

# RISE OF THE FALLEN

## RUIN MIST: DAWN OF THE AGES



**ROBERT STANEK**  
BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# **RISE OF THE FALLEN**

---

**RUIN MIST: DAWN OF THE AGES**



**ROBERT STANEK**

This is a work of fiction. All the characters, names, places, and events portrayed in this book either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to any actual locale, person, or event is entirely coincidental.

# **RISE OF THE FALLEN**

---

## **RUIN MIST: DAWN OF THE AGES**

Copyright © 2010 by Robert Stanek.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Reagent Press LLC, Attention: Permissions Department, P.O. Box 362, East Olympia, WA 98540-0362.

**ISBN: 978-1-57545-097-1**

Text and illustrations copyright © 2010 Robert Stanek. All rights reserved. Published by Reagent Press LLC. RP BOOKS, REAGENT PRESS, RUIN MIST, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Reagent Press LLC.



**REAGENT PRESS**  
**WWW.REAGENTPRESS.COM**

# **PART I**

## **KARTHOLD**

The Cycle 11226  
Drakón Standard

*The ageless rose up, tall as mountains  
And breathed fire across the hundred worlds.*  
—Translated from the *Secti Monter Drakón*,  
or *Book of the Dragons*



# CHAPTER ONE

All across the dark, windswept lands, a million slaves from a hundred broken worlds and their slavered beasts toiled in and about the pits created by their excavations, unearthing and reclaiming relics of a forgotten age for the never-seen gods of their age. The overlords kept watch from high above, looking down on the labor. Now and again, as the tocks and tolls passed, a cry of discovery would issue forth. Then those closest to the caller would rush in by the hundreds and thousands, toiling as one until the new artifact was unearthed and dragged away by ropes and mute beasts.

Sometimes, after an unearthing, an overlord would grant reward to all laborers in the sector, allowing them to pause in their work and partake of liquid bread spread freely at the overlord's beckoning, offered as if a gift. Rastín was one of the few who never took the offered drink, relying instead on a pouch of water and hard black biscuits he secreted away and packed each morning before the day's labors began.

After an unearthing an overlord would always grant reward to the laborer who made the discovery, descending from the heavens on his

## ROBERT STANEK

---

platform until he was eight or nine spans from the ground, stepping down living stairs and across a living carpet formed by the workers until he stood before the recipient of his gift. He would then raise his staff of office to the heavens while calling out to the ageless gods, and then he would touch the tip of his staff to the top of the recipient's head. In the end, the recipient would thank and bless the overlord even as lightning flashed from the heavens and ripped him from the fields and this life.

Such an end was said to be a blessing, and every worker in every corner of the dark land was expected to pay tribute to it by crying out to the heavens and begging for such glory for themselves. Even the dimwitted beasts would join in, though they had no tongues and could only make guttural croonings. Rastín did not believe such an end brought glory, however, finding only the futility and folly of it. So while others cried with their blessings to the ageless, he exclaimed muddled curses, secretly damning the ageless with every foul word of every foul language he had learned in his short life.

By evenfall this day, Rastín had cursed the ageless an unprecedented seventeen times, and there was palpable tension in the air as he joined the lines before the thousand-fold gates to return to the realm of the overlords. A daring few whispered of the day's many unearthings and the expectations of a major discovery—possibly that of a cornerstone—soon. Such a find would make the discoverer one of the exalted, raising him or her from drudgery and postponing the blessed parting until such time as the ageless themselves willed the exalted from this life.

Rastín had no desire to become an exalted, yet he could not help thinking about what such a future would mean for him and the companion he chose. It was the one true dream left to one who

## RISE OF THE FALLEN

---

### RUIN MIST: DAWN OF THE AGES

otherwise had no aspirations, no dreams, no escape save blessed death.

Because his dig site was far from the thousand-fold gates, there were many ahead of him by the time he joined the lines. In the distance he could hear the night criers as the darkening skies and the disembarking masses emboldened the criers to emerge from their shrouded hiding places.

The overlords hovered high above on their floating platforms, gathered in clusters. Their staffs of office, transformed into fiery whips with long sinewy tendrils, lashed out occasionally at the empty spaces between the illuminated lines and the deepening shadows. Rastín knew this without having to look back as he began to make his way forward through the lines. His youth and lineage ensured that he had only to touch a hand to the shoulder of anyone blocking his way to be allowed to pass, so in this way he made his way toward the front of his line.

