

FIRST BOOK

CHAPTER I

OKIZAR

Trotting slowly, the King Okizar and his horse went to the river. He looked at the sun emerging from the East; it looked like a ball of fire ready to burst. He half-closed the eyes and thousands of little lights were on his retina, while he uttered the following words: “Good morning and show your eye”.

It was then when the rider felt the weight of his weapon over the back, and this calmed him because no one had ever dared to get into the dark and mysterious Forest of the Otherworld without being protected by the edge of a sword.

The King crossed the bridge between the two banks of Corraniaid river, the one that could hear voices from the okis, even those voices brought by the wind from unknown lands, and also those uttered by trees, birds and every creature inhabiting the Kingdom of the Otherworld, because their subsequent transformation into a monotonous noise spread everywhere even to ears with the gift of listening to them.

A group of laundresses recognized him and greeted with their hands raised to the sky. The King returned such courtesy shaking lightly his head, and while spurring his horse, galloped, left the river behind and headed to the main road.

In the West, the hills were suddenly illuminated and apple-tree groves were before the eyes of the King as if by magic. Beyond, from side to side there were lands of thick woods and green prairies, finally devoured by an inexpugnable, dangerous desert never travelled through by any living being but useful for the strategic defence of the South Kingdom.

Three or four labors were in the middle of the road; and others were grazing on the sides. They looked tame if not disturbed, but could be very dangerous if treated roughly. Ocular saw them, stopped, and was about to leave the road, when a dwarf appeared suddenly and was ready to let him pass.

The dwarf's name was Hornbori, but hiding his real name, he made him call Eiddilic. He was renowned in that region for dealing willingly with farm tasks, for his outbursts of rage, and for his tendency to curse anything that disturbed him.

The lebirs followed meekly to Hornbori that, shrilly whistling, was leading them toward a huge heap of grass that Hornbori had piled at certain distance. From there, under the brim of his wide red hat adorned with a beautiful and blue bird quill, the dwarf looked in askance at the

King who still was at the same site. Hornbori did not pay attention, turned his back and, as if nothing happened, continued with its tasks.

Hornbori was the owner of lands beyond the great East Hill but because he had permission to carry their lebirs to the King's lands, it was possible to see him nearby while he talked to himself and worked.

In fact, the dwarf recited verses in his language that was known to some few, or perhaps to some few old men belonging to poor families who had inhabited the strange Lebir Valley, beyond the Great Hill, before the Great War against the margonts.

These elders told the Lebir Valley was shaking quite often, usually the soil opened and made emerge, from tortuous and deep cracks, certain ugly, shaggy and almost blind creatures howling, who are called *goblins*. The dwarves chased them mercilessly and beheaded them with their sharp swords made in the best forges of the known World. On such occasions, the forges were fed with the bodies of these evil inhabitants of the darkness of the Earth –of all those that Ahriman, the Shadow Lord was able to create with his abject and mighty energy.

Aw ha aur
Mezw ha mezw
Ard Er'borg leute.
Aw ha aw.
Hornbori.
Mezwwi'ten.
Ard ri Dana'an.
Ow ha ow;
Oki'zar¹.

Hornbbori was son of the dwarf Bergleute, who had come from remote regions beyond the seas –the famous and mythical Bergleute that, as a child, had snatched the fabulous South Sword from the evil Ahriman, the Shadow that had devastated the World with his army of trolls, but that had been defeated by peoples and entities integrating the Brotherhood of Light about six hundred years ago.

Hornbori sang his father's stories in his lonely rural days. Without family or friends, and under a surmised name, Eiddilic just had stories told many times by his absent father that, three hundred years after the war against the trolls, had given the South Sword to the legendary Danaan, Great King of the Okis, but that previously had crossed the Obstacle Bridge to enter the scatch land, an Atlantean people, where the priestess Sora had protected the Sword with the spell of the star Halcyon.

¹ I am myself, son of the Great Bergleute. I am myself: Hornbori. You are you, descendant of the great King Danaan. You are Okizar.

Hornbori, the King's son, sang to his acquaintances all those stories, and his grave and melancholic voice mixed into the wind and trill of birds vanished in the remote East Valley, in majestic north mountains or lonely dark woods, because no one listened to him any more.

