



MARGARET WEIS
& DON PERRIN

RAISTLIN

CHRONICLES

THE SOULFORGE
BROTHERS AT ARMS



HE NEVER WORE HIS WHITE ROBES WHILE TRAVELING. Few mages did, in those days, the days before the great and terrible War of the Lance spilled out of its cauldron like boiling oil and scalded the countryside. In those days, just fifteen or so years before the war, the fire beneath the pot had been lit, the Dark Queen and her minions had struck the sparks that would start the blaze. The oil was cool, black, and sluggish in the cauldron. But at the bottom, the oil was beginning to simmer.

Most people on Ansalon would never see the cauldron, much less the bubbling oil inside, until it was poured on their heads, along with dragonfire and the countless other horrors of war. At this time of relative peace, the majority of people living on Ansalon never looked up, never looked from side to side to see what was going on in the world around them. Instead, they gazed at their own feet, plodding through the dusty day, and if they ever lifted their heads, it was usually to see if it was likely to rain and spoil their picnic.

A few felt the heat of the newly kindled fire. A few had been watching closely the turgid black liquid in the cauldron. Now they could see that it was starting to simmer. These few were uneasy. These few began to make plans.

The wizard's name was Antimodes. He was human, of good middle-class merchant stock, hailing from Port Balifor. The youngest of three, he had been raised in the family business, which was tailoring. To this day, he still displayed with pride the scars of the pinpricks on the middle finger of his right hand. His early experience left him with a canny business sense and a taste for, and knowledge of, fine clothing, one reason he rarely wore his white robes.

Some mages were afraid to wear their robes, which were a symbol of their calling, because that calling was not well loved in Ansalon. Antimodes was not afraid. He did not wear his white robes because white showed the dirt. He detested arriving at his destination mud-splattered, the stains of the road upon him.

He traveled alone, which in those uneasy days meant that he was either a fool, a kender, or an extremely powerful person. Antimodes was not a fool, nor was he a kender. He traveled alone because he preferred his own company and that of his donkey, Jenny, to that of almost all others of his acquaintance. Hired bodyguards were generally loutish and dull, not to mention expensive. Antimodes could adequately and handily defend himself, should need arise.

The need had rarely arisen, in all his fifty-plus years. Thieves look for prey that is timid, cowering, drunk, or heedless. Though his finely made dark blue woolen cloak with its silver clasps showed him to be a man of wealth, Antimodes wore that cloak with an air of confidence, riding with his back straight on his daintily stepping donkey, his head held high, his sharp-eyed gaze taking notice of every squirrel in the trees, every toad in the ruts.

He displayed no weapon, but his long sleeves and tall leather boots could easily conceal a poignard; the bags that dangled from his hand-tooled leather belt almost certainly contained spell components. Every thief worth his lock-picking tools recognized that the ivory case Antimodes wore on a leather thong looped around his chest contained magical scrolls. Shadowy figures lurking in the hedgerows slunk out of his way and waited for likelier victims.

Antimodes was journeying to the Tower of High Sorcery in Wayreth. He was taking the long way around, for he could have easily walked the corridors of magic in order to reach the tower from his home in Port Balifor. He had been requested to make the journey overland. The request had come from Par-Salian, head of the Order of White Robes and head of the Wizards' Conclave, and therefore, strictly speaking, Antimodes's master. The two were fast friends, however, their friendship dating back to the day when both were young and had arrived at the Tower at the same time to take the exacting, grueling, and occasionally lethal test. Both had been kept waiting in the same antechamber in the tower, each had shared his trepidation and fear with the other, each had found much-needed comfort, consolation, and support. The two White Robes had been friends ever since.

Thus Par-Salian "requested" that Antimodes take this long and tiresome journey. The head of the conclave did not order it, as he might have done with another.

Antimodes was to accomplish two goals during his journey. First, he was

to peer into every dark corner, eavesdrop on every whispered conversation, peep through the shutters of every window that was locked and bolted. Second, he was to look for new talent. The first was a bit dangerous; people do not take kindly to snoops, especially if said people have something to hide. The second was tedious and boring, for it generally meant dealing with children, and Antimodes had an aversion to children. All in all, Antimodes preferred the spying.

