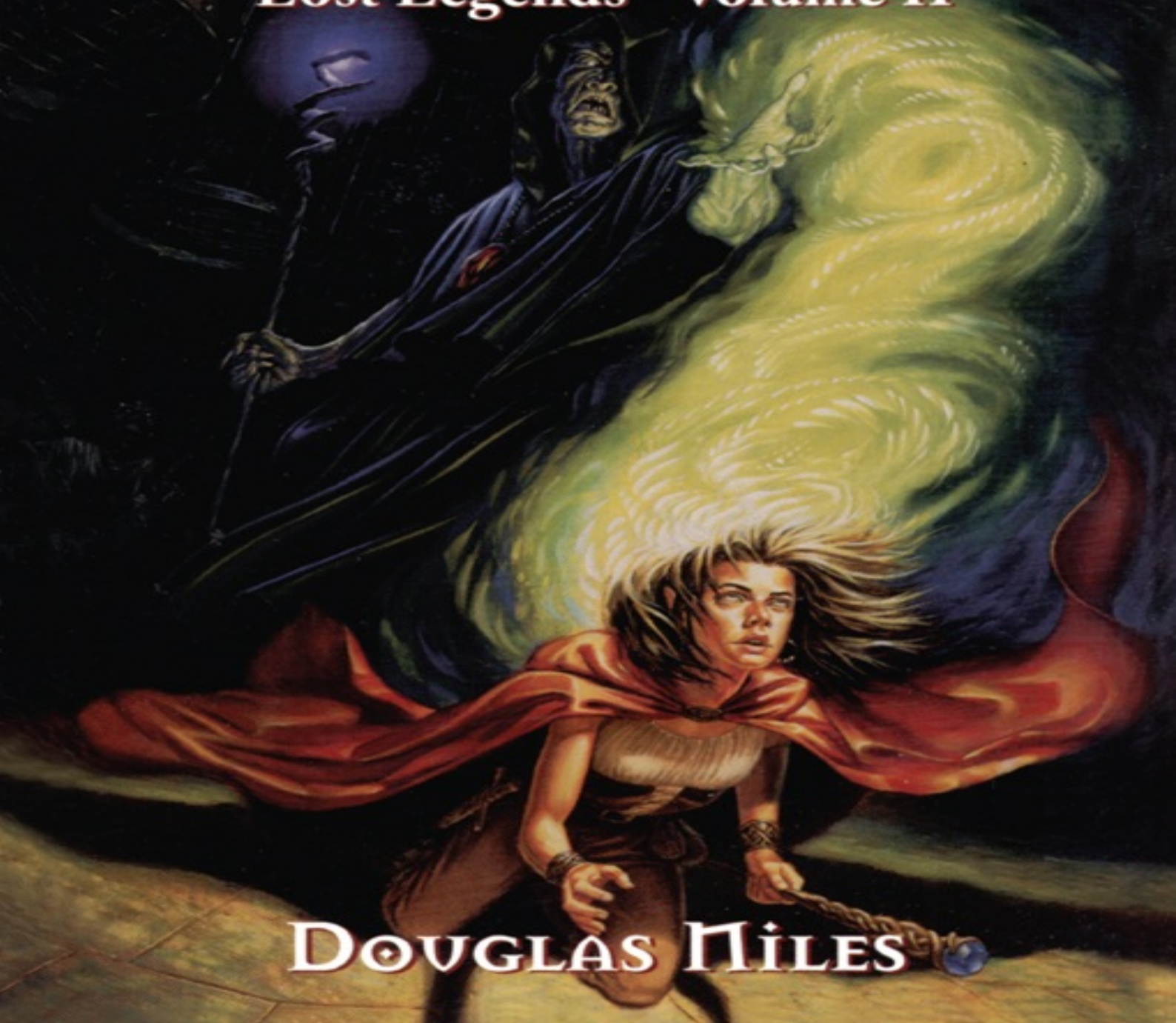


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DRAGONLANCE[®]
Saga

FIST AND ANTILVS REBORN

Lost Legends • Volume II



DOUGLAS NILES

Though Flayzeranyx valued many things, he treasured nothing so much as the skull he had claimed from Skullcap following his battle with the brass dragon.

The dragon didn't know what it was about the bony artifact that made it so compelling to him; he merely understood that it gave him a sense of power and well-being to look upon the object. Now he rose, spreading his wings to add a bit of lift to his gliding leap across the searing rock of the moat. He came to rest before the skull and squatted, staring into those black eyes.

He felt it again, a sensation that had become increasingly common when he regarded the thing. It was a feeling that the skull was trying to talk to him, to communicate something that was terribly important.

“What is it, my skull? Show me ... speak to me!” he urged....



