



LEGENDS

VOLUME THREE

TEST OF THE TWINS

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman

Poetry By Michael Williams

Cover Art By Matt Stawicki

Interior Art By Valerie Valusek



The Hammer of the Gods

Like sharp steel, the clarion call of a trumpet split the autumn air as the armies of the dwarves of Thorbardin rode down into the Plains of Dergoth to meet their foe—their kinsmen. Centuries of hatred and misunderstanding between the hill dwarves and their mountain cousins poured red upon the plains that day. Victory became meaningless—an objective no one sought. To avenge wrongs committed long ago by grandfathers long since dead was the aim of both sides. To kill and kill and kill again—this was the Dwarfgate War.

True to his word, the dwarven hero, Kharas, fought for his King Beneath the Mountain. Clean-shaven, his beard sacrificed to shame that he must fight those he called kin, Kharas was at the vanguard of the army, weeping even as he killed. But as he fought, he suddenly came to see that the word *victory* had become twisted to mean annihilation. He saw the standards of both armies fall, lying trampled and forgotten upon the bloody plain as the madness of revenge engulfed both armies in a fearsome red wave. And when he saw that no matter who won there would be no victor, Kharas threw down his Hammer—the Hammer forged with the help of Reorx, god of the dwarves—and left the field.

Many were the voices that shrieked “coward.” If Kharas heard, he paid them no heed. He knew his worth in his own heart, he knew it better than any. Wiping the bitter tears from his eyes, washing the blood of his kinsmen from his hands, Kharas searched among the dead until he found the bodies of King Duncan’s two beloved sons. Throwing the hacked and mutilated corpses of the young dwarves over the back of a horse, Kharas left the Plains of Dergoth, returning to Thorbardin with his burden.

Kharas rode far, but not far enough to escape the sound of hoarse voices crying for revenge, the clash of steel, the screams

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of the dying. He did not look back. He had the feeling he would hear those voices to the end of his days.

The dwarven hero was just riding into the first foothills of the Kharolis Mountains when he heard an eerie rumbling sound begin. Kharas's horse shied nervously. The dwarf checked it and stopped to soothe the animal. As he did so, he looked around uneasily. What was it? It was no sound of war, no sound of nature.

Kharas turned. The sound came from behind him, from the lands he had just left, lands where his kinsmen were still slaughtering each other in the name of justice. The sound increased in magnitude, becoming a low, dull, booming sound that grew louder and louder. Kharas almost imagined he could see the sound, coming closer and closer. The dwarven hero shuddered and lowered his head as the dreadful roar came nearer, thundering across the Plains.

It is Reorx, he thought in grief and horror. It is the voice of the angry god. We are doomed.

The sound hit Kharas, along with a shock wave—a blast of heat and scorching, foul-smelling wind that nearly blew him from the saddle. Clouds of sand and dust and ash enveloped him, turning day into a horrible, perverted night. Trees around him bent and twisted, his horses screamed in terror and nearly bolted. For a moment, it was all Kharas could do to retain control of the panic-stricken animals.

Blinded by the stinging dustcloud, choking and coughing, Kharas covered his mouth and tried—as best he could in the strange darkness—to cover the eyes of the horses as well. How long he stood in that cloud of sand and ash and hot wind, he could not remember. But, as suddenly as it came, it passed.

The sand and dust settled. The trees straightened. The horses grew calm. The cloud drifted past on the gentler winds of autumn, leaving behind a silence more dreadful than the thunderous noise.

Filled with dreadful foreboding, Kharas urged his tired horses on as fast as he could and rode up into the hills, seeking desperately for some vantage site. Finally, he found it—

an out-cropping of rock. Tying the pack animals with their sorrowful burden to a tree, Kharas rode his horse out onto the rock and looked out over the Plains of Dergoth. Stopping, he stared down below him in awe.

Nothing living stirred. In fact, there was nothing there at all; nothing except blackened, blasted sand and rock.

Both armies were completely wiped out. So devastating was the explosion that not even corpses remained upon the ash-covered Plain. Even the very face of the land itself had changed. Kharas's horrified gaze went to where the magical fortress of Zhaman had once stood, its tall, graceful spires ruling the Plains. It, too, had been destroyed—but not totally. The fortress had collapsed in upon itself and now—most horribly—its ruins resembled a human skull sitting, grinning, upon the barren Plain of Death.

"Reorx, Father, Forger, forgive us," murmured Kharas, tears blurring his vision. Then, his head bowed in grief, the dwarven hero left the site, returning to Thorbardin.

