

# TERRY GOODKIND

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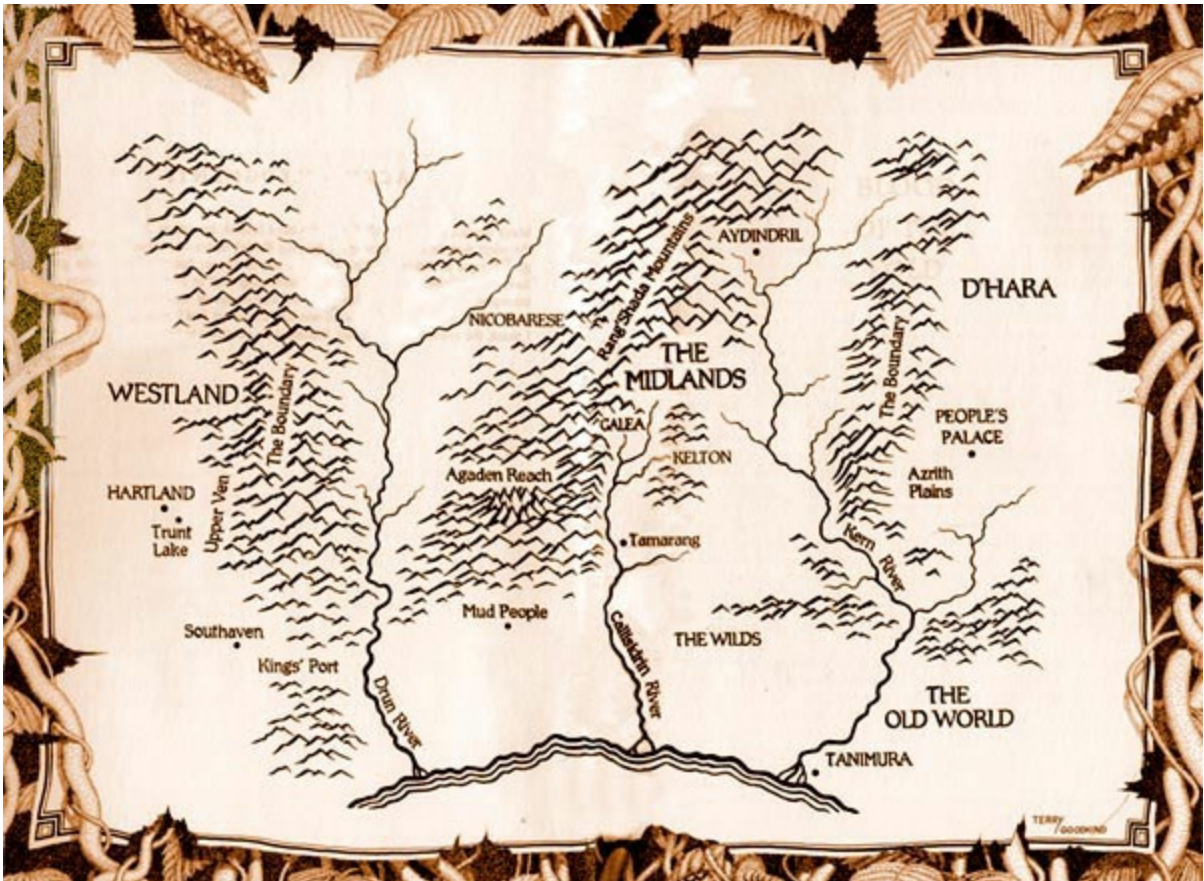
A SWORD  
OF TRUTH  
NOVEL

# TEMPLE OF THE WINDS

# Temple of the Winds

Sword of Truth 04

Terry Goodkind



## Chapter 1

“Let me kill him,” Cara said, her boot strikes sounding like rawhide mallets hammering the polished marble floor.

The supple leather boots Kahlan wore beneath her elegant, white Confessor’s dress whispered against the cold stone as he tried to keep pace without letting her legs break into a run.

“No.”

Cara exhibited no response, keeping her blue eyes ahead to the wide corridor stretching into the distance. A dozen leather- and chain-mail-clad D’Haran soldiers, their unadorned swords sheathed, or crescent-bladed battle-axes hooked on belt hangers, crossed at an intersection just ahead. Though their weapons weren’t drawn, every wooden hilt was gripped in a ready fist as vigilant eyes scrutinized the shadows among the doorways and columns to each side. Their hasty bows toward Kahlan only briefly interrupted their attention to their task.

“We can’t just kill him,” Kahlan explained. “We need answers.”

An eyebrow lifted over one icy blue eye. “Oh, I didn’t say he wouldn’t give us answers before he dies. He will answer any question you have when I’m finished with him.” A mirthless smile ghosted across her flawless face. “That is the job of a Mord-Sith: getting people to answer questions”-she paused as the smile returned to widen with professional satisfaction-“before they die.”

