
ROBERT STANEK
BATTLE for RUIN MIST
DISCORD
A DAUGHTER OF KINGS
COMIC #4

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BATTLE FOR RUIN MIST: A DAUGHTER OF KINGS, Comic #3. First printing 2011.
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A decade before the events of the bestselling author Robert Stanek's epic Ruin Mist, Kingdoms and Dragons books, a princess named Delinna Alder touches one of the Four Orbs crafted by Dnyarr, the last great Elf King of Greye, and is transformed forever. But Princess Delinna Alder has much to learn about the lethal price of being both within time and outside its bounds.

The special edition comic, Discord (A Daughter of Kings, Comic #4), is the final comic of a four-part series that tells the never-before-told story of Delinna's journey into exile. Threaded through all four comics are the tragic romances that will eventually tear nations apart and destroy worlds. Read Betrayal (A Daughter of Kings, Comic #1) first, continue on to Deliverance (A Daughter of Kings, Comic #2), Rebirth (A Daughter of Kings, Comic #3), and Discord (A Daughter of Kings, Comic #4).

Robert Stanek is the bestselling author of the epic series Ruin Mist Chronicles, which includes Keeper Martin's Tale, Kingdom Alliance, Fields of Honor, and Mark of the Dragon. Ruin Mist Chronicles was also released for young adults as The Kingdoms and the Elves of the Reaches #1-#4 and In the Service of Dragons #1-#4. He has also written many other novels and short stories, and is well-known for his Bugville Critters children's picture book series.

It's been a fairly open secret that Robert Stanek is the name of the more familiar bestselling author, William Stanek. His books have been bestsellers on Amazon.com, Barnesandnobel.com, Audible.com, and Apple iTunes. Robert's "Stormjammers" received a full-page review in The Journal of Electronic Defense. A review by the JED is as high an honor as it gets with a book by a military flyer.



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Content

Body

In an age long since lost to myth and memory, a race of supreme giants known as titans ruled over all the lands of Ruin Mist from their homes on Over-Earth. Without question, titans were the masters of the gates. They moved freely between realms and across lands. Darkness came to mark the end of the age of the titans as surely as there was ever light at the beginning. During this time of darkness, known as the Great Purge, it was the greatest of all titans, Ky'el, who gave men, elves, and dwarves their freedom.

By the end of the purge, the only known gate to Over-Earth was sealad for all time, ushering in a new beginning. A new age. An age of men, elves, and dwarves. After countless wars waged against themselves, each other, and the other races, men, elves, and dwarves settled in to an uneasy peace within their divided lands. In time, like the titans before them, dwarves became folk of myth and legend, leaving only absence like a darkness where once there had been a great presence and a light.

The age of men and elves had arrived, its arrival marked by the coming of the Great War. Some would call this war Dnyarr's war, after the elven king who started it. Others would call It the War of the Thousand Year siege. Those who fought and died would call it War of Ten Million Tears. Victory for man above all others brought little joy, even though it ushered In a new age. The age of men.

There are some who fear this age to be Ruin Mist's last. For if men succumb to darkness, there will be no beginning, and darkness will surely rule forever. It is in this time, at the twilight of the age of men, that those long lost have returned to thwart the darkness. They are the fallen sons of ages past and present. They are the keepers, the watchers, and the guardians. They are those who hold the key to Ruin Mist's future.




Pity Delinna. Rudely thrust from the only home she's ever known. Her tears, though, are long gone, replaced with bitterness and sadness.
Easy now, Thunder, guide me true. The forest has eyes, I sense them, and I know you do too.
Delinna makes her way south and west. She has yet to find the Watcher, though the Bottoms, Fradéyl-wicke, and Moeck are all far behind her.
Steady. Steady, boy.
WHOOOAAAA!!
The night comes. Keep me safe, as I know you can. We'll make camp soon.
Ahead, there... A break in the canopy at last.
The mountains. Thunder, we are closer than I thought.
How her empty belly growls, but her determination does not wane. She tells herself the Watcher will be in Alderan, and if not Alderan, Quashan'.


Shall we leave those who watch behind? Chase the wind, my friend.
The pendant comes to life. She fears Nedraw's return.
His words pervade her thoughts.
His form haunts her. It is here she must take refuge. He has told her this, whether for ill or good.
She sees to Thunder's needs first, then prepares for the night.
Fire comes at her call.
The blaze warms her, but the chill does not fade. Instead, it settles in deep as...
...Nedraw continues to speak words only she can hear.
He tells her of the dark times that come. He speaks in hushed, reverent tones of the eternal one she now serves.


