

THE
DUSK
WATCHMAN

ALSO BY TOM LLOYD

THE STORMCALLER

BOOK ONE OF THE TWILIGHT REIGN

THE TWILIGHT HERALD

BOOK TWO OF THE TWILIGHT REIGN

THE GRAVE THIEF

BOOK THREE OF THE TWILIGHT REIGN

THE RAGGED MAN

BOOK FOUR OF THE TWILIGHT REIGN

THE
DUSK
WATCHMAN

*BOOK FIVE OF THE
TWILIGHT REIGN*

TOM LLOYD



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For Ella Louise Wright

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

- Abay, General Hym**—general of the Knights of the Temples and member of its ruling council
- Aels, Counsel Mirani**—Vanach Commissar of the Fourth Enlightenment
- Afasin**—White-eye general of the Knights of the Temples, ruler of Mustet and member of its ruling council
- Alterr**—Goddess of the Night Sky and Greater Moon, member of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon
- Amah, Suzerain Duril**—Deceased Farlan nobleman, died at battle of Chir Plains
- Amah, Suzerain Koshir**—Farlan nobleman, uncle of Duril Amah
- Amavoq**—Goddess of the Forest, patron of the Yeetatchen, member of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon
- Amber**—A Menin major in the Cheme Third Legion
- Antern, Count Opress**—Narkang nobleman and advisor to King Emin
- Anyar, Duke Heyl**—ruler of Sautin
- Aracnan**—Deceased Demi-God, first son of Death
- Ardela**—Farlan devotee of the Lady, Legana’s companion
- Arek, General Kontor**—Menin general, commander of the Fourth Army
- Aryn Bwr**—Battle name of the last Elven king, who led their rebellion against the Gods. His true name has been excised from history
- Ashain, Coternin**—Narkang mage
- Azaer**—A shadow
- Bahl**—Deceased Lord of the Farlan; Chosen of Nartis before Lord Isak
- Belarannar**—Goddess of the Earth, member of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon, once patron of the Vukotic tribe
- Bessarei, General Saraventole**—General of the Narkang Kingsguard
- Beyn, Ignas**—Deceased member of the Brotherhood
- Bissen**—Mage in the employ of Natai Escral, Duchess of Byora
- Carasay, Sir Cerse**—Colonel of the Tirah Palace Guard Legions
- Carel (Carefolden), Marshal Betyn**—Farlan nobleman, mentor, friend and former commander of Lord Isak’s Personal Guard
- Cedei, Herred**—Member of the Brotherhood

- Celao, Lord**—Litse white-eye, Chosen of Ilit and ruler of the Ismess quarter of the Circle City
- Cerrat, Jeco**—Legion Chaplain of the Ghosts, raised directly from novitiacy by the posthumous order of Lord Bahl
- Certinse, Knight-Cardinal Horel**—Commander of the Knights of the Temples, younger brother of Suzerain Tildek, Farlan by birth
- Certinse, High Cardinal Varn**—Deceased Farlan cleric. Third son of the Tildek Suzerainty, younger brother of Suzerain Tildek, Knight-Cardinal Certinse and Duchess Lomin
- Certinse, Duke Karlat**—Deceased Farlan nobleman, former ruler of Lomin, nephew of Suzerain Tildek
- Cetarn, Shile**—Deceased mage from Narkang
- Chaist, Duke**—Ruler of Embere, Member of the Knights of the Temples
- Coran**—Deceased white-eye bodyguard of King Emin Thonal of Narkang
- Cotterin, Suzerain Piranei**—Narkang nobleman
- Dacan, Priesan**—Vanach Commissar of the Fifth Enlightenment and member of the ruling Sanctum
- Daima**—A witch of Llehden
- Daken, General (the Mad Axe)**—White-eye from Canar Fell, a General of the Narkang Army and Marshal of Inchets, aligned to the Litanian Trickster, an Aspect of Larat
- Danva, Suzerain Woral**—Deceased Farlan nobleman, suzerain-in-regent for his infant nephew
- Danva, Suzerain Wattan**—Farlan nobleman, son of Woral Danva
- Darass, Prefect Shor**—Vanach Commissar of the Fifth Enlightenment and, Overseer of Toristern Settlement
- Dashain (Dash)**—Second-in-command of the Brotherhood
- Dass**—Carastar mercenary
- Dassai, Marshal Canerin**—Narkang nobleman and colonel of the Green Scarves
- Death**—Chief of the Gods and head of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon
- Dechem**—Chetse champion from the Eastern Desert
- Dedessen**—A minor daemon
- Derager, Gavai**—Wife of a Byoran wine merchant, a Farlan agent
- Derager, Lell**—Wine merchant from Byora and Farlan agent
- Derenin, Suzerain**—Narkang nobleman, lord of Moorview Castle
- Derral, Captain Kinen**—Soldier from the Circle City, member of the Knights of the Temples

