

## Path of the Raven: Recurrence Vol I

**Devon Manning**

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(260pp)

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*Fans of Dungeons and Dragons campaigns and other world-building enterprises will be inspired by this winning fantasy novel.*

Devon Manning's ace sword and sorcery fantasy novel *The Path of the Raven* follows three motley heroes as they grow to trust their found family.

Dragonborn wizard Valex Shatterscale, rebellious and noble elf Kaylessa Siannodel, and rugged con artist Vel Valdove are strangers to each other, but they do have some factors in common. First, each has no home, family, or available friends. Second, they are young and headstrong, and therefore fallible. Third, each is visited by a talking raven who promises to solve their woes if they meet his master, a discreetly wealthy pepper beard, Wravien Leonhart. Leonhart employs the trio to gather assets for a mysterious mission; though he pays handsomely, questions and dangers burgeon.

Fans of Dungeons and Dragons campaigns and other world-building enterprises will be inspired by the ease at which the land of Meridia takes shape. There are no long-winded descriptions. Instead, tried and true tropes such as blue misty dead creatures and riddling sphinxes leave uncluttered pages open for action and team bonding.

As expected, orphan Vel is fiercely loyal, Kaylessa is wicked smart and good with a bow and arrow, and Valex is the bumbling muscle. As they face abandoned mines, uncharted islands, and fortified prisons, they witness their personal faults. When one fails, the other two swoop in to save them. After adversity, they begin to trust and even love one another.

Of the many phenomenal transformations in this story, none is shinier than the home gifted to the conquerors by Leonhart. Its rooms are a perfect fit for their size and interest, with ingredients for Valex's spells, treasure boxes for Vel's finds, and musical instruments for Kaylessa's deft fingers.

Pairing a familiar plot with medium-length chapters and illustrative maps, *The Path of the Raven* could enthrall a younger audience, but be warned there is mature language and some triggering content. Valex becomes dependent on alcohol, visiting the bottle before and after battle, and when the three compatriots lose an exhibition match they are held to be raped by the captain.

The tense threads are plaited with great humor, though. Valex's response to his treatment in jail is to "complain to management"; the blush of naive Kaylessa is used to note warlord Xhan's "big package." The effect is a steadfast tone as endearing as the main characters. Further, there are multiple strong women, including the majority of the core party and a fierce pirate captain who is also bisexual. The final chapter, aptly titled "The Beginning of the End," summons the newborn team to their destiny.

*The Path of the Raven* is a winning campaign fantasy novel that prompts affection for its heroes and a desire for its continuation.

SAMANTHA ANN EHLE (September 6, 2022)

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