



THE WAR OF SOULS  
VOLUME THREE

DRAGONS  
OF  
A  
VANISHED MOON

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# I

## Lost Souls



In the dungeon of the Tower of High Sorcery, that had once been in Palanthas but now resided in Nightlund, the great archmagus Raistlin Majere had conjured a magical Pool of Seeing. By gazing into this pool, he was able to follow and sometimes shape events transpiring in the world. Although Raistlin Majere had been dead many long years, his magical Pool of Seeing remained in use. The wizard Dalamar, who had inherited the Tower from his *Shalafi*, maintained the magic of the pool. A veritable prisoner in the Tower that was an island in the river of the dead, Dalamar had often made use of the pool to visit in his mind those places he could not travel in his body.

Palin Majere stood now at the pool's edge, staring into the unwavering blue flame that burned in the center of the still water and was the chamber's only light. Dalamar was close beside him, his gaze fixed on the same unwavering fire. Although the mages could have seen events transpiring anywhere in the world, they

watched intently an event that was happening quite close to them, an event taking place at the top of the very Tower in which they stood.

Goldmoon of the Citadel of Light, and Mina, Lord of the Night, leader of the Dark Knights of Neraka, were to meet in the laboratory that had once belonged to Raistlin Majere. Goldmoon had already arrived at the strange meeting place. The laboratory was cold and dark and shadowed. Dalamar had left her a lantern, but its light was feeble and served only to emphasize the darkness that could never truly be illuminated, not if every lantern and every candle on Krynn should burst into flame. The darkness that was the soul of this dread Tower had its heart here in this chamber, which in the past had been a scene of death and pain and suffering.

In this chamber, Raistlin Majere had sought to emulate the gods and create life, only to fail utterly, bringing into the world misbegotten, shambling, pathetic beings known as the Live Ones, who had lived out their wretched existence in the room where the two wizards now stood. In the chamber, the Blue Dragonlady Kitiara had died, her death as brutal and bloody as her life. Here stood the Portal to the Abyss, a link between the realm of the mortal and realm of the dead, a link that had long ago been severed and was nothing now but a home to mice and spiders.

Goldmoon knew the dark history of this room. She must be considering that now, Palin thought, watching her image that shimmered on the surface of the pool. She stood in the laboratory, her arms clasped about her. She shivered not with the cold, but with fear. Palin was concerned. He could not remember—in all the years that he had known her—seeing Goldmoon afraid.

Perhaps it was the strange body that Goldmoon's spirit inhabited. She was over ninety. Her true body was that of an elderly woman—still vigorous, still strong for her years, but with skin marked and marred with time, a back that was starting to stoop, fingers that were gnarled, but whose touch was gentle. She had been comfortable with that body. She had

never feared or regretted the passage of the years that had brought the joy of love and birth, the sorrow of love and death. That body had been taken from her the night of the great storm, and she had been given another body, a stranger's body, one that was young and beautiful, healthful and vibrant. Only the eyes were the eyes of the woman Palin had known throughout his life.

She is right, he thought, this body doesn't belong to her. It's borrowed finery. Clothing that doesn't fit.

"I should be with her," Palin muttered. He stirred, shifted, began to pace restlessly along the water's edge. The chamber was made of stone and was dark and chill, the only light the unwavering flame that burned in the heart of the dark pool, and it illuminated little and gave no warmth. "Goldmoon looks strong, but she's not. Her body may be that of someone in her twenties, but her heart is the heart of a woman whose life has spanned nine decades. The shock of seeing Mina again—especially as she is—may kill her."

"In that case, the shock of seeing you beheaded by the Dark Knights would probably do very little for her either," returned Dalamar caustically. "Which is what she would see if you were to march up there now. The Tower is surrounded by soldiers. There must be at least thirty of them out there."

"I don't think they'd kill me," said Palin.

"No? And what would they do? Tell you to go stand in a corner with your face to the wall and think what a bad boy you've been?" Dalamar scoffed.

"Speaking of corners," he added suddenly, his voice altering, "did you see that?"

"What?" Palin jerked his head, looked around in alarm.

"Not here! There!" Dalamar pointed into the pool. "A flash in the eyes of dragons that guard the Portal."

"All I see is dust," Palin said after a moment's intense gaze, "and cobwebs and mouse dung. You're imagining things."

"Am I?" Dalamar asked. His sardonic tone had softened, was unusually somber. "I wonder."

"You wonder what?"

"A great many things," said Dalamar.

