

i Libri



della Quercia

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(The water monkey is from an original drawing
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OSSIDEA

BOOK 1



THE SKY CITY

PRÓLOGO



It was dawn and a thin mist enveloped the tree tops. The creature stopped to catch his breath, seeking refuge among the foliage, but his panting, which the cold transformed into a dense vapour, gave away his hiding place. The hunt was on again.

That creature, small and slender, moved with extraordinary agility and the eldernwolves would have had no chance of catching him if there hadn't been so many of them. In their midst there was a truly colossal one, black as night: it let his companions go on before him, but it never took his eyes off the prey. Its gaze was icy as death.

A red eldernwolf, faster than the others, managed to reach the tree creature and, blinded by excitement, he leapt among the branches, eager to drag him down into the mud. With whiplash speed, the elf unsheathed a slim silver blade and slashed off one of the wolf's ears. The beast howled with pain and fury and instantly lunged forwards in search of revenge, but the elf struck it again, leaving a deep wound over its left eye.

When the elf withdrew, blood gushed out of his



mouth; he too had been wounded. It was then that the black eldernwolf spoke:

« *Kahòsh ahinmarr Ossidearr!* »

Its words were coarse and uncertain, as if it were speaking a tongue not its own, or as if speech were something at the limits of its possibilities. The elf replied, showing no fear:

« *Ossidea etheran'him, vaurgh'fohm!* » d he said contemptuously, but no matter how shrewd and fast he was, he could not resist for long. The eldernwolf knew this and it spoke again in scornful tones:

« *Elphrr ahikarr, maurgorr?* »

Surrounded, the tree elf looked around, seeking an escape route; then he renewed his desperate flight, leaping from branch to branch.

The pursuit continued until the eldernwolves managed to drive their prey to the edge of the wood; without trees to leap among the elf was trapped. The beasts' excitement grew; they snarled and leapt and it seemed that their savage bodies were filled with a new strength. Finally, as was inevitable, one of the wolves managed to clamp its jaws on the slender body. Its fangs sank into the leg and the bone snapped with a horrible sound. The elf smothered a moan, raised his sword and struck again, but his movements had become slow; the end was near. For a brief instant his youthful face betrayed fear and desperation. He sought the gaze of the black



eldernwolf; the beast was there, patient and ghastly. The two stared at each other and in his mind the elf could almost hear his tormentor's distorted words: it's over, elf... your battle is lost.

The elf shook his head, mustered his remaining strength and made a last leap, a desperate leap... into the void.

The black wolf unleashed his attack; fast as lightning and silent as a demon of the darkness, it leapt in front of his companions, ready to reap its victory. It was then that the elf took the horn slung over his shoulder and blew into it strongly. The woods filled with a vibrant sound that made the leaves of the trees tremble as if in the wind; the tree elf's body seemed to flare up like a torch and it disintegrated in a trail of light and golden sparks that filled the mouth of his assailant. The eldernwolf fell back to the ground and snarled out its fury in a single grim, throaty rattle.

