

TARZAN ON MARS
by
John Bloodstone
(Stuart J. Byrne)

COLLECTOR'S EDITION
1954

Being an unauthorized novel by S. J. Byrne continuing the adventures of the famous characters created by Edgar Rice Burroughs. This is a non-profit edition created for the sole purpose of nostalgic reading enjoyment.

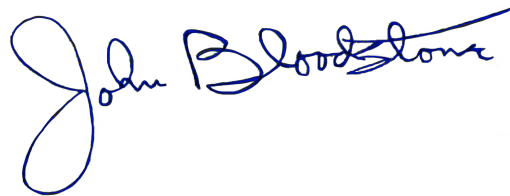
A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Bloodstone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

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Chapter I - DESTINY FOR TWO

La, High Priestess of the Flaming God, looked disconsolately at her own reflection in a full-length mirror of polished silver which had been set in the ancient wall of her living quarters by remotely remembered ancestors. She saw a tall, white-skinned woman, nearly naked but for a jeweled girdle wrought mostly of masterfully strung pearls of another age, and breastplates of golden wires spun into finer filagree than ever had been seen even in the old world jewel markets of the Middle East. In her copious raven black hair rested a jewel-set circlet of gold and platinum. In all, she wore a fortune in precious elements and gems which seemed only appropriate to grace the exquisite perfection of her natural feminine endowments.

But La, who had not in her long recollection ever contacted the civilization of men, only sensed but dimly the tremendous value of her accoutrements. Save for the few lesser priestesses of Opar who yet assisted her in the rituals of the crumbling Temple of the Flaming God, she had no basis for comparing her great beauty of face and form with the standards of that outer world which lay somewhere beyond the age-old granite ramparts of this hidden valley in East Central Africa. Only instinctively did she guess that she was well formed, as it seemed to her primitive logic that, as it was true in all the other manifestations of Nature, so it must be with the human body-that symmetry of feature and form were the mark of perfection.

"I am beautiful!" she exclaimed. "So why should he not love me? Why does he never return from his accursed forests to claim me-before it will be too late? Is he such a blind and ungrateful fool that he will forever spurn the love of La?-Who spared him from the sacred knife of the sacrifice?"

Before her mind's eye there formed the vision of a tall, handsome giant of a man, bronzed from a lifetime of exposure to the equatorial sun, an incomparable lord of the jungles whose mighty muscles had gained him supremacy over the great apes and even Numa, the erstwhile King of Beasts. She saw herself borne in his irresistible arms into the sanctuary of the trees on that long-gone day when he had rescued her from Tantor the bull elephant. She not only remembered but had

relived that precious night a thousand times when she had implored him to save them both by giving her his love. Bound hand and foot beside her within the privacy of the thorn boma which her priests had constructed, he had lain there in stoic, maddening indifference both to the imminence of death by sacrifice to the Flaming God and to her tearful importunities and the avowals of her pent-up desperate love for him.

Unashamed, she had caressed him and loved him through that cruelly fleeting night, seeking to capture one moment of response from him that might save him from the sacrifice which it devolved upon her to make when the sun arose. For should he have chosen to join the dwindling community of Opar and become a priest, it would have lain within her vested authority as High Priestess to select him for her mate. And in Opar it was law that she should have chosen a mate long ere this! But in comparison to the gnarled and stunted half-human atavisms that were the native priests of Opar, Tarzan of the Apes emerged as a shining god.

She saw him through the veil of memory, standing there in the forest after he had overcome her priests in furious combat, a towering wild thing of breath-taking masculine perfection and terrifying strength, as his gray eyes blazed in anger, and clearly she would always hear his parting words to Cadj, the high priest.

"La goes back to her temple under the protection of her priests and the threat of Tarzan that whoever harms her shall die. Protect her so that when Tarzan comes again he will find La there to greet him."

"La will be there to greet thee!" she had exclaimed. "And La will wait, longing, always longing, until you come again. Oh, tell me that you will come!" "Who knows?" he had answered even as he swung effortlessly into the lower terraces of the jungle and disappeared from her sight.

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the appearance of one of her few remaining assistant priestesses. This one had been once fair to look upon, but the passage of years in the time-stranded ruins of Opar had wrought two fatal changes in the woman. She now displayed the marks of age which slashed at the once firm contours of

her face with wrinkles and withdrew the bloom of youth from her flesh. But the environment of Opar had also added to this a dereliction of the human attributes, reducing her to an unkempt, primordial female with the wary, shifty eyes of the wild and untamed. In fact, she had abandoned the ancient tongue of her ancestors in favor of the guttural speech of the apes which had infested Opar for ages.

"Cadj awaits you with the other priests in the council chamber," she announced. "He says he has something of great importance to tell you."

The knowing look in the savage eyes of the lesser priestess apprised La only too readily of the nature of the impending conference. Her time had come. The priests would not wait any longer for her to choose a mate among them. Especially Cadj, son of Cadj, the new high priest, who had inherited his father's jealousy of Tarzan. In view of his superior station above the others he felt that he had a particular priority in this matter, and of late his beetling eyes had gazed upon her with ill-concealed possessive lust.

It nauseated her to think of his gnarled and stunted body, the low, slanting brow and the graying shaggy hair of his body and his matted, lice-infested beard that reached to his sagging belly. Nor were any of the others more prepossessing, with the possible exception of A-tun, who at least was cleaner than the others and slightly more intelligent.

"Tell Cadj," she said, "that La would prepare herself for the occasion. I shall be there presently." It was a well-calculated reply which, coupled with a sad expression of resignation, seemed to carry with it the connotation of acceptance. It was by this ruse that she hoped to obtain time to think of some alternative to this long-impending fate.

Excited by the prospect of change in the changeless monotony of the miserably limited society of Opar, the lesser priestess withdrew at once from La's quarters and hastened away to advise the others. When she had gone, La no longer looked at her reflection in the silvery mirror. Instead, she walked out onto her vine-grown balcony which overlooked the barren valley and gave her a view of the distant

cliffs which barred her from the mysterious outer world she had never really known. From that direction had come Tarzan on various occasions which had been separated by many long years. Yet on each visit he had appeared to be as invulnerable to the arrows of time and the talons of death as was she, herself. Could it be that both of them shared the guarded secret of immortality in common? And if this were so, then did not Fate itself decree that they were meant for each other?

La bit her lip to fight back the tears which were generated by conflicting emotions, tears of unrequited love, yet tears of jealous rage and deeply hurt pride-as she realized that she had been deliberately deceiving herself with the false hope that Tarzan was destined to come back to her. For did she not remember Tarzan's mate, the same woman whom he had rescued from the altar of the Flaming God, even from under the point of La's descending knife?

"Who is she?" La had asked him.

And Tarzan had wounded her with the simple statement, "She is mine."

The words had struck her down as effectively as if he had hit her with the blood-stained bludgeon in his mighty hand. The distant cliffs that cut off her view of the savage African jungle seemed to give her the answer to her plight. As barren of hope as they were of vegetation, those boulder-strewn slopes and ledges seemed to say, "Thy dream is done. Go, thou, and face the fate to which thou wert born."

For the first time since she had laid eyes on Tarzan, La was freed from the debilitating defense mechanism which had caused her to depend upon the fulfillment of wishful thinking rather than upon herself for salvation. Now that circumstances had at last forced her to face the reality of her situation alone and unaided, she groped subconsciously within the depths of her mind and spirit in an attempt to take inventory of whatever faculties or powers she might possess with which to meet the impossible alternative which Cadj was waiting to inflict upon her.

La, to her own self, was a mystery, a mystery compounded of certain dreaded secrets which were known to her alone, and by other

secrets which she had not had the courage to penetrate, so stupendous and incomprehensible was the nature of them. But one sustaining certainty emerged before all other considerations. She was different from the others of Opar, both from the degenerated priestesses and from the weird, half-human male inhabitants who were the progeny of a twisted ethnic evolution. In her was a subconscious awareness of exalted origin, though veiled by years too numerous to recall, as though her soul, rather than her mind, had become afflicted with amnesia. And more important and tantalizing still, she had long been aware of a certain distant call to tremendous destiny, as though it were muffled by intervening years yet to come.

If this were so, she asked herself, then why should it be possible for Cadj or any of the other priests to succeed in defiling her? On the other hand, was this sense of greatness but another hallucination to spare her mind and heart the cold shock of facing a fruitless reality?

But no!

She straightened her lithe, graceful body and lifted her perfectly molded chin disdainfully, her blue eyes flashing in regal anger. She was different. She was a chosen child of destiny. And she was not for the likes of Cadj!

Neither would she run away from Opar and risk the ignominy of being overtaken by them and dragged back to the obnoxious fate which they sought to impose upon her, nor would she accede to their demands this day.

"La will take her own mate!" she exclaimed aloud, stamping her sandaled foot. "And on the day when La chooses, not they!"

"La is wrong. She will take her mate today, and it is too late for her to choose. I, Cadj, have spoken!"

She whirled about, startled by the guttural voice, her full lips parting in a muffled shriek as she saw the high priest standing in the doorway of her private quarters. Beyond him she could see the other priests. She also saw the angry scowls on their faces and heard them grumbling and threatening. In Cadj's wide, gnarled fist was a short golden bludgeon which glistened with fresh-spilled blood. As he stood there, several deep-red drops fell to the floor suggestively.

"A-tun said you were his," growled Cadj, brandishing his weapon and baring yellowed fangs. "Now A-tun is dead, because you belong to Cadj!" His small eyes were bloodshot, his heavy brows lowering ominously.

Already the restraining wall of age-old religious code had broken under the violent pressure of primitive emotions. La's trained eye and senses forewarned her of what was impending. They had started to fight among themselves over her, but in a few moments every last vestige of human refinement in their reasoning would be blotted out by murderous, bestial rage. And at least one of them--perhaps Cadj--would run amok, killing blindly and indiscriminately. If she could but deflect the direction of this menacing tide back among the others, she might--

At that moment, three of the other priests roared out their defiance to Cadj and charged him, but in the same instant he whirled with lightning swiftness and slammed the heavy door of iron wood and plated gold in their faces, throwing the great bar in place.

While the muffled shrieks of frustration and rage sounded beyond that barrier, Cadj now turned slowly to face La. Far from being subtle, which was beyond the scope of his mentality, he was now gloatingly obvious concerning his intentions, but sadistically he was making it clear to her that he had plenty of time to accomplish the inevitable without interruption.

"Now," he growled, the while he trembled and slavered in anticipation, "you are Cadj's she!"

As he waddled toward her on his short, hairy legs, his long arms reaching out to grasp her, La knew that his mind was fully blocked to any appeal to reason. This was a horribly clear and simple circumstance which called for self-defense. She wore between her breasts the slim golden knife of the sacrifice, but that she might have a chance to use it effectively on this evilly aroused brute was doubtful. Though Cadj was stunted in stature, he was half as strong as the great apes and weighed fully two hundred pounds.

La backed away from him, and instantly his eyes widened in lustful triumph. Her demonstration of fear made her the more enticing. He leaped at her...

Tarzan of the Apes rode his horse disconsolately after the other members of the hunting party. Ahead of him were his wife, Jane, and two important guests who were attached to the British Consulate staff in Nairobi. They were laughing and chatting together just as though the official summons the men had brought to him had been an innocent invitation to attend a Sunday church picnic.

But perhaps he could not blame them for failing to sense that which only he could feel. At least his Waziri warriors who were guiding the party ahead must have known what was burning in the depths of his heart and spirit, for their quiet mood seemed but to reflect his own. Like the primordial dumb beasts of the jungle, Tarzan chose to lick his secret wounds alone and in silence, and particularly was he resolved not to inflict his private unhappiness upon his wife, whose long unexpressed life's dream was about to be fulfilled.

They were to leave Africa, possibly forever. War clouds had long been gathering in Europe, and at last Mussolini's ruthless invasion of Ethiopia had marked the beginning of the inevitable. As John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, Tarzan now had responsibilities in London. He had been requested to organize a certain secret advisory committee, for, as the diplomatic message advised him, there was "no citizen of the entire British Empire who might be considered a more qualified authority on Central Africa" than himself. He was urgently needed, and he would go, because duty demanded it.

To Jane the summons had come in the guise of a long-awaited opportunity. At last Tarzan would join her again in the civilized world that had been a normal part of her life before she had met him. Nor would there be much purpose, he told himself, in trying to return to Africa after the war, for already the dark continent had changed for him, considering the steady advances of modernism and the growth of organized social ideologies which left few corners of the jungle in the olden spell of timeless peace and pristine beauty to which he had been accustomed during the more vigorous years of his life.

Tarzan did not consider himself to be old. On the contrary--thanks to a lifelong exposure to that same natural environment which guarded all other creatures of the wild from the effects of disease and senility--he was an astonishing example of perpetuated virility and strength. But at last he had been forced to face the fact that the old days were over with and gone. There were no more frontiers of adventure and mystery, only the political concept of the world remaining, and he felt that the age of individual contribution to the welfare of his particular area of Africa had been replaced by a rather inevitable historical transition to group effort. Much as he was saddened to close the book on all those blissful and exciting chapters of the "good old days," he realized that the die was cast. Adventure was done. He would retire to the carpeted salons of civilized society and begin to atrophy in the smog-laden atmosphere of the metropolis.

The hunting party was passing leisurely along an open trail on the edge of the jungle. The unforested side of their path slanted upward several hundred yards and ended abruptly. Tarzan knew that this was the low Muwansa Ridge marking the northern boundary of the Waziri country. Beyond lay some of the lesser known territory of the African interior in which many a strange adventure had befallen him as well as Jane.

Just as memory was beginning to draw his thoughts far away into that mysterious land and into another almost forgotten day, he was startled to see little Manu, the monkey, come scuttling and screaming toward him over the top of the ridge. Attracted by the little creature's loud, excited chattering and chirping, the rest of the party stopped and turned to look.

"Oh, John!" exclaimed Jane Clayton, with a delighted smile of recognition on her patrician face. "Isn't that little Nkima? The poor little thing wandered off somewhere and was lost," she explained to her guests. "We haven't seen him in months!"

The two rather pasty faced gentlemen from the British Consulate laughed at the antics of the monkey as it sprang unhesitatingly to Tarzan's knee and screamed at him hysterically.

"My word!" exclaimed one of them, laughing. "Here is an opportunity to see whether it is fact or fiction that Lord Greystoke can actually converse with the children of Nature! What is the little beast saying to you, Greystoke?"

Only Jane and several of the Waziri interpreted the quick passing shadow of concern which crossed over Tarzan's face before he looked up at them and smiled.

"Only what your dog might tell you," he answered. "When a dog barks or growls he is telling you what a mighty fighter he is. Or when he licks your hand or wags his tail he is saying simply that he loves you. Little Nkima here is telling me that same old story which is ever new in the jungle--that he's a mighty hunter and a mighty fighter, but that he is at the same time tremendously glad he has found me--and he wants to know if I have anything to eat."

The two government employees laughed understandingly and turned to continue on their way, but Jane paused, her delicate brows contracting slightly as she saw Tarzan's smile fade suddenly and his gray eyes turn toward the ridge. When he guided his mount in that direction, she followed him.

"Do you see what I see?" he asked her as she drew alongside him.

He pointed out across the rolling plains that stretched away before them, and Jane strained her eyes to discover the cause of Nkima's excitement.

Above the distance-purpled horizon rose mighty mountain peaks. Then came the broad green mat of the jungle, followed by the semi-forested plain in the foreground, broken here and there by the meandering silvery band of an unnamed river. At first she could discern nothing that might be regarded as unusual, but suddenly she stifled a gasp of astonishment. And then she gripped her husband's mighty arm in fear--a fear which memory brought to her out of the distant past.

"Oh no, John!" she exclaimed.

"Nkima says that I am the objective. You'd better get our guests back to the bungalow for dinner. Tell them I have gone to track down some hartebeests for them and that if my hunch is right I'll take them out to get some of them tomorrow."

"But John--"Jane started to protest.

"There is no danger," said the apeman, patting her arm where it rested on his. "But I am going to have to strip down and revert to the primordial, dear. Our guests are not accustomed to hearing an English lord converse in the language of the first men." As she hesitated to leave him, he added, "You can tell Muviro about it, if it will ease your mind. Half of his Waziri can remain here to watch how I get along."

"All right, John," she answered. "But promise me you will take no chances."

"I promise. But go now. I must hurry."

As she left him, Tarzan looked down at little Nkima and smiled. "In this last hour," he said to the monkey in English, "you bring Tarzan yet another call to adventure."

Yes, it was adventure that called Tarzan of the Apes down there beyond the ridge, but at a price which he would never have been prepared to pay. Nor could he know that little Nkima, by finding him, had affected the destiny of an entire world...

Chapter II - EVIL FROM ANTIQUITY

When Cadj leaped forward to grasp La in his eagerly trembling hands, she side-stepped his clumsy Charge and stuck out her foot. As he tripped and fell flat on his bearded face, she darted toward her silver mirror. Pressing her shapely knees against it, she pushed it inward on its ancient stone pivots. The ponderous panel turned slowly over, again filling the secret exit-way which it had concealed, leaving a cobweb covered rough stone surface where before there had been a smoothly polished sheet of silver. And as it had opened, La had ducked through into a dark passageway beyond, but not before Cadj had observed her. Now completely berserk, he dropped his golden bludgeon and got to his feet with a murderous roar. He dashed to the panel and opened it, following La headlong into the mysterious passage she had entered. Reduced to the mental level of a bull ape, he relied now only on the mighty strength of his hands and the

sharpness of his fighting fangs to satisfy the pangs of an overwhelming thirst which had degenerated from that of the flesh to that of blood.

Grunting and thumping his hairy chest and foaming at the mouth, Cadj followed the High Priestess of the Flaming God—followed her like the beast he had become, sniffing impatiently with his nose to trace her delicate scent spoor, down age-worn stone steps and under the half-corroded and tumbled foundations of ancient Opar.

La, in the meantime, knew where she was going whereas Cadj did not. Or at least she believed she could remember her way in these long unused labyrinths and Chambers of the dead. Here was a territory which no Oparian priest would enter in his right mind, for superstition told him that the spirits of the dead waited in these dreaded catacombs to sacrifice the living on their own altar. Years before, Tarzan had made good his escape by this same route, and La believed that somewhere he had found a rear entrance to the treasure vaults, which gave access, she knew, to the valley beyond the city. Now it appeared that her only hope of eluding her insane pursuer was to find that same exit, and she prayed to her unknown ancestors that she might be guided in the footsteps of her long lost love.

Several times as she paused to reconnoiter, her fear sensitized ears caught the distant sounds of Cadj's approach as he growled and pounded his chest and bounded gorilla-like along her trail on all fours. And that distant thumping that was the prelude to certain death, should she be overtaken, was augmented by the audible thumping of her heart.

Half out of her mind, herself, La ran onward, and now in her distraught mental condition she became shorn of rational judgment in relation to which passageways she should choose. First into one and then into the other she ran, sometimes discovering only a blank wall, an empty room, or an impassable pit, from which she would have to retreat, only to hasten onward, frantically groping through that dim lost world of the dead for any chance avenue of escape. The more she feared being apprehended the stronger her scent spoor became, thus making it easier for her relentless, drooling nemesis to follow.

Finally, when ready to scream aloud in her terrible desperation, she came to a dead stop in mid-flight. She held her temples tightly and sought to still the chaotic hammering of her pulse. She tried to hold her breath so that she could listen.

Something had changed. She could no longer hear the sounds of pursuit. There was no distant shuffling of feet or scraping of calloused knuckles along the dust-covered passages, no bestial panting or thumping of hair-matted chest. Only a terrible silence. Yet she knew Cadj couldn't have lost her spoor.

Mighty Ancestor of the Flaming God!-he was stalking her in cold deliberation! Better it would have been by far to meet him in all his frenzied insanity than now, as a craftily calculating tracker, bent on rape and murder.

To add hysteria to terror, La also realized that she had become hopelessly lost.

She found herself in a vaulted Chamber which appeared to have no opening save that through which she had entered. Far above her was a circle of daylight, and from this came just sufficient illumination for her to make out some of the details of her surroundings. At last she discerned a raised dais at one side of the room, on which there was an altar.

La's eyes widened in sudden recognition. This was the dreaded Chamber of the Dead, where the spirits were supposed to sacrifice the living. This was a room into which no inhabitant of Opar could have been forced by all the threats and menaces of the outer world. Yet here she stood, fearing Cadj far more than the souls of the departed. As High Priestess, her intimacy with the dogmas of her religion had long ago dispelled the shadows of superstition from such tales as that which concerned this long-forgotten Chamber. Her only interest in it now was in discovering some other means of exit.

As her frantic eyes searched about, they came suddenly to rest on a shallow pool of water on the floor. Such a thing was not at all unusual, considering the frequency of tropical rains in this season of the year, but there was something about that particular patch of water which attracted her attention. As she examined it more closely,

she saw that the water came from under the wall from the other side of the wall!

Quickly and with throbbing heart, La felt of the wall, to discover that the bricks of which it was composed were quite loose and had evidently been placed there without mortar. They but concealed another passageway. Merciful ancestors! She had found the secret of Tarzan's escape.

However, she had not yet removed the first stone before she was petrified by a maniacal scream of triumph behind her. With a superhuman effort of the will, she broke the spell of paralysis and whirled about-to see the foam-flecked face of Cadj before her, his great fangs distended to tear at her unprotected throat.

Instinctively, she grasped her sacrificial knife and raised it, only to have it torn from her trembling fingers by her attacker. He grasped her with a terrible strength born of madness and whirled her about. As he bent her backward and raised the knife to cut her down, La slumped into merciful unconsciousness.

* * *

Filing slowly and laboriously across a hog-back in the midst of a patch of forest, approximately a half mile distant, a long thin line of grotesque, stunted wild men could be seen from Tarzan's point of vantage on the Muwanza Ridge. Little idiosyncrasies marked them so unmistakably for what they were that even Jan Clayton had recognized them at once. Their white, troglodyte skins and their shaggy beards, their ape-like, waddling walk and the gnarled bludgeons over their Shoulders, all these signs advertised the fact that they were the priests of Opar.

Nkima always exaggerated precisely in proportion to the maximum capacity of his mercurial imagination, so according to him this was a strange tribe terrible Tarmangani whose number exceeded the leaves of the forest and from whom Numa the lion and Buto the rhinoceros and Tantor the elephant were already hiding for fear of instant annihilation at their hands. But Nkima, Mighty Hunter, Mighty Fighter, had gone to investigate these intruders upon Tarzan's

domain. He had found that they spoke with one another in the language of the Mangani, and so Nkima had been able to learn that these horrible creatures were seeking none other than the Lord of the Jungle, himself.

Tarzan, stripped now to his loin cloth, hastened to intercept them before they should come too far into areas where other men might see them. For very personal reasons of his own he had always attempted to keep the existence of Opar a secret. It was highly possible that if word concerning the existence of such a primordial species of white man in the unexplored interior of Africa should come to the attention of either scientific investigators or Sensation minded motion picture producers an expedition might be organized, with the end result that ancient Opar would be discovered by modern civilization. Immediately its fabulous wealth would be appropriated by individuals or by one or several governments, possible at the cost of bloodshed or even diplomatic reprisals.

Twice before had Tarzan made constructive use of a small portion of the treasures of Opar. The knowledge of the existence of the tremendous balance of gold and jewels which yet lay there in those subterranean vaults had long been regarded by the apeman as one of those acquisitions which become personal property by right of discovery. He had been saving that great source of wealth for some unforeseen emergency in his life. As a civilized man he felt he had a legal right to the wealth of Opar, but as the Lord of the Jungle, he relied upon a much more fundamental law, the applied effects of which its violators would certainly feel should Tarzan apprehend them.

His reason for reverting to loin cloth and the silent weapons of the primitive was also well considered. In the first place, these primordial creatures of Opar shared with their cousins, the apes, very short memories for detail. Although they might recall his name and some of the circumstances of their past experiences with him it was almost certain that they would not recognize him in riding breeches and khaki shirt. Moreover, he could not be certain whether they came in peace or with predatory intent, for on the two previous occasions of their emergence from the hidden Valley of Opar their purpose had been far less than one dedicated to the promotion of

friendship. Therefore, before revealing himself openly to them he chose to stalk them and investigate their disposition, which could best be accomplished as Tarzan of the Apes rather than as John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, who had just received notice that his Services were required in London.

So it was that when Akmath and his followers entered the remaining Stretch of forest after negotiating the hog-back, they were followed by a bronzed, smoothly muscled giant who moved easily and swiftly above them through the middle terraces, as silently and expertly as Sheeta, himself. He traveled behind them so that Usha the wind could bring him the more eloquent message of their scent, and it told him that they came not in anger - but in fear.

Fear? Of what? Surely their number was sufficient to safeguard them from Numa. Nor could savages be on their trail, for no tribes inhabited the mysterious regions from which they had emerged.

Filled with animal curiosity now, and certain that he would not be needlessly exposing himself to a concerted at-tack on their part, Tarzan waited only until Azmath was on the point of emerging upon the plain, which lay in open view of the ridge where his Waziri were watching. Then he called to the Oparians in the language of the apes, for he had never had the opportunity of learning their mysterious form of human speech.

Akmath and the others halted at once and instinctively took to cover. When Tarzan dropped, cat-like, into the trail at the edge of the plain, Akmath recognized him and, bludgeon still in hand, emerged warily from the bushes. Slowly, then, the others appeared, one by one, as stiff-legged as their crooked limbs would allow, some of them on all fours. They bared their fangs and growled ominously, closing in about him, nostrils distended and quivering.

Tarzan smiled inwardly though maintaining on the outside a very menacing attitude as he glared fiercely back and emitted a warning rumble from his deep chest in answer to their growls, it was jungle protocol, more rigidly adhered to than the rules of etiquette of an English duchess, and he knew it would have been useless to hope for constructive communication (in either case) until such preliminaries had been attended to.

But at last the Conference began, restricted as it was by the paucity of abstract vocabulary which is peculiar to anthropoid speech. To Tarzan's guests from the British Consulate in Nairobi, they might have appeared to be a pack of wild baboons, for all the barking, growling and menacing grimaces to which they resorted in the struggle to communicate.

"Tarzan has power to keep his word," acknowledged Akmath. "He said that one who sought to harm La would die. And this has come true. Cadj would have killed La because she would not choose him for her mate. We fought with Cadj and tried to stop him, but he went mad and he killed many of us. Then he barred us from him and chased La down into the Chambers of the dead. And there he lies now, Struck down by the spirits of our ancestors whom Tarzan commanded to watch over La."

"And La?" queried Tarzan. "She is safe?"

"We cannot know," said Akmath. "She is gone."

Tarzan's eyes widened almost imperceptibly. This news was a matter of considerable concern to him because he had always felt sorry for La and had often searched his conscience in an attempt to decide what might be a proper Solution to her strange plight. Yet, somehow, an indefinable, almost instinctive deterrent had always interposed itself when he had harbored thoughts of exposing La to the refinements of modern civilization. There were many things in the jungle and all of nature which the jungle and nature were better equipped to understand than man, who in precise imitation of the lower Orders which he despised always thought that his way was the best possible of all alternatives. Perhaps, after all, La had been born to a particular destiny and purpose of her own in Opar.

But now this news of her disappearance placed the case of La, High Priestess of the Flaming God, in a more objective category.

"Gone?" he said. "Where did she go-why?"

Akmath shrugged his hairy Shoulders. "We do not know. But we think that the enemy of the Flaming God came down and stole her away from us."

"Who is the enemy of the Flaming God?"

"Goro, the moon," came the matter-of-fact reply.

Thus confronted with alarming fact confused and tangled in the web of superstition and ignorance, Tarzan patiently and determinedly extracted such details as he thought he could rely upon. And gradually there emerged one single fact which the Oparians steadfastly upheld in spite of all the possible reinterpretations Tarzan sought to make of their account.

La had not gone away from Opar. La was not lying some-where unconscious, lost or imprisoned in the subterranean Chambers of that ancient ruin-for at last the priests had forced themselves to search for her, en masse and equipped with sacred, demon-proof torches. They had found Cadj, untouched by human hand, yet lying lifeless upon the altar in

the Chamber of the Dead, and they had left him there as proof to future generations that none might hope to thwart the will of the spirits or defy the threat of Tarzan. But La was no-where to be found, nor had she emerged from the foundations of Opar. Therefore, she had disappeared into thin air-or, as some believed, she had been stolen by Goro, the moon.

It must have been a god who stole her," said Akmath, "because when La struggled with him his magic eye fell from his head. We found it where La's last footprints in the dust led us, and beyond this there was no further spoor."

Without warning, Akmath handed to Tarzan a ponderous, ancient diadem. "This is an evil thing. We are afraid to keep it. Someday the god will return for his eye, and only Tarzan is strong enough to capture him and make him tell where he has hidden La."

Before Tarzan could think consciously, the animal in him bristled inadvertently, his instincts abruptly shocked and alert to the threatening evil which lay already in his hands. It was as though a ghostly hand had reached out across an abyss of incalculable eons and slapped him into painful, staring wakefulness. There before him seemed to lie the great, baleful eye of a living ogre, encased in a socket of glittering, priceless diamonds, rubies and emeralds and other jewels difficult to describe-an evil eye, lambent with the deep-smoldering fires of forbidden knowledge and wizardry long since forgotten behind the crumbled walls of ages beyond history...

The ramifications of effect are often far more reaching and variegated in magnitude and direction than are the roots of cause. Particularly was this true with regard to the appearance of the mysterious diadem from Opar. Whereas it was destined to affect the history of an entire world, it also spared the lives of a small family of hartebeests which had wandered into Waziri country. For on the next day after his meeting with the Oparian priests Tarzan was too preoccupied with his thoughts to conduct the hunt successfully for his guests.

This was the last day of their visit and he could not now discard the tradition of Greystoke hospitality which it devolved upon him to preserve. But while he accompanied them he allowed Muviro, his Waziri chief, to be the hunter. His mind was filled with apprehension concerning La, whom he had once promised to protect. The appeal of the mystified Oparians for his help in finding La their offer of all the contents of the treasure vaults as a reward, and their startling presentation of the ancient diadem as a possible clue to the mystery—all these things and more filled his mind with conjecture to such an extent that he could hardly pay even lip service to the social amenities required of him by his guests.

He had promised the men of Opar an investigation into the matter before he should leave Africa, and on this subject he and Jane Clayton had conversed in private until long after midnight. At first his wife had remonstrated, but when he showed her the ancient diadem everything had changed like magic. And this was the strangest mystery of all.

As though mesmerized by the great jewel in the center of the diadem, Jane Clayton had suddenly become fascinated. For from being repelled by the evil aura of the thing, she had hardly been able to contain her wonder and enthusiasm.

"This is positively the most exquisite, gorgeous and priceless gem I have ever seen or heard of, John!" she had exclaimed. And at once she had begged him to let her keep it.

Inasmuch as Jane Clayton had never been the type of woman to have recourse to the outward appearances of wealth in order to advertise her distinguished Station in life, and as hers had always been a

practical nature relative to the utilization of all things of great value, this reaction of hers to the ancient diadem had mystified Tarzan most of all. Actually, his wife contemplated keeping the diadem as an addition to her personal jewelry-an object of tremendous archaeological value which was probably worth a king's ransom, or ten times that amount for all he knew.

Obviously, then, the diadem had a distinct attraction for women whereas it repelled men. Why? And how could La's evident attraction for it be attributed to the cause of her mysterious disappearance?

"Someday the god will return for the eye," Akmath had said.

Of course this was the most abysmal superstition, Tarzan admitted, and yet-was there latent within that warning phrase the seeds of a more comprehensible danger? As a matter of fact, had he made some fatal error in having left Jane Clayton alone with the accursed thing?

Then all at once Tarzan's civilized reasoning came to his aid and he forced himself to smile at his own superstitions. Modern education had given him at least one philosophical principle on which he could rely: That for every effect, no matter how strange or miraculous it might appear to be, there was a perfectly understandable cause.

Nevertheless, something in Tarzan's inner consciousness caused him to chafe at the length of the hunt, and it was with a great sensation of relief that he finally rode up to the ranch bungalow of his African estate and dismounted. It was supper time, however, and Lady Greystoke, usually the conspicuous hostess, was now conspicuous by her absence!

Baira, the comely daughter of Muviro, had become the girl Friday of the Greystoke household. It was she who first signalled to Tarzan that something was amiss. Her brown eyes were wide with concern.

"I am glad that you have returned, Bwana, for many of us are worried that Lady Jane may be ill. She has not come out of her room all afternoon. We saw her go into her room a short time after you left on the hunt, but she has not come out of it since. The door is locked, the windows are closed, and so are the shutters. We have knocked many times and called to her but she does not answer."

Tarzan may have thought many things in that moment, but his aquiline features only froze into a cold, expressionless mask over his emotions. He asked a single question.

"Where is the key?"

"Lady Jane has it with her, Bwana, inside her room," answered Buirra, who shrank back a little from her towering master as she saw the old scar on his forehead start to take on a livid color.

The startled girl saw him stride swiftly down the hallway to Jane Clayton's bedroom. "Jane!" he called, after knocking loudly but briefly on the heavy mahogany paneling of the door.

In the next instant, he stepped back and lunged with all the savage power of his two hundred and fifty pounds of jungle tempered brawn. The door exploded loudly in a cloud of debris that included the frame and part of the plaster.

Inside Jane Clayton's bedroom a single light was burning on her dressing table, but the room, itself, from which no one had seen her emerge, was empty of her presence. On the floor next to the dressing table lay the glittering diadem from Opar-to remind Tarzan of the identical disappearance of La, High Priestess of the Flaming God.

Chapter III - TARIO THE LOTHARIAN

INCOMPREHENSIBLE to man are the workings of destiny.

A twig may be broken by the boot of a paleontologist while exhuming the prehistoric remains of a dinosaur. The saurian, in another eon of time, might have met its death in that precise location owing to a sudden shower of meteorites. On the other hand, the meteorites might have been the fragments of a star which had exploded somewhere on the edge of the universe a billion years before. Thus we may fairly assume that if the star had not exploded the twig would not have been broken-at least not at that particular moment, by the boot of that particular paleontologist.

Such were the wide-spread ramifications of the causes and effects which were to weave a web of destiny around the lives of La, Tarzan and Jane Clayton-and a world as yet unknown to all three. For who

could have foreseen that the same cataclysm which sank Atlantis also destroyed a mighty planet then existing somewhere between Mars and Jupiter, and that this celestial phenomenon was to form a heavy Strand of the web?

One of the fragments of that world fell upon the red planet Mars, ages ago, and gouged out a Valley which may still be seen today, fully two hundred miles in extent. At its farthest extremity and in its deepest depression stands the titanic meteoric fragment. Four miles of its length lie buried beneath the valley's floor. The other three miles of its length rise upward in full view, forming the loftiest escarpment on the planet. For two miles its scarred and pitted face still lies in the shadow of the valley's walls. For the remaining mile it rises above the natural surface of dying Mars, its summit appearing to challenge the passage of Thuria, the nearer moon, in her headlong flight across the glittering star fields of the Martian night.

The valley, lying in one of the least explored areas of the southern hemisphere, is known to its inhabitants as Tarnath. On the summit of the Great Escarpment of Tarnath lies a mysterious hidden city, known to the initiated as Zumor.

It is more than fifty thousand years old...

* * *

On that long gone day when Tarzan rescued La from Tantor, the bull elephant, Tario the Lotharian made a decision which involved their future destiny, though Tario lived some forty-eight millions of miles from Africa-on the planet which we call Mars but which was known to him as Barsoom.

Tario knew nothing of Tarzan. In fact, he was not even thinking of distant Jasoom, which was the Martian name for Earth. He was, in common with most of the billions of inhabitants of both worlds, thinking chiefly of himself.

But inasmuch as we are not capable of evaluating our personal situations without involving other people, so it was that Tario was forced to think of a certain Martian red man named Carthoris, who,

though it might seem surprising, carried the blood of an Earth-man in his veins. For Carthoris was the son of John Carter of Virginia-known to every in-habitant of the red planet as the Warlord of Barsoom.

That is, almost every inhabitant. Until the Coming of Carthoris to Lothar in search of Thuvia of Ptarth, the strange inhabitants of that ancient and isolated city had never heard of

John Carter, In fact, the Lotharians had believed for long ages of time that Barsoom had been emptied of human survivors, save for themselves and the warring tribes of green men who roamed the moss-covered dead sea bottoms of the slowly dying planet.

Ever since Carthoris of Helium and Thuvia of Ptarth had made good their escape from the great walled city of Lothar and found their way back through the hidden tunnel in the mountains to the tribal territory of the green man Torquas, Tario, Jeddak of Lothar, had been gravely troubled in his mind. When the two representatives of the red race had first made their appearance in his royal Chambers he had been convinced that they could not be real, that they were but clever chimeras of the imagination. Yet when he had found the opportunity to take the beautiful Princess of Ptarth into his arms, after subjecting her to the hypnotic compulsion of his might mind, he had discovered to his amazement and delight that she was actually of living flesh and blood. And the blow which Carthoris, Prince of Helium, had dealt him, had been as real in its stinging power as were the passions which the shapely young red woman had aroused in the breast of Tario.

Therefore, if indeed the two who had escaped him were real and not but convincing phantoms such as the Lotharians could easily create with their prodigious mentalities, then it must follow that their description of the outer world of Barsoom was reasonably valid.

The red race had flourished once more as a result of the invention of their great atmosphere plants. Great nations of them had arisen to conquer an environment which had almost erased life from the surface of the planet. Powerful Jeddaks ruled over proud and martial peoples, commanding great armies and fleets of powerful aerial warships. Trade and commerce flourished once more between nations, but this time through the air, where long ago in Barsoomian antiquity this commerce had been borne on the rolling surface of

oceans. Thus, persistent ingenuity and the eternal resilience of the human mind and spirit had at last succeeded in holding back the inevitable death of the ancient planet for yet another span of ages...

All of which startling realization finally had the effect of launching Tario into a brand new and totally unexpected phase of his existence. For ages reaching so far into antiquity that their memory was lost to him, Tario-wizard, mentalist supreme, Jeddak of Lothar-had lain dreaming in abysmal loneliness, waiting for the end of creation, only to discover that the world he had thought dead had come to life. This fact placed an entirely new interpretation upon the position, the abnormal powers, and the life purpose of Tario.

"Sorn!" he shouted, at the moment of his great decision. From the furs and silks of his royal couch he called imperiously to his aide, servant and advisor.

Sorn, a true Lotharian-as opposed to the realistic phantoms that often filled the untenanted halls of the palace-quickly made himself apparent. He entered the royal Chamber and threw himself to his knees, whereupon he crawled forward toward his lord, wagging his body much in the manner of a fawning hound.

"Yes, Tario, most glorious jeddak!" cried Sorn. "But speak thy will, and it shall be done!"

Tario's brows lowered in a frown of disapproval. He sprang from his couch and stood on the raised dais, legs apart and arms akimbo, a magnificent figure of a man, richly harnessed, fair of skin, possessed of light auburn hair and Piercing blue eyes. For white, not red, was the lost race of Lothar.

"Enough of this!" he shouted. "Get up on your feet!"

The astonished Sorn could not have been censured for not thus instantly breaking a tradition of the ages, yet when he hesitated, still on his knees, Tario leaped from the dais and grasped him roughly, dragging him to his feet.

"But-my jeddak!" protested Sorn, uncomprehendingly. "Has it not been the custom for time beyond memory-"

"Yes!" answered Tario, glaring at him. "But all that has come to an end! While we few surviving Lotharians lived together in this

monotonous immortality of ours without any hope of change save death, it was necessary for me, your jeddak, to maintain a position of unquestioned superiority through these symbols of deference which I demanded-lest you fall upon each other and decimate your precious numbers in a struggle for the throne. However, now that I am at last convinced that the outer world is populated with nations of people who await my leadership I am willing to abandon our etherealist existence and strength us all with the awakening to realism!"

"But, Tario, I still do not comprehend! The outer world is dead save for the constantly warring tribes of green men-our eternal enemies."

Tario paced rapidly now, back and forth before his bewildered lieutenant. "And what of the red man, Carthoris of Helium, who came here to rescue Thuvia, the Princess of Ptarth? Did they not reflect the mores, tastes and long established culture of might civilizations?"

"But, sire! You, yourself, directed us to consider them your own mental creation-something merely to add diversion to our monotonous existence!"

"True," smiled Tario, grimly. "But none of you actually believed what I decreed. Oh, do not attempt to shield your mind from me, Sorn! I need not penetrate it to know the truth. All of you knew that the red man's story must be valid. You have but waited these long years since his departure for me to analyze the Situation and take appropriate action. Well, this is proper. It was respectful, it was wise, and your wait has not been in vain. I, Tario, have made my decision!"

Into Sorn's own blue eyes there now crept a new light. His reaction could also be observed in the squaring of his Shoulders, the gradual elevation of his chin.

"Sire!" he exclaimed, daring to hope. "You have seen the only answer to this great revelation of organized human life beyond our walls! We are the master race! It is our destiny to rule them!"

With a swiftness that caught Sorn completely unprepared, the royal Chamber filled suddenly with half a utan of Tario's bowmen. Tall, white-skinned, fair-haired and blue-eyed, they held their

arrows already in drawn bows, ready to propel the unerring missiles straight into Sorn's wildly beating heart.

"No, my Jeddak!" sh shrieked, falling to his knees. "Spare me!"

Tario's handsome face registered a cold and deadly smile. "I do not approve of your choice of pronouns, Sorn. It is my destiny to rule Barsoom, not yours! All of you shall be my chosen adjutants and as such your rewards and positions of power will be adequate to satisfy your wildest dreams. Now get back onto your feet!"

As Sorn slowly arose, the bowmen lowered their weapons. They waited a few moments longer and then filed silently from the Chamber like the phantom creations of Tario's mentality that they were. Once out of sight, they vanished into the nothingness from which from which they had sprung.

Both Tario and Sorn knew this. Yet both knew that the arrows of these phantoms could kill-because their effective-ness depended upon the power of Tario's mind.

And of that there could be no doubt...

Yet there were two things which caused Tario at least the annoyance of a haunting doubt as he prepared to seat himself at the fascinating game board of world conquest.

One of these matters concerned his bowmen. For many centuries he had brought them into phantom existence whenever the need for them arose. In as much as their effectiveness depended upon realism, he had concentrated on them as individuals, repeatedly rematerializing the same ones, again and again. Each bowman had a name and was possessed of individual characteristics of feature and personality. Behind this stratagem had lain a secret hope-that one day he would cause to remain in reality one or several of their number.

Through centuries of concentration and persistent materializations he had theorized, it might be possible to create living men of flesh and blood and thus provide a means of regenerating his lost race. For there were no women in Lothar, nor had there been since that long gone day when the survivors of his race had fled along the muddy shores of the receding seas, pursued and decimated by the green men. Only a few women had reached this last sanctuary behind the mountains, but they had succumbed to the

effects of long endured starvation and flight, and thus only a comparative handful of male Lotharians had occupied this dead fortress city of the ancients.

Among Tario's bowmen there had been a certain odwar, or general, upon whom he had concentrated persistently in order to bring about his transition from chimera to reality. What troubled Tario was that for several years this odwar had suddenly ceased to materialize among the other phantoms of his army. Ever since the day upon which Carthoris of Helium and Thuvia of Ptarth had arrived. The city was being besieged by the Torquasian green men at the time, and the bowman armies of the Lotharians had gone far afield, even beyond the forests and the mountains, in pursuit of the retreating enemy. It was from this foray that his valuable odwar had never returned.

Inasmuch as the phantom bowmen were, perforce, deathless as long as their mental creators lived, Tario could arrive at but one conclusion. That particular bowman had actually remained among the living after the others had dematerialized. Instead of coming back to Lothar, he had evidently fled. It was even possible that he had since allied himself with the Prince of Helium.

His name was Kar Komak.

Someday, Tario knew that he must find Kar Komak and destroy him. His probable existence in the enemy camp and his knowledge of the tremendous mental powers of the Lotharians was one of two weak links in the chain of developments which would be necessary to Tario's plan of con-quest.

The other matter which troubled Tario was a secret which was also known to him alone. The Lotharian who had occupied Sorn's rank and Station in the palace at the time of Carthoris' appearance had been a man named Jav. He was later killed by Komal, the sacred banth a Barsoomian Hon. Before he died, however, Tario had extracted one vital item of information from his mind, as a result of Jav's close association with Carthoris during his brief stay in Lothar.

Carthoris had represented himself as being a "Prince of the house of Tardos Mors, Jeddak of Helium, and son of John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom, and of his wife, Dejah Thoris."

Tario's great secret concerned this strange warlord. His son had insisted to Jav that John Carter (as his name might well confirm) was not of Barsoom. Rather was he from Jasoom, and for this reason his great strength which was the product of the heavier gravitation of another world had enabled him to accomplish seeming miracles. But what was most significant of all to Tario was the fact that no Barsoomian, however accomplished in the universal gift of telepathy, could penetrate this alien's powerful mind.

Here, indeed, might be Tario's greatest obstacle: John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom! Therefore, he reasoned, it would be well to place him first on the list of people, places and things to be investigated in his preliminary survey of the world that he intended to rule ...

Prior to the advent of John Carter on Mars, the sight of an armed green warrior walking free and unguarded within the confines of a city of red men would have precipitated pandemonium, violent bloodshed and death. But many were the customs, beliefs and human relationships which had been reconstructed as the result of the Warlord's historic conquests, both in the matter of arms and of the mind.

Not that the fierce, towering green men of the wild sea bottoms now had a free passport to any Martian city, but there were certain in their number who did, on occasion, enter the gates of the twin cities of Helium on diplomatic missions. The best known and most highly trusted of these was that mightiest of all green warriors, Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark.

Imagine him, if you will, as he strides along the broad Avenue of Ancestors in Greater Helium, en route to the palace of his friend and ally, the Warlord. The picture is fairly analogous to a Goliath on Broadway.

Actually, Tars Tarkas moved along the side lanes of the great thoroughfare which was provided for pedestrians, for the avenue itself consisted of a close-cropped scarlet sward which served to mark the Channel for vehicular traffic that moved through the air.

These were the "ground" fliers, moving in continuous lines in opposite directions. They skimmed along the surface of the park-like sward, soaring gracefully into the air at times to pass over a

slower-moving driver ahead, or at intersections where the north and south traffic had the right of way and that going east and west was required to rise above it.

Above Tar Tarkas raced the long, light passenger fliers, plying, each in its proper level, between the numerous landing stages and internal passenger traffic. The landing stages that towered high into the heavens above these lanes were for the great international passenger liners. Freighters had other landing stages at various lower levels. From private hangers upon many a rooftop, smaller fliers were darting into the line of the "ground" traffic, contributing to the general soft whirring of either radium engines or the more modern magnetic engines-both of which types of locomotion possessed the virtue of having no air contaminating exhaust fumes.

With all the swift movement and the countless thousands rushing hither and thither, the predominant Suggestion was that of luxurious ease and soft noiselessness. From various buildings or private dwellings issued strains of inspiring music. Scarlet swards and flowered parkways continually provided aesthetic relief to the massiveness of man-made edifices. Children played at the great splashing fountains of synthetic liquid-for water was too precious a natural re-source to allow to evaporate so extravagantly-and comely women laughed and chatted with their acquaintances.

Everywhere were evidences of culture, luxury and wealth. Slaves appeared upon every housetop, taking in gorgeous silks and costly furs where they had been sunning during the day, for the sun was setting and the populace was preparing for the night. Jewel-encrusted women and richly harnessed men lolled upon the craven balconies, watching the gay, peaceful river of humanity that flowed beneath them, and above through the sky.

But what the great savage Thark loved most of all about the aspect of the red men's cities, particularly in Helium, was the striking evidence of strength in the midst of comfort and ease, of the proud readiness of each man to instantly defend his right to

tenderness and compassion. Each Barsoomian, whether red, yellow, black, green or white, was raised from infancy on the principle that war was a natural State. Every man and boy was as adept at using long or short sword as you and I might be in the use of a pen or pencil. The clank of sidearms in everyday pedestrian traffic was as familiar to the Barsoomian ear as is the beep of an auto horn to a civilized earth-man.

This was peculiar to Mars because of two factors which do not obtain upon our own world. First, the scarcity of natural resources, limitation to the growth of population. Secondly, the advanced art and science of medicine and surgery, coupled with the beneficial effects of a lessened gravitational attraction and a greater distance from the harder radiations of the sun, contributed to a life span that often exceeded one thousand years, provided that one did not fall in mortal combat or succumb to the assassin's blade long ere this allotted time, which was the more likely case.

Consequently, life was not as precious to a people who could anticipate far more than three score years and ten. Moreover, the Barsoomians would be ready to tell you that to live in noble awareness of physical self-sufficiency and to experience life more vividly in the constant imminence of death was by far better than to wait for the ravages of disease, famine and mass slaughter born of self-seeking ideologies to take the matter of population control out of their hands.

And probably the most eloquent of all arguments in their favor was the fact that there were no lawyers on Mars.

So it was that as Tars Tarkas strode along the Avenue of Ancestry, the fact that he was heavily armed with long and short swords and a radium(!) pistol elicited no comment whatsoever. In fact, had he not worn these weapons, he would have seemed naked, indeed!

It was only the savage appearance of the Thark, his tremendous stature, and his international fame as a heroic chieftain and battle companion of the mighty Warlord of Barsoom that caused the passersby to stop and point him out.

In common with all other members of his race, Tars Tarkas was equipped with four arms. His eyes were set at the extreme sides of his head, a trifle above the center, and protruded in such a manner that they might be directed either forward or back and also independently of each other, thus permitting him to look in any direction, or in two directions at once without the necessity of turning his head.

His ears, which were slightly above his eyes and closer together were cup-shaped antennae, protruding several inches from his head, while his nose was but a longitudinal slit in the center of his face, midway between mouth and ears.

He had no hair on his body, which was a dark olive green in color.

But it was his teeth which added a most ferocious appearance to an otherwise fearsome and terrible countenance. Whiter than ivory, as snowy and gleaming as china, the lower tusks curved upward to sharp points, ending about where the eyes of earthly human beings are located. Standing out in contrast against the dark skin of the weird face in such a striking manner, these not inconsiderable natural weapons of combat presented a singularly formidable appearance.

(1) Whenever radium engines or radium-energized weapons are mentioned in reference to Martian civilization, the word, "radium", is preserved here as a literary license in order to preserve a tradition established in previous accounts of Mars. Subsequent studies of the subject, particularly by Jason Gridley, who communicated with Mars by means of his famous "Gridley Wave", reveal that the source of the energy in question must be nuclear in nature-but it is not actually radium. Owing to the high development of quantum studies on Mars, the advanced science of that planet is somehow able to achieve transmutation and the production of useful radioactive isotopes by a much simpler and more efficient means than ours to the present day.

Yet, withal his appearance among the beautiful people of Helium was welcomed rather than shunned, and many were the cheery greetings of "Koar!" which sounded in his ears as he passed along the pedestrian lanes. They respected him for his mighty sword arm which could level half a dozen men at one titanic sweep, but they admired him most of all because simpler and more efficient means than ours to the present day, his own intelligence had raised him on a level above that of the rest of his cruel and taciturn race, which knew nothing of family attachments or kindred love. It had been this awakening to the softer qualities of life which, indeed, became the secret fountain of his strength and leadership.

Moreover, the Citizens of Helium accepted his presence among the pedestrians as a compliment to themselves. They knew his kind. Hatched on the wide-open sea bottoms of Barsoom, he was by temperament what we might call a plainsman. Having been raised from childhood to ride the giant, savage, eight-legged thout swiftly and tirelessly over the resident, noiseless moss of his native habitat, the green man was very much averse to Walking. Yet here was the mightiest Jeddak of them all, Walking to the palace because he enjoyed mingling with the proud, beautiful people who had accepted John Carter or Virginia as their Warlord!

When the great Thark presented himself at the palace gates and was respectfully admitted by the guards, none there were in all Helium who knew that he was being watched by a penetrating pair of unfriendly blue eyes. Nor did anyone know that an enemy of the entire planet was following him unseen up the ramps to the royal apartments which had been reserved in anticipation of his arrival.

Tars Tarkas had been brought to Helium by a government cruiser from Thark, but prior to boarding the war craft he had been riding hard with his jeds and lieutenants for several days, communicating with various smaller tribes of green men which were affiliated with the tribal nation of Thark. Therefore, before presenting himself in the court of the Warlord and sitting at his banquet table he had anticipated catching a few hours of sleep. And it was for this reason that he soon dismissed the retinue of servants which had been assigned to him.

As he turned to his sleeping couch of silks and furs, especially designed for his giant frame, the guards outside his door could scarce restrain themselves from smiling. It was merely diplomatic etiquette which kept them there, they told themselves, for what assassin would dare to approach the person of so mighty an adversary?

It was no assassin who materialized in the sleeping Chamber of Tars Tarkas, there in the very heart of the palace of the Warlord of Barsoom, in Greater Helium, yet this most likely of probabilities aroused the great Thark to action when he discerned the fair-haired white man standing at the foot of his couch.

Grasping the long sword which is as much a part of the green man's bed as his sleeping furs, Tars Tarkas at once leaped to his feet, almost grazing the arched ceiling of the richly furnished room. His great hulk loomed ominously over the rash intruder.

He raised his sword to strike, but as the stranger was apparently unarmed but for a dagger he wore in his jeweled harness, he hesitated. It was not honor, per se, so much as an ages long code of combat which stayed his hand. According to this code, no warrior might engage another-even an assassin-with any weapon other than that which the adversary chose to use.

But this strange white man did not even draw his puny dagger!

"Who be you, stranger?" asked the green man menacingly. "And what do you here in the private sleeping Chambers of Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark? Your harness is not of Helium, nor are you a red man. Though your skin is white, you are not of the thern race, because well do I know by experience that they are bald from birth! Nor is that the holy yellow wig of the thern which you wear. Speak! Identify yourself-and State your purpose here-or die!"

Neither did the intruder speak, nor did Tars Tarkas strike the blow of certain death which he was preparing. Instead, the keen blue eyes of the white man took hold of the great Thark in a titanic grip from which a dozen such as he could not have escaped. He was powerless to move. Even powerless to think!

The last thing he remembered was that the stranger led him to a storage Chamber, where he was bidden to sleep through the night until

the next dawn. Also, he was vaguely aware, after his eyes had closed, that his mind was probed to its innermost depths.

But even this recollection was to fade from Tar Tarkas' mind as though nothing unusual had happened at all. Instead, he was to remember, falsely, that he had attended a banquet and conversed at length with John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom.

* * *

Hurtling Thuria and her more distant brother, Cluros, cast a double shadow of the Great Escarpment of Tarnath across the deserted and desolate lands which lay beyond the deep valley. Far aloft, in the secret city of Zumor, Ranas Ghol sat up on his couch, aroused from troubled sleep.

He listened. The small, sleeping city gave forth no sound that might have been interpreted as the source of that which had awakened him.

But Ranas Ghol had more than ears with which to listen and more than two eyes with which to see. A subtly alien type of human, bald except for a narrow strip of bristling bluish hair that reached from his forehead to the base of his prodigious skull, he remained motionless, supported by his elbows, as though he were testing the very ether, itself, for signs of danger.

At last, still convinced that something of grave import was impending, he resorted to another sense which neither you nor I nor any Barsoomian possesses.

A deep furrow in his forehead parted slowly, and there was revealed in the moonlit Chamber the baleful orb of a third eye-which stared unblinking into the fourth dimension...

Chapter IV - FIRST CLUE

IN the exact moment when Cadj raised the sacrificial knife over La's unprotected breast, the sun god passed over the air shaft above. His rays reflected for one brief moment from the puddle of water and cast a shadow of Cadj and his helpless victim against the opposite side of the room.

Cadj, at the same time, snapped suddenly out of his blinding madness into a State of clear rationality-which was his undoing. For he saw for the first time where he was, in the terrible Chamber of the Dead. And there, looming at him over the altar, was a ghostly shadow of a dead priest with the knife of the sacrifice in his hand!

Emitting a single, piercing shriek of terror, Cadj slumped lifeless to the floor. His savage heart had failed him...

When La regained consciousness, she found Cadj's corpse lying across her body. The sacrificial knife lay harmlessly in the center of the room. Weakly, she struggled to roll him over, and when she saw his wide-open eyes staring at some nameless horror the memory of which was sealed forever within his dead brain, she began to wonder if, indeed, the dreaded spirits of his ancestors had not deliberately gathered him into their eternal halls.

Still terrified, she hastened to remove the loosened stones in the artificial wall, and at last she made an opening large enough to admit her slender body. However, as she was about to crawl through her eyes rested once more upon the fallen body of the high priest. And suddenly a vengeful smile curved her lips. No wound was apparent on Cadj. Perhaps, she reasoned, his heart had stopped as the result of his strenuous fit of madness, but there was a way of making the others who might follow him to this Spot believe that the old superstition was true-that the dead had offered him up in sacrifice.

She took hold of his limp, heavy arms and dragged him to the altar. Struggling determinedly, she finally pulled him up onto it and rolled him over onto his back, where his dead, horror-widened eyes could be seen. This, she thought with grim satisfaction, would provide a more certain barrier to further pursuit than a ten foot wall of granite.

After she had passed through the opening in the wall, she carefully replaced the stones, duplicating Tarzan's own handiwork of years gone by. And then she continued on her way, confident now that she would soon find the ancient treasure vaults and the outside exit to the Valley.

It was not long before she came to a round shaft in the floor. Fortunately, illumination from above revealed the pit in time, or she might have plunged to destruction in its dark depths. Dimly she remembered this place. She had visited it so long ago that it was impossible to count the years. It was an old well that the workers in the mines had used, and it had once been covered with wood. Beyond this place, she knew for sure, she would find a wooden door that would give her entrance to the main treasure vault of Opar.

She made a quick little run and leapt across the shaft, landing just on its farther edge. Then she continued onward and soon discovered that which she sought. The great door complained loudly as she struggled to push it inward, but at last she stood within that darkened vault where a hundred kings' ransoms in golden ingots lay neatly piled, row upon endless row—the great wealth of an ancient empire that had disappeared long ago beneath the sea. Here the product of a long dead industry of that mighty nation still lay in Opar, the forgotten outpost of Atlantis, once the favorite vacation spa of the nobility.

But all these faintly recollected fragments of history were subjugated in La's mind to the present urgency of getting out of the vault. At its opposite end was another door, and beyond it, she knew, was a series of stone Steps leading upward to sunlight and freedom.

However, as she tested the fastenings of this one last barrier, she suddenly heard voices on its opposite side, and she almost forgot to breathe.

"Who is there?" called someone in the ancient tongue of Opar, and she recognized the voice of Akmath, who was one of the high priests.

"It is La, High Priestess of the Flaming God!" she cried out in desperation. "Open the door!"

"Where is Cadj, who followed you into the halls of the dead?" asked Akmath.

"They have already judged him for attempting to defile the sacred representative of his god! If you do not believe me, then dare you to visit the actual Chamber of the Dead where I saw him sacrificed by his own ancestors! There you may see his body, untouched by the knife of the living, as he still Stares in horror at what dread things only his spirit may tell you. And you would not suffer the same fate, then open the way to the light of our god, that your priestess may lead you again to the worship of his flaming glory!"

This resounding speech was calculated to dissolve their resistance and bring them trembling to their knees in repentance, yet somehow it failed to accomplish La's purpose. The door still remained closed. After a long delay during which she could hear the sounds of a whispered Conference, Akmath made his reply.

"We shall not enter the Chamber of the Dead, La. But we have decided that you shall not regain your freedom and your place among us until you are willing to choose one of us. Time passes, and new blood must be given to our line so that our sacred work shall not come to an end for want of descendants. True, we can mate with the lesser priestesses as we have in the past, but only your own blood line can give us a legitimate successor to the holy Station of high priest. Cadj, and Tha before him were but Substitutes for a true high priest, and the Flaming God will not smile on us until we comply with his ancient law!"

"You cannot imprison me here!" exclaimed La, pounding on the door.

"Each day," said Akmath, "one of us will be stationed here at the door of the treasure vault. When you are ready to fulfill your sacred responsibility you have only to announce your intention and you will be freed. Until then, you will have to remain where your are."

La knew that it was useless to argue. The mentalities of the priests were limited, but for them to have cogitated on such an involved scale as this was tantamount to an historical event. They would cling to their decision now as though it had been a divine revelation.

She might retrace her steps and find one other way out, through the secret niche behind the altar in the upper temple which Tarzan

had used, but of this exit the priests were well aware. It would be guarded day and night, as well as her personal living quarters.

Therefore, she was a prisoner. Nor had her jailers mentioned any provision for giving her food and water. If she did not accede to their demands she would soon starve. This possibility they had no doubt considered, and they probably reasoned that it was their last guarantee that she would surrender.

Well, she thought, stubbornly, perhaps shall choose-death rather than submit!

And then it was that a curious, somewhat superstitious thought entered La's mind. If, indeed, she were being preserved for a greater destiny, might she not force Fate to advance the time of fulfillment by threatening the whole fabric of her life with an attempt at suicide? She had had enough of waiting-waiting in lonely, empty eternity-for what?

Well, she would see just what. If she had deceived herself with delusions of greatness, then there was no reason left for which to continue to live, anyway.

Thus motivated by what seemed to her to be infallible logic, La prepared herself for a duel with Fate. She was going to taunt the powers of destiny by going on a hunger strike.

Thus the days and the nights slowly passed, while the priests of Opar maintained their relentless vigil over the three known exits. And La passed the time in exploring all the subterranean passages and Chambers of the ruins in which she was incarcerated.

She had ample time to think of the mysteries which enshrouded her past-things which she had refrained from revealing to anyone, for in the first place no one would have been able to comprehend. La did not know that the most learned modern scholars of the world would have been deeply mystified by her continued vitality in spite of existing many days without sustenance of any kind. Somewhere in her impenetrable past some great genius or lucky alchemist had hit upon the formula of perpetual self-rejuvenation, and La had been the, perhaps, innocent victim, or the beneficiary, as the case might be. She had lived so long that not only her mind, but her very soul,

which men label with the subterfuge word, the subconscious, had forgotten.

But the one dark curse that caused her to retreat in horror from the thought of mating was the greatest mystery of all. From this she had sought for centuries to escape, but in vain. And it proved that she was different from all other women on earth. To whom but her unknown ancestors could she ever divulge such a hideous secret as this? It had been her greatest hope that a union with Tarzan might have brought an end to the thing which haunted her entire existence, but that hope had died a natural death.

Perhaps if she could pierce the veil of the ages she might recall her actual origin and thus discover some clue to the mystery of such a monstrous abnormality as was hers. Dimly, at last, there came to her mind the recollection of a secret vault where once she had hidden certain personal keepsakes which, if she could again discover them, might help to refresh her memory of the very ancient past.

Particularly, she recalled a certain beautiful diadem which was connected in some way with forbidden knowledge or powers. In its center it had contained a tremendous jewel of such rare quality and strange properties that its duplicate was not to be found in all the world, or in the entire universe, for all she knew. She could not quite recall the details, but somewhere in the past this gem had been both feared and worshipped. And she sensed that if anything might hold the key to the memory vaults of antiquity this ancient symbol of a former great Station in life should serve her purpose.

La searched carefully, and at last she found the secret panel that gave access to her long neglected personal treasures. Inside she found the dust-covered relics of her life in ages that preceded the building of the pyramids of Egypt. For a long period of time which she could not have measured consciously, she stood there like the embodiment of an ethnic lament, a mourning wraith poised in the dark corridor of eternity as though listening for some dim echoing whisper of revelation from its somber, cob-webbed tapestries of life that had been.

