

Ba'al's Rapture

The Oil Men of Shinar

Volume-1

TIM E KOCH

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Volume the First

a novella by Tim E Koch

A Vintage Science Fantasy

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The Oil Men of Shinar, Volume the First

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In the fourteenth great cycle of the occupation of the central seat of the Assembly of Matrons of the Realm of Adamah by the Qadesh Asherah of House Astarte, a dower was born of Lady Shalim and unto her great house did she deliver an heiress. Hence was the consignment of Hadad of House Astarte and Sydyk of House Khasis, they two being companion consorts unto Lady Shalim, accomplished and they released therefrom. Likewise did commence, unbeknownst of them and those who loved them, a season that should incite unto Ba'al Hadad a great duress.

Now the Ba'al did, with the whole of House Shalim make merriment and celebrate excessively the birth of Arsay. For to the several young manch who before were delivered of Lady Shalim did the

birth of Arsay secure the longevity of their great house, and by her should the house continue. Rejoiced they with much feasting and play at energetic sport, and Hadad with them. For to Ba'al Hadad did the birth of Arsay contribute toward his return to the Metropole and his home therein. And so he did, with Yagrush, the sleek, black dog which unto the Ba'al his uncle Kothar and his aunt the Lady Khasis had made provision, make merriment and celebrate excessively. But Sydyk did not partake of the season of merriment but made ready the sedan barge of House Astarte for conveyance of himself and the Ba'al unto House Shachar, the site of their next consignment unto Lady Shachar thereof.

A full year had the barge sat idly by and stanchioned whilst the two-score bearer naphthalin made employment about House Shalim. But now Sydyk commanded these naphthalin about the organization of the scullery and the supply of the larder in the galley of the barge's underbelly, to the appointments of the staterooms of the residential pavilion which across the aft of the barge did stretch, and to the filling of the basin which did occupy the midst of the barge's deck, lying before the great bronze stack and aft the veranda pavilion which didst the width of the prow of the barge occupy.

'Cousin,' did the Ba'al cry out unto Sydyk as he pranced about in naught but hosiery with the other manch as they play at ball, 'come and join us!'

And so, at performance of the wishes of the Ba'al, the beloved manchild of Qadesh Asherah, did Sydyk join in play and celebration. When he might, however, he stole forth unto the halls of the great house to ensure the wellbeing of the matron and her dower. He found Lady Shalim in gentle repose in bed of white linens, the baby in her arms. She looked up from the face of the little one, setting her dark eyes upon Sydyk in expression of longing. He looked about to three of his sisters, the Kotharat who did attend the matrons of Adamah as midwives in birthing and toward the care of precious dowers, and inquired:

'Is any amiss with the dower?'

'Nay,' declared one among them, 'but all is most delightful of the heiress.'

'Might I have a discrete word of Sydyk?' implored the lady to which the Kotharat straightly made obeisant bows and departed.

Now unto Sydyk did the lady show eyes that glistened of tears and unto her bed went he and sat thereon aside her and enwrapped an arm round about her shoulder, beseeching: 'What troubles the

lady on this greatest of days of House Shalim at the birth of an heiress unto you?’

‘Must you go?’ pled the woman.

‘Indeed, we must,’ confirmed he, ‘for the terms of our consignment are accomplished and another matron awaits our arrival unto the commencement of our consignment unto her.’

‘But cannot Hadad go forth with another companion,’ bade she, ‘and leave you here with us?’

At this request was Sydyk taken aback, for of his own admission and design was he the lesser to the Ba’al. Sydyk’s hair was light but not so golden as Hadad’s; his flesh was tawny yet not so bronze as Hadad’s; his eyes were blue but not so piercingly azure as were Hadad’s; his features admirable but not so chiseled as Hadad’s; for so was his design: that he might remain ancillary unto the Ba’al and never achieve preference o’er him. By the mind of his sire, even Kothar of House Khasis, was he conceived, and by his hands and the hands of his matron Lady Khasis was he wrought: that the beloved of them, the Ba’al Hadad, might be safely given companionship in consortium as he performed his duties unto the matrons of Adamah.

‘What troubles you so at this behest?’ desired know the lady, removing from the swaddled child a

hand that it might touch the arm of Sydyk.

But he withdrew from her touch, standing and proffering obeisance in a bow. 'My deepest apologies, my good lady,' opined he, 'but with the Ba'al must I continue.'

'The Ba'al,' chided she, and, in so doing, imparting must discomfiture upon her audience. 'You are beloved as well.'

Again, he delivered gracious bow unto her but confessed: 'I am of a lesser house and of monogamous conception. I might ne'er aspire to the greatness of the Ba'al.'

'Is House Khasis lesser than House Astarte?' returned she. 'And of such conception was there once no shame.'

'But so is the way of the Realm of Adamah,' informed he, 'and of the Policy of the Assembly of Matrons.'

At the lady's sudden reaching and grasping toward Sydyk with such abandon as to jeopardize the welfare of the child in her arms, one among the Kotharat, thusly disproving the discretion allowed they the matron in her palaver with their brother, did rush forth and proffer care of the precious heiress. Moreover did Sydyk retreat as the matron, now free her encumbrance of child, beseeched him all the more,

repair hastily thence and into the companionship of another of his sisters.

‘You mustn’t allow her forestall your departure,’ submitted she unto this likeness of brother her sire and matron had made, ‘for the Lady Shachar approaches the fertility of her womanly cycle, and thusly should be the fulfillment of your consignment unto her and the return of the Ba’al to Qadesh Asherah and the Qadeshtu Anat who greatly desire his return unto them.’

