

# **Ylana of Callisto - Jandar 07**

## **By Lin Carter**

Book I

AFTER THE VICTORY

## Chapter 1

### THE ETERNAL FEMININE

IT is one of the ironies of the human condition that only in the darkest of times do the brightest and noblest traits of man come forth: endurance, courage, self-sacrifice.

I have seen this proved true in my own experience a thousand times, and I have observed it in the experience of others.

As, for example, in the adventures which befell Ylana of the Jungle Country and young Tomar after the fall of Kuur . . .

THE citadel of the Mind Wizards had fallen before the assault of the victorious warriors of golden Shondakor, and Tharkol, and seacoast Soraba.

The mighty armada of flying ships had traversed the known surface of Thanator, had explored the unknown mysteries of the Far Side of the planet, and had found at last the secret city of the Kuurians.

After a hard and desperate day-long battle, the warriors of the Three Cities had triumphed even over the super-science of the yellow dwarfs and their amazing ability to control the minds of men. One by one the cruel and cunning telepaths had been rooted out and cut down. Those they had taken captive were released, and among these was Tomar of Shondakor, a youthful scion of the House of Valadon.

The lad had served aboard the sky-ship Jalathadar on her first expedition against Zanadar the City in the Clouds, and had distinguished himself by his keen wits and youthful valor. The villainous Ulthar had disabled the craft, hiding himself so cleverly aboard the former ship of the Sky Pirates that none could find him. It had been Tomar who had stumbled upon the secret of his hiding-place and who had succeeded in slaying the Zanadarian traitor in hand-to-hand combat, thereby saving the vessel and all its crew.\*

Thus had the boy first come to the attention of the high lords and royal courtiers of the Golden City, among them Lukor of Ganatol, the peppery and sharp-tongued Swordmaster who had been one of my first friends on the jungle Moon. Much later, the brave, handsome, serious youth had served during my own ill-fated voyage against Kuur.\*\* Further adventures include our being carried off together by the rapacious bird-men, the Zarkoon, shortly after the fleet had flown over the Edge of the World into the unknown hemisphere.

While prisoners in the hanging cages of the Zarkoon, Tomar and I had first made the acquaintance of Ylana. The Jungle Maid was a daughter of a savage tribe which inhabited a hitherto unknown plateau to the east of the Zarkoon country. She had fled from the cave-dwellings of her tribe, she told us, rather than be forced into the arms of a brutal and repulsive warrior who had won her hand in marriage.

From this adventure we had managed to escape, but a whim of the inscrutable Fates decreed that our paths should soon be sundered. For while I and Tomar were taken captive by the Mind Wizards of Kuur, Ylana was rescued by my friends aboard the Xaxar, which had remained behind to search for Tomar and me. The Jungle Maid had returned with them to Shondakor, and had taken her place aboard the second mighty fleet of sky-ships during the final, triumphant expedition against Kuur.

And here is what happened to her, an adventure that I heard from her own lips and that I have set down very much in her own words, although with certain attitudes and descriptions and interpolations of my own added.

WHEN once the warriors descended into the Valley of Kuur amongst the towering Peaks of Harangzar, surging down the long tunnel that led into the subterranean lair of the Mind Wizards, Ylana of the Jungle Country was in the very forefront of them all.

For this expedition, the jungle Maid had reverted to the abbreviated costume she had worn in the wild, discarding at last the long and clinging courtly gown my beloved Princess Darloona had arrayed her in during her stay in Shondakor. Now the savage girl went clothed in her native dress—a brief garment of supple hide, the skin of some jungle cat that inhabited her plateau homeland. This scant garment draped around her slim hips, exposing her long, bare, golden legs, and stretched tightly over her small, nubile breasts, leaving her tanned throat and shoulders bare. About her neck was clasped a crude necklace of ivory fangs; a rough bracelet of hammered copper wire coiled about her upper arm. Her mane of untrimmed dark hair streamed down her back, and her small feet were encased in high-laced buskins of soft leather.

In her fists, the savage girl clenched long knives drawn from the twin scabbards bound with thongs to her upper thighs. With these weapons she was singularly adroit. In the Jungle Country the children of men do not long survive unless they are able to defend themselves against the dangerous predators who make that jungle their lair. And, even though Ylana was the only daughter of Jugrid, the chief of the Cave People, her folk were so close to the naked struggle for survival that she had been schooled in the arts of the hunt and of war, as much as any boy of the clan.

I shall not repeat here the general account of the battle for Kuur, that furious onslaught of the swordsmen of the Three Cities against the monstrous flesh robots of the Kuurians and the uncanny science weapons of the yellow dwarflings. For of these things you may read in another place's . . . but a savage and desperate conflict it was; the men of Soraba and Tharkol and golden Shondakor fought their way step by step through the subterranean laboratories and chambers of the hidden citadel.

Ever Ylana pressed ahead, and by now the blades of her long knives were red with the gore of Kuurians and their hideous slave monsters. The one overpowering desire in the heart of the savage girl was to find the dungeons wherein were imprisoned the nobles and warriors who had survived the downfall of the first invasion fleet. Among those were Kojá the Yathoon, Lankar, my American friend, Princess Zamara, Lukor of Ganatol, and, of course, I, Jandar. But of them all, the one captive foremost in the mind of Ylana was the boy Tomar. As yet she did not know whether the brave youth still lived or had been slain by the Mind Wizards. But she held in her heart a single ray of hope that he had survived the long days of cruel imprisonment in the Pits of Kuur.

Something had sprung up between the earnest, serious, easily embarrassed young Shondakorian officer and the savage girl during our adventures together after escaping from the Zarkoon bird-men. They were nearly the same age—sixteen or seventeen, I would say, although it has always been difficult for me to tell the ages of the people on this planet—and, although they came from different backgrounds, each had glimpsed in the heart of the other that elusive and indescribable quality that calls a man to a woman across all the world.

Bluff, burly Ergon joined Ylana in the final search, and little Taran, too, with the mighty form of Bozo the othode at his side. That immense, faithful beast sniffed us out, and the iron strength of Ergon forced open the doors to our cells, and one by one we emerged into the sourceless illumination that pervaded the Pits of Kuur.

Ylana had eyes only for Tomar, and came quickly to his side. The boy was pale from his underground imprisonment, and his garment was a mere scrap of rag wound about his loins. The rest of his body was naked, and filthy from the primitive conditions in which he had endured the long weeks of his captivity. But Ylana could see that he was whole and uninjured. A vast relief welled up within her heart, and emotion so filled her that her great, dark, long-lashed eyes were suddenly lustrous with the brilliance of unshed tears.

Her hand went out, tentatively, to touch him. Then, in the next moment, she turned what had been almost a caress into an impudent poke in the ribs. The eternal perversity of the female heart reasserted itself in a burst of mocking laughter.

“Wh-what’s so funny?” blurted Tomar, crimsoning.

“You are!” the girl laughed, although closer to tears of relief than to honest mirth. She cocked a thumb at his dirty face and lean ribs. “You were skinny and bony of knee even before,” she said, grinning impishly. “But look at you now! I can count every rib! Captivity certainly doesn’t agree with you.”

The boy bit his lower lip in embarrassment. Then a reluctant grin tugged at the corners of his mouth.

Things, at last, were back to normal, thought Tomar to himself. He could not help but derive a certain comfort from the notion, difficult as it was to stand there, awkward and dirty and almost naked, and face her mischievous grin.

## Chapter 2

### FOOTPRINTS IN THE DUST

ALL about the two youngsters surged the fury of battle, for the attack on Kuur was at its height. The final outcome of the struggle still hung in the balance and only time would tell whether the mad assault on the citadel of the Mind Wizards would result in victory or defeat for the valiant warriors of the Three Cities.

Wasting but little time greeting my old friends and comrades, I, Jandar, swiftly marshaled the newly freed captives into a fighting force, hoping to take the defenders of Kuur from the rear. Weapons we found aplenty in the guardroom, and in less time than it would take me to describe, we were armed with glittering longswords.

With my American friend, Lankar, at my side, and the giant othode who had given his heart to the Earthling close behind, I led the assault against the rear of the citadel defenders. Most of the warriors from the further hemisphere were still battling their way down through the tunnels, and it was slow going, for the Mind Wizards had deployed their flesh robots in such a manner as to make the attackers pay dearly for every hall and chamber taken.

We thrust against the rear of this bastion of living flesh, and at once became far too busy to think about

what might be happening to those at our own rear.

Had it not been so, I would have no tale to tell and this book would never have been written . . .

THE savage girl was armed, as already told, with twin knives, but Tomar bore a heavy-bladed, cutlasslike sword which Ergon had handed him when the cache of weapons had been broken into and distributed among the former captives.

The sword was not exactly to Tomar's liking, and thus, for a moment, he hesitated and remained behind, although his every instinct clamored to join the fight. The blade was thick and difficult to wield, and in his hands he feared it would make a clumsy weapon. Noticing his hesitation, and correctly interpreting the cause thereof, Ylana offered him one of her long, thin, stiletto-like knives. This offer the boy declined, not wishing to deprive the jungle Maid of one-half of her arms. The girl tossed her curls impatiently, then glanced thoughtfully at the further end of the hall.

"There was a storeroom of weapons at the fore of the cellblock," she remarked. "Perhaps there will be another such at the rear. It's worth a try, and it will only take us a moment."

Tomar agreed and the two hurried to the far end of the stone-floored corridor. And there, indeed, they found a similar room, long and narrow and high-ceilinged, whose walls were thickly hung with a variety of weapons, including many kinds of swords, dirks, and spears with which they were both unfamiliar.

"If these are the weapons which the Kuurians stripped from their captives," the boy observed, as he selected a slim-bladed rapier more fitted to one his size, and swished it back and forth for a moment to try the weight and balance, "then the Mind Wizards must have taken hundreds of prisoners over the years."

Ylana repressed a faint shudder of distaste.

"Our friends are even now battling against the re. suits of their misfortune in being captured by the little yellow men," she said grimly.

Tomar gave her a questioning glance, then realized what the girl referred to. "The giant men . . ." he murmured, a slight grimace of disgust on his features.

"Monsters would be a better name for them," the girl said. "Some of them have four arms, and none of them are easy to kill!"

Tomar nodded with distaste. "The Mind Wizards made them out of parts of their captives," the boy said grimly. "They were cut apart and sewn together again, parts of one being added onto the bodies of others. It's horrible . . . we thought that was probably how we were going to end up, too, once the little fiends were finished gathering information from our memories . . ."

"How did they do that?" the girl inquired.

"They can listen to your thoughts just like you can listen to my voice," the boy replied. "And they can also dig deeper into your mind and explore all of your memories. I don't quite understand it, myself, but that's the way they are."

The girl shivered. "They don't sound-human," she said faintly. Then she added, "Come to think of it, they don't exactly look human, either!"

By this, Ylana probably referred to the dwarfish size and wrinkled, hairless skin of the Kuurians, which was of a distinct lemon-yellow hue. No race remotely resembling the Kuurians had hitherto been known. Nor, for that matter, had a blond, white-skinned race such as the jungle savages of Ylana's own tribe. Their antecedents remained unknown, and this occurred to Tomar, but he thought it tactless to comment upon it in the presence of the jungle Maid, and therefore held his tongue.

"What's this?" inquired the girl curiously, pointing to a hairline crack in the stone wall at the farther end of the long, narrow storeroom.

"Looks like a door of some kind, cut into the rock," said Tomar, studying it. After a little tugging and poking, the boy discovered the trick to opening it. Peering within, he saw nothing of interest, merely a bare, stone-walled cubicle the size of a closet, empty of everything save for dust, which had settled thickly upon the floor like a feathery carpet.

He shrugged. "An unused storage space, I guess. Let's go, Ylana, or the fight will be over before we get a chance to blood our weapons."

"Mine are blooded already," the girl grinned, displaying her two knives, which were scummed with scarlet from hilt to point. "But I'm willing to give you a chance to display your prowess-if any!"

The boy flushed, but said nothing. He was accus. tomed by now to the girl's teasing, and could but rarely think of a good rejoinder. He knew she was merely creating mischief, for during their earlier adventures together there had been enough fighting.

Closing the stone slab that concealed the unused cubicle, he left the storeroom and the two went to join their friends in the fight for freedom.

"There's one Mind Wizard I'd dearly love to meet up with," the boy said grimly, as they engaged battle at one end of a row of warriors.

"Who's that?"

"Zhu Kor," Tomar said. "He was the creature who interrogated me and some of the others in my cell. . ."

The girl parried a sword stroke skillfully, and sank her other knife to its hilt in the bowels of her opponent, who fell gasping. "Did he . . . torture you?" she asked in a faint whisper.

Tomar shook his head as his sword slashed air then enemy flesh.

"Not torture, exactly," the boy said slowly. "But to have someone else pawing through your mind, fondling your memories, digging into secret places . . . well . . . it isn't fun, exactly."

Remembering the experience, he paled, then set his jaw resolutely, and redoubled his efforts to down opponents. He fought furiously, his blade weaving a shimmering curtain of steel before him. It was as if he fought Zhu Kor, instead of merely lumbering flesh robots.

Ylana asked no further questions. A mind-probe, she guessed, must be a distasteful violation of the most private places of the mind, a sort of mental rape. The thought that this evil thing had been done to the boy who now fought at her side, and whom she knew to be brave and manly and chivalrous, enraged her.

She bent to her work, and felt a glow of inward satisfaction when her flickering knives pierced the guard of the creature she fought, and slit its throat from ear to ear. It was almost as if she were helping to revenge the things done to the boy for whom she felt a certain fondness she was not always willing to admit, even in the depths of her own heart.

Thereafter they were, both of them, much too busy for further words.

LATER, when the major resistance had been broken, Princess Zamara of Tharkol took charge of the warriors engaged in clearing the Pits. Several of her officers had fought by her side during the pitched battle, and to these she gave her orders. Among the young men was a member of a minor house of the Tharkolian nobility named Kadar, who had shared a cell with Tomar. This lieutenant was only a year or two older than Tomar himself.

Spotting his friend and former cellmate at the flank of the line, Kadar went over to where Tomar was resting and suggested he check out the cellblock and adjacent storerooms to make certain none of the Kuurians or their slaves were hidden in any of them.

“I’ll go with him,” said the tanned, dark-haired girl who sprawled wearily nearby. Kadar nodded, clapped Tomar on one bare shoulder in comradely salute, passed on down the line, and had no cause until much later to recall the brief exchange.

Tomar and Ylana had cleaned the gore off their blades, and the boy had taken up a baldric and empty scabbard from the fallen. Sheathing his rapier therein, he set off on the search with the jungle Maid at his side. ‘

They were weary from hours of battle, and both were hungry, but they had drunk deep of the waterbottles that the Shondakorians had shared with the captives, passing the canteens down the line. Tomar was somewhat depleted from the privations he had endured during the long weeks of his captivity, but to have a sword in his hand again and an enemy to face is a marvelous stimulant to a former prisoner, he had discovered.

The two searched through all of the cells without finding anyone hidden, and explored each of the guardrooms, storerooms, and other chambers in the sector to which they had been assigned.

“This is a waste of time,” Ylana complained as they completed their tour of the cellblock. “Far rather would I be on the upper level with Prince Jandar. At least there might be some fighting to do up there!”

“We have not yet looked at the weapon room at the end of the row, you know, the one where I got my sword.”

“We’ve already checked it once,” Ylana complained pettishly. “Why bother doing it again? We left it empty, you may remember!”

“Yes, but we also left it unlocked,” Tomar reminded her.

The girl tossed back her hair defiantly.

“Well, I’m not going to waste time searching a room I’ve already searched once,” she snapped. “You may fool around down here all you like, but I’m going up where there may still be some fighting! Are you coming or aren’t you?”

“I’ll see you later,” Tomar said. “I promised Kadar I would search thoroughly . . .”

The dark-haired girl sneered, eyes mirroring scorn.

“Oh, very well, then, I’ll waste time with you,” she grumbled. “But do hurry up, boy, or there won’t be any killing left to do!”

Tomar flushed at the tone of her voice, but set his jaw stubbornly. His sense of duty refused to allow him the easy way out. Trying to ignore her pointed silence, and the mockery in her face, the youth looked over the weapons storeroom and found it as empty as Ylana had said it would be.

“Satisfied now?” she challenged.

He flushed. “There is still the little stone room at the back,” said he, embarrassedly.

“Oh, in the name of the Red Moon!” she stormed, stamping her little, buskin-shod foot impatiently. “You simply hope that if you loiter long enough down here, you won’t have to risk your skin against the last few surviving enemies! Go ahead, then, look your fill but I’m going!”

She turned on her heel, but at the door she paused, glancing back to see if he was following.

He was not. Tomar had pried open the stone slab that served the little closet for a door, and was peering within. Suddenly he called her name. The urgency in his voice made her still the smart retort that rose to her lips. Knife in hand, the jungle Maid came to peer over his shoulder where he crouched by the door, keeping low so that what little light there was from the dim ceiling fixture could illuminate the dusty cubicle.

“What is it?” the girl snapped. “There’s no one here . . .”

“But there was, and not long since,” the boy replied in low tones. “Look. . . 1”

She followed his pointing finger with her eyes, and suddenly she gasped.

“Footprints!” she breathed. For there before her, clearly visible, the marks of a sandaled foot could be seen in the thick dust that mantled the stone floor.

“Yes,” he said tensely. “And do you notice anything curious about them, beyond the simple fact that they are there at all?”

She considered the view, then her eyes widened.

“There are only footprints going into the cubicle,” she breathed faintly, excitement in her huge eyes. “There are none leading out!”

The boy nodded. “Yes, and they end right there . . .”

He pointed again and again she looked.

The line of footprints ended in a blank wall of seemingly solid stone.



## Chapter 3

### AFTER THE BATTLE

WHILE these events were taking place in the gloomy caverns and tunnels beneath the floor of the Valley of Kuur, other things were happening above ground which were to affect the fortunes of Ylana of the Jungle Country and Tomar of Shondakor.

As resistance was crushed out in the underground citadel, one by one the warriors of the Three Cities emerged again into the open air to rest, partake of food and drink, report to the command post, and accept new assignments. Many were wounded, for, while the telepathic dwarves were not themselves fighters, they controlled a slave-force of indomitable soldiery in their will-less zombies. These were tenacious, utterly fearless, and therefore remarkably difficult to kill. But they were not invulnerable, and one by one they were overcome.

The Valley of Kuur was a bleak, desolate region of dry, sterile sands where nothing lived or grew. Meandering through the center of the long valley, which was walled to the north and to the south by tall mountains, glided in sinuous curves a stream of cold, black waters known as Dragon River. Above, the golden skies of Thanator were hidden by impenetrable mists. These, however, proved at length to be artificial, rather than natural. For as the ranks of the Mind Wizards were diminished by each death, the barrier of blurring mists began to dissipate, to become more transparent by infinitely fine gradations of light.

Finally, about three hours after the attack on Kuur had begun, the mist-barrier was completely dispersed, and the healthy light of open day shone gloriously down upon the dominion of the Mind Wizards for the first time in many years.

“Amazing, truly amazing,” puffed Dr. Abziz, the fussy, self-important, little master-geographer of Soraba. “I -would have sworn those clouds were a natural phenomenon, albeit that their oddly stationary quality made their naturalness somewhat suspect, due to the high winds and furious updrafts of the mountainous region in which the vale is situated.”

“There seems to be no question about it,” commented the Earthling, Prince Lankar. “We know for certain, at this point, that the clouds were an illusion, generated by long-range telepathy. . .”

“Aye, yer lordship,” rascally little Glypto piped up in his rasping tones, “even as were that illusion what masked the door to Kuur itself, right over there in they great cliffs-the which were not good enough to fool the nose of yon hulking beast at yer side!”

Crouched at the Earthling’s feet, Bozo, the mighty othode whose heart Lankar had won, and who had accompanied the Earthman all the way from the trackless jungles of the Grand Kumala to the gray shores of Dragon River, raised his ferociously ugly head to have the loose purple fur behind his ears scratched. It was as if the faithful brute, reminded of his important part in finding the hidden entrance to Kuur, signified his willingness to accept yet further thanks in the form of a caress from the hand of the Earthman upon whom he had bestowed all the doglike devotion of his bottomless heart.

The door to Kuur in truth stood visible, a triangular opening cut in the smooth stone of the cliffs that ran for some distance along the borders of the black river. Once it had been cunningly concealed by telepathic illusion, masked by a thought-projection which made it seem that the opening was but a solid continuation of the stony surface. Now it yawned blackly open in the clear, golden light, and through it emerged warriors by the score, the uninjured assisting their wounded comrades.

“Pass that there bottle o’ quarra back here again, neighbor!” said Glypto of Tharkol. “An’ let me an’ his lordship here sample atween us what little be left after yer guzzlin’.”

The fat little geographer flushed guiltily, his scarlet visage assuming an even deeper shade. Brusquely, he handed the bottle over and Glypto upended it, his head tilted aloft, and his two companions watched as the Adam’s-apple bobbed up and down, up and down, as a truly prodigious draft of the fiery, brandylike beverage poured down that scrawny throat.

“Ahhh,” breathed the rascally little guttersnipe, finishing his drink. “That do cut th’ dust, it truly do! Here we go, yer lordship, take aboard a little more o’ this-here Soraban Courage. We have surely earned our quarra with this day’s work, I warrant, and among them prodigious deeds o’ valor these eyes o’ mine ‘aye seen terday, not the least o’ ‘em were committed by yerself, armed with that-there great staff, aye, and the burly brute at yer side!”

The Earthling smiled, thinking back over the day’s fighting. For a fortyish and quite sedentary author, used to little more physical exertion than it takes to walk a dog down the streets of a Long Island town of an evening, he felt comfortably weary. True, there were aches in every muscle, and a knee that would limp a bit for a week or two, and a cut on the back of one wrist that would leave an ugly white scar, never to fade, remaining a permanent souvenir of the battle for Kuur and his slight role in it; but on the whole, it had been an exciting adventure.

He had described sword-fights in a score of novels, had Lankar of Callisto. But this was the first time he had ever been in one!

TOWARD the center of the beach I, Jandar, stood in conversation with Zantor and Thuron and the two other captains of the flying galleons of the armada, the Zarkoon and the Avenger. I was just suggesting to my officers that it might be wise to leave a fair-sized force of fighting-men here behind in Kuur, to make certain we had this nest of vipers cleared out. Zantor looked past me to the doorway cut in the rock.

“Here comes Lukor with the death-roster,” the former Sky Private and Zanadarian gladiator observed. The spry and nimble little Ganatolian masterswordsman came up to where we stood, bearing in one fist a scrap of parchment. The other hand held a slimbladed rapier, dyed crimson with gore from hilt to point. He saluted with the blade carelessly.

“How goes the count now, Master Lukor?” inquired Zantor in his deep, somber voice.

“Fair enough, my Admiral,” Lukor smiled cheerfully. “I have myself examined the corpses, and no fewer than thirteen of the yellow devils are accounted for.”

“I gather your total does not include the naked brain in the case, slain by the boy Taran, or the one in the floating chair struck down by Prince Lankar’s othode,” Zantor mused.

“Quite right,” the silver-haired master-swordsman nodded. “That raises the total of dead Mind Wizards to fifteen. You said there were only seventeen of the fiends in all, lad?”

I shook my head, thoughtfully.

“Sixteen,” I corrected him. “Bozo the othode slew one at Gates of Kuur just before Lankar was captured. That means there is only one Kuurian left alive. . .”

“Well, lad, he’s down there in that nasty warren somewhere, and our men will smoke him out ere long,” Lukor said.

“Let’s hope so,” I remarked wearily. “We’ll not be able to rest easy until the last of them is dead and the entire race has been exterminated. What about the flesh robots? Are all of them dead?”

“A half-dozen were taken alive, the poor creatures) Better if they had gone down fighting, for I doubt their minds can ever be restored to them. Mayhap we had best put the unfortunate creatures out of their misery. . .”

“Well, we can decide on that later,” I shrugged. It was not a decision I was looking forward to making. I am perfectly willing to kill men in battle, when they are my enemies, but to cut down men in cold blood is a bit more than I can comfortably stomach. I am a warrior, not an executioner. Still, there was probably nothing else to do with them. If we didn’t give the zombielike former servitors of the Mind Wizards a quick, clean death by the sword, they would die lingeringly and horribly later on from starvation, for I doubted the flesh robots could tend to themselves without mental commands. The Kuurians had destroyed their will entirely, whether by drugs or surgery or telepathic means, I don’t know.

Just then Prince Valkar of Shondakor, my nephew-in-law, if there is such a term (and there was, on Thanator at least, for the denizens of this world have an extremely complex system of genealogy, to which they adhere scrupulously), came striding up to the command post where we stood talking.

With him was Koja the Yathoon, the tall, chitin-clad, insect-man who had been the first friend I ever made on the jungle Moon, and also Zamara of Tharkol, our royal ally, who was disheveled, and flushed, clad in tattered scraps of a once-gorgeous gown, with a scratch on her cheek and a smudge on her nose, and her long black hair floating about her exquisitely beautiful face in complete disarray. For all that, she looked like the proverbial cat that ate the canary. A glance at the dripping sword she held carelessly in one hand—a weapon she had wielded with remarkable dexterity and obvious grim pleasure—told me why. The proud and fiery Princess of Tharkol had been busy exacting a little personal revenge for the discomforts she had endured as a captive of the Mind Wizards. With her were two young officers, her own lieutenant, Karan, and one of mine, a fellow called Sojan.

We greeted them, and Valkar inquired as to my instructions on the disposal of the captured Kuurian weapons and instruments.

“We have thus far discovered an entire armory of the hand-weapons and the gas-receptacles,” he explained, by the latter term referring to the containers of sleep-gas the defenders of the underground city had employed so effectively.

I told him they should all be destroyed, and the equipment in the Kuurian laboratories, too. “The devilish science of the Mind Wizards must die with the last of their race,” I said. “Never again must these devices be used against our kingdoms.”

“I agree,” said Zamara. “The warriors of Thanator need no devil-magic to defend their cities against whatever foes shall rise to threaten us in the future. Our gallant fighting men have proved here this day that simple courage, armed with simple steel, can overwhelm even the evil science of Kuur. Let

everything be destroyed!”

“Yes, but not until we have all left the caverns,” I added. “Some of the laboratories may contain deadly poisons or acids or powerful explosives. See to this, will you, Lukor?”

He accepted the responsibility with evident pleasure, but spoke up to suggest that a small force remain behind after the departure of the main fleet to make certain of things.

“Zantor and I were just discussing this very point,” I told him. “Zantor, if the Jalathadar is still as skyworthy as I believe she is, let’s leave her here under Haakon, with Lukor in charge of the occupation force.”

The Admiral nodded in agreement. Koja turned to me inquiringly, and spoke in his flat, metallic tones.

