

# CHASING BROTHER MOON

---

A Novel By  
**Catherine Cruzan**

Copyright © 2018 Catherine Cruzan

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, except for the purpose of review and/or reference, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published by Catherine Cruzan, Los Angeles, CA  
[www.CatherineCruzan.com](http://www.CatherineCruzan.com)

Printed by Kindle Direct Publishing

Cover Photo: Dusk Landscape by Yuriy Kulik  
(Fotolia File #36502265)

Map Art: Giovanni Cenna ([giocenn.weebly.com](http://giocenn.weebly.com))

ISBN-13:

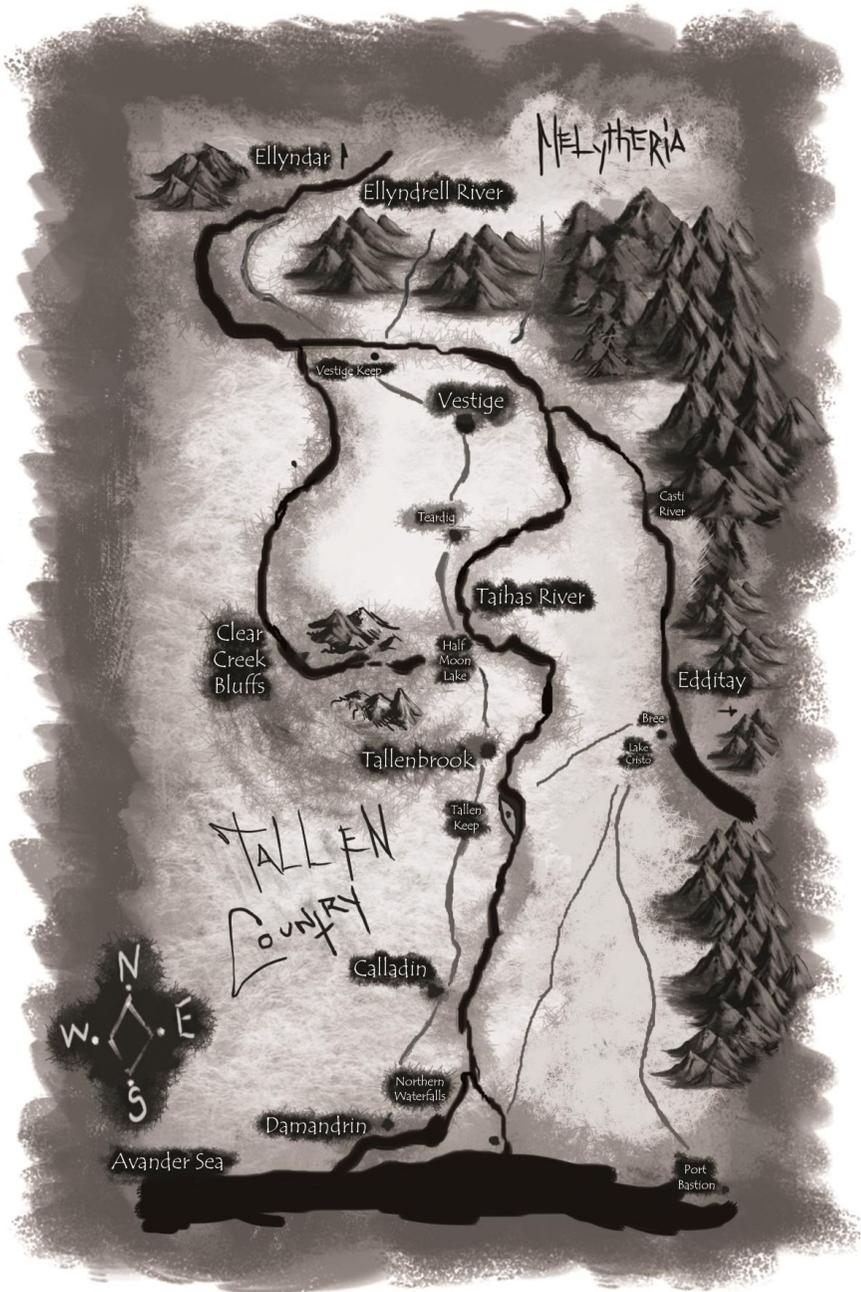
ISBN-10:

eBook AISBN:

Audiobook ASIN:

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

FIRST EDITION



Ellyndar

NELYTHERIA

Ellyndrell River

Vestige Keep

Vestige

Teardig

Taihas River

Casti River

Clear Creek Bluffs

Half Moon Lake

Edditay

Tallenbrook

Bree  
Lake Crato

Tallen Keep

TALLEN COUNTRY

Calladin

Northern Waterfalls

Damandrin

Avander Sea

Port Bastion





**Also by Catherine Cruzan**

Elfkind

Shadow Box

Udon

One for the Baron

The Red Moon Rises



## 1. LIGHTNING AND FIRE

Larea buried her fingers in the wolf's coarse black fur. His coat was damp from the evening drizzle, yet his undercoat remained luxuriously soft and dry. The rain had stopped, leaving the forest coated in a wet sheen. Her breath misted in the crisp night air.

A low growl rumbled Aeda's throat.

"Easy boy," she said, curling her fingers deeper into the warmth of his fleece.

Clouds engulfed the young moon, making the red lightning easy to see. Jagged threads crisscrossed each other, filling the sky, their target a single fixed point on the distant horizon.

The Grahze are here, Aeda said.

There aren't any Grahze left, she replied, placing the words in his mind amidst his other wolfish thoughts.

She spoke to her kinsmen this way. Elves often communicated mind-to-mind and thought-to-thought, but these internal exchanges shouldn't have been possible with an animal. Aeda was something strange, something special.

I smell them, he said. Dyed wool and sulfur—Camphor—Iron—Decay.

He padded along the river's edge with his nose to the ground. The river poured gurgling in the shallows, churning over its rocky bed. Farther out away from the shore, the depths reflected the lightning. The water pitched and scuttled, and scrambled the display into indiscernible patterns that danced across its surface like glimmering red fire.

They've definitely been here, Aeda said.

He snuffed around a patch of weedy grass, circling, circling, circling.

Not for a long time, Larea replied.

His mention of camphor reminded her of the last time the Grahze had come to feed on her people, to devour Elvin souls, except now she smelled only the fresh green of trees, mineral-rich soil, and the season's first sprigs of Idlemyst flowers—subtle and sweet. The blossoms would deepen from white to pink, growing sweeter still until they were ready for harvesting. They would flavor Elvin breads and wines, and her favorite tea.

## *Chasing Brother Moon*

Aeda returned to her, his paws silent on the earthen trail. Be mindful, he said. They no longer sleep.

She cocked her head to listen.

There was only the steady rush of water, no insect songs or fox cries, no rodents in the brush, no deer stripping bark from the trees.

The moon broke through the clouds in haloed brilliance, splitting the gloom, lighting the pinnacled arches of Ellyndar's bridges far enough upriver to seem like a forgotten realm.

Larea shivered with a notion of her world crumbling, the bridges collapsing into the depths of the river like the bones of a rotting beast. That's how the wars had left them before the rebuilding, when rust stained the piles of toppled white bricks, and tarnish dulled what silver remained.

It had been years since the Wardens destroyed the last of the Grahze Order, yet tonight red-tinged fingers forked overhead.

Aeda passed his weight between his front paws, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, until Larea was ready to knock him sideways with her knee. He needed to calm down. Was it possible? Had the Grahze returned to Melytheria?

Yvorian appeared at the trailhead, striding briskly toward them, his eyes fixed on the lightning. The Warden Captain, in all his severity, was a contradiction in the moonlight. The luminescence of his pale hair and skin softened his expression to the point he looked almost serene. If she didn't know him better, she might have believed his ease, but there was nothing soft about this elf.

He'd come down from Aventhahl at a time when nothing crossed the northern woodland range, like something spat from the mountains because they didn't want him stuck in their teeth. He was a wiry, scruffy little thing back then, with more ferocity than sense. There was also talent, and a hunger for training which surpassed his need for food or sleep.

Yvorian shared no thoughts or projections as he approached. Instead, he flashed a set of hand signals, What do you see?

The Grahze stalked their prey along internal exchanges shared between source and target. Did he sense it too? Did he think it was unsafe?