- Dev, General Chate**—Chetse general and Commander of the Ten Thousand
- Doranei, Ashin**—A member of the Brotherhood
- Dorom, Colonel**—A Menin officer
- Ebarn, Fei**—A battle-mage from Narkang
- Echer, High Cardinal**—Deceased Farlan cleric and leader of the cardinal branch of the Cult of Nartis
- Ehla**—The name Lord Isak is permitted to use for the witch of Llehden
- Eleil, Cardinal Luth**—Deceased priest of Ilit from Ismess, member of the Knights of the Temples, former head of the Serian in the Circle City, then deputy of the Devout Congress
- Endine, Tomal**—Narkang mage in the employ of King Emin
- Escral, Duchess Natai**—Ruler of the Byora quarter of the Circle City
- Escral, Duke Ganas**—Deceased husband of Natai Escral
- Etesia**—Goddess of Lust, one of the three linked Goddesses—with Triena, Goddess of Romantic Love, and Kantay, Goddess of Longing—who together cover all the aspects of love
- Farlan, Prince Kasi**—Farlan prince during the Great War, in whose image white-eyes were created and after whom the lesser moon was named
- Farray, Sepesian**—Vanach Commissar of the Fourth Enlightenment
- Fate**—Deceased Goddess of Luck, also known as the Lady, killed by Aracnan
- Fernal**—a Demi-God living in Llehden, son of Nartis and nominated by Isak to be his successor as Lord of the Farlan
- Fershin, Horman**—Farlan wagon-driver, father to Lord Isak
- Firnin, Camba**—Specialist mage from Narkang
- Firrin**—A member of the Brotherhood
- Fordan, Suzerain Leren**—Farlan nobleman, died at the Battle of Chir Plains
- Fordan, Suzerain Karad**—Farlan nobleman, son of Leren Fordan
- Forrow, Ame**—A member of the Brotherhood and Coran's replacement as King Emin's bodyguard
- Frost**—Nickname of a Menin nobleman
- Fynner, Chaplain**—Priest of Nartis from Lomin and chaplain of the Knights of the Temples
- Galasara**—Elven poet from before the Great War
- Garalden, Sergeant**—Soldier in charge of a squad in King Emin's Narkang Army.
- Garash, High Priest Kel**—Priest of Belarannar from Narkang, member of the Knights of the Temples and head of the Devout Congress
- Gaur, General**—Beastman warrior from the Waste, former commander of the Third Army and most trusted aide of the former Menin lord

- Genedel**—A dragon
- Gesh**—Litse white-eye, Chosen of Ilit and Krann to Lord Celao, First Guardian of the Library of Seasons
- Gittin, Colonel**—Officer of the Knights of the Temples from Mustet
- Gort, General Jebehl**—Deceased general of the Knights of the Temples and member of its ruling council
- Govin, Keyt**—Menin mage, adept of Larat and part of Larim's coterie
- Grast, Deverk**—Infamous former Lord of the Menin
- Grisat**—Mercenary-turned-penitent of Ushull in the Circle City
- Haysh (The Steel Dancer)**—Aspect of Karkarn, one of several Aspects linked to a specific style of fighting taught in training temples prevalent among the Menin
- Hesh, Isalail**—Litse boy, son of a carpenter in Byora
- Hirta**—Female member of the Brotherhood
- Holtai, Tasseran**—Narkang mage and scryer
- Horotain, Priesan**—Vanach Commissar of the Fifth Enlightenment and member of the Sanctum
- Horshen, Commissar**—Vanach commissar of the Second Enlightenment
- Hulf**—Dog belonging to Isak
- Ifarana**—Goddess of Life and once member of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon until falling at the Last Battle
- Ileil, Child Soisa**—Litse inhabitant of Byora and follower of Ruhen
- Ilit**—God of the Wind, patron of the Litse tribe and member of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon
- Ilumene**—A former member of the Brotherhood, now disciple of Azaer
- Introl, Tila**—Deceased Farlan political advisor to the Lords Isak and Fernal; fiancée of Count Vesna
- Isak**—~~Deceased~~ white-eye, former Lord of the Farlan, Duke of Tirah and Chosen of Nartis
- Istelian, Child**—Byoran member of Ruhen's Children
- Jachen, (Major Jachen Ansayl)**—Commander of Lord Isak's personal guard, former mercenary
- Jackdaw (Prior Corci)**—Former monk of Vellern
- Jailer of the Dark**—Dragon that fought the Gods during the Age of Myths and lost. Too powerful for them to completely kill, it was chained to the doorway to Death's throne room on the lower slope of Ghain
- Jeil**—Farlan ranger assigned to Lord Isak's Personal Guard
- Jesters, the**—Four brothers, sons of Death, all Demi-Gods and Raylin mercenaries