“Jandar, if Lukor remains to attend to the final tasks, I request permission to assist him.”

I told him he had my approval, if he felt he needed it. The witty, elegant, short-tempered and adventurous old masterswordsman and the solemn, emotionless Yathoon warrior had become the closest of friends, despite the many differences of race, background, and temperament between them.

By this time hundreds of warriors had emerged from the doorway in the cliff and stood about exchanging weary jests, binding their wounds, cleansing their bloody weapons, and taking nourishment. Others had brought down from the ship provisions of food and drink for the weary soldiers, and although merely field rations, they were delicious to hungry, thirsty men.

I dispatched Valkar in one of the flying gigs to the triple-crested mountain and he returned shortly with word that the ships captured from the First Expedition were safe, securely moored within a concealed cavern, and ready for the return flight.

“Good news, but no more than I had expected. Are all our people accounted for, Lukor?” The Ganatolian shook his head.

“Two parties are still missing,” he explained. “They were assigned to tracing the extent of the tunnels and have not yet returned. Also, one of the ex-prisoners and one crew-member of the Second Armada are missing. Neither had been assigned to the two search parties and I am unable to account for their whereabouts, unless they met and joined with one or another of the searching parties.”

“Oh? Who are these?” I inquired.

“Ylana the Jungle Maid and young Tomar,” said Lukor. “I last laid eyes on the boy when we were all mingling in the corridor, having just been released from our cells. As for the girl, she was fighting near me when we cut our path through the second complex of laboratories and storerooms. She may have sought out young Tomar after we crushed that pocket of resistance, for I believe that there exists . . . a certain fondness between those two.”

“Well, doubtless they will turn up soon enough,” I nodded. “Let me know when the missing search parties return. Zantor, let us begin getting the men back to their ships—the wounded and the former prisoners first. The men need rest badly. Lukor, take Sojan and Karan here and notify those who will remain behind as part of your occupation force. We must get their gear down from the ships. Zantor, will you assign crews to the Conqueress, the Arkonna, and the Jalathadar? We need to get them out of their moorings in the cavern, test them for air-worthiness, and see them fully reprovisioned. Then, once these

matters are attended to, I see no reason why the combined fleets cannot begin the long voyage home . . . home to Shondakor and Tharkol, with the good news of victory and of the destruction of the greatest menace that has ever threatened our world!”

## Chapter 4

### THE SECRET STAIR

TOMAR studied the row of footprints that seemed to end against a stone wall, as if the person who had made them had somehow possessed the power to walk through solid barriers.

The boy was both excited and fascinated. He knew by sheer instinct that the discovery was of enormous importance, and he marveled at how easily they could have missed it. If they had not already explored the small room to know there had been no footprints, they could easily have overlooked them now. They were, after all, hunting for live enemies, not marks in the dust.

Tomar straightened up, coming to a swift decision. He turned to go but his companion laid her hand on his arm, staying him.

“What is it?”

“Where are you going?”

“Back to apprise Kadar of our discovery,” he said.

“Kadar?” she repeated. “Why Kadar? Let’s look into this, on our own-why share the credit with your lieutenant?”

“Because that’s the way things are done,” the boy murmured, with just a trace of exasperation in his voice. He began to explain military organization to the savage girl, realizing that her people were too primitive to have developed sophisticated codes of behavior like that which governed the legions of Shondakor the Golden. His words faded into silence, as soon as he found that Ylana was paying absolutely no attention to what he was patiently trying to explain. Instead, the girl was busily hunting through the weapons and gear and equipment with which the walls of the outer chamber were hung.

“What are you doing?” he inquired.

She flashed him a look of scorn.

“Hunting for a light, of course. It’s much too dark in that little cubbyhole to see. If your Mind Wizards have these magic lights in the ceiling, they may have portable ones, as well.” She pointed at the dimly luminous globe affixed by a bracket to the roof of the chamber.

Tomar grinned feebly. “That’s clever of you, Ylana,” he admitted. “I’d never have thought of that.”

“Probably not,” she agreed. Then, snatching up a metal tube to the end of which a dull globe of heavy crystal was fastened, she uttered an exclamation. Turning it upon him she did something which caused the globe to blaze suddenly with cold light.

With this clenched in one fist, she turned back to the small, dusty room and its mysterious footprints. Shining the light upon the wall against which the footprints ended, the girl began to rap and tap there on with the hilt of her knife, then to poke and probe into every crack with the knife’s point

Tomar watched her in silence for a moment, then cleared his throat and spoke up.

“I still think we should go back and tell Kadar what we have found,” he protested halfheartedly.

The girl paid him absolutely no attention, intent on what she was doing. He repeated the remark in a firmer tone.

“Tell him what?” she asked scathingly. “That you’ve found some marks in the dust? What do you expect him to say to that?”

“Well . . .”

“He’ll just tell you not to bother him with nonsense, and to come back again when you have really found something-something with a bit more substance to it, you ninny!”

“Well . . .” he faltered, then let the word fade away. There was, after all, something to be said for Ylana’s point of view. Perhaps it would be wiser to investigate more fully, rather than being in such a hurry to report the first clue they found.

“Maybe you’re right,” he mused.

“Of course I’m right, I’m always right,” she muttered absently. “Here-lend a hand-put your shoulders behind this. . .”

“This” was a hairline crack her probing had found in the apparently solid stone of the back wall. The tip of her blade had pried into it. Tomar obediently threw his strength into the breach.

“Careful, you hulking oaf, you’ll snap my blade!” the girl flared. With a sheepish grin he relaxed his effort. Heaving and prying, shoving and pulling, they widened the crack. Now it could clearly be seen that there was a secret door in the back wall of the tiny room. Obviously, there must have been some simpler and easier way to effect an entrance, some secret spring or catch that unlocked the hidden door. But they did not have time to hunt for it. Whoever had come this way had done so very recently. He or it was one of their enemies, and was—must be—attempting to hide from capture, or to make an escape to freedom. And every moment weighed in the balance.

With a final heave of his strong young back and shoulders, Tomar, red-faced and gleaming with sweat, managed to force open the door against whatever counterweight had sealed it.

“There!” he grunted when it was done.

The girl cast him an appraising glance, running her eyes over the rigid muscles of his manly, young torso, as he held the door open. His half-naked body was like a work of sculpture, and the woman within her thrilled almost against her will at his display of strength.

For an instant, admiration glistened in her eyes and her soft lips parted. In the next she snapped her mouth shut and forced a sneer.

“Well, you’re good for something anyway, boy,” she grinned. Then she wormed past him and crept into the black opening before he could voice a protest or try to stop her.

“What are you doing!” he burst out in alarm. “Come back!”

“Pooh,” she sneered, or the Thanatorian equivalent thereof.

“But there may be more than one of them-too many for you to fight alone!” he cried.

“Then come in and back me up with some of those muscles you like to show off,” she suggested.

Tomar shrugged helplessly, an expression of bewilderment on his face. His lips framed a silent expletive, which I believe may be translated as “Women!” and did as she had bidden him. Still bracing the door open, he entered the darkness that filled the hidden doorway. He could see nothing until she shone her light in his eyes.

“Well, come on, will you? Let’s explore!” she urged, her voice eager with excitement.

“But what about the door? It may not open from this side.”

“Well, block it with something, and let’s be about our business, she said impatiently, her voice now coming from some distance away.

“With what?” he almost yelled.

“Oh, here, I’ll do it myself,” the girl said furiously, leaning past him to insert the hilt of her dagger between the edge of the stone door and the wall. Reluctantly, Tomar relaxed his effort and let the door-slab slide gratingly back into place. It did not entirely shut, a crack of dim radiance showing in the gloom.

“That should do it, I guess,” he admitted. Ylana laughed shortly and observed in a tart voice that she had to think of everything on this adventure, and that all he was good for was musclework.

“Come on, let’s look around,” she urged, casting the beam of light about them. Its rays pierced the darkness, disclosing stone walls thick with dripping mold and unhealthily pallid fungus, but nothing else.

The air smelled dank and lifeless, as if vitiated from long confinement. Whatever method the Mind Wizards had employed to draw fresh air down from the upper world to circulate through their labyrinthine caverns obviously was not used here.

Suddenly the girl uttered a cry of triumph.

Her light speared a stone structure that interrupted the regularity of walls and flooring.

“A secret stair,” she breathed, excitement glistening in her eyes. And it was exactly that.

THEY debated about which course of action they should follow. Or, to be more precise, Tomar

debated and Ylana refused to consider any of his ideas. The boy sensibly suggested it was time they went back to summon others to assist them in the search. Ylana stubbornly refused to hear of it.

“But, Ylana, it’s dangerous to go ahead on our own-suppose there are several of them in here?”

“Then you will defend me like the great, big hero you are,” she said with a wicked grin. He shrugged helplessly.

“But suppose there are too many of them for both of us to fight?”

“If you’re afraid, you can go back and wait for me in the weapon-room,” she advised. “It’ll be safe enough for you there, I suppose?”

Choking back an ungentlemanly word, Tomar subsided, seething inwardly. Every time he suggested doing something the reasonable or the sensible way, the girl had a tart rejoinder that made it seem his motives sprang from fear of danger, or trouble, or fighting. It proved more than the boy could cope with, and he gave up in despair.

THE stairs were hewn or somehow cut out of solid rock. They were narrow and steep, and remarkably slippery. The thick growth of mold that carpeted them crushed into slime underfoot.

But other feet had gone this same route, and very recently. For Ylana’s light clearly showed a trail of crushed mold leading up the stairs. Some of the fungoid growths had been smeared to slime so very recently, they still leaked an oily ooze.

They climbed the slippery stairs carefully, and slowly, holding on to each other, and talking in low whispers, when they spoke at all.

At the top of the stair, they found themselves at one end of a long tunnel cut through the bedrock beneath the valley floor.

Here the excavations had been performed in haste, and little effort had been taken by the diggers to smooth the walls and ceilings of the tunnel, which were ragged with masses of sharp mineral outcroppings. The floor of the tunnel was smooth enough under their feet, however, and aided by Ylana’s light, they went forward with good speed.

“We must be under the mountains,” puffed the boy after a time. “The valley wasn’t all that wide!”

“Perhaps,” Ylana nodded disinterestedly.

“But which mountains, I wonder?” he persisted. “If I remember the map on the silver amulet Jandar found, there was a range of mountains to the north and to the south, but nothing to the west. And more mountains to the eastern end of the valley, or that one big mountain, anyway, the one with the triple peak . . .”

“Will you stop talking?” the girl hissed venomously. “Just save your breath for walking. We have enough of it to do. This tunnel seems to go on forever. . .”

Suddenly the girl broke off, stopping short-so short that Tomar stumbled into her from behind. He was about to apologize when he noticed that she wasn’t saying anything, just standing there as if her strength had all at once given out, or her determination to pursue this reckless journey into danger, or possibly



both. He grinned. It wasn't often that Tomar thought of a taunt-more often he was on the receiving end of them.

"Well, I see you've stopping talking, yourself," said he, slyly. "What's the matter, are you running out of breath, after warning me against it?"

"Not quite," said the girl in a strangely stifled voice.

"Well, then, why don't you continue complaining about my oafish ways?" he grinned.

"It's rather hard to talk," she said in a strangled voice, "when somebody's holding the point of a sword against your throat."

## Chapter 5

### THE SIXTEENTH CORPSE

BEFORE the end of that day of attack and battle and victory, the warriors of the Three Cities were ready to depart for their distant homes on the other side of the planet.

Lukor and Ergon and Kojá and the other nobles and officers and fighting men who would remain behind as the occupation force, to make certain of the destruction of Kuur, bade farewell to their friends and comrades.

The wounded and the former prisoners were all safely aboard, and the last instructions were given. Gear and provisions had been left behind in sufficient quantities to ensure the safety and also the comfort of the occupation troops. And, of course, one of the sky ships remained, moored to the cliff-top above the Gate to Kuur, for the use of the fighting men left behind. This was the Jalathadar, under Captain Haakon. Manned by a skeleton crew, the ship would bring the occupation force home when their tasks were concluded.

The only element of uneasiness to mar the mood of victory was that the whereabouts of young Tomar and of the Jungle Maid, Ylana, were still unknown. The two youngsters had not returned from their mission. As yet, their absence had caused no consternation among their friends. No one as yet knew of any reason to worry about their safety. The fact that they had not yet returned was merely deemed unfortunate.

So little attention had been given to their absence, in fact, that no one had mentioned it to the Tharkolian lieutenant, Kadar, who had volunteered to serve during the occupation of Kuur. Had he been asked, the young officer could have told how he had dispatched the two to search the cellblock and its adjacent chambers, thus yielding the first clue as to where the missing youngsters had been going when they had so mysteriously vanished from their comrades.

WHEN the golden skies of Thanator were illuminated by the brilliance of dawn, the last men ascended to the ships of the fleet in gigs, which were stored away in their deck-houses, and the ships themselves

were made ready to depart.

The ornithopters Conqueress and Arkonna, which had been slightly battered and damaged when they had been captured by the Mind Wizards, had been hastily repaired during the hours of darkness, and were now ready for the long flight home.

Without further ado, the mightiest air-fleet ever assembled in the skies of Callisto spread its great wings to catch the winds of morning. From the beach of the Dragon River below, the warriors of Lukor's company waved and cheered as the royal colors of Shondakor and Tharkol and Soraba broke from the flag-masts of the Xaxar, the Avenger, the Conqueress, the Arkonna, and the Zarkoon. The five gigantic galleons of the skies rose weightlessly into the golden heavens, floated in a grand and stately curve, circling once the Valley of Kuur, then drew into an arrowhead formation, pointed their prows westward, and lifted their jointed and mobile vans in salute to the warriors below.

Like a flotilla of clouds, the great Armada drifted slowly from view, soaring grandly over the length of the vale, and disappeared from the view of those on the beach. One by one they dwindled to tiny motes in the west and were gone.

And now there was work to be done!

Lukor wasted no time in setting his men to their tasks.

"Friend Koja, take twenty men into the caverns and bring up all the bodies of the dead. We shall burn them in a funeral pyre, as the best means of disposing of the corpses. Our own dead are being flown back home for a state funeral, but we must dispose decently of the bodies of our enemies. I want a complete roster of the dead, with descriptions of each, mind you!"

The ungainly arthropod saluted and withdrew to select his work-party. They descended into Kuur to their grisly task.

The master-swordsman then turned to gruff, burly Ergon, the former Perushtarian slave, who had fought beside Jandar of Callisto in the gladiatorial arena of Zanadar and was now a member of the Shondakorian court.

"Ergon, old comrade, I will give you the task of checking through all of the storerooms and laboratories and arsenals of the Mind Wizards," said Lukor. "Any weapons, gear, provisions or supplies of food or drink which you deem we can put to good use, I want brought up and added to our supply depot up the beach, there. Then the laboratories and storage chambers are to be sealed off. Some of the devices and machines of the dwarfish yellow devils are doubtless dangerous to tamper with, and I desire no untoward accidents!"

"Aye, komad," grunted Ergon, saluting his captain. "Jandar has already warned that the chemical laboratories have explosives and acids and poisons, and others such-like devil-stuff. Seal 'em off, I will!" He ambled off to choose a team for the job.

Some of the others were given the task of drawing up a precise map of the underground facilities of the Mind Wizards, and departed at once in search of drawing implements and measuring tools.

These assignments given out to worthy and competent men, Lukor posted guards at lookout stations and turned to the task he had reserved unto himself.

## The finding of Tomar and Ylanal

THE day wore on, slowly. It is not a Thanatorian custom to indulge in a midday meal; however, Lukor decided that he would break with tradition this once and see that his men partook of that Earthling innovation Jandar of Callisto had introduced, which was called "lunch." After a morning spent in the dank underground tunnels, he decided they required an interval of rest in the open air, at least.

By late afternoon, the corpses of the slain had been fetched up from the labyrinthine ways of the Underground City and sanitarily disposed of on a huge funeral pyre at the other end of the beach. Those weapons and gear that Ergon had found in the subterranean storage-chambers, and that he decided could be of use to the occupation force, had either been added to the stores held at the supply depot, or had been stored away aboard the Jalathadar.

The laboratories and machine shops had been sealed off, as Lukor had ordered. As an additional precaution, Ergon had posted guards at their entrances.

The underground passages and chambers had, by evening, been thoroughly explored and mapped. The cartographers had added descriptive captions as to the nature and use of each -chamber, as far as these could be deduced. A number of secret cubicles or previously undiscovered tunnels had also been found, so thorough had been the work of the officers assigned to this task.

Over the evening meal, by the light of flaring torches, Lukor examined these charts. Dividing his attention almost equally between the hot stew prepared aboard the galley of the flying ship that hovered aloft, and the annotated maps, he studied the designs of the subterranean system of chambers with a certain dissatisfaction and uneasiness gnawing at his heart, a feeling that had nothing to do with the the maps of the Underground City.

The reason for this growing dissatisfaction was quite simple-in his own task, Lukor had failed.

Tomar and Ylana had not been found.

THE men slept that night in blanket rolls on the beach, while a huge bonfire flared against the dark,, and alert guards strolled the perimeter of the camp or stood sentinel at the Gates of Kuur.

The night was clear and mild, almost warm. But that was not the reason the men voiced for sleeping out-of-doors. None of them had the slightest desire to spend the night in those dank, grim, underground rooms where once the fiendish Mind Wizards had held sway.

Lukor alone did not sleep.

It had finally occurred to the gallant, old Ganatolian to announce to all his troops that the two young people were missing, and to inquire if any of the warriors had a notion of what might have become of them.

Kadar had looked up with surprise etched on his handsome features. The Tharkolian lieutenant had not, until that very moment, realized that the Shondakorian boy and the jungle Maid were among the missing.

"Sir Lukor," he spoke up, "I last saw them in the cellblock where Prince Jandar and all of us who survived the capture of the First Armada were held."

"When was that, precisely?" Lukor demanded keenly. The officer told him.

The young juru-komad then recounted how Princess Zamara had instructed him to assign to some of the warriors the duty of searching all of the cellblock and the adjacent guardrooms and storage-chambers, in order to make absolutely certain that none of the Kuurians or their slaves were hiding there.

“Which cellblock do you refer to?” inquired Lukor. “Show it to me on the map.”

The lieutenant studied the chart by the light of the torches, and then laid his finger on the area he had described. Lukor looked over the map carefully: no known tunnel or hallway stretched beyond that region. The corridor, lined with cells on either side, ended in a blank wall. There was only a small store room of weapons beyond the last pair of cells, the one where Ergon had discovered a variety of hand-weapons and warriors’ gear obviously stripped from former captives.

The Ganatolian then questioned all of the other officers and warriors in his troop, but none remembered having seen the two young people at any point later than had Kadar.

“Very well; tomorrow, after breakfast, we will start the search at that place, beginning with the last position at which they are known to have been,” decided Lukor.

He turned his attention to the study of the death roster which Koja had drawn up. It was complete in every detail, but something about it nagged at his mind, bothering him in a way he could not quite describe, even to himself.

SOMETIME later, Koja, just going off guard duty, noticed while making his way to his bedroll that Lukor was still awake. The expression on the old Ganatolian’s face was one of troubled thoughtfulness.

“You seem disturbed, friend Lukor,” observed the solemn arthropod, coming up to where his captain sat studying a scroll by the light of a flaring torch. “Does your wound still annoy you?”

“A scratch, nothing more,” shrugged the other, dismissing the slight injury he had taken in the battle. “I have been looking at the roster of the dead which you prepared. What disturbs me is the number of the corpses.”

“Our own losses were light,” murmured the Yathoon, mistaking the death-count to which Lukor referred to be that of the Fleet-members slain in the battle.

“I mean the Kuurian corpses,” Lukor snapped testily. “I’ve just gone over the figures for the third time tonight. There were sixteen of the yellow devils alive before the battle. After the battle, we found fifteen carcasses.”

“Then. . . ?”

“Precisely. Where is the sixteenth corpse?”

Book II

INTO AN UNKNOWN WORLD

## Chapter 6

### THE YELLOW DWARF

FROM the southern slopes of the Peaks of Harangzar they watched with longing eyes the departure of the five flying galleons. Ylana and Tomar exchanged an eloquent glance, but said nothing. For there was truly nothing to be said.

The skies of Thanator had flushed with the bright golden splendor of that weird dawn that illuminates the heavens of the jungle Moon like a vast, silent explosion of auric light. By the brilliance of that illumination, the youth and the savage girl observed the mighty ships of the sky ascend from their moorings until they hovered as weightlessly as so many clouds above the Valley of the Mind Wizards.

One by one, they circled the vale, they drew into the familiar arrowhead formation, and pointed their ornate prows toward the horizon of the west, spread their great ungainly wings to catch the morning breeze, and sailed for the far and distant Edge of the World, bound for Shondakor and Tharkol and Soraba.

Tomar bowed his head despairingly, striving to think, and trying to force back the hot tears that filled his eyes, so that the girl at his side might not discover the depth of his emotion and the bitterness of his despair.

She was his to care for now, for there was no other to stand between the slim, lovely child of the jungle Country and this unexplored and savage wilderness and the innumerable dangers it contained.

He wanted her to think him braver and more manly than he knew himself to be—as brave and as manly, at least, as events now required him to be.

He did not want her to see the gleam of tears in his eyes. For, to stand between Ylana and the perils of the wild, he must play the part of a strong and courageous fighting man.

It would not do for her to see him weeping like a child who is frightened of the dark.

BUT, in all honesty, there was reason enough and more for him to feel despair, if not indeed to be fearful of the fate that awaited them in this hostile, new world.

That which preyed most upon Tomar's mind was the knowledge that his friends and comrades had sailed for home without him and Ylana, abandoning them to an unknown destiny. He could hardly imagine why Prince Jandar and the others should have done this. The only reason that occurred to him was that, just possibly, the warriors of the West believed that Tomar and Ylana were dead, slain in the battle in which the citadel of the Mind Wizards had been conquered.

And yet it was not at all like Jandar of Callisto to fly away and leave them behind without positive evidence of their demise. Nor could the boy picture Lukor of Ganatol or Koja of the Yathoon Horde nor any of his other friends and comrades aboard the fleet behaving in so callous and careless a manner.

Their behavior seemed inexplicable. And yet with his own eyes he had seen the departure of the Armada.

It did not, unfortunately, occur to Tomar to count the number of aerial vessels that had made their departure that morning. Had he done so, and had he noted with care which of the great sailing ships of the sky had flown from Kuur, he might have realized the truth: that one of the great ornithopters had remained behind with the occupation force.

For, of course, the Jalathadar had not sailed but was still moored in the secret cavern within the mountain of the triple peaks which stood like a mighty monument at the far eastern end of the Valley of Kuur.

This Tomar could not have known. Nor could he see clearly enough from his particular vantage point that the warriors of the West still remained encamped before the Gates of Kuur.

And so Tomar thought himself and Ylana left behind by his former comrades, abandoned to an unknown fate, lost and alone and helpless in an unknown world.

These were not pleasant thoughts, but far less pleasant even than these broodings was the fact that both he and the girl were the prisoners of a cunning and implacable enemy who had disarmed and bound them in the valley of Kuur.

For, even as Lukor of Ganatol had begun to surmise, one of the dread Mind Wizards yet lived.

Worse yet, it was Zhu Kor, that merciless and cruel yellow fiend, high in the hierarchy of the dwarfish telepaths, who had probed and fondled the most intimate places in Tomar's mind.

Tomar shuddered inwardly, remembering with crawling horror the cold, hideous sensation of those icy, insidious tendrils of thought from an alien brain slithering through his tenderest and most private memories.

And again he tasted the bitterness of despair. For, while it was dire and difficult enough to have been taken prisoner, the position in which he and Ylana now found themselves was the uttermost extremity of hopelessness.

For how can you escape from a captor who can read your every thought?

IT had seemed likely to Tomar that, with the fleet of the West having departed from Kuur, the yellow dwarf who held them prisoners would seek to re-enter the Underground City. Doubtless Zhu Kor was adept in the use of the uncanny science and arms of his people. When the dwarfish telepath had fled into the secret passages in order to avoid being captured or slain by the warriors of the Three Cities, he had enjoyed such a slender margin of time that he had only been able to snatch up a leather case of food and drink, and had armed himself with only one of the slim rapiers, selected from among the variety of swords that adorned the walls of the stone chamber, along with a mysterious hand weapon of glittering metal and crystal, whose purpose and nature were still unknown to the two youngsters.

Inexplicably, however, Zhu Kor turned his back on Kuur and impelled his prisoners in the opposite direction.

As they stumbled along, wrists bound behind their backs, loops of cord about their throats held like dogs' leashes in the wrinkled clawlike hand of their master, the two young people puzzled as to where their destination might be.

The subterranean passage in which they had been taken prisoner by the last surviving Mind Wizard had led onto the slopes of the southern mountains, the exit therefrom being concealed behind a slab of rough rock which seemed to the eye simply an outcropping of stone.

Instead of leading his captives back into the terminus of the underground passageway, by that means to retrace their steps back into the subterranean city which they believed was by now empty, the yellow dwarf turned their faces into the west and marched them before him between the twin peaks and down the further slope.

Nor did Zhu Kor bother to enlighten them as to where they were headed, nor why they did not return to Kuur. The Mind Wizard had, as yet, said very little to the two captives. He seemed distracted and thoughtful, the wrinkled yellow mask of his skull-like visage drawn into a frown of somber meditation.

It was not difficult to imagine some of the thoughts that passed through the mind of Zhu Kor. His race was destroyed and with it all its plans and plots and schemes for the future conquest and subjugation of this world. This was enough to give the most implacable villain pause for inward contemplation.

In simple fact, of course, the Kuurian with his mind-reading powers was fully aware of those recent events whereof Tomar of Shondakor and Ylana of the Jungle Country were as yet ignorant. He knew, from his uncanny sensory perceptions, that a strong host of the fighting men of the West yet invested Kuur, that rather than having been left deserted, the Underground City of the Mind Wizards was under close and careful guard by the warriors of Lukor's force. He knew, as well, from his weird ability to eavesdrop upon the private thoughts of others, that Kojia and Lukor and Ergon and the rest of Tomar and Ylana's former shipmates were now actively searching for the lost pair, aware that one of the Mind Wizards was still at large.

And he knew that Lukor's men would be on his trail all too soon.

THEY slept that night in the depths of a narrow cave at the base of the southern range of mountains which surrounded the Valley of Kuur.

Tomar and Ylana slept but fitfully, for all that they were exhausted from the descent of the steep southern slopes. The way down would have taxed their strength and agility even had their hands been free. But Zhu Kor did not dare to cut them loose from their bonds, for some reason he did not explain. Not only did he keep their hands tied, but he forced them to retain about their throats the loops of cord whose ends he had tied to his own wrist.