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**Lost Legends
Volume II**

Fistandantilus Reborn

Douglas Niles



Lost Legends: Volume II

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Prologue

The River of Time is eternal, flowing inexorably toward a mysterious destination along a channel gouged by the continuing history of Kryn. A tide broad and stately over the course of decades, centuries, and ages becomes torrential and violent through other stretches of lives, generations, and years. Languishing within murky depths or churning around the obstacles that periodically constrict the flow into an angry cataract, the current progresses—and millions of individual beings entangle, each bringing a tale with its own beginning, middle, and conclusion. Yet each, as well, is a part of the great river, an often indistinguishable mote in the onward rush of time.

It is the historian's task to place these widely disparate truths into context, to illustrate how the mote of a single life must inevitably blend into the great flow. Be it a tale of light or darkness, of great men or small, the historian's pen must record honestly and impartially the perception of the truth that is viewed through said historian's eyes.

Most often the droplet of an individual's story is swept along by the greater flow, contributing its almost imperceptible weight in ways that even the astute chronicler must struggle to perceive. These are the teeming millions of the world, and despite the relative insignificance of each individual, it is their collective mass that gives majesty to the current and power to its flow.

Occasionally, however, a speck of a specific life will develop a momentum of its own, setting a course that will have impetus far beyond its own weight. Such an individual will twist the motes around it, perhaps swirling into a deep eddy, even pulling much of the river into an isolated and powerful orbit. Sometimes it will dip below the surface, vanishing by its appearances, yet in fact creating a powerful vortex, with currents rippling far downstream.

But even such mighty waters, these mortal cataracts and whirlpools, cannot escape the confines of the river. Ultimately they, too, are swept by the relentless, unstoppable current.

that is time, until even the ripples have faded away, vanished as if they had never been.

In a sense, the historian's task is to demonstrate otherwise. He must draw these rivulets up from the past and reproduce them to one who would study the river's channel, who would try to understand even a small segment of the overall course. The diligent chronicler pushes through the murky depths, identifies the key strains, and finds at the bed of the river the firmament that provides the proof.

Of historians who are perceptive and capable of recording the truth there are many, though one in particular comes to mind at present. Of tales worthy of the telling, the same may be said. Though the river is wide, this is a channel of the current that has always held great fascination to all who would hear the history of Krynn, perhaps because this tale concerns mortal who strove constantly to hold the frailties of mortality at bay.

And he very nearly succeeded.

Now I find it fitting that this historian, and this tale, should come together. It is a story of life and death, though not necessarily in that order, and of a man who stirred the River of Time like no one else. His passing, when it became known, was celebrated by all who knew of his villainy and his might. His return to life, conversely, was conceived and executed in secret, and bore with it the seeds of overwhelming terror for the future of the world.

Yet I precede myself—or, rather, I precede the telling. Let it be noted that the river must first be observed in portions upstream from the main channel of our story, segments of time that will place our story in context. Those glimpses, naturally, have been selected by the chronicling historian. He knows, as do I, that the story in fact begins much closer to the great stream's headwaters, and that its currents will ripple farther, into cataracts that remain to be revealed.

But herein lies the heart of the tale.

From the Chronicles of Astinur
Lorekeeper of Krynn



Chapter 1

A Seed of Survival

In the Name of His Excellency Astinus, Lorekeeper of Krynn
Notes Pertaining to events 2 PC-1 PC
Scribed this Fourth Misham, Deepkolt, 369 AC

One of the greatest challenges in recording the story of Fistandantilus arises from the fact that he—and the archmage Raistlin Majere—caused the River of Time to divide for a period into two parallel channels. There are two versions of history, and though in many respects they are identical, in some significant aspects the flowage takes a decidedly different appearance between the two tales.

The divergence occurred a short time before the Cataclysm. In one history, Fistandantilus made preparations for his journey to Istar, where he would forge an alliance with a white-robed priest and cast his mighty spell of time travel. In the other course of the channel, Fistandantilus was mastered by Raistlin Majere, who had traveled from the future for that confrontation. It became the younger man's destiny to escape the Cataclysm, to befriend the priest, and to follow in the steps that (he learned too late) were ordained by destiny.

In either case, one hundred years after the Cataclysm there occurred an epic battle of magical power and violence, and the Dwarfgate War culminated in the massive destruction of Dergoth. In one current of history, Fistandantilus was killed here. In the other, Raistlin was banished to the Abyss—but there, too, it seems likely that the remnant portion of Fistandantilus met a matching end.

I shall focus this consideration of my research upon the time leading up to that confrontation. Raistlin and Fistandantilus were two entities before the melding of their lives by the magic that would so stir the River of Time. While the gods of Krynn and the Kingpriest

of Istar moved ever closer to their inevitable clash, the Tower of Wayreth became the center of magical mastery on Ansalon, and the archmage Fistandantilus rose to the highest pinnacle of his power.

