

THE MAP OF  
MORDIA



THE ISLAND OF SLAVES

Colbby

# The Map of Mordia

Book 5

Island of Slaves Series

By

Colbby



Strategic Book Publishing & Rights Co.

Copyright © 2012  
All rights reserved – Colin Blackburn

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the permission, in writing, from the publisher.

Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.  
12620 FM 1960, Suite A4-507  
Houston, TX 77065  
[www.sbpra.com](http://www.sbpra.com)

ISBN: 978-1-61897-531-7

# Chapter 1

## The Map

The great hall in the citadel was packed with all the princes in the land. The Lord Chamberlain was presiding over the ceremony of the Map. The ceremony was the most important event of the year for the citizens of Mordia. It was also the most important rite for the Regal of Mordia for it was at this gathering that the Regal had to present the map to the princes to show that he was a fit and worthy person to be in charge of the country and therefore the map represented the highest badge of office. If the map went missing the Regal would fail and be unfit to rule. He would be deposed and had one year to the next ceremony to produce the map or be put to death. If any other prince could produce the map no matter how he obtained it, then he could claim the throne and as the Regal could award contracts to supply goods and services, there were always some plotting to get their hands on it, but they were very cautious as to fail meant certain death.

As the rites continued the Lord Chamberlain called for the map to be brought forward. The man in charge of the escort to the map called out an order and then led the march into the great hall with an escort with four soldiers carrying a litter upon which was a box. They halted in front of the Chamberlain and then the Regal produced a key to the special lock set into the iron clad strong box. The Chamberlain took the key and opened the box to reveal the Map. Four princes then checked the map to verify that it was genuine and not a copy, and then it was returned to its box and was once again escorted to the vaults below the citadel where it was locked away for another year.

The officer in charge was Zedus a minor lord with a rank similar to that of a baron the lowest ranking lord, and he was also a major in the army whose task was the safe keeping of the map. His duties now over, he handed over to another major and left the citadel. Zedus returned to his lodgings in the city. Turning off the main avenue and walking up a small side street he came to a shabby looking inn where he had his small room.

He nodded to the inn keeper and made his way up a flight of stairs to throw himself onto the bed. Awaking later in the evening Zedus changed from his uniform and went down for a meal. The food was plain but good and as it was still too warm outside to go for a walk he ordered a drink and settled down to spending another lonely evening at the inn. He contemplated trying his luck on the balance machine. This was a device with a balance that had a cup on each end of an arm. A hidden ball of varying weight was dropped into one cup and the punters placed coins in the other cup. The person who placed the last coin as the balance was tipped won all the coins in the cup. The gamble was that if a heavy ball had dropped you could put all your money in without tipping the balance and then someone could place one more coin and win all your money. Zedus checked his purse and then decided to give it a miss because all he had was his army pay and that didn't leave much to spare. He envied the other lords and princes with their estates and private income and even some of his brother officers owned villas and had slaves of their own, but he had nothing. What Zedus didn't know was that his prospects were about to get a great deal better.

Hanno Zen was one of the princes in the great hall watching the ceremony of the map. He looked on with envy at the figure of the Regal with his youthful good looks and a body full of health. Hanno and the Regal had been in the army together when they were young men but that was fifty years ago and now he was growing old while the Regal had had a brain transplant and now had a young body. A very few transplants were carried out as the amount of donors was limited. A donor had to be young and have an accident or illness that damaged the brain as no man could be forced to give up their bodies, but that made people think that it was the surgeons acting on the orders of the Regal that were rationing the supply, and when a body did become available then the Regal's supporter got it. As the rites continued he began to

think that if only he could get his hands on the map then he could have the next body and be a young man once again.

The escort marched out of the great hall carrying the map box but Hanno was busy thinking. How many people handled the map on the way to the hall and then on the way back? Would it be possible to attack the escort and steal it or would the escort fight and then call for the main guard? There were five soldiers with the box at all times and the vaults were full of the citadels guards making it practically impossible as he would need a very large force, and even if he could hire some mercenaries how can he get them into the vaults and out again with the map? Hanno decided that force wasn't the way and that he would have to think of another plan. One week later Zedus was eating his meal in the inn and didn't notice a man watching every move he made and everyone he spoke to. Hanno was putting his plan to work and the first thing to do was to get to know all the people who had access to the vaults and the map no matter how small and in what capacity. His spies quickly told him of how many men had access and what their duties were. Hanno dismissed the common guards as being too risky to approach and concentrated on the sergeants and officers who could have a lot to gain such as high rank and wealth and even a new body.

