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The High King's Tomb (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWith the ghostly help of the First Rider, Karigan G'ladheon had transported the corrupt spirit of Mornhavon the Black into the future, buying valuable time for her king and country.But how far in the future is Mornhavon now? A hundred years? Ten years? Only one year? There's no way to tell. So though the immediate threat has passed, Mornhavon's shadow still lies heavily on the land, and on their minds ... although there are threats closer to home as well. The D'Yer Wall, protecting Sacoridia from the dark, corrupted Blackveil forest, remains breached despite Karigan and her fellow Riders best efforts. They've scoured the land searching for lost documents and magical clues to help mend the breach, fend off

any incursions from Blackveil Forest and, more pressingly, protect them from Mornhavon's return. Nor is the breach in the wall the only danger. Mornhavon may have gone, but the descendants of his people remain and they're ready to claim the land that their forefathers failed to conquer. These vengeful enemies, hidden within the peaceful borders of Sacordia, have spent generations honing their dark magic ready to strike - and ensuring that their blow, when it comes, will be one that Karigan and the Sacordians have no defence against ...

Extrait 1. CROWN OF FLAME In the autumn season, hawks, falcons, and eagles followed an ancient path through the sky on their journey south for the winter, the same path their ancestors had flown since the first took wing in ages long dark to memory. Their route swept down from the northlands, along the great frothing river that flowed from the glaciers to the sea, and over a cluster of small mountains. These were the Teligmar Hills of Mirwell Province, located on the western border of Sacordia. Perhaps the raptors were relieved when they saw the hills bulging on the horizon, for they were landmarks that helped guide the way, and the rising north wind gave loft to wings that had many hundreds of miles yet to fly, easing the toil of the journey. They hovered on updrafts over the rounded, weathered summits, resting on air currents and keeping an eye out for prey, maybe a stray songbird intent on its own imperative to migrate, or an unwary rodent. This year, the raptors, with their sharp vision, spotted something new and curious among the mountains: humans. Numerous humans had taken up residence on one of the summits. There were clusters of tents and other structures among the trees and rocks, wood smoke wafting in the air, voices carried by the wind, and metal glinting in the morning sun. The raptors sensed a strange power down there, something their small bird minds could not grasp, but definitely something that ruffled their feathers. Whatever it was, the concerns of the raptors rested with their own journey south, not with the affairs of humans. They left behind the Teligmar Hills, and would soon leave the land of Sacordia to its winter, the Earth wheeling beneath the trailing edges of their wings. As soon as the woman stepped out of her tent, she was greeted by the excited voices of children. They clustered around her, all chattering at once, tugging on her skirt for attention, showing her where a baby tooth was newly missing, asking her to play games or tell stories. She laughed and patted heads, the crinkles around her eyes and mouth deepening. It was a mild autumn morning, but the cold breezes swept over the top of the small mountains summit as they always did, tumbling leaves about her feet in whorls, and loosening a lock of steel gray hair from her braid. She tired of the wind, but the children didn't mind it, and she'd seen plenty of hawks using it as they passed south. The mountain her people camped on was aptly named Hawk Hill. Now, now, my children, she said. There will be time to play games and tell stories later. Right now I need to see Ferdan. Ferdan? Where are you? A towheaded boy raised his hand and the woman waded through the children to reach him. His face was drawn, with circles under his eyes and a smudge of dirt on his chin. His shirt was not buttoned correctly, as if he had dressed himself. How is your mum today? she asked. She knelt to rebutton his shirt and straighten it out. Not too good, the boy said. Coughing real bad. When the woman finished with his shirt, she stood and pressed a pouch fragrant with herbs into the boy's small hand. Tell her to take this with her tea, a pinch thrice daily, no more, no less. It will help clear her lungs. Keep water steaming in a pot nearby for her to breathe. It will make her easier. You understand? Be careful not to burn yourself. When Ferdan's expression of worry did not alter, she tousled his hair and said, I'll be along to visit her this afternoon. Now you go and see that your mum has some of that tea. Yes, Grandmother, Ferdan said, and he darted off to a lean-to draped with a stained blanket used both for privacy and to keep out the weather, the pouch clutched to his breast. She would see to it his mother pulled through. It was a tragedy that any child should lose their mum. She shook her head and turned her attention to the rest of the children. Isn't it time you went to your lessons with Master Holdt? There was whining and groaning from the children, but no real rebellion, and she shooed them away, chuckling. Only one child remained after all the others left, a little girl who was the woman's true granddaughter, Lala. Lala was too simple in her mind for lessons and she did not like playing with the other children. Nor did she talk. So most of the time she shadowed her grandmother or played by herself. While the woman was Lala's grandmother by blood, she was also known as Grandmother to all her people in the encampment. She birthed their babies, provided them with medicines when they were sick, cared for their wounds, and counseled them on matters of marriage and family. She also led them in their spiritual beliefs. When it came time to flee Sacor City and seek safe haven, it was her they had looked to; it was her they followed on the grueling journey across the country all the way west to Mirwell Province, sometimes traveling along roads, but more often than not making their way through the unforgiving wilderness of the Green Cloak Forest. It had not been easy, and not all survived the journey, but those who did expressed their gratitude for her foresight and wisdom. She was a simple woman, glad to be of comfort to them and honored by their trust.

