



CHRONICLES

PART

3

# THE NIGHTMARE LANDS

MARGARET WEIS & TRACY HICKMAN

COVER ART

Glen Angus

INTERIOR ART

Vinod Rams



The winter winds raged outside, but within the caverns of the mountain dwarves beneath the Kharolis Mountains, the fury of the storm was not felt. As the Thane called for silence among the assembled dwarves and humans, a dwarven bard stepped forward to do homage to the companions.

## SONG OF THE NINE HEROES

From the north came danger, as we knew it would:  
In the vanguard of winter, a dragon's dance  
Unraveled the land, until out of the forest,  
Out of the plains they came, from the mothering earth,  
The sky unreckoned before them.  
*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*

One from a garden of stone arising,  
From dwarf-halls, from weather and wisdom,  
Where the heart and mind ride unquestioned  
In the untapped vein of the hand.  
In his fathering arms, the spirit gathered.  
*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*

One from a haven of breezes descending,  
Light in the handling air,  
To the waving meadows, the kender's country,  
Where the grain out of smallness arises itself  
To grow green and golden and green again.

*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*

The next from the plains, the long land's keeping,  
Nurtured in distance, horizons of nothing.  
Bearing a staff she came, and a burden  
Of mercy and light converged in her hand:  
Bearing the wounds of the world, she came.

*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*

The next from the plains, in the moon's shadow,  
Through custom, through ritual, trailing the moon  
Where her phases, her wax and her wane, controlled  
The tide of his blood, and his warrior's hand  
Ascended through hierarchies of space into light.

*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*

One within absences, known by departures,  
The dark swordswoman at the heart of fire:  
Her glories the space between words,  
The cradlesong recollected in age,  
Recalled at the edge of awakening and thought.

*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*





One in the heart of honor, formed by the sword,  
By the centuries' flight of the kingfisher over the land,  
By Solamnia ruined and risen, rising again  
When the heart ascends into duty.  
As it dances, the sword is forever an heirloom.  
*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*

The next in a simple light a brother to darkness,  
Letting the sword hand try all subtleties,  
Even the intricate webs of the heart. His thoughts  
Are pools disrupted in changing wind—  
He cannot see their bottom.  
*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*

The next the leader, half-elven, betrayed  
As the twining blood pulls asunder the land,  
The forests, the worlds of elves and men.  
Called into bravery, but fearing for love,  
And fearing that, called into both, he does nothing.  
*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*

The last from the darkness, breathing the night  
Where the abstract stars hide a nest of words,  
Where the body endures the wound of numbers,  
Surrendered to knowledge, until, unable to bless,  
His blessing falls on the low, the benighted.

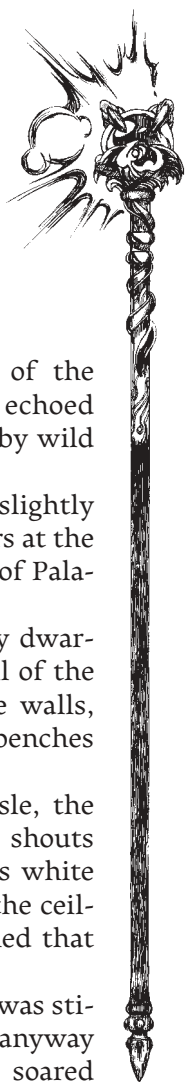
*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*

Joined by others they were in the telling:  
A graceless girl, graced beyond graces;  
A princess of seeds and saplings, called to the forest;  
An ancient weaver of accidents;  
Nor can we say who the story will gather.  
*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*

From the north came danger, as we knew it would:  
In encampments of winter, the dragon's sleep  
Has settled the land, but out of the forest,  
Out of the plains they come, from the mothering earth  
Defining the sky before them.  
*Nine they were, under the three moons,  
Under the autumn twilight:  
As the world declined, they arose  
Into the heart of the story.*



## THE HAMMER



**T**he Hammer of Kharas!”

The great Hall of Audience of the King of the Mountain Dwarves echoed with the triumphal announcement. It was followed by wild cheering, the deep

booming voices of the dwarves mingling with the slightly higher-pitched shouts of the humans as the huge doors at the rear of the Hall were thrown open and Elistan, cleric of Paladine, entered.