He had written his report in his neat and precise tailor's handwriting in a journal, which he would turn over to Par-Salian. Antimodes reread in his mind every word in that journal as he trotted along on his white donkey, a present from his eldest brother, who had taken over the family business and was now a prosperous tailor in Port Balifor. Antimodes spent his time on the road pondering all he had seen and heard—nothing significant, everything portentous.

"Par-Salian will find this interesting reading," Antimodes told Jenny, who gave her head a shake and pricked her ears to indicate her agreement. "I look forward to handing the journal over," her master continued. "He will read it and ask questions, and I will explain what I have seen and heard, all the while drinking his most excellent elven wine. And you, my dear, will have oats for dinner."

Jenny gave her hearty approval. In some places in which they'd stayed, she'd been forced to eat damp, moldy hay or worse. Once she'd actually been offered potato peelings.

The two had nearly reached their journey's end. Within the month, Antimodes would arrive at the Tower of High Sorcery in Wayreth. Or, rather, the tower would arrive at Antimodes. One never found the magical Tower of Wayreth. It found you, or not, as its master chose.

This night Antimodes would spend in the town of Solace. He might have pushed on, for the season was late spring, and it was only noon, with plenty of daylight left for travel. But he was fond of Solace, fond of its famous inn, the Inn of the Last Home, fond of Otik Sandath, the inn's owner, and especially fond of the inn's ale. Antimodes had been tasting that chilled dark ale with its creamy head in his imagination ever since he had swallowed his first mouthful of road dust.

His arrival in Solace went unnoticed, unlike his arrival in other towns in Ansalon, where every stranger was taken to be a thief or plague-carrier, a murderer or kidnapper of children. Solace was a different town than most on Ansalon. It was a town of refugees, who had fled for their lives during the Cataclysm and had only stopped running when they came to this location. Having once been strangers on the road themselves, the founders

of Solace took a kindly view toward other strangers, and this attitude had been passed down to their descendants. Solace had become known as a haven for outcasts, loners, the restless, the adventuresome.

The inhabitants were friendly and tolerant—up to a point. Lawlessness was known to be bad for business, and Solace was a town with a sharp eye for business.

Being located on a bustling road that was the major route from northern Ansalon to all points south, Solace was accustomed to entertaining travelers, but that was not the reason few noticed the arrival of Antimodes. The main reason was that most of the people of Solace never saw him, due to the fact that they were high above him. The major portion of the town of Solace was built in the vast, spreading, gigantic branches of the immense and wondrous vallenwood trees.

The early inhabitants of Solace had literally taken to the trees to escape their enemies. Having found living among the treetops to be safe and secure, they had built their homes among the leaves, and their descendants and those who came after them had continued the tradition.

Craning his neck, Antimodes looked up from the donkey's back to the wooden plank bridges that extended from tree to tree, watching the bridges swing and sway as the villagers hastened across on various errands. Antimodes was a dapper man, with an eye for the ladies, and though the women of Solace kept their flowing skirts firmly in hand when crossing the bridges, there was always the possibility of catching a glimpse of a shapely ankle or a well-turned leg.

Antimodes's attention to this pleasant occupation was interrupted when he heard sounds of shrill yelling. He lowered his gaze to find that he and Jenny had been overtaken by a brigade of bare-legged, sunburned boys armed with wooden swords and tree-branch spears and giving battle to an army of imaginary foes.

The boys had not meant to run down Antimodes. The swirl of battle had carried them in his direction; the invisible goblins or ogres or whatever enemy the boys chased were in full retreat toward Crystalmir Lake. Caught up in the shouting, yelling, sword-thwacking melee, Antimodes's donkey, Jenny, shied and danced, wild-eyed with fright.

A mage's mount is not a war-horse. A mage's mount is not trained to gallop into the noise and blood and confusion of battle or to face spears without flinching. At most, a mage's mount must accustom herself to a few foul-smelling spell components and an occasional lightning show. Jenny was a placid donkey, strong and hale, with an uncanny knack for avoiding ruts and loose stones, providing her rider with a smooth and comfortable

journey. Jenny considered that she'd put up with a great deal on this trip: bad food, leaky accommodations, dubious stablemates. An army of stick-wielding boys was simply too much to bear.

