

**DRAY PRESCOT: 5**

**PRINCE OF  
SCORPIO**

**KENNETH BULMER**

writing as

**ALAN BURT AKERS**

**A Mushroom eBook**



# PRINCE OF SCORPIO

**Dray Prescott #5**

**ALAN BURT AKERS**

**Mushroom eBooks**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### This is the Fair borrows my Savanti sword

I, Dray Prescott, of Earth and of Kregen, once more trod the beautiful and brutal planet of my adoption, and in the engaging way of the Star Lords who had brought me here, was faced instantly with headlong action and deadly danger.

A bulky man in black leathers ran full tilt upon me, seeking to pin me to the ground with his rapier. The slender blade glistened redly in the mingled light from the twin suns of Scorpio. I do not argue when a man tries to kill me.

The guttural shouts and hoarse screams in my ears, the flickering impression of frenzied action all about me, and the black galvanic forms of men contorted in violent conflict running and stabbing and caught up in a confused melee washed around me; but the burly man with the bushy brown moustaches and the eyes of a killer lunged down fiercely upon me.

I rolled.

He cursed and dragged his blade free of the thin earth that dribbled over bare rock, swung himself forward for another essay at mounting me like a butterfly in a glass case.

Nothing else mattered in the world — either this world or the world of Earth distant four hundred light-years — beside that professional killer and his blade.

“You panval cramph!” he said as he advanced, with a little more wariness this time, a trifle of cunning evident in his clear wish to spit me as I rolled.

I shoved up on my hands, getting my feet under me, not rising on hands and knees. I was, as always when I landed on Kregen, stark naked. There were no handy weapons — a sword, a spear, a helmet — just me, Dray Prescott, naked as the day I was born.

A shrieking man ran past, his matted hair streaming, pursued by another of the killers in his black leather uniform. This screaming wretch, too, was naked, and so I reasoned that no one was surprised at my absence of clothes.

“Rast of a panval!” The killer lunged and I sprang, attempting to slip beneath the blade and so grasp him in my arms and break his back.

But he was quick. He eluded me, and a line of bright red wealed up along my thigh.

Now it was my turn to curse.

Normally I never bother to shout and curse when in action; it wastes breath and I do not need my morale boosted in this way.

“By the Black Chunkrah!” I yelled. “I’ll take your Makki-Grodno infested tripes out and wrap them around your diseased neck!”

He was coming in again as I shouted and he looked at my face. He hadn’t bothered to look before; all slaves look alike to their indifferent guards. Now he looked. He checked. He faltered in his attack in so obvious a way that I knew I was wearing that old ugly powerful look, the facial expression men say gives me the look of the devil, and I did not waste my chance.

I fended off with my left hand and sent his rapier skewering empty air skyward. I took his throat in my right hand and squeezed, then I brought my left fist down and around and under and hit him in the belly.

He would have shrieked, but no air could get past my constricting fingers.

He wriggled and flailed and tried to shorten his blade to stab me in the back, but I glared into his eyes with what I know is a wild and maniacal stare habitual to me when someone is trying to kill me, and I choked him and flung him down like a harvested sheaf of grain. I took his rapier. His left-hand dagger swung still at his waist; of what need had he of main-gauche against an unarmed slave?

With the weapons in my fists I sprang up, and at a half-crouch, ready for the next fool to show up, I surveyed the scene.

The bare rocks, with their thin scattering of dirt cover in which straggly beach-grasses and thorn-ivy struggled to grow here and there, led down to a shaly

beach. Scattered along the beach an enormous mass of timbers, bales, bundles, ropes, and spars indicated a shipwreck. At first I thought the naked, screaming running men and women had been oar-slaves, but what was left of the vessel did not match my knowledge either of a swifter of the Eye of the World or a swordship of the Sunset Sea.

A fellow rolling with muscle, vociferous, authoritarian, yelled and waved his rapier. "Round 'em all up, you calsanys! Every last one of the Pandrite-benighted panvals."

Like the other guards he was clad in black leathers, and tall black boots. Like them he wore beneath the leather tunic a garment whose sleeves covered his arms with bands of red and black. He wore a helmet, narrow-brimmed at the sides and curled up at the fore and aft brim, after the fashion of a morion. His face was congested, bloated, full of annoyance that his command had broken down in what to him was clearly a most messy business.

I looked at the sea — to me, then, an unknown sea — and felt the deep longing for the fresh sweep of the breeze and the clean feel of a keel beneath me scudding through the waves. Then I advanced on this man, this leader of men who slaughtered unarmed men and women as they shrieked and begged for mercy.

