

DOUGLAS S. TAYLOR'S

CHRONICLES OF CALEDON

SWORD
OF
SOULS



BOOK

ONE

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I

“Oh, from afar the Deliverer shall come and smite the terrible army of the Wicked and bind the hearts of men into one against the Iniquity . . .” From an ancient Rune Kobarian prophecy.

Long before the fall of the central kingdoms and the dark sails of Draccus pierced the hearts of both men and beasts into a great war, a tribal battle in the frozen north is drawing to a final close. The battle, these barbaric skirmishes have lasted nearly four generations before the silence of near genocide befell the weaker, the quieter and peaceful, as it does so many times before. Now, beneath the audience of the dark granite peaks and across the bloodstained snowfields the spoils of war belongs to the victor. For the victor, the fierce Tarvas who dwelt over timeless seas of generations high in the Catanbar Mountains region had finally come to them. The lands below the snowfields beyond the Iratirus River, the lands of their foes, lay the Ramadan lands. The great Chieftain, Y'llian-Talbok lay dead in the snow, his strong powerful body separated from his

head in a pool of freezing blood, along with countless of other bodies that dotted the pristine landscape. The Tarvas warriors raced through the winding pass wreaking havoc upon the villages below like a great pestilence of locusts, and the fall of the Ramadans has now begun.

Soon, pillars of smoke rose from the landscape of the forest canopy below the mountains, and the air filled with screams suddenly silenced. With the fall of the Ramadans, the Tarvas grew stronger in numbers, enslaving the women and children and putting to the blade, every old and sick Ramadan man over the age of twelve. In chains, those few Ramadans now forced to march under the Tarvas whip. To the north, through the high passes of the Catanbar Mountains on which many imprisoned succumbed to the elements, the death marched continued. A Ramadan boy stood there shackled to his mother who lay in the snow, her body broken and cold, laid still, the boy too exhausted to cry fell along the side of her, his body barely covered shivered. He looked up into his mother's face; her steel blue eyes had faded as the life left her a few moments before. He knew she was dead, and he realized that he too would be with her, and

as he thought, he too would join his father who died months before against the relentless Tarvas masters.

The young child had stopped shivering so uncontrollably now as he could almost hear his mother's voice calling him from afar in a direction he could not quite discern. The taste of blood from his bleeding gums, wounds sustained in beatings from his Tarvas masters. His legs bruised and nearly broken and his skin on his back had shown signs of old and fresh wounds by the Tarvas whip is uncovered to the elements of the bitter cold. A sound much closer in the snowfield came forth from behind him, for he knew this familiar sound; it was the sound of feet in the snow, feet belonging to the Tarvas demons.

The lad laid still and held his breath, thinking it was his last, "Look here is two more!" growled the menace that loomed just above the boy that concentrated a stare into his dead mother's eyes. "A boy I think and that of a woman, dead!" The voice said. The boy knew the man above him had his head turned to another farther down the pass at a slight distance from all the others who are chained and marching further up the mountains. "Shit, these Ramadans are weak, if this keeps up, we will have none to tend to

our goats!” The Tarvas warrior began to laugh as he bent down and unshackled the small boy and woman. “No sense of leaving good steel on this Ramadan trash.” The boy could feel only the numbing bitter cold go deep into his body while concentrating as hard as he could in staring into his mother’s eyes. He then could hear the footsteps of the Tarvas warrior leave, as he lay there motionless in the snow as the frost began to form on his brow and eyelashes.

Just then, the sun began to shine through the thick brooding clouds, so bright that it nearly blinded him causing him to squint with the reflection off the snow. It has been the first time he has seen the sun in three or four days traveling through the rugged and remote passes of these mountains. He could not move it was now only a matter of time before he too would follow his mother and he accepted it. The young boy thinking that on the other side, somewhere he knew nothing about, only that it had to be a better place, a place that he would find both his mother and his father waiting for him. Tears began to well up in his eyes as he could feel the sun upon his frozen flesh warming his body slowly at first. After a few minutes, the stinging in his legs, feet, and toes were almost

too unbearable, but he was still alive. With each passing minute, he grew warmer under the intensive sun. Eventually for whatever reason, he knew that it would be some other day before he would meet his mother and father on the other side of this life, this harsh life he must continue to endure.

