



CHRONICLES

BY MARGARET WEIS & TRACY HICKMAN

A RUMOR OF DRAGONS

NIGHT OF THE DRAGONS

THE NIGHTMARE LANDS

(AVAILABLE OCTOBER 2003)

TO THE GATES OF PALANTHAS

(AVAILABLE DECEMBER 2003)

HOPE'S FLAME

(AVAILABLE JANUARY 2004)

A DAWN OF DRAGONS

(AVAILABLE MARCH 2004)



CHRONICLES

PART

2

NIGHT OF THE DRAGONS

MARGARET WEIS & TRACY HICKMAN

COVER ART

Glen Angus

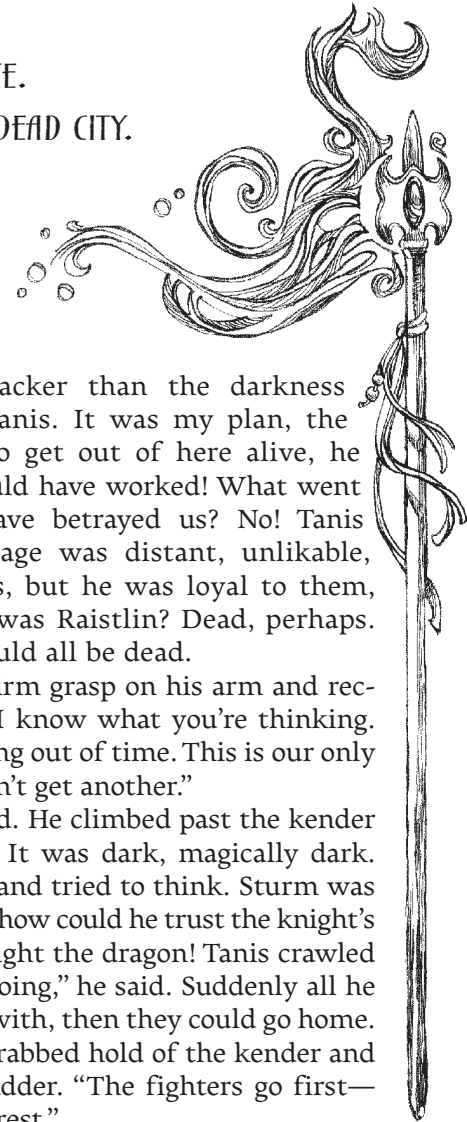
INTERIOR ART

Vinod Rams



THE SACRIFICE.
THE TWICE-DEAD CITY.

1



Despair blacker than the darkness blinded Tanis. It was my plan, the only way we had a chance to get out of here alive, he thought. It was sound, it should have worked! What went wrong? Raistlin—could he have betrayed us? No! Tanis clenched his fist. No! The mage was distant, unlikable, impossible to understand, yes, but he was loyal to them, Tanis would swear it. Where was Raistlin? Dead, perhaps. Not that it mattered. They would all be dead.

“Tanis”—the half-elf felt a firm grasp on his arm and recognized Sturm’s deep voice—“I know what you’re thinking. We have no choice. We’re running out of time. This is our only chance to get the Disks. We won’t get another.”

“I’m going to look,” Tanis said. He climbed past the kender and peered through the grate. It was dark, magically dark. Tanis put his head in his hand and tried to think. Sturm was right: time was running out. Yet how could he trust the knight’s judgement? Sturm wanted to fight the dragon! Tanis crawled back down the ladder. “We’re going,” he said. Suddenly all he wanted to do was get this over with, then they could go home. Home to Solace. “No, Tas.” He grabbed hold of the kender and dragged him back down the ladder. “The fighters go first—Sturm and Caramon. Then the rest.”



But the knight was already shoving past him eagerly, his sword clanking against his thigh.

"We're always last!" Tasslehoff sniffed, shoving the dwarf along. Flint climbed the ladder slowly, his knees creaking. "Hurry up!" Tas said. "I hope nothing happens before we get there. I've never talked to a dragon."

"I'll bet the dragon's never talked to a kender either!" The dwarf snorted. "You realize, you hare-brain, that we're probably going to die. Tanis knows, I could tell by his voice."

Tas paused, clinging to the ladder while Sturm slowly pushed on the grating. "You know, Flint," the kender said seriously, "my people don't fear death. In a way, we look forward to it, the last big adventure. But I think I'd feel badly about leaving this life. I'd miss my things"—he patted his pouches—"and my maps, and you and Tanis. Unless," he added brightly, "we all go to the same place when we die."