Hanno walked down a dark poorly lit road on the edge of the city with his cloak pulled high hiding his face. As he passed a couple of shadowy figures a few coins made a clinking noise. A few paces further along he whipped around just before a dagger was plunged into his back. Hanno was ready for the attack and his sword was at the man's throat before he had time to do anything.

"So you like to kill men for money." The man didn't say anything but couldn't move as the tip on the blade was still pressing against his neck. "How would five hundred gold Regal's sound to you?" This time the man found his voice.

"For that kind of money I'd murder the Regal himself."

"I don't want the regal dead at least not yet. Be at this place tomorrow night and I'll show you who to take care of. There are three men and they will earn you a hundred apiece with a bonus of two hundred when the job is done." Hanno removed his sword and the man hesitated for a moment and then fled into the night. Glancing around Hanno pulled up his cloak as high as it could go and continued on his way.

The following day Hanno was in his rooms at the Round House. This was a very large area like a football stadium but made up of rooms for rent. The Round House was just behind the Citadel and therefore a lot of the princes had rooms instead of buying a villa in the capital. The roundhouse like the Citadel had a constant supply of hot water fed from underground springs, and large baths in the basement where the princes could meet. Two slaves looked after him in the rooms but his main villa was in the country two days travel away so he kept a suit of room on a permanent basis. Hanno dismissed his slaves and as soon as they had left went to a locked trunk and took out a small key. After making sure he was alone he opened the box and laid out the contents on a table. The box contained a sheaf of paper containing all the information his spies had provided. He rejected all the men connected with guarding the treasury and the map as being too risky to approach and placed these into one pile. That left two sheets giving the names of the only men with the chance to steal the map and they were the guard commander of the map room or his relief as they were the only men locked in with the map, and as one of the commanders had a supply contract from the Regal it would be unlikely that he would want the Regal replaced, and that left one man, Zedus. His mind now made up the sheaf of papers was burned. The next job was to get rid of any witness and the only men who knew he was plotting something was the spies and if the map went missing they could put two and two together and blackmail him before the year was up, therefore they had to be eliminated.

The night was dark with no stars showing and that suited Hanno as he made his way to the street of assassins. Once there he strode into the centre of the street and then quickly made for the shadows. If the assassin was waiting then he would have been seen and sure enough a man was waiting. Hanno checked to make sure it was the same man otherwise his sword would soon eliminate any threat to his safety. It was the same man and Hanno said to follow at a distance and set off back to a certain tavern where one of his spies usually drank.

When arriving at the tavern he saw his intended victim sitting with a group of men inside. He let the assassin catch up and then pointed the spy out.

“That’s the first man,” he said and then darted into the shadows as a man walked from the inn. “And that’s the second.” The assassin gave a nod and said just two words: “It’s done.”

Hanno threw a purse with a hundred gold coins to the man.

“First hundred,” he said and walked away saying to meet him at the same place when both jobs were completed. Two days later he heard his slaves talking about two murders that had occurred near to the tavern. It appeared that the two men had been in an argument and had stabbed each other in a fight with the result that both had died. As these fights happened frequently the authorities took details asked a few questions and then concluded it must have been a feud between the two. Hanno met the assassin to show him the last spy.

“Good work with the first two. Meet me here for your money when the last one has been dealt with.” He gave the man another hundred coins and told him to follow.

The final spy lived near a small river at the other side of the roundhouse. The river had small boats but was too shallow to allow anything large except for a flat bottomed ferry. Hanno showed the man a small house and told that his intended victim lived alone and took the ferry every morning to go to the roundhouse looking for work. Two days later a report came that a man had been pulled out of the river when he’d fallen in after drinking too much and he’d drowned. Hanno smiled as the link had been broken. Now to deal with the assassin and that would be tonight.

At the meeting place the assassin was waiting for Hanno. He held out his hand saying the job was done. Hanno reached underneath his cloak and took out a bag and gave it a shake. The sound of coins chinking was heard as he tossed it over to the man. Hanno had deliberately tossed the bag short and as the man tried to grab it, it fell to the ground. The assassin stooped to pick it up and at that moment when he wasn’t looking Hanno pulled back his cloak to reveal his sword and sliced through the man’s ribs. He wiped the blood off his sword using the man’s clothing, picked up the money bag and left the scene.

Hanno Zen remained in his rooms until the following day. A murder in the town wasn’t anything new and nothing was said about it. The next day he took his bath in the basement trying to think of a way to approach Zedus without arousing suspicion.

