

DRAY PRESCOT: 4

**SWORDSHIPS
OF SCORPIO**

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writing as

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A Mushroom eBook

SWORSHIPS OF SCORPIO

Dray Prescott #4

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A Note On The Tapes From Rio De Janeiro

I had assumed, along with thousands of readers who I am sure shared the same genuine sorrow, that the saga of Prescott of Antares must come to an end with the final transcriptions of the tapes from Africa. The editing of the tapes that chronicle the incredible story of Dray Prescott on Kregen beneath the Suns of Scorpio, a task which by a fortunate chance had fallen to me, had been so arranged that each volume might be read as an individual story in its own right.

But this meant that there were but few pages left to see publication after the first three volumes.

After that — nothing. I had hoped that Dray Prescott might in some way have been able to see a volume of his saga and perhaps be moved to contact me. So far this hope has proved vain.

But the ways of the Star Lords, no less than the Savanti, are passing strange and beyond the comprehension of mere mortal men.

I had just written the words, “. . . and then I yelled,” and pushed back in my chair in my old book-lined study, feeling as though I had screwed down the coffin-lid on the face of an old friend, all glory fled from two

worlds, when the telephone rang and it was Geoffrey Dean, long-distance from Washington. The coincidence affected me profoundly for it had been Geoffrey, an old friend and now connected with the State Department, who had given me the tapes from Africa. He had received them from Dan Fraser, a young field worker, who had provided Dray Prescott with the cassette tape recorder in that epidemic-stricken village of West Africa where Prescott had saved the situation. Geoffrey was wildly excited.

His first words were: "I have more tapes from Dray Prescott, Alan!"

By the time we both had calmed down, I had arranged to fly out to see him at once. A mysterious box had that moment arrived, and he had opened it, all unknowing; but he began to suspect as he saw the packed cassettes, played the first one for a few seconds only — and then had phoned me. There was a letter he was having translated. The box had been all over the world, it appeared, but had been mailed from Rio de Janeiro. Geoffrey met me at the airport and I drove with him to his Washington hotel in an impatience I could barely control. As soon as we entered his room I saw them. The box had been left as he had opened it. The manila-wrapped cardboard box, carelessly slit open, rested on a chair, and paper and string hung down. From the box a whole heaping pile of tape cassettes lay tumbled — and I knew that they contained a great wonderful El Dorado of exotic adventures on Kregen beneath Antares, that fierce and beautiful, mystic and

awe-inspiring planet four hundred light-years from our Earth.

Geoffrey was waving a letter in my face.

“Read this first, Alan!”

The letter in translation was curt to mystification.

Dear Mr. Fraser:

I have been asked by Mr. Dray Prescott to forward to you these cassettes. Mr. Prescott was instrumental in foiling a skyjack attempt upon a jet liner in which I was a passenger. The bandits were after ransom without political aims in their act. We crashed in the jungle. None of the passengers would be alive today if Mr. Prescott had not guided us all to safety and taken care of us along the way. We would have done anything for him. All he required was the use of my tape recorder - and a large number of cassettes. And a promise to send them to you. With great pleasure this I now do. I regret I have been unable to listen to any of them as my English is imperfect. Mr. Prescott has now left Rio de Janeiro. If you see him please convey my deepest regard and warmest admiration.

(signed) Francisco Rodriguez.

“And a hotel address in Rio,” I said.

Geoffrey sighed. “No trace of Rodriguez, I’m afraid.”

I looked at the heaping pile of cassettes and my hands shook as I placed that marked *One* in the machine. The opening was garbled; but then a voice sounded out clearly. I knew that deep, powerful voice; I would know it anywhere. I cannot vouch for the truth of his story, but that calm sure voice inspires confidence — more, it demands belief.

The precious box had been sent by sea mail to Dan Fraser's address in Africa, had been shipped back to Washington by the agency and, because Dan had been tragically killed in an auto accident and had no relatives, had found its way to Geoffrey Dean, Dan's boss. Geoffrey had made inquiries about this skyjacking, but had discovered nothing at the various embassies he approached. "Whatever happened down there in South America we may never know. No one is talking."

But, beside this wonderful cache of undreamed-of treasure, I did not care. Now the world could once more share the adventures of Dray Prescott on Kregen under the Suns of Scorpio and revel in the barbaric color and headlong action of his life.

As described by Dan Fraser, Dray Prescott is above middle height, with straight brown hair and intelligent brown eyes that are level and oddly dominating, compelling. His shoulders made Dan's eyes pop. Dan sensed an abrasive honesty and a fearless courage about him. He moves, Dan said, like a great hunting cat, quiet and deadly.

Born in 1775, Dray Prescott had clawed his way up through the hawsehole to become a ship's officer; but thereafter had little success in this world. I believe it is clear that, even then, he perceived with an inner conviction that he was destined for some vast and unimaginable fate. When he was whirled away to Kregen he positively reveled in the perils set to test him, and through his immersion in the sacred pool of baptism in the River Zelph of Aphrasöe he is assured of a thousand

years of life, as is his beloved, Delia of the Blue Mountains. Banished to Earth he was recalled by the Star Lords — of whom he tells us nothing — as a kind of interstellar troubleshooter, and he quickly rose to become Zorcander of his clansmen, and then Lord of Strombor, an enclave house of the city of Zenicce on the west coast of the continent of Segesthes. Hurlled through the void once more he suffered the horrors of the overlords of Magdag and was instrumental in raising his army of slaves and workers in an attempt to overthrow them. In the midst of his final onslaught he was whisked to another part of Kregen's inner sea, and plunged once again into the Star Lords' schemes. He had become a member of the famous Krozairs of Zy, entitled to be called Pur Dray, dedicated to the red-sun deity Zair.

Determined to reach Vallia, and Delia, he set off toward the east. But Delia had set her emperor father's air service in motion to find him, and had come herself to the inner sea in search of her lost love. Delia and Dray Prescott flew through The Stratemsk, as Prescott describes them a truly horrific range of mountains walling off the inner sea from the land to the east, the Hostile Territories. With two companions, Seg and Thelda, they crash and go through adventure after adventure until, at last, with the death of the beast-man Umgar Stro at Prescott's hands and the rescue of Delia, they make a dash for it astride Umgar Stro's own impiter — a gigantic coal-black flying beast. Seg and Thelda, so Prescott relates with great sadness, had been ridden down by a host of half-men. A Vallian Air Service

airboat picks them up; but there is treachery aboard this flier, *Lorenztone*, for Prescott awakes beneath a thorn-ivy bush. He has been drugged. He finds weapons and food tossed down to color the impression that he has fled because he is frightened to face Delia's father, the emperor. This is the work, he believes, of the Vallian Racter party, who do not wish the Princess Majestrix of Vallia to wed him, a man not of their choice.

At this point Dray Prescott picks himself up and says: "On my own two feet, then!"

At this point the present volume, *Swordships of Scorpio*, takes up the narrative. At the junction where the tapes from Africa end and the tapes from Rio begin, I have made a note. They do not run consecutively on; there is a gap. From study of the cassettes I am sure there are other gaps to come in the story we have. I repeat, we are superlatively lucky even to have what we do of the fascinating and pulse-stirring saga of Prescott of Antares.

Kregen under the Suns of Scorpio is a real world, savage and beautiful, marvelous and terrible. Dray Prescott is there now, I feel sure, carving out fresh adventures by the side of his Delia of Delphond, his Delia of the Blue Mountains.

Alan Burt Akers.

CHAPTER ONE

I march toward Vallia

On my own two feet, then, I would march all the way across the Hostile Territories and take ship at whatever port I came across and sail to Vallia, and there I would march into the palace of the dread emperor of that proud empire and in sight of all claim from him my beloved, my Delia, my Delia of Delphond, my Delia of the Blue Mountains.

I would!

The deadly Krozair long sword felt good in my fist.

My head still ached from the effects of the poison and my insides felt as though an insane vintner of Zond were trying to stamp a premier vintage from my guts. But I went on. There was no stopping me now — or so I thought then, wrapped about in rage and frustration and the unhealthy desire to smash a few skulls. . .

The plain continued on in gentle undulations to the low hills ringing the horizon. Long pale green grasses blew in the wind sweeping past. Over all the scene that streaming mingled light of the twin suns of Antares

scorched down. The water bottle was half-full. Evidently, whoever had poisoned me and thrown me into the hole beneath the thorn-ivy bush had tossed down the scarlet silk wrapped about weapons and food to fool those aboard the airboat. The food and water had not been meant to keep me alive; I had a shrewd idea that the poisoner thought me dead.

If I, Dray Prescot, with weapons at my disposal could not live off this land, then I did not deserve to survive.

As you will know I was no soft innocent from a big city who always walked on stone sidewalks, who took automobiles everywhere riding on concrete pavements, who pressed buttons for light and warmth, who ate pre-packaged food. Although I am a civilized man from Earth, I was then and have remained when circumstances require as much a savage barbarian as any of the primordial reavers ravaging out from the bleak northlands.

The first river I came to I swam across and the devil take what monsters might be lurking beneath the water.

Along the banks were mounds of bare earth. These I skirted respectfully.

Ahead the tall grasses gave way to a lower variety, and the ground lay bare and dusty in patches here and there. The long black and red-glinting column I did not wish to see advanced obliquely from my right. I had no hesitation whatsoever in turning in my eastward tramp and heading off to the northeast.

From a low hillock — a natural hillock — I could see the seemingly endless stream of ants. I give them their

Earthly name, for the Kregen names for the varieties of ants would fill a book. These were shining black, active, prowling restlessly toward some destiny of their own. The twin suns sank slowly behind me and the land ahead filled with the flooding opaline radiance from Zim and Genodras.

