



THE WARLOCK'S STAFF

TORPIX
THE TWISTING
SERPENT

*With special thanks to
J.N. Richards*

For my cousins Jayden and Lucas



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TORPIX
THE TWISTING
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BY ADAM BLADE



THE SEA OF SERAPH

THE
ETERNAL
FLAME

THE SNOWY NORTH

FISHING
VILLAGE

THE RAGING RIVER



Seraph

A hand-drawn map of a fantasy world, enclosed in a rough, stone-like border. In the top right corner, a large, circular sun or moon is depicted with a textured, stippled interior. The word "Seraph" is written across the sun in a stylized, serif font. The map shows a coastline on the right side, with a large forest area labeled "THE EASTERN FOREST" in the center. To the left of the forest, a small village with several buildings is visible. In the upper left, a region is labeled "REDWELL". The map is drawn with simple lines and shading to represent terrain, trees, and buildings.

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



Malvel took in a ragged breath and leant heavily on the Warlock's Staff. The air was thin on the mountain ledge. Every part of his body ached from the long climb up the steep rocky path and his legs felt like they were made from lead.

The Dark Wizard scowled. His body had become so feeble!

But it won't be for long, he reminded himself. Once I reach the Eternal Flame and put the Warlock's Staff in the magical

fire, I'll be strong again. Malvel's face twisted into an evil grin. "I will be the most powerful wizard in all the known kingdoms," he rasped.

Malvel cackled but quickly began to wheeze and cough. He wiped a hand across his mouth and struggled on higher up the mountain, his bones creaking. Sweat stung his eyes and the wind whipped at his robes, but still the Dark Wizard climbed.

Soon he reached the top of the rocky wall and found himself standing on a vast plateau. It was barren except for a hedge of thickly twisted green vines that grew a head taller than he stood. The vines were as thick as his arms and looked shiny and tough. Malvel's heart leapt. Through the tiny gaps in the vines, he could see a vibrant orange

glow – the Eternal Flame.

I've finally made it!

Finding new strength in his tired legs, Malvel rushed forwards.

He scanned the hedge, searching for a place where he could wriggle through. But the thick vines were knotted together too tightly. The huge plant looked like a tangled fishing net.

Malvel frowned. Were the vines enchanted to protect the flame? His fingers found the carved stick at his waist. "The magic of the Warlock's Staff may help me," he muttered.

Raising the staff above his head, Malvel plunged it into a tiny gap between two vines.

A hole appeared, an arm-span wide. Dark, menacing smoke curled from its edges. As swiftly as his old

body would allow, Malvel clambered through and tumbled across the earth on the other side. The vines hissed angrily. The black smoke was blasted away by a powerful wind. Malvel dropped the Warlock's Staff to the ground and the hole quickly closed up again.

Malvel struggled to his feet and felt a shiver of excitement go through his body. In front of him stood the Eternal Flame! The fire flared high but did not flicker or splutter, despite the fierce winds.

Malvel stepped towards it cautiously, expecting to feel a gust of heat slap his face – but the flame did not give off any warmth at all.

Magic fire! Malvel thought with wonder. *Powerful enough to make me the ruler of every kingdom.* He advanced

slowly, walking right up to it.

As he peered more closely, two bright eyes appeared. Malvel took a step back in surprise as a huge snake rose from the cold flames.

Stupid, stupid! he cursed himself. In his eagerness to reach the Eternal Flame he hadn't stopped to think whether a Beast might be here!

Malvel felt the hairs on his arms



stand on end as the serpent reared up to its full height. The snake was as tall as an oak and its red and yellow scales glinted in the light of the fire. Along its back, scales rose like spikes. The giant Beast opened its mouth wide and Malvel could see venom glistening on its fangs. The Dark Wizard wanted to move but fear froze him to the spot.

The snake hissed and a jet of yellow acid flew from its mouth, landing on Malvel's cloak. The Dark Wizard screamed as the acid burnt through and seared his skin.

He leapt back and threw off the cloak, his heart pounding.

The snake lunged for him but Malvel jerked to his left, managing to roll out of the way just in time, although his tired body screamed in

protest. He crawled towards the vines on his hands and his knees.

“I must get away. I must get away,” Malvel whispered.

Something slapped around his ankles. Looking over his shoulder he could see that the snake’s tongue had wrapped around his feet. It felt like a rope of flames had him caught, as acid from the snake’s tongue burnt through to his skin.

Malvel screamed as he was lifted off the ground, spinning in the air as the Beast snapped his tongue back and brought the wizard towards his mouth. The Beast’s breath was hot on Malvel’s face.