Just then another Lord entered the bath and saw Hanno sitting on a bench by the wall. The new Lord lived just a short distance from the estate of Hanno and they usually travelled together. He enquired if Hanno was going home as after the map ceremony things were quiet in the capital. Hanno was about to say no when the new Lord mentioned that their usual escort wasn’t available and did Hanno know of anyone to entrust with their safety as it was dangerous to travel alone because of bandits. Hanno thought that this was the opportunity he was looking for as he knew from his spies that Zedus was due for a months leave. The next day he saw the guard commander and asked him to pass on a message when Zedus had finished his latest duty.

Would he be interested in escorting two Lords to their villas? The commander did as requested and passed the message on.

Zedus arrived at Hanno’s rooms in the roundhouse and was seated in a comfortable chair sipping on an expensive wine when Hanno appeared. Hanno then took him down to the baths to meet with his friend and later after bathing they were seated in the hot room talking about the trip.

“It’s not too dangerous,” said the other Lord, “but one can’t be too careful.”

Zedus agreed especially as the good wine was taking its effect.

“Yes I agree. Only two days ago one of my contacts was murdered only a few streets away and that were here in the capital in full view of everyone.” Hanno gave a little smile and thought that hoped it wasn’t in full view of everyone. At the end of the evening Zedus agreed to the trip. The money was good and he hadn’t planned on going anywhere for his leave.

Zedus inspected the four soldiers who were accompanying the two wagons’ the Lords were taking to their estates. The wagons held goods that could only be purchased in the capital such as good wines and rare foods and some furniture. The goods on one wagon equalled a years pay for a major while all he had

was his small room in an inn on a side street. He thought it was a little unfair and snapped at one of the soldiers a little harshly and then realised that it wasn't the soldiers fault but he was a lord and a major and therefore couldn't apologise to the man. The goods were secured and the wagons set forth on the road south. The large cows pulling the wagons set the pace as they couldn't be hurried. Everyone else had to walk except the lords who had the use of an accommodation wagon that had beds and cooking facilities. As they were close to the capital Zedus was invited to ride in the wagon and a skin of wine was produced. Zedus was a little flattered to be included in the two lords company and drinking their wine, but didn't realise that this was part of Hanno's plan.

The first day's journey was a long trying bumpy ride but the wine helped to make it pass without too much trouble. The wagons finally reached their night stop at a small garrison at the foot of a mountain. It had fresh running water from a spring and a large flat area where the wagons could be parked up for the night. A wooden fence surrounded the area and as it was patrolled by sentries it was considered safe. It was the next day when the wagons moved through the mountains when they may expect bandits to strike and had to be on guard at all times.

Once again Zedus was invited to share the lord's meal and spend the evening with them chatting and joking by the fire. When he retired at the end of a pleasant night he was in a happy mood well fortified by more wine. As there wasn't any room in the wagon he pulled his blankets around and settled down by the fire. The night was warm and he soon fell fast asleep thinking that he'd found two good friends and had been accepted into their company as an equal.

# Chapter 2

## The Plot

Noise of the camp coming back to life awoke him in the early morning. He stirred and then threw off his blankets and kicked some life back into the fire. He called to his men to start breakfast and to pack away all the sleeping blankets and bring out the plates. Around the area other wagons were also stirring as some more of the princes that had been to the map ceremony were going home. From the garrison four separate roads led in different directions and from what he had been told, they were the only wagons going down their road that day. This meant that from now on he had to be alert as an attack could come at any time. The two lords in the accommodation wagon had their own slaves to serve them and they would still be wrapped in their blankets. Zedus could see that smoke was coming from the wagon telling him that the fire had been lit and he could forget about them. The servants put a large cauldron filled with water over the fire and started to prepare a pot of cereal. After breakfast was over the large cows were hitched to the wagons and they set off out of the safety of the garrison and down the road.

Zedus stationed two of the soldiers just behind the lead wagon with the other two coming up at the rear of the column. He rode on the second wagon and the servants walked at the side. By doing this any attack could only shoot at one soldier as they were walking side by side and then they risked being counter attacked by the guards. As bandits liked to hit and run and not risk a fight Zedus reckoned that this was the best defence. After four hours the road climbed to a small plateau where camp was set up to enable a fire to be set. Zedus was sure they had been seen but the bandits must have reckoned that five soldiers and the two lords with their servants and slaves was too heavily armed for them and left them alone to wait for easier pickings.

That night after setting up camp by a small stream Zedus was once again invited to the accommodation wagon and the lords company to be plied with good wine and pleasant talk. It was all part of Hanno's plan to make Zedus envious of what he couldn't afford and then to suggest a way where he too could gain wealth and status but at the moment it was too soon and Hanno would wait until Zedus had tasted the good life of being waited on hand and foot on his estate.

