

Silverthorn

RAYMOND E. FEIST

A NOVEL BY THE AUTHOR OF MAGICIAN



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Riftware Sage Book 2

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Our Story So Far . . .

Pug and Tomas, two kitchen boys at Castle Crydee, were caught up in the invasion of their homeland, the Kingdom of the Isles on the world of Midkemia. Four years had passed since Pug's capture by soldiers of the Empire of Tsuranuanni. He was working as a slave in a swamp camp on the Tsurani homeworld, Kelewan, with newcomer, Laurie of Try-Sog, a minstrel. After trouble with the camp overseer they were taken by Hokanu, youngest son of the Shinzawai, to his father's estate. Pug and Laurie were ordered to train Kasumi in every aspect of Kingdom culture and language. There Pug also met a slave girl, Katala, with whom he fell in love. The brother of the Lord of the Shinzawai, Kamatsu, was a Great One, a magician of power, beings who were a law unto themselves. One night the Great One, Fumita, learned Pug had been apprenticed as a magician on Midkemia. He claimed Pug for the Assembly, the brotherhood of magicians, and they vanished from the Shinzawai estate.

Back on Midkemia, Tomas had by then grown to a figure of stunning power, made so by his ancient armor, once worn by a Valheru—a Dragon Lord—the legendary first people of Midkemia, masters of all. Little was known about them save they were cruel and powerful and had kept the elves and moredhel as slaves. Aglaranna, her son Calin, and Tathar, her senior advisor, feared Tomas was being consumed by the power of Ashen-Shugar, the ancient Dragon Lord whose armor he wore. They feared an attempted return of Valheru domination. Aglaranna was doubly troubled, for beside fearing Tomas, she was falling in love with him. The Tsurani invaded Elvandar, and were repulsed by Tomas and Dolgan's forces, aided by the mysterious Macros the Black. After the battle, Aglaranna admitted her feeling to Tomas, took him as a lover, and thereby lost her power to command him.

Pug was cleansed of his memory by the teachers of the Assembly and, after four years of training, became a magician. He learned he was a gifted follower of the Greater Path, a magic nonexistent upon Midkemia. Kulgan was a Lesser Path magician, so he had been unable to teach Pug. Pug was given the name Milamber when he became a Great One. His teacher, Shimone, watched as Milamber passed the final test, standing upon a thin spire at the height of a storm while having the history of the Empire revealed. There he was steeped in the first duty of a Great One, to serve the

Empire. Pug met his first friend in the Assembly, Hochopepa, a shrewd magician who instructed Pug on the pitfalls of Tsurani politics.

By the ninth year of the war, Arutha feared they were losing the struggle, then learned from a captive slave that new troops were arriving from Kelewan. With Martin Longbow, his father's Huntmaster, and Amos Trask, Arutha traveled to Krondor to seek additional aid from Prince Erland. During the journey, Amos discovered Martin's secret, that Martin was Lord Borric's bastard. Martin made Amos swear never to reveal the secret until he allowed it. In Krondor, Arutha discovered the city under the control of Guy, Duke of Bas-Tyra, an avowed enemy of Lord Borric. Arutha then ran afoul of Jocko Radburn, Guy's henchman and head of the secret police, who chased Arutha, Martin, and Amos into the arms of the Mockers, the thieves of Krondor. There they met Jimmy the Hand, a boy thief, Trevor Hull, a former pirate turned smuggler, and his first mate, Aaron Cook. The Mockers were hiding Princess Anita, who had fled the palace. Jocko Radburn was furiously trying to recapture Anita before Guy du Bas-Tyra returned from a border skirmish with the neighboring Empire of Great Kesh. With the Mockers help, Arutha, his companions, and Anita, fled the city. During a sea chase, Amos lured Radburn's ship onto the rocks and the head of the secret police drowned. Upon returning to Crydee, Arutha learned that Squire Roland had been killed in a skirmish. By then Arutha was in love with Anita, though he would not admit as much to himself, counting her as too young.

Pug, now known as Milamber, returned to the Shinzawai estate to claim Katala, and discovered he was a father. His son, William, had been born during his absence. He also learned that the Shinzawai were involved in a plot with the Emperor to force peace on the High Council, dominated by the Warlord. Laurie and Pug were to guide Kasumi, who had by then mastered the language and custom of the Kingdom, to the King, bearing the Emperor's offer of peace. Pug wished them well, and then took his wife and child to their home.

Tomas underwent a great change, bringing the forces of the Valheru and the human boy into balance, but only after nearly killing Martin Longbow. In a titanic inner battle, the boy was nearly overcome, but at the end he mastered the raging thing that once was a Dragon Lord, and at last, discovered peace within his soul.

