The Seven Courses of Rustam

by Firdausi (Abu'l-Qasim Firdausi, c. 1010) · translated by Arthur George Warner and Edmond Warner (1906)

An excerpt, word for word: Kai Káús goes to Mázandarán and is struck blind and captured, Rustam rides to his rescue through the Seven Courses and slays the White Dív, from The Sháhnáma of Firdausí, vol. II, sections 4 to 12 (printed pages 38 to 62), in blank verse. Public domain (published 1906). Text from the Internet Archive scan of the 1906 volume, corrected against the page images; the translators' footnotes are kept, the running heads and marginal verse numbers are dropped.

How Káús went to Mázandarán

Next day arose the tymbals' din, Gúdarz
And Tús led on the troops. Káús, their lustre,
Went with them, and upon a shaded spot
Set up his throne before Mount Ispurúz
For rest and sleep, while terror everywhere
Fell on the brutish dívs. Upon the heights
The Sháh spread cloth of gold; the air was fragrant
With luscious wine; the favoured paladins
Sat by his throne and spent the night together.
At dawn they woke and entered helmed and armed
The presence of the Sháh, who ordered Gív:—
"Choose from the warriors two thousand men—
Mace-wielders—to prepare for us a path
Mázandarán-ward, slaughter young and old,
Fire all the settlements, turn day to night,
And slay the warlocks ere they are aware."

Gív girt him, left the portal of the Sháh,
Chose valiant warriors, and when he reached
Mázandarán showered scimitars and maces.
The women, children, and old men with staves,
Received no quarter from his sword; he sacked
And burned the cities, scattering bane instead
Of antidote. He lighted on a spot
Like Paradise, replete with all delights,
And in each street and quarter countless slaves
With necklaces and earrings, and still more
With casques and faces like the shining moon.
In every place were treasures stored away,
Here gold, there gems. The cattle were past count.
Thou wouldst have said: "'Tis Paradise itself!"
They told Káús the news, who cried: "Live happy
The man who said: 'Mázandarán may match
With Paradise, and thou wouldst say that all
The country is an Idols' temple decked

With wreaths of roses and brocade of Chín;
Its Idols come from Paradise with faces
Bathed in pomegranate-blossoms by Rizwán.'"[1]

The Íránians plundered for one week, then ceased.
The monarch of Mázandarán received
The news; his heart was sad, his head was heavy.
There was a dív named Sanja at the court,
Who also grieved. The monarch said to him:—
"Go swift as Sol in yonder circling heaven
And tell the White Dív: 'There hath come a host
Out of Írán to spoil Mázandarán;
They have burnt up our cities and inflamed
Our vengeance by the outrage. Kai Káús,
With many young and brave, is in command
Without thy help we shall be all destroyed.'"

When Sanja heard the message he sped forth
And carried to the dív the king's appeal.
The White Dív answered: "Be not in despair,
For I am coming with a mighty host
To cut the Sháh's foot from Mázandarán."

He spake and like a mountain rose erect;
His head was level with the turning sky.

Night came, a cloud involved the Íránian host,
The world grew like a negro's face for blackness,
And thou hadst said: "'Tis like a sea of pitch,
And all its light is lost."
The White Dív spread
Above their heads a tent of pitchy smoke,
Air dusked and eyes were darkened. From the sky
He showered stones and darts, the Íránian troops
Dispersed abroad, and many sought Írán,
Heart-broken at the doings of Káús.
When day had come the ambitious Sháh and most
Among his warriors were blind. The nobles
Were wroth with him, his troops were prisoners,

His treasures pillaged, and his fortunes old.
It is a ne'er to be forgotten tale,
For at such wonders wonder's self must fail!
Now when the Sháh perceived his plight he said:—
"A prudent minister is more than treasure;
Alas that I accepted not the counsel
Of Zál the worldlord but misdoubted it."

When he had passed seven days in misery
And looked on no Íránian, on the eighth
The White Dív thundered at him: "O thou Sháh,
As fruitless as a willow! thou wouldst have
Complete supremacy and seize our pastures.
Like to a maddened elephant's appeared
Thy strength to thee, thou wouldst not yield to any!
Content not with the crown above thy throne
Thou hast perverted wisdom and hast wrought
Ill in Mázandarán, and slaughtered many
With massive mace. The news of mine achievements
Perchance ne'er reached thee, such a dullard thou
On thine imperial throne! Now thou hast gained
The fitting outcome of thy heart's desire."