Palin eyed the dark elf closely but could not read on that gaunt and drawn face a single thought stirring behind the dark eyes. In his black robes, Dalamar was indistinguishable from the darkness of the chamber. Only his hands with their delicate fingers could be seen, and they appeared to be hands that lacked a body. The long-lived elf was presumably in the prime of life, but his wasted form, consumed by the fever of frustrated ambition, might have belonged to an elder of his race.

I shouldn't be casting aspersions. What does he see when he looks at me? Palin asked himself. A shabby, middle-aged man. My face wan and wasted. My hair graying, thin. My eyes the embittered eyes of one who has not found what he was promised.

I stand on the edge of wondrous magic created by my uncle, and what have I done, except fail everyone who ever expected anything of me. Including myself. Goldmoon is just the most recent. I should be with her. A hero like my father would be with her, no matter that it meant sacrificing his freedom, perhaps his life. Yet here I am, skulking in the basement of this Tower.

"Stop fidgeting, will you?" Dalamar said irritably. "You'll slip and fall in the pool. Look there." He pointed excitedly to the water. "Mina has arrived." Dalamar rubbed his thin hands. "Now we will see and hear something to our advantage."

Palin halted on the edge of the pool, wavering in his decision. If he left immediately, walked the corridors of magic, he might yet reach Goldmoon in time to protect her. Yet, he could not pull himself away. He stared down at the pool in dread fascination.

"I can see nothing in this wizard's murk," Mina was saying loudly. "We need more light."

The light in the chamber grew brighter, so bright that it dazzled eyes accustomed to the darkness.

"I didn't know Mina was a mage," said Palin, shading his eyes with his hand.

"She's not," said Dalamar shortly. He cast Palin a strange glance. "Doesn't that tell you something?"

Palin ignored the question, concentrated on the conversation.

"You . . . you are so beautiful, Mother," Mina said softly, awed. "You look just as I imagined."

Sinking to her knees, the girl extended her hands. "Come, kiss me, Mother," she cried, tears falling. "Kiss me as you used to. I am Mina. Your Mina."

"And so she was, for many years," murmured Palin, watching in sorrowful concern as Goldmoon advanced unsteadily to clasp her adopted child in her arms. "Goldmoon found Mina washed up on the shore, presumably the survivor of some terrible ship wreck, though no wreckage or bodies or any other survivors were ever discovered. They brought her to the Citadel's orphanage. Intelligent, bold, fearless, Mina charmed all, including Goldmoon, who took the child to her heart. And then, one day, at the age of fourteen, Mina ran away. We searched, but we could find no trace of her, nor could anyone say why she had gone, for she had seemed so happy. Goldmoon's heart broke, then."

"Of course, Goldmoon found her," Dalamar said. "She was meant to find her."

"What do you mean?" Palin glanced at Dalamar, but the elf's expression was enigmatic.

Dalamar shrugged, said nothing, gestured back to the dark pool.

"Mina!" Goldmoon whispered, rocking her adopted daughter. "Mina! Child . . . why did you leave us when we all loved you so much?"

"I left for love of you, Mother. I left to seek what you wanted so desperately. And I found it, Mother! I found it for you.

"Dearest Mother." Mina took hold of Goldmoon's hands and pressed them to her lips. "All that I am and all that I have done, I have done for you."

"I . . . don't understand, child," Goldmoon faltered. "You wear the symbol of evil, of darkness. . . . Where did you go?"

Where have you been? What has happened to you?"

Mina laughed. "Where I went and where I have been is not important. What happened to me along the way—that is what you must hear.

"Do you remember, Mother, the stories you used to tell me? The story about how you traveled into darkness to search for the gods? And how you found the gods and brought faith in the gods back to the people of the world?"

"Yes," said Goldmoon. She had gone so very pale that Palin determined to be with her, cost him what it might.

He began to chant the words of magic. The words that came out of his mouth, however, were not the words that had formed in his brain. Those words were rounded, smooth, flowed easily. The words he spoke were thick and square-sided, tumbled out like blocks dropped on the floor.

He halted, angry at himself, forced himself to calm down and try again. He knew the spell, could have said it backward. He might well have said it backward, for all the sense it made.

"You're doing this to me!" Palin said accusingly.

Dalamar was amused. "Me?" He waved his hand. "Go to Goldmoon, if you want. Die with her, if you want. I'm not stopping you."

"Then who is? This One God?"

Dalamar regarded him in silence a moment, then turned back to gaze down into the pool. He folded his hands in the sleeves of his robes. "There was no past, Majere. You went back in time. There was no past."

"You told me the gods were gone, Mother," Mina said. "You told me that because the gods were gone we had to rely on ourselves to find our way in the world. But I didn't believe that story, Mother.