They were loosely knotted, those leashes, and had either Tomar or Ylana fallen or attempted to flee, they would have tightened around their necks and strangled them. Therefore, it had been necessary to find a way down the mountain by slow and easy stages, following a meandering ledge by which the boy and girl could descend without using their hands. This had consumed most of the day, without a single pause for rest or sustenance.

With nightfall the Mind Wizard had forced them into the dank recesses of the narrow cave, and then he had, however grudgingly, permitted them to eat and to drink, albeit quite sparingly, from his stores. Then he instructed them to seek what repose they could until dawn, settling himself in the mouth of the cave, so that he stood between his two captives and freedom.

Zhu Kor himself did not sleep. The Kuurians despised the body and its grossly physical needs, and had learned to drive and discipline themselves. To conquer the weariness that pervaded his dwarfish form, the

yellow man swallowed a certain powder which his kind carried ever on their persons. The drug overrode the weariness of the body and the desire for slumber.

It was dangerous, that drug, he knew all too well. But he took it nonetheless. For he had much thinking to do.

He was the last of his kind in all this world, and he knew it. But he knew also that the powers of the mind that he possessed made him the most dangerous of all the living creatures on this planet, and potentially the most powerful of them all. A single savant of his race the insidious Ool had achieved utter dominance over that powerful bandit legion called the Chac Yuul, in times gone by. Another, in a similar fashion, became the secret power behind the throne of Zanadar, and had subjugated the immensely powerful Sky Pirates to his wishes. A third, Ang Chan, had manipulated the Princess of Tharkol like a puppet on a string, precipitating her insane attempt to conquer the entire world of Thanator.

Pondering these matters, Zhu Kor permitted a small, cold smile of cunning to touch the corners of his thin lips.

For Ool and Ang Chan and the Mind Wizard who had secretly ruled the Sky Pirates of Zanadar-one Rakhu by name had been but less skilled at mind control than he. For he, Zhu Kor, was the fourth most powerful and the fourth most ancient member of the yellow men of Kuur.

And, with the destruction of his superiors, and the extinction of his kind, he had now achieved supremacy. He was the last and now the greatest of the Kuurians.

And the conquest of this planet might still be within his grasp. . .

Dreaming his mad dreams of power and conquest and of the subjugation of an entire planet, he stared with unseeing eyes upon a night now made glorious by the rising of the great moons of Gordrinator, or Jupiter. Among them, the far distant world from which he and all his kind had immigrated by a means now known only to himself alone.

## Chapter 7

### THE TERROR OF THE SKIES

WHEN the dawn of the second morning after the destruction of Kuur illuminated the golden and vaporous skies of the jungle Moon, Zhu Kor roused his prisoners rudely from their rest and bade them relieve themselves, partake of a few morsels of nourishment and a sip of precious water, and be on their way.

Although the Mind Wizard contemptuously regarded the two young specimens of humanity, who to his coldly superior mind were little better than cattle, he did not awaken them with a kick or a blow. Physical punishments were all but alien to the thinking of his kind, for in every conceivable manner they eschewed the things of the body. This doubtless explained why such purely physical means of coercion as torture or bodily abuse had not been visited upon Tomar and the other warriors during their recent captivity in



Kuur.

When one possesses the uncanny ability to insert a mental probe into the minds of others, physical mistreatment becomes a vapid anachronism and a superfluous cruelty.

He awoke them with a swift, sharp mental probe into their dreaming brains.

Tomar jerked awake, cold and sweating, haunted by hideous memories of similar violations.

At least he was accustomed to such experiences. This unfortunately, was not so with Ylana. The savage girl awoke screaming in terror, her eyes wide and glazed with shock at so intimate a touch. It took Tomar some time to soothe her frightened and bewildered sobs. And all the while the hunched, gaunt, dwarfish Zhu Kor watched his slaves with idle amusement.

“You shall learn, animal, to suffer far worse from your master,” said the Kuurian, calmly. “Absolute and instantaneous obedience to my every whim is the only course of behavior that will insure that similar experiences occur but seldom. Learn to anticipate my wishes and to act before prodded into action, if you dislike the prod so much. Remember that there exists no portion of your being-body, mind or soul-that I cannot violate in any manner, at any time, if only to amuse myself.”

Ylana, now crimson with outrage after recovering from her shock, would have spat a crude epithet, had not Tomar shouted at her to hold her tongue. She shot the boy a smoldering glare of mute and vindictive fury, but swallowed her words. This seemed to afford their captor a certain degree of cold satisfaction.

“Good,” he chuckled, “very good( Learn from your companion how not to cause me annoyance, and all will be well enough with you. Now, both of you, crawl out into the open-for I have ascertained that we are unobserved-and relieve yourselves of bodily wastes in the disgusting manner of your brutish kind. And be quick about it! We must go far this day, and time is of the utmost importance.”

The two youngsters had no option but to do as they were told, and crawled out into the open, squatted, and performed the functions of nature as best they could. Poor Tomar was scarlet with embarrassment at being forced to relieve himself in the company of the girl, and scrupulously avoided glancing in her direction. The Jungle Maid was somewhat less fastidious about such matters, although even among her primitive tribe such necessities were attended to in relative privacy. However, she felt ashamed and soiled by the act and endured her indignity as best she could. But her opinions of the creature who has forced this shame upon the two of them were so vitriolic that they cannot be repeated here.

Zhu Kor, of course, was aware of her discomfiture and of her loathing. It did not in the least annoy him: in his cold, inhuman way, he found it rather amusing.

ALL that day they continued traveling westward, after wending south for the first hour and a half of the journey. Zhu Kor had taken the lead and hobbled along with an easy and effortless stride, for all his hunched and diminutive stature. The boy and the girl followed as best they could, but found it difficult with their hands bound to traverse the sandy plain, littered with tumbled slabs of broken rock.

On more than one occasion Tomar or Ylana tripped and fell, and the strangling-noose each still wore tightened, cutting off their breathing. On each such occasion, however, Zhu Kor paused and stood negligently smiling his cold, cruel, thin-lipped smile while the boy or the girl, or both, struggled slowly and painfully to their feet again.

As it was not the custom of the inhabitants of Thanator to indulge in the midday meal, no pause in their

progress was permitted until late afternoon. Weary and bedraggled, bruised and dusty, aching in every muscle, the two captives limped and staggered along, striving to keep up with their captor, who still wore the ends of their leashes fastened about his bony wrist.

To alleviate the boredom of their journey, the two conversed at times in whispers pitched too low for their captor to overhear. Doubtless, Zhu Kor was aware of this, for from time to time Tomar and Ylana were aware of the cold and alien touch of his intrusion into the privacy of their thoughts, fleeting as these intrusions were. But the contempt of the Mind Wizard for the two captives he regarded as little more than articulate beasts was such that it mattered not to him what they said to one other.

“West, and always west,” whispered Ylana after a time through dry, parched lips. “Wherever do you suppose he is taking us?”

“Only the Lords of Gordrinator know that,” Tomar breathed.

An hour or so later, a thought suddenly occurred to the jungle Maid, and she stiffened up from the exhausted slouch she had assumed and hissed to attract Tomar’s attention.

“What is it?” he asked wearily.

Excitement danced in the girl’s bright eyes.

“I believe I know where he is leading us,” the girl gasped with eagerness.

“Where, then?”

“If I remember rightly the big chart that Dr. Abziz drew up, the only geographical feature of any particular importance lying slightly south and due west of Kuur is the plateau that bears the great lake of Cor-Az, and the jungle country where my people live,” the girl whispered excitedly. “I think that’s where we are going, and, if I am right, then all may yet be well with us!”

“Oh? Why do you think that?” asked Tomar in low tones.

A flash of her old temper sparked in the jungle Girl’s heart. In much her old rude manner, she snorted, eyeing her companion contemptuously.

“You’ve about as much brains in your head as a zell,” she said impolitely, naming a flying lizardlike creature that was one of the denizens of this inhospitable country and which had never particularly been noticed for its intelligence.

“What do you mean?” whispered the boy, flushing as he always did under the lashing of the girl’s tongue.

“By the Red Moon, you scrawny lout, don’t you remember that my father, Jugrid, is the chieftain of the Cave Country, and that my mother came from among the River People, the other tribe who share that land with us, and who live near the shores of the river that drains from the Cor-Az and pours over the edge of the plateau from a precipice known as the Falls, and that she was herself the daughter of Zuruk, the chief?”

“Yes, I remember you mentioning the matter,” said the boy dispiritedly.

“Well, then I” snorted the girl. “If he leads us there and I don’t know why he should, but I can’t think

where else we could be going-then it seems to me that there's an awfully good chance that either my father's people or my mother's folk would fight to free us. He's not all that powerful, you know. He can't control more than a couple minds at a time. He surely can't take over the brains of the warriors of a whole tribe all at once!"

"I see what you're getting at," muttered Tomar, his head down, not looking at her, as they trudged along over the rough and broken ground.

"So?"

"So I'm afraid that you're the one whose forgotten something," he said.

"And what is it that I've forgotten that's so important?" the girl demanded.

"You've forgotten that your father, even though he was the chief of your tribe, had no power to go against the wishes of the Elders when it came to their wanting you to marry that warrior of the tribe whom you disliked so-what was his name?"

"Xangan."

"That's right, Xangan. I seem to remember that you ran away rather than be forced into this marriage with Xangan, and got yourself captured by the Flying Men, which is how Prince Janchan and I met you in the first place."

"So what?" demanded the girl impatiently. She disliked being reminded of that episode, in which she had forgotten that which was drummed into all the children of her tribe-to be wary and cautious of capture by the dreaded winged cannibals called the Zarkoon.

"So-in case you've forgotten, Ylana, the Elders of your tribe just about worship the Mind Wizards of Kuur, whom they call the 'Unseen Ones,' or something like that, and if Jugrid the chief, your father, had so little authority over the Elders that he couldn't even keep them from forcing you into marriage with a man you detested, he's not going to be able to get you free from a Mind Wizard the Elders revere almost as a god."

The girl said nothing, merely limped along at his side.

"And, since the Elders summoned the Mind Wizards from Kuur to come and carry off Prince Janchan and Lukor and myself, that time we managed with your help to escape from the caves of your people, they certainly aren't going to be friendly toward us this time, with a live Mind Wizard on the scene."

The girl made no reply to this, not that there was much of anything she could have said in rebuttal. Tomar stole a glance at her. Ylana's head sagged on her breast and her hair, dusty and disheveled, hung so that it hid her expression from him.

"Ylana, I'm sorry."

She said nothing.

They went forward in silence together, under the blazing sky.

AND before long there appeared against that sky a bat-winged mote.

It was Ylana who noticed it first. The Jungle Maid, tossing her damp curls back limply, glanced skyward and froze, violet eyes dilating.

“What is- it?” mumbled Tomar, not noticing her attention riveted on the heavens.

“A ghasozar,” the girl breathed. “Coming this way. . .”

The boy gasped an oath, turning wild eyes aloft. The black shape grew swiftly in size, and soon the long, swishing tail with its barbed tip could be seen, as well as the long, arched neck and alligatorlike snout.

The ghasozar is a flying lizard of prodigious size, and one of the most dreaded and feared of all the predators on the jungle Moon. I have seen them at close range myself, and to my untutored gaze they distinctly resemble the grisly pterodactyl, winged monstrosity of the dim Pleistocene skies.

While the boy and girl gazed skyward in consternation, unable because of their bonds to flee or even to defend themselves, the flying reptile hurtled nearer and nearer.

Nor did Zhu Kor seem in the slightest degree fearful at the approach of the winged dragon, whose insatiable appetite and adamantine claws made him an object of horror the length and breadth of Thanator.

“The Terror of the Skies,” he was called by the nations of this world. Even those ferocious, indomitable, and coldly emotionless warriors, the Yathoon Horde, held this creature in helpless awe.

Black-ribbed, membranous wings spread wide, blotting out the golden skies, the flying horror dropped toward the three tiny figures on the rocky plain

Tomar and Ylana shrieked.

But Zhu Kor only smiled his thin, mirthless smile as the titanic aerial reptile fell upon them.

## Chapter 8

### CARRIED OFF!

IT was not long before Lukor discovered the first important clue as to what had befallen young Tomar and the Jungle Maid.

Armed with a precise map of the Underground City, his search teams combed every inch of the corridors and cells and chambers that extended beyond the last place where the two youngsters were known to have been.

The Tharkolian lieutenant, Kadar, had explained how he had assigned to Tomar and the girl the task of searching the vacant cellblock and storage-chambers to make certain no one was concealed therein.

It was Koja who discovered Ylana's knife still wedged between the sill and the stone door in the empty cubicle at the rear of the storage-chamber. The Yathoon swordsman quickly raised the alarm, summoning to his side a party of warriors. Lukor came down at the news, eyes sparkling with zestful excitement.

The strong arms of Ergon pried open the stone door. Swordsmen entered the secret chamber, naked blades held ready in one hand, the other holding aloft flaring torches.

Lukor gasped, pointing.

The torch light revealed three sets of footprints clearly marked on the dusty pave. The smaller ones in the supple buskins could easily have been made by the jungle Maid. Those slightly larger, in sandals of regulation cut, were probably Tomar's.

But-the third set?

Lukor bent over them, keen eyes searching in the glare of the torches. Eventually he straightened, and those who stood about, awaiting his instruction, saw an expression of grim satisfaction on his aristocratic features.

"Friend Koja, I believe we have found the whereabouts of the sixteenth corpse," he said tersely. "Albeit, the corpse is not yet a corpse-a lapse I trust we shall soon be able to rectify!"

"In other words," murmured the solemn arthropod, "you believe the third set of prints were made by the missing Mind Wizard?"

The old Ganatolian nodded, sleek, silver hair gleaming in the fire of the torches.

"Precisely so," he puffed. "Somehow or other, Ylana and the boy got wind of his hiding-place, and unjudiciously chose to search him out on their own. A pity! I trust they have been sensible enough to merely dog his steps, and not attempt to arrest the yellow devil. Captain, a troop of men, quickly. Follow the trail wherever it leads and report back to me at the command post. Koja, you may accompany the search party if you so desire. I am going back to apprise our comrades of this discovery and to alert the sentries to the possibilities that at least one of the Kuurians somehow managed to survive the massacre. . ."

Koja nodded and turned to join the waiting warriors, while Lukor and grumbling Ergon turned to reenter the main portion of the labyrinth.

"I do not understand, Sir Lukor, why I may not accompany the search party," the Perushtarian gladiator glowered.

"Because I have need of your strong back and fighting strength," replied the master-swordsman crisply. "Come, and make haste! We have many things to do . . ."

"Such as?" inquired the red gladiator, a truculent and surly expression on his heavy-jawed face.

"Such as to make certain our facilities are secure against any depredations the fugitive Mind Wizard might attempt," said the Ganatolian. "The Underground City is sufficiently guarded to prevent him from returning to it and from using it as a hideaway. The Jalathadar is aloft and beyond his reach. The Valley

itself is infested with our troops, so it is unlikely he could utilize our stores or food supplies. One area remains open to possible use by the little yellow devil, however, and that is the cavern hidden in the side of the mountain, where the Kuurians had our captive vessels moored. I will alert our sentries and guards in the labyrinthine ways, the beach above, and aloft in the flying ship. I rely on you, friend Ergon, to lead a squad to occupy the mountain cavern, to make certain that the fugitive does not make use of it. Come along now, and briskly!”

THE war party, which Lukor had assigned to follow the subterranean tunnel to its end, made swift progress through the darkness. The warriors were eager to pursue the fugitive telepath and to render him helpless. They were also anxious to ascertain the safety of the youth and the girl whom they assumed, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, to be still following the trail of the Kuurian.

They found the secret stair and, still following the marks the feet of the Kuurian and his pursuers had made in the dust and the mold and lichen, ascended to the upper level, finding themselves in the long passageway that led underneath the mountains. Here they divided into two forces, which was the only course that reason and common sense dictated, as they had no way of knowing in which direction the three had gone. Here the floor was of damp stone-too dry to support lichenous growths that might display the marks of feet, and yet too moist to permit dust to gather for the same purpose.

The captain of the troop, a Soraban royal guardsman called Thord, led his squad in one direction, while Koja assumed command of the remainder of the force, with Kadar as his second-in-command. Koja’s troop followed the tunnel toward the mountains.

Kadar eagerly took the fore. Holding his flaring torch aloft, the young Tharkolian lieutenant prosecuted the pursuit with all alacrity and attention. Although the misadventures that had befallen young Tomar and the jungle Maid were, of course, none of his doing, he nevertheless felt a certain degree of personal responsibility for their plight, whose direness was yet unknown. It had been Kadar, after all, who had assigned them to this ill-fated mission, and the young officer would not have been worthy of his position of command had he not been keenly sensible of his share in the responsibility for their present dangers.

They traversed the length of the cavernous tunnel with all possible speed. They did not, however, pursue the fleeing three with haste so precipitous as to preclude a sharp attention to detail. Koja solemnly instructed his warriors to shine the light of their torches upon the walls of the passage to detect any side tunnel which might branch off unexpectedly from the main shaft they were following.

Erelong one of the warriors uttered a low cry, stooped, and held into the light of the flaring torches a bit of coppery metal. Koja inspected it thoughtfully. It resembled a short length of hammered copper wire, such as the coil that Ylana wore as an item of adornment, wound around her upper arm. The end of the wire-which was half a hand’s-breadth long-was rough and shone with clear brilliance in the flaring, orange light, as if swiftly torn away from the remainder of the coil.

“What do you think?” inquired the insectoid, showing the bit of wire to the Tharkolian.

“It looks like part of the copper ornament the savage girl wore about her arm,” murmured the young officer.

“Quite likely so,” mused Koja. “Moreover, it has not lain here for long, otherwise the moisture which bedews the floor of the cavern would have marked the metal with greenish corrosion.”

“The implication of which is, then, that the girl left it here to mark the way for any of us who might follow,” said Kadar.

“I believe that to be the most reasonable assumption to make, under the circumstances,” said Kojá in his harsh, metallic voice, devoid of inflection. “Do you deduce any further intelligence from this discovery?”

The Tharkolian replied that he did not.

“They have been captured by the Kuurian,” said the Yathoon warrior with conviction in his emotionless tones. Kadar looked up at his towering height with surprise.

“How do you figure that?”

“Why else leave a bit of copper behind? The tunnel goes straight on in the direction we have been traveling since we ascended the secret stair. It does not branch off in any other side tunnel. So the bit of copper could not have been set here in order that the two young people might find their way back in the manner in which they came. I believe the Kuurian detected that he was being followed and hid here to surprise them. There is no blood on the cavern floor, hence there was no battle. He must have seized control of their minds, or forced them to disarm at swordpoint. They are now prisoners, completely in the power of a desperate creature. Forward, my warriors, with all possible speed—our friends may yet live!”

THE mouth of the tunnel was masked by a slab of stone. When they reached it, and realized they could go no further, Kojá’s warriors searched about, poking and prying until they managed to discover the hidden catch that opened the door.

They emerged onto the flank of the wall of mountains which marched along the edge of the Valley of the Mind Wizards to the south. It was still daylight, therefore they were able to search the slope carefully and thoroughly. They did so, however, without finding anything indicating that the Mind Wizard or his two presumed captives had come this way.

“Search again,” commanded the Yathoon emotionlessly. “There was no other way they could have gone.”

By nightfall, they were still searching. Under the dim light of the moon Juruvad they continued to cover the ground, but eventually the failure of the light rendered further search impossible.

“We shall camp here until dawn,” decided Kojá. Kadar began to protest, but the Yathoon silenced him curtly. “There is naught else to do, Kadar. We cannot hope to find footprints or a further piece of Ylana’s copper wire in the darkness. Unfortunately for our young friends, this is the Night of the Single Moon.”

“Aye, curse the luck!” muttered Kadar grimly. “And that one moon would have to be Juruvad, due to the innate perversity of things!”

Kojá said nothing, although doubtless he shared the bitter emotion. Juruvad is the Thanatorian name for Amalthea, the tiny satellite of Jupiter that is the inmost of all her many moons. Because of her smallness, or her great distance from Callisto, or both, Juruvad sheds remarkably little light on the world called Thanator.

They had carried with them no food nor water, due to the haste with which they had embarked upon their pursuit of the fugitives. Hence they fasted that night. But with the first blaze of dawn, they were awake and ready to march.

The slopes that led into the Valley of the Mind Wizards they had already thoroughly covered the night before. Now the warriors turned their attentions to the further side, which led down to the rock-strewn plains surrounding the mountainguarded valley.

Almost at once, a young Shondakorian swordsman named Vargon discovered Ylana's second token, a short length of copper wire torn obviously from her ornament, and about the same size as the first they had discovered. It marked a narrow passage across the cloven peak of the mountain, with a trail which zigzagged down the slope to the plain beyond.

"The girl has kept her wits about her," commented Koja with approval. "They took this way down. Swiftly now, men, and watch your footing!"

As they made their descent of the further slope, Kadar wondered aloud how the jungle Maid was managing to leave clues behind to mark their trail without this being known by the Mind Wizard. Koja flexed his brow-antennae in the Yathoon equivalent of a human shrug of the shoulders..

"Obviously, there are limits to the powers of the Mind Wizards," he observed solemnly. "To exert continuous control over the mind of another must be fatiguing, or may require a degree of concentration that the Kuurian cannot afford to exert while negotiating so precipitous a decline as this. Or, conversely, it is difficult or even impossible for him to control or even overwatch two minds simultaneously; so, probably assuming the boy Tomar to be the more potentially quarrelsome or dangerous of the pair, he ignores the girl most of the time. But let us save our breath for the climb down. Speculation on the unknown is fruitless, at best."

At the bottom of the cliff, they spread out and searched in both directions. Before long they found marks indicating that the Mind Wizard and his prisoners had spent the night in a small cave. The warriors fanned out, searching in everwidening circles from the cave, using it as a base for their reconnaissance. Before long a third piece of copper wire was found, pointing south and west.

"They have gone in this direction," decided Koja. Then he turned to one of the warriors, a Tharkolian named Jarak. "Jarak, reascend the cliff and return at once to report these things to Sir Lukor. It is probable that we shall require many more men to search the wilderness that lies before us, which is largely unexplored. We may require the services of the Jalathadar itself, but that is a decision only Lukor can make."

"Yes, sir," said the warrior, saluting smartly. As he turned on his heel to go, Koja detained him for additional instruction.

"There is, by the way, no need to retrace our path through the tunnel, for that would be wasting time, which is our most valuable commodity, under these circumstances," the insect-man said thoughtfully. "Simply descend to the floor of the Valley on the other side of this mountain, Jarak. You will reach the encampment of our troops much more swiftly in that manner."

The warrior nodded, saluted again, and began to climb.

Koja turned, ordered his men into arrowhead formation, and began to traverse the plain in the direction which Ylana's token had specified.

"What if the Kuurian chooses to change the direction in which he is traveling?" inquired Kadar after a time.



“We may hope that Ylana remains unobserved long enough to mark the new direction as she has previously marked her trail,” replied Koja.

“And if she is unable to do so, or prevented from doing so?”

Koja looked straight ahead and continued striding into the southwest without further reply to Kadar’s question.

There was nothing he could say.

MANY hours later the warriors under Koja’s command were resting in the shade of a vast, rocky outcropping. Lack of food and water was beginning to reduce their strength. There was nothing they could do about this, however, but endure as stolidly as they could the rigors of hunger and thirst. The wilderness of scattered rock and sterile sands was seemingly uninhabited by men or beasts; and there was no water here.

Suddenly, the sentry posted atop the rock uttered a joyous cry. He pointed into the eastern sky, where a soaring mote of darker hue had been descried against the clear, golden sky.

The keen eyes of Koja soon made out the identity of the flying thing.

“Lukor has followed in the Jalathadar,” he remarked with grave satisfaction. “It is even as I had hoped.”

“One could wish we had happier news to report,” said Kadar. Kaja said nothing.

The observers stationed aboard the flying ship soon recognized them and before long the mighty galleon of the skies paused in its flight to hover directly above them. Erelong one of the gigs came circling down, and aboard were Lukor of Ganatol and the scout Koja had commanded to return to camp with word of their discoveries, Jarak of Tharkol.

The gig came down to ground level, anchored to a rocky spur, and Lukor dismounted with a swift agility which belied his years.

“What further news, friend Koja?” he demanded.

“Little that is good, I fear,” said Koja heavily. “From a great distance we descried the descent of a ghastozar. When we reached the spot, our friends and the Kuurian were no longer there.”

Lukor blinked, aghast.

“Do you mean they have been carried off by a flying lizard?”

“Evidently so,” replied Koja.

## Chapter 9

### JUGRID OF THE JUNGLE COUNTRY

MIDWAY between the Valley of Kuur and the Mountains of the Zarkoon, positioned almost exactly on the equator of Callisto, there rises a vast plateau many leagues in extent, completely walled about by mountains.

When, during an earlier adventure, I, Jandar, together with Lukor, Koja the Yathoon, Tomar, and Ylana, had been forced down upon this plateau, after making our escape from the hollow mountain where the cannibal bird-men called the Zarkoon nested, this jungle-clad tableland reminded me inescapably of a similar plateau, which was the scene of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous romance, *The Lost World*.

The plateau is inhabited by all manner of ferocious beasts, including some not found elsewhere upon the known surface of Thanator, such as the dinosaurlike groacks, which infest the waters of Cor-Az, the Great Lake which occupies the southwestern corner of this country. In this respect, of course, the jungle-clad plateau most resembles the "lost world" of Conan Doyle's fantastic tale.

But the plateau bears, as well, a second item of resemblance to its fictional counterpart in that it is also inhabited by tribes of primitive savages. To the north, in a region of rocky hills that border upon the edges of the central jungles, dwell a tribe of Cave People, whose chief is the mighty Jugrid, Ylana's father. And to the southeast live the River People, in the hill country that borders upon the Great Waterfall; Ylana's mother was a daughter of the chief of this tribe. Thus, even in this respect, does the plateau match that in *The Lost World*, for as I recall hairy, shambling Neanderthals dwelt there, if not as well tribes of CroMagnon men.

Theirs is a harsh, cruel, and unremitting struggle for the means of existence, at any rate, and the human inhabitants of the jungle Country stand low on the scale of civilization upon Callisto. In fact, unless you wish to consider the barbaric war-hordes of the Yathoon insectoids as "human," or the beaked, winged, cannibalistic Zarkoon, the tribes of the jungle Country are the most primitive of all the nations of Thana. for known to me.

Like many another primitive race in man's long history, the Cave People are dominated by a religious elite. These are the Elders, a group of men who function as priests or shamans for the savages, and who presume to interpret the will of the so-called "Unseen Ones," or "Shadowy Ones," whom the superstitious cavemen venerate as gods.

