

Bal-Sagoth, The Splendour Of A Thousand Swords

"Altarus:" Gaze deep into the mists with your spirit-eyes, Xerxes... look far, and tell me what you see.

"Xerxes:" I see a land far to the north... a vast empire of dark endless moors and snow-crowned mountains... a land of brooding citadels and warrior-kings who hail to grim gods.

"Altarus:" Look well, Xerxes, for enlightenment hides within the fog-swathed vales of Hyperborea...

"Chapter 1. The King's Dream:"

By the onyx sceptre of my forefathers, the air is churning with auguries of dethronement... Impending dread thus prophesized! In a dream I was bade ride the argent-eyed unicorn to the Ring of Stones... There a torrent of viscid slime assailed me, as pipes and horns sang the clarion of my dissolution... And the usurpation of my ancient azure throne. Assassins stalk the nighted halls of my palace... poisoned blades and chalices surround me. I thirsted for a balm, but my thirst was slaked by an envenomed draught. My swordarm shackled by tendrils of sloth... enthralled by the chasmed gloom... Borne upon wings of labyrinthine dread... I awaken! I shall seek the counsel of the sorcerer, keeper of the ancient scrolls of wisdom, and the Crystals of Power...

"The Words of the Sorcerer:"

My liege, great and regal king... the mists disclose their secrets... you are destined to wield a great dark power. Drink deep of the potions of the apothecary, for upon thee now I bestow a shard of the mystic Crystal of Mera... sacred artefact of the Atlantean mages, won in battle by our legions. My liege, the Crystal of Mera shall unveil the truth lurking hidden in thy most fever-haunted dreams...

"The Voice of the Harbinger:"

The land awash with spilled blood, and viscera torn forth from the sundered dead... Gorge the earth with flesh darkened with the claw and fang of war... rent open the ravenous maws of worms...

"The King:"

The Crystal illumines dark secrets, the truth is known... a dire and ancient threat is ranged against me. Hearken, the clarion is upon the winds, now the call to arms is upon us all, Grim warriors, take up thy spears and hone thy gleaming swords. Archers, string thy bows, brave knights, saddle the steeds of war, The glory of battle is nigh at last, our banner shall fly this day in victory!

My warriors, a legacy shall this day be wrought by our blades, decreed by the gods, Blessed by the blood of vanquished foes. Our destiny beckons...

"Lord Angsaar, Dark Liege of Chaos:"

Come, great king of Hyperborea, march against me with your splendid legions and shimmering swords. I, the Bane of the Atlantean Kings, the Scourge of Lemuria, Archfoe of the Immortals of Ultima Thule, shall Crush you! I shall visit a thousand plagues upon your realm, and wreak untold havoc and bloody carnage until I have your throne... and your soul!

"Chapter 2. The Immortal's Legacy:"

"Altarus:" And thus, flanked by the splendour of azure banners, a vast army marched forth from the great walls of the Imperial City of Hyperborea, and at the forefront of the mighty legions, astride an ebon war-stallion, rode the king, sunlight glinting up on his splendid armour... compelled by dreams, and guided by the Crystal of Mera...

"Xerxes:" Where? Where did the king's path take him?

"Altarus:" The king was compelled to lead his forces to the shadow-haunted Mountains of the Dead, a grim and brooding place steeped in dark and ancient legendry. Alone he rode into the gaping maw of a huge cave hewn into the side

of the tallest mountain countless ages past by unknown hands. For three full days and nights he did not emerge from the cave... until, at last, he rode forth from the eldritch mountain once more, a terrible knowledge shadowed in his icy eyes, and bearing in his gauntleted fist a huge black sword, a magnificent ebon blade which no human blacksmith ever forged. Fearsome sorcerous power crackled within the yard of black steel, dancing upon its searingly honed, glyph-scored blade... and its bejewelled, dragon-carved hilt did whisper arcane secrets to the king in a strange, elder tongue.

"Xerxes:" But master, what powers did this blade possess? What secrets did it hold?

"Altarus:" Many centuries ago, before even were waged the Great Wars between the ancient kingdoms of Atlantis and Hyperborea, Lord Angsaar did rise from his charnel-tomb and do battle with a powerful immortal warrior-shaman over the possession of the elder Crystals of Mera, mystic gems of unparalleled magical potency. Angsaar, his power swelled by forces from the vast Outer Darkness, did smite his foe to the brink of destruction... but, with his fading sorceries, the immortal mystically transferred his life-essence into his great black sword, and scattered the magic crystals across the galaxy, leaving Angsaar with a hollow victory and forcing him to return once more to his dark Chamber of Slumber. The sword was lost for centuries, as were the crystals, until the one gem to remain on this world was discovered deep beneath the northern seas by an ancient Atlantean wizard. And the sword... legends spoke of how its final resting place would be made known by the sorceries of the last crystal only when the blade's power would once again be needed to battle the Chaos-liege. This was the immortal's final, most powerful spell... upon the reawakening of Angsaar, the sorcerous energies and undying life-force encased within the blade would be transferred to its wielder... aye, the one who discovered the Shadow-Sword would be imbued with the power of the immortal, and by the art of elder spellcraft, he would do battle with his ancient nemesis once more...

"Xerxes:" Then there looms such a cataclysmic battle!

"Altarus:" And so, from his Black Citadel, the Chaos-liege did send forth his Horde of Wraiths to engage the army of the king...

"Chapter 3. The Arrival Upon The Field Of Blood:"

"The King:" Behold, a legion of undead fiends meets us upon the field of war. Face me, Scourge of Lemuria, I wield thy bane, the Shadow-Sword... (and darksome sorceries now empower me with thunderous might!) Hearken, the clarion is upon the winds, now the call to arms is upon us all, The glory of battle is nigh at last, into the fray we ride!

"Xerxes:" The outcome, master... who left the field victorious? Did the king prevail?

"Altarus:" The mists begin to disperse... for now, the images fade. That tale shall have to wait 'til another day...

(Lyrics: Byron)

(Music: Jonny Maudling)