The first screams ripped from the gathering shadows. Now I knew where the stream of ants was headed.

Soldier ants, large fierce fellows, their mandibles perfectly capable of shearing through ordinary leather, kept watch on the flanks of the columns of workers. The soldier ants, I judged, were all of six nails in length. Six nails make a knuckle. A knuckle in Kregen mensuration is about four-point-two inches, say one hundred and eighty millimeters.

These were big fellows.

The screams continued.

I hurried on, parallel to the column, seeing the sinking suns-light glancing off armored bodies, glinting red from joint and mandible.

Ahead the column spread out. It seemed to me like some blasphemous inkblot, spreading and pooling, ever-fed by new streams.

The man had been staked out.

His wrists and ankles were bound with rawhide to four thick stakes, their tops bruised and battered from the blows of hammers. He twisted and writhed; but the tide of black horrors swarmed over him, a living carpet eating him to the bone.

There was only one way to get him out of it.

My Krozair long sword had been in action against mighty foes before; now it would have to go up against tiny killers four inches long.

Four quick slashes released the thongs. I bent and hoisted the man, holding him in my left hand, swatting with the sword. Already the horrors were scuttling up my legs, over my back, along my arms. Agonizing pains stabbed my flesh. I danced and jumped and ran and shed crushed black bodies like a mincer.

The man was clearly dying. I had merely saved him from the kind of death the people — or things — had planned for him.

By the time I had got rid of the last ant, and had rubbed my skin and felt the slick blood greasy there, and had placed the man down gently against a grassy bank, I knew he had mere moments to live. Most of his lower abdomen and legs had been eaten away, his chest cavity was partially exposed, only his head — with the exception of the eyes — remained to appear as a reasonable facsimile of a man.

He was trying to speak, now, croaking sounds from his throat, gargling, his useless arms attempting to lift toward me.

“Rest easy, my friend,” I said in the universal Kregish. “You will sleep soon, and have no more pain.”

“So—,” he said. “Sos—” He choked the words out. “Sosiel!”

“Rest easy, dom.” I uncorked my water bottle, filled it at the river, and poured water over his face and

between his lips. His tongue licked greedily. Some of the blood washed away.

“Save my Sosie!”

“Yes.”

He knew he was dying, I think, and his voice strengthened.

“I am Mangar na Arkasson. Sosie! She — the devils of Cherwangtung took her — they took her — they — the ants! The ants!”

I moistened his lips again. “Easy, dom, easy.”

His black skin shone now with a sweat-sheen in the pink radiance from She of the Veils, the fourth moon of Kregen. He had been a proud and imposing man. His face, despite the contortions his agony wrought in his countenance, still showed hauteur and pride. His features were not the hawk like ones of Xoltemb, the caravan-master I had met on the plains of Segesthes, who came from the island of Xuntal. This man, this Mangar na Arkasson, had features more Negroid in their fashioning, hard and firm with a generous and mobile mouth.

“Swear!” Mangar na Arkasson whispered. “Swear you will save my Sosie from those devils of Cherwangtung. Swear!”

He was dying. He was a fellow human being.

I said, “I will do all I can to save your Sosie, Mangar na Arkasson. You have the word of Dray Prescot, Krozair, the Lord of Strombor.”

“Good — good—”

His mind was wandering now and although I knew he did not have the slightest notion what a Krozair was, and had never heard of Strombor, yet I believe that he took with him into the grave the conviction — and I hope the comforting one — that I was a man who would do as I had sworn.

When he died, after a few mumbled and almost incoherent blasphemies and pleas, cries of strange gods, and, at my questioning, the statement that Cherwangtung stood at the confluence of two rivers, by a mountain, away to the northeast, I buried him. There was no way of judging what marker or memorial he would want, so I contented myself with manhandling a great stone over his grave. That would hold the plains lurfings at bay, for a time at least.

Few lurfings would attack a single man, even, unless there were a round dozen of them. Low-bellied, lean-flanked, gray-furred scavengers are lurfings, equipped with probing snout-like faces well-suited to the tasks nature has set them.

I stood up.

Four moons wheeled across the sky now, and their combined radiance lit up the night-land of Kregen, here on the eastern plains of Central Turismond. Far away to the east lay the coast. On the coast stood port cities, of Vallia, of Pandahem, of Murn-Chem, of a number of trading countries from overseas. I had to reach one, take ship, sail to Vallia. . .

But, first, I had given my word to a dying man.

I do not believe you, who listen to these tapes cut in this stricken famine-area of your own Earth, can condemn me for what I had sworn to do. I knew my Delia was safe. She was even now aboard the Vallian Air Service airboat *Lorenztone* securely on her way back to Vallia and her father the emperor. I need no longer suffer the cruel tortures for her safety I had recently gone through, when I believed her dead, then the captive of Umgar Stro whom I had slain, and so released her. No. With a clear conscience I could do what I had sworn.

My Delia, Delia of the Blue Mountains, would understand.

At that time I had, of course, had no experience of motive power for shipping other than the wind and the oar. The swifthers of the inland sea with their massed banks of oars could sail independently of the wind — but I had gained the strong impression that I should judge the Vallian Air Service more from my own experience as a naval officer of a King's Ship of my own planet rather than from the wild times I had spent as a swifter oar slave and captain on the Eye of the World. I had in the nature of my profession heard of Claude Francois, Marquis de Jouffroy d'Abbans, who in 1783 had invented a paddle-boat and sailed her on the Seine at Paris, thus being, as far as I knew, the man to sail the world's first successful steam vessel. The first practical steamer had been built by the Scotsman, William Symington, whose *Charlotte Dundas* in 1801 proved herself by towing exercises. Robert Fulton, an American

who would work for whoever paid him, had designed a paddle-steamer, *Demologos*, with the paddles between two hulls and armed with twenty-four thirty-two pounders. I wondered, then, as I strode across the pink-lit night-lands of eastern Turismond, just what this independence of the wind would mean in a vessel, in these sky ships built in far Havilfar.

All of which meant that I had no idea how long it would be before Delia reached her home in Vallia.

If the plans of the man who had poisoned me and dumped me under the thorn-ivy bush went as he envisaged, would Delia believe I had run off? Could she think I had quailed from meeting her formidable father, the emperor?

If she did so think — then I refused to contemplate that

If she did not think so she would very well do as she had done before and send a fleet of airboats scouring the world for me. That, I confess, was a comforting thought.

The men of Cherwangtung, having staked out Mangar na Arkasson for the soldier ants, had merely removed themselves from that immediate vicinity before they got up to their devil's tricks with Sosie na Arkasson.

She was not screaming and so the first sounds I heard were the stamp of naked feet on hard earth, the throbbing of drums, the chanting and leem-keening of the men of Cherwangtung as they danced around the central stake.

This was a scene I did not relish.

Bound to that stake the lissome form of Sosie gleamed in the torchlight, her black skin in startling contrast to the fish-belly white of the men who danced about her shaking axes and spears, their ankles festooned with bells and bones and feathers. They danced two forward, one back, stamp, stamp, slide, stamp, stamp, slide, and they shook their weapons and in the torchlight their faces showed corpse-white and lascivious and incredibly evil.

Sosie held her head up proudly. They had stripped her garments from her. Her hair, done in the fashion we know on this Earth as Afro, bristled. Dust and grass stems covered it, and there were long scratches on her thighs. I could not see her back, lashed to the stake; but I guessed that, too, was lacerated in like fashion as these men had dragged her here for sacrifice.

What the sacrifice was about, what they were going to do, what blasphemous gods they worshiped — of all that I knew nothing. It could be I was interfering in a ritual demanded by law and custom. Both Mangar and Sosie na Arkasson could have been criminals, meeting a just end.

But no civilized man binds a young naked girl to a post and dances around her in the torch glare, his every intention obvious. I felt sure that I was not committing a gross error as I took the bow contemptuously tossed down from *Lorenztone* into my hand. This was not a great longbow of Loh. I shut my mind to thoughts of Seg Segutorio, who was of Erthydrin, and who was a master

bowman, and who was now — I had seen him fall beneath the nactrix hooves — dead and gone and best forgotten.

How could anyone forget Seg Segutorio?

I lifted the bow. I must put thoughts of Seg from my mind. There were twenty of them out there, and after perhaps the fourth or fifth shaft the rest would flee into the pink-lit shadows. They would not escape by running; but I would have to be quick.

If only Seg were at my side now!

Angrily — furious that thoughts of my comrade Seg, who was gone, smashed into my mind — I loosed the shafts as fast as I could snatch up the arrows, draw back the string, and let loose.

One, two, three, four — the four went down, coughing, with shafts feathered into them.

The chanting and drum-throbbing ceased.

One of the men yelled and I put a shaft through his mouth.

Others were shouting, and running, their naked white rumps gleaming in the pink moons-light.

I pinned three more and then they were gone, in every direction. From now on I would be the hunted, not they.

Speed. . .

Sosie regarded me as though I had appeared through the screen of a shadow play, in the round, flesh and blood, miraculously taking the place of a phantom.

“Sosie,” I said. I spoke harshly. “I have come to take you away from these evil men. Mangar has sent me—”

All the time I spoke I slashed her bonds free. As the ropes released, she buckled and fell. The agony of her returning circulation meant I must carry her. She was no Delia, who had been running fleetly at my side, wielding a sword, moments after I had cut her loose.

“Mangar, my father,” she moaned. “I saw — I saw what they did! The ants! *The ants!*”

“Zair has him in his keeping now,” I said.