With a hoarse cry the Dark Wizard lifted the Warlock’s Staff and brought it down on the Beast’s head with a crack. The snake hissed in pain and

his tongue unravelled – releasing Malvel. The Staff flew out of Malvel’s hand and it spun through the air, landing on the other side of the vines.

I’m doomed! Malvel thought, as the snake’s tongue darted out to curl around his body.

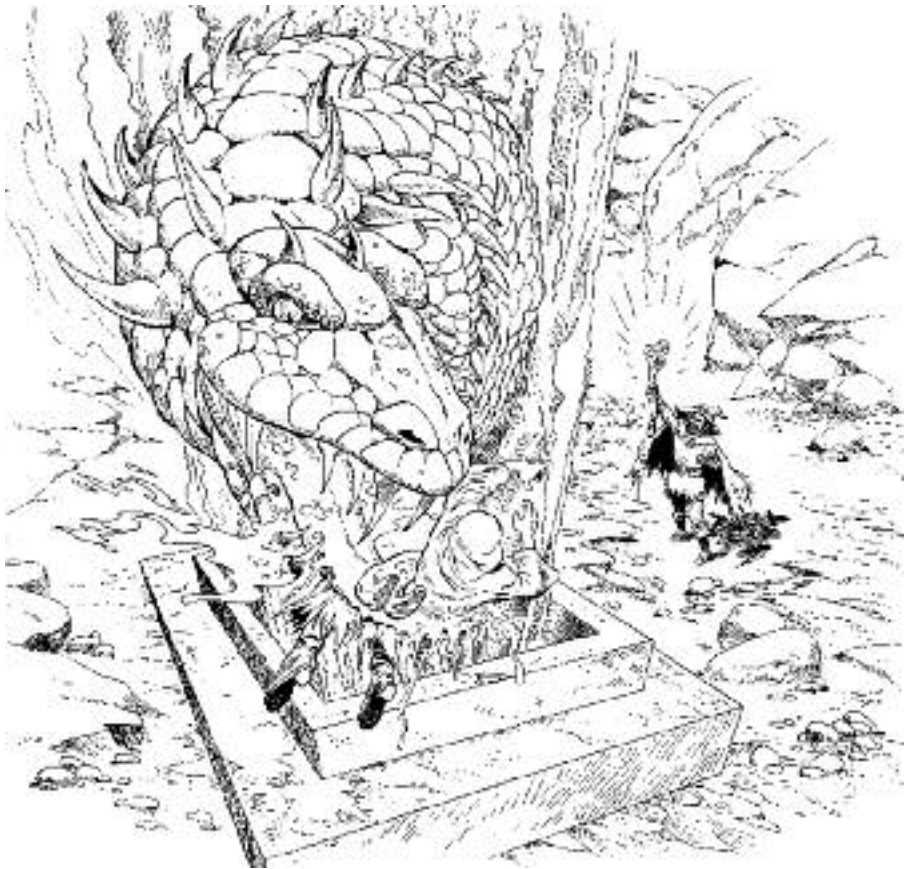
He heard a cackle of laughter. Looking down he saw a familiar stout figure approaching the Staff that lay unguarded on the ground...

“Petra!” Malvel growled at his apprentice. “Leave that Staff alone! It’s mine!”

Petra grinned up at him. “Quiet, old man. You can’t tell me what to do. Now *I* have the Warlock’s Staff.”

“Traitor!” Malvel screamed as he was dragged towards the snake’s mouth.

“And you’re about to become



a snake's supper," Petra replied holding the Staff above her head.

The little witch's smug face was the last thing Malvel saw before the Beast's mouth closed around him.



CHAPTER ONE

THE DIAMOND TUNNELS



“Do you think the Eternal Flame is near?” Elenna asked. Her voice sounded hollow and ghostly as it echoed off the walls of the damp tunnels that lay beneath Seraph.

“I hope so,” Tom murmured. “The future of every kingdom depends on it.”

Varra, the leader of the Seraph

fishing village, had told Tom that the tunnels were a shortcut to the Eternal Flame, but he was still worried. He and Elenna had to get to the flame before Malvel brought the Warlock's Staff to the fire, or the Dark Wizard would gain power over all the known kingdoms, including Avantia. Tom frowned as he thought of how Malvel and Petra had been criss-crossing the kingdom on their way to the Eternal Flame, using evil magic to turn the innocent creatures and people of Seraph into Beasts.

It had not been easy, but Tom had managed to undo their evil magic at each stage of his Quest. He smiled as he remembered his most recent victory. He had restored a mighty sea Beast called Spikefin to his original human form.