By the twitch of her long ears and the baring of her yellow teeth, Jenny was obviously prepared to strike back by bucking and kicking at the boys, which would have probably not damaged the boys much but would certainly dislodge her rider. Antimodes endeavored to control the donkey, but he was not having any luck. The younger boys, maddened with battle lust, did not see the man's distress. They swirled about him, lashing out with their swords, shrieking and crowing in shrill triumph. Antimodes might well have entered Solace on his posterior, when, out of the dust and noise, an older boy—perhaps about eight or nine—appeared, caught hold of Jenny's reins, and, with a gentle touch and forceful presence, calmed the terrified donkey.

"Go around!" the youth ordered, waving his sword, which he had shifted to his left hand. "Clear out, fellows! You're frightening the donkey."

The younger boys, ranging in age from six upward, good-naturedly obeyed the youth and continued on their rowdy way. Their shouts and laughter echoed among the enormous trunks of the vallenwood trees.

The older boy paused and, with an accent that was definitely not of this part of Ansalon, spoke his apology as he soothingly stroked the donkey's soft nose. "Forgive us, good sir. We were caught up in our play and did not notice your arrival. I trust you have taken no harm."

The young man had straight, thick blond hair, which he wore bowl-cropped around his ears in a style that was popular in Solammia, but nowhere else on Krynn. His eyes were gray-blue, and he had a stem and serious demeanor that belied his years, a noble bearing of which he was extremely conscious. His speech was polished and educated. This was no country bumpkin, no laborer's son.

"Thank you, young sir," Antimodes replied. He carefully took stock of his spell components, checking to make certain that the buffeting he had taken had not loosened any of his pouches he wore on his belt. He was about to ask the young man's name, for he found himself interested in this youth, but, on looking up, he found the young man's blue eyes fixed upon the pouches. The expression on the youthful face was one of disdain, disapproval.

"If you are certain you are well, Sir Mage, and have taken no harm from our play, I will take my leave." The youth made a stiff and rigid bow and, letting loose the donkey's halter, turned to run after the other boys. "Coming, Kit?" he called brusquely to another older boy, who had halted to study the stranger with interest.

"In a minute, Sturm," said the other youth, and it was only when she

spoke that Antimodes realized this curly-haired boy, wearing pants and a leather vest, was actually a girl.

She was an attractive girl—now that he studied her closely—or perhaps he should say “young lady,” for though only in her early teens, her figure was well defined, her movements were graceful, and her gaze was bold and unwavering. She studied Antimodes in her turn, regarding him with an intense, thoughtful interest that he found difficult to understand. He was accustomed to meeting with disdain and dislike, but the young woman’s interest was not idle curiosity. Her gaze held no antipathy. It seemed as if she were making up her mind about something.

Antimodes was old-fashioned in his attitude toward women. He liked them soft and perfumed, loving and gentle, with blushing cheeks and properly downcast eyes. He realized that in this day of powerful female wizards and strong female warriors his attitude was backward, but he was comfortable with it. He frowned slightly to indicate his own disapproval of this young hoyden and clucked at Jenny, urging her in the direction of the public stables, located near the blacksmith’s shop. The stables, the blacksmith’s, and the baker’s shop, with its immense ovens, were three of the few buildings in Solace situated on the ground.

Even as Antimodes passed by the young woman, he could feel her brown-eyed gaze focused on him, wondering, considering.

**BROTHERS
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MISTS SHROUDED THE TOWER OF HIGH SORCERY AT WAYRETH, AND A light rain fell. The rain shimmered on the mullioned windows. Drops welled up on the thick stone ledges of the windows, overflowed to trickle down the black obsidian walls of the Tower, where the raindrops collected in puddles in the courtyard. In that courtyard stood a donkey and two horses loaded with blanket rolls and saddlebags, ready for travel.

