



DELIVERANCE of DRAGONS

BOOK THREE

of The Dragon Prophecy

MERCEDES LACKEY
and JAMES MALLORY



Tor Publishing Group NEW YORK



PROLOGUE

Darkness Visible

*Though there are many songs of the High King's reign,
there are none of her journey westward through the lands she
had once conquered.*

No one who was a part of that journey will ever speak of those days.

—Thurion Pathfinder, Private Journal

Before Time itself came to be, *He Who Is* had been: changeless, eternal, perfect. And all was Darkness, and *He Who Is* ruled over all there was.

Then the Light came, dancing through the Dark and making it into Dark and not-Dark. Making it a finite, a bounded thing. Where there had been silence, and Void, and infinity, there came music, and not-Void, and Time . . .

And a world.

He Who Is lashed out against this debasement of *His* perfect Nothingness, and the Light realized *He Who Is* meant to take from it the beautiful world of shape and form and time and boundary it had created. Light could not destroy the Darkness without destroying itself, but Light could bring life to flourish where destruction had walked.

The new life was as changeable as *He Who Is* was changeless, and to this life, Light gave weapons. Light Itself coursed through the new life's veins, and Light fell in love with silver life. Light left the high vault of heaven and scattered itself across the land, and silver life traveled to the places of the Light to rejoice in it.

But *He Who Is* vowed *He* would win in the end. This time, *He* bound *His* war into time, to let *His* tools learn from the enemy *He* would ultimately destroy. To all the things of the Light, *He Who Is* held up a dark

mirror. For the Bright World, a World Without Sun. For life and love, death and pain. For trust, treachery. For kindness, power.

For skill . . . magic.

For Life . . . the Endarkened. *He Who Is* created thirteen intermediaries to scour the Bright World of life: the Dark Guard and their King. *He Who Is* sent *His* Endarkened forth from their lair beneath Obsidian Mountain and *His* creations glutted themselves upon blood and pain. The land around Obsidian Mountain became a wasteland where nothing lived, and each night the Endarkened ranged farther to spread their desolation. But they were few and Life reproduced quickly. So King Virulan worked a great magic to change his twelve vassals so that their bodies could bring forth more soldiers for this great war. Only Prince Uralesse had foreseen Virulan's intention, and hid himself from the casting of that great spell. Once it had been cast, there was no power left to do it again – no matter how much Virulan wished to do so – and thus Uralesse remained as *He Who Is* had made him.

The eleven who were then the Created-and-Changed brought forth life from their bodies, and soon, where the Endarkened had been one interchangeable and unchanging people, they were three: the Created, the Created-and-Changed, and the Born.

The children of *He Who Is* were bound by the laws of time and matter, and in that realm even *His* vast power could not create a sorcery that did not require payment. *His* creatures of magic did not possess infinite power, for the power of the Endarkened came from the pain and fear of their victims and from the anguish and despair of their victims' deaths. Each spell they cast was paid for in the blood and suffering of others.

Of slaves.

The first Elflings the Endarkened took cried out to Aradhwain the Mare and wept for the vast openness of the Goldengrass. Time passed in the Bright World, and the Elfling victims cried out to the Sword-Giver and the Bride of Battles, to Amretheon and Pelashia, to the Starry Hunt. None of their Brightworld Powers saved them.

Then one day a captive struck back with the Light itself. With magic. The Light had hidden the only weapon which could slay the eternal beautiful children of *He Who Is* in the changeable world of form and

time. Only the audacity of the Light had led it to disclose its great secret, for if it had not shared that secret with Elvenkind, the Endarkened and *He Who Is* would have remained ignorant of it . . .

Until it was too late.

And so *He Who Is* gave new orders to *His* Endarkened. The time of slaughter was over. The time of war had come.

The Endarkened threw themselves into preparations for the coming war. It was to be a harvest of blood and pain as the world had never seen. The King of the Endarkened rallied his troops and prepared his twisted weapons of Darkness. When this war was over, no living thing would remain in the Bright World — no blade of grass, no flower, no tree. No fish in the water, no bird in the air, no beast on the earth would remain.

And Elvenkind would die first.

But as the King of the Endarkened began to discover, Elves were extremely hard to kill.