

HE IS AN OUTLANDER, A BARBARIAN QUITE OUT OF PLACE IN THE CROWDED BYWAYS OF ICHAR, THRONE-CITY OF THE REALM OF PYTHARIA. BUT THE DARK-MANED GIANT'S ORIGINS MATTER LITTLE TO THE FEMINE EYES THAT COAT HIS SUN-BRONZED FORM WITH SIGHFUL GAZES--

--OR TO THE CURIOUS NODS THAT FOLLOW THE GLITTERING CRIMSON GAUNTLET THAT GLOVES HIS SURE AND STEADY SWORD-HAND--

--NOR DO THEY MUCH MATTER TO THE GUILTY EARS THAT SOON CATCH THE JANGLE OF GOLD COINS CARRIED FAR TOO CARELESSLY BY ONE NOT WARY OF CITY WAYS...

BUT TO CONFUSE CARELESSNESS WITH IGNORANCE CAN BE A GRAVE MISTAKE, EVEN IN A BARBARIAN --

--ESPECIALLY THIS BARBARIAN--

--FOR HE IS--
VALCAN, WHOM MEN CALL--

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BRAKASH

CLAW

THE UNCONQUERED

the Sword and the Silent Scream

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IF YOUR **STEALTH** WERE AS STRONG AS YOUR **STENCH**, SLY ONE, YOU'D YET BE IN ONE PIECE!

STILL, YOU SETTLED MY PONDERINGS WHETHER OR NOT TO ENTER THIS GODLESS HOLE-- I SUPPOSE YOU DESERVE **SOME** RECOMPENSE FOR YOUR EFFORTS!



INKEEPER / A FLAGON OF WINE-- AND A PLATE OF WHATEVER PASSES FOR MEAT IN THIS DEN OF THIEVES!



SOON...

MY HANDSOME ONE, I MUST SAY YOU HAVE A **TALENT** FOR MAKING AN **ENTRANCE!**

AND PERHAPS, AFTER YOU'VE DINED, THERE ARE OTHER TALENTS YOU'D CARE TO SHARE WITH--



OH!

CLUMSY WENCH!



I-I'M SORRY, SIR! HERE, LET ME HELP YOU CLEAN--

NO! LEAVE THAT--



--ALONE.

GASP! Y-YOUR HAND! LIKE... LIKE SOMETHING FROM THE PIT! A-A DEMON HAND!



FOR A MOMENT, THE COLD-EYED STRANGER HESITATES, WEIGHING THE ADVANTAGES OF FLIGHT AGAINST THE EMP'TINESS IN HIS BELLY--



-- AND THEN, CAUTION SUSPENDED BY HUNGER, TURNS BACK TO HIS PLATE...

-- UN-AWARE THAT ONE MAN'S MEAT--



-- CAN SOMETIMES BECOME THAT SAME MAN'S POISON...

HE'S THE ONE, GIRL? YOU'RE SURE? 'CAUSE IF YOU'RE LYIN' TO OLD TARMAG--

OH, NO, GOOD MASTER, I SWEAR! H-HIS HAND! IT'S WEBBED-- LIKE SOME HORRIBLE SERPENT!



WELL THEN, MY PRETTY, IN THAT CASE TOMORROW'S SUN SHOULD FIND YOUR MASTER A VERY RICH MAN! AND YON BARBARIAN --

-- A VERY DEAD ONE!



DARKNESS FALLS, AS IS ITS HABIT, AND SOON...

HMPH, I'D WAGER CARRION-EATERS HAVE DINED BETTER THIS NIGHT THAN I! AND IN MORE CONGENIAL COMPANY AS WE--



SUDDENLY, THE DARKNESS IS FILLED WITH SHAPES-- SHADOWS THAT LUNGE WITH TEETH OF STEEL...

!!

ONLY TO FIND
THEIR INTENDED
VICTIM WITH
TEETH OF HIS
OWN!

URNK!