Kasumi and Laurie came through the rift and made their way to Rillanon, where they discovered the King had become thoroughly mad. He accused them of being spies and they fled with the aid of Duke Caldric. The Duke advised them to seek out Lord Borric, for it seemed civil war would surely come. Reaching the camp, Laurie and Kasumi met Lyam, who informed them Borric was close to death from a wound.

Milamber—Pug—attended the Imperial Games, given by the Warlord, to commemorate his smashing victory over Lord Borric. Milamber became enraged at the wanton cruelty, especially the treatment of Midkemian prisoners. In a fit of rage, he destroyed the arena, shaming the Warlord, thereby throwing the politics of the empire into shambles. Milamber then fled with Katala and William back to Midkemia, a Tsurani Great One no longer, once again Pug of Crydee.

Pug returned in time to be at Lord Borric's side when he died. The Duke's last act was to legitimize Martin. The King then arrived, angered by his commanders' inability to end the long war. He led a mad charge against the Tsurani and, against all odds, broke their front, driving them back into the valley where they held their rift machine. The King was mortally wounded, and in a rare lucid moment, named Lyam his heir.

Lyam sent word to the Tsurani he would accept the peace offer Rodric spurned, and the date for the truce talk was set. Macros then went to Elvandar, warning Tomas to expect deception at the peace meeting. Tomas agreed then to bring his warriors, as would the dwarves.

At the peace meeting, Macros created an illusion, bringing chaos and battle where peace was the intent. Macros arrived, for now the need was the greatest. Pug and Macros then destroyed the rift, which stranded four thousand Tsurani under Kasumi's command on Midkemia. Pug surrendered them to Lyam, who granted them all freedom if they swore fealty.

All returned to Rillanon for Lyam's coronation, save Arutha, Pug, and Kulgan, who visited Macros's isle. There they discovered Gathis, a goblin-like servant of the sorcerer, who gave them a message. Macros, it appeared, died in the destruction of the rift. He left his vast library to Pug and Kulgan, who plan to start an academy for magicians. Macros explained his treachery by saying that a being known only as the Enemy, a vast and terrible power known to the Tsurani in ancient times, could find Midkemia using the rift. That is why he had forced a situation where the rift had to be destroyed.

All then reached Rillanon, where Arutha discovered the truth about Martin. Being the eldest, Martins birth clouded Lyam's inheritance, but the former Huntmaster renounced any claim to the throne, and Lyam became King. Arutha was made Prince of Krondor, as Anita's father had died. Guy du Bas-Tyra was in hiding and, in his absence, was banished as a traitor. Laurie then made the acquaintance of Princess Carline, who seemed to return his interest.

Lyam, Martin, who became Duke of Crydee, and Arutha left for a tour of the Eastern Realm, while Pug and his family, along with Kulgan traveled to the island of Stardock, to begin the construction of the Academy. For a year, peace reigned in the Kingdom . . .

Book III - Arutha And Jimmy

Their rising all at once was as the
sound Of thunder heard remote.

—MILTON, *Paradise Lost*,
BOOK II, 1. 476

PROLOGUE - Twilight

The sun dropped behind the peaks.

The last rays of warmth touched the earth and only the rosy afterglow of the day remained. From the east, indigo darkness approached rapidly. The wind cut through the hills like a sharp-edged blade, as if spring were only a faintly remembered dream. Winter's ice still clung to shadow-protected pockets, ice that cracked loudly under the heels of heavy boots. Out of the evening's darkness three figures entered the firelight.

The old witch looked up, her dark eyes widening slightly at the sight of the three. She knew the figure on the left, the broad, mute warrior with the shaved head and single long scalp lock. He had come once before, seeking magic signs for strange rites. Though he was a powerful chieftain, she had sent him away, for his nature was evil, and while issues of good and evil seldom held any significance for the witch, there were limits even for her. Besides, she had little love for any *moredhel*, especially one who had cut out his own tongue as a sign of devotion to dark powers.

The mute warrior regarded her with the blue eyes unusual for one of his race. He was broader of shoulders than most, even for one of the mountain clans, who tended to be more powerful of arm and shoulder than their forest-dwelling cousins. The mute wore golden circle rings in his large, upswept ears, painful to affix, as the *moredhel* had no lobes. Upon each cheek were three scars, mystic symbols whose meaning was not lost upon the witch.

