

BLOOD *of the* FOLD

National Bestseller



Book Three of
THE SWORD
OF TRUTH

TERRY GOODKIND

Annotation

An Epic of Two Worlds

In a world as rich and real as our own, Richard Rahl and Kahlan Amnell stand against the ancient forces which besiege the New World — forces so terrible that when last they threatened, they could only be withstood by sealing off the Old World from whence they came. Now the barrier has been breached, and the New World is again beset by their evil power.

War and treachery plague the world, and only Richard and Kahlan can save it from an armageddon of unimaginable savagery and destruction.

Terry Goodkind, author of the brilliant bestsellers *Wizard's First Rule* and *Stone of Tears*, has created his most masterful epic yet, a sumptuous feast of magic and excitement replete with the wonders of his unique fantasy vision.

- [Terry GOODKIND](#)
 - [CHAPTER 1](#)
 - [CHAPTER 2](#)
 - [CHAPTER 3](#)
 - [CHAPTER 4](#)
 - [CHAPTER 5](#)
 - [CHAPTER 6](#)
 - [CHAPTER 7](#)
 - [CHAPTER 8](#)
 - [CHAPTER 9](#)
 - [CHAPTER 10](#)
 - [CHAPTER 11](#)
 - [CHAPTER 12](#)
 - [CHAPTER 13](#)
 - [CHAPTER 14](#)
 - [CHAPTER 15](#)
 - [CHAPTER 16](#)
 - [CHAPTER 17](#)
 - [CHAPTER 18](#)
 - [CHAPTER 19](#)

- [CHAPTER 20](#)
 - [CHAPTER 21](#)
 - [CHAPTER 22](#)
 - [CHAPTER 23](#)
 - [CHAPTER 24](#)
 - [CHAPTER 25](#)
 - [CHAPTER 26](#)
 - [CHAPTER 27](#)
 - [CHAPTER 28](#)
 - [CHAPTER 29](#)
 - [CHAPTER 30](#)
 - [CHAPTER 31](#)
 - [CHAPTER 32](#)
 - [CHAPTER 33](#)
 - [CHAPTER 34](#)
 - [CHAPTER 35](#)
 - [CHAPTER 36](#)
 - [CHAPTER 37](#)
 - [CHAPTER 38](#)
 - [CHAPTER 39](#)
 - [CHAPTER 40](#)
 - [CHAPTER 41](#)
 - [CHAPTER 42](#)
 - [CHAPTER 43](#)
 - [CHAPTER 44](#)
 - [CHAPTER 45](#)
 - [CHAPTER 46](#)
 - [CHAPTER 47](#)
 - [CHAPTER 48](#)
 - [CHAPTER 49](#)
 - [CHAPTER 50](#)
 - [CHAPTER 51](#)
 - [CHAPTER 52](#)
 - [CHAPTER 53](#)
 - [CHAPTER 54](#)
-

Terry GOODKIND
Blood of the Fold

CHAPTER 1

At the exact same instant, the six women suddenly awoke, the lingering sound of their screams echoing around the cramped officer's cabin. In the darkness, Sister Ulicia could hear the others gasping to catch their breath. She swallowed, trying to slow her own panting, and immediately winced at the raw pain in her throat. She could feel wetness on her eyelids, but her lips were so dry she had to lick them, for fear they would crack and bleed.

Someone was banging on the door. She was aware of his shouts only as a dull drone in her head. She didn't bother trying to focus on the words or their meaning; the man was inconsequential.

Lifting a trembling hand toward the center of the coal black quarters, she released a flow of her Han, the essence of life and spirit, directing a point of heat into the oil lamp she knew to be hanging on the low beam. Its wick obediently sprang to flame, releasing a sinuous line of soot that traced the lamp's slow, to-and-fro sway as the ship rolled in the sea.