YUNK!

AYE, BUT JARMAL'S
CARCASS PULLS HIS
SWORD FROM HIM!
AND HE'LL NOT
ESCAPE ME SO--

GODS! HE'S
QUICK AS A CAT;
THIS OUTLANDER!

YOU TALK
TOO MUCH,
AXEMAN!

HUH?!

ALLOW ME
TO CURE YOU
OF THAT VULGAR
HABIT!

KRAK

YOU JESTS GLIBLY,
LONG-HAIR! BUT WE'LL
SEE HOW WELL YOUR
MOUTH WORKS WHEN
YOUR HEAD IS PARTED
FROM YOUR--

WHA--F Y-YOU
KNOCKED AWAY
MY SWORD--
LIKE IT WAS A
FEATHER!

AYE, CUR,
FOR I'VE NO
LOVE FOR
ASSASSIN'S
BLADES--

--NOR FOR THE
LOUTS WHO WIELD
THEM!

SWATCH

UNNNNNNNNN



AND AS FOR YOU, FAT ONE, NEVER LET IT BE SAID THAT **VALCAN** IS UNMERCIFUL--FOR I SHALL ALLOW YOU TO LIVE!

THOUGH WITH ALTERATIONS THAT WILL MAKE YOU WISH FOR YEARS TO COME THAT I HADN'T!



BUT THEN...

YOU THERE! HOLD!

CITY GUARDS!

AYE, LUCK IS WITH YOU, FAT ONE! FOR I'VE NO DESIRE TO FACE A DOZEN MORE SWORDS THIS NIGHT!



CATCH HIM!
H-HE'S A THIEF! A MURDERER!

DON'T WORRY, GOOD SIR! HE WON'T GET FAR!



WHEW! HE CAN'T GET FAR ENOUGH TO SUIT ME!

BUT PERHAPS THERE'S STILL A WAY TO TURN A PROFIT OUT OF ALL THIS--WITHOUT HAVING TO FACE THE SWORD OF SOME BULL-MAD BARBARIAN!



TIME PASSES, AS THE PORTLY INKEEPER'S HURRIED FOOTSTEPS TAKE HIM TO CASTLE DARKMORN, THE MIST-SHADOWED CITADEL WHERE DWELLS--

--OCCULAS OF THE YELLOW EYE, LORD RULER OF ALL PYTHARIA!

Y-YES, SIRE, I'M SURE IT WAS HIM! AND HE HAS THE DRAGON'S HAND, JUST AS YOU DESCRIBED!



A-AND THOUGH I KNOW YOU WANTED THE MAN HIMSELF, SIRE, ISN'T THIS INFORMATION WORTH... SOMETHING?

AYE, INKEEPER, YOU'VE DONE WELL. YOUR WORDS ARE VALUABLE INDEED --AS IS YOUR SILENCE!



OH, Y-YOU CAN TRUST ME, SIRE! I-I WON'T BREATHE A WORD OF OUR, UH, TRANSACTIONS!

OF THAT I'M SURE, TARMAG--

SNAP



CHK



--QUITE SURE!



YOU WERE WISE, O KING. THAT CHURL'S WAGGING TONGUE COULD HAVE PROVEN DANGEROUS!

AYE, MIFTUNG, I NEED NOT YOUR *SORCERY* TO TELL ME THAT!

AND AS FOR YOU, ZEDON, YOUR BLADE WAS USEFUL-- AS ALWAYS!

THANK YOU SIRE, I... TRY TO PLEASE!



LIKE A BEATEN DOG, SILENCE SINKS INTO THE HALL, SETTLING SOFTLY OVER THE PLAYERS: THREE GRINNING CONSPIRATORS --AND THE LEERING FACE OF DEATH...

...A SCENE MOST FAMILIAR TO THE EYES OF TIME, FOR IT HAS BEEN PLAYED BEFORE--

--IN A DAY WHEN KING WAS PRINCE--
AND NONE TOO HAPPY ABOUT IT...

