

# Shards of the Emerald Throne

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The wind howled across the Dragonfang Ridge like a chorus of lost spirits, carrying with it the scent of ozone and ancient stone. Arin Stormward, his apprentice robes plastered to his frame, clutched his staff against the gale, the crystal at its tip flickering with unstable light. Beside him, Ser Caldre stood immovable as a bastion, his silver plate scarred and gleaming with rain, one gauntleted hand resting on the pommel of his greatsword.



"The seer's vision was precise," Caldre's voice was a low rumble, barely audible over the storm. "The Shard of Storms rests in the highest tower of the Sundered Keep. A place no sane soul has tread in five centuries."

"Because it's guarded," Arin muttered, his eyes not on the distant, broken silhouette, but on the swirling clouds above it. The patterns were wrong. They coiled against the wind, forming vortices of deep, emerald green. "Not by men. The air itself is awake."

Before Caldre could reply, a third figure emerged from the mist behind them, her steps silent on the wet rock. Lady Myriel, Court Seer of the Sunstone Throne, wore robes the colour of twilight, and her eyes, milky with prophecy, saw more than the physical realm.



"The guardian is not merely awake, Arin," she said, her voice carrying an unnatural clarity. "It is watching. The shard calls to its kin. Your presence, young Stormward, is a beacon." She extended a

slender hand towards the citadel. "The dragon Vaelrix sleeps no longer. He broods over his hoard of broken history."

A deafening crack of thunder, not from the sky, but from the citadel, shook the very mountain. Stones the size of houses tumbled from a central tower. And within the newly opened gap, something moved. A vast, serpentine neck unfurled, scales catching the fractured light like a mountain of polished jade. Two eyes, each larger than a shield, ignited with intelligent, ancient malice.



"By the Sunstone..." breathed Caldre, his sword sliding from its sheath with a steely whisper.

"Hold!" Myriel commanded, though a tremor of fear touched her voice. "He does not attack. He observes. The shard has made him... curious."

As if hearing her, a voice echoed in their minds, deep as tectonic plates shifting, old as the first rain.  
\*Little lights. You carry a fragment of the Whole. The Sky-Sunderer.\* It was not sound, but pure concept, pressed into their consciousness. The dragon, Vaelrix, lowered his colossal head, bringing one immense eye level with the ridge across the chasm.

Arin fought the urge to flee, the primal terror screaming in his blood. Instead, he raised his staff, focusing his will. "We seek only the Shard of Storms, Ancient One. To mend what was broken."

\*Mend?\* The mental voice dripped with scorn and sorrow. \*You seek to reforge the Crown of Akal? A tool of dominion. My kind remember its weight. We who were bound by it.\*

Lady Myriel stepped forward, her seeing crystal blazing. "The Crown was shattered, its tyranny ended. But the Void-Spawn stirs in the deep places, Vaelrix. The shards are not a weapon, but a seal. We need them all."

The dragon was silent for a long moment, the only sound the shrieking wind. \*The seer speaks true. I taste the shadow on the edge of the world.\* His great eye fixed on Arin. \*The mage-blood. You bear the Stormward lineage. Your ancestor was the one who shattered the Crown, who freed the last of my brood from its thrall.\*



A revelation, crashing over Arin like the storm itself. His family's secret shame, their lost legacy, was this? Not betrayal, but liberation?

"Then let us finish his work," Arin called out, newfound strength in his voice. "Help us."

\*I do not help mortals. But I will... test.\* Vaelrix's wings snapped open, blotting out the sky. A torrent of emerald-tinged lightning lashed the chasm between the ridge and the citadel, not attacking them, but sculpting. The stone sizzled and melted, reforming into a narrow, arcing bridge of obsidian glass.

\*Cross the Storm-Bridge. Face the echoes of the past that guard my hoard. Retrieve your shard from the heart of the keep. If you are worthy of your blood, you will live. If not, your fragment will join my collection.\*

With that, the immense dragon withdrew into the shattered tower, leaving the perilous bridge humming with residual power.

Ser Caldre eyed the crackling path. "A test. Or a polite execution."

"It is a thread of fate," Myriel corrected, her blind eyes wide. "The bridge is not of pure lightning. It is woven with memory. Tread carefully, for you will walk through shadows of the Last War."

Arin took the first step onto the bridge. It was solid, yet vibrated with a psychic echo. Images flickered at the edges of his vision: armies of men and dragons locked in combat, a brilliant crown on a brow of stone, a great shattering. He pressed on.



Halfway across, the echoes solidified. Phantom dragons, smaller and less distinct than Vaelrix, swooped in silent roars. Spectral knights charged. Caldre batted at a phantom spear, his sword passing through it with a flash of light. "Illusions!" he growled.

"Illusions with bite!" Arin cried, as a dragon's ghostly breath washed over him. Cold, deeper than winter, seeped into his bones. He channeled energy through his staff, casting a ward of warm sunlight, and the phantom dissipated with a shriek.

Lady Myriel walked through the chaos untouched, her form slightly out of phase with the echoes. "They do not see me. My sight is already in their time. Focus! The bridge responds to your will, Arin. Shape it!"

Gritting his teeth, Arin poured his concentration not into defense, but into the bridge itself. He remembered his lessons on storm-magic, on the eye of the tempest. He sought the calm within the memory of violence. The bridge's vibrations softened. The phantoms faded, becoming distant, mournful whispers.

They reached the other side, the entrance to the Sundered Keep yawning before them like a stone throat. The air was still and thick with dust and power.

Inside the vast, roofless hall, treasures beyond imagining lay heaped-not just gold and gems, but broken weapons of legend, petrified eggs, and towering statues toppled. And at the center, on a pedestal of black basalt, floated a shard of crystal. It crackled with a silent, internal storm, lightning frozen within its heart. The Shard of Storms.

But between them and it, the floor was not stone. It was a mosaic, vast and intricate, depicting the great Crown of Akal. And one piece, directly in their path, was missing-a piece exactly the size of the shard on the pedestal.



"A final test," Myriel whispered. "To prove intent. Place the shard not in your pouch, but in the Crown. To complete the image is to reject its original purpose."

Arin approached the pedestal. As his fingers neared the shard, the static charge made his hair stand on end. He lifted it. It was lighter than he expected, humming with a familiar, familial power. He turned to the mosaic.

With a deep breath, he knelt and fitted the Shard of Storms into the empty space in the mosaic crown.

Light erupted. Not a destructive blast, but a wave of cleansing energy, silent and pure. The mosaic shone, then faded, now complete and whole. The shard in the floor ceased its storming, becoming

dormant, inert glass.

But in Arin's hand, where the shard had been, a new, identical shard now materialized, its storm quieted to a gentle pulse.

The voice of Vaelrix filled the hall once more, but it was softer, almost weary. \*You chose to complete the prison, not claim the key. The Stormward blood runs true. Take your fragment, mage. Use it to seal the darkness. My vigil... continues.\*

Outside, the storm over Dragonfang Ridge began to dissipate, the emerald tints