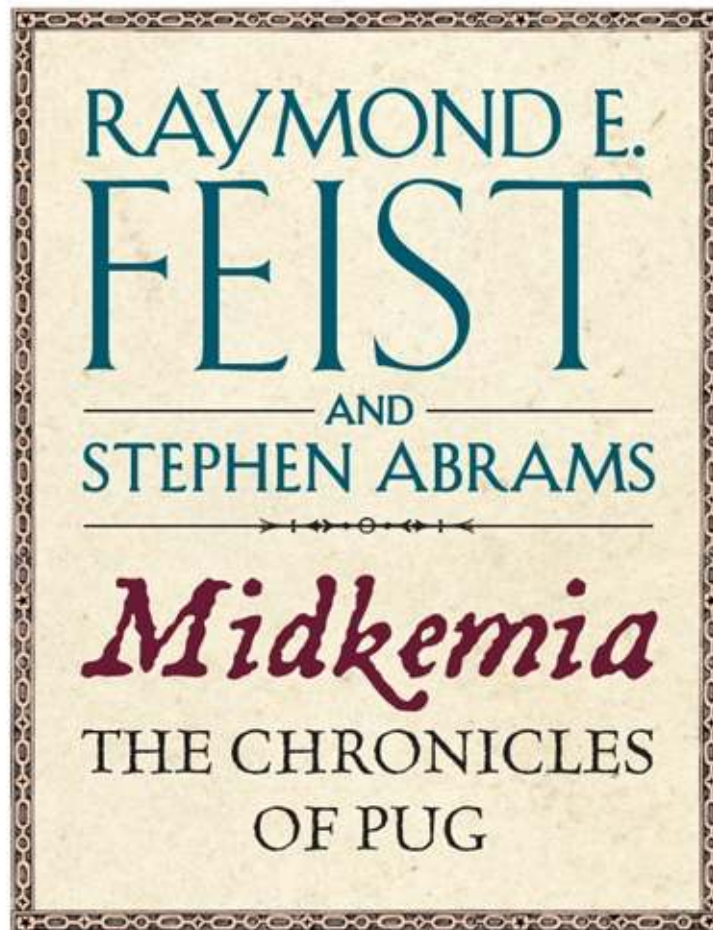


The *New York Times* Bestselling Author

RAYMOND E.
FEIST

— AND —
STEPHEN ABRAMS

Midkemia
THE CHRONICLES
OF PUG



HARPER DESIGN
An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

Dedication

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
TIM LESELLE,
ONE OF THE ORIGINAL THURSDAY NIGHTERS. NEVER FORGOTTEN.

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List of Characters

Aglaranna: Elf Queen in Elvandar, later wife of Lord Tomas.

Alma-Lodaka: Valhur, Dragon Lord, Emerald Lady of Serpents. Creator of the Pantathians and the Saaur.

Amos: Trask, former pirate, “Captain Trenchard,” later companion of Prince Arutha, later companion of Prince Nicholas and Calis in Novindus.

Anita: Princess of the Kingdom, daughter of Prince Erland of Krondor, later wife of Prince Arutha.

Arutha conDoin: Prince of the Kingdom, second son of Lord Borric of Crydee and brother to King Lyam, later Prince of Krondor.

Arutha Jamison: son of James (I) and Gamina, Lord Vencar, Baron of the King’s Court, father of James (II) and Dashed Jamison.

Ashen-Shugar: Valheru (Dragon Lord, Ancient One), Ruler of the Eagles Reaches.

Baru: “Serpentslayer,” Hadati hillman, companion to Prince Arutha in Armengar.

Borric conDoin (I): Duke of Crydee, father to Lyam (I), Arutha, and Carline.

Borric conDoin (II): Prince of the Kingdom, son of Arutha, brother to Erland (II), later King of the Isles.

Brendan conDoin: son of Henry (II), brother to Henry (III) and Martin (II).

Caleb: youngest son of Miranda and Pug, brother to Magnus, half-brother to William and Gamin. Husband of Marie, foster father to Tad, Zane, and Jommy.

Calin: elf heir to the throne of Elvandar, half-brother to Calis, son of Queen Aglaranna and King Aidan.

Calis: son of Aglaranna and Tomas, half-brother to Calin, later “The Eagle of Krondor,” special agent of the Prince of Krondor, Duke of the Court.

Carline: Princess of Crydee, daughter of Lord Borric, sister of Lyam and Arutha, later wife to Laurie.

Dashed Jamison: “Dash,” younger son of Arutha (II), grandson of James (I), brother to James (II), later Duke of Rillanon and grandfather to James.

Dolgan: Dwarf Chieftain at Village Caldara, later King of the Dwarves in the West, holder of the

Hammer of Tholin.

Draken-Korin: Valheru (Dragon Lord, Ancient One), Lord of the Tigers.

Edward: cousin to Ryan and Gregory, later Prince of Krondor.

Emerald Queen: see entry for “Jorna.”

Eiek: von Darkmoor, apprentice blacksmith, boyhood friend of Rupert, later member of Calis “Desperate Men,” later Sergeant, then Captain of the Crimson Eagles, later Knight-Marshal of the Kingdom.

