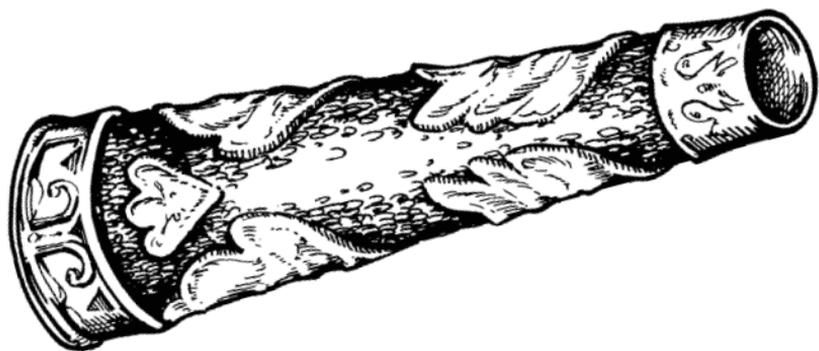




The **DAWNING**
of a **NEW AGE**





Prologue

Palin's Descent

Palin Majere stood near a broken altar in the midst of a fire-ravaged forest. He was tall and spindly, like the handful of scorched birch trees that clung to life around him. A staff topped by a hammered silver dragon's claw was tucked under one arm and his white robe whipped about his legs in the strong breeze. His long, chestnut-colored hair fluttered annoyingly against his neck and face and streamed into his eyes. Nevertheless, he wouldn't remove his fingers from the book he cradled to brush away the bothersome strands.

He glanced down at the cover. The red leather binding was cracked and faded, and it nearly matched the rosy shade of Lunitari, the moon emerging overhead—the moon named

for one of Krynn's gods of magic. There was magic in the book. Palin could sense it. He could feel a tingling in his slender fingers, feel the pulse of arcane energy that seemed at first erratic but now beat in time with his heart.

The gold lettering on the tome's cover was faint. "Magius," was the only word Palin could make out.

Still, that word, the name of the greatest war-wizard of Krynn, revealed the importance of what he was holding. The ancient tome was the most treasured of the collection of spellbooks in the Tower of Wayreth. Palin knew the tome had never been allowed outside that august building until now, until the enchantments penned on its flaking pages were so desperately needed. Yet would they be enough against Chaos, who had been unleashed by the Graygem and who was threatening to destroy the world? And would he, little more than an apprentice, be up to the task of invoking the enchantments against the all-powerful deity who raged in the Abyss?

Raistlin, who stood nearby, had placed the book in Palin's hands. In so doing, he had placed an immeasurable amount of trust in his young nephew's ability to use the spells wisely. Palin considered himself a mere fledgling next to his Uncle Raistlin and the other revered and powerful sorcerers of Krynn. He had not made the sacrifices in the name of magic that they had, though the challenge before him could make up for that. It could end his young life.

"I am ready," he told Raistlin. I am ready to make my sacrifice, he added silently.

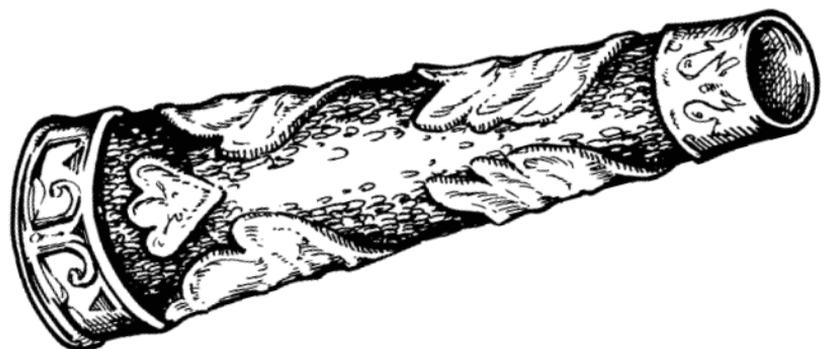
The black-robed sorcerer nodded and backed away. Usha, a child of the Irda who was at Raistlin's side, opened her mouth to say something but her words were lost in the quickening, howling wind. The growing magical gust overtook Palin and swept him up above the forest floor like a weightless leaf, carrying him from the land of the Irda and from Raistlin and beautiful Usha with the golden eyes.

He floated, suspended like a marionette on invisible strings, buffeted by what was now a caterwauling gale. The whites and greens of the birch trees, the blacks of the charred firs, gyrated around him and blended into a dizzying array of swirls and splotches. Then a moment later he felt himself falling, the strings cut, the wind gone. All sound ceased except for the pounding of his heart. The magic sucked him down into a silent, seemingly bottomless vortex of quivering energy that sent sparks dancing and biting across his skin like thousands of ravenous insects.

After several interminable moments, the irritating sensation lessened and became a mere tingling on his arms and face, on his fingers that still clasped the book. But the sensation of falling continued.

