



CHRONICLES

PART

4

TO THE
GATES
OF
PALANTHAS

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The story of the companions' journey to Ice Wall Castle and their defeat of the evil Dragon Highlord, Feal-thas, became legend among the Ice Barbarians who inhabit that desolate land. It is still told by the village cleric on long winter nights when heroic deeds are remembered and songs are sung.

SONG OF THE ICE REAVER

I am the one who brought them back.
I am Raggart I am telling you this.
Snow upon snow cancels the signals of ice
Over the snow the sun bleeds whiteness
In cold light forever unbearable.
And if I do not tell you this
The snow descends on the deeds of heroes
And their strength in my singing
Lies down in a core of frost rising no more
No more as the lost breath crumbles.

Seven they were from the hot lands
(I am the one who brought them back)
Four swordsmen sworn in the North
The elf-woman Laurana
The dwarf from the floes of stone
The kender small-boned as a hawk.
Riding three blades they came to the tunnel
To the throat of the only castle.

Down among Thanoi the old guardians
Where their swordsmen carved hot air
Finding tendon finding bone



As the tunnels melted red.
Down upon minotaur upon ice bear
And the swords whistled again
Bright on the corner of madness
The tunnel knee-high in arms
In claws in unspeakable things
As the swordsmen descended
Bright steam freezing behind them.

Then to the chambers at the castle heart
Where Feal-thas awaited lord of dragons and wolves
Armored in white that is nothing
That covers the ice as the sun bleeds whiteness.
And he called on the wolves the baby-stealers
Who suckled on murder in the lairs of ancestors.
Around the heroes a circle of knives of craving
As the wolves stalked in their master's eye.

And Aran the first to break the circle
Hot wind at the throat of Feal-thas
Brought down and unraveled
In the reel of the hunt perfected.
Brian the next when the sword of the wolf lord
Sent him seeking the warm lands.
All stood frozen in the wheel of razors
All stood frozen except for Laurana.
Blind in a hot light flashing the crown of the mind
Where death melts in a diving sun
She takes up the Ice Reaver
And over the boil of wolves over the slaughter
Bearing a blade of ice bearing darkness
She opened the throat of the wolf lord
And the wolves fell silent as the head collapsed.

The rest is short in the telling.
Destroying the eggs the violent get of the dragons
A tunnel of scales and ordure
Followed into the terrible larder
Followed further followed to treasure.
There the orb danced blue danced white
Swelled like a heart in its endless beating
(They let me hold it I brought them back).
Out from the tunnel blood on blood under the ice
Bearing their own incredible burden
The young knights silent and tattered
They came five now only
The kender last small pockets bulging.
I am Raggart I am telling you this.
I am the one who brought them back.



DARK JOURNEY.

1

Behind them, the snow rumbled and toppled over the side of the mountain.

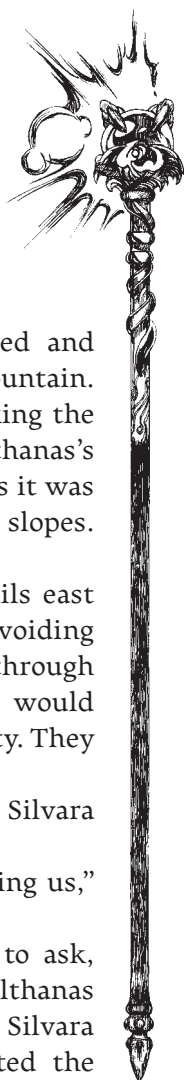
Cascading down in white sheets, blocking and choking the pass, it obliterated their presence. The echoes of Gilthanas's magical thunder still resounded in the air, or perhaps it was the booming of the rocks as they bounded down the slopes. They could not be certain.

The companions, led by Silvara, traveled the trails east slowly and cautiously, walking where it was rocky, avoiding the snowy patches if at all possible. They walked through each other's footsteps so that the pursuing elves would never know for certain how many were in their party. They were so careful, in fact, that Laurana grew worried.

"Remember, we want them to find *us*," she said to Silvara as they crept across the top of a rocky defile.

"Do not be upset. They will have no trouble finding us," answered Silvara.