Erland (I): Prince of Krondor, uncle to King Rodrick, father of Princess Anita, cousin to Lord Borric and family.

Erland (II): Royal Prince, son of Arutha and Anita, younger twin to Borric (II), later Prince of Rillanon.

Gamina: adopted daughter of Pug and sister of William, wife of James (I), mother of Arutha (II).

Gardan: Sergeant at Crydee, later Knight-Marshal at Krondor.

Gregory: son of Patrick, younger brother to Ryan, later king after his brother, cousin to Richard and Edward.

Guy: du Bas-Tyra, Duke of Bas-Tyra, later Duke of Rillanon.

Henry (I): “Harry,” son of the Earl of Ludlum, companion of Prince Nicholas, later Governor of the Sunset Isles.

Henry (II): “Harry,” Duke of Crydee, father to Henry (III), Martin (II), and Brendan.

Henry (III): “Hal,” Duke of Crydee, later King Henry V of the Isles, husband of Stephané of Roldem.

James: Jimmy the Hand, later Duke of Rillanon, then Krondor, father to Arutha (II), grandfather to James (II) and Dasher.

James (II): Jamison, son of Arutha (II), brother to Dasher, grandson of James (I), later Duke of Rillanon, grandfather to James (III).

James (III): Jamison, “Jim Dasher,” spy for the crown, grandson of James (II).

Jorna: “Lady Clovis,” later Emerald Queen, wife of Macros and mother of Miranda, later wife of Nakor.

Kaspar: Duke of Olasko, later exiled in Novin-dus, later servant of the Conclave of Shadows and defender of Kelewan against the Dasati.

Katala: Thuril slave girl in Kelewan, later wife to Pug and mother to William.

Kulgan: magician at Crydee Keep, Pug’s first teacher, companion to Meecham.

Laurie: troubadour, later slave with Pug on Kelewan, later Duke of Salador and husband of Prince Carline.

Leso: Varen, also known as Sidi, mad magician, servant of the God of Evil, pawn of the Dreamer, confidant of Kaspar of Olasko.

Locklear: squire of Prince Arutha's court, later baronet and court baron, friend of James (I).

Lyam (I): son of Lord Borric, brother to Prince Arutha, later King of the Kingdom of the Isles.

Lyam (II): son of Prince Arutha, brother to Prince Borric (II), Princess Elaina, and Prince Nicholas.

Macros: the Black Sorcerer, father of Miranda, grandfather of Magnus and Caleb.

Magnus: son of Pug and Miranda, grandson of Macros the Black.

Marcus: son of Martin (I), Duke of Crydee, cousin to Prince Patrick.

Martin (I): illegitimate son of Borric (I), half-brother to Lyam (I) and Arutha (I).

Martin (II): son of Henry (II), brother of Henry (III) and Brendan.

Meecham: "Franklin," freeborn land owner, hunter, companion to Kulgan.

Miranda: magician, daughter of Macros and Jorma, later second wife of Pug, mother of Magnus and Caleb.

Murad: Moredhel chieftain of Clan Raven, servant of the false Murmandamus.

Murmandamus: false prophet of the Moredhel, disguised Pantathian Serpent Priest.

Nakor: Isalani gambler from Kesh, companion to Princes Borric and Erland, later to Nicholas, the Pug, Magnus, and Macros. Second husband of Jorma. Sometimes known as "the Blue Rider."

Nicholas: youngest son of Arutha (I), brother to Borric (I), Erland (I), and Elena, later Admiral of the King's Bitter Sea Fleet.

Oracle of Aal: ancient seer of the oldest known race in the universe. Saved from a dying planet by Pug, her mind inhabits the body of the ancient dragon Ryath; also known as the jeweled dragon, the Oracle at Sethanon, or simply the Oracle.

Owen: Greylock, Swordmaster of Darkmoor, later captain in the Prince of Krondor's army.

Patrick: son of Erland (II), nephew to Borric (II), Nicholas, and Elena, father to Ryan and Gregory.

Pug: orphan boy from Crydee, also Milamber of the Assembly of Magicians on Kelewan, also Pug of Stardock, founder of the Conclave of Shadows, also the Black Sorcerer after Macros the Black.

Richard: cousin to King Patrick, caretaker of Prince of Krondor before Edward.

Robert: "Bobby" de Loungville, sergeant in Calis's Crimson Eagles.

Roald: mercenary soldier, boyhood companion of Laurie, later companion of Arutha at Armengar.

Rodric IV: King of the Isles, cousin to Lord Borric and Princes Lyam and Arutha, nephew of Prince Erland.

Rupert “Roo” Avery: boyhood companion of Eric von Darkmoor, later member of Calis’s “Desperate Men,” later young merchant of Krondor.

Ryan: son of Patrick, brother to Gregory, later King of the Isles.

Stephané: Princess of Roldem, daughter of King Carole, later wife of Henry (III) and Queen of the Kingdom of the Isles.

Talon of the Silver Hawk: also known as Talwin Hawkins, trial boy from the mountains, father of Tyron Hawkins.

Tomas: kitchen boy from Crydee, later inheritor of the Dragon Lord’s armor from Ashen-Shuga, later Warleader of Elvandar and husband of Aglaranna, father of Calis.

