

# Dark of the Elvenwood

MageLore Book II



Christine Morgan

**Dark  
of the  
Elvenwood**  
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By Christine Morgan

Published by:



**Published by:**  
Sabledrake Enterprises  
PO Box 30751  
Seattle, WA 98103  
<http://www.sabledrake.com>  
[sabledrake@sabledrake.com](mailto:sabledrake@sabledrake.com)

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1<sup>st</sup> Printing – Summer, 2000  
Cover Art Copyright © 2000 Christi Smith Hayden  
Introduction Copyright © 2000 John Kovalic

ISBN 0-9702189-0-7

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Printed in the United States by:  
Morris Publishing  
3212 East Highway 30  
Kearney, NE 68847  
1-800-650-7888

## 8

*Plan anyway. Every once in a while, it might work.*

*—The Book of Yor*

“You’re out of your mind,” Greyquin stated, but since he did so with barely a sound, almost mouthing the words, the words lost much of their impact.

Alphonse ignored him and kept on uncoiling the rope from his pack.

“I’m not jesting around, here. I mean it,” the gnome continued. “What manner of plan is this, anyway? Are you trying to get me killed?”

“If I wanted you dead, I’d just wring your neck. Now hush and give me your grapnel.”

Muttering darkly in gnomish, even though it wasn’t really a language suited for swearing, Greyquin rummaged in his pack and came up with a folding grapnel.

He’d used it many times to scale walls, a skill he’d learned from Cat, and knew it was strong enough to support his weight. His, but not Alphonse’s. At least the big orckin realized that, which was why his plan was something else altogether.

He handed it to Alphonse, who began tying the end of the rope to it. “Why do I have to be the one to make a distraction?” he whispered, peering down at the ring of *Morvalan*. The female, Marona, stood out strikingly among them, head thrown back, amethyst hair cascading to her hips as she murmured strange elven words.

“You’re quicker, I’m stronger. You couldn’t pull up the rope, and I wouldn’t be able to outrun a fireball.”

Darkfire fidgeted unhappily. Greyquin wished again that he had

Cat's knack of understanding him. The best he could do was sense a bit of the drake's emotions. A knot had formed in his belly when Cat and Arien were in danger, followed by a soothing wash of relief when they'd escaped. Now, the feelings he received were of a different sort, determination tinged with regret, sorrow mingled with rage.

Seeing Alphonse's steely black eye upon him, he crept silently out of the balcony alcove and into the curved hallway beyond. He paused and looked back.

"Delvin Fleetfoot was the fastest runner in the history of Gnome Keep, and even *he* wouldn't be able to outrun a fireball," Greyquin said sourly. "Besides, I don't like splitting up any further."

"You had your chance to be leader," Alphonse growled. "Now go! We don't have much time. Can't you *feel* it?"

He could. The atmosphere in the round casting chamber was humming with power, alive with evil malignant force.

With no more objections, he turned away from Alphonse and crept along the hallway. Within moments, he found what he'd been looking for, a marble spiral staircase. Darkfire clenched his arm with sharp claws. The drake's jewellike eyes were a bright gold, glimmering in the half-light.

All too soon, he had skirted the circular chamber until he was on the opposite side of it from Alphonse. One of the arched doorways was just ahead of him, eerie radiance spilling out into the hall. There were dragon columns on this side as well, and Greyquin couldn't help but look sharply at them, imagining the merciless eyes coming to rest on his small form. He'd had his fill of dragons, thank you very much!

Here we go, he thought. I'm going to die. Elsanni, I'll see you on the Other Side.

He silently drew a knife, carefully balanced for throwing. He thought longingly of his favorite spear, now so much wreckage at the bottom of what he'd come to think of as Dragon's Canyon.

Darkfire shifted to the other shoulder, crooning softly and encouragingly in his ear. He stood in the doorway, unnoticed by the busy elves, and aimed at his target.

