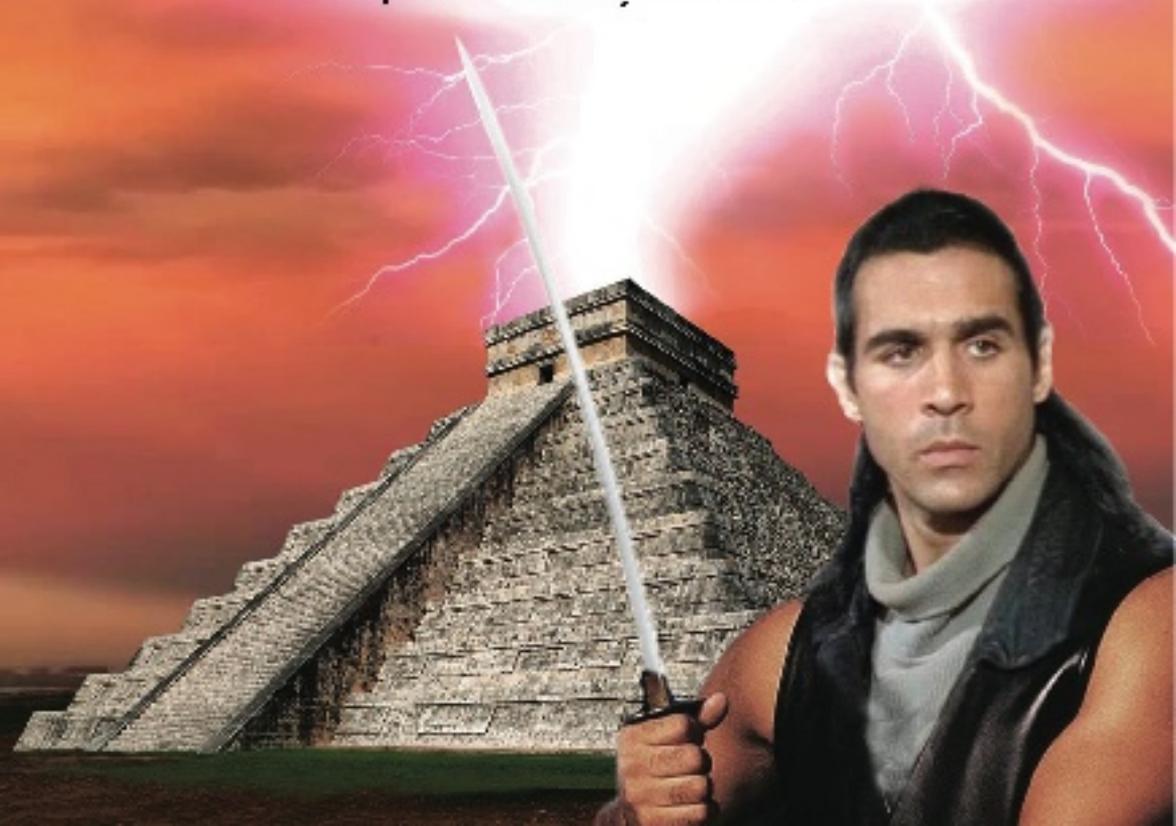
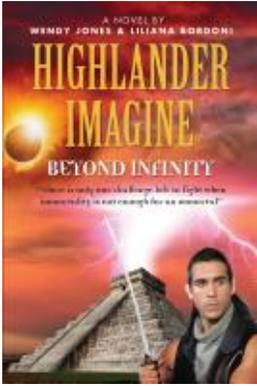


A NOVEL BY
WENDY JONES & LILIANA BORDONI

HIGHLANDER IMAGINE BEYOND INFINITY

“there is only one challenge left to fight when
immortality is not enough for an immortal”





Duncan MacLeod becomes embroiled in an adventure, which takes him to the Temple of the Feathered Serpent in Teotihuacán. Having purchased a rare set of ancient South American llama statues, Duncan is unaware of their ritual significance to an immortal Olmec, named Kawill, who intends to repeat a dark ritual, written on a codex in the Olmec language, and stop time, as the Aztecs understood it. Can Duncan stop this Immortal before time is up?