PRINCE OCCULAS?!
WHY UH, WHAT BRINGS
YOU TO MY--

YOU KNOW
QUITE WELL
WHY I'M HERE,
MIFTUNG!
I GROW
IMPATIENT--

--AND SICK OF SERVING
A KING WHOSE WEAKNESS
DRIPS LIKE SYRUP FROM HIS
EDICTS! YOU PROPHESED
THE THRONE FOR ME, SEER
--AND I WOULD KNOW
WHEN!

B-BUT, SIR
PRINCE, SUCH
THINGS TAKE
TIME--!

BUT TIME IS
BECOMING
INCREASINGLY
PRECIOUS FOR
BOTH OF US,
WIZARD--
IF I MAKE
MYSELF
CLEAR!

I-I'LL GET MY
Y-VIEWING CRYSTAL
RIGHT AWAY, S-S-SIRE!

AND
SOON...

I SEE IT NOW, GOOD
PRINCE. IN ONE WEEK, THE
THRONE SHALL BE YOURS!

BUT BEWARE,
FOR THE CRYSTAL
SHOWS ANOTHER
OMEN AS WELL!
A HAND--

--WEBBED
LIKE A
DRAGON'S
PAW!

IT IS THE HAND OF
JUSTICE, SIRE--AND
THE ONLY POWER
THAT CAN THREATEN
YOUR RULE!

NO! I'VE WAITED
TOO LONG FOR THIS!
I'LL TOLERATE NO
THREATS! THE
OWNER OF THE
DRAGON'S HAND
MUST BE FOUND--

--AND
ELIMINATED!

CONTINUED ON
ESP PAGE FOLLOWING

FOR A MAN OF **SCRIPLES**, SUCH A TASK MIGHT HAVE PROVEN **DIFFICULT**--BUT FOR **OCULAS** OF THE **YELLOW EYE**...

ONLY **SAGH** ONE... IN ALL... **PYTHARIA** **LINH** WITH SUCH... A HAND...

KREGAR **LUNGH** OF **KANON WOOD**...

AND, AFTER A SHORT CONFERENCE WITH A TRUSTING KING...

KREGAR? PLOTTING TO **ASSASSINATE** ME? I FIND THAT **DIFFICULT** TO BELIEVE, **PRINCE OCULAS**! BUT, IF YOU SAY IT'S TRUE--

--HAVE HIM BROUGHT TO THE CASTLE! I'LL **INVESTIGATE** THIS MATTER MYSELF!

HOWEVER,

THERE ARE MANY **INTERESTS** INVOLVED HERE, **ZEDON**, AND **YOURS** WOULD BEST BE SERVED IF THIS **KREGAR** WERE NOT TO REACH THE CASTLE... **ALIVE!**

I UNDERSTAND, MILORD!

AND SO, A SHORT TIME LATER IN **KANON WOOD**...

TREASON?! BUT THE KING'S ALWAYS HAD MY LOYALTY--HE KNOWS THAT!

NEVERTHELESS, **KREGAR**, YOU STAND **ACCUSED!** WILL YOU COME PEACEFULLY?

AYE, I'VE NOTHING TO HIDE! I'LL COME!

A PITY, THAT! SINCE MY **REPORT** MUST STATE THAT YOU --

--DIED WHILE TRYING TO **ESCAPE!**

KREGAR!



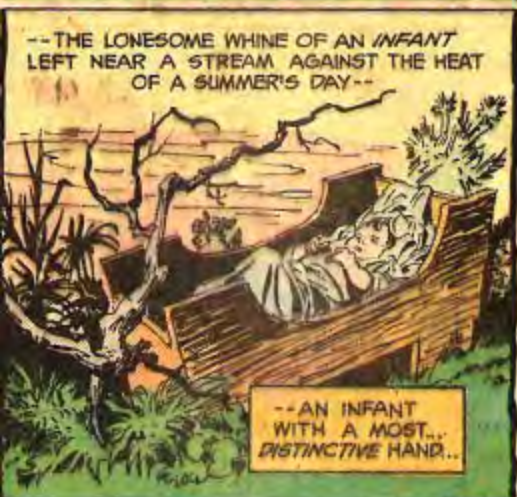
AND, OF COURSE, MILADY, I CAN'T LEAVE ANYONE ALIVE TO DISPUTE THAT REPORT. NOW CAN I? HA HA HA!

