



## The Lost Realm (Crown of Three Book 2)

By J. D. Rinehart

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Family secrets combine with fantasy in this epic tale of battle, magic, strange creatures, power, and fate, in a sweeping new middle grade series that *Publishers Weekly* called “*Game of Thrones* on a mellow day.”

The kingdom of Toronia is being torn apart by civil war. The kingdom’s only hope comes in the form of illegitimate triplets, who are prophesied to kill the king and rule together in peace. Separated at birth and scattered throughout the realms, the triplets face a desperate fight to secure their destiny. Will they survive long enough to rule?

The resurrected King Brutan and his army of the dead control the city of Idilliam. Outside, Eloide and Tarlan are trying to hold their own army together and find a way to rescue their brother Gulph who is trapped inside the city. Or is he? Gulph has found a passageway to the lost realm of Celestis, which lies beneath Idilliam. There he is reunited with the mother he has never known—but she can’t remember him. If Gulph stays in the city, will he also forget those above ground whom he loves?

Meanwhile, Tarlan and the wizard Melchior set out on a quest to restore the wizard’s powers, leaving Eloide and her army to keep watch. But Eloide is betrayed, her troops slaughtered, and she is taken captive by Lord Vicerin, her former guardian, who is determined to use her to get to the throne.

Seemingly further from the throne than ever, the triplets will need to use all of their strength and abilities if they are to survive—let alone rule.

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## **Editorial Review**

### Unknown

In the sequel to *Crown of Three* (2015, with the author writing as J.D. Blackthorn), three young, white rulers-to-be fight undead hordes while trying to regain their inheritance. When the lost heir is triplets, there's thrice the opportunity for cliché-packed heroic journeys. This high-fantasy quest begins midbattle, as the undead king massacres and zombifies an entire town. Evil King Brutan's prophesied babies were secreted away and raised separately. Now, 13 years later, Gulph is an acrobat, Elodie is a princess, and Tarlan is a feral lad raised with beasts. The three of them journey around the map of fantasyland, each learning about his or her own magical abilities. Tarlan (who speaks with animals) travels to the borders of the known world with the ancient wizard Melchior and fights a gratuitously invading army. Elodie (who talks to ghosts) sneakily spies on her wicked foster parents, who have creepily incestuous plans for her. Gulph (who can turn invisible) finds a long-lost realm where his allies seem to forget everything, even their own names. The trail of corpses seen and left by these 13-year-olds seems endless; Tarlan kills hundreds of soldiers with a single sword stroke. A heavy hand with the well-worn tropes of the genre replaces character development, and choppy, exclamation-point-laden prose stands in for the buildup of real tension. This middle volume may make a zany-if-dark pulp TV movie, but as a novel, it's only for high-fantasy addicts. (Kirkus Reviews 3/1/16)

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Elodie, Gulph, and Tarlan, 13-year-old triplets, continue their attempts to overthrow their father, the evil and undead King Brutan, while also battling new enemies. In this exciting, often violent second installment, imprisoned Elodie is forced to marry her power-hungry guardian, Lord Vicerin, and her brother Gulph must rescue old friends captured by King Brutan. Meanwhile, Tarlan calls on his loyal army of animals to help stop invaders. There are many characters and plot threads to keep track of, and this sequel, like its predecessor, ends on a cliff-hanger. An exciting return that will be most enjoyed by readers familiar with book one. — Sharon Rawlins (Booklist online March 30, 2016)

### About the Author

J.D. Rinehart

J.D. Rinehart is a pseudonym for author Graham Edwards. When he's not writing, he can be found exploring

castles, watching films, or hiking through the countryside with Sir Galahad, his pet Great Dane. He loves falconry, and once raised a young falcon he found abandoned. He lives in Nottinghamshire, England.

Iacopo Bruno

Iacopo Bruno is an illustrator and graphic designer living in Milan, Italy.

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The Lost Realm



## CHAPTER 1

To the postern gate!” shouted Captain Ossilius. “It’s our only chance!”

He swung his sword, killing two undead warriors simultaneously. Gulph dodged past his friend, kicking out at the bodies, once, twice, tumbling them end over end down the steep stone stairs, where they scattered the oncoming enemy soldiers like bowling pins.

“That should buy us some time,” he gasped. “What’s a postern gate?”