Then, for a shocked instant, I wondered if these people of Arkasson worshiped Grodno, the false green-sun deity of the green sun Genodras. But Sosie gave no sign that she understood. I ran. Out from the torchlight and into the pink-shrouded darkness where that darkness was illusory, where the moons in Kregen’s night sky cast down enough light so that one might read the small print of a directory, I ran — and then I stopped running. Sosie was bundled down by a small bush — not a thorn-ivy but, blessedly, a paline bush. Immediately she began to stuff the appetizing yellow palines into her mouth, drawing sustenance, refreshment, and surcease from them.

I scanned the horizon, lying down and looking up. One of the torturers showed against the skyline and he went down with an arrow in his guts.

His scream attracted two more, who ran, like fools, over to him, to be slain in their turn.

How many more were there? Another ten, I estimated, at least.

This crouching down was no way of fighting for me.

“Sosie.” I spoke with an urgency that was not altogether feigned. I had to drive through to her mind. “Sosie! I am Dray Prescot. Your father made me swear to save you. Now, you lie hidden in this paline bush. Do not move. I will return for you.”

She understood enough of that in her dazed condition for me to think it safe to leave her.

Then I went a-hunting men who tied girls to stakes, all black and naked, and tortured them.

They went down, one by one, until in the end five of them clumped together, brandishing their axes and spears, and charged me as I shafted one of their number who attempted to cast his spear into my belly.

Now was the moment I had hungered for, to my shame.

The bow went into the grass. The Krozair long sword ripped from my belt — that belt given me aboard the airboat by Delia — sliding against the fold of scarlet cloth on my thigh. I gripped the hilt in both fists, spreading them, the left against the pommel, the right hard up against the guard. That way the two-handed sword wielded by one cunning in its use could strike past and through the spears and axes of these white-skinned barbarians. They rushed against me, whooping, charged with anger, probably unable to comprehend just where I had come from or who I was — a man like themselves and no half-beast half-man of Kregen.

Like any man of Kregen who carries weapons they were skilled. But they could not match the swordsman-

ship of a Krozair. There is no boast in this; I merely state a fact.

By the time they had realized this, it was too late, and as I chopped the last of them — a wild and reckless stroke that took his head clean away from his shoulders — I was aware of the ostentatiousness of my behavior. They were men and not half-men; but they had been behaving like subhumans. That, I submit, is the only excuse I can offer for my savage conduct.

When I reached Sosie she was crying. Her slender body shook with her sobs. As tenderly as I could I lifted her.

“Where lies Arkasson, Sosie?”

“Over there.”

She pointed due north.

I grunted. North in the compass bearing had bedeviled my progress through the Hostile Territories.

So, bearing a naked black girl in my arms, I set off to take her home.

CHAPTER TWO

Of the black feathers and gemmed quiver of Sosie na Arkasson

“You cannot just go walking off across the Owlrah Waste, Dray Prescott!”

Sosie na Arkasson glared at me in a positive fury, her hands on her hips, her eyes bright; but her full lower lip quivered betrayingly.

“I have to, Sosie, and I must.”

“But, Dray! There are leems, and stilangs, and graint, and even risslaca, besides those devils of Cherwangtung. You just can’t go!”

I have never been a man who laughs easily — except in moments of stress or passion — and I could not force a laugh now. Had I done so, it is doubtful if it would have soothed Sosie’s real fears. Arkasson had proved to be an interesting town, built against a sheer cliff of stone in which giant gems twinkled in the mingled light of Scorpio. The architecture ran to much convoluted tracery and scrollwork carved in stone, and massive

drum towers capped with round pointed roofs built from the heavy slates from local quarries. There were open spaces in which greenery grew; but, still, echoing the inflexible rules of all towns and cities to the west within the Hostile Territories, no handy perching places had been overlooked. The defense against aerial attackers was not carried out with quite the same fanatical attention to every detail in Arkasson, and the walls cincturing the town were battlemented against ground troops as their first priority; but a force of aerial chivalry would stumble attempting to alight in Arkasson.

Mangar, who had died so cruelly, had been a leading man of the town; and although I met a number of the notables and was treated with universal kindness by them, I itched to press on to the east, to Vallia, and to Delia.

My pale skin, tanned by the Suns of Scorpio though it was, aroused intense interest in the black-skinned people of Arkasson. Sosie, indeed, had had to speak with rapidity and with lucidity to prevent a spear degutting me on that first arrival.

The people of Cherwangtung roamed the land all about during the nights, the land that hereabouts was called the Owlarh Waste, and retired to caves and hidey-holes during the day. From Arkasson they were regarded with loathing as beasts who made life difficult and dangerous. The farms ringing the town were all heavily defended by wall and moat; but the fiends from Cherwangtung would creep through by night and raid

and burn and kill. Sosie's farm lay in ruins, blackened by the flames, her mother dead and now her father dead, also. The white-skinned savages had done that.

I still retain a vivid mental picture of that torture stake with the slim black form of Sosie bound naked to it, and the torchlight flickering wildly on the gyrating bodies of the white savages in their bells and feathers as they circled her screeching their menace, shaking their weapons, lusting for her blood.

"If you go, Dray Prescott — I shall never see you alive again."

"Oh, come now, Sosie! I can protect myself."

This was, in truth, a strange conversation.

When, at last, Sosie and her friends and the relatives with whom she was staying in Arkasson — until she had found a man and married and so ventured forth to rebuild her farm — understood that I fully intended to walk on toward the east, they insisted on loading me with presents. Any town must have food brought into it, and manufactures to sustain it, and Arkasson was no exception. The farms were the lifeblood of the town, and the white savages of Cherwangtung were attempting to bleed that lifeline dry.

Similar situations must exist all over the Hostile Territories; this one was none of my business. I had fulfilled my oath to Mangar na Arkasson; now I must be on my way.

From Sosie I accepted only food and drink, and a finely built Lohvian longbow. Memories of Seg ghosted up, to be firmly repressed. The longbow was all of six

feet six inches in height, and the pull I judged to better a hundred pounds. It was a bow with which I would acquit myself well; had I not been trained by Seg Segutorio, the master bowman of Erthydrin?

Sosie smiled as she handed me the quiver fully stocked with shafts. There was in her eyes the look of a woman who bedecks a corpse for its final journey to the Ice Floes of Sicce. Out of politeness I examined the quiver, and noticed the exquisite bead-embroidery covering it, animals and flowers and border motifs, all stitched in brilliant colors. The beads glinted in the suns-light — and at that I frowned.

“These gems were gathered by myself from the cliffs, Dray. I have spent many years stitching this quiver. It—” She stopped, and her black face shone upon me and her everted lips trembled and she lowered her eyelids with their long curling black lashes. I thought, then, that I understood.

Her aunt confirmed my suspicions.

“A maiden of Arkasson, on marriage, is expected to hand to her bridegroom an embroidered quiver, and tunic, and shoes of buckskin, stitched with gems she has gathered from the cliffs with her own hand, and polished to perfection, and drilled without a flaw or chip. You are a strange man, Dray Prescot. But for the color of your skin you would be a worthy member of the noblest of Arkasson.”

“And will no young man take her to wife if she cannot provide him with these trinkets?”

The aunt — one Slopa, with a lined face and graying hair, which meant she must be well over a hundred and fifty — looked affronted. “No.”

“Sink me!” I burst out. “I can’t take the quiver from Sosie! It’s taken her years to make. If no gallant will have her without it, then she’ll wait years and years more, gathering gems, polishing them, drilling them, stitching them to a new quiver. And what of her farm? Aunt Slopa — I can’t take it!”

“You will hurt her cruelly if you do not.”

“I know, by Zim-Zair, I know!”

Aunt Slopa pursed her full lips. “Sosie would not have done this just because you saved her life. There is more to this business than that.”

“Can you bring me an undecorated quiver?”

“I can. But that—”

“Just bring it, please, Aunt Slopa.”

When I had transferred all the shafts from the brilliant embroidered quiver into the plain one and had time to mark the perfection of the feather-setting — every feather was jet black — I took up the quiver that was the gift of Sosie na Arkasson and sought her out where she sat on a bench in a courtyard, the anti-flier wire stretching above her Afro hairstyle. She was reading a book — it was *The Quest of Kyr Nath*,^[1] a rollicking tale of mythical adventure at least two thousand years old and known all over Kregen — and as I approached she put one slim black finger between the leaves to mark her place and looked up at me with a smile.

“Nath,” I said. “I know a man called Nath, a dear comrade, and I intend to go drinking and carousing with him and Zolta again one of these fine days.”

She looked at the quiver.

“I would like to live, Sosie, and yet you put me in mortal peril.”

“I! Put you in peril, Dray Prescot! Why, how can you think it?”

“See how these marvelous gems and this incredibly lovely stitching gleam and wink and glitter in the light of Zim and Genodras!”

She reached out her free hand and stroked down the embroidery and the gemstones. Her face showed satisfaction and pride, as was right and proper for a young girl who knows she has stitched well.

“Indeed, they do look fine. Over your back they will proclaim to the world that the quiver was made for you by a girl who—” She stopped. Again her soft everted lips trembled. She did not go on.

I said, in something of that foul and harshly-dominating tone I so much deplore in myself, “The quiver is beautiful, Sosie. I am a rough adventurer, who must travel in wild and perilous lands. It could be the death of me. It would show the world where I was; it would show the world that I carried a fortune on my back. I would have no peace.” She started to say something, quickly, hotly, but I shushed her and went on. “This should hang in the house of the man you marry, Sosie, the man you will love. For him, it will be a

source of unceasing joy and pleasure. For me, it could bring death.”

“But — Dray—” She was confused.

