

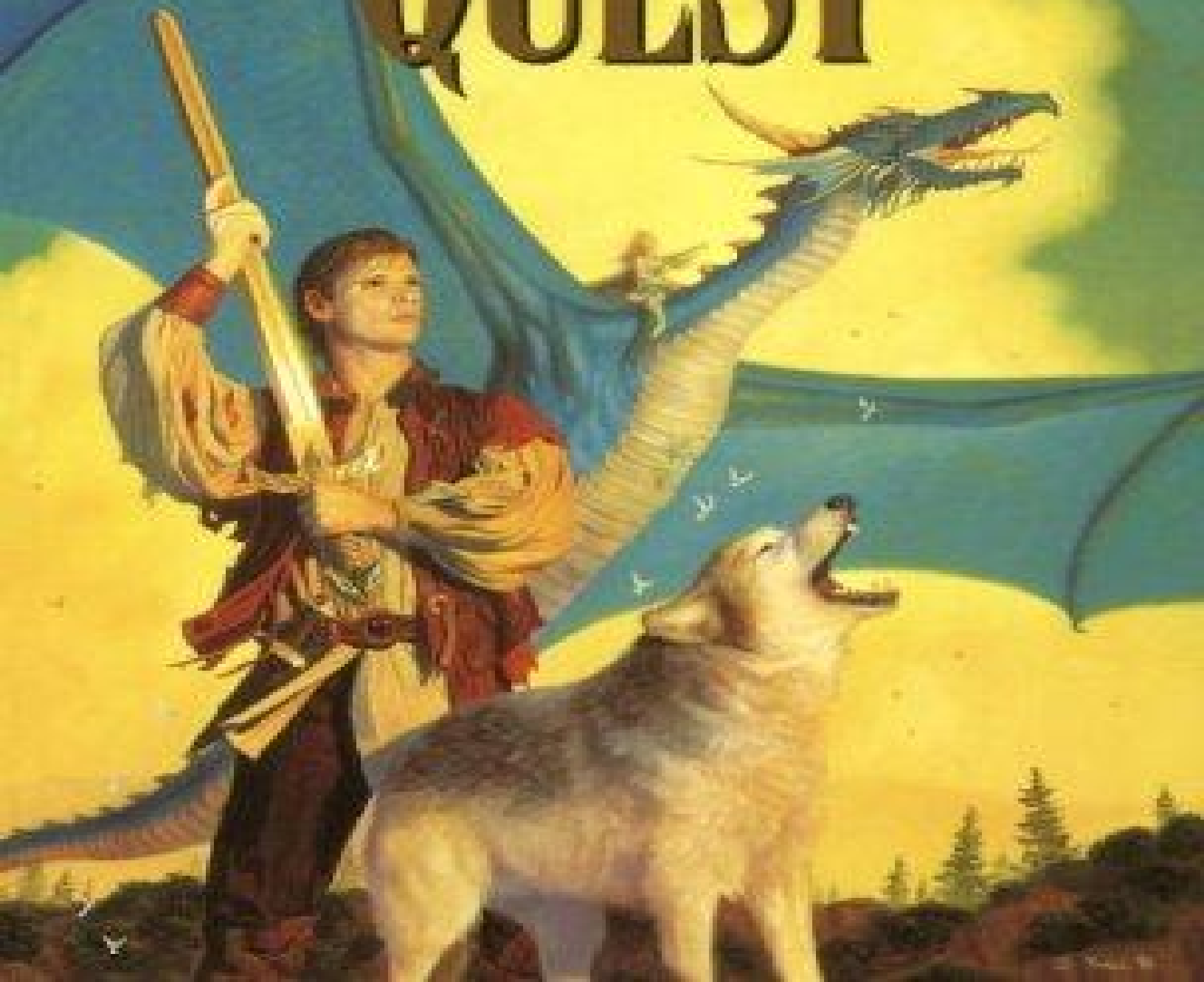
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THE FARSEER

ASSASSIN'S QUEST



Farseer 3 - Assassin's Quest

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PROLOGUE

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The Unremembered

I AWAKE EVERY MORNING with ink on my hands. Sometimes I am sprawled, facedown, on my worktable, amidst a welter of scrolls and papers. My boy, when he comes in with my tray, may dare to chide me for not taking myself off to bed the night before. But sometimes he looks at my face and ventures no word. I do not try to explain to him why I do as I do. It is not a secret one can give to a younger man; it is one he must earn and learn on his own.