"Oh"—Mina placed her hand over Goldmoon's mouth, silencing her—"I don't think you lied to me. You were mistaken, that was all. You see, I knew better. I knew there was a god for I heard the voice of the god when I was little and our

boat sank and I was cast alone into the sea. You found me on the shore, do you remember, Mother? But you never knew how I came to be there, because I promised I would never tell. The others drowned, but I was saved. The god held me and supported me and sang to me when I was afraid of the loneliness and dark.

"You said there were no gods, Mother, but I knew you were wrong. So I did what you did. I went to find god and bring god back to you. And I've done that, Mother. The miracle of the storm. That is the One God. The miracle of your youth and beauty. That is the One God, Mother."

"Now do you understand, Majere?" Dalamar said softly.

"I think I am beginning to," said Palin. His broken hands clasped tightly together. The room was cold, his fingers ached with the chill. "I would add, 'the gods help us,' but that might be out of place."

"Hush!" Dalamar snapped. "I can't hear. What did she say?"

"You asked for this," Goldmoon demanded, indicating her altered body with a gesture. "This is not me. It is your vision of me. . . ."

"Aren't you pleased?" Mina continued, not hearing her or not wanting to hear. "I have so much to tell you that will please you. I've brought the miracle of healing back into the world with the power of the One God. With the blessing of the One, I felled the shield the elves had raised over Silvanesti and I killed the treacherous dragon Cyan Bloodbane. A truly monstrous green dragon, Beryl, is dead by the power of the One God. The elven nations that were corrupt and faithless have both been destroyed, their people dead."

"The elven nations destroyed!" Dalamar gasped, his eyes burning. "She lies! She cannot mean that!"

"Strange to say this, but I do not think Mina knows how to lie," Palin said.

"But in death, they will find redemption," Mina preached. "Death will lead them to the One God."

"I see blood on these hands," Goldmoon said, her voice

tremulous. "The blood of thousands! This god you have found is terrible god. A god of darkness and evil!"

"The One God told me you would feel this way, Mother," Mina responded. "When the other gods departed and you thought you were left alone, you were angry and afraid. You felt betrayed, and that was only natural. For you *had* been betrayed. The gods in which you had so misguidedly placed your faith fled in fear. . . ."

"No!" Goldmoon cried out. She rose unsteadily to her feet and fell away from Mina, holding out her hand in warding. "No, Child, I don't believe it. I won't listen to you."

Mina seized Goldmoon's hand.

"You *will* listen, Mother. You must, so that you will understand. The gods fled in fear of Chaos, Mother. All except one. One god remained loyal to the people she had helped to create. One only had the courage to face the terror of the Father of All and of Nothing. The battle left her weak. Too weak to make manifest her presence in the world. Too weak to fight the strange dragons that came to take her place. But although she could not be with her people, she gave gifts to her people to help them fight the dragons. The magic that they called the wild magic, the power of healing that you know as the power of the heart . . . those were her gifts. Her gifts to you."

"If those were her gifts, then why did the dead need to steal them for her . . ." said Dalamar softly. "Look! Look there!" He pointed to the still water.

"I see." Palin breathed.

The heads of the five dragons that guarded what had once been the Portal to the Abyss began to glow with an eerie radiance, one red, one blue, one green, one white, one black.

"What fools we have been," Palin murmured.

"Kneel down," Mina commanded Goldmoon, "and offer your prayers of faith and thanksgiving to the One True God. The One God who remained faithful to her creation—"

"No, I don't believe what you are telling me!" Goldmoon said, standing fast. "You have been deceived, Child. I know

this One God. I know her of old. I know her tricks and her lies and deceptions."

Goldmoon looked at the five-headed dragon.

"I do not believe your lies, Takhisis!" Goldmoon said defiantly. "I will never believe that the blessed Paladine and Mishakal left us to your mercy!"

"They didn't leave, did they?" Palin said.

"No," Dalamar said. "They did not."

"You are what you have always been," Goldmoon cried. "A god of Evil who does not want worshipers, you want slaves! I will never bow down to you! I will never serve you!"

White fire flared from the eyes of the five dragons. Palin watched in horror to see Goldmoon begin to wither in the terrible heat.

"Too late," said Dalamar with terrible calm. "Too late. For her. And for us. They'll be coming for us soon. You know that."

"This chamber is hidden—" Palin began.

"From Takhisis?" Dalamar gave a mirthless laugh. "She knew of this chamber's existence long before your uncle showed it to me. How could anything be hidden from the 'One God'? The One God who stole away Krynn!"