The elder wizard was the black-robed archmage, Master of the Tower of Sorcery, and subsequent to his creation of the time-travel spell—Master of Past and Present as well. He had existed for centuries and scribed spellbooks that unlocked arcane secrets no mage before—or since, with one exception—would ever be able to grasp. Already Fistandantilus was widely known to be an ancient being. Even a study of elven lore must progress to the earliest volumes to predate him. Certainly for a long time prior to the Cataclysm he was the undisputed lord of magic upon Ansalon.

Central to his longevity, we now know, was the parasitical consumption of young lives—specifically, the blood and souls of the most skilled among his apprentices, those who were strong and who bore the seeds of magic deep within them. He harvested them as coldly as any butcher might a hog. The frequency of these cruel and murderous episodes is hard to judge, but it seems likely that he claimed a new apprentice's life at least every couple of decades.

Yet still the young men came to him, perhaps not quite believing in the horror stories they surely must have heard. They were drawn by ambition, knowing that he was the only teacher who could show them the secrets of true magical power. Desperate for the keys to that knowledge and to its attendant might, they traveled from far and wide to seek the great wizard. And indeed, many a black-robed sorcerer emerged from that tutelage with his life, not his soul, intact, progressing to a reign of greatness and high influence in the world.

But there were many who never came out, who gave their lives to the archmage's insatiable hunger for young, vital hearts. And ever did the ancient one remain vibrant with eternal health, vigorous youth, and the greatest magic that the world had ever known.

And this brings us to Raistlin, whose mission has been well documented. In the aftermath of the War of the Lance, he journeyed into the past so that he could learn from, and inevitably challenge, the archmage. He mastered the spellbooks of Fistandantilus and had the advantage of knowing the history that he would attempt to revise. Indeed, one of the ironies of Raistlin's story is that the man who was so determined to change the course of the river found instead that he was trapped into reliving one of the most violent and disastrous segments of the flow.

The contest between Fistandantilus and Raistlin would be a battle with enigmatic results, a cataract of the river that tumbles well beyond the bounds of my current research. However, on one thing, the archmage's notes provide impeccable confirmation. (Incidentally, this also occurs *only* on the historical path involving the confrontation with Raistlin; in the original occurrence, I assume that the life of some unfortunate apprentice was successfully consumed by the archmage.)

In any event, of the preparations made by Fistandantilus immediately before he attempted to devour Raistlin's soul, one sequence must be noted.

Perhaps it was because he sensed the great power of his adversary that he performed the enchantment. Certainly Raistlin was a potential victim who stirred a great hunger in Fistandantilus. At the same time, the villainous sorcerer needed to approach his new conquest with a measure of respect. To this end, he took a precaution prior to his spell that

was unique among the countless castings he had done before.

As usual, the archmage had several apprentices besides the young man of mysterious origins whom he had selected as his victim. The historically astute reader may well be aware that, prior to his soul-devouring ritual, Fistantilus invariably discharged his other apprentices. The unchosen were sent from the tower immediately, with no awareness of how fortunate they had been. It has been documented—by both parties, in fact—that he did this prior to his attack against the disguised Raistlin.

The archmage's own notes detail his precaution, which required the use of a complex enchantment, a spell that he cast upon himself. It is a complicated procedure to understand, similar to the magic jar spell that allows a powerful sorcerer to place his soul, his spirit, his essence, into some sort of object for a period of time, protecting the wizard, as it were, from the vicissitudes of the world.

In the case of Fistantilus, this casting split his essence into an animate and inanimate portion, allowing his mortal self to remain intact, but preserving a precautionary reserve of his entire being. The potion embodied a portion of all his essences—mental, physical, spiritual, and arcane. This enchanted liquid he collected in a silver vial and bestowed upon one of his departing apprentices as a gift. Even at the time, according to the archmage's notes, he was not certain whether or not the magic worked.

Our current tale is not concerned with the history-shaping conflict between Raistlin and the archmage, although later we shall be peripherally concerned with the subsequent events regarding the Dwarfgate War and the convulsion of magic that would shape the mountains called Skullcap. For the time being, instead, we will follow the steps of this discharged apprentice, one Whastryk Kite of Kharolis.

Foryth Tee
In unworthy service to Gilea



Chapter 2

Whastryk Kite

1 PC

First Palast, Reapember

The young magic-user tried to walk softly, to bring his smooth-soled boots soundless against the forest trail. But with each footfall came a whisper of bending grass or the tinny slurp of suction from moist, bare dirt. Once, when he raised his head to look through the brush before him, he carelessly cracked a twig, and the noise was like a lightning bolt stabbing through the silent woods and into his pounding heart.

