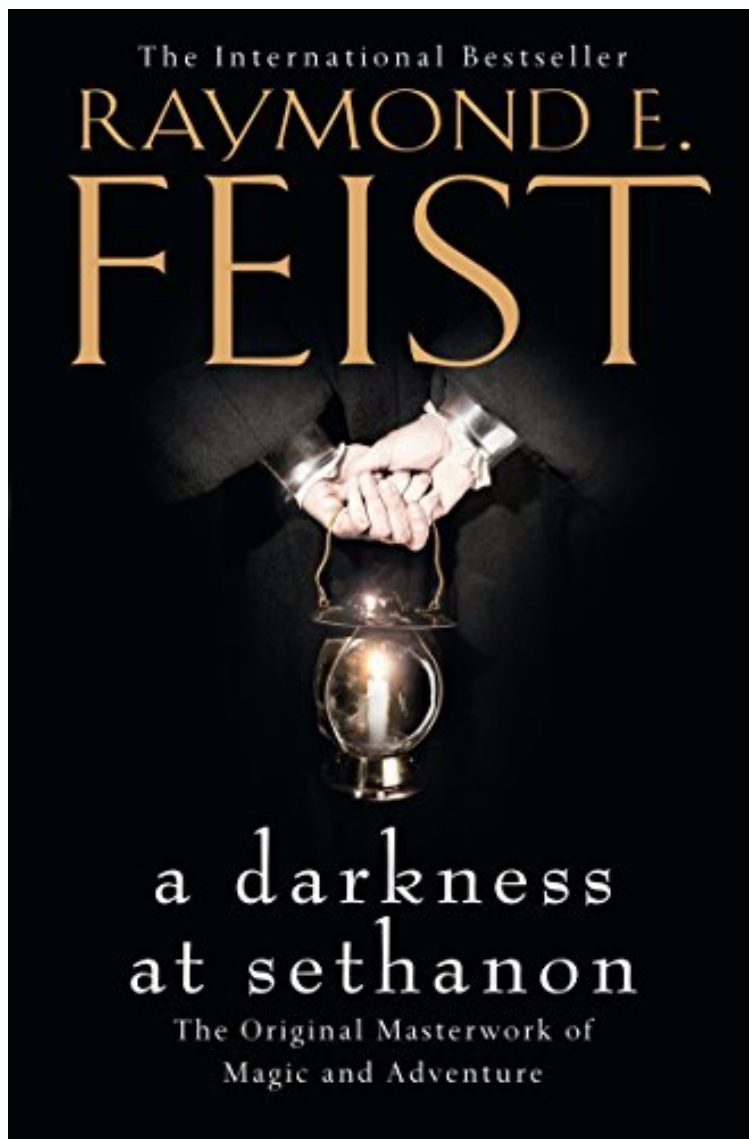


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A Darkness at Sethanon (The Riftwar Saga, Book 3)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe whole of the magnificent Riftwar Cycle by bestselling author Raymond E. Feist, master of magic and adventure, now available in ebookAs Prince Arutha and his companions rally their forces for the final battle with an ancient and mysterious evil, the dread necromancer Marcos the Black has once again unleashed his dark sorcery.Now the fate of two worlds will be decided in a titanic struggle beneath the walls of Sethanon, as the link between Kelewan and Midkemia is revived.A Darkness at Sethanon concludes Raymond E. Feists bestselling Riftwar Saga.ExtraitPrologueDarkwindThe wind came

