

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Ed Greenwood

Swords of
The Knights of Myth Drannor Book II
Dragonfire



Prologue

Many flickering enchantments flared up in pale warning at Old Ghost's approach, as he drifted along the grim stone corridors of the Citadel of the Raven. Wherefore, he moved cautiously among their menaces, hurrying only as much as he could. New wards and locks and illusions that hid doors and locks and sliding wall-panels were everywhere among the older barriers—and no wonder.

The Zhentarim were prospering in this Year of the Spur. The Citadel seemed overrun with bright-eyed and cruel young magelings, all seeking to impress the senior mages so as to rise to places among them. Preening fools.

Fools who had to be kept out of moots where a handful of them could pounce on and overwhelm a hurrying slave or servant—or one of their own fellows they'd taken a dislike to. Not that any of them were very likable.

Some of them were at least energetic, and it was that verve and vitality, that superior life-force of an entity gifted with arcane ability, drive, and ambition, that Old Ghost wanted. Hungered for. All right, the Watching Gods be his witness: needed.

Old Ghost was recollecting as much, ruefully, as he seeped under a very old door and came out into a room where chains were rattling.

Amid a trio of three grinning magelings, a helpless prisoner struggled vainly against massive iron manacles that held her upright with her arms spread wide.

Teeth clenched, she snarled and sobbed her way to exhaustion, and then sagged down in her chains—only to stiffen and stare in horror at a sudden roiling glow occurring just above her own belt. “What—?” she gasped.

The three wizards grinned.

The Knights of Myth Drannor

“Delzyn of the Zhentarim am I,” one of them said grandly, stepping forward and drawing a long, curved dagger, “and mine is the spell you’re now feeling.”

He slashed through her rope belt with a flourish, and the upperworks of the breeches beneath, not quite cutting skin.

The garment fell. The prisoner screamed, or tried to, but Delzyn was still slicing away most of the front of her jerkin to bare her from breasts to clout—and display a long, wriggling worm of her own flesh that had drawn away from the red, wetly glistening organs beneath. As four gazes watched, it arched, undulated, and grew a blind, snakelike, fanged head.

The magelings chuckled and murmured in approval as the snake-thing reared back from the terrified prisoner—and then struck at her, its needlelike fangs biting viciously into the very body it had been fashioned from.

“Notice,” Delzyn commented, ignoring the raw screams of agony now erupting from right beside him, “how swiftly it devours the—”

The screams stopped abruptly as Old Ghost plunged through the unfortunate woman from behind, leaving her empty-eyed and silently staring.

“Say, now,” one of the watching Zhentarim commented, “*that’s* not supposed to happen, is it? Delzyn, your spell must need—”

Delzyn’s eyes bulged. He made an odd, urgent choking sound, lifting a hand to claw vainly at the air as if it were pressing in upon him. He swayed, his eyes going from frantic fear to emptiness, and then toppled.

The two other Zhentarim sprang hastily back to keep clear, and let Delzyn’s bones shatter on the flagstones. They wanted nothing to do with whatever had gone wrong with the spell. It was obviously—

Plunging through them, too—faster than they could do anything about it. They trembled for an instant each, something almost visible flickering between them, and then fell on their faces to join Delzyn in death, on the floor.

Old Ghost rushed right on out of the chamber, seeking the swiftest way up to the sentinel who must also be slain. Usually he liked to linger when he fed, basking in the slow, warming drift of life-energy into him, but just now he was in some haste.

He dared not be late for this particular secret meeting.

In a high chamber far across the Citadel from the room where a dead woman sagged in chains with three lifeless Zhentarim at her feet, Ilbrar Thaelwand,

duty-sentinel of the Brotherhood, stared hard into the glowing scrying-sphere in front of him, shaking his head in disbelief.

No matter how often he murmured over it, touched it, and even slapped it, the scene in the sphere didn't change. Something had happened at last, after months of bored staring at nothing unremarkable. Bane forfend, he'd just seen some sort of wraith fly *through* Delzyn and the others, and drain them as it did so. Drain them dead.

Hissing in apprehension, Ilbrar turned to strike the alarm gong—and recoiled from what came right at his eyes: a disembodied man's left hand, reaching at him out of thin air and gliding closer . . . closer . . .

Ilbrar gabbled in fear and swatted at it, seeking to strike the hand aside, but it ducked deftly under his frantic arms and swooped up to touch him.