The mute made a sign to his companions, and the one to the far right seemed to nod. It was difficult to judge, for he was clothed in an all-concealing robe, with a deep hood revealing no features. Both hands were hidden in voluminous sleeves that were kept together. As if speaking from a great distance, the cloaked figure said, "We seek a reading of signs." His voice was sibilant, almost a hiss, and there was a note of something alien in it. One hand appeared and the witch pulled away, for it was misshapen and scaled, as if the owner possessed talons covered with snakeskin. She then knew the creature for what it was: a priest of the Pantathian serpent people. Compared to the serpent people, the *moredhel* were held in high regard by the witch.

She turned her attention from the end figures and studied the one in the center. He stood a full head taller than the mute and was even more

impressive in bulk. He slowly removed a bearskin robe, the bear's skull providing a helm for his own head, and cast it aside. The old witch gasped, for he was the most striking moredhel she had seen in her long life. He wore the heavy trousers, vest, and knee-high boots of the hill clans, and his chest was bare. His powerfully muscled body gleamed in the firelight, and he leaned forward to study the witch. His face was almost frightening in its near-perfect beauty. But what had caused her to gasp, more than his awesome appearance, was the sign upon his chest. "Do you know me?" he asked the witch. She nodded. "I know who you appear to be." He leaned even farther forward, until his face was lit from below by the fire, revealing something in his nature. "I am who I appear to be," he whispered with a smile. She felt fear, for behind his handsome features, behind the benign smile, she saw the visage of evil, evil so pure it defied endurance. "We seek a reading of signs," he repeated, his voice the sound of ice-clear madness.

She chuckled. "Even one so mighty has limits?" The handsome moredhel's smile slowly vanished. "One may not foretell one's own future."

Resigned to her own likely lot, she said, "I require silver." The moredhel nodded. The mute dug a coin from out of his belt pouch and tossed it upon the floor before the witch. Without touching it, she prepared some ingredients in a stone cup. When the concoction was ready, she poured it upon the silver. A hissing came, both from the coin and from the serpent man. A green-scaled claw began to make signs, and the witch snapped, "None of that nonsense, snake. Your hot-land magic will only cant my reading."

The serpent man was restrained by a gentle touch and smile from the center figure, who nodded at the witch.

In croaking tones, her throat dry with fear, the witch said, "Say you then truly: What would you know?" She studied the hissing silver coin, covered now in bubbling green slime.

"Is it time? Shall I do now that which was ordained?"

A bright green flame sprang from the coin and danced. The witch followed its movement closely, her eyes seeing something within the flame none but she could divine. After a while she said, "The Bloodstones form the Cross of Fire. That which you are, you are. That which you are born to do . . . do!" The last word was a half-gasp.

Something in the witch's expression was unexpected, for the moredhel said, "What else, crone?"

"You stand not unopposed, for there is one who is your bane. You stand not alone, for behind you . . . I do not understand." Her voice was weak, faint.

"What?" The moredhel showed no smile this time.

"Something . . . something vast, something distant, something evil."

The moredhel paused to consider; turning to the serpent man, he spoke softly yet commandingly. "Go then, Cathos. Employ your arcane skills and discover where this seat of weakness lies. Give a name to our enemy. Find him."

The serpent man bowed awkwardly and shambled out of the cave. The moredhel turned to his mute companion and said, "Raise the standards, my general, and gather the loyal clans upon the plains of Isbandia, beneath the towers of Sar-Sargoth. Raise highest that standard I have chosen for my own, and let all know we begin that which was ordained. You shall be my battlemaster, Murad, and all shall know you stand highest among my servants. Glory and greatness now await.

"Then, when the mad snake has identified our quarry, lead forth the Black Slayers. Let those whose souls are mine serve us by seeking out our enemy. Find him! Destroy him! Go!"

The mute nodded once and left the cave. The moredhel with the sign on his chest faced the witch. "Then, human refuse, do you know what dark powers move?"

"Aye, messenger of destruction, I know. By the Dark Lady, I know."

He laughed, a cold humorless sound. "I wear the sign," he said, pointing to the purple birthmark upon his chest, which seemed to glow angrily in the firelight. It was clear that his was no simple disfigurement but some sort of magic talisman, for it formed a perfect silhouette of a dragon in flight. He raised his finger, pointing upward. "I have the power." He made a circular motion with his upraised finger. "I am the foreordained. I am destiny."

The witch nodded, knowing death raced to embrace her. She suddenly mouthed a complex incantation, her hands moving furiously through the air. A gathering of power manifested itself in the cave and a strange keening filled the night. The warrior before her simply shook his head. She cast a spell at him, one that should have withered him where he stood. He