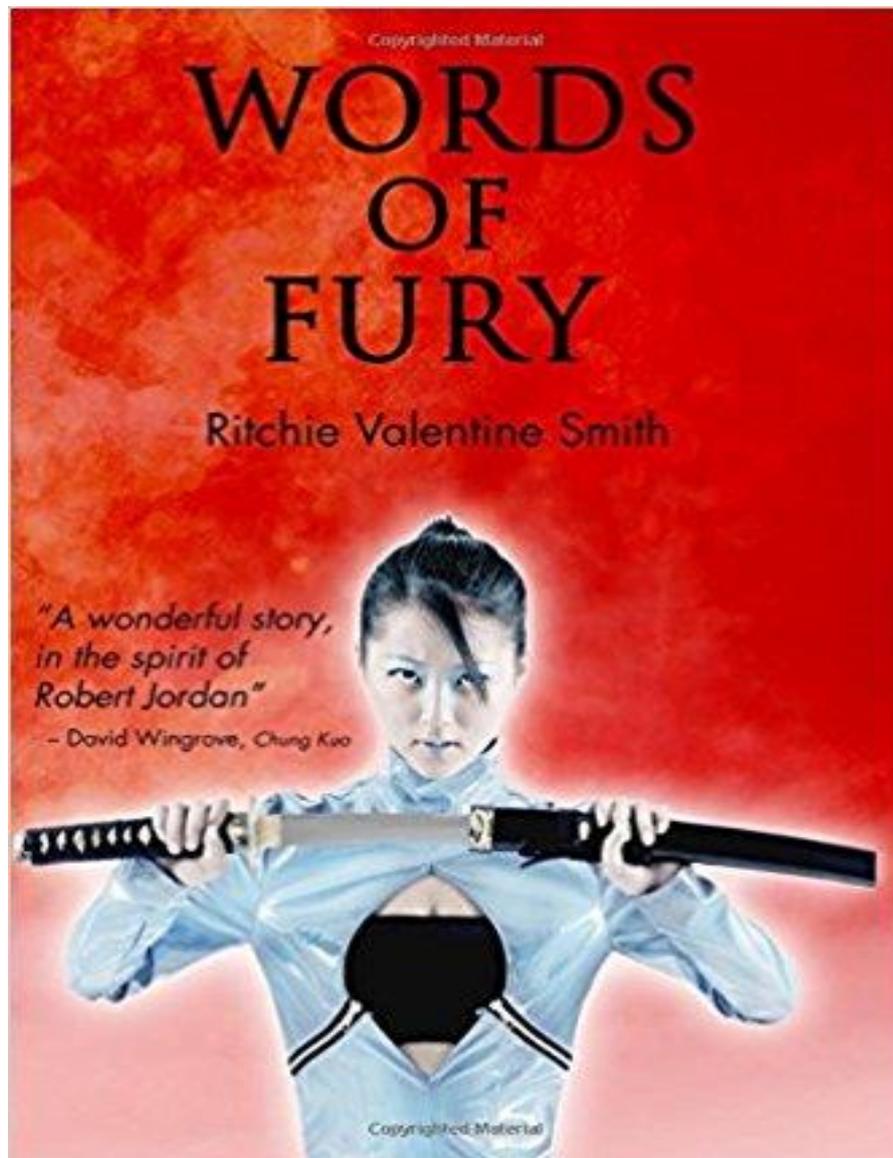


WORDS OF FURY



Words of Power vol. 2

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Ritchie Valentine Smith

*Whatever has happened before, from now on
everything can be different...*

Author's dedication:

This is for Tony and Louise Richards

'I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that persecute you, do good to them that hate you.' (Matthew 5, 44)

'Don't mistake my kindness for weakness.' – Al Capone

PART ONE

There is a war between darkness and light in every world, including our own. In samurai Japan, where the Empire of Albion and new faiths have arrived, the city of Jade has been lost. Those who led the fight to save the city are using a balloon to get to sanctuary, but their great enemy – a half-human face of incredible forces in this universe – is in pursuit...

Prologue to Part One: *Half of Heaven*

Man woke up shivering, turning his shoulders restlessly in the cold. He had been dreaming about Jade, that wonderful cosmopolitan port city in Japan, and the fight there against Albion and the Lord of the North. In the aftermath, he and his friends had escaped. Now their balloon sailed fourteen thousand feet above sea-level, and the thin chill air was making him breathless.

Why did I wake? Something bad ahead...?

But what? Man considered what it might be, hanging by his hands from the rigging-ropes. Those ropes held the bench he sat on with the others, who were sleeping. He was Emmanuel, though usually Man to his friends and to others.