The donkey's head was lowered, her back sagged, her ears drooped. She was a spoiled donkey, fond of dry oats, a snug stable, a sunlit road, and a slow and easy pace. Jenny knew of no reason why her master should travel on such a wet day and had stubbornly resisted all attempts to drag her from her stall. The burly human who had attempted to do so was now nursing a bruised thigh.

The donkey would still be in her warm stall, but she had fallen victim to a ruse, a foul trick played on her by the big human. The fragrant smell of carrot, the lush scent of apple—these had been her temptation and her downfall. Now she stood in the rain, feeling much put upon and determined to make the big human suffer, make them all suffer.

The head of the Conclave, the master of the Tower of Wayreth, Par-Salian, gazed down upon the donkey from the window of his chambers in the North Tower. He saw the donkey's ears twitch, and he winced involuntarily as her left hind hoof lashed out at Caramon Majere, who was endeavoring to secure a pack onto the donkey's saddle. Caramon had fallen victim to the donkey once this day and he was on the lookout. He, too, had seen the telltale ear twitch, understood its portent, and managed to dodge the

kick. He stroked the donkey's neck and produced another apple, but the donkey lowered her head. By the look of her, Par-Salian thought—he knew something about donkeys, though few would have believed it—the ornery beast was contemplating rolling on the ground.

Blissfully unaware that all his careful packing was on the verge of being dislodged and squashed flat, not to mention soaked in a puddle, Caramon began loading the two horses. Unlike the donkey, the horses were glad to be away from the confinement and boredom of the stalls, were looking forward to a brisk canter and the chance to stretch their muscles, see new sights. The horses frisked and stamped and danced playfully on the flagstone, blowing and snuffing at the rain, and looking eagerly out the gates at the road beyond.

Par-Salian, too, looked at the road beyond. He could see where it led, could see the road far more clearly than others at that time on Krynn. He saw the trials and travails, he saw the danger. He saw hope, too, though its light was dim and wavering as the magical light cast by a crystal atop a young mage's staff. Par-Salian had purchased this hope, but at a terrible cost, and, at the moment, hope's light did little more than reveal to him more dangers. He must have faith, however. Faith in the gods, faith in himself, faith in the one he had chosen as his battle sword.

His "battle sword" stood in the courtyard, miserable in the rain, coughing fitfully, shivering and chilled as he watched his brother—limping slightly from his bruised thigh—ready the horses for their journey. A warrior such as the brother would have rejected such a sword outright, for it was, to all appearances, weak and brittle, liable to break at the first pass.

Par-Salian knew more about this sword than did the sword itself, perhaps. He knew that the iron will of the young mage's soul, having been tempered with blood, heated by fire, shaped by fate's hammer, and cooled with his own tears, was now finest steel, strong and sharp. Par-Salian had created a fine-honed weapon, but like all weapons, it had a double edge. It could be used to defend the weak and the innocent, or to attack them. He did not know yet which way the sword would cut. He doubted if the sword knew.

The young mage, wearing his new red robes—plain homespun robes without adornment, for he had no money to purchase better—stood huddled beneath a rose tree blooming in the courtyard, finding what shelter he could from the rain. The thin shoulders of the young man shook occasionally, he coughed into a handkerchief. At every cough, his brother, hale and robust, would pause in his work to glance back at his frail twin anxiously. Par-Salian could see the young man stiffen with irritation, could see his lips move and

almost hear his curt admonition for his brother to get on with his task and leave him be.

Another person bustled out into the courtyard, just in time to prevent the donkey from spilling her load. A neat and dapper man of middle years, wearing gray robes—he would not spoil his white robes with the stains of travel—and a hooded cloak, Antimodes was a welcome sight. His cheerful air seemed to dispel the gloom of the day as he chided the donkey, all the while fondling her ears, and instructed the robust twin on some point of packing, to judge by the hand-waving and gesticulating. Par-Salian could not hear their conversation, but he smiled at the sight. Antimodes was old friend, mentor, and sponsor to the young mage.

