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SERIES**

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**LORD OF STORMWEATHER**  
Dave Gross



— S E M B I A —  
**LORD OF  
STORMWEATHER**

**Dave Gross**



Dedication  
To Ed Greenwood, for the Whole Wide Realms.

**LORD OF STORMWEATHER**  
**Sembia**

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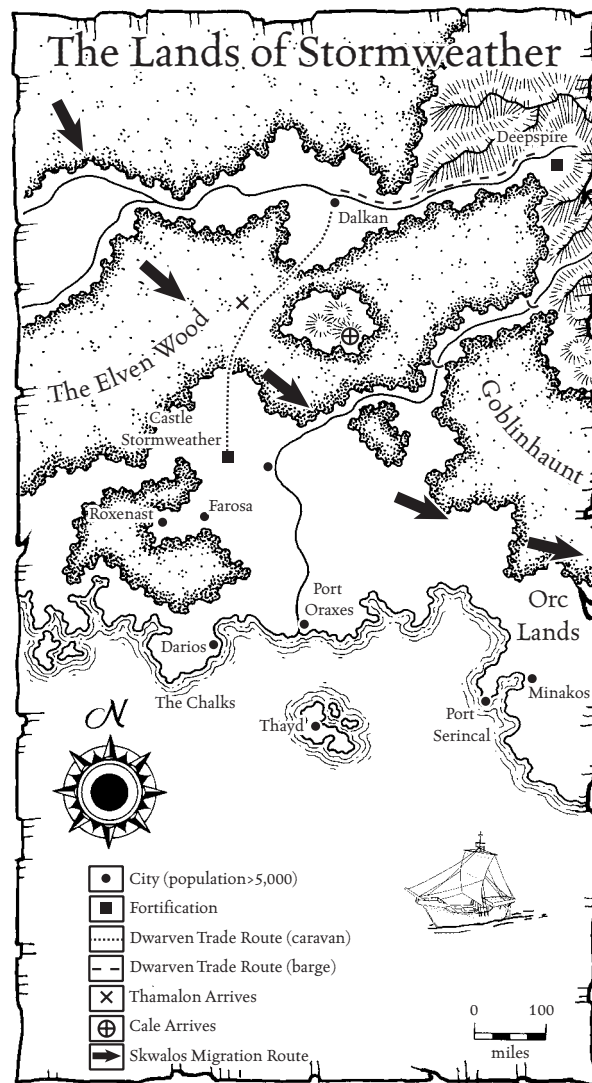
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## CHAPTER 1

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### WAKING 11 Alturiak, 1373 DR

*T*amlin soars through the thunderous clouds. Lightning sears his naked skin as the storm-god Talos scratches at the flea that dares crawl in his beard.

*He spreads his arms to catch the wind, heedless of the torment of his body. Above the clouds there is something he must see, a revelation of arcane wisdom.*

*The gale beats him down, and he tumbles through the cold mist. His arms find no hold in the empty air. To fly, he needs magic, but he does not have the words to call it. He opens his mouth to shout a half-remembered phrase from youthful fantasy.*

*But the words have no power, and the storm sucks the breath from his lungs, hollowing him but for the leaden fear that rolls in his stomach, weighing him, bearing him down, down, and down. . .*

Tamlin awoke in darkness, reeling from his vision. He was numb, astonished.

Tamlin Uskevren had not experienced a flying dream since he was ten years old. At twenty-eight, he'd all but forgotten there was anything but oblivion in slumber.

That wasn't quite true, he realized. While a thousand forgotten dreams blazed like stars in his memory, he knew a host of vague illusions had taken their place over the years. Those mornings he woke befogged with imagined fumbblings in linen closets with the comeliest of serving wenches—those were forgeries of his idle, conscious mind. They weren't true dreams.

They were nothing like flying.

