



BOOK I



THE
EREVIS CALE
TRILOGY

Book I

Twilight Falling

PAUL S. KEMP

Book II

Dawn of Night

PAUL S. KEMP

2004

Book III

Midnight's Mask

PAUL S. KEMP

2005



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PAUL S. KEMP



The Erevis Cale Trilogy, Book I
TWILIGHT FALLING

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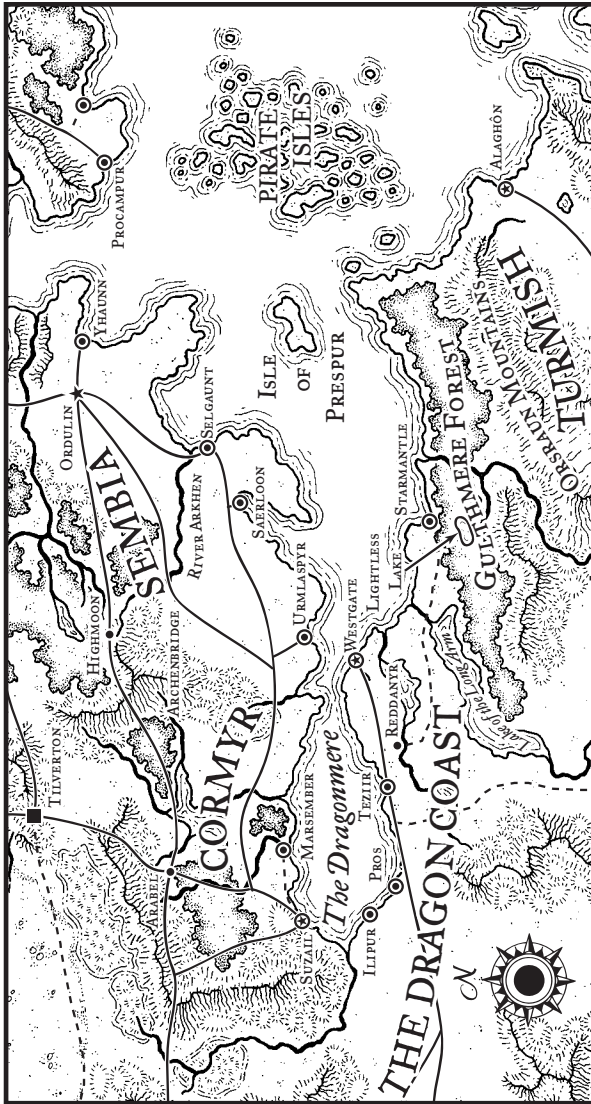
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For Jennifer,

the love of my life,
whose light holds twilight at bay.

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Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
A bitter wind . . .

—the bard Tennyson



PROLOGUE

FACT-FINDING

The young Tymoran priest lay unconscious on his side, bound hand and foot with thick hemp rope. A purple bruise was already beginning to form around his left eye. Vraggen eyed him coldly.

“Get him up,” Vraggen ordered his agents.

Dolgan, the big Cormyrean, slung his axe and kneeled at the captive’s side. He took the priest’s face in his ham hand and squeezed.

“Awaken,” Dolgan said.

The priest groaned, but did not open his eyes.

“Well done,” taunted Azriim. He stood beside Vraggen with a smirk on his dusky-skinned face. “Very creative.”

Dolgan looked at the half-drow with his typically thick expression and grunted, “Huh?”

Azriim, dressed in the green finery and high

boots that he favored, flashed a smile at Vraggen.

“He never gets the joke, does he?”

Vraggen made no reply. To Azriim, everything was a joke.

“I don’t?” Dolgan asked, still dumbfounded.

“Wake him up,” Vraggen said to the Cormyrean warrior.

“And try not break him,” Azriim added. “We need him capable of speech.”

Dolgan nodded, turned back to the captive, shook him by the shoulders, and said, “Wake up! Wake up!”

The young priest groaned again. Dolgan lightly tapped his cheeks, and after a moment, the priest’s eyes fluttered open.

“There,” Dolgan said. He stood and backed away a few steps to stand beside Azriim and Vraggen.

The priest’s bleary eyes cleared the moment his situation registered. He struggled against his bonds, but only for a moment. Vraggen waited until he saw resignation in the Tymoran’s eyes before he spoke.

“What is the last thing you remember?”

The captive tried to speak, but found his mouth too dry. He swallowed, and said, “You abducted me from the streets of Ordulin.” He looked around the cell. “Where am I?”

“Far from Ordulin,” Vraggen replied.

Azriim chuckled, and the sight of a laughing half-drow must have unnerved the Tymoran further. His face went pale.

