

Rollicking science-fiction
adventure

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THE LOVERS

The Green Odyssey



THE GREEN ODYSSEY

by Philip José Farmer

...an uproarious, hell-bent adventure story, combining fantasy, imagination and science, with a liberal dash of humor. It is in the best tradition of adventure science fiction, a swashbuckling tale of a resourceful spaceman who is, however, uneasily aware that he may have been miscast. Fortunately, he has the assistance of a large, gorgeous, energetic and adoring female who is supremely confident of his ability to handle all comers. With her help, that is.

The tale of their adventures is reading for sheer fun.

To Nan Gerding

DANGER! THRILLS! ADVENTURE!

Alan Green was not exactly a hero. In fact he liked peace just as well as the next man. Not that he was really afraid of that crazy, hot-blooded hound-dog Alzo, or even of the hound's gorgeous owner, the Duchess Zuni—who was also hot-blooded (to say nothing of the Duke). After all, these things were understood on this backward, violent planet, and a man could manage, provided he was alert twenty-four hours a day.

And as a matter of fact, Alan was only normally apprehensive of his Junoesque, tempestuous (but altogether lovable) wife Amra. Delightful, demanding Amra—and her five uproarious kids. The trouble was, he was tired. And homesick.

So when he heard of two other downed spacemen, he hitched a ride with a piratical merchant-captain on a windroller destined to carry him to the spaceship and thence to the peaceful green hills of Earth. But he had reckoned without the vagaries of the windroller, pirates, the "traveling islands," the rascally Captain, and various flora and fauna peculiar to this planet—all of which, it now seemed, regarded Alan with unnerving malevolence.

And worst of all, Amra was determined that he should be a hero. Amra won.

1

For two years Alan Green had lived without hope. From the day the spaceship had crashed on this unknown planet he had resigned himself to the destiny created for him by accident and mathematics. Chances against another ship landing within the next hundred years were a million to one. Therefore it would do no good to sit around waiting for rescue. Much as he loathed the idea, he must live the rest of his life here, and he must squeeze as much blood as he could out of this planet-sized turnip. There wasn't much to squeeze. In fact, it seemed to him that he was the one losing the blood. Shortly after he'd been cast away he'd been made a slave.

Now, suddenly, he had hope.

Hope came to him a month after he'd been made foreman of the kitchen slaves of the Duke of Tropat. It came to him as he was standing behind the Duchess during a meal and directing those who were waiting upon her.

It was the Duchess Zuni who had not so subtly maneuvered him from the labor pens to his coveted, if dangerous, position. Why dangerous? Because she was very jealous and possessive, and the slightest hint of lack of attention from him could mean he'd lose his life or one limb or another. The knowledge of what had happened to his two predecessors kept him extremely sensitive to her every gesture, her every wish.

That fateful morning he was standing behind her as she sat at one end of the long breakfast table. In one hand he held his foreman's wand, a little white baton topped by a large red ball. With it he gestured at the slaves who served food, who poured wine and beer, who fanned away the flies, who carried in the household god and sat it on the god chair, who played something like music. Now and then he bent over the Duchess Zuni's long black hair and whispered phrases from this or that love poem, praising her beauty, her supposed unattainability, and his burning, if seemingly hopeless, passion for her. Zuni would smile, or repeat the formula of thanks—the short one—or

else giggle at his funny accent.

The Duke sat at the other end of the table. He ignored the by-play, just as he ignored the so-called secret passage inside the walls of the castle, which Green used to get to the Duchess's apartments. Custom demanded this, just as custom demanded that he should play the outraged husband if she got tired of Green or angry at him and accused him publicly of amorous advances. This was enough to make Green jittery, but he had more than the Duke to consider. There was Alzo.

Alzo was the Duchess's watchdog, a mastiff-like monster with shaggy red-gold hair. The dog hated Green with a vindictiveness that Green could only account for by supposing that the animal knew, perhaps from his body-odor, that he was not a native of this planet. Alzo rumbled a warning deep in his chest every time Green bent over the Duchess or made a too-sudden movement. Occasionally he rose to his four feet and nuzzled the man's leg. When that happened Green could not keep from breaking out into a sweat, for the dog had twice bitten him, playfully, so to speak, and severely lacerated his calf. As if that weren't bad enough, Green had to worry that the natives might notice that his scars healed abnormally fast, almost overnight. He'd been forced to wear bandages on his legs long after the new skin had come in.

