

## **Chapter Seven - The Twin Islands**

The Island of Regos was ten miles wide and forty miles long and it was ruled by a big and powerful King named Gos. Near to the shores were green and fertile fields, but farther back from the sea were rugged hills and mountains, so rocky that nothing would grow there. But in these mountains were mines of gold and silver, which the slaves of the King were forced to work, being confined in dark underground passages for that purpose. In the course of time huge caverns had been hollowed out by the slaves, in which they lived and slept, never seeing the light of day. Cruel overseers with whips stood over these poor people, who had been captured in many countries by the raiding parties of King Cos, and the overseers were quite willing to lash the slaves with their whips if they faltered a moment in their work.

Between the green shores and the mountains were forests of thick, tangled trees, between which narrow paths had been cut to lead up to the caves of the mines. It was on the level green meadows, not far from the ocean, that the great City of Regos had been built, wherein was located the palace of the King. This city was inhabited by thousands of the fierce warriors of Gos, who frequently took to their boats and spread over the sea to the neighboring islands to conquer and pillage, as they had done at Pingaree. When they were not absent on one of these expeditions, the City of Regos swarmed with them and so became a dangerous place for any peaceful person to live in, for the warriors were as lawless as their King.

The Island of Coregos lay close beside the Island of Regos; so close, indeed, that one might have thrown a stone from one shore to another. But Coregos was only half the size of Regos and instead of being mountainous it was a rich and pleasant country, covered with fields of grain. The fields of Coregos furnished food for the warriors and citizens of both countries, while the mines of Regos made them all rich.

Coregos was ruled by Queen Cor, who was wedded to King Gos; but so stern and cruel was the nature of this Queen that the people could not decide which of their sovereigns they dreaded most.

Queen Cor lived in her own City of Coregos, which lay on that side of her island facing Regos, and her slaves, who were mostly women, were made to plow the land and to plant and harvest the grain.

From Regos to Coregos stretched a bridge of boats, set close together, with planks laid across their edges for people to walk upon. In this way it was easy to pass from one island to the other and in times of danger the bridge could be quickly removed.

The native inhabitants of Regos and Coregos consisted of the warriors, who did nothing but fight and ravage, and the trembling servants who waited on them. King Gos and Queen Cor were at war with all the rest of the world. Other islanders hated and feared them, for their slaves were badly treated and absolutely no mercy was shown to the weak or ill.

When the boats that had gone to Pingaree returned loaded with rich plunder and a host of captives, there was much rejoicing in Regos and Coregos and the King and Queen gave a fine feast to the warriors who had accomplished so great a conquest. This feast was set for the warriors in the grounds of King Gos's palace, while with them in the great throne room all the captains and leaders of the fighting men were assembled with King Gos and Queen Cor, who had come from her island to attend the ceremony. Then all the goods that had been stolen from the King of Pingaree were divided according to rank, the King and Queen taking half, the captains a quarter, and the rest being divided amongst the warriors.

The day following the feast King Gos sent King Kitticut and all the men of Pingaree to work in his mines under the mountains, having first chained them together so they could not escape. The gentle Queen of Pingaree and all her women, together with the captured children, were given to Queen Cor, who set them to work in her grain fields.

Then the rulers and warriors of these dreadful islands thought they had done forever with Pingaree. Despoiled of all its wealth, its houses torn down, its boats captured and all its people enslaved, what likelihood was there that they might ever again hear of the desolated island? So the people of Regos and Coregos were surprised and puzzled when one morning they observed approaching their shores from the direction of the south a black boat containing a boy, a fat man and a goat. The warriors asked one another who these could be, and where they had come from? No one ever came to those islands of their own accord, that was certain.

Prince Inga guided his boat to the south end of the Island of Regos, which was the landing place nearest to the city, and when the warriors saw this action they went down to the shore to meet him, being led by a big captain named Buzzub.

"Those people surely mean us no good," said Rinkitink uneasily to the boy. "Without doubt they intend to capture us and make us their slaves."

"Do not fear, sir," answered Inga, in a calm voice. "Stay quietly in the boat with Bilbil until I have spoken with these men."

He stopped the boat a dozen feet from the shore, and standing up in his place made a grave bow to the multitude confronting him. Said the big Captain Buzzub in a gruff voice:

"Well, little one, who may you be? And how dare you come, uninvited and all alone, to the Island of Regos?"