The colors shifted before his eyes as the rose of Lunitari, the gold of Usha's mesmerizing eyes, and the silvery white of his Uncle Raistlin's hair chased away the hues of the birches and the burned firs. The red, gold, and white worked themselves together like yarn on a spinning wheel, blended into one by the spell that was transporting him between dimensions and to the plane named the Abyss.

He blinked, and the colors changed again, for an instant becoming a brilliant blue that swelled and receded as if it were a thing alive, a great being inhaling and exhaling. Then the blue was gone, replaced by a foglike, wispy gray that felt damp and oppressive. Gray tendrils like spidery lengths of an old man's hair, curled and wrapped about his wrists and ankles, circled his waist and tugged him ever onward toward his frightening destination. Above and below him there was only this grayness, this perpetual fog that filled his senses, this fog that carried him toward Chaos, and perhaps to his doom.



Chapter 1

The Storm Over Krynn

In Nightlund, far from the land of the I rda, a dense fog clung to a broad swatch of tall rye grass and stretched toward a lush forest canopy high overhead. The fog's milk-white tendrils writhed about the trunks of the oldest oaks, circling ever tighter.

The fog was thickest against the earth, palpable, practically obscuring the gentle rise and fall of the land. It flowed toward a clearing on the horizon, where it embraced a ring of ancient stones.

The fog never left the ring, which marked the heart of Nightlund. The sun couldn't chase it away, and the fiercest wind couldn't drive it away. It was part of the primal, unending

magic that pulsed through the carved stones and reached beyond Krynn—to other worlds and the dimensions that lay between. The fog shrouded the ring of stones from the curious, keeping it safe for those few who knew how to use it as a portal. And whenever a traveler used the ring, the fog shimmered with energy—just as it shimmered now.

Inside the ring bits of color, gold and blue, sparked, danced, and shimmered, then faded and coalesced again. The blue intensified to a brilliant, glistening hue, growing to fill the interior of the stone circle. The gold sparks expanded to form huge twin orbs that cut through the fog like beacons.

“I am home,” the traveler hissed. “And soon, Kitiara, very soon, I shall bring you home, too.”

The traveler’s thick blue legs tensed and pushed against the ground, propelling him above the ring and the fog, above the forest’s highest canopy and into Nightlund’s cloudless early evening sky.

He swept his enormous wings out to his sides and beat them almost imperceptibly, just enough to keep himself aloft. Then the traveler craned his long, scaly neck, and his cavernous nostrils quivered and sniffed and took in the heady scent of the land below.

The blue dragon was immense, a great ancient wyrm. Each of his scales was as large as a knight’s shield, though they all lay sleek and gleaming against his body, making it seem as if he was made of molten sapphires. His serpentine tail trailed behind him and undulated slowly.

“Ah, Kitiara, to have finally found you!” he cried. “To have touched you after so many years!” He threw back his head and a joyous rumble started deep in his belly. The sound raced up his throat, and he opened wide his gigantic jaws. A bolt of white-hot lightning shot from between his fangs and arced high into the sky, streaking toward Lunitari. “Soon, Kitiara, we shall be together again!”

The dragon beat his wings faster now, whipping the air

into a frenzy, forcing away all of the fog except that which eternally clung to the ring. His jaws clacked open and shut rhythmically, and his tail jerked and twitched. He closed his eyes. Seemingly from out of nowhere, clouds gathered and blotted out the pale red moon. The clouds quickly turned dark and thickened, grew heavy with rain.

A bolt of lightning shot from the dragon's mouth and buried itself deep into the largest cloud. The sky reverberated in response, and a myriad of lightning strokes flashed down to tease the treetops and dance erratically toward the earth.

A bolt struck the dragon's wings, raced to his shoulder blades, then played along the spiked ridge of his back. It crackled up his neck and along the length of his silver-white horns, and it darted toward the tip of his tail and sparked across his massive haunches. Then another bolt struck him, and another. He relished its tingling touch. He was its master.

The dragon closed his eyes in ecstasy, and his roar was echoed by the storm's booming thunder. Then the rain began, splashing against the dragon's hide, against the shrouded, ancient ring of stones far below. He flew higher, until he was just below the clouds, and then unleashed his lightning breath again and again. He was illuminated by the bolts, his rain-shiny scales acting as bits of mirrors that reflected the lightning and made him glow.

He lashed his tail about like a whip. In response, the storm grew fiercer still, and the rain came in torrents, battering the trees and flattening the grass.

The deluge intensified as the dragon swooped to hover above the ring of stones, still hidden by the immutable magical fog, but not from him.

"Hear me!" he cried in a voice that sounded like a keen wind. "Khellendros, the Portal Master . . . Khellendros, the Storm Over Krynn . . . has returned! Khellendros, once called Skie by Kitiara, is home!"

DRAGONPLANCE FIFTH AGE

The lightning and thunder rocked the ground, the rain hammered against the trees, and the sky grew black as midnight.