
**Praise for
David Gemmell**

“I am truly amazed at David Gemmell’s ability to focus his writer’s eye. His images are crisp and complete, a history lesson woven within the detailed tapestry of the highest adventure. Gemmell’s characters are no less complete, real men and women with qualities good and bad, placed in *Sword in the Storm* (Rigante Book 1) trying times and rising to heroism or falling victim to their own weaknesses.”

—R. A. SALVATORE
Author of *Mortalis*

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—CHRISTOPHER STASHEFF
Author of the *Wizard in Rhyme* novels

“Gemmell’s great reading; the action never lets up; he’s several rungs above the good—right into the fabulous!”

—ANNE MCCAFFREY

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Prologue

I WAS A child when I saw him last, a scrawny straw-haired boy living in the highlands. It was the afternoon of my eleventh birthday. My sister had died in childbirth the day before, the babe with her. My widowed father Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) was inconsolable, and I left the farm early, leaving him with his grief. I was sad, too, but as with most children, my sorrow was also tinged with self-pity. Ara had died and spoiled my birthday. I shiver with shame at the memory even now.

I wandered through Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) the high woods for most of the morning, playing games. Warrior games. I was a hero, hunting for enemies. I was the deadliest swordsman of them all. I was Demonblade the King.

I had seen him once before when he and several of his companions had Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) ridden to our lonely farm. They were merely passing through, and my father gave them water and a little bread. The king had dismounted and thanked Father, and they stood talking about the dry summer and the problems it was causing. I was around five, I think, and all I remember was his size and the fact that his eyes were strange. One was a tawny brown, the other green, like a jewel. My father told him how our one bull had died, struck by lightning. Three days later a rider came by leading a fine big-horned bull, which he gave to us. My father was a king's man after that.

I was just eleven when I saw him again. Tired of playing alone, I went to my cousin's house in the Rift Valley, some three miles from home. He gave me food and let me help while he chopped wood. I Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) would roll the rounds Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) to where he stood and place them on the low stump. He would swing his ax and split them. After he Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) had finished chopping, Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) we carried the wood to the log pile and stacked the split chunks against the north wall of the house.

I was tired and would have spent the night, except that I knew Father would be worried, so an hour before dusk I headed for home, climbing the Balg Hills and making for the high woods. My journey took me close to the old stone circle. Father told me giants had crafted it in a bygone age, but my aunt said that the stones themselves were once Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) giants, cursed by Taranis. I don't know which story is true, but the circle is a splendid place. Eighteen huge stones there are, each over twenty feet high. Hard, golden stone, totally unlike the gray granite of the Druagh mountains.

I had no intention of going to the circle, for it was more than a Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) little out of my way. But as I was making my way through the trees, I saw a pack of wolves. I stopped and picked up a stone. Wolves will rarely attack a man. They steer clear of us. I don't blame them. We hunt and kill them whenever we can. The leader of the pack stood very still, his golden eyes staring at me. I felt a chill and knew with great certainty that this wolf was unafraid.

For a moment I stood my ground. He darted forward. Dropping the stone, I turned and ran. I knew they were loping after me, and I sprinted Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) hard, leaping fallen trees, and scrambling through the bracken. I was in a panic and fled without thinking. Then I reached the tree line no more than a few yards from the stone circle. To run farther would be to die. This realization allowed me to overcome my fear, and my mind began to clear.

There was a low branch just ahead. I leapt and swung myself up to it. The lead wolf was just behind me. He Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) leapt, too, his teeth closing on Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) my shoe, tearing Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) it from my foot. I climbed a little higher, and the wolves gathered silently below the tree.

Safe now, I became angry both at myself and at the wolves. Breaking off a dry branch, I hurled it down on to the pack. They leapt aside and began to prowl around the tree.

It was then that I heard riders. The wolves scattered and loped back into the woods. I was about to call out to the newcomers, but something stopped me. I cannot say what it was. I don't think I was afraid, but perhaps I sensed some danger. Anyway, I crouched down on the thick branch and watched them ride into the stone Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) circle. There were nine of them. All wore swords and daggers. Their clothes were very fine, and their horses tall, like those ridden by the king's Iron Wolves. As they dismounted, they led their horses Sword in the Storm (Rigante Book 1) out of the circle, tethering them close by.

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