Although the bowl-shaped Hall was large, even by dwarven standards, it was crammed to capacity. Nearly all of the eight hundred refugees from Pax Tharkas lined the walls, while the dwarves packed onto the carved stone benches below.

Elistan appeared at the foot of a long central aisle, the giant warhammer held reverently in his hands. The shouts increased at the sight of the cleric of Paladine in his white robes, the sound booming against the great vault of the ceiling and reverberating through the hall until it seemed that the ground shook with the vibrations.

Tanis winced as the noise made his head throb. He was stifled in the crowd. He didn't like being underground anyway and, although the ceiling was so high that the top soared

beyond the blazing torchlight and disappeared into shadow, the half-elf felt enclosed, trapped.

"I'll be glad when this is over," he muttered to Sturm, standing next to him.

Sturm, always melancholy, seemed even darker and more brooding than usual. "I don't approve of this, Tanis," he muttered, folding his arms across the bright metal of his antique breastplate.

"I know," said Tanis irritably. "You've said it—not once, but several times. It's too late now. There's nothing to be done but make the best of it."

The end of his sentence was lost in another resounding cheer as Elistan raised the Hammer above his head, showing it to the crowd before beginning the walk down the aisle. Tanis put his hand on his forehead. He was growing dizzy as the cool underground cavern heated up from the mass of bodies.

Elistan started to walk down the aisle. Rising to greet him on a dais in the center of the Hall was Hornfel, Thane of the Hylar dwarves. Spaced behind the dwarf were seven carved stone thrones, all of them now empty. Hornfel stood before the seventh throne—the most magnificent, the throne for the King of Thorbardin. Long empty, it would be occupied once more, as Hornfel accepted the Hammer of Kharas. The return of this ancient relic was a singular triumph for Hornfel. Since his thanedom was now in possession of the coveted Hammer, he could unite the rival dwarven thanes under his leadership.

"We fought to recover that Hammer," Sturm said slowly, his eyes upon the gleaming weapon. "The legendary Hammer of Kharas. Used to forge the dragonlances. Lost for hundreds of years, found again, and lost once more. And now given to the dwarves!" he said in disgust.

"It was given to the dwarves once before," Tanis reminded him wearily, feeling sweat trickle down his forehead. "Have Flint tell you the tale, if you've forgotten. At any rate, it is





truly theirs now." Elistan had arrived at the foot of the stone dais where the Thane, dressed in the heavy robes and massive gold chains dwarves loved, awaited him. Elistan knelt at the foot of the dais, a politic gesture, for otherwise the tall, muscular cleric would stand face-to-face with the dwarf, despite the fact that the dais was a good three feet off the ground. The dwarves cheered mightily at this. The humans were, Tanis noticed, more subdued, some muttering among themselves, not liking the sight of their leader abasing himself.

"Accept this gift of our people—" Elistan's words were lost in another cheer from the dwarves.

"Gift!" Sturm snorted. "Ransom is nearer the mark."

"In return for which," Elistan continued when he could be heard, "we thank the dwarves for their generous gift of a place to live within their kingdom."

"For the right to be sealed in a tomb . . ." Sturm muttered.

"And we pledge our support to the dwarves if the war should come upon us!" Elistan shouted.

Cheering resounded throughout the chamber, increasing as Thane Hornfel bent to receive the Hammer. The dwarves stamped and whistled, most climbing up on the stone benches.

Tanis began to feel nauseated. He glanced around. They would never be missed. Hornfel would speak; so would each of the other six Thanes, not to mention the members of the Highseekers Council. The half-elf touched Sturm on the arm, motioning to the knight to follow him. The two walked silently from the Hall, bending low to get through a narrow archway. Although still underground in the massive dwarven city, at least they were away from the noise, out in the cool night air.

"Are you all right?" Sturm asked, noticing Tanis's pallor beneath his beard. The half-elf gulped draughts of cool air.

"I am now," Tanis said, flushing in shame at his weakness. "It was the heat . . . and the noise."