Larea signaled back, Aeda says Grahze.

Yvorian locked eyes with the wolf who cocked his head as if puzzled by the scrutiny.

"How does a wolf know about the Grahze?" asked Yvorian.

## CATHERINE CRUZAN

Larea never doubted Aeda. He was as intelligent as any Elvin companion, but how could she explain that to her Captain? The wolf either wouldn't, or couldn't, speak to anyone else. She didn't know why. She could only assure Yvorian the Melytherian border was intact for the time being, though she doubted her teammates trusted her opinion of late.

Omission wasn't a lie if no one believed you anyway.

Her stomach repaid her dishonesty with a twinge. The Grahze employed different methods to breach Elvin defenses, including violent self-sacrifice. She'd seen it firsthand—hundreds of them cramming through ruptures in the Elvin Rim laid open by the burning bodies of their disciples.

"The red lightning always brings the Grahze," she said.

They watched the last of the fiery tendrils fade.

Red residue smoldered in the clouds like embers exuding their final breath of heat. Somewhere south of Elvin lands the humans had lit the Red Stone of Damandrin. Its master used it to summon the red lightning for the first time since the Grahze had been expunged.

An owl dropped from its perch, swooping low through the trees. With a final upward thrust, it settled on a branch overhanging the water. Thick with seedpods and spiny leaves, the tree reached across the river as if it longed for the opposing bank where the Elvin protections were strongest.

"We need to find out what's happening in Vestige," said Yvorian. He turned, and then disappeared back up the trailhead into the trees.

Aeda whined after him.

"You don't have to go with us if you don't want to," said Larea.

Brother Moon says danger is coming, Aeda replied.

He bounded after Yvorian.

The shadows swallowed his silvered-black coat almost immediately; he disappeared from view with a final toss of his hind feet.

Larea tugged at a fern, scattering the raindrops poised upon its feathery fronds. She wanted to follow the wolf into obscurity, known only to his pack and the wooded terrain they called home.

If Brother Moon was generous, he would send the shadows to swallow her too, and she would never have to return to a world of uncertainty and pain. But she was a Warden, sworn to protect the

## *Chasing Brother Moon*

greatest of the Elvin cities, Ellyndar. She had defeated their enemies through countless dangers come and gone. She knew the difference between occasional nervousness and the whiff of a real threat.

Tonight, Brother Moon would illuminate the path for her and her friends. As long as he shone brightly, she would be able to keep them all safe.

\* \* \*

Terrovan's greed ignited behind his eyes like a roiling fire, fueled by the self-destructive greed he often promised himself he would learn to suppress.

He regretted not tying back his hair. He wanted nothing more than to swipe the tickling strands from his face. But he needed to appear calm, even though he felt about as calm as a goose on slaughtering day. Two empty mugs sat near the half-empty one in his hand—the usual trappings. He hadn't actually swallowed a drop of liquor in days.

Creegar sat across the table, watching him from behind a steeple of manicured fingertips. Everything about the man suggested an aristocratic pedigree—his perfectly tailored blue silk coat with silver thread and pearl buttons, his neatly cropped black hair and beard, his evident disdain for the tavern and everyone in it.

Even the tabac smoke seemed wary of him. It filled the room, coiling between pockets of conversation like a dog sniffing out treats in every corner, but the nobleman was a stern master it wasn't going to beg.

“What is it you want in exchange?” said Terrovan.

Despite the begrudged sobriety, he had miscalculated. He realized it the moment Creegar smiled.

The door creaked inward, sending a waft of muggy heat into the room. A woman faltered in the doorway, swaying from the muscled shoulder of a local blacksmith. Her rouged lips were even richer than the roses in her yellow hair.

Drums riddled a melody of fiddles in the alleyway behind them, in what had to be the most loathsome tune Terrovan had ever heard.

The proprietor shouted from behind the bar, “In or out!” With his saggy jowls and bulging eyes, he reminded Terrovan of an old toad.

## CATHERINE CRUZAN

The blacksmith ushered his woman to a table, then sat with a heavy thud. She tumbled into his lap, dropping her head into the crook of his neck.

When the door closed on the music outside, Creegar said, "It will be a clean trade."