Reaching the gate platform, he stepped forward and made ready for the brief passage between this land and that of the overlords. A dense bunch of mute beasts moved before the gate, however, refusing to pass through or allow others to do so. Two guardians, one on either side of the gate, brought their weighted chains around and carved a swath through the gathered beasts. Yet this did not stop them from blocking Rastín's passage until several other laborers moved ahead of him and went through the gate.

Shaken by the incident but resolved to leave the dark land, Rastín stepped into the gate. Bone-chilling cold found him for an instant, and then just as suddenly he was walking through one of the colossal passageways that led through the massive fortifications surrounding the immortal city of the ageless.

The cool, moist air in the corridor was invigorating after his long



## ROBERT STANEK

---

day. As he emerged from the corridor, open skies and mammoth towers greeted him. The way paths between the towers were crowded, the air paths no better as peoples and beasts of all manner abided in the city. He was excited about the prospect of speaking with his father and conferring with him about the possibility of yet another cornerstone find, and for this reason he made his way rapidly to the encampment of the people of Élvemere, his people.

His family's pavilion was in the farthest corner of the camp, its aging silk and cloth a reminder of a past lost to the mists of time. Looking at the tattered silk and cloth fluttering in the wind, he could not help mourning a time he had never known, for his father's mind lived in this time.

Alborn and Djerg, who stood guard outside the pavilion, stepped aside as he approached. He returned their gesture of respect with a kind word of greeting. "Pritish," he told them in the language of ceremony. It was a greeting of praise and honor and the guards returned it heartily, for in this place none were slaves or masters.

King Enáthon Túrring was lying in his once-garish bed of ruined silks and satins with many bloated pillows to keep him upright. Rastín no longer noticed the ruin of his father's body or the serpent magi who kept his father alive, even though little flesh remained under the blankets.

He knew the ageless maintained his father because his father kept order, and without his father there would be chaos. He did not resent the serpent magi, but he knew their duties included keeping watch and reporting back to their masters.

"Salus, salut," he told his father, again using the language of ceremony. It was tradition, speaking to his father's health and honor. After kissing the living side of his father's face he knelt and bowed his

## RISE OF THE FALLEN

---

### RUIN MIST: DAWN OF THE AGES

head, waiting for his father to speak.

“Dny, my son,” the old king said, the living side of his face suddenly showing color. “Sadly, you have only just missed your mother.”

Still kneeling, Rastín Dnyarr Túrring looked up at his father. He said nothing of the fact that his mother had gone to the blessed land many cycles ago. Instead, he smiled and said, “I should have liked to have seen her. She would have been pleased at my discoveries this day.”

“She would have been,” his father said turning his good eye to regard his son, his dead eye continuing to stare off into the distance. Then he muttered something about food and drink.

Rastín knew the food and drink was for him, because his father rarely ate now. He stood, poured a glass of water from a silver pitcher. He drank deeply, and then ate the leftovers from his father’s discarded meal. The food quenched a hunger in him that he had not noticed until he started eating.

While he ate, his father spoke of the flat, open grassland beyond his pavilion and the forest that was just beyond the line of sight. Though this place existed for them only in dream now, Rastín knew it well, for it was the land of his people and his father spoke of it often. “Your mother walks to the trees. She wants to speak to the ancient ones. Will you meet her before she returns?”

“I will, father. I will take your stallion, Windrunner. I should like to speak with the ancient ones myself.”

“Good, good. She will be so pleased to see you, and the two of you can talk. You know my time comes, I can sense it, and so it will be you who must lead our people. Do you honor the old ways? Do you sing the praises of your kin?”

## ROBERT STANEK

---

“I do, father. I honor always those in the blessed lands. I pray for them to protect and keep me on the path.”

“This is good, my son. You will make a fine high king. The kings of all lands will swear fealty to you, and our people will regain our rightful place.”

“On my honor, as I live and breathe, father, I will restore our family name.” As he said this, Rastín hid a tear that came to his eye, for the truth of those words was too close to his heart. And although this great sadness was fleeting, it was enough to interrupt his second consciousness—the self he kept hidden to all save his father’s second self.

His fingers lost their grip on his father’s arm. The lost grip broke the connection. His father uttered a stray word—a single word, no more, no less, but it was an unexpected word for those who kept watch and thought they saw and heard all.

Rastín pretended not to hear the word. Instead, he picked up the silver pitcher and filled a cup, then helped his father drink from the cup, careful not to raise the cup too quickly as his father could only drink from one side of his mouth. He dabbed the side of his father’s face with a cloth, and then returned to the affectedly proper speech to which the magi were accustomed. “Father, I should be going soon. Do you have a message to pass along to mother?”

