



# THE GARGOYLE KING

OGRE TITANS  VOLUME THREE

RICHARD A. KNAAK



The Ogre Titans, Volume Three  
**THE GARGOYLE KING**

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# Prologue



## THE GOLDEN CITY

The sprawling city set in the midst of the ogre kingdom of Kern glistened in the burning sun. The surrounding wall was seamless, perfect, and from a distance appeared made of pure gold. Jagged battlements shaped like upturned claws topped the wall. Great towers rose from the wall's four corners, gleaming spears that thrust ten stories high. On every floor of each tower, all four sides of the building had windows shaped like half moons.

Etched into every edge of the vast wall and its accompanying towers was a repeating pattern, a single symbol: the talons of some great raptor.

At the gates of the city, fabulous, golden doors loomed over all who would enter. On them was emblazoned not the talons, but a handsome, majestic countenance that made the beauty of the elf races pale in comparison. The strong, perfect jaw; the flowing, dark hair; the proud nose; and commanding gaze . . . they appeared to be the markings of a great king. Yet the face was not that

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of any ogre, as the people of the continent of Ansalon knew them; for that matter, not any race on the face of all the world of Krynn would have recognized the bestial people. Furthermore, the perfection of the face was marred by two things: the great eyes without pupils and the arrogance of the expression. It was a being who knew itself to be a god.

For all the splendor of the wall and towers, they gave but a hint of the opulence within. Vast, elegant buildings with high-arched doors and rounded roofs lined the shining, immaculate streets. It was as if it were a city of princes—nay, *emperors*. No edifice was exactly alike any other, yet all spoke of riches, of power, of glory. Intricate patterns representing the stars and the landscape decorated some; mystic runes, others. Great statues of fantastic beasts, especially griffons, dotted the city, all so lifelike they appeared ready to pounce upon those who might pass by. Massive fountains with elaborate scrollwork unleashed torrents of water in a place known for its harsh, dry surroundings. Magnificent gems of every color artfully decorated most buildings, fountains, and statuary, a king's ransom's worth on each.

All was perfection and above many of the tallest structures rose the symbol of those responsible for creating that perfection. The raptor's talons filled the center of hundreds of huge, fluttering banners—also golden, save for the talon itself, which was utterly black. That was the symbol of the Titans, the gargantuan ogre sorcerers who stood some fifteen feet tall . . . half again the height of most regular ogres. It was the face of their leader that covered the gates. He had been foremost among those responsible for the transformation of what

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had once been a half-crumbling, ancient ruin of a once-mighty capital, creating something new and even more glorious than its founders had imagined.

And lest any forget that Safrag was not only leader of the Titans, but the one who commanded the power that had resurrected the capital, one had only to gaze upon the focal point of his great achievement: the grand palace. Not in the least did the palace resemble the old marble-and-stone edifice from which the rulers of the current inhabitants' ancestors—the High Ogres—had surveyed their domain. Nay, what stood there was a gargantuan place of sharp, glittering angles and five magnificent towers topped by arched roofs. Though it was in width and depth equal to its predecessor, that was the only similarity. Indeed, the new structure stood twice the height and was not made of marble, but rather of some sleek material that shone brighter than a legion of newly armored warriors at high sun. It was also unique for being the only building not golden in color. Instead, the palace was of a tint best and yet poorly described as greenish blue, a rare, peculiar hue, as if such a mix had been created by the hand of a god.

Rising up at the front were six awesome columns, each shaped into the semblance of the Titan leader. No single column was like another, for in the first pose Safrag stood as a warrior with a sword; in the second, a learned teacher holding a staff, and so on. Though whether stern or wise, the Titan's demeanor resembled that of a father tending his small children.

Two massive bronze doors, also unique in the city of gold, marked the entrance. The talon symbol was etched upon each. Though the Titans had their own sanctum far from the capital, that had been the place

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from which they ruled back when the city was known as Garantha. Henceforth it would be called, in the musical tongue of the Titans, Dai Ushran, and as explained in Safrag's proclamation, the phrase literally meant "the Golden City."

Only three days had passed since the Titan leader had renamed Garantha. And only three days had gone by since he had used the power of the magical Fire Rose to completely transform the city in less than a single minute's time.

The inhabitants of Dai Ushran still marveled at the astounding feat. The excitement was palpable, more so because they had been promised something else even more spectacular than what Safrag had achieved: the transformation of the ogre race itself.