He paused for the barmaid twisting between tables with fistfuls of mugs. Brown curls spilled from a seashell comb at the base of her neck. She set most of the drinks in front of a table full of tradesmen in pressed linen shirts, before delivering the rest to a pair of farmers with sun-chafed necks and meaty hands.

Terrovan leaned closer to hear the sorcerer's terms, though his instincts urged him to follow the music out the door.

"I will give you the stone," Creegar continued, "but first you must bring me an elf."

"Bring you an elf—"

What could a nobleman possibly want with an elf, and in exchange for something as valuable as a stone of power?

"Alive—that stipulation is fixed. None of your mercenary tricks—"

Terrovan snorted. Treachery depended upon his mood and the circumstance of the day. "What guarantee do I have that you'll be equally upstanding?"

Creegar stood. His eyes lingered on the bronze pendant beneath Terrovan's throat, before he turned to leave.

Terrovan used to enjoy the week-long Spring Orchard celebrations, and the lucrative sport they offered, but this year was off to a retched start. He hated himself the moment he called out, "Wait—"

The sorcerer sat back down, looking smugly satisfied.

Terrovan's apprehension threatened to surface along with the over-spiced cabbage percolating in his stomach. He had lost his nerve and his credibility in a single foul stroke, and he needed to get them both back—fast.

"If you're as powerful as they say you are," he said, "why don't you just go up there and get one yourself?"

"Do you mean to challenge me, boy? Need I remind you—?"

"No—you needn't." He was hardly a boy. Most men his age were running laps between tilling soil and spawning devil children. "It was an honest question. I need to know what I'm up against before I strike any deal."

## *Chasing Brother Moon*

Creegar's hazel eyes gleamed dangerously.

He returned the glare, knowing that if he flinched now, the negotiations were as good as over. Everyone in Damandrin called this man 'Master', from the wealthiest politicians to the beggars in the street, not to mention the stories branding him the most powerful sorcerer of their time. Had he completely lost his mind, challenging someone so powerful?

"Fine," the nobleman-sorcerer said. "Elvin lands are impervious to men like me. I cannot simply swagger across their borders. If I did, I would have to be prepared to take on the entire Elvin army. Or worse, chase the mice deeper into their holes than I care to go. It's simpler to send a rat into the hole after them."

"Fair enough—" Terrovan replied.

The cabbage threatened upheaval again. If the man preferred battling an army over pursuing his prey, perhaps the stories were true. How was he supposed to maneuver between a dangerous sorcerer and a mythical race of beings cloaked in dark powers rooted at the heart of Melytheria?

"So," Creegar asked, "are we still wasting my time?"

"Bring you an elf—alive—no other stipulations?"

"No. What you do when you leave here doesn't concern me. Just don't keep me waiting or I'll send more rats into the hole after you."

"Send them now then. I don't work for free." It was time for Terrovan to regain his leverage. He did have the best reputation in Damandrin for delivering.

"Mr. Angill, if you're suggesting I need you or your specific skills, you are mistaken." The sorcerer reached into his coat.

Terrovan pulled a knife, and leveled it at the sorcerer's throat rather than find himself on the business end of a stone of power.

Creegar leaned against the knife tip, letting it bite into his skin. "I suggest you yield the point, boy."

"I suggest you withdraw an empty hand."

Frost crackled along the knife's edge, then cold charged painfully up Terrovan's arm. He dropped the weapon clattering on the table.

"Your magic doesn't frighten me," he said, pulling a carved bone knife this time.

"If that were true, you wouldn't be so eager to test it."

"Only the Black Stone of Damandrin can summon ice like that, yet you proffered the green."

## CATHERINE CRUZAN

“I set terms for the green, yes,” Creegar said. “I made no mention of what is mine.” He looked almost amused by the bone knife. “Do you need a demonstration? I could freeze a finger or two.”

“What—” said Terrovan, “no pets to handle the dirty work for you?”

Creegar raised an eyebrow.

The stories had the man heeling Grahze monks like dogs. If the Elves were real, surely the macabre Brotherhood was real as well. He stuck the bone knife into the table, driving its tip deep into the already marred wood.

The toad behind the bar gave him a dour look before swiping the foamy head off a mug. He set the drink on the barmaid’s tray, and then watched her navigate the room while he mopped the bar with a rag.

