



THE WARLOCK'S STAFF

URSUS
THE CLAWED
ROAR

With special thanks to Michael Ford

To Stan and Ted



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URSUS
THE CLAWED
ROAR



BY ADAM BLADE



THE SEA OF SERAPH

THE
ETERNAL
FLAME

THE SNOWY NORTH

FISHING
VILLAGE

THE RAGING RIVER



Seraph



REDWELL

THE
EASTERN
FOREST



Tom and Elenna are such fools! They thought their Quests were over and that my master was defeated. They were wrong! For now Malvel has the Warlock's Staff, hewn from the Tree of Being, and all kingdoms will soon be at his mercy.

We travel the land of Seraph, to find the Eternal Flame. And when we burn the staff in the flame, our evil magic will be unstoppable. Tom and Elenna can chase us if they wish, but they'll find more than just Beasts lying in wait. They're alone this time, with no wizard to help them.

I hope Tom and Elenna are ready to meet me again. I've been waiting a long time for my revenge.

Yours, with glee, Petra the Witch



PROLOGUE



Brendan lifted the lid off the stew pot and breathed deeply. “Smells delicious!” he said to his son Luke, who sat on the other side of the fire.

Luke pointed into the cave behind them, the entrance to the whole network where the rest of the tribe lived. “The others will pick up the scent too. They’ll be hungry.”

Brendan ladled stew into a bowl and handed it to Luke. “Just think,” he said. “They say that people in

Avantia eat off golden platters.”

Luke laughed. “Don’t be silly, Father! Avantia’s not even real. I’ve heard they sleep in feather beds too. Who would make up such a thing?”

Brendan spooned some of the broth into his mouth. “Ow! It’s hot!” He sucked in cool breaths, then swallowed. “Perhaps you’re right. Feathers must be itchy! A hammock’s good enough for me.”

Luke blew on his broth, and gazed out over the landscape of Seraph. Trees dotted the rich pastures, and cattle roamed over the plains. The sky was cloudless and hazy, and a distant lake sparkled like a sapphire.

Who needs real jewels? Luke thought.

As he watched, Ursus the Bear nosed through the bushes nearby. His glossy brown fur rippled over

muscled flanks as he lumbered along. Luke and Brendan both bowed to greet the old bear who had always been their protector. No one really knew if having him around helped to guard the village, but it reassured them all to have him nearby. Ursus lifted his nose in reply. With a yawn, he disappeared back into the undergrowth. *Probably looking for a bees' nest to plunder*, thought Luke.

"In Avantia the people worship a man," said Brendan. "They call him a 'king'."

"These Avantians sound stranger all the time!" Luke replied. "Ursus has never abandoned us, so I'll stick with him."

As he took the first mouthful of his stew, thunder rumbled from above. Luke frowned.

"That's odd," he said. "There's no

storm approaching.”

Brendan stood up, and pointed.
“Oh yes there is.”

Luke saw a small black cloud floating in the sky. He reached for his staff and stood beside his father.
“What could it be?”

“Let’s investigate,” Brendan replied.
They scrambled down the path from the caves. With a sharp crack, the cloud parted. Luke grabbed his father’s tunic and tugged him behind a tree.

“There’s something inside!” he gasped.

As they watched, a stone staircase emerged from the black smoke, reaching downwards in a spiral. Luke could feel his father trembling.

“What magic is this?” he asked.
As the steps touched the ground not far from their tree, Luke saw two

figures emerge from the black smoke. First came a man wearing a dark hooded cloak. He carried a staff made of gnarled wood. This cloaked figure led a short, fat girl wearing a silly pointed hat. Dark, lank tresses hung over her shoulder, and her eyes squinted into the light. The man reached the bottom of the steps, then crouched and laid his hand on the soil. His face twisted into a sneer.



“It worked!” the man said. “We’ve reached Seraph.”

The girl hopped from foot to foot, giggling. “It’s ours!” she said.

“*What’s theirs?*” whispered Luke.

Brendan cautiously stepped out from his hiding place. “Come on, son. You know Seraph’s first law.”

“Welcome to all,” Luke replied.

Although Brendan felt uneasy, he nodded. “Let’s greet our visitors.”

Striding ahead of his son, he approached the man and his girl companion. He held out his fist, ready to touch knuckles in the gesture used by all the people of Seraph.

“Greetings, visitors!” he began.

“Welcome to—”

The girl gave a squeal of horror and shot out an arm. A bolt of purple light crackled from her fingertips

towards them, and Brendan felt a scorching pain across his hand.

“Get away from us!” the man snarled.

Brendan pulled Luke to safety back behind the tree. “They must have misunderstood,” Luke said. When he peered around the trunk once more, the two figures were hurrying away, and the man was pointing towards the distant mountains.

“I don’t think they’re nice people,” Luke muttered. “They seem to be looking for something.”

“This doesn’t feel good,” Brendan said. “We should go back to the caves and warn the rest of the tribe.”

Cradling his injured hand, he looked back, but the strangers had vanished. He shuddered. Something evil had arrived in Seraph...



CHAPTER ONE

HOMECOMING



Errinel appeared on the horizon and Tom's heart lifted. He pushed Storm harder, and the black stallion responded with a burst of speed. Tendrils of smoke from several chimneys rose above the familiar houses. Tom couldn't quite believe Avantia was safe again. Sanpao the Pirate King had been banished for

good, and his mother Freya and Silver were freed from Tavania.

“How does it feel to be home?” shouted Elenna.

He looked sideways to where she galloped on Blizzard, the beautiful white mare she’d met on their previous Quest.