The dwarves would believe—for so Kharas himself would report—that the destruction of both armies on the Plains of Dergoth was brought about by Reorx. That the god had, in his anger, hurled his hammer down upon the land, smiting his children.

But the Chronicles of Astinus truly record what happened upon the Plains of Dergoth that day:

Now at the height of his magical powers, the archmage, Raistlin, known also as Fistantilus, and the White-robed cleric of Paladine, Crysanina, sought entry into the Portal that leads to the Abyss, there to challenge and fight the Queen of Darkness.

Dark crimes of his own this archmage had committed to reach this point—the pinnacle of his ambition. The Black Robes he wore were stained with blood; some of it his own. Yet this man knew the human heart. He knew how to wrench it and twist it and make those who should have reviled him and spurned him come to admire him instead. Such a one was Lady Crysanina, of the House of Tarinius. A Revered Daughter of the church, she possessed one fatal flaw in the white marble of her soul. And that flaw Raistlin found and

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widened so that the crack would spread throughout her being and eventually reach her heart. . . .

Crysania followed him to the dread Portal. Here she called upon her god and Paladine answered, for, truly, she was his chosen. Raistlin called upon his magic and he was successful, for no wizard had yet lived as powerful as this young man.

The Portal opened.

Raistlin started to enter, but a magical, time-traveling device being operated by the mage's twin brother, Caramon, and the kender, Tasslehoff Burrfoot, interfered with the archmage's powerful spell. The field of magic was disrupted . . .

. . . with disastrous and unforeseen consequences.



CHAPTER I

“Oops,” said Tasslehoff Burrfoot.

Caramon fixed the kender with a stern eye.

“It’s not my fault! Really, Caramon!” Tas protested.

But, even as he spoke, the kender’s gaze went to their surroundings, then he glanced up at Caramon, then back to their surroundings again. Tas’s lower lip began to tremble and he reached for his handkerchief, just in case he felt a snuffle coming. But his handkerchief wasn’t there, his pouches weren’t there. Tas sighed. In the excitement of the moment, he’d forgotten—they’d all been left behind in the dungeons of Thorbardin.

And it had been a truly exciting moment. One minute he and Caramon had been standing in the magical fortress of Zhaman, activating the magical time-traveling device; the next minute Raistlin had begun working *his* magic and, before Tas knew it, there had been a terrible commotion—stones singing and rocks cracking and a horrible feeling of being pulled in six different directions at once and then—

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WHOOSH—here they were.

Wherever here was. And, wherever it was, it certainly didn't seem to be where it was supposed to be.

He and Caramon were on a mountain trail, near a large boulder, standing ankle-deep in slick ash-gray mud that completely covered the face of the land below them for as far as Tas could see. Here and there, jagged ends of broken rock jutted from the soft flesh of the ash covering. There were no signs of life. Nothing could be alive in that desolation. No trees remained standing; only fire-blackened stumps poked through the thick mud. As far as the eye could see, clear to the horizon, in every direction, there was nothing but complete and total devastation.

The sky itself offered no relief. Above them, it was gray and empty. To the west, however, it was a strange violet color, boiling with weird, luminous clouds laced with lightning of brilliant blue. Other than the distant rumble of thunder, there was no sound . . . no movement . . . nothing.

Caramon drew a deep breath and rubbed his hand across his face. The heat was intense and, already, even though they had been standing in this place only a few minutes, his sweaty skin was coated with a fine film of gray ash.

"Where are we?" he asked in even, measured tones.

"I—I'm sure I haven't any idea, Caramon," Tas said. Then, after a pause, "Have you?"

"I did everything the way you told me to," Caramon replied, his voice ominously calm. "You said Gnimsh said that all we had to do was *think* of where we wanted to go and there we'd be. I know *I* was thinking of Solace—"

"I was too!" Tas cried. Then, seeing Caramon glare at him, the kender faltered. "At least I was thinking of it *most* of the time . . ."

"*Most* of the time?" Caramon asked in a dreadfully calm voice.

"Well"—Tas gulped—"I—I did th-think once, just for an instant, mind you, about how—er—how much fun and interesting and, well, unique, it would be to—uh—visit a—uuh . . . um. . ."

"Um what?" Caramon demanded.

"A . . . mmmmm."

"A what?"

"Mmmmm," Tas mumbled.

Caramon sucked in his breath.

"A moon!" Tas said quickly.

"Moon!" repeated Caramon incredulously. "Which moon?" he asked after a moment, glancing around.