THE STILLNESS OF THE CLEARING CRACKS TO THE SHRILL OF CRUEL LAUGHTER--



-- A SOUND THAT FADES ONLY WITH THE HOOFBEATS OF THE SLAYER'S STEED -- HOOFBEATS LEAVING BEHIND A STILLNESS NO LONGER COMPLETE --

--FOR NOW ANOTHER SOUND CAN BE HEARD--



-- THE LONESOME WHINE OF AN INFANT LEFT NEAR A STREAM AGAINST THE HEAT OF A SUMMER'S DAY --

-- AN INFANT WITH A MOST... DISTINCTIVE HAND...



AND HAD THE MURDEROUS SOLDIER HEARD THAT CRY, AND STOPPED TO INVESTIGATE -- HE MIGHT HAVE WITNESSED YET ANOTHER UNUSUAL APPEARANCE...



HUSH, CHILD --FEAR NOT!



YOUR TIME IS NOT YET COME! FOR THERE ARE TASKS AWAITING --



-- TASKS THAT ONLY YOU MAY PERFORM...

BUT IN TRUTH, THE SLAYER STAINED NONE OF THIS, AND SO MERELY REPORTED SUCCESS TO HIS MASTER--



--WHO, WITH THE AID OF A PARTICULARLY VILE POTION, WAS SOON KING OCCULUS THE FIRST!

YEARS PASSED YEARS THAT SAW THE PEOPLE OF PYTHARIA PLUNGED INTO AN ERA OF DESOLATE SERVITUDE--



--A TIME WHEN BLOOD FLOWED TO FILL THE COFFERS OF THE ROYAL TREASURY...

BUT EVEN A KING REMAINS VULNERABLE TO HIS OWN FEARS...



AND SO...



WHY, YOUR DREAMS SHOW TRUTH, SIRE! THERE DOES LIVE ANOTHER WHO BEARS THE WEBBED DRAGON-HAND!

HIS NAME IS VALCAN--THOUGH HIS DEFORMITY HAS EARNED HIM THE FEARED TITLE OF --CLAW!

THE NAME MATTERS NOT, MIFTUNG, FOR THE FACT REMAINS! THERE STILL EXISTS ONE WHO WOULD OPPOSE MY ULTIMATE DOMINATION OF THIS GLOBE! AND LIKE HIS PREDECESSOR, HE MUST BE LOCATED --





--AND DESTROYED!

AYE, SIRE, BUT YOU'LL BE NEEDING MORE THAN *MORTAL* STRENGTH TO SLAY THIS ONE! SUCH STRENGTH AS I CAN PROVIDE WITH--



--THE EYE OF KANN! AN ANCIENT TALISMAN THAT WHEN COMBINED WITH THE PROPER WORDS, WIELDS GREAT MYSTIC POWER!

ATTEND, ZEDON, WHILE I INSTRUCT YOU IN ITS USE!



AND LATER, AS THE GUARDSMAN LEAVES WITH THE ARCANE GEM...

DO I DETECT A HINT OF *SELF-SATISFACTION* IN YOUR MANNER, WIZARD?

YOU'RE MOST OBSERVANT, MILORD, 'TIS TRUE. FOR YOUNG ZEDON WAS BECOMING OVERLY *AMBITIOUS*, AND 'TWOULD NOT BE LONG ERE HE DESIRED THE *THRONE* ITSELF!



