

the pirates, many individuals flocked to join their companies — escaped slaves, common criminals, unemployed sailors, dispossessed yeomen.

The latter came in swelling numbers throughout the eighth century, as the plutocrats of Zefnar and Parros cajoled or coerced many small freeholders into selling their farms. Thereafter, land that had supported many hard-working families was turned into vineyards or sheep pastures. The former yeomen became demoralized, unemployed hangers-on, supported by a government dole. Unfit for military service, mercenaries filled their places in city armies.

Superficially, Parros prospered — but a tangible menace grew off its coasts. By the end of the eighth century, the coves of the Golkus sheltered enough ships and hard-bitten seafighters to form whole fleets, commanded by elected admirals. Where once pirate captains competed openly and violently, now most belonged to a few large piratical brotherhoods ("rombunes," in Minarian slang). The rombunes had efficient intelligence systems, whereby pirates would fraternize with merchant crewmen in the coastal towns, discover their destinations and cargos, and relay the information back to the Golkus. Harbor records of Parros and Zefnar reveal the appalling losses shippers sustained. It was common for a

continental trader to visit the black markets of the Golkus and find himself bidding on looted merchandise bearing his own shipping company's name.

Severe though sea robbery was, it was only a sideline to the pirates' main occupation of slave-running. As if in retribution for the callous way the sea powers had preyed upon the islands in earlier times, the new islanders scoured the coasts for prisoners. Many towns paid out tribute to ward them off; some were forced to accept agreements by which pirate vessels, could outfit and sell merchandise in their harbors. By the latter ninth century, the Golkus was the main source of chattel for the slave-hungry Trade Cities of the South Plains.

And still the danger increased. The shipwrights of Mivior had developed swift, deep-water craft called *lamash* vessels. As numbers of these ships fell into the hands of the pirates, the pace of their depredations was stepped up, and near panic descended on the Minarian sea powers. In the records of his temple, the high priest of the Parrosian god Ashikag laments: "Pirates came into our city by night and abducted more than three hundred young maids, women and other innocents, slave and free. Before our garrison could deal them their punishment, they cut loose the boats in our harbor to prevent pursuit and escaped

with all their captives and booty. Neither was the freedom of the prisoners secured until the council of the city handed over to the pillagers a vast ransom of silver."

Even now Parros did not dispatch a fleet against the pirates; troubles on the Barbarian Frontier were even more pressing. The Wisnyos, horse nomads led by a chieftain called Simir Raviev, were conquering the south, sending defeated tribes fleeing north to Parros' borders. The city council of Parros, desperate for manpower, hired some of these tribesmen to fend off other, wilder bands. Alas, one large group they employed took bribes from Simir Raviev. As the Wisnyos approached the city, these treacherous hirelings seized the city's key fortresses and its leaders. For eight days Parros was given over to debauchery and looting; afterwards, without pausing to organize his conquest, Simir Raviev extended his campaign north.

The Wisnyo conquest had a profound effect on the pirates' slave trade. With an empire at their feet, the nomads had no need for outside slave dealers. Further, their ignorance and extortions ruined the merchant marines of Parros and Zefnar, leaving only the depressed but well guarded ships of Mivior to prey upon. The Miviorians reacted with deadly vengeance, raiding the pirate bases, scut-

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