Before he had time to ponder the meaning of their return, his tender body demanded his full attention. His head throbbed, dull and toxic from a night of . . . he couldn't remember exactly what. Wavering visions of dancing girls merged with a violent struggle in a black alley, and both gave way to the remembrance of soaring through moonlit clouds. Clenching his teeth, he rejected all of these thoughts as the reality of his present circumstances came into focus.

Rather than the comforting eiderdown quilt of his bed, Tamlin felt cold, damp limestone against his cheek.

He turned his head slightly, but that was enough to summon an overwhelming wave of nausea. A thin, hot stream of bile surged up to burn his throat before leaking out of his cracked lips. He felt it run down his chin to join a clammy mass of vomit clumped beneath his cheek. The stink revolted him, but he had not the strength to lift his head away from it.

Tamlin had been hung over many times before, but never so miserably. His normally silken voice was as rough as charcoal and weaker than a moth's fart when he called out, "Great . . . hopping . . . Ilmater . . ."

The martyr god was forever the subject of Tamlin's exclamations, but thus far the deity had never deigned to answer his profanity.

"Es?" he croaked. "Escevar?"

No one answered, but he wasn't surprised. Neither his henchman nor his bodyguard were nearby. He was alone. A sudden weight of despair pulled on his heart, and he feared he might never see them again. He remembered Escevar shouting for help just before . . . the rest was still a confusing vortex of memories.

He knew somehow that he'd lolled insensate for days, but how many?

Dripping water counted long seconds nearby, and the only other sound was a faint scrabbling near his feet. When he pushed himself up on one elbow, pain gripped his spine and squeezed hot tears from his gummy eyes. Blinking, he strained to perceive the faintest blur of yellow light emanating from the crack beneath a door. Except for the silhouettes of a few vertical bars, he could make out no other features of the room.

"Hello!" he called. He cleared his throat. "A spot of help, if you don't mind. Much appreciated, I assure you."

No one answered. Briefly he thought he sensed a presence, someone standing silently nearby.

"Hello?" he ventured meekly.

Still there was no answer. He tried to shake off the feeling of being watched by praying aloud once more.

"Blessed Beshaba, how have I offended thee?"

The goddess of ill fortune had rarely cast her gaze on Thamalon Uskevren II, but she had her place in the temple gallery of Stormweather Towers.

"Tymora, I beg you. Talk some sense into her."

The goddess of luck wasn't known for her power to persuade her twin sister, but she smiled on brash fools from time to time. Tamlin hoped he'd been sufficiently brash lately—the fool part he'd long since mastered.

"Ow!"

Whatever rustled at his toes had finally bitten through his doeskin boots. He kicked, and intense pain shot through his spine, but he was rewarded by an indignant squeal.

“Great god of rats and mice!” Tamlin yelled. “Whatever your name, lay off!”

His sight had returned just well enough that he could make out the vague shape of a large rat perched just beyond the reach of his pointed boots. Careful of his back, Tamlin pushed himself into a sitting position, swallowed hard to suppress another bout of nausea, and peered into the gloom.

Between him and the light under the door was a wall of bars. He reached out to feel them and discovered cold iron. Beyond that barrier, he saw a cracked stone floor. An elaborate design sketched in chalk curved between the bars and the door. Its perfect arc implied a circle around his cage, and its white lines glowed faintly brighter as he stared at them.

Tamlin knew at once that it was a magic circle.

Despite a summer’s tutelage with a wizard, Tamlin had never shown an aptitude for the Art. After three months, he couldn’t so much as ignite a candle with a lump of sulfur and coal, so gradually his passion for things arcane dwindled into a quaint but thereby acceptable superstitious streak.

His lack of talent was disappointing, but where skill was lacking, wealth could often suffice. Tamlin’s collection of magical charms was the most extensive among his cohorts, some of whom teasingly called him “the sorcerer” behind his back.

He didn’t mind the jest, at least not from those whose favor he desired, but he preferred the nickname “Deuce,” a reminder to all that he was Thamalon Uskevren *the Second*, heir to one of the most powerful merchant Houses of Selgaunt’s Old Chauncel.

