



THE NEW
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5

DRAGON SWORD

REE SOESBEE

COVER & INTERIOR ART
Vinod Rams



MIRROR
STONE



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The earth around Cairngorn Keep was damp and dark. Boots crushed the soil as the soldiers marched relentlessly toward the high black gates. In the sky, a silver moon shimmered, waiting to be joined by its fellow moons as the night advanced.

A woman stood before the keep's gates. Her own army had long since fled, and her enemies swarmed across the field. Yet even standing alone before hundreds of soldiers, she did not show fear.

Three monstrous red dragons flew against the dark clouds. They swooped down, one by one, their raucous cries like the caws of crows over the battlefield.

The woman lifted her chin, her jet-black hair swinging in a long coil down her back. Her clawed hands tore through the air. Blue fire flung from her fingertips again and again, cutting through the army marching toward her. One by one, the soldiers fell, until only a handful remained.

They ran for their lives.

"Fools!" she cried out. "You cannot stand against Asvorla! Not today . . ." Sparks of magic swarmed around her like fireflies in

the night sky. Today her magic was stronger than ever, hoarded and ready for her final victory. As she watched the soldiers' retreating forms, she laughed, a terrible sound that echoed through the skies.

But one man defied her.

One man did not flee.

He forced himself through the fire of her magic, toward the gate. On his armor, the sigil of a bronze dragon shone, its head raised in a fierce roar.

"Asvoria," he said. "You have lost all. The kingdom is broken beneath you, and your rule even now fades. Your army is defeated, and already the cities of this land celebrate your death."

The brave man wore a simple black helmet, black armor, and bore a sword that was darkened with battle. Beneath the helmet's visor, his eyes were dark with sorrow and weary with pain. "I can no longer allow your tyranny to grind us all to dust."

"Poor Captain Viranesh," Asvoria greeted him mockingly. "This is not my end. On the contrary, it is the beginning of a new life for me. A new beginning—and one in which you can still play a part." Her amethyst eyes flashed. On her breast, a necklace hung; the medallion brilliant as the sun at noon. "You say my power is fading, but you are wrong. I am stronger than I have ever been! The defeat of my soldiers means nothing, no more than the scattering of a thousand ants. When I ascend, I will have no need for any pitiful armies. My magic will overwhelm you all, and still I will reign. When the three moons rise and join together . . . I will become what I was meant to be!"

The man shook his head, lifting his sword and taking a battle-stance. "You are wrong, my dear."

Asvoria laughed once more, her hands forming strange patterns in the air. Her magic swept forward, the green and yellow wave swelling like an ocean's tide . . . but when the surge subsided, the



captain still walked across the keep's bridge, advancing step by step toward her.

Stunned, Asvoria staggered backward. Her face contorted viciously, hands clawing at the air as she spoke a phrase of power. A crack of dark thunder broke the heavens.

Still Viranesh advanced.

"It cannot be . . ." she whispered, the first touch of fear illuminating her shining eyes. She tossed her ebony hair. "Are you here to kill me, Captain?"

"I am here," he said slowly, "to prevent your ascension. To destroy the woman I love before she becomes an abomination."

Viranesh raised his sword and saluted. On his breast, the bronze dragon seemed to roar out the grief that he felt but could not utter.

"You, of all people," Asvoria said. "Of all those in my kingdom, you believe that you can destroy me—with what? With your *love*?" She sneered. "What we had once is dead."

The sorceress reached to her side, unsheathing her own slender sword. The silver steel rang as it came free of its bonds, and green lightning flickered down the blade. A malachite stone shimmered in its handle, and emerald shards embedded within the sword's blade twinkled like envious eyes.

"Recognize this, Captain?" Asvoria hissed. "It is the blade Aegis, the most powerful weapon any human has ever known. With this alone, I could reconquer my kingdom and bring fear to those who have defied me.

"But more," she continued, the blade flashing in her hands, "When I have ascended, then I will walk the skies." Her eyes glittered with the fire of her conviction.

