

FORGOTTEN REALMS

R.A.
SALVATORE

The Cleric
Quintet
BOOK
II

In Sylvan Shadows

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PROLOGUE

Q

Cadderly moved his quill out toward the inkwell then changed his mind and put it down on his desk. He looked out the window at the foliage surrounding the Edificant Library, and at Percival, the white squirrel, tangling with acorns along the rain gutter of the lower level. It was the month of Eleasias, Highsun, the height of summer, and the season had been unusually bright and warm so high in the Snowflake Mountains.

Everything was as it always had been for Cadderly—at least, that's what the young scholar tried to convince himself. Percival was at play in the sunshine, the library was secure and peaceful once more, and the lazy remainder of summer promised days of leisure and quiet walks.

As it always had been.

Cadderly dropped his chin into his palm then ran his hand back through his sandy brown hair. He tried to concentrate on the peaceful images before him, on the quiet summer world of the Snowflake Mountains, but

eyes looked back at him from the depths of his mind: the eyes of a man he had killed.

Nothing would ever be the same. Cadderly's gray eyes were no longer so quick to turn up in that boyish, full-faced smile.

With renewed determination, the young scholar poked the quill into the ink and smoothed the parchment before him.

*Entry Number Seventeen
by Cadderly of Carradoon
Appointed Scholar, Order of Deneir
4 Eleasias, the Year of Maidens (1361 DR)
It has been three and a half tendays since
Barjin's defeat, yet I see his dead eyes—*

Cadderly stopped and scribbled out the thought, both from the parchment and from his mind. He looked again out the window, dropped his quill, and rubbed his hands over his boyish face.

This is important, he reminded himself.

He hadn't made an entry in more than a tenday, and if he failed at his year, the consequences to all the Southern Heartlands could be devastating. Again the quill went into the inkwell.

It has been three and a half tendays since we defeated the curse that befell the Edificant Library. The most distressing news since then: Ivan and Pikel Bouldersoulder have left the library in pursuit of Pikel's aspirations to druidhood. I wish Pikel well, though I doubt that the woodland priests will welcome a dwarf into their order. The

dwarves wouldn't say where they were going (I don't believe they themselves knew). I miss them terribly, for they, Danica, and Newander were the true heroes in the fight against the Talonite priest named Barjin—if that was his true name.

Cadderly paused for a few moments. Assigning a name to the man he had killed didn't make things any easier for the innocent young scholar. It took him some time before he could concentrate on the information necessary to his entry, the interview he had done with the interrogating priests.

The clerics who called back the dead man's spirit warned me to take their findings as "probable" rather than exact. Witnesses from beyond the grave are often elusive, they explained, and Barjin's stubborn spirit proved to be as difficult an opponent as the priest had been in life. Little information was garnered, but the clerics came away believing that the evil priest was part of a conspiracy—one of conquest that still threatens us, or so I must assume. That only increases the importance of my task.

Again, many moments passed before Cadderly was able to continue. He looked at the sunshine, at the white squirrel, and pushed away Percival's staring eyes.

Barjin served the goddess Talona, and that bodes ill indeed for us all. The Lady of Poison is a vile deity of chaos, restricted by no moral code. But I am hard-pressed to explain one discrepancy:

Barjin hardly fit the description of a Talonite disciple; he had not scarred himself in any visible way, as priests worshiping the Lady of Poison typically do. The holy symbol he wore, though—the trident with small vials atop each point—does resemble the triangular, three-teardrop design of Talona.

But with this, too, we have been led down a trail that leads only to guesses. More exact information must be gained, and gained soon, I fear.

This day, my quest has taken a different turn. Prince Elbereth of Shilmista, a most respected elf lord, has come to the library, bearing gloves taken from a band of marauding bugbears in the wood. The insignia on these gloves match Barjin's symbol exactly—there can be little doubt that the bugbears and the Talonite priest were allied.

The headmasters have made no decisions yet, beyond agreeing that someone should accompany Prince Elbereth back to the forest. It seems only logical that I will be their choice. My quest can go no farther here; already I have perused every source of information on Talona in our possession—our knowledge is not vast on this subject. And as for the magical elixir that Barjin used, I have looked through every major alchemical tome and have consulted extensively with Vicero Belago, the library's resident alchemist. Further study will be required as time permits, but my inquiries have hit only dead ends. Belago believes that he would learn more of the elixir if he had the bottle in his possession, but the headmasters have flatly refused that request. The lower catacombs have been

sealed—no one is to be allowed down there, and the bottle is to remain where I put it, immersed in a font of blessed water in the room that Barjin used to house his vile altar.

The only clues remaining, then, lead to Shilmista. Always have I wanted to visit the enchanted forest, to witness the elves' dance and hear their melancholy song. But not like this.