"Well, we'll be out of here soon," Sturm said. "Depending,

of course, on whether or not the Council of Highseekers votes to let us go to Tarsis."

"Oh, there's no doubt how they'll vote," Tanis said, shrugging. "Elistan is clearly in control, now that he's led the people to a place of safety. None of the Highseekers dares oppose him—at least to his face. No, my friend, within a month's time perhaps, we'll be setting sail in one of the white-winged ships of Tarsis the Beautiful."

"Without the Hammer of Kharas," Sturm added bitterly. Softly, he began to quote. *"And so it was told that the Knights took the golden Hammer, the Hammer blessed by the great god Paladine and given to the One of the Silver Arm so that he might forge the Dragonlance of Huma, Dragonbane, and gave the Hammer to the dwarf they called Kharas, or Knight, for his extraordinary valor and honor in battle. And he kept Kharas for his name. And the Hammer of Kharas passed into the dwarven kingdom with assurances from the dwarves that it should be brought forth again at need—"*

"It *has* been brought forth," Tanis said, struggling to contain his rising anger. He had heard that quotation entirely too many times!

"It has been brought forth and will be left behind!" Sturm bit the words. "We might have taken it to Solamnia, used it to forge our own dragonlances—"

"And you would be another Huma, riding to glory, the Dragonlance in your hand!" Tanis's control snapped. "Meanwhile you'd let eight hundred people die—"

"No, I would not have let them die!" Sturm shouted in a towering rage. "The first clue we have to the dragonlances and you sell it for—"

Both men stopped arguing abruptly, suddenly aware of a shadow creeping from the darker shadows surrounding them.

"*Shirak*," whispered a voice, and a bright light flared, gleaming from a crystal ball clutched in the golden, disembodied claw of a dragon atop a plain, wooden staff. The light illuminated the red robes of a magic-user. The young mage



walked toward the two, leaning upon his staff, coughing slightly. The light from his staff shone upon a skeletal face, with glistening metallic gold skin drawn tightly over fine bones. His eyes gleamed golden.

"Raistlin," said Tanis, his voice tight. "Is there something you want?"

Raistlin did not seem at all bothered by the angry looks both men cast him, apparently well accustomed to the fact that few felt comfortable in his presence or wanted him around.

He stopped before the two. Stretching forth his frail hand, the mage spoke, "*Akular-alan suh Tagolann Jistrathar*," and a pale image of a weapon shimmered into being as Tanis and Sturm watched in astonishment.

It was a footman's lance, nearly twelve feet long. The point was made of pure silver, barbed and gleaming, the shaft crafted of polished wood. The tip was steel, designed to be thrust into the ground.

"It's beautiful!" Tanis gasped. "What is it?"

"A dragonlance," Raistlin answered. Holding the lance in his hand, the mage stepped between the two, who stood aside to let him pass as if unwilling to be touched by him. Their eyes were on the lance. Then Raistlin turned and held it out to Sturm.

"There is your dragonlance, knight," Raistlin hissed, "without benefit of the Hammer or the Silver Arm. Will you ride with it into glory, remembering that, for Huma, with glory came death?"

Sturm's eyes flashed. He caught his breath in awe as he reached out to take hold of the dragonlance. To his amazement, his hand passed right through it! The dragonlance vanished, even as he touched it.

"More of your tricks!" he snarled. Spinning on his heel, he stalked away, choking in anger.

"If you meant that as a joke, Raistlin," Tanis said quietly, "it wasn't funny."

"A joke?" the mage whispered. His strange golden eyes followed the knight as Sturm walked into the thick blackness of the dwarven city beneath the mountain. "You should know me better, Tanis."

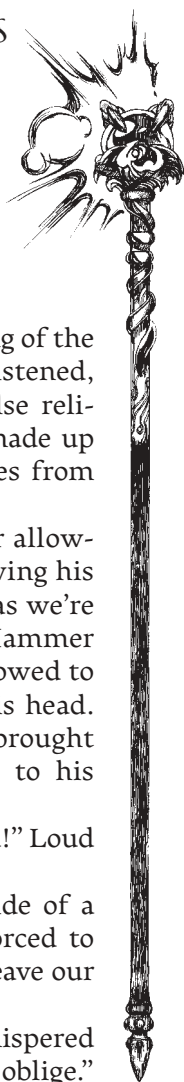
The mage laughed—the weird laughter Tanis had heard only once before. Then, bowing sardonically to the half-elf, Raistlin disappeared, following the knight into the shadows.

