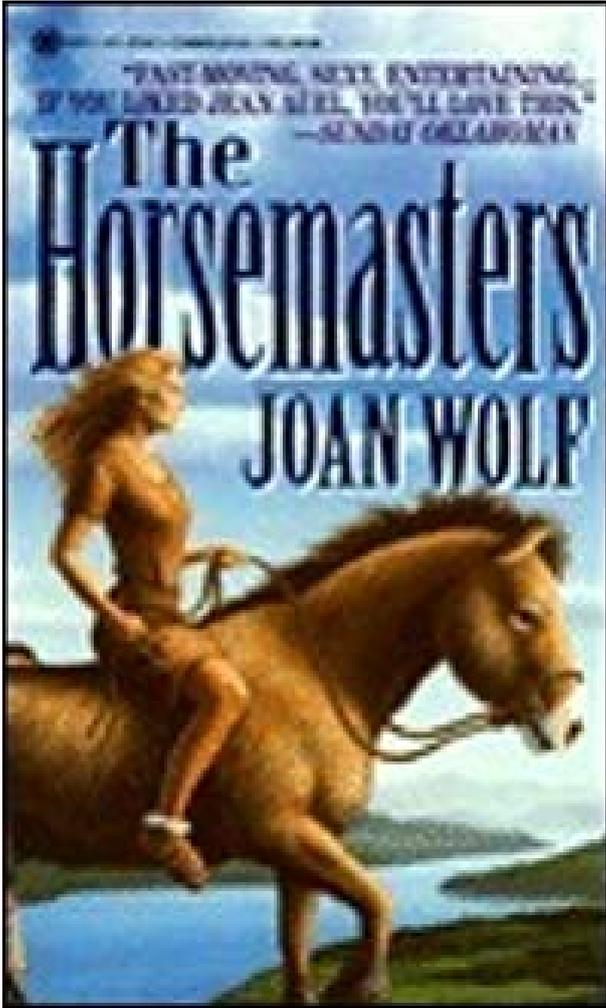


The Horsemasters



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Set way before the mists of time, when humankind was taking its first defiant steps to master the earth, this brilliantly imagined tale returns to the same setting of Joan Wolf's first novel of prehistory, *Daughter of the Red Deer*. The tribes who call themselves the Kindred and live in the lush green valleys of Southern France have already encountered the rivalries and desires that divide societies while uniting passionate men and women with a force no power, ancient or modern, has ever deigned to break. One of the special tribes among the Kindred, the Tribe of the Red Deer alone is still ruled by the priestess/chief called the Mistress. Through cabalistic rites in mysterious caves, she teaches her band to share in the sacred gifts of the Great Mother. But change is coming on the chill wind that howls through the stark Pyrenees. Alarming reports are being circulated during Kindred gatherings about a race of conquerors swooping down from the North.

Yet the Tribe's Mistress, Arika, gives little credence to such wild stories. Her attention is captured by the ambition of the proud, handsome young Ronan, the son she gave away at birth; the charisma of the small, dark-haired girl, Nel, her dead sister's child whose extraordinary talents with animals and healing will someday make her a dangerous rival; and the lust of beautiful, laughing, sensual Morna, Arika's self-centered

daughter who is intent on seducing Ronan, the one warrior forbidden to her because he is her half-brother. As age hungers for love and power become a catalyst in the battle for the tribe's destiny, Ronan is cast out. While struggling to form a tribe of his own, he undertakes a journey to an Eden-like secret valley and discovers that the fierce band of northerners has mastered the art of horsemanship and is moving south in a wave of conquest. The terrifying threat is that these brutal warriors will enslave the Kindred women, murder their men, and burn their villages to ashes. Ronan's challenge