"What makes you so certain?" Laurana started to ask, then she slipped and fell to her hands and knees. Gilthanas helped her stand. Grimacing with pain, she stared at Silvara in silence. None of them, including Theros, trusted the



sudden change that had come over the Wilder elf since their parting with the knights. But they had no choice except to follow her.

"Because they know our destination," Silvara answered. "You were clever to think I left a sign to them in the cave. I did. Fortunately, you did not find it. Below those sticks you so kindly scattered for me I had drawn a crude map. When they find it, they will think I drew it to show you our destination. You made it look most realistic, Laurana." Her voice was defiant until she met Gilthanas's eyes.

The elflord turned away from her, his face grave. Silvara faltered. Her voice became pleading. "I did it for a reason, a good reason. I knew then, when I saw the tracks, we would have to split up. You must believe me!"

"What about the dragon orb? What were you doing with it?" Laurana demanded.

"N-nothing," Silvara stammered. "You must trust me!"

"I don't see why," Laurana returned coldly.

"I have done you no harm—" Silvara began.

"Unless you have sent the knights and the dragon orb into a deathtrap!" Laurana cried.

"No!" Silvara wrung her hands. "I haven't! Believe me. They will be safe. That has been my plan all along. Nothing must happen to the dragon orb. Above all, it must not fall into the hands of the elves. That is why I sent it away. That is why I helped you escape!" She glanced around, seeming to sniff the air like an animal. "Come! We have lingered too long."

"If we go with you at all!" Gilthanas said harshly. "What do you know about the dragon orb?"

"Don't ask me!" Silvara's voice was suddenly deep and filled with sadness. Her blue eyes stared into Gilthanas's with such love that he could not bear to face her. He shook his head, avoiding her gaze. Silvara caught hold of his arm.





"Please, *shalori*, beloved, trust me! Remember what we talked about, at the pool. You said you had to do these things—defy your people, become an outcast, because of what you believed in your heart. I said that I understood, that I had to do the same. Didn't you believe me?"

Gilthanas stood a moment, his head bowed. "I believed you," he said softly. Reaching out, he pulled her to him, kissing her silver hair. "We'll go with you. Come on, Laurana." Arms around each other, the two trudged off through the snow.

Laurana looked blankly at the others. They avoided her eyes. Then Theros came up to her.

"I've lived in this world nearly fifty years, young woman," he said gently. "Not long to you elves, I know. But we humans live those years, we don't just let them drift by. And I'll tell you this—that girl loves your brother as truly as I've ever seen woman love man. And he loves her. Such love cannot come to evil. For the sake of their love alone, I'd follow them into a dragon's den."

The smith walked after the two.

"For the sake of my cold feet, I'd follow them into a dragon's den, if he'd warm my toes!" Flint stamped on the ground. "Come on, let's go." Grabbing the kender, he dragged Tas along after the blacksmith.

Laurana remained standing, alone. That she would follow was settled. She had no choice. She wanted to trust Theros's words. One time, she would have believed the world ran that way. But now she knew much she had believed in was false. Why not love?

All she could see in her mind were the swirling colors of the dragon orb.



The companions traveled east, into the gloom of gathering night. Descending from the high mountain pass, they found the air easier to breathe. The frozen rocks gave way to scraggly pines, then the forests closed in around them once more. Silvara confidently led them at last into a fog-shrouded valley.

The Wilder elf no longer seemed to care about covering their tracks. All that concerned her now was speed. She pushed the group on, as if racing the sun across the sky. When night fell, they sank into the tree-rimmed darkness, too tired even to eat. But Silvara allowed them only a few hours of restless, aching sleep. When the moons rose, the silver and the red, nearing their fullness now, she urged the companions on.

When anyone questioned, wearily, why they hurried, she only answered, "They are near. They are very near."

Each assumed she meant the elves, though Laurana had long ago lost the feeling of dark shapes trailing them.

Dawn broke, but the light was filtered through fog so thick Tasslehoff thought he might grab a handful and store it in one of his pouches. The companions walked close together, even holding hands to avoid being separated. The air grew warmer. They shed their wet and heavy cloaks as they stumbled along a trail that seemed to materialize beneath their feet, out of the fog. Silvara walked before them. The faint light shining from her silver hair was their only guide.

Finally the ground grew level at their feet, the trees cleared, and they walked on smooth grass, brown with winter. Although none of them could see more than a few feet in the gray fog, they had the impression they were in a wide clearing.