Tyron Hawkins: son of Talwin Hawkins, companion of Duke Henry (III), secret apprentice for James (III).

Valko: Dasati Deathknight, later ruler of the entire Dasati Empire.

William: son of Pug, brother of Gamina, later Knight-Lieutenant in Krondor, later Knight-Marshal of Krondor.

To you, the reader, an introduction . . .

YOU ARE COUNTED AMONG A SELECT FEW, *those entrusted with the innermost workings of the Conclave of Shadows. If you are reading this, be you student at Stardock or on Sorcerer's Isle, noble of the Kingdom, or close ally of the Conclave, know that only a handful of others have been granted access to the material compiled between these covers.*

Here you hold a copy of what began as my father's journal, as much of it as he could manage to compile during his lifetime. I chanced upon it while attending to the matter of my father's possessions after I inherited his mantle as leader of our community, here on Sorcerer's Isle.

I will confess that upon finding it, I only intended to skim through it, and then consign it to one portion of his library or another, but as I began to read, I realized how little I knew about my father's early life and those experiences that shaped him. So it was with interest I read of his youth and those early adventures that formed a perspective set hard and fast by the time I was old enough to begin my education.

I found those bits of narrative and commentary on his discoveries a fascinating tale, one that spoke not only of the great deeds that are chronicled in other volumes, but also of the small events that contributed to the making of a man. By most common standards, my father was elderly when he wed my mother, though to outward appearances he was a robust man of middle years, of short stature and slightly greying black hair, but otherwise apparently little marked by time. Yet the truth is he was a century of age and more, for it is our blessing, or curse as you may see it, that provides those of us gifted with magical abilities with, if not eternal youth, then at least a very slowly advancing old age. For me, finding these glimpses into my father's past was welcomed; I learned that he had once been a boy, a callow youth, and a young man forged in the crucible of adversity; and, in gaining this glimpse into the boy, I better understood the man.

I decided to do my part in organizing this volume a bit more than my father had. He was a man of considerable gifts and remarkable talents, but organizing small things was never his knack; he always had others who saw to the details, so in this, I am the last of those to do so.

As I attempted this small endeavor, I realized I had two advantages of perspective over him. First, my father and I have discussed many of the topics he has written about, and thus, I was presented with what he wrote here and what he told me years, sometimes many years, later; this was instructive of how the memory often shifts and modifies events in one's mind. Second, over the years I have spoken to others who have witnessed various events chronicled here and elsewhere, and the difference in their perspective is also informative.

I added commentary where I might, as well as some notes and information given to me by others, either from direct recollection or reliable hearsay. When diverse sources were balanced, I believe a fairly accurate representation of true events was achieved; in other cases, while accuracy may be less, the value of the tale was such that I included it. Occasionally the choices were motivated by my affections for my father, rather than judging the event of historical weight.

My father was by nature a modest man, one who saw himself thrust by circumstances into a role he did not wish, or choose, but I believe with that self-effacement he did himself a disservice, for which his critical role in history may have been foreordained by forces larger than himself, his choices within that role were uniformly heroic and self-sacrificing. I may be alone, or one of a very few, who truly understands the scope of my father's personal sacrifices and the horrible burdens he chose to shoulder alone, to preserve this world and protect those he loved. He never once asked to be thanked or even cared if others knew what he suffered.

His is a story worthy of being told. So, with my occasional annotation, I present you what I choose to call the Chronicles of Pug.

—Magnus of Sorcerer's Isle

Entry, the First

IN THE SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN of King Lyam the First, I, Pug of Crydee, magician to the royal court and cousin to the King by adoption, do take quill in hand and set forth this account, that all may benefit from the knowledge I have gained. My purpose is to ensure that what has been learned is not forgotten, for life has taught me that death is her constant companion. Much has been bestowed on me and it must endure beyond me, so this is my cause.

To understand what I have learned, one must abide some tales of my life. I will deal with the discoveries of my travels, but first I need to share who I am. I do not speak of myself for purposes of aggrandizement or out of vanity, but rather to explain how I learned, and to present other worthies to the reader, people far more deserving of praise and thanks than I, so their achievements may be widely known and their contributions appreciated.

I further avow that much of those accomplishments credited to me are rather the fruits of labor and struggles, and sacrifice by others, many giving the ultimate sacrifice in the conflicts we endure. Where possible, their names will be noted.

The preponderance of the material I present here within came from the library of Macros, called the Black Sorcerer by many, and a figure of some legend in the region of the Bitter Sea and its surroundings. He was an agent of the gods, as much as any man, and as such a good and faithful servant, though at a price upon which I can only speculate. He lost much in that service and I pray he found respite and reward in whatever fate awaited him at the end of the Riftwar.

He bequeathed to me a marvelous legacy, Sorcerer's Isle, site of the legendary Black Castle and the hidden Villa Beata, or "beautiful home." Within that villa resided his library, full of maps, journals, accountings, histories, and other notes and scraps as would come to him. Of organization there was none, so realizing the vast wealth of knowledge here, I have undertaken to bring something of order to these many items.

As anyone who knows me well will attest, I am a man of some skills in the magician's arts, but I lack the true discipline needed as an Archivist. I may, at some later day, entreat the aid of another to bring order out of this chaos and find better arrangement to these many bits of knowledge than I have achieved, but here at the start, I will seek to do my best.