Then of the valiant dívs that drew the sword
He chose twelve thousand, setting them to guard
The Íránians, and afflicted grievously
Those headstrong men. He gave them food enough
To keep them living on from day to day,
While all the treasures of the Sháh and host,
The jewelled diadems and turquoise thrones,
All that he saw, he gave o'er to Arzhang,
The general of Mázandarán, and said:—
"Convey these to the king and say to him:—
'Blame not thou Áhriman, for I have done
All that was needed, and have brought yon folk
To dust. The Sháh and paladins will never
Behold the bright sun or the moon again.
I have not threatened him with death, but taught him

The ups and downs of fortune. He will grow
Wise through his troubles, and hereafter none
Will listen to such schemes.'"

Thereat Arzhang
Went to the monarch of Mázandarán,
And took with him the treasure and the troops,
The captives and the steeds caparisoned.
This done the White Dív went back to his home
As glorious as the sun, while Kai Káús
Remained within Mázandarán to moan:—
"I was to blame for this and I alone."

[1] The door-keeper of Paradise.

The Message of Kai Káús to Zál and Rustam

Káús with stricken heart sent to Zábul
To Zál a warrior, like a bird that flew
As swift as smoke, to say: “What hap is mine!
My crown and throne have tumbled to the dust,
And heaven hath given to the dívs my treasures
And troops arrayed like roses in the spring;
The wind, thou wouldst say, rose and bore them off.
Mine eyes are blinded and my fortunes shent,
My crown and throne are both o’erturned, and I
Lie stricken in the hand of Áhriman,
Who rendeth me asunder, soul from body.
I often sigh to think on thine advice,
Which I rejected foolishly, thus causing
The present trouble. If thou dost not act
Both capital and interest will be lost.”

He went as ’twere a bird as swift as smoke
And told what he had seen and heard to Zál,
Whose skin burst at the tidings, but he kept
The news from friend and foe. His shrewd heart showed him
The ills that fate would bring upon Káús.
“The scimitar is all but out,” he said
To Rustam. “We must not thus feed at ease,
But make provision for the crown itself,
Because the Sháh is in the Dragon’s breath:
How great a bale is on the Íránians!
Thy part is now to saddle Rakhsh and seek
For vengeance with the world-allotting sword.
God surely made thee for a time like this,
And thou art fitted for such labours now,
While I, I have outlived two centuries!
Thou wilt gain high renown and save the Sháh.
Thou must not in this Áhriman’s own business
Take matters leisurely or stop to breathe,
But don the tiger-skin and purge thy head

Of sleep and thought. When one hath seen thy spear
Will any say: ‘His soul will rest?’ If thou
Shouldst fight the sea ’twould turn to blood, thy voice
Will level mountains. Thou must make Arzhang,
And the White Dív no less, despair of life.
As for the monarch of Mázandarán
Go smash him, neck and spine, with thy great mace.”

He answered thus: “The way is long, and I . . .
How shall I go to take revenge?”
Said Zál:—
“There are two routes both hard and dangerous;
One, which is long, was taken by Káús;
The other is a journey of two weeks,
The haunt of dív and lion, and all gloom;
Its murk will maze thine eyes. Choose thou the short,
And see its wonders; God will be thine aid.
What though the way be hard? An end will come,
The feet of glorious Rakhsh will traverse it,
And I will pray all night to see again
Thy limbs and iron mace; while if the Worldlord
Shall let the dívs’ grip close upon thy life,
Who can resist His word? ’Tis said and done.
None can abide here though he tarry long,
And one whose fame embraceth all the world
Is not cast down at going.”
Rustam answered:—
“I gird me to obey although the great
Of yore walked not to Hell advisedly,
And only one grown sick of life will counter
The rending lion. Think of me as girt
And gone. I ask no help but God’s, will give
Both soul and body for the Sháh, and break
The talismans that guard those sorcerers.
All that survive among the Íránians there
Will I bring back and gird their loins again;
I will not spare the White Dív nor Arzhang,
Nor Sanja nor Púlád son of Ghundí,

Nor Bíd. I swear by God, the only God,
Not to quit Rakhsh till I have bound. Arzhang
With yoke on neck and hands as firm as rocks,
Have trod the brains and headpiece of Púlád,
And shaken earth beneath the feet of Rakhsh."