He told himself that it should not be so, that his fear, his extreme caution, were illogical reactions to a danger that he had by now left safely behind. In fact, it was a threat that was probably imaginary. There would be no pursuit—indeed, he had been sent away from Wayreth by the master of the tower himself, and Fistandantilus was no doubt glad that young Whastryk Kite was gone.

But still he was afraid.

Nervously he cast a glance over his shoulder, along the tangled track of Wayreth Forest. The tower was invisible now, screened by the intervening foliage. That same greenery had parted invitingly before Whastryk, leading him away from the sorcerous spire and its two remaining occupants. The tower, with its arcane legacy and wonderful trove of magic, had been Whastryk Kite's home, as well as his school and the residence of his companions, for several years. Yet abruptly the course of all the apprentices' studies had come to an end. Now, as he suspected that he had left that place behind him forever, he felt a strange mixture of emotions.

Despite the midsummer warmth in the woods, when he thought of the pair of magic-use

who still occupied that arcane spire, the young mage shivered forcefully enough to send ripples shimmering through the smooth silk of his black robe. What powers, he wondered, would be wielded by them before the issue was resolved?

And that resolution, Whastryk had come to suspect, would be the death of the young apprentice, the lone representative from among the archmage's pupils who had been selected to remain.

He shuddered at the thought of ancient Fistantantilus, the lean and wolfish man with the vitality and temperament of a caged feline. Whastryk had seen the hunger so clearly etched in his master's ageless eyes. The archmage craved something precious and vital from the young men who came to study at his table, to learn from his words. He lusted for their youth and vigor, and from one he would claim his very soul.

Whastryk had felt his master's hunger himself, had chilled to the knowledge that the elder's gaze seemed to penetrate to every fiber of his being. The touch of those eyes had been a terrifying sensation, yet strangely exciting and alluring as well.

Even now, as the discharged apprentice hastened away on the forest trail—even now, when he suspected that the chosen one was doomed, would quite possibly be dead before the sun rose on the morrow—Whastryk felt a surge of jealousy, of pure, raw hatred directed at the one who had been selected to remain.

Why had that apprentice, and not Whastryk Kite, been found worthy?

Bitter thoughts raged in the young mage's mind, and he felt again the familiar resentment at the knowledge that in every aspect of life, his lot was unfairly restricted. Orphaned and abandoned as a boy, he had survived on the rough streets of Xak Tsaroth by his wits and eventually by the knack for magic that had persuaded bigger, stronger thugs to leave him alone. Then Fistantantilus had summoned him to the tower, and Whastryk had seen things he could never have imagined. For his own benefit, he had learned to wield his power, an arcane might that would allow him to master many other men and further the causes of the Order of the Black Robe.

And yet he would have given it up for a chance to stay behind, to share the powerful—and undoubtedly lethal—enchantment of his master's greatest spell.

Still, the young mage carried a valuable legacy from the Tower of Wayreth. It was not a treasure in his pouch, a value in steel or even in arcane trinkets. It was the knowledge of magic, the memories of his master's teaching, that he now held in his mind. He was free, and that knowledge would be the key to great power among the world of humankind. Whastryk merely had to choose where he would go and how he would wield that power.

And he also had one memento of his tutelage in the library of Fistantantilus.

The magic-user's hand settled around the silver vial in his belt pouch, the treasure that his master had given him as a parting gift. The liquid within was clear, and his fingers could sense the unnatural coldness through the smooth metal of the tiny jar. He remembered the solemn sense of ceremony with which Fistantantilus had bestowed the treasure upon him.

And once more he wondered, Why me? The archmage had been secretive on that point, telling his young apprentice to save the potion, retaining it for all the years of his life, unless at some point, Whastryk Kite was threatened with imminent and seemingly inevitable death. If he drank the potion at such a time, Fistantantilus had declared, then the magical liquid would insure his survival.

A rumble of thunder trembled through the woods, and the black-clad mage paused. The tiny patches of sky visible between the dense canopy of leaves were invariably blue, and the sky had been cloudless when Whastryk had departed the tower barely two hours earlier. When the deep, resonant noise came again, the man knew: This thunder was born of magic, not nature. The source was the tall tower, the spire of sorcery that lay at the heart of Wayreth Forest.

Light flashed, a sparking glow brighter than the sun, penetrating deep among the trees with a cold, white glare. More thunder smashed, and shivers of force rolled through the ground. Whastryk stepped faster now, trotting, then running along the trail. His earlier regret vanished, washed away by a wave of pure fear that—like the noise and the light—certainly emanated from that distant tower.

Winds lashed through the trees, hot blasts of air that bore none of the moist freshness of a rainstorm. Instead, this was a stinking, sulfurous gale, a wash of putrid breath that pushed him even faster along the trail. Lightning crackled with growing violence, and he shuddered under a clear impression that the sky itself screamed in raw horror. He heard a clatter, then felt a sharp stab of pain against his shoulder as black hailstones rattled through the trees, bouncing and cracking against the ground.

