

The Splendour of a Thousand Swords Gleaming Beneath the Blazon of the

Bal-Sagoth

[THE ANTEDILUVIAN ORACLE:]

Behold glorious Hyperborea, gleaming jewel of the north; an eon-veiled kingdom forever steeped in ancient legendry and the renown of its martial splendour... but of late, an ill wind whispers malignly through its opulent labyrinth of marbled citadels...

[WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE:]

[Episode I:]

THE SPLENDOUR OF A THOUSAND SWORDS GLEAMING BENEATH THE BLAZON OF THE HYPERBOREAN EMPIRE

[To be found on the second Bal-Sagoth album; "Starfire Burning Upon The Ice-Veiled Throne of Ultima Thule"]

[Episode II:]

THE DARK LIEGE OF CHAOS IS UNLEASHED AT THE ENSORCELLED SHRINE OF A'ZURA-KAI (THE SPLENDOUR OF A THOUSAND SWORDS GLEAMING BENEATH THE BLAZON OF THE HYPERBOREAN EMPIRE: Part: II)

[To be found on the third Bal-Sagoth album; "Battle Magic"]

NOW...

[Episode III:]

CRY HAVOC FOR GLORY, AND THE ANNIHILATION OF THE TITANS OF CHAOS! (THE SPLENDOUR OF A THOUSAND SWORDS GLEAMING BENEATH THE BLAZON OF THE HYPERBOREAN EMPIRE: Part: III)

[ALTARUS:]

And so, it ends. You have learned much, young Xerxes. Your training is nigh on complete.

The years which you have spent here at the Praxeum have been difficult ones, but the reward of elucidation you have gained far outweighs the hardship you have endured. Many lessons have you learned, not least of which is that knowledge is never without its price, my neophyte.

[XERXES:]

Yes, master Altarus. I have heeded your tutelage well, and your wisdom has been a great balm to me during the many trials I have undergone. I can now command the Mists of the Oracle, and the Great Eye of the Universe opens at my bidding. And yet, before I am placed before the final scrutiny of the Elders, I ask that I be allowed to gaze into the sidereal vista once more, to witness the final outcome of that great struggle which has so captivated me during my studies at the Praxeum.

[ALTARUS:]

Ah yes... the epic conflict between the Dark Liege of Chaos and the royal Scion of proud Hyperborea. Very well, my young apprentice. Command the starscape to divulge its mysteries... look deep into the fathomless mists, and the ruinous carnage of A'zura-Kai shall once again be arrayed before thine

curious gaze. Aye Xerxes, thrice you have summoned the besieged and benighted
vista of Hyperborea... now pay heed, for the final battle is at hand!

[Chapter 7: The Last Stand Against Chaos.]

[ALTARUS:]

And a crimson sun rose slowly over the Field of Blood... and such
were the corpse-
mounds of the dead that they aspired to touch that ireful orb.
Slithering shadows nuzzled the massed bodies of the slain, as the King rallied
the survivors of the battle against Chaos to one final act of defiance...

[LORD ANGSAAR:]

Impertinent mortal wormcast! Do you truly aspire to prevail
against me? I am the Bane of the Atlantean Kings, the Scourge of Lemuria,
Arch-Foe of the Immortals of Ultima Thule! Long before man hurled himself
squamously from the primordial ooze, I waged war with gods and thwarted
eternity!

[ALTARUS:]

Lord Angsaar, the Dark Liege of Chaos, was poised on the brink of
ultimate victory. By insidious manipulation, he had carefully drawn the forces
of Hyperborea to battle at the Shrine of A'zura-Kai, pitting his legions of
ravening wraiths against the stalwart forces of the Hyperborean Empire, and
during the fray his agents of evil had seized the Ninth Crystal of Mera from
the grasp of the King. With the cosmic energies of the Shrine magnifying the
empyrean power of the Ninth Crystal, Angsaar triumphantly performed the arcane
rite that would sunder the sorcerous fetters which had hitherto kept his
physical incarnation confined within the ancient Chamber of Slumber. Summoning
the interdimensional portal which the mystic power of the Shrine allied with
the sorceries of the Crystal could generate, Angsaar channelled his fiendish
presence from his darksome prison directly to the death-
gorged Field of Blood.
Thus was the spell of confinement woven countless aeons ago by
Angsaar's immortal nemesis broken, and on that fateful day the dread
Chaos-
Liege strode the world of mortal men once more. The King, flanked by the
few valiant survivors of the ruinous Wraith-onslaught, stood defiant before
the withering glare of Chaos...