"Yes," he replied quietly. "I know what you plan. And it will never succeed. No one has ever transformed permanently from human to dragon. It cannot be done."



“Simply because something has not ever been accomplished does not mean that it is impossible,” she crowed, lifting one hand from the blade. Her skin shimmered, small scales coating it, like the fine tracings of a spider web. “You see? Already, it begins.”

The captain stepped forward, but Asvoria gripped the Aegis once more, steeling it against him. “A new reign, Viranesh. A new kingdom, ruled by a queen who spans both dragon and mortal kind. A reign I shall christen, I think, with your death.” She raised the Aegis in a strong, overhand stroke.

Viranesh swung his sword, and the dark blade rang against Asvoria’s shining green steel.

“It’s over, Asvoria,” Viranesh said. “You cannot defeat me without your most powerful magic, and you can’t afford to use it, not now. If you do, you won’t have enough for the ascension.” He glanced up at the sky.

Lunitari, red as blood, began to crowd the silver moon. The black moon waited, hidden against the darkness, for the final moments of the confluence.

“You underestimate the Aegis, my *dear*,” Asvoria spat.

She swept her sword toward his legs. Viranesh stepped far to the right to avoid its sharp bite. And Asvoria over-extended.

Viranesh chose his moment quickly, jabbing the hilt of his weapon against Asvoria’s unprotected stomach. She screamed, more in fury than in pain, and staggered back into the keep.

Viranesh pursued her through the narrow doorway, and the green fire of the Aegis crashed against the captain’s black sword. Asvoria fought unflinching, but Viranesh’s prowess with the sword proved legendary. He pressed her deeper into the keep with each swing of his blade, down long corridors of gilded mahogany, and up winding stairs. Finally, in a small room filled with tapestries, Asvoria found herself backed into a



corner, unable to retreat more. She wielded the Aegis as though the sword had its own mind. But it was not enough.

Viranesh's sword cut her, slashing a thin red line along Asvoria's midsection. She pressed her hand to the wound.

Staring at the red blood upon her hand, she said, "Well, Viranesh, my dear, it seems I do bleed after all." Her eyes glowed in the light of the Aegis's sickly flame.

"End this," Viranesh whispered, his sword inches from her throat.

Behind him, the three moons of Krynn shone through a tall window. The silver light of Solinari had narrowed to a crescent as its ebony brother moved across the sky. Only a few moments more . . .

"Never," she hissed. "Even after my death, I will still seek my destiny. You can only slow my ascent. It cannot be stopped."

"Then you leave me no choice." With a muffled cry, Viranesh plunged his dark sword into Asvoria's chest.

Asvoria fell backward, her blood soaking the magnificent tapestry behind her. The Aegis's dying fire was captured in the thin slivers of her pupils, defiant even at the end of all things.

"I am . . . I will be . . ."—she choked, one fist clenched around the Aegis and the other scrabbling desperately at the tapestry's thick material—"the Dragon Queen . . ."

"I'm sorry that it came to this, my lady." Viranesh fell to his knees as the three moons became one. "I'm so sorry." Tears ran down his cheeks, but he refused to turn away.

Asvoria lifted the Aegis with both hands, bringing it up with all of her strength into Viranesh's chest.

He died there, her sword piercing his heart.

With her last breath, Asvoria began to chant, holding the tapestry to her chest and letting her blood deluge its bright colors. Her last magic . . . her last spell. She had saved her power for her



ascension—now she must use it to create a new beginning—one that would take place when the moons conjoined once more.

The spell was rough, half-wild with pain and with splintered dreams, but it would be enough . . . enough to hold her soul. The threads of the woven fabric shimmered with a strange green light, and the tapestry fell away as her eyes closed.

She would never die.





1

BLOOD OF THE FUTURE

Thousands of years later, in the same dark keep, Davyn lowered his knife, the rage on his face slowly ebbing away as he regained control. He pointed with the blade toward the old man who sat on the nearby bed.

“Nearra is *not* dead,” Davyn said bitterly. “Never say that again.”