I hope that whoever you may be who reads this, you will appreciate that all here within was compiled by a man of small gifts in such a task and forgive whatever flaws you may find. I am, your humble servant,

—*Pug of Stardoc*
known to some as Milamber of the Assembly

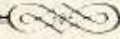


✿ *The above was written by my father as he began to organize the materials in this volume. This was before my birth, even before he met my mother, by many years. Much of what he observed as he organized lacks the perspective of later years, so if any notes by my father are inconsistent with later discoveries or findings, that is the reason. I will undertake to allow my father's comments to stand unless my additional comments correct errors or otherwise add perspective.*

—**Magnu**

Section I

THE
RIFTWAR



SINCE MY FATHER'S BIRTH there have been five dimensional wars, yet when he began the chronicle, he had experienced only the first and thought it unique. What follows is my brief account of the history of those five wars; hopefully my words will provide further insight into the times and my father's life.

The Riftwar

The Riftwar was an incursion into our world by the nation known as the Empire of Tsuranuanni during the reign of King Rodric IV. The Tsurani reached Midkemia via a "rift," also known as a dimensional portal or gateway, allowing instantaneous travel over vast distances, between worlds and possibly through time, though this last is speculation on my part. At first it was judged they had come seeking to conquer for metal, as their own world was metal poor. In time the truth was discovered: This was one ploy in a complex game of politics back on their world, with thousands of lives being spent simply to advance one side's cause.

Father was taken early in the war and made a slave in the Tsurani world, Kelewan. It was there his true ability manifested and he was taken to study by the magicians of that world, as the ability to practice what they call the Greater Path Magic conferred a status irrespective of previous rank, hence a slave from another world was elevated to a position among the most powerful and important members of that society.

My father's role in that war has been chronicled elsewhere, but in summation it can be said he was instrumental in ending that conflict and eventually bringing peace to both worlds. But it was a peace that was all too fleeting, for forces elsewhere were already in motion, preparing for the next assault on "Midkemia"



THIS MAP OF TRIAGIA hangs on the wall in my study, where Macros the Black originally placed it. It faithfully depicts the continent.

The Serpent War

There resided on Midkemia a race of serpent beings, the Pantathians. They proved to be instrumental pawns in a conflict that existed ages before my father's birth and will no doubt linger long after I have

passed on to whatever awaits after this life.

~~During the early days of the reign of King Borric, these Serpent Priests again arose to plague the Kingdom with another plot, and began another bid to take Sethanon and the Lifestone.~~

The Pantathians had discovered a rift to the world of Shila, home to a race of lizardlike beings, the Saaur. The Pantathians betrayed the Saaur, unleashing a demon host on their world, eventually forcing the Saaur to flee to Midkemia. Their participation on behalf of a demon disguised as a human, the Emerald Queen, led to the bloodiest of conflicts in recent history, and the destruction of much of the Principality of Krondor. When the deception was unmasked, the Saaur quit the struggle, and the invading host was stopped at the legendary Battle of Nightmare Ridge.

The Dark War

Again an attempt was made to invade Midkemia on behalf of the dark forces seeking to overthrow the calm order of things and install a terror unimaginable over the world. A rift through dimensions through time allowed a race of beings known as the Dasati to invade our universe, on the Tsurani home world of Kelewan. They were powerful warriors and deathly priests, and each alone was a match for a half dozen human warriors or magicians. Only the combined efforts of armies from two worlds held them at bay until my father, Nakor, and I could reach the source of this terror and destroy the passage between worlds, but at a terrible price. The obliteration of the world of Kelewan and most of its inhabitants saved our entire dimension from utter destruction.

These events forever changed my father, for within him dwelled regret beyond imagining at the loss of life and the destruction of ancient cultures. While many Tsurani, Thuril, and other inhabitants of that world were relocated to a safe, new world, four out of five souls perished in that final battle with the Dasati.



THIS IS A MAP OF THE KINGDOM OF THE ISLES, an exact copy of one in the Royal Library at Rillanon. It was a generous gift from King Lyam after I had admired it within his hearing.

The Demon War

The Demon War was a conflict between rival demon kings that unfortunately spilled over into Midkemia, forcing my father and our brother magicians in the Conclave of Shadows to take a hand. Here two things of note occurred: my mother and brother were lost in the struggle, further driving my father into a place few can imagine, his heart forever in darkness, and our final understanding that every event from before the first Riftwar was but a single conflict in an ongoing struggle between forces nearly unimaginable to mortals. The utter destruction of a large portion of the demons' realm led to events that culminated in the final struggle.

The Chaos Wars

The Chaos Wars were thought to have been the original struggle between the Blind Gods of the Beginning and those beings who occupied Midkemia, elven-kind and dragons, and the new gods and all who came after: humans, dwarves, and goblins.

At the end of the struggle, we realized that all these conflicts were but part of a seemingly eternal clash between incredible forces with the fate of all reality hanging in the balance. Even then, nothing could have prepared us for what would come after.