- Kadin, Major Sessero**—Officer of the Knights of the Temples
- Kantay**—Goddess of Longing, one of the linked Goddesses—with Etesia, Goddess of Lust and Triena, Goddess of Romantic Love—who together cover all the aspects of love, sometimes referred to as Queen of the Unrequited
- Kao**—Berserker Aspect of Karkarn
- Karkarn**—God of War, patron of the Menin tribe and member of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon
- Kayel, Sergeant Hener**—The alias used by Ilumene in the Circle City
- Kervar, Quartermaster-General Pelay**—Farlan Quartermaster-General of the Farlan Army
- Kestis, Commissar**—Vanach Commissar of the Third Enlightenment
- Kirl, Horsemistress Lay**—Deceased Menin auxiliary, attached to the Cheme Third Legion
- Kitar**—Goddess of Harvest and Fertility, member of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon
- Kosotern, Captain**—Member of the Knights of the Temples from Mustet
- Koteer**—Demi-God and eldest brother of the Jesters, a son of Death
- Lahk, General**—Farlan white-eye, commander of the forces in Tirah and a marshal of the Tirah-Tebran border district
- Larassa**—Deceased Farlan caravan driver, mother of Isak Stormcaller
- Larat**—God of Magic & Manipulation, member of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon
- Larim, Lord Shotein**—Menin white-eye mage, Lord of the Hidden Tower and Chosen of Larat
- Legana**—Farlan Mortal-Aspect of the Lady, formerly a devotee and former agent of Chief Steward Lesarl
- Lehm, Suzerain Preter**—Farlan nobleman
- Lesarl, Chief Steward Fordan**—Principal advisor to the Lord of the Farlan
- Leshi**—Farlan Ascetite soldier, attached to Lord Isak's Personal Guard
- Litania (the Trickster)**—Aspect of Larat
- Lomin, Duchess Feya**—Deceased Farlan noblewoman, wife of Koren Lomin, mother to Duke Karlart Certinse, sister to Cardinal Certinse, Knight-Cardinal Certinse and Suzerain Tildek
- Lomin, Duke Koren**—Deceased Farlan nobleman and former ruler of Lomin
- Lomin, Duke Belir Ankremmer**—Farlan nobleman and ruler of Lomin, bastard of the previous duke
- Lopir, General**—Narkang general

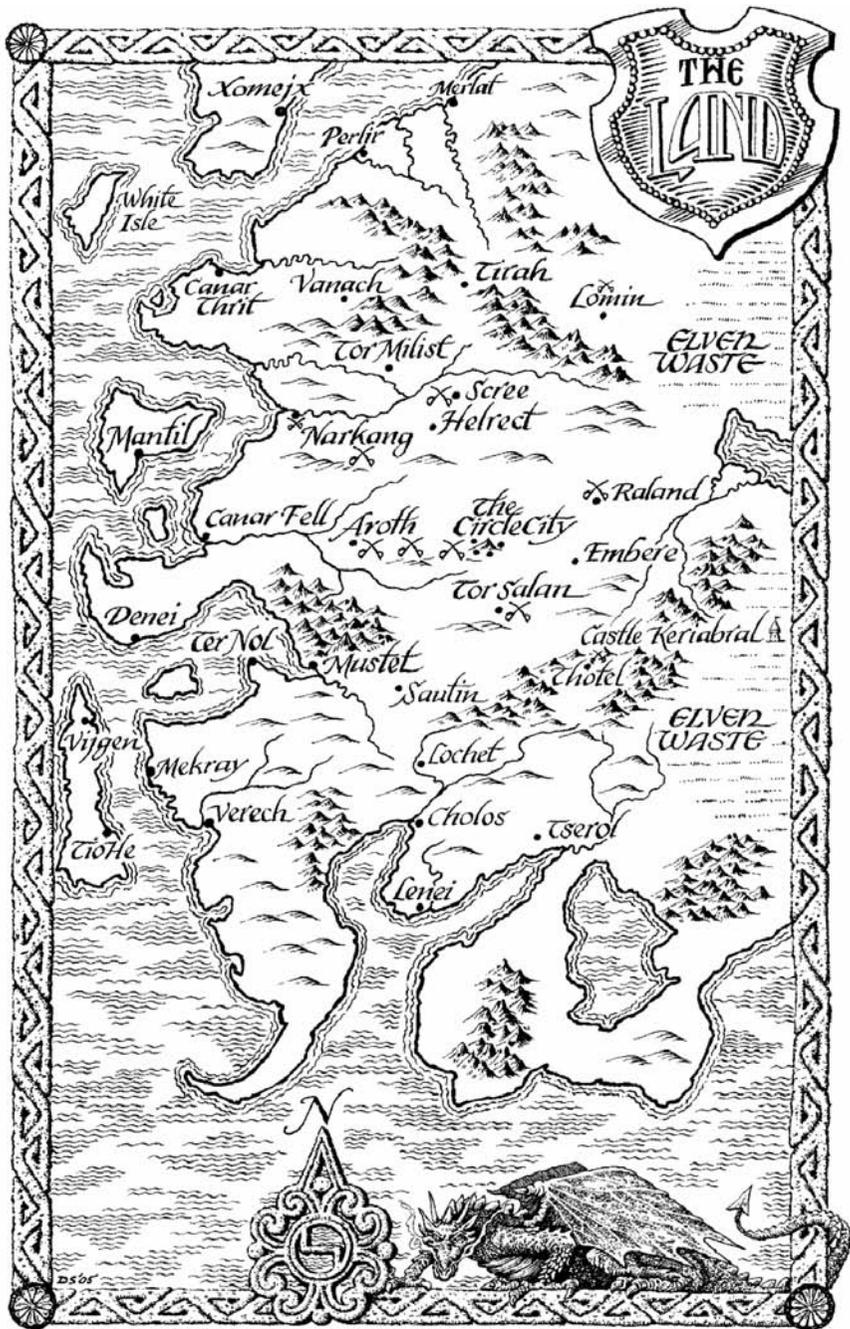
- Luerce**—Byoran, first among Ruhen's Children
- Macove, Count Perel**—Farlan nobleman and member of the Brethren of the Sacred Teachings
- Malich, Cheliss**—Deceased mage from Embere who led the expedition to Castle Keriabral, father of Cordein Malich and tutor to Morghien
- Malich, Cordein**—Deceased necromancer from Embere
- Maram Boatman**—The mysterious entity that patrols the River Maram between Ghain and the home of daemons, Ghenna
- Marn (ab Codor ab Veir)**—A Harlequin
- Mekir, Count Terman**—Farlan nobleman from Lomin
- Menax, Sergeant**—Menin sergeant commanding Amber's guards
- Mihn (ab Netren ab Felith)**—Failed Harlequin, now Lord Isak's bodyguard and dubbed "The Grave Thief" by the witch of Llehden
- Morghien**—A drifter of Embere descent, known as the man of many spirits
- Nai**—Former acolyte to the deceased necromancer Isherin Purn
- Nartis**—God of the Night, Storms and Hunters. Patron of the Farlan tribe and member of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon
- Nostil, Prince Velere**—Aryn Bwr's heir, first owner of the Skull of Ruling, assassinated during the Great War
- Nyphal**—Goddess of Travellers
- Osir, High Priest Beras**—High Priest of Death and member of the Ruling Council of the Knights of the Temples
- Ozhern**—Undead mercenary, leader of the Legion of the Damned
- Peness**—Mage from the Byora quarter of the Circle City
- Perforren, Captain Halier**—Farlan officer of the Knights of the Temples, aide to the Knight-Cardinal
- Pettir, Swordmaster Korpel**—Farlan soldier who succeeded Swordmaster Kerin as Commander of the Swordmasters and Knight-Defender of Tirah
- Purn, Isherin**—Deceased Menin necromancer, once apprenticed to Cordein Malich
- Rojak**—Deceased minstrel originally from Embere who died in Scree only to reappear in Venn's shadow, first among Azaer's disciples
- Ruhen**—The name taken by Azaer as a mortal
- Saranay**—Agent of Ilumene's and servant of Azaer
- Saroc, Suzerain Fir**—Farlan nobleman and member of the Brethren of the Sacred Teachings
- Saroc, Scion Intonay**—Farlan nobleman, teenage heir of Suzerain Saroc
- Sebe (Sebetin)**—Deceased member of the Brotherhood, also the name Isak uses when in Vanach