Each of the articles which surrounded her seemed to echo not in mournful tones but in tantalizing, dim and ghostly visions of things,

loves, passions, powers and events which loomed silently and titanically but ever just beyond the semblance of shape and form. The crumbling items of once exquisitely carved and polished wood inlaid with gems and jade and mother of pearl, the ponderous golden chests and the intimate artifacts of a queenly woman's boudoir-all these plucked softly at her inner memory.

Was that the clarion ring of a hundred trumpets announcing her approach through marble halls? Was this the clang and clash of sword and shield?-the proud battle cry of a million warriors carving out the destiny of the master nation of the world? And- hark!-Was this the wind of Time, or was it the crescendo roar of dark and terrible waters blotting out the light of day, crumbling the mighty walls of cities and washing palaces and golden temples forever into the black and the cold abyss?

She shook her head, frightened by her imaginings. She must find that for which she had entered this place. Groping through the dust and debris that once had been precious splendor, her hands finally touched a flat, Square box of polished platinum. Inside, covered with the crumbled dust of once beautiful silk cushions, she found the diadem.

Trembling unaccountably now, and filled with indefinable anticipations of long sought revelation, La carried the heavy, priceless piece of jewelry to a room where a shaft of moon-light could be found. And there she gazed at the central stone-into that giant, weirdly scintillating eye of antiquity, as though it were some magic crystal that would unfold to her a vision of all the unknowable things that ever had been or were to come. As though awakened from a thousand millennia of slumber, the wicked thing seemed to quicken slowly with an inner glow of lambent life. It seemed to glare at her in preemptory command, dominating her mind and soul, calling to her out of the dimness of incalculable time and Space.

Slowly, La saw the glowing pool of light in her hand expand into a gulf of glittering stars. And of a sudden she was falling into it, unable to cry out, as though disembodied and drifting down a cold abyss of emptiness-forever...

* * *

"The war," said Tarzan, "is over. My special duties connected with British Intelligence had been terminated. In fact, I was released eight months ago, and since that time I have again devoted every possible moment to the investigation of my wife's disappearance. I started all over for the second time, in Opar itself, trying to discover further clues either to Jane's disappearance or La's, since a clue to the one mystery would no doubt be a clue to the other. Yet there is no further clue other than this ancient diadem. As an old friend and fellow adventurer whose scientific background is a bit more esoteric than orthodox, I have come to you for help."

His listener was Jason Gridley, the same scientific investigator and explorer who had accompanied Tarzan into the land of Pellucidar which lies at the earth's core. The two men sat in Gridley's private study which was a part of the Gridley Research Foundation building in Tarzan, California. Gridley was momentarily engaged in deep concentration as he examined the ponderous diadem, holding it up to the light, turning it over and over in his hands, and tapping it gently here and there. But most often he would look at the back of the diadem where a strange inscription was engraved.

"You have given me much information in your letters," he replied, at last, "but the bombshell was that phone call from Amsterdam the other night. Man! I have never seen anyone cover distance so fast! Did you hire a jet plane?"

A sad smile touched Tarzan's drawn, sleepless countenance. "Just good connections," he replied. "When Doctor Loewenfeld gave me his conclusions regarding that principal gem in the diadem I knew I would have to start where biased orthodox scientific investigators would fear to tread-lest

they jeopardize their reputations."

Gridley smiled faintly. He was no longer examining the diadem. Instead, he was leaning back in his chair and studying Tarzan.

"Loewenfeld," he said, "is the world's greatest authority on gems. If he says his spectrum of this jewel's internal rays revealed

lines unknown to astro-physics and that the sub-stance of which it is composed is harder than a diamond, there is no need for me to attempt to duplicate his findings. After your report to me from Amsterdam I was much more interested in examining the hieroglyphics on the back of the diadem."

"Now you have seen them," said Tarzan. "What is your reaction? The greatest antiquarians and philologists in the world cannot even recognize those markings."

Gridley still studied Tarzan closely. "My friend," he answered at last, "what I have in mind is perhaps too daring an assumption to be based on mere recollection. I have seen something like this before, and it directs my suspicions in an extremely startling direction."

Tarzan's great frame began to straighten and he sat forward in his chair. For the first time in long years of desperate waiting and hopeless searching, someone was at least hinting that there might be some direction to follow in the Solution of the greatest mystery of his life.

"I do not want it to come from me," Gridley continued, "whether it turns out to be a positive or a negative hunch. I would rather you had it from the greatest living authority on Earth. I am going to give you the address of a man who--"

"Authority?" questioned the ape-man. "Authority on what?"

"On these hieroglyphics--and much more that may be pertinent to this diadem. His name is Jules Ainwright Carter. You will have no difficulty in locating the famous Carter House of Virginia. I shall provide you with a letter. Hm-m-m.

So you say this Opar was probably a colony of ancient Atlantis. I wonder--"

"Gridley," interrupted Tarzan, "you will forgive me if I accuse you of speaking in riddles. Will you please tell me--"

"If I told you, perhaps you would not go to Virginia," countered Gridley, quickly. "Perhaps you would begin to have some misgivings with regard to the intellectual integrity of your old friend, Jason Gridley--even you, Tarzan, who were suckled at a savage foster mother's breast in the heart of an African jungle, who discovered lost Opar and lived through such weird experiences in such unknown

and unsuspected places-among the Ant Men, in Pal-ul-don, and in Pellucidar-yes, even you might doubt me without proof. Therefore, I urge you to go to Virginia first. You must tell every-thing you know to Jules Carter. Show him the diadem."

"Who is this Jules Carter, really?"

"He is the favorite nephew of a world's most famous man-But no. I cannot tell you. You must find out for your-self..."

Chapter V - FLESH AND BLOOD

FIVE evenings later, Jason Gridley looked up from his desk, startled.

It was Tarzan of the Apes who stood there in the open doorway. He still wore the clothes of John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, but the thin patina of civilization about him was gone. Visible as is the lightning of a distant storm was the scar of Bolgani the gorilla on his noble brow.

"Good Lord!" ejaculate Gridley. "I told the night man to send you up, not catapult you!" he gestured at the telephone on his desk. "It was only a few seconds ago-"

"I have spent three days at the Carter House." said Tarzan. His voice was low, yet dominating.

Had the ape-man discoursed on the subject for an hour he could not have told Gridley more. The latter sat back in his leather chair, the work before him dismissed as inconsequential although a multi-million dollar Corporation awaited the answer to his calculations within twelve hours.

"Sit down, Tarzan. You've really been going at it. TU bet you haven't slept one night in three!"

"The Gridley Wave," said Tarzan, his grey eyes penetrating those of the scientist. "That same invention of yours which you used to communicate with David Innes at the Earth's core. You have also used it successfully in communicating with Mars-

Gridley smiled, albeit with a certain element of restraint. "I see Jules Carter has told you everything," he answered. "But-I

hesitated connecting your quest with Mars until you had seen a few things with your own eyes. Until you understood-

Tarzan withdrew an envelope from his inside coat pocket. From the envelope he withdrew two pieces of paper. One was a hand-written note. The other was a photostat. He laid them on Gridley's desk.

"I know all the rest of it," he said, "but this is enough.

Gridley leaned forward and picked up the photostat. Suddenly, he tensed, excited-

"Why, this is a copy of-of something that was written by-

Tarzan nodded, finally seating himself on the edge of a chair beside the desk. "By John Carter, himself," he said. "During one of his visits here he spent some time compiling data for his nephew. Read that photostatic copy. It pertains to the diadem."

And this is what Gridley read, written in the hand of John Carter, Warlord of Mars:

The highest rank to which a member of the priesthood of the entirely evil and now fully discredited religious order of Therns could attain was the so-called Tenth Cycle, than which there was none higher save that of the dark and soulless false goddess, Issus, herself.

The distinguishing mark of the Hekkador, or Father of Therns, was that rarest of all jeweled artifacts on Barsoom, the Holy Diadem, worn on a golden circlet about the sacred yellow wig which invariably covered the Thern's completely bald head. In addition to being wrought of precious gold and platinum and certain alloys known only to the more esoteric Thern artificers, it was set with many beautiful jewels, principal among which was that rarest of all gems in the

universe, the Star of Issus, of which-as legend has it-there were only two in existence.

I have personal knowledge of the destruction of that lesser Star of Issus which adorned the brow of the last Hekkador, Matai Shang, as he fell to his death from an airship into a deep crevasse along the Great Ice Barrier of the Northern polar region of Barsoom. Of the other, only the very ancient Legend of Issus can tell.

According to this legend, Issus, herself, wore a greater stone on her own holy diadem, 'twice as large as the eye of a man,' which was

known as the Great Star of Issus. In later times, the original and genuine Issus caused to be made a lesser stone, which she handed over to the Father of Therns-as though it were a badge of authority given to one who ruled the lower heavens-and it was apparently this lesser Star of Issus which went to destruction along with its iniquitous wearer, Matai Shang, at the end of an ages-old dynasty of Hekkador's.

Insofar as the original Great Star of Issus is concerned, legend loses its detail somewhere, lost as an ancient river which sinks at last spent with its journey across time and distance into the dead sands of Yesterday's silenced eons. At this writing, all I can say is that if the Great Star of Issus exists, it is the only gern of its kind in the universe...

To this Observation was appended a most interesting footnote:

A great loss, if it is never to be located, inasmuch as certain Barsoomian scientists have been desirous of examining this rare gern in the light of certain historical information-to the effect that both of the stones mentioned above may, indeed, be composed of that legendary element, tharton, allegedly utilized by the ancient wizards of olden Barsoom. This element, alone, with phenomena occurring in the frequency ranges of human thought. Hence its other name, the psychic ray...

As Jason Gridley looked up to stare at Tarzan, the latter gestured at the other piece of paper.

"There's a note from Jules Carter-to you. Read that," he said, almost without expression, yet with the Suggestion of an emotion which was too great to be expressed.

Gridley picked up the note and read it aloud, since it had that characteristic about it which is typical of men who would rather think than make Speeches. It was short and to the point:

Dear Gridley:

John Carter left me a sufficient compilation of Barsoomian hieroglyphics to identify the diadem's inscription unmistakably. Morphology checks with earliest classical for of the language-extreme antiquity. Deciphered as: tekonossul Issus.. Translation: Great Star of Issus...

For some moments after he had read this, Gridley continued to stare at the note. His mind was racing far ahead, already dismissing the seeming miracle of so fortunate and complete an identification of the mysterious jewel from Opar, subordinating the wonder of it to the importance of its application.

"The-tenth Barsoomian ray." he mused. Then he looked up. "Now, my friend, how can we tie all this in with the disappearance of your wife and of La, High Priestess of the Flaming God?"

Tarzan rose and began pacing the carpeted floor like a caged lion, fascinating the eye with his swift, silent movement.

"I am not myself tonight," he said, then corrected himself, with a faint, cold smile. "Or perhaps I am too much myself! Words are not with me-"

Gridley understood his old friend. I'll talk for you, Tarzan. It may help us both to assemble our thoughts."

Tarzan continued pacing, though more slowly and thoughtfully now, as Gridley continued.

"We will keep in mind first of all that we are discussing an entirely different world than our own. Furthermore, in a comparative sense it is incredibly ancient. When homo sapiens first fashioned an arrowhead of flint, on Earth, civilization on Mars was already advanced. The Great Cataclysm that caused the Deluge and sank

Atlantis, and which almost wiped Mars clean of life, could still not erase at least the mental aspects of their progress.

"With the exception of the universal gift of telepathy, most Martians are about on a level with us today, but-there were some who seemed to ride a last wave of the olden tide. Some Martians-perhaps living in isolated seclusion-are frighteningly advanced-"

"Carter told me about Kar Komak and his phantom bowmen," interposed Tarzan.

"Ah! The Lotharians! Exactly the point!"

"It was Kar Komak," said Tarzan, "who taught John Carter the art of mental teleportation-across interplanetary space. He has achieved it several times.

Gridley leaned forward. "Suppose, then, that we save words, Tarzan. LH express our mutual hypothesis: The Great Star of Issus has psychic properties, or is attuned to frequencies occurring on a psychic level. As such, it could work as a medium, even an amplifier for human thought. Now-if a great mentality on Mars tried hard enough, it might teleport someone from Earth to Mars-particularly someone who happened to be concentrating upon the jewel at that moment.

"Admittedly, this is quite a thin hypothesis, but how also could you explain the peculiar circumstances surrounding the disappearance of La of Opar and your wife, Jane?"

"These are the conclusions we arrived at in Virginia," answered the ape-man.

"Of course," said Gridley, "this opens up a few more fascinating questions. First of all-how did a-jeweled diadem fashioned on Mars come to Earth in ancient times, and how did it end up in Opar, a colony of lost Atlantis? And secondly-who on Mars would want to snare a couple of terrestrial thin ice, but when there's o other way to cross the river-"

Now Tarzan stopped pacing. He stood before the desk. "The Gridley Wave," he repeated. "Can you try it, Jason?-can you communicate with this-John Carter? At least that would be a beginning!"

Gridley had foreseen this question. He slumped back in his chair. "I have done so, some years ago," he answered, slowly, "but it won't work now."

"Why not?"

"Cosmic rays wreak havoc with it at certain times. For several years the interference has been completely prohibitive. Just now conditions are at their worst. It would be of no use to even try. I-I'm sorry. I know how much it would mean-

"When do you expect the interference to lessen?"

Gridley shrugged, sadly. "I have no way of knowing, really. It could be months-or years.."

The scientist stared at his desk. In the silence which followed, he found it difficult to look up at the face of the man who had labored so desperately and waited so long-who stood at the threshold of discovery and Solution, only to be confronted with a insurmountable barrier.

He heard Tarzan take a deep breath, finally, and he heard him say, "Then I am afraid that I will have to take matters into my own hands."

There was something in the tone of that low, level voice which made Gridley look up quickly. "What do you mean?" he asked.

Tarzan shrugged, but he was not trying to be nonchalant. "I must go to Mars," he said.

The very simplicity of the Statement was overpowering and somehow frightening to Jason Gridley. His lips parted, gaping.

"You mean-actually, you contemplate-"

Tarzan's lips curved in a faint smile. "I have not the slightest intention of delving into mental science or necromancy, nor do I harbor any hope of achieving astral projection, as did John Carter originally. If I am to reach Mars at all it will have to be by purely physical means- in the flesh and blood."

Gridley shook his head negatively. "Some day, my friend, perhaps such a thing may be accomplished, but-

"Just a moment," said Tarzan. "Carter has quoted you to me. You wrote him only last year that-'the physical requirements for

achieving interplanetary flight have already been reduced to known mathematical quantities..."

"True," said Gridley, "but-"

Tarzan interrupted him, again in that low, dominating tone.

"I want that equation translated into a ship!"

Gridley got to his feet, on the defensive. "Now look here, Tarzan, you've got to be realistic! The equation you're talking about also emphasizes many obstacles in actuality which have not been overcome!"

"Such as?"

The scientist waved his hands in an all inclusive gesture. "Why, a host of insurmountable engineering-"

Tarzan's face was a white mask. His eyes bored relentlessly into Gridley's. "What are the obstacles? Name them. Let's take them apart, one by one."

"Why-such a project would require lighter metals, much stronger than are available today. Whole subsidiary research companies would be necessary-"

Tarzan smiled grimly. "You are more orthodox than I had

thought," he said. "The citadel of organized scientific dogma has robbed your mind of versatility-even caused you to forget, Jason! Do you remember the O-220?-the lighter than air vacuum dirigible which carried us both to Pellucidar? Do you remember the metal, Harbenite, and all your develop-mental work in Friedrichshafen, years ago?"

Gridley clapped his hand to his forehead."

Harbenite" It's true! Such a strong, light metal would have possibilities of altering the ballistics computations!"

Tarzan nodded. "The old mine must still be there-back in the Wiramwazi Mountains. Now- what is the next obstacle?"

A vague excitement began to grip Gridley, but he subdued it, knowing what practical truths he would yet have to State. "If's no use, Tarzan. There are so many details-we would need government help-I mean, if only in the matter of restricted materials, the use of giant electronic Computing equipment-"

"You forget again," interrupted Tarzan. "I am an English Lord. I am not unknown to those in government circles who have influence.

After all, the British and American governments should be vitally interested in such an enterprise."

"Ha!" exclaimed Gridley. "If we breathed one word to them concerning Barsoom as we understand it, they would shun us as though we were flying saucer addicts! I know! My Gridley Wave worked fine until I invited the Government and the press to listen in on Helium. That's just when the cosmic ray interference blotted out everything. I've spent years trying to recover my reputation in that direction."

"Need they know anything-except that we are striving to reach Mars?"

Gridley shrugged. "Using their money? I should say so! They'd be into everything!"

"I don't believe I suggested government subsidies," countered the ape-man quietly.

This Statement was followed by a long silence on Gridley's part. He stared at Tarzan, then sat down heavily in his chair. "You don't mean-"

Tarzan did not smile. Very levelly, he asked, "How much, Gridley? How much will it cost to translate the equation?"

Gridley at last pulled himself together. "Now look here," he said, determinedly. "I am going to have to deal with you in terms of cold and pitiless fact! It would cost many millions of dollars even to arrive at an estimate of how much! What can I say? One billion,-two?"

Tarzan's lips curved grimly. "not a space island, Gridley. Just a one-man rocket..."

Gridley stared back, grim and emphatic. "A one man rocket, without benefit of space island, eh? Give it four stages, and you have a projectile approximately twenty-four stories high, weighing hundreds of thousands of tons!"

"Wait a minute, Jason," said Tarzan, stubbornly. "Again you forget Harbenite, and that this isn't a government project. It can be a smaller undertaking, more efficient-and likely revamp your cost estimates relative to a metal like Harbenite. That mine, you know, won't cost anything except the labor and some new equipment."

Gridley struggled a moment with his thoughts, then shook his head again, negatively. "Even so, Tarzan," he insisted, "you're still way up in astronomical figures of dollars and cents. Reduce it even to a few hundred millions, and still-"

"Ah!" Tarzan exclaimed. "A price begins to emerge! I assure you I would not be facetious in a matter which concerns me so deeply. I want to know if the thing is possible at all."

Gridley slumped once more. "All right, Tarzan," he sighed. "For the sake of argument-two hundred million dollars-maybe! Now-where do we go from there?"

Tarzan's lips curved just perceptibly into a quiet smile of triumph. He began pacing the floor again, slowly, silently. Then he said, "My own estate, if completely liquidated, might start the project on its way-perhaps in the amount of ten or twelve million pounds. However, I have not forgotten that in my search for Jane Clayton I am also searching for La, High Priestess of the Flaming God. The priests of Opar offered me the entire contents of their treasure vaults. Inasmuch as I have at least some direction to follow now in the solution of the mystery which they first engaged me to solve, I would feel justified in asking them to make good their offer. I have many connections in that part of Africa, as you well know. My Waziri would not object to transporting such a burden of treasure into the hands of my business agents. And I am certain that my connections in the British government would prove helpful in converting everything quite rapidly into suitable banking credit."

"But-do you mean to say," asked Gridley, incredulously, "that the wealth of Opar would be sufficient to support the gigantic project you have in mind?"

Tarzan looked at him and replied with perfect equanimity, "You have not visited those ancient vaults. There is enough there to have affected the entire economy of Atlantis."

* * *

Where there is life there is hope.

The four-stage rocket, leaning high up against the sky, seemed to be a shining monument to the man who held this as the credo of his existence-Tarzan of the Apes.

There had been unforeseen problems, obstacles, moments of deep despair, and the cold negation of a giant Computer, which said that even with Harbenite, the initial acceleration required would kill.

But an electronic brain can only be as valid as the data which gives it orientation. Tarzan was not a Standard in the equations. He made them prove it, with him in the centrifuge.

Heart, circulation, kin-aesthetic and visual component measurements, though greatly affected by the terrible weight of acceleration, all held within the Classification of "purposeful and sustaining." Gridley and his associates could not believe the evidence which the instruments presented, yet Tarzan proved to be superior in stamina and strength to the full grown male orangutan which they had tested originally.

Then-at the penultimate hour-certain course data added to the Computer produced unexpected indications of limitations on the weight of cargo which the rocket would be able to carry. After much recalculation, the conclusion was reached that the only alternative was to eliminate the supply of food, water and air tanks which would be necessary to sustain a single occupant during the year long voyage across the terrible gulf separating Earth and Mars. As this consideration seemed totally untenable, the project appeared to be doomed to failure just at the very threshold of success.

However, Jason Gridley then announced that he might have a Solution to the dilemma if Tarzan were willing to take the risk. It developed that during the course of his previous Communications with Mars, Gridley had gleaned something of Martian surgical science from Ulysses Paxton, the one other Earth-man who had succeeded in "crossing over" as had John Carter originally. Paxton, known of Barsoom as Vad Varo, the famous disciple of that great genius and brain surgeon, Ras Thavas, had instructed Gridley in the art of suspended animation and had given him that same formula for the

preservation of tissue and blood as the famed Master Mind of Mars, Ras Thavas, had developed centuries before.

Gridley explained to his colleagues how it would be possible to design telemeter controlled equipment which would automatically place Tarzan in suspended animation for the duration of his voyage and resuscitate him later at the proper time. Thus, it would be unnecessary to weight the rocket down with anything but the sheepest minimum of air supply and water and concentrated food.

Tarzan naturally insisted on taking the risk, and after certain clinical experiments had been concluded, using the Ras Thavas method of suspended animation, all of the foundation's scientific advisers agreed that Tarzan's chances of reaching Mars lay well within the range of probability. And so it was concluded that the departure should be scheduled as soon as possible.

The site chosen for take-off by the Computer, as being the optimum approximation of the ballistics specifications, was the norther Beni region of Bolivia..

Like a transplanted Eiffel Tower, the gigantic four-stage rocket towered incongruously above the wide sweeping green mat of Bolivian jungle, ready to deluge that slumbering tropic world in a devastating blast of energy that would launch the first terrestrial human being into true interplanetary flight, out into the eternal gulf of dark and utter coldness that was the void of ethereal Space.

As Gridley and the others waited through those long tropical nights in their little encampment there for the red planet to reach the exact position designated by the Computer, each hour that loomed swiftly upon them out of the future and hurtled impenitently by into the past seemed increasingly more miraculous and utterly precious. For there were correspondingly fewer hours remaining for one among them who would leave Earth forever. All of them felt this strongly, with the single exception of him on whom their thoughts and emotions were concentrated. Or so it seemed.

During the last few weeks of their preparations and waiting, Tarzan had fallen in an uncommunicative mood and displayed an increasing predilection for the solitude of the jungle. He was often gone a day at a time on long hunting forays, in spite of warnings

from the native guides that the ferocious Potorero and Yanaigua savages were wont to wander through these parts.

Only on the occasion when his son, Jack Clayton and his wife, Jeanne Jacot Clayton, arrived on the scene to take up their vigil with the rest of the group did he break down into a wistful sort of cheerfulness, but only momentarily. Jack Clayton, who had learned the jungle ways of his famous sire, having been better known to certain jungle denizens of Central Africa as Korak the Killer, at once comprehended the ape-man's mood, as did the his wife, for she, too, had experienced that other life which translates the scents and sounds of the forest into a three-dimensional encyclopedia of meaning. In fact, father and son soon developed the habit of disappearing together and not coming back to camp until a day or two later.

On the very night of the take-off the two were conspicuous by their absence, and at last the members of the Gridley expedition felt that their sense of propriety must be subordinated to the vital experiment that lay before them. Gridley, himself, was delegated as a committee of one to call Tarzan to his task. True, the zero hour was still eight hours away, but the others could no longer endure the anxiety which his apparently unconcerned absence was causing them.

"Meriem," Gridley said to Jeanne Clayton-for he had become sufficiently acquainted with the beautiful young Frenchwoman by now to use her more familiar name-"you must help us to locate Jack and Tarzan. There is no time left Vital preparations must be made."

Meriem laughed, albeit with an ill-concealed note of sadness in her voice. "I know," she said. "Bwana has caused you considerable worry, but do not think that for one moment he has forgotten what lies before him." Her newly displayed habit of referring to her father-in-law as "Bwana," Gridley recalled, was but another outgrowth of her adventurous past, stemming from the time when she had been rescued by Tarzan from Arab slave merchants in Africa. "On the contrary," she continued, "it is because of that which lies ahead that he so ardently seeks the past."

'What do you mean?" Gridley asked, uncomprehendingly.

"Come!" she said. "I will show you."

They took to horseback and, well armed, rode out from the encampment toward a low ridge of hills where the jungles began. It was early evening, and a full tropical moon was rising. Beyond the ridge, Gridley knew, was the Madre de Dios River, one of the headwater tributaries of the Amazon, where Tarzan had amused himself several times with an Indian dug-out canoe, fighting rapids and whirlpools in a manner which would have earned any ordinary man the epithet of fool.

Gridley and Meriem topped the ridge, finally, a mile and a half downstream from the camp, and there she pointed out to him a scene which he would never forget. At their feet, the ridge sank abruptly toward a basin densely overgrown with the low, scrubby jungle that is typical of the Bolivian Montana. Beyond this growth was the broad moonlit band of the river, and in between was a brief expanse of grassland and sand. It was there, on the river's Strand, that he saw the two, father and son. They had just emerged from the water after a vigorous swim, both of their magnificent bodies gleaming in the rays of the moon.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Swimming at night, too! That water is infested with piranhas!"

"They have known worse dangers," said Meriem, pensively.

"We must call them at once," Gridley insisted.

"Yes. You are right. But do you know what it means to put an end to this moment in their lives?" she nodded toward the two below. "It isn't just a goodbye between father and son. It is an adieu, forever, to a world that Bwana loved and taught Korak to love. And I, too, have known and loved it, so I can understand. This is the jungle again. The tropic warmth of it exudes a magic elixir that changes the very chemistry of the blood and transforms one into something almost mythical, which makes him akin to nature and all that is in it—a sort of animal Nirvana.

"It is true that Bwana is going to try to mind My Dear-". This was Meriem's former name for her mother-in-law, Jane Clayton, Lady Greystoke, and in view of her use of it at this time, Gridley knew that she, too, had retrogressed in mood to that of her husband and his father. "But have you considered that he may also find only

oblivion," she continued, "out in the grave-less emptiness which lies between two worlds? Or even should he find her, will they both not be imprisoned forever out there in the heavens on another planet which is waning away to its own cold death? Where, again, will he know aught of the green warmth of sunlit forests, of the sweet sound of full rushing waters, or catch the subtle effluvium of life in the very air around him, aware of the youth and abundance of the young and vigorous planet which bore him?"

Gridley gazed at Meriem in amazement and saw her face glistening with tears. So intent had he been on what she was saying that he had not noticed the approach of Tarzan and his son. They rode their horses bareback, and each of them wore only his riding breeches and boots, for they had apparently intended to finish dressing while en route to camp. At sight of the other two, they gave a shout of greeting and forced their mounts into a wild, uphill gallop.

As they drew in alongside atop the ridge, Gridley could not help gaping at their stupendous figures, the high-held heads and full-muscled necks and arms and the massive Squares of their heroic chests. The thought had been only haunting him until now, but at this moment he was so poignantly aware of the significance of what this night must bring forever between these two that he was, himself, on the verge of tears.

"Getting worried, Jason?" asked Tarzan.

On his strong, perfectly chiseled face was a rare kind of smile which Gridley had not seen since the days of Pellucidar. That the other two knew that smile only too well was evidenced by the looks which passed between them.

Tarzan had shaken off the precariously anchored veneer of civilization. He was his old legendary self again, his towering strength and spirit made ready to face death with the awful simplicity of the primordial beast-in silence and without complaint, yet prepared also to pit his every power and faculty against all odds that might be thrown against him. He was taciturn, grim, even reckless-but motivated by a private purposefulness now that was terrifying to Gridley.

May God help this man's enemies!-Gridley thought, as they rode back to camp together in the most eloquent silence he had ever experienced.

No more need be recounted here except that the zero hour finally arrived. Farewells were said and Jack Clayton and his wife moved away from the rest of the group-they knew that they would look to the skies with a new longing for the rest of their lives.

As Gridley watched the great rocket disappear into the dark cold of that great gulf which separates us from the stars, he recalled that Tarzan had taken with him on his lonely journey the Great Star of Issus. How that evil diadem ever left the world of its origin not even legend could relate, but he was sure that the manner of its homecoming was destined to contribute a whole new volume to the ages-long history of Barsoom...

Chapter VI - THE ARCHITECT OF DOOM

TO John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom, it was a meeting between two old battle companions.

"Tars Tarkas!" he exclaimed, heartily grasping two of his giant friend's four massive arms. "You old green ghost of Thark! It is good to see you again!"

To this Tars Tarkas, however, there was nothing familiar about the meeting other than that which he could understand, vicariously, from the memory of the real Tars Tarkas. As the green chieftain, he was only an induced mental image in the surface convolutions of John Carter's brain, as he was to the three or four score guests in the Warlord's reception room.

He avoided physical contact as much as possible. As he withdrew from the Warlord's grip he noted the other's fleeting expression of puzzlement.

"It is always a pleasure to see you," he answered. "But you must forgive me if I seem dull this evening. I have ridden far and slept none at all in several days."

Before him, Tario saw the man who formed his greatest barrier to conquest. Though not possessed of the red-hued skin of his compatriots, neither was he white as a Thern or as the Lotharian.. Nearly naked except for his richly jeweled harness and fighting swords, he was a bronzed young giant, his splendid body displaying the clean, hard line of the trained fighting man and victorious Veteran of glorious battles that he was. His black hair, his steel grey eyes, brave, loyal, smiling-brought home to Tario the awareness of a dangerous strength, both of body and of spirit.

Of his mind he could not yet be sure, for preliminary light probing had proved it closed to ordinary telepathic Penetration. He would save a supreme thrust into that alien mental screen for later, when he was ready to leave.

"Ah, yes!" said John Carter. There is trouble brewing once more along the sea bottoms. Well, at least you shall be satisfied with food and drink before we go into that. Come!"

For one who had remained secluded from humanity for entire millennia of time, this emergence of Tario from his cloistered halls of philosophy and etherialism. Its people were far more numerous than he had imagined. They were brave, intelligent, scientifically far advanced, and amazingly self-sufficient. But, if all that he saw impressed him, it did not dismay. On the contrary, it intrigued him and only served to crystallize his original desire of conquest into a clear, cold flame of purpose.

In the hypnotic disguise of Tars Tarkas, he met them all-Tardos Mors, Jeddak of Greater Helium, Mors Kajak, Jed of Lesser Helium, Gahan of Gathol and his beautiful wife, Tara of Helium, sister to Carthoris.

That same Carthoris, son of the Warlord, who had first awakened Tario to the existence of the living world outside of Lothar, stood there beside his illustrious sire, almost equally as formidable a warrior. Beside him was Thuvia, his wife, formerly that same fair Princess of Ptarth who had awakened in him the life blood of the man who had wasted centuries of virility in ethereal dreaming.

However great her attraction still remained for Tario at this moment, it was eclipsed by the celestial beauty of the even more

queenly woman who stood beside her, smiling at him in sincere greeting to the friend of her husband. He

recognized her from the memory of Tars Tarkas as Dejah Thoris, wife of John Carter and beloved of an entire nation of red men.

Indeed was this a world worthy of taking!

After the banquet, out of consideration for Tars Tarkas' expressed fatigue, John Carter excused himself and withdrew with the imposter into his private Conference room. This was a broad, handsome room, semi-circular, opening out upon a great balcony which overlooked the now darkened city.

Tario saw the slender towers of Greater and Lesser Helium silhouetted starkly against the rising disc of Thuria, like two mighty swords raised in warning against the sky.

"Sit down, Tars Tarkas."

There was a new tone in the Warlord's voice. Tario looked at him. The two were alone now, face to face. It appeared to be the intimacy of comradeship which reached out to him, and also he noted a sign of concern.

John Carter pointed out a great chair of polished ersite which had been placed near one end of the Conference table. It had been designed, long ago, to fit the mighty shape of the Jeddak of Thark.

"Something is troubling you quite gravely," continued the Warlord, seating himself with a clanking of his great sword and harness. "Your message intimated trouble with the Warhoon's and the Thurds-maybe also the Torquasians. I hope we shall not be forced to subdue those bloodthirsty devils again!" Yet one wondered if this was what the Warlord really hoped, for a warning light of ready challenge lit his grey eyes briefly.

Then Tario recalled from the memory of Tars Tarkas the former scenes of battle in which this Earth-man had appeared. He saw him fighting Shoulder to Shoulder with the great Thark, against the white apes and the horrifying plant men, on the shore of the Lost Sea of Korus, there behind the golden Mountains of Otz where the River Iss and the deceived pilgrims it bore on its dark bosom arrived at the terminus of their respective journeys.

He saw him in many scenes of memory, which startled him with the other's strength, prowess and daring-saw him overthrowing the religious empire of the Therns, entering even into the subterranean depths of Omean, world of the black-skinned First Born, and dethroning the false Issus in the Holy of Hohes of Barsoomian theology.

Indeed, this man was going to make his game at least interesting for him, thought Tario. A stranger to this ancient world, he had come into it unannounced, naked and unarmed, yet with his famous sword, later acquired from the defeated green Jeddak, Lorquas PtomeI he had carved out whole chapters of history and sent an ages-old System of things and beliefs tumbling into the flames and the dust of destruction and oblivion.

Aha!-thought Tario. Here was one weak spot in John Carter's empire which perhaps no one had yet detected.

All the while he analyzed these things, he conversed with his host concerning the affairs of Thark, borrowing automatically from the fund of knowledge which he had extracted from Tars Tarkas' mind. Yet, privately, half his mind worked secretly in personal direction.

John Carter had torn down the old beliefs and traditions which had existed for millennia of time. He had cast out the religion of Issus and of the Therns and saved the people from hideous deception.

But-and here was the vital point-what had he given them to replace these traditions?-to filling the spiritual hiatus which the Warlord's great changes had created?

Tario suddenly concentrated on what he found himself relating to John Carter concerning the uprisings among the green tribes.

"Actually," he heard himself saying, "I think that the restlessness of the tribes is spiritual in nature. I think they long for a return to the old religion."

John Carter frowned. "How can that be possible?" he retorted. "Do they not know that the River Iss would carry them to hell and hideous death rather than to heaven? Of course, the power of the Thern priests has been broken. Well, do you remember, Tars Tarkas, our adventures within the sacred Mountain of Otz, and how we discovered, together, the Great Deception-how they used to prey upon the pilgrims

to their false heaven and rob them of their worldly possessions before turning them over to the tender mercies of the great white apes and the plant men. And do they not remember," he continued, angrily, "that the Issus I overthrew was a false and cruel old hag-a witch and cannibal?"

Tario studied the Warlord's intense expression and took not of his clenched fists. He could not resist putting words into the mouth of the Thark Jeddak he represented.

"However bitter the taste of truth," he countered, "men have always demonstrated the proclivity to eat of Carrion and of death if it be pabulum to the soul!"

A dark shadow passed over the features of John Carter. He was silent for a long time.

Then, with a suddenness which the Lotharian would not foresee, the Warlord was on his feet, and his long, keen fighting blade pricked lightly at Tario's chest.

"Who be you? That you are not Tars Tarkas I am certain. I have known him too many years. I know his race and I know his mind and temperament. Four times this evening have you betrayed yourself as an imposter. First, your strange attitude, your apparent groping to recognize old acquaintances, your obvious search for the correct words to say. Secondly, Tars Tarkas never shielded his mind from me- and yet you wear a metal screen which is as impenetrable as any I have ever sought to probe. Thirdly, you made the mistake of trying to probe my own mind. And now you speak words which no Thark ever had the depth of mind and soul to utter! More-over, just now I caught a glimpse of your inner thoughts, and I saw a colossal egotist! Speak! Identify yourself-or die!"

Tario did not release his disguise, but John Carter saw the false Thark smile, which on a green man's face is usually a sign of impending cruelty, or death. The Warlord's sword pressed harder-quick, insistent.

"I have no intention, just now, of revealing my identity to anyone," said Tario, calmly. "But one day you will meet me again, and then you will know who is your master, John Carter!"

The Warlord thrust almost instantaneously, but he thrust at empty air. He looked at the balcony, astounded.

There stood the imposter Thark, laughing. Mysteriously, he had transferred himself to this new location in the fraction of a second.

"Before I leave you," he said, "I would know the shape of your mind!" Then the laughter faded. He frowned, concentrating.

John Carter felt his mind gripped invisibly in a titanic fist, and cruelly pressed. He sweated, but he did not yield. Relentlessly, the terrible grip increased, pressing, crushing, probing with a strong needle point of tremendous mentality.

Retaliating, he leaped over the table, his earthly muscles carrying him thirty feet through the air. This time, when he drove his blade home, he felt it bite into flesh. In the same instant, the apparition of the green man disappeared entirely.

But, on the point of his sword-was blood!

Sardon Dhur was a Thern. Moreover, he was a Thern of the Tenth Cycle, next to the exalted and holy rank of Hekkador. But since the last Hekkador, Matai Shang, had met his death at the hands of John Carter, there remained no one to occupy the Eleventh Cycle, with the possible exception of himself.

But the Warlord had overthrown the old religion. Gone was the power of the Therns and the Holy Hekkador.

Sardon Dhur and his small group of the higher orders still maintained contact, however, hoping and waiting for the day when things might change. And that change came, at last, with the appearance of Tario.

"John Carter," said the Lotharian, "is well established. He is strong-too strong. And in that one fact lies the seed of his destruction, because the weapon which must now be used against him will be far more painful to him-and more enduring in its effect."

"I am not averse to considering the destruction of the Warlord of Barsoom," replied Sardon Dhur, cautiously, "but why have you come to me? In what way would I fit into your scheme?"

Furthermore, he wanted to say, where do you come in?

But Tario read his thought. "Where do I come in?" he repeated, "answering the unspoken question first."

"I am the sole master of Barsoom. That point must be made quite clear at the outset. But I need loyal allies, and they shall benefit from their participation by realizing their fondest hopes and dreams."

Sardon Dhur got to his feet. The two men were in his Conference Chamber in a small, secret palace which was still retained for him by the hidden Underground Organization of Therns.

"You assume too much, Lotharian!" he exclaimed, his hand already on the hilt of his sword.

But in the same instant his mind was taken over, and he seated himself once more in his chair, though not of his own volition. While he still remained in the irresistible mental grip of the other, he retained faculties to understand what his visitor was saying.

"Do you not recall the ancient wizards of Barsoom who were the advisers to the genuine Issus, herself? Of such am I, Sardon Dhur. In fact, memory of the past ages through which I have lived slowly returns to me, and I recall the fact

that I was always the master of them all. As such, I am the natural choice of rulers today. I shall depose this Warlord and his vaunted Jeds and Jeddaks who support him-and I shall be Jeddak of Jeddaks of all Barsoom; but you shall not lose out because of it. On the contrary, the Therns will be reinstated and the old religion will rule the minds of men once more."

At his point, Sardon Dhur felt himself released from his paralysis. Moreover, he sensed that he would even be allowed the privacy of his own thoughts again. So he took the opportunity to make certain mental reservations before he at last relaxed and even smiled, though grimly.

"You demonstrate your powers very well," he said. "But I take issue with you on your theories. Even assuming that John Carter's will in the matter could be thwarted-the old mysticism would be lacking, since the truth of what lies at the end of the River Iss has been revealed to all the erstwhile faithful of Barsoom.

"Ah!" said Tario. "That is just the focal point of my plan. Suppose that instead of death at the end of the River Iss the faithful were to find at least a portion of what they sought-a peaceful existence, their loved ones-happiness."

Sardon Dhur's brow furrowed. "I do not understand. Among other arguments I might present, the most apparent objection is that the Valley Dor in which the Sea of Korus lies would quickly become overpopulated."

Tario dismissed this with a wave of his hand. "Not all of the faithful need arrive. At first-all of them, yes. Later, when we are well entrenched-fewer, perhaps. Moreover, the faithful need tarry only a certain length of time in the lesser heaven of the Valley Dor."

"Lesser heaven? What do you mean?"

"Whenever necessary, the pressure of population may be relieved by diverting those of higher seniority into Omean," replied Tario.

Sardon Dhur frowned darkly. "Do you imply that the empire of the First Born is also to be resurrected, according to your plan?"

Tario continued patiently. "That the First Born and the Therns were once hereditary enemies was the basic cause of their downfall. In my more logical plan the two of you would be united, which would immediately form the basis of your strength."

Sardon Dhur shook his head. "Wisdom speaks, perhaps, where tradition cannot hear. Some of us might appreciate the possible benefits of such collective security, but the majority--"

"The majority of you will also hear and comprehend this wisdom," insisted Tario, "because each will again behold the vision of former strength and privilege. He will want all that again, especially if the gaining of it were to involve half the risk because of doubled strength."

"But-if Omean, the land of the First Born, figures in your plan as the second heaven, it cannot be revered as such again without the eternal goddess, Issus. John Carter exposed the last Issus as a fraud. This is the weakest point in the whole idea."

"Not at all," countered Tario. "It is our greatest opportunity."

Sardon Dhur frowned again, mystified. "I do not follow you," he said.

Tario waved his hands. "Simple," he answered. "Consider the Spiritual impact upon the masses if we were to make this an age of miracles and resurrect the original Issus of antiquity."

The Thern tensed, a nameless fear and excitement gripping him. 'You have opened this subject too far,' he said, for indulgence now in riddles. Tell me precisely what you mean!"

"Don't be naive," said Tario, with a cold smile. "We will find ourselves an Issus, and we shall prepare her mind to believe that she is what the faithful acclaim her to be."

Sardon Dhur relaxed visibly, but not entirely. The vague, slow tide of excitement still continued to rise within him. "By the gods!" he exclaimed. "But you tell a convincing plan, Lotharian! Yet, you have not explained how I am to help."

"This is also quite simple," said Tario. "You are the leader of the Therns, in fact their provisional Hekkador. Your order still possesses its old connections, its Underground lines of communication, as it were, into every major city and nation of Barsoom."

"Yes. This is true. And communication is important. But speaking practically again must I remind you that every plan of conquest must eventually turn to the subject of force of arms? I see your plan well enough. To divide the people with the sword of fanaticism is excellent. But this must always be backed by armies, ships, weapons. What of those, Tario of Lothar?"

"I and my followers can supply an army of almost a million warriors," replied Tario, smiling confidently.

"I do not know how," said Sardon Dhur, "but assuming that you can, this is nothing compared to the armed might of Helium alone, not to mention-

"A divided Helium," corrected Tario. "Helium and all her allies will eventually be weakened by the call to religious fanaticism, by the sub-conscience yearnings of the race to return to the olden faith - to embrace the sacred bosom of the River Iss and return to a resurrected Issus!"

"Even so-you know there must be a greater element of security in your plan."

"Correct. At one time the Therns maintained their own military, their armies, weapons and air fleets. You should, on the basis of a long term plan, be able to organize at least a million men to add to

my own. And let us not minimize the possibility of enlisting a great majority of the tribes of green men. I have personal knowledge that they would return again to the olden faith, if someone would show them the way."

The tide of excitement now raced free and full within the breast of Sardon Dhur. "You draw nearer to probability, Tario!" he exclaimed. "Now, show me one more source of support. Do you think that the First Born-?"

"Yes, the First Born. Once were their fleets mighty and feared upon Barsoom. This I have read in your own mind as well as in the minds of others. Moreover, I am remembering things out of antiquity of which none of you is now aware- and all things are in our favor. I believe that the black-skinned race can muster yet another million men to arms if not more-and if they cannot build us a fleet of warships, they can pirate them, as they have in the past."

Sardon Dhur sprang up, his eyes ablaze with a flood of released fanaticism. "By my sacred ancestors!" he cried. "It is a worthy plan!"

Tario remained calm and cool. "A plan which will require patience, secrecy, cleverness, logic, and leadership. As your leader, I now propose our next step." He watched Sardon Dhur's face carefully.

The latter guarded his mind and his expression. He said nothing but tried to look pleased.

"The next step," said Tario, "is for both of us to visit the First Born."

Instinctive revulsion assailed Sardon Dhur. "You mean - in Omean?" he asked.

Tario nodded. "In the depths of Omean!"

* * *

So it was that on that long gone day, on Earth, when Tarzan of the Apes walked with tailed men into the primordial shadows of Pal-ul-don, a much greater destiny was shaping for him through the medium of a small Martian airship which shot swiftly and silently across the lonely, forbidden regions of the Otz Mountains-toward the southern pole of Mars, itself. It carried two men, white-skinned like himself, but whose thought, intentions and motivations were as alien to his own as were those of the pithecanthropus at his side. Indeed, even more so.

For what could the ape-man have known then of Issus, of the subterranean Sea of Omean and the dark-skinned First Born, of the disgruntled race of Therns who licked their wounds and plotted together with the greatest mental wizard of all time to lay the torch of fanaticism to the pillars of an empire which a soldier from Virginia had erected upon an alien world?

Nothing then, to be sure. But the years were to weave a tapestry of fate which included him, and inexorably the distant and seemingly incompatible threads of causation and effect drew together.

* * *

Zithad, black Dator, or Prince, of the First Born, laughed aloud. A magnificent specimen of powerful, finely knit fighting man, chiseled in gleaming ebony, resplendent in white, jeweled harness, he threw his head back and laughed, flashing clean, white teeth as he did.

"By sacred Issus!" he exclaimed almost breathlessly. "John Carter himself would never have been so foolhardy! The two of you, a Thern and a Lotharian-and of Lothar I have heard nought in three hundred years of life! The two of you-come here into Omean, to the palace of the Dator, himself, ahne, seeking me as an ally in a mad plan to over-throw the Warlord of all Barsoom- to reestablish the forbidden religion in the very teeth of armed forces and navies which could obliterate us all in a Single day!"

He struggled to control himself, using the back of his hand to wipe tears of merriment from his eyes. "But on top of it all, this-this madman,yow!" He pointed an accusing finger at Tario. "You proclaim yourself dictator of the world!-master of us all!-before a Single sword has been raised to strike a blow of conquest!"

Again, he could not restrain his laughter. And as he laughed, Sardon Dhur watched him darkly, nursing within himself the instinctive hatred of his kind for his traditional enemy.

Always, he thought, had the First Born sought to lord it over the Therns of the lesser heaven- they who had harbored the false, cannibalistic goddess, Issus, in their hidden domain-or at least the entrance to her temple. From time immemorial their dark fleets had risen out of the depths of Omean to make massive raids upon the Therns, despoiling them of their treasures gathered painstakingly from the faithful who had gone to the bosom of the Iss, and to Korus. But this time, perhaps, it would be different.

Sardon Dhur stood at the foot of Zithad's throne. Two dozen royal guardsmen stood behind him. Yet he drew his sword and sprang half way up the dais toward Zithad.

"Your tongue is sharper and noisier than your sword, Zithad!" he cried. "This is not the time for a display of the usual egotism of the First Born. Silence your tongue and hear us out-or by my ancestors!-I shall silence it for you!"

Before Sardon Dhur had finished speaking, Zithad's face had changed mercurially from an expression of amusement to one of murderous rage. He drew his sword and sprang down the steps of the dais in one swift flow of movement.

Yet, even as the guards closed in to slay Sardon Dhur, and as the Thern's blade crashed against the First Born's guard, Tario intervened.

Not physically, but mentally. The two contestants from suddenly into immobility, as did the guards. Each man there present felt his mind isolated from his body, as though encased in a shell of steel. They all stood there like motion-less statues, as in some fantastic tableau.

"Sardon Dhur," said Tario, quietly. "Sheathe your sword."

The Thern complied, as though in a trace.

"Zithad, sheathe your sword also, and be seated on your throne."

The proud Dator of the First Born slowly sheathed his sword and returned to his throne.

"And now," said Tario, "behold!" He turned and waved his hand imperiously at the entrance of the throne room.

Trumpets sounded. Martial music crescendoed in the palace of the Dator, and the latter saw a military orchestra enter his throne room, followed by utan after utan of tall, white-skinned bowmen.

Gradually, as the room filled, Tario released his mental grip on the living men present. The black-skinned guards turned to look in consternation and amazement at this impossible invasion. Then they whirled about to face their ruler, swords still in hand.

"But speak, sire!" said the pad-war who was their officer. "And we will die in your defense!"

Zithad had risen to his feet, staring alternately at the bowmen and at Tario. He dismissed the brave Suggestion of his lieutenant with an impatient gesture.

As the music stopped and an ominous silence descended upon the great throne room, Zithad addressed Tario. "Long is the memory of the First Born," he said, "who walked upon the world before the rest of you had yet sprung from the Tree of Life. Thus it is that I recognize here the phantom bowmen of legend. And now I know who your are-Tario of Lothar. You are of that lost race of wizards who once gave immortality to Issus, herself! The original Issus, who disappeared at the time of the Cataclysm. Tell me-be there more of your kind?"

"Indeed," smiled Tario. "and if your memory of these legends serves you well, you will realize that our phantom arrows can kill."

Zithad sat down on his throne again. He waved a hand at the bowmen. "Dismiss them," he said, quietly. "I would hear your plan. You do not intimidate me, but your very existence is a thing that impresses me."

"I cannot do that," said Tario. "We adhere to the principle of realism with regard to our bowmen. To dematerialize them now would be to rob your guards of the conviction that they are real."

Zithad looked at his guards, then back at Tario, puzzled. "But you revealed their secret in the presence of my guards."

Tario smiled. "While I spoke to you, they were deaf and knew not of it. Instead, they heard you say that they should retire from the throne room..."

The pad-war of the guards had already saluted with his sword. He ordered his men to face about, and without another word they marched out.

"But-they would at least question such an order! My person is sacred to them, and this room is filled with alien soldiers!"

"They do not see them," replied Tario. "In fact, they are under the impression that you asked me to send the bowmen away."

Zithad could only stare at Tario.

"Now!" exclaimed Sardon Dhur. "Perhaps you will listen to us!"

Zithad frowned darkly at the Them.

"I cannot presume," said Tario, "that hereditary enemies would care to trust each other for long- nor could I, myself, ever trust either Them or First Born. We may as well be honest with each other. But certainly you will agree that the overthrow of John Carter, the reestablishment of the old religion, and the resurrection of Issus will work to the benefit of us all. And this may only be accomplished by the union of our forces now. Later, perhaps," he smiled coldly, "we may decide the issues which will effect our permanent relationship, one to the other."

Zithad studied Tario for a long moment in silence. Then he, too, smiled-coldly, yet with a certain registration of appreciation, such as one unscrupulous cut-throat might accord another when forced into a condition of armed truce.

"Well spoken, Tario of Lothar," he said, evenly. "Let us discuss your plan..."

Chapter VII - THE LEGEND OF ISSUS

RANAS Ghol sighed, but whether this was an expression of sadness, boredom or fatigue no man would have been able to surmise. For he and the few surviving members of his race were not to be judged, measured or understood by ordinary human Standards.

"Tonight," he said to Derlas Kor, "they come."

Derlas Kor was on his knees digging in the soil of the valley's floor. The two Zumorians' bluish skin blended with the mottled shade of the forest. Beside them, a woodland stream murmured softly. The day was peaceful, calm.

Derlas Kor straightened up, admiring his flowers. The two of them looked down at the colorful flower bed. Derlas Kor was a specialist with plants. Half the forest of Tarnath displayed the mastery of his patient hand.

Finally, the two Zumorians stood beside the stream and looked about them at the great, silent trees and upward, between the leaves and branches at the deep blue sky. Forest and stream was not their natural environment. But peace was-the king of ageless calm that was the result of changelessness.

"Yes," said Derlas Kor. "They will come. I have seen it also, and often have I cursed this gift our race possesses-to discern the structure of the future."

"Fortunately," smiled Ranas Ghol, "the future is blurred by variables of probability. We cannot know all."

"No!" retorted Derlas Kor. "It is not fortunate. Were the future a structure of crystal clarity, entirely pre-determined by the Creative Force, we might relax in the very imminence of doom-but the mists of probability call ever upon us to choose that course which is the least distorted by disaster. If only men knew that change is the root of evil, the earth-fault that presages destruction!

"For ages, Barsoom has been changeless, balanced as are all things in nature by the twin forces of good and evil, and we have survived in peace. Then came John Carter. We foresaw that he would overthrow the apparently evil system of this world's religion-but we hesitated to give him advice to the contrary, because perhaps it

would have been selfish, since only ourselves are vitally sensitive to change. Yet, were we not selfish, after all, in blinding ourselves to what our other eye could see?"

"Perhaps," answered Ranas Ghol. "His work, though sincere and nobly inspired, has sown the seed of its own destruction."

"Not necessarily. Do not forget the variables, my brother!"

"If we do not take an active part this time," said Ranas Ghol, "well-you have seen the course of that future. Yet when I explore the other variable which ensues from our participation, it divides itself again in split probability."

Derlas Kor smiled strangely. "Have you examined the third probability along that variable?" he asked.

Ranas Ghol nodded. "I have seen it. What do you think?"

"For once," said Derlas Kor, "let us think of the inhabitants of the living planets, and not of ourselves. Our world died long ago..."

They both looked once more at the sky, as though they could see the great belt of the asteroids, halfway between

Mars and Jupiter. Thence had they come, seeking refuge from the forces of the Cataclysm long years before their world was destroyed.

"It would be well to confer with the others," suggested Ranas Ghol. "I believe that they will agree on the third probability on the line of the second variable."

"Which means," sighed Derlas Kor, "that we must ally ourselves with those who will arrive tonight."

"So it seems."

"How is your ceramic art processing these days?"

"I have been concentrating on a new form of pottery," replied Ranas Ghol, happily.

The two walked through the still forest. They conversed quietly together, speaking of flowers and pottery in the looming shadow of the Great Escarpment of Tarnath-and in the much deeper shadow of a forbidding tomorrow.

The great banth looked up at the moonless night and growled. There were no clouds in the star-fired sky, yet fleeting shadows had raced above him and the wild thout which was his kill. In his sensitive ears was the subdued and distant whisper of whirring radium

engines, but since such sounds were not in the category of the Martian lions's experience re relegated the unknown to its own domain and soon returned to his feeding.

And the small fleet of darkened airships continued far beyond him, swiftly, silently, flying close to the surface of the rising sea bottoms. Secrecy was their shield. Should it be penetrated, the entire value of the plan they served would be lost as a bubble exploded in the air.

There were fourteen vessels, some of them first class warships, the others light cruisers. And they were black- black as the mouth of Omean.

In fact, on their bows was the cameo-like device of that subterranean empire-a Single white tower on a black field, representing Issus" sacred Temple of the Sun.

On the leading warship stood Zithad, Dator of the First Born, his royal cloak whipping behind his broad Shoulders as he leaned into the wind and peered ahead at the desolate horizon. Beside him stood Sardon Dhur, provisional Hekkador of Zithad's traditional enemies, the white-skinned holy Therns. And at his other side stood Tario of Lothar, self-acclaimed Jeddak of Jeddaks of all Barsoom.

The latter pointed ahead, suddenly. "There!" he ex-claimed. "My memory of antiquity has not failed me."

The other two finally discerned the mysterious objective. Against a horizon that blazed with stars they saw rising into the night a lonely tower. As they drew rapidly nearer, it rose massively before them, slowly dwarfing the small fleet into insignificance.

"Never did I imagine," said Zithad, "that he legendary Rock of Oracles yet existed."

"It-it is the tallest natural peak on the planet!" ex-claimed Sardon Dhur.

"It is not quite the natural phenomenon you have in mind," said Tario. "Moreover, only in legend is it known as the Rock of Oracles. In later times it came to be known as-the Great Escarpment of Rarnath."

Minutes later, the silent fleet soared slowly above the deep Valley of Tarnath. Thousands of the First Born troops and Thern

soldiery alike gazed wonderingly down at that sight which is rarest of all to Martian eyes-towering forest and meandering streams of fresh water.

As the ships drifted cautiously toward the looming Escarpment, the Valley widened and deepened, until at last is disclosed a titanic depression which was fully two miles deep.

"Look!" exclaimed Sardon Dhur, pointing over the railing of the open deck. "There below! I see the stars reflected back to me!"

"It is the Lake of Darkness," said Tario, "at the very base of the escarpment.

Zithad leaned far back to look above at the soaring cliff. "From base to top it must be all of six or seven haads(2) in height," he said.

"You have asked me to provide a hidden base of Operations," said Tario, "since even the depths of Omean are periodically policed by the forces of the Warlord and the size of your fleet is prescribed by the terms of your previous surrender. Here," he said, triumphantly, sweeping his arms wide to include the entire Valley, "is the great hidden Valley of Tarnath, the existence of which our alien enemy, John Carter, is totally unaware! And before you rises a fortress such as no world has ever seen!"

Zithad and Sardon Dhur whirled upon him. "Fortress!!" they both exclaimed.

Tario nodded. "That cliff is a giant meteor composed of material which no weapon of Barsoom may ever penetrate. yet is honeycombed with Chambers and it bristles with armaments."

Zithad grasped the hilt of his sword, tensing. "Is this betrayal, Tario? Have you led us into a trap of your own devising?"

(2) A Martian haad is equivalent to slightly more than two-thirds of an Earth mile, or approximately 2,339 feet. It is one-hundredth of a Martian degree at the equator.

Sardon Dhur now appraised the frowning escarpment with obvious apprehension. "Do you mean to say that mountainous pile is inhabited?" he gasped.

"No trap, gentlemen," said Tario. "But it is inhabited."

"By-what?" asked Zithad.

"By red men. I believe."

"Red men!" ejaculated Zithad. "Then they would be allies of the Heliumite Empire!"

"I doubt is they have heard aught of Helium in their lives. Moreover, they are merely the servants of the Masters of

Zumor-and that city still exists atop the Escarpment."

Zithad looked again at the top of the cliff, then back at Tario.

"Zumor?" His eyes widened. "By Issus! Do you mean-"

"Yes," said Tario, watching the Dator of the First Born closely.

"I see the legend of the Oracle is well preserved in your mind. I believe they may still live in that ancient city. They, too, must have wasted the ages, even as I, dreaming in futility."

Sardon Dhur became visible disturbed when he saw the proud Dator from Omean apparently cower in fear.

"Who are these Masters of Zumor, of whom you speak?" he demanded to know.

"Our allies," said Tario, gazing up at the Escarpment. "I hope!" He looked at the other two, gravely. "They are not men as you know them, and even I cannot penetrate their alien minds. You had better let me do all the talking. Zithad, order your ships aloft-to the city.

"Wait!" said Zithad. "You, Tario! You, yourself, fear them, do you not?"

"I fear nothing," replied Tario, evenly. "But I am possessed of sufficient wisdom to approach with caution that which is fraught with danger."

"I cannot fathom you, Tario!" complained Zithad. "Know-ing all these things concerning this fortress, how could you dare to risk us all in this manner? We lie beneath their guns-but why do they not hail us?"

Tario laughed. "Is not the ulsio(3) safe in the lair of banth? Out pitiful force is not worthy of their guns. And we had come with a fleet ten times as large as this we might have been obliterated ere we had ever sighted the Escarpment. Enough, Zithad! Let us know timidly and humbly at the legendary Gate of Oracles."

* * *

"We were aware of your plan," said Ranas Ghol, "even before it had fully taken shape in your mind. Your first positive act, which was the impersonation of Tars Tarkas, disturbed the future continuum with a new variable-and to these things we are quite sensitive-particularly if the new variable presents the probability of affecting every inhabitant of the planet."

The Lotharian, the Thern and the Dator of the First Born sat at a table facing seven blue-skinned Zumorians. The Conference room had been hewn from the metallic substance of the great meteor, itself. Close above their heads was a transparent ceiling through which they could see distant Cluros in the night sky. At their backs was a great amphitheater provided with seats that consisted of semi-circular elevations in the floor, like a concentric pattern of sound waves emerging from the base of the high, circular dais on which the Conference table was located. Beyond the empty seats were wide, circular steps leading upward to a broad, pillared balcony. From the railing of this balcony to the Lake of Darkness below was a sheer drop of three miles, owing to the two mile deep depression of the Valley of Tarnath at this point.

Beyond the balcony floated the dark shapes of the warships from Omean-awaiting the pleasure of the Dator.

(3) Martian rat

Tario turned to Sardon Dhur and to Zithad, a quiet smile of triumph on his handsome face. "Impressed as you were with my plan," he said, "it has been as nothing to me until this moment, as far as the element of security is concerned. I hoped that if the Zumorians yet lived we might ask them to examine the future results of our alliance. You have head their leader, Ranas Ghol. He already intimates that we are capable of altering the history of Barsoom."

Sardon Dhur shook his head. "It is too much to fathom.

And what I cannot understand, I cannot trust."

"Ranas Ghol," said Zithad, "would you kindly demonstrate to our ally here how you are able to look into the future?"

"Of course," replied the latter. He then addressed Sardon Dhur. "I shall not bore you with theory. Suffice it to say that all physical things have four dimensions, the fourth one being duration, since nothing can exist instantaneously, Now you are equipped with only two eyes, and your minds are so constituted that you catch only a planar perspective of the space-time continuum. If you saw light only along the path of those rays which have an angle of incidence of ninety degrees, you would call this polarized light. But your perspective of the true four dimensional universe is also polarized. You see only now. We, on the other hand, see at least the outlines of the extension of all things into past and future-thusF

Whereupon the furrow in his forehead opened wide, to disclose a great, baleful orb that was gray, vaguely opalescent, and totally devoid of a pupil.

Sardon Dhur half rose out of his chair, his face contorted in alarm and instinctive revulsion. "Be the Holy Seed of Life!" he swore. "You are not human-not of this world!"

"They are human," said Tario, "but they originated from a world which was destroyed by the Great Cataclysm."

Sardon Dhur sank back in his seat, staring at Ranas Ghol's third eye. "And with that" he asked, "you can see our future?"

"Not as individuals," said Ranas Ghol, as though in a trance-for his third eye still stared unblinking into the fourth dimension. "But by the probable affects of your combined efforts." Having said this, he closed the great eye in his forehead.

"A question, then," said Tario, leaning forward. "Would your view of the future indicate to you whether or not you should ally yourselves with our cause?"

"We have anticipated that question," replied Ranas Ghol. "And the answer is affirmative."

Zithad and Tario exchanged triumphant glances. Sardon Dhur could only watch Ranas Ghol in silent fascination.

"Provided that you consider some of own suggestions," added the Zumorian.

"Since your kind, alone, can see the future, your suggestions are our greatest asset," said Tario. "Speak!"

"First," said Ranas Ghol, "the Thern, Sardon Dhur, can furnish you, Tario, with an instrument of great value-which you, alone, can use to a greater advantage than any of us."

The Thern frowned in puzzlement. The black-skinned Dator of the First Born and the auburn-haired Lotharian stared at him.

Ranas Ghol continued, addressing Sardon Dhur. "When your Hekkador, Matai Shang, fell to his death in a crevasse in the northern polar regions of Barsoom, various members of your order formed a secret expedition-not to recover the body of Matai Shang, but the Holy Diadem, which contains the rare jewel known as the Star of Issus."

Sardon Dhur sprang to his feet, his sword half drawn. "None shall take it from me!" he exclaimed. "The Holy Diadem is the symbol of the Hekkador, and if anyone shall wear it, it shall be worn by myself! For this have I preserved it!"

Tario tensed. "The Star of Issus!" He looked at Ranas Ghol. "You mean, the same jewel which-"

"Which you, yourself, created," said Ranas Ghol, "out of that finer matter, tharton, which once existed in the quanta from the sun-before the Cataclysm."

Sardon Dhur's mouth dropped open. "Which you created!" he exclaimed, to Tario. "But how-"

"Long, long ago," said Tario, "I fashioned two of thern-the greater, original stone for Issus, herself. But the Great Star of Issus was lost with its sacred wearer, at the time of the Cataclysm."