Even now, the nauseating canine was sniffing around Green's quivering hide in the hope of putting the fear of the devil in him. At that moment the Earthman resolved that, come the headsman's ax, rack, wheel, or other hellish tortures, he was going to kill that hound. It was just after he made that vow that the Duchess caused him to forget altogether the beast.

"Dear," said Zuni, interrupting the Duke in the midst of his conversation with a merchant-captain, "what is this I hear about two men who have fallen from the sky in a great ship of iron?"

Green quivered, and he held his breath as he waited for the Duke's reply.

The Duke, a short, dark many-chinned man with white hair and very thick bristly salt-and-pepper eyebrows, frowned.

"Men? Demons, rather! Can men fly in an iron ship through the air? These two claimed to have come from the stars, and you know what that means.

Remember Oixrotl's prophecy: *A demon will come, claiming to be an angel.* No doubt about these two! Just to show you their subtlety, they claim to be neither demon nor angels, but men! Now, there's devilish clever thinking. Confusing to anybody but the most clear-headed. I'm glad the King of Estorya wasn't taken in."

Eagerly Zuni leaned forward, her large brown eyes bright, and her red-painted mouth open and wet. "Oh, has he burned them already? What a shame! I should think he'd at least torture them for a while."

Miran, the merchant-captain, said, "Your pardon, gracious lady, but the King of Estorya has done no such thing. The Estoryan law demands that all suspected demons should be kept in prison for two years. Everybody knows that a devil can't keep his human disguise more than two years. At the end of that time he reverts to his natural flesh and form, a hideous sight to behold, blasphemous, repulsive, soul-shaking."

Miran rolled his one good eye so that only the white showed and made the sign to ward off evil, the index finger held rigidly out from a clenched fist. Jugkaxtr, the household priest, dived under the table, where he crouched praying, secure in the knowledge that demons couldn't touch him while he knelt beneath the thrice-blessed wood. The Duke swallowed a whole glass of wine, apparently to calm his nerves, and belched.

Miran wiped his face and said, "Of course, I wasn't able to find out much, because we merchants are regarded with deep suspicion and scarcely dare to move outside the harbor or the marketplace. The Estoryans worship a female deity—ridiculous, isn't it?—and eat fish. They hate us Tropatians because we worship Zaxropatr, Male of Males, and because they must depend on us to bring them fish. But they aren't close-mouthed. They babble on and on to us, especially when one has given them wine for nothing."

Green finally released his breath in a sigh of relief. How glad he was that he had never told these people his true origin! So far as they knew he was merely one of the many slaves who came from a distant country in the North.

Miran cleared his throat, adjusted his violet turban and yellow robes, pulled gently at the large gold ring that hung from his nose and said, "It took me a month to get back from Estorya, and that is very good time indeed, but then I am noted for my good luck, though I prefer to call it skill plus the favor given

by the gods to the truly devout. I do not boast, O gods, but merely give you tribute because you have smiled upon my ventures and have found pleasing the scent of my many sacrifices in your nostrils!"

Green lowered his eyelids to conceal the expression of disgust which he felt must be shining from them. At the same time, he saw Zuni's shoe tapping impatiently. Inwardly he groaned, because he knew she would divert the conversation to something more interesting to her, to her clothes and the state of her stomach and/or complexion. And there would be nothing that anybody could do about it, because the custom was that the woman of the house regulated the subject of talk during breakfast. If only this had been lunch or dinner! Then the men would theoretically have had uncontested control.

"These two demons were very tall, like your slave Green, here," said Miran, "and they could not speak a word of Estoryan. Or at least they claimed they couldn't. When King Rausmig's soldiers tried to capture them they brought from the folds of their strange clothes two pistols that only had to be pointed to send silent and awesome and sure death. Everywhere men dropped dead. Panic overtook many, but there were brave soldiers who kept on charging, and eventually the magical instruments became exhausted. The demons were overpowered and put into the Tower of Grass Cats from which no man or demon has yet escaped. And there they will be until the Festival of the Sun's Eye. Then they will be burnt...."