‘Haste shall I make with the Ba’al thither,’ assured Sydyk.

And so, within the hour, with certain matters of the appointment of the sedan barge not yet fulfilled, did the two-score great naphthalin assemble roundabout it and lift it from the support of its stanchions and stow them ’neath its great deck and commence their conveyance of it away from House Shalim as the several manch thereof proffered woeful farewell all along El’s Way and the poor matron did likewise from the lofty casement of her bedchamber with the several Kotharat attending at her side. And, whilst Yagrush loped excitedly about the deck and barked at those who had been to them such delightful companionship this year, Ba’al Hadad, accoutred in a silken tunic of ocean blue hemmed of gold-spun lace

and gathered at the sides with silver hasps set with emeralds, finest white hosiery, and silver knit slippers, did most vehemently return their gesticulations of farewell.

And when the eyes of the occupants of that great house had fallen away at the naphthalin's bearing of the barge swiftly thence, did Hadad doff tunic and even his hosiery and plunge into the basin in the midst of the barge's deck. After a lengthy moment of frolic therein did he rest the breadth of his tawny shoulders against the coping of the pool's edge and cry unto his cousin Sydyk:

'How long might we endure this consignment unto Lady Shachar?'

'Only to the conception of a dower,' returned Sydyk as he delivered a chalice of libation unto the Ba'al.

'So we bed the old girl according to your insights and we are returned home to the Metropole,' assessed Hadad.

'Precisely so,' admitted Sydyk.

'I do miss home,' reported Hadad, bringing the chalice to his lips, the azure of the heavens reflecting upon the wine therein, the surface of which was interrupted not the slightest at the footsteps of the naphthalin which bore them forth.

‘As do I,’ assented Sydyk as he repaired to the cool
’neath the canopy of the veranda.

‘What miss you the most?’ desired Hadad.

Sydyk, nestling himself upon a silken bolster at table, thoughtfully mentioned: ‘The many wonderful folk thereof, the bustle of the streets, House Khasis. The nearness of things.’ With no little chagrin, Hadad nodded his assent, to which Sydyk furthered: ‘And thou?’

Hadad hesitated not a moment before declaring only: ‘Anat.’ After a long sip from his cup, he fixed a gaze upon his cousin and implored: ‘How odd be that?’

Sydyk smiled and shrugged. ‘She is your little sibling. You care of her.’

Hadad guffawed. ‘She is a bother and a brat.’

‘Ah, but she is your bother and your brat,’ harangued Sydyk. ‘You may choose whom you like but not whom you love.’

‘Oh, thou poet,’ returned Hadad.

He tipped back his head, allowing his golden locks dangle therefrom to dry. Above, beyond the jutting tips of the Elemental Mountains along which El’s Way proceeded northward, the heavenly orbs of Erae and Benase had risen, the gathered lands of each appearing watchful eyes amid their great seas. Likewise

should the land of Adamah appear thence, a great land rising from the waters roundabout. And should the land of Adamah appear the iris of a great eye peering back at Erae and Benase, Elba and Asonja, the four sisters which didst about Orjares cycle round, then its pupil shouldst be the Metropole at the heart of Adamah, that great convergence of the cities of humanity: Calneh, said to be where the first men, after the sea's assault upon the land, by which were the Great Ones destroyed, set up tents against the tempest, now the place of industry wherein winnowing, weaving, and fabrication of all that of humanity is required for pleasant living does occur; Erech, where the greatest among the men are said to have gone and built for themselves great towering houses to dwell therein and built great walls roundabout each, forming great estates within, wherein they and their offspring might safely dwell; and Accad, whence rose Astarte, foremost among the matrons, who, with aid of her brother's great naphthalin, didst rise up against and overthrow the patrons of Erech and build the interwoven cycles of houses, their plaiting so enthralling each with the other and their likeness so unrelenting as to make the start of one and the end of another indistinguishable.

From the midst of Calneh, from a rooftop of the

low ancillaries roundabout the foreboding tower of House Ishat did launch and rise a levitant, the newest creation of House Khasis and conception of the mind of Kothar. Sleek was it, its alloy framework and crystalline casements glistening as silver in the light of Orjares. Masts spread forth on its either side as wings of the moth, and by these was it lifted from its place. Fiery furnaces of naphtha engines then jettisoned it forth. It sailed from the Metropole as lightning of a tempest arcing the sky. Its manifest included the several mechanical servants required of its conduct, Lord Moloch, chief consort of Lady Ishat, and the little bronze mechanical valet which had come to prove itself most indispensable to the petite lord.

As the craft sallied forth, abandoning the Metropole for Bay Yamm and House Yamm thereon and Judge Nahar who dwelt therein, the little bronze valet delivered libation upon its master. Fumes of smoke exhausted from a port abaft its cranial dome, thence to be extracted of the vessel of discreet exhaust fans. It received no gratitude thence, nor did it require any, for its pleasure was but to serve, and so it did. In the stead of thanks did it receive chiding of the petite lord:

‘You’d better be correct in your information to me of the truth of the Qadesh’s indiscretions, for should

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I appear a fool before the magister, I shall certainly commend you to the melting pot and see myself to your reduction.'

The face of the valet, appearing an old man, pinched into something of a sneer as it bowed and submitted: 'May it be so if incorrect I am found.'

'Oh, so it shall,' assured Lord Moloch. 'You may depend your little metal inwards of naught else save that it shall be done as your master hath spoken.'

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