Up above, he saw how the bright shining constellations stretched to the horizon. In this dark and cloudless night the Milky Way was a glowing river, which perhaps a hero could sail.

The rigging creaked again, though probably not enough to wake the others.

Then the Lady Joah turned her head.

Emmanuel?

His mind spoke back to hers. *I feel something wrong! – What?*

'We always knew *he* would pursue.'

They had their enemy the Lord of the North, who was much, much more than a person. But Man had half hoped *he* had been left behind, and he was about to argue that optimistic case. Instead, he gasped – because up ahead half of heaven was being shaken. Magical forces ran like a fountain of power, flowing up to many miles above them and then all the way down to sea-level.

'Look at that! Joah, it's like the stars are going to be ripped out of the sky. That has to be the enemy – *him*.'

'Yes, Emmanuel. There on the dark horizon the Lord of the North is doing something colossal.'

‘Do you know what?’

She considered, touching her chin, then touching her red sash where a long knife hung. ‘I think he’s building a trap.’

‘For *us*?’

Their balloon was only a soap-bubble enlarged by magic. If it touched that force all would be over – after a long dreadful fall to the sea.

‘Who else?’

There was a partial Moon to give them light. So, when Man turned to look, the samurai lady was no longer an exquisite ghost. Moonlight showed what their struggle back in Jade had done. She had fought bravely, like Man, but she too was stained with blood and was clearly exhausted – and their fight was far from over.

‘We both see what comes is deadly,’ he told her. ‘Still you are brave.’

She touched the tiny crucifix at her throat, and when she half turned back to him he felt her warm breath on his cheek.

‘No! Man, I am only good at overcoming fear; that merely seems like bravery.’

‘You are too modest.’

‘I am fooling you, then – but not myself. *He* is a face of some of the most profound forces in the universe. His power has long made me afraid. If we cannot get ourselves to The Waning of the Moon, we are finished.’ The look she gave Man pierced his heart. ‘Ahead may be our murder-place!’

Man looked again at the shivering chaos they were being driven towards. Lady Joah was right about the scale of that power. For the very first time, he considered surrendering.

Then he turned to her. ‘Lady, you’re too young and pretty to die.’

‘Perhaps *I* am! But what about you?’

He touched the strong curve of his jaw and he laughed out loud.

‘Too young. Now, look ahead. Think of escape. There must be something we can figure out.’

The enemy was there, with a trap miles across already laid, a magic trap certain to bring them down. If a woman acted to counter the trap, *he* would know at once and respond. In the same way, any other man using magic would be recognized as an enemy by the Lord of the North. So how could it be done?

There must be some escape possible, by clever trick or act of bravery.

Man tried very hard to see it.

Chapter One: No Way Through

The sky ahead of them shook again and again, and there was no way through *his* magical clawing that Man could see – though he looked long and hard. He leaned down from the swaying bench to rub the bronze casket lashed below.

‘You’re hoping for luck?’

The sleek metal case held the Eye of Jade and its Talking Book, one of the mightiest power gems known and a certain target for the Lord of the North.

Better to destroy the Eye, and ourselves too, than let it fall into *his* hands...

‘At least a touch of good fortune.’ Man straightened up, wishing that he still had access to the gem’s power. He pulled a rueful face. He was young and normally confident, but very worried now. ‘If only the Eye would like me again...’

‘You usually say that about girls!’

He managed to laugh.

Now, as they were blown forward, Lady Joah and he watched their doom together.

‘I can see little detail of *his* weaves, but I see their power.’

She smiled wanly, and played again with her sash where a long-bladed knife hung. ‘A man’s magic is hardly visible to other men; only the effects. There’s no way through.’

‘It’s the same, reversed, isn’t it? A woman’s power is easily noticed by men. So if you do something – ’

‘Then *he* will at once see *me*, and strike back, and it will be over.’

‘I already feel *his* character.’ Man considered, all his senses alert. ‘He’s brutally self-confident; he knows *exactly* how to win – or he thinks he does.’

‘You sound overawed.’

‘That’s how the Lord of the North wants me to think. So if I know how he wants me to think, maybe I can do something different.’ Man gave a grim smile, feeling slightly dizzy from the lack of oxygen. ‘But I see things in *him* I see in me – things I don’t like. And he *is* over-confident.’

Power still fountained up and then down.

She took his wrist, held it desperately. ‘Can you act against him?’

‘We can’t fight *his* magic head-on.’

‘Then we’re done?’

Suddenly Man was decisive; an idea had come, though only half formed. ‘I think there’s a way even *he* might be fooled.’

She let go of his hand. ‘How? And who might do that? Mother Zandar is too remote and my father is imprisoned back in Jade, and they are both far stronger than us.’

The idea was firming up in Man’s mind. ‘There is us, you and I together.’