Whereupon Ilbrar's panted curses became a sizzling sound, and he slumped over with smoke curling in gentle wisps from his eyes, nose, and mouth.

Hissing at the haste that denied him this chance to bask and gloat, Old Ghost raced away again.

Behind him the gong remained silent, flanked by a sentinel forevermore mindless, his brain cooked inside his head.

In another room of the Citadel that was far older, darker, and better hidden than the previous two, a wizard whose left arm ended at the wrist stood calmly watching that stump as his hand slowly faded back into view.

When it seemed whole and solid once more, he wagged his fingers experimentally, seemed satisfied with the result, and turned to face the lone door of the room.

It was closed and locked, but that seemed to pose no trouble at all for the sinister shadow that was now seeping through it, and gliding upright into a ghostly shape that was vaguely manlike—and sharply menacing.

Old Ghost was good at seeming menacing.

"Hesperdan," the wraith-thing asked, by way of greeting, "why did you summon me? I dislike showing myself so boldly."

"Your behavior regarding Horaundoon was so intemperate," the wizard replied, "that I felt it necessary to re-examine your aims and beliefs. And eliminate you, if necessary."

"I, too, feel *necessities*," Old Ghost replied, and thrust open doors in his mind that he'd held firmly closed for some time, to glare at the words of fire blazing behind them.

The Knights of Myth Drannor

In answer to those breaches the air shimmered in four places in the room, opening like windows into four chambers distant indeed in Faerûn, in each of which stood a blank-faced mage with a wand in his hand. Murmuring mindlessly, the four unleashed the magics of their wands.

Ravaging spells howled forth and struck Hesperdan from all sides, wrestling and raging in the air—but somehow failed to touch the calmly watching wizard. Instead, something unseen turned aside the spells into writhing, crackling chaos.

Through the roiling tumult Old Ghost arrowed forward, plunging into Hesperdan with a snarl of glee.

Only to emerge beyond the unmoving wizard, much diminished and smoldering. He gasped in a voice trembling with pain, “How did you—?”

The wizard shrugged. “Continue wondering. *I* dislike imparting information so boldly. Suffice it to say that you may continue to exist—for now.”

“Please accept my thanks for that benevolence,” Old Ghost said. “Is there a price?”

“Of course. Answering me fully and honestly: Do you still consider yourself a loyal member of the Zhentarim?”

“Yes.” The wraith-thing’s tone was as firm as it was sullen.

“Loyal to whom, exactly?”

“The High Imperceptor. You. Lord Chess.”

“Until you can slay us, of course. Yet you act against the Zhentarim, repeatedly, in matters both large and small. Why?”

“For the reasons I have always done: to thwart and ultimately eliminate Manshoon, who has so perverted our Brotherhood into a fellowship at war with itself, and his personal tool of influence and domination.”

Hesperdan crooked an eyebrow. “And to confound him, you destroy *other* members and plans of the Zhentarim?”

“I do. Those who obey him more than our founding causes are part of his stain and shadow upon us. His self-serving schemes are not ours, and the more he achieves them the more his power grows. The Zhentarim are torn aside from what they should be.”

“To specifics: Why did you act as you did in the matter of the Red Wizard Hilmryn?”

“The Thayan dared to use his spells to influence the minds of a few of our magelings—a weakness no one must be allowed to conclude exists. So

I rode him into turning on his fellow Red Wizards with reckless slaying spells, and exacted a toll high enough, before they blasted him to wet dust, that all Red Wizards will think twice about daring to meddle with any Zhentarim again.”

Hesperdan nodded. “How will you deal with Horaundoon, now that you’ve . . . become as you are?”

“He is my rival and a blundering fool, still wildly seeking to escape his new nature even as he learns it, but when he calms—if he strays not into tactics too dangerous—I will aid him in working against the Brotherhood, to weaken Manshoon’s rule.”

“And your intentions for the Knights of Myth Drannor?”

“Are my own.”

Hesperdan raised a hand, and there was suddenly a shining webwork of force all around Old Ghost, thrusting sharp lance-points of crackling energy at him. “Fully and honestly,” the wizard reminded.

“They are capable steeds that both Horaundoon and I know now how to ride comfortably and exactly. And they are headed closer to where we want them.”

“Away from the Hidden House, that neither of you dare approach,” Hesperdan replied silkily, “and closer to the decaying mythal of Myth Drannor, whose energies you can call upon.”

