

# The Vermillion Crown War

(As told through the eyes of those close to the great Warlords Kossak Mageslayer and Darq, the Corrupt)

## Part 1



### The Song of Kossak

#### Chapter X, Book IV

#### Following the Battle of the Vale of Dawn

Kossak stands by the Vale of Dawn, his axes stained with wine-dark blood. Looking down at bodies of kinsmen, his heart grows heavy in his breast. "Where is the sweet cup of victory," he cries. "Where are the songs of joy?"

All he sees around him is death; the gods seem not to care for his plight. Swift-winged night steals over the valley; he turns away to speak with his kin. His army is weary and lacking of spirit; the ghost of defeat haunts his dreams.

Back in his tents, the great lord sits; councilors praise his name to the skies. But Kossak hears not their empty phrases; darkness sits upon his brow. "Enough!" he growls, and the voices are silenced. "The gods are against me still."

"Still we wander in search of our enemies. Still we fight 'til our blood stains the ground." Kossak Mageslayer turns from his kinsman, his once-bright gaze now dark as death. "Yet our foes walk away from the field whole. Fate is a fickle mistress."

Then quick-tongued Huhn, wise artilleryman, speaks to Kossak, his kinsman-chief. "Many days have passed since we stayed with our families. We long to see them, even now. Still we follow you, Paragon's Heir, for you fight as only he did."

"Your horns still gleam in the morning light, and your glance sows fear among your foes. Your axes hold death in their gleaming blades, and your fists rain suffering upon the unworthy. The elves are your allies, the stars your heralds. Your troops follow unto death."

At these words, the Mageslayer pauses. The flames of the campfire matches his gaze. "Faithful Huhn," he speaks the words boldly. "You remind me of my solemn vow. I will not fail my kinsmen and allies. I will gather them up and move forward."

Kossak stands and moves into the darkness, gazing up at the stars of his birth. He looks down at his hands, massive and powerful, then at the fires ablaze through the night. "My trolls, my kinsman," he whispers softly. "By Paragon's Arm, I will not fail."

The Mageslayer looks at the sky once more, shouts powerful words for all to hear. "I will find you, Kho'ta, League Betrayer! I will find you, Darq, Robber of Death! Or I will die trying, this vow do I swear. "

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## Day 115



Darq the Corrupt emerged, grim and silent, from his castle's sleeping chambers in the first hour of the day and gathered his lieutenants immediately. They met briefly around the cold, stone conference table, the warlord demanding his vassal-generals account for their dispositions, troop strengths and so on. As usual, Darq leveled a withering stare at anyone who dared air complaints, making it clear no problems would be addressed at this meeting. The conference dissolved rapidly, leaving Warlord Darq in brief solitary contemplation.

But the warlord did not tarry there long, instead gathering his robes about him and walking briskly down the broad stairway and out into his castle's courtyard, where much of his army was camped. He made his way finally to the lone tent pitched at the edge of the encampment, where he had only the day before ordered the mysterious relic stored and well-guarded. The Vermillion Crown, an artifact from a lost age, was locked in a heavy strongbox encumbered by chains and locks. The guards froze at attention as their commander approached. Darq produced a dark and rusted key that hung from a chain about his neck and disappeared inside, snapping that he was not to be disturbed.

Warlord Darq remained inside the tent for the rest of the day and well into the night. At times the tent walls were completely dark, while at others they glowed with a strange, fiery radiation. The relic's light danced along the interior of the tent, illuminating the canvas and leaking crimson fire out through the cracks between tent wall and ground and where stitches on the seams had frayed. Darq turned the crown slowly in his hands, studying the object closely and mumbling to it. Finally, he cursed loudly and slammed the strongbox lid, plunging the tent back into total darkness. He then burst forth from the tent, his eyes sunken, and charged headlong back to his sleeping chambers, gripping the top of his skull with both hands.

In the hours after midnight, Warlord Darq's voice could be heard throughout the castle, wailing and swearing. Servants and soldiers within its stone walls, passing by on their usual business, kept a wary eye on their commander's quarters; some whispered among themselves, but most quickened their pace. The day dawned foul, bringing savage cold winds and swift, roiling clouds. Just before noon, Warlord Darq emerged from his chambers, looking steady and determined. He called his vassal-generals together once again and issued his curt orders.