Across the chamber, he could see Alphonse's face rising over the rim of the balcony like a craggy, ugly moon. Alphonse nodded encouragement.

Greyquin took a deep breath, raised his arm, and waited for the perfect moment. When it came, he was ready. One of the robed elves moved slightly, and his target was clear. He whipped his arm forward and the knife flew, spinning, end over end.

In the timeless instant while the knife was suspended in midair,

he remembered another spell he'd seen Arien use, a spell of shielding. He winced, expecting the knife to miss, but the luck of some kind god was with him in this hostile place.

The knife sailed straight and true, piercing golden robes and shapely flesh. Marona's shriek filled the chamber, almost high enough to shatter glass. Their concentration rudely broken, the wizards staggered, confused.

Marona's hands found the knife, the handle protruding from just below her breasts. She pulled it free, and dark blood poured from the wound. She raised the bloodied knife before her pale eyes. Her face seemed suddenly carved of crystal, the light shining through the skin and into her soul. The knife fell from her shaking hand and she collapsed.

The other elves stood frozen, staring at her crumpled body. Some of the wizards clutched their heads as if in unendurable, skull-shattering pain.

Greyquin also stood frozen, unable to believe that he'd actually done it, that the knife had found its mark. That he, Greyquin, who had flattered and flirted with the Countess of Keyda herself, had withered so much as a warning struck down a beautiful woman.

Suddenly one of the apprentices cried out and pointed. The rest turned and saw him.

For a moment, they all just looked at each other. Then elven faces contorted in rage, and elven hands began tracing mystical symbols in the air, and from elven lips spilled harsh words of magic.

Then gnomish legs turned, and gnomish feet beat a rapid rhythm down the marble hallway while a gnomish heart pounded a matching one.

Darkfire quickly found his wings and sped ahead of him, leading the way. Behind him, he heard the rising elven voices and the sounds of pursuit.

"I hope you know where you're going," he panted, racing after the drake.

\* \* \*

Alphonse blinked, impressed by Greyquin's shot. He, too, had realized at the last minute that the wizards would probably be shielded, that their plan would be undone before it got underway. But Greyquin and his knife had come through.

Enraged elves were dashing out of the room in pursuit of the fleeing gnome. Some of them had sparks crackling around their hands as they called lightning bolts into being. Others grew balls of ice

between their palms.

The elves that did not run from the room gathered around Marona. Funny thing, he noticed, none of them went to her aid with spells of healing. Maybe it didn't fit their philosophy. He'd have to ask Arlen assuming they all got out of here alive.

None of them were looking in his direction. He lowered the grapnel over the rail, paying out the rope as fast as he dared, trying to keep the metal hook from swinging. One clank against a marble pillar, and he'd be revealed.

The grapnel dropped smoothly and bumped the wooden rack. Trying to be patient and quick at the same time, Alphonse tugged and wiggled the rope. He felt like a fisherman trying to land a particularly wily fish, a sport he'd never cared for. Much as his tribe had loved the taste of fish, they just didn't have the knack for catching them.

The hook snagged and the rope pulled taut. He wrapped it around his hands and began to lift. The rack was light, for him if not for the several frail elves that had lugged it in here, but it was bulky and unwieldy. It began to turn, spinning lazily on the end of the rope as it rose. The gems rattled.

He was sure the elves would hear the noise and look over, but at that moment a deep horn call rang through the fort. One of them had rushed off to sound the alarm.

Alphonse hauled harder. The horn call grew louder, and he was sure even elven ears were being deafened. The rack bumped against the underside of the balcony and shuddered. It caught.

"*Arkaz!*" he swore under his breath. As if offended by the vile orcish oath, the rack came hurriedly loose and continued rising.

One of the wizards finally took some sort of action to help Marona, and Alphonse was so startled by it that he very nearly dropped the rope. The wizard beckoned to one of the apprentices, and when the hapless lad came obediently close, the wizard rested one hand upon his brow, the other upon Marona's and intoned some sort of spell.

