

The Tomb of Kings

Carthian Spinesetter stood before the Tomb of Kings as, for the third day in a row, a cold wind continued to carry the stench of the dead into the city from outside the walls of Dragonspine Citadel. As of yet, the Citadel was not fallen. Today, as in the past, the only successful invasion was that all too familiar stench breaching the walls of the citadel. Better to have the invading stench, than be the stench, his ever-grim thoughts reminded him. Behind him, in silence, a small band of his soldiers covered their faces with cloths in an effort to gain some relief from the smell.

Gritting his teeth, the weathered champion grimaced, a slight wave of nausea washing through him. It wasn't too difficult to overcome such things if you were always exposed to it. He'd been through this more times than he cared to remember. Sighing, Carthian closed his eyes and concentrated on control. Within a few seconds, his stomach settled.

He opened his eyes and gazed in wonder at the large double-doors of brass which gave entrance to the Tomb of Kings. The tomb had stood for half a millennia, untouched by the hand of time. He had come here for a reason, and yearned within for the outcome to favor him. It was a decision made in faith, much to the surprise of his soldiers, many of which thought him mad to attempt what he was about to do.

The Tomb of Kings was held in awe by all who lived within Dragonspine Citadel. Only the most noble, heroic souls were taken by the tomb. None possessed the right to enter this blessed shrine, but The Warden. The Warden, The Keeper of Souls, had been slain by a stray arrow, leaving Dragonspine Citadel without a mediator between his forefathers, who now rested within, and the Tomb of Kings.

Carthian knew he was about to risk losing his life, possibly his soul, in this desperate hour. He gripped one of the two large golden rings and pulled with all his strength. To his surprise, the heavy door opened noiselessly, and without resistance.

Taking a deep breath, he looked into the tomb as a breath of stagnant air exhaled from within, blowing his long black hair back over his shoulders. Deep from within, Carthian could hear whispering. It was not too late to turn back. No, he had to try.

This tomb was a Living Relic of The Ancients, a sentient structure with an awareness of its own, built for the first king who ever ruled Dragonspine Citadel -- the first king who had earned the right to be buried within its dustless chambers. The Tomb of Kings was a mystery, often discussed by those who contemplated its origin. It was a complete mystery to all but The Keeper of Souls. To enter into this place was to seek audience with death itself.

Without hesitation, Carthian banished any and all lingering doubts within his mind. There was no time for doubts. Within, he would petition the dead. If that petition was granted, the tomb would spare him. If it did not, this Relic would swallow him into darkness. His soul would never know rest.

Before entering, General Spinesetter knelt in respect and reverence, the only fear penetrating his being was that of losing Dragonspine Citadel to the nightmares which had ever besieged it. He thought of the first king, taken into rest by the Tomb of The Ancients. His name was Raven Spinesetter, the first Knight to be crowned a king and rule Dragonspine Citadel, long ago during The Great Conflict. Carthian was his direct descendant; the last living of that noble heritage.

Without hesitating, Carthian entered the tomb. His men watched on in horror as he vanished into darkness. After a few moments of tense silence, they heard Carthian speak.

"Master, for many years the people of the land have given faithful heed your ancient summons. Without hesitation, many hundreds have responded to your call to arms, enlisting in the mighty forces of your kingdom, taking up your banner as if it were there own. They fearlessly bleed and die to shield the common folk from the dangers that lie in wait beyond the mighty walls of this citadel. Your covenant to shield us in the safety of your might has never failed, even after you passed beyond this mortal realm. Our part in this two way promise was to faithfully do your bidding at all times, without question. We have kept that covenant faithfully. In return, you, master, have blessed us to prosper within the sanctuary of this ancient abode.

In the histories, left for us to pore over, you counsel us to explore the vast and mysterious Wilderlands of Utaemia in search of treasures and wealth which lay mingled with the fallen. Since The Old War, many treasures possessed by the once living, to this day, lay with their scattered bones upon the land. Many of these treasures are hidden deep within the Dungeon of Shadows. Many more lie within the dreaded Tomb of Unrest, all free for the taking, should there be those strong enough to survive the conflicts within.

Master, this is why I have come. I wish to lead a company of your soldiers out into the Wilderlands in search of those treasures, which were lost. I wish to discover the location of the Dungeon of Shadows, and the Tomb of Unrest. I need your blessing if I am to accomplish this task. Your blessing would give my loyal soldiers the strength and moral they need.

If these treasures are discovered and claimed, it would increase our strength. In turn, this would strengthen the defense of Dragonspine Citadel against the nightmares which have ever laid siege to this mighty fortress. As do many of your servants, I seek to forge my own power, so your kingdom will continue to be a protection as it was when you reigned in mortality.

The people of Dragonspine Citadel love and remember you. We, all of us, have not forgotten you. Indeed, you are the father of Dragonspine Citadel. Even though you have passed beyond the veil of mortality, we need your help. My liege, times grow darker with the passing of each day. The enemy grows in number, and now openly comes out to battle against us, against you, threatening our peace. Some have sworn to destroy your resting place, desecrate this holy sanctuary. Of late, this citadel weakens under the influences of our enemies. We lose more soldiers than we can train. Help me to help them stand fast as you did in the might of your mortal reign. With your blessing, Dragonspine Citadel will never fall to the hosts which threaten its peace."

Outside the Tomb of Kings, his soldiers heard Carthian's petition end. They waited. the moments turned into minutes, which became hours. The hours stretched on until three days had passed. Still, their fearless leader did not come back to them.

On the morning of the fourth day, as they were about to depart, for they thought their commander had been devoured by The Tomb of Kings, the door of the tomb opened, and Carthian emerged triumphantly from its depths, donned in golden armor. On his left arm he wore a silver shield that reflected and transformed the morning rays of the sun into lightning, which arched from its surface. In his right hand, he wielded a sword, the likes which none had ever beheld after the death of the first king. As he approached his men, they knelt before him, astonished, some weeping in gratitude, a few asking forgiveness for doubting him. Stopping before them, he grimly looked down upon them. Raising up his blade, Carthian Spinesetter spoke as he touched each of them with the flat of his blade.

"I , King Spinesetter, confer the office of Knight upon each of you. Serve Dragonspine Citadel and its people. Vanquish every foe. Rise and follow me to victory!" Sheathing his blade, Carthian charged, leading his small band toward the main entrance to the citadel. As he neared the massive, worn-torn gates, he commanded them to be opened. Without hesitation, the astonished Gate Guardians did as he commanded. Before leaving into the Wilderlands, their new king turned to the people, crying with a loud voice.

After we are gone, close the gates and make ready this city for the return of peace!"

Instantly, a deafening cheer broke forth from his ragged host of men. Instantly, Carthian beheld courage replacing doubt, strength and vitality filling once weakened mortal frames. Looking back toward the Tomb of Kings, the new king cried out, "Father, thank you!" As if in answer, thunder rolled across cloudless heavens above.

Quickly the most swift and strong Warhorses were brought forth, fitted in unblemished plated barding. He and his knights mounted up, and without further delay, raced forth from Dragonspine Citadel, directly against a host of a new enemy, now advancing quickly against across the blood painted grasslands against them.

Upon the battlements, all readied themselves for the advancing enemy -- an enemy that never reached the walls of Dragonspine Citadel.