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EXILE'S  
RETURN

Voyager

RAYMOND E. FEIST

# EXILE'S RETURN

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*Book Three*



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# EXILE'S RETURN

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Thanks to my mother, for being there.

Lastly, and most deeply, to my children for their love and beauty; they drive me crazy while keeping me sane.

*This one's for James, with all the love a father can give.*







# novindus

The Kingdom



May see thee now, though late, redeem thy name,  
And glorify what else is damned to fame.

Richard Savage  
*Character of Foster*

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• CHAPTER ONE •

## Captive

THE RIDERS CAME AT HIM.

Kaspar, who had until the day before held the title of Duke of Olasko, waited, holding his chains ready. Moments before he had been deposited on this dusty plain by a tall white-haired magician who, with only a few words of farewell, had vanished, leaving the exiled nobleman to face an approaching band of nomads.

Kaspar had never felt this alive and vitalized. He grinned, took a deep breath and flexed his knees. The riders were fanning out, and Kaspar knew they judged him a risk even though he stood alone, barefoot and without any weapon save for heavy chains with manacles and leggings attached to each end.

The riders slowed. Kaspar counted six of them. They wore alien garments, loose-fitting outer robes of indigo over white

blouses belted at the waist with whipcord; ballooning trousers were tucked into black leather boots. Their heads were covered by wrapped turbans, with a length of cloth left hanging on the right. Kaspar judged that this could be quickly raised to cover mouth and nose against a sudden dust storm or to hide identity. The clothing looked less like a uniform than tribal garb, he decided. And they carried a variety of lethal-looking weapons.

The leader spoke in a language Kaspar didn't understand, though there was something oddly familiar about it. Kaspar replied, 'I don't suppose there's the remotest chance you speak Olaskon?'

The man Kaspar had identified as the leader said something to his companions, made a gesture, then sat back to watch. Two men dismounted and approached Kaspar, drawing weapons. A third behind them unwound a leather cord, with which he obviously intended to bind their new captive.

Kaspar let his chains drop slightly, and slumped his shoulders, as if acknowledging the inevitability of his circumstances. From the manner in which they approached, Kaspar knew two things: these were experienced fighting men – tough, sunburned plainsmen who probably lived in tents – and they were not trained soldiers. One glance gave Kaspar the one fact he needed to make his decision on how to act. None of the three men still on horseback had drawn a bow.

Kaspar allowed the man with the leather bindings to approach, and then at the last instant he kicked out, taking the man in the chest. That man was the least dangerous of the three at hand. Kaspar then swung his chains, releasing an end at the same instant, and the swordsman on his right who had judged himself out of Kaspar's reach was slammed across the face with the

makeshift weapon. Kaspar heard bone crack. The man went down silently.

The other swordsman was quick to react, raising his sword and shouting something – an insult, battle cry, or prayer to a god, Kaspar didn't know which. All the former duke knew was that he had perhaps three or four seconds to live. Instead of moving away from the attacker, Kaspar threw himself at the man, coming up hard against him as the sword fell through empty air.

He got his shoulder under the man's armpit and the momentum of the missed blow carried the nomad over Kaspar's shoulder. Kaspar's powerful arms pushed up hard and the man spun through the air, landing hard upon the ground. The breath seemed to explode out of his body and Kaspar suspected he might have cracked his spine.

Kaspar sensed more than saw that two archers were unlimbering their bows, so he sprang forward, and with a diving shoulder roll, came to his feet holding the closest man's sword. The nomad who had held the binding leather was trying to come to his feet and draw his own sword at the same time as Kaspar stepped by him, smashing the man's head with the flat of the blade. The man fell over without a sound.

Kaspar might not be the swordsman Tal Hawkins had been, but he had trained as a soldier most of his life, and now he was in his element, in-close brawling. He ran at the three riders, two with bows and one with a slender lance, that man levelling his weapon as he put his heels to his horse's barrel. The animal might not be a seasoned warhorse but it was well trained. It leapt forward as if sprinting from the starting line in a race and Kaspar barely avoided being trampled. He almost took the point

of the man's lance in the chest, but with a quick move to the left evaded it. Had the horse started only a yard or two farther back, he would have been moving too fast for Kaspar's next move, which was to continue twisting and reaching up with his left hand, grab the rider by the back of his robe and yank him from the saddle.

Kaspar didn't wait to see the man hit the ground, but used his momentum to keep turning until he was facing the closest rider, who was trying to draw his bow. Kaspar reached out with his left hand and grabbed the man's ankle. He yanked it back and then up and the bowman fell from the saddle.

Kaspar spun, looking for the last opponent, or to see if one of those he had unhorsed had regained his footing. He turned twice before accepting his situation. Slowly he stood up and let the sword fall from his fingers.

The last bowman had calmly moved his horse away a few yards, and now sat quietly in the saddle, drawing a bead on Kaspar. It was hopeless. Unless he was a terrible shot, Kaspar would never avoid the arrow pointing at his chest.

The man smiled and nodded, and said something that Kaspar took as 'good', then flicked his gaze to someone behind Kaspar.

Suddenly one of the riders he had embarrassed smashed his forearm into the back of Kaspar's neck, driving him to his knees. Kaspar tried to turn as he heard metal clanking, and he realized someone was approaching with his discarded manacles. Before he could get his head around, cold iron slammed into the point of his jaw. Bright lights exploded behind his eyes for an instant before he lapsed into unconsciousness.

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Kaspar's jaw throbbed. His neck hurt and he felt sore all over his body. He was disoriented for a moment, then remembered the confrontation with the nomads. He blinked, trying to clear his vision, then realized it was night. From the variety of aches he experienced when he tried to move, he assumed the riders had spent a fair amount of time kicking him after he had been knocked unconscious, displaying their displeasure at the manner in which he had received their request for him to surrender.

He judged it a good thing he hadn't killed any of them, for that would have probably earned him a cut throat. He realized his chance of escaping that encounter had been slim. He struggled upright, no mean feat with his hands bound behind him with leather cords. But he also knew that a trained fighting man might stand a better chance of survival amongst people like these compared to a common field-hand or house-servant.

Looking around, he discovered he was secured behind a tent. His bindings were tight around his wrists, and those in turn were tied by a tough rope to a tent stake. He could move around a few feet, but there wasn't enough slack in the rope to enable him to stand. A quick inspection of the stake revealed he could probably pull it out, but if he did, he would bring down the tent, clearly informing his hosts of his attempted departure.

He was dressed as he had been when taken. He did a quick physical inventory and judged that nothing was broken or sprained too badly.

He sat quietly and considered things. His instincts about these people seemed correct so far. From what little he could see beyond the tent, this was a small camp, perhaps just the six riders and their families, maybe a few more. But he could see