MARGARET WEIS & TRACY HICKMAN



## WHITE-WINGED SHIPS. HOPE LIES ACROSS THE PLAINS OF DUST.

# 1



Tanis Half-Elven sat in the meeting of the Council of Highseekers and listened, frowning. Though officially the false religion of the Seekers was now dead, the group that made up the political leadership of the eight hundred refugees from Pax Tharkas was still called that.

"It isn't that we're not grateful to the dwarves for allowing us to live here," stated Hederick expansively, waving his scarred hand. "We are all grateful, I'm certain. Just as we're grateful to those whose heroism in recovering the Hammer of Kharas made our move here possible." Hederick bowed to Tanis, who returned the bow with a brief nod of his head. "But we are not dwarves!" This emphatic statement brought murmurs of approval, causing Hederick to warm to his audience.

"We *humans* were never meant to live underground!" Loud calls of approval and some clapping of hands.

"We are farmers. We cannot grow food on the side of a mountain! We want lands like the ones we were forced to leave behind. And I say that those who forced us to leave our old homeland should provide us with new!"

"Does he mean the Dragon Highlords?" Sturm whispered sarcastically to Tanis. "I'm certain they'd be happy to oblige."

"The fools ought to be thankful they're alive!" Tanis muttered. "Look at them, turning to Elistan—as if it were *his* doing!" The cleric of Paladine—and leader of the refugees—rose to his feet to answer Hederick.

"It is because we need new homes," Elistan said, his strong baritone resounding through the cavern, "that I propose we send a delegation south, to the city of Tarsis the Beautiful."

Tanis had heard Elistan's plan before. His mind wandered over the month since he and his companions had returned from Derkin's Tomb with the sacred Hammer.

The dwarven Thanes, now consolidated under the leadership of Hornfel, were preparing to battle the evil coming from the north. The dwarves did not greatly fear this evil. Their mountain kingdom seemed impregnable. And they had kept the promise they made Tanis in return for the Hammer: the refugees from Pax Tharkas could settle in Southgate, the southernmost part of the mountain kingdom of Thorbardin.

Elistan brought the refugees to Thorbardin. They began trying to rebuild their lives, but the arrangement was not totally satisfactory.

They were safe, to be sure, but the refugees, mostly farmers, were not happy living underground in the huge dwarven caverns. In the spring they could plant crops on the mountainside, but the rocky soil would produce only a bare living. The people wanted to live in the sunshine and fresh air. They did not want to be dependent on the dwarves.

It was Elistan who recalled the ancient legends of Tarsis the Beautiful and its gull-winged ships. But that's all they were—legends, as Tanis had pointed out when Elistan first mentioned his idea. No one on this part of Ansalon had heard anything about the city of Tarsis since the Cataclysm three hundred years ago. At that time, the dwarves had closed off the mountain kingdom of Thorbardin, effectively shutting off all communication between the south and north, since the only way through the Kharolis Mountains was through Thorbardin.





Tanis listened gloomily as the Council of Highseekers voted unanimously to approve Elistan's suggestion. They proposed sending a small group of people to Tarsis with instructions to find what ships came into port, where they were bound, and how much it would cost to book passage—or even to buy a ship.

“And who's going to lead this group?” Tanis asked himself silently, though he already knew the answer.

All eyes now turned to him. Before Tanis could speak, Raistlin, who had been listening to all that was said without comment, walked forward to stand before the Council. He stared around at them, his strange eyes glittering golden.

“You are fools,” Raistlin said, his whispering voice soft with scorn, “and you are living in a fool's dream. How often must I repeat myself? How often must I remind you of the portent of the stars? What do you say to yourselves when you look into the night sky and see the gaping black holes where the two constellations are missing?”

The Council members shifted in their seats, several exchanging long-suffering glances indicative of boredom.