‘But who are *we*, unschooled as we are, to even try?’

That annoyed Man, who had a temper.

‘Lady Joah, my father was Lord of Arms of all Albion, and you are the daughter of Lord Okada of the Jade, one of the most powerful men in this whole country. *I* used the Eye of Jade to rock an entire city. Joah, we’re strong. We *are*. Especially together!’

He twisted about, put both his hands onto her head. She leaned back in annoyance, but he persisted. There was flickering light in his mind, silver swirling with gold, his diminished power and hers, and then their two magics became one.

He gasped. Through the eyes of Joah, a woman of power, Man could see the enemy’s weaves rising from where *he* was at his work. Man saw a first veil of fiery red, backed by another veil that was a poisonous glowing violet.

Man saw what was coming. ‘If we pass through his magic, the balloon carrying us will be ripped apart – and it’s a long way down!’

He felt Joah shudder. ‘Does he want us to stop? I don’t see how we can!’

So she thought they would likely die?

He wanted to seize her, reassure her, kiss her.

He did none of these things, only tried to prepare magic of his own. Red and purple veils were falling out of the sky miles above them and then all the way down to the sea. They came closer and closer.

‘We’re going to fall,’ she said calmly, ‘and that will be the end.’

He saw there was a possible weakness in the great fountain of power. Where two different weaves met he saw a gap. In spite of the high-altitude cold he was sweating and nervous, but he took a necessary risk and used their merged magic to push the balloon hard left towards the seam. He heard the rigging-ropes creak as the balloon slewed over to one side, and Faslane, his fellow from Albion, snored horribly and muttered. Neither the Voice from Afar nor Man’s samurai friend Yoshi stirred.

Not enough power, thought Man. I must move us further...

‘*Wish me luck with the weaves!*’

‘Man, surely that’s too much power; he *will* see us!’

‘True, he *should*. Only, my power is now a mimic of *his*, and I’m pushing us in the same direction as the wind *he* made...’

Fire licked towards them, hot and red although icy cold. Man shivered.

‘We won’t get through, my Man!’

The balloon shuddered, and Man spread his fingers to make a larger parting in the enemy’s force.

‘You’ve done too much. He’ll see us!’

‘Maybe not. *I’m pretending to be him...*’

He gave the balloon a few more pushes, guiding them out of the final clawing reds. They had passed through, to the safe space beyond.

‘Man, I don’t see how you survived even one challenge!’

She sounded amazed. Though there had been no alert, and he felt satisfied over that, there was a bigger risk to come. Those dangerous, clawing shades of red were behind them, but still the deadly violet barrier was glowing ahead. His skin tingled; he knew the purple veil contained an even more deadly negative energy.

‘It’s getting worse ahead,’ she told him quietly. ‘The Lord of the North is still building up his magic, though the centre of the enemy’s power is far away and I cannot see what is waiting for us there.’

‘It won’t be a handshake and a free ticket home, that’s sure!’ He laughed, a little wildly. ‘Or maybe *he* will be right there, and it will be!’

He was still carefully watching the last and most dangerous veil. It was like a living violet net, painfully bright when seen by magic. He had to use even more power to push away those violet claws. The whole balloon shuddered. Electric-purple flashes surrounded them, and they both flinched though the blasts of light were silent.

He looked down, and from the sheer mad height he felt sick. Yet somehow he said nothing and the swaying balloon stayed whole.

Man exhaled, wondering at their good luck, wondering if *he* had really not noticed them. If he *had*, if there was an even more subtle trap being prepared...

He closed his eyes, and let his soul go looking for their great enemy...

‘Emmanuel!’

Nothing; he had seen nothing of the Lord of the North. They were *still* undiscovered.

‘Oh, Emmanuel!’ Joah sounded shocked, and entirely without gratitude. ‘I never ever imagined escape was possible!’

He waited for a better reaction. When it did not come his smile faded and he pulled his hands off her head.

The connection was broken; they were separate again. Without the use of her eyes all he could see of the trap ahead was the same colorless clawing, and he watched to see if there was any change, any sign they would be pursued.

‘Joah, I wonder if *he* knows we’ve escaped?’

Ahead, behind, in fact all around them, heaven continued to shake with *his* power. Man knew the Lord of the North was close and had set that giant trap, but he trusted Lady Joah.

She gestured with empty hands. ‘I don’t think he even knows we’re here, at least he doesn’t yet. But look at those lines of force still coming up! He is working on something gigantic.’

Man took a burning breath. ‘Whatever it is, it’s still hours away.’

Joah sighed. ‘The Lord of the North, when he springs this trap... Oh, if only we could reason with him, or plead...’

Man turned his head, to dispute the soft things she had just said.