Flint had a sudden vision of the happy-go-lucky kender lying cold and dead. He felt a lump of pain in his chest and was thankful for the concealing darkness. Clearing his throat, he said huskily, "If you think I'm going to share my afterlife with a bunch of kender, you're crazier than Raistlin. Come on!"

Sturm carefully lifted the grating and shoved it to one side. It scraped over the floor, causing him to grit his teeth. He heaved himself up easily. Turning, he bent down to help Caramon who was having trouble squeezing his body and his clanking arsenal through the shaft.

"In the name of Istar, be quiet!" Sturm hissed.

"I'm trying," Caramon muttered, finally climbing over the edge. Sturm gave his hand to Goldmoon. Last came Tas, delighted that nobody had done anything exciting in his absence.

"We've got to have light," Sturm said.

"Light?" replied a voice as cold and dark as winter midnight. "Yes, let us have light."

The darkness fled instantly. The companions saw they were in a huge domed chamber that soared hundreds of feet into the air. Cold gray light filtered into the room through a crack

in the ceiling, shining on a large altar in the center of the circular room. On the floor surrounding the altar were masses of jewels, coins, and other treasures of the dead city. The jewels did not gleam. The gold did not glitter. The dim light illuminated nothing, nothing except a black dragon perched on top of the pedestal like some huge beast of prey.

"Feeling betrayed?" the dragon asked in conversational tones.

"The mage betrayed us! Where is he? Serving you?" Sturm cried fiercely, drawing his sword and taking a step forward.

"Stand back, foul Knight of Solamnia. Stand back or your magic-user will use his magic no more!" The dragon snaked her great neck down and stared at them with gleaming red eyes. Then, slowly and delicately, she lifted one clawed foot. Lying beneath it, on the pedestal, was Raistlin.

"Raist!" Caramon roared and lunged for the altar.

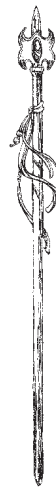
"Stop, fool!" the dragon hissed. She rested one pointed claw lightly on the mage's abdomen. With a great effort, Raistlin moved his head to look at his brother with his strange golden eyes. He made a weak gesture and Caramon halted. Tanis saw something move on the floor beneath the altar. It was Bupu, huddled among the riches, too afraid even to whimper. The Staff of Magius lay next to her.

"Move one step closer and I will impale this shriveled human upon the altar with my claw."

Caramon's face flushed a deep, ugly red. "Let him go!" he shouted. "Your fight is with me."

"My fight is with none of you," the dragon said, lazily moving its wings. Raistlin flinched as the dragon's clawed foot shifted slightly, teasingly, digging her claw into his flesh. The mage's metallic skin glistened with sweat. He drew a deep, ragged breath. "Don't even twitch, mage," the dragon sneered. "We speak the same language, remember? One word of a spell and your friends' carcasses will be used to feed the gully dwarves!"

Raistlin's eyes closed as in exhaustion. But Tanis could see the mage's hands clench and unclench, and he knew Raistlin was preparing one final spell. It would be his last—by the





time he cast it the dragon would kill him. But it might give Riverwind a chance to reach the Disks and get out alive with Goldmoon. Tanis edged toward the Plainsman.

"As I was saying," the dragon continued smoothly. "I do not choose to fight any of you. How you have escaped my wrath so far, I do not understand. Still, you are here. And you return to me that which was stolen. Yes, Lady of Que-shu, I see you hold the blue crystal staff. Bring it to me."

Tanis hissed one word to Goldmoon—"Stall!" But, looking at her cool marble face, he wondered if she heard him or if she even heard the dragon. She seemed to be listening to other words, other voices.

"Obey me." The dragon lowered her head menacingly. "Obey me or the mage dies. And after him—the knight. And then the half-elf. And so on—one after the other, until you, Lady of Que-shu, are the last survivor. Then you will bring me the staff and you will beg me to be merciful."

Goldmoon bowed her head in submission. Gently pushing Riverwind away with her hand, she turned to Tanis and clasped the half-elf in a loving embrace. "Farewell, my friend," she said loudly, laying her cheek against his. Her voice dropped to a whisper. "I know what I must do. I am going to take the staff to the dragon and—"

"No!" Tanis said fiercely. "It won't matter. The dragon intends to kill us anyway."

"Listen to me!" Goldmoon's nails dug into Tanis's arm. "Stay with Riverwind, Tanis. Do not let him try to stop me."

"And if I tried to stop you?" Tanis asked gently, holding Goldmoon close in his arms.

"You won't," she said with a sweet, sad smile. "You know that each of us has a destiny to fulfill, as the Forestmaster said. Riverwind will need you. Farewell, my friend."