I do not know whether the other tribe, the River People who share the jungle Country with Jugrid's clan, adhere to a similar belief.

The principal item of difference between the divinities worshiped by the Cave People of Callisto and their terrene counterparts of prehistoric times, is that the Callistan deities exist, although they are not divine, of course, but the Mind Wizards of Kuur.

JUGRID of the Jungle Country observed the lateness of the day with a measure of grim trepidation not unmingled with that stolid fatalism that is among the more appealing and admirable of the traits of his primitive kind.

The skies of Callisto are evenly illuminated from horizon to horizon, and from pole to pole, by some electrical excitation of inert vapors suspended high in the planet's stratosphere, and not by any such radiant orb as the sun. Hence, it is impossible to tell from the direction of light or the inclination of the

source of illumination the approximate hour of the day, as it is, for instance, on our own Earth.

But from countless ages of experience the races that dwelt upon the surface of Thanator developed an unconscious sense of time, like a subconscious clock. By pure instinct, the Thanatorian knows the approximate hour, and can predict the interval between any point of time and the coming of darkness.

Thus it was that Jugrid of the Jungle Country knew with grim certitude and fatalistic foreboding how little time there yet remained of his life.

For with the coming of darkness, which at this season of the year coincided precisely with the rising of mighty Gordrinator or Jupiter upon the horizon, he would suffer the penalty of death. The Elders had so decreed when, at the termination of lengthy and interminable councils, and the study of innumerable omens and signs, they had removed him from the chieftainship of the tribe and condemned him to be sacrificed to the Unseen Ones, against whose strictures he had been judged to have sinned beyond all forgiveness.

He stood now at the barred grille which closed the mouth of one cave, making of it a reasonable facsimile of a prison cell, and his bearded and majestic features were inscrutable as he studied the illuminated heavens.

On guard at that hour of his imprisonment was a young warrior of the tribe, by the name of Thadron.

Little speech had passed between Jugrid and his guard, but the reason for this did not lie in any lack of sympathy on the part of Thadron for his former chief, nor from any cruel pleasure the young warrior might have taken in the humbling and degradation of one who had, in better times, ruled with strength, manliness, and a rude sense of justice.

Thadron, in fact, sympathized deeply with the plight of the hapless Jugrid, and regretted the sorry fate to which the mighty warrior chief of the jungle Country had nearly come.

And Thadron had serious misgivings about the member of the tribe whom the vindictive Elders had selected to replace Jugrid in the chieftainship. That individual, a hulking, surly, overbearing lout named Xangan, was the favorite grandson of the most powerful and influential of the Elders, Quone by name. Thus it may be seen that the element of nepotism was not altogether foreign even to the primitive customs of so savage and backward a tribe as the cave-dwellers.

And Thadron had good and sufficient reason to despise the new chief, for on more than one occasion he and Xangan had been at odds, whereas between the young warrior and his former chief there had never existed anything but a manly mutual respect and liking.

Now that the hour of sacrifice was almost come, Xangan came strolling over from the feasting-place, and Thadron, observing the slouching approach of the bully, rightly guessed that Xangan had in mind one final taunting insult to the former chief, before the termination of his mortal existence made any further humiliations impossible.

The differences between such of the tribe as Jugrid and Thadron, and the burly Xangan, were clearly visible. The former chief was a huge man with a stalwart and clean-cut mien and a powerful physique. His thick mane of hair and short, neatly trimmed beard, were black shot through with strands of gray which were premature, for he was in the full prime of his manhood. His gaze was clear and steady, his demeanor dignified and stern. Thadron, although many years his junior, was of a similar nobility of carriage, a handsome young man of smoothly muscular build, with a good face, a strong jaw, and candid,

fearless eyes. Both men were rudely clothed in brief loincloths of animal hides and wore primitive ornaments of bone ivory and hammered metal.

Xangan, in striking contrast, was a repulsive, slouching man, with coarse, heavy features and bloodshot eyes, his sensual features bestubbed and unshaven, his burly chest hirsute. Albeit that he was nearer to Thadron's age than to Jugrid's, his figure had lost the lithe, supple, and erect posture of the younger man, if, indeed, it had ever possessed it, and was running to unhealthy and unsightly flabbiness.

His black locks were tangled and matted, his person unkempt. But about his hairy throat was clasped the fang and claw necklace of the chieftaincy.

A malignant gleam shone in his puffy eyes as he strolled over to the door of the prison cave where Jugrid stood. Xangan had brought with him from the cook-fires a haunch of meat upon which he gnawed, pausing from time to time to lick a particularly succulent goblet of fat from his greasy fingers, or to wipe these upon his thighs. He munched with obvious relish in full knowledge of the fact that his former chief, whom he had come to taunt, had eaten nothing that day, since it was the custom of the tribe that those who were condemned to death should fast to purify their spirits before journeying to the unknown and paradisiacal gardens of the Unseen Ones.

Jugrid knew both hunger and thirst, but his iron dignity did not permit him to display the slightest flicker of emotion as the grinning bully lounged against the bars of the door, looking him up and down with insolent and malicious eyes, all the while sucking the last toothsome morsel from the bone he had nearly cleaned.

Wiping his loose and pendulous lips clean on the back of his hand, Xangan emitted a belch of satisfaction, and addressed him.

"Since you doubtless hunger, O Jugrid, I have brought you a bone to chew upon, like the othode you are," he grinned, tossing the bone through the bars so that it fell at Jugrid's feet.

"I shall leave it to the unfortunate tribe who now must suffer under the rule of such as you, O Xangan, to decide which of us is more the othode," said Jugrid calmly, not deigning to even look at the bone at his feet.

The features of Xangan flushed and his grin went sour. An ugly glint appeared in his eye. It was not so much the cold contempt clearly audible in Jugrid's tones as he addressed him, as it was the fact that the fallen chief did not display the slightest sign of fear or dismay at his approaching fate that ruffled the mood of the new chief. A bully to the core and a coward to the heart—he knew fear so intimately and so thoroughly, that it somewhat bolstered his own self-esteem to discern the marks of it in others.

No one so enjoys the display of cowardice in others so much as the man who has cowardice within his own heart.

He grimaced and spat. "Boast as you will, you fomak," growled Xangan, employing the name of the venomous cavespider as an epithet, "you shall whimper and squirm soon enough, under the knife of sacrifice!"

"If I am a fomak as you say, O Xangan," smiled Jugrid, "I would that you could feel my bite before that hour comes!"

Xangan laughed loudly, but at this Thadron spoke up, with a slight smile upon his handsome, clean-cut

features.

“Yes, O Chief, Jugrid makes a valid point,” said the young warrior. “Whatever happened to the ancient custom of the tribe that when a chief has been, for any reason, deposed and condemned to death, he may claim the right to trial-by-combat against the person of the new chief, thereby to fall honorably in battle, if such indeed be the will of the Unseen Ones?”

Xangan looked disconcerted. The very thought of having to face such a magnificent fighting man as the former chief struck terror into his queasy heart, for he knew full well that in any honest test of strength or courage or fighting skill, he would fare miserably at the hands of the mighty Jugrid. At the very notion he turned pale and swallowed. Thadron and Jugrid, observing this and correctly guessing the direction of his thought, exchanged an amused glance, and laughed quietly together.

Flushing with rage again, Xangan controlled his features, distorting them into a savage grimace of vindictiveness. Then he attempted to assume a loftier pose, one for which his degraded face and form were but poorly suited.

“The Elders, who interpret the will of the Unseen Ones, as you know, have in this instance rendered null that ancient custom,” he said virtuously. Then, in a flash of braggadocio, he added, “Were it not for their holy strictures, I should enjoy nothing more than to meet the traitor, Jugrid, in combat!”

Neither Thadron nor Jugrid were deceived by his boasting. They smiled again.

“You speak the truth, O Chief,” said Thadron solemnly.

Xangan glanced at the young warrior quickly, to see if there was mischief in his eye. But Thadron kept a straight face.

“I do?” said Xangan, surprised.

“Yes, you do. For truthfully you would ‘enjoy nothing more’ than to face the mighty Jugrid in hand-to-hand battle. At least, that is,” he amended with a quiet smile, “you would never enjoy anything again, after facing Jugrid in battle. For I doubt if you would survive the contest, and dead men may enjoy nothing, I am given to understand!”

Xangan snarled, his eyes mean and vicious. “You do ill to insult your chief, warrior,” he growled. “The Elders, whom, as you know, interpret the will of the Unseen Ones. . .

Jugrid laughed contemptuously.

“You are fond of mouthing that pious phrase, O Xangan,” he observed. “I have come to believe that the Unseen Ones are also Unheard Ones, and I have little doubt that the Elders more often than not merely interpret the will of the Elders. That is to say, the will of one of them, at least, the venerable Quone, your own grandfather. For otherwise even the Unseen Ones could not be so foolish as to elevate a cowardly bully like yourself to the chieftainship of the tribe.”

“That is sacrilege,” sputtered Xangan in a strangled tone.

“Slay me for it, then,” said Jugrid, coolly. “A man can die only once. Since I am already condemned to death, I might as well give voice to the secret feelings of my heart. I have kept them hidden far too long already.”

Xangan, who was rarely at his best in any contest of wit or intelligence, could think of no rejoinder to these calm statements and contented himself with a spiteful smirk. He spat coarsely at Jugrid's feet and made as if to turn away in disdain. But just then a shout was heard to ring out from the sentries posted atop the cliffs which ringed in the valley in which they stood.

All craned their heads to see what peril impended. The sentry gestured wildly to call attention to himself, then pointed off into the east. Soon there became visible a black mote against the golden sky. At the sight of it, Xangan went a mottled grayish-white, the color of dirty milk, and swallowed painfully, his eyes wide with fear.

It was a ghastozar.

The giant flying reptile, whose ferocity and rapacious hunger made it feared above even the denizens of the jungle depths, was descending upon the valley.

The clangor of alarm went up. Warriors sprang to their feet, snatching up bows and crude spears. Xangan swallowed again and seemed to be trembling. Observing his obvious terror, Thadron smiled and again exchanged a humorous glance with his former chief.

"When the warriors of the village gather to battle against the Terror of the Skies," he said clearly, "surely the stalwart and courageous Xangan will wish to stand in their fore, to display to all his valor and courage("

Xangan was too agitated even to snarl. He peered about from side to side, as if hunting for a place to hide until the raid was over. Obviously finding one, he slunk away in the direction of the trees that grew thickly at the edge of the jungle rising at the end of the valley.

"I fear the warriors of the tribe will have to fend for themselves, lacking the example and the leadership of their new chief," said Thadron, disgustedly.

Jugrid was straining his eyes at the winged horror aloft.

"In this instance, I fear I must disagree with you, my friend," replied Jugrid in a curious tone.

Thadron glanced at him inquiringly.

Jugrid nodded aloft.

"I greatly doubt if this ghastozar will afford the warriors any opportunity to require the example or the leadership of Xangan," said Jugrid.

"How so?" asked the younger man in a puzzled tone of voice.

"Because never before have these eyes of mine looked upon a ghastozar ridden by human beings," said Jugrid of the Jungle Country quietly. "And since I observe three riders to be mounted astride the winged dragon, I can only assume the monster to be tame."

Thadron turned his eyes searchingly aloft and observed that this was in fact the truth.

He had never seen a ghastozar with human riders either, and could not help wondering what so curious a

marvel portended.

A few moments after this, his eyes widened even further.

For two of the riders who sat astride the monster pterodactyl were people he knew.

They were, in fact, people he thought long dead!

## Chapter 10

### A PIECE OF BONE

AS it happened, the warriors of the tribe had no need for their feather-tufted arrows or their flint-bladed spears. Before so much as a single barbed shaft could be loosed upon the monstrous flying reptile or its riders, a shrill voice screeched out a harsh command.

“Stop!”

It was Quone the Elder, the grandfather of Xangan the new chief. He was a tall, gaunt old man with a bald, knobby skull crowned with fugitive wisps of pale, colorless hair. His visage was remarkable in its extreme homeliness, with a prominent nose like a proboscis, and keen but rheumy, red-rimmed eyes. His skinny frame was wrapped in tanned hides, whose ragged fringes dangled about his bony shanks. His brow was crowned with gaudy feathers, and his wattled throat was hung with strings of beads and shells and the fangs of beasts.

He customarily wore an air of cold, supercilious hauteur and thin-lipped reproof, which lent to his physiognomy an expression antequely Roman. But at this moment his agitation was such that his normally aloof repose was forgotten. He squawked and flapped his arms like a distraught old turkey.

Puzzled, the warriors exchanged reluctant glances with one another, and slowly lowered their weapons. They watched with fear in their faces as the lizardlike creature, which had hovered all this while on beating and batlike wings, settled heavily to the rocky floor of the narrow valley that stretched between the two walls of soaring cliffs in which the caves yawned blackly.

Quone hobbled forward stiffly, then flopped bellydown in the dust and groveled like a trodden worm before the slit-eyed little yellow man who now descended from between the shoulders of the monstrous flying reptile.

From the puzzlement in the faces of the warriors, you might have decided-correctly, I believe-that, with the sole exception of the seven Elders, few of the men or women of the tribe in all their long history had looked upon the actual person of one of the Unseen Ones whom they venerated.

The yellow dwarf exchanged a few crisp sentences with the cringing Elder in a low whisper, then turned to enter the cave from whose mouth the other Elders blinked querulously. At Quone's command, warriors stepped forward to gingerly assist the two other riders to dismount from the giant reptile.

It would have been difficult for the two to have dismounted unassisted, for their hands were bound by thongs behind their backs.

As they were helped down from the back of the huge and curiously docile pterodactyl, all of the tribe saw and recognized them as Jugrid and Thadron had already done.

One of them was Ylana, the daughter of the former chief.

The other was the boy, Tomar, who had formerly been imprisoned, together with Lukor of Ganatol and Jandar of Callisto, in the selfsame prison-cave wherein Jugrid now abided the hour of human sacrifice.

The members of the tribe murmured and whispered among themselves at the unexpected sight of the two fugitives, who were known to have fled into the jungle long ago, and whom all, like Thadron, had presumed to be dead by now.

At the command of Quone the two were thrust into the prison-cave where Jugrid stood, and the door was locked behind them.

Then Quone scurried off into the cave of the Elders to confer with his lord and master, Zhu Kor, the last of the Mind Wizards.

THE eyes of Ylana widened incredulously at the sight of her father. Then they brimmed with hot tears and the girl, whose arms had been freed by the guards, hurled herself upon his broad and manly breast.

Jugrid enfolded her in his embrace and buried his head in her hair. For a long moment they clung to each other, then slowly they parted.

“Thanks be to whatever Spirits guide our fortunes, my child, that you still live and are not long-since devoured by the beasts of the wild, as I had feared!” Jugrid murmured in low, heartfelt tones. But then he added, grimly, “But my curse\_ upon the capricious lords of our destiny, who have forced you once again into the hands of those who would do you ill.”

As soon as Ylana recovered herself, and mastered her emotions, she demanded to know what strange reversal of fortune had thrust the former chieftain of her people into such a sorry condition as this of imprisonment.

Jugrid fingered the base of his throat where now there no longer hung the fang-and-claw necklace of the chieftaincy, and his majestic features assumed an expression of resignation.

“It causes me no pleasure to admit that it was your own actions, my daughter, which have brought me low,” he said heavily.

The girl blinked.

“My actions, father?”

“Yes, my child,” said Jugrid. “When our former prisoners, including this youth here, whose features I recognize, managed to escape from this same place of imprisonment, it was believed by more than a few of the tribe that I, Jugrid, had taken part in setting them free.”



“But, father, it was I!” protested Ylana, and in a swift torrent of words which tumbled from her lips in a scarcely intelligible manner, the girl related how she had smuggled a small knife to Jandar and Lukor and Tomar, so that they might escape and flee into the jungles before their enemies, the Mind Wizards of Kuur, arrived to carry them captive back to the Underground City.\*

Jugrid, who had remained ignorant of the precise manner in which the prisoners had escaped until now, nodded in comprehension.

“Ah, now at last I understand,” he rumbled in his deep voice. “In their escape one of the two guards at the gate was slain by such a knife, the other was knocked unconscious and died not long thereafter of a cracked skull. While many of our fellow-tribesmen believed that it was you, Ylana, who had somehow helped your friends to make their break for freedom, no one was easily convinced that a girl of your slender stature and few years could knock down a full-grown warrior and crack his skull, much less slay an alert guardsman with a knife. Hence, it was assumed that I, your father, had somehow been persuaded to do the deed, myself.”

The girl was white-faced with horror.

“Do you mean that you have been condemned to death for things that I did alone, and of which you were completely ignorant, at the time?” the girl demanded incredulously.

Her father nodded somberly. ‘

“So much for the justice meted out by our pious and god-fearing Elders,” muttered a voice at the barred gate.

It was young Thadron, the guard. The warrior was somewhat more intelligent and better-bred than the brutish tribesmen of Xangan’s ilk. Ylana turned upon him in a mute appeal for help. He looked ashamed and distinctly uncomfortable.

“Thadron, is it not?” she asked urgently. “Thadron, I recall you were ever a warrior of honor, who dealt with me courteously and in a respectful manner. Can you not help us now, in our time of need? I am more than willing to bear testimony that it was not my father who struck down Brokar and Cadj,” (these were the names of the two guards who were felled during the attempted escape) “but that I am the guilty one.”

Thadron bit his lip and lowered his head, so as not to have to meet the eyes of Ylana.

“Daughter of the chief, I would help you if I could,” the young warrior said in low tones, “but even I find it impossible to believe that a girl such as yourself could slay two such mighty warriors as Brokar and Cadj.”

“But I did not slay them,” protested Ylana in a vehement tone. “It was Prince Jandar and the old swordsman, Lukor! It must have been they-but in all events, it was certainly not Jugrid, your chief!”

Here young Tomar stepped forward. Looking the guard in the eye the boy told in earnest tones how Lukor had persuaded the guards to open the door on a pretext, and had sprung upon one of them and had slit his throat with the flint-bladed knife that Ylana had slipped to them earlier, while Jandar dispatched the other with a blow of his fist.

Thadron opened his mouth to make, some reply to the appeal of the others when there sounded behind

him the crunch of a sandal on the stony soil.

He turned to see a hulking and hirsute figure eyeing him with an expression at once suspicious and truculent. It was a warrior known as Fanga, a crony of Xangan's.

"By orders of Xangan the chief, I am to replace you here," grunted Fanga.

"My duty is not up until nightfall, or so I had been given to understand," protested Thadron. The other shrugged and took up the stone-tipped spear that Thadron had left standing against the stone wall beside the entrance of the cave.

There was nothing for Thadron to do but turn away and seek out the cook-fires, where a few scraps doubtless remained for those who, like himself, had been on guard or sentry duty during the mealtime.

But he went with slow steps and a heavy heart.

TO change the subject to one less painful, Jugrid inquired of his daughter by what peculiar magic they had come flying down from the skies astride one of the fearsome, bat-winged, dragonlike predators.

Ylana and Tomar, frequently interrupting each other in their eagerness, described the recent events that had taken place. They told of the expedition of the warriors and fighting men of the distant West in their uncanny aerial ships, and of the battle for Kuur, and of its conquest and the destruction of the Mind Wizards, who were the only reality behind the weird myths of the Unseen Ones.

They then explained how they had been captured by the last surviving Mind Wizard and forced to accompany him across the hostile wilderness between Kuur and the Jungle Country.

Tomar explained how the Kuurians possessed the chilling power to read influence, and even control the minds of others, and how this could be exercised even over the beasts of the wild. He told how Zhu Kor, weary at last of traversing the barren and rocky land afoot, had called down by his eerie powers one of the great bat-winged ghasozars, which the savants of his race were accustomed to use for riding-beasts when they needed to transport themselves swiftly from one place to another.

It was by Mind Wizards mounted on a force of monstrous ghasozars that the flying galleons of the First Expedition against Kuur had been taken by surprise attack one dark and moonless night while still high above the surface of the planet, Tomar explained.

Holding the small, rapacious brain of the flying predator helpless under his will, Zhu Kor had forced the brute to take them upon its back, and they had thus flown the remaining leagues to the jungle Country more swiftly than they could have accomplished the same distance even mounted upon fleet-footed thaptors.

At the conclusion of their narrative, the two young people lapsed into silence. Both the boy and the girl had had little sleep the night before, and were greatly wearied by their long trek afoot over the rocky wastes, and their bleary eyes and uncontrolled yawns attested to their need for rest. Jugrid advised them to snatch what little respite they could before nightfall, and they needed very little encouragement. Both lay down against the wall and were soon asleep, leaving Jugrid to his moody thoughts.

NIGHT fell, and the golden skies of Callisto darkened at once as if a black pall had been cast across the world, or as if the unseen source of all radiance had suddenly been extinguished.

The immense, ochre-banded bulk of mighty Gordrinator filled nearly one-quarter of the horizon, its great Red Spot glaring down at the valley of the Cave People like an angry and baleful eye.

But the fires of the sacrifice were not lit, and the guards did not come to lead Jugrid to the place of his death.

In the darkness of the cave the chief busied himself about a small, secret task, grateful for even so brief a stay as this given him by the Mind Wizard, who held the Elders long in council, delaying the hour of execution.

Tomar had confided his opinions as to why Zhu Kor had sought out the cave country atop the high plateau. With the destruction of Kuur, and the demise of his brethren, he had reasoned Zhu Kor was the last of his race in all the world. And the country of the Cave People, who worshiped his kind and who were under the thumb of the Elders, was the last and only power base that remained to the yellow dwarf.

What use Zhu Kor might put the savage tribe to was as yet unguessable. But at least, in the cavern of the Elders, he had a place of refuge.

As the huge and luminous rondure of Gordrinator rose into the skies of Callisto, its beams struck deep into the cave where the two young people slept. The light shining into his eyes eventually awoke Tomar, who roused to find that, unaccountably, his arm was about the warm shoulders of the still sleeping Ylana, and the girl's slim body was cuddled cozily against his side.

Flushing scarlet, the boy disengaged himself as gently as he could, to avoid waking the exhausted girl, and glanced guiltily about the cave to see if her father had noticed their position, which as a male relative he might easily have considered compromising.

Jugrid, however, was more tolerant of the affections of young people than Tomar guessed, and had only smiled affectionately, remembering with nostalgia his own youth when he noticed the sleeping pair.

Besides, he had other and more vital matters on his mind-his impending execution and the safety of his daughter and her young friend.

Seeing that Tomar was now awake, the chief beckoned the boy nearer. The boy came to Ylana's mighty sire, and the two conversed in whispers for a time, keeping their voices pitched too low for the hulking and oafish Fanga to hear from his place by the mouth of the cave.

Jugrid informed the Shondakorian youth of his intention to escape with Tomar and Ylana into the jungle, there to perhaps seek refuge with the River People.

"I am certainly anxious to get Ylana out of here, sir," said Tomar diffidently, "but how can we possibly get away? Prince Jandar and Sir Lukor and I, when we were imprisoned here before, examined the walls and floor of the entire cave, and the cave mouth is the only way out-and that is securely barred."

He indicated the heavy grill of thick, bamboolike wood blocking the entrance. The shafts were bound together with heavy strands of rope made of dried and woven grasses. It was so heavy that it customarily took two men to move it.

And before it, squatting on the stone floor just beyond their reach, the burly Fanga crouched, snoring heavily.

“Even if we could manage to get through the gate, what about him?” asked Tomar. “He has a stone axe and a spear, and we have nothing to fight with.”

“That’s not quite so,” smiled Jugrid. “Shortly before your arrival, Xangan was kind enough to present me with the key to our gate, and a weapon wherewith to defend ourselves against even such as Fanga.”

“What key also serves as a weapon?” asked Tomar. Still smiling, Jugrid showed the boy something in his hand.

“But-that’s only a piece of bone!” protested Tomar.

“Quite so,” said Jugrid, smiling. Then, in quick, low tones he explained to the youth how he intended to use the piece of bone that Xangan had tossed at his feet in taunting derision.

### Book III

#### THE HUNTERS AND THE HUNTED

#### Chapter 11

#### THE SEARCH BEGINS

THEY roused Xangan at dawn from a drunken stupor with the word that all the captives had somehow managed to escape during the night.

The chieftain, to quiet the qualms occasioned by the arrival of Zhu Kor the Mind Wizard, had partaken heavily of a sort of palm-wine called Bokka which the Cave People brew. The beverage, although potent, was not potent enough. It is one thing to worship your gods-at a safe distance. It is quite another thing to suddenly have one of them, living, breathing, and large as life, plunked down suddenly in your very midst.

Such, at least, was the experience of Xangan.

He blinked bleary eyes up at the guards, sitting up quickly. “What do you mean-escaped? Curse you, Mozar, how could the filthy fomaks have escaped?”

He broke off, groaning. Sitting up so quickly made it seem as if his head, which felt as fragile as an eggshell, was being kicked around by men in heavy jackboots.

“Come and see,” growled the guard, who was beginning to lose his fear of the swaggering bully. A coward himself, it somehow made him feel better to know that Xangan the chief was afraid of the Unseen One.

Xangan went to look. What he saw was to him inexplicable. The massive grill was enormously heavy . . . certainly much too heavy to have been opened by a slim girl and a scrawny boy.

“They must have sawed through the ropes,” smiled Thadron, who had come to enjoy the sight of Xangan’s discomfiture. He pointed to the unraveled ends of the strands of woven grass, which were stringy and tough, resilient and strong, but also dry.

“Notice how they worked it?” the young warrior pointed out to the belligerent, baffled, scowling Xangan. “They simply cut loose the door itself from the frame. Then they toppled it from its standing position. It fell on Fanga, who must have been asleep, and crushed his skull. Then they took up his weapons, and fled into the jungle, probably. Also, they seem to have picked up a bow and a quiverful of arrows from the front of Tugar’s cave. At least he is missing one, and believes he left it standing outside the mouth of the cave last night. . .”

“Cut the ropes? Cut them! With what, blast you?” roared Xangan, sick with fury. “They were disarmed they had nothing to cut the grass ropes with!”

“With this, evidently,” said Thadron, mildly, holding out a long, sharp-edged sliver of bone like an ivory-bladed knife. “Do you recognize it, O Chief? It seems to be a piece broken off from the meat bone that you threw to your former chief last night, as a man might throw a bone to his favorite othode.”

Xangan flushed crimson, and turned a hot, malignant glare on the smiling, smooth-faced young tribesman. Shaking with rage, he leveled one hairy and not particularly clean arm at the lithe warrior.

“Thadron, I have endured your cunning remarks and sly inferences too long,” he growled deep in his chest. “Watch yourself, you girl-faced horeb, or you’ll end up in the sacrifice beside your traitorous friends!”