Kahlan heaved a sigh. “Cara, that’s no longer your job-your life. Your job now is to protect Richard.”

“That is why you should let me kill him. We should not take a risk by letting this man live.”

“No. We first have to find out what’s going on, and we’re not going to start out doing it the way you want.”

Cara’s smile, humourless as it was, had vanished again. “As you wish, Mother Confessor.”

Kahlan wondered how the woman had managed to change into her skin-tight red leather outfit so fast. Whenever there was so much as a whiff of trouble, at least one of the three Mord-Sith seemed to materialize out of nowhere in her red leather. Red, as they often pointed out, didn’t show blood.

“Are you sure he said that, this man? Those were his words?”

“Yes, Mother Confessor, his exact words. You should let me kill him before he has a chance to try to bring them to pass.”

Kahlan ignored the repeated request as they hurried on down the hall. “Where’s Richard?”

“You wish me to get Lord Rahl?”

“No! I just want to know where he is, in case there’s trouble.”

“I would say that this qualifies as trouble.”

“You said that there must be two hundred soldiers holding weapons on him. How much trouble can one man cause with all those swords, axes, and arrows pointed at him?”

“My former master, Darken Rahl, knew that steel alone could not always ward danger. That is why he had Mord-Sith nearby and at the ready.”

“That evil man would kill people without even bothering to determine if they were really a danger to him. Richard isn’t like that, and neither am I. You know that if there is a true threat, I’m not shy about eliminating it, but if this man is more than he seems, then why is he so timidly cowering before all that steel? Besides, as a Confessor I am hardly defenseless against threats that steel won’t stop.”

“We have to keep our heads. Let’s not start leaping to judgments that may be unwarranted.”

“If you don’t think he could be trouble, then why am I nearly running to just keep up with you?”

Kahlan realized that she was a half a step ahead of the woman. She slowed her pace to a brisk walk. “Because it’s Richard we’re talking about,” she said in a near whisper.

Cara smirked. “You’re as worried as I.”

“Of course I am. But for all we know, killing this man, if he is more than he seems, could be springing a snare.”

“You could be right, but that is the purpose for Mord-Sith.”

“So, where is Richard?”

Cara gripped the red leather at her waist and stretched her armor-backed glove tighter onto her hand as she flexed her fist. Her Agiel, an awesome weapon that appeared to be nothing more than a finger-width foot-long red leather rod, dangled from a fine gold chain at her right wrist, ever at the ready. One just like it, but no weapon in Kahlan’s hands, hung on a chain

around Kahlan's neck. It had been a gift from Richard, a gift that symbolized the pain and sacrifice they had both endured.

"He is out behind the palace, in one of the private parks." Cara gestured over her shoulder. "The one that way. Raina and Berdine are with him."

Kahlan was relieved to hear that the other two Mord-Sith were watching over him. "Something to do with his surprise for me?"

"What surprise?"

Kahlan smiled. "Surely he's told you, Cara."

Cara snatched a glimpse out of the corner of her eye. "Of course he has told me."

"Then what is it?"

"He also told me not to tell you."

Kahlan shrugged. "I won't tell him that you told me."

Cara's laugh, like her smile before, bore no humor. "Lord Rahl has a peculiar way of finding out things, especially those things you wish him not to know."

Kahlan knew the truth of that. "So what's he doing out there?"

The muscles in Cara's jaw flexed. "Outdoor things. You know Lord Rahl; he likes to do outdoor things."

Kahlan glanced over to see that Cara's face had turned nearly as red as her leather outfit. "What sort of outdoor things?"

Cara cleared her throat into her armored fist. "He is taming chipmunks."

"He's what? I can't hear you."

Cara waved an impatient hand. "He said that the chipmunks have come out to test the warming weather. He is taming them." Her cheeks rounded as she huffed. "With seeds."

Kahlan smiled at the thought of Richard, the man she loved, the man who had seized command of D'Hara, and had much of the Midlands now eating out of his hand, having a fine afternoon teaching chipmunks to eat seeds out of his hand.

"Well, that sounds innocent enough - feeding seeds to chipmunks."

Cara flexed her armored fist again as they swept between two D'Haran guards. "He is teaching them to eat those seeds," she said through clenched teeth, "out of Raina and Berdine's hands. The two of them were giggling!" She aimed a mortified expression toward the ceiling as she threw her hands up. Her Agiel swung on the gold chain at her wrist. "Mord-Sith - giggling!"

Kahlan pressed her lips tight, trying to keep from breaking into laughter. Cara pulled her long blond braid forward, over her shoulder, stroking it in a way that provoked in Kahlan an unsettling memory of the way Shota, the witch woman, stroked her snakes.