[LORD ANGSAAR:]

Ah, great King of Hyperborea! My mystic shackles are at last
broken... I am free once more! Your army is lost, your realm is mine...
it shall be blessed with the honour of being the first to fall before my
renewed onslaught! Bow to me in obeisance!

[THE KING:]

Never! For too long your diseased machinations have hung like a
black pall over glorious Hyperborea... you have invaded my very dreams and
sown the virulent seeds of base treachery within my court. It ends here,
arch-fiend!

[LORD ANGSAAR:]

Feh! Yield to me, throw down your sword! Obey and I promise
that your death shall be swift, if not entirely devoid of suffering!

[THE KING:]

I defy you!

[LORD ANGSAAR:]

Hyperborea shall fall! Your court shall become the heart of my new imperium! Your people shall become my lackeys, bearing the glorious burden of my sovereignty with sweet praise upon their lips!

[THE KING:]

I shall always defy you!

[LORD ANGSAAR:]

Then your pain shall etch a new legend of suffering in the benighted obelisks of the Outer Darkness, and not even that cursed blade of adamantine black steel shall preserve thee! Die!

[THE KING:]

So, the final battle begins! Into the fray we ride! For the eternal glory of Hyperborea!

[ALTARUS:]

And the Chaos-Liege summoned the remnants of his cackling wraith-horde, commanding the unholy brood to once more hurl itself like a black tide against the now bloodied but still razor edged steel of the grim survivors of Hyperborea. With the enchantments of the Ninth Crystal still crackling in the air about the Shrine, the incorporeal frames of the wraiths were once more transmogrified into squamous pseudo-flesh, and thus vulnerable to the biting blades of the King's depleted war-host. Rallying his forces once more, the Royal Scion of Hyperborea clove into the massed hordes of nethermost horror, his ensorcelled ebon blade hewing five-score left and five-score right, leaving a viscous and noxious trail of sundered fiends in his wake. The Arch-Wraith of Lord Angsaar, that same bestial horror which had smitten the King and seized the Crystal of Mera from his gauntleted fist, swooped screaming from the crimson sky in a bid to extinguish the life-force of the Hyperborean monarch, but the benighted blade of the King was swifter, and with a flash of noisome green light and smoke, the Arch-Wraith's head rolled to the blood-slaked earth, its leering countenance forever frozen in a grotesque parody of un-death. And once more, like a purifying storm of righteous fury the heroes of Hyperborea dealt steel-cold and martial discipline unto the baying hounds of Chaos.

[XERXES:]

And yet I perceive that the wraith-horde's number was being ever bolstered by the sorceries of the reborn Chaos-Liege... for every keening horror hacked down by a Hyperborean blade, three more were summoned from the Outer Darkness by the machinations of Angsaar. Even the courage and the grim determination of the King's valiant force could not hope to prevail against such an overwhelming foe. But the last, best hope still remained, clutched tightly within the King's fist! The Shadow-Sword!

[ALTARUS:]

Your perceptions are clear, young Xerxes. The life-essence of Angsaar's arch-foe was still encased within the stygian sword following their last cataclysmic encounter many aeons past, and that yard of fearsome black steel spoke once more to the King in the same long dead tongue it had burned upon his mind deep within the Mountains of the Dead. One hope remained to

defeat Angsaar, but it would carry with it a most terrible price for the King.

[Chapter 8: The Return of the Immortal]

[THE ECHOES OF THE IMMORTAL:]

Hearken, noble King of Hyperborea. Long ago, before life evolved from the boiling oceans of the primordial sphere, I waged furious and slaughterous battle with the Chaos-Liege over the possession of the sacred Crystals of Mera, shards of such incredible sorcerous potency that even the Empyrean Lexicon itself was no greater a prize. Although I succeeded in smiting the dark one and imprisoning him within his Chamber of Slumber, I was hammered to the brink of dissolution by the abominations of Chaos, and I thus transferred my life-essence into my Sword, that same blade which you now hold in your grasp. I committed my fading energies to concealing the blade from the sight of man until such time as it would once more be needed to bring to bear against Chaos... aye, until such time as Angsaar reawakened. It was I who guided you to the mountainous resting place of the blade when my arch-foe marked you as central protagonist in his scheme to recover the Prime Crystal, o' King of the North. To utterly destroy the Dark Liege of Chaos, you must join your essence with mine... we must fuse our life-forces and become one so that my full power may be unleashed against Angsaar once more. But this final deed demands the most severe of tolls, o' noble monarch ... To become as one with the immortal essence of the Shadow-Sword is to sacrifice forever your own mortality, and to forsake eternally the world of man. Are you prepared to pay this price, King of Hyperborea?