"As I said, what fools we have been," said Palin.

"You yourself discovered the truth, Majere. You used the device to journey back to Krynn's past, yet you could go back only to the moment Chaos was defeated. Prior to that, there was no past. Why? Because in that moment, Takhisis stole the past, the present, and the future. She stole the world. The clues were there, if we'd had sense enough to read them."

"So the future Tasslehoff saw—"

"—will never come to pass. He leaped forward to the future that was supposed to have happened. He landed in the future that is now happening. Consider the facts: a strange-looking sun in the sky; one moon where there were once three; the patterns of the stars are vastly different; a red star burns in the heavens where one had never before been seen; strange dragons appear from out of nowhere. Takhisis brought the world here, to this part

of the universe, wherever that may be. Thus the strange sun, the single moon, the alien dragons, and the One God, all-powerful, with no one to stop her."

"Except Tasslehoff," said Palin, thinking of the kender secreted in an upstairs chamber.

"Bah!" Dalamar snorted. "They've probably found him by now. Him and the gnome. When they do, Takhisis will do with him what we planned to do—she will send him back to die."

Palin glanced toward the door. From somewhere above came shouted orders and the sound of feet running to obey. "The fact Tasslehoff is here at all proves to me that the Dark Queen is not infallible. She could not have foreseen his coming."

"Cling to that if it makes you happy," said Dalamar. "I see no hope in any of this. Witness the evidence of the Dark Queen's power."

They continued to watch the reflections of time shimmering in the dark pool. In the laboratory, an elderly woman lay on the floor, her white hair loose and unbound around her shoulders. Youth, beauty, strength, life had all been snatched away by the vengeful goddess, angry that her generous gifts had been spurned.

Mina knelt beside the dying woman. Taking hold of Goldmoon's hands, Mina pressed them again to her lips. "Please, Mother. I can restore your youth. I can bring back your beauty. You can begin life all over again. You will walk with me, and together we will rule the world in the name of the One God. All you have to do is to come to the One God in humility and ask this favor of her, and it will be done."

Goldmoon closed her eyes. Her lips did not move.

Mina bent close. "Mother," she begged. "Mother, do this for me if not for yourself. Do this for love of me!"

"I pray," said Goldmoon in a voice so soft that Palin held his breath to hear, "I pray to Paladine and Mishakal that they forgive me for my lack of faith. I should have known the truth," she said softly, her voice weakening as she spoke the words with her dying breath, "I pray that Paladine will hear my prayer and he will come . . . for love of Mina . . . For love of all . . ."

Goldmoon sank, lifeless, to the floor.

"Mother," said Mina, bewildered as a lost child, "I did this for you. . . ."

Palin's eyes burned with tears, but he was not sure for whom it was he wept—for Goldmoon, who had brought light into the world, or for the orphan girl, whose loving heart had been snared, tricked, deceived by the darkness.

"May Paladine hear her dying prayer," Palin said quietly.

"May I be given bat wings to flap around this chamber," Dalamar retorted. "Her soul has gone to join the river of the dead, and I fancy that our souls will not be far behind."

Footsteps clattered down the stairs, steel swords banged against the sides of the stone walls. The footsteps halted outside their door.

"I don't suppose anyone found a key?" asked a deep, rumbling voice.

"I don't like this, Galdar," said another. "This place stinks of death and magic. Let's get out of here."

"We can't get in if there's no key, sir," said a third. "We tried. It wasn't our fault we failed."

A moment's pause, then the first voice spoke, his voice firm. "Mina gave us our orders. We will break down the door."

Blows began to rain on the wooden door. The Knights started to beat on it with their fists and the hilts of their swords, but none sounded very enthusiastic.

"How long will the spell of warding hold?" Palin asked.

"Indefinitely, against this lot," said Dalamar disparagingly. "Not long at all against Her Dark Majesty."

"You are very cool about this," said Palin. "Perhaps you are not overly sorry to hear that Takhisis has returned."

"Say, rather, that she never left," Dalamar corrected with fine irony.

Palin made an impatient gesture. "You wore the black robes. You worshiped her—"

"No, I did not," said Dalamar so quietly that Palin could barely hear him over the banging and the shouting and the thundering

on the door. "I worshiped Nuitari, the son, not the mother. She could never forgive me for that."

"Yet, if we believe what Mina said, Takhisis gave us both the magic—me the wild magic and you the magic of the dead. Why would she do that?"

"To make fools of us," said Dalamar. "To laugh at us, as she is undoubtedly laughing now."