My mother returned, at least in a sense, as her memories had been grafted onto another being, and for my father and me it was a difficult time, for here before us stood the exact likeness of one dear to us both, yet one who was really not her. In time we adjusted, and after even more time, we accepted this being, a demon with my mother's face and mind.

For reasons that will become apparent, the last narration of this chronicle of my father will be mine alone, for my observations are a postscript to his life. Yet much of what my father was lives on in me, or at least that is my hope, for he was and remains one of the most remarkable individuals to have ever lived. I say this as a son filled with pride, but also as a student of history, and feel safe asserting that every living creature on Midkemia owes their continued existence to my father's sacrifice.

The maps that follow this section are old, current at the time of the events referred to in the opening section of his chronicle. My father obtained the first map from Macros's library, and the second was a gift from King Lyam; both are accurate in regard to the continent of Triagia and the Kingdom of the Isles as they existed in my father's youth.

There are three continents on Midkemia, the largest of which is Triagia, a massive body of land extending far into both hemispheres. Many nations and people call Triagia home, but the two most powerful nations by far are the Kingdom of the Isles to the north, and the Empire of Great Kesh to the south. The island Kingdom of Roldem is notable for its influence in the arts as well as its sizable navy. Its presence has often kept the two larger nations from needless conflict over the years.

—Magnus of Sorcerer's Isle

Entry, the Second

THE FAR COAST OF THE KINGDOM OF THE ISLES is home to the Duchy of Crydee, the most distant province of the Kingdom. Without magic, travel to Crydee from Rillanon is arduous and lengthy.

Crydee is home to Duke Martin, brother to the King, and his family. It was his father, Borric, most worthy and just man, who was Duke at the time my story begins.

After some travels, I feel safe in observing that in many ways the Far Coast is a different culture from the rest of the Kingdom of the Isles. Three generations of relative isolation have resulted in a rougher character, less refined, more rustic, and in some ways a character more virtuous than to the east.

Not that men and women of virtue don't exist to the east, but rather the overriding concerns of other Kingdom nobles—advancement, politics, power, and gain—are absent along the Far Coast. The inhabitants of the Far Coast are more occupied with the daily exigencies of life, and little more.

The Duchy of Crydee is as simple as any in the Kingdom, consisting of three boroughs: Tulan, a barony; Carse, an earldom; and the duchy home itself. If three noble families could be considered close, it would be here, for lacking the constant political bickering common to the East, and relying far more upon one another than any help coming from the rest of the Kingdom, these noble families are more like kin than vassals and lord.

I presume to weigh matters unknown to me at the time, but reassessed by knowledge gained after the fact, but it was only the royal blood of the Duke's family that conferred any status for Crydee at the Congress of Lords and the royal courts of Rillanon and Krondor. I suspect absent that, Crydee would have been left to linger neglected. As it was, it was greatly left to its own devices until the coming of the Tsurani.

Crydee was both abundant and harsh. It consisted of woodlands and deep forests, mines and meadows, farmland and mountains, rivers and game in profusion. It was a rich land, more than capable of supporting the population there, but it was hardly an idyllic place, for we had neighbors not all of whom were affable.

To the north dwelled the elves, servants of the Queen, Aglaranna, and to the southeast lived the dwarves, under the command of their chieftain, Dolgan. We lived in peace with these people, rarely passing on their lands, they rarely visiting ours. We occasionally traded with the dwarves, their furs and ale bringing a premium, and our seafood being a delicacy to them. The elves were content to keep their own counsel but occasionally welcomed our hunters, most notably the current Duke, Martin, when he was a boy. Of all men in the Kingdom, he perhaps understands the elves most of all.

Not all our neighbors were so affable. We also were cursed with the marauders of the Brotherhood of the Dark Path, as the dark elves were known to us. I later learned they were known as the Moredh in their own tongue. They were at times served by goblins, foul creatures with wolf-like visages, who raided and killed for sport and sacrifice to dark gods. Trolls and other creatures also troubled us from

time to time, so despite Crydee's bounty, we were forced to be ever vigilant. Add to that the constant threat of predation by lions, bears, wolves, wild dogs, and the occasional wyvern, and it was a foolish traveler to move through the duchy without stout weapon or large company, and who trod anywhere but the King's Road between Tulan, Carse, and Crydee Keep. Most travel was achieved by ship as all three towns boasted welcoming harbors.

Within the boundaries of the towns and villages, and upon the farmsteads, herd, and lumber camps, relative safety was assured, and within the woodlands near those populations as well. But the Green Heart was always dangerous, and its threats became manifest to me personally, as did the perilous foothills of the Grey Tower Mountains to the east of the duchy. A single road from Crydee over the mountains to Yabon and another to the south and over to the Free Cities were the only relatively safe passage, and even then attacks by bandits, as well as the dark elves and others were a constant threat.



THIS MAP OF THE FAR COAST was found in Macros's library on Sorcerer's Isle. It is similar to one kept in Duke Borric's study, though both possess minor inaccuracies. I suspect they were due to the mapmaker's working from other people's descriptions rather than firsthand knowledge of a given area. Still, on the whole, this map is reliable enough that a traveler to the Far Coast would have little reason to fear getting lost. Detail is lacking in some places, however; should it not be obvious, areas that appear empty and fringed by trees, such as the Green Heart and north of Elvandar, are in truth heavy forest. A copy of another map from Lord Borric's study, showing the significant landmarks, trails, roads, and other features of interest of Crydee and the surrounding area, from just before the Tsurani invasion.