Leaving Sacor City had meant a great deal of upheaval and sacrifice. Theyd left behind trades, businesses, respectable posts in the community; farms, homesteads, and houses. She had worried most about the children in the beginning, but learned over the ensuing months just how resilient the young ones were. This was a grand adventure for them, camping and hiding out in the wilds of the countryside, and the older boys liked to play outlaw, which usually involved the king and his men running after the outlaws of Second Empire, and ending when the outlaws slew the enemy with the sticks they used for swords. The empire always prevailed, the lads cheering with gusto. The hiding and camping tended to be harder on the adults, who recognized what they had given up and left behind forever. Yes, they had lost much, but they still possessed their freedom and their lives, and here they could wear their pendants or tattoos of the black tree unhidden. One day, Grandmother believed, the black tree of Mornhavonia would bloom again, but in the meantime they would not be at the mercy of kings law. When the king discovered the existence of Second Empire over the summer, the sect in Sacor City began to collapse almost immediately with the capture of their leader, Weldon Spurlock. It was not Weldon who had revealed them, but another of their group, Westley Uxton. Names had been given, which led to more arrests and someone else giving additional names, and so on. Grandmother managed to escape with little more than a hundred of the faithful. Others chose to remain in Sacor City on the chance theyd not be discovered, and so had those who were too elderly or unfit to travel. Some took their own lives lest they be used by the king to acquire information, and a few were operatives who knew how to evade capture. The refugees from Sacor City occupied one side of the gray granite summit, where children recited lessons with Master Holdt and their parents washed laundry, repaired household goods, tended chickens and goats, and prepared for stalking game along the flanks of the mountain. The soldiers camped across from them, where they currently sharpened blades, practiced swordplay, and ate breakfast. Their tents and sturdy lean-tos were tucked into clusters of boulders and against outcrops. The soldiers were not children of the empire, but had been equally persecuted by the king. Some were bandits, mercenaries, and deserters, but most were loyalists of the old Lord Mirwell, who had attempted to depose the king two years ago. The loyalists had been forced into hiding to avoid arrest and the inevitable execution. Grandmother was convinced it was God who had brought her people and the soldiers together, unlikely allies though they may be. Her people required protection, and she needed to start building an army, and blessing be, she found the leader of the soldiers at a crossroads during their exodus. She had no gold to pay the soldiers with, no position in life with which to reward them at least not yet but she had been able to give them purpose, for they shared a common enemy: the king and Sacoridia. When the time was right, she would expand their ranks with the devout of Second Empire. Already some of the men and older boys of her sect trained with the soldiers. Others remained embedded with their units in provincial and private militias, as well as the kings own military. When she called, they would come to her well trained and ready to attend to whatever task she set before them. Her ancestors had been wise to melt into everyday Sacoridian society, spreading a network of sects across the provinces and into Rhovanny as well. They had infiltrated not only the military, but the trades and guilds. They ran farms and sold wares. They lived as any Sacoridian did, but secretly awaited the time when the empire would rise again. One day they would rule over those who had been their neighbors, control all trade and the military. The empire would finally conquer this land of heathens. This was the dream of the five who founded Second Empire in the aftermath of the Long War, and Grandmother did not think the fruition of that dream far off. Such thoughts always warmed her, made her proud of her people. Over a millennium they had endured, keeping their secrets, and waiting ever so patiently. Their day would come. The officer who commanded the soldiers made his way across the summit to where she stood taking in the morning and halted before her. They had an appointment. Lala, dear, she said, turning to her granddaughter, fetch my basket, please. The little girl ducked into the tent they shared, and reemerged almost instantly with a long-handled basket that contained skeins of Grandmothers yarn. The soldier awaiting her pleasure was tall and broad-shouldered and moved with the grace of any well-trained, disciplined warrior. He