The moment was imminent. The ogres breathlessly awaited the word to gather. The Titans presented power and beauty on a scale that the grotesque, tusked giants had never dreamed would be theirs to possess or behold. Since the downfall of their ancestors, the ogres had lived in squalor, sometimes pretending to aspire to their former greatness, but always looking more comical than noble. Even those of the upper castes, who regularly donned robes stolen from the elves or copied by the best ogre weavers, looked more like animals dressed for sport.

For a time there had come one among them, a singular half-breed, who had offered some hope, some imitation of their former greatness, by learning lessons from their enemies and training the ogres to be proper soldiers who could win in battle. Golgren of the Severed Hand had been slighter than his fellows but agile and clever of wit. No one remembered such an ogre-elf mix before

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Golgren, and most would have assumed, rightly, that such a creature could not exist, much less survive in the wastes of Kern and Blöde. But survive Golgren had, rising up to become Grand Khan of both ogre realms, which he renamed Golthuu, after himself.

But he had made enemies of the Titans, and even those among the population who had been his most ardent followers found it difficult to wish for his return when the sorcerers promised so much more for the future. Yet why did the Titans delay the moment of ecstasy that had been promised? If they could create a new city in a flicker of time, why had they not already begun to lavish the same transformational magic on their people?

It was a question to which several of the Titans themselves desired an answer.



Three of the Titans approached Morgada first, for they knew that she had Safrag's ear as his apprentice and as perhaps much more. The male Titans were of a kind—tall, handsome, and with the bearing of the gods, some thought. Their flawless skin was of a brilliant blue, and their upswept golden orbs glowed bright. Their ears were long and gracefully pointed, and all three wore their lengthy, midnight-black hair bound in a tail.

They were clad identically in flowing silken robes of dark blue with shimmering hints of crimson. The robes gave the impression of gliding rather than walking. From the right shoulder down to the left side of the waist ran a red sash that ended beneath a golden belt. The left shoulder of each was covered by a decorative armor plate.

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It was the only piece of armor; the arms themselves were unclad save for a silver band on the right wrist and a crimson one made out of silk on the left.

“He said he would come, and yet again he has not!” snapped the middle of the trio in the musical tongue. As his mouth opened, much of the perfection of his face was lost due to the savage rows of sharklike teeth.

Morgada smiled back at him; the female Titan’s teeth were less pronounced but still very sharp. She was as beautiful as they were handsome . . . more so. The most wondrous elf maiden paled before her dark glory. Her raven hair flowed unbound nearly to her waist, and although her garments were almost identical to those worn by the males, they were shaped to fit her lush form well.

“The master delves into the myriad intricacies of the Fire Rose, Kulgrath,” she replied with half-veiled eyes in the same tongue. “Time is immaterial where the study of the artifact is involved. You would be wise to be patient.”

Kulgrath spread his hands in frustration, displaying the long, ebony nails at the ends of his fingers from which the Titan inner circle, the Black Talon, took its name. Like those of his comrades, they were strong and deadly nails capable of ripping open a throat or disemboweling a foe. Farther back, at the elbow, small, jagged hooks sprouted out of his skin. They, too, were sharp, though of a more ornamental nature. “What does the master need to study? He transformed an entire city with but a whim! He turned Falstoch from an abomination into a Titan again! Surely, he needs no further research into these—”

Though her smile remained, Morgada’s voice evidenced a slight chill. “And you would dictate this message to the master?”

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The pair with Kulgrath drew back a step from him. Sensing their withdrawal, he bowed his head slightly and smiled back at Morgada. "I would never question the wisdom of the master! It's just that we are in the dark; we only seek enlightenment."

"And the Fire Rose to use as *you* desire, yes?"

"I don't deny that I wish to take my turn at commanding it, as Safrag did promise us, but of course when he has deemed the moment proper! We are also concerned for him as well, for we all know the legends of the Fire Rose and its dangers. Even the master should beware of those, Morgada."

"The master—"

The ground trembled. Kulgrath and his companions instinctively reached for support. Only Morgada stood in place, oddly amused. The ogre lands were known for their tremors, some of which had tortured and ripped apart the capital in ancient times. Yet she only smiled in the face of potential destruction.

The walls suddenly rushed away from one another. Great, fluted columns shot from the floor, rising to meet a ceiling abruptly three stories high. The floor itself, once white marble, bore a bluish tint akin to the outside walls.