- Sechach, High Priest Usech**—High Priest of Tsatach and member of the Ruling Council of the Knights of the Temples
- Seliasei**—Minor Aspect of Vasle that now inhabits Morghien
- Shanas**—Young devotee of the Lady from south of Aroth
- Shanatin, Witchfinder Otei**—Member of the Knights of the Temples from Akell and servant of Azaer
- Shinir**—Farlan Ascetite agent attached to Lord Isak's Personal Guard
- Shotir**—God of Healing and Forgiveness.
- Soldier, the**—One of the five Aspects of Death known as the Reapers
- Sorolis, Priesan Estess**—Vanach Commissar of the Fifth Enlightenment, Anointed First of the Sanctum and effective ruler of Vanach
- Sourl, Cardinal**—Ruler of the Akell quarter of the Circle City and member of Ruling Council the Knights of the Temples
- , **Scion Kohrad**—Deceased Menin white-eye, son of the former lord
- , **Duke**—Menin white-eye, former Lord of the Menin
- , **Marsay**—stillborn younger sister of Major Amber
- Tachan, Captain Choes**—Member of the Knights of the Temples originally from Lochet
- Tebran, Suzerain Kehed**—Deceased Farlan nobleman
- Tebran, Scion Pannar**—Farlan nobleman, son of Kehed Tebran
- Thonal, King Emin**—King of Narkang and the Three Cities
- Thonal, Gennay**—Deceased elder sister of King Emin
- Thonal, Queen Oterness**—Queen of Narkang and the Three Cities
- Thonal, Prince Sebetin**—Son of King Emin and Queen Oterness
- Tillen, Captain**—Officer of the Knights of the Temples
- Timonas, Sergeant**—Witchfinder of the Knights of the Temples from Akell
- Tiniq**—Farlan ranger and General Lahk's twin brother, member of Lord Isak's personal guard
- Torl, Suzerain Karn**—Farlan nobleman and member of the Brethren of the Sacred Teachings
- Tremal, Harlo**—Member of the Brotherhood
- Triena**—Goddess of Romantic Love and Fidelity, one of the three linked Goddesses—with Etesia, Goddess of Lust and Kantay, Goddess of Longing—who together cover all the aspects of love
- Tsatach**—God of Fire and the Sun, patron of the Chetse tribe and member of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon
- Vasle**—God of Rivers and Inland Seas
- Veil, Arin**—Member of the Brotherhood