Highlander Imagine: Beyond Infinity

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**“This is impossible!” Paula exclaimed.
“It’s just superstition and primitive ignorance—
nothing more. It can’t be real.”**

“But what if it is?” Kawill asked quietly. “What if there is a *great beyond?*”

“There is no such thing,” Paula insisted.

Kawill grinned to himself as he rose.

“Maybe you’re right,” he replied, patronizingly, “here,” and he pulled the llama statues from the disk, “take these talismans back to MacLeod, where they belong—I took them to perform a primitive, superstitious ritual that has no meaning in our twentieth-century. I’m just a foolish, sick man, ashamed of my ignorance.”

Paula stepped in front of the man she had once held in dread and grabbed his arm, halting him. Her eyes passed from the large Aztec calendar to the codex on the table before her.

“It **cannot** be real,” she said emphatically, trying to deny any trace of the words she had just read.

Kawill met her fiery Peruvian eyes.

“But what if it is?” he replied. “Do you want to risk losing the only opportunity to see what no mortal eyes have ever seen—the *ultimate* power in the universe—the **Source?**”

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Highlander *Imagine* Series

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A NOVEL BY

**WENDY LOU JONES
&
LILIANA BORDONI**



Prologue

Slowly, Kawill Rockford's hand reached into the box on his desk once again—his other hand held the phone's receiver tightly against his ear. A rumble of thunder from a late fall storm building outside his Argentine hotel room was making phone reception difficult. What he was hearing of the report from the other end displeased him greatly.

Kawill, an Immortal Olmec descendant almost 1200 years old, prided himself on his smooth self-control. But at the moment, all he wanted to do was crush the life out of something.

A crisp snapping sound from the box brought his attention back to it. His hand brought out a small, now broken, sculpture from a local dig-site—a carved wooden llama. This ancient native artifact was more than 300 years old. Kawill knew the piece was authentic and its potential value to a collector. It had survived intact in the dry climate surrounding Llullaillaco, the slumbering stratovolcano, which lay in the distance from his hotel room. It had been carefully excavated, cleaned and brought to him by one of his workers who knew better than to put so much as a scratch on anything he carried to his boss.

Now, slowly and meticulously, Kawill's fingers began breaking the remaining legs off the sculpture, one by one, destroying yet another irreplaceable piece of antiquity. In the next instant, he slammed the receiver on his desk effectively ending the call. His eyes focused only briefly on the small statue. Slowly, he snapped its neck then smiled. Dropping it back into the box, he shoved it roughly to the end of the table then rose.

"The Highlander," he said quietly. "So this is your game. No doubt, this is all just a big joke to you." Grabbing the small box, he threw it into the trash. A violent temper boiled under his businessman's façade, which he had carefully cultivated for centuries.

"You have absolutely no idea what you have trespassed upon and in whose face you are flaunting your little escapade."

A sudden gust of wind blew the first drops of the South American storm against the window as Kawill turned, piercing brown eyes gazing out into the rain.

"You haven't the slightest clue what you've held in your hands, or its connection to a power beyond any immortality we understand," he finished quietly grinding his teeth. Reaching for his phone, he dialed another number; his call connected after a long moment. Kawill's instructions were brief.

"Find Duncan MacLeod—and don't call me back until you do." Pressing the receiver, he ended the call then traded the phone in his hand for his two-handed machete—his weapon of choice for taking the heads of those who stood in his way.

"You've meddled in my affairs for the last time, Highlander," he whispered.



Kawill's Two-Handed Machete

Chapter One

Duncan brought his sword around and down in one swift movement. Sparks flew as the sound of steel against steel was heard once again. She was fast – too fast for his maneuver to connect. His blade slid off her angled parry again as she countered with a twisting slash that connected painfully, drawing a blood streak across his muscular arm.

He lunged backward just in time to avoid her thrust as her body quickly recovered from the momentum of her torque.

She was a small, strong fighter and the curved Scimitar in her hands functioned as a perfect extension of her arms—her entire body.