The other women, all of them naked as she was, were sitting up as well, their eyes fixed on the feeble, yellow glow, as if seeking from it salvation, or perhaps reassurance that they were still alive and there was light to be seen. A tear rolled down Ulicia's cheek, too, at the sight of the flame. The blackness had been suffocating, like a great weight of damp, black earth shoveled over her.

Her bedding was sodden and cold with sweat, but even without the sweat, everything was always wet in the salt air, to say nothing of the spray that sporadically drenched the deck and trickled into everything below. She couldn't remember what it was like to feel dry clothes or bedding against her. She hated this ship, its interminable damp, its foul smells, and the constant rolling and pitching that turned her stomach. At least she was alive to hate the ship. Gingerly, she swallowed back the taste of bile.

Ulicia wiped her fingers at the warm wetness over her eyes and held out her hand; her fingertips glistened with blood. As if emboldened by her example, some of the others cautiously did the same. Each of them had bloody scratches on their eyelids, eyebrows, and cheeks from trying desperately, but futilely, to claw their eyes open, to wake themselves from the snare of sleep, in a vain attempt to escape the dream that was not a dream.

Ulicia struggled to clear the fog from her mind. It must have been a simple nightmare.

She forced herself to look away from the flame, at the other women. Sister Tovi hunched in a lower bunk opposite, the thick rolls of flesh at her sides seeming to sag in sympathy with the morose expression on her wrinkled face as she watched the lamp. Sister Cecilia's habitually tidy, curly gray hair stood out in disarray, her incessant smile replaced by an ashen mask of fear as she stared up from the lower bunk next to Tovi. Leaning forward a bit, Ulicia glanced at the bunk above. Sister Armina, not nearly as old as Tovi or Cecilia, but closer to Ulicia's age and still attractive, appeared haggard. With shaking fingers, the usually staid Armina wiped the blood from her eyelids.

Across the confining walkway, in the bunks above Tovi and Cecilia, sat the two youngest and most self-possessed Sisters. Ragged scratches marred the flawless skin of Sister Nicci's cheeks. Strands of her blond hair stuck to the tears, sweat, and blood on her face. Sister Merissa, equally beautiful, clutched a blanket to her naked breast, not in modesty, but in shuddering dread. Her long, dark hair was a tangled mat.

The others were older, and adeptly wielded power tempered in the forge of experience, but both Nicci and Merissa were possessed of rare, innate, dark talents — a deft touch that no amount of experience could invoke. Astute beyond their years, neither was beguiled by Cecilia or Tovi's kindly smiles or gentle affectations. Though young and self-assured, they both knew that Cecilia, Tovi, Armina, and especially Ulicia herself were capable of taking them both apart, piece by piece, if they so chose. Still, that did not diminish their mastery; in their own right, they were two of the most formidable women ever to have drawn breath. But it was for their singular resolve to prevail that the Keeper had selected them.

Seeing these women she knew so well in such a state was unnerving, but it was the sight of Merissa's unbridled terror that really shook Ulicia. She had never known a Sister as composed, as unemotional, as implacable, as merciless, as Merissa. Sister Merissa had a heart of black ice.

Ulicia had known Merissa for close to 170 years, and in all that time she could not recall having ever seen her cry. She was sobbing now.

Sister Ulicia drew strength from seeing the others in a condition of such abject weakness, and in fact it pleased her; she was their leader, and stronger than they.

The man was still banging at the door, wanting to know what the trouble

was, what the screaming was all about. She unleashed her anger toward the door. "Leave us! If you are needed you will be summoned!"

The sailor's muffled curses faded away as he retreated down the passageway. The only sound, other than the creak of timbers as the ship yawed when struck abeam by a heavy sea, was the sobbing.

"Stop your sniveling, Merissa," Ulicia snapped.

Merissa's dark eyes, stilt glazed with fear, focused on her. "It's never been like that before." Tovi and Cecilia nodded their agreement. "I've done his bidding. Why has he done this? I have not failed him."

"Had we failed him," Ulicia said, "we would be there, with Sister Liliana."