“I should like to go with you, my son,” his father replied, “but as I cannot—”

Rastín’s second self heard no more of the other self’s conversation as he continued with his account of the dig. “Seventeen unearthings is unprecedented. The whisperers say a cornerstone is at hand.”

“Indeed,” his father said, “the final one at last then.”

“The last, are you sure?”

## RISE OF THE FALLEN

---

### RUIN MIST: DAWN OF THE AGES

“We are elf kind, High King of Élvemere. We see it, fully formed.”

Rastín had not meant to offend his father. “What will come of it?”

“It will open the path to a place not seen since the Firstborn walked and dreamed. A place both outside time and within it. In this place, you could live a lifetime, return to our place, and find that millennia have passed or that no time has passed at all. From this place, the ageless will rule over all living things for all time. I can see this as clearly as I’ve ever seen—”

Rastín interrupted, speaking quickly while the vision was at its strongest, “What will become of us? What will become of our people?”

“The ageless,” Túrring began to say, but further words became impossible as he gurgled and gasped for breath as blood bubbled up from his lungs.

Rastín collapsed his thoughts and became one within himself. He picked up the churn bucket from the floor and put it under his father’s chin while leaning his father forward with his other hand. While his father coughed and sputtered, he said a silent prayer to his mother. “Protect and keep us,” he whispered, imagining her waiting for them both in the blessed land.



#### **About the Author**

Robert Stanek is the bestselling author of more than 100 books for young people and adults. He lives with his wife and children in the Pacific Northwest in the United States, and is intensely fascinated with our natural world. He loves the outdoors and frequently takes his family on short trips to see the natural wonders of the Pacific Northwest.

**Learn more at [www.robertstanek.com](http://www.robertstanek.com)**



**Enter the world of Ruin Mist**  
**[www.ruinmistmovie.com](http://www.ruinmistmovie.com)**

**ROBERT  
for  
BATTLE  
SIA NEK  
RUIN MISTK**



**BETRAYAL**  
**A DAUGHTER OF KINGS**  
COMIC #1

Enter the other realm now and see what she sees. Dark dreams disturb her sleep. She is a daughter of kings about to be dealt fate's darkest hand. Her name is Delinna Alder.



Hello?  
Hello?

Strange sounds awake her. Frightened, she sits up and looks around her room. She makes deep noises in her throat, can you hear them?



She puts a hand to her head, her eyes wide with terror. In her mind's eye she sees a phantom surrounded by tendrils of lightning and flame. It is magic. Darkness to those who believe the ancient texts; light to those who can see beyond prejudice and fear.





It is him.

The one they call the Watcher, returned from afar. But she does not know that as she screams. She sees only the phantom emerging from shadows.

Shadows left behind, hood lowered, the face is revealed. She knows him. He is Xith, a shaman of the northern reaches and the last of the watchers. To some, he is an impish gnome. To her, he is salvation.

You found it at last!

He doesn't answer. His face is grim; his mood, ever darker. It is a strange hour to intrude on a princess's sleep. A strange hour to wake a daughter of kings.

You startle me awake and say nothing?

If the Watcher seems familiar to you, that's as may be. Like the Keepers, Watchers have been seen across time. They are both within time and outside its bounds.





Smell her fear as he reveals it. She knows immediately that it is one of the four—an Orb of Power fashioned by Dnyarr, the last great Elf King of Greys. The orb is what the Watcher has been seeking; why he has arrived at such an odd hour.

If Keepers are masters of lore, dream and shadow. Watchers are masters of voice, magic and illusion. His command can be her will. Her fear to this will be as wind to water.

He shows it to her.

Touch it!

I mustn't!

You must!

She doesn't want to, but it beckons to her. She must touch it. How could she do otherwise! And yet she is able to refuse its pull if only for a few beats of her heart. The toll will tell true though. It will. This I can say for sure.

Please, no.

Answer its call. Take it now. Both hands. No fear.



It responds to her touch, exploding to life as legend says it must, for she is a daughter of kings. It feeds on her earliest memories first, ripping them from her and leaving her gasping before tearing through all the days of her young life. It knows her now as even she does not yet know herself.

Hungry still. It looks for more; it reaches out to him. He holds the power back, keeps it from consuming him and her.

Stop! No more!

How! Is it even possible! It wants so much more. It hungers.

It wants ME-E-E!

We've only begun. The orb gives as much as it takes. You must ask it to give back.

The keys, you have them. Don't think, do, and it will respond.