A horeb is a repulsive rodentlike scavenger of despicable habits. The word is a deadly insult among the Thanatorians, and in a warrior society-especially one as primitive as that of the Cave People-insults are not lightly thrown in the teeth of fighting men raised from the cradle with weapons in their hands. Thadron went white to the lips, and his eyes were hard. They bored coldly into the bleary, bloodshot orbs of Xangan. The bully blustered and swore, but dropped his gaze guiltily.

“I will let that pass,” said Thadron evenly, “my Chief. But I will say this only: if Thadron must die, he can think of no finer company in which to meet his end than that of Jugrid of the Jungle Country.”

Xangan flushed and cursed, waving his arms and mouthing loud oaths. But not one of the many tribesmen who stood in silent witness to the scene failed to notice that their new leader did not dare to meet the cool, contemptuous gaze of the youth, Thadron.

“Enough of this exchanging of words,” hissed a thin voice from behind them. “You waste time-and breath. Hasten, animals, in pursuit of the escaped prisoners. Not one must get away, do you understand?”

It was Zhu Kor. The malignant dwarf flicked his slitted gaze about the group, and men muttered and turned aside rather than meet the expression in those slant eyes, cold and black and deadly, like globules of frozen venom.

“You heard the Mighty One, you othodes,” blustered Xangan, trembling uncontrollably in the icy presence of his god, whom he loathed and feared, detested and yet went in livid terror of. Then a grin of

gloating pleasure curved his loose lips.

“To you, O Thadron, I give the leadership of the war party,” he leered.

“I shall do my best to capture them . . .”

“Capture them? Did you not hear the words of the Lord? Kill them. Kill them all. The girl. Kill her. Not one must escape alive to join the River People and seek safe refuge amongst them. Go now-and do not come back unless success has rewarded your efforts! Or I will see you among the sacrifice, as long as I am chief of the tribe.”

Thadron said nothing. He saluted mechanically, and went to take up his weapons and assemble the warriors. But his heart was heavy within his breast at what he must do.

Zhu Kor gazed after the departing war party, his face a wrinkled, unreadable, saffron mask. But within his heart cold fear coiled and curled like a maggot in a lump of putrid meat.

The girl Ylana and the boy Tomar were the only humans alive, outside of the primitives themselves, who knew to what place he had fled. And even now the warriors of the West might well be scouring the plains for some sign of them, perhaps riding in one of the great galleons of the clouds, whose secrets they had wrested from the Sky Pirates. If either the youth or the girl survived the hunting by Thadron’s troop of savages to meet their Shondakorian friends, the immeasurable strength of the Three Cities would fall upon this jungle plateau that was his hiding place.

He licked his lips, numb with fear.

Like a cornered rat, he had fled to the nearest hole.

And there was no other hole to run to.

WHILE the Jalathadar hovered aloft, Koja and the others led Lukor to the spot from which they believed Ylana and Tomar had been carried off by the ghastozar.

The ground underfoot was a level plain of sterile sand, bestrewn with slabs and fragments of broken rock. In such terrain, even so mighty a hunter as Koja the Yathoon had great difficulty in discerning the spoor of those they had pursued. A pebble or two, dislodged from its bed; a scuffmark in the sand which might, or might not, have been made by a human foot: these alone afforded evidence that the jungle Maid and the youth had been carried away by the flying reptile from this particular spot.

Save for one other sign-the clawmarks of the giant reptile, clearly scored in the flinty soil.

Lukor surveyed the ground thoughtfully, his keen, quick eyes missing nothing, a frown of concentration upon his lofty brow, crowned with its gleaming wealth of silver hair.

“No sign of a battle here, that I can see, at least,” he mused. “Both boy and girl were armed, were they not? And would presumably attempt to fight off the sky dragon. . .”

“Unless they had been captured by the fugitive Mind Wizard, as we believe was the case, in which event surely the Kuurian would have disarmed them,” said Koja.

The old knight nodded reluctantly. Then his features brightened.

“In which event, the Kuurian himself would have fought the monster,” he chirruped brightly. “There should be more scuffmarks, certainly, and blood. Fresh blood.”

But there was no blood on the scene, and the soil seemed remarkably undisturbed. The only conclusion that could be reached under these circumstances was that the victims of the flying predator had, for some reason, not fought against the reptile.

“Perhaps the ghastozar took them completely off guard and by surprise,” murmured Jarak of Tharkol, the young warrior Kojas had sent back to Kuur with his message.

“Perhaps,” mused Lukor, tugging his silvery spike of beard as if hoping by this action to stimulate thought.

Then he shrugged, admitting himself baffled by these apparently inexplicable events.

“If you watched the ghastozar rise from afar, friend Kojas, doubtless you also marked the direction of its flight?”

The giant arthropod flexed his brow-antennae in the Yathoon equivalent of a nod.

“Due west,” he announced solemnly.

“Very well, then,” said Lukor of Ganatol crisply. “There are mountains in that direction, if I remember the map compiled by our friend, Abziz, correctly. Doubtless the creature’s lair is in those peaks.”

“It is your intention then to continue the search?” Kojas inquired.

“Certainly! We have come all this way; we can attempt to follow the trail of our young friends a bit further, before giving up -the search. One of the young people, at least, might still be alive.”

Lukor boarded the gig and flew back to the Jalathadar. The vessel lowered itself as close to the surface of the planet as the buoyant vapors trapped within its double hull would permit. Rope ladders were tossed over the deck-rails, and by these the warriors of Kojas’s squad ascended to the deck of the aerial galleon, as did the Yathoon himself.

The great ornithopter then rose to the height of about a quarter of a mile and began to cruise slowly in a direction due west. From observation balconies and belvederes, keen-eyed lookouts kept the terrain under close surveillance, searching for any sign of the ghastozar’s descent.

None was visible, neither did they observe any further signs that indicated Tomar, Ylana or their captor had continued on foot beyond the point where they had been observed to have been carried off by the flying monster.

Flying with a skeleton crew, the stately galleon of the skies floated slowly into the golden west like some great cloud borne before the winds.

By nightfall the warriors of the West had found nothing. It was risky to attempt to fly by night in mountainous country, due to the sudden and unpredictable updrafts and the ever-present danger of collision with a rocky spire. They were approaching that region of the Far Side of Callisto known to be the haunts of the dreaded Zarkoon, the flying sub-men whose grisly and cannibalistic habits made them

doubly feared. As it was known that the flying men preferred to hunt by night, as the full light of day was painful to their eyes, and as previous experience had demonstrated that the Zarkoon did not scruple even to attack one of the mighty ornithopters, Lukor commanded the vessel rise to the height of one mile above the surface of Callisto and pause there until daybreak.

Such a height was itself dangerous, but was believed to be beyond the limits to which the winged cannibals could ascend, and was also above and beyond the reach of the strong prevailing winds that blow powerfully in these latitudes. Hence the galleon of the clouds could float more or less stationary during the hours of darkness.

A full guard was mounted to keep watch for ghasozars or for the faint chance that marauding Zarkoon might come this way. The remainder of the ship's company took to their bunks and hammocks for a few hours of well-earned rest.

With dawn they rose, broke their fast, descended into the strength of the prevailing winds, and continued on their way. Before long the great chain of mountains that encircled the plateau hove upon the horizon.

The Jalathadar pointed her prow in that direction, and began to search the peaks for the nesting-places of the giant winged reptiles.

Several such nests were in fact discovered, some empty and long abandoned, some containing eggs or the squalling young of the ghasozars, but none bore any sign or token that the missing young people had been there.

It took all of that day to circle the great plateau. The search proved fruitless. Several times, nesting ghasozar females attempted to attack the flying gigs that disturbed their nests. Each time archers mounted in the observation balconies and belvederes succeeded in driving away the enraged dragonesses before the fragile gigs could be damaged or their occupants injured.

By evening the plateau had been completely explored. Over dinner, the warriors of the West discussed what further could be done to search for their missing friends. An atmosphere of gloomy pessimism pervaded the discussion; few of the searchers retained the hope that Tomar or Ylana could possibly be alive after all this time.

Many, however, argued that in the mountains of the Zarkoon, a bit further to the west, ghasozars might also nest, and that this region should also be scrutinized before the search was abandoned and the Jalathadar pointed her prow east for the return voyage to the Valley of Kuur, where the remainder of Lukor's troop held the subterranean citadel of the Mind Wizards under strong guard.

Lukor himself inclined toward continuing ' the search upon the following day.

With dawn the Jalathadar left her mooring to cruise across the breadth of the jungled plateau, in the direction of the westerly mountains of the Zarkoon.

An alert lookout sounded the alarm shortly thereafter, which brought the spry old Ganatolian to the bridge with haste. The warrior directed Lukor's attention to the terrain below.

Koja ascended to the bridge, having also heard the lookout's signal.

"What has happened, Lukor?" inquired Koja.



The Ganatolian beckoned him to the rail and pointed below their floating keel.

“We seem to have stumbled upon something,” the sword-master said excitedly.

“What is it?”

“It looks like a battle,” said Lukor. “Helmsman, take us down( Archers, to your posts!” Then, turning to Kojja, the old knight said:

“I believe we have come at a most fortuitous moment, and that our descent should prove a timely interruption!”

## Chapter 12

### GRINNING JAWS

WITHIN half an hour after entering the jungle, young Tomar confessed to be completely lost.

The jungle aisles were pitch-black, drowned in a degree of gloom the youth found impenetrable. This was due to the fact that, although two or three of the larger moons of Gordrinator were aloft in the night skies, the interlaced boughs of the jungle trees, heavy with foliage and thick with tangled vines and lianas, met so completely overhead as to form an almost solid roof of verdure blocking the lunar radiance.

Jugrid and his daughter, however, seemed to possess an infallible sense of direction, and impatiently took the lead, demanding that the Shondakorian boy keep up with them. The youth, reared in the city and unaccustomed to the way of the jungle, found it difficult to believe that either Ylana or her father knew where they were going in such darkness.

A moment's reflection might have reminded Tomar that the folk of Jugrid's tribe subsisted entirely upon the hunt, and that hunters had no choice but to search the jungle for game during the hours of darkness, for at that time such game as dwelt upon this plateau was awake and abroad. Hence he should have guessed that Ylana and Jugrid knew every twist and turn of these paths as they knew the contours of their own cavernous home.

Even a chief and his daughter were not so privileged as to leave the hunting of game to others. Every member of the tribe, save for the Elders and children, customarily shared the duties of the hunt according to a rigid schedule.

Stumbling along behind them, Tomar felt himself remarkably clumsy and useless. Unseen roots caught his feet and sent him stumbling; dangling vines and lianas brushed against his face or on occasion tightened about his neck like a hangman's noose. More than once he went blundering headlong into a tree trunk, unseen in the dark, or strayed from the path to find himself caught up in thick, thorny-leafed bushes.

At length, even Jugrid realized the impossibility of attempting to continue their flight through the darkness of the jungle aisles, encumbered as they were by one unused to such surroundings.

“We may as well pause for the night here,” he said to his daughter, “and seek safety in the branches above until day. Your friend is making enough commotion to rouse half the jungle. If any of Xangan’s men are already on our trail, the noise he is making will draw them to our position unerringly. Besides, he is slowing us down.”

Tomar flushed uncomfortably, hearing this exchange, and was suddenly grateful for the darkness, which meant that his companions could not see him blushing like a girl.

“But, Father, have we come far enough into the jungle?” protested Ylana. “They will hunt us with othodes, surely, once they discover that we have managed to escape from the prison-cave. And we have only been traveling for a half an hour, no more. . .”

Jugrid shook his head.

“It will be morning, at least, before any of Xangan’s men are likely to find that we have gotten away,” he said.

“How can you be certain of that?” asked the girl, dubiously.

“When Fanga replaced Thadron on guard duty before the cave wherein we were imprisoned,” Jugrid explained, “I recall that he said that he would be there until dawn. Even then it will probably take that clumsy oaf, Xangan, some time to organize a searching-party. It was always his way to waste half the day with bluff and swagger and loud boasting, before getting down to an attempt to accomplish anything. And we shall be up and away an hour before day. Come now, let us rest while we can. We have nothing to fear from pursuit until day has come.”

Such confidence was certainly reassuring. Ylana gave a shrug of her slim, bare shoulders, and began to climb into the nearest tree. Jugrid followed after. Springing lightly into the air for all his bulk, the big man reached up, grasped a heavy bough, and swung himself up into the foliage with a supple grace that would have shamed an acrobat.

And there was nothing else for Tomar to do but follow their example. Alas, even in this, the boy felt himself to be woefully clumsy and useless. The first tree he tried to climb he fell out of, landing on his shoulders with a resounding thump that knocked the wind out of him and left him puffing and blowing like a beached whale.

“Not that way, you stumble-footed lump!” Ylana snapped. “This way! Grasp the branch in both hands and lever yourself up until you have a footing. Then find a comfortable crotch or a branch broad enough to stretch out upon, and settle down for sleep.”

The boy tried to do as she suggested, but his sandals slipped on the bark and, unable to see in the dark, he bumped his head painfully on the branch above.

Eventually, with much effort and difficulty, Tomar found himself about fifteen feet aloft, clinging with both arms to the main trunk while seated on a broad branch which reached out horizontally, with his legs dangling down to either side.

He was secure enough, but could not imagine relaxing his hold enough to be able to fall asleep. Surely, the moment he had succeeded in nodding off, he would fall out of the tree and crack his skull.

“Oh, by the Cold Moon!” cursed Ylana, exasperatedly, after the boy had falteringly explained the cause of his trepidations in response to her query. “If that’s what’s worrying you, take off your baldric and tie yourself to the branch with it. Now hush up and let’s get what little sleep we can, in what remains, of the night!”

Shamefaced that this notion had not occurred to him, Tomar did as she suggested, looping the baldric of his swordbelt about the base of the branch, he discovered it did indeed hold him securely in place.

He lay upon his back, the belt fitting snugly under his arms, and tried to compose himself for sleep. If you have ever had to try to sleep in a tree, you may perhaps have some idea of how difficult it was for Tomar to do so.

In the first place, he could not roll over onto his side, as the swordbelt was too tight for that, and if he did so he might well drop right off the branch. Then again, the coarse bark rasped harshly against the skin of his legs and arms, and the hard wood made a flat and stony pillow. Every position in which he tried to put his head turned out after a few minutes to be an uncomfortable one.

Beyond these purely physical discomforts, there were a host of others that might be considered to fall into the category of the imaginary. These were occasioned by the fact that the jungle night was alive with noises, each of which seemed to whisper the stealthy approach of a host of creeping monsters, preparing to pounce on a juicy morsel: himself.

The branches creaked, rubbing together. Dead leaves rustled; boughs of the underbrush crackled, as if giving way before the sliding bulk of a crouching predator. Small creatures scurried, pattering through the grass, giving vent to small, shrill squeaks. Distantly, there sounded the heavy, coughing grunt of the big brutes. And once, at least, he heard the thunderous growl of challenge, followed by the noise of huge bodies thrashing in combat.

Once there was a sharp, unearthly screech that lifted the hairs on young Tomar’s nape and chilled his blood. He lay there frozen, utterly awake, his heart thudding painfully against his ribs, while the screech died slowly in sobbing murmurs.

And another time something passed through the upper boughs of the tree he had picked as for his bedchamber. The boy had no idea what it might be, but the branches bent beneath its gliding weight and its eyes glowed like green moons through the dense gloom surrounding him.

Globules of cold perspiration burst out on his brow and neck, and the palms of his hands were clammy as he lay staring up into those fierce and lambent eyes burning like green flames.

They vanished; branches creaked; all was still.

And Tomar began to breathe again.

And somehow, finally, he fell to sleep.

HIS dreams were fitful and troubled and obscure, dreams of running and hiding from that which pursued him, some monstrous and hulking prowler of the jungle night.

Sometimes it was a deltagar which chased him through interminable vistas of savage jungle. Then again, the dream would melt and shift and change and it would be a massive vastodon which lumbered after him, angry little pig-eyes redly gleaming through the murk, cruel tusks flashing and chomping. At times the

dream would change, and it would be a gigantic hopping karkadan which hunted him through the jungle aisles.

Mostly, however, it was a deltagar.\*

In his dreams the huge beast crept upon him with stealthy, gliding steps-then leaped, knocked him over, and sat upon his chest, its crushing weight collapsing his lungs, its grinning jaws inches from his face, so that its hot, reeking breath, almost suffocated him.

He awoke suddenly, aware of a growing discomfort.

And for a horrible, spine-chilling moment he thought his dream was come true . . . for a terrible constriction bound his chest like a massive weight, and he struggled and fought for breath, and opened his eyes

To stare directly into the grinning jaws of a ferocious deltagar!

THE world whirled giddily about, then he righted himself.

And Tomar realized what had happened. He had, as he had feared he would, rolled off the branch in his sleep, but the swordbelt had held and now it pinned him to the branch, biting painfully under his arms and constricting his chest so that he could hardly draw a breath of air into his aching, oxygen-starved lungs.

He was dangling helplessly from underneath the branch, arms and legs hanging down.

And directly beneath him, clearly visible in a vagrant shaft of moonlight that had somehow found a vent in the thick foliage through which to hurl its cold glory, crouched the largest deltagar the boy had ever seen or heard of.

It was staring up at him as if puzzled by his predicament. Quite likely the giant, catlike predator had never before chanced to encounter a human being dangling from a branch like a ripe fruit, and did not know what to do about it.

In a moment or two, doubtless, the hunger which gnawed in the great cat's lean belly would force a decision upon its murderous brain. But, for the moment, the scarlet super-tiger crouched with stiffened spine and slowly twitching tail, staring up at the helpless boy with burning eyes, panting between grinning jaws armed, like a terrestrial saber-tooth, with the longest and wickedest pair of gleaming ivory fangs you might ever hope to see.

Tomar squeezed his eyes shut, hoping he was still in the dream. When he opened them, he discovered he wasn't. The dream was all too horribly real, and the great horned cat was still there.

And any instant now its growling and empty belly would overrule its innate, feline caution, and it would pounce upon this tempting morsel of boyflesh that dangled from the bough like an apple ready for picking. Tomar could almost feel those terrible fangs slicing like razors through his flesh

And then two things happened in the same identical instant of time.

From the tree at his left, in which Ylana had spent the night, a red arrow flashed to bury itself almost to the feather in the deltagar's side, just below its breastbone.

At the same moment the foliage above Tomar's head rustled as the brawny figure of Jugrid hurtled through the air, a bright knife clenched between his teeth. His burly form flung itself into space and came crashing down upon the back of the crouching cat, its weight nearly knocking the deltagar over. In a flash, Jugrid clamped his legs about the barrel of its chest and levered one arm about its neck with crushing force, like a vise. With the other hand he snatched the knife from between his teeth and drove it again and again into the beast's side.

And in the next instant he was fighting for his life as the beast awoke from its paralysis and exploded in squalling, spitting fury!

## Chapter 13

### THE TRAIL OF BLOOD

THE deltagar strove to dislodge the hated man-thing clinging to its back, but its claws could not reach Jugrid, who buried his face in the scarlet fur of the beast's neck.

Again and again, he drove the slim blade of the dagger to its hilt in the breast of the cat-monster. Blood spurted from the wounds, bedrabbling the trampled grasses with hot gore.

In its frenzy, leaping and bucking frantically, the deltagar crossed the small clearing. Suddenly rearing in its squalling, spitting fury, the giant cat sprang into the bushes that blocked the far end of the glade. In a moment the boughs closed over the opening its body had made, and it was as if the hideous -monster had never been there at all, so magically swift was the manner of its going.

A knife sawed through the leather belt that still bound Tomar helpless to the underside of the branch whereon he had spent the night. He dropped heavily to the turf, the impact of his fall knocking the wind out of him. As he lay there gasping, struggling for breath, Ylana dropped lithely to the ground beside him, sheathing the blade with which she had cut him free.

The boy and the girl looked at each other in desperation. The last glimpse they had had of the girl's father, he had still been clinging to the shoulders of the enraged deltagar. The sounds of the beast's passage through the underbrush were already almost lost in the thick forest. For all they knew, Jugrid might still be clinging to the cat's back, striving to slay it. Or he might already have lost his hold, and fallen, in which case the furious predator could have turned upon him, ripping him asunder with its claws-or it might have continued on in the direction it had originally been traveling.

Jugrid could be dead by now, or seriously injured, or even relatively unharmed. Ylana was desperate to discover what had befallen her father.

Before the winded boy could recover himself, the girl turned on her heel and vanished between the trees in the same direction the beast had taken. Tomar croaked out her name, but she neither paused nor returned.

Staggering to his feet, Tomar plunged into the depths of the jungle, struggled through the thick bushes,

and emerged upon a narrow jungle aisle, but dimly illuminated, still thick with darkness. He peered this way and that, but the girl was nowhere to be found. Having recovered his breath by now, he tried calling her name, and then Jugrid's. Neither effort resulted in anything. So he continued on in the direction he had first taken-as well as he could remember-and, in less time than it takes me to tell of it, he was thoroughly lost.

After some hours, exhausted, thirsty, possessed by a feeling of helplessness, Tomar lay down beneath a bush to rest.

He must have fallen into a fitful, restless doze, because the next thing he knew a touch upon his shoulder aroused him from blurred, unpleasant dreams of pursuit and danger and fighting.

For a moment, blinking stupidly, he thought that he was still dreaming.

Then he knew that he wasn't. A man was indeed standing over him with the point of his spear just pricking the smooth tanned skin above his heart.

YLANA had no difficulty in following the deltagar because the spoor of the beast clearly marked its trail.

Evidently, it was still bleeding heavily from the wounds inflicted by Jugrid's knife. She knew this from the fresh blood that splattered the grasses and the leaves of the bushes through which she crept. The gore, still wet, indeed still warm, had been shed in such copious quantities, that she knew that the deltagar was seriously wounded by now, and could not for long maintain the pace of its flight.

She did not find her father, which was puzzling but not disheartening. At least, she did not find his mangled corpse, which meant that he was probably still alive.

She continued following the trail of blood with as much speed as she could attain, while being careful not to make any more noise than she could help.

If she thought at all about Tomar, it was to assume without really stopping to think much about it, that the boy was somewhere behind her, following in her wake. Surely, she thought, he was intelligent enough to find and follow the fresh trail of blood. Of course, she could not have guessed that he had become confused almost immediately upon entering the dense undergrowth, and had started off in an entirely wrong direction from the one the wounded beast had taken.

After about an hour, she came, quite suddenly, upon the body of the deltagar.

It lay sprawled on its side in a welter of gore, but Jugrid was no longer with it. Indeed, the jungle monarch was nowhere to be seen. The cat lay in a pool of its own blood and dabbling her fingers in the crimson fluid, Ylana found that it was tepid to the touch and already beginning to congeal where it lay the thinnest. By this sign she guessed that the brute had been dead for a little less than an hour.

Wiping her hands clean on the grasses, the girl rose easily to her feet and looked around her, thoughtfully, debating the course of action she should follow. Should she retrace her steps to meet Tomar? Or should she circle the place where the beast had fallen, hoping to find her father? Obviously, Jugrid had fallen from the rampaging monster's back, or had jumped clear, something before the deltagar had gasped its last breath. That he had left the path marked by the blood-trail, suggested to her anxious mind that he was himself injured, and had crawled into the thick brush for such protection or concealment as it might afford him from the lesser predators and scavengers of the jungle, who were doubtless even now following the blood so that they might sate their hungers on the body of the slain deltagar.

Reaching a decision shortly, the savage girl turned, surveyed the nearer trees, and selected one to her liking. Then she climbed it easily and swiftly to its middle tier of branches. From this height she could see more of the jungle paths and trails and clearings within her immediate vicinity. Nowhere did she spy the boy Tomar or Jugrid, her father.

She ran out along a broad branch which was level with the ground, and climbed therefrom into the next tree. From thence she found a tangle of thick vines by which she swung into the foliage of an adjoining tree, having tested them for strength. Moving through the middle terraces of the jungle in this manner, she could cover far more territory much more swiftly than on foot, and she could also enjoy a relative immunity from the possibilities of attack by the jungle scavengers, which were already gathering on the trail of the dead cat-monster.

Some two hours later, about to swing into the next tree, she stopped short, and froze motionless. Was it only her imagination, or had her keen ears indeed detected the approach of armed men?

There it was again, that crackling of dry leaves and snapping of twigs, as of many men forcing a path through the underbrush. And now she could faintly make out the muttering of voices conversing in low tones. The men, for there seemed to be several of them, were somewhere up ahead of her, not very far away, and moving at a good pace through the aisles of the forest, coming directly toward the tree in which she crouched.

She crouched lower, seeking a place of concealment behind a screen of thick leaves. As her sharp eyes searched the jungle path below, she clenched in one small, capable fist her only weapon, the bow she had taken up from before the mouth of the cave.

She placed an arrow nocked and ready, and crouched waiting.

If it was a search party from the Cave Country that she heard coming nearer, it was not her intention to permit herself to be taken alive. Like a beast, once trapped, who somehow has managed to escape from its captors, Ylana fiercely determined to give her life rather than suffer the indignity of falling a second time into the hunter's snare.

She held her breath, eyes keen, as the first man stepped into view from the bushes.

JUGRID clung between the shoulders of the beast as the great cat sprang through the bushes into the thick darkness of the jungle. Twigs slashed at his arms and shoulders, leaves whipped across his eyes, blinding him, as the cat went crashing through the foliage. It landed on its haunches, and again he drew back his arm and struck, sinking his knife deep within its panting breast.

Hissing with pain and fury, maddened by the unaccustomed burden of bearing a rider, the cat went loping off down the nearest of the jungle aisles. It was panting heavily now, and foam dripped from its gaping jaws. Erelong, Jugrid saw that blood was mixed with this foam, and knew thereby that at least one of his dagger blows had bitten deep into the great cat's lung.

Now it tried to scrape him from its back by brushing up against the trunks of trees. His bronze hide lacerated and bruised by the rough bark, the jungle man nevertheless continued to cling to his precarious perch atop the slavering brute. This he deemed the wiser course, for he knew that if he sprang from his place astride the savage deltagar, the great cat would turn upon him like a flash with its cruel fangs and claws. He was wise in the ways of cats, was Jugrid. So he clung to the back of the beast, overcoming its every attempt to dislodge him.

Then, a little while later, the deltagar, now wobbling drunkenly upon its feet and bleeding profusely from several of its wounds, blundered into a net of vines which dangled like a dense curtain from the branches of one enormous tree. As luck would have it, one of these lianas looped itself around Jugrid's throat as the cat pushed its way through. The jungle man was forced to release his hold on the beast, or be garroted by the vine as by a strangler's noose.

He swung free in the tangle of vines, clutching to them. As the beast realized the hated man-thing no longer clung between its shoulders, it whipped about as Jugrid had predicted it would do, filled with a furious frenzy to savage him with its great claws. One sidewise stroke of those fearsome hooked claws could disembowel him, Jugrid knew.