And then he was sprinting like the wind, driven by the force of his own terror. Branches lashed his face, and unnatural gusts tore at his hair, whipped his robe. It seemed that the two magic-users behind him, the tower, the woods, and the very world itself were being torn to pieces. If he slowed even a half pace from his full run, Whastryk sensed that the destruction would extend even to himself.

Finally the woods were gone. Wayreth Forest vanished into the mists over his shoulder, the place of his past. He was surprised to learn, at the first village he came to, that he was in the foothills of the Kharolis Mountains. After all, the magical forest had grown outside the great trading city of Xak Tsaroth when Whastryk had first encountered it. But he had heard that was the way of the enchanted wood. The worthy traveler did not find Wayreth Forest, so much as Wayreth Forest found the worthy traveler.

Now he saw no sign of the woods behind him, and the young mage thought it was good to be removed from the place. He set his sights upon the future, sensing that he would never see that forest again—and the knowledge was more a relief than a fear.



Chapter 3

Ends and Conclusions

*In the Name of His Excellency Astinus, Lorekeeper of Krynn
Notes Pertaining to events 2 PC-1 PC
Scribed this Fourth Misham, Deepkolt, 369 AC*

I have regrettably concluded that, for the most part, the tale of Whastryk Kite is the story of a relatively unremarkable life. He left the Tower of Wayreth and made his way to Haven. (It should be noted that in this he was fortunate; several of the other apprentices who departed at the same time as Whastryk journeyed to Xak Tsaroth and Istar; naturally they perished at either site during the Cataclysm. Apparently Whastryk Kite had better instincts—or information.)

In any event, upon entering the city of Haven, Whastryk took up residence there and prepared to put his magic to use. He established himself with the name of the Black Kite and immediately started building a reputation as a sorcerer to be feared—and one who was willing to perform services, for the right buyer at an adequate price.

Within a short time, of course, Krynn was rocked by the Cataclysm. Haven was spared much of the damage that befell other regions of Ansalon; in fact, the good fortune caused the city to swell with immigrants fleeing from regions that had been sorely wracked.

Never a godly place, Haven eventually became rife with the Seeker priests, purveyors of false religions who pronounced their doctrines on every street corner in the teeming city. However, immediately after the Cataclysm, conditions were terribly unsettled. He who had such power and wielded it to his advantage would be able to gain great influence.

Over the years, the Black Kite became well known in Haven as one who not only had such power, but was also willing to employ that power to serve his own ends. His services were

used by brigands and warlords, by jilted lovers and jealous wives. Some of the city's most powerful nobles paid him handsomely, for no service other than that he left them alone—and that the rich folk could let it be known that the dark wizard was an acquaintance of theirs, not a true friend.

Whastryk Kite modeled himself after his master, and the calling of the Dark Mage suited him. Of course, he was never to be as powerful as Fistantilus, but he was able to wield great influence in the relatively isolated orbit of post-Cataclysmic Haven.

Fortunately the wizard left some rather extensive notes and records regarding those years. I have studied them and reached firm conclusions:

Firstly, Whastryk Kite heard only rumors of the fate befalling the wizard Fistantilus, his former master. It was said that the archmage had been in Istar when the wrath of the gods smote the world. Since there were no reports of his presence anywhere in Ansalon, Whastryk—and the rest of the world—made the not illogical assumption that he had been killed.

For Whastryk, it was enough to be his own master. Even more, he became one of the foremost black-robed magic-users of post-Cataclysmic Kryn. Of Fistantilus he thought only rarely, most often when he held the small silver vial that had been the wizard's parting gift. It is clear from his notes that he did not know what the potion was for; nevertheless, he kept it ready. Occasionally he would examine the clear liquid, sensing its deep enchantment and its abiding might. He always carried it on his person, holding it for the time when he feared that his death might be at hand.

In the later years of his life, Whastryk became the target of many an ambitious hero. There were people who had come to hate the wizard for wrongs he had inflicted, directly or indirectly. Some were bold knights acting alone, while others were bands of simple folk anxious to avenge an evil deed. At least one was a woman, daughter of a merchant Whastryk had destroyed for his failure to offer the mage proper respect.

All of these attackers were killed, usually with great quickness and violence as soon as they passed through the arched entry into the wizard's courtyard. He developed a tactic effective not only for its deadliness, but also for the sense of terror it instilled in potential enemies. Whastryk would cast a spell from his eyes, twin blasts of energy that would strike the victim in the same place, tearing the orbs of vision from his flesh and leaving gory, gaping wounds. Such blinded enemies, if they still presented a threat, were very easy to kill.