So long as Thamalon the elder lived, he was known beyond his most intimate circles simply as Tamlin. In truth, and none too secretly, he preferred to remain “Deuce” and “the younger” for as long as possible. As the heir to Stormweather Towers, he enjoyed all the benefits of wealth and power with precious few of the responsibilities.

Not that any of those benefits was helpful at the moment.

Tamlin tried standing but found that his cage was only five feet high, forcing him to stoop like a hunchback in one of his brother’s ridiculous plays. Rather than endure that indignity, he sat down once more, careful to avoid the mess he’d made.

His fingers took an inventory of his attire. He still wore the woolen hose and fashionably high boots, but the slender dagger was missing from his hip. No surprise, that. His cloak was gone, but he retained both the quilted doublet and his fine silk blouse, though he planned to burn them both once he found clean garments. It was one thing to blanch at some revolting beggar in the gutter, but to offend himself with such a stink—it was beyond endurance!

His new hat was gone, as were his jewels, which was a pity, for most of his charms went with them. At last he touched his collar and found a pair of pins his captors had overlooked. One enhanced virility while muting fertility—a popular item among those who could better afford charms than bastards—and the other was a ward against pickpockets. The witch who sold them to him had thrice sworn to their efficacy, though he supposed he couldn’t complain. Neither was purported to foil kidnappings.

The inquisitive rodent crept closer, smelled the rebel contents of Tamlin’s stomach, and made a lapping sound. The noise would have made Tamlin vomit again if he’d had anything left in his stomach. Briefly, he pitied the rat, but then pain wrenched his stomach. He’d never before felt anything quite like that dry, taut ache, and he wondered whether he’d contracted some disease in his crude prison, wherever it was. He needed the ministrations of a cleric, but first he had to find a way out of his cage.

Therein lay the rub.

“How did I get into this mess, Ratty?”

The rodent paused briefly in its disgusting feast, then resumed slurping.

Even if the rat could speak with all the wisdom of Elminster the Sage, it didn't matter. Tamlin was already beginning to recall the events of the hours preceding his current disgrace, and he knew that he had no one to blame but himself.



“Let's get out of here, Deuce.”

Even in adulthood, Escevar had an impish array of freckles across his pug nose. Combined with his russet hair, they gave him a mischievous air that Tamlin appreciated in part because standing beside Escevar made him look more mature.

“I am not afraid of Mister Pale,” said Tamlin.

He smiled, thinking he sounded brave by saying it aloud. The smile turned into a wince as another wave of his hangover crashed against his brain.

Perhaps I should have retired before dawn, he thought.

“I don't know. He wouldn't have ushered you out of the meeting without the Old Owl's nod,” said Escevar, looking up toward Vox for support.

Vox stood a head taller than Tamlin, and his brutal features—those not obscured by his wild black beard—suggested he was not wholly human. His wide, crooked nose and heavy forehead with its single eyebrow suggested ogre ancestry. He wore his hair in a thick braid curled around the left side of his neck. Tamlin had seen the ugly scar it concealed and knew it was a legacy of the wound that stole the man's voice.

“You agree that I should stay and apologize,” said Tamlin. “Don't you, Vox?”

The big man replied in the private language he and Tamlin had devised, a quick series of hand gestures, *Better to be out of his sight for a while.*

“Far be it from me to ignore the advice of my bodyguard,” said Tamlin, hoping to sound reluctant.

Secretly, he was glad to escape. It had been a long time since he'd made his father this angry, and all over a slip of the tongue.

He nodded toward the grand stairway, and Vox led the way. As the three men passed through the halls of Stormweather Towers, servants stepped aside and bowed, tiny bells tinkling on their turbans. As they approached the grand front entrance, Tamlin ordered the doorman to summon a carriage, and allowed the man to wrap him neatly in his fine ermine coat.