Terrovan returned the steel knife to his belt, ignoring a jolt from the still-cold blade when it touched his skin.

Creegar pulled a handful of silk from his pocket, and unfolded it with more caution than Terrovan would have expected from such a man. A green stone lay in the folds of fabric, so deep in color it looked almost black. The candlelight stroked it, warming its curves, making them glimmer. One edge was round like the bottom of a bowl. The other curved sinuously like water spilling over rocks.

A bead of radiance glowed at the heart of it, where a depression had been carved into its oblong surface. When the sorcerer brought it closer to the candle’s flame, it pulsed—once, twice, three times.

The greedy fire ignited behind Terrovan’s eyes again.

The attraction amazed him, so simple yet so complete. The Green Stone of Damandrin promised power beyond anything he’d ever known. He was done being a servant grubbing from one job to the next. He would be Master for a change, dressed in tailored silks, with a bellyful of meat and a woman on either arm.

He reached for the stone.

Creegar snatched it away. “Are you mad? There are at least a dozen fire sources in here. You’ll blow us all to oblivion with those unskilled hands of yours.”

Terrovan sat back, folding his arms. “Do you want the elf or not?”

“Bring the elf,” Creegar said. “You don’t get the stone a breath sooner.” He rewrapped the stone then tucked it back into his coat.

## *Chasing Brother Moon*

“We have a deal,” Terrovan said, staring at the pocket holding the stone. They would call him Master.

Creegar stood. “Send word when you’re ready to exchange.” He left the room with a distasteful sneer at everything in his path.

Terrovan didn’t exhale until the sorcerer had disappeared into the alleyway. The door swung shut, truncating a discordant chord from a flute echoing off the close-set buildings, once again sealing the patrons in their cocoon of smoke and clatter.

Terrovan glanced at the blacksmith and the woman purring at him through half-lidded eyes. The commotion of the festival would conceal his preparations, but that was all he would allow himself tonight. The women would have to wait.

“What do you think?” he said over his shoulder.

“I think you’re as crazy as ever,” Maligant replied.

His old friend rose from the adjacent table to take Creegar’s seat. His hair hung past his shoulders in dozens of long braids, and he hadn’t shaved his beard in days. His blue eyes glinted like ice in the firelight.

Terrovan wondered about his friend’s hesitation. Maligant never shied from a challenge. “You think we shouldn’t take the job?”

“It’s a dangerous business when the prize can’t be divided into equal shares.”

“I can’t do this alone. Name your price.”

“Oblivion,” Maligant said, smiling scandalously. “I liked the sound of that.” He tossed his braids over his shoulder then lowered his voice. “There were two stones in that coat of his.”

“And he wields both proficiently.”

“Oblivion, my friend.”

Terrovan shook his head. “You’re the crazy one—downright insane.”

“So it’s business as usual then?”

Terrovan frowned at him.

“We both get an amulet,” said Maligant, “or you get to bumble through this mess on your own.”

Terrovan scrubbed at his whiskers. He doubted Creegar meant to give him the one stone, let alone two. No one in their right mind would casually give away power like that.

The barmaid walked by again, and this time Maligant pulled her into his lap. She put up just enough fuss to feign propriety before falling into his embrace with a brilliant smile.

## CATHERINE CRUZAN

“Well, missy,” said Maligant. “My friend and I need ale—lots of ale. Tomorrow we venture into oblivion.”

The barmaid squirmed but Terrovan doubted it was about escaping. If there was one thing he envied, it was his friend’s ease with women. He pried his bone knife from the table then stashed it into his belt alongside the steel one. Then he stood, pushing back his chair. “We have a deal?”

Maligant nodded, his gaze still locked on the barmaid.

“The usual spot,” Terrovan said. “Don’t be late this time.” He headed for the door, ignoring more protestation from the cabbage.

Outside, he clenched his teeth against the hateful music, and followed the side of the building around to the back. Various couples lingered along the way, wrapped around each other, pressed against the walls, smelling of sweat and spirits.

The local undertaker had a pipe in one hand and a woman in the other. Terrovan hadn’t seen the man since wintertime when he’d buried a fellow guildsman. The smoke swirled around him and his partner in a veil of haze that did little to conceal his fumbling beneath her blouse.