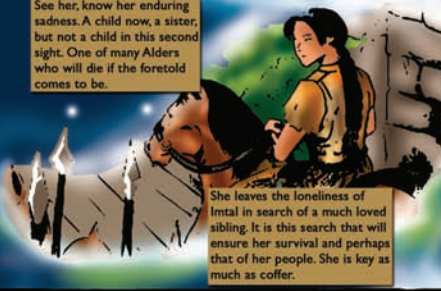
Then give yourself to it!

The Watcher commands and Delinna gives. She hopes it has the answers she's long sought, but at what cost? Her salvation? Her damnation? There's always a cost. Sometimes, a cost in flesh. Other times, a cost far greater for just as the ages cut across time, so does the power of the orb. It knows no bounds and no one person can truly contain its power.

But will it tell her who lives and who dies? These are the answers long sought and the reasons for the Watcher's long journeys across dark lands. True enough, death and sorrow have been foretold, but can these things be undone before they are done? Will the Alders end truly bring down the Kingdoms of Men?

The One True Path has many turnings and a woman's quest must begin with a girl's decisions. But who can be saved and who must be lost? Difficult choices for anyone. For one as young as she, choices that will haunt the days of her life.

See her, know her enduring sadness. A child now, a sister, but not a child in this second sight. One of many Alders who will die if the foretold comes to be.



She leaves the loneliness of Imtal in search of a much loved sibling. It is this search that will ensure her survival and perhaps that of her people. She is key as much as coffer.

Take control of the orb or it will control you.

Do as I command. Tell it to show you who must live.

Exert your will. Demand release. Command!

Yes, find control, focus. That's it now. We must be sure. We must know more.

It wants too much. Its touch is agony. The pain!

Please, make it stop. Let me find release. I can't. No more!

It wants. I feel it devouring all that I am.

Her, and them, and him. They are the ones I see most clearly.

See the two, know their determination. They are Elves of the Reaches, not seen in the Lands of Men for a thousand years. Of the two, one will be lost and the other saved, and yet both must live. How can this be so?



They leave Lektorall, City of Elves, in search of hope, but will find betrayal instead of brotherhood. Men and elves are enemies as it has ever been since the War of Blood.



Give me release. P-I-e-e-a-s-e! I beg you take it from me.

Don't cry, hold in the pain. Almost done... Yes, we are, and then rest.

No more, no more! I want none of it. It hungers; I can't control it.

Rest comes, a deep peace. Hold on only now—yes, there... That's it. Pass it willingly now.

See the boy, child of her loins, know his terror. See him meet his death in the eyes of the great beast. It is a shifter. The shifters have a part. Yes, they do. Terrible and dark.





Good, good. That's it. A careful focusing now.

Is it over? Will it ever be over? Can it ever be over?

You've done well. Now command it! Pass your power to me for safekeeping.

You are safer now without this burden. Power as this was not meant for your hands. The line may be kept and it may be Adrina saved. There is hope. The shifters will hunt me now.

Would that she were that fortunate. It hunts by instinct. Quickly, efficiently, dispassionately. It will find a way to feel her touch again. To make her tremble, to know her fear, to grasp her innocence. He knows all this, but says nothing for now. The knowledge would consume her as surely as it wants to consume her even now.

For all!

The Keeper comes, accept his gift willingly.

I want nothing of gifts or powers. I want only peace and quiet. Rest.

The Watcher leaves her to her peace and quiet, to her rest. But can you smell it? Not the sweat of her labors, but the fear. It has returned unasked for. She sees the things the orb has shown her, feels the length of the chain wrapping the ball of the world.

Even at this young age, she senses her destiny, knows its impossible weight and measure.

*In this extraordinary new fantasy epic, bestselling author Robert Stanek returns readers to the fantasy universe of Ruin Mist, where the fate of a hundred worlds rests on the shoulders of an Alvish boy born into bondage...*

For thousands of years the ageless masters have ruled the hundred worlds, conquering all who oppose them while raising those who bring them glory. But in remote Karthold, the boy Rastin struggles to keep alive the memories of his fallen people and fulfill the wishes of his ailing father. For an Alv he is young; he has no great power to help him, no true magic to light his way and keep him safe. Yet as his life turns increasingly grim, he must find the courage and resourcefulness to befriend his most savage enemies if there is to be hope for him and his people.

#### **About the Author**

Robert Stanek is the bestselling author of more than 100 books for young people and adults. He lives with his wife and children in the Pacific Northwest in the United States, and is intensely fascinated with our natural world. He loves the outdoors and frequently takes his family on short trips to see the natural wonders of the Pacific Northwest.

Published by Reagent Press  
[www.reagentpress.com](http://www.reagentpress.com)

