

A FANTASTIC JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY FOR ALL AGES

DRAGONSPELL

A NOVEL

DONITA K. PAUL

Praise for
Dragonspell

“In *Dragonspell*, Donita K. Paul has created an amazing world of fantasy adventure. From riding on dragons to jumping off cliffs to moving mountains, this story is sure to spark a reader’s imagination—young and old. And with a message of identity transformed from slavery to servanthood, it’s a book families will love reading and discussing together.”

—CHRISTOPHER P. N. MASELLI, children’s author of *Reality Shift*
and founder of TruthPop.com

“A reluctant heroine, her fainting dragon, and an assortment of colorful companions make for a delightful read in Donita K. Paul’s *Dragonspell*. This is adventure and fantasy at its finest—a must-read for the imaginative soul.”

—LINDA WINDSOR, award-winning author of *Along Came Jones*
and the Fires of Gleanmara trilogy

“*Dragonspell* is a fine, well-written tale guaranteed to entertain both old and young alike. This was proven in our household when our eleven-year-old son snatched up the book and devoured it. Upon returning it, he exclaimed, ‘It’s good!’—high praise from a rabid fan of Tolkien, Lewis, Jacques, and company. I can only nod my head in agreement.”

—CHRISTOPHER A. LANE, author of children’s and adult fiction,
and winner of Gold Medallion and C. S. Lewis awards

“Inventive, engaging, witty, insightful, touching, and profound—*Dragonspell* is all this and more. If Donita K. Paul’s only intention was to create a world where readers encounter novelties and wonders at every turn, then she has succeeded admirably. But she actually does much more than that: She enables us to see our relationship with God and His world through new eyes. A delight for all true fans of fantasy literature.”

—JIM WARE, author of *God of the Fairy Tale* and coauthor
of *Finding God in the Lord of the Rings*

“Enchanting! A perilous quest, a timeless battle, an unlikely heroine, and a rousing adventure in a world of magic and mystery—Donita K. Paul has

concocted a tale brimming with eternal truth and seasoned with delightful and amazing characters that linger in the senses long after the last page. *Dragonspell* is destined to become a classic for a new generation of adventurers!”

—SUSAN MAY WARREN, award-winning author of *Happily Ever After*

“The greatest thing any author can do is to catch you up and transport you right into the very scene, the very action, the story...in such a way that you live the book, not merely read it. That is exactly what Donita K. Paul does with *Dragonspell*. For a few hours, you will take a journey to a place you have never been, with a story you will never forget. Enjoy the trip!”

—STEPHEN BLY, author of *Paperback Writer* and *The Long Trail Home*, winner of the Christy award

“*Dragonspell* is a tightly written fantasy quest set in an extraordinarily rendered storyworld. With seven intelligent races, seven evil races, several delightful dragons, one weird wizard, and an endless supply of exotic plants and animals, you will *not* be bored.”

—RANDY INGERMANSON, author of *Oxygen* and *Premonition*, winners of the Christy award

“No one will ever be able to read this and doubt that Christian fantasy is a viable genre for spreading God’s Word.”

—CHRISTINE LYNXWILER, president of American Christian Romance Writers

“Charming, well-drawn characters, a story chock full of adventures and misadventures, a land populated with dragons, doneels, emerlindians, grawligs, and all sorts of other fascinating inhabitants—I ask you, what more could any reader want? With *Dragonspell*, Donita K. Paul has nailed a complex and engaging fantasy world. Whether nine or ninety, you won’t be disappointed.”

—KATHLEEN MORGAN, author of *Consuming Fire* and *All Good Gifts*

“*Dragonspell* has a heart-thumping, page-turning plot that is sure to captivate and enthrall even the most reluctant reader!”

—PEGGY WILBER, author of *Reading Rescue 1-2-3*

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DONITA K. PAUL



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God has blessed me by bringing young people into my life. This book is dedicated to my first readers. They kept me on my toes and the story progressing.