Raistlin noticed this and continued, his voice growing more and more contemptuous. “Yes, I have heard some of you saying that it is nothing more than a natural phenomenon—a thing that happens, perhaps, like the falling of leaves from the trees.”

Several Council members muttered among themselves, nodding. Raistlin watched silently for a moment, his lip curled in derision. Then he spoke once more. “I repeat, you are fools. The constellation known as the Queen of Darkness is missing from the sky because the Queen is present here upon Krynn. The Warrior constellation, which represents the ancient God Paladine, as we are told in the Disks of Mishakal, has also returned to Krynn to fight her.”

Raistlin paused. Elistan, who stood among them, was a prophet of Paladine, and many here were converts to this new religion. He could sense the growing anger at what some

considered his blasphemy. The idea that gods would become personally involved in the affairs of men! Shocking! But being considered blasphemous had never bothered Raistlin.

His voice rose to a high pitch. "Mark well my words! With the Queen of Darkness have come her 'shrieking hosts,' as it says in the Canticle. And the shrieking hosts are dragons!" Raistlin drew out the last word into a hiss that, as Flint said, "shivered the skin."

"We know all this," Hederick snapped in impatience. It was past time for the Theocrat's nightly glass of mulled wine, and his thirst gave him courage to speak. He immediately regretted it, however, when Raistlin's hourglass eyes seemed to pierce the Theocrat like black arrows. "W-what are you driving at?"

"That peace no longer exists anywhere on Krynn," the mage whispered. He waved a frail hand. "Find ships, travel where you will. Wherever you go, whenever you look up into the night sky, you will see those gaping black holes. Wherever you go, there will be dragons!" Raistlin began to cough. His body twisted with the spasms, and he seemed likely to fall, but his twin brother, Caramon, ran forward and caught him in his strong arms.

After Caramon led the mage out of the Council meeting, it seemed as if a dark cloud had been lifted. The Council members shook themselves and laughed—if somewhat shakily—and talked of children's tales. To think that war had spread to all of Krynn was comic. Why, the war was near an end here in Ansalon already. The Dragon Highlord, Verminaard, had been defeated, his draconian armies driven back.

The Council members stood and stretched and left the chamber to head for the alehouse or their homes.

They forgot they had never asked Tanis if he would lead the group to Tarsis. They simply assumed he would.

Tanis, exchanging grim glances with Sturm, left the cavern. It was his night to stand watch. Even though the dwarves might consider themselves safe in their mountain fortress,





Tanis and Sturm insisted that a watch be kept upon the walls leading into Southgate. They had come to respect the Dragon Highlords too much to sleep in peace without it—even underground.

Tanis leaned against the outer wall of Southgate, his face thoughtful and serious. Before him spread a meadow covered by smooth, powdery snow. The night was calm and still. Behind him was the great mass of the Kharolis Mountains. The gate of Southgate was, in fact, a gigantic plug in the side of the mountains. It was part of the dwarven defenses that had kept the world out for three hundred years following the Cataclysm and the destructive Dwarven Wars.

Sixty feet wide at the base and almost half again as high, the gate was operated by a huge mechanism that forced it in and out of the mountain. At least forty feet thick in its center, the gate was as indestructible as any known on Krynn, except for the one matching it in the north. Once shut, they could not be distinguished from the faces of the mountain, such was the craftsmanship of the ancient dwarven masons.

Yet, since the arrival of the humans at Southgate, torches had been set about the opening, allowing the men, women, and children access to the outside air—a human need that seemed an unaccountable weakness to the subterranean dwarves.

As Tanis stood there, staring into the woods beyond the meadow and finding no peace in their quiet beauty, Sturm, Elistan, and Laurana joined him. The three had been talking—obviously of him—and fell into an uncomfortable silence.

“How solemn you are,” Laurana said to Tanis softly, coming near and putting her hand on his arm. “You believe Raistlin is right, don’t you, Tanthal—Tanis?” Laurana blushed. His human name still came clumsily to her lips, yet she knew him well enough now to understand that his elven name only brought him pain.