From beneath the table rose the babble of the priest, Jugkaxtr, as he blessed everyone in the house, down to the latest-born pup, and the fleas living thereof, and cursed all those who were possessed by even the tiniest demon. The Duke, growing impatient at the noise, kicked under the table. Jugkaxtr yelped and presently crawled out. He sat down and began gnawing the meat from a bone, a well-done-thou-good-and-faithful-servant expression on his fat features. Green also felt like kicking him, just as he often felt like kicking every single human being on this planet. It was hard to remember that he must exercise compassion and understanding for them, and that his own remote ancestors had once been just as nauseatingly superstitious, cruel and bloody.

There was a big difference between reading about such people and actually living among them. A history or a romantic novel could describe how

unwashed and diseased and formula-bound primitives were, but only the too-too substantial stench and filth could make your gorge rise.

Even as he stood there Zuni's powerful perfume rose and clung in heavy festoons about him and slithered down his nostrils. It was a rare and expensive perfume, brought back by Miran from his voyages and given to her as a token of the merchant's esteem. Used in small quantities it would have been quite effective to express feminine daintiness and to hint at delicate passion. But no, Zuni poured it like water over her, hoping to cover up the stale odor left by *not* taking a bath more than once a month.

She looked so beautiful, he thought. And stank so terribly. At least she had at first. Now she looked less beautiful because he knew how stupid she was, and didn't stink quite so badly because his nostrils had become somewhat adjusted. They'd had to.

"I intend to be back in Estorya by the time of the festival," said Miran. "I've never seen the Eye of the Sun burn demons before. It's a giant lens, you know. There will be just time enough to make a voyage there and get back before the rainy season. I expect to make even greater profits than the last time, because I've established some highly placed contacts. O gods, I do not boast but merely praise your favor to your humble worshiper, Miran the Merchant of the Clan of Effenycan!"

"Please bring me some more of this perfume," said the Duchess, "and I just love the diamond necklace you gave me."

"Diamonds, emeralds, rubies!" cried Miran, kissing his hand and rolling his eye ecstatically. "I tell you, the Estoryans are rich beyond our dreams! Jewels flow in their marketplaces like drops of water in a cataract! Ah, if only the Emperor could be induced to organize a great raiding fleet and storm its walls!"

"He remembers too well what happened to his father's fleet when he tried it," growled the Duke. "The storm that destroyed his thirty ships was undoubtedly raised by the priests of the Goddess Hooda. I still think that the expedition would have succeeded, however, if the late Emperor had not ignored the vision that came to him the night before they set sail. It was the great god Axopotqui, and he said...."

There was a lengthy conversation which did not hold Green's attention. He was too busy trying to think of a plan whereby he could get to Estorya and to the demons' iron vessel, which was obviously a spaceship. This was his only chance. Soon the rainy season would start and there would be no vessels leaving for at least three months.

He could, of course, just walk away and hope to get to Estorya on foot. Thousands of miles through countless perils, and he had only a general idea of where the city was ... no, Miran was his only hope.

But how...? He didn't think that stowing away would work. There was always a careful search for slaves who might try just that very plan. He looked at Miran, the short, fat, big-stomached, hook-nosed, one-eyed fellow with many chins and a large gold ring in his nose. The fellow was shrewd, shrewd, and he would not want to offend the Duchess by helping her official gigolo escape. Not, that is, unless Green could offer him something that was so valuable that he couldn't afford not to take the risk. Miran boasted that he was a hard-headed businessman, but it was Green's observation that there was always a large soft spot in that supposedly impenetrable cranium: the Fissure of Cupiditas.

2

The Duke rose, and everybody followed his example. Jugkaxtr chanted the formula of dismissal, then sat down to finish gnawing on the bone. The others filed out. Green walked in front of Zuni in order to warn her of any obstacles in her path and to take the brunt of any attempted assassination. As he did so he was seized by the ankle and tripped headlong. He did not fall hard because he was a quick man, in spite of his six-foot-two and hundred ninety pounds. But he rose red-faced because of the loud laughter and from repressed anger at Alzo, who had again repeated his trick of grabbing Green's leg and upsetting him. He wanted to grab a spear from a nearby guard and spit Alzo. But that would be the end of Green. And whereas up to now there had been many times when he would not particularly have cared if he left this planet via the death route, he could not now make a false move. Not when escape was so near!

