

*i Libri*



*della Quercia*

TIM BRUNO

# OSSIDEA

BOOK 2



THE WAR OF THE GIANTS

Salani  Editore

## CHAPTER

### 1



# THE FLIGHT OF GALANTHÒR

**T**he wind flowed swiftly over Galanthòr's white plumage, making it quiver like the leaves on the highest branch. The swan was proceeding confidently eastwards, towards the Middle Sea; its long neck stretched out forwards like that of a dragon, it swayed with every wing beat. Below them there unfolded Arboréa, the Eternal Forest. By that time Etheria could no longer be seen but, from high in the sky, the huge cloud of black smoke raised by the fire of Kahòs was still visible.

David Dream peered at the holy trees, trying to spot among the foliage the arbohir of the elves. Up there, between the wings of the sacred swan, he felt safe from the war, but fear for the fate of his friends and that of Ossidea, the queen of the elves, troubled his young heart; the siege of the Sky City would begin within only three days. All hopes were pinned on him and on the army of the giants, but time was flying faster than Galanthòr.



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It looked like no more than a cloud when David saw it for the first time in the distance, to the east; a dark cloud that was moving rapidly towards them.

‘Odd’ the boy thought, ‘the wind is coming from the west’.

As if it had read his mind, Galanthòr turned its head towards the east and, after observing the cloud, it speeded up, beating its wings even more vigorously.

« What is it, Galanthòr? » David asked. « Are you afraid? »

Suddenly, the cloud seemed to change shape and reach out towards them like a snake.

‘It’s not what it looks like...’ David thought and his hand swiftly grasped Inuk, the sword of the Nuk Nuks.

A few seconds later he heard a blood chilling sound, like the cry of shrieking demons. Galanthòr heard it too, because the beating of its wing became frantic. The hunt was on.

« What the devil is that? »

A voice resounded in the boy’s head and he could no longer distinguish his own thoughts from those of the swan.

‘*Corax... demons of the dark*’.

Only then did he recognize them: thousands of birds, black and glossy as the night, were flying towards them, forming a gigantic flock. Their cries came distorted by the wind, like the lament of damned souls. David unsheathed his sword and urged his mount onwards.

« Faster, Galanthòr! Faster! »



But the swan was already flying as fast as it could and their followers were faster.

They had beaks long as knives and eyes grey as smoke. Their incessant cries penetrated the mind and induced terror and madness.

« They're on us! »

In a desperate attempt to elude the enemy, Galanthòr tried to gain speed by descending, but the manoeuvre proved useless: within a few moments the flock surrounded them.

« Go away! » David yelled as he slashed the air with his sword.

Amid that multitude of birds the colour of darkness, the swan looked even bigger and the colour of its plumage more intense.

The *corax* thronged around Galanthòr, until they were so numerous their wings blotted out the sky. They were flying in formation, from one side and the other, without attacking.

« What are they...? »

But suddenly, as if they had agreed on a strategy, they swooped down on the swan.

« No! » David cried, leaning forwards to protect his companion.

Galanthòr withdrew its neck, reared up and struck, fast as a snake; the creature clutched in its beak gave a horrible cry before plunging down into the void in a cloud of black feathers.



Surprised by the swan's speed, the birds broke formation and some of them came within range of Inuk; David struck out and three corax were struck by his blade. But he had no time to rejoice before other birds, in their hundreds, began to strike at them from all sides, careless of their companions who fell dead or injured. They were aiming at the swan's head, trying to blind it and make it lose control. The great bird could no longer evade their pecking and within a few moments its white plumage was tinged with red. The boy tried to defend it, but in vain because the birds had soon learned to avoid his thrusts.

« Damn you! Go away! Go away! » he yelled as he whirled his sword in the air, but by now Galanthòr was defenceless; it was losing height and its flight had become slow and breathless. The *corax* stung him relentlessly, like a swarm of maddened insects.

David saw the branches of the tress so close he could almost have touched them; the swan was flying a few metres above the foliage by then. They were plunging downwards like an aircraft out of control.

« No, no! Hang on, Galanthòr! Hang on! » the boy shouted.

Galanthòr managed to gain a few metres in height, but immediately the corax struck again in a bid to make it fall. One wing collided with the top of a tree and the bird spun round sharply. The boy squeezed his eyelids, clutched at the feathers with his fingers and prepared for the crash.



It was then that he heard a shrill, muffled sound.

When he opened his eyes he had just enough time to see a *corax* fall dead. Then he saw another and another again and it seemed to him that a new cloud was rising up towards them from the tree tops.

‘What...?’

Hundreds of arrows flashed through the air, passing so close that David could hear their cold hissing; not one missed the target.

In a few moments, the *corax* gave up the chase and flew upwards in an attempt to avoid the slaughter. The boy looked down and, even without seeing them, he said:

« Elves are remarkable creatures ».

Then he looked at Galanthòr and his eyes filled with tears. The swan’s neck was covered in blood and only its desperate defence had prevented it from being blinded.

« Let’s stop! You can’t go on like this! Let’s stop to rest a moment. Let me take a look at your wounds ».

But the swan seemed oblivious to that plea. It gained a little height and turned eastwards once more, returning to its original route. Its fight became regular again and in a few minutes the swan seemed to get over all pain and fear. David stretched out one hand, caressed it slowly and spoke to it with kind thoughts; Galanthòr replied to him reassuringly.