Old Ghost paused. “So,” he hissed, after a time of tense silence. “You know.”

“Of course,” Hesperdan replied. “I helped raise that mythal; I can feel your attempts to draw on it.”

“You. . . ?”

“Awed disbelief becomes you not, Arlonder Darmeth. Let us see if you wear obedience better. Do as you please to Manshoon and the Zhentarim—but neither drain nor harm any Knight of Myth Drannor. They are *my* unwitting tools. So ride or hamper them not. In the slightest. ‘Or else,’ as they say.”

The wizard smiled then. It was a cold smile, like that of a prowling wolf—and for the first time in longer than he could remember, Old Ghost found himself shivering.

He hadn’t known, until then, that he *could* still shiver.

This shuffling old Zhent had been part of creating the mythal of Myth Drannor?

The Knights of Myth Drannor

And just how, by all the Watching Gods, was it that he knew Old Ghost's name?

Who *was* he?

As if he'd shouted those thoughts aloud, Hesperdan said quietly, "By all means entertain yourself seeking to find out. Yet go. Now. We both have more important things to do than tarry here trading menacing words."

Old Ghost went, trying not to hurry.

But failing.

Chapter 1

DOOM COMES REACHING

Doom comes reaching for a Knight or two
And the taverns fall suddenly empty,
Fires crackling in silence where boasting
And swaggering held sway but moments ago.
Leaving a little quiet for true heroes
To hear themselves think, for once.

Mirt the Moneylender

Proof I Cannot Write Poetry:

A Fat Man's Chapbook

published in the Year of the Saddle





Deep in the undercellars of the massive stone building known as the Royal Court of Cormyr were chambers that no one but certain senior Crown-sworn wizards of the realm ever willingly entered. The doors were as thick as stylish horse-carriages stretched wide, and barred with great beams that required several sweating men to shift. The brightest lights those large, nigh-empty chambers ever saw were spell-glow.

The chambers were one of the places that the war wizards of Cormyr cast dangerous and unpleasant spells that—hopefully—weren't too explosive. Spells that were necessary, but better kept hidden.

The silently raging, vivid blue fires of mighty spells flared and flickered busily in one of those rooms, making eerie masks of the grim faces of the two war wizards who stood watching a third at work.

Laspeera Naerinth and Beldos Margaster made not a sound. The dragontail rings on their fingers spat tiny lightnings in response to each of Vangerdahast's powerful spells, but otherwise they were still.

Those magics raged and swirled, and finally each died down in turn, and faded away. After a long, silent time, the Royal Magician of Cormyr turned wearily away from the unconscious man on the cot.

"I've done all I can," Vangerdahast growled. "Margaster?"

The elderly man who'd once been the trusted confidant and messenger of King Azoun's father, the second ruling Rhigaerd, shook his head grimly. "As well cast as I've ever seen," he said grimly. "If they work not, then the gods meant this one's life not to stretch longer. If we confine him, the worms will eat his head hollow from within."

Laspeera nodded—and then three wizard's heads turned as one, as they all watched something black and slimy gush from Florin Falconhand's nose, lift from the cot like a wet and unwilling bat, and sail through the

The Knights of Myth Drannor

air to land with a *splat* in the brazier in front of Laspeera. She lifted both of her hands in command. The brazier's flames roared up obediently, and the black thing sizzled.

Suddenly it popped, sending Laspeera reeling back—but Margaster was ready. Something streaked from his pointing finger, consuming the black fragments in a tiny, raging sphere of flames that drew the fire of the brazier up into it, extinguishing the blaze, but reducing the blackness to nothing at all.

"That's the last of his mindworms," Vangerdahast said. "We're almost done."

All three of them turned rather reluctantly to look across the room at another cot. It held all that was left of Narantha Crownsilver, a bloody heap surrounded by more spell-glow. From the waist up, she was nothing but wet, amorphous gore.

"So ends *that* fair flower of the Crownsilvers," Vangey muttered. "She's riddled with them, and must be burned, I'm afraid. Lasp?"

Laspeera nodded grimly, and cast a careful spell that enshrouded the cot with magic that ignited—and, spiraling slowly, drank—all within it. Narantha's funeral pyre rose into softly reaching flames and smoke that became part of the rising shroud, twisted into it, and then dwindled.