Cadderly set the quill down and blew lightly on the parchment to help dry the ink. His entry seemed terribly short, considering that he had not recorded anything for many days and there was so much to catch up on. It would have to do, though, for Cadderly's thoughts were too jumbled for him to make sense of them in writing.

Orphaned at a very young age, Cadderly had lived at the Edificant Library since his earliest recollections. The library was a fortress, never threatened in modern times—not until Barjin had come. To the young Cadderly, orcs and goblins, undead monsters and evil wizards, had all been the stuff of tales in dusty books.

It had suddenly become all too real and Cadderly had been thrust into the midst of it. The other priests, even Headmaster Avery, had called him a hero for his actions in defeating Barjin. Cadderly saw things differently, though. Confusion, chaos, and blind fate had facilitated his every move. Even killing Barjin had been an accident—a fortunate accident?

Cadderly honestly didn't know, didn't understand what Deneir wanted or expected of him. Accident or not, the act of killing Barjin haunted the young scholar. He saw the Talonite's dead eyes in his thoughts and in his dreams, staring at him, accusing him.

Outside the window, Percival danced and played along the rain gutter as warm sunshine filtered through the thick leaves of the huge oaks and maples common to the mountainside. Far, far below, Impresk Lake glittered, quiet and serene, in the gentle rays of the summer light.

To Cadderly, the “hero,” it all seemed a horrible facade.

ONE

BY SURPRISE

Q

Twilight.

Fifty elf archers lay concealed across the first ridge and fifty more waited behind them atop the second in the rolling, hilly section of the Shilmista Forest known as the Dells. The flicker of faraway torches came into view through the trees.

“That’s not the leading edge,” the elf maiden Shayleigh warned, and indeed, lines of goblins were soon spotted much closer than the torches, traveling swiftly and silently through the darkness. Shayleigh’s violet eyes glittered eagerly in the starlight; she kept the cowl of her cloak up high, fearing that the luster of her golden hair, undiminished by the quiet colors of night, would betray her position.

The advancing goblins came on, their shortbows bent back, arrows poised to strike.

The skilled elves held their longbows steady, not one of them trembling under the great pull of their powerful weapons. They looked around somewhat

nervously, though, awaiting Shayleigh's command, their discipline severely tested as orcs and goblins, and larger, more ominous forms, came almost to the base of the ridge.

Shayleigh moved down the line quickly. *Two arrows away and retreat*, she instructed, using a silent code of hand signals and hushed whispers. *On my call*.

Orcs were on the hillock, climbing steadily toward the ridge. Still Shayleigh held the volley, trusting in the erupting chaos to keep her enemies at bay.

A large orc stopped and sniffed the air just ten paces from the ridge. Those in line behind the beast stopped too, glancing around in an effort to discern what their companion had sensed. The porcine creature tilted its head back, trying to bring some focus to the unusual form lying just a few feet ahead of it.

"*Now!*" came Shayleigh's cry.

The lead orc never managed to squeal a warning before the arrow dived into its face, the force of the blow lifting the creature from the ground and sending it tumbling back down the slope. All across the north face of the hillock, the invading monsters screamed out and fell, some hit by two or three arrows in just the blink of an eye.

Then the ground shook under the monstrous charge as the invading army's second rank learned of the enemy concealed atop the ridge. Almost every arrow of the elves' ensuing volley hit the mark, but it hardly slowed the sudden press of drooling, monstrous forms.

According to plan, Shayleigh and her troops took flight, with goblins, orcs, and ogres on their heels.

Galladel, the elf king of Shilmista, commanding the second line, turned his archers loose as soon as the

monsters appeared over the lip of the first ridge. Arrow after arrow hit home. Groups of four elves concentrated their fire on single targets—the huge ogres—and the great monsters were brought crashing down.

Shayleigh's group crossed the second ridge and fell into place beside their companions then turned their longbows and joined in the massacre. With horrifying speed, the valley between the ridges filled with corpses and blood.

One ogre slipped through the throng and nearly got to the elven line—even had its club raised high for a strike—but a dozen arrows burrowed into its chest, staggering it. Shayleigh, fearless and grim, leaped over the closest archer and drove her fine sword into the stunned monster's heart.

Q

As soon as he heard the fighting in the Dells, the wizard Tintagel knew that he and his three magic-using associates would soon be hard-pressed by monstrous invaders. Only a dozen archers had been spared to go with the wizards, and those, Tintagel knew, would spend more time scouting to the east and keeping communication open with the main host than fighting. The four elf magic-users had mapped out their defenses carefully, and they trusted in their Art. If the ambush at the Dells was to succeed, Tintagel and his companions would have to hold the line in the east. They could not fail.