As stated, I was a foundling, left on the doorstep of the Abbey of Dala in the foothills of the Grey Tower Mountains. A mendicant order, the monks could not care for me, so they took me to a most remarkable man, Lord Borric conDoin.

Lord Borric possessed many fine qualities, but first among those was a sense of justice and compassion. Without pedigree I could have been pronounced a bond servant, requiring twenty years of service to whoever held my bond before calling my life my own. He judged it far more just to let

bondsman's child be free than consign a freeborn child to a bond. I was given to Magya, the cook's wife, to rear, as she just had given birth to a boy, and raising two side by side seemed as natural to her as if she had borne twins. So I was raised as their son, alongside my foster brother, Tomas, due to the generosity of that most remarkable man, Lord Borric conDoin.

As a boy of the keep, I had duties from as early as I can remember. At first my world was the kitchen, for Megar, the cook, and Magya occupied a small room behind the kitchen proper. Tomas and I played at their feet until we were old enough to be given minor chores. I can't remember a time I didn't have duties in the kitchen, and my earliest memory is of sneezing from flour dust, followed by one of falling a great deal as I tried to herd chickens back into their roost. I had opened the coop door and set them free by accident.

Washing, peeling, and chopping vegetables, plucking birds, stirring simmering stock, and cleaning every implement and surface in the kitchen became second nature to me. As I write this, it's been more than two decades since I lived in that kitchen, but I wager I could cook Megar's seafood chowder from memory this very day.

Given the close quarters of the small room the cook and his wife occupied, at an early age Tomas and I took to sleeping wherever we found ourselves late at night, most often on the kitchen floor near the baking ovens in the winter, or outside during the summer heat. I look back from many years later wondering how I slept so soundly on the stone floor or hard-packed dirt, yet I did.

As I grew, first the keep, then the town of Crydee became familiar, my home ground enlarging as I roamed more at will. Getting into town was a treat for keep boys, as we had very little time for ourselves. We of the keep were self-sufficient in many ways, for the Duke's taxes often came in the form of livestock, grain, lumber, or stone, but in the town were items that appeared exotic by a young boy's standards. Cloth from distant lands, which shone in the afternoon sun, exotic spices I rarely encountered in the Duke's kitchen, and other seemingly novel items, and of course the town girls.

Tomas always caught their eyes. He was tallest among the boys our age and had a confident, easy grace to his manner. He was by any measure a handsome fellow and was easily the best among us at running, climbing, brawling, or any other skill I could name. He was confident he would become a soldier, and to the girls of Crydee that made him a bit dashing, I think.

I, on the other hand, was small and quiet, and any attention I received was only Tomas's reflected glory. His presence kept me from being bullied a great deal more than I should have endured, and for that I was grateful.

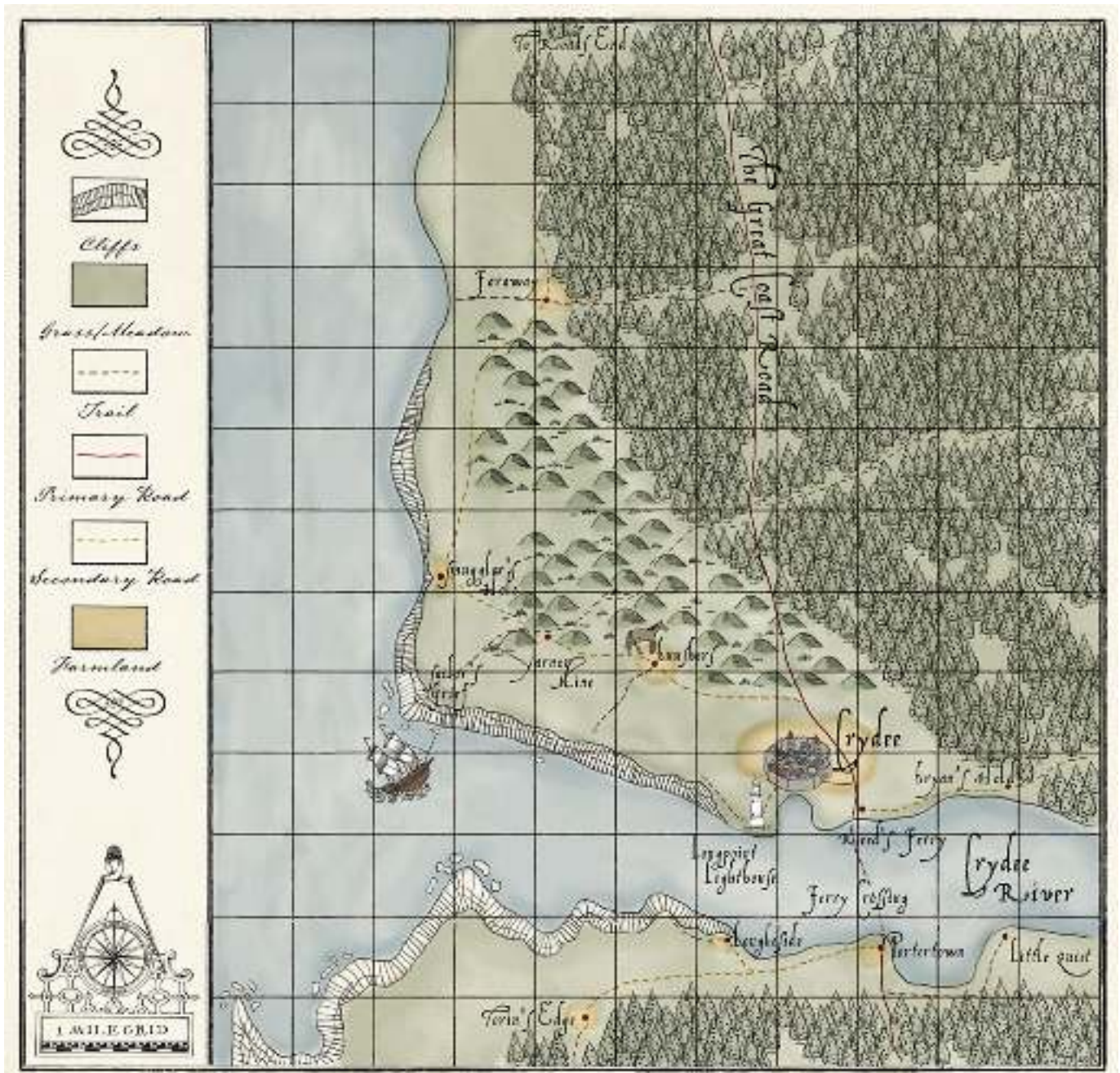
As every boy in Crydee was required, upon my eighth Midsummer's Day, I began to apprentice and train with various crafts throughout the duchy. This practice had begun with Lord Borric's grandfather, the first Duke of Crydee, who had quickly come to understand that his newly established duchy lacked enough skilled laborers at harvest, or when it was time to bring the herds down from the alpine meadows before winter, or to help repair storm damage. He decreed that every boy would spend at least a few weeks helping at all the important crafts.