- Vener, General Telith**—Member of the Knights of the Temples and ruler of Raland
- Venn (ab Teier ab Pirc)**—Former Harlequin, now disciple of Azaer
- Verliq, Arasay**—Celebrated mage and academic, killed by the last Menin lord
- Vesna, Evanelial**—Farlan soldier and Mortal-Aspect of Karkarn called the Iron General, once Count of Anvee
- Vrerr, Duke Sarole**—Ruler of Tor Milist
- Vres, Hesper**—Village headman in Tarafain
- Vrest**—God of the Beasts and member of the Upper Circle of the Pantheon, formerly an Aspect of Veren before Veren's death
- Vrill, Duke Anote**—Menin white-eye general
- Vukotic, Princess Araia**—Second of the Vukotic children, cursed with vampirism after the Last Battle
- Vukotic, Prince Feneyaz**—Third of the Vukotic children, cursed with vampirism after the Last Battle
- Vukotic, Prince Koezh**—Ruler of the Vukotic tribe, cursed with vampirism after the Last Battle
- Vukotic, King Manayaz**—Former ruler of the Vukotic tribe and ally of Aryn Bwr who died during the Great War
- Vukotic, Prince Vorizh**—Fourth of the Vukotic children, cursed with vampirism after the Last Battle and subsequently driven insane
- Vukotic, Princess Zhia**—Youngest of the Vukotic family, cursed with vampirism after the Last Battle
- Wentersorn, Edelay**—Mercenary battle-mage from Akell
- Wither Queen, the**—One of the five Aspects of Death known as the Reapers
- Xeliath**—Deceased Yeetatchen white-eye intended to be Isak's queen, who had the Skull of Dreams fused to her hand
- Yokar, Commissar**—Vanach Commissar of the First Enlightenment

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SCREW EVERYONE ELSE, THIS ONE WAS ALL DOWN TO ME.



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

AS THE FARLAN RETREATED FROM THE BATTLE OF THE BYORAN FENS, Lord Isak chose to face his proscribed fate and stay to cover their retreat. He died at the hands of the Menin lord, who had been driven half-mad with grief after Isak killed his son, having goaded the Menin lord into sending him directly to Ghenna.

In the wake of Isak's death, the Chief of the Gods, Death himself, incarnates on the battleground to gather those Aspects Isak had inadvertently torn from His control—the five minor Gods known as the Reapers—only to discover one, the Wither Queen, remains beyond His control. After her bargain with Isak, the Wither Queen has become too strong to be recalled. Fulfilling her bargain with Isak, she is far to the north, hunting Elves in the forests beyond Lomin, where she find the Elves are enslaving local spirits there to use as weapons. The Wither Queen subsumes these spirits and uses their power to bolster her strength as she looks to remain a Goddess in her own right, separate from her former master, Death.

In Byora, Doranei mourns his best friend, Sebe, in the company of Zhia Vukotic. Sebe died at the start of the battle as he tried to assassinate Aracnan on a Byoran street. He managed only to wound the Demi-God, but the poison he used is now slowly killing Aracnan.

In Llehden, Mihn, Xeliath and the witch of Llehden set Isak's desperate last plan in motion: Mihn travels into the underworld to attempt to break Isak out of Ghenna. The Chief of the Gods permits him to pass through onto the slopes of Ghain, the great mountain at the heart of which is the Dark Place, the home of daemons. Mihn ascends to the ivory gates of Ghenna, crosses the fiery river Maram and enters the lowest domain of Ghenna, where Isak's dreams have told him the soul of Aryn Bwr, captive in Isak's mind, would end up. He is successful, but for them to escape back to the lands of

the living, Xeliath, Isak's love, is forced to fight the Jailer of the Dark, an ancient dragon bound there by the Gods, and is killed in the battle.

Meanwhile in the Circle City, Zhia Vukotic and her brother Koezh take the sword Aenaris to a temporary hiding-place out in the spirit-haunted fens beyond Byora, since the Menin lord disturbed its long-standing rest in the Library of Seasons and woke the maddened dragon they had set there as the sword's guardian. The Menin lord himself, lost in his grief over his dead son, is ignoring the ravages of the enraged dragon, which is laying waste to each quarter of the Circle City. The Duchess of Byora and her ward Ruhen—a young boy who is in fact the vessel Azaer has taken as his mortal form—come to petition him, and only then is the badly injured Major Amber able to succeed in waking his lord from his all-consuming grief. The Menin lord agrees to free his newest subjects from the dragon, and Ruhen uses the opportunity to forge a link between himself and the man grieving for his lost son.