"The Vermillion Crown is cursed and useless to us," he said. "But there is a place and a means to break that curse and force the artifact to serve our cause. Strike the camp! Assemble your troops! We march tonight!"

# The Vermillion Crown War

## Part 2



### The Song of Kossak

#### Chapter XI, Book IV

#### Of Kossak's Rage

The sun rises once again from the thrice-blesséd Land to light the world. Its rays shine down on the head of Kossak, fair-destined heir of Paragon's realm. His army of kinsmen march alongside him, weary yet faithful, with focused will.

Kossak stands at the head of his kinsmen, head and shoulders above the rest. His arm is an oak, his fists are boulders; his gaze is weary, but shows no weakness. His axes are as fangs of dragons, death to the Land's enemies.

A messenger comes, loyal and swift, with news the warlord receives with impatience. "The vampyr, my lord, returns again. He rides at their head like a pillar of flame. His host of dead walks also, swifly. Ashon Rye is his goal."

Kossak hears, but does not answer. At last he nods, furrows on his brow. "The battle is done there, yet he returns. His actions seem to make no sense. Yet the Deathless Lord does not act without reason. Send my kinsman to watch."

The messenger leaves, and with him the swiftest of all the trolls in Kossak's host. Kossak himself goes from campfire to campfire, rousing his kinsman to fight once more. When daylight comes, he is tired, but ready; his army stands anxious to battle the foe.

Back they turn, to Ashon Rye. Back to the fields where blood was spilt. Back to the place where Darq swept away their chance at victory, chance at honor. The Land's champion was turned again from triumph to bitterest rage

Suddenly, scouts appear, bloodied. Thrice-loyal kinsmen, they kneel at his feet. "My cousins," said Kossak, hands clenched beside him. "What news have you for Paragon's Heir?" "Kossak, our lord, we grieve for our kinsmen. They rise from the dead to serve Darq."

Twas then that a fire rose up within Kossak. His eyes burned with unholy light. He gave a great cry that rent the air; his axes were raised to the sky in his fists. His anger unleashed, his kinsmen moved to tear their own hair in rage.

"Now!" Kossak screamed for his troops to hear. "Now does he go beyond all limits! He chains our brethern into slavery, a mockery of their noble birth! He tries me beyond the bounds of tolerance! No longer shall he be endured!"

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## Day 120



It was a few hours after midnight when Warlord Darq's army descended upon the ravaged landscape of Ashon Rye. He had demanded his men march at night, eager to make the most of the next day's grim work. Moonlight glowed in the eyes of wolves and ravens and their carrion brethren, which feasted on the rotting flesh of the fallen soldiers littering the battlefield for as long as they dared, scurrying away into the darkness only when forced by the approach of marching feet

The area secured and sentries posted, Darq set to his grisly task. The soldiers-turned-grave-robbers were issued shovels and picks; their job would be easy, turning the loose earth from fairly recent, hastily dug mass graves. Darq's necromancer ally, Nex, followed the warlord closely, his dark cloak and skin appearing to absorb all light. Darq led his grim troops unerringly across the broken landscape, fixated on what he sought.

"Here," Darq said, pointing with his long-fingered hand. "This is the spot. Dig all through here, where Kossak Mageslayer's Trolls died by the score. That he took time to bury them at all should prove that he is soft and unworthy--don't you agree, Nex?"

"Indeed," replied Nex, "but there are humans buried here too." He kicked at one queerly twisted arm that poked above the soil—it was clearly human.

"Yes," Darq said, contemplating the remains, "so there are. But I need only the Trolls. Pile the other corpses high and put them to the torch, or bring up the axmen and hack them to pieces. No one will raise them up as zombies to fight against us!"

"A wise precaution, Lord Darq," Nex acquiesced.

"Nex, begin with these." The soldiers had already unearthed seven hulking Troll bodies and laid them out beneath a withered tree, their bent and broken limbs straightened, heads lolling on lifeless necks, eyes bulging and tongues swollen. "The first recruits of my undead horde!"

Nex approached and examined the corpses, gathering his cloak in one hand and kneeling close to each one. The Necromancer sniffed the putrid flesh, poking it here and there with a long fingernail, probing ghastly, pus-filled wounds. He put his palm flat over every Troll's breast and paused with a contemplative expression, approving of six but insisting the seventh be hauled away, never explaining why this one differed from the others.