He donned the tiger-skin and stretched himself,
While Zál called many blessings down on him,
Then mounted on his elephantine steed
With steadfast heart and mien. Rúdába came
With tearful cheeks while Zál too wept. She said:—
"So thou wilt go and leave me here to grieve!
How canst thou hope in God?"
He said: "Good mother!
I did not choose my course; 'tis destiny.
Do thou commit to God my soul and body."

The people came to him to say farewell;
Who knew if he should look on Rustam more?

Uncounted by the wise the moments fly,
And, when an evil day hath passed thee, try
To reckon that the world hath gained thereby.

The First Course: How Rakhsh fought with a Lion

Then Rustam, that world-brightening paladin,
Departed from his sire and, treating night
Like day, made two days' journey into one,
Not giving Rakhsh repose. Now as his body
Failed him through lack of food he reached a plain
Where onager abounded, and urged Rakhsh
To whom their speed was slow: no beast could 'scape
From Rustam's lasso and his horse's feet.
The Lion with his royal lasso caught
A gallant onager and, striking sparks
Upon an arrow's point, enkindled fire
With stubble, thorns, and wood to roast the beast.
He ate the flesh and threw away the bones;
The onager itself was pot and tray.
He spied some pasture, slipped off Rakhsh's bridle,
Turned him out loose upon the meadow-land,
And made himself a couch within a reed-bed;
He deemed it safe though it was fear's own door,
For in it was a lion's lair; no elephant
Dared pluck a reed. One watch passed, then the lion
Came boldly forth and was amazed to see
An elephantine form among the reeds,
Reposing with a charger standing by.
"First," said the lion, "I must maim the steed,
Then I can take the rider when I please."

He sprang at glossy Rakhsh, who raged like fire
And lashed out at the lion's head, then fixed
His sharp teeth in its back and dashed the beast
To pieces by a shift that made it shiftless.
When Rustam, deft of hand, awoke and saw
How earth was straitened to that ravening beast
He said: "O foolish Rakhsh! who bade thee fight
A lion? Hadst thou perished 'neath its claws
Could I have carried to Mázandarán

My helmet, tiger-skin, bow, lasso, sword,
And massive mace? Had my sweet sleep been broken
Thy combat with the lion had been brief."

He slept and rested long, and when the sun
Rose o'er the darksome hills awoke still drowsy;
He rubbed down Rakhsh and saddled him, then prayed
To God, the Author of all good, for aid.

The Second Course: How Rustam found a Spring

He had to face all dizzy as he was
A desert waterless, a heat intense
That dried the birds to powder; plain and waste
Were as they had been scorched thou wouldst have said.
Rakhsh was exhausted, while his rider's tongue
Failed through the heat and drought, and Rustam, clutching
A double-headed dart, went staggering
Like one bemused, and saw no means of safety.
He looked up saying: "O all-righteous Judge!
Thou bring'st all toil and hardship on my head,
And if Thou findest pleasure in my pains
My hoard is great indeed! I fare in hope
That God will grant deliverance to the Sháh,
And that the Ruler of the world will free
The Íránians from the clutches of the Dív,
Unscathed. They sinned, and Thou hast cast them out,
But still they are Thy slaves and worshippers."

This said, that elephantine form became
Weak and distraught with thirst, and fell, with tongue
All cracked and blistered, on the burning dust.
Anon a well-fed ram passed by. The hero
On seeing thought: "Where is its watering-place?
In sooth God's mercy is extended to me!"
Then in the Worldlord's strength rose to his feet
And followed up the ram, with scimitar
In one hand while the other grasped the reins,
Until he saw the spring, for thither went
That stately ram. Then Rustam looked toward heaven,
And said: "O Judge, that ever speakest sooth!
The ram hath left no tracks about the spring!
It is no desert-sheep of flesh and blood!"

When hardships press on thee, in thy concern
Flee unto God, the Just One; they who turn

Away from Him have wisdom still to learn.

He blessed that ram and said: “Ne’er may mishap
From circling heaven be thine; green be thy pastures;
May cheetah never mark thee for its prey;
Snapped be the bow and dark the soul of him
That shooteth at thee who hath rescued Rustam,
Else were he thinking of his shroud; but now
He is not in the mighty dragon’s maw
As yet, or in the clutches of the wolf,
So that the fragments of his clothes and limbs
Should serve as tokens to his enemies.”