He demands more than she can give.
No, never.
She sees the Dragon King in the flames. He demands obedience.
The fire roars and churns.
He reaches out.
No more. I... will...
Delinna commands the trees to bend and shift so she may see beyond.
The watchers are revealed.
If they seem familiar, that's as may be.
Words are difficult but she tries.
Not... in... control.
From fire, ash. From ash, fire.
This, I can see, girl. It takes and takes. You must ask it to give back.


For this, I crossed worlds, Delinna Alder.
As have we all.
Forgive... what I am about to do.
You have the keys. Take control or be lost to flame.
Fire rages.
It is you who are lost, watcher. Forgive me...
Fire envelops.
Fire seeks all.
Find strength, Delinna.
Y-O-U live, untouched by flame?
Rage more, if you must, Zanzas. But know she is mine.
Fight him.
She is mine. She has chosen.
Release her or the key will never be yours.


How slowly the hours pass.
Nor will he stop fighting for control of you.
Zanzas desires the key above all else. He will not risk its loss.
Delinna hears their words but her thoughts dwell in the flames.
Someone approaches.
Calm yourself, child. It is only I, Martin Braddabaggon.
But we have little time. They follow. They are close.
Who follows, keeper?
Nedraw must submit now. There is no time left for games, Zanzas.
It is the Wolm Queen, is it not? I've sensed her, though as if in shadow, since moonbreak.
Your sand and echoes, dirt, and ash. They come, Martin. Are you sure of this path we've woven?
He is absent within me. I sense him no more.
As sure now, as I am of anything.


Nedraw, I summon you. Serve now, or all will be undone.
EEEYAAHHH!!!
I see what Nedraw sees. They are near.
She hears what Nedraw hears as well, but does not tell them of the inhuman sounds.
Let them come. We are ready now.
So it would seem.
Or is this but an echo of an echo once more.
Indeed.
In time, we will know.
The terror shows in her eyes, but she hides it well otherwise.


Errvane's advantage is blind obedience.
Kill them all, save for the girl. Take her alive.
That is her strength—that and her resolve.
Nedraw draws through Delinna.
His fire catches the first wave.
She feels it as though she wielded it.
It is how he teaches her.
DIIEEE!!
That for your damned queen!


Wolmerrelle, shape changers all.
Take her!!!
Spawn of a wicked union.
Alv and Wirg
Deadly.
Relentless.
Accursed.
Here preesy, preesy! Here!!
Untrained, inexperienced, Delinna panics.
She attempts to flee...
No, no!!
...but that is a mistake.


I only want the girl.
You'll not have her.
Min– ooo!!!!
Why have you returned! The realms of men are forbidden you.
Delinna, draw from Nadraw. Do it now!
Circle, circle. More beast than man.
You're fierce but you're done.
And you too...


Nedraw, I have need. Show me again your fire.
Razing fire to cleanse the way.
Beasts or not. What she's done weighs on her heart. She doesn't like the feel of it.
Why must it all burn? Surely there is another way.
Inside she feels her mother die in her arms all over again.
Once Dolinna's wall of fire spreads, there is no chance of stopping it.
Your deaths I never wanted.
The clearing becomes a burning inferno.


Try to ignore, if you can, the jarring sounds of striking flames and crackling lightning.
You've no place here. You violate the accord. Yield or die.
Kill me, and unleash him. You know this, having struck the bargain yourself.
We are ready this time. It will not be as before.
Notice instead the magical field that envelops the Worm Queen.


What have I become?
To where do I run?
Must this exile be?
Bathe in the flames!
Try me!
And so, I will.


Do you feel the urgency in the air? They do.
This can't be happening. Where do they keep coming from!
They attack mercilessly, desperate to finish Edward and get to their queen.
Martin and Delinna methodically weave sheets of fire into the wolm ranks.
Edward, to me! To me. We must work our way to Xith.
But for each wolm who falls there is another emerging from the darkness.


The companions meet back to back as the shifters circle them.
By Arr's pledge, your death I bring, watcher.
As do we all.
It is your queen's death I bring with certainty. Yield or she dies and I come next after your god.
F-i-ght them, my people, for by Arr, I do.