His examination complete, the Necromancer concentrated his energies on a single Troll corpse at the end of the line. Nex rose and put both hands flat against his face, shielding his eyes from all distractions. He rolled his head and flexed his shoulders, muttering a low chant barely audible above the sounds of continued digging.

Without warning a burst of blackness wiped everything momentarily from existence. The diggers stopped and blinked, and even Draq averted his gaze. It was as sudden as a flash of gunpowder but with precisely the opposite optical effect. The instant of magic completed, the once-dead Troll flesh lurched and quivered, fighting against rigor with sickening, unnatural snaps and pops. Darq smiled and said calmly, "With Kossak's Trolls, I cannot be beaten. We can continue south uncontested."

# **The Vermillion Crown War**

## **Part 3**



### **The Song of Kossak**

#### **Chapter XII, Book IV**

#### **Kossak Pursues Darq**

Kossak Mageslayer's army moves as though fires of Hell dog their footsteps, Tracking Darq, the undead lord, and stolen souls he captured as fodder. South is the path the Death Lord took, and they race to catch his trail.

Kossak himself burns with rage, Paragon risen against the dragon. His gaze burns wherever it rests, so strong is the anger within his heart. His horns glint wickedly, sun or moon, and his axes are raptor's claws.

Always the Mageslayer's army closes, for speed is their birthright against the dead. Yet who can count the souls claimed in battle? They rise like wheat stalks at Darq's command. Grains of sand on an unnatural sea; their numbers are always greater.

Kossak refuses to yield to fate; determined to reclaim his enslaved brethren. Axes swinging, whirling blades of death, he reaps Darq's sinister harvest. Again and again, he harries walking dead as wolves worry their prey.

Paragon's Heir, the Mageslayer stands and fights as a lion, then fades again. Fight and fade, attack and withdraw, the cycle repeats for an endless time. One by one, the enemies fall, yet still no end is in sight.

Kossak grows madder as raids continue, but magic nor might can slow the undead. He reclaims kinsman, but many are bound by corrupted magic, to serve the Darq. To spend his rage, he wades into battle to bathe in wine-dark blood.

His voice cries out, "I will know why this mockery walks to Ashon Rye's fields! His body is foul, unworthy to sheathe the blades of my axes; his goal will be thwarted. I will know his secrets before my fists squeeze the unlife from his corpse."

Again, he fights to free his people. Again, his enemies fall to his fury. Again, he swims through a league of nuphractii to slake his thirst for Darq's own blood. His noble, thrice-blesséd actions become him as bards do sing his name.

Darq, the evil lord of Blood; Darq, warlord of a fallen host. Darq, thrice-curséd pawn of the Sect, an abomination to Land and sky. Mothers curse your name to their infants, a thousand times your death will come.

Paragon's Heir, Star-Heralded, Mageslayer and Kinsman-Chief. Kossak will lead our tribes together to strip the evil from the Land. Elf and Troll, League and Empire, none can deny his path.

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## Day 126



In the weeks after the raising of the undead Troll horde at Ashon Rye, Darq kept to himself, absorbed in further study of the strange artifact or wandering in quiet reflection through his army's encampments in the darkest hours of the night.

However, when after three days' march the army was miles short of the Warlord's original goals, he gathered his vassal-generals together to explain themselves. They blamed the Necromancer Nex, declaring as one that his efforts to motivate the undead Trolls were lacking. Nex countered by saying that the vassal-generals were negligent in keeping the entire army moving forward. Warlord Darq listened patiently and in the end had one vassal-general put to death. His fellows, properly motivated, improved the army's progress in subsequent days.

The army passed through the strange lands of the south and encountered many wanderers and vagabonds. Among these were three different groups of mercenaries seeking employment; word of Darq's approach had preceded him, an annoying consequence of his slower-than-expected progress. Darq met with the human and Dwarven mercenaries in the predawn hours, parlaying terms of payment in magestone. How easily they renounced their previous allegiances beneath the spell of Darq's ample supplies of precious magestone! They were typical of the mercenary scum that scavenged the border regions between the Empire, Sect and League. Darq ordered the mercenaries placed among the rest of his army; privately, he ordered his vassal-generals to deploy them as expendables.

But Kossak was coming. Darq knew it and reminded his vassal-generals of it constantly. When the first Zombies and mercenaries slain by Kossak's approaching hordes were brought to Darq for inspection, he pulled a black-fletched arrow from a corpse and smeared the gore from its point with his thumb. The arrow points, every one of them, were carved with a crude "D." Darq gathered the arrows and snapped them across his knee.