His praises offered he unsaddled Rakhsh,
Washed him, and made him shining as the sun.
Then Rustam much refreshed filled up his quiver
And as he hunted dropped an onager
Huge as an elephant, removed the entrails,
The hide, and feet, lit up a blazing fire,
And having washed the carcase roasted it.
This done he feasted, breaking up the bones,
And having quenched his thirst prepared for sleep.
He said to Rakhsh: “Fight not and make no friends.
If any foe approacheth run to me,
But venture not to counter dívs and lions.”

He lay and slept, his lips in silence bound,
While Rakhsh till midnight grazed and strayed around.

The Third Course: How Rustam fought with a Dragon

A dragon, such an one as, thou hadst said,
No elephant could ’scape, came from the waste.
Its haunt was there; no dív dared pass thereby.
It came, beheld the atheling asleep,
A charger near him, and was wroth. It thought:—
“What do I see? Who dareth to sleep here?”
Because no lions, dívs, or elephants
Dared pass that way or, if they did, escaped not
The clutches of that dragon fierce and fell,
It turned on glossy Rakhsh, who ran to Rustam,
Stamped with his brazen hoofs upon the ground,
Whisked with his tail, and gave a thundering neigh.
The hero woke up furious, looked about
Upon the waste, perceived not that fell dragon,
And wreaked his wrath on Rakhsh for waking him.
He slept again, again the worm approached
Out of the gloom; Rakhsh ran to Rustam’s couch,
And kicked the earth about and trampled it.
The sleeper woke, his cheeks rose-red with passion,
Looked round and, seeing nothing but the gloom,
Said to affectionate and watchful Rakhsh:—
“Thou canst not blink the darkness of the night
Yet wakest me again impatiently!
If thou disturb me more I will behead thee
With my sharp scimitar, and carry it,
My helmet, and my massive mace, on foot.
I said: ‘Should any lion come at thee
I will encounter it.’ I never said:—
‘Rush on me in the night!’ Leave me to slumber.”

Then for the third time with his tiger-skin
Upon his breast he set himself to sleep.
The fearsome dragon roared and, thou hadst said,
Breathed fire. Rakhsh left the pasturage forthwith,
But dared not to approach the paladin.

Yet was his heart distracted by his fears
For Rustam with that dragon, till at length,
O'ermastered by affection for his lord,
He rushed swift as a blast to Rustam's side
And neighed and fretted, pawed upon the ground,
And stamped the earth to pieces with his hoofs.
Then Rustam, wakened from his sweet repose,
Raged at his docile steed; but now the Maker
Willed that the dragon should be seen, and Rustam,
Perceiving it amid the gloom, unsheathed
The keen sword at his girdle, thundered out
Like spring-clouds, and filled earth with battle-fire.
Then said he to the dragon: "Tell thy name;
Earth is no longer thine, yet must not I
Rob thy dark form of life, thy name untold."

The laidly dragon said: "None scapeth me.
For centuries this waste hath been my home,
And mine its firmament; no eagle dareth
To fly across or star to dream thereof."
It further said: "What is thy name, for she
Will have to weep that bare thee?"
"I am Rustam,"
He answered, "sprung from Zál—the son of Sám—
And Narímán withal. I am myself
A host, and trample earth 'neath dauntless Rakhsh.
Thou shalt behold my prowess; I will lay
Thy head in dust."
The dragon closed with him,
And in the end escaped not though it strove
So fiercely with the elephantine hero
That thou hadst said: "He will be worsted." Rakhsh,
On seeing the dragon's might, and how it battled
With Rustam, laid his ears back, joined the fray,
Bit at the dragon's shoulders, tore its hide
As though he were a lion, and amazed
The valiant paladin, who with keen glaive
Smote off the dragon's head; blood jetted out

In rivers, and its carcase hid the earth.
The matchless one, astonied at the sight,
Invoked God's name and bathed him in the spring.
Desiring conquest through God's strength alone
He said: "O righteous Judge! me Thou hast given
Grace, might, and wisdom; what care I for lion,
Dív, elephant, parched desert, and blue sea?
When I am wroth all foes are one to me."