Goldmoon stepped back, her clear blue eyes on Riverwind as though she would memorize every detail to keep with her throughout eternity. Realizing she was saying goodbye, he started to go to her.

"Riverwind," Tanis said softly. "Trust her. She trusted you, all those years. She waited while you fought the battles. Now it is you who must wait. This is her battle."

Riverwind trembled, then stood still. Tanis could see the veins swell in his neck, his jaw muscles clench. The half-elf gripped the Plainsman's arm. The tall man didn't even look at him. His eyes were on Goldmoon.

"What is this delay?" the dragon asked. "I grow bored. Come forward."

Goldmoon turned away from Riverwind. She walked past Flint and Tasslehoff. The dwarf bowed his head. Tas watched wide-eyed and solemn. Somehow this wasn't as exciting as he had imagined. For the first time in his life, the kender felt small and helpless and alone. It was a horrible, unpleasant feeling, and he thought death might be preferable.

Goldmoon stopped near Caramon, put her hand on his arm. "Don't worry," she said to the big warrior, who was staring at his brother in agony, "he'll be all right." Caramon choked and nodded. And then Goldmoon neared Sturm. Suddenly, as if the horror of the dragon was too overwhelming, she slumped forward. The knight caught her and held her.

"Come with me, Sturm," Goldmoon whispered as he put his arm around her. "You must vow to do as I command, no matter what happens. Vow on your honor as a knight of Solamnia."

Sturm hesitated. Goldmoon's eyes, calm and clear, met his. "Vow," she demanded, "or I go alone."

"I vow, lady," he said reverently. "I will obey."

Goldmoon sighed thankfully. "Walk with me. Make no threatening gesture."

Together the barbarian woman of the Plains and the knight walked toward the dragon.



Raistlin lay beneath the dragon's claw, his eyes closed, preparing himself mentally for the spell that would be his





last. But the words to the spell would not form out of the turmoil in his mind. He fought to regain control.

I am wasting myself—and for what? Raistlin wondered bitterly. To get these fools out of the mess they got themselves into. They will not attack for fear of hurting me—even though they fear and despise me. It makes no sense—just as my sacrifice makes no sense. Why am I dying for them when I deserve to live more than they?

It is not for them you do this, a voice answered him. Raistlin started, trying to concentrate, to catch hold of the voice. It was a real voice, a familiar voice, but he couldn't remember whose it was or where he had heard it. All he knew was that it spoke to him in moments of great stress. The closer to death he came, the louder was the voice.

It is not for them that you make this sacrifice, the voice repeated. *It is because you cannot bear defeat! Nothing has ever defeated you, not even death itself...*

Raistlin drew a deep breath and relaxed. He did not understand the words completely, just as he could not remember the voice. But now the spell came easily to his mind. “*Astol arakhkh um—*” he murmured, feeling the magic begin to course through his frail body. Then another voice broke his concentration and this voice was a living voice speaking to his mind. He opened his eyes, turned his head slowly, and stared into the chamber at his companions.

The voice came from the woman—barbarian princess of a dead tribe. Raistlin looked at Goldmoon as she walked toward him, leaning on Sturm's arm. The words in her mind had touched Raistlin's mind. He regarded the woman coldly, detachedly. His distorted vision had forever killed any physical desire the mage might have felt when he looked upon human flesh. He could not see the beauty that so captivated Tanis and his brother. His hourglass eyes saw her withering and dying. He felt no closeness, no compassion for her. He knew she pitied him—and he hated her for that—but she feared him as well. So why, then, was she speaking to him?

She was telling him to wait.

Raistlin understood. She knew what he intended and she was telling him it wasn't necessary. She had been chosen. She was the one who was going to make the sacrifice.

He watched Goldmoon with his strange golden eyes as she drew nearer and nearer, her own eyes on the dragon. He saw Sturm moving solemnly beside her, looking as ancient and noble as old Huma himself. What a perfect cat's paw Sturm made, the ideal participant in Goldmoon's sacrifice. But why had Riverwind allowed her to go? Couldn't he see this coming? Raistlin glanced quickly at Riverwind. Ah, of course! The half-elf stood by his side, looking pained and grieved, dropping words of wisdom like blood, no doubt. The barbarian was becoming as gullible as Caramon. Raistlin flicked his eyes back to Goldmoon.

She stood before the dragon now, her face pale with resolve. Next to her, Sturm appeared grave and tortured, gnawed by inner conflict. Goldmoon had probably extracted some vow of strict obedience which the knight was honor-bound to fulfill. Raistlin's lip curled in a sneer.