So he grinned sheepishly and again preceded the Duchess, while the others followed her out. When they reached the bottom of the broad stone staircase that led to the upper floors of the castle, Zuni told Green that he was to go to the marketplace and buy tomorrow's food. As for her, she was going back to bed and sleep until noon.

Inwardly Green groaned. How long could he keep up this pace? He was expected to stay up half the night with her, then attend to his official duties during the day. She slept enough to be refreshed by the time he visited her, but he never had a chance for any real rest. Even when he had his free hours in the afternoon he had to go to his house in the pens, and there he had to stay awake and attend to all his familial duties. And Amra, his slave-wife, and her six children demanded much from him. They were even more tyrannical than the Duchess, if that were possible.

How long, O Lord, how long? The situation was intolerable; even if he'd not heard of the spaceship he would have plotted to escape. Better a quick death

while trying to get away than a slow, torturous one by exhaustion.

He bowed good-by to the Duke and Duchess, then followed the violet turban and yellow robes of Miran through the courtyard, through the thick stone walls, over the bridge of the broad moat, and into the narrow winding streets of the city of Quotz. Here the merchant-captain got into his silver-and-jewel-decorated rickshaw. The two long-legged men between its shafts, sailors and clansmen from Miran's vessel, the *Bird of Fortune*, began running through the crowd. The people made way for them, as two other sailors preceded them calling out Miran's name and cracking whips in the air.

Green, after looking to make certain that nobody from the castle was around to see him, ran until he was even with the rickshaw. Miran halted it and asked what he wanted.

"Your pardon, Your Richness, but may a humble slave speak and not be reprimanded?"

"I presume it is no idle thought you have in mind," said Miran, looking Green over his one eye narrow in its fat-folds.

"It has to do with money."

"Ah, despite your foreign accent you speak with a pleasing voice; you are the golden trumpet of Mennirox, my patron god. Speak!"

"First Your Richness must swear by Mennirox that you will under no circumstances divulge my proposal."

"There is wealth in this? For me?"

"There is."

Miran glanced at his clansmen, standing there patiently, apparently oblivious of what was going on. He had power of life and death over them, but he didn't trust them. He said, "Perhaps it would be better if I thought about this before making such a drastic oath. Could you meet me tonight at the Hour of the Wineglass at the House of Equality? And could you perhaps give me a slight hint of what you have in mind?"

"The answer to both is yes. My proposal has to do with the dried fish that you carry as cargo to the Estoryans. There is another thing, too, but I may not even hint at it until I have your oath."

"Very well then. At the agreed hour. Fish, eh? I must be off. Time is money, you know. Get going boys, full sails."

Green hailed a passing rickshaw and seated himself comfortably in it. As assistant majordomo he had plenty of money. Moreover, the Duke and Duchess would have been outraged if he had lowered their prestige by walking through the city's streets. His vehicle made good time, too, because everybody recognized his livery: the scarlet and white tricorne hat and the white sleeveless shirt with the Duke's heraldic arms on its chest—red and green concentric circles pierced by a black arrow.

The street led always downward, for the city had been built on the foothills of the mountains. It wandered here and there and gave Green plenty of time to think.

The trouble was, he thought, that if the two imprisoned men at Estorya were to die before he got to them he'd still be lost. He had no idea of how to pilot or navigate a spaceship. He'd been a passenger on a freighter when it had unaccountably blown up, and he'd been forced to leave the dying vessel in one of those automatic castaway emergency shells. The capsule had got him down to the surface of this planet and was, as far as he knew, still up in the hills where he'd left it. After wandering for a week and almost starving to death he'd been picked up by some peasants. They had turned him in to the soldiers of a nearby garrison, thinking he must be a runaway slave on whom they'd collect a reward. Taken to the capital city of Quotz, Green had almost been freed because there was no record of his being anybody's property. But his tallness, blondness and inability to speak the local language had convinced his captors that he must have wandered down from some far northern country. Therefore if he wasn't a slave he should be.

