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**The Necromancer Trilogy:** Books 3, 6, 9

I – Shadow from the Past

II –

III –

# SHADOW FROM THE PAST

Book Three in Legends of the Four Races  
Book Three in the Weapons Trilogy  
Book One in the Necromancer Trilogy

E. A. Rappaport

Owl King Publishing, LLC

Orange, CT

**Shadow from the Past**

Book Three in Legends of the Four Races

Book Three in the Weapons Trilogy

Book One in the Necromancer Trilogy

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# SHADOW FROM THE PAST

*For My Daughter, Hannah*

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# CHAPTER I

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## THE BROKEN STAFF

Cassor approached the Gathering Tree, a massive banyan that dominated the center of Hillswood. Its outer branches streamed down from the sky a hundred paces from the trunk, forming a natural dome, beneath which many adult Arboreals conducted their business while the younger tenderlings attended their studies. On his way toward the old banyan, Cassor passed several groups of workers: pollinators, who selected the perfect seeds to plant; germinators, who ensured that the seeds sprouted properly; and feeders, who gave the seedlings the proper amount of nutrients. Climbing through the thousands of branches above were healers, pruners, and scores of other Arboreals dedicated to the sylvan life cycle.

Unlike the majority of his fellow townfolk, Cassor always carried a slender sword by his side. Since he had become an elder, however, he found little use for the weapon. The last time he had even held the blade in combat was several springs ago, and then only to scare away a young sabertooth that had wandered into

Arboreal territory. Too many people took the current span of peace for granted.

When he reached the Gathering Tree, Cassor scaled the trunk as easily as he had strolled across the moss-lined forest paths. Near the top of the tree, the branches parted into a doorway, revealing a small, circular chamber hidden within the crown. Uncountable branches, packed with firm green leaves, formed the floor, ceiling, and walls of the room, as well as a table and six chairs.

“At least I am not the first to arrive today,” he said as he entered the room.

One of the younger members of the elder council, Cassor wore his long green hair in a braid and always dressed in a sleeveless tunic. He was proud to display a scar, running from his shoulder to his wrist, that he had received during a bloody battle of the Brymorian War. Stronger than most other Arboreals because of his training, his body resembled that of a Ferfolk, stocky and muscular, but without the leathery skin.

Cassor breathed in the sweet smell of nectar and pointed at the walls. “I did not realize the honeysuckle was in bloom already.” Long vines weaved in and out of the branches, adding a pattern of yellow and white flowers to the perimeter.

“It is a bit early,” said Kuril in a deep, weathered voice. “The caretakers were able to coax them from their buds for me. After all these springs, I am still not used to such drab northern winters.”

Looking very old, Kuril sat in a comfortable branch chair at the head of the table. Even after a half-century, he fingered the long scar on his cheek, now withered with age. Kuril wore baggy clothing, which made him appear to be more wrinkled than he was, but a heavy gold chain, strapped to his waist, enhanced his otherwise dull outfit.

Cassor shook his head at the belt. Metal was good for weapons and nothing else.

Beside Kuril, Eslinor sat motionless, staring blankly ahead. With a narrow face and a delicate smile, Eslinor's beauty was unrivaled in the entire hamlet. Her olive hair, twice as long as Cassor's, flowed down her back and mingled with the leaves of the chamber floor. Her mottled green dress hung over the sides of her chair, making it appear as if she were part of the furniture.

The final elder present, Aquila, had dark skin and was dressed in brown clothes, well-suited for working in the dirt. A trio of brightly colored feathers held her hair firmly in a bun, save for a handful of long strands draped over her shoulder. Aquila held the loose strands in one hand and slowly ran her fingers through them. She tilted her head slightly toward an empty chair and raised her eyebrows.

"Is it not noon already?" asked Cassor, disdainful of the customary wordless communication of nods and gestures. "I do not feel like waiting for the others today. Why do we not begin our discussions without them? Polsor and Zehuti may join us whenever they happen to arrive."

"Be patient," said Kuril. "Sit here and meditate with us on this beautiful morning. The others will be here soon enough."