Maddoc met the boy’s steely gaze and said nothing, the lines in his aged face showing weary solemnity. His black robes were unruffled despite wear, and he bore their depth like a dethroned king.

“I said she was lost, Davyn, not dead.” The old wizard sighed lightly, keeping his eyes locked on his adopted son. “But the difference is small.”

Davyn’s sandy brown hair was unruly, his eyes were fierce. “It isn’t true.”

Standing in front of him, Catriona said, “Davyn, we aren’t getting anywhere by fighting. We need Maddoc—we need his knowledge—or we’ll lose any chance we have of finding her and bringing her back.”

Behind Catriona, a small kender hopped up and down on the

tips of his toes, his purple wizard's cape fluffing out like half of an indigo toadstool.

"You tell him, Cat!" Sindri chirped.

"Hush, Sindri, you're not helping." Catriona rolled her green eyes and turned back to Davyn. "I know you're worried about Nearra. We're all worried about Nearra." Catriona was much taller than Davyn, and held him back with arms woven of solid muscle. "But attacking Maddoc is not going to get her back."

"Why not?" Davyn asked. "This is his fault in the first place."

Another voice hissed from the shadows at the far side of the room. "Blame is a waste of time."

Catriona glanced back at the slender elf leaning against the corner wall, and nodded. "Elidor's right. Blame doesn't get Nearra back. It just means we sit in this keep, arguing among ourselves and getting absolutely nothing done to save her. Is that what you want, Davyn? To waste all of our energy yelling at Maddoc, and have none left to fight for Nearra when she needs us? We're going to find her, Davyn."

Davyn sheathed his long knife and shrugged off Catriona's hold. "I know." He stared out the window at the grounds of Cairngorn Keep, watching as the pounding rain soaked the bare earth below. "But I don't have to like it."

The kender joined Davyn by the window, ducking underneath Cat's arm as she tried to grasp his collar. Tugging on the ranger's belt and grinning, Sindri said, "I know you hate him, Davyn. I'd hate him, too, if he'd pretended to be my father and had ruined my life."

Catriona grimaced, and Elidor stifled a groan.

Sindri didn't seem to notice. "But Maddoc knows magic. And he knows Asvorja. We've got to work with him." Sindri climbed up onto the windowsill, staring at Davyn. "Don't worry, though.



If he makes one wrong move—boom!—we'll take him apart."

The kender's sturdy assurances brought a faint smile to Davyn's face, despite their lack of tact, and the ranger nodded. "All right, Sindri. All right."

Sindri beamed.

Maddoc rolled his eyes, lifting his bound hands. "Do you really think I'm going to do much, trussed up like this?" The old wizard wiggled his fingers. "Couldn't you just—"

"No," Davyn and Elidor chorused.

Maddoc sighed. "Even if I could move my hands, I have no magic. Asvoria burned it from me. I could not even power the smallest cantrip."

"He's lying." Davyn whirled to face the old wizard. "I'll agree to let him live for now—but I still say he can't be trusted. It's his fault Asvoria's returned—his fault that Nearra's soul is trapped. This was his plan."

Maddoc replied patiently, "My plan was far more elaborate, Davyn. You should know that. But now there is no hope of it ever succeeding. Why beleaguer the point, Son?"

"Don't call me *Son*," Davyn snarled. "I'm not your son. And you have magic, I'm sure of it. You're just hiding it—and until I know why, I'll never trust you, not a single moment. No matter what bonds hold you or what promises you make."

Maddoc sighed, and looked away.

Elidor drew a small knife from his belt, cleaning his fingers with the blade. "You're wasting what patience we have, Maddoc," he said quietly. Long blonde hair brushed against his shoulders and catlike eyes glinted with the same steel color of his knife's blade. "Tell us what we need to know about Asvoria."

"Asvoria," the old wizard muttered. "Yes, Asvoria. Ancient sorceress, tyrannical queen, phenomenal magic-user and to all historical accounts, a classic beauty . . ." Sensing his audience's



impatience, Maddoc spoke more quickly, “She trapped her spirit within an ancient tapestry. I discovered it and used it to restore her.”