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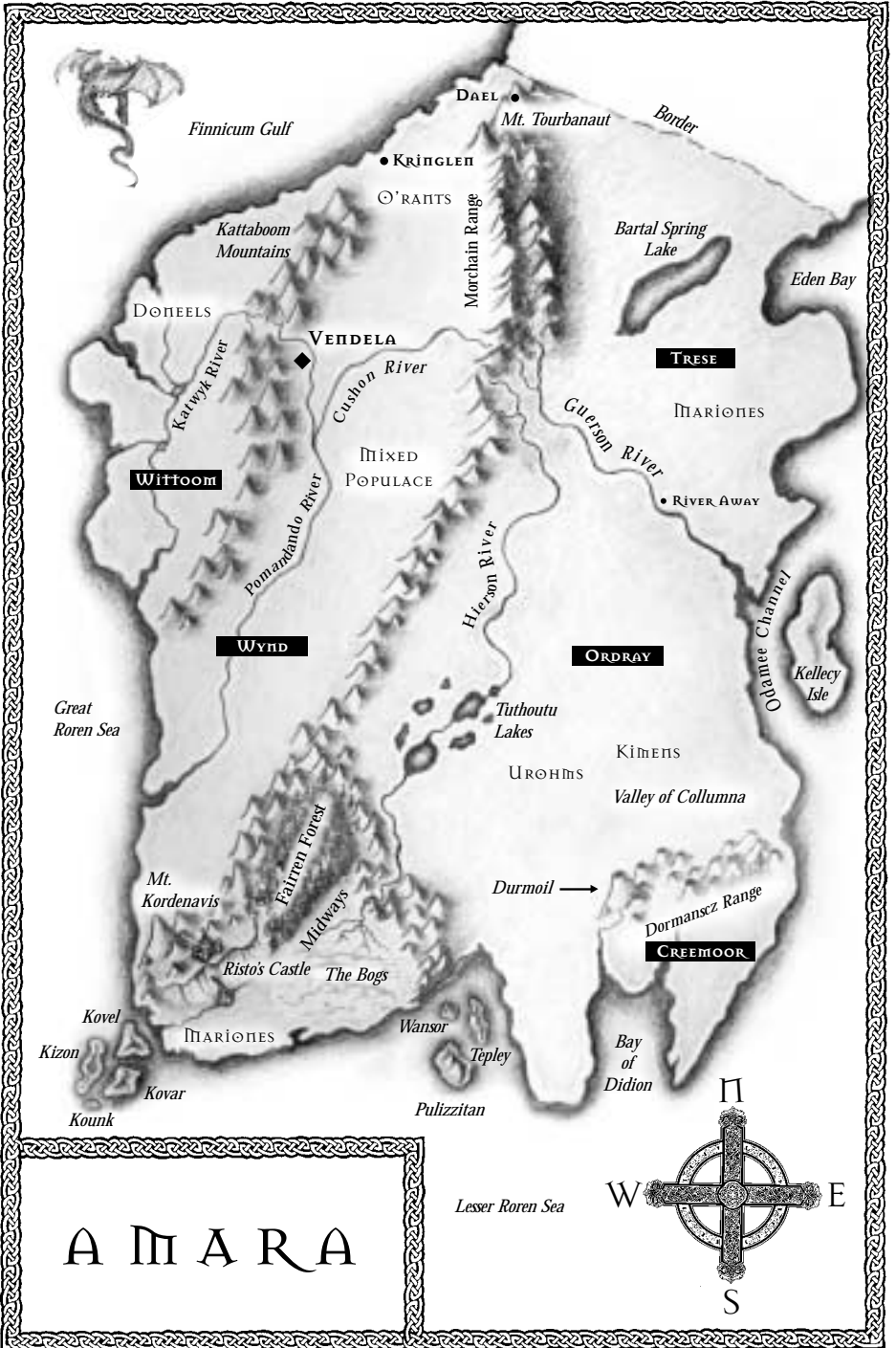
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Where there is no guidance the people fall,
but in abundance of counselors there is victory.

PROVERBS 11:14, NASB

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ALMOST THERE

“Are ye sure ye won’t ride all the way into the city?”