The Fourth Course: How Rustam slew a Witch

Thanksgivings done, he harnessed rose-cheeked Rakhsh
And mounting came in time where sorcerers dwelt.
Long had he fared and saw, as Sol declined,
Trees, grass, and stream—the very spot for youth.
There was a spring as bright as pheasant's eyes;
Beside it were a golden bowl of wine,
A roasted mountain-sheep with bread thereon,
And salts and sweetmeats. Rustam thanked the Lord
For showing him a place so opportune,
Dismounted from his steed, took off the saddle,
And marvelled at the loaves and venison.
It was a sorcerers' meal, and when he came
His voice had caused those dívs to disappear.
He sat beside the rushy stream and brimmed
A jewelled cup with wine. A dainty lute
Was there, the desert seemed a banquet-hall!
He took the lute up, touched the chords, and sang:—

"Oh! Rustam is an outcast still
    And hath no days of pleasure,
Marked out for every kind of ill
    And not a moment's leisure.

"Be where he may it is his plight
    With battle still to harden,
And wilderness and mountain-height
    Must serve him for a garden.

"His combatings are never done
    And there is no assuagement,
'Tis dragon, dív, and desert—one
    Perpetual engagement!

"The wine and cup, the scented rose,
    And where lush herbage groweth—

Such things are not at his dispose,
    These fortune ne'er bestoweth

"On one that with the crocodile
    Is still engaged in fighting,
Save when the leopard for a while
    The combat is inviting."

The sound of music reached a witch's ears;
She made her cheeks like spring, although by rights
She was not fair, and then, perfumed and decked,
Approached, saluted, and sat down by Rustam,
Who gave God thanks at finding in the desert
Board, wine, and lute, and youthful boon-companion.
Not knowing that she was a wicked witch,
An Áhriman beneath her bravery,
He handed her a cup of wine, invoking
The Giver of all good. Now when he named
The Lord of love her favour changed; no soul
Had she for gratitude, no tongue for praise,
But blackened at God's name, while Rustam, flinging
His lasso quicker than the wind, ensnared,
And questioned her: "What art thou? Speak and show
Thy proper favour."
                In the lasso's coils
There was a fetid hag all guile and wrinkle,
Calamitous. He clave her with his blade
And made the hearts of sorcerers afraid.

The Fifth Course: How Rustam took Úlád captive

He journeyed on and reached a place of gloom
Black as a negro's face—a murky night
Without a star or moon; thou wouldst have said:—
"The sun is captive and the stars are lassoed!"
He gave the rein to Rakhsh and journeyed on,
Not seeing height or river for the murk.
When he emerged to light he saw a land,
Like painted silk with crops, where all was verdure
And streams; the old world had renewed its youth.
His clothes were drenched, and longing for repose
He took off his cuirass of tiger-skin,
And dripping helm, to dry them in the sun,
Unbridled Rakhsh, and loosed him in the corn,
Then, donning his dried helmet and his breastplate,
Couched like a mighty lion in the grass,
His shield his pillow and his hand on hilt.
The watchman of the plain, on seeing Rakhsh
Among the crops, ran up with hue and cry;
He smote the hero smartly with a stick
Upon the foot and said, as Rustam woke:—
"O Áhriman! why didst thou loose thy steed
Among the corn to eat where others toiled?"
But Rustam, angered, seized the watchman's ears,
Wrung them and tore them off without a word.
The watchman howled and snatched them up, aghast
At Rustam. Now Úlád was marchlord there—
A brave and famous youth. To him the watchman
Went howling with his hands and head all bloody,
And ears wrung off, and said: "There is a man,
Like the Black Dív, with leopard-skin cuirass
And iron casque, a perfect Áhriman,
Or else a dragon was asleep in mail!
I went to drive his charger from the corn,
He would not suffer it but, when he saw me,
Rose without word, wrung off mine ears, and slept!"

Úlád was hunting there with other nobles,
But when he heard the watchman and beheld
The Lion's track in his preserves, they rode
Toward where the peerless Rustam had been seen
To find out who he was, and why he served
The watchman of the plain so scurvily.
Úlád in threatening wise drew near to Rustam,
Who mounted Rakhsh, unsheathed his trenchant sword,
And then came onward like a thunder-cloud.
As they drew near they questioned one another.
"What is thy name?" Úlád cried. "Who art thou?
Who is thy king and who is backing thee?
Hence is no passage to the warrior-dívs.
Why didst thou tear away the watchman's ears
And turn thy charger loose among the corn?
Just so will I make black the world to thee
And lay thy helm in dust."
"My name is 'Cloud,'"[1]
Said Rustam, "if a cloud hath lion's claws,
With swords and maces only for its fruit,
And beareth on its lap the heads of chieftains.
My real name, should it reach thine ears, would freeze
Thy life's breath and heart's blood. Hast thou not heard
Of the elephantine warrior's bow and lasso
In every company? We call the mothers
Of sons like thee shroud-stitchers, wailing-women.
Thou comest thus against me with a troop,
But only throwest walnuts on a dome."