My original purpose in isolating tharton was to obtain a crystal that would generate the Tenth Barsoomian ray."

"I have not heard of the tenth ray," interrupted Zithad. "What is its nature?"

"It is a psychic ray," replied Tario. "With it my race could have worked such wonders as man could not dream, but Issus was jealous of our power after that and prevented me from experimenting further. The Great Star of Issus even gave her miraculous seeming power over her subjects. That the Hekkadors did not discover the secret of the precious tharton crystal in their own Holy Diadem is their own loss."

Ranas Ghol looked again at Sardon Dhur. "If you would have this 'Holy Alliance' of yours succeed, you must allow Tario to use the Star of Issus."

"Ah! Lend it to him-yes! But it is sacred property and may not be taken permanently from our holy order," said Sardon Dhur.

Zithad frowned. "Just what will you be able to do with it Tario?" he asked.

"I am not sure," replied the Lotharian, evasively. "But we shall see when the time comes."

"And now," said Ranas Ghol, "we come to the second Suggestion. It is that you should study carefully the ancient Legend of Issus. In that legend is a prophecy. Do you remember?"

"I do!" exclaimed Zithad, a feverish glow of fanaticism lighting his eyes.

"Good! The you should tell it to us, for the First Born were the original guardians of the genuine goddess, herself. But before you do, let us clarify one thing. Who was the original Issus?"

Silence. Each man looked at the other.

"We do not know," said Zithad. Do you? All I recall is that she was of the Thern race."

Sardon Dhur's brows arched. "Thern!" he exclaimed.

"But I thought-"

"That she was of the First Born? No," replied Ranas Ghol. "But you have established my point. The original Issus was white"

Tario frowned, trying hard to recall facts out of distant antiquity which eluded him just beyond the veil of memory. For once, his sharp eyes failed to notice something that was important to him. He did not see Derlas Kor and several other Zumorians look at him intently and then apparently relax when it became evident that he could not remember.

"Now," said Ranas Ghol. "The Legend of Issus, if you please, Zithad. Actually, it is misnamed, as a legend, you know. It is really a prophecy, from beginning to end."

The Dator of the First Born appeared to be entranced. As though from a catechism learned as a child long ago, he recited, almost chanted-"Fire and destruction shall fall lip-on the worlds of man. One world shall die. One shall know a twilight of life. Two shall live, and one of these shall harbor Issus. But eons must pass white the twilight world shall struggle to survive, and a false Issus shall rise up, and great shall be her evil power. The she, too, will pass, and there shall follow a twilight of religion..until the true and eternal Issus shall return to her own world..."

He stopped, staring at his audience.

"Go on," urged Ranas Ghol.

"Yes," said Tario, a new excitement lighting his eyes. "Now that I recall, there is more, Zithad. Go on!"

The Dator, almost fearful of his own emotions, continued. But-her glory will only be complete when her mate, Tharos Pthan, Guardian ofHeaven, shall emerge from the body of a great white ape and place upon her head the original Holy Diadem which supports the Great Star of Issus, twice the size of a man's eye. And it will be a time of miracles when even animals shall speak, and the final period oft he peace and glory of Issus shall prevail.

Zithad shook his head, frowning. "There is something more, I believe," he said, "but I cannot recall it."

"The rest is immateriell,M said Ranas Ghol.

"It is preposterous!" exclaimed Sardon Dhur. "How can all this gibberish be of importance to us here?"

"It is your greatest weapon," said Ranas Ghol. "This prophecy will be taught to the people of Barsoom, through your own Channels of communication-through the old temples of the Therns, in every city and nation."

"Don't you see the wisdom of it?" smiled Tario. "We 'resurrect' an Issus in which the faithful will believe implicitly. Thus half of the prophecy will be reality to them. But they shall wait, quite fanatically, for the coming of the Guardian of Heaven, Tharos Pthan. And that will never be, of course, since it is, as you say, gibberish -to us who know better. But the people will believe, and while they wait they will be our faithful allies-against the Warlord."

"I see it now," smiled Sardon Dhur at last. "No faith is so strong as that which looks to the distant promise of fulfillment!"

However, Zithad did not smile. "To the First Born," he muttered, as though to himself, "the prophecy is valid, for did not the false Issus already fall? We believe in the resurrection of the true Issus."

Tario and Sardon Dhur winked at Ranas Ghol.

They could not quite fathom the Zumorian, however, when he answered, "Who knows, for certain?"

Which was a strange Statement, indeed, for one who could observe the future!

Chapter VIII - KAR KOMAK'S QUEST

YEARS later, certain gentlemen attached to the British Government prepared a note to their consular agents in Nairobi. It was designed to call to London one John Clayton, Lord Greystoke--otherwise known as Tarzan of the Apes.

As they signed the secret order, a bugle sounded, clear and sweet. But these gentlemen could not have heard this particular bugle, for it sounded in a great ballroom in the palace of Tardos Mors, Jeddak of Greater Helium--some forty-eight million miles away.

"The dance of Barsoom!" exclaimed the red skinned warrior, lowering his bugle.

"I claim you for it, Valla Dia!"

The Jeddara of Dusor turned her lovely head to smile devastatingly at the resplendent prince who had addressed her.

"Carthoris!" she exclaimed. "And what of Thuvia? Can she forebear to overlook the slightest opportunity of being in the arms of her handsome husband?"

"Evidently!" laughed Carthoris. "For she has suspected you of the same dereliction of wifely devotion!" He nodded toward a couple on the floor who had already swung into the dance.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Jeddara, frowning in mock jealousy.

"So it has happened at last! My own husband, Vad Varo, has finally succumbed to the fatal charms of your maiden of Ptarth!"

"Alas!--that we should be left to console each other!"

The two turned laughingly to the attendant who brought them their instrument. Already, the other dancers had found their appointed musical parts in the memorized score, and from everywhere in the ballroom came the pleasant notes which they played. Each instrument was constructed of skeel wood, the single string being composed of gut, and was shaped to fit the left forearm of the dancer, to whom it was strapped. There was also a ring wound with gut which was worn between the first and second joints of the index finger of the right hand and which, when passed over the string of the instrument, elicited the single note required of the dancer.

As the dance progressed, Valla Dia took note of a tall, handsome officer who merely stood on the sidelines and watched the others.

"There is a very strange man," she said to Carthoris. "I have seen him several times at social functions. He is a fine looking warrior, yet he is never in the Company of a woman."

Carthoris soon discerned the man, himself. As he recognized him, he smiled, looking back at Valla Dia.

"Is that the only strange thing you have noticed in him?" he asked.

"No. That he is not a red man is obvious. He is white, as is Vad Varo and your illustrious father, John Carter. But, if he were of that other world of Jasoom, I should have known the fact ere now. Nor is he a Thern, for his fair hair is real enough, whereas the Therns are bald from birth."

"He is a Lotharian," said Carthoris.

"Lotharian? What far place is that? I do not recall having ever heard of Lothar."

"Few people have. I was there once." A frown passed over Carthoris' features.

"Ah yes! Well do I remember now! It was from Lothar that you rescued Thuvia of Ptarth! And this Lotharian became your ally."

"Yes. He is my friend-a formidable battle companion, too."

"And his name?"

"Kar Komak. He was formerly an odwar of the Lotharian bowmen, but now he is a dwar in the Service of my father, the Warlord."

Valla Dia looked again at Kar Komak, sadly. "He seems to be such a very lonely man."

"Yes," said Carthoris, pensively. "Very lonely."

It was at that moment that a palace guard brought a verbal message to Kar Komak. He nodded gravely and quickly followed the guard out of the ballroom.

Fifteen minutes, later, he stood before John Carter in the latter's Conference room. The two were alone.

"Sit down, Kar Komak," said the Warlord.

As the dwar complied, his superior studied him carefully. "You have been away for a long time," said the his superior. "Were you not attached to the twenty-fifth and thirty-seventh utans which accompanied Tars Tarkas, on the campaign against the southern Warhoons?"

"Yes, sire. I have but just returned."

"Naturally," said the Warlord, "I have received my official report on this campaign, but I should like to get your personal reaction. Why do you think the tribes are in turmoil?" I Kar Komak looked his surprise. "It is common knowledge, sire! They have abandoned the treaty of peace which you and Tars Tarkas made with them years ago."

"And the reason?"

"The reason is that you oppose the old religion. They have returned to it, and, since you are opposed to the idea of worshipping Issus, they consider it sacrilege to adhere to your government."

John Carter got up from his chair and began to pace the floor. It is strange," he said. "The belief in a resurrection of Issus is growing."

"The Therns are at work again, John Carter," said Kar Komak.

"I know it! We have investigated their activities, yet, on the surface, they appear quiescent enough. They are working secretly. And the dangerous part of it is that if I were to smash their Underground Organization and make public examples of them I would only succeed in making martyrs out of them-thus strengthening their cause!"

"There are signs of their work everywhere."

"Yes. This thing has been growing for years. And have you taken note of the increase of debtor slavery in our agricultural areas? With increasing frequency the people appear to be unable to redeem their currency(4) believe they are actually giving money to the Therns!"

"Do you suspect that there is someone behind all this?" asked Kar Komak.

John Carter stopped his pacing. He looked at the other gravely, studying him. At first, he did not answer. Instead, he returned to his chair and sat down.

"Kar Komak," he said at last, "you are a Lotharian - a member of an ancient race of mental wizards. It is you who taught me the secret of teleportation between worlds, and several times have I availed myself of the opportunity to visit my old friends on Earth-that is, on Jasoom."

"That is true," said Kar Komak. "Yet curiously enough I have never, myself, had the inclination to visit another planet."

"But tell me," continued the Warlord, "why it is that I am able to teleport myself across the gulf of interplanetary space, yet I am unable to travel short distances by the same method-as from this table, let us say, to that balcony."

"Ah! Localized teleportation would require a much finer degree of control."

(4) Debtor slavery was first explained in A Princess of Mars: "Paper money is issued by individuals as they require it and redeemed twice yearly. If a man issues more than he can redeem, the government pays his creditors in full and the debtor works out the amount upon the farms or in the mines, which are all owned by the government. This suits everyone but the debtor, as it has been a difficult thing to obtain sufficient voluntary labor to work the great isolated farm lands of Mars, stretching as they do like narrow ribbons from pole to pole..."

John Carter glared at him. "Kar Komak-can yow do it?"

"It never occurred to me to try.

"Then try it! It is important!"

Kar Komak studied the Warlord's face for a moment and became convinced that he had very good reasons for making the request. Therefore, he concentrated, applying the same principle which he had taught John Carter.

In the next instant, he stood on the balcony, smiling back at the Warlord. "It works!" he exclaimed. "Why is it that you who are less endowed with these powers must always remind me of my potentialities? It was Carthoris who first suggested that I materialize my own phantom army of bowmen-"

"Kar Komak," interrupted John Carter. "Please come back and be seated. I would tell you of something which happened in this same room more than ten years ago. Until now, I have told it to no one, for I could not explain it. Now, perhaps I can."

Whereupon he related to Kar Komak the experience which he had had with the false Tars Tarkas. When he finished, the color had drained from his listener's face.

"By my sacred ancestors!" exclaimed the latter. "But this was the work of a Lotharian!"

"I have long suspected it." replied John Carter, with a cold, grim smile of recollection on his face. "Before the

imposter made his mental assault on me, he said, 'One day you will meet me again, and then you will know who is your master..'"

Kar Komak sprang to his feet, alarmed. "I know the author of those words!" he exclaimed. "Who should know better than I the author of such egotism-for he is Tario, Jeddak of Lothar-the great mentality who created me!"

A long silence ensued, while the two men shared together the effects of this revelation.

"Curiously enough," said John Carter, at last, "we had been discussing the restlessness of the green hordes of the sea bottoms-and the subject of religious reform."

Kar Komak's expression slowly changed from one of apprehension to a frown of anger. He clenched his right fist and banged it upon the table.

"Tario! Always did he regard himself as the ruler of all men. Once he became awakened to the awareness of a repopulated world surrounding him, it would be a natural assumption on his part that he should be Jeddak of Jeddaks of all Barsoom! Tario is abroad in the world, John Carter! And he is a very real menace-even to you!"

"For this reason have I called you into Conference," re-plied John Carter. "I need proof of what we now both suspect. Someone must spy upon Lothar. Who but yourself would be a more satisfactory choice for the assignment?"

Kar Komak tensed. "And who but myself could more thoroughly appreciate the dangers involved?"

John Carter's brows arched. "You are afraid?" he asked.

Kar Komak smiled, coldly. "On the contrary," he answered. "It is a Singular opportunity for which I have waited long. But I should go disguised as a red man."

"Your mind, too, should be disguised," said John Carter, wryly, as he read in the Lotharian's mind the intent of an assassin.

Again, the cold smile. "You comprehend the nature of the mission well, my lord!"

As Kar Komak, effectively disguised as a red Martian panthan, sped away from the twin towers of Helium on his swift, one man flier, he alone was aware that he was concerned with two missions rather than one.

A lonely man was Kar Komak, for reasons which had long remained buried in his secret heart. There beneath hurtling Thuria and the more distant Cluros, as he raced south of Hastor and west, toward the dead and waterless Sea of Throxus, he considered a personal problem that had plagued him ever since the day when he had first entered the society of Helium.

Woman. The female of the species.

That he was attracted to the opposite sex was to be expected, especially in a nation where beautiful women were the norm rather than the exception. But, because all of the women he had met inspired

in him the noblest instincts of man, this very reaction was the deterrent to a closer association, which had mystified his friends and acquaintances—all save Carthoris, perhaps, who seemed to divine a portion of the truth.

One of the first gifts a man wishes to lay at the feet of a loved one is an open heart. Honesty—and the ability to give as much as is received. But Kar Komak felt that in his case marriage would be a deception. And, therefore, he envied the happy couples he knew—Carthoris and Thuvia, Gahan of Gathol and Tara of Helium, and above all—John Carter and Dejah Thoris.

Why? Because Kar Komak was not as other men. He was a mental creation. True, he was of the flesh and blood of the living. But what heredity, what legacy of blood line could he give to his offspring. None. None at all!

Nor could he dare to reveal the closely guarded secret of his origin to a prospective sweetheart, lest she think him mad. Therefore, into Kar Komak's lonely life had come no

love of a woman, because he, himself, willed it so—even in spite of the avid interest which many a Heliumite maiden had demonstrated to him.

But of late, a great and daring inspiration had come to him. There was a way of solving his loneliness—if he dared! And what a princess she would be—if only the miracle lay within his power!

However, Kar Komak was a loyal soldier who had laid his sword at the feet of John Carter. This meant that his sword and his life was forever dedicated to the Service of the Warlord. Therefore, there were other matters which should be occupying his mind this night.

He forced himself, at last, to concentrate on the dangerous mission which lay before him.

Boldness was a part of the plan. Such rash boldness as would allay any suspicions on the part of the Lotharians that he was anything but what he pretended to be—a panthan, or soldier of fortune, who was ready to serve any nation or minor jid in return for profit, or at least his food and shelter.

Moreover, he knew that the soaring battlements of Lothar were not protected by an air patrol. The Lotharians were philosophers and

mentalists who relied upon their deadly phantom bowmen to protect them. They knew naught of aircraft.

Thus it was that when Kar Komak passed over the range of mountains which concealed Lothar from the outer world, he did not land to conceal his flier and approach the ancient city on foot. Instead, he sailed innocently onward, until the great, towering walls loomed before him.

Strange were the emotions of the man who must call this his native land, yet of which he had never been a part. Still, it was home. Here had been his origin-in the very mind of the most dangerous enemy he sought-Tario, Jeddak of Lothar!

Boldly, he sailed across the walls and floated above the city. And in that same instant, dawn came with the abruptness which was typical of Barsoom.

The light of the rising sun illuminated the broad avenues and the magnificent buildings of the ancients. He cut his engine and drifted slowly toward the center of the city, examining it curiously. Silence greeted him. No human figure, whether real or phantom, stirred there below. He could sense that Lothar was empty. Its inhabitants were gone.

His mind filled with Startled conjecture, Kar Komak landed in the great Square before the massive palace of the jeddak. If he were being deceived and led into a trap, he reasoned, it were just as well. He would explain that since he had discovered an apparently deserted city he had decided to explore it. Which was a plausible story, inasmuch as the dead sea bottoms of Barsoom are dotted with the deserted cities of the ancient races.

Yet he could not rid himself of the conviction that Tario had left this place and taken the others with him. As he walked through the empty halls, even the soft padding of his sandals of sitidar hide raising a somber echo among the golden, jewel-encrusted pillars, this conviction grew.

And, at last, he stood in the empty throne room of Tario, himself.

Gone. All gone. A lifeless city. He was its sole inhabitant.
Or was he?

Suddenly, a thought occurred to him which stirred him to instant action. He raced up the dais of the throne. Since he was a mental creation of Tario, he recalled the jeddaks secrets. And there was a secret here in Lothar which touched heavily upon his own personal prob lern.

He found the room-a secret Chamber adjoining Tario's private sleeping quarters-windowless, escape-proof, except for the massive stone door which now stood ajar.

Kar Komak entered the place in awe. Here, in this hidden room, Tario had sought to perform the same miracle which now haunted his own mind and heart.

Well, and why should it not be possible? Was he not, himself, the living proof that the thing could be done- again? He was a mental creation-a man.

Here in this room, for many years, Tario had concentrated upon a phantom woman of unimaginable beauty, hoping to bring her into permanent reality even as Kar Komak had been created.

Perhaps Tario had failed in this. But that did not matter now. Necessary to the processes involved was just such a perfect room as this, isolated and undisturbed. And now that Kar Komak had it to himself, he would use it for the same purpose!

Mental creation. A woman, who would share with him a similar origin and know him alone in this world to call "My Chieftain!"

The years of loneliness and despair ebbed away from Kar Komak now like a might tide, leaving him shivering on the rock of realization. He was weak with his own emotions. At last, here was the Solution to his longings!

Then he sobered. It would require years, and he would have to train himself to patience. That door must remain closed. Never could he look upon his phantom love until he was sure that she would remain in life. To visit her before the transformation had occurred would be to lose her forever.

He wondered if he would be equal to the temptation, or would he go mad with waiting? He could go about his affairs in the world as usual, but at least one hour out of each day he would have to devote to concentration upon this hidden Chamber, implanting within it the enduring faith image of his mental mate.

Today he would begin. He would spend the entire day and night in concentration-upon her.

Then, he would depart in search of Tario...

All that day and far into the night, Kar Komak permitted himself the luxury of concentrating on that which was of his

own private world. Later, he would return to duty, but now what he was doing was more important to him than life, itself.

Once the flood gages of long restricted emotion had been opened, he was carried away by his determination to achieve his impossible dream.

Impossible? Who could say? According to the Lotharian ethereahst school, mind was all. Matter was only its grosser manifestation.

He conceived of a different kind of woman. White, like himself, but with raven black hair and deep blue eyes. With that excess of tenderness of which only the strong and silent are capable, and which the world would never witness, he formed her in his thoughts, in body and mind. She was not to be but the reflection of his secret yearnings, a mere puppet to cling to him in helpless devotion. One the contrary, she would be strong, lithe, beautiful, proud-with a mind and character of her own, whom he would have to win!

And, by the gods!-he would win her!

Thus it was that Kar Komak was not aware, that night, that his small flier had attracted unwanted attention. He was not aware of the two dark battle cruisers drifting silently above the Square in front of the jeddak's palace.

He was not aware of anything but the shining phantom princess whose form, he believed, was already taking shape behind the closed door of Tario's secret Chamber-upon whom he might not hope to gaze until he was sure her transformation into reality had occurred.

Then-rough hands seized him from behind. He turned in the darkness of Tario's sleeping quarters to see half a dozen black-skinned warriors, their short swords already at his ribs.

And another thing he saw in a single shaft of moonlight, just before he was Struck unconscious by a blow from the flat side of a sword. He saw several white men behind the others, each of them wearing the outlawed yellow wig of the holy Thern...

Chapter IX - TARNATH

WHEN Kar Komak regained consciousness, he found himself on board a large aerial battle cruiser. He lay on the open deck chained to the starboard rail evidently in preparation for disembarkation, for the vessel was slowing its for-ward movement.

It was now somewhere near mid-day and he saw hundreds of black-skinned First Born soldiery and Therns alike, also in battle harness, moving quickly about the ship on their various duties. Not far away on the starboard moved another great, black battle cruiser, on the bow of which he could make out the device of Omean.

Above his head swooped smaller, swifter craft These appeared to be the units of an air patrol. On them he could discern both the device of Omean and another-a blazing sun-which he understood to be the outlawed device of the overthrown Them Empire.

"Where are we?" he asked of a First Born pad-war of the guard, who stood near.

The black warrior looked down at him, surprised that he was conscious. He smiled with a mixed expression of derision and triumph. "Ha! Red man-awake! And shake your wits alive!" he exclaimed. "For you are at the mighty gates of Tarnath!"

Dim memories assailed Kar Komak-memories which were borrowed from the mind of Tario. A ghostly Suggestion of awesome antiquity and mystery carried over.

"Tarnath," he muttered, dazedly. "What is Tarnath?"

For answer, the black-skinned pad-war grasped him roughly and pulled him to his feet. "Look!" he exclaimed. "Let your own eyes bring you the answer! See for yourself, panthan, where your next and final allegiance must lie!-for to serve any other cause now than that of the Holy Alliance and Sacred Issus is to serve defeat, and to suffer damnation of the soul!"

Thus it was that Kar Komak was permitted to look upon the results of ten long years of uninterrupted preparations at Tarnath. He saw below him the forested Valley, which seemed to sink gradually into a dizzying abyss as it led to the massive, looming Escarpment.

Down there, to his amazement, he made out vast troop encampments and open air factories where aerial battle craft were being assembled. Most astonishing of all, he discerned a large party of giant green warrior riding on their swift thoats straight through the largest encampment of red men!

Above the Valley, beyond its walls, he could make out many more vast military camps. In the sky near the pinnacle of the Escarpment his startled gaze disclosed for the first time a gigantic fleet of first line battle craft, and far beyond, near the horizon, he made out a long, thin line of ships which numbered in the thousands.

"And all of this," said his guard, "is but the surface detail! Mighty is the Alliance! In every city and nation the people are ready to rise in their righteous wrath against the Warlord who had denied a world-upon which he was never born-its sacred right to worship of Issus!"

Kar Komak cautiously probed the other's mind, and he found there much more that he could not fathom entirely.

There was something about a mysterious race of Zumorians who claimed that the time to strike was yet far off, that greater security must yet be provided against the might of Helium and her allies. He saw that the First Born were fanatically impatient to strike for Issus-who had not yet been resurrected but in whose imminent appearance the firmly believed.

But, most important of all-he read in this man's mind that Tario and all the other Lotharians had made Tarnath their headquarters!

Frantically, Kar Komak snatched at thoughts of the other men moving about the deck. Mentally, he staggered, caught in a kaleidoscope turned to Maelstrom.

Tario! Always Tario loomed behind each picture that came to him. Tario of Lothar-who called himself Jeddak of Jeddaks of all Barsoom. Tario, who had united Thern and First Born and centralized their efforts under the extra-dimensional vision of the Zumorians. Tario, who had added to the Holy Alliance half the green hordes of the sea bottoms!

And John Carter only suspected that trouble was brewing!

By his unknown ancestors! If he were not apprised of this terrible danger soon, if he did not immediately rise in all his might to strike a blow of death to Tarnath, he and all he had fought for would surely be plunged to destruction!

Beyond this face, Kar Komak knew three things for certain. First, he must learn all he could of this Holy Alliance-its plans, its scope, its structure, and the military strength behind it. Secondly, he must escape to bring such vital information to John Carter.

But, if he was to do either, he would have to disguise his very mind from the tremendous aura of mental awareness that was represented here by one thousand Lotharians-and Tario!

However, not even Tario, himself, was aware of seven Zumorian eyes that opened at once to stare in unison at a brightening future variable-as Kar Komak was led into his prison cell far below in the depths of the Escarpment.

Nor could even Ranas Ghol quite discern such a detail as that which was occurring at that moment somewhere across the abyss of interplanetary Space. Even his great, baleful third eye could not see the bestial Cadj as he chased after La, High Priestess of the Flaming God, down under the crumbling foundations of Opar.

Late that night, Kar Komak awoke from exhausted sleep to see the door of his prison cell open. An old man, one of the red skinned race of Barsoom, was shoved unceremoniously into the large cell with horror as he saw the jailer who was silhouetted for a few seconds against the light from radium bulbs in the outside corridor. Then the heavy door closed and he was left in darkness with his new companion.

"By the gods!" he exclaimed, rising to his elbows on his couch. "What was that monstrous thing? Surely it was not human!"

The old man laughed in the darkness. "You are new in Tarnath," he said. "Everyone who knows Tarnath knows Thum. He, himself, has made certain of that!"

"But-he was half the size of a Thark-yet formed as you or I, with two legs, two arms-"

"And there the similarity ceases," interrupted the other. "Did you notice the abnormality of proportion? The length of one arm as against the other? The lack of a face, except for his Single eye in the very center?"

"Merciful ancestors, no! I did not see his face. What is he? Surely such a monstrosity never budded from the Tree of Life! That creature could not be of Barsoom!"

"And have you heard of the Great Toonolian Marshes, of Ras Thavas, the great surgeon-and what sacrilege he committed there against the Law of Life?"

Kar Komak was momentarily aware of a prickly Sensation of the scalp. "Morbus! he exclaimed.

"Ah!" sighed the other. "Then you know. The hideous city of Morbus, populated by those poor synthetic creatures which were spawned from the devilish vats of life of Ras Thavas.

"Then-this Thum, as you call him, is a synthetic man?"

"A hormad," agreed the other.

"But John Carter destroyed Morbus and all that was in it!" protested Kar Komak, recalling the history of that adventure as it had been related to him by its principal character, the famous red swordsman, Vor Daj.

"Indeed, you must be from the outside world!" said the old man. "For few there are in Tarnath who have heard of the Warlord by his right name."

"But-how could a hormad from Morbus still be alive today-and how came he here to Tarnath?"

"The story is not unimaginable," replied the other. "He merely escaped from Morbus before the destruction."

"But the Great Marsh, filled with unknown wild beasts and wilder savages! How could he have fought his way out of such a vast, hostile territory and crossed thousands of haads of the sea bottoms, to come here?"

"You do not know him. He has fought green men with his bare hands, and he is difficult to kill. He is a monster of strength. I, personally, have seen him strangle a great white ape. John Carter, himself, would be as an infant in his hands."

"This seems impossible. Even if it were true, how comes it that he has found employment here?"

"What better dwarf of the prisons than one who is jealous of his terrible strength and who hates all men-except the Zumorians who first took him in? However, it was Tario who made him dwarf of the prison guards, for prior to the Coming of Tario, and Sardon Dhur and Zithad of the First Born, there were very few prisoners here."

Further sleep was forgotten that night as Kar Komak became acquainted with his cellmate and gleamed many things concerning the Holy Alliance. For this was Var Koros, a man whose name was well known to the scholarly as the greatest authority on the subject of Barsoomian language and Barsoomian antiquity. It was astonishing to Kar Komak to know that he yet lived, because Var Koros, according to history, long ago took his final journey on the River Iss, beneath the Mountains of Otz- into the Sacred Worlds from which there was no return. That had been in the old days prior to the Coming of John Carter when the River Iss carried the faithful to unsuspected hideous death in the Valley Dor on the banks of the lost Sea of Korus.

"How I came here," said Var Koros, "is a personal secret of my own. Suffice it to say, I have lived here in the Valley of Tarnath a full two hundred years. I know its history and I know the details of what is transpiring now to challenge the power of the Warlord."

When Kar Komak questioned him further, he suddenly became aware that the antiquarian was attempting to probe his mind. He shielded himself, instantly.

"What are you?" he asked, angrily. "A spy sent in here to learn of my identity and purpose?"

"No," replied the other, "but you are a spy, and you are disguised as a red panthan. That much I learned before you closed that powerful mind of yours. Who are you, really?"

Kar Komak remained silent. The man already knew too much. Should he divulge this information to anyone here in authority it would be his death Warrant. His life was one consideration. The welfare of all Barsoom was another. Var Koros knew enough now to endanger his chances of escaping, and this endangered the entire planet.

"I should kill you," he said at last, quietly.

"Well?" queried the old man. "And will you?"

For answer, Kar Komak hurled all the prodigious power of his Lotharian mind at the other, tearing ruthlessly through a surprisingly strong mental barrier. He heard Var Koros

gasp, straining futilely against him, as he rushed precipitately into the old man's private citadel of thought.

"Stop!" screamed Var Koros. "I can't stand it!"

Silence!-Kar Komak's mind commanded. And the man became still.

Then he released him. "You are safe," he said. "I gather that you are as much an enemy of the Holy Alliance as I-though I spared you your privacy. I did not go into details."

"By Issus!" exclaimed Var Koros. "But you are a threat to Tario, himself, with a mentality like that! Such a wizard's power of mind can only belong to a Lotharian!"

"I could hypnotize you so that you will forget what you already know. Yet I can use every friend and ally I can find. But, tell me one thing. Will you betray me?"

Before Var Koros could answer, Kar Komak probed him mentally again, swiftly and with clinical precision.

"I read hesitation and doubt in you," he continued. "While you oppose the Holy Alliance, you also resent John Carter. Then, where does your alliance lie?"

"With the people," came the answer. "All the inhabitants of the planet-for both the Holy Alliance and John Carter are wrong!"

"And you, alone, know the right answer?" smiled Kar Komak.

"Perhaps. But I suspect the Zumorians know also. I suspect them of playing with Tario and the others as a calot(5) would play with ulsio. For the principles of the Holy Alliance and the principles of John Carter, with relation to the religious needs of this planet, stand between the wild thout of deception and the mad zitidar of error.

Thus it was that Var Koros, the famous antiquarian of Barsoom who had returned from Korus, of old, educated Kar Komak with respect to the issues at hand.

First came a brief review of the religious System of Barsoom prior to the advent of John Carter. Since Martians usually lived as long as a thousand years if not killed in battle or by the assassin's blade, the later years which robbed them of vigor and forced them into a less eventful way of life were often regarded as lonely and fruitless, especially if other loved ones were already departed.

Therefore, it was a great moral and spiritual relief to them to embark upon one last great adventure from which no man was ever permitted to return. They would gather their personal belongings and usually in the Company of friends and loved ones they would embark upon the mysterious River Iss which bore them beneath the sacred Mountains of Otz to the Valley Dor and the lost Sea of Korus.

Here, according to the teachings of the Them priests, was heaven in mortal life where the faithful would meet other friends and loved ones and live in peace and happiness on the shores of an actual watery sea, in the sight of actual forests and under the protection of the higher Therns of the Sacred Worlds who, themselves, would never see the outer world again.

Then later, the initiated would one day be permitted to visit the holy Temple of Issus and gaze upon the incomparable living goddess, herself-which was the crowning spiritual goal of all mortal life.

It had been a beautiful and sustaining belief, on the outside.

(5)Calot-Martian watchdog, a huge, fierce creature possessing ten short, swift legs...

But it was true that the heaven of Korus was a hideous lie. It was true, as John Carter had revealed, that the Therns of the higher cycles who dwelled in their fortress empire in the Mountains of Otz and in the Golden Cliffs of Dor pirated the pilgrims and led them to death at the hands of the plant men and the great white apes. Or, if some of the pilgrims to this false heaven possessed the strength and the courage to escape the Therns, they fell victims to the mad souls who had preceded them along the futile course of escape, or to the giant reptiles which inhabited the subterranean caverns of murderous Iss. Those who tried to escape into the outer world of the "living" from whence they had come were cursed as heretics and driven back into the terrifying caverns of death once more.

"Then," said Kar Komak, "do you not agree that John Carter was really the savior of Barsoom in overthrowing such a hellish System of deception?"

"In a way, yes," answered Var Koros, "but in another sense he has sown the seeds of his own destruction."

"What do you mean?"

"He has shattered a tradition of the ages. Religious belief, tradition, faith—all these things form the basis of reason, a knowledge of right from wrong. Whether intrinsically valid or not, this does not matter to a man if it can provide an inner balance, a rock upon which to place the foot of judgement.

"Now, therefore—if one is to remove the rock of reason from under humanity, he had better replace it with another—and quickly! But this was John Carter's great mistake. He is the valiant hero who overthrew the false idol, for he is first and foremost a warrior, and he has left it to men to find themselves again, unaided. But, in providing no satisfactory Substitute for the beliefs and the traditions of the religion of Issus he left a great hiatus into which he, himself, must fall to destruction."

Kar Komak remained silent for a long time, deeply troubled. Finally, he said, "Then I suppose that it is the purpose of the so-called Holy Alliance to reestablish the old religion. But how can they, now that the people know the truth of what lies beyond the River?"

"Ah, but there you have the subtle genius of Tario!" cried Var Koros. "Not only would he gain the support of such blind fools who would embrace the old religion without any reform at all-but also he reaches out to those more powerful

Potential allies, men of reason, intelligence, and position, who stand on the borderline between the ugly truth of the old ways and the incompleteness of John Carter's way. The Holy Alliance proposes to establish in the Valley Dor, the land of love and peace which it was purported to have been in the beginning. Furthermore, they have made powerful Propaganda out of the ancient of Issus and now hold forth to the faithful the promise that the original goddess will be resurrected. Do you not see what a mighty sword they wield? It is a weapon of fanaticism, used by a master!"

Long after Var Koros had fallen asleep, Kor Komak remained awake. What he had learned in this single day had shaken him to the depths of his being. The old Barsoomian scholar told him much that he could never have imagined or surmised-of the growing might of the individual members of the Sacred Council and their suspicious and jealousies and the increasing strife between them-of the Legend of Issus, of the plan to resurrect her-and of the prophecy concerning Tharos Pthan, Guardian of Heaven, who was to be the mate of Issus.

Tharos Pthan. Something in that mystic name bothered Kar Komak. Somewhere it rang a distant bell of memory. Either he had heard that name before, or it held a special meaning that he could not quite grasp. But he felt, vaguely, that it was important to remember.

Great though his mental preoccupations were, however, Kar Komak did not neglect to devote one hour of concentration on that distant, secret Chamber in the palace of the jeddak in Lothar. There hovered the phantom wraith of his love, who would know life or extinction depending upon the powers of his concentration and faithful devotion. Or this, at least, Kar Komak was certain.

Chapter X - THE SACRED COUNCIL

FOR the second time he was awakened by Thum, the hormad dwar of the prison guards. But this time, it was in the light of day, and Thum stood directly over him, staring horribly at him out of his Single eye. There was nothing else visible on that impossible face other than the Cyclopean eye, for the giant Thum was without a nose, and his mouth was a gaping orifice beneath his chin.

The monster poked him brutally with a ponderous fist and roared at him. "On your feet, panthan!"

As Kar Komak failed to comply instantly, Thum grabbed his arm and Shoulder in one hand and jerked him painfully into the air, where he hung ludicrously at arm's length.

"My name is Thum!" he hello-wed at him. "I am the dwar of the prison guard! When I give a command-obey!" Where-with he hurled Kar Komak bodily out into the corridor.

The Lotharian had been deeply immersed in the ethics and traditions of the fighting men of Helium, at the side of Carthoris, son of the famed Warlord, himself. Far from being a coward, of which there are few upon the surface of Barsoom, he was an acknowledged warrior who had not yet know the meaning of fear where mortal combat was concerned.

Unarmed though he was, Kar Komak gathered himself for a furious Charge-enraged at such unwarranted brutality.

He could have argued the point that he was a panthan and not guilty of any crime-that he was entitled to a hearing before being subjected to the rough treatment which was evidently given to prisoners in this place. But instead, he retaliated with action rather than words.

As he sprang forward. Thum met him with a bellow of laughter, and a mighty blow that sent Kar Komak reeling to the floor of the corridor bleeding and all but senseless.

"Thum! You were told to bring the prisoner to me- alive, not dead! I cannot question a dead man!"

Through blurred eyes, Kar Komak saw a richly harnessed officer-a white man who wore a yellow wig. He was a Therm

Thum only grumbled disrespectfully and closed the door of the prison cell upon Var Koros, who had witnessed his act of brutality. He stood there, still guarding Kar Komak and waiting for trouble.

"Can you stand?" asked the Therm.

Kar Komak felt that he would rather lie down and die. He was sick. Waves of blackness swept intermittently before his eyes. Yet, his mind was alert enough to sense that it was being penetrated, either by the Therm or by others. And for this eventuality he had prepared himself on the previous night.

He had placed a post-hypnotic Suggestion in his mind, to be activated by the first mental probing of another. Instantly, a false picture of an innocent panthan was presented to whoever might care to investigate his thoughts, whereas a deeper camouflaged screen sealed his real identity within.

He struggled to his feet.

"What is your name?" asked the officer.

John Carter had prepared him with a little known alias which he, himself, had used to good advantage in the past, and it was this that he used now. "I am Dotar Sojat," he answered, through swollen, blood-soaked lips. "I am a panthan, but so far

my treatment here has not been conducive to allegiance to yourselves-whoever you may be and whatever your cause."

"That is beside the point!" snapped the Therm. "What were you doing in the ancient city of Lothar?"

"I might ask you the same question..."

Having read Thum's intention mentally, Kar Komak ducked the giant's sudden back-handed blow and, at the same time, used a trick taught him by Carthoris. Placing his leg behind the hormad's knee, he shoved quickly with his own knee against the other's thigh with all his might and caused him to topple to the floor. Whereupon, he was at his throat in an instant with the dwar's own dagger.

"Don't move!" he commanded, while the point of the blade pressed hard against the colorless flesh of the synthetic monstrosity.

Thum did not move, but his flabby mouth hissed a warning: "TU kill you for this!"

Kar Komak felt the point of a short sword pricking his back precisely over his right kidney.

It might be something of a loss to have you killed," said the Them officer behind him. "That was a neat trick which I have not seen performed before. On your feet, panthan! And beware of your life! Your next false move will be your last! and Thum-

As Kar Komak began to get up, the giant's terrible arms reached for him, then paused. The eye of the Cyclops was on the Them.

"Thum," warned the Thern, "you would prove yourself more useful and intelligent if you would save your strength for a more appropriate occasion." He took the dagger from Kar Komak and gave it back to the scowling dwar, who rose toweringly and menacingly to his feet.

"Now," continued the Them to Kar Komak. "What were you doing in Lothar?"

"Exploring," he replied sullenly. "I presume that the city where you found me is the one you refer to by the name of Lothar, though I have not heard of it before. I was hoping to find water there."

The Them considered this Statement for a long moment as his sharp eyes studied the stalwart figure of the panthan. "It is small wonder that you have not heard of that city," he said, at last. "For ages it has remained hidden from the eyes of any but the green hordes of the sea bottoms." After another pause, he added, TU vouch for you, panthan, if you would seek here a very worthy engagement as a warrior-for a cause which transcends any that you could ever hope to defend in this world."

"If the alternative is to become the hacking block of this freak of a warden-then I'll serve any cause," he answered.

Thum almost whimpered aloud in his lust for Kar Komak's blood, but the Them officer warned him off again.

"I would be careful if I were you, Dotar Sojat," he advised, with a wry smile. "You would not fare well if you ever fell into the hands of Thum again!"

"The next time," growled Thum, "he will die!"

As Kar Komak walked away with the Them official, he asked, "Who is the old man with whom I was imprisoned?"

"He is Var Koros," replied the other. "A man who has a few too many ideas of his own. A brilliant fellow, but one who will have to be isolated until he learns to keep his ideas to himself."

Kar Komak was relieved to know that his new found friend was at least temporarily safe. There was something about Var Koros to which the unsolved mysteries and the incomplete portions of Kar Komak's mind and soul cried out, as a son to his father, pleading for an answer. Instinctively, he felt that Var Koros was going to be important to him. Perhaps, he thought, he might yet find a way to free him.

And thus it was that Kar Komak, the Lotharian spy for Helium, became Dotar Sojat, a pad-war in the seventy-seventh utan of the Third Army under the gilded banner of the Holy Alliance... while La, High Priestess of the Flaming God, wandered through the dark catacombs of Opar, seeking the answer to the mystery of her own life.

* * *

The great amphitheater in Zumor had undergone alterations. The Conference table now stood on the broad balcony overlooking the tremendous Valley of Tarnath. Where it had once been located on the high, circular dais in the center of the amphitheater a gleaming throne of gold encrusted with precious jewels had been placed under a gorgeous canopy of costly silks, surrounded by the exotic plants and flowers which only Derlas Kor could coax into existence.

Tario had said it would be a strong psychological symbol. Zithad had insisted it was vitally necessary-even though in a temporary location. And Sardon Dhur could only wonder if both were right-or mad.

For this was the ancient throne of Issus. And it was still empty.

On the balcony, the Sacred Council sat in secret Session. The same four were there-Tario of Lothar, Zithad, black Dator of the First Born, Sardon Dhur, provisional Hekkador of Therns, and Ranas

Ghol, chief and representative of the Zumorians. The changes which ten years had wrought in them were indicative of the character, the motivations and the chosen strategy of each.

Sardon Dhur wore gorgeous trappings heavy with gold and diamonds and the holy Symbols of his Station in the empire of the Therns; and even his yellow wig has laden with jewels. His face had hardened into those lines of stern contempt and cruelty which are the mark of the petulant tyrant whose sudden acquisition of vast power for overshadows his capacity for wielding it.

"You of the First Born are too ready on the trigger," he accused Zithad. "You would plunge us all into the battle against the Warlord at a time when the gamble is yet even. Why will you not wait until our force is so great that the element of risk will be eliminated?"

The black Dotar scowled at the Thern. He, too, was resplendent in his heavily jeweled harness of bleached Zithdar hide. Most prominent of all four men was Zithad in the matter of personal weapons. He fairly bristled with armaments, which included a great, jeweled long sword, a short sword, a dagger, and two heavy caliber radium pistols. He, too, wore the hard, forbidding mask of the tyrant, except that in his Piercing black eyes shone the clear cold fire of fanaticism.

"Well it is for you, Sardon Dhur, to counsel delay, for if we should never come to grips with the sacred issue at hand you would already have achieved your own personal goals. Do you think we are not aware of the fact that the higher Therns already fawn upon you and fill your treasure chests with tribute in exchange for the promise of favoritism once the battle is won? You sit in your glorious palace, drowning yourself in food and wine, gathering to yourself beautiful women and opiate dreams- while the rest of us do your work for you!"

Sardon Dhur demonstrated that the threat of his sword was beneath the new power and dignity to which he had risen. He merely smiled, but only with his lips.

"The Holy Empire of the Seventh Cycle now consists of five and a half millions of highly trained and coordinated priests," he said, evenly, "of which two million are practiced warriors. And an aerial

navy of four thousand warcraft is not an inconsiderable contribution to the cause of the Holy Alliance, by impulsive friend!"

Tario, on the other hand, had changed only in one detail. He now wore on his brow the gorgeous Holy Diadem, in the center of which was the scintillating Star of Issus-"borrowed" from Sardon Dhur. Somehow, the great crystal of tharton seemed to augment the mighty mentality which lived beneath it.

"Enough!" he exclaimed. "I warned you two in the beginning that the secret of your strength and future victory lay in unity, not division. It is of vital importance to us all that you learn this lesson before it is too late. Need I remind you that our greatest asset is the oracular eye of Ranas Ghol and his kind? It is he who will tell us when we are strong enough and ready enough to bring our Ultimatum before the Heliumetic Empire."

"Well then," retorted Zithad, "let him speak. Tell us, Ranas Ghol, what the pattern of the future indicates. Are we ready, or are we not?"

Of the four of them, Ranas Ghol had not changed at all. His spartan simplicity of harness was the same, and he wore no weapons. In his supple, artist's hands he held a small, beautiful cup-his latest achievement in ceramic art, almost transparent in its delicacy and ethereal in its subtle coloring and simplicity of design.

"Sardon Dhur," he replied, "has expressed the Situation well. You must strike when the element of risk has been reduced to a minimum. But-" He looked up quickly from admiring his cup. "I believe that you Zithad, were going to surprise us with a startling announcement, were you not?"

Zithad smiled. "That you divine it in the future is an indication that it promises results. Yes," he said, "while Sardon Dhur boasts of his armaments we of the First Born would rather have more than the mere right to boast. Our own army of three million warriors and our navy of six thousand battle craft are as nothing compared to what we have recently acquired-as a result of energetic investigation."

"A euphemism," said Tario, reading his mind, "for piracy and kidnaping-but continue, Dator."

Zithad only smiled as he continued. "We have been deliberately stealing the latest science of the civilization of the red men," he said. "By a remarkable piece of good fortune, we were able to kidnap an obscure scientist from Zodanga who actually deserves a monument in the hall of fame. We captured him just before he had announced his latest discovery-and now that discovery is ours!" He leaned forward, grinning his triumph. "A beam of interference, gentlemen, which can nullify the effects of the eighth Barsoomian ray!"

Sardon Dhur tensed. "But-it is the eighth ray which gives buoyancy to the tanks of every airship on the planet!" he exclaimed.

"Precisely!" exclaimed the Dator. "And with the interference beam we can set the navies of the Warlord on the ground!" He sat back, self-satisfied, to let the effects of this announcement strike home.

Since Sardon Dhur appeared to be stunned to silence and Tario and Ranas Ghol offered no comment, Zithad added, "It is this weapon which removes the element of uncertainty. And, therefore, I say it is time to strike!"

"No," said Ranas Ghol. "In the first place, you must develop the new weapon. This fortress of Tarnath, itself, must be well defended by it, because this will be the focal point of the battle."

'That will not take long," retorted Zithad. "Half a year at the most-and this will include projectors of the beam for at least every flagship in our combined fleets."

"One more weapon," insisted Ranas Ghol, "must be added to the arsenal." The other three looked at him quizzically as he continued. "It is the weapon of the subconscious," he said, "which is the most powerful of all. In short, the time is at hand when the first half of the prophecy must be fulfilled. It is time that the goddess should be resurrected."

Zithad's eyes widened in fanatic response. "Yes!" he exclaimed. "Issus! With our immortal goddess upon the throne again, the people of Barsoom will be won entirely to our cause!"

Sardon Dhur sneered at the Dator. "Well, we have waited long enough for the miracle in which you believe, Zithad. Is it not time now to be practical and produce our own Issus?"

"As a temporary Solution, yes," admitted the Dator, coolly. "But, sooner or later, she will return from that mystery into which she was lost ages ago!"

"Tario," said Ranas Ghol, "will provide us with our Issus."

The Thern and the First Born Dator stared at Tario.

"You have made a selection?" asked Sardon Dhur of the Lotharian.

"No," he replied, "but it should not be difficult. The maiden's mind can always be altered to make her believe that she is what the masses believe her to be."

"She must be white," said Zithad.

"Since there are no Lotharian women," added Sardon Dhur, "this leaves you only a choice of Thern women."

Ranas Ghol interrupted. "Using a Thern woman is problematical," he said. "Her disappearance from among her acquaintances, coinciding as it will with the appearance of Issus, may arouse some suspicion."

"But from what other source may a white-skinned Issus be obtained?" Sardon Dhur complained.

"I believe," said Ranas Ghol, "that the Holy Diadem will provide the answer-but only in the hands of Tario."

Zithad and Sardon Dhur frowned at Tario.

"What does he mean by that?" asked Sardon Dhur.

Tario, himself, did not know. He studied Ranas Ghol, wishing fervently that he could penetrate the Zumorian's alien mind. But he would not reveal his ignorance of the other's meaning.

"We shall see," he replied, evasively.

"Well," said Zithad, "and what of Tharos Pthan, the prophesied Guardian of Heaven-Issus' mate?"

For once, Ranas Ghol stirred visibly with emotion, and he raised his voice emphatically. "I warn you that Tharos Pthan is a dangerous subject!" he exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" asked Tario.

"Consider," replied Ranas Ghol, "the possibility of bringing into the picture a false Tharos Pthan. As the sacred mate of Issus and the actual warden and master of the Sacred Worlds of both Korus and Omean, he would not only rule your own empires, but the masses of people in the outer world would support him even against yourselves."

Thus, you must never contemplate the creation of a Tharos Pthan, for even an imposter would reap the benefit of your own Propaganda-and he would wield a power which none of you could challenge."

The expression which crept into the eyes of all three of Ranas Ghol's listeners fully satisfied the Zumorian, but he feigned alarm. "You see! The very poisonousness of the idea is having its effect on your own minds!" he exclaimed. "Of all positions of power, privilege and advantage which could ever exist on Barsoom, that of Tharos Pthan, mate to the eternal Issus, would be the most coveted of all. And for that very reason, Tharos Pthan must always remain the distant promise and the unfilled portion of the prophecy."

"Suppose," said Zithad, "that the actual prophecy were to be fulfilled? What if the true Tharos Pthan should appear?"

"Nonsense!" snorted Sardon Dhur.

"It is to be hoped that the idea is a preposterous one," replied Ranas Ghol. For, if a genuine Tharos Pthan were to arise all your powerful work of Propaganda-the very faith which you are inspiring in the people-would serve as an ironical trap-in which your every dream of reward and power and perhaps your very lives would be utterly dissolved."

Sardon Dhur and Zithad, Dator of the First Born, glared at each other in dark speculation. Tario, self-styled Jeddak of Jeddaks of all Barsoom, glowered meditatively at them both.

And Ranas Ghol? The taciturn Zumorian merely lifted up his delicate ceramic cup to the light, admiring its pale lavender coloration.

"The patterning of the absolute in creation," he said cryptically, "is an elixir to the soul..."

Chapter XI - THE BRIDE OF CAESAR

TO Tario, Tario was a name for Caesar.

Though he would not have understood the word, itself, he would have recognized the pattern of motivation, the sense of exalted power, and the potentialities of a Caesar-as his own.

In common with all such strange and lonely men, Tario really believed that he was destined to rule his world-and that the assumption of universal authority by anyone else was gross Usurpation, in fact little short of sacrilege.

Thus, to such men, the principle was always valid that the end justified the means and the annihilation of all Opposition was but justice foreordained.

Unfortunately for the victims of Caesar, such negative reasoning is not of the substance of dreams. History turns to us its sphinx-like countenance where we may observe the scars which prove that such reasoning usually leads to action.

There, atop the Great Escarpment of Tarnath overlooking the long, deep Valley, Tario spent several days and nights in careful and profound deliberation. On the third night, he stood again at the window of his private Chambers in a bartizaned corner tower perched high on the outer walls of Zumor. Owing to the chill of that altitude, he wore over his Shoulders a regal robe of orluk fur. In the Star of Issus of the

Holy Diadem which he wore on his brow, the rays of both Thuria and Cluros were brilliantly reflected and augmented so that a psychic beacon appeared to mark the generation of his thoughts as he glowered at the world.

Ranas Ghol had named his destiny, he decided. From the beginning of the Alliance, Tario knew that the regenerated empires of Them and First Born could be restrained from destroying each other only until the Warlord had been over-thrown. Then, he was certain, Sardon Dhur and Zithad would be at each other's throats.

In a sense, the weakening of these two would make it easier for himself to occupy the seat of authority, but his power would have been dissipated by a pyrrhic victory in which the war machinery of

all contenders, which he needed for himself, including that of the Heliumetic Empire, would lie in shards and smoldering shambles.

Rather would it be more logical and advantageous to preserve their strength, he reasoned-but there was the great dilemma. How to maintain the strength of his Opposition for his own use later and yet dominate them at the pinnacle of their power?

Ranas Ghol had pointed out the only answer. He, Tario, must become the prophesied Tharos Pthan.

He smiled with cold, thin lips as he assured himself that this same idea had already occurred to Sardon Dhur and to Zithad, as well. But he anticipated one advantage which the other two would not enjoy.

Whoever Issus was going to be, Ranas Ghol had foreseen that he, Tario, would know her first. And that was all that was necessary. He would implant in her mind a powerful and irresistible post-hypnotic Suggestion. Then, after an entire world had acclaimed her, she, herself, would recognize him and declare him to be Tharos Pthan-just at the right psycho-logical moment when it would be too late for his competitors to thwart the will of an adoring world.

Yes! It was indeed an ironical trap! But not for Tario! He chuckled to himself as he thought of the clever plan. Then he sobered, suddenly. There was just one question left.

From whence would he procure a woman to pose as Issus? If not a Them, then who? For the legend decreed that she must be white.

It was on this third night that Tario's great inspiration came to him.

He recalled Lothar. He remembered the phantom woman when he had attempted for years to bring into lasting reality. He had felt many times that that beautiful creature was on the verge of making the inexplicable transition, yet he had never been certain enough to risk testing her reality for fear that she would implode into the nothingness from which she had come.

Instead, it was Kar Komak, the odwar of his bowmen, who had metamorphosed into reality. And he had escaped to become allied with his enemies.

But now-now a new element had been added, literally! The element, tharton, which composed the Star of Issus on his forehead.

In generating the tenth Barsoomian ray, it served to augment the effect of his mentality to such proportions as only he could realize.

With the Star of Issus he had secretly performed the seeming miracles of the wizards of old. Impersonation, levitation, teleportation-even telekinesis.

Why not, then, mentally create his Issus, once and for all? And indeed, would this not be tantamount to fulfilling the prophecy?

Tario paced the floor of his Chamber in an ecstasy of inspiration. What a stroke this would be! And who would have the greater moral right to the title of Tharos Pthan than he who had actually created Issus!

"By the sacred gods!" he exclaimed. "Can it be possible that I am a part of the true prophecy? Can it be that such power as mine was fore-ordained?"

He sprang to the window and looked out upon the moonlit planet, at the thousand eyes of the night below, which were the campfires of the uniting armies of conquest.

"Yes!" he exclaimed. "Ranas Ghol has seen it written on the pages of the future!" He could not tell the others the truth, because it was not meant for him to reveal it before-hand! Ah, what a subtle devil was Ranas Ghol! Now Tario perceived the full meaning of the Zumorian's words when he announces to the Sacred Council that "Tario will provide us with our Issus."

Then he staggered visible when he recalled those other cryptic words: "I believe that the Holy Diadem will provide the answer-but only in the hands of Tario"

With the tears of an overpowering emotion in his eyes, as though he were Narcissus confronted with his own image incarnate, Tario sat on his sleeping silks, momentarily humbled before the magnificent spectacle of himself. Tario-Tharos Pthan-Guardian of Heaven, Warden of the Sacred Worlds, mate to Issus, and ruler of all the jeddaks of the outer world! A touch of petit mal flecked the corners of his mouth as the crystallization of his Single purpose gripped him.

Now! Now he would create her!

He tore the Holy Diadem from his head and placed it in his trembling hands before him where he could gaze directly into the glowing depths of the Star of Issus. And there, with all his terrible mental powers augmented a thousandfold, he conjured up the memory of the she-phantom of Lothar.

* * *

La, High Priestess of the Flaming God, held in her hands the Great Star of Issus, the original Holy Diadem of legend-and knew it not.

As though awakened from a thousand millennia of slumber, the wicked thing seemed to glare of her in peremptory command, dominating her mind and soul, calling to her out of the dimness of incalculable time and space.

Slowly, La saw the glowing pool of light in her hand expand into a gulf of glittering stars. And of a sudden she was falling into it, unable to cry out, as though disembodied and drifting down a cold abyss of emptiness-forever...

As Gridley had pointed out to Tarzan, some Martians-those isolated wizards who had yet ridden the last wave of the "olden tide" of progress-were frighteningly advanced.

Though Tario was not aware of what the stupendously amplified concentration of his mentality was accomplishing, had he known the true facts, he could have explained it to you in terms of the universal basics of cause and effect. However, he might also have been force to extend the span of your life perhaps a few hundred years so that you could first learn a great deal more concerning the real nature of matter and energy, to initiate you into the metaphysical dynamics of inductive causation and then allow you to acquire that which no man may be taught-the wisdom that elevates to a cosmic perspective, mechanics of psychical relativity.

For our story, however, it should suffice to say that the tenth Barsoomian ray, which was generated only in tharton, acted like a magnetic flux in relation to another concentration of tharton. Inasmuch as there were only two tharton crystals in existence, the

rays generated in each had an affinity for each other. Augmented by Tario's mind, these rays leapt out to each other and locked in a psychic bridge across intervening space. And it was this invisible bridge which transmitted the mentality of Tario to Opar. What followed was teleportation in reverse. La, who held in her hands the greatest of the two psychic amplifiers, was teleported to Mars.

For, as any Lotharian would tell you, the mind and its manifestations are neither limited by nor related to the deceiving relativity of physical distance. The same thing might have been accomplished even across the Intergalactic Crevasse, itself.

Tario started, looking up from the diadem in time to see the figure of a woman, nearly naked and gleaming white as moonlight in the rays of Thuria, slump to unconsciousness at his feet.

He sprang up with a cry that was without meaning yet which was beyond ideation. To him, it was the exultant shout of a creator who shattered the stillness and the dark of unborn Eternity with the command: "Let there be-"

And there was-

There was she whom he alone had created!- for whom he had waited down through ages of fruitless longevity-she whom he would make into Issus, who was the symbol of the power he coveted- mate eternal of Tharos Pthan, Guardian of Heaven, Warden of the Sacred Worlds, ruler of men!

Sobbing with the centuries-long imprisoned emotions of the monomaniac, the mentalist-philosopher and the lost, lonely man that he was, Tario flung himself to the floor beside the woman and pulled her into his arms.

The brilliant rays of both Thuria and Cluros shone full upon her face and form through that window perched high on the walls of ancient Zumor. Her long, flowing black hair, her pale, unblemished features, white throat and heavenly body adorned in spun gold and precious jewels, was an ecstatic shock to Tario.

He trembled, almost gibbering, as he gazed upon her and stoked her hair and, at last, tearfully caressed her, near to swooning with unimaginable joy.

It was then that she opened her eyes and saw him- clear, cold blue eyes that held no welcome light of response for her creator.

He felt her sudden tension, saw the soft, parted lips tighten above sharp, white teeth as she snarled, then sank her nails into his flesh with an astounding strength and bit him-not as a woman, but as a ferocious savage animal at bay.

Searing pain shot through him and his flesh recoiled instinctively, violently. Before he could think, he Struck her with all his might and sent her reeling from him. His throat and neck ran hot and wet with blood...

"Tario," said Ranas Ghol, "you have been wounded!"

This was early the next day as the Zumorian leader discovered him Standing on the great balcony of the amphi-theater which had been converted into a provisional throne room for Issus.

Tario turned to him, scowling darkly. On his throat, precariously near the Jugular vein, was a great, livid scar which the marvelous medicines of Barsoom had almost healed.

'TU not explain it to you if you are unaware of its causes," he answered, heavily. "But I am not pleased with the fact that you evidently foresee so much and divulge so little, Ranas Ghol!"

The blue-skinned Zumorian looked out unperturbed at the tremendous Valley which yet lay in the macabre mists and shadows of the morning. "I can only give guidance with what I foresee," he answered, quietly. "What cannot be divulged beforehand will not be divulged, Tario of Lothar."

Tario took a step closer to the other, glaring at him with menacing expression and clenched fists. "Do you know what I think?" he almost shouted. "I suspect that you are deluding yourself with the idea that you can play games with me-and with the whole alliance!"

"For your own sake and for the welfare of the planet, perhaps-"

"Welfare of the planet?" shouted Tario. That is for me to decide! I, Tario-"

"Who would be Taros Pthan?" interrupted Ranas Ghol.

Tario grasped the Zumorian in both his powerful hands.

"Then you know!" he exclaimed, fiercely. "You know what has happened!"

Suddenly, a full utan of red Martian Tarnathian guards stepped out from behind the pillars of the amphitheater. In the next moment they had Tario surrounded, and their dwar had his sword point at Tario's heart.

"Release him!" commanded the officer, coolly.

"You see," smiled Ranas Ghol, "the awareness of impending events is often quite advantageous. One has time to prepare for these little eventualities. Now, Tario, why do you not submit your emotions to the control of that magnificent intellect of yours?"

Tario glared in trembling white rage at the Tarnathian officer. He drew himself up, imperiously. "You dare?" he almost shrieked.

In the next instant, the amphitheater became congested with the tall, silent bowmen, who already drew their bows in readiness to fire their unerring missiles at the guards.

"Peace, Tario!" Ranas Ghol's great, baleful eye revealed itself in his forehead.

To Tario's eyes, a darkness fell upon the world, a palpable darkness that was the total absence of light. Yet he retained all of his faculties, which seemed, however, curiously detached and in a state of suspended animation. He felt frozen, as though he were adrift in the interstellar void.

Then he became engulfed in a titanic, swirling vision for which his mind had not been born a kaleidoscopic vista of the impending future. It was too confused with sound and light and motion for him to grasp at details, but he was aware of a world-Barsoom-trembling in the grip of total war, of holocaust and the smell of wholesale battle and slaughter and the sight of millions of people running for their lives-of mighty cities flashing into extinction-of the heavens darkened with hurtling war fleets and of the smoldering ruins of once proud civilizations, from the rubble of which half rotted skulls stared out at him with death hollowed eyes.

To Tario, this experience seemed a lifetime in itself, yet it had only lasted an instant. When Ranas Ghol released him, he threw an arm across his eyes and swayed as though he would fall.

"How would you enjoy living with such visions of the future?" asked Ranas Ghol. "I but showed you a single variable which could be

the result of your actions, and perhaps it may still be as you have seen it-for I and my kind cannot directly control the events which humankind foolishly wills into being.

"But you ask me if I am playing games. Do you call this a game, Tario? It is life, itself, the pulsing, living loom of creation with which you tamper! Games, you say! No, Tario. I am only a spectator, and I may only suggest, help, or hinder in an infinitesimal way."

Slowly, the Lotharian bowmen lowered their weapons. After a moment, they marched silently from the room. The red guardsmen could only gape after them in uncomprehending wonderment. The Dwarf of the Tarnathian guards looked at Ranas Ghol, puzzled.

The latter dismissed him with a wave of his hand. As the officer marched his men away, Ranas Ghol studied Tario intently.

Tario's face was bathed in cold perspiration. He had experienced too much during the past twelve hours for any ordinary man. But he was no ordinary man, and his purposes were not of such small magnitude that they could be swayed in a single moment by any event or revelation, however great.

In a cold, hoarse voice he half whispered to Ranas Ghol. "This is but momentary truce, my friend! Now I know how dangerous you are to me. If the future be the effect of human will, then mine alone is sufficient! So, read tomorrow as you will, Zumorian, and beware! For I am still master of the world!"

Ranas Ghol sighed. "So be it, Tario. Perhaps when this planet wings dead and withered of life along its timeless course and when all the others are black and barren, too-there may yet rise up a race among the ageless stars which will be endowed with the wisdom of the Absolute. Without this hope, creation itself is futile. I am done!"

"No!" exclaimed Tario. "You are not done! You know what happened last night, because you foresaw it!" "Yes," replied the other, resignedly. "I foresaw it!"

"Then tell me! What have I done? Does that sickening middle eye of yours foretell that she is Issus?"

Ranas Ghol looked back at him sternly. "You say I am not done, Tario. Neither are you. The future of this woman belongs to the prophecy. What have you done with her?"

"Tell me!" insisted Tario. "Is this the immortal Issus, resurrected by some miracle I do not comprehend?"

The Zumorian sighed. "There is yet another who will be called Issus," he answered. "In telling you this much, I am violating the laws of my race, and it is dangerous. Ask me no more. But what have you done with the woman? I am curious because her lines of variable probability are lost to me."

Tario grinned sardonically. "At least, that should remain a secret," he said. "I have placed her in hiding where none may find her, and I have borrowed ten of your Tarnathian red men to guard her until I visit her again."