Kale hardly heard the farmer’s question as she stood beside his wagon-load of barley grain. Her eyes looked over the crude cart she’d traveled in and then turned to the dazzling metropolis across the wide valley. The sun sparkled on Vendela, a city of sheer white walls, shining blue roofs, and golden domes. Many spires and steeples and turrets towered above the city, but in a vast variety of shapes and colors. More than a dozen castles clustered outside the capital, and more palaces were scattered over the landscape across a wide river.

Seeing Vendela reminded Kale her life had changed forever. Her hand rose to her chest and rested on the small pouch hidden under her clothes.

I have a destiny. The thought scared her and pleased her too. After being a village slave all fourteen years of her life, she’d been freed.

Well, sort of free.

One week ago she’d left River Away, her village of two dozen homes, a shop, a tavern, and a meetinghouse. In maybe another week, she’d go through the tall gates of the most beautiful walled city in all of Amara, quite possibly in the entire civilized world. It would take a week to get used to the clamor. She could feel it from here.

I’d go mad in my head if I stepped into Vendela tonight.

The city pulsed with thoughts and feelings of more people than she could count. On market day in River Away, she endured thirty or forty people close enough for her to feel their lives bumping against the walls of her inner person. But Vendela...

I might smother. I'll go slowly into that city. Nobody knows I'm coming. I don't have to hurry. A mile or so a day. Slow, till it feels comfortable.

A lot of things worried her. It was easy to say you were glad not to be a slave any longer. It was hard to walk alone into a place you'd never been before. Nobody knew or cared about her in Vendela. In River Away, most everybody cared, even if the caring revolved around whether or not she worked hard.

"Girl!" The old man's bark jerked Kale from her thoughts. He scowled at her. "I'm going right into the city. Ye might as well ride with me."

"Thank you, Farmer Brigg, but I'd just as soon walk the rest of the way. I can look at how pretty Vendela is."

She smiled up at him, feeling some affection for the gruff old man. She'd ridden the last leg of her journey beside him on the wide wooden seat. He'd been kind to her, sharing his bread and cheese and stories of all the wonders in the great city. Nevertheless, Kale would not be rushed into entering Vendela. She'd do it in her own time.

"Ye're headed for The Hall, aren't ye?" His pale blue eyes twinkled under bushy gray eyebrows.

Kale didn't answer. To say yes would give away more about herself than she intended. Not such a good idea, trusting someone outside your own village, even a grandfatherly, talkative old farmer.

"Well, I see ye're not going to tell me." He winked at her and then looked off at the city, his expression growing grim. "Should ye get in trouble, go to The Goose and The Gander Tavern, North City. Ask for Maye. Tell her ye're a friend of mine, and she'll help ye if she can."

"I will," said Kale, and waved good-bye to the old man before trudging up the hill, away from the road. She listened to the squeak of the axle and creak of the wheels but didn't turn to watch the farmer's wagon lumber down the sloping road. Among an hour's worth of advice, Mistress Meiger had said to keep her focus on what's ahead.

Kale sighed. *Mistress Meiger knows best.*

Lush gorse bushes covered the grassy slope. The hill nestled right

against one of the mountains. Farmer Brigg had known the names of all the peaks in the Morchain Range. His stories of how these names came to be fascinated Kale, but it was tales of Vendela that caught her attention. After all, Vendela would be her home.

Just over the rise, she found a place to settle. She sat with her back to a gum tree, her bare feet propped up on a stone outcropping. She rested her arms on knees pulled up to her chin and her chin on her folded arms. Then Kale took a long peaceful breath of the hot summer air and allowed herself the luxury of gazing at beautiful Vendela. The twisting spires and floating spheres were beyond anything she had imagined. The whole scene looked like a magical picture, clean and bright and full of promise.

Pulling the thong at her neck, Kale drew out a soft scarlet pouch. She placed it between her hands, gently rubbing the material, enjoying the satin finish, elated by the secret of the stonelike egg within. The egg warmed, responding to her excitement. It thrummed. The gentle vibration communicated joy and anticipation through Kale's sensitive fingers.

With her eyes back on the city, Kale talked aloud. "In a week we'll be going to The Hall. I'll be a servant of the people then, not a slave. That's higher class than I ever dreamed of being. Fancy food, fancy clothes, fancy education."

