



THE  
WIZARDS  
BLACKSTAFF  
steven e. schend



---

## PROLOGUE

---

*Feast of the Moon, the Year of True Names  
(464 DR)*

“**G**et back here, you malevolent windbag!”

The wizard was dark in demeanor, garb, and action. He snarled out an incantation, and his arms erupted with orange energy.

His colossal spell-arms seized the creature by its tail and yanked it hard away from its prey—a wide-eyed elf child. The mage then whipped his arms downward as if he were swinging a hammer. The green creature in his spell’s grasp smacked against an outcrop of rock, popping many eyes along its length with each impact. The wizard could tell the phaerimm was in pain and angry by the high-pitched wind whistling around it, and he repeated his actions to disrupt any spells it tried to cast. He felt the creature collapse and stop its struggles, its body broken with bones jutting out through its sickly green skin.

The man kept his focus on his spell but yelled to be heard over the wind, "Child, come here!"

The small elf girl only shook with terror, unaware she was safe for the moment.

He visualized his hands wringing the creature out like a dishrag, and a harsh whistle on the winds were the phaerimm's final screams.

Phaerimm, to him, were the ugliest creatures ever to hover over the lands of Faerûn, their strange conical forms ending around an ovoid head filled with barbed teeth and surrounded by four angular arms. Their tails ended in a poisonous barb, and they flew at all times unless prevented from doing so. The ugly creatures were usually imprisoned beneath the desert they formed with their malicious spells. Apparently, some had either found their way free or came from elsewhere, hoping to free more of their own.

The black-clad wizard grabbed the amulet around his neck. He ran toward the tiny child, but spoke low into the amulet. "Take this child to her mother and protect them both. Follow the elf woman's directions, if in doubt."

A short distance away, a massive figure made of steel and wood turned its head with a shriek of straining metal and began running. Its massive limbs and body seemed to ignore the problems of running in sand as it thundered forward. By the time the shield guardian had reached them, the wizard had scooped up the shivering child whose eyes saw nothing but her fears. He ignored the dimpled chin and steel-blue eyes they shared.

With one free hand, the mage cast a short spell and whispered to her, "Your fears are over, little girl. Find your courage, and know that our father and I will keep these monsters at bay. Now, let my servant bear you home, tiny Phaerl."

The girl blinked at the sound of her name, and her face filled with color again.

She asked, "*Osu?*" The young girl reached in relief to touch his full beard but reared back as she noticed his rounded ear. "*Ru n'tel'quess! N'osu!*"

“Aye, *d’nys*, I am no elf, but we share fathers, you and I.” His waist-length black hair whipping around them both like a creature alive, the human mage untangled his amulet’s chain and looped it around her small neck twice to ensure it would remain in place. “I hope to get to know you soon, but he and I need to stop these phaerimm. Now, this *aegiskeryn* will carry you and keep your family safe. Get home, and we shall follow when we can!” Despite the child’s clinging to his robes, he placed her in the cradling arm of his shield guardian and yelled, “Go!”

The twelve-foot-tall construct stood, and the child gasped to find herself seven feet in the air and swiftly moving away.

The wizard turned and surveyed the battlefield once more, sweeping his long hair from his face yet again and cursing the blowing sand. The phaerimm he had slammed against the rocks remained there, dead. Despite the blowing dust, the setting sun illuminated the surroundings well. Another phaerimm lay dead on the field. A short distance to the east, three more phaerimm hovered around or near a humanoid that stood atop a low sand dune. The man held an axe in one hand, his other hand glowing with arcane energy. At his side, a dire wolf shimmered into existence between him and his foes.

“He uses Mother’s axe,” the human wizard muttered.

Nightmarish portents had led the man up from the lush forests to the south. His trust in his goddess led him into the wastes of the Sword of Anauroch. His dreams the past three nights were of teeth, green magic, and his father’s aged face. The wizard had planned for battle. What he had not planned for was finding Arun leading a family of elves across the wastes to some western destination. The wizard faced many challenges, but he was not ready to face his father, the man who looked, pointed ears aside, like his twin brother.

What name his half-elf father bore then, the dark-clad human knew not. He only knew that it was definitely Arun Maerdrym of Myth Drannor—the Lupinaxe confirmed

that. The wizard had only seen his father nine times since his seventh birthday, and each time together they had less to say to each other. He wondered if they would ever get another chance to speak, as the phaerimm engaged Arun and his dire wolf. The black-maned wizard winced as one phaerimm blasted Arun with boulders of steaming ice. He heard the half-elf mage scream in pain, and that moved the younger man into battle.

Slightly to the west, a cluster of figures fled into the wastes. The wizard put himself in harm's way to buy Arun's new wife and children time to escape with his shield guardian. He tightened his grip on his intricately carved gray ash staff and laughed mirthlessly. It looked as if Arun had yet to notice who he was, other than to acknowledge a much-needed helping hand.