The jagged boulders beneath my feet felt decidedly uncomfortable after my sojourn on Earth wearing decent shoes, but I have spent most of my life barefoot, and I took little notice. The Star Lords, this time,

evidently had asked a very great deal of me. As always I had been dumped down on Kregen naked and defenseless, and as always a crisis situation was presented to me. This time I had been flung headfirst right slap into the middle of the action.

I jumped down off the rocks onto the beach and for a moment the big ruffian was hidden from me by contorting bodies. A girl screamed right at my feet and I looked down and to my left. She sprawled on the shaly beach, and I saw that the chains between the fetters on her ankles had tripped and brought her down. A black-clad guard was quite callously, quite intentionally, preparing to drive his rapier through her stomach.

I bent and with the main-gauche slewed a scatter of the shale into his face. He cursed and sprang back. He saw me. His main-gauche came out with the practiced ease of the fighting-man, and I knew I would have to take him first.

He tried to circle me. That was a waste of time — of my time, for his was going to finish here and now.

A second guard ran across with a four-foot-long javelin and hurled it at me. I swayed and the missile hissed past. The second drew both his blades. The girl lay, staring up with wide eyes; fear had drugged her emotions, so that she could no longer weep or cry out.

I wanted to get over this fight quickly. There were well over a hundred naked men and women in chains, and something like fifteen or twenty guards methodically butchering them. The two split up, to take me from left and right.

I have fought many times, and no doubt will fight many more times. These two were fair to middling examples of rapier men, which meant that, combined, they added up to a combination that could always take the better single man. I just had to be better than both.

They both succumbed, one after the other, to timed thrusts.

The shipwreck, the black shale beach, the susurrations of that unknown sea, the black rocks, and the evil thorn-ivy bushes coalesced into the backdrop for wild action and devilish murder. I dispatched two more guards. I could hear a roaring and a raging nearer the scattered timbers of the wreck and I ran toward the focus of the sounds, dropping another guard as I ran.

On the beach the big bull-roarer of a guard captain was down. He sat on the black shale looking stupidly at the stump of his left arm. The red and black sleeved arm lay on the ground at his side, still with the hand clutching his dagger.

Three other guards were backtracking rapidly. I looked at the man facing them, and I felt a painful and thrilling thump of blood from my heart tingle all through my body.

Oh, yes, I recognized who that young man must be!

Fair and open of face, with smooth blond hair, and eyes of an icy-blue, he fought with a grace and a delicacy that warmed my heart. Young, strong, confident, bold, he weaved a net of glittering steel before him, and, one, two, three, down went those guards, gouting blood.

He wore soft leathers cincturing his waist and drawn up between his legs, the whole held in position by a wide belt the buckle of which gleamed dully gold. On his left arm he wore a stout leather bracer. He wore soft leather gloves. On his feet he wore leather hunting boots. I had worn that gear once, myself, in the long ago. . .

And his sword. . .

Oh, yes, I felt all the strife and evil of two worlds flowing out and away from me and the beginnings of a new and altogether glorious promise. Here, before me, was my passport to paradise!

“Hai!” shouted this gallant young man, and he charged headlong for a group of guards who withdrew their reeking blades from the corpses of their victims and sprang up to face him.

Before me, half crouched on the beach, a naked man clasped a woman close, the black iron of their chains harsh against their skin. They were middle-aged, with faces lined with care, and yet for all that, the man could look up at the young man with eyes wide with wonder.

“Now in the name of the twins! Where did he come from?”

“Hush, Jeniu, hush!” His wife dragged him down into the black shale, burrowing for shelter.

I jumped over them, and because it seemed the right thing to do, as I leaped I shouted down to them.

“Remain quiet and you will be safe.”

“Opaz the all-glorious preserve us!”

So far I had seen no beings other than humans among these guards and the slaves they were butchering

to prevent their escape. There were no representatives of the half-men half-beasts of Kregen, those other races of intelligent beings who share the planet with human men and women.

The young man — I had the fleeting wonder if he might not also come from the planet Earth — had engaged nobly with the guards, and in pressing them back, was displaying fine swordsmanship. As I fought, indeed, as I do almost anything, I kept a weather eye open and alert. If a fighting-man sought to leap on me from the rear he more often than not found me suddenly facing him with a naked brand in my fist.

If you tread dangerous paths that is an essential to staying alive — on Earth as on Kregen.