She smoothed the silky cloth at her throat with one rough hand. Mistress Meiger had given her the long blue scarf the night her husband, Chief Councilman Meiger, told Kale to go to Vendela. The rest of Kale's homespun attire reflected her social status. Her trousers had two patches, one at the knee and one at her seat. She wore a shirt, a tunic, and the blue scarf. Travel dust covered every inch of her. She'd find a stream and clean up before entering Vendela.

A new life awaited her in that beautiful city. Not one person in all of River Away remembered a time when a local had been sent to The Hall. Master Meiger said to hold the honor tight. Kale held it tight all right, if only to convince herself she wasn't scared like a squawking peeper fallen out of the nest.

Focus on what's ahead.

"We'll travel and do Paladin's bidding." She grinned at that. "Sounds pretty high and mighty for the likes of me."

For a few moments, she stared at the fairy-tale castles surrounding the walled city. Seven bridges in jewel colors crossed the Pomandando River on the eastern side. Each bridge led to a towering entrance to the inner city.

"People from each of the seven high races cross those bridges at one time or another," she whispered.

The wall in the River Away Tavern had a mural of a brotherhood marching across a mountain pass. Each of the races was represented. Crudely drawn, the figures nonetheless looked excited to be adventuring.

Kale imagined a similar procession crossing one of the great bridges. "Bantam doneels, giant urohms, the elegant emeraldians, fighting marionones, tumanhofers, swift kimens, and o'rants." Kale sighed. "O'rants, like me. Chief Councilman Meiger said he thought I was an o'rant though he'd never seen one. Another reason for me to go to The Hall, he said."

She squinted as a large, dark shape swooped over the far mountains and headed for Vendela. She jumped to her feet and could not keep from bouncing on her toes as she recognized a Greater Dragon. It circled the city, a dark silhouette passing in front of the iridescent white towers.

Kale tucked the pouch safely back into her shirt and scrambled up the steep hillside, hoping for a better view. She stopped and gave a whoop as she saw two more of the majestic creatures crest the mountains and make a downward approach to Vendela.

Climbing the sharp incline on her hands and knees now, Kale grabbed branches and jagged rocks to hoist herself up. She topped the embankment and rolled over the edge.

Guttural shouts greeted her arrival. Rough, hairy hands grabbed her arms and legs. A putrid smell filled her nose, and her mouth watered in revulsion. Her stomach lurched. *Grawligs?*

Kale had heard tales told in the tavern. Nothing smelled as bad as the mountain ogres. She saw dark hairy legs, a leather loincloth, tattered cloth

hanging over a barrel chest, fat lips, yellowed teeth, a grossly flabby nose, and tiny eyes, solidly black. *Grawligs!*

Two of the mountain ogres flipped her through the air. Her muscles tightened as she expected to come crashing down among the rocks. Instead, another grawlig snatched her before she hit the ground, and a screech ripped from her mouth. A burst of raucous laughter greeted her alarm. Her captors joyfully sped up their game of toss.

One grawlig claimed her as his prize. He slung her over his shoulder, his hard muscles smashing into her middle, forcing the air from her lungs. He gave a hoot of triumph and ran around the crude camp with the others chasing him. Kale hung upside down with her arms dangling. Her face bounced into the oily, matted hair on his back.

They'll kill me! They'll play with me, then kill me.

The grawlig's beefy hands tightened on her thighs, and she felt herself swung in an arc over his head. He jumped and twisted, performing some kind of ritual dance with the others howling and gyrating around them. Kale desperately tried to pull in one cleansing breath of air.

"Stupid o'rant. Stupid o'rant." The ogre's taunt filled her ears. "We heard you coming."

He released Kale and launched her frail body across the clearing toward the ridge she had climbed. Just before she sailed over the thirty-foot drop, another grawlig caught her by an arm and the back of her tunic. He swung her over his head, chanting.

"Stupid o'rant. Stupid o'rant. We heard you coming."

He changed the angle of the swing. Now her head came within inches of the ground and then high above the grawlig's massive skull. Pain roared within her head with every sweep. On the next swing downward, she fought darkness closing in around her. She lost.

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