

# [PDF] Starcraft: Queen Of Blades

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## Books Details:

Title: Starcraft: Queen of Blades

Author:

Released: 2007-05-01

Language:

Pages: 384

ISBN:

ISBN13:

ASIN: B000QBVED2



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## Description:

**About the Author** Aaron Rosenberg writes novels, roleplaying games, and educational books. He lives in New York with his wife and daughter, and runs his own game company, Clockworks, in his spare time.

**Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. PROLOGUE**

The world went dark.

Not just a darkened sky -- no mere nightfall could produce such utter darkness. No, this was the dark of captivity, confinement, blindness. Nothing visible, no light, no shadow, only a smothering visual shroud. A stark contrast to the blinding lights and sudden bursts of color from just before.

I struggle to make sense of my surroundings. Where am I?

Nothing but blankness answers, and an instant later a far larger question looms up, erasing the first. Who am I?

A wave of panic rises deep within, bile carried along its edge, threatening to drown me as I realize I cannot remember. I do not know who I am!

Calm, I tell myself. Calm. I force the panic down, pushing it back by sheer will, refusing to let it envelop me. What do you remember, then?

Nothing. No, brief flashes. A battle. A war. Horrid, horrible foes, great monstrous beings surrounding me, dwarfing me. Betrayal -- though I cannot recall the act itself I can still taste the bitter realization of it. Abandonment. Desperation, a last frenzied struggle. The feel of sinewy flesh pinning me, choking me, killing me. The light fading around me as the numbness creeps in.

And now this.

Where am I? I stretch my senses to their limit, probing my surroundings. The results, though hazy and disjointed, form a single conclusion.

I am being carried.

I can feel the movement, the gentle rocking motion. Not directly -- something cushions me, envelops me, holds me all around. But that cushioning is moving, and me with it.

I try lashing out, but my limbs will not cooperate. I feel sluggish, drained -- drugged. Senses dulled, body leaden, but nerves oddly on fire. I am burning from within! My flesh crawls, creeps, melts, morphs -- I have no control over my own form anymore. I am changing.

Around me I can feel others shifting. They are not confined as I am -- they are free to move, though their minds are oddly blunted. They are my captors, conveying me in my confinement.

I can hear their thoughts, slithering across me, through me. A part of me recoils but another part -- a newer part -- welcomes their intrusion. Vibrates in tune with their gibbering, allowing the patterns to resonate through me. Changing me further, bringing me closer to those waiting just beyond.

The part that is still me, the old me, recoils in horror. I cannot, I will not become one of these! I must escape! I must be free! My body is captive but my mind soars, reaching out for help, any help. I scream, desperate for anyone to hear.

And, far away, I know that my pleas have been heard.

Help me!

Rubble lay everywhere, evidence of a city in flames, a world in demise. Buildings had fallen, vehicles were crashed and crushed, bodies littered the ground. A sign still stood near the edge of the destruction, its scorched surface reading "Welcome to" -- the name New Gettysburg only a jagged hole with blackened edges. All manner of bodies, from the pale flesh of the Terrans to the smooth hides of the protoss to the sinewy blades of the zerg. People, those not yet dead and unable to evacuate, ran screaming, wailing for help. Some brandished weapons, crazed beyond rational thought, desperate to defend themselves and their families. Others cowered, weeping, unable to face

the end of their world. A few hid or ran, hoping to escape their fate.

The Swarm ignored them. It had a higher agenda.

The battle had not gone as expected. The Terrans had put up a strong fight but with fewer soldiers than anticipated. The protoss, the hated protoss, had appeared as always, gleaming in their battle suits and glowing in their arrogance, but had rapidly lost focus, dividing their attentions as if facing not one but two opponents. In some places the Swarm had sighted Terrans battling protoss, a strange but welcome sight. Yes, it had been a strange battlefield, the sides constantly shifting. But that was for the Overmind to consider and digest. For now, the conflict was over, the battle won. The remaining Terrans posed little threat and the protoss had vanished once the outcome was clear. For some reason they had not razed the planet, a fact which had allowed the Swarm to discover and claim a previously unexpected prize.