“Well,” Kahlan said, trying to cool the other woman’s indignation, “maybe it’s not by their choice. They are bonded to him. Perhaps Richard ordered it, and they’re simply obeying him.”

Cara shot her an incredulous look. Kahlan knew that any of the three Mord-Sith would defend Richard to the death - they had shown themselves prepared to sacrifice their lives without hesitation - but though they were bonded to him through magic, they disregarded his orders wantonly if they judged them trivial, unimportant, or unwise. Kahlan imagined that it was because Richard had given them their freedom from the rigid principles of their profession, and they enjoyed exercising that freedom. Darken Rahl, their former master, Richard’s father, would have killed them in a heartbeat had he even suspected that they were considering disobeying his orders, no matter how trivial they were.

“The sooner you wed Lord Rahl the better. Then, instead of teaching chipmunks to eat out of Mord-Sith hands, he will be eating out of yours.”

Kahlan exhaled in a soft, lilting laugh, thinking about being his wife. It wouldn’t be long, now. “Richard will have my hand, but you should know as well as anyone that he will not be eating out of it - and I wouldn’t want him to.”

“If you regain your senses, come see me, and I will teach you how.” Cara turned her attention to the alert D’Haran soldiers. Men at arms were rushing everywhere, checking every hall and looking behind every door, no doubt at Cara’s insistence.

“Egan is with Lord Rahl, too. He should be safe while we see to this man.”

Kahlan’s mirth withered. “How did he get in here, anyway? Did he come in with the petitioners?”

“No.” A professional chill settled back into Cara’s tone. “But I intend to find out. From what I gather, he just walked up to a patrol of guards not far from the council chambers and asked where he could find Lord Rahl, as if just anyone can walk in and ask to see the Master of D’Hara, as if he was a head butcher that anyone can go to if they want a choice cut of mutton.”

“That’s when the guards asked him why he wanted to see Richard?”

Cara nodded. "I think we should kill him."

Realization wormed up Kahlan's spine in a cold tingle. Cara wasn't simply an aggressive bodyguard, unconcerned about spilling the blood of others - she was afraid. She was afraid for Richard.

"I want to know how he got in here. He presented himself to a patrol inside the palace; he shouldn't have been able to get inside, wandering around unfettered. What if we have a hitherto-unknown breach in security? Wouldn't it be better to find out before another comes without the courtesy of announcing himself?"

"We can find out if you let me do it my way."

"We don't know enough yet; he could end up dead before we find out anything, then the danger to Richard could become greater."

"All right," Cara said with a sigh, "we will do it your way, as long as you understand that I have orders to follow."

"What orders?"

"Lord Rahl told us to protect you as we would protect him." With a toss of her head, Cara flicked her blond braid back over her shoulder. "If you are not careful, Mother Confessor, and needlessly endanger Lord Rahl with your restraint, I will withdraw my permission for Richard to keep you."

Kahlan laughed. Her laughter died out when Cara didn't so much as smile. She was never entirely sure when the Mord-Sith were joking and when they were being deadly serious.

"In here," Kahlan said. "It's shorter this way, and besides, I want to see what petitioners are waiting, in view of our strange visitor. He could even be a diversion to draw our attention away from someone else-the true threat."

Cara's brow twitched as if she had been slighted. "Why do you think I had Petitioners' Hall sealed and ringed with guards?"

"You did it surreptitiously, I hope. There's no need to frighten the wits out of innocent petitioners."

"I told the officers not to frighten the people in there if they didn't have to, but our first responsibility is to protect Lord Rahl."

Kahlan nodded. She couldn't argue with that.

Two heavily muscled guards bowed, along with twenty others nearby, before pulling open the tall, brassbound doors leading to an arched passageway. A stone rail supported by fat, vase-shaped balusters ran along the white marble pillars. The barrier, separating the petitioners in the

hundred-foot-long room from the officials' passageway, was symbolic rather than teal. Skylights thirty feet overhead lit the waiting room, but left the length of the passageway to the muted golden light of lamps hung in the peak of each small Vault in its ceiling.

It was a long-standing custom for people-petitioners-to come to the Confessors' Palace to seek any number of things, from settlement of disagreements over the rights of peddlers to coveted street comers, to officials of different lands seeking armed intervention in border disputes. Matters that could be handled by city officials were directed to the proper offices. Matters brought by dignitaries of the lands, if those matters were deemed to be important enough, or could be handled in no other way, were taken before the council. Petitioners' Hall was where officers of protocol determined the disposition of requests.

When Darken Rahl, Richard's father had attacked the Midlands, many of the officials in Ayndrill had been killed, among them Saul Witherrin, the Chief of Protocol, along with most of his office Richard had defeated Darken Rahl, and being the gifted heir, had ascended to Master of D'Hara. He had ended the bickering and battling among the lands of the Midlands by demanding their surrender in order to forge them all into a force capable of withstanding the common threat from the Old World, from the Imperial Order.