The dragon spoke and the mage tensed, ready for action. “Lay the staff down with the other remnants of mankind's folly,” the dragon commanded Goldmoon, inclining her shining, scaled head toward the pile of treasure below the altar.

Goldmoon, overcome with dragonfear, did not move. She could do nothing but stare at the monstrous creature, trembling. Sturm, next to her, searched the treasure trove with his eyes, looking for the Disks of Mishakal, fighting to control his fear of the dragon. Sturm had not known he could be this frightened of anything. He repeated the code, “Honor is Life,” over and over, and he knew it was pride alone that kept him from running away.

Goldmoon saw Sturm's hand shake, she saw the knight's face glistening with sweat. Dear goddess, she cried in her soul, grant me courage! Then Sturm nudged her. She had to say something, she realized. She had been silent too long.





"What will you give us in return for the miraculous staff?" Goldmoon asked, forcing herself to speak calmly, though her throat was parched and her tongue felt swollen.

The dragon laughed—shrill, ugly laughter. "What will I give you?" The dragon snaked her head to stare at Goldmoon. "Nothing! Nothing at all. I do not deal with thieves. Still—" The dragon reared its head back, its red eyes closed to slits. Playfully she dug her claw into Raistlin's flesh; the mage flinched, but he bore the pain without a murmur. The dragon removed the claw and held it just high enough so that they could all see the blood drip from it. "It is not inconceivable that Lord Verminaard—the Dragon Highmaster—may view favorably the fact that you surrender the staff. He may even be inclined to mercy—he is a cleric and they have strange values. But know this, Lady of Que-shu, Lord Verminaard does not need your friends. Give up the staff now and they will be spared. Force me to take it—and they will die. The mage first of all!"

Goldmoon, her spirit seemingly broken, slumped in defeat. Sturm moved close to her, appearing to console her.

"I have found the Disks," he whispered harshly. He grasped her arm, feeling her shivering with fear. "Are you resolved on this course of action, my lady?" he asked softly.

Goldmoon bowed her head. She was deathly pale but composed and calm. Tendrils of her fine silver-golden hair had escaped from the binding and fell around her face, hiding her expression from the dragon. Though she appeared defeated, she looked up at Sturm and smiled. There was both peace and sorrow in her smile, much like the smile on the marble goddess. She did not speak but Sturm had his answer. He bowed in submission.

"May my courage be equal to yours, lady," he said. "I will not fail you."

"Farewell, knight. Tell Riverwind—" Goldmoon faltered, blinking her eyes as tears filled them. Fearing her resolve might yet break, she swallowed her words and turned to face the

dragon as the voice of Mishakal filled her being, answering her prayer. *Present the staff boldly!* Goldmoon, imbued with an inner strength, raised the blue crystal staff.

"We do not choose to surrender!" Goldmoon shouted, her voice echoing throughout the chamber. Moving swiftly, before the startled dragon could react, Chieftain's Daughter swung her staff one last time, striking the clawed foot poised above Raistlin.

The staff made a low ringing sound as it struck the dragon—then it shattered. A burst of pure, radiant blue light beamed from the broken staff. The light grew brighter, spreading out in concentric waves, engulfing the dragon.

Khisanth screamed in rage. The dragon was injured, terribly, mortally. She lashed out with her tail, flung her head about, and fought to escape the burning blue flame. She wanted nothing except to kill those that dared inflict such pain, but the intense blue fire relentlessly consumed her—as it consumed Goldmoon.

The Chieftain's Daughter had not dropped the staff when it shattered. She held on to the fragmented end, watching as the light grew, keeping it as close to the dragon as she could. When the blue light touched her hands she felt intense, burning pain. Staggering, she fell to her knees, still clutching the staff. She heard the dragon shrieking and roaring above her, then she could hear nothing but the ringing of the staff. The pain grew so horrible it was no longer a part of her, and she was overcome with a great weariness. I will sleep, she thought. I will sleep and when I waken, I will be where I truly belong. . . .

Sturm saw the blue light slowly destroy the dragon, then it spread along the staff to Goldmoon. He heard the ringing sound grow louder and louder until it drowned out even the screams of the dying dragon. Sturm took a step toward Goldmoon, thinking to wrench the splintered staff from her hand and drag her clear of the deadly blue flame . . . but even as he approached, he knew he could not save her.