from nowhere. Ringing into existence with the reverberation of a hammer striking doom, it carried the heat of a forge that fashioned hot war and searing death, It came into being in the heart of a lost land, emerging from some strange place between that which is and that which seeks to be. It blew from the south, where snakes walked upright and spoke ancient words. Angry, it stank of ancient evil, echoing with long-forgotten prophecies. In a frenzy the wind spun, swirling out of the void, seeking a course; then it paused, then it blew northward. The old nurse hummed a simple tune, one handed down from mother to daughter for generations, while she sewed. She paused to glance up from her needlework. Her two small charges lay sleeping, tiny faces serene while they dreamed their tiny dreams. Occasionally fingers would flex or lips would purse in sucking motions, then one or the other would return to quiescence. They were beautiful babies and would grow to be handsome lads, of this the nurse was certain. As men they would have only vague memories of the woman who sat with them this night, but for now they belonged as much to her as to their mother, who sat with her husband presiding over a state dinner. Then through the window a strange wind came, chilling her despite its heat. It carried a hint of alien and distorted dissonance in its sound, an evil tune barely perceived. The nurse shivered and looked toward the boys. They became restless, as if ready to wake crying. The nurse hurried to the window and closed the shutters, blocking out the strange and disquieting night air. For a moment it seemed all time held its breath, then, as if with a slight sigh, the breeze died away and the night was calm again. The nurse tightened her shawl about her shoulders and the babies stirred fitfully for another moment, before lapsing into a deep and quiet sleep. In another room nearby, a young man worked over a list, struggling to put aside personal likes and dislikes as he decided who was to serve at a minor function the next day. It was a task he hated, but he did it well. Then the wind made the window curtains blow inward. Without thinking, the youngster was half out of his chair in a crouch, a dirk seeming to fly from his boot top to his hand, as a street-born sense of wariness signaled danger. Poised to fight, he stood with heart pounding for a long moment, as certain of a death struggle as he had ever been in his conflict-torn life. Seeing no one there, the young man slowly relaxed. The moment was lost. He shook his head in perplexity. An odd queasiness settled in the pit of his stomach as he slowly crossed to the window. For long, slowly passing minutes he gazed toward the north, into the night, where he knew the great mountains lay, and beyond, where an enemy of dark aspect waited. The young man's eyes narrowed as he stared into the gloom, as if seeking to catch a glimpse of some danger lurking out there. Then, as the last of the rage and fear fled, he returned to his task. But throughout the balance of the night he occasionally turned to look out the window. Out in the city a group of revelers made their way through the streets, seeking another inn and more merry companions. The wind blew past them and they halted a moment, exchanging glances. One, a seasoned mercenary, began to walk again, then halted, considering something. With a sudden loss of interest in celebration, he bade his companions good night and returned to the palace where he had guested for almost a year. The wind blew out to sea where a ship raced toward its home port after a long patrol. The captain, a tall old man with a scarred face and a white eye, paused as he was touched by the freshening wind. He was about to call for the sheets to be shortened when a strange chill passed through him. He looked over to his first mate, a pock-faced man who had been at his side for years. They exchanged glances, then the wind passed. The captain paused, gave the order to send men aloft, and, after another silent moment, shouted for extra lanterns to be lit against the suddenly oppressive gloom. Farther to the north, the wind blew through the streets of a city, creating angry little dust swirls that danced a mad caper across the cobbles, skittering along like demented jesters. Within this city men from another world lived beside men born there. In the soldiers' commons of the garrison, a man from that other world wrestled one raised within a mile of where the match was taking place, with heavy wagering among those who watched. Each man had taken one fall and the third would decide the winner. The wind suddenly struck and the two opponents paused, looking about. Dust stung eyes and several seasoned veterans suppressed shudders. Without words the two opponents quit the match, and those who had placed wagers picked up their bets without protest. Silently those in the commons returned to their quarters, the festive mood of the contest having fled before the bitter wind. The wind swept northward until it struck a forest where little apelike beings, gentle and shy, huddled in the branches, seeking a warmth that only close physical contact can provide. Below, on the floor of the forest, a man sat in meditative pose. His legs were crossed and he rested the backs of his wrists upon his knees, thumbs and forefingers forming circles that represent the Wheel of Life to which all creatures are bound. His eyes snapped open at the first caress of the darkling wind and he regarded the being who sat facing him. An old elf, showing but the faint signs of age native to his race, contemplated the human for a moment, seeing the unspoken question. He nodded his head slightly. The human picked up the two weapons

that lay at his side. The long sword and halfsword he placed in his belt sash, and with only a gesture of farewell he was off, moving through the trees of the forest as he began his journey to the sea. There he would seek out another man, one who was also counted friend to the elves, and prepare for the final confrontation that would soon begin. As the warrior made his way toward the ocean the leaves rustled in the branches over his head. In another forest, leaves also trembled, in sympathy with those troubled by the passing darkwind. Across an enormous gulf of stars, around a greenish yellow sun spun a hot planet. Upon that world, below the cap of ice at the north pole, lay a forest twin to that left behind by the traveling warrior.

Deep within that second forest sat a circle of beings steeped in timeless lore. They wove magic. A soft, warm glow of light formed a sphere about them, as each sat upon the bare earth, richly colored robes unblemished by stain of soil. All eyes were closed, but each saw what he or she needed to see. One, ancient beyond the memory of the others, sat above the circle, suspended in air by the strength of the spell they all wove together. His white hair hung below his shoulders, held back by a simple wire of copper set with a single jade stone upon his forehead. His palms were held up and forward, and his eyes were fixed upon another, a black-robed human, who floated opposite him. That other rode the currents of arcane energy forming a matrix about him, sending his consciousness along those lines, mastering this alien magic. The black-robed one sat in mirror pose, his hands held palm out, but his eyes were closed as he learned. He mentally caressed the fabric of this ancient elven sorcery and felt the intertwined energies of every living thing in this forest, taken and lightly turned, never forced, toward the needs of the community. Thus the Spellweavers used their powers: gently, but persistently, spinning the fiber of these ever natural energies into a thread of magic that could be used. He touched the magic with his mind and he knew. He knew his powers were growing beyond human understanding, becoming godlike in comparison to what he had once thought were the limits of his talents. He had mastered much in the passing year, yet he knew there was much more to learn. Still, with his tutoring he now had the means to find other sources of knowledge. The secrets known to few but the greatest masters--to pass between worlds by strength of will, to move through time, and even to cheat death--he now understood were possible. And with that understanding, he knew he would someday discover the means of mastering those secrets. If he was granted enough time. And time was at a premium.

