

The *New York Times* Bestseller

DAVID EDDINGS

Book Four of The Malloreon

SORCERESS OF DARSHIVA



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PROLOGUE

Being a Brief History of the Eastern Empire.

From Emperors of Melcena and Mallorea University of Melcene Press

The origins of the Melcene Empire are forever lost to us. Some legends maintain that the precursors of the Melcenes came in rude canoes out of the vast sea lying east of the Melcene Islands; others contend that the ancestral Melcene was an offshoot of that curious culture existing in Dalasia. Whatever the source, however, Melcena stands as the oldest civilization on the earth.

Melcena has always been closely allied with the sea, and her original home lay in the islands off the east coast of the Mallorea continent. The capital at Melcena was a city of light and culture when Tol Honeth was a rude village and

Mal Zeth was only a shabby cluster of tents. Only Kell stood in contemplation of the heavens to rival the ancestral home of the Melcenes.

It was the advent of a catastrophe which caused Melcena to abandon its splendid isolation. At a time estimated to be five thousand years ago, a disaster occurred far to the west. The Angaraks and Alorns blame this on a theological dispute between the Gods. Such explanation is not to be taken seriously, but it does give some insight into the gropings of primitive minds to explain the forces of nature.

Whatever the source, the cataclysm involved a great split in the protocontinent and engendered colossal tidal waves. The seas first fell, then rose, and ultimately came to rest at more or less the present shoreline. For Melcena, this was disastrous. Fully half the land area of ancient Melcena was lost to the sea. Although the loss of property was enormous, the bulk of the people were saved. This left a pitifully overcrowded population clinging to the remnants of their former islands. The capital at Melcena had been a fair city in the mountains, where affairs could be managed without the debilitating effects of the climate in the tropical lowlands. Following the catastrophe, Melcena was a shattered city, destroyed by earthquake and flood, lying no more than a league from the new coast.

After a period of rebuilding, it became clear that the shrunken homeland could no longer support the population. Thus the Melcenes turned to the mainland. Southeastern Mallorea lay closest, a region populated by peoples of their own racial stock with a compatible, though corrupted, language; to that region the Melcenes turned their attention. There were five primitive kingdoms in the area—Gandahar, Darshiva, Celanta, Peldane, and Rengel. These were quickly overrun by the technologically superior Melcenes and were absorbed into their growing empire.

The dominating force in the Melcene Empire was the bureaucracy. While there were drawbacks to a bureaucratic form of government, it provided the advantages of continuity and a clear-eyed pragmatism more concerned with finding the most practical way to get the job done than with whim, prejudice, and egocentricity, which so frequently move other forms of government. Melcene bureaucracy was practical almost to a fault. The concept of “an aristocracy of talent” dominated Melcene thinking. If one bureau ignored a talented individual, another was almost certain to snap him up.

The various departments of the Melcene government rushed into the newly conquered mainland provinces to winnow through the population in search of genius. The conquered peoples were thus absorbed directly into the mainstream of the life of the empire. Always pragmatic, the Melcenes left the royal houses of the five mainland provinces in place, preferring to operate in rough established lines of authority rather than set up new ones.

For the next fourteen hundred years, the Melcene Empire prospered, far removed from the theological and political squabbles of the western continent. Melcene culture was secular, civilized, and highly educated. Slavery was unknown, and trade with the Angaraks and their subject peoples in Karanda and Dalasia was extremely profitable. The old capital at Melcena became a major center of learning. Unfortunately, some Melcene scholars turned toward the arcane. Their summoning of evil spirits went far beyond the mumbo jumbo of the Morindim or the Karandese and began to delve into darker and more serious areas. They made progress in witchcraft and necromancy. But the major interest lay in the field of alchemy.

The first encounter with the Angaraks took place during this period. Although victorious in that first meeting, the Melcenes realized that

eventually the Angaraks would overwhelm them by sheer weight of numbers.