Azaer's disciple within the Harlequin clans realises it's time to lead them south, to add legitimacy to Ruhen's burgeoning power.

In Llehden, Mihn and the witch bury Xeliath and try to coax the traumatised Isak back to his senses. Isak has been left broken and horribly scarred by the tortures inflicted on him in Ghenna; in the days after his escape he is a catatonic wreck.

Elsewhere, in Narkang territory, the Mortal-Aspect Legana has escaped the Circle City in search of King Emin, and she finds him at last as he is gathering an élite strike-team to send to Byora and kill Ruhen. The king believes Ruhen to be a vehicle of Azaer's control over the Duchess of Byora, rather than the mortal form of Azaer he actually is. She and the king come to an agreement: he will provide sanctuary for her and her former sisters, the Daughters of Fate, and in return they will help his over-stretched élite assassinate Harlequins across the Land before Ruhen can twist them all to his service.

In the Circle City, the Menin lord discusses the next step of his plan to ascend to Godhood with General Gaur. They start a programme of murdering priests of Karkarn, and send an Elven assassin to kill Count Vesna, now the Mortal-Aspect of Karkarn, in order to weaken the God of War and ultimately allow the Menin lord to replace him. Once that is in play, the Menin lord very publically kills the dragon plaguing the city as a way to demonstrate his strength to the powerbrokers there. Elsewhere in the Circle City, Luerce—the principal disciple of Ruhen's rabble of followers—meets with Knight-Cardinal Certinse, the leader of the Devoted, to offer them a

solution to their crippling problem of a fanatical priesthood taking control of their martial Order.

As the Farlan army retreats home and Count Vesna begins to appreciate the full implications of becoming Karkarn's Mortal-Aspect, he discovers Isak had left orders to make Fernal, a Demi-God and companion of the witch of Llehden, next Lord of the Farlan. Isak's order includes a deal with High Cardinal Certinse, the newly established head of the cults in Tirah, but before Fernal can profit from this collusion the fanatics within the cults have the High Cardinal murdered, forcing Fernal to do a deal with the nobility instead, to shore up his uncertain position and avoid the tribe descending into civil war.

When Count Vesna does get back to Tirah at last, it is to a city almost under siege, as the religious factions are all struggling to control it. His first meeting on his return with Carel, Isak's surrogate father, is fraught, but Vesna begins to realise Isak might have had a plan in dying the way he did; that he might not have thrown his life away as they currently believe.

In Narkang, King Emin is visited by the God Larat, who warns him that the Menin will soon invade and he must not face them in battle, so powerful has the Menin lord now become.

Not far away, in the sanctuary of Llehden, Isak's sanity is slowly returning, helped in part by the gift of a puppy, Hulf, and the witch removing those portions of his memory that are too horrific to remain. However, with the loss of those memories go some remembrances of his life before his imprisonment in Ghenna, including his knowledge of Carel, and the damage this has caused to Isak's mind becomes increasingly clear. Meanwhile Mihn hears the legend of the Ragged Man from a local girl, who presumes Isak is that figure out of folklore.

King Emin's strike-force reaches the Circle City and attacks the Ruby Tower of Byora. Though they fail to find Ruhen, they do manage to kill the failing Demi-God Aracnan. Doranei is then given a journal by his lover, Zhia Vukotic; the prize Azaer's followers were hunting in Scree, for which they sacrificed the Skull of Ruling to possess. The journal belonged to Zhia's mad brother, Vorizh Vukotic, who stole Termin Mystt, Death's own sword, a weapon equalled in power only by Aenaris.

After the attack on the Ruby Tower, the Menin focus entirely on invading Narkang. Following Isak's last decree, his troop of personal guards is sent to King Emin and a few travel on to Llehden, where they discover their lord reborn. King Emin makes his final preparations for invasion with

Legana, while desperately searching for a way to defeat a man born to be invincible in battle. When the Menin do invade, they are savage in their assault. Frustrated by the Narkang armies' refusal to meet them in battle, they decimate the eastern half of the nation, culminating in the wholesale destruction of Aroth, one of the nation's biggest cities.

Azaer's followers, Venn and the spirit of the minstrel Rojak caught in Venn's shadow, make a deal with the Wither Queen for her support. In return, they break the bargain she made with Isak that constricts her. Luerce and a Witchfinder within the Devoted engineer the death of a high-ranking priest who had been containing the worst excesses of the fanatics within the Devoted. As the Devoted suffer increased oppression from their own priests, they start to remember their Order's original doctrine: they were created as an army for a coming saviour. All the while, Walls of Intercession appear across Byora as the desperate and mad begin to see Ruhen as a saviour sent by the Gods in the place of a corrupt priesthood.