One of the three phaerimm floated toward him, its flight unhindered by the whipping winds. The wizard swept his arm in a wide arc, umber crackles trailing his sleeve. The dune rose and became a wave of sand that engulfed the phaerimm. While the magic animating the sand ended on contact with the phaerimm's aura, the weight of it still buried the creature. The mage then engulfed the mound with balls of fire and bolts of lightning from his staff, turning the sand to raw, heavy glass. Despite its glass cage, the creature cast a wave of ice daggers . . . toward the empty air where the man had stood.

The wizard popped back from his subdimensional jaunt right next to the other man. "Hello, Father," he said flatly to the man at his side, as he unleashed a barrage of magical bolts at their foe. The ocean-colored bursts melted against the phaerimm's magical resistance. The taller man threw his axe at the creature, its head emitting a wolf's howl as the blade sliced into its target. A breath after contact, the axe disappeared before the phaerimm could grab it, reappearing in its master's hand.

"Calarel saw a reunion written in the stars today," the man said and grunted as he threw the axe again. "What are you doing here, son?"

The human wizard answered him by sweeping his staff behind Arun's knees as he threw himself backward as well. Both men fell down the descending slope of a sand dune, as a slash of razors whipped through the space where they previously stood. The half-elf screamed as he rolled. Both men coughed as sand threatened to flood their mouths, eyes, and noses.

Rolling backward to a kneeling position, Arun's son asked, "Any spells left?"

Arun rolled to his right, coughing up sand as he crouched and cradled his left arm. "Very few that will do much good, like walls for temporary shelters. Most of my spells sped us across the desert and protected us from the elements. Besides, it takes longer to cast with only one hand." Arun turned, revealing his blood-covered left forearm, its bones obviously broken.

"Use Petrylloc's Gambit!" the human yelled.

The half-elf looked confused, but he started casting after his son began his own spell. The largest phaerimm loomed over the top of the sand dune. Its toothy maw and strange elongated arms lashed out at them, trying physical attacks for a change over its spells.

The human wizard watched his spell take effect, the outline of an iron wall appearing beside and behind the creature. The massive wall fell onto the monster's midsection with a wet crunch, the phaerimm screaming its airy whistle. Arun, for his part, cast a spell on his axe, picked it up, and threw the weapon into the throat of the phaerimm as it screamed. He dived to one side and covered his head. A breath later, the phaerimm exploded, fire shooting out of its mouth then rupturing its entire form.

The human asked, "Why didn't you cast your wall spell to fall on it?"

"Because I had no idea what you said, son," Arun sighed as his soot- and gore-stained axe returned to his hand in a shimmer of magic. "You forget—not everyone had your teachers. You need to—watch out!"

Arun's son turned, too late. The phaerimm he assumed

was trapped in glass had floated silently behind them, and all the wizard's spell mantles failed. The phaerimm's barb gored through his defenses, lodging its poisonous stinger into his lower back. Within a breath, he felt his entire body go numb and float up off the sands. He bobbed helplessly in the air as the phaerimm grabbed his torso and his left arm, then yanked hard. The man screamed as his shoulder ripped out of place. He didn't feel bones snap, but his left arm hung limp and useless.

Arun picked up his son's fallen staff, and howled a command word: "*Arkatid!*" The phaerimm disappeared for a moment beneath a blast of white. When the effect ended, an icy sheen coated the phaerimm. Arun barked out: "*Suralam!*" and a massive energy axe head formed on the staff. He swung this down, and the axe leeches into the phaerimm's form and utterly disintegrated its body.

"Thank the gods you still have the Duskstaff of Sarael, son!" Arun reached up and grabbed his son's belt to pull him closer. He said, "*Ruthais,*" and a sphere of translucent energy appeared around them. The two men floated within the sphere as it rolled down the eastern side of the dune and away from the last phaerimm. Both Arun and his son were happy to draw the phaerimm even farther away from the fleeing elves. "Why didn't you use the wrack-blade before?"

The man was still floating in mid-air, but he was starting to move his head and his unbroken arm. ". . . too few charges . . . too many foes . . ." His eyes widened with fear as he looked over his father's shoulder.

Outside their shimmering sphere stood a man in a heavy black leather cloak, every inch of his skin hidden from the sun's touch. The man noticed them as their globe settled into the soft sand no more than ten paces away from him. His spells still smoked in the sands beside him, and headless bodies littered the ground surrounding the crater, an oily smoke flowing from them into the pit. The black-cloaked one locked eyes with the floating mage, and his smile flashed his fangs.

Both Arun and son whispered, "Palron Kaeth," and they paled with fury, pain, and fear.

From the crater the man had just blasted rose three more phaerimm, all much larger than those they had previously fought.