“You do see, Sosie. I appreciate—”

As I spoke, as I held out the scintillating quiver to her, she leaped to her feet with a choked cry. *Kyr Nath* went flying. Her arms went about me and she kissed me with a full fierce passion that held in it only an innocence and a sweetness.

That hot wet pressure on my lips shot through me with a spike of agony. Then Sosie released me and fled into the house.

I sighed. Bending, I retrieved the book.

Kyr Nath. Well. I read at random: “And in this wise did Kyr Nath astride his coal-black impiter smite the legions of Sicce, so that they recoiled from him in thunder and lightning, and Kyr Nath smote them from beyond the sunrise to the day of judgment, so that they fell to the ground and crawled into the caves beneath the Mountains of Pearl and Gold from whence issueth their fiery breath even to this day.”

I put the book down. Sunrise. It said sunrise. I was still, as an Earthman, bothered over saying “suns-rise” instead of sunrise. Those ancient people of the Eye of the World who had lived and laughed along the coasts, who had built the Grand Canal and the Dam of Days, they were called the people of the sunrise or the people of the sunset. There were mysteries here that I had no way at all of unraveling.

Perhaps Maspero, in distant, unknown Aphrasöe, could have explained.

Also, and significantly, this copy of the book had Kyr Nath flying an impiter. Those coal-black flying animals with their huge wingspread were well known here, in the Hostile Territories, and I had alternately cursed and blessed them, as I had fought Ullars screeching wildly on their backs, and flown with my Delia astride Umgar Stro's great impiter away to find safety with the airboat *Lorenztone* from Vallia. In Sanurkazz the story would have had Kyr Nath riding a sectrix. Certainly, the story as I had first heard it, declaimed among the wagon circle of my Clansmen of Felschraung, had Kyr Nath riding a vove.

The culture of a whole planet is an intricately-woven tapestry — and, I can remember now, that I turned with that duly solemn thought to find Aunt Slopa regarding me mournfully.

“Sosie asks me to say to you that she quite understands.”

Although I had faced many wild beasts, as you have heard, I felt the strongest disinclination to probe into the details of the scene that had preceded that announcement. What had been said between Slopa and Sosie was nothing to do with me. It was to do with me, really; but it could not be allowed to become of me.

The subject of conversation being turned, Aunt Slopa said in answer to my question: “When a man dies, his embroidered quiver and tunic and buckskins are laid up with him in the Glittering Caves.”

“The Glittering Caves?”

She nodded to the overbearing cliff face dominating Arkasson. “The cliff is riddled with the caves. The gems within the rock glow and glitter.”

Further comment from me did not seem required; but I did think that a fortune beyond calculation lay within that cliff, embedded in the rock and lying beside the dead bodies of generations of men in the Glittering Caves.

Before I left Sosie appeared. She had dried her tears and made herself look presentable, which, in reality, meant that she looked dazzlingly beautiful with her black skin gleaming and her Afro hairdo a puffed-up nimbus. She wore a simple dress of a dark orange color, heavily spattered with sewn gems, and her feet were clad in yellow slippers. I remember those yellow slippers.

I started to say, “You will forgive me, Sosie—”

She hushed me at once, for which I was grateful. I make it a rule never to apologize; sometimes — not often — that rule of life becomes tricky.

“So you are determined to travel the Owlrah Waste, Dray Prescott! I know, now, I cannot prevent that. I thank you for your kindness to me—”

“Now, Sosie, it is you who are kind!”

“But not kind enough.”

That was spoken tartly enough. She was no weeping willow, was this Sosie na Arkasson.

“I wish you all the luck in the world, Sosie — all the luck in Kregen. May you find the man of your heart, and

marry, and the farm prosper. May you be happy. Zair go with you.”

As before, she did not question my use of the name Zair. They were tolerant, in Arkasson, of any man’s religion, unlike the primitives of Cherwangtung.

“And with you, Dray Prescott”

Before me lay what Sosie called the Owlrah Waste. I took a few steps away from the frowning stone walls, out of their shadow and into the streaming light of the Suns of Scorpio, and I turned.

“Remberee, Sosie!”

She lifted her arm in farewell. “Remberee Dray Prescott. Remberee!”

With deliberate purpose I did not look back until the town of Arkasson had sunk into a blending gray against the lowering cliff upthrust beyond its walls.

During the midday break when I ate and drank sparingly was the time to take stock of myself.

Around my waist I wore the scarlet silk formed into a breechclout. Sosie had, without my knowledge, stitched up for me a scabbard and baldric from plain supple leather of lesten hide and the deadly Krozair long sword now snugged safely against my thigh. She had made some remarkably raucous comments on that sword which, to her eyes accustomed to the slender blades of the Hostile Territories, was so monstrous a brand. The broad belt Delia had given me aboard the airboat buckled up firmly about my waist, the silver buckle deliberately left tarnished, and kept the silken loincloth in place, for silk has this exasperating tendency to slip.

The rapier hung at my left side. It did not hang parallel to the long sword but thrust out at a divergent angle. The main-gauche was scabbarded to my right side. You may smile at this plethora of weapons, and consider me a walking arsenal — remember Hap Loder! — but I was accustomed to be so accoutered and could manage athletic evolutions without the slightest inconvenience.

The quiver that had caused so much heart-searching I slung over my back, the black-feathered shafts protruding up past my right shoulder. This was for convenience in carrying. For rapid shooting the quiver would be carried slung low and angled forward on the left hip. The bow itself, all six feet six inches of it, I carried unstrung. In a waxed-leather pouch I had a dozen spare strings.

Also there were the food bag and the water bottle.

So, thus I found myself, Dray Prescott, walking on my bare feet toward the eastern coast of Turismond.

If I fail to mention the broad-bladed hunting knife sheathed onto the belt behind my right hip it is merely because a knife in that position has been my constant companion from the time I first stepped aboard a seventy-four.

In my long life I have handled many weapons and grown skilled in the use of weapons wholly strange to an Earthman. Armor in its right and proper place has also been of importance to me. Yet, however much I grow used to any one sword or rapier in particular, one special bow, I have never chained myself and my fortunes to just one single weapon. Many weapons have

been presented to me, I have bought large numbers, and taken quantities from dead foemen; if I were to lose all this gaudy arsenal I would feel annoyance — an annoyance not, for instance, that I had lost this one particular Krozair long sword presented to me by Pur Zenkiren, but annoyance over the loss of any weapon in the midst of dangers.

The man who wishes to be an adventuring fighting-man had best not lock his fortune to one brand alone. Fate is all too often ready to snatch it from him, and seldom ready to offer it back — as I had snatched back my sword from Umgar Stro after I had snapped his backbone.

And with this goes the corollary that the true fighting-man can fight with whatever weapons come into his hands.

The twin suns of Antares passed across the sky, the smaller green Genodras now leading the giant red Zim, so that at the second sunset the land took on the tincture of rusted iron, a broad wash of orange and brown and crimson with the last few streaks and streamers of green pulsing through that ruby sky. Ahead the Owlrah Waste stretched in dust and thorn-ivy and prickly scrub. Finding safe anchorage for the night was not overly difficult and by the time Genodras reappeared ahead of me with its filaments of lacy green patterning the sky ahead and painting out the last stars I was well on my first leg of the day's journey.

There had been a noticeable lack of interference from the people of Cherwangtung and this could be explained

in a number of ways, perhaps the best of these being Sosie's comment when I had left that the wild white men tended to lay up during the day and roam only at night. I was not naïve enough to believe they had spotted me and, remembering what I had done to their war party, were afraid to approach me. They might well have been; but that way lies arrogance, psychosis, self-delusion, and eventual destruction.

The land here in the Owlrah Waste was poor and getting worse as I tramped eastward. Arkasson was a town muchly cut off from the world, tending its own circle of farms and minding its own business. The problem facing me soon would be water. Dust kicked up at the unwary tread, behooving me to walk carefully. Leem prowled here, so Sosie had said, raiding into the farms if the fences were left unrepaired, at other times subsisting on the rabbit-like animals burrowing into the plain — animals on which I, too, must depend for food.

I had less concern that I might meet risslaca — of which there are innumerable varieties. The overlords of Magdag placed a bronze risslaca beneath the beaks of their swifterns where the wales met. They more often than not took the fancy of using a mythical risslaca, a great lizard-dragon with fangs and forked tongue. Those that I had previously encountered during my runs ashore when I was fighting my way up as a swiftern commander on the inner sea, the Eye of the World, had been impressive enough, saurian monsters, cold-blooded, fanged and clawed, armored with plate and scale, chilly of eye. Nath, Zolta, and I had fought our

quota in defending Sanurkazz's southern boundaries. That all seemed a long time ago to me, now.[\[2\]](#)

As you may well imagine, having encountered dinosaurs in the flesh on Kregen, I have, whenever the opportunity offered, studied the dinosaurs of our Earth. They form a subject for study that fascinates everyone, from the school child to the paleontologist. Just why this is so can be explained glibly — or with much psychological insight. I had the idea of trying to trace any comparisons, any parallels, between the long-gone saurian kings of the Earth and the very present flesh and blood risslaca of Kregen.

There were, of course, many points of similarity. Equally, risslaca existed — had chased me and been slain — that were unlike anything that we know stalked the Earth at the end of the mid Mesozoic Era, the Jurassic Period, all of one hundred and forty million years ago.

Many were quite dumb. Many emitted shrieks like bursting boilers. Many hunted by eye. Many hunted by scent.

