

ASULON

A PTI Press book

ASULON

The Sword of Fire-Book One

By William R. McGrath

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“Of Men and Magic” An excerpt from chapter 12 of Asulon:

“Do you want to explain to me how you did that?” demanded Moor without preamble.

“Not really, I have things to do,” replied Simon. He looked at the paladin standing there silent and immobile. “I suppose that you mean the storm. Would it satisfy you if I said it was just a trick I had picked up over the years?”

“No. Snake charming is a trick, walking barefoot across hot coals is a trick,” said Moor, rising anger in his voice. “Maybe I can accept that what you did in the tavern as some kind of mind trick, perhaps even summoning every rat in Eboracium *just* when you needed them was also a trick, but calling forth a storm out of a cloudless sky in time to save the giants—no, *that* was not a trick, *that* was magic.”

He gave Simon a suspicious look. “Just what kind of priest *are* you that you can do these things? I have heard of people able to do magic down through the years, but none were actually able to do much when challenged.”

Simon shook his head and sighed. “No, it is not magic. What men call magic is merely a poor imitation of this.”

“Oh? If it not magic, what then?”

“Authority,” Simon said. “Something that mankind had over creation as our birthright, but lost when the first man fell and the earth was cursed.”

“So why did you not use this ‘authority’ of yours earlier?” demanded Moor. “You could have saved us a good deal of trouble at several points.

“I do not have the mantle of authority all the time,” replied the priest, “I do not know ahead of time when I will be able to command the beasts or the elements. The times I may do these things are limited—so that I will not become proud, I suppose.

“Only when the Lord leads my spirit can I command creation, and then only specific things within it. For instance, I have never held command over any man, woman or child, for we are all co-heirs to this authority, though few realize it and fewer still use it.”

Moor raised an eyebrow, even more skeptical now that he had Simon’s explanation.

“So that is what happened in the tavern and with the rats and the storm? You used this *authority* of yours?”

“The rats, yes, and also the storm, but the vision we saw in the tavern surprised me nearly as much as you,” Simon said.

“Are you saying that you had no hand in it?” asked Moor.

Simon thought for a moment before he spoke. “When the guard marshal was questioning you at the tunnel and the Anakim were under attack at Logres, I saw the danger and knew what must be done. In Asulon, I called for any creatures nearby to aid us and, it being Eboracium, rats came. As for the Anakim, fire threatened, so rain came. But the vision in the tavern—that was different. The Lord spoke in my spirit, saying, ‘Bring the girl to the hearth and support her in prayer.’ I was as surprised as you by what followed. For her part, Rachel told me that the Lord spoke to her and said, ‘Go to the hearth and sing’. I did not know what would happen, only that the Lord’s hand was at work in it. We are in strange days and stranger days are yet to come.”

“All this still sounds like magic to me,” Moor said.

“Argeus told me that you were married once,” said the priest.

“Yes . . . once. A lifetime ago,” replied Moor.

“Then you should understand this analogy. The difference between magic and the authority I use is much like the difference between the wrong and the right times people have sexual relations.”

“Oh?” Moor said, wondering where the old man was going with this.

“An old man may buy the services of a prostitute, a young man may sleep with a girl he is fond of, though not wed to, or a young couple may come together on their wedding night. All have sexual relations, but it makes a great difference whether the act is under God’s law and therefore protected. The sex act is powerful and, like all powerful things, dangerous. Prostitution is unlawful because it puts you in danger of physical and spiritual infection. God’s law forbids fornication because an act that holds so much power is dangerous outside the safety of the fortress of marriage. The sex act carries the power of binding and, once an unwed couple go their separate ways, their spirits are torn apart and wounded.

“Men seek magic much like most of them seek sex, chasing something unlawful or, at least, premature in this age. Those who follow what is commonly called ‘black magic’ want only raw power and I have no use for them. They use magic to satisfy their lust for power, as a man uses a prostitute to satisfy his physical lust. But I *do* feel sorrow for those lured into what is mislabeled as ‘white magic.’ They seek something they know once must have been, but they do so before the time for its return.”

“And what do they seek?” asked Moor.

“A return to Eden,” replied Simon, a note of longing in his voice. “What attracts most people to magic is an innate desire in the human heart to regain the world as God first made it, before mankind fell. We instinctively know what we lost and long for its return.

“We all long for a time when we had power over creation and were its caretakers, when we could command the wind and the earth and the waters in a place where death walked not and sickness was unknown, where we could understand the speech of the animals and none would do us harm. That is why children are so fond of magic in their fairy tales, for they know that the world *should* work that way, even if it does not now. But all of us long for Eden, whether we know that name or not. We seek to satisfy our homesickness for a land we have never seen, but know, as surely as we know our hearts beat and our lungs draw breath, once existed and will exist again.

“But, as I said, that birthright was stolen from us. Those who practice magic, whether they realize it or not, attempt to buy back a portion of that birthright from the very one who stole it. Of course, he will never give up such power willingly, so they receive hollow shams and counterfeits, phantoms of the power man once had. What you see me doing is possible because God has lifted the curse for a moment and given back to me mankind’s birthright for a time.

Magic seeks to carve a creature out of stone before the true birth of the living child that will be the new earth reborn and Eden returned. That is the difference between magic and what I do.”

Moor stood staring at Simon, silent for a long time.

“You are a strange kind of priest,” said the paladin finally. He opened the cabin door and walked away.

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