So for five years I would spend one week out of four helping at carpentry, mending fishing nets, stoking the forge, or doing any other task that someday might be my own. Through this process two goals were achieved: masters learned the strengths of boys who would soon stand for Choosing, when all boys age 14 stand to be taken as apprentices by the masters of various crafts—some had no sons of their own, and some boys had elder brothers apprenticing and found no place to work at their father's side—and we boys were acquainted with the requirements of the various crafts to better enable us to understand where our futures might be best served.

Another consequence of this practice was we learned to appreciate just how difficult various trades

and crafts were; what might seem to be trivial or easy in accomplishment was in truth significant and difficult. It raised our appreciation for the skills and abilities of other men and also gave us a better understanding of the roles played by women in our duchy, beyond the more obvious of wife and mother.

The last benefit of this practice was travel, or perhaps exploration would be a better term, for one of the ironies of my life is that while I have ventured to another world, I would never have visited Carse and Tulan save for my stint apprenticing as a wagoner on one occasion and a sailor on another. That is how I first came to travel within Crydee.



I'LL ADMIT TO BEING AMUSED TO DISCOVER that the mapmaker called the road north from Crydee the Great Coast Road, but no one in Crydee called it that. It was an extension of the King's Road that was never built. Lord Borric's father attempted to clear away a fair bit of it to aid deep forest lumbering, but given that everything east of the coast hills was patrolled rarely, there was little use of it, and it fell into disrepair, effectively vanishing into the hills to the east of the Yarnor Mine and the village of Buusbers.

Smuggler's Hole and Faraway are also worthy of a brief mention. Smuggler's Hole was named after the Duke's father raided a nest of smugglers who had been utilizing the cove there to move weapons from Kesh up over the Great Northern Mountains to renegade humans and the Brotherhood of the Dark Path.

The Duchy of Crydee, as granted by the Crown to Lord Borric's grandfather, extends far to the

north of where it ends in reality. A colony village, by name Brisa, was established by the second Duke but it failed in less than two years. While the Kingdom may claim lands as far north as where the Great Northern Mountains meet the sea, in actuality the King's law ceases at Road's End. A small garrison town, it is home to a handful of fishermen, farmers, and herdsman who tend the needs of the tiny garrison, situated halfway between the river known as Rushing Deep, and the Crydee River known to those of us who live in the duchy as River Boundary, for it is the river that marks the southern limit of the forests that surround Elvandar.

Carse, not Crydee, is the commerce center of the Far Coast. Carse has the best of the three harbors and the only one suitable for more than two or three deepwater ships. Crydee has a long pier running the north side of the harbor, but it can accommodate one large or two small ships at most. Tulan is situated on a series of small islands linked by bridges and hand-dug landings for small boats, so all ships must anchor offshore and goods are ferried by barge or shallow draft boat.

My first journey, to Carse, began in the summer just after my ninth year. I was full of excitement as this was to be my first journey outside of Crydee. The days were hot and travel was tedious and the excitement quickly diminished. Still, for a boy of nine the slightest change in scenery held a hint of the exotic.