"Borrowed? How could they-"

"I borrowed their minds, as well. They know nothing, except that anyone other than myself who approaches her hiding place must die."

"Then-you intend to use her to further your own personal plans?"

"I hold her in reserve for the right moment," replied Tario. "In time, if it be my will, she shall be enthroned as Issus."

"And yourself will be proclaimed Tharos Pthan," added Ranas Ghol, wryly.

"When the time is right-yes!"

"I foresee no such time..."

"You shall!" exclaimed Tario, hotly. "Because you told me what I wanted to know-that even the future you divine is alterable-in accordance with human will! I, Tario, shall mould that future destiny of Barsoom even as you mould your tiny cups of clay!"

"If it is possible," admitted Ranas Ghol, "but not advisable."

Tario turned to stare at him again. "If it is not advisable, my friend, then why do you continue with your plans to make the Great Escarpment the defending fortress of the Holy Alliance?"

Again, Ranas Ghol sighed. "How am I to explain the inexplicable?" he said. "My evaluations are not as yours. The rhythm of my race is as alien to you as is the farthest star. We of Zumor oppose many things which none of you can measure. Perhaps we, too, are selfish in a sense. Suffice it to say, Tario of Lothar, that our position as your ally is one that destiny itself forces upon us."

Chapter XII - ESCAPE

WHILE Akmath and the other priests of Opar filed slowly and laboriously through the jungles of East Central Africa in search of Tarzan, a common pad-war of the seventy-seventh utan of the Third Army paused in another forest, on another world, to gaze in astonishment at an old man who was tending a bed of purple flowers.

"Vor Koros!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

The old man looked up at the warrior with a slow smile of recognition. "Ah, Kar Komak," he said, rising to his feet. "I was told you had taken Service with the Holy Alliance. I was hoping our paths might cross once more."

"But-how did you get out of prison so soon, Var Koros? Here I have been cudgeling my poor brain these past days in an attempt to devise a plan for your rescue!"

"That was kind of you. I was fortunate enough to be released through the Intervention of Derlas Kor, the Zumorian. You see, I have tended his flowers for many years, and he missed me soon after I was incarcerated."

As Kar Komak offered nothing to say in return, Var Koros continued, but this time in a lowered tone of voice, as he looked cautiously about him to determine whether or not they might be overheard. "I must speak to you," he said. "Are you free of your duties for a few moments?"

Kar Komak frowned his puzzlement. "Yes," he answered. "In a certain degree, I am. I have just come down off the ridge on my way to the Escarpment. I have a routine message for the commanding odwar."

"Excellent!" exclaimed the other. "Come with me, quickly! It will not take long." He started away into a barely discernible trail through the underbrush.

Kar Komak, after a quick glance about him, followed in silence, wondering what unexpected turn of events his former cellmate might have to offer. He had been disappointed with his new military position in the enemy's camp. It had offered very little opportunity to obtain further information for John Carter. He had only learned

that the armies of the Thern Empire and of the First Born numbered in the millions and that their combined aerial navies numbered close to ten thousand warships. But he hungered for more vital details, and also he had chafed at the waste of time involved concerning his routine training duties as a common pad-war of the infantry.

So it was that he followed Var Koros with a feeling of anticipation. The old scholar was evidently high in the favor of one of the important masters of Zumor. Moreover, he had lived in this valley for centuries and must surely know his way about, he reasoned.

At last they arrived in a hidden bower, deep back into the underbrush between the densest Cluster of giant trees which Kar Komak has as yet discovered.

"What is it that you have to tell me?" he asked, impatiently.

Var Koros cautioned him to lower his voice. "We must not be overheard," he replied. "And it must never be known that you met me here in the forest."

"Well?" whispered Kar Komak. "What is it?"

"First, you must escape from Tarnath and return to your Warlord," said Var Koros.

Kar Komak smiled. This is not news, my friend! My eyes have been open for a means of escape, but as yet I have found none."

"I will tell you how that means may be supplied."

Kar Komak's brows arched. "You!" he exclaimed. "But how-"

"Shh! Now listen! You must carry to John Carter the following piece of information..."

Whereupon, Var Koros described the secret weapon of the First Born, which would nullify the eighth Barsoomian ray.

When he had finished, Kar Komak exclaimed, "But, that would destroy the effectiveness of any war fleet which might move upon Tarnath! This is terrible news, Var Koros! How did you find out?"

"Never mind. There is no time for explanations. You must trust me when I tell you that the information is valid. The point is, it will take time for the First Born to develop this weapon to there point of effectiveness. If ever the Warlord is going to strike, he should strike now. You must escape and lead him to Tarnath, for if he delays too long, it will forever be too late!"

"All right!" agreed Kar Komak. "But how am I to effect this escape?"

"You have, I believe, a warrior in the seventy-seventh utan named U-Daj-formerly a panthan from Kaol," said Var Koros.

"I do not know all of their names as yet," replied Kar Komak, "but this one I know. He is an excellent swordsman. What of him?"

"This U-Daj has an older brother who is a pad-war of the guard in the Escarpment. But his is a special detail in Charge of guarding the private fliers of the members of the Sacred Council.

Kar Komak shook his head, grinning at his friend. "How you get your inside information is beyond me," he said.

"Never mind that now. Just follow my instructions closely and you cannot fail. After you have transmitted your assigned message to the odwar, you must request permission to see the brother of U-Daj, whose name is U-Bar Daj. Say that you have a personal message from his brother in your utan. I am quite certain that the odwar will give you a written pass to enter into the section guarded by U-Bar Daj. And once you are there, U-Bar Daj will help you."

"You mean-he will help me to escape? I cannot understand-"

"There is no time, Kar Komak! In another fifteen xats(6) the guard will be changed and he will not be there. He will help you to take the black flier of Zithad, Dator of the First Born. It is the swiftest ship available, and no one will be able to overtake you. You will be fired upon by U-Bar Daj, but he will not fire true. He will pretend that you tricked him."

"But, why should this U-Bar Daj do this for me?"

"Go, Kar Komak!" insisted Var Koros.

"And if you, yourself, do not favor the principles of John Carter, then why..."

"Go, Kar Komak! Ask no more questions of me! And my your ancestors smile upon you. I have spoken!"

(6) Xat-Martian period of time equivalent to about 3 minutes

Kar Komak thanked Var Koros, and as the old man advised him to appear in the outer trau without him he quickly left him Standing there in the shadowed bower deep within the Tarnathian Forest.

He delivered his message to the odwar, who was a heavy set, suspicious looking man with a deep scar crossing over one eye. When he requested permission to speak with U-Bar Daj and explained his reason, the odwar scowled.

"U-Bar Daj is assigned to a restricted part of the fortress, pad-war," he growled. "You knew that, didn't you?"

"Not my odwar," replied Kar Komak, while he deftly disguised his mind, should the other seek to probe it. This was a special trick of the mentality which was common chiefly among Lotharians. "It's really not too important, I suppose, although his brother was quite excited. it seems he has received some long cherished news from home-from Kaol, I believe." He laughed. "You know how it is with the poor warrior in the ranks! Each little deviation from the routine takes on a magnified significance. But I would like to please the fellow if possible. he is one of my best swordsmen, and an uncommonly good technician with the radium rifles."

The odwar studied him for a moment, then smiled suddenly. "I will give you a pass," he said.

In another few moments, Kar Komak found himself being conducted by a red Tarnathian guard along corridors and up ramps and through large Chambers which had been cut from the hard substance of the meteor, itself. Just how this had been accomplished, he could not guess, but he reasoned that the place was very ancient-and with time all things are possible.

The main concern of the moment was to make good his ruse. He had rushed so swiftly to take advantage of Var Koros' unexpected aid that he had not taken the time to think of the possible consequences, should he fail.

For the first time he realized that to be too brave in regard to his own skin was to be selfish with regard to the welfare of Barsoom. up to the present moment, he seemed to be the only precious link between this great hidden enemy and the Heliumetic Empire. Moreover,

the new knowledge he now carried with him was absolutely vital to survival.

He followed his guide grimly now. What he was going to attempt was no daredevil's prank. The fate of a world might depend upon it.

He had no sooner arrived at this conclusion than his

guide led him through a great, arched doorway, and that which met his view indicated at once that he had arrived at his goal. A huge Chamber opened before him, which was illuminated by the light of day more than it was by the radium bulbs in the ceiling. Daylight flooded into the place from a great opening at the room's opposite side. And between him and that other, greater entrance lay three wonderful looking Barsoomian aircraft.

All of them were of the air scout class, sleek and swift. But it was the small black one which attracted his attention most of all, for this one, according to Var Koros, was the personal flier of the Dator of the First Born, himself-swifter than any pursuit ship at Tarnath. It was this black craft which was to carry him at once to John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom.

However, he was confronted by a tall, broad-shouldered officer whose trappings revealed that he was a dwar, or captain. The man glared at him, a sardonic smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

"You are U-Bar Daj?" queried Kar Komak, hesitantly. "I had thought you were a pad-war." Inasmuch as it was unwritten army protocol that a junior officer should not probe a senior officer's mind, Kar Komak did not dare to do so now.

"I am not U-Bar Daj," said the officer. "He has but just left his post because he has been summoned before the odwar for questioning!"

Kar Komak's pulse began to race, but he guarded his expression well. The odwar had tricked him! "Oh!" he said. "I am sorry. I hope he is not in some kind of trouble. I had a message for him-but it can wait."

"Just a moment, pad-war!" exclaimed the dwar. "You are Dator Sojat, a panthan but recently arrived to Tarnath, are you not?"

"Yes. That is my name. Why do you ask?"

I think that you, too, had better see the odwar," replied the dwar. "Guard, take him!"

As the guard who had accompanied him reached for his arm to place him under arrest, Kar Komak whirled, drawing his great sword and short sword simultaneously. As speech would have been superfluous under the circumstances, he fell to work with his weapons.

The guard leaped back, drawing his sword and throwing up a startled defense, and at the same time the dwar laughed aloud and drew both of his.

"Oh, come now!" shouted the latter. "Your life isn't worth a few questions-" He was already moving against Kar Komak's defense, wielding a lightning swift blade. "Unless, of course, you are really a spy for the Warlord, as the odwar suspects!"

Kar Komak had learned much from Carthoris who was second only to the greatest swordsman on the planet, John Carter, himself. And the guard who would have arrested him was first to learn of it though not to his benefit. For he fell dead with a long, keen blade through his heart.

Hardly had Kar Komak withdrawn his weapon from the man's carcass before the dwar transformed himself into a living demon of offensive swordplay. Though Kar Komak had been considered exceptional in Helium, he knew that his Opponent was undoubtedly more than a match for him. As the Tarnathian officer twice penetrated his expert guard and drew blood, he knew that the contest would either last too long or be tragically short, for him. For already he heard the sound of reinforcements approaching in the corridor.

"Surrender, panthan!" exclaimed the dwar, slashing at him savagely. "Before I cut you down!"

Had it only been a matter of his own life and honor, Kar Komak might have adhered to the universal warrior's code of the planet, which perhaps only a Martian and John Carter and that other terrestrial, Vad Varo, could understand. He would have fought his Opponent with equal weapons.

However, much more than himself was concerned here, and as a dozen guards plunged into the hanger with drawn swords, he knew that the time for valor was done. Therefore, he gave them fair warning.

"Stand back!" he shouted. "Or die-all of you!"

At the same time, fully twenty phantom bowmen appeared to rush into the hanger behind the newly arrived guards. They drew their long shafts and aimed with perfect precision at the Tarnathians.

It was not the first time that these fierce bowmen had been seen at Tarnath. The Lotharians had often drilled their phantom armies in the Valley, and their arrows were highly respected.

The dwar stepped back for a moment, staring in amazement at the phantoms, which to him and the others were quite real. The other guards also lowered their swords in astonishment, waiting for the dwar to issue whatever command might be effective under the unusual circumstances.

"You are a Lotharian!" exclaimed the dwar to Kar Komak. "A Lotharian-disguised as a red man! But why?-what is it you want here?"

Kar Komak did not relish having Tario learn of his existence-not just yet. So he said, "I am a Heliumite who has learned the mental wizardry of the Lotharians. And I want the Dotar's flier." As he spoke, he moved toward the black scout-ship.

The dwar appeared to swell up and darken with rage. Suddenly, with a cry of "Slay him!"-he sprang at Kar Komak. And the others moved instantly to block his escape with death.

But, in the next moment, every Tarnathian in that Chamber straightened with a cry of mortal pain, including the dwar. The, each of them fell dead on the floor, with a long, slim shaft of an arrow piercing his body precisely through the heart.

No sooner had they gasped their last than the bowmen and the arrows disappeared into thin air. But the men were still very dead, because their minds had told them that their hearts were torn and bleeding. The nerves Controlling their hearts had reacted to the conviction of the mind, and each heart had stopped its beating. Indeed, a cold, thin shaft might just as well have been lodged within each of the warriors, for the effect was exactly the same.

But still, thought Kar Komak as he gained the deck of the coveted flier, Tario would recognize this work as his. Now, for certain, he would have to make good his escape!

It was easier, from there on, than he had imagined. As he started the ship's powerful engine, the sun sank behind the valley's walls and the long, deep shadows of approaching night were like the arms of a kindly fate stretched out to receive him.

With a tremendous acceleration, he shot out of the Escarpment and was gone beyond the Valley before he could be detected.

As the Martian night descended upon him and he hurtled swiftly southward over the great, dead sea bottoms, Kar Komak had other regrets than having had to dispose of the Tarnathian guards. First, he regretted that he had not been able to take Var Koros with him. And secondly, he regretted that he could not have saved U-Bar Daj from questioning.

Truly, he reasoned, men of State such as John Carter must have terrible decisions to make at times. For when more than one's own self is at stake the sacrifice of others to a cause becomes an unavoidable necessity. He could only hope that U-Bar Daj would not die for his part in Var Koros' little plot.

And there was the greatest mystery of all! How would Var Koros know so much about the secrets of the Holy Alliance? And how could he has arranged such a thing, unaided?

Kar Komak had learned what every Tarnathian warrior knew about the Zumorians that they were few in number, that they were an ancient and alien race, and that they were the oracle upon which the leaders of the Holy Alliance were gambling their entire cause.

These weird beings could foresee the future. It was said that what they had foreseen had influenced them to become allied with the cause of the Holy Alliance. And yet there were others who whispered that the members of the Sacred Council suspected the Zumorians of playing with them like superhuman puppet masters. What was the truth? No man could tell.

But one little item bothered him. Var Koros was evidently the favorite of one of the Zumorians-the grower of flowers. What was his name? Derlas Kor-that was it!

Could it be that Derlas Kor had arranged his escape? And, if so, why? Was he, Kar Komak, but another puppet of destiny for the Zumorians, dangling on an invisible thread along with Var Koros? He

could not know, but as this swift flier would accomplish a purpose which was far more comprehensible and realistic to him, he had no objections-so far. The main thing was to get to Helium as fast as he could travel.

However diligently men may persevere in his attempt to divine the intended course of fate, the more he is humbled by the occurrence of unforeseeable events. And, usually, the cruel snare into which he falls is but the result of the fact that he is, after all, only human.

As Kar Komak's course took him on a giant, sweeping arc across the southern hemisphere of the planet, he recalled that his was the time of night in which he had been wont to concentrate upon the creation of his secret phantom princess in Lothar. And, as the thought occurred to him, he realized that to visit that ancient, deserted city would not take him far out of his way; nor would it consume much time because of the marvelous velocity of this flier.

It is never difficult for the lover to rationalize to his own advantage. Having justified his desire, he soon altered his course and headed for Lothar, salving his conscience with the knowledge that he would breakfast in Helium on the morrow. And that was soon enough for all the world!

But tonight-his private dreams were his to enjoy.

Ever since he had learned from John Carter that Tario had emerged into the outer world, he had been haunted by the presentment that he would one day meet his mental creator face to face. That it would not be a friendly meeting he had little doubt. Instead, it would probably result in a battle of mentalities.

Against such an eventuality, he had been preparing. He had taken careful inventory of this mental capacities and surprised himself with what he had discovered. Daily, he had secretly practiced certain exercises which would have been comprehensible only to a Lotharian. The result was that Kar Komak was astounded at his own powers.

This was true also concerning his secret experiment in Lothar. Each time he concentrated on the materialization of his intended mate in Lothar, he had felt that he was succeeding rapidly. Daily, the

conviction had been growing that her transition into reality was close at hand.

So now, as he approached the mountains which concealed the ancient city from the outer world his mind concentrated once again on that hidden Chamber in the jeddak's palace. As his thoughts reached out to that phantom vision of loveliness, his extra-sensory perception told him that she was almost complete. He was filled with the awareness of a living, consient woman, waiting for him in the inner depths of that great, lonely pile!

God of his ancestors! Could it be possible that he had succeeded so soon? What impossible ecstasy would it be to him now if he should indeed find her there!

The flier seemed to leap forward with his burning thoughts.

But hold! He must control himself. To be deluded by wishful thinking-to open the door of her secret Chamber too soon-would be to lose her entirely. He must be sure. But how?

His aching heart told him that she would be there, and yet his mind, like some hateful and undesired stranger, held up a warning hand to him.

Thus struggling with his reason and his emotions, Kar Komak set his flier down in the broad Square before the palace of the jeddak and leapt from its side. But, as he ran up the broad Steps of the looming edifice, there were men who watched his approach.

They were men from whose minds all thought had been removed, as though by some cruel surgeon's knife-save for the single, dominating conviction that anyone who entered this place must die.

Chapter XIII - OF LOVE AND VALOR

WITH his mind centered exclusively on the secret Chamber he sought, Kar Komak entered the somber pile without considering the possibility of danger. Of course, in the ancient deserted cities of Barsoom, one might always chance upon a family of great white apes, or upon a visiting tribe of green men. However, the presence of green men is usually marked by their great, ferocious throats, and of these he had discovered no evidence. Evidently the fear of the phantom bowmen who had guarded Lothar for ages was still very much alive among the giant green vandals of the sea bottoms, and they had no yet learned that Lothar had been abandoned by its masters.

As for the great white apes, well-they had fallen under the bold stroke of a sword before this. And he was young. This new, delicious emotion which had taken hold of him seemed to make all things possible. Danger was as remote to him now as were the repressed admonitions of reason.

Kar Komak was in love-in love with the ideal woman of his secret and lonely dreams. Perhaps even now she waited for him to release her from the chrysalis of his might will into the reality of his arms!

Various ancient radium bulbs in the palace still functioned, and by their now dim and flickering light he soon

found his way to Tario's throne room. Beyond this, adjoining the departed jeddak's private Chambers, was the precious room he sought.

Ever he approached this place, his extra-sensory perception brought him a more insistent awareness of her. He could swear that she was there in living, breathing reality-an incredible miracle, yet undeniable!

In his mind he had made her tall, lithe, strong and proud, with raven black hair in contrast to the light auburn hair of the typical Lotharian. Moreover, he had insisted on having to win her. She was not to be but the reflection of his secret yearnings, such as one who would cling to him in helpless devotion. She would have clear, blue eyes which would reflect a mind and character of her own. Yet, she would not be such a completed product that there would be no room left for improvement. On the contrary, she would be almost a savage

who would be tamed by the beast of virility and mellowed by the elixir of undying devotion.

With such thoughts and emotions as these, Kar Komak at last entered Tario's former sleeping quarters and stepped at once to the secret door of the hidden Chamber. With the pounding of his heart almost at an audible level, he placed his ear to the cold, ponderous stone and strained with every faculty of his mind to penetrate beyond -to discover some positive proof that she lived.

As he did so, his great sword clanked loudly against the door. And in response, he heard a distant, muffled cry-the cry of a woman! It had issued from inside the secret room!

His eyes widened. Cold Perspiration poured from his trembling body.

"She lives!" he shouted, exultantly. "Most adored ancestors!-she lives!"

It was then, in the very moment that he prepared to spring wide the great stone door, that three red warriors leaped from hiding behind the **arras(7)** near the head of Tario's bed. In their hands were their naked long swords. And their harness told Kar Komak that they were from Tarnath.

How they had come here or what their purpose he could not guess, but that they opposed his now and were bent on murder rather than capture, he well knew by the Single which he read in their minds.

Instantly, he drew his long and short swords, but at the same time he sought to impress upon them a vision of the bowmen. Quickly, he became aware of the appalling fact that only a remnant of their minds were left to them-and on such as these he could work no subtleties of illusion! As well he might have attempted to hypnotize a Kaolian sith(8) or a slaving silian(9) from the Sea of Korus! Nor had these lugubrious mental remnants of men any more fear of death than such primordial monsters!

(7) Arras-concealing draperies

(8) Sith-Hornet-like monster of the Kaloian Forest

(9) Silian-slime reptile inhabiting the Sea of Korus

The three Tarnathians came upon him voicelessly, already drawing back their gleaming blades for the death thrust. With the instantaneousness of thought, it occurred to him that in this glorious moment of fulfillment he could not die, in fact- would not, however great his danger. It was such a hideous irony of fate that it filled him with non-contain-able rage.

Emitting a loud roar of defiance, Kar Komak smashed two threatening blades aside with his short sword and swung his long sword in an irresistible arc which lopped off the head of one Opponent and parted the face of the other. Almost simultaneously, he arched out of the way of the third man's thrust and whirled as the latter's body lunged past, burying his short sword in his attacker's back.

It all happened so quickly that he at first did not fully realize what he had accomplished. Then his flushed, wrathful countenance relaxed slowly into a rueful grin of triumph. Why was it, he asked himself, that when a warrior accomplishes the near impossible, there is never a witness to support his story? By a miracle, he had slain three men in almost a single maneuver. He knew it was such a thing as could never be repeated. But there they were, all three of them, stone dead on the floor.

Hastily, he wiped his swords in the hair of his last victim's head-a more or less common practice on Barsoom, since a warriors only clothing is the leather of his harness. He sheathed the weapons and turned once again to the great stone door of the secret Chamber.

With trembling fingers, he released the hidden mechanism which he had discovered on his previous visit, and as the door swung slightly ajar, he grasped it with both hands and heaved it wide open.

Inside, the light of a single, dim radium bulb revealed to him the very woman he had desired-tall, lithe and beautiful, with raven black hair. As she stood there, looking in blue-eyed amazement at him and at the dead men on the floor behind him, he lost his voice. He had prepared a thousand wonderful things to tell her, but now, in this magic moment, it was as though time had stopped-and with it his heart and his very breath.

By the gods, but she was beautiful!

What now, warrior? He upbraided himself. So ardently were you on the course to your cherished dreams that you waded through flesh and blood to win this magic threshold! What sorak's(10) blood is this in your veins that stays you now-that holds your tongue and freezes your trembling limbs?

Could he but have known it, such was the fate of all the honest and stalwart men since time began. Where a lesser man would have entered the scans as a self-styled master at the art of love, the most virile and ardent of warriors would pause and suddenly find that he possessed great, clumsy hands and feet and a scarecrow's tongue of straw.

For one brief, awkward moment he stood there staring at her. But in the next instant, her blue eyes flashed defiance at him and she sprang out of the room with a tremendous, agile leap. It was a seemingly impossible jump which carried her beyond Kar Komak and even against the opposite wall of the bed-chamber. The impact stunned her, and she fell to the floor, momentarily limp.

He sprang to her side and started to pick her up, but as he did so, she recovered her senses and turned upon him with a biting, clawing savagery that was actually formidable and dangerous to him.

Ha!-he thought, as he struggled mightily to control her-did I not say that she would be one to require taming? By Issus!-but she was a tremendous, vibrant creature! Beautiful as is all the savage and untamed of nature.

The more she fought him with her astonishing strength and fury, the more determined he was to quiet her down and assure her that she was not only in the hands of her master-but safe. Ah, yes! Quite safe, for the rest of her natural life. For she was his!

(10) Sorak-A Martian lap pet, about the size of a cat

At last, he locked her arms behind her, which was no simple task, and he gripped her long black hair in his hands against her wrists. Her position was such that she could not lean forward to get at him with her teeth without pulling her hair out by the roots.

As she rested a moment, locked in his arms, she seemed to discover his eyes and face for the first time. As he did not seek to take advantage of her under the circumstances, a new expression crept into her eyes, an expression tinged with faint, wondering hope-then awakened curiosity.

Perhaps she remembered the three dead men on the floor who had obviously been slain in order to effect her rescue, or perhaps it was the kind, but masterful, look of assurance in him, but the result of her new Observation caused her to relax slightly as she studied him, startlingly similar to a trapped animal who is being offered food.

"Now," said Kar Komak, 'isn't that better? I am your protector, not your nemesis!"

She did not reply. He slight frown of puzzlement only deepened.

It was then that Kar Komak realized his princess might have to learn to speak, as a newly hatched child. And yet, being his own mental creation, she should have a ready made memory of language to fall back on.

He shrugged. Time would tell. Now that he had obtained his precious prize of a lifetime, his duty called him urgently to Helium, where he would take his woman at once. There, perhaps, his friend Carthoris, and perhaps even Thuvia, could help him teach her.

By signs, Kar Komak made it clear to the lovely girl that he would lead her to a place of safety- meaning, of course, his flier. She appeared, at last, to comprehend, for she permitted him to lead her by the hand out of the former sleeping quarters of Tario.

With singing heart, he stepped into Tario's throne room-only to freeze in mid-stride, his eyes widening in sudden alarm. Behind him, the girl gasped, and he felt her hand tense in his.

Facing him at the foot of the dais were a dozen giant green men wearing the leather of the bloodthirsty Torquasian hordes, then which there are none more bestial and cruel on the face of Barsoom.

Beneath their feet were the dead bodies of seven more red Tarnathian guardsmen. And behind this looming dozen massively proportioned cut-throats were scores more of their number. He heard the muffled squealing of their throats in the corridors of the palace, as well as the clash of sidearms and the guttural oaths and shouts of yet other green warriors beyond the throne room.

At sight of him and his beautiful companion, they raised a triumphant shout and sprang up the dais to cut him down with their giant swords.

But if the woman behind Kar Komak had expected him to turn and flee with her she was mistaken. Instead, both she and the Torquasians were momentarily puzzled by the grim and almost triumphant smile on his face as he drew his swords to meet their overwhelming charge.

In the next instant, however, the reason for his smile became apparent. Out of that same passage through which Kar Komak had led his new found love, tall, white bowmen came running and shouting, throwing themselves at once into the battle. In the hands of some were battle axes which they wielded now with deadly effect. Others quickly loaded their bows and fired their arrows rapidly, with unerring precision. And still more crowded in behind them, shouting and eager for combat.

While the advance green men fell back before this unexpected onslaught, and while Kar Komak, himself, led his phantom army against the foe with a victorious battle cry, a great commotion occurred at the opposite end of the throne room. Mingled with the shouts of the green men were the hideous, reverberating roars of banths.

For the first time, the woman on the dais observed Barsoomian lions in action. There were a dozen of the beasts at the far end of the throne room, tearing into the ranks of the giant green men with terrible effect. Her eyes widened, not in fear, but in horrified astonishment, as she saw the giant beasts.

They were almost hairless, but for a great, bristling mane about their thick necks. Their long, tawny bodies were supported by ten powerful legs and their enormous jaws were equipped with several rows of long needle-like fangs. Their huge, protruding green eyes blazed with murderous rage and hate.

Thus, caught between these two unexpected forces, the green men fell beneath giant fangs or battle axe or deadly arrow-or, indeed, before the lightning swift blade of Kar Komak, himself. However, though the green warriors feared the bowmen alone, and only because of the well-founded superstition that they were the ghosts of the departed ancestors of the ancient people of Barsoom, they did not even think in terms of yielding or escape, for they were never hatched with the mechanism necessary to surrender. It is a proverb upon Barsoom: give a green man one arm and one leg with which to fight and he may yet win his way to free-dom.

So it was that the bloody battle raged back and forth in that crowded, dimly lighted room, and to the girl on the dais it was like some mad dream that could never be in reality. Perhaps the only reality she could appreciate was that mighty red-hued warrior who had held such a wondrous look of love for her in his eyes and who now fought for her safety like some demon incarnate.

Suddenly, Kar Komak turned and called for her to follow him closely through a path that seemed open for them, and without hesitation, she responded. But her walk was more like a strange series of jumps which puzzled her as well as her protector. As there was no time to dwell upon this peculiarity, he merely signaled her to stay close behind him as he fought, flanked on either side by his fearless, fair-haired warriors.

It was in that moment that a further commotion was heard, and suddenly, a group of green warriors charged among the banths at the other end of the throne room, mounted on huge, savage thoats. These Torquasians carried great, long lances, and as they possessed four arms they were able to carry on a battle with long and short sword simultaneously, the while their ferocious thoats defended themselves formidably against the Barsoomian lions.

The bowmen brought some of these charging warriors down with their silent arrows, but yet others charged over the carcasses of fallen warrior and thoat alike, determined to reach Kar Komak, whose artificially colored red skin and short-cropped, black-dyed hair seemed to single him out as the principal target.

In the midst of a death-cut through the great body of a green Opponent, Kar Komak suddenly saw a huge thoat and a towering, grinning green man who wore the metal of a jed looming upon him. Before he could raise his sword to defend himself, the jed's great, long lance loomed into his field of vision like a battering ram.

He heard his beloved princess scream. Then the world exploded in searing white flame. There followed an aware-ness of falling through bottomless space, and as he feil, the flame and din of pain and battle faded away into infinity.

He plummeted into cold oblivion, and with him went all his phantoms-bowmen and banths alike...

Chapter XIV - THE MIRACLE

TARIO paced the great balcony before the Sacred Council in rage. "Why was I not advised?" he shouted to Ranas Ghol, while Zithad and Sardon Dhur scowled darkly at both of them. "Why did not your subjects, these Tarnathians, advise me that a strange panthan had been captured in Lothar and imprisoned here in the Escarpment beneath out feet? Had I known it, I should have seen through his disguise at once, and he would never have escaped!

"You ask me if he could have been a Lotharian. Of course he is! Who should know better than I? He is Kar Komak, a former odwar of my bowmen-"

"But we of the Council know that the bowmen are illusions, Tario," objected Zithad. "This man was real, as far as we know."

For definite reasons of his own, Tario did not choose to enlighten them concerning the true facts behind the origin of Kar Komak. "He is actually a renegade Lotharian-a man of flesh and blood," he admitted. "But he is also the most dangerous of our enemies, barring only the Warlord, himself!"

'You, Ranas Ghol," said Sardon Dhur. "Could you not have foreseen the arrival of this spy in our midst?"

"Perhaps," sighed the Sumorian. "All of the future, in all its intricate ramifications of probability, are evident. But if you will but glance at the huge perspective of this Valley of Tarnath below us you will not notice such details as a broken limb of an individual tree. Your attention will be attracted, rather, by the major details such as the forest as a whole, the military encampments, and the towering walls of the Valley.

"So it is with future events. Only the important ones impress themselves upon us. That I was unattracted by the impending visit of this renegade signifies that he cannot be of much importance to the future. You, Tario, have but just returned from your search for him. Did you not find the stolen flier a burned and smoldering wreck, out on the sea bottoms? And, would this not indicate that he was shot down by the rifles of the green men? I believe you may dismiss Kar Komak from your mind."

This Tario could not do. The presentiment remained that he would yet meet Kar Komak one day. Obviously, a horde of green men had invaded Lothar, where he had found the remains of the flier. He had found the dead Tarnathian guards, who had evidently been killed in physical combat. But he had also found the dead carcasses of green men on whose bodies no mark of violence could be discovered—exactly as the Tarnathian guards had been found in the hanger below, from which Zithad's flier had been stolen originally.

This was the work of Kar Komak's bowmen. Therefore, he had either escaped, or he had been captured. If he had been killed, they would have left his body where it fell.

As for the woman, this was what enraged him the most. Not that he thought she had been stolen from him by Kar Komak, or captured by the green men. No Kar Komak must have had some other object in visiting Lothar.

The truth was, Tario was convinced she did not exist. The revelation of Kar Komak's presence in Tarnath at the time of the woman's appearance had placed a different light on the whole matter. It explained the mystery of how he could have materialized a woman such as he had never envisioned in the first place.

He saw it clearly now. Kar Komak had thrown a phantom devil into his waiting arms. It was he who had caused her to try to assassinate him!

Inadvertently, he felt for the scar on his neck which had been so perilously close to his jugular vein. It had disappeared entirely, and although others might attribute the fact to the efficiency of the advanced medicines of Barsoom, Tario knew that that scar had been but an illusion-an illusion which had brought him terribly close to death.

"If Kar Komak lives," he grumbled, "he is dangerous. One day I shall conduct a private search of my own to find him, and he shall be destroyed."

"So be it," said Zithad. "Let us trust that this occurrence will cost no more than my best scout ship. Just now there are more important matters to concern us."

"Yes," agreed Sardon Dhur, looking at the coveted Holy Diadem on Tario's brow, "we have completed the long preliminary stage of preparation. Our armies stand ready, and our aerial battle fleets soon to be strengthened by the new nullifying beam, but await our command. In every city and nation, including the Heliumetic Empire, itself, we have a well trained Underground force of Thern priests and civilian sympathizers. Already, various jeds and jeddaks have expressed interest in our cause and are asking embarrassing questions. When do we strike? and when shall Issus arise? As a matter of fact, Tario, how long do you think you will continue to make use of the Holy Diadem? It is sacred property. As the chosen Hekkador of the Thern Empire, it is my right to wear it, and I shall not subdue my impatience much longer!"

Tario turned slowly to glare at the Thern. His eyes were cold, his Ups thin and tight pressed against his teeth as he smiled without mirth. "You shall have it," he replied, evenly, "if and when I see fit to let you wear it. I will not remind you again that I am the ruling voice of this Council, and the Jeddak of Barsoom. You my propose, Sardon Dhur, but it is I who dispose!"

Both the Thern and the black Dator of the First Born sprang to their feet, enraged.

"Enough!" shouted Sardon Dhur. "I am sick of your egotism, Tario!"

"As am I," exclaimed Zithad. "I demand, here and now, that we agree on equal partnerships until the Warlord is overthrown! Otherwise, I withdraw my support from the Alliance!"

"The Dator," said Sardon Dhur, "has expressed my own sentiments exactly!"

"And both of you," sneered Tario, "are demonstrating the validity of my warning to you in the beginning. Divided, you fall, with John Carter on both your necks-and a very unpleasant history shall have repeated itself in spite of all our will laid plans and preparations!"

"Just a moment," interrupted Ranas Ghol, calmly. "You are all forgetting one incontrovertible fact. By now, you have gone too far to dissolve the strength of the Alliance. The next forward step must be taken or the new allies you have won among the nations of Barsoom will only join forces with the Warlord and make it a simple matter for him to crush you entirely. The next step, gentlemen, is the vital one, without which you will die in a deadly trap of your own making."

What do you mean by the next step?" asked Sardon Dhur.

Ranas Ghol studied all three before answering. The he pointed to the golden throne significantly.

"The resurrection of Issus!" exclaimed Zithad. Suddenly, his militant attitude was replaced by the old flame of his fanaticism.

"All right, Sardon Dhur smiled, derisively. "You wear the Holy Diadem for the purpose of bringing us this enchanted goddess, Tario, though just how it may be accomplished I know not. How long must we wait for you to produce her?"

Tario recalled his plan to create an Issus. That he might yet materialize the coveted phantom he had once dreamed of in Lothar he was reasonably confident, nor had the personal advantages of this possibility been forgotten.

"Sooner, perhaps, than you imagine," he smiled.

At that moment, a detachment of Tarnathian guardsmen entered the great amphitheater in haste. The dwar who was their commanding officer ordered his men to remain near the entrance as he approached the Sacred Council's table. When he reached the Steps of the wide balcony, he dropped to one knee.

"Sire!" he cried, to Ranas Ghol. "Forgive this interruption of the most sacred Council, but I bring you an announcement of great importance!"

"Speak, warrior!" commanded Tario, stubbornly asserting himself above the others.

The dwar hesitated, looking from Tario to Ranas Ghol, but as the latter signal-led him to speak, he said, "There awaits the Council a powerful jeddak from the outer world. He has told me to say that he demands an audience!"

Zithad frowned at Sardon Dhur. "Since when were your priests permitted to divulge the secret of Tarnath's location?" he demanded. "This is not only our most Strategie fortress-it is temporarily a part of the inner Sacred Worlds, which men from the outside may never visit unless they have departed on their final journey from the living!"

Sardon Dhur smiled. "The bait we have dangled before men's souls is to tantalizing, Zithad. Did it not occur to you that my workers could be tortured for information? I knew this would happen. The 'faithful' have forced our hand, gentlemen."

"Who is the royal delegate?" asked Ranas Ghol of the Tarnathian dwar, who still waited on one knee.

"He is Tavan Jal, sire, the ruling Jeddak of the far kingdom of Jahar."

Sardon Dhur's brows raised up. "Jahar!" he exclaimed, appreciatively. "Very large and notoriously belligerent. They have had trouble with the Warlord in the past."

"Let the jeddak enter, commanded Tario. "We would grant him an audience."

"Just a moment!" exclaimed Zithad. "We would belittle the mysticism and sanctity of the very theology we are attempting to strengthen if we were to permit this traffic between the Sacred Worlds of the dead and the outer world. I say that this jeddak be given to understand that the price for his entrance here is the renunciation of his throne and his very life, as he knew it. In other words, once he has entered the throne room of Issus, he is as one dead, and must forever remain within the periphery of the inner worlds, exactly as if he had taken his final journey upon the boom of Iss!"

Even Tario considered this advice for a long moment.

"He is right," said Sardon Dhur. "We cannot dilute our psychological advantage now or at any other time."

"Ranas Ghol," said Tario, "what do you think?"

The Zumorian smiled. "It would be interesting to permit the Jeddak of Jahar to think about such a proposition." He turned to the dwar. "You have heard, Obar Daj?"

"Yes, sire," replied the warrior, who had been gravely impressed by the Councils decision. "I shall transmit the message to the Jeddak at once."

The members of the Sacred Council waited some time before the reply was given. But when the answer came, it was in the form of Tavan Jal, the Jeddak of Jahar, himself. Accompanied by the Tarnathian guards, he came unarmed into their presence, a tall man, proud, broad-shouldered and heavy set, his harness glittering profusely with the jewels and emblems of his lofty Station.

The guardsmen, all except Obar Daj, again remained at a distance. The jeddak and Obar Daj walked silently toward the balcony.

"Stay!" commanded Tario. "Thus far, and no more!"

The jeddak stopped. He scanned the faces of the Council members slowly, devoting a long, wondering moment to Ranas Ghol, and finally his eyes rested on the Holy Diadem worn by Tario. Since the inhabitants of the outer world knew very little concerning the higher cycles of Therns who lived exclusively in the Sacred Worlds, they knew nothing of the significance of the Holy Diadem of the Hekkadors. However, the great jewel on Tario's forehead seemed to single him out

as the spokesman for the Sacred Council, and therefore the jeddak addressed him.

"I come to the world of the dead," he announced, "neither as a fool nor as a traitor. But I have a condition to make which is inspired by purely practical considerations."

"Speak, Tavan Jal," said Tario, glaring at him. "We shall then tell you how you have been judged. We shall also ask you how you found your way to Tarnath, which is a part of the Sacred Worlds and may not be approached by the living.

Tavan Jal smiled confidently. "But now I am of the blessed dead."

"And therefore," said Zithad, sharply, "you shall never return whence you came. This is the ancient law, as valid now as it ever was in Barsoomian antiquity!"

"As the Council wills," replied the former Jeddak of Jahar. "But someone must carry a message back to my son, Sor Tal, who will take my throne. The message must be in my own handwriting, in a certain rare written language which is known to few(!!). Only this will Prince Sor Tal recognize as genuine. It must tell him that I have found the Holy Alliance to be what it pretends to be-and that I have looked upon the resurrected Issus."

Zithad started. He cast an apprehensive glance at Sardon Dhur, but the latter did not notice, for he was concentrating all of his attention upon Tavan Jaw. Ranas Ghol sat at ease, his expression indefinable.

Tario, on the other hand, frowned menacingly. "And if no message ever reaches your son! What then?" he demanded to know.

"Then," smiled Tavan Jal, "Jahar will join forces with the Warlord-as will half a dozen other nations, such as Phundahl and Tjanath and Amhor - not to mention Zodanga.

Zithad and Sardon Dhur straightened up. "Zodanga!" they exclaimed in uni-son, impressed by the name of one of the mightiest member nations of the Heliumetic Alliance.

(!!) On Barsoom, there is only one spoken language, but the written languages are legion...

"You see," said Tavan Jal, "there is one other besides myself who knows the location of Tarnath- and that is my son, Price Sor Tal, himself. In fact, it was he who discovered your escarpment years ago. Neither he nor myself have divulged this valuable information. But we have formulated a plan to test, once and for all, where our allegiance must lie in the Coming battle-in the great Holy War which now looms inevitable upon Barsoom as the result of the work of the Holy Alliance. Six other great nations of this planet are relying on my word, or that of my son. So you see," he smiled again, confidently, "it is not I alone who stand here before you." He drew himself up to his full height, and very suddenly his smile changed into a menacing scowl. "You do not dare to violate the person of a representative of seven nations!" he exclaimed. "We hold an allied force in reserve, which consists of more than ten million warriors and above twenty thousands of warships. I am here to decide whether they join the Holy Alliance or the Warlord-and for this decision have I dared to cross your sacred threshold!"

Zithad scowled darkly, his hand toying with the hilt of his sword. Sardon Dhur slumped in his chair. Ranas Ghol looked curiously at Tario, as though to say, "I have warned all of you of this impending trap!"

Tario frowned, but not because of the former jeddak's challenge. Something was bothering his mind-a strange ringing in the distance that was yet without sound. A name-less excitement began slowly to pervade him.

He shook himself, concentrating upon Tavan Jal. "You have forgotten one thing," he replied, evenly. "What may the force of arms avail against the sacred will of Issus?"

Zithad looked up at him, Startled and wonderingly, as did Sardon Dhur.

Tavan Jal looked about the amphitheater and then finally his eyes rested on the golden throne on the raised dais. He turned back to Tario.

"I see the throne of Issus," he replied. "But where is the goddess, herself?"

As Tario did not answer, he continued. "Please understand me. What the Holy Therns have preached to us concerning the reformed religion and the Coming resurrection of Issus all men wish to believe. But all men of intelligence wish also to know for certain that the Holy Alliance is not but a disguise for the cruel and hideous deceptions of old. This is such a vital issue to the world that all nations now stand divided between positive doubt and wishful thinking. Do you understand? We who would side with the Holy Alliance wish to believe!"

Tario could have taken hold of this man's mind and made him believe anything. Zithad and Sardon Dhur knew it. However, Ranas Ghol knew that Tario would do something far more effective.

Suddenly, Tavan Jal, the former Jeddak of Jahar, staggered back, his mouth agape, as he stared wide-eyed at Ranas Ghol. All men in the throne room of Issus turned to see that the Zumorian's brow had parted to reveal his third eye, which now stared unblinking into realms which only he could envision.

Tario saw it. He also saw the direction of the Zumorian's gaze. The latter was staring directly at the golden throne of Issus.

At the same time, the nameless disturbance within him turned to a form of epilepsy which again flecked the corners of his now trembling mouth. For in his mind the ringing had become audible and there emerged before his mental vision the face of a beautiful woman—that same phantom of Lothar whom he had attempted to create originally. The Star of Issus in the diadem, resting heavily against his perspiring brow, augmented this vision mightily.

Without knowing or asking why, Tario knew instinctively that the time for his cherished miracle had come. Now! Now would he create her!

He concentrated with the total forces of his intellect upon the golden throne. Slowly, his pointing finger rose until it directed all eyes in the amphitheater to that hallowed spot.

"Look!" he gasped.

And suddenly a great, roaring tide of energy seemed to pour from him, leaving him weak. As well it should have. For again he had teleported a human being through forty-eight million miles of interplanetary space.

On the throne of Issus sat a queenly woman. Her raiment was strange, but her identity was incontrovertible.

"Issus!" came a great cry from everyone, except Ranas Ghol and Tario.

All save these two men, and even including Sardon Dhur and Zithad, fell to the floor in trembling fear and adoration.

Tario's mind leapt out, swiftly, powerfully. This was the moment of crisis, upon which would depend the fate of Tharos Pthan. But when he tried to penetrate the dazed woman's mind he was stopped by that same barrier which he had met in John Carter! He could not penetrate, but he could hold her with his will. He could control her conscious movements, at least, which was more than he had been able to accomplish with the Warlord.

After a long, strained silence, his voice rose in the great amphitheater. Speak, most holy goddess!" he cried, dramatically. "Bless us with your sacred name!"

He strained his mind to the breaking point, while all the groveling faithful waited. Then, slowly, the queenly woman spoke, as though in a trance, her lips struggling with strange words which she could not understand-which Tario was forcing upon her.

"Behold!" she said. "I am Issus arisen!"

* * *

Far, far away, in the ranch house of the Greystoke estate in East Central Africa, the Great Star of Issus lay smoldering in its own cold flame-on the floor of an empty room...

Chapter XV - THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

IN that silent hour of the night which precedes the dawn, in that lost island of time which seems inhabited more by the spirits of the dead than by the living, Thuria beckoned her brother, Cluros, to look upon the deserted city of Lothar. The magnificent residences, public buildings and palaces gazed sadly, with death hollowed eyes, at the broad, moonlit avenues in which no creature stirred, at the city whose voice was stilled by the dusty burden of the ages.

Gradually, however, there emerged a few details which were incongruous to the changelessness of this sprawling mausoleum of memory. For here and there along the avenues the signs of a recent Visitation could be seen. Here the recumbent form of a dead green warrior, there a living thout, riderless, quietly grazing on the scarlet sward of the boulevard, a broken lance dangling from its saddle.

And in the great plaza before the palace of the former jeddak, smoldering fires licked at the remains of a once sleek scout ship which bore on its crumbling bow the insignia of Omean.

More noteworthy still was the fact that the tremendous circular gate in the city's wall had been left open by the departing Torquasian horde, and it was that motley, straggling group of people who entered there in this still hour of the night which might, indeed, have given hurtling Thuria the power of speech.

Never before on the dying bosom of Barsoom had such a confraternity of different races been gathered together in peaceful co-existence. For here were strange green men and their females, shorn of their instinctive ferocity, humbled by their fate, mingling with red man, and with the rare yellow men of the northern arctic regions of Barsoom. Some there were who limped or hobbled along, helped by the others, struggling to grasp at the lingering shreds of life which yet remained to their deformed and tortured bodies. And there came with them, too, like some macabre delegation from the tombs, the sightless and the deaf and dumb-and others sill whose very minds had been deformed by the unbearable experience of the River Iss.

These were the Lost People, who moved on the fringes of the outer world only under the cover of night, for were their identity known to the "living," they would have been attacked and driven back into that subterranean hell beneath the Mountains of Otz from which they had emerged.

Here, indeed, was the most poignant example of the religious hiatus which now threatened to hurl the entire planet into universal conflict. It was true that John Carter had overthrown the old religion and outlawed the cruel deception of the Therns. But one thing he could not control, and the other he had not controlled enough.

The decline of any tradition, however false, is followed inevitably by a straggling remnant of those who stubbornly persist in the old ways. So it was that long after the River Iss had been condemned as a passage for pilgrims to the false heaven of the Valley Dor, there were those who had clung to the desperate hope that the world was wrong, and that the power of faith, alone, would bring them through the dark unknown to their cherished paradise.

Thus cast upon the bosom of Iss, they were the prisoners of its insidious currents, and they entered into the charnel caverns of the dead, or of the mad and depraved, those cannibal survivors who could neither face the plant men and the carnivorous white apes on the shores of Korus nor return to the world of the living.

And here was the sorest point of all. Even though a universal declaration had been made that the survivors of Iss might return to their former lives in the outer world, the rupture of ages-long tradition and the instinctive law of the race was a thing which should not have been expected of a mere official decree. In many cases the returning pilgrim was received with superstitious revulsion, as one might receive a ghost wearing the scythe scar of the Reaper on his brow, and soon the unfortunate lost soul was either killed outright or driven back into the caves of madness and death—for his claims against the Great Deception were always rejected as the sacrilege and the blasphemy of a heretic.

So it was that some survivors of this cruel fate had adapted themselves, however strangely, to an environment which was limbo-caught between the hate of the living and the madness of the dead. Of such were the Lost People, eking out a nomadic existence in the dread, dreary wastes of the outer Valleys of Otz, the orphaned progeny of mismated philosophies.

Before the arrival of the swift brightening Martian dawn, they had found Kar Komak sorely wounded and near to death. They had stanchd the ebbing of his blood and carried him off with them into the wilderness which they alone could claim as home.

Somewhere in that never-land which lay uncharted and unwanted between the worlds of the quick and the dead, the Lost People had built themselves a makeshift town of sorts. Here was a farming Community in one of those rare, lost Valleys where the skulking river of the dead briefly shows its face to the light of day. And from here this motley colony Struck out on certain expeditions of exploration through the caverns of Iss, motivated by an olden dream which one among their number had implanted in their souls long, long ago-before he had disappeared while engaged on the very quest which they had never quite abandoned.

To Kar Komak, however, his new way of life among these people was the only way of life he knew, for the memory of another life beyond that night in the palace of Tario in Lothar had been blotted out as a result of his injuries. Somewhere deep in his mind the vision of a woman, tall, lithe and beautiful, with raven hair and deep blue eyes, invaded his dreams at night, and he would awake with a Start, only to find that he existed in a world of the living dead.

While Kar Komak existed thus from day to day without apparent meaning or purpose, the German Luftwaffe turned the skies of London to incarnadine, and under the cover of the blackouts a disconsolate English Lord worked hard and long at the task of building Intelligence machinery which was to affect certain facets of the future of Africa.

Yet, his dreams, too, were haunted by the vision of a woman, and he would often wake with a start as he remembered an empty room, a lighted dressing table lamp, and that glowing evil from antiquity which lay upon the floor.

"Jane!" he would cry out despairingly.

Or he would pray, grimly and silently, for the war's end, so that he could search for her again.

* * *

As the ancient oceans of Mars receded gradually, those populations which had depended on the sea for a livelihood followed the sinking shorelines, building new cities to replace the older ones left behind. This process continued through the ages of encroaching death which preceded the invention of the atmosphere plants, until finally the oceans were no more. And the people died with the waters, leaving only the dead sea bottoms and the vacant windowed cities to mark their graves.

Such was the dead city of Korad, ancient, ownerless, a derelict adrift in the endless stream of time. To take advantage of its shelter from roaming banths or perchance a wandering airship from some red Martian nation, or else to slack their thirst at the Springs which could usually be found in such places, either the nomadic green men or the great white apes were wont to take up a temporary residence here.

At this particular time, Korad was inhabited by a horde of green men which bore allegiance to the tribal nation of Tor-quas. Here were their vicious, squealing throats locked up in the great courtyards of the ancient buildings. Here were the females who accomplished all the useful work of the tribe, cleaning the swords of the warriors, repairing their battle harness or their long radium rifles, manufacturing ammunition and preparing food, while the males consorted about the central palace of Korad, where sat the court of Xotar Kova, Jed.

In one of the apartments of the city rested one who was not of their race, a prisoner, yet one too fair and choice to be chained like any common victim of a raid in the lightless pits below. A woman, white, proud, with raven hair, and possessed of a haunting, alien beauty and a ferocious strength that made her appear to Xotar Kova a young she-banth in human form.

Xotar Kova's women fed her and were supposed to keep her under their surveillance, but at times they were wont to entrust this duty to their calots.

And so it was that La, High Priestess of the Flaming God, now found herself a prisoner of two Martian watchdogs, or calots, whose great size and ugly appearance fascinated her, because she had learned by now that their beastly aspect disguised a very high order of intelligence-such as she had never observed in any earthly animal, nor indeed in the priests of Opar! Though it was difficult to believe, she even suspected that they were guided by telepathy.

What alien world she had been cast upon she could not accurately surmise, inasmuch as La knew little concerning modern astronomy. To her, each small light in the night skies of Africa had marked the departed soul of an ancestor like a cosmic scoreboard for all the populations of eternity, and if some were distinguished as stars and others as planets she didn't know it. And those which fell to Earth in the silent night were but the souls of those who were returning to another incarnation.

She knew that this was another world, but inasmuch as there were no other worlds for the living it followed by a process of simple and logical deduction that she was dead. This was the beginning of that adventure beyond the pale of mortality for which her soul had waited.

Each new experience, therefore, and each unimaginable creature she saw was accepted as something which was only to be expected-for incomprehensible were the wonders of the After World.

However, ever since the night she was captured by these giant green men, the fact had puzzled her that death occurred in this world as well as in her own. Was it possible, she had asked herself, that there were yet other lives to live beyond each death, making of death, itself, but a harmless transition between the Segments of life eternal? Thus did La perceive the beginnings of the revelations in After Life.

However, she had not been able to resist speculating upon her own possible destiny here. Where did she fit into this incomprehensible picture?

Her last remembrance of her other life had been one that held an unanswered question. She had been in search of a destiny that had called to her out of antiquity and promised a fulfillment in the future.

Was this, then, that exalted destiny?-to be a prisoner of a tribe of four-armed monstrosities? No, she answered herself. This was again but transition. There yet awaited her

something beyond all this, but perhaps it devolved upon herself to provide a means of achieving her ultimate destination. Therefore, she must escape, but how?

Her mind recalled the strange red-skinned warrior who had fought to rescue her from her previous prison. She could not forget the unmistakable expression of adoration and devotion in his eyes. No man had ever looked into the eyes of La in such a manner before. Had Tarzan of the Apes looked upon her with such an expression for but one moment in all eternity, she thought, that single moment had been the sum of life itself.

But Tarzan was not of this world. Perhaps someday he would penetrate the veil and find her here, but that glorious day lay far, far down the future. Nor did she have her strange red warrior chieftain and his numerous army of phantom bowmen to help her now.

She was utterly alone in her strange new world. What was to become of her was a matter which appeared to be divided between the will of Xotar Kova-and her own.

There were tears in her lovely eyes and yet she frowned angrily at her own futile emotions. But who could blame her for tears? Had she not suffered through long ages of mortal life in the hope that some change would come to her, heralding at last the long awaited reward for earthly happiness.

What life had been more profitless? Who had ever invested so many endless years of waiting in a proposition which had yielded so little? What irony was there so abysmally cruel as this? Was this the reward of a Priestess of the Flaming God? Was this, then, the vaulted Paradise which had been promised to the faithful?

Yet, how could she judge, how could she evaluate, that which was totally unfamiliar? Her first step, therefore, was to become an independent agent in this world, free to move about and observe. She did not ask yet know how this might be accomplished, but she was determined that if it lay within her power to do so, she would avoid a repetition of her former life. In this life she would find her destiny, she would grasp at every opportunity, and she would find her destiny, she would grasp at every opportunity, and she would color her days with the fulfillment of life-or quickly and willingly embrace the next death on the stairway to eternity.

Thus La established her credo! Death was nothing-life was all... And therefore, fear was merely the result of not having arrived at this conclusion.

Fearlessly she surveyed her environment with a cool, objective mind. As she did, her tension left her. A new confidence was born in her, and there welled up within her soul that old awareness of exalted origin and tremendous destiny. She felt the strength, the purpose, and the power in her and it lifted her chin with pride and brought a gleam of resourcefulness to her eyes.

She rose to her feet and stared peremptorily at the two calots who lay before the exit to her Chamber. The great beasts met her gaze with unblinking eyes, but they stirred uneasily, sensing telepathically the change in her personality, as an African Hon might sense with his nose that his quarry had ceased to fear him.

Slowly, the carnivorous creatures rose up on their ten short legs and bared their multiple rows of long, sharp tusks, like frog-faced dragons in a delirious dream. They were larger than Numa, and far more savage. Though intelligent enough to be trained into devoted allies, their training at the hands of a brutal and heartless people had served but to reflect the total ferocity of the green Community in which they lived.

Yet, La walked directly toward them. Walking, running or jumping in this strange world had started out to be a mystery to her, for her terrestrial muscles were more than adequate to the lighter gravity of Barsoom. But, in a short time she had learned how to control her movements, and so it was that she moved now, slowly, gracefully and determinedly, toward the exit.

"Out of my way!" she commanded, in the ancient language of Opar.

That they understood, at least, her thought was evidenced by the fact that they stepped silently aside to let her pass. As she emerged into the corridor, they fell in behind her. She couldn't know if she had won a victory over them, or if it were their duty merely to protect her rather than to imprison her.

Well, she thought, and where to now? Vaguely in her mind a plan was becoming organized. If she could find a hiding place and eventually elude her captors, she might have an opportunity later to contact that other civilization of people who were formed as herself—perhaps the very nation or tribe to which the warrior chieftain belonged who had tried to rescue her from the green men.

But how could she hide herself with these myriad-legged brutes at her heels?

She stopped as she came out upon a long, open arcade. To her left was a series of doors leading into other apartments. To her right was a beautiful parapet of polished stone, which supported delicately carved pillars. These, in turn, supported gently curving arches which opened upon a narrow enclosed court below where once a great fountain had gushed with water.

Across this narrow court was the roof of a neighboring building. The roof adjoined another edifice which was four stories in height and was crowned by soaring towers. If she could gain the roof of one

of the towers, she thought, it would be possible to survey the city and surrounding territory to a much better advantage.

La carefully measured the distance from the railing of the arcade to the opposite roof. It appeared to be in the neighborhood of eighteen feet. In her own world, such a distance would have been prohibitive, but in this strange world of the Second Life, it seemed that many unusual things were possible. She might be able to make the jump, she reasoned, and if she did so, she would, at least, temporarily elude her savage guardians.

Keeping strongly in mind the new credo of her life, La carefully climbed to the broad stone top of the balustrade. Instantly, the two calots uttered a strange sound and closed in behind her. The nearest one raised up on six of its ten legs and opened its cavernous jaws to grasp her.

And then La jumped, with all the strength that was in her.

Much to her surprise, she not only cleared the eighteen foot gap, but much more, landing well in upon the stone rooftop. Instead of sprawling on her face, however, she avoided this by converting her forward momentum into another leap, and thus, by a series of prodigious agile jumps, she quickly gained a window of the looming edifice before her.

Glancing back, she saw the calots race like blurred phantoms toward the far exit from the second story arcade. She well knew that they would soon be upon her if she did not find a hiding place. Therefore, she climbed quickly through the window and into a large room.

It was only in that moment that she discovered, too late, that the Chamber was occupied. But this was no human, nor even so comparatively gentle and reassuring a creature as a Torquasian green man which rose from the floor to receive her. It was a great, white ape, fully fourteen feet tall, hairless except for a shock of white, bristly fur atop its gorilla-like head. It growled hideously, baring great white fangs, and caught her wrist in one of its four huge hands before she could turn to run...

Chapter XVI - THE QUESTION OF THE AGES

CHURG was less a great white ape than he was a missing link in the chain of evolution. For in his little brain had been born the glimmering spark of curiosity—a vague yearning for enlightenment and a more interesting, if not better, way of life.

There were others of his kind, extremely rare and seldom seen or even suspected, who imitated man, as did Churg, by wearing the semblance of harness. It was crude, fashioned of poorly cured animal hid, and as yet purposeless, for it was only a mimicry of the men which Churg and his kind desired to become.

But it was a beginning.

Of such was the tribe of Churg, the great white ape of Barsoom. The secret urge was never constant, to be sure. Still did they lie in wait like any other white ape to fall upon their prey, human or otherwise. Still were they savage and carnivorous. But, withal, they were haunted in their embryonic souls by the distant call to something, and ethnic destiny, as it were, which lay beyond the horizons of beastly instinct.

So, when their bellies were full with the meat of their kills, they sometimes watched the activities of the green men who shared the lonely environment of the dead sea bottoms and the ancient deserted cities with them. They would

wonder at their ways and even steal some of their weapons or articles of apparel in order to penetrate the mystery of the higher phylum.

But lately, there had come to Churg a plan which was tantamount to a stroke of genius. Why not go one step farther, he had reasoned, and steal a living representative of the other species? There were green men and there were the smaller red men who had only two arms. The latter were evidently the more clever, for all their diminutive stature and puny strength. And that was what intrigued him. These creatures had another strength that was not composed of bone and muscle.

It must be so, because they could travel through the sky in strange, voiceless birds without wings, and they had trained these birds to drop eggs of death on the green men. Those great, ferocious warriors, as large as Churg, himself, had often run for their very lives at the mere sight of a red man's sky bird.

Yet, why was it that these smaller creatures seemed to form a larger and more powerful tribe? What was the secret of this strange strength which lived not in their arms or their hands or their teeth? It was a magic which he yearned to discover, for in it he recognized a power that could make him the king of apes.

Churg's belly was full, but not of meat that was to his liking, for ulsio is not of the more savory species such as calot(5) or thoat-or indeed, a green man. The day was quiet and serene; the light of the sun fell warmly on his hairless hide, through the open window. This window offered a view of the buildings which were occupied by the green men but, though the opportunity to observe their activities thus presented itself, he felt lazy and too much at peace with his timeless world to so much as lift his head and gaze across the sill.

Later, perhaps, he would look. And he might even see that strange, small female creature who was neither red nor green but almost as white as himself. He alone had caught sight of her on the previous day, and his curiosity concerning her had been greatly aroused at the moment. Either she would be interesting to inspect or, undoubtedly, very tender to the taste, should he ever decide to catch her and tear her apart to pass around among the members of his tribe.

But for the moment, he felt like napping in his warm patch of afternoon sunlight. Tomorrow, perhaps, he would catch her.

There was always tomorrow...

(5) Calot - Martian watchdog, a huge, fierce creature possessing ten short, swift legs...

In that moment, he recognized the strange white female creature whom the green men had captured. Now that she was close and in his grasp, he saw that she was indeed a tender morsel. Perhaps she would be very good to eat, but his belly was full. Well, he could kill her now so that she would not bother his nap, and eat her later when he was hungry.

Before smashing her skull, however, it might be clever of him to ask her where men kept their secret power. For the moment, he failed to realize that men did not speak the language of the apes.

"What is the secret strength of man?" he asked, simply and directly voicing the greatest question of the ages.

To La, it was not too much to expect that the apes of this world should employ the same common denominator of primordial expression as those of her former life. The fact that she understood his guttural barks, grunts and whines did not startle her, but his question did. Also, she was mystified by the face that he wore rudimentary harness fashioned of poorly cured Strips of thout hide.

There was no time to be clever. The respite of speech was haven enough for the moment. And therefore, La answered almost as instinctively, in accordance was her own primitive school of thought.

"All strength comes from god," she answered, while she wondered at her unwavering fearlessness in the titanic grip of this great hulking brute.

Her anthropoid expression of the abstract idea of god, however, was one to which earthmen might have taken exception, for the ideation carried the connotation of "sun." Therefore, what she had really said was that all strength comes from the sun. And in a purely biological sense, who could say that she had erred?

Churg's great, dumb face wrinkled in outward sign of his herculean mental struggle with this concept. After a long moment, he stepped to the window, still gripping La's numbed wrist. He squinted up at the sun. Then he grunted.

"Churg looks many times at the sun. But Churg cannot fly through the sky like the red man. How can Churg ask the sun for strength?"

In spite of the pain in her wrist, La perceived a miracle, even for this world of the After Life. For the first time in her existence, she was confronted by the spectacle of a beast who had found the power of the abstract.

"Churg has already started to grow strong, like man," she answered.

The towering, massive ape looked down at the comparatively puny female creature in his grip. But, like a little child looking into the face of his mother, he asked, "Can you show Churg how to be a man?"

Boldly, La replied, "Yes. If you let La live, she will show you the path to follow."