The leaves of the trees echoed the rustle of the distant darkwind. The man in black set dark eyes upon the ancient being floating before him, as both withdrew their minds from the matrix. Speaking by the strength of mind, the man in black said, So soon, Acala? The other smiled, and pale blue eyes shone forth with a light of their own, a light which when first seen had startled the man in black. Now he knew that light came from a deep power beyond any he had known in any mortal save one other. But this was a different power, not the astonishing might of that other but the soothing, healing power of life, love, and serenity. This being was truly one with all around him. To gaze into those glowing eyes was to be made whole, and his smile was a comfort to see. But the thoughts that crossed the distance between the two as they gently floated earthward were troubled. It has been a year. It would have served us all had we more time, but time passes as it will,

and it may be that you are ready. Then with a texture of thought the black-robed man had come to understand was humor, he added aloud, "But ready or unready, it is time." The others rose as one and for a silent moment the black-clad one felt their minds join with his, in a final farewell. They were sending him back to where a struggle was under way, a struggle in which he was to play a vital part. But they were sending him with much more than he had possessed when he had come to them. He felt the last contact, and said, "Thank you. I will return to where I can travel quickly home." Without further words he closed his eyes, and vanished. Those in the circle were silent a moment, then each turned to undertake whatever task awaited him or her. In the branches the leaves remained restless and the echo of the darkwind was slow in fading. The darkwind blew until it reached a ridge trail above a distant vale, where a band of men crouched in hiding. For a brief moment they faced the south, as if seeking the source of this oddly disturbing wind, then

they returned to observing the plains below. The two closest to the edge had ridden long and hard in response to a report by an outriding patrol. Below, an army gathered under banners of ill aspect. The leader, a greying tall man with a black patch over his right eye, hunkered down below the ridge. "It's as bad as we feared," he said in hushed tones. The other man, not as tall but stouter, scratched at a grey-shot black beard as he squatted beside his companion. "No, it's worse," he whispered. "By the number of campfires, there's one hell of a storm brewing down there." The man with the eye patch sat silently for a long moment. "Well, we've somehow gained a year. I expected them to hit us last summer. It is well we prepared, for now they'll surely come." He moved in a crouch as he returned to where a tall, blond man held his horse. "Are you staying?" The second man said, "Yes, I think I'll watch for a while. By seeing how many arrive and at what

rate, I may hazard a good guess at how many he's bringing."The leader mounted. The blond man said, "What matter? When he comes, he'll bring all he has." "I just don't like surprises, I suppose." "How long?" asked the first man. "Two, three days at most, then it will get too crowded hereabouts." "They're certain to have patrols out by now. Two days at the most." With a grim smile he said, "You're not much as company goes, but after two years I've grown used to having you around. Be careful."The second man flashed a broad grin. "That cuts two ways. You've stung them enough for the last two years: they'd love to throw a net over you. It wouldn't do to have them show up at the city gates with your head on a battle pike."The blond man said, "That will not happen." His open smile was in contrast to his tone, one of determination the other two knew well. "Well, just see it doesn't. Now get along."The company moved out, with one rider staying behind to accompany the stout man in his watch. After a long minute of observing, the stout man muttered softly, "What are you up to this time, you misbegotten son of a motherless whoremonger? Just what are you going to throw at us this summer, Mormandamus?"

Revue de presse

Further praise for the Riftwar saga: "Most exciting...a very worthy and absorbing addition to the fantasy field." -- Andre Norton on *Magician* "As exciting and absorbing as *Magician* in every way. The excellent characterization wedded to a tight and well-turned plot makes it one of the outstanding fantasy offerings of the season." -- Andre Norton on *Silverthorn* "A lively tale where engaging characters inhabit a well-rounded fantasy land." -- Publishers Weekly on *Prince of the Blood* "Has humor and tears and romance...just about everything a fantasy fan could ask for...This is a book to read whether or not you have read the earlier trilogy." -- UPI on *Prince of the Blood* "A superior, rousing adventure." -- Publishers Weekly on *The King's Buccaneer* "An entertaining tale of high-seas adventure and exotic fantasy." -- Locus on *The King's Buccaneer*?