Fitting last words, because the next moment, Xith directs dark illusions to her mind.
As a master of the mystic arts, he knows how to stir every dark thought in every far corner of her psyche.
Erravane finds herself facing her greatest fears, and I imagine it is not a pleasant experience.
Where's her bravado now, I wonder. Can you hear her screams?


Clearly some new horrors find Erravara, for her screams now are like to wake the heavens.
The less said about these dark things, the better.
Dozens of your subjects are dead. The rest have had their fill of this fight, I'd say. Have you!
He'll avenge me, if you dare do this.
And this time, we are ready, as you've seen.
Get out... of... my mind! I will defeat you.
DIE, DIE, DIE!
DIE!
You will lose. Watchers and keepers together, not against as before.
I will add essence and enchantery to the line, this I vow. My children will walk as men do, for all time.
Scheme your madness if you will, but it will never be so. Not while I live, not while there are watchers yet in the realms.


Errvane's plans for Delinna are so much ash and echoes but the flames rage on. It requires Delinna's all to stay in control.
Errovane has submitted. Break off the attack, but stand ready.
Delinna knows fire as well as any now. By fire she was cleansed and reborn. With fire she has fought and lived.
But fire consumes as much as it gives and she scarcely hears Xith's call to reel it back.
It takes not long at all for the flames to fade and when they do, Delinna finds herself in that other realm. The land of starless moonless red skies.
Errovane, you should not have returned to the realms. For your disregard, I take what magic remains you. For your conceit, I close to you the paths.
Delinna hears little of what's said owing—if nothing else—to a discourse between...
Nedraw and Zanzes that only she is privy to. It seems all she can do to stand.
One day all accounts will be balanced and there will be much to atone for.
That may well be, for now be thankful to live.

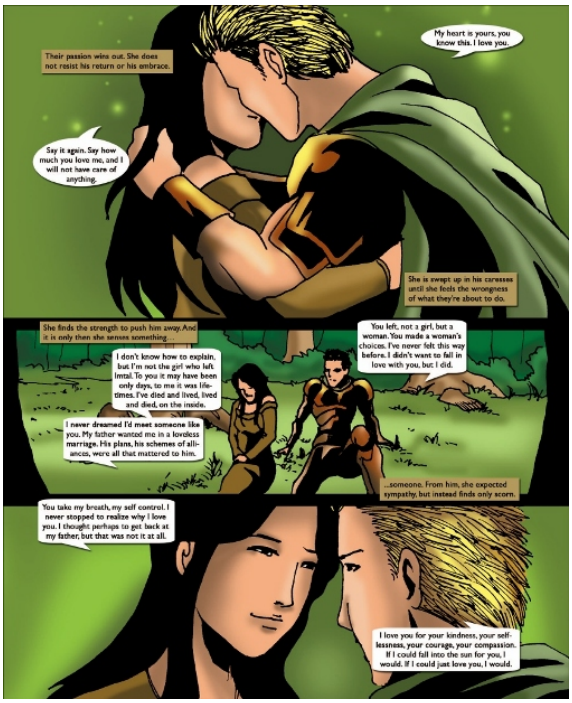

Xith returns the companions to the realms of men, at the place of his encampment. There he beckons them...
...to gather round a campfire readied by unseen hands. He speaks at length about Erravane and her plans.
Everything's wrong. Some turning we did not see. It must be.
Dirt and ash to her and all shifters.
Dirt and ash to the vile queen, I say.
She has proven too much of a nuisance.
I don't deny their unnerving nature, but they have a place. This we all know.
Suffice the gates will no longer open at her call. She is banished once more.
It will be years before she fully recovers from this night, and when she tries again, we will be waiting for her.
Delinea listens, her thoughts racing. Hours it takes him, hours of making assurances to ease their stance.
And finally, he finds the resolve to speak of other, darker matters. Zanzes. The orb. The key. The path.