Presto, changeo! He was. And he'd put in six months in a quarry and a year as a dock worker. Then the Duchess had chanced to see him on the streets as she rode by, and he'd been transferred to the castle.

The streets were alive with the short, dark, stocky natives and the taller, lighter-complexioned slaves. The former wore their turbans of various colors, indicating their status and trade. The latter wore their three-cornered hats. Occasionally a priest in his high conical hat, hexagonal spectacles and goatee rode by. Wagons and rickshaws drawn by men or by big, powerful dogs went

by. Merchants stood at the fronts of their shops and hawked their wares in loud voices. They sold cloth, grixtr nut, parchment, knives, swords, helmets, drugs, books—on magic, on religion, on travel—spices, perfumes, ink, rugs, highly sugared drinks, wine, beer, tonic, paintings, everything that went to make up their civilization. Butchers stood before open shops where dressed fowl, deer and dogs hung. Dealers in birds pointed out the virtues of their many-colored and multi-songed pets.

For the thousandth time Green wondered at this strange planet where the only large animals were men, dogs, grass cats, a small deer and a very small equine. In fact, there was a paucity of any variety of animal life, except for the surprisingly large number of birds. It was this scarcity of horses and oxen, he supposed, that helped perpetuate slavery. Man and dog had to provide most of the labor.

No doubt there was an explanation for all this, but it must be buried so deep in this people's forgotten history that one would never know. Green, always curious, wished that he had time and means to explore. But he didn't. He might as well resign himself to keeping a whole skin and to getting out of this mess as fast as he could.

There was enough to do merely to make his way through the narrow and crowded streets. He had to display his baton often to clear a path, though when he approached the harbor area he had less trouble because the streets were much wider.

Here great wagons drawn by gangs of slaves carried huge loads to or from the ships. The thoroughfares had to be broad, else the people would have been crushed between wagon and house. Here also were the so-called Pens, where the dock-slaves lived. Once the area had actually been an enclosure where men and women were locked up for the night. But the walls had been torn down and new houses built in the old Duke's time. The closest Earthly parallel Green could think of for these edifices was a housing project. Small cottages, all exactly alike, set in military columns.

For a moment he considered stopping off to see Amra, then decided against it. She'd get him tied up in an argument or something, and he'd spend too much time trying to soothe her, time that should be spent at the marketplace. He hated scenes, whereas Amra was a born self-dramatist who reveled in

them, almost wallowed, one might say.

He averted his eyes from the Pens and looked at the other side of the street, where the walls of the great warehouses towered. Workmen swarmed around them, and cranes, operated by gangs pushing wheels like a ship's capstan, raised or lowered big bundles. Here, he thought, was a business opportunity for him.

Introduce the steam engine. It'd be the greatest thing that ever hit this planet. Wood-burning automobiles could replace the rickshaws. Cranes could be run by donkey-engines. The ships themselves could have their wheels powered by steam. Or perhaps, he thought, rails could be laid across the Xurdimur, and locomotives would make the ships obsolete.

No, that wouldn't work. Iron rails cost too much. And the savages that roved over the grassy plains would tear them up and forge weapons from them.

Besides, every time he suggested to the Duke a new and much more efficient method of doing something he ran dead into the brick wall of tradition and custom. Nothing new could be accepted unless the gods accepted it. The gods' will was interpreted by the priests. The priests clutched the status quo as tightly as a hungry infant clutches its mother's breast or an old man clings to his property.

Green could make a fight against the theocracy, but he didn't feel it was worth while to become a martyr.

He heard a familiar voice behind him calling his name.

"Alan! Alan!"

He hunched his shoulders like a turtle withdrawing his head and thought desperately for a moment of trying to ignore the voice. But, though a woman's, it was powerful and penetrating, and everybody around him had already turned to see its owner. So he couldn't pretend he hadn't heard it.

"ALAN, YOU BIG BLOND NO-GOOD HUNK OF MAN, STOP!"

Reluctantly Green told his rickshaw boy to turn around. The boy, grinning, did so. Like everybody else along the harbor front he knew Amra and was familiar with her relations with Green. She held their one-year-old daughter in her arms, cradled against her magnificent bosom. Behind her stood her