"Soon enough for what?" asked Polsor as he stepped into the room and playfully nudged Cassor aside.

"Do you still refuse to straighten your hair?" asked Cassor. He wanted to comment about the similarities between Polsor and a wild human, but that would only delay things further.

"It is not yet the equinox," said Polsor, a near twin of Cassor, except for the top of his head. He shook his tangled mass of shoulder-length hair and gazed around the room. "Good, Zehuti is not here yet. Shall we begin without him?"

“Just because we might disagree with his research does not mean we should exclude him from our discussions,” said Aquila.

“It is not only his research.” Polsor frowned. “He always gets his way, whether it be allowing others to live among us or sending our trees farther and farther north. Do we not have equal say in the matter?”

“Perhaps you are just not persuasive enough,” said Cassor, slapping his brother on the back. “You should take some lessons from your grandson.”

Behind them, the leaves rustled as Zehuti appeared. An older Arboreal with a youthful appearance, Zehuti had dark green eyes, an unusually hefty build, and a shaved head. He pushed his way past the much taller brothers and announced, “I have a request.”

“If you were so anxious to begin,” said Cassor, “you would not have come late.”

“I apologize, but I was in the middle of an experiment that has taken me a fortnight to prepare. Unfortunately, I am still missing some information.”

Polsor glared at him. “You should give up these frivolous experiments.”

“Or move your home from the northern spiral, closer to the Gathering Tree,” said Cassor as he took his seat beside Aquila.

Zehuti shook his head with an almost-frightened look on his face.

“No one need move their home,” said Polsor, in rare agreement with the old Arboreal. “We are all here now, and the sun has only just peaked in the sky. Shall we begin? I believe Zehuti has a request for us to agree upon.”

Kuril gave an almost-imperceptible nod, echoed by Aquila and Eslinor. Cassor, however, smiled at his brother’s sarcasm.

Whenever Polsor was upset, he was able to brighten his mood with a joke or a lighthearted comment.

Zehuti took a few extra moments to get comfortable in his seat across from Kuril. “My research has kept me quite busy these past few springs. I have even asked my wife, Otha, to assist me on occasion. The humans knew more about magic than we had imagined.”

“That is impossible.” Polsor chuckled. “The humans would have been lucky to gain a fraction of our knowledge during their short lives. They were marginally more intelligent than the spider monkeys that frolic in the trees.”

“I speak the truth,” said Zehuti. “Each one of them might have lacked our wisdom, but as a group, they held much knowledge.”

“What the humans knew was concentrated on destructive behavior,” said Cassor. “They spent their few springs learning to exploit fire, imprisoning spirits and animals, and creating ever more dangerous weapons. We should not concern ourselves with such pursuits.”

“Yes, much of their effort was spent on subjects we chose to avoid in the past,” said Zehuti, “but that does not mean they were as ignorant as you say. Some of their knowledge might even aid us with our own specialties.”

Cassor joined his brother in laughter. He had known several humans, and none had ever approached the experience or wisdom of an Arboreal. Kuril, Eslinor, and Aquila grinned slightly, adding their equivalent of a hearty laugh.

“Do not mock me until you have seen the results of my research,” said Zehuti. He touched the leaves on the floor and whispered a few words.

Moments later, an ancient Arboreal entered the room carrying six tomes, each one wrapped in a single brown leaf. Otha had long braids of gray hair, heavily wrinkled skin, and a warm face. She could have been mistaken for Zehuti's mother instead of his wife. Without a sound, she placed the set of books by Kuril's feet and left the chamber.

"These observations are only the beginning of what I have discovered," said Zehuti. "I require an apprentice to work with me and continue my research should anything prevent my involvement in the future."

"You have already spent too much of your own time on this wasted research," said Cassor. "We should not squander the talents of our tenderlings as well. It would be more helpful to train them in swordplay. Each spring, there are fewer guardians. Just because the Ferfolk have not attacked us recently does not mean they have given up their aggressive nature. Are we to forget their vicious forays against us during the war? They killed innocent children and animals, burned down entire hamlets, and trampled every living plant in their path."