"This is Foghaven Vale," Silvara replied in answer to their questions. "Long years ago, before the Cataclysm, it was one



of the most beautiful places upon Krynn . . . so my people say."

"It might still be beautiful," Flint grumbled, "if we could see it through this confounded mist."

"No," said Silvara sadly. "Like much else in this world, the beauty of Foghaven has vanished. Once the fortress of Foghaven floated above the mist as if floating on a cloud. The rising sun colored the mists pink in the morning, burned them off at midday so that the soaring spires of the fortress could be seen for miles. In the evening, the fog returned to cover the fortress like a blanket. By night, the silver and the red moons shone on the mists with a shimmering light. Pilgrims came, from all parts of Krynn—" Silvara stopped abruptly. "We will make camp here tonight."

"What pilgrims?" Laurana asked, letting her pack fall.

Silvara shrugged. "I do not know," she said, averting her face. "It is only a legend of my people. Perhaps it is not even true. Certainly no one comes here now."

She's lying, thought Laurana, but she said nothing. She was too tired to care. And even Silvara's low, gentle voice seemed unnaturally loud and jarring in the eerie stillness. The companions spread their blankets in silence. They ate in silence, too, nibbling without appetite on the dried fruit in their packs. Even the kender was subdued. The fog was oppressive, weighing them down. The only thing they could hear was a steady drip, drip, drip of water plopping onto the mat of dead leaves on the forest floor below.

"Sleep now," said Silvara softly, spreading her blanket near Gilthanas's, "for when the silver moon has neared its zenith, we must leave."

"What difference will that make?" The kender yawned. "We can't see it anyway."

"Nonetheless, we must go. I will wake you."

"When we return from Sancrist—after the Council of Whitestone—we can be married," Gilthanas said softly to Silvara as they lay together, wrapped in his blanket.

The girl stirred in his arms. He felt her soft hair rub against his cheek. But she did not answer.

"Don't worry about my father," Gilthanas said, smiling, stroking the beautiful hair that shone even in the darkness. "He'll be stern and grim for a while, but I am the younger brother, no one cares what becomes of me. Porthios will rant and rave and carry on. But we'll ignore him. We don't have to live with my people. I'm not sure how I'd fit in with yours, but I could learn. I'm a good shot with a bow. And I'd like our children to grow up in the wilderness, free and happy . . . what . . . Silvara, why—you're crying!"

Gilthanas held her close as she buried her face in his shoulder, sobbing bitterly. "There, there," he whispered soothingly, smiling in the darkness. Women were such funny creatures. He wondered what he'd said. "Hush, Silvara," he murmured. "It will be all right." And Gilthanas fell asleep, dreaming of silver-haired children running in the green woods.



"It is time. We must leave."

Laurana felt a hand on her shoulder, shaking her. Startled, she woke from a vague, frightening dream that she could not remember to find the Wilder elf kneeling above her.

"I'll wake the others," Silvara said, and disappeared.

Feeling more tired than if she hadn't slept, Laurana packed her things by reflex and stood waiting, shivering, in the darkness. Next to her, she heard the dwarf groan. The damp air was making his joints ache painfully. This journey had been hard on Flint, Laurana realized. He was, after all,



what—almost one hundred and fifty years old? A respectable age for a dwarf. His face had lost some of its color during his illness on the voyage. His lips, barely visible beneath the beard, had a bluish tinge, and occasionally he pressed his hand against his chest. But he always stoutly insisted he was fine and kept up with them on the trail.

"All set!" cried Tas. His shrill voice echoed weirdly in the fog, and he had the distinct feeling he'd disturbed something. "I'm sorry," he said, cringing. "Gee," he muttered to Flint, "it's like being in a temple."

"Just shut up and start moving!" the dwarf snapped.

A torch flared. The companions started at the sudden, blinding light that Silvara held.

"We must have light," she said before any could protest. "Do not fear. The vale we are in is sealed shut. Long ago, there were two entrances: one led to human lands where the knights had their outpost, the other led east into the lands of the ogres. Both passes were lost during the Cataclysm. We need have no fear. I have led you by a way known only to myself."

"And to your people," Laurana reminded her sharply.

"Yes—my people . . ." Silvara said, and Laurana was surprised to see the girl grow pale.

"Where are you taking us?" Laurana insisted.