The apprentice cried out in agony and fell on his face with a thud, and Marona stirred. Her pale eyes opened, and by some quirk of fate, they looked directly into Alphonse's own.

She cried out, shrill and audible even over the alarm.

The elves turned, and the look of surprise on their faces was so comic that he almost dropped the rope again. He'd pulled it high enough. He grabbed the wooden frame and manhandled it over the rail, laughing loudly yet somewhat crazily.

A small ball of ice whizzed past his head and he swallowed his laughter, ducking behind the scant protection of the wooden lattice

He seized the rack in both hands and pulled with all his strength. The rack was magically strong or somesuch, resisting his attempts, but he was very motivated as he heard Marona yelling commands from below. He clenched his teeth, braced himself, and gave a mighty heave.

The wood burst asunder in his hands. Splinters and yellow light puffed around him. Opals clattered and bounced over the floor. He stood, seeing the elves gathering under the balcony, and flung the ruined rack at them. They scattered, but one was too slow and was driven to the floor in a pile of broken wood.

He knelt and scooped up opals, dozens of them, a fortune in gems. The value didn't matter. The magical energy was the important thing. He stuffed opals into his pockets, into his pack.

An elven guardsman raced into the alcove, wielding a sword. He chopped wildly at Alphonse.

He brought his arm up. The blade cut into his arm instead of his chest. He ignored the brief pain, catching the elf by the wrist. He squeezed, and felt tiny bones give way.

The sword fell and the elf gasped. His other hand moved, quicker than quick, and clamped across Alphonse's forehead. "*Talindiran!*" the elf cried.

Alphonse, recognizing a spell when he heard one, tried to duck back, but he was too late. A cloaking blindness fell over his eyes. He almost panicked, then remembered one very important fact that the wizard seemed to have forgotten. Who had ahold of whose wrist.

He pulled, and the elf stumbled forward, caught off-guard. When he felt the body slam into him, Alphonse grabbed a handful of clothes with the other hand. Before the elf could unleash another spell, he was standing, turning toward the rail, and lifting. The elf was light, and his struggles had as much effect as those of a child.

"Catch!" Alphonse bellowed as he hurled the elf into the open space of the casting chamber. He heard the elf's scream, and the cries of the others below, rising above the horn calls. He also heard a satisfying smack.

His foot struck something and he bent to pick it up. It was another opal, smooth and round as an egg. He knew most of them rested in his pockets, but he couldn't remember how many of them were still scattered on the floor. There wasn't time. Blind, stumbling, he made his way clumsily out of the alcove.

He'd only gotten a few steps when his sight came back. Seeing his surroundings reminded him anew of the danger they faced, and he began to run.



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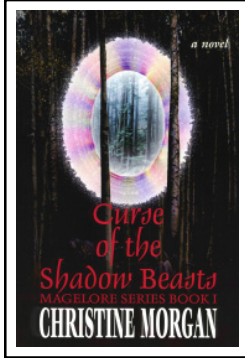
# Books & Games



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Always the home for online orders, free pdf demos and exclusive stories, as well as appearances, reviews and more.

*The MageLore & ElfLore Trilogy  
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They come from beyond the walls of nightmare, hideous creatures bent on seeking and slaughtering, leaving only death and misery in their wake.

Arien Mirida knows them only too well. He has faced them before and witnessed their evil, and fears that their hunger can never be stopped.

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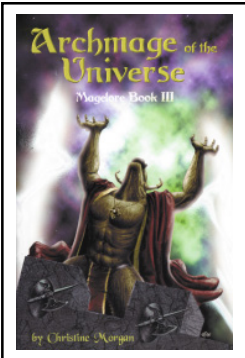
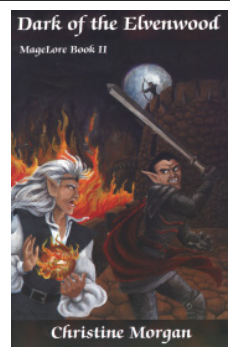
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**Dark of the Elvenwood – MageLore Book II**

They are the Morvalan, elves in the service of a god of destruction. To further their war against humanity, they have joined forces with the minotaur wizard Solarrin. Together, they have hatched a plot to bring about the downfall of the Northlands.