“What do you want?”

Vraggen stepped forward, kneeled at the priest’s side, and said, “Information.”

For the first time, the priest’s eyes went to Vraggen’s broach pin—a jawless skull in a purple sunburst—the symbol of Cyric the Dark Sun. Fear flashed in his brown eyes. He uttered a prayer under his breath.

“Is it reasonable for me to assume that you understand your situation?” Vraggen asked.

“I don’t know anything,” the Tymoran blurted. “I swear! Nothing.”

Vraggen nodded and stood. “We shall see.”

He beckoned Dolgan and Azriim forward. His agents stepped up to the priest, grabbed him by the arms, and lifted him to his feet.

“Don’t! Please don’t!” the priest pleaded.

Vraggen stared into the captive’s fear-filled face. For effect, he let shadows leak from his hands and dance around his head. The Tymoran’s breath audibly caught.

“You are a shadow adept,” the priest whispered.

Vraggen didn’t bother to answer; the shadows were answer enough.

“I’ll tell you everything I know.”

“Of course you will,” Vraggen said. “The only issue is whether or not I feel I can trust you to tell me the truth without my having to resort to more forceful means. The resolution of that issue will determine whether or not your last moments are spent in pain.”

The priest’s lips trembled. He looked into Vraggen’s eyes.

“I have a family,” he said.

Vraggen was unmoved.

“No doubt they will miss you,” Azriim said, smiling.

Dolgan too grinned and shifted from foot to foot, fairly giddy at the thought of bloodshed. The Cormyrean had a fetish for pain—administering it, and receiving it.

The priest’s whole body began to shake. Tears began to leak from his eyes.

“Why are you doing this? I don’t even know you. I don’t know any of you.”

Azriim scoffed, “What does that have to do with it?”

Vraggen patted the priest’s cheek, as close as he would come to offering comfort, and said, “I am going to cast a spell that will subject your will to me. Do not resist it. I know that you will speak the truth under the effect of this spell. That is the only way I can be certain. Otherwise. . . .”

He left the threat unspoken, but the priest took the point. He nodded in resignation.

Vraggen smiled and said, “You’ve made the right decision.”

Beside the captive, Dolgan sighed in disappointment.

Vraggen ignored the Cormyrean, drew on the Shadow Weave, and pronounced the arcane words to a spell that would make the Tymoran his thrall. When he finished, the captive priest's eyes went vacant. Ever careful, Vraggen verified that his spell had taken hold of the priest by casting a second spell that allowed him to see dweomers.

The priest glowed a soft red in his sight, indicating that he was under the effect of a spell. Surprisingly, so too did Dolgan and Azriim. Vraggen looked a question at his lieutenants.

Azriim took the sense of that look immediately. He held up one long fingered hand, upon which hung a platinum band.

"Our rings, Vraggen."

Vraggen nodded. He had forgotten that each of his lieutenants wore a ring that warded them against scrying. He turned his attention back to the captive priest.

"About one year ago, your adventuring company looted a ruined temple in the Sunset Mountains. Do you remember?"

"Yes," the priest answered in a monotone.

The priest and his comrades, calling themselves the Band of the Broken Bow, had happened upon an abandoned temple of Shar that Vraggen had been seeking for months.

"Among the treasures you took from those ruins was a crystal globe of gray quartz, about fist-sized and inset with chips of gemstones." Vraggen tried to keep his voice level when he asked the next question. "Do you remember this globe?"

"Yes."

Vraggen shared a glance with Azriim. The half-drow smiled and winked.

"Where is the globe now?"

The priest's brow furrowed and he said, "After we left the temple, we disputed how to divide the plunder. The globe was a curiosity but not very valuable. Solin took it as a throwaway part of his share."

Vraggen kept his eagerness under control. The fools had no idea what they had taken from that temple.

"Solin?"

"Solin Dar," the priest replied. "A warrior out of Sembia."

"Where in Sembia?"

"Selgaunt," the priest answered.

Vraggen would have laughed if he'd had a sense of humor. He hailed from Selgaunt himself, had served with the Zhentarim there. It was almost as though the globe had been trying to find *him*. He decided to take the news as a sign of Cyric's favor.

"Thank you, priest," he said to the Tymoran. He looked to Dolgan. "Throttle him."

Dolgan grinned, grabbed the priest around the throat, and choked him. While the bound priest gagged and died, Azriim moved to Vraggen's side.

"At least we have a name now. Selgaunt?"

Vraggen nodded. They would use their teleportation rods to move quickly to Selgaunt, find Solin Dar, and subject him to the same technique as they had used on the Tymoran priest.