BUT IF HE USES THAT ANCIENT JEWEL *PROPERLY*-- WE MAY WELL RID OURSELVES OF *TWO* THREATS WITH ONE STONE! HEH HEH!



SHORTLY, IN A SHADOWED ICHARIAN ALLEYWAY...

THEY'RE *PERSISTENT* DOGS, THESE GUARDSMEN! IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE--?



WHO--?

EASY WITH THAT *SWORD*, HANDSOME ONE! HOW CAN I GUIDE YOU TO *SAFETY* IF YOU SPLIT MY GIZZARD, EH?

NOW HURRY, BEFORE THE GUARDS RETURN!



BUT... WHY SHOULD YOU HELP ME?

MY MASTER WAS A CRUEL MAN. HE WENT TO SLAY YOU -- AND DID NOT RETURN!

FOR THAT, I OWE YOU MUCH MORE THAN GRATITUDE!



BUT TELL ME WHY WOULD YOUR LIFE BE WORTH SOMETHING TO A MAN LIKE TARMAG?

I KNOW NOT, GIRL. IN MATTER OF TRUTH, I KNOW LITTLE OF MY OWN EXISTENCE SAVE FOR THE EVENTS OF THE PAST FEW DAYS!



WHAT?

AYE, MY PAST IS A STRANGER TO ME! I KNOW ONLY THAT I HAVE A GNAWING SENSE OF FATE-- A FEELING THAT I AM TO PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN THE FUTURE OF THIS WORLD!



BUT WHAT ROLE, OR WHY I AM TO PLAY IT, REMAINS A MYSTERY! THIS IS MY FUTURE AS VAGUE AS MY PAST!

NOT SO YOUR IMMEDIATE FUTURE, OUTLANDER, FOR WE HAVE ARRIVED!



BY THE SEVEN BEARDS OF BOTH! WHAT MANNER OF DEVIL'S DEN IS THIS?

IT WAS A TEMPLE! THE FOLLOWERS OF KANN WORSHIPPED HERE AGES AGO--UNTIL THEY ABANDONED THEIR RELIGION!

SOME SAY BECAUSE THEY BECAME AFRAID OF THEIR OWN GOD!



ONLY RUMORS
REMAIN AS TO
WHAT HAPPENED
TO THAT DEITY,
BUT--

--BUT YOU
SHOULDN'T
WORRY YOUR
SHAGGY HEAD
ABOUT IT,
BARBARIAN--



--FOR YOU'LL
SOON BE TOO
DEAD TO CARE!

A TRAP! I SHOULD
HAVE KNOWN NOT TO
TRUST A PRETTY
FACE!

COME THEN,
ASSASSINS, AND
I'LL TAKE A DOZEN
OF YOU TO HELL
WITH ME!



OH, I'VE NO
INTENTIONS OF
LOSING GOOD
MEN TO YOUR
SWORD, LONG-
HAIR! NOT
WHEN I CAN
LET A GOD DO
MY SLAYING
FOR ME!
BECAUSE,
YOU SEE--

--KANN
LIVES!



AYE, THOUGH THE
FEARFUL KANNITES
BANISHED HIM TO A
NETHER WORLD, THIS
JEWEL WILL FOCUS
ENOUGH ENERGY
TO BRING HIM
BACK!

AND
AFTER ALL
THESE EONS,
EVEN A GOD
MUST--
HUNGER!



DARK WORDS ARE
SPOKEN--AND A
CHILL WHINE LANCES
THE THICK NIGHT AIR--




--A THROBBING CRY
THAT SWELLS TO A
MIND-SPLITTING SHRIEK
AS THE PULSING HELL-
JEWEL GLOWS--



--SPREADING THE TEMPLE
IN A BLANKET OF PALLID,
UNHEALTHY LIGHT--

--A FITTING HALO
TO HERALD THE
DAMNABLE
RESURRECTION OF--



--KANN
THE ALL-
CONSUMING!

