

# ON THE WAY

## Dennis Thornton

Dragon illo by Jose Sanchez

“You bellowed, sir?” Nerek said as he entered the command tent. The Captain turned with a smile on his craggy face. Nerek was of average height but broad in the shoulders with a deep chest. His face was fair and covered with a well-trimmed mustache and beard of black. Hair of the same color was combed away from the brow and hung to his shoulders. His clothes were of the finest leather chased with gold and silver filigree. A long sword was between his shoulders. On his right hip was a holster that held a Magpistol. It used magnets to fire a small rail. It was quite deadly at close distance.

“I suppose you could say it that way.” The captain chuckled. He’d always found Nerek to be a cheerful man. “I need you to do something you may not want to.”

“If it helps the Kingdom.”

The captain handed him a leather pouch.

“This is the plans for an invasion of the Eastern Borders, The king must get these as soon as possible.”

“Wouldn’t it better to send someone else? I’m more useful as a fighter.”

“I would have you here but if the Lureth find out we have the plans they will try to stop the messenger. You’re the only one who can make it through.”

Nerek was stunned by the captain’s words. Never before



had anyone expressed such confidence in his abilities. Most people thought of him as a good soldier, the perfect killer, but never did they say anything about trusting him with an important mission. He'd come a long way since his times as a thief in the cities of Zalanor.

"Thank you, sir. I go as fast as Justice will take me. I won't fail you."

Under the purple sky, Nerek walked swiftly to the corral. There he saddled Justice, his riding lizard. Its light gray scales gleamed in the brightness of the sun. After saddling it he rubbed its scaled neck and spoke soothing words. He slid into the saddle and began his ride.

As swift as the wind he rode across the plains of Huraku, the blue grass swaying with their passing. As the sun began to set he neared the forest of Tathu. It was there that four men rode out on their lizards towards him. From their red hair and pale skins he knew they were Lureth.

He drew the sword from between his shoulders and spurred Justice to a run. One of the Lureth was faster than his partners and they came together their swords ringing. Nerek ducked another slash and plunged his sword into the other's neck. He drew it out in time to parry another slash.

The remaining three men were drawing close. Nerek turned his opponent's sword aside and slashed across the throat. As the man fell he grabbed hold of Nerek dragging him from the saddle. Nerek hit the ground and rolled into a crouch.

The rest of the Lureth drew their lizards to a stop and leapt to the ground. They began to circle him like a pack of hungry wolves. No matter what, they must die.

He stood slowly watching them. One of them would be the leader, would attack first and then let the other's come in while he was engaged. He'd seen the tactic many times before. For two years he'd fought in the Arena of death. He knew well the strategies of killers.

Instead of waiting he acted, suddenly leaping at one of the men, His sword swung down and then man blocked the blow. Nerek was close to another man so he kicked him in the kneecap. Bones broken the man screamed in pain. He dropped to the ground writhing in agony.

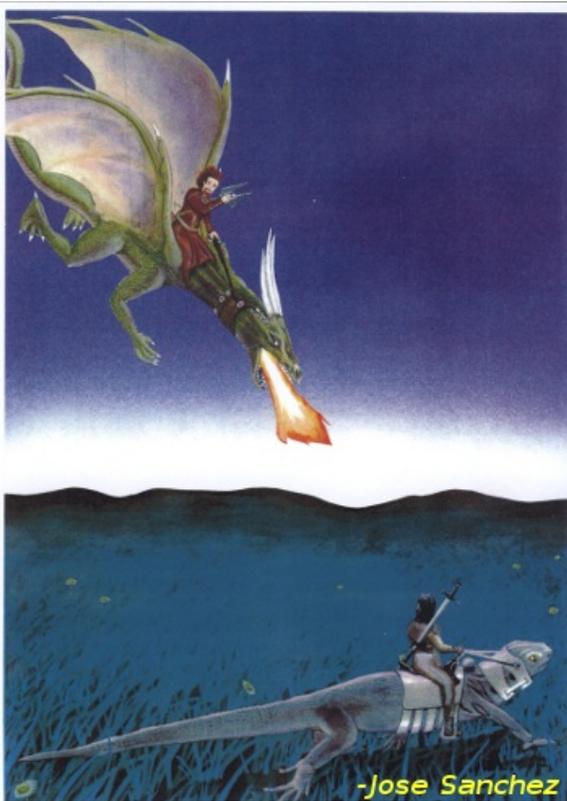
The last two were shocked by this sudden turn of events and

Nerek took advantage of it. Moving his blade under the first man's, he thrust it into his heart. The man screamed as blood gushed out. Nerek extracted his blade, reversed it swiftly and plunged it into the belly of the final man.

Three men were dead and one would soon die. The sun was setting and Nerek knew he could waste no more time. He swiftly slit the dying man's throat. A killer he was but not merciless. He didn't want the man to suffer.

Justice nudged Nerek with its muzzle. Nerek leapt into the brown saddle and snapped the reins. Once more they were racing on their important mission.

They entered the forest. The trees began to blur as they ran by, they were going so swiftly. Time passed as they neared their target. Through the screen of the trees they could see the walls of the capitol. Another hour and they would be safe within them.



Then horror struck. From the sky there came a screech. Nerek glanced up and blanched. A huge lizard was flying above; on its back was a Lureth soldier. One of their tamed Dragons. Pulling its wings close it dived for them. Nerek reined in Justice and slid from the saddle. He told it to get deeper into the forest. But Justice wasn't going to let anything hurt his master. As the dragon came closer Justice reared and struck out with its claws. This time the dragon roared in pain as the claws ripped into its hide.

Nerek drew his Magpistol and aimed. He fired but the creature moved slightly. The rail hit the rider and knocked him from the saddle and he plunged screaming to the ground. The creature landed next to him. Nerek moved back into the deeper woods. The creature's jaws snapped shut where he'd been only a minute before.

Justice leapt unto the back of the dragon and began tearing along the back. The dragon's long snaky head tried to bite Justice but couldn't quite reach him. At the same time Nerek raced forward and plunged his sword into the dragon's scaled chest.

It squealed in pain. Both claws and sword hurt it. Aiming for the dragon's eyes Nerek fired. The rail tore through its right eyes and out the top of its skull. The body began to shudder and Justice leapt back off. Nerek moved back as the great bulk crashed to the ground.

At that moment there was movement from behind them. Justice and Nerek turned to see astonished guardsmen. No one had ever seen a dragon killed so easily.

Nerek took Justice's reins and, under the fading sky, walked with him into the city. He was quartered with the other lizards.

"Thank you my friend, I couldn't have done it without you." Nerek told him. Justice just nodded its head and began to eat the dead meat in its trough.

Nerek was escorted into the lavish throne room and taken before the King. Nerek gave him the attack plans of the Lureth.

"The Kingdom owes you great debt Nerek. I can honestly say I'm proud of how you turned out. When Captain Orsek came to me with you I didn't think it would work but you've proven me wrong. I'll never forget this service to me and my people."

Nerek went to his room in the shadowy barracks and fell exhausted into his bunk. He was soon asleep. Saving the Kingdom is tiring business.

THE END

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