They ignored Terrovan when he brushed past them, muttering about manners and decency, though he cared little for either himself. He just felt like complaining.

He rounded a corner then another, continuing away from the torch-lit paths to where the shadows reached farther than they did in the better parts of town. Eventually he found himself alone in the maze that constituted the underbelly of Damandrin’s Merchant District.

He preferred the polished, painted, well-to-do storefronts to these battered doors and boarded-up windows, but this was where he needed to be. He passed a stable marinating in urine, with his hand over his nose. The cabbage smell on his fingers did little to cut through the overbearing smell of feces.

How did he get himself into these convoluted twists?

Once he had an amulet stone he would be free to do whatever he wanted, to go wherever he wanted, whenever he wanted, without having to rely on anyone else. Until then, he needed just two things—a way to find, capture and return with an elf; and the means to deprive a powerful sorcerer of not one, but two of the most valuable weapons in existence.

Two plans—two simple things—easy.

## *Chasing Brother Moon*

He stopped in the middle of a narrow street to stare at a faded green door. Its handle had always reminded him of an old man leaning back in a rocking chair.

When he tried the latch, the door opened to a dimly-lit room. Glass shelves lined the walls, filled with colorful bottles and stoppered vials. Rows of dishes proffered dried herbs, grasses and flowers, with sachets stacked between them like princess pillows amidst the fields.

He stepped inside, inhaling the familiar jumble of smells.

Joelle stooped over the shop counter in her nightgown. Her raven hair spilled in waves down her back as she scooped ruddy-brown powder with a diminutive spoon, working back and forth between a set of scales and a vial. Lamplight glowed from the top of the staircase behind her. She was so absorbed in her measurements she hadn't noticed him enter.

Terrovan shut the door with a purposeful click.

Joelle looked up, a knife flashing in her hand. Then with a snap of her fingers, she lit a nearby candle in a spray of sparks. The wick flared, spattering everything with refracted yellow warmth.

For a moment, they blinked at each other in the new light.

"Van, darling," Joelle said in her richly soothing voice, the one she reserved for enticements. She slipped her blade back up her sleeve. "You frightened me."

"I need the tonic, Jo."

She stepped out from behind the counter still clutching the vial of powder. Her gown fluttered about her hips as she glided toward him.

"I told you yesterday," she said. "I don't have all the ingredients." She took his chin with her free hand. Her fingers were impossibly soft but they smelled of sharp, metallic toxins. "Patience, Dearest."

Terrovan slid his arm around the small of her back and pulled her close. She fell against him when he kissed her, and his body responded with pained yearning. Her lips were even softer than her hands. Her hair smelled of lilac and honey.

Except, he couldn't be the pawn tonight.

He forced himself to let go and stepped back, forcing the swimming heat from his head with a long, drawn breath. Joelle reached for him again, but he clamped hold of the wrist she kept tucked behind her hip. He wrenched the vial from her fingers then held it up accusingly.

## CATHERINE CRUZAN

“A sleep aid,” she said.

A shadow fell across the top of the stairs, and a deep voice boomed, “Joelle, where’d ya get off too?”

The raven beauty bit her lip. She looked at Terrovan, her dark eyes large with worry and a hint of mischief. He almost pitied the unsuspecting fool upstairs when he opened his palm to her. The man had probably wronged the Merchant’s Guild in some way, and Joelle was the instrument of his demise. If he was lucky, he would wake up on a ship bound for the southern continent.

“Sorry, love,” she said, snatching the vial from his hand. “Come back next week.”

“Three days,” he said.

Not that it mattered; he would be gone by morning. He just didn’t want her to know that. The less she knew of his business the better. Of course, that business would have gone smoother with the potion she owed him. He considered depriving her of the sleep aid, but he didn’t want to be the fool waking up on a slave ship.

“I’ll try,” she said with a cunning smile.

Terrovan headed for the door. No more spiced cabbage. No matter how good it tasted on the way down, it invariably ruined his stomach in the end.

He tugged at the brass man rocking and stepped outside. He hated himself for wanting to go back to Joelle, as he pulled the door shut on the soft yellow light.

Two plans—two simple things—easy! Hah!