With that he drew his baleful Crocodile,
Hung his coiled lasso to the saddle-bow,
Came like a lion midst a flock, and slew
All that were in his reach. At every stroke
He sheared two chieftains' heads and strewed the dust
Beneath his feet therewith. The troops thus broken
Fled in dismay, and wilderness and dale
Were filled with dust-clouds by the cavaliers
As they dispersed among the rocks and hollows.

Then Rustam, like an elephant enraged,
With sixty coils of lasso on his arm,
Pressed forward and, when Rakhsh was near Úlád,
Whose day was darkened, flung his mighty lasso,
Ensnared that chieftain's head, and then alighting
Made fast his hands, drave him in front and, mounting,
Said: "If thou speak the truth, and if I find
No guile at all in thee from first to last,
If thou wilt show me where the White Dív dwelleth,
Where dwell Púlád son of Ghundí and Bíd,
And where Káús, who caused these ills, is bound;
If thou dost show this truly and art faithful,
Then from the monarch of Mázandarán
Will I take crown and throne and massive mace,
And thou shalt be the ruler of the land;
But if thy words prove guileful I will make
Thine eyes run blood."
Úlád said: "Be not wroth,
But gracious just for once and slay me not
In wantonness, and I will answer thee.
I will point out to thee the roads and city
Wherein Káús is bound, the White Dív's dwelling
And Bíd's, since thou hast reassured my heart.
Know, O thou worshipful dív-hearted hero!
That God hath fashioned thee of noble clay!
There are between us now and Kai Káús
A hundred leagues, O thou of gracious feet!
Whence to the White Dív is another hundred.
The road is bad and dangerous, through a gorge—
A fearful spot o'er which no eagle flieth.
There is a cavern midst two hundred others,
A wondrous place beyond all measurement,
And there twelve thousand warriors, all dívs,
Keep watch by night upon the mountain-top;
Their captain is Púlád son of Ghundí,
While Bíd and Sanja are their outpost-guards.
Of all the dívs the White Dív is the chief;
At him the mountains shake like willow-leaves,

And thou wilt find his person mountain-tall,
With shoulders, breast, and neck ten cords across.
E'en with such arms and hands and reins as thine,
And though thou brandishest sword, mace, and spear,
And hast such stature, mien, and energy,
It is not well for thee to fight that dív.
Beyond are rocks that no gazelle could pass,
And then a river two leagues wide and more
Watched by the dív in charge of all that province
With all the other dívs at his command.
Call it three hundred leagues to the Narmpái[2]
From the Buzgúsh,[3] whence to Mázandarán
The journey is a foul and tedious one.
A myriad of cavaliers at least
Are posted through the realm, so armed and paid
That thou wilt not see one dissatisfied.
There are twelve hundred elephants of war;
The city cannot hold them. Thou'rt but one,
Though iron, and but gratest on the file
Of Áhriman."
The words made Rustam laugh.
"If thou wilt be my comrade," he replied,
"Thou shalt see how one elephantine chief
Will treat yon famous band by help of God,
The Prosperer, and fortune, arms, and prowess.
When they behold my might of breast and neck,
And mace-blows in the fight, their feet and hides
Will burst in sheer dismay, they will not know
A stirrup from a rein; so point me out
Káús, where'er he be, and step along."

This said, he sprang on Rakhsh, while swift as wind
Úlád ran on beside him, day or night
Not resting till he reached Mount Ispurúz,
Where dívs and warlocks had o'erthrown Káús.
At midnight shoutings went up from the plain,
The folk lit watch-fires in Mázandarán
And torches everywhere. Then matchless Rustam

Asked of Úlád: “What is the cause that fires
Are springing up to right and left of us?”

“It is the entrance to Mázandarán,”
Úlád replied. “The more part of each night
None dareth sleep; the dív Arzhang is there
And he is ever noisy.”
Rustam slept
Till dawn, then took Úlád, bound him in anguish
Against a tree, and, hanging on the saddle
The mace his grandsire had been wont to use,
Departed confident and full of ruse.