When the raiders from Kossak's forces ravaged the mercenaries and Zombies on the fringe of Darq's camp, it became clear why the army was making better progress: the vassal-generals had been forgoing the proper construction of marching camps, leaving the army vulnerable. Walls had not been erected and moats were left undug. Darq put another of their number to death, but the raids continued. Elves and living Trolls under Kossak's direct command harried Darq's army as it moved south.

"Would that he would present himself where I might confront him!" Darq snarled at one point, tossing his sword and shield aside in frustration. Such was the manner of the march for many days. Raiders picked away at the army here and there, but never in great numbers and never with enough force to warrant the deployment of Darq's legions. Nex and the mercenary warlords petitioned that their forces be placed toward the center of the marching order; Darq repositioned the mighty undead Trolls but left the mercenaries where they were.

When confronted by a vassal-general about the mounting losses, Darq replied curtly, "So long as Kossak picks away at our fringes and leaves the bulk of the army unmolested, we shall not change either our plans or our route of march. Is that clear?"

# **The Vermillion Crown War**

## **Part 4**



### **The Song of Kossak**

#### **Chapter XIII, Book IV**

#### **Kossak Confronts Darq**

Kossak sees the Dread Lord's army move his quarry from his reach. His stolen brethren shelter in the midst of Darq's unnatural guard. The Dread Lord mocks our Kinsman-Chief, even as we strike.

Kossak frowns as Darq moves on into the Empire, our ancient foes. But Darq heeds not, his forces marching straight to bright-walled Fairhaven. The Lord of Blood dares all to reach the fields of Fairhold.

"What can this mean," says quick-tongued Huhn, to Kossak, his great Kinsman-Chief. "The Empire does not shield his kind, and yet he flaunts their wrath. Surely he will fall to their defenses if he tries."

Kossak turns his penetrating gaze away from Darq's encampment. "I do not know," he says, his eyes afire with flames of white-hot fury. "But none shall shield him from me; we shall follow on his heels."

That night the heavens blaze as on the night of Kossak's foretold birth. Mageslayer stands before his troops, his axes gleam with stars' bright glory. He speaks, his voice heard strong and true by all within the camp.

"My friends and kinsman," Kossak speaks, "the virtuous guardians of the Land, You've followed me through fear and fire, blood and grief as allies true; The stars themselves proclaim our worthy struggle not in vain.

"Tomorrow we shall grind Darq's bones against the millstones of the Empire. His minions' shattered forms will crack beneath onslaught of our blades. Atlantis itself will feel the blow that signals Darq's defeat."

As one the battle horns cry out, a call to stir the blood and Land. The voices of a thousand cries ring out and rend the morning air. As one the League fall down upon Darq's horde as hawks on hares.

The Rangers fight according to the vision born in Kossak's heart. Feathered arrows rain upon the golems raised of corpses' bones; As Hawk-Eyed Rangers take their lethal aim, the shafts ne'er shoot but true.

Crystal Bladesmen stand to form a glittering wall of bladed death. They fight, defending Rangers from attacks of cruel undead foes. Their blazing swords shine brightly even through a sea of blood.



Yet still the Land pours forth Her aid, through massenliche auras of power, The wrath of Darq's foul troops can only slow the march of their destruction. The priestesses heal valiant wounded warriors with a touch.

Yet slaughter should not slow the soldiers stolen from black-visaged Death. Kossak turns to allies of his cause, the graceful lupine shifters. Werewolves' loping strides soon run Grave Robbers to the ground.

But Kossak Mageslayer, Heir of Paragon, shines the brightest in the battle. Axes spinning, whirling put end to Darq's abominations;

First into the fray, he leads with victory at his heels.

Kossak tears into the mass of walking dead that lay before him His horns like burnished gold, he calls out "Kinsman, come and fight with me! Today we free our brethren of the curse which binds them here!

They cut through the nupheratii as a ship's bow cuts through rushing waves. Malicious corpses fall at Kossak's blades as wheat before a scythe With Kossak at the forefront, none can stand before his wrath.

Finally he reaches them, the source of all his anguished rage, Grieving in his heart, he finds the undead kinsmen of his clan. Joy is on his face as he returns them to the Land.

Victory at last his own, Kossak lifts his booming voice.

"Darq, I did not find you, so I know you yet exist and flee. Know your days are numbered, Darq, this I do swear!"