Now, their linked minds already turned from this conflict to those stretching out before them, the zerg marshaled their forces and prepared for their victorious departure.

One brood cleared a path, removing any obstructions, whether flesh or stone or metal. A second brood followed close behind, its ranks protectively closed around its prize. Near the center several ultralisks moved in close formation, their back-spikes almost touching. Between them were four hydralisks, thick arms linked to support the large oblong they held. Through its rough, sticky shell the cocoon pulsed with light, though its faint glow was lost amid the fires and flares and explosions that had once been this city.

"Carefully," warned the brood's cerebrate, observing their progress through the overlord floating just above the sphere. Because the celebrant itself could not move, the airborne overlords served as its eyes, ears, and mouth. "The Chrysalis must not be harmed!"

Obedient to its will, the ultralisks shifted slightly closer and slowed their pace, allowing more time for the brood before them to open the way. Their heavy feet crushed bone and metal and wood without thought or pause as they lumbered on, shielding the Chrysalis from attack.

"We have it, Master," the cerebrate announced in the depths of its own mind. "We have your prize."

"Good." The reply echoed from within, rising from the deep well of the zerg hive-mind. "You must watch over the Chrysalis, and ensure that no harm comes to the creature within it. Go now and keep safe my prize."

Accepting the Overmind's orders as always, the cerebrate redoubled its efforts, making sure its brood's defenses were secure. The Chrysalis would be protected at all costs.

On the zerg marched, the city burning around them. At last the Swarm had gathered itself within a vast crater where once the city's vaunted lake had stretched. Now the surface was glass-smooth, seared by the force of the protoss's landing ships and unmarred by the heavy feet that had trekked across toward the city under siege.

"We are ready, Master," the cerebrate declared, arraying its brood around the Chrysalis.

"I am well pleased, young Cerebrate," the Overmind answered, the warm glow of its benediction washing over the cerebrate and through it all the members of its Swarm. "And so long as my prize remains intact, I shall remain pleased. Thus, its life and yours shall be made as one. As it prospers, so shall you. For you are part of the Swarm. If ever your flesh should fail, that flesh shall be made anew. That is my covenant with all cerebrates."

As the cerebrate swelled with pride, a great darkness descended upon the crater, a shadow of the mass that drifted into view high above them. Beyond the upper reaches of the planet's dying atmosphere hung a massive storm, a swirl of orange and violet gases that spun around strange flickering lights. They moved faster and faster, the colors merging in their fury, until the center of the storm collapsed in upon itself, light and color giving way to a shadowy circle far darker than even the space hovering beyond.

"Now you have grown strong enough to bear the rigors of warp travel with the Swarm," the Overmind stated, its words sending a thrum of power through the Swarm. "Thus we shall make our exit from this blasted world and secure the Chrysalis within the Hive Cluster upon the planet Char."

As one the first brood rose, soaring high above the ruined city. They broke free of the planet's weak, fading grasp and approached the storm above, pulled into that yawning, beckoning darkness at its center, and vanished. The cerebrate felt their transit through the hive-mind link all zerg shared and allowed a spark of contentment to linger within its own mind. Then the Overmind summoned it as well, and the cerebrate called its brood together, linking them tightly for travel through the warp. They rose from the crater, letting the power of the Swarm fill them as they ascended, and soon the darkness had drowned out all thought, all sense, as it carried them across the vastness of space to their destination.

And within the Chrysalis, faintly visible through its thick skin and viscous contents, a body writhed in pain. Though not conscious the figure within shifted, stirred, unable to lie still as the zerg virus penetrated every cell, changing DNA to match their own. Soon the Chrysalis would open and the new zerg would emerge. All the Swarm exulted with the Overmind.

And, as they departed and Tarsonis died behind them, the mind trapped within the Chrysalis screamed.

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