[1] Cf. p. 13.

[2] The name of a tribe, “the Bandy-legged”; ἰμαντόποδες, loripedes. Cf. p. 63.

[3] The name of a tribe, “the Goat-ears.”

The Sixth Course: How Rustam fought with the Dív Arzhang

In royal helm and sweat-soaked tiger-skin
He sought, intent on fight, the chief Arzhang,
And shouted in the middle of the host;
Thou wouldst have said: “The hills and seas are rent!”
The dív Arzhang came leaping from the camp
At that tremendous shout, while Rustam spurring
Came on him like Ázargashasp, grasped boldly
His head and ears and neck, then lion-like
Tore off his head and flung it at his troops.
The dívs’ hearts burst in terror at the sight
Of Rustam’s iron mace, and son and sire,
Forgetting land and crops, went off pell mell,
While Rustam drew his vengeful scimitar
And cleared the neighbourhood. At set of sun
He made all speed back to Mount Ispurúz,
Untied Úlád, and, as they sat beneath
The lofty tree, asked how to reach the city
Where Sháh Káús was, and then hurried on
Led by Úlád afoot. When he arrived
Rakhsh gave a thundering neigh, which Kai Káús,
Who heard it, understood and told the Íránians:—
“Our evil days are all but over now;
I heard the neigh of Rakhsh; it made my heart
And spirit young. Thus neighed he in the wars
Of Kai Kubád against the Turkman king.”

The soldiers said: “His mind hath gone through hardship,
And he hath lost his wisdom, sense, and Grace!
Thou wouldest say: ‘He talketh in his sleep.’
But in these grievous bonds we can do naught;
In good sooth fortune hath abandoned us.”

Anon that ardent lover of the fray,
The elephantine chief, approached Káús,
And all the noble paladins—Gúdarz,

Tús, gallant Gív, Bahrám the Lion, Shídúsh,
And Gustaham—nocked round while Rustam wept
Right sorely, did obeisance to the Sháh,
And asked about his longsome toils. Káús,
Embracing him, inquired concerning Zál,
And all his travail, then said privily:—
"Let not these sorcerers get sight of Rakhsh,
For when the White Dív is apprised: 'Arzhang
Is dead and Rustam is with Kai Káús!'
The valiant dívs will gather, earth will teem
With them, and then thy toils will bear no fruit.
Seek the White Dív's abode, exert thyself
With sword and arrow; holy God may aid thee
In bringing to the dust these sorcerers' heads.
O'er seven mountains must thou pass, and troops
Of dívs throng everywhere. At length a cavern
Of frightful aspect will appear before thee,
A fearsome place, as I have heard: the approach
Is held by warrior-dívs equipped like pards
For fight. That cavern is the White Dív's home:
He is the hope and terror of his troops.
May'st thou have strength to put an end to him
Because he is that army's chief and stay.
My soldiers' eyes are blinded by their griefs;
I am in darkness too. Our leeches trust
To blood extracted from the White Dív's vitals,
In which regard a wise physician said:—
'Let three drops of his blood descend like tears
Upon the eyes and it will banish blindness.'"

He made him ready, and in setting forth
Spake thus to the Íránians: "Be alert,
For 'tis the White Dív that I go against—
That Elephant of war, full of resource,
And compassed by a host of warriors.
If he shall catch my body with his noose
A shameful sorry plight will long be yours,
But if the Lord and my good star shall aid me

Our country and our throne will we restore,
And this our royal Tree shall fruit once more.”

The Seventh Course: How Rustam slew the White Dív

He went girt up—all battle and revenge;
He took Úlád and made Rakhsh go like wind.
As soon as Rakhsh had reached the seven mountains,
With all their troops of valiant dívs, the chieftain
Drew near the abysmal cave, saw them on guard,
And spake thus to Úlád: “Thou hast been faithful,
So now that we must act point out the way.”

Úlád made answer: “When the sun is hot
The dívs will sleep and thou wilt overcome them;
So bide thy time and thou wilt see no dívs,
Except some few on duty, and may’st triumph
If He that giveth victory shall aid thee.”