Half-blinded by the light and deafened by the sound, the knight realized that it would take all his strength and courage to fulfill his oath—to retrieve the Disks. He tore his gaze from Goldmoon, whose face was twisted in agony and whose flesh was withering in the fire. Gritting his teeth against the pain in his head, he staggered toward the treasure pile where he had seen the Disks—hundreds of thin sheets of platinum bound together by a single ring through the top. Reaching down, he lifted them, amazed at their lightness. Then his heart almost stopped beating when a bloody hand reached up from the pile of treasure and grasped his wrist.

“Help me!”

He could not hear the voice so much as sense the thought. Grasping Raistlin’s hand, he pulled the mage to his feet. Blood was visible through the red of Raistlin’s robe, but he did not appear to be seriously injured—at least he could stand. But could he walk? Sturm needed help. He wondered where the others were; he couldn’t see them in the brilliance. Suddenly Caramon loomed up by his side, his armor gleaming in the blue flame.

Raistlin clutched at him. “Help me find the spellbook!” he hissed.

“Who cares about that?” Caramon roared, reaching for his brother. “I’ll get you out of here!”

Raistlin’s mouth twisted so in fury and frustration that he could not speak. He dropped to his knees and began to search frantically through the pile of treasure. Caramon tried to draw him away, but Raistlin shoved him back with his frail hand.

And still the ringing sound pierced their ears. Sturm felt tears of pain trickle down his cheeks. Suddenly something crashed to the floor in front of the knight. The chamber ceiling was collapsing! The entire building shook around them, the ringing sound causing the pillars to tremble and the walls to crack.

Then the ringing died—and with it the dragon. Khisanth had vanished, leaving behind nothing but a pile of smoldering ash.

Sturm gasped in relief but not for long. As soon as the ringing sound ended, he could hear the sounds of the palace caving in, the cracking of the ceiling and the thuds and explosive crashes as huge stone slabs struck the floor. Then, out of the dust and noise, Tanis appeared before him. Blood trickled from a cut on the half-elf’s cheek. Sturm grabbed his friend and pulled him to the altar as another chunk of ceiling plummeted near them.

“The whole city is collapsing!” Sturm yelled. “How do we get out?”

Tanis shook his head. “The only way I know is back the way we came, through that tunnel,” he shouted. He ducked as another piece of ceiling crashed onto the empty altar.

“That’ll be a death trap! There must be another way!”

“We’ll find it,” Tanis said firmly. He peered through the billowing dust. “Where are the others?” he asked. Then, turning, he saw Raistlin and Caramon. Tanis stared in horror and disgust at the mage scavenging among the treasure. Then he saw a small figure tugging Raistlin’s sleeve. Bupu! Tanis made a lunge for her, nearly scaring the gully dwarf witless. She shrank back against Raistlin with a startled scream.

“We’ve got to get out of here!” Tanis roared. He grabbed hold of Raistlin’s robes and dragged the slender young man to his feet. “Stop looting and get that gully dwarf of yours to show us the way out, or so help me, you’ll die by my hands!”

Raistlin’s thin lips parted in a ghastly smile as Tanis flung him back against the altar. Bupu shrieked. “Come! We go! I know way!”

“Raist,” Caramon begged, “you can’t find it! You’ll die if we don’t get out of here!”

“Very well,” the mage snarled. He lifted the Staff of Magius from the altar and stood up, reaching out his arm for his brother’s aid. “Bupu, show us the way,” he commanded.

“Raistlin, light your staff so we can follow you.” Tanis ordered. “I’m going to find the others.”





"Over there," Caramon said grimly. "You're going to need help with the Plainsman."

Tanis flung his arm over his face as more stone fell, then jumped across the rubble. He found Riverwind collapsed where Goldmoon had been standing, Flint and Tasslehoff trying to get the Plainsman to his feet. There was nothing there now except a large area of blackened stone. Goldmoon had been totally consumed in the flames.

"Is he alive?" Tanis shouted.

"Yes!" Tas answered, his voice carrying shrilly above the noise. "But he won't move!"

"I'll talk to him," Tanis said. "Follow the others. We'll be there in a moment. Go on!"

Tasslehoff hesitated, but Flint, after a glance at Tanis's face, put his hand on the kender's arm. Snuffling, Tas turned and began running through the rubble with the dwarf.

Tanis knelt beside Riverwind, then the half-elf glanced up as Sturm appeared out of the gloom. "Go on," Tanis said. "You're in command now."

Sturm hesitated. A column toppled over near them, showering them in rock dust. Tanis flung his body across Riverwind's. "Go on!" he yelled at Sturm. "I'm holding you responsible!" Sturm drew a breath, laid a hand on Tanis's shoulder, then ran toward the light from Raistlin's staff.

