

# ROBERT STANEK

for

# BATTLE RUIN MIST



COMIC #3

# ROBERT STANEK

## BATTLE FOR RUIN MIST



**BATTLE FOR RUIN MIST: A DAUGHTER OF KINGS, Comic #3.** First printing 2011. ISBN 978-1-57545-886-1. Published by Reagent Press, LLC, P.O. Box 362, East Olympia, WA 98540-0362. Copyright © 2011 Robert Stanek. All rights reserved. All characters featured in this issue and the distinctive names and likenesses thereof, and all related indicia are trademarks of Robert Stanek. The stories, characters, names and incidents mentioned in this book are entirely fictional, and any similarity which may exist to any actual locale, person or event is entirely coincidental. Original printing in the U.S.A. For ordering or inquires, visit [www.reagentpress.com](http://www.reagentpress.com).



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, Rebirth (A Daughter of Kings, Comic #3), is the third of four and 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, Barnesandnoble.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.



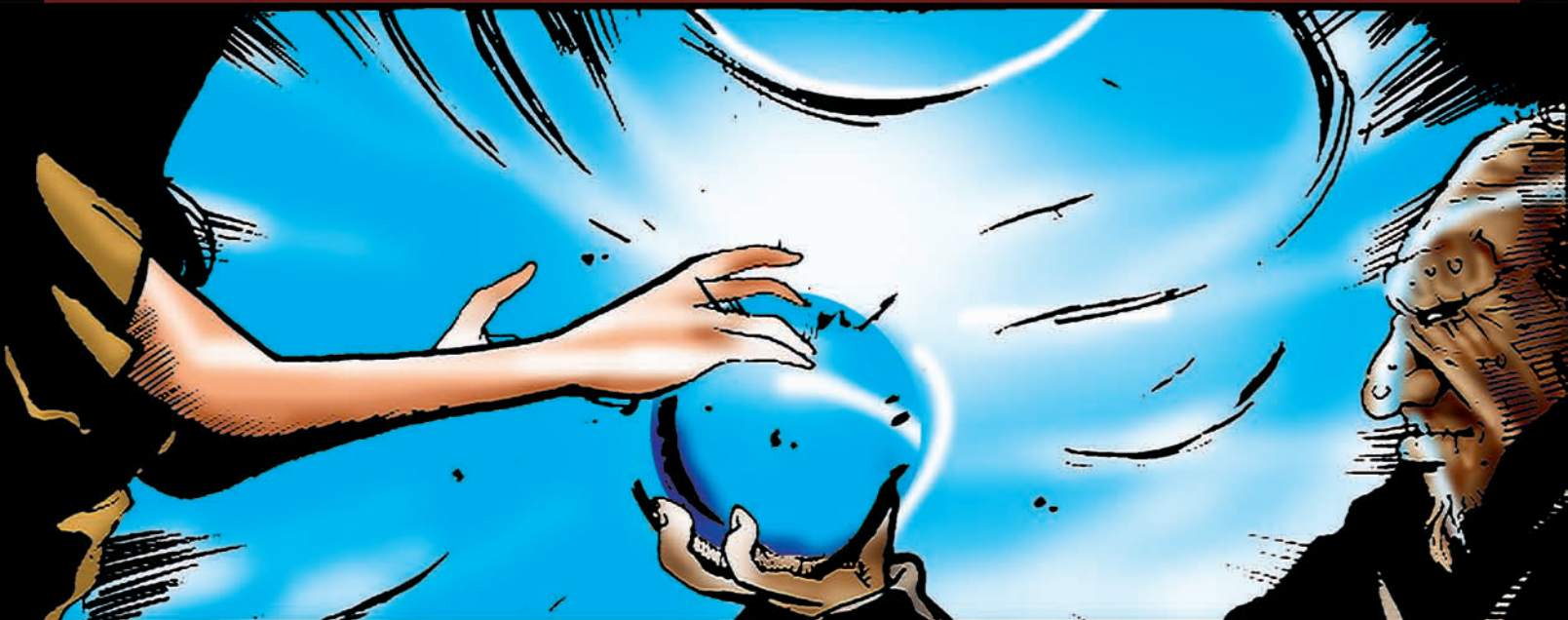
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In an age long since lost to myth and memory, a race of supreme giants known as titans ruled over all the lands of Ruin Mist from their homes on Over-Earth. Without question, titans were the masters of the gates. They moved freely between realms and 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 sealed 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 the War of Ten Million Tears. Victory for men 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.