"We have not seen a single Ferfolk for the past twenty springs," said Aquila, "and I do not expect this one to be any different."

Zehuti glanced curiously at her, lifted the top book off the pile, and placed it on the table in front of Cassor. "Please keep an open mind."

Cassor crossed his arms. His brother was correct. The others would follow whatever Zehuti suggested, whether or not it was best for the hamlet.

"Just because there have been a few springs of peace does not mean we can trust the Ferfolk," he said. "They are a race of

warriors. The best time to plan an attack is when your enemy is least suspecting.”

“Are you suggesting we initiate an attack against them?” asked Aquila.

Eslinor’s face curled up in horror. “That would be terrible. We are a peaceful people.”

“I suggested no such thing,” said Cassor. “If we do not prepare to defend ourselves, the Ferfolk would have an overwhelming advantage.”

With a quick sneer at Zehuti, Polsor nodded. “We must ready our tenderlings for war. Many of them have never touched a sword.”

Cassor stifled a grin. He appreciated the support, but his brother cared more about pestering Zehuti than about weapons training. Polsor hadn’t picked up a sword in many springs.

“We seem to be split on this matter,” said Polsor, turning to Kuril. “What do you say?”

Kuril’s eyes shifted downward for several minutes before returning to the group with a silent answer, expressed by a quick gaze at the books and a nod at each of the elders. Cassor shook his head at his brother. It was just as he had predicted.

“You have made a wise suggestion, Kuril,” said Eslinor. “We will review Zehuti’s findings in detail before deciding on either of these issues. Should his research merit additional effort, I have just the tenderling to make a fine apprentice: the orphan, Jarlen.”

“He is not even a full ... ,” Cassor stopped when Kuril scowled slightly. His brother would have agreed with him, but the others would prevail over their dissension. “Good now,” he said. “I will read through Zehuti’s work, but we must speak further about the Ferfolk threat before adjourning.”

Zehuti passed out the heavy tomes. “Our treaty with the Ferfolk has been sufficient in the past,” he said, “but we still have several hours before midnight arrives. Cassor may try to convince us of the danger we face. One can never be too safe.”

When the morning sun roused Petula from her meditation, she climbed up through the ceiling of her sleeping chamber, past her well-stocked dining area, and into a special garden at the top of her mahogany tree. Rays of sunlight streamed into the room, nourishing scores of herb and vegetable plants. It had rained overnight, and any water that hadn’t found its way to the soil in one of the many leaf planters followed grooves in a few specially grown branches to the base of the mahogany.

Petula spent more than an hour singing to her plants, digging up root vegetables, harvesting edible leaves, and collecting drops of nectar from the flowers. After caring for each member of the garden individually, she sank through the floor into the dining area and prepared a meal of diced figs, crunchy vegetables, and sweetened greens, quietly humming to herself.

Soon she had a table full of food, two place settings, and no husband in sight.

“It is time for you to end your meditation,” she called out. “Why must you always rise late?”

She caressed the branches of the eastern wall and sang a soft tune. Below her feet, the tree limbs rustled gently.

“Is it morning already?” a groggy voice responded.

“Dawn has long since passed, and it is time for us to eat,” said Petula. “I do not wish to wait any longer.”

“You sound like a human,” said the voice, “always rushing me.”

“If you are going to insult me,” huffed Petula, “then you may take your breakfast when you wish. I am hungry now.”

She waited a few more minutes while arranging the plates, each one made from overlapping leaves and covered by a thin layer of wax. Finally, she shook her head and finished her breakfast in leisure.

“Do not skip your morning meal,” she called out, “or you will be hungry all day.”

Petula touched the northern wall of the chamber and, instantly, an opening appeared in the branches. She stepped out onto a large limb overlooking a murky swamp. Below her, pools of water glistened in the sunlight, offering her no room for a ground-level garden. The house stood at the tip of the southern spiral, surrounded on three sides by an immense marsh. Petula headed northward, crawling through the canopy along a treetop passageway.