A man has to have a purpose in life. I know this now, but it took me the first score years of my life to learn it. In that I scarcely think myself unique. Still, it is a lesson that, once learned, has remained with me. So, with little besides pain with which to occupy myself these days, I have sought out a purpose for myself. I have turned to a task that both Lady Patience and Scribe Fedwren had long ago advocated. I began these pages as an effort to write down a coherent history of the Six Duchies. But I found it difficult to keep my mind long fixed on a single topic, and so I distract myself with lesser treatises, on my theories of magic, on my observations of political structures, and my reflections on other cultures. When the discomfort is at its worst and I cannot sort my own thoughts well enough to write them down, I work on translations, or attempt to make a legible recording of older documents. I busy my hands in the hope of distracting my mind.

My writing serves me as Verity's mapmaking once served him. The detail of the work and the concentration required is almost enough to make one forget both the longings of the addiction, and the residual pains of having once indulged it. One can become lost in such work, and forget oneself. Or one can go even deeper, and find many recollections of that self. All too often, I find I have wandered far from a history of the duchies into a history of FitzChivalry. Those recollections leave me face-to-face with who I once was, and who I have become.

When one is deeply absorbed in such a recounting, it is surprising how much detail one can recall. Not all the memories I summon up are painful. I

have had more than a just share of good friends, and found them more loyal than I had any right to expect. I have known beauties and joys that tried my heart's strength as surely as the tragedies and uglinesses have. Yet I possess, perhaps, a greater share of dark memories than most men; few men have known death in a dungeon, or can recall the inside of a coffin buried beneath the snow. The mind shies away from the details of such things. It is one thing to recall that Regal killed me. It is another to focus on the details of the days and nights endured as he starved me and then had me beaten to death. When I do, there are moments that still can turn my bowels to ice, even after all these years. I can recall the eyes of the man and the sound of his fist breaking my nose. There still exists for me a place I visit in my dreams, where I fight to remain standing, trying not to let myself think of how I will make a final effort to kill Regal. I recall the blow from him that split my swollen skin and left the scar down my face that I still bear.

I have never forgiven myself the triumph I ceded to him when I took poison and died.

But more painful than the events I can recall are those that are lost to me. When Regal killed me, I died. I was never again commonly known as FitzChivalry, I never renewed bonds to the Buckkeep folk who had known me since I was a child of six. I never lived in Buckkeep Castle again, never more waited on the Lady Patience, never sat on the hearthstones at Chade's feet again. Lost to me were the rhythms of lives that had intertwined with mine. Friends died, others were wed, babes were born, children came of age, and I saw none of it. Though I no longer possess the body of a healthy young man, many still live who once called me friend. Sometimes, still, I long to rest eyes on them, to touch hands, to lay to peace the loneliness of years.

I cannot.

Those years are lost to me, and all the years of their lives to come. Lost, too, is that period, no longer than a month, but seeming much longer, when I was confined to dungeon and then coffin. My king had died in my arms, yet I did not see him buried. Nor was I present at the council after my death when I was found guilty of having used the Wit magic, and hence deserving of the death that had been dealt me.

Patience came to lay claim to my body. My father's wife, once so distressed to discover he had sired a bastard before they were wed, was the one who took me from that cell. Hers the hands that washed my body for

burial, that straightened my limbs and wrapped me in a grave cloth. Awkward, eccentric Lady Patience, for whatever reason, cleansed my wounds and bound them as carefully as if I still lived. She alone ordered the digging of my grave and saw to the burying of my coffin. She and Lacey, her woman, mourned me, when all others, out of fear or disgust at my crime, abandoned me.

Yet she knew nothing of how Burrich and Chade, my assassin mentor, came nights later to that grave, and dug away the snow that had fallen and the frozen clumps of earth that had been tossed down on my coffin. Only those two were present as Burrich broke through the lid of the coffin and tugged out my body, and then summoned, by his own Wit magic, the wolf that had been entrusted with my soul. They wrested that soul from the wolf and sealed it back into the battered body it had fled. They raised me, to walk once more in a man's shape, to recall what it was to have a king and be bound by an oath. To this day, I do not know if I thank them for that. Perhaps, as the Fool insists, they had no choice. Perhaps there can be no thanks nor any blame, but only recognition of the forces that brought us and bound us to our inevitable fates.

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CHAPTER ONE