Much as the Path wraps around everything and all, Nedraw's fire surrounds Delinna Alder. She knows both horror and dismay.

What more could your masters possibly want?

Heed the Lady, follow the Watcher, deliver the Keeper, mind the Path.

Fire and ash you want; fire and ash you become!

The flames both burn and cleanse, and yet do not truly burn—for her pain is not of the flesh.

Her pain is of the mind, for it is the last vestiges of her former self that Nedraw wants her to give...

...and why she fights so steadfastly not to give.

But there are few who can resist a dragon's will.

Even fewer still who can endure a cleansing to the depths of the soul.

And yet she fights because she does not know how to do otherwise...

You'll not take what I won't give freely.

...and because it is her path.

When Nedraw learns this, it only increases his fury. His fiery rage seeks to transform all.

But her will is too great to break...

What is happening?

...and so Nedraw pours himself and his fire into a jeweled pendant...

...that he wraps around her neck.


Then Nedraw opens the way to the one who can bend Delinna's will.

No, no, no. Return me at once to the palace and my fate.

It must be me, and not him. Ansh is the one, not I.

Her gift helps her sense what's coming. She sees danger ahead. But her instincts about what's happening are all wrong.

She fears for Ansh when she should fear for herself, for she doesn't truly understand how bad things are about to get.



The path is before her. There seems to be but one way to go. The tower beckons.

She does not know it, but her every step takes her closer to that which she cannot avoid.

It is his tower in his domain. Here, he is the master of all.

He knows this and would tell her this if she were to ask, but she is drawn as much by fear as by fate and so she walks on in silence.

At the very end of the path, at the very entrance of his tower, she pauses to look down into the depths of the chasm below.

Mother, forgive me. I did not see as fully as I should have seen. So many branches, so many turnings. Knowing now does not make it any less bitter.

What virtue is there in any of this, Keeper? I've done everything and still it is all dirt and ash.

...where they blot out the light of the heavens and cast all into shadow. And from this host of thousands...

He comes.

Wha-a-at is this?

That's when she hears the flutter of thousands of wings as they shoot skyward from the depths...

We are Zanzas, King of Dragons.

Dark dreams of days past must seem ordinary now, for Zanzes stalks every corner of her mind.

His very presence within her thoughts bends and breaks her as an ill-tempered child might break a least-favored toy.

Oh, but you have... Nedraw is an extension of my will. By refusing him, you refused me.

Delinna Alder, you dared to refuse my will. Explain yourself.

You must believe me. I've never knowingly refused you.

I did not know. How could I know this?

I do not wish to be anyone's play thing.

I chose because a choice was needed.

And yet you did know, for I have seen that you did. The Path is not a plaything, though you most certainly are.

And yet you are because I say you are. Tell me, plaything, and think carefully lest you cease to amuse and interest, what gave you the right?

Who said you were the one to choose? How bold, how stupid.

Take whatever retribution you want. I accept; I refuse no longer.

The gifts are mine. You cannot take from me, or else you would have already.


You speak in riddles.

As if you now had that choice. The true strength of your line is held by the key; perhaps she could, but not you. It has been an age since the last. It has.

Careful. Play on the edges of a thing you dare not try to know the bounds and depths of and get lost within. The echoes will continue with or without you.