While the Angaraks bent most of their efforts to the establishment of the Dalasian Protectorates, there was a wary, tentative peace. The trade contacts between the two nations yielded a somewhat better understanding of each other, though the Melcenes were amused by the preoccupation with religion of even the most worldly Angarak. Over the next eighteen hundred years relations between the two nations deteriorated into little wars, seldom lasting more than a year or two. Both sides scrupulously avoided committing their full forces, obviously not wishing all-out confrontation.

To gain more information about each other, the two nations developed a tradition of exchanging the children of various leaders for certain periods of time. The sons of high-ranking Melcene bureaucrats were sent to Mal Zeth to live with the families of Angarak generals, and the generals' sons were sent to the imperial capital to be raised. The result was a group of young men with cosmopolitanism which later became the norm for the ruling class of the Mallolean Empire.

One such exchange toward the end of the fourth millennium ultimately resulted in the unification of the two peoples. At about the age of twelve, a youth named Kallath, son of a high-ranking Angarak general, was sent to Melcena to spend his formative years in the household of the Imperial Minister of Foreign Affairs. The minister had frequent official and social contacts with the imperial family, and Kallath soon became a welcome guest at the imperial palace. Emperor Molvan was an elderly man with but one surviving child, a daughter named Danera, perhaps a year younger than Kallath. Matters between the two youngsters progressed in a not uncommon fashion until Kallath was recalled at eighteen to Mal Zeth to begin his military career. Kallath rose meteorically through the ranks to the position of Governor-General of the District of Rakuth by the time he was twenty-eight, thereby becoming the youngest man ever elevated to the General Staff. A year later he journeyed to Melcene, where he and Princess Danera were married.

In the years that followed, Kallath divided his time between Melcena and Mal Zeth, building a power base in each, and when Emperor Molvan died in 3829, he was ready. There had been others in line for the throne, but most of these had died—frequently under mysterious circumstances. It was,

nonetheless, over the violent objections of many noble families of Melcena that Kallath was declared Emperor of Melcena in 3830; these objections were quieted with brutal efficiency by Kallath's cohorts. Danera had produced seven healthy children to insure that Kallath's line would continue.

Journeying to Mal Zeth the following year, Kallath brought the Melcene army to the border of Delchin, where it stood poised. At Mal Zeth, Kallath delivered an ultimatum to the General Staff. His forces comprised the army of his own district of Rakuth and of the eastern principalities in Karand, where the Angarak military governors had sworn allegiance to him. Together with the army on the Delchin border, these gave him absolute military supremacy. His demand was to be appointed OverGeneral of the armies of Angarak. There were precedents. In the past, an occasional general had been granted that office, though it was far more common for the General Staff to rule jointly. But Kallath's demand brought something new into the picture. His position as emperor was hereditary, and he insisted that the OverGeneralship of Angarak also be passed to his heirs. Helplessly, the generals acceded to his demands. Kallath stood supreme on the continent as Emperor of Melcene and Commander in Chief of Angarak.

The integration of Melcene and Angarak was turbulent, but in the end, Melcene patience won out over Angarak brutality, as it became evident over the years that the Melcene bureaucracy was infinitely more efficient than Angarak military administration. The bureaucracy first moved on such mundane matters as standards and currency. From there it was but a short step to establishing a continental Bureau of Roads. Within a few hundred years, the bureaucracy ran virtually every aspect of life on the continent. As always, it gathered up talented men and women from every corner of Mallorea, regardless of race; soon administrative units comprised of Melcenes, Karands, Dalasians, and Angaraks were not at all uncommon. By 4400, the bureaucratic ascendancy was complete. In the interim, the title of OverGeneral had begun to fall into disuse, perhaps because the bureaucracy customarily addressed all communications to "the Emperor." There appears to have been no specific date when the Emperor of Melcena became the Emperor of Mallorea, and such usage was never formally approved until after the disastrous adventure in the West which ended in the Battle of Vo Mimbre.

The conversion of Melcenes to the worship of Torak was at best superficial. They pragmatically accepted the forms of Angarak worship out of political expediency, but the Grolims were unable to command the abject submission to the Dragon God which had always characterized the Angaraks.