The three wizards watched until nothing was left but ashes on the stone floor. Vangerdahast cast a spell of his own on them, sighed, and announced, "This threat to the realm is ended."

He strode briskly to the door. "Now for the next one!"



Master Understeward-of-Chambers Halighon Amranthur strode grandly to the double doors and flung them wide, seven liveried doorjacks at his heels. "Now we must make haste," he commanded, "because the Knights will be here in less than a bell, and all must be—"

He stopped, blinked at the four people sprawled quietly in the most comfortable lounges at the northeastern corner of the room, and snapped, "And who are you? How did you get in here?"

The woman who looked like a burly, almost mannish farm lass looked up at him and said calmly, "Islif Lurelake. At your service, courtier."

“Courtier? *Courtier?*” Halighon almost spat the word, voice rising into full and scandalized incredulity, his shoulders prickling with the (quite correct) realization that the doorjacks were undoubtedly exchanging delighted grins behind his back. “Wench, I am no mere courtier, let me assure you! I am—*hold!*” His voice sank down into the deep, hissing whisper of real shock. “Are those *weapons* upon your persons? Here, in the Royal Wing?”

A smaller, darker woman in form-fitting leathers put her feet up on the best cushions and drawled, “Yes, sirrah, your eyesight fails you not. And *such* swift, keen wits you have, too! These are indeed weapons upon our persons. Here, in the Royal Wing.”

As the understeward stared at her in shock, mouth gaping and face pale, she inspected her nails idly and told them, “Oh, yes; Halighon, be aware that I am best known as Pennae. And whereas Islif politely places herself at your service, *I expect you to service me.*”

In the silence that followed that serene observation, a doorjack snickered—and Understeward Halighon lost his last desperate hold on his temper, stormed to a bellpull beside the door, and tugged it so savagely that the cord tore and was left hanging by a few threads. “This—this is *scandalous!*” he snarled.

“When the Purple Dragons storm in here,” Pennae murmured imperturbably, “be sure to introduce us properly. This personage of dainty carriage is Jhessail Silvertree, and this handsome but quiet priest of Tymora is Doust Sulwood. Two of our companions are absent, but should join us shortly: Semoor Wolftooth, a holy man of Lathander, and Florin Falconhand, who’s—”

A paneled section of wall burst open and a dozen bright-armored men streamed through the revealed opening into the room, swords drawn. They peered alertly in all directions, eyes stern and faces grim.

“Who sounded the danger-gong?” the foremost snapped, from behind a formidable mustache. “Where’s the peril?”

Pennae pointed languidly. “Behold the sounder of the gong *and* the only peril we face in this chamber, all in one man: Understeward—ah! Pray forgive me—*Master Understeward-of-Chambers Halighon Amranthur.*”

“I—ah—that is to say . . .” Halighon faltered, as the Purple Dragons strode nearer, giving him hard looks.

The Knights of Myth Drannor

Then he gathered himself visibly, reddening in the process, and glared at Pennae. “How is it you know my name? And who *are* you—all of you, your two absent friends included? Just how did you get in here?”

Pennae smiled. “Answer the first: Fee—ah, pray pardon, *Queen Filfaeril* to you—told me. Answer the second: we are the Knights of Myth Drannor, royally chartered adventurers. Answer the third: Vangey—ah, forgive me again, I am unused to court protocol—*Royal Magician Vangerdahast* brought us here through that same secret door the loyal Purple Dragons have just employed, and bade us remain here until he brought Florin to us. Florin is meeting privately with Vangey, Laspeera, and Margaster elsewhere in this quaint pile. War wizard business, I’m given to understand.”

Master Understeward-of-Chambers Halighon Amranthur had slowly gone a dirty yellow hue, as of old bone, and was now trying to manage a hue as white as fresh linen.

The Purple Dragons gave him contemptuous glances, sheathed their swords pointedly, and exchanged rolled eyes with some of the doorjacks. At a curt nod from the Purple Dragon commander, the doorjacks departed the room.

That commander dispensed another pointed look that sent his own men filing back through the no-longer-so-secret door, and ere following them, turned to favor Halighon with a cold glare.

After the door closed softly behind them all, leaving the understeward alone with the Knights, Halighon regarded the four folk on the lounges with open loathing.

“Adventurers,” he hissed. “I *hate* adventurers.”