Soon, Vraggen would have his globe.



CHAPTER 1

MIDNIGHT OF THE SOUL

Cale sat alone in the darkness of Stormweather Towers's parlor. He had not bothered to light one of the wrist-thick wax tapers that stood on candelabrum around the room. The darkness enshrouded him, which was well. It suited his mood. He felt . . . black. Heavy. The Elvish language had a word that perfectly expressed his feeling: *Vaendin-thiil*, which meant "fatigued by life's dark trials." Of course, in elven philosophy the concept of *Vaendin-thiil* never appeared alone, but was paired always with a balancing concept which the elves, in their wisdom or folly, deemed a necessary corollary: *Vaendaan-naes*, "reborn in life's bright struggles." For the elves, dark trials necessarily gave rise to bright rebirths. Cale was not so sure. At that moment, he could see only the darkness. The brightness of rebirth seemed impossibly distant.

Selûne, trailed by her tears, peered gibbous through the parlor's high windows, casting the room in a faint luminescence. Artwork from the four corners of Faerûn decorated the dim parlor: paintings from the sun-baked lands of the far south, sculpture from Mulhorand, elven woodcarvings from the distant High Forest. Suits of archaic armor, ghostly in the silver moonlight, stood in each corner of the large room: a suit of fine elven mail taken from the ruins of Myth Drannor, a set of thick dwarven plate mail from the Great Rift, and two suits of ornate Sembian ceremonial armor, both centuries old. That armor was the pride of Thamalon's collection.

Reflexively, Cale corrected his thought—the armor *had been* the pride of Thamalon's collection. His lord was dead. And the Halls of Stormweather felt dead too, a great stone and wood corpse whose soul had been extinguished.

Cale settled deeper into his favorite leather chair and brooded. How many evenings had he spent in that parlor with his nose in a tome, feeding his appetite for literature and languages, finding respite in the lore and poetry of lost ages? Hundreds, certainly. The parlor had been as much his room as were his own quarters.

But not anymore.

The books and scrolls lining the recessed walnut shelves held for him no comfort, the paintings and sculptures no solace. In everything Cale saw the ghost of his lord, his friend. Thamalon had been as much a father to Cale as an employer, and his lord's absence from the manse felt somehow . . . obscene. The heart had been ripped from the family.

Cale's eyes welled, but he shook his head and blinked back the tears. His blurry gaze fell on one of the last acquisitions Thamalon had made before his death. It sat on a small three-legged pedestal on an upper shelf, a solid orb of smooth, translucent, smoky-gray quartz the size of an ogre's fist, with pinpoints of diamond and other tiny gemstones embedded within it. The chaos of the piece was striking, a virtual embodiment of madness. Thamalon had taken a liking to it at

once. He had purchased it only a month before, along with a variety of other oddities, from Alkenen, a wild-eyed, eccentric street peddler.

Cale had been at Thamalon's side that day, one of the last days of his lord's life. They had played chess in the afternoon, and in the evening shared an ale and discussed the clumsy plots of the Talendar family. Cale smiled at the memory. He resolved then and there to take the orb with him when he left Stormweather, as a memento of his master.

He didn't realize the full import of his thought until a few moments later. *When he left Stormweather*. When had he decided to leave? *Had* he decided to leave?

The question sat heavy in his mind, fat and pregnant.

He leaned forward in the chair and rested his forearms on his knees. He was surprised to see that he held between his fingers a velvet mask—his holy symbol of Mask the Lord of Shadows. Odd. While Cale always kept it on his person, he didn't remember taking it from his vest pocket.

He stuffed the mask back into his vest, interlaced his fingers, and stared at the hardwood floor. Perhaps it *was* time to leave. Thamalon was gone and Tamlin was head of the family. And Tamlin had little use for Cale. What else was there for him?

The answer leaped into his consciousness the moment he asked the question: Thazienne. Thazienne was there for him.

He crushed the thought, frowning. Thazienne was not there, at least not for him. Her heart belonged to another. Her arms embraced another. Another shared her—

He snarled and shook his head, struggling to control his anger. Anger did him no good, and he knew it. He had spent years loving her, though he had always feared it to be futile. She was the daughter of a merchant noble, he but an assassin playing servant. But the rational understanding that she could never return his love had not quelled the secret hope—he could

finally admit that to himself, that he had hoped—that somehow, *somehow*, they would end up together. Of course, his rationality had done nothing to stop the knife stab of pain he had felt when she had returned from abroad, smiling on the arm of Steorf. Merely thinking the man's name shot him full of rage.