It was a trio of the latter who picked me up toward the middle of the afternoon, when I had entered an area where the ground, although still poor, offered perfect conditions for fern growth. A river had wandered athwart my path and I had crossed it and carried on. The ferns grew in lush profusion. I felt the hunter's itch between my shoulder blades. The light from the twin suns burned down, orange and jade, shafts of sunlight striking down between the great ferns. The foliage

curved over me. The unending stalks towered above. I walked very lightly, turning and twisting my head, and I had strung my bow with that practiced ease that Seg Segutorio exemplified best. I carried the longbow in my hand, an arrow nocked.

Walking thus lightly and alertly through the green and golden glory of the ferns with the jade and orange light falling all about me I came to a swampy area that I must bypass. Here and there the water gleamed like bronze. A wall moved before me. That wall rippled with scaled muscle. Blotches of color — amber, jade, jet — camouflaged the risslaca against the crowding ferns. I saw a narrow head greedily gulping ferns and the drooping leaves of the bristle-topped sickly trees that grew palm-like around the fringes of the water. A serpentine neck curled around. The head lifted from the ferns and cocked so that one eye could regard — *not* me! The eye looked coldly back down the twisted trail up which I had walked.

The three killers were there. They padded up on their three-toed feet — and I saw the first toe of each hind foot carried the long scythe-bladed claw, razor-sharp, that distinguished our Earthly deinonychus. The light from the twin suns of Antares fell luridly across their arrogantly gold and ebony-banded scales. Ten feet long, were the killers; seventy feet at least the camarasaurus-like herbivore.

And I stood between them.

The rudder-like tails of the deinonychus risslacas extended stiffly backward. Those long-curved scythe-

claws caught the gleam of suns-light and glittered with deadly power.

With explosive, incredible ferocity, the three killers sprang.

CHAPTER THREE

Into the Klackadrin

With reflexive action so fast the movement was completed before I saw the first risslaca's hind legs leave the ground the black feathers drew back to my ear, the last extra urge of muscle snapped out as the bow bent, my fingers released the arrow, and the shaft loosed.

So fast had I reacted, my aim exact, that thereby I was nearly killed.

For I had not expected the incredible jumping power of the reptile. It sailed up into the air, its tail rigidly extended backward, its body straightening into the upright position that would enable those slashing blades on its feet to slice me to the backbone. I have seen kangaroos in Australia, larger than these risslacas, leap fantastic distances. The dinosaurs were no sluggish, lethargic movers; they were agile, rapid, deadly — and these were killers.

The risslaca leaped above my point of aim. The arrow skewered past its belly and struck deeply into the junction of tail and body.

Sosie had given me a selection of arrows, so that I had the alternatives of the thin armor-piercing bodkin, the body punching pile, the broad meat-cleaving barb, or the utility arrowheaded point. Against what I had fancied would be after me for supper I had chosen the great barbed meat-slicing head. This slashed its way through the scale and flesh of the risslaca, gouging deeply. Chance had driven that arrow with deadly precision.

For deinonychus of the type on Kregen has the thick bunched tendons and muscles around the root of the tail so that the tail may be extended rigidly and thus give the animal the balance necessary for it to spring and use its lethal scythe-claw.

The arrow slashed all those staying tendons and muscles apart. The tail flopped. The risslaca, hissing, somersaulted, all balance and control gone.

In the same instant I darted into the shadows of the giant ferns.

The two following risslacas hurdled their screeching companion. They sprang again. High and viciously they curved into the air. I heard the shrieking snorting roar of the giant camarasaurus as they landed on its back, one high against the junction of neck and shoulders, the other lower down, so that its curved claws sank bloodily into the belly of the herbivore.

At that instant, simply by stepping forward and loosing twice, I could have slain both killers.

But I do not kill unnecessarily. I regret that sometimes in my long life I have been forced to kill.

Certainly, I own to the weakness of being willing to slay first the man or beast attempting to slay me. It is a defect of character, no doubt. Here, though, nature was merely being followed. Since long before I had arrived so unexpectedly on Kregen and, without a doubt, long after I am gone, the risslacas hunt and kill as do all carnivores. It is in the nature of these fascinating creatures — just as it was in the nature of the scorpion to sting my father to death.

Judging by the noise and the thrashing among the giant curving ferns the killers were not having it all their own way.

Circumspectly, then, I left that scene that might have been wrenched from the scarlet pages of Earth's Jurassic and walked delicately on around the swamp.

Perhaps, by taking out one of the hunting party of carnivores, I had given the herbivore the better chance, at that.

You may be sure I walked long into the night, constantly alert, until I was well away from the swamps and ferns of the meandering river and once again treading the poor, dry and dusty ground. I camped that night without a fire and merely dozed. Three days and nights later and with the land still as unfriendly and with only a mouthful of water left in my canteen, I had to revert still further to our barbaric ancestors. My shaft drove skillfully, and slew me a darting rat-like creature — not a Kregen rast, although no doubt a species allied to those unpleasant creatures — and I drank its blood to slake my thirst.

I strode on, having recovered my arrow and cleaned it on the animal's gray and dusty fur, ever vigilant for predatory enemies. More to the point, I was also constantly on the lookout for food. So, I suppose, as is the way with men or the half-men of Kregen, I was the greater predator crossing that dismal and hostile wilderness.

Toward evening of the fifth day I ran across one of the broad high-banked roads left by the conquerors of the Empire of Walfarg who had driven through here from the eastern seaboard in the old days and taken their suzerainty of all the Hostile Territories.

The debate I carried out did not last long. Of a certainty I could travel far faster along the road with its squared slabs than across the arid plain. Those stones were still in remarkable condition, squared, their edges only slightly crumbled and the greenery that attempted to struggle through the interstices could subsist only on drifted soil, for the old engineers of Loh had built well. But on the road I would be marked.

So, keeping the road generally in sight, I traveled more safely if more slowly parallel to it, heading east.

On the eighth day I began to discern a jagged appearance to the eastern horizon. The skyline there did not bear the kind of outline I associated with a mountain range, and I hoped there was going to be nothing like The Stratemsk ahead of me. I did not relish that thought. We had flown through The Stratemsk, Delia and Seg and Thelda and I. That mountain chain lofted so high, extended so sprawingly vast, that it defied all

rational comprehension. It walled off with chilling finality the western end of the Hostile Territories from the eastern end of the lands on the eastern border of the inner sea. What happened there, in the Eye of the World, might have been happening back on my Earth for all that the people of the Hostile Territories knew. And, now, I began to entertain the deepest suspicions that another and equally hostile barrier existed between the Hostile Territories and the eastern seaboard of this continent of Turismond.

If it did, I would have to pass through, somehow, so as to reach the coast, take ship to Vallia, and reach my Delia of the Blue Mountains.

The terrain continued unpleasant, much cut up with dry gulches and razor-backed outcroppings of naked rock. Here — although I knew I must have trended well north of the parallel of latitude on which stood Pattelonia, the city of the eastern seaboard of the Eye of the World from which we had set out — the weather continued hot with the brazen Suns of Scorpio burning down. I had now to hunt my food and drink in earnest.

The jagged impression of the skyline before me continued when I was able to observe it from a higher-than-usual eminence, although the difficulty of the ground with its bare-bones, desiccated look meant I was more often than not confined between rocky walls. My back kept up an infernal itch and my head swiveled from side to side, constantly observing my back trail, like — if you will pardon the anachronistic image — the rear turret of a Lancaster. The only life that scraped a

subsistence here larger than the insects and lizards and other burrowing animals seemed, from all that I observed, to be a kind of six-legged opossum and the wheeling birds, both of which fed on the life lower down the food-chain. You may easily understand how relieved I was that from day to day the birds that followed me were no larger in size than an Earthly vulture or kite. Why they were following me was obvious; but I had to reach my Delia of Delphond, and was in no mood to provide a meal for these scavengers of the air.

Harsh vegetation grew scrawnily along shadowed cracks in the uptilted rock faces. There were ants here, too, and I avoided their dwellings with great circumspection.

So it was that a quick and furtive movement beyond a boulder at the far end of a draw sent me at once to cover.

I waited.

Patience is not merely the virtue of the hunter — it is his life.

Presently a Chulik stepped out into the center of the draw.

I drew my breath in a gasp of amazement.

The Chuliks I had seen on Kregen before were full-fleshed men, with two arms and two legs, with a healthy, oily yellow skin. They habitually shaved their skulls with the exception of a long rope of hair that might grow to reach their waists. From the corners of their lips protruded two upward thrusting tusks a full three inches in length and, although they were human-

seeming, they knew little of humanity. Normally they were highly prized as mercenaries and guards commanding higher prices than the Ochs or the Rapas, beast-men who performed similar functions. Some I had seen as slaves, not many.

This Chulik's hair grew matted and coarse and filthy. One of his tusks was broken jaggedly. He wore a scrap of black cloth about his middle, much covered with dust and dung and his yellow skin was likewise befouled. In one hand he carried a long pole fabricated from a number of spliced lengths cut from the twisted and scrawny bushes that were all that grew hereabouts, and the end of the pole carried a yoke-like fork. A basket woven of dry stems enclosed four of the little opossum creatures. The Chulik was busy about the task of catching a fifth, poking and prying down into a shallow hole beneath a boulder, moving with an alacrity pathetic in comparison with the lithe and vigorous movements of the Chuliks I had known.

I waited.

Moments later another figure joined the first.

Again I felt astonishment.

This was a Fristle, a half-man with a face as much like a cat's as anything else, furred, whiskered, slit-eyed, and fang-mouthed. Although I still had no love for Fristles — for Fristles had carried my Delia off to captivity in Zenicce so soon after I had been taken to Kregen for the second time — much of my dislike had been mitigated by the gallant actions of Sheemiff, the female Fristle, she who had called me her Jikai and had

so proudly worn the yellow-painted vosk-skull helmet when my rabble army of slaves and workers revolted in Magdag.