“You will do my bidding” The voice sounded sinisterly and far off that was in the young boy’s native tongue.

The boy remained motionless, and thought about the direction where the old and sinister voice was coming from, he waited nearly holding his own breath, “I have spared your life so that I may do my work in you.” The voice faded off again, and for the boy, this troubled him because he knew that someone out there knew he was yet alive.

“Arise, my child.” The voice sounded closer, like it was just behind and above him. The boy heard no other noise, no footsteps, no breathing, and no sound of armor and steel mail.

“Adajahara, you will go, there you will learn what is already inside you, and there you will also learn much” The voice faded off into the slight breeze and then came back to the boy lying in the frozen snow.

“Arise and head down on where you have came, I will guide you to where you need to be, and be not afraid.” The sinister voice seemed colder than that of the boy’s surroundings, but he had nothing else to trust, nothing else to go by and he was certainly smart enough to realize if he stayed there in the pass, he would die.

Shortly after all the noise from behind him had passed and he knew he was alone, he arose and looked around and could see no one, except for his mother’s frozen body. He then took her outer garments as his own and arose and turned and walked down the pass, in doing so, he turned one final time to his mother’s body as his tears flowed from his reddening frost bitten face and said goodbye in his native tongue.

He traveled down the pass as carefully as he could in the blinding sun, he was warmer now, his body was trembling, not from the cold, or fear of recapture by the Tarvas, but in knowing, he was truly alone.

Soon minutes passed into hours, and hours into a few days. He had now managed to escape the Tarvas’s whip and headed south along the foothills of the mountain range behind him. The young orphan ate wild berries to the point it was making him sick,

but he was free. The boy did manage to find a small sword, a Ramadan dagger in fact, but in his tiny hands, it was like a sword, and something that would give him an illusion of protection.

The small boy, thoughts filled on where to go, in what direction, and for how long, preoccupied his mind. He had no real sense of direction, and he found it hard to focus, so he decided to follow the direction of the sun as it rose, and as soon it was over him, he would follow his shadow until night, this he knew would keep him heading in one direction. He had done this for several more days.

By his second week of walking through the foothills that opened to the plains of his people, he came across several villages, mostly leveled to the ground; there he found enough bread and clothing to get dressed. He made a pack, crude in nature so that he could haul some meager supplies and an old flask for his drinking water.

The bruising suffered from his beatings was healing in his legs as he grew stronger, and the wounds on his back and arms began to heal as well. The land he was traveling through was unfamiliar to him and at times he thought briefly about turning back, but he did not, he figured to stay with his original plan as

best as he could. His fears of being alone gave way to excitement of the adventure that was beginning to unfold before his eyes.

In another week, the mountains were just a purple distant line barely noticeable over his left shoulder. The young boy continued now accompanied by a heavy wooden staff he held firmly in his right hand as he walked. He also had a leather belt tied around his waist that held his dagger and kept his dark-blue wool tunic from blowing up over his head in the wind. He managed to find a pair of leather sandals, slightly too big for his small feet, but they were much better than the animal skin rags he was wearing before.

Eventually he left behind the ruins of his people and crossed over several small streams before he was at the edge of a huge river, too wide and swift to cross. On the other side, as far as he could see in either direction was a huge green forest. As he looked through his green eyes, he could see hills rising from the forest, covered in strange trees like those that he has never seen before. They were not of the scattered pines he was accustomed to seeing in his homeland. As he stood there in the midday sun, his face covered in dirt and sweat he looked down at the small pool of still water from the raging

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