“In Nearra,” Davyn spat the words like a curse.

Maddoc merely nodded, showing no sign of remorse. “And it worked. Asvoria has returned.”

Sindri whistled from the windowsill. “Weren’t you afraid?”

Maddoc shot a scathing glance at the kender. “No. Why should I be? Asvoria and I are of like minds. I assumed she would understand—not see me as a threat.” He looked down at his empty hands. “I thought I could control her. Merge our magics—take the world and split it between us.”

The revulsion on Catriona’s face was echoed in her words. “The world is not yours to take or to split.”

Maddoc ignored her. “Nearra’s soul should have tempered Asvoria’s greed and anger. I considered every option. I made allowances . . .”

“So what are we going to do now?” The elf looked up from his knife, eyes slitted dangerously.

“Well.” Sindri pursed his lips and reached inside his cloak to pull forth a gleaming amulet. “I suppose we’re going to have to use this.”

“Put that away, you fool kender!” Maddoc shouted. “You don’t know what it can do!”

“Fool?” Sindri harrumphed. “I’ll have you know that my family is descended from a great wizard, renowned for his magical prowess through the lands of the kender! We’re practically famous!”

“Famous, but obviously short-lived.” Maddoc sneered. “Now put that away before she senses it.”

Chagrined, the kender tucked the amulet back into his brown cloak. “She can do that?”



“It is not beyond Asvoria. Her two main goals now will be to reestablish her power—to consolidate what she has lost, and to rebuild her kingdom.”

“What will she need to do that?” Davyn asked, his eyebrows knitting. Catriona leaned against the foot of the bed, her eyes focused on Maddoc’s every move.

“The Daystar”—Maddoc gestured toward the kender’s medallion—“and the Aegis.”

For a long moment, the four others exchanged confused glances. The room was bathed in light as a strike of lightning lit the window and ignited Maddoc’s stoic face. The marble walls shone for a flickering moment.

“The Aegis?” Catriona asked at last, her patience breaking. “What’s the Aegis?”

Maddoc did not reply, staring down at his hands. Elidor kicked the bed, shaking the dark-robed wizard.

“What is the Aegis?” Elidor repeated, his white teeth shining in a near-feral snarl. The elf’s Kagonesti blood showed most when he was upset or angry, and now it revealed itself in an almost wolfish grin of ferocity. “Talk, wizard.”

Maddoc lifted his bound hands to his eyes, rubbing them wearily. “The Aegis, sometimes known as the Dragon Sword, is the most dangerous weapon that Asvoria possesses. Where the Daystar is a primarily defensive weapon, able to reverse enchantments and levy only minor offensive powers, the Aegis is a sword of tremendous power. Its force rivals the power of a hundred dragons. The last time its full power was called upon, Asvoria scattered an army with a single stroke.”

Catriona’s eyes flew wide, but Sindri was first to speak. The kender leaped from the windowsill and climbed onto the bed beside Maddoc. “That’s amazing! It really can do that? What’s it made of? Who forged it? Where did she get it? Where is it now?”



The barrage of questions came like elven arrows, leaping one after the other from the excited kender's mouth.

"Slow down, Sindri," Davyn said grudgingly. "Maddoc has to answer the first question before you can ask more."

But Maddoc shook his head, his expression dim and reserved. "No, I will not say any more. It is dangerous information to have. More dangerous, still, to give out to those who will not respect it."

Davyn pushed past Catriona and gripped the frame of the bed, white-knuckled. "You'll tell us, or I'll kill you."

Maddoc began to laugh. His humorless laughter was low and broken, rolling from his throat like rocks in an avalanche. The wizard lifted his bound wrists next to his face.