The notes reveal in graphic detail that some of the wizard's foes—including the bold and doomed heroine—were only slain following a long period of imprisonment and tortures, mental, physical, and spiritual assault. (Indeed, the details of this suffering may cause even the dispassionate chronicler to weep with sorrow for the victims.)

By this time, the wizard exerted his control over a very significant part of the city—a region that included many prosperous shops and approximately one quarter of Haven's entire area. It was an area ruled by evil, selfishness, and greed, but it was also a place of order and undisputed master. Whastryk collected a great deal of money from those within his orbit, and he commanded the obedience of a great many sword arms.

By thirty years after the Cataclysm, the theocrats were beginning to lay their claims of official rulership of Haven, and Whastryk did nothing to usurp their authority in a visible or ostentatious fashion. Indeed, it is known that he performed many favors, including assassinations, magical disguises, and surreptitious reconnaissance, for the powerful Seeker

priests. No doubt the underhanded use of magic served to awe the populace and enhanced the authority of the corrupt theocrats and their false gods.

And always the wizard's power grew, and his influence spread wide across the world—until, in 37 AC, his writings abruptly ceased.

Though this might be regarded as occurring at the height of Whastryk's influence and power, a careful study of the records arrives at a different conclusion. Indeed, I have discerned that, during the five or six years preceding (say, from 31 AC on), the notations of Whastryk increasingly indicate the effects of advancing age. I see a hint of palsy creeping into what had once been a steady hand, and the last volume of records is shoddily kept, at least in comparison to Whastryk's early notes. Eventually, with no reason given, the notes cease altogether.

Perhaps boredom simply caused the mage to lose interest in his record keeping (a historian's worst nightmare!), or perhaps he met some kind of sudden end that has been lost to the history books. Furthermore, though I have pored over the records from Haven during that and subsequent periods, I have found no mention of the silver vial given to Whastryk by Fistantilus. Whatever the archmage's purposes with that uncharacteristic gift, it seems conclusive that those purposes were thwarted. The vial and its contents, like the life of Whastryk itself, were brought to a terminus in that chaotic city.

Perhaps I shall get to Haven some day to pursue the matter; until then, it seems that there is nothing more to learn.

Foryth Tee
In Research for the Scale of Gilead



Chapter 4

An Unlikely Hero

37 AC

Third Miranor

On the way home from the smithy, Paulus Thwait turned as he always did into the street where he lived. It was more of an alley, he was inclined to admit in moments of honesty, but—more important to him than any outward appearance of status or grandeur—it led the way to the place that he called *home*.

A smile played across his face, brightening the young man's normally intense features as he thought of the wife and baby awaiting him a hundred steps away. He ignored the close quarters of the taverns and tenements pressing from each side, the squalor of Haven that was so rank around him, and allowed his step to be buoyed by the thought of the cramped room that would be warm and aromatic from the cookstove, and by the knowledge that his family would be there, waiting.

It was strange to feel so happy, he thought, remembering that a few years earlier he would have guessed such a life to be as removed from his future as a visit to the farthest of Krynn's three moons. Indeed, how easily he could have fallen into a life of thuggery, playing the role of one of the Black Kite's bullies as so many young men of Haven did. After all, Paulus had proved that he was strong and brave, and keen and steady with his blade. And he had the temper that insured his fighting skills stayed in good practice.

Yet he had talent with his hands and eyes as well, talent that had been recognized by one of the city's premier silversmiths. That artisan, Revrius Frank, had taken the young man as an apprentice, allowed Paulus Thwait's talent to grow through the working of an honest trade.

The brawny apprentice had progressed to journeyman in a surprisingly short time, and

lately Revrius had slyly hinted that he would soon have competition in this city quarter from another master silversmith. Now, making his way home at the end of a long, hard day of work, Paulus felt a flush of pride at the notion, and his pride swelled into a determination that tomorrow he would do an even better job with his metal and his tools.

But even beyond the gratification of his developing craft, the young silversmith had the best reason of all to be happy. It had been nearly two years ago that a caravan of settlers had come through the city, on their way to the good farming country reputed to exist to the south, in Kharolis. Belinda Mayliss, the daughter of one such farmer, had immediately caught the tradesman's eye, an attraction that swiftly proved mutual. The two had been married before Belinda's family had moved on, and now his bride—and, recently, their young, husky baby boy—had given Paulus all the reason he could hope for to work hard, do well, and be happy.

In the quarter of Haven where Revrius Frank maintained his smithy, Paulus was already developing a reputation as a man who could be trusted to perform skilled work. Indeed, for the last week he had been working on his most elaborate project to date: a silver mirror of perfect reflectivity, a sheet of metal hammered thin so as to be easily transportable, in a frame that would be highly pleasing to the eye. Tomorrow he would put the final polish on the piece, which had been commissioned by the most successful garment maker in Haven.