This Fristle wore a black breechclout, was as filthy and downcast as the Chulik. He carried the curved scimitar that is the racial weapon of the Fristles, but its hangings and lockets were tarnished and broken.

What had brought these two representatives of proud and haughty races so low?

The impression grew in me strongly that I had nothing to fear from them.

The strangeness of that feeling must be apparent to you who have listened to my story so far.

I stepped out and lifted my hand.

“Llahal!” I called, using the double-L prefix, after the Welsh fashion, to the word of greeting, as was right when encountering strangers.

They looked up sluggishly.

After a time the Fristle said: “Llahal.”

The Chulik said: “Why do you not work?”

“I am going to the coast.”

For a moment they did not understand. Then the Fristle cackled. I know, now, that laughter for him and the others here occurred so infrequently that it might never have been invented; it came almost as seldom to them as it does to me.

“I have marched from the Hostile Territories, through the Owlrah Waste, and I have not come here to be laughed at — by a Fristle least of all.”

In response the Fristle merely blinked. His hand did not even fall to his scimitar hilt.

The Chulik cowered back, but he did not lift the forked pole against me.

I rolled out a vile Makki-Grodno oath.

What had happened to these men? What power had so ferociously tamed them into pitiful wrecks of their former selves?

Also, the thought occurred to me, it is said there is hereditary enmity between Chulik and Fristle, except when they are engaged by the same employer.

Knowing that, I was profoundly impressed when the Fristle helped the Chulik hoist the cage containing the four opossum creatures onto his back. I caught a glimmering, then, that whatever horrific experiences these men had gone through had brought them closer together and by stripping away the artificialities of race and species had displayed them to each other in adversity as creatures together beneath Zair and Grodno.

“The grint has gone, now,” said the Chulik. He spoke in the whine habitual to the slave. “Four will not be enough, but that is all the Phokaym will get.”[\[3\]](#)

At this name, this name of Phokaym, both Chulik and Fristle gave an involuntary shudder.

Before I could say another word they hunched around and slouched off, quickly vanishing into the tangle of boulders at the end of the draw.

I ran fleetingly enough after them; but when I entered the rock-strewn area I saw quickly that they had

taken themselves off and lost me, traveling by secret paths and passages they would know well.

Pushing on through this country grew more difficult in the following few burs and so, at last, I chanced striding out along the old road of empire.

One vital fact was very clear. In this area lived some power of such strength that it could reduce arrogant beast-men to a cowering state lower than that of a whip-beaten slave. From the evidence of the Fristle's scimitar I judged that they were not slaves. All resistance had been knocked out of them, and warriors who had strode victoriously over a score of battlefields had been reduced to a state of abject degradation. All this was proved to be true — as I found to my cost, as you shall hear.

Occasionally I glimpsed over the twisted and fantastically jumbled landscape on either side of the road more of these subdued people, men and women, Ochs, Rapas, Fristles, and Chuliks, as well as Ullars and other half-beast, half-men I had not so far encountered closely enough to identify. They all scuttled at my approach, disappearing into crevices in the rock. None ventured onto the squared blocks of the road surface.

That night I camped uncomfortably in a rock crevice of my own close to the road and, apart from a few strips of dried meat hung on my belt, I went supperless to bed. I had the strongest conviction I should save as much food as possible for what the future held.

In the morning with that jade and ruby fire mingling and pulsing down I stood up and stretched and was at

once alert and ready to face the terrors of the day. As I walked along that ancient road I saw that scummy water filled pools and hollows among the rocks, and that a weird and gnarled vegetation grew, all twisted and stunted, its roots curling like petrified serpents from the rocks into the fetid water. Indeed, the smells of indescribable foulness grew every yard I progressed. I began to feel a dizziness. I blinked and shook my head and pressed on. The road appeared to me to waver as does tar macadam at the brow of a hill in hot sunshine; a shimmering stream of interconnecting and vibrating images at once obscuring vision and lending it a fraudulent magnifying quality.

Now I walked all alone. No other living soul I could see stirred in that dismal expanse.

Ahead of me lay the east coast, and a ship, and Vallia — and Delia. No fainting fit would hold me back. I staggered as I marched. I hauled up, the sweat starting out all over my body as I stared directly ahead along that ancient road, there on the continent of Turismond on the planet of Kregen beneath the Suns of Scorpio — and saw a three-decker of a hundred and twelve guns lift her scarlet-lidded gun ports and saw the thirty-two pounders and the twenty-four pounders and the eighteen pounders run out, grinning at me, and belch in silent flame and smoke!

That smashing broadside would pulverize me in an instant. The familiar yellow smoke engulfed me and I could not prevent the old prayer rising to my lips — but even as I said, “For what we are about to receive,” the

three-decker vanished. In her place I saw a swifter of the inner sea, a lean deadly hundredswifter turning toward me so that her bronze rostrum aimed directly at the rib beneath my heart!

I yelled — and in that wavering mist and confusing smoke, the glint of the twin suns and the smothering feeling of madness rising in my mind I saw my friend Zorg — Zorg of Felteraz — smiling at me, his moustache curling. Zorg, dead, and gone and food for chanks in the inner sea!

His face was ripped away and next I saw Nath and Zolta, my oar comrades who with Zorg and I had labored at the oars as slaves. Nath and Zolta, chuckling, the one with a leather blackjack slopping wine, the other with a giggling wench on his knee.

I shouted.

I lurched forward — and now I saw Gloag, my good comrade from Zenicce who was not a full human being and yet who knew more of human kindness than — than Glycas, that cruel and cunning man of Magdag, and his sister, the beautiful and evil Princess Susheeng — and I saw Queen Lilah, the Queen of Pain of Hiclantung — and I saw Hap Loder and all of my clansmen in headlong cry astride their massive voves — I saw Prince Varden Wanek of the House of Eward. I saw many people, then, all replaying the roles they had played in my life.

I saw Seg Segutorio and Thelda — and I wept.

And then — then I saw my Delia, my Delia of Delphond, as she had walked with so lithe a swing down

toward Great-Aunt Shusha and me. Delia I saw, wearing that flaunting scarlet breechclout and with the dazzlingly white ling furs I had given her aswing about her form, her long lissome legs very splendid in the sunlight.

Then I knew beyond a doubt that I dreamed.

I shook my head.

Knowledge of hallucinatory drugs is more widespread on this Earth than heretofore, and armed with modern knowledge I might have appreciated far more rapidly just what was happening to me. Opium and hashish were known to me, as was the more luscious and gentle if treacherous kaf used by the weak-willed on Kregen beneath Antares. Drug-taking for escape from life is generally the mark of a decadent or bored society — and on Kregen life was too vivid and headlong and demanding for those who sought life out for the taking of drugs to be more than a marginal nuisance. It has seemed to me that I have never had the time to investigate properly all this modern to-do over the drug habit and on Kregen I have always had far too much to do, even as slave, when my every thought has normally been set on escape.

So now I staggered and lurched along the old imperial road and the phantoms from my mind took on form and substance and came to leer and gibber at me, to mock, or to smile and hold out their hands in friendly Lahal.

That first time I attempted to cross this barrier to the eastern coast — the barrier was called the Klackadrin,

as you shall hear — I entered on the task as a young and innocent. Those scummy pools fed minerals to the scrawny plants, which breathed out their miasmic bedevilment, betraying the wits of men and beasts. The Klackadrin sealed the eastern flanks of the Hostile Territories as effectively as The Stratemsk sealed the western.

Delia's counterfeit image swung away and in her place pranced all the might of the cavalry aswirl about me at Waterloo. I brushed a hand across my eyes, and when I looked again I saw Umgar Stro, huge and ferocious, charging upon me with the ghostly replica of the sword I now carried!

Tendrils from the marshy pools set amid deep crevices of the rocks at the side of the road wriggled across the road at me. At first I thought them figments of my imagination, perhaps a reminder of those morfangs we had battled in that cave of the Hostile Territories. Then a thick and clutching tendril wrapped itself about my ankle. It hauled.

A single slash from my Krozair long sword severed the thing.

More of them crowded the road ahead, writhing, seeming obscenely beckoning arms, beseeching me to walk into their embrace. I would have to hack my way through.

A fresh sound obtruded. A hard, ringing clash of steel-like claws on the flagstones of the road.

I swung about.

I really believe, even now, that I thought I was bewitched still, seeing phantoms, seeing things that never were.

That belief, sluggish and obstinate, held me in a stasis that came from the foolish belief that of all these hallucinations none could harm me and that only from the beckoning and writhing tendrils had I any physical danger to fear.

What I saw impacted with the sense of physical nausea and yet, with all my experience of Kregen and its beast-men to give me a guide, I realized that these beast-men were not half-men half-beasts; these were half-beast half-monster. They were the Phokaym.

They rode cousins to those risslacas I had previously met, huge lumbering dinosaurs that yet moved with a quickness that would tax a sectrix to match. The Phokaym themselves, quite clearly, were racial descendants of risslacas. They were cold-blooded, as I discovered, with the wide-fanged mouth of the carnivorous risslaca, the small front legs that had adapted into manipulative arms and clawed hands, and the powerful hind legs and tail of the carnivorous dinosaur. They were perhaps twelve feet tall. They carried their tails curled up and around behind the ornate saddles. Each one was armed with spear and sword. They wore barbaric ornaments, and their scales were painted and lacquered into geometric patterns of cold reptilian beauty. Were they real?

Intelligent, armed, cold-blooded carnivorous dinosaurs riding spurred and bridled herbivorous dinosaurs? They were real.