In that moment, a great commotion was heard arising from some other location in the building. La heard the battle cries of other apes, and she assumed correctly that her two captives had encountered other members of the tribe of Churg before they had been able to reach her.

At the same time, a huge spear came hurtling through the window, barely missing one of Churg's great Shoulders. The two of them, white ape and white woman, turned to look across the rooftop.

There stood three giant green men behind the balustrade from which La had escaped. In their center, she recognized the superior stature and the tusk, evil face of Xotar Kova, Jed. It was he who had hurled the spear in preference to using his more effective radium rifle in his hand, evidently because he had hoped to single out only the ape for death, whereas an explosive bullet would have been quite impartial.

"Come!" said Churg, tossing La's light form over his Shoulder.

As she was carried thus unceremoniously out of the Chamber, La caught one last glimpse of Xotar Kova and his two companions. She saw that they were laughing, and she understood, Already she had learned that the only humor in the breast of a green man is that which is aroused at the sight of death or torture-or the prospect of fates even worse than this.

Yet La wondered which fate might be worse- to remain in the hands of her recent captors, who were bloodthirsty butchers at best, or to play High Priestess of the Flaming God to a tribe of great white apes...

* * *

To Jane Clayton, this was also a world which could only exist in another life. Had she the possession of her own will and normal consciousness, her educated mind would soon have told her where she was.

There was a man who at least told her her identity. He was a tall, impressive man who wore on his high forehead a beautiful shining jewel which was somehow familiar. Some-where, she had seen a jewel like this-indeed, a greater one. And the jewel itself seemed to be the voice of this man-his silent voice which was yet louder than all the sounds in the universe.

The silent voice gripped her mind incessantly, day and night, whether the man was physically present before her or not. In a language which was alien yet comprehensible to her, it said, "You are Issus arisen! You are the living goddess of life eternal! You name is sacred to all people and their destiny is yours!"

She was as much aware of her physical surroundings as she might have been under normal circumstances, except for the presentiment that there was something unreal about her present Status. It was as though she looked at the world through borrowed eyes, and far, far away, a small voice cried out like an unknown prisoner in a secret dungeon of her mind. At times, in the dark of the night, she would try to hear this voice and follow it to its source, but the vision of the man with the jewel on his head would always intervene and his silent voice would pull her back, saying, "You are Issus arisen!"

The days and the years seemed to pass by just beyond her fingertips, fraught with tremendous meaning, ponderous with destiny, yet strangely weightless to her soul. Strange servant women with pale red skins, or with fair, white skins like her own, or sometimes with beautiful skins of ebony, came adoringly to feed her and care for

her, bathing her body with scented oils and dressing her in raiment of barbaric splendor. Strange, priestly white men wearing yellow wigs came to the foot of her throne and prostrated themselves before her as though she were the fountain of human life.

Then slowly, certain personalities began to emerge and to be identified. The man with the jewel was Tario, who was master of the world, yet her obedient slave-or so he seemed to assure her.

The bluish man, the strange, kindly, trustworthy man with the great, mournful third eye in his forehead, was Ranas Ghol, a member of her Sacred Council.

And the black-skinned warrior prince who wore so many weapons and stared at her sometimes in fanatic rapture and at other times with a strange, brooding covetousness, was Zithad, Dator of the First Born-a powerful man who was also a Council member.

The other member of her Council was a yellow-wigged priest, a lean and hungry looking man whom she felt she could trust the least of all. His name was Sardon Dhur, who was Hekkador of the Holy Therns, and it was he who looked upon her with covetousness alone.

One day all these men came before her. All other persons had been ordered out of the throne room, as was customary at times when this Sacred Council met. Ranas Ghol remained somewhat in the background, but the others were close together at the bottom step of the dias.

These latter three were darkly angered. They shouted at each other, and the black Dator of the First Born even drew his sword. By now she had learned enough to understand what he was saying.

"By Issus!" he exclaimed. "If there is to be a Tharos Pthan, if this whole embattled planet insists upon having their Guardian of the Sacred Worlds, then that role shall be mine! Who but the Dator of the First Born, who guarded the Temple of Issus of old, should be her protector and her prince? I say this issue shall be settled her and now, or, by my sacred ancestors-I shall use my total forces and the nullifier against the pack of you!"

"Your words," said Sardon Dhur, coldly, "but fill the vacuum of your logic, Zithad. The Holy Thern Empire forms the universal fabric of the faith which Supports this Issus. As holy Hekkador, it is / who fit the specification better than all of you!"

"Ranas Ghol," said Tario, visibly agitated now that the greatest issue of all had come out into the open, "what does the future tell you, man! Who will be Tharos Pthan?"

As all three men stared at the calm Zumorian, he smiled sadly. "The future is garbled with myriad lines of probability now," he said, "for this is the crowning issue of our history, and all men would be Tharos Pthan."

"Enough!" cried Tario, facing his contenders. "Since you press me do this prematurely, before our battle is done, I shall reveal the answer to you!" He turned his white, angry face upward to the throne.

Jane Clayton felt his power and she heard his silent voice thundering in her mind. '7, Tario" it shouted to her. "am Tharos Pthan!" But, with his lips he said a different thing.

"Let Issus, herself, decide! Speak, goddess of eternal life!-and reveal to the world who is your rightful mateP

Mate... The connotation of the word and the thought stirred something deep within her. Mate was a word for a man. A certain, specific man. Into her mind came the vision of a tall, bronzed giant of a godlike man, a man whose life was closely bound to her own-and one who had come to her before when she was far away, lost, and troubled as she was now.

Strangely, this vision filled her with a distant hope. It gave her a mysterious strength-and pride! Yes! That man was indeed her rightful mate!

So it was that the startled members of the Sacred Council saw their goddess rise up proudly before them from her throne. As though entranced, her eyes looked far away beyond them, and her voice, as she spoke to them, sounded even to Ranas Ghol like the voice of prophecy.

"The mate of Issus," she said, "is not among you. But he will come one day to claim her as his own. And when this comes to pass he will make himself know to all the world, for in his mighty strength and in his vengeful wrath, he shall lay waste to the citadels of his enemies and bring them death!"

Chapter XVII - THE ADVENT OF TARZAN OF THE APES

TARZAN opened his eyes.

First Came the visual impression-amber light from the glow panels, then the instruments and controls emerging out of a plane of lines and shadows into glistening reality. Those meters were alive. Little lights glowed or blinked at him-red, blue-red, blue. Delicate ammeters deflected slender luminous needles like tiny metronomes reflecting the rhythm of his pulse, of his nerves, and his awakening mind.

Then he was aware of certain sounds. Very soft they were, but sounds-efficient little distant sounds, like the clicking of electrical relays, the soft whirring of the dosed Ventilation System, the hum of a transformer.

Two hundred million dollars worth of man's highest intelligence held him alive in a capsule-a warm, living, breathing creature of God-alone, far, far out in the absolute cold of emptiness.

Earth was a distant star. The barrier of the ages had been broken by a human meteor. A year-long journey was done, and there was the smell of ozone, of oil and insulation, and of overheated G.L paint.

He looked down at himself in the cushioned chair, suddenly remembering. His chest and arms were bare, and attached to the largest vein of his right arm was a glass tube,

taped snugly against him. The tube was attached to plastic tubing which led under his chair to a pump and a glass Chamber, from which another piece of tubing emerged to be connected to a glass tube in his left arm.

It seemed only a moment before he had been blacking out under the pressure of acceleration, sweating with the heat of passage through

Earth's atmosphere, his ear drums almost shattered by the screaming of the rocket and the roar of its engines.

Now-ominous peace and serenity. The lack of a sense of motion, the unawareness of location. How long had it been? Had he really been sitting here in suspended animation for a year? Had he actually followed the long hyperbola plotted by the Computer?

Or had something unpredictable occurred, casting him forever into the cold abyss? On the other hand he could be either approaching Mars as scheduled, or at this moment he could be hurtling directly at its surface with the speed of a meteor!

Tarzan was not a scientist. The instruments before him should have been his hunting spear, a grass rope, and bow and arrow. Rather than tough, confining walls of Harbenite, he would have preferred the open freedom of the African veldt where Usha the wind could fill his nostrils with the smell of the jungle and bring him the far cry of birds on the wing.

He felt no fear, only resentment because the enclosing walls which crowded him in and blinded him, limiting his powers. But somewhere ahead was Jane. This was the bridge he had been forced to cross; these were the instruments which Gridley had placed in his hands for annihilating the tremendous gulf that had barred him from her. And now, somewhere close below him, he believed, she waited for him to come to her.

Tarzan shook himself in an attempt to alert his faculties to the unfamiliar task of taking over the controls of the rocket. As he did so, his movement activated a tiny switch.

"Greetings, Tarzan-and congratulations!"

The apeman started, then quickly relaxed with a slight smile on his lips as he saw the small loudspeaker on the panel. It was Gridley's voice on tape, carefully recorded for this moment.

"This is Gridley," the tape continued, quietly and calmly. "Our plan has been to follow your course visually in the telescopes as well as mathematically. At the proper moment, we were to send the radar impulse that would activate the Ras Thavas pump and resuscitate you. The fact that you are listening to this recording now is proof

that everything has developed according to plan. So you may relax, Tarzan. Take a deep breath-and relax..."

After a long moment of silence, the voice continued. "Now, listen carefully. First of all, I want you to know that you have ample time to accomplish what I am going to instruct you to do. In fact, before you touch a Single control, you should have twelve hours to get yourself adjusted and prepared. I'll give you your position. When our radar impulse reached you, it also activated your Chronometer. Read that Chronometer now..."

"At-precisely 0100," Gridley's voice continued, "your Position will be-five hundred and twenty three thousand miles from the planet Mars. Your present velocity is 12.17 miles per second. In twelve hours, you will cross the orbit, and, at that time, you will take the controls. Your deceleration and landing maneuvers, including your time in the glider, will require three hours. Therefore, Tarzan, at approximately 1500 by your Chronometer, you should be Standing on the planet Mars.

* * *

From the smoldering ruins of a war-torn city, a red Martian warrior looked up at the sky. Something had flashed against the outer rim of the atmosphere, like a meteor.

A thousand miles away on the lonely dead sea bottoms a great banth lifted his head. He heard a distant sound like the sighing of a gigantic monster. A dull red glow cut a wound across the sky, as though a titanic talon had Struck the world a might blow.

And again, in the deserted city of Horz, a green warrior of Thark halted his giant thout with a mental command as he pivoted his chameleon eyes upward. Something faster than any airship of Barsoom was hurtling over him, far aloft-and his superstitious soul shuddered before the unknown.

Less than an hour later, a large flock of giant malagors spread their wings over the great Toonolian Marsh and fled in a panic as a roaring, smoldering fireball hurtled over the islands and reeds and stagnant water. A great saurian creature lifted its reptilian head

from the swamp and voiced a piercing scream of beastly rage, for its brain was too small to register fear.

Then the saurian died as the rocket struck it and carried its remains deep down into the mud and slime, where the murky waters continued to boil for hours.

But there were several wild thoats in the waterless Sea of Throxus who saw something else. It came soundlessly out of the sky, a small, gliding thing with short, swept-back wings. For a moment they watched it intently, and then they returned to their feeding upon the ocre moss at their feet.

Thuria and Cluros were momentarily absent from the star-fired sky as Tarzan opened the hatch of the glider and stepped out unceremoniously onto the moss-grown soil of Barsoom.

Dressed in a high altitude flying suit given to the Gridley Foundation by the United States Air Force, Tarzan might well have impressed any native observer as an alien visitor from the stars. He pushed back his padded crash helmet and examined the unfamiliar sky. There were far too many stars to permit of recognition of the constellations, but he could not miss the blue-green first magnitude light that marked the world of his origin-Earth, with its verdure clad mountains, its full flowing rivers and its mighty, restless seas.

He vouchsafed a smile and a mental nod of appreciation for the serious minds of the men who had brought him safely across that unthinkable void- and for that insensate monster of wires and tubes and transistors, the giant Computer, which had at last, grudgingly, admitted that he would be standing here breathing the thin, crisp air of another world.

Tarzan then allowed his wondering gaze to roam across the darkened landscape. Against the horizon, he saw the ridges of low, broken hills. There was nothing more, except the silent, moss-covered sea bottom. No dark line of forest, no meandering shadow of a river bed-nothing. Nor was there a cloud in the moonless sky.

A tremendous adventure, this-the greatest in his life, he thought -but isolated, barren, foreboding. And there was no return. Tarzan could not escape the impression that his very soul had been cast naked and without provisions into the middle of an endless desert forever.

The only sustaining hope was that he would find here his beloved mate-and perhaps locate that beautiful orphan of destiny, La, High Priestess of the Flaming God.

Disconsolately, he extracted a portion of concentrated food from the pocket of his flying jacket. As he consumed the tasteless stuff, meditating on his fate and trying to decide what direction he should take in the prosecution of his search for Jane, the golden light of Thuria suddenly flooded the world.

Ere he had fully adjusted himself to the spectacle of that close hurtling orb in the sky, distant Cluros followed in a celestial game of tag. The night sky was suddenly transform-ed into a warm wonder world of activity and light-and before him a moonlit Barsoomian landscape revealed itself in all its sad but deceptive beauty. Each rise of ground acquired a new, deep dimension and projected a double, slowly wheeling shadow, and the yellows and reds of the perennial moss came swirling into his vision like some ethereal revelation.

Simultaneously, a vagrant zephyr brought to him the unmistakable scent of a stalking carnivore.

The apeman straightened. His eyes were filled with magic color and movement, his nostrils quivered sensitively, reading Usha the wind, as of old. Out there in the wheeling shadows, a drama was being enacted which reminded him of his African boyhood. He was keenly aware of the unseen carnivore, and also, he now caught scent of its prey-an unsuspecting herbivore of some kind which evidently derived its sustenance from this spongy moss at his feet.

In a single moment, the bleakness was banished from his heart and soul. The instinct of the hunting animal joined him in brotherhood with his new environment, because it was not so barren and strange, after all!

Suddenly, that same instinct caused Tarzan to gather his tremendous earthly strength and leap forward with all his might, because in the merest fraction of a second he had been alerted to danger and had acted simultaneously.

To his entire astonishment, he sailed fully one hundred feet through the air, but even before he landed he recalled that Gridley had forewarned him of the lesser gravity of Mars. Though the sensation was eerie, Tarzan was no unaccustomed to long leaps through the air, and this was somewhat analogous to being catapulted from the end of a swinging vine into the branch of a distant tree. Nor was he unaccustomed to preparing for defense even while in aerial flight.

So it was that he twisted fully around to face his attacker, and when he hit the ground backwards, he was prepared to utilize his momentum correctly. He grasped his shins and rolled, but in such a way that he could catch a glimpse of the thing which followed him.

And follow him it did, with a reverberating roar and the speed of an arrow. In the jungle where ever lurking death requires instant adaption to danger it is not unusual that orientation, decision and action occur all at the same moment.

So it was that when Tarzan observed his first Barsoomian lion, a ten-legged juggernaut with shark-like fangs and great, glowing green eyes, which shot toward him with a speed surpassing that of any beast in his experience, when he realized that there was no time to pull out the .45 automatic in his jacket pocket and that he would have to rely on his body alone for salvation, he very coolly accomplished that which was the only logical alternative.

He knew before he stopped rolling precisely where he would be with relation of the banth when he came to rest. He also knew how long it would take him to get his legs under him and how much more distance his attacker would have covered in that one additional instant. Had he been stripped to a loin cloth and unencumbered by the heavy flying suit, he might have calculated that there was enough time to jump again.

But as it was, there would not be time for that. Therefore, he managed to come to rest on his back, and in that same split second, when the snarling animal loomed upon him in its death leap, he took full advantage of his thick-soled boots and kicked back at that myriad-toothed face with all the titanic power of his arching body.

Again, the result was astonishing.

He felt and heard the sickening crunch of the banth's great head, and it rolled ponderously to one side, stone dead. He had hardly enough time to gain his feet and observe the frightful effects of his double-booted kick before another spine-tingling roar reverberated in his ears.

He swung about to see the creature's mate, which was loping in a curious side-stepping gait around him in a wide arc, cautious, but fully worked up to an attack. Again, Tarzan regretted that he was not stripped down for action. He longed for the fuel of a heavy hunting spear in his hand.

But, for the moment he chose the only weapon at hand, which was his automatic. A good hunting rifle would have suited him better, but the Computer had denied him the luxury of its added weight. Pulling the gun from his pocket, he stood the almost motionlessly in the wild, moonlit night and pumped full ten rounds into the beast.

At first, it shrieked in rage and started to charge, but ere it reached him, it was jerking spasmodically on the ground. And with the last shot, aimed at its brain, it straightened out convulsively and died.

Tarzan still stood there looking down at the utterly huge carnivores, but if his eyes were engaged in examining them his other senses were not thus restricted. His nostrils quivered, analyzing the wind, and his ears listened for sounds which you and I could never have detected.

Evidently, he thought with a grim smile, as he at last looked about him again, he would have to remember that the very soundlessness of this mossy terrain was its most treacherous characteristic and undoubtedly the greatest contributing factor to the continued existence of this tawny, lion-like species before him.

There was not much choice, after this encounter, but to strike out in some given direction in an attempt to contact the civilization of red men of which Jules Carter had apprised him. He carried in his pockets a flat canteen of water, concentrated food, and additional ammunition. Inside his flying suit, he also carried his hunting knife, and a sealed package which contained the prime cause of his present predicament-the Great Star of Issus.

Thus simply equipped, Tarzan started off in the direction of the hill country. If he had been a master of the long trek in the jungles and on the equatorial plains of his own world, here in the presence of a lighter gravity, he was almost unlimited. At first, he proceeded with some awkwardness resulting from the process of broad jumping rather than walking, but, in a much shorter length of time than would have been required by a less perfectly coordinated terrestrial, he soon attained a long, gliding stride which gave him almost the sensation of loping along on skis.

Rapidly, he traversed the long, empty miles, his thoughts busy with reflection and conjecture. Seven long years had passed since that darkest day of his life when he had burst into Jane's bedroom in the little ranch house in East Central Africa, to find it empty of her presence. In that interim, a great war had been fought and won, on Earth, and the affairs of men had gradually found their normal track once more. What might have transpired here on this far flung planet during that period of time he could not know. But if there yet remained any hope of finding Jane and of reconstructing, at least, a portion of their long disrupted life together, then such a hope, in itself, would be a cause to which he would dedicate his whole mind and heart and every faculty and last ounce of strength that was in him.

Yes, he told himself, in a dull, red gloom of desperation and anger, to this he would be dedicated-even if it were to shear from his animal hide the very last vestige of civilization and reduce him to the status of the wild, the predatory, the savage and primordial beast.

He paused at the entrance to a tortuous canyon through the hills in order to partake of water and food. However, he had no sooner taken a bite of the concentrated food than he spat it from him in disgust. He recalled the scent of the herbivore which he had detected earlier, and he wondered if it might not be worth while making an attempt to locate such game in order to appease his suddenly aroused appetite for raw, red meat.

At the thought, a low growl escaped his Ups and he rose up, impatient to be under way. As on many another occasion, his belly would have to wait if it were to be satisfied with the sustenance it craved.

But at that moment he froze, motionless, while the hair bristled at the nape of his neck. Swinging out of the canyon toward him on a pair of long, intermediary arms came a type of giant anthropoid of which Jules Carter had forewarned him. He recognized the creature as the dreaded great white ape of Barsoom, yet he had not been quite ready to believe the description he had been given-until now. For, before the horrible, ferocious aspect of one of these, Bolgani, himself might have bolted, screaming and frothing at the mouth in his terror.

To add seeming hopelessness to the Situation, three more of the Gargantuan brutes followed behind their leader, and two of them carried great stone clubs. There was not one of them which measured less than fourteen feet in height. Each was equipped with giant fighting fangs and four colossal arms.

With murderous, hungering intent, they encircled him, stiff-legged, nearly erect, while they growled and snarled their warnings to him.

Tarzan almost forgot the .45 automatic in his hand when he realized that he could understand them perfectly! He had little time to dwell upon the philological implications of this seeming miracle, however, for death breathed hotly on his neck.

"I am Kudg!" snarled the massive leader of the pack. "Mighty hunter! Mighty Fighter! None can stand against Kudg! I kill!" As though to emphasize the idea, he pounded on his powerful chest.

Should Tarzan have walked into an ambush of African gorillas, he might have done either one of two things. First, he would have considered flight through the trees as being a practical application of the jungle code for survival in the face of such overwhelming odds. Lacking trees or the means for flight, he could have attempted to bluff.

This latter alternative appeared to be precarious, however, since with the gorilla, he might have had, at least, the shadow of a chance for survival should his bluff have been called, whereas, any one these mammoth nightmares could probably break him like a dried twig under foot, he reasoned.

Yet Tarzan's disconsolate mood and his own animal hunger had placed him in no psychological condition for flight, and for the moment, he forgot all about his new ability of jumping. He was much more cognizant of his bristling neck and the deep, rumbling growl of warning that emerged from his own great chest.

"None is mightier than Tarzan!" he answered, stubbornly. "Go in peace-or die!

The towering, ghostly white animals demonstrated a higher degree of intelligence than he had anticipated, for when he spoke to them, not only in their own vernacular, but, in their very mannerism and mood, it gave them pause. Not out of a sense of fear because of his threat, he reasoned, but probably because he had done that which was least expected.

"What creature is this," asked the white ape standing behind Kudg, "that looks like a man-thing, but speaks with the mangani?"

"Let us catch it," said another, "and make it talk more."

"We can eat it later," said a third.

"No!" roared Kudg. "I kill!"

Tarzan remembered the gun too late, for Kudg was already upon him, and, as the apeman's lightning instinct was not so much attuned to trigger pulling as it was to total muscular response, he fell naturally and instantaneously into a backward roll even as he grasped one of the ape's great arms and utilized its own momentum to send it somersaulting beyond him. Or, at least, this was the effect he had suspected.

Again, however, he had underestimated his strength in relation to the lighter gravity of Mars. Instead of rolling over in a heap, Kudg literally flew through the air a full twenty

feet. He landed in sprawling, many-limbed anger, rolling over several times before he could gain his feet. But, by now he had gone completely berserk. He rose up with a bellowing shriek of rage and sought out the puny man-thing which had dared to belittle him in the eyes of his companions. When he saw Tarzan already standing, waiting for him, he charged again, to the accompaniment of many growls and screams of encouragement offered by the other three.

Tarzan waited until Kudg was in precisely the right Position before him, and then, when the frothing monster reached out to annihilate him, he ducked beneath its arms and swung a mighty blow into the pit of the other's hairless belly, at the same time side-stepping the infuriated animal's lunging charge.

Kudg fell flat on his face, moaning faintly, only semi-conscious. Instantly, Tarzan was on his back. He obtained a full nelson on the creature and lost no time in pressing the grip home to its deadliest advantage. With a suddenness which surprised him, the ape's neck snapped. He felt the monster go limp.

Then he hurled himself to one side as a great stone club descended toward him. Instead of striking him, the weapon struck Kudg and crushed his skull like an over-ripe melon. Tarzan saw, scented and felt that the other apes were now bent on tearing him bodily asunder. He was hardly aware of his own action when he snatched the club from the hand of his attacker.

But suddenly he had the club. It felt reassuringly heavy in his ready hands as he swung it about his head and struck the dopest ape on the shoulder with it. He saw that shoulder splinter, spouting bone and blood.

And the battle was on!

Time, itself, was lost in that swirling, striking, snarling circle of raw rage and bestiality. Tarzan could only analyze later, in retrospect, the fact that many times an ape laid hold

of him but had not been equal to his more than earthly strength. He either pulled loose in each case or actually broke the arm or the

hand which held him. And ever that swinging club exacted its toll, crushing, killing, breaking and maiming.

Two apes were left Standing when the club was finally tom from his grasp. The other club had been hurled at him, but it missed, striking his own club, and both weapons shattered, falling in splintered shards to the ground.

One of the apes facing him only had its two left arms available, for the whole right side of its body was a bleeding, pulpy mass of mutilation. This one hesitated to attack him and, at last, fell back on its haunches, whimpering.

But not so the other. With an insane bellow, it charged, using its four arms to guard against Tarzan's fists. And then it closed with him, holding him fast and reaching for his throat with its froth-flecked fangs.

Only then, did Tarzan have opportunity to measure his strength. Sorely fatigued and bleeding as he was, he was yet able to overcome the power of those quadruple arms. His hands found the anthropoid's thick neck and slowly he throttled it, pressing back the huge, grimacing gorilla face from his own, until, at last, blood poured from the flat nostrils and it went limp.

He let the great body sag to the ground and, breathing heavily, watched the other ape which his club had so badly crippled. It made no move toward him, but still sat there whimpering in its pain and slowly bleeding to death.

Faint with fatigue, Tarzan yet stood there, catching his breath. He looked about him at the unbelievable carnage he had wrought, then at himself. His flying suit was all but torn from his body, as were the rest of his garments underneath. A great bruise swelled on his head, and blood coagulated down the side of his face.

Such had been his welcome to Barsoom. If this were symbolic of what was to come, he reflected, then well had he prepared his mind and temperament for it.

Directing a warning growl at the dying beast in front of him, he turned to search for his canteen of water. Having found it, he drained half of it. Then he searched the ground for any personal effects which might be worth carrying, and soon he discovered the

glittering Holy Diadem from Opar, torn loose from its wrappings. Nearby was one of a pair of fingerless, fur-lined mitts which he had been carrying in his belt. This he tied to the shreds of his remaining garments, using it as a hunting pouch, and into it he deposited the Great Star of Issus.

Then he walked slowly away from the bloody scene of battle and climbed up the side of the nearest hill, having forgotten the automatic entirely. At the top, he observed a continuation of endless, rolling ridges beyond. He felt sick and faint.

Finally, he lay down on the ground to rest. Thuria had already passed beyond the western horizon and only Cluros remained, as though curiously watching this amazing new-comer to the aged planet. Old Barsoom had witnessed many strange sights of which men only whispered in superstitious awe, but never before had such a man as Tarzan of the Apes walked upon its time-worn surface. Or ever would again.

Wondering at his own unbelievable prowess in this strange new environment, Tarzan fell asleep. But the night was cold and he was not at ease because of a lack of orientation with his surroundings. Therefore, he slept only long enough to recover from his momentary exhaustion.

Long before the dawn, he arose and shook himself morosely. He was sore from his recent battle, he was immersed in a mood of brooding, sullen anger, and he was very hungry.

Feeling that same amazing lightness in his limbs which he had experienced before, he started off down the other side of the hill. This time, however, he moved cautiously, stealthily, his nostrils attuned to the gently shifting breezes of the night. In his bloodied hand was the hunting knife of his father.

And soon, the scent assailed him for which he searched. He paused, motionless, listening. The wind gave him his direction, and soon he perceived something moving in the shadows of a group of boulders, some two hundred feet away.

As the thing moved out of sight behind one of the stone outcroppings, he shot forward in great, silent leaps and bounds, arriving at a point of vantage near his quarry within a few swift moments.

There he waited, crouched, watching. Soon the young wild thoat appeared from behind the boulder, quietly cropping a patch of scarlet sward that grew here in the tiny Valley between the hills.

Tarzan's hunger was subordinated momentarily to his curiosity, for he saw before him another animal which was totally new to him. The creature walked on eight, graceful legs which appeared to be constructed for racing. Its broad, flat tail was broader at the tip than at the root. Its mouth was enormous, Splitting its head from its snout to its long, massive neck. Like the white apes, it was devoid of hair, its skin being of a dark slate color and exceedingly smooth and glossy, with the exception of the belly, which was white, and the legs, which shaded from slate at the Shoulders and hips to a vivid yellow at its feet. The feet were heavy padded and were neither hooped nor taloned.

Exactly what nature of animal it might be, the apeman did not know, but that it was evidently the natural prey of the carnivore and that it fed on herbs and grasses as did his own Bara, the deer, indicated to his reason, his olfactory senses, and his empty stomach that this was what he sought.

As the creature moved to within thirty feet of him, he crouched lower, taking a firmer grip on his knife. He realized he must not again underestimate the capacity of his earthly muscles or he would undoubtedly go hungry. Therefore, he decided to throw himself forward at such a low angle that the anima, itself, would prevent him from overshooting his goal.

With an irrepressible growl, Tarzan sprang. He hurtled through the air, and even as his arm locked about the thoat's long neck it was already in startled flight. The forward momentum, however, served to swing the apeman onto its back.

The thoat raced headlong down the Valley, while Tarzan clung to its back and plunged his hunting knife again and again into its bleeding ehest

Soon it faltered, tripped, and fell. Not so defenseless as Bara, however, it raised its head to snap at him with its formidable teeth, and Tarzan barely missed being defaced. In automatic defensive response to the creature's maneuver, he struck back at the flashing head with his fist.

Again, he felt and heard the snapping of bone, and the thout died with a broken skull. Tarzan sat there a moment and surveyed his amazing kill. Then, slowly, an old familiar elixir crept into his blood, and he rose silently to his feet.

He raised his head to the lowering, single moon. Standing on the body of the dead thout, he opened his lips and broke the vast stillness of the Barsoomian night with the far-echoing victory cry of the bull ape.

It was the exultant dawn cry of the primordial, the subconscious, yearning cry of all created things, wresting single identity from the wideness of the undefined, asserting itself against all the unknown forces of nature in one long, soul-born outpouring of mortal challenge.

Startled Cluros paused on the horizon, then fled incontinently in pursuit of his distant sister, Thuria.

That weird, ringing cry carried afar in the thin, crisp air of Barsoom, even as Tarzan crouched over his kill and tore loose a great, red, dripping steak of savor flesh. And there were two, in particular, who heard it.

One there was who gasped, listening, wondering-not daring to hope that there was something terribly familiar about that totally un-Barsoomian sound.

The other who heard it was certain that such an uncanny cry had never been voiced before in his world. He straightened up in his saddle, a towering, four-armed green warrior sentinel of the savage tribe of Torquas...

Chapter XVIII - GODDESS OF THE SUN

IN a desolate wilderness of jagged, barren hills and shadowed canyons, an aged traveler paused to gaze upon the subject of a long and desperate search. He was one of those rare red Martians who had escaped the warrior's blade and the assassin's knife long enough to reach the latter portion of his natural span of life. His hair was shot with gray and his Shoulders sagged a trifle to show the weight of time upon him, but in his eyes there lived a bright flame of knowledge and wisdom which only death, itself, might quench.

He lowered his radium rifle to the ground as though it were his hiking staff, and his eyes narrowed, taking in the details of a scene which was all too familiar now on Barsoom. He might have been a travel weary observer of the ancient Crusades, on Earth, Standing above the passes into the Holy Land, for there below him was a scene of battle which could never have occurred save for the mystic element in man's misguided soul.

At least, he told himself, had it not been for the old religion of Issus there would never have arisen that strange colony of the Lost People whom he saw now embattled with an invading foe in the Valley below him.

From all parts of the Valley the able-bodied defenders were Streaming, tall green men and red and yellow men alike, joined in the brotherhood of the damned, ready as ever to fight against these forces of the outer world which sometimes hunted them out and sought to drive them once more into the caverns of the dead.

Though there was something familiar in the scene, yet was there an unusual element about it which held him back momentarily from joining sympathetically in their defense. The invaders were far from ordinary. True, the main body of them consisted of mounted green warriors-probably Thurds,

he reasoned-but intermingled with them were hundreds of great white apes!

Strange, indeed, was such a sight to Martian eyes, for never had two such natural enemies as the great white ape and the green man consorted together in the history of the planet! Moreover, the apes

seemed to be wearing battle harness and even the glistening metal of warriors! In fact, some of them carried axes and swords instead of clubs!

At the point of entry into the make-shift city of the Lost People, the battle was growing thick and deadly. To the old man on the hilltop, it seemed a pointless battle which could only result in death for the innocent and nothing of material profit for the victors.

He was about to raise his formidable weapon to his Shoulder with the intention of picking off a few of the invaders when his attention was attracted by the appearance of a massive zitidar as it emerged from the pass through which the vanguard had come. The huge mastodon was pulling behind it one of those large three wheeled chariots which are a familiar sight in every green Martian caravan, except that this particular chariot glistened from afar in the sunlight as though it were plated with gold and set with priceless gems. The zitidar, itself, was gorgeously trapped in costly material, and on its back sat a young green giant of a warrior.

Walking beside the chariot were a number of great white apes wearing what appeared to be religious Symbols. Evidently these creatures were the bodyguards of the important personage which the chariot contained.

As soon as this vehicle appeared on the scene, the green warrior who rode the zitidar turned, as though listening to someone within the chariot. The old man could not observe the nature of the passenger because of a low canopy of gorgeous silks which cast the interior of the vehicle into deep shadow, but that some word of command had been issued was evidenced by the fact that the green warrior turned about and raised a peculiar cry to the advanced battalions fighting below.

Immediately, some sign of truce was made among the contenders, and the battle at the edge of the city subsided. It appeared that both sides were willing to await the arrival of the chariot for some reason.

Taking advantage of the lull in the fighting, the old man hastened downward from the hill, anxious to be on hand when the mysterious chariot arrived.

Thus it was that Var Koros of Tarnath came upon La of Opar, who was known to her numerous followers on Barsoom as the Goddess of the Son. And that both of them should meet in the Valley of the Lost People was again one of those mysterious coincidences which would seem to ascribe the workings of destiny to more than blind force alone.

For here, also, lived Kar Komak, the Lotharian...

When Var Koros arrived within hailing distance of the Lost People, there were several of their number who recognized him. Although the golden chariot had now arrived in their midst and their leaders were engaged in a Conference, those who recognized him turned at once toward him and cried out his name in tones of wonder and gladness.

"Var Koros!" they shouted, attracting the attention of the others. "Var Koros has returned!"

Immediately the attention of the Lost People as well as that of the invaders turned to the old man. Or, at least, there was nothing else for the strangers to do but to witness this meeting, for the Lost People were entirely consumed by a tremendous emotion of ecstatic joy at sight of the newcomer and proceeded to surround him almost to the total exclusion of the motley horde from the outer world.

La stood there at the rail of her chariot, tall, proud, and gorgeously trapped in richly jeweled leather and silks, as much the picture of a delectable goddess as any there might have been. But, recent years had brought a hardness to her beautiful face and a cold intolerance into her deep blue eyes. She surveyed the commotion with a frown of impatience, and finally she uttered a guttural, barking sound to a great white ape which stood near her.

Immediately, the huge anthropoid reached out one of its four great hands and grasped a red Citizen of the hidden Community by the arm, Holding him unceremoniously in the air, he brought him close beside the chariot, Rather than fear, however, the man's face registered indignation. He struggled furiously,

"Put me down!" he shouted.

"Silence!" exclaimed La, angrily. And, as the ape's victim subsided momentarily, she continued. "La is not accustomed to being interrupted in this manner, but I am curious concern-ing this old man whom you greet with such reverence, Who is he?"

"Make this monster set me down," scowled the man, "and I will tell you!"

By this time, Var Koros had asked a similar question concerning La, and so it was that he was included in there meeting of leaders in which the identity of everybody was established.

The man whom the ape had taken hold of was Mordos Val, once a famous warrior jeddak of Gathol, and who was now second only in command to that scarred giant, Sorquas Ptorel, who was the jeddak of the Lost People and the most tremendous green warrior imaginable, towering a full head above the tallest of the others.

"This man, Var Koros," said Sorquas Ptorel, to La, "is the father of the only hope which has sustained us, Surely, you know who we are, You need only consider our location in this lost Valley of the River Iss, or look upon our strange mixture of races which could never occur in the outer world, to know that we are the Lost People, living between the hatred and revulsion of the outer world and the dark caverns of Iss, which lead only to madness or death on the shores of the Lost Sea of Korus,

"But, long ago this Var Koros, who is the world's greatest authority on Barsoomian antiquity, remembered a lost legend and told it to us. He said that the ancient legend spoke of an oracle which might be found at the fountainhead of the River Iss. No one knows where the source of this once sacred river lies, inasmuch as the water travels perhaps as much under the ground as it does on the surface, But the legend tells us that the ancient Rock of Oracles still Stands there at the beginning, and that, in this great rock,

dwells a people who are wiser than all other creatures ever created. So wise are they, that they were once the advisers to the original living Issus, herself, before the Cataclysm,

"It was Var Koros' Suggestion that we dedicate our other-wise purposeless existence to the task of locating the source of the River Iss, for if we could find the Rock of Oracles, we might be able to obtain from the dwellers within it an oracle pertaining to our own destiny which could guide us to the Solution of our strange dilemma.

"Whether some would be inclined to doubt the validity of this legend or not made little difference to us. It was something to hope for, something upon which we could fasten our shattered faiths-and so we searched the endless caverns for the fountainhead. Finally, Var Koros, himself, disappeared from our sight in the prosecution of the very search which he had instituted. For many years he has been absent from us, and we could only surmise that he had perished at the hands of the terrible creatures which inhabit the subterranean worlds of the dead through which he wandered.

"It is only now, in this moment, that he has returned to us.M

At there end of this explanation, the tremendous green warrior turned and placed a giant hand on Var Koros's Shoulder. The latter smiled faintly, distracted by the mystery which La appeared to represent. He was about to speak to her when she interrupted with a significant Statement.

"Your return, Var Koros, indicates you must have survived your adventures," she said to him. "But it also might indicate that you found your Rock of Oracles at last. Is this true?"

"This is a subject which I should like to reserve for careful discussion later," he replied, cautiously. "But first, I believe we should do you the honor of receiving you properly. I do not know what caused the encounter I witnessed here, but surely it must have been the result of some misunderstanding. Your strange forces would have no cause to attack such an unfortunate Community as this. Who are you?"

La gazed back at the aged scholar, meeting his eyes with a presentiment of something indefinable yet significant, to her. The hardness of her features softened slightly, but only for a moment.

"I am La," she answered, finally, "and in this world I am called the Goddess of the Sun."

Var Karos' brows raised slightly. "And were you called by another name in some other world?" he asked, mildly.

Some of the Lost People were beginning to look at La with mixed expressions of doubt and wonderment, though they did not correctly divine her meaning.

"And what was the cause of your conflict her?" asked Var Koros.

La shrugged. "Who can control a green savage of the sea bottoms? I am engaged upon an expedition to discover a suitable location for the establishment of my cult. We must remain secluded and erect temples and prepare dwelling places for the faithful who would serve the eternal Flame of Life, which is the sun. It was during the prosecution of this search that I chanced upon this lost Valley. Before I could get close enough to command my advanced scouts fell into combat with your people, as a matter of habit."

"In other words," said Var Koros, "you actually came in peace?"

La surveyed the Valley some what calculatingly. "Today," she replied, "I come in peace."

"And tomorrow?" queried Sorquas Ptorel.

"It is that 'tomorrow' I would discuss with you," she answered laconically.

That night, La's forces camped on the hills above the Valley while she remained in the city, accompanied by a picked group of green warriors and great white apes. Sorquas Ptorel, Mordos Val, Var Koros and many others met with her in the only stone building in the city, which was used in Heu of a palace. Here, at rustic tables and by the illumination of the crude oil gas lamps of the green men, they shared an inelegant, but salubrious, supper of fresh vegetables, and milk from the mantalia plant of Barsoom, which was also cultivated in the Valley.

It was then that Var Koros learned something of the strange history of La, Goddess of the Sun. He said little, other than to ask carefully worded questions, but he listened intently and meditated much on what he heard. Whenever Sorquas Ptorel or Mordos Val would ask him to tell of his own adventures and reveal what he had

discovered, he would always evade the issue, as though it were but a momentary delay, while he skillfully maneuvered the conversation toward the Goddess of the Sun.

This strange, beautiful white woman who claimed to be neither Thern nor Lotharian insisted that she had lived in another world, that she had died, and that this was her second life. She related to them the details of her life in Opar, following which she continued the story of her life on Barsoom. Her simple explanation of her ability to communicate with the apes was that she had always been able to do so.

She told them how her cult had begun with the indoctrination of the intelligent tribe of Churg, the great white ape. Soon, other tribes of apes accepted Churg as their king, and a small nation of anthropoids developed under his influence, all of them recognizing La as the second abstraction they had ever comprehended, she being the symbol of the first, the sun. Though La did not attempt to analyze it, Var Koros did so for the benefit of the others.

"Animal life on Barsoom," he said, "has advanced apace with human life, as is evidenced by the fact that the lowly thout and the calot are receptive to telepathic commands. Therefore, it would not seem incongruous that some of the great white apes should be fairly on the threshold of becoming at least quasi-human. That the desire to imitate men should have awakened in them and that some should even have approached the achievement of abstract thought should not surprise us.

"The subconscious urge for development is latent within them. So it is that this strangely endowed woman has become the physical symbolization of the abstract concept of mysticism-which is naught else but the Sublimation of the primordial into the ethereal. This is the natural law of humanity. If even the apes are aware of it, think, then, how much more affected are men! Deny them this natural process of spiritual Sublimation and you will have what Barsoom has already become-a war torn world, with brother raising his sword against brother and each individual not knowing what his other hand will do tomorrow. These great white apes, therefore, are the very shibboleths of the dilemma which faces the entire planet..."

La then explained how the green men had become her followers. At first they had attributed mystical powers to her because of her dominance of the great white apes, but later they came to accept her as a goddess in her own right.

"In fact," she concluded, "they now continue to seek me out and follow me in ever increasing numbers because of a belief which originated among themselves. This belief has even attracted men of your own race, Var Koros."

"Do you mean," asked Mordos Val of Gathol, astounded, "that red Barsoomians, too, have joined this cult?"

La shrugged gleaming white Shoulder. "I cannot prevent it."

"And what," said Var Koros, "is this belief which you say has originated among your followers?"

"To Outsiders," she said, "I am referred to as the Goddess of the Sun, but among themselves they call me-the resurrected Issus..."

Mordos Val and Sorquas Ptorel, as well as half a dozen of the others present, rose to their feet staring at her in wonderment.

"Issus!" exclaimed Sorquas Ptorel. "By the sacred Tree of Life!-but she fits the ancient legend!"

"A white woman," muttered Mordos Val, deeply disturbed, "and from another world."

"Who speaks with animals!" exclaimed another.

"Just a moment!" interrupted Var Koros. "You of the Lost People have not yet learned what the outer world has known for many years-that the resurrected Issus already sits upon her throne in the Sacred Worlds."

Sorquas Ptorel tensed. "Var Koros-what you say is difficult to believe! Do you know what that means?"

The old man nodded solemnly. "More than you realize. As I have said, brother now fights against brother. Within each city and nation, the people are divided between belief

and disbelief, and blood runs daily in the streets. I came to tell you of this and much more."

"But-" Mordos Val was grave, visibly shaken. "Is it really true? Is it but another hideous deception of the Therns or is it, at last, the long awaited miracle of legend?"

"Tell us, Var Koros!" exclaimed Sorquas Ptorel. "Do you know if she who sits upon the eternal throne is actually Issus?"

Var Koros looked at La. "Who can say?" he answered. "La, tell me, do you believe that you are Issus?"

La narrowed her eyes as she surveyed them all. "let men call me what they will. I am myself! I was not my own creator, nor did I choose my Station now. Therefore, blame the powers that put me here. I am but their instrument, and if I symbolize that which men require for their souls, then why should I deny that which I am?"

During the pause which followed, everyone could sense that each was withdrawing into his own private citadel of thought. This sacred Issus was truly one which could divide every human fraternity against itself. Many of the warriors fell into a brooding silence, staring either at her or at each other or at Var Koros.

"But enough of this!" La exclaimed. "I would speak of another thing, which is the purpose of my visit to your Valley. It is to my liking here, and it is the location where I would build my temple."

"I can understand your need," said Sorquas Ptorel, "but we also require such a hidden refuge as this."

La smiled. "Many of my warriors would relish the prospect of taking it from you," she said, quietly, "but this can be avoided."

"And how is that?" the green jeddak inquired.

"Sooner or later you will join me. Why not now?"

"There is something you have not divulged, as yet," interrupted Var Koros. "You seem to have a desire to acquire as many followers as possible. Is it that you seek converts or power?"

Again, La's blue eyes narrowed and her face hardened. "who is my enemy but fate?" she answered quickly. "I was cast into this existence due to circumstances which were beyond my control. I came defenseless and unarmed and found myself surrounded by a world in turmoil. Until I discover that for which I am truly destined, I shall avail myself of every opportunity to surround myself with the means of power-which is self-protection-defense, if you will, against the weapons of fate. I can accept no censure for my actions. I am what I am, and no power in the universe can change that single fact!"

"Well spoken, La!" exclaimed Var Koros.

A yellow man from distant Okar rose. "By my ancestors!-this is the living Issus!" He drew his sword and lifted it high. "And here is my sword on it!"

"Do you see that sword?" Var Koros asked of La. "It is symbolic of a terrible power which even the false prophets may wield in their wildernesses. Beware of your power, La! Remember, if you can, that it is not the authors of dogma who kill themselves, but their victims!"

La did not answer. She only looked at the yellow man's sword, which now lay on the table before him. Var Koros troubled her strangely and she knew not why.

"There is a place far better suited than this to your purpose," said Mordos Val. "Lothar is now abandoned. It is a walled city and your temple is already built. It is the palace of the jeddak who once ruled there-Tario the Lotharian."

Lothar! La had learned from her captors the name of that strange city where a man called Tario had once held her imprisoned.

"It is where we found poor Omad," reflected Sorquas Ptoel, "after the Torquasians had ransacked the place. He was almost dead."

"Omad?" queried La, as a strange excitement possessed her.

"A man with but one name," answered Mordos Val, "which, in this case, is no name at all. He was disguised as a red man, but actually he is a Lotharian. He is a mystery to us, for he can tell us nothing of that night when the green men came. His injuries at their hands robbed him of his memory."

La's eyes widened. Var Koros, however, appeared to be even more excited.

"A Lotharian in disguise could be only one man!" he exclaimed. "I know him! Where is he now?"

So it was that "Omad" was brought before them, and Var Koros beheld the man who was to have changed the history of a world by bringing to the Warlord a vital piece of information. But not it was far too late.

And La beheld him, too, remembering the look of love and adoration which had flamed in his eyes on that long gone, never to be forgotten night in Lothar. But here, she did not see a red Martian panthan with black, short-cropped hair. In-stead, she saw a tall,

handsome white man, as bronzed as Tarzan of the Apes, with clear blue eyes and thick, auburn hair.

In those blue eyes was a pitiable emptiness, however, until the moment that he saw her. Then, slowly, he seemed to concentrate upon her, and he frowned, trying to remember.

Var Koros got up and went to him, placing his hand on his shoulder. "Kar Komak!" he exclaimed. "Do you remember your old friend, Var Koros?"

Kar Komak looked at the old man, struggling to remember. But, at last, he only shook his head.

"I do not know you," he said. But his eyes sought again the vision of loveliness who sat at the end of the long table.

"This woman, though. Somewhere--"

Var Koros turned to La. "You have seen him before?" he asked.

"I have related my experiences to you," she answered, while she continued to look at Kar Komak. "It is this warrior who attempted to rescue me from the palace."

"It is sad," Var Koros frowned. "Very sad, indeed, that I find him in this condition."

"He is struggling to remember," said La. "Perhaps-if I were to take him to Lothar, he would recall certain events which transpired there."

"Then you are considering Lothar as your abiding place?" asked Sorquas Ptoel.

"I shall visit the city," replied La. "It may well be the object of my search."

"Then I shall follow her to Lothar!" exclaimed the yellow man who had offered his sword.

"And I!" exclaimed another.

"Wait!" said Var Koros. "Before too many of you decide on this course, you must hear a message I bring you." He smiled at La. "After the goddess has departed," he added. "It is something which is of importance only to the Lost People. To you, La, I offer my friendship, for I believe you are inspired by frank and honest motives, though you are not guided by the highest quality of wisdom."

I hope that we shall meet again. Take Kar Komak with you. If he regains his memory, remind him that you saw me here."

Late the next night, La's strange caravan moved out of the foothills of Otz toward that ring of mountains on the eastern shore of Throxus which enclosed the former kingdom of Lothar. Several hundred great white apes and fully three thousand green men accompanied her. These were a mixture of all the tribes, even including some who had defected from Thark, itself, greatest of all the hordes which inhabited the dead sea bottoms of Barsoom. And among these rode several hundred red Martians, as well as the yellow man for distant Okar.

Within the shadow of the golden chariot, beneath the low canopy of gorgeous silks, Kar Komak awakened from slumber to gaze into the eyes of La, who leaned over him in curious deliberation.

"Do you remember me?" she asked.

"Somewhere," he answered. "I have seen you before."

"And of what do I remind you?"

"Of something which a warrior may not say," he replied, gazing at her perfect face and all her ethereal beauty.

La knew enough concerning the moral codes of Barsoom to realize what he was trying to convey to her. Not until a warrior has won his mate in battle or presented other incontrovertible proof that he is devoted to her may he call her his princess, which is the Barsoomian way of saying, "I love you." And Kar Komak could not remember the fact that, in her case, he had already satisfied the requirements of this code.

She was sorely troubled by this man. He was the only real man who had ever loved her. She felt terribly lonely in this strange world, and she longed for love. Yet her heart was always stayed by the memory of a man whom no one else could equal.

Tears welled up in her eyes, tears of frustration and anger. What a twisted fate is this!-she thought. To grow to hate a love so great that it imprisons the heart forever!

"You are beautiful!" exclaimed the man who lay on the sleeping furs beside her.

La hated fate, which always turned her away from the path of fulfillment. Fate was her mortal enemy. How wise to strike back, then, but to violate its own restrictions?

She leaned closer to Kar Komak, parting her full lips in deliberate invitation. And suddenly, he raised up, taking her into his arms.

"It matters not if I knew you before!" he exclaimed. "I know you now!"

It was in that moment, while distant Cloros rested for one fleeting moment on the horizon, that La straightened up, startled, listening. Kar Komak heard it, too.

From afar off it came, echoing faintly out of the dim vastness of the empty sea bottoms—the long drawn out cry of some nameless beast such as had never been heard before in all the history of Barsoom. It was a sound that plucked at the long forgotten cords of racial memory and caused a prickly, chilling Sensation to touch one's spine.

Thoats squealed in the caravan behind them. Many of the great white apes answered that distant cry with restless, rumbling growls. The zitidar, looming darkly in front of them, raised up its head and bellowed.

"In the name of my first ancestor!" Kar Komak exclaimed. "What is that?"

La rose to her feet and he followed her. His arm, touching hers, detected that she was cold and trembling. He saw her look out at the world with the face of one who has seen ghost.

"Do you know what it is?" he asked her.

After a long moment, she answered, "I am almost afraid to say that I do, because I am not sure the thing I am thinking is possible." Then she looked up quickly into his eyes and he saw in her beautiful face such an expression of despair and longing as no man had ever witnessed. "But I must know!" he exclaimed. "I must!"

Chapter XIX - ON THE EVE OF BATTLE

TARZAN awoke from deep slumber, triggered to instant wakefulness by the awareness of danger. The full light of day revealed that he was closely surrounded by a horde of ferocious looking green giants who were seated on adult replicas of the animal he had killed

He raised himself slowly onto his elbows, watching them warily. There were at least twenty of the four-armed monstrosities. They sat there silently surveying him, and so inhuman were their physiognomies that he could not judge their immediate disposition.

Recognizing them, however, by Jules Carter's description, he realized that he was in the presence of creatures who would undoubtedly wish to take him alive so that they might relish his death by torture later. The apeman rose very slowly and cautiously to his feet, studying these notoriously blood-thirsty and uncompromising savages with a practiced eye. Long years of experience among the tribes of darkest Africa had developed in him certain powers of evaluation and judgement with regard to the primordial temperaments and mannerisms of uncivilized men which had often meant the difference between life and death.

This particular tribe, he noted, had a flare for bravado as well as sadism. He noted their colorful headbands of white and yellow fur, terminating in double Strips of the pelt down their backs. This was the bravado in them, advertising their prowess in the hunt, as were their broad and ornate short-sword scabbards across their massive chests the announcement of their intrepidity in battle. The dried human hands depending from the necks of some of them were the mark of sadism. With such as these, there could be no appeal to reason. But Tarzan grinned mentally as he realized from his experience that there was, perhaps, a more basic method of persuasion.

Tarzan was thinking that to fall into their hands would undoubtedly result in eventual death, or, at best, a grievous delay of his search for Jane, he had to escape, but just how this might be accomplished in view of their formidable size, armaments and numbers he did not know. So he waited for his would-be captors to make the first move. After that, he reasoned, fate would have to take its course.

At last, desisting in his efforts to communicate, the green warrior with the lance gave the peremptory command to one of his companions. Evidently quite certain of the apeman's defenselessness and comparative weakness, he wheeled his mount about and began to lead the way back whence he had come.

The single warrior who had been assigned the task of taking him prisoner now swung easily alongside Tarzan and leaned down to grasp him. In that instant, the apeman took hold of the giant fellow's arm and yanked him off his thout.

Simultaneously he heard a chorus of low laughs from the others who had turned in their saddles to witness the scene. They waited there idly to watch their companion dispatch him.

Tarzan had intended to occupy the green warrior's place on the thout, but the creature had darted away with a wild squeal of fright and he was left standing on the ground facing his first green Martian antagonist. The latter sprang to his feet with a bellow of rage and turned upon him with four outstretched giant hands.

The green man was fast, but not so swift as the apeman, who ducked under the other's arms and felled him instantly with a mortal blow into his mid-section. The warrior fell dead before he knew what had hit him, his internal organs completely ruptured and his spine broken like a dry stick.

In spite of the shout of alarm and astonishment that went up from the others as they wheeled about to attack him, Tarzan was forced to conjecture for one brief moment that the denizens of this world must be of a frailer bone and muscle structure, commensurate with the lesser gravitational attraction of the planet. To them, his more than ordinary earthly strength would be a terrifying thing.

There was his most effective weapon, he thought swiftly, as the other green warriors charged toward him bellowing an angry war cry. He would weaken their morale with the terribleness of his work, and perhaps enough of them would be sufficiently intimidated to abandon him to his own resources-provided that he did not get himself sliced in twain by one of those flashing long-swords. He did not know of the unwritten warrior's code which forbade the use of those swords as lethal instruments in view of his unarmed condition. Had he known that only the flat sides of those naked blades were intended for his skull, his method of defense might have been altered somewhat.

As the first of his new attackers loomed upon him, Tarzan ducked beneath the other's giant mount and, grasping one of the creature's eight legs, he heaved mightily upward, taking the weight of warrior and thot on his back. The result was that the squealing animal was thrown completely over the top of its rider, pinning him to the ground. The thot turned ferociously to bite the apeman, and at the same time he Struck it on the skull with both his fists, killing it instantly.

Other green men whirled about and closed in, but by this time he had grasped the dismounted rider's lance, which he hurled at a charging adversary. The point of the huge weapon passed through the green man's deep ehest and he feil dead at Tarzan's feet.

To avoid a windmill blow from another sword, he ducked again under a passing thot and overturned it; but this time the rider jumped free in time to avoid being pinned down, and without an instant's hesitation, he leaped upon Tarzan, seeking to overcome him with his bare hands.

As though this method of attack were a signal for the others, fully five of the giant brutes leaped upon him. Tarzan Struck at them, breaking heads, necks, limbs and dealing out death with the ferocity and strength of a demon, but still they came grasping at him, striking back and finally overcoming him with the sheer weight of insurmountable numbers.

At last he went down beneath them as the flat of a sword Struck his head, causing him to lose consciousness-but not before he had left on the field of battle two dead thoats and five dead Torquasian warriors. All of which, his astounded captors noted, he had accomplished with his bare hands!

Thus began the saga that was eventually to earn Tarzan of the Apes another name-a certain legendary name that was to shake the foundations of Barsoomian civilization...

* * *

"The observatory of Helium insists that this is the area. They have recorded two infra-radiation trails at this point. If a Space rocket actually did crash on Barsoom, it is reasonable to think that its occupant might have effected a separate landing in a smaller vehicle."

The Speaker was Carthoris, who stood on the deck of a mighty aerial dreadnought of Helium. The huge, heavily armed ship, escorted by twenty other large fighting craft, glided low above the great sea bottom, its observers scanning the entire area for signs of the visitor from Earth.

In other time, Carthoris and a few of his friends might have come alone in a small ship to make such an investigation, but, in these dark and troubled days it was necessary to travel well prepared for conflict. Moreover, even a giant first line fighting ship could not venture forth without an adequate fleet combat unit for escort.

Indeed, John Carter, himself, would have been the first to lead the search for a visitor from the planet of his birth, but just now, grim and heart-breaking duties called the Warlord to various far flung battle fronts in half a dozen sectors of the planet. That this particular fleet unit had been spared at all, however briefly, gave ample testimony of thee importance which he had attached to the report from the observatory.

There was with Carthoris, however, a man who qualified almost equally as well as John Carter for the responsibility of greeting a traveler from Earth. This was Vad Varo, alias Ulysses Paxton, the only other terrestrial on the planet.

"It is terribly unfortunate," said the latter, "that this first physical contact between our two worlds should have to occur at a time when Barsoom is torn in a mortal struggle of ideologies."

Carthoris' features hardened at the thought. "Even at this moment," he added, "we are preparing for the greatest battle of all. What has gone before has been merely the preliminary fighting. Rebellions and massacres have taken place, nations divided themselves in civil war and many of our former allies have withdrawn from our side to support the so-called Holy Alliance. But we believe now that the enemy is definitely headquartered in one specific location. When we discover that hidden base, we shall pour our last ship and our last man into the conflict!" Carthoris's eyes gleamed sullen hatred-which was a hatred for the death of millions of warriors and ordinary Citizens alike, both in the past and in the immediate future. He longed to eliminate the self-seeking causes of such useless carnage and destruction.

"The history of Earth can tell you of similar great human conflagrations," said Vad Varo, pensively, "where brother slew brother and father fought against son-all for an ideal or a fixed belief. The Crusades, the Revolutionary War and the Civil War-all these great conflicts resulted from such a division of opinions concerning the basic beliefs by which men sought to live."

Carthoris turned swiftly toward his companion. "And does your history, at last, prove which side was right and which was wrong?" he asked.

Vad Varo smiled. "The eye of history is always omniscient," he replied. "It is easy to judge the right and wrong of men's deeds in another age than your own. In the heat of the actual battle, however, the advantageous perspective of the historian is lost to the victim of his own time. And thus, I fear, will ever be the fate of humankind."

Carthoris smiled, but grimly. "You should be a diplomat, Vad Varo. With resounding eloquence, you have told me nothing. Now, tell me-do you believe this risen Issus is the true goddess and that the time of spiritual fulfillment is upon us, or do you detect, as does my father, the odor of Thern deception, as of old?"

Vad Varo looked about him carefully. Even among the loyal officers and men who had personally offered their lives and their swords to John Carter and his gallant son, the Prince of Helium, this subject was explosive.

Finally, he shrugged. "Who am I to judge?" he answered. "Once your father was a hero for revealing the deception of the river Iss to all the world. This time, if he is wrong, he can go down in history as the greatest villain of all time."

"Then you believe there is something in this Issus?" demanded Carthoris, almost threateningly.

"Not necessarily. But, have you considered the middle ground between fact and deception on which your enemies may take refuge? Sometimes men must invent or believe in things and make them as good as real-whereupon they become real, in effect. On Earth, a great section of humanity known as the Moslems have their own Valley Dor, which they call Mecca. Whatever its validity, it sustains the faith of millions. Other millions turn their faces reverently toward a sacred spot which is known as the Vatican City. In all worlds and in all time, men have built their Meccas or their Temples of the Sun. And, so it is in your case here upon Barsoom. Whether you win or lose against the Holy Alliance, the fact remains that the issue in men's souls must be settled once and for all."

Carthoris clenched his fists against the ship's rail. "It is too much to think of!" he exclaimed. "I am a warrior. All I can do is pledge my sword and my life to whatever cause my father will support!"

"I understand," said Vad Varo. "And you know that my blade is here with yours, dedicated to the same purpose. A warrior can do no more."

"Look!" exclaimed Carthoris, pointing suddenly below. "Down there-a man! He is signaling to us!"

Vad Varo soon discerned the distant figure of a white man who was running across the ocher-colored sea bottom and waving his arms at the Heliumetic fleet. "He wears battle harness and a sword," he observed. "He is not of Jasoom."

Carthoris turned to an officer and issued a command, whereupon the entire fleet soon halted in mid-air and a small patrol boat was dispatched to retrieve the stranger.

Ten minutes later when the man, himself, sprang from the deck of the patrol boat onto the flagship, Carthoris shouted his name in Startled recognition.

"Kar Komak!" he exclaimed. "By the gods!-is it possible, after all these years? I had given you up for dead!"

Had Carthoris known of the strange adventures which had befallen his friend, he would have been surprised to see him perfectly rational and in full possession of his memory, as he was now. The two men greeted each other with hands on

each other's Shoulders, and then Vad Varo greeted him also as an old acquaintance.

"The device of Helium flying above me today," smiled Kar Komak, "is the most heavenly sight I have seen since my departure."

"You are wounded!" Carthoris cried out, noting clotted blood on the other's left temple.

"There was a battle," replied Kar Komak. "It seems I was in some sort of caravan, and a great party of Torquasian green men came upon us. I was Struck on the head in the middle of it and left for dead. When I regained consciousness, I knew I must contact you or the Warlord at once, so I started out on foot, hoping that I might arrive at Hastor before I succumbed to starvation or thirst.

Carthoris gripped his arm. "My friend! Do not tell me-that you have discovered Tario's hiding place!"

"Yes," Kar Komak replied, gravely. "The headquarters and main base of Operations of the Holy Alliance."

Carthoris gave a shout of triumph. "At last!" he cried. "After all these years!"

Kar Komak's brows furrowed in puzzlement. "Twice," he said, "you have referred to the passage of many years since I left Helium." He passed a hand over his brow. "I remember-many things, event, places, but vaguely, as in a dream."

Vad Varo, who had once been a skilled physician under the tutelage of Ras Thavas, the Master Mind, was first to surmise correctly what had happened. "But, now you are in full possession of your faculties-after receiving that blow on your head," he observed. "Perhaps you have been a victim of amnesia."

"Amnesia! Carthoris-how long has it been since-"

"Since you left Helium? I would estimate it to be close to four years(12)."

Kar Komak's face blanched. "Four year!" He grasped Carthoris' Shoulder. "By my first ancestor! And the wars are still continuing?"

Carthoris smiled a sad, cold smile. "The war against the Holy Alliance," he said, "is about to begin in earnest, now that we have you to tell us the location of the enemy."

"But-have they not used their new weapon?"

Carthoris cast a quick glance of apprehension toward Vad Varo. "What new weapon?" he asked.

"Why-the secret weapon of the First Born! The nullifier beam, which can eliminate the effectiveness of the eighth Barsoomian ray!"

"Eighth Barsoomian ray!" Carthoris looked about the deck, tensely, to see whether or not they had been over-heard. Then he grasped Kar Komak's arm. "Please, my friend! Let us get into Conference at once. Come to my cabin!"

Two hours later, the Conference was concluded.

"So I can only believe either one of two things concern-ing the secret weapon," said Kar Komak. "Either they have been confronted with unforeseen technological difficulties, or they are holding it in reserve for just such an all out offensive upon Tarnath, itself, which you now anticipate."

(12) The Martian year is 1.88 Earth years in length.

"I must get to my father at once with all this information," said Carthoris, frowning. "But, whether the enemy is equipped with this weapon or not, we shall attack! If need be, on foot! From what you have told me concerning the peculiar political composition of the Holy Alliance, I can see that this whole fantasy concerning Issus and religious reform is but a masterfully refined deception of the people -again! Tario would be Tharos Pthan-or, if not him, then Zithad, Dator of the First Born, or else Sardon Dhur, Hekkador of Therns.