It is safe to presume that, as he walked home this pleasant spring evening, Paulus Thwaite had no inkling of the role he would play as a small but influential mote in the current that makes up the River of Time.

He moved easily up the lane, stepping over the refuse that was scattered in the gutter, skirting the elder hermit who snored noisily, as he did every afternoon, on a small patch of greening grass. Close now, Paulus caught the scents of garlic and pepper, and knew his young wife had found the ingredients for a marvelous stew. The silversmith's stomach growled loudly as he clumped up the steps that led to the narrow balcony outside of their humble lodgings.

"That fat horse merchant tipped me two steel pieces for my work on his bridle," he announced as he burst through the door. Belinda, the babe in her arms, rushed across the room to him, startling Paulus with a gasp of relief as she threw herself against his chest.

Only then did he notice the mysterious figure across the room, in the corner farthest from the fire. It resembled a man cloaked completely in rags of dark cloth, but as he looked closer Paulus felt a shiver of disquiet. Though the stranger seemed to stand upright, its lower reaches vanished into tendrils of mist! It had no legs, nor did it seem to be supported in any way on the floor.

"It came here a moment ago!" Belinda declared in a rush of fright. "Just appeared—in the corner, where it is now."

"Did it harm you? Threaten you?" His voice choked as Paulus looked at the thing, fear and fury mingling in his emotions.

"No, nor young Dany. It just stayed there, as if it's waiting for something."

Paulus was a brave man, but he knew that it was only sensible to fear magic and the supernatural, both of which seemed well represented by the disembodied figure that now swirled threateningly toward the middle of the tiny room. But this was *his* home, and the knowledge brought courage and determination to the fore.

“What do you want?” the silversmith demanded in a voice thick with anger. All his brawler’s past came flooding back, and he crouched, fists clenching at his side.

“Two steel pieces will be an adequate start,” hissed the stranger in a voice that reminded the silversmith of water rolling at a steady boil.

“Why should I pay you?”

“Because you wish to live, to see your family survive, and to ply your trade in my city.”

“I am doing all that now.” With great effort, the smith restrained himself from striking the apparition.

“Ah, but for how long? That is the question every mortal dreads to answer, is it not?”

“Go away. Leave my home!”

“I will take the steel for now,” insisted the ghostly interloper.

“You will take nothing!”

“Hah! You will pay, as do they all. You will be in my master’s thrall from this day forward. And if you do not give steel, then I claim by fee in dearer coin!”

Infuriated, the young man attacked the figure, only to find that his fist punched through the cowl of black, cold air. He felt a chill of fear, but in his anger, he flailed wildly, both hands swinging through the intangible form. The vaporous messenger slipped past him in a hissing spoor of gas, a sound punctuated by a manic, cackling laugh.

Belinda screamed as the insidious vapor swirled around her and the squalling baby. With a whoosh of wind, the gaseous cloud swept the child out of her arms. “You *will* obey. And to be certain, I will keep the child—one year, to begin with.”

The ghostly vision danced laughingly away as Paulus lunged after his son. “After that time you *might* get him back. And if you come after him, know that you shall be struck blind, and he will be killed.”

With a gust of wind, the ghost whirled away, carrying the baby through an opened window and out of sight in the darkened skies.

The pair charged out the door, but already the apparition—and the child—had vanished into the night air.

“Where did they go?” The young mother’s question was an anguished wail. “Where did the thing take my baby?”

Paulus, frantic with grief and fear, knew the answer.

“The Black Kite!” He whispered the exclamation, as all citizens of Haven whispered when they mentioned the name of the feared and hated wizard. “This was *his* work!”

“But why did he come here—why *us*?” Belinda turned to him, seizing him by the shoulder. “And why would he take Dany?”

“He wants me—he wants power over me,” Paulus declared, stunned by the realization. “I should have expected this. He holds all this corner of Haven in his thrall.”

“You can’t matter—not to him!”

“I can.” Paulus was beginning to understand. “I know that Revrius Frank is forced to pay him, though he never speaks of it. Indeed, he’s ashamed of the fact. But the Black Kite takes his steel and leaves him otherwise alone.”

“Then why did he take Dany?”

“Because I was a fool,” Paulus admitted, slumping in dejection. “I should have paid him.”

“No!” Belinda was suddenly adamant. “It’s more than that. He *fears* you. He knows you

might stand up to him.”

His wife continued, speaking with firm conviction—and affection. “He knows what stubborn, bullheaded fool you are, and he knows the reputation of your fists.”

Paulus flushed with shame, not wanting to recollect the part of his life spent brawling and fighting, but he knew that she was right.

“I won’t pay him,” he vowed. “But I’ll get Dany back for us, and I’ll see that Whastryk Kite is the one who pays.”

“But how can you? You heard him. You’d be struck blind as soon as you try to go in!”

