remnant of black-and-white opposition in *The Gammage Cup*, by the time the reader reaches *The Firelings*, all the opposition has faded into sophisticated shades of gray, thus creating a thoughtful, intelligent, mature kind of children's fantasy that deserves critical attention.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Garner favors fantasy set in the modern world:

For example, if we are in Eldorado and we find a mandrake, then OK, so it's a mandrake: in Eldorado anything goes. But, by force of imagination, compel the reader to believe that there is a mandrake in a garden in Mayfield Road, Ulverston, Lancashire, then when you pull up that mandrake it is really going to scream; and possibly the reader will, too. ("Real Mandrakes" 591)

<sup>2</sup>One of the artifacts Fooley brought back is a list of business abbreviations, such as "co., etc., ltd." Since these symbols mean nothing to the Minnipins, Fooley's descendants adopt them as personal names—with the periods intact.

<sup>3</sup>Not coincidentally, at least three of the five individualists of Slipper-on-the-Water are based on real people in Kendall's Life. Walter the Earl is a picture of her husband, a scholar with romantic leanings; Curley Green resembles Kendall's daughter Carol and bears Carol's nickname; and Muggles is a self-portrait. (See *Something About the Author Autobiography Series* 7, 171-89.) Kendall coined the name Muggles long before J. K. Rowling dreamed of Harry Potter, and unlike another author who used the name, Kendall has not accused Rowling of stealing her ideas.

<sup>4</sup>Five seems to be Kendall's ideal number for protagonists. There are five heroes in the first book as well, and five adolescents share the spotlight in *The Firelings* (with a sixth, somewhat younger child in tow). In all three books, two of the protagonists are female and three are male. It is ironic that these confirmed individualists operate in groups.

<sup>5</sup>Kendall never identifies the Firelings as Minnipins, but there is a suggestion of relationship

in that MudLar's "chopper," with which he easily hacks a path through thick brush and forest, seems to operate like the Minnipins' magic swords. In fact, it is eventually identified as a sword by a family of "Earls" who are likely descendants of Walter the Earl. However, the Firelings are never called anything but Firelings; even the distant relatives who welcome them to Gold Mountain when they escape from Belcher are called Firelings.

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