"I can't quite place the role of these curious beings, the Zumorians, however," added Vad Varo.

"It is immaterial," retorted Carthoris. "As men of honor, we know what roles we have to play in this!"

"I had given the whole problem considerable thought," said Kar Komak, "while serving in the army of the Holy Alliance at Tarnath. Granted, this is a deception, does not the fact still remain that something should be decided about religious reform-for the people of Barsoom? What a marvelous twist against the false prophets of Tarnath it would be if we could bring into reality the reforms-affecting the River Iss and the Sea of Korus-which they have promised the world!"

Vad Varo chuckled. "What an ironical trap for them, now that they have the masses of civilization worked up to fever pitch, if a true Tharos Pthan could appear on the scene! The people, alone, would be strength enough for him to overthrow the whole empire of the Holy Alliance!"

At that moment, a messenger presented himself at the prince's cabin.

"Sire, the flight dwar wishes to report sighting something of interest below, which might be connected with the man you seek."

Carthoris saluted the young officer and rose to his feet, signaling the other two to follow him. In a few words, he acquainted Kar Komak with the purpose of their present mission.

When they reached the railing outside, the huge cruiser was already lowering toward the ground near an expanse of hills and Valleys.

"There below, sire," said the dwar, who was second in command of the fleet under Carthoris, "near the entrance to that small canyon."

"Ah yes! I can make out the carcasses of some white apes," said Carthoris.

"Probably attacked by banths, remarked Kar Komak.

"But, what has that to do with this visitor from another world?"

"Our Observation scopes reveal something else of interest there," replied the dwar, respectfully. "You shall soon see what I mean."

So it was that Carthoris, son of John Carter of Virginia, came upon the torn clothing and other effects of Tarzan of the Apes, which he had abandoned after his encounter with the great white apes. The found blood-stained pieces of his flying jacket, as well as the automatic, both of which were irrefutable evidence to Vad Varo that another Earth-man had come to Mars.

"A terrible tragedy," he remarked. "The poor fellow was probably carried off and devoured by the banths."

"Wait! Look here!" exclaimed Carthoris, digging into the lining of the flying jacket. "There is some sort of document here. Vad Varo, you will be able to read it!"

Vad Varo quickly took a sealed envelope from Carthoris's hand. When he read the words which were neatly typewritten on the face of it, he almost dropped it in his astonishment.

"What is it?" asked Kar Komak. "What does it say?"

With trembling hands, Vad Varo handed it back to Carthoris. "It is addressed to John Carter, Helium. And it is from none other than Jason Gridley, with whom we were once in communication, if you will recall."

"I will take the responsibility of opening it," said Carthoris. "Please translate its contents." He extracted a single sheet of paper and handed it to Vad Varo.

The Earth-man took the letter into his hands almost reverently, at last remembering how long it had been since he had contacted his native planet. He looked at the typewritten words as though he were about to decipher an alien tongue.

"To John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom-greetings!" he translated. "This letter will introduce to you John Clayton, Lord Greystoke-" He looked up, startled. "Can you imagine that? The fellow was a miner jed from one of the greatest nations of Jasoom!"

"Continue!" commanded Carthoris.

"...who comes to you with a personal problem of such a mysterious and unusual nature that I must refrain from attempting to explain it. However, your kind assistance to Lord Greystoke, insofar as it may lie within your power to aid him, is urgently requested..."

The letter went on to express the hope that the Gridley Wave might get through to Helium once more, so that news might be obtained concerning the outcome of the mission. It was signed by Gridley, himself.

For a few moments, the three men merely stood there in silence looking at one another. Finally, Carthoris bent down and picked up an article from the ground. It was the mate to the Air Force flying mitt which Tarzan had appropriated in Heu of a hunting pouch.

"What do these characters indicate?" he asked of Vad Varo, showing him the mitt.

"U.S.A.F" read Vad Varo. A mistiness crept into his eyes as he remembered his former captaincy in the United States Infantry during World War I. He remembered France and a gallant group of men who risked their lives in lumbering biplanes. "How well I remember," he mumbled aloud to himself. "This is a symbol for the most gallant aerial navy of Jasoom."

Carthoris looked up at the sky. "And now that navy has reached out to a sister planet," he mused. "Someday, men will come again in other spaceships."

"And a very old and charming planet will never be the same again," smiled Vad Varo, ruefully. "But perhaps interplanetary travel is inevitable."

"We have been experimenting along that line," said Carthoris. "One of our scientists is developing a new type of magnetic propulsion. With the eight Barsoomian ray and a hermetically sealed ship, coupled with the magnetic field drive-" He shrugged, then frowned. "But I forget-Barsoom has its own affairs to settle first! Come! We shall return at once to Helium! Before visiting Jasoom, I would visit the accursed fortress of Tarnath!"

"It is certainly a terrible tragedy," remarked Vad Varo as they boarded the great battle cruiser, "that Lord Greystoke is dead. Poor fellow! Can you imagine his consternation and terror upon being attacked by those apes, or by a pack of banths?"

"Perhaps," suggested Carthoris, "he was fortunate enough to faint with fright before he was torn to pieces..."

Chapter XX - THE GREAT GAMES

WHEN Tarzan was chained in the dark pits of the great, ancient-looking walled city to which his captors had taken him, he noted with some surprise that a great number of normal men like himself were also chained there-except that their skins were slightly reddish in hue. There were giant green men in chains, as well, but his interest was centered principally upon the others, for they were of the race he sought, who might know of the whereabouts of Helium-and John Carter. If he could but speak their language now!

He had only a moment to note their curious and some-what astonished surveillance of him before his jailers de-parted, carrying their torches with them. After that, he shared with his fellow prisoners the Stygian darkness of the dreaded pits, which was a typical feature of all such subterranean jails of Barsoom. Every city on the planet possessed its pits for the enemy, which were actually labyrinthine mazes of tunnels and Chambers, intricately interconnected and often half forgotten and unexplored. His present location reminded the apeman of the subterranean catacombs of Opar except that this place had evidently been built on a much grander scale.

One other detail he had noted before the torches were withdrawn, was that the other prisoners were bound with what appeared to be very light chain, whereas his own chains were double. Moreover, his arms and legs had been doubly bound with thongs of thick, tough hide. Undoubtedly, it was this added precaution on the part of his captors which had caused the others to stare at him with amazement.

Even so, he smiled openly under the cover of darkness, it was evidently difficult for the Martians to conceive of the tremendous difference between his own kind of strength and theirs. His leather bonds, and his chains, constructed of a softer metal than iron, were relatively weak. He had tested them secretly, and although they might have been sufficient to restrict an ordinary man of Earth, he knew they were not a match for the abnormal muscular powers with which his lifelong jungle environment had endowed him.

That he could break his bonds he was certain, yet he lay there in silent contemplation of his predicament while he attempted to plan out the best method of taking advantage of his secret. Unfortunately, they had taken his hunting knife from him and he was totally unarmed. But that, too, could be remedied when the time came for action, he reflected.

A red Martian close beside him whispered to him in a furtive attempt at communication, but as he knew the barrier of language was as yet insurmountable, he made no attempt to reply. The tongue of Barsoom, he had noted, was somehow hauntingly familiar. Somewhere, it seemed to Tarzan that he had heard it spoken before in one of the strange regions of Africa to which his past adventures had taken him, but he could not quite place it.

Other prisoners were carrying on a desultory conversation now, and several times he heard the word, "Lothar," which he assumed was the name of the ancient city in which he now found himself incarcerated.

It was difficult to judge the passage of time in such complete darkness, and how long he had lain there before his captors came again he did not know. But come they did, and

this time it was in large numbers of heavily armed guards. All of the prisoners were released from the rings which tied them to the walls and, still in chains, they were forced to march along the dim corridors at the heels of the official who was in charge of the special guard detail. Again, red men and green men alike gazed at him curiously as the guards cut loose the bonds restricting his legs so that he could work.

And well they should have been amazed at this tall, herculean white giant of a man who walked in their midst so heavily chained, yet apparently contemptuous of the entire Situation. Almost a head taller than the red Martians, the Lord of the Jungle bore himself with such quiet dignity that all who saw him assumed that he must be not only a mighty warrior, but a personage of royal lineage, as well. There was some-thing in the depths of his cool, grey eyes and the impassive set of his patrician features which demonstrated hidden strength and reliable leadership.

But who was he? Whence had he come? And why had the Torquasians bound him with such a fantastic regard for his strength? Surely not even a great white ape could break loose from double chains and heavy thongs of zitidar hide!

Inasmuch as Tarzan's adventures had placed him in situations analogous to this before, he was not surprised to discover the destination of the captives. Readily did he recognize the outer pits which bordered upon the arena. And thus did he he perceive the cruel intentions of his captors. Evidently, the lot of them were to furnish entertainment to the victors in the form of a death struggle against overpowering beasts or numbers of men.

The large, long cages into which the prisoners were thrown were on a level with the sands of the arena. Through the outer bars one could see the cages completely encircling the area directly underneath the overhanging ring of stone balconies, except for a large gate at one end. This great, somber looking gateway was cast into deep shadow by an ornate, extended stone balcony which had been reinforced with twenty foot piers of carved and polished wood to take the place of some of the stone pillars which had fallen into ruin owing to the extreme antiquity of the arena.

It was on this prominent balcony, under gorgeous silken canopies, that Tarzan observed the usual Upper echelon of this green horde, who were also recognizable by their more ostentatious trappings and by the manner in which they issued commands to their inferiors.

The seats in the coliseum-like edifice were filling rapidly now with members of the Community of green men, and for the first time the apeman observed females of the species, who ranged between ten

and twelve feet in height. Also he noted the presence of green children, but nowhere did he see an infant in arms. Then he remembered that Jules Carter had told him that this cold and taciturn race was oviparous, as were all Martians, and that the eggs of the young lay five years incubating, so that when hatched, this child was not actually an infant, but well developed and ready to learn the vicious ways of its Community-but not necessarily from its own parents, for parental attachment was unknown to the green men. Children were raised by the Community as a whole. They were taught war and hate, and that kindness, love and affection were weaknesses whereas cruelty was a virtue and the torture and lingering sufferings of another was the highest form of humor.

They came now in grim silence, unaccompanied by the garrulousness and laughter of other such crowds he had seen before. But later, no doubt, they would laugh in a horrible transport of sadistic rapture as the victims of the Great Games of Lothar fell before fang, talon and sword.

Now, Tarzan turned his attention upon the prisoners, whom he saw for the first time by the light of day. Particularly, he took note of the red men. Their stature and general appearance, save for the reddish hue of their skins, was in every way identical with that of earthmen, except that he did not observe that usual difference between strong and weak, or between fat and lean, or old and young, as might have been the case on Earth. On Barsoom, where nature enabled man to reach a thousand years of life, a comparison of ages was very difficult. Also, there were no apparent weaknesses. Each man was a stalwart warrior, lean, well constructed, and alert. Evidently, the apeman mused with a grim sort of admiration, the nature of Martian society was not such as to preserve those whose lack of character or morale might cause them to rely upon others for the salvation of their destiny. Here he saw the result of a natural law of selection which he had only observed before among the beasts of the jungle.

But withal he noted in most of the red men a marked nobility and fineness of feature and character. These men were not like their

giant green companions in chains. They had known their own mothers and had not been strangers to filial affection.

Tarzan's savage heart went out to the spirit of them and his heredity responded to their character. He reflected that it would indeed be a pleasure to shake the hand of John Carter of Virginia who was such a man as to inspire admiration and devotion in the breasts of a people who were themselves paragons of courage, strength and nobility.

He found himself caged in with a group of ten red men who kept largely to themselves and appeared to be discussing him, judging by the frequency of their curious glances cast in his direction. Beyond this cell, through intervening bars, he could see others, including the giant green men, who apparently considered him to be more fascinating than the fate which awaited them outside on the sands of the arena.

One of his own cell mates was about to approach him with a question when two green men entered the cage with keys to their chains. They quickly selected three of the red men and freed them from their bonds, whereupon they were given daggers with which to defend themselves. Then they opened the outer door of the cage and shoved them roughly onto the sand outside.

Tarzan looked again at the great balcony overhanging the large, darkened gate at the far end of the arena. He observed that the arrival of some important personage there had signaled the beginning of the events. The green warrior who now took the seat of honor on the balcony was evidently the chief of the tribe, for he was half a head taller than the others, tremendously proportioned, and heavily laden with gorgeous trappings and the jeweled metal insignia of his rank. Here, thought Tarzan, was the Caesar who would preside over the carnival of carnage to be celebrated this day, whose small, hard soul was the epitome of brutality, the criterion of all those negative virtues which his community strove to emulate.

Suddenly, the apeman tensed and his eyes narrowed, for he recognized on the broad chest of this chieftain something which he had momentarily forgotten, but which was his own property. It was only then that he realized that his flyer's mitt, which he had

utilized as a hunting pouch, had been taken from him; and in it had been the Great Star of Issus which the leader of green men now wore!

Few there were who noticed the fierce gleam in Tarzan's eyes or heard the low growl of anger that escaped his lips, for at that moment a rumble of voices arose from the audience and the prisoner cages, and all eyes were turned toward the great gate beneath the canopied balcony. AS the gates swung outward, a giant, green-eyed banth sprang out into the arena. It roared hungrily at the crowd, and then its great, baleful eyes slowly took in the sands of the arena.

Tarzan's heart again went out to the race which was represented by the three prisoners who now faced this monstrous, ten-legged beast with its cavernous mouth and multiple rows of slavering fangs. Instead of cowering in the shadow of the arena's walls, the three of them walked bravely to the center of the death ring and stood there waiting, daggers in hand, to give the best possible accounting for themselves before being torn to pieces.

He regretted that he could not be at their side helping them to defend themselves, but even if he should be able to reach them in time and kill the banth, he reasoned, his action would be a profligate waste of an opportunity which might be more beneficial to himself and perhaps to all of the others- should the turn of events offer unforeseen advantage later on in the day. When he thought in terms of self-preservation, however, it was only an indirect consideration for the welfare of Jane Clayton.

So it was that he was forced to watch the slaughter of three brave men as the hunger-enraged banth literally tore them to pieces, and as the onlookers in the seats above shrieked with hideous laughter. Again, the apeman was forced to admire his fellow captives, for instead of cowering before the horrible sight or whimpering in terror or other-wise revealing their emotions, they stood at the bars and looked out in grim silence, awaiting their own turn to be slaughtered.

As the day wore on into afternoon, it began to appear that the green men were reserving Tarzan for the finale. By now, half of the cages were empty and the torn and mutilated bodies of those who had occupied them now lay strewn about the bloodied sands of the arena.

He had witnessed many a feat of daring, courage and strength on the part of red and green captives alike, during which great white apes had actually been overcome by concerted attacks. But in the end it was always the same. Superior forces of apes or banths were inevitably released from the great, shadowed gateway beneath the jeddak's balcony, and the temporary victors met their deaths in spite of all their efforts and fighting skill.

Tarzan at last decided that he had had enough. Something would have to be done for the remaining survivors. Into

His mind had come a plan which might aid them as well as himself. These men were fighters. Out on the arena's floor, where many a duel had been fought between red and green men, swords, lances and bludgeons lay scattered about in profusion. Many of the prisoners had been relieved of their bonds and had been armed in preparation for combat, anyway. If he could, somehow, effect the release of all of them simultaneously, they might be able to give the gloating audience a surprise, and some might yet make good their escape. He, in particular, had certain definite intentions concerning that tusky jeddak who sat leering down upon his victims from the great balcony—and who wore on his chest the Great Star of Issus.

Having decided, Tarzan acted. Of a sudden, he swelled his chest and arms against his chains. There was a dull report as they parted, and with them the thongs of zitidar hide were rent as under.

The four remaining captives in his own cage looked upon him with open-mouthed amazement, but he lost no time basking in their admiration. Instead, he stepped to the side of one of the red men and examined the small chains which bound his wrists behind him. Gripping the slack of the chain between the man's arms, Tarzan jerked mightily and broke it apart; where-upon he unwound the rest of the chain and freed the man.

Others in adjacent cells began to murmur in surprise as they observed this incredulous demonstration of strength, but Tarzan placed a finger to his lips, cautioning all of them to silence. In a matter of a few moments he had freed the remaining captives in his cage.

He was about to enter upon the second part of his plan when he was distracted by a sudden shout of anticipation from the audience outside. He joined his companions for a moment at the front bars of the cage, which he noticed were not as earthly prison bars, being smaller and of softer metal. Then, he looked out into the arena.

Instantly, he froze into rigid immobility, his every faculty leaping into sharp awareness of a thing which he could not believe. But, though it seemed almost too much to expect, he knew he had to believe the evidence of his eyes and his memory—for nowhere, not even on this far flung alien world, could he fail to recognize the white-limbed undulant grace and perfection of the woman who now stood alone in the center of the arena awaiting her death.

He was looking at none other than La of Opar, one of those two for whom he had crossed the abyss of space! And she might well have knowledge of the fate of Jane Clayton, his own beloved wife!

In the same moment, while he staggered mentally under the impact of this revelation, the great, shadowy gate under the jeddak's balcony opened once more, and another giant banth leaped with a ferocious roar into the arena.

* * *

In his cabin on board the great cruiser, Kar Komak awoke with a start. Suddenly he had remembered the caravan more distinctly. He recalled that mysterious and wondrous when a beautiful woman had leaned over him in the soft light of Cluros and offered him her incomparable lips.

Just as he held her in his arms, a curious and weirdly disturbing cry had issued from afar, out on the dead sea bottom of Throxus, and she had pushed away from him trembling and vowing that she must discover the source of the sound.

Later, when the Torquasian hordes had charged upon the caravan, he had joined the others in fighting to protect this woman. And now, he remembered that she was that same wonderful creature whom he, himself, had created!

She was his alone-and he had twice failed to protect her! Even now, she would be languishing helplessly in a Torquasian prison-perhaps again at Lothar, in the region of which she had been captured.

With an irrepressible cry of anger, Kar Komak leapt from his couch and donned his harness and weapons. He had accomplished his mission for the Warlord, he reasoned, now that he had given Carthoris the location of Tarnath and forewarned him of the secret weapon of the First Born. Now he would take care of his personal affairs. He must find his secret and wondrous love, she of the blue eyes and the raven hair, even though she might lie in the deepest pits beneath a fully occupied city of green men!

Outside his cabin, he discovered Carthoris sleeplessly pacing the wind-swept deck.

"What, Kar Komak? Has the imminence of the final battle robbed you also of sleep?" asked the son of John Carter. "But stay!-you must have seen the ghosts of your ancestors! What ails you, man!"

He told the Prince of Helium merely of the woman, herself, but not of her origin as he understood it.

"Then I take it that you have at last found your princess," said Carthoris, warmly sympathetic. "My friend, on Barsoom there are two things alone for which a true warrior must live or die-his country, or his woman."

"Then you understand? You will forgive me, my Prince, if I leave you in this hour of battle?"

"How can I deny you that which no man would deter myself from doing were I in your place? I shall give you a fast scout ship, Kar Komak. If you succeed, return with her as soon as you can to Helium. I am curious to see this beautiful princess of yours."

So it was, that as the darkened battle fleet continued silently on its urgent flight toward distant Helium, Kar Komak sped swiftly away in an opposite direction. His heart sang for his love and his blood seethed with rage against the enemies who had stolen her from him.

For this woman was his own, whom no man or demon or embattled world would deny him!

Chapter XXI - THE GATES OF DEATH

WHEN the great, hunger-goaded banth leaped into the arena and emitted a reverberating roar, and when his protruding green eyes turned intently upon the defenseless figure of La, the entire concourse of spectators and captives alike were startled and amazed to hear an answering beastly roar of rage from the prisoner's cages.

But, as they craned their necks to discover its source it was La, alone, who was cognizant of the true identity of the white giant of a man who tore apart his prison bars and leaped unarmed into the arena with a look of death in his cold gray eyes and a great red scar aflame on his noble forehead.

In that barest fraction of an instant before the huge banth charged upon her, what must have been the emotional experiences of this beauteous outcast of time, this saddened orphan of destiny, as she stood there and looked upon that long lost warden of her heart and soul who had evidently crossed the chasm of death itself to find her? It is a chapter which may never be written, for no man will ever know to what depths the shock of Tarzan's appearance at that pinnacle of her need for him penetrated into her immortal being.

"Oh, my beloved!" she cried aloud in the ancient tongue of Opar.

This could she express and nothing more, for the huge

Barsoomian lion was charging directly toward her. She could have jumped, perhaps, or run a pitiably short distance, but the shock of her emotions and her fascination for the deadly beast held her incapacitated for the moment and deafened her ears to the thundering shouts of alarm and astonishment of the spectators who had all risen to their feet in a body.

Just as the banth was about to close upon her she saw the hurtling body of the apeman strike the tawny east under its right front Shoulder with the force of a battering ram, and the two of them rolled past her to one side in a roaring, swirling blur of motion.

Only for a single moment did Tarzan remain within range of those mighty jaws and myriad talons. Having momentarily knocked the wind and the wits out of the banth, he leaped aside, and it was such a leap as had never before been witnessed. Fully seventy feet he leaped, and then he turned swiftly about to face the giant animal again.

The banth was on its feet almost as Tarzan landed, and now it turned its full attention upon him. But, in the same moment, La snatched up a great long-sword from the dead hand of a green warrior, and even as the creature charged the apeman, she hurled the weapon with all her earthly strength in the direction of her rescuer. Tarzan had just time enough to roll under the banth's hurtling body and to one side, but in the next moment he snatched up the huge sword from where it had fallen and when the banth whirled in a flurry of dust to charge again, he was ready for it.

Not as any warrior of Barsoom did Tarzan wield a sword. When that mighty blade swung whistling through the air, it was driven by strength and ferocity which was without equal on two worlds. That day in the arena of Lothar, thousands of green men and red men alike saw a man strike a Barsoomian lion with a giant long-sword-so swiftly and powerfully that the blow drove the blade straight down its face and neck into its mighty shoulders. So suddenly did the beast die that its nervous system still functioned for one brief moment. With cloven head and neck and a great-sword standing out above its blood-drenched shoulders, its body charged blindly about, then at last, twitched spasmodically and dropped, quivering weirdly in after death, to the bloodied sands.

As Tarzan turned to look for La, he found her close beside him. Spontaneously, she flew into his protecting arms and broke into tears of joy and utter relief. Whatever terrors might yet come upon them, in this place no longer mattered, nor did it matter if they lived or died on the spot-for at last the loneliness of eternity had been assuaged by glorious fulfillment.

Nor could the apeman deny her his arms for the moment, as he was not insensitive to the force of her emotion which seemed to strike a hundred considerations and moral restrictions aside as though they had been paper fortresses in the path of the Deluge itself.

"My love! My love!" she cried in the more comprehensible language of the first men.

"La, look out!" he warned her, suddenly looking up at the jeddak who was giving the jailers a signal to open the gates of death once more.

The unbridled wild shouting of acclaim from the prisoners in their cages and the tumultuous uproar of the astounded audience above was suddenly drowned out by a mad, frenzied bellow that seemed to shake the world, as the tall gates beneath the high balcony were battered asunder and trampled under foot by such towering monstrous mass of beastly ferocity as Tarzan had never beheld in his life. La turned swiftly to look, and then, for all her wild and savage heart, she screamed instinctively in horror and fright.

To Tarzan, the gigantic zitidar towering a full sixteen feet above the ground, was a prehistoric mastodon, so utterly berserk that the froth of its mouth glistened on its lower tusks. Before the wrath of such a Gargantuan monster as this, a mad bull elephant would have been completely helpless.

For one instant, before the terrible creature could focus its bloodshot eyes on its puny victim, Tarzan's own eyes blazed hatred at the laughing jeddak on the balcony. And, in that moment, the old red haze of battle lust came into his vision.

The apeman thrust La away from him and sprang to a position which was not more than twenty feet from the massive head of the looming zitidar. And there, to the surprise of beast and man alike, he raised his face to the heavens and roared forth the blood-chilling battle cry of the bull ape.

Unexpectedly, it was answered by the roars and shrieks of a pack of great white apes which now lumbered from the darkness of the open gateway. They were apes such as Tarzan had never seen before, for they wore battle harness like men, though they were weaponless.

What saved that moment for the Lord of the Jungle and possible for Barsoom, itself, that day was a cry emitted by La behind him in the language of the anthropoids.

"Tarzan-the apes are mine!" he heard here exclaim.

Then...the zitidar charged.

Without questioning why or how these strange white apes should be allied with La, the fact alone sufficed to tell him that she would be safe in their presence. He also knew that they would be helpless to assist him or to defend them-selves against the zitidar-unless he supplied them with suitable weapons. His careful eye had not previously scanned the arena in vain, and now he was ready to make use of his observations.

As the lumbering beast charged, Tarzan sprang nimbly to one side, but not far enough to be out of its short range of vision. It turned with a rumbling roar of rage and charged again, but this time in the desired direction. Tarzan led the living juggernaut of destruction under the wooden pilings which supported the jeddak's balcony and then gave a full leap

to be out of harm's way. There followed a loud, rending sound and a shout of alarm on the part of the jeddak and his companions. Then the great balcony collapsed ponderously into the arena as the wooden piers splintered and toppled over before the zitidar's charge.

In spite of his seething anger and his lust to destroy them, Tarzan was forced to give the green men credit for being fearless. Suddenly cast into the center of mortal peril, the jeddak and those of his followers who had not been crushed already by the murderous zitidar quickly drew their swords and tried to hack the beast down. But as well they might have tried to chop down the coliseum, itself. The huge monster simply whirled about him and trampled them all to death, including the jeddak himself.

And now, it turned its attention once more upon the apeman.

But, again he was ready. Taking hold of a twelve foot piece of hardwood he swung it about his head like the arm of a giant windmill, and when it collided with the great beast it staggered him.

While the brute shuddered momentarily from the impact, Tarzan shouted at the apes in their own language, "Protect yourselves! Do what you see me do! Kill! Kill!"

"Churg!" he heard La cry out to the largest of the white apes. "This man is my mate! Defend him!"

Not bothering to answer the dim and distant ethics of such a claim on La's part, the apeman feil to with his ponderous weapon which, had he been on Earth, he might not have been able to wield at all. He Struck the monster again, this time on top of the head, and it trumpeted in pain, almost falling to its knees.

As it turned to Charge him, he saw Churg, the greatest of the white apes, take up another huge piece of piling and shove its splintered end full into the giant beast's open mouth and even into its throat, whereupon he rammed his end of it into the ground.

The zitidar reared up, gurgling and frothing blood, and then, both Tarzan and another of the great white apes landed resounding blows behind the tremendous head. As the head was still braced upward by the other piling it could not yield, and so the mighty spine of the creature cracked.

It shook spasmodically and soon rolled over onto the ground, gasping in horrible throes of death.

Above, on the balconies, green warriors were gathering in menacing force, watching Tarzan and his unexpected reinforcements apprehensively.

"Quick!" he shouted to the apes again. "Do as I do! Free the men in the cages so that they may help you kill the others!"

Whereupon, he carried his piece of piling with him and soon rammed it home into the bars of the nearest cage, which was filled with shouting green men. No sooner had an opening been made than the giant warriors sprang out into the arena and sought sword, lance and bludgeon with which to fight their way to freedom or to a more satisfying death than the one which had been planned for them.

Tarzan saw the red men with whom he had been imprisoned, who had since emerged through the hole he had made in the bars of their own cage. These latter appeared to be allied with La, for they rallied

about her and called encouragement to yet others who were being liberated by Churg and his followers.

Above the bedlam Tarzan heard a repeated word, which sounded like "Issus!" And, by the time he was surrounded by a sufficient force to be effective he began to hear another name which they were directing at him.

"Tharos Pthan!" they shouted, fanatically, pointing in his direction.

As Tarzan turned to look up at his enemies above, he paused, momentarily puzzled by the spectacle which met his

eyes. For he saw the green Torquasians fighting wildly among themselves, and some of these were also shouting what he took to be the Martian pronunciation of Tarzan.

"Tharos Pthan!" came a rising shout of acclaim from a group of green warriors above who seemed to be defending the cause of the prisoners.

He felt La's cool hands on his arm and looked down into her enraptured face.

"Tharos Pthan," she said to him, "is the name for the mate of Issus."

"And who is Issus?" he asked her.

"I am Issus," was her simple answer.

"Come!" he grunted, suddenly picking her up and throwing her over his brawny Shoulder in the most primordial tradition of male dominance. "We must get out of here!" Wherewith he headed for the now harmless "gate of death."

The others followed him, and as they did so, yet others of the Torquasian tribe leaped into the arena to join them. As Tarzan reached the rubble of the fallen balcony, he descried the mangled remains of the jeddak and paused to examine him.

Quickly, he retrieved three objects which he handed to La. One of these was the Air Force mitt which he still desired for a hunting pouch. One was his steel hunting knife which the jeddak had also appropriated. And the third was the Great Star of Issus.

La gasped her astonishment when she saw it. "Where did you get this?" she asked him.

"It is what brought me here," he commented, and carried her over the rubble into the tunnel behind the trampled gate.

Behind him came thousands of fanatic followers who now swore to each other that the prophecies had been fulfilled-for at last, the risen Issus and her mighty mate had come to their war-torn world.

For, who could deny that this incredible being was not their Tharos Pthan of legend?

Chapter XXII - "AND WE ARE DONE, YOU AND I!"

DAWN had not yet come to Lothar ere the furtive shadow of a one man scout ship passed above its walls. There was no air patrol, nor had an organized sentinel System as yet been established. It was too soon after the battle.

Kar Komak could not know of the great battle which had been fought in Lothar the previous afternoon and half through the night. He could only observe a few torches here and there in the streets, and the presence of thoats in many of the courtyards forewarned him of the occupancy of green men.

At first, he had approached the city warily, but after a brief examination of it, he arrived at the conclusion that perhaps only a few Square haads surrounding the central portion were inhabited. Therefore, he circled it and came in low over the deserted eastern section. Both moons had gone below the horizon and the night was conveniently obscure as he brought his flier in upon a rooftop and moored it there to await his return.

Cautiously, he advance toward the center of the city on foot, keeping to the narrower streets which would be less likely to be frequented by the present inhabitants. As he drew nearer to his goal, he became certain that the great palace, formerly occupied by Tario, was again the center of activities.

Also, he was aware of something intangible different about this great Torquasian camp. The usual quiet of the dark hours preceding the dawn was absent, and in its place, he sensed a certain excitement and sleeplessness that seemed to have invaded the place. In distant

Windows he caught sight of moving crowds of green men, and he heard the muffled undertone of distant loud discussions. Voices were sometimes raised in argument, sometimes in victorious shouting.

Then, suddenly he came upon a building which was occupied by red men. He held back in the shadows of the narrow side street he had entered. Through one of the Windows of a second story, he could see several of them silhouetted against the radium bulb in the ceiling. Obviously, they were not prisoners. Neither were they bound nor was the tone of their voices nor their attitude that of slaves. He could not hear what they were saying, but he noted the enthusiasm of their movements and gestures which indicated anything but dejection or, for that matter, secrecy.

Evidently, then, these men must be in some way allied with the green horde which had occupied the city. It puzzled him, but he was determined to proceed with caution and to forearm himself with information before revealing himself to anyone-if at all.

At that moment, a red Martian warrior entered the narrow street behind him without warning. He would have collided with Kar Komak but for the swift movement of the latter to one side. As he moved, he tripped the stranger and was at his neck with his dagger before the other could utter a sound.

"And you would live to speak at all," Kar Komak told him, "keep your voice low and answer my questions!" He noticed that his captive wore the harness of Ptarth, whereas he, himself, still wore the unknown borrowed harness of the secret armies of Tarnath.

The stranger's eyes widened at sight of the dagger at his throat, but he relaxed slightly when he realized he was not in the hands of an assassin, who would have struck first and spoken not at all.

"Who be you?" he asked of Kar Komak. "Your harness is unknown to me, and I have seen many metals from the farthest reaches of Barsoom."

"Silence!" demanded Kar Komak. "I will ask the questions. First, know you aught of the whereabouts or fate of a white woman who was recently captured by the Torquasians?"

Now, the other's eyes widened in startled wonderment. "By the gods, man!" he exclaimed. "There is only one such woman here! And know you not her true identity?"

"This is not the answer to my question. It matters not who she is. I must know where she is!" The dagger pressed insistently against the other's neck.

"Where else but in the throne room of the palace? She is none other than the arisen Issus!"

Kar Komak almost lost his grip on the dagger. "Issus! But this is impossible! I alone know of the woman's true origin-"

"Blasphemer!" snarled the man under him, suddenly tensing in anger. "Know you not that she has been joined this day by her mate of legend, the invincible Tharos Pthan, himself?"

"Mate!" Kar Komak's eyes blazed in jealous rage. "There is but one mate for the woman of whom I speak-"

"And he lies even now at her side!" sneered the other.

"You lie!"

"Then why don't you storm the palace, O Great One?-and see for yourself?"

Kar Komak tossed his blade up, caught it in one swift movement, and brought the handle down heavily on the Ptarthian's head. Making sure that the man was unconscious, he dragged his body behind a patch of shrubbery next to the building and quickly left him.

His mind was sorely perplexed by this incomprehensible information and his heart was laden with anger and for boding. What nonsense was this? And who was this imposter who claimed to be Tharos Pthan?

By his first ancestor!-if he actually should find her in another man's arms this night, his blade would prove him to be no legendary Tharos Pthan but a creature made of mortal flesh and blood!

* * *

Through La, Tarzan began to comprehend the significance of his position as that tumultuous afternoon wore on into night and the two of them were at last installed as deities in the palace of Lothar. There were seeming parallels to this Situation which the apeman felt had occurred in his previous experience, where the role of witch doctor or pagan god had been forced upon him as an expedient necessary to escape, or to survival in the midst of a savage and superstitious tribe or primitive race of people.

That he was underestimating his role and making a mistake by placing his Situation in the latter category, only to discover, after it had become too late to correct it. For the time being, he simply considered it advisable to act as Tharos Pthan as long as it increased his chances of helping La and as long as it promised to serve as a springboard for launching his major effort in search of Jane Clayton.

Once installed in the former throne room of Tario, La ordered that the Chamber be cleared, and when they were at last alone together, she threw herself into his arms.

"My beloved!" she cried out. "It is impossible that you should be here with me at last in this world of the After Life, but I shall not question the fates when they are smiling upon us! I love you! For an eternity I have waited for an answer to my unknown destiny, and at last my sweet reward had come to me! At last, my Tarzan, you are mine!"

The apeman was too tall for her to reach his Ups, so La turned up her face to him and waited with closed eyes for the lover's caress she had dreamed of through thousands of lonely nights. Her arms encircled him, her white, heaving bosom pressed hotly against his cool, unyielding chest, her flowing, raven hair a midnight cloud of loveliness framing her flushed, beautiful countenance.

Tarzan knew the complexion of her heart, but he had not been born to subtleness. Kindness and charity lived in his great, savage heart, but he had ever been the full-blooded brother to justice and realism.

"What must be," he said, "must be. I am sorry, La, but I came here seeking yet another besides yourself. My mate-Jane Clayton. Do you know aught of her fate on this world?"

"Your-mate! Jane Clayton! Do you mean that she, too-" Her full lips and her chin trembled. She was unable to speak further.

"Yes, La. Your priests brought me the great diadem from Opar, and Jane looked into it as you did. She, also, was taken across the bridge of stars to this world. I have spent the entire treasure of Opar to reach you both. Now that I have found you, I must continue my search for her. I had hoped that you might have learned something of her whereabouts."

Dazedly, La allowed her arms to fall away from him. "Bridge of stars? Treasure of Opar?" she murmured. "But-we are dead, Tarzan. This is the After Life."

The apeman smiled. He tried to explain the true Situation to her, but through the medium of their primitive language he was forced to resort to many figures of speech.

"This is a world in the sky, like Goro, the moon, only larger and much farther away, La. I have flown here in a great bird of fire. But you and Jane were brought here through the great jewel by a mighty witch doctor who lives here. Have you not seen this magician or learned his purpose in bringing you here?"

As though in a trance, La said, "There was a man-I remember. A white man in a great tower, far away from here. Perhaps it was he-"

Tarzan tensed slowly, his gray eyes burning down into hers. "You must remember this man, La. Who is he? What is his name? And where is this tower?"

"His name? Tario. He brought me here. I think this palace was his -but now he lives in the distant tower. It reaches far up into the sky."

"La-where is this tower?" Tarzan insisted.

It was then that Las recovered from shock, but her heart had been seared by a white-hot bolt of lightning, and there was nothing left to sustain her but one emotion. Her face whitened with it and her lips thinned out flat against her gleaming teeth.

"Your mate!" she snarled. "She is my fate! Thief of my days! Destroyer of my life! Why did she has to be born! I hope she is dead!"

Tarzan frowned. "Take care, La-"

La's eyes widened, her lips curling in a glad smile of hope. "Yes! Dead!" she cried. "Dead! If she is dead, then the way is yet clear!" She raised her voice in a wild shriek. "Dead! Dead! Dead! I hope she is dead!"

The apeman sprang upon her with a low growl and grasped her by the throat. La struggled instinctively in his titanic grip, and suddenly fear sprang into her face as she saw the terrible threat of death in his blazing eye.

"Tarzan!" she cried out. "Spare my life!"

It was the strangled sound of her voice that brought him out of his rage. He eased the pressure but did not release her. "You will not speak of my mate like that!" he told her, fiercely. "I have been your friend and protector, La, but such a thing I will not tolerate-even from you!"

La slumped against him, bursting into tears. "La is sorry!" she wailed, clenching her fists against his chest. "But what do you know of that which lives within me?-of the terrible secret which is mine-that only you may free me of, Tarzan? How long have I waited for you, my love, only to learn-even in this world-that you are not for me?"

The apeman tried to console her. "I think," he said, "the time has passed for the keeping of secrets, La. Tell me-what is it that haunts you so?"

"No one has ever known it," she answered, "but to you alone I will reveal that which has darkened my soul for ages!"

There, in the great palace of Tarzo on distant Barsoom, La of Opar, finally, unburdened herself of the dreaded, secret thing which had troubled her all her life. And as she told it-a personal, feminine thing such as a woman might confide to her husband-Tarzan's heart was softened by the awareness of a predicament which had reduced her to confiding this deepest of buried secrets to one who could not be the mate who should have heard it from her lips. Yet the nature of the information also lifted his brows in surprise and set his mind to conjecturing along previously unexplored channels which pointed amazingly to the revelation of things too incredible for him to accept immediately.

After she had told him, she continued to lean against him, sobbing softly, helpless, lost, disconsolate. He stroked her hair.

"You have suffered, La. The strangest of all destinies has made you the mystery of the ages. I wish that I could do one thing for you that would bring you happiness. But, what is left-"

She threw her arms about him once more and lifted her face to his. "One thing only, my Tarzan! Before you go out of my life forever, surely it is not too much to ask. But one caress! Only once, and then never more!"

He smiled sadly down upon her upturned lips. "You ask for an arrow in your heart to wear forever. It is no way to rid yourself of love, or the illusion of it."

"But I ask it!" she pleaded. "Just once, beloved!- and we are done, you and I!"

He studied her in silence, his mind filled with distant memories of a vine-grown min on another world and of all the adventures he had experienced there-how he had first seen this beautiful woman bending over him with the raised knife of the sacrifice in her hand, and how he had later rescued her and promised to protect her. And now-her strange, haunting secret, her touching confidence in him, her frustration and deep despair. For her to reduce herself to the condition of pleading for love was to sacrifice a woman's most precious possession, pride and dignity, without which the personality would be broken forever. There was only one way to restore it.

Slowly, Tarzan of the Apes enfolded the Goddess of the Sun in his mighty arms and placed a kiss of compassion on her trembling lips.

As he did so, the arras behind the throne parted. The apeman turned, as did La, to look upon the impressive figure of Kar Komak, who glared at Tarzan in murderous wrath. This was such a consuming anger as to over-ride the warrior's code of battle. When he drew his long-sword, all three were aware that its single purpose was to slay...

Chapter XXIII - THE GATHERING STORM

TARZAN might not tried to explain his apparently compromising Situation even if he could have spoken the language of Barsoom. In such circumstances as this, where one's life was threatened abruptly, he was accustomed to acting first and conversing later, if at all.

In spite of the emergency facing him, however, he did not lose sight of the fact that this strange warrior evidently had a personal interest in La, as there could be no other ex-planation for his anger. Obviously, he was an outraged lover.

Thus, as Kar Komak drew his sword to slay him, Tarzan faced him with a strange smile of amusement, for he was thinking that La had been withholding information from him. She had not told him of this young and ardent suitor!

"Kar Komak!" cried La. "Stay! You know not what you do!" She was angered by his untimely interruption and frightened by his intention, for Tarzan was unarmed save for his hunting knife.

"It is unfortunate," smiled Kar Komak, grimly, "that you have chosen this man. Know you that none may claim you but myself!"

La drew herself up indignantly. "By what right do you make such a claim? I do not belong to you!"

"Ah-but I created you, for but one purpose, my princess - to be my mate.

She raised her brows. "You created me!" Then she laughed. "Not unless you are as old as Thuria-"

Tarzan had understood nothing of this conversation except the man's name, and suddenly he remembered where he had heard it before.

"Kar Komak!" he exclaimed, unable to express himself further. This was the man who had taught John Carter the secret of teleportation. A white-skinned Lotharian-a mental creation. Perhaps, then, this Tario of the distant tower was a Lotharian, too, and Kar Komak would know of him.

When the apeman spoke his name, Kar Komak turned his full attention back upon him. When he looked at Tarzan's hunting knife, he finally decided in favor of the warrior's code, after all, and threw his sword aside contemptuously. Drawing his dagger, he sprang from the dias.

"Die!" he shouted.

But Tarzan was not yet ready to die-nor did he intend killing his adversary, who had suddenly become precious to him. He did not even draw his knife, nor did he move from his position.

Instead, he caught Kar Komak's wrist in one hand and his throat in the other. His superior strength instantly eliminated the possibility of a contest. Kar Komak simply met an irresistible force and came to an abrupt stop. The unimaginable pressure on his wrist deadened the nerves of his hand so that he dropped the dagger. The other hand, on his throat, pressed just hard enough to promise instant death, should he attempt further violence.

Yet he strained with all his might, pulling at the mighty arm with his free hand. But he might as well have fought with a stone statue.

"What manner of man are you!" he gasped. "John Carter, himself, would be but a child in your hands!"

"He is Tharos Pthan," said La, proudly. She was about to add that he was the legendary mate of Issus, meaning herself-but then she remembered Jane Clayton. She also remembered the words of Var Koros, who said, "The resurrected Issus already sits upon her throne in the Sacred Worlds..." She remembered Tarnath, and Tario, who had brought her here. Jane Clayton had also looked into the diadem, and now she was here in this world. Could it be possible, La asked herself in growing consternation, that the other Issus was none other than Tarzan's mate?

"I am Issus!" she cried out

By this time, Tarzan had lightened his hold on Kar Komak, and both men looked at her in mild surprise because of the shocking expression of jealous rage and frustration on her face.

"La," said Tarzan, "calm yourself. I know of this man. He is important to me. You must help me question him. But first, what is he to you? He seems to know you-in fact, it appears he is in love with you."

If Kar Komak was surprised to hear animal growls and barking issue from the mouth of Tarzan, he was stupefied with astonishment to hear his beloved princess answer him in the same manner.

She tossed her dark hair back over her Shoulder, disdainfully. "He is a strange warrior who twice fought for me," she answered, "and now, he thinks he owns me!"

Tarzan grinned. "Not a bad idea," he commented. "Somebody should own you! But ask him if he knows aught of Tario, La."

Her eyes blazed defiance. "Do not taunt me, Tarzan! There are thousands here who call me Issus, and you will yet have to answer to me if you belittle my emotions. You know what they are. I have prostrated myself to you and begged you for your love. Now I am done, and it shall be the other way around. If I please, I will take you and when I choose!"

Tarzan's gray eyes met hers steadily. "Ask Kar Komak if he knows Tario, La," he demanded in low, even tones.

La, herself, now wished to learn more of Tario, for reasons of her own, and so she questioned Kar Komak.

"Yes, I know of Tario," he answered, "but first, ask this inhuman creature to release me. Too much is happening here which bewilders me. I would ask a thousand questions of my own."

Tarzan released him before La could translate his request. A host of new questions and half completed revelations loomed in his mind as he suddenly recalled where he had heard a language similar to that which La was speaking. It was identical in its sound and structure to that of the ancient tongue of Opar - which was of Atlantis - from which the Great Star of Issus had come! And before that, the diadem had come from Barsoom!

"First," said Kar Komak, "do you love this man?"

"Yes," was her instant reply, "but he does not love me-yet! He pines for his own mate, who sits even now upon the throne of Issus at Tarnath. She is a false Issus, and I shall de throne her ere I am done!"

A new light of comprehension came into Kar Komak's eyes as he looked at Tarzan. "Perhaps he is, indeed, our long-awaited Tharos Pthan!" he exclaimed.

"He is Tharos Pthan, all right," retorted La, "but this world has yet to see who shall be his mate-and that woman will be the genuine Issus! now you, Kar Komak, that the choice lies between that other woman and myself alone?-for I am also hailed as Issus!"

He shook his head. "Do not delude yourself, my princess. This other one is the eternal goddess. Neither you nor I can stay the miraculous hand of destiny. So save yourself the pain of disillusionment and face reality. Your are mine. I claim you, and none other shall know you as his princess."

For answer, La spat at his feet. "That for your presumption!" she almost screamed at him. "I alone shall choose, when the time comes, but first I shall lead my forces against Tarnath and dethrone this false usurper!"

Kar Komak laughed. "You!" he exclaimed. "Even the great Warlord of Barsoom, John Carter, himself, with all his mighty fleets and armies, will risk his life to approach that terrible fortress! Think again, my princess!"

"La!" insisted Tarzan. "I have waited long enough. I want you to tell me what he is saying."

In her present belligerent mood, La might have defied this command in spite of the dark threat in the apeman's eyes. But, so important were her secret plans to her now that she subordinated her anger to the growing need for subterfuge and crafty diplomacy.

She fell to interpreting for the two men with a will, at the same time gathering all the information she could for her own purposes, as well. She even reminded Kar Komak of his life among the Lost People, where she had found him. She told him of Var Koros and what he had said concerning Tarnath.

The end result was that Tarzan was able to conclude that Tario was definitely his man, and that Jane Clayton could be found at Tarnath. This, in itself, would have been sufficient reason to make Tarnath his objective, but when Kar Komak represented himself as a secret agent of John Carter, the apeman suggested that the two of them might pose as Therns and act as agents together for the Warlord.

"This is possible," agreed Kar Komak. "Both of us have white skins. I would help you find your rightful mate, Tharos Pthan!"

When Tarzan objected to taking his assumed role seriously, Kar Komak suddenly cast a new light on the subject.

"Whether you are Tharos Pthan or not," he said, "it would be marvelous strategy for you to continue in that role. The people will follow you. If you favor John Carter's side, then Barsoom will be his to command-against the Holy Alliance. Don't you see? It will be a trap for those who sought to

deceive the people for their own personal interests! You are a top secret weapon as Tharos Pthan."

The apeman grinned, because the argument had its merits. Even La could see the logic of it, but she was troubled because of the vagueness attached to her own future. Was she really Issus? or was Jane Clayton?

Jane Clayton! She hated her! Not only did she threaten to rob her of personal happiness and again deprive her of Tarzan's love-but now she even stood in the way of her destiny as the eternal goddess she had half believed herself to be.

If John Carter should gain the upper hand again, there would be an end of the religion of Issus forever. Yet, here was a man who loved her, Kar Komak, and a man whom she loved, Tarzan of the Apes, conspiring to achieve that very objective!

"Why?" she exclaimed aloud, more to herself than to either of them.

"Why do I ally myself with your Tharos Pthan?" smiled Kar Komak. "Not only for the sake of Barsoom, my princess, but for your own sake as well. For, as soon as his mate is safely in his arms once more you will come to your senses. Then your beautiful eyes will be able to look upon Kar Komak, who is your mate, your lover, and your only happiness. For no one will ever love you more!"

La stamped her foot. "Get out!" she screamed. "Get out of my sight, thou sickening egotist."

When he smiled at her in amusement, and when Tarzan joined him in an understanding masculine grin, her rage knew no bounds. She raised her voice, calling to her guards, and mixed with her commands were certain animal sounds directed at Churg and his followers.

Immediately, the entrance doors of the throne room were thrown open, and a score of great green warriors entered, accompanied by Churg and fully thirty great white

apes. Tarzan noted with approval that Kar Komak did not reveal a single emotion of fear or consternation at the sight of them.

"Seize these two!" La shrieked. "One is an enemy, and this other whom you thought to be Tharos Pthan is an imposter!"

The green men hesitated, not out of fear of Tarzan, for in spite of his terrible powers, they knew no fear, but because he had proved himself to be superhuman and their superstitious faith in his exalted identity was strong within them.

Not so with Churg, however. His teacher and his deity was La. Unhesitatingly, he led his lumbering horde of towering brutes across the room toward Tarzan, who was already eyeing Kar Komak's discarded sword speculatively.

The contest for authority between this Issus and Tharos Pthan was interrupted, however, by Kar Komak, who suddenly remembered that he was a Lotharian. Instantly, his half of the throne room was filled with phantom bowmen, who fitted arrows to their bows with what Tarzan considered admirable precision. As they aimed to fire upon the apes, La screamed.

"No! Spare them! You win this time, Kar Komak! But go from my sight! And take this stupid fool with you! We shall meet again, and then not even your archers will prevail against me!"

"Goodbye, my princess!" he grinned. "You are right. We shall indeed meet again!" wherewith, he motioned to Tarzan and sprang up the dais and quickly passed beyond the arras.

The apeman looked at La, then at the great white apes who still stood at bay before the bowmen.

"Protect her," he commanded them. "If harm befalls her, you will answer to Tarzan, Mighty Hunter, Mighty Fighter!" To La, he said, "Look into your heart, La, instead of at your anger and pride. Kar Komak is not to be taken lightly. Think well before you strike!" And with this parting admonition, he was gone behind the arras in a single bound.

"Tarzan!" La cried out, struggling to hold back her tears.

As the phantom bowmen marched through the arras after the apeman, the green men moved slowly forward among the apes.

"We do not understand," said their spokesman. "You are Issus, and he who follows the Lotharian is Tharos Pthan-yet he acts not as though he were your mate. And you have called him an imposter."

La suddenly remembered her secret plans. These followers were more important to her now than ever before.

"Seek not to solve the mysteries of the gods," she retorted. "Know you that an imposter sits upon the throne of Issus in the Sacred Worlds, and Tharos Pthan has gone to depose her! For / am the living Issus!"

"But, you said he was an imposter," insisted the other.

"I spoke in anger," she replied, "because of a personal thing which is a matter for our own resolution.

"Then why did you presume that we could lay our hands upon him with impunity?"

"He asked me to make this test of your loyalty-and you have shown it only too well. But enough! Issus will not be questioned forever! I have spoken!"

"It is well," replied the green man, solemnly, "because you have an important visitor who would see you with his own eyes. If he believes you are Issus, then in truth you will have an army to fight for you!"

La controlled a sudden surge of elation as she heard these words. She carefully maintained her original expression of self-assurance. "Know you not that the fad of Issus is sufficient unto itself?" she said, peremptorily. "It matters not whether the jeddaks of Barsoom believe in me today-for tomorrow it is written: I alone shall occupy the sacred throne! But bid this stranger enter! I welcome doubt, for in my presence it may be banished at once rather than by the more lingering persuasion of inevitable proofs which the future will surely bring!"

As she spoke, an aisle was formed, and into her presence strode the mightiest chieftain of all living green men.

"Eternal Issus," said the green dwar of the guards, "this is Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of all Thark!"

As the mighty Thark came to a halt before her, his cruel, inhuman face inscrutable and his chameleon eyes swinging balefully upon her, La saw another man enter the throne room and pause to observe the scene with the penetrating and disquieting eyes of wisdom. He was a red Martian, an old man bent with age, whom she recognized as Var Koros, the spiritual leader of the Lost People.

"Men call your name Issus," boomed the deep, challenging voice of Tars Tarkas. "Where were you born?"

La recognized in the resplendent insignia of this impressive warrior giant, in his bearing and in his tone of voice the signs of high authority and power. She sensed, in the attitude of the other green men present, a deep respect for this virile chieftain whose huge eyes were on a level with her own, even though she stood on top of the dias.

Something also in the expression of Var Koros told her that this moment was a very decisive one in her career. She was under test, and it made her indignant though wary.

Instead of answering Tars Tarkas at once, she drew herself up majestically and gazed upon her guards and the white apes.

"Align yourselves here as guards!" she commanded the green men. "You will have to be taught that no man may enter my presence while armed, for this assumption of power and authority before Issus is sacrilege."

She also muttered a quick command to Churg, and instantly he and his followers lumbered into a massed position on the steps of the dias.

The green guards formed closed ranks on either side of Tars Tarkas, yet their dwar hesitated to deprive him of his swords and pistols. A rumbling laugh answered them as the great Thark observed La's maneuver with grim appreciation.

"Know you, woman," he said, "that Lothar and all its mountains are surrounded by two hundred thousand warriors - my entire nation, and many allies. I am here to decide whether you are Issus."

This announcement came evidently as a surprise to the guards, because there were many who muttered an exclamation of astonishment. La, however, did not flicker an eyelash.

"And would you expect a goddess to cringe with fear because of such a pitiful display of worldly strength?" she asked him, evenly.

"You speak well," answered Tars Tarkas, "but whence comes your superior power, which you intimate you have- and of what does it consist?"

La slowly raised a shapely white arm and pointed her finger at her haughty interrogator. "You are my power," she answered. "You came to me because you need an Issus, as shall others come also, until at last you are all united in your need. And, when you are united, the power will be yours alone, and I the symbol of it, as ever in the past."

"This is valid," said Tars Tarkas, "only if you are the living Issus. And you would have my sword at your feet, answer my question: Where were you born?"

La's eyes found those of Var Koros for one brief moment. His gaze was penetrating, intent, a sad, wise smile curving his lips.

"The birthplace of Issus is a mystery," she answered slowly. "I have lived in two worlds, and I was born before the Cataclysm."

Now, Var Koros moved forward down the aisle which had been formed by the green guards. Tars Tarkas' eyes swung backward in their sockets, watching his approach. The two apparently knew each other.

"We would help you to remember your origin," said Var Koros. "Do you remember the First Born, who were the original guardians of Issus and the Temple of the Sun?"

La pointed to the great white apes. "These are know as the first men," she answered.

"No. I mean the First Born, real men of our own stature and form, but black of skin. They have sometimes been called the black pirates of Barsoom, and legend has it that they once traveled the star roads and that they maintained a secret colony on the farther moon."

"In the other world," said La, "there are many black men, but it is no small moon. It is a mightier world than this."

"She speaks of Jasoom, the world of John Carter, him-self!" exclaimed Tars Tarkas.

"Before the Cataclysm," said Var Koros, "the most ancient form of the Barsoomian language was spoken by the First Born." Then he astounded La by speaking slowly and hesitatingly in another language, which she understood with perfect clarity.

For it was the secret language of ancient Opar.

"I would have you translate the ancient infinitive verb form - tharasi, Var Koros continued, in the modern tongue of Barsoom.

"Tharasi" she murmured, while inwardly trembling with emotion. "This means to do-to create..."

Var Koros smiled. "And its first person indicative form?"

"I-I don't understand."

"How would you say-I create thee!"

La hesitated, her eyes widening in astonishment. Slowly, her Ups parted, as though to speak.

"From tharasi-to create," urged Var Koros. "Also, the nominative form of 'thou' was tha. Now, give me the objective form and say, in the ancient tongue: I create thee!"

Slowly, La spoke. "I create thee,' in my own tongue, would be-" She swayed, then got control of herself. "It would be: TharosPthan."

Tars Tarkas solemnly drew his long-sword. Kneeling, he placed it on the floor at the foot of the dias.

"My sword," he said, "now belongs to Issus..."

"Now," said Var Koros, "where is this Tharos Pthan of legend who has slain banths and white apes and the zitidar, and whose strength is greater by far than that of the Warlord, himself?"

La passed a hand across her damp forehead. The swirling mists of memory were falling away with dizzying speed.

"He-has but just left the palace," she answered, "in the Company of Kar Komak, the Lotharian."

"Kar Komak!" exclaimed Var Koros. "Whither is he bound?"

"ToTarnath."

The old Martian turned to Tars Tarkas. "Then there is no time to lose, my friend. We must march upon Tarnath at once!"

"We?" queried La.

"Yes", answered Var Koros. "The Lost People are ready, also, to join with the green hordes in a march upon Tarnath, for I know a way through the caverns of Iss. Tars Tarkas came to our Valley seeking Tarnath. I told him of you, and he insisted that we bring you with us -for if we are to overthrow the self-seeking forces of the Holy Alliance, we must present the people of Barsoom with the true Issus. It is regrettable that Tharos Pthan has gone ahead. The effect would have been much greater to enthrone you both simultaneously.

"But-what of that other Issus who sits even now upon the sacred throne?" asked La.

"A perhaps innocent tool of Tario," said Var Koros.

There were none in that room, except La, herself, who knew the true identity of that other woman. Yet, they assumed that Tarzan was Tharos Pthan and, therefore, the

mate of Issus. And she, La, was Issus, after all!"

A triumphant smile lighted her beautiful face. "We shall see how innocent the false Issus may be, for it is possible she has self-seeking motives as well as any of the others at Tarnath. But you have chosen your steps well. I have been waiting for this moment-and now I, Issus, shall lead you to triumph!"

A shout of approval went up from the throats of the green men, and Tars Tarkas grinned in savage delight at the prospect of battle. But Var Koros did not smile. Instead, his strange eyes penetrated La's, solemnly.

"You have said that your power lies with the people," he told her. "This is true-but it is also true that such power can destroy the symbol which guides it, if used wrongly. That Symbol is you. Beware of this mighty scepter, and use it well!"

"What of the Warlord?" asked La. "He does not approve of the religion of Issus."

"This is why we must hasten to reach Tarnath in time," said Var Koros.

"The Warlord, John Carter, has been my dosest friend and battle companion," said Tars Tarkas, "but we have since separated over this very point. I fear that he will be destroyed by the will of the people unless we can meet him at Tarnath and convince him that the time of fulfillment has actually arrived. Once he has joined forces with us and changed his mind with regard to the religious issue, the nations of Barsoom will support him full-heartedly, and then he will be able to take care of all the opposing powers of the Holy Alliance-and the lie which lives in Tarnath can be converted into golden truth. This, eternal Issus, is the most holy Crusade of the ages!"

"For Issus!" came a cry of triumph from the rear of the throne room.

All present turned to see a group of red Martian warriors and several yellow men who now raised their swords on high and saluted Tars Tarkas and La.

"For Issus!" answered the green men.

"Well?" said Tars Tarkas to Var Koros. "What say you? Are we ready?"

The old Martian cast a troubled glance toward La. "As ready as we can be," he answered.

La came down from her dias and picked up the great Thark's sword. She handed it back to Tars Tarkas.

"For Barsoom," she said, with simple eloquence.

He took the weapon from her and raised it high above his head, facing the others, and his voice boomed out a command.

"On to Tarnath!" he bellowed.

"To Tarnath!" they answered.

It was a cry that echoed beyond the palace and beyond the city, through the ranks of La's forces, through the gathering ranks of the Lost People, and onward into the mountains among two hundred thousand battle hungry green men.

"To Tarnath!"

"For Issus!"

"For Barsoom!"

Perhaps the trouble that shadowed the eyes of Var Koros stemmed from the realization that the increased forces of La were still as nothing when compared with the tremendous armies and fleets of Tarnath, with the mighty opposing forces of the Warlord, and with the other millions who yet wavered from side to side.

The final holocaust was being fired, and the outcome depended not only upon the true identity of La, who might indeed be Issus-but upon her character, as well.

And the added mystery of Tharos Pthan was the great remaining element of uncertainty-or else the greatest guarantee of victory. But the die was cast. He must now lead these forces from the sea bottoms, and the desperate refugees from the caverns of the dead- through the lost worlds of ancient Iss-and on to Tarnath..

Chapter XXIV - THE TYRANT OF TARNATH

AS Tarzan passed behind the arras and faced the passage which led to Tario's former sleeping quarters, his attention was attracted by an architectural peculiarity of the entrance archway. On top of the accentuated keystone was a potbellied gargoyle. Its mouth was open wide, disclosing a dark cavity inside.

From the moment when he had considered disguising himself as a Thern, he had been concerned about protecting the Great Star of Issus from discovery, and now this yawning gargoyle appeared to offer him the best possible hiding place until he could return for it when the need arose.

Therefore, he sprang lightly upward and grasped the keystone, exploring the gargoyle's mouth carefully with one free hand, he

discovered that it was of ample size to conceal the diadem. In the next moment, he had extracted the great glittering piece of priceless jewelry from the USAF mitt at his side and deposited it within the hiding place; whereupon, he dropped easily to the floor again and proceeded to follow Kar Komak, not realizing at the moment how symbolic a thing it was-to place the very fulcrum of Barsoomian history upon a keystone.

Nor did he know that the gargoyle was a representation of Uln, the ancient god of prophecy, of revelation, and of mysticism..

Kar Komak waited for him in the window of Tario's Chamber. As Tarzan entered, he motioned toward him, signaling him to follow. Then he sprang to the sill and disappeared to the left along an unseen ledge.

Tarzan looked out and perceived the other's objective, which was a low roof top some thirty feet distant. He waited, watching Kar Komak's painstaking progress, until the latter had reached the distant rooftop. The Lotharian turned then and motioned to him, as though he were trying to reassure him that the feat was not difficult.

At last, the apeman stepped lightly to the sill and, poising himself there for one brief moment, he gave a mighty leap which landed him beyond the Martian, well in upon the roof. When he turned toward his new found ally, he saw the latter gaping at him in astonishment.

Tarzan smiled and made a sign that asked, unmistakably, "Where to now?"

Kar Komak studied the apeman carefully, noting that his only weapon was the hunting knife. He drew his short sword and had-ed it to Tarzan, but he refused to take it

After another moment of silent, wondering surveillance, Kar Komak turned about and led the way toward his distant flier, at the same time dematerializing his phantom bowmen as they stepped behind the arras in the throne room of the palace.

Thus two men of two different worlds, each remarkably endowed with special powers of his own, moved through the night shadows of Lothar together, unable to communicate yet bound by a mutual purpose-

to enter the mighty fortress of Tarnath, to rescue Jane Clayton, and to aid the Warlord, if possible, against the forces of the Holy Alliance...

* * *

On the plains beyond the mighty twin cities of Helium, great battle cruisers and dreadnoughts and thousands of sleek attack ships waited. Surrounding this fleet for miles were the encampments of warriors and thoats, the reception and clearance centers and the ammunition and weapons distributing stations which typified the Warlord's vast preparations for the major battle of the long and bloody Holy Wars-for the great invasion of Tarnath.