"Oh"—Tas shrugged—"any of the three. I suppose one's as good as another. Quite similar, I should imagine. Except, of course, that Solinari would have all glittering silver rocks and Lunitari all bright red rocks, and I guess the other one would be all black, though I can't say for sure, never having seen—"

Caramon growled at this point, and Tas decided it might be best to hold his tongue. He did, too, for about three minutes during which time Caramon continued to look around at their surroundings with a solemn face. But it would have taken more holding than the kender had inside him (or a sharp knife) to keep his tongue from talking longer than that.

"Caramon," he blurted out, "do—do you think we actually *did* it? Went to a—uh—moon, that is? I mean, this certainly doesn't look like anyplace I've ever been before. Not that these rocks are silver or red or even black. They're more of a rock color, but—"

"I wouldn't doubt it," Caramon said gloomily. "After all, you did take us to a seaport city that was sitting squarely in the middle of a desert—"

"That wasn't my fault either!" Tas said indignantly. "Why even Tanis said—"

"Still"—Caramon's face creased in puzzlement—"this place certainly *looks* strange, but it *seems* familiar somehow."

"You're right," said Tas after a moment, staring around again at the bleak, ash-choked landscape. "It does remind me of somewhere, now that you mention it. Only"—the kender shivered—"I don't recall ever having been anyplace quite this awful . . . except the Abyss," he added, but he said it under his breath.

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The boiling clouds surged nearer and nearer as the two spoke, casting a further pall over the barren land. A hot wind sprang up, and a fine rain began to fall, mingling with the ash drifting through the air. Tas was just about to comment on the slimy quality of the rain when suddenly, without warning, the world blew up.

At least that was Tas's first impression. Brilliant, blinding light, a sizzling sound, a crack, a boom that shook the ground, and Tasslehoff found himself sitting in the gray mud, staring stupidly at a gigantic hole that had been blasted in the rock not a hundred feet away from him.

"Name of the gods!" Caramon gasped. Reaching down, he dragged Tas to his feet. "Are you all right?"

"I—I think so," said Tas, somewhat shaken. As he watched, lightning streaked again from the cloud to ground, sending rock and ash hurtling through the air. "My! That certainly was an interesting experience. Though nothing I'd care to repeat right away," he added hastily, fearful that the sky, which was growing darker and darker by the minute, might decide to treat him to that interesting experience all over again.

"Wherever we are, we better get off this high ground," Caramon muttered. "At least there's a trail. It must lead somewhere."

Glancing down the mud-choked trail into the equally mud-choked valley below, Tas had the fleeting thought that Somewhere was likely to be every bit as gray and yucky as Here, but, after a glimpse of Caramon's grim face, the kender quickly decided to keep his thoughts to himself.

As they slogged down the trail through the thick mud, the hot wind blew harder, driving specks of blackened wood and cinders and ash into their flesh. Lightning danced among the trees, making them burst into balls of bright green or blue flame. The ground shook with the concussive roar of the thunder. And still, the storm clouds massed on the horizon. Caramon hurried their pace.

As they labored down the hillside they entered what must once have been, Tas imagined, a beautiful valley. At one

time, he guessed, the trees here must have been ablaze with autumn oranges and golds, or misty green in the spring.

Here and there, he saw spirals of smoke curling up, only to be whipped away immediately by the storm wind. Undoubtedly from more lightning strikes, he thought. But, in an odd sort of way, that reminded him of something, too. Like Caramon, he was becoming increasingly convinced that he knew this place.

Wading through the mud, trying to ignore what the icky stuff was doing to his green shoes and bright blue leggings, Tas decided to try an old kender trick *To Use When Lost*. Closing his eyes and blotting everything from his mind, he ordered his brain to provide him with a picture of the landscape before him. The rather interesting kender logic behind this being that since it was likely that some kender in Tasslehoff's family had undoubtedly been to this place before, the memory was somehow passed on to his or her descendants. While this was never scientifically verified (the gnomes are working on it, having referred it to committee), it certainly is true that—to this day—no kender has ever been reported lost on Krynn.

At any rate, Tas, standing shin-deep in mud, closed his eyes and tried to conjure up a picture of his surroundings. One came to him, so vivid in its clarity that he was rather startled—certainly his ancestors' mental maps had never been so perfect. There were trees—giant trees—there were mountains on the horizon, there was a lake. . . .

Opening his eyes, Tas gasped. There was a lake! He hadn't noticed it before, probably because it was the same gray, sludge color as the ash-covered ground. Was there water there, still? Or was it filled with mud?