Tanis looked down at the small, slender hand on his arm and gently put his own over it. Only a few months earlier the touch of that hand would have irritated him, causing confusion and guilt as he wrestled with love for a human woman against what he told himself was a childhood infatuation with this elfmaiden. But now the touch of Laurana's hand filled him with warmth and peace, even as it stirred his blood. He pondered these new, disturbing feelings as he responded to her question.

"I have long found Raistlin's advice sound," he said, knowing how this would upset them. Sure enough, Sturm's face darkened. Elistan frowned. "And I think he is right this time. We have won a battle, but we are a long way from winning the war. We know it is being fought far north, in Solamnia. I think we may safely assume that it is not for the conquest of Abanasinia alone that the forces of darkness are fighting."

"But you are only speculating!" Elistan argued. "Do not let the darkness that hangs around the young mage cloud your thinking. He may be right, but that is no reason to give up hope, to give up trying! Tarsis is a large seaport city—at least according to all we know of it. There we'll find those who can tell us if the war encompasses the world. If so, then surely there still must be havens where we can find peace."

"Listen to Elistan, Tanis," Laurana said gently. "He is wise. When our people left Qualinesti, they did not flee blindly. They traveled to a peaceful haven. My father had a plan, though he dared not reveal it—"

Laurana broke off, startled to see the effect of her speech. Abruptly Tanis snatched his arm from her touch and turned his gaze on Elistan, his eyes filled with anger.

"Raistlin says hope is the denial of reality," Tanis stated coldly. Then, seeing Elistan's care-worn face regard him with sorrow, the half-elf smiled wearily. "I apologize, Elistan. I am tired, that's all. Forgive me. Your suggestion is good. We'll travel to Tarsis with hope, if nothing else."

Elistan nodded and turned to leave. "Are you coming,



Laurana? I know you are tired, my dear, but we have a great deal to do before I can turn the leadership over to the Council in my absence."

"I'll be with you presently, Elistan," Laurana said, flushing. "I—I want to speak a moment with Tanis."

Elistan gave them both an appraising, understanding look, then walked through the darkened gateway with Sturm. Tanis began dousing the torches, preparatory to the closing of the gate. Laurana stood near the entrance, her expression growing cold as it became obvious Tanis was ignoring her.

"What is the matter with you?" she said finally. "It almost sounds as if you are taking that dark-souled mage's part against Elistan, one of the best and wisest humans I have ever met!"

"Don't judge Raistlin, Laurana," Tanis said harshly, thrusting a torch into a bucket of water. The light vanished with a hiss. "Things aren't always black and white, as you elves are inclined to believe. The mage has saved our lives more than once. I have come to rely upon his thinking—which, I admit, I find easier to rely on than blind faith!"

"*You* elves!" Laurana cried. "How typically human that sounds! There is more elven in you than you care to admit, Tanthalas! You used to say you didn't wear the beard to hide your heritage, and I believed you. But now I'm not so certain. I've lived around humans long enough to know how they feel about elves! But I'm proud of my heritage. You're not! You're ashamed of it. Why? Because of that human woman you're in love with! What's her name, Kitiara?"

"Stop it, Laurana!" Tanis shouted. Hurling down a torch to the ground, he strode to the elven maiden standing in the doorway. "If you want to discuss relationships, what about you and Elistan? He may be a cleric of Paladine, but he's a man, a fact to which you can, no doubt, testify! All I hear from you," he mimicked her voice, "is 'Elistan is so wise,' 'Ask Elistan, he'll know what to do,' 'Listen to Elistan, Tanis—' "

"How dare you accuse me of your own failings?" Laurana returned. "I love Elistan. I reverence him. He is the wisest man I have known, and the gentlest. He is self-sacrificing—his entire life is wrapped up in serving others. But there is only one man I love, only one man I have ever loved—though now I am beginning to ask myself if perhaps I haven't made a mistake! You said, in that awful place, the Sla-Mori, that I was behaving like a little girl and I had better grow up. Well, I have grown, Tanis Half-Elven. In these past few bitter months, I have seen suffering and death. I have been afraid as I never knew fear existed! I have learned to fight, and I have dealt death to my enemies. All of that hurt me inside until I'm so numb I can't feel the pain anymore. But what hurts worse is to see you with clear eyes."