‘Lady Joah, *don’t* imagine you can reason with him, still less plead. That was *his* best chance, right here – and we got past. In the morning, everything will look very different.’

‘Yes, I suppose, for the dark of night is *his* time.’

It was strange how resigned she seemed.

‘What about the others?’

‘Let them sleep on, Emmanuel, and you, too. If you and I together cannot fight *him* directly, what could even the Voice from Afar do?’

The Voice was was a sweet wild child of Albion descent. She was now a famous singer in the port of Jade who did magical things with music and sound. Man loved her, too, and was awed by her touch of what might be musical genius.

One day they might both go back to Albion, and be famous for very different reasons, but that day was not yet.

Soon he fell into an exhausted sleep.

Hours passed as he dreamed of falling, right to the centre of the Earth. Transparent walls showed red-hot rock pressing down. It was terrifying. But in his dream he was with someone very important, who *had* to be protected.

Then a hand was shaking his shoulder.

‘Emmanuel-John, we need you!’ Lady Joah said. ‘*Please wake up!*’

The dawn was a pink promise beyond his closed eyes, but he kept his eyes shut. Then the bench was kicked so hard he almost tumbled from it.

He blinked madly. The sunrise was an immense display that dazzled. In its centre bloody red was turning to white-hot gold.

Their bamboo bench swung perilously on the ropes that stretched down from the frail balloon. Man saw all his friends were awake now. The women were on either side of him, while the other men perched on the two bench ends. From the expressions Man saw they were all as afraid as he was.

‘Ah, I feel the Lord of the North is very close.’

The Voice from Afar had spoken.

The bench was buffeted again. Man snapped: ‘You’re right. That’s no caress!’

Now Yoshi eyed him, blearily. He was a very cool young man, stylish in his green and gold kimono and red leggings, though he too was blood-splashed. His swords had proved crucial to their fight back in Jade.

‘Tell me something I don’t know, my Man!’

She sounded weary. ‘It won’t be long till we are brought down.’

Lady Joah was interrupted by Faslane. He was the mariner newly come from Albion, earthy, powerful-looking and smart. ‘My lords, ladies, surely we have to do something?’

‘Put heat into the balloon, and we’d soar away!’

Joah responded, ‘If we use magic, dear Voice from Afar, he’ll know *exactly* where we are.’

‘Surely he knows already?’ said Yoshi.

‘No – because so far *his* strikes have missed.’

‘So far!’ Yoshi was angry. ‘Faslane is right; it’s necessary to act.’

‘I know it is,’ said the Voice. She pulled at her long, disarranged red-blond hair. ‘For last night I dreamed of the future – of what will happen should we fail.’

Man had to know. ‘How will it be?’

‘If *he* kills us and takes the Eye, *his* world will come to pass. Cold earth only, with humanity bred to be slaves in *his* prison tunnels. And elsewhere only a cold, cold imitation of life upon this earth – till beyond the end of time, forever.’

The Voice sometimes had the gift of Foreseeing. That, especially said in such a powerful, mournful tone, silenced everyone.

Man stared at the shimmering weaves over the still-dark sea, turning his head from side to side. ‘You women, what do you see?’

The Voice answered. ‘I don’t know what he’s making, but his weaves stretch for miles.’

‘How long till we hit the trap?’

‘*He* has had time enough to make it inescapable, my Man,’ said Joah softly. ‘All the time there is.’

Man was furious with that negativity; but how could he argue?

Yoshi ran fingers down the bandolier of throwing knives strapped to his chest. ‘I hate being helpless. I like to fight! You people with the power, tell me how!’

Joah spoke quickly. ‘We mustn’t be rash! – If we keep walking small and work no magic, perhaps we can escape.’

Yoshi sounded even angrier. ‘He bangs on the balloon so that we’re like monkeys being shaken out of a tree! *He wants to kill us!* Your “perhaps we can escape” isn’t good enough!’

‘Don’t forget that Man has the Eye, the greatest of all power gems!’

Though it was after a long and dark night, Man could tell Joah had found her shining enthusiasm again. But he said nothing now. *I don’t want to tell them.*

Joah continued, ‘Now look ahead, everyone! Please! Across the sea – look below the dawn – there is Mount Unzen! Look!’

Emmanuel did look. Many, many miles away there was land visible below the blinding sunrise – the Unzen peninsula. It was dark and indistinct land, but real.

Joah explained more. ‘*There* is hope! *There* is sanctuary! On the other side of the mountain is The Waning of the Moon! In that place are scholars and fighters from all over the known world, and they can teach us how to prevail.’ She turned to Man, visibly excited. ‘Oh, *there* is our promised land!’

On this side of the mountains the land was still dark. But on the other side, where the Waning was, Man knew there would be light.

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