She's relentless, Duncan thought. Despite his instinctive reluctance to take a woman's head, he knew this confrontation could only end one way. *Push whatever chivalrous feeling you have from your heart if you want to survive,* his subconscious mind told himself. *If you want to see Tessa again, there can be only one victor—only one survivor from this fight.*

Tessa—her face flashed across his mind's eye. She was almost the same build as the woman in front of him now—a woman who had literally come out of nowhere on this Paris park trail with death in her slender hands.

Richie's expression blanched noticeably as he watched Duncan trade blows with an Immortal who looked no older than himself, but was undeniably Duncan's match.

They had been walking down a quiet trail, angling away from the main park road this morning, searching for a perfect spot to practice once again. Duncan had been giving his usual lecture—a mixture of the immortal rules and fighting style variations. His voice had droned on, a comfortable sound in Richie's ear as they walked together in the beautiful Parisian morning. Richie, for his part, had come to expect these near daily outings over the past month. His life after the MacLeod wedding had smoothly slipped into a comfortable, conforming son to mentor, son to father, relationship. His mood was light, and the world couldn't possibly look brighter. Duncan was a surrogate for the father he had never known. Equally important, they were both Immortals. Their relationship could be endless.

Suddenly, reality came crashing in—he sensed another Immortal's presence—an Immortal with an agenda.

"There can be only one," she had said.

Until that moment, the only swords drawn in his presence had been to teach him, to build his understanding, to hone his fighting skills for that day—far off in the inconceivably distant future—when he would have to fight to save his immortal head. He never imagined that today he would be watching his instructor fight for his life. With scarcely her name given, the battle had been joined, preventing any other Immortal from interfering.

"You can take her," Richie said in a breathless voice as he watched wide-eyed, trying to convince his pounding heart that all this was no more than a speed-bump in their daily routine. Fear wrapped itself around him, tightening its grip with every

resounding sword stroke. *What if I have to go home and back to Tessa today without Duncan?*

Could he? Duncan's mind thought in reply. *Get closer and overpower her!* He swung to catch her sword's guard with the tip of his blade, hoping to use his size and strength against her.

Seeing his shift in stance, she instinctively moved with him. Anticipating yet another of his maneuvers, she knocked his blade aside.

Duncan flinched as he overshot, then recovered as he lunged to the side avoiding her downward swipe. *She is too fast!* Again and again, the sound of steel on steel was heard. The next time their blades struck, an unexpected sound was heard—a dog's bark.

WOOF! WOOF!

The barking distracted Richie from his mentor in time to see a large German Shepherd bolt from the ridge above their position and pace quickly toward them.

A rapidly approaching object, advancing on their position, distracted the battling pair—dividing their attention. Their concentration was broken and they parted as the barking animal halted nervously—out of range and uncertain what to do.

Large, dark brown probing eyes shifted rapidly between the hostile pair, uncertain what she was sensing. Her carnivore's instincts—evolved over countless millennia—were keenly alert to danger. Her bark, now a mixture of questioning and threatening tones, was delivered rapidly as she jockeyed her position back and forth.

“Carola! Carola!” a female voice shouted urgently, closing in from beyond the ridge above.

Reflexively, Duncan lurched backward at the sight of the rapidly approaching dog while his combatant swung her Scimitar at the new, rapidly shifting threat.

She missed!

The response was instantaneous and explosive. Ears flashed forward, hackles shot up like an ocean's wave from shoulders to tail, a mouth full of sharp wolf-like fangs was fully bared.

Danger! Fear! Defend! Retreat! Attack! her instincts signaled, driving her rapid motions. She lunged and retreated rapidly, barking viciously at the threatening humans.

Richie grabbed for the end of the trailing leash, far away from the head of this massive biting machine, just as a second shout for the dog was heard.

Both Immortals froze momentarily, their eyes locked on each other's. Understanding flashed between them in that second—*the immortal rules of combat. Our battles are not for mortal eyes. Another time, another place*, they silently agreed.

In unison, they gave the briefest of nods, broke off their aggression, and turned rapidly to conceal their weapons as someone approaching was heard. She disappeared into the bush-lined path as Duncan dropped his katana by his hastily tossed cloak.