No, the riddle is before you. Your choice now is simple. Choose a door; take a path. One of three.



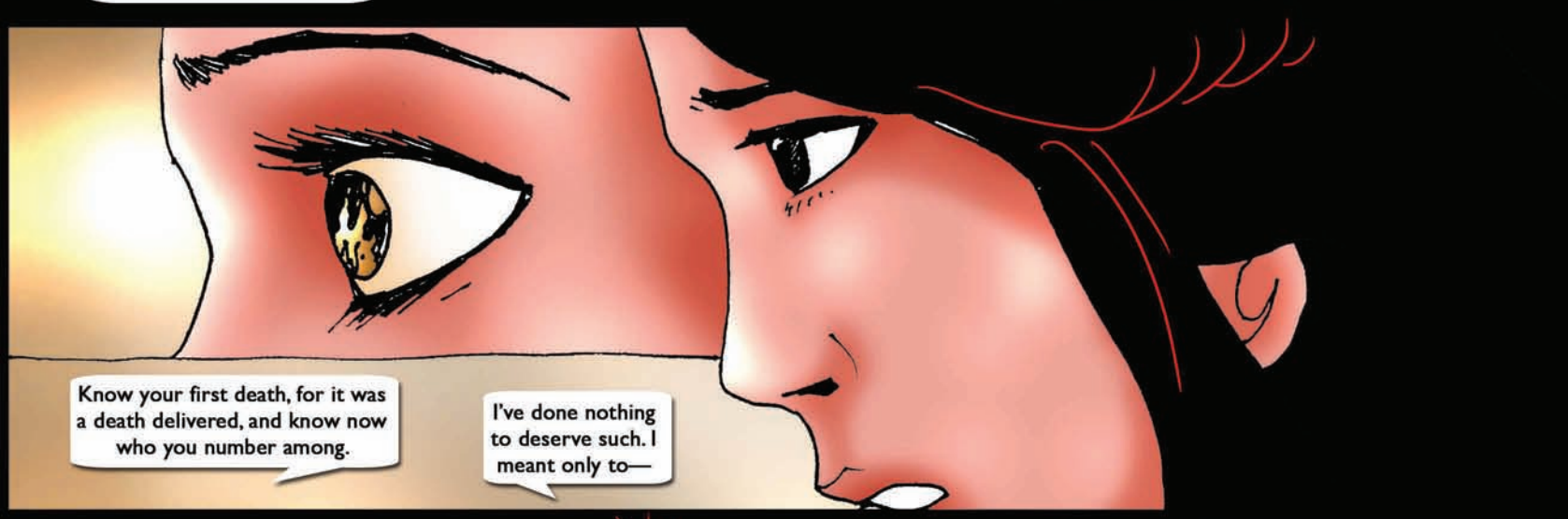


And if I refuse, what then?  
Would you kill me here  
where I stand?

It is you who is in my service, not I  
in yours. I've a need for your gifts,  
and so you will have the long life  
your mother will never have, while  
I've the power to make it so.


I feared as much. You  
shame me with life  
when I wish death.

You feared far too little. Your  
true death when it comes will  
be a thing begged for... Taste  
now what comes.



Know your first death, for it was  
a death delivered, and know now  
who you number among.


I've done nothing  
to deserve such. I  
meant only to—



Please, no more. I'll  
choose if I must.


Still your tongue. Listen now. As I  
live in exile, you will soon. Seek out  
the protection of the sisters. Above  
all else, see to the key. Hold the  
thread of her path if you must until  
it is time to send her to me.

I release the Fourth Wind now as I  
can keep time still no longer. The  
game continues, choose quickly or  
all will be lost. Each door leads to  
a life, so see now the threads of  
these paths and choose wisely.



She sees with human eyes.  
Her human heart makes the  
choice as much as her mind.

Would that Delinna could see the  
paths as Zanzas sees them, but  
she ain't the King of Dragons.



Can you sense what  
comes as she does?