wore tough fighting leathers and a serviceable longsword in a scarred sheath on his right hip. His flesh also bore the scars of battle, notably a patch over his eye and the hook on his right wrist that replaced his missing hand. He had once been a favorite of the old lord-governors, and proved experienced and highly capable. Grandmother liked him very much. Good morning, Captain Immerez, she said. Morning. His voice was low and gravelly. Were ready for you. She nodded and followed him across the summit. Without looking, she knew Lala tagged along carrying the basket. The girl was always interested, or perhaps entertained, by her grandmothers activities, whether it was healing the sick or punishing transgressors. Since Lala did not speak or show much in the way of emotion, it was hard to say

what she thought about anything. Still, she was biddable, and her silence did not bother Grandmother in the least, for she was used to it. She had cut the girl from the womb of her own dead daughter nine years ago, and even then, though the baby had survived, she uttered not a sound when she emerged into the world, and had not made a sound since. The captain led them to a corner of the encampment where the prisoner sat bound beneath the watchful gaze of his guard. The man was a wreck of welts, bruises, and gashes. No doubt there were broken bones beneath abused flesh. Jeremiah, Grandmother said, I am disappointed in you. At the sound of his name, the prisoner looked up at her. One of his eyes was swollen shut. Captain Immerez tells me you were seen and overheard talking to some kings men down in Mirwellton. You were starting to give them details about us. Is this so? Jeremiah did not answer, and Grandmother took this as confirmation of his guilt. Thank God the captains men stopped you before you ruined us, she said. Exposing our secrets is one of the highest acts of betrayal you could commit. Why? Why would you do such a thing? Bloody saliva oozed from Jeremiahs mouth. Many of his teeth had been smashed during the interrogation. It took him a few moments to get any words out, and when they came, they were a wet whisper. I do not believe. I do not believe in the destiny of Second Empire. Grandmother schooled herself to calmness, though his words made her want to cry. Shed known Jeremiah since he was a toddler, had taught him with the other children in the ways of the empire, and she loved him as she loved all the others. Before she could speak, he continued, I likelike my life in Sacoridia. Do not need empire. Grandmother wanted to cover her ears at his words, but she could not deny the truth of his betrayal. It had happened to others, other descendents of Arcosia who adapted to life as Sacoridians so well they gave up on the empire, turned their backs on it. Whole sects had faded away; others had watered down bloodlines so much by marrying outside the society they were shunned. Those of the blood who turned away but did not seem likely to expose Second Empire were left alone in the hope they would return to the fold. Others, like Jeremiah, who had actively tried to betray them, were dealt with. You would turn away from your heritage and all it means? She shook her head in disbelief and he did not deny her accusation. You would have destroyed us your family, your neighbors, your kin. Just want to farm, Jeremiah said. Didnt like leaving my land. Have peace. Nothing wrong with Sacoridia. Dont need empire. Grandmother closed her eyes and took a deep breath. You know what this means, Jeremiah? I do. Yes, he would know. Every one of them knew the consequences of betrayal. Second Empire had remained hidden for so long because of the doctrine of secrecy it adhered to. Punishment against transgressors was harsh to protect that secret. Jeremiah, she said, I have no choice but to pronounce you a traitor. He did not protest, he did not say a word. Was anyone else involved in this heresy? she asked the captain. The kings men he talked to were ambushed and killed, the captain replied. There was no one else. We were thorough in our questioning. She nodded. The evidence of their thoroughness sat before her. You have brought this upon yourself, she told Jeremiah. He bowed his head, accepting his doom. Grandmother beckoned Lala forward and took her basket of yarn from the girl. Now be a good girl and go fetch my bowl. You know the one. Lala nodded and trotted off. Grandmother gazed into her basket at her yarn. There were skeins dyed deep red, indigo, and an earthy brown, and a small ball of sky blue. She chose the red, drawing out a strand about the length of her arm, and cut it with a sharp little knife that hung from her waist. She set the basket aside. Jeremiah rocked back and forth at her feet, mumbling prayers to God. Even if he betrayed his people, at least he had not assimilated so far that he had abandoned