

# Shadows for a Princess

## (Trials of Terraina Book 1)

The forewarning had him jumping at shadows, and Geoffrey came close to drawing his sword on an innocent cast member who crossed their path.

“Why are we leaving this way? We told Elric we would meet him at the front of the theater where he left us.”

“Less crowded this way.”

“But Elric won’t know where to find us.”

“He will,” he insisted.

At least he hoped so. Relying on the dubious words of an invisible stranger was among one of his foolhardier decisions. He opened the door, and rather than allow her to step through before him, he clutched the princess close—to hell with propriety—and shuffled them both through the door at once into the narrow alley.

The air in their surroundings hummed with malevolence, a foreboding presence that lanced spikes of dread into his subconscious.

Had the voice led them into danger instead?

“They are here,” it whispered, as if reading his thoughts. “Two of them. In the shadows to your left.”

“Ysolde,” Geoffrey spoke quietly.

“I feel it,” she whispered.

The coachman awaited them in Ysolde’s handsome, two-horse carriage. He faced forward, sweating profusely despite the cool weather of the evening, and upon their arrival, he jerked around and leapt down from his seat.

“Ser Ashcroft, what’s happening?” Elric asked while pulling open the door. “Why were those oddball Fas Perrans adamant that I come here?”

A dark shape lunged from the darkness, robbing Geoffrey of his chance to answer the man. Instincts guided him, and with one step, he maneuvered his body between Ysolde and her would-be attacker.

A weapon clashed against his shield, and then he skewered the masked swordwielder.

Another assassin came from the other side, but Ysolde was there, a formidable opponent in her own right. Before he could spin, she released a wave of flames.

She was powerful, but magical spells were risky in close quarters. The backdraft of the heat tightened Geoffrey’s skin. He patted out his cape before it became ablaze with fire.

In the distance, someone shrieked, and voices called out in alarm.

Then the sky roared and ripped open, the tear revealing a glowing gateway into a world of nightmarish creatures. One squeezed through, more teeth and fangs than body, easily as large as a horse. Its slavering mouth opened wide, and two clawed arms extended toward them.

Fire welled up from Ysolde’s palm and swirled in an upward funnel. It crashed with a roar into the descending beast, igniting it in brilliant, white flames.

“Take cover within the carriage!” Geoffrey yelled, thrusting Ysolde behind him with his shield out as fiery debris rained toward them from above.

“But Geoffrey—”

Another man leapt out, only to be felled by an invisible force, an unseen protector. Geoffrey heard a choked gurgle, saw a splash of blood, and watched the futile clawing at the dagger hilt protruding from their assailant’s throat.

“Go! I’m behind you, love.”

Ysolde was nimble, even in the full dress of a proper lady. She leapt into the coach without an assistive step, and Geoffrey boarded behind her.

The carriage lurched forward at speed and jostled them in their seats. Geoffrey reached out an arm to steady her as it raced down the cobblestone streets.

“Don’t stop until we’ve reached the castle, Elric!”

A loud thud followed by a scream echoed into the carriage. The vehicle veered sharply, threatening to topple off balance. Then an unearthly howl sent cold shivers racing down his spine.

“Geoffrey, look out!”