A scout rushed by Tintagel, and the wizard brushed aside his thick, dark locks and squinted with blue eyes toward the north.

“Mixed group,” the young elf explained, looking

back. "Goblins, mostly, but with a fair number of orcs beside them."

Tintagel rubbed his hands together and motioned to his three wizard comrades. All four began their spells at about the same time and soon the air north of their position was filled with sticky filaments, drifting down to form thick webs between the trees. The scout's warning had come at the last moment, for even as the webs began to take shape, several goblins rushed into them, becoming helplessly stuck.

Cries went up from several sources to the north. The press of goblins and orcs, though considerable, couldn't break through the wizard's spells, and many monsters were crushed into the webs to gag on the sticky substance and slowly suffocate. The few archers accompanying the wizards picked their shots carefully, protecting their precious few arrows, firing only if it appeared that a monster was about to break loose of its sticky bonds.

Many more were still free, beyond the webbing. Many, many more, but at least the spells had bought the elves in the Dells some time.

Q

The second ridge was given up, but not before scores of dead invaders lay piled across the valley. The elves' retreat was swift, down one hill, over the piled leaves at its base, up another hill, then falling into familiar positions atop the third ridge.

Screams to the east told Shayleigh that many monsters had approached from that way, and hundreds of torches had sprung up in the night far to the north.

"How many are you?" the elf maiden whispered, almost out of breath.

As if in answer, a black tide rolled down the southern side of the second ridge.

The invaders found a surprise waiting for them at the bottom of the small valley. The elves had leaped over the piled leaves, for they knew of the spike-filled pits hidden beneath.

With the charge stalled, showers of arrows had an even more devastating effect. Goblin after goblin died, and tough ogres growled away a dozen arrow hits only to be hit a dozen more times.

The elves cried out in savage fury, raining death on the intruders, but no smile found Shayleigh's face. She knew that the main host, coming in steadily behind the advance lines of fodder, would be more organized and better controlled.

"Death to the enemies of Shilmista!" one exuberant elf screamed, leaping to his feet and hurling his fist into the air.

In answer, a huge rock sailed through the darkness and caught the foolish young elf squarely in the face, nearly decapitating him.

"Giant!" came the cry from several positions all at once.

Another rock whipped past, narrowly missing Shayleigh's cowed head.

Q

The wizards couldn't possibly conjure enough webbing to block the entire eastern Dells. They had known that from the beginning and had selected specific trees on which to anchor their webs, creating a maze to slow the enemy's approach. Tintagel and his three cohorts nodded grimly to each other, took up predetermined

positions at the mouths of the web tunnels, and prepared their next spells.

“They have entered the second channel!” called a scout.

Tintagel silently counted to five then clapped his hands. At the sound of the signal, the four wizards began identical chants. They saw the forms, shadowy and blurred by the web veils, slipping through the maze, apparently having solved the riddle. On came the charging goblins, hungry for elf blood. The wizards kept their composure, though, concentrating on their spells and trusting that they had timed the approach through the maze correctly.

Groups of goblins came straight at each of them, all in a line between the channeling webs.

One after another, the elf wizards pointed out at the enemy and uttered the final syllables of their incantations. Bolts of lightning split the darkness, shooting down each of the channels with killing fury.

The goblins didn't even have time to cry out before they fell, scorched corpses in a sylvan grave.

Q

“It is time to leave,” Galladel told Shayleigh, and the maiden, for once, didn't argue. The woods beyond the second ridge were lit by so many torches it seemed as though the sun had come up—and still more were coming in.

Shayleigh couldn't tell how many giants had taken position beyond the ridge, but judging from the numbers of boulders sailing the elves' way, there were several at least.

“Five more arrows!” the fiery elf maiden cried to her troops.

But many of the elves couldn't follow that command. They had to drop their bows and take up swords, for a host of bugbears, stealthy despite their great size, had slipped in from the west.

Shayleigh raced over to join the melee. If the bugbears delayed their retreat even for a short while, the elves would be overwhelmed. By the time she got there, though, the competent elves had dispatched most of the bugbears, with only a single loss. Three elves had one of the remaining monsters surrounded, and another group was in pursuit of two bugbears, heading back to the west. To the side, though, another bugbear appeared, and only one elf, a young maiden, stood before it.

Shayleigh veered straight in, recognizing the elf as Cellanie and knowing that she was too inexperienced to handle the likes of a bugbear.

The young elf fell before Shayleigh got there, her skull crushed by the bugbear's heavy club. The seven-foot, hairy goblinoid stood there grinning with its yellow teeth.

Shayleigh dipped her head and growled loudly, as though to charge. The bugbear braced itself and clenched its wicked club tightly, but the elf maiden stopped and used her forward momentum to hurl her sword.