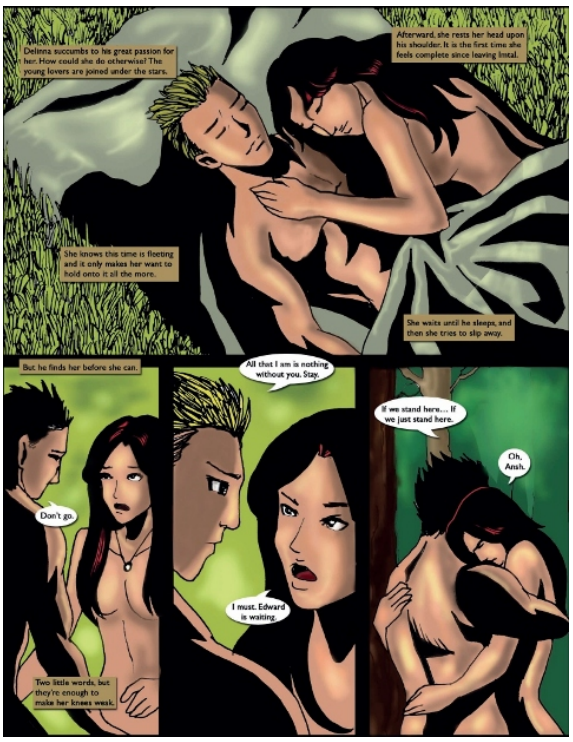

Delinna suspects that what Nedraw tells her of Xith's camp is true. It is too quiet; there is something out there in the fog.
Why do I have to go with Edward now?
Martin, it is time.
Edward knows the path, where you must go next.
He will take you to see one who waits for you, and then he will take you to the sisters where you'll be safe.
Xith and Martin combine their powers to work a powerful magic.
The gate opens. The way is made.
This is goodbye, for now, my dear. For my part, I am sorry. Know that it could not be any other way.
I will see you soon, once you're settled with the sisters. Know that the burden of your mother's death is mine, though she knew her part and chose her path.
A kindness meant, but I lived the truth of it. Goodbye, keeper.


The way paths take them to a place Delirna is unfamiliar with. Just one more of life's surprises, she figures.
Where are we? That smell?
H-O-M-E, or as close to it as I'll see for now.
Stay close. We're a long day ahead.
Does she mock herself with her sarcasm? She thinks so, but perhaps Nedraw feeds her his bitterness.
Nedraw doesn't like the control she's learning, and he resents that he was made to teach her the secrets of fire.
Look away, they'll not harm you.
But they seem to want something.
What they want, you don't want to give.
Truth to tell, their whereabouts aren't entirely a surprise. She suspects their location and their destination.
Not much farther now. He waits nearby, follow the shore south.
I'll wait for your return, Sunset, no later. Alone.
As much as any. I'd not hurt you intentionally if that's what you mean to ask.
Edward, I can trust you, can't I?
Until sunset then.
Truth, or is it as Nedraw tells her? She is but a lamb being led to slaughter.


Delinna walks to the farthest shore of the lake, and there she finds Anah waiting. How she's longed to see him again.
I dared not hope it'd be you who waited, yet here you are. My thoughts have ever been with you. I feared so what father mi—
I am here, my love. Your father held true to his word, as did the keeper.
It was the keeper, Martin, who bade me come, though I did not know why I too hoped it'd be you I waited for.
We've so little time. Again, we must fit a lifetime into... so little.
Here in your arms I'd stay forever if I could. Would that we could carry each other from all of this.
I chased the winds to get here because even the smallest hope of seeing you was better than the thought of never seeing you.
My love is a burden... My troubles are nothing compared to the pain I've caused.
What I feel for you is no burden. Know that no matter what separates us, my love will always be. It was I, not you, who caused this.
Delinna says nothing more of burdens and causes. She's thankful he knows so little and fears he would not love her if he knew all.


Sunset arrives too soon for the young lovers. It seems but a moment.
Goodbye, my love.
There's so much she wishes she could tell him.
He wishes with all his heart not to leave her.
His mount senses his reluctance and rears.
He eases up and guides the stallion through.
Too brief, but I will cherish it always. Thank you, keeper. I know you risked much.
How his heart pounds. How his thoughts race. How he wishes more.
Goodbye...
Her heart aches. She thinks death would be a kindness to this pain. But her life is no longer her own to take or give.