The knight found the others huddled in a narrow hallway. The arched ceiling above them seemed to be holding together, but Sturm could hear thudding sounds above. The ground shook beneath their feet and little rivulets of water were beginning to seep through new cracks in the walls.

"Where's Tanis?" Caramon asked.

"He'll be along," Sturm said harshly. "We'll wait . . . a few moments at least." He did not mention that he would wait until waiting had dissolved into death.

There was a shattering crack. Water began to gush through the wall, flooding the floor. Sturm was about to order the others out when a figure emerged from the collapsing

doorway. It was Riverwind, carrying Tanis's inert body in his arms.

"What happened?" Sturm leaped forward, his throat constricting. "He's not—"

"He stayed with me," Riverwind said softly. "I told him to leave me. I wanted to die—there with her. Then—a slab of stone. He never saw it—"

"I'll carry him," Caramon said.

"No!" Riverwind glared at the big warrior. His arms gripped Tanis's body tighter. "I will carry him. We must go."

"Yes! This way! We go now!" urged the gully dwarf. She led them out of the city that was dying a second time. They emerged from the dragon's lair into the plaza, which was rapidly being submerged as Newsea poured into the crumbling cavern. The companions waded across, holding onto each other to keep from being swept away in the vicious current. Howling gully dwarves swarmed everywhere in a state of wild confusion, some getting caught in the current, others climbing up into the top stories of shaking buildings, still others dashing down the streets.

Sturm could think of only one way out. "Go east!" he shouted, gesturing down the broad street that led to the waterfall. He looked anxiously at Riverwind. The dazed Plainsman seemed oblivious to the commotion around him. Tanis was unconscious—maybe dead. Fear chilled Sturm's blood, but he forcibly suppressed all emotions. The knight ran ahead, catching up with the twins.

"Our only chance is the lift!" he yelled.

Caramon nodded slowly. "It will mean a fight."

"Yes, damn it!" said Sturm in exasperation, envisioning all of the draconians trying to leave this stricken city. "It *will* mean a fight! You got any better ideas?"

Caramon shook his head.

At a corner, Sturm waited to herd his limping, exhausted band in the right direction. Peering through the dust and mist, he could see the lift ahead of them. It was, as he had





foreseen, surrounded by a dark, writhing mass of draconians. Fortunately, they were all intent on escape. They had to strike quickly, Sturm knew, to catch the creatures off guard. Timing was critical. He caught hold of the kender as Tas scurried past.

"Tas!" he yelled. "We're going up the lift!"

Tasslehoff nodded to show he understood, then made a face to imitate a draconian and slashed his hand across his throat.

"When we get near," Sturm shouted—"sneak around to where you can see the pot descending. When it starts to come down, signal me. We'll attack when it reaches the ground."

Tasslehoff's topknot bobbed.

"Tell Flint!" Sturm finished, his voice nearly gone from shouting. Tas nodded again and raced off to find the dwarf. Sturm straightened his aching back with a sigh and continued on down the street. He could see about twenty or twenty-five draconians gathered in the courtyard, watching for the pot that would carry them to safety to begin its descent. Sturm imagined the confusion up on the top—draconians whipping and bullying the panic-stricken gully dwarves, forcing them into the lift. He hoped the confusion would last.

Sturm saw the brothers in the shadows at the edge of the courtyard. He joined them, glancing up nervously as a stone slab crashed down behind him. As Riverwind staggered out of the mist and dust, Sturm started to help him, but the Plainsman looked at the knight as if he had never seen him before in his life.

"Bring Tanis over here," Sturm said. "You can lay him down and rest a moment. We're going up in the lift and we'll have a fight on our hands. Wait here. When we signal—"

"Do what you must," Riverwind interrupted coldly. He laid Tanis's body gently on the ground and slumped down beside him, burying his face in his hands.

Sturm hesitated. He started to kneel down by Tanis as Flint came to stand by his side.

"Go on. I'll check on him," the dwarf offered.

Sturm nodded thankfully. He saw Tasslehoff skitter across the courtyard and into a doorway. Looking toward the lift, he saw the draconians yelling and cursing into the mist as if they could hurry the pot's descent.

Flint poked Sturm in the ribs. "How are we going to fight all of them?" he shouted.

"We're not. You're going to stay here with Riverwind and Tanis," Sturm said. "Caramon and I can handle this," he added, wishing he believed it himself.