An instant later, a woman topped the ridge above them as Richie pulled the dog's leash back.

“Carola Stop! Carola Heel! No! Come here, girl!” she shouted and started over and down the ridge at a run—caught her foot on a branch, and stumbled. Her flailing hands grabbed what they could catch to break her downward fall, as she half slid and half tumbled down from the ridge.

Richie jumped toward her on the steep bank, trying to catch her and stop her downward slide, just as the agitated animal’s focus shifted to him.

“Nice dog—uh—Carola. Good boy—I mean, girl,” he said rapidly, and none too convincingly to the living chainsaw.

In the next instant, Carola bolted toward him.

Richie threw up his arm to block the impending attack.

Recovering from her sideways fall, the woman reached out a hand and snagged her dog’s leash as the animal passed, the force of Carola’s momentum dragging her several feet through the dirt.

“Carola stop! Stop! Come here, girl!” she shouted frantically as she finally regained control over her dog.

Richie, usually quick to help, was definitely keeping his distance from this poor, dirty, leafy woman.

“I’m sorry! She didn’t hurt anyone, did she? Come here, girl—calm down, Carola! She got away from me—she doesn’t usually do that. You’re all OK, aren’t you?” she exclaimed all at once as she wrapped her arms around the dog’s neck and shoulders, trying to calm her. “Shh! Quiet down. I’m all right—Shh! Stop barking. No one’s going to hurt you,” she finished. A bit more composed, she rubbed the bridge of Carola’s long dark nose.

A final ‘woof’ escaped her muzzle before Carola’s voice fell silent. Her eyes flashed between the two strange human males—alert and wary.

Swing anything at me and I’ll rip you to pieces, her expression seemed to say.

“Are you alright?” Duncan asked. Walking toward the woman, he stopped out of range of the dog.

“I think so,” she said struggling to get to her feet while hanging on to Carola’s shoulders. “It was the shock of falling—I don’t think that anything is broken.”

Richie tried once again to extend his hand to her, this time on her off-side, away from the dog.

Carola had other ideas.

With one eye riveted on the dog, he reached his hand toward her in an air handshake gesture.

“I’m Richie Ryan.”

“Claire—uh—Bailey,” she said quickly, reaching over Carola’s shoulders with one hand, repeating the gesture while holding the dog’s head with the other.

“Pleased to meet you,” Richie replied, a warm smile spreading across his face.

Claire half nodded as she hastily swept herself off. Gathering up the leash, she kept one hand securely on the animal’s long nose as she took several careful steps off the hillside and onto the trail. Her third step brought pain and she winced. *Oh damn, not my ankle!* she thought as she stepped down and fought through the pain. *I don’t need this now—I have to get out of here.*

Richie saw her falter and moved to support her.

Carola quickly imposed herself, halting Richie.

“Are you sure you’re OK, Claire?” Richie asked, seriously considering how he was going to outmaneuver the dog. “I really do like dogs you know,” he said to Carola with as much enthusiasm as he could muster.

Carola’s unyielding stare was a serious vote of *no confidence*.

Claire nodded waving him off. “I’m OK—I’m really sorry about all of this.”

Richie smoothed his hair. “I think I’ve seen you here before—in the park that is.”

Blushing a bit, Claire quickly bobbed her head as she continued trying to put one foot in front of the other. “Possibly,” she stammered. “I dog-walk here often.”

Richie’s smile broadened. “You know, Claire, if I could get past the idea of being her next lunch, I think I could help you—teach Carola that is—how not to pull you over a cliff,” he finished, his voice slipping into warmer tones.

Claire was trying to make her way as quickly as possible on a stiffening hip, shoulder, and ankle while keeping Carola under control. The situation was frustrating.

“I’m sorry,” she said shaking her head briefly. “Carola is a one person dog as you can see,” she finished fervently, hoping this conversation was over.

It wasn’t.

