

A GUILE OF DRAGONS

JAMES ENGE

A GUILLE OF DRAGONS

» A TOURNAMENT OF SHADOWS | BOOK ONE «



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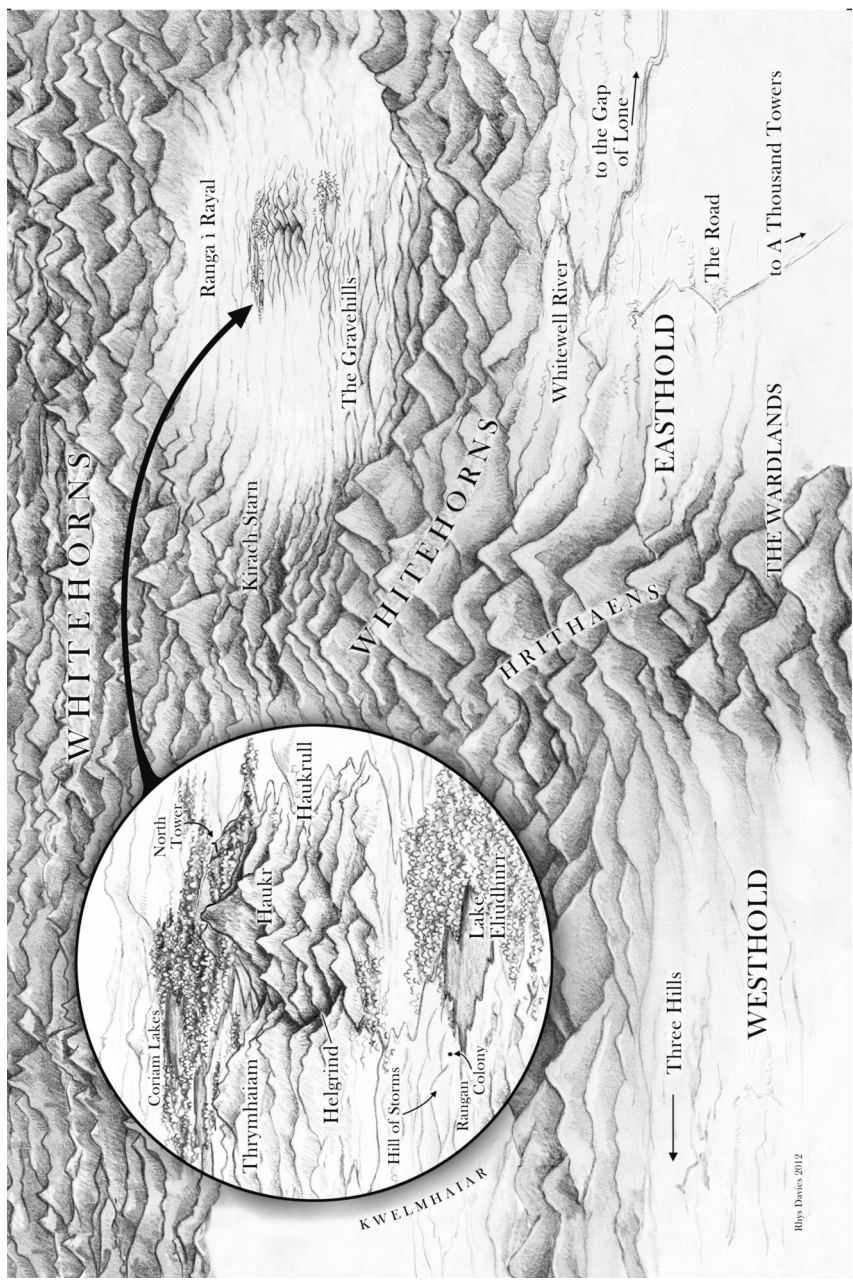
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To Patrick,
who deserves a book of real history but instead gets this.

*Laudato si, mi Signore, per frate Focu,
per lo quale ennallumini la nocte:
ed ello è bello et incundo et robustoso et forte.*



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The Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* is quoted from the translation by David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (revised by Howard A. Johnson), (Princeton, 1971).

The quotation for Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* is from from David Magarshack's translation.