the one true God in favor of the multitudes the heathen Sacoridians worshipped. From then on she ignored Jeremiah and concentrated on the strand of yarn, which she started tying into knots. Intricate knots, knots that had been taught to her by her mother, as her mothers mother had taught, and down the maternal line of her family through the millennia. Only since summer, however, had she been able to call the true power to the knots. As Grandmother worked, sparks flew from her fingers, though they did not ignite the yarn. Cook fires around the encampment dwindled and sputtered as though the life had been sucked from them. Feed the fires, she instructed Captain Immerez. She barely registered him passing the order along to his subordinates. With each loop and tug of the yarn she worked the art, speaking words of power that were Arcosian in origin, but not of the Arcosian language. She bound the power as she tightened each knot. The energy of the cook fires flowed through her and into the knots. She did not see red yarn woven about her fingers, but a golden strand of flame. It did not burn her. When she finished, she held in her hands what looked a mass of snarled red yarn to those not gifted with the art. To Grandmother, it was a crown of fire. She placed it on Jeremiahs head. Safir! she commanded, and it blazed. There were easier, more direct ways to execute traitors, it was true, but this was uniquely Arcosian, and thus fitting. The annals of her people told of the crown of fire as one form of punishing a traitor. It also provided a graphic example to others who might harbor secret thoughts of rebellion. They could not help but

recognize her power and authority when they witnessed nothing more than a harmless bit of yarn bring about an excruciating death. Jeremiahs hair smoldered and crackled, then burned away. The yarn sank into his skull, greedily feeding on flesh to fuel its flame of power. When Jeremiah began screaming, the captain stuffed a rag into his mouth that a soldier had been using to oil his sword. Smoke rose from Jeremiahs head and his body spasmed, his back arching. The skin of his face and skull blackened and bubbled with blisters as the flames burned from the inside out. With a final muffled scream, Jeremiah heaved over and died. I must be quick now, Grandmother said, feeling fevered herself. Lala? There you are. The bowl, please. The bowl was made of nondescript earthenware, the spiderweb crackling of the glaze stained a rusty color. The vessel had always been used for the purpose for which Grandmother now employed it. It had been handed down her maternal line like the knowledge of how to tie the knots. Lala set the bowl in place. Good girl, Grandmother said. She crouched beside Jeremiah. He may have tried to betray his people, but now he could give back and maybe God would forgive him, allow him into the eternal meadow. Really, she had done the young man a kindness she now could sin no further and perhaps had not lost all chance of gaining entrance to paradise. She thrust her knife into the artery of his neck and held the bowl to catch his blood. Captain Immerez hovered nearby while his men stayed clear of the grotesque scene of the bleeding of Jeremiah with his blackened, smoking head. Ive news for you, but thought it better to wait till this task was completed. Grandmother glanced over her shoulder at him. Go ahead. He nodded. Ive had word that the parchment has been located. Grandmother grinned. How wonderful! Yes. Events have been set in motion in Sacor City just as you wished, and we should obtain the parchment very soon. Saddened as Grandmother was by Jeremiahs betrayal and the necessity of his death, Immerezs news buoyed her spirits. It also pleased her that Jeremiahs blood would not go to waste, but would aid her cause. Her ordinary looking bowl would keep the blood warm and fresh till she needed to use it. Her happiness grew even as crimson liquid filled the bowl to the brim. From Publishers Weekly Karigan G'ladheon was hoping for a break from adventure after the breakneck escapades of *First Rider's Call* (2004), but this action-packed third *Green Rider* volume gives her no time to rest. Sent on what she thinks is a mundane errand for the king of Sacordia and the captain of the royal messenger corps known as the *Green Riders*, Karigan begins having strange dreams that may hold hidden meaning. Then she receives a cryptic message from the ghost of a would-be magician. Karigan finally accepts that she's destined for the extraordinary when the magnificent black horse *Salvistar*, the steed of the god of death, beckons her to ride with him among the stars. Britain keeps the excitement high from beginning to end, balancing epic magical battles with the humor and camaraderie of Karigan and her fellow riders. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.