"And I," whispered the mage. "I still have my spells." The knight did not answer. He distrusted magic and he distrusted Raistlin. Still, he had no choice—Caramon would not go into battle without his brother by his side. Tugging at his moustaches, Sturm restlessly loosened his sword. Caramon flexed his arms, clenching and unclenching his huge hands. Raistlin, his eyes closed, was lost in concentration. Bupu, hidden in a niche in the wall behind him, watched everything with wide, frightened eyes.

The pot swung into view, gully dwarves hanging from its sides. As Sturm hoped, the draconians on the ground began to fight among themselves, none wanting to be left behind. Their panic increased as great cracks ran through the pavement toward them. Water rose through the cracks. The city of Xak Tsaroth would soon be lying at the bottom of Newsea.

As the pot touched ground, the gully dwarves scurried over the sides and fled. The draconians clambered in, hitting and shoving each other.

"Now!" the knight yelled.

"Get out of my way!" the mage hissed. Pulling a handful of sand from one of his pouches, he sprinkled it on the ground and whispered, "*Ast tasark sinuralan krynow*," moving his right hand in an arc in the direction of the draconians. First one, then a few more blinked their eyes and slumped to the ground in sleep, but others remained standing, glancing around in alarm. The mage ducked back into the doorway and, seeing nothing, the draconians turned back to the lift,





stepping on the bodies of their sleeping comrades in their frantic rush. Raistlin leaned against the wall, closing his eyes wearily.

"How many?" he asked.

"Only about six." Caramon drew his sword from its sheath.

"Just get in the damn pot!" Sturm yelled. "We'll come back for Tanis when the fight's ended."

Under cover of the mist, the two warriors—swords drawn—covered the distance to the draconians within a few heartbeats, Raistlin stumbling behind. Sturm shouted his battle cry. At the sound, the draconians spun around in alarm.

And Riverwind raised his head.

The sound of battle penetrated Riverwind's fog of despair. The Plainsman saw Goldmoon before him, dying in the blue flame. The dead expression left his face, replaced by a ferocity so bestial and terrifying that Bupu, still hiding in the doorway, screamed in alarm. Riverwind leaped to his feet. He didn't even draw his sword but charged forward, empty-handed. He tore into the ranks of the scrambling draconians like a starving panther and began to kill. He killed with his bare hands, twisting, choking, gouging. Draconians stabbed at him with their swords; soon his leather tunic was soaked with blood. Yet he never stopped moving among them, never stopped killing. His face was that of a madman. The draconians in Riverwind's path saw death in his eyes, and they also saw that their weapons had no effect. One broke and ran and, soon, another.

Sturm, finishing an opponent, looked up grimly, prepared to find six more coming at him. Instead he saw the enemy fleeing for their lives into the mist. Riverwind, covered with blood, collapsed onto the ground.

"The lift!" The mage pointed. It was hovering about two feet off the ground and starting to move upward. There were gully dwarves in the top pot coming down.

"Stop it!" Sturm yelled. Tasslehoff raced from his hiding place and leaped for the edge. He clung, his feet dangling,

trying desperately to keep the empty pot from rising. "Caramon! Hang onto it!" Sturm ordered the warrior. "I'll get Tanis!"

"I can hold it, but not for long." The big man grunted, grasping onto the edge and digging his feet into the ground. He dragged the lift to a halt. Tasslehoff climbed inside, hoping his small body might add ballast.

Sturm ran back swiftly to Tanis. Flint was beside him, his axe in his hands.

"He's alive!" the dwarf called as the knight approached.

Sturm paused a moment to thank some god, somewhere, then he and Flint lifted the unconscious half-elf and carried him to the pot. They placed him inside, then returned for Riverwind. It took four of them to get Riverwind's bloody body into the lift. Tas tried without much success to stanch the wounds with one of his handkerchiefs.

"Hurry!" Caramon gasped. Despite all his efforts, the pot was rising slowly.

"Get in!" Sturm ordered Raistlin.

The mage glanced at him coldly and ran back into the mist. Within moments, he reappeared, carrying Bupu in his arms. The knight grabbed the trembling gully dwarf and flung her into the lift. Bupu, whimpering, crouched on the bottom, still clutching her bag to her chest. Raistlin climbed over the side. The pot continued to rise; Caramon's arms were nearly pulled out of their sockets.

"Go on," Sturm ordered Caramon, the knight being the last to leave the field of battle as usual. Caramon knew better than to argue. He heaved himself up, nearly tipping the pot over. Flint and Raistlin dragged him in. Without Caramon holding it, the pot lunged upward rapidly. Sturm caught hold of it with both hands and clung to the side as it rose into the air. After two or three tries, he managed to swing a leg over the edge and climbed in with Caramon's help.