In 4850, Torak himself suddenly emerged from his eons of seclusion at Ashaba. A vast shock ran through Mallorea as the living God, his maimed face concealed behind a polished steel mask, appeared at the gates of Mal Zeth. The Emperor was disdainfully set aside, and Torak assumed full authority as “Kal”—King and God. Messengers were dispatched to Cthol Murgos, Mishrak ac Thull, and Gar og Nadrak, and a council of war was held at Mal Zeth in 4852. The Dalasians, Karands, and Melcenes were stunned by the appearance of a figure they had always thought purely mythical, and their shock was compounded by the presence of Torak’s disciples.

Torak was a God and did not speak, except to issue commands. But the Disciples, Ctuchik, Zedar, and Urvon, were men and they probed and examined everything with a kind of cold disdain. They saw at once that Mallorea society had become almost totally secular—and took steps to rectify the situation. A reign of terror descended upon Mallorea. Grolims were everywhere, and secularism was a form of heresy to them. The sacrifices, long virtually unknown, were renewed with fanatic enthusiasm; soon not a village in all Mallorea did not have its altar and reeking bonfire. In one stroke, Torak’s disciples overturned millennia of military and bureaucratic rule and returned absolute dominion to the Grolims. Soon there was not one facet of Mallorea life that did not bow abjectly to the will of Torak.

The mobilization of Mallorea in preparation for the war with the West virtually depopulated the continent, and the disaster at Vo Mimbire wiped out an entire generation. The catastrophic campaign, coupled with the apparent death of Torak at the hands of the Rivan Warder, utterly demoralized Mallorea. The doddering old emperor emerged from retirement to try to rebuild the shattered bureaucracy. Grolim efforts to maintain control were met with universal hatred. Without Torak, they had no real power. Most of the emperor’s sons had perished at Vo Mimbire, but one gifted child remained, a boy of seven, the son of his old age. The emperor spent his few remaining years instructing and preparing his son for the task

of ruling. When age finally rendered the emperor incompetent, Korzeth, then about fourteen, callously deposed his father and ascended the imperial throne.

After the war, Mallorea society had fractured back to its original components of Melcena, Karanda, Dalasia, and Mallorea Antiqua. There was even a movement to disintegrate further into the prehistoric kingdoms which had existed before the coming of the Angaraks. This movement was particularly strong in the principality of Gandahar in southern Melcena, in Zamad and Voresebo in Karanda, and in Perivor in the Dalasian Protectorates. Deceived by Korzeth's youth, these regions rashly declared independence from the imperial throne at Mat Zeth, and other principalities gave indications that they would soon follow suit. Korzeth moved immediately to stem the tide of revolution. The boy emperor spent the rest of his life on horseback in perhaps the greatest bloodbath in history; but when he was done, he delivered a reunified Mallorea to his successor to the throne.

The descendants of Korzeth brought a different kind of rule to the continent. Before the disastrous war, the Emperor of Mallorea had often been little more than a figurehead, and power had largely rested with the bureaucracy. But now the imperial throne was absolute. The center of power shifted from Melcena to Mal Zeth in keeping with the military orientation of Korzeth and his descendants. As is usual when power rests in the hands of one supreme ruler, intrigue became commonplace. Plots and conspiracies abounded as various functionaries schemed to discredit rivals and gain imperial favor. Rather than trying to stop these palace intrigues, Korzeth's descendants encouraged them, perceiving that men divided by mutual distrust could never unite to challenge the power of the throne.

The present emperor, Zakath, assumed the throne during his eighteenth year. Intelligent, sensitive, and capable, he gave early promise of enlightened rule. A personal tragedy, however, turned him from that course and made him a man feared by half the world. Now he is obsessed with the concept of power; the idea of becoming Overking of all the Angaraks has dominated his thoughts for the past two decades. Only time will determine if Zakath will succeed in asserting dominance over the Western Angarak Kingdoms, but if he succeeds, the history of the entire world may be profoundly altered.

PART ONE - MELGENA