Four reunited companions are all that stand between the Morvalan and success. But as Cat, Arien, Greyquin and Alphonse brave the dangers of the woodlands, a worse peril threatens the very home that they left to save.

\$11.95 • 0-9702189-0-7 • 272 pages



**Archmage of the Universe – MageLore Book III**

He is Solarrin. Once his body was as twisted as his mind. Now inhabiting the form of a minotaur, his physical and magical prowess are without equal.

The young Highlord is his pawn. The city of Thanis is under his control. His next move will plunge the Northlands into war.

The only ones who will stand a chance against him fled on a foolish quest – to bring his predecessor back from the dead.

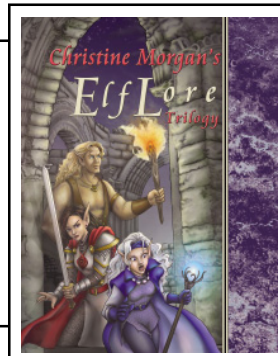
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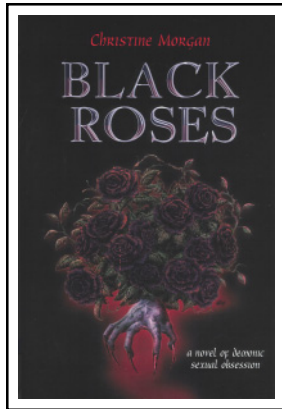
Set 20 years after the MageLore books, the ElfLore Trilogy follows the story of the next generation as they seek to find their place in a world recovering from a devastating war.

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*The Trinity Bay series  
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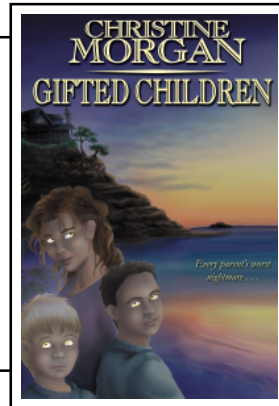
He is the man of their dreams – literally. He feeds on the sleeping minds of the women of Trinity Bay, making them believe their most forbidden fantasies are coming true. Now he has chosen the one woman he intends to be his, no matter how many people must die. Theresa Zane, newly returned to her childhood home, is drawn into a century-old mystery of sex, death, and the ominous haunting of the power behind the black roses.

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The children of Trinity Bay are like any other American kids. Lora Blake has a way with animals. Toby Edwards is the class brain. Jenny Forrester can talk her friends into anything. But in the innocent gifts of these children and others like them, someone has seen a gift of terrifying potential. Seacliff, the house on the hill, has a new secret.

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**Changeling Moon – Trinity Bay Book III**

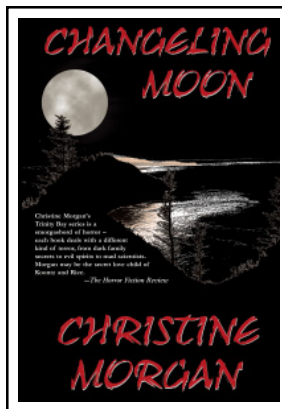
For thousands of years, they have lived among us. Their abilities have given rise to our oldest legends and our deepest fears.

They are changelings. Shape-shifters. Hunters. Creatures of the night. Ruled by the moon, and by their own savage hungers.

To them, we are prey.

Now they have come to Trinity Bay, where one troubled young woman will be caught in the midst of their deadly conflict.