"How fortuitous," the vampire laughed, his voice sounding tinny to them through the sphere, "that the son and the father should be sacrifices to my plans just as their precious mother and wife was decades ago. Your blood ought to allow us to shatter the Sharnwall completely . . . assuming I don't get too thirsty. Still, I suppose I could feed on your pitiful relations, eh, *Gohlkiir of Cormanthor*? Or should I continue culling the ranks of your Harpers in Twilight?" His hand gestured toward the headless bodies behind him.

"We shall ever stand against you and your corrupt Prefects, Kaeth!" Arun howled at him.

The vampire laughed and mocked, "At least your son learned composure from his mother. You could learn something from his reserved nature, Arun."

The setting sun no longer between the dunes, the vampire threw back his hood, exposing his bald head and black sigils tattooed on his cheek and neck. He turned to the phaerimm rising from the pit and spoke the strange whispering winds of the creatures' speech. The last survivor floated down into the steep dell, and the four phaerimm took positions surrounding the sphere.

Arun gripped his staff tightly and leveled its head toward Palron Kaeth, but his son put his hand on his shoulder. "No, Father." He touched the staff, said: "*Erarla*," and the sphere darkened to black, preventing either set of foes a view of the other. Inside the sphere, runes along the staff glowed blue, providing the pair some light. The Nameless One asked, "Any teleports left in you, Father? I'm out."

"No. Use the staff to get yourself to safety. Inform our friends of the threat."

"No, Father. We're down to one option and you know it. There's only one way to make him pay for murdering

Mother and those Harpers . . . and it should prevent these other problems from spreading as well. Unfortunately, each of us lacks the two arms to do it.”

Both men looked into each other’s eyes and nodded. The human finally settled back down onto the sphere as his system fought back against the phaerimm poison.

“No matter what you believed these fifty years, I am proud of you, my son.” Arun handed his son the Duskstaff as spells began to crack, splash, and thunder at the outer surface of the sphere. “I only wish we could have found your name in this lifetime.”

The human wizard nodded, blinking away tears and setting a grim resolve on his face. He whispered, “Sweet Lady of Mysteries, let this not be in vain.”

He seated the staff hard against the sphere’s bottom, hooking one foot around it to brace it. He leaned against it, pulling as hard as he could with his uninjured arm to snap it over his back and shoulders.

Arun grabbed the Lupinaxe, the blade worked to resemble the profile of a snarling wolf’s head. He smiled grimly as he hefted it, saying only, “For Arielimnda and the Harpers in Twilight, my son.”

Arun swung the axe at the staff’s bending point as his nameless son replied, “Indeed.”

Neither man heard the furious explosion that destroyed them instants before turning the surrounding desert dell into a glassy crater.



*Awaken, Son of Arun. Know that you are Chosen.*

*Mother? Is that you?*

*In a way, child, though not of your first body.*

*Where am I?*

*Between life and death. Are you prepared to serve me?*

*Who are you?*

*Our mysteries have touched you. Our name you revere.*

*Your prayers are answered.*

Surrounding white, no sense of self, only the voice, soft

yet awesome, a whisper to drown out the thunder of a beating heart.

*Your blood's sacrifices are powerful and they go not unnoted. Know that you are Chosen.*

Floating, suspended, no pain, no sense of touch, but feeling stronger with each loud heartbeat.

*Your tasks are many, so shall be your gifts.*

Blue and silver whirls around, surrounding, filling every sense beyond their limits, feeling a tingling that cannot be ignored, shut out, or denied, a tingling that grows to burning.

*Our fires do not consume but convert. Accept them. Let the silver become you and you become silver.*

The man remembers the silver-white hair of his *u'osu*, the disapproving stare of an otherwise-noble elf's disdain.

*Dwell not on your past, child. Gain the knowledge to serve us over centuries. Unto you we impart three truths, seven secrets, nine soulnames, and thirteen omens.*

The pain subsided as the fires brought with them flashes of insight, and an old memory. "Stare into the firelight, Nameless One, and you shall see truths you hide from your own mind."

*Mentor spoke our will that day. You shall aid the Weave Ourselves. You are crucial to us, e'er moreso than these twelve-score you see.*

The man saw faces of strangers . . . a white-bearded wizard with a red streak of hair at his lower lip . . . a dark-skinned man with a dead right eye and a gold brand on his right temple . . . a toothless old woman awash in the filth of the gutters despite her rich robes . . . a black-haired man straining against chains, his elf lover tortured before him by a shorter man in a mask . . . a bald man with a green gem glinting where his left eye should be . . . and so many more. He struggled, wondering where all this came from.

*Hear me, dutiful one. We are the Weave. We are the Mysteries. We are Mystra. Know that you are Chosen.*

The man smiled and let the fires kindle and grow from cinders of hints to flames of awareness.