So Rustam paused till noon, then, having bound
Úlád fast with the lasso, mounted Rakhsh,
Unsheathed his warlike Crocodile, and shouted
His name like thunder, came like flying dust
Among the troops, and parted heads from trunks.
None sought for glory by withstanding him.
Thence radiant as the sun he went to seek
The White Dív, found a pit like Hell, but saw not
The sorcerer for the murk. There sword in hand
He paused; no room was there for fight or flight.
He rubbed his eyelids, bathed his eyes, and searched
The cave till in the gloom he saw a Mountain
That blotted all within, with sable face
And hair like lion’s mane—a world to see!
Now Rustam hasted not to slay the dív
Asleep, but roused him with a leopard’s roar.
He charged at Rustam, like a gloomy mountain
With iron helm and brassards, seized a millstone
And drave at him like smoke. The hero quailed,
And thought: “Mine end is come!” Yet like a lion
Enraged he struck full at the dív and lopped

From that enormous bulk a hand and foot,
So mighty was he with his trenchant sword!
As 'twere some lofty-crested elephant
And lion in its wrath the maimed dív closed
With Rustam, and one-footed wrecked the cave.
They wrestled, tearing out each other's flesh,
Till all the ground was puddled with their blood,
And Rustam thought: "If I survive this day
I ne'er shall die."
The White Dív also thought:—
"Life hath no hopes for me, for, should I scape
This Dragon's claws, maimed as I am and torn,
None great or small within Mázandarán
Will look at me."
Such was his wretched comfort!
But still they wrestled, streaming blood and sweat,
While elephantine Rustam in God's strength
Strove mightily in anguish and revenge,
Till sore bestead, bold Lion that he was,
He reached out, clutched the dív, raised him neck-high,
And dashed the life-breath from him on the ground,
Then with a dagger stabbed him to the heart
And plucked the liver from his swarthy form:
The carcase filled the cave, and all the world
Was like a sea of blood. Then Rustam freed
Úlád, put back the lasso in the straps,
And, giving him the liver of the dív
To carry, went back to Sháh Kai Káús.

"O Lion!" said Úlád, "thou hast subdued
The world beneath thy sword, and I myself
On my bruised body bears thy lasso's marks,
So now I hope that thou wilt keep thy promise,
For lion-fierceness and a royal mien
Sort not with broken faith."
"I give thee all
Mázandarán," he answered. "I have yet
Long toils before me, many ups and downs,

For I must hale its monarch from his throne
And fling him in a ditch, behead a myriad
Of sorcerer-dívs with my relentless sword,
And then, it may be, tread the ground again,[1]
But if not I will still keep faith with thee."

He reached Káús while all in gladness cried:—
"The chief of ardent spirit hath returned!"
And ran to him with thanks and praise past count.
He said: "O Sháh, thou seeker after knowledge!
Rejoice, thy foe is slain. I have ripped out
The White Dív's liver, and his king hath naught
To hope from him. What would my lord the Sháh?"

Káús blessed Rustam. "Ne'er may crown and host
Lack thee," he said. "The mother of such offspring
Must not be mentioned but in terms of praise.
Now may a thousand blessings be on Zál,
And on the country of Zábulistán,
Because they have produced so brave a chief.
In sooth the age hath not beheld thy like,
But brighter still is my lot since I have
For liege this lion-slaying Elephant."

When he had made an end of praise he said:—
"O warrior of blessed steps! now put
The White Dív's blood upon mine eyes and those
Of all my folk; God willing, we may see
Thy face again."
They anointed his dim eyes,
Which grew as bright as Sol, and forthwith Rustam
Anointed all the others with the blood.
Their eyes grew bright, and all the world to them
A rosary. They hung the crown and set
Káús beneath it on an ivory throne
As monarch of Mázandarán, with Rustam,
Tús, Faríburz, Gúdarz, Rúhhám, and Gív,
Gurgín, and brave Bahrám. One week he revelled,
The eighth day mounted with his chiefs and troops,

Who spread themselves like fire among dry reeds
Throughout the land and plied the massive mace
According to the bidding of the Sháh.
They scorched the realm with their keen scimitars,
And of the warlocks slew so many that blood
Flowed in a river. When night fell the warriors
All rested and Káús proclaimed: "The wrong
Hath been avenged, the dívs have their deserts,
'Tis time to cease from slaughter. Now we need
A man of weight and sense, with sense to wait
Yet prompt, to work upon and overawe
The monarch of Mázandarán."
The son
Of Zál and all the other chiefs agreed
On this that such a letter should be sent
To give his darkened mind enlightenment.

[1] In war-time he would ride, and he had sworn to ride till he had triumphed. Cf. p. 44.