"Kill me?" Maddoc chortled. "There is little more you could do to me in this world, Davyn, than Asvorla has done. I am a broken man, with no magic and no further ambition. Death—even death granted to me by my own son—would be a blessing." Maddoc pushed himself from the bed, striding forward without fear to face his adopted son. "Kill me, then, Davyn, and finish it. Lose Nearra, and everything you fight for, but gain your *revenge*." The word was spat from Maddoc's clenched jaw, his eyes as dark as his black robes.

Before he could help himself, Davyn staggered back a step, the lessons of his past too firmly ingrained in his soul.

Catriona leaped between them again, her red hair a tempest against her pale skin. "Stop this!" she shouted, and Maddoc and Davyn were forced apart. "We will rescue Nearra, but not like this." Wheeling on Maddoc, Catriona shoved him in the chest with her finger, eyes blazing. "Answer the questions. Now."

Maddoc nodded, relenting. "The Aegis is a sword forged by the gods themselves, long before the Cataclysm. It is like no other weapon in the world. Some say that the Goddess Takhisis wielded



it, before she was cast down by Paladine. Other legends say her first High Priest forged it in the fires of the broken earth, before cities rose in the Vingaard Mountains.”

“Legends.” Davyn scowled. “Is there anything you are certain of?”

“I am certain that Asvoria wielded the sword during her first reign. I am certain Asvoria will try to find it, and with it, she will become as powerful as she was before—during the height of her kingdom, and the strength of her tyranny.

“As for the Aegis, I know what the sword is said to be capable of performing. It enhances strength and agility, erases fatigue. The longer you have the sword, the more it is able to increase your power. But the Aegis is also like a drug; once you have used it, you are addicted to it forever after. Asvoria feels that she *must* have the weapon or her rise to power may fail.”

“Ooh,” Sindri said. “Is it made all of magic? I mean, does the blade glow, or turn into a tiger, or strike people with lightning?” A flash of light outside the window echoed the kender’s words.

Maddoc smiled sardonically. “It has power over lightning, yes. But that is not its main ability. The Aegis was created at the same time, and with the same magic, as the Daystar. The Daystar can cancel magic potency, while the Aegis protects its wielder from offensive magics—but only so long as the wielder has conviction. If the user’s conviction fails, then the sword loses its power.”

“Asvoria’s got enough conviction to enslave nations,” Elidor said quietly. “If that’s all she needs, then she’ll never fall, as long as she has the sword.”

“We can’t let her get it.” Sindri bounced upon the bed, his black hair flouncing against his back with emphasis. “We have to stop her. We have the Daystar, that’s something.”

“With the Aegis, she could easily retake the Daystar, and then conquer much of Krynn.” Maddoc said quietly to the kender,



showing an uncharacteristic gentleness. “You would have no chance against her.”

“We must find it first, then,” Elidor murmured, resheathing his knife.

“Yes, where can we find it?” Sindri asked.

Maddoc hung his head. “I have been asking myself the same question for many years. Only a few months ago, I came across a legend that claims the sword was buried with her bones, interred in her tomb at Navarre. But I do not know if this legend can be believed.”

“Where’s Navarre?” Sindri asked eagerly.

Maddoc sat down on the edge of the bed once more, with a soft sigh. “Navarre was once a summer home to Asvoria, one of her favorite places. It is mentioned in several texts. When she was buried, the small palace became her tomb—and its location was removed from every map, every text, and every memory. Her body was taken from Cairngorn Keep after her death, and hidden there by her most loyal servants for the day that she would return. All those who knew the location of Navarre were killed—by Asvoria’s servants, who then took their own lives to protect her secrets. It is said that the palace was buried under tons of rubble to keep her possessions safe from tomb-robbers, in the hope that she would rise and return once more.”

“Well, she did, and that’s your fault, but do you know *where* it is?” bounced the kender.

“No.” Maddoc said a bit too quickly. He looked down at his bound hands.

“You’re lying!” Davyn snapped.