Antimodes lifted his head and gazed at the North Tower, looking up at Par-Salian looking down. Though Antimodes could not see the Head of the Order from where he stood in the courtyard, he knew perfectly well that Par-Salian was there and that he was watching. Antimodes frowned and glowered, making certain that Par-Salian was aware of his ire and disapproval. The rain and the mist were Par-Salian's doing, of course. The Head of the Conclave controlled the weather around the Tower of High Sorcery. He could have sent his guests off in sunshine and springtime had he chosen to do so.

In truth, Antimodes was not that upset about the weather. It was merely an excuse. The real reason for Antimodes's ire was his disapproval of the way Par-Salian had handled the young mage's Test in the Tower of High Sorcery. Antimodes's disapproval was so strong that it had cast a cloud over the two men's long friendship.

The rain was Par-Salian's way of saying, "I understand your concern, my friend, but we cannot live all our days in sunshine. The rose tree needs the rain to survive, as well as the sun. And this gloom, this dreary darkness is nothing, my friend, nothing compared to what is yet to come!"

Antimodes shook his head, as if he had heard Par-Salian's thoughts, and turned grumpily away. A practical and pragmatic man, he didn't appreciate the symbolism, and he resented being forced to start out on his journey wet to the bone.

The young mage had been watching Antimodes closely. When Antimodes turned away and went back to placating his irate donkey, Raistlin Majere turned his own gaze to the North Tower, to the very window where stood Par-Salian. The archmage felt the gaze of those eyes—golden eyes, whose pupils were the shape of hourglasses—touch him, prick his flesh as though the tip of the sword's blade had sliced across his skin. The golden eyes, with their accursed vision, gave no hint of the thoughts behind them.

Raistlin did not understand fully what had happened to him. Par-Salian dreaded the day when Raistlin would come to understand. But that had been part of the price.

Was the young mage bitter, resentful? Par-Salian wondered. His body had been shattered, his health ruined. From now on, he would be sickly, easily fatigued, in pain, reliant on his stronger brother. Resentment would be natural, understandable. Or was Raistlin accepting? Did he believe that the fine steel of his blade had been worth the price? Probably not. He did not yet know his own strength. He would have time to learn, the gods willing. He was about to receive his first lesson.

All the archmages in the Conclave had either participated in Raistlin's Test or they had heard about what had occurred during the Test from their colleagues.¹ None of them would accept him as an apprentice.

"His soul is not his own," said Ladonna of the Black Robes, "and who knows when the buyer will come to claim his property."

The young mage needed instruction, needed training not only in magic, but in life. Par-Salian had done some discreet investigation and found a teacher whom he hoped would provide a suitable course of study. A rather unlikely instructor, but one in whom Par-Salian had a lot of faith, though this instructor would have been astounded to hear so.

Acting under Par-Salian's instructions, Antimodes inquired if the young mage and his brother would be interested in traveling east during the springtime, to train as mercenaries with the army of the renowned Baron Ivor of Langtree. Such training would be ideally suited to the young mage and his warrior brother, who needed to earn their bread and butter, all the while honing their martial skills.

Skills they would need later, unless Par-Salian was very much mistaken.

There was no need for hurry. The time of the year was early fall, the season when warriors begin to think of putting away their weapons, start searching for a comfortable place to spend the cold winter days by the fire, telling tales of their own valor. Summer was the season of war, spring the season of preparing for war. The young man would have all winter to heal. Or rather, he would have time to adapt to his handicap, for he would never heal.

Such legitimate work would prevent Raistlin from exhibiting his talents in the local fairs in exchange for money, something he'd done in the past, much to the shock of the Conclave. It was all very well for illusionists or unskilled practitioners of the art to make spectacles of themselves before the public, but not for those who had been accepted into the Conclave.

¹ The story of Raistlin's Test in the Tower of High Sorcery is related in *The Soulforge*, TSR publisher, 1998.

Par-Salian had yet another motive for sending Raistlin to the baron, a motive the young man would never—if he was lucky—come to know. Antimodes had his suspicions. His old friend Par-Salian never did anything just for the doing of it, all his means were aimed at a specific end. Antimodes had endeavored to find out, for he was man who loved secrets as a miser loves his coins, liked to count them over in the night, fondle them and gloat over them. But Par-Salian was closemouthed, would not fall victim to even the most cunningly laid snare.