Proud ships of Helium and its allied cities, such as Hastor, were already taking on the burden of men and beasts in preparation for the total aerial list of the fighting forces. Slave conscripts and foreign volunteers alike mingled together. Tall, proud warriors from distant Manator and Manatos, the famed "Chessmen" of Barsoom with their gorgeous feathered war helmets, rubbed elbows with the grim swordsmen of Gathol, with yellow men from cold, remote Okar in the north, who, alone of all Barsoomians wore black beards and carried strange, formidable saucer shields and sword hooks, with short, murderous javelins strapped to their backs. Towering green men-volunteers from Warhoon and Torquas, from the wild nation of the Thurds and from mighty Thark, itself, had emerged from their ancient dead cities along the sea bottoms. From Aanthor and Xanator, from Horz and Korad, they had swarmed, bringing their giant fighting thoats and vicious war calots, their thirty foot lances and their deadly radium rifles. Among these were even white-skinned Therns and black-skinned First Born warriors. Men of all philosophies and colors and shapes had arrived from the farthest reaches of the planet, from the steaming shores of Toonol to the snow-clad Artolian Hills, because they rode the opposing tide of doubt, because they either suspected the Holy Alliance of duplicity or sought revenge against those who had not fulfilled a promised reward or position of authority.

In war, the barriers of tradition are shattered and new barriers of hatred and suspicion are erected on new horizons and the complexion of the world changes so that man becomes disorientated and, resenting his own sense of instability, he is prepared to strike blindly out at the foe, impatient to bring the battle to an end.

So it was before the gates and the walls of Helium, as it was before Ptarth and in the forests of Kaol, and outside the city of Dusar-fleets, warriors and mounts, all gathering under the leading banner of Helium-for John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom.

Yet the spies of the Holy Alliance were legion and all these preparations did not go unnoticed. This force, led by Prince Carthoris, consisted of so much of ships and ordnance and men, or that force led by Tardos Mors, Jeddak of Greater Helium, consisted of so many main line cruisers equipped with late model long range guns, or that fleet led by Mors Kajak, jed of lesser Helium, or this army of mixed nations of men led by Gahan of Gathol, represented so much naval power or tactical ground strength.

But these very details began slowly to reveal to the waiting enemy that the most important factor of all had not been accounted for. All the heaviest battleships and the finest flower of the regular soldiery and navy of Helium and her allies, as well as the dreaded Warlord, himself, were conspicuous by their absences. However penetrating and thorough was the enemy's System of Underground work and espionage, this one secret had not yet been discovered.

Plainly, then, the fact emerged before the masters of Tarnath that the Warlord was preparing a mighty reserve in some secret location, which would undoubtedly be employed at the moment of battle crisis. And against this eventuality, the tremendous armies and navies of the Therns and the First Born waited, while at Zodanga and Jahar and U-Gor and Tjanath and Amhor and Phundhal, the preliminary forces of their allies assembled their fleets and their weapons and their millions of men, who, in their turn, would fight for Issus and Reform, or for coveted personal advantage.

Whereas the major element in the Heliumitic forces, the Warlord himself, had not been discovered as yet, it was also true that a host of smaller details in far-flung places were overlooked-such as a small, trusted band of hunters from Helium who, under the leadership of Vor Daj, a famous swordsman, trudged through steaming jungles in the vast Toonolian Marshes, dragging barges behind them in which were large, sturdy cages.

Inside these cages were not the hideous synthetic hormads of the extinct city of Morbus, for these had long ago been exterminated. But, if the masters of Tarnath could have discerned what was actually imprisoned within these cages they would have realized that the Opposition is capable always of operating its own System of espionage -and capable, as well, of improvising its own desperate last-minute counter-weapons...

* * *

Far above the teeming Valley of Tarnath, atop the looming fortress escarpment, the Sacred Council of the Holy Alliance was in special Session.

Zithad, Dator of the First Born, was now more gorgeously harnessed than ever, and even his bristling array of weapons were so encrusted with jewels as to render them almost unserviceable for combat. That they were the unmistakable Symbols of established imperial authority and power was plainly evidenced by the cold, impatient fire in his eyes and the uncompromising set of his thin lips and his strong, ebony-hued chin.

Sardon Dhur displayed an equivalent predilection for the outward signs of wealth and power, but the advantage of his Position as Hekkador of the Holy Thern Empire had made its mark upon his body as well as in his personality. Rich food and wine and heavy indulgence of the flesh had fattened him like some oriental potentate of Earth in the time and tradition of Genghis Khan, and his cruel, covetous features were lined with the inroads of self-abuse.

Tario, on the other hand, but wore a beautiful, unadorned robe of the pure white fur of the are-tie apt, and on his brow still gleamed

the lesser Star of Issus. His face alone mirrored the burden of the long, intense years of preparation and his keen awareness of the present moment's potentialities, for it was colorless, set, impassive, illuminated only by the penetrating glare of his eyes.

And Ranas Ghol, the ever changeless and self-effacing oracle of Zumor, sat silently at the great table on the balcony, meditating expressionlessly over a frail, exquisite cup of translucent pink glass-his latest creation.

The great amphitheater was empty, as was required under sacred law when the Council was in Session. And the golden throne, itself, was unoccupied, for it was early morning, and Issus had not yet awakened in her closely guarded quarters...

"My secret agents have confirmed that the enemy is aware of the location of Tarnath," Sardon Dhur was saying.

"At any moment we may see the battle fleets of the Warlord on the horizon."

And there they shall remain," interposed Zithad.

"This is to be hoped," said Tario. Our high promise of nullifiers for every battleship had not been fulfilled. We have but a single projector here to rely on."

"It will be enough," insisted Zithad.

"I doubt it," argued Sardon Dhur. "While you hold one fleet on the ground, another can move high overhead, outside the radius of the beam."

"That fleet above our heads will be our own-moving out to bomb and shell the helpless craft of the enemy where they lie anchored to the ground, unable to maneuver," replied Zithad confidently. "And do not forget that without the nullifier our own fleets and armies coupled with the massive fire power and impregnability of the Escarpment are formidable enough. Moreover, our satellite allies in the outer world will be moving upon the undefended cities of the enemy while we engage his main forces here at Tarnath."

"As soon as the enemy fleet is forced to the ground by the nullifier," said Sardon Dhur, "their ground forces will disembark and approach overland."

"And that will be the signal for our well trained millions of fighters to rise up out of the Valley and meet them head on!" exclaimed Zithad.

Sardon Dhur smiled at the other members of the Council. "It would be embarrassing to Tarnath," he said, "if fully half of its defenses in ships and men should suddenly raise neutral colors and refuse to fight."

Tario and Zithad glared at him.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Tario.

"I am referring to the loyal forces of the Thern Empire," he replied, watching them keenly.

Zithad placed a hand on his long-sword, glowering darkly. "You speak of the deadliest form of treason!" he warned. "Weigh your words carefully, Sardon Dhur!"

"In a sense," said Tario, in icy tones, "you have threatened us as effectively as if you had drawn your sword. Not that you have revealed yourself, you had better explain-carefully and well!"

The Them Hekkador maintained his calm smile. "It is you who threaten me," he returned. "I speak only of defending my interests. Zithad, you are a superstitious and emotional fool who actually has faith in the Legend of Issus. This blinds you to the realities of life."

"Do not add sacrilege to treason," warned the Dator, "or, by Issus, I shall silence that poisonous tongue of yours!"

Ranas Ghol raised his brows slightly as he looked first at Zithad and then at Sardon Dhur. He said nothing, but there was the faintest trace of a prophetic smile about his lips, which Tario alone observed.

"Do you wish to be merely a self-sacrificing tool of

Tario's?" asked Sardon Dhur. "What rewards will be yours- or mine, Zithad-after the battle is won? Is it not plain that he already imagines himself as Guardian of Issus and Warden of the Sacred Worlds? Don't you see that he cannot achieve these things without our help? What has he offered in return?-a small army of phantom bowmen? No, Zithad, I am here now to divide the spoils before they are won.

And if the guarantees I demand are not established at once-then you already have my answer.

Zithad bristled with rage. His sword hand moved to his radium pistol, but Tario raised his hand, signaling him to wait.

"I suppose," said the latter, "that it would be useless to remind you that our defeat would be yours, as well."

"You do not hold me in your cleverly devised trap, Tario," sneered Sardon Dhur. "I have thought out the alternatives and I have reliable plans of my own, should I become neutral and be subject to John Carter's judgement. So don't hold that over my head. I am a free agent."

Tario laughed. "You are not!" he corrected. "You are a moronic child, and you will do exactly as you are told! Do you think I would assume the role of Jeddak of all Barsoom without a justifiable claim to that position? No, Sardon Dhur, if you would receive the generous rewards I have always promised you, you will follow me as your master." Tario frowned suddenly. "Or suffer living death-at my hands!"

Sardon Dhur sprang to his feet. 'You see?" he shouted to Zithad. "This is what I have been trying to tell you! We are but warriors on his jet-an board! He would use us as expendable pieces in his own game of conquest!"

Slowly, Zithad's eyes left Sardon Dhur and turned to meet those of Tario. His hand, white-knuckled, still gripped the butt of his radium pistol.

"Now it is you, Tario, who speak of worse than treason," he accused.

"Ask him!" shouted Sardon Dhur. "Ask him for a clear, final Statement of his intentions!"

"You do not need to ask," said Tario. 'You know my intentions already. I shall be Tharos Pthan and you two will be my favored emperors. Ask more than this and you shall have nothing at all."

Sardon Dhur and Zithad exchanged glances. The Sacred Council was immersed in deathly silence for the moment. Then Ranas Ghol entered the argument.

"Have you forgotten the prophecy of our present Issus?" he asked. "She has rejected you all as her mate. She insists that he shall yet come and destroy his enemies. And now you have heard the rumors to the effect that such a man has already made his appearance. A strange, mighty warrior, white-skinned as Issus herself, and endowed with miraculous powers. He has already been acclaimed by many as Tharos Pthan. What of him?"

"A genuine mate of the eternal Issus would I serve," said Zithad, heatedly, "but an imposter such as yourself, Tario-never!" As he said this he drew his pistol and fired it point blank at the Lotharian.

Sardon Dhur's eyes widened and his face paled as he saw Tario slump forward across the Council table, clutching at his torn and bloodied breast where the radium bullet had exploded. He looked at the lifeless body incredulously. "You've killed him!" he cried.

"And now?" said Zithad. "the argument lies between the two of us."

Ranas Ghol, meanwhile, had remained quite calm. He smiled. "Truthfully," he said, "you two are children. You underestimate Tario -as you underestimate me"

"You!" sneered Zithad. "I have not even considered you-except as a useful freak who can sometimes discern a few meager scraps of the future, and then only unreliably. You keep out of this, Ranas Ghol. You will do as you are told!"

"He is right," agreed Sardon Dhur. "We are in command now. And there is work to be done!"

The Zumorian sighed and shook his head. "I will give you one example of your fatal puerility," he replied. "Tario is not dead."

The Thern and the Dator of the First Born paused to look at Ranas Ghol in amazement. Then suddenly, Zithad leaped to Tario's side and lifted his head by the hair, looking into his dead face. By now, the Lotharian's blood had half covered the table.

"What do you call that?" he shouted. "I have seen dead men before who by comparison with this shattered corpse were much more alive than he! What nonsense is this you spread, Zumorian?"

For answer, the corpse and the blood suddenly disappeared into thin air, and Tario's laugh rang out above their heads. They turned swiftly to discover him sitting on the golden throne of Issus.

"Idiots!" he shouted. "You have never measured the mighty powers of Tario! Through the centuries, I have developed faculties of which you could never dream- and now this Star of Issus has augmented them a thousandfold! How else could I have created Issus, herself? You shot at my image, Zithad, and even now, you cannot know but what I am phantom or flesh. Do not waste your time trying to assassinate me. It will never be done. I know your thoughts and foresee every action you contemplate. You two force my hand! Zithad, is this what you want?" He pointed to Sardon Dhur.

As Zithad turned to look upon the exalted Hekkador of the Holy Therns he was astounded to see him groveling upon the floor, bowing in reverence to Tario.

"I can make you do as I wish," continued Tario, "but I would rather have you be the agents of your own free will. And now I demand that you choose between the two alternatives!"

Sweat beaded the brow of Zithad as he watched Sardon Dhur's nauseating display of abject subservience.

"Master!" the Thern was mumbling to Tario. "But name thy will and it shall be done!"

"You are a monster!" shouted Zithad. "Make me what you will, but I shall await the Coming of the true Tharos Pthan!"

Tario's brow contracted. Suddenly, darkness fell upon the world outside and a reverberating roll of thunder was heard. Lightning ripped the atmosphere but a few yards from the balcony, and the howl of the wind rose to a piercing scream.

Tario rose up dramatically, glaring at Zithad. "I am Tharos Pthan!" he cried. "I am the Guardian of Issus, Warden of the Sacred Worlds, Jeddak of Jeddaks of all Barsoom!"

Zithad looked out at the titanic storm, believing that Tario had commanded it into being, and at last his superstitious should succumbed. He turned toward the throne and dropped significantly to one knee.

As he did so, the storm subsided, and the light of day penetrated the throne room of Issus once more.

"I must accept what cannot be denied," said Zithad. "I do not understand you, Tario, but you are great among men—a fit mate to Issus."

Tario smiled, but he looked at last upon Ranas Ghol. "And what say you now, Zumorian? Am I not the master of the world?"

Ranas Ghol quietly fondled his pink cup. "A master of the mental arts," he corrected, solemnly. "But one is not the master of men or of himself until he first masters his emotions. I chose not to see or hear your hypnotic storm, Tario. It was a childish demonstration serving only the needs of your age. When the ego is hungered, fear is at large. You fear something, Tario. And, well you should."

Slowly, Zithad rose to his feet, looking from Ranas Ghol to Tario in bewilderment.

Tario, however, continued to smile. "At last you have revealed fallibility." he answered. "You think that I fear this rumored Tharos Pthan. Know you not that certain spies at Lothar have already apprised me of his Coming? Fighting ships are already in search of the small flier on which he travels."

Ranas Ghol looked up at Tario sternly. "And did they tell you of his pilot?" he asked.

"No. They did not attach any importance to the other." Tario tensed. "Don't tell me he travels in Company with the Warlord, himself!"

"No. Not the Warlord."

Tario sprang from the dais and ran to the Zumorian's side. "Speak!" he commanded. "Tell me the identity of the other!"

"There are certain elements of the future which may not be revealed," countered the Zumorian. "You will have to find out for yourself."

Tario fumed in his frustration. "I told you before," he said, "that my will alone is equal to the forces of destiny! So do not waggle your dire foreboding at me, Ranas Ghol!"

Zithad leaned over the table, he pleaded with the Zumorian. "You are wise beyond all men," he said. "Tell me what I should do. Where should my allegiance lie?"

Ranas Ghol sighed. "With yourself, Zithad. Follow the dictates of your own reason."

"You speak of monsters!" laughed Tario, addressing Zithad. "Here sits the king of them all! He lies in his growing web of destinies like a great, deadly spider, planning and plotting, dabbling with the future, playing upon the emotions and desires of men with fiendish deliberation. He knows what will happen to us all! He thinks he knows! He thinks we are falling into a trap of our own devising and he would see us destroyed!"

"What say you to that accusation?" asked Zithad of the Zumorian.

"I am not important," replied the latter.

"But your people-the warriors of Tarnath- will they not man the fortress and resist the invasion of the Warlord?"

"They have long been under Tario's command," he answered, "so I suppose that they will."

Zithad waved his hands helplessly. "It is too much!" he exclaimed. He drew his jeweled sword and threw it onto the table before Tario. "My sword is yours," he said. "For sanity's sake-and for Issus!"

Tario picked up the sword and admired it. "You have followed the dictates of your own reason, as Ranas Ghol has advised. And it is well."

"Master!" mumbled Sardon Dhur, from the floor.

Zithad looked at him disgustedly. "And what of him he asked.

Tario shrugged. "He and his empire are your to command."

Zithad beamed. "Do you mean it? Can you continue to control him thus?"

"Easily," came Tario's reply. "I can bring him out of that condition and make him believe he is acting as a free agent, yet he will be your most trusted servant."

Zithad did not pause to consider the possibility that he, himself, might be the mental puppet of Tario's incredible mind, but while he gloated inwardly over the prospect of enjoying power and authority in the Sacred Worlds which would be second only to those of this self-acclaimed Tharos Pthan, tens of thousands of warcraft moved purposefully toward Tarnath out of Helium and Ptarth and Gathol and Kaol and a dozen other points.

While, in his hidden rendezvous, John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom, stood on the deck of a mighty battleship and waited for his own time to plunge into the final battle.

Chapter XXV - IN THE CAVERNS OF ISS

AS Tarzan lay lashed to the wind swept deck of the small scout flier alongside Kar Komak, the swiftly unfolding moonlit landscape beneath him failed to attract his full attention because his mind was occupied with the urgent problem of communication. Here he was in a strange world preparing to enter into a vast enemy camp and assail a tremendous fortress, incognito, and yet he could not even speak the language of Barsoom. If only he might converse with Kar Komak in some way he might acquire information which would be of great value later on.

Kar Komak must have been concentrating upon the same problem, for the apeman soon became aware of thoughts in his mind which were not his own.

He had a mental image of a red Martian warrior walking along a road, and with the image came a mental sound, a word symbol: mad. He looked over at Kar Komak, who smiled and nodded encouragement.

"Mad," said Tarzan. He realized then that the Lotharian was trying to teach him the language by telepathic means. Evidently, "mad" was the Barsoomian word for "man".

This was confirmed in the next moment when the man-image in his mind changed to that of a woman, followed by the mental word-sound: Amad.

"Amad," said Tarzan.

The mental images began to come faster. There were two men, followed by the plural word: Madan. Then there were two women and the plural: Amadan.

Then boy: manid; and girl: amadid; and the plurals: manidan and amanidan; male child: female child: alid; and the plurals: lidden and alidden.

And so the strange, eerie images and Symbols progressed, faster and faster, until Tarzan desisted in his attempts to pronounce them. Most amazing of all, as he relaxed his mind to receive Kar Komak's thoughts, was the fact that they came to him with such penetrating force that there was no question of being able to remember. The vocabulary and grammatical structures, the distinctions between formal and informal moods and cases and persons, refined usages and slight regional differences of meaning or pronunciation-all remained indelibly fixed in his mind. Within a period of one hour, Tarzan found himself conjugating Martian verbs in five moods and seven tenses.

Kar Komak slowed the flier's headlong pace above the dead sea bottoms and circled about aimlessly for hours until the sun arose, while Tarzan closed his eyes and allowed his mind to absorb what might have required years of painstaking labor by the mechanical and wastefully repetitious traditional methods of language learning.

At last, he opened his eyes and smiled at his companion. With perfect ease, he said, "Goyan sumidu goyanan kuonanauni pthalanari u nigolanan uri..." Which meant: "I think that we may be able to communicate with each other now..."

Actually, Kar Komak had not taught the apeman element by element and step by step, as one might build a house by placing brick upon brick. By a process of memory transference and giving Tarzan a feeling for moods and perspectives Barsoomian, he had rather given him the plans for the "house" along with the tools and materials for building it. The rest was a matter of work and practice.

Moreover, no ordinary man of Barsoom would have been able to accomplish this. Thanks to Kar Komak's tremendous Lotharian mentality, a vast and complicated semantic orientation had been

impressed indelibly upon his companion's mind, which now turned out to be vital to both of them.

"I think," said Tarzan, after they had conversed experimentally for some time, "that it would be advisable for us to land somewhere in a secluded spot and spend a day or two in getting acquainted. If I am to succeed in my quest, there are many things I must know."

"And I, too, have many questions to ask you," replied Kar Komak.

He pointed out the very ancient ruins of a small city, hidden in a range of low hills. "That will be as good a place as any," he said. "And I believe that we shall find water there, as well as food." By food, as Tarzan was to learn, he meant the mantalia plant which grew in a thick grove beside the ruins. This was the vegetable "milk" plant of Barsoom.

Thus it was that the two companions in adventures came to know each other. Tarzan was able to confirm the facts concerning Kar Komak of which Jules Carter had apprised him, to the effect that he was a mental creation of Tario and a highly developed mentalist. He was also able to confirm Tario's identity as the erstwhile emperor of the Lotharians and one of the present masters of Tarnath. Kar Komak explained to him more fully the nature of the Holy Alliance and the principal issues which were at stake between the Alliance and the forces of the Warlord. He also related to Tarzan the Legend of Issus.

When the apeman then explained his own purposes and his actual origin, Kar Komak was incredulous, not so much because of the fact that Tarzan was of Earth, but that La had had her origin there.

"And I had thought," he said, ruefully, "that I had created her, even as Tario created me."

"But you love her, do you not?" asked Tarzan.

"Do you love her?" he asked.

The apeman smiled. "In a brotherly way, perhaps. Do not forget my main purpose in being here. My own mate is at Tarnath."

"But La is in love with you!" Kar Komak insisted.

"She thinks she is. I was the only man of her own kind who ever entered her lonely life, until you fought for her." Tarzan smiled again. "I would say that you had first claim upon her affections, my friend-and I can think of no better choice! However much she may seem

to reject you, I know her well enough to understand that you have attracted her very much. And remember this: she needs a warrior such as you."

Had Tarzan been trying to be a diplomat, he could not have accomplished more than he did by his simple frankness and sincerity in this delicate matter. From that moment on, Kar Komak was his devoted friend and ally. There is nothing more binding between male companions upon Barsoom, or perhaps on any other world, than sharing harmonious views in regard to both love and war. Each had the same objective in battle, which was Tarnath. And each had his woman to fight for.

"I am left terribly confused, nevertheless," Kar Komak confessed, at last. "La might well be Issus, and you have all the appearance of Tharos Pthan. On the other hand, if this latter is true, then it would seem all the more likely that she who presently occupies the Golden Throne at Tarnath is Issus, for she is your rightful mate."

"Such confusion may be eliminated," suggested Tarzan, "by cancelling out your assumptions and theories and starting afresh. you should allow the future to reveal whether or not the Legend of Issus may ever be fulfilled. I can tell you for

certain that my mate is not your Issus of prophecy, nor am I your Tharos Pthan."

"But to offer the people nothing save disillusionment at this stage would be to invite the continuation of universal chaos even after victory is won-by either side!" protested Kar Komak. "Their dream of a holy River Iss and a genuine heaven in the Valley Dor, their longing for Spiritual identity with an eternal Issus-all these things cannot fall into dust!"

"Only the passage of time and the further development of events may determine the wisest course," replied Tarzan.

"You deny that you are Tharos Pthan and that your mate is Issus," said Kar Komak, watching him closely, "yet you do not apply this denial to La. Do you believe she is the real Issus?"

"Her history is exceedingly strange and mysterious," answered the apeman. "But, if the facts in the case would tend to support such a

theory, certainly her actions and evaluations are devoid of ethereal motivations or eternal qualities."

"What do you mean by that?"

"She desires and emotes on a very mortal plane, and she threatens. She seeks power for personal advantage and reward. I could be angered with her, but instead I am moved to pity. Her present course may only lead to disillusionment, heart-break, and perhaps even to self-destruction."

"I could not permit the latter to happen," said Kar Komak sternly.

Tarzan placed his hand on the other's Shoulder. "It is well that you are so determined," he replied. "For you, I believe, are her only real salvation."

It was in that moment that they both heard the whirring sound of radium engines outside the building in which they were conversing. Simultaneously, they heard the dank of sidearms and the shouts of men.

They looked at each other in sudden alarm, then silently went outside into an adjacent courtyard to examine the sky.

Directly overhead was a long, black battle cruiser. It had come to a halt and now floated serenely above them on its buoyancy tanks. Men could be seen boarding a smaller landing craft which had been lowered over its side.

"They have no doubt spotted our flier," observed Tarzan, calmly.

"I can interpret its colors and its device," said Kar Komak. "It is of the Holy Alliance-from Tarnath!"

Tarzan's lips curved in a grim smile. "Well, my friend? We hardly look like Therns just now. If they succeed in capturing us, do you know what little story might gain us some advantage with them? We could try to flee, or fight. !!! rely on your experience and I am with you in whatever you suggest. We must act quickly."

An idea suddenly came to Kar Komak, and he smiled the happy smile of a warrior who is about to assail his enemy. "Suppose we reveal our true identities," he suggested.

Tarzan raised his brows. "What would it gain us? They know nothing on this world of Tarzan of the Apes."

"Not Tarzan," corrected Kar Komak, "but Tharos Pthan."

The apeman's brow furrowed. "I do not understand. Why?"

"Don't you see? It would accelerate our entrance into Tarnath. I am sure that Tario, especially, would wish to preserve both of us long enough to attend to our destruction personally. All I ask is to be brought into his presence."

"I see," smiled Tarzan. "It is better to attack the Commander rather than his army."

"I would rely on my own special powers and yours to take advantage of any chance opportunity which might then arise."

"It is a gamble with but one trial," mused the apeman. "Certainly the most dangerous of all possible plans, but the most direct. It is to my liking."

"For Helium, then!" exclaimed Kar Komak, placing his hands upon Tarzan's Shoulders, with a warm smile of friend-ship.

Tarzan duplicated the gesture with a sincere feeling of admiration for his companion. "It would be well to exhibit a certain measure of meekness to our captors," he admonished, "so that they will underestimate us. I know not what your code is upon Barsoom, but, in my world a wise and experienced fighter will permit the enemy to display the full measure of his strength and prowess first, insofar as such a maneuver may be possible. The fighting man's full use of his strength and ability at the precise moment of crisis then becomes practical rather than mere display."

"Upon Barsoom," returned Kar Komak, "this subterfuge is tolerable within the limitations of pride and honor-but in our case there is much more at stake than personal considerations. I agree, Tharos Pthan. We are helpless as our grandmothers' soraks."

"I am Tarzan," corrected the apeman.

"Do not forget your identity here," insisted Kar Komak. "If you would interest Tario to look upon you, you must claim to be Tharos Pthan!"

Unknown to Kar Komak and Tarzan, there was one who had been sent along with the regular naval forces of the Holy Alliance whose strength and brutality were intended to humble this white stranger

whom they sought, whose prowess and strength had been advertised far and wide ever since his slaying of the Zitidar at Lothar.

It was this monstrous creature who first came upon the two in the courtyard, and whom Kar Komak recognized with an exclamation of alarm.

"Thum!" he exclaimed, as he saw his former jailer of Tarnath looming upon them.

It was indeed Thum, very much in his glory at the prospect of subduing one who reportedly challenged his title to the role of the strongest man in the world. He did not recognize Kar Komak, for, at their last meeting the Lotharian had been disguised as a red panthan.

"Which of you is he who calls himself Tharos Pthan?" he bellowed. Behind him crowded the well equipped warriors of the Holy Alliance, red man and black First Born alike, who displayed a mixture of curiosity and wariness, not knowing what to expect of the rumor that they might, indeed, be face to face with prophetic fulfillment-in spite of Tario's claim to the title of Tharos Pthan.

Tarzan and Kar Komak glanced swiftly at each other, as though to say, "What of the subterfuge of meekness now?"

Then, quietly, the apeman turned to face this creature the like of which he had never seen before, who towered several feet above him, leering like some mythical Cyclops with his one great eye in the middle of his synthetic face.

"I am he," he replied.

* * *

La rode in a cushioned palanquin which hung suspended between the Shoulders of two great white apes. On either side of her were more apes, as well as mounted green men, bearing torches. Ahead were hundreds of moving torches borne by green men, red men and apes. Behind was an apparently endless train of torch-bearing men of all races and sizes and shapes, mounted or afoot. All of them moved in comparative silence through the long, winding caverns of subterranean Iss, through regions which had remained unvisited for millennia of

time save for the exploratory journeys of Va Caraways, who now led the way to Tarnath and the legendary Rock of Oracles.

La had only a vague idea of the number of her motley forces, yet she sensed the growing power they represented. She had identified herself with this power and now she moved forward with it, at last pervaded by an awareness of great purpose and destiny. That the motivations which attracted these swiftly growing numbers to her now were not all based on religious considerations did not exactly matter. Once Tars Tarkas and his great horde of warriors had joined her cause, other allies of various sorts, sizes and descriptions had quickly followed. Many there were who moved upon Tarnath with the thought of conquest alone, or of pillage and murder, with a thirst for vengeance or a thirst for wealth.

So it was that as the dark river of mystery flowed downward through the caverns from Tarnath and hurried onward beyond their rear flank on its course toward distant Korus and the Valley Dor, this other mighty river, composed of men and beasts, flowed steadily upstream along the banks, moving inexorably nearer to the main base of the Holy Alliance.

But La did not behold this scene as vividly as she did another which she fondly imagined to be within her immediate future. She saw herself dethroning Jane Clayton, denouncing her as a false Issus before the people of Barsoom. And, in this she took for granted her rival's destruction at their hands. She also saw Tarzan in chains, her prisoner, until time should heal his wounds and he would at last succumb to her will and accept her as the true Issus and his mate.

Yes!-she told herself. Let men judge her act as they would, but if she were truly Issus, her acts would be beyond their judgement. Had not fate forced her to challenge its own cruel dictates? Had she not been mercilessly goaded into this revolt against barren and insupportable destiny? Let men remain the victim of these forces, but a goddess was fate, itself. If she did not demand of life all things which she desired, then she was reduced to the common denominator of mortal men and was no deity at all, unworthy of men's worship.

What she desired most of all was Tarzan of the Apes, and she was determined to have him or she would thenceforth distrust her own identity as Issus.

A small thout of the type domesticated by red men drew in alongside her litter, and she recognized its solemn-visaged rider at once.

"Ah, Va Caraways!" she exclaimed. "And what say you now of the progress of our journey? Does the Golden Throne of Issus lie yet far ahead?"

The red Martian did not seem to be quite as slumped over with age as usual. He rode the thout well and seeming like a warrior, his long radium rifle slung purposefully across his back. And in his face was no beatific expression of the religious disciple or philosophic dreamer. He wore, instead, an expression of sullen, brooding resentment and deep concern.

"I bring you a message from Tars Tarkas," he answered, riding along beside her. "You seem to be the actual authority among us now, La. He wants to know if you have a plan of action relative to our approach."

La smiled at him. "None but to announce the arrival of the true Issus, so that the imposter may be dethroned. This, alone, should be strategy enough to bring the enemy's forces to our side."

Va Caraways frowned. "Are you aware of the present size and composition of your army?" he asked. "If not, I should like to suggest that you inspect it."

"You are my wisest counselor," La replied. "But I feel that you resent me for some reason. Do you doubt that I am Issus, Va Caraways?"

The old man did not answer at first, but finally he said, "Do you doubt it?"

"Your question has a strange sound to it," she countered, with narrowing eyes. "Why do you couch such weighted words in double meaning?"

"I feel," he answered, "that you fear you may not be Issus, after all. If you were sure of it, you would not entrench yourself so firmly in this citadel of ruthless power which is building around about you now."

Always did the brooding eyes of Va Caraways trouble La in a way that was undefinable. "Come!" she said. "I will slow my pace so that we may fall back among the ranks. I would follow your Suggestion and inspect my forces."

"It is well," he muttered.

La ordered her apes to rest, and they lowered her litter to a save, dry spot high on the shadowed river's banks. Together, she and Va Caraways watched the warriors pass. Whenever they saw her seated there in the gorgeous palanquin between the great torches borne by the richly trapped white apes, they hailed her as Issus and went on twice inspired.

For hours the mighty hordes passed by until La began to realize that fully half a million troops supported her. And while she watched the spectacle in growing wonderment, Va Caraways studied her beautiful face- for there, he reasoned, could be reflected the actual oracle of Barsoomian destiny. La, as a contending Issus, backed by this great symbolic armed hegira through the caverns of sacred Iss, could well be one of the major stress points about which the hinges of fate would swing on the morrow.

The sight which seemed to bother her most of all was that of the Lost People, whose original forces had been augmented greatly by a new influx of other members of the lost legion of the "dead" from the nether regions of the Otz Mountains. She saw the halt and the blind, the half-deformed and the gibbering ones who were led forward into battle by their friends and loved ones, even including children who bowed to her in reverence and marched on starry-eyed and trusting toward promised fulfillment. These were the victims of a false religion which now depended upon such forces as hers to be reformed.

There were others who came behind them who were not as taken up with fanaticism as with lust and greed. Off-scouring of the assassin's guilds, pirate kings of swamplands and mountain fastnesses who raised their villainous swords on high to La, grinning at the prospect of indulging mightily and lustily in their chosen sport and profession.

At last, La noticed Va Caraways' persistent surveillance of her and she revolted. "Why do you stare at me so?" she cried. "What is it your eyes would tell me, Va Caraways?"

"True power," he answered, "has a beneficial effect upon a true leader-in that it humbles that leader into a realization of his responsibilities to others.

She shrugged her gleaming white Shoulders and tossed her head disdainfully, throwing raven black tresses across her shapely back. "Shall you speak in parables to me?" she said. "I do not understand you."

"Don't you?" He glared at her. "Then I will make my thoughts quite clear to you, La. Look at me!"

Strangely fascinated by him, she looked into his penetrating eyes as he spoke to her intensely, rapidly, with a positive tone of wisdom and authority the source of which she could not define.

"I will analyze yourself and your Situation for you so that you may have a basis for the judgement of your acts. You sit now on the prow of a juggernaut which can destroy or work salvation in the destinies of men. Here are three hundred thousand savage green men, tens of thousands of the Lost People, and hundred of thousands of red and yellow men, armed and ready to do your bidding or to achieve their own ambitions. You have attracted both the sincere and the fanatics and others who do not support the religious cause or who are too dim-witted to grasp such a concept. Your personal ambition has led you to influence men by telling them you will lead them to the last battleground-the greatest battle ever fought-that there will be justice, loot, rewards and food, according to their desires. In the midst of it all, La, you are actually fearful of the magnitude of the thing which you have set in motion. You find yourself a lone woman caught on a tidal wave of violence, pent up emotions of the soul,

murderous wrath, covetous piracy and blood-hungry bestiality in its most raw and primordial form."

As she listened to him, spellbound, she began to tremble. She fought for self-control, but he continued relentlessly.

"Yet, withal, you are amazed at the nerve, confidence and nameless wisdom which keeps you successfully at the head and in the leader's seat. You are discovering within yourself a bottomless well of talent and power over the minds of men and beasts. That it is something truly mystical and very real terrifies you. You are aware of an unknown strength, and you wonder if, after all, you are a living goddess. You fear that you are not Issus, yet at the same time you fear that you are, because your subconscious self forewarns you of the terrible responsibility that single fact would involve."

Tears began to well in La's great, blue eyes. "Don't!" she pleaded. "Stop!"

"How shall you use this power, La?" Va Caraways almost thundered at her. The last of the rear guard had passed them now and they were alone except for a restless, grumbling detail of great white apes. His voice echoed somberly above the swirling waters of the sacred river. "What is good and what is evil? Of these things must you think before we arrive in Tarnath. Perhaps the great Thark chieftain, Tars Tarkas, is shrewd enough to have placed a double meaning in his question, La. What are your secret plans? What shall be the real purpose of this mighty hegira? To fulfill mortal ambition and satisfy ephemeral desires of the heart and flesh at the cost of self-seeking pillage and destruction-or shall we be guided by a noble cause borne in strength and nurtured by the enriching flood of benevolence from a true goddess of the prophecies? I say unto you, your fears will vanish and your enduring glory and power will rise to the pinnacle of fulfillment when you, yourself, realize that you are Issus! And the road to faith is not through self, but through humility and self effacement. Plan well your acts thenceforth, for on yourself may depend the lives and fortunes of millions yet unhatched. I have spoken!" He turned on his thout and rode swiftly after the distant torchlights of the rear guard.

La watched him go, and she struggled against the almost epileptic seizure which filled her body with cold trembling. At last, the tears dried in her eyes and her lips compressed in anger.

"Issus is a fate unto herself!" she cried out, as though Va Caraways could still hear her.

As she ordered her apes to resume the march and overtake the others, she rationalized stubbornly that to allow the will of Issus to be questioned was to deprive her sacred role of its validity.

And so, as of old, the vision of a tall, bronzed giant of a godlike man superimposed itself on the epic base-relief of world and men in mortal turmoil.

"Tarzan," she murmured, half aloud. "My Tharos Pthan! Beloved! Our day of fulfillment is at hand!"

Chapter XXVI - THE ZERO HOUR

WHEN Tarzan admitted this identity as Tharos Pthan, Them boomed forth a shout of triumph.

"Ha! At last, imposter, you come face to face with your master! Know you that Tario of Lothar is the true Tharos Pthan, and all others who lay claim to being the mate of Issus shall die!"

"If I am to die," said Tarzan, quietly, "then let it be at the hands of Tario, if he is able to destroy me."

"Issus, herself, should decide who is her rightful mate," interposed Kar Komak.

"I am the only mate of her who sits upon the Golden Throne at Tarnath," added Tarzan. "For her am I come to this world."

Thum held his sides and guffawed out of the bottom side of his chin, and some of the warriors behind him followed his example, although there were others who still looked at Tarzan's noble height and bearing with some misgivings.

"Enough!" exclaimed Thum, at last. "You are my prisoners. Come!" Wherewith, he picked Tarzan up with one hand and Kar Komak with the other, carrying them against his hips as though they had been baby lambs.

The apeman became aware that this towering monstrosity was not to be compared with the green men. His strength

was something to be wary of. In fact, he might well be a more formidable Opponent than a great white ape.

At sight of the undignified position of the two men under Thum's great arms, other warriors now joined in laughter and derision with the rest.

"What great warriors are these?" they shouted to each other.

"They have submitted to capture as cowards, without even the sign of a struggle!"

"It would be a waste of Tario's time if we were to bring them to his attention."

"Yet those are my orders," said the Them dwar who was in Charge of the arresting detail. "Do you not know the identity of this other one? He is equally important."

Kar Komak looked over at Tarzan in surprise, then at the Them.

"Is my identity then known to you?" he asked.

The Them laughed. "You are easily identified. Your white skin might indicate that you are a Them, but your albino hair says that you are a Lotharian. And there is only one Lotharian outside of Tarnath-one for whose capture Tario has personally offered a great reward. You are Kar Komak, the bowman.

"This is true," said Kar Komak, suppressing a smile of triumph.

"I have been trying to reach Tario, because I have a message for him."

"You shall see him," bellowed Thum, joggling him roughly, "because Tario has a message for you-and it is death."

They had arrived at the landing craft, and now Thum threw both of the men unceremoniously onto its deck. Tarzan rolled onto his feet, catlike, a low growl emanating from behind bared teeth, while he glared menacingly at Thum, ready to spring.

"Careful!" whispered Kar Komak. "Remember our plan!"

Thum heard him growl and caught his menacing look. "What manner of animal are you!" he exclaimed. "TB teach you to growl at me!" Whereupon he struck Tarzan a surprisingly swift blow on the head with

the back of his hand, and the apeman was sent sprawling almost over the opposite gunwale.

It was a stupendous blow, fully as jarring as the kick of a mule. Tarzan's senses reeled, carrying him to the brink of unconsciousness. He shook his head and got to his knees, aware of warm blood on his temple.

"Enough!" cried the Them officer. "Thum, you are under orders to stop abusing the prisoners. You have proved your point. This man could not possibly be the true Tharos Pthan."

As Tarzan gathered himself for a savage charge, Kar Komak walked between him and his tormentor, signaling him to desist.

"For Helium!" he whispered.

So it was that the two adventures submitted to their captors and were borne on a fighting ship of the Holy Alliance to Tarnath. Great was Tarzan's wonderment, in spite of Kar Komak's previous description, when he beheld the long, deep Valley of Tarnath and its stupendous, frowning escarpment, towering as it did above the two mile deep depression where lay the Lake of Darkness. Moreover, the sight of so many great military encampments below and the huge, alerted fleets maneuvering above reminded him of the massive fight power he had once seen poised on the coasts of England at D-Day during World War II.

"John Carter must be quite a formidable Warlord," he commented to Kar Komak, "to have inspired such a mighty preparation on the part of his enemies."

"This is only the Main Base of Operations," replied Kar Komak, who was carefully observing the thousands of battle craft in the sky over Tarnath. "Entire nations are also allied with force, in the outer world. I fear for the success of the Warlord now, for religious fanaticism has divided his ranks, and as you can see, the enemy has been alerted. From the looks of it, they have already received word that his grand invasion is imminent."

Then we have arrived none too soon," commented Tarzan.

Thum overheard their remarks, and he laughed derisively. "What difference does it make to you?" he bellowed. "You have a Space reserved for you in one of the dungeons of the Escarpment-and there you will await the pleasure of Tharos Pthan, who is Tario."

"The proof of that," retorted Kar Komak, "rests with Issus."

"No," sneered Thum, showing them both his mighty fish "This is proof enough-and the bolted door that will keep you prisoner until Tario summons you before him!"

Tarzan chose to remain indifferent to the taunts of this hideous synthetic monstrosity. Instead, he gazed fixedly at the top of the Escarpment where Kar Komak had told him the city of Zumor was located. It was there that he would find his beloved wife, Jane Clayton. He trembled within himself to think that once she had been separated from him by forty-eight million miles of interplanetary Space, and now only a mile or two of physical distance lay between himself and her!" Once seven years of time had separated them-and now, if God willed it, only days, or even hours, lay between them.

Thum's bolted door, as they soon learned, was nothing less than promised, for it was constructed of the impenetrable material of the Escarpment, itself. The dungeon in which they soon found themselves was large and occupied by half a dozen other prisoners, but it differed from Kar Komak's former prison chiefly in the matter of elevation. This one was but half a mile above the Lake of Darkness, deep within the great looming walls of the Valley where the sunlight seldom reach-ed. Above them the incredible mass of the Escarpment towered fully two and a half miles into the sky. A single barred window emitted the indirect light of day.

Tarzan's first act was to inspect the window and its bars. He observed that the latter were thicker than those which he

had defied in the pits of Lothar, yet they were composed of the same mild metal as the others. As he pretended to gaze out the window, he overheard the comments of the other prisoners behind him.

"How futile it is, stranger, to contemplate escape through the window! Even were it possible to remove the bars, you would find beyond the sill a sheer drop of a full haad and more, into the Lake of Darkness, where men say a giant whirlpool will such you down into the bowels of Barsoom."

"I know this rock," said another. "Fifty ads(13) below here is a balcony. It gives entrance into the lower regions of the fortress."

"I, too, know the rock," said yet another, who was evidently a native of Tarnath. "Below the level of this dungeon lies a region which is given over to the ghosts of our ancestors-uninhabited by any others save banths and great white apes."

Tarzan had not turned to face the others meanwhile. Instead, he continued quietly to observe the bars before him, remembering a story he had once read concerning a giant grizzly bear that refused to be imprisoned. The author of the story had humanized the bear's thoughts and caused it to philosophize that "iron will bend and steel will bread."

As he realized that his own beloved wife breathed and moved close above his head, Tarzan smiled a cold, hard smile, knowing full well these bars would fail to hold him if this window were to be the chosen avenue of his escape.

Finally, he turned to seek out his companion, Kar Komak, whom he found close beside him in a corner, staring moodily into space.

"There is a thing I must tell you," said Tarzan, seating himself beside him. Out of earshot of the others, he continued almost in a whisper, "In case we should become separated and something should happen to me, I would like you to know the hiding place of an article which may be of great value some day." Whereupon, he told him of the Great Star of Issus and how he had hidden it in the mouth of the gargoyle above the entrance to Tario's Chambers in the palace at Lothar.

(13) Ad-Martian foot, or about 11.694 inches.

The news of this ancient jewel excited Kar Komak greatly. "By Issus!" he exclaimed. "Do you know what this means? It means you are actually the genuine Tharos Pthan! Do you not recall the legend? It makes mention of the Great Star of Issus, which Tharos Pthan was to place upon the brow of Issus in the final hour of fulfillment!"

Tarzan smiled. "How inconsiderate of me to thus thwart the plan of the ages. I have neglected to bring it along with me.

"The legend says that it is twice the size of a man's eye."

Tarzan sobered. "And so it is. I find myself confused by the mysterious portents and signs of the times here upon Barsoom. The diadem of which I speak actually originated on this planet, yet I have brought it here from my own world. Then, too, the history of La is equally mysterious."

"She may indeed be Issus," commented Kar Komak, gloomily.

"Perhaps it is foolish of me to presume to stand in the way of that which is written. You are Tharos Pthan, and so you are her mate."

"No, my friend. My mate is here above us in Zumor," answered the apeman.

Kar Komak shook his head, stubbornly. "That union is only a temporary thing of the mortal world. When your hour of destiny arrives, Tharos Pthan, you shall be enthroned in eternity with the living goddess, Issus herself, whom I have presumed to call 'my princess.' What a fool I have been."

Tarzan frowned as he observed the genuine anguish written in his companion's noble features. "This business is becoming quite grave," he remarked. "Perhaps I should take your legend more seriously. On my own planet there were times of miracles. It is not outside the boundaries of reason to consider that this may be your own age of revelation. There is a very strange fact concerning La which I feel I should share with you now, but I must bind you to strictest confidence. It is her most intimate secret."

Tarzan then revealed to Kar Komak the secret curse of La's existence, which she had confided to him in the Palace of Lothar. As he told it, Kar Komak tensed, and his eyes widened in alarm.

"By the gods!" he whispered, frightened. "This is the final proof! She is Issus! It is proof incontrovertible! Does she know it not?" Cannot you, your self, understand its significance?"

"She has not quite put two and two together yet, as we say on Jasoom," replied the apeman, solemnly, "but ever since she revealed this incredible thing to me I have been gravely troubled by its significance. It answers, to me, the whole mystery of Atlantis."

"Atlantis?"

"That is another story, which explains why a continent called Africa, on Jasoom, was the apparent origin of a great race of black-skinned men."

Kar Komak's head jerked up. "The First Born!" he exclaimed. "The original guardians of Issus!"

"And in a place called Egypt," said Tarzan, "her legend must have been born anew, for they once worshipped a goddess called Isis."

Kar Komak frowned deeply. "There is another portion of the Legend of Issus which is not well known to men, and I have forgotten it. Would that I might remember it now!"

Further discussion of the matter was interrupted by the muffled sound of trumpets and the shouts of men above them in the great Escarpment. They also heard similar sounds rising out of the Valley below and from the multitudinous patrols along the tops of its mighty walls. With one accord, the prisoners in the dungeon crowded to the window.

"The invasion has begun!" exclaimed one of them, pointing to the sky. "look at the fleets! They are moving swiftly into battle formation!"

"And there in the Valley you can see the green tribesmen mustering their utans together."

"I see the Third Army up above them there. Those are the Tarnathian regulars. Oh, they've been alerted, all right! There's going to be an attack!"

"Look!" cried the first observer, pointing up the Valley and above the horizon. "The battle fleets of the Warlord!"

Tarzan and Kar Komak saw them, too. At first they seemed to be but a thin line of birds migrating northward, followed by other lines to the east and to the west, and in a few moments the distant dots in the sky began to resolve themselves into thousands of majestic warships.

"They are too far away yet to make out their colors," commented Kar Komak, excitedly.

"And too far out of range to commence firing," commented one of the red men. "But they're probably of Helium or of Ptarth, or both."

"This fortress has very long range guns," said the Tarnathian. "It could fire upon them even now, but I know what they are waiting for."

"And what is that?" asked Kar Komak.

"The fortress command is hoping to draw them closer, within a short march of the Holy Alliance armies," was the reply. "And then, the secret weapon of the First Born will be used."

"You mean the beam which nullifies the eighth Barsoomian ray," said Kar Komak. "I knew of its location before this, and I pray to the gods that the Warlord knows of it by now!"

"Evidently, he does not," replied the Tarnathian, "because his ships are at its mercy at this moment."

"Tell me, Tarnathian," continued Kar Komak, "if this secret weapon has been installed on all of the ships of the Holy Alliance or on but a few."

The red man looked at him suspiciously. "Why should I tell you?" he retorted. "you might well be a Them disguised, sent here to spy upon me. I worked on the weapon, and now they say I know too much."

"Know you not whom you would serve if you revealed this thing? It is important that you tell me what you know."

Now, the remaining prisoners turned their attention upon the newcomers for the moment.

"This man here," said Kar Komak, pointing to Tarzan, "is the only one who seems to be disguised. Can you not recognize him for what he is? He is the genuine Tharos Pthan!"

Tarzan started to speak his denial of this, but Kar Komak warned him to maintain silence. The other prisoners now looked upon him with a new set of evaluations, but it was plain that most of them were skeptical.

"If this be so," said another red man, "how comes it that he finds himself imprisoned here?"

"Tario is Tharos Pthan," said another. "Even now it is said that he plans to take Issus to mate as soon as victory is won.

Tarzan frowned. "She shall never be his mate," he almost growled, "so long as I live."

The Tarnathian snickered. "You speak boldly for one who is imprisoned."

"Never fear," said Kar Komak. "He is Tharos Pthan and he has his own reasons for being here. The important thing is to tell us of the secret weapon."

"It is not on the ships," said the Tarnathian. "There is but one projector in existence, hidden in the golden tower of Zumor. But it, alone, will suffice, I am afraid."

"Only one!" exclaimed Kar Komak. "Then there is a chance!"

"I doubt it," said another. "Look you now-out there! Already the nullifier is at work!"

When Tarzan and Kar Komak looked, they observed that the invading fleets of warships were settling rapidly to the ground beyond the valley's walls.

"Their buoyancy tanks are useless under the influence of the nullifier beam," explained the Tarnathian. "Now the fortress will fire upon them and the Holy Alliance fleets will attack-and you will no doubt see the armies here begin their grand attack overland."

As he finished speaking, they heard the dull booming sounds of mighty guns above them, and far away on the horizon they could see the smoke clouds rising where the explosive radium shells wrecked havoc among the advanced units of the invader's warships, which were already grounded. The great fleets moved out swiftly from Tarnath and soared high above the opposing forces, rifling them and dropping bombs.

"They will be massacred," commented Tarzan.

"I know the temperament of most of those troops," returned Kar Komak, with a grim smile. "Bombs and Shells alone cannot discourage them. They will be disembarking now and charging toward the Valley."

"They will be met by these great armies which are lying in wait for them here," replied the Apeman. "Something should be done. I think we had better try to escape and reach the golden tower of which the Tarnathian speaks. If their single nullifier can be destroyed, it will give John Carter the advantage."

Kar Komak smiled. "And you say you are not Tharos Pthan? Here you stand enclosed in a dungeon below the fortress, yet you calmly harbor thoughts of conquering it. You must be relying on secret powers which yet remain to be revealed. As for myself, I can escape from here, for I know my own powers--"

Suddenly, Kar Komak paled and his eyes stared into space. He trembled visibly. Then he staggered back toward a stone bench and sat down.

"By the holy seed of life!" he exclaimed.

"What ails you, friend?" asked Tarzan.

"I-I have just remembered! The final words of the Legend of Issus!"

Tarzan waited for the Lotharian to continue, but he only stared incredulously into space while beads of Perspiration emerged upon his forehead.

"Well, Tharos Pthan," said the Tarnathian, "if you would overthrow Tario, you had better help the Warlord quickly. His invasion fleet is being demolished."

"I am sorry," said the apeman to Kar Komak. "We will have to consider your legend at a later time. Just now, we should be concentrating upon escape from this place."

Having said this, he turned abruptly to the bars in the window and grasped them with mighty hands. While the other prisoners watched in sudden wonderment, he braced his Shoulders against the casing and, taking advantage of all the leverage he could, he pressed outward, throwing all the savage strength of his powerfully muscled body against the metal, which slowly began to yield.

"Look!" exclaimed one of them. "His strength is superhuman! The bars are bending!"

As the bars opened further and one of them finally burst loose from its anchorage, even the Tarnathian was convinced.

"He is Tharos Pthan, after all!" he exclaimed. "It is a miracle!"

At that moment, however, the door of the dungeon swung open, and all except Kar Komak turned to see the towering, hideous form of Thum step inside. He closed and locked the door behind him and then caught Tarzan directly in his baleful gaze.

"Tario or no," he rumbled, "the laws of Tarnath permit me to have my way with you now. You are trying to escape, and so I am permitted to kill you!"

Having delivered himself of this declaration, Thum knocked two prisoners senseless who stood in his way. He stepped over their prostrate bodies and moved purposefully upon Tarzan, who had not yet made an opening large enough in the window to permit escape...

Chapter XXVII - INTO THE ABYSS

AS Thum advanced swiftly toward Tarzan, Kar Komak seemed to be oblivious of what was transpiring. He still stared into emptiness as though Struck dumb with his thought, his forehead a glistening mass of Perspiration.

The other prisoners in the dungeon, being unarmed, were helpless to be of assistance. However, after having been told that Tarzan was Tharos Pthan, and after having witnessed his demonstration of superhuman strength at the barred window, they wondered for the moment if, indeed, such a man would need any assistance at all, even against such a stupendous beast as Thum.

Tarzan immediately placed before his mind's eye his precious goal, so near above him on top of the Escarpment, which served to sharpen his instinct of self-preservation. And so it was that before his titanic antagonist reached him, he charged with a beastly roar which set the red men's spines to tingling and Startled Kar Komak out of his trance.

The latter saw the apeman slam a devastating blow into the pit of Thum's stomach, which the Lotharian knew would have killed a giant white ape. Thum staggered back heavily, grunting in pain, taken completely by surprise, yet he did not fall. Before he could gather himself for a counter-charge, Tarzan was upon him again, this time with a quick leg-trip that brought the towering brute to the floor, and in the next instant the Lord of the Jungle pounced upon him and smashed home his fist straight into Thum's Cyclopean face.

Several of the prisoners gasped when they saw that almost featureless face crack under the terrible impact. The blow that could instantly kill a giant thout split open Thum's face and drew forth a dark, slow river of ghastly blood. By ordinary human Standards, he should have died, yet it was only then that it came to the monster's stunned senses that he would have to defend his life against this unsuspected demon of a white man who but a moment before had been his intended victim.

Instead of lying there in Woody, broken dissolution, Thum rumbled an incoherent warning and rose slowly to his feet with the apeman clinging to him.

"Tarzan!" cried Kar Komak. "He is synthetic, not human! No part of him can die except by complete dismemberment and starvation or by fire! Don not try to destroy him! Break away!"

Too late did this warning come to the apeman, however, for he now found himself pinned against Thum's giant chest in a cold, dead grip of granite, so ponderous and immovable did it seem. Yet he struggled mightily to get his own arms inside that grip before the life should be crushed from him. Slowly, inch by inch, as though he were bending iron bars, he thrust his arms up under him against Thum's body, to where he could start bracing back, and when finally he was ready, he pushed outward against his adversary with a savage burst of energy, almost blacking out with the effort. As he did so, Thum's great arms yielded, and Tarzan broke free, hurtling to the opposite end of the dungeon.

Thum stood there breathing heavily, his broken, bleeding face impossible to decipher, but his huge, single eye held fast upon the figure of his antagonist. As the apeman rose again to his feet, Kar Komak suddenly stepped into Thum's path. There was a strange new expression on the Lotharian's face, but for the moment it seemed to escape definition.

"Desist, Thum!" he commanded. "You know not what forces you face here. Interfere, and you shall be destroyed!"

Thum was beyond conversation at the moment. His mind was a seething cauldron of hatred and rage. Like the dumb, injured brute that he was, he could think of nothing now but to destroy. He took a step forward, his grotesque, giant hands outstretched to seize Kar Komak.

Instantly, a dozen phantom bowmen materialized in the dungeon, and simultaneously they discharged their arrows at Thum, amidst the shouts of astonishment on the part of the prisoners.

"He's a Lotharian!" shouted one of them.

Thum straightened rigidly, tugging at a cluster of feathered shafts piercing his chest. He groaned hideously, almost blind with the induced illusion of pain which Kar Komak's mind was causing him.

"Stand back, Thum," Kar Komak told him, "or my bowmen will fire again." To Tarzan he said, "Make good your escape, my friend."

"And you, Kar Komak?" questioned Tarzan.

"I have an urgent errand of my own, Tarzan. Never fear. I shall escape."

The apeman smiled grimly. "I cannot leave a friend to face my enemy while I escape, Kar Komak. You must come with me."

"My mission is in another direction. But pass through the window, if you can, and as you leave you may witness the manner of my escape."

"Very well," replied the apeman. Then he turned to the other prisoners. "You men-if you would help our cause-assist me."

The four red men who had remained unharmed by Thum's attack crowded about him instantly.

"You may count on us, Tharos Rhan!" exclaimed one of them.

"How can we help?" asked another.

Tarzan shook his head. "Enough of this! I am not Tharos Rhan. But I would help John Carter's cause this day."

"But you are Tharos Rhan!" exclaimed another.

"Hurry-all of you!" urged Kar Komak, as he and his phantoms still held Thum at bay.

"I need your harness Straps," said Tarzan. "While I finish making an opening in the window, please buckle your Straps together. I'll need some kind of a lifeline for lowering myself to the balcony below us."

Without another word, the four set to the task with swift and practiced efficiency, while the apeman labored at the metal bars, slowly bending them aside. And all the while, Thum's baleful, Single eye did not lose one detail of Tarzan's work.

Finally, a satisfactory opening was made, and the other prisoners quickly attached one end of a long series of harness Straps to one of the bars which yet remained intact.

"You men," said Tarzan, "may go first, and I will follow."

One of the red men paled, shaking his head. "I am a warrior," he said, "not a blind fool! Weaponless, none but your self might hope for survival in those dreaded Chambers below!"

"Make good your own escape," insisted the man of Tarnath.

Tarzan smiled. "And when both my friend and I are gone?-what of your chances against Thum?"

The Tarnathian laughed. "Is it not obvious that Thum will follow you?"

"But the bars!" protested another. "The passage is yet not large enough for his bulk!"

"The bars will not stop me!" rumbled Thum.

"Go, Tarzan," urged Kar Komak. "I sense that he will not be held much longer. He cannot be killed, even if he were dismembered entirely."

Tarzan turned then and nimbly climbed through the opening. He paused, looking down the face of the Escarpment into a dizzying abyss. Half a mile below him was the Lake of Darkness, half enshrouded by mists arising out of the great whirlpool at one end of it. Directly beneath him, only fifty feet down, was an ancient

balcony. His ladder of Straps reached only thirty feet of the distance, but he knew that he could drop the remaining twenty feet with safety, thanks to the lesser gravity of Barsoom.

He looked back into the dungeon. "Now," he said, quietly, to Kar Komak, "prove that you can escape, for if you do not, that poor dumb freak may yet destroy you in spite of your mentality."

For answer, Kar Komak looked strangely off into nothingness.

"Until we meet again, then, Tarzan," he said, tensely. "Good luck!"

In the next instant, the Lotharian disappeared into thin air, and with him went not only his phantom bowmen but the arrows in Thum's chest. The monster looked down at himself in uncomprehending amazement. Then he roared out a triumphant challenge and charged the window.

Tarzan waited no longer. With the swift agility of an ape, he swung down the Straps toward the balcony. Yet, hardly had he commenced his descent when he heard the bars of the window above him crack loose from their weakened anchor-ing, and he saw Thum's hideous bulk lunging through.

No sooner had the latter added his huge weight to that of the apeman's than the straining buckles at the window parted. Tarzan remembered hearing the prisoners above him cry out in dismay, and then he was falling outward into the great abyss, with Thum tumbling after him-down and down, swiftly, toward the Lake of Darkness, half a mile below.

Instinctively, he twisted his body in the air, seeking to align himself vertically, head down, arms and finger-tips outstretched to cut the water. In spite of the hopelessness of his predicament, Tarzan's life credo yet guided his efforts to preserve himself, for always where there was life there was hope.

The broad, black waters seemed to hurtle upward to meet him, and with the vision of Jane Clayton foremost in his mind he cleaved the surface of the lake in a clean, perfect dive that plunged him almost instantly into depths which struck at his ears with the sharpness of daggers.

He remembered arching in order to turn his course upward, and a searing flame of pain crossed his back. Only semi-conscious, he seemed to drift slowly toward the surface at last, borne by an ever swiftening current toward the whirlpool.

His lungs threatened to burst as the blackness of death crowded in upon his life. Yet in spite of his extremity, he would never forget the sight of Thum's head, completely severed from his mangled body, plunging past him, with its single great eye glaring at him in still living hate.

Only in the last moment before oblivion did he see the thing which came downward, reaching out for him. It was a man thing with a great, shining sword, yet seeming like a mighty angel, with giant, feathered wings outspread through the murky, watery depths.

Then he lost consciousness...

* * *

Far behind the great circle of grounded invasion ships moved a giant, gray battle cruiser, slowly, and low above the ground. It was just beyond range of the nullifier beam, traveling without insignia or colors. For almost two hours, it had traveled around the area of Tarnath. Whenever its buoyancy began to fail, it would withdraw until normal Operation was obtained.

From time to time, one of the Heliumitic scout-ships or allied patrol boats would challenge the cruiser menacingly, but always a quick flashing secret signal would gain it clear passage.

Underneath a false deck, wearing the disguise of a red Martian panthan, John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom, pointed his short-sword at a map of Tarnath, whereon a wide circle had been drawn. His sword-point pricked their circle's center.

"There, gentlemen, you have the source of the nullifier beam-in the Escarpment, itself. We may thank our ancestors that this weapon has not been installed on the decks of their battle-craft. The beam generator is stationary. It is up to us to locate it, and to eliminate it!" He looked up at the at the hundred of commandoes before him. "Tarnath is surrounded by fifteen thousand ships carrying

a total complement of five million men. True, most of the ships are on the ground, but we expected that. The plan has been followed to the letter. Our major forces were to move in on all sides as far as possible, and they have done so. We were to hold our fire, as the Fortress of Tarnath may not be damaged by ordinary ordnance. By feigning helplessness, however, we have suffered a minimum bombardment, and now a small portion of our ground forces are making an appearance in an attempt to draw out the Tarnathian armies from their sanctuary in the Valley. When this happens, our grounded fleets will open fire, and the main ground forces will charge.

"However, before that time arrives, we have to reach the fortress and, if possible, eliminate the nullifier. If we can do so, then our fleets will be airborne again, ready to cope with the fleets of the enemy. At the same time, as you all know, I am holding our heaviest ships and deadliest armaments in reserve at Okar, where the spies of the Holy Alliance have thus far been unable to penetrate. Once the nullifier has been taken care of, this heavy battle unit will move directly toward Tarnath.

"As you can see, almost everything depends upon the success of our own attack," he concluded. "We must find the nullifier!"

There was an undercurrent of response, but no great shout of enthusiasm. Five hundred lean, hard commandos, the picked fighters of more than seven nations, stared back at the magnificent figure of the Warlord, some of them in sullen silence, others with a troubled expression of uncertainty. Certainly, he knew it was not fear which gripped them, for the Barsoomian fighting man would rather breathe the smoke of battle than the perfume of his lady's ear.

Now, Talu, the yellow-skinned, black bearded Jeddak of Okar, stepped close to the Warlord and spoke in low tones. "Clarify your position, John Carter, as you have to me. Your stubbornness and your reticence has lost you the support of Zodanga and other lesser nations, not to mention the allegiance of Tars Tarkas, himself. Speak frankly, dangerous though the subject may be, and let them know that they go forth to battle as men of intelligence who would defend Barsoom against false deception and opportunism and anarchy."

A shadow crossed John Carter's face at mention of his old friend and mighty battle companion, Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark. "Very well," he said to Talu. Then he looked into the tense faces of his waiting commandos. "Men, we will face the issue squarely. Ever since the so-called Holy Alliance began to organize, Barsoom has been torn between two ideologies. Yet we stand here ready to fight for neither one..."

As the assembled warriors stirred uneasily and looked at one another quizzically, he hastened to explain. "One ideology says that Barsoom must return to the old religion of Issus, which will be based on-a a reformed, genuine paradise in the Valley Dor by the Lost Sea of Korus." He frowned. "The Holy Alliance Claims that the original Issus has returned, according to prophecy-"

"And Tharos Pthan, as well!" cried a red warrior jed from Kaol.

