

THE KNIGHTS OF ETERNITY

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CHAPTER 1: The Man Cursed To Live!

“SERVANT! Hurry with the molten silver! You think I have all day for your dawdling?!” The voice was Merlin’s - half son of the devil and celebrated magician to King Arthur. Of course, it was centuries ago that Arthur had perished but demi-gods and demons take longer to die.

Merlin had the look of a 60 year old man – in truth, he was more like 600 years old. His long grey hair was held back from his face by a ponytail and covered by a black cap. His beard hung down like cobwebs from his pointy chin, while his white robe was overlain by a simple purple silk apron. He was in a bad mood. He was always in a bad mood. And, as ever, his servant, Adam, took the brunt!

“Coming Master, coming”. Dressed in simple cloth black trousers and billowing, if somewhat unkempt, white stained shirt, Adam was used to being ordered around. Even still, he resented it. More and more, he wished he had listened to his mother. She had told him Merlin would never give up his magicks, not for a wretch like him. Still, she was dead now. After all, Adam had killed her!

Both figures were standing in the small stone clad building that passed for a laboratory in a remote wood in Restrouguet, Cornwall. The place was filthy; covered in cobwebs and dust. Multi-coloured liquids and jars of hideous eyes and other body parts lined the small abode. This place was not built for comfort!

Adam held the jug of molten silver over the mould of an ankh by pair of long forceps. He knew this was something special. Merlin had been casting spells night and day over the mould and silver for five days now. Adam had been prohibited from entering the room until this now final stage. “Pour, pour!” cried Merlin, as he slit his forearm. Blood cascaded down the ornately adorned dagger, dropping into the mould and mixing with the silver. “Let me conquer time!”

“Time, Master? Hasn’t such as thee lived far beyond thy mortal life?” “Fool!” spat Merlin, “This ankh is not for one such as the son of the devil! With this vessel, any man may live fore’er, travelling to past, present, future and other worlds, one such as thee hath no concept of!” As soon as the silver and blood touched the mould, the mixture instantly cooled; even, some may say, frosted!

Reaching inside the mould, Merlin grabs the object and hold it aloft “At last! It is mine! THE ANKH OF TIME!” Surreptitiously, Adam takes hold of the knife used by Merlin. “Nay, Master! The Ankh is mine!” The knife plunges ferociously into the back of the old wizard. Perhaps a wiser man than Adam would wonder why no blood spilled from the body of the mage. Instead, Adam but takes hold of the Ankh and smiles. “Thirty years. Thirty years of shouting and abuse. Well, this is my reward, you old dog. Adam is now the Master and Merlin is but the Fool”.

“Wha...?”. Adam gasps in amazement as a mist appears from the wound inflicted by the knife. “Can this be a ghost? The ghost of Merlin”. The mist slowly rises to the ceiling of the stone built laboratory, all the while concentrating and coalescing into a recognisable form. A face, you might say - the face of Merlin!

“Ha,” shouts Adam. “Ghost you may be but foolish Adam, he lives fore’er!”, as Adam lifts the Ankh to the spirit of the mage. A booming voice, as loud as thunder, emanates from the ghostly apparition, “And that, fool Adam, will be both your blessing and your curse!” So great is the intensity of the voice the roof begins to shake. “A fool like you could cause no harm to the great Merlin”. Wood and stone begin to fall from the roof. “No, fool Merlin!” responds Adam, “You are dead and I am free – I am the Eternal!”. “You will never be free my Eternal. NEVER!” With the final shout of the wizard, the building collapses, engulfing the newly styled Eternal with it.

All is silent. The cold rural landscape sees a red mist ascending from the pile of wood and brick – dust from the former laboratory of the greatest magician who ever lived. But nothing stirs. Until...

Ten minutes later, scrabbling can be heard. A low moan emanates from the pile of debris. Then suddenly, shaking his head free of dust, the Eternal stands aloft. A large smile cracks from his lips. “Ha! So it is true! I am unharmed...but the Ankh of Time is lost amidst the ruins”. “Still, I feel stronger and fitter than e’er before. Mayhap, the power of the Ankh was transferred to me before the collapse of the building?” Adam begins to walk towards the small Cornish village of Perranarworthal. “Let us see just how immortal I am – by drinking the public house dry, ha ha!”

Ten minutes later, Adam reaches the local inn. An hour later, Adam has drunk more ale than he ever has in his entire life...with no effect! “Barman! Another ale!”. “But, Sir, you have drunk more than any gentleman should.” Rising in anger, the Eternal responds “Do I look

drunk to you, yeoman! Another ale! NOW!” Quivering, the barman responds “I’m sorry sir but I will not serve another”. Slamming his fist on the bar, the Eternal shouts “Another ale n...Aaagh!” Doubled in pain, the Eternal slowly slumps to the floor. “The pain! It’s the pain of death! But am I not immortal? Does not the Ankh...the Ankh! That is the key. I must have the Ankh, lest I suffer these pains e’ermore!”