“Oh, I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” Richie said and reached again to support Claire. A low growl escaped Carola’s muzzle and he withdrew his hand quickly. “I think she was just surprised to see there was someone over the ridge. She’s never seen Mac and me, I mean Duncan and me—uh—I mean us—well, you get it,” he finished awkwardly, shifting nervously.

Claire quickly nodded, finally straightening.

“Well, it was nice meeting you, Richie. I’d better get going—get myself cleaned up and see to this ankle.”

“Are you sure I shouldn’t walk up the way with you?”

She gave a quick shake of her head and smiled, then picked up the pace as much as her tender ankle would allow.

Richie watched her stumble away.

“Saw something you liked—snapping jaws aside?” Duncan said with a knowing grin.

“What makes you say that?” Richie remarked with a silly grin that was ear to ear.

Duncan shook his head as he retrieved his cloak. “What do you know about dog training?”

“It’s a dog—how hard can it be?”

“Yeah, sure.” Duncan rolled his eyes. “Come-on, we’ve got some practicing to get in today.” Handing Richie’s practice sword back to him, he slapped his shoulder.

Richie gave a final glance back toward the receding pair, now far up the trail, before turning to join Duncan.

Reaching the top of the ridge, Claire finally stopped struggling and sat down on a fallen tree. Tying Carola securely with a double knot, she slipped her shoe off then rubbed her tender hip and shoulder.

“I can’t believe you did that,” she said as much to the dog as to nobody. “Why couldn’t you have chased a squirrel instead of crashing an Immortal’s swordfight?”

Carola stared up at her and then cocked her head.

“You know if you were a Watcher, you would have just broken one of our cardinal rules—never interfere in an Immortal’s life.” She shook her head then looked away. “Yeah—like you’re going to understand me.”

Carola thumped her tail several times on the ground then twisted her head as far over as she could.

Her monolog was interrupted by a ringing sound. Reaching into her handbag, Claire pulled out her cell phone.

“Claire, what the hell was that? Do you realize you just violated our Watchers’ protocol? What do you think you were doing? We are not supposed to interfere!” Joe’s voice shouted.

“I know, Joe. It wasn’t me. It was this dog. I told her to ‘sit’, and I thought I had her tied off. Who was the woman that challenged MacLeod? I have never seen her before?”

“Her name is Estela Castillo. She is from South America. MacLeod met her boyfriend, Kawill Rockford, at Schiphol Airport the day you took Richie as your Immortal, so I checked her.”

“Do you have any idea what she is doing on this side of the planet? It was anyone’s guess who was going to lose their head when Carola crashed the fight—yes—that is what I said. If there is supposed to be some prophetic history in their lives, Carola just rewrote it today.”

“Why were you with that crazy dog?”

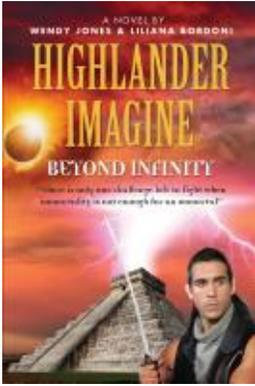
“Dog-walking is my cover. I want a poodle next time—this one pulls like a horse.” Claire paused and nibbled her lip before she spoke again.

“Something else came up, Joe. Richie, uh, noticed me—yeah, I said *noticed*. It’s lucky he didn’t recognize me. I think I brushed him off,” she quickly added. *I hope I brushed him off*, she thought then sighed. Something about his smile just wouldn’t leave her subconscious mind alone. *Stop it, Claire*, she told herself sternly. *You don’t need this kind of thing happening to you, no—not with an Immortal.*

Up on a ridge across the Seine, a silent observer sat on his motorcycle. Field glasses in his hand, he watched their exchange.



Estela’s Scimitar



Duncan MacLeod becomes embroiled in an adventure, which takes him to the Temple of the Feathered Serpent in Teotihuacán. Having purchased a rare set of ancient South American llama statues, Duncan is unaware of their ritual significance to an immortal Olmec, named Kawill, who intends to repeat a dark ritual, written on a codex in the Olmec language, and stop time, as the Aztecs understood it. Can Duncan stop this Immortal before time is up?

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