I wonder, Tas mused, if Uncle Trapspringer ever visited a moon. If so, that would account for the fact that I recognize this place. But surely he would have told someone. . . . Perhaps he would have if the goblins hadn't eaten him before he had the chance. Speaking of food, that reminds me . . .

"Caramon," Tas shouted over the rising wind and the boom of the thunder. "Did you bring along any water? I

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didn't. Nor any food, either. I didn't suppose we'd need any, what with going back home and all. But—"

Tas suddenly saw something that drove thoughts of food and water and Uncle Trapspringer from his mind.

"Oh, Caramon!" Tas clutched at the big warrior, pointing. "Look, do you suppose *that's* the sun?"

"What else would it be?" Caramon snapped gruffly, his gaze on a watery, greenish-yellow disk that had appeared through a rift in the storm clouds. "And, no, I didn't bring any water. So just keep quiet about it, huh?"

"Well, you needn't be ru—" Tas began. Then he saw Caramon's face and quickly hushed.

They had come to a halt, slipping in the mud, halfway down the trail. The hot wind blew about them, sending Tas's topknot streaming out from his head like a banner and whipping Caramon's cloak out. The big warrior was staring at the lake—the same lake Tas had noticed. Caramon's face was pale, his eyes troubled. After a moment, he began walking again, trudging grimly down the trail. With a sigh, Tas squished along after him. He had reached a decision.

"Caramon," he said, "let's get out of here. Let's leave this place. Even if it *is* a moon like Uncle Trapspringer must have visited before the goblins ate him, it isn't much fun. The moon, I mean, not being eaten by goblins which I suppose wouldn't be much fun either, come to think of it. To tell you the truth, this moon's just about as boring as the Abyss and it certainly smells as bad. Besides, there I wasn't thirsty. . . . Not that I'm thirsty now," he added hastily, remembering too late that he wasn't supposed to talk about it, "but my tongue's sort of dried out, if you know what I mean, which makes it hard to talk. We've got the magical device." He held the jewel-encrusted sceptre-shaped object up in his hand, just in case Caramon had forgotten in the last half-hour what it looked like. "And I *promise* . . . I solemnly vow . . . that I'll think of Solace with *all* my brain this time, Caramon. I—Caramon?"

"Hush, Tas," Caramon said.

They had reached the valley floor, where the mud was ankle-deep on Caramon, which made it about shin-deep on

Tas. Caramon had begun to limp again from when he'd fallen and wrenched his knee back in the magical fortress of Zhaman. Now, in addition to worry, there was a look of pain on his face.

There was another look, too. A look that made Tas feel all prickly inside—a look of true fear. Tas, startled, glanced about quickly, wondering what Caramon saw. It seemed pretty much the same at the bottom as it had at the top, he thought—gray and yucky and horrible. Nothing had changed, except that it was growing darker. The storm clouds had obliterated the sun again, rather to Tas's relief, since it was an unwholesome-looking sun that made the bleak, gray landscape appear worse than ever. The rain was falling harder as the storm clouds drew nearer. Other than that, there certainly didn't appear to be anything frightening.

The kender tried his best to keep silent, but the words just sort of leaped out of his mouth before he could stop them.

"What's the matter, Caramon? I don't see anything. Is your knee bothering you? I—"

"Be quiet, Tas!" Caramon ordered in a strained, tight voice. He was staring around him, his eyes wide, his hands clenching and unclenching nervously.

Tas sighed and clapped his hand over his mouth to bottle up the words, determined to keep quiet if it killed him. When he was quiet, it suddenly occurred to him that it was so *very* quiet around here. There was no sound at all when the thunder wasn't thundering, not even the usual sounds he was used to hearing when it rained—water dripping from tree leaves and plopping onto the ground, the wind rustling in the branches, birds singing their rain songs, complaining about their wet feathers. . . .

Tas had a strange, quaking feeling inside. He looked at the stumps of the burned trees more closely. Even burned, they were huge, easily the largest trees he had ever seen in his life except for—

Tas gulped. Leaves, autumn colors, the smoke of cooking fires curling up from the valley, the lake—blue and smooth as crystal . . .

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Blinking, he rubbed his eyes to clear them of the gummy film of mud and rain. He stared around him, looking back up at the trail, at that huge boulder. . . . He stared at the lake that he could see quite clearly through the burned tree stumps. He stared at the mountains with their sharp, jagged peaks. It wasn't Uncle Trapspringer who'd been here before. . . . "Oh, Caramon!" he whispered in horror.