The morning was bright and warm as they approached the beginning of Hanno's land. Now that the danger of bandits was receding Zedus was riding with the lords looking on as Hanno pointed out his various fields full of crops earning him a vast amount of money. Shortly afterwards the villa came into sight. A vast sprawling villa with two separate wings with a central courtyard and a large display fountain set at the front of a large garden. This was a show of wealth that Zedus could only dream of. The other lord left them to continue to his home as they drew into the courtyard. Servants rushed out to take care of them and see to the unpacking and the men's needs as Zedus was led into the villa. The lord whispered to his chief servant and Zedus was led to the other wing where he was shown where he was to stay. He could hardly believe the opulence of the room with its rich furnishings and huge bed draped in silk like sheets. Two slaves were assigned to look after his every need and a hot bath was prepared as he munched on fruit from a huge basket filled with all kinds of good things. After bathing he rested until the evening when he was summoned to the table of the lord where the evening meal was served. The meal was meat and fowl from the estate followed by a fruit cocktail of delicious tastes that Zedus had never eaten before. Various wines were served and afterwards they sat by the fire although the room wasn't cold. Zedus couldn't help but to remark he'd never had a meal so fine in all his life as the one that he'd just eaten. Hanno simply nodded at the compliment pleased that his guest appreciated the food.

"Is your room to your satisfaction?" He enquired.

"It's the finest room I've ever stayed in."

Hanno was flattering his guest.

“Surely not. You must have been a guest in many rooms of a similar nature.”

“No, I have only my army pay to fall back on and you know how much that is.” Hanno did know just how much Zedus earned and what his outgoings were and in fact everything there was to know about him.

One of the house slaves brought more wine and poured out two glasses.

“I think you’ll find that this wine is just to your taste,” he said as he passed over a glass to Zedus. “That will be all for tonight.” He said to the slave. Zedus noticed a small stud in the ear of the slave as the man turned and left the room.

“Is that slave from a Subsale?” Hanno turned to watch as the door was closing.

“Yes I bought him last year at around this time. He is supposed to be the son of a lord or somebody with high rank but they don’t tell you who he is and where he has come from. Zedus knew the Subsale slaves were men who had been sentenced to death for murder or some other serious crime but had paid the victim’s relatives money to be spared. He also would have paid someone to be executed in his place such as a person dying of an incurable disease or very old and infirm who wished to provide a sum for his family. The man then had to spend a long time as a slave and be sold at auction. The length of time was determined by the court on the circumstances of his victim’s death.

“Do you trust him to serve you?” Zedus asked. “I mean aren’t they murderers and really bad men?” Hanno smiled and shook his head.

“They’re just like ordinary men with just one unfortunate incident on their record and they have to serve me well because if they’re sent back it could be fatal for them as the courts may carry out their original sentence, and they’re less likely to run away as they would be executed if caught. Anyway in nine year’s he will be reunited with his family so why shouldn’t I trust him. I may even meet him in the future at the citadel if I live that long.” Hanno was in his late sixties just a few years younger than the Regal before his transplant.

“It does seem a shame that we have to die just when we have enough to start living. Why doesn’t the Regal make more transplants available?” Zedus was talking but without thinking things through.

“It’s the bodies of the young men that are holding things up, they’re in short supply. Why doesn’t he let us buy a young body just like buying a man at a subsale, it’s the same principle? I mean there are hundreds of young men who could help their families if they were given the chance.” Hanno had planted the idea firmly in the head of Zedus and for the time being was satisfied.

The two met at breakfast and Zedus started the conversation. He had been awake for most of the night thinking about the Regal.

“If the Regal’s got a new body then how does he get deposed seeing that he will live for another sixty years?”

“That’s a good point you’ve raised. He can only be removed if enough of the princes vote him out of office and is very unlikely as most of them have a contract given by him, and the only other way is to kill him but then it would mean an open vote and there’s no telling who would succeed. The last way is of course at the map ceremony when he has to produce the map but you are the guardian of the map and you know it can’t be done.” Hanno was leading Zedus but very shrewdly so that he didn’t realise.

“You may be right about the map not being stolen from someone on the outside, that’s impossible, but what about someone on the inside?” Hanno knew he’d got his man now that Zedus had raised the possibility of stealing the map himself.

“How could anyone get in to the map room? I mean aren’t there soldiers inside and a heavy door and what of the citadel guards?”

“Well let’s say that I wanted to steal the map. I have a key for the guardroom door so that’s one problem sorted. The soldiers could be drugged by putting a drug into their food and that would leave me three days to break into the treasure room to get to the map. There are only the bars at the front of the room to stop me.”