The Cale of fifteen years past would have killed Steorf out of spite. The thought of that still tempted some tiny part of him.

But Cale no longer heeded that part of himself. And he owed that change to Thazienne.

It had been nearly two years since he'd left her a note containing the sum total of his feelings for her: *Ai armiel telere maenen hir*, he had written in Elvish. *You hold my heart forever*.

She had never even acknowledged the note. Not a word, not even a knowing glance. They had stopped meeting in the butler's pantry late at night for drinks and conversation. She had turned away from him in some undefinable way. When he looked her in the eyes, it was as though she didn't see him, not the way she once had.

She was not there for him, and it was time to leave. Stormweather Towers was suffocating him.

Once made, the decision lifted some of the weight that sat heavily on his soul. He did not yet know where he would go, but he *would* leave. Perhaps he could convince Jak to accompany him.

As always, the thought of the halfling rounded the corners of Cale's anger and brought a smile to his face. Jak had stood by him through much, through everything. They had faced Zhents, ghouls, and demons together. Perhaps most importantly, Jak had helped Cale understand Mask's Calling. Jak had taught him how to cast his first spells.

Of course Jak would accompany him. Jak was his best friend, his only friend, his conscience. A man—even a killer—couldn't go anywhere without his conscience. He and Jak seemed linked, seemed to share a common fate.

Cale smiled and reminded himself that he did not believe in fate. At least he hadn't. But maybe he had come to. Or at least maybe he should. How could he not? He had been called to the priesthood by his god and had defeated a demon through that Calling.

But I chose to accept the Calling, he reminded himself.

Korvikoum. That word—his favorite concept from dwarven philosophy—elbowed its way to the front of his mind. Dwarves did not believe much in fate. They believed in *Korvikoum*: choices and consequences. In a sense, fate and *Korvikoum* stood in opposition to one another, as much as did *Vaendin-thiil* and *Vaendaanaes*, as much as did being a killer and being a good man who killed.

Cale reached for the wine chalice on the table beside his chair and took a sip. The five-year-old vintage of Thamalon's Best, a heavy red wine, reminded him of the nights in the library he and his lord had played chess over a glass. Thamalon had believed in fate, strongly so. The Old Owl had once told Cale that a man could either embrace fate and walk beside it, or reject it and get pulled along nevertheless. That evening, Cale had merely nodded at the words and said nothing, but ultimately he wondered if Thamalon had gotten it right.

Still, Cale was convinced that the choices a man made could not be meaningless. If there was fate, then perhaps a man's future was not fixed. Perhaps a man could shape his fate through the choices he made. Fate delineated boundaries; choice established details. So fate might make a man a farmer, but the farmer chose what crops to plant. Fate might make a man a soldier, but the soldier chose which battles to fight.

Cale liked that. Fate may have made him a killer, but he would decide if, who, why, and when he killed.

He raised his glass to the darkness, silently toasting the memory of Thamalon Uskevren.

I'll miss you, my lord, he thought.

He would miss the rest of the Uskevren too, and

Stormweather Towers, but he would leave nevertheless. From then on, he would serve only one lord.

He reached back into his vest and again withdrew his holy symbol. The velvet of the mask felt smooth in his hands. He held it before his face and stared at it, thoughtful. The empty eye holes stared back.

Fate or choice? they seemed to ask.

Cale considered that, and after a moment, he gave his answer.

"Both," he whispered, "and neither."

With that, he turned the mask around and put it on, the first time he had ever done so in Stormweather Towers. It did not bring the expected comfort. Instead, it felt wrong, as obscene as Thamalon's absence from the manse. He pulled it off and crumpled it in his fist.

"What do you want from me?" he whispered to Mask.

As usual, his god provided him no answers, no signs. Mask never provided answers, only more questions, only more choices.

Months before, in an effort to better understand his Calling, Cale had scoured Thamalon's personal library for information about Mask and the Lord of Shadows' faithful. Unsurprisingly, for Mask *was* the god of shadows and thieves, after all, there was little to be found. He had finally concluded that serving Mask was different than serving other gods. The priests of Faerûn's other faiths proselytized, ministered, preached, and in that way won converts and served their gods. Mask's priests did no such thing. There were no Maskarran preachers, no street ministers, no pilgrims. Mask did not require his priests to win converts. Either the darkness spoke to you or it didn't. If it did, you were already Mask's. If it didn't, you never would be.

The darkness *had* spoken to Cale, had whispered his name and wrapped him in shadow. And now it was telling him to leave Stormweather Towers.

He sighed, finished his wine, and stood. If he was to be reborn in life's bright struggles, he would have to do it elsewhere. It was time to go.