“I quite agree,” said an all-too-familiar voice from right behind him, sending the courtier up into the air with a little shriek of startlement. “However, it’s not politic to say so, out loud, when we can perhaps still get them to do something useful for us. *Lesser Understeward Amranthur.*”

Halighon Amranthur tried to sink right through the rich furs underfoot, but as they lay upon a solid stone floor and yielded not a fingerbreadth, he settled for toppling into a senseless heap.

Court Wizard of the Realm and Royal Magician of Cormyr Vangerdahast sighed, stepped over the unconscious courtier, and regarded the grinning Knights with what some might have described as a “jaundiced eye.”

“Can’t you lot keep out of trouble for *less* than a bell? Do you know how much it costs to train good servants?”

“Ah,” Pennae replied serenely, pointing at the huddled heap on the floor. “That must be why you haven’t gotten around to training *him*.”

Behind Vangerdahast, one of the two grandly sinister war wizards who’d accompanied him into the room snorted with mirth.

Vangerdahast sighed again. Patiently.

“Your Florin will live,” he growled, “and his wits are his own. More than that, he seems to have as many as most folk need in life. Which is better than I can say for some of you.” He turned his head slowly, to give all four Knights a warning glare.

“You may enjoy royal favor, and a proper charter, but let me remind you that you do *not* command any license to thief freely through every grand house and noble mansion in Suzail or Arabel or anywhere *else* in the realm. Nor is making foes of loyal servants of the Crown a wise road on through life, no matter how tiresome they may seem to you. Cormyr presents the appearance of a tolerant land, but believe you me, Cormyr has a way of *dealing with irritants*.”

“The war wizards and their master with his oh-so-subtle-threats?” Pennae asked archly. “Or were you speaking of some other way?”

The Royal Magician of Cormyr regarded her expressionlessly for a long moment, and then said flatly, “I managed to save Florin Falconhand. I could not save the Lady Narantha. Her father will not forgive that. And before you feel moved to shrug that away with more insolence, I bid you—all of you—remember three names: Martess Ilmra, Agannor Wildsilver, and Bey Freemantle. Three who are too dead to be Knights of Myth Drannor any longer.”

He turned away.

“Lord Vangerdahast?” Islif asked quietly, from behind him, rising from the lounges. “May we thank you for our Florin’s life?”

“You may.”

“Thank you,” Jhessail said fervently, standing up in turn.

“Aye, thanks,” Pennae added quickly, still lounging with her boots up. “Do all his bits still work?”

Making sure they could not see his smile, Vangerdahast sighed again. Loudly.

The Knights of Myth Drannor



The boom of distant double doors being violently flung open brought the two casually lounging Highknights into stiff, impassive alertness. An instant was all they needed to assume formal stances, halberds crossed in front of the door into the royal study.

In the distance, a fast-striding figure turned a corner and began the long walk toward them, cloak swirling. It did not slow as it approached, but merely snarled, “Get out of the way!”

Lord Maniol Crownsilver was already in a towering rage. As the halberds moved not a fingerwidth, his eyes widened, his face reddened, and his lips drew back in a snarl ere he burst out, “Underlings, *move!* I demand audience with the king! As is the right of every noble-born Cormyrean!”

The Highknights might have been two statues, if statues could regard sputtering nobles with coldly withering contempt.

“*Obey*, gods curse you!” Crownsilver roared. “How low has this fair land come, when insolence rules its very Palace drudges?”

Silence was the only reply they gave him, even when his howlings rose into curses commenting personally and quite specifically upon their ancestry, social habits, and thankfully armor-hidden physical attributes. They stood like statues when Crownsilver clawed at the hilt of his ornate court sword and then drew it on them.

“Must I hew you like tree trunks?” the lord ranted, swinging hard—and striking the metal-clad haft of a halberd with a ringing clang that numbed his arm right up to the shoulder, but moved the halberd not a whit, that he could see. “A little *obedience* is all I expect!”

He swung again as he spat, “And is that too *much* to expect, in the Cormyr of here and now?”

Another ringing clang and another, the halberds moving smoothly to catch and deflect his strongest blows.

Panting, the noble used his favorite trick: thrusting at one expressionless face and then swooping his blade down viciously at the flaring top edge of that guard’s codpiece—only to have the other guard do something blurringly fast with his own sword, that sent Crownsilver’s halberd back over his head to clang off the passage ceiling and clatter somewhere behind him.