Had they been more alien, more weird, more unearthly than their very forms suggested, I might have believed. There are so many unearthly life-forms on Kregen that one can understand the profusion of life and its multiplicity; had they been like those morfangs, or the wlachoffs — incredibly alien in appearance — or any other of the many unterrestrial creatures I have encountered on Kregen, I might have reacted sooner. As it was their very suggestion of Earthly dinosaurs riding Earthly dinosaurs, a conception staggering to me then, if not so much later, with its immediate impact of rejection and dissociation in that bath of hallucinogenic compounds, made me laggard and late.

Thick blood-red strands fell about me, tacky and binding, dragging my arm and long sword into my side, entangling my bow and quiver, wrapping me from shoulder to ankle. I fell.

The smash of the hard stone against my cheek awoke me.

But it was too late.

Enmeshed I was dragged along the hard stones of the road, back toward the west, back away from the coast, back into a slavery of the kind I had seen in those unfortunates skulking among the rocks and fetid pools.

Triumphantly shrilling, the Phokaym dragged me away.

Had they had eight limbs each, I would have believed in them, and my long sword would have drunk cold reptilian blood. Had they had eight legs, I would have believed.

Six legs, even. . .

CHAPTER FOUR

The Phokaym

An old crone of an Och came to me in the corner of a cave where the Phokaym had flung me, still tightly bound in the thick blood-red strands. She was old and her stringy bleached hair hung lankly down. She stood before me on her legs, holding the pannikin of foul water with her middle limbs, and brushed the scum from the surface of the water with one of her upper hands, while the other dipped the stone spoon and so dribbled water between my lips.

“They want you alive and healthy for the voryasen.”

The spoon was merely a dumbbell-shaped piece of stone with one end hollowed out. Most of the water trickled down my chin and into my beard — which was longer and more ragged than I customarily allowed — but the drops I sucked in, despite my knowledge of their stinking condition, tasted like the best Zond wine.

The Och made no attempt to free me. She cringed at the slightest sound, shutting her eyes and hunching her head down into her neck. She spilled more water than I

got, but at least I felt a little more myself. I asked her impatient questions, and when I mastered myself enough to soothe her, she was able to speak, albeit falteringly and with many frightened glances over her shoulder. Outside came the noise of people moving about, the rhythmical gong-like notes as stone struck against stone. The suns had set, but it was still hot.

“The Klackadrin.” The old Och woman sighed. Her name, she said, was Ooloo. She had no clear memory of any life before this; yet she must have been brought here in some way, if she had not been born here. She did not remember. “The Klackadrin. It is evil, weird, ghosts and bad spirits dwell there. No one can cross it at all — only the roads, only the roads—”

How many of these poor devils had sought to escape via the roads, only to have the fearsome Phokaym astride their risslacas hunt them down and bind them with the blood-red cords and cast them to the voryasen?

“Devils,” she said, muttering, and cast a terrified glance toward the cave mouth.

The Klackadrin, she told me, was not a great distance in an east-west direction, although its north-south axis, meandering and curving, stretched she did not know how far into North Turismond and ended, she thought, far down into the south, perhaps as far as the Cyphren Sea where the Zim Stream sweeps up from unknown oceans.

“Evil dreams, nightmares, madness, that is all the Klackadrin can offer. There are monsters there — monsters—” She shut her eyes. I had had no food and

when I asked she brought me a piece of raw opossum which, as a warrior, I knew I must eat to keep up my strength, yet tasted hard and stringy and needed much chewing.

“One day, perhaps, the Phokaym will go away and leave us in peace,” said Ooloo. It was pathetically transparent that she did not believe this would ever happen.

By continuous perseverance I discovered I could move my fingers a little within the constriction of the blood-red strands. I kept working away, pushing and pulling one muscle against the next in well-remembered drill, seeking to keep them flexible and the blood coursing through my body. If I was to escape I could not have the agony of blood returning to circulation slowing me down.

I was working on my upper arms when the Phokaym amid a loud noise of clashing weapons and scaled armor came for me.

“The voryasen!” whispered old Ooloo. As I was dragged out with a great shouting and much buffeting I heard her say, “Jikai, Jikai,” and I thought she sobbed.

We warriors always felt a trifle contemptuous of Ochs with their little round shields when it came to combat; but I think I can trace my emergence of a better feeling for them from that encounter with old Ooloo there in the fetid caves of the Phokaym.

Clouds drifted across the sky and She of the Veils, the fourth moon, shone more fitfully even than usual, while the first moon, almost twice the size of our own

moon, the Maiden with the Many Smiles, was already setting far across the Owlarh Waste.

The collection of food and the production of tools and utensils were the primary concerns of the crushed-down people, both men and half-men, under the despotic rule of the Phokaym.

Tonight was to be a spectacle night, an occasion when the risslaca Phokaym emphasized their absolute power. A man was to be tossed to the voryasen. Consequently, so I gathered, more torches than usual were lit, painfully gathered by the slaves from the waste, twisted and gnarled branches they had so painfully gathered set alight gleefully by the Phokaym to illuminate their celebrations.

I saw stone jugs passing from claw to claw as the Phokaym gathered. Their scales glittered in the torchlight. It was difficult to distinguish just what was armor and what was their own scaly hide. I was dragged toward the stone lip of a great pit. Above the pit an arrangement of wooden supports lashed together projected, like the boom of a crane. The Phokaym crowded toward this pit. I was hoisted upside down and my lashed ankles were fastened by a rope painstakingly woven from dry stems. Torchlight glared upon the scene, ruddy and orange, streaming light and driving weird shadows cavorting among the rocks and the stunted bushes.

Up I swung, twisting and turning, upside down, hanging from the rope. The boom moved and turned and I was carried out over the pit. I looked down.

A voryas is a form of risslaca one might imagine in nightmare, part crocodile, part tylosaurus, a giant fang-filled mouth, all jaw and muscle, and an agile scaly body and bludgeoning tail, that one would do well never to imagine, even in nightmare, let alone care to encounter.

Bound and helpless, with all my weapons about me and unable to use them, I swung upside down above a water-filled pit crawling with the saurian horrors.

They lifted from the surface of the water, hissing and spitting, their jaws wedges of fangs, their eyes red and wicked and glaring upon me with voracious intent.

The Phokaym had fun.

They kept paying out the rope and lowering me down toward the surface of the water so that the voryasen would leap up at me, giant scaled forms gleaming dully emerald and amber, surging upward to fall back, baffled, hissing their rage, as the rope was hastily hauled in.

Up and down I went, and the voryasen leaped and hissed, and the world turned scarlet from the thrum of blood in my head and my eyes threatened to start from their sockets, and my body grew numb.

By a stupendous effort I managed to jackknife my body and look upward. A Phokaym, his teeth glinting as carnivorously as any voryas in the pit below, held out a blazing torch. He was touching the fizzing and sputtering torch to the rope holding my bound body above the pit.

Furiously I struggled with the blood-red cords, but they would not yield.

If I could swing, I could reach the timber support of the boom from which I hung suspended. The smells, the shrieks, the whole cacophony of noises spurted up to rumble and roil in my head. I was helpless. Below me the carnivorous water-predators saw the flame of the torch and their hissing redoubled.

They knew what would happen when the torch burned through the rope.

They knew!

I was sweating now; everything whirled about me. One crunch of those gigantic fanged jaws below and I would be cut into two bloody halves.

There could be no last-minute rescue. There was no one within a hundred dwaburs who could aid me now — no one anywhere on this wild and savage world of Kregen.

The pit yawned beneath my dangling head. Torchlight splintered back from the scales and the eyes of the voryasen below. Now their hissing bounced back in magnified echoes from the pit walls. I craned up again — the rope was burning!

I could see the frayed and blackened strands parting, one by one, curling out like spent matches.

The torchlight burned into my eyes.

The shrieking and yelling of the Phokaym deafened me.

I swung. . .

My mouth was wide open, but I was not yelling.

This might be the end of it all, of all the high dreams I had had, here on Kregen, of winning my princess and

of taking her to my palace and estates in Zenicce, of once more riding with my loyal clansmen across the great plains of Segesthes. . .

I swung. . .

The world dizzied before my swimming eyes. Smoke and flame mingled and blinded me.

But I could see the fire of burning rope, see the strands parting, see the evil flickering flame gnawing through the only thing that supported me above the fangs and jaws of those merciless risslacas below. . .

I saw — I saw the last strand burn, the rope part and break and then I yelled—

* * * *

At this point the tapes from Africa end.

The following narrative picks up the story later on in Prescott's life on Kregen. It begins in the middle of a sentence.

The end of the last cassette came with a noise — a sound — of such unimaginable ferocity as to chill me to the heart when I first heard it, and which I hesitate to play over again. After that the tape spins emptily through the heads. Whatever it was that made that frightful sound, I have grave doubts that even the African jungle harbors its creator.

The beginning of the fresh cassette is garbled and there is some confused noise as of laughter and — I guess — the popping of champagne corks. This, as I think you who have followed the saga of Prescott this far will agree, is well in keeping.

The writer who has been giving me invaluable assistance in editing these tapes, a distinguished author with an international reputation, when he heard this portion observed, with what I took to be wry admiration: “Dray Prescott has successfully pulled off one of the oldest classical clichés in the book.”

“Of course,” I told him. “That’s Dray Prescott’s style.”

I do wonder, though, if we will ever be privileged to hear what failed to record at the beginning of this tape. Just how *did* Dray Prescott do it? Those of you who have followed his saga so far will have no doubts whatsoever that he *could* do it. . .