The Far Coast is unforgiving save for a few stretches near the three main ports. The most notable bluff is a headland west of Crydee known as Sailor's Grief. The shape of the coast there is deceptive with a rapidly rising shelf just below the surface. More than a few unsuspecting ship's captains have sailed nearby in a following wind in what seems deep water, only to be pushed onto the rocks by the ocean surge meeting the tide race from the Crydee River.

The rest of the coastline between Crydee and Carse is hardly more forgiving, and where there is a small stretch fit for landing, there is only one village on the shore, the fishing community of Windswept. Other villages like Road Town and Seaside are either on bluffs overlooking the sea or above inaccessible beaches or rocky coasts where landing boats is impossible. Where the beach can be reached from the King's Road, there is usually a steep, narrow path, little more than an animal trail.

Such natural obstacles have contributed to the rarity of pirate raiding that troubles the western coasts of Kesh and the ports of the Free Cities in the Bitter Sea. The only safe place to come ashore in numbers is within the harbors of Carse and Crydee, and they are well defended. Tulan also offers other problems for attackers.

My first reaction on seeing Carse was that it was a much larger community than Crydee. In my boyish world, Crydee would have to be the superior town, being the home to the Duke and all. As I learned, the original Duke had picked that location as the first defensible position he could seize, allowing reinforcement from the sea, after crossing the Grey Towers in the conquest of what was then Keshian Bosnia.

After securing that position, the original keep tower was built—now the northwest corner of the Duke's castle—and a year later what became known as the Southern Campaign began. Carse was the largest of the three Keshian enclaves to fall to Duke Borric's grandfather and was a prosperous trading port compared to Tulan. The major export to the Empire was hard oak, a species that didn't exist in the Empire of Great Kesh and one superior for shipbuilding.

To my unschooled eye, Carse was a beehive, people swarming everywhere, an impression I carried with me for years until visiting larger cities. There were a half-dozen good-sized ships in the harbor whereas Crydee rarely had more than one at a time in port. I learned later these were still small ships by Kingdom standards, coasters that rarely braved deep waters.

I had yet to undertake that portion of my training concerning boats and their handling, so what

recall is sketchy but I do remember a busy port, with many barges and boats carrying cargo to and from the city.

Carse was my first venture away from home, along with a wainwright named Francis, his apprentice, and three other boys. We were delivering two newly made wagons to a farmer who was meeting us in Carse. I and another boy took turns driving one small wagon, while the other pair of boys drove the second. The apprentice, a quiet lad named Teddy, moved from wagon to wagon, so we all had his tutelage, as well as some time on the big wagon with Master Francis.

I was looking forward to spending the night in an inn with hot food and stories from travelers from far-flung lands, but we housed in the stable with Teddy while Master Francis partook of the inn's comforts and departed the next morning. I was disappointed more over not being permitted to explore Carse than spending a night on damp straw.

Still, it had been my first taste of adventure and for a lad of nine I had not disgraced myself driving a team. I was well satisfied, though I knew before the journey was half over that I had a desire to be either a teamster or a wainwright.

My second journey was by boat, down the coast to Tulan, to carry messages to the Baron of Tulan from my lord Borric. It was here I discovered I had neither any aptitude for sailing nor love of the sea. The water was choppy and while I didn't get seasick, neither was I fully at ease. The work was hard, I was the youngest lad aboard and the smallest, but thankfully I endured no task alone, so things were done in good order. My hands were already calloused but the ropes—stays and sheets as the sailors call them—burned my hands, and by the time we reached Tulan my palms were raw. I was told salt water would toughen them.

Tulan was fascinating once we dropped anchor, for it was originally a fortress on a rocky isle in the mouth of a large river. To reach Tulan, you sail along the coast, then turn toward a headlands and beat against the tide and wind into a small bay, not really more than a deep inlet, to a series of small islands that cluster there.

The original fortification was designed as a defensive position against any incursions from Kesh attempting to retake Bosnia from the Kingdom. Initially there had been a hastily erected wooden fenced compound behind a good-sized dock and three ships anchored a short distance away. They composed the entirety of the Duke's fleet and were the only Kingdom ships beyond the Straits of Darkness.

By my first visit to Tulan, the old wooden fortification had been supplanted by a full-sized stone keep, including stables and yard, occupying the entirety of the island, save for the docks. As a result, the community of Tulan had sprung up on the nearby islands, many of them connected by bridges, most by dock and boat, and a unique town had evolved.

When weather permitted, the passages between islands—naturally occurring parts of the estuary supplemented by a handful of man-made canals—were thronged with boats and barges moving goods and people from island to island. I found the entire tableau fascinating. It was late spring so the weather was warm and the breezes gentle, and everything about this town felt exotic.

We spent three days in Tulan before departing back to Crydee, and rather than a stable as I endured two years before, we were allowed to sleep aboard the boat. We had meals fetched to us by servants of the Baron, and I could only imagine what life in this watery town would be like.

Perhaps someday I will return to Tulan should time permit, just to take a look around. The sailing home was uneventful but tedious as we had to sail away from the coast against the wind to avoid the rocks. That meant long tacks out to sea, then short runs back toward the coast. It took us six days to return compared to three getting to Tulan, but at least by then my hands had toughened enough so that

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