Branches from neighboring trees clasped one another, forming a nearly continuous path high above the ground. Occasionally, she came to a break in the path. Instead of leaping to the other side, Petula chanted a brief song, causing the tree limbs to extend outward, weave together, and patch the hole. The closer she came to the center of town, however, the fewer breaks she encountered.

Petula had climbed through several trees when she stopped suddenly, her eyes drawn to the ground. The end of an oddly shaped black stick was poking up through the muddy water. She leaped down without a sound and approached the strange object. Petula circled the wood, viewing it from all angles. Eventually, she decided there was no danger and leaned in for a closer look.

The stick she had found was the top of an ornate staff buried in the muck. A pair of intertwined snakes, their heads

pointed away from each other and their tongues extended, formed the shaft. Petula poked the wood a few times and finally yanked the staff from the water, falling backward when it was only half as long as she had expected. The staff had been broken, with the lower section missing. She plunged her arm into the murky water but found nothing more.

Petula stood, wiping the mud from both the staff and her clothing.

“You look very old,” she said, examining the quality of the wood. “One would think that an Arboreal must have carved you, but you are probably of human origin. They always did like serpents and other unappealing beasts. I should throw you back to your watery grave in the swamp.”

She’d raised the staff behind her shoulder, ready to toss it into the center of the bog, when she heard a tiny voice scream, “No!”

“Who said that?” she asked, spinning around and gazing up into the trees. There was nobody else around. “Did you speak to me?” she asked the staff.

A voice whispered, “Yes.”

“You must be enchanted with human magic.”

She returned home, hoping to catch her husband before he left, but arrived to find a set of empty dishes. Petula set the staff down on the table and slumped into a chair, her eyes fixed on the enigmatic object. Before long, she had drifted into a meditative trance.

“I am here,” a gruff voice rumbled from far away. “Come closer to me.”

Petula rubbed her eyes, trying to see through a dense gray fog. She moved forward, drifting inches above the ground. At first,

she was in a forest of oaks and ironwoods, but as she moved, the trees thinned out and the land became hilly.

“I have never been out of the forest before,” she said, slowing down. “Must I keep going?”

“Do not stop,” said the voice, sounding somewhat closer. “You have almost found me.”

After Petula passed the last of the trees, the grass disappeared and the hills turned into jagged rocks. She tried to change direction and return to the safety of the forest, but she couldn't control her motion. Petula drifted along, just above the rocky terrain, until an iron cage appeared in the distance. The forbidding bars stretched from the ground to the sky, high enough to enclose the tallest trees. Inside the cage, a solitary figure sat patiently.

“Come closer to me,” said the human. “You have nothing to fear.”

Against her will, Petula floated forward, her unblinking eyes growing wider each second. She reached the cage and didn't stop, passing through the solid iron bars and tumbling onto the rocks in front of the heavy-set human.

He had shaved his hair down to the scalp on one side of his head but allowed it to grow longer on the other side. His face was compact, and his body was full of battle scars. Beside him, an enormous broadsword was stuck blade-first in the ground.

“Greetings, Petula. I am Oengus,” he said. “Thank you for rescuing me from this prison. I have waited far too long.”

Her heart beat faster, thumping harder and harder against her chest until she could see its movement through her shirt. Once again, she tried to turn around and escape, but her legs refused to obey. She was trapped in the cage with a human.

“How do you know my name?” she asked. “We have never met before.”

“You are an Arboreal,” said Oengus, piercing her with his stare.

He yanked the sword from the ground and walked forward. Petula remained motionless while Oengus passed first through her and then through the iron bars. Outside the cage, he spun around to face her.

“The Ferfolk are to blame!” he shouted and raised his sword into the air. “We shall destroy them all! No mercy! Go!”

Petula gasped in her chair. She was still resting comfortably in her tree house, and her husband hadn’t yet returned. The ebony staff, no longer on the table, lay across her lap. Without thinking, she tossed it against the far wall.

“You are obviously cursed to bring visions of terror,” she said, wrinkling her nose. “You must be returned to your home in the bog. May you rot in the water until you have returned to the soil!”

She crossed the room but stopped short, gazing in horror at the black staff. “I cannot do it,” she moaned, afraid to get any closer to the evil human artifact.