My Quest hasn't just been about defeating Malvel, Tom thought, feeling a spurt of anxiety. *It's also about saving Aduro's life.* The Good Wizard had collapsed and disappeared at the start of this Quest because Malvel had stolen the Warlock's Staff. Without the Staff in its rightful place in King Hugo's palace, Aduro had become weak and melted away. Tom was determined to return the Staff. Nothing would stop him from helping his friend!

Tom and Elenna walked on, leading Storm and Silver through the tunnels. Tom could feel his stallion dragging his hooves, while Silver the wolf stayed close to Elenna's side and made low whining noises.

Tom didn't blame his animal friends for being nervous. The tunnels were

dark and the air felt heavy with menace. This place made the hairs on his arm stand on end.

“Tom! Look!” Elenna said, pointing to a glimmer of light ahead.

“It’s the way out!” Tom exclaimed.



“It has to be.”

The four friends hurried forwards, turning a corner. Tom stopped as a flood of bright light surrounded them. Squinting against the glare, he looked around to see...

“Diamonds!” Elenna gasped.

They were everywhere. A wall of glittering jewels reared up from the ground and crusted the tunnel’s ceiling. Every surface was covered with a sparkling white glow that seemed to come from the heart of the diamonds.

“I don’t understand,” Elenna said. “They must be reflecting light – but where’s it coming from?”

Tom glanced around. There wasn’t a single beam of sunlight or the glow of a candle. He gingerly placed a hand against one of the diamond-

encrusted walls. It felt warm and pulsed under his palm. "It must be some kind of magic," he said. "At least now we can see properly where we're going." Whatever magic this was, Tom felt glad of it.

They walked on through the diamond tunnel. The path began to slant steeply upwards, and the slippery, diamond-encrusted ground beneath Tom's feet made it difficult to keep his balance.

With a high-pitched whinny of fear, Storm reared up on his hind legs and kicked out, slipping backwards.

"Whoa, boy!" Tom ducked under Storm's flailing hooves and wrapped the horse's bridle around his hand. He planted his feet and pulled, the muscles in his arms straining as he yanked on the bridle so that the

stallion didn't slide any further back. A horse with a broken leg would be a disaster this far underground.

Storm's hooves clattered back onto the diamond floor but his sides were heaving and his mouth flecked with foam.

Tom stroked Storm's mane soothingly. "What's the matter, boy?"

"He's scared of the reflections," Elenna said, kneeling to stroke her wolf's bristling fur. "So is Silver."

Tom looked around him. They were surrounded by their reflections in every direction. Distorted images of the four of them flickered and danced on the shiny diamond walls and stretched out across the roof of the tunnel.

Tom felt sweat prickle on his skin. The longer he looked, the more

sinister and distorted the reflections became. Every flicker of movement on the diamond wall looked like a potential attacker. *Perhaps this isn't good magic, after all*, he thought – although he didn't dare say the words out loud.

“We should go, now!” Elenna jumped to her feet. “Can't you feel it? It's like we're being watched... And the walls...they're pressing in on us!”

Tom drew his sword and swiped it in front of him in an arc, ready to defend his friends. But nothing leapt forward and the walls did not move.

“Elenna, stay calm,” Tom said. “The light from the diamonds is making you see things.”

Elenna raked a hand through her short hair. “I don't understand, I could have sworn that those walls

were moving.”

“Come on,” Tom said. “We have to find a way out of here.” The sooner they were back at ground level, the better. They had a Quest to complete!

Elenna nodded, straightening her shoulders. “You’re right, let’s go.”

Tom smiled to himself as Elenna strode forward, leading the way. Silver lolloped by her side and Storm followed closely behind. Tom and his friends soon fell into a slow and steady pace.

Elenna froze and Silver almost collided with her.

“What’s wrong?” Tom called.
“Are you alright?”

His friend gave a choked scream. “I was right. The walls are moving in on us!” she gasped. “We’ve got to get out of here!” She broke into a run,

with Silver following. Storm had already pushed ahead, neighing nervously.

Tom could hear a slow, grinding noise like stone scraping across stone. Or diamonds scraping across diamonds! He looked around himself, turning in a tight circle. Elenna was right. Slowly but surely the glittering walls of the tunnel were sliding closer and closer. He turned to follow his friends, but the ground beneath his feet began to rumble. He heard a creaking sound from above – the ceiling was descending, too.

He felt a sudden sharp pain in his arm and glanced down. A jutting shard of diamond was slowly beginning to press into his flesh, its sharp point cutting through Tom's tunic.



Elenna had been right.
Why hadn't Tom moved more
quickly?
We're going to be crushed! he thought.