Kahlan found it unsettling to be the Mother Confessor who had reigned over the end of the Midlands as a formal entity, a union of sovereign lands, but she knew that her first responsibility was to the lives of the people, not to tradition; if not stopped, the Imperial Order would cast the world into slavery, and the people of the Midlands would be its chattel. Richard had accomplished what his father could not, but did so for entirely different reasons. She loved Richard and knew his benevolent intent in seizing power.

Soon they would be wedded, and their marriage would unite the Midlands and D'Hara in peace and unity for all time. More than that, though, it would be a personal fulfilment of their love and deepest desire: to be one.

Kahlan missed Saul Witherrin; he had been a capable aide. With the council now dead, too, and the Midlands now a part of D'Hara, matters of protocol were in disarray. A few frustrated D'Haran officers were standing at the railing, attempting to minister to the petitioners' needs.

As she entered, Kahlan's gaze swept the waiting crowd, analyzing the nature of problems brought to the palace this day. By their dress, most

appeared to be people from the surrounding city of Aydindril: labors, shopkeepers, and merchants.

She saw a knot of children she knew from the day before when Richard had taken her to watch them playing a game of Ja'La. It was the first time she had seen the fast-paced game, and it had been an entertaining diversion for a couple of hours: to watch children play and laugh. The children probably wanted Richard to come watch another game; he had been an ardent supporter of each team. Even if he had picked one team to cheer over the other, Kahlan doubted it would have made any difference; children were drawn to Richard, seeming to instinctively sense his kind heart.

Kahlan recognized several diplomats from a few of the smaller lands, who she hoped had come to accept Richard's offer of a peaceful surrender and union into D'Haran rule. She knew the leaders of those lands, and was expecting them to heed her urging to join with them in the cause of freedom.

She recognized, too, a group of diplomats from some of the larger lands that had standing armies. They had been expected, and later that day Richard and Kahlan were to meet with them, along with any other newly arrived representatives, to hear their decision.

She wished Richard would find himself something more suitable to wear. His woods clothes had served him well, but he now needed to present a more fitting image of the position he found himself in. He was so much more than a woods guide now.

Having served nearly her whole life as a person of authority, Kahlan knew that it often smoothed matters of leadership if you matched people's expectations. Kahlan doubted people who needed a woods guide would have followed Richard if he hadn't dressed for the woods. In a way, Richard was their guide in this treacherous new world of untested allegiances and new enemies. He often asked her advice; she was going to have to talk to him about his clothes.

When the people assembled saw the Mother Confessor striding into the passageway, conversation stilled and they began going to a knee in deep bows. Despite the fact that she was of an unprecedentedly young age for the post, there was no one of higher authority in the Midlands than the Mother Confessor. The Mother Confessor was the Mother Confessor, no matter the face of the woman who held the office. People bowed not so much to the woman as to that ancient authority. Matters of Confessors were an enigma to

most people of the Midlands; Confessors chose the Mother Confessor. To Confessors, age was of secondary consideration.

Though she was chosen to preserve the freedoms and rights of the people of the Midlands, people rarely saw it in those terms. To most, a ruler was a ruler. Some were good, some were bad. As the ruler of rulers, the Mother Confessor encouraged the good, and suppressed the bad. If a ruler proved bad enough, it was within her power to eliminate them. That was the ultimate purpose of a Mother Confessor. To most people, though, such far removed matters of governance simply seemed the squabbling of rulers.

In the sudden silence that filled Petitioners' Hall, Kahlan paused to acknowledge the gathered visitors.

A young woman standing against the far wall watched as all those around her fell to one knee. She glanced in Kahlan's direction, back to those kneeling, and then followed suit.

Kahlan's brow tightened.

In the Midlands, the length of a woman's hair denoted her power and standing. Matters of power, no matter how trivial they might seem on the surface, were taken seriously in the Midlands. Not even a queen's hair was allowed to be as long as a Confessor's, and no Confessor's hair was as long as that of the Mother Confessor.

This woman had a thick mass of brown hair close to the length of Kahlan's.

Kahlan knew nearly every person of high rank in the Midlands; it was her duty, and she took it seriously. A woman with hair that long was obviously a person of high standing, but Kahlan didn't recognize her. There was likely to be no man or woman in the entire city, other than Kahlan, who would outrank the woman-if she was in fact from the Midlands.

"Rise, my children," Kahlan said in formal response to the tops of the waiting, bowed heads.

Dresses and coats rustled as everyone began coming to their feet, most keeping their eyes to the floor, out of respect, or needless fear. The woman rose to her feet, twisting a simply made kerchief in her fingers, watching those around her. She turned her brown eyes to the floor, as most of the others were.

"Cara," Kahlan whispered, "could that woman there, with the long hair, be from D'Hara?"