Ed Greenwood

Lord Crownsilver stared at the two guards in speechless disbelief. He'd been disarmed with casual ease, and lo, they were back in their statuelike poses again as if he weren't there at all!

He whirled away, seething, and spat out the worst insults he could think of, one after another, as he clawed at the floor with numbed fingers for his blade.

Recovering it, he spun around in case one of the guards was considering his backside a suitable target for a kick, snarling, "And your stone-faced insolence betrays a lawlessness that bodes the realm ill, in its brazen disregard for rightful rank! You may think yourselves clever, you lowborn pizzle-heads, but no statue of a sentinel is revered by pigeons, and I've half a mind to down my breeches and serve the both of you the same—"

Which was when he noticed that the study door behind the two impassive guards had quietly opened, and the King of All Cormyr was standing in the doorway not quite succeeding in keeping a smile off his face, as he silently beckoned his visitor in.

And Maniol Crownsilver suddenly ran out of words to say.



"Fool! You bear the wasting curse that now afflicts all of you Knights of Myth Drannor! You shall all soon be as I am, if you tarry west of the Thunder Peaks! Doom reaches for you, Semoor Wolftooth! Doom!" intoned the mage, ending his spell with a flourish that made the unicorn-headed ring on his fingers flash in the lamplight.

In his mind, he watched the skeletal wench melt to nothing in the distant—and astonished—Semoor Wolftooth's arms. The Knight's fearful flight, an instant later, made him chuckle.

"Alluring flesh to bones to terrifying nothing! A night or two more of this," the War Wizard Ghoruld Applethorn told himself gleefully, "and they'll bolt for the swiftest road out of the realm no matter *what* Vangey threatens them with! Hah!"

He strode to the door, and began making the complicated passes and murmurings that would part ward after ward—the same wards that kept Vangerdahast himself from spying on what Applethorn or anyone else did in this secret chamber.

The Knights of Myth Drannor

Only Vangerdahast was supposed to know of this room—but the Royal Magician was *so* busy, and had so many secret chambers all over the realm, and so many distractions to keep him from noticing from when someone who knew how slipped into one and used it for a breath or two.

“Yes,” Applethorn gloated. “Let them off to the Dales to dance at the Blackstaff’s bidding among the hayheads and hairy lasses, out of my way but handy if I need them to wear blame.” He chuckled. “Hah! Talking to myself again! Ah, well, as long as I don’t fall to arguing with myself. Or worse yet, *losing* those arguments!”

He snorted mirthfully at that thought, parted the last ward, opened the now-unlocked door, and hurried off. Vangey *so* hated to be kept waiting.



Mortification had left Maniol dumbstruck, but his still-flaming rage and the king’s kindly manner gave him a boldness that would have surprised him if he hadn’t been so angry.

“Azoun—Majesty—don’t make me plead!” he snarled. “I must have the throats of these villainous Knights of Myth Drannor! Here, in these hands, I must have them!”

He shook his hands, like two upturned claws, under the nose of the seated king. “My wife they’ve taken from me, and now my daughter!” Then he whirled away, pacing down the room to cry, “I demand justice! Give them to me, for me to butcher fittingly while all the realm watches. All will see what it means to dare to slay a Crownsilver!”

“No, Maniol,” the king said, and his voice was stern. “They did *not* take your wife from you. Nor your daughter. Foul magic did that; foul magic your wife nurtured and was part of! She forged the doom that slew her, and it infected your daughter. More than that, it infected the some of Knights, and those who have not followed your Narantha into the arms of the gods may well soon!”

Crownsilver stared at him, mouth working, a dreadful hope openly warring with grief and disappointment on his face.

“Demand not justice too loudly,” Azoun told him, trying not to let any trace of the disgust he felt at Crownsilver’s reaction show in his face or voice. “For when you loose it, who knows whom it’ll strike down?”

Ed Greenwood

The noble took a few unsteady steps nearer, whimpering.

“Fear not,” Azoun said. “The Wizards of War are at work on the Knights right now. Any who may yet live when our mages are done with them will no longer be welcome in Cormyr.”

Lord Crownsilver stared at his king with widening eyes—and then burst into sudden tears, staggering forward almost blindly. Azoun rose from the chair swiftly enough to embrace and comfort him, crouching to enfold the shorter man to his chest.

Maniol Crownsilver buried his nose in a royal armpit and cried like a baby.