“It feels great!” Tom replied.

Elenna’s wolf, Silver, bounded between the horses, his tongue lolling. Tom looked back over his shoulder. Behind him, on a magnificent chestnut stallion, rode his father Taladon, wearing his shining golden armour. And at his side Freya sat in the saddle of a bay war-horse.

For a long time, he’d never dreamed his mother was alive, let alone that she and his father could be reunited. As Mistress of the Beasts,

her Quests had taken her far and wide to battle evil.

Tom felt pride welling up inside him. *We're a family for the first time!*

They slowed to a canter as they passed the outer reaches of Errinel. Tom couldn't wait to see Aunt Maria and Uncle Henry's faces when they clapped eyes on their visitors.

Outside the stables, Tom and the other riders dismounted and tied their horses up.

"I haven't been here for years," said Freya. "But it looks just the same."

Tom led the way to the forge where his uncle worked. Even before they arrived they heard the clang of a hammer. Tom signalled for the others to stay outside and pushed open the door. A blast of heat baked his face, and he saw Uncle Henry bent over

an anvil, sweat dripping from his brow. He held a bar of red-hot iron in a pair of tongs. In his other hand he gripped a hammer. With expert strokes, he bent the iron into the shape of a horseshoe. As he dropped the shoe, hissing, into a barrel of water, Tom called out, "Uncle!"

Henry spun around, wiping the sweat from his forehead. His face broke into a broad grin.

"Tom!" he cried. "It's been so long! Is everything all right?"

Tom nodded and clapped his uncle on the shoulder. "Everything's fine. I've brought visitors!" He looked at the door. "Come in, all of you."

As Taladon led Freya inside, Uncle Henry's eyes widened. "It can't...it can't be!"

"It is!" said Freya.

“Maria!” Uncle Henry shouted, dropping the hammer and tearing off the leather apron. He rushed forward, pulling both Freya and Taladon into his huge embrace.

“What is it?” called a woman’s voice.

“Come quickly!” Henry shouted.

“I’m making a cherry pie!” Tom’s Aunt Maria called back.

“That can wait!” shouted Henry, as Tom and his father began to laugh. They both loved Maria’s cherry pie. “You really have to see this!”

Aunt Maria came in, her hands coated in flour. “If the crust burns, I’ll hit you with my rolling...” She gasped as her eyes fell on Taladon and Freya. Tears sprang into her eyes as she joined the huddle.

Tom drew back to stand with

Elenna. He knew how hard it must be for her at times like this: her parents were long dead.

“There must be a feast!” Uncle Henry announced. “Let’s celebrate the return of my brother and his wife.”

Elenna was charged with spreading the news around the village, while Tom and his parents arranged tables



in the main square. Soon families emerged from all the houses carrying platters of food. The owner of the local tavern dragged out a barrel of apple juice. A hog roast turned on a spit and a cauldron of stew bubbled.

Musicians began to play a jig, and Tom was amazed to see his mother and father dancing. Freya was much better, but Taladon made a game effort to keep up with her rapid steps. Silver bounded around Freya's heels.

"Want to try?" asked Elenna, her face flushed.

"Why not?" said Tom. But as he led the way to the dancing area, he noticed a strange blue glow coming from behind the village hall. "Wait a moment," he muttered. "What's that?"

Elenna followed him around behind the bubbling stew pot, to

where a familiar figure was dusting off his brown travelling cloak.

Tom's face broke into a smile.

"Aduro! What are you doing here?"

The wizard threw up his hands.

"I need to talk with..." He tailed off as a puppy rounded the side of the building, pursued by two small children. "You don't think I'd miss the celebration, do you?" he continued, darting a nervous glance at the children. "Now show me the way to some food. I'm starving!"

As Tom led his wizard friend back to the party, he wondered why Aduro had really come. Aduro placed an arm over his and Elenna's shoulders. "Best keep my identity a secret, I think. We don't want people worrying about a wizard in their midst."

Tom nodded. "Of course. Though

Father might need a bit of magic to help with his dancing.”

Elenna and Aduro laughed as they mingled with the crowd.

“Who’s this?” said Uncle Henry, appearing before them, arm in arm with Aunt Maria.

“An old friend from the palace,” said Elenna quickly. “Just passing through.”

After they’d settled Aduro down with some food, Elenna went to get more wood for the giant bonfire. Tom was wondering whether to go for a second helping of roasted meat, when he noticed that Aduro had barely touched a morsel on his plate.

“Something’s wrong, isn’t it?” he asked.

Aduro looked down at him gravely. “Sorry to spoil the party,” he said,

“but can you fetch Taladon and Freya? Elenna too. I’ll wait by the stables.”

Tom felt a ball of dread gather in his gut. He pushed through the whirling bodies of the dancers until he found his parents. “I need to talk with you,” he said. They heard the seriousness in his tone, because they stopped dancing and followed wordlessly. He found Elenna feeding a large piece of pork to Silver, and gestured for her to come too.

Back near the stables, Aduro stood stroking Storm’s nose. He peered past them, nervously. “I’m afraid I haven’t come here for the celebrations,” he said. “Word has reached me of grave events.”

“What is it?” asked Taladon.

“Our oldest enemy,” said Aduro.



“Malvel?” Tom breathed.

The wizard nodded. “You know that he escaped when the prison was destroyed. Well, I hoped that would be the last we’d see of him.”

“No chance,” said Elenna.

“He’s been spotted near the palace,” Aduro went on. “Tom and Elenna must return to the city as soon as possible. The King needs them!”