Striding along as if all was still and not in chaos, Morgada moved toward a rounded window that had just opened in the wall near to her. The male Titans stumbled after, clutching at whatever was available to them, including each other's arms.

And through the window, they saw that not only had their surroundings changed again, not only had the palace once more shifted form, but all of Dai Ushran had been transformed anew. The outer wall had blocky, square projections thrusting outward at

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the top. The towers were taller and broader and three points crowned each, with the face of Safrag molded into the sides.

A great, golden hill arose in the north quarter, and atop it stood a triangular temple with shining columns that arched skyward. Like the towers, it had a three-pointed roof. The temple was nearly the height of the palace and had a winding path composed of something like glittering diamonds running down the new hill.

As the city quieted, ogres poured from their dwellings into the streets. There was panic, for even their own homes had not gone unchanged. They sported designs akin to the towers and the temple, and the face of Safrag could be found peering out from hundreds of citizens' walls.

"What—what is he doing?" Kulgrath gasped, eyes wide in awe.

"It would seem that he's changed his mind about some of his earlier designs," Morgada sang.

"'Changed' . . . this is the third time now in days . . . and the most extravagant!" Kulgrath peered at one nearby visage, and his golden orbs could not hide their jealousy. "Most extravagant . . ."

"I was about to return to the master when I sensed your call. If you like, I shall extend your concerns to him."

The male Titan anxiously shook his head. "There's no need, Morgada, no need."

Bowing to them—displaying well some of the physical attributes that Kulgrath and others believed the true reason for her trusted place beside the master—Morgada purred, "As you like."

Ebony flames burst up from the floor and engulfed

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her. The female sorcerer vanished, her satisfied smile somehow lingering a moment longer.

“This was a foolish act,” one of the other Titans muttered. “She will tell Safrag of our complaints, and he will use the Fire Rose on *us* next!”

“He dares not,” retorted Kulgrath. “The Titans are one! It’s that female who causes any problems among us. Safrag will see that once we speak with him! He will listen to reason.”

“Yes,” returned the other, not sounding at all convinced. “We must keep telling ourselves that, mustn’t we?”

Kulgrath did not answer, saying no more, instead looking out the window again at the nearest of the huge, decorative faces and frowning.



Slowly—ever so slowly—the panic of the ogres of Dai Ushran was replaced first with calm then with renewed anticipation. The latest transformation of their city was surely a sign that the Titan leader was merely readying things for the race’s own fantastic change. He was merely making the capital worthy of their future. Soon, so very soon, he would no doubt appear at the palace steps and begin their metamorphosis from tusked, hairy brutes to beings more powerful than even their ancestors had been.

The many ogres milled around for some time, waiting. However, as more time passed and nothing happened, gradually the crowds filtered back into their altered dwellings. Safrag would summon them when it was time. Surely, he would.

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But a shrouded figure flanked by four gargoyles had observed all that from the mountains beyond the capital and did not share their belief. With long, white, oval orbs—the only part of the face not hidden by either the deep gray and black hood atop his head or the tight, golden cloth wrapped across everything below those deathly eyes—the figure had avidly surveyed the new transformation. It chuckled, giving a hint of a masculine identity but nothing more than a hint.

The gargoyles reacted to the chuckle with low, staccato grunts that were their kind's sign of amusement. Nearly as tall as a human when standing straight, they were twice as wide and all muscle. Their musky scent was strong but went unnoticed by their master. They were gray of varying shades, with huge, leathery wings that opened and closed at times as they sought to disperse some of the heat constantly building up due to the oppressive sun.

Their master loomed over them, taller than a human, shorter than an ogre. His shadowy form was thin, and the hands that suddenly stretched out from the voluminous folds of the sleeves were utterly white and all but fleshless. The dark garment in which the gargoyles' lord was clad hung to the ground and almost seemed to cloak nothing but air.

*So very perfect . . .* came a rasping voice that was not audible, but rather reverberated in the heads of the winged creatures. *All the puppets play their roles. Soon, very soon, the long wait will be over.*

With another chuckle, the shrouded figure simply faded away. The gargoyles bent their heads low then took to the air.

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And far below, Dai Ushran suddenly trembled again. The great wall shimmered. The towers spread wide, and their crowns grew rounded.

Through the power of the Fire Rose, the Titan leader, Safrag, molded the capital to his *latest* whim.