“Who has the key to the bars and would it be noticed if it went missing?”

“The Commander has the only key at his desk and yes it would be noticed if it was missing.” Zedus suddenly stopped eating as he now realised what they were discussing.

“You’re not planning to steal the map are you?”

“Me? No, but it would be good to see the Regal’s face if he found the map gone but you are the only one who could do it with any chance of success because you know what would happen if we tried and failed.” Hanno had purposely said we instead of you failed giving Zedus the hint that he may consider it with his support.

“I should want a lot to risk it such as a new title.” Zedus replied.

“How would prince sound to you? I should think that it would suit a loyal supporter of the new Regal especially with a new estate your title would bring you, along with a couple of supply contracts to swell your purse.” Zedus smiled, to think, a prince with his own estate and money to spend.

“For that I’ll risk it, but what about the bars? How do we get through those without being heard?”

“I don’t know yet but let me think about it, meanwhile enjoy your stay and relax.”

Zedus spent the next week or two following Hanno as he administered his estate riding around in two carts pulled by slaves. These carts were like the racing carts used in the national sport. They had a platform over two small wheels and a small seat. These carts were used as the horse’s being very small and just as big as a dog, couldn’t travel far. At the far end of one field was a huge barn filled with grain being put into sacks by the workmen and then stacked onto big farm carts ready to be taken to market. Zedus dreamed of the day when he too would be sending his supplies from his estate, but that was in the future.

The little convoy neared the capital. Zedus had enjoyed the luxury of Hanno’s estate but now was back to his usual life of duty and his little rooms at the run down inn. Hanno only saw him once in the next few days as it was better that nobody could suspect anything going on between them. On the occasion that they met at they discussed tunnelling but as the vaults were built into the living rock that would take weeks.

They had to cut the bars or get the key without anyone knowing.

Two day’s later Hanno was watching from the shadows across the street from a locksmiths shop. Just as the man was starting to close his shop Hanno quickly crossed and stepped inside.

“I have a special job for you, one that will pay well. My uncle has a special box that contains some information that I need. I must open this box without him knowing that it’s been opened but the only time he removes the key is when he’s changing his clothes.”

“You’ll have to get me the key to copy or get me an imprint so that I can make one. You’ll need this.” He gave Hanno a small box that split into two sections. In each of the sections was a type of resin. The locksmith laid a key on one part and then placed the other half on the top and waited for five seconds and then he removed the top and took out the key leaving a perfect imprint in the resin.

“Can you manage or do you want me to show you again?” Hanno said that he’d manage and slipped out of the shop and into the darkness. He headed for the inn where Zedus lodged to give him the box and instruct him on its use. Zedus was sitting at his usual table having just finished a meal. He saw Hanno in the doorway and followed him outside where he was shown what to do.

“Pull a badge off your uniform and it’ll give you an excuse to go down early to the commander saying that you’re looking for it. Hang about until the commander inspects his troops or leaves his desk for a moment and take the imprint and then wipe the key clean and resume your duty. Remember it doesn’t have to be done right away if you can’t get near the desk. If we can get a key that fits the bars then we’ll decide whether to go through with the plan.” Zedus nodded and placed the box in an inside pocket of his cloak.

At his next day for duty Zedus made his way down to the vaults. The commander saw him and gave a nod and then something caught the commander’s eye. One of his men had done something that wasn’t to the commander’s liking, and with a below he marched down the passage to admonish the man leaving Zedus alone. His quickly opened the cupboard door and selected the key to the bars and placed it inside the little box. One press, wait for five seconds and then take out the key. A quick wipe and the key was placed back on its hook and the little box back under the cloak of Zedus.

As the commander returned to his desk Zedus asked him if a badge had been found when he was last in the vaults, as he had lost one. After being assured that nothing had been handed in, he made his way back to his room in the citadel to prepare for his duty.

A few days later he handed the box over to Hanno who told him he'd be in touch when the key was ready and not to see him in the meantime. The next night Hanno made his way to the locksmith making sure he wasn't seen. Just before closing time as before he slipped into the shop and presented the box to the smith.

"This is a security key and very intricate, it will take a lot of work as they are designed not to be copied."

"Yes but can you do it?" Hanno asked.

"Yes, but it will cost you at least twenty Gold Regal's and it will take two to three weeks if all goes well or even more if I have trouble with it."

"Good I'll call back in three weeks." Hanno turned and was gone.

Buy the B&N ePub version at:-

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-map-of-mordia-colbby/1111510041?ean=2940014766777>

Buy the Kindle version at:-

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Map-Mordia-Island-ebook/dp/B008AS8BD2/ref>