"Rumors-false prophets!" retorted John Carter, stubbornly. "And there you have the opposite ideology, which is my own. I say that all the Propaganda issued by the Holy Alliance is a great black lie perpetrated by Tario the Lotharian, who calls himself Jeddak of Jeddaks of all Barsoom and who would, himself, be Tharos Pthan. I say that as he is a false usurper then so must be his Issus, or else an innocent victim of his hypnotic mentality-and the Therns and the First Born are attracted to him because of the promise of a return to their olden power-and eventually, the River Iss and the shores of Korus would become the same charnel house of hell as it was in the days when we blasted both of those empires from the seat of power and the false black Issus of Omean was overthrown.

As many of his listeners scowled darkly now, the Warlord held up his hand. "But remember! Today we fight for neither one of these ideologies. There is a third great cause which is a very fair compromise between the two. That is-we should fight for the right to directly examine and control the actions of the Holy Alliance. Let us fight for a truce between men's minds-so that the leaders of all Barsoom may decide this issue once and for all-at Tarnath, now!"

There was a moment of tense silence. Then, as one man, the commandos raised their swords with a shout of approval.

"For this we will fight, John Carter!"

"This is reason in a sea of doubt!"

"It is a warrior's way of going at it!"

"To Tarnath, then!"

"For Barsoom!"

"For Helium!"

"For the Warlord!"

When John Carter looked at Talu, the Jeddak smiled as though to say, "What did I tell you?"

The warlord drew his shining long-sword and raised it high. It was the same famous sword which had cut the roots of the old religion and opened a path of truth for all peoples of Barsoom. "Remove the false deck!" he cried. "Prepare the Mount! And remember-disperse for your approach. Fly low and fast. Then-converge upon the city of Zumor, as we have planned it. And may the true Issus, where ever she may be, smile upon your work this day!"

"The master stroke!" muttered Talu, grimly, as the commandos shouted in enthusiastic response.

John Carter's brief answering smile faded as he sheathed his sword. "We have mounts of our own, Talu. Let us go in the lead together..."

So it was that the false deck of the strange battle cruiser was removed, and from its inner holds emerged the secret weapon of the Warlord. Fighting commandos rose into the air on the backs of giant malagaors, the great man-carrying birds of the Toonolian Marshes- which were totally immune to the effects of the nullifier beam. Utan after utan they came, by the hundreds, dispersing widely and winging swiftly over the grounded Heliumitic fleets toward the towering Escarpment of Tarnath. And as they flew, five million warriors looked up and shouted encouragement.

John Carter and Talu of Okar flew side by side within earshot of each other, urging their great, powerful birds to greater speed. As they neared the valley's edge, they discerned the armies of Tarnath.

"Look!" shouted Talu. "They are emerging to Charge our forces!"

"Good!" returned John Carter. "The closer they get to our ships, the safer that area will be from bombardment!"

The two fighting men turned briefly to look back at the allied Heliumitic fleets, where they observed a thin line of mounted warriors moving forward to meet the mighty hordes of the enemy.

"We must hurry!" exclaimed Talu.

"Our own bombardment should begin," shouted John Carter. "It will distract attention from us!"

No sooner had he made this Observation than the rumble of explosions overtook them, and they saw the advancing vanguard of the Tarnathian hordes scatter before the Heliumitic bombardment. At the same time, as they looked back, they saw the main ground forces charging forward from the grounded ships, and faintly above the sound of shellfire and explosions they heard their roaring battle cry like the thunder of an advancing hurricane.

Meanwhile, units of the Holy Alliance air force now centered in upon the grounded ships and resumed their own bombardment even in the face of withering fire from below. Many a ship of Omean or of the vaunted Them Empire blasted into ruin before the allied guns of Helium, but the battle raged on relentlessly.

Singly and in widespread deployment, the commandoes flew onward, toward Zumor, hardly noticed by the great armies and airships thus engaged in mortal combat. John Carter and Talu were somewhat in the lead of the others and were the first to draw in upon the towering battlements of the ancient city atop the Escarpment. As they did so, the Warlord drew his long-sword in preparation for battle.

However, when they had arrived at a distance of several hundred yards from the outer walls, a great, solid phalanx of white-skinned, bowmen raised up along the battlements and drew their bowstrings, aiming ten thousand deadly arrows at them.

"The Lotharian phantoms!" shouted John Carter. "You know what to do! Remember Kar Komak's training!"

"Yes!" shouted Talu. "But the malagors think they are real!"

"Let us hope that they take aim only at us!"

When they drew within easy range of the bowmen, however, the myriad arrows were shot at both themselves and at the giant birds as well. The two men concentrated on the knowledge that the arrows were merely psychic phenomena and therefore would inflict no harm, and so the phantom shafts sped through them without damage. But not so with the malagors, which screamed in alarm and beat their mighty wings in a futile effort to escape.

Talu's mount staggered in mid-air, gravely wounded by a dozen shafts. John Carter saw the bearded Okarian jeddak carried to the base of Zumor's walls, where he clung to a precarious ledge as his malagor fell away into the three-mile abyss below.

The Warlord instantly turned his mount into a swift dive in order to get beneath the line of fire. But, as he did so, a hidden sniper within the fortress itself fired at him with a radium rifle. The projectile just grazed the bird's huge talons and exploded several yards beyond. The flash and concussion blinded and stunned both bird and man, and they plummeted together toward the Lake of Darkness.

Only moments before it reached the surface of the lake, the malagor rallied in a burst of energy, beating its wings wildly to break the fall, and in that same instant John Carter saw two struggling bodies plunge past him and hit unyielding stone, but the other clove the surface in a perfect dive.

Then he and his Mount struck, not hard, but swiftly enough to carry them deep down into chilling darkness, where a giant current smote them and carried them toward the whirlpool.

Chapter XXVIII - THE LOOM OF FATE

JOHN Carter had clung to the malagor in order to have it break his fall, and now in the depths of the Lake of Darkness he clung to it because its mighty efforts to regain the surface were more productive of results than his own might have been, unaided. The malagors were adept at diving below the surface of the Toonolian swamp waters after their prey, and so it was that this present circumstance was not unnatural to it.

As it swam instinctively, fighting for the surface, the al-most naked body of a white man drifted close, and John Carter grasped it by one arm. When he broke the surface and gasped for air, this stranger he had rescued did the same, though he was still not quite aware of his actions. The struggling malagor gained a rocky shore ledge just before the rushing waters curved into a descending fall that roared into the black mouth of the whirlpool.

As the two men fell gasping to the damp, dark ledge, the Warlord noticed for the first time that his malagor was sorely wounded by the phantom arrows of the bowmen. He tried, mentally, to dissuade the great bird from believing in the reality of the psychic phenomenon, but in vain. The giant creature shuddered at the ledge, then fell back into the current and was swallowed up by the whirlpool.

He examined that ominous, roaring hole in the ground

and saw that it was really more of a giant cataract. The rocky ledge on which he now found himself widened near the dark crevasse and seemed to form a series of natural Steps down into subterranean depths alongside the rushing waters. Obviously, the Lake of Darkness was the source of some vast subterranean river-perhaps the River Iss itself.

But there was little time for such conjecture. As it had happened so often in the course of his past adventures, Providence had rescued him again from death only to plunge him into the next gamut of mortal danger. He looked up at the valley's frowning walls and at the stupendous Escarpment, discovering that the Lake of Darkness was effectually a prison. The lowest wall was that of the Valley floor, to his right, which broke off abruptly in a precipice two hundred

feet high. Up there he saw green trees and jungle grasses beckoning, but there was no way up.

Dimly, there came to his ears the sound of distant battle. Far above he heard the guns of the fortress, itself, taking part in the conflict. And high aloft in the blue sky he could make out the tiny specks which he knew would be some of his commandoes, still trying to assail the defenses of Zumor. Well, Talu was up there somewhere. He might make it, he reflected. And here he was at the bottom of the Escarpment. At least he was entirely out of range of the Tarnathian guns.

The man beside him shook his head and sat up. When John Carter looked at him, the stranger smiled, ruefully.

"Thanks," he said, succinctly, and immediately commenced analyzing his surroundings.

The Warlord now began to examine his unknown companion in some surprise, for he noticed only now the heroic size and proportions of the man.

"Who are you?" he queried, suspiciously. In spite of the other's hair, he might just possibly turn out to be a Them, or even a Lotharian.

The stranger looked him over with equal wariness. "I seem to be heir to many names, only one of which you might recognize." Tarzan was considering the admonitions of Kar Komak. Of all roles possible to assume, there was one in particular which seemed most likely to gain him allegiance on the part of any red warrior such as this fine looking panthan beside him. "Men call me Tharos Pthan." he added.

The reaction of this red man, however, was not what he had anticipated. The man sprang to his feet, and instantly, Tarzan found the keen point of a long-sword at his throat. He could not recall ever having looked into a more threatening pair of steel grey eyes.

"Good"! Exclaimed the latter. "Tario is one who claims that distinction. You must be the other of whom I have heard. It is well! I have wanted to meet both of you. If I can destroy you, then you are a lie. If I cannot destroy you, then the prophecy has come true-and I, for one, will be your most faithful ally! But I must know the truth!"

Tarzan returned him a quiet smile. "Is this the code of a warrior?" he asked, looking at the long, keen blade thrust at him. "I am unarmed. If you would reduce your armaments to mine, I might be vouchsafed a basis for argument."

John Carter raised his brows. "You beg for advantage?" he queried. "If you are the promised deity, Tharos Pthan, then you are thrice-armed, my friend! It is I who have the disadvantage, even with this blade at your throat!"

Tarzan moved more quickly than even the Warlord was prepared for. Faster than the eye could follow, his hand shot upward, deflecting the sword point for one split second. In the next instant, he tripped his antagonist and had him unarmed.

Instead of paling in fright, however, the other grinned confidently. He grasped Tarzan, preparatory to overcoming his attack with superior strength. But then, his face clouded with puzzlement, for the apeman took hold of his arms and pinned them with apparent ease.

"This is amazing!" John Carter said, then, "Your quickness and strength surpass my own!"

"What is so amazing about that?" asked Tarzan, though secretly he had been astounded by the ferocious strength of this man. For a moment it had seemed to him that he had come to grips with a great white ape. "But enough of this! Are you for or against the Alliance?"

John Carter scowled. "Against it!"

"Good! Then do not waste your time opposing me. We should work together. There is little time to lose."

"I am not convinced that you are Tharos Pthan," replied John Carter, "but you are certainly a better candidate than Tario. Come to think of it, if you are opposed ;to the Alliance and the people believe in you, it might be a good temporary strategy to use you in this role-until the final truth is told."

"Who are you?" Tarzan asked him.

"I am Dotar Sojat, a soldier in the Service of Helium."

"Good!" said the apeman. "Then we are allies. Let us set to work!"

As Tarzan released John Carter and the two regained their feet, the latter reflected that if he should find it necessary to dispatch this mighty stranger in the future, he would not underestimate his amazing prowess again. He would be prepared. For the time being, he chose to regard his companion in the light of his possible Strategic value with relation to the fate of Barsoom.

"By the gods!" he exclaimed. "It might work! If we could let the forces of the enemy know that they are opposing Tharos Pthan, then they might turn their arms to our advantage."

"Another Strategist has already advised me of this possibility," replied Tarzan. "But, for the moment, we seem to be considerably isolated here." He turned his keen eyes toward the shadowed base of the Escarpment. "Look there. Do you discern an opening?" He pointed to the dim outline of a massive door.

"I see it," said Carter. "But do you also discern the fact that it is a gate in an outer wall? The top of the wall must be a full hundred ads high."

Tarzan scanned the wall. "It is not a wall," he answered. "But a dam-or dike. Evidently the water level here is variable at times."

The two men advanced along the rocky ledge toward the Escarpment. As they did so, they found that the ledge broadened out into a wide, barren shore which was more than a mile in length and half a mile deep. The great wall stood at the farther end. They walked rapidly toward it. When they arrived they found that there was no apparent means of opening the great door from their side.

"It is unfortunate that the wall is so high," observed John Carter. He knew that had it been only half as high, he might have attempted to scale it, but this lofty barrier was too much even for his earthly strength.

"Look out!" cried Tarzan. At the same time he pulled the Warlord with him behind a large overhanging rock just as an explosion shattered the ground where they had been standing. "There are sentinels on the wall!"

"Ah!" said the Warlord. "Then that means they are guarding a possible entrance to the fortress from its base! We must get over the top of that barrier!"

"Here comes a possible answer," replied the apeman, pointing upward. As John Carter followed his pointing finger with his eyes, he discerned half a dozen malagors descending rapidly toward them. On their backs he could make out the figures of his own commandos. Quickly, he signaled to them and they darted in swiftly under the protecting rock, barely escaping the radium rifle fire of the sentinels above.

"Sire!" cried the leading commando. "We thought you had perished in the lake!"

"Quickly!" exclaimed the Warlord. "Did you see any of the others enter Zumor?"

"None so far," came the reply. "The bowmen can kill the birds."

"Then you will follow a new plan of action at once! Two of you will remain here, as we need the malagors, but the rest of you will return aloft and contact as many of our special force as you can find. Bring them back here and we will assail that wall. But, if any of you fall into the hands of the enemy, pass the word among the common soldiers especially that Tharos Pthan Stands here now at the base of the Escarpment. He knocks at the door of Tarnath, and he awaits the faithful to follow him against Tario, who is a false prophet!"

The commandos looked at Tarzan in amazement, and evident awe.

"Is this he who slew the mad zitidar in the pits of Lothar?" asked one. "All Barsoom has heard of that one's prowess by now."

"It is he," said the Warlord.

"But why Stands he here, then, instead of smiting his enemies?"

"He Stands at my side," replied John Carter. "Tell them that. And we shall not wait for the allegiance of all men before entering the fortress."

So it was that four of the commandos flew swiftly upward again, bravely dodging the fire of the sentinels, but only three of them made it over the valley's walls. The fourth one met with an explosive

bullet, and he and his mount fell back into the lake where they sank from sight and were seen no more.

"May his ancestors receive him as he deserves," commented the Warlord, glumly. "At least, three have escaped. If only one of them makes contact with the others, my plan has a chance."

"I did not realize you were one of the commanding officers," commented Tarzan.

One of the remaining commandos laughed. "Indeed!-" he started to say, but John Carter interrupted him.

"We will wait but a short while for reinforcements," he said. "If they do not come, Tharos Pthan and I will want your mounts, so stand by."

The two commandos surveyed the wall and the giant door. Then one of them turned to the Warlord.

"It would be better to wait long, if necessary, for the others, sire," he said. "You cannot go with only one companion, however formidable he may be. You are not equipped to face an entire armed garrison, unless Tharos Pthan is possessed of truly miraculous powers, and if that is the case, why stands he here waiting?"

At that moment, fully two hundred Tarnathian guards-men mounted the battlements of the giant wall and aimed their rifles at them. The four men crowded in under the protecting rock just in time to escape a deadly hail of explosive bullets.

At the same time, however, an answering fusillade struck the enemy guards and withered their ranks with a deadly accuracy of aim. Half a hundred Tarnathians fell forward from the wall.

"Where did that come from?" asked the Warlord.

For answer, Tarzan touched his arm. "Look!" he said, pointing toward the whirlpool. "This is a day of miracles."

When John Carter and his two commandos looked in the direction the apeman had indicated, they discerned the vanguard of a powerful army of green and red men alike emerging from the cavernous depths into which the whirlpool descended. They were firing at the guards on the wall while those of them who were mounted on thots rode swiftly in their direction.

"Merciful gods!" ejaculated the Warlord. "Look who leads them! It is none other than Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark!"

"I know not of him," said Tarzan, but others I seem to recognize."

Many of the advancing warriors also recognized Tarzan, for they had witnessed his work at Lothar. In fact, three of them had been his companions in the cage beside the arena.

"Tharos Pthan!" they cried, triumphantly.

John Carter surveyed his tall companion in deep puzzlement. "Can it be true?" he asked. "Are you really the fulfillment of prophecy?"

Tarzan returned him a grim smile. "No less, perhaps," he said, "than she whom you see on that litter borne by great white apes-for she is called Issus."

Both of them discerned a beautiful woman in a gorgeous palanquin, whose face, as she saw Tarzan, registered such an expression of joy and ecstatic relief as it has been vouchsafed few mortal men to see.

"Tharos Pthan!" they heard her cry from a distance, as she reached out her lovely white arms in a gesture of insuppressible longing.

John Carter gripped his sword. "By the gods!" he exclaimed, darkly. "Be this miracle or evil deception, I will see it through! If you both lie-then we shall let all Barsoom declare its own judgement of your fate?"

Chapter XXIX - SURPRISE WEAPON

A constant fire from the apparently inexhaustible ranks of this great army of green and red men now kept the Tarnathian garrison off the battlements of the great wall, which was an absolute necessity in view of the fact that very little shelter was afforded the invaders. They surged forward onto the shore area where it broadened out from the lake, filling it with thousands and tens of thousands, and still they came filing up out of the depths of the ground, many of them hailing the sight of the great Escarpment with cries of joy-others with grimmer shouts of triumph-or for vengeance.

Tars Tarkas, the great Thark jeddak, galloped his mount in close to where Tarzan and his companion stood together with the two commandos and the malagors. I "Kaor. panthan!" exclaimed the mighty green man, addressing the Warlord. "Methinks I penetrate that red disguise, for I have seen it before."

"Then will you know, my old friend," answered John Carter, "why I stand here before the gates of Tarnath and Zumor. But what is your allegiance, now that both of us are rejoined? Is it my side, or a middle path?"

Tarzan wondered much at the double meanings which passed between these two. The sudden attitude and tone of vast authority in his red companion also gave him food for thought.

Tars Tarkas swept his tremendous lance in La's direction. "There is cause enough for us both," he answered. "She is the living Issus! And it is she whom we come to place on the Golden Throne!"

John Carter looked once more in La's direction. his brow furrowed in dark trepidation. "Tars Tarkas," he said, "I will tell you what I have already told my special attack group today. Barsoom is divided between two greatly opposed ideologies, and there is a third great cause-a compromise between the two, We must fight for the right to directly examine and control the actions of the Holy Alliance. We must fight for a truce between men's minds-so that the leaders of Barsoom may decide this issue once and for all-here, at Tarnath."

As the Warlord spoke, Var Koros drew in close on his smaller mount. It was he who answered for Tars Tarkas.

"Well spoken!" he commented, gravely. "Though Issus may have returned to us, it is well that in this hour of fulfillment all mankind shall be satisfied concerning the confirmed Status of the reformed religion."

By this time, the white apes bearing La had drawn in close and set her litter upon the ground, Instantly, she sprang out and ran toward Tarzan, throwing herself into his arms.

"Beloved!" she cried. "At last we have found our true destiny! Do you not see that it was written thus?" She forgot, in her ardor, to use the language of the first men, speaking to him instead in the tongue of Barsoom.

Var Koros and Tars Tarkas surveyed Tarzan carefully.

"She has called him Tharos Pthan," said Var Koros. "I-" "A seeming male for Issus," added Tars Tarkas. "If he be that stranger who slew white apes and green men with his bare hands and killed the mad zitidar at Lothar."

Tarzan thrust La from him and suddenly frowned at all of them. He surprised La by speaking the Barsoomian tongue. "Enough!" he growled. "I am the mate of her who sits even now upon the throne of Issus-and for her alone am I come to this place."

"Ah!" cried Var Koros. "The other Issus!"

"An imposter!" La exclaimed, reddening in her anger and mortification. "It is she who is the traitor - whom I am come to expose and destroy!"

Tarzan's gray eyes turned cold as he surveyed La's tremendous following. Then he turned to her in a low, even tone of voice. "Stand not in my way, woman!" he warned. "A great and vital destiny may await you if you are deserving of it-but do not make me your enemy!"

La salved her mortification and secret lover's anguish with lofty derision. "Know you that the mate of Issus was born to do her bidding, Tharos Pthan?" she shouted. "You cannot be my enemy-for you are my slave!" Having said this, she signaled to Churg, the mightiest of her great white apes, to take the apeman prisoner.

The giant anthropoid moved forward toward Tarzan. He was impressively harnessed in the sacred Symbols of the cult of the Sun God, and on his brow he wore a white, turbaned affair of costly silk which supported a crude golden star. With an intuition born of the moment, Tars Tarkas, Var Koros and John Carter stood aside, waiting to see the outcome of this unexpected contest.

"The man is unarmed!" cried one of the commandos.

"But he is Tharos Pthan," explained another red man, confidently.

"It is the will of Issus," grinned Tars Tarkas, with the typical grim humor of his kind.

So it was that important representatives of an embattled world watched silently the developments of this predicament into which La had plunged her recalcitrant love.

Tarzan waited for Churg to make the first move, but suddenly his brow furrowed in puzzlement. He seemed to hesitate, uncertain.

Tarzan, came a powerful thought into his mind, 'Churg has been put out of the way temporarily. This mental image of him is my Camouflage. Yes, it is I, Kar Komak. I read your thoughts. There is no time to explain. You must pretend to attack me, and you must continue in the wie of Tharos Pthan. You will understand later-but quickly now-attack!'

Without further hesitation, then, Tarzan took the initiative. He sprang forward, and with a display of strength that elicited a great shout of astonishment from the onlookers he lifted "Churg" bodily off his feet and hurled him down the bank of the shore toward the Lake of Darkness. Instantly, he was after him, and the two closed with each other in silent combat, rolling ever nearer to the dark and swirling waters.

"What is your plan?" Tarzan asked him in a low voice as they struggled realistically with one another.

"No time to explain," answered the other swiftly. "Those other apes are real. Beware, Tarzan! I cannot show my hand here!"

La, perceiving Churg's difficulty, now ordered half a dozen more apes to assist their leader. With rumbling growls, they lumbered down the bank to do her bidding, even as Churg fell to one side, apparently knocked senseless by a blow from the apeman.

Where Tarzan had first displayed hesitancy in attacking Churg, he did not restrain himself now. With crushing blows, he fought the others, killing two and maiming another before he was finally pined to the ground.

La then ordered several of the green guards in her retinue to bind him in heavy chains.

"Truly, this man is superhuman," commented John Carter. "I do not approve this woman's judgement of him. It is not fitting for him to be chained."

"He is the mate of Issus-and as such he is to do her will," grinned Tars Tarkas. "But enough, my friend!" He addressed the Warlord. "What you have said is more enlightening than any of our previous conversations. On these grounds of compromise, we can agree.

What say you as to the best means of gaining entrance to the fortress?"

As the two discussed military strategy, Tarzan was borne by the apes to La's feet, where he glared upward at her in his maddening stoic calm as of old, save for a faint, warning redness in the scar that crossed his brow, and cold gray eyes met hers in stern disapprobation for her act. Meanwhile, Churg recovered and returned to the side of his mistress, while Var Koros studied the chained prisoner in deep meditation.

Suddenly, a great cry of consternation was heard arising from the mass of soldiery which still attempted to crowd upward out of the caverns of Iss. A red man came swiftly riding to the side of Tars Tarkas.

"The caverns below are flooding!" he exclaimed. "The rear guard says a gate has been closed which has dammed up the river!"

John Carter grasped the wrist of the Thark jeddak. "We must act quickly!" he exclaimed. "The enemy will drown us all in this natural basin unless we open the gate in that wall!"

Without further explanation, he sprang to the back of a malagor and in the next moment was borne aloft toward the top of the frowning battlements. Instantly, one of the commandos mounted the remaining malagor and followed.

"Cover them!" roared Tars Tarkas to those behind him.

As Tarnathian guards again appeared at the battlements above, the green and red men alike fired upon them, but not before the commando had been struck down by a well-placed explosive bullet. He and the malagor fell lifeless to the ground at the base of the wall, while John Carter soared beyond it and lost to their sight.

"He cannot possibly survive, single handed!" exclaimed

Tars Tarkas, chafing miserably. "If only we might batter down that gate!"

"It is of the substance of the Escarpment," returned Var Koros. "It is impenetrable."

The mile of beach became dangerously crowded as panicked masses of infantry pushed upward out of the whirlpool's gorge, trying to escape the rising waters.

"Something must be done!" cried another green chieftain beside Tars Tarkas. "An entire army like this cannot drown before striking a single blow at Tarnath!"

La's proud face slowly changed its complexion as she became fully cognizant of the perilous Situation affecting herself and her numerous followers. Tears filled her eyes as she sank suddenly to her knees beside Tarzan. Then she threw her body across his and sobbed.

"My love! My love!" she cried. "Must fate destroy these thousands to thwart this single life of mine? Why? Why?"

"Do I detect a note of humility in the voice of the glorious Issus?" asked Tarzan, quietly. "Do I hear, for the first time, an expression of concern for others?"

"Please! Please! Do not mock me now!" she pleaded, unaware, the while, of Var Koros' grave surveillance nearby.

"On the contrary," said Tarzan. "Perhaps this is your real beginning, La. Humility must be learned. It is the mother of wisdom."

As the cries of the multitude behind them crescendoed and the roaring sound of the whirlpool changed to a muffled gurgling, the apeman felt the beautiful body of the woman so tightly pressed against him begin to tremble.

"La," he whispered, "listen to me. I have almost positive evidence that you are the genuine Issus. The fate of this entire bleeding world depends on the faith which you can inspire in men today. Do not lose your composure. This is your greatest test."

She tensed, listening to him, seemingly speechless.

Finally, she whispered back, "Tarzan! I have long suspected it, yet I cannot believe that it is so!"

"You have wished it, but you fear it," he told her.

"Yes! Yes! She sobbed, helplessly.

"The terrible responsibility of it - the mystery of it. I understand."

"Oh, Tarzan-I am but a lost and misguided woman of flesh and blood!" she whispered. "Tell me what I should do!"

"Stand up to it!" he urged. "You will find the answer here at Tarnath- today!"

"But we shall drown! All of us-you and I together!"

"Perhaps not. Release me. I will try to open the gate."

La sprang to her feet. "Release Tharos Pthan!" she commanded her green guards. "He alone can save us!"

But it was Churg who snatched the keys from a green guard and worked to free the apeman.

See how she loves you still! came Kar Komak's anguished thought.

Tarzan attempted to think back at him, "As you are an illusion, so is her love for me. But, as you say, there is no time to explain, my friend."

All eyes now turned upon the apeman as he rose to his feet.

"How do you propose-" Tars Tarkas began, but Tarzan touched his giant long-sword.

"Lend me that-quickly!" he said.

Silently, the great Thark unsheathed the mighty blade which few living men could wield. Tarzan snatched it from him as though it had been a wooden stick.

They watched him, mystified, as he ran forward half a hundred feet and turned to face the great wall.

"Cover me with your rifles!" he shouted.

Then, as a low growl escaped his ups, he sprang forward with the swiftness of an arrow and executed a mighty leap such as no Barsoomian had ever witnessed before. Whether or not the mighty shout of acclaim that followed him bore with it a measure of faith which assisted him, none may say, but it is written in the history of Barsoom that he struck the wall within twenty ads of its top. He struck feet first and ran up the remaining distance more swiftly than it seemed any man could travel, and, great-sword in hand, he hurtled beyond the frowning top of the battlements and disappeared...

Chapter XXX - TO THE GOLDEN THRONE

AS Tarzan cleared the battlements he alighted on a wide catwalk mounted on scaffolding behind the great wall and found himself quite alone. But a sight met his eyes which convinced him at once of the identity of the strange red panthan who had preceded him on the malagor.

On a ramp below him he discerned that same warrior, with his back to the wall, holding off a dozen attackers with his lightning swift blade. Even as he took in the scene, he noticed the main body of the garrison rushing toward the lone swordsman from another direction. The Situation seemed hopeless for him, yet he glared at his opponents in triumph as though he knew that nothing could stop him.

As though to confirm his suspicions, Tarzan heard one of the guards cry out, "It is the Warlord, himself!"

"Look!" cried another, pointing to Tarzan. 'That one has scaled the outer wall without the aid of a malagor!"

As yet another raised a radium rifle to fire upon him, John Carter shouted, even as he continued to duel with his opponents, "Wait! Would you fire upon the genuine Tharos Pthan?"

There was a very brief lull in the fighting as many stopped to look back and upwards at the mighty figure of the apeman who stood there on the catwalk like an avenging

angel with a terrible giant sword in his hand. Then Tarzan leaped upon them, a full fifty feet through the air. As he landed among them he swung that ponderous blade as though it were a scythe of Judgement, cutting a path through bone and flesh. Though the apeman was no swordsman in the technical sense, he more than compensated for it by the terrible havoc he wrought with the superior reach and momentum of his giant weapon.

"Release the Warlord!" he roared. "Open the gate for the eternal Issus!"

For the moment, the defenders were demoralized, confronted as they were simultaneously by the dreaded Warlord and by one who seemed verily to be the long-awaited Holy Warrior of legend, so incredible was his strength and ferocity. But that moment was all John Carter

required to take advantage of them. Understanding now that Tarzan might easily follow him, he leaped over the heads of the newcomers and shouted to the apeman to do the same.

Leaping easily after him, Tarzan joined the Warlord in outdistancing the Tarnathians down the ramp of to the gate.

"We must find a way to open it-quickly!" exclaimed the Virginian.

"I see no latch or secret trigger," commented the apeman.

Beyond this single Observation there was no time to do anything but to turn again and face the guards, who had rallied sufficiently to give them renewed Opposition. Now the Tarnathians pressed strongly upon them, but again John Carter's famous sword proved capable of being in a dozen places to every one of theirs, while Tarzan stepped out among them and maintained a cleared circle about him with his swinging blade.

"It is useless to oppose the Warlord and Tharos Pthan together!" shouted a dwar of one contingent.

"It may be as the tall one says!" cried another. "The genuine Issus may be beyond the gate!"

"Whoever you may be," gasped John Carter to his companion, "one truth Stands clear. You are the mightiest warrior of the ages!"

"Our moral advantage is going to be short-lived," observed Tarzan, nodding quickly up the ramp.

"Stop fighting!" came a sharp command from this direction.

When the Warlord looked to discover the author of it, he discerned a delegation of Therns accompanied by several black-skinned First Born officers.

"Fools!" cried the leading Thern. "You have the Warlord in your hands! This other one is a blasphemous imposter! You hold no warrior's code for such as these. Shoot them down!"

As the Tarnathian guards hesitated, the First Born officers raised radium rifles to their Shoulders, aiming directly to John Carter and Tarzan. In that same instant, however, the marksmen were blasted into fragments by explosive bullets aimed at them from above, and all eyes turned upward to discover a full three score commandos descending on malagors.

Firing on both sides followed almost instantaneously, but those of the Therns who survived the first salvo soon took to shelter. The malagors landed in the midst of the Tarnathians, and the battle became equalized.

John Carter then leaped upon a guard, crying out to Tarzan to cover him. The apeman stood in front of the two and slew all who dared to approach. But few there were who so dared, and within a short Space of time the defenders were completely demoralized.

"Tell me how to open the gate!" demanded the Warlord, his short-sword at the throat of the dwar he had pinned to the ground.

"Spare my life, John Carter," cried the dwar, "and my sword is yours to command!"

"Then open the gate!" demanded the Warlord, getting to his feet and pulling the Tarnathian up with him.

The red man went to the wall without hesitation then and opened a secret niche. "The lever is inside here," he said, "but it is rusted fast, and there is no way of applying a bar to it."

The Warlord thrust his arm inside and found an ancient, rust-caked handle. Strain as he might, even his earthly muscles proved insufficient for the task.

"Perhaps-" suggested the dwar, looking at Tarzan, "if this one is indeed Tharos Pthan-"

Without waiting for further invitation, Tarzan thrust his long, heavy arm into the niche and grasped the handle. He strained until beads of sweat broke out through every pore, and finally, slowly, the mechanism yielded to him. Simultaneously, the muffled sound of rushing water was heard inside the wall.

"He did it!" exclaimed the Tarnathian. "The mechanism operates a hydraulic counterbalance. It's working!"

With a heavy, rumbling sound, the great gate raised slowly upward into a recess in the wall, and through the entrance poured the mighty Tharks, led by Tars Tarkas, himself, who by this time had acquired another great-sword.

The Tarnathian garrison, not wishing to become prisoners, now decided to take sides with the attackers, so there was no Opposition remaining in this sector. When Tars Tarkas realized this, he shouted to the Warlord.

"Get them to open the lower dam in the caverns below, before the others drown!"

"That other gate is controlled from above, in the for-tress!" cried the dwar.

"Quickly, then!" demanded the Warlord, "lead the way!" He turned to one of the commando officers near him. "How goes the battle beyond the valley?" he queried.

"Not well, sire," replied the other. "The nullifier beam must be found. However, your message has been brought to the enemy concerning Tharos Pthan. Many of our number who were captured have been spreading the word. It may have an effect upon them before long."

As the great army of Issus now surged through the gate,

John Carter and Tarzan joined Tars Tarkas in leading the way into the dark catacombs of the lower fortress. Somewhere behind came Churg and the other apes bearing La in her golden litter. And the hordes of mounted green and red men followed endlessly forward and ever upward into the Great Escarpment. Among them somewhere, lost in the multitude, was Var Koros, who alone appreciated the full significance of what was happening.

So it was that while the aerial navies of Zodanga and Jahar, of U-Gor, Tjanath, Amhor and Phundahl attacked undefended cities of the Heliumitic Empire in the outer world, and while the main allied fleets and armies of the Warlord lay locked in close, mighty battle with the fleets and armies of the Holy Alliance at Tarnath, a great, secret army of ferocious warriors was unleashed into the interior of the Great Escarpment, led by John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom, by Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark, and by Tarzan of the Apes, who needed no false identity of a Tharos Pthan to establish him, in his own right, as the most formidable warrior in the long history of the dying planet.

Shoulder to Shoulder, Tarzan fought with John Carter and the mighty Thark, climbing together with them over the dead bodies of Them, First Born warriors or Tarnathians, to cut a path through all Opposition. Contingents of their army swiftly occupied adjoining passages and reduced each section garrison as it was encountered. The control of the subterranean lock was also found, and the dam was released in the lower caverns of Iss, thus lowering the waters and saving most of the rear guard from certain death.

The invaders had hardly occupied half of the mighty citadel before most of its defenders changed their allegiance to the Warlord and to him whom they chose to accept as the genuine Tharos Pthan. As this circumstance developed, its effects were felt among the armies of the Heliumitic Alliance fighting beyond the rim of the Valley, for the mighty guns of the fortress were soon silenced. Yet, the secret nullifier beam of the First Born continued to operate and to keep the invading armada on the ground.

As the three mighty warriors fought in the vanguard they were joined by a great white ape, an ape wearing a silken turban and wielding a flashing sword with amazing skill and deadly effectiveness.

"It is a day of miracles!" shouted Tars Tarkas. "Even as the prophecy of Issus has proclaimed!"

"If this strange ape could talk," replied John Carter, smiling grimly, "I would believe it myself!"

"The day of the Prophecy is at hand, John Carter," said the great white ape.

"By the gods!" cried the Warlord. "What illusion is this! It speaks!"

The last remaining guards who opposed them, having witnessed this latter miracle, now threw down their swords and surrendered.

"It is enough!" cried their dwar. "This is the prophesied day of revelation. Go you to Tario, John Carter. Stand before the Sacred Council of the Holy Alliance and have your say. If Tario is Tharos Pthan, then you will know it. If he is an imposter, then let this other Tharos Pthan prove himself the mate of Issus! We are done!"

They were close now to the entrance of Zumor and the sacred Throne-room of Issus. As the Tarnathians thus surrendered, a score of Thern priests emerged from the inner Holy of Hohes, armed with radium pistols.

"Stand back!" cried their leader, "or die!"

"You have chosen the weapons," retorted the Warlord, drawing his own pistol. "Our fire power is greater. Stand aside!"

For answer, the Therns smiled confidently and stepped aside. As they did so, half a dozen auburn haired white men joined them.

"You know who these men are," said the Thern leader.

"Lotharians!" exclaimed several of the warriors behind Tars Tarkas and Tarzan.

At this point, Churg stepped forward and spoke. "None shall stand in our way," he announced, to the astonishment of the Therns and the Lotharians alike. "Come!" he said to those behind him. "They will do you no harm."

Instantly, the Lotharians materialized their deadly phantoms, blocking the giant ape's path, but even as they drew their bows to fire upon him their arrows turned into poisonous reptiles which fell to the floor and struck at the screaming Therns.

The Lotharians strained mightily to correct this induced illusion, but in vain. They could only stare helplessly at Churg as their phantoms faded into thin air and the Thern priests fell dead. No sooner had these latter succumbed than the venomous reptiles also disappeared, and Churg advanced upon the Lotharians, brandishing his sword. For one more moment they strove to hold their ground. Then, in a body, they turned and fled.

"Charge the throne-room!" roared John Carter, raising his sword.

But even as he charged there was one who leapt ahead of him. This was Tarzan of the Apes, his old battle scar gleaming angrily on his brow and a low growl of murderous anger on his lips as he entered the great Throne-room of Issus atop the Escarpment and gazed upon Tario, Jeddak of Barsoom.

It was Tario, himself, who stood before the Golden Throne surrounded by a full thousand bowmen. But of that second Issus, Jane Clayton, Lady Greystoke, there was no sign in all that vast amphitheater of warriors and deadly phantoms.

Chapter XXXI - THE DAY OF THE PROPHECY

AS Tarzan paused to survey the scene before him, he heard John Carter's voice at his Shoulder.

"Beware, my friend!" he cautioned.

'Those archers are but phantoms like the others we saw growled Tarzan, glaring up at Tario.

"But they can kill," advised the Warlord, "unless--"

"Unless I refuse to believe that they are capable of it," retorted the apeman. "And I refuse!" Wherewith, he began to advance upon Tario even as the bowmen drew their shafts. Nor did he look behind him to discover whether or not Kar Komak, in the form of Churg, was following him.

John Carter's quick eye took in other details of the room, noticing that on the great balcony stood a half dozen blue-skinned men whom he took to be Zumorians. But, on the Steps of the throne itself stood a full score of red jeds and jeddaks who represented all of the kingdoms which had cast their lot with the Holy Alliance.

Before the phantom bowmen could fire, he shouted, pointing at Tario. "Behold! Tario is an imposter! Here is he who justly Claims Issus for his own!"

One of the jeddaks on the Steps of the throne sneered derisively, though he had cast a wondering and apprehensive eye at Tarzan's mighty figure.

"What is the word of a mere panthan against Tario's?" he exclaimed.

At this point, Tario himself spoke. "This is no panthan. It is the vaunted Warlord of Barsoom."

The jeds and jeddaks started, grasping their sword hilts, but Tario raised his hand, smiling. "It is well," he said calmly. "The time has come for all of us to know the truth." Here, he pointed at Tarzan, who still slowly approached him. "This tall white stranger is the imposter. Here is my great challenger, gentlemen! This man also claims he is Tharos Pthan. Now we shall see the outcome of our meeting."

Because of the phantom bowmen, only Tarzan and John Carter had as yet made an entrance into the amphitheater, though Tars Tarkas held his forces triggered to make a charge, and Churg, who might possibly have entered there with impunity, remained as yet unseen for mysterious reasons of his own. However, the jeds and jeddaks assembled on the steps of the great dais supporting the Golden Throne of Issus tensed with anticipation as they waited for the contest to develop.

Slowly, Tario raised his hand and pointed it at Tarzan, who had now come to a stop at the foot of the dais. "Thus far, false one!" he commanded. "Beyond that point you cannot move! Now-drop your sword!"

Tarzan felt his mind gripped by the icy hand of another's will. At first, it seemed that he was actually powerless, yet he soon perceived that he had not obeyed the command to drop his sword. A red haze of anger pervaded him, and he knew that it was this alone that gave him strength before this mental demon, whose eyes bored into his with a searing, searching power that might have terrorized a lesser victim. Here, before him, was that same mighty mentality which had transported first La of Opar and then Jane Clayton to another world. It was to this strange entity Akmath had referred on that now long gone day when he had first given him the Great Star of Issus and said, "Someday the god will return for his eye, and only Tarzan is strong enough to capture him and make him tell where he has hidden La." Well, La had been found, but the greatest question of all remained.

"Where is my mate?" he suddenly demanded, in tones so menacing that several of the lesser jeds nearby stepped back involuntarily."

A fleeting expression of surprise visited Tario's countenance and then was gone. His lips curved thinly. "Still he persists in his blasphemy! Then die, o false one!"

Tarzan felt his mind blacking out before a nameless force that pressed relentlessly upon him now. Yet, there was in him alone, of all those present, that which could reject the subtlety of hypnosis, and it was this he grasped at—the raw primordial, the instinct of the unreasoning beast at bay. The red haze of his anger swelled upward mightily, struggling against the quailing reaction of his civilized levels of consciousness. Tario, and the jungle-nurtured instinct of self-reservation, forced Tarzan's mind back, back into time, until he was a savage completely stripped of modern mental refinements.

This strange Tarmangani, this puny white witch doctor, had stolen his mate and now threatened his life. For such a circumstance, there was but one law in all the jungle.

With a sudden, beastly roar of defiance, he flung his sword from him and bounded up the steps. He pounced upon Tario, taking his throat in his mighty hands, ready to throttle the life from him. But, in that instant, animal cunning stayed him. If he should kill this man, then he might never learn where the scoundrel had concealed his mate, Jane Clayton.

At the same time, the phantom bowmen aimed a thousand shafts at the apeman's unprotected back, but as they did so, Churg lumbered silently into the amphitheater, ignoring the exclamations of surprise elicited by those who had not seen him before.

Tarzan came his insistent thought, leave Tario to me. Your enemy is eise where...

Simultaneously, the phantom bowmen faded into nothingness and Tario gasped, not before the physical power of Tarzan's grip, but before the impact of a mental power such as he had never before experienced. He was not aware of its true source, not could he trace it because it faded from his mind as soon as his phantoms were gone.

As the apeman slowly eased his grip on Tario, John Carter sprang half way up the steps of the dais, signaling Tars Tarkas to enter the amphitheater in force.

"Jeds and jeddaks of Barsoom!" he shouted, even as Tars Tarkas led the vanguard of the army of Issus into the vast Chamber. "You know me as he who pulled down the pillars and foundations of the old religion of Issus because it was cruel, man-made deception and cannibalism in its maddest form." As some of the Barsoomian nobility now menacingly drew their swords, he raised his palm. "Stay! But hear me out! I, John Carter, swear that we are come here not to enforce our will upon the planet arbitrarily, but to decide with both sides of the issue present and represented, what is the just and wisest Solution of our problem. Know you that there has been revealed to me this day certain evidence that the fulfillment of the Legend of Issus may well be at hand!"

Hearing this unexpected speech from his enemy, Tavan Jal, Jeddak of Jahar, now stepped forward and spoke. "Do you mean to say, John Carter, that you propose to face the truth at last? Are you prepared to embrace the olden faith of Issus?"

The Warlord glared disdainfully at the Speaker. "Before I would permit the people of Barsoom to be deceived again I would tear this fortress apart and see every city on the face of the planet reduced to ruins. But, I am telling you that the Prophecy, itself, is at hand. Be patient, and together we may yet see the shape of a destiny which was written long ages ago."

Another jeddak snorted contemptuously. "The Warlord has lost his mind!"

"No!" cried Tario, rubbing his throat where Tarzan had gripped it. "He has not lost his mind. It is a trick to deceive us all!"

"One moment, please-all of you!"

They turned to see Ranas Ghol, the Zumorian, who stood at the head of the table of the Sacred Council, He pointed to the entrance through which the soldiers of Issus were still surging.

"There is the one man who can answer every question in our minds, once and for all," he announced, simply.

Even Tario raised his brows in astonishment at this Statement. Indeed, even Churg turned to observe who this announced oracle of the ages might be.

"It is Var Koros!" ejaculated Tars Tarkas. "But, how could he-"

The strange little red man walked serenely to the balcony, mounted the Steps before the Council's table, and faced them all. A palpable silence pervaded that great Chamber as all eyes turned wonderingly upon him. Even Tarzan could not restrain his curiosity now, in spite of his sullen impatience to discover what had happened to Jane Clayton. Perhaps, he reasoned, this man might give him a clue. And if he did not, then he would concentrate upon his own problem and Mars could work out its destiny as its leaders saw fit. He was done with Camouflage, but he would restrain himself just long enough to hear this stranger out.

At last, Var Koros spoke.

"It is well," he began, "that many of the kingdoms of Barsoom are represented here to bear witness to that which shall now be revealed. My only regret is that more of the jeddaks of the Heliumitic Alliance are not present. However, John Carter, as Warlord, is well qualified to bear witness for them, and Tars Tarkas, as Jeddak of Thark, is equally qualified to represent the green nations."

"I see no one here," interrupted John Carter, "to represent the Thern Empire, or that of the First Born of Omean. They, especially, should be here."

Ranas Ghol smiled as he answered. "Even as we of Zumor foresaw it-Zithad, Dator of the First Born, and Sardon Dhur, Hekkador of Therns, have defected from the Alliance in order to safeguard their own interests."

John Carter started. "Then-the air forces of Tarnath-"

Ranas Ghol nodded. "They are withdrawing to battle among themselves. Also, the ground forces are already in confusion. The Heliumitic armies should be able to take the Valley soon, for the Fortress, itself, is silenced."

The Jeddak of Jahar drew his sword in sudden alarm. He looked up at Tario accusingly. "Why was this information withheld from us?" he shouted. "I shall leave at once to contact my own forces!"

Var Koros raised his hand. "That will not be necessary," he said. "Now hear me out. You all know the issue at hand. Shall there be, or shall there not be, a religious reformation? Is the Legend of Issus valid? Is there or is there not a living Issus-"

"She has occupied this throne for these many years!" insisted Tario.

"Of the two women who claim to be Issus," continued Var Koros, "which of them is the genuine goddess and which of them is but the innocent victim of a scheme to help further the private ambitions of a false Tharos Pthan?"

"Take care, ancient one!" threatened Tario, who was secretly puzzled by the fact that he could not begin to probe Var Koros's mind. Nor did Kar Komak realize that the one time he had probed it had been with the old man's acquiescence. "All that you have said so far is false presumption. We are here to speak the truth! I, alone, am Tharos Pthan, mate to Issus, and the judge of all of you. Therefore, choose your words with care!"

Tarzan just stood there beside the empty throne, his great, bronzed arms folded across his mighty chest, waiting patiently for Var Koros's promised revelation.

In answer to Tario's admonition, Var Koros smiled confidently, "All I can reply is that the true Tharos Pthan stands among us at this moment, but whether or not it is you of whom I speak yet remains to be proven, Tario. Your turn will come. Be patient and hear me out." Whereupon, he continued addressing the others.

Many of you have heard of this place ere this. Your legends have referred to the Escarpment of Tarnath as the Rock of Oracles, which lies at the source of the sacred River Iss. It has acquired such a name because of the Zumorians, whose unwanted gift is to perceive certain aspects of the future. Long ago, the Zumorians foresaw this day, but there were certain variables. The future could take several paths. They knew what forces might influence the development of one variable or another, yet they hesitated to take a hand in the fate of Barsoom-until Tario emerged with an evil ambition to do more than serve the purposes of a Tharos Pthan. He would not have been content to be Guardian of the Sacred Worlds alone. He proclaimed himself

Jeddak of Jeddaks of all Barsoom. It was because of this that the Zumorians decided to take part in the game that was to decide the issue of the future."

"I knew it!" cried Tario, vehemently. "Ranas Ghol is a traitor to the cause of the Holy Alliance! It is he who managed to divide our forces!"

Ranas Ghol smiled but said nothing.

"Now," continued Var Koros, "we come to the moment of great revelations." He pointed to the entrance. "Behold, gentlemen-at last, the eternal Issus, the same living goddess for whom the sacred throne was fashioned ages ago! She has come home to fulfill the Prophecy!"

All eyes now turned upon the spectacle of La's arrival.

She came, borne in her resplendent litter on the Shoulders of great white apes. On her beautiful countenance was registered a mixed expression of fear, wonderment and flickering hope-even humility-as she looked upon the Golden Throne and at Tarzan, waiting there beside it.

"Stop!" shouted Tario. "Beware of an insidious deception - all of you! I see it now! This is Lotharian mentalism. There is among us a sworn enemy of mine who would stop at nothing to destroy me. This woman-" He pointed at La, furiously. "She is but a phantom created by him, who once sought to kill me before this!"

Var Koros looked up at Tario calmly. "It may well be that your enemy is present," he replied. "What is his name?"

"Kar Komak!" exclaimed Tario. "He is not even a true Lotharian-for I, myself created him!"

Disbelief clouded the faces of the assembled jeds and jeddaks, but John Carter corroborated Tario's claim.

"It is true," he said. "I know Kar Komak personally and this he has confessed to me. He is a mental creation of Tario, but he is no phantom."

"Ah!" exclaimed Var Koros. "I am pleased that Tario has admitted the fact. Now we may concentrate upon the last part of the Legend of Issus. Strange though it may seem, the Legend states that Tharos Pthan and Issus, though not brother and sister, are of a single parent-for the one is of flesh and blood, and the other of the mind.

Kar Komak is Tharos Pthan, and this Issus you see before you, Tario, is your own daughter!"

Had the heavens opened up and shaken the planet with the devastation of doom, Tario could not have been shaken more. He gasped, then staggered back, pale and almost powerless to stand. La looked up at him wonderingly and he found in her eyes that which brought memory of the past leaping up at him like an avenging ancestral spirit. Yet, even then, he struggled to reject the revelation. He turned to Var Koros.

"How can you know this?" he demanded.

For answer, Var Koros tore from his forehead a false layer of skin, revealing a tell-tale third eye. "I am Dras Khral, the oldest Zumorian alive. I was a witness, as you well know, to your experiment in immortality. I was alive when you isolated the psychic crystals of tharton which composed both the Star of Issus you now wear and the Great Star of Iss, which gave your daughter more power than you wished her to have. She destroyed your evil power and sent you and your kind into exile-before the Cataclysm. I also witnessed the flight of the First Born to ancient Jasoom, when they took Issus with them. Now, she alone has survived the ancient destruction of that ill-fated colony, and she Claims her golden throne, as of old!"

As Var Koros spoke, the great white apes lowered La's litter to the floor before the dais, and as one in a trance she slowly mounted the Steps, seemingly oblivious to all save the golden throne, itself. It was as though this throne were the key that would unlock the entire mystery of her existence.

When she finally reached it, she felt of its great, jewel-encrusted arms, wonderingly. Then, very slowly, she seated herself upon it. Silence fell upon the vast Chamber as the representatives of an embattled world observed her reactions.

At last, she turned to Tarzan, and her eyes filled with tears.

"This is the answer to my life, Tarzan," she said. "The haunting burden of the whole eternity of waiting is lifted from me. Forgive me my selfish love, Tarzan. I am Issus, and here is my destiny."

Tarzan did not smile. His gray eyes penetrated hers searchingly. "And what of Kar Komak now?" he asked.

"Ah, yes! Kar Komak! Hirn, too, have I wronged. Where is he now?"

"Issus!" shouted the Jeddak of Jahor, dropping to one knee. "Hail to Issus Eternal!"

"Wait!" cried Tario. "We are not yet done with the Prophecy! Where is that other miracle, the revelation of Tharos Pthan? According to legend, animals would speak this day, and the genuine Tharos Pthan would step forth from the body of a great white ape."

Now "Churg" came to the foot of the dais. "I am he," he said, looking upward. And, as he spoke, the illusion of the ape faded, revealing Kar Komak, who still wore the same curious turban which Churg had worn.

Above the exclamations of surprise on the part of others present, Tario shouted in triumph. "I knew it was deception! It was easy for one gifted with Lotharian mental powers to make the Legend seem to come true. But there is one final proof, gentlemen! You will recall that the true mate of Issus was supposed to reveal the original Great Star of Issus and place it upon the head of the goddess. Let this imposter produce the genuine Holy Diadem-now!"

"So be it!" said Kar Komak. He removed this turban and revealed on his brow the great, baleful eye of the fateful stone which Tarzan had left in Lothar.

"Hail Tharos Pthan!" came a cry of acclaim from the assembled jeds and jeddaks.

Kar Komak looked up at Tarzan and smiled. "In our prison cell, I suddenly remembered the last part of the legend-that Tharos Pthan was a mental creation. It was then that I knew my true identity. I left you to retrieve the Great Star of Issus from the place where you had hidden it, Tarzan."

"It is an imitation!" insisted Tario. "It cannot be the original stone!" Froth was one Tario's lips and his eyes watered under the overpowering burden of hatred and despair. "If you are Tharos Pthan," he shrieked, "then take me!" Wherewith, he poured all the prodigious power of his mentality through the augmenting crystal of tharton on his brow, aiming a lethal blow of psychic energy at Kar Komak which would have felled a herd of zitidars.

But the Great Star of Issus was a mightier amplifier, still, as Kar Komak's mind leaped out to come to grips with its own creator. A tense, silent moment ensued during which all present were aware of mental tides surging through that room which pained even those who stood at the farthest periphery.

Then, abruptly, the crystal on Tario's forehead shattered into dust, and as it did so, Tario of Lothar dropped dead at the feet of Issus.

"Hail to Issus and to Tharos Pthan!" came a cry from the multitude below.

And Kar Komak mounted the dais to La's side, where he removed the Great Star of Issus from his brow and placed it tenderly on her raven head. In the next moment, she was in his arms, and the Prophecy was at an end.

Tarzan looked down at John Carter, significantly. The Warlord could only stare at the united couple. Strange, indeed, had been the result of the long and bloody Holy War. He shook his head, burdened by a cloud of problems as yet unresolved. But he would never have imagined this.

At that moment, a commotion occurred at the entrance to the throne room, and suddenly a shout of triumph was heard.

"The nullifier has been destroyed!"

John Carter turned to see the yellow-skinned form of his battle companion, Talu, Jeddak of Okar, who entered now with a broad smile on his black-bearded face.

"I made it!" he exclaimed. "I reached the tower where the beam was hidden! Look you, John Carter!" He pointed beyond the balcony in the direction of the Valley. "The allied fleets are once more aloft!"

As all eyes turned to look outside, they observed a sky clouded with the mighty ships of the invading forces.

"What of the Therns and the First Born?" asked John Carter.

"When Zithad, Dator of the First Born, realized the Escarpment was being taken," replied Talu, "he abducted the other woman whom Tario claimed was Issus, and with him went Sardon Dhur, though whether as his prisoner or his ally I do not know; but it is feared that Zithad will yet claim he is Tharos Pthan."

The Warlord was about to speak, but Tarzan sprang halfway down the steps of the dais, interrupting him. His gray eyes blazed anger. "Now, I must take matters into my own hands," he nearly growled. "But tell me the direction this Dator of the First Born may have taken, and I shall attend to my own affairs. The woman he has taken is mine!"

"I will help you to find her," said Kar Komak. "As Warden of the Sacred Worlds, it is now my responsibility to seek out the Dator of the First Born and bring him to judgement, as well as Sardon Dhur, Hekkador of Therns."

John Carter smiled. "You will require a great force to follow them, either to the Mountains of Otz or into Omean. Now that my fleets have been released from the influence to the nullifier beam, the message must have been sent to Okar to bring my heaviest striking force hither. I place it at your disposal, Tharos Pthan, since this fortress has already been reduced."

The Jeddak of Jahar had been listening to Tars Tarkas, and now suddenly he demanded the attention of everyone present. "The Warlord has brought to Tarnath a worthy plan, which is a practical basis for an approach to the Solution of all our problems. Now that the Prophecy has been fulfilled, I propose a universal truce until we shall have had a chance to assemble formally and plan the details of the future. I shall, for one, withdraw my forces in the outer world and give the cities peace!"

One by one, the jeds and jeddaks drew their swords and acclaimed the idea, shouting, "For the Glory of Issus!"

John Carter turned again to Tarzan, smiling faintly. "I know not who you may be, stranger. For a while, I was half convinced you were our Holy Warrior of legend. However, your valorous contribution to the fruits of this day has certainly earned you our loyal assistance."

Tarzan tried to smile, but his gray eyes gleamed narrowly. "I will be grateful for your support, provided that it does not interfere with your own affairs here."

"If you are to find Sardon Dhur or the Dator of the First Born," smiled the Warlord, "you will require all the backing of military might that we can muster, my friend."

Tarzan shrugged. "In massed might or in stealth, it matters not. And she yet lives, I will find her."

Tars Tarkas grinned appreciatively. "By Issus!" he exclaimed. "I would not wish to be this warrior's enemy! Methinks there is no power great enough to keep him from his goal!"

Chapter XXXII - JANE

QUICKLY the Warlord urged his followers to prepare to aid the apeman in his search for his mate. This rescue now became the most vital task of the armies of the Heliumitic Empire. John Carter full knew how he would feel if his princess, the incomparable Dejah Thoris, were the one being borne away by such Villains as Zithad and Sardon Dhur. Nothing would stop him until they both lay dead at his feet.

Tarzan finally could wait no longer for the Warlord or Taros Pthan to prepare their troops, and so, finally, he approached the new Guardian of Issus.

"Taros Pthan," he spoke, "I must go ahead. I cannot wait! Follow when you can, but I must find my mate as soon as possible!" Without waiting for an answer, the apeman turned and started for the door.

As he trod purposely, Tarzan was brought to a sudden halt by a sight which he had traveled over a year to see-Jane Clayton, Lady Greystoke, strode through the door between two men. The one was as pale as any Thern and the other somewhat darker, but not quite the redness of the other Barsoomian's. He was tall and powerful. Tarzan thought he saw a hint of familiarity about him.

These men could wait. The King of the Apes rushed to his wife and crushed her to his chest.

All about the throne room, activity stopped and men turned to see the powerful apeman holding a beautiful blond woman as though she was the most valuable treasure ever known, which she was to Tarzan of the Apes.

"John," Lady Jane struggled free enough to look up into the apeman's happy face. "Don't hold so tight! You're breaking my ribs!"

Tarzan relaxed the pressure on her, but did not let go.

"How did you escape? I was just on my way to rescue you!"

"I was on a strange boat in the air when I suddenly seemed out of some sort of trance. I could not remember anything after looking at the amulet from Opar the other night. I had no idea of where I was or who I was with but just then we were attacked," Jane Clayton began.

"The battle was furious. There were black and white men defending the

group I was with against a much larger force of red and yellow men as well as several giant green creatures with four arms. The attackers beat down my companions forces and soon placed all the defenders in chains."

"After the battle, the leader of the victors came to where I was and tried to talk to me, but I didn't understand a word he was saying and told him so. He turned and left only to return a short time later with another man who began again to question me. When I answered in English, I was surprised by the look of recognition on his face. He smiled and asked, Who are you and how do you speak English?"

"After I had identified myself, he told me that he was an America soldier who had been living on Mars for many years. We talked about all kinds of things until we reached this land where we heard that a giant white man and the Warlord had beaten the evil of a being named Tario."

Jane Clayton took her husband's hand and led him to the two men who had escorted her into the throne room. "This is Vad Varo," she pointed to the white skinned man, "and this is Carthoris, the son of John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom."

Tarzan reached out to each of them. "Vad Varo and Carthoris," he spoke. "I owe you more than my life for rescuing my mate, or more properly, as you would say, my princess. You have but to ask and all that I have is yours."

The son of John Carter smiled back. "We have done nothing that we wouldn't have done for any other woman, Lord Greystoke."

"Nevertheless, Tarzan of the Apes owes you more than he can ever repay," replied the apeman.

A look of pure shock appeared on Vad Varo's face-"T-T-Tarzan of the Apes!" he exclaimed. "And I thought great white apes could kill Lord Greystoke."

Vad Varo turned to his companions and become a nobleman in one of the great countries of that world. Finally, Tarzan felt he had heard enough about himself for one day.

"Vad Varo," he interrupted. "What happened to Zithad and Sardon Dhur? Did they get away?"

For answer, Carthoris signaled and the Dator of the First Born and the Hekkador of Holy Therns were ushered into the room chained and begging for mercy.

"They are yours, Tarzan!" Carthoris handed the ends of their chains to the apeman. "You have they offended the most. It is for you decide their punishment."

Fury blazed in Tarzan's eyes and the great scar on his forehead turned bright red. Then it subsided and the civilized man in John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, surfaced before he spoke.

"You deserve a death of great pain," he told the two miscreants, "but I think it will be better if you serve as slaves to the great white apes of Issus!" and so he turned to the leader of the white apes and spoke to him in his own language, "I give these mangani to you to do with as you wish. Make them bi your slaves, but do not kill them. Keep them in chains and never let them go. They are yours."

As the apes dragged Zithad and Sardon Dhur off to whatever fate they would find, Tarzan turned to the Warlord.

"Now," he said, "if only we can find a way to return to our home."

"I think I know a way--," John Carter answered. "But, it will be up to Tharos Pthan to make the decision."

* * *

For several months, Tarzan and Jane visited with La and Tharos Pthan in the place at Tarnath. Each day Tarzan and Tharos Pthan would spend long hours in studying the methods of travel which might return Tarzan and Jane to their native Earth.

Finally, both Tarzan and Tharos Pthan felt that the time had come to try to make the journey. The day would be a day of celebration-- John Carter and his princess Dejah Thoris were invited to the farewell meal as were Carthoris and Vad Varo.

When the meal was over, the Warlord took the King of the Apes aside. "My friend," he said, "I wish that you could stay? I've found

Barsoom to be more suited to me than Earth and I am glad to live here. Why not change your mind and stay?"

"Your world is interesting, John Carter," the apeman replied, "but, we still have our children on Earth and wish to see them and let them know that we are still alive. Perhaps, fate will allow us to return someday."

"You will always find a welcome at the palace in Helium, my friend." John Carter's eyes smiled with just a bit of sadness.

The time had come! These people whose lives had been entwined across space and time for nearly a decade might never see each other again. It was a solemn time all around.

For the last time, Tarzan and Janes looked at the little egg in incubator in the courtyard of the palace of Tarnath. La had thought she was not even human because she couldn't have children, but now as Issus, she knew that she was fulfilled on the planet of her origin, Barsoom. The egg that she and Tharos Pthan had placed there would produce the next great ruler of Lothar as it was rebuilt.

Issus handed her husband the Great Star of Issus. Reverently, he who had been Kar Komak, held the jewel in front of him at shoulder height. For months, he and Tarzan had experimented with teleportation using the jewel and now they were going to try to reverse what had been done by Tario so many years before. Tario had brought La of Opar and Jane Clayton to Barsoom from Earth using the power of both the Greater and Lesser Stars of Issus. He would try to send Jane Clayton and Tarzan back to earth by the same means.

Tharos Pthan lifted the smaller jewel from its place on a small pedestal near the wall. "With these two jewels," he said, "Tario tried to rule a planet. We will try to restore our friends to their homes."

All present gathered about Lord and Lady Greystoke while Tharos Pthan closed his eyes and concentrated. Each person added their own mental power to that of the Consort of Issus and concentrated.

How long they stood there concentrating can not be known, but suddenly, after what seemed like hours or days, Tarzan and Jane Clayton vanished before their very eyes--

THE END

APPENDIX

Dear Ray:

You can see that at this point I could branch in either one of two directions: 1) To wind up the yarn as quickly as possible, with Tarzan rescuing Jane and bringing Zithad and Sardon Dhur to justice; and by Carthoris coming up with a Martian space ship to take them home, after contact is once more made with Gridley. 2) Or I could expand the treachery of Zithad and Sardon Dhur into a long stretch of adventures for continued serialization, taking Tarzan to Venus, not to Earth.

Anyway, you'll probably want to know one thing: What about La's secret curse of the ages? I was saving that for a punch line, as on Barsoom her "curse" turns out to be a blessing, proving she is undeniably a Martian female. At the end of the story, Tarzan and Jane are shown her new pride and joy, in an incubator atop the Temple of the Sun beyond the Sea of Korus.

It is an egg.

Stu