They stepped outside, into the bracing Alturiak morning. A light snow covered the cobblestone drive, while drifts of a foot or more still lingered in the corners of the courtyard from a recent snowstorm.

Before the frozen fountain stood one of the four House carriages. Escevar instructed the driver as the footman lent his arm to help Tamlin mount the step before nestling into the cushioned seats. Vox joined the footman on the rear step of the carriage, while Escevar joined his master inside. The coachman slapped the reins, and they rode through the gates and into the streets of Selgaunt.

“We should stop at the Green Gauntlet,” said Tamlin. “I could use a few drinks to smooth the corners.”

“That's in the wrong direction,” said Escevar. He produced a slim pewter flask from a pocket within his thigh-high boot. “This should help us reach the festhall in comfort.”

Tamlin took a long pull from the flask. The brandy performed its magic, warming his throat and soothing his troubled stomach.

“This is the one with the Calishite girl you were telling me about?”

“The Djinni's Pearl.” Escevar leered. He'd been buzzing with gossip for a tenday about the exotic new festhall dancer.

“She is undoubtedly still asleep at this hour.”

“I suspect the proprietors will be glad to accommodate a special performance.”

“I hope you brought another purse,” said Tamlin, rubbing his sore neck. “And another flask.”



The additional funds proved unnecessary once the bare-chested doorman heard the name Uskevren. Within moments, musicians arrived and filled the parlor with the sour strains of desert music. Tamlin and Escevar lounged on fringed pillows, while Vox squatted behind them, leaning on his war axe.

The place had seemed empty when they first arrived, but with a few claps of his hands, their host conjured a trio of serving wenches wearing gossamer harem pants and a few ounces of cheap jewelry. They were obviously local girls, matched in the predictable blond, brunette, and redhead combination that panderers all thought was sure to please. They brought the men wine-drenched dates and took turns feeding them first to Escevar, who tasted everything before it was fit for his master, then to Tamlin.

“Perhaps we should have waited until evening,” said Tamlin. He yawned into his fist. “It’s more fun with a crowd.”

“Boy!” called Escevar. A pasty Sembian lad ran to their low table. His gaudy fez and vest looked as though they’d been stolen from a performing monkey. “Your best wine.”

Vox touched Tamlin’s shoulder with two fingers, then pressed a third before tapping all three once, sharply.

“Relax, Vox,” said Tamlin. “Have a date.”

He flipped one of the dark fruits over his shoulder in the general vicinity of the big man’s mouth. Vox snatched it out of the air with a huge fist, sniffed it, and took a bite.

Tamlin drank wine and watched dully as the local girls danced to the Calishite music. Despite the pleasant undulations of their bodies and the very nearly artful gestures of their hands and chins, he couldn’t stop thinking about the morning’s gaffe. As much as he wanted to blame his

father for unreasonably ejecting him from the meeting, he realized the failing was his own. A slip of the tongue, Tamlin had called it. A drunken obscenity, his father had thundered.

Tamlin drained his goblet and held it up for a refill.

The remainder of the afternoon was hard to recall. Tamlin remembered asking after the Djinni’s Pearl, and he had a dim recollection of assurances that she would rise with the noon sun. Would he care for some grilled lamb?

At some point he insisted that Vox join them in a drink. The brooding bodyguard no doubt protested. Tamlin didn’t remember for certain, but that was the way Vox usually behaved. Dutiful to the end.

The one clear memory of the last minutes in the festhall was of stumbling into the nearby alley to be sick against the wall. The stench of garlic in his vomit remained pungent even days later, as he wallowed in fresher stinks. He retained a vague impression of Vox’s strong hands on his arms, then a sudden fall to the moist ground. The sounds of blades drawn from their sheaths . . . a painful cry from Escevar, abruptly silenced . . . sudden darkness as a big body crashed to the ground beside him . . . and a series of stunning red impacts to his skull. . . .