In Tirah, while Fernal agrees to break his mutual defence treaties with Narkang in return for the support of the Farlan nobility, Vesna and Tila's wedding day finally comes—but before the ceremony can be completed, the assassin sent by the Menin lord strikes. Vesna survives, but the rest of the wedding party is killed before the assassin dies. In the aftermath he discovers there is a larger plot afoot as priests of Karkarn are also murdered. Now apart from the usual structure of Farlan society, not bound by the agreements made between Fernal and the nobility, he is free to continue the war Isak sacrificed himself for. Grieving deeply, he leaves to aid Narkang.

Isak is now partially recovered, and when he discovers he has the means to defeat the Menin lord, he tells King Emin. He halts the Narkang retreat and together Isak and Emin stand their ground at Moorview Castle. The battle sees terrible losses on both sides, almost shattering the allies, even as Vesna, accompanied by the Palace Guard of Tirah, arrives and forces the Menin lord into desperate actions. The Narkang mage Cetarn sacrifices himself to bait the trap, and Emin's white-eye bodyguard, Coran, dies leading the charge to close it.

Isak summons the Gods of the Upper Circle and compels them to curse the Menin lord and strip his name from history, just as they once did to Aryn Bwr. He is not killed, but entirely crippled. Once divested of his Crystal Skulls, the Menin lord is transported to Llehden to take Isak's place as the Ragged Man, leaving his army in disarray—some to fight to the death, others to flee.

CHAPTER 1

H HE FELT IT AS A DISTANT CRY; an eagle's shriek swooping down from the heavens. In his bones he heard it, rumbling up from the dark places underground to shake the very stones of the city. He stared up at the overcast sky, then all around at the courtyard. The veteran soldier found himself suddenly and unaccountably afraid. He reached behind his back and drew one scimitar, but the reassurance of it in his hand was eclipsed by a mounting sense of foreboding.

There was a clatter from the street outside and he struck blindly as he turned, but there was no one behind him. Voices broke through the soft patter of rain on stone, sounding confused and angry, but not like men ready to kill. Then the whispers started, running around the courtyard, and he turned a full circle, his scimitar ready, but saw nothing but empty ground and bare high walls.

The voices in the street grew in number; he heard broken sentences that tailed off into nothing. He felt suddenly weak and though he still circled, his movements were more hesitant as his knees threatened to collapse. The whispers were so close now, in his shadow. Cold fingers probed at the recesses of his mind. Instinctively he shook his head, trying to clear the sensation, but it had no effect.

A moment later the claws came.

He gasped and dropped his sword, clutching his head in both hands as tiny teeth started to tear at his mind. Their chill touch dug deeper and he fell to one knee. For a moment he was paralysed by shock and pain. He didn't notice his own nails tearing into his skin, nor feel the blood running down his fingers. The greater pain was inside his skull: an icy fire that spread through his mind leaving a scorched trail of memories.

Now he screamed. Oblivious to the impact of stone, he toppled over. He convulsed, writhing on the ground as the claws rooted in every forgotten corner, rending with swift, dispassionate precision. Words from his past were ripped away. A memory of his proud parents flashed past his eyes, then their

voices were empty sounds. He felt a name torn out and scattered to the winds. Eventually the pain receded, to be replaced then by a numbing cold; one that made him gasp for breath and shake uncontrollably. He lay on the ground, knees drawn up to his chest and arms wrapped around his head. Stars burst across his vision before the cold took him. Darkness wrapped itself around him and he sank willingly into its embrace.

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He felt himself shaken awake and rolled onto his back. A hushed voice was speaking urgently above him. It sounded familiar. When he opened his eyes a whip-crack of pain flashed through his head.

The voice spoke again, a word he thought he recognised, but his mind was a mire. He tried to speak, but it came out only as a feeble moan.

“Amber,” the voice hissed, “Amber, you must wake up!”

He felt himself pulled into a seating position, but as soon as the pressure lessened he flopped back to the ground. The Land swam and blurred around him as he was hauled up again.

The voice didn’t give up. “Listen to me, Amber: you must *listen*.”

He was held steady, and now dim shapes slowly started forming before his eyes: a blank courtyard wall and a weathered face with light hair and a smear of mud on one cheek—a man he thought he’d once known.

The man crouched before him, maintaining a firm grip on his arms and staring hard into his eyes. “Amber, I need you on your feet.”

He didn’t move. He could not fathom the words washing over him, nor command his limbs to move.

In frustration the man shook him like a doll and clouted his boot to try and attract his attention. “On your feet, Amber—if you don’t get up now, you’re dead.”

He looked down at the boot the man had struck, then at the man’s own bare feet: they were mismatched. One was normal, the other a squat lump with fat little toes. The sight sparked something in his mind, causing him to flinch even as he said a name: “Nai.”

“Yes, that’s right,” the man said encouragingly. He cast a nervous glance to one side before returning his attention to the stricken man. “Now you, your name is Amber—remember? Say it, say ‘Amber.’”

His first attempt came out as garbled nonsense as panic filled his mind. *Name? My name . . .*

His head snapped back as Nai slapped him hard across the face. "Say it, Amber. *Say it.*"

"Ahh— Amber," he gasped as tears spilled from his eyes and without knowing why he started to keen softly until Nai struck him again, then grabbed his head to keep his attention focused.