So he did the only logical thing: he climbed up the vines to the branch above, and sat upon it, hoping that the cat in its present condition would be unable to climb the tree after him.

It was. After staggering around and around the tree in a circle a time or two, the deltagar went lurching off through the bushes and vanished from view. And Jugrid began to relax, and to examine himself for wounds.

As far as he knew, no one had ever before slew one of the dreaded cat-monsters before, armed only with a knife. The beast had measured twenty-two feet from nose-tip to tail.

It was not a feat he cared to attempt a second time.

HIS wounds proved to be less serious than he might have expected. He was bruised and lame, aching and sore in every muscle, but nothing seemed to be broken. His back and shoulders were marked with many small cuts and lacerations suffered when he had ridden the deltagar through the bushes, but these were mere scratches and would soon heal. His most dangerous injury was a long, jagged wound in the right thigh, where the deltagar had gored him with the tip of one of the two curling horns that grew from its brow.

Finding a small pool in a clearing, Jugrid cleansed the wound as best he could, smeared the raw flesh with the sticky ooze of a medicinal plant that grew amid the rocks above the pool, and bound the lips of the long cut together tightly with a strip of fur torn from the end of his garment.

It was rude enough medicine; but it would have to do.

He began to search for Ylana and Tomar. It was broad daylight by now, and the more dangerous of the jungle predators had crept one by one to their lairs, so he could stride along boldly without fear of any enemy other than man. That enemy, however, he was wary of and went cautiously about the search, making as little noise as possible, for he knew that by now a search party from the caves would have entered the jungle to track them. Xangan would never permit them to escape with their lives, if he could help it.

After about an hour he was forced to abandon the search for his daughter and her friend. The wound in his thigh gave him pain and made him walk with a limp, and the exertion caused it to begin bleeding again. He took up a length of sturdy sapling and leaned his weight on the stick, to ease his injured leg, but soon he could go no further. He sought the highest tree he could find and clambered up into its topmost branches, where few of the larger or more dangerous beasts could come. Then he composed himself as comfortably as was possible under the circumstances, and patiently waited for nightfall. A few hours of rest would give the medicinal herbs a chance to ease his injured leg, and would refresh him.



Hunger and thirst were a torment, but Jugrid was born to the jungle and its ways, and knew nothing of civilized luxuries. His entire life had been one of iron endurance and stoic patience, and he had never known anything but the crudest and most primitive conditions. So he simply put his bodily discomforts out of his mind, as he had learned long ago to do, and endured.

It seemed he had fallen into a deep, restful sleep, for he awoke suddenly as his catlike senses detected the approach of many men still at a considerable distance. He went from deepest sleep to full, alert wakefulness instantly, as the beasts of the jungle learn to do if they are to survive therein for long.

It was night, which meant that he had slept longer than he could have wished. But his weary body had recovered much of its vigor from the hours of slumber, so he did not begrudge the time lost. His wound pained him but slightly, and while the great muscles of his upper leg were numb and, at the same time, tender, he tested the limb until he was certain that it would bear his weight.

Many men were moving through the trees, making little sound. It was a war party of considerable size, he decided, listening intently, or a band of hunters. Creeping out on a long branch which overlooked the trail, he lay in the shadows like a great cat, watching up the path.

Soon they came into view, and he was relieved to see that they were strangers, and not the men of his own tribe. They resembled the warriors of the Cave Country, and were dressed very much like them, but around their necks they wore shells strung on thongs. By this token he recognized them as huntsmen of the River People, as the tribe which inhabited the southern part of the jungle plateau were known.

And then he froze, as their prisoner came stumbling wearily into view. Froze, all but his right hand, which stole to his waist where the long knife with which he had slain the dreaded deltagar slept in its sheath.

His fingers closed about the hilt of the knife, then faltered and fell away. And the heart of Jugrid tasted bitterness.

They were too many for him to attack, a single man. It would be suicide.

He lay there, stretched out on the bough, and watched with an aching heart as the savages led his daughter, bound and helpless, into captivity. And he knew in his heart that he could do nothing to help her, except to die trying to set her free.

## Chapter 14

### THE GHOST THAT KILLS

CHARAK of the River People felt satisfaction, and the taste of it was like wine to a thirsty man. The long day's hunt had been a successful one, and many a plump beast had fallen to the bows of his warriors, and now dangled from poles carried over their shoulders. But the prize of prizes had been the dark-haired girl who stumbled wearily before him, her head bowed upon her breast, her wrists bound behind her back, her ankles hobbled with a length of sturdy thong.

Charak knew her for the daughter of the chief of the Cave Country, and the tribe thereof had been the enemies of his own folk from the beginning of time. As long as anyone could remember, there had raged intermittent war between the two tribes who were situated at the opposite ends of the great plateau. True, the old chief of the River People, Zuruk, had won a truce of sorts, and for a time had put an end to the age-old strife. But he was old now, his beard and mane hoary with the years, and ripe for the challenging. A young, bold, strong man might yet win the necklace of the chieftainship—especially if he was supported by the younger, more quarrelsome element of the tribe. And by that faction, Charak was looked upon as a spokesman and a leader.

The burly subchieftan grinned in his black beard as he thought of the reception he would receive when he returned at last to the huts of the River People, bearing for hostage the girl Ylana, chief's daughter of the hated Cave-Dwellers. The young men would cheer him loudly, and would call for war! And war it would be, between the north and the south, let the old chief yammer of peace and truce as loudly as he wished. With such a hostage, it would have to be war, for the insult to the pride of Jugrid's folk could only be wiped out in blood.

He winced as he strode the jungle path, and began to limp again, favoring his left leg, where Ylana's fifth arrow had sunk to the feather in the flesh of his thigh. And he cursed the wench for her coolness, her calm hand, her steady eye. But at that, he had been luckier than Varap or Marook or Nord. They would never return from this day's hunting, for her arrows had struck true in their case. . .

They had surprised her in the trees, or so they thought, but the girl had been ready for them, after all, and fought with the fury of a tigress. Only when she had exhausted her store of arrows had they been able to capture her, and even then she had led them a furious and exhausting chase through the treetops. Now, hobbled with a length of thong, he thought with a spiteful grin, she limped along slowly enough. From time to time he struck her with the stick he had cut to walk with, in partial repayment for his injury.

It annoyed him that, strike her as hard as he could, he could not wring a cry of pain or a whimper of complaint from the girl. Well, she would wax eloquent enough when they bound her to the fire-stakes, once the chief had condemned her to death!

Charak grinned at the thought. Zuruk, that peaceloving old fool, had years before concluded a treaty with Jugrid, which had been sealed with a marriage, for Zuruk had given his own daughter to Jugrid of the Caves for a wife. She had been Ylana's own mother. It amused Charak to think that soon he would be able to force Zuruk to burn his own granddaughter alive, to appease the will of his tribe!

Just how he might work this, however, still eluded his agile wits. True, the younger men of the River People agitated vociferously for war, since only through warfare could they prove their manliness and win the warrior's plume. As there had existed no state of war between the two nations for about eighteen years, there were more than a few males among the River People who felt cheated of their manhood, and who wished, either secretly or loudly in public, for an end to this unnatural state of peace.

But public pressure alone would not suffice to force the old chief to break his own treaty, much less to sacrifice his own granddaughter, whom he had seen only as a child, and that once only.

Suddenly, a gleam lit the eyes of Charak with cruel cunning. What if old Zuruk did not know the Cave girl to be his granddaughter? What if he somehow contrived to silence her so that she could not speak? Busily, his mind turned over possible courses of action with great rapidity. He could hardly have her tongue cut out, and plead that the injury had been given in the struggle to capture her, since no one would believe so unlikely a story.

He was trying to think of another idea when an arrow struck out of nowhere.

It took the young warrior at his side full in the throat, killing him almost instantly. As the corpse toppled on its face, Charak whirled, yelling the alarm. Alert warriors raised their shields, ready to face a charge.

But no charge came. Nothing rustled in the bushes, and there was nothing to be seen in the trees. The warriors looked at one another blankly. Everything they had ever heard about war led them to assume that first the attackers strike from ambush, then charge their victims, once they have stirred them to panic. Where, then, was the charge?

The unknown attacker seemed to have melted into thin air, for wary search parties went out to beat the bush, returning with no glimpse of the mysterious assailant. It was as if they had incurred the malignity of a ghost. Ghosts they knew all about, but-a ghost that kills?

TOMAR raised his head slowly, and met the eye of the tall, lithe warrior who stood over him with the spearpoint touching his breast just above the heart. The boy gulped and paled, for he knew their flight to have been hopeless.

It was Thadron, with a band of young hunters at his back.

“Your name is Tomar,” said Thadron quietly. “Tomar, where are your companions, Jugrid the Chief, and Ylana?”

“I do not know,” said the boy flatly, “and I would not tell you, even if I did know!”

Thadron said nothing, but increased the pressure of his hand upon the spear shaft. The sharp point of the flint spearhead indented the tawny hide of the boy’s breast, then broke the skin. A bead of bright blood appeared, and a scarlet trickle slowly ran down Tomar’s ribs. The boy bit his lip, but his resolute expression did not change.

Something very near to admiration appeared briefly in the eye of Thadron, and was gone. He removed the spear, turning to his men.

“Bind his hands,” he said. Then he added that they were to give him water and food. One of the men challenged his orders, pointing out that it would not please Xangan if he were to learn that they coddled fugitives. Thadron shrugged.

“There are so many things that do not please Xangan already,” he said, “that one more will do no harm. Feed him and give him water. We are men, not beasts.”

They resumed the pursuit, and before long they found the trail of blood that led to the dead deltagar. Thadron knelt to examine the body, brushing away the buzzing cloud of insects.

“This is Jugrid’s work,” he said briefly.

“Jugrid’s?” sneered Pandan, the warrior who had objected to giving food and water to Tomar. “You think he could slay a full-grown deltagar with a knife?”

“No one but Jugrid could have accomplished it,” said Thadron. “No one else would have the courage to try.”

Scouts sent out to range through the brush to every side of the clearing now returned with word that a party of hunters had passed this way very recently, headed south. Thadron debated, chewing his lip.

“It must be a party of the River People,” he decided at last. “For Xangan would not have dispatched two search parties on the same task.”

“Well, whoever they were, they ran into a little trouble,” grinned the scout. “We found blood, and the signs of a struggle.”

“Show me the spot,” said Thadron. Examining it, he smiled and rose to his feet.

“The smaller prints could only have been made by Ylana,” he said. “Therefore, she still lives. They would not have bothered to carry her dead body with them, which means they must have taken her prisoner. They will be bound for the River Country. Let us be on our way.”

“Where to?”

“To rescue her, of course. Although a fugitive, she is still a woman of the tribe. We shall attempt to take her from them, even if only to bring her back for punishment.”

They made good time through the jungle for about an hour, before one of Thadron’s men spoke, giving words to the thought that was within the minds of them all.

“Why would the River People capture one of our tribe? Has there not existed peace between us ever since Jugrid the Chief took to wife the daughter of Zuruk of the River?”

“It would seem,” said Thadron dryly, “that some among the River People have had a bellyful of peace, and wish to foment war. What better way to do this than to capture one of our people, pretending to have caught a spy?”

The other hunter grinned.

“Xangan will definitely not be happy with this turn of events,” he laughed. “He is such a coward, war is the last thing he wants. I will wager that when he hears of it, he will even let Jugrid be chief again, so that Xangan will not have to lead the warriors of the tribe into battle.”

Thadron could not help smiling at this estimate of Xangan’s bravery. But then his expression sobered.

“War is the last thing any of us ought to wish for,” he said somberly. “For generations we have fought, and children went fatherless, and women husbandless, and the old were hungry and uncared for without their kin. Since Jugrid the chief concluded peace with Zuruk of the River People, life has been easier and more comfortable, and few of us have gone to sleep with an empty belly. War is an ugly thing, and life, which is difficult enough even in the best of times, is made harder and more miserable thereby. Let us move more quickly, or we shall not catch up with them before they reach their own country.”

SHORTLY thereafter they found the first body, that of the warrior who had gone at the side of Charak. The arrow was still sticking out of his throat. Thadron examined it carefully, and when he was through he looked mystified.

“I recognize it,” he said. “It is an arrow tied by Tugar. . . .”

“Come to think of it, Tugar claimed to have lost his bow and quiver when Jugrid and the others fled into the jungle,” said his lieutenant. Thadron nodded, and took the bloody arrow over to where Tomar stood under guard. He showed it to him.

“Is this one of the arrows with which Ylana or Jugrid were armed?” he inquired.

Tomar looked stubborn and kept his lips clamped tightly shut. But something about the serious expression in Thadron’s face and the earnestness in his voice loosened the boy’s tongue.

“Ylana had the bow,” he said reluctantly. “And the arrows in her quiver were tied in that manner, yes.”

The young lieutenant, Goran, spoke up.

“But if Ylana was captured by the River People back at the trampled place,” he demanded, “how is it that she is firing off arrows at them?”

Thadron shrugged. “I am not sure. Perhaps they left her bow behind, the arrows lost or exhausted. And then someone may have found the bow and retrieved the arrows, and is now using the weapon from ambush, to pick off the stragglers for some reason. . .”

“But for what reason, and who?” asked Goran.

Thadron said nothing, but increased the pace. It did not take Goran very long to figure out that the one person known to be somewhere in the jungle who had the strongest reason to hurry and cut down Ylana’s captors was Jugrid.

They found a second body a while later, and then a third.

The advance scout was examining the trail when Thadron caught up to him.

“They are running now,” the scout said, with a grin. “See where they have begun to throw aside their shields and baggage? And over there, they dropped one of the game beasts they had taken. The arrows, striking from the darkness and the silence of the jungle, must be driving them half-mad with terror. They cannot know that it is only one man. Maybe they think it is a ghost!”

THEY passed four more bodies, left behind in the flight of Charak and his huntsmen. From these corpses, the arrows had been retrieved. Obviously, Jugrid had launched his campaign of terror and retaliation with a strictly limited supply of barbed shafts, and was in danger of running out of arrows long before he ran out of enemies to kill.

Maintaining a swift and steady pace, moving through the aisles of a jungle they knew like their own hands, Thadron’s band crossed the plateau from north to south. Tomar, no longer bound, as his bondage would have impeded the ease of their progress, accompanied them willingly, even more anxious than they about the safety of Ylana.

They paused neither to eat nor drink, to rest themselves nor to relieve nature, but continued with all possible speed. But the River People had an hour’s start on them, and they were moving with great rapidity, too, although their motive was one of superstitious terror, rather than revenge.

The territory of the River People lay among the low hills and fields which bordered the southeastern

corner of the plateau, near the great waterfall. Their huts were clustered on both sides of the River of the Groack. It was towards this haven that Charak was leading his men with all haste.

By late afternoon, Thadron believed that he had almost managed to catch up with the hunting band. He was very near the edge of the jungle by now, and between it and the shore of the great lake called the Cor-Az there would be no cover for concealment.

Suddenly there dropped lithely from the branches above the gigantic figure of a bearded warrior of mature years. So swiftly had he appeared directly in their path that some of the men started, as at some apparition.

But it was no apparition. It was Jugrid. Arms folded upon his mighty breast, the deposed chief of the Cave People stood eyeing them calmly as Thadron came up to him, a spear ready in his hands.

Ignoring the spear, Jugrid gestured behind him.

“They have taken my daughter among the huts,” he said bleakly. “The band is led by one Charak, leader of a faction who desires to foment war between our two tribes. Zuruk the Peace-Maker, my father-in-law, still lives, but has lost much of his authority due to his years. Charak will use Ylana as a pretext for war.”

Thadron listened thoughtfully to his words, then shrugged.

Handing over his spear to Jugrid, he said simply: “Then we must get her back. What are your commands, my Chief?”

## Chapter 15

### A VOICE IN THE DARK

YLANA had been fed and given fresh water to assuage her thirst; albeit these small amenities were given grudgingly, she accepted them with gratitude. Now, tethered by a thong to the centerpost of one of the huts, her wrists and feet unbound at last, she was permitted to rest and recover her strength while under the glory of the moons her fate was being decided in tribal council. She could overhear some of the louder voices, but so exhausted was she from the long trek upon which she had been forced at breakneck speed and with many cruel blows, that she was content merely to rest and await whatever decision might be the outcome of the council.

Charak, in a bold, blustering manner, had given out that they had surprised her in spying upon the territory of the River People. Slanting his words with instinctive cunning, he made it seem as if a war party had been lurking in the underbrush, studying the defenses of the encampment. In this manner he explained the missing members of his hunting-band, claiming them to have been cruelly murdered from ambush by the marauding band of Cave People. He had hustled the girl out of sight before she could be questioned. Luckily, Zuruk did not seem to have recognized her, having not seen her since she was a small child.

The surviving members of his band of huntsmen, who were all supporters of his drive for war, loudly backed him in these lies, and those among the tribe who favored, for one reason or another, a return to the conditions of warfare that had long existed between the two tribes, were vociferous and insistent in calling upon Zuruk for a swift decision to attack the cavedwellings of their enemies in reprisal for this heinous betrayal of the peace.

The chief temporized, called for calmness, strove to discuss alternative courses of action in a sane and reasonable manner, but Charak's hotheads raised a clamor and shouted him down. Zuruk was old, but he was not infirm. His mane and beard were gray as iron, and the years had lined his face with care. But still he retained considerable vigor and the light of the several moons gleamed along the great thews of his chest and shoulders and mighty arms.

At length he rose to his full height, commanding silence. Reluctantly, those of Charak's faction who had hoped to outweigh the arguments of caution by sheer lungpower, fell silent one by one to let the old chief speak.

"We have heard much of spies and skulkers among the bushes," Zuruk said quietly. "But no one has yet told us what there is to spy upon, or for what reason the skulkers skulk. Do not our friends, the Cave People, know full well the location of our village? They are aware from of old that no earthwork or palisade guards the approaches to the settlement. What, then, were they looking for? I, for one, will refuse to believe they entertain any desire to renew the age-old conflict that once burned between our peoples, until I have better reason to suppose it to be the truth. For they, like us, will have discovered in these recent years of peace the fruitful rewards thereof. No more are wives left husbandless, no longer do children go hungry, not now do the young men die terribly in the full flower of their strength. . ."

Charak sprang to his feet, a sneer of derision on his coarse features.

"These are the words of a woman, or of a man who has lived so long that he has left manhood behind!" he bellowed. "What of the young warriors with me who fell this day to treachery and ambush? Their blood cries out: for vengeance. . ."

"Treachery and ambush, you say?" demanded Zuruk. "Mayhap those who slew the warriors you spoke of but sought to wrest free from your captivity the young woman you so cowardly seized( Since when do women spy on the encampment of the enemy? Since when do men fight with young girls? You will find, Charak, before the world is very much older, that Zuruk of the River People yet retains enough of the vigor of his youth to deal honorably with those who jeer insults at him."

Charak glowered and looked disgruntled, but lapsed into a surly silence. The discussion continued, while the fate of Ylana hung in the balance.

FROM the wall of thick underbrush at the edge of the jungle, Jugrid and Thadron observed the village of the River People. They were too distant to make out what was being said, but it was obvious from the commotion and excitement that a heated argument was under way.

Since Thadron had vowed his allegiance to the former chief, Jugrid had been in a position to command the entire company. For when Thadron had picked his warriors for this expedition, he had, as was only natural, chosen those of his friends whom he knew to be honorable and brave, trustworthy, and of a similar disposition and outlook as himself. They were, therefore, for the most part, young men of the tribe who disliked Xangan and disapproved of his judgements and opinions. One and all, they would have preferred to have Jugrid as their chief again, and now that this was an accomplished thing, they were content to obey his orders without question.

The only member of the band who had any doubts about this was Pandan, the young warrior who had questioned Thadron's kindness in giving food and water to Tomar. Pandan was no crony of Xangan, but was a cautious fellow who always liked to examine both sides of any course of action, before making up his mind which to follow. His fault seemed to lie in that he had an imagination which was too active. Where most of the tribesmen chose instinctively the path to which honor or loyalty or friendship bade them, Pandan would hesitate and temporize, to see which course held the least peril or the most personal advantage for himself. He had held his tongue when Thadron impulsively yielded command to Jugrid, but those who had observed him had noticed that the expression on his face was thoughtful, sly, and cunning. And he had carefully avoided the proximity of Jugrid or Thadron ever since.

TOMAR felt rather out of things, restless and uneasy. Younger than the jungle warriors, more rash and impulsive than they, and less given to thoughtful ponderings, his anxiety over Ylana's safety by now chafed at the bonds of restraint. It began to look as if Thadron, and even Jugrid, were going to leave Ylana where she was, and wait for a more fortunate turn of events that would afford them an opportunity to strike.

Tomar felt the need to do something positive, some action that would restore his own diminished sense of self-esteem. The boy felt, rightly or wrongly, that his own role in recent events had fallen considerably short of heroism or even of manliness. Because he had tied himself to the tree, then fallen into trouble like some oafish simpleton, all their plans had gone awry, they had become separated, and Ylana had gotten into her present dire predicament.

Stealing a knife, he began to creep away from where the hunters of Jugrid's force lay. It was not difficult to do, since the attention of everyone else was riveted upon the council of the River People, and no one was paying any attention at all to their former captive, who was now a captive no longer, but an ally.

Keeping well to the blacker shadows and avoiding, where possible, patches of moonlight, the determined boy circled the camp of Jugrid widely, and made his way down to the bank of the river, hopefully unseen. The grasses grew long and thick along here. He wormed through them on his belly, slid into the dark, cold waters, and made his way across to the other side of the stream. There the ground rose in low dunes or hillocks, and he could approach the village without detection.

He entered the town, staying in the shadows, and moved toward the but wherein Ylana was imprisoned. Jugrid had pointed it out to all of them, and it was unmistakable, even in the shifting rays of the many colored moonlight.

Tomar probably would not have been able to enter the village so easily had it not been for the war council. As its outcome was one that would affect the entire tribe, most of the people were gathered round the fire to listen and to lend their voice in support of the faction of their choice.

Reaching the rear of the but in which Ylana lay bound, the boy took the knife from between his teeth and began to cut his way in. This did not prove to be as difficult as he had feared, for the but was not constructed of wooden planks or logs but of dry bundles of river-reeds, tied together with ropes of woven grasses.

THE council arrived at the moment of decision. Zuruk obstinately refused to consider war on any terms, until he had himself laid questions to the captive Jungle Maid. Only she, he pointed out, could tell them what she and her comrades had really been doing "skulking" in the jungle. Her mission might easily have been an innocent one, posing no danger to the security of the River People. To decide on war without questioning her, was to decide upon the impulse of the moment, without ascertaining the facts. And the



matter was too important to be decided impulsively.

Even among those of Charak's faction, there were more than a few to whom the chief's calm and reasonable remarks made good sense. So the angry chorus of hooting cries which rose-upon a secret signal from Charak-in protest to Zuruk's decision was less vociferous and noisy than that worthy could have wished. He sprang to his feet, losing his temper, and growing fearful of the way events were beginning to slip from his control. Of all the things Charak did not wish to happen, he wished least of all for Zuruk to question Ylana and to discover her true identity.

But there was no way to stop the chief than by challenging him. The right of challenge belonged to every mature tribesmen, and was his to exercise upon any and all occasions when he disagreed vehemently with the decision of the moment. The challenge was, however, to personal combat. And Charak did not quite feel up to engaging in a hand-to-hand battle with Zuruk. The chief, once mighty, now old, was possibly still strong enough to beat Charak. Charak knew this, and hesitated.

Zuruk waited in majestic aloofness for a long, suspenseful moment, to see if Charak intended to challenge him. When the wrathful snarl died on Charak's ugly visage, to be replaced by sullen scowls, he turned on his heel and began to stride in the direction of Ylana's hut.

In so doing, of course, he turned his back on his enemy.

The tribesmen of the jungle plateau had a rude and simple conception of honor. Men fought face to face, they did not leap upon their foes from behind. But Charak, in this instance, threw honor to the winds. He knew that if he could slay Zuruk, even in so cowardly a manner as this, he would become chief in his stead.

Then all decisions of peace or war were his to make. The temptation to take the easiest way out of his dilemma proved irresistible.

Drawing his flint knife, he threw himself on Zuruk, striking from behind, swift as a serpent. Those near enough to see what he was attempting to do, shouted to alarm Zuruk. But, as it happened, the old chief did not need their warnings. For he knew Charak to the depths of his unscrupulous and ambitious heart, and had been listening for that scrape of sandal-leather against beaten earth that would announce his movement.

With a swiftness which belied his hoary locks, Zuruk turned to meet the astounded Charak in mid-leap. One strong hand reached up to seize Charak's outthrust arm, and clamped about his wrist with a grip like steel. The other hand caught him by the upper thigh.

Whirling about, so that the impetus of Charak's leap propelled him-but in another direction-Zuruk let go.

Charak yelled shrilly, losing his knife, and fell into the middle of the council fire!

Sparks exploded in every direction. Blazing coals and burning sticks of wood went flying. In the confusion, in the whirling smoke, everyone drew back from the scene, leaving Zuruk and Charak alone in the center of a wide circle.

Singed and besmirched with soot, Charak crawled and floundered out of the fire. With wincing hands he smote at his burning garment, beating out the smoldering places where the tanned hides had caught fire. Then, recovering himself, he glared around to locate his enemy-a wild-eyed and ferocious-looking madman, half his beard burnt away, his face blackened by soot, the ends of his tangled mane smoking

and still afire in places.

He was furious and maniacal, and the expression on his face was foolish, compounded equally of astonished outrage and frustrated fury. His eyes bulged like those of a fish, and, equally ridiculous, he gasped and sputtered like a fish out of water.

Someone in the crowd tittered at his wild-eyed expression. He glared around furiously to see who was laughing at him, letting everyone see how funny he looked with his hair all on end and smoking, and half his beard gone.

They all began to laugh, for when tension grows so taut that it must be released, it gives way either to murderous fury or to helpless laughter. In the present instance, laughter proved the panacea. And to be laughed at, to appear ridiculous in the eyes of his followers and supporters, was the one thing in all the world that Charak feared the most. Far rather would he have faced Zuruk and fought him, than to endure the ridicule of his fellow-tribesmen.

Spitting curses, he limped away into the darkness, and the duel was over.

YLANA had fallen into a doze. Suddenly a furtive sound woke her to full alertness. Something was scratching away at the rear wall of the but in which she lay helplessly bound.

The girl sat up quickly, peering around her in the darkness. Her hands were free, but she was tethered to the centerpost of the but by stout thongs. If some deadly predator had crept stealthily into the camp and was now trying to claw its way through the but to pounce upon her in the night, she knew herself to be defenseless, for she could not flee, and had no weapon.

