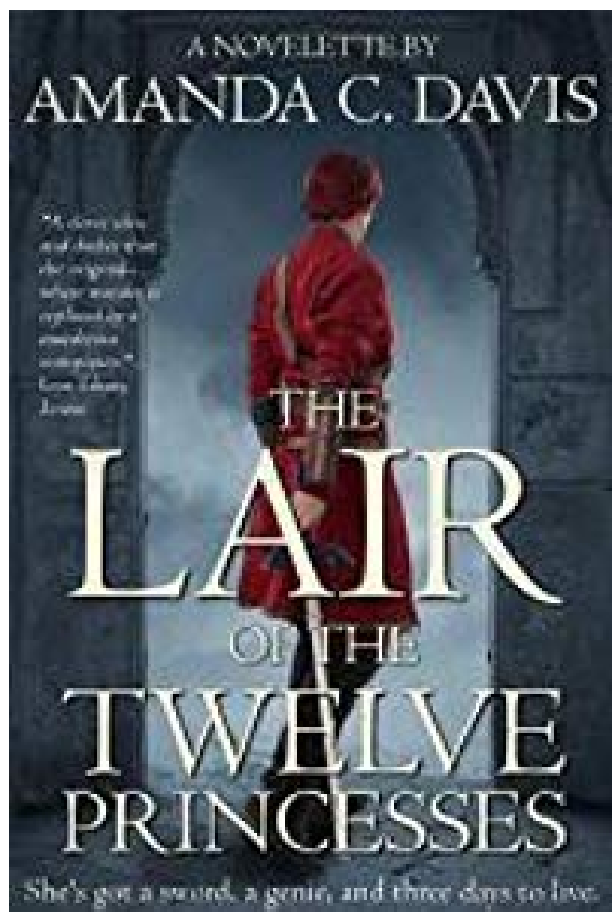


The Lair of the Twelve Princesses



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Bay has nothing to show for her years of military service but the clothes on her back, a bad leg, and a sardonic imp in a bottle who's more harm than help. When she hears an open call for bodyguards for the twelve headstrong princesses, she thinks the job could reverse her fortunes. Unfortunately, her new charges are under a nightly curse, and everyone seems determined to keep the details a mystery--including its victims. Luckily, Bay has a trick up her sleeve. Her imp owes her three wishes, and is desperate to grant them. She's been hoarding his magic for an emergency, but it might be time to cash in: according to a fine-print clause in her contract, if she cannot solve the princesses' curse in three nights, she'll be executed the following dawn. This 9000-word novelette first appeared in InterGalactic Medicine Show in January 2012. Cover elements by Jessica Truscott and Jeannie Ann Numos.