“Our last chance.”

Together, Gulph and Ossilius climbed the rest of the way up the stairs, ran along the battlement, and plunged down a steep ramp into a small, enclosed courtyard.

Here they halted, leaning against each other as they fought for breath. Gulph felt small against the burly, gray-haired captain, and wondered if he would always be as skinny as he was now.

Never mind growing up, he thought, massaging the aches from his crooked back, I just wish I’d grow straight.

“So where’s this last chance of yours?” he said, stepping away from his companion, who was still struggling to breathe. Ossilius ran a hand through his gray hair and ushered Gulph over to a break in the wall.

“Look,” he said, pointing through the shattered stonework toward a squat tower built into the city wall.

“I can see what looks like a door,” said Gulph. “What are those things on either side of it? Statues?”

Ossilius nodded. “That’s the postern gate.”

Gulph stared skeptically at the stretch of ground lying between them and their destination. Swarms of undead warriors were fighting their way through ranks of terrified citizens, and thick smoke shrouded the scene, making it hard to see exactly what was happening. But Gulph could hear the screams clearly enough.

All the people of Idilliam wanted was to flee, but even as they tried to escape they were seized and made undead. This was the horror: the enemy didn’t kill you.

The enemy made you like itself.

“Every time we lose a soldier,” whispered Gulph, “they gain one. How can we ever win?”

For a brief moment the smoke surrounding a nearby tower cleared, and King Brutan himself strode into view. Flesh hung from his bones; his blood-streaked clothes flapped in tatters; his eyes burned red with fire.

Gulph closed his eyes, trying to remember how Brutan had looked when he'd been alive. But all he could bring to mind was the look of betrayal on the king's face when he, Gulph, had placed the poisoned crown on his head.

I didn't know it would kill you, Gulph thought. I never imagined it would make you a monster. He shook his head, correcting himself. No—you already were a monster, weren't you?

Brutan's left hand closed on the neck of a man; with his right he snatched up a peasant woman. He lifted them both off the ground and squeezed his skeleton fingers. They struggled briefly, then their eyes closed and their bodies went slack. Their skin turned white; their flesh sank in on itself.

When their eyes opened again, they were filled with flame.

Gulph watched, aghast. He'd seen this happen many times during their headlong run across the battlefield; still, it never failed to repulse him. What made it worse was the knowledge of who Brutan really was.

You're more than a monster. You're my father.

A fresh wave of city dwellers burst from a breach in the wall: ordinary people clutching bags and boxes and clumsy wraps of cloth. Gulph gripped the rubble of the broken wall, silently urging them on, wondering what meager possessions they'd managed to collect, and where they thought they could flee to.

“They don't know about the bridge,” said Ossilius.

Gulph held his breath as the first of the refugees reached the edge of the chasm. It encircled Idilliam as a moat surrounds a castle—except this moat was bottomless. One man led his children to the brink and stopped, staring dumbstruck at the ruins of the bridge that had once connected the city to the rest of Toronia. . . .

“They have nowhere to go,” Gulph groaned. “There's no escape. They're trapped here. We're all trapped.”

He lifted the golden crown he'd carried across the battlefield. His fingers were cramped from clutching it. Now that he had the crown, he couldn't imagine ever letting it go—yet part of him wanted to cast it into the chasm.

“Just this morning Nynus was wearing it,” he said. He shuddered, remembering what Nynus had done to take the crown—and to try to keep it. He'd tricked Gulph into killing Brutan and come up with the insane scheme to destroy the bridge and isolate Idilliam. “Nynus was no better than his father,” Gulph said. “Our father.”

“Gulph—Nynus is dead.”

“But the crown is still here! Was it the crown that made him do all those terrible things, Ossilius? What will

happen to me if I put it on? If I try to rule? The prophecy says that I'm one of the three. That it's my destiny to rule Toronia. But what if I turn out to be just as much a monster as Brutan or Nynus?"

He stared at Ossilius, his eyes wide, the crown held between both hands. Ossilius looked solemnly back.

"It is just a crown, Gulph. A piece of metal. What you do with it is your choice and yours alone."

Gulph stared at the gold band. What did it matter now, anyway? For a brief moment, just after Nynus had died, when Ossilius had picked up the crown and handed it to him, Gulph had believed everything might turn out all right. But the dead had taken over Idilliam and there was nothing left to rule.