With a pounding heart she lay there in the darkness and strained her ears to make out what was trying to get to her. Should she cry out for help, and alarm the camp? That would have been the sensible thing to do, but how could a girl as stubborn and spirited as Ylana have called upon her enemies for help?

Suddenly whatever it was that worked at the rear wall of the but opened a seam between two bundles of dry reeds, for a ragged slit of moonlight showed where only blackness had been. As the girl watched, wideeyed and breathless with suspense, a black form came shouldering through the opening-And whispered her name!

Book IV

JUNGLE WAR

Chapter 16

RED MURDER

WHEN Tomar crept away from the place at the jungle's edge wherefrom Thadron and Jugrid watched the activities in the village of the River People, and began a circuitous route around the warriors of the Cave People, on his way to attempt his rescue of the jungle Maid, he was oblivious to the fact that another of the Cave People was also leaving the vicinity at the same moment.

It was Pandan, the least loyal of Thadron's band, who now slunk furtively into the deeper brush, eluding the sentinels Jugrid had posted. But Pandan had no intention of doing anything as hazardous as striving to set Ylana free. Quite the contrary, in fact.

The one major flaw in Pandan's character was that he thought too much. In this particular case, however, his ratiocinations had eventually resulted in a certain decision, that he now wasted no time in putting into effect.

Thadron had acknowledged the deposed and condemned Jugrid to be the rightful chief, and had yielded the command of his war-party to the former leader of the Cave People. It did not take long for Pandan to decide that this information would prove to be of enormous importance to the present chief of the tribe, and that this personage, Xangan, would reward with his favor the individual who was first to apprise him of this turn of events.

Eluding the sentinels, then, Pandan glided into the jungle on furtive feet, and headed north in the direction of the Cave People's country, which was situated at the extreme verge of the plateau. Night had folded its black wings over the far side of Callisto, and it was easy for Pandan to melt into the shadows and vanish from his comrades' ken.

To move through the jungle paths by night, of course, is neither a safe nor a prudent act, and Pandan knew full well the risks he was taking. For it is during the hours of darkness that the great predators awake and rouse themselves from their hidden lairs, to stalk abroad in hunt of living flesh to rend and tear.

But Pandan, despite whatever shortcomings or flaws of character he might possess, was no coward like Xangan. He was, in fact, a skillful and veteran hunter, schooled in all the jungle crafts, and the greatest of his virtues was a contempt for personal danger which, in another, would have been praiseworthy in the extreme. He well knew the ways of the beasts of the plateau, when at their nightly searches for food, and tested his cogency to the utmost now, as he eluded them, one by one.

He avoided the several small streams that ran through the underbrush, knowing that these would culminate eventually in water-holes to which the great predators would come to drink, or near which they would lie in wait for their prey. And he avoided the denser parts of the jungle, where thorny bushes grew thick and close, rendering these leafy barriers all but impassable, for there, he knew, many of the more dangerous beasts, like the mighty deltagar or the yathrib or even the great vastodon, as the dreaded elephantboars of the jungle Country are called, make their lairs. He also avoided, where possible, certain trees known to be favored by some of the creatures he wished most earnestly to evade, for on these long, heavy branches, which stretch out parallel to the jungle floor, certain of the predators lie in wait for game to pass beneath.

Even in the thick blackness of the jungle paths, where only fugitive gleams of the many-colored moonlight can penetrate the foliage, he did not lose his way. On swift, unerring feet the traitor Pandan traversed the jungle Country, guided by the instinct of the hunter and the cunning of the savage.

The way was long and difficult. Many times he was forced to seek a place of hiding, and to crouch in concealment, his blood congealed to ice within his veins, while unseen beasts ahead of him fought

thunderously in that nightly warfare that is the predators' way of acquiring their dinner. By great good luck, he evaded the mischance of supplying the main course, in his own person, at any of these nocturnal feasting.

By dawn he reached the northern margin of the jungles and made his way with all swiftness to the cave usually occupied by the chief of the tribe and his women. But Xangan was not there, he was informed by the slatternly shrew who served the chief in the capacity of housekeeper and general factotum. Before the hour of daybreak, he had been roused from his rest by the command of the Mind Wizard, Zhu Kor, who bade him attend the council of the Elders in that large and capacious cavern reserved for the uses of the ancient grandsires who were the actual rulers of the tribe.

Xangan had hurried to attend the council, the old woman sniffed, but tremblingly and with great reluctance, as he loathed and feared the cold-eyed yellow dwarf from Kuur as he loathed and feared naught else in the world. This was common knowledge, as Pandan knew, and he reflected for a moment on certain difficulties attendant upon the chieftainship to which he had never before given much thought.

If you must despise and live in terror of someone, thought Pandan uneasily to himself, it is at very least unfortunate if that someone happens to be a telepath, a mind-reader. For, of course, the dwarfish Kuurian knew full well the feelings of Xangan, and knew him as well to be a rascal and a coward, a bully and a braggart. Doubtless it amused Zhu Kor to bend to his uses so frail a reed as Xangan. The Mind Wizard, who had long ago foresworn almost all of the pleasures of the flesh, took a malignant, vicious pleasure in inspiring awe and terror in the hearts of others. It was virtually his only vice.

Pandan himself went in dread of the Unseen One who now dwelt in the midst of the tribe. The warrior would have avoided any encounter with the little yellow man if he could. Nevertheless, he made his way directly from the chief's cave to the cavern of the Elders, to lay before them, and before Xangan, the facts of Thadron's betrayal.

And, before the day was an hour older, there entered the borders of the jungle a mighty force of the warriors of the Cave People, led by Xangan himself, surrounded by his favorites and supporters, accompanied not only by Quone, the leader of the Elders, but also by Zhu Kor the Mind Wizard.

The turn of events reported by Pandan was exactly counter to the wishes of the Kuurian. Not only did Jugrid the chief and the boy Tomar still live, but they had gathered unto themselves a force of some strength. No longer alone and helpless, no longer the hunted fugitives fleeing from strong pursuit, there had occurred an unexpected turnabout. And, unless this rebellion were nipped in the bud, and swiftly, the hunted might become the hunters. . .

Especially if Jugrid were able to ally himself with Zuruk, thereby enlisting the fighting strength of the entire tribe of the River People on his side. A jungle war might then ensue, such as the great plateau had not seen in a generation. And it was chillingly possible that in the outcome of that uncertain and evenly matched conflict, the last living Mind Wizard of Kuur might lose his only refuge. The world of Thanator afforded no safer haven to Zhu Kor than this jungle plateau inhabited by superstitious savages. And he did not intend to lose his place here without a fight.

TOMAR cut Ylana free of her tether and led her out through the opening he had made in the rear wall of the hut.

Hand in hand the boy and girl crept through the almost-deserted outskirts of the village, thankful that still virtually every member of the tribe was gathered around the council fire.

At first Ylana seemed little impressed by Tomar's bravery and daring in entering the camp of the River People alone in order to free her, armed with but his knife. The reason for this was that at first she did not realize that he had accomplished this feat unaided. But as they approached the last few huts, and still Jugrid her father had not appeared as she had expected him to, she turned wide eyes upon her companion.

Her repeated questions on this point at length elicited from the reluctant lips of the boy the information that he had indeed performed the daring rescue by himself. "Daring," of course, is an editorial comment by the humble narrator of these events. Tomar himself would have stammered and blushed scarlet, had he been so unthinking as to apply the adjective in description of his exploit. The boy felt it immodest to praise one's own actions, and claimed no particular valor for the deed. But Ylana was impressed, and it was always her way to show her true feelings, and to yield to impulse.

Therefore, when they had almost reached a place of safety, and only a few steps remained before they could put the village of the River People behind them and seek refuge among her father's warriors, she came close to where the boy was standing and looked up into his face with eyes suddenly shy and demure.

They could, in fact, be described as "starry," those eyes. And there was an expression in them of tenderness and wonder, the sort of expression which may be seen in the eyes of any young girl when she looks upon a young man whose appearance or demeanor or conduct are not displeasing to her.

"Tomar," she breathed.

"What?" the boy murmured absently, peering about, his keen eyes probing the shadows. In the light of the many moons, which floated in the sky like enormous colored lanterns, it seemed to Ylana that she looked upon him for the very first time. And perhaps the moonlight, gleaming upon the long and supple muscles of his bare arms and shoulders and torso, made him seem different to her. Certainly the moonlight bronzed his features very handsomely, highlighting the strong line of his jaw, the height of his brow, and the alert and capable seriousness wherewith he examined the darkness and weighed their chances of flight.

"Tomar," she breathed again. And this time he turned his head to look at her. Their eyes met, their gaze mingled, and it was as if suddenly, by a magic older than magic, older than the world itself, each of them was able to look into the other's heart.

Without hesitation, the boy put his strong arms around the girl and drew her to him. She nestled against his breast, her cheek warm upon his heart, and she seemed to fit into his embrace so perfectly that it was as if the two of them had been designed for this moment.

No longer mocking or fiercely contemptuous, the eyes of Ylana looked dreamily into his earnest and probing gaze, and her being was suffused with an emotion so tremulous, so warm, so overpowering, that it was a revelation to her that she had never felt it before.

She raised her lips to be kissed and he lowered his mouth to hers and for a long, endless moment during which it seemed that time itself hung suspended, reluctant to tick away another of the world's store of seconds, they clung together breathlessly, each feeling the tumult of the other's heart, the racing of the other's pulse, the heady drunkenness of the other's emotion.

But the moment ended at last, as all such moments must if the world is to continue.

A nasty, snarling laugh sounded from behind them.

His arm still about the girl's slim, bare shoulders, Tomar spun about, his knife held at the ready in his right hand.

But there was a spear in the hands of Charak, and there was red murder in his eyes.

## Chapter 17

### FIRST BLOOD

TOMAR FROZE, one arm encircling Ylana's slender shoulders, his other hand clutching the knife wherewith he had cut his way into her hut.

The expression on the boy's face was resolute, unafraid-but undecided. Charak grinned wickedly. Having caught the girl from the Cave Country in the act of escaping, and having also seized her accomplice, he knew, would reflect great credit upon himself. It might do much to restore him in the esteem of his fellow-tribesmen.

He expected no trouble, of course. For one thing, he was a full-grown man in the burly strength of his prime, while his opponent was a skinny, half-grown boy. And, for another, he was armed with a long spear, while the boy held only a knife.

He was in for a surprise, was Charak. For Tomar had just been kissed by a lovely young girl, and as every one of my readers who has ever experienced that thrilling emotion knows, he felt filled with fortitude. In his present mood he knew or believed himself to be unconquerable. He was in the mood to dare impossible dangers, to attempt absurdly quixotic deeds. In short, he felt like fighting dragons or giants. None of these were presently to hand, of course, being about as rare on Callisto as they are on our own planet. But Charak was to hand, and, as his bull-chested, beefy-thewed form towered impressively over the boy's average height, he made a passable stand-in for a giant.

Without the slightest change of expression or flicker of warning, he hurled himself at Charak's throat.

With one forearm he knocked aside the spear. Its point grazed the smooth skin of his tanned breast, drawing a narrow scarlet line from nipple to shoulder. The sting of this slight wound Tomar ignored, if, in fact, he felt it at all.

Charak went over backwards, crashing to the ground, completely astounded. To his further discomfiture, the breath was knocked out of him by the boy's unexpected leap. The spear went flying.

Tomar had just enough time to smash his balled fists into Charak's heavy-jawed, ugly face—a belting left and a powerful right—before the burly hunter recovered his wits. Then, with a choked growl of fury, Charak exploded into action. His hairy arms closed about Tomar's waist, as the boy locked his hands in a throttling grip about the older man's throat. The two struggled to their feet, grunting and straining. Tomar felt the breath squeezed out of him by the other's bearlike grip, but as for Charak, he was in

somewhat more severe straits. For the wind had been knocked out of him by his fall and he had still not entirely filled his air-starved lungs before the boy clamped strong hands about his windpipe. Purpling with effort, gasping and half-strangled, Charak threw all of the massive strength of his beefy arms and shoulders into an all-out attempt to break the boy's back before his youthful assailant succeeded in throttling him.

In agony from the man's crushing grip, Tomar in desperation did the only thing he could have done under the circumstances. He kicked Charak's legs out from under him and down they went for the second time. Again Charak landed on his back, and this time the not-inconsiderable weight of his opponent landed on his belly.

What little breath he had went whooshing out as he thudded to the ground, measuring his length upon the beaten earth. His head swam and a red mist rose before his eyes to dim his vision. Then his powerful hold on Tomar's waist loosened. Able to breathe again, and no longer suffering the excruciating pain of that crushing and viselike grip, Tomar threw all his remaining strength into a savage uppercut to Charak's slack and gaping jaw. The impact of that crashing blow was clearly audible, like the sound a butcher's mallet makes when it smacks into a side of beef.

Blood trickled scarlet from Charak's mashed lips. His eyes glazed and rolled up into his skull, revealing the bloodshot whites. And the big man subsided with a groan, out cold.

Tomar staggered lamely to his feet, his own head swimming dizzily. He had only enough time to suck a little air into his lungs before Ylana threw herself upon him, starry-eyed, sobbing with relief, her cheeks wet with tears.

She hugged him and kissed him passionately. Aching in every muscle, and groggy as he was, yet the boy did not complain. He felt completely wonderful, very heroic and manly. And Tomar would not have been completely human, had he not been grateful to whatever unseen Fates may rule our lives, that they had permitted him a wide-eyed witness to his savage battle, in the form of the girl in whose opinions he was so singularly interested.

"However did you do it," Ylana gasped, smothering him with wet kisses. "That huge, ugly brute! Ugh! And with only your bare hands!"

Surprised, Tomar glanced at his hands. The fingers of one fist were still curled tightly around the handle of the dagger. In the fury of the battle, he had completely forgotten to use the knife, and had stupidly attempted to stun Charak into unconsciousness with only his balled fist, when he could easily have driven the sharp point of the dagger into his hairy breast!

He grinned feebly, saying nothing.

He also decided never to explain to Ylana that the fine and manly art of fisticuffs had been something that he had learned from Prince Jandar, whose pugilistic prowess was unheard of on the jungle Moon.

Tomar was learning. . .

RECOVERING his strength, the boy-albeit with understandable reluctance-gently disengaged the girl's warm arms from about his neck, and led her from the village into the darkness of the night. He feared that the sounds of his struggle with Charak might have aroused the villagers to pursuit, and wished to be across the river and into the jungle's edge, where Jugrid and Thadron and the other Cave Country warriors lay in hiding, before their escape was noticed.

But the darkness of the night was no longer what it had been when first he had swum the racing flood and crept through the grasses into the lanes between the village huts. Now at least two of the gorgeous moons were aloft to lessen the gloom, and already the vast and ochre-banded globe of mighty Jupiter was part way risen over the horizon. Soon it would occupy nearly one-quarter of the sky, and its orange and tawny golden glory would flood the entire landscape with a luminance almost as brilliant as the full light of day.

The boy and girl had crept only a little way from the edge of the village of the River People before the gloom of night was lit with golden illumination, rendering them quite visible to any eye that might chance to be watching in their direction.

And eyes, in fact, there were!

For the grunting scuffle of Tomar's battle against Charak, while not particularly loud nor of very lengthy duration, had come to the ears of lonely sentinels. And these soon raised the alarm. In less time than it takes me to describe the scene, the hue and cry were loudly on the heels of the fleeing youngsters.

Swiftly turning from the council fires as the alarm of the sentinels split the night, the warriors and hunters of the tribe snatched up stone axe and club and flint-bladed knife and spear, and came pelting through the spaces between the huts to discover the cause of the alarm. Pausing but a moment at the hut wherein Ylana had been imprisoned, it took them a single swift, all-encompassing glance to discover the girl no longer tethered to the centerpost, but fled into the night through the long rent cut by Tomar's knife in the rear of the hut.

Then the hue and cry was raised in earnest!

At the edge of the village, they discovered the sprawled figure of Charak, bruised and beaten. It was Charak's confidant and chief lieutenant, Ugar, who came upon the groggy bully first and raised him to his feet.

"That way," mumbled Charak, gesturing. "Took m' spear. . ."

"How many of them?" demanded Zuruk the chief. When Charak fumblingly explained in thick, halting words that the girl captive had been rescued by only one warrior, and that but a half-grown boy, the chief said nothing but raised his eyebrows in exaggerated amazement.

Several of the other men of the tribe, who disapproved of Charak's belligerent warmongering and supported Zuruk's peacemaking between the tribes, exchanged eloquent, mocking glances, and more than a couple of them laughed.

Ugar growled an oath and flushed, scowling. But Charak himself was still too groggy to resent the humor expressed over his humiliation at being so soundly thrashed by a mere boy.

"There they are!" roared Ugar, pointing. The others looked down the grassy slopes to the thick reeds along the edges of the river. In the golden radiance of mighty Gordrinator, the fugitive girl and her rescuer could be glimpsed, wading into the shallows.

Ugar led the pursuit. A howling mob swept down upon Tomar and Ylana, composed principally of Charak's most vociferous supporters and some of the more hot-headed of the younger members of the tribe. Eager to seize the runaways himself, and thus redeem a portion of the vanquished Charak's honor,



Ugar imprudently waded out into the shallows after the two.

Tomar knew that he could not get across the river with Ylana to safety before the River People caught them. So the boy turned to face the angry Ugar. Cold water lapped to his knees and there was an empty feeling in his gut that he did not like. The taste of it against the back of his tongue was almost the taste of fear, and fear has a nasty taste. Tomar did not dare to flee; the only thing left to do was-fight!

Lunging forward, he thrust the blade of the spear into Ugar's belly.

The man yelped-staggered-and sat down suddenly in the water, his face pasty white, his eyes blank. They were as glazed as had been the eyes of Charak when Tomar had knocked him unconscious.

Then Ugar fell forward face down, and floated, while the rushing water around him slowly turned red.

Tomar thrust out at the second man, who knocked his spear aside with his own, and closed with him, roaring. Suddenly Ylana was there, snatching the knife from Tomar's waist-thong. She thrust out, drawing a jagged crimson furrow down the hairy forearm of the River warrior. He cried out and snatched back his arm, dropping the spear into the water. The current caught it and dragged it from his reach, but Ylana grabbed it. Then both of them were armed, and the mob of River People hung back a little, yelling and waving their spears, each trying to egg on the next man, while hanging back himself.

"Come on!" gasped Ylana, touching Tomar's arm. The boy turned and followed the girl out into the middle of the stream. The current was stronger here, but the river was shallow enough at this point that the two youngsters could wade across, which they did, each holding their spears high above their heads so the current would not drag at their arms or their weapons.

Seeing the two were escaping made the war-hungry supporters of Charak angry enough to overcome their trepidations. They began to wade out into the river after the fleeing pair. Others from the village now came after the younger hotheads, and among these were both Zuruk the chief and Charak himself, now fully recovered from his fight with Tomar, and filled with bellicose rage.

The warriors came across the river, a dozen in the fore, but thrice that number following close behind.

By now Tomar and Ylana had reached the other side, brushing through the reeds that grew in the shallows, and scrambling up the far bank.

The distance from the riverbank to the edge of the jungle was not very far at this point along the stream, but it was far enough. Tomar grimly knew that the two of them would not be able to reach a place of safety before they would be attacked.

He also knew that even though they were both armed with spears, the two of them would be no match for a dozen angry warriors on equal ground.

FROM the screen of thick bushes at the jungle's edge, Jugrid and Thadron had watched with bated breath the escape of the two young people. Several times during the tenses moments, Jugrid's grip on his stone axe had tightened until the great thews stood out along his arm like cast iron. Each time he had been on the point of commanding the warriors of Thadron's band to attack in order to defend his daughter and her brave young rescuer. Each time the crisis had passed without that necessity.

He knew that to order the attack would be to break forever the peace that he and Zuruk had built between the two tribes. Once broken, red war would flare out between their nations again, and this time

the peace would be all but impossible to rebuild.

Now the decision -was taken from him. Within moments he must order the attack or stand by with idle hands while his only child and her gallant young champion were slain. That would require a degree of statesmanship even Jugrid did not possess.

He raised his hand, futility in his heart.

The control over events had passed from him. It would be jungle war, whether he wished it or not. And besides, Tomar had struck down Charak, and slain Ugar.

In effect, the war had already begun. At least, first blood had been taken and shed. Nothing he could do now could alter that fact.

He felt the bitterness of despair. But his child was in danger, and there was nothing more to be done.

He dropped his hand and the first wave of arrows fell among the forefront of the enemy warriors and cut them down.

## Chapter 18

### ATTACK BY NIGHT

CHARAK, as it happened, was not exactly in the forefront of the warriors who were upon the very heels of the fleeing boy and girl, and thus it was that when the first arrows fell amongst them in a deadly rain, the sub-chief was spared. But the four men who had crossed the river in the vanguard, and who fell to the barbed shafts, were among the loudest and most devoted of his supporters.

The remainder of the force was caught in midstream when their comrades fell. They paused as if to think things over, but by then it was too late. Bows in hand, arrows nocked at the ready, Thadron and Jugrid and the other huntsmen appeared, melting from the underbrush at the jungle's edge. They held the attackers at bay while friendly hands helped the boy and girl scramble to safety.

Then Jugrid flung his arm aloft and called out in a mighty voice, bidding his warriors stay their hands. Charak's men slunk back out of the water, spitting curses, gaining the far bank where their leaders stood glowering beside the calm-faced Zuruk. It was a stalemate, and for a long moment war hung in the air.

"Is it war you would force upon us, O Jugrid, that you come thus armed into the River Country, visiting death from ambush upon my warriors?" demanded Zuruk sternly.

Jugrid shook his head.

"Not I, Great Chief, my brother, but you would break the peace," he replied in firm and level tones.

"Why else did the warriors of your party seize and carry off a helpless captive this child of mine, your

own granddaughter?”

Zuruk gasped and his eyes widened.

“It it Ylana, then, the daughter of Narda, mine own daughter? Alas, I knew her not, neither did I exchange words with her. . .”

Jugrid’s stern gaze and grim and unrelenting expression did not change. “For what reason was she made captive?” he demanded. “Does one young girl alone in the jungle comprise a menace to the safety of the River People? Or do they now make war upon children, when they find them strayed far from the safety of their kind?”

Zuruk turned his gaze full upon Charak, who flushed guiltily, wishing himself elsewhere with all the fervor of his heart.

“Charak, it was you who claimed to have found the girl ‘skulking’ in the jungle and spying upon our village. Speak now, before all, and let your words be words of truth, for we have had a bellyful of lies and deceptions. Speak, I command you!”

Charak opened his mouth, furious at this debacle, cudgeling his wits for some way out of this dilemma. But before the surly chieftain could think of anything to say, Ylana stepped forward, hand in hand with Tomar.

“Zuruk my grandsire, father of my mother, I did not ‘skulk’ in the jungle, but was fleeing from danger, hoping to reach your village and the safety it might afford me, when this black-bearded villain took me prisoner. He did not find it an easy task, for I slew more than one of his henchmen when they sought to seize me. Is this a taste of the hospitality my mother’s people offer to her only child?”

And in clear, ringing voice the jungle Maid described every detail of her pursuit and captivity while Zuruk grew ever more stern of mien and more wrathful of heart, and Charak ever more furious and afraid.

When she was done speaking, even the most warlike of Charak’s faction, and those most partial to his cause, had edged away from his proximity, some with open contempt written upon their features, and others less obtrusively, but no less positively.

“Now give judgement, O Zuruk my brother, upon your warriors and my own, and let us hear from your own lips who has given the greater offense in this: your men, who did all that has been described here, or my own? Who are the guilty ones—the girl Ylana, who sought safety among your people, and was taken prisoner and cruelly used? The boy Tomar, who crept alone into your camp to free her, and fought only to protect his life and her own? My bowmen here, who struck only to protect these children in their flight? Speak your judgement, O Chief of the River People!”

Zuruk turned to look into the eyes of his warriors. In their eyes he read a judgement that coincided with his own, aye, even in the eyes of Charak’s supporters.

“My judgement is this, O Jugrid my son,” the old chief said slowly, “and it is with a heavy heart that I speak it. For it is my own people who have been at fault in this matter, and they alone who have given provocation. Charak, the ringleader, who seized the girl Ylana in full knowledge of her identity, could only have done so in hopes of causing war between our tribes. He is guilty of an act of treason against the peace that has long existed between us, and that has gone unbroken until this night. Guilty he is, as well, of disobedience to my orders, and of acts contrary to my oftstated will. The punishment for treason and

disobedience is death. Will that satisfy the honor of the Chief of the Cave Country, or shall I make reparations in payment to my granddaughter for her suffering and the mistreatments she has endured at the hands of the traitor, Charak?"

"Enough lives have been spent already, I think, that no further deaths should follow upon this unhappy sequence of events," replied Jugrid warmly, "but I will leave the punishment of Charak to your own decision. As for myself, I am satisfied. But I cannot speak on the behalf of the Cave People, for another has taken the chieftaincy from me, and I am but the leader of these men you see who stand here shoulder to shoulder with me. As for the discomforts my daughter has suffered at the hands of your people, she has, I trust, endured them with the stoicism and courage that is to be expected from one who is the daughter of the daughter of the mighty Zuruk, and has taken no great or lasting hurt therefrom. Any reparations you would bestow I desire to be given out to the widows or the orphans of those men whom my archers struck down. I have spoken."

WITH the restoration of peace, all tensions relaxed and men of the two tribes exchanged tentative greetings. Zuruk commanded that Charak be bound and imprisoned in an unused but under guard, whereupon he invited Jugrid and his party to cross the river and to partake of the hospitality of the River People. This was done, and ere long Zuruk clasped his granddaughter to his breast and kissed her lovingly, exchanging the handclasp of peace with Jugrid and Thadron and young Tomar.

Although the night was well advanced, the visitors were ushered into the encampment of the River People and were invited to rest themselves before the fire while food and drink were prepared for their feasting. While Thadron and his warriors refreshed themselves, and rested from their labors, Jugrid and Zuruk conferred together over the disturbing turn of events that had dislodged Jugrid from his accustomed position of command, and Jugrid informed his father-in-law of the discomfiting fact that a Mind Wizard had taken refuge among the caves. .

As it happened, the River People had never fallen under the awe and terror of the Unseen Ones. They feared and despised the Dark Lords of Kuur, but neither venerated nor obeyed the yellow dwarves. Tomar and Ylana were brought into the council-circle to lay before Zuruk and his chiefs the story of recent events. They described the expeditions launched against the citadel of the Mind Wizards by Jandar of Shondakor, Zamara of Tharkol, and Kaamurath of Soraba. They told of the battle against Kuur, of its fall, and gave the happy news of the destruction of the Kuurians and of their power. That only the lone Zhu Kor had survived the extermination of his hated kind was welcome news to Zuruk. That he had now come to dwell upon the jungle plateau, under the protection of Quone and the Elders, however, was grim news, and of dire foreboding.