So it was that I had to stop twice more to deal with inopportunately pressing men in black leather, with their red and black sleeves, and their morionlike helmets. I observed a naked man, with a shaggy mop of brown hair and brown hair on his body so that he resembled a great brown bear, wrapping his chains about the neck of a guard and apparently on the point of severing head from body. This huge man, as thick in the chest as the barrels in which palines are shipped for sea use, roared his delight. I saw the suns-light glisten and gleam along the hairy muscles of his forearms as he leaned back. He saw me as I stepped outside a guard's lunge, dazzle him with what — I confess — was a flamboyant flourish of my dagger, and bring the rapier in for the terminal thrust; and Brown Bear yelled, hugely delighted. "Hai, Jikai!"

“Hai, Jikai!” I roared back. “We will finish them all very soon — and then I will strike off your irons.”

“Not until I am done with using them. Never, by Vaosh, would I have believed I could love my chains so much! Ha!”

All over the beach and the soil-covered rocks just above, the bodies of slain men and women sprawled. But many more had reached some kind of sanctuary among the rocks, and among the dead lay many more guards than any of the escaping slaves had any right to expect. Brown Bear had accounted for his share, and I, mine — and this glorious youngster to whose aid I now sprang had fought right well and nobly.

Perhaps he was too noble; certainly, for all his skill and training he lacked experience. Twice I had dodged flung javelins. I saw it all. I shouted — uselessly, vainly, stupidly. There was nothing else I could do but shout and hurl my dagger; but long before the dagger found its mark in the javelin-thrower’s throat, the cruel steel head of the flung spear smashed bloodily red out through the chest of the gallant young fighter.

It is not easy for me to speak of that moment. I can clearly remember that sharp steel javelin-head sprouting from the lad’s chest. I can recall with exact clarity the way the twin streaming mingled light of Zim and Genodras cast sharp ugly shadows down over the muscles of his chest and the smooth tanned stomach, before he doubled up and fell sideways, drew his legs in, and began to cough up blood.

After that my next memory is of drawing my rapier from the leather-clad body of a guard, and looking around for more, and finding them all lying dead in the abandoned postures of complete destruction along the beach. Evidently, at the end, they had tried to flee from me.

I looked back up the beach.

A small clump of naked men and women had gathered, and more were creeping out from their hiding places among the rocks and boulders and thorn-ivy bushes.

The huge brown bear of a man stood a little way in front.

All stared at me.

None would approach.

I ignored them.

I went back to the dying youngster.

He lay still on his side, for the javelin prevented him lying in another posture. He was conscious and his eyes followed me as I approached. Those blue eyes were still bright and brilliant, but the face had drained of blood.

“Llahal, Jikai,” he said painfully, dribbling blood. “You fight right merrily.”

I did not reply with the rolling double-L of the non-familiar greeting of “Llahal” of Kregen; instead I said: “Lahal,” which is used only to those one knows.

He looked surprised, but his weakness made him incurious and unable to ponder the matter overlong. I knelt by his side. There was nothing material I could do for him.

I looked at him, and I waited until I felt a light of intelligence in those eyes, struggling up past the engulfing waves of blackness seeking to drag him down forever.

I spoke.

“Happy Swinging,” I said. My voice was not my own; it was hoarse, strange, harsh. “Happy Swinging.”

He looked at me with the same shock his face had shown when the javelin pierced him through.

“Happy Swinging—”

“Tell me, dom. Where lies Aphrasöe, the Swinging City?”

He coughed and blood dribbled from his mouth, for he was almost gone.

“Aphrasöe!” He tried to move and could not. “I was there — there in Aphrasöe — only moments ago. I talked with Maspero and bid him Remberee — and then I was here. And—”

“Maspero is my friend. He was my tutor. Where lies Aphrasöe?”

The cords in his throat moved and shuddered, and I saw he was trying to shake his head. His voice was faint.

“I do not know. The transition was made — cold and darkness — and then — here. . .”

I had to know where Aphrasöe, the Swinging City, was situated on the planet of Kregen. Next to my concern for my Delia, Delia of Delphond, Delia of the Blue Mountains, next to my love for her, I must know the whereabouts of Aphrasöe. For Aphrasöe was paradise.

He was trying to speak again.

“Tell Maspero — tell him — Alex Hunter tried — tried—”

“Rest easy, Alex Hunter. You have come a long way from Earth, but now you are with friends.”

He looked up into my ugly face with its gargoyle-look strong upon it, and the bright blueness of his eyes faded and he sighed, very softly. His blood-smearred mouth smiled — he smiled, looking upon me, Dray Prescot — and then he died.

I stood up.

I turned to face the gathered naked people.

“Are any guards left alive?” I called. My voice rose harshly, bitter and cutting.

The big brown bear of a man shouted back. “They are all dead.”