All translations from the Dwarvish and Wardic in the text are from H. N. Emrys' magisterial commentary on Von Brauch's *Liber Glaucus* (Euphemia State University Press, 1952). They are used here by gracious permission of her estate.



CONTENTS

PART ONE: ALL SUCH ENEMIES

- Chapter One: In a Dark Wood
- Chapter Two: Conversations in Broceliande
- Chapter Three: The Sea of Worlds
- Chapter Four: The Witness Stone
- Chapter Five: Tyr's Grasp

PART TWO: UNDER THE GUARD

- Chapter Six: Earno Goes North
- Chapter Seven: Knife
- Chapter Eight: Settlement
- Chapter Nine: Fire and Thunder

PART THREE: ENVOY TO DRAGONS

- Chapter Ten: The Deep Roads
- Chapter Eleven: Challenge
- Chapter Twelve: Maijarra
- Chapter Thirteen: Voices

PART FOUR: AGAINST EVERYTHING

- Chapter Fourteen: Control
- Chapter Fifteen: Guardians
- Chapter Sixteen: Tunglskin
- Chapter Seventeen: Under the Mountains
- Chapter Eighteen: Guile

EPILOGUE: CYMBALS**APPENDICES:**

- A. The Lands of Laent in the Ontilian Interregnum
- B. The Gods of Laent
- C. Calendar and Astronomy
- D. The Wardlands and the Graith of Guardians

The day of wrath, that day
will shatter the centuries in fire.

—*Dies Irae*



PART ONE

ALL SUCH ENEMIES

I have the courage, I believe, to doubt everything: I have the courage, I believe, to fight with everything; but I have not the courage to know anything, not the courage to possess, to own anything. Most people complain that the world is so prosaic, that life is not like romance, where opportunities are always so favorable. I complain that life is not like romance, where one had hard-hearted parents, and nixies and trolls to fight, and enchanted princesses to free. What are all such enemies, taken together, compared to the pale, bloodless, tenacious nocturnal shapes with which I fight, and to whom I give life and substance?

—Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*



CHAPTER ONE

IN A DARK WOOD

The Two Powers hated everything, each other most of all. When Torlan said, “Yes,” Zahkaar said, “No,” and when Torlan said, “I meant no, ha ha ha,” Zahkaar said, “I meant yes,” and did not laugh. It made their conversations tedious, but they were not aware of it: tedium was not something they could experience.

The Two Powers pervaded the universe; so it was written in the holy books of the Anhikh sorcerer-priests. Those-who-know, the fratricidal fraternity of magical adepts, gave them a more local habitation, in the accursed forest of Tychar, Laent’s dark-blue poisonous heart.

This is the history of the universe, according to the Anhikh religion of the Two Powers. In the beginning, there was nothing. Then one of the Two Powers came into being (some say it was Torlan, the power of Fate; some say it was Zahkaar, the power of Chaos—wars have been fought over this important issue). Its being naturally summoned its anti-being into existence, and they began to struggle. Time and the universe and everything in it is a consequence of that struggle. In the end, one of the Powers will vanquish the other and time and the universe and everything in it will be swept away in that unending victory.

Those-who-know do not generally believe this. But there was no denying the existence of the Two Powers, nor their dreadful if ill-defined abilities, and sorcerers of every stripe of opinion generally gave them a wide berth. “Being an atheist is no protection,” as Guelph the Many-Minded remarked on his scaffold, “if a god decides to believe in you.”

Today, on the first day of the new year, the two gods had decided to believe in someone.

"Ambrosius," said Torlan, the power of Fate.

"Ambrosius," disagreed Zahkaar, the power of Chaos.

"We hate him," Torlan said.

"Hate," agreed Zahkaar reluctantly, then added, "I hated him first."

"Liar. Liar."

"You're the liar."

"All my decrees are true and eternal."

"True and eternal *lies*."

So the long day wore on. They enjoyed, insofar as they could enjoy anything, when they could disagree about something they agreed on. It made the inevitable cooperation less repugnant to their natures.

But the new quarrel, added to their endless ancient quarrel, did not stop them from executing the resolution arising from their clashing wills. They both hated Ambrosius. He would suffer for inspiring them to agree on anything.