The small group was at last ready to set out. Antimodes climbed upon his donkey. Raistlin mounted his horse with assistance from his brother, assistance that he accepted churlishly and with an ill grace, by the looks of it. Caramon, with exemplary patience, made certain his brother was settled and comfortable, and then he swung himself easily into the saddle of his own large-boned steed.

Antimodes took the lead. The three headed toward the gate. Caramon rode with his head down against the slashing rain. Antimodes left with a backward glare for the North Tower window, a glare expressive of his extreme discomfort and irritation. Raistlin halted his horse at the last moment, turned in the saddle to gaze at the Tower of High Sorcery. Par-Salian could guess what was going through the young man's mind. Much the same had gone through his mind, when he had been young.

How my life has changed in only a few short days! I entered this place strong and confident. I leave it weak and shattered, my vision cursed, my body frail. Yet, I leave this place triumphant. I leave with the magic. To gain that, I would have traded away my very soul. . . .

"Yes," Par-Salian said quietly, watching until the three had ridden into the magical Forest of Wayreth and there vanished from his mortal sight. His mind's eye kept them in view much longer. "Yes, you would have. You did. But you don't know that yet."

The rain fell harder. Antimodes would be cursing his friend heartily now. Par-Salian smiled. They would have sunshine when they left the forest. The sun's heat would bake them dry, they would not have to ride long in wet clothes. Antimodes was a wealthy man, fond of his comforts. He would see to it that they slept in a bed in a reputable inn. He would pay for it, too, if he could find a way to do so that would not offend the twins, who had only a few meager coins in their purses, but whose pride could have filled the royal coffers of Palanthas.

Par-Salian turned from the window. He had too much to do to stand there, staring out into a curtain of rain. He cast a wizard-lock spell upon the door, a strong spell that would keep out even the most powerful mages, mages such as Ladonna of the Black Robes. Admittedly, Ladonna had not

visited the Tower in a long, long time, but she took great delight in arriving unexpectedly and at the most inopportune moments. It would never do for her to find him involved in these particular studies. Nor could he allow any of the other mages who lived in or frequented the Tower to find out what he was doing.

The time was not right to disclose what little he knew. He did not yet know enough. He had to learn more, to discover if what he had begun to suspect was true. He had to learn more, to ascertain if the information he had gleaned from his spies was accurate.

Certain that no one short of Solinari, God of White Magic, could break the spell cast upon the door, Par-Salian seated himself at his desk. On the desk—which was of dwarf-make, a present from one of the thanes of Thorbardin in return for services rendered—lay a book.

The book was old, very old. Old and forgotten. Par-Salian had found the book only by references made to it in other texts, else he himself would not have known of its existence. At that, he'd been forced to search for it for a great many hours, search through the library of the Tower of High Sorcery, a library of reference books and spellbooks and magical scrolls, a library so vast that it had never been catalogued. Nor would it ever be catalogued, except in Par-Salian's mind, for there were dangerous texts there, texts whose existence must be carefully guarded, texts known only to the Heads of the Three Orders, certain texts known only to the Master of the Tower himself. There were also texts of whose existence even he was not aware, as proven by the book in front of him, a book he had finally discovered in a corner of a storage room packed either mistakenly or by design in a box labeled "Child's Play."

Judging from the other artifacts to be found in the box, the box itself had come from the Tower of High Sorcery in Palanthas and dated back to the time of Huma. The box had undoubtedly been among those hastily packed when the mages had swallowed their pride and abandoned their Tower, rather than declare all-out war upon the people of Ansalon. The box marked "Child's Play" had been shoved into a corner and then forgotten in the chaos following the Cataclysm.

Par-Salian brushed his hand gently over the leather cover of the old book, the only book to be found in the box. He brushed away the dust and mouse-droppings and cobwebs that had partially obliterated the book's embossed title, a title whose letters he felt as bumps beneath his fingertips. A title that raised bumps on his flesh.