

To illustrate some of the things I was talking about in FD 118, and because I will most certainly be pretty well rewriting the following in its entirety before it wd ever be published (if it is ever to be published, of course), yhos dgv is bringing to Apa F and Apa L the following, which is the beginning of my novel THE BLACK MAGICIAN (portions of the following may seem familiar, but they have been rewritten since last appearing in this lumpy old weekly fanzine). I am, by the way, very interested in any comments...

FIRST DRAFT #119

Vol. 20, No. 5

20 Jun 66

sorry, no motto this week...

THE BLACK MAGICIAN: Chapter One -- Wine And Swords

"As all good stories do," said the stocky man in the dim-lit tavern, stripping off his leathern jacket, "this one is going to begin with a fight!"

"So be it, Master Konarr," said the slender young man in faded crimson and black, a sneer on his almost-handsome face. "You may prepare to die!"

The long hot day had faded into cool breezes of evening. At the Inn of the Cudgel, outside the high gates of proud Zetri, Queen City of Tarmisorn, the doors and windows were opened wide to catch every breath of night wind.

For long hours Konarr had sat at his accustomed bench, drinking cool wine, and arguing with friends and strangers alike of politics and soldiery, of wizards and women.

He considered it both his recreation and his business, for he did not carouse and argue and brawl purely for the pleasures of conversation and fighting and wine. Captain of a Free Company of a hundred and more sturdy fighters, enrolled at present in the services of the Lady Tza, he was a man constantly wary of the new and shifting airs of trouble and turmoil that had begun to spread throughout all Tarmisorn.

Half of his forty years had been spent in soldiering, and though his hair had become sparse and grey, his heavy-set frame had lost none of its toughness. And always he kept his eyes ready to spy a likely youth or veteran; there were never too many men in a Free Company, he considered, no matter what traditions said.

Tonight there was a likely lad from Periareth, a far traveller indeed for such dangerous times; the dust of the road on his once-brilliant crimson and black garments did not mislead Konarr into thinking him simply a penniless wanderer.

The burly Free Captain smiled darkly; he had his own grimly humorous way of entering upon a recruitment.

"Well, young fellow," said Konarr, signalling to old Darkal the inn-keeper for more drink, "and what tales from distant Periareth can you tell us? Perhaps a story of the latest antics of your drunken lunatic ruler, Hariri the Stupid! Eh?" And Konarr roared with the laughter of the onlookers.

Tassoran of Periareth scowled and fingered the engraved hilt of his sword. "Master Konarr, I tell stories with poor art. But perhaps you know a few to regale us with. I mind me of one told of the former Lady

Tza, the illustrious mother of your present ruler, or so they say. Refresh us on the details -- something about the seven days and seven nights she spent in a pig sty, granting her favors to the poor farmers of the countryside..."

Konarr's slow slight smile kept the onlookers from laughing or speaking. "Very well, we have traded insults handsomely. Perhaps, though, you would not mind if I made up a story here, on the spot?"

Tassoran looked about him, and shrugged. "How, then, does it begin?" Expecting the answer he got, he casually began undoing the points of the cloak from around his neck.

And Konarr stood up and told him.

Konarr laughed at the youth's answer. "Draw, Tassoran. Let us end this quickly; I promise I'll teach you manners permanently. Then back to the wine -- ah, so young you are, and to taste wine no more!" He laughed again and wrapped his jacket round his forearm.

The other's blade was drawn, and his faded cloak was already wound around his right forearm. Before Konarr had more than closed his hand around the hilt of his sword, Tassoran whipped his own blade at him in a vicious sidewise swipe at the knee.

"A good stroke!" shouted Konarr, moving backwards with the practiced grace of the professional swordsman and evading the whistling steel with ease. Instantly his sword was out.

He stepped back in with a backhand blow at Tassoran's right arm, catching instead Tassoran's own blade in its return stroke.

Sparks flew and the dull clang of metal sounded through the low-roofed tavern.

Konarr slashed and parried, and kept a part of his attention on his surroundings in simple caution.

A half dozen other men had hastily gathered up their tankards of ale, and were standing along the far wall of the inn. Over their shoulders loomed the great kegs wherein Darkal the innkeeper stored his wines and excellent brews.

Darkal himself, Konarr observed between strokes, stood to one side, a huge cudgel held at readiness belying his stooped once-mighty frame crowned by the thin white hair of old age.

Seldom before had Konarr picked a fight at the Inn of the Cudgel, for he well knew that there was a time once when the aged innkeeper would have stepped forward at the first whisper of blade on scabbard.

Contemptuously he had stung brawlers with casual swipes of his cudgel; once with a couple of swings of his heavy boot he had ejected Konarr and Sharbol, the former captain of their Free Company. It had injured only their pride, and once outside Konarr had bested Shabol easily and taken over the command.

Konarr had been left with a healthy respect for the old man, but seventy-five years had finally sapped his vigor. The great cudgel hung unused at his side, held to his wrist by a thong. And now with the others he watched the two fighters.

For they were splendid fighters, and mightily well matched -- the swift young Tassoran, his blade a lightning argument, and the older and slower Konarr... Not a good place to stop, but no more space. Perhaps more next week, so in the meantime, hoping you are the sane...