I nodded.

“As well for them they are. By dying they escape my wrath.”

Then I turned and looked out to that unknown sea and I did not weep. For many memories had poured upon me and I could face no one until I had purged myself of weakness.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Sweet and refreshing is canalwater of Vallia

The released prisoners wanted to build the cooking fires into conflagrations of joy, and I had to explain to them as gently as I could — and, Zair knows, I am a gentle enough man when the occasion calls for it — that as no one of them knew where we were, and I did not, the night would almost certainly contain hostile eyes. We must cook our supper carefully, and post watches, and be ready with the gathered-up weapons to defend our newly-won freedom.

They all seemed to think I had been in the prison ship with them. On her way to the Penal Islands, a gale had driven her off course. No one knew where we were — but they all knew from whence they had come.

Vallia!

I was on an island off the southeast coast of Vallia. Somewhere over that sea lay the island empire ruled by the despotic father of my beloved. Over there lay my

target, Vallia, the island I had vowed to reach and storm, bare-handed if necessary, and claim my Delia before all the world.

Prosaic matters obtruded themselves now, however. The released prisoners were far too weak to march, and we had espied not a sign of life or a habitation of any sort. The prisoners could not march; I could not stay here.

The big brown bear of a man — Borg — said, when I queried him: “Prisoners, dom? Aye, we are prisoners, truly enough. Politicals.”

At a guess, I said, “The Racter party?”

He glowered. “Aye! The racters, may Gurush of the Bottomless Marsh take them all.”

I have spoken of the Racter party, those great lords, landowners, and wealthy tycoons who were bitterly opposed to the wedding between myself and Delia. These people were almost all of the Panval party, a more popular front, although containing many folk, I suspected, who had joined together in mere opposition to the ractors as through any common ideology.

Borg was a canalman. The canals of Vallia are one of the wonders of Kregen, spreading out over the entire island, fed by the awe-inspiring Mountains of the North, which have various names in their various districts. The canalfolk are a people apart and a way of life apart. Borg’s name was Ven Borg nal Ogier. *Ven* is a title applicable only to canalmen, as *Vena* for the canal-women. Ogier was his canal, the Ogier Cut, from which he took his patronymic. That the canal was upward of

six hundred miles long, with many branches and loops, spreading across many counties of Vallia, meant nothing. Mere land area was of no account to a canal-man; he marked out his lineage in the canal his parents traversed.

“I shall go and find help,” I told Borg. “These people must be cared for.”

He had taken a guard’s leather tunic, but his arms and legs were bare. He carried the rapier and left-handed dagger as though he knew how to use them. He nodded in agreement.

“Good. Then, Koter Drak, I will come with you.”

*Koter* is pure Vallian, equivalent to our Earthly “mister.”

“No, Ven Borg. If you will, you would do best to look after these people. And without disrespect to you, I can travel faster alone.”

He glowered at me, and fingered the plain steel hilt of the rapier, but he saw my face, and agreed.

“By Vaosh the all-glorious! You are a hard man.”

“Sometimes I have need to be.”

My feelings after Alex Hunter had died revealed another facet, but I would not discuss that. The thought occurred to me to wonder if the Star Lords had brought me here because they knew Alex Hunter would fail? But that would indicate a prophecy, a power to foretell what would happen. I put nothing past the Star Lords in those days, but the idea made me prickle a little up the backbone. Then the further thought came to me that the Savanti had sent Alex Hunter on a mission similar to

those I would have been sent on had I passed all the stringent tests of Aphrasöe, instead of having the Savanti boot me out of paradise. I still bore them no ill will for that. They had their nature as I had mine. Whatever the truth of the business, I was here on Kregen and — given I could avoid too obvious a collision with either the Savanti or the Star Lords — here I intended to stay and reach Vallia and claim Delia as my bride.

And such was my mood, I was beginning to feel to hell with her father.

So far, the thought that I must in some measure demean him in her eyes had halted me, had checked my footsteps, had held me back from the headlong rush to Vallia and the arrogant barging into Vondium I knew I would have, one day, to make.

I gently unwrapped and unstrapped Alex Hunter's Savanti hunting leathers from him, before I buried him with solemnity and two prayers. Then I washed the leathers in a stream of clear water — how marvelously supple is the hunting leather of the city of Aphrasöe! — and donned them, pulling the end up through my legs and buckling up the wide belt. I hesitated before pulling on the boots, but I might need them if the going became rough. After my march across the Oularh Waste and through the Klackadrin I felt my foot soles could march across hell without flinching.

And the sword.

The Savanti sword!























































