The Eternal makes his way from the Inn, down the coastal road to the small stone clad laboratory. Every step jars the new immortal with only his newly-gained superhuman strength driving the ragged murderer on. At last, he comes to the pile of bricks, dust and wood that was once his workplace. Now, many men may falter faced with this prospect but many men are not the Eternal. Committed to life forever in death pains lest he find the Ankh of Time, the Eternal painfully digs at the mound. The pace is slow but the figure works as fast as his ache-filled body can go. At last, a glint of silver! The Eternal clutches at the Ankh, eventually grabbing hold of it and pulling it free from the remaining debris. And every ache in his body immediately disappears.

“So, this is what is meant by the curse of eternity” speaks the sorrowful figure. “If I am without the Ankh of Time for so much as an hour, death pains shall engulf this immortal body. Death without relief! I am surely the man cursed to live!” A spirit form begins to assemble behind the man – the spirit of Merlin! “And you shall do my bidding for all eternity, foolish one. You may live forever and travel to all time and all places – but only at my command!” says the voice of wizard. “That is the blessing and the curse of the son of the devil!”

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Many years had passed since that fateful day. How many? Decades? Centuries? Millennia? It is difficult to say for an immortal does not think in the ways of an ordinary man. Time instead is but a blur. The Eternal had travelled to the ancient past, when terrible beasts roamed the Earth and even London contained no men. He had seen the glory of King Arthur, with a younger Merlin who marvelled at this indestructible man. He had travelled to France, when this most cultured of countries was brought down to degradation and savagery. Lords and peasants fought in the street and Merlin, curse him, forced

the Eternal to fight on the side of the aristocrats. He had seen his Highland brothers conquer the English, though he fought to save the Anglos. He had then fought against the English when the Scots were massacred. He had appeared in what must be Hell, where some advanced flintlock fired all around and men drowned in mud or green air. Although even this horror fell short of the German man caging and burning those who had wished him no ill – that, surely, was the Seventh Hell.

And more, yet more, sights to baffle the eye, to please the heart and to chill the soul. But always fighting. It is not the will of Merlin to have his servant lay idle, or even to choose the side to fight for. Instead the Eternal always fought for the oppressed, the threatened and, more often than not, the losers!

Yet, through all these adventures, be it pleasing or horrifying, the Eternal wished only one thing – to die! He had known the pain of death on more than one occasion, such as when the thief stole the Ankh during the reign of a Queen known as Victoria or dropping it when being flown through the air by, what can only be described as, a lizard-bird! By Merlin, the pains were difficult then! The lizard-bird incident was especially hard. Lost in the strangest forest ever beheld by human eyes - ferns and horsetails as tall as trees, grass as high as bushes, yet not a single woody stem in sight – it took the Eternal three hours to locate the Ankh. Of course, by that time, even walking was well nigh impossible. Still, all through the search, the Eternal could almost hear the Ankh calling to him – like a lost lover waiting for her suitor to find her.

Something was different this time. The Eternal had been summoned by Merlin to aid some young child free himself from slavery. It was a job the immortal enjoyed. Not only did he give life to the child, he also got the chance to kill the traders. Spilling of blood was always something the Eternal enjoyed! After completing the task, though, no swirling mists came to take him away to another time. The Ankh did not glow in his hand to demonstrate the time-travel was beginning. Instead, the Eternal had been living as a free man for almost one month – an eternity to a caged immortal! “Can it be Merlin has released me from my curse?”, thought the Eternal. “If this be the case I promise to dedicate myself to helping my fellow knaves to overcome oppression” promised the immortal. “I will be a hero and a champion. Restless in my seeking to right wrongs. And I will take of a wife and she may bear me a child – the finest ch... Oh no!”

Slowly the green and blue mist form began to form, eventually the familiar red rising up, coalescing into the grim face of Merlin. “Servant! I have need of you once more.” “But, please Master. I have served you faithfully. I have battled my own kind for you and never faltered” pleaded the Eternal. “Let me be, I beg of you...or let me die!”

“You thought me gone then, fool?”, boomed the voice. “Nay, instead I have grave news. The forces of evil are massing. Forces which e’en the mighty Merlin may not stem. The mission is clear and the fate of worlds hang in the balance.” “What care I if the world ends”, spoke the Eternal. “Maybe then, a wretch such as I may find peace?” Merlin’s face grew angrier. “Thou art now and fore’er a fool!”. “I speak not only of this world but of Avalon where the heroic dead may rest! A place where thyself, should thee e’er be redeemed in mine eyes, will find solace, peace and beauty – even this may fall!”

The Eternal’s mind raced. He cared little for the fate of this or any other world but did Merlin mention redemption? Redemption followed by freedom? In glorious Avalon? “Master! I will do this for you, for I care much for my fellow man. Though, he, like me, may fall short of such a status as you, he may yet rise to fulfil the potential the gods have borne in mind for him”.

“You do this willingly?” asked the wizard incredulously. “Very well – that is good.” “Then thou must assemble the finest heroes this realm hast e’er known – past, present and future. Yea, you will travel e’en beyond the place you know as the Seventh Hell – to a world of light and stone. But that is to come. First, prepare yourself to gather BEOWULF!”