The sounds of fists beating at the door suddenly ceased. Quiet descended on those outside. For a hope-filled moment, Palin thought that perhaps they had given up and departed. Then came a shuffling sound, as of feet moving hastily to clear a path. More footsteps could be heard—lighter than those before.

A single voice called out. The voice was ragged, as if it were choked by tears.

"I speak to the wizard Dalamar," called Mina. "I know you are within. Remove the magical spell you have cast on the door that we may meet together and talk of matters of mutual interest."

Dalamar's lip curled slightly. He made no response, but stood silent, impassive.

"The One God has given you many gifts, Dalamar, made you powerful, more powerful than ever," Mina resumed, after a pause to hear an answer that did not come. "The One God does not ask for thanks, only that you serve her with all your heart and all your soul. The magic of the dead will be yours. A million million souls will come to you each day to do your bidding. You will be free of this Tower, free to roam the world. You may return to your homeland, to the forests that you love and for which you long. The elven people are lost, seeking. They will embrace you as their leader, bow down before you, and worship you in my name."

Dalamar's eyes closed, as if in pain.

He has been offered the dearest wish of his heart, Palin realized. Who could turn that down?

Still, Dalamar said nothing.

"I speak now to you, Palin Majere," Mina said, and it seemed to Palin that he could see her amber eyes shining through the

closed and spell-bound door. "Your uncle Raistlin Majere had the power and the courage to challenge the One God to battle. Look at you, his nephew. Hiding from the One God like a child who fears punishment. What a disappointment you have been. To your uncle, to your family, to yourself. The One God sees into your heart. The One God sees the hunger there. Serve the One God, Majere, and you will be greater than your uncle, more honored, more revered. Do you accept, Majere?"

"Had you come to me earlier, I might have believed you, Mina," Palin answered. "You have a way of speaking to the dark part of the soul. But the moment is passed. My uncle, wherever his spirit roams, is not ashamed of me. My family loves me, though I have done little to deserve it. I do thank this One God of yours for opening my eyes, for making me see that if I have done nothing else of value in this life, I have loved and been loved. And that is all that truly matters."

"A very pretty sentiment, Majere," Mina responded. "I will write that on your tomb. What of you, Dark Elf? Have you made your decision? I trust you will not be as foolish as your friend."

Dalamar spoke finally, but not to Mina. He spoke to the blue flame, burning in the center of the still pool of dark water.

"I have looked into the night sky and seen the dark moon, and I have thrilled to know that my eyes were among the few eyes that could see it. I have heard the voice of the god Nuitari and reveled in his blessed touch as I cast my spells. Long ago, the magic breathed and danced and sparkled in my blood. Now it crawls out of my fingers like maggots swarming from a carrion carcass. I would rather be that corpse than be a slave to one who so fears the living that she can trust only servants who are dead."

A single hand smote the door. The door and the spell that guarded it shattered.

Mina entered the chamber. She entered alone. The jet of flame that burned in the pool shone in her black armor, burned in her heart and in her amber eyes. Her shorn red hair glistened. She was might and power and majesty, but Palin saw that the amber

eyes were red and swollen, tears stained her cheeks, grief for Goldmoon. Palin understood then the depth of the Dark Queen's perfidy, and he had never hated Takhisis so much as he hated her now. Not for what she had done or was about to do to him, but for what she had done to Mina and all the innocents like her.

Mina's Knights, fearful of the powerful wizards, hung back upon the shadowy stairs. Dalamar's voice raised in a chant, but the words were mumbled and inarticulate, and his voice faded slowly away. Palin tried desperately to summon the magic to him. The spell dissolved in his hands, ran through his fingers like grains of sand from a broken hourglass.

Mina regarded them both with a disdainful smile. "You are nothing without the magic. Look at you—two broken-down, impotent old men. Fall on your knees before the One God. Beg her to give you back the magic! She will grant your pleas."

Neither Palin nor Dalamar moved. Neither spoke.

"So be it," said Mina.

She raised her hand. Flames burned from the tips of her five fingers. Green fire, blue and red, white, and the red-black of embers lit the Chamber of Seeing. The flames merged together to form two spears forged of magic. The first spear she hurled at Dalamar.

The spear struck the elf in the breast, pinned him against the wall of the Chamber of Seeing. For a moment, he hung impaled upon the burning spear, his body writhing. Then his head sagged, his body went limp.

Mina paused. Holding the spear, she gazed at Palin.

"Beg," she said to him. "Beg the One God for your life."

Palin's lips tightened. He knew a moment's panicked fear, then pain sheared through his body. The pain was so horrific, so agonizing that it brought its own blessing. The pain made his last living thought a longing for death.