

THE HOLY MAN'S WAR

Book One of

THE MYSTIC ISLE LEGENDS

by

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EXCERPT

CHAPTER FIVE

The massive stone stood at the top of a secluded hill in the shadows of a gargantuan oak tree whose branches fanned out across the sky like an exotic bird of the East. The dolmen had been placed there in unrecorded ages when the druids ruled the land. It had been the sight of unspeakable mysteries when distant stars aligned with the obelisk and set in motion powers within the stone. The megalith was a silent witness to a time when initiates knew of forces beneath the earth containing the key to the secrets of the universe.

Hidden schools from the four corners of the world had received and passed on such knowledge. Mayan priests, the Chaldeans of Assyria, the Magi of Persia, the High Priests of Egypt, the students of Pythagoras had all partaken in the life-giving learning which had come down from a source beyond the sun. The druids were the last to know these secrets and had kept them alive through an oral teaching which had left no trace in the outer world. The depths of their spiritual treasures were hinted at by the remnants of temples such as the one found on the plains of Salisbury by the river Avon, known to history as Stonehenge.

With the coming of each season, the druids would gather in their long white ceremonial robes and enact ancient rites in the ghostly light of moonglow. From across the cosmic spaces, beyond the outer edges of the solar system, aligned with stars never seen by human eyes, a forcefield, attracted as by a magnet, would reach down into the mists of the blue planet and ring within the crystals of the stone. Men of great wisdom would lift their spirits in ecstasy and combine their radiant energy with the power entering the stone from above and from below. The great menhir rose over two underground streams which crossed immediately below its base. This was one of the most active rocks in the region.

At every moon phase it would vibrate ever so slightly, its inner quartz filled with such surges of energy that anyone who touched it, or focused its power through ritual, would be harnessing forces greater than lightning. Upon closer inspection, one could notice that the lower sides of the rock had become vitrified, molten by an unearthly heat. No

bonfire could have created such intensity. Now the dolmen stood forgotten on the cliff. It rose in splendid isolation, a witness to another age when men were not ruled by warrior instincts.

Squirrels scampered around the rock, avoiding its touch for they had learned long ago that a strange sensation emanated from its core. Nor did birds ever rest upon its oval summit. The mysterious stone was abandoned by all. Without the guiding power of the priests, the cosmic beacon was but a useless monument. Its link with other such sights, Silbury Hill, the Glastonbury Tor, Stonehenge, so meticulously designed by sages of yore, meant nothing to the pillaging tribes of the Picts, Alamans and Saxons whose only concern for the heavens was that they not fall on their heads.

Two visitors still came to the megalith when the moon was full. This very eve, as the earth's axis shifted with the arrival of the spring equinox, they would come before the dolmen and fill themselves with its strange power. A giant owl let out a piercing cry as the forest fell prey to the darkness of night. Shadowy creatures furtively wandered among the great oak trees, in search of food. The tiny clearing where the living stone looked up at the heavens was flooded with the dim bluish light of the moon. It seemed to be patiently waiting for its masters, oblivious to the ravages of passing time and the annihilation of those who had placed it there and knew its secrets.

But this eve was different. Someone was coming, someone who knew the spiraling currents within the dolmen and could direct them for his purposes. Rustling leaves broke the silence and announced his arrival. A tall figure stepped into the clearing and came to stand before the sacred stone. The ghostly light seemed to welcome the visitor as though he were part of its eerie atmosphere. The silhouette, the dolmen, and the moon seemed linked by the invisible forces which soared between them. It was as though they were not separate entities but blended together beyond the fragile walls of matter giving the illusion of distance and separation. Slowly, the black-robed man approached the dolmen, raising his arms like giant wings spreading for flight. He placed his old, withered hands upon the stone.

The crickets suddenly stopped chirping. A hum filled the clearing as the stone began to shake and the man's body shiver. From the depths of the earth came a power current so strong that the silhouette was thrown back. It was immediately followed by the loud, frantic flapping of owls' wings as the night creatures hurried from their trees to escape the unnatural sound. The tall figure raised his arms toward the black skies. A glow radiated from the eagle eyes of the wizard Ubarra.

He looked toward the giant, cold eye of the moon and whispered hoarsely:

"The Time has come!"

Suddenly, the clearing was filled with sounds. Voices, moans, laughter, shouts and shrill cries. Mingling with the moonglow, ethereal shapes swirled in the air, appearing and disappearing as though caught between the realms of spirit and matter. Ubarra kept his arms held high and watched the bizarre movements with wild amazement.

"Come to me!" he shouted. "I've been waiting so long! Come to me!"

A wisp of light formed a few feet from him like smoke blown by a whirlwind. It writhed before him, struggling to take shape. Ubarra mumbled out an incantation in a strange tongue, turning scarlet with strain.

"I am here!" a low, gravelly voice said with a snicker.

The unearthly voice sounded like the rumble of distant thunder. Ubarra whirled around and found standing before him a little, heavy-set man wearing a broad-rimmed hat and blue cloak. He had only one eye and from it came a beam of light sparkling with arrogance. The old warlock studied him carefully. He was surprised by the almost humorous appearance of the odd little man.

"Don't be fooled. It is I!" he said in his unnatural voice.

"Odin!" Ubarra whispered in awe.

"My appearance is different in the upper world, but there too I am not what I seem to be. You of all humans should not be fooled by the visible!"

"You look just as the myths have described you . . . " Ubarra said breathlessly.

"This is not my first visit to the middle world," he growled. "But it may be my last if we do not accomplish what has been ordained!"

"I am ready," the old wizard stated with determination.

"Certainly you are. We have not risked your travel to our world for nothing. We are depending on you now."

"What do you command?"

Ghostly figures continued to dance about the clearing as the old wizard and the strange little man spoke. The outcome of their meeting would determine who would be the rulers of earth.

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