The knight knelt down beside Tanis and was relieved beyond expression to see the half-elf stir and moan. Sturm





grasped the half-elf and held him close. "You have no idea how glad I am you're back!" the knight said, his voice husky.

"Riverwind—" Tanis murmured groggily.

"He's here. He saved your life. He saved all our lives." Sturm talked rapidly, almost incoherently. "We're in the lift, going up. The city's destroyed. Where are you hurt?"

"Broken ribs, feels like." Wincing in pain, Tanis looked over at Riverwind, still conscious, despite his wounds. "Poor man," Tanis said softly. "Goldmoon. I saw her die, Sturm. There was nothing I could do."

Sturm helped the half-elf rise to his feet. "We have the Disks," the knight said firmly. "It was what she wanted, what she fought for. They're in my pack. Are you sure you can stand?"

"Yes," Tanis said. He drew a ragged, painful breath. "We have the Disks, whatever good that will do us."

They were interrupted by the shrill screams as the second pot, gully dwarves flying like banners, went past them. The gully dwarves shook their fists and cursed the companions. Bupu laughed, then she stood up, looking at Raistlin in concern. The mage leaned wearily against the side of the pot, his lips moving silently, calling to mind another spell.

Sturm peered up through the mist. "I wonder how many will be at the top?" he asked.

Tanis, too, glanced up. "Most have fled, I hope," he said. He caught his breath sharply and clutched at his ribs.

There was a sudden lurch. The pot fell about a foot, stopped with a jolt, then slowly started to rise again. The companions looked at each other in alarm.

"The mechanism—"

"It's either starting to collapse or the draconians have recognized us and are trying to destroy it," Tanis said.

"There's nothing we can do," Sturm said in bitter frustration. He stared down at the pack containing the Disks, which lay at his feet. "Except pray to these gods—"

The pot lurched and dropped again. For a moment it hung, suspended, swaying in the mist-shrouded air. Then it started

up, moving slowly, shuddering. The companions could see the edge of the rock ledge and the opening above them. The pot rose inch by creaking inch, each of those inside mentally supporting every link of the chain that was carrying them up to—

"Draconians!" cried Tas shrilly, pointing up.

Two draconians stared down at them. As the pot crept closer and closer, Tanis saw the draconians crouch, ready to jump.

"They're going to leap down here! The pot won't hold!" Flint rumbled. "We'll crash!"

"That may be their intent," Tanis said. "They have wings."

"Stand back," Raistlin said, staggering to his feet.

"Raist, don't!" His brother caught hold of him. "You're too weak."

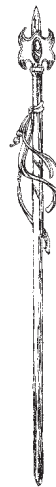
"I have strength for one more spell," the mage whispered. "But it may not work. If they see I am magi, they may be able to resist my magic."

"Hide behind Caramon's shield," Tanis said swiftly. The big man thrust his body and his shield in front of his brother.

The mist swirled around them, concealing them from draconian eyes but also preventing them from seeing the draconians. The pot rose, inch by inch, the chain creaking and lurching upward. Raistlin stood poised behind Caramon's shield, his strange eyes staring, waiting for the mists to part.

Cool air touched Tanis's cheek. A breeze swirled the mists apart, just for an instant. The draconians were so close they could have almost touched them! The draconians saw them at the same time. One spread its wings and floated down toward the pot, sword in hand, shrieking in triumph.

Raistlin spoke. Caramon moved his shield and the mage spread his thin fingers. A ball of white shot from his hands, hitting the draconian squarely in the chest. The ball exploded, covering the creature in sticky webbing. Its cry of triumph changed to a horrifying shriek as the webbing tangled its wings. It plummeted into the mist, its body striking the edge of the iron pot as it fell. The pot began to rock and sway.



"There's still one more!" Raistlin gasped, sinking to his knees. "Hold me up, Caramon, help me stand. The mage began to cough violently, blood trickling from his mouth.

"Raist!" his brother pleaded, dropping his shield and catching his fainting twin. "Stop! There's nothing you can do. You'll kill yourself!"

A look of command was enough. The warrior supported his brother as the mage began to speak again the eerie-sounding language of magic.

The remaining draconian hesitated, still hearing the yells of its fallen companion. It knew the human was a magic-user. It also knew that it could probably resist the magic. But this human facing it was like no human magic-user it had ever encountered. The human's body seemed weak practically to the point of death, but a strong aura of power surrounded him.

The mage raised his hand, pointing at the creature. The draconian cast one last, vicious glance at the companions, then turned and fled. Raistlin, unconscious, sank into his brother's arms as the pot completed its journey to the surface.