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## Day 148



"We shall continue to cut across Fairhaven." Warlord Darq pointed a long finger at the map unfurled before his gathered generals. The dim light of a fog-shrouded morning cast weak shadows on the damp ground, now three days' march into enemy territory. Though they had all felt the sting of gathering Empire forces before them, none dared to contradict Darq's firm decision.

"Do not fear the Empire," he assured them, lowering a stare at each quivering general in turn. "Their forces marshal slowly before us, and our sell-sword scum are taking the brunt of it." Darq had deployed the mercenaries at the front of the column to absorb the ambushes and brief holding actions of the outnumbered Empire forces.

"But Kossak still continues to harry us from behind. His Trolls threaten our rear guard and baggage train daily, despite my explicit orders that this must stop!" His words lashed out at the assembled officers, each hoping to avoid his intense glare. "Your continued failure forces me to act!" Darq unrolled another map, one that displayed the region in greater detail. Angrily, he issued his specific orders for a rear-guard battle against Kossak's harassing Trolls; each general accepted his assignment wordlessly, bowed low, then quickly retreated from their commander's presence.

As the warhost prepared for the march, Darq set himself personally to the task of placing his troops, not trusting the generals to carry out his orders quickly or accurately enough. At times Darq disappeared entirely into the assembled throng, shouting commands and slapping soldiers and officers alike where he saw sloth or incompetence. When his host was in place, he gave the order to begin the steady journey through Fairhaven, and for all to be on the watch for the Elementalist forces that were surely not far behind.

Battle was engaged by mid afternoon. From the scattered reports and steady stream of butchered casualties that were brought back from the skirmish lines, the day was not going in Darq's favor. Reinforcements were called for, and some wavering units answered the call. But the weight of battle pushed against Darq's faltering army all day long until the call for general retreat sounded just before dark.

Blood splattered and enraged, Darq called his generals together again just before midnight. Barely half the number from the morning presented themselves, the others having been hacked to bits by Kossak's armies or deserted. The light of a small fire danced on their weary faces as a gentle rain hissed into the flames. Darq opened a small scroll, reviewed its contents while gritting his teeth, then tore it in two and threw it into the fire.

"Are our Bone Golems made of sticks!" he demanded, kicking the edge of the flames. Bright sparks flew amongst his cowering generals. "Who allowed their Werewolves to maneuver around behind our flank? We may as well have sent children to fight them off!" Darq pushed one of the leaders bodily, throwing him into the rain spattered grass. "Kossak has bested me," he roared, "only because you have failed me! There is no other reason. Our Shades and Zombies faltered, and the Bone Golems were made useless by your poor foresight. The very Trolls I went to so much effort to resurrect were cut down like weeds on the scythe." He backhanded another of his leaders across the face, shattering his already bent and crooked nose.

"Today, we should have been victorious," Darq demanded, licking blood from the back of his knuckles, "but instead we are left with Kossak's forces still hounding at our heels. One more day like today," he growled, "and I might find more need for the lot of you as shambling nupheratii than as my generals."

Furious, Darq issued the orders to ready his army for another day's march into Fairhaven. When that was done and his generals dismissed, he retreated to his tent. There, he opened the strongbox and let the magical glow of the Vermillion Crown wash over him.

## The Vermillion Crown War

### Part 5



#### The Song of Kossak

#### Chapter XIV, Book IV

#### The Bleeding of Kossak

Kossak, Bringer of Darq's Ruin, stands amidst his counselors wise,  
"For each soldier killed in battle, let the funeral pyres burn bright.  
Tonight we sing to honor those who gave the Land their lives."

Kossak's counselors gather 'round, with quick-tongued Huhn among them.  
"Heir of Paragon," he says, "your star is bright in the skies,  
Yet wise Kunoth, seer of ages, fears for you in his heart."

Then Kunoth, wizened sage of lore, points with his staff to the heavens.  
"Kinsman-chief, I have seen a thing that makes my old heart weary,  
Let me tell you of the omen that has made my blood run cold.

"Tonight I stood on yonder hill, away from fire's earthly light,  
And, as on nights before, I bade the stars speak of our fates.  
The omens never lie when once their portents are revealed.

"I saw your star, bright heaven's son, rise high among his shining kin.  
He rose near to where shines the Throne, then paused, as though to take its place.  
The night was clear, no wisp of cloud marred the blazing light.