"There's no time for that. Don't think, just do as I say, soldier! Your name is Amber, do you understand me? Your name is Amber and you need to get on your feet." Without waiting for a response Nai arranged Amber's feet so they were flat on the ground, then stood on them and hauled on the big soldier's arms.

Amber felt himself lurch forward, but he was unable to do anything to help, instead concentrating on the one word he understood, the name he clung to with the desperation of a drowning man. He nearly toppled onto Nai, but the smaller man caught him in time and held him balanced.

"A little help would be useful right about now," Nai muttered as he manoeuvred himself around and underneath Amber's right arm. Before he tried to stand he grabbed Amber's lost scimitar and slid it back into the scabbard on his back, then gave him a pat on the shoulder.

"Now, push upwards," he said. "I can't carry you all the way."

Nai forced himself upright, and Amber felt his legs respond to the movement and straighten. For a moment he was standing tall before he slumped back down onto Nai.

"Good," Nai puffed, "but we'd better try that again. I can't carry you out of the city."

"I— I've lost—"

"You've lost a name, yes, I know," Nai said in a softer tone. "It was stolen from you—it was stolen from us all, but you felt it worse than anyone."

"Wh . . . ?" Amber tailed off, defeated by the effort of thinking as a swirl of unformed questions clouded his mind.

"Now's really not the time for that conversation. Come on, try to take a step forward." He leaned forward, trying to make Amber move his feet and take his own weight. The right drifted a little and caught on the ground until Nai knocked it with his instep and got his boot flat on the ground again. This time Amber moved forward on instinct and the weight across Nai's shoulder's lessened a touch.

"That's good, now one more," he said encouragingly, and the pair began to make painfully slow progress across the courtyard.

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Once they reached the gate Nai stopped and looked up at Amber. "You're not strong enough yet, but I need you moving quicker than that or we're both dead." He edged Amber to the wall and leaned him against it to take some of the weight off his shoulders, but a moment later a second voice broke the quiet.

"Hey, who're you?"

Nai turned to see a man with long blond hair standing inside the half-open gate to the courtyard: a Byoran labourer, by the way he was dressed, holding a cudgel in his hands. The man peered forward, his eyes slowly widening as he looked at Amber.

"That's a damned . . ." The man didn't bother finishing his sentence but raised his weapon and headed towards them.

Nai saw a flicker of surprise in the man's face as he advanced with his own empty hands outstretched.

The Byoran got ready to smash Nai in the face with his cudgel, but before he had fully raised his weapon, a flash of light erupted from Nai's palms into the man's face. The smell of scorched flesh filled the air and the man reeled, dropping the cudgel and clapping his hands to his cheeks.

Nai kept moving, drawing a dagger from his belt and punching the tip into the man's stomach, then tilting it upwards and driving it towards his heart. Then he withdrew it and ran the blade across his throat, just to make sure. The Byoran fell without a further sound and lay spasming on the ground.

Nai bent and wiped the blade clean on the man's shirt before he sheathed the weapon and eased the courtyard door shut again. Amber hadn't moved throughout the brief struggle, and when Nai returned to him he didn't seem to have even noticed it. He stood a little taller now, holding one hand on the wall to steady himself, but Nai could see he was still in no condition to walk down the street yet, let alone run.

"Another turn about the grounds then?" He asked as he slipped under Amber's arm and turned the soldier around. He spared a look at the corpse on the ground, a small trail of blood making its way towards the courtyard wall. "Let's just hope you prove useful enough to make this worthwhile."

Struck by a thought, Nai stopped and passed a hand across Amber's face,

muttering arcane words under his breath as he did so. After half a minute he stopped. "At least the link's still there," he muttered to himself. "Not sure who will be glad to see a Menin soldier after today, but King Emin might be able to use you to track down his turncoat, Ilumene. It isn't much of a choice, but it's the best one you're likely to get, and a man in my profession could always use a king owing him a favour."

Amber still didn't respond and Nai's expression turned pitying. "Gods, your parents wouldn't have expected this when they named you for your lordly, albeit distant, relation—who could have? That was one of the odder sensations in my life, I think, having a name plucked from my mind—and it didn't even involve necromancy! This life's full of surprises, but let's just be glad no one's used your real name since you joined the army, otherwise I think you'd be on the ground, and undoubtedly crippled."

He paused a moment, wincing, and had to blink away a sudden unpleasant sense of disjointed loss. "How curious: it's uncomfortable to even try and remember—very uncomfortable. Well, no matter; he must be dead by now, and I can think of him as the Menin lord easily enough."

He patted Amber on the shoulder again and directed him back across the courtyard. "And you, my friend; you're still Major Amber, so not much has changed there really—except you're a major in an army currently being obliterated, and you're as fragile as a baby. Just as well I can think of a use for you, and a certain king who might pay rather well for that use."

They started walking, short, shuffling steps away from the courtyard gate. "Don't worry," Nai added with forced brightness, "you can thank me for saving your life later. Once I've sold you to the enemy."