"It's time to go," said Ossilius. Gently, he removed one of Gulph's hands from the crown and placed a sword in it. "Are you ready?"

"I don't think I was ready for any of this," Gulph replied. But he followed Ossilius as they crept through the hole in the wall, heads lowered, and began to cross the battlefield. In the shadow of the nearby tower, Brutan had closed his bony fingers around the throat of a boy of about thirteen—Gulph's age. The undead king hoisted the lad into the air and studied his face with blazing red eyes.

"Are you my son?" he bellowed. "Are you the one who killed me?"

"Leave him alone!" Gulph hissed, but when he started toward the horrific scene, Ossilius pulled him back.

"It is too late," Ossilius insisted.

The boy's whimpers were cut off as Brutan squeezed. A moment later, his life had ended and his new, undead existence had begun.

"Revenge!" Brutan roared as he marched on. "I will have revenge on my son and my treacherous people!"

"I have to do something!" said Gulph, shaking Ossilius's hand from his shoulder. "I don't care if it's hopeless. These are my people. I should be fighting with them!"

He started off through the smoke, but Ossilius caught him again. "I understand, Gulph. I do. But this is not the time for you to fight. This is the time for you to hide."

Gulph stopped struggling and stared at him, dumbfounded. "Hide? What kind of king hides when his people need him?"

"The kind of king who wants to stay alive."

"A cowardly one, more like."

Ossilius shook his head, exasperated. "You know already that you cannot win this battle, Gulph. But you can make plans for the future. You can gather allies and arms. If you lie low now, one day you will rise again."

Gulph looked into the face of the man who was old enough to be his father, perhaps even his grandfather. He couldn't imagine a more loyal companion. And yet . . .

“The Legion was my life,” Ossilius pressed. “I know when to fight, Gulph. And I know when to make a tactical retreat. Believe me when I tell you that time is now.”

“But my friends are out here somewhere. Pip and Sidebottom John and the others. I won’t leave them behind. I won’t leave anyone behind!”

“Do you mean the troupe of performers you arrived with? Gulph, we cannot risk it.”

Gulph looked out at the legion of undead. He knew his friend was right. What chance did the two of them have? If they tried to find his friends, they’d only die in the attempt.

“All right,” Gulph said reluctantly. “Let’s go. But we’ll take whoever we can save with us.”

They ran on, hugging the city wall as they tried to circle around the worst of the fighting. The billowing smoke was acrid; Gulph could barely see through the tears streaming from his eyes.

“Look out!” shouted Ossilius as a rotting warrior leaped out from behind a mound of bodies. Gulph folded his legs, tucked in his body, and rolled away from the warrior with an agility that would have drawn a round of applause from an audience.

Once a Tangletree Player, he thought giddily, always a Tangletree Player.

As he sprang upright, he realized he had dropped his own sword, but spied a short sword lodged beneath an enormous stone that had fallen from the wall. He grabbed the hilt, yanked it free, whirled, and slashed his attacker across the chest. There was no blood, just a spray of bone shards and dust. The undead warrior came on, grinning its skeletal leer through hanging strips of flesh.

Gulph bent his knees and threw himself into a clumsy backflip. He landed on top of the stone and drove the sword into the warrior’s skull. At the same instant, Ossilius sliced the thing’s legs off at the knees.

The warrior’s dismembered remains collapsed, twitching and hissing with their strange semblance of life.

“Keep moving!” Ossilius cried. “The longer we stay out in the open, the more danger we’re in.”

Gradually, they forged a path toward their goal. I haven’t abandoned you, my friends, Gulph thought as he ducked and wove through a shrieking knot of undead. I’ll come for you. If not today, then tomorrow. If not tomorrow, then the day after that. I’ll come for you. I promise!

“Help me.”

The voice came from behind the stone. It sounded like a girl, surely no older than Gulph.

“Pip?” He peered into the shadows, his heart suddenly racing. “Pip, is that you?”

But the face that peered up at him was not that of his oldest friend. This girl was much younger. Her cheeks were streaked with blood and her blond hair was matted with filth. She was shaking all over.

“Come with us,” said Gulph without hesitation. He stretched out a hand, but the girl just stared at it, too terrified to move.

“Gulph, hurry!” called Ossilius from ahead. “We cannot afford to stop.”