Okizar kept moving. The image of Honbori became more and more distant. How old was he? Nearly three hundred years had passed since the Great War, and that would be the age of the dwarf that recited verses in the honor of his father that had passed away like a hero defending Danaan, the great-great-grandfather of the King Okizar.

The sun was high in the sky when Okizar reached the crossroad opened like a trident: toward the south it was a wide, clear and unobstructed road, and later right ahead toward regions known as the Farthest-Reaches-Kingdom, inhabited by the Queen Bugovila, his relative and ally. Toward the south-east, it was narrow and tortuous like a snake, sunk in green meadows of the grown valley, entering hilly areas and vanishing in remote lands by the sea. In front, to the east and later to the north, it ended at the White Road, but half an hour after the crossroad, it became a blurred detour filled with daisies, poppies and verbenas, and vanished amid hills covered by a jungle that the King was determined to travel through intending to save many miles.

The horse galloped to the west more than half an hour, but later, being restless, it suddenly stopped. The horse was hitting the ground with its front legs, and as the rider urged it to go to the thick wood, the horse reared up where the detour toward the White Road appeared suddenly amid lights and shadows.

The King was aware of the horse refusing to go on, and alighted calmly. He did not know quite well how to manage without his horse to reach his destination, but something told him those things would be solved in some way following such path. His hunch was as strong as to reject any logic warning against reaching far without his horse; so, he decided to go ahead with determination toward the forest. As the King saw the thick wood, apparently he thought to be hearing some low voices from the forest: there were whispers and his name uttered with smooth and slow modulations. But Okizar was afraid of nothing and, when he decided something, hardly stepped back.

"Well, friend, come back home," Okizar said, strongly patting the rump of his horse, "because my heart tells me this is my route and not another, although apparently I am crazy".

The excited horse raised the front legs, turned, and started trotting homeward. Soon, all this became a distant sound of hooves and a tenuous cloud of dust gilded by sunlight.

The King adjusted the pouch on his back and girded up the sword on his waist –unaware of the fact that it was the same sword held by Danaan in the war against the margonts, the South Sword also known as *the Sword of Bergleute*– and with steady step he went ahead through the green path under tender sprouts of yew trees; beyond, while entering the thick wood, he could see other trees of the same kind and gorgeous branches and so impressive and large trunks that four men entwined around it might not encompass its whole circumference. These beautiful trees were old giants of more than twenty yards high but so lethal that every part of them could even kill the strongest man. Entertained while looking at those old yew trees, the King did not notice he had stepped on a group of mushrooms that disappeared instantly under the weight of his shoes, emanating a strong and unpleasant smell that Okizar recognized at once and refused to breathe in for all means.

The king held his breath and ran swiftly toward the heart of the forest, whose beats and those of the King were one breath. He reached an extremely large and old oak; its top was as high as to be impossible to see it, but leaning on its very wide trunk full of holes, he caught his breath.

The foul smell had disappeared. Okizar had stepped on some very poisonous mushroom; in case of inhalation, its vapors caused terrible migraines and aroused the presence of strange beings and ideas of suicide and self-mutilation in those who were possessed. He had seen men and women with no hands, ears and even eyes after encountering those monsters of nature.

Okizar looked for his waterskin and drank a little water. Suddenly he heard a whisper from holes in the oak trunk, something like: “*Dieh, tah dieh, Oki...*” (“Good days, Oki... Good days, Okizar”).

It was dryads’ language. Some being was nearby, talking to him. Okizar was extremely careful not to make any sudden movement, hanged his waterskin on the waist and looked up; a quite little creature of golden hair was staring at him with huge and intense light-blue colored eyes.

“*Dieh, dieh, dryad*”, the King replied.

These words were enough for quite beautiful little creatures to emerge from every hole of the tree; all together they talked and caused so much uproar that Okizar did not dare speak a word.

Dryads flew around him as fast as butterflies whose wings moved as swiftly as those of hummingbirds. It was like a noise of crazy bumblebees at the sight of a huge and generous honeycomb.

Some of them, by way of welcome, poured over his head flowers of rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and little dry leaves. All the rest imitated them and the King had to cover his face with the hands –such welcome

became a rain of flowers, berries, acorns, rowans and beechnuts that were thrown from all corners.