"But then a tiny darkness formed between the Throne and Kossak's twin,  
A cloud perhaps it was, or a shape that passed before my eyes.  
It spread and grew, a cancer in the midst of heaven's hall.

"At first your star, my kinsman-chief, burned brighter, blazing at the dark.  
Fiercely did its light beat back the thundering cloud and clear its way.  
Others gathered in its light, a space now cleared of the dark foe's blight.

"Yet just as it seemed that the cloud must fade from sight and disappear,  
Another joined it, offering fresh strength to fight their common foe.  
Darkness grew, as the Land's armies swell their ranks before a fight.

"The star—your star—blazed in response, though those around it sparked and died,  
But then its blaze grew dim, as though it suffered from a deadly blow.  
One last flame, then nothing, as the cloud surged o'er its prey."

Kossak stares into the fire, then lifts his hand to gesture east.  
Golden dawn stretches forth her wings across the graying sky.  
"Night is done," he says. "The Land brings forth a pale new day.

“I hear your words,” says Kossak, enemy to all the Land’s defilers.  
“Yet battle calls, and Darq cannot be left to carry out his plans.  
I will go with my army,” he says. “The gods will have their due.”

Another day of travel sees the armies of the Land in place.  
The Elven allies wait to send their arrows through the deathless throats.  
Raging Kossak tears into the enemy’s flanks, and then is gone forever.

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## Day 157

### *Clearing a Path*



Relentless wind drove across the path of Darq's army for several days after the first engagement against Kossak, carrying on its back thick, dark clouds and a series of dismal lightning storms. The generals kept to their tasks, keeping the army moving south by harsh words or whips where necessary. They gathered just once every day to endure Darq's marching orders, dispensed with deprecating malice and his well-practiced derisive ire.

On the third morning following the defeat Darq entertained an embassy of Atlantean mercenaries petitioning to take service in his ranks. Despite universal agreement among the generals that their leader would 'send these dogs packing,' Darq emerged from his tent issuing orders that the Atlanteans be given rations and prominent positions in the ranks. Slack-jawed generals leapt to follow his commands, all fueling rumors that Lord Darq had lost confidence in his officers and zombies after the disaster against Kossak. Uneasy fear gripped the ranks, especially among the sycophantic generals.

"Your minds are addled!" Darq roared at one staff meeting, speaking directly to cautious inquiries about the Atlantean newcomers. "I have explained this all before," he continued through clenched teeth, "but it seems I must do so again. We are continuing south, and Kossak will stand to block our path. Additional mercenaries, even Atlanteans, will be of use. Is that clear?" No one replied.

Darq's assessment of the strategic situation played out three mornings hence when scouts reported a large army of Atlanteans arrayed along the rolling hills and woodlands before them. He shouted deployment orders and cuffed a few heads here and there to keep the army in line, reminding his generals "This will not be a repeat of our last engagement, is that clear!"

But the beginning of the day looked very much like the previous disaster. Panicked, mud- and blood-spattered troops fell back from the front lines, carrying large numbers of wounded with them. Fear gripped the ranks, as it had before, and the day once again appeared lost when a fine drizzle rained down upon the battered army.

What effect can one soldier have in a battle? One filthy messenger slogged his way back through the dispirited rankers. He whispered his simple message to the soldiers who gathered near him, and they in turn to their fellows until a wave of optimism spread steadily out behind him. When the messenger reached the grim-faced commander he averted his eyes and held out a small scroll. Darq took this, untied and read it, and a smile crept across his lips. "Kossak has been wounded, perhaps killed," he said to no one in particular. "You men, come with me!" He raised his gloved hand and rallied the stragglers around him into an eager fighting force.

The tide of battle turned on that news. Fear was replaced by optimism, exhaustion by strength, and Darq's army quickly routed the enemy from the field. Confirmation of Kossak's status was never achieved, at least his body was not recovered, but he no longer presented himself on the battlefield and his formations were ineffective without him. Faced with the Atlantean mercenaries fighting among the undead, especially those led by one of their own Magus, a

woman of mysterious origin, the enemy units broke and quit the field. By sundown the smouldering fires of battle illuminated heaps of enemy corpses.

Darq surveyed the carnage like a hawk surveys its territory. "Get me the name of that Magus," he ordered. "I must speak with her at once. And raise as many of these Atlantean dogs as possible to fill our ranks."