Maddoc set his jaw and looked up. “The location of Navarre is an ancient mystery—one that I could never break. A few months ago, I learned of a group of explorers who *had* penetrated its depths. They entered Navarre and were all killed, all but one. The fool



reached Asvoria's tomb but he dared not enter alone. So he placed a spell around its entrance, and vowed to return. I compelled the man to tell me how to disarm the shield-spell. But he . . . he died before he told me the exact location of the palace. And now, even if I were to find the palace now, the spell would be much too strong and in this shape,"—he raised his bound hands once more—"it would be suicide for me to try to retrieve the sword."

"But not for us," Catriona said firmly. "You could try to lead us to Navarre."

"I will not. It would be madness."

"No matter." Davyn broke in. "We don't need the wizard. I know someone else who can help us." Heads turned toward him, and Elidor's face darkened with concern. Davyn continued, "There is a bard in Ravenscar—a mapmaker. He's got maps of every inch of Krynn. If he doesn't have a map showing Navarre, then one doesn't exist."

"How do you know this man, Davyn?" Catriona asked.

The ranger shrugged. "He pays well for maps of untraveled country. I sold him some maps a few years ago. His name is Godwin Elfbearer. I'd say he's our best bet."

"I told you. Every map that showed Navarre's location has been destroyed," Maddoc said quietly. "It's a waste of time."

"Maybe you think it is. To me, it looks more like our only hope." Davyn said, turning on his heel to face Catriona. "Are you in?"

Catriona grinned. "Of course."

The others nodded, and Sindri leaped from the bed to the floor. "This is exciting. There must be tons of information in Asvoria's tomb. Spell books, lost alchemist's texts, a hundred magic items forgotten to all but the ancient scholars! Can we start out right now, Cat? Can we?"

The beautiful warrior shook her head. "No, Sindri. We're all tired, and we'll need to restock our equipment and our food. And



. . . we need to decide: what will we do with Maddoc?”

“He’ll come with us, of course!” Sindri smiled. “He knows Asvoria better than anyone in the world. He knows how to disarm the tomb spell. And he’s the only one who knows what the Aegis looks like—what if she’s got other magic swords, huh? How will we know which one is the Aegis?” Sindri’s eyes were pleading as he looked back and forth among his friends.

Davyn shook his head roughly. “No. I don’t trust him. Who knows if this tomb even exists? It might be another trick.”

Catriona and Elidor considered in silence before Cat spoke at last. “I’m going to say we can’t leave him here, Davyn. Maddoc’s no real threat to us now. He’s got no magic left, and Asvoria’s as likely to kill him as she is to destroy us. We’re the only people standing between him and death at Asvoria’s hands. And if he does have some information from his research that can help us once we’re in the tomb, we can’t turn our back on that.”

Davyn turned to Elidor. “You can’t agree with them,” he said. “You, of all people, know what Maddoc’s done, how he’s tried to kill us at every turn—what he did to Nearra. Do you think we should trust him?”

Exasperated, Davyn kicked at a stool, skittering the light wooden object across the floor. “We can do it ourselves. We just need him to write out what he knows, and then we can . . . we can . . .”

“Turn him over to the authorities?” Elidor murmured. “Do you really think anyone will believe us? ‘Hello, sir, this black wizard kidnapped our friend and released the soul of a pre-Cataclysm sorceress into her body. Will you hold him for us?’” Sarcasm dripped from Elidor’s words.

Davyn scowled. “But—take him with us?”

“There’s no other choice.” Elidor nodded to Catriona. “And if he betrays us, I relish the fact that it’s going to be my dagger in his back, the instant it happens.”



If the threat made Maddoc uncomfortable, he did not show it. He sat upon the bed in his black robes, his sharp face registering neither emotion nor interest. Davyn shot him an icy look. "I don't have to like it," Davyn said, turning toward the door and throwing it open. "And I don't have to pretend that I do." He strode through the door, slamming it behind him and vanishing into the dark stone corridors.

Catriona, Sindri, and Elidor gazed at one another. "Should we go after him?" Cat said.

"No," Elidor replied. "Let him walk it off. He understands that it's our only option."

Elidor turned away from the door and reached for his pack. "He won't do it for us. He will do it . . . for Nearra."