Through his fingers like a fan covering his face, he could see hundreds of dryads going to and fro, and shouting in unison:

“Dieh, tah dieh, Oki. Wee neh?” (‘Good days, Oki. Where are you going?’).

Their voices sounded like the chiming of little crystal bells, playing a sweet melody spread throughout the forest with a strange feeling of unreality and leaving the monarch speechless.

Okizar knew the dryad language, and also that they could communicate with human beings because they had learned the oki language at the beginning of time. So, he thought: “I am looking for Haghedisse”.

At the end of such sentence, some very little beautiful creatures stopped their tasks and vanished.

The humming of their little silvery and vaporous wings, and the tinkle from their crystal voices were replaced by a deep silence, a shivery silence.

Each step of Okizar on the smooth ground of leaves sounded like a grave and monotonous echo multiplied in each beech, ash, rowan, ilex, oak or yew tree appearing before his marveled eyes.

That was an extraordinary place inhabited by shadows, lights and a vaporous scintillating mist that, arising from strong and twisted roots, settled in leafy bushes and low branches, and finally ascended like a spiral to the sky, entirely hidden by interlaced treetops.

The path had disappeared. Okizar had lost his bearings and in order to keep on ahead he set aside low branches of an oak, which were almost totally covered by splendid ferns whose leaves had reached the ground forming new flowering plants of big, long and blackish rhizomes.

The whole forest was breathing rhythmically, and its bitter-sweet breath entered the nostrils of Okizar and its effect was hypnotic.

The King emerged on a circular glade whose green roof nearly illuminated by minute irregular blotches of sunlight shivered before a scared flock of gold-crests flying away amid rustling leaves and eerie whistling of birds. Later, everything was silent again to such an extent that everything was motionless, and he perceived that somebody had given an order for this event: hundreds of eyes were watching over him and he had reason to distrust because the Great War had caused much sorrow to the people in the Kingdom of Otherworld that in the past had lived in a generous and friendly spirit of solidarity with the men.

Okizar looked around and knew he was lost and had to be oriented while there was light. Therefore, he headed toward gigantic oak and, after a respectful reverence, asked permission to climb its branches.

“Bile roble, in Németon. I, Oki, King of the Okis, asks permission for climb your branches until your top.”

His loud and clear voice echoed in the labyrinthine and shady forest untouched by human footsteps since immemorial time: a green and wild forest of rustling leaves barely moved in the soft breeze of the beginning of summer.

The oak looked at him from above and like only a tree can do; and with its extremely generous, kind, sincere and cordial soul adjusted serenely its strong and heavy branches for Okizar to climb.

The King recalled his father, the King Godoalan’s sayings about conversations with a quite old and wise oak born of the wind breath and the earth strength in earlier times to Danaan, and how he had mourned when an ominous thunderbolt killed him and took him aflame to the Different Kingdom.

A threatening silence until then in the forest was broken by a strident music of cicadas and crickets competing in unison for the strongest song, immediately along with the squawk of a raven that was watching him very carefully.

Later, this place was sweetened and his soul calmed down by the mummings of two doves from a rowan full of fruits.

With his heart calmer, Ozikar began to climb the big branches of the oak. He knew he had to climb carefully not to make it harm; so, he looked up and at everywhere trying to see what would be the nearest and most proper branch to use it like a rung. So, quite carefully not to harm the magical oak, he climbed and climbed and eventually reached the highest point of the tree and from there he could see the main road coming from the north, the White Road, and the winding path to travel through the valley toward the east, an also the exuberant jungle framing the White Road, a thick and mysterious jungle continuing in Menhir Valley.

Now Okizar was oriented and ready to descend but at that moment, with no time to react, he was repulsed and thrown into the void by a merciless power.

The King flew toward the north, from hill to hill. He crossed Mehnir Valley and later, over mountains standing on the Oak Valley, he flew at level over Hircocervia and Greewen, and harmless he reached the beginning of Corraniaid river because that mysterious power placed him smoothly over some dark, huge and rough rocks through which the crystalline water of the whispering and cold Corraniaid river was flowing.

Noble and magical oaks had carried him to his final destination.
Waters of the river talked him with a childlike voice:

“Haghedisse, Haghedisse, Cailleach in Németon.”

Okizar drank waters from the river and instantly knew where the witch stood and made his way in that direction.