Far into the night they conferred, and in the hours before dawn gave over the conference without reaching any decision as to the wisest course of action they might follow.

Weariness now lay heavily upon them all, for it had been a long and busy night. One by one they went to rest, and Jugrid was given a bed of honor in the very enclosure of Zuruk, with Ylana taking a place among the women. As for Tomar, he slept wrapped in a cloak among the warriors grouped around the dying fire.

But in the village of the River People, not everyone slept. Although Charak had greatly fallen from his former place of esteem, and although Ugar and two or three of his most ardent supporters had been slain, there were still a dozen or so of his henchmen who had cause enough to bitterly regret the recent catastrophic turn of events. Some of these were raw young men, untried in battle, ambitious for sub-chieftaincies, who were so generally disliked by Zuruk's people that they had little recourse but to side with Charak, even in defeat. And there were, as well, a few older men who chose to side with

Charak in sheer desperation. Lazy men, poor hunters, cowardly backbiters, jealous of other men in high positions, who were generally looked down upon by the cleaner, kinder, wiser men of the tribe, and were thus forced to band together for want of comradeship.

To such as these, Charak's swift and thorough fall meant their own disgrace, as well. The failure of his cause was the collapse of all their hopes and ambitions. Muttering together, they decided upon a desperate course of action. They would free Charak from his bonds and, together, seek refuge in either the jungle or among the Cave People who were followers of this Xangan of whom Jugrid had spoke in such disparaging terms. His own cowardice, brutality and treachery, made Xangan sound like their own kind. And if he was truly in command of the Cave People now, perhaps they could join his service and find it more to their liking than that of Zuruk.

One thing was certain, at least. They had no longer any future here among the River People. Charak's disgrace was complete, and in the disintegration of his plans they saw the complete destruction of all their hopes and schemes for the future.

DAWN was almost upon them when the last few followers of Charak crept upon the warrior who stood guard over their bound leader and struck him down with a cowardly blow from behind. Charak, who had spent the last hours in cold terror of imminent execution or exile, babbled with relief and joy as he recognized, among those who stole into his hut to free him, the features of those who were staunchest among his remaining henchmen.

Wasting no time, and making as little noise as possible, they cut the blackbeard free, snatched up what weapons and provisions they could find, and left the village by stealthy and secret ways.

They crept down the sloping meadow, went through the tall rushes by the river's edge, and waded shivering into the cold water of the shallows.

Beyond the River of the Groack lay the jungle, and safety, and-quite possibly-a rich, comfortable new life among the followers of Xangan, to whom their brutal and cowardly and treacherous hearts had already warmed.

Just as clean, brave, noblehearted men, when they meet, are able to sense their own qualities even in strangers, the same is true of the cowards and bullies and traitors of this world, as of my own.

Like cries out with eloquent tongue to like, despite all barriers of creed or race or birth.

They were halfway across the river, and already beginning to scramble up the further bank, when suddenly, and without the slightest warning, a howling mob of warriors came leaping out at them from the jungle's edge, brandishing clubs and axes and spears.

Who these strangers were, Charak's men had no way of knowing. But, whereas many of them would have greatly preferred to turn and run from a pitched battle, they had no choice but to stand and defend themselves. And so they fought, Charak among them, for the condemned traitor had been in the forefront of those who fled the village, thinking it the safest place to be in case Zuruk's sentinels should fall upon them from the rear.

Instead-as often happens-the forefront was the last place he could have wished to be. For, when the unknown attackers swept down upon them from the edges of the jungle, he found himself in the front line of the battle. And so thick and heavy was the press of his own men behind him, scrambling at his very heels, that he could not, under any pretense, fall back and let the other men do the fighting for him, as

was his natural inclination.

A burly and hulking fellow stood directly in his way, swinging a great, terrible club. He was trembling and pale, his bloated, ugly features wet with perspiration. And there spewed continually from his thick lips a cowardly bleating, mixed with a torrent of foul oaths.

Whimpering and snarling, knees trembling with terror, Charak fended off the stranger's blows awkwardly, and thrust out with his spear. The stroke was clumsy, but driven with all the strength of panic. And, so stumblingly did the stranger swerve aside with a bleat of fear as the obsidian blade of the spear came flashing for his breast, that he tripped over his own feet and fell sprawling in the wet mud of the riverbank.

Charak growled a wolfish growl, leering. He wrenched his spear loose from the mud and drove it again at his assailant's unprotected breast. Knifelike, the keen-edged blade sank into the stranger's flesh piercing his heart.

Just then, as chance would have it, dawn broke in all its golden glory over the jungle Moon.

Blinking in the sudden light, Charak stared down into the dead face of Xangan, wondering who he was...

## Chapter 19

### THE JAWS OF DOOM

NEAR dawn, when the tumult of battle arose from the river, the warriors in the village of the River People awoke suddenly to a sense of danger. Snatching up their weapons, they ran out of their huts eager to discover what manner of menace threatened their peace. Tomar and Ylana, in their separate quarters, were rudely jarred awake in this manner. Hearts thudding with excitement, the boy and girl donned their garments and went to see what was happening.

Zuruk the chief had sprung so swiftly from his sleeping-place that he had not bothered to put on his kiltlike skirt. Clenching a long spear and war-axe in his fists, he stood naked in the golden daylight, peering around him keenly, every sense alert for the presence of danger.

He was surprised to see the warriors of his tribe struggling in the shallows with a strange war band. From the noise, he had drawn the conclusion that one of the river-monsters had attacked the sentries posted about the perimeter of the encampment. These giant reptiles, called the groack by reason of their characteristic, croaking screech, resembled an extinct Mesozoic species of aquatic saurian called the plesiosaur more than anything else, and grew to enormous size. In general, they preferred the deeper portions of the Cor-Az for their habitat, but it was not exactly unknown for an occasional predator of their kind to venture into the more shallow waters of the river. More than a few of the less cautious River People had, over recent years, fallen prey to their hungry jaws.

But the cause of the disturbance was not, after all, a groack, but a band of unknown savages, wearing-as Zuruk quickly observed-the typical warriors' gear of the Cave Country.

“What has occurred?” demanded Jugrid, who emerged into the light grasping his powerful bow. In terse words, the old chief advised his son-in-law of the invasion. Staring into the battle, Jugrid saw and recognized some of the fighting men as warriors of his own tribe. In particular, he observed that they were among the more quarrelsome and restive of the younger Cave warriors—those who had taken the villainous Xangan for their spokesman and leader.

But it soon became apparent that the villainies of Xangan were at an end. For there at Charak’s feet the corpse of the troublesome chief lay, his slack-jawed features gaping up at his murderer.

Jugrid would not have been human had he not experienced a brief and fleeting sense of relief and satisfaction to discover the foremost of his scheming adversaries would trouble him no more. Then, however, this sense of vindication and grim triumph passed, to be replaced by a new and urgent sensation of anxiety. For, having but yester-evening narrowly averted an outbreak of hostilities between the River People and his own tribe, he now observed the newly patched peace imperiled yet again.

His keen eyes sought out and identified the cause of the new peril, for Pandan, whose inexplicable absence had, of course, ere now been noticed by Thadron, who had brought the puzzling matter to Jugrid’s attention, stood in the forefront of the attackers. Jugrid instantly surmised that the young warrior had not merely wandered off into the jungle to be eaten by one or another of the night-prowling predators, as he had first supposed, but had carried tales back to Xangan, precipitating this present debacle.

Among the attacking force of warriors from the Cave People, Jugrid could see none of the older or more responsible of the members of his tribe. Xangan’s war-party had been drawn exclusively, it would seem, from the more disputatious, dissatisfied, and less loyal tribesmen. Jugrid was relieved to note this, and hastened to apprise Zuruk of the fact. The attack thus mounted, he explained, was not a full-scale invasion by the tribe as a whole, but represented a more-or-less private vendetta by Xangan and his more disreputable cronies, among whom he noticed Xangan’s own grandfather, Quone, the leader of the Elders, who had long been the most vindictive and venomous of Jugrid’s adversaries.

“Think not, O Chief,” said Jugrid with a half-smile, “that it will particularly offend me if your warriors make mincemeat of their opponents. There are among them none whom I count friends or supporters of mine, and none whose loss will make me bitter.”

Zuruk cleared his throat, and grinned a ferocious grin of his own.

“I was about to remark upon similar lines, my son and brother! For I espy among those of the River People currently embroiled with your warriors, none but those who are the more vehement and rebellious of Charak’s faction, not one of which I regard as indispensable to my serenity, nor any whose loss I would have cause to bemoan. I suggest we refrain from any intervention on either side, and let them fight it out between them.”

“Agreed,” Jugrid chuckled. “Unless I am mistaken, those of your people involved in the fight were those pointed out to me as the most belligerent of the River People, who most desired war. Am I not correct?”

“You are,” nodded Zuruk. “Right now, they seem to be having a bellyful of it. Let us leave them to enjoy that which they so vigorously sought. . .”

RECOVERING from the duel with Xangan, who now lay dead at his feet, Charak next found himself facing the whirling axe of a burly ruffian named Rask, who served as Xangan’s chief bodyguard. It was

luck, not skill, that enabled the cowardly River warrior to fell the heavier man with a spear in the guts, for Rask slipped in the mud underfoot and before he was able to recover his footing, Charak had thrust the spear into him. But then the River warrior found himself attacked by a scrawny old man whose wattled neck was hung about with beads and trinkets, his all-but-hairless skull adorned with colored feathers. Screeching in a foaming fury, this spindly shanked old dodderer launched himself upon Charak in a blind, choked rage.

It was Quone the elder, who had long schemed to dislodge Jugrid from the chieftaincy of the tribe in favor of that spoiled and pampered grandson of his, the same Xangan whom the River warrior had killed just before dawn. Throwing caution to the winds in his mad fury, the Elder flung himself upon Charak's back, a flint-bladed knife clenched in the bony fingers of one hand. Before the surprised blackbeard could brush the skinny old man aside, the keen stone blade had slashed deep into his throat.

Blood gushed from a severed artery. Cursing and staggering, floundering to his knees in the slick mud, Charak bewilderedly felt his extremities going numb, saw his vision darken. He coughed lurid oaths, choking on his own blood. Reaching around, he seized the bony neck of the old man between huge, strong hands and dragged his assailant from bestride his back. Then he began pounding the old man's head against a rock that protruded from the mudbank conveniently to hand.

Just before death took him, Charak quite thoroughly managed to beat out the brains of Quone the Elder. Then his own corpse sagged and collapsed across the gaunt body of his murderer, whom he had just murdered.

It was not without a certain flavor of poetic irony, this scene, in which the more villainous elements in Jugrid's tribe fought against the more villainous elements in Zuruk's tribe, each slaughtering the other, and being slaughtered thereby.

FROM the top of the riverbank, Zhu Kor witnessed the carnage with acute displeasure. Events had triggered the Cave warriors into action so swiftly that the Kuurian had not been able to interpose his will in time. Now he viewed the battle with distinct unhappiness.

Xangan's party had reached the edge of the river before dawn and were about to reconnoiter the encampment of the River People when a war-band, armed to the teeth, burst up unexpectedly from the river and were among them before either group quite realized the fact. To attack the stranger had been instinctive on both sides of the conflict; and now, bitterly, Zhu Kor observed the straits to which this unfortunate accident had brought him.

More than half of Xangan's force were dying or already dead, Xangan among them. And, while they had managed to slay more than half of the River warriors, driving the remnant back into the shallows, there could be but one outcome to the conflict, and the malignant little dwarf perceived that this outcome could only be detrimental to his wishes.

For there, drawn up on the other bank of the river, armed and ready, stood nearly three score of the River warriors. As yet, for some curious reason, they had taken no part in the engagement. It did not require the unique abilities of a telepath, to hazard the guess that the force that had obviously crept stealthily by night from the encampment of the River People had been a gang of unruly dissidents or rebels.

Among the River People who stood ranked along the further side of the river stream, Zhu Kor spied Jugrid and Tomar and Ylana. Since they were not bound, and, indeed, bore arms, it was blatantly obvious to the little Mind Wizard that they were not prisoners, but had found a safe and friendly haven



among the southern tribe. This did not bode well for the Kuurian: no matter which way victory fell in the conflict, whether to the handful of Xangan's men who yet lived, or the eight or nine of Charak's former supporters who remained, surely the River warriors, egged on by Jugrid and Tomar and Ylana, would destroy the survivors, or make them captive, and turn their hostile attentions, finally, upon himself.

Zhu Kor felt his blood run cold at the unpleasant thought. Alone and friendless, devoid of the host of warriors who had come hither with him, most of whom were now dead, he stood little chance of escaping his own demise.

But even the last of the vicious and cunning Mind Wizards of Callisto was not without certain skills that might tip the scales of fate in his favor. Chief among these was his uncanny power to control the minds of others. It was not impossible for him to so interfere with the vision of an ordinary man as to render himself invisible. That is, while the eyes of such men might observe him clearly, it was within the scope of his telepathic abilities to convince the vision-center of the brain that the eyes had seen nothing.\*

Briefly, Zhu Kor considered this possibility, reluctantly deciding against it. While it was within his powers to so control the vision centers of human brains, only a few humans could be so influenced at one time. There were far too many ranked against him for him to control them all.

He turned his cunning and agile mind to other courses of action. What was required here, obviously, was something in the nature of a diversion. The bigger the diversion, the better, thought he.

He turned his shrewd and crafty gaze upon the river itself. This he knew full well to be the River of the Groack; and he was well aware that the name of the stream derived from the immense and predatory reptiles who at times infested its waters. Now, it was far easier for one of the Mind Wizards of Callisto to control the mind of a beast than that of a human. The reason for this lay in the fact that the brains of animals are smaller, and simpler, and far less alert and self-aware than are the brains of men.

Concentrating his telepathic organ, Zhu Kor now projected a tendril of thought-waves that ranged the length of the river as it meandered across the grassy plain from the distant shores of the Cor-Az. While thought-waves diminish in strength and intensity of focus in direct correlation to the distance they must traverse, Zhu Kor was able to reach and identify the typical mind-radiations of a monster groack not too far upriver. The giant reptile was browsing among a school of fish along the deeper portions of the river bottom.

Inserting a tendril of thought into the sluggish mind of the immense predator, the Kuurian insidiously implanted therein an irresistible urge to swim the length of the river to the site opposite the encampment of the tribe of Zুরু. Without pause or delay to investigate the origin of this overpowering whim, as a man or woman might well have done, the riverdragon left off his depredations among the small school of fish, and began to swim downriver with all possible speed.

BEFORE very long the members of Xangan's band had slain to the last man the former followers of Charak. The few of the Cave People who survived the sanguinary contest now regained the further bank, to cluster about the hunched, diminutive figure of Zhu Kor the Mind Wizard, in lieu of any other more obvious leader to command them. It would have been sheer madness to attack the ranks of River men, and only in flight, they assumed, lay the slightest possibility of safety. Indeed, the turncoat Pandan, who had managed to avoid the battle, urged that they retreat into the jungle immediately, before Zুরু's men could be upon them. This, however, was contrary to the wishes of the yellow dwarf, who lingered in full view of his enemies.

Zুরু and Jugrid now commanded their men into the shallows. In less time than it takes me to describe

the scene, the warriors had crossed the shallow river and came scrambling up the further bank, prepared to slay or take captive the survivors of Xangan's force and their Kuurian leader.

It was precisely then that an ear-splitting screech rent the air and they turned, stricken with horror, to observe the vast and wriggling and scaly bulk of the enormous groack as it came heaving up out of the water to hurl itself upon them.

Jugrid and Zuruk, in the fore, turned in consternation and found themselves staring into the very jaws of doom.

## Chapter 20

### ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

THE huge river monster loomed up over the two chieftains, and it needed no mental prodings from Zhu Kor to spur the beast to the attack. The hunger that growled in the great saurian's belly provided all the impetus it needed.

The great, wedge-shaped head swung toward the two man-sized morsels. Fanged jaws agape, it floundered towards them. With one accord, Jugrid and Zuruk came splashing up out of the shallows to gain the slick mud of the steep shore. There they paused, took their stance, turned and loosed their throwing spears directly in the face of the ravenous groack. The crude javelins thudded home, one burying itself in the base of the monster's long, snaky neck, the second sinking deep within its rounded shoulder.

The groack shrieked deafeningly, as bright pain lanced through its minuscule mind. It swiveled its head to snap at the barbed sticks it somehow sensed were the cause of its torment.

But the uncanny power of Zhu Kor reached out again, grasping control of its dim, pain-blurred brain, and driving the monster up out of the shallows in pursuit of the two chiefs.

And at that precise moment, a diversion occurred.

A winged black shadow fell suddenly over the scene.

So swift and unexpected was this interruption that it jarred Zhu Kor's concentration. His hold upon the tiny brain of the lizard snapped. He stared above him into the golden sky, with surprise, swift comprehension, and dawning fear.

It was the Jalathadar, come at last!

Lukor and Koja and Kadar of Tharkol leaned over the mid-ship rail, staring below.

What they saw eluded their comprehension, for the figures beneath their keel were diminutive, and, when seen from directly overhead, unrecognizable. In the confusion below them they sensed a confrontation,

the aftermath of a battle, but little else. They watched the huge river dragon come heaving up out of the water, frightened by the sudden and enormous shadow of the flying ship. It forgot to be hungry, forgot even its pain, in the urgent desire to be gone from the presence of the aerial monster. Perhaps the groack mistook the winged shape for that of its only natural enemy, the immense, predatory flying ghastozar. Perhaps it was only spurred to flight by some dim flicker of the instinct for survival. At any rate, it came floundering and flopping up out of the river and plowed through the handful of remaining Cave warriors, who were trampled to red slime under the weight of its ponderous flippers.

A small, malignant yellow form darted before it, slitted eyes blazing with command. Blinding pain lanced through the groack as mental force struck and tore at its mental centers. Without thought-as carelessly as a man slaps out at an annoying fly without thinking about it-the groack struck out, snatched the little yellow man up in its jaws and broke his spine with a shake of its head. For a moment or two the dwarfish figure squealed and flopped, dangling from the great jaws. Then they came together with a crunch, and it moved no longer, shrunken limbs hanging lifelessly, dripping blood on the wet, trampled grasses.

The groack slid heavily into the underbrush and vanished within the woods. Later, doubtless, when it felt safe, it would emerge to slither back into the winding river again.

It would never comprehend the fact that it had been the curious destiny of a brutish reptile to slay in passing the last of all the Mind Wizards of Kuur.

THE Jalathadar descended, anchor-cables fastened to treetops. Spry, grinning Lukor came down the rope ladder to clasp young Tomar to his bosom and to be kissed resoundingly by Ylana. Kadar and Ergon and Koja and the others soon joined him on the turf, and were greeted by Zuruk of the River People and Jugrid of the Cave Country with all the dignity the two chiefs could command.

It was a measure of their courage and manhood that they stood fast and did not flee from the approach of the fantastic flying ship, as did their people. When they saw to their own satisfaction that the dwellers in the airship were, after all, merely men, and after both Tomar and Ylana explained their friendliness, the two chiefs gradually unbent enough to offer hospitality, and loudly summoned their people to come forth and greet the strangers from the sky. One by one, the savage warriors crept forth from hiding, to see for themselves that the sky-dwellers were ordinary men, although strangely dressed and curiously armed, and apparently friendly enough, they, too, gradually relaxed.

By midday a huge feast was prepared to welcome the visitors from the other side of the world, and the food and drink were plenteous and satisfying. Every one enjoyed himself hugely, and had a chance to tell his story.

Lukor and the others were fascinated to learn of how the boy and girl had been carried off by the last surviving Mind Wizard, and in their turn explained how they had searched the jungle plateau and its surrounding plains and mountains for days, seeking some trace of the vanished pair. They were amazed to learn how their chance appearance had stampeded the river monster into sudden flight, thus bringing the long and evil life of Zhu Kor to an accidental, but swift, termination. Lukor swore by the Red Moon and the Green, and even somber and emotionless Koja expressed himself astonished at the ending of the adventure.

But it was not quite over yet. Xangan was dead, and so was Quone. The Cave People and their Elders were alike leaderless. As well, most of Xangan's more disruptive and dedicated followers had been slaughtered in the battle at the river. As these individuals had comprised the more troublemaking and disloyal of the younger element, Jugrid felt assured that he could now regain the chieftaincy of the tribe, since most of those who remained had been the members of his own faction.

Zuruk, too, found that the battle at the river had disposed of most of the troublesome element in his tribe, and those who yet lived were heavily outnumbered by his own supporters.

“Amusing how Xangan and Charak served us by each slaughtering the other’s followers, thus purging both of our tribes of the dissident factions,” chuckled Jugrid grimly. Zuruk nodded.

“Aye, but they got their wish, didn’t they? War between the tribes and a chance for honor and glory and victory. Which leaves the rest of us, who were always happy to live in peace-in peace!”

THE next dawn Jugrid and Thadron and their party left for the jungle trek back to the Cave Country, to install Ylana’s father once again in the chieftainship.

Just to make doubly certain that his return to power was smooth and without bloodshed or dissent, Zuruk and a party of fifty warriors accompanied them, while the Jalathadar floated overhead, great wings lazily beating the brisk morning wind.

At their first glimpse of the incredible flying machine, the Cave People took refuge in their deepest and darkest caves. Long and loud did Jugrid call them to come forth, and, eventually, they emerged into the light no less timidly than had the River People. While Zuruk stood by, leaning upon his spear, and all his warriors behind him, Thadron firmly announced Jugrid’s candidacy for his former office. The ordinary tribesmen were pleased enough to welcome him back and to give him the chieftaincy by acclamation. Even the Elders, lacking the leadership of wily old Quone, and being themselves sharp enough to see how the wind was now blowing, did not dispute the results of the election.

While everything was running so smoothly, Jugrid seized the opportunity to explain that the last of the Unseen Ones had left for parts unknown, and that his last command had been to remove all but the vestiges of authority from the Elders, which authority was from now on to be vested solely in the tribal chief.

With a wary eye on Zuruk, who hefted his great spear meaningfully, and a glance at the gigantic aerial vehicle floating directly overhead, the Elders declined to dispute the reported wishes of their now-departed god. The old men had not survived to their considerable ages by going against the clearly obvious will of the majority. Only the cunning of Quone, and his ambitions for his grandson, Xangan, had been able to mobilize their influence against Jugrid’s faction. One sensed that, deprived of authority-and the tiresome responsibilities of that authority-the old gaffers would be content to laze in the sun, their vanity satisfied by being consulted on purely ceremonial matters.

Jugrid then surprised the tribe by announcing the impending nuptials of his daughter Ylana to the outlander boy, Tomar. Considering the length of time the two youngsters had been together in close and intimate proximity, the adventures they had shared, and the brave and resourceful actions of the youth in protecting, rescuing, and taking care of the girl, everyone seemed to think it was quite fitting that their attachment to each other should be solemnized by marriage. A glance at the starry eyes of Ylana and the burning cheeks and happy smile of Tomar reassured any last doubters.

Marriage, to the Cave People, was a ceremony so unadorned as to be simplicity itself. Before the full assembly of the tribe the two stepped forth, clasped their hands together, and declared themselves mated. Then the chief and the foremost of the Elders ratified these brief nuptials by a verbal consent, the two young people exchanged a kiss, and that was that.

Following the marriage, another feast was held in which the Cave People entertained the visiting River

tribesmen, and in the presence of all the two chiefs formally reiterated the truce that had long existed between the two nations, and that had only recently become strained. Then, bidding an affectionate adieu to Jugrid and Thadron, Tomar and Ylana, and the visitors from the sky, Zuruk and his warriors began the long trek home to their own village.

Never again (the two chiefs solemnly vowed to each other) would hot young heads be permitted to fray the friendly relations between the tribes.

The jungle plateau was big enough for both of them.

It became time for the Jalathadar to depart. Tomar and Ylana made their farewells of Jugrid and Thadron and the others, and clambered up the rope ladders to board the sky vessel.

Great wings lazily fanning the breeze, the aerial galleon climbed above the plateau and sailed off in the direction of Kuur.

Returning to the Underground City, Lukor saw the completion of the work assigned to the occupation force, took aboard the last of his men, and bade Haakon turn the prow of the ship of the skies towards distant Shondakor and home.

On the homeward voyage Tomar and Ylana shared the largest cabin, which had been that of the captain of the vessel, but which now became the "bridal suite"-if a warship of the clouds can, in fact, be said to contain a bridal suite.

The girl pinked and veiled her eyes behind her lashes while relating this portion of her tale to me. Her reticence concerning what took place between the four walls of this cabin was only seemly. Some things are too private, too personal, even to be recorded in the pages of a sober and veracious history, such as this one.

Such matters concern two persons only, and are none of our business, surely.

But from the dreamy expression on Ylana's lovely face, and the proud expression of the boy when he regarded her fondly, I believe we can assume that they had achieved the happiness they deserve.

AND so the Jalathadar sailed back again over the Edge of the World, and across the Great Plains of Haratha, and above the spires of Tharkol the Scarlet, and, bright and early one morning, came home to Shondakor the Golden, and to a hero's welcome.

The death of the last of the Mind Wizards was a great relief to Darloona and me, as was the reconciliation of the differences between the two jungle tribes and the finding of the lost youngsters. Tomar's father, Prince Thorak, was heartily pleased with his son's choice of a mate. The two youngsters were married all over again before the twin thrones in the great palace of Darloona's ancestors, in the presence of the full court and nobility, and this time according to the rites of the Shondakorians.

In the months since their return from the other side of Thanator, I have compiled this account from the very lips of those who partook in those adventures, although I have not hesitated to interpret this sequence of actions and events in the light of my own knowledge of the participants, and to read between the lines, so to speak. Now, at last this chronicle has reached its gradual completion, and soon the warriors of my retinue will bear it through the jungles of the Grand Kumala to that jade altar-stone that forms the Callisto terminus of the Gate Between Two Worlds. In time, I hope and trust, the manuscript will find its way into the hands of my amanuensis and friend, my fellow Earthling who is known here as

Prince Lankar.

The affairs of Shondakor have occupied perhaps overmuch of my time of late, and in the span of these last months I have found little opportunity for leisure in which to complete recording this latest adventure upon the jungle Moon. Perhaps this is fortunate, for it enables me to finish the story of Tomar and Ylana in a most appropriate manner.

Only this morning, in the 7thxapac of the 18thchore, ninth day of the fourth zome, was Ylana brought to bed and gave birth to twins.

The boy Tomar has named Jorad, after his grandfather.

The girl, Ylana has named Narda, after her mother.

And they are very happy.