Armina started. "You saw her, too? She was — "

"I saw her," Ulicia said, masking her own horror with an even tone.

Sister Nicci drew a twisted skein of sodden blond hair back off her face. Gathering composure smoothed her voice. "Sister Liliana failed the Master."

Sister Merissa, the glaze in her eyes ebbing, flashed a look of cool disdain. "She is paying the price of failure." The crisp edge in her own tone thickened like winter's frost on a window. "Forever." Merissa almost never let emotion touch her smooth features, but it touched her face now as her brows drew together in a murderous scowl, "She countermanded your orders, Sister Ulicia, and the Keeper's. She ruined our plans. This is her fault."

Liliana had indeed failed the Keeper. They wouldn't all be on this cursed ship if it weren't for Sister Liliana. Ulicia's face heated at the thought of that woman's arrogance. Liliana had thought to have the glory to herself. She had gotten what she deserved. Even so, Ulicia swallowed at the memory of having seen Liliana's torment, and didn't even notice the pain of her raw throat this time.

"But what of us?" Cecilia asked. Her smile returned, apologetic, rather than merry. "Must we do as this . . . man says?"

Ulicia wiped a hand across her face. They had no time to hesitate, if this was real, if what she had seen had really happened. It must be nothing more than a simple nightmare; no one but the Keeper had ever before come to her in the dream that was not a dream. Yes, it had to be just a nightmare. Ulicia watched a roach crawl into the chamber pot. Her gaze suddenly rose.

"This man? You did not see the Keeper? You saw a man?"

Cecilia quailed. "Jagang."

Tovi raised her hand toward her lips to kiss her ring finger — an ancient

gesture beseeching the Creator's protection. It was an old habit, begun the first morning of a novice's training. Each of them had learned to do it every morning, without fail, upon arising, and in times of tribulation. Tovi had probably done it by rote countless thousands of times, as had they all. A Sister of the Light was symbolically betrothed to the Creator, and His will. Kissing the ring finger was a ritual renewal of that betrothal.

There was no telling what the act of kissing that finger would do, now, in view of their betrayal. Superstition had it that it was death for one who had pledged her soul to the Keeper — a Sister of the Dark — to kiss that finger. While it was unclear whether it truly would invoke the Creator's wrath, there was no doubt it would invoke the Keeper's. When her hand was halfway to her lips, Tovi realized what she was about to do and snatched it away.

"You all saw Jagang?" Ulicia regarded each in turn, and each nodded. A small name of hope still flickered in her. "So you saw the emperor. That means nothing." She leaned toward Tovi. "Did you hear him say anything?"

Tovi drew the coverlet up to her chin. "We were all there, as we always are when the Keeper seeks us. We sat in the semicircle, naked, as we always do. But it was Jagang who came, not the Master."

A soft sob came from Armina in the bunk above. "Silence!" Ulicia returned her attention to the shivering Tovi. "But what did he say? What were his words?"

Tovi's gaze sought the floor. "He said our souls were his now. He said we were his now, and we lived only at his whim. He said we must come to him at once, or we would envy Sister Liliana's fate." She looked up, into Ulicia's eyes. "He said we would regret it if we made him wait." Tears flooded her eyes. "And then he gave me a taste of what it would mean to displease him."

Ulicia's flesh had gone cold, and she realized that she, too, had drawn her sheet up. She pushed it back into her lap with an effort. "Armina?" Soft confirmation came from above. "Cecilia?" Cecilia nodded. Ulicia looked to the two in the upper bunk opposite. The composure they had worked so hard to bring back seemed to have settled in. "Well? Did you two hear the same words?"

"Yes," Nicci said.

"The exact same," Merissa said without emotion. "Liliana has brought this upon us."

"Perhaps the Keeper is displeased with us," Cecilia offered, "and has

given us to the emperor so we may serve him as a way of earning back our place of favor."

Merissa's back stiffened. Her eyes were a window into her frozen heart. "I have given my soul oath to the Keeper. If we must serve this vulgar beast in order to return to our Master's graces, then I will serve. I will lick this man's feet, if I must."