"I am Inga, Prince of Pingaree," returned the boy, "and I have come here to free my parents and my people, whom you have wrongfully enslaved."

When they heard this bold speech a mighty laugh arose from the band of warriors, and when it had subsided the captain said:

"You love to jest, my baby Prince, and the joke is fairly good. But why did you willingly thrust your head into the lion's mouth? When you were free, why did you not stay free? We did not know we had left a single person in Pingaree! But since you managed to escape us then, it is really kind of you to come here of your own free will, to be our slave. Who is the funny fat person with you?"

"It is His Majesty, King Rinkitink, of the great City of Gilgad. He has accompanied me to see that you render full restitution for all you have stolen from Pingaree."

"Better yet!" laughed Buzzub. "He will make a fine slave for Queen Cor, who loves to tickle fat men, and see them jump."

King Rinkitink was filled with horror when he heard this, but the Prince answered as boldly as before, saying:

"We are not to be frightened by bluster, believe me; nor are we so weak as you imagine. We have magic powers so great and terrible that no host of warriors can possibly withstand us, and therefore I call upon you to surrender your city and your island to us, before we crush you with our mighty powers."

The boy spoke very gravely and earnestly, but his words only aroused another shout of laughter. So while the men of Regos were laughing Inga drove the boat we'll up onto the sandy beach and leaped out. He also helped Rinkitink out, and when the goat had unaided sprung to the sands, the King got upon

Bilbil's back, trembling a little internally, but striving to look as brave as possible.

There was a bunch of coarse hair between the goat's ears, and this Inga clutched firmly in his left hand. The boy knew the Pink Pearl would protect not only himself, but all whom he touched, from any harm, and as Rinkitink was astride the goat and Inga had his hand upon the animal, the three could not be injured by anything the warriors could do. But Captain Buzzub did not know this, and the little group of three seemed so weak and ridiculous that he believed their capture would be easy. So he turned to his men and with a wave of his hand said:

"Seize the intruders!"

Instantly two or three of the warriors stepped forward to obey, but to their amazement they could not reach any of the three; their hands were arrested as if by an invisible wall of iron. Without paying any attention to these attempts at capture, Inga advanced slowly and the goat kept pace with him. And when Rinkitink saw that he was safe from harm he gave one of his big, merry laughs, and it startled the warriors and made them nervous. Captain Buzzub's eyes grew big with surprise as the three steadily advanced and forced his men backward; nor was he free from terror himself at the magic that protected these strange visitors. As for the warriors, they presently became terror-stricken and fled in a panic up the slope toward the city, and Buzzub was obliged to chase after them and shout threats of punishment before he could halt them and form them into a line of battle.

All the men of Regos bore spears and bows-and-arrows, and some of the officers had swords and battle-axes; so Buzzub ordered them to stand their ground and shoot and slay the strangers as they approached. This they tried to do. Inga being in advance, the warriors sent a flight of sharp arrows straight at the boy's breast, while others cast their long spears at him.

It seemed to Rinkitink that the little Prince must surely perish as he stood facing this hail of murderous missiles; but the power of the Pink Pearl did not desert him, and when the arrows and spears had reached to within an inch of his body they bounded back again and fell harmlessly at his feet. Nor were Rinkitink or Bilbil injured in the least, although they stood close beside Inga.

Buzzub stood for a moment looking upon the boy in silent wonder. Then, recovering himself, he shouted in a loud voice:

"Once again! All together, my men. No one shall ever defy our might and live!"

Again a flight of arrows and spears sped toward the three, and since many more of the warriors of Regos had by this time joined their fellows, the air was for a moment darkened by the deadly shafts. But again all fell harmless before the power of the Pink Pearl, and Bilbil, who had been growing very angry at the attempts to injure him and his party, suddenly made a bolt forward, casting off Inga's hold, and butted into the line of warriors, who were standing amazed at their failure to conquer.

Taken by surprise at the goat's attack, a dozen big warriors tumbled in a heap, yelling with fear, and their comrades, not knowing what had happened but imagining that their foes were attacking them, turned about and ran to the city as hard as they could go. Bilbil, still angry, had just time to catch the big captain as he turned to follow his men, and Buzzub first sprawled headlong upon the ground, then rolled over two or three times, and finally jumped up and ran yelling after his defeated warriors. This butting on the part of the goat was very hard upon King Rinkitink, who nearly fell off Bilbil's back at the shock of encounter; but the little fat King wound his arms around the goat's neck and shut his eyes and clung on with all his might. It was not until he heard Inga say triumphantly, "We have won the fight without striking a blow!" that Rinkitink dared open his eyes again. Then he saw the warriors rushing into the City of Regos and barring the heavy gates, and he was very much relieved at the sight.