“Wait, Ossilius!”

The captain appeared through a billow of smoke. His brow was furrowed, but as soon as he saw the little girl, his face softened. He plucked her gently from her hiding place and they hurried on.

“It’s all right,” said Gulph to the girl as they ran. “You’re safe now.”

He hoped it was true.

Ahead, the ruined mausoleum loomed out of the smoke. Built by Brutan as a towering monument to death, it was now a mountain of broken stone. As they clambered over the rubble, Gulph shuddered, remembering the unearthly power that had brought this mighty building crashing to the ground.

Limmoni’s power.

Broken roof tiles crunched beneath his feet—perhaps the very tiles on which Limmoni had stood when she’d been executed. The order to take her life had been the final command of Nynus’s short reign as king of Toronia. A bloody reign indeed.

Will mine be any different? Ossilius had said he thought so, but Gulph wondered if he’d ever be sure.

“There!” Ossilius cried. “The postern gate!”

Gulph blinked away stinging soot and saw the tower they’d glimpsed from a distance. Set into its base was a large stone door, flanked by the statues Gulph had noticed. On the left was a man with the head of a bull; on the right was a snake-headed woman.

“So you mean the door?” said Gulph. “Where does it go?”

By now they’d run clear of the fighting. Perhaps the smoke was keeping people—and unpeople—away.

“The postern gate is the back door to the city.”

“You mean it just leads to more fighting? What good will that do us?”

“We will not be going through the door.”

“But I thought . . .”

Ossilius was off again, dodging through the smoke with the little girl held tight against his chest. Gulph followed, reaching the tower just a few paces behind the grizzled captain.

No sooner had they stopped than a man emerged from behind the bull-headed statue. He wore the uniform of an Idilliam soldier and was brandishing a long sword. Gulph couldn’t tell which part of his body was trembling more: his arms or his knees.

“Stay back!” the man cried.



“At your ease, soldier,” said Ossilius. He lowered the girl to the ground and held out his hands. “Do you know me?”

The man squinted at Ossilius’s grimy outfit, then his eyes widened. “Captain Ossilius? Of the Legion?” Lowering his sword, he made a clumsy salute. “What are your orders, sir?”

Gulph spotted more movement behind the statue. “Come out,” he said. “All of you. It’s all right. We won’t hurt you.”

Two more figures appeared: a woman wearing a baker’s apron and a man whose face Gulph recognized.

“You were with us in the Vault of Heaven,” Gulph said, staring at the manacles still locked around the man’s ankles.

“Never saw you,” retorted the man. “I’d have remembered a little freak like you.”

“Shut up, Slater,” said the soldier. But his tone remained fearful.

“Shall I strike him, my king?” said Ossilius mildly.

Slater’s eyes narrowed. The eyes of the others grew wide.

“No,” said Gulph at once. “He’s just afraid.”

“?‘King’?” said Slater suspiciously. “What d’you mean, ‘king’?”

Ossilius dropped slowly to one knee. “This is Agulphus, son of Brutan, born one of three. This is a child of the prophecy stars, who has slain his father and taken back the crown. See, he holds it now, in waiting for the time when the three shall be brought together to take the throne as one. If you would join his quest, kneel with me now and show your allegiance.”

The soldier’s jaw dropped open. The woman gasped. The little girl, crouched beside the kneeling Ossilius, stared up at Gulph with uncomprehending eyes. Slater snorted and looked away.

Gulph raised the crown he’d been carrying this whole time, but which the little crowd seemed only now to see. The crown was suddenly very heavy.

Is this what power feels like? I never knew it weighed so much.

Slowly, with infinite care, he placed the crown on his head.

“The prophecy!” cried the woman, sinking to her knees and clasping her hands in front of her apron.

“My lord,” said the soldier, pressing his closed fist to his bronze breastplate. “My liege. I—Marcus of the King’s Legion—am yours to command.”

Slater looked back, seeming to see Gulph for the first time. His expression melted slowly from insolent to amazed.

“Can’t be true,” he said. “Can’t be.”

“It can,” Ossilius replied. “It is.”

“Suppose I might follow a king,” Slater said after a moment’s consideration. “If he had somewhere to lead me.”

“As it happens,” Gulph replied, “I do.”

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### **From reader reviews:**

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