Ulicia remembered Jagang, just before he had departed the semicircle in the dream that was not a dream, commanding Merissa to stand. He had then casually reached out, grabbed her right breast in his powerful fingers, and squeezed until her knees buckled. Ulicia glanced at Merissa's breast, now, and saw lurid bruises there.

Merissa made no effort to cover herself as her serene expression settled on Ulicia's eyes. "The emperor said we would regret it, if we made him wait,"

Ulicia, too, had heard the same instructions. Jagang had displayed what bordered on contempt for the Keeper. How was he able to supplant the Keeper in the dream that was not a dream? He had — that was all that mattered. It had happened to all of them, it had not been a mere dream.

Tingling dread thickened in the pit of her stomach as the small flame of hope extinguished. She, too, had been given a taste of what disobedience would mean. The blood that was crusting over her eyes reminded her of how much she had wanted to escape that lesson. It had been real, and they all knew it. They had no choice. There wasn't a moment to lose. A cold bead of sweat trickled down between her breasts. If they were late. .

Ulicia bounded out of bed.

"Turn his ship around!" she shrieked as she flung open the door. "Turn it around at once!"

No one was in the passageway. She sprang up the companionway, screaming as she went. The others raced after her, pounding on cabin doors as they followed. Ulicia didn't bother with the doors; it was the helmsman who pointed the ship where it was going and commanded the deckhands to the sails.

Ulicia heaved open the hatch door to be greeted by murky light; dawn was not yet upon them. Leaden clouds seethed above the dark cauldron of the sea. Luminous foam frothed just beyond the rail as the ship slid down a towering wave, making it seem they were plunging into an inky chasm. The other Sisters poured from the hatchway behind her out onto the spray-swept deck.

"Turn this ship around!" she screamed to the barefoot sailors who turned in mule surprise.

Ulicia growled a curse and raced aft, toward the tiller. The five Sisters followed on her heels as she dashed across the pitching deck. Hands gripping the lapels of his coat, the helmsman stretched his neck to see what the trouble was. Lantern light came through the opening at his feet, showing the faces of the four men manning the tiller. Sailors gathered near the bearded helmsman, and stood gawking at the six women.

Ulicia gulped air trying to catch her breath. "What's the matter with you slack-jawed idiots? Didn't you hear me? I said to turn this ship around!"

Suddenly, she fathomed the reason for the stares: the six of them were naked. Merissa stepped up beside her, standing tall and aloof, as if she were dressed in a gown that covered her from neck to deck.

One of the leering deckhands spoke as his gaze played over the younger woman. "Well, well. Looks like the ladies have come out to play."

Cool and unattainable, Merissa regarded his lecherous grin with unruffled authority. "What's mine is mine, and not anyone else's, even to look upon, unless I decide it is so. Remove your eyes from my flesh at once, or have them removed."

Had the man the gift, and Ulicia's mastery of it, he would have been able to sense the air about Merissa cracking ominously with power. These men knew them only as wealthy nobility wanting passage to strange and distant places; they didn't know who, or what, the six women really were. Captain Blake knew them as Sisters of the Light, but Ulicia had ordered him to keep that knowledge from his men.

The man mocked Merissa with a lecherous expression and obscene thrusts of his hips. "Don't be standoffish, lass. You wouldn't of come out here like that unless you had in mind the same as us."

The air sizzled around Merissa. Blood blossomed at the crotch of the man's trousers. He squealed as he looked up with eyes gone wild. Lightning glinted off the long knife at his belt as he yanked it free. Yelling an oath of retribution, he staggered ahead with lethal intent.

A distant smile touched Merissa's full lips. "You filthy scum," she murmured to herself. "I deliver you into the cold embrace of my Master."

His flesh burst apart as if he were a rotten melon whacked with a stick. A concussion of air driven by the power of the gift slammed him over the rail. A bloody trail traced his course across the planks. With scarcely a