"Without striking a blow!" said Bilbil indignantly. "That is not quite true, Prince Inga. You did not fight, I admit, but I struck a couple of times to good purpose, and I claim to have conquered the cowardly warriors unaided."

"You and I together, Bilbil," said Rinkitink mildly. "But the next time you make a charge, please warn me in time, so that I may dismount and give you all the credit for the attack."

There being no one now to oppose their advance, the three walked to the gates of the city, which had been closed against them. The gates were of iron and heavily barred, and upon the top of the high walls of the city a host of the warriors now appeared armed with arrows and spears and other weapons. For Buzzub had gone straight to the palace of King Cos and reported his defeat, relating the powerful magic of the boy, the fat King and the goat, and had asked what to do next.

The big captain still trembled with fear, but King Gos did not believe in magic, and called Buzzub a coward and a weakling. At once the King took command of his men personally, and he ordered the walls manned with warriors and instructed them to shoot to kill if any of the three strangers approached the gates.

Of course, neither Rinkitink nor Bilbil knew how they had been protected from harm and so at first they were inclined to resent the boy's command that the three must always keep together and touch one another at all times. But when Inga explained that his magic would not otherwise save them from injury, they agreed to obey, for they had now seen enough to convince them that the Prince was really protected by some invisible power.

As they came before the gates another shower of arrows and spears descended upon them, and as before not a single missile touched their bodies. King Gos, who was upon the wall, was greatly amazed and somewhat worried, but he depended upon the strength of his gates and commanded his men to continue shooting until all their weapons were gone.

Inga let them shoot as much as they wished, while he stood before the great gates and examined them carefully.

"Perhaps Bilbil can batter down the gates, suggested Rinkitink.

"No," replied the goat; "my head is hard, but not harder than iron."

"Then," returned the King, "let us stay outside; especially as we can't get in."

But Inga was not at all sure they could not get in. The gates opened inward, and three heavy bars were held in place by means of stout staples riveted to the sheets of steel. The boy had been told that the power of the Blue Pearl would enable him to accomplish any feat of strength, and he believed that this was true.

The warriors, under the direction of King Gos, continued to hurl arrows and darts and spears and axes and huge stones upon the invaders, all without avail. The ground below was thickly covered with weapons, yet not one of the three before the gates had been injured in the slightest manner. When everything had been cast that was available and not a single weapon of any sort remained at hand, the amazed warriors saw the boy put his shoulder against the gates and burst asunder the huge staples that held the bars in place. A thousand of their men could not have accomplished this feat, yet the

small, slight boy did it with seeming ease. The gates burst open, and Inga advanced into the city street and called upon King Gos to surrender.

But Gos was now as badly frightened as were his warriors. He and his men were accustomed to war and pillage and they had carried terror into many countries, but here was a small boy, a fat man and a goat who could not be injured by all his skill in warfare, his numerous army and thousands of death-dealing weapons. Moreover, they not only defied King Gos's entire army but they had broken in the huge gates of the city--as easily as if they had been made of paper--and such an exhibition of enormous strength made the wicked King fear for his life. Like all bullies and marauders, Gos was a coward at heart, and now a panic seized him and he turned and fled before the calm advance of Prince Inga of Pingaree. The warriors were like their master, and having thrown all their weapons over the wall and being helpless to oppose the strangers, they all swarmed after Gos, who abandoned his city and crossed the bridge of boats to the Island of Coregos. There was a desperate struggle among these cowardly warriors to get over the bridge, and many were pushed into the water and obliged to swim; but finally every fighting man of Regos had gained the shore of Coregos and then they tore away the bridge of boats and drew them up on their own side, hoping the stretch of open water would prevent the magic invaders from following them.

The humble citizens and serving people of Regos, who had been terrified and abused by the rough warriors all their lives, were not only greatly astonished by this sudden conquest of their masters but greatly delighted. As the King and his army fled to Coregos, the people embraced one another and danced for very joy, and then they turned to see what the conquerors of Regos were like.