“I know, but I have a plan.” Or at least, he amended privately, I *will* have a plan. Indeed Paulus was no longer an impetuous man. Yet his son was gone, and he was certain that if he was going to save him, he would have to act fast.

Leaving his wife with a promise that he would be careful, Paulus went quickly to the smithy of Revrius Frank. There he spent several hours polishing to a high sheen the mirror of pure silver that he had been crafting for the garment maker. The reflective metal had been hammered so thin that it was of very light weight, easily transportable, and perfectly suited to the silversmith’s plan. Finally he attached a leather handle to the mirror’s back, ignoring the deep gouges he scored in the once immaculate frame.

Next the silversmith girded on a sword, suspending the weapon from his own belt, which was secured by a sturdy silver buckle of his own design. The metal clasp represented most of the saved wealth of his young family, and it seemed appropriate that he wore it now, when he went to fight for that family’s very survival.

It was a grimly determined Paulus Thwait who started through the streets toward the wizard’s home, which was a great mansion and compound that occupied a full block of the city. Black towers jutted from beyond a stone wall. The barrier was breached only in one place, by an arched gateway, an opening wide enough to allow passage of a large carriage.

The reputation of the place was well known to everyone in Haven. There was no gate that ever closed across the entryway, but anyone who had entered there with hostile intention had been met by the wizard, then struck blind by those searing darts that emanated from his eyes. Once sightless, the victim was usually captured or killed. Those who had been taken prisoner invariably vanished forever from the ken of the rest of humankind.

“Whastryk Kite! I demand the return of my son!”

Paulus loudly announced his presence, and then made as though to enter the low archway in the gatehouse wall. Here he waited in the shadow underneath the arch, watching the great door of the house.

In moments the door swung wide, and something black swirled forward with impossible haste. The figure was cloaked heavily, its appearance blurred like the ghostly apparition, but Paulus knew this was the wizard, the Black Kite’s speed clearly enhanced by some arcane spell. The silversmith took care to keep his eyes low, away from his enemy’s face.

“Fool!” cried Whastryk Kite, in a sharper, more immediate version of the voice that had bubbled from the legless visitor. “You dare to challenge me, silversmith? Know that your child, and your bride, shall pay!”

The laugh turned to a sneer. “But take comfort that you will not have to witness the suffering!”

Paulus still did not look at his enemy. Instead, he held the mirror before his face and

stepped forward as he heard the mage bark sharp, guttural words of magic.

Crimson light flashed in the courtyard, and the silversmith heard a wail of anguish. Now he drew his weapon, dropped the mirror, and charged.

The wizard known as the Black Kite was reeling backward, both hands clutching the bleeding wounds that were his eye sockets. Paulus's boots thudded on the pavement as he rushed closer, and he raised the sword for a single, killing strike.

Then the man saw the mage, with his left hand, pull a small silver vial from a pouch at his side. Ignoring the danger and the blood pouring down his face, Whastryk tossed back his head and instantly swallowed the vial's contents in the face of Paulus's attack.

A moment later the silversmith's sword cut through the wizard's cowled hood, slicing deep into his brain. The Black Kite stiffened and toppled heavily to the ground, where he lay motionless in a spreading pool of blood.

The bold young silversmith stepped back only far enough to keep the sticky liquid from his boots. After a minute, he probed with his sword, making certain that the wizard was truly dead.

Then he went into the house to look for his child.



Chapter 5

Further Evidence

Scribed In Haven

371 AC

To my mentor and inspiration, Falstar Kane

As I had hoped, Esteemed Master, a chance to study the local records has allowed me to penetrate closer to the truth. To wit: I have learned of the fate of the wizard Whastryk Kite.

The tale was yielded up from the depths of Haven's oldest records. He did, in fact, die in 37 AC, killed by one of the citizens of this wretched city, a silversmith whose son the Black Kite had kidnapped. (The man's infant son was found, unharmed, within the magic-user's stronghold.)

As to the potion given to Whastryk Kite by Fistantantilus some thirty-eight years earlier, nothing is revealed by these records. It seems clear that, whether or not the magic was imbibed by Whastryk in his last moments, the enchantment had no effect on the outcome of the fight. The wizard was unequivocally slain; indeed, his passing was cause for more than a few celebrations.

Of the silversmith and his family a little more is known. The man became a hero for a short time: His quest had regained the baby, and an entire quarter of Haven was able to emerge from the shadow of the evil wizard's reign. Reputedly, there was enough gratitude among the merchants and tradesfolk to cause them to pay the young couple a handsome stipend.

Enriched by the rewards, the pair and their son removed to a small village in the countryside. There it is said that the baby grew to manhood, well versed in the tale of his father's heroism. Beyond that reference, however, the line disappears from view, offering no more

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