"I never claimed to be perfect, Laurana," Tanis said quietly.

The silver moon and the red had risen, neither of them full yet, but shining brightly enough for Tanis to see tears in Laurana's luminous eyes. He reached out his hands to take her in his arms, but she took a step backwards.

"You may never claim it," she said scornfully, "but you certainly enjoy allowing us to think it!"

Ignoring his outstretched hands, she grabbed a torch from the wall and walked into the darkness beyond the gate of Thorbardin. Tanis watched her leave, watched the light shine on her honey-colored hair, watched her walk, as graceful as the slender aspens of their elven homeland of Qualinesti.

Tanis stood for a moment, staring after her, scratching the thick, reddish beard that no elf on Krynn could grow. Pondering Laurana's last statement, he thought, incongruously, of Kitiara. He conjured up pictures in his mind of Kit's cropped, curly black hair, her crooked smile, her fiery, impetuous temper, and her strong, sensual body—the body of a trained swordswoman, but he discovered to his amazement that now the picture dissolved, pierced by the calm, clear gaze of two slightly slanted, luminous, elven eyes.



Thunder rolled out from the mountain. The shaft that moved the huge stone gate began to turn, grinding the door shut. Tanis, watching it shut, decided he would not go in. "Sealed in a tomb." He smiled, recalling Sturm's words, but there was a shiver in his soul as well. He stood for long moments, staring at the door, feeling its weight settle between him and Laurana. The door sealed shut with a dull boom. The face of the mountain was blank, cold, forbidding.

With a sigh, Tanis pulled his cloak about him and started toward the woods. Even sleeping in the snow was better than sleeping underground. He had better get used to it anyway. The Plains of Dust they would be traveling through to reach Tarsis would probably be choked with snow, even this early in the winter.

Thinking of the journey as he walked, Tanis looked up into the night sky. It was beautiful, glittering with stars. But two gaping black holes marred the beauty. Raistlin's missing constellations.

Holes in the sky. Holes in himself.



After his fight with Laurana, Tanis was almost glad to start on the journey. All the companions had agreed to go. Tanis knew that none of them felt truly at home among the refugees.

Preparations for the journey gave him plenty to think about. He was able to tell himself he didn't care that Laurana avoided him. And, at the beginning, the journey itself was enjoyable. It seemed as if they were back in the early days of fall instead of the beginning of winter. The sun shone, warming the air. Only Raistlin wore his heaviest cloak.

Conversation as the companions walked through the northern part of the Plains was light-hearted and merry, filled with teasing and bantering and reminding each other of the fun they had shared in earlier, happier days in Solace. No one spoke of the dark and evil things they had seen in



the recent past. It was as if, in the contemplation of a brighter future, they willed these things never to have existed.

At night, Elistan explained to them what he was learning of the ancient gods from the Disks of Mishakal, which he carried with him. His stories filled their souls with peace and reinforced their faith. Even Tanis—who had spent a lifetime searching for something to believe in and now that they had found it viewed it with skepticism—felt deep in his soul that he could believe in this if he believed in anything. He wanted to believe in it, but something held him back, and every time he looked at Laurana, he knew what it was. Until he could resolve his own inner turmoil, the raging division between the elven and human inside of him, he would never know peace.

Only Raistlin did not share in the conversations, the merriment, the pranks and jokes, the campfire talks. The mage spent his days studying his spellbook. If interrupted, he would answer with a snarl. After dinner, of which he ate little, he sat by himself, his eyes on the night sky, staring at the two gaping black holes that were mirrored in the mage's black hourglass-shaped pupils.

It was only after several days that spirits began to flag. The sun was obscured by clouds and the wind blew chill from the north. Snow fell so thickly that one day they could not travel at all but were forced to seek shelter in a cave until the blizzard blew itself out. They set double watch at night, though no one could say exactly why, only that they felt a growing sense of threat and menace. Riverwind stared uneasily at the trail they left in the snow behind them. As Flint said, a blind gully dwarf could follow it. The sense of menace grew, the sense of eyes watching and ears listening.

Yet who could it be, out here in the Plains of Dust where nothing and no one had lived for three hundred years?