\$14.95 • 0-9771005-0-2 • 284 pages



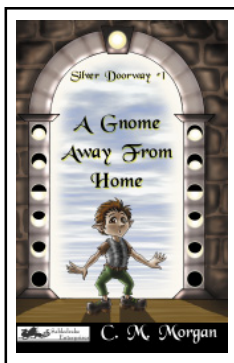
*The Silver Doorway series  
by C. M. Morgan*

Life is complicated for the Broderick kids. They've just moved to a new neighborhood. Their parents are having problems. Mom is always busy with work, Dad is always busy on his computer. Half the time, it seems like they forget they even have children.

The kids are having problems too. Twelve-year-old Katie doesn't like having to take care of little brother Sam. Katie's twin Kevin is only interested in sports, and is mad at Mom and Dad. Eight-year-old Sam can't stand being bossed around by Katie.

The rest of the family thinks Dad's sister, Aunt Ellie, is weird. But when the kids discover a secret room in Aunt Ellie's basement, and a glowing silver doorway that leads to another world, they realize how weird their aunt really is.

Other kids sometimes come through that door. Kids from a world where magic is real, and so are gnomes, elves, goblins, and dragons. They come through the door looking for help from a good sorceress. Instead, they get Katie, Kevin and Sam.



**A Gnome Away From Home – Silver Doorway #1**

Marky of Gnome Keep is lost and alone. He can't find Pip, his puppy. He can't find his way out of the woods. To make matters worse, some giant owls have decided to have him for dinner.

When Dad doesn't show up to get them after Kevin's game, the Broderick kids decide to walk to Aunt Ellie's house. She isn't at home, so they use the spare key.

A sneeze leads them down to the basement, where they follow a little gnome back through the door . . .

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**Dwarves in the Dark – Silver Doorway #2**

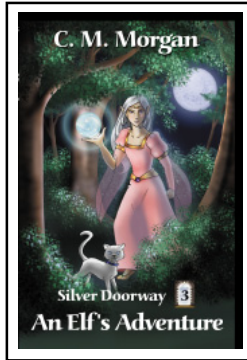
Stone Hammerfine and Sam Broderick might be from different worlds, one of them a dwarven boy and one of them a human boy, but they have something in common. Mean, bossy sisters!

Sam decides to prove he's not a baby by going off to find Stone all by himself. But when giant spiders want to tie them up in webs, and robbers with axes chase them through the dark tunnels, Sam and Stone wonder if maybe this time, just once, they should have listened to their sisters after all.

\$6.99 • 0-9702189-3-1 • 104 pages



Silver Doorway books are written for younger readers, ages 7-12.



### **An Elf's Adventure – Silver Doorway #3**

The world on the other side of the Doorway is a dangerous place, full of giant owls, spiders, goblins, and robbers. So, just in case, Kevin gets a lesson in how to use a sword from Aunt Ellie's boyfriend, Cal.

The kids are spending the whole week with Aunt Ellie, when someone comes through the Doorway. She is the most beautiful girl Kevin has ever seen. She's an elf, able to cast magic spells, and she is on a quest for an enchanted cup that will make her divorcing parents fall in love again. She needs help. She needs someone to protect her.

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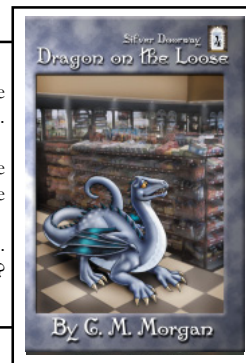
### **Dragon on the Loose – Silver Doorway #4**

Katie thinks that she is going to have a peaceful day. Her brothers are playing video games. She is spending a pleasant afternoon reading . . . until she gets a phone call from Aunt Ellie's cat.

With Ellie gone, Chester knows that there are only three people he can turn to for help. There is no time to waste! A baby dragon is on the loose in Luna Park!

And catching the baby turns out to be just the start of their problems. They have to take the baby home to its mother, but where is its mother?