"You will see. We will be there within the hour."

The companions glanced at each other, then all of them looked at Laurana.

Damn them! she thought. "Don't look to me for answers!" she said angrily. "What do you want to do? Stay out here, lost in the fog—"

"I won't betray you!" Silvara murmured despondently. "Please, just trust me a little further."

"Go ahead," said Laurana tiredly. "We'll follow."



The fog seemed to close around them more thickly, until all that kept the darkness at bay was the light of Silvara's torch.

No one had any idea of the direction they traveled. The landscape did not change. They walked through tall grass. There were no trees.

Occasionally a large boulder loomed out of the darkness, but that was all. Of night birds or animals, there was no sign. There was a sense of urgency that increased as they walked until all of them felt it, and they hurried their steps, keeping ever within the light of the torch.

Then, suddenly, without warning, Silvara stopped.

"We are here," she said, and she held the torch aloft. The torch's light pierced the fog. They could all see a shadowy something beyond. At first, it was so ghostly materializing out of the fog that the companions could not recognize it.

Silvara drew closer. They followed her, curious, fearful.

Then the silence of the night was broken by bubbling sounds like water boiling in a giant kettle. The fog grew denser, the air was warm and stifling.

"Hot springs!" said Theros in sudden understanding. "Of course, that explains the constant fog. And this dark shape—"

"The bridge which leads across them," Silvara replied, shining the torchlight upon what they could see was a glistening stone bridge spanning the water boiling in the streams below them, filling the night air with its warm, billowing fog.

"We're supposed to cross that!" Flint exclaimed, staring at the black, boiling water in horror. "We're supposed to cross—"

"It is called the Bridge of Passage," said Silvara.

The dwarf's only answer was a strangled gulp.



The Bridge of Passage was a long, smooth arch of pure white marble. Along its sides—carved in vivid relief—long columns of knights walked symbolically across the bubbling streams. The span was so high that they could not see the top through the swirling mists. And it was old, so old that Flint, reverently touching the worn rock with his hand, could not recognize the craftsmanship. It was not dwarven, not elven, not human. Who had done such marvelous work?

Then he noticed there were no hand-rails, nothing but the marble span itself, slick and glistening with the mist rising constantly from the bubbling springs beneath.

“We cannot cross that,” said Laurana, her voice trembling. “And now we are trapped—”

“We *can* cross,” Silvara said. “For we have been summoned.”

“Summoned?” Laurana repeated in exasperation. “By what? Where?”

“Wait,” commanded Silvara.

They waited. There was nothing left for them to do. Each stood staring around in the torchlight, but they saw only the mist rising from the streams, heard only the gurgling water.

“It is the time of Solinari,” Silvara said suddenly, and—swinging her arm—she hurled her torch into the water.

Darkness swallowed them. Involuntarily, they crept closer together. Silvara seemed to have vanished with the light. Gilthanas called for her, but she did not answer.

Then the mist turned to shimmering silver. They could see once more, and now they could see Silvara, a dark, shadowy outline against the silvery mist. She stood at the foot of the bridge, staring up into the sky. Slowly she raised her hands, and slowly the mists parted. Looking up, the companions saw the mists separate like long, graceful fingers to reveal the silver moon, full and brilliant in the starry sky.

Silvara spoke strange words, and the moonlight poured down upon her, bathing her in its light. The moon's light shone upon the bubbling waters, making them come alive, dancing with silver. It shone upon the marble bridge, giving life to the knights who spent eternity crossing the stream.

But it was not these beautiful sights that caused the companions to clasp each other with shaking hands or to hold each other closely. The moon's light on the water did not cause Flint to repeat the name of Reorx in the most reverent prayer he ever uttered, or cause Laurana to lean her head against her brother's shoulder, her eyes dimmed with sudden tears, or cause Gilthanas to hold her tightly, overwhelmed by a feeling of fear and awe and reverence.

Soaring high above them, so tall its head might have torn a moon from the sky, was the figure of a dragon, carved out of a mountain of rock, shining silver in the moonlight.

"Where are we?" Laurana asked in a hushed voice. "What is this place?"

"When you cross the Bridge of Passage, you will stand before the Monument of the Silver Dragon," answered Silvara softly. "It guards the Tomb of Huma, Knight of Solamnia."