[THE KING:]

To preserve the sovereignty of my realm and safeguard my people from the forces of darkness? Aye! For my kingship demands no less a commitment! So be it... let this final deed be done!

[THE WARRIORS OF HYPERBOREA:]

Imperius Rex!

[LORD ANGSAAR:]

What futile gesture is this? Curse you, manling! Can you not accept the inevitability of your defeat?

[THE KING:]

Begone, servitor of Chaos! Your nemesis awaits thee! Return to the Outer Darkness!

[LORD ANGSAAR:]

You fool! You cannot comprehend your actions! I offered you sweet oblivion, and instead you have chosen tortuous damnation!

[THE KING:]

I would sooner suffer damnation a thousand times than bend the knee to Chaos!

[ALTARUS:]

And a great stillness descended over the Field of Blood. Grimly, slowly, the King held aloft the Shadow-Sword and spoke those baleful words of power which had been forever branded indelibly upon his soul. Writhing tendrils of night-dark, coruscating energy lanced from the surface of the blade, entwining the King in a pulsating chrysalis of searing sorcerous power. His eyes shone deep crimson with an illuminatory radiance not born of this world,

and forces which had lain dormant since before the fall of the Third Moon stirred at last from their aeons-old slumber...

[LORD ANGSAAR:]

No... my eternal nemesis, you will not thwart me! Abominations rise! Destroy these mortals who vex me as the buzzing of gnats vexes a titan!

Drag their impudent souls to the abyss!

[THE WARRIORS OF HYPERBOREA:]

Havoc is the cry! Come, fiends of the nether-void... face righteous pattern-welded death!

[LORD ANGSAAR:]

Praise Chaos! By the crystal heart of Mera I shall stand deified!

[THE WARRIORS OF HYPERBOREA:]

Glory eternal! For our King and sacred Hyperborea!

[THE KING:]

Noble warriors of Hyperborea... I salute your steadfast courage. This will be my final command to you. Now come... follow your King into battle one last time. Into the fray we ride... For the eternal glory of Hyperborea!

[ANGSAAR:]

The circle closes... you cannot resist the unparalleled might of Chaos and the exquisite majesty of the Z'xulth! I shall unleash all the terrors of the Outer Darkness against thee! Behold the true extent of my power... My flesh is a shrine wherein all demons dwell!

[THE WARRIORS OF HYPERBOREA:]

Stand fast! Cry havoc for glory and the annihilation of the titans of Chaos! We fight to the last man!

[THE KING:]

By all the gods of Hyperborea... a legacy shall be wrought by our blades... our legend shall live forever! Hear me, Angsaar! My humanity fades... my mortality dissipates as does the darkness before the glimmering kiss of the dawn! Let us finish it... Let this be our final battle!

[ALTARUS:]

And thus was etched into the eternal codex of the heavens the immortal legend of the Hyperborean Empire.

[XERXES:]

But master Altarus... what was the outcome of the final clash? What effect did the power of the Immortal have upon the King? Did he ultimately defeat Angsaar and the horrors spawned from the Outer Darkness?

[ALTARUS:]

Alas Xerxes, no one knows the final outcome of the battle. Even the Great Eye of the Universe and the Mists of the Oracle are unable to ascertain

the fate of the King and his army on that fate-steeped dawn. So much unparalleled and polarized arcane power was unleashed upon the Field of Blood at that instant that it has forever obscured the oracular vista and shielded the truth from the eyes of even the most talented and presentient master of the Praxeum. Today, Hyperborea is but a memory, a glorious legend which rests forever within the same fathomless shark-haunted grave as do mythic Lemuria and fabled Atlantis..

[XERXES:]

I shall make it a priority to ascertain the truth, master. I vow I shall channel all the skills I have learned here at the Praxeum into discovering the final fate of the King of Hyperborea!

[ALTARUS:]

And I believe that you may well succeed, my young apprentice. But whatever the case, one thing is certain. As long as legends endure in the cosmos and the deeds of heroes are celebrated in the annals of eternity, none who gaze in awe beyond the mists and are blessed to behold it shall ever forget the splendour of a thousand swords gleaming beneath the blazon of the Hyperborean Empire.

[THE END...?]

[15 October: 1893]

After a sleepless and oppressively feverish night spent pondering the truths which I exhumed amongst The Ghosts Of Angkor Wat, I have concluded that these perceived parallels and their possible significance carry me ever closer to the centre of this great global web, the strands of which I have been traversing in my long quest for enlightenment, and yet I now fear that the owner of this web has surely felt the tremblings I have caused along its delicate filaments, and may well feel compelled to investigate the disturbance...