\$6.99 • 0-9702189-7-4 • 104 pages



### **Orcs Ahoy! – Silver Doorway #5**

Sam Broderick thinks he's got it bad.

That is, he does until he meets Druush. Druush has it a lot worse.

Chagro, the fiercest warrior in the Empire of Gerosh, wants to marry Druush's mother. But before he can, he has to get rid of one thing – her son.

The people of Gerosh are seagoing orcs – strong, tough and blood-thirsty. On his own, there is no way Druush would survive. He needs help. He needs a way to convince the emperor to spare his life.

\$6.99 • 0-9702189-8-2 • 104 pages

### **The Alchemist's Girl – Silver Doorway #6**

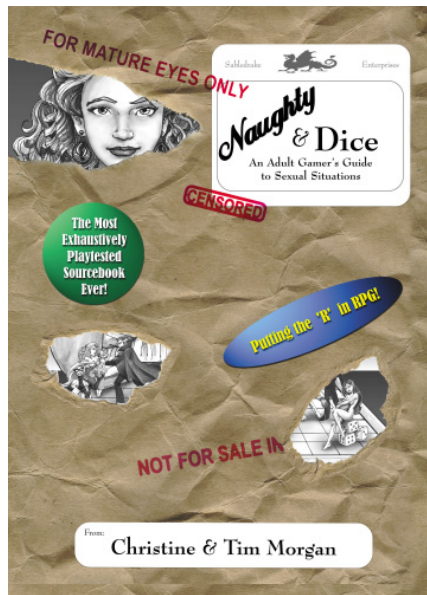
After all of their adventures, keeping the secret of the Silver Doorway has been difficult. But it becomes impossible when hostile wizards from the other side send their magic against Aunt Ellie and Chester.

Katie, Kevin and Sam must find help on both sides of the Doorway in order to rescue their Aunt, but can they do it in time?

*Coming in May, 2007*

\$6.99 • 0-9771005-2-9 • 104 pages

## Roleplaying Games



### Naughty & Dice: An Adult Gamer's Guide to Sexual Situations

Written by Origins Award nominated author Christine Morgan and 20+ year gaming veteran and game store manager Tim Morgan, *Naughty & Dice* takes a light-hearted yet serious look at the topic of sex in RPGs. The tone of the book is centered around themes of tolerance and respect. It is recommended for mature readers, and is easily adaptable to any roleplaying game system.

*Naughty & Dice* includes chapters on:

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Coming  
in  
July,  
2007

*Christine Morgan*



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In addition to the works presented here, Christine Morgan's writing has appeared in many magazines and story anthologies.

"Coppers, the Alchemist" in *Pyramid Magazine* #17.

"The Reaching Wall" in *Cthulhu Sex Magazine* #14, Vol 2.

Several entries in *GURPS Villians*.

"The Dawn of the Living Impaired" in *The Book of All Flesh*.

"Seven Brains, Ten Minutes" in *The Book of Final Flesh*.

"I Am . . ." in *Leather, Lace & Lust*.

"Safe Sucks" in *Closet Desires IV*.

"Monsters" in *Path of the Bold*.

"Don't Look Back" in *Fear of the Unknown*.

"Death and the Scream Queen" in *Hell Hath No Fury*.

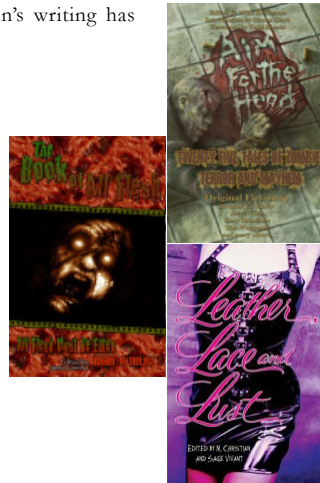
"Easting for Two" in *Dreaded Pall*

and coming soon . . .

"Family Life" in *Aim for the Head*.

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