And, there is the yellow fang of the Phokaym Prescott gave to Pando to act as a clue. . .

Alan Burt Akers

* * * *

. . . bringing me up out of the light doze into which I had fallen and this time louder and more urgent. I opened my eyes and cursed and stretched out a hand across the wide rumped bed where the fused jade and ruby light from the twin suns threw a miniature landscape of mountain and valley. The light glinted back from the hilt of my rapier as I took it up into my fists. Again the scream knifed up the narrow black-wood stairs of *The Red Leem*. I cursed, and groaned, for my legs were still rubbery and my head throbbed as though an impiter smote me with his coal-black wings.

“What in the name of Makki-Grodno’s diseased armpit is going on?” I yelled.

By the time the third scream ripped out I recognized Tilda's voice. I staggered a little, and gripped onto the bedpost. The wooden floor with its scattered rugs of bright Walfarg weave swayed under me like the deck of a frigate blockading Brest. I shook my head. I had my old scarlet breechclout wrapped around my middle and my rapier in my fist. Hastily I snatched up the main-gauche and started for the door.

The door burst open and young Pando appeared, his hair wild, his eyes reflecting more of the red light than the green, his whole body animated with anger and furious defiance. He shouted at me, his words tumbling over one another, a little dagger in his fist that shook with his passion.

"The Pandrite-forsaken devils!" He danced up and down. "They're insulting Mother — Dray! Come on! You've got to help!"

"I'm coming, Pando." I set straight for the door and bounced from the jamb. Pando grabbed my arm and steered me through the doorway. "You'd best not stick 'em with that toothpick, Pando," I said. "You'll only upset them."

"I'll degut 'em all!" he shrilled. He was only nine years old, as I had to remind myself, and he thought everything in life was black and white.

Then, as though commenting on my thoughts about him, he gave me a kick to help me on my way. I wobbled toward the black-wood stairs, twisted, my feet shot from under me on one of the Walfarg rugs, and down the

stairs I went, bump, bump, bump, to the bottom. The bottom hit me hard.

Through the arched opening into the main room of the inn I could see the counter with its ranked amphorae, its trim rows of sparkling glass cups, the covers over the food, everything neat and tidy and waiting for evening when the men and women of Pa Mejab would crowd in for their evening's entertainment.

The chief source of their entertainment was now struggling in the grip of three men. They were ruffians, all right, intent on their prey. As I stood up, smarting, and stared blearily at them I fancied they were leem-hunters, men from the back hills away to the west and probably men who would venture almost to the Klackadrin itself. They wore clothes made from leem pelts, and broad leather harness, with swaggering rapiers and daggers and large riding boots and all seeming to me to be very powerful and blurry.

I blinked.

Tilda's blouse had ripped down over one shoulder and then the other, and the men laughed.

"Let go, you stinking cramphs!" Tilda was yelling. Her long mane of black hair floated freely from her head, swirling out, in truth, very much like the wings of an impiter. She got one arm free and slapped a leem-hunter across his leathery, whiskered cheeks, whereat he roared with laughter, and, catching that arm, bent it back and drew his face close to Tilda's.

"You won't dance for us, ma faril, when we ask all politely, so you'll dance to another tune now."

“Wait until we open our doors, rast!”

“Hold on!” shouted another of the men, too late, for Tilda’s naked toes slammed into him. He doubled up, clutching himself, and rolled away, both laughing and retching.

Yes, they were ruffians, all right. In from the country and wanting their fun. Pando ran past me, straight up to them, and struck wildly with the dagger at the man gripping his mother.

“Pando!” I yelled, alarmed.

The man back-handed Pando off. He staggered back, cannoned into a table, went over spilling the vase of moon-flowers onto the floor. The man roared his good humor. About to bend again to Tilda he caught sight of me, in the doorway, the rapier and main-gauche in my fists.

He straightened up and threw Tilda into the arms of the third man, who grabbed her — most familiarly, I thought — whereat she squealed and tried both to kick and bite him.

“So what have we here, by the gross Armipand himself!”

He ripped his rapier from its sheath, and the dagger followed as quickly. The man Tilda had kicked hauled himself up, turning to face me, his features still twisted and the tears still in his eyes. For a moment the tableau held in the main room of *The Red Leem*. I was conscious of the stupidity of all this. My head rang as though a swifter’s oars were beating my skull all the way along the hull of a two-hundred-and-tenswifter.

“You had best release the lady,” I said with some difficulty.

They guffawed.

“A tavern wench a lady! Haw, haw!”

I shook my head in negation — and that was a mistake. All the bells of Beng-Kishi clanged resonantly inside my skull.

“She is not a tavern wench. She is Tilda, the famous entertainer, a dancer and actress. She is,” I added with words more like myself, “not for scum of the likes of you.”

“Ho! A ruffler!” The leader of the leem-hunters abruptly threw himself into the posture of the fighting-man. “A swagger with a rapier and dagger! Come on, little man, let us see you back your words with your sword point.”

When I say my legs felt like rubber, it would be more correct to say I could hardly feel them at all, and my knees seemed like mashed banana. I took a step forward, and my rapier point described trembling circles.

The three men laughed hugely.

“Serve him as you served the landlord, Gorlan!”

Portly Nath, the landlord, lay huddled beyond an overturned table. All I could see of him were his legs and feet in their satin slippers, and his balding head, the face turned away from me, and a small trickle of blood. He was not dead, for he moaned; but he had been struck a shrewd blow.

“I am not a fat old innkeeper,” I said.

“Then I will open your tripes and find out!” said this Gorlan, flickering his blade very swiftly before me.

He lunged.

My dagger seemed — of its own volition and without any conscious effort of my muscles — to do as it pleased. It sliced up, deflected the rapier blade in a screech of metal, and so drove Gorlan back, with a spring, his face abruptly blackening with thwarted anger.

“You miserable cramph!” he bellowed.

He drove in again, powerfully, overbearing me by sheer weight and ferocity. My twin blades beat him off. The metal slithered and clanged, sliding and twisting with many cunning tricks and turns. He scored a long slicing cut across my left arm and then my rapier point pressed into his throat and his dagger flew spinning across the inn. I did not hear it land.

“Oh, Gorlan,” I said, rather thickly and with the world jumping and dancing with purple spots and streaks of white fire. “Oh pitiful little Gorlan!”

His face blanched. It was a very wonderful sight to see that swarthy visage drain of blood, the eyes glare in terror upon me, the lips go suddenly dry.

“Dray!” screeched Tilda.

I swiveled to my right, taking the rapier around ninety degrees and showing its point to the man Tilda had kicked and who was now rushing upon me with drawn sword. My left hand gripping the main-gauche swung around with my movement and my fist smashed sloggingly into Gorlan’s jaw. He dropped like a sack.

The second man hauled up, his rapier engaging mine, and for a short space we circled. With an oath the man grasping Tilda flung her from him, drew his own weapons, and charged in upon me at the side of his companion. The difficulty of focusing nearly betrayed me; I did not want to kill these two, as I knew they would not wish to kill me. This was a tavern brawl over a woman — as far as they were concerned a tavern wench — and they knew the arm of the law of Pandahem stretched here to Pa Mejab. As for me, the same strictures obtained. That Tilda was in very truth a famous actress, here in this colonial port city of Pandahem only because she had married for love, and her soldier husband had been killed here, leaving her stranded with her nine-year-old son Pando, meant nothing to them, although it meant a great deal to me.

So I engaged, and parried, and feinted, and took their blades upon my dagger, and thrust in the attempt to disable them. And all the time the world pressed roaring and swirling in upon me, my sight dimmed. I felt my banana knees bucking, and their onslaughts grew stronger and stronger as I grew weaker.

By a desperate piece of sheer outrageous Spanish-style two-handed fencing that would have had my old master, the cunning Spaniard, Don Hurtado de Oquendo, foaming with outraged professionalism, I managed to disarm the second man and send him reeling back with blood spurting from a pierced bicep.

But the other fellow bored in and my sluggish legs wouldn't drag me around in time to meet his attack.

Then — like an avenging angel — Tilda rose up at his back and, two-handed, brought down a jug of purple wine upon his head.

He grunted and lurched forward and his rapier skewered the floorboards as he smashed on past, the blade vibrating backward and forward and the hilt seesawing like an upside down metronome.

As though hypnotized by that rhythmic motion I went to my knees, toppled slowly forward, and so came to rest beside the leem-hunter — and all of Kregen fell on me in blackness.

Sorry, but that's the end of the sampler. We hope you enjoyed it. If you would like to find out what happens next, you can buy the complete Mushroom eBook edition from the usual online bookshops or through www.mushroom-ebooks.com.

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About the author

Alan Burt Akers is a pen name of the prolific British author Kenneth Bulmer. Bulmer has published over 160 novels and countless short stories, predominantly science fiction.

More details about the author, and current links to other sources of information, can be found at www.mushroom-ebooks.com

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Notes

[1] The Word “Kyr” has been used by Prescott many times in his narrative but I have generally changed it to “Lord.” It begins to look as though this usage may be incorrect, and the honorific “sir” is a better translation. As part of the title of a book its use here is perfectly justified. Also we have here, I suspect, the root reason why there are so many Naths on Kregen.

[2] Here is another example of a reference to incidents in Dray Prescott’s life on Kregen during the period he spent on the inner sea and in Sanurkazz lost to us with those missing cassettes, as related in “A note on the tapes from Africa” in *The Suns of Scorpio. A.B.A.*

[3] Prescott spells out this name, Phokaym, giving it the “Ph” and the “Y,” although he nowhere tells us where he learned that these were the correct spellings, in place of the “F” and the “I”. *A.B.A.*