My heart is yours, you know this. I love you.
Their passion wins out. She does not resist his return or his embrace.
Say it again. Say how much you love me, and I will not have care of anything.
She is swept up in his caresses until she feels the wrongness of what they're about to do.
She finds the strength to push him away. And it is only then she senses something...
You left, not a girl, but a woman. You made a woman's choices. I've never felt this way before. I didn't want to fall in love with you, but I did.
I don't know how to explain, but I'm not the girl who left Imtal. To you it may have been only days, to me it was lifetimes. I've died and lived, lived and died, on the inside.
I never dreamed I'd meet someone like you. My father wanted me in a loveless marriage. His plans, his schemes of alliances, were all that mattered to him.
...someone. From him, she expected sympathy, but instead finds only scorn.
You take my breath, my self control. I never stopped to realize why I love you. I thought perhaps to get back at my father, but that was not it at all.
I love you for your kindness, your selflessness, your courage, your compassion. If I could fall into the sun for you, I would. If I could just love you, I would.


Delinna succumbs to his great passion for her. How could she do otherwise? The young lovers are joined under the stars.
Afterward, she rests her head upon his shoulder. It is the first time she feels complete since leaving Instal.
She knows this tame is fleeting and it only makes her want to hold onto it all the more.
She waits until he sleeps, and then she tries to slip away.
But he finds her before she can.
All that I am is nothing without you. Stay.
If we stand here... If we just stand here.
Oh, Ansh.
Don't go.
I must. Edward is waiting.
Two little words, but they're enough to make her knees weak.


Delinna and Ansh find it impossible to part. They pass the night awake in each other's arms. Now Delinna knows she can delay no more.
It is time.
I know.
I will never forget. I will keep this with me, and you will always be there in my thoughts.
Nor will I forget. My tears may dry, but my heart bleeds until we meet again.
Don't let us part like this
His touch is electrifying. It brings with it a vision. Naturally, she wonders whether what she sees is a blessing or a curse.
Nadrew probes her mind and her thoughts spiral inward. It is an intrusion, but also a warning


The beast was absent previously. With his return, he tells her what she must know to leave.
She guides her hand to her stomach and his atop hers follows.
We may be miles apart, but I'll be with you, and you'll be with me. Born of our love, a son. He will be like his father. Good and kind and strong.
A last kiss and then she leaves him. It's an hour's walk north along the water before she finds Edward.


Judge me however you will. I care not. I'm not drowning; I'm saved.
I judge not—others already have—but if you only had listened...
I'd've told them we saw wrong and your path would have been a very different one. Now your fates are intertwined, and it cannot be undone.
You'll not darken my mood. I've Nedraw for that.
The deeper Edward takes Delinna into this strange land, the more she worries, but she hides it well.
I'm furnished. I could eat another.
Good to see your fondness for fish. Aside from what we can gather on our way, it'll be our main staple for awhile.
Coming right up. A good catch. Of course, I had much time to pass.
Oh, thank you, Edward. You are much too kind. ... Is a kind word too much to ask? ... Straight to sleep again this day.
Mock me if you must. Two days of endless trekking... I'm exhausted. I do thank you. I thought you knew that.
Nedraw dislikes this place. He says it clouds his sight and perhaps that is the purpose of the journey.
Thank me by catching the fish tomorrow while I gather wood and kindling.


Edward prattles on endlessly about the source and the path. She wants to scream, but doesn't. She is grateful for what he's done for her.
The sisters—
—are nowhere near here.
What we discuss is not trivial, I assure you. These matters you must know.
To hide Nedraw from the sisters, much as I hide you from Zanzas even now, you must know these things.
The waters of the swamp roil and boil. Something big stirs in the dark waters.
I don't like this. Come away quickly.
E-D-Waaarrrd! What is it? What is that sound?
If ever you are going to listen to me, the time is now. Stay close. Move fast. Run. Now.
Yes, Edward. I'm sorry.
Edward and Delinna run deeper and deeper into the dense trees.
Run, focus on the path ahead.
You hide me from Zanzas. Why? I thought...


Edward senses something, so does Delinna. The trees have eyes.
Edward, I need truth, reassurance. Are you truly taking me to the sisters?
I am your friend, Delinna, more so than you know. Without Zanzea's influence, Nedraw must depend on you. It is the only way I can free you of what I endured.
You ask too many questions. Prepare yourself. They come closer, though unseen.
It is true then. You were Nedraw's holder before me. What will become of my child? Is he the key?
That is not an answer.
It is what it is. Feed Nedraw dream and source as we've discussed, and he will return essence and magic.
And if you must question what you already know… Yes, I was his keeper. I was not strong enough, so now my burden is yours.


Wood trolls, nasty creatures. Ready for this?
I am.
Let us see then how well you listened.


BETRAYAL
DELIVERANCE
REBIRTH
DISCORD