The bugbear stood dumbfounded. Swords were not designed for such attacks! But if the creature doubted Shayleigh's intelligence in throwing the weapon, or her prowess with such a trick, all it had to do was look to its chest, to the elf's sword hilt, vibrating horribly just five inches out of the bugbear's hairy ribs. The creature's blood spurted across the sword hilt and stained the ground.

The bugbear looked down, glanced up at Shayleigh, and it fell dead.

“To the west!” Shayleigh cried, rushing over to retrieve her sword. “As we planned! To the west!”

She grabbed the bloodied hilt and tugged, but the weapon would not slip free. Shayleigh remained more concerned with the progress of her troops than her own vulnerable position. Still looking back to oversee the retreat, she braced her foot on the dead bugbear’s chest and gripped her sword tightly in both hands.

When she heard the snort above her, she knew her folly. Both her hands were on a weapon she could not use, either to strike or to parry.

Defenseless, Shayleigh looked up to see another bugbear and its huge, spiked club.

Q

The wizards, coming in to join their allies, concentrated their magical attacks on the torches of the enemy host beyond the second ridge. Enchanted flames roared to life under the pyrotechnical magic. Sparks flew wildly, burning into any monsters standing too close. Other torches poured heavy smoke, filling the area, blinding and choking, forcing the monsters to drop back or fall to the ground.

With that magical cover holding back their foes, the elves soon cleared the third ridge.

Q

A flash emanated from beside Shayleigh’s face, burned her and blinded her. At first, she thought it was the impact from the bugbear’s club, but when the elf maiden’s wits and vision returned, she still stood over the bugbear she had killed, clutching her impaled sword.

She finally sorted out the other bugbear, its back

against a tree, a smoldering hole burned right through its belly. The creature's hair danced wildly, charged, Shayleigh realized, from a wizard's lightning bolt.

Tintagel was beside her.

"Come," he said, helping her tear her sword from the dead monster. "We have slowed the enemy charge, but the great, dark force will not be stopped. Already, our lead runners have encountered resistance in the west."

Shayleigh tried to respond, but found that her jaw would not move.

The wizard looked to the two archers covering his rear. "Gather up poor Cellanie," he said. "We must leave no dead for our cruel enemies to toy with."

Tintagel took Shayleigh's arm and led her off after the rest of the fleeing host. Cries and monstrous shouts erupted from all around them, but the elves did not panic. They stayed with their carefully designed plan and executed it to perfection. They met pockets of resistance in the west, but the broken ground worked in their favor against the slower, less agile monsters, especially since even on the run the elves could shoot their bows with deadly accuracy. Every group of monsters was overwhelmed and the elves continued on their way without taking another loss.

The eastern sky had grown pink with the budding dawn before they regrouped and found some rest. Shayleigh had seen no more fighting during the night, fortunately. Her head ached so badly she couldn't even keep her bearings without Tintagel's aid. The wizard stayed beside her through it all, and would have willingly died beside her if the enemy had caught them.

"I must beg your pardon," Tintagel said to her after the new camp had been set, south of the Dells. "The

bugbear was too close—I had to begin the bolt too near you.”

“You apologize for saving my life?” Shayleigh asked. Every word she spoke pained the valiant maiden.

“Your face shines with the redness of a burn,” Tintagel said, touching her glowing cheek lightly and wincing with sympathy as he did.

“It will heal,” Shayleigh replied, managing a weak smile. “Better than would my head if that bugbear had clubbed me!” She couldn’t even manage a smile at her statement, though, and not for the pain, but for the memory of Cellanie, falling dead to the ground.

“How many did we lose?” Shayleigh asked.

“Three,” replied Tintagel in equally grim tones.

“Only three,” came the voice of King Galladel, moving to them from the side. “And the blood of hundreds of goblins and their allies stains the ground. By some accounts, even a giant was felled last night.” Galladel winced when he noticed Shayleigh’s red face.

“It’s nothing,” the elf maiden said into his wide-eyed stare, waving her hand his way.

Galladel broke his concentrated stare, embarrassed. “We are in your debt,” he said, his smile returning. “Because of your fine planning, we scored a great victory this night.” The elf king nodded, patted Shayleigh on the shoulder, and took his leave, having many other matters to attend to.

Shayleigh’s grimace told Tintagel that she didn’t share Galladel’s optimism.

“The outcome,” the wizard reminded her, “could have been much, much worse.”

From his somber tone, Shayleigh knew she didn’t have to explain her fears. They had hit their enemy by

surprise, on a battlefield they had prepared and that their enemy had not seen before, and so they had lost only three. All that was true, but it seemed to Shayleigh that those three dead elves held more value than hundreds of dead goblins among the seemingly countless masses invading Shilmista's northern border.

And it was the elves, not the invaders, who had been forced to flee.