GODS! THE
BEAST'S SCREAM
MAKES NO SOUND
--YET IT TEARS
AT MY VERY
BRAIN!




FLEE, GIRL!
WHILE I STILL
HAVE... REASON
LEFT... TO
FIGHT THE
THING!



BUT...

VALCAN!



YOU MAY HAVE...
BETRAYED ME, GIRL...
BUT NO ONE DESERVES
...SUCH AN OBSCENE
FATE... AS--




FLAMES OF SILENT AGONY TEAR AT CLAW'S MIND EVEN AS THE WRITHING SLIME DRAWS HIM CLOSER...




WHICH RAISES THE QUESTION IS IT THE LAST REMNANTS OF REASON OR SOMETHING MORE-- THAT GUIDES A CRIMSON-GLOVED HAND ACROSS THE DUST-MOTTLED FLOOR--






SOTH! EVEN AS A CORPSE, THE THING'S ENOUGH TO TURN ONE'S--

VALCAN L-LOOK!




AYE! THE POOR DEVIL SAID THE JEWEL REQUIRED ENERGY! ONLY HE MUST NEVER HAVE REALIZED THAT ENERGY WOULD BE DRAINED--

--FROM HIS OWN SOUL!




WELL, AT LEAST HE WON'T BE NEEDING THIS ANY LONGER, AND I'VE AN UNEASY FEELING I WILL!

AND...WILL YOU TAKE ME WITH YOU, HANDSOME ONE?




WHY? SO YOU CAN BETRAY ME AGAIN?



OH, B-BUT I ONLY HELPED THE GUARDS UNDER THREAT OF DEATH! I SWEAR! AND ANYWAY, YOU'LL FIND I HAVE CERTAIN CHARMS TO MAKE A LONG JOURNEY MORE... COMFORTABLE!



RIGHT NOW, GIRL, YOUR CHARMS MEAN LESS TO ME THAN A GOOD HORSE! BUT STILL, I WOULDN'T LEAVE THE WRETCHED-EST HAG TO THE "TENDER MERCIES" OF ICHARIAN SOLDIERS--



--SO COME! MY DESTINY AWAITS!

AND I ALREADY BEGIN TO ENVY THOSE WHO'VE FOUND THEIRS!

EPILOGUE:

SOME DAYS LATER...

YOU'D BEST FILL YOUR FLASK, GIRL. WE'VE A LONG WAY TO TRAVEL ERE NIGHTFALL.

HMMM. AND WHY NOT STAY HERE, HANDSOME ONE?

I'M SURE WE COULD FIND SOME WAY TO PASS THE TIME!

THIS IS NEITHER THE TIME NOR THE PLACE FOR -- EH?

SO! I NO SOONER BEGIN TO TRUST YOU THAN YOU TRY TO WHITTLE ME BEHIND MY BACK! WHY, GIRL?

OW! P-PLEASE! Y-YOU'RE HURTING ME!

AND I'LL DO WORSE THAN THAT IF I DON'T GET SOME ANSWERS--AND QUICKLY!

THERE! AGH! O-ON THAT TREE!

WHAT--? OH, I SEE. I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THERE'D BE A PRICE ON YOUR LOYALTY!

WAIT! Y-YOU CAN'T LEAVE ME HERE ALONE!

YOU'LL HAVE COMPANY SOON ENOUGH, GIRL! THERE'LL BE JACKALS ABOUT COME SUNSET-- AND I'M SURE YOU'LL FEEL QUITE AT HOME WITH THEM!

AND, ANYWAY, I'VE OTHER THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT... NOW...

REWARD
10,000 DREMKARS
FOR THE HEAD
AND RIGHT HAND
OF YULCAN THE CLAW

AN EARLY EVENING WIND CURLS THE SAND, MOANING THE LEGEND OF A MAN WITHOUT